

ECUMENICAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Affirm the significance of the Council of Nicaea (325AD) for the Catholic and Universal Church (*Section 1.1*).
3. Affirm the universal dimension of the identity of the Church of Scotland as expressed in Article I of the *Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland* (*Section 1.2*).
4. Instruct the Ecumenical Relations Committee to bring an amended Local Ecumenical Partnerships Act (Act XI 2012) to the General Assembly of 2026 (*Section 2.5.1-4*).
5. Delegate powers to the Ecumenical Relations Committee to act on behalf of the General Assembly with respect to the amendment of the constitution of an existing Local Ecumenical Partnership, in conjunction with the relevant Presbytery, the General Trustees, and in consultation with the Law Department (*Section 2.5.5-6*).
6. Welcome the amendments to the *Code of Canons* of the Scottish Episcopal Church authorising ministers of Word and Sacrament of the Church of Scotland to celebrate Holy Communion within congregations of the Scottish Episcopal Church, subject to the provisions of Canon 15 (*Section 3.1*).
7. Note the contribution of the Ecumenical Relations Committee to the ongoing review of the international work of the Church of Scotland (*Section 3.6*).
8. Approve the delegates to Assemblies, Synods and Conferences of other Churches, and the appointment of representatives to Ecumenical Bodies (*Appendix II*).

Executive Summary

The Report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee in 2025 notes the Catholic and Universal significance of the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 325AD and recalls the foundation of the work of the Committee in the *Articles Declaratory* with particular reference to Article VII, and to Article I where it is affirmed that the 'Church of Scotland is part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church'.

The Report focuses on the work of the Committee in developing engagement with local congregations and Presbyteries, with reference to: Ecumenical Audit; Presbytery Mission Plan Ecumenical Guidance; Ecumenical Relations Task Group in the Presbytery of Fife; guidance with reference to the appointing of Locums from other traditions of the church; Local Ecumenical Partnerships Act (Act XI 2012); local partnership models and templates.

The Report welcomes the amendments made by the Scottish Episcopal Church to Canon 15 of the *Code of Canons* and notes the initial discussions with the United Reformed Church on the possibility of a Joint Declaration. Further, it provides an update on progress towards the establishing of a Scottish Christian Forum and notes the contribution of the Committee to the review of the international work of the Church of Scotland.

Report

1. A UNIVERSAL VISION

1.1 A Universal Vision: The Council of Nicaea

1.1.1 The creed of the Council of Nicaea held in 325AD affirms the faith of the Catholic and Universal Church in the following terms:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things seen and unseen.

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only-begotten, that is, of the essence of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of the same being as the Father, through whom all things came to be, both the things in heaven and on earth, who for us humans and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, becoming human, who suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, who is coming to judge the living and the dead.

And in the Holy Spirit.^[i]

1.1.2 The 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which we mark in 2025, provides an opportunity to reflect on a creed intended to be catholic in its intent and to offer a universal vision of the One God, and the One Lord 'who for us... and for our salvation...was made flesh' amongst us.

1.1.3 The significance of the Council of Nicaea for the Church Universal cannot be overstated and may be described in the following terms:

The convening of the Council of Nicaea in 325 was a defining moment for the Christian church. It was the first attempt to reach consensus in the church through an assembly representing all of Christendom. It affirmed the Christian faith in the triune God, and marked the transition from Christians being a persecuted minority to becoming a church recognized by the Roman State. In Nicaea, now İznik in present-day Türkiye, Christians who only recently had been persecuted in the Roman Empire were able to gather under the patronage of the emperor to affirm their faith and witness to the society around them. Then, as now, the call to unity was heard within the context of a troubled, unequal, and divided world.^[ii]

1.1.4 The Roman Emperor Constantine embraced the Christian faith in 312AD and, following his assuming sole imperial rule in 324AD, his calling of the Council reflects, in part, his desire to address the issue of disunity amongst

those who professed the faith across the Empire. This disunity was expressed in a range of matters relating to, *inter alia*, ministry, church order and the exercise of authority.^[iii] Woven through this, the theological developments pertaining to the understanding of the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son, as agreed at the Council, may be said to have been foundational in shaping Christian belief for succeeding generations.

1.1.5 The interpretation of the Nicene understanding of the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son has been shaped in distinctive ways within particular churches and cultures. In parallel with this, the reception of the creed of Nicaea, allied to the further development of it at the Council of Constantinople in 381AD, and the subsequent recognition of Nicaea as the first Ecumenical Council has, in turn, significantly impacted the history of those churches and cultures.

1.1.6 In relation to this, it may be said that the Council of Nicaea ‘marks a point at which Christianity goes from being a persecuted religion and a religion very much on the sidelines to actually having an official status’. This change of status from the 4th century onwards has profoundly impacted the history of the church thereafter. That is, as a consequence of this change of status, it may be said to have created the basis for the evolution and emergence of the relationship between Monarch and Church that we now term “Christendom”. This complex process of evolution and emergence took place over a number of centuries and, whilst there is no sense in which we can describe that process as a simple result of cause and effect, it may be further said that: ‘Without the Council of Nicaea we might not have had European Christendom and the whole of the European history would have been different.’^[iv]

1.1.7 Given the significance of the Council of Nicaea, the 1700th Anniversary will be marked by the holding of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, taking place from 24th-28th October 2025 at the Logos Papal Centre, St Bishoy Monastery at Wadi El Natrun, Alexandria, Egypt. The Conference takes place under the auspices of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and is held in Egypt at the invitation of the Coptic Orthodox Church.^[v] As stated, this is the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, with the first Faith and Order Conference being held in Lausanne in 1927 and thereafter in Edinburgh in 1937. The Faith and Order movement then became an integral part of the WCC in 1948, with subsequent conferences being held in Lund, Sweden in 1952; Montreal, Canada in 1963 and Santiago de Compostela, Spain in 1993.^[vi]

1.1.8 The theme of the World Conference on Faith and Order: “Where now for visible unity?” will address matters of Faith, Mission and Unity from the perspective of the shared call to visible unity. In respect of the call to unity, *Towards the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order* states:

An increasingly divided and polarized world needs the search for unity of Christians and churches. This unity is not uniformity. It implies the fundamental and profound conviction that humankind must stand together to seek each other’s best interests and to uphold the dignity of each human being and the whole creation...The anniversary of the Council of Nicaea is an encouragement to consider the significance of ecumenical councils as places where Christians can face together the issues on which they are separated.^[vii]

According to this understanding, the call to unity is set in the context of an ‘increasingly divided and polarized world’. At this particular time, we can hardly claim to be unaware of this context as we consider what it means to live out our response to the prayer of Jesus ‘that they may all be one...that the world may believe’. (John 17: 21)

1.1.9 In 2025, we seek to live out our faith in the place where we are and in so doing to bear witness in a ‘divided and polarized world’ to the One Lord ‘who for us...and for our salvation...was made flesh’ amongst us. As we do so, we live out the reality of what it is to be part of the Universal Church in the context of the Church of Scotland of which we are members, of the wider Church in Scotland of which we are a part, and in the locality in which we are called to bear witness so ‘that the world may believe’.

1.2 A Universal Vision: The Church of Scotland

1.2.1 The universal dimension of the Church of Scotland’s identity is expressed in Article I of the *Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland* where it is affirmed that the ‘Church of Scotland is part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church’. The vision of the church expressed there may be understood as core to the identity of the Church.^[viii]

1.2.2 In this context, the role of the Ecumenical Relations Committee within the life of the Church of Scotland is to be understood in the light of the *Articles Declaratory* with particular reference to Article VII:

The Church of Scotland, believing it to be the will of Christ that His disciples should be all one in the Father and in Him, that the world may believe that the Father has sent Him, recognises the obligation to seek and promote union with other Churches in which it finds the Word to be purely preached, the sacraments administered according to Christ’s ordinance, and discipline rightly exercised; and it has the right to unite with any such Church without loss of its identity on terms which this Church finds to be consistent with these Articles.

1.2.3 The *Articles Declaratory* themselves are contained in the Schedule to the Church of Scotland Act, 1921, and are described in the Act as follows:

[C]ertain articles declaratory of the constitution of the Church of Scotland in matters spiritual...prepared with the authority of the General Assembly of the Church, with a view to facilitate the union of other Churches with the Church of Scotland.^[ix]

1.2.4 It is of note that within the Church of Scotland Act, 1921, no other purpose is ascribed to the *Articles Declaratory* than that of facilitating union with other churches. That is, the principal purpose of the *Articles Declaratory* is the enabling of a unified Church in Scotland that might, in turn, live out its response to the prayer of Jesus ‘that they may all be one...that the world may believe’. (John 17: 21) Once more, the stated purpose of the *Articles Declaratory* is the enabling of a unified church within Scotland for the purpose of serving the mission of God. No more and no less.

1.2.5 One of the earliest advocates within the Church of Scotland in this regard was the Very Rev Dr William Mair who first called for the consideration of a unified Scottish Presbyterian church in his Moderatorial Address in 1897, and in a series of papers published in the years following.^[x] In *The Scottish Churches: The Hope of Union*, Mair sets out his understanding of the case for a unified church and the initial progress made towards that from 1907 onwards.^[xi] The Overture received by the General Assembly in that year marked the beginning of that progress with the expressed desire to enter into conversation with the Free Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland.^[xii]

1.2.6 Mair begins by setting out the two principles that he judges ought to guide that conversation: the continuing national recognition of the place of the Church of Scotland in the life of the nation; and the affirmation of the spiritual freedom of the Church.^[xiii] However, Mair is clear that unification of the churches in Scotland will not be realised by an abstract consideration of matters of principle, important though they are. Rather, the hope of union is grounded in the practical consideration of the duplication of resources at a local level and of the proliferation of 'church buildings otherwise needless'.^[xiv]

1.2.7 All of this said, Mair is clear that, in the last analysis, it is the 'revealed desire and will' of our Lord expressed in the prayer of Jesus in John 17:21 that is the 'compelling power' that ought to drive the divided Church towards the consideration of unity. The union of the churches in Scotland is to be sought within the purpose of serving the mission of God. That it is the revealed desire and will of our Lord constitutes '*The Hope of Union*'.^[xv]

1.2.8 The long journey that eventually led to the union of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland in 1929 began from considerations such as those outlined in the reflections of William Mair, and the Basis of Union eventually realised in 1929 retains that abiding note of hope.^[xvi]

1.2.9 As stated, within the Church of Scotland Act, 1921, no other purpose is ascribed to the *Articles Declaratory* than that of facilitating union with other churches and the realisation of a unified church for the nation. The *Articles Declaratory* themselves become the more intelligible when read in this light and in the light of the reflections of those who first embarked on the journey that led to the union of 1929. That journey was informed by the vision of a Church of Scotland that was a 'part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church', and that, in common with the Church Universal, is called to bear witness to the One Lord 'who for us...and for our salvation...was made flesh' amongst us.

2. TRANSLATING THE VISION

2.1 Translating the Vision: Ecumenical Audit

2.1.1 In October 2024 representatives of the Committee met with representatives of the EMU Partnership between the Scottish Episcopal Church, Methodist Church and United Reformed Church.^[xvii] In the course of discussion, it was agreed that an Ecumenical Audit would be undertaken in the course of 2025, with each of the churches using an agreed set of questions which would be circulated within each church and thereafter analysed collectively. Within the Church of Scotland, it was agreed that this information would be ingathered in the context of the annual returns on congregational statistics. We are indebted to Rev Dr Fiona Tweedie and Laura Bryce for their assistance in formulating the questions and their work in the initial analysis of the Church of Scotland returns.

2.1.2 The Church of Scotland had undertaken an Ecumenical Audit in 2013, and the template generated then has provided a basis for the Audit in 2025.^[xviii] The agreement to undertake this, in conjunction with the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church in Scotland and the United Reformed Church (National Synod of Scotland), will strengthen the basis for analysis and give a wider perspective on current local partnerships, and potentially highlight the prospects for enabling future local cooperative partnerships. An initial report on this is found in the context of the report of the Assembly Trustees and a further report will be given to the General Assembly of 2026 by the Committee.

2.2 Translating the Vision: Presbytery Mission Plan Guidance

2.2.1 Under the report of the then Faith Nurture Forum, the General Assembly of 2023 approved the following deliverance, with reference to the ecumenical dimension of the development of the Presbytery Mission Plan in each Presbytery:

Reaffirm the ecumenical aspect of the secondary principles and existing guidance relating to the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021), and (a) instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to emphasise this in future guidance; and (b) instruct Presbyteries to consider this and articulate it more clearly in implementation and at the annual evaluation and development of Presbytery Mission Plans.

2.2.2 In December 2023, the Committee drafted a revised form of the Guidance and transmitted this for consideration to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team. The Committee advises that the ecumenical dimension of the Guidance was updated on 27th September 2024 and would encourage Presbyteries to take account of this as appropriate in their consideration of the Presbytery Mission Plan process.^[xix] The Committee would welcome the opportunity to engage with Presbyteries in this regard and wrote to all Presbyteries with reference to this in January 2025.

2.3 Translating the Vision: Presbytery of Fife

2.3.1 In the course of the past year, the Committee has sought to proactively engage with Presbyteries on a range of issues and to establish good working relationships with Presbytery Clerks. So, for example, in the past year the Ecumenical Officer has met with the Clerk and representatives of the Presbytery of Fife to discuss establishing an Ecumenical Relations Task Group within the Presbytery. The terms of reference of the Task Group offer a framework for the enabling of cooperative working at a local level and signal intentionality at a presbytery level with respect to ecumenism. Further, the intention is to embed cooperative working between the presbytery and the national committee. (Appendix I)

2.4 Translating the Vision: Appointing Locums

2.4.1 In the course of the past year, the Ecumenical Officer has offered advice to a number of Presbytery Clerks seeking guidance on the appointment of ministers from other traditions to the position of Locum within a parish. The appointment of a Locum in a Vacancy is a matter for the Kirk Session, under the direction of the Interim Moderator, and is further enabled through the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team. Of particular importance, it should be noted that the Kirk Session is required to ensure that the potential Locum is a member of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) Scheme prior to their appointment.^[xx]

2.4.2 It should also be noted that, whilst the appointment of a Locum is the responsibility of the Kirk Session, Presbytery's permission for such an appointment is required where the person being considered is not a minister holding an O, E or R registration in terms of the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II 2017), and this would, of course, apply when a prospective Locum is a minister within another tradition of the Church.^[xxi]

2.4.3 In seeking to offer advice in the latter case, the matter has been approached through seeking to answer the question as to whether, or not, the understanding of ordination in that particular tradition is 'in accordance with the standards of the Church of Scotland' for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of the Sacraments Act (Act V 2000) regarding eligibility to celebrate the sacraments. In general terms, s.1 of that Act refers to ordained ministers of the Church of Scotland, ministers of other Presbyterian churches and ministers of churches where we share specific ecumenical agreements. In the case of ministers of other Presbyterian churches and ministers of churches where ecumenical agreements exist then the advice offered is that a minister from one of those churches is, in principle, eligible to be considered for appointment as a Locum.^[xxii]

2.4.4 Where a minister is from a church not covered by these provisions, the advice, as stated, seeks to answer the question as to, whether, or not, the understanding of ordination in that particular tradition is 'in accordance with the standards of the Church of Scotland'. That is, the advice would seek to offer the basis for establishing whether, in principle, a minister from a church not covered by the provisions above is, in principle, eligible to be considered for appointment as a Locum, in virtue of the fact that we recognise their ordination to be 'in accordance with the standards of the Church of Scotland'.

2.4.5 This initial stage might be regarded as the first part of a four-stage process, to be followed in the next stage by the establishing of whether, or not, a minister is in good standing within their church, and it would be for the Presbytery to be satisfied in this regard. The third stage is the decision of a Kirk Session to appoint a Locum, followed in the final stage by the decision of the Presbytery to approve such an appointment and the processing of this through the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team.

2.4.6 Within the context of a Locum appointment, it might be thought prudent for the Presbytery to affirm that the minister is covered by the Sacraments Act, s.2 and to authorise them to celebrate the sacraments, and to specify that the permission of Presbytery in this regard refers to a particular parish context. For the avoidance of doubt, it should be understood that the appointment as a Locum of a minister from outwith the Church of Scotland does not confer any status on that minister with respect to any subsequent application to be admitted as a minister of the Church of Scotland, and that the appointment does not confer membership of the Presbytery within whose bounds the appointment is made.^[xxiii]

2.5 Translating the Vision: Local Ecumenical Partnerships

2.5.1 In the course of the past year, the Ecumenical Officer has offered advice to a number of Presbytery Clerks with respect to existing Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs), there being within the Church of Scotland a small number of formal LEPs in which a congregation of the Church is in partnership with a church, or churches: Methodist, Scottish Episcopal Church, United Free Church or United Reformed Church.^[xxiv]

2.5.2 In each case, the congregation will have a bespoke constitution reflecting that particular partnership and one which recognises that the oversight of that congregation is exercised by the Presbytery within whose bounds it sits and also by the equivalent body within the other church or churches.

2.5.3 Within the current Acts of the General Assembly, the Local Ecumenical Partnerships Act (Act XI 2012) provides the basis for the creation of new LEPs, and may be said to offer a template for establishing a formal LEP as a discrete legal entity. That is, the Act is intended to provide the 'Model Constitution for a single Congregation Local Ecumenical Partnership'.^[xxv]

2.5.4 The Committee notes that the Act has been used on only one occasion to establish a new LEP and, following consideration, is of the view that the terms of the Act ought to be reviewed and an amended Act brought to the General Assembly of 2026.

2.5.5 Further, the Committee is conscious that existing LEPs may, from time to time, wish to amend and update their constitution and requests that it be delegated powers by the General Assembly to approve amendments to the constitutions of existing LEPs, in conjunction with the relevant Presbytery, the General Trustees, and in consultation with the Law Department.

2.5.6 The General Assembly has previously delegated powers to the Committee to act on its behalf with respect to the dissolution of LEPs, and a delegation with respect to the amendment of existing LEP constitutions would be congruent with that.

2.6 Translating the Vision: Enabling Local Partnerships

2.6.1 In the course of the past year, the Ecumenical Officer has received requests from a number of local congregations and Presbytery Clerks with respect to enabling the development of local partnerships with other churches within, and furth of, Scotland. The Committee is very willing to respond to such requests and to support Presbyteries in the development of such partnerships. It is recognised that any such partnerships will be framed, from

the perspective of the Church of Scotland, within the context of the agreed Presbytery Mission Plan of each Presbytery. Equally, the Committee recognises that it cannot fully respond to each request without reference to the partner church and would encourage active dialogue between local partners and the bodies with responsibility for their oversight, such as Presbytery, Diocese, Circuit or Synod.

2.6.2 The requests referred to will often seek guidance as to models and templates that might be adopted and one resource that the Committee would highlight is that produced by Churches Together in England: *A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission*.^[xxvi]

2.6.3 The *Framework* offers three forms of agreement to address a range of possible contexts for fruitful cooperative partnership: i) Working Agreements; ii) Partnership Agreements and iii) Constitutional Agreements. The Constitutional Agreements will be those most akin to the Local Ecumenical Partnerships Act (Act XI 2012) as discussed above.

2.6.4 In relation to i), *A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission: A Brief Introduction* states:

A working agreement is a set of agreed guidelines which will suffice in some circumstances to enable churches to get on with a particular piece of work together in response to the missional opportunities they discern in their communities – this would apply to many local mission initiatives for example.

2.6.5 Further, in relation to ii) it states:

A partnership agreement covers more extensive sharing of resources – for example, allowing the sharing of a church building with another congregation or setting up a structure to enable the use of resources from a number of congregations to run a night shelter together, or to allow two separate denominations to consult on important decisions, to worship together and to share ministry. A partnership agreement would not attempt to establish an independent organisation, but would be intended to set out how existing denominational bodies would work in partnership together, including decision making, accountability and resourcing.^[xxvii]

2.6.6 Although there are no “copy and paste” solutions available, there are resources available that offer helpful templates which will be potentially applicable when tailored to the local context. The Committee undertakes to continue to engage with partner churches on the development of templates for enabling local cooperative partnerships in Scotland. Alongside this, the Committee is conscious that there are good examples of such partnerships which have developed as a result of local initiative. The Committee will seek to engage with such partnerships and to learn from their experience.

3. SHARING THE VISION

3.1 Sharing the Vision: Scottish Episcopal Church

3.1.1 In 2021, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church entered into the *Saint Andrew Declaration*. In the *Declaration*, it is affirmed in a series of Acknowledgements that:

We acknowledge one another's churches as churches belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God.

We acknowledge that our churches share in the common confession of the Apostolic Faith.

We acknowledge that in our churches the Word of God is authentically preached, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion are faithfully administered.

We acknowledge one another's ordained ministries as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit but also Christ's commission through the Church and are given by God as instruments of grace for the mission and unity of the Church.^[xxviii]

These Acknowledgements may be said to constitute the bedrock of the *Declaration*, and as mutually affirming the integrity of our respective churches and our common confession of the Faith. Further, the *Declaration* affirms the integrity of the ministry of Word and Sacrament within our respective traditions.

3.1.2 Following on from the Acknowledgements, there is a series of Commitments in which we ‘commit ourselves to respond together to our common calling to proclaim the reign of God to all the people of Scotland by strengthening our partnership in ministry and mission’. In so doing, ‘we hope to enrich our continuing relationships locally, nationally and internationally with the churches of Scotland and throughout the world, that we may deepen our individual faith and serve God's whole creation’. Thus, we commit:

To pray for and with one another; to work towards the fuller sharing of ministry...To encourage, affirm and support local expressions of our common calling within the life of the Church as it participates in the mission of God.^[xxix]

3.1.3 To be clear, the affirmation of the integrity of the ministry of Word and Sacrament within our respective traditions should not be interpreted as signifying the mutual recognition of those ministries across our respective traditions. This being so, there is a task to be undertaken in order to reach that point if so desired. In this regard, the General Assembly of 2023 agreed an amendment to the Sacraments Act (Act V 2000), with respect to the authorisation to celebrate the Sacraments and extending that authorisation to:

[A] person who has the status of an ordained minister in the Church of England, in virtue of the Columba Declaration (2016), or of the Scottish Episcopal Church, in virtue of the Saint Andrew Declaration (2021), and who has been duly authorised to administer the Sacraments by the Presbytery of the bounds, in which matter the Presbytery shall be the sole judge.^[xxx]

3.1.4 In parallel with this, the Scottish Episcopal Church began a two-year process to amend their Canon with respect to the authorisation to celebrate the Sacraments. That process was completed at the General Synod in June 2024, with the amending of Canon 15 of the *Code of Canons* and the extension of authorisation to lead worship and to preside at Holy Communion, subject to the provisions of the Canon, to ministers of the Church of Scotland, as well as to ministers of the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.

3.1.5 The relevant sections of Canon 15 now read:

The Scottish Episcopal Church has...entered into Agreements [including the *Saint Andrew Declaration*], endorsed by General Synod, which permit limited exchange of ministries with a number of Churches...Clergy or authorised lay people of these Churches may give addresses, lead prayers and worship and assist in the distribution of Holy Communion in services in the Scottish Episcopal Church, as authorised by their own Church...Clergy may preside at a service of Holy Communion in a charge in the Scottish Episcopal Church subject to the [further] provisions...of this Canon and as authorised by their own Church.^[xxxii]

3.1.6 With respect to presiding 'at a service of Holy Communion in the Scottish Episcopal Church':

An ordained minister from one of the Churches [with which the Scottish Episcopal Church has entered into Agreement]...may be invited to preside at a Eucharist in a charge of the Scottish Episcopal Church according to a rite normally used in and within the tradition of their own Church. The service should be advertised as a service of Holy Communion in the tradition of the Church to which they are licensed.^[xxxiii]

3.1.7 As stated above, this extension of authorisation should not be interpreted as signifying the mutual recognition of those ministries across our respective traditions. Rather, it should be welcomed and celebrated as a significant extension of the affirmation of the integrity of the ministry of Word and Sacrament within our respective traditions, and, in the providence of God, as a potential step towards that mutual recognition.

3.1.8 In expressing the working out of what it means for two churches within Scotland 'belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God' to affirm the integrity of their respective ministries, we see both a sharing of a vision and a translation of that universal vision that informs the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ.

3.2 Sharing the Vision: Church of England

3.2.1 The Columba Declaration Contact Group welcomes new Joint Chairs in the Rt Rev Rob Saner-Haigh on behalf of the Church of England and the Very Rev Colin Sinclair on behalf of the Church of Scotland. The Contact Group met in January 2025 with the Joint Chairs and looks forward to continuing to contribute to the ongoing working relationship between our two churches.

3.3 Sharing the Vision: United Reformed Church

3.3.1 In the course of the past year, representatives of the Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church have had initial discussions on the possibility of a Joint Declaration between the two churches. In recent years, the Church of Scotland has entered into a series of bilateral Declarations with our partner churches: *Columba Declaration* with the Church of England (2016); *Saint Andrew Declaration* with the Scottish Episcopal Church (2021) and the *Saint Margaret Declaration* with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland (2022). These Declarations have given expression to that which we share in common with respect to our profession of the Apostolic faith, notwithstanding the different traditions from which our respective churches come.

3.3.2 With respect to the possibility of a Joint Declaration between the Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church, we note that both churches come from a shared tradition and that both are members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe. That is, the continuing discussion between the churches will be shaped by that which we already hold in common within our shared tradition.

3.3.3 The Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church already cooperate at a number of levels and we anticipate that a future Joint Declaration will, alongside an articulation of the Apostolic faith we hold in common, focus on the practical outworking of that faith within our shared tradition.

3.4 Sharing the Vision: Scottish Christian Forum

3.4.1 The General Assembly of 2024 approved the following with respect to the creation of the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum and the establishing of a national ecumenical body:

Approve the form of the Scottish Christian Forum, and the participation of representatives of the Church of Scotland within it, and recognise it as the National Ecumenical Body within Scotland.^[xxxiii]

3.4.2 As outlined in the Committee's Report to the General Assembly of 2024, the constituent elements of the Scottish Christian Forum: the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum and the Ecumenical Officers' Forum, are functioning and meeting on a regular basis, with the former meeting on a quarterly basis and the latter on circa eight occasions per annum.^[xxxiv]

3.4.3 The decision taken by the General Assembly is one that has been paralleled in other partner churches and it is anticipated that this process of decision-making will be completed in the course of the year with respect to the nine members of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS). Once the process is complete, it is again anticipated that the Forum will evolve and develop more fully.

3.5 Sharing the Vision: Action of Churches Together in Scotland

3.5.1 With respect to ACTS, the Church of Scotland is entitled to appoint a Trustee and the Committee wishes to place on record its thanks to Miss Carole Hope for her service as a Trustee on behalf of the Church of Scotland, and as Convener of the ACTS Trustees, over the course of nearly six years. The Committee is indebted to her for her willingness to serve in this capacity. With effect from February of this year, the Committee nominated Rev Dr George Whyte to serve as a Trustee on behalf of the Church of Scotland.

3.6 Sharing the Vision: International Ecumenical Bodies

3.6.1 During the past year, the Committee has contributed to the review of the international work of the Church of Scotland with particular reference to our participation in a number of international ecumenical bodies. Historically, the Church of Scotland has been a significant contributor to the work of a number of ecumenical bodies, with this being, in principle, understood as consonant with Article VII of the *Articles Declaratory* and the universal vision expressed therein, and with the Ecumenical Policy of the Church of Scotland as agreed by the General Assembly of 2018.^[xxxv]

3.6.2 That said, if Article VII offers the stable reference point with respect to that universal vision, the Ecumenical Policy articulated in 2018 is inherently revisable and did itself replace the 2005 policy. Further, the practical outworking of any policy will be subject to considerations of changing context and the availability of resources. Equally, the practical outworking of that policy will require to be measured against such criteria as are deemed appropriate.^[xxxvi]

3.6.3 The role of the Church of Scotland in these various ecumenical bodies reflects, in part, the history of the Church in the 19th and 20th centuries, and of the modern ecumenical movement which traces its roots to the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference, with the churches in Scotland playing a significant part in enabling the Conference. At this point in time the Church of Scotland is a member of four international ecumenical bodies.

3.6.4 *World Communion of Reformed Churches:* The first ecumenical body in which the Church of Scotland participated was the Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System. The Alliance was founded in London in 1875, with the constituent parts of the present Church of Scotland being among the founding members. Its first assembly was held in Edinburgh in 1877 and its office was in that city from 1913 until it moved to Geneva in 1948. In 1891, the International Congregational Council was constituted in London to unite the Congregational family of churches. In 1970, the Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System united with the International Congregational Council to become the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Presbyterian and Congregational) (WARC). In 1946, the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, primarily representing churches from the Dutch Reformed tradition, was formed and was renamed the Reformed Ecumenical Council in 1988. In 2010, WARC and the Reformed Ecumenical Council united and formed the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). WCRC is now a communion of over 200 Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting and Waldensian churches worldwide, with its offices now located in Hannover. In 2025, WCRC marks the 150th Anniversary of its founding body and now has member churches in over a hundred countries which have a total membership of over 100 million Christians.^[xxxvii] WCRC has geographically-based regional councils and the Church of Scotland is a member of WCRC Europe in this regard.^[xxxviii]

3.6.5 *World Council of Churches:* The WCC understands itself to be 'a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling...a community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ. It seeks to advance towards this unity, as Jesus prayed for his followers, "so that the world may believe." (John 17:21)'. It 'brings together churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 120 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 580 million Christians and including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches'.^[xxxix] The historical roots of the WCC are found in student and lay movements of the 19th Century, the 1910 World Missionary Conference and an Encyclical from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1920, suggesting a fellowship of churches similar to the League of Nations.^[xl] Leaders representing more than 100 churches voted in 1937-38 to found a World Council of Churches, but its inauguration was delayed following the outbreak of the Second World War. It was formally set up in 1948, not least as a response by the churches to the trauma of the second global conflict of the century. It brought together two pre-existing streams of ecumenical life: *Faith and Order* and *Life and Work*, and subsequently further ecumenical streams of work on mission and education were incorporated. The WCC is the broadest ecumenical body of which the Church of Scotland is a member; it was, once more, a founding member of that body.

3.6.6 *Conference of European Churches:* CEC emerged in the context of a 'fragmented and divided Europe' in the years following the Second World War and the recognition of the potential role of the churches in Europe to contribute to the process of healing and reconciliation and that the 'churches could become instruments for peace and understanding throughout a wounded continent'. The first assembly took place in Nyborg, Denmark in 1959. A significant contribution of CEC, in conjunction with the Catholic Conference of European Bishops (CCEE), was the publication of the *Charta Oecumenica* in 2001, with an updated version of the Charta being signed in April 2025.^[xli] At present, CEC has a membership of over 120 churches from the Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant traditions.^[xlii] In 2021, a comprehensive reconfiguration of the work of CEC was undertaken, with a resulting specific focus on: 1) Engagement with European Union institutions, and; 2) Theological dialogue. The work of the Churches Commission on Migrants in Europe, having been previously integrated into CEC, is now being detached from CEC. In 2022, the Ecumenical Relations Committee met with the then General Secretary of CEC in order to better understand this reconfiguration. In November 2023, representatives of the Church of Scotland were invited to convene a conversation amongst such British and Irish churches who would be willing to take part regarding the future direction of the work of CEC, and the extent to which this work aligned with the present concerns of the churches. A series of five meetings were held throughout 2024, and in the course of the year a number of British and Irish churches have withdrawn from membership of CEC.

3.6.7 *Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe:* CPCE was founded as the Leuenberg Church Fellowship on the basis of the *Leuenberg Agreement* signed in 1973, with the Church of Scotland being a founding signatory. CPCE encourages churches from differing confessional traditions to accord each other fellowship in Word and Sacrament and to seek cooperation in witness and service. The relationship includes mutual recognition of Ordination and the practice of reciprocal presidency at the Lord's Supper. The membership of CPCE is composed of over ninety churches from within the Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed and United Church traditions, as well as pre-Reformation bodies such as the

Church of the Czech Brethren and the Waldensian Church, drawn from over thirty countries, primarily in Europe.^[xliii] The General Assembly is the principal decision-making body of the CPCE, with Assemblies taking place on a six-year cycle. Between Assemblies, the work of the CPCE is taken forward by a Council elected at each Assembly, which is itself led by a three-member Presidium, coordinated by the office of the CPCE in Vienna. The General Assembly receives the work undertaken as a consequence of the previous Assembly and, in turn, determines the work to be undertaken during the forthcoming cycle. The annual membership fee is relatively modest and gives the Church of Scotland contact with a wide range of Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe. The United Reformed Church represents the interests of the Church of Scotland on CPCE, with the intention of producing efficiencies within both churches whilst, at the same time, enhancing our mutual relationship.

3.6.8 The international ecumenical bodies of which we are a member allow us to participate in a broad fellowship of churches and in areas of work that are best undertaken in partnership with others. We are a European church and one shaped by European history and our membership of European ecumenical bodies gives expression to that. We are also members of a global church and there is an international dimension to our identity, especially given the role that the Church of Scotland played in former times. However, it need hardly be said that the world has changed significantly over the course of the life of these bodies and that the circumstances which led to their creation have altered significantly.

3.6.9 So, for example, in our engagement with the ecumenical bodies that are based in Europe, we recognise that the relative stability which obtained on continental Europe in recent generations has undergone considerable challenge, not least with respect to the war in Ukraine. Equally, the political relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union has itself also undergone a profound change. Notwithstanding the latter point and ever-conscious of the former, we ought to resist any tendency to view events on continental Europe in a detached manner. The future shape of the continent will, in part, impact upon our society as a whole and the Church requires to be responsive to any consequent changes in the wider landscape that we inhabit. With respect to the global dimension, that which might be said with respect to Europe is multiplied many times over as regards the disappearance of a previous stability and the increasing range of concerns that now cross the horizon. As the world has changed, so also has the Church of Scotland changed and in ways that now limit the resources available to us. Through all of this, there are questions that remain to be answered and the task of doing so impinges upon us with urgency.

3.6.10 Amongst those questions, we might consider the following to be worthy of addressing at some future point: What is the vision of the Church of Scotland in relation to the universal dimension of its identity? How do we understand the ecumenical dimension of our identity and how is this best expressed in the international context? Does the local dimension of the Church of Scotland's identity have primacy over the universal dimension, or does the universal permeate and inform the local? How do we acknowledge the changed context that we now inhabit, and how do we allocate resources in the light of this? These questions would, of course, apply to all aspects of the Church of Scotland's international work and not only to the ecumenical dimension.

3.7 Sharing the Vision: International Ecumenical Engagement

3.7.1 In April 2024, the Committee supported the initiative of Justice and Peace Scotland and the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF), in conjunction with the Archdiocese of Glasgow, in inviting Fr Gabriel Romanelli, priest of the Holy Family Parish, Gaza to Glasgow.^[xliv] Fr Romanelli delivered a profoundly moving account of the situation faced by the Christian community in Gaza to an audience at the Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow, and the Very Rev Sally Foster-Fulton and the Most Rev William Nolan, Archbishop of Glasgow signed a joint statement calling for an end to the violence in Gaza.^[xlv]

3.7.2 In December 2024, the Very Rev Dr Shaw Paterson and the Ecumenical Officer were privileged to be invited to meet and to hear from His Beatitude Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.^[xlvii] Cardinal Pizzaballa highlighted the importance of an ecumenical response to the challenges that the churches face in the Middle East. As judged necessary, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem have issued statements with respect to the situation in the Middle East, and this is made on behalf of the: Greek Orthodox; Armenian Orthodox; Latin Catholic; Franciscan (Custos of the Holy Land); Coptic Orthodox; Syrian Orthodox; Ethiopian Orthodox; Greek Catholic; Maronite; Episcopal (Anglican); Evangelical Lutheran; Syrian Catholic; and Armenian Catholic churches and communities.^[xlviii]

4. CONCLUSION

4.1.1 The 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea offers to us a universal vision of the One God, and the One Lord 'who for us...and for our salvation...was made flesh' amongst us, and we take the opportunity to affirm the significance of the Council of Nicaea (325AD) for the Catholic and Universal Church, and it is within this context that we further affirm the universal dimension of the identity of the Church of Scotland as expressed in Article I of the *Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland*.

4.1.2 In highlighting this universal vision and the Universal and Catholic dimension of our identity, we should not understand this to be an abstract expression of our faith. Rather, the universal vision permeates and informs the local and allows us to realise our identity, within the local, as part of the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. There is no local church that is not enfolded within the universal and no universal that is not given expression in the local.

4.1.3 Therefore, the Report moves from the universal vision to the realisation of that vision in a range of practical applications, as outlined in sections 2 and 3 of the Report. It does so in order that that universal vision will be lived out in the local churches in which we are necessarily rooted.

4.1.4 The Church is always rooted in the local and we note that one of the bishops who attended the Council of Nicaea in 325AD was Asclepias of Gaza.[xlvi] The universal vision was, is and continues to be rooted in the places where the people of God gather to worship and to bear witness to the One Lord 'who for us...and for our salvation...was made flesh' amongst us. As it was 1700 years ago, may it be so for us in our generation.

In the name of the Committee

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

Appendix I

Presbytery of Fife

Ecumenical Relations Task Group

Remit

1. To focus upon local ecumenical working within Fife and to regularly update the Presbytery Clerk and Presbytery on local initiatives, national ecumenical developments and strategies.
2. To promote engagement with representatives of other denominations in local parishes recognising the work of Churches Together in many areas.
3. To promote ecumenical initiatives and services, including the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Thy Kingdom Come, Try Praying and to work on ecumenical projects, as requested.
4. To work closely with the national Ecumenical Relations Committee to provide advice and encouragement to Presbyteries and congregations in developing and deepening relationships and co-operation with churches of other denominations in their contexts.
5. To encourage opportunities for developing closer working relationships with colleagues in different denominations recognising the agreements in recent years between the Church of Scotland and other denominations: The Saint Andrew Declaration with the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Saint Margaret Declaration with the Catholic Church in Scotland.
6. To facilitate and support conversations between Church of Scotland ministers, congregations and representatives of other denominations to explore deepening ecumenical relationships and the possibilities for shared witness in local parishes.

Appendix II

Delegates to other Churches

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

Presbyterian Church of Wales: Moderator

United Reformed Church: Moderator

Church of England: Rev Dr David Coulter

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

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

Scottish Episcopal Church: Rev Ross Blackman

United Free Church of Scotland: Rev Dr John L McPake

Congregational Federation in Scotland: Mrs Pauline Weibye

Ecumenical Bodies

The following represent(-ed) the Church of Scotland on Assemblies and Committees of the ecumenical bodies of which the Church is a member:

World Council of Churches

Central Committee: Ms Miriam Weibye

Community of Protestant Churches in Europe

General Assembly (August 2024): Rev Ian Alexander; Rev Tara Curlewis

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Board of Trustees: Dr Gemma King

Action of Churches Together in Scotland

Members' Meeting:

Voting Member: Convener of the Ecumenical Relations Committee

Non-Voting Member: Vice Convener of the Ecumenical Relations Committee

Non-Voting Member: Ecumenical Officer

Non-Voting Member: Rev Eileen Miller

Trustee: Rev Dr George Whyte

Columba Declaration Contact Group

Co-Chair: Very Rev Colin Sinclair

Co-Secretary: Rev Dr John L McPake

Member: Mrs Pauline Weibye

Saint Andrew Declaration Contact Group

Co-Chair: Rev Ross Blackman

Co-Secretary: Rev Dr John L McPake

Rev Dr Nikki Macdonald, Rev Eileen Miller

Scottish Church Leaders' Forum

Moderator, Principal Clerk, Ecumenical Officer

Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum

Ecumenical Officer

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