

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND 2024

Building Together



Therefore encourage one another
and **build each other up**, just as
in fact you are doing.

Thessalonians 5:11



The Church of Scotland

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2024

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ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE MAY 2024

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 Roy Pinkerton and Mr David Stewart to prepare and index a summary log of the Assembly. (Section 6.2)
4. Invite Commissioners to submit to the Procedure Committee via email: pcoffice@churchofscotland.org.uk by Monday 20 May at 12pm, nominations for consideration to serve on the Selection Committee.
5. Note the expenses levels for those attending at least 13 of the 17 General Assembly sessions in person. (Section 6.3)
6. Instruct all Presbyteries to work with the Office of the General Assembly and the Human Resources Department to establish consistency of terms and conditions across Presbyteries and to align as appropriate with the Central Services employment terms and conditions as well as to develop a competency and capability procedure. (Section 4)
7. Commend the Scottish Bible Society's global outreach to the generosity of congregations and members, and support the Society in its desire to work in partnership with congregations to encourage confidence in the gospel and in sharing the Bible. (Appendix A)

Report

1. RT REV SALLY FOSTER-FULTON

- 1.1 The Church of Scotland has been well served by the Rt Rev Sally Foster-Fulton as our Moderator.
- 1.2 From preaching at the presentation of the Honours of Scotland to His Majesty King Charles III, to meeting Pope Francis in Rome, Sally has represented the Church in high profile places. She has also been present to local congregations across the breadth of our denomination, listening to their hopes and fears about how they will be church in the months and years ahead. At all times, she has been a powerful voice and witness, offering welcome words of wisdom, comfort and of inspiration.
- 1.3 Sally has worked closely with our partner churches and sister denominations, most recently during a visit to Jamaica with the United Reformed Church and Scottish Episcopal Church, to understand more about the issues which continue around the legacy of slavery.
- 1.4 Taking up the role of Moderator required Sally to step away from her leadership of Christian Aid Scotland. We are grateful to all who enabled her to undertake this special ministry, but we are especially mindful of her husband Stuart, and of her children, whose love and care have enabled her to fully inhabit the role. As Sally prepares to pass on the duties and tasks of the office, the Committee thank her for all she has done on behalf of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.
- 1.5 At the 2023 General Assembly, Sally utilised a benediction inviting Commissioners to continue to approach the day and tasks ahead in the same spirit as they had participated in worship. To Sally we now say: the moderatorial year is over, let the service continue.

2. PRESBYTERY REPRESENTATION

- 2.1 The Presbytery returns show that there are in all 925 charges, whether vacant or not, and 184 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: 231 ministers and 231 elders, with 13 Deacons being eligible for appointment along with the five most recent past Moderators.

3. NEW STANDING ORDER ON PROBATIONERS AND FAMILIARISATION CANDIDATES

- 3.1 The General Assembly of 2023 resolved:
 3. Instruct the Assembly Business Committee in consultation with the Legal Questions Committee and the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to consider the issue of representation within the General Assembly, of Candidates in Training and Probationers, including the possibility of voting rights and to report to the General Assembly of 2024.
 4. Instruct the Assembly Business Committee in consultation with Legal Questions Committee and the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to consider the issue of youth representation within the General Assembly, including the possibility of voting rights and to report to the General Assembly of 2024.
- 3.2 The Legal Questions Committee provided a paper to the Committee. Neither Committee thought that it was appropriate to alter our Presbyterian polity, and thus an obvious solution was touted: that it is for individual Kirk Sessions to decide whether a member of their congregation should be ordained to the eldership, taking their place in the governance of the Church at every level in the usual way as others discern they have the wisdom and skill to do so.

3.3 In proposing the solution of ordination to the eldership, both Committees recognise that this is not an entirely straightforward answer. Not all young people may be seen by their Kirk Session as being ready for ordination to the eldership and equally not all young people may wish or seek to take on the responsibilities of eldership. As assuming the office of eldership would mean that the young person takes their place in the governance of the Church, this is an important discernment for the Church to make. There are also difficulties for Candidates and Probationers: their relationship with a Kirk Session can become more tenuous as they take on placements and then undertake their fifteen month probation, so that the opportunity for them to become an elder, if not already one, may be diminished. At this time in their training it is perhaps appropriate that their responsibilities are suitable for their circumstances. Both Committees were also cognisant of the special rights to speak and move motions already afforded to Youth Representatives at the General Assembly by virtue of Standing Orders, whereas there are no such rights for Candidates and Probationers. Overall however neither Committee felt that these points outweighed the other considerations.

3.4 The Committee decided that it does wish to offer the right to attend Assembly to Probationers, i.e. rights to attend, speak and move motions, but without voting rights. Candidates were not included but will know that this opportunity awaits them during their Probation.

3.5 On consultation with Faith Action staff on behalf of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT), queries were raised about expenses. In addition, the question of whether Familiarisation Candidates should also be given the opportunity to attend on the same basis as Probationers was highlighted. Both of these points have been addressed: the Committee has decided that Familiarisation Candidates will be included and expenses will be met as if Probationers and Familiarisation Candidates were Commissioners. Some discretion is to be afforded to FAPLT in selecting exactly who attends annually, albeit it is stated that each Probationer and Familiarisation Candidate may attend only one Assembly in that capacity.

3.6 A new Standing Order has been drafted and this is set out at Appendix B. It is numbered 35A to avoid renumbering the bulk of the Standing Orders, as people are understood to be generally familiar with the overall numbering. As directed by Standing Order 128, the accompanying section of deliverance appears in the Report of the Legal Questions Committee.

4. PRESBYTERY DEVELOPMENT

4.1 The General Assembly of 2023 noted the work undertaken to date by the Presbytery Development Group in implementation of sections 12 [*terms and conditions of employment for Presbytery Clerks*], 13 [*training and support for Presbytery Clerks*] and 14 [*code of practice and capability process for Presbytery Clerks*] of the Assembly Business Committee's deliverance at the General Assembly of 2022, and instructed the Assembly Business Committee to bring a further report to the General Assembly of 2024.

4.2 Development of the newly formed Presbyteries is a continual process and, if the new Presbyteries are to be effective, it must begin with a solid foundation across them all. That solid foundation is about good governance in the Presbytery as well as the competence of the Clerks and all who serve and work for the Presbytery, whether as a member of Presbytery or as an employee. A clear understanding of the role of a Clerk is essential. The role of the Clerk brings with it a responsibility for maintaining good order and consistent practice and procedure within the Presbytery. The Clerk is the servant of the court at all times and must set any 'leadership role' within that context. The Clerk is a giver of advice, not a maker of policy. The Clerk has a duty to be constantly informed about the law and procedures of the Church and to give impartial advice on them to all members of Presbytery, when requested and required. In the course of their work, a Clerk must maintain objectivity, discretion and confidentiality. At the same time, a Clerk must act pastorally in carrying out their duties. Knowing where, and from whom, to seek guidance within the wider structures of the Church is wise, and not weak; the Office of the General Assembly is always available for advice and support. The duties and responsibilities of the Clerk are onerous and those who are carrying out the role in the name of the Church have taken on a significant task. As such they are entitled to good line management, guidelines for their role and practice, and Continuing Professional Development to support them in achieving best practice and in keeping up to date with the law and practice of the Church.

4.3 Induction training for Presbytery Clerks has been put in place by the Office of the General Assembly. The first session of this training was held in November 2023 for three newly appointed Presbytery Clerks, and will be repeated as and when new Presbytery Clerks are appointed. The initial session received positive feedback, and the training will continue to be developed and assessed for its effectiveness.

4.4 Development of a Code of Practice and a capability process involves work across a number of agencies. This work is in process between the Assembly Business Committee, the Legal Questions Committee and the Human Resources Department, and will involve consultation with Presbyteries.

4.5 Proper accountability is an essential component of good governance in any organization. Our Kirk Sessions are accountable to their Presbyteries through the Local Church Review process. Consistent accountability suggests that Presbyteries in their turn should be accountable to the General Assembly. The Legal Questions Committee has undertaken extensive work since 2016 to create a fit for purpose Presbytery Review process similar to the existing Local Church Review process. The Assembly Business Committee welcomes this work, and the report of this year's Legal Questions Committee which will introduce a draft Presbytery Review Act and a one-year pilot and consultation process.

4.6 The formation of the new Presbyteries has been a gradual process over 2022 and 2023, and this fluid process resulted in a divergence in the terms and conditions of employment for the new full time Clerks. Working together, the new Presbyteries, the Human Resources department and the Office of the General Assembly have achieved a measure of coherence in the terms of those contracts. This good practice, and formation of good working relationships

in the process, is to be commended. It is to build on this positive momentum that we bring a deliverance seeking an instruction that this good practice be established as routine process.

5. PROPERTY

5.1 Moderator's Residence

5.1.1 Last year's General Assembly approved the Committee's proposal to sell the Moderator's Residence at Rothesay Terrace, invest the proceeds and acquire a replacement, preferably by repurposing a property already owned by the Church. Unfortunately, on closer inspection, the furlough flat at Grange Loan Gardens administered by the World Mission Overseas Staff Trust proved to be unsuitable for a wheelchair user without substantial re-modelling of the doorways and corridors; and none of the other furlough properties met the Committee's specifications for long-term, accessible accommodation. A suitable furlough flat at Inverleith Row has been reserved, however, for the Moderator Designate during his term of office in 2024/25. The Committee will continue to investigate other possible properties, including redundant manses. Meanwhile, the property at Rothesay Terrace will be put on the market after the General Assembly.

5.2 Assembly Hall

5.2.1 The Committee has continued its review of the long-term future of the Assembly Hall, noting attempts over the past twenty years to offset the building's running costs by hires to external users, particularly during the Edinburgh Festival, including partnership with a letting agent.

5.2.2 Between 2014 and 2023 total expenditure on the Hall amounted to £1.4 million, of which annual repairs and maintenance accounted for £650,000; insurance was a significant cost, increasing from £36,000 in 2014 to £53,000 in 2023, a large premium for a building used by the Church for less than three weeks each year. The total cost included in the Church's budget for the Hall operation for the period 2024 to 2027 is currently just over £1 million. Repair and maintenance costs are likely to increase due to cost inflation, particularly in the building trades.

5.2.3 Generating higher levels of income in competition with state-of-the-art conference venues in Edinburgh is hampered by the building's lack of catering facilities, breakout rooms and exhibition space, as well as accessibility. While the maintenance needs of the Hall are ably met by our architect and regular statutory checks are carried out by the Estates Department; new health and safety measures are likely to place additional responsibilities on operators of premises with a capacity of more than 800.

5.2.4 Since much of the plant, equipment and furnishings require to be renewed in the foreseeable future, a capital expenditure plan and rolling maintenance programme was drawn up in 2019. This anticipated future expenditure on big-ticket items such as the air-conditioning and ventilation system, seating, floor coverings and lighting. Pending greater clarity about its future, however, the Committee is currently only authorising essential expenditure on the Hall. It no longer has the capacity to accept one-day lets.

5.2.5 Tentative conversations have taken place with a third party about a possible long-term lease of the building that would relieve the Church of its financial responsibilities, while ensuring that the title and the right to use the refurbished Hall for the General Assembly are retained. The Committee continues to investigate all options for the Hall's future, including these discussions.

5.2.6 In 2019 a report and valuation were commissioned from Colliers: this found that the property was generally wind and watertight and provided serviceable accommodation, but would benefit from significant internal refurbishment. However, modernising the Hall would have a significant capital cost.

5.2.7 At the Committee's request, last year the General Trustees surveyed the Hall's condition and reviewed its maintenance liabilities. This confirmed that the external envelope is generally in good condition with no major expenditure anticipated within the next decade, but commented that the Hall appears to be under-utilised and would benefit from internal refurbishment to make it fit for purpose in the 21st century. This would require considerable investment, including measures to reduce energy usage and heat loss and ensure that there is disabled access to all parts of the building. At the time of writing the Committee is seeking an Energy Performance Certificate for the Hall and is collaborating with the Net Zero Strategy Group.

5.2.8 The Committee is concerned to be a good steward of this iconic asset but must acknowledge that the Hall is a serious drain on scarce resources at a time when the Church has other priorities. Despite extensive efforts by the Committee over the years, the building continues to be unable to generate enough income through external lets to offset more than a small fraction of its running costs; granting an extended lease to the Hall's only significant tenant would result in the loss of the building's rates exemption, assessed in 2019 at £79,000. To fund replacement of its obsolescent plant and furnishings, invest in the facilities required of a modern conference venue and improve the building's energy efficiency, the Church would have to be prepared to invest substantial sums without any guarantee that this expenditure would raise enough additional revenue in the highly competitive Edinburgh marketplace to lead to a significant reduction in its annual deficit.

5.2.9 In 2016 the Assembly Arrangements Committee reported no apparent wish across the Church to move the General Assembly from the Assembly Hall in Edinburgh, advising that without greatly reducing the numbers attending, the logistical challenges and cost of moving to other locations could not be justified. The Church is now in a very different situation. At the local level, much-loved church buildings are being closed and disposed of as congregations and Presbyteries respond to the challenge of delivering the Five Marks of Mission with fewer resources. While it remains to be seen how the role of the General Assembly will evolve to take account of the creation of fewer, much larger Presbyteries, the current configuration of the Hall tends to dictate its culture and limit the scope for reform. There are also fewer Commissioners now than at the time of the 2016 Report; and unless there is an increase in ministerial numbers and in the funding required to support them, that number is likely to continue to decrease. Another major

change affecting the number who require to be accommodated in the Hall has been the introduction, consequent on the COVID-19 pandemic, of hybrid meetings: in 2023, for example, nearly one quarter of Commissioners participated on-line. As a result, the Church no longer requires a space as large and costly to maintain, let alone modernise, as the current 1000-seat Assembly Hall.

5.2.10 In the light of this changed context, the Committee proposes to consult further over the next year and report back to the 2025 General Assembly with proposals for the long-term future of the Hall.

6. ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS

6.1 Risk Assessment

6.1.1 A thorough 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 steps taken to reduce the identified risks to acceptable levels. The Committee continues to monitor all relevant guidance, advice and changes in legislation, and keep the Risk Assessment under regular review in consultation with the Church of Scotland's Health and Safety Manager. A copy of the Risk Assessment for the General Assembly of 2024 can be found on the additional documents section of the 2024 General Assembly section of the Church of Scotland website.

6.2 Logging the Assembly

6.2.1 Advances in technology have impacted on the way in which a permanent record of the Assembly is preserved, and it is no longer in order to talk, as in the past, of a distinct 'verbatim record'. Instead, the permanent record of the Assembly now consists simply of the series of video recordings to be found in the public domain on the Church of Scotland website within the General Assembly section. To enable the exact location within these recordings of specific sections of the business to be easily accessed, the Committee has made arrangements for a summary log of the whole Assembly to be produced, along with an index of speakers and an index of reports and other business.

6.3 Commissioner Expenses

6.3.1 Expense rates for those participating in the Assembly Hall at the General Assembly of 2024 will be a maximum of £100 per night for accommodation and a limit of £20 each day for out-of-pocket expenses. When Commissioners are staying with family or friends, a total allowance of up to £80 may be claimed towards a token gift for hosts. Attendance at 13 of the 17 sessions will be required for any expenses to be authorised.

6.4 Circulation Breaks

6.4.1 The Committee has arranged for tea and coffee to be available in the Rainy Hall during circulation breaks. In order to serve as many people as possible, those present in the Hall are requested to have a contactless device available as they order their beverage. Coffee and tea is available for £2.25 and £1.75 respectively; bottled water is available for £1.50. Drinking water is also available throughout the building where indicated.

6.5 Publications Timetable

6.5.1 The Committee are conscious of the vying demands on Commissioners' time, and appreciate that many would value having more time with reports prior to the General Assembly in order to prepare. The Committee hold to the principle that as soon as reports are able to be put online, this occurs. All reports will be available at least two weeks before the General Assembly opens, with most being available prior to this. The Committee hope this provides Commissioners with enough time to read the reports and prayerfully consider their content.

6.6 Bookstall, Events and Exhibitions

6.6.1 In addition to Cornerstone Bookshop in the Rainy Hall, an exhibition space has been created in the Martin Hall. In-person Commissioners are warmly invited to explore the CrossReach Heart for Art Gallery and various resource stalls during circulation breaks and at lunch times. In addition, a full fringe event programme is in operation, details of which can be found on the 2024 General Assembly section of the Church of Scotland website. The Committee are exploring mechanisms by which online Commissioners might also engage with these opportunities.

6.7 Mr John Williams – 50 Years of General Assemblies

6.7.1 The Committee wish to gratefully mark the 50th General Assembly at which Mr John Williams has provided his skills and expertise in ensuring the Audio and Visual capability is of the highest possible standard. John's knowledge of the Assembly Hall is second to none, gained through many hours of dedicated commitment. His technical expertise was heavily relied upon during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw the Church of Scotland move to fully online and then hybrid General Assemblies. Throughout this time, John worked hard to ensure that joining remotely did not impede the experience for Commissioners. Despite serious health concerns, John faithfully attends Committee and Sub Group meetings, where his advice is offered with wisdom and grace. The Committee thank John for all his efforts, and assure him of their continued prayers as he undergoes his treatments.

6.8 Depute Chief Steward

6.8.1 Mr Neil Proven tendered his resignation as Depute Chief Steward following the 2023 General Assembly. The Committee are grateful to Mr Proven for his tenure as Depute Chief Steward. We are working with the Chief Steward to ensure an open and transparent recruitment process to identify a successor. The Committee are grateful to Mr Simon Bolam, who has agreed to assume the responsibilities of Depute Chief Steward for the 2024 General Assembly.

6.9 Communion

6.9.1 As directed by Standing Order 21, the Committee has arranged for the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to take place at 9:15am on Monday 20 May. Individual glasses with non-alcoholic wine and gluten-free bread will be dispersed to those gathered on the ground floor and in the East (Public) and North (Throne) Galleries of the Assembly Hall. Those participating remotely are warmly encouraged to provide their own elements and to have them ready to participate when directed by the Moderator.

7. EX OFFICIO SEAT ON THE ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES

7.1 The Convener of the Assembly Business Committee is an ex officio Assembly Trustee. The Convener undertook this role from his appointment in May 2023 until October 2023. At that time, the Convener was appointed as Chaplain to the UK Oil and Gas Industry, in which he is employed by the Church of Scotland, and seconded to the Oil and Gas Chaplaincy Trust. As an employee of the Church of Scotland, the Convener is ineligible to be an Assembly Trustee. Committee member Rev Dr John Ferguson kindly agreed to complete the Convener's term until the 2024 General Assembly.

8. REVIEW OF THE ROLE OF THE MODERATOR**8.1 PRESBYTERY MODERATORS**

8.1.1 One of the recommendations from the review of the role of the Moderator was that: 'the Moderator should seek to build up stronger relations with Presbytery Moderators'. An online meeting took place between all the Presbytery Moderators in post at January 2024 and the Moderator of the General Assembly. This was a friendly and constructive meeting which all present said they found very helpful. It also resulted in the Presbytery Moderators seeking to build better relations between themselves, and a WhatsApp Group has now been established. A further meeting is planned, and it is hoped that these gatherings will take place on an occasional basis going forward.

In the name of the Committee

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

Appendix A**REPORT OF THE SCOTTISH BIBLE SOCIETY**

'All this is from God, who reconciled us through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation'

(2 Corinthians 5:18)

'God's word – reconciliation for the world' was the theme of the United Bible Societies World Assembly, held in the Netherlands last October. The theme would be relevant at any time in our troubled world, but imagine the poignancy when representatives from our three Bible Societies in the Bible Lands were not able to come because the war broke out just days before we met.

380 of us from 138 different countries were able to meet, and the joy and excitement in the room was palpable. We discussed topics integral to our mission: Bible translation; Bible distribution; Bible engagement and mission resilience; alongside global issues which impact our work: digital developments; migration and creation care. Drawing on the wisdom and experience of so many from different cultures and church traditions was enriching. We are a diverse, scattered group; united around our vision of 'The Bible for Everyone' and our conviction that the Lord Jesus reconciles us to God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The SBS Board Chair attended for the first time and said, 'My enduring memory will be of the international dimension of our work being brought to life'.

We continue to pray for those Bible Societies who minister in conflict areas as we admire their fortitude and trust in God. The Israeli Bible Society, the Palestinian Bible Society and the Arab Israeli Bible Society are all doing what they can to continue to minister to their communities and bring Christians together from across the divides. Amidst these tumultuous times, stories of faith, compassion and unity shine as beacons of hope. They say, 'we want to build communities of forgivers and peacemakers.'

Our colleagues in Ukraine continue on undaunted. Despite the war, they have launched a new contemporary translation of the Bible in Ukrainian. They say, 'Our sincere prayer is that God continues to speak to the hearts of our nation through His word in this translation'.

Through our appeals we have been able to give significant practical support to the Bible Societies in Bolivia; Burkina Faso and Egypt. And through the generosity of our supporters, we have again been able to keep the cost of Bibles in China affordable through contributing to the cost of paper for printing. These are all ways in which we help other Bible Societies share the Bible in their own context.

Here in Scotland, we have added Luke's gospel to our selection of magazine-style, easy-to-read gospels. Churches use these in a variety of ways, but primarily to share the Bible with those who are either new to the Bible or do not find a full Bible easy to access. Our prayer is always that these gospels will lead people to Jesus.

We are excited about 'Bibles for Bairns'. When a baby is registered with us (born in specific years) they receive a 'Share the Story' Bible on their first birthday. For birthdays 2, 3 and 4 they will get an age-appropriate gift to help the family continue to engage with the Bible. On their 5th birthday they will receive a children's Bible, just as they are learning to read themselves.

Must Know Bible Stories, our educational resource, is proving a hit with staff and pupils alike. Along with the resources, we are able to offer schools an RME day so that teachers see children interact with the Bible and gain insights into how to use the resources well.

'Field Guide to the Bible' is aimed at helping teenagers navigate the Bible well. We were able to give 1,000 copies away at Magnitude, the SU Scotland festival, and youth leaders are finding it to be a useful tool.

Recent research is showing that people in their 20s and 30s are reading the Bible in greater numbers than we might expect. They are not in church physically but may explore church online. We are working with other Bible Societies in similar mission landscapes to find ways to connect with these folk. God is at work, reconciling the world!

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

Appendix B

(d) PROBATIONERS AND FAMILIARISATION CANDIDATES

35A. Status

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

Oversight

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

LEGAL QUESTIONS COMMITTEE MAY 2024**Proposed Deliverance****The General Assembly:**

1. Receive the Report.
2. Approve a new Standing Order 35A on Probationers and Familiarisation Candidates as detailed in Appendix B of the Report of the Assembly Business Committee (*Section 3 – Amendments to Standing Orders*).
3. In relation to Presbytery Review (*Section 4 – Presbytery Review*):
 - a. Instruct that the Presbytery Review Committee (“PRC”) be established as a Standing Committee of the General Assembly, comprising a Convener, Vice-Convener and eleven members nominated by the Nomination Committee and appointed by the General Assembly, together with *ex officio* the Principal Clerk and the Depute Clerk; and otherwise in terms of section 1b) of the draft Presbytery Review Act attached to this Report and set out in Appendix A (“the draft Act”);
 - b. Instruct the PRC to carry out in 2024-2025, as pilots, Reviews in the Presbyteries of (1) Edinburgh and West Lothian and (2) Perth, working in accordance with the principles and processes set out in the draft Act, with Summary Reports as referred to in the draft Act being submitted to the General Assembly of 2025;
 - c. Instruct Presbyteries to send comments on the draft Act to the Principal Clerk by 31 December 2024, and instruct the Committee to bring a Presbytery Review Act in final form to the General Assembly of 2025; and
 - d. Instruct the PRC to submit a Report on inspection of Presbytery Records in accordance with the draft Act to the General Assembly of 2025.
4. Pass an Act amending the Discipline Act (Act I 2019), as amended, as set out in Appendix B to this Report (*Section 5.2 – Review of the Complaints Process and Proposed Amendments to the Discipline Act (Act I 2019) and Legal Aid in Disciplinary Proceedings Regulations (Regs I 2018)*).
5. Pass Regulations amending the Legal Aid in Disciplinary Proceedings Regulations as set out in Appendix C to this Report (*Section 5.3 – Review of the Complaints Process and Proposed Amendments to the Discipline Act (Act I 2019) and Legal Aid in Disciplinary Proceedings Regulations (Regs I 2018)*).
6. Instruct the Committee to develop a process for dealing with complaints made against a Presbytery committee and a bespoke process for a complaint against a Presbytery Clerk and to report to the General Assembly of 2025 (*Section 5.4 – Review of the Complaints Process and Proposed Amendments to the Discipline Act (Act I 2019) and Legal Aid in Disciplinary Proceedings Regulations (Regs I 2018)*).
7. Repeal the Presbytery Membership Act (Act I 2006) (*Section 10 – Repeal of Superseded Act*).

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;
- inspect annually records of Agencies of the General Assembly; and
- inspect annually records of Presbyteries.

1.2 Members of the Committee examined the minutes of Assembly Standing Committees for the year 2023 on Thursday 22nd February 2024. In general, these were found to be acceptable and any shortcomings were drawn to the attention of the Committee concerned.

1.3 The Committee has prepared some guidance about how minutes should be prepared and this is found immediately below in section 2 of this Report. In particular, with an increasing number of Committees keeping minutes in electronic form, it is important that guidance is followed to ensure that a proper archive of records may be maintained.

1.4 The Committee in its remit is also tasked with the annual inspection of Presbytery Records, but with the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and thereafter due to resourcing issues, has not yet initiated this work. It is now proposed that the work be taken on by the new Presbytery Review Committee - see section 4 below.

2. GUIDANCE ON PREPARATION OF MINUTES OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEES

2.1 In accordance with the arrangements set in place by the General Assembly (GA) of 2000, the Committee is asked to examine Minutes of the Standing Committees of the General Assembly on an annual basis. In order to assist Secretaries/Clerks of Standing Committees, the Committee has provided some guidance as to what its inspectors will be looking for at its annual inspections, as follows:

- 1) that the Record is paginated - please use sequential page numbering*;
- 2) the inspectors will be noting the pages from and to which the Record has been examined, and the date of the Minute of the last meeting of the Committee;
- 3) that places and dates of meetings are duly entered;
- 4) details of whether the Committee met in person, online or in hybrid format (optional but desirable);
- 5) that headings and/or marginal references are sufficiently clear and explicit;
- 6) that the Sederunt is duly entered;
- 7) that it is recorded that meetings are open and closed with prayer;
- 8) that the Minutes are signed by the Convener and Clerk (individual pages need not be initialled but Committees are welcome to continue this practice if they so wish);
- 9) whether the business of the Committee appears to be orderly conducted; and
- 10) it is noted that the inspectors may make any other observations which may occur to them as important to be submitted to the Assembly.

*By sequential page numbering is meant a system whereby the page numbering of the minutes is continued from one minute to the next (a) across a calendar year, (b) across a Church year (June to May), (c) across the Committee's minutes intended to form one bound volume, or (d) even from that Committee's inception. The purpose of this is to ensure that there are no unauthorised additions to or omissions from the final archived record.

For electronically submitted Minutes, Secretaries/Clerks are requested to:

- file and submit these as pdfs (or one composite pdf for the calendar year);
- for individual files, save these with a name commencing YYYY-MM-DD to facilitate the reading of the Minutes in sequential order; and
- add the graphic signatures of the Convener and Clerk to the pdf record of each meeting.

3. AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS

3.1 The Assembly Business Committee received the following remits at the General Assembly of 2023:

- *Instruct the Assembly Business Committee in consultation with the Legal Questions Committee and the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to consider the issue of representation within the General Assembly, of Candidates in Training and Probationers, including the possibility of voting rights and to report to the General Assembly of 2024.*
- *Instruct the Assembly Business Committee in consultation with Legal Questions Committee and the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to consider the issue of youth representation within the General Assembly, including the possibility of voting rights and to report to the General Assembly of 2024.*

3.2. The Committee provided a paper to the Assembly Business Committee. A report on this matter is contained within the Report of the Assembly Business Committee and as required by Standing Order 128, the accompanying section of deliverance is set out at item 2 of this Committee's Proposed Deliverance above.

4. PRESBYTERY REVIEW

4.1 The idea of a process of Presbytery Review, first raised at the General Assembly of 2016, was initially developed during 2017 and 2018 as a peer-review process in which a number of Presbyteries took part. Although the General Assembly of 2019 instructed the Committee to prepare legislation, the decision by the same Assembly to reduce the number of Presbyteries (together with the Covid-19 pandemic) meant that this work was paused until 2022. Principles of Presbytery Review were then brought to and approved by the General Assembly of 2023 which instructed the Committee to bring a Presbytery Review Act to the Assembly of 2024.

4.2 The aims of Presbytery Review are as follows:

- to encourage and enable a Presbytery to reflect on its life and work;
- to assess whether a Presbytery is satisfactorily fulfilling its Functions and Responsibilities;
- to enable action to be taken when in the life of a Presbytery there is conflict or when there are issues of non-compliance with the Functions and Responsibilities;
- to give the opportunity for the leadership and the wider membership of the Presbytery as a whole to challenge one another as to the effectiveness or otherwise of the Presbytery's structures and the functioning of them;
- to hear of and celebrate good practice by Presbyteries and share such with the wider Church; and
- to assist with the co-ordination of the central resourcing of the wider Church.

The "Functions and Responsibilities" are those referred to in the Church Courts Act (Act VI 2023).

4.3 During the course of the past year, concerns were raised about governance structures and their operation in one of the newly formed Presbyteries and in June 2023 the Committee appointed a sub-group to undertake an urgent Governance Review. This Governance Sub-Group presented its report to the Committee in November and immediately thereafter presented recommendations to the Presbytery itself, which appointed a Working Group to develop these for implementation by the Presbytery. At the time of writing this work is still underway but it promises to ensure more robust governance in the Presbytery concerned going forward. The experience of dealing with that Review has greatly informed the proposals for the Presbytery Review Act which are now presented.

4.4 The draft Act annexed in Appendix A has been prepared in light of the Governance Review and taking account of civil law requirements, meaning that the peer-review process previously trialled has been replaced by a process more akin to that in the Local Church Review Act (Act I 2011). Presbytery Review would be overseen by a new Standing Committee of the General Assembly, the Presbytery Review Committee. Each year, on a flexible five-year cycle, two or three Presbyteries would be reviewed each by a Review Group of three people drawn from and reporting back to the Committee, which would then ensure that a Summary Report is presented to the General Assembly. Guidance for the conduct of Presbytery Review will be prepared by the Legal Questions Committee in the first instance and this will be developed by the Presbytery Review Committee in the light of experience.

4.5 The Committee has taken the view that it would be best to present a draft Act this year and allow further time for final consultation with Presbyteries over the coming year. A draft Presbytery Review Act is presented in Appendix A, with the proposal that it be 'road tested' in the Presbytery of Edinburgh and West Lothian and in the Presbytery of Perth during 2024-2025. A final Act will be brought to the Assembly of 2025 for approval.

5. REVIEW OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS AND PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE DISCIPLINE ACT (ACT I 2019) AND LEGAL AID IN DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS REGULATIONS (REGS I 2018)

5.1 A sub-group has been formed and in accordance with the remit from the General Assembly of 2023, is undertaking a review for the Assembly of 2025, of the Complaints process, as that is set out on the Church's website. The Committee has since determined that the review should include aspects of the Discipline Act. Meantime, some minor amendments to both the Discipline Act and the Legal Aid Regulations have been identified, and the Committee thought it would be helpful to bring these to this year's Assembly.

5.2 In relation to the Discipline Act (Act I 2019), these appear as a proposed amending Act in Appendix B and they are:

- Addressing the situation where a Discipline matter follows on from a civil law court case, to enable the civil court's decision to be admissible in evidence in the Church court and to be held to have established any issue in respect of which the decision is relevant, subject to the possibility of proof to the contrary.
- Allowing a Respondent six weeks rather than four weeks to accept an offer of a Censure with consent, given that legal advice must first be obtained.
- Tidying up the Act's provisions about who receives documentation recording censures.
- Aligning the Act better with the provisions of the Legal Aid in Disciplinary Proceedings Regulations (Regs I 2018).

5.3 In relation to the Legal Aid in Disciplinary Proceedings Regulations (Regs I 2018) these appear as proposed amending Regulations in Appendix C and they are:

- Removing obsolete wording around previous Disciplinary legislation.
- Making clear that legal aid may be available where a Respondent chooses the Accelerated Procedure under the Act.
- Clarifying that whether the Respondent is obliged to take legal advice before agreeing to a Censure with Consent or to a Joint Minute under the Accelerated Procedure is a relevant consideration for the Legal Aid Sub-Committee.

5.4 During discussions on the draft Presbytery Review Act, the Committee considered the fact that there is currently no formal process by which complaints might be made against a Presbytery committee nor a bespoke process for a complaint against a Presbytery Clerk. The sub-group took the view that good governance requires such procedures to be put in place, albeit that they may be used only infrequently. The sub-group was also conscious of the need to bear in mind the employed status of Clerks and thus of the need for a fair process which does not duplicate or conflict with the terms of their employment contracts. The sub-group will, therefore, give further consideration to how such procedures might operate and whether there may be some cross-over with the provisions of the Act and will report back to the General Assembly of 2025.

6. COMMISSION OF ASSEMBLY HELD ON 30 NOVEMBER 2023 AS TO HYBRID CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

6.1 Following a Petition to the Assembly of 2023 from the Kirk Session of St Andrew's, Bo'ness, the Committee was instructed, *"to consider bringing forward proposals to a Commission of Assembly, to be held in any format permitted under section 4(2) of the Commission of Assembly Act (Act VI 1997) before 30 November 2023, to enable congregational meetings convened for any purpose to be held, in addition to wholly in person, online or by a combination of in-person and online (ie in hybrid format) with voting and thus decision-making similarly taking place simultaneously in person and/or online, such proposals to be contained in a new Protocol to be passed for that purpose."*

6.2 An online Commission of Assembly was held on 30 November 2023 and the Minute of that Commission is included in the Volume of Reports prepared for this Assembly. Approval was given to a Protocol authorising the holding of congregational meetings in hybrid format, i.e. with persons permitted to be present in person or online, from 1 December 2023. It is for a Kirk Session to decide whether to proceed with a hybrid meeting. The Protocol does not

permit wholly online congregational meetings, nor postal votes, and relevant explanations are given in paragraph 2.3 of the Committee's Report for the Commission, annexed to the Minute.

7. TERMS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR MINISTERS

7.1 The Committee has worked on preparing draft Terms of Responsibility for Ministers in the Church of Scotland, which have been passed to the Assembly Trustees and Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to take forward.

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

8.1 The Office of the General Assembly continues to process requests for review received from Kirk Sessions, in relation to Presbytery Mission Plan decisions. The Act provides for a review of the process used by the Presbytery in preparing and approving a Mission Plan, not an appeal of the decision made, and thus it does not substitute a different decision; rather it looks at how the decision was taken. A decision to uphold a request for review means that the Presbytery then reruns the process of taking the decision on the relevant part of the Mission Plan. The decision from the rerun of process could be the same as per the existing Plan or it could be different.

8.2 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.

8.3 At the time of writing, there have been 38 requests for review across 18 Presbyteries in relation to initial approval of Mission Plans, with two requests in addition from Presbyteries for assistance under section 2.2.4 of the Act. Most of these requests have been processed, with only a small number currently pending decision.

8.4 The Mission Plan Review Group is fully appointed with 15 members, and all have worked on several cases. The work is difficult, sensitive and time-consuming and the Committee is grateful to all those on the Group for their diligence in service.

8.5 Not all Mission Plans are yet approved. Also, in due course, a new round of requests for review will arise, related to annual evaluation and development of Presbytery Mission Plans.

9. SUB-GROUP ON NATIONAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

9.1 A sub-group of the Committee has been set up to consider and monitor national and constitutional issues in the life of the Church, such as the Oath of Accession, in light of events following the death of Her late Majesty the Queen. The sub-group comprises the Principal Clerk; the Solicitor; the Minister of St Giles'; the Dean of the Chapel Royal; the Procurator and the Committee's Convener, all appointed in an *ex officio* capacity. The sub-group will undertake this work in consultation with other agencies, as deemed necessary from time to time.

10. REPEAL OF SUPERSEDED ACT

10.1 The opportunity is taken to repeal the Presbytery Membership Act (Act I 2006) which was superseded by the Church Courts Act (Act VI 2023).

In the name of the Committee

MARJORY MACLEAN, *Convener*
ALAN REID, *Vice-Convener*
FIONA SMITH, *Secretary*

Addendum

Rev Alan Reid brought to his year as Vice Convener the experience and wisdom of a former Presbytery Clerk, but also the grace and imagination everyone associates with his wider ministry. No task has been too great or too small for him; he has been equally willing both to represent the Convener in small technical tasks and to lead a Working Group examining the most delicate and sensitive of questions. Alan always ensures the pastoral character of what might otherwise remain simply as dry impersonal rules. The Committee is grateful to him for his counsel and commitment, and wishes him well as he takes up new responsibilities in his Presbytery.

MARJORY MACLEAN, *Convener*
FIONA SMITH, *Secretary*

Appendix A**Draft Presbytery Review Act****PRESBYTERY REVIEW ACT***Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []*

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

Accordingly, the General Assembly hereby enact and ordain:

1. DEFINITIONS

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

2. PRESBYTERY REVIEW

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

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

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

3. THE COMMITTEE'S ROLE

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

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

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

and in particular that:

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

3.3 The Committee shall appoint a Review Group of three persons to act on its behalf when embarking on the

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

3.4 Members of the Committee must adhere to the conflict of interest policy specified in Guidance.

4. ANNUAL INSPECTION OF RECORDS

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

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

5. DOCUMENTS AND VISITS/MEETINGS FOR PRESBYTERY REVIEW

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

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

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

6. PREPARATION OF A PRESBYTERY REVIEW REPORT

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

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

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

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

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

6.5 The Committee's Summary Report for the General Assembly shall be submitted to the Principal Clerk no later than 1st February each year [*Note: once Act is finalised, date can be 1st March*].

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

7. TERRITORIAL EXTENT

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

8. GUIDANCE

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

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

Edinburgh, [] May 2024, Session []

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

1. *In section 5, add at the end: "Where the decision of any court or tribunal in the United Kingdom is relevant to any Charges in the Disciplinary Complaint, that decision will be admissible in evidence, and be held to have established any issue in the Disciplinary Proceedings in respect of which the decision is relevant, unless the contrary is proved."*
2. *In section 22(1)(b) and also section 23, delete "twenty eight (28) days" and substitute "forty two (42) days".*
3. *In section 23, add at the end: "The Assessor shall send the document recording the agreed Censure with consent to the Respondent, the Session Clerk(s) of the congregation(s) concerned, the Presbytery Clerk, the Principal Clerk of the General Assembly and (save where the Respondent is an Elder or Office-Bearer) the Head of the Faith Action Programme, and to the Solicitor of the Church, who shall make it available for public inspection."*
4. *Amend section 37(4) to read: "The Secretary of the Discipline Tribunal shall send the documents referred to in sections 37(1) and 37(3) to each of the parties, the Session Clerk(s) of the congregation(s) concerned, the Presbytery Clerk, the Principal Clerk of the General Assembly and (save where the Respondent is an Elder or Office-Bearer) the Head of the Faith Action Programme, and shall make them available for public inspection."*
5. *In section 38 add a new sub-section (4) and renumber the existing sub-section (4) as sub-section (5): "The Secretary of the Discipline Tribunal shall send the document referred to in section 38(3) to each of the parties, the Session Clerk(s) of the congregation(s) concerned, the Presbytery Clerk, the Principal Clerk of the General Assembly and (save where the Respondent is an Elder or Office-Bearer) the Head of the Faith Action Programme, and shall make it available for public inspection."*
6. *In section 49 after "appeal following thereon", add the words "and (c) where a Respondent is making an admission under Part 9 (Accelerated Procedure)" so that section 49 reads as follows:*

"A Respondent shall be entitled to apply for financial assistance towards the costs of legal representation (a) where a Censure with consent is being accepted, (b) in the conduct of Disciplinary Proceedings under Part 8 and any appeal following thereon, and (c) where a Respondent is making an admission under Part 9 (Accelerated Procedure), in each case in terms of the Legal Aid in Disciplinary Proceedings Regulations (Regulations I 2018)."

Appendix C**[] REGS AMENDING THE LEGAL AID IN DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS REGULATIONS (REGS I 2018)**

Edinburgh, [] May 2024, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Legal Aid in Disciplinary Proceedings Regulations (Regs I 2018), shall be amended as follows:

1. *In section 1(1):*
 - (a) *delete the words "the Discipline of Ministry Act (Act III 2001) ("the 2001 Act"), or", and also "Part 4 of the 2001 Act or";*
 - (b) *after "or who wishes to accept a Censure with consent in terms of the 2019 Act,", add the words "or who is making an admission under Part 9 of the 2019 Act (Accelerated Procedure)";*

so that section 1(1) reads as follows:

"Applicant" shall mean a person (1) who is subject to discipline in terms of the Discipline Act (Act I 2019) ("the 2019 Act"), (2) against whom disciplinary proceedings have been initiated in terms of Part 8 of the 2019 Act, or who wishes to accept a Censure with consent in terms of the 2019 Act, or who is making an admission under Part 9 of the 2019 Act (Accelerated Procedure), and (3) who is an applicant for legal aid;"

2. *In section 3:*
 - (a) *Delete the words "Part 4 of the 2001 Act or";*
 - (b) *add at the end: ", or (3) where the Applicant is making an admission under Part 9 of the 2019 Act (Accelerated Procedure), in which case any award shall be restricted to the cost of work required to enable the admission(s) to be made, the Joint Minute to be negotiated and agreed and the Applicant to be represented at the diet at which the Discipline Tribunal's decision is made";*

so that section 3 reads as follows:

"An Applicant shall be entitled to apply to the Sub Committee for legal aid in respect of legal costs incurred by him or her in one or other of the following situations:

- (a) in relation to disciplinary proceedings initiated in terms of Part 8 of the 2019 Act, and any appeal following thereon, in which case any award shall be restricted to the cost of work undertaken after the initiation of such disciplinary proceedings, or
- (b) where the Applicant wishes to accept a Censure with consent in terms of the 2019 Act, in which case any award shall be restricted to the cost of work required to enable the Censure with consent to be accepted, or

- (c) where the Applicant is making an admission under Part 9 of the 2019 Act (Accelerated Procedure), in which case any award shall be restricted to the cost of work required to enable the admission(s) to be made, the Joint Minute to be negotiated and agreed and the Applicant to be represented at the diet at which the Discipline Tribunal's decision is made."
- 3. *In section 4, insert a new paragraph 4(c) as follows and re-letter the existing paragraph 4(c) as 4(d):*
"whether the Applicant is obliged in terms of section 22(1)(b) or section 38(1) of the 2019 Act to take legal advice before agreeing to a Censure with Consent or a Joint Minute under the Accelerated Procedure; and"

COMMISSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

30 NOVEMBER 2023

CONCERNING HYBRID CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

At Edinburgh, within the Church of Scotland Offices at 121 George Street, and also via video-conference using Zoom Meetings, on the 30th day of November 2023 at 10.30 am.

The Commission of the General Assembly was constituted with prayer by the Moderator, the Rt Rev Sally Foster-Fulton. The List of Commissioners was laid on the Table.

The Commission called for the Report of the Procedure Committee which was given in by the Rev Sheila Kirk, Vice-Convenor.

The Commission took up consideration of a Report of the Legal Questions Committee (copy attached) which was given in by the Rev Dr Marjory MacLean, Convenor.

It was moved and seconded:

The Commission of the General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. As envisaged by the General Assembly of 2023, in relation to hybrid congregational meetings, agree with effect from 1 December 2023 the Protocol contained in the Appendix to the Report.

On a vote being taken For or Against section 1, there voted For 50 and Against 0.

On a vote being taken For or Against section 2, there voted For 50 and Against 0.

On a vote being taken For or Against the Deliverance as a whole, there voted For 50 and Against 0.

The Moderator thanked everyone who had been involved in the Commission of Assembly.

It was moved, seconded and agreed:

Appoint the Clerks as a Committee to Prepare the Minute.

It was moved, seconded and agreed:

Instruct the Legal Questions Committee to report the proceedings and decisions of the Commission of Assembly to the next General Assembly in terms of sections 15 and 16 of the Commission of Assembly Act (Act VI 1997).

The Commission of Assembly concluded at 10.52 am with the Benediction pronounced by the Moderator.

121 GEORGE STREET, EDINBURGH
and online via video-conference
30 November 2023, 10.52 am

COPY ATTACHED: REPORT OF THE LEGAL QUESTIONS COMMITTEE

LEGAL QUESTIONS COMMITTEE

NOVEMBER 2023

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

The Commission of Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. As envisaged by the General Assembly of 2023, in relation to hybrid congregational meetings, agree with effect from 1 December 2023 the Protocol contained in the Appendix to the Report.

REPORT

1. THE REMIT TO THE COMMITTEE

1.1 At the General Assembly of 2023 the following remit was given to the Committee:

Instruct the Committee to consider bringing forward proposals to a Commission of Assembly, to be held in any format permitted under section 4(2) of the Commission of Assembly Act (Act VI 1997) before 30 November 2023, to enable congregational meetings convened for any purpose to be held, in addition to wholly in person, online or by a combination of in-person and online (ie in hybrid format) with voting and thus decision-making similarly taking place simultaneously in person and/or online, such proposals to be contained in a new Protocol to be passed for that purpose.

1.2 The Committee has met and has agreed that a Commission of Assembly should be held on 30 November 2023 and that it should be held online.

PROPOSED PROTOCOL

2.1 The Committee agreed that there are obvious benefits to permitting hybrid congregational meetings, such as enabling people to attend meetings when they would not otherwise be able to do so, saving time and money and benefiting the environment. Online participation in meetings has become widespread and normalised in recent years, so that many people now routinely join online meetings and are comfortable doing so.

2.2 A proposed Protocol is annexed in the Appendix, to take effect from 1 December 2023. The Committee gave careful thought to the conditions which should apply. Clearly, holding a hybrid congregational meeting in accordance with the Protocol will require some preparatory and follow up work on the part of the Kirk Session and also a certain amount of diligence during the hybrid meeting itself.

2.3 Two specific points to note on the drafting of the Protocol are:

2.3.1 After discussion, the Committee thought that congregational meetings should not be set up to be held entirely online. It was felt that in view of the numbers of persons involved and the diverse nature of attendees, in terms of their technical expertise, to authorise wholly online meetings might disenfranchise some people. Therefore, the Committee took the view that such meetings should not be allowed. It is noted however that the wording is intended to provide that should it happen in practice that all attendees invited to a hybrid meeting attend online, that would be permissible.

2.3.2 The Committee did not include in the Protocol provision for postal voting. A fundamental provision of our Church polity has always been that only those present at the properly constituted meeting, having heard the arguments and discussion leading up to the vote, are entitled to vote and it was felt that to enable postal voting would wholly undermine this important principle.

2.4 The Committee commends the Protocol to the Commission.

In the name of the Committee

MARJORY MACLEAN, *Convener*
ALAN REID, *Vice-Convener*
FIONA SMITH, *Secretary*

APPENDIX

PROTOCOL AS TO HYBRID CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

From 1 December 2023, congregational meetings, in addition to being held wholly in person, may be held in hybrid form, meaning with attendees permitted to be present in person or online, provided that certain conditions as set out below are met.

However, **congregational meetings may NOT be arranged to be held wholly online.**

The conditions which will apply to congregational meetings held in hybrid form are mainly intended to achieve equivalence to the requirements which would apply under existing Church law to a meeting held wholly in person, and they are as follows:

1. The Kirk Session must decide in advance that the specific congregational meeting in question is one which it is appropriate to hold in hybrid form rather than wholly in person, having regard to the subject matter of the meeting and to the congregation's particular circumstances;
2. The Communion Roll or Electoral Register, as the case may be, must be up to date as follows: in the case of the Communion Roll it must have been annually revised and attested in terms of the Communion Rolls Act (Act VI 2000) within the calendar year prior to the date on which the congregational meeting is to take place, and in the case of the Electoral Register, it must have been prepared and may be updated in terms of the Vacancy Procedure Act (Act VIII 2003);
3. Notice of the congregational meeting must be intimated in the normal way, ie by pulpit intimation and where appropriate via the congregation's website and/or social media, by at least ten days' (including two Sundays') notice to the congregation;
4. The Kirk Session must be satisfied that arrangements can be made to distribute in advance to those who request it and are entitled to it, a link to join the congregational meeting online and information about how to connect and participate, including details of how to contribute to the discussion and how to vote;
5. The Kirk Session must be satisfied that it will be able to verify the identity of those who will be joining the congregational meeting online as being persons entitled to attend, participate and vote in such a meeting;
6. The Kirk Session must be satisfied that the congregational meeting can be set up and run with sufficient technical expertise to enable all those present, whether in person or online, to hear the full meeting, including all prayer, worship and debate and also to participate in the meeting should they so wish;
7. Before any vote is taken, the Moderator or Interim Moderator shall remind the meeting that only those who have been present during the full meeting and who are eligible to vote, can now proceed to vote;
8. Where a vote is required, the Kirk Session must be satisfied that an accurate ballot can be held; in the case of a secret ballot the arrangements made shall ensure secrecy of the ballot while maintaining verification of eligibility to vote^[i]; and
9. The minute of the congregational meeting shall record that the conditions set out in this Protocol were fulfilled, and the minute shall then be engrossed (included and signed) in the minutes of the next Kirk Session meeting.

References

- [i] There are anonymised polls available on both Zoom and Microsoft Teams (Zoom Polls and Microsoft Forms/ Polls).

MINUTE OF MINISTRIES APPEAL PANEL HEARING, 10 JANUARY 2024

On the tenth day of January 2024 at 11am the Ministries Appeal Panel met at 121 George Street, Edinburgh and was duly constituted with prayer.

Sederunt: Mr Robin Stimpson (Convener), Rev Dr A Leslie Milton (Vice-Convener), Rev Dr Amos Chewachong and Mr Andrew Gibb

Appellant: In attendance with a companion

Respondent: Two Presbytery Representatives in attendance, including the Chair at the Appraisal meetings, and Ms Kay Cathcart, People and Training Manager, Faith Action Programme staff

In attendance: Rev Fiona Smith, Principal Clerk and Ms Christine Paterson, Depute Clerk

Introductions were made and the Convener explained the purpose of the hearing.

The Ministries Appeal Panel took up consideration of an Appeal in terms of the Selection and Training for Full-Time Ministry Act (Act X 2004) ("the Act"), section 21, against a decision intimated on 13 September 2023 to terminate the Appellant's Candidature for full-time Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Parties were heard.

Questions were asked.

Parties made closing statements.

It was agreed that the Panel's decision would be intimated to the parties by email.

Parties withdrew.

Following deliberation, the Ministries Appeal Panel resolved unanimously to dismiss the appeal and uphold the decision to terminate the Appellant's Candidature.

The Panel did not find that there were any irregularities in process or breach of the principles of natural justice affecting the Appraisal meetings. *[Detailed reasons were given to the Parties.]*

The hearing was closed by the Panel saying the Grace together.

ROBIN STIMPSON, *Convener*
FIONA SMITH, *Clerk*

DELEGATION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MAY 2024

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

1.1 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. 87 congregations adopted the Unitary Constitution in 2023 compared to 53 in 2022. Since 2004, the Unitary Constitution has been issued to 944 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

FIONA SMITH, *Chair*
MARY E MACLEOD, *Secretary*

ECUMENICAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Reaffirm the ecumenical vision articulated in the Declaratory Act anent the Third Article Declaratory (2010), and instruct the unincorporated entities of the Church of Scotland to take account of this in their future work (*Sections 2.5, 2.6, 14.2*).
3. Instruct the Ecumenical Relations Committee to report to the General Assembly of 2025 on its ongoing engagement with the Presbyteries of the Church of Scotland (*Section 5*).
4. Approve the form of the Scottish Christian Forum, and the participation of representatives of the Church of Scotland within it, and recognise it as the National Ecumenical Body within Scotland (Appendix I) (*Section 7.8*).
5. Welcome the renewal of the work of the Joint Commission on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland (*Section 8.7*).
6. Instruct the Ecumenical Relations Committee and the Theological Forum to reflect on the contemporary significance of the Council of Nicaea, and to report to the General Assembly of 2025 (*Section 13.6*).
7. Approve the delegates to Assemblies, Synods and Conferences of other Churches, and the appointment of representatives to Ecumenical Bodies (*Appendix II*).

Executive Summary

The Report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee in 2024 focuses primarily on the future shape of the church in Scotland, with particular reference to the *Articles Declaratory* of the Church of Scotland. Affirming the ecumenical vision inherent in the *Articles Declaratory*, the Committee addresses the realisation of that vision with reference to Presbytery Mission Planning, engagement with the Presbyteries of the Church and the possibility of a wider national church conversation in relation to ministry and mission.

With respect to the creation of a national ecumenical body within Scotland, the Committee invites the General Assembly to recognise the Scottish Christian Forum as such a body and to approve the participation of representatives of the Church of Scotland within it.

The Committee notes the ongoing work in relation to the *Saint Margaret Declaration*, with the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland and, in particular, the proposal to renew the work of the Joint Commission on Doctrine. In relation to the *Saint Andrew Declaration*, with the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Committee notes the ongoing process within the Scottish Episcopal Church in relation to the amendment of their ecumenical Canon (Canon 15) and the potential for enabling shared ministry through this. In relation to the *Columba Declaration*, with the Church of England, the Committee places on record its thanks to the Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, for his commitment to the relationship between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland, and highlights our ongoing commitment to the ecumenical, prayer initiative: *Thy Kingdom Come*.

The Committee highlights our ongoing engagement with the church in Europe through the Conference of European Churches and the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe. Further, it highlights our ongoing engagement with the church globally and notes the forthcoming 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 2025.

In conclusion, the Committee invites the General Assembly to reaffirm the ecumenical vision inherent in the *Articles Declaratory*.

Report

1. THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The future shape of the church in Scotland is a matter that concerns all who are involved in the life of the Church of Scotland. Equally, it is a matter that will concern those who share in the life of every other church within Scotland. It may also be a matter of concern for those of good will who note the contribution that the Church has made, and continues to make, to the wider society of which we are a part.

1.2 The Church of Scotland as we have known it is undoubtedly changing as a result of decisions taken within the Church in recent years. Equally, the impact of societal change, including that associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath, continues to affect institutions and bodies which might once have been thought to be relatively unchanging features of our society. Indeed, in the present context, it might be thought that the only permanent element is change itself. To the extent that this is so, we acknowledge that discerning the contours of the future shape of the church is no easy task.

1.3 What then is the role of the Ecumenical Relations Committee within the life of the Church of Scotland at this time? In a formal sense, the role of the Committee is to serve the General Assembly by advising it in relation to the ecumenical implications of its work, 'with particular reference to Article VII of the *Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland*'.^[i] How might this role be further articulated? It may be said that the Committee understands its task to be that of calling the Church of Scotland to look beyond its present boundaries at a local, regional, national and international level, in order that it might discern that which God is doing beyond the boundaries of our particular embodiment of the Church of Jesus Christ.

1.4 In so discerning, we may reflect on that which we understand God to be doing within our church. Why is there value in so doing? As we within our church experience change and respond to the reality of societal change, we may be sure that we are not alone in this. The realities that are impacting upon us are the same realities that are impacting upon others. The outcomes may, or may not, be different, but the underlying reality of change is a shared feature of our common life. As the future shape of the church evolves within the Church of Scotland in response, so also does it evolve within other churches.

1.5 In an ideal world, the vision of the apostle Paul in 1st Corinthians would be integral to our shared experience as part of the Church of Jesus Christ within Scotland:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.^[ii]

1.6 In our shared suffering and in our shared rejoicing, we would experience together that which God is doing across the whole face of the church. Our response to the impact of change would be a mutually shared response and the evolution of the future shape of the church a mutually shared experience. To imagine that we could hermetically seal ourselves off from the wider experience of the church, and primarily focus only on that which is internal to us, would be to deny ourselves the wisdom, insight and opportunities which exist beyond our boundaries.

1.7 To seek to understand that which God is doing beyond the immediate boundaries of our church is not to undervalue what we understand God to have done within the Church of Scotland in times past. Rather, it is to be true to our vocation as an *ecclesia reformata sed semper reformanda*, a church reformed but always requiring to be reformed.^[iii] It is to be true to our vocation as a church that understands its present shape to be provisional and open to the reforming and renewing impulse of the Holy Spirit.

1.8 The present shape of the Church of Scotland is not, of course, coterminous with the present shape of the church in Scotland. Within Scotland, there are a variety of different traditions of the church, with each one embodying and giving expression to the rich diversity of the gifting of the Spirit. Many of these churches have been part of the ecclesial landscape of the country for centuries. Meanwhile, others have come to inhabit the landscape only in more recent times. We may be more, or less, familiar with certain of these traditions than others. What we can say of them collectively, and particularly, is that as they evolve, their future shape will differ from their present shape. The reforming and renewing impulse of the Spirit will ensure that this is so. Our vocation as an *ecclesia reformata sed semper reformanda* asks that we be open to the Spirit at work within, and beyond, the boundaries of our tradition, in order that we may discover the future shape of the church in Scotland.

2. THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND: ARTICLES DECLARATORY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

2.1 In recent years, the Committee has consistently referenced the *Articles Declaratory* in the course of its Reports, as evidenced in those of 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2023. The *Articles Declaratory* may be said to have shaped the Church of Scotland from 1929 onwards and to continue to shape the life of the church at this present time.^[iv] From the perspective of the Committee, the principal focus of these Reports has been on Article VII upon which, as noted above, the work of the Committee is founded:

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.

2.2 How are we to understand the significance of Article VII today? The Report of the Committee in 2018, with reference to the great High Priestly Prayer of Jesus in John 17, stated:

The prayer of Jesus for the unity of the disciples ('that they may all be one') is in order to realise the mission of Jesus ('so that the world may believe that you have sent me'). Jesus prays for unity in order to enable that mission with unity itself understood as an expression of an integral relationship between the Father and the Son ('just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you'). The identity of the Church of Scotland, as expressed in the *Articles Declaratory*, is in this sense bound up with its understanding of what Jesus intends as he prays to the Father.^[vi]

2.3 That is, Article VII speaks of that which lies at the heart of the church and is integral to its identity: the mission of Jesus and the unity that enables it. At this juncture in the life of the Church of Scotland, we do well to ask: How seriously have we taken this insight into the nature of mission and to what extent has it given shape to the life of the church?

2.4 Alongside this, it should be stated that the Committee has always encouraged the Church of Scotland, and our partner churches in Scotland, to view Article VII in the context of the *Articles Declaratory* as a whole, believing that the Articles inform one another and ought not to be viewed in isolation. In particular, the Committee has consistently highlighted the relationship between Article VII and Article III:

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.

2.5 The Report of the Committee in 2019 sought to highlight the relationship between Article III and Article VII with reference back to the General Assembly of 2010 and the Declaratory Act anent the Third Article Declaratory approved at that Assembly.^[vii] The Act states:

The Church of Scotland reaffirms the principles enshrined in the third Article Declaratory and declares anew its commitment to be a national church with a distinctive evangelical and pastoral concern for the people and nation of Scotland.

2.6 It then continues:

The Church of Scotland remains committed to the ecumenical vision set out in the seventh Article Declaratory and, in pursuit of that vision, stands eager to share with other churches in Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland.^[viii]

2.7 The Report of the Committee in 2021 returned to the highlighting of this relationship and interpreted it in terms of a call to 'cooperative partnership' with other churches in Scotland in the following terms:

[T]he future shape of ministry and mission in Scotland ought to be undertaken on the basis of cooperative partnership as a response to the challenges facing the church...The vision embedded in the *Articles Declaratory* opens our horizons to the ever-present opportunity of sharing "in Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland". In the times in which we live, the commitment to living out our response in cooperative partnership is an indispensable element in our response to the prayer of Jesus and to the challenges we face. There is no future for the Church of Scotland that does not embed cooperative partnership as an integral element of its ongoing identity.^[ix]

2.8 With respect to 'the future shape of ministry and mission in Scotland', the Committee reaffirms its view that: 'There is no future for the Church of Scotland that does not embed cooperative partnership as an integral element of its ongoing identity.'

2.9 This is not to suggest that the entirety of the issues we face can be addressed solely through this means. Rather, it is to say that we are not alone in addressing the challenges of 'ministry and mission in Scotland' and that we address them better when done in cooperative partnership with other churches.

2.10 The Report of the Committee in 2023 sought to place Article VII in the context of the *Articles Declaratory* as a whole and offered a brief commentary on the inter-relationship of the Articles, with reference to each of them.^[ix] It suggests that 'the purpose of the *Articles Declaratory*, in the first instance, is to affirm the nature and identity of the Church of Scotland' and its essential continuity with the Church of Scotland since the time of the Reformation in 1560. Further, it contends that if Article VII had been omitted and 'contained only Articles I-VI and VIII and IX':

We might say that this is the sole purpose of the *Articles* and that they are intended to describe what would be, in effect, a closed and essentially non-permeable ecclesiastical system.

2.11 Having offered a description of the *Articles Declaratory* without Article VII, it states:

However, Article VII is an integral part of the *Articles Declaratory* and we may deduce from this that the *Articles* are intended to describe that which the Church of Scotland is and has historically been whilst, at the same time, pointing to a future in which the Church lives out its response to the prayer of Jesus 'that they may all be one... that the world may believe'. (John 17: 21) and is reshaped by the ongoing call to renewal.

2.12 That is, the *Articles* are intended to encompass the Church of Scotland as it is and as it has been, and, crucially, as it will be in the future. Thus, the question of the future shape of the Church of Scotland, and of the church in Scotland, is embedded within the *Articles Declaratory* and it is incumbent upon us to reckon with it. The work that will shape the future of the Church in Scotland is ongoing and we, by the grace of God, act as participants in it and are witnesses to it.

3. THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND: REALISING THE VISION

3.1 As noted above, the Declaratory Act anent the Third Article Declaratory reaffirms ‘the ecumenical vision’ set out in the *Articles Declaratory* and affirms that the Church of Scotland ‘in pursuit of that vision, stands eager to share with other churches in Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland.’^[x]

3.2 Taking this as a given, the challenge is then to address the question of how we translate that vision in practical terms in order that we might see it realised in the shared life of the church in Scotland. To attempt to do so would be a considerable undertaking and one that would involve the contribution of many different churches in relation to a multiplicity of different matters. Nevertheless, it is better to make a beginning and trust that this might serve as a catalyst in the process. The following sections of the Report seek to make such a beginning and to offer such a catalyst.

4. THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND: PRESBYTERY MISSION PLANNING

4.1 Under the Report of the Committee to the General Assembly of 2023, a deliverance was agreed which noted ‘the ecumenical implications of the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021) and the “Presbytery Mission Plan Act: Guidance and Code of Practice”’, with reference to the ecumenical guidance in relation to planning dating from September 2021. Further, during the Report of the Faith Nurture Forum, the General Assembly agreed to update this guidance and ‘instruct Presbyteries to consider this and articulate it more clearly in implementation and at the annual evaluation and development of Presbytery Mission Plans.’^[xi]

4.2 In order to assist in the development of this guidance, the Committee offered draft proposals to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team for their consideration and look forward to its adoption, in amended form as required, and circulation to Presbyteries. The Committee stands ready to assist Presbyteries in relation to this and would welcome engagement with them in order to develop an ecumenical approach that takes account of the requirements of Presbytery mission planning and which, in turn, informs that planning process.

5. THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND: ENGAGEMENT WITH PRESBYTERIES

5.1 In the light of the fact that the future shape of the pattern of Presbyteries across Scotland is now in place, the Committee regard this as an opportune time to establish a corresponding pattern of engagement with them. To that end, the Committee has been in touch with each of the Presbyteries with a view to establishing such a relationship and to identify the best point of contact within the evolving structures of each Presbytery. This builds upon the engagement that already takes place and it is anticipated that this will better inform the Committee with respect to the challenges facing Presbyteries and the opportunities for cooperative engagement that we believe are present in many localities. An integral part of this approach will be to enable Presbyteries to better connect with the corresponding presbyteries, dioceses, synods and circuits of our partners and to enable the mutual realisation of these opportunities. There are, of course, many good examples of local cooperative working across Scotland and the opportunity to learn from them will potentially serve as an encouragement to others to embark on cooperative working in their own locality.

5.2 We judge that this pattern of engagement might best be undertaken on a three-year cycle, with the Committee proactively focussing on engaging with four Presbyteries in 2024/2025, then again in 2025/2026, *et cetera*. The Committee undertakes to report on progress in this matter to a future General Assembly.

6. THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND: NATIONAL CHURCH CONVERSATION

6.1 During the Report of the Committee to the General Assembly of 2023, a deliverance was agreed in the following terms:

Instruct the Ecumenical Relations Committee urgently to initiate a conversation across the whole Church with our sister Churches in Scotland about cooperation in Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland.

6.2 The Committee agreed that the most appropriate place to raise this matter in the first instance was within the context of the Scottish Church Leaders’ Forum, given that senior representatives of our partner churches are present within that body. Equally, it is the case that our partner churches inhabit exactly the same landscape as we do and are faced with identical, or very similar, challenges to the ones that we face. Further, our partner churches, each in accordance with its own tradition, have their own particular sense of vocation in terms of the call to provide ministry and mission within Scotland. The particular sense of vocation will be worked out in different ways within different churches, each according to the resources available to them. Nevertheless, there is a general communality of interest amongst our partner churches with reference to the provision of ministry and mission within Scotland. Given that there is such a general communality of interest, it would seem appropriate for partner churches in Scotland to share together in the addressing of the challenges we face. The Committee will continue to encourage the ongoing conversation within the Scottish Church Leaders’ Forum.

7. THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND: SCOTTISH CHRISTIAN FORUM

7.1 The Committee reported to the General Assembly of 2017 that a review of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) had been initiated and in the following year that the reception of the report of the review, undertaken by Theos, was ongoing.^[xii] Further, the Committee reported to the General Assembly of 2019 that it had been agreed to begin the transition from ACTS to a Scottish Christian Forum.^[xiii] Thereafter, the General Assembly of 2021 approved the following deliverance:

Agree to the participation of the Church of Scotland in the Scottish Christian Forum and recognise it as the national ecumenical body in Scotland and note the proposal to dissolve Action of Churches Together in Scotland once the Scottish Christian Forum has been formed.^[xiv]

7.2 It would be fair to say that since that point, the member churches of ACTS have struggled to reach a consensus as to the future shape of the ecumenical body in Scotland and to reach agreement on the form of the Scottish Christian Forum (SCF). At the same time, the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum and the Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum, as two of the integral parts of the prospective SCF, had evolved and developed and were active and functioning in their own right.^[xv]

7.3 The Committee reported to the General Assembly of 2023 that a renewed effort to reach consensus and agreement had been initiated in January 2023 with a conference organised by the Ecumenical Officers' Forum: "The Future of Scottish Ecumenism".^[xvi] This saw the beginning of a fresh cycle of meetings and an agreement that the Ecumenical Officers' Forum be tasked with bringing proposals that would lead to the establishment of the SCF. In the course of this cycle, it became clear that a consensus would only be achievable with respect to a relatively modest proposal regarding the form of the SCF.^[xvii] This proposal was presented to a meeting initiated by the Ecumenical Officers' Forum, held on 6 February 2024, to which representatives of all of the member churches of ACTS, and others, were invited. The proposed form of the SCF was presented and discussed and a consensus reached that, in the present climate, the proposal represented a realistic and sustainable model which would give shape to the future of Scottish ecumenism. Something of the vision that animates the SCF proposal is expressed in the following:

The vision is inspired by a renewal of the call to prayer and our common witness to the Gospel. Embracing this vision will lead to the deepening of a shared spirituality; support for ecumenical initiatives at all levels; and the exploration of common challenges. It will foster ecumenical relationships which respect the variety of Christian life and witness in Scotland and encourage participation in the shared life of the Church. (Appendix I)

7.4 It should be noted, for the avoidance of doubt, that the proposal does not create a separate and discrete charity and that the General Assembly is not being invited to enter into any undertakings beyond the scope of the proposal set out in Appendix I. In the form proposed, the SCF would not be able to enter into any contracts or to take on any liabilities in its own right.

7.5 In reaching a decision in relation to this matter, the Committee wish to draw the attention of the General Assembly to the fact that the proposal being discussed at this point would fulfil the first part of the deliverance agreed at the General Assembly of 2021, that is:

Agree to the participation of the Church of Scotland in the Scottish Christian Forum and recognise it as the national ecumenical body in Scotland.

7.6 However, it should be noted that it would not lead to the fulfilment of the second part in relation to 'the proposal to dissolve Action of Churches Together in Scotland once the Scottish Christian Forum has been formed'.

7.7 As noted above, the member churches of ACTS have struggled to reach a consensus as to the future shape of the ecumenical body in Scotland, and the process that will lead to the eventual dissolution of ACTS has, in effect, been detached from the process that has led to the proposals with respect to the SCF. The former process is ongoing and its outcome will be reported to a future General Assembly. Whilst unsatisfactory in certain regards, it is judged that it is better to have reached a clear outcome, with respect to the designation of the national ecumenical body, and to establish the SCF, than to allow the lack of consensus in relation to the future of ACTS to delay matters further. The Church of Scotland will continue to be a member of ACTS until such time as a final decision is reached with respect to it, with such a decision being dependent on a consensus being reached. The Committee advises that no payments have been made to ACTS since the end of 2019, and in the event that the General Assembly approves the proposed form of the SCF, in concert with the other participating churches, ACTS will cease to be the national ecumenical body in Scotland.

7.8 The Committee invites the General Assembly to approve the form of the Scottish Christian Forum, and the participation of representatives of the Church of Scotland within it, and recognise it as the National Ecumenical Body within Scotland. (Appendix I) The work that will shape the future of the Church in Scotland is ongoing and we, by the grace of God, act as participants in it and are witnesses to it.

8. THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND: SAINT MARGARET DECLARATION

8.1 The *Saint Margaret Declaration*, agreed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2022 represents one of the most significant ecumenical developments realised within Scotland in recent years.^[xviii] The *Declaration* itself built upon a growing friendship between the two traditions at both local and national levels, with one of the most significant of the latter being the Joint Commission on Doctrine.

8.2 The Joint Commission on Doctrine (JCD) has a history that stretches back over nearly fifty years to 1977, and the growing cooperation between the two churches is reflected in the work undertaken within the JCD in the years since then. Equally, the origins of the JCD lie in the new atmosphere of more open friendliness between the two churches following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).^[xix] Informal discussions between ministers and clergy began to take place subsequent to this, and these were followed by the establishing of a Commission for Christian Unity within the Bishops' Conference. Thereafter, the Commission began a more formal conversation with representatives of the then Inter-Church Relations Committee of the Church of Scotland, with this resulting in an invitation to the Bishops' Conference to be represented at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Further, work undertaken by the Panel on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland on shared and differentiated doctrinal understanding between the two traditions in the mid-1970's paved the way for the eventual establishment of the JCD.

8.3 The first meeting of the JCD took place in November 1977 and it continued the pattern previously established in the work of the Panel on Doctrine in seeking to articulate both shared, and differentiated, doctrinal understanding between the two traditions. That is, the JCD sought to clarify common ground and, in so doing, to establish mutually acknowledged differences. This approach is exemplified in Alistair Heron's *Agreement & Disagreement* which flowed out of the work of the Panel on Doctrine and into the ongoing work of the JCD.^[xxv]

8.4 The initial cycle of the work of the JCD focused on the doctrine of the Church and then thereafter on the understanding of marriage within the Christian tradition, with particular reference to Roman Catholic canon law and the *Code of Canon Law* published in 1983, with that cycle being completed in 1993. Thereafter, a pause in the work of the JCD was followed by a renewed cycle of work from 2000 onwards, with the particular catalyst for this being the publication of the Official Common Statement on the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic in 1999.^[xxvi] and the ongoing engagement between the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity and the World Council of Churches on the doctrine of baptism.^[xxvii] The focus on the twin themes of baptism and the doctrine of justification resulted in the publication of *Baptism: Catholic and Reformed* (2007)^[xxviii] followed by a *Liturgy for the Re-affirmation of Baptismal Vows* (2010), an initiative in which the Scottish Episcopal Church participated.^[xxix]

8.5 During the course of these two cycles, there have been a series of four International Catholic-Reformed Dialogues and the JCD has engaged with these and drawn upon them in the course of its work.^[xxx] The work of the JCD may be said to mirror the international dialogues with the international informing the national and, with respect to *Baptism: Catholic and Reformed*, the national informing the international.^[xxxi] The JCD also responded to other international dialogues and, uniquely in a global context, made a joint response in 2016 to the convergence text offered by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches: *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013).^[xxxii] At that point in time it was noted:

It is a testimony to the distance the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church have travelled in their relationship to one another that such an ecumenical response was possible.^[xxxiii]

8.6 Alongside this, the JCD organised a series of conferences focusing on, for example, the 500th Anniversary of the birth of John Calvin (2009), the 450th Anniversary of the Scottish Reformation (2010), the 50th Anniversary of Vatican II (2013) and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2015).

8.7 The work of the JCD effectively reached a hiatus in 2020 with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is now proposed to renew the work of the JCD and to initiate a fresh cycle. Initial discussions have taken place in this regard and a report on the agreed basis of work within this cycle will be presented to the General Assembly of 2025. The renewal of this work is a further sign of the commitments made in the *Saint Margaret Declaration* and builds on the work undertaken in recent decades.

9. THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND: SAINT ANDREW DECLARATION

9.1 The *Saint Andrew Declaration*, agreed by the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2021, affirms the relationship of two churches who share a call to provide a territorial ministry within Scotland.^[xxxiv] The Committee notes with satisfaction that the Rt Rev Sally Foster-Fulton was invited to address the General Synod in 2023 and was warmly received in so doing.

9.2 Under the Report of the Committee to the General Assembly of 2023, the Committee addressed the terms of the Sacraments Act (Act V 2000) and the granting, to ministers within different traditions of the Church, of permission to celebrate the Sacraments within the Church of Scotland on an occasional basis. In particular, the Committee sought to take account of the implications of the signing of the *Columba Declaration* with the Church of England (2016) and the *Saint Andrew Declaration* with the Scottish Episcopal Church (2021), as well the implications of our membership of particular ecumenical bodies.^[xxxv] The amended Act reflects the decision of the General Assembly in relation to this matter.^[xxxvi]

9.3 Parallel to the addressing of this matter in the context of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) began the first stage of the process within their tradition of potentially amending the Canon with respect to the relationship between the SEC and other churches, including those outwith the Anglican tradition, with respect to officiating at services of worship: Canon 15 "Of the Admission of Clergy of other Churches, Provinces and Dioceses to Officiate".^[xxxvii]

9.4 The proposed amendment to Canon 15 identifies the *Saint Andrew Declaration* as one of the ecumenical agreements entered into by the SEC whose implications are not covered by the present Canon, and notes that the *Declaration*:

[A]ffirms that "in our churches the Word of God is authentically preached, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion are faithfully administered," and commits the two Churches "to welcome one another's members to worship and participate in the congregational life of each other's churches."^[xxxviii]

9.5 Similarly, within the wider Scottish context, the amendment identifies the Episcopal-Methodist-United Reformed Church Partnership (2010) (EMU) as a further agreement whose implications are not covered.^[xxxix]

9.6 With respect, *inter alia*, to the *Saint Andrew Declaration* and the EMU Partnership, the amendment would, within the overall provisions of the Canon, create the basis for a 'limited exchange of ministries' in which:

Clergy or authorised lay people of these Churches may give addresses, lead prayers and worship and assist in the distribution of Holy Communion in services in the Scottish Episcopal Church, as authorised by their own Church...Clergy may preside at a service of Holy Communion in a charge in the Scottish Episcopal Church subject to the provisions...of this Canon and as authorised by their own Church.^[xxxv]

9.7 It should be noted that the amendment does not create a basis for the full interchangeability of ministries, and the terms of the 'limited exchange of ministries' should be observed. Nevertheless, the amendment recognises the potential implications of the *Saint Andrew Declaration* and seeks to build upon it in such a way as to enhance the mutual capacity of two churches who share a call to provide a territorial ministry within Scotland.

9.8 The proposed amendment was carried, in the Houses of Bishops, Clergy and Laity respectively, in the first stage of the process within the tradition of the SEC. It was then referred to the Diocesan Synods, in a process analogous in certain respects to Barrier Act procedure within the Church of Scotland. It is expected that the amendment will be presented for a second time and be subject to approval at the General Synod in 2024.^[xxxvi] The Committee will report on the outcome of this process to the General Assembly of 2025.

10. THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH: COLUMBA DECLARATION

10.1 The *Columba Declaration*, agreed by the General Synod of the Church of England and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2016 stands as the first in a series of bilateral Declarations through which the Church of Scotland and its partner churches have sought to give expression to that which they hold in common and seek to affirm together.^[xxxvii] The *Columba Declaration* is distinctive insofar as it gives such expression across a national border, whilst affirming the Christian faith that binds us together and enables us to face the common challenges which transcend borders. As national churches within our respective borders, those common challenges invite us to work together in our responses to them.

10.2 At this time, we wish to express our thanks to the retiring Joint Chairs of the *Columba Declaration* Contact Group: Rt Rev James Newcome, formerly Bishop of Carlisle and the Very Rev Russell Barr who have sought to carry forward the commitments undertaken in the *Declaration* particularly through the challenges of the post-pandemic period. We look forward to a fresh cycle of the work of the Contact Group as new Chairs are identified and a renewed agenda is identified. To this end, we welcome the appointment of the Rt Rev Rob Saner-Haigh, Bishop of Penrith in the Diocese of Carlisle as co-Chair on behalf of the Church of England.

10.3 An annual meeting between the Moderator of the General Assembly and the Archbishop of Canterbury has become an established feature of the engagement between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland, with the meetings providing an opportunity for shared reflection on the common challenges before us. Further, the meetings have helped to establish a strong working relationship between Lambeth Palace and the Principal Clerk's Office.

10.4 We would place on record our thanks to the Most Revd & Rt Hon Justin Welby GCVO for his commitment to this relationship and for his engagement with the Church of Scotland in the years since taking up the office of Archbishop of Canterbury in 2013. The relationship has proven to be of especial value in recent years in relation to, for example, the planning for the Ecumenical Pilgrimage to South Sudan in 2022; the marking of the passing of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth in 2022, and the arrangements for the Coronation of King Charles III in 2023. In all of these examples, the good working relationship established has enabled ready communication and mutual understanding.

10.5 *Thy Kingdom Come* is a global ecumenical prayer initiative, begun in May 2016 with the invitation of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to every parish in the Church of England to join in prayer from Ascension Day to Pentecost Sunday. In the following year, every diocese within the Church of England responded to the initiative and since then it has grown into an ecumenical movement which unites more than a million Christians in prayer, in nearly 90% of countries worldwide, across 85 different denominations and traditions.^[xxxviii] In 2024, *Thy Kingdom Come* takes place from 9-19 May, and the Church of Scotland has partnered in this initiative from 2018 onwards. An integral part of the annual resourcing of *Thy Kingdom Come* is the provision of a Prayer Journal to accompany the prayer journey made from Ascension Day to Pentecost Sunday. In 2024, a new provision has been added to the resources with a Scottish Prayer Journal included for the first time. The Scottish Prayer Journal has eleven representative voices drawn from across the church, primarily from within the membership of the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum, as arranged by the Ecumenical Officer of the Church of Scotland. We thank Emma Buchan, Kemi Bamgbose and Revd Jean Kerr from the *Thy Kingdom Come* team for their support in this initiative.

10.6 The future shape of the church will surely be discerned as we pray together; 'thy kingdom come'. The work that will shape the future of the Church in Scotland is ongoing and we, by the grace of God, act as participants in it and are witnesses to it.

11. THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH: CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES

11.1 Christians from across Europe met in Tallinn, Estonia, for the General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) (14-20 June 2023) with the theme: "Under God's Blessing – Shaping the Future", with a strong representation from the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church as part of it. Since the previous General Assembly in 2018, much has happened in Europe and the General Assembly was deeply conscious of the significance of the invasion of Ukraine and what it could mean for other states bordering Russia, including Estonia, the host country. Delegates remained conscious throughout the Assembly of the fragility of the geo-political situation in that part of the world.

11.2 CEC was originally set up to create a space in which Europeans of diverse history, polity and ethnicity could meet together because of, and despite, differences of perspective and experience. In this space, Christians are understood to be united in Christ, enriched by diversity and called to witness to that unity in expressing in word and action their concern for those without power or who suffer injustice at the hands of others.

11.3 The four keynote speakers at the Assembly contributed much to reflect upon. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, from Belarus, spoke on the theme: "What can Churches offer in European society?" Following the Belarussian Presidential elections on 9 August 2020, she now lives in exile in Lithuania and as the leader of the Belarussian democratic movement has visited 28 countries, gathering support and advocating for the release of more than 1500 political prisoners and a peaceful transition of power through free and fair elections. Her speech to the Assembly called for religious communities and people of faith to 'play a significant role in promoting peace in the society, maintaining hope under the yoke of tyranny, and contributing to democratic transformation. People whose faith teaches them not to kill, not to steal, not to bear false witness, who honour God more than political leaders, whose moral strength is empowered by their belief - are extremely dangerous for dictatorships and extremely needed in democracies'. She contrasted the language of brotherhood used by the Russians in describing their invasion of Ukraine with the experience of sisterhood amongst women involved in the attempted revolution in Belarus. She implored church leaders to use their power in supporting people in Belarus: to demand the release of political prisoners, especially those with pre-existing health conditions like cancer and diabetes, to demand access to worship sites, to hold public services and prayers for Belarus and to facilitate dialogue.^[xxxix]

11.4 Professor Dr Hartmut Rosa, Professor of Sociology at the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena, delivered a challenging and thought-provoking keynote speech, reflecting on the role of churches in offering a different model to Europe's desire for permanent growth and acceleration. He began his speech by describing what he saw as two versions of Europe: 1. Dynamic Stabilisation, 2. Europe as a space of resonance. He said that European society is at a point of 'breakneck standstill', in which life is focused on destructive growth to maintain the status quo. On the macro level, this system creates pollution and environmental problems; on the micro level, aggression and burnout. Rosa referred to the increase of mental health problems and suicide rates among young people who are not able to take the stress of constant acceleration. In response, Rosa proposed an alternative model of 'resonance', with resonance described as a mode of listening and responding to each other and the offering of a different conception of the good life.^[xli]

11.5 Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury spoke on the theme: "Living theologically: what blessing does the church of Christ bring?" He explored the question of what it means to be blessed and how that question impacts the way churches relate to today's world. His exploration was rooted in an understanding of theology which has its origins in liturgy. He stated: 'Those who are not anxious about stockpiling their resources but acknowledge their dependence on mercy and gift; those who are hungry not for more security for themselves, but for a justice that is shared with all; those who are compassionate and without aggression, who are not afraid to be wounded, who labour for reconciliation - all these are people who have left behind the passion to be the possessors and managers of their destiny, people who know that it is only in relation to God, and to their brothers and sisters under God, that they will be fully human...Instead of an obsessive longing to define their world and secure their control, they listen for the call of God and look for the gift of God in the needs of the world, and they find the courage to embrace the risks that this looking and listening can bring.' Williams also discussed practical priorities and engagement with Europe's political future, with the environmental crisis overshadowing every other issue, Williams insisted: 'The story here is of an insanely unbalanced account of human entitlement and human capacity that has consistently, in the last three centuries, ignored any sense of the interdependence of human life and the life of the organic order as a whole.'^[xlii]

11.6 His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in his keynote address, asked some challenging questions about the future of ecumenism in Europe. He recalled that the ecumenical movement gained momentum in the wake of the devastation of the two world wars in the last century. However, he noted that the ecumenical movement thrived in a very different Europe than that which we know and live in today: 'As Christian churches, we can no longer take for granted that Europeans will identify with national churches or, indeed, with any particular form of belief.' He then discussed the purpose or goal of the ecumenical movement in this kind of Europe and reflected on the possibility of a Christian Europe mirroring the openness and respect that we expect of one another in ecumenical circles, calling for all voices to be heard, including those that express disagreement and disbelief, through mutual respect and social justice.^[xliii]

11.7 The CEC General Assembly was not without discord and there clearly remain concerns over the strategy of the organisation, with some delegates continuing to express disagreement with CEC's decision to withdraw funding from the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and from the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) in order to focus on building a platform for advocacy, primarily to European Union institutions and agencies, and on theological issues. The Committee undertakes to continue to monitor this matter and to report to a future General Assembly as necessary.

12. THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH: COMMUNION OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES IN EUROPE

12.1 The General Assembly of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) takes place from 27 August-2 September 2024 in Sibiu, Romania, on the theme: "In the Light of Christ: Called to Hope". The membership of the CPCE is composed of some ninety-six churches from within the Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed and United Church traditions, as well as pre-Reformation bodies such as the Church of the Czech Brethren and the Waldensian Church, drawn from over thirty countries, primarily in Europe. The *Leuenberg Agreement* signed in 1973, with the Church of Scotland being a founding signatory, is the basis of the CPCE. The General Assembly is the principal decision-making body of the CPCE, with Assemblies taking place on a six-year cycle. Between Assemblies, the work of the CPCE is taken forward by a Council elected at each Assembly, which is itself led by a three-member Presidium, coordinated by the office of the CPCE in Vienna. The General Assembly receives the work undertaken as a consequence of the previous Assembly and, in turn, determines the work to be undertaken during the forthcoming cycle.^[xliii] The current President of the CPCE Council is the Rev Dr John Bradbury, General Secretary of the United Reformed Church, and the Committee wish to place on record its thanks to him for representing the interests of the Church of Scotland in relation to the work of the CPCE.

12.2 In our engagement with the representative ecumenical bodies that are based in Europe, we recognise that the relative stability which obtained on continental Europe in recent generations has undergone considerable challenge, not least with respect to the war in Ukraine. Equally, the political relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union has itself also undergone a profound change. Notwithstanding the latter point and ever-conscious of the former, we ought to resist any tendency to view events on continental Europe in a detached manner. The future shape of the continent will, in part, impact upon our society as a whole and the Church requires to be responsive to any consequent changes in the wider landscape that we inhabit.

13. THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH: NICAEA 2025

13.1 The Committee wish to highlight the forthcoming 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 2025. The Council came in time to be acknowledged as the first Ecumenical Council of the Church Catholic and its formulation of the relationship between the ‘one God, the Father, the Almighty...[and the] one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God...of one Being with the Father’, lies at the heart of the Nicene Creed, whose final form was developed in subsequent ecumenical councils.^[xiv]

13.2 The World Council of Churches intends to mark the Anniversary and to convene a World Conference on Faith and Order at the St Bishoy Monastery at Wadi El Natrun, Alexandria, Egypt from 25 to 28 October 2025, on the theme: “Where Now for Visible Unity?” In relation to this, it is stated that:

The first Ecumenical Council in 325 was a gathering of Christian bishops in Nicaea, now İznik in present-day Türkiye, as the first attempt to reach consensus in the church through an assembly representing all of Christendom, and to affirm the Christian faith in the triune God...Then, as now, the call to unity was heard within the context of a troubled, unequal, and divided world. The anniversary offers an opportunity to celebrate and reflect on the affirmation of faith in the Nicene Creed, the mission of God’s triune love and the implications this has for the common witness and service of the churches, and offers the opportunity to ask afresh with others what Nicaea means for churches and Christians today.^[xiv]

13.3 This World Conference on Faith and Order will be the sixth such conference, with the first having taken place at Lausanne in 1927 and the second in Edinburgh in 1937. In 1948, the World Conference on Faith and Order became a constituent part of the World Council of Churches and a third World Conference on Faith and Order took place in Lund in 1952, and thereafter in Montreal in 1963 and Santiago de Compostela in 1993.

13.4 The significance of the Ecumenical Council at Nicaea, as summoned by the Emperor Constantine, cannot be overstated in terms of its impact on the subsequent development of our understanding of the Christian faith, and on our understanding of the nature of the relationship between the Church and the prevailing political order. Without question, the Council of Nicaea shaped the future of the Church from AD 325 onwards.

13.5 In recalling the Council, it is important to seek to place it within its historical context and then to endeavour to understand the way in which it shaped the subsequent expression of the Christian faith. Our faith is always expressed within a specific social and cultural context and locality and the form in which it is expressed can never be divorced from that. Underlying this, the common confession of the substance of the ecumenical creeds binds the Church of Jesus Christ in order that it might believe within the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. It is within the context of this Church that we, within the Church of Scotland, consider the future shape of the Church in our own specific context.

13.6 In highlighting the forthcoming 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, the Committee gives notice that it intends to shape its report to the General Assembly of 2025 around themes relating to the Council and to reflect upon its contemporary significance for the Church today. The Committee wishes to do so in partnership with the Theological Forum and invites the General Assembly to instruct the Committee and the Forum so to do.

14. CONCLUSION

14.1 A recurring coda throughout the Report affirms that: The work that will shape the future of the Church in Scotland is ongoing and we, by the grace of God, act as participants in it and are witnesses to it. This might be taken as a statement of that which is always true, and thus a truism. On the other hand, it may be taken as an invitation to seek to discern that which is the ongoing work of God and thereafter to intentionally affirm it in partnership with those who also discern the ways in the Church of the Jesus Christ is being shaped and remade in our times. Once more, we affirm: ‘There is no future for the Church of Scotland that does not embed cooperative partnership as an integral element of its ongoing identity.’

14.2 The ecumenical vision which animates this Report is itself an attempt to articulate our response to the prayer of Jesus; ‘that they may all be one...that the world may believe’. The prayer is itself woven into the *Articles Declaratory* which lie as the foundation of the church of which we are a part, and every part thereof. Those who first framed the *Articles Declaratory* were themselves deeply concerned for the future shape of the Church of Scotland and the church in Scotland. We, in turn, are no less so. In the midst of all the challenges we face, we reaffirm our commitment to the vision set out in the *Articles Declaratory* and, in a spirit of cooperative partnership, seek to live out our response to the prayer of Jesus.

In the name of the Committee

ROSS BLACKMAN, *Convener*
 PAULINE WEIBYE, *Vice-Convener*
 JOHN L MCPAKE, *Secretary*

Appendix I

Scottish Christian Forum

Vision:

1. The vision for the Scottish Christian Forum is rooted in the belief that the Holy Spirit is calling the churches, inter-church and Christian organisations in Scotland to a pilgrimage of greater unity, cooperation and common witness. The Forum will create an open space where respectful conversation between leaders and representatives from these bodies can take place.
2. The vision is inspired by a renewal of the call to prayer and our common witness to the Gospel. Embracing this vision will lead to the deepening of a shared spirituality; support for ecumenical initiatives at all levels; and the exploration of common challenges. It will foster ecumenical relationships which respect the variety of Christian life and witness in Scotland and encourage participation in the shared life of the Church.
3. The foundation of the Forum is mutual respect, acceptance and attentive listening, allied to the recognition of diversity among the participants. The Forum will seek to discern the work of the Holy Spirit and to respond in an ecumenism of action. Implicit in this is the recognition that participation will not require any church or organisation to abandon particular theological perspectives or traditional religious identities. Participation is to be understood theologically, whereby it is acknowledged that all participants are members of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

Constituent Elements:

The constituent elements of the Scottish Christian Forum, in the first instance, are the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum and the Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum. As the Forum evolves it is anticipated that other forums will develop and become an integral part of the body.

National Ecumenical Body:

The Scottish Christian Forum will be designated the National Ecumenical Body, and will relate as such to the other ecumenical instruments within Britain and Ireland through the Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum.

Scottish Church Leaders' Forum

Nature and Purpose:

The Scottish Church Leaders' Forum is a forum in which designated senior leaders within particular churches in Scotland gather together for the purpose of sharing fellowship, information and insight. At present, the Forum offers a meeting place to the following churches and communities:

1. Church of Scotland
2. Catholic Church in Scotland
3. Scottish Episcopal Church
4. United Free Church of Scotland
5. United Reformed Church
6. Methodist Church in Scotland
7. Religious Society of Friends
8. Salvation Army
9. Congregational Federation
10. Baptist Union of Scotland
11. Free Church of Scotland
12. Redeemed Christian Church of God
13. Greek Orthodox Church
14. Ukrainian Catholic Church

The Scottish Church Leaders' Forum is a participatory body and is, in nature, a voluntary association and its purpose, as stated, provides the basis on which the Forum is established. The Forum welcomes the participation of other churches within its life on the basis of agreement with the stated Nature, Purpose & Aims, and on the basis of the consensus of the Forum.

The Forum was initiated in March 2020 and the catalyst for its initiation and subsequent development was the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for a shared response to the challenges of the pandemic. Subsequent to this, the aims of the Forum have evolved in relation to the present context of the church in Scotland.

Aims:

The Forum seeks to:

1. Encourage the mission of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in Scotland;
2. Encourage the living out of our shared response to the prayer of Jesus that we may 'all be one' (John 17: 21);
3. Encourage the Church to share in the call to prayer;
4. Encourage a broad spectrum of churches to participate in its life;
5. Encourage the commissioning of research into areas of mutual interest;
6. Provide a platform for working cooperatively with other churches and ecumenical bodies within Scotland, and within Britain and Ireland.

Cooperation:

The Scottish Church Leaders' Forum will work cooperatively with other church and ecumenical bodies, as appropriate, including:

1. Ecumenical Officers' Forum
2. Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office
3. Scottish Churches Committee
4. Scottish Church Planters' Network
5. Evangelical Alliance (Scotland)
6. Churches Together in Britain & Ireland
7. Churches Together in England
8. Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting
9. Churches Together in Wales (Cytûn)

Convener:

The Convener of the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum shall be appointed from amongst the members of the Forum and shall serve at the pleasure of the Forum.

Secretary:

The Secretariat of the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum shall be provided by the Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum.

Annual Review:

The Scottish Church Leaders' Forum shall conduct an annual review towards the end of each calendar year and set goals for the calendar year following.

Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum

Nature and Purpose:

The Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum is a forum in which designated Ecumenical Officers, and those with ecumenical responsibility within their church, gather together for the purpose of sharing fellowship, information and insight.

Further, the Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum serves as the Secretariat of the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum and in that capacity shall record the Minute of meetings of the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum and, where appropriate, to forward initiatives agreed by the latter Forum.

The Forum offers a meeting place to the following churches and communities, and includes, where appropriate, representatives from the respective Committees of those churches and communities:

1. Church of Scotland (Ecumenical Relations Committee)
2. Catholic Church in Scotland (Bishops' Ecumenical Reference Group of the Scottish Catholic Bishops' Conference)
3. Scottish Episcopal Church (Inter-Church Relations Committee)
4. United Free Church of Scotland (Ecumenical Relations Working Group)
5. United Reformed Church (Ecumenical Relations Task Group of the National Synod of Scotland)
6. Salvation Army
7. The Redeemed Christian Church of God
8. Religious Society of Friends
9. Methodist Church in Scotland
10. Churches in Communities

The Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum is a participatory body and is, in nature, a voluntary association and its purpose, as stated, provides the basis on which the Forum is established. It was initiated in November 2019.

Aims:

The Forum seeks to:

1. Encourage the living out of our shared response to the prayer of Jesus that we may 'all be one' (John 17: 21);
2. Encourage the Church to share in the call to prayer;
3. Encourage a broad spectrum of churches to participate in its life;
4. Provide a platform for working cooperatively with other churches and ecumenical bodies within Scotland, and within Britain and Ireland.
5. Encourage the witness of the Church to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, by encouraging, enabling and supporting the formation, development and ongoing life of ecumenical partnerships at a local and national level.

Local Ecumenical Partnerships:

The Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum will seek to encourage and support new and innovative forms of local ecumenical partnership. Further, it will seek to fulfil the responsibilities of Oversight and Review which are written into the constitutions of established Local Ecumenical Partnerships, and will liaise with the parent bodies of the churches which are members of such Partnerships.

Cooperation:

The Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum will seek to work cooperatively with other church and ecumenical bodies, as appropriate, including:

1. Scottish Church Leaders' Forum
2. Ecumenical Committees of the Scottish churches
3. Local Ecumenical Partnerships and the governing bodies of the churches party to them
4. Churches Together in Britain & Ireland

Convener:

The Convener of the Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum shall be appointed from amongst the members of the Forum and shall serve at the pleasure of the Forum.

Secretary:

The Secretary of the Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum shall be appointed from amongst the members of the Forum and shall serve at the pleasure of the Forum.

Annual Review:

The Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum shall conduct an annual review towards the end of each calendar year and set goals for the calendar year following.

Appendix II

Delegates to other Churches

The following have been appointed as delegates to the Assemblies, Synods and Conferences of other Churches:

Presbyterian Church of Wales: Moderator

United Reformed Church: Moderator

Church of England: Rev Dr David Coulter

United Reformed Church (National Synod of Scotland): Rev Ross Blackman

Methodist Church in Scotland (Synod): Rev Dr John L McPake

Scottish Episcopal Church: Rev Ross Blackman

United Free Church of Scotland: Rev Dr John L McPake

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

Conference of European Churches

General Assembly (June 2023):

Miss Gemma King, Mrs Pauline Weibye

Community of Protestant Churches in Europe

General Assembly (August 2024):

Rev Ian Alexander

Rev Tara Curlewis

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Board of Trustees:

Miss 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

Trustee:

Columba Declaration Contact Group

Co-Chair:

Co-Secretary: Rev Dr John L McPake

Members: Rev Dr Peter McEnhill, Mrs Pauline Weibye

Saint Andrew Declaration Contact Group

Co-Chair: Rev Ross Blackman

Co-Secretary: Rev Dr John L McPake

Rev Dr Nikki Macdonald, Rev Eileen Miller

Scottish Church Leaders' Forum

Moderator, Principal Clerk, Ecumenical Officer

Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum

Ecumenical Officer

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- [ii] 1 Corinthians 12: 12-13a), 26.
- [iii] Weatherhead, JL, *The Constitution and Laws of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1997), 19.
- [iv] <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/church-law/church-constitution>
- [v] GA 2018 Reports, 12/10.
- [vi] GA 2019 Reports, 18/3.
- [vii] Act V (2010): <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/church-law/acts>
- [viii] GA Reports 2021, 6/2.
- [ix] GA Reports 2023, 4/1-2.
- [x] Act V (2010): <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/church-law/acts>
- [xi] GA 2023: 'Reaffirm the ecumenical aspect of the secondary principles and existing guidance relating to the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021), and (a) instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to emphasise this in future guidance; and (b) instruct Presbyteries to consider this and articulate it more clearly in implementation and at the annual evaluation and development of Presbytery Mission Plans.'
- [xii] GA 2017 Reports, 16/5; GA Reports 2018, 12/1, 12/4-6.
- [xiii] GA Reports 2019, 18/6.
- [xiv] GA Reports 2021, 6/1.
- [xv] GA Reports 2021, 6/3-4; GA Reports 2022, 5/9.
- [xvi] GA Reports 2023, 4/4-5.
- [xvii] Appendix I.
- [xviii] <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/archive/2022/churches-embark-on-new-friendship-journey#full>
- [xix] Quinn, J., "Ecumenism and Scottish Catholics", *The Innes Review* (29: 2) (December 1978), 204-210.
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- [xxii] Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, "The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue: a JWG Study", in *Eighth Report 1999-2005* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), pp. 73-89.
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- [xxix] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/81331/Saint-Andrew-Declaration.pdf
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- [xxxi] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1839/2000-act-5-sacraments-consolidating-act.pdf, 158-171.
- [xxxii] <https://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Final-General-Synod-Papers-2023.pdf>,
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CHALMERS LECTURESHIP TRUST MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.

Report

1. CHALMERS LECTURES 2022-2026

1.1 The Trustees are grateful to the the joint Chalmers Lecturers, Rev Professor John Swinton and Dr Katie Cross, for their work in preparing detailed proposals for a series of lectures on the theme of 'Hope in today's world' for the Lectureship cycle 2022-2026.

2. DETAILED PROPOSALS FOR THE SERIES OF LECTURES

2.1 Each lecturer will deliver three online lectures with the opportunity for Q&A at the end of each lecture. Rev Professor John Swinton's lectures are entitled 'Being present: finding friendship in a 'hopeless' world.' Dr Katie Cross's lectures are entitled 'Hope is a verb: from witness to action in a traumatised world', which will examine our current state of a traumatised world, the importance of witnessing to trauma, and the idea of hope as an intentional practice or action. The final session of the series will be in hybrid format in Aberdeen at which both lecturers will take part in a facilitated dialogue and conversation about their different approaches to the overarching theme of 'Hope in today's world.'

2.2 The provisional dates for the online lectures are: 22, 24, 29 and 31 October, 3 and 5 December 2024 at 7pm. The final facilitated dialogue and conversation will take place on 9 December 2024 at 7 pm in hybrid form. Publicity will be produced to promote the lecture series throughout the Church and beyond.

2.3 The intention is for the lectures and dialogue to be published as a Lent book for congregations to use in 2025.

In the name of the Trust

FIONA E SMITH, *Chair*

ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Agree that the Church's financial situation demands further urgent attention supported by a focus on the agreed priorities (*Section 1.8*).
3. Note the ongoing work between the Trustees and Presbyteries in terms of driving the mission imperative of the Church (*Section 3.3*).
4. Agree the total number of planned ministry posts for 2025 remains at the previously approved 600 plus 60 vacancies and for this to be the basis for the next five years, subject to annual reporting and agreement of the General Assembly (*Section 2*).
5. Note the ongoing work in relation to reviewing the suitability of Vacancy Allowance, current Tenure arrangements, Stipend and Benefits Structure, International Presence and work within the Priority Areas (*Sections 5, 6, 10.7, 15.6, 15.7*).
6. Receive the 2023 Report and Accounts of the Church of Scotland Unincorporated Entities (*Section 7*).
7. Note the approved budget for 2024 and the indicative rolling budgets for 2025 to 2029 (*Sections 8.2 & 8.3*).
8. Note the expectation that the Trustees will require to bring proposals to adjust the parameters of the components of Giving to Grow to the General Assembly of 2025, if forecasts indicate that sufficient funding is not likely to be available for the expected cost of ministry from 2026 onwards (*Section 8.6*).
9. Pass Regulations amending the Congregational Contributions "Giving to Grow" Regulations (Regs I 2022), as amended, as set out in Appendix I (*8.6.13 & Appendix 1*).
10. Pass Regulations amending the Seeds for Growth Fund Regulations (Regs IV 2022), as amended, as set out in Appendix II (*Section 11.3 & Appendix II*).
11. Approve the amended structure, remit and membership of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team as set out in Appendix III (*Section 14 & Appendix III*).
12. Approve the changes to the administrative arrangements of the Salvesen Fund and substitute the Schedule in Appendix IV for the Schedule in Appendix I to the Report of the Faith Impact Forum to, and as revised by, the Commission of Assembly in November 2019 (*Section 17*).
13. Approve the amendments to the Constitution and Remit of the Assembly Trustees as set out in Appendix V (*Sections 14.3 & 23.2*).
14. Note the appointment from 1st April 2024 of Jenny Simpson as Head of Finance and General Treasurer and confer upon the said Jenny Simpson, 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 22.1*).
15. Approve the following appointments to the Assembly Trustees; Crawford Gillies, a member and elder at Dunkeld Parish Church for a 3-year period and Michael Yuille a member and elder at St Blane's, Dunblane for a 3-year period (*Section 23.2*).

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Assembly Trustee body was formed out of the 2019 Special Commission on Structural Reform which acknowledged that the Church of Scotland required a rapid response to an emerging sense of crisis that had been increasing for tens of years. The Assembly Trustees were delegated the responsibility for the development of vision, strategy and overarching policy as guided by the decisions made by the General Assembly. A Radical Action Plan was approved in response to the significant issues facing the Church as a result of falling membership, reduced finances, rising costs and a structure that did not provide effective governance and was argued to disempower effective decision making. There was an acknowledgement that this crisis had multiple causes including our lack of clear direction to deal with what we were facing up to and our increasingly concerning financial, organisational and motivational situations. Over the proceeding five years to 2024 the goal of the Trustees has been to address the issues defined in 2019, and then built on by the further directions from subsequent General Assemblies, in a deliberate, considered, calm and assured manner.

1.2 Our 2024 report is about maintaining the course on which we set out, learning from our journey to date, continuing to undertake important course corrections when appropriate and picking up the pace as there is much greater clarity around the next steps that need to be taken. Whilst the majority of the targets set in 2019 have been successfully progressed there is clearly much still to do and we can now build on the foundations set by Presbytery Mission Planning, the establishment of the new Presbyteries, so vital to our future, and the wide range of achievements made to date.

1.3 The principal duty of charity trustees is to preserve and deal with the charity's assets prudently in accordance with its purposes and by implication to address the Church's previous unsuccessful attempts to coordinate strategy and work collaboratively towards delivery of agreed priorities.

1.4 Our progress to date includes moving towards a leaner central organisation whilst reducing bureaucracy and at the same time supporting the establishment of properly resourced Presbyteries. The fusion of four Councils into two then subsequently one grouping, the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT), was delivered and continues to evolve. The Research and Analysis Unit was formed to provide what has turned out to be invaluable robust and granular data on which we can base our decisions with financial implications with greater confidence. Increased budgetary prudence has been applied across all areas, the deficit reduction plan was enacted though this now clearly needs to go further than the original goals and work with CrossReach to reduce deficits, and agree the basis for future financial support, continues.

1.5 Growth of the Church is at the core of the plans and 2023/2024 has seen the first grant awards from the £25m Seeds for Growth funding, emergence of some New Worshipping Communities and the recognition that further thinking is required around fostering engagement with those that are under the age of 40. This will all rely heavily on the future work of the Presbyteries and local congregations.

1.6 The Special Commission noted how slow the Church has been to bring about the radical structural reforms recommended in the past and 'without immediate change it's unlikely that the Church can operate in a way that will command the confidence of its members, ministers and employees'. It was also noted that there was lack of urgency in dealing with our financial situation – much time and effort has been focused on rectifying this. We now have a much greater understanding of the gravity of our situation and the difficult decisions that need to be taken, with real urgency, to protect the future of the Church. Areas where reviews need to be undertaken include how tenure should work in our new situation, the future of our international presence and how vacancy allowances should be managed going forward.

1.7 In looking back over the last five years significant progress has been achieved across the Church on areas where there was little progress made in the past, whilst acknowledging the pain that the significant change has caused. Unfortunately, the severe impact of the global factors, coupled with the longer-term decline in Church membership and an increasingly aging population means that we are not yet into the period of consolidation that was hoped for.

1.8 The 2023 General Assembly agreed three main priorities which remain important and totally valid on our journey and are being actively used in prioritising work at a national level.

- i. An emphasis on progressing the growth and development of the Church through the new Presbyteries working closely with the local congregations.
- ii. Ensuring that the work of the national is focused on the local need with a particular emphasis on recruiting and equipping our future leaders for the ministries of the Church in light of the different challenges ahead.
- iii. Progressing the identified imperative of modernising and simplifying our governance, structure and processes.

1.9 The main objective for 2024/25 is to achieve a clearer common understanding of the strategic priorities at all levels of the Church of Scotland supported by development of a well-prepared integrated rolling programme of work. This can only be achieved by collaborative working within all levels of the Church and by truly striving to achieve the aim of the "national being there for the local".

1.10 There has been a seismic change in the external environment that has severely impacted on the Church and society in general. Covid-19, followed by the war in Ukraine and instability in the Middle East causing high rates of inflation has had consequences on individuals, communities and the Church. We have seen significant changes to behaviours and people's health, income and financial status with the resultant impact on church membership, church life and church finances.

1.11 The impact of the above has been continually assessed and factored into the modelling of the church dynamics (ministry numbers, church membership, income and costs). The Presbytery Mission Plan Act established a figure of 600 ministries plus 60 vacancies which still holds today, and the requirement of Presbyteries to approve Presbytery Mission Plans. It is recognised that the effort, planning, time and pain in producing these plans has been considerable and is still being felt. The need for some flexibility around ministry numbers is recognised in managing our way through the transition and this is already allowed for in specific cases where it can be justified.

1.12 Looking forwards there are some vital areas to be built on. The new Presbyteries are now largely in place. Transferring the responsibility and accountability for delivery to them for regional ministry and finance is a critical step. This will mean no longer solely looking to the centre for solutions but taking local decisions with the congregations. The Church is one of the last bastions of hope for our increasingly broken society and requires both a strong local presence and inspirational leadership. Our congregations are at the sharp end of all of this – without them there will be no Church and they need to be the focus of our attention in all that we do.

1.13 It is apparent that the Church can no longer afford its current model of ministry support and the Assembly Trustees therefore have a duty to take urgent steps to move to a new, affordable, model which recognises the hard reality that only 29% of charges are paying for the cost of the ministry they receive. As the Church has only limited options at present in terms of increasing income, attention must be focused on reducing spending and stopping or delaying some activities. The Trustees believe that local growth will lead to increased local income which we urgently need for our future sustainability alongside alternative income streams.

1.14 Our finances must be taken into account in all our decision making whether this is around ministry allocation, the way we will handle vacancies in the future or investment decisions taken in driving the mission imperative of the Church forward.

1.15 The following three goals have been identified towards achieving this:

- **Maximise our income** by looking at our options beyond the current dominant model of congregational income.
- **Reduce our costs.** Whilst this alone will not provide the whole solution, it is something that we must continue to do. It is judged that this cannot be achieved by simply paring more from the central budgets when the majority of the financial allocation is to ministries.
- **Change our operating model.** If we do not undertake further radical, systemic change then we will be facing an existential threat within a relatively short period of time.

1.16 The Church of Scotland has inherited and developed a complex order and system of organisation which cannot be lightly discarded. However, the freedom and spontaneity of the spirit must not be inhibited. There is always the danger of coming to like and live within the structures which deflects us from the true objectives. Only as new life compels the need for innovation will new forms emerge to take the place of the old.

1.17 An enormous amount has been written about the role of the whole people of God in mission, and about structure to deliver that mission. However not nearly so much has been delivered. Our default is to keep concentrating on the National Office - the solutions don't lie there - they lie with our congregations and our people. Human nature is such that we can more easily see problems than opportunities and if the work to create the conditions for renewal of the Church is to be of value then we require a more positive approach to develop the process.

1.18 The following headline principles have emerged to map out the practicalities of the change agenda interpreting our agreed priorities.

- The need to transfer responsibility and accountability for regional decision-making and resources to Presbyteries.
- The National Office to provide only what is absolutely necessary in terms of support to the local and that required to meet our statutory and regulatory requirements - this will be implemented in the first instance via the National Office Priorities Project.
- The imperative to work ecumenically in enacting our Presbytery Mission Plans – – to meet our objective of covering all of Scotland.
- Focus primarily on the Church in Scotland - we need to acknowledge that we can no longer be all things to all people in all places. With the stretch of our resources we need to prioritise and re-focus.
- Don't do what others can do more effectively - re-examine all areas of our work and financial support arrangements to establish what is better done by other organisations and work in partnership in some form with them.

1.19 What we see is a Church facing multiple challenges, the problem of an ageing and declining membership, linked to the need to unite parishes and dispose of surplus church buildings, part of a wider problem relating to the financial position of the Church.

1.20 The Church of Scotland seeks renewal and reform, embracing change and redefining its mission. This reflects the biblical concept of stewardship, where we are called to manage resources entrusted to us by God. (1 Corinthians 4:2) acknowledging the seismic changes in both external and internal environments, and the need to trust in God's guidance during challenging times. (Isaiah 43:2)

1.21 As we navigate this fundamental shift in our Church's place in society, may we heed the disruptive spirit of God, calling us on a different journey. Working in unity as the body of Christ on a shared journey among the people of our parishes, remembering that the Church began as a movement, not an institution. The Book of Acts describes this as an exciting and dynamic process of experimentation, discernment and discovery. We must return to the simple call of living out the Gospel, presenting a different perspective to the world through enthusiastic worshipping, witnessing, nurturing, and serving communities.

1.22 The heart of the matter is about seeing the good news of Jesus Christ shared and changing lives and communities for the better. Local congregations and Presbyteries have the often-challenging work of carrying forward the Church's work. In this season, mission must be the priority of the whole church, in every place and at every level. All of us are in this together.

2. PRESBYTERY PLANNING AND FUTURE MINISTRY NUMBERS

2.1 As required under the Presbytery Mission Planning Act (Act 8 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 five-year future budget assumptions as described in the Finance Section below. The deployment of these ministries across Presbyteries is detailed in the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team report (Ministries Numbers).

2.2 The 2021 General Assembly report emphasises the importance *'to have as accurate as possible a forecast of what is both a realistic and affordable number of ministries.'* The figure for 2021 was determined based on projections of the financial situation at the time and anticipated retirement figures for Ministries. Despite the conservative assumptions used in the modelling, the actual numbers of retirements and resignations have surpassed initial estimates. Setting aside financial considerations, the Church of Scotland currently lacks the necessary number of people discerning a call to ministry to alter the current allocation assumptions without causing an imbalance of ministries across Scotland.

3. RELEASING RESOURCES TO PRESBYTERIES FOR MINISTRIES AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

3.1 Successive General Assemblies have mandated the need to decentralise some of the work that has been discharged through the National Office over the years. A review of all the National Office work carried out through the Prioritisation Project has established that a number of areas of work may be more effectively progressed and delivered locally. This results in the requirement to consider transferring such responsibilities to the Presbyteries and congregations, whilst taking cognisance of capacity within regional areas. It is recognised that the needs, demands, issues to be addressed and associated solutions are best taken forward by those who are experiencing them on the ground which is why the dynamic needs to change from National to Local. This approach aligns with one of the General Assembly agreed priorities around the "National being there for the Local"

3.2 The model that we currently operate has high levels of centralised control and uniformity. The Assembly Trustees therefore wish to move to a position, in consultation with the Presbyteries, which enables responsibility and accountability for specific and agreed work to be held locally. This will need to be supported by the right resources and decision-making powers and requires a rebalancing of resources and finance. This reflects the fact that the needs, demands, issues and solutions are best known to those who are experiencing them on the ground. Such a move will involve significant change as to how our structures currently operate and will require very careful working through not least in terms of the financial and resourcing implications.

3.3 As part of managing this change the Assembly Trustees have been considering the enabling principles that could be deployed in achieving the goal of higher levels of local empowerment, resourcing and decision making. The next step is to further engage the Presbyteries on these principles, which includes discussion around pilot projects seeking to develop working models with different approaches. Flexibility, understanding and prudent financial management at all levels will be vital given our financial constraints as we navigate the path towards releasing resources to the local for ministry and mission. In support of this goal the Church must focus on both generating new income and developing sustainable practices in the future that are less reliant on central funding.

4. NATIONAL CHURCH PROVISION FOR ONLY NECESSARY SERVICES

4.1 The National Office of the Church has commenced work on a Priorities Project which is the current phase in paring back central activities and the provision of resources. The principle needs to be established that the centre provides services for specific reasons, being around:

- i. Economies of scale
- ii. Particular expertise that may not be present at Presbytery level
- iii. Compliance and governance.

4.2 The range of services provided and the costs to provide these services would have to form part of an agreement with the Presbyteries to remit funding to the centre. This will be done on a phased and collaborative basis only when the Presbyteries are in agreement with and equipped for the additional responsibilities.

5. VACANCY ALLOWANCE

5.1 The annual cost to the Church for Vacancy Allowance in the 2024 budget is £3.7m. There are 460 congregations with vacancies (370 charges). Many of the new vacancies are as a result of the Presbytery Mission Planning process and once this has been worked through it has been anticipated that the number of vacancies will reduce towards the target of 60.

5.2 Until General Assembly of May 2023 Vacancy Allowance was directly linked to the cost of a locum carrying out two days' pastoral work and one Sunday. As from June 2023 Vacancy Allowance no longer covered the full cost of a locum carrying out this work.

5.3 The Radical Action Plan in 2019 proposed that each Presbytery would be allocated an amount of Vacancy Allowance proportionate to the number of vacancies in that Presbytery and it would be used to provide appropriate cover for vacant congregations but implementation of this was delayed pending the implementation of Presbytery Mission Plans. As part of the plans to give more autonomy to Presbyteries this idea will be developed over the coming year.

5.4 Until then, as agreed with FAPLT, the Vacancy Allowance will remain at the same level of £11,196 annually and £12,984 for a linked charge

6. TENURE

6.1 Unrestricted tenure has historically been understood as an indefinite calling of a minister to live and work within the bounds of a particular parish. It operates so as to protect the ministry of the Church from the whims and prejudices of congregations, so that whilst a minister may be the servant of a congregation, the congregation is not the master of the minister. Tenure has, however, failed to adapt with changing times and has not developed as a dynamic concept as was anticipated by the Special Commission on Tenure which reported to the General Assembly in 2014.

6.2 Increasingly, as we are reporting to the Assembly, the cost of parish ministry is being met from General Fund reserves, with only 29% of congregations currently meeting the cost of the ministry they receive. It is apparent that the Church can no longer afford to operate its existing model of ministry, of which tenure is an integral part. This model is also having an impact on the implementation of Presbytery Mission Plans. If a Presbytery wishes to unite two or more congregations in the interests of better shaping of the life of the local church around mission, it can be the case that it cannot do so because one or both of the parish ministers are on full tenure and do not agree to what is proposed; or it might be that two congregations are to be united, and whilst one congregation is in vacancy the minister of the other congregation does not agree to take on the vacant congregation. Our current model means that no union of such congregations can take place until and unless one of the two either retires or moves elsewhere; the most that can be achieved is that a deferred union is agreed, to take effect once one of the congregations is in vacancy. There are also hard questions to be answered, in terms of the Church's civil law obligations, where a non-viable congregation maintains its existence simply because the minister is on unrestricted tenure.

6.3 The General Assembly in 2019 instructed the Ministries Council, when framing the new Vacancy Procedures Act and reviewing the Appraisal and Adjustment Act, to consider incorporating the principle that no charge should, in future, be granted leave to call a minister on an unrestricted basis, but that tenure should instead be granted on a reviewable basis of no more than 7 years. The General Assembly of 2020 instructed the Faith Nurture Forum, in consultation with the Assembly Trustees and Presbyteries, to review the Appraisal and Adjustment Act (Act VII 2003), with a view to bringing to the General Assembly of 2021 proposed amendments to the Act which would enable Presbyteries to overcome barriers encountered when seeking to implement robust planning, and to include in such a review the exploration of whether, where appropriate and after careful consideration, a Presbytery should be enabled to dissolve the pastoral tie so that adjustments could be made. Whilst the Presbytery Mission Plan Act was agreed by the assembly in 2021, these instructions have not to date been implemented.

6.4 We will therefore be working with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and the Legal Questions Committee over the coming year to consider how tenure should be understood and develop in the context of the needs of the Church in the 21st Century and modern charity law requirements and will bring a report to the 2025 General Assembly.

7. AUDIT OF ANNUAL ACCOUNTS FOR 2023

7.1 It is the responsibility of the Assembly Trustees to prepare and approve the audited 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 Financial Statements 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 the OSCR 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.

8. NATIONAL FINANCES

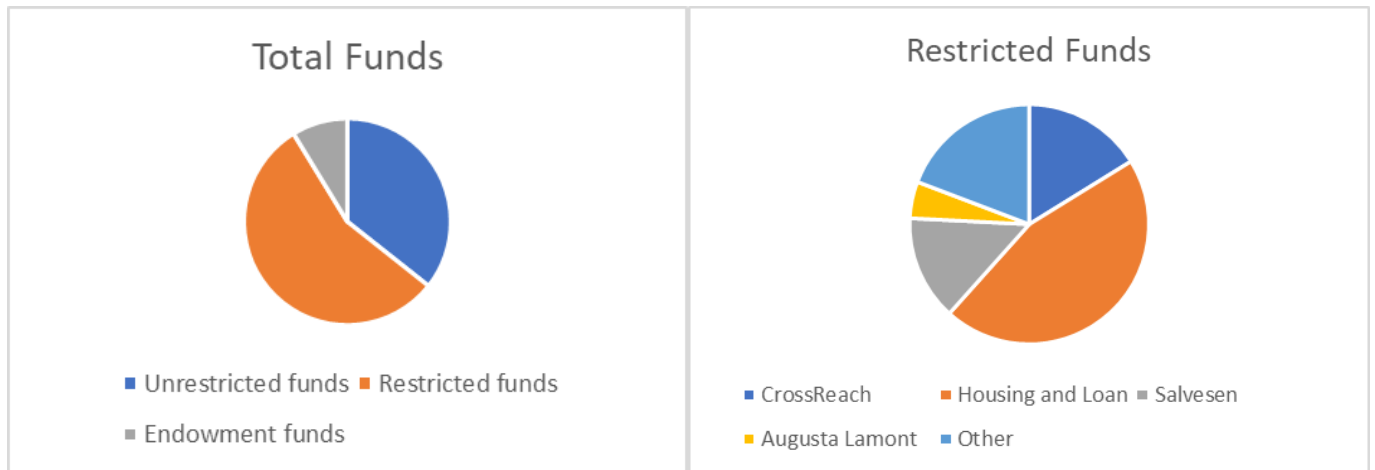
8.1 Stewardship and Finance in the Church

8.1.1 The Stewardship Team report describes how Living Generously is at the heart of our faith. This is our collective responsibility and our aim is not to hoard financial resources but to ensure that they are used wisely to carry out the Church's work. Setting priorities does not mean that our other work is not valued. The demand will always be greater than the available resources and the challenge is deciding what work should be funded over work that cannot.

8.1.2 Last year we highlighted the decline in numbers of members, ministers and a budget for the Church with deficits which would see our General Fund extinguished by 2026/2027 based upon the current model of operation and assumptions at that point in time. The General Fund is the Church's only reserve without any restrictions which funds our costs including ministers' stipends and staff salaries as well as any annual deficits. 77% of the Church's costs relate to stipends and salaries and it has to be borne in mind that many ministers have unrestricted tenure.

8.1.3 The Church has a strong balance sheet but the majority of its funds, 64% including endowments, are restricted. Some of these can be used for our operating purposes but not for ministries and staff salaries and normal running costs. The restrictions placed on some of our funds also means that their purposes do not necessarily align with the priorities the Trustees and General Assembly have agreed upon. Work continues to reorganise some of these funds where possible and the Trustees and committees are continuously undertaking reviews with the aim of making better use of all of the Church’s assets. Rationalisation of funds and assets will all improve our financial position and should not be underestimated. Overall however our current operational model is not sustainable because costs continue to outstrip income.

8.1.4 The charts show in very simple terms the makeup of the Unincorporated Entities Funds at December 2023.



8.1.5 In answer to the question “what happens when the money runs out?” the answer is that this simply cannot be allowed to happen. For decades, reports of the Trustees or their predecessors have warned of difficult financial situations. Yet financially we have until now managed to maintain an adequate level of income for two primary reasons. The first is the faithful giving of our members and supporters – which despite falling numbers was being maintained with fewer giving more, although not holding our own when inflation is considered. The second is the positive actions taken by Trustees past and present, to stabilise the Church’s finances through measures such as cost reduction programmes and reviews of reserves. We are continuing to work on ways of augmenting the General Fund and this buys us time to reposition our operations while we work to become financially sustainable.

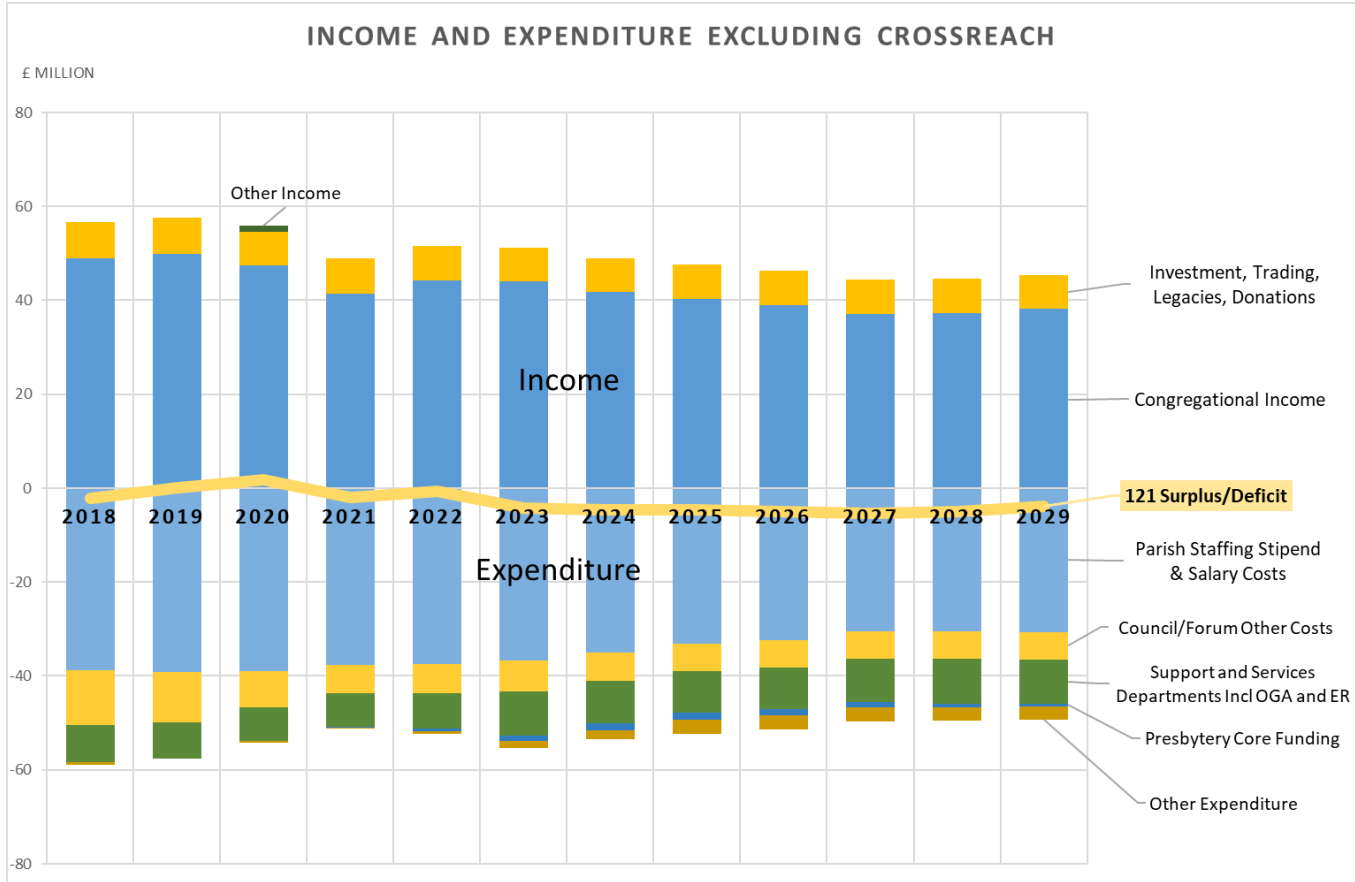
8.1.6 To achieve this sustainability the Assembly Trustees recognise that a more fundamental change of direction is needed. Last year we highlighted that even with significant action the Church would likely have to live with some level of deficits for the next five years. Significant action already factored into the National Budget includes a £2 million cost saving in 2024 and a further £4 million per annum in the subsequent years. This further cost reduction must take place, guided by the National Prioritisation Project (discussed below) but it will not provide the solution to the Church’s overall financial situation. There needs to be a rebalancing of the way in which ministries are provided and supported. Ministries are our priority yet the stark reality is that **only 29% of charges are paying for the cost of the ministry they receive.**

8.1.7 The budget for 2024 is a deficit of £8.1 million. If deficits continue without further and more fundamental actions then the only means of paying core costs including Ministers stipends and staff salaries will be from the Church’s General Fund. Based on our revised assumptions using updated data available to us, the General Fund will be extinguished by 2032. As Trustees of the Charity there is no option but to ensure an end to deficit budgets and to have a plan to achieve this.

8.1.8 The chart below shows income and costs from 2018 to 2029 with the later years based on the most up to date budget predictions. It demonstrates how we have managed the reducing income and increasing costs while accommodating:

- Annual inflation – ideally our income should increase year on year just to stand still
- Pay increases for Office Holders and staff
- Additional investment to improve efficiency (ICT and Finance)
- Costs to generate income in the National Office
- Investment in Seeds for Growth
- Presbytery core funding.

8.1.9 The chart demonstrates that the gap between income and expenditure is even wider when inflation is accounted for. Cost pressures have included stipend and salary increases at a time when our income is actually declining. Other organisations can pass these costs on to their clients or customers. The Church is not able to pass the costs on to congregations, far too few of whom are currently able to pay the cost of their minister let alone contribute to the ministry of congregations who cannot afford to pay for theirs.



8.2 2024 Budget

8.2.1 The outline budget approved by the Trustees is shown below. The Church’s finances are complex but as stated above, the bottom line is that spending is significantly higher than income. Due to the Church’s structures and governance there are very few areas where pressure can be easily or successfully exerted by management or the Trustees to improve costs and income. The Trustees and Senior Management are working extremely hard to achieve this in consultation with all committees, groups and the Church’s other statutory bodies such as the General Trustees.

8.2.2 The National Church is here for the Local and while not all expenditure can be neatly attributable to one of these two categories the budget does broadly present the allocation of funding. Funding could move between the headings of National and Local but unless we look more creatively at how both the income and expenditure of the whole Church could develop and the income grow then we will simply be moving resources around within a shrinking pool.

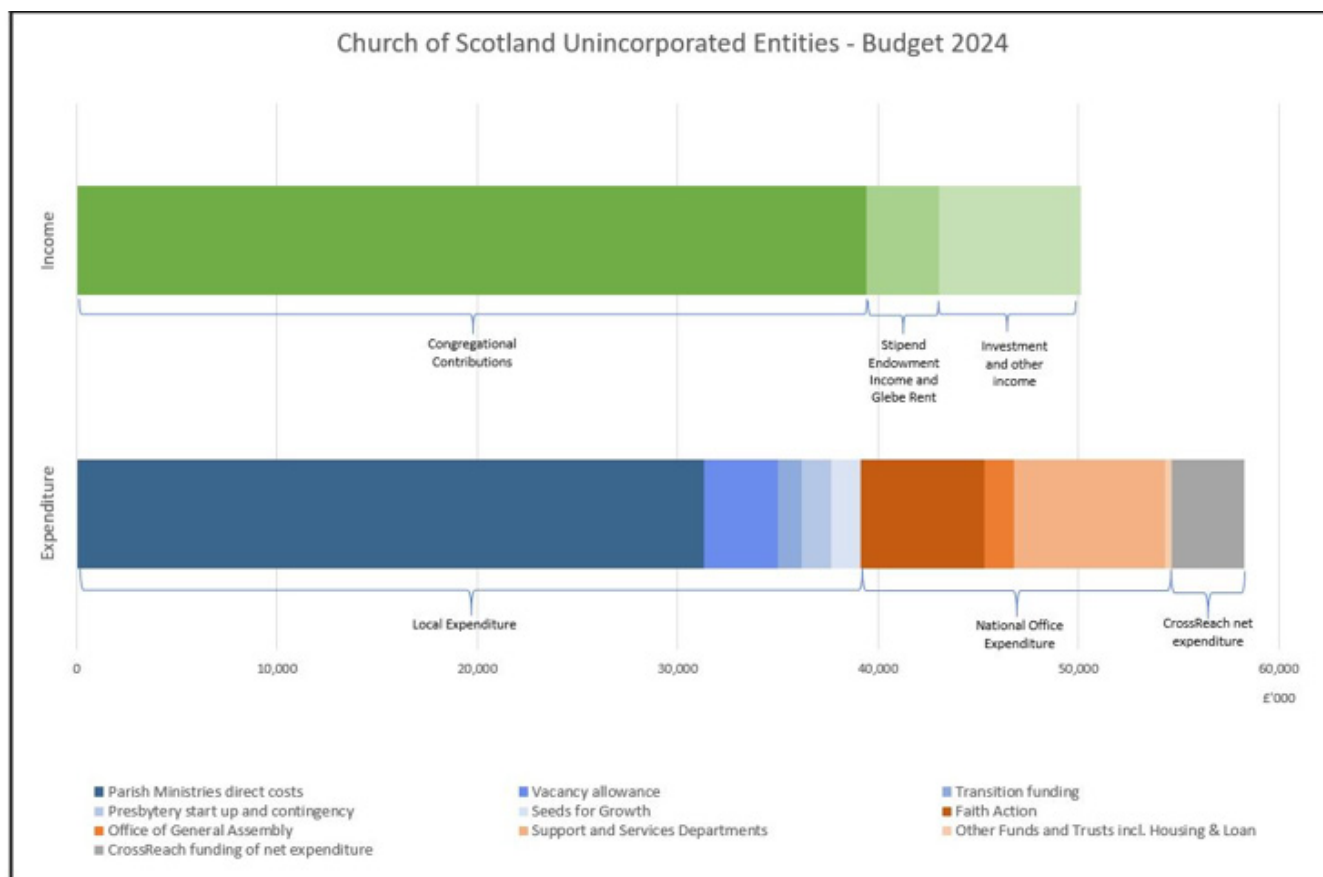
8.2.3 The budget is looking through the lens of the National Charity and so the income and expenditure shown here is only part of the picture.

Church of Scotland Unincorporated Entities - the Charity

Budget 2024

Income	£000's
Congregational Contributions	39,408
Stipend Endowment Income (and Glebe Rent)	3,609
Investment and other income	7,119
Total Income	50,136
Local Expenditure	
Parish Ministries direct costs	31,304
Vacancy allowance	3,708
Total Parish Ministry costs	35,012
Transition funding	1,195
Presbytery start up and contingency	1,450
Seeds for Growth	1,500
	39,157
National Office expenditure	
Faith Action	6,160
Office of the General Assembly	1,440
Support and Services Departments	7,570
Other Funds and Trusts including Housing & Loan	339
	15,509
CrossReach funding of net expenditure	
Operational	2,786
Investment in operational properties	835
	3,621
Net operational costs to be met from reserves	(8,151)

8.2.4 Another way of representing this budget is shown in the figure below. This clearly demonstrates that of the £39.4m of congregational contributions, £35m (89%) is spent on parish ministry costs. Other items of local expenditure including transition funding, Presbytery start up and contingency funding, as well as Seeds for Growth funding brings total local expenditure to approximately the same amount as congregational contributions.



8.2.5 Explanatory notes on the 2024 budget:

- Congregational contributions are calculated based on assessed congregational accounts for 2022.
- Stipend endowment income of £3.6m is being maintained by sale of capital in the Stipend Endowment fund.
- Parish Ministers are based on 512 Ministers of Word and Sacrament; 75 MDS; 19 Assistant Ministers; 13 Interim Ministers; 1 Minister for Deaf as well as **354 vacancies which greatly exceeds the vacancy figure within the 600 + 60 assumptions.**
- Ministries and staff costs include the 5% pay increase for 2024.
- Support and Services department costs include the cost of servicing the General Trustees, Pension Trustees, Investors Trust and Church of Scotland Trust. Costs recovered from these bodies, who have separate finances, is included in Other Income.
- The budget includes some investment in operational properties of CrossReach and Housing and Loan.
- There is a further capital expenditure budget for the Church of £1.1m for projects which will be costed over several years such as in ICT.

8.3 Rolling Budgets 2025 to 2029

8.3.1 The Trustees have noted the budgets for 2025 to 2029. These budgets will be reviewed in detail each year starting with the 2025 budget to be approved in late 2024. This timetable is in line with the change to the Trustees' constitution agreed by the Assembly in May 2023. This enables us to include the budgets and other financial information in the main report as opposed to a supplementary report as has been customary.

8.3.2 The change in the approach to budgeting allows for more accurate budget forecasting, including in the case of CrossReach, whose service commissioning year runs from April to March and is dependent on wage rates set by the Scottish Government and other external factors. The rest of the Church's budgets are also affected by external factors and decisions of the General Assembly. All budgets can be impacted by extreme geo-political circumstances as have been experienced since 2020.

8.3.3 The budgets are based on the best information available at the time and the further ahead we look the less accurate this will be. To ensure that the budgets are as accurate as possible they are amended annually to take account of the evolving shape of the Church and the Trustees' plans.

8.3.4 The Trustees are committed and working towards bringing the budget back into balance. Current work in this area, including the Prioritisation Project, is aimed at doing this. We are also working with CrossReach and other agencies to define what is meant by break-even budgets. There can be a case, as has been agreed in previous years, where there may be an allowable over-distribution of accumulated revenue for strategic purposes. In other words, spend may be made from income which was received in prior years. Whether for CrossReach or other areas of the Church, a business

case needs to be made for this type of additional expenditure and it must be planned into budgets as part of the annual planning cycle. This is the only way in which budgets and cash can be managed across the Church.

8.3.5 The rolling budgets before future decisions and plans have been implemented are summarised below. By far the largest elements of the budget are parish ministry costs and congregational contributions. It is these items where risk and accountability need to be managed and responsibility placed where they can be best controlled. This is interconnected with empowering Presbyteries and developing new ways of working which may take several years to work through. In the meantime, even with the savings mentioned in the introduction to the finance section of the report, annual deficits are projected to continue to run between £2m to £5m per annum.

	2025 £000s	2026 £000s	2027 £000s	2028 £000s	2029 £000s
Income					
<i>Congregational Contributions</i>	37,541	36,355	34,438	34,670	35,433
<i>Stipend Endowment Income (and Glebe Rent)</i>	3,609	2,699	2,689	2,689	2,689
<i>Investment and other income</i>	7,206	7,236	7,239	7,240	7,249
Total Income	48,356	46,290	44,366	44,599	45,371
<i>Expenditure excluding CrossReach:</i>					
Local Expenditure					
<i>Parish Ministries direct costs</i>	29,773	29,531	29,248	29,105	28,945
<i>Vacancy allowance</i>	3,359	2,799	1,198	1,428	1,688
Total Parish Ministries costs	33,132	32,330	30,446	30,533	30,633
<i>Transition Funding</i>	779	-	-	-	-
<i>Presbytery start-up and contingency</i>	1,460	1,306	1,157	723	500
<i>Seeds for Growth</i>	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500
	37,871	36,136	34,103	33,756	33,633
National Office Expenditure					
<i>Faith Action</i>	5,836	5,831	5,826	5,826	5,826
<i>Office of the General Assembly</i>	1,440	1,413	1,501	1,478	1,326
<i>Support and Services Departments</i>	7,518	7,538	7,843	8,041	8,126
<i>Other Funds and Trusts including Housing & Loan</i>	400	485	567	642	722
<i>Required Savings</i>	(2,000)	(4,000)	(4,000)	(4,000)	(4,000)
	13,194	11,267	11,737	11,987	12,000
CrossReach funding of net expenditure					
<i>Operational</i>	2,033	1,255	1,115	1,115	1,115
<i>Investment in operational properties</i>	400	400	400	400	400
	2,433	1,655	1,515	1,515	1,515
Net operational costs to be met from reserves	(5,142)	(2,768)	(2,989)	(2,659)	(1,777)

8.4 Key Assumptions in the Rolling Budgets

- Congregational contributions are based on accessible congregational income which we have assumed decreases by 5% in each successive year from 2025 to 2027 with some recovery in 2028 as a result of actions taken in the intervening period (decrease of only 1% from the prior year) and greater recovery in 2029 (2% increase from the prior year). An adjustment has also been made each year in respect of the reduction in number of Ministers of Word and Sacrament.
- Stipend endowment income is maintained at £3.6m until 2025 pending discussions between Faith Action and the General Trustees.
- Transition Funding related to the implementation of Giving to Grow is currently assumed to end after 2025 although we are proposing a slight change to this later in the report.
- Presbytery start-up/core funding is budgeted for a five-year period from inception of each new Presbytery. Thereafter, depending on the operating model agreed going forward, an amount will be agreed that recognises the reality at that time. In the rolling budget a "holding" amount has been included to reflect the ongoing commitment to fund Presbyteries at an appropriate amount.
- The amount of deficit funding for CrossReach is shown as reducing to £1.115m by 2027. This equates to the previous level of congregational contributions provided to CrossReach. At the time of writing the basis of future funding is under discussion.
- Stipend and salary increase assumptions have been included in the budgets each year noting that the budget assumptions do not equate to an agreed position on the actual stipend and salary award.

- Until the final outcome of Presbytery Mission Planning is known, the budgets for ministries are based on estimated retirements and admissions and cannot mirror the actual plans. By 2029 the numbers are assumed to be 436 MWS; 75 MDS; 14 Interim and Deaf Ministry; 135 vacancies, totalling 660 posts.

8.5 2023 Financial Results

8.5.1 In keeping with previous years these results are based on unaudited management accounts and exclude gains (realised or unrealised) on sale of property and investments and end of year adjustments which will be included in the statutory accounts namely pensions disclosures required by accounting regulations and results of the establishments in Israel.

- The budgeted operational deficit for the full year for the Charity was £8.1m.
- Budgeted income for the year was £104.4m and budgeted expenditure was £112.5m.
- The operational result for the year was a deficit of £3.4m taking account of £3.6m for a historic legacy which was able to be valued and brought in as income in 2023. Without this, the operational result would have been a deficit of £7m, a positive variance of £1.1m compared to the budget.
- Legacies to the Church during 2023 were £769k for CrossReach and £5.8m for the rest of the Unincorporated Entities. This included the £3.6m legacy mentioned above.
- All areas worked within budget and income was higher than budgeted on investments.
- Within Parish Ministries there was an underspend on stipends of £1.8m and overspends of MDS salaries of £902k and on vacancy allowance of £451k. Part of the reason for this was 39 fixed term minister appointments during the period while posts have been unable to be filled during Presbytery Mission Planning. These were classed as MDS as opposed to Minister appointments.
- CrossReach had net expenditure of £3m compared to the budget of £3.5m. Contingencies for increased energy costs were not required. There were positive variances for Adult Services, Children and Families and Central Services but Services to Older People continued to show negative variances on both income and expenditure.
- The establishments in Israel were adversely affected by the current conflict situation.

8.6 Congregational Income and Giving to Grow

8.6.1 There is a provision in the Giving to Grow Regulations that they should be subject to an annual review, which is particularly important because the scheme has been implemented against a background of change due to Presbytery reform and Presbytery Mission Planning (PMP).

8.6.2 A short-term group was created which examined key areas. The income raised through Giving to Grow and its relationship to parish ministry costs was considered and it was agreed, subject to General Assembly approval, that if the total number of planned ministry posts remained at 600 plus 60 vacancies, it seemed reasonable to expect Giving to Grow to fund this number of posts. However, the variables that impact the amount Giving to Grow raises, such as the level of congregational income and number of full-time equivalent Ministers of Word and Sacrament, cannot be quickly changed and therefore there needs to be flexibility within the calculation. This is especially important given the current state of change and that the outcomes and impact on finances of a congregation are still unknown. Future budgets have been created based on assumptions but actual trends in relation to congregational income and membership could well be different.

8.6.3 This is why there may have to be changes to the parameters of Giving to Grow in the future, to ensure that what we received from congregations in contributions together with endowment income and glebe rent, funds total parish ministry costs. We believe this stays true to the principles of the scheme and resists aiming to collect a specific level of contributions, as the Ministries and Mission Scheme did. However, it recognises that in order for Giving to Grow to be effective it should fund planned and budgeted parish ministry costs. The group agreed that the Shared Activities component should remain at 10% of assessable income.

8.6.4 The group believed that Giving to Grow should cover the cost of local ministry, regardless of what this is called. This means that Ministries Development Staff (MDS) should be included in the Ministry Here component in addition to Ministers of Word and Sacrament upon which it is currently calculated. As a consequence, Ministry Elsewhere would fund ministry in other places that do not cover the cost of the ministry they receive. This also means that ministries not assigned to a charge will need to be looked at. Work will be done to explore the implementation of this.

8.6.5 Transition funding is calculated as the sum total of increases in Contributions for Congregations within a Presbytery between the last year of the previous Contribution system (2022) and that current year's requirement. This is communicated to Presbytery ahead of the final invoice to congregations and Presbytery advise on how it should be applied.

8.6.6 The group had concern about what happens when transition funding ends and the ability of congregations to pay their Giving to Grow contribution. It is, in effect, holding congregations due to pay more, to the 2022 Ministries and Mission (M&M) contribution which does not help the transition to Giving to Grow. The historical 12% cap where M&M contributions could not increase by more than this in a year, as well as Presbytery applying their 5% to lower contributions, has also exacerbated the gap between what congregations were paying under M&M and what they are expected to pay under Giving to Grow.

8.6.7 It is for this reason that we propose giving Presbytery the ability to spread the amount of transition funding calculated for 2025 across years 2025 and 2026 thereby extending the transition funding period by one year. This should be applied in a way that reduces the effect of the increase in Giving to Grow for example through providing a decreasing amount of transition funding in 2025 (e.g. applying only 75%) and then less of a decrease in 2026 (e.g. 25%). It should also be targeted at those congregations who really need it and not simply because they are due to pay more (for example as a consequence of having increased assessable income).

8.6.8 The group considered whether relief should be given for certain types of congregations or ministry configurations and agreed that Giving to Grow should remain as it is and be applied consistently to all congregations. They also confirmed that Giving agreements should remain in the regulations and Presbytery should be encouraged to make use of these where there is the potential for increased giving. These Giving agreements should be used to fund missional work, wider Presbytery work and support congregations who require it.

8.6.9 Last year we reported that 70 congregations were not contributing towards Ministry Here, Ministry Elsewhere or Shared Activities due to the deductions to their Giving to Grow contribution which reduced it to zero. The Assembly Trustees feel it is important for all congregations to contribute something towards the work of the Church and this is why an amendment to the Giving to Grow regulations is proposed to the General Assembly to ensure that all congregations are required to pay the shared activities component (10% of assessable income) of Giving to Grow.

8.6.10 Key congregational finance statistics:

- Total assessable income for 2022 (from congregations' annual accounts) is £75.7m which is an increase of 1.8% compared to 2021.
- Assessable offerings reduced by 1.5% from £53.2m to £52.4m in 2022 compared with 2021.
- Proportion of charges not meeting the cost of the ministry they receive is 71%.
- 332 congregations had transition funding allocated against their 2024 Giving to Grow contribution.
- Proportion of congregations with an increase in 2024 Giving to Grow contribution compared to 2022 Ministry and Mission contribution (before any allowances e.g. transition funding, vacancy allowance etc.) is 29%.
- Total Gross Giving to Grow contributions are 9% less in total than 2022 Ministries and Mission contributions.

8.6.11 To summarise, the Giving to Grow annual review confirmed that the system should be applied consistently. It is functioning as it was intended to on the whole, although there is recognition that there are some areas that need further work. This includes ensuring that the costs of planned ministry posts are recovered from contributions and amending transition funding in order that it lessens the gap between those congregations facing a higher Giving to Grow contribution compared with Ministries and Mission. Giving to Grow is an income raising system and it cannot be the solution to the complex issues that the Church is currently facing.

8.6.12 The Trustees recognise that although work has been done in recent years to stabilise the Church's finances more needs to be done than was mandated by the Special Commission in 2019, approved at the time by the General Assembly and subsequently delivered. This means that as well as aligning our resources to priorities, the Trustees will be going further and looking to create a sustainable operating model where costs do not exceed income.

8.6.13 Sustainability does not just come from reducing costs. It also involves growing income. There is one main source of income for the Church (the National, and Presbytery and Local) and that is from congregations. Therefore, we all have our part to play in creating a more stable financial picture for the Church. Proposed amendments to the Giving to Grow regulations can be found in Appendix I.

9. PENSION SCHEMES

9.1 Defined Benefit Schemes

9.1.1 The last triennial valuation of the Schemes took place effective 31 December 2021 with the Pension Trustees and employing agencies agreeing actuarial assumptions for the valuation. No deficit repair payments are required due to the schemes being fully funded.

9.2 Defined Contribution Schemes

9.2.1 Membership of the Church's Plan has now been made available to staff directly employed by Presbyteries. The Group Personal Pensions Governance Group monitors the arrangements for both the CrossReach Pension Plan and the Church of Scotland Plan for defined contribution pensions. It meets to review the provider's performance reports, service provision and developments, which currently include Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) and related matters. A review of the investments provided by Legal and General was carried out by the Church's Pension advisors in 2021 and their recommendation to change the default investment fund was implemented 2022. Members may still elect to invest in Legal & General funds of their own choosing.

10. EXPECTATIONS AND STIPENDS OF MINISTRIES

10.1 The Assembly Trustees, working in consultation with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, received an instruction from the General Assembly of 2023 to (i) report to the General Assembly of 2024 on the broad expectations of those in ministries; (ii) review stipends and detail the system how these are to be determined, including all factors taken into account; and (iii) provide details of the support available to those in ministries and what may be required going forward as they meet the challenges of change and radical reform.

10.2 FAPLT have brought forward terms of responsibility for ministers serving in the Church of Scotland. These can be found in the forward Section 3 of the proposed deliverance, sections 2.16 and Appendix II of the FAPLT report.

10.3 Work has also been carried out in relation to stipends. Ministers are paid a stipend rather than a salary, a fundamental difference in which a minister is paid 'a reasonable maintenance'^[1]. In order to understand the real value of the stipend, the following information is offered, with the break down including National and congregational elements:

Report of the Assembly Trustees.....

The purpose of this paper is to calculate the costs of ministry over and above stipend. It aims to show a realistic cost of ministry and highlight costs that are not necessarily initially factored in when looking at the cost of a minister.

It also aims to quantify what is available to ministers as their financial package.

Where applicable 'benefits' have been grossed up to show what a minister would have to earn as part of a taxable salary elsewhere to get the same value of benefit.

IN SERVICE

Statutory per annum	Taxable £	Non taxable £	Gross £	National Church	Congregational	Total Cost £	Benefit £	Comments
				Cost £	Cost £			
Stipend	38,884		38,884	38,884		38,884	38,884	2024 Top of scale as budgeted for 2024
Employer's National Insurance		4,243	4,243	4,243		4,243		16.2% of stipend
Pension contributions / Death in Service Cover / Income Protection		6,299	6,299	6,299		6,299	6,299	£80 per month (taxable)
Car allowance	960		960		960	960	960	(Av. 2023 Scotland rent per citylets Scottish PRS Rental Report £1081 pm)
Living accommodation		12,972	16,215		12,972	12,972	16,215	Based on Average Council Band F in 2023
Council tax		2,289	2,861		2,289	2,289	2,861	
	39,844	25,803	69,462	49,426	16,221	65,647	65,220	
Costs reimbursed per annum								
PVG scheme membership subscriptions		59	59	59		59		(Protecting Vulnerable Groups)
7 Sundays Pulpit Supply	700		700		700	700		
Mileage / travel expenses		840	840		840	840		Average £70 per month, for fulfilment of ministerial duties
Telephone costs		500	500		500	500		(Average) For fulfillment of ministerial duties
Manse upkeep		650	650		650	650		Claimed against receipts
	700	2,049	2,749	59	2,690	2,749	0	
Total annual costs / benefits	40,544	27,852	72,211	49,485	18,911	68,396	65,220	

Discretionary	Taxable £	Non taxable £	Gross £	National Church	Congregational	Total Cost £	Benefit £	Comments
				Cost £	Cost £			
Island allowance	2,062		2,062	2,062		2,062		Outer island allowance p.a.2024
Cleaning / gardening		700	875		700	700	875	(Average)
Support allowance		250	313	250		250	313	Support allowance as agreed at GA
Support to manse families / hardship grants		500	625	500		500	625	Average
Discretionary holiday fund		500	625	500		500	625	Average
Access to study leave funding for further training / personal development		275	344	275		275	344	£275 p.a
Ministers car loan funding at 6% APR on £5,000 (over 3 years)		294	368	294		294	368	Mkt ave APR 10% APR - saving of approx £294
Access to new ministers furniture loan £1,000 int free (over 3 years)		460	575	460		460	575	Mkt av APR 29.9%
Stipend loan funding at 6% APR on £5,000 (over 3 years)		294	368	294		294	368	Mkt ave APR 10% APR - saving of approx £294
Sick pay (annualised 20 years)	3,888		3,888	3,888		3,888	3,888	2 years full Stipend
Death in service (annualised 20 years)		9,721	12,151	9,721		9,721	12,151	(5 x stipend) 194420
Income protection (annualised 20 years)		4,627	5,784	4,627		4,627	5,784	(2 yrs full pay, then 1/3 stipend and 1/3 pension) 92543.92

One off / Irregular	Taxable £	Non taxable £	Gross £	National Church	Congregational	Total Cost £	Benefit £	Comments
				Cost £	Cost £			
Removal costs		3500	4,375		3,500	3,500	4,375	Average cost (paid for by congregation / Faith Action)
Disturbance allowance		1,740	2,175		1,740	1,740	2,175	Refunded against receipts by congregation

ON RETIREMENT

	Taxable £	Non taxable £	Gross £	National Church	Congregational	Total Cost £	Benefit £	Comments
				Cost £	Cost £			
Removal costs		3500	3,500	3,500		3,500	3,500	Average cost (paid for by congregation / Faith Action)
Access to Housing & Loan retirement home at 50% reduced rent		4,875	4,875	4,875		4,875	4,875	Average open mkt rent of a Housing & Loan fund home £9,750 pa
Defined benefit pension		7000	7,000			0	7,000	1/40 for every year of service of std annuity typically 20 years
Defined contribution pension		5,444	5,444			0	5,444	14% of stipend paid in every year
State pension (bought by NI contributions)		10,600	10,600			0	10,600	£203.85 p.w.
Access to part time locum work post-retirement	13,746		13,746		13,746	13,746	13,746	Based on 2 pastoral days plus 1 Sunday service (current rates)

Please note these figures are based on assumptions and apply to ministers in Scotland only.

10.4 In order to aid understanding around the Ministerial stipend, the breakdown of all elements of a Minister's stipend is essential. Understandably, focus has tended to be on the stipend itself but what are less obvious are the non-taxable benefits which accompany stipend. Whilst not every Minister or his or her dependents will receive every benefit (e.g. income protection) comment from Ministers who have come out of the Parish and into employment roles has been that they had not realised the value of these benefits until they had to pay them from net salaries. The value of the tax-free provision of manse accommodation must also be taken into account (and further reference to this is made in the Report of the General Trustees, in terms of their implementation of an instruction from last year's Assembly).

10.5 Affordability of ministry costs for the Church is a pressing matter. The 5% increase to stipend and MDS salaries in 2024 added £1.3m⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ by way of stipend and £211k in salary costs in respect of MDS, with this figure compounded every year thereafter, in addition to any further awards. We are a Church made up of local charges formed by one or more congregations. The reality is that most charges – 71% – do not raise enough income to meet the cost of ministry where they are. We are a National Church and the reality is that 29% of charges support the other 71%.

10.6 As stipends increase, and if there were to be a review and a significant upward revision to the stipend scales, this could mean that more charges would be unable to afford the cost. This would then impact upon the National Church's General Fund which could not shore up the cost of ministries indefinitely. One of the aims of the new Giving to Grow scheme, which began in 2023, was to allow congregations to retain more income locally, once the cost of ministry has been paid. As stipends increase and Giving to Grow contributions increase there is less ability to achieve this aim.

10.7 The Assembly Trustees consider that the time has come for a review of the current stipend structure and we propose to work with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team over the next year to consider possible amendments to the existing stipend and benefits structure, and report to the General Assembly of 2025.

10.8 Commentary regarding Manse provision, an integral part of the factors noted within the deliverance, is discussed in the General Trustees' report (see Section 6.3). The 'support available for Ministries' as per the deliverance is referenced within the FAPLT report. Work is ongoing in regards to a survey on Ministerial Health and all who are serving in the Ministries of the Church are encouraged to submit a response.

11. SEEDS FOR GROWTH FUNDING

11.1 The Assembly Trustees launched Seeds for Growth at General Assembly 2022. Three levels of grant are currently being awarded with a fourth at a future point. Funding for Level 1 (up to £1000) and Level 2 (up to £10,000) grants was made available from June 2023 with applications for Level 3 funding grants of up to £40k per annum for three years) opening from August 2023. Level 4 (up to £100k) will be available later in the year. To date, £24,500 in Level 1 and 2 grants, and £634,694 in Level 3 grants have been awarded.

11.2 An example of the use of smaller grants is supporting people training in pioneering ministry, an incubator programme where ten people can each do a short internship resulting in congregations putting into practice ideas for mission. Projects awarded larger grants include pioneering work in a large new-build estate, and work continuing to implement big ideas from stories of non-churched folks (under 40s), listening to God and community stories, responding with love and service, building community and exploring discipleship.

11.3 Having worked with the funding regulations for just under a year, the Committee is proposing a tightening of criteria. This approach has been endorsed by the Assembly Trustees. The current purposes are noted as follows:

The purposes of the Fund are to support the numerical and spiritual growth of existing Church of Scotland congregations and of new Church of Scotland worshipping communities through (i) the planting of New Worshipping Communities; (ii) work focused on the development of new forms and fresh expressions of church life; (iii) creative engagement with all sectors of society in particular with those aged 40 and under, in every case promoting the advancement of religion and the overarching purpose of the numerical and spiritual growth of the Church; and (iv) The enablement of community transformation motivated by Christian service.

11.4 The Committee and Assembly Trustees recommend to the Assembly that the purposes of Seeds for Growth are simplified to the following:

The purposes of Seeds for Growth funding are to support the numerical and spiritual growth of the Church of Scotland through:

- i. Developing mission through New Worshipping Communities, and
- ii. Developing and nurturing faith in those under the age of 40.

11.5 Seeds for Growth funding is granted solely from the Church of Scotland's reserves.

11.6 The Church needs to focus on both developing new and regenerating existing worshipping communities, for the future, and this is where the money and committee's energies need to be invested. Alternative funds are available across the Charitable sector which support initiatives such as in community transformation and the Grants Unit is able to provide support in relation to accessing such external funding streams.

11.7 The Seeds for Growth Committee includes individuals with specialist knowledge in the area of New Worshipping Communities. Members are appointed by the Assembly Trustees working in collaboration with the Nomination Committee. The list of members of the Committee can be found in Appendix VI. The Committee meets at least five times a year with all grants over £75,000 requiring Assembly Trustees' approval. The work of the Committee has increased over the last year and with the detailed assessment process introduced for the Level 3 and 4 funds (in which a committee member undertakes a review in advance with each of the applicants prior to discussion within the meeting) and now finds itself in the position where it would like to increase its committee members from the current 9 to 11. This is in addition to a number of co-opts who are brought into the committee due to their specific skill set.

11.8 The current regulations stress that Presbyteries and not congregations make application to the fund. The Trustees and Committee are seeking for this to be changed, so that applications can either be made by Presbyteries or congregations with Presbytery approval. This allows a more direct relationship with congregations, whilst always ensuring that Presbyteries are properly involved. Note that the Committee will not discuss any application until Presbytery approval (usually indicated via the signature of the Presbytery Clerk or relevant Presbytery appointed person) has been received. Proposed amendments to the arrangements are contained within Appendix II.

12. OTHER GRANTS

12.1 As noted in previous years, the Small Grants Fund (which includes the Winter Support Fund) is being ended in 2024, with a smaller budget of £40,000 made available to congregations. The Pioneer Mission Fund, the precursor of Seeds for Growth, has now seen all grants issued within 2023, and it too comes to an end. Finally, the last of the Go For It funding, extended due to the Covid-19 pandemic, is coming to an end in 2024, marking the full cycle of this much celebrated funding stream.

12.2 External to the funds being offered by the Church of Scotland, the Grants Unit has continued its work in supporting congregations and church groups seeking monies from external grant sources with around £1.44 million having been directly awarded to congregations with the support of the Grants Unit since the Unit's inception in 2020.

13. STEWARDSHIP

13.1 *'Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.'* 2 Corinthians 9:10-12 (NIV)

13.2 Living generously is at the heart of our faith. God's generosity towards us gives rise to thankfulness which is expressed through our generosity towards others. Reflecting God's generous nature in every aspect of our lives is the principal message being promoted by the National Stewardship Team. This team encourages and supports congregations, Presbyteries and the National Church to recognise the blessings God has given and to respond by using these gifts and resources to live out the Good News and bring glory to God.

13.3 Key Resources

13.3.1 How we understand and express our generosity as a church is explored across the following stewardship resources:

Joyful Generosity focusses on our personal giving, offering congregations a way to explore the links between God's generous nature and our own financial stewardship;

A Narrative of Generosity encourages a whole-life approach to stewardship, providing starters for worship, discussion, small group study guides and personal devotions;

Exploring Generosity offers intergenerational resources; and

Lasting Generosity encourages the promotion of legacy giving.

13.3.2 Building on this theme of generosity, and seeking to reach a wider audience, the team is finding new platforms and opportunities to raise the profile of Christian stewardship. In this regard, the Assembly Trustees are pleased to announce that Saint Andrew Press has recently published a new book from the team, entitled *Living Generously: a whole-life response to God's love*. We commend this accessible and practical resource to the Church for use individually and collectively, as we seek to mirror God's generosity in all areas of our lives.

13.4 The Offering

13.4.1 A dedicated time of offering provides worshippers with an opportunity to recognise and actively respond to God's generosity, and for these offerings – however they are received – to be acknowledged. Since the adaptations necessitated during the height of the pandemic, we are aware that a number of congregations have changed their practice of uplifting an offering during worship. To help worship leaders and Kirk Sessions reflect on the practice of offering in their setting, the team has produced a short video on Inspiring Giving: Enhancing the Time of Offering in Worship' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fc03gwzjfjWs>). In addition, an article exploring the history and theology of offering within the Scottish Church will be published in the Spring 2024 edition of Theology in Scotland (<https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/TIS/index>).

13.5 Digital Giving

13.5.1 Enabling giving through different methods requires research and care by local trustees within congregations. The complex area of digital giving is one with which the team can offer support through online meetings and telephone conversations, followed up with tailored information on products, providers and discounts, helping ensure that the most appropriate digital giving options for the context are considered.

13.6 Legacy Giving

13.6.1 A legacy gift to the Church is one of the most valuable and lasting ways we can continue to support its mission and its ministry, whether the gift is directed to a local congregation or to the wider work of the Church.

13.6.2 In 2021, 286 congregations benefitted from legacy income totalling £6.66 million.

13.6.3 In 2022, 325 congregations benefitted from legacy income totalling £4.45 million.

13.6.4 Based on 68% congregational returns received by 29 February 2024, 351 congregations benefitted in 2023 from legacy income totalling £4.01 million.

13.6.5 Legacies received for the wider work of the Church (i.e. the Unincorporated Entities) for those years totalled:

2021: £3.0 million, of which unrestricted legacies were £1.2 million.

2022: £2.4 million, of which unrestricted legacies were £0.9 million.

2023: £6.4 million, of which unrestricted legacies were £5.2 million.

13.6.6 Legacy giving is a powerful expression of faith, and churches should be confident in promoting this among our members and supporters. To support this, the Church of Scotland is continuing to partner with Christian Aid, the Church of England, the Quakers in Britain – and now also the United Reformed Church – in the joint legacy initiative – *Faith Will*. More than fifty Church of Scotland congregations signed up for these resources in 2023, and it is planned to build on this good start with further promotion of *Faith Will* in the autumn of 2024. The Trustees are delighted to note that the *Faith Will* initiative is a finalist in the Legacy Campaign of the Year category, Smee and Ford Legacy Awards 2024. The Trustees are very grateful to our friends in Christian Aid for leading this joint project so effectively.

13.7 Online Events

13.7.1 Over the last twelve months, the National Stewardship Team has hosted webinars and online meetings and surgeries to support congregations with up-to-date guidance and creative ideas. These included two digital giving surgeries and an *Exploring Generosity* webinar to support an intergenerational approach to stewardship.

13.7.2 The team is planning an online event in the summer of 2024 to provide information and advice on both stewardship and finance in relation to new and forthcoming unions. Further details will be sent direct to Session Clerks and Congregational Treasurers. In the meantime, the guidance note of practical steps for unions can be found here: https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/107436/guidance-notes-on-unions.pdf

13.8 General Assembly Fringe event

13.8.1 Commissioners are invited to attend the in-person lunchtime fringe event on Monday 20 May in Augustine United Church.

13.9 Work with Congregations

13.9.1 The National Stewardship Team has seen an increase in requests for more in-depth work with individual congregations. This can take different forms depending on the context. The team of four consultants is flexible and able to support congregations in a whole range of ways, including with income generation, enabling giving, Gift Aid and learning resources. Recent visits have included supporting personal giving programmes and special fundraising efforts, meeting with Kirk Sessions and small teams, giving introductory presentations, facilitating workshops, speaking in Sunday services, and leading worship and Café Church events.

13.9.2 The Trustees would encourage congregations to contact the team to explore a range of ways to foster more effective stewardship in different settings. Commissioners are invited to chat with the team in the Martin Hall during the General Assembly, and to look out for their lunchtime fringe event too.

13.10 Presbytery Engagement

13.10.1 The National Stewardship Team has sought to engage with the Church at a regional level, with visits to a number of Presbytery events and meetings. This team is a resource for the whole church, and the Trustees encourage every Presbytery to make time each year for input from their regional stewardship consultant.

13.10.2 The services of the National Stewardship Team are provided free of charge. Contact details can be found on the Church's website: <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/stewardship>.

13.10.3 The series of stewardship webinars can be viewed on the team's YouTube page here: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqb_rm5hfTSGVK00tBFv6og

13.10.4 The Stewardship Newsletter is continuing to provide regular stewardship news, ideas, events and information. Please subscribe through the website: <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/newsletters>

14. REMIT OF THE FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM (FAPLT)

14.1 The General Assembly of 2023 approved the creation of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) with its four programme groups. The Leadership Team and groups have now been operating for a year, and as with all things new, as the working realities of a new structure begin to settle changes to processes can be identified. As a result, the FAPLT remit has been revised and is presented in Appendix III.

14.2 Two significant changes to the arrangements presented last year are proposed, both in order to simplify and streamline governance processes. The first is the movement of Presbytery Mission Planning from a sub-group of the Mission Support Programme Group to a full Programme Group known as Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group (PMPIG). The remit for this Group can be found in FAPLT's report, Appendix IX.

14.3 The second area is to create a sub-committee of the Assembly Trustees to oversee arrangements in relation to the Church's establishments in Israel, currently sitting within the remit of the Resource and Presence Programme Group. At present, a four-stage reporting process through which certain recommendations have to be processed exists. Decisions have to move from the Directors/Governors of the establishments to the Resource and Presence Programme Group to FAPLT with reporting to the Assembly Trustees for final approval on significant strategic and/or financial matters. Each of the parties involved in this process has concluded that this is not satisfactory and so a more direct line between Assembly Trustees and Directors/Governors through the Israel Sub-Committee is requested. All parties involved have confirmed they agree with the proposed amendments. This will necessitate an addition to the Assembly Trustees Constitution and Remit (Appendix V).

15. THE PRIORITIES PROJECT

15.1 Following the 2023 General Assembly, the Chief Officer was tasked by the Assembly Trustees to commence a review of all areas of work conducted within the National Office covering the Support Services and Faith Action Programme. The scope of the review was agreed in August 2023. The work was managed through a Project Board which included Stakeholders from Presbyteries, the General Trustees and the Convener of the Faith Action Leadership Programme.

15.2 In 2019, the staffing establishment for the National administration was 241 employees (FTE = 228.85). Since then, some areas have been strengthened to meet local need (e.g. the addition of Presbytery Buildings Officers), and numbers in other areas have reduced. In January 2024 there were 203 staff (FTE 198.38).

15.3 Whilst staff numbers have declined, the workload of service departments has increased significantly through congregations requiring increasing support due to falling numbers with fewer people taking on positions of responsibility and increasing demands in civil legislation. Presbytery reform and the Mission Planning process has created a significant volume of work for departments, not least Finance and Law and those dealing with the planning process. Deliverances from the General Assembly also need to be discharged and, year on year, the number and complexity of instructions received compound the position. All of this involves resource to deliver, both financial and people.

15.4 The increasing workload has also been accompanied by a number of internal changes. The structure of four Councils was moved into the two Forum structures of Faith Nurture and Faith Impact. This occurred on the brink of the pandemic which involved furlough of a number of staff members and Forums which met online. The Forums operated for two years, with the General Assembly in 2023 approving the formation of Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) with its four programme groups. At no point during this period of successive change has an opportunity been found to review the work areas being delivered across the organisation in order to ensure they remain aligned with the needs now being presented by the local church.

15.5 This is the first project that has looked across all areas of work undertaken within the National Offices and questioned whether the work requires to remain as a priority for the Church and delivered at a national level. Capacity now also needs to be created, within the existing resource, to move into new areas of work. The National IT transformation project, which is in the tendering phase, will bring considerable benefits to the wider Church and will particularly transform the interactions with the Finance Department both in terms of the submission and release of data. Work also needs to occur within the area managed under Faith Action. It is clear that there are areas of work which have continued with limited resource which now need to be reviewed and a decision made regarding future direction.

15.6 The project has identified two areas to be reviewed. The first is in relation to our international work and presence. Currently the Church of Scotland has eight Mission Partners operating in four countries in addition to providing a number of significant grants and funds to international partners. The Trustees have commissioned a review designed to assess the impact of the Church's work internationally and assist in identifying whether alterations to the current models are required.

15.7 The second relates to the Priority Areas work. A new Head of Mission Support, has been appointed and has been tasked with reviewing the overall programme of work, which itself has undergone much transformation in recent years, to determine the future requirements.

16. CROSSREACH

16.1 As noted within the report to General Assembly 2023, CrossReach, the Church's Social Care arm, now accounts for over half of the total income and expenditure of the Church of Scotland. The Trustees are appreciative of the close working relationships between senior staff led by the Chief Officer and CrossReach's Chief Executive Officer, and of the regular engagement on matters of import. The report of the Social Care Council once again demonstrates the range and depth of CrossReach's activities as in Christ's name they support people to achieve the highest quality of life possible and to live it to the full. CrossReach is a significant part of the Church's caring presence across Scotland, and one with which, as church members, we should be proud to be associated.

17. SALVESEN FUND

17.1 As reported to the General Assembly of 2023, an application was submitted and subsequently approved by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) resulting in the widening of the trust purpose of the fund. The reorganisation of the scheme (holding a market value capital of £16.6m at end December 2023) is being used to support work internationally and the Church of Scotland Overseas partners.

17.2 The individuals who are Assembly Trustees have now, in accordance with the agreement of the 2023 Assembly, become the ex officio trustees of the Salvesen Fund. The Salvesen Trustees have taken the opportunity to revise the administrative arrangements for the fund, with the Grants Unit taking over the administration and a Salvesen Support Group chaired by a Salvesen Trustee with representatives from FAPLT and independent members who have experience of working internationally.

17.3 Revised administrative arrangements for the Salvesen Fund are presented in Appendix V, to replace those set out in the Schedule in Appendix I to the Report of the Faith Impact Forum to, and as revised by, the Commission of Assembly in November 2019.

18. HOUSING AND LOAN FUND

18.1 The Assembly Trustees through the Chief Officer and the Law Department have spent the last year working alongside the Housing and Loan Fund as the Fund considered a number of changes to its Constitution, including a discretionary power to the Fund's Trustees to donate to the wider Church such part of the trust funds which is surplus to the Housing and Loan work of the Fund. Detail is provided in the Housing and Loan report. The Assembly Trustees are pleased that the current surplus of monies identified within the Fund, £9m, will be transferred to them for use for wider Church purposes. In order to comply with general Trust Law, the Fund's Trustees will receive reports from the Assembly Trustees setting out how payments received from the Fund have been or are to be utilised.

19. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI) GROUP

19.1 Introduction and Overview

19.1.1 Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) continues to be a growing and developing area of work under the governance of the Assembly Trustees. The EDI Group's vision for the Church is that all people are welcome and that everyone who visits a congregation, the National Offices and any other Church setting, can discern this as a result of welcoming attitudes and behaviours, the built environment and the atmosphere that everyone plays a role in creating.

19.1.2 Since General Assembly 2023, the last year has been focused on continuing to progress the three strategic priorities for the EDI Group: racial justice, disability inclusion, and conduct and culture. Each of these priorities had a corresponding group made up of EDI Group and co-opted members with specialist interest and expertise in these areas. Following a review of the group's terms of reference the EDI Group will continue to support working groups on Disability Inclusion and Racial Justice for at least the next year. Task groups are convened by a member of the EDI Group, but may include co-opted members as determined by the EDI Group. The Racial Justice Working Group has been formed jointly with the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group and will also consider the issues arising from the Legacy of Slavery report (General Assembly 2023). It has been decided to bring the Conduct and Cultural Group into the agenda of the main EDI Group discussions, rather than holding a separate series of meetings. The EDI Group will be guided by a strategy and work plan, agreed with the Assembly Trustees.

19.1.3 The EDI Group launched the Church of Scotland EDI Facebook group in 2023 to reach a broad audience and encourage discussion and resource sharing between communities.

19.1.4 In general terms the EDI Group has also responded to inquiries and initiatives relating to policy, procedure and themes of work which do not fit within the recognised priorities and areas of ongoing work. Information regarding the Group's membership can be found in Appendix VI.

19.2 Racial Justice

19.2.1 The Church of Scotland is making significant efforts to address racial and social justice issues within its institutions and practices. These efforts are highlighted through initiatives focused on the familiarisation process, public acknowledgment of the legacy of slavery, and congregational engagement with historical injustices.

19.2.2 The Racial Justice Working Group is taking on the recommendations and learning from the research findings outlined in the report *Towards a Church where Everyone is Welcome*. The Group is prioritising issues such as funerals (highlighted at the General Assembly of 2023) and familiarisation for ministers from overseas.

19.3 Disability Inclusion

19.3.1 The overarching aim of the Disability Inclusion Working Group (DIWG), is to support and enable Church of Scotland congregations to proactively seek to cultivate a culture where they are communities of belonging for all.

19.3.2 Following a successful Disability Fringe event in 2023 a second event will be held in 2024. The event included examples of how congregations and Presbyteries had worked to create an ethos of belonging for disabled people and signposted resources and organisations who could support and equip interested groups.

19.3.3 A *Theology of Disability* statement, which will include theological reflections and practical implications, is under development. The statement will advocate for the Church of Scotland to embrace a theology of disability, emphasising inclusivity, justice, and the celebration of diversity. It will call for active participation and leadership opportunities for individuals with disabilities, challenging cultural assumptions and advocating for societal changes. The Church aims to serve as a prophetic voice, offering pastoral care and fostering communities where everyone is recognised as integral and celebrated as a reflection of the Kingdom of God.

19.3.4 The DIWG also contributed to the weekly worship advice on disability inclusion. This is publicly available and aims to support communities to act to support everyone.

19.4 Conduct and Culture

19.4.1 In September the EDI Group worked with the People and Training Team to develop four anti-racism films exploring this subject from an explicitly Christian lens. The material has been piloted with the Ministries Training Network and will be made more widely available through the Church of Scotland online learning platform. Already on this platform are a number of EDI training modules across several areas including a general introduction to EDI principles, bias, and racial justice have been recorded and delivered as e-learning and facilitated training respectively. The aim is for training and information to be widely available to anyone who plays an active role in Church life. The EDI training is available to everyone with a church email address and can be accessed through the training portal.

19.4.2 A suitable model for rolling out widespread anti-racism training is being considered with the aim of providing a long-term facilitated training programme accessible to all office holders. The means of funding such a programme is the main consideration as well as ensuring that it is open to all.

20. SCOTTISH STORYTELLING CENTRE AND JOHN KNOX HOUSE

20.1 At the time of going to print, discussions are ongoing in relation to the future of the Scottish Storytelling Centre and John Knox House. An update will be provided to the Assembly.

21. NET ZERO

21.1 As part of the deliverances received from General Assembly 2023, the Assembly Trustees were instructed that *'In order to achieve Net Zero by 2030, instruct the Assembly Trustees to assess carbon emissions from national Church travel (both international and national), determine options to reduce this, agree an annual carbon budget for the national Church and report to General Assembly in 2024'*.

21.2 Prior to 2023, the National Administration had not been assessing its carbon emissions in respect of travel. This in part was due to no travel taking place during the Covid-19 pandemic. Emission data has been collected on international flights and in the year of 2023, 53.8 tonnes of CO2 emissions were recorded. Attempting to establish the national travel tonnage is proving more complicated than envisaged and a technological solution is being investigated. As could be appreciated in order to set a carbon target there needs to be an understanding of a baseline. The Assembly Trustees will be bringing further information back to General Assembly 2025 regarding developments around Net Zero. In the meantime, work is ongoing seeking to reduce further international travel through revised means of working.

22. APPOINTMENT OF THE HEAD OF FINANCE AND GENERAL TREASURER

22.1 Following the retirement of Anne MacIntosh, the Assembly Trustees are pleased to announce the appointment of Jenny Simpson to the post of Head of Finance and General Treasurer. 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 Jenny Simpson full power to discharge legacies, bequests and donations (as defined in Section 14 of the proposed deliverance above).

23. MEETINGS

23.1 Since last reporting, the Assembly Trustees have held six meetings onsite with an online option and four meetings wholly online. In making appointments to maintain our number each year, we look carefully at skill sets and succession planning and give consideration to gender balance and age range. Of the twelve Trustees in 2023-2024, there were five Ministers of Word and Sacrament. For much of the year, two of them were Presbytery Clerks, that is now one. Of the others two are Parish Ministers and one is a Professor of Christian Dogmatics. We also have amongst our number a management consultant, a deputy company chairman, a non-executive company chairman, an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion professional, a communications officer, and practising KC and former UK Judge on the General Court of the European Union. All are active members of congregations and most are elders. Many have significant third-sector experience. The geographical spread of Assembly Trustees now extends to the International Presbytery.

23.2 David Harrison's term as Vice Convener ends in May 2024 and Geoff Miller will succeed him in this role. Ann Nelson's term as a trustee ends in May 2024. With the end of her term, the resignation of one trustee and two trustees continuing for a second term, we will welcome two new trustees in June 2024. We no longer have the two *ex officio* trustees envisaged, and set in place, when the Assembly Trustees were created. A change to this arrangement was made in 2023 to allow representation of the General Trustees by a member other than their Chair. Owing to a change in the employment status of the current Convener of the Assembly Business Committee, his place at trustee meetings has been taken by another representative of that Committee since the autumn of 2023. Accordingly, a further change to our Constitution and Remit is proposed, as set out in Appendix V, to allow that Committee to appoint one of its members, who need not be its Convener, as a representative.

From June 2023 to March 2024

Trustees	Meetings	Attended
David Cameron (<i>Convener</i>)	10	10
Jean Couper	10	9
Ian Forrester	10	8
David Harrison (<i>Vice-Convener</i>)	10	10
Miranda Heggie (June 2023)	10	6
Barry Hughes	10	7
Jennifer MacDonald	10	7
Michael Mair (<i>from June 2023, resigned October 2023</i>)	5	3
Peter McEnhill (<i>resigned November 2023</i>)	6	4
Geoff Miller	10	10
Ann Nelson (Administrative Trustee)	10	10
Norman Smith	10	9
Philip Ziegler	10	9
Corresponding Member		
Scott Rennie, Vice Chair, General Trustees	10	8
Representative from Assembly Business Committee		
John Ferguson (November 2023)	5	4

24. CONGREGATIONAL STATISTICS 2023

24.1 The congregational statistics, along with many other aspects of life in the Church of Scotland in 2023, bear the imprint of Presbytery Mission Planning. From the large-scale formation of the Presbytery of Clèir Eilean Ì: Highlands and Hebrides from 9 former Presbyteries on 1 January 2024, to unions within existing linkages, little is unaffected. Three Presbyteries report for the first time in 2023 in their own right.

24.2 We are particularly grateful to the Clerks of the outgoing and new Presbyteries, as well as the IT Department in the National Offices, who have enabled this collection to happen at a time of significant change. We also note our appreciation of all Presbytery Clerks and congregations for their diligence and strenuous efforts in their work on this year’s statistics. The information which follows greatly assists in supporting the understanding of the Church of Scotland at all levels.

24.3 Summary

- As at December 2023, there were 259,200 members of the Church of Scotland, a fall of 4.1% from 2022.
- In the last ten years, since 2013, the number of members has fallen by 35%.
- Information collected indicates that in 2023, 63% of congregations offered worship services that were online; and 32% offered alternative offline worship services. 22,775 people are estimated to have worshipped online, and 4,075 made use of alternative offline provisions.
- Over a fifth (21%) of congregations reported a New Worshipping Community.
- The number of Professions of Faith increased in line with the last two years.
- 161 congregations formed 62 unions during 2023, in previous years around a dozen unions took place annually.

24.4 Technical Summary

- The large number of unions this year has affected the figures in various ways. Attention to administration of rolls has seen a large increase in those “Leaving Otherwise”, and possibly to Professions of Faith as people choose to formally become a member in order to vote on proposals.
- Numbers at both Presbytery level and National level have been rounded, in line with best practice, to avoid giving a false sense of precision. Numbers that would round down to 0 are indicated with e.g. “<5” to distinguish them from actual 0s. This also means that the totals at the end of each column may not equal the sum of the numbers above.
- There was a response rate of 86% to the standard questions about membership, leadership etc.
- Additional Questions continue to be included to reflect changes in worship provision, with many churches offering a hybrid form of worship, both online and offline. This is the third year in which information on New Worshipping Communities (NWCs) is provided. These Additional Questions had a 54% response rate.

- Collection was made in mixed mode – some reported through Presbytery Information Management System (PIMS), others through Excel with additional questions through MS Forms or Excel.

24.5 Introduction

24.5.1 The continuing effect of Presbytery reform and Mission Planning can be seen in the congregational statistics for 2023. Nine Presbyteries closed on 31st December in order to form the new Presbytery of Clèir Eilean Ì: Highlands and Hebrides on 1 January 2024. In previous years around a dozen unions took place each year; in 2023 there were over 60, and more are expected in 2024. We are grateful to Presbytery and Session Clerks for their diligence and patience through these changes.

24.5.2 Information from the congregational statistics is collected as at 31 December each year and is reported under the Presbytery name as at that date. Thus, the Presbyteries that have formed Clèir Eilean Ì: Highlands and Hebrides are reported under their original names. The Presbyteries of Lothian and Borders, Perth, and the North East and Northern Isles are reported as single entities for the first time, and Clèir Eilean Ì: Highlands and Hebrides will report in its own right at the end of 2024.

24.6 Church-level membership and participation, 2023

24.6.1 Congregations within the Church of Scotland come in all shapes and sizes, from large city congregations to small rural or island communities. Table 1 shows the reported participation at the smallest 5% and 25% of churches, the median (i.e. middle) church, the largest 25% and 5% of churches (i.e. 75th and 95th percentile), and the mean (average) church. A “typical” church may be better described by the median value as a few large congregations can result in a larger mean value that may not be reflective of the overall data.

	5th percentile	25th percentile	Median (middle) church	75th percentile	95th percentile	Mean (average) church
Members	8	82	167	293	530	209
Adherents	1	3	6	16	45	14
Weekly Attendance						
In person	10	26	45	72	140	56
Average Age	46	57	63	69	74	62
Online	0	2	5	35	60	21
Offline	0	1	3	21	35	11
Professions of Faith	0	0	0	0	4	1
Children	0	0	4	4	120	25
Children receiving Communion	0	0	0	0	10	2
Elders	4	10	16	26	48	20
Baptisms	0	0	0	2	5	1
Weddings	0	0	0	1	4	1
Funerals	0	2	8	15	31	11

Table 1: Church participation summary, 2023

24.6.2 What a 'typical' congregation looks like:

The "typical", i.e. median, congregation has 167 members and 6 adherents. In the median congregation there are also:

- 4 children associated with the congregation, none of whom receive communion
- 45 people worshipping in the church, 5 people worshipping online and 3 offline
- 0 professions of faith
- 8 funerals, 0 baptisms, and 0 weddings
- a leadership of 16 elders

24.6.3 Only 18% of congregations welcomed new Christians through Professions of Faith. 30% of congregations welcomed new members through certificates from other Church of Scotland congregations, and 26% through resolution of the Kirk Session.

24.6.4 Children received Communion in 18% of congregations.

24.7 Admissions and Removals within the Church of Scotland, 2023

The membership statistics may be stated thus:

	Removals by Death	7,810	
Less	Admissions by Profession	760	7,050
	Removals by Certificate	1,560	
Less	Admissions by Certificate	1,175	385
	Other Removals	7,220	
Less	Restoration	1,320	5,900
	 Total decrease		 13,335

And shown graphically in Figure 1, below.

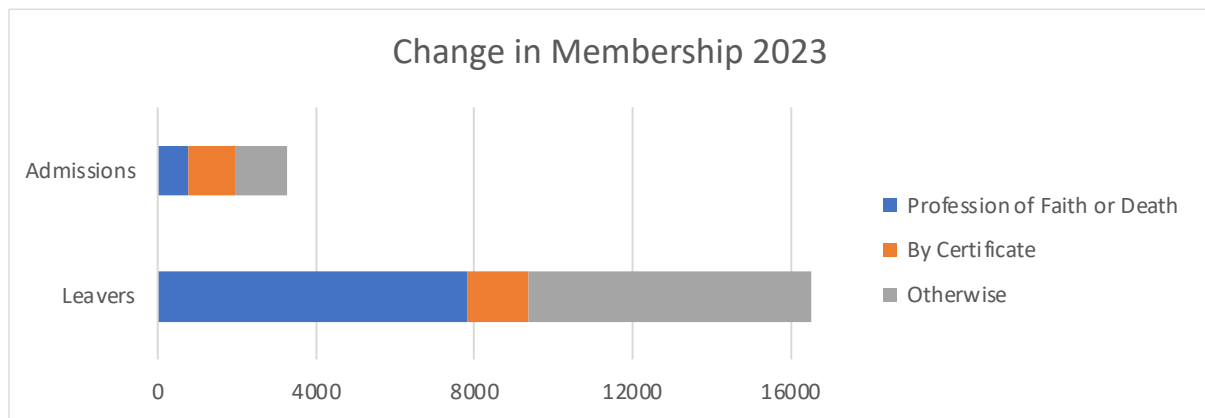
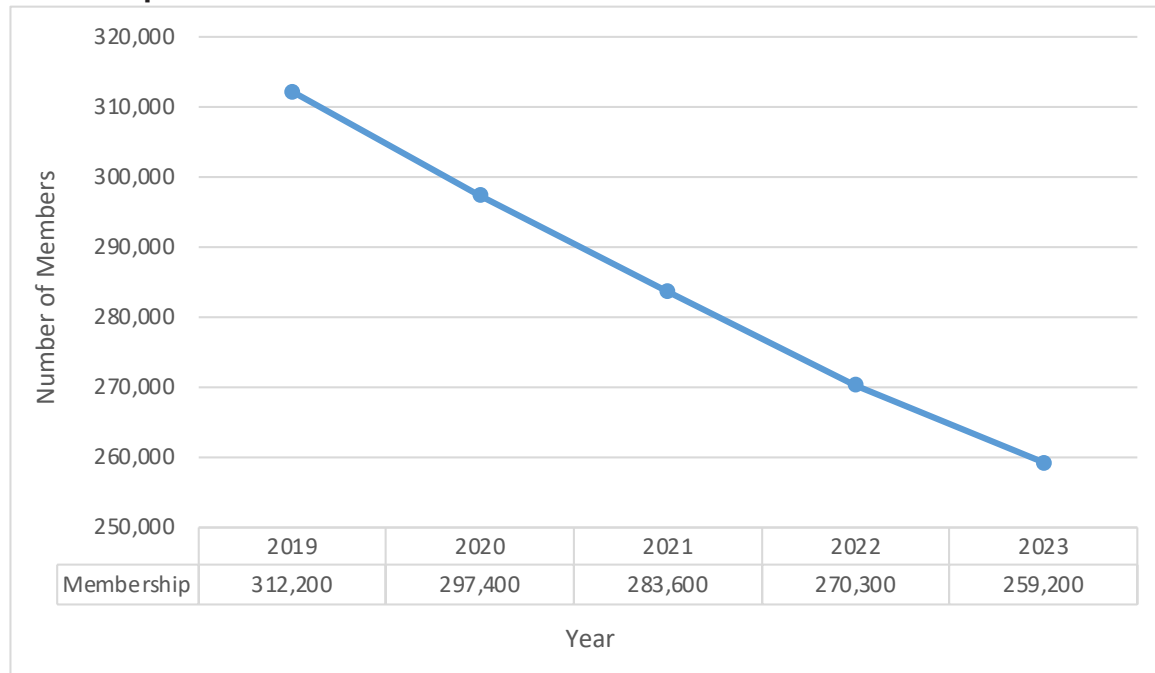


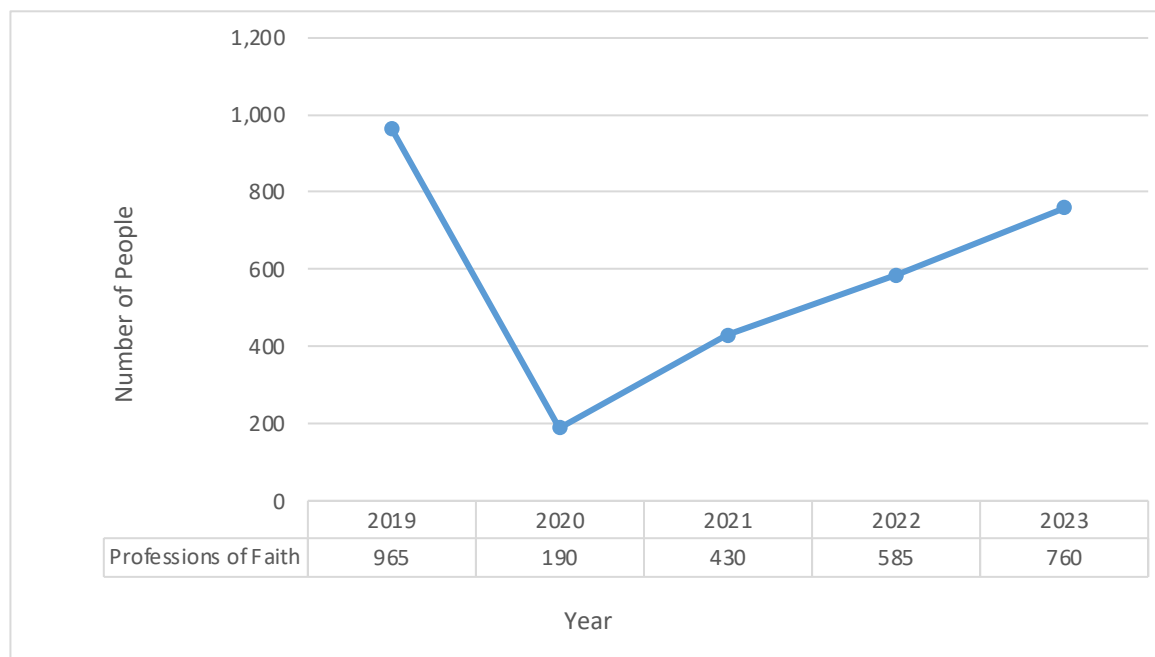
Figure 1: Leavers and Joiners in 2023

24.8 Comparative Graphs

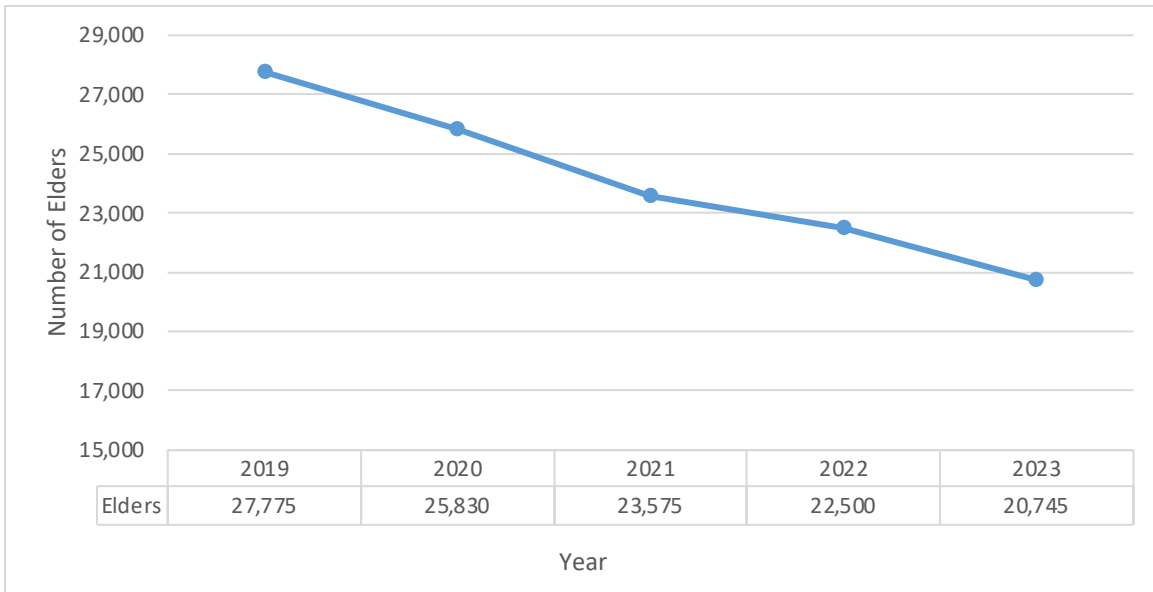
Membership



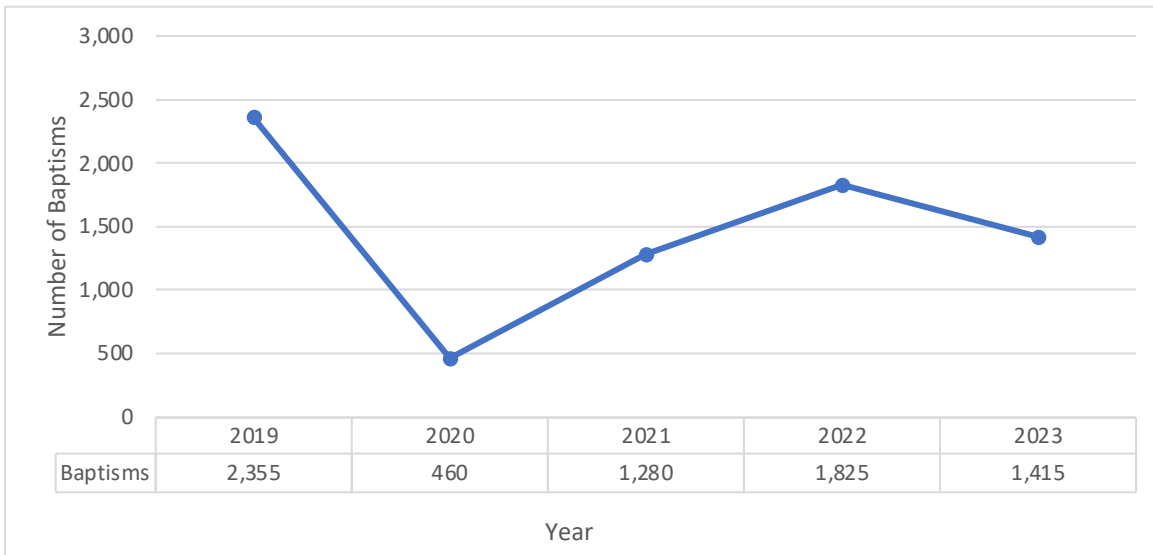
Professions of Faith



Elders



Baptisms



24.9 Presbytery Data**Reporting**

Presbytery	Membership as at 31st Dec 2022	Admissions	Removals	Membership as at 31st Dec 2023	Notices of Removal	Supplementary Roll	Response Rate
Edinburgh and West Lothian	24,600	385	1,680	23,300	85	1,555	98%
Lothian and Borders	20,300	235	1,420	19,100	50	1,950	89%
The South West	38,700	405	1,845	37,300	85	3,435	90%
Clyde	20,800	210	1,225	19,800	30	2,370	96%
Glasgow	24,500	300	1,830	23,000	50	1,770	80%
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	29,200	295	2,530	27,000	70	4,530	96%
Fife	15,400	205	960	14,600	30	1,710	82%
Perth	40,000	450	2,505	37,900	65	3,765	92%
North East and Northern Isles	39,200	265	1,560	38,200	40	2,560	71%
Argyll	5,200	150	115	5,300	-	265	81%
Abernethy	900	20	225	900	10	20	91%
Inverness	4,400	120	355	4,100	5	380	97%
Lochaber	800	10	255	800	<5	25	94%
Ross	1,400	85	85	1,400	10	60	83%
Sutherland	500	35	25	500	-	65	64%
Caithness	800	10	25	800	-	5	44%
Lochcarron-Skye	500	15	45	400	-	25	89%
Uist	300	<5	15	200	-	-	67%
Lewis	800	40	25	800	5	-	100%
England & Channel Islands	1,700	15	280	1,400	5	110	100%
International Charges	2,200	-	-	2,200	-	-	0%
Church of Scotland	272,300	3,255	17,000	259,200	545	24,600	86%

Table 2: Presbytery reporting

Membership

Presbyteries	Number of Congregations as at 31st Dec 2023	Membership as at 31st Dec 2023	Admissions			Removals		
			Profession of Faith	By Certificate	Restoration or Resolution	By Death	By Certificate	Otherwise
Edinburgh and West Lothian	88	23,300	95	140	150	790	195	695
Lothian and Borders	85	19,100	55	85	95	540	70	815
The South West	143	37,300	75	195	135	1,265	170	415
Clyde	73	19,800	50	105	55	725	110	390
Glasgow	120	23,000	110	115	75	670	125	1,035
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	118	27,000	100	135	55	1,005	275	1,250
Fife	73	14,600	30	65	110	495	75	395
Perth	152	37,900	125	140	190	1,155	230	1,120
North East and Northern Isles	126	38,200	45	105	115	750	220	595
Argyll	33	5,300	0	5	145	100	<5	15
Abernethy	9	900	<5	10	10	25	10	10
Inverness	23	4,100	10	40	70	125	55	170
Lochaber	9	800	5	0	<5	20	<5	10
Ross	15	1,400	<5	20	65	45	10	30
Sutherland	14	500	15	<5	20	20	<5	5
Caithness	9	800	0	5	5	15	<5	5
Lochcarron-Skye	7	400	0	<5	10	20	<5	25
Uist	6	200	<5	0	0	<5	0	10
Lewis	11	800	30	0	10	15	5	<5
England & Channel Islands	6	1,400	<5	5	5	35	10	235
International Charges	16	2,200	-	-	-	-	-	-
Church of Scotland	1,136	259,200	745	1,170	1,320	7,815	1,560	7,225

Table 3: Presbytery membership figures

24.10 Young people and adults not on the Communion Roll

Reports from the Presbyteries showed that as at 31 December 2023:

1. The number of children and young people aged 17 years and under who are involved in the life of the congregation was 28,100;
2. The number of adults whose names are not on the Communion Roll, but who are involved in the life of the congregations was 10,800 and
3. The number of children who receive Holy Communion in terms of Act V, 2000, Section 15 was 1,700, 6% of the total.

Presbyteries	Membership as at 31st Dec 2023	Children 17 and under	Children receiving Communion	Adults not on Communion roll
Edinburgh and West Lothian	23,300	4,540	290	1,250
Lothian and Borders	19,100	1,300	125	760
The South West	37,300	2,360	165	505
Clyde	19,800	3,005	100	585
Glasgow	23,000	4,500	200	1,095
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	27,000	5,045	355	925
Fife	14,600	770	50	270
Perth	37,900	3,315	155	2,025
North East and Northern Isles	38,200	1,820	140	750
Argyll	5,300	35	<5	100
Abernethy	900	65	15	145
Inverness	4,100	605	50	365
Lochaber	800	40	<5	145
Ross	1,400	175	<5	710
Sutherland	500	90	<5	130
Caithness	800	50	10	215
Lochcarron-Skye	400	10	<5	140
Uist	200	15	-	115
Lewis	800	260	20	475
England & Channel Islands	1,400	70	15	60
International Charges	2,200	-	-	-
Church of Scotland	259,200	28,100	1,700	10,800

Table 4: Young People and Adherents

24.11 Occasional Offices

Church of Scotland congregations:

- Baptised or gave thanks for 1,440 people, of whom 270 were adults, 3.1% of Scottish births in 2023, and
- Celebrated 1,125 marriages (4.1% of all weddings) and conducted 12,265 funerals (19.1% of those who died in Scotland).

Presbyteries	Baptisms			Weddings	Funerals
	All Baptisms	Adult baptisms	Birth Thanksgiving Services		
Edinburgh and West Lothian	165	30	20	110	1,160
Lothian and Borders	145	35	15	120	865
The South West	210	60	15	175	2,025
Clyde	120	10	10	65	1,120
Glasgow	180	20	10	135	1,280
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	185	45	20	85	1,655
Fife	65	10	<5	65	630
Perth	175	25	15	145	1,410
North East and Northern Isles	100	15	5	95	1,000
Argyll	15	5	<5	25	185
Abernethy	<5	0	0	5	45
Inverness	30	<5	<5	30	245
Lochaber	5	<5	<5	5	45
Ross	5	0	<5	15	175
Sutherland	5	<5	0	15	70
Caithness	5	0	0	10	100
Lochcarron-Skye	<5	0	0	<5	55
Uist	0	0	0	0	20
Lewis	10	5	10	15	105
England & Channel Islands	15	0	<5	10	75
International Charges	0	0	0	0	0
Church of Scotland	1,440	270	125	1,125	12,265

Table5: Presbytery baptisms, weddings and funerals figures

24.12 Leadership

There were 20,745 elders reported in the Church of Scotland of whom 41.1% are male and 58.9% female. Elders account for 8.0% of the membership.

Presbyteries	Elders			Other leaders		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Edinburgh and West Lothian	1,010	1,335	2,345	90	130	220
Lothian and Borders	565	800	1,365	50	55	100
The South West	1,220	1,790	3,015	135	230	365
Clyde	855	1,190	2,045	70	110	180
Glasgow	915	1,310	2,225	85	165	245
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	1,090	1,550	2,640	100	200	300
Fife	380	680	1,060	30	65	95
Perth	1,130	1,585	2,715	65	145	210
North East and Northern Isles	670	1,075	1,745	45	135	180
Argyll	190	310	500	15	20	35
Abernethy	35	65	100	0	0	0
Inverness	165	155	320	25	55	75
Lochaber	35	110	140	<5	25	30
Ross	70	85	155	15	25	40
Sutherland	15	35	50	5	10	15
Caithness	25	30	50	<5	<5	5
Lochcarron-Skye	20	10	30	10	10	20
Uist	15	10	25	<5	10	15
Lewis	60	<5	65	20	20	40
England & Channel Islands	60	95	155	0	0	0
International Charges	0	0	0	0	0	0
Church of Scotland	8,525	12,220	20,745	760	1,410	2,170

Table 6: Presbytery leadership figures, includes only those congregations who responded in 2023.

24.13 Public Worship in 2023

24.13.1 Congregational statistics continue to be gathered on alternative forms of worship to reflect the change of practice occurring since the pandemic. It should be noted that it is very difficult to obtain accurate estimates for online worshippers and to establish what level of engagement should be of equivalence to in-person attendance. The levels of engagement are however indicative of the wide reach of worship and the efforts of congregations across the country to allow all who wish to continue to worship within their local congregation to do so.

24.13.2 At least 61,580 people attended worship in person (24% of members), 22,775 online, and 4,075 in other offline ways, during a 'regular' week in 2023, that is not a major festival such as Easter or Christmas.

24.13.3 63% of congregations responding offered online worship, with 32% making alternative offline provisions such as phone-in services or worship sheets.

24.13.4 The figures for in-person and accessible worship attendance for Church of Scotland Presbyteries are given in Tables 7 and 8. For accessible worship attendance, there is only a 54% response rate.

Presbyteries	Membership as at 31st Dec 2023	Age ranges of worshippers						Number of Worshippers attending in person	% membership attending worship in person
		Under 16	16-24	25-44	45-64	65-84	85 and over		
Edinburgh and West Lothian	23,300	8%	3%	10%	22%	48%	9%	6,360	27%
Lothian and Borders	19,100	10%	3%	10%	23%	47%	8%	4,320	23%
The South West	37,300	8%	2%	8%	20%	53%	9%	6,825	18%
Clyde	19,800	9%	3%	9%	21%	48%	10%	5,505	28%
Glasgow	23,000	10%	5%	11%	22%	42%	9%	7,355	32%
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	27,000	9%	3%	9%	23%	47%	8%	7,540	28%
Fife	14,600	7%	2%	7%	18%	56%	10%	3,535	23%
Perth	37,900	8%	3%	9%	20%	51%	10%	7,585	20%
North East and Northern Isles	38,200	8%	2%	8%	21%	51%	9%	5,615	15%
Argyll	5,300	4%	2%	5%	19%	63%	8%	1,520	29%
Abernethy	900	10%	2%	9%	20%	49%	9%	395	46%
Inverness	4,100	7%	3%	10%	22%	48%	10%	1,715	41%
Lochaber	800	5%	5%	5%	19%	52%	14%	365	46%
Ross	1,400	11%	2%	8%	20%	50%	9%	775	66%
Sutherland	500	12%	0%	9%	20%	52%	7%	350	69%
Caithness	800	10%	3%	9%	21%	47%	10%	310	39%
Lochcarron-Skye	400	4%	1%	8%	29%	51%	8%	425	100%
Uist	200	8%	0%	5%	22%	54%	11%	125	51%
Lewis	800	15%	8%	13%	25%	33%	5%	640	78%
England & Channel Islands	1,400	9%	4%	9%	22%	40%	15%	320	23%
International Charges	2,200	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Church of Scotland	259,200	5%	3%	9%	22%	50%	9%	61,580	24%

Table 7: Presbytery physical attendance figures

Presbytery	Membership as at 31st Dec 2023	Able to offer online worship	Estimate of online worshippers	Able to offer alternative offline worship	Estimate of worshippers engaging with alternative offline worship	Response rate
Edinburgh and West Lothian	23,300	79%	3,330	29%	20	75%
Lothian and Borders	19,100	64%	1,740	38%	20	57%
The South West	37,300	53%	3,450	38%	35	52%
Clyde	19,800	66%	2,125	24%	10	68%
Glasgow	23,000	74%	2,185	26%	20	64%
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	27,000	63%	1,555	38%	40	87%
Fife	14,600	65%	710	31%	10	34%
Perth	37,900	52%	2,390	30%	35	66%
North East and Northern Isles	38,200	51%	1,655	24%	15	40%
Argyll	5,300	6%	680	0%	<5	0%
Abernethy	900	21%	20	0%	-	91%
Inverness	4,100	100%	80	100%	<5	3%
Lochaber	800	0%	0	0%	-	0%
Ross	1,400	0%	0	0%	-	0%
Sutherland	500	0%	0	0%	<5	0%
Caithness	800	22%	70	0%	<5	0%
Lochcarron-Skye	400	11%	5	0%	<5	0%
Uist	200	0%	0	0%	-	0%
Lewis	800	73%	2,425	67%	5	82%
England & Channel Islands	1,400	100%	225	60%	<5	63%
International Charges	2,200	75%	130	0%	-	25%
Church of Scotland	259,200	63%	22,775	32%	210	54%

Table 8: Presbytery Alternative Worship Figures, includes only those congregations who responded in 2023.

24.14. New Worshipping Communities

24.14.1 New Worshipping Communities can take a multitude of forms, and must show evidence of all the following characteristics:

- **Missional:** the focus is on people beyond existing congregations;
- **Contextual:** their format, culture and activities are shaped by the particular setting;
- **Consistency:** a community is developing, with some of the same people participating regularly;
- **Ecclesial:** it sees itself as part of, and is developing connections with, the wider Church;
- **Formational:** participants are encouraged to grow in Christian faith and character.

24.14.2 Additional questions were included in the congregational statistics to obtain information on those congregations and Presbyteries with a New Worshipping Community during 2023. We present in Table 9 some overall figures. Information gathered from the 2022 collection has formed the basis of more in-depth research within Pioneering Ministries.

24.14.3 The overall response rate was 54% with no responses obtained from the Presbyteries of Argyll, Lochaber, Ross, Sutherland, Caithness, Lochcarron-Skye or Uist. Figures given in this section are based on the responses submitted, not the total number of congregations.

24.14.4 19% of congregations offered at least one New Worshipping Community, with a number of congregations offering more than one type during the year. A further 20% offered a group that met some, but not all, of the criteria for a NWC.

24.14.5 In total 305 full New Worshipping Communities, and 230 others were reported to be operating in congregations across the Church of Scotland, with a further two reported at Presbytery-wide level for 2023. The majority of New Worshipping Communities were described as Messy Church (26%) and Café Church (17%). Other types of New Worshipping Communities reported included Youth Church, Older People's Church, Forest Church and Special Interest Groups.

Presbyteries	Number Congregations during 2023	% Congregations with New Worshipping Communities	Number of New Worshipping Communities within Congregations	Response Rate
Edinburgh and West Lothian	101	35%	70	75%
Lothian and Borders	96	35%	15	57%
The South West	178	23%	40	52%
Clyde	73	0%	15	68%
Glasgow	126	13%	60	64%
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	120	19%	40	87%
Fife	77	30%	10	34%
Perth	170	20%	30	66%
North East and Northern Isles	156	27%	25	40%
Argyll	54	21%	-	0%
Abernethy	11	9%	<5	91%
Inverness	34	3%	<5	3%
Lochaber	17	-	-	0%
Ross	23	-	-	0%
Sutherland	14	-	-	0%
Caithness	9	-	-	0%
Lochcarron-Skye	9	-	-	0%
Uist	6	-	-	0%
Lewis	11	27%	10	82%
England and Channel Islands	8	18%	5	63%
International Charges	16	16%	<5	25%
Church of Scotland	1,309	32%	305	54%

Table 9: New Worshipping Communities, includes only those congregations who responded in 2023.

24.15 Congregational Activities

24.15.1 Congregations are asked whether they engage in activities relating to:

- School chaplaincy
- Youth work
- Community development
- International links
- Environmental issues
- Political issues
- Health issues
- Economic inequality
- Food Poverty

24.15.2 Data was received from all but one Presbytery, resulting in the following summary graph:

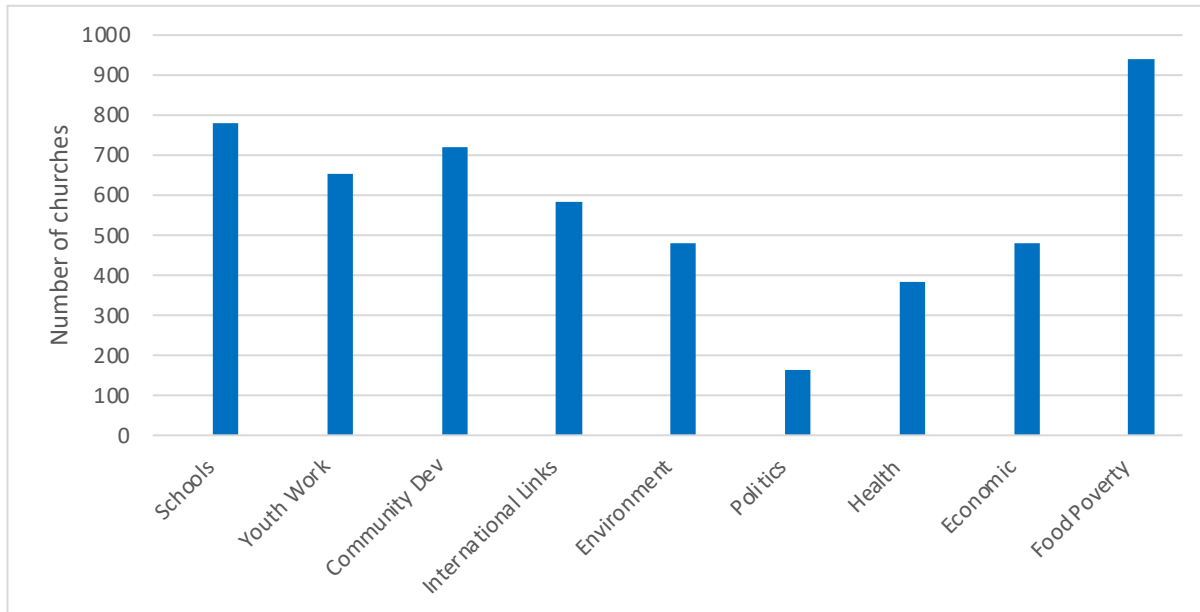


Figure 2: Congregational activities

24.15.3 Alleviating food poverty (84%) and school chaplaincy (69%) were the most common activities in congregations of the Church of Scotland. Engagement with political issues was the least common with only 15% of congregations reporting this.

Presbyteries	Schools	Youth work	Community development	International links	Environment	Politics	Health	Economic inequality	Food p'rtly
Edinburgh and West Lothian	64%	60%	62%	59%	51%	16%	38%	46%	83%
Lothian and Borders	76%	62%	68%	55%	48%	18%	39%	35%	88%
The South West	57%	34%	43%	42%	26%	7%	21%	28%	64%
Clyde	81%	71%	79%	53%	44%	16%	49%	53%	90%
Glasgow	86%	82%	81%	70%	64%	31%	54%	62%	93%
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	74%	70%	67%	57%	50%	20%	44%	56%	94%
Fife	68%	57%	73%	62%	43%	21%	40%	48%	100%
Perth	62%	54%	71%	41%	39%	9%	26%	41%	80%
North East and Northern Isles	79%	68%	59%	60%	40%	14%	22%	40%	88%
Highlands and Hebrides	47%	34%	45%	34%	38%	6%	30%	28%	57%
Lewis	64%	73%	55%	45%	27%	18%	36%	55%	73%
England & Channel Islands	67%	50%	83%	67%	67%	50%	67%	67%	67%
International Charges	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Church of Scotland	69%	58%	64%	52%	42%	15%	34%	42%	84%

Table 10: Congregational activities

In the name of the Assembly Trustees

DAVID CAMERON, *Convener*
 DAVID HARRISON, *Vice Convener*
 ANN NELSON, *Administrative Trustee*

Addendum

Ann Nelson, Administrative Trustee

The Assembly Trustees express our deepest gratitude for the unwavering dedication and exceptional service of Ann Nelson as Administrative Trustee who has played a pivotal role within the Church of Scotland. Ann’s legal professional experience, steadfast commitment and deep faith have been invaluable in this period of managing change within the Church. Her tireless efforts, keen attention to detail, and unwavering dedication to upholding the highest standards of governance have been invaluable. From meticulous minutes and keen eye for detail she distilled complex information to a readable style for monthly Assembly Trustee updates informing the wider Church of our work. Ann’s selfless service and exemplary leadership have left an indelible mark on the Church of Scotland, and for that, we are eternally grateful. As Ann embarks on new journeys and settles into her new home in Minnigaff she leaves a legacy of integrity, diligence, and service which will continue to inspire us all. The Assembly Trustees on behalf of the wider Church wholeheartedly thank Ann and wish her every blessing for the future.

Anne Macintosh, BA, CA, General Treasurer and Head of Finance

Anne Macintosh, the Church of Scotland’s General Treasurer and Head of Finance, retired at the end of March 2024 after 25 years of excellent, dedicated service to the Church of Scotland. Anne started with the Church as the Finance Manager for World Mission in 2000 prior to being promoted as Deputy General Treasurer in 2008 before becoming General Treasurer and Head of Finance in 2016 - a post she has remained in to date. Anne has led the Church through what has been a truly turbulent period where the finances have been more challenging than at any time in living memory. Anne has proven to be a first-class treasurer and has headed up one of the largest National Office departments where she has led from the front, facilitated, exercised oversight and encouraged people in the management of the finances right across the Church. Anne has managed to do all of this with compassion, wit and good humour whilst being professional and robust in her messaging and without ever losing sight of what matters in ensuring we are sustainable into the future. Anne leaves us with our thanks for making a huge contribution whilst being a wonderful colleague, friend and advisor to so many. Anne will be greatly missed but we wish her a glorious retirement with her garden, travels and family.

Appendix I

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

[Edinburgh, [] May 2024, Session []

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

1. *In paragraph 9, delete "by Extract Minute".*
2. *In paragraph 10, delete "in the current year and" and substitute "from".*
3. *In paragraph 16(b), delete "income" and substitute "Charge's Income Base".*
4. *In paragraph 17 delete "income" on three occasions and substitute "Assessable Income" each time.*
5. *In paragraph 18, insert the words "Ministry Here and Ministry Elsewhere components of the" between "deducted from the" and "Congregation's Contribution".*
6. *Delete paragraph 19 and substitute "No deductions or set off shall be made in respect of the Shared Activities component of the Contribution, which shall always be payable in full".*
7. *Delete the third sentence of paragraph 21 and substitute:
"This funding will be available as follows:
(i) for the first two years (i.e. in the years 2023 – 2024) of this Giving to Grow contribution system, as the full amount annually, and
(ii) in the third and fourth years (i.e. in the years 2025 and 2026) of this Giving to Grow contribution system, as one full annual amount to be made available across the two years in a proportion as determined by the individual Presbyteries."*
8. *In paragraph 23, delete "by Extract Minute".*
9. *In the second sentence of paragraph 26, insert the words "Ministry Here and Ministry Elsewhere components of the" between "deducted from the" and "Charge's Contribution".*
10. *In the second sentence of paragraph 27, insert the words "Ministry Here and Ministry Elsewhere components of the" between "deducted from the" and "Charge's Contribution".*

Appendix II

[] REGULATIONS AMENDING THE 'SEEDS FOR GROWTH' FUND REGULATIONS (REGULATIONS IV 2022) (AS AMENDED)

Edinburgh, [] May 2024, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the 'Seeds for Growth' Fund Regulations (Regulations IV 2022), as amended, shall be further amended as follows:

1. *Delete paragraph 3 and substitute:
"The purposes of Seeds for Growth funding are to support the numerical and spiritual growth of the Church of Scotland through:
i. Developing mission through New Worshipping Communities, and
ii. Developing and nurturing faith in those under the age of 40."*
2. *Delete paragraph 6 and substitute:
"An application to the Fund may be made by (i) a Presbytery or a group of Presbyteries, or (ii) provided that prior approval of the relevant Presbytery or Presbyteries has been given and that validation of this is supplied to the Committee along with the application, a congregation or congregations."*
3. *In the Schedule to the Regulations, delete the section "Purpose" (this being duplication):*
4. *In the Schedule to the Regulations, under the heading "Criteria", delete paragraph 1 and substitute:
"Collaboration with other partners, specifically including ecumenical co-operation, will be encouraged where such collaboration furthers numerical and spiritual growth of the Church."*
5. *In the Schedule to the Regulations, under the heading "Criteria", delete paragraph 2 and substitute:
"Applications must demonstrate a visionary approach and must set out the anticipated effect of the project at a congregational or Presbytery level and include a clear plan and measurable targets."*
6. *In the Schedule to the Regulations, under the heading "Governance", delete paragraph 1 and substitute:
"The operation of the Seeds for Growth Fund shall initially be overseen by a Committee of nine persons, increasing to eleven from 1 June 2024, 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. Of those first appointed, four shall serve three years renewable and three shall serve two years, renewable for a three-year term. Members appointed from 1 June 2024 shall be appointed for a three-year term. Trustee members shall serve during their appointed term as an Assembly Trustee."*

7. *In the Schedule to the Regulations, under the heading "Governance", in relation to paragraph 4: (i) in the second sentence of paragraph 4, delete "trustee" and substitute "Assembly Trustee", and (ii) delete the third sentence, which references Act VI 2018, which has now been repealed.*

Appendix III

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM REMIT

Membership

1. The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team ("FAPLT") shall comprise:
 - A Convener
 - Five 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 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.
2. The quorum shall be five members. The Convener shall have a casting vote.
3. The Convener shall be appointed for a term of four years. Of the Vice Conveners, two will be appointed for two years and three for three years as decided by the Nomination Committee. Subsequent to those first appointed, the Convener and Vice Conveners may be appointed from existing members and will conclude service at the conclusion of their term as Convener or Vice Convener.

Of the other members of FAPLT 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.

Operation

4. FAPLT shall be a Standing Committee of the General Assembly as the successor body to the Faith Impact Forum and the Faith Nurture Forum. As such, it is an Agency of the General Assembly over which general oversight is exercised by the Assembly Trustees.
5. Meetings of FAPLT shall be held at least five times each year. Each meeting shall be minuted and copies of the minutes shall be sent to the Assembly Trustees promptly on being finalised.
6. Meetings shall be serviced and attended by such staff as the Chief Officer and as FAPLT shall determine.

Remit

7. FAPLT shall lead and deliver the Faith Action Programme to enable the delivery of the Church's identified priorities. It shall implement the strategic objectives of the General Assembly and the strategic priorities of the Assembly Trustees and shall work with the Assembly Trustees, the General Trustees, Presbyteries and other parts of the Church to achieve a collaborative approach with the purpose of nurturing the people of the Church in their witness, worship and service. In particular, it shall:
 - **Support the ministries of the Church**
 - i. Review recruitment processes for the recognised ministries of the Church, creating pathways that attract and allow the Church to recruit the required number of leaders for the recognised ministries for which they are suited and called
 - ii. Review and administer the selection processes for recognised ministries
 - iii. Provide pastoral support for the recognised ministries
 - **Equip inspirational leaders and disciples**
 - i. Create a single, integrated training programme supporting all levels and aspects of Church life
 - ii. Provide support to the local as required in respect of education, worship and mission and discipleship
 - iii. Assist Presbyteries as requested to create accessible platforms for the sharing of good practice across the Church
 - iv. Support and enable digital ministry both in delivery and roll-out
 - **Engage with congregations**
 - i. Resource congregations in the work of campaigning and advocacy for justice, peace, inclusion, neighbourliness and the integrity of creation
 - ii. Support and enable congregational engagement with the work of the Church outside Scotland and congregational involvement with Christian Aid

- **Engage with the wider world**
 - i. Develop and maintain mutually enriching relationships with partner churches at home and in the wider world
 - ii. Identify appropriate opportunities to engage with those displaced
 - iii. Identify appropriate opportunities to support peacemaking and peace-building
 - iv. Build appropriate interfaith relationships which lead to mutual understanding and respect
- **Public witness**
 - i. Share the ideas and experience of the Church with government, parliamentarians, ecumenical partners, faith groups, and civil society and support the exchange of information and opinions between national institutions and Presbyteries and congregations in the pursuit of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.
 - ii. Speak truth to power on issues of poverty, marginalisation, violence, peace and justice, environmental protection and sustainability
- **Work with Presbyteries on Mission Planning**
 - i. Together with the General Trustees, assist in ensuring appropriate and robust Presbytery Planning and necessary readjustments in the context of the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021) or replacement legislation
 - ii. Assist in the provision of Specialist Ministries
 - iii. Ensure appropriate MDS recruitment, deployment and management processes
 - iv. Identify needs for planting and growing of new contextually relevant worshipping communities.
 - v. Work with other agencies to develop fresh expressions of Church.

Structure

8. 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.
9. Each Vice Convener will lead a Programme Group. No other members of FAPLT will be a member of a Programme Group.
10. 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.
11. 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.

Programme Group Remits

12. The Programme Groups will have responsibility for the following work streams.
 - **The Mission Support Programme Group**
 - 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.
 - Developing the Church’s ministry and mission in Priority Areas.
 - Supporting the work of the Education and Schools Group and the Gaelic Group.
 - Supporting Ministries through pastoral care provision.
 - Supporting and enabling digital ministry both in delivery and roll-out.
 - **The People and Training Programme Group**
 - The recruitment, training and formation of those in the Recognised Ministries of the Church of Scotland.
 - The training, discipleship and support of members and elders of the Church of Scotland and maintaining key partnerships including those with Presbyteries and Academic Partners.

- Alongside Presbyteries, recruiting, resourcing and training people intentionally for the mission of God, especially nurturing those who are new to faith.
- Supporting ministries and learning through the ASCEND programme.

The Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group

- Equipping the Church to pursue God’s mission of inclusivity, social justice and care for creation in Scotland and around the world.
- Supporting activities of Presbyteries and congregations in engaging with national and international issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation, with a priority for inclusion of those who are marginalised or struggle against poverty.
- Engaging policies which contribute to public life by developing and sharing the witness of the Church with government, parliament, ecumenical partners, faith groups, and civil society, and supporting the exchange of information and opinions between national institutions and Presbyteries and congregations.
- Providing a space in which to explore theologically, reflect, discuss and respond as a Church to important public matters that arise.

The Resource and Presence Programme Group

- 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.

PRESBYTERY MISSION PLANNING PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION GROUP

The Group will be responsible for all aspects of Mission Planning in terms of Act VIII 2021, in liaison with Presbyteries, and will nurture and review strategic relationships with Presbyteries and other stakeholders, communicating effectively and appropriately in partnership.

1. Advise on bases of adjustment and reviewable charges.
2. Maintain documentation of Presbytery plans and associated records, including publicly available information and how the data collated from Presbytery Plans can be stored and accessible for use by relevant parties in strategic planning and development.
3. Monitor annual evaluation and development plans.
4. Deal with requests from Presbyteries for revisions of their plan.
5. Work to support Presbyteries in implementing Mission Plans and other areas relating to adjustment and inform the appropriate bodies of the resources, experience and support that PMPIG can provide along with how they might shape thinking around realistic planning for the future with Presbyteries.
6. Work with Presbyteries and liaise with the General Trustees in the classification and use of buildings and applications for work at buildings.
7. Monitor all aspects of Guardianships.
8. Monitor the overall patterns and trends in Mission Planning.
9. Undertake policy development for Mission Planning in partnership with all relevant parties.
10. To take such actions as required for it carry out its duties and functions, including but not limited to offering advice, consulting with, and issuing guidance to the National Church, Presbyteries and congregations.
11. 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.
12. 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:
 - 12.1 Appraisal and Adjustment Act (Act VII 2003)
 - 12.2 Vacancy Procedure Act (Act VIII 2003) as temporarily amended
 - 12.3 Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021)
 - 12.4 Section 31 of the Faith Nurture Forum’s Deliverance to General Assembly 2021

Finance and Management

13. The Head of Finance & General Treasurer and Chief Officer will allocate a budget for the Faith Action Programme in consultation with FAPLT and by approval of the Assembly Trustees, based upon available finance resources. FAPLT shall work within that budget, ensuring co-ordination and oversight of priorities and with work ceasing if no longer required. FAPLT will agree with the Assembly Trustees by October each year measurable outcomes which it seeks to achieve.

Reporting

14. A draft of the Report on the Faith Action Programme will be submitted to the Assembly Trustees for approval no later than four weeks before the date on which it is due to be lodged with the Principal Clerk.
15. The Convener and Vice Conveners together on behalf of FAPLT and its Programme Groups will present the Report on the Faith Action Programme to the General Assembly, assisted as appropriate by other members or by senior staff.

Continuity

16. Other than as provided for in terms of paragraph 17 of this remit, FAPLT shall assume all of the rights, assets and responsibilities of the Faith Nurture Forum and the Faith Impact Forum, whose work and functions are incorporated into the work and functions of FAPLT. Any existing trust funds and all future donations and legacies received in connection with either the Faith Nurture Forum or the Faith Impact Forum or any such work or functions will be held and applied by the Assembly Trustees on behalf of FAPLT, all according to the terms and conditions applying to individual donations.

The Ministries Council and World Mission Council

17. The Ministries Council and World Mission Council will remain as constituent committees of FAPLT, with members appointed from among the membership of FAPLT and with specific responsibility for acting as the statutory employer of individuals who are members of the Church of Scotland Pension Scheme for Ministers and Overseas Missionaries and the Church of Scotland Pension Scheme for Ministries Development Staff.

Appendix IV

SCHEDULE

The Salvesen Fund

1. The Salvesen Fund was reorganised in 2023 with the consent of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).
2. The purpose for which the trustees of the Salvesen Fund (the "Trustees") hold the trust fund is to apply the whole fund, both capital and income, to provide support to the Church of Scotland in its work as it labours, itself or through its partner Churches, organisations or communities, for the advancement of the Kingdom of God throughout the world (but outwith the UK and Channel Islands) through Christian worship, fellowship, instruction, mission, and service.
3. The Trustees are the Assembly Trustees.
4. In carrying out their duties as trustees, the Trustees may delegate to a committee the day-to-day administration of the Trust.
5. The Trustees shall meet as necessary, and at least once per calendar year.
6. The Trustees shall maintain minutes of their meetings, duly approved. The minutes shall include a full account of the work of any delegated groups, with a synopsis of all applications received, and the reasoning for recommendations made to the Trustees.

Appendix V

Trustees' Constitution and Remit

1. The third and fourth sentences of clause 10 shall be deleted and the following shall be substituted:

"In addition to appointed Trustees, the Business Committee of the General Assembly and the Church of Scotland General Trustees shall each appoint one of their members as a representative who shall be entitled to attend all meetings as a corresponding member but without a right to vote or make a motion, such member being eligible to serve for a maximum period of three years".

2. The following sentence shall be inserted as a new clause 13:

"There shall be an Israel Sub-Committee with the remit and powers set out in Schedule G below".

3. The following shall be inserted as a new clause 17 (re-numbered as clause 18):

"The Trustees have and may exercise all the functions and powers held formerly by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (formerly the Faith Impact Forum and previously the World Mission Council and its Middle East Committee) under the Constitution of the Scots Memorial, Jerusalem (St. Andrew's Church and Hospice) Trust. The Convener of the Trustees and the Chief Officer shall be the successors in office of the Convener and Secretary of the World Mission Council and as such are trustees ex officio under the said Constitution".

4. The following shall be inserted as a new Schedule G:

Israel Sub-Committee Remit

1. The Committee shall have delegated authority from the Assembly Trustees for:-

- (a) Oversight of the Church's work and relationships in Israel and Palestine;
- (b) Management, maintenance and oversight of the Church's establishments in Israel ("the Establishments"),

which are:

- The Scots Hotel, Tiberias
- St Andrew’s House Hotel, Jerusalem
- Tabeetha School, Jaffa
- St Andrew’s Memorial Church, Jerusalem
- St Andrew’s Church, Tiberias

(c) Management, maintenance and oversight of land owned by the Church in Safed (currently leased to the Israeli Ministry of Health) and a cemetery in Tiberias.

This shall be recorded in a formal Scheme of Delegation to be put in place by the Assembly Trustees.

2. The Assembly Trustees shall maintain budgetary control of the use of the resources allocated to the work of the Committee.
3. The Committee shall appoint Board members to St Andrew’s Galilee Ltd, St Andrew’s Scottish Centre Ltd and Tabeetha School, Jaffa. With reference to St Andrew’s Galilee Ltd and St Andrew’s Scottish Centre Ltd, the Church of Scotland Trust as sole shareholder, will approve these appointments. The Board of Directors of St Andrew’s Galilee Ltd, the Board of Directors of St Andrew’s Scottish Centre Ltd and the Board of Governors of Tabeetha School shall each report to the Committee.
4. The Boards of Directors and Board of Governors shall be responsible for the day to day oversight of the Establishments. This remit shall include:
 - 4.1 developing strategies for the work of the Establishments within the overall strategies set by the General Assembly and enacted by the Assembly Trustees, and recommending proposals to the Committee for approval;
 - 4.2 ensuring that robust best practice management systems and procedures for the Establishments are in place and followed;
 - 4.3 ensuring that all necessary financial controls and protocols are in place and adhered to, including the preparation of budgets, investment plans, and expenditure authorisations;
 - 4.4 appointing and managing locally based staff in senior management positions within the Establishments;
 - 4.5 ensuring risk registers are updated regularly;
 - 4.6 developing investment and maintenance plans;
 - 4.7 liaising with all relevant stakeholders, including the Church of Scotland Trust;
 - 4.8 ensuring compliance with General Assembly policy in respect of the Church’s work within the Establishments;
 - 4.9 ensuring effective communication and reporting processes to the Assembly Trustees are in place and adhered to.
5. The Committee shall be responsible, under the authority of the Assembly Trustees, for implementing policies and strategies agreed by the General Assembly in respect of the Church’s wider engagement in Israel and Palestine. In doing so it shall work closely with the Principal Clerk and the Ecumenical Officer.
6. In the event of major capital investment in any property or land owned by the Church in Israel being proposed by the Committee and approved by the Assembly Trustees, the Committee shall manage the project, reporting regularly to the Assembly Trustees, who shall retain overall responsibility for the project. The Assembly Trustees shall appoint a supervisory group with suitable skills and expertise, including representative(s) of the Church of Scotland Trust, with a view to ensuring that any such project is completed on time and within budget.

Management

7. The Resource and Presence Manager shall be responsible for the line management of the Principal of Tabeetha School and the General Managers of the Scots Hotel, Tiberias and the St Andrew’s House Hotel, Jerusalem.
8. The Resource and Presence Manager shall also be responsible for the line management of the ministers of St Andrew’s Memorial Church, Jerusalem and St Andrew’s Church, Tiberias.
9. The Resource and Presence Manager shall report to the Chief Officer.
10. The Convener of the Assembly Trustees shall be responsible for ensuring that all requirements of this remit are implemented.

Membership

11. The Committee shall comprise:
 - a Convener (who shall be a member of the Assembly Trustees)
 - a Vice-Convener (who shall be the Convener of the FAPLT Resource and Presence Programme Group *ex officio*) to deputise for the Convener when unavailable
 - three members
 - the Chair of the Board of Directors of St Andrew’s Galilee Ltd, the Chair of the Board of Directors of St Andrew’s Scottish Centre Ltd, and the Chair of the Board of Governors of Tabeetha School, who shall each serve as non-voting members of the Committee

12. The Convener and Vice-Convener shall serve for three years each (non-renewable) save that the first Vice Convener shall serve for two years. Subsequent to those first appointed, Conveners and Vice-Conveners may be appointed from existing members and shall conclude service at the conclusion of their term as Convener or Vice Convener.
13. Voting members shall serve for three years, renewable for one further term on special cause shown. Trustee members shall serve during their appointed term as an Assembly Trustee.
14. At least two members of the Committee (including the Convener) shall be members of the Assembly Trustees. Other voting members shall be appointed by the Assembly Trustees, working in collaboration with FAPLT and the Nomination Committee.
15. The Committee shall also have the power, subject to the prior written approval of the Assembly Trustees, to co-opt other individuals onto its membership for specific and time limited tasks. Any such individuals shall be non-voting members of the Committee.
16. In view of the range and complexities of the work, the Committee shall have the power to commission such professional advice as is appropriate and necessary in order to enable it to fulfil its remit.
17. The Committee shall be serviced by the Resource and Presence Manager and the designated Finance Manager. The Chief Officer shall attend meetings of the Committee.

Meetings

18. The Committee shall meet at least quarterly and has discretion to decide on the format, duration and agenda of its meetings. Additional meetings may be called to address urgent issues. All meetings shall be minuted and the minutes shall be circulated to the next meeting of the Assembly Trustees after the relevant meeting of the Committee.

Quorum

19. The quorum shall be three members. The Convener shall have a casting vote.

Reporting and approvals

20. The Committee is accountable to the Assembly Trustees and shall report, through its Convener, to the Assembly Trustees on its activities. Following each meeting of the Committee, a report shall be made to the Assembly Trustees and at each meeting of the Assembly Trustees an update on any material developments will be provided. At least once a year the Convener shall present a full report on the work of the Committee to a meeting of the Assembly Trustees.
21. All approvals which require to be given by the Assembly Trustees in terms of the Scheme of Delegation shall be timeously sought and accompanied by full details of all relevant matters to enable informed decisions to be taken.

Appendix VI

SEEDS FOR GROWTH COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

	Term ends	Name
Convener	2025	Rev Neil Glover
Vice Convener	2026	Rev Jamie Milliken
(Assembly Trustee)	While trustee	Rev Barry Hughes
(Assembly Trustee)	While trustee	Rev Norman Smith
Committee Member	2026	Rev Lynsey Brennan
Committee Member	2025	Rev Fiona Morrison
Committee Member	2026	Mr Steven Owens
Committee Member	2026	Mrs Heather Thorp
Committee Member	2025	Mrs Gillian Gunn
Co-opt		Mrs Anthea Bircham
Co-opt		Mr Michael Harvey
Co-opt		Rev Mark Johnston

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Governance

The operation of the Seeds for Growth Fund shall be overseen by a Committee of eleven persons, two of whom will be Assembly Trustees. The other members shall be appointed by the Assembly Trustees working in collaboration with the Nomination Committee. Members so appointed shall serve a three-year term, renewable unless otherwise determined by the Assembly Trustees. Of those first appointed, four shall serve three years renewable and three shall serve two years, renewable for a three-year term. Trustee members shall serve during their appointed term as an Assembly Trustee

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION (EDI) GROUP MEMBERSHIP

	Term ends	Name
Convener	2026	Rev Mandy Ralph
Vice Convener	2025	Tamsin Munro
(Assembly Trustee)	While trustee	Jennifer MacDonald
(Assembly Trustee)	While trustee	Rev Phil Ziegler
Group Member	2024	Rev Blair Robertson
Group Member	2024	Rev Jessie Fubara-Manuel
Group Member	2025	Mark Cooper
Group Member	2025	Rev D. McCartney
Group Member	2025	Rev Shuna Dicks
Group member	2026	Rev Elijah Obinna
Group member	2026	Kay Keith

Governance

The remit of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group is to offer assistance and advice to the Assembly Trustees in the development of strategies, programmes and projects on matters of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; promote and develop work to improve awareness and understanding around issues of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Church of Scotland; report to the Assembly Trustees on progress made in discharging the remit.

Members of the Group shall be appointed in accordance with a system approved by the Assembly Trustees and the Nomination Committee.

References

[i] Taken from the standard reference book on Stipend, by Rev A J Gibson, Stipend in the Church of Scotland, A.J. H Gibson 1961;2

[ii] This includes all Ministries – including Probationers, Interim Ministers and Associate Ministers but not MDS

COMMITTEE ON OVERTURES AND CASES

REPORT ON RETURNS TO OVERTURE MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. (i) Note that the requisite proportion (two thirds) of the Presbyteries of the Church have approved the text of the proposed amendments to Articles II and V of the Articles Declaratory in Matters Spiritual (1921) enacted by the General Assembly of 1926 and to the Preamble, Questions and Formula authorised by the General Assembly of 1929, all of which are contained in the Confessions of Faith Overture sent down for the consideration of Presbyteries by the General Assembly of 2023; and
 - (ii) Resolve in this immediately successive year to adopt the Overture a second time, but as amended, as set out in Appendix B; and
 - (iii) Transmit again the Overture, as amended, to the Presbyteries for their consideration under the provisions of Article VIII of the Articles Declaratory in Matters Spiritual (1921), directing that returns be sent to the Principal Clerk not later than 31 December 2024, and noting for the avoidance of doubt that the Book of Confessions referred to in the Overture will contain the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, The Scots Confession, The Westminster Confession of Faith and the 1992 Statement of Faith.

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 As will be seen from the Returns detailed in Appendix A, the Confessions of Faith Overture has received sufficient support from Presbyteries (19 out of 22 Presbyteries - more than two thirds - approving with or without suggested amendment) to be again presented to this General Assembly.

1.2 The Committee has sought advice from the Theological Forum, which has carefully considered all proposed amendments, questions and comments received from Presbyteries. The Forum recommends that the Overture be sent in a slightly amended form to Presbyteries for their consideration again, with returns to the Principal Clerk by 31 December 2024. Their reasons for this recommendation are set out below.

2. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE TEXT OF THE OVERTURE AS SENT DOWN TO PRESBYTERIES BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 2023 OVERTURE – COMMENTS FROM THE THEOLOGICAL FORUM

2.1 Two Presbyteries proposed amendments to the Overture.

2.2 One Presbytery, voting 117 For and 5 Against, proposed that the Overture be amended, so that the Book of Confessions should contain the following additional wording: after 'Westminster Confession of Faith,' add the words: 'with the Shorter Catechism added as an Appendix.'

2.3 The Forum does not recommend acceptance of this proposed amendment. The Forum members observed that there was no concept of an 'appendix' in the original plan for a Book of Confessions, and it was unclear what status it was envisaged this would hold, or how it would be amended in terms of its contents. The Convener noted that a catechism is, in any case, a different kind of document from a Confession. All this said, the Forum acknowledged the important part the Westminster Shorter Catechism has played in the historical life of the Church, and recognises that it remains a resource of value in certain contexts. The Forum intends to mention the Catechism in the introduction to the Westminster Confession, and remains open in the longer term to looking at the place that catechetical and other ancillary resources (such as the Articles Declaratory and Vows themselves) can be given in the Church. The Forum sends its thanks to the Presbytery for this suggested amendment.

2.4 Another Presbytery suggested that the proposed alteration to the last paragraph of the Preamble (section 4 of the Overture) did not read well; this was because in the amendment 'the Church of Scotland' was no longer the subject of the first clause of the paragraph, meaning that to what the participles 'recognising' and 'claiming' relate was not properly expressed. This Presbytery suggested the simplest way to rectify this would be to begin, "**The Church of Scotland holds as its subordinate standards those contained in its Book of Confessions**, recognising etc.....". The Forum agrees that the change proposed is a matter of good grammar and, with insertion of the word "documents" in the phrase "those contained", wishes to adopt it. The Overture as printed in Appendix B incorporates this amendment.

2.5 In response to a comment from a Presbytery, the Forum wishes to clarify the wording of the proposed amendments to Article V. Section 1.2 of the Overture in Appendix B now sets out the proposed amended text of Article V in full.

2.6 In Appendix B these amendments made this year are shown not only in **bold** but also in ***italics and underlined***.

3. QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM PRESBYTERIES ON THE OVERTURE – COMMENTS FROM THE THEOLOGICAL FORUM

3.1 Questions and comments were received from seven Presbyteries, and responses from the Theological Forum are set out in the following paragraphs.

3.2 Comment: *In publishing the Book of Confessions, the Westminster Confession should be printed without those statements which the General Assembly decided some half a century ago that the Church of Scotland no longer held to. This will be in line with the St. Margaret declaration.*

Response: The Theological Forum is inclined to include the original historic text of the Westminster Confession, but with clear information in the introduction or in a footnote at the appropriate place, regarding the status of these words in the Church of Scotland since the passage of the 1986 Act.

3.3 Comment: *In publishing the Book of Confessions, it would be advantageous to print each of the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed in its original language, along with a recognised translation in English and in Gaelic. This would allow the translated versions to appear without either language being subordinated to the other. It would also allow the translations to be adjusted as these living languages change, but without there being any suggestion that the Church of Scotland has altered its adherence to these Creeds which are now gaining so much more prominence.*

Response: The Theological Forum did not agree that printing original Greek or Latin texts of the ancient creeds in the Book of Confessions would be a good use of resources.

The Theological Forum is sympathetic to the proposal that the Book of Confessions should be available in Gaelic, as this will be a clear and public statement that Gaelic is a living language in parts of the Church to the present day. The documents in Gaelic could also have practical use in Gaelic-language services and teaching contexts. It was noted that historic confessions such as the Scots and Westminster were published in Gaelic, but in high-register early-modern classical Gaelic that may not be readily comprehensible to some modern speakers of the language. Consequently, preparation of a Gaelic version of the Book could take longer than the autumn timescale proposed for the English text. It was also noted that including an interleaved Gaelic text in a printed version of the Book of Confessions would increase the size and cost of the volume to no benefit to the great majority of the Church's office-holders.

Consequently, the Forum agreed to ask the Gaelic Committee, via Rev. Hector Morrison who is a member of both the Forum and the Committee, whether the Committee would be interested in taking on the production of a separate Gaelic edition of the Book of Confessions. This need not be subject to so strict a timetable as being finalised by the autumn.

The Forum will still need to decide whether to include the original Scots text of the Scots Confession, and in any case will need to ensure that the standard English translation by James Bulloch is available for use in the Church's Book, either through permission of the estate or through assurance that copyright is not asserted on the text. It was noted that the PCUSA use the Bulloch text in their Book of Confessions, suggesting that copyright on this translation will not be a problem.

3.4 Comment: *Consideration should be given to indicating that the Nicene Creed can be read with or without the Filioque (and from the Son). This would indicate that the Church of Scotland wishes good relations with the Eastern as well as the Western churches, and that no one would be excommunicated for preferring one version or the other.*

Response: The Theological Forum is minded to include the filioque clause without brackets, as it has been included in the text of the Creed used in the Western Church since the sixth century, but will be happy to add an explanatory note, either in the introduction or in the footnote, explaining that this clause was a later addition and is not subscribed to by the Eastern Church.

3.5 Question: *Will sitting ministers, elders and deacons be required to take the new vows?*

Response: No. Office-bearers only take vows again if they move to a new congregation to hold office there, or take on a new office. However, support for the new vows in the courts of the Church clearly implies a willingness on the part of the individual office-bearer to subscribe the new vows, and decisions on whether to vote in favour of the Overture should be made in that light. Once the new vow is adopted by the Church (on the current timetable, at the General Assembly of 2025), continuation in office will indicate the individual office-holder's willingness to subscribe the new vows, and to be held accountable to them.

3.6 Questions: *How will the Book of Confessions be controlled against temporal/issue- based amendments? Also: What will the process be for amending the [Book of Confessions]? And:*

Comment: *Concern was expressed as to how the contents of the proposed Book of Confessions would be altered in the future. It was hoped that this would be clarified to confirm that any addition of or removal of Confession would also require to be dealt with under the Double Barrier Act provisions.*

Response: The Forum has obtained advice from the Assembly Clerks that any change to the content of the Book of Confessions would require approval under the 'Double Barrier Act' process. Thus, the Book of Confessions will be guarded by the double Barrier Act procedure required for amendment of the Articles Declaratory, meaning that any amendment to the content of the Book must pass three consecutive General Assemblies, and obtain the support of the majority of Presbyteries in the two intervening years.

3.7 Question/comment: *Why are both Reformed and Catholic capitalised in this instance - the person asking the question thought that meant something else entirely? Also: Another Presbytery questioned the use of a capital 'C' in the word 'Catholic' in the new Vow in the Ordination and Induction Vow and would appreciate an explanation for this.*

Response: 'Catholic' is capitalised because that is how it appears in the Articles Declaratory; 'Reformed' is capitalised for the same reason. Both terms express aspects of the Church of Scotland's historic identity: a part of the worldwide and historic Christian Church, holding to the ancient ecumenical creeds of the Church; and a national Church descending from the Protestant Reformation, and influenced by it in doctrine, worship and practice.

3.8 Comment: *The amended form of the vows requires only belief in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. The creeds are excellent; they set out the basic beliefs of all Christians. But they are not sufficient for a church that is reformed in its theology. To relegate the Westminster Confession of Faith to be part of a Book of Confessions which we only promise to be "guided by" is not strong enough. It should remain as our subordinate standard.*

Response: This is a legitimate view, though not one shared by the General Assembly. It is worth noting that the new promise, to be 'guided by' the Westminster Confession, is, in fact, significantly stronger than the office-holders' present commitment, which indicates belief only in the undefined 'essential doctrines of the Christian faith contained in' the Westminster Confession. The Forum suggests that for reasons of integrity and of accountability, the proposed change is merited. Ultimately, this question must be determined by the courts of the Church.

3.9 Comment: *Recognising, as has been said, that many will not have read the Westminster Confession and yet profess adherence to it, recognising the importance of clear and appropriate credal statements, and recognising that the Westminster Confession contains some statements which will prove difficult for some to accept I have, sadly, significant concerns that the proposed basis of subscription, namely the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, omit several important elements. These include the uniqueness of God, the holiness and righteousness of God, the fallen and sinful nature of all men and the need for atonement for those sins. With all that in mind, I therefore will have to vote against the Overture.*

Response: This is a legitimate view, though not one shared by the General Assembly. It is worth noting that the new promise, to be 'guided by' the Westminster Confession, is, in fact, significantly stronger than the office-holders' present commitment, which indicates belief only in the undefined 'essential doctrines of the Christian faith contained in' the Westminster Confession.

3.10 Comment: *In Common Order published in 1994, the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son was carefully dealt with by the use of brackets, signalling the Church of Scotland's awareness of the ecumenical dialogues through the later 20th century between Eastern and Western churches on the filioque. General Assemblies were given careful theological reports on these matters, and Church of Scotland representatives, including myself, in ecumenical dialogue work, were fully aware of the importance of avoiding any sense of subordinating the Holy Spirit to the Son, for all that we undoubtedly affirm the close relationship between the Son and the Spirit.*

It seems therefore strange and worryingly forgetful that there is not even an asterisk or word of explanation for the (filioque-including) form of the Nicene Creed being referred to through this Barrier Act procedure. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of A.D. 381 has the capacity to function as a symbol of our united faith - part of our Church's Articles Declaratory. Theological sloppiness does not endear itself at a time of our Church redefining its confessional standards. This all said, who knows I may have misunderstood the Theological Forum's plan: but I see neither in 2022 or 2023 reports the text of the Nicene Creed being printed out.

Response: The Theological Forum is minded to include the filioque clause without brackets, as it has been included in the text of the Creed used in the Western Church since the sixth century, but will be happy to add an explanatory note, either in the introduction or in the footnote, explaining that this clause was a later addition and is not subscribed to by the Eastern Church.

3.11 Comment: *Presbytery noted that it would be helpful if the Act specified the particular confessions included in the Book of Confessions - to ensure clarity as to the nature of the subordinate standard. However, it was also noted that a wider collection of Christian confessions would be helpful for teaching and deepening understanding, such as they have in the Presbyterian Church (USA).*

Presbytery also suggested that a wider collection of confessions could be useful for communicant classes and discussion groups. And it was mentioned by someone that the PC (USA) uses a book of 12 confessions for this purpose (and possibly for its subordinate standard).

Response: The five confessions forming the initial contents of the Book of Confessions have been chosen as documents already approved by previous General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland, and as reflecting the historical development of the Church. Once the current Overture has been enacted, the Book will be open for further amendment, including the addition of further confessions, by the 'double Barrier Act' process, as mentioned above.

3.12 One Presbytery made a comment about the format of the Return to Overture form which was sent to Presbyteries. The Office of the General Assembly will respond direct to that.

In the name and by the authority of the Committee

FIONA SMITH, Convener

Appendix A

RETURNS TO THE CONFESSIONS OF FAITH OVERTURE

	Approve without suggested amendment		Approve with suggested amendment		Disapprove	
Number of Presbyteries*	17		2		1	
Total number of Presbyters	896	116	112	59	1	26
Overall number of Presbyteries approving the Overture, whether with or without suggested amendment, and disapproving it	19				1	

**In the year to 31 December 2023, there existed 22 Presbyteries in the Church. Two Presbyteries did not submit a return: (i) the Presbytery of Abernethy did not consider the Overture before 31 December 2023 and that Presbytery now no longer exists, having been assumed into Clèir Eilean Ì, the Church of Scotland in the Highlands and Hebrides, from 1 January 2024, and (ii) the Presbytery of Jerusalem, where the situation in Israel and Palestine did not permit consideration.*

Appendix B

THE CONFESSIONS OF FAITH OVERTURE

The General Assembly again adopt the Overture the tenor whereof follows, and transmit the same a second time to Presbyteries for their consideration under the provisions of Article VIII of the Articles Declaratory in Matters Spiritual (1921), directing that returns be sent to the Principal Clerk not later than 31 December 2024.

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

1. Articles Declaratory

1.1 *Change Article II from:*

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

To:

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

1.2 *Also change Article V from:*

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

To:

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

2. Ordination and Induction Vows

2.1 *Change the vow:*

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

To

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

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

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

3. Formula of Subscription

3.1 *Change the first paragraph of the Formula from:*

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

To

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

4. Preamble

4.1 *Change the last paragraph of the Preamble from:*

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

To:

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

THEOLOGICAL FORUM MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Receive the appended report "Transgender Identities in the Church of Scotland" in fulfilment of the instruction of the General Assembly of 2023, and commend it to congregations, Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries for study (*Section 3*).

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

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

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

1.2 The Forum has continued to fulfil this remit and over the last year has concentrated on the numerous issues assigned to it by the General Assembly of 2023. Its work has been carried out through substantial reading, discussion, reflection and prayer in its meetings, and through consultation with the other Councils, Committees and Fora of the Church. The Forum has also advised upon various issues that have arisen out of enquiries received from the wider Church. The following Report and Appendix are offered as an update on work carried out throughout 2023.

2. CONFESSION OF FAITH OVERTURE

2.1 The General Assembly of 2023 approved an Overture presented by the Theological Forum to amend the Church's Confessional basis, and transmitted it to the Presbyteries of the Church for consideration under the provisions of Article VIII of the Articles Declaratory in Matters Spiritual (1921), directing that returns be sent to the Principal Clerk not later than 31 December 2023. The responses received to this overture, and the answers to questions supplied by the Forum, are reported separately by the Committee on Cases and Overtures.

2.2 The work of the Forum in this area over the last year has included preparation of a video resource to assist Presbyteries in their deliberations,^[1] answering queries received throughout the year in response to the consultation process, and commencing planning for the preparation of the text of a Book of Confessions as stipulated in the Overture.

2.3 The Forum continues to commend the Overture to the support of the wider Church.

3. TRANSGENDER IDENTITIES

3.1 The General Assembly of 2023 instructed the Theological Forum 'to explore the theology of transgender identities within the context of the Church's life and ministry, and report to the General Assembly of 2024'. In fulfilment of this instruction, the Forum has undertaken extensive reading and discussion around the theological questions raised by the presence of people with transgender identities in the Church. The Forum received detailed presentations on the relevant Scriptural exegesis from Rev. Hector Morrison and Rev. Prof. Paul Middleton, and on the Church of England's process of debate and discussion on issues relating to LGBT identities, directed by the text *Living in Love & Faith*, from Ms. Jennifer Stark. The Forum has also met with a number of transgender Christians to hear more fully their experiences, and met with one Christian who had formerly identified as transgender but has now detransitioned. The Forum is very grateful to these Christians for their willingness to speak to us about such deeply personal matters.

3.2 In fulfilment of the instruction from the Assembly of 2023, the Forum presents to this year's Assembly the appended report "Transgender Identities in the Church of Scotland", and commends it to the attention of the wider Church.

4. CONVERSION THERAPY

4.1 The General Assembly of 2023 instructed 'the Theological Forum to: (1) study the Scottish Government's Independent Report entitled, 'Ending Conversion Practices: Report and Recommendations'; (2) collaborate with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to review previous General Assembly Reports and decisions on the matter of conversion therapy, and (3) report findings back to the 2024 General Assembly'.

4.2 As instructed, the Forum read and discussed the Independent Report in detail. Some members expressed strong concern at the content of the document, which they considered as threatening to prohibit in law actions that for many people would be considered normal parental conduct, and normal pastoral care. Others noted that some of the language in the report raised concerns about the potential for state intrusion into the Church. Even defenders of the basic content of the report granted that its language was too sweeping.

4.3 The Scottish Government commenced a public consultation on legislation against conversion therapy on 9th January 2024. The Forum read and discussed the consultation document, and found that the religious liberty concerns raised regarding the Independent Report have largely been addressed. The Forum wrote to the Public Life and Social Justice Group of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to state that the Forum considers the current proposal for legislation largely satisfactory in theological terms.

4.4 In terms of previous General Assembly Reports and decisions on the matter of conversion therapy, there was only one, the deliverance that the General Assembly of 2022 '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"'.

5. FUTURE WORK

5.1 The Forum expects to continue to address issues relating to the calling of the Church, in fulfilment of instructions from the 2023 General Assembly. It will also continue to discuss the Third Article Declaratory and its interpretation in the modern Church of Scotland in consultation with other bodies as instructed by that Assembly, expecting to report on this in 2025. The Forum will also work on a joint report with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, to be presented to the 2025 General Assembly, on the decline of the Church of Scotland and what can be done to address it. The Forum will also participate in the drafting of a statement of acknowledgment and apology for the Church's involvement with and connection to historic chattel slavery, to be considered for adoption at a future General Assembly. The Forum will work collaboratively with the Ecumenical Relations Committee on consideration of a theology of friendship, and, if so instructed, on the commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed in 2025. The Forum has largely devolved its work on the subject of assisted dying to a joint working group which will report separately, but does expect to be consulted on the theological aspects of this issue over the next year. The Forum stands ready to assist the General Assembly and its Councils, Committees and Fora in any matter of theology and doctrine and would welcome consultation at an early stage in any significant pieces of work.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

In the name of the Theological Forum

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

Addendum

Rev. Dr Lance Stone

This year, Dr Stone reaches the end of his time on the Theological Forum. He has brought insight and passion to the Forum's business, making valuable contributions to our Ecotheology and Calling of the Church reports. He has been a valued colleague, and we pray God's blessing upon him for his future life and ministry.

Rev. Rebecca Bartocho

Rev. Rebecca Bartocho was appointed to the membership of the Forum by the General Assembly of 2023. Regrettably, she had to resign after just a few months of membership for personal reasons. We thank Rebecca for her brief term of service, and wish her every blessing for the future.

In the name of the Theological Forum

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

Appendix

TRANSGENDER IDENTITIES IN THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (2024)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The General Assembly of 2023 instructed the Theological Forum 'to explore the theology of transgender identities within the context of the Church's life and ministry, and report to the General Assembly of 2024'. In this report, we seek to fulfil that instruction by exploring biblical and theological understandings of transgender identity, especially in the context of the Church. For the purposes of this report, a 'transgender / trans identity' will be defined as 'when someone feels their gender is different from, or doesn't sit comfortably with, the sex they were registered at birth', following the NSPCC definition which includes non-binary gender identities.^[i] This situation may also be described by the term 'gender dysphoria'.

1.2 The Theological Forum must begin this work by acknowledging that this field is not a blank slate for the Church of Scotland. In 2016, in response to an Assembly instruction that year, the former Mission and Discipleship Council produced a substantial booklet entitled 'Diverse Gender Identities', which remains available for consultation and use.^[ii] While this was not strictly a theological work, it promotes learning, awareness, and inclusive pastoral care. It also has the advantage of permitting readers to hear directly from transgender people within the Church regarding their experience of transgender identity within the Church community. The present report should be understood, therefore, as building on this foundation of broad welcome of and positive engagement with transgender people. We have met with both transgender people and individuals who have de-transitioned in the course of writing this report.

1.3 In our deliberations, we recognised our theology must engage with Scripture and with lived experience before we could address the principal questions, and we follow this order in the report.

2. ENGAGEMENT WITH SCRIPTURE

2.1 While the Bible makes no mention of transgender identity, it operates on the fundamental principle that human beings are created male and female (Gen 1.27). This clear sexual binary, combined with a strong procreation ethic, underpins virtually all biblical thinking on gender roles and sexual ethics. For some in the Church, this clear distinction between men and women from the beginning is therefore decisive. Maleness and femaleness are essential characteristics of a good creation, they argue, and therefore, people should not seek to change their sex.

2.2 Others argue these ancient accounts cannot be determinative for the way in which we understand sex and gender today. Most Christians would hold that the pre-scientific Genesis creation accounts do not override advances in the natural sciences, and the same argument could be made regarding the human sciences, such as biology and psychology. Therefore, since our contemporary understandings of the world were outside the experience of these early authors, to these Christians the creation accounts can be understood as descriptive (how the world looked to them) rather than prescriptive (how the world ought to look in all periods of time). In any case, we have limited understanding of how creation accounts were understood in ancient times, and should remember that these accounts are followed by the Biblical narrative of the Fall (Genesis 3), which is represented as bringing radical change in human experience, further complicating efforts to represent a text from Genesis 1 as a prescriptive ideal.

2.3 Moreover, some Christians would note that assumptions about gender roles and limitations appear to be hard-wired into Biblical accounts of gender, with the result of limiting in some respects what women could do in Hebrew society. For example, women could inherit property only if they had no living brothers (Numbers 27:1-11); vows made by them were not regarded as binding without the acquiescence of their father or husband (Numbers 30:1-16); and they could not divorce their husbands, although their husbands could divorce them (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).^[iv] Just as we generally consider the Old Testament dietary and sartorial regulations not to be obligatory on the New Testament Church, as we see them as fulfilled in Christ, so it is possible to take these verses directing rigid gender distinctions not to be binding today.

2.4 While the Bible nowhere directly addresses the experiences of trans people, some have thought the figure of the eunuch is helpful. Eunuchs were a distinct category of men who functioned almost as a third or intermediate gender within Ancient Near Eastern societies. They could fulfil otherwise feminine roles such as providing personal service to royal wives and concubines. Eunuchs were viewed as particularly unfortunate because of the heavy emphasis on the blessing of reproduction in the Hebrew scriptures. Interestingly, though they were disbarred from the assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:1), the Biblical presentation of eunuchs is overwhelmingly positive. Eunuchs helped Jehu defeat the murderous Queen Jezebel (2 Kings 9:32-3); Ebed-melech the eunuch rescued the prophet Jeremiah from

imprisonment (Jeremiah 38:7-13); the Biblical hero Daniel received help from a Babylonian eunuch (Daniel 1:8-20); and the Ethiopian eunuch willingly believed the Christian gospel preached by Philip and received baptism (Acts 8:27-40). As a royal cup-bearer appearing before the Persian Queen (Nehemiah 1:11, 2:6), Nehemiah may well have been a eunuch, which would explain why neither wife nor children are mentioned in relation to him. Eunuchs received a particular promise of God's blessing in Isaiah 56:3-5, which was explicitly stated to more than compensate them for their inability to conceive children.

2.5 Jesus furthermore referred positively to eunuchs in preaching: 'For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can' (Matthew 19:12). This teaching appears to equate voluntary celibacy, where a man chose not to fulfil the traditional gender role of reproduction and fatherhood, with being a eunuch.

2.6 At the very least, such passages teach that fulfilment of rigid gender roles cannot be considered Biblically as essential to receiving spiritual blessing or rendering true service to God. Furthermore, some Biblical figures received a calling that required them to depart, at least to some degree, from traditional gender norms: Paul was called to celibacy, Deborah to being a judge (Judges 4-5), Jael to an act of warfare (Judges 4:17-24), and Mordecai to a nurturing adoptive parenthood (Esther 2:7). It need not be considered inherently unbiblical, therefore, for people to conclude that they are called by God to a life diverging in some respect from the gender role traditionally associated with their biological sex.

2.7 Of more immediate relevance to the Church in its handling of this issue are the broader Biblical principles of love and mercy as the priorities of the Christian Church (Micah 6:8, 1 John. 4:16-18), of the Golden Rule as the foundation of our ethics (Matthew 7:12), and of the ultimate unimportance of our differences of outward state and condition (Galatians 3:28).

3. ENGAGEMENT WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

3.1 The single most important consideration from lived experience in this area is simply that gender dysphoria (or more broadly, diverse gender identity) exists, as is well established in psychological literature, occurring both in children and adults.^[vi] We have met with transgender people who testify to lifelong experience of difficulty with binary gendered expectations. As the minute of one such conversation records, one transgender person 'explained that she has found the traditional teachings of the Church abusive, and that she is full of rage and grief as she looks back on painful life experiences of suppression of her gender identity. It is deeply important to her that the Church changes in an inclusive direction'.^[vii]

3.2 Interestingly, another interviewee from the same meeting testified that they have 'had more positive experiences of the Church, having grown up in an inclusive and liberal Christian context, but they still find discomfort in some Church contexts due to the legacy of discriminatory teachings'. Since coming out as non-binary, 'they have not experienced much pushback within the Church, although they have been disappointed by some ignoring or even resisting their new presentation'.^[viii] However, one interviewee who was engaged at the time in pastoral ministry was forced to conclude that 'her local setting was not a safe environment in which she could transition', obliging her to step away from pastoral ministry while transitioning in gender.^[viii]

3.3 Lifelong transgender experiences cannot be dismissed lightly. Indeed, a small minority of cases of gender dysphoria have been found to be due to physical or chromosomal complications whereby the person's body is ambiguous in biological sex. However, it is important to stress that a solely mental experience of diverse gender identity is as significant and valid as one related to physical cause.

3.4 While it is reasonable for a person's experience of gender to be explored carefully before they embark on any form of medical pathway of transition, it is evident that many incidences of diverse gender identity are deeply rooted and apparently permanent. The Forum did interview one man who lived for some years as a transgender woman but has now detransitioned. He found support in an independent Pentecostal church during a difficult time in his life when he was experiencing homelessness following a relationship breakdown. He testified, according to the minute of the conversation, that

His minister had preached on the words 'being still' and he felt God speaking to him. He was accepted but not affirmed by the Church, and was permitted to join the women's bible study. He was also baptized in August 2018 while continuing to identify as a woman. He was offered prayer ministry, which he found pivotal. He was able to unpack aspects of his upbringing that he felt had been unhelpful, particularly experiences of rejection and lack of affirmation, which he believed had contributed to his transgender feelings.^[ix]

3.5 The Forum recognises the validity of this individual experience, while also recognizing that many transgender Christians have different experiences. Significantly, this man himself urges 'that the Church must be open, unafraid of people who are different, and that it should not try to change or fix people, which he considers God's work. Rather, the Church should offer discipleship and prayer.' It should 'see transgender people through the eyes of Jesus, applying His approach to the woman caught in adultery (John 8) – extending unlimited grace whilst holding to truth'.^[ix]

3.6 Based on all our interviews, the duty of the Church community to people presenting a diverse gender identity would seem clear. They must be welcomed without reserve into the worship and prayer life of the Church. In terms of issues specific to transgender identity, both the Golden Rule and the duty of love require the Church to follow a course that will avoid causing distress, and that will promote wellbeing and demonstrate compassion. We are more likely to be perceived as doing so if we use the person's chosen name to address them, their chosen pronouns to refer to them, and welcome and support their chosen gender presentation.

3.7 One important point is that transgender interviewees concur that the recent increased visibility of the

transgender community has sparked a backlash in society, especially over the last five years. Some fear a similar response from the Church. One interviewee commented to us that ‘the Church needed to stop seeing transgender people as a problem, and emphasized that the hardest thing was often for trans people to learn to love themselves as they are.’^[xi] Another interviewee observed that ‘the Church needed to hear that the voice and presence of transgender people matter’.^[xii]

4. THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

4.1 A number of specifically theological questions naturally arise. Does the existence of transgender people in our midst present the Church with a theological problem? Some Christians have clearly thought so, and have taken the gender binary found in Scripture as obligatory. In this view, the experience of a greater knowledge of God and His power should sanctify the transgender Christian and even gradually mitigate the experience of gender diversity. Such Christians would consider a person’s full acceptance of the sex with which they were registered at birth as a path of obedience. This view is the view traditionally held by the majority of the members of the Church in the past, and remains the view of many of our largest ecumenical partners, notably the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. Furthermore, we acknowledge that this view is entirely compatible with the conviction that we must treat transgender people with grace and kindness.

4.2 For many Christians, however, the question above can be answered in the negative. In this world, our experiences are of imperfection – in ourselves and in the world and society around us. Such imperfections include all forms of discomfort and distress, mental, physical and spiritual, and also the incomprehension and even cruelty which we may encounter in our lives, from individuals, and from society as a whole. But our experiences also, by God’s grace, are of salvation and restoration in Christ. Gender transition, and the acceptance of diverse presentation of gender, may be part of the experience of salvation for some of the Lord’s people. Many Christians see diversity of gender identity as a gift from God and a blessing.

4.3 In this view, there is no reason to expect transgender identities to be mitigated by sanctification, and indeed undue delay in gender transition may be holding a person back in their sanctification, by inhibiting them from fulfilling their Christian service. The transgender theologian Jack Woodruff offers a helpful insight here:

A big part of Jesus’ teaching was about rebirth into living life by the Spirit and new beginnings. I see no reason not to transition, because for me it is all about the alignment with how I and God see me and how the outside world sees me... It is in transforming ourselves to live out our calling as trans children of God that we gain a greater sense of belonging.^[xiii]

4.4 For a transgender believer, transition may be their embrace of their felt calling from God to be a faithful person in Christ. Furthermore, such an experience of transition may bring its own blessings. The American theologian Scott Bader-Saye has reflected helpfully on the transgender person’s experience of gender transition, quoting Rowan Williams: ‘Those who transform the body through hormones or surgery do so in order to present the self in a unified manner, and in so doing they make a partner of the body for the sake of grace—that is, for seeing and being seen “as significant, as wanted,” and “as the occasion of joy.”’^[xiv]

4.5 We must also take some account of the current standing of transgender people in the Church of Scotland. Currently, there is no consideration of sex or gender for anyone joining the Church of Scotland, or holding office as an Elder, Reader, Deacon, OLM or Minister. In the view of the Theological Forum, this situation is right and should not change. To exclude a category of people because of their gender identity would be biblically and theologically illegitimate, and the current system of assessing gifting and calling on an individual basis should continue.^[xv]

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 In conclusion, the Theological Forum would urge the exercise of charity and grace on all sides in the handling of this debate. All participants in these debates should remember that rhetoric in this area directly impacts real people. The vital point we wish to assert is really very simple. Transgender people are part of the Church of Scotland and they are welcome.

References

- [i] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_YkZfCWLuU&t=1s
- [ii] 'What is Gender Identity?', NSPCC, available online at URL: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/sex-relationships/gender-identity/>
- [iii] 'Diverse Gender Identities', Church of Scotland, available online at URL: https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/48256/Web_PDF_Diverse_Gender_Identities_and_Pastoral_Care.pdf
- [iv] In practice, of course, there were clearly many areas of activity in which women and men both shared in Biblical times, such as working the fields and vineyards, and trading goods and property (cf. Proverbs 31:10-31).
- [v] Martin Mitchell & Charlie Howarth, 'Trans Research Review', National Centre of Social Research, 2009, available online at URL: https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research_report_27_trans_research_review.pdf
- [vi] Minute of Meeting of Theological Forum with Trans Christians (1), 03.01.2024.
- [vii] Minute of Meeting of Theological Forum with Trans Christians (1), 03.01.2024.
- [viii] Minute of Meeting of Theological Forum with Trans Christians (3), 25.01.2024.
- [ix] Minute of Meeting of Theological Forum with Detransitioned Christian, 15.01.2024.
- [x] Minute of Meeting of Theological Forum with Detransitioned Christian, 15.01.2024.
- [xi] Minute of Meeting of Theological Forum with Trans Christians (1), 03.01.2024.
- [xii] Minute of Meeting of Theological Forum with Trans Christians (3), 25.01.2024.
- [xiii] Jack Woodruff, 'Trans and Christian' (78-89), in Young, Woke and Christian, ed. Victoria Turner (London: SCM Press, 2022), 82.
- [xiv] Scott Bader-Saye, 'The Transgender Body's Grace' (75-92), *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2019), 89.
- [xv] In addition to the sources cited above, the Theological Forum has read various works from diverse perspectives. A clear and broadly compassionate statement of a conservative and non-affirming viewpoint on transgender identities is found in the Diocese of Sydney's study *A Theology of Gender and Gender Identity* (2017), available online at URL: https://www.sds.asn.au/sites/default/files/ATheologyOfGenderAndGenderIdentity%28SydDoctrineCommission%29.Aug2017.pdf?doc_id=NTQ3NjM A further important work from an affirming perspective is Susannah Cornwall, *Constructive Theology and Gender Variance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). A very full discussion of various Christian perspectives on LGBT issues is found in the Church of England document *Living in Love & Faith* (London: Church House Publishing, 2020).

INTERIM JOINT REPORT OF THE THEOLOGICAL FORUM AND FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM ON ASSISTED DYING MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Interim Joint Report.
2. Note the work of the Assisted Dying Working Group to date and that further consultations will be undertaken prior to a final report being produced for the General Assembly of 2025.

Report

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 In light of the proposed introduction of the 'Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill' to the Scottish Parliament, the Faith Impact Forum invited the General Assembly of 2023 to reaffirm its historic opposition to Assisted Dying. The deliverance stated:

'[The General Assembly] supports the current legal protections which prohibit assisted suicide/assisted dying and urge members of the Church to make representation to their MSPs.'

1.2 However, a countermotion was moved, which recognised that opinion in the Church was more diverse than outright opposition. This countermotion also instructed that this diversity of views be explored further:

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

1.3. On a vote, 103 supported the original motion to reaffirm the Church's blanket opposition to assisted dying, while 225 voted for the countermotion, which then passed 238–71, with 5 commissioners recording dissent.

1.4 Following this decision, a small Group consisting of members of the Theological Forum, FAPLT and experts in this area was formed to follow through on the decision of the General Assembly. Its members are: Rev Dr John Ferguson (Convener), Rev Dr Liam Fraser, Rev Dr Alasdair MacLeod, Ms Nathalie Mares MacCallum, Professor Paul Middleton, Dr Murdo MacDonald, Rev Tara Granados and Libby Milton.

1.5 The Group understands its remit to include identifying the range of theological and ethical opinion in the Church, exploring the theological and ethical basis of these views, including their theological validity, and asking what affect this diversity should have on the Church of Scotland's response to any proposed change of legislation.

2. THE WORK OF THE GROUP TO DATE

2.1 Given the complexity of this issue and the sensitive questions it raises, the Group has not yet completed its work for this year's General Assembly. This is therefore an Interim Report to update Assembly on progress to date. A final report will be presented in 2025.

2.2 The Group has met on six occasions, and has spent considerable time reflecting on theological and ethical aspects of the issue, including the implications of any change in the Church of Scotland's position. It also researched the position of other denominations. It has heard from a number of experts working in this area, including the head of Palliative Care at a University in Canada, who spoke about their experience of MAiD (Medical Assistance in Dying), as well as a Researcher in Medical Ethics, and a Professor of Neurology.

2.3 Through its deliberations, the Group has identified a number of different positions held by members of the Church of Scotland, which it intends to explore further, including:

- Those who continue to support the historic opposition to assisted dying.
- Those who would not choose assisted dying for themselves for theological or other reasons, but would support a change in the law so as to not impose their beliefs on others.
- Those who see no theological or ethical impediment to changing the law, but would nonetheless be unsure whether or not they would take up the option themselves.
- Those who support a change in the law and would be at peace in their Christian faith to consider or choose assisted dying if they received a qualifying terminal diagnosis.

2.4 These are the main positions on a spectrum of belief, underpinned by either conflicting theological views, or conflicting interpretations of the same theological view. However, while the Group has identified a range of diverse opinion, it has identified more agreement on the necessity for safeguards should there be a change in the law, such as methods, access, residency requirements, etc., which would require further consideration.

3. NEXT STEPS

3.1 The Group will continue to explore the spectrum of views by speaking with further organisations, including CrossReach, and individuals, such as hospice chaplains, and representatives of charities working in this area, and other denominations. The Group also intend to create space for Presbyteries to inform its discussions should they wish.

3.2 Given the likely ongoing significance of this issue, the Group intends to produce resource materials to help congregations and members think through the theological and pastoral implications raised by the questions around Assisted Dying.

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

TOMMY MACNEIL, *Convener*
KAY CATHCART, *Acting Secretary*
LIAM J FRASER, *Convener*
ALASDAIR J MACLEOD, *Acting Secretary*
JOHN FERGUSON, *Working Group Convener*

REGISTRATION OF MINISTRIES COMMITTEE MAY 2024**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, 4 & 5 and Appendix I*).

Report**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 It is seven years since the General Assembly passed the Registration of Ministries Act. The last twelve months have led to consideration of changes which would enhance the operation of the Act, and these are detailed further on in the Report.

1.2. The Committee's main function is to consider applications from Church of Scotland Parish Ministers, who are currently categorised as E or R, who wish to have the status of O, which entitles them to be inducted to a charge. 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.

1.3 Over and above this, the Committee also works with Presbyteries to review the names of those for whom it has pastoral responsibility and this exercise takes place each year. Details of the Committee's work can be found at this link <http://bit.ly/3J3jSzg> on the main Church of Scotland website, and the Registration of Ministries Act is accessible at this link <http://bit.ly/3IRoMQ3>.

2. ASSISTANT MINISTERS, PROBATIONERS, AND FAMILIARISATION CANDIDATES

2.1 The season in which the Church finds itself is one where probationers and familiarisation candidates who have satisfactorily completed their training, or familiarisation placement, have not been able to transition into parishes as readily as in the past. In consultation with the Principal Clerk, who sits on the Committee, such ministers who have taken on assistant minister contracts and have been ordained by their Presbytery will be registered as Category E. Subject to their graduate candidate status being affirmed by the Presbytery, or certificate of eligibility still being valid, they will move to be automatically registered as Category O status on induction to a parish. The provisions of section 22A (5) of Act X 2004 on Selection and Training for Full-Time Ministry will still apply, where a Presbytery has renewed such graduate candidate status, on three occasions (i.e. for up to three years) and it would then fall to the individual minister to make application to the Registration of Ministries Committee.

3. LENGTH OF VALIDITY OF REGISTRATION

3.1 For ministers who demit their pastoral charge, whether on grounds of age, or for other reasons, the normal practice thus far is that they retain their Category O registration for a period of three years after demission. The Committee wishes to maintain the integrity of the process, and given that a minister may not have exercised the functions of ministry in that three-year window, proposes that the time for which Category O registration is valid be set at two years rather than three. The detail of this is presented in the amending Act attached as Appendix I.

4. MINISTERS RETURNING FROM SUSPENSION

4.1 One of the first amendments to the Act related to applications for reinstatement from ministers who had been suspended. The Act was amended to introduce the requirement to invite the Recruitment Sub-Committee, as defined in the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2018), to comment on the application and to adhere thereafter to the recommendations of that Sub-Committee (s28 (1.4)). In consultation with the Safeguarding Committee, it is felt that this automatic referral into the Recruitment Sub-Committee is not proportionate. However, it should be a requirement that the Safeguarding Service be invited to comment on the application submitted by a minister seeking to return from suspension. It would be for the Safeguarding Service to consider whether the application would require to be referred for consideration by the Recruitment Sub-Committee; and, in cases considered by the Recruitment Sub-Committee, with any arising recommendations from the Recruitment Sub-Committee, the Registration of Ministries Committee would adhere thereafter to any such recommendations. The amending Act attached as Appendix I refers.

5. COMPOSITION OF COMMITTEE

5.1 On three occasions this year, the Committee has found itself to be inquorate, and this has resulted in applications being deferred. In response, the Committee proposes an amendment to the Rules of Procedure currently presented in the Act as Schedule 1, to increase the membership to seven, while retaining the quorum of three, and again this proposed change is outlined in the amending Act attached as Appendix I.

6. MEETINGS SINCE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 2023

6.1 The Committee has met regularly since the General Assembly of 2023, twice in person, and on other occasions in hybrid format. Four applications for Category O registration were granted; three of these were from ministers currently on the Register in this category, but not in a parish, and one was from a graduate candidate seeking Category O registration for the first time. Three applications by ministers seeking to return from suspension were considered. Dates for the Committee’s cycle of meetings are published on the Church of Scotland website at the above link, along with an indication of a deadline for submission of applications.

In the name of the Committee

ROBERT HAMILTON, *Convener*
 HILARY MCDUGALL, *Vice-Convener*
 ANGUS R. MATHIESON, *Registrar*

Addendum

Dr Hazel Hastie was appointed as Convener of the Registration of Ministries Committee at the General Assembly of 2021. She resigned shortly before the General Assembly of 2023. Her significant contributions include the redesign of the Application Form for Category O status, as well as leading the Committee in a series of roadshows reported to last year’s General Assembly. She was appointed as Clerk to the Presbytery of Edinburgh and West Lothian, having served as Clerk to the Presbytery of Annandale and Eskdale while also serving as Depute Clerk, and Acting Clerk, to the Presbytery of Edinburgh and West Lothian. The Committee is grateful for her wisdom and service and thanks her for her contribution.

ANGUS R. MATHIESON, *Registrar*

Appendix I

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

Edinburgh, [] May 2024, Session []

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

1. *Amend section 19 in two places (the introductory paragraph and the penultimate paragraph), in each case by deleting “three” and substituting “two”.*
2. *Amend section 19(v) by deleting “seventy two (72)” and substituting “seventy three (73)” and in one place by deleting “three” and substituting “two”.*
3. *Amend section 20 in one place by deleting “three” and substituting “two”*
4. *Delete section 28(1)(iv) and substitute:*
 “invite the Safeguarding Service, as defined in the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2018), to consider the application and if that Service thinks it appropriate, it shall have the Recruitment Sub-Committee (as defined in the said Act) comment on the application; provided always that if the Sub-Committee makes any recommendations, the Service shall report those to the Committee and the Committee shall adhere to them.”
5. *Amend Schedule 1 paragraphs 3(1) and (2) to increase the number of General Assembly appointed members on the Committee from three to five, so that paragraphs 3(1) and (2) read as follows:*
 3. (1) The Committee shall be a committee of **seven** persons, consisting of a Convener, Vice-Convener and **five** other members. One member shall be appointed by the Legal Questions Committee, one by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and the other **five** members shall be appointed by the General Assembly on the nomination of the Nomination Committee.
 - (2) The General Assembly shall appoint a Convener and Vice-Convener, both of whom shall be proposed by the Nomination Committee and selected from its own **five** nominees. The **five** nominees proposed by the Nomination Committee shall include one member who is legally qualified, at least one Minister of Word and Sacrament and at least one elder.

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 2023

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.

Report

1. CHURCH HYMNARY 4TH EDITION

1.1 In the year to 30 September 2023 the sales of the various editions were as follows:-

Words	231 copies compared with 243 (2022)
Full Music Edition:	310 copies compared with 257 (2022)
Melody Edition:	76 copies compared with 94 (2022)
Large Print Edition:	113 copies compared with 129 (2022)
CD-Rom:	24 copies compared with 27 (2022)

1.2 The commission due to the Trust calculated in respect of the year to 30 September 2023 in respect of CH4 was £1370.40 compared with £1,334.36 in the previous year. From this, royalties were payable to the authors of £1124.44, the first £2000 of which is met by the publishers with net commission due to the Trust of £1370.40

2. FUNDING FOR PROJECTS

2.1 The Trustees affirm their wish to encourage more applications for grants to be made from trust funds, particularly where the applications relate to local training purposes. Enquiries can be sent to the Secretary Anne Steele by email asteele@churchofscotland.org.uk or by post to the Church offices, 121 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4YN. The Trust purposes include: -

“the advancement of the Christian faith through the promotion and development of hymnody in Scotland with particular reference to the Church of Scotland by assisting in the development, promotion, provision and understanding of hymns, psalms and paraphrases suitable for use in public worship... to enable the Church, and in particular the Church of Scotland, to worship in ways which are relevant to individual congregations or groups of congregations”.

3. MEMBERSHIP

3.1 Membership remains unchanged

In the name of the Trustees

PHILIP H BRODIE, *Chair*
ANNE STEELE, *Secretary and Treasurer*

REPORT OF THE SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL (KNOWN AS CROSSREACH BOARD) MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Recognise the continued pressures with recruitment across the sector, commend the workforce for all they are continuing to achieve in the face of that, and encourage the sharing of recruitment resources across wider Church of Scotland networks (Section 1.3).
3. Note the initiative being piloted with Scottish Workforce Chaplaincy and endorse the move to ensure that spiritual wellbeing remains a priority for the CrossReach workforce and those it supports (Section 1.3.5).
4. Commend the ecumenical and interfaith efforts to bring attention to the issue of Fair Work in social care and endorse further collaboration in this area (Section 1.4).
5. Express alarm about the cuts to vital care services being experienced by CrossReach and other care providers in the social care sector and ask CrossReach, working with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, to raise awareness about the crisis in social care with Presbyteries and congregations and to make representations to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government (Section 2.8).
6. Note the extensive consultation exercise undertaken by CrossReach to set a clear way forward which will allow it to continue to play its part in the overall mission of the Church of Scotland, and urge Presbyteries to continue to work with CrossReach in a spirit of collaboration and mutual support (Section 3.5).

Report

1. BUILDING TOGETHER

1.1 Strong foundations

1.1.1 *'I've met 6 or 7 people that seen me last year when I was at my lowest. That's meant a lot to me... cos they've seen me at my worst. And now I am here with a CrossReach t-shirt on as a volunteer. It's been amazing.'* (CrossReach Recovery Volunteer at the Recovery Walk 2023)

1.1.2 *'Eskmills means everything to me – they've looked after me.'* *'It's like having another family.'*

(Eskmills Learning Disability Customers - 25 years Anniversary)

1.1.3 *'I get plenty of time to go at my own pace.'* *'I feel able to do what I want.'*

(Residents' feedback - Older People Quality Circles event)

1.1.4 *'Going each week, talking to Anna and people my own age through music and art therapy I found an understanding that I wasn't alone.'*

(Young Person - Sunflower Garden Service)

1.1.5 2023 has been a full and varied year for CrossReach as it has grappled with the complexities of a time of great change for the Church of Scotland and a time of great uncertainty for social care across Scotland.

1.1.6 In the face of significant financial pressures, pending legislative change, and growing need but constrained resources, a key task for the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and CrossReach Board has been trying to keep things as steady as possible for people accessing and working in the services, while taking stock of what the future might hold.

1.1.7 Part of the process of taking stock has been recognising and celebrating the value of what CrossReach does now. The care and support offered, as part of the overall mission of the Church of Scotland, and in line with the third mark of mission, makes a positive difference to the lives of around 28,500 people across Scotland every year.

<https://www.crossreach.org.uk/impact-report-2024>

1.1.8 In 2023, the services touched thousands of lives, continuing to demonstrate Christ's love for his people through love in action, and empowering them to live life to the full, whatever the circumstances faced.

1.1.9 There have been a number of highlights across each of the service areas.

1.1.9.1 Children and Families Services marked the 20th anniversary of [Sunflower Garden](#) in Edinburgh. The service works with children and young people, impacted by drug or alcohol use in their families, by offering Counselling, Art Therapy, Groupwork and Therapeutic Support from their base on Queen Street and out in local communities and schools. Last year, the service offered 3404 sessions to 299 children and young people. It is financed through a number of different funding streams, including charitable donations. The CrossReach Board have also allocated funds received from Church of Scotland to this service, recognising the benefit that it brings to hundreds of children every year.

1.1.9.1.1 [Sunflower Garden](#) is just one of the services which offers therapeutic support to children and young people. These are much needed services which see a growing demand in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. The counselling and support teams report that they are being presented with more trauma and distress than at any other time. This is of concern in all services but particularly in those supporting families with infants in the early years, where there can be lifelong impact on the health and wellbeing of a baby or young child where a parent is experiencing high levels of distress. CrossReach [Daisy Chain](#) and the [Perinatal Counselling Services](#) provide family wellbeing support which helps families to be emotionally and mentally well. They help to reduce parental isolation, offer a sense of routine and a nurturing and safe place to belong, while improving relationships for the whole family.

1.1.9.1.2 The [Perinatal Counselling Services](#) provided over 800 counselling sessions last year. Extending access to a crèche within those counselling services helps parents to be able to attend but can be anxiety provoking as it is often the first time a child has been left with someone outside of close family. The staff teams work closely with parents to navigate these moments positively. Role modelling, singing, reading and baby-led communication boost parents' confidence and improves the bond between parent and infant. 91% of clients felt they had an improved bond with their baby and an improved sense of wellbeing overall.

1.1.9.2 The Adult Care leadership team received a report following a piece of research led by Professor Sarah Johnsen, Heriot-Watt University, about the impact of [Dochas](#) (Stornoway) which offers preventative support for those at risk of becoming homeless. This service works out of The [Lewis Street Project](#) where five people are offered supported accommodation to help with their mental health. Both services achieve good outcomes for supported people and Professor Johnsen commented specifically on 'the great deal of hope' which [Dochas](#) holds out to the people who come into contact with it. The hope continues to be offered, despite the fact that some of the people being supported can find services hard to engage with. One of the people contributing to the report states:

'At times, I have actually thrown it back in their face and I feel awful for doing that – but that's the nature of the drink. When I've been drinking, I won't reply to their phone calls, texts or the door. They're always the same with me. It's the same support worker I get regardless and that matters as it makes it so much easier to be open and trusting.'

1.1.9.2.1 Every year, CrossReach is represented by staff and people who have found recovery from alcohol or drug use at The Recovery Walk Scotland. This national event is organised by the Scottish Recovery Consortium in partnership with organisations and individuals invested in recovery. The purpose of the event, which brings people in recovery together from across the country is threefold; to pay tribute to those who have lost their lives to alcohol, drugs or poor mental health; to celebrate recovery wherever that happens; and to make recovery visible to the people of Scotland, in order to bring hope to others.

1.1.9.3 The Older People services welcome generous gifts for [South Beach House](#), a residential care home for older people in Ardrossan and [Cameron House](#), a dementia specialist care home in Inverness. The donation of £10,000 provided by St Cuthbert's Guild, Saltcoats will be used to furnish a Namaste therapy room in [South Beach House](#) which will provide life-enriching sensory experiences for residents living with advanced dementia. The very active Friends Group at [Cameron House](#) have been fundraising for a new minibus to help residents take part in more community activities. A recent bid for funding from Highland Cross, a 50 mile fundraising initiative based in the Scottish Highlands, will mean that they have now reached their goal and can look forward to enjoying outings in and around the Inverness area.

1.2 Powerful Partnerships

1.2.1 Working in partnership has played an increasingly important part in supporting existing work and in creating opportunities for growth at both a local and national level. Scottish Government funding of £2,386,865 under the Residential Rehabilitation Rapid Capacity Programme will see capacity in [Beechwood House](#), Inverness, grow so that it can provide each year a service to an additional 22 people struggling with alcohol or drug use.

1.2.2 [Heart for Art](#), which benefited from Guild project partnership funding in the past, has also continued to grow and develop. This initiative supports people living with dementia, along with their carers, by offering therapeutic arts-based activities designed to stimulate conversation, help concentration and express themselves more freely. There are now 18 groups running from church halls across the country, as well as in a number of the residential care homes, operated by CrossReach. It has been humbling to work alongside so many congregations to help make a difference in their communities. A significant legacy received last year will support further growth of this initiative into 2024.

1.2.3 The two prison visitor centres ([HMP Perth](#) and [HMPYOI Polmont](#)) continue to provide much needed and valued support to families with loved ones in prison. The success of these centres often depends on close collaboration with both the Scottish Prison Service and Families Outside. During 2023, there was a particular focus on siblings who often take on a caring role when a family member is given a custodial sentence, with a push to understanding what more can be done to support them, including access to more informal visiting arrangements. Visiting arrangements at [HMP Perth](#) have also been strengthened over the past year to allow more time to be spent in the waiting areas and this has allowed for more frequent engagement with a bigger pool of visitors than was possible when the team there were working from their standalone building on the perimeter.

1.3 Workforce

1.3.1 None of what is achieved is possible without the support of a highly skilled and qualified workforce. At a time when recruitment remains difficult across all sectors and remains the greatest risk on the CrossReach risk register, a number of steps have been taken to recognise the value of existing employees and to recruit to vacant positions over the past year. One of the most important has been to introduce the Living Wage as a minimum standard for all employees, as well as to pay careful attention to differentials for frontline staff and managers who are carrying added responsibility.

1.3.2 There has been significant investment in IT solutions in the form of a new recruitment website 'JobTrain' which has seen 9372 applications since it was launched in April 2023, representing a fivefold increase in the number of applications being processed. This is a significant increase and has helped speed up recruitment processes by greater automation around tasks such as inviting for interview, calling for references and issuing standard letters. The process of inducting new staff members has also been reviewed with greater support being offered in the first few weeks of taking up a post with CrossReach. There has been some success reported as a result of these steps being taken but with over 250 FTE vacancies still to fill (22.9% of the full staffing compliment), and high agency costs being felt as a direct consequence, it is no time for complacency. Regrettably, the lack of recognition in some Local Government contracts that all working in care should be paid a Living Wage, means that the full costs of care are not always covered and runs

the risk of putting additional strain on the longer term sustainability of services themselves. The CrossReach Board and CMT have been greatly encouraged by the support of many of the new Presbyteries in responding to a request to share vacancies across their own networks. It is anticipated that this will pay dividends in the future as different ways of working together continue to be explored.

1.3.3 Retention, by demonstrating to staff just how much they are valued, is an important part of workforce management. The employee awards celebrated those with long service records and acknowledged the achievements of the 52 members of staff who gained professional qualifications over the course of the year. Qualifications were gained in a number of specialisms such as SVQ's in social care, management and leadership, teaching and understanding autism. Employees also gathered together, face to face and virtually, to celebrate the exceptional contributions made over the course of the year by individual staff members, volunteers and teams as nominated by their peers or people supported by the services. It was a highly successful event with a good mix of employees from both operational and support services that were acknowledged for their dedication, innovation and expertise on the day.

1.3.4 It is good when the value of employees is recognised from those within CrossReach but special to the Board when it is also externally acknowledged. This year, they were pleased when the Fundraising and Engagement team were awarded the trophy for best individual giving campaign by the Chartered Institute of Fundraising Scotland in September 2023, a major accolade for a young team in a well contested field. The CrossReach workforce is made up of specialists in different roles who all play a vital part in supporting services in different ways.

1.3.5 As well as recognising considerable strengths, looking after the wellbeing of employees as they face increasing pressures remains a priority for CrossReach. A number of steps have been taken over the last year in collaboration with the Wellbeing Champions; members of the workforce who take on a responsibility within their own place of work to support others and signpost to wider wellbeing networks where necessary. One of the most recent initiatives involves a collaboration with Scottish Workplace Chaplaincy. Four chaplains, with the potential for a fifth, have been paired with services in different parts of the country and are now offering additional spiritual care across our Children and Families, Adult Care and Older People Services. The overall impact will be evaluated towards the middle of the year and a decision taken as to whether this should be rolled out further, but it is hoped that the strong relationships being built up can continue well into the future.

1.4 Fair Work

1.4.1 One of the biggest factors at play in recruiting and retaining a workforce remains pay and conditions. Our 2023 report to the General Assembly detailed the issue of fair pay in social care and outlined an initiative led by Archbishop Nolan (Archbishop of Glasgow and President of Justice and Peace Scotland) and the then Moderator, Very Rev. Dr Iain Greenshields.

1.4.2 This initiative explored fair work as a matter of justice and equity for employees, but also recognised the negative impact on those who could not receive a service due to lack of available staff. Over 400 faith leaders from Salvation Army, Free Church of Scotland, The Scottish Episcopal Church, The Catholic Church, The Church of Scotland, The Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society and Jewish Care Scotland went on to sign a declaration asking the Scottish Government to rethink their pay policy for social care workers, which had already fallen well behind equivalent grades in the NHS. This initiative was then used to add a different voice to a campaign, #4StepsToFairWork, which was spearheaded by CCPS, the umbrella body for organisations delivering care and support in Scotland's voluntary sector. In December 2023, representatives from the Catholic Church in Scotland, Church of Scotland and CrossReach, led by Right Rev. Dr Sally Foster-Fulton, in her role as Moderator, met with Michael Matheson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care. This meeting was arranged on behalf of faith leaders to discuss the wider issues and seek solutions. While progress has been made, with some previously excluded categories of children's workers now being included in the Scottish Government pay deal, there remains much to do if those working in care are to be appropriately recognised for their skills and expertise.

1.4.3 The support of individuals, presbyteries, and congregations in signing up to the declaration, and recognising the wider importance of this issue, has already been greatly appreciated. It is hoped that Fair Work in social care is an issue on which continued collaboration is possible. Leaders from the faith communities in Scotland will meet in June 2024 to discuss the next steps.

1.4.4 The premise of Fair Work goes wider than that of pay. One of the factors which has led to the sector falling behind and feeling undervalued is a lack of effective voice. The social care workforce is largely female (85%) and is not widely represented by trade unions. CrossReach has recognised this as a significant barrier to good employee relations and has worked alongside the Employee Representative Group (ERG) over the past year to ensure that CrossReach employees feel that they do have a voice and can influence decision making at both a service and organisational level. The ERG now has a raised profile within CrossReach and it is hoped that this will start to make a difference to the confidence of employees in bringing forward matters of importance to them, and seeking a collaborative way forward.

2. BUILDING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

2.1 Financial challenges in the social care sector

2.1.1 While there remains much to be thankful for, there are significant threats to services posed by Local Authority budget cuts. Over the course of the last year, four longstanding services have been affected by decisions about their funding. [Daisy Chain](#) in Govanhill had over £90K pulled from its budget in the spring of 2023 and was helped through a tough time by generous donations made to the emergency appeal run by the CrossReach fundraising department. There has been some remodelling of that service, and it is hoped that discussions about a different way of operating will bear fruit and allow the service to continue to offer support to children and their families experiencing extreme disadvantage in the Govanhill area. However, this is far from settled and the service remains precarious.

2.2 The [Dick Stewart Service](#) in Glasgow, which offers supported accommodation to offenders who have recently left prison is under threat, after 20 years of operation, following budget decisions made by Glasgow City Council. This, despite it being recognised as a service of exceptional quality by the Care Inspectorate and Scottish Prison Service, and where those who have benefitted from the service are highly unlikely to reoffend. A recent inspection praised the service for excellent relationships between staff and the people they support, and the commitment to helping them progress, which meant that the risk of reoffending was assessed to be very low.

2.3 [Day services for older people](#) in Pitlochry and Bankfoot had notification of their funding being discontinued at the end of the year, but after some discussion with Perth and Kinross Health and Social Care Partnership, a [Heart for Art Group](#) was commissioned. This now runs from The Tryst, allowing CrossReach to continue to support some people from that area in collaboration with NHS and Alzheimer Scotland.

2.4 The Board also took the difficult decision to close Glasgow Supported Living Services, Yoker, because of the difficulties in funding and recruitment overall.

2.5 [Morven Day Services](#) in Kilmarnock, which supports people who have had a challenging time with their mental health has also been advised that its core funding will cease later this year. Significant representation has been made by people supported by the service to local Councillors and MSPs. Senior staff are now in discussion with the Health and Social Care Partnership about their intentions for the future, and whether any element of the service can be salvaged, but it is a fragile situation.

2.6 In a blow to homelessness services in Glasgow, the Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness (GAEH) effectively came to a premature end in August 2023. CrossReach was a partner along with 6 other third sector partners (Aspire, Mungo Foundation, Right There, SACRO, Salvation Army and Wheatley Care), People with Lived Experience and Glasgow City HSCP. The Alliance model had been held up as a promising alternative to competitive tendering. That it has not been successful in Glasgow will be of note across the country. The decision to dissolve the GAEH, triggered by Glasgow City, was disappointing for all other partners but reveals something of the challenges Glasgow City Council continues to face as it tries to balance a budget and meet its statutory responsibilities.

2.7 All of the above cuts, and consequential disruption to services, have caused significant distress to supported people, their families and employees as few alternatives to these vital services are being offered. Each of the operational leads have been doing what they can to support those most affected by these difficult funding decisions.

2.8 Whilst the huge financial challenges experienced by Health and Social Partnerships is recognised and understood, there is a sense of inevitability that the short-term savings being made today can only lead to greater expense for tomorrow. The services subject to funding cuts within CrossReach and across the voluntary sector are high quality, cost effective and deliver good outcomes for people. These are the very services which help prevent family breakdown, support people to live well by recognising what is important to them, and can relieve the pressure on the already overloaded services provided by the NHS or the Scottish Prison Service. The cuts to social care, both within CrossReach and across the sector, will initially be felt most keenly by those individuals who rely on the support offered. However, in time, this will have a ripple effect in communities across Scotland as more people reach crisis point due to the erosion of the supportive infrastructure that social care currently offers. It is important that the current cuts to early intervention and care services are understood, debated and that future assurances are given to the Scottish public about services being there for the future when people most need them. CrossReach staff are ready to work alongside the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to raise awareness within congregations about these issues so that appropriate representation is made to key policy makers, and now seek support to that end.

2.9 It is highly likely that in a time of stretched financial resources in Local Government and in The Church of Scotland that more difficult decisions will have to be made, despite all efforts to the contrary. The imperative to reach a breakeven position by 2026 remains a key focus of the Corporate Management Team and the CrossReach Board and Finance Group who keep all services under rigorous financial scrutiny while working hard to retain high quality. The Finance Group have introduced new processes around assessing the viability of services for the future which will help highlight both the critical path to success and where more difficult decisions may have to be taken.

2.10 The conditions around any future funding for CrossReach, directly from Church of Scotland funds, is a matter currently being discussed between the Assembly Trustees and the CrossReach Board. Resolution is anticipated later in 2024 and in time for 2025 budget preparation. However, resourcing mission goes wider than financial considerations and this will also continue to be explored and encouraged. The CrossReach Board are working in full co-operation with the Assembly Trustees and appreciate their ongoing interest and support whilst recognising the challenges that they are currently facing.

3. BUILDING TOGETHER

3.1 Collaborative conversations about the future

3.1.1 Following a period of Covid recovery but with new uncertainties looming, the CrossReach Board agreed to take some time to engage with supported people, employees, and partners to understand what was important to them. The resulting work has allowed the Board and CMT to explore core beliefs about CrossReach, know a bit more about what works well and what could be better, and think about the future, together.

3.1.2 The work undertaken has been humbling, insightful and thought provoking.

3.1.3 Overall, much of the initial feedback was positive about the work of CrossReach and highlighted significant strengths.

3.1.4 Feedback included words such as caring, compassionate, inclusive, professional and supportive.

3.1.5 There were no indicators that CrossReach was involved in care and support in areas which were no longer relevant, with a number of responses from supported people, carers and professional partners asking for more of the same.

3.1.6 There was a recognition that CrossReach makes a real difference to the people it supports with a number of people able to illustrate why life is better.

3.1.7 While there were a number of issues which were highlighted as important to different groups and individuals specifically, there was a good consistency in the feedback across all of those surveyed and who engaged in other ways, which will allow CrossReach to determine core principles and priorities for the future.

3.2 The people we support, families and carers

3.2.1 An initial survey which engaged over 100 people was followed up by an opportunity to get together and join in a more in-depth discussion. This was done differently in each of the three service areas, to ensure that people could engage well depending on their communication style and preferences.

3.2.2 Older People Services held Quality Circle afternoon tea events in each of the 14 care homes and were able to gain feedback from over 400 people in that way. It was important that residents were comfortable, in a familiar environment, and had people around them who could prompt with questions and feedback cards where that was helpful to them. Families and carers were all invited to play a part. Overwhelmingly, residents fed back that they felt safe, supported, and listened to. Having rapport with other residents and positive relationships with familiar staff featured highly in discussions. The feedback also highlighted how much individuals value the range of activities on offer including rickshaw rides, attending community events and enjoying live entertainment within their homes. Importantly, some residents communicated what they would like to see even more of, including opportunities to engage in music and other activities. People also shared how much they valued being able to go about their day at their own pace and the ability to make ongoing choices.

3.2.3 Adult Care Services held a World Café style event in Perth where 50 people with a range of different support needs including learning disability, mental health, homelessness and substance use came together to discuss how they would like CrossReach to develop for the future. A range of topics were covered and discussions were helped along by facilitators at each table. There were topics which were more important to some individuals than others, but a number of themes emerged. There was a concern across all the discussions regarding staffing, levels of retention and the desire for a more consistent staff base which would reduce the need for agency staff. These were identified as a top priority. Feeling fully involved in decisions, having their voices heard and acted on and making good connections in the communities around them were also high on the priority list.

3.2.4 Children and Families Services engaged with 29 children and young people. 14 came from the care and education service, including 4 on the pupil council, and 15 from the children with disability service based at [The Mallard](#) in Springburn, Glasgow.

3.2.5 They held two fun and friendly events which involved dressing up and assuming the role of ‘boss for the day’. Again, core themes quickly emerged including the need for consistent, well-trained staff teams around them, a need to be well connected in communities which would open up a range of activities and choices, and the need to be seen as individuals who were fully involved in decisions affecting them.

3.3 Employees

3.3.1 438 employees chose to give feedback as part of a workforce wide survey, and the senior management team were involved in a face-to-face session with a facilitator in addition. The priorities were clear. Recruitment and retention was the top issue identified by employees, who were concerned about the number of vacant roles and the levels of pay compared to other sectors. Funding and finance was second, but related, with concerns being expressed about sustainability in the light of the constraints to funding and if high agency costs were to continue. Third was quality and capacity, reflecting comments about a need to support employees with good training and supervision and identify routes for career development and progression so that current and future needs could be met well. Investment in the IT infrastructure to support care delivery was also important to employees along with Employee Voice, the environment (including net zero aspirations), and faith and mission.

3.3.2 Feedback from volunteers surveyed was consistent with that of employees.

3.4 Corporate partners

3.4.1 Feedback from the 22 partner organisations contacted was broadly similar. This included comments from NHS and Local Authority partners, national church offices, funders and commissioners. Quality of services and future capacity to meet current and emerging needs was a number one priority with a well trained developed and remunerated workforce in order to facilitate that being the second highest issue raised. Financial security, supporting the net zero targets and using influence to develop public policy were also features of that feedback.

3.5 Presbytery partners

3.5.1 Last year over 200 Churches, Guilds and Presbytery partners collaborated with CrossReach as part of the 'Share the Love' initiative. This involved working in new and different ways to both raise awareness of social issues and to raise funds so that both the local congregations and CrossReach community-based services could better respond to them. This has helped reignite relationships in some areas and has brought mutual benefit with over £65,000 having been raised to date.

3.5.2 In order to continue to support the relationships being formed, CrossReach undertook a series of discussions with Presbytery Clerks and Mission Officers. These explored how to foster greater collaboration between the new Presbyteries, the CrossReach services in their areas, and the wider work and influence of CrossReach. Nine of the eleven Presbyteries based in Scotland have been part of the conversations so far, with two, which are more newly formed or in the process to follow at the most appropriate point. CrossReach continues to enjoy a good relationship with the Presbytery of England and appreciates the ongoing financial support from the Liverpool St Andrew's Fund.

3.5.3 These were positive and constructive conversations, allowing all parties involved to understand the pressures around and to work out ways in which to improve communications in the first instance, so that future opportunities can be recognised and developed.

3.5.4 The CrossReach Board appreciate the time that Presbyteries have given to these conversations and are grateful for the follow-up including the sharing of recruitment materials and for support for the Fair Work campaign. They look forward to engaging further on 'Share the Love' and strengthening partnerships over the course of the next year.

3.5.5 While none of the feedback received has been a total surprise, it has been really helpful to hear from such a wide range of the people for whom CrossReach is important and will allow the CrossReach CMT and Board to build on some of the actions which it has already taken over the past 18 months. These include investment in strengthening the mechanisms through which supported people and employees can have a more influential voice in the decisions which affect them, as well as enhancing pay terms and conditions for employees.

3.5.6 The consultation has also highlighted the importance of further developing strong partnerships which will be a key component to future success and will allow future collaboration around both service delivery and policy development.

3.5.7 There has been no identified need to change the remit set by the General Assembly for the Social Care Council (operating as CrossReach) which states:

- as part of the Church's mission, to offer services in Christ's name to people in need;
- to provide specialist resources to further the caring work of the Church;
- to identify existing and emerging areas of need, to guide the Church in pioneering new approaches to relevant problems and to make responses on issues arising within the area of the Council's concern through appropriate channels.

3.5.8 The purpose, vision and values will all be updated to reflect the feedback received and will be published, along with a set of core principles and a five year plan, later this year.

3.5.9 The Board are grateful to all who took the time to engage with the surveys and wider discussions and would want to thank them for their openness, honesty, and ambition for CrossReach as it looks to the future.

4. BUILDING TOGETHER

4.1 A fairer, more just society

4.1.1 These were highlighted in various sections of deliverance in 2023 and continue to be important areas for involvement by CrossReach and the wider church community.

4.2 National Care Service

4.2.1 The Scottish Government introduced the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill on 20th June 2022 with a view to making the change by 2026. Despite the widely agreed need for radical reform in the way in that Social Care is organised and funded there is still much debate about how this should be achieved, and what it will cost. The debate about Stage 1 of the Bill was significantly delayed as a result, but took place in February 2024. CrossReach have contributed to discussions in a number of ways and took part in the National Forum event in October 2023, organised by the co-design team at the Scottish Government, which provided an opportunity for people to come together and talk about the future of community health and social care in Scotland. However, by December 2023, the Scottish Government pushed back the date of full implementation from 2026 to 2029.

4.2.2 In December 2023 Audit Scotland commented:

4.2.2.1 *'Quite rightly time needs to be taken over planning and implementing the scale of the changes proposed in the Bill but the sector simply cannot wait for the reform that this is intended to bring. Action is needed now to ensure the sustainability of the sector and improve the availability and quality of social care services.'*

4.2.2.2 Focus must also be given to the specific local pressures seen across different areas of Scotland, in particular our rural and island communities. An ageing population, coupled with depopulation and the significantly increasing costs of delivering services in these communities is of real concern’.

4.2.3 There is still not enough information to assess the implications of the Bill on providers of social care in the voluntary sector. CrossReach will continue to work alongside the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, who have been a supportive and welcome ally on this issue, to make representations at the most appropriate points.

4.3 National Mission on Drugs Deaths 2022- 2026

4.3.1 CrossReach continues to play an important role in the mission to reduce drugs deaths in Scotland by being an active participant in initiatives like the National Collaborative. The investment at [Beechwood House](#) in Inverness, reported above, will be a focus for the remainder of 2024 and the new facility is due to open its doors in November 2024.

4.3.2 CrossReach has also supported the work of the Church of Scotland’s Faith Action Programme Leadership Team by contributing to an online training resource which will help tackle stigma in the area of substance use by facilitating discussion on the role that stigma can play in preventing recovery, and giving some examples of the way CrossReach services tackle this issue.

4.4 Fair Work in Social Care

4.4.1 Reported in the section under recruitment challenges, the CrossReach Board acknowledge the significant support given to this area of work by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team which has involved preparation of resources, as well as attending meetings with Scottish Ministers. They are grateful for that support and would encourage continued collaborative effort on this issue.

4.5 National Dementia Strategy

4.5.1 The Scottish Government published the implementation plan in February 2024 and CrossReach will continue to support COSLA and national partners to deliver on that plan. CrossReach was the first care provider in Scotland to appoint Dementia Ambassadors within each of the Older People Services and are proud to have continued to support the programme since 2012. Dementia Ambassadors work across social and public service settings and strive to improve the lives of people with dementia and their families and carers. Dementia Ambassadors are supported in a range of ways, including online information sessions to provide timely updates and share opportunities. In person regional meetings also provide opportunities to link with colleagues from other services, to share ideas and to celebrate success. In addition, ongoing support is provided in our Dementia Ambassador Microsoft Teams space with access to extensive resources organised by theme including types of dementia, seasonal activity ideas, and information for carers. The chat function allows Dementia Ambassadors to liaise with more than 60 colleagues from across the organisation.

4.5.2 Dementia Ambassadors are given time each month to focus on ongoing learning both internally and externally with key stakeholders including NHS Education Scotland and the Scottish Social Services Council. They also play a key role in supporting the Heart for Art service which is a collaboration between CrossReach and local congregations to support those in the community living with dementia.

4.6 The Promise Scotland

4.6.1 In 2020, Scotland recognised that it needed to improve the way in which it looked after children in care so that they could grow up loved, safe and respected. CrossReach supported the consultation on what could be different and has continued the journey to “#keepthepromise” over the last year in a number of innovative ways.

4.6.2 Following feedback from young people that the transition from care was a poor experience significant effort has been put into improving this by working more closely with Local Authority partners. One young person reports a very positive experience after CrossReach took on the lease of a flat for him, close to the house which he had lived in so that CrossReach staff who had become his family could continue to support him. The Local Authority committed financially to keeping the space open for him in the children’s house so that if it didn’t work out, he could return at any point. This has worked exceptionally well, and he will shortly take over the tenancy agreement himself.

4.6.3 Other feedback from children and young people was in relation to care plans, which they said should be improved. The CrossReach lead practitioner for The Promise worked with a group of staff to review these and make them more relevant and appealing to young people and this is now paying dividends as support needs can be better captured and understood.

4.6.4 In order to keep staff up to date with the latest thinking and developments, a Promise Newsletter has been circulated quarterly containing relevant information, podcasts and updates. A learning community which focuses on all of the above has been established and 2023 saw the publication of a new practice model to ensure that all Children and Families staff can stay engaged in new learning and theory, and are able to share ideas and thoughts with one another.

4.6.5 In responding to the needs of families who want to stay together but require some support to do this, the residential houses have provided a range of short-break options with some children coming to stay once a month or fortnight, giving them and their family a break, while staff also provide support. This is working well, and feedback has been positive.

4.6.6 The Children and Families team are exploring ways of developing our work with families who need additional support and were successful in gaining funding from the Scottish Government Drugs Mission Fund to support families impacted by substance use. With the launch of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, it is hoped that other opportunities will emerge.

4.7 Net Carbon Zero target

4.7.1 While it is recognised that this needs to be a whole Church effort, there are particular challenges to CrossReach, as a provider of social care services and a high energy consumer, in determining the most helpful way forward. The Board agreed to invest in a survey to assess the current situation in a number of buildings from which it operates and make initial recommendations for consideration. This work was carried out in the Autumn of 2023. A restructuring of the Estates department gave the opportunity to appoint a part-time post to take recommendations forward and to support all of the services to make small changes while a broader view of the bigger steps and investment needed could be taken. This is proving to be a helpful way forward and the Board would anticipate bringing a further update on progress to GA 2025.

4.8 Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry

4.8.1 The Inquiry is investigating the devolved strategic response to the coronavirus pandemic in Scotland between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2022. The independent Inquiry will establish the facts, identify the lessons that need to be learned and make recommendations to Scottish Ministers, so Scotland is better prepared in future. The Church of Scotland is a Core Participant in the Inquiry which is taking evidence from different groups at different stages of its investigations. CrossReach will give evidence as part of the health and social care impact hearings in March 2024.

4.9 Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

4.9.1 The Inquiry has been sitting since 2017 and is looking at the abuse of children in care in Scotland to understand what happened and why and where abuse took place. It is also examining the effects of abuse on children and their families and whether the organisations responsible for children in care failed in their duties. CrossReach has given evidence, on behalf of the Church of Scotland, on two separate occasions already and is preparing to give evidence on phase 8 in May 2024 which will cover the abuse of children in residential accommodation for young offenders, Borstal institutions, remand institutions and young offenders’ institutions.

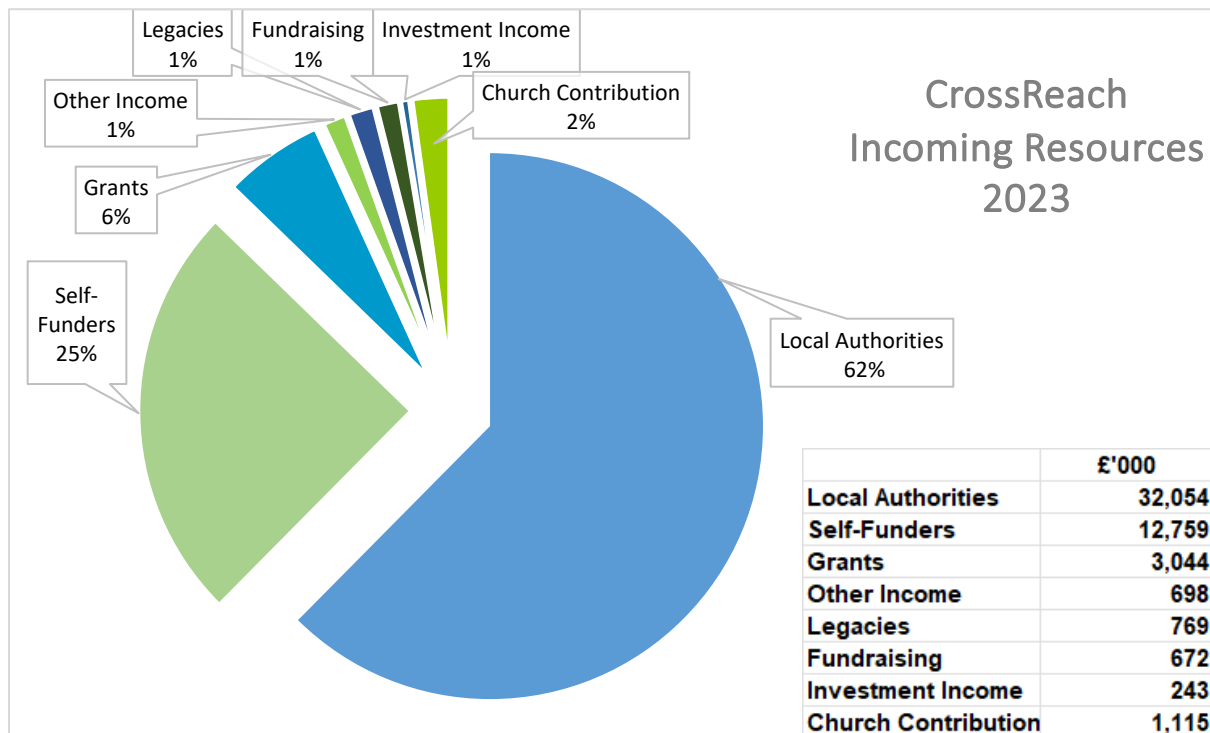
4.9.2 The Church of Scotland has acknowledged the harm it caused to some young people in its care establishments in the past and has offered a deep and profound apology. It has signed up to the Scottish Government Redress Scheme and recently provided a report on the steps CrossReach takes to prevent abuse now, as well as make redress to survivors as part of that scheme. The CrossReach Board are grateful to the legal department who are supporting them concerning both of these inquiries.

4.9.3 CrossReach will continue to play a part in using its voice and resources to raise issues of national significance to the Church and wider communities across Scotland with, and on behalf of, supported people and employees. The CrossReach Board appreciates the interest and given attention to these big issues which affect so many people today and will be vital for a fair and inclusive Scotland in the future.

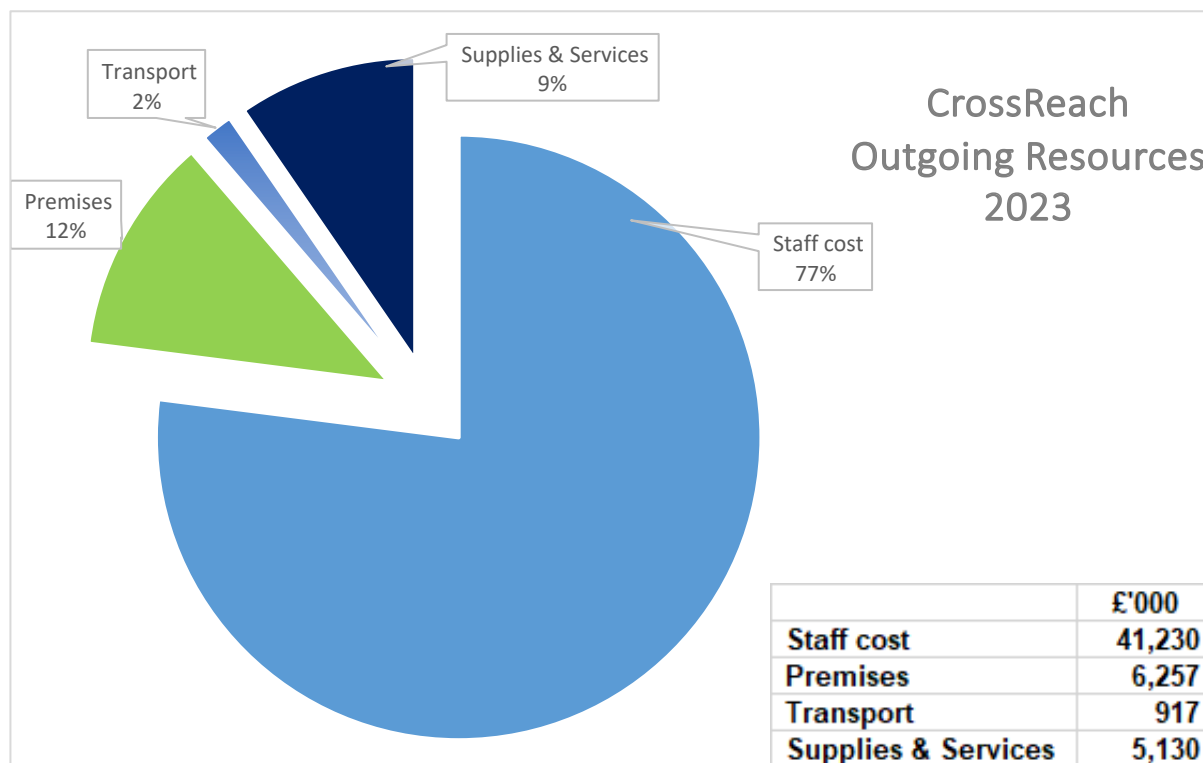
5. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2023

5.1 Financial graphs

Graph A



Graph B



5.2 Financial performance

5.2.1 2023 was another challenging year for CrossReach from a financial perspective, with Service Delivery costs up by 4.5%, and income from Charitable Activities up a similar 4.4%. Support costs in respect of Charitable Activities reduced by 3%. As in 2022, the increase in Service delivery costs and Charitable Activities income derived from an increase in the Scottish Living Wage which was passed on to staff, but which was only partly funded through Government and Local Authority contracts. This continuing trend of partly funding official pay increases, whilst also refusing to fund non-staff cost increases, has been challenging for the whole third sector.

5.2.1.1 There continues to be a heavy reliance on agency staff, mainly due to recruitment challenges, with costs rising by 5.7% in the year.

5.2.1.2 The reduction in support costs reflects an easing in Utility prices.

5.2.1.3 The net effect of these increases is that the net outgoings of CrossReach, before property disposals, gains on investments, and property impairments, increased from a deficit of £(2,745)k in 2022 to a deficit of £(3,142)k in 2023.

5.2.1.4 After property disposals (2022 surplus £204k; 2023 surplus £118k), unrealised gains/(losses) in the value of investments (2022 £(1,149)k; 2023 £672k), and property impairment (2022 £(715)k; 2023 £(72)k), the overall net outgoings improved from a deficit of £(4,405)k in 2022 to a deficit of £(2,424)k in 2023.

5.3 Local Government Pension Scheme

5.3.1 During 2023, CrossReach de-risked its balance sheet by exiting two Local Government Pension Schemes (LGPS) at a time when the markets were favourable. This brought a net cash benefit of £3,450k to CrossReach.

5.3.2 The net inflow of £3,450k from the LGPS exit outweighed the 2023 deficit of £(2,424) mentioned above, leading to a £320k reduction in the overdraft from the General Treasurer in the course of the year.

6. QUALITY AND IMPROVEMENT

6.1 Annual survey of the people who are supported by CrossReach

6.1.1 Of the 411 responses received from supported people:

- 94% Strongly Agree/Agree that CrossReach staff treat them with respect.
- 94% Strongly Agree/Agree that CrossReach staff are kind and caring to them.
- 89% believe they receive the right information at the right time in a way that they understand.
- 80% believe if they make a complaint or raise a concern then it is acted upon.
- 89% feel safe and are protected from neglect, abuse or avoidable harm.

6.2 Care Inspectorate

6.2.1 CrossReach has 53 services which are inspected by the Care Inspectorate.

6.2.2 During 2023, 19 services were inspected. Grades are awarded for each inspection theme ranging from 1 - unsatisfactory to 6 - excellent.

6.2.3 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?

Not all inspection themes are assessed in each inspection, but most inspections cover the following two areas:

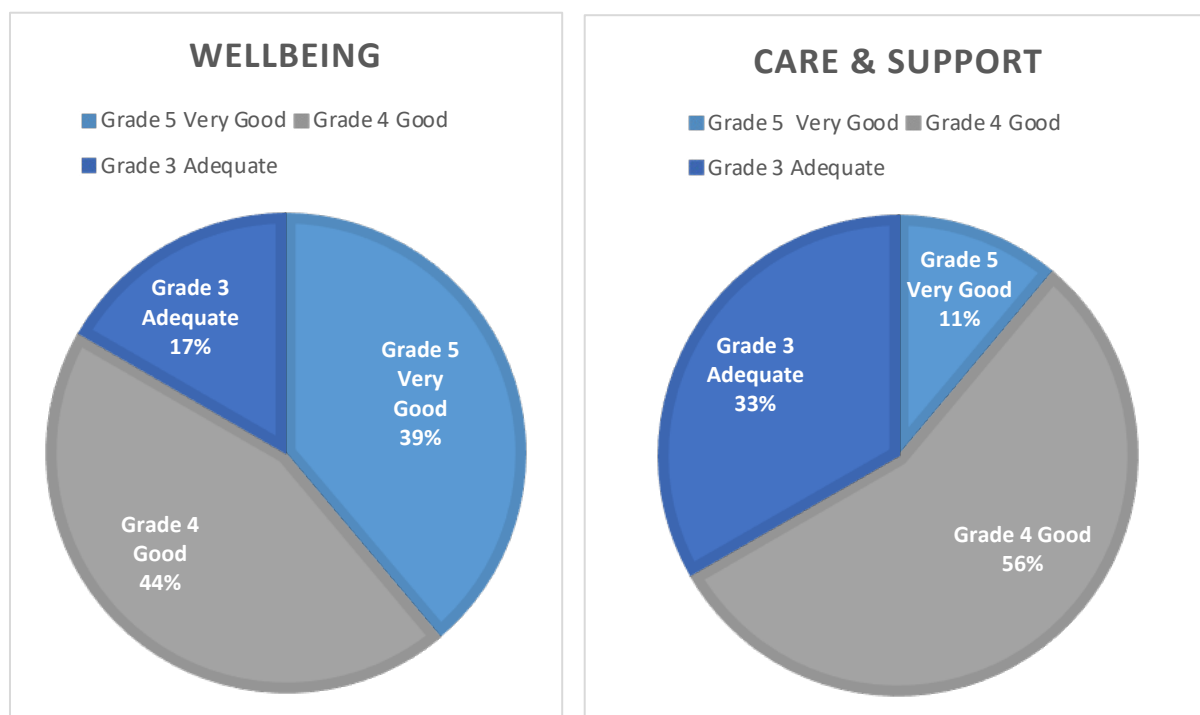
Area A - How well do we support people’s wellbeing?

- Of the 19 services inspected during 2023, 18 were inspected on this theme.
- 84% of our registered services inspected on this key question achieved a grade of at least 4 (Good), with 39% achieving 5 (Very Good).

Area B - How well is our care and support planned?

- Of the 19 services inspected during 2023, 9 were inspected on this theme. 67% on this key question achieved a grade of at least 4 (Good), with 1 service achieving 5 (Very Good).

Graph C and Graph D



6.3 Numbers of staff

6.3.1 Table A

Employee Numbers @ 31st January 2024

	Full Time	Part Time	Total	Full Time Equivalent
Operational Staff	364	693	1057	814.77
Relief Staff		385	385	87.21
Executive Office Support Staff	70	31	101	88.02
Total	434	1109	1543	990

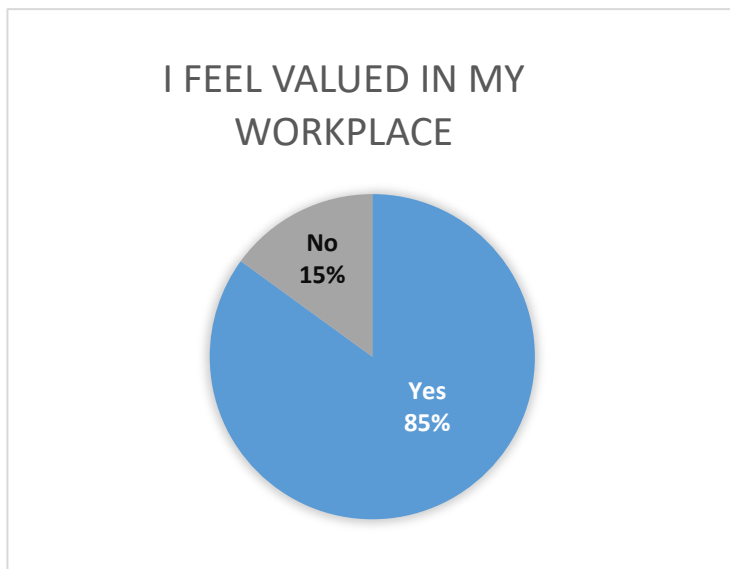
6.4 Staff survey

6.4.1 CrossReach employee survey 2023

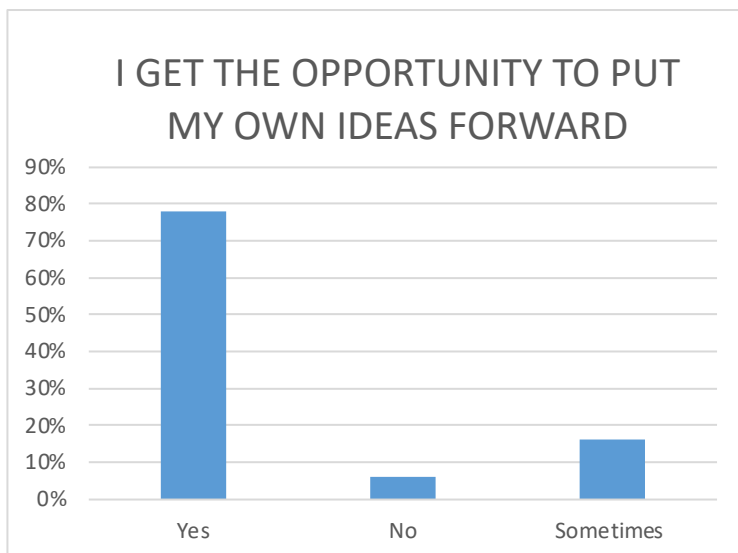
6.4.2 Every two years, CrossReach undertakes a survey of its permanent and relief staff and in September 2023, a survey was circulated to ascertain the view of its workforce.

6.4.2.1 468 people participated, this equating to approximately a third of the current workforce. The findings of the survey were presented to the Board of CrossReach and disseminated to senior managers. Managers review the results and these assist the development of local action plans in services to any concerns raised.

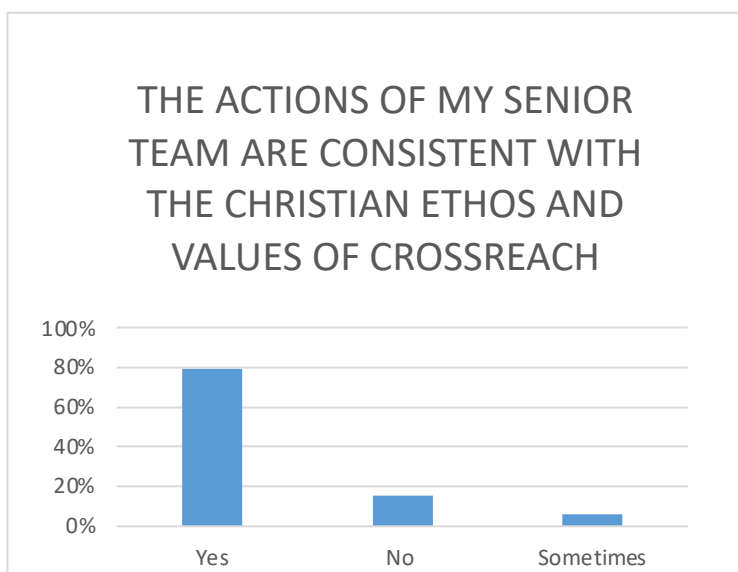
Graph E



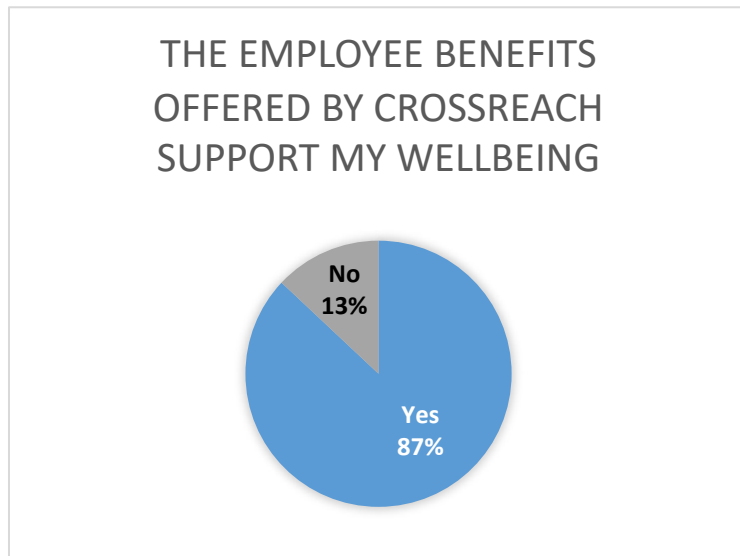
Graph F



Graph G



Graph H



6.4.2.2 The benefits offered by CrossReach have been appreciated by the workforce.

In the name of the Social Care Council (known as CrossReach Board)

THOM RIDDELL, *Convener*
MIKE CANTLAY, *Vice Convener*
VIV DICKENSON, *Chief Executive Officer*

Addendum

Rev Thom Riddell

Rev Thom Riddell joined the Social Care Council in 2012 having previously spent some time on the Council of Assembly. He soon proved an invaluable member of the Social Care Council, bringing with him experience 19 years of ministry in Linlithgow (Livingston Old, then St Michael’s where he currently serves as an auxiliary minister) coupled with an expertise in risk management and health and safety following a career as an Occupational Safety Specialist for Ineos, formerly BP. Thom has been a member of the HR and Quality Group and the Executive Committee within the Social Care Council, assuming the role of Vice Convener in 2018. Following the sad and sudden death of the then Convener, Bill Steele, at the end of 2019, Thom then took on the role of Convener. In 2020 he helped steer CrossReach through the Covid-19 pandemic, which was a particularly challenging and distressing time for social care. By June 2020, Thom had introduced a new system of governance as the Council brought in a more appropriate Board type structure to oversee the organisation and which has helped speed up the reporting and decision-making processes. Thom has done all of that while serving as Presbytery Clerk for West Lothian, supporting the union of West Lothian and Edinburgh Presbyteries, and continuing to act as an auxiliary minister, with all that the role involves. That has been no mean feat and one which few would have the passion and energy for. Thom has been a good and trusted friend to Council members and senior staff alike, and is known for his pragmatism, warmth, humour and deep faith which have been such a blessing to all. The Council and indeed The Church are indebted to Thom for his leadership and loyal service and to his wife Joyce for her patience and good grace while Thom has been out and about visiting CrossReach services across the country and attending to the many duties that come with this position. The Social Care Council wish Thom every blessing as he leaves CrossReach and hopes there will now be more time for Scottish country dancing, golf, and even the occasional day of rest.

MIKE CANTLAY, *Vice Convener*
VIV DICKENSON, *Chief Executive Officer*

Appendix 1 – List of CrossReach Services

Adult Services

Justice Services

- Dick Stewart Service (Glasgow)

Homeless People

- Cale House (Inverness)
- Cunningham House (Edinburgh)
- Kirkhaven Project (Glasgow)

Learning Disabilities

- Eskmills (Edinburgh)
- The Bungalow (Stonehaven)
- Threshold Edinburgh
- Threshold Glasgow
- Threshold Support Services – Housing and Residential (North and South Lanarkshire)
- Threshold Support Services – Community and Short Breaks (North and South Lanarkshire)

Mental Health

- Allarton (Glasgow)
- Gaberston House (Alloa)
- Morven Day Services (Kilmarnock)
- Lewis Street (Stornoway)

Substance Use Services

- Beechwood House (Inverness)
- Dochas Housing Support (Stornoway)
- CrossReach Abstinence Recovery Service (Glasgow)
- Rankeillor Initiative (Edinburgh)
- Tayside Support Service (Dundee)
- Whiteinch Move on Service (Glasgow)

Children and Family Services

Looked After Children (7 small residential houses)

- Carraig View (Port Glasgow)
- Dumbrook House (Strathblane)
- Finniescroft Farm (Lennoxton)
- Millmuir Farm (Gargunnoch)
- 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 Support and Advice Centre
- Polmont Prison Visitor Centre

Counselling, Support & Training

CrossReach Counselling West and North – includes:

- Bluebell Perinatal Counselling Services (Glasgow)
- Tom Allan Centre (Glasgow)
- COSCA Counselling Training (Glasgow)
- CrossReach Counselling Inverness – Young People’s Counselling and Generic Service
- CrossReach Counselling Moray – Perinatal and Generic Service
- Workplace Counselling Service

CrossReach Counselling East – Simpson House and Palmerston Place – includes:

- East Perinatal Counselling
- Recovery Counselling
- Sunflower Garden

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, Carluke – Carers
- Heart for Art, Edinburgh (Morningside)
- Heart for Art, Edinburgh (Charteris Centre)
- Heart for Art, Galashiels
- Heart for Art, Garelochhead
- Heart for Art, Glasgow (Broomhill)
- Heart for Art, Kirkcudbright
- Heart for Art, Musselburgh
- Heart for Art, Perth & Kinross (The Tryst)
- Heart for Art, Stonehaven
- Heart for Art, Dunfermline
- Morlich House (Edinburgh)
- Oversteps (Dornoch)
- Queen’s Bay Lodge (Edinburgh)
- South Beach House (Ardrossan)
- St Margaret’s House (Polmont) – Dementia & Heart for Art in the Care Home
- The Elms Care Home (Edinburgh) – Dementia & Heart for Art in the Care Home
- The Oasis Garelochhead
- Walter & Joan Gray Care Home (Shetland)
- Walter & Joan Gray Day Care (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

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GUILD MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Continue to encourage uniting congregations to ensure that the Guild is involved in discussions and enabled to explore ways in which Guilds merge or work in new ways, welcoming those mergers that have taken place (*Section 2.4*).
3. Encourage Kirk Sessions to consider if establishing a Guild can assist in their mission to their local community (*Section 2.8*).
4. Welcome the ways in which Guilds are reaching out to local communities and encourage Guilds and congregations to see this as an opportunity for mission together (*Section 3.3*).
5. Encourage youth workers, ministers, Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries to support the work of the Young Adult Guild (*Section 3.6*).
6. Commend the Guild for the work of its Project Partnership Scheme 2021-24 and recognise the important issues tackled and vital monies raised (*Section 4.2*).
7. Congratulate the Guild and the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia on their collaborative working and learning together (*Section 4.3*).
8. Commend Guilds Together Groups for exploring new ways of working together and welcome the new structure of Guilds at a Regional Level agreed by the Guild conference (*Section 5.2.2*).

Report

1. NEW WINE, NEW WINESKINS

1.1 'See, I am doing a new thing!'

1.2 The past year has been one where the Guild has focussed on how we renew and reinvigorate the movement as we look forward to the challenges and changes that are facing the church.

1.3 The report is written, recognising that the changes taking place in the wider church will undoubtedly have an impact on the number of Guilds, where they meet and when they meet. However it also provides an opportunity for growth and renewal.

1.4 Similarly, as we look forward, we have been exploring new ways of 'being' Guild that enables us to respond to the challenges we face and encourages Guilds to engage in new ways in God's mission in their area.

1.5 We are delighted that in the past year 402 new people have joined the Guild. This is a real source of encouragement to us and our branches and we look forward to welcoming more women and men to the Guild in the year ahead.

2. NEW GUILDS COMING TOGETHER

2.1 Guild branches in local congregations form the backbone of the Guild. They are where people come together in worship, prayer and fellowship to take action on a wide range of issues. They are integral to the success of the Guild and in supporting people in their local area.

2.2 One of the biggest challenges we have faced and continue to face is the position of Guilds in united congregations.

2.3 The Guild can play a pivotal role in the success of a Union if they embrace the new situation and find ways of working together.

2.4 There are a number of positive examples where the development of a new congregation has led to growth in Guild membership in that congregation. This has happened because people have, often for the first time, had the opportunity to join a Guild and participate in the wide range of activities a Guild provides.

2.5 It has also happened because the Guild is an excellent way of meeting people if you have come from a different congregation or you have moved to a new town, and of giving people a sense of being part of their new community.

2.6 The assumption of the National Guild is that when a congregation comes together into one place of worship then the Guild should also do likewise and help ensure that the Union is a success

2.7 However there are cases in more rural areas, where a church building has closed and there is no Christian worship in that area. In these situations, with the support of a Kirk Session, we hope it would be possible for a Guild to meet in a village hall or in a hotel, or other community space providing continued Christian witness. This also allows people, for whom travel may prove difficult to share in worship and fellowship together.

2.8 We have been encouraged by the success of new Guilds that have been established over the past few years. During this year the Guilds at Loudon, at Ellon and at Newport - on - Tay have been new shoots of growth and encouragement. We would encourage Kirk Sessions to consider how establishing a Guild may help in the mission of their congregation and we hope that these new Guilds will be an inspiration to other congregations.

3. NEW WAYS OF REACHING OUT

3.1 Over the year Guilds have been encouraged to think afresh about their programmes and find ways of reaching out to the wider church family and into the community.

3.1.1 New resources have been developed to support Guilds which enable them to be part of Sunday worship, help grow their faith and encourage the consideration of new ways in which they can be active in God's mission both in their community and the wider world.

3.2. Our Guild Initiative Fund provides grants to Guilds who embark on new community initiatives. This year we helped establish Faifley Flicks, a community cinema initiative which enabled outreach into the community of Faifley in Clydebank by the Guild and the local congregation.

3.3 The Initiative Fund is an important part of our outreach and we would encourage congregations and Guilds to come together and develop local outreach initiatives.

3.4 In Millport, the Guild working with the congregation and local school has developed a polycrub, a sheltered growing area, to grow produce and this has proved another excellent way of engaging with the local community.

3.5 One of the most encouraging events in the Guild calendar is our Annual Gathering where Guild members, together with representatives of sister organisations, come together to share, celebrate and look forward to the work God has for us in the year ahead. This year was no exception.

3.5.1 We returned to the Assembly Hall and were encouraged that over 750 members and friends made the journey to Edinburgh to share in the event.

3.5.2 We were also joined online by Guilds across the country. The use of modern technology has enhanced the event and allows the reach to extend to people's communities and even into their homes.

3.5.3 The day included an address by the Moderator, Rt Rev Sally Foster Fulton, who provided encouragement and challenge to our members to keep on renewing and developing as we witness for Christ in our communities.

3.5.4 Our keynote speaker this year was Professor Jason Leitch who provided an invaluable insight into his Christian journey, his charitable work in India and his role during the pandemic. His input was challenging and inspiring in equal measure

3.5.5 The Govan Songsters, a Salvation Army singing group, provided the musical input for the day and had everyone engaged in worship with a variety of songs both old and new.

3.5.6 We also presented the Convener's Challenge shield, this year for the best planter or hanging basket. This year the winner was from Glasgow North Guilds Together.

3.5.7 The day culminated in the installation of our new National Convener, who challenged members to change and renew themselves and their Guilds in the year ahead.

3.6 Our Young Adults Guild has been a positive development for both the Guild and the young people involved who have taken on the leadership of the group. This has been a source of great encouragement to the Guild and we would encourage congregations, youth workers, Ministers and Presbyteries to encourage their young people to get involved in the life and work of the Young Adult Guild.

4. NEW WORK WITH PARTNERS

4.1 Partnership working is key to the success of the Guild. These partnerships take place locally with Guilds supporting initiatives in their local community, nationally through our work with Faith in Older people, the Scottish Women's' Convention, our sister church organisations and with the Faith Action Programme. Internationally we work through our Project Partnership scheme and our developing links with Malawi.

4.2 Project Partnership Scheme

4.2.1 Our Project Partnership Scheme continues to be a beacon of hope in so many communities and we are delighted that £379,297.58 has been raised during this project cycle. This is a remarkable total given that year one saw Guilds unable to meet.

4.2.2 Project partnerships have for many decades challenged Guild members to tackle difficult and often pioneering issues such as prostitution, HIV/Aids, FGM and support for refugees. This project cycle has been no different.

4.2.3 This year saw the opening of the 'Sunflower Sanctuary', the first dedicated facility of its kind in Uganda for children with special educational needs. Working with Starchild this facility will transform the lives of these children and enable them to fulfil their potential.

4.2.4 In Kazunzu, Tanzania, the children who have moved into their purpose-built homes with loving foster families are progressing well. They are getting new opportunities to thrive and share in family life and families are getting a chance to build a sustainable future.

4.2.5 So many of our important events in life often revolve around food but for people struggling with eating disorders this can be challenging. Our support has enabled our partner Beat, to create a Coping with Celebrations workshop. A blend of e-learning and a live Zoom workshop, this training course aims to give carers of people with eating disorders the skills and strategies to support their loved ones through events that are food-focused.

4.2.6 Working with Pioneers in South East Asia, chocolate production has now expanded and the aim is for them to become self-sustaining so that the business will provide employment for many years to come. More than 2000 bars of chocolate have been sold across Scotland this year.

4.2.7 Last year in Scotland almost 3,000 children entered the care system, many due to abuse or neglect. Working with Home for Good, work is ongoing to encourage Christian families and mobilise local churches to find and sustain homes through fostering, adoption and supported lodgings for teenagers.

4.2.8 In Brazil, our partnership with UNIDA has provided 42 scholarships widening access to theological education and equipping women to serve faith communities and the wider society. The scholarships have made a huge impact on students' lives and to church life in local communities.

4.3 Malawi

4.3.1 We continue to develop our partnerships with the Guilds of the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia. We have shared in prayer, in worship and in faith development.

4.3.2 This year our National Convener was able to attend the biennial conference of the Women's Guild in Bandawe and to bring greetings from the Church of Scotland. These opportunities to share with each other, learn more about each other and encourage each other in love and enable us to grow our faith.

4.3.3 Our twinnings between Guilds Together in Ayr and District, North Ayrshire, Shetland and Dunbartonshire with Presbyterian Guilds in Bandawe, Milala, Dwangwa and Mzuzu respectively have continued to develop during the past year. Relationships have grown through prayer and dialogue and we are looking forward to welcoming five sisters and brothers from Malawi to Scotland in September.

4.3.3.1 These visits will involve time in their respective twinned areas, learning more about the work and witness of the Guild and how our relationships with Malawi enhance that.

4.3.3.2 The Green Canopy initiative which has seen a tree nursery established at Ekwendeni is progressing well and trees are now planted and more planting planned for 2024-25. This initiative helps with soil degradation, food production and the impact of climate change.

4.3.3.3 This year Guilds have also supported Ekwendeni Hospital, by providing much needed medical supplies both in cash and through the Banana Box Trust.

5. NEW REGIONAL STRUCTURE

5.1 Change is never easy but the changes to congregations and Presbyteries have without doubt impacted on the Guild. The Guild has, over recent years, sought to change how we work in a range of practical ways.

5.2 The Guild at a Regional level has traditionally been organised on the same boundaries as Presbyteries in Guilds Together Groups. It is these groups who elect members to serve on our National Council and provide the strategic direction for the Guild.

5.2.1 We recognised that the current structure needed to be reviewed and made more responsive to the needs of the Guild whilst at the same time maintaining important relationships with Presbyteries.

5.2.2 Following consultation with branches, Guilds Together Groups and the National Council, our National Conference has agreed a new more streamlined structure which reduces the size of our National Council, and combines Guilds Together Groups in such a way as works for the Guild.

5.2.3 We believe this new structure enhances the sustainability of the Guild at a Regional level, provides a responsive National Council and a positive new method of policy formation within the Guild.

6. NEW EVENTS

6.1 The Guild, like the wider church, continues to operate within tight financial constraints. However the National Council recognised that it remained important that we still found ways of meeting members in their local area and to be responsive to the needs of members.

6.2 Embracing modern technology we meet quarterly online with local Guild conveners to provide advice and support. These meetings are also an opportunity for Guilds to learn and share with each other.

6.3 Responding to requests from members we have developed a four-year rolling programme of Regional Mini Gatherings that will see the National Guild host events across the country. These events combine training for Guild members, ideas for Guild meetings and uplifting worship and fellowship. This year we have hosted events in Earlston, Fort William, Dingwall, Orkney, Shetland, Kilmarnock and Castle Douglas.

6.4 Our Big Sing events are also a source of encouragement to our members and also support our work with Malawian brothers and sisters through offerings. This year events in Glasgow, Kilmarnock and at the General Assembly will support the work of Ekwendeni Hospital.

6.5 The Guild Weekend has proved successful and has enabled Guild leaders and members to come together to share ideas, information and encourage each other.

7. IN CONCLUSION

7.1 The Church of Scotland Guild is in good heart. We recognise the challenges we face but believe that God still has work for us to do and will equip us for the road ahead as we seek to serve him in our branches, in our communities, in Scotland and in the wider world.

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

In the name of the Committee

RAE LIND, *National Convener*
KAREN GILLON, *General Secretary*

Appendix

Guild Finances 2023

Membership 10634

Groups 495

General Fund Income	£	General Fund Expenditure	£
Members' Contributions	149,571	Management and admin	182,470
Donations and Grants	10,279	Objects Expenditure	31,604
Sales of goods	9,715	Cost of sales	7,256
Project Support	23,073		
Other	28,106		
Total	220,744	Total	221,330

DONATIONS TO THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

Sums given by Guilds in 2023, based on returns received to 29 February 2024, were as follows:

To Ministry and Mission Funds via Congregations	35,080.21
To Congregational Funds	131,721.63
To work of the church, including projects	190,205.10
To work outwith the Church	67,064.15
Total	424,071.09

PROJECT DONATIONS FROM APRIL 2023 TO FEBRUARY 2024

BEAT - There is Hope	27,619.71
PIONEERS - Chocolate Heaven	22,106.14
STARCHILD - Finding the Light	26,676.29
VINE TRUST - Kazuznu Village	25,022.05
HOME FOR GOOD - A Home for Good	36,901.45
UNIDA - Hear our Voice	23,296.19
Total	161,621.83

Addendum

Rae Lind, National Convener, 2023-24

Rae’s time in the Guild began when she joined Young Wives Group in Annan in 1982. She then joined the Guild in Galloway in 1984. She then moved to Larbert Old where she served on the Guild committee.

From there she returned to Annan serving as convener of the Guild.

During that time she also served as convener of Annandale and Eskdale Presbyterial Council.

After moving to Stewarton in 2010 she served on the Guild committee. She was also an active member of Irvine and Kilmarnock Guilds Together, serving as Convener and as National Council representative.

In 2021 she helped establish a new Guild at Loudon Church in Newmilns where she is currently the convener.

Rae joined the Leadership Team of the National Guild in 2022 serving as a National Vice Convener with responsibility for developing resources and supporting Guilds in the South of Scotland.

We wish Rae and her husband George every blessing for the future and offer our sincere thanks for her service to the Guild at local, regional and national level.

CHRISTINA PATERSON,
FLORA BUTHLAY,
MORAG DUNCAN,
KAY COULL,
National Vice-Conveners
KAREN GILLON, *General Secretary*

FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

INTRODUCTION

1. Receive the Report.

PEOPLE

2. Instruct Presbyteries to appoint Church of Scotland representatives to local authority committees which deal with education, according to the principles set out in the report; and affirm the report on Church of Scotland representatives' voting powers on education committees (*Section 2.1*).
3. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, in consultation with the Assembly Trustees, to review the Income Protection and Ill Health Act (Act VI 2019) in light of its operation in practice over the past five years (such review to include consulting with people who have had direct experience of it) and report to the General Assembly of 2025 (*Section 2.12.2*).
4. Adopt the '*Terms of Responsibility for Ministers Serving in the Church of Scotland*', as contained in Appendix II, as a standard for the duties of the office of Ministry of Word and Sacrament, instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to make this available to all Ministers of Word & Sacrament as well as including it in the Ministers' Handbook and encourage ministers to study and adhere to these (*Section 2.16 Appendix II*).

PRAISE

5. Commend the Church Hymnary Supplement '*God Welcomes All*' and thank the Hymnary Supplement Committee for their work in producing this resource of contemporary songs supporting the renewal of worship (*Section 3.1*).
6. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to conduct research, including consultation with Presbyteries, into the use of local worship leaders and Readers across the church, and to report to the General Assembly in 2025 with recommendations on how these roles should be shaped to best support the emerging shape of the Church of Scotland and its worshipping communities (*Section 3.8*).

POVERTY

7. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to encourage Presbyteries to engage with Priority Areas to explore ways in which the Church of Scotland's priority for the poorest and most marginalised in society can continue to be delivered in areas where major adjustments have taken place to Priority Area parishes (*Section 4*).
8. Call for the introduction of a Minimum Income Guarantee and instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, in consultation with the Theological Forum, to explore theological perspectives on this issue (*Section 4.7*).

PRESENCE

9. Give thanks for the faithful witness and service in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), and the Waldensian movement and Church in Italy, CCAP celebrating their centenary, and the Waldensians reaching 850 years and pray God's richest blessing on both (*Section 6.4.2*).

PEACE

10. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to share the voices of Palestinian Christians, and to continue to support the Church's contribution to interfaith dialogue (*Section 7.1*).
11. Call on the whole Church of Scotland to pray for peace in the conflict in Gaza between Israel and Hamas and in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah, and restate the 2015 General Assembly call urging the UK Government to recognise without delay the State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel, as a contribution to securing lasting peace and justice for all (*Section 7.2*).
12. Urge political leaders and media institutions to avoid the use of dehumanising and hostile language when describing migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; and instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to work with partners in speaking out against this rhetoric (*Section 7.3*).

PARTNERSHIP

13. Re-appoint Rev Bruce Sinclair as a Trustee of the Housing and Loan Fund for Retired Ministers and Widows and Widowers of Ministers (*Section 8.5*).
14. Invite congregations and Presbyteries to use and share resources prepared for the upcoming UK Parliament general election by the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office, especially the Voter Champion initiative to promote voter registration and awareness, and guidance on how to organise an election hustings (*Section 8.8*).

PRESBYTERY MISSION PLANNING

15. Approve the allocation of the total number of planned ministry posts among the Presbyteries as contained in Appendix VI for 2025 (*Section 10.6 and Appendix VII*).
16. Pass an Act amending the Presbytery Mission Plan Act, as set out in Appendix VIII (*Section 10.9 and Appendix VIII*).

REMITTS AND THE CREATION OF PRESBYTERY MISSION PLANNING IMPLEMENTATION GROUP (PMPIG) AS AN ADDITIONAL PROGRAMME GROUP

17. Note the creation of an additional Programme Group, Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group, in terms of the remit contained as Appendix IX (*Section 11 and Appendix IX*).

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (Hebrews 12 v1)

1.2 In reflecting on the beginnings of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT), since the General Assembly of 2023, it has been a journey; perhaps more of a race, and indeed a relay race.

1.3 The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team came into existence as a result of various decisions made in recent years. The Special Commission of 2019 proposed the establishment of the Faith Nurture and Faith Impact Forums, as a merger of the four previous Councils. The General Assembly of 2022 asked the Assembly Trustees to explore whether the two Forums should be brought into one body, and following the work of the D10 Group, the 2023 General Assembly agreed to the creation of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team. FAPLT is a group of people from within our church who are passionate about ministry and mission, and about pursuing God's heart so we prioritise His plans and purposes.

1.4 FAPLT has faced a mammoth task, seeking to understand the sheer volume of work which the excellent Faith Action Programme Staff group is already doing. The challenge has been, and continues to be, to see where FAPLT, as a newly created body, best fits, and to find and develop appropriate relationships with other parts of the church.

1.5 FAPLT members had a Big Picture Day in September; with the help of Neil Glover and an 'innovation consultant,' we began to make sense of our history and felt a greater sense of direction going forward. We had much to think and pray about and much to plan for.

1.6 As FAPLT has looked to run this race, some hurdles have been overcome not as barriers, but as an important part of the race. FAPLT has asked questions about its make up as a group; about its remit; and about how we fulfil the tasks given by the General Assembly. Does 'Resource and Presence' with its business focus sit best with the work of FAPLT? Is there a danger that the crucial voices from 'Public Life and Social Justice' are being lost in the midst of our business and busyness? Then there is the crucial work of mission planning through PMPIG. As FAPLT is tasked with seeking God for the focus and direction of our church over the next five years, should PMPIG become a recognised programme group within FAPLT? There are question marks in these last sentences. These are deliberate as they are issues we're still pondering and praying into.

1.7 The final part of the race is that for FAPLT and for our Church, as we look to run the race before us, it is not a sprint, it is a marathon. That may sound negative – it is not, it is wisdom. FAPLT was brought into existence in recognition of the fact that, as a church, we are in crisis, and it is a crisis which has lasted 50 years. Declining ministers, declining members, declining money, declining mission.... As Convener, Tommy MacNeil has shared the wisdom of Winston Churchill in recent months with- 'Never let a good crisis go to waste!' That is what FAPLT is determined to do – and it will take time.

1.8 In view of our race thus far, FAPLT asks for two things from the Church, as we come to the end of our first year. FAPLT asks for your patience with us, and for your trust in us.

1.9 The Convener and Vice-Conveners of FAPLT, each and every member of our team, and our excellent Faith Action staff, are very mindful of the size of the task we have been given. We are determined, in our reliance on God, and our trust in God, that God will go before us and help us prepare for a better and brighter future. A better and brighter future, for our Church, for your Church, and so for our nation and all for Christ's glory.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize?

Run in such a way as to get the prize. (1 Corinthians 9.24)

2. PEOPLE

2.1 Church of Scotland Representatives on Local Authority Education Committees

2.1.1 Two significant matters have arisen over the course of the year in relation to the Church of Scotland's representation on local authority committees which deal with education. The first is to suggest a change in how the Church makes these appointments, the second is in relation to questions about whether they should have voting powers.

2.2 Church of Scotland Education Committee Representatives – Appointment Process

2.2.1 In 2005 the General Assembly confirmed the policy that the appointment of Church of Scotland representatives on local authority education committees was the responsibility of the national Education Committee. This Committee was dissolved in January 2020 and its powers and responsibilities were taken on by the Faith Impact Forum, which itself was replaced in June 2023 by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team.

2.2.2 These committee changes, together with the process of Presbytery reform, have caused FAPLT to review who should appoint Church of Scotland representatives, and it is proposed that this responsibility be transferred to Presbyteries. FAPLT proposes the following principles, to take effect from 1 June 2024:

2.2.2.1 Church of Scotland representatives currently in post should remain in their roles for the rest of the term (until the next local authority elections), unless they resign or leave for some other reason. The filling of any vacancies which arise after 1 June 2024 becomes the responsibility of the relevant Presbytery.

2.2.2.2 Presbyteries are responsible for local authorities in their bounds - if a local authority covers more than one Presbytery, the Presbyteries should agree between them who to appoint. (It may be that one Presbytery only has a small area in a local authority which another Presbytery has a larger presence; it should be obvious who takes the lead, but we strongly encourage consultation and communication).

2.2.2.3 Representatives should be chosen for their relevant knowledge, experience and understanding, and that they are aware of their role as representatives of the Church of Scotland

2.2.2.4 The Education and Schools Group, part of the Mission Support Programme Group, will continue to offer a forum for networking and fellowship for all Church of Scotland representatives.

2.2.2.5 Presbyteries should liaise directly with their local authorities about the appointment and any other issues in relation to governance or accountability towards the Church of Scotland representatives.

2.2.2.6 Presbyteries should inform the Education and Schools Group of the names and contact details of Church of Scotland representatives after they have been appointed, to enable good communication and to ensure appropriate information is included in the Yearbook.

2.3 Voting powers on education committees

2.3.1 The Church of Scotland has a commitment to serving our nation and our communities. The Kirk’s constitution, the Articles Declaratory, whose lawfulness was declared by Parliament in the Church of Scotland Act 1921, affirm that we are a national Church and that we have a distinctive call and duty to every person in Scotland, whether or not they are Christian or a Church of Scotland member. The Articles Declaratory also state that we acknowledge the *“authority of the civil magistrate”* within their own sphere, and that *“the Church and State owe mutual duties to each other, and acting within their respective spheres may signally promote each other’s welfare”*. They go on to say that *“the Church and the State have the right to determine each for itself all questions concerning the extent and the continuance of their mutual relations in the discharge of these duties and the obligations arising therefrom.”*

2.3.2 In the work of education and schools, our contribution is offered to promote the common good and in the highest interests of all people. Where we are present, in committees, in schools, in church and in community we seek to offer advice, challenge and affirmation to those charged with responsibility for caring for and educating our children and young people.

2.3.3 Our role in community gives the Church insight into the experiences of people struggling against poverty and marginalisation; the Church is often there alongside people in times of difficulty. Where we can, our role will be to stand and speak alongside those in need, advocating for greater inclusion and equality for those who face additional barriers to attainment and achievement.

2.3.4 Through our extensive provision of youth and children’s workers, the care and dedication of school chaplains, and our comprehensive safeguarding policies and culture, we are clear that we always put the welfare of children and young people first.

2.3.5 This means that our involvement in local authority education committees is free from party political influence. Our presence on committees is not about pursuing narrow or sectional self-interest of the Church of Scotland; we see it as a continuation of our calling to serve the people of Scotland.

2.3.6 Our experience

2.3.6.1 The history of the Church of Scotland’s involvement in the establishment of Scotland’s schools and education system is well known. It was the early Reformers who led the call for *‘a school in every parish’*, to teach reading to all so that all may study the Bible. Since the handover of responsibility of schools to the state in 1872, the Church has continued to be involved in education matters, including representation on boards and committees.

2.3.6.2 Our continued presence on education committees is founded on this history. It has been recognised and by the Scottish Government and Parliament that it is justified that we continue to be formally present. This is not due solely to history but more importantly because of the positive examples of work that we do within our communities: this includes school chaplaincy, youth and children’s work, and work alongside the poor and marginalised.

2.3.6.3 The Church of Scotland representatives on local authority education committees are chosen for their expertise and experience. They are often former teachers, school chaplains or have had a direct, real and recent understanding of what happens in a classroom. Their insights and knowledge can often be invaluable to share with politicians and others, allowing a wider diversity of ideas to be brought to the table.

2.3.7 Faith in public life

2.3.7.1 We acknowledge that we are entitled to a formal advisory role on education committees. We believe that we have a useful contribution to make whether or not our representatives have voting powers: in our experience, very few decisions in local authority education committees are put to a vote, and in many circumstances the Church of Scotland representatives do not take part in voting, even where they have the powers to do so. Whatever decision is made by an individual local authority about the Church/Religious Representatives voting powers, we believe there remains a strong justification for the continued presence of Church of Scotland representatives to play a part in the life of local authority education committees.

2.3.7.2 We note there are others who may not share this view and consider the issue to be related to the principles of democracy, and that only directly elected representatives should be involved in public decision-making. We would observe that there are many local and national government bodies, boards, advisory groups and inquiries which have powers of expenditure and making high-profile recommendations for public policy where the members are not elected, but appointed based on merit. We also note that in other UK jurisdictions, Church representatives are appointed to decision-making bodies such as non-denominational school governing bodies.

2.3.7.3 Where discussions are being held in local authorities about removing voting powers for Church/Religious representatives, we have a particular concern for our sisters and brothers in the Catholic Church. In Scotland there is a particular place and role for Catholic education, and we recognise that removing voting powers is resisted by the Catholic Church for the sake of maintaining a degree of influence over policies with regards to its schools. We stand in solidarity with the Catholic Church and urge that particular weight be given to their arguments with regards to the distinctiveness of Catholic education.

2.3.7.4 We welcome public discussion and debate about what actually happens in local government decision-making. This also allows for an opportunity to consider the wider role of faith in public life, and in particular with regards to education and schools. While we are in the main untroubled by the removal of voting powers of Church/Religious representatives on local authority education committees (given the relative infrequency of votes and the higher rates of abstention by Church of Scotland representatives where there is a vote), we would strongly resist any moves to end the role of faith in education, such as removing the statutory requirement for the Church of Scotland to be represented on education committees, restricting the provision of school chaplaincy or diminishing the provision of Religious and Moral Education as part of the curriculum.

2.3.8 Request for public debate

2.3.8.1 We believe the role of the Church of Scotland representatives is held in high regard by those they work with: councillors, local authority staff members, teachers, parents/carers and children and young people, and that many representatives themselves are highly regarded. We aspire to their being fully involved in contributing to discussions to make a positive difference to the lives of schools and young people.

2.3.8.2 We fully respect the role of elected councillors. As is implied in the Articles Declaratory, summarised above, we are here and willing to serve and contribute at the invitation and request of the State. Councillors undertake an important public service and we thank them for it. We also acknowledge the fundamental importance of democratic principles in our society.

2.3.8.3 We request that where a local authority is considering a change, that there is a discussion about the role of Church/Religious representatives and their involvement in the committee. This should be open, engaging, transparent and willing to listen to and respect different points of view. We encourage local authorities and councillors to speak to their Church of Scotland representative and to contact the relevant Church of Scotland Presbytery to engage with the views and ideas of people locally.

2.4 Children and Young People & Schools and Education

2.4.1 We would encourage all congregations to reach out and prioritise the faith and discipleship of all in their communities. With decreasing numbers of younger people and their families attending Sunday morning services, we are recognising significant growth in other ways to connect and engage with younger people and families. These include Messy Church, Forest Church, Holiday Clubs, Toddler Groups as well as children and youth groups.

2.4.2 Information and resources are shared through the Children and Youth Newsletter and the Now You're Talking Facebook Group. We are also developing a database to be able to send bespoke information out to those involved in specific areas of children and youth ministry.

2.4.3 Training and support is offered through the ReNew series of webinars and offering the Ministry Essentials Children's course (developed by a national ecumenical group related to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland - CTBI) and signposting to training and resources offered by others.

2.4.4 We have a network of paid workers offering support and encouragement as well as a retreat. In 2023 this was on Iona.

2.4.5 Recognising the significant contribution and engagement of many congregations, ministers and others into local schools, the Education and Schools Group is prioritising offering training and webinars to support school chaplaincy and engagement and sharing ideas, stories and resources through [Serve Your Local School](#). The Education and Schools Group are holding an annual day conference for all Religious Representatives on local authority education committees and have been exploring the issues and implications of education reform in Scotland. The Group has also contributed to national consultations on matters relating to education. The Church of Scotland has a representative on the General Teaching Council of Scotland, Susan Leslie, who has agreed to continue in this role for a further four years; the Mission Support Programme Group has agreed to support this proposal.

2.5 Magnitude

2.5.1 Magnitude is a youth festival run by Scripture Union Scotland. It gathers around 1000 young people and youth leaders for 5 days offering teaching and worship alongside sports and entertainment. It offers a rich faith experience with many young people taking big steps of faith, seeing God as relevant in their life, and allowing them to answer a call to follow, going deeper in their faith and in their Christian friendships.

2.5.2 In July 2023 Faith Action staff ran a pilot project offering a Church of Scotland Village at the festival. This allowed small groups from a variety of congregations who otherwise would not have attended, to gather and participate. People who were apprehensive and strangers on the first day left as confident people and friends at the end.

2.5.3 Following the successful pilot, we are intending to host a Church of Scotland Village again at Magnitude 2024 and are hoping to grow our offering to reach more young people and support more youth leaders. Please encourage young people in or attached to your congregation to join us. Contact FaithAction@churchofscotland.org.uk for more details.

2.6 Being an Intergenerational Church

2.6.1 We are seeking to encourage the church to explore new ways of ‘being church’ that intentionally include and welcome people of all ages.

2.6.2 August 2023 saw the publication of a landmark book written by staff members Suzi Farrant and Darren Philip. Published by St Andrew Press, ‘*Being an Intergenerational Church: Practices to Bring the Generations Back Together*’ calls the church to re-discover its DNA as an intergenerational community of transformation. In conversation with the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the book develops a theological rationale for intentional intergenerational relationships of mutuality lived out within the core activities of the church.

2.6.3 Being an intergenerational church is not just about getting more children and young people engaging in the lives of our congregations, it is about being the people and communities that God has made us to be. We would highly recommend people buy and read the book, and the authors stand ready to help congregations and Presbyteries explore things further so please get in contact if you would appreciate a conversation at FaithAction@churchofscotland.org.uk

2.6.4 The Church of Scotland’s Stewardship Team has also produced a number of resources to encourage intergenerational engagement.

2.7 Racism and funerals

2.7.1 The General Assembly of 2023 agreed:

“Note with alarm the research which reports that Black ministers, ministers of colour and ministers from an ethnic minority are being overlooked or asked not to officiate at funerals but to give way to a White Scottish minister: instruct the Assembly Trustees through the work of the EDI Group to highlight this issue; urge the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to liaise with relevant public bodies and funeral directors to invite their intervention; and encourage Presbytery Clerks to raise awareness of this issue in every parish.”

2.7.2 A newly-established Racial Justice Working Group is liaising with funeral directors and ministers to explore and address this issue, initially through discussions aimed at collaboratively understanding the dynamics within the process of organising a funeral by which, in some instances, Black and Ethnic Minority ministers are being overlooked or asked not to officiate at funerals, but to give way to a white Scottish minister. The aim is not to apportion blame, but to look at the communication between churches, families and funeral directors to identify support, training or any practical actions that could be offered to help prevent further instances of this behaviour.

2.8 Probationers attending the General Assembly

2.8.1 The General Assembly of 2023 instructed the Assembly Business Committee in consultation with the Legal Questions Committee and the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to consider the issue of representation within the General Assembly, of Candidates in Training and Probationers, including the possibility of voting rights and to report to the General Assembly of 2024. The Assembly Business Committee reports on this elsewhere; FAPLT is happy to note the proposed revision of the Standing Orders of the General Assembly for Probationers and Familiarisation Candidates to attend on the same basis as Youth Representatives, with the capacity to speak, and to propose motions, but without voting rights. This will be effective from the General Assembly 2025.

2.9 Assistant Minister Scheme

2.9.1 Finishing Probationers and Familiarisation Candidates continue to be offered a role through the Assistant Minister scheme, which will remain in place until December 2025. Some have opted to stay in their final placement context, while others are moving into new roles identified by their Presbytery.

2.10 Ascend

2.10.1 Our Ascend website <https://bit.ly/3UPyB0f> continues to be our main source of development and support opportunities and resources for those serving in our national ministries. We particularly wish to commend Ministerial Development Conversations, which give an annual opportunity for a supported review and planning process.

2.11 Sabbatical and Study Leave

2.11.1 We continue to review Study Leave, and see it as vital for the support and wellbeing of our Full Time, Word and Sacrament (FTWS) ministers. We encourage all those who are entitled to make full use of this provision, and more information is given through the ASCEND website, which can be accessed through this link: <https://bit.ly/3UPyB0f>. FAPLT is also acutely aware of the cross over between Sabbatical and Study Leave, and will report on this to a future General Assembly.

2.12 Ministries Support

2.12.1 The Pastoral Support Team:

2.12.2.1 While primary pastoral support for those serving in the Recognised Ministries of the Church lies within each Presbytery structure, FAPLT provides further dedicated and skilled support.

2.12.2.2 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 the lifecycle of ministry are all part and parcel of the everyday work of the Team.

2.12.2.3 One of the main parts of the work of the Support Team is the Pre-Retirement Conference, taking place over a 24-hour residential conference, 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.

2.12.2.4 The Reverend Dr Lezley Stewart gave notice of her intention to move on in the first half of 2023 and the post of Ministries Support Operations Manager was advertised in the latter part of 2023. The Reverend Allan McCafferty, formerly minister of St Andrews: St Mark’s Parish Church and prior to that, in Kirkwall: East Parish Church in the then

Presbytery of Orkney, took up the role in January 2024.

2.12.2.5 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.

2.12.2.6 The Team can be contacted via pastoralsupport@churchofscotland.org.uk

2.12.2 The Income Protection and Ill Health Act

2.12.2.1 The Income Protection and Ill Health Act (Act VI, 2019, as amended; <https://bit.ly/3PBFko2>) is now five years old, and it makes sense to review its operation, and to consult with those who have direct experience of the Act, and to report back to the General Assembly of 2025.

2.12.3 Developing Support Services

2.12.3.1 While early aspirations for the Ascend programme focussed on supporting those in the first years of ministry, the greater aspiration was to have these support services available to every minister. Since 2018/2019 through the reorganisation of the Ministries Benevolent Fund, full-time ministers can access an allowance of £240 per year towards Pastoral Supervision. This also applies to Probationers, and Deacons in Deacon-specific MDS posts.

2.12.3.2 While Spiritual Accompaniment has remained only available to those in Probation/First Five Years, and Coaching has been free to all at point of access, [due to the Coaching model inherited initially out of the Priority Areas Coaching Team], from the beginning of 2024, a new integrated Support Allowance has been available.

2.12.4 New Integrated Support Allowance

2.12.4.1 The Support Allowance of £250 per calendar year which was announced last year is now available, to enable access to any or all, of the above services, as best fits the individual's support needs at any one time. The Support Allowance will be available to full-time stipendiary ministers, Probationers, those in Familiarisation, and Ordained Deacons in Deacon-specific MDS posts.

2.12.4.2 The Support Allowance will be able to 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 provision.

2.12.4.3 The changes are being brought forward, out of the learning of the last years, to enable the fullest benefit to be received. We understand the value in having the widest choice of support, as well as the pragmatism of expanding resource, knowing people are trained, accredited and able to offer their services, practising under the appropriate professional body.

2.12.5 Funded Retreats

2.12.5.1 The possibility of funded retreats, up to £250 per year, through the Todd Endowment Trust has been a welcome addition to the support provisions. Ministers and deacons with at least 2 years' service are already benefitting from this opportunity.

2.12.6 Additional Support

2.12.6.1 Access to counselling remains in addition to the Support Allowance/Retreat Allowance, as does the ability to benefit from hardship and support grants.

2.12.6.2 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 we are unable to meet.

2.12.7 Review

2.12.6.1 All Support provisions and funding arrangements remain under ongoing review as would be expected for good governance and sustainability, but FAPLT is committed to offering the best support it can to those serving in ministry into the future.

2.12.8 Time Away for Rest and Restoration

2.12.8.1 FAPLT also reminds stipendiary ministers of their Pulpit Supply provisions for rest and recuperation throughout the year and hardship funds where there is need. Congregations are encouraged to exercise their duty of care role in supporting Office Holders to take time off, for physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing.

2.12.9 Partnership with Place for Hope – Living Peace

2.12.9.1 The partnership with *Place for Hope* reported to last year's General Assembly 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.

2.12.9.2 As was reported to the General Assembly of 2023, 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>

2.12.10 Wellbeing Survey

2.12.10.1 FAPLT took on the instruction from the General Assembly of 2023 to undertake a wellbeing survey of ministers. This work is ongoing; the Church of England had undertaken a similar survey and we have been fortunate enough to use this as a framework for our own survey, being carried out in cooperation with the Office of the Assembly Trustees.

2.12.11 Pastoral Care in a Time of Change

2.12.11.1 In a sermon on vocation, The Right Reverend Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury delights in a God who chooses us, *'weak, sinful and silly as we are', for 'the privilege of loving and serving him.'* Quoted in the Grove booklet, *"When the Church Says No"*, he continues, *'at least for those of us who are chosen. There is a bit of a problem with the rest.'* That hurt for those who are wrestling with the challenges and pain of Presbytery Mission Planning is very real, for ministers, MDS, office-bearers, elders, members, and all who are associated with congregational life, as they live through their experience of undeserved pain.

2.12.11.2 The General Assembly of 2023 instructed the Theological Forum and the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to investigate the production of pastoral guidance on situations where a minister or congregation's sense of call is not affirmed by the Presbytery during its planning processes. Early conversations have taken place, and this work will continue after the General Assembly of 2024, with a further report coming to next year's General Assembly.

2.12.11.3 The full range of resources of the Church, those outlined above, and those available at Presbytery level, are available to those who would seek succour and help and pastoral help. FAPLT recognises that the Church is occupying an in-between time, and wants to reassure the wider Church of its concern and care, and its prayers, in this season of change and challenge. There are no quick and easy solutions, and we all do well to stop and listen to the stories of those who are experiencing tough times. May we know the healing touch of Jesus; the love of God; and the support of the Holy Spirit in these days.

2.13 Locums

2.13.1 The General Assembly of 2023 agreed the following deliverance:

"Noting that the General Assembly has backed the call for frontline social care workers to be paid a minimum of £12 per hour, instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to review the pay and conditions of those who serve as Locums, giving consideration to the provision of written employment contracts, and report to the General Assembly of 2024."

2.13.2 The phrase Locum is shorthand for *locum tenens*, holding the place of a minister. As such, locum ministers are office-holders, and not employees, and it would therefore be inappropriate to provide employment contracts.

2.13.3 While the reality in recent years has meant that vacancies have been more protracted; the underlying principle is that locums should generally serve for a shorter period and not the longer term. The average number of locums serving in 2018 was 192, and this had dropped to 157 for 2023. As Presbytery Mission Plans move towards fuller implementation, the need for locums will further reduce, as will the length of time for which locums are required, except in longer term cases of guardianship.

2.13.4 Introducing contracts of employment for locums would have significant ramifications. The Presbytery Mission Planning process has shown that a majority of congregations do not have the capacity to take on the formal role of employer and so a designation of either Presbytery or Faith Action as employer would be required, with a move to formal job descriptions; the requirement for transparent recruitment; qualifications; alongside formal line management supervision as well as a framework to manage employee relationships, all of which would require significant financial and human resource, at a time when headcount in the Church Offices has reduced by 30%. FAPLT believes that the financial commitment required by such a transition is not appropriate at this season in the Church's life.

2.13.5 Scope for Improving the Locum Experience

FAPLT recognises that there is scope for improving the Locum experience. While the Locum Appointment Form contains much useful information, a refreshed Locum Engagement Form would be valuable and could be issued as part of every Locum appointment. At the moment appointment of a locum is the responsibility of a Kirk Session. It might be appropriate for Presbyteries to take on this role, of appointment and oversight, given that these functions are at the heart of the role of Presbytery.

2.13.6 Locum remuneration for Pastoral Work will be kept under review on an annual basis to ensure that they are at a minimum compliant with the national minimum wage. The Pulpit Supply element will rise in line with general increases in Pulpit Supply as reported to the General Assembly. The responsibilities which sit with locums are not equivalent to those which rest with an Inducted Minister or Interim Moderator. It is not therefore appropriate to compare remuneration of locums to a pro rata amount of stipend. It is the inducted minister, or the Interim Moderator, who has the responsibility for moderating the Kirk Session; responsibility for representing the congregation's interests to the Presbytery and the Presbytery's role to the congregation; and for steering the congregation through the vacancy process, or in cases of guardianship, through that time in guardianship.

2.13.7 FAPLT recognised that in some instances Locums and Interim Moderators are one and the same person. That said, Interim Moderators are not remunerated for their service, and many elders also serve as Interim Moderators. It would be good practice, while recognising the challenges of finding Interim Moderators, to separate, as far as possible, the two roles of Locum and Interim Moderator.

2.14 Vacancy Procedures Act

2.14.1 Successive General Assemblies have recognised the need to revise, or replace, the Vacancy Procedure Act, Act 8 of 2003. A useful gathering with Presbytery Clerks took place in December 2023, and the small group of representatives of the Legal Questions Committee and the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team are agreed that a replacement Act is needed, rather than a revision to an Act which has been the subject of many alterations over the years. A replacement Act will come to the General Assembly of 2025.

2.15 Capability Process

2.15.1 Capacity has prevented the progressing of this important matter, which was outlined in detail to the General Assembly of 2022. Outstanding issues which require to be discussed before presenting a final version of such a Capability Procedure are varied. FAPLT is clear that issues of pastoral support are critical, and that such pastoral support need not necessarily come from within the Presbytery. The provisions of Act X 2012, on co-operation among Presbyteries will usefully be applied in any Capability Procedure, to allow for appropriate involvement of others. Equally, ensuring that the Appointed Person, and members of any Capability Procedure Panel, are equipped and possess the appropriate skills will be an essential part of a Capability Procedure. The next stage in this exercise will be proposals for the General Assembly of 2025.

2.16 Expectations and Responsibilities of Ministers in the Church of Scotland

2.16.1 The Faith Nurture Forum reported to the General Assembly about its exploration, together with the Office of the General Assembly, and the Legal Questions Committee, of what terms and conditions might be appropriate for ministers of word and sacrament. Office-holders in other areas of public life co-exist satisfactorily with terms and conditions. In working through what might be appropriate, the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team offers a set of terms of responsibility, to be included in the Ministers' Handbook alongside the other useful information contained therein. These are not innovative, and are linked to the promises made by ministers in their ordination vows, and they set out some key points relating to what any good minister should already know and be doing. These are contained as *Appendix II*.

3. PRAISE

3.1 The General Assembly of 2019 asked the Mission & Discipleship Council to produce a supplement to the fourth edition of the Church Hymnary, CH4. This summary would focus on contemporary music. Work has been ongoing since then to produce a printed publication in partnership with Hymns Ancient and Modern, called *God Welcomes All*, and a range of digital resources, with support from the Church Hymnary Trustees.

3.2 As this is a supplement, a decision was taken to focus on songs published after CH4 was produced. This also gave a good definition for "contemporary" as it covered a 20-year time period. The main criteria for songs were whether they were singable by a congregation and whether they would be a "gift to the church". While *God Welcomes All* is a supplement to CH4, it is also hoped that its contemporary nature will make it a useful resource in the renewal of worship for congregations who use other hymn books and resources.

3.3. As part of the process a congregational survey was undertaken and a call for songs was held, with an excellent response rate. Songs were also considered from a wide range of sources and the editorial process narrowed the options from around 10,000 songs down to 219 which are included in the final resource. The committee which made the decisions on which songs to include considered all songs anonymously to ensure that there would be no bias or conflict of interest based on who wrote the songs.

3.4 As well as seeking out the best contemporary songs from any style there was also an aim to address contemporary themes and concerns, such as the climate crisis, lament, racial justice and poverty. There were also some songs included from before CH4 was published in order to redress historic underrepresentation in hymn books, or where they filled thematic gaps which felt important today. The choices also reflect a breadth of songs from around the world.

3.5 The Church of Scotland is very broad in its style of worship, and in aiming to represent contemporary songs from across this breadth, it is recognised that not all songs will suit everyone. The songs selected still represent a breadth of approaches and theological perspectives. It is hoped that everyone will find something that is new and inspiring for their worshipping community.

3.6 To celebrate the launch of *God Welcomes All* and to encourage the Church to explore and experiment with the resources, a launch event is being held at St. Cuthbert's Parish Church, Edinburgh, on the evening of Sunday 19th May. This will be complimented by launch events held in partnership with Presbyteries and a series of webinars.

3.7 Full music and words only editions will be available in May 2024, while digital resources will be available later in the year, including backing tracks and lyrics videos available for sale (with special offers on whole set packages) and an expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website with samples available to stream and background information on each song.

3.8 PRAISE – Local Worship Leaders

3.8.1 The last few years have seen tremendous growth in people training to become local worship leaders across the country, with courses now run in most Presbyteries and by four Academic Partners. The role of Local Worship Leader is deployed in a wide range of ways across the country, including many cases where people lead worship regularly across a Presbytery. At the same time, statistics show that there has been a very low rate of applications and acceptances for Readership in recent years.

3.8.2 Given the substantially different requirements between these roles for training and accreditation/calling, but recognising the overlap in how roles are being used in some areas, there needs to be further detailed research in order to best understand how these roles can be shaped to make them attractive for people to take on while best providing the worship leadership that is required by the emerging shape of the Church of Scotland and its worshipping communities.

3.8.3 This research would include speaking to existing Readers and local worship leaders, as well as consulting Presbyteries to gain deeper understanding of how people in these roles are being used and what requirements Presbyteries have in terms of providing worship leaders for congregations.

3.8.4 This will build upon previous surveys which were commissioned by the General Assembly and the establishment in 2022 of a “Presbytery Worship Trainers Network” which brings people together to share experience and learning around equipping and empowering the roles of worship leading in local and Presbytery contexts.

3.8.5 There is a strong desire from the Faith Action Programme to continue a collaborative approach in this area, for example through supporting training run by Presbyteries and Academic Partners rather than duplication through national provision. However, there is also a recognition that church wide roles require some degree of consistency, and that this will become even more important as there is a development of clearer pathways into the Recognised Ministries.

3.9 PRAISE – Digital Ministry

3.9.1 The Faith Action Programme has created a cross-Church Digital Ministry team to develop the national digital strategy. This will hold in balanced tension two interconnected areas and the space in-between; mission with the unchurched, equipping and inspiring the existing Church with and towards relevant digital ministries, and the overlap of these two. The hope remains to develop an international digital presence, equipping the Church to digitally fulfil the 5 Marks of Mission. We are partnering with the Priority Areas Team, in seeking to address digital equity and inclusion. Work has begun with Presbyteries to ascertain the existing provision of digital ministry, aspirations at Presbytery level, and how these aspirations might be resourced and supported.

3.9.2 Sanctuary First continues to grow as a global digital ministry of the Church of Scotland with a renewed missional directive with their new minister, Rev Ruth Kennedy, pioneering and nurturing a flourishing creative community, shaping new projects for the unchurched and under-40s, and offering an international platform for engagement.

4. POVERTY

4.1 Last year the General Assembly passed this deliverance:

Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to share the Church’s practical experiences and policy ideas in relation to tackling poverty and helping people with the cost of living with the Scottish and UK Governments, and to report to the General Assembly of 2024.

4.2 The following report is presented following collaboration between the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group and the Priority Areas team.

4.3 Background

Since the financial crash of 2008/09, the Church of Scotland has repeatedly considered and made public calls in relation to growing inequality and rising poverty in our communities. The following list is just a selection of some of the topics in relation to public policy principles or ideas which have been brought to the General Assembly over the last 15 years: -

- Alternatives to GDP using these priorities for measuring the health of Scotland’s economy (2014)
- Benefit sanctions (2015)
- Credit Unions (2009, 2012, 2014)
- Devolving welfare and benefits to the Scottish Parliament (2014, 2019)
- Food insecurity (2012, 2014)
- Fuel poverty (2016, 2022)
- Funeral costs (2013, 2014, 2019)
- Justice and Markets (2009)
- Living Wage (2008, 2012)
- Personal debt and maximum rates for consumer credit (2012, 2014, 2021)
- Political rhetoric about poverty (2013, 2014)
- Poverty-proofing budgets (2010)
- Tax redistribution (2015, 2022)
- Tax transparency (2014)

- The Purposes of Economic Activity (2012): reducing inequality, ending poverty, ensuring sustainability and promoting mutuality
- Wealth inequality (2014, 2015, 2016)
- Welfare and social security (2013, 2014, 2019)

We continue to stand by our commitment to the Gospel bias to the poor – a bias not only to offer support and to provide for those experiencing poverty but to address the injustices that force people into poverty and keep them trapped there. It is in this tradition of speaking out, advocating with and building relationships with those in power that we bring this report.

4.4 The 2023 deliverance asked about *practical experience and policy ideas*. In the interests of brevity, we will not repeat the scriptural and theological basis for our engagement on this issue: we take it as a given. If you would like to explore these areas further we can recommend study of the 2012 report of the Special Commission on the Purposes of Economic Activity *A Right Relationship with Money*, the 2015 report of the Church and Society Council *Common Wealth? Sharing through tax and giving* and the 2016 and 2017 Church and Society Council *Speak Out!* Reports.

4.5 Principles

4.5.1 The work of the Church in Priority Areas has long been guided by the principle that the involvement of those who struggle daily against the reality of poverty must be central to the shaping of the Church's response. It is the role of the Church collectively to stand alongside and speak with those who are truly experts-by-experience. The priority for those in the most deprived communities has long been a commitment of the whole Church, repeatedly reaffirmed by the General Assembly over many years. Working to overcome poverty is everyone's responsibility, not only those who are in Priority Areas – but their knowledge and experience is essential to understand and shape meaningful responses to injustice and inequality.

4.5.2 The Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group's vision is for the Church of Scotland to be empowered with knowledge, understanding and courage to respond to and pursue issues of social justice and public life both within the Church and in wider society, using our distinct Christian voice to influence policies and decision making.

4.5.3 In relation to policy work to tackle poverty, we are guided by the General Assembly, which in 2014 agreed to: *Affirm that the primary aim of the welfare system is to enhance human dignity for all, so that every citizen may live life in all its fullness, and urge all consideration of welfare policy to be characterised by the principles of fairness and compassion.*

4.6 Poverty Alliance

4.6.1 The Poverty Alliance is an anti-poverty umbrella group of a range of charities and civil society organisations. The Church of Scotland has been a member for many years and it remains an important part of our work and witness to be active in this secular/pluralist space.

4.6.2 The flagship campaigning activity of the Poverty Alliance is the annual 'Challenge Poverty Week', held each October. This is a key opportunity for the Church of Scotland to highlight its commitment to tackling poverty and to engage in conversations about this with wider society. We have a close working relationship to the Poverty Alliance, through representation on their board and through contributing to a working group who determined the policy asks for Challenge Poverty Week 2023.

4.6.3 For the second year running we ran an ecumenical in person event in partnership with the Xaverian missionaries at Conforti Institute which this year explored Minimum Income Guarantee. The event heard from Russell Gunson, chair of the Scottish Government's expert group, while also exploring the theological context and hearing from those with lived experience of poverty about how it would impact them.

4.7 Minimum Income Guarantee

4.7.1 In the 15 years since the financial crash, the impact of cuts and restrictions to social security has produced a welfare system which is failing the people it is meant to support. There are increasing issues in the labour market, with a majority of people in work still struggling against poverty (see the Report on Poverty in 2024 from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) at this link: <https://bit.ly/49FMvgD>) Low wages and increasing precarity in the job market have been compounded by the end of freedom of movement due to Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Charities like Christians Against Poverty and Citizens Advice Scotland report a growing number of people, (around 50% of their debt help client base), grappling with insufficient income and therefore experiencing destitution and debt.

4.7.2 In the 2021/22 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government made a commitment to begin work on a Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG). Since then, a MIG Steering Group and Expert Group were established to take forward this commitment. A MIG is a simple yet transformative idea that guarantees everyone in Scotland could secure a minimum acceptable standard of living and ensure that everyone has enough money for housing, food, and essentials, enabling people to live a decent, dignified, healthy and financially secure life. A Minimum Income Guarantee is a policy proposal which has emerged as a response to these longstanding issues. The idea is the setting of a minimum level of income beneath which no one is allowed to fall. There is cross-party support for it in the Scottish Parliament and a Scottish Government commissioned independent expert group is expected to report in 2024.

4.8 What is a Minimum Income Guarantee?

4.8.1 A Minimum Income Guarantee is a guaranteed level of income beneath which no individual living in Scotland would fall, this would be yours by right. It is in essence a simple, yet highly transformative initiative that would provide adequate income, tailored to the needs of a household, to guarantee the stability needed for people to realize their potential.

4.8.2 Key features of a Minimum Income Guarantee include:

- A minimum income set to ensure an acceptable standard of living that promotes dignity and a decent quality of life;
- Designed to recognize our distinct needs which vary by person and/or family – not a flat payment;
- Clearly focused on tackling poverty, inequality and financial insecurity;
- A suite of interventions – including to reform collective services, the world of work and social security; and
- Accessible to all of us with a clear focus on reducing inequalities – considering the specific needs of women (particularly lone parents) and disabled people.

4.8.3 MIG is more than just a social security proposal, and is made up of several complementary parts:

- Reform to the world of work
- Reduced costs for essentials
- A Minimum Income Guarantee payment

4.8.4 There are key differences between a Universal Basic Income (or Citizen’s Income) and a Minimum Income Guarantee. Universal Basic Income is paid to everyone, regardless of their income, and is a flat payment, regardless of circumstances. By contrast, a Minimum Income Guarantee follows the principles of targeting and tailoring, in that it takes account of household or individual circumstances and is only paid in full to people on low incomes.

4.8.5 Universal Basic Income was considered by the Church and Society Council in its 2015 report *Common Wealth? Sharing through tax and giving* but at the time the Council declined to endorse the idea, instead saying more thinking was needed. We now think that the proposal for a Minimum Income Guarantee is a more developed idea that could make the single biggest difference to dramatically reducing poverty whose time for implementation has now come.

4.8.6 The Scottish Government’s Expert Group made an interim report in March 2023 which found that:

- It is likely that a full Scottish Minimum Income Guarantee may need further devolution of powers, but that some progress can be made under the existing constitutional framework.
- The Minimum Income Guarantee level, in its full form, should be set somewhere between the relative poverty line (a household is in relative poverty if their combined net income from all income sources is below the poverty line, defined as 60% of the UK median household income – income of £150 per week in 2022 after housing costs) and the Minimum Income Standard (£567 a week for a single person, source, JRF <https://bit.ly/3TsSyj5>) for different individual and household circumstances. This would be higher than existing UK benefit levels.
- The Minimum Income Guarantee in its full form should be set to secure a dignified quality of life for all. This would vary by individual and household need, and should be informed by the general public and prioritise lived experience.
- The uprating of the Minimum Income Guarantee should consider real changes to the cost of living in a timely manner. This would move away from arbitrary levels of payments set by politicians. A Minimum Income Guarantee needs to be responsive to real and immediate need.
- To realise a Minimum Income Guarantee, reforms to the world of work will be needed, to ensure work is equitable, flexible and accessible to all.
- A Minimum Income Guarantee will need to reduce as people and households see increases income.
- In its full form, a Minimum Income Guarantee would be designed to replace many of the existing UK-wide income-assessed social security payments in Scotland, such as Universal Credit.
- For a Minimum Income Guarantee to deliver its core principles, it would see an end to the existing caps, freezes, limits and waits built in to the current UK system, alongside an end to the sanctions and conditionality regime.

4.8.7 MIG has received a strong endorsement from those attending the Priority Areas events where it has been explored and it is the view of the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group that this policy idea represents that paradigm shift that is required to really tackle poverty in Scotland. It is hard to fully articulate the seismic difference that an adequate income would make to hundreds of thousands of people across Scotland; providing enough to have the dignity to live a decent, healthy and financially secure life; a foundation to build from. The opportunity for people to realise their potential, not just to escape the all-consuming burden of debt and poverty, but to be able to flourish.

4.8.8 Given that Minimum Income Guarantee is an area of policy with strong government support and where all political parties in Holyrood are represented in its development, it would be helpful for the Church of Scotland to explore it further, particularly bringing in a theological perspective and the voices of those with lived experience of poverty. We expect there will be a strong desire to continue to work ecumenically and with other faith groups where there is a commitment to tackling poverty in Scotland.

4.8.9 Summary

- The safety net and social contract across the UK has frayed to unprecedented levels – we have a social insecurity system, starved of investment, with destitution built-in.
- A MIG is a simple but transformational idea. – There should be a guaranteed minimum level of income beneath which no one is allowed to fall, distinct from UBI or existing UC system.
- Any payments made by a MIG would vary by individual/household need and offer chance to value unpaid work.
- A MIG may be simple in principle but it will be difficult and complicated to deliver in practice – but it would be worth it. It could transform levels of poverty and inequality in Scotland, recognising the innate value in everyone living in Scotland and creating opportunities for people to realise their potential.

- A MIG is more than social security. It will need to combine reforms to work, costs infrastructure such as travel and child care and social security to succeed.
- We can make progress now, but further powers likely needed to deliver on full potential.

4.9 The Big Conversation / Priority Areas Consultation and Networking

4.9.1 The Big Conversation is an opportunity for people from Priority Areas congregations and communities to meet together each year and is also open to anyone from the Church of Scotland who is committed to tackling poverty in their context. Our 2023 event was a moment for people to come together in the middle of a period of significant change, with many feeling weary from the impact of the pandemic and Presbytery Mission Planning.

4.9.2 We heard from keynote speakers and partner organisations, but the most impactful contributions were hearing the stories from Priority Areas congregations about the work they are doing in their communities. This brought home how big an impact the Church of Scotland is making in the lives of people in Priority Areas communities, the majority of whom are not church members. There are signs of people and communities flourishing around the country and there is a tension about how this relates to a push for numerical growth.

4.9.3 The fragility of mission and ministry in Priority Areas was also highlighted, with projects often relying on small numbers of staff and volunteers and short-term funding. With a reduction in staffing across the country, the need for networking and sharing expertise is crucial. Priority Areas also continue to hold a weekly online drop-in session on Friday mornings called the Wee Conversation, open to anyone interested in anti-poverty work.

4.10 Priority Areas Learning Programme

4.10.1 Last year saw the second year of our Building Worship Teams training, run jointly by Priority Areas and the Wild Goose Resource Group. This is designed to be suitable for any level of experience and focuses on building the confidence and creativity of people in congregations to lead worship in their local congregation collaboratively and contextually. With the course now established we are exploring options to run this jointly with Presbyteries or to train people to deliver it and would be delighted to speak to any Presbyteries who are interested in this.

4.10.2 Our Learning Programme has been refreshed for 2024 after consultation with Priority Area congregations about what support they need. It will cover a range of topics including training by Kintsugi Hope for congregations to run mental health wellbeing groups and training by the Guild of Health for congregations to understand and engage in Christian healing ministry. Other topics will include how to design community projects and apply for funding, discipleship as a follow-on from community work, creative practice in worship, and understanding your community using a range of resource such as statistics and asset-based approaches.

4.11 Young Adult Volunteer Programme

4.11.1 In 2015 Priority Areas began a partnership agreement with Presbyterian Church of USA (PCUSA) to run the Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) Programme in Scotland. Since this agreement, the Church of Scotland have hosted 3-5 young adult volunteers per year, who are matched with volunteer placements in Priority Area parishes. Since 2021 the YAV programme has been based in Dundee where we committed to three years of support for congregations in order to create a consistent resource that would enable them to develop specific areas of work.

4.11.2 The YAV programme is mutually beneficial for both the placement churches and the young adult volunteers. The Priority Area congregations who host a YAV gain the assistance of a highly motivated young person, enabling them to grow their support and programmes of work with the local community. In parallel with this the YAV gains work experience, developing their skills and confidence alongside deepened understanding of poverty and mission. Some of the work we have seen flourishing as a result of this has included projects to combat food poverty, youth work provision and missional community outreach.

4.11.3 Following on from our time in Dundee, the YAV programme is moving to Irvine in 2024/25 to support the development of the newly united congregation there.

4.11.4 In 2022, the Church of Scotland extended its partnership with the YAV programme by recruiting and sending 5 young adult volunteers to the USA; in New York (2) and New Orleans (3). This development of the Church of Scotland's participation with the YAV programme linked directly to the strategic priorities of engaging with those under 40, the development of young leaders and more broadly pathways to recruitment. In line with the results of the Assembly Trustees' Prioritisation Exercise, the different components of the YAV programme will be kept under review. See

4.12 Presbytery Mission Planning

4.12.1 The Priority Areas national office team have sought to support congregations and Presbyteries throughout the Presbytery Mission Planning process where this was requested. They have also been looking to deepen links with the new Presbyteries in order to better support Priority Areas congregations.

4.12.2 Following the completion of Presbytery Mission Plans, we have been undertaking an analysis of the impact of the process on Priority Areas. There were particular concerns expressed by some congregations that the double weighting by which national allocations were determined has not been reflected in some Plans. We are keen to engage with Presbyteries to ensure that the Church of Scotland's priority for the poor is maintained where adjustments have been made to Priority Areas parishes, including looking at creative ways in which this can happen.

4.13 Fair Pay for Social Care

4.13.1 In June 2023, a Campaign for Fair Pay in Social Care was launched in a joint initiative between the Church of Scotland and the Catholic Church in Scotland, in collaboration with CrossReach to *"unite the views of the faith communities on an urgent call to Scottish Government for fair pay to all social care workers"*. The campaign draws attention to the recruitment crisis in social care and the recognised delay to deliver a promise of fair pay to the social care workforce. We are asking for at least the real living wage for all workers in the sector in the name of Mercy, Compassion and Equality of Opportunity. We are particularly concerned that this is an issue of gender justice given that

80% of care workers are women, a fact highlighted in the Fair Work Convention Report; *“Fair Work in Scotland’s Social Care Sector 2019”*.

4.13.2 The Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group (PLSJ) have promoted the campaign across the Church, and the Moderator and the PLSJ Programme Group Chair participated in a week of action in August 2023. Over 400 Faith Leaders have signed a Declaration and the campaign is now interfaith. All ministers and others taking the lead in caring initiatives within congregations are invited to get involved in the next steps of this campaign of which further details are now available. The Campaign was brought to the Scottish Government through a meeting between the Moderator, CrossReach and the Archbishop of Glasgow with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Care.

4.13.3 Letters to the Cabinet Secretary for the Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy and to the First Minister asking for an uplift in salaries in the 2024 budget have been sent and at the time of writing a meeting date with the Cabinet Secretary is to be finalised. The campaign is set to continue.

5. PLANET

5.1 The Net Zero Strategy Group, which at the time of writing sits under the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team’s Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group, includes members from the General Trustees, CrossReach, Eco Congregation Scotland, Parish Ministers and Elders. The Strategy Group has continued to work with the General Trustees, CrossReach and Eco-Congregation Scotland to promote the [Net Zero Strategy](#) and to raise awareness across the Church about how we can work towards the target of Net Zero by 2030. Implementation of the Net Zero Strategy requires co-ordinated and interdisciplinary effort across all entities in the Church, and this is taking time to develop. It also requires leadership at all levels, from the Assembly Trustees to Presbyteries and congregations. While the central Church plays a role in informing, enabling and supporting Presbyteries and congregations to take action, congregations need to make their own plans to cut emissions. A report on progress towards implementation of the Strategy is included in the table below.

5.2 [The Net Zero Pathway](#) is now available on line to help congregations identify practical actions towards saving energy and reducing their carbon emissions. Congregations and presbyteries are urged to use the Pathway. Produced in collaboration with the General Trustees (GTs), the Pathway provides practical actions and signposts to further sources of information. It includes everyday topics such as waste and recycling, reducing food waste and composting, tackling the issue of travel to church, and finance and investments, as well as advice from the GTs on saving energy in buildings. Webinars and other information relating to funding for energy saving projects are also provided, from partnerships with Eco-Congregation Scotland and the GTs.

5.3. The *Energy Footprint Tool* (EFT), which enables congregations to measure and record their energy use and carbon footprint, is finally being tested prior to piloting and introduction. There were significant delays in getting full approval within the Church of Scotland to use the Church of England tool, which were then further exacerbated by changes in staffing in the Church of England during that period. The data generated will map onto the GTs’ data sources about buildings, enabling the development of more informed strategies and plans. When the EFT is rolled out, Presbyteries are urged to support congregations in using it. Guidance for users will be available on the website.

5.4 Presbytery Climate Roadshows, organised in partnership with Christian Aid, Eco-Congregation Scotland and the Guild, are available for Presbyteries to host. At the time of writing, four Presbyteries have engaged with this opportunity and all are encouraged to do so. These networking events enable congregations to share experiences and hear about initiatives and support available to congregations. Please get in touch with the Net Zero Strategy Group if you would like a Net Zero presentation or a Climate Roadshow for your Presbytery or committee at FaithAction@churchofscotland.org.uk

5.5 The following table provides an update on progress on the Net Zero Strategy outcomes agreed by the 2023 General Assembly. The ‘rating’ mark indicates Green: on track, Amber: some issues or uncertainties, Red: major concerns

5.6

Net Zero Strategy Outcomes	Progress by Jan 2024	What action needed now and by whom?	Rating
1. 50% of congregations using the Energy Footprint Tool (EFT) to submit their data via the EFT system by 2025, rising to 75% by 2027	EFT tool developed & being tested for partial roll out by end 2024. Unlikely that 50% will have submitted data in the first year of full roll out.	FAPLT and GTs to continue with development and to co-ordinate roll out with Presbyteries and building officers when ready.	RED ongoing
2. All entities of the church have agreed a standardised emissions reporting system by 2024	Emissions reporting from direct energy use in congregation’s buildings and central offices and potentially from transport will be available when the EFT is fully launched and is being completed by congregations and managers of other non-residential buildings. EPCs for residential properties are also a standard that can be used to inform strategy.	The EFT needs to be rolled out and congregations supported to enter their data. FAPLT and the GTs are working with the IT Dept on this.	AMBER ongoing
3. National Church emissions reduction plan agreed by 2024	The ATs are investigating how to collect and collate information from different departments and systems to produce baseline data on emissions from travel and energy use. For reasons of capacity, no baseline data is available, and no reduction plan will be presented this year.	As EFT and other data sources become available, they can be used to develop strategic priorities for tackling emissions with all entities of the Church playing a role as appropriate e.g. GTs, Presbyteries, congregations, CrossReach, Housing & Loans etc. This is unlikely to be developed by the end of 2024.	RED
4. Review of buildings and land to identify feasibility, requirements, and priorities for Net Zero by 2025 and a carbon management plan for all land owned by The Church by 2025.	The GTs have continued to support congregations in fabric and efficiency matters, either through the guidance of Presbytery Buildings Officers or financial support in the form of grants and loans. The GTs have worked with FAPLT and IT in the development of the EFT, which will play an important part in prioritising investment in efficiency measures.	<p>The GTs have encouraged congregations to submit applications for works to their buildings, via Presbytery, and this includes net zero measures.</p> <p>The GTs are ready to engage with congregations who wish to utilise Glebe land which becomes vacant for net zero initiatives.</p> <p>The GTs are working with Eco Congregation Scotland to develop guidance on audits and surveys which would identify the most appropriate interventions, test viability and access funding.</p>	AMBER
5. Net Zero Pathway available for churches by end of 2022 50% of congregations are submitting additional annual activity data by 2025, rising to 75% by 2027.	Net Zero Pathway has been available since September 2023. This enables congregations to submit data on their carbon emissions through the Climate Stewards, and signposts on actions to reduce emissions. It is not known how many congregations are using this resource.	FAPLT and Presbyteries can encourage congregations to use the Pathway and to use Climate Stewards to collect data on their energy footprint.	GREEN

Net Zero Strategy Outcomes	Progress by Jan 2024	What action needed now and by whom?	Rating
6. All areas of The Church of Scotland understand their emissions footprint by 2024	See (2) above. No data on emissions footprint has yet been published by any area of the Church. The EFT, once completed by congregations and building managers, will enable them to see their energy emissions footprint and the associated carbon emissions, in relation to others and in relation to the occupancy of their buildings. It will also provide next steps advice on lowering these emissions. The Pathway enables congregations to enter data to understand the footprint of their day to day operations. CrossReach have recruited specialist staff in this area. Lack of capacity hampers progress.	Congregations, Presbyteries and entities including CrossReach and Housing and Loans Trust, as well as the ATs, continue to take action to improve their understand of their emissions.	AMBER /RED
7. All areas of The Church of Scotland understand the emissions footprint of their investment portfolio by 2025	<p>The Investors Trust Growth Fund’s Environmental, Social and Governance Activities Report includes information on the relative carbon footprint of its investments.</p> <p>An Ethical Oversight Committee for the Investors Trust was set up following the 2023 GA and they will help to take this forward.</p> <p>The Pension Trustees Statement of Principles include Environmental, Social and Governance. These principles are applied in their investment decisions.</p> <p>The current staff pensions scheme is provided through Legal & General. There are two default pension funds selected by the Church. Neither of these funds provide information on their carbon footprint.</p>	The Investment Trust, Pension Trustees and the ATs are responsible.	AMBER
8. From 2024, Net Zero and emissions reductions will be considered in all new policies.	CSC policy review takes into account emissions reductions in all new policies as of Feb 24. Hybrid Working; revised Travel Policies; increased use of video conferencing; and replacing lighting with LEDs.	ATs are responsible for CSC policy review.	AMBER
9. All areas of The Church to review operational policies and guidelines that influence decision making. Undertake to update any relevant policies that have the potential to lower the emissions impact of operations by 2025	In the summer of 2023, the NZ Strategy Group sought meetings with 19 National Church Committees and all Presbytery Clerks to discuss the Strategy and how it affects their area of work. Six Committees and four Presbyteries have engaged as at February 2024.	More work is needed to engage committees and Presbyteries and to get Net Zero onto their agendas.	RED

Net Zero Strategy Outcomes	Progress by Jan 2024	What action needed now and by whom?	Rating
10. All staff in all areas of The Church are briefed and Net Zero aware by 2023	Awareness raising efforts to staff, congregations and Presbyteries include: Presentations to All Staff Meetings for Central Services Staff, Life and Work & Comms work, Presbytery Climate Roadshows, in partnership with Christian Aid, EcoCongregation Scotland and the Guild have been arranged in 4 Presbyteries so far. NZ work being discussed with staff working with youth initiatives and the Guild.	A resourced engagement strategy would ensure a more consistent and sustained approach. Conversations with the ATs about how this might be achieved are expected.	AMBER
11. Care for Creation and climate justice will be evident in church teaching and ministry.	Weekly Worship materials were developed for 4th June 2023 and 2024 materials are in development. Christian Aid's prayers for Climate Justice have been promoted. Churches which are part EcoCongregation Scotland can access their worship resources. Stewardship Resources on the Church website include an environmental theme in the "Narrative of Generosity".	FAPLT continue to work with the Comms Team on this.	GREEN
12. Church is visibly engaged, participating and challenging world leaders at the highest levels of international debate	The Moderator and the SCPO have engaged with MSPs, the First Minister and with MPs in these issues during visits to parliaments. As part of the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition, and as a partner of Christian Aid the Church has been represented in discussions on Climate Justice around COP 28 in the Scottish and UK parliaments. FAPLT responds to policy consultations on relevant areas.	FAPLT will continue to promote these issues with decision-makers as part of the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office's role.	GREEN
13. Church is visibly engaged with staff, congregations and its entities to ensure their views, experience and, business operational and service needs inform policies, strategies and actions towards meeting the net zero targets.	Means of engagement with staff, congregations and committees are detailed under awareness raising. Progress is reported to the GA. The multi-stakeholder nature of the Net Zero Strategy Group enables the group to share perspectives from different sectors of the Church.	Currently the Net Zero Strategy Group is under FAPLT but this is subject to review.	AMBER
14. All areas of The Church to look at the fiscal feasibility of offsetting and agree on national or independent offsetting strategies. These are developed by late 2024. Voluntary emissions offset and reporting opportunities available for congregations by 2024.	No work has been started on this. Research is required to inform a strategy on off-setting. Lack of expertise and resources have hampered progress.	Research into offsetting is needed, to be undertaken by the Church, both at national, Presbytery, and congregational level..	RED

6. PRESENCE

6.1 New Worshipping Communities

6.1.1 It remains the goal of the Church of Scotland to establish at least 100 new worshipping communities in the coming years. Work undertaken by staff in the Faith Nurture Forum of previous years has established that we are well over halfway towards that goal. FAPLT continues to collect information, and will share that in ways which are helpful. We are part of the Scottish Fresh Expressions Network. For the 2025 General Assembly, FAPLT plans to bring much more information on where new worshipping communities and church plants are thriving, as well as plans for resourcing and developing further church planting and new worshipping communities across the nation.

6.1.2 In the meantime, we are taking time to learn from other denominations and partner organisations about their approaches to church plants. Members of FAPLT and others are participating in the Scottish Church Planters Network, and speaking with the relevant staff members in other denominations about their church planting strategy. Partnerships with Forge/Cairn have been developing too, with 30 Church of Scotland ministers and members participating in the Introduction To Pioneering course in early 2024, and Church of Scotland church plants benefitting from funding and training. New College and Trinity College have successfully delivered courses in New Worshipping Communities and reaching out in the new normal.

6.1.3 Seeds for Growth funding exists to enable church planting and new worshipping communities. Applications are invited from for congregations and Presbyteries applications. We would encourage congregations and Presbyteries, as they feel ready in their emerging new shape, to go ahead and discuss with Seeds for Growth the new worshipping communities they are seeking to develop. Please note that all applications to Seeds for Growth require to be approved by Presbytery. More information on Seeds for Growth can be accessed at this link: <https://bit.ly/3l8zXST>

6.2 The Church of Scotland Establishments in Israel

6.2.1 In 2023, our Establishments were all operating very well, until the war began on 7 October 2023. Since then, there have been challenging times for each of these as would be expected, with the Hotels facing a complete stop of tourism, and the School faced with international students leaving and local parents faced with unemployment and reduction of income. The Boards of Directors and Governors are working closely with the staff to support them in decision making in these difficult times.

6.2.2 Tabeetha School will need major investment to its buildings over the coming years, and the Board of Governors is engaged in this process. Much of the funding required will need to come from donors.

6.3 Other Areas of Work

6.3.1 During 2023, a rationalisation process has taken place with regards to the Furlough Properties owned by the Church. In the coming months, it is expected that some of these properties will be sold as they are no longer required, and remaining properties will be used either to service both the needs of the Church and its partners, or to produce commercial income for the Church.

6.3.2 At the time of writing the Resource and Presence Programme Group are in conversations with the Assembly Trustees with regards to future plans for the Scottish Storytelling Centre and John Knox House.

6.4 International Partnerships

6.4.1 Africa

6.4.1.1 Malawi – Church of Central Africa Presbyterian 100th anniversary

6.4.1.1.1 In August 2024, the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) will mark the centenary of its formation in 1924. The theme of the anniversary celebrations is *“He has done great things for us” Psalm 126:3*. Plans include events to celebrate the impact of CCAP in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe in the last 100 years, while emphasising and focussing on how the church can be prepared for the future. With so many Scottish links, it is a great honour that the Moderator of the General Assembly has been invited to the high-level celebrations and will visit some of the schools, hospitals and universities of the CCAP.

6.4.1.1.2 Currently, CCAP membership in Malawi is estimated at 2.8 million, with some 200,000 in Zambia, and 150,000 in Zimbabwe, making a total of more than 3.1 million members. Its worship services are thronged by people of all ages, though with a preponderance of young people. Its diaconal work is spearheaded by the ubiquitous Women’s Guild, which ministers to the sick and vulnerable in a context where state provision is minimal or absent. It has thousands of primary schools, numerous secondary schools and four universities. Its hospitals and clinics play a prominent role in the provision of healthcare. Its track record of contributing prophetically to national life at times of crisis ensures that its witness within Malawi’s public life is highly respected. There is much for which to give thanks to God!

6.4.1.1.3 The centenary will surely be an occasion of profound thanksgiving. At the same time, it offers an opportunity to take stock. The union of 1924 was a triumph of missionary imagination – a church that transcended the missions from which it came and that would have a fully African identity. Nevertheless, it also demonstrated the limitations of missionary paternalism as the Missions continued to operate separately under European-only Mission Councils. When the Missions eventually handed over their assets and responsibilities to the CCAP in the late 1950s, each Mission handed over to the Synod with which it was connected, not to the CCAP as a whole. The result is that, even to this day, property, power and resources are concentrated at Synod level. The General Assembly has often struggled to find a meaningful role and to exercise the authority that it ought to enjoy as the supreme court. With Malawi’s politics prone to operating along regional lines, the Synods are vulnerable to political manipulation that has driven them apart at times. The centenary provides an opportunity to take further steps towards the fulfilment of the vision that inspired the formation of the CCAP.

6.4.1.1.4 An aspect of the dream that has been fulfilled is that the CCAP has become a truly African church, operating under fully African leadership. This is an unmistakable reality today. The Scottish origins of the CCAP continue to be greatly cherished.

6.4.1.1.5 The Innerleithen, Traquair and Walkerburn partnership with CCAP Thondwe Congregation in Zomba Presbytery in Malawi goes from strength to strength. Rooted in the church, its branches reach out into the community, both in Scotland and Malawi, where links with the schools, cafés, and even the local hairdressers, are flourishing. Although the Scottish partners are able to raise funds for projects, particularly after events like Cyclone Freddy in 2023 where help was needed for those who had lost homes and possessions, the funding is not seen as the most important aspect of the partnership but it is the developing friendships and opportunity for mission outreach.

6.4.1.2 South Sudan

6.4.1.2.1 One of the hoped-for outcomes of the Pilgrimage for Peace in 2023 to South Sudan was the holding of free and fair elections in December 2024. Key issues still to be resolved, according to the Head of the UN Mission in South Sudan are: a new permanent constitutional framework; voter registration details; an election security plan; well trained, equipped, and unified security forces; and a mechanism for resolving disputes over results. At the time of writing (Feb 2024) these were still not in place, although the UN Head reported there was still time to get them into place in time for elections. South Sudan has also had to face the challenge of the fighting in neighbouring Sudan which has meant people escaping from Sudan heading into South Sudan to seek safety and shelter, exacerbating the already difficult situation in South Sudan.

6.4.1.2.2 The Presbyterian Church in South Sudan (PCOSS) is scheduled to hold its next General Assembly in November 2024, and it is to be hoped and prayed that this will lead to a new united leadership. The PCOSS has two leadership groups vying for control, and while there have been some signals of willingness to talk to each other and consider how best to cooperate, it is not an easy process and one with considerable hurdles before any resolution will come about. Dr Riek Machar, the First Vice President of the Republic of South Sudan, is a prominent Presbyterian and has been seeking to support efforts for reconciliation.

6.4.1.2.3 The search for peace in solidarity must continue to be pursued and there has been ongoing contact between the Vatican, Anglican Communion and Presbyterians to keep alive the original vision of the Peace Pilgrimage that the people of South Sudan may know a permanent and sustainable peace in a land bursting with human and natural potential.

6.4.2 Europe

6.4.2.1 Italy – 850th Anniversary of the Waldensians

6.4.2.1.1 2024 marks the 850th anniversary of the birth of the Waldensian movement, in Lyon in 1174, which supported the need for the spiritual renewal of Christianity through direct access to Scripture, the free preaching of the gospel, the poverty of the church, and its separation from political power, overcoming the barrier between clergy and lay people. In 1632, the movement adhered to the Protestant Reformation, becoming the Waldensian Evangelical Church. Despite persecutions and prejudices, it has continued to support the inspiring principles of its origins despite the profound changes of the modern age.

6.4.2.1.2 On the eve of this anniversary year, the Moderator was able to visit Rome and make a visit to the Waldensian Church, engaging with the Moderator, Deacon Alessandra Trotta, to discuss many issues of contemporary shared relevance, including the work of Mediterranean Hope, Diaconal ministries, such as care for the elderly, violence against women, involvement of youth, and theological education for those training for ministry and for the whole people of God. The General Assembly has enjoyed many centuries of friendship with the Waldensian Church and give thanks for its 850th anniversary and pray God's blessings on its contemporary work and witness.

6.4.2.2 Reformed Ecumenical Liaison Officer & Minister: St Andrew's, Rome

6.4.2.2.1 There was great delight in the two services of Introduction for the Rev Tara Curlewis as Minister of St Andrew's Church Rome in the morning, and as Reformed Ecumenical Liaison Officer of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in Piazza Cavour Waldensian Church in the evening of Sunday Nov 5, 2023. Both were well attended and there was a palpable sense of joy and timeliness in the beginnings of these ministries. As part of the introduction liturgy, copies of *the Saint Margaret Declaration*, *the Saint Andrew Declaration*, and *the Columba Declaration* were presented to the new minister. Tara will minister to the congregation and also build connections with the Vatican and the other World Communions with representatives in Rome on behalf of the Reformed family. Tara is developing links with Lothian and Borders Presbytery as their Mission Partner and was able to make an initial visit in February.

6.4.3 Asia

6.4.3.1 India

6.4.3.1.1 One of the candidates for ministry in the Church of Scotland, Ms Adaeze Goziem-Ibonye, heard a presentation by Carol Finlay about the international connections of the Church of Scotland, and approached Carol about any possibilities of doing part of her probation in a partner church. Adaeze spent three months of probation with the Diocese of Madurai-Ramnad within the Church of South India (CSI).

6.4.3.1.2 Based at the CSI Cathedral Madura and supervised by Rev. J. Ebenezer Joshua, Adaeze's duties opened up a different way of ministry through all parts of Madurai-Ramnad Diocese, covering six towns and many villages. Adaeze participated in Sunday services, conducted evening English services and helped at weddings, baptism, funeral and marriage counselling sessions.

6.4.3.1.3 Adaeze appreciated her three-month placement, and felt she had learned and grown through the process which helped her prepare for ministry in Scotland. *“I was given the opportunity to further appreciate and understand that every institution, and ministry, have their challenges. Ministries all over deal with different, diverse, and contextual challenges, which is managed and faced according to the environment. It has prepared me for a more openminded Ecumenism going forward in my ministry.”*

6.4.3.2 Myanmar

6.4.3.2.1 In late 2023, The Church of Scotland was pleased to welcome to Scotland the Rev Pek Muan Cuang, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar (PCM). In meetings with the Moderator and Principal Clerk he highlighted how the civil war still ongoing and how much of the military action and resistance was taking place in the area where the Presbyterian Church was most present. In late February, and early March 2024, there was bombing and shooting in Tahan, where the Presbyterian Church is centred, with many fleeing the area. The government ordered a compulsory conscription, which resulted in young people fleeing their homes and the church reported many in hiding to avoid being conscripted. Rev Pek asked the church here to continue to remember the Church in Myanmar and the difficult situation there and to keep them in our prayers.

6.4.4 More Information

6.4.4.1 Further information on our international partnerships can be found on the General Assembly pages of the Church of Scotland website, including information on Mission Partners in Malawi; the work of Mediterranean Hope; South Korea; as well as Lebanon and Syria.

7. PEACE

7.1 Israel and Palestine

7.1.1 The 2019 General Assembly committed to *‘continue the Church’s support for a peace which is based on justice and love with equal rights for all’*.

7.1.2 On the 7 October 2023, Hamas launched an horrific attack into southern Israel, leading to the deaths of around 1,200 people, alongside the capture of over 200 hostages. Israel’s response has added enormously to the toll of civilian suffering, due to the large-scale military operation in Gaza, by land, sea, and air, which has caused massive civilian casualties (over 30,000 at the time of writing), extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure, and the displacement of the overwhelming majority of the population.

7.1.3 In the Guardian on Oct 22, 2023, the Chief Rabbi is quoted as saying: *‘Those who do not condemn, condone.’*¹ It is right for the Church to condemn the terror of Hamas, and to demand the release of every hostage. It is also right to condemn the widespread destruction of life, homes, hospitals, and health centres, by the Israeli military, and the deprivation of food and medicine which is leading to a humanitarian disaster. Our partner, the Near East Council of Churches (NECC), who are part of the Department of Services for Palestinian Refugees, wrote about their experiences in December:

7.1.3.1 *Unfortunately, our medical centre in the Al-Daraj area has been bombarded and levelled to the ground, and the primary health care clinics, the pharmacy, the physiotherapy, the optical and the dental clinics and the psychosocial unit, do not exist anymore... nobody from our staff was there but unfortunately tens of neighbours who used to be our clients were killed and injured in that bombardment.*

7.1.3.2 *Nevertheless, our staff are proceeding in response to the huge needs and to reduce the pain and suffering of the people in Gaza; we are proud of them, we believe that they are real heroes, they are standing for care and support, working days and nights while trying to take care of their family members and themselves.*

7.1.3.3 *NECC are working with the forcibly displaced people in the south of the Gaza Strip, targeting Psychosocial interventions, first aid training, the distribution of health kits, and providing medical services where they can. As they say, “For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me; I was naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.” Matthew 25:35-36.*

7.1.4 Life in the West Bank has been significantly affected too, with lockdowns on all Palestinian cities, and the lifeblood of tourism absent. Violence has spread rapidly, and many Palestinians have been killed by military forces and settlers, with thousands injured.

7.1.5 In Israel, whilst many brave Jewish Israelis are standing up against what is being done in their name, Arab-Jewish tension has risen exponentially, with a deep distrust of the other. There have been concerning reports of citizens being arrested for speaking out against the actions of the Government, and for many Arab citizens, there is a greater fear that they are no longer welcome in their own country.

7.1.6 We pray for those affected, those who have lost loved ones, and those who have lost their homes, security, and freedom. We pray for those in authority to find a different way to bring an end to the current violence and intolerance, to see the humanity in the other, and to solve this 75-year-old conflict.

7.1.7 The Church of Scotland mourns for all the innocent lives that have been lost. The General Assembly has long spoken about the unsustainability of the status quo in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. A new solution must be found, and despite the chances of a two-state solution receding rapidly, the General Assembly’s call over many years is something to reaffirm: A State of Palestine must be recognised by the International Community, and that there must be serious action around how all people of the land can live together.

7.1.8 At the General Assembly 2023, the Jewish-Christian Glossary was applauded and approved. This is a piece of work which can help Christians and Jews better understand each other. At the same time, the Church must be able to speak out, as a friend, about issues and using words which might be difficult for some people to hear. We are aware that there is terminology that has not been covered by the Glossary which would be useful to develop. The Church of Scotland has a long history of speaking out against injustice, and it is important that as a Church, we properly consider the words that we use to describe these injustices.

7.1.9 It is important that our statements about the Israeli Occupation, and its devastating effect on both Israelis and Palestinians, are clear and unequivocal, and that we also call for adherence to International Law and International Humanitarian Law. In this it is important to hear from our Palestinian Christian friends in particular, and to find ways to create opportunities and spaces for interfaith dialogue.

7.1.10 Christian Presence in Israel and Palestine

7.1.10.1 The 2019 General Assembly committed to '*continue the Church's breadth of support for the presence of the Christian community in Israel and Palestine*'.

7.1.10.2 Even before the 7th of October, Palestinian Christians had been struggling under increased pressure, especially in Jerusalem. The outbreak of war has brought their plight into sharper focus, as settler groups have been encouraged to step up their encroachment onto church lands, including inside the Old City of Jerusalem. With tourism non-existent, the streams of Pilgrims that supported and sustained the dwindling Christian communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank, have stopped. Many Christians have taken the difficult decision to leave their homeland, unable to see any future in the Holy Land.

7.1.10.3 Churches and Church leaders have spoken out, often at great risk, against the way that many western Christians appear to have offered unwavering support² to Israel's war against the people of Palestine, and have written to challenge western theologians and church leaders who have voiced uncritical support to Israel to call them to repent and change.

7.1.10.4 Christians in Gaza, which numbered only 1000 prior to the 7th of October, have been suffering alongside their fellow Gazans. Some have been killed in the attacks on the area, others have been forced to flee south, although there is no guaranteed safe route or destination for them, and others have had to make the almost impossible decision to stay in their homes or churches, fearing what may happen if they leave. The war threatens to eliminate the Christian presence in the Strip for the first time in almost 2,000 years.

7.1.11 Our Presence in Israel and Palestine

7.1.11.1 The Church of Scotland has a history spanning more than 150 years in the land where Jesus lived. He called out injustices where he saw them, and spoke of truth and freedom, and as Christians, we are called to do the same.

7.1.11.2 Our physical presence, which consists of the Scots Hotel in Tiberias, the St Andrew's House Hotel in Jerusalem, our churches in both Jerusalem and Tiberias, and Tabeetha School in Jaffa, give spaces where people from different communities and with different beliefs and attitudes can find common ground. In a time of polarisation, we commend, and pray for those who are still working to hold these spaces, under challenging circumstances. This includes our 160 local staff, and our partnerships with local churches and other organisations which are working in political and religious arenas for justice with peace in the region. These partnerships are vital as we seek to understand the realities on the ground and amplify different approaches to peace-making.

7.1.11.3 Whilst our hotels have been closed to tourists since the outbreak of hostilities, the Scots hotel has been housing around 100 evacuees from the Northern border of Israel, creating amongst other things, a kindergarten and play area within the confines of the Hotel. Tabeetha School has continued its vital job of educating students of all backgrounds, religions and ethnicities – a living example of how multi-cultural and multi faith education and living can transform the minds of staff and students alike.

7.1.11.4 Following advice at the start of the war, our two Mission Partners in Israel temporarily came back to Scotland. They both returned to their work stations at the start of the year to continue the vital work of sharing with our partners, supporting our local staff, and sustaining the congregations. They are also engaging in the very real work of nurturing collaboration and mutual respect, and developing new initiatives to deepen our presence.

7.2 Integrity: Violence Against Women Task Group

7.2.1 The Church of Scotland violence against women task group, *Integrity*, has survived in the midst of significant odds since 2020. Loss of expert staff, significant cuts to its funding and the impact of Covid to name a few. More than survive, the group has achieved a great deal in the face of such challenges. Dedicated and enthusiastic group members have pooled resources and established a successful training programme which over the past four years worked with over 170 people from all roles in the Church. With the help of constructive feedback, the training developed into a reliably impactful learning resource which consistently demonstrated improved understanding and confidence of the participants who took part.

7.2.2 Since 2019, Integrity's strategy worked towards numerous outcomes under four themes of changing attitudes, representation and power, partnership, and capacity building. These four areas are all necessary components of realising a vision of the Church leading in the struggle to end violence against women. With continued cuts to funding and loss of personnel within the group, Integrity members have spent the majority of time from August to December 2023 renewing and reinvigorating this strategy. The group worked with an external facilitator to help them reflect on the successes of the past few years; make changes to their resources and prioritise the outcomes towards which Integrity could continue to work. The result of this time has been the production of a strategy that narrows outcomes from sixteen to four with a clearer and more achievable vision. This strategy, organised around a theory of change

model, better reflects the levers of influence available to the group and lays the strategic groundwork for building on past success. A theory of change model is one where a programme is defined around its long-term vision and then maps backward to identify necessary preconditions.

7.2.3 The new strategy still looks across the same thematic areas with an additional reference to governance so as to ensure Integrity is using its resources and has the ability to deliver plans and measure impact. The overall vision Integrity is working from is:

A Church where gender justice is central, where all are equally safe and respected, which actively seeks to build a world where all people, especially women and children, live free from gendered abuse and where attitudes that perpetuate and normalise abuse are challenged.

7.2.4 In order to achieve this vision Integrity is focusing on three top level outcomes:

- Those within the life of the Church are equipped to competently receive disclosures.
- Individuals and communities feel empowered to recognise and challenge harmful attitudes and gender stereotypes that support violent behaviour.
- Survivors are able to access appropriate support services through their Church.

7.2.5 There are numerous outcomes which these higher-level outcomes rely upon to succeed but are too numerous to list here. The activities Integrity will continue to develop will be the delivery of training, now in collaboration with rape crisis. This collaboration will ensure that experts in the field of gendered violence can help shape the learning resources Integrity can offer. This will be in the form of e-learning and facilitated training as a combined approach. Integrity will also continue to make progress on forming a community of congregations who are engaged and committed to this subject as it was instructed to do in collaboration with Faith Impact Forum in 2023.

7.2.6 With regard to the deliverance received last year to form a community around the violence against women charter, the group has decided to work with *Restored* and to act as a bridge between their network of beacon congregations and Church of Scotland congregations. *Restored* is a UK non-denominational Christian organisation raising awareness of domestic abuse in the Church and offering practical support to congregations as well as a survivor’s network for Christian women. This decision was reached due to lack of capacity within the group to build something from the ground up and out of the recognition that the support and guidance *Restored* can offer congregations is of a vastly better quality than what Integrity might do.

7.2.7 An additional development since last May has been Integrity’s acceptance into the Faith and Violence Against Women Coalition. Inclusion into this vast network spanning the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland has given Integrity the opportunity to collaborate and learn from numerous organisations across a number of faith traditions working in their own communities to end violence against women. Working with others who understand the complexities of how faith intersects with gendered violence will provide a great deal of wisdom and is hugely valuable for the ongoing development of current and future projects of Integrity. Indeed, like the community Integrity is designing to provide for Church of Scotland congregations, admission into such a network will give Integrity members a great deal of encouragement and support.

7.3 Refugees

7.3.1 The Church of Scotland has been consistent in its support for refugees and people seeking asylum across the UK. The Church has used its voice to speak out against the Illegal Migration Act and the Safety of Rwanda Bill, legislation that would erode the human rights of people seeking humanitarian protection. The Church also campaigned alongside other faith groups in the successful campaign to offer free bus travel for people in the asylum system.

7.3.2 The Moderator has hosted discussions between faith leaders and key leaders in the refugee sector. From those conversations has come a commitment to challenging the rise in hostile rhetoric towards migrants we are seeing repeated in our media, our politicians, and our communities. We will be developing a campaign to address dehumanising language, building on the success of last year’s [#HospitalityNotHostility](#) campaign.

7.3.3 Throughout Scotland congregations have been involved in providing care and support for New Scots, including people in the asylum system, people displaced from Ukraine, and people arriving through resettlement schemes. They are supported in this work by Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees (SFAR), a multi-faith partnership hosted by the Church of Scotland. SFAR provides support, advice, training, and resources freely to congregations, allowing them to play a leading role in the support and integration of refugees. In addition, SFAR has been engaging with the Scottish Government on the inclusion of faith in the upcoming New Scots Integration Strategy.

7.3.4 Congregations are encouraged to incorporate welcome and hospitality into their worship. Last year congregations participated in Sanctuary Sunday using the SFAR worship resource ‘[The God Who Sees Me](#)’. Churches will be encouraged to mark Sanctuary Sunday on 23rd June 2024 and to participate in celebrating Refugee Festival Scotland.

8. PARTNERSHIP

8.1 Life and Work

8.1.1 *'You do great work and we are indebted to you for keeping us abreast of developments in the Church. It's an excellent magazine and surpasses in quality the majority of magazines to be found elsewhere.'*

'I am a life-long reader of Life and Work and I have watched it go from strength to strength! I like the new format. Like so many people, I miss the long-favoured contributors when the time has come for them to retire. But then we can embrace the new!'

8.1.2 Life and Work remains a key connection resource with the work of the Church of Scotland for many people.

8.1.3 However, these are challenging times for both the magazine and the wider media. Life and Work has remained flexible and ready to adapt within the changing backdrop, with these challenges likely to continue. There has been a drop off in readership in early 2024 which, whilst concerning, affords an opportunity to revisit the format of the magazine and embrace changes that need to be made to develop a stronger magazine.

8.1.4 New income streams were developed during 2023 (including a number of commercial paid partnerships and funding to support the publication of the quarterly Gaelic Supplement from Bord na Gadhlig) and this area will continue to be developed in 2024.

8.1.5 The Editor remains grateful for the support of the Life and Work Advisory Committee and its collective wisdom and support.

8.1.6 To help shape and resource commissioners and followers of the General Assembly, digital access to the May issue of Life and Work is available here <https://digital.lifeandwork.org/magazine/reader/262207?pageNumber=1>

8.1.7 A digital supplement summarising the business of this General Assembly will also be available shortly after its conclusion at www.lifeandwork.org

8.2 The Church of Scotland HIV Aids Programme

8.2.1 The Church of Scotland HIV Programme continues to support projects of partner churches and organisations around the world. One of the recurring themes in the reports received is that stigma remains the number one issue for people living with HIV, despite the access to antiretroviral medication and opportunity to live a long and valued life. This is noted particularly in reports from our Scottish and our Asian partners. HIV is also seen to rise in times of war and migration due to lack of access to treatment while on the move. This year, this has been a particular problem for people in Gaza and in Ukraine. The latter have been supported by Christian Aid partners who have continued to work in the places where people remain in war torn Ukraine. Partners often report their gratitude for the small grants received, particularly when they realise they have been raised from donations in church following Souper Sunday events. The materials for this year's Souper Sunday appear on the Church website and can be accessed at this link: <https://bit.ly/48tW2pD>

8.3 Scottish Workplace Chaplaincy

8.3.1 Scottish Workplace Chaplaincy (SWC) is continuing to develop the workplace chaplaincy network along with the support of its dedicated volunteer chaplains. Initially, 30 chaplains chose to join the new, ecumenical agency in early 2023, having previously worked with the Workplace Chaplaincy Scotland. Once the welcoming of the 'existing' chaplains was over, the task of developing an induction programme began for new applicants. Three more chaplains have joined thus far.

8.3.2 During 2023, discussions took place with CrossReach to develop a pilot scheme involving chaplaincy support for its extensive range of care services. The scheme, involving five chaplains, supporting a diverse range of services, began in December 2023 and will run until the summer of 2024. This will be followed by a review, with the intention of providing chaplaincy support across all CrossReach services.

8.4 Christian Aid

8.4.1 We continue to engage closely with our colleagues in Christian Aid and Carol Finlay, Faith Action staff member, serves on the Christian Aid Advisory Board for Scotland. The engagement at congregational level remains an important part of our partnership and this includes opportunities for advocacy and campaigning, use of worship materials and of course fund raising. Christian Aid's strategic aims of reduction of poverty remains the overarching premise of their work, and the themes of climate justice, gender and debt reduction remain priorities. Strategic discussions around the partnership with Christian Aid nationally and at Presbytery level are ongoing.

8.5 Nomination to Housing and Loan Fund

8.5.1 The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team has a very close working relationship with the Housing and Loan Fund, which reports separately to the General Assembly. The Reverend Bruce Sinclair, minister of Jordanhill Parish Church, has served one term as the FAPLT nominee on Housing and Loan; he has agreed to serve a second term, and FAPLT presents his name for the agreement of the General Assembly.

8.6 St Andrew Press

8.6.1 In the publishing year ending 30 September 2023, Saint Andrew Press published two titles: *"The Church of Scotland Year Book 2023-24"*, and *"Being an Intergenerational Church"* by Suzi Farrant and Darren Philip which has been very well received.

8.6.2 In the current financial year (October 2023-September 2024) we look forward to publishing four titles, including the prestigious *Scottish Religious Poetry* edited by Linden Bicket, Emma Dymock and Alison Jack. The editors have been a model of professionalism throughout and secured sufficient grants to cover not only the cost of permission fees, but also to engage a specialist freelancer in copyright clearances. *Scottish Religious Poetry* will be published in hardback in June 2024. Other scheduled titles are *Finding Our Voice* by Neil Glover, *Living Generously* by Fiona Penny, Darren

Philip, Catherine Southern and Pauline Wilson and the next edition of the Year Book. Work on *God Welcomes All* the supplement to CH4 will, like its hymn book companion, will be published under the Canterbury Press imprint, with the full music edition appearing first, followed by the words and electronic words editions.

8.6.3 At the time of writing, two titles are scheduled for 2024-25, the Church of Scotland Yearbook; and The Retreat of Faith, a study of the secularisation of Scotland by Martyn Percy.

8.6.4 Sales

Financial year October 2022 to September 2023

Budget £76,000 Actual sales £64,478

Financial year October 2023 to September 2024

Budget £84,730 Sales to 31st December 2023 Budget £31,500 Actual £22,300

8.6.5 This deficit (£9,000) is due to under-performance of backlist (older) titles which we hope to improve on.

Church of Scotland Yearbook 2023-2024 sold 1280 copies / £12,200 YTD including despatch to all ministers in Church of Scotland.

Being an Intergenerational Church sold 184 copies / £700 YTD

The net income to the Church of Scotland from St Andrew Press in 2023 amounted to £21,560.

8.7 Interfaith Programme activity report

8.7.1 Antisemitism & Islamophobia

8.7.1.1 At the time of writing antisemitism levels have seen an increase by 147% since the same period in 2022. Jewish people have reported unprecedented levels of fear, fear that people will discover their or their children's Jewish identity. Attacks will range from physical assault, vandalism, stalking Jewish businesses with threatening phone calls and many more. It is noteworthy that according to figures provided by the Community Security Trust most of the antisemitic incidents in 2023 took place in the week immediately following the Hamas attacks on Israeli civilians rather than in the wake of an Israeli military response.

8.7.1.2 Islamophobia has also risen in the UK with individual Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim targeted with hate crime and speech. This is very much evident in the nature of anti-Muslim attacks in recent months which associate Muslims and Islam with the atrocities committed by Hamas on the 7th October or see the conflict in Gaza as part of a global war between Jews and Muslims.

8.7.1.3 The Church of Scotland should note this rise of both these forms of hate with alarm and offer solidarity with the Jewish and Muslim communities in helping them to face and challenge it. We must be vigilant that our response as a Church to events in Israel and Palestine is mindful of not veering into stereotypes, anti-Jewish or Muslim tropes and is altogether mindful of how it might affect Jews and Muslims in the UK. It is also important to note that it is not our place to view incidents in the UK as a natural outpouring of support for either Israel or Palestine. The objective of all hate crime is not to further human rights, instead it only diminishes the rights of religious minorities in the UK to live free from fear.

8.7.2 Interfaith Funding

8.7.2.1 It is noted with dismay the considerable funding challenges many interfaith bodies in Scotland and across the UK are facing. At the time of writing the Interfaith Network UK are facing the difficult decision to close due to the cessation of core funding from the UK government. This will leave a large vacuum of interfaith organising across England and the loss of an important regional partner for Interfaith Scotland. Interfaith Glasgow has faced the loss of core funding from Glasgow City Council and is seeking to maintain its commitment to interfaith cooperation across Scotland's most diverse cities. Many Church of Scotland congregations have been active in supporting Interfaith Glasgow's fundraising efforts and the Church of Scotland's equality officer will continue to work closely to support and seek avenues for collaboration where possible.

8.7.3 Jewish-Christian Glossary and Jewish-Christian Dialogue

8.7.3.1 Dialogues organised by the Council of Christians and Jews West of Scotland branch began to use the Jewish-Christian Glossary as source of reflection and mutual learning in Spring 2024 and will continue to develop and share learning with other groups. A similar effort is being made in Edinburgh. The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities are also hoping to bring this to University Campuses and take the glossary on a road show later in 2024. The Equalities Officer is working closely with all these groups.

8.7.3.2 The Equalities Officer is honoured to be involved in a ground-breaking Jewish-Muslim-Christian dialogue following as a response to the conflict in Gaza and corresponding rise in Islamophobia and antisemitism. This dialogue is organised by Interfaith Scotland and Interfaith Glasgow and is not intended to be a platform for debate but rather to give an open and honest space for community members to share the impact of this conflict on communities in Scotland.

8.8 UK General Election - Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office

8.8.1 The UK Parliament general election is expected to take place later this year. The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office has been working with Scottish and UK ecumenical partners to develop resources for congregations to encourage and support participation in and awareness of the process.

8.8.2 This includes encouraging congregations to share the Voter Champion initiative from Citizens UK, which asks community and faith groups and other organisations to encourage voter registration, to raise awareness about the

new requirement to present a valid form of photo identification if voting in-person, and to remind people about the importance of voting on polling day itself.

8.8.3 With CTBI, the Joint Public Issues Team and others, a new revised guidance for congregations holding hustings or election meetings have been produced. It is hoped that as many church-run hustings as possible can be organised to encourage church and wider community members to meet their candidates and hear their views.

8.8.4 After the election, the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office is planning to renew the 'Meet Your MP' project and we invite congregations and Presbyteries to engage in this relationship-building effort at public witness and advocacy.

9. PROGRAMME GROUP UPDATES

9.1 MISSION SUPPORT PROGRAMME GROUP

9.1.1 The Mission Support Programme Group (MSPG) has spent a significant amount of time listening to and learning from one another.

9.1.2 The remit for this Programme group is wide:

- Equipping, inspiring, resourcing and supporting the church locally, at Presbytery, and at the National level in mission
- Exploring new ways of being Church
- Developing the Church's ministry and mission in Priority Areas
- Informing worship, both traditional and digital, and developing a digital strategy
- Engaging with congregations through international education and support
- Supporting the work of the Education and Schools Group and the Gaelic group
- Overseeing Presbytery mission planning and international partnership support
- Supporting Ministries through pastoral care provision

9.1.3 Soon after launching, it became clear that we needed to co-opt additional members to address these challenges. Andrea Boyes, Stuart Finlayson, Gillian Rooney and Julie Torrance, have joined the group, with each of them bringing a unique skillset and insight. We have also begun the process of moving forward following the tragic passing of Richard Lloyd in December of last year, who had been appointed as Convener at the General Assembly of 2023.

9.1.4 As the church proceeds with the implementation of Mission Plans, the MSPG is aware that the word 'plan' has perhaps overtaken that of 'mission' in many aspects of the life of our church. As we seek to accompany the church in her journey of lament, healing, and moving forward, the MSPG acknowledges that their progress in their work has been slower than anticipated while also recognising the existing work which is already happening. For a variety of reasons, both the Programme Group and the Mission Support Staff Team have been, to a certain extent, in a holding pattern for reasons beyond anyone's control. The new Mission Support Manager, Sarah Johnson, formerly of Edinburgh City Mission, took up her post in mid-March and we very much look forward to working with her in shaping the work that is taken into the future. We note with gratitude the contribution of Shirley Grieve, who held this post up until August 2023.

9.1.5 We aspire to listen, respond and collaborate. In order that we may achieve this, the MSPG have appointed representatives to liaise with those Mission Directors in the Presbyteries, where they exist, and with those listed as Mission contacts within each Presbytery, in order that we may build a dialogue with them, to hear of the good news to be found in our Presbyteries and to learn of the ways in which we can offer help where required. We look forward to taking these conversations forward as the mission life of our church continues in order to support Presbyteries in supporting their congregations as they progress in many new and different ways over the years to come. We also look forward to learning of how Presbyteries might collaborate with each other and how those stories might be shared more effectively to support the *Missio Dei* which God has given the Church.

9.2 PUBLIC LIFE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

9.2.1 The remit of the Public Life and Social Justice (PLSJ) Programme Group includes a role to contribute to public life by developing and sharing the witness of the Church with government, parliament and civil society. Since the last General Assembly, the Programme Group has submitted or contributed to official responses in relation to:

- Abortion (Safe Access Zones) (Scotland) Bill
- Consultation on a Minimum Unit Price for alcohol
- Proposed Ecocide (Prevention) (Scotland) Bill
- Heat in Buildings (Scotland) Bill consultation
- Consultation on a Bill to End Conversion Practices (in development at the time of writing)

All the responses made by the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group are available on the Church of Scotland website: <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-views/responses-to-consultations>

9.2.2 The Programme Group has also supported or made a number of public statements in response to events or issue, including on:

- the Rwanda asylum seeker deportation scheme
- child poverty
- the Scottish budget
- land reform

9.2.3 The priorities and focus of the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group over the coming year is likely to be in relation to:

- Reports to GA2025 on an apology statement for historic slavery, and on the assisted dying review.
- Continuing to support the work of Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees, the Society Religion and Technology Project and Integrity: The Violence Against Women Task Group
- The outcomes and recommendations of the Priorities Project of the Assembly Trustees.
- Supporting good interfaith relations and developing links with other Churches and faith groups on issues where we have shared goals or vision, such as the Fair Pay in Social Care campaign.
- Responding to public issues and political/societal news as best we can, including supporting the Church in preparing for the next UK General Election.

9.3 PEOPLE AND TRAINING PROGRAMME GROUP

9.3.1 The People & Training Programme Group has responsibility for

- The training, discipleship and support of members and elders of the Church.
- The recruitment and training of those in the national ministries of the Church.

The Group is extremely grateful for the time invested by Presbyteries in developing partnership potential in many of these areas of work.

9.3.2 Calling

9.3.2.1 Building on the Theological Forum's report to the GA 2023, *'The Calling of the Church'*, the People and Training team are working to support a culture of 'Calling' for all of God's people across all its work.

9.3.2.2 Materials launched on Church of Scotland Learning: <https://bit.ly/4bJHHbw> in January 2024 enable us to explore what God might be calling us to, and the spiritual gifts which are given for this purpose.

9.3.2.3 Our Towards Ministry team engage with people wishing to discern or are applying for acceptance for training for our national ministries. This year we have introduced informal online and in-person events, to allow people to explore their calling. These *Celebration of Calling* days and *Conversations in Calling* courses are allowing people to take the first tentative steps of exploration without signing up to our more formal assessment processes.

9.3.2.4 *Ascend* has featured a number of short articles which have unpacked what Calling looks like; how we give God our Yes; and where it might lead us.

9.3.3 Apprenticeship Routes into Ministry

9.3.3.1 Following last year's deliverance regarding the development of an Apprenticeship Route, FAPLT will present a Supplementary Report, with proposals for the widening of training opportunities for our family of ministries.

9.3.4 National Assessors

9.3.4.1 Our team of National Assessors ensure they continue to understand the requirements for leaders of the Church, to identify those who can be trained to serve in national roles. The Supplementary Report will contain names of those being proposed to the GA in this role.

9.3.5 Leadership

9.3.5.1 We understand that the church of tomorrow needs leadership by resilient people who have a heart for God's people, God's word and God's world. Our leaders need a strength of relational ability and a confidence in leading us towards mission. All of us are able to identify, encourage and invest in those who carry even the beginnings of this potential.

9.3.5.2 Church of Scotland Learning has materials for groups or individuals who are taking first steps in leadership of any kind, as well as for Elders and Session Clerks. Supporting resources which could grow people in faith and mission are also ready to be used.

9.3.5.3 A good number of Churches, Presbyteries and individuals have used many of these materials already. You can sign up to the Platform using this link on <https://bit.ly/4bJHHbw> on the Church of Scotland website. There is great potential in the coming year to gather those who would develop and training others.

9.3.6 Admissions and Readmissions

9.3.6.1 Our Admissions process allows ordained ministers outwith our denomination and/or outwith the UK, to apply for entry into the ministry of the Church of Scotland. Given the slow release of vacant charges leading to a rise of those on Assistant Minister contracts, it is felt prudent to pause applications through Admissions for the time being.

9.3.6.2 Consultation with key stakeholders including previous familiarisation Candidates and Supervisors has been undertaken, with those entering familiarisation in 2024 piloting a more bespoke support and training programme. This will be brought to GA2025 together with a review of the relevant Admissions legislation.

9.3.7 Supervisors

9.3.7.1 We are extremely grateful to those who see as part of their Ministry calling, the importance of investing in the next generation who would serve in our national ministries. New training programmes have been very well received in 2023, and continuous ministerial development opportunities will be offered to all Supervisors in the coming year.

10. PRESBYTERY MISSION PLANNING

10.1 Background

10.1.1 When the General Assembly of 2021 passed what would become Act 8, the Presbytery Mission Plan Act, there were forty-four Presbyteries in the Church of Scotland. Since 1 January 2024, there are thirteen. All of these Presbyteries, save the Presbytery of Jerusalem, have been challenged, and changed, by Presbytery Mission Planning. While the impetus for the passing of the Act sits in a complex equation of finance, shortage of ministries, an oversupply of Church buildings, and an aging profile in the ordained ministry of word and sacrament, the lens of mission has been the critical eye through which the exercise has been viewed.

10.2 A demanding common task

10.2.1 The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team wishes to express its gratitude to all at Presbytery level who have worked tirelessly on Presbytery Mission Plans – Clerks, Conveners, those who served on Committees and project groups, those who consulted and met local congregations, and those who facilitated discussions which were often fraught and challenging. In last year’s Report of the Faith Nurture Forum to the General Assembly, the point was made Presbytery Mission Plans needed to focus on three different but complementary themes – creativity, comfort and challenge. FAPLT would like to reiterate these three themes, and to reaffirm that the best of the Church’s Presbytery Mission Plans succeed in showing these themes.

10.2.2 Members of the Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group (PMPiG) have engaged with Presbytery Conveners, and Presbytery Clerks on numerous occasions, and much work has been done using email exchanges, commenting on the detail in bases of adjustment. Other work has taken place at a strategic level, in advising Presbyteries and Planning Conveners on the overall thrust of their Presbytery Mission Plans, and on implementation issues. PMPiG has acted as a critical friend and has sought to ensure a consistent and equitable approach in collaboration with the Presbyteries of the Church of Scotland, offering learning and wisdom offered in conversations with many different people. It is entirely appropriate to pay tribute to the hard work which has gone into this exercise at Presbytery level.

10.3 Update

10.3.1 Of the twelve Presbyteries now responding to Presbytery Mission Planning, four are still outstanding in that they have not had a Presbytery Mission Plan approved. The Presbytery of Forth Valley and Clydesdale has made significant progress and is on track to have a plan agreed ahead of the General Assembly of 2024. The Presbytery of Lewis has now invoked the provisions of the Presbytery Review Panel process to assist it in agreeing a Presbytery Mission Plan. The former Presbyteries of Uist and Caithness, now part of Clèir Eilean Ì (Highlands and Hebrides), continue in conversation with the Planning Committee of the new Presbytery and PMPiG. The former Presbyteries of Moray and Abernethy also sought the involvement of the Presbytery Review Panel, and their plans were agreed in the latter part of 2023.

10.4 The Next Stage

10.4.1 Almost all Presbyteries are at the implementation stage of Mission Planning. This is as challenging as the exercise of compiling a Presbytery Mission Plan, and elsewhere in the volume of Reports to the General Assembly, comment is made on the challenge represented by tenure, and by the time-honoured principle of a congregation’s right to call its own minister, rather than have a minister imposed. PMPiG met formally with Presbytery Mission Planning Conveners and Presbytery Clerks in June 2023, and also attended the Clerks’ Forum at the end of February 2024.

10.5 Annual Evaluation and Development

10.5.1 The Presbytery Mission Plan provides for a process of annual evaluation and development. The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team believes that this dynamic aspect of Presbytery Mission Planning is critical, particularly in light of the experience of the Church since 2012. Despite a requirement in the 2003 Act for Presbyteries to undertake annual review of their Presbytery Plans, this did not happen on a consistent basis. In June 2023 PMPiG met with Presbytery Clerks and Planning Conveners and agreed that this first round of evaluation and development should be light touch, yet still robust, and that it would be conducted at a timescale to be agreed between PMPiG and the Presbyteries, with the Presbyteries in the driving seat in terms of determining the date. This was particularly important in the light of the creation of new Presbyteries which found themselves dealing with the legacy of plans created by their predecessor Presbyteries, with different approaches underlying the content of these Presbytery Mission Plans.

10.5.2 At the time of writing, three of these smaller Presbyteries which are now part of Clèir Eilean Ì had completed their annual evaluation and development, and that Presbytery has now received extract minutes from the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team noting its approval of the findings in that process of annual evaluation and development. The former Presbyteries of Lochaber; Ross; and Inverness completed that process of annual evaluation and development in the final months of 2023.

10.5.3 Further guidance on annual evaluation and development has been issued to all Presbyteries, and dates have been agreed with most Presbyteries for a schedule of annual evaluation and development with input from PMPiG and the General Trustees.

10.6 Ministries Numbers

10.6.1 The Presbytery Mission Plan Act requires that a proposed total number of ministry posts is presented annually to the General Assembly, outlining the disposition of posts to be funded by the Parish Staffing Fund, allocated among the Presbyteries, in each of the next five years, so that there is a five-year rolling plan for such allocations.

10.6.2 Discussions with the Assembly Trustees indicate that the figures presented to previous General Assembly will similarly apply for 2025 and through to the end of 2026 and thereafter, with any amendments coming to subsequent General Assemblies.

10.6.3 These numbers, as outlined in *Appendix VI*, will form the shape of the Church's ministry over the next five years. It is for the Assembly Trustees to determine the finances available, and to inform the General Assembly of these numbers.

10.6.4 As noted above, the landscape looks very different in terms of the shape of Presbyteries across Scotland. The General Assembly of 2022 instructed Presbyteries to ensure that, in the period up to the General Assembly of 2025, where a weighting of resources is allocated to part or parts of the area of a Presbytery, the allocation of ministry in the Presbytery Mission Plan is demonstrably distributed so as to fulfil the spirit and purpose of the weighting; and instructed the Forum to take this principle into account in approving Presbytery Mission Plans.

10.6.5 The numbers shown at Appendix VII represent the aggregate of weightings previously reported to the General Assembly and allocated across the 12 Presbyteries affected.

10.6.6 With the challenges presented by the new shape of Presbyteries, with the full spectrum of previous weightings of island; remote rural; rural; and urban all now present in virtually every Presbytery, a more nuanced approach will be required in allocating ministries. Additional information will be available as the results of the 2022 Scottish Census are made available in a usable format for the Church to use in forward planning, and the FAPLT will report into the General Assembly 2025 on initial findings arising out of that data.

10.7 Team Ministries

10.7.1 Conversations continue with those Presbyteries who have included Team Ministries in Mission Plans, as understood in the Presbytery Mission Plan Act. These are different from long standing teams comprising inducted minister, along with either MDS staff members or Associate Ministers. 9 of the 12 Presbyteries have some form of Team Ministry, as outlined in S.7 (10) of the PMPA, equating to 74 Team Ministries, in diverse places.

10.7.2 It is hoped to be in contact with these charges developing Team Ministries to explore what the challenges have been, and what the learning points are. As the work of Ministerial Education develops, so too will the training and support requirements develop for these areas where ministers and congregations are committed to working together more closely.

10.8 The Ecumenical Dimension

10.8.1 At the General Assembly of 2023, comment was made by one of the ecumenical visitors to the General Assembly, about some unfortunate local decision making where no consultation had taken place in one instance where a congregation of another denomination had been worshipping in a Church of Scotland building which the Presbytery had categorised as Category B, to be sold, let or otherwise disposed of. That General Assembly reaffirmed the ecumenical aspect of the secondary principles and existing guidance relating to the Presbytery Mission Plan Act and instructed the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to emphasise this in future guidance; and also instructed Presbyteries to consider this and articulate it more clearly in implementation and at the annual evaluation and development of Presbytery Mission Plans. Further information on this has been supplied by the Committee on Ecumenical Relations, and will be shared as part of PMPIG's work with the Presbyteries on Annual Evaluation and Development.

10.9 The Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act 8, 2021)

10.9.1 The Act was agreed by the General Assembly in 2021, some three years ago. The Legal Questions Committee has considered whether the Act requires changing at this point, and in consultation with that body, the FAPLT offers the changes outlined in Appendix VIII. These changes would allow Committees within the larger Presbyteries to exercise decision making on bases of adjustment using delegated powers, without the need to decide such matters at a Presbytery meeting, where all votes have been in favour.

11. REMITS AND THE CREATION OF PRESBYTERY MISSION PLANNING IMPLEMENTATION GROUP (PMPIG) AS AN ADDITIONAL PROGRAMME GROUP

11.1 In this first year of FAPLT's existence, it has become clear that it would be helpful for Presbytery Mission Planning Implementation Group (PMPIG) to be constituted as a separate Programme Group, on the same basis as the other Programme Groups in FAPLT, with its Convener being a Vice-Convener of FAPLT, and with PMPIG's membership (six plus Convener) appointed through the Nominations Committee, with the possibility of co-opting other Programme Group members subject to the approval by FAPLT of these co-options. Accordingly, in consultation with the Assembly Trustees, agreement has been reached on the creation of an additional Programme Group, to be known as PMPIG in the short term, in line with the contents of the remit attached as *Appendix IX*. The formal section of deliverance proposing this will be found in the Assembly Trustees Report.

Further work will take place on the remits of the other Programme Groups and of FAPLT itself.

12. FINANCIAL INFORMATION AND ALLOWANCES

12.1 Information re stipend levels and other allowances can be found at Appendix X.

In the name of the Committee

TOMMY MACNEIL, *Convener*
ALISTAIR CUMMING, *Vice-Convener (Resource and Presence)*
JONATHAN FLEMING, *Vice-Convener (Mission Support)*
EMMA JACKSON, *Vice-Convener (Public Life and Social Justice)*
BILL WISHART, *Vice-Convener (People and Training)*
KAY CATHCART, *Acting Secretary*

IN MEMORIAM

Richard Lloyd

Richard Lloyd took on the role as Vice-Convener of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and Convener of the Mission Support Programme Group following the General Assembly of 2023. After a brief period of illness, he died on Saturday 16th December. He had served as congregational facilitator for the Church’s Path of Renewal movement; as a facilitator for Future Focus, in Mission and Discipleship; as an Assembly appointed member of the Mission and Discipleship Council; and then on the Faith Nurture Forum for two years. He had been a member of the Scottish steering group for the Growing Young project and a member of the Church’s Intergenerational Church Task Group. Our prayers are with his wife Sue and his children.

Appendix i

Summary of activity as a result of the Deliverance of the 2023 General Assembly in relation to the reports of the Faith Nurture Forum and Faith Impact Forum.

Deliverance	Comment
FAITH NURTURE FORUM	
2. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team through the work of the Mission Support Programme Group to work with Priority Area Congregations and the supplementary network of congregations to ensure their stories, including the learning and experience from their mission are shared with the wider church via the Church’s website and other platforms.	Recording of stories, and listening, is happening on a regular basis. Wee conversations on a Friday attract a regular core of participants who share their stories.
3. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team through the work of the Mission Support Programme Group to support congregations’ and Presbyteries’ engagement with response to poverty.	See main report (Section 4)
4. Commend the work of the Education and Schools Group and instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team through the work of the Mission Support Programme Group to encourage Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions to support Ministers, paid workers and volunteers in their ministry to schools.	See main report (Section 2.4)
5. Urge Presbyteries to recognise their Local Education Representatives’ contributions to Local Authority policy and the welfare and holistic development of young people generally by encouraging networking across the Local Authority boundaries.	See main report (Section 2.1)
6. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team through the work of the Mission Support Programme Group to welcome new Gaelic-medium resources for children from Scottish Bible Society and the Gaelic Committee of the Church of Scotland, and urge Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions to be alert to opportunities for mission with Gaelic-speaking communities and schools, and to make use of the Gaelic-medium resources now available.	Significant work has taken place – Lego Church and other work.
7. Pass an Act on Ministries for Deaf Congregations as set out in Appendix i.	Implemented – further work on going to be reported to General Assembly of 2025
8. Pass an Act amending the Ordination of Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Deacons Act (Act I 2018) as set out in Appendix ii.	Implemented
9. Approve the allocation of the total number of planned ministry posts among the Presbyteries as contained in Appendix iii for 2024.	See figures for 2025 following in Appendices VI

Deliverance	Comment
<p>10. Reaffirm the ecumenical aspect of the secondary principles and existing guidance relating to the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021), and</p> <p>(a) instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to emphasise this in future guidance; and</p> <p>(b) instruct Presbyteries to consider this and articulate it more clearly in implementation and at the annual evaluation and development of Presbytery Mission Plans.</p>	<p>Helpful information has been provided by the Ecumenical Relations Committee, and guidance has been rewritten and will be further reframed as part of annual evaluation and development of Presbytery Mission Plans.</p>
<p>11. Note the proposal from the Diaconate Council to use endowment funds to create a part-time Development Worker post to research and shape proposals for the future of the Diaconate and instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to bring a report to a future General Assembly.</p>	<p>Job Description is finalised and is being evaluated; recruitment to take place post Easter 2024, with delay being due to staff pressures.</p>
<p>12. Re-appoint Rev Dorothy U Anderson as a Trustee of the Housing and Loan Fund for Retired Ministers and Widows and Widowers of Ministers, in the capacity of Chair of said Fund.</p>	<p>This was agreed, and it now falls to the General Assembly to approve the appointment of the Rev Bruce Sinclair for a further term. (Section 8.5)</p>
<p>13. Note the introduction from 1 January 2024 of an integrated support allowance of £250 per year for those in fulltime ministry.</p>	<p>This has been well subscribed by those who are eligible</p>
<p>14. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to commission or otherwise conduct a comprehensive independent survey of ministerial well-being with the aim of deepening understanding of the causes of work-related ministerial stress and developing strategies to reduce it.</p>	<p>This is ongoing; the Church of England had undertaken a similar survey and we have been fortunate enough to use this as a framework for our own survey, being carried out in cooperation with the Office of the Assembly Trustees.</p>
<p>15. Pass an Act amending the Act on Selection and Training for Full-time Ministry Act (Act X 2004) as set out in Appendix vi.</p>	<p>Implemented.</p>
<p>16. Encourage the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to develop work on an Apprenticeship Route with hope to pilot in 2024, subject to further General Assembly approval.</p>	<p>Work has been done; two symposia have taken place with stakeholders in February and March 2024. More information in the Supplementary Report to the General Assembly.</p>
<p>17. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (1) to create an apprenticeship programme for those seeking to serve young people and youth; and (2) Enable local congregations to resource Youth Ministry through grant making bodies of the Church and congregational funds; being an important next and vital step once the Apprenticeship route is established.</p>	<p>More information in the Supplementary Report to the General Assembly.</p>
<p>18. Agree that the pulpit supply fee (and the fee where congregations have to pay for funerals) should be raised from £60 to £100, and any additional service raised from £30 to £50.</p>	<p>Implemented following the 2023 General Assembly.</p>

Deliverance	Comment
<p>19. In the light of the creativity shown by Presbyteries in the development and implementation of Presbytery Mission Plans and the increasing variety of part-time ministries being designed in different contexts, pass Regulations amending the Regulations for Remuneration and Reimbursement of Parish Ministers as follows:</p> <p>REGULATIONS AMENDING THE REGULATIONS FOR REMUNERATION AND REIMBURSEMENT OF PARISH MINISTERS (REGULATIONS I 2015)</p> <p><i>Edinburgh, [] May 2023, Session []</i></p> <p>The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Regulations for Remuneration and reimbursement of Parish Ministers (Regulations I 2015), shall be amended as follows:</p> <p>1. In the Schedule, Part 2, delete the fifth bullet point (ie delete "All part-time Parish Ministers are expected to conduct Sunday services as part of the duties of their Office in the same way as full-time Ministers. There is therefore no difference in the number of Sundays in any calendar year on which Pulpit Supply is to be paid (7 Sundays).")</p> <p>and confirm that it is for Presbyteries in the drafting of Bases of Adjustment to determine the frequency of conduct of worship by any part-time minister.</p>	<p>Waiting to be implemented in other places, and to be applied in existing part time charges.</p>
<p>20. Noting that the General Assembly has backed the call for frontline social care workers to be paid a minimum of £12 per hour, instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to review the pay and conditions of those who serve as Locums, giving consideration to the provision of written employment contracts, and report to the General Assembly of 2024.</p>	<p>See Main Report (Section 4.7)</p>
<p>FAITH IMPACT FORUM</p>	
<p>2.</p> <p>a. Commend the report on 'the Church of Scotland and the legacies of slavery' for study and action and reaffirm the Church of Scotland's teaching and action for racial justice.</p> <p>b. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to consider ways to support the delivery of the recommendations set out in the report.</p> <p>c. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, in partnership with the Theological Forum and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group to prepare a statement of acknowledgment and apology for the Church's involvement with and connection to historic chattel slavery, to be considered for adoption at a future General Assembly.</p> <p>d. Encourage congregations to research the history of slavery and its connections in their local areas, and to continue to celebrate Racial Justice Sunday to challenge racism and speak out against racial injustice.</p>	<p>The Public Life and Social Justice Group and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group have formed a new joint Racial Justice Working Group to take forward the recommendations of the legacies of slavery report.</p> <p>A process for the development of a statement of acknowledgment and apology is, at the time of writing, being considered, and it is hoped that a proposal will be brought to the General Assembly of 2025.</p>

Deliverance	Comment
<p>3. Urge Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, and national committees and agencies to note and consider ways of taking forward the outcomes of the 'Net Zero Strategic Outline', and instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, in partnership with the Assembly Trustees, General Trustees, CrossReach and Eco Congregation Scotland to continue to develop plans and activities to encourage and enable all parts of the Church to work towards the target of Net Zero by 2030</p>	<p>The Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group has continued to support the work of the Net Zero Strategy Group, which has representatives of relevant national departments and committees as well as the voices of local church experience. A more detailed report on progress in relation to the various activity areas of the Net Zero Strategic Outline is included at Section 5. of this report.</p>
<p>4. Urge congregations and Presbyteries to follow the Net Zero Pathway and use the Energy Footprint Tool (both of which are to be published by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team) to help them measure and reduce their emissions in line with the Net Zero 2030 target.</p>	<p>The Net Zero Pathway is available at https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/achieving-net-zero. Faith Action staff have promoted the pathway to congregations and Presbyteries since its launch and will continue to share it at all levels of the Church. The Energy Footprint Tool remains (at the time of writing) in development but it is hoped that this will be available shortly. (Section 5.3)</p>
<p>5. Encourage the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to explore partnerships and opportunities that will enable the Church to contribute to wildlife and biodiversity restoration and call upon the Scottish Government to do more in their efforts to improve national biodiversity for the wellbeing of both people and wildlife.</p>	<p>The Church of Scotland is a member of Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and works with this umbrella group of organisations to highlight the importance of environmental protection. With partners in Eco Congregation Scotland the Church promotes and celebrates Creation Time each September-October. The Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group responded to a consultation on proposals for a bill to prevent ecocide, put forward by Monica Lennon MSP.</p>
<p>6. Welcome the decision at COP27 to establish a Loss and Damage Fund, and instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to work with Christian Aid and other ecumenical partners to call on the UK Government to pledge a fair and reasonable contribution to the Loss and Damage Fund and call on the Scottish Government to deliver its existing promises and funding pledges.</p>	<p>With Christian Aid and international Church organisations including the World Council of Churches, as well as Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, we supported advocacy and campaign work in the run up to COP28. Christian Aid welcomed the announcement at COP28 that there would be a UN-backed Loss and Damage Fund, and is calling for a 'make polluters pay' principle whereby the income needed for loss and damage is raised from the profits generated by the fossil fuel industry and other high-polluting businesses.</p>
<p>7. Give thanks for the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Peace to South Sudan and encourage ongoing contact with the Anglican Communion, the Roman Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA) to continue to support local and international efforts in peace-making and reconciliation, and commend the shared pilgrimage as a model of cooperative working.</p>	<p>See main report (Section 6.4.1.2)</p>
<p>8. Encourage Presbyteries and congregations to offer prayerful and financial support to the rebuilding of lives and churches in Syria and Lebanon through 'Standing Firm – Rebuilding lives in Syria'.</p>	<p>The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon continues to offer small amounts of assistance to projects it has been managing and, with donations from supportive partners. NESSL has been grateful for the support of congregations and individuals in the Church of Scotland who have offered prayerful and financial support to the rebuilding of lives and churches in Syria and Lebanon through 'Standing Firm – Rebuilding lives in Syria', as encouraged by the 2023 GA deliverance. The £20,000 sent by congregations over the past year has been hugely appreciated.</p>
<p>9. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to continue to engage with ecumenical and international partners on the misuse of the blasphemy law and forced conversion and forced marriage in Pakistan.</p>	<p>We have continued to work, albeit at a reduced level, CLAAS, one of our longstanding partners in this whole area. We provide some financial support; more details on CLAAS work can be found on their website at https://www.claas.org.uk/</p>

Deliverance	Comment
<p>10. Commend the Debt Justice for Sri Lanka campaign; instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to work with Jubilee Scotland to provide information to congregations and Presbyteries about the campaign.</p>	<p>It is with regret that we report to the General Assembly that it was not possible to develop work in relation to this campaign during the course of the year. The charity Jubilee Scotland sadly wound up and its activities have now ceased. In the absence of an expert partner organisations to take forward this advocacy campaign, we have lacked the capacity to do this. We ask for the Assembly’s understanding and we remain open to future opportunities and partnerships on the important issue of debt relief for international development.</p>
<p>11. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, in collaboration with Integrity to develop the Violence Against Women Charter as a resource to build a network of congregations, supported and equipped to help respond to and prevent this form of violence.</p>	<p>Integrity has worked with Restored, a UK non-denominational Christian organisation raising awareness of domestic abuse in the Church. Further details are at Section 7.2 of the report.</p>
<p>12. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to share the Church’s practical experiences and policy ideas in relation to tackling poverty and helping people with the cost of living with the Scottish and UK Governments, and to report to the General Assembly of 2024.</p>	<p>The issues of cost of living and tackling poverty were high on the agenda in meetings with political leaders over the course of the year. In particular Faith Action staff support the Moderator at meetings with Holyrood and Westminster party leaders. The Church of Scotland supported Challenge Poverty Week once again, and have continued to develop good working relationships with the Poverty Alliance. Our report on new policy ideas, specifically about a ‘minimum income guarantee’ is included above at Section 4.7</p>
<p>13. Note with regret the reduction of Scottish Government funding to third sector organisations and instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to enter into a dialogue, on behalf of organisations affected, with the Government expressing the Church’s concerns about the reduction and the Government’s practices around funding.</p>	<p>During the course of the year Faith Action staff have raised this issue with the Scottish Government. The response has often been to point out that the Scottish and local government budgets are particularly challenging due to the wider economic and social context and decisions made in other centres of power (Westminster, from a Holyrood perspective, or Holyrood from a local government perspective).</p> <p>The Church of Scotland is a member of the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations, which is leading some campaigning and advocacy on this particular issue, under the heading Fair Funding for the Voluntary Sector (see www.scvo.scot)</p>
<p>14. Urge the UK Government to revise the Illegal Migration Bill in alignment with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and (1) instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to continue to advocate for refugees and immigration policy; (2) commend those congregations which have worked to welcome those forcibly displaced from their homes, and; (3) promote the engagement of Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees in its ongoing efforts to co-ordinate the Church’s mission to support and care for asylum-seekers and refugees</p>	<p>The Church of Scotland has continued to engage in making robust public statements on human rights and refugee protection, including during debates and Parliamentary consideration of the scheme to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda. The Public Life and Social Justice staff team has continued to support the role of Refugee Co-ordinator for Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees, a Church of Scotland led multifaith project.</p>
<p>15. Noting that the historical decisions of the General Assembly have been to support current civil law as to assisted dying, but now recognising that there exists a range of theological views and ethical opinions on assisted dying within the Church, instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, the Theological Forum and other relevant parties to explore such views and opinions and report to a future General Assembly.</p>	<p>The Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group has established a task group to explore the issue and to prepare a report. Representatives from the Theological Forum are members of the task group, which is carefully studying a range of ideas, positions and commentary. It is expected that the task group will present a final report to the General Assembly next year.</p>

Deliverance	Comment
16. Reaffirm that the Church will remain impartial on the issue of Scottish independence and on related questions about the holding of a referendum.	This position remains clear in our public issues work and in our relationships with political actors from both sides of the debate.
17. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to research and develop thinking on the policy, ethical, spiritual and theological issues arising from Scotland’s current crisis with regards to addictions and substance use, including producing advice and information to support the work of local congregations.	<p>Faith Action staff together with members of the Society, Religion and Technology Project reference group are developing a training module for the Church’s learning platform, with input and support from CrossReach. The training will be aimed at Ministers, Elders and others in congregations who want to learn more about how problematic substance use impacts individuals, families and communities. The training will discuss ethical theological and social issues, including the role that stigma can play in preventing recovery, examine how services such as CrossReach support people affected by these issues, and provide examples of congregation-led activities which provide support in the community.</p> <p>Some relevant additional information is presented on the website: https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-views/drugs-deaths-and-substance-dependency-in-scotland</p>
18. Welcome the work of the Jewish-Christian Glossary project, noting that the Glossary aims to improve mutual understanding; encourage Ministers in particular to study and engage with it in a way that will inform local, national and international relationship with Jewish communities.	<p>Printed copies of the Glossary have been made available and shared with key stakeholders. A PDF version is free to download from the Church of Scotland website: https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/108745/ocr23-01_a-jewish-christian-glossary_a4_v4.pdf</p> <p>If a Presbytery, Minister, Kirk Session or other group would like more information, they are encouraged to contact the Faith Action office.</p>
Theological Forum	
Instruct the Theological Forum jointly with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team 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.	Work on this is ongoing, and the Theological Forum will offer a fuller report to the General Assembly of 2025.

Appendix ii

TERMS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR MINISTERS SERVING IN THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

Introduction

These terms are intended to cover the responsibilities and expectations of Ministers serving the Church of Scotland as Office Holders. They draw on matters referenced in the Acts and Regulations of the General Assembly, and offer a consolidated framework where the Office is understood by nature of being set apart for Holy Ministry in the Vows of Ordination and Induction of this Church.

The Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament

It is recognised that ministry does not offer a “one size fits all” job description that can accurately reflect all ministries, but that there are distinctive aspects which are expected of you as an Office Holder serving in a Charge or Appointment.

These include:

- the celebration of the Sacraments - the Lord’s Supper (or Holy Communion) and Baptism;
- preaching and the conduct of worship;
- moderating meetings of the Kirk Session, which has responsibility for the spiritual issues within a congregation, and guiding the Session in its discussions;
- conducting funerals and offering pastoral support to those who are dying and to people who have been bereaved;
- conducting weddings and helping people prepare for marriage;
- providing ministry, including pastoral care, that is not exclusive to membership of the Church;
- providing local leadership while working collaboratively with others;
- offering ministry service in the wider community, relevant to context;

- full time hours of service across a week, or % of full-time service according to Charge/Appointment;
- timely reporting of absence from duties for ill health or any other reason, and providing medical Fit Notes as appropriate;
- taking time off annually for rest and personal wellbeing as allowed for in Pulpit Supply arrangements;
- displaying an integrity of faith and life, with Christ-like values and attitudes.

Wider duties

The primary role of ministers is to serve within the Charge or Appointment. However, you are also required to serve within Presbytery where duties will include membership of Presbytery committees, and serving as Interim Moderators. You may also be appointed to serve on a committee of the General Assembly.

Such responsibilities, along with others, make up the roles and functions of those Ordained to serve in the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Church of Scotland.

The responsibilities are rooted in the Vows of Ordination and Induction. A note of these follows with some commentary added, which is intended to be illustrative and not exhaustive as to the responsibilities which might be associated with any particular Vow.

Vows of Ordination and Induction and associated Responsibilities

Do you believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and do you confess anew the Lord Jesus as your Saviour and Lord?

To sustain spiritual practices to nurture and shape the personal faith and belief that is the foundation of your calling into ministry

Do you believe the Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, to be the supreme rule of faith and life?

To serve in ministry in a way where the rule of life of faith guides behaviours, interactions, relationships and shows forth the revealed nature of God, in Jesus Christ

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

To share and shape contextual ministry that is consistent with the Confessions of the Church of Scotland

Do you acknowledge the Presbyterian government of this Church to be agreeable to the Word of God; and do you promise to be subject in the Lord to this Presbytery and to the General Assembly of this Church, and to take your due part in the administration of its affairs?

To share in the life of Presbytery, taking your place alongside others to exercise the shared responsibilities of the Presbytery

Do you promise to seek the peace and unity of this Church; to uphold its doctrine, worship, government, and to cherish a spirit of love to all your brothers and sisters in Christ?

To serve in ministry in collaboration with others, mindful of the ministry of the whole people of God, and in accordance always with the Acts of the Church

Are not zeal for the glory of God, love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and a desire for the salvation of all people, so far as you know your own heart, your great motives and chief inducements to enter into the office of the Holy Ministry?

To serve in Holy Ministry, recognising the Office is a status within the Church of Scotland, and to be mindful of that privilege and responsibility

Do you engage in the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ to live a godly and circumspect life; and faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully to discharge the duties of your ministry, seeking in all things the advancement of the kingdom of God?

To serve in that strength, and with an attitude of reflective practice, to identify and engage with the support and tools that enable ministry to be fulfilled and fulfilling

Do you [accept and close with the call to be pastor of this charge], and promise through grace to study to approve yourself a faithful minister of the Gospel among this people?

To avail yourself of opportunities for self-development, wellbeing and study, that will equip your ministry in context, as you, the Charge and its people are further shaped and changed in God's mission

Other Responsibilities of the Office

Capability: *The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team is developing a capability policy for ministers. This will enable support, training, development and other assistance to be provided as required. You will be expected to engage constructively with this process.*

Charity trustee duties: As a minister in a charge, you are a charity trustee under civil legislation and must adhere to the civil law in this area as well as guidance produced by OSCR.

Each congregation in the Church of Scotland has separate charitable status, with the national Church being the parent charity. As a minister working in a congregation, you will be one of the charity trustees of the congregation and must therefore fulfil the duties incumbent on charity trustees under civil law. The underpinning duty of charity trustees is to act at all times in the best interests of the charity and consistently with its purpose, ensuring that resources are managed responsibly and showing care and diligence in the management of the charity's affairs.

The sole charitable purpose of the Church of Scotland is 'the advancement of religion' and so everything that the congregation does has to be in furtherance of that purpose. The Church has the status of a 'Designated Religious Charity' in terms of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and this carries certain privileges, as it exempts us from some elements of the compliance regime which applies to all other charities. This is because DRCs are considered by the Charity Regulator (OSCR) to have internal structures which offer an acceptable degree of self-regulation. It is therefore important that you play your part in enabling the Church to demonstrate that this is indeed the case, in particular by ensuring that the congregation complies with all statutory accounting and reporting requirements and also complying with Church and civil law in all respects.

Church law: You should be familiar with general principles of Church law. Law in the life of the Church seeks to provide consistency and also clarity about "who may do what and who is answerable to whom, because every Christian has to know how to work out their responsibility to God within the context of the various relationships and obligations they are involved in. Understanding and knowing how to work with [Church law] is a necessary aspect of exercising authority and holding responsibility in the Church" (Lord Rowan Williams). The Acts and Regulations of the Church are accessible on the Church website and advice on Church law is available from your Presbytery Clerk and the Office of the General Assembly. The Law Dept has also produced circulars on many matters of relevance to ministers, which are contained in the [Resources](#) section of the Church website.

Code of Conduct: In your life and work, you should adhere to the Code of Conduct, approved by the General Assembly, set out in the Appendix to this Handbook. A breach of the requirements of the Code will be unbecoming of the office you hold and of the Gospel values of the Christian faith we proclaim.

Collaborative working: Where a Basis of Team Ministry is in place, you should work collaboratively with the other members of the team and in accordance with the Basis of Team Ministry. Where there is no Basis of Team Ministry but the congregation in which you serve employs someone (such as an MDS worker) for whom you have line management responsibilities, you should work with that person in an open and collaborative way which enables everyone in the team to achieve their fullest potential. Guidance and support is available from the Presbytery and from both the HR team and the staff of FAPLT in the national offices.

Conflicts of interest: You must be alert to the possibilities of conflicts of interest, whether real or perceived, arising in your interactions. The Law Dept has issued a conflict of interest policy which sets out good practice in this area and you should ensure that it is adopted by your congregation and that you read and adhere to it.

Contact: For data security reasons, you must use your Church of Scotland email address for all Church-related communications and should be contactable on a publicly-available telephone number (whether mobile or landline).

Discipline: In matters of misconduct, you come under the jurisdiction of the Presbytery to which you belong. You have a duty to engage constructively with the disciplinary procedure of the Church. The detail of the discipline procedure is specified in the [Discipline Act \(Act I 2019\)](#). If you are involved in disciplinary proceedings, you may be entitled to assistance with legal costs in terms of the [Legal Aid Regulations \(Regs I 2018\)](#).

Local Church Review: Presbytery appoints a team to visit every congregation once every five years. In the course of this visit a meeting is held with you to discuss any matters of concern and, where appropriate, these will be treated in strict confidence. A review is carried out in terms of the [Local Church Review Act \(Act I 2011\)](#).

Marriages and funerals: There are some key points to be aware of:

- You must solemnise marriages in a religious service, not a civil one. It is contrary to Church law for a minister to act as a celebrant of civil marriages and doing so is also a criminal offence in terms of the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977.
- You only have a responsibility to conduct 'parish' funerals from within the bounds of your parish and you should not agree to perform marriages in parishes other than your own without seeking the consent of the parish minister or Interim Moderator (IM) of that parish.
- If you receive a private invitation from close family or friends to conduct a wedding, you should only do so with the agreement of the parish minister or IM.
- You should not participate in any wedding service in which a close relative has a business interest, either as a civil celebrant or as a wedding organiser.
- No fee may be charged or received by you for carrying out the functions of ministry, including the conduct of marriage ceremonies or funerals.

Paid employment and public office: You should not take on paid employment in addition to your ministerial duties, unless your ministerial role is not full-time and you have first obtained the approval of the Presbytery. If you wish to seek appointment to a public office, you should refer to the [Ministers and Deacons in Public Office Act \(Act IV 2001\)](#), which makes provision for Presbytery's involvement.

Retirement: Parish ministers must normally retire at the age of 75, although provision is made in the [Continuing Parish Ministry Beyond the Age of 75 Regulations \(Regs II 2018\)](#) for a minister to continue beyond this age in certain circumstances.

Safeguarding: You should understand and comply with Safeguarding law (including the [Safeguarding Act \(Act XVI 2018\)](#)) and responsibilities. Advice given by the Safeguarding Service, when framed as an instruction, must be followed by all office-holders, staff and volunteers.

Appendix iii

DISCERNMENT AND ASSESSMENT STATISTICS

Year	2019	2020	Jan-Dec 2021	Jan- Dec 2022	Jan- Dec 2023
Enquirers	170	124	95	85	108
Discernment Conversations	93	65	36	36	45
Applicants for Ministry (all types)	74	50	28	29	38
Entered Local Assessment	62	52	31	35	36
Chose to Withdraw (locally)	5	3	3	7	3
Readership (Applicants)	2	1	6	1	4
Readership Accepted	2	0	6	1	4

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Completed Local Assessment	29	37	45	20	29
Attended Assessment Conference	29	36	39	13	23
Full-time Ministry (Applicants)	17	25	26	7	17
Full-time Ministry Accepted	15	17	15	5	12
Ordained Local Ministry (Applicants)	11	9	12	6	5
Ordained Local Ministry Accepted	8	7	9	3	5
Deacons (Applicants)	1	2	1	0	1
Deacons Accepted	0	1	1	0	1
First Time Applicants	25	30	31	8	21
Accepted	19	21	21	4	16
Returning Applicants	4	6	8	5	2
Accepted	4	4	4	4	2

Appendix iv

ADMISSIONS AND READMISSIONS STATISTICS

Admissions

Numbers of attendees at Admissions Conference

YEAR	ATTENDEES	ACCEPT	NON ACCEPT
2019	23	13	10
2020	27	15	12
2021	27	12	15
2022	18	2	16
2023	17	5	12

Appendix v

CANDIDATES AND PROBATIONERS STATISTICS

Candidates who started training in August 2023	
FTWAS	10
OLM	7
Diaconal	1
<i>Total across categories</i>	18
Candidates accepted for entry for August 2023 but deferred entry	
FTWAS	3
OLM	0
Diaconal	0
<i>Deferred training total</i>	3
Candidates across all years prior to probation as at August 2023 including those who have deferred	
FTWAS	29
OLM	13
Diaconal	2
<i>Total across all categories</i>	44
FTWAS candidates studying at recognised providers 2023-24	
Aberdeen campus based	0
Aberdeen distance learning	1
Glasgow campus based	5
Edinburgh campus based	9
Highland Theological College campus based	0
Highland Theological College distance learning	10
St Andrews campus based	1
OLM candidates studying at recognised providers 2023-24	
Aberdeen distance learning	9
Highland Theological College distance learning	3
Diaconal candidates studying at recognised providers 2023-24	
Aberdeen campus based	2
Highland Theological College distance learning	1
Number of probationers completing training in 2023/early 2024	
FTWAS	9
OLM	5
Diaconal	0
<i>Total</i>	14

Probationers beginning summer 2023	
FTWAS	16
OLM	4
Diaconal	0
<i>Total</i>	20
Late Starts 2023/early 2024	
FTWAS	2
OLM	2
Diaconal	0
<i>Total</i>	4
Readers	
Readers in training in 2023	4
Readers set apart in 2023	9

Appendix vi

ALLOCATION OF MINISTRIES NUMBERS

Presbytery Number	Name	Allocation	
1.	Edinburgh & West Lothian	65.5	
3	Lothian and the Borders	44	
7	South West	78	
14	Clyde	40	
16	Glasgow (inc. Cumbernauld)	84	
17	Forth Valley and Clydesdale	59.5	
24	Fife	44.5	
28	Perth	78	
31	North East and the Northern Isles	87	
42	Clèir Eilean Ì	71	New total for H&H including Argyll
44	Lewis	5	
47	England and the Channel Islands	4	
48	International	5	
		665.5	

Appendix vii

OVERVIEW OF VACANCIES

In order to reduce the uncertainty and anxiety for existing probationers, ministry students, potential ministry candidates and those in familiarisation and reviewable tenure, the General Assembly of 2022 instructed the Faith Nurture Forum, or successor, to report to future General Assemblies with full ministries numbers, covering the following areas:

- ministers of Full Time Word and Sacrament currently in charges,
- number of MDS staff counted towards the 600 fulltime ministries target figure by end of 2025,
- number of ministers in reviewable tenures,
- number of ministers in familiarisation,
- number of ministers expected to retire in the year;

Minister numbers (FTE)	526 ministers in a parish
Interim / Transition Ministers (FTE)	7
Ministers inducted on basis of reviewable charge	46 (7 th March 2024 figures)
Probationers and Familiarisation	23
MDS numbers (FTE)	84
Fixed term assistant minister contracts	40
Actual retired in 2023	48
Actual demitted in 2023	27
Expected retirals and demissions in 2024	58

These figures are the ones collected as at 31 January 2024. At time of writing, there are 18 vacancies on the Church of Scotland website. The Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group, since November 2023, to February 2024, has processed bases of adjustment amounting to 28.5 vacancies which should appear on the vacancy list when Presbyteries have exercised due diligence in terms of congregation votes and subsequent Presbytery approval of these votes, with the (hopefully concomitant) granting of permission to call.

Appendix viii

ACT AMENDING THE PRESBYTERY MISSION PLAN ACT (ACT VIII 2021) (AS AMENDED)

Edinburgh, [] May 2024, Session []

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

1. Delete the existing section 10.2 and substitute:

“10.2 A detailed Basis of Adjustment shall be negotiated with the office-bearers involved, and in the course of the negotiation its text shall be submitted to the Forum to ensure it is consistent with the Mission Plan, and to the Principal Clerk and the Solicitor of the Church who shall ensure that the provisions of the Basis are in conformity with Church and Civil Law. The Basis of Adjustment shall be voted upon firstly by the office-bearers and then by the congregation or congregations involved. Those entitled to speak and vote at such a congregational meeting shall include those who have been formally recognised by the Kirk Session as adherents of the congregation. **If all the votes are, by a majority, in favour of the Adjustment, then the Committee of Presbytery to which the matter has been delegated under section 10.1 may proceed to implement the Adjustment without the need to decide the matter at a Presbytery meeting. Alternatively, if all the votes have not been, by a majority, in favour, the Presbytery’s Committee shall consider the matter further and shall bring proposals to the Presbytery for the Presbytery to decide upon, subject always to section 10.3 of this Act.** In operating this section 10.2 it is provided always that:

 - (a) no Basis affecting the rights of a minister shall be presented to his or her, or any other, congregation without his or her written consent,
 - (b) any congregation directly involved in and named in any proposed Basis shall be cited to appear for their interests at any full meeting of the Presbytery at which a decision is to be made in terms of this Act.”
2. *In the second sentence of section 11.1, delete “Presbytery’s decision on the Basis” and substitute “the decision of the Presbytery or its Committee on the Basis, as the case may be.”*

Appendix ix

PRESBYTERY MISSION PLANNING PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION GROUP

The Group will be responsible for all aspects of Mission Planning in terms of Act VIII 2021, in liaison with Presbyteries, and will nurture and review strategic relationships with Presbyteries and other stakeholders, communicating effectively and appropriately in partnership.

1. Advise on bases of adjustment and reviewable charges.
2. Maintain documentation of Presbytery plans and associated records, including publicly available information and how the data collated from Presbytery Plans can be stored and accessible for use by relevant parties in strategic planning and development.
3. Monitor annual evaluation and development plans.
4. Deal with requests from Presbyteries for revisions of their plan.
5. Work to support Presbyteries in implementing Mission Plans and other areas relating to adjustment and inform the appropriate bodies of the resources, experience and support that PMPIG can provide along with how they might shape thinking around realistic planning for the future with Presbyteries.
6. Work with Presbyteries and liaise with the General Trustees in the classification and use of buildings and applications for work at buildings.
7. Monitor all aspects of Guardianships.
8. Monitor the overall patterns and trends in Mission Planning
9. Undertake policy development for Mission Planning in partnership with all relevant parties.
10. To take such actions as required for it carry out its duties and functions, including but not limited to offering advice, consulting with, and issuing guidance to the national Church, Presbyteries and Congregations.
11. 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.
12. 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:
 - 12.1 Appraisal and Adjustment Act (Act VII 2003)
 - 12.2 Vacancy Procedure Act (Act VIII 2003) as temporarily amended
 - 12.3 Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021)
 - 12.4 Section 31 of the Faith Nurture Forum's Deliverance to General Assembly 2021

Appendix x

FINANCIAL INFORMATION AND ALLOWANCES

1. *Stipends and Salaries*

The Assembly Trustees approved the recommendation of the Faith Action Leadership Team that stipend & salary scales be increased by 5% for 2024.

Stipend Scale (including Associate Ministers) 2024

Point 1 £31,642

Point 2 £33,711

Point 3 £35,780

Point 4 £37,850

Point 5 £38,884

Ministries Development Staff Scales 2024

MDS General Scale

Point 1 £28,815

Point 2 £29,758

Point 3 £30,697

Point 4 £31,640

Point 5 £32,575

Team Leader Scale

- Point 1 £35,083
- Point 2 £35,866
- Point 3 £36,648
- Point 4 £37,433
- Point 5 £38,215

Deacon Scale (Genuine Occupational Requirement)

- Point 1 £30,697
- Point 2 £31,640
- Point 3 £32,575
- Point 4 £33,516
- Point 5 £34,456

Island Allowance

Island allowances also increase by 5% for 2024.

Outer Island Allowance: £2,062 pa

Inner Island Allowance: £811 pa

Travel Expenses 2024

Travel expenses payable remain as:

Rates for those providing their own car:

a) reimbursed to ministers and MDS providing their own car for pastoral duties:

45p per mile for the first 10,000 miles

25p per mile for all additional mileage

Ministers also receive capital reimbursement of £80 per month.

b) reimbursement of travel expenses for students, probationers, OLMs, auxiliary ministers and locums:

45p per mile for the first 10,000 miles

25p per mile for all additional mileage

c) reimbursed to ministers and MDS providing their own motor bike for pastoral duties:

24p per mile travelled per annum

d) reimbursed to ministers and MDS providing their own pedal bike for pastoral duties:

20p per mile travelled per annum

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.

3. *Removal and Disturbance Allowance*

When a Minister is called to a Charge, the congregation(s) to which the Minister is called shall meet the removal costs incurred in transporting the minister's personal effects into the manse of the Charge. In addition, a manse disturbance allowance of up to £1,740 can be paid on production of appropriate receipts.

If a Charge has an average income base of less than £60,000, application may be made to Faith Action for assistance in meeting removal costs. This assistance may take the form of a grant or loan (or a combination of both) to the congregation.

When a minister retires on account of age or infirmity, and in the case of a widow(er) of a Minister who dies in service, Faith Action will meet the cost of removal expenses.

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.

5. *Vacancy Allowance*

For 2024 the Vacancy Allowance remains at £933 per month and £1,082 for linked charges. The Vacancy Allowance is deducted directly from each vacant charge's 'Giving to Grow' Allocation.

6. *Guardianship Allowance*

For 2024 the Guardianship Allowance also remains at £933 per month in line with the vacancy allowance.

References

- 1 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/22/michael-gove-tells-london-rally-uk-must-stand-with-israel-against-hamas>
- 2 https://www.change.org/p/an-open-letter-from-palestinian-christians-to-western-church-leaders-and-theologians?recruiter=1319605589&recruited_by_id=a6f6fd10-6e69-11ee-abdf-5b152ac3937c&utm_source=share_petition&utm_campaign=share_for_starters_page&utm_medium=copylink

COMMITTEE ON CHAPLAINS TO HIS MAJESTY'S FORCES MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Note with concern the lack of applications for military chaplaincy, and encourage all eligible ministers of the Church to consider service as a Chaplain to HM Forces, Regular or Reservist (*Section 1*).
3. Encourage those eligible to consider service as Chaplains in any of the Cadet organisations and thank all serving Cadet Chaplains (*Section 1.3*).
4. Thank those who serve in His Majesty's Forces as Chaplains for their service to Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force personnel, their families, and the wider military community, and commend them, and their own families, to the prayers of the Church (*Section 2*).
5. Note the significant contribution of HM Forces personnel in a variety of theatres, notably the NATO response to the war in Ukraine and current operations in the Red Sea area (*Section 2.1.1*).
6. Welcome the review by Lord Etherton KC into the historic treatment of LGBT+ personnel, and urge HM Government to implement the recommendations in full and note with regret any breach, in the past, of the pastoral relationship between Chaplain and military personnel (*Section 3.5*).

Report

1. RECRUITMENT – CRITICAL ISSUE

1.1 The Committee, at the time of writing, and as a part of its constitutional purpose, has not endorsed any candidates for ministry in HM Forces since the last Assembly. Our numbers are at an historic low, with an anticipated number of retirements in the next 3 to 5 years. Please pray for an increase in vocations to this important and valued ministry. We are at historic lows numerically: 3 in the Royal Navy, 13 in the Army, and 2 in the RAF. (These are our full-time numbers, with gaps too in our Reserves) The issue is that we are no longer seen as a significant contributor to Chaplain numbers across Defence.

1.2 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, full-time or part-time. The Committee would welcome any suggestions or advice on how we respond to our recruiting crisis. It is a fantastic community in which to minister.

1.3 Chaplaincy in the Cadet Forces provides many benefits too – mission to the young and development of ministerial skill-sets – in the course of parish (or other civilian) ministry. We highly commend this ministry to the Church too.

2. THE WORK OF CHAPLAINS

2.1 Routine and Operational Work

2.1.1 The operational tempo continues to affect the whole of the Armed Forces, and their families. For example, over 6000 UK personnel were deployed overseas over the Christmas period 2023.

2.1.2 The Committee commends Rev Dr Mark Davidson RN, (a Church of Scotland Chaplain), Principal of the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, for the training given to Ukrainian military Chaplains, and welcomes the bonds of friendship, fellowship and support that have now been forged.

3. CHAPLAINS AND THE CHURCH

3.1 Tri-Service Conference 2023/24

3.1.1 The Tri-Service Conference (Continuous Professional Development) for Church of Scotland and Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) Chaplains was held at the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, in Wiltshire, in September of last year, where the visiting speaker was Dr Rick Hill from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The Conference was attended by the Convener and his counterpart in PCI. The Committee very much values the shared fellowship with PCI.

3.2 Pastoral Contact

3.2.1 This 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. The Convener responds to more acute pastoral situations, which can involve a Chaplain's ill-health, professional issues, or to discuss discernment of future service.

3.3 Moderator's Visit to HM Forces

3.3.1 In February, the Moderator and Convener visited the Royal Air Force. Time was spent at the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre at the Defence Academy, at RAF Brize Norton to see the hub of the RAF's humanitarian effort on the C17 aircraft, to meet personnel who fly the Chinook helicopter at RAF Benson and at RAF Halton to meet with those under training. The Committee is grateful to the Chaplain-in-Chief and the wider RAF community for their welcome and hospitality. It was a rewarding and challenging few days, as the Moderator was briefed on the challenges facing the Armed Forces today, including recruitment, retention and reducing resources.

3.4 Armed Forces and Veterans Champions

3.4.1 The Committee has invited the new Presbyteries to appoint an Armed Forces and Veterans Champion, and is grateful to those who have responded. Training and support are offered to all who have taken up this role.

3.5 The Etherton Review

3.5.1 The Committee welcomes the Etherton Review into historic abuses of LGBT+ personnel prior to the lifting of the 'gay ban' in 2000. The Committee hopes that all of the recommendations of the review will be carried out in full, bringing justice, closure and compensation to those directly affected. The Committee regrets that military Chaplains were implicated (in the Review) in breaching the code of confidentiality at the time, and is fully committed through the 3 Heads of Chaplaincy, to ensuring that Chaplains are completely confidential in their pastoral relationships with Service personnel.

4. GOVERNANCE ISSUES

4.1 Tri-Service Advisory Group

4.1.1 The Committee invites the church to note a change in Defence policy, allowing 'non-religious pastoral officers' (Humanist Chaplains) to serve in HM Forces. The Committee welcomes this change, and is assured that this policy change is not to the detriment of well-established and successful Christian and World Faiths chaplaincy to the Defence community.

4.2 The Committee welcomes to the Assembly today representatives of all MOD Endorsing Authorities, (Christian, other World Faiths and Humanist) and thanks them for their support as we all seek what is best for our people across the Defence community.

In the name of the Committee

SCOTT J BROWN CBE, *Convener*
ANDREW TAIT, *Vice-Convener*
DARAN GOLBY, *Secretary*

Appendix

Royal Navy

Over the past year, the Royal Navy has continued to serve across the world, playing its part in multiple alliances committed to policing the seas, protecting civilian shipping, and delivering disaster relief. Despite its small size – with just over 32,000 Royal Navy and Royal Marine personnel – the Royal Navy continues to operate on a global scale, whether that be training in the Arctic Circle, patrolling the waters of the Antarctic, capturing drug smugglers in the Caribbean, destroying Houthi drones in the Red Sea, delivering aid to Gazan civilians, or protecting the integrity of British territorial waters. This year, as every year, Royal Naval chaplains have deployed around the globe in support of these endeavours.

Over the past year, our Church of Scotland chaplains have been busy in key roles within the UK. Chaplain Mark Dalton has continued to serve in his role as a member of the Chaplaincy Team at HMNB CLYDE (Faslane). This continues to be one of the most challenging postings within the RN, with increased pressures upon the submarine flotilla translating into higher demands upon chaplaincy. Over the past year, Mark has also developed chaplaincy links with RN CALEDONIA (Rosyth) and provides regular support to service personnel there.

After a successful period as Chaplaincy Team Leader in HMS SULTAN, Chaplain Stephen Ashley-Emery was appointed Staff Chaplain to the Naval Chaplaincy Service headquarters in Portsmouth in early 2024. In this role, he provides support to the Chaplain of the Fleet and the Deputy Chaplain of the Fleet. This vital role is complex, fast-paced and challenging.

Chaplain Mark Davidson has spent the past year serving as Principal, Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre. In this role, he oversees all tri-service chaplaincy training. Over the past year, the AFCC has also provided training to multiple groups of Ukrainian military chaplains. In January 2024, he assumed the role of Principal Denominational Chaplain (Church of Scotland and Free Churches).

Rev Mark Dalton RN

HM Naval Base Clyde

Rev Dr Mark Davidson RN

Principal, Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom

Rev Stephen Ashley-Emery RN

Staff Chaplain to the Chaplain of the Fleet, Portsmouth

Army

There are currently 13 Regular and 4 Reserve Chaplains serving in the Royal Army Chaplains' Department.

Of note, Rev David Anderson has promoted to CF2 and will move to HQ 51 Inf Bde as Senior Chaplain Scotland.

Rev Nicola Frail leads the RACHD Working Group on Moral Injury (in conversation with the Australian Armed Forces Chaplaincy Service) seeking the best pastoral and spiritual response to this growing need within the Services community alongside the important work that Veterans' Chaplaincy Scotland delivers.

Rev Chris Kellock serves as the Staff Chaplain responsible for coordinating and caring for all Chaplains on Operations across the globe from the Permanent Joint Headquarters at Northwood in London. He writes -

"My role as the staff chaplain at PJHQ is to advise the Commander on the provision of chaplaincy across operational areas and to assure it through the preparation and deployment of tri-Service chaplaincy. In practice this means ensuring that any chaplain who is about to deploy overseas is ready to do so and that once they are deployed, they are pastorally and practically cared for as they conduct their ministries.

Today, as I write on a rather damp day in February, we have chaplains deployed in eastern Europe, across the broader Middle East, in Cyprus, Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, Africa, and various naval assets around the world. My role also involves personal visits to these operations, having conducted such visits across Estonia, Cyprus, Poland, Germany and soon East Africa and the Middle East.

Chaplains who deploy overseas conduct their ministries as they would at home, but in sharing the deprivations and experience of those they serve alongside bring something of the love of Christ in to the heart of some very demanding situations. Chaplains are at the forefront of assisting in the process that prepare our service personal to contend with the moral and ethical issues and decisions they may face in difficult circumstances; they are also key in the process called Operational Stress Management, where service personnel are prepared for homecoming and reintegration with home life and family. Ministry is a privilege and across the spectrum of operations, Church of Scotland Chaplains alongside their colleagues, continue to look after the pastoral, moral, and spiritual wellbeing of all Service Personnel in the name of Christ. Please remember them all in your prayers and those they serve alongside in some very demanding circumstances; please also remember their families and friends and all who support them as you do."

From our training world, Rev Richard Begg writes -

"Serving with phase two soldiers is an exciting space. (Phase 2 two training follows Phase 1 Basic training and is where soldiers learn skills specific to their regiment or arm.) They continue to learn what it means to be a soldier and learn additional skills particular to the cap badge they are serving with. At Gibraltar Barracks I have the privilege of working alongside the Royal Engineer phase two training as individuals develop as Combat Sappers. The sense of joy on their faces as they receive their distinctive Royal Engineers stable belts and are referred to as Sappers is huge and a massive testimony to the hours invested by the Permanent Staff and of the Trainees themselves. Alongside the phase two Royal Engineers I also have many career courses which pass through the Station including the Student Bandmasters of the Royal Corps of Army Music. It has been wonderful to have them complete their Church assessment with a live band on a Sunday morning during worship in St Andrew's Garrison Church, Aldershot. The church was dedicated nearly 100 years ago as a memorial to the soldiers of the Church of Scotland and kindred Presbyterian Churches."

Rev Christopher Rowe, the Reserve Chaplain serving with 5 Military Intelligence writes of accompanying his soldiers home as they visited the battlefields of Monte Cassino in Italy -

"This provided an ideal place for me to explore with the troops the ethics of warfare (the ancient Benedictine Abbey was deliberately bombed and utterly destroyed by the allied air forces), to introduce the idea of moral injury (the damage done to our own sense of who we are by witnessing or taking part in actions that transgress our own moral code), and to remember with gratitude the thousands who died trying to liberate Italy. Our act of remembrance was very poignant, and visiting the destroyed but now fully restored Benedictine Abbey was a surprisingly spiritually significant moment - entering under the word PAX - and many of us sensing the importance of retaining places of sanctuary and peace, even amidst the evil and violence of war."

Rev Dr Ken Jeffrey is a Reserve Chaplain serving in his first post at 7 SCOTS

'It was my pleasure, towards the end of September, to participate in Sava Star (an annual Exercise that takes place in Croatia between British and Croatian Forces) along with colleagues from 7SCOTS, 6SCOTS and 3SCOTS. I enjoyed the opportunity of deepening relationships with friends from 7SCOTS and was glad to make new friends from the other Battalions. I continue to be humbled by the acceptance and welcome I receive from everyone. It is a great privilege and pleasure to receive the opportunity of serving a group of such dedicated and hard-working men and women. Most of my time is spent listening to people. I am also delighted to have regular times of reflection and worship with everyone too. I have the impression folk are glad that I am simply around, while the banter and craic is always good. It is only three years since I commissioned. Nevertheless, I am delighted to have received the opportunity to serve as Reserve Padre. I have received abundantly from the whole experience.'

Rev Geoff Berry is in his final post as Chaplain to 3 SCOTS at Fort George, Inverness.

Geoff started out as an Officiating Chaplain to the Military with 2 SCOTS whilst Parish Minister in Penicuik before he answered the Call to Regular Chaplaincy 15 years ago. He has served with various units overseas and on Operations. He writes -

"I believe it is fitting that in the week preceding the Assembly this year, I shall be in France conducting the military funeral of a WW1 Black Watch soldier whose remains were recently discovered. This opportunity to honour their predecessors is special to the troops who will be there, both serving and veteran; and also, a stark reminder that those

who serve enter into a covenant with the people of our nation which may require them to make the ultimate sacrifice in defence of those they love and protect. It is also a reminder to those of us who serve in the name of Christ, that our troops have need of the prayers and care the Kirk and His people provide, whether they recognise it in the day-to-day of Barracks routine or not.

The last 15 years serving the military community both as a civilian and in uniform, have seen many laughs and tears, tragedies and celebrations. Everything seems more intense in-service life; the highs are higher ... perhaps because the lows can be so crushing. Throughout it all, I have remained proud of the people I minister to, even when they mess up big-time. It has been a privilege to be known simply as 'Padre' by thousands of young people over the years, with all that the name encompasses."

Rev Duncan Macpherson CF, Denominational Representative Chaplain for the Church of Scotland.

List of Church of Scotland Regular Chaplains (Actively recruiting)

Chaplain	Unit	Location
Rev Dr Jim Francis MBE	Regional Command	Aldershot
Rev David Anderson	HQ North West England	Preston
Rev Chris Kellock	Permanent Joint Headquarters	Northwood
Rev Duncan Macpherson	Deep Recce Strike Brigade Combat Team	Tidworth
Rev Nicola Frail	Headquarters North England	Whittington
Rev Alan Cobain	Headquarters South West	Tidworth
Rev David Thom	Northern Ireland Garrison Support Unit	Lisburn
Rev Hector MacKenzie	2 Infantry Training Battalion	Catterick Garrison
Rev Paul Van Sittert	1 LANCS	Cyprus
Rev Richard Begg	Royal School of Military Engineering	Minley
Rev Geoff Berry	3 SCOTS	Fort George
Rev Stewart MacKay	3 Army Training Regiment	Pirbright
Rev Neil McLay	HQ Regional Point of Control for Central England	Cottesmore

List of Church of Scotland Reserve Chaplains (2 vacancies in Scotland)

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

List of Church of Scotland Army Cadet Force (ACF) Chaplains (9 Vacancies out of 20)

Chaplain	Unit
Rev Fraser Stewart	1 Bn The Highlanders, ACF
Rev Alen McCulloch	1 Bn The 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 Sean Swindells	Angus and Dundee, ACF
Rev Cameron McKenzie	Lothian & Borders, ACF

Royal Air Force

Over the last 12 months the world has seemed more uncertain, unstable and challenging. News of natural disasters in Türkiye, Syria, Libya and beyond, as well as conflict in Eastern Europe, and across the Middle East, have caused heart-wrenching suffering and loss of life. The Royal Air Force is often the UK's "first responder" flying humanitarian support into the aftermath of natural disasters, as well as acting to deter conflict or to defend our own nation and our allies – in the words of the Chief of Air Staff, "Ready to fly and fight".

Into this uncertain world, men and women are called to serve incarnationally and sacrificially as chaplains, and the RAF is blessed to have two Church of Scotland ministers serving in our Chaplains' Profession. Both have served with distinction overseas in recent times and now serve at RAF Honington and RAF Cosford, supporting the spiritual, pastoral and moral wellbeing of our community. We are grateful to God for their vocation to this ministry, and to the Church of Scotland for releasing and supporting them in their service.

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| Rev Craig Lancaster RAF | RAF Cosford |
| Rev David Young RAF | RAF Honington |

SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Instruct the Safeguarding Committee to develop and implement processes and working practices which ensure compliance with The Disclosure Scotland Act 2020, to be enacted in April 2025, and instruct Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries to cooperate with such processes and work practices (*Sections 2.4 & 3*).
3. Instruct the Safeguarding Service to consider the vision of safeguarding across all areas of the Church and encourage all to support the development of a positive Safeguarding Culture (*Sections 2.4.3 & 4.5*).
4. Note the ongoing work of the Safeguarding Committee to roll out the Leadership and Trustee Safeguarding training courses and encourage those for whom such training is mandatory to attend training and use their learning to promote a positive safeguarding culture (*Section 4*).
5. Note the ongoing work by the Safeguarding Service to assess child and adult wellbeing and protection concerns and provide professional advice to congregations, Presbyteries, CrossReach, the national offices of the Church of Scotland and the Girls Brigade (*Section 5*).
6. Note the ongoing work to review and update the 2009 report 'For of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven' (*Section 6.1*).
7. Note the ongoing work by the Safeguarding Service to manage those who pose a risk in Church Communities (*Section 6.3*).
8. Approve the Support for Survivors of Historical Abuse Policy as set out in the Appendix and encourage its implementation in Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries and the National Office (*Section 7*).

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 "But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation."

Psalm 13:5

1.1.1 From the earliest days of church history and theology, the importance of trust has been acknowledged. Clement of Alexandria and Augustine both assert the place of trust as being a component of the earliest parts of our faith journey. Martin Luther speaks of trust in God and the Council of Trent (1545-63) also pay heed to trust as one of the steps in being justified before God.

1.1.2 In today's world, there are countless examples of where the public have lost trust, in companies, in politicians, in the media. The Church does not enjoy exemption from this pervading cynicism and lack of trust. The Safeguarding Service has to acknowledge that while we cannot place any guarantee that harm or abuse will not occur, we must do everything within our power to fulfil our duty to continue to build permanent structures, processes and training that work towards providing a safe church for all.

1.1.3 This year we have critically and honestly examined what we can do to care for those whose trust has been utterly shattered – survivors of abuse. Within a context of major denominational challenges and organisational change, the Safeguarding Service wishes to address important issues that emerge in the pastoral care of victim-survivors, notwithstanding issues such as spiritual disempowerment and fractured trust in God and in the world.

1.1.4 The Safeguarding Service is committed to working consistently, with balance and careful assessment of who we are and what we must do to protect and uphold robust safeguarding measures. We will do all we can do to fulfil our duty in protecting the most vulnerable amongst us and fostering a pastoral sense of safeguarding in the Church.

2. SAFE CHURCHES FOR ALL

2.1 Regulatory Compliance

2.1.1 As legislation governing Safeguarding in Scotland and further afield continues to develop, the administration requirements and tasks are constantly evolving. The work of the Safeguarding Service administration team covers a wide remit which includes being the first point of contact for all incoming enquiries to the Safeguarding Service and providing support and guidance to congregations and Presbyteries.

2.1.2 An effective administration team is essential and business critical as they have responsibility for processing safer recruitment checks for all regulatory work roles within the Church, including CrossReach. As part of this function, they must ensure the lawful use of personal information and the maintenance of records to meet regulatory standards and legislative duties.

The team process applications for membership of the Protected Vulnerable Groups scheme (PVG) on behalf of congregations, the Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade, Faith Action and Human Resources.

2.2. Statistics

2.2.1 The following information relates to the calendar year January to December 2023 and reflects the core tasks of the team.

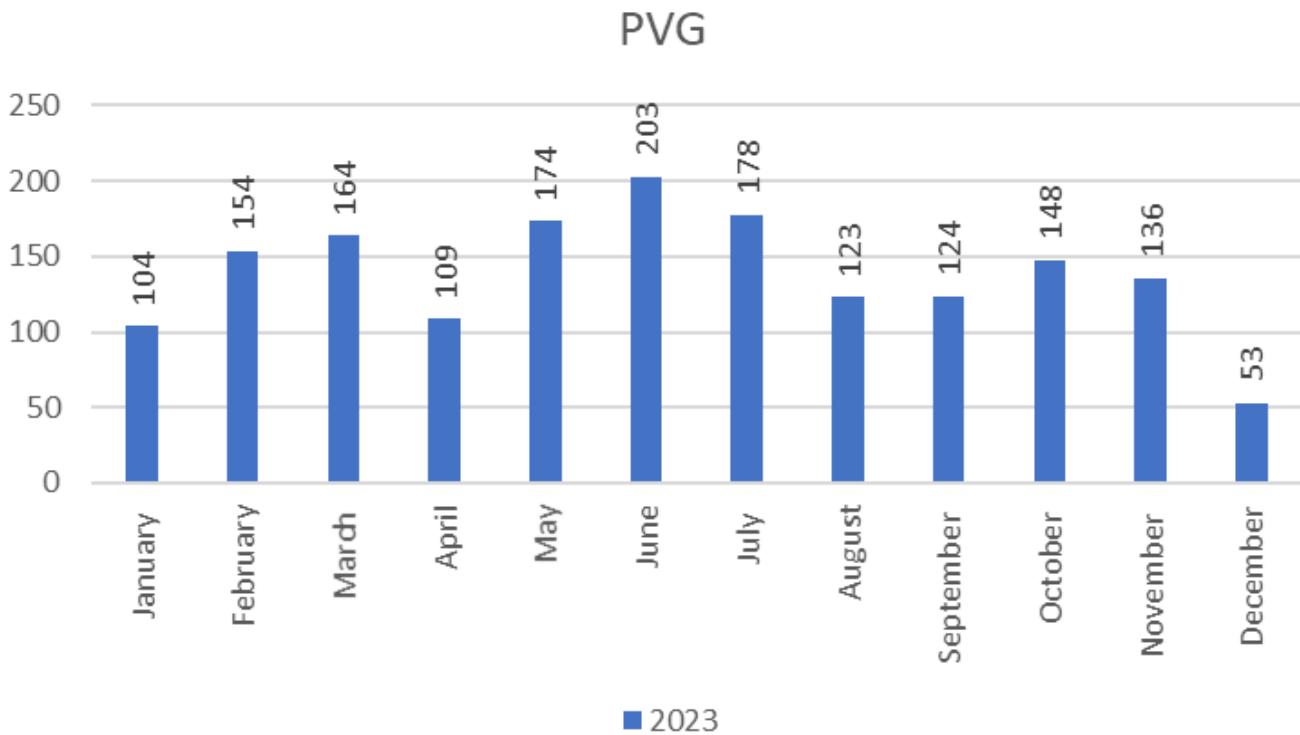
PVG applications: 1692 (Figure 1)

Disclosure and Barring Service checks: 26 (England & Channel Islands)

Basic Disclosure applications: 139

Disclosure Scotland notifications - removals 1211 (Removal of those no longer undertaking regulatory work)

Figure: 1



2.4 Priorities 2023 – 24: Disclosure Scotland Act (2020)

2.4.1 The implementation of the Disclosure Scotland Act (2020) was expected in April 2024; however, this has been delayed until April 2025. The implementation will mean significant changes to our PVG regulatory check processes as the new scheme requires an update application every five years. This will have a notable impact on the volume of work for the Administration Team. To prepare for the implementation we must prioritise information management processes to increase the efficiency of data collection and reporting.

2.4.2 Disclosure Scotland Act (2020) introduces tighter compliance checks in regard to records of individuals we have an ‘interest’ in. Having an ‘interest’ in an individual means we have declared that person is currently carrying out regulated work and, as a result, Disclosure Scotland will ensure they provide us with any relevant information which may mean the individual poses a risk to the protected group they are registered to work with. We also have a legal duty to inform Disclosure Scotland of any disciplinary action we take in respect of that individual to ensure ongoing accurate assessment of risk by statutory bodies. Currently we have an ‘interest’ in approximately 40,000 individuals while it is estimated our regulated workforce (including volunteers) is less than 30,000. This brings additional challenges in respect of compliance with data management legislation as we have no legal purpose to store information on individuals who are not actively involved in regulated work.

2.4.3 Ensuring accurate records in relation to those undertaking regulatory work is a significant challenge which we must overcome to meet the regulatory and legislative requirements. We rely on volunteer Safeguarding Coordinators to maintain accurate congregational registers, with an attestation of records being carried out annually by Presbyteries. This system is not working and we must explore options that will enable us to have confidence in our data and ensure compliance with legislation. In addition, accurate information in regard to Ministers is also a significant challenge. As a result, and as per proposed deliverances 2 and 3, the Safeguarding Committee requires the support and commitment from Presbyteries, Congregations and National Office to develop and implement processes and procedures to enable us to overcome these challenges.

3. PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY SERVICE

3.1 The Safeguarding Service continues to provide a professional advisory service to congregations, Presbyteries, National Office Departments, The Boys’ Brigade, The Girls’ Brigade and The United Reformed Church in Scotland. The types of enquiry it receives range from safer recruitment, regulatory checks such as Disclosure Scotland, policy, procedure and safe working practices. There were 549 enquiries in the 2023 calendar year.

3.2 Recruitment Sub-Committee

3.2.1 The Recruitment Sub-Committee has continued to regularly risk assess applications for both voluntary and paid positions across the wider work of the Church including congregations, Human Resources, Faith Action and CrossReach. Risk assessments are necessary when individuals disclose information in pre-employment forms or applications for regulatory checks, including membership of the Protected Vulnerable Group (PVG) Scheme or Disclosure and Barring Scheme (DBS), are returned with information that may impact on an individual's suitability for work with protected groups.

3.2.2 The sub-Committee currently also carry out this process for the Boys Brigade and the Girls Brigade. Whilst working closely with Disclosure Scotland and the Volunteer Disclosure Scotland Service in preparation for the implementation of the Disclosure Scotland Act 2020, an issue was identified with this aspect of our work. Disclosure Scotland are clear that information provided by them via Disclosure Certificates or 'Under Consideration for Listing' notifications must not be shared with any third-party organisation. In respect of Disclosure Scotland legislation, the Boys' Brigade and the Girls' Brigade are considered third-party organisations despite the long and integral connection. The organisation that 'holds the interest' in an individual, must make the final recruitment decision.

3.2.3 While the Recruitment Sub-Committee process for both organisations is the same as the process for recruiting within The Church, what happens after the recruitment decision is made by the Sub-Committee differs. For internal candidates, the relevant department or congregation Safeguarding Coordinator is informed that the application is 'cleared' or not. The decision of the RSC is final. When the RSC inform the Boys Brigade of the RSC decision, they request the information provided by Disclosure Scotland to present to their own Safeguarding Panel to enable them to make the final decision. The Girls Brigade Chief Executive requests the Disclosure information to discuss with the President and they make the final decision. Disclosure Scotland are unequivocal in their instruction that this information sharing process is unlawful and must not continue.

3.2.4 As a result, the service level agreement with the Boys Brigade will need to be terminated. At the time of writing, the Safeguarding Committee are in discussion with all parties to negotiate a planned transition. The Boys' Brigade is currently registered with Disclosure Scotland as they process applications for their own employees. The key aspect of the transition will be transferring the 'interest' in volunteers from The Church of Scotland to the Boys Brigade without the need to have all submit new application. Disclosure Scotland have indicated that they are keen to support us to make the transition as seamless as possible.

3.2.5 The Girls Brigade is satisfied that our process will be fit for purpose and are willing to forego sight of the Disclosure information and accept the RSC decision as final. They recognise that they do not have to capacity within the organisation to take on full responsibility for processing PVG Scheme membership applications and are grateful to be able to continue with the Service Level Agreement, and have it amended to reflect the changes in information sharing.

3.3 International Presbytery

3.3.1 The Safeguarding Service responsibilities includes the International Presbytery. Work is ongoing to develop our processes to ensure the Service has accurate records of individuals working in the International Presbytery and can effectively support safer recruitment as well as the provision of mandatory safeguarding training.

4. TRAINING

4.1 Safeguarding training plays a pivotal role in ensuring that those working with children or protected adults have the relevant knowledge and understanding to safeguard and prevent harm and abuse of children and protected adults. Training is facilitated by Volunteer Safeguarding Trainers, who are supported by Volunteer Safeguarding Presbytery Contacts, ensuring the smooth running of training in their respective Presbyteries. Ensuring the availability of training courses is an ongoing challenge. The Safeguarding Service work in partnership with Presbyteries to support the recruitment of trainers. We are immensely grateful for the commitment of all involved.

4.2 At the present time the Church has 93 volunteer safeguarding trainers, including those in training, who provide safeguarding training in Presbyteries. There are different Learning Pathways depending on the role of the individual. These were introduced in 2022. Some people will only be required to attend one training course while others will have to attend two or more. The following is a brief overview of the courses:

- *Introductory*: basic training to equip people with the understanding of how to identify concerns and how to report them. For those undertaking 'regulated work'.
- *Advanced*: focuses on the structures and processes of safeguarding within the Church. For Safeguarding Coordinator and members of Safeguarding Panels.
- *Trustee*: considers the role of trustees in relation to oversight of safeguarding within the Church. For all trustees.

4.3 Feedback from participants has been used to improve and further develop the training materials.

4.4 The table below, figure 2, provides participant numbers for each of the training courses.

Figure 2: 2023 Training Stats per Presbytery

Presbytery	2023			
	Advanced	Introductory	Trustee	Total
Argyll	8	0	97	105
Cleir Eilean l	0	0	3	3
Clyde	121	318	376	815
Edinburgh and West Lothian	51	80	411	542
England and Channel Islands	0	0	0	0
Fife	82	213	522	817
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	114	540	60	714
Glasgow	59	291	304	654
Inverness	46	181	163	390
Jerusalem	0	0	0	0
Lochaber	0	0	0	0
Lothian & Borders	98	266	522	886
North East and Northern Isles	81	246	559	886
Perth	171	469	662	1302
Ross	0	26	43	69
Sutherland	9	24	0	33
Lewis	0	0	69	69
Uist	0	0	0	0
Locharron - Skye	0	0	0	0
Caithness	0	0	0	0
Abernethy	0	0	0	0
The South West	56	137	661	854
Unknown	24	62	68	154
Total	920	2853	4520	8293

4.5 Ministers’ Learning Pathway & Refresher Training Update

4.5.1 The General Assembly 2023 instructed the Safeguarding Committee to amend the Ministers’ Learning Pathway. In June 2023, an additional course was agreed by the Safeguarding Committee: The Leadership Safeguarding Training package. The focus of the leadership aspect of this pathway is on evaluating and promoting safeguarding cultures. The course has now been delivered on a pilot basis to groups of ministers and associated roles. However, commitment to the Ministers’ Pathway has been limited with only 12 of an initial cohort of 20 attending the course. Feedback will be used to inform the roll out of this pathway.

4.5.2 The General Assembly 2023 instructed the Safeguarding Committee to develop and roll out refresher training and consider e-learning as a medium for volunteers and Trustees to complete this training. We have explored this deliverance and considered the benefits and advantages of online self-led training for volunteers. The Safeguarding Committee strongly believe that it is important that all those doing regulated work directly with children and protected adults attend facilitator led training (either online or face to face) every 5 years as a minimum requirement. Much of the learning on training courses comes from co-construction at the time of the training; people bring their own examples and their own perceptions of safeguarding and learn a lot from exploring these within a safe environment. This cannot be replicated through self-led training.

4.5.3 The Safeguarding Committee is continuing to explore the scope for “Refresher” Trustee Training to be provided as eLearning and will report back on decision making in relation to this in 2025.

4.6 CrossReach

4.6.1 The Service continues to work in partnership with CrossReach to ensure their safeguarding training needs are met. The Safeguarding Service and CrossReach trainers work together to provide both Child and Adult Protection training courses.

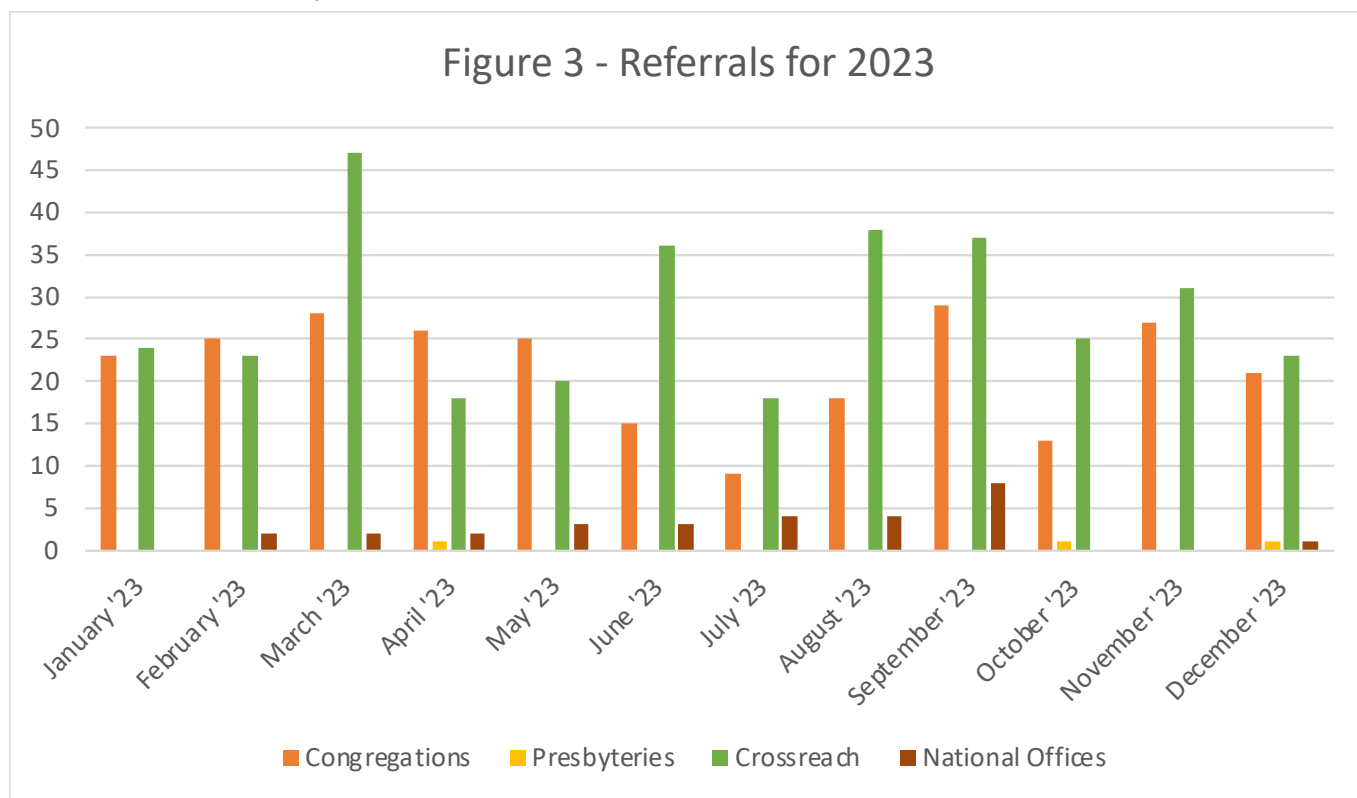
5. SAFE CHURCH FOR ALL - REFERRALS

5.1 The Safeguarding Service continues to provide advice and guidance in respect of safeguarding concerns submitted in referrals. This can be in relation to child protection, adult protection or public protection (managing those who may pose a risk to others).

5.2 The main sources of referrals are congregations, Presbyteries, CrossReach and the National Office. As well as supporting those with current concerns, the Safeguarding Service also manages non-recent (historical) abuse referrals.

5.3 Over the last 12 months, referrals have included requests for advice about a wide range of concerns including domestic abuse, technology enabled abuse and child sexual exploitation (CSE).

The total number of referrals for the year was 631. The graph below, figure 3, depicts the number of referrals by source received between 1st January 2023 and 31st December 2023:



5.4 The Safeguarding Service aims to further develop recording and reporting processes to enable reporting on a range of factors, for example, how many referrals a specific congregation or CrossReach service have submitted with concerns regarding physical abuse or spiritual abuse.

Such data could be used to identify trends and areas for improvement or focused work.

6. 'FOR OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN'

6.1 In 2023, the General Assembly instructed the Safeguarding Committee to begin the work of reviewing and updating the 2009 report 'For of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven'.

The purpose of the review is to identify areas of strength and areas that require further development to ensure our process and guidance continues to reflect best practice as well as national policy and legislation. Representatives involved in the review include Police, Criminal Justice Social Work and Stop it Now.

6.2 Progress

6.2.1 The first stage of the review involved collating views of those who have been working with Covenants of Responsibilities in the Church. This stage has been concluded. The next planned stage is to interrogate the information collated and to draw conclusions around strengths and areas for further development to inform future direction of the review. We aim to present the completed review and recommendations to the General Assembly of 2025.

6.3 Covenants of Responsibilities

6.3.1 A Covenant of Responsibilities is a written agreement between an individual and the Parish Church that they attend or wish to have a connection with and is our key tool for the implementation of 'For of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven'. The need for the Covenant arises when an individual is identified as posing a risk to children and/or protected adults due to being a convicted sex offender or having demonstrated harmful sexual behaviour that meets the threshold for Statutory Service monitoring and/or is thus in conflict with the Church of Scotland values and commitment to creating churches that are safe for all.

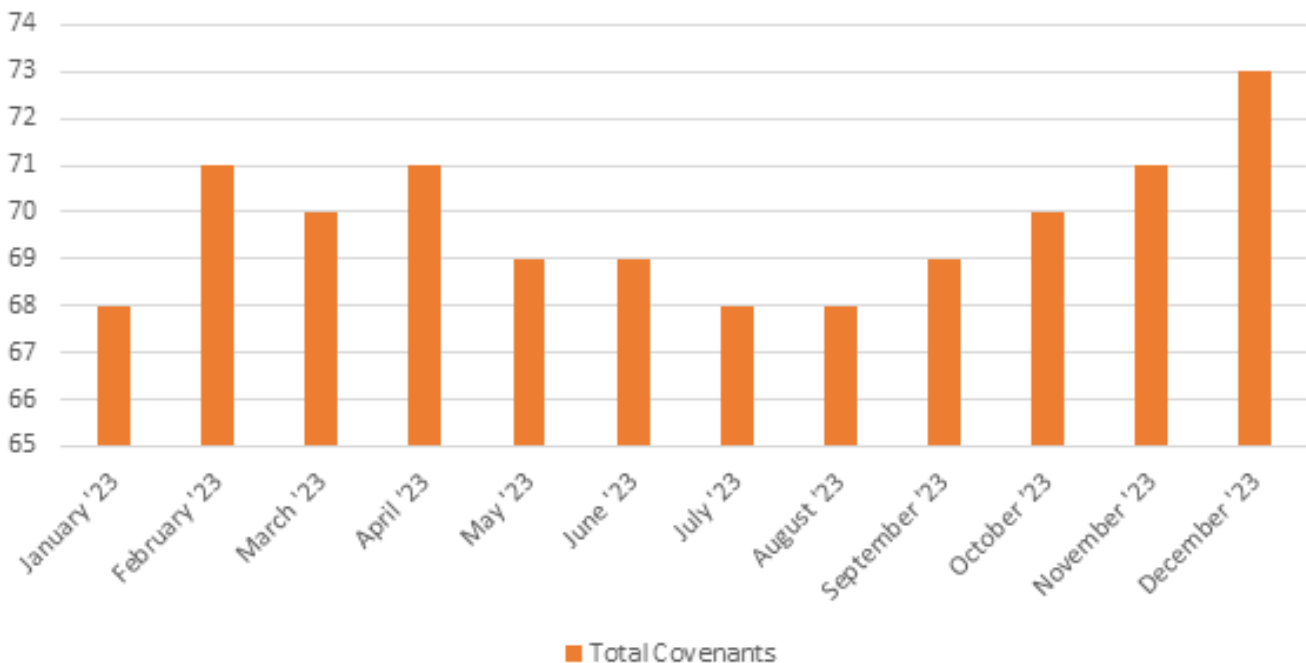
6.3.2 A Covenant of Responsibilities is akin to a behavioural agreement which lays down the expectations of how such a person will behave when attending Church or a Church-led event. Failure to abide by the agreement means that the individual is in effect, deciding not to worship or be involved in Church activity.

6.3.3 Covenants are developed and monitored by Parish Safeguarding Panels working in close partnership with Police Scotland and Criminal Justice Social Work Services. The Safeguarding Service manage the processes around Covenants and ensure appropriate support according to the risk posed and control measures required. We thank congregational safeguarding panels for their work in this area.

6.3.4 The total number of Covenants in place at the end of December 2023 is slightly higher than January 2023. Growing awareness of those who pose a risk in congregations and the fact that individuals are subject to a lifetime Covenant will most likely see a continuing upward trajectory for the future.

Total number of Covenants between January 2023 and Dec 2023:

Covenants for 2023



7. SURVIVOR POLICY UPDATE

7.1 The Independent Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, established in 2015, continues to highlight the importance of recognising those who have experienced abuse within institutional settings and statutory services in the past. The Church of Scotland is committed to co-operating with the Inquiry and to supporting survivors.

7.2 The Safeguarding Committee, in collaboration with Faith Action, CrossReach, Integrity, representatives from congregations, representatives from organisations for survivors of abuse and survivors, has worked toward the completion of this important policy. The policy provides guidance on responding to the needs of survivors of historical abuse and reaffirms our commitment to survivors. The policy aims to:

- Ensure that survivors are heard, understood, believed and supported
- Provide a sensitive and effective response for survivors who report any type of abuse perpetrated by a Church office bearer or employee (see glossary), in a Church activity, or by a worker or another service user in a social care service provided by CrossReach (Social Care Council), as well as those in a Church context who have experienced abuse in other settings and who have felt able to disclose the abuse
- Treat all disclosures of historical abuse seriously and respond in an appropriate and timely way
- Make sure that victims, survivors and Church workers know what process and procedures will be followed if someone discloses abuse
- Strive to understand the possible impact of trauma on the person disclosing abuse and the best way to respond to it
- Respond in a way that prevents further trauma to the person concerned
- Create a healthy safeguarding culture- one of listening, respect, openness and transparency to encourage an environment where people feel safe to disclose abuse
- Ensure that disclosures of alleged criminal activity and/or current risk of significant harm to the victim or survivor, child or adult, is shared appropriately with police or other public authorities

7.3 The full policy is provided as an appendix to the Safeguarding Service Report.

8. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS

8.1 The Safeguarding Service continues to work in partnership with CrossReach and the United Reformed Church in Scotland through service level agreements. These relationships will continue, and we aim to improve our service through development of management information reporting over the next year.

8.2 As referenced in section 3.2.4 of this report, the service level agreement with the Boys' Brigade will come to an end due to the changes in legislation and practice within Disclosure Scotland. The Safeguarding Service will support the organisations by participating in negotiating the terms of the transition with Disclosure Scotland and Volunteer Scotland Disclosure Services to ensure a handover that is manageable and ensures continuing safety and protection for children.

In the name of the Committee

ADAM DILLON, *Convener*
JUDY WILSON, *Vice Convener*
DEBORAH BLACKHURST, *Service Manager*

Addendum

Rev Adam Dillon

This year, the Committee is sorry to lose the services of its Convener, Rev Adam Dillon. Adam became Convener in May 2019 and we are glad to have had the benefit of his convenership for a year longer than the usual term, as he kindly agreed in 2023 to remain on for an additional year. His term of service was an eventful one, as it included the duration of the pandemic, during which the Safeguarding Service continued to deliver its core services in a very challenging context for a long period. He also oversaw the introduction of a safeguarding training programme for ministers and bringing to the Assembly this year a Survivor Policy which we know will be welcomed by the Church. He has been a champion of good safeguarding practice and a safe hand on the tiller in the varied and important work of the Committee, taking all of this on in addition to his demanding role as a parish minister, latterly in Sherbrooke Moss park Parish Church. He is also providing leadership and support as an Interim Moderator to a congregation in vacancy, where his drive and vision are valued as they are in his own congregation. Adam has served not only the national Church but his Presbytery in Safeguarding matters, and continues a short series of contributions to Presbytery meetings called Safeguarding Soundbites.

Friendships and family are deeply important to Adam who offers his friendship and support, often in most challenging times but in a quiet and unspoken way. As he steps down from his role as Convener we know that he will not be at a loss for work to occupy him but hope that he may have more opportunity to spend time with his wife Sheila, to enjoy nurturing these rich and rewarding friendships and to explore more of the world, not least in visiting family in some far-flung places. He leaves with our grateful thanks and best wishes for the future.

JUDY WILSON, *Vice Convener*
DEBORAH BLACKHURST, *Service Manager*

Appendix

APP. SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS OF HISTORICAL ABUSE POLICY 2024 (also known as non-recent abuse) (Supplement to Safeguarding Handbook)

1. Policy Statement

1.1 This policy is about how the Church aims to respond to the needs of survivors of historical abuse. It is underpinned by the Safeguarding Policy Statement and Safeguarding Handbook [see [Safeguarding Service webpages](#) for current version].

See section 10 for definitions and section 9 for a summary flowchart.

1.2 The Church will:

- Ensure that survivors are heard, understood, believed and supported
- Provide a sensitive and effective response for survivors who report any type of abuse perpetrated by a Church office bearer or employee (see glossary), in a Church activity, or by a worker or another service user in a social care service provided by CrossReach (Social Care Council), as well as those in a Church context who have experienced abuse in other settings and who have felt able to disclose the abuse,
- Treat all disclosures of historical abuse seriously and respond in an appropriate and timely way
- Make sure that victims, survivors and Church workers know what process and procedures will be followed if someone discloses abuse
- Strive to understand the possible impact of trauma on the person disclosing abuse and the best way to respond to it
- Respond in a way that prevents further trauma to the person concerned
- Create a healthy safeguarding culture- one of listening, respect, openness and transparency to encourage an environment where people feel safe to disclose abuse
- Ensure that disclosures of alleged criminal activity and/or current risk of significant harm to the victim or survivor, child or adult, is shared appropriately with police or other public authorities

2. Church of Scotland Theology of Safeguarding

2.1 Jesus had a very clear message about the most vulnerable people. It is a theme which is replicated throughout the whole Bible, with God portrayed in the 121st Psalm as the 'keeper' of Israel. This Hebrew word can be translated as Safeguard, which is God's need and wish for the Church, not only that we are safe, but we all work for the safety of all people. That is affirmed in the theological idea of Salvation.

2.2 In both the Greek and the Latin version of the word, the root of the word is safekeeping. The theological imperative of God is the safety of his children. Jesus continues this theme in St Matthew 18, when he places a child in the midst of the disciples when they ask him: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" His reply is revolutionary when he says: "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven". (Matthew 18: 3-5). The power of the Jesus' imagery shows us the strength of his teaching about the most vulnerable in our midst. Yet again, Jesus gives us the example that worldly power is not the most important thing in his world, and that Christians are called to replicate that radical hospitality and celebrate Christ's Incarnation, by the love we have for the most vulnerable in our midst.

2.3 There are other examples in the Gospels of Jesus holding up the poor and vulnerable elderly as examples of great faith, as in the story of the widow, who brings her gift to the Temple. He holds her up as an example of humility and generosity. Jesus teaches that, in the Kingdom, people are judged by what is in their hearts and how they put their faith into action, rather than the learned, like the Pharisees who know the Law, but fail to put it into practice. Theologically, the Church of Scotland is committed to promoting environments where everyone is free from the risk of harm and abuse. This stems from the Gospel imperative that Jesus loves everyone, particularly those who are the least, the last and the lost in society, and wishes everyone to be safe and cared for, particularly those who are vulnerable.

2.4 The other side of this coin is that we know there are some people who worship in our congregations, or who might wish to work for the Church, who present a risk of harm and abuse to vulnerable people. For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven Report 2009, is the Church of Scotland's understanding of our theological attitude to Forgiveness, and how we support and manage people who pose a risk to vulnerable people. At its heart is an understanding that people who survive abuse should be cared for and not be placed in a situation, where the hurt they have experienced can be perpetuated, even inadvertently, by our actions. This means that in discipleship terms, someone who has abused can no longer be allowed to be in a place of leadership within the Church and they must be accountable for their continued discipleship journey.

2.5 Forgiveness can only be given by the survivor. The "institution" of the Church does not have the right to forgive an individual on behalf of anyone who has been abused. It may be that someone who has been abused may not be able to forgive the person who has abused them, and the Church should never make anyone feel obliged to forgive the kind of abuse they may have suffered. The Church should rightly leave that great responsibility and right to God. It is also important to remember that forgiveness is not about forgetting. Jesus still had the scars on his body after the resurrection and everyone lives with their own scars. People who survive abuse have hidden scars, and the Church should ensure that, as an institution, we do not add to their scars.

- 2.6** The person who poses a risk of harm and abuse and wishes to continue to worship within the Church of Scotland is required, as part of their discipleship journey, to recognise they are under the authority of God. They, like everyone who seeks to live out their discipleship, must try to acknowledge what they have done and how they have done it, and seek to find ways to amend their behaviour and to repent of their sin. This acknowledgement may only be to God, but it is hoped that with the support of the local congregation, and by bible study, prayer and reflection with the Minister and others, they might find a way to live with what they have done and to live safely.
- 2.7** Safeguarding is at the heart of God’s will for everyone and while it is sometimes challenging to incorporate its requirements into the life of the congregation, its foundations assure us that God’s love requires us to place the most vulnerable at the heart of what we do and who we are. This ensures that in the Body of Christ, we encourage everyone to live fully, radically and in God’s love and safekeeping.

2.8 Apologies

Apologising for historical abuse can be challenging, particularly when the perpetrators of the abuse have died or are no longer part of the church. Aspects of apologies are referred to throughout the Bible. There are many examples in book of Acts of how people can be held responsible for sins they may not have directly carried out; Peter charges the “[m]en of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem” (v. 14) with crucifying Jesus (v. 23, 36). To be sure, they did this by the hands of lawless men...” (v. 23), however as they had been present, they bore some responsibility for Jesus’s death.

- 2.9** Receiving an apology can be therapeutic for a survivor and can support their healing. We must reflect on what the Bible tells us and how we can make apologies that are meaningful. The following should be considered:
- *Recognition: I acknowledge what happened, and I see the negative effects of those sins of omission or commission.*
 - *Remorse: I feel terrible for what has happened.*
 - *Renunciation: I reject what has taken place in the past and repudiate those beliefs, words, thoughts, or actions.*
 - *Repentance: I have sinned against God and will turn away from this evil and strive after greater obedience to God’s law in my life.*

(DeYoung, 2018)

3. Types of Abuse experienced in faith communities and the impact of abuse

- 3.1** Abuse can happen anywhere and can be perpetrated by anyone. Abuse within faith communities may include sexual, physical, emotional/psychological, domestic and spiritual abuse, financial or material abuse and neglect.
- 3.2** Survivors of abuse have shared their experiences, highlighting common themes about how abuse occurs within these communities and how their voices are heard or not.
- 3.3** The needs of survivors of abuse vary greatly depending on individual circumstances. They may or may not experience trauma as a result of life events. Many types of experience can lead to psychological trauma, including but not limited to, interpersonal violence, chronic or repetitive experiences such as child abuse and neglect. Experiencing trauma may shape how people respond to a particular situation or event and can have a wide range of adverse outcomes, including poorer mental and physical health, economic and social outcomes, and religious/spiritual impacts.
- 3.4** Their needs can change over time and be triggered at different points in their lifetime or be lifelong.
- 3.5** Whilst the majority of the population has been, directly or indirectly, exposed to at least one traumatic event in their lifetime, it is important to note that no two people experience harmful events in the same way. Some people are resilient and able to ‘bounce back’ without experiencing the same impact as their neighbour while other people may develop damaging coping skills e.g. problematic substance use.
- 3.6** Survivors might need practical support about how to report abuse and access appropriate medical help, advocacy support and therapeutic support such as counselling and psychotherapy.
- 3.7** For those with a safeguarding role in the Church (it’s everyone’s job), being aware of the impact of abuse on survivors and the connection between abuse and trauma, can help us provide an effective and timely response when needed.

4. Barriers and Challenges to Disclosing Abuse in Faith Communities

- The trust people have in religious leaders, which both creates opportunities for abuse and makes it less likely that survivors will be believed if they accuse a religious community leader
- The difficulty people have in thinking that someone of their own faith would abuse another member of that same faith, tied with the desire not to damage the reputation of the faith group by exposing such individuals
- An attitude of welcome and inclusion, which makes religious communities susceptible to people who wish to enter them in order to abuse. This can be tied up with issues of forgiveness and second chances
- Blurred boundaries between adults and children, for example on pilgrimages and other trips

- Reliance, especially at the level of individual congregations, on volunteers to handle safeguarding issues; volunteers who will have varying degrees of knowledge and confidence, and who can easily walk away if not properly supported
- A concern for organisational reputation, stemming at least in part from the status of religious groups as morally good organisations. This status is threatened by abuse within the organisation, and appears to be a consideration in the repeated covering up of potential scandals in a number of faith groups.
- Community organisations/charities, faith groups – especially smaller ones – may have limited resources to devote to safeguarding
- Many lack a culture of safe recruitment, supervision, human resources and other management structures which can lead to accountability and transparency
- Tension between religious laws and customs and statutory requirements
- How to best use limited resources (SCIE)

5. Importance of Trauma Informed Co-production

5.1 The voices of Survivors should be heard in a meaningful and non-tokenistic way. This means seeing survivors as a valuable resource, and reaching out to engage with them in safeguarding improvement work, for example through co-producing policies and procedures, training and safeguarding education. However, in our aim to be a trauma informed organisation, we must ensure engagement does not re-traumatise survivors of abuse. Reflecting this, the Church of Scotland Survivor Group has been assisted in its work by a number of different people with lived experience and representative organisations. We thank them for their time and commitment to ensuring this policy was well-informed.

6. Our commitment to survivors of abuse within the Church of Scotland:

6.1 Many survivors and survivor groups tell us they need

- To be heard
- To be listened to
- To be believed and not judged
- To receive caring and empathetic support from professionals and others

6.2 This policy aims to meet these needs through the implementation of this policy and the supporting procedures detailed below.

7. Procedure

7.1 This procedure provides a framework for responding to reports of historical abuse. It should be read alongside the flowchart on page 9

I. Disclosure

The process starts with a report of historical abuse by a survivor, or other person, about the harmful conduct by a person as defined in 1.2 above. The disclosure may relate to any organised activity or service-provision in the Church or in a current, or past, CrossReach service or in a context outwith the Church (flowchart, step 1).

It is important not to give the person disclosing the information the promise of confidentiality. The Church has a duty of care and responsibility to contribute to the protection of individuals and the public in general. While their information will be treated with sensitivity, it may be necessary to pass this on to statutory bodies including the Police and Social Work Services. However, reassurance can be given that information will only be shared on this basis and only those who need to know, will be told.

II. Safeguarding procedure

Historical abuse should be referred to the Safeguarding Service using the established safeguarding procedure for all reported harm (flowchart step 2).

III. Initial Risk Assessment

The Safeguarding Service will do a risk assessment (flowchart step 3) using the disclosed information to determine if there is a current risk and if the information disclosed needs to be shared with the police or other statutory bodies immediately (flowchart step 4). Sometimes the survivor may be at risk of on-going harm or another child or adult may currently be at risk of significant harm and this should be acted on.

If this is not the case, the Safeguarding Service will support the collation of basic information about what happened, where, when and who was involved. This is about establishing the context of the alleged abuse, NOT investigating the allegation. The police, or other statutory bodies, will take the lead role in any investigation (flowchart step 3a).

Appropriate senior staff in the Church Offices and/or CrossReach will be advised about the disclosure.

IV. Reported crime and/or current risk of harm?

When a disclosure suggests that a crime has been committed, the Church’s standard practice will be to share this information with the relevant Police service (flowchart step 4). The initial risk assessment will be used to determine when Police are informed – see (III) above.

- Sharing information with the police

If the survivor wishes to inform Police themselves, they will be encouraged and supported to do so.

The Church has a duty to contribute to public protection. If a survivor does not want to, or is not able to do this, the relevant Church department or The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will share this information.

However, the survivor retains control – they do not have to speak with the Police unless they want to. It is highly unlikely that the Police will contact the survivor when it is known that they do not want this to happen. It is the role of Police to decide what to do with the information e.g. note it for information or investigate.

V. Being Heard

“The greatest thing you can give a survivor is acknowledgement, not sympathy but acknowledgement” (1)

The survivor will have the opportunity to be heard if they wish through contact with the Safeguarding Service. The Safeguarding Service will work with the survivor to ensure appropriate opportunities to be heard are identified. Contact with the Safeguarding Service can be a face-to-face meeting, or the survivor may prefer to communicate via email, letter, telephone or video call (flowchart step 5).

VI. Responding to survivors’ needs

Being heard is the first step in responding to survivors’ needs. Survivors will be supported to share any needs they have identified with the Safeguarding Service. The Church will consider these, and where it is reasonable and appropriate to do so, make a response. These may include one or more of the following: being heard and listened to; provision of on-going pastoral care; professional counselling; police investigation; meeting with a senior representative of the Church; access to the survivor’s records from the time of the reported abuse; being put in contact with specialist voluntary organisations for supporting survivors.

(1) Quote from a survivor on the front cover of the Scottish Government report into historical abuse, Time to be Heard: A Pilot Forum, Tom Shaw, February 2011.

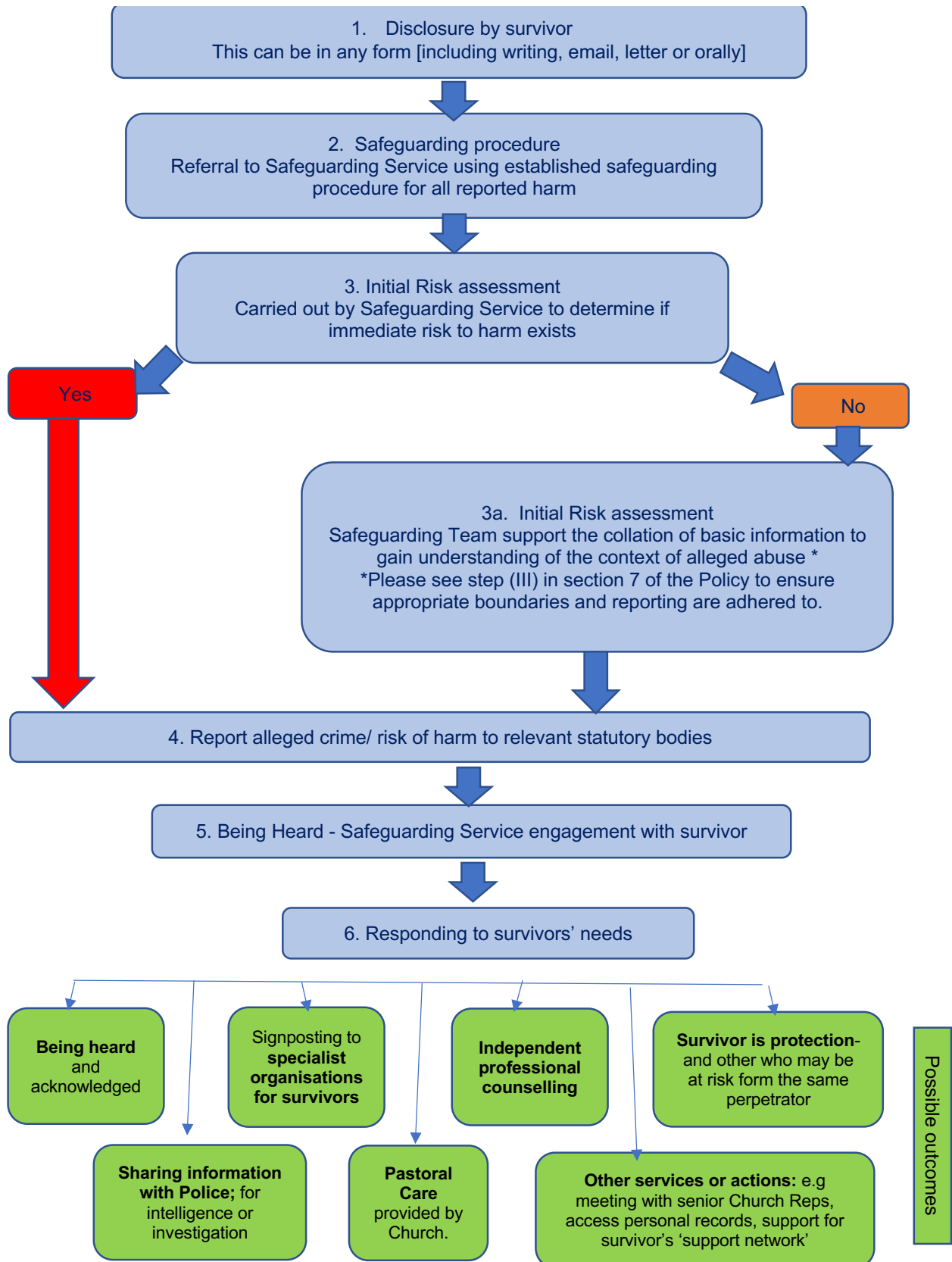
8. Summary

8.1 The Church will be receptive to the needs of survivors and will give them an opportunity to be heard. The policy and procedure provide a structure and process for this to happen. The measures of success will be the outcomes for survivors.

8.2 The Safeguarding Committee will regularly monitor and review this policy and procedure.

9. Flowchart

The Church of Scotland: Support for Survivors of Historical Abuse Policy, 2024



10. Glossary

Adults at risk

As defined in the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007: a person who is unable to safeguard their own wellbeing, is at risk of harm, and, because they are affected by disability, mental ill health, physical or learning disabilities, is more vulnerable to harm than a person not so affected.

Child

A child is a person under the age of 18 years old.

Church

All Church of Scotland congregations and Presbyteries world-wide, General Assembly Standing Committees, statutory corporations, Church-provided social care services past and present, and any service provided by Church office bearers/employees.

Church office bearer and employee

An office bearer is (a) any person occupying a voluntary post or office in a congregation or Presbytery and (b) a Minister, Deacon, Reader, Candidate or Probationer of the Church of Scotland. An employee is a paid member of staff e.g. paid youth worker, pastoral care visitor, or paid staff working with 'adults at risk' in a congregation, staff in CrossReach services etc.

Disclosure or reporting

This is when an adult, or a young person, speaks about abuse they experienced in their childhood. The disclosure may relate to an individual's experience in the family home, community or while in foster, residential or other social care setting.

Historical abuse, also known as non-recent abuse

This means adults reporting abuse that occurred when they were children. Historical abuse includes neglect, emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse which took place before the survivor was 18 years old; and that has been reported by the survivor a significant time after the event. For more about what is meant by harm/abuse see Safeguarding Handbook. The term historical abuse is a misnomer: the effects of abuse are current, not past, for survivors. Similarly, the offences may be 'historic' but reported criminality from the past needs to be investigated in the present which makes such cases current.

Perpetrators of abuse and historical abuse

The Church of Scotland historical abuse policy and procedure primarily relates to people who allege/report abuse by Church office bearers/employees and not to a person who discloses abuse by others whether or not this took place in a Church context. For the Church this means any current or former employee, office bearer, Church member or volunteer in any current, or former, congregation, Church organisation or CrossReach service. For CrossReach, and some activities in congregations, the alleged perpetrators could also be other children or adults at risk using the service.

However, this policy will also support survivors whose perpetrator of abuse had no connection to the Church, but have felt able to disclose their abuse to someone within the Church.

Statutory Body

This is Police Scotland, local authority social work services, health services or regulatory organisations (Care Inspectorate, Scottish Social Services Council).

Survivor

This is the preferred term for the person affected by historical abuse. A survivor is usually an adult but may also be an older child or an 'adult at risk'. The survivor's 'supportive family members', spouses and partners are also indirectly affected by that same abuse.

11. Supporting Documents

- Anne-Marie McAlinden: [Politics of apology](#) Cambridge University Press, 2021
- Church of Scotland: [Theology of Safeguarding](#), Church of Scotland, online, nd
- Dr Godfred Boahen & David Worlock: [Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse](#), The Church of England, 2021
- Eloise K. Thomas et al: [Clergy Apologies Following Abuse: What Makes A Difference?](#), ResearchGate, 2008
- Jasvinder Sangera CBE: ["Don't Panic - Be Pastoral"](#), Independent Safeguarding Board, 2022
- Kevin DeYoung: [Toward a Theology of Apology](#), The Gospel Coalition, online, 2018
- Pete Singer: [Toward a More Trauma-Informed Church](#), The Theological Journal of the Lutheran School of Theology and Wartburg Theological Seminary Vol.51 No.1, 2024
- Scottish Government & NHS Education for Scotland: [Trauma Informed Practice Toolkit, The Scottish Government, Edinburgh, 2021](#)
- Scottish Government: [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 – Updated 2023](#), The Scottish Government, Edinburgh, 2023
- Stephen Winter et al.: [The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State and Faith Based Care: A Preliminary Review](#), The Royal Commission, Wellington, 2018
- The Church of Scotland: [The Safeguarding Act](#), Church of Scotland, website, 2009
- The Mission and Discipleship Council and The Safeguarding Committee: [For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven](#), Church of Scotland, 2009
- The Safeguarding Committee: [Safeguarding Act Guidance](#), Church of Scotland, website, 2018
- The Safeguarding Committee: [Safeguarding Handbook](#), Church of Scotland, website, 2018 updated 2023
- Tom Shaw: [Time to be Heard: A Pilot Forum](#), Scottish Government, Edinburgh, 2011

IONA COMMUNITY BOARD MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Encourage the Church of Scotland at every level - nationally, at Presbytery and in congregations - to identify specific ways in which the different strands of the work of the Iona Community might inform and influence the future planning and delivery of mission and outreach work of the Church.
3. In the face of Brexit and ongoing rise of populism across Europe, urge Presbyteries, Kirk Sessions and congregations to take up opportunities to forge links, cross-cultural learning and partnerships across Europe.
4. Commend the work of the Church of Scotland in Israel and Palestine, while regretting the withdrawal of Church of Scotland funds from the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (*Section 4.2*).
5. Welcome the proposal by Monica Lennon MSP for an Ecocide Prevention (Scotland) Bill in the Scottish Parliament which seeks to deter mass environmental damage and destruction taking place in Scotland, and aims to protect the environment, habitats, and natural resources by introducing the crime of ecocide into Scots Law; note the engagement by both members of the Iona Community Environment Common Concern Network and the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group in the consultation about this proposal; note the involvement of the World Council of Churches in the Faith for Ecocide Law initiative, and support further development of legal protections of the environment both in Scotland and internationally (*Section 4.3*).

Report

1. GROWING A GLOBAL FAITH COMMUNITY IN PARTNERSHIP.

1.1 Our global community continues to expand particularly through the use of online platforms. While we recognise the limitations, we celebrate the opportunities to connect across borders that this technology offers. We are aware of the injustices that remain, with connectivity to our members in the Caribbean and in parts of Africa, for example, remaining a challenge. In the face of these challenges we are glad that global membership is increasing with renewed alliances with the [Wellspring Community](#), and a growth of our membership in Africa along with increased membership in Central Europe.

1.2 The [daily worship](#) prepared by Members of our Community and shared on our social media channels is followed by scores of people who tell us regularly how much they value being part of a global worshipping community committed to justice, peace and the renewal of the church.

1.3 We recognise the necessary and painful work that the Church of Scotland is doing to support renewal, and continue to pray for the Church and all its members at this time.

1.4 One way in which we continue to support churches is through our [Wild Goose Resource Group](#) which continues to offer resources for creative worship and faith exploration. Through them we offer ideas, inspiration and methodologies that enable others to develop imaginations, skills and sensitivities in the areas of liturgy and worship, bringing the Bible alive, delving into deep God-talk, and so playing a part in enriching the responsiveness of people of faith to the realities of contemporary life.

1.5 Through our WGRG we continue to support the life of local churches which is focused for a season on Gorbals Parish Church in Glasgow. We contribute regularly to [Spill the Beans](#), and offer input to the Glasgow University short course on liturgy and worship.

1.6 In these times of extensive change and consolidation within the mainstream churches, we trust in God that this renewal is a path which will bring more peace in a world at war, more justice in a world imbalanced, and more hope in a world of despair.

1.7 Some of our most profound learning about the interface between spirituality and justice comes from our engagement with people in non-church/faith settings. Our presence at the [Glastonbury Festival](#), where we have for over 30 years hosted a sanctuary space for up to 500 festival goers, and at the [Greenbelt Festival](#), where we host workshops and Big and Wee Sings for 100s of participants hungry for liturgy and song that expresses faith rooted in every-day life, are reminders of the desire particularly amongst young folk for words and ways in to faith. We welcome a renewed and deepened relationship with the Greenbelt Festival in 2024.

1.8 A visit in 2023 to the [Agape Centre](#) near Turin in Northern Italy, founded out of the rubble of the second world war as a sanctuary space for young people from different sides in that conflict, reminded us of our shared roots as communities of peace rooted in faith. Later in the year, our Trustees visited the [Corrymeela Community](#) in Northern Ireland, yet another example of the power of community in the face of war and violence. We treasure these relationships and are glad to belong to [Oikosnet Europe](#), a network of faith-based communities and 'lay academies' across Europe. Members will meet in Community in 2024 in the [Augustinian Monastery](#) in Erfurt, Germany. As communities across Europe fragment and polarise, so we celebrate these deep connections.

1.9 2023 saw our Leader, Ruth Harvey, join the [Wellspring Community](#) in the lands now called Australia to take part in a 5-week pilgrimage meeting 30 indigenous Christian leaders who shared their stories of creation care, the quest for a 'voice' in the Australian parliament, and their desire for peace with justice rooted in a faith in Jesus Christ. You can read about this pilgrimage at [Iona Community Learn](#).

2. LEARNING AND EQUIPPING

2.1 In the 1940s and 50s the 'experiment' on Iona which resulted in the rebuilding of the living quarter of Iona Abbey, and the explorations in forging new approaches to living in communities of faith were variously described by George MacLeod as a 'laboratory' or a 'lighthouse of learning.' The programmes offered to guests at our islands centres remain part of that learning process. A deeper learning comes from the shared experience, at these centres, and in our local Family Groups across the globe, of living in community with one another as we account for our keeping of the [Rule of Life](#).

2.2 A pilot scheme to expand and consolidate our approach to learning and equipping was launched in 2023. Through [Iona Community Learn](#) we are developing new pathways for volunteers, supporting our global New Members programme, and deepening our work with our partners in the field of higher education.

2.3 In 2023 this included working with staff on Iona and at Camas to learn about the rhythm of life at our islands centres and the 'radical/costly hospitality' they offer year round. How our volunteers, who number up to 80 annually, fit in with this rhythm and are supported through it, will be the next step. We will be helped in this with the new post of Volunteer Manager. The health and well-being of our volunteers, along with managing the workload of our hard-working staff, remain core priorities in this ongoing 'laboratory of learning.'

2.4 Since Brexit, we have become aware of increasing barriers to volunteers seeking to travel to the UK from Europe and further afield. This restricts opportunities for all of us, both in learning from those from other cultures, and in opportunities for young people from the UK to travel and work within Europe.

2.5 We are particularly keen to ensure that our islands centres attract a more diverse and global group of volunteers. Conversations are ongoing with experienced practitioners working with people living in poverty including the Church of Scotland Priority Areas team, Faith in Community Scotland and the GK Experience. We recognise that in our offer of hospitality, including the food we share, we are modelling the community that we seek. And so we celebrate the [Iona Abbey Cook Book](#) by Anja Jardine, reflecting the justice at the heart of hospitality.

2.6 Iona Community Members and Associate Members world-wide are nurtured by the songs and liturgies produced by the Wild Goose Resource Group and others, and by the hands-on spirituality which connects their faith and their daily living. Those whose first language is not English are teaching us ways in which our gatherings can be more inclusive and contextually sensitive. Our New Members programme includes 13 people based in the UK, 3 in Germany, 5 in the United States of America and 1 in Aotearoa/New Zealand. We recognise that while our primary belonging in community is with those who live near us on site, we can also forge deep and lasting connections across time zones, continents and oceans. We are learning again the art of dispersed community.

2.7 With our current learning partners, the School of Divinity at Edinburgh University, the Theology and Religious Studies Department at Glasgow University and the Student Christian Movement, we are exploring mutually enriching learning opportunities. This includes collating postgraduate research that has focused on the Iona Community and exploring ways to gather existing research in an accessible format while also connecting university students with Members and the work of the Iona Community. Our Young Adults Group continues to support monthly worship at the University of Glasgow, and Members regularly take part in panel discussions and book festival events hosted by the School of Divinity in Edinburgh.

2.8 We value and aim to advance the interplay between theological rigour and contextual practice. This comes to life particularly as masters or research students seek the wisdom and experience of our Common Concern Network members to deepen their research. The annual Iona Community Lecture (this year offered by the Joint Public Issues Team on Friday 25th October 2024 at New College, Edinburgh) will explore issues of poverty and inclusion.

3. IONA ABBEY, CAMAS OUTDOOR CENTRE, AND THE MACLEOD CENTRE

3.1 [Camas Outdoor Centre](#) on Mull had an outstanding year in 2023, often supporting young people from situations of deprivation. Our staff team of 9 residents, supported by up to 6 volunteers each week, welcome groups of guests, up to 28 at a time, who stay with us for a week. In 2023 our staff welcomed 450 guests over the course of the season. 70% of those guests are living with disadvantage of some kind, whether they are asylum seekers or refugees, people with little social or economic power, or individuals recovering from addiction. Everyone who comes to Camas is welcomed into community, into the home of our staff. Together in community we share in the beauty of what Camas has to offer.

3.2 Camas remains a centre primarily for young people and young adults living on the margins of society. 60% of our groups in 2023 were aged under 18, with most of the rest primarily being people under the age of 30. Of the 20 volunteers we had in 2023, 19 were under 40 and 18 under 30. Guests and volunteers of all ages are always welcome to ensure wide diversity.

3.3 Twice daily worship in Iona Abbey remains a key part of our daily rhythm of life and one of the joys is that any member of the team - staff or volunteer - is invited to lead. Many arrive never having led worship before but with support and encouragement, we have been truly moved and challenged by their passion and creativity. The overwhelmingly positive feedback we receive from those who join in worship is heartening: one example being a day visitor who hadn't been to church for decades and was ardent in his gratitude for feeling so welcome.

3.4 Every Wednesday evening, we offer an Agape Service in Iona Abbey - sharing around a table, hearing stories from lived experience, often from guests, and from 'Scriptures and other well-springs of nourishment', followed by sharing a home-made cookie and a cup of 'living water'. It is a time of deep solidarity: for instance in September 2023, during a week focusing on Israel/Palestine, the three leaders (Jewish, Muslim and Christian) each read from their own scriptures - in Hebrew, Arabic and English. We had no idea of what was about to happen in the Middle East and their presence with us made that ever more personal.

- 3.5** In July, we welcomed some three dozen young people to YouthFest: two groups from London - the majority of whom were from black and minority ethnic communities - and one group from Maryland, USA. As well as the energy they brought, one of the most telling things from their feedback was how they were in awe of the beauty of the nature around them on Iona - a totally new experience for many who had never been out of the city before.
- 3.6** We continue to welcome guests through the Unlocked Programme - for people for whom the cost of living crisis means they cannot afford a holiday, and those who are burnt out through work or for other reasons and need a break.
- 3.7** An outstanding 'moment' of 2023 was sitting in a semi-circle in the Abbey Church with the trans Scottish actor and playwright, Jo Clifford, as she performed '[The Gospel of Jesus Queen of Heaven](#)' - a soul-stirring expression of Jesus' love for everybody, particularly those who suffer from prejudice or rejection from the society around them.
- 3.8** The MacLeod Centre on Iona is temporarily closed, with a Project Manager in place to bring business planning expertise to build on the vision, agreed by Trustees, for a centre focussing on young people and environmental concerns.

4. COMMON CONCERN NETWORKS

4.1 Over 1000 of our Members and Associate Members find expressions for their life and faith through our global [Common Concern Networks](#). Each of these CCNs is led by volunteer moderators who host monthly online meetings. For these many hours of dedicated leadership in a world sorely in need of hope we offer our deep gratitude.

4.2 Our Israel/Palestine Common Concern Network brought a revised [Position Statement](#) to the Community in early 2023. They also brought their considerable talent and expertise to bear in leading a programme week at Iona Abbey in September. This week brought input from those who are observant members of Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths. We listened to Palestinian voices (Muslim and Christian). We reflected with British analysts and activists (Jewish and Christian) and left informed, energized and grateful for the creative engagement of volunteers and staff. Less than a month later we were traumatized by seeing the violence on and since October 7th, and by the bombardment in Gaza that killed 21 family members of one of our guest speakers, Ahmed Alnaouq.

4.3 CCN Environment

4.3.1 "The environmental crisis overshadows every other issue: The story here is of an insanely unbalanced account of human entitlement and human capacity that has consistently, in the last three centuries, ignored any sense of the interdependence of human life and the life of the organic order as a whole: the life that matters has been, explicitly or implicitly, defined as human life - and human life lived in a specific mode, that of expanding consumption."

(Rowan Williams, Conference of European Churches General Assembly 2023)

4.3.2 Our Environment Common Concern Network is truly international, with active members in Australia, Kenya, Europe and North America. Both professionally and personally, their environmental action includes: local community gardening and food-growing, national campaigning and vigils on fossil-fuel divestment, biodiversity conservation and reforestation, and public speaking and preaching. It also includes action on the horrendous and utterly unaccountable ways in which conflict, militarism and the global arms trade devastate habitats. They share their experience and ideas, and bear witness to each other about the local impacts of the worldwide disaster that is still limply referred to as 'climate change.'

4.3.3 But though members act locally, their deepest area of sharing is in the conviction that this is a profound spiritual and theological crisis, well-expressed in the words of Rowan Williams above. The Network remains committed to amplifying the unlistened-to and unheard voices of the victims of environmental injustice, and to rekindling community in an expansive, inclusive Commonwealth of God that promotes thriving communion of our human, and nonhuman, siblings.

4.3.4 Members of the Iona Community CCN Environment have contributed to and support Monica Lennon MSP's proposal for an [Ecocide Prevention Bill](#) and invite the Church of Scotland General Assembly to offer its support for this issue.

4.4 CCN Migration and Refugees

4.4.1 Members of our Migration and Refugees CCN have been active in protesting against the Illegal Migration Act as it passed through Parliament. Members have also been challenging the current government's attitude towards asylum seekers and refugees - for example, in supporting refugees housed in hotels and other accommodation, including the barge at Portland; in providing clothing, toiletries and Christmas gifts to asylum seekers and refugees in various locations; in devoting some time to the needs of those at Calais; as well as in offering hospitality to Ukrainians.

4.4.2 Alison Phipps, an Iona Community Member and [UNESCO Chair Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts \(RILA\), Glasgow University](#), led a week at our Camas Centre with refugees marking World Refugee Day. She says "every World Refugee Day marks the loss of more protections and provisions. As political leadership in these lands is contested, using a barometer of cruelty, whilst many cannot feed themselves or their children, the past feels hauntingly close."

4.5 CCN LGBTQ+

4.5.1 We uphold the right of all loving couples to have their commitment acknowledged within our churches, and commend those denominations that have made this possible, including the Church of Scotland in enabling ministers to marry same-sex couples, and encourage clergy to opt in to offer this ministry.

4.5.2 The Iona Community, through our LGBTQ+ CCN, responded to the outcome of the [Living in Love and Faith](#) process of the Church of England. As an ecumenical movement working for justice and peace, we affirm the inherent goodness of people of all sexualities and genders and their loving relationships. We continue to uphold our commitment to “celebrate human diversity and work to combat discrimination on grounds of gender, sexual orientation or religion.”

4.5.3 We remain concerned about the ongoing impact that homophobic and transphobic statements and exclusionary teachings have on LGBTQ+ people and those who love them, and the impact in wider society. We long for the day when all in the LGBTQ+ community are welcomed equally throughout the breadth of churches and we support our members in actions to promote this.

4.6 The Iona Community added their voice to the Poverty Alliance’s call for the First Minister of Scotland to make good on his word and use this next Programme for Government to take meaningful action to rid Scotland of poverty. The Interfaith Relations CCN and Peace CCN prepared daily prayers for the Week of Prayer for World Peace in 2023, with leaders from eight different religious and spiritual traditions following the theme of this year’s WPWP: Praying with Hope in a Troubled World. The CCN focusing on Challenging Racism continues to promote education tools to raise awareness about the historic legacy of slavery.

5. OUTLOOK

5.1 We look forward to the Glasgow weekend in early June 2024 and the Hallowing of 11 New Members. We invite Commissioners and all others to join us in the Iona Community: to [‘stay, pray, belong.’](#)

In the name of the Committee

REV. ANIKÓ SCHÜTZ BRADWELL, *Convener, Iona Community Board*
TORSTEN HAAK, *Executive Director, Iona Community*
REV RUTH HARVEY, *Leader, Iona Community*

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND PENSION TRUSTEES MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Approve the appointment of Rosalind Scott-Douglas as an Employer Nominated Trustee of all three Schemes (Section 1.4.1).

Report

1. BACKGROUND & STATISTICS

As at 31 December 2023, 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 4,500 members. This Report is made by the Trustees of each of those Schemes (the “**Trustees**”). As at 31 December 2023 the Trustees held, in aggregate, total assets of approximately £352 million for the purposes of the Schemes.

1.1 Scheme funding

A summary of the respective funding positions of the Schemes at 31 December 2023 following completion of the annual actuarial updates are set out overleaf:

Scheme	Funding level at 31/12/2022	Funding level at 31/12/2023
Ministers Scheme, Main Pension Fund	108%	114%
Ministers Scheme, Widows & Orphans Fund	112%	124%
Ministers Scheme, Contributors Fund	109%	125%
Staff Scheme (CSC Section)	101%	103%
Staff Scheme (SCC Section)	98%	104%
MDS Scheme	98%	102%

The Trustees are pleased to advise that each Scheme/Section remains well funded.

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 Scheme Actuary excluded data relating to the period of the pandemic, in line with industry practice. The Trustees accepted a recommendation to review mortality assumptions at the next triennial valuation as at 31 December 2024, when more information would be available about the lasting impact of the pandemic and its associated restrictions.

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 2024, were 5.0% 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 5.0%.

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.

2024 pension increases

The Trustees of the Ministers’ Scheme decided to implement increases as follows

- Ministers Main Fund: 6.7% increase on pre-1997 pensionable service for all pensions in payment as at 1 January 2024
- Widows and Orphans Fund: 8.9% increase on benefits as at 1 January 2024 for all deferred and pensioner members’ benefits
- Contributors Fund: 8.9% increase on benefits as at 1 January 2024 for all deferred and pensioner members’ benefits.

1.3 Investment Strategy

The investment strategy employed by the Trustees reflects the high funding level and the desire of the Trustees, with the support of the participating employers to minimise the risk of any future deficit contributions. This means holding predominantly assets which match the nature and duration of the Scheme's liabilities. These matching assets are typically fixed income securities, gilts, and inflation linked gilts. The objective is to reduce unrewarded investment risk being taken due to the interest rate and inflation sensitivities of the assets not matching those of the liabilities.

Adopting a lower risk investment strategy means the volatility of the funding position of the Scheme is reduced, leading to improved security of member benefits and more certainty for the employer around the requirement for future contributions.

The Trustees have agreed to target a return from the Scheme's assets of 0.3% per annum above the liability matching assets. This is achieved by investing in a diversified manner in a variety of low risk assets, whilst still maintaining a full hedge against interest rate and inflation movements. This target return is met by taking a low risk approach.

The Trustees continue to consider the nature, disposition, marketability, security, and valuation of the Scheme's investments and their appropriateness relative to the reasons for holding each class of investment. More details about investments are given in the notes to the financial statements.

The investment managers have full discretion over voting rights for the stocks they hold in the pooled funds on behalf of the schemes.

1.3.1 Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG)

The Schemes, given their strong funding positions, no longer invest directly in shares of companies. 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 for the asset class they are looking to invest in, as determined by the Trustees' Investment Adviser, other than in exceptional circumstances where the Trustees believe this would compromise the return they are seeking against the inherent risk of the asset class they are looking to invest in. Investments are sought in companies, both through shares and debt, which comply with good corporate governance principles, which act as responsible employers, which have regard to the environment and which show sensitivity to the communities in which they operate.

During the reporting period, the Trustees received formal advice from their Investment Adviser proposing a sustainable multi-asset mandate. It was recognised that the majority of any ESG impact within the Schemes' investments would arise in the growth assets, and hence this was an area that a positive impact could be made. The Schemes transferred their holdings in the Baillie Gifford Diversified Growth Fund to a sustainably equivalent fund, the Baillie Gifford Sustainable Multi-Asset Fund. This switch follows on from the introduction of the Alliance Bernstein Sustainable All Market Portfolio in 2022, meaning that the Schemes' entire multi-asset allocations are considered to be sustainable and have achieved the highest ESG rating available (as assessed by the Schemes' Investment Advisers). In addition to adding another sustainable mandate to the Schemes' portfolios, the in-specie transfer within Baillie Gifford reduced expected transition costs. The Schemes' Investment Adviser is comfortable that the introduction of this mandate aligns well with, and will help fulfil, the Schemes' ESG objectives as well as the Trustees' ESG views.

The Trustees expect the investment manager to vote on all company resolutions unless they are of a purely routine nature.

1.3.2 Investment Markets

The Trustees monitor, through the Investment and Funding Sub-Group (IFSG), all its investments closely, in conjunction with the investment and actuarial advisers. 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 2023 the assets of the scheme moved broadly in line with the liability value. The Scheme saw a significant improvement in funding level at the year-end due to a change in actuarial basis and strong growth asset performance.

The calendar year 2023 saw monetary policy and the potential of an economic downturn dominate investment markets. Fortunately given the low-risk investment strategy of the Scheme, these challenges were all manageable by the IFSG and the funding level was protected by the interest rate and inflation hedging strategy of the Scheme.

The Scheme's 4% allocation to growth assets served it well over the year, with global equities rallying largely due to the expectation that the US economy would avoid a recession. Global equities enjoyed their best month in three years in November 2023, with the positive momentum continuing into December 2023. This equity performance was reflected in strong positive returns from both the Baillie Gifford and the Alliance Bernstein fund over the year.

1.4 Changes in Trustees

1.4.1 Trustees

We are pleased to propose the appointment of Rosalind Scott-Douglas as an Employer Nominated Trustee of all three Schemes, replacing Gordon Taylor. The General Assembly is asked to approve the appointment of Rosalind Scott-Douglas as Trustee of the Schemes.

The Pension Scheme for Ministries Development Staff

Ian Gray retired on 3 July 2023 and John Flynn was appointed on 29 November 2023.

The Pension Scheme for Staff

Following Stuart Stephen's appointment as Chair of Trustees, John Thomson was appointed on 29 November 2023 to fill the resultant vacancy.

The Pension Scheme for Ministers and Overseas Missionaries

Gordon Taylor, Alan Garrity and Susan Anderson retired on 17 August 2023, 1 October 2023 and 7 November 2023 respectively. Gary Yeaman was appointed on 29 November 2023.

We are fortunate to be served by so many skilled and experienced people, willing to serve in this way. We currently have a vacancy for a Member Nominated Trustee of the Ministers Scheme and we are always looking for new Trustees, so please consider serving yourself or nominating someone who would make a good Trustee.

1.4.2 The Trustees wish to record their thanks to Ian Gray, Gordon Taylor, Alan Garrity and Susan Anderson for their dedicated service and contribution to the work of the Trustees.

2. SCHEME ADMINISTRATION

2.1 The Trustees monitor the administration team's performance by receiving quarterly reports on service achieved and welcoming feedback from Scheme members on the service they have received from the team.

2.2. A formal Administration Agreement has now been put in place between the Pension Trustees and the Assembly Trustees to ensure that the administration team remains appropriately resourced and that the other internal functions on which the Pension Schemes rely, are supported.

This has always happened in practice, but until now had not been formally documented.

The Agreement was signed on behalf of the Pension Fund Trustees and the Assembly Trustees on 12 December 2023.

3 GOVERNANCE

3.1 The Trustees continue their focus on training and development. Each new Trustee completes the Pensions Regulator's Trustee Toolkit. On-going training this year included a day of training from the Schemes' advisers prior to the November Trustee meeting and shorter topical sessions as part of quarterly meetings.

In the name of the Pension Trustees

STUART STEPHEN, *Chair*
LIN MACMILLAN, *Vice-Chair*

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND INVESTORS' TRUST MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Approve the re-appointments of Mrs J McKeown, Mr J Millar and Mr R Nisbet as from 1 June 2024.
3. Approve the appointment of Mr S Anderson with effect from 1 June 2024.
4. Receive the Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Investors Trust for 2023.

Report

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

1. INTRODUCTION

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

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

1.3 The trustees communicate with investors through a range of methods including bulletins which are sent direct to investors and posted on the COSIT section of the Church of Scotland website (which contains comprehensive information for investors, including practical guidance to assist church treasurers). In September 2023 an online webinar was organised which attracted a good number of representatives of congregations and other investors. Presentations were made by the investment managers of the three COSIT funds and the opportunity was given to ask questions. It is planned to repeat this exercise later in 2024.

1.4 Following a competitive tendering exercise, the trustees appointed new investment consultants, Barnett Waddingham, in September 2023. Since that time, the trustees have worked with the consultants on a comprehensive review of all elements of our investment policy. This is being followed by a review of all three of our funds, commencing with the Growth Fund. Any changes in the investment management arrangements for the three Funds will be communicated to investors in due course.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

2.1 Ethical considerations form an integral part of the investment management process and the Trustees have given instructions in this respect to the investment managers, taking into account views expressed by the General Assembly. At their own meetings, the Trustees regularly review and consider matters arising in respect of ethical investment. Investment is avoided in any company which engages in management practices which are judged by the Trustees to be unacceptable. In particular, investment is avoided in shares in any company substantially involved (generating more than 10% (previously 15%) of turnover) in gambling, tobacco products (including vaping), alcohol, armaments, thermal coal and tar sands and recreational cannabis. In general, investment is sought in companies that demonstrate responsible employment and good corporate governance practices, have regard to environmental performance (particularly Climate Change), acknowledge the importance of human rights and act with sensitivity to the communities in which they operate. It is recognised that issues relating to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues are complex and more work is required in the investment management industry before there is a standard method of assessing and reporting on these matters.

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

2.3 Following the establishment by the 2023 General Assembly of the Ethical Oversight Committee (EOC), three COSIT trustees have participated in the work of this Committee and have contributed to the development of the proposed Front Door Language which is referred to in the Deliverance from the EOC. The COSIT representatives supported the EOC's proposed reduction in the turnover limit from 15% to 10% for investment in restricted sectors (see 2.1 above).

3. INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE AND OUTLOOK

3.1 After the turbulent market conditions experienced in 2022, which saw negative returns in almost all global markets, the main themes which affected performance in 2023 were price inflation, rising interest rates, and concerns about recession. Although price inflation fell from the relatively high levels of 2022, the rates of price inflation did not fall to the target levels set by central banks, including the Bank of England. As a result of that, interest rates did not fall as quickly as had been anticipated. As the year ended, markets continued to have concerns about the possibility of major economies falling into recession. Almost all markets delivered positive returns in sterling terms for the year and the Growth and Income Funds both saw increases in unit prices.

3.2 The net total value of funds due to investors increased from £474.5million at 31 December 2022 to £508.9million at 31 December 2023. All three funds were able to increase the level of income distributed to investors.

3.3 Growth Fund (£318.6 million (2022 - £294.6 million))

The Growth fund is mainly invested in UK and overseas company shares (equities) and is managed by Newton Investment Management. In 2023, the Growth Fund delivered a total net return of 10.6% against the composite benchmark (adjusted to mirror the ethical guidelines of this fund) of 13.2%. The Fund outperformed the ARC Steady Growth Index return for the year by 3.3%. One of the changes arising from the review of our Investment Policy is that the future objective for the Growth Fund is to be amended to produce returns in line with increases in CPI inflation plus 3% per annum net of fees over the long term.

3.4 Although the managers of the Growth Fund are not given an income target, investors in the Fund will receive a total distribution of 13.5p per unit for 2023 (2022: 12.00p per unit) (a 12.5% increase).

3.5 Income Fund (£82.9 million (2022 - £77.4 million))

The Income Fund continues to be invested in pooled funds investing in underlying bonds offered by the managers, Royal London Asset Management and in a small direct holding in the Savills Charity Property Fund. The Income Fund's total return for the year was 9.44% (2022: -12.16%) against the composite benchmark return of 8.60% (2022: -17.72%). The Fund has consistently outperformed its benchmark over every period since the appointment of the managers in February 2012.

3.6 After an increase in the income distributed from the Income Fund in 2022, there was a further increase in the income earned by the Fund in 2023 and the total income distribution to investors for 2023 has increased by 15.8% to 55.0p per unit (2022: 47.5p per unit).

3.7 Deposit Fund (£ 107.4 million (2022 - £102.5 million))

The Fund is invested in short-term deposits with Banks and Building Societies. Deposits are generally placed for periods of up to 12 months at the rates prevailing at the time the deposit is made. After increases in UK bank base rates in 2022 and early 2023, the market anticipation is that as price inflation falls, there will be reductions in bank base rates. The timing of these changes remains uncertain.

3.8 The average annual rate of interest paid for 2023 was 4.26% (2022: 1.16%).

4. MEMBERSHIP

4.1 In accordance with the terms of the Constitution, the following members are due to retire by rotation at 31 May 2024: Mrs J McKeown, Mr J Millar and Mr R Nisbet.

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

4.3 Following advertisements inviting expressions of interest from prospective new trustees, and in accordance with the terms of the Constitution, it is recommended that Mr S Anderson be appointed as a trustee as from 1 June 2024.

4.4 Having served as a trustee since 2009, including a three-year term as Chairman, Mr B Duffin has indicated his wish to retire. Mr Duffin has served COSIT faithfully during his years of service and led the organisation during a busy period for COSIT and challenging times in investment markets. He has also represented COSIT on the Board of the Church Investors Group. We are grateful to him for all that he has done.

4.5 The COSIT trustees wish to record their sincere thanks to Mrs Anne Macintosh, General Treasurer, for all her support and assistance and to extend our best wishes to her on her retirement.

5. ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR 2023

5.1 Copies of the 2023 Annual Review and the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year to 31 December 2023 are available to download from The Church of Scotland website or can be obtained from the Secretary.

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

R D BURGON, *Chair*
E CRICHTON, *Vice-Chair*
J LEE, *Executive Officer*

ETHICAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Approve the Faith values aspirations or “Front Door Language” as set out in the Appendix and encourage the Church of Scotland Investors Trust to engage with these aspirations.

Report

1.1 How the church uses its money is a significant factor in how we live out the gospel of Jesus Christ. The work done to set up the Ethical Oversight Committee (EOC) highlighted that the Bible speaks more about how we use our money than just about anything else. How we acquire wealth, and what we do with it, says a significant amount about our characters, principle and priorities. The EOC was set up last year by the General Assembly to support the Church, most specifically The Church of Scotland Investors Trust (COSIT), to be able to engage with the myriad of ethical dilemmas that are faced in the world of investment.

1.2 The first year of this committee has very much been spent working with FaithInvest (an international non-profit network of religious groups and faith-based institutional investors which sees faith communities as natural powerhouses for ethical, faith-based, and impact investing that can contribute to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) or socially responsible investing (SRI)) to articulate the faith values of the Church of Scotland. This is important, as without this articulation of our faith values, it becomes harder to build a detailed brief for investment managers. This document is referred to as our ‘front door’ policy, as it should be the first thing people see when they go looking for a statement on the values that guide our investment practices.

1.3 Over the last year we have looked at what other churches and faith groups have produced and have chosen to frame our own values around the Five Marks of Mission (appendix 1). The crafting of this document has been challenging. It has to be robust enough to make it clear what the Church believes about using its assets, but avoid being so specific that investment guidelines cannot respond dynamically to new information and situations between General Assemblies.

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

1.5 This year has very much been a year of formation and so no specific thematic issues have been discussed to report on. The next steps for this committee are to ensure the practical outworking of its work on a daily basis. Without rehearsing all of the points that were made in last year’s report of the Special Committee on the Ethics of Investment Practice, it is important to remember that COSIT is responsible for the relationship with the investment managers, and also for the oversight of the money invested with them.

1.6 The purpose of the EOC is to give investment related issues that arise on the floor of the Assembly a locus where they can be researched and discussed more fully, and work done to ascertain if there are practical and workable ways of reflecting the concerns of the Assembly in the investment space. Too often conversations that were had during the General Assembly were left with committees that had limited, if any, ability to do much about them. The hope is that the General Assembly will still have robust and challenging conversations about a host of issues which can then be referred to the EOC to take forward and report back to a future General Assembly. In this way the issues can be worked on alongside COSIT to support positive change where possible.

1.7 We are pleased to report that, as per the recommendation last year, COSIT has reduced from 15% to 10% the proportion permitted of a company’s total revenues in the excluded sectors (which include armaments, tobacco, alcohol, and gambling). As welcomed by the General Assembly 2021, COSIT will also not reinvest in any fossil fuel companies without agreement with the successor body of the Faith Impact Forum that there was good evidence of alignment with the stringent targets set within the Paris Agreement. Not only is this a positive step forward, it is indicative of the willingness of COSIT to engage fully with this process.

1.8 The EOC is currently made up of eight members, one person having had to withdraw due to work commitments. There are currently three representatives of COSIT, one General Trustee, two ministers, one young person and the chair. I’m delighted to report that the group has worked well together, and there has been a real willingness from all parties to make the EOC effective. It is clear that there are a variety of opinions in the group and the robust, intelligent, yet respectful, conversations that we have had thus far set us up well to be able to take forward our remit as a forum for engaging with the issues of interest to the Church and their intersection with the investments that the Church holds.

1.9 The next stage for the committee is to understand better the investments that the church holds and the work that investment managers are doing in the engagement space. This will be done over the coming months, and from there the EOC can begin to ascertain if there are issues that it would like to address and subsequently raise with COSIT.

In the name of the Ethical Oversight Committee

VAL BROWN, *Convener*
IAN ALEXANDER, *Secretary*

Appendix

Ethical Oversight Committee

Faith values aspirations or “Front Door Language”

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ.

The priority of the Church of Scotland is participating in Christ’s mission.^[i]

The mission of the Church of Scotland is carried out by multiple registered charities, which express that priority in the overarching charitable purpose of the Parent Charity, the Church of Scotland (SC011353): “the advancement of religion.”

The objects of the Church of Scotland (SC011353) are:

- 1) to offer Christian worship, fellowship, instruction, mission and service;
- 2) to labour for the advancement of the Kingdom of God throughout the world;
- 3) to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry.^[ii]

In order to enable the mission of the church through these objects, financial resources are needed. These resources are administered and invested through local congregations and other charities of which the Church of Scotland is Parent Charity. This document outlines aspirations for the investments of The Church of Scotland Investors Trust (SC022884), which offers “the councils, committees and congregations of the Church a simple and economical medium for the investment of their funds”, sharing the charitable purpose of its parent charity.^[iii]

The Church of Scotland chooses to use the “Five Marks of Mission” as a helpful definition of the breadth and shape of Christ’s mission, and therefore of the mission of the whole Church of Scotland.^[iv]

The “Five Marks of Mission” shall mean:

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ:

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

The priority of Christ’s mission encompasses the charitable objects of the church, and applies to all aspects of church life, including the financial activity that supports that mission. Therefore, the Five Marks of Mission can offer a framework for investment by the whole Church of Scotland and The Church of Scotland Investors Trust (COSIT) in particular.

With others

The mission of Christ is not just the mission of the Church of Scotland, but of the whole Church universal. Therefore, in financial and investment matters the Church of Scotland and COSIT will work with other Christian denominations, and other sympathetic bodies, in encouraging the formulation of investment policies based on ethical principles and assisting each other in putting such policies into practice.

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

COSIT aspires to its financial and investment activity being an active part of the mission of the church. This could include positive screening, engagement, and impact investing in organisations in order to lead to positive impacts (in terms of the Five Marks of Mission), in addition to negative screening and divestment from activities that harm society and are contrary to the church’s mission.

This will also lead to wider communication of policies and their implementation, in partnership with other Christian denominations, principally through the Church Investors Group, and interfaith bodies.

2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers

The values that shape the investments of COSIT will be communicated within the church, including the General Assembly. Teaching and learning in national and local contexts will support the wider membership to reflect on how they can express Christ’s mission in personal and congregational finance, potentially leading to greater impact. Such engagement will also enable the wider church membership to influence the ongoing development of these investment values.

3. To respond to human need by loving service

In every local expression of church and nationally through CrossReach, the Church of Scotland works to love others in practical ways. This can also be done through investment in services and activities that meet practical needs, that build social capital, and that support those who need assistance in accessing employment. This also leads to negative obligations, avoiding investing funds in activities that lead to harmful addictions and in companies that do not offer fair pay or recognise workers' rights.

4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation

The Church of Scotland recognises the Gospel bias to the poor and God's concern for peace, justice and reconciliation.^[v] This leads to negative obligations, avoiding investing funds in weapons and equipment used for oppression, and in activities involving the exploitation of human beings or nations, including social, gender or racial injustice. This also leads to positive obligations to invest and engage in ways that actively promote the full breadth of human rights and equitable distribution of resources.

5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Humanity is one part of the integrated web of life that God has created on the Earth. Humanity is also learning more of its role in threatening the integrity of creation. Therefore, there are obligations to reduce and stop activities now known to damage life on Earth, through climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, and extraction or consumption of resources. There are also opportunities to invest and engage in research, development, and distribution of alternative technologies and potential solutions that may renew the life of the Earth.

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- [ii] <https://www.oscr.org.uk/about-charities/search-the-register/charity-details?number=SC011353>
- [iii] <https://www.oscr.org.uk/about-charities/search-the-register/charity-details?number=SC022884>
- [iv] Presbytery Mission Plan Act 2021 Introduction and section 1.1 https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/95987/2021-Act-8-Presbytery-Mission-Plan-Act.pdf
- [v] e.g. Report of the Faith Impact Forum to the General Assembly 2023

GENERAL TRUSTEES MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report (*Section 1.2*).
2. Note the work of the Manse Liaison Group (Standards) which was established to consider, on a practical basis, how manse standards may be improved, specifically looking at refurbishment proposals and manse replacement and welcome the requirement that all manses should have standards which are in excess of statutory tolerable standards (*Section 6.2*).
3. Note the disappointing level of information on current manse condition which has been returned by Presbyteries (*Sections 6.2.3, 6.2.4 and Appendix 3*).
4. Commend the report into provision of manses with specific reference to the question of ministers living in their own homes and accept the recommendation of the Manse Liaison Group (Provision) that the default position should continue to be that ministers live in manses and that for other circumstances the Manse Adjudication Committee may be utilised (*Section 6.3*).
5. Approve the two proposals set out in section 7.1.4 of this Report as to permitting disbursement for non-fabric purposes from the Consolidated Fabric Fund (*Section 7.1*).
6. Approve and adopt the amendments to the "Use of Monies in the Consolidated Fabric Fund" as set out in Appendix 5 to the Report (*Section 7.1 and Appendix 5*).
7. Note the position in relation to Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 (Register of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land) Regulations 2021 (*Section 8.2*).
8. Appoint Mr Fraser Bews, Rev Dr David Coulter, Mr Tim Podger and Rev Nigel J Robb as members of the General Trustees (*Section 9.1.5*).
9. Authorise the payment of £2,000 to each of Mr Alan Kennedy as Chair and Rev Scott Rennie as Vice-Chair for their services over the past year (*Section 9.1.7*).

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)

1.2 The Trustees submit to the General Assembly their ninety-seventh report since their incorporation under the Church of Scotland (General Trustees) Order Confirmation Act 1921 and their Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2023.

2. APPRECIATION

2.1 The General Trustees wish to thank all members of their staff for the service they provide to them and to congregations. They are also most appreciative of the assistance they receive from other staff in the central offices, especially those in the Law and Stewardship & Finance Departments with whom they work most closely.

2.2 In addition to thanking the Trustees and Advisory Members listed in section 9 who are retiring at this year's General Assembly, a special word of thanks is due to Anne Macintosh who recently retired from the post of General Treasurer. We wish Anne a long and happy retirement.

2.3 The Trustees continue to collaborate with Presbyteries and Presbytery Clerks. Regular meetings are held with the Convener of the Assembly Trustees and the Chief Officer who attended the Trustees' conference along with the Principal Clerk. The Vice-Chair attends meetings of the Assembly Trustees as an observer.

2.4 The General Trustees look forward to continuing our strategic partnership working with the Assembly Trustees.

3. GOVERNANCE

3.1 Governance Review

3.1.1 Following a tender process, the Trustees appointed Turcan Connell to carry out an external review of governance with agreed terms of reference. This review involved interviews with several Trustees, senior staff and the Solicitor as well as a survey. The results of the review were presented to the Trustees at their conference held in October 2023.

3.1.2 The key areas of the report were the recruitment process, the balance of skills, diversity, having an induction and training process including legislative awareness, the format of meetings to encourage effective participation, the decision-making process and delegated authorities.

3.1.3 The Trustees accepted the report; both the positive comments and those where improvements were recommended. The Trustees' Nominations Committee is monitoring progress with each of the agreed actions. The main priority was holding training sessions and these have already commenced. A Code of Conduct has been introduced.

3.2 Investment Policy Review

3.2.1 Mercers were appointed to carry out the review in September 2022. Subsequent developments are described in section 5.5.4.1.

3.3 Operation of the Board, Committees and Working Groups and their Terms of Reference

3.3.1 A review of all terms of reference took place following the revision to the Committee structure and the creation of underpinning Working Groups. The Committees are Nominations, Audit & Assurance, Fabric, Finance & Resources, Glebes and Presbytery Support & Buildings (“PSB”). The Working Groups consist of Energy Procurement and the Insurance Forum reporting to the Finance & Resources Committee; Safe Buildings and Manse Liaison reporting to the Fabric Committee and Presbytery Mission Planning, Signature Churches and Historic Property Portfolio reporting to the PSB Committee.

3.3.2 As defined in the Board’s Terms of Reference, the General Trustees now have four types of volunteers: General Trustees, Advisory Members, Committee Members and Co-Opted Members.

3.3.2.1 The Board consists of General Trustees whose appointments have been approved by the General Assembly.

3.3.2.2 The Board appoints Advisory Members to participate in the work of the Board and its Committees and Working Groups. They receive papers and contribute to discussions at Board meetings but are not entitled to vote. In due course, if they are ministers or elders, their names may be put forward to a General Assembly for them to become General Trustees.

3.3.2.3 On the recommendation of Committees, the Board may approve the membership of such Committees of individuals with relevant skills who do not otherwise participate in the work of the Board and its other Committees.

3.3.2.4 The Board has authorised Committees to co-opt individuals to Working Groups to assist with specific short-term project work. They do not otherwise participate in the wider work of the Trustees.

4. PROGRESS WITH THE 2023 GENERAL ASSEMBLY DELIVERANCE

4.1 Ethical Investment: Mr Manliffe Goodbody, General Trustee, has been appointed to the Ethical Oversight Committee as a representative of the Trustees.

4.2 Net Zero: The Trustees contributed to Faith Action’s online Net Zero Pathway publication, available on the Church of Scotland’s website, by providing the pathway on Buildings. In this, the Trustees provided advice on how to measure and reduce the carbon footprint of our buildings. Connected with this is the ongoing development of the Energy Footprint Tool, which will help congregations measure and record their environmental impact. The Trustees are also working with suppliers and congregations to explore ways to facilitate the installation of electric vehicle charging points on Church of Scotland sites. There are legal and practical challenges to the installation and we continue to explore the best ways to overcome these. We encourage congregations that are considering an installation to contact the General Trustees at an early stage.

4.3 Presbytery Mission Plan Act (“PMPA”) based on Mission: The Trustees affirm that mission, as set out in the Mission Plan, is the principal consideration when considering the approval of plans. The Trustees have continued to serve on the Presbytery Mission Planning Implementation Group (PMPIG). In addition, the meetings held by the Trustees’ Presbytery Mission Planning Sub Group, which consider Mission Plans and Annual Evaluation and Development submissions, are attended by the relevant Faith Action Facilitators.

4.4 Affordability under PMPA: The Trustees have and will continue to give strong emphasis to the affordability of buildings when considering Mission Plans and Annual Evaluation and Development submissions. This applies to both the income required to manage and maintain a building and the capital required to make the building a safe, accessible, well-equipped space in good condition, where it is not already.

4.5 Theological Reflection under PMPA: As detailed in 4.3, the Trustees will continue to work closely with PMPIG in the consideration of Mission Plans and ensure that liturgical diversity and geography are given due consideration.

4.6 Review Categorisation of Buildings as A or B within the PMPA: The proposal of introducing additional building categorisations was discussed at the 2023 Trustees’ Conference. The discussion occupied much of the morning of the conference and included contributions from senior figures within the Church, beyond the Trustees. Whilst the potential benefits were understood and examined in detail, the concluding view was that a change to the categorisation system at this stage would be unhelpful and could potentially be damaging to the PMP process.

4.7 Recruitment of Presbytery Buildings Officers (“PBO”s): The contracts for the PBOs are now all permanent and further appointments are anticipated. See section 7.3.

4.8 Manse Conditions: See section 6.2, appendices 2 and 3.

4.9 Manse Provision: See section 6.3.

4.10 Clarification of the Operation of the Consolidated Fabric Fund: A “Reallocation Schematic” has been prepared detailing the various ways centrally held funds can be applied for and utilised. This will be issued to Presbytery Clerks subject to the General Trustees (Properties, Funds & Endowments) Act 2024 being approved at the General Assembly as this may influence the content of the Schematic. Material changes, however, are described in Section 7.1.

4.11 Exploring an Increase in Use of the Consolidated Fabric Fund for Mission: See section 7.1.

4.12 Creating Presbytery Sub-Funds within the Central Fabric Fund: These have been established by the Stewardship & Finance Department. Upon the dissolution of a congregation, half of the net proceeds may now be ring-fenced to provide grants for approved fabric projects within that same Presbytery.

4.13 Continued Use of Buildings Prior to Disposal: With regard to the sale of a Church and/or Hall building, congregations are encouraged to ensure that, wherever possible, it remains open and in regular use, with a normal maintenance regime in place until the sale completes, to ensure reasonable levels of insurance costs and security. If levels of occupancy of the building change at any time, Church of Scotland Insurance Services (COSIS) should be notified.

4.14 Consider affordable housing and other social aims in sale process: The Trustees have established working relationships with both Housing Justice and Church Action for the Homeless in the last year. Housing Justice currently operate in England and Wales and through their "Faith in Affordable Housing" project, act as a link between Faith Organisations and Housing Associations to provide affordable housing in areas of need. The Trustees and congregations do, however, have a duty to act in the best interests of the congregation and in furtherance of the Church's charitable purpose, which is the advancement of religion and accordingly have only limited scope for disposing of land at anything other than its full market value. This does not create an absolute bar to disposal of land with social aims in view but it does mean that opportunities to do so are constrained by all of the factors applying in a local context.

4.15 Consider Income Generation from the Retention of Land and Buildings: The Trustees have engaged with consultants on the potential for doing pre-development work on sites. Risks and opportunities will be carefully evaluated and monitored.

4.16 New Consolidating Act: See section 8.1 and Supplementary Report.

4.17 Register of Controlled Interests in Land: See section 8.2.

4.18 Mitigation of Climate risks: See section 4.2.

4.19 Consider Innovative Use of Glebeland: This is being considered by the Trustees' Glebes Committee. See section 5.2.

4.20 Signature Churches: See section 5.3.8.

5. COMMITTEE REPORTS

5.1 Fabric Committee

5.1.1 The work of the Committee continued post-Covid and the Trustees provided guidance and financial assistance to congregations where applications were considered via Presbytery. It should be noted that the number of applications received and the level of financial assistance offered were considerably reduced as against what might be termed a "normal" year. Inevitably, the Presbytery Mission Planning process had a significant impact on the work of the Committee given that it was agreed that only works of an emergency, wind/ watertight or replacement/repair nature would be considered, together with attendant financial assistance, during the Presbytery Mission Planning process until requisite Plans had been approved. Now that most Presbytery Mission Plans are approved and are being implemented, it is hoped and expected that the volume of applications for works and any attendant financial assistance will revert to "normal" levels and indeed each Presbytery has been contacted with a view to encouraging congregations to make appropriate application for works to buildings and, if required, financial assistance thereon. Reference is made to the guidelines for applications and works to buildings in the General Trustees section of the Church website and paper copies are available by contacting the General Trustees.

5.1.2 Specialist advice continued to be made available in the areas of:

- Lighting
- Heating
- Audio Visual (AV) systems
- Communion-ware, memorials and movables
- Local Authority planning and Ecclesiastical Exemption
- Release of funds held for the benefit of congregations in the Consolidated Fabric Fund for a variety of fabric and fabric-related items, including utility and insurance cost reimbursement

5.1.3 The Fabric Committee meets ten times per year, usually in the second half of the month, and to December 2023 made available £779k in grant assistance, £1.8m in loans and £74k in Bequest Fund grants.

5.1.4 Looking to the future, it is likely that in-person and on-site visits will once again be made by Trustees and staff, including Presbytery Buildings Officers, in consideration of applications for works to buildings. Congregations are strongly encouraged to engage with the Presbytery and the Trustees at the earliest possible opportunity where a project or major scheme of works, whether repair, refurbishment or new construction, is being considered.

5.2 Glebes Committee

5.2.1 The Trustees encourage all congregations who have glebes to engage with the Trustees in the management of glebeland, either to generate income for their congregation – by leasing or sale – or to utilise land for mission purposes. The Glebes Committee considered how it assessed innovative proposals for the use of glebeland and found that it welcomed and supported these initiatives and would continue to do so. Accordingly, Kirk Sessions are encouraged to consider whether their glebes can assist with mission. To maximise income for the long term and, in many cases, provide much needed housing in rural communities, the Trustees are keen to engage with local congregations on long-term planning for potential development of glebeland. The Trustees engaged with the local parish in Barra to assist in

fulfilling their aim to provide a small area of glebeland for the construction of affordable housing, badly needed on the island. Twelve houses will be built by Hebridean Housing, a social housing charity. Six are already occupied at Rathad Na Ceardaich.

5.2.2 Congregations who are considering getting involved in trading activity should make early contact with the Church of Scotland Law Department so that legal advice may be taken to ensure compliance with charity law requirements and allow all relevant matters including risk assessment, charitable purpose and trading vehicle to be considered.

5.2.3 All income received from glebeland, whether rent or capital receipts, accrues for the benefit of the local congregation.

5.2.4 Leases: The Trustees report that income from agricultural, grazing and amenity lets in 2023 was around the same level as in the previous year. Throughout 2023, 73 new leases were approved by the Trustees and 91 rent reviews of existing leases were carried out to ensure that rents remain at market rates. Total income generated from glebe rents was £438k which assists the financial commitment of congregations to support their Giving to Grow contributions.

5.2.5 Sales: 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 ("PSB") Committee

5.3.1 The PSB Committee has delegated responsibility from the General Trustees' Board to support and guide Presbyteries on General Trustee matters, generally relating to the management and release of buildings, disposals, special projects and Presbytery Mission Planning. Three working groups report to the PSB Committee covering Presbytery Mission Planning, the Historic Property Portfolio and Signature Churches.

5.3.2 The PSB Committee gives particular focus to the development of Trustee guidance and policy. The committee will continue to develop guidance in relation to the letting of manses, the off-market transfer of properties, the management of buildings identified for disposal and templates to measure the affordability of buildings.

5.3.3 The Committee has overall oversight with regards to the Trustees' response to Presbytery Mission Planning. Although much of the deliberation is conducted by subgroups, all report back to the PSB Committee. Through the PSB Committee, the Trustees have responded to Presbytery Mission Plans and more recently, Annual Evaluation and Development submissions, assisting PMPIC with its decision-making. The Trustees have additionally provided support to Presbyteries and uniting congregations with Presbytery Mission Planning-related building visits to assist local parties, as impartial advisors, to identify which buildings represent the best resources for mission and outreach.

5.3.4 Over the last year, the Committee has overseen the completion of the Bertha Park Presbytery Mission Initiative, which involved the acquisition and fitting out of a shop unit in the Bertha Park suburb of Perth. The "Hub" provides a presence in a significant area of residential expansion to the Northwest of Perth and the unit is extensively used six days per week. Much of this use is community-based outreach with a big focus on children's activities such as music classes, high school drop-in sessions, youth clubs and toddler groups. Worship takes place once per week at the Hub as do bible study sessions.

5.3.5 The Committee has also supported Presbyteries and congregations on various initiatives to generate income using buildings and sites identified for retention in the Presbytery Mission Plans. The Committee has sought to work with partners in the transfer of redundant sites for the purpose of the provision of social housing.

5.3.6 The PBOs continue to provide invaluable advice to Presbyteries and congregations, as well as to the Trustees.

5.3.6.1 The Presbyteries of Edinburgh & West Lothian, Fife, Forth Valley & Clydesdale, The North East & Northern Isles and Perth have PBOs in post. A new PBO has been recruited for Clyde, recruitment is underway for The South West and discussions are ongoing with Lothian & Borders and Cleir Eilean I.

5.3.6.2 Further information on the contracts and funding for PBOs is contained at section 7.3.

5.3.7 The Historic Property Portfolio working group was set up to administer the buildings and the remaining net assets in respect of two A-listed churches which were transferred to the Trustees following dissolution. While the costs associated with the upkeep of these buildings over an extended period are substantial, the disposal of both properties is now under detailed consideration and no similar transfers are envisaged at this time.

5.3.8 The Signature Churches working group has been established to consider how best to assist congregations with the financial burden of having large iconic churches. Collaboration is being taken forward between the Trustees, the congregations and other bodies that may be able to assist with fabric advice or grant funding.

5.3.8.1 It has already become apparent that many opportunities lie ahead for these congregations in community collaborations that will enhance their mission and financial sustainability for the future. We hope these collaborations will have lessons for the Church as the whole.

5.4 Audit and Assurance Committee

5.4.1 Since the 2023 General Assembly, the Committee has overseen the audit of the delayed 2022 Trustees' Annual Report as well as, more recently, the 2023 Trustees' Annual Report.

5.4.2 The Committee is developing a more practical analytical tool to inform the Trustees' risk register.

5.4.3 The Committee commissioned the Internal Governance Review referred to in section 3.1 and is considering how best to implement its recommendations.

5.5 Finance & Resources Committee

5.5.1 General Finance

5.5.1.1 In addition to its involvement in the production of the Trustees' Annual Reports, the Committee reviews draft budgets and, after their approval by the Trustees, monitors performance through management accounts with summaries being provided to the Trustees.

5.5.1.2 The budgeting process has been extended by the Stewardship & Finance Department to include five-year projections of income and expenditure. The principal features are the level of costs incurred by the General Fund and the level of Support Costs that it is able to charge to the other funds. Concerns about these projections have led to the proposals in section 7.2.

5.5.2 Energy Procurement Working Group

5.5.2.1 The working group carried out a tender exercise in mid-2023 for the supply of electricity and gas and, as intimated at the 2023 General Assembly, the favourable terms previously applicable could not be maintained due to major changes in world energy markets. This resulted in the average cost of each supply roughly doubling.

5.5.2.2 The electricity supply contract from OPUS ended on 30 September 2023. E.ON Next is the new supplier under a fixed term contract running until 30 September 2025. Electricity is supplied to 845 congregations under the scheme.

5.5.2.3 The gas supply from Scottish Hydro (SSE) ended on 31 March 2024. This has also switched to E.ON Next with the new fixed term supply contract running until 31 March 2026. Gas is supplied to 568 congregations under the scheme.

5.5.2.4 When the electricity supply contract moved to OPUS in 2020, the level of standing charges reduced considerably. Relatively speaking, this benefitted premises with lower consumption levels. E.ON Next's even simpler charging structure enabled that approach to continue for electricity and it has now been extended to the gas contract. This should prove helpful to congregations with buildings awaiting disposal under Presbytery Mission Planning.

5.5.2.5 Many congregations that participate for their gas supply will know that SSE changed its billing system in late 2023. Unfortunately, their new system was no longer capable of producing invoices for individual congregations. The Trustees can assure congregations that every effort was made on their behalf to resolve this problem caused by SSE. In March 2024, SSE started to issue manual invoices to the affected congregations although these could no longer be paid by direct debit. SSE has been made well aware of everyone's frustration and annoyance especially as this coincided with year-end accounts.

5.5.3 Church of Scotland Insurance Services ("COSIS") and the Insurance Forum Working Group

5.5.3.1 The Church Insurance Scheme, currently insured with Aviva, is due for renewal at the end of 2024. Negotiations are underway with both the current insurer and alternative carriers. The insurance marketplace for large property risks has become increasingly challenging post-pandemic. Additionally, the perceived risks associated with the Church, especially regarding property management and unoccupied properties following unions, will result in significant premium increases. To assist congregations and the General Trustees in finding a sustainable solution, COSIS is exploring alternative business models.

5.5.3.2 Given the large number of changes in both occupancy and use of church property, congregations are reminded that they have a duty to disclose all relevant information to their insurer.

5.5.3.3 As the sole shareholder of COSIS, the Trustees are kept informed of developments through the Insurance Forum including their impact on the future level of gift aided income.

5.5.3.4 Collaboration has also been developing at the executive level. Topics include cover for unoccupied buildings and building revaluations as well as managing the residual risks run by the Trustees as the owner of most of the insured buildings.

5.5.4 Investment Update

5.5.4.1 Investment Policy Review: The Committee is also responsible for making investment recommendations to the Trustees and, in so doing, it periodically commissions an external review of its Investment Policy. Mercers were appointed in September 2022 following a robust tender process and they first reported back to the Committee with their key findings in January 2023. A follow up report was presented in April 2023 with recommendations regarding the optimum asset mix for each of the five funds under the control of the Trustees based on the continued deployment of the Growth, Income and Deposit Funds of the Church of Scotland Investors Trust ("COSIT"). These recommendations on asset mix were accepted in full and implemented by the Stewardship and Finance Department on behalf of the Trustees during the course of 2023. The original report from Mercers was shared with COSIT and this was followed up with a meeting with the COSIT Chair and Vice-Chair. It was later in 2023 that the Trustees were informed that COSIT intended to undertake its own investment review and that began with COSIT appointing new investment consultants, Barnett Waddingham, in September 2023. At the time of writing, the General Trustees have yet to be formally notified of the outcome of that review by COSIT. It is only then that the Committee will be in a position to re-evaluate the original Investment Policy Review from Mercers.

5.5.4.2 Investment Performance: All of the funds under the control of the Trustees are currently invested in the Growth, Income and Deposit Funds of COSIT whose report to the General Assembly provides investment performance information.

5.5.4.3 Gaberston House: Gaberston House is a residential service for adults with mental health issues and run by CrossReach. The support service has been operating in Alloa since 1990. In late 2022, CrossReach approached the Trustees to ask for assistance in funding the rebuilding of Gaberston House. After detailed discussions, the Trustees agreed to provide a loan facility for CrossReach to be drawn down as the redevelopment work progresses. It is anticipated that the first such payment will be made in April 2024. The total loan facility is £3.2m and it will be provided from the Consolidated Stipend Fund with the agreement of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team. This represents just over 3% of the fund and the interest earned will contribute to the income distributed to congregations. The security of the loan has been guaranteed by the Unincorporated Entities. The loan agreement and the guarantee were reviewed by the Law Department and approved by the General Trustees and the Assembly Trustees. The remainder of the Consolidated Stipend Fund is still invested in the Investors Trust Growth Fund. The Trustees do not envisage making any further loans of this nature.

6. MANSES

6.1 Deliverance from the 2023 General Assembly

6.1.1 The collated deliverance of the General Assembly of 2023 included the following four that related to manses:

- (a) Instruct Congregations to ensure that all retained Manses are fully wind and water-tight and meet the Repairing Standard as per the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 by 31 December 2024.
- (b) Instruct Congregations 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.
- (c) Remind Presbyteries of their oversight obligations in regard to each of the above.
- (d) Establish a Manse Liaison Group to present a proposal on manse provision to the General Assembly of 2024 with the involvement of the General Trustees, the Faith Nurture Forum, the Assembly Trustees, Presbyteries, Presbytery Buildings Officers and the Law Department.

6.2 Manse Conditions

6.2.1 A Manse Working Group (Standards) was established in May 2023 with representatives of the General Trustees, Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, Assembly Trustees and the Law Department invited to attend monthly meetings. Terms of Reference for the Group were agreed and the main purpose of the working group is to share knowledge about current and future manse requirements in relation to the habitability, and energy efficiency, of the manse, and compare how they rate against currently agreed standards.

6.2.2 The Repairing Standards, as per the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006, have been updated to reflect the latest legislation requiring compliance from 1 March 2024. The current Repairing Standards are attached at Appendix 2. The repairing standards were circulated by email to Presbyteries in July 2023 together with a request to:

- **Instruction to Congregations:** (deliverance 6.1.1 (a)) Ensuring manses meet the Repairing Standard.
 - All retained manses within our Presbytery must be maintained to the highest standards of habitability. As per the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006, we kindly request that you instruct your respective congregations to ensure that all Manses are fully wind and watertight, meeting the Repairing Standard. This compliance will help provide safe and comfortable housing for our ministers. We have attached the standard factsheet to pass on to congregations for reference.
- **Instruction to Congregations:** (deliverance 6.1.1 (b)) Submission of Documentation
 - To ensure transparency and accountability, we request that Congregations provide the following documents as part of their next Manse Condition Schedule submission:
 - *A valid Energy Performance Certificate for each Manse*
 - *A report on compliance with the Repairing Standard*
 - Including these documents will assist us in evaluating the overall condition of each manse and identifying any necessary improvements to meet the required standards.
- **Reminder of Presbyterial Oversight Obligations** (deliverance 6.1.1 (c))
 - We would like to remind all Presbyteries of their oversight obligations regarding the abovementioned matters. We must actively oversee and monitor the adherence to the Repairing Standard by each Congregation and ensure their compliance with the housing regulations. By working collaboratively, we can promptly address any concerns and rectify any issues.
 - As a courtesy reminder to all Presbyteries that five-yearly (“quinquennial”) inspections on manses are still required to be undertaken by either the PBO (if they have one) or a chartered architect or building surveyor

6.2.3 Acknowledgements were received from 17 out of the 19 Presbyteries. Subsequent to the email in July 2023, a further request was issued to Presbyteries requesting that they provide “a list of the manses within your Presbytery which do not meet the required standards and are to be retained under the Presbytery plan”. The aim of the request was to focus grant funding and resources towards the manses, ministers and their families that were most in need of assistance and allow the General Trustees to assess the likely funds and resources that would be required to ensure that manses meet the minimum standards.

6.2.4 A summary of the responses is included at Appendix 3. To summarise, from the evidence provided it appears that only two Presbyteries are proactively managing the review of manse condition with a programme in place for the upgrade or replacement of manses. Most Presbyteries deal with manses in an ad hoc manner as and when issues are brought to their attention. In conclusion, the Trustees believe that a significant amount of input will be required to assist congregations and Presbyteries with their obligations to provide manses of the required standard.

6.2.5 Given the information received to date, at this time we are therefore unable to draw any further conclusions on the condition of manses and note that further dialogue will be required between the manse working group, Presbyteries and congregations during 2024.

6.2.6 In order to gather information directly from ministers, a survey has been issued requesting information on how the ministers feel about the manse relating to its condition, energy performance and suitability. The survey was issued to ministers on 8 March 2024 with a request that responses be completed before the start of Holy Week. This is the link to the questionnaire: <https://forms.office.com/e/5ww49QGkTb>

6.2.7 As there is public access to the residential Energy Performance Certificates (EPC), the General Trustees Business Support team have downloaded all EPCs relating to manses and the following table has been prepared showing the EPC ratings for manses by Presbytery:

Presbytery	Energy Performance Certificate Rating							No record
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	
Clyde	0	0	17	25	9	1	0	12
Edinburgh & West Lothian	0	2	15	28	8	2	0	35
England	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Fife	0	3	24	17	3	1	0	8
Forth Valley & Clydesdale	0	0	30	46	9	0	0	21
Glasgow	0	5	25	50	20	10	0	20
Cleir Eilean I (Highlands & Hebrides)	0	0	13	31	21	13	2	36
Lewis	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	7
Lothian & Borders	1	0	11	22	9	3	0	14
North East & Northern Isles	1	2	15	37	19	8	0	26
Perth	0	4	32	38	16	1	0	29
South West	0	3	11	37	26	4	0	35
Total number	2	19	194	333	140	44	2	245
Percentage	0.2%	2.0%	20.0%	34.3%	14.4%	3.6%	0.2%	25.3%

Notes on table

1. The table is based on information drawn from the database of manses held by the General Trustees on 30 October 2023.
2. This is a live situation with manses being sold and new manses purchased on a monthly basis however this is unlikely to have a major impact on the overall percentages reported above.
3. No record means that there is no EPC for the manse held publicly, this may be for a variety of reasons which requires further investigation.

From the above table the following points are highlighted:

- There remains around 25% of manses with no record of an EPC on the public record. This is despite the deliverance in 2013 that all manses should have an EPC (deliverance 6.1.1 (b)).
- Only circa 22% of manses have an EPC rating of C or above.
- The majority of manses (circa 35%) have an EPC rating of D.
- Due to the rising energy bills, the EPC rating of manses is having an impact on the cost of living for ministers and their families.

6.2.8 The Manse Working Group has reviewed and discussed the above data and recommended that:

- a. Where no record of an EPC can be found publicly, congregations will be contacted directly by the General Trustees to discuss why there isn't an EPC and arrange for one to be completed as soon as possible if required.
- b. Manses with EPC ratings of E and below are to be prioritised and reviewed by Presbytery with assistance from the General Trustees.
- c. A review be undertaken to assess the actions required to improve EPC rated D properties to a C rating.
- d. A pilot study be undertaken within one Presbytery to undertake the works required to improve manses from an EPC rating of D to C or above if possible.
- e. Progress is reported and assessed against the above table for future reports.

6.2.9 Based on findings from the above actions, the Manse Working Group will draft guidance relating to manses to assist Presbyteries and Congregations with their responsibilities relating to the repair of existing manses and how to make informed decisions to upgrade or sell manses.

6.2.10 In conclusion, 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.

6.3 Manse Provision

6.3.1 Background

6.3.1.1 In response to a Deliverance from the 2023 General Assembly, a Manse Working Group (Provision) was formed comprising representatives from the General Trustees, Assembly Trustees, Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, Law Department, Stewardship & Finance Department, Presbyteries and Ministers (the Group).

6.3.1.2 The Group considered a variety of documents, including previous reports to the General Assembly by the former Ministries Council and Board of Ministry, HMRC position and advice from the Church's tax advisers and information from other denominations. Those also invited to attend a meeting of the Group were Rev Robert Allan, Minister at Falkirk Trinity, and the proposer for the above Deliverance; a Minister from a Priority Areas congregation; and the Secretary to the Housing & Loan Fund.

6.3.2 The Current Position

6.3.2.1 The current default position for the Church of Scotland is that a minister is required to live in the manse provided by the congregation. The HMRC position has not changed over a long number of years and HMRC has long accepted that ministers living in manses provided by their congregations fall within their tax exemption guidelines. Further reference is made to the remuneration package of a minister, which comprises a stipend, the right to be provided with a manse and the corresponding duty to occupy it and discharge the duties of their office from it, in the Assembly Trustees' Report.

6.3.2.2 If the Church of Scotland was unable to prove that living in a manse was the default position for ministers and that the accommodation was provided for the better performance of their duties, then the tax advantage would be lost for all ministers. This would have costly consequences as those ministers who were housed in manses would be taxed on the provision of this accommodation as a benefit in kind.

6.3.2.3 The Group considered that as long as the HMRC position remained as it had always been, the default position for Church of Scotland ministers should not change. However, there were also a number of other reasons that the Group considered a minister should, wherever possible, live in the manse of the parish that he/she ministers to:

- A parish minister is called into a relationship with a congregation. The minister becomes a part of the community that is the congregation, as well as being part of the wider community in which the church is situated. To be an effective pastor as well as a leader, the minister needs to live as a true member of the two communities and as a representative of the congregation. The most effective way of achieving this is to be living in a house the church has provided – it makes the minister 'one of us'. To live in a home of one's own is to set up a boundary which works against this principle.
- As the manse is the church's property it makes it a 'safe' place for people to come for church business and for pastoral reasons.
- As a vocation, ministry demands constant attention and availability, with unpredictable needs arising at any time. Given the nature of the role and its relentless pressures, it is advantageous for ministers to be relieved of the burdens associated with property ownership. A manse provides the necessary space for ministers to fully dedicate themselves to their calling and deliver their best efforts without the added stress of property responsibilities.
- When a minister is called to a charge, and then on to another charge, there is a need, in terms of ministerial function and commitment to the congregation, to arrive completely and to leave completely, without any lingering problems of not having managed to sell their house and/or not completed a purchase in the place they are going to. The housing market does not perform to the Church's timetable. The provision of a manse takes away the problem.
- The housing stock in each parish differs in style and price. When moving from one charge to another, a minister may not be able to afford a house in the place they are going to and/or there may not be a house suitable for the minister on the market at the time that the minister needs to purchase. In some markets, house sales can be stagnant for many months. Moving into the manse of the congregation ensures that none of this need be considered.

- Ministers living in manses are relieved of the considerable stress and financial worry associated with an unexpected and otherwise crippling repair bill and Council Tax and associated water charges are usually met by the congregations.

6.3.3 The Alternatives

6.3.3.1 Minister living in own home

6.3.3.1.1 Currently, a minister wishing to live in their own house is required to make an application, via Presbytery, to the Manse Adjudication Committee (MAC). The Group reviewed the MAC Regulations (Regs III 2013) (as amended by Regs I 2021) and considered them to be robust and fit for purpose. The Group noted that there were only two applications to the MAC in 2023. The MAC Regulations recognise that in exceptional circumstances a minister may be allowed to live in their own home—the circumstances for this are usually:

- Where the Parish manse is not suitable for the specific needs (for reasons of health or disability) of the minister or an immediate family member.
- The minister is within less than 12 months of retirement and the planned move from the designated manse to the minister's own home is accepted as part of the overall retirement process.
- The designated manse is of such a low standard, with no other suitable accommodation nearby, that the minister, who may have a home in the area, has no choice but to move into their own accommodation (such a scenario is rare but not unheard of).

6.3.3.2 Mixed economy—some ministers live in manses and some in own home

6.3.3.2.1 The Group considered the reasons put forward for, and the consequences of, allowing ministers the option to live in their own home. It was noted that any system of removing the duty to live in the manse would result in replacing a tax-free benefit with a system where income (either in the form of housing allowance or rent) was chargeable. While it was noted from discussions that some other denominations offered their ministers the option to live in their own home, the Group's understanding is that the tax implications are the same for all denominations.

6.3.4 Manse standards

6.3.4.1 Of concern to the Group and to many in the Church was the standard of some manses and the struggle some ministers face to have them properly maintained. The Group considered that the poor condition of some manses was linked to the issue of some ministers indicating a preference to live in their own homes. The Trustees' Manse Liaison Group (Standards) has considered this further and has provided a report at section 6.2 and Appendices 2 and 3.

6.3.5 Housing in Retirement

6.3.5.1 The Group recognised that ministers who live in a manse throughout their ministry may struggle to purchase a house for their retirement, although many do own houses either bought for retirement or to rent out until required or sold and a more suitable replacement bought for retirement. The Housing and Loan Fund provides a valuable benefit and for those meeting the Fund's criteria, can purchase a house to rent in the area of a minister's choosing up to the purchase limit set annually by the Fund, currently £260,000. A minister usually pays a reduced rent, currently 50% of market rent. Widows, widowers and bereaved civil partners are currently charged 25% of market rent. Alternatively, depending upon the applicant's level of capital, the Fund can provide a loan to assist with house purchase up to the same price limit. Applications are welcomed from those up to 10 years away from retirement. The Secretary of the Housing and Loan Fund is always willing to discuss how the Fund might be able to assist.

6.3.6 Conclusion and recommendations

6.3.6.1 The Group considered all the relevant information available, and the views presented to it and recommends to the General Assembly that manse provision should remain as the default position of the Church of Scotland unless and until HMRC's position on the taxation of living accommodation changes.

7. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

7.1 Use of Monies in the Consolidated Fabric Fund

7.1.1 Background: The Consolidated Fabric Fund (the "CFF") was created in 1996 and is administered by the General Trustees. Holdings in the CFF comprise Capital Accounts and Revenue Accounts. At present, Capital is only available for approved fabric expenditure while Revenue can also be used for approved fabric-related costs such as heating, lighting, cleaning and insurance. The Trustees continue to promote the latter and there has been an increase in the number of congregations taking advantage of it for the cost of utilities albeit such disbursements are only made if invoices are submitted.

7.1.2 At the 2003 General Assembly, it was agreed that those congregations which had balances in excess of £50,000 in their Revenue Account could make withdrawals for non-fabric related projects within the spirit of the "Church Without Walls" Report to the General Assembly of 2001 subject to Presbytery approval. This is little used.

7.1.3 At present, if a congregation's holding in the CFF is in excess of its reasonable requirements for fabric purposes, the whole or part of the surplus may be transferred to a holding in the Consolidated Stipend Fund. This is also little used.

7.1.4 The General Trustees have been investigating what options there may be for increasing the flexibility and simplifying the administration of the CFF in order to permit disbursements for non-fabric purposes. The following two proposals have emerged:

7.1.4.1 Revenue Accounts: That, with effect from 1 June 2024, Revenue may be disbursed to congregations for any purpose that is aligned with the Five Marks of Mission subject only to the congregation's application indicating how it intends to use the money. To be clear, it would no longer be limited to fabric work or utility costs and receipts would no longer be required.

7.1.4.2 Capital Accounts: That, with effect from 1 June 2024, Capital may also be released for non-fabric projects. This would be considered on a case-by-case basis and would require consideration of how much Capital is likely to be required for future building works, maintenance and fabric-related costs in coming years. An allowance would be made for any locally held restricted fabric funds. If there is still likely to be a very substantial amount of Capital remaining, it may be possible for some of that Capital to be released for non-fabric projects aligned with the Five Marks of Mission.

7.1.4.3 For information, the Five Marks of Mission are:

- To proclaim the Good News of Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

7.1.5 A document entitled “Guidance on the Use of Monies in the Consolidated Fabric Fund” was approved by the General Assembly in 1995 and further amended in 1997 and 2003. If the Assembly approves the proposals set out in section 7.1.4, this Guidance will be amended post-Assembly to reflect those changes.

7.1.6 Alterations to the “Use of Monies in the Consolidated Fabric Fund” to give effect to these proposals are contained in Appendix 5.

7.2 Financial Resources of the General Trustees

7.2.1 Background: In the corresponding section of the Trustees’ report to the 2023 General Assembly, figures were provided that highlighted the fact that the administrative costs assessed as being incurred in respect of each of the restricted funds far exceeded the level of support costs that the General Fund was allowed to charge. The difference represented a subsidy from the General Fund to the restricted funds. The level of these subsidies has increased further in 2023 and Stewardship and Finance’s projections show that they will increase at an alarming rate in future if nothing is done to address the matter. Indeed, in just a year or two, the free reserves that require to be held in the General Fund for contingencies will no longer be adequately covered.

7.2.2 Proposal: The Trustees propose that, with effect from 1 January 2025, each restricted fund will be charged with an amount not exceeding the actual incurred costs assessed in line with the Statement of Recommended Practice (“SORP”). In respect of the Consolidated Fabric Fund, the SORP will require the charge to be limited to the costs incurred for the investment element of the CFF and not the buildings element. The significant costs incurred by the Trustees working with congregations and Presbyteries on building element, whose costs will continue to be met from the General Fund.

7.2.3 Impact: Despite the increase in charges, they will still be very small compared to the size of the restricted funds and that is why FAPLT has accepted the need for these changes.

7.3 Presbytery Buildings Officers (“PBOs”)

7.3.1 Funding Proposal: The Trustees propose that, with effect from 1 January 2025, the total cost of employing the PBOs (payroll costs plus expenses) will be met by the Trustees’ General Fund with the intention that half would be charged to the Central Fabric Fund with that proportion being kept under review. Such a review would take account of the expected increase in income to the Central Fabric Fund arising from the application of the Levy to the net proceeds of sales of buildings as well as the future level of requests from congregations for grants and loans.

7.3.2 Condition: This proposal would not proceed if, for whatever reason, the revised basis for charging support costs to the restricted funds did not also proceed.

7.4 Levy on the Net Proceeds of Property Sales

7.4.1 Background: The current 10% levy is applied to the net proceeds of property sales (subject to certain limitations) and is credited to the Central Fabric Fund from which the Trustees provide grants and loans for fabric purposes. In section 6.4.9 of the Trustees’ report to the 2023 General Assembly, the Trustees said they would consider whether the levy might be increased with the increase being made available within the congregation or the wider Presbytery for fabric or non-fabric purposes.

7.4.2 Following consultation, the Trustees have decided to take this suggestion no further at present especially as the increased flexibility being proposed for the Consolidated Fabric Fund should be capable of providing congregations with assistance for non-fabric projects in a less complicated manner.

8. LEGISLATION

8.1 Legislation Review

8.1.1 As promised, work has been carried out to bring together all of the various Acts and Regulations into a consolidated Act, to be named The General Trustees (Properties, Funds and Endowments) Act. This Act will be presented to the Assembly in a Supplementary Report.

8.2 Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 (Register of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land) Regulations 2021

8.2.1 The Trustees are pleased to report to the Assembly that although, regrettably, the Scottish Government has not been willing to change its policy so as to take a more proportionate approach to those in scope and required to submit entries in this new Register, there have been some positive developments.

8.2.2 Having reflected further on the nature of their role, the Trustees resolved to seek the view of the Procurator as to whether it was correct to characterise their holding of title to congregational properties as being, in the words of the Regulations, *“as a trustee of, or otherwise on behalf of, the members of an unincorporated body of persons”*. The Procurator’s Opinion is that such properties are not in fact held on that basis.

8.2.3 Historically and by express declaration in the Declaratory Articles, the Church of Scotland has a national mission to bring “the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry”. A church was to be provided for every parish and was for the benefit of the inhabitants of the parish as a whole. The Church has the ability and right to promote the erection, disjunction or suppression of ecclesiastical parishes and in doing so, allocating churches (with associated manses and glebes) for the purpose of ministering to the parish. This is consistent with church properties being held for the benefit of the parish, as opposed to an individual congregation. This was reflected in the provisions of the Church of Scotland (Property and Endowments) Act 1925 and a subsequent amending Act in 1933 which saw the transfer of title to churches, manses and glebes to the Trustees. Such properties can therefore be seen as being held for the Church of Scotland and not – for the purposes of the Regulations – *“on behalf of”* members of a congregation.

8.2.4 That is not to say that churches, halls, manses and glebes are not held for the delivery of the Church’s national mission by congregations. They are indeed held for that purpose and for most practical purposes must be treated as being the responsibility of the congregation as the “embodiment” of the parish.

8.2.5 In light of the legal Opinion received from the Procurator, no congregational properties vested in the Trustees require to be registered in the Register of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land. This will come as a relief to the thousands of office-holders who would otherwise have to enter their details in the Register.

8.2.6 Unfortunately, the position is different for properties where title is held in the names of local congregational trustees. These trustees will still have to enter their details on the Register. The Law Department has been working with the Registers of Scotland to try to find the least burdensome way in which this can be done, given the number of entries required, but at the time of writing no solution is available which will remove the requirement for individual registrations. The Law Department can support congregations through this process in a number of ways:

- They can provide congregations with information about the properties held for the congregation and the title-holding trustees, and sign-post to tailored guidance to help office-bearers to make the required entries in the Register
- They can make the necessary entries on behalf of a congregation, for a small fee
- They can provide information about properties and title-holding trustees and congregations can engage the services of a local solicitor to complete the required entries

8.2.7 The registration process is not straightforward and detailed guidance, together with worked examples, can be found on the Church website: [RCI guidance for congregations \(churchofscotland.org.uk\)](https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/rci-guidance).

8.2.8 All of this involves an additional burden on staff in the Law Department at a time when resources are already stretched in dealing with the increased volume of property sales and other work flowing from the large number of unions and other readjustments in implementation of Presbytery Mission Plans. A programme is in place to assist congregations with the registration process and a dedicated email address – RCI@churchofscotland.org.uk – has been set up, to which all communications on this topic should be addressed. The transition period for compliance ended on 1 April 2024 but office-bearers should not see this date as being of critical importance, given that a programme of compliance is underway.

8.3 Determinations under Regulations V 1995

8.3.1 The Regulations provide a mechanism to re-allocate the capital held by the Trustees for the benefit of congregations in the Consolidated Stipend and Fabric Funds. There were two reallocations during the reporting period, both from the Consolidated Fabric Fund to the Consolidated Stipend Fund.

8.4 Determinations made under Act VII 1995

8.4.1 The Trustees report that, under the powers delegated to them by the General Assembly by Act VII 1995 (as amended by Act XIII 1996), they have made 150 Determinations as set out below in Appendix 4.

9. OPERATION OF THE GENERAL TRUSTEES

9.1 General Trustees and Advisory Members

9.1.1 The Trustees wish to record their thanks for the dedicated service given to them and to Congregations by those who have retired or resigned since the General Assembly of 2023:

9.1.2 General Trustees: Retirements:

- Mr Richard S Bell (May 2024) (Fabric Committee, Safe Buildings Working Group, Manse Working Group (Conditions))
- Mr Douglas Kerr (May 2024) (Glebes Committee)
- Mr John W Maddock (May 2024) (Fabric Committee, PSB Committee)
- Dr John M Trushell (May 2024) (Convener of the Fabric Committee)

9.1.3 Advisory Members: Retirements:

- Mr Hamish McBean (May 2024) (Glebes Committee)

9.1.4 Six Advisory Members have been appointed by the Board since the 2023 General Assembly:

- Mr Fraser Bews (September 2023) who serves on the Finance & Resources Committee
- Rev Dr David Coulter (September 2023) who serves on the PSB Committee
- Mr Tim Podger (September 2023) who serves on the Fabric and PSB Committees
- Rev Nigel Robb (September 2023) who serves on the Fabric, PSB and Audit & Assurance Committees and Manse Working Group (Conditions)
- Rev Dr George Whyte (September 2023) who served on the PSB and Audit & Assurance Committees
- Mr Michael Pearson (February 2024) who serves on the PSB Committee
- Mr Logan Brown (March 2024) who serves on the Glebes Committee

9.1.5 The Trustees ask the General Assembly to appoint Mr Fraser Bews, Rev Dr David Coulter, Mr Tim Podger and Rev Nigel J Robb as new members of the General Trustees.

9.1.6 One Advisory Member resigned since the 2023 General Assembly:

- Rev Dr George Whyte (September 2023) who served on the Fabric, PSB and Audit & Assurance Committees

9.1.7 The Trustees recommend that Mr Alan Kennedy (Chair) and Rev Scott Rennie (Vice-Chair) each receive £2,000 for their services as Chair and Vice-Chair over the past year, as authorised under S.38 of the 1925 Act.

9.1.8 The Trustees continue to seek new members with skills and backgrounds aligned to its needs and its wish to increase the diversity of its membership. Those interested are asked to contact the Chair, Vice-Chair or Chief Executive for further information.

9.2 Staffing

9.2.1 The Trustees were pleased to appoint Mr Brian Waller as Chief Executive and Clerk with Mrs Morag Menneer as his depute.

In the name of the General Trustees

ALAN F K KENNEDY, *Chair*
SCOTT RENNIE, *Vice-Chair*
BRIAN D WALLER, *Chief Executive*

Appendix 1**Funds of the General Trustees**

	31/12/2023 (£'000)	31/12/2022 (£'000)
Held for Congregations (Consolidated)		
Glebes (Land)	29,588	29,392
Stipend Fund (Investments)	109,252	100,043
Total Stipend	138,840	129,435
Buildings (Churches & Halls)	238,208	234,927
Buildings (Manses)	294,933	298,042
Fabric Fund (Investments - Capital)	88,677	77,770
Fabric Fund (Investments - Revenue)	9,884	11,705
Total Fabric	631,702	622,444
Individual Funds	4,349	4,128
Total for Congregations	774,891	756,007
General Trustees' Funds		
General Fund	11,524	11,084
CoSIS	7,307	7,057
Central Fabric Fund	21,745	19,788
Glebe Improvement Fund	441	384
Heritage Property Fund	793	652
Individual Bequests	3,699	3,427
Total for GT Funds	45,509	42,392
Grand Total	820,400	798,399
Total for Buildings and Land	562,729	562,361
Total for Investments	212,162	193,646
Total for GT Funds	45,509	42,392
	820,400	798,399

Appendix 2**Manse Standards****The Repairing Standard**

- The property must be wind and watertight and in all other respects reasonably fit for people to live in.
- The structure and exterior (including drains, gutters and external pipes) must be in a reasonable state of repair and in property working order.
- Installations for supplying water, gas and electricity and for sanitation, space heating and heating water must be in a reasonable state of repair and in proper working order; any fixtures, fittings and appliance that the are provided must be in a reasonable state of repair and in proper working order.
- Any furnishings must be capable of being used safely for the purpose for which they are designed and the property must meet the tolerable standard (see below).
- Water pipes must be free of lead (where this cannot be ascertained water testing must be carried out to check for the presence of lead piping).
- Electrical installations must be protected by a residual current device (RCD).
- Properties must have a fixed space heating system (a permanent installation in the property which is plumbed or hard-wired and capable of maintaining a temperature of 21°C in at least one room and 18°C elsewhere, when the outside temperature is -1°C).
- Installations for fuels other than gas and electricity to be in a reasonable state of repair and in proper working order.
- Any common parts pertaining to the property must be able to be accessed and used safely.
- The property must have satisfactory provision for, and safe access to, a food storage area and food preparation space.
- Where the property is in a tenement, common doors must be secure and fitted with satisfactory emergency exit locks and a secure entry system.

The Tolerable Standard

The Housing (Scotland) Act 1969 introduced the tolerable standard which is a basic standard of habitability and applies to all housing in Scotland, regardless of tenure. A property meets the tolerable standard if it:

- Is structurally stable
- Is substantially free from rising or penetrating damp
- Has satisfactory provisions for natural and artificial lighting, for ventilation and for heating
- Has satisfactory thermal insulation
- Has an adequate piped supply of wholesome water available within the property
- Has a sink provided with a satisfactory supply of both hot and cold water within the property
- Has an indoor toilet for exclusive use of the occupants of the property
- Has a fixed bath or shower and a wash-hand basin, each provided with a satisfactory supply of both hot and cold water and suitably located within the property
- Has an effective system for the drainage and disposal of foul and surface water in the case of a property having a supply of electricity, complies with the relevant requirements in relation to the electrical installation for the purposes of that supply
- Has satisfactory facilities for the cooking of food within the property
- Has satisfactory access to all external doors and outbuildings
- Has satisfactory equipment installed for detecting, and for giving warning of, fire or suspected fire
- Has satisfactory equipment installed for detecting, and for giving warning of, carbon monoxide present in a concentration that is hazardous to health

Appendix 3

Manse Standards – Update received from Presbyteries following request for information in November 2023

Presbytery	Summary and General Trustee Comments
Abernethy	Update received confirming condition and status of each manse.
Argyll	Copies of all survey reports shared with the Trustees, work required to review reports to assess which manses do not meet the required standards.
Caithness	No response received.
Clyde	Presbytery have committed to reviewing manse condition schedules and working with the Trustees to progress the requested review however couldn't meet the requested timescale. This is partly due to the vacant PBO position.
Edinburgh & West Lothian	Presbytery have shared a spreadsheet which reviews and compares all manses in relation to standard and energy performance. Presbytery are actively managing a programme of replacement or upgrading of manses.
Fife	Copies of all survey reports shared with the Trustees, work required to review reports to assess which manses do not meet the required standards.
Forth Valley & Clydesdale	No formal response from Presbytery. From speaking to the PBO, the Presbytery is managing the sale or upgrade of manses on a reactive basis. The lack of an approved Presbytery Mission Plan means that a proactive approach isn't currently possible.
Glasgow	Presbytery are actively monitoring and managing manses. Spreadsheet shared with Trustees.
Inverness	Request acknowledged but no information received. Told the Trustees to contact the new Presbytery Clerk.
Lewis	Status update provided for all manses.
Lochaber	General statement received confirming all manses meet the standards. Trustees to check against EPC register.
Lochcarron-Skye	Request passed on to session clerks. No responses received from Session Clerks.
Lothian & Borders	No response received, meeting arranged with Presbytery in March.
North East & Northern Isles	No formal response from Presbytery. From speaking to the PBO, the Presbytery is managing the sale or upgrade of manses on a reactive basis. The PBO is in touch with individual ministers who have concerns regarding manses.
Perth	Presbytery provided spreadsheet confirming manse ownership and basic update on status.
Ross	No response received
Sutherland	No response received
The South West	No response received
Uist	No response received

Appendix 4

Determinations made under Act VII 1995

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: Aberdeen: Devana – sale of hall; Aberdeen : Devana – sale of manse; Aberdeen: Fountainhall – sale of Rubislaw Church; Aberdeen: Fountainhall – sale of Holburn West Church; Aberdeen: Hillside – sale of Woodside Church; Aberdeen: Kingswell – sale of Kingswell Church; Aberdeen: Ruthrieston West – sale of Ruthrieston West Church; Aberdeen: St Mary's – sale of manse; Abernethy, Dron & Arngask – sale of Arngask Church; Abernethy, Dron & Arngask – sale of manse; Abernuthnott; sale of Marykirk Church; Applecross, Lochcarron and Torridon – sale of manse; Avoch – sale of Avoch Church; Ayr St Columba – sale of manse; Ayton and District Churches – sale of manse; Balgay – sale of Balgay Church; Balmaclellan, Kells & Dalry – sale of manse; Barthol Chapel – sale of St Katherine's building; Belhaven and Spott – sale of manse; Bennachie – sale of Blairdaff Church; Bennachie – sale of Cluny Church; Bennachie – sale of Kemnay manse; Bennachie – sale of Midmar Church; Bennachie – Old Blairdaff Ruin; Boat of Garten, Carrbridge and Kincardine – sale of Kincardine Church; Brimmond – sale of Bucksburn and Stoneywood Church; Burnside Blairbeth – sale of church and hall; Campbeltown – sale of Campbeltown Highland Church; Cargill Burrelton – sale of manse; Carnock & Oakley – sale of manse; Cathcart Old – sale of manse; Ceres, Kemback and Springfield – sale of Kemback Church; Clackmannan – sale of manse; Coatbridge New St Andrew's – sale of retirement house; Coatbridge Old Monkland – sale of Church and Session House; Coatbridge Old Monkland – sale of manse; Coldstream & District Parishes – sale of Swinton Church; Corby – sale of St Andrew's building; Cowal Kirk – sale of High Kirk; Cragnish – sale of Ardfern Church; Creich – sale of Creich Church; Crieff – sale of St Michael's Church; Cromarty – sale of Cromarty Church; Crossmichael, Parton and Balmaghie – sale of manse; Cullen and Deskford – sale of Cullen Church; Cupar St John's and Dairsie United – sale of Dairsie Church and Hall; Dalmellington – sale of Kirk of the Covenant (Dalmellington Church); Dalry St Margaret's – sale of manse; Darvel, Galston, Loudoun, Newmilns – sale of manse; Dingwall Castle Street – sale of manse; Dundee Camperdown – sale of Church and Hall; Dundee Craigiebank – sale of Church site; Dundee: Menzieshill – sale of manse; Dundee St David's High – sale of manse; Dysart St Clair – sale of church and hall; Eddrachillis – sale of manse; Edenshead – sale of Strathmiglo Church; Edinburgh: Clermiston – sale of manse; Edinburgh: Dalmeny and Queensferry – sale of manse; Edinburgh: Drylaw – sale of manse; Edinburgh: Polwarth – sale of manse; Edzell – sale of Fern Church; Edzell – sale of Carestone Church; Edzell – sale of Maule Memorial Church; Fearn Abbey & Nigg – sale of Fearn Abbey Church; Flotta – sale of Flotta Church; Fogo – sale of Fogo Church; Forbes St Laurence – sale of manse; Fort William Kilmallie – sale of Caol Church; Fort William Kilmallie – sale of Corpach Scout Hall; Garvald and Morham – sale of Garvald Church; Garvald and Morham – sale of Morham Church; Glasgow Broomhill Hyndland – sale of Hyndland Church; Glasgow Newlands South – sale of manse; Glasgow Queen's Park Govanhill – sale of manse; Glasgow: Ruchazie – sale of manse; Greenock Lyle Kirk – sale of hall; Greenock Lyle Kirk – sale of manse; Greenock St Ninian's – sale of Church, Hall and land; Hoy and Walls – sale of St Columba's building; Hutton, Fishwick & Paxton – sale of Hutton Church; Hutton, Fishwick & Paxton – sale of Paxton Church; Inch – sale of hall; Inverness Inshes East – sale of East Church; Inverness Inshes East – sale of manse; Inverness Trinity Dalneigh – sale of Trinity Church and Hall; Johnstone St Andrew's Trinity – sale of manse; Kelso Country Churches – sale of manse; Kilchrenan and Dalavich – sale of Dalavich Church; Kilchrenan and Dalavich – sale of Kilchrenan Church; Kilmalcolm Old – sale of manse; Kilmarnock New Laigh Kirk – sale of St John's Onthank Church and Hall; Kilmarnock New Laigh Kirk – sale of manse; Kilmarnock St Marnock's – sale of hall; Kilmuir & Logie Easter – sale of manse; Kincardine, Croick and Edderton – sale of Kincardine Church and Hall; Kincardine, Croick and Edderton – sale of manse; Kirkcaldy Abbotshall – sale of manse; Kirknewton and East Calder – sale fo Kirknewton Church; Lasswade & Rosewell – sale of Lasswade Church; Linlithgow St Michael's – exchange of land; Linwood – sale of manse; Lismore – sale of church and house buildings; Markinch & Thornton – sale of Thornton Church; Meldrum & Bourtie – sale of Bourtie Church; Monifieth South Angus – sale of Monikie Church; Monifieth South Angus – sale of Murroes Church; Montrose – sale of manse; Moy, Dalarossie and Tomatin – sale of Dalarossie Church; Newbattle – sale of hall at Mayfield; Newbattle – sale of Kirkbank Centre; Newport-on-Tay – sale of house building; North & West Islay – sale of Kilmeny Church; North & West Islay – sale of Portnahaven Church; Paisley West – sale of church and hall; Peterhead New – sale of Muckle Kirk; Petty – sale of East Petty Church; Pittenweem – sale of manse; Prestonpans Prestongrange – sale of manse; Quarter – sale of manse; Rathven – sale of Rathven Church and Hall; Rutherglen West and Wardlawhill – sale of manse; Sanday – sale of Sanday Cross Kirk; St Andrew's Lhanbryd & Urquhart – sale of St Andrew's Lhanbryd Church; St Andrew's Lhanbryd & Urquhart – sale of St Margaret's Hall; Stepps – sale of manse; South Islay – sale of hall; South Lochaber – sale of manse; Stonehaven Carronside – sale of South Church; Templehall and Torbain United – sale of Templehall Church; United Church of Bute – sale of manse; Upper Annandale – sale of Kirkpatrick Juxta Church and Hall; Upper Donside North – sale of manse; Urra & Kilchrist – sale of Urray Church; West Cowal – sale of Colintraive Church; West Gordon – sale of Cushnie & Tough manse; West Gordon – sale of Cushnie Church; West Gordon – sale of Noth manse; West Gordon – sale of Tough Church; West Gordon – sale of Upper Donside manse; Wick, Pulteneytown and Thrumster – sale of Thrumster Church; Yester, Bolton & Saltoun – sale of Bolton Church; Yester, Bolton & Saltoun – sale of Saltoun Church

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: Auchtertool; Kingussie; Kirkinner; Knockbain; Lismore; Netherlorn, Tillicoultry.

Miscellaneous Sales:

The General Trustees made the following miscellaneous determinations: Trinity Gask & Kinkell (Dissolved) – sale of Trinity Gask Church

Appendix 5

Amendments to "Use of Monies in the Consolidated Fabric Fund" (as approved by the General Assembly of 1997 and amended by the General Assemblies of 1997 and 2003).

There will be added a new paragraph 6 in the following terms:

6. The General Trustees are empowered to release capital for non-fabric purposes subject to the following provisos:
 - (a) The purpose for which the money is to be released is one which has been approved by Presbytery as being within the spirit of the Report of the Special Commission anent Review and Reform to the General Assembly of 2001;
 - (b) The release of capital for non-fabric purposes would not be contrary to any trust conditions in the title of the property or properties from the sale of which the monies derive; and
 - (c) Capital may only be released to the extent that the General Trustees consider that the congregation's remaining holding in the Fund is sufficient to meet its future fabric requirements.

TRUSTEES OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND HOUSING AND LOAN FUND FOR RETIRED MINISTERS AND WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS OF MINISTERS MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Note the new Constitution of the Fund as set out in Appendix 5 (*Section 8 and Appendix 5*).
3. Appoint Alison Fyfe as a Trustee of the Fund.

1. AIM OF THE FUND

1.1 The Fund exists to support retired Church of Scotland ministers, and widows, widowers, separated or divorced spouses and separated or former civil partners of Church of Scotland ministers, in need of help with housing. The assistance available depends on an individual's circumstances and finances. Details of the help available, and the parameters set, and regularly reviewed, by the Trustees are available in the Guidance Notes on the Church of Scotland website or from the Secretary at the Church offices. The Secretary may also be contacted by potential applicants to discuss their particular situation, and the assistance which the Trustees may be able to provide to them.

1.2 Help from the Fund takes one of two forms. A beneficiary of the Fund is provided with either a house to rent or a loan to assist with a house purchase. The maximum house purchase price, set in December 2023 is £260,000. 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 normal maximum since January 2024 of £182,000 for Shared Appreciation Loans and £50,000 for Standard Loans.

2. HOUSING TRANSACTIONS: 2023

2.1 Assistance provided during 2023 to ministers, widows and widowers, and separated and divorced spouses, is detailed in Appendix 1. The property market settled down compared to recent years but is still competitive for popular properties. Against a backdrop of changing economic circumstances and fluctuating interest rates, surveyors are not prepared to predict how the market will perform in the coming months.

2.2 The Trustees owned 188 houses at the end of 2023. The houses purchased and those sold by the Trustees during that year are detailed in Appendix 2, which also shows the average price of the houses purchased, and the average price of the houses which were sold. At the end of 2023, 8 houses were being marketed or prepared for sale.

3. RENTS AND RENTAL REVIEWS

3.1 At the start of a tenancy the Fund obtains a professional assessment of the Market Rent. Rents are charged at 50% of the Market Rent for Ministers, separated or divorced spouses and separated or former civil partners of ministers, and at 25% for widows, widowers and bereaved civil partners of ministers.

3.2 The Trustees carefully considered the level of annual rent increase. In light of the good financial position of the Fund, the Trustees decided that rents should not be increased in 2024.

3.3 Rental income has been sufficient to cover maintenance and repairs. Routine visits to rental properties are being carried out and reported maintenance work dealt with as expeditiously as possible.

4. LOAN TRANSACTIONS: 2023

4.1 The Fund provides loans by way of Standard Loans, Shared Appreciation Loans, and Short-Term Bridging Loans.

4.2 Standard Loans in 2023 were available up to a normal maximum limit of £25,000 at a rate of interest of two per cent for ministers and separated or divorced spouses and separated or former civil partners of ministers and one per cent for surviving widows, widowers or bereaved civil partners of ministers.

4.3 Shared Appreciation Loans, which link loan repayment values over their term to the value of the property concerned over the same period, were granted up to the maximum limit of £175,000. Currently rates of interest for such loans are one and a half per cent for ministers and separated or divorced spouses and separated or former civil partners of ministers and three quarters of a per cent for widows, widowers or bereaved civil partners of ministers. Borrowers with Shared Appreciation Loans receive quinquennial visits from the Secretary and, in 2023, 18 visits were carried out.

4.4 Short Term Bridging Loans are granted for a specific period, and in specific circumstances, at the discretion of the Trustees. Interest is charged at a rate equivalent to that permitted by H M Revenue & Customs without liability for benefit-in-kind taxation. At the time of preparation of this Report this was two and a quarter per cent.

4.5 Details of each of the three types of loan outstanding as at 31st December 2023 are given in Appendix 3.

5. DONATIONS, BEQUESTS ETC.

5.1 The Trustees are gratified to report that, during 2023, donations, bequests and gifts to the Fund, including the bequest of a property, amounted to £354,000

6. FUNDS

6.1 The expenditure on house purchases less the amount realised from sales of houses during 2023 was £743,108. The net increase in long-term loans during 2023 was £41,500.

6.2 Investments at market value, and cash deposits, at 31st December 2023 amounted to £28,041,795.

6.3 On the question of Congregational Contributions which have been suspended in each of the years from 2018 to date, the Fund's Report to the General Assembly of 2020 stated:

"the Trustees of the Fund are in agreement that the Fund should not seek the reinstatement of Congregational Contributions at this Review point. It is proposed that this be reviewed again during the first quarter of 2024. "

Accordingly, this matter has been reviewed by the Trustees. There is neither a current intention to ask for reinstatement of Congregational Contributions at this point nor any expectation that this will be sought in the future, but the Trustees reserve their position on this matter.

7. THE FUTURE

7.1 Those 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 always 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 dealt with 53 enquiries about assistance in 2023, with 17 new and 13 updated applications approved. Details of commitments for the next five years, and approved at 31st December 2023, 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 2023 and the number on the Preliminary Applications List for assistance can also be found at Appendix 4.

7.1.1 The Fund can be of assistance beyond the point of retiral. Already-retired Church of Scotland ministers, their widows, widowers, bereaved civil partners, separated or divorced spouses and separated or former civil partners who find that their circumstances have changed and who would now like to be considered for assistance from the Fund are welcome to speak to the Secretary at any point. This can include those already in receipt of assistance from the Fund.

7.2 In December 2023 the Trustees carefully considered the 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, the Fund's obligations towards the Church and the proper and appropriate stewardship of its resources. The Trustees agreed that the house purchase price limits for 2024 be increased so that the maximum price for a house to rent increased by £10,000 to £260,000 and the maximum price, or value, of a house in respect of which a loan would be given increased to £260,000. The Trustees are satisfied that such parameters will enable appropriate housing to be purchased for rental, or with the aid of Fund loans, in the current housing market for those who are eligible for assistance from the Fund.

8. REVIEW

8.1 It has been apparent to the Trustees since 2020 that the assets of the Fund are more than is required to meet the Fund's anticipated obligations. Since then the Trustees have been working with the Assembly Trustees and others to find a way forward that would allow surplus assets to be used by the Fund for other charitable purposes within the Church. In terms of the Fund's current Constitution, which came into effect in 2016, there is no clear route for the Fund's Trustees to use, or divest themselves of, surplus assets. It does, however, allow the Fund's Trustees to "propose a variation of the Constitution to the Charity Trustees for the purpose of varying or modifying the Charitable Purpose, powers and/or other provisions" of the Constitution.

8.2 A new Constitution has been prepared and was agreed by the Fund's Trustees on 28th February 2024. As required by the 2016 Constitution, the new Constitution was presented to the Assembly Trustees, as the Church's Charity Trustees, and approved by them on 14th March 2024. It now needs to be reported to the General Assembly, and is attached to this Report as Appendix 5.

8.3 The most significant change is found at Clause 11.2. This permits the Fund's Trustees, in their sole discretion, to make a donation to the Church for the furtherance of its charitable purposes, but only when there is a genuine surplus and the sum to be donated is not required for housing and loan matters and could be applied to better effect for the charitable purposes of the Church.

8.4 Other changes made by the Constitution worth drawing to the Assembly's attention are:

Clause 1.1 - The shortening of the name of the Fund to "The Church of Scotland Housing and Loan Fund";

Clause 11.1.4 - The increase in the support available to beneficiaries of the Fund by allowing their removal costs to be paid;

Clauses 4 and 13 - The tidying up of matters of administration regarding Trusteeship and eligibility.

8.5 Taking into account (i) the Fund's outstanding commitments over the next 5 years, (ii) a sum expected to be needed for ministers already working over retirement age and possible increased demand as a result of Presbytery Mission Plan implementation, (iii) the Fund's projected costs on Energy Performance and Net Zero requirements for the portfolio of rental properties and (iv) a year's running and administration costs, the Fund's Trustees have identified that £9 million is surplus to the Fund's requirements. That is the amount which it is intended will be transferred to the Assembly Trustees at this time.

8.6 The new Constitution enables further donations to be made in the event of surpluses being identified in future. By way of example, the Fund's Trustees have considered giving those in Training for the Full Time Ministry of Word and Sacrament help with their housing costs, meeting the removals costs of retiring ministers, and making donations to the Church of Scotland Ministry Benevolent Fund.

9. DILIGENCE

9.1 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. It can still prove challenging at times to find reliable trades people and contractors to carry out maintenance and repair work within desired timescales.

9.2 Any empty property held by the Fund presents challenges, as the Fund follows good practice by ensuring that they are all checked regularly and heated during cold weather, a practice underlined by the Insurers' requirement for such precautions. Garden upkeep and payment of Council Tax add significantly to the costs of maintenance for such properties. Efforts are made to try and re-let suitable properties but this is often not practicable. Commercial rental of such properties is only undertaken rarely, where the prospect of a sale is, for market reasons, highly unlikely. Empty properties are offered to potential tenants in the first instance and if not suitable are marketed for sale as soon as possible.

9.3 The Trustees endeavour to maintain the properties owned by the Fund at a high standard and to comply with all legal requirements.

10. STAFF

10.1 The Trustees wish to place on record their indebtedness to the work of the staff of the Fund, and in particular the care and support afforded by staff to all those who apply to, or have been assisted by, the Fund.

10.2 The Property Assistant's increased hours have proved a great benefit in allowing administration and maintenance issues to be dealt with promptly.

10.3 The Project Manager took up his role in February 2023 and has since gained a good knowledge of how the Fund operates and has spent time developing a strategy for taking forward the work to fulfil the Fund's obligations in terms of expected Energy Performance Certificate Regulations and to assist with the Church's Net Zero aims.

11. MEMBERSHIP

11.1 The Trustees would be pleased if the General Assembly would agree to the appointment of Alison Fyfe, an Elder at Monifieth South Angus Church, as a Trustee of the Fund.

11.2 Mr Harry D W Findlay comes to the end of his second term as a Trustee. The Fund has appreciated his faithful attendance, pertinent contributions to discussions and dedication and attention to Fund matters, and are grateful too for the time he has committed to Fund business.

11.3 The Trustees and Secretary would be delighted to speak to anyone interested in becoming a future Trustee of the Fund.

In the name of the Trustees

DOROTHY U ANDERSON, *Chair*
BRUCE H SINCLAIR, *Deputy Chair*
HAZEL BETT, *Secretary*

Appendix 1

Assistance provided	2023	2022	2021
Number of Ministers retiring *	48	38	40
Percentage assisted with a house to rent	17%	3%	15%
Percentage assisted with a house purchase loan	6%	8%	8%
Total percentage assisted	23%	11%	23%
Instances of assistance provided*	2023	2022	2021
Retiring Ministers	14	4	9
Ministers already retired	2	1	3
Widow(er)s & Civil Partners	1	0	1
Spouses	0	3	0
Total	17	8	13

* Assistance may be provided in a different calendar year to that in which the Minister actually retires

<i>Tenants as at 31st December</i>	2023	2022	2021
Ministers	115	111	123
Widow(er)s & Civil Partners	51	54	51
Spouses	12	11	9
Commercial rental	2	2	2
Vacant	8	7	4
<i>Borrowers as at 31st December</i>	2023	2022	2021
Ministers**	62	65	65
Widow(er)s & Civil Partners	36	34	34
Spouses	0	0	0

**2Ministers have dual loans

Appendix 2

Rental Housing			
	2023	2022	2021
Total number of houses owned at 1st January	185	189	197
Houses purchased during year	12	4	8
Total cost of purchases	£2,703,418	£704,521	£1,336,621
Average house price	£225,285	£176,130	£167,078
Houses sold during year	9	8	16
Total amount realised	£1,960,310	£1,598,609	£2,739,438
Average proceeds	£217,812	£199,826	£171,215
Houses bequeathed/gifted during year	1	1	1
Houses relet during year	1	0	0
Total number of houses owned at 31st December	188	185	189
Average market rent of property purchased during year	£10,520	£8,700	£8,250
Average rent of new tenancies - Ministers/Spouses	£5,260	£4,350	£4,125
Average rent of new tenancies - Widow(er)s	£2,630	£2,175	£2,063

Appendix 3

Housing Loans			
	2023	2022	2021
<i>Long term loans outstanding at 1st January</i>	101	101	110
Value of loans outstanding	£6,191,250	£6,000,250	£6,241,750
New loans granted during year	2	3	4
Additional loans granted during year	0	0	1
Value of loans granted	£195,000	£302,000	£377,000
Loans fully repaid during year	3	3	13
Loans partially repaid during year	0	2	1
Value of loans repaid	£153,500	£111,000	£618,500
Long term loans outstanding at 31st December	100	101	101
Value of long term loans outstanding	£6,232,750	£6,191,250	£6,000,250
<i>Short term Bridging Loans outstanding at 1st January</i>	0	0	0
Value of Bridging Loans outstanding	£0	£0	£0
Bridging loans granted during year	3	2	0
Value of Bridging Loans granted	£175,280	£117,000	£0
Bridging loans repaid during year	3	2	0
Value of Bridging Loans repaid	£175,280	£117,000	£0
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	2023	2022	2021
For next 5 years			
Houses to rent	15	20	21
Housing Loans	5	7	5
Value of outstanding commitments	£4,581,150	£5,485,030	£5,183,000
Preliminary Applications	2023	2022	2021
For those retiring between 5 - 10 years	2	4	4

Appendix 5

CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND HOUSING AND LOAN FUND

(a component element of The Church of Scotland, Scottish Charity Number SC011353)

MAY 2024 (as approved by the Fund's Trustees, and approved by the Charity Trustees, and reported to the General Assembly, all under clause 15)

1. NAME AND CHARITABLE PURPOSES

1.1 The Church of Scotland Housing and Loan Fund (formerly The Church of Scotland Housing and Loan Fund for Retired Ministers and Widows and Widowers of Ministers, the change of name to come into effect at the same time as this Constitution) ("**the Fund**") was established by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland ("**the General Assembly**") in 1969 to further the charitable purposes of the Church of Scotland, Scottish Charity number SC011353, ("**the Church**"), including:

1.1.1 the provision on behalf of the Church of housing accommodation and other related assistance:

- a. on retirement, or thereafter, for those individuals holding the status of Minister of the Church who are eligible for enrolment in, or who are in receipt of benefit from, the Church of Scotland Pension Scheme for Ministers and Overseas Missionaries and/or the Church of Scotland Pension Plan, or any successor plan thereto (whether or not such enrolment has taken place); or who, having such status, serve, or have served the Church as Ministers of charges in Presbyteries furth of the United Kingdom; and
- b. for those in receipt of benefits from the Church's Income Protection arrangements for Ministers or any successor arrangements thereto; and
- c. for Widows, Widowers, Separated or Divorced Spouses and Separated or Former Civil Partners of Ministers of the Church (where "Former Civil Partner" includes those whose civil partnership has ended through death or the dissolution of the partnership);

("the Beneficiaries", and each a "Beneficiary", and all subject to the qualifications set out in Clause 13).

2. THE TRUST FUNDS

The capital of the Fund (which is not in the form of an endowment) consisted initially in 1969 or shortly thereafter of (a) a sum of £25,000 provided by the Church's former Committee on the Maintenance of the Ministry, (b) a sum of around £40,000 provided by the Church's former Committee on the Aged and Infirm Ministers' Fund and (c) a sum of £25,000 provided by The Baird Trust charity number SC016549, then acting under The Baird Trust Orders of 1939 and 1957, as confirmed by The Baird Trust Order Confirmation Acts 1939 and 1957 and now incorporated as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Acts, company number SC235853, conform to the Baird Trust Reorganisation Act 2005 ("**The Baird Trust**"). Such initial provisions, together with all past, current and future receipts by the Fund in respect of Congregational contributions paid through the Church's Ministries Council, donations, legacies, rents, interests, all heritable properties, and the proceeds thereof, loans or other assets of whatever description are hereinafter referred to as "**the trust funds**".

3. CHARITY TRUSTEES

3.1 The Assembly Trustees (or any successor body), being the Charity Trustees of the Church, designated a "**designated religious charity**" under Section 65 of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 (as may be amended or re-enacted from time to time) (the "**Charities Act**"), of which the Fund is a component element, are therefore the Charity Trustees of the Fund under the Charities Act (the "**Charity Trustees**"), and accordingly are entitled to act in a supervisory and disciplinary role in a delegated capacity on behalf of the General Assembly.

3.2 For administrative convenience, the heritable assets of the Fund are vested in the Church of Scotland General Trustees as bare Trustees and are held by them for behoof, and at the direction, of the Fund's Trustees appointed in terms of Clause 4 (the "**Fund's Trustees**").

4. THE FUND'S TRUSTEES

4.1 Decisions as to the general strategy, policy, management, administration, investment and the application and disbursement of the trust funds are taken exclusively by the Fund's Trustees. The trust funds shall be vested in the Fund's Trustees, subject to the terms of Clause 3.2.

4.2 The Fund's Trustees shall be a minimum of five in number and a maximum of eleven in number, being:

- 4.2.1** Up to three Ministers of the Church and one member of the Church appointed by the General Assembly on the nomination of the Church's Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (or any successor body as established by the General Assembly);

- 4.2.2 Up to four persons (either Ministers or members of the Church) appointed by the General Assembly on the nomination of the Fund's Trustees;
- 4.2.3 Up to three individuals appointed by The Baird Trust.
- 4.3 The following provisions shall apply with regard to the length of time a Fund's Trustee may serve as such:
 - 4.3.1 With regard to those Fund's Trustees appointed in terms of Clause 4.2.1 or 4.2.2, each will serve for a term of four years, which may be renewable to allow a second four-year term.
 - 4.3.2 With regard to those Fund's Trustees appointed in terms of Clause 4.2.3, none will have any limit on his or her term of office, which is at the behest of the Trustees of The Baird Trust.
 - 4.3.3 Any of the Fund's Trustees appointed in terms of Clause 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 who have served two four-year terms may not serve as a Fund's Trustee again without at least one year out of office, and then only for one further four-year term.
 - 4.3.4 Any Fund's Trustee appointed in terms of Clause 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 may serve for up to a further two four-year terms as a Fund's Trustee (beyond those terms permitted in clauses 4.3.1 and/or 4.3.3) if elected also, in terms of Clause 5, as Chair or Deputy Chair. However, on demitting office as Chair or Deputy Chair, where the first two four-year terms as a Fund's Trustee have expired, such Fund's Trustee shall retire not only as Chair or Deputy Chair but also as a Fund's Trustee at the same time.
- 4.4 In any of the following circumstances a Fund's Trustee may no longer serve as such and will cease to be a Fund's Trustee:
 - 4.4.1 if by notice in writing he or she resigns his or her office; or
 - 4.4.2 if he or she comes to be employed by or on behalf of the Fund or receives any payment for holding the office of Fund's Trustee (other than reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses or, if a professional person, his or her normal professional charges for any professional work carried out for the Fund, subject always to the terms of section 67 of the Charities Act; or
 - 4.4.3 if he or she becomes a bankrupt person, or insolvent or apparently insolvent or makes any arrangement or composition with his or her creditors generally; or
 - 4.4.4 if he or she is unable, due to ill health, to fulfil the duties of his or her office but only if that has continued (or is expected to continue) for a period of more than six months; or
 - 4.4.5 if he or she is absent (without good reason, in the opinion of the Fund's Trustees) from more than three consecutive meetings of the Fund's Trustees, but only if the Fund's Trustees resolve to remove that person from office; or
 - 4.4.6 if he or she is not permitted to be a Trustee in terms of Section 69 of the Charities Act; or
 - 4.4.7 if, in terms of section 66(5) of the Charities Act, he or she is considered by the other Fund's Trustees to have been in serious or persistent breach of either or both of the duties listed in sections 66(1) and 66(2) of the Charities Act, such Fund's Trustee being entitled to be heard prior to the other Trustees taking a decision; or
 - 4.4.8 if he or she dies; or
 - 4.4.9 if a Fund's Trustee appointed in terms of Clause 4.2.1 or 4.2.2., ceases to be a member of the Church; or
 - 4.4.10 if he or she is removed from office as a Fund's Trustee by the General Assembly on disciplinary grounds on the recommendation of the Charity Trustees, or if he or she is disqualified as a charity trustee in terms of the Charities Act; or
 - 4.4.11 if he or she has made an application to become a Beneficiary of the Fund which is due to be considered at a meeting of the Fund's Trustees.
- 5. **CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR**
 The Fund's Trustees shall appoint one of their number to be Chair and another to be Deputy Chair at meetings of the Fund's Trustees, and the Chair and Deputy Chair appointed shall each serve as such until the meeting following the fourth anniversary of his or her appointment, when he or she may be re-appointed for a further four-year term, or a new Chair or Deputy Chair appointed as may be decided by the Fund's Trustees. A Chair or Deputy Chair may not serve as such for more than two four-year terms.
- 6. **OFFICIALS**
 - 6.1 The Fund's Trustees shall appoint the Secretary of the Fund, who, if remunerated, shall be employed by the Employing Agency for staff in the Church offices and on the terms and conditions set by that Agency.
 - 6.2 The Fund's Trustees, with the approval of the Charity Trustees, may appoint such other officials as from time to time they may consider necessary for the proper administration of the Fund and may define the duties of all such officials.
 - 6.3 The General Treasurer of the Church ex officio shall be the Treasurer of the Fund. The role of Treasurer is not that of a Fund's Trustee or a Charity Trustee.

7. CONDUCT OF MEETINGS

- 7.1** Regular meetings of the Fund's Trustees shall be held at such places as may be appointed by the Fund's Trustees, and such meetings shall be called by a notice sent by the Secretary or Chair stating generally the purposes of the meeting and addressed to each of the Fund's Trustees and posted and/or e-mailed at least five clear days before the date of the meeting, provided that in exceptional circumstances it shall be competent with the consent of a quorum of the Fund's Trustees as after-mentioned to call a meeting of the Fund's Trustees on shorter notice.
- 7.2** Meetings of the Fund's Trustees will habitually take place in person but may take place where expediency dictates by telephone conference call, video conference call or by any other collective electronic means approved unanimously by them from time to time.
- 7.3** In the event of the Chair being absent from a meeting of the Fund's Trustees, then the Fund's Trustees present at such meeting shall appoint the Deputy Chair, whom failing one of their number, to act as the chair of that meeting.
- 7.4** Any resolution shall be passed by a majority of the Fund's Trustees present at a meeting of the Fund's Trustees, and in the case of equality the Chair (or chair of the meeting) shall have a casting vote in addition to a deliberative vote. As noted at Clause 7.2 above, Trustees will be present if they can communicate with others present, and vote on any business of the meeting (for example via telephone or video conferencing).
- 7.5** The Minute of any meeting of the Fund's Trustees shall be submitted for approval at the following meeting of the Fund's Trustees and, if approved, shall be signed by the Chair (or chair of that following meeting) and the Secretary and shall thereafter be recorded as duly authenticated as evidence of the views and resolutions therein stated.
- 7.6** Five of the Fund's Trustees shall be a quorum at meetings, of whom at least one shall be appointed in terms of Clause 4.2.2 and at least one shall be appointed in terms of Clause 4.2.3.
- 7.7** The business of the Fund and all its correspondence with and notification to or from the Fund's Trustees may be conducted equally validly and effectively as if by post if transmitted by e-mail or other electronic means.
- 7.8** The Fund's Trustees shall delegate to some of their number the task of meeting at least once yearly with members of the Church's Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, or any successor body, to keep under review matters of mutual interest.

8. LEGACIES AND DONATIONS

Legacies and donations to the Fund shall be validly discharged by the Treasurer, or other official of the Church, so authorised by the General Assembly.

9. EXPENSES

The expenses of management of the Fund each year (including without prejudice to the foregoing generality employment costs relating to the Secretary and other staff) shall be due and payable from the trust funds.

10. ACCOUNTS

The Accounts of the Fund as at 31 December shall be prepared by the Treasurer each year and reported to the Fund's Trustees. The Fund will be audited as part of the Annual Accounts of the Unincorporated Councils and Committees of the Church.

11. MANAGEMENT OF TRUST FUNDS

11.1 The Fund's Trustees shall utilise the trust funds or such part thereof as may be required:

- 11.1.1** in the acquisition of suitable heritable property for the provision at their discretion of housing accommodation for the Beneficiaries. Such property may be made available on such terms as to rent (including non-liability to rent) *etc* as the Fund's Trustees, in the particular case, shall determine; and
- 11.1.2** in the making at their discretion of loans to the Beneficiaries for the purpose of assisting such persons in the purchase of housing accommodation for their own occupation. Such loans may be made of such amount and on such terms as to interest (including non-liability to interest), repayment *etc* as the Fund's Trustees in the particular case shall determine. The Fund's Trustees shall have discretion as to whether loans shall, in the particular circumstances of each case, be heritably secured; and
- 11.1.3** in the maintenance, repair and improvement of the heritable properties owned by the Fund; and
- 11.1.4** in the payment of reasonable removal costs incurred by a Beneficiary, where assistance in that regard is not available elsewhere, such payments to be made at the discretion of the Trustees and in an amount and on such terms as the Fund's Trustees, in the particular circumstances of each case, shall determine.

11.2 In the event that the Fund's Trustees, in their sole discretion, consider that part of the trust funds which are not required solely for use in furtherance of the purposes set out in Clause 1.1.1, could be applied to better effect for the charitable purposes of the Church consistently with this Constitution, and that the purposes of the Fund set out in Clause 1.1.1 are adequately provided for without that part of the trust funds, the Fund's Trustees may make a donation or donations to the Church for the furtherance of its charitable purposes.

11.3 The Fund's Trustees shall not be bound to distribute the whole of the revenue of the trust funds arising during the course of any one year but shall have discretion as to what proportion (if any) be distributed and what proportion be accumulated for future distribution or for allocation to capital.

- 11.4** The balance of the trust funds not required for the aforementioned purposes may be invested by the Fund's Trustees in any investment in which trustees in Scotland are at such time entitled to invest funds according to law. The Fund's Trustees shall in particular have power to lodge the funds with The Church of Scotland Investors Trust incorporated by The Church of Scotland (Properties and Investments) Order Confirmation Act, 1994, Scottish Charity Number SC022884, or any successor body, for investment by the Investors Trust in terms of its powers. The Fund's Trustees shall have power to vary the investments from time to time.
- 11.5** The Fund's Trustees shall not be liable for the fall in value of any investments in which the trust funds may from time to time be placed, nor for the intromissions of any accountant, investment manager and/or factor appointed by them, nor for their own intromissions. The Fund's Trustees shall be liable only for acts of commission involving fraud and/or negligence and each for his or her acts only.
- 12. EXECUTION OF DEEDS**
For any purpose, a document is validly executed by the Fund if it is signed on its behalf by a Fund's Trustee and its Secretary whom failing two Fund's Trustees.
- 13. ELIGIBILITY FOR BENEFIT OF FUND**
- 13.1** The following shall not or no longer be eligible for benefit under clause 1.1.1:
- 13.1.1** Widows and widowers of Ministers of the Church upon their remarriage, entering into a civil partnership or entering into a relationship resulting in another person living with them;
- 13.1.2** Separated and/or divorced spouses of Ministers of the Church upon their remarriage, entering into a civil partnership or entering into a relationship resulting in another person living with them;
- 13.1.3** Separated and/or Former Civil Partners of Ministers of the Church upon their entering into a new civil partnership, a marriage or entering into a relationship resulting in another person living with them;
- 13.1.4** Beneficiaries whose personal or financial circumstances improve to the extent that they no longer fall within the parameters for assistance operated by the Fund's Trustees at that time as determined by the Fund's Trustees in their sole discretion.
- 13.2** Persons who cease to hold the status of Minister of the Church shall not be eligible for any new or additional benefit under clause 1.1.1.
- 14. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**
- 14.1** All Fund's Trustees and employees of the Fund have an obligation to notify any potential or real conflicts of interest to the Secretary, or, in the case of the Secretary, to the Chair, as they arise and ensure that these are minuted.
- 14.2** Where a Fund's Trustee or employee has so notified a potential or real conflict of interest, he or she must remove himself or herself from that section of the Trustees' meeting. In the event of any uncertainty or dispute in this respect, the matter shall be determined by the Chair (or the chair of the meeting).
- 15. VARIATION**
- 15.1** The Fund's Trustees may at any time and from time to time propose a variation of the Constitution to the Charity Trustees for the purpose of varying or modifying the Fund's charitable purposes in Clause 1, and/or the powers and/or other provisions of this Constitution, provided that no such variation or modification shall cause the purposes of the Fund to cease to be charitable. Such proposal for variation or modification will require a special majority of at least 75% of the Fund's Trustees.
- 15.2** If the Fund's Trustees at any time consider that the Fund's charitable purposes and/or other salient features of the Fund may better be achieved through a different constitutional format, they may propose to the Charity Trustees that the Fund be changed into such new constitutional format (be that a guarantee company or other type of organisation then available to charities), provided that:
- 15.2.1** the new constitutional format shall itself be capable of being recognised as a charity;
- 15.2.2** the Fund's charitable purposes shall be included (but not necessarily exclusively) within the new constitutional format; and
- 15.2.3** the whole trust funds (subject only to the costs of such change) be transferred to the new constitutional format.
- 15.3** Any changes proposed by the Fund's Trustees in terms of this Clause 15 will require to be approved by the Charity Trustees and reported to the General Assembly.
- 16. WINDING UP THE FUND**
In the event of a special majority of at least 75% of the Fund's Trustees considering it either impractical to implement the Fund's charitable purposes in Clause 1 or otherwise advisable not to continue with the Fund, the Fund's Trustees shall be entitled, in such circumstances and with the agreement of the Charity Trustees, to wind up the Fund and, after satisfaction of all its debts and liabilities, to transfer the balance of its assets and funds to the Assembly Trustees, or any successor body, for their use in furtherance of charitable purposes that are similar (wholly or in part) to the charitable purposes of the Fund.

17. INDEMNITY

Without prejudice to any other indemnity, the Fund's Trustees, and any employee of the Fund shall, so far as permissible by law, be indemnified out of the trust funds against any loss or liability (including the costs of defending successfully any court proceedings) which he, she or they may respectively incur or sustain, in connection with or on behalf of the Fund, and they shall not be answerable for the acts, receipts, neglects or defaults of each other, but each of them for his or her own acts, receipts, neglects or defaults only. The Fund may, where available, obtain trustee indemnity insurance in this regard.

18. REGISTRATION

The Fund's Trustees consent to the registration hereof for preservation.

19. GOVERNING LAW

This Constitution and any variations or modifications thereof in terms of Clause 15 shall be governed and construed in accordance with the Law of Scotland.

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND TRUST MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Re-appoint Mr John Hodge and Mr Christopher Mackay as members of the Trust from 1 June 2024 (*Section 3.1*).

Report

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

1. THE WORK OF THE TRUST

1.1 General

1.1.1 The function of the Church of Scotland Trust is to hold properties outwith Scotland and to act as a trustee in a number of third party trusts. During the year it has dealt with various matters which have arisen regarding these properties and trusts. Matters of particular significance are noted hereafter.

1.2 Third Party Trusts

1.2.1 The Trust is currently trustee of 48 third party trusts which benefit different areas of the Church's work. In 2007 the Trust instigated a Rolling Review Programme for these trusts. The Trust's Secretary and Clerk undertakes a review of the trusts annually, producing reports on half the third party trust portfolio to each of the February/March and September/October Trust meetings.

1.3 Pakistan

1.3.1 The Trust is disappointed to report that due to difficulties in Pakistan with regard to the registration process the new Succession Trust is still not operational. Preparation of a revised trust deed for resubmission to the local registrar is being progressed urgently. It is intended that the new Trust will take title to the Church's property interests in Pakistan in terms of the Church of Scotland Trust Order Confirmation Act 1958. At the same time the Trust are actively pursuing a transfer of assets to Government authorities in Pakistan in the event that registration of the new Trust cannot be completed timeously.

1.3.2 The Trust and Faith Action Programme 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 Faith Action Programme Leadership Team regarding ongoing and future developments relating to property in Israel.

1.5 Act II 2016 – the International Presbytery Act

1.5.1 Since the General Assembly of 2016 all congregations in the International Presbytery require the approval of both Presbytery and the Church of Scotland Trust for (a) any extensive alterations to their building/s; (b) any property purchase and (c) the lease of any property in excess of one year. The Trust continues to work with the International Presbytery to fulfil these responsibilities.

1.5.2 Every congregation in the International Presbytery is required to produce a Property Report to Presbytery each year with details of the management, maintenance and insurance of congregational buildings which is copied to the Trust.

2. ACCOUNTS FOR 2024

2.1 The Trust's Accounts for the year 2024 have been audited and copies thereof are available on request from the Secretary and Clerk.

3. MEMBERSHIP

3.1 In accordance with the constitution of the Trust, the following two members retire by rotation on 31 May 2024 but are eligible for re-appointment: Mr John Hodge and Mr Christopher Mackay. It is suggested to the General Assembly that Mr John Hodge and Mr Christopher Mackay be re-appointed as members of the Trust from 1 June 2024.

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

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

NOMINATION COMMITTEE MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Note the six areas of work of the Strategic Review Group (*Section 3.2.2*).
3. Note the compilation by the Nomination Committee of a handbook to simplify its work, as part of the ongoing Strategic Review (*Section 3.2.5*).
4. Make appointments to the Standing Committees of the General Assembly as set out in the Report (*Section 5*).
5. Appoint Michael Cantlay as Convener of the Social Care Council (*Section 5.1*).
6. Appoint Sonia Blakesley as Convener of the Safeguarding Committee (*Section 5.1*).
7. Reappoint James Stewart as Convener of the Life and Work Advisory Committee (*Section 5.1*).
8. Appoint Robert Hamilton as Convener of the Registration of Ministries Committee (with effect from May 2023) (*Section 5.1*).
9. Reappoint Philip Brodie as Convener of the Appeals Committee of the Commission of Assembly (*Section 5.1*).
10. Appoint Leslie Milton as Convener of the Ministries Appeal Panel (*Section 5.1*).

Report

1. COMMITTEE REMIT AND PROCESS

1.1 Preamble

1.1.1 The remit of the Nomination Committee is to identify Ministers, Deacons, Elders and Members with relevant skills and experience to serve the Standing Committees of the General Assembly. The Nomination Committee works with Standing Committees to ensure that the appointment of Conveners and Vice Conveners is made in a fair and transparent manner. The Nomination Committee also has a role in assisting other bodies with their appointments process.

1.1.2 The Nomination Committee is grateful to those who have offered their skills to serve the Standing Committees of the General Assembly through the nomination cycle of 2023/24.

1.1.3 At the time of writing, three vacancies remain unfilled on Standing Committees.

1.1.4 With the help of the Communications Department, two short videos were distributed to promote the work of the Nomination Committee.

1.1.5 As in recent years, the Nomination Committee has met online in order to reduce costs and in accordance with the General Assembly's strategy towards a net zero pathway by 2030.

1.2 Faith Action Programme Leadership Team

1.2.1 The Nomination Committee was saddened to hear of the passing of Richard Lloyd after a short illness. Richard served as Leader of the Mission Support Programme Group and in that capacity as a Vice Convener of FAPLT. The Nomination Committee is grateful that Jonathan Fleming has been willing to take on that role.

1.3 Appointments to Legal Bodies

1.3.1 The Committee received names at its January/February meeting from the Convener of the Legal Questions Committee, Principal Clerk and Depute Principal Clerk.

1.4 Nomination of the Moderator Committee

1.4.1 Under a new process introduced by the General Assembly of 2023 for appointments to the Nomination of the Moderator Committee, the Nomination Committee received the names of two potential nominees from each Presbytery. While this generally worked well, the Nomination Committee hopes in future years to offer guidance to Presbyteries about the process to be followed for identifying potential nominees and to invite the Presbyteries to provide to the Nomination Committee more detail of each potential nominee.

2. NEW APPOINTMENTS TO THE ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES AND SUB-COMMITTEES

2.1 Background

2.1.1 The work of the Nomination Committee has evolved as the role of the Assembly Trustees and sub-Committees (the Seeds for Growth Committee and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group) has developed. The Nomination Committee is not responsible for making appointments to these but plays a role in ensuring that appointments are made in a fair and transparent manner.

2.2 Assembly Trustees

2.2.1 The Nomination Committee is satisfied that new appointments being proposed by the Assembly Trustees have been made in a fair and transparent manner.

2.3 Seeds for Growth Committee

2.3.1 A representative from the Nomination Committee was present when the Seeds for Growth Committee met and selected nominees for mid-term appointments. The Nomination Committee is satisfied that the process was fair and transparent.

2.4 EDI Group

2.4.1 A representative from the Nomination Committee was present when the EDI Group met and selected nominees for new appointments. The Nomination Committee is satisfied that the process was fair and transparent.

3. STRATEGIC REVIEW OF THE NOMINATIONS PROCESS

3.1 Background

3.1.1 In 2023, the support and coordination of the nominations process and the work of the Nomination Committee moved from the Office of Assembly Trustees to the Office of the General Assembly. There were also staffing changes in relation to the Nomination Committee, with the appointment of a new Secretary and Support Administrator. The Nomination Committee took this opportunity of change to invite the General Assembly to approve a review of the nominations process. At the General Assembly of 2023, the following section of deliverance was agreed: "Instruct the Nomination Committee to carry out a strategic review of the General Assembly's nomination process and put forward proposals for reform to the General Assembly of 2024".

3.2 Strategic Review Group

3.2.1 A Strategic Review Group was formed by the Nomination Committee, comprising the Convener, Vice Convener, Secretary, Administrator and a member of the Nomination Committee, along with the Liaison Trustee from the Assembly Trustees and the Secretary of the Assembly and Presbytery Clerks Forum. At the time of writing, the Strategic Review Group has met five times, on one occasion with the Principal Clerk also present.

3.2.2 The Strategic Review Group identified six areas of work in order to scope the review:

- the internal working of the Nomination Committee;
- sources of information;
- the recruitment process and engagement with the wider Church;
- eligibility for membership of Standing Committees and other bodies;
- working with Conveners of Standing Committees and other bodies; and
- working with the new enlarged Presbyteries.

3.2.3 The Strategic Review Group has to date focused primarily on the first two areas of work. It is satisfied that the Nomination Committee generally works well in fulfilling its remit in an effective way. In particular it has a clear sense of the responsibility and privilege it holds of serving the wider Church in populating Standing Committees and of the wisdom and care needed in making decisions and in dealing with individuals who step forward to make an application for a Standing Committee, including those who are not nominated as well as those who are successful in their application.

3.2.4 There are two main meetings of the Nomination Committee each year, with an introductory meeting in September to plan the recruitment process for the year ahead and a two-day meeting in January/February to consider applications. The behind the scenes work throughout the year of advertising and recruitment, of making mid-year appointments and of liaising with other Committees and bodies and with Presbyteries means that the work of the Nomination Committee is administratively heavy and the various processes can be time consuming for staff, Conveners and members of the Nomination Committee. With this in mind, it was decided that it would not be advantageous to reduce the size of the Nomination Committee, although this will continue to be kept under review.

3.2.5 The regulations for the work of the Nomination Committee are mainly embedded in the Standing Orders of the General Assembly, supplemented by specific rules, customs and practices, only some of which are documented. The Nomination Committee is satisfied that good practice is followed, but it can be time consuming dealing with different sources of information, especially as there is no single process for making appointments to the various Standing Committees and other bodies. To assist with this, the Nomination Committee plans to put together a Nominations Handbook which would set out in one place the law and good practice for the work of the Nomination Committee.

3.3 Looking Ahead

3.3.1 The work of the Strategic Review Group is not complete and it is hoped to consult with other Committees and bodies, with Presbyteries and with the wider Church in the coming year about other aspects of its work. Further recommendations may be brought to the General Assembly of 2025.

4. FACTS AND FIGURES

4.1 General

4.1.1 A total of 71 proposed nominees were considered, with several individuals proposed for more than one Standing Committee or other body.

4.1.2 From the application forms submitted, 40% of potential nominees had heard about the nomination process through e-mail directly from the Nomination Committee, 20% had heard of the process through a member of the Nomination Committee, and others had heard through their Minister, Session Clerk, Presbytery Clerk or Facebook.

4.1.3 From the application forms submitted, almost 50% of potential nominees had not served on a General Assembly Committee in the past 10 years.

4.1.4 From the application forms submitted, 90% of potential nominees indicated that their preference to attend meetings was “either online or in person”, while a small number preferred “online only” or “in person” only.

4.1.5 From the application forms submitted, 19% of potential nominees were under the age of 45, 50% were aged 45-64 and 21% were in the age band of 65 or over.

4.1.6 Of the supporting forms submitted, 62% came from Ministers, 26% from Standing Committees, 10% from Kirk Session and 22% from Presbyteries.

5. NOMINATIONS FOR APPOINTMENT TO STANDING COMMITTEES

5.1 The Nomination Committee recommends the following appointments:

** denotes a reappointment*

Assembly Business Committee

Minister Retiring Douglas Reid

Member Retiring James Houston

Members Appointed Chloe Clemmons (Edinburgh: Portobello and Joppa), Neil Proven (Edinburgh: Corstorphine St Anne's)

Audit Committee

Minister Resigned Graeme Glover

Chaplains to HM Forces Committee

Member Retiring Jacqueline Thomson DCS

Committee to Nominate the Moderator

Ministers and Deacons Appointed Hayley Cohen (Musselburgh: Northesk), Mark Evans DCS (Edinburgh: Colinton), Audrey Jamieson (Glasgow: Drumchapel St Mark's), Gordon Kennedy (Edinburgh: Craiglockhart), Margaret McArthur (Cardross), John McMahon (West London Mental Health Trust), Colin Strong (Mormond West)

Elders Appointed Gayle Lennon (Cupar: St John's and Dairsie United), Christine Mackenzie (Inverness: Old High St Stephen's), Heather McDonald (Ardoch linked with Blackford), Harry Sergeant (Larbert: West), Violet Service (Gatehouse and Borgue linked with Tarff and Twynholm)

Ecumenical Relations Committee

Ministers Retiring Nikki Macdonald, Gary Peacock

Ministers Appointed Conor Fegan (Markinch and Thornton), Pauline Steenbergen (Carlisle, Presbytery of the South West)

Ethical Oversight Committee

Member Resigned Andrew Wells Aug 2023

Minister Appointed Justin Taylor (Guernsey: St Andrew's in the Grange) (2yrs)

Faith Action Programme

-Leadership Team

Vice-Convener Resigned Richard Lloyd Dec 2023

Vice-Convener Appointed Jonathan Fleming Dec 2023 (Greenock: Lyle Kirk)

Minister from Presbytery Resigned Lynsey Brennan Sep 2023

Minister from Presbytery Appointed James McNay Sep 2023 (West Kilbride, Presbytery of the South West)

-Mission Support Programme Group

Minister Resigned Jonathan Fleming Dec 2023

Minister Appointed George Sneddon (East Kilbride: Mossneuk) (3yrs)

-Resource and Presence Programme Group

Minister Resigned Neil Meyer May 2023

Minister Appointed Teri Peterson May 2023 (Gourock: St John's)

Iona Community Board

Minister Retiring Willie Strachan

Minister Appointed Liz Johnson Blythe (Glasgow: Castlemilk and Glasgow: Carmunnock)

Legal Questions Committee

Vice-Convener Retiring Alan Reid

Vice-Convener Appointed Katherine Taylor (Tranent) (1yr)

Minister Resigned Euan Glen Jun 2023

Ministers Appointed Janet Mathieson Oct 2023 (Williamwood), Douglas Reid (Edinburgh: Palmerston Place) (1yr)

Ministers Retiring Janet Mathieson, Katherine Taylor

Member Resigned Robert McDougall Aug 2023

Members Retiring David McClements, Andrew Gibb

Members Appointed Wendy Culross (Hamilton Old), David McClements* (Falkirk: Trinity), James McLean (Edinburgh: St Cuthbert's) (1yr)

Appointment to Legal Bodies

-Appeals Committee of the Commission of Assembly

Convener Retiring Philip Brodie

Convener Appointed Philip Brodie* (Edinburgh High (St Giles'))

-Discipline Tribunal

Vice-Convener Resigned Jonathan Brodie May 2023

Vice-Convener Appointed Kirsty Hood May 2023

-Judicial Commission

Vice-Convener Resigning William Hewitt

Vice-Convener Appointed Elspeth McKay (Devana)

-Judicial Panel

Minister Resigned Marjory MacLean May 2023

Ministers Retiring John Christie, Robin Hill

Ministers Appointed John Christie* (Paisley: Oakshaw Trinity), Robin Hill* (Gladsmuir linked with Longniddry)

Elders Retiring David Alexander, William Imlay, Leslie Moffat, Sam Scobie

Elders Appointed Gordon Aitken Jul 2023 (Bearsden: Cross), David Alexander* (Uddingston: Viewpark), William Imlay* (Newport-on-Tay), Leslie Moffat* (Formartine), Sam Scobie* (Kirkcowan linked with Wigtown)

-Ministries Appeal Panel

Convener Retiring Robin Stimpson

Convener Appointed Leslie Milton (Musselburgh: St Andrew's High)

Vice-Convener Resigning Leslie Milton

Vice-Convener Appointed Janet Mathieson (Williamwood)

Minister Retiring Amos Chewachong

Member Retiring Andrew Gibb

Minister Appointed Amos Chewachong* (Newport-on-Tay)

Member Appointed Andrew Gibb* (Edinburgh: Corstorphine St Ninian's)

-Mission Plan Review Group

Minister Resigned George Whyte Aug 2023

Ministers Appointed Euan Glen Jul 2023 (Bennachie), Iain May Sep 2023 (Edinburgh: Leith South)

Pro Tem Substitute Member Appointed Roger Dodd Oct 2023 (Coldstream and District Parishes linked with Eccles and Leitholm)

-Personnel Appeal Group

Minister Resigned Norman Smith May 2023

Life & Work Advisory Committee

Convener Retiring James Stewart

Convener Appointed James Stewart* (Perth: Letham St Mark's) (1yr)

Ministers Retiring Ewen Gilchrist, John Paterson

Ministers Appointed Rosemary Frew (Bowden and Melrose), John Paterson* (Lugar linked with Old Cumnock: Old), David Pitkeathly (London: St Columba's linked with Newcastle: St Andrews)

Nomination Committee

Minister Resigning Moira Taylor-Wintersgill

Ministers Appointed Jillian Storie (Wishaw: Cambusnethan North), Kerr Wintersgill (Birsay, Harray and Sandwick, and Stromness)

Members Retiring Christine Mackenzie, David Murie

Member Appointed David Lloyd (Brussels: St Andrew's)

Registration of Ministries Committee

Convener Appointed Robert Hamilton May 2023 (Bothwell) (2yrs)

Vice-Convener Retiring Hilary McDougall

Vice-Convener Appointed Hilary McDougall* (Cambuslang) (1yr)

Safeguarding Committee

Convener Retiring Adam Dillon

Convener Appointed Sonia Blakesley (Paisley: St Mark's Oldhall)

Vice-Convener Resigned Fiona Reynolds May 2023

Vice-Convener Appointed Judy Wilson May 2023 (Cardross) (1yr)

Vice-Convener Retiring Judy Wilson

Vice-Convener Appointed Judy Wilson* (Cardross)

Ministers Retiring Elspeth McKay, Sonia Blakesley

Member Resigned Judy Wilson May 2023

Member Retiring Robert McCabe

Members Appointed Doreen Henderson (Kilmore and Oban) (1yr), Natasha Hepburn (Arbuthnott, Bervie and Kinneff), Corinne Morrison-Gillies (Edinburgh: Portobello and Joppa)

Social Care Council - CrossReach Board

Convener Retiring Thomas Riddell

Convener Appointed Mike Cantlay (Callander)

Vice-Convener Retiring Mike Cantlay

Vice-Convener Appointed Douglas Hamilton (Traprain) (2yrs)

Minister Retiring Douglas Hamilton

Minister Appointed Iain Greenshields (Dunfermline: St Margaret's)

Members Resigning Lorna Gilhooly, Susie Lind

Member Appointed Iain Hunter (Aberdeen: Mannofield)

Theological Forum

Minister Resigned Rebecca Bartocho Dec 2023

Minister Retiring Lance Stone

Minister Appointed Moira Taylor-Wintersgill (Birsay, Harray and Sandwick, and Stromness)

Member Retiring Glen Pettigrove

Members Appointed Alasdair Macleod March 2024 (Strathnairn and Strathdearn) (3yrs), Glen Pettigrove* (Milngavie: Cairns)

In the name of the Committee

ANDREW GARDNER, *Convener*
BRYAN KERR, *Vice-Convener*
VICTORIA LINFORD, *Secretary*

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