

JOINT SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT OF THE FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM AND THE ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES ON LIFE AND WORK MAGAZINE MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

- 1. Receive the Joint Supplementary Report.
- 2. Celebrate the history and impact of Life and Work as the Church of Scotland’s magazine over many years, and acknowledge and thank all of its dedicated staff for their contributions (Section 1).
- 3. Note the financial deficits resulting from falling readership of Life and Work and agree to cease production in the current format (Sections 2.1 – 2.3).
- 4. Note work is commencing to explore an alternative, financially sustainable membership magazine that sits within a wider communications strategy for the Church of Scotland (Section 5.4).

Report

1. LIFE AND WORK

1.1 Current status

1.2 Life and Work has been in existence for 146 years, bringing news and encouragement to many Church of Scotland members throughout that time. Editorially independent, and firmly rooted in the affairs of the Church, over the years it has aimed to cover a broad range of subjects of interest to church goers across the spectrum. It has a special place in the Church’s heart, connecting people to key events and interesting updates in the life of the denomination and wider world throughout its history.

1.3 In recent years, as with many other print magazines, readership of, and subscriptions to, Life and Work have fallen significantly, as production costs have increased. Whereas previously the magazine worked as a standalone business generating surplus income, the magazine now requires significant investment year on year from central funds to underwrite its production. It is therefore with a very heavy heart that this report is now being presented to the Assembly for it has come to the point where the Church cannot continue to sustain Life and Work in its current print form.

2 CHANGES IN RECENT YEARS

2.1 Considerable work has been undertaken in recent years to place the magazine back onto a sound financial footing with a number of significant changes in style and content in the hope of increasing circulation. The circulation figures, as recorded by the Stewardship and Finance Department as of December 2024 record 4,011 set against the Church of Scotland membership of 245,000.

2.2 In recent years, an emphasis has been made on digital copies, but this also has not borne fruit. Digital sales income was £890 in 2017, and £8,391 in 2024, but this increase is against a decrease in print sales from £427,319 in 2017 to £209,414 in 2024.

2.3 Other revenue streams have also been investigated including branding, sponsorship, and grant funding. From a financial standpoint, costs such as printing and distribution have been driven down over the last few years and are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Advertising revenue has also seen reductions, dropping from £220k in 2017 to £97k in 2024. Prior to 2021, the financial results of Life and Work gave a steady surplus of around £50K per annum on average. Since then there has been a yearly loss.

Year	Net profit / (Loss) £
2017	66,684
2018	56,864
2019	45,953
2020	26,084
2021	(28,884)
2022	(6,635)
2023	(25,240)
2024	(133,323)

Table 1: Surplus and Deficit of Life and Work Magazine across the years

2.4 The original 2025 budget was forecast as being a deficit of £237k followed by an increasing year on year deficit position.

3 EXTERNAL REVIEW

3.1 The Resource & Presence Programme group was given oversight of the operations of the magazine with the creation of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) in May 2023. They identified early on that the magazine was facing significant financial challenge. In mid-2024 an independent consultant working *pro-bono* was asked to conduct a review of the magazine, examining both the business model and the content of the publication. This review lasted three months, and the staff of Life and Work contributed very helpfully to this piece of work.

3.2 The review concluded that the magazine had a dwindling readership, high running costs and was in need of a relaunch with a significantly different focus and style; and that the magazine was not sustainable in its current form, with costs continuing to rise and readership continuing to drop. A complete overhaul of the content was required in order to attract a new readership and for the content to align with the current needs of the Church of Scotland. In summary, not only is the magazine facing significant financial problems but its style and content is such that it would not appeal to a new generation of readership.

4 THE FUTURE

4.1 A Church publication has the potential to enthuse people and make them proud to be members of the Church of Scotland. It plays an important role in communicating with members and creating and consolidating our community. Despite regular attempts at reviewing design and content, the magazine as it stands does not entirely fulfil this purpose, except to a small section of Church membership.

4.2 Life and Work has played a significant part in the Church of Scotland's life and witness. Work will commence in seeking to find a way that the legacy of the magazine can continue in a different format which appeals to a wider readership and, like all other aspect of the Church's work, is financially sustainable.

4.3 This will form part of the developing internal communications strategy that seeks to provide a focus on and support to the Church of Scotland community both in Scotland and beyond. This internal communications strategy will be focused across a number of areas including support for local leadership, ministry, sustainable finances and the younger generation. Key to delivering on this will be the Digital Transformation Project which is now well under way and covered in more detail within the main report of the Assembly Trustees.

4.4 FAPLT and the Assembly Trustees would like to extend their thanks to the dedicated and long serving staff of Life and Work, to the Life and Work Advisory Committee and to those that have contributed to the magazine across the years. We recognise that the uncertainty of the last few months has been difficult for the staff and it is with considerable regret that we must recommend to the Assembly that the current model of magazine is brought to an end by October 2025 with the date of the final edition to be confirmed. Subscribers will be reimbursed for any unexpired portion of their subscription for the year.

4.5 We hope to be able to report to next year's Assembly on a new, financially sustainable membership magazine sitting within a well-developed internal communications strategy which will bring increased connectivity across the Church.

In the name of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and the Assembly Trustees

TOMMY MACNEIL, *Convener*
ALISTAIR CUMMING, *Vice-Convener, Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and Convener*
of the Resource & Presence Programme Group
KAY CATHCART, *Head of Ministries and Mission*
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