

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 Aadaeze 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