

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE MAY 2022

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Approve the order of business for the first two days.
3. Appoint Rev Colin Renwick to be Precentor until May 2023.
4. Appoint Mr Roy Pinkerton to index the verbatim record.
5. Invite Commissioners to submit to the Procedure Committee via email: pcoffice@churchofscotland.org.uk by Monday 23 May at 12pm, nominations for consideration to serve on the Selection Committee.
6. Note the expenses levels for those attending at least 12 of the 15 General Assembly sessions in person.
7. Note the proposed timetable of Moderator's visits to Presbyteries.
8. Acknowledge the consultation work undertaken by the Committee in the area of General Assembly Reform as reported in section 8 of the Report and instruct the Committee to bring in-depth proposals to the General Assembly of 2023.
9. Give thanks for the ongoing work of the Scottish Bible Society and:-
 - a) urge the Scottish Bible Society to pursue its ongoing efforts to address the challenge of global Bible translation and distribution;
 - b) support the Society in its desire to work in partnership with congregations to improve people's experience of the Bible and its impact on their life;
 - c) endorse the Society in its efforts to encourage confidence in the gospel and in providing Scripture resources for mission purposes; and
 - d) commend the Society's global outreach to the generosity of congregations and members.

Report

1. LORD WALLACE OF TANKERNESS

1.1 During the past year our Moderator, the Rt Hon Lord Wallace of Tankerness, Jim, has been an outstanding ambassador for the Church and for the eldership in particular. Online and on-site he has participated in many events including the Guild Annual Gathering, the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum, National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast, the Kirking of the Scottish Parliament, several anniversary services (including one marking the 20th Anniversary of 9/11), COP26, a congregational Songs of Praise service at which he remotely introduced his favourite hymn, Edinburgh Rotary Club, CrossReach Fundraising and Awareness raising events, and television appearances on Reflections at the Quay.

1.2 He has engaged with Church, national and other faith leaders, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi, Chair of the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society, First Minister, Prime Minister and many others, where matters discussed have included: Criminal Justice, Social Care Reform, Poverty and Net Zero Carbon, to mention a few.

1.3 Visits during the year have included HMP Perth Visitors' Support and Advice Centre, HM Prisons in Edinburgh and Dumfries, many congregations (some with particular significance in his own faith journey), two days with the Royal Navy in Portsmouth, plus time with the Universities of Edinburgh, St Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh Napier.

1.4 He has visited Edinburgh Presbytery and, at the time of this report being submitted, he is due to visit Irvine & Kilmarnock, Sutherland and Angus Presbyteries.

1.5 Regrettably, planned trips to Lebanon and Malawi had to be cancelled, but he did deliver an online lecture to the Zomba Theological College and had a 'virtual visit' to the Mulanje Mission Hospital.

1.6 Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Jim attended a service of the Divine Liturgy in the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Edinburgh and was invited to address the congregation after the service. He also participated in an Ecumenical Prayer meeting at New College and an Edinburgh Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Ukraine.

1.7 During his year, the time came for the St Andrew's Declaration to be signed, marking a commitment to greater shared working together between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church.

1.8 Jim has the distinction of being the first sitting Moderator to make an address to the House of Lords in a debate led by the Archbishop of Canterbury on contemporary challenges to freedom of speech.

1.9 Within the Kirk, Jim has attended many meetings, among them Assembly Business Committee and its Sub Groups. Jim has taken time to engage with staff, and has shared in leading online staff devotions. He has met many ministers, those in training, elders and members around the Church.

1.10 To Jim, we are filled with gratitude for the gracious manner in which he has led the Church this past year. We wish him and his wife Rosie, who has shared so much of the year with him, every blessing.

2. THE PRECENTOR

2.1 The Committee is grateful to Rev Colin Renwick for his willingness over recent years to be Precentor at the General Assembly, and is glad that this year he is able to lead us in praise.

3. PRESBYTERY REPRESENTATION

3.1 The Presbytery returns show that there are in all the Presbyteries 1011 charges, whether vacant or not, and that there are 180 other ministers (excluding retired ministers) who are members of Presbyteries. Representation is calculated for each Presbytery in accordance with Act III 2000 and the Interim Act 2021 and the total number of Commissioners is currently made up as follows: 268 Ministers, 268 Elders and 19 Deacons.

4. AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS

4.1 Some suggested changes to Standing Orders are set out in Appendix B. These will be proposed in the deliverance of the Legal Questions Committee. As mentioned at section 7.4 below, further changes to Standing Orders will also be required following the decisions of the Commission of Assembly of 23 March regarding the format of the General Assembly of 2022.

5. PROPERTY

5.1 Moderator's Residence

5.1.1 This property has a dual purpose: to provide a high-quality venue on the ground floor for official entertaining and living accommodation on the upper floor for the Moderator and their family. Consultation with those who have stayed there during the past few years has confirmed that it is no longer suitable for the latter purpose, particularly for anyone with a mobility problem, so a business case for the disposal of the property and the acquisition of a replacement is being drawn up.

5.2 Assembly Hall

5.2.1 Last year's General Assembly was again held online, and, because of the pandemic, there was hardly any revenue from external hires to set against property costs of almost £190,000. Building repairs and maintenance accounted for 42% of this expenditure, much of it necessarily reactive rather than planned. Means of reducing the cost of electricity used, and of insurance premiums (at 23% of the budget) are being investigated. A detailed feasibility study looking at the management, operation and maintenance of the Assembly Hall has been carried out by the Estates Department as part of an options appraisal of the long-term future of the building.

6. PRESBYTERY DEVELOPMENT

6.1 New Presbyteries

6.1.1 The General Assembly of 2019 set the ambitious target of reducing the number of Scottish Presbyteries to around twelve by the General Assembly of 2024.

6.1.2 In the intervening years it has been encouraging to see how the leaderships of our Presbyteries got behind this objective and bought into the hopes for what larger Presbyteries might be able to do in support of the local Church.

6.1.3 As can be seen from the table below much has already been achieved and there is the expectation of further unions in the coming months. It seems likely that by 2024 we will have ten or eleven Presbyteries north of the border. Discussions are on-going with the Presbytery of England and the Presbytery of International Charges about how they will fit in with the new patterns of regional Church life.

6.1.4 The Committee is pleased to note the cooperation between Presbyteries and the national agencies of the Church which has resulted in helpful, practical and financial support for these new structures.

New Presbyteries Already Approved	Date of Commencement
Aberdeen & Shetland	1 June 2020
Fife	1 January 2021
Clyde	1 September 2020
Forth Valley & Clydesdale	1 January 2022
Edinburgh & West Lothian	1 January 2022
The South West	30 September 2022
Presbyteries Currently in Discussion	Proposed Date for Overture to GA and Date of Commencement
Lothians & Borders Lothian, Duns, Jedburgh, Melrose & Peebles	GA 2022 1 January 2023
The North East & the Northern Isles Aberdeen & Shetland, Gordon, Buchan, Kincardine & Deeside, Orkney and Moray	GA 2022 1 January 2023
Highlands & Hebrides Argyll, Caithness, Sutherland, Ross, Inverness, Abernethy, Lochaber, Lochcarron-Skye, Uist and Lewis	GA 2023 1 January 2024
Perth Angus, Dundee, Perth, Dunkeld & Meigle, Stirling	GA 2022 1 January 2023
Forth Valley & Clydesdale Forth Valley & Clydesdale and Falkirk	GA 2022 1 June 2022
The Presbytery of England and the Presbytery of the International Charges are discussing what Presbytery Reform means for them in their unique positions.	

6.2 Communication with Presbyteries

6.2.1 As mentioned in the GA Reform section of this report, developing the connectedness between Assembly and the Presbyteries is crucial, and the Committee will continue to develop ongoing communication, particularly as new patterns of Presbytery life take shape.

6.3 Presbytery Accountability to the General Assembly

6.3.1 Once again, Presbyteries have been invited to make a five-minute presentation video in order that good news stories might be shared at appropriate points during Assembly. The wider question of accountability will be taken up in the Presbytery Review process being developed by the Legal Questions Committee.

6.4 Proposed Moderator's Presbytery Visits

6.4.1 The Moderator has previously made a formal visit to four Presbyteries as part of their year in office which has meant that each Presbytery can expect a visit on a ten-year rolling cycle. The intention behind these visits is to strengthen the life of the local church by bringing words of encouragement and creating occasions which draw attention to the Church's interest and engagement across community life. The visits have typically been ten days long.

6.4.2 With the expected reduction to around ten Presbyteries it is now suggested that there is a five-year cycle of Presbytery visits on the understanding that each Presbytery can choose to "use" the Moderator to visit either a part or the whole of the Presbytery area. If the choice is to do a part, then perhaps five years later the focus could cover the rest of the ground and that way, we would ensure that every part of each Presbytery receives a Moderatorial visit every ten years.

6.4.3 It has been agreed that the Moderator will visit Clyde and Glasgow Presbyteries in the year 2022/23, and subject to Presbytery restructuring implementation, the following is noted:

2022-2023	Clyde Glasgow	2026-2027	Edinburgh and West Lothian Perth
2023-2024	Forth Valley and Clydesdale Fife		England (in this cycle then every second cycle so next time 2036-2037)
2024-2025	South West North East & Northern Isles		
2025-2026	Highlands & Hebrides Lothians and Borders		

7. ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS

7.1 Feedback from the General Assembly of 2021

7.1.1 The Committee are grateful to the 403 commissioners, delegates, corresponding members and youth representatives who took the time to respond to the post-General Assembly 2021 survey. The feedback received allowed the Committee to scrutinise the experience of an online Assembly, learn from what went well and understand some of the challenges faced by meeting in this way. Many Commissioners expressed benefits in online engagement, including limiting travel and accommodation, being able to refer to multiple devices and documentation in familiar surroundings, and being able to remain with family. However, there are features of the Assembly which are lost as the online environment does not enable networking, a wider sense of belonging, opportunities for celebration, or a platform for the Kirk's national profile, which is created by an in-person gathering of ministers, deacons, elders, youth representatives, and ecumenical and overseas partners. Respondents to the post-General Assembly 2021 survey were split on whether future General Assemblies should be online or in person and the Committee believe that decisions on the format of future meetings are best taken by the General Assembly itself. Our experience of the General Assembly in 2020 and 2021 will enable the Committee to build on best practice to ensure all whose names appear within the Order of Proceedings are not disenfranchised by the method of their attendance.

7.2 Commission of Assembly

7.2.1 At a meeting of the Committee in March 2022, it was agreed to ask the Legal Questions Committee to call a Commission of Assembly to vary the format of the General Assembly 2022 from fully in-person to a hybrid Assembly where some Commissioners attend online. The Commission met on 23 March and the Committee will make all arrangements for the General Assembly as are required by the decision of this Commission.

7.3 Risk Assessment

7.3.1 A thorough Risk Assessment has been prepared which sets out in detail the risks associated with gathering in the Assembly Hall and the steps taken to reduce these risks to acceptable levels. Some of these apply every year – for example, around technical preparations; while some are specifically related to Covid-19. The Committee will continuously monitor public health guidance as this evolves in the coming months and will keep the Risk Assessment under regular review in consultation with the Church's Health and Safety Manager.

7.4 Standing Orders

7.4.1 Following the Commission of Assembly held on 23 March, the Committee will ensure that the Standing Orders of the Church are appropriate for the General Assembly of 2022 and in particular that no-one is disenfranchised. Amendments will be brought in a Supplementary Report with the section of deliverance proposed by the Legal Questions Committee.

7.5 Commissioner Expenses

7.5.1 Expenses rates for those participating in the Assembly Hall at the 2022 General Assembly will be up to £75 per night for accommodation and up to £15 a day for out-of-pocket expenses. When Commissioners are staying with family or friends a total allowance of up to £80 may be claimed towards a token gift for hosts. Attendance at 12 of the 15 sessions will be required for any expenses to be authorised.

8. GENERAL ASSEMBLY REFORM

8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 The General Assembly of 2019 instructed the newly formed Assembly Business Committee *'to report on ways in which the composition and format of the General Assembly can more effectively and efficiently serve the work of the Church.'*

8.1.2 At the Assembly of 2021, the Committee undertook to consult widely and to bring proposals to this General Assembly in response to the instruction: *"Instruct the Committee to continue its work on General Assembly reform, including engagement with the Legal Questions Committee's work on the Church Courts Act, reflection on the report of the Special Commission on the Effectiveness of the Presbyterian Form of Church Governance, and to share proposals with Presbyteries for early consultation, prior to reporting to the General Assembly of 2022."*

8.1.3 The Committee has engaged in a wide and diverse consultation process. Conversations with Presbyteries, individual ministers, elders, deacons, a group of 'under 40s', and some working with children and young people have engaged over 500 people. The conversations have looked at the six questions: Why, Where, When, What, Who, and How?

8.1.4 Responses have been analysed and emerging themes highlighted below, along with a statement of the areas where recommendations are expected in 2023 after further consideration. We hope that in what follows Commissioners will hear reflected some of what has been said as we listened to the voice of the wider Church.

8.1.5 The Committee's recommendations can be summarised as being:

- that the Committee continue exploration of the most suitable venue for an in-person General Assembly.
- that the Committee explore the frequency of the Assembly, establishing whether the idea of biennial Assemblies has merit, or whether a long weekend format and a second Assembly or Commission of Assembly in the Autumn may be of practical benefit.
- that, in consultation with others, the Committee investigate which areas of General Assembly decision-making might be better delegated to Forums, Committees or the Presbyteries.
- that the Committee explore options for enhancing opportunities for prayer online and on-site during the Assembly.
- that the Principal Clerk engage in conversations with appropriate persons regarding the ceremonial aspects of the opening and closing sessions.

- that the Committee review the allocation of General Assembly Youth Representatives to ensure that their engagement is not reduced as a result of the restructuring into fewer Presbyteries.
- that the Committee, in liaison with the Ecumenical Relations Committee and the Faith Impact Forum, develop opportunities to improve engagement by delegates and visitors via the use of technology.
- that the Committee consider allowing Probationers to be delegates to the General Assembly.
- that the Committee reflect upon and explore further the possibilities of online and hybrid formats for the General Assembly.
- that the Committee consider whether non-voting Assembly participants should be able to cast an indicative vote.
- that all reporting bodies expecting to bring significant business to the General Assembly consider hosting a 'preparatory webinar', open to all, thereby enabling participants to engage in conversation about key issues coming to the Assembly, with a view to making the subsequent debate better informed; the timing of the webinars to be coordinated by the Assembly Trustees Webinar Group.
- that all Presbyteries review their provision of training and preparation of Commissioners prior to each General Assembly.
- that the Committee revise the Remits document to make it visually appealing, perhaps also augmenting it with other media, in order to encourage, support and enthuse the wider church in working through the decisions of General Assembly.
- that the Legal Questions Committee carry out a review of the effectiveness of the Barrier Act as a means of ensuring the necessary scrutiny and broad acceptance of proposed changes to matters of doctrine, worship, discipline and government within the Church.
- that the Committee simplify the language and structure of deliverances wherever possible, while recognizing that a technical term may capture a nuanced meaning in a concise way.
- that the glossary of terms used by the Assembly be made available to Commissioners and kept under review by the Committee.
- that a podcast team be established, drawing on the experience of the Communications Department and other producers, to create a daily audio podcast reflection hosted by a Delegate, Visitor or other guest, using existing resources in order to minimize costs.
- that all Committees, Forums and other reporting bodies be encouraged to consider how to develop regular communication with the wider Church using all appropriate media formats.
- that the Committee consider how to ensure, once all the larger Presbyteries are established, that time is allocated during the General Assembly for a proportion of them to report each year on their work.

8.2 Why?

8.2.1 Why Reform the General Assembly? Right across the Church there is a recognition of the need to change, although not always the will to implement it. There is a vast jigsaw of pieces which need to come together. We don't have the lid with the final picture, yet we progress through these times of adaptive change in a cycle of experimenting, reflecting and reviewing. Some have suggested that until we have '*sorted out the new larger Presbytery structures*' we should leave the General Assembly alone. Doug Gay in 'Reforming the Kirk: The future of the Church of Scotland', looks back to the Review and Reform Report to the General Assembly (2011) quoting: "*Large scale reform of a complex organisation must be undertaken as a systematic process. It is because reform of one area has profound implications for other areas that the architecture of the whole system needs to be considered..... It will be a huge step for a future Assembly to ...reform of both the presbytery and the council system, but the two areas are so interdependent that there cannot be coherent reform of one without a simultaneous, joined-up reform of the other*" (p.155-156, 2017).

8.2.2 A further reason is the fact that over the years, the General Assembly has adapted and reformed in response to changing times and must continue to do so. For example, in recent years the Assembly has embraced new technology, introduced breaks to allow more time for fellowship, reduced its size in line with a smaller Church and introduced aspects such as Youth Representatives.

8.3 Where?

8.3.1 The Assembly Hall

8.3.1.1 For several years, consideration has been given to the suitability of the Assembly Hall as a venue for the Assembly. With the current review of all Church buildings, it would seem sensible to explore the options for alternative venues.

8.3.1.2 Consideration could also be given to hiring a meeting space for the Assembly to use. Many of the conversations with Presbyteries reminded us of times when the Scottish Parliament were using the Hall, and we decanted to the Usher Hall and Edinburgh International Conference Centre – but these were paid for by the Scottish Government who were using our Hall. These were pre-live streaming days, and a significant factor is that providing internet facilities for live streaming sufficient for several hundred Commissioners in a venue other than the Assembly Hall would be more expensive.

8.4 When?

8.4.1 There was a wide range of views in the survey about the frequency of General Assemblies. Some suggested only holding a General Assembly in every second year, with the consequent requirement of Moderators to then serve for two years. However, others put forward the option of holding an Assembly annually over a long weekend which might include more conference-type features to enable a focus on the key priorities facing the Church. The General Assembly has not always met for a week beginning on the third Saturday in May. In order to make it easier for those tied to 9 to 5 Monday to Friday studying or work routines, a 'long weekend option' may be beneficial.

8.4.2 On current experience of an event of this duration would not, however, enable all Assembly business to be processed. Consideration could be given to then additionally holding either a Commission of Assembly or a second Assembly online, in order to deal with matters which could not be taken during the Spring Assembly. A great deal of work would be required to establish if this suggestion has any merit.

'Where and When?' Recommendations:

- that the Committee continue exploration of the most suitable venue for an in-person General Assembly.
- that the Committee explore the frequency of the Assembly, establishing whether the idea of biennial Assemblies has merit, or whether a long weekend format and a second Assembly or Commission of Assembly in the Autumn may be of practical benefit.

8.5 What?

8.5.1 At many of the consultations, the place of prayer for and during the Assembly was mentioned. Leading the Assembly in prayer belongs to the Moderator, who may, in addition to the daily opening worship, call the Assembly to prayer at any appropriate time. Many have expressed the view that they would welcome opportunities to gather for prayer online or on-site during the Assembly. The Assembly Business Committee would be open to considering a suitable time and place.

8.5.2 Judicial matters are now mostly remitted to other bodies with delegated authority to act in the name of the General Assembly. Are there other areas in which the Assembly could grant delegated authority to a Forum, Committee, or to Presbyteries?

8.5.3 Many who were consulted, particularly among the eldership, spoke of how their understanding of the wider work of the Church was greatly enhanced by attendance at the General Assembly. While significant, this also highlights the need for improved ongoing communication throughout the year and for Presbyteries to be places of support, inspiration and information.

Opening and Closing Sessions

8.5.4 Opinion is divided on the 'pomp and ceremony' particularly in the opening and closing sessions. There is recognition that it enshrines the Kirk's constitutional position and can create opportunities for media coverage to the wider world, nonetheless there is a case for reviewing the extent of these formalities.

8.5.5 Many in the consultations mentioned the importance for the closing session to end on an inspirational, encouraging note.

'What?' Recommendations

- that, in consultation with others, the Committee investigate which areas of General Assembly decision-making might be better delegated to Forums, Committees or the Presbyteries.
- that the Committee explore options for enhancing opportunities for prayer online and on-site during the Assembly.
- that the Principal Clerk engage in conversations with appropriate persons regarding the ceremonial aspects of the opening and closing sessions.

8.6 Who?

8.6.1 Presbytery Allocations

8.6.1.1 The General Assembly of 2022 passed to Presbyteries consideration of a reduction in the number of commissions allocated to each Presbytery to '1 in 5', and this year's Assembly will be invited to enact that along with legislation to allow the five most recent former Moderators to be members of Assembly by virtue of their former office.

8.6.2 'Under 40s'

8.6.2.1 Nearly all the Presbytery Consultations mentioned the need better to engage with younger people, and spoke highly of the way in which Youth Representatives to the General Assembly prepare and participate in it. We can learn much from the 'Under 40s' - an age range identified by the Assembly Trustees. It was good to be able to gather online with a group of ministers, elders and others in that age bracket. Many feel disconnected from the Assembly, and we heard much of their frustrations and perception that it has little relevance in their journey of faith and engagement in their local congregations. With the ending of the National Youth Assembly and the reduction in the number of Assembly Youth Representatives due to there being fewer Presbyteries, much concern has been raised both by the 'young people' and by Presbyteries.

8.6.3 Delegates and Visitors

8.6.3.1 Delegates and Visitors from Ecumenical and Overseas partners bring a connectedness with the world church and much blessing to the Assembly. Many have expressed appreciation for the way in which live and pre-recorded videos have enabled us to visit them in their context, something that has made these connections all the more meaningful.

8.6.4 Presbytery Representation

8.6.4.1 As we move towards fewer, larger Presbyteries, there is an opportunity to consider populating Standing Committees by a process of Presbytery representation. In this new world, it might be that Presbytery Moderators and Clerks have a greater part to play in the life of the General Assembly.

'Who' Recommendations

- that the Committee review the allocation of General Assembly Youth Representatives to ensure that their engagement is not reduced as a result of the restructuring into fewer Presbyteries.
- that the Committee, in liaison with the Ecumenical Relations Committee and the Faith Impact Forum, develop opportunities to improve engagement by delegates and visitors via the use of technology.
- that the Committee consider allowing Probationers to be delegates to the General Assembly.

8.7 How?**8.7.1 Online/In person**

8.7.1.1 The results of the questions about being online, in person or operating a hybrid model for business showed that there are mixed views on what model is best. Comments included:

- Hybrid 'enables' Commissioners unable to attend in Edinburgh in person or those unable to attend for the whole week, such as younger elders with work or family commitments, still to participate.
- Online assemblies are settling down, becoming sharper as technology becomes familiar.
- An online Assembly is more accessible to all and cheaper to run.
- Hybrid should allow a more diverse range of General Assembly participants.
- Hybrid Assembly is preferred due to the in-person costs and travel involved when living further afield.
- There should be virtual attendance from now on. Continue online with Zoom. Remain online.
- I like the idea of hybrid but we do need to be careful that it does not lead to "them and us".
- I found Hybrid format good, easier to speak but unsatisfactory sitting too long at screen.
- It is difficult to 'read the room' online before re-shaping contribution and deciding to speak.
- Online is a lonely experience if home alone: introduce online fellowship possibilities.
- Online and hybrid could risk excluding either those without IT expertise and equipment or those who live in areas where broadband connectivity is slow or non-existent.

8.7.1.2 Other respondents, however, pointed out that much is lost when people do not come together in person, not least diligent scrutiny and the holding to account of Forums and Committees, Christian fellowship and the sense of occasion which an in-person Assembly generates.

8.7.1.3 The introduction of online attendance at the General Assembly and also the option of a hybrid model would represent one of the biggest changes to the format of the Assembly for many years. It is clear that the Committee should continue to consult widely on this matter and carefully consider how it should be taken forward.

8.7.2 Indicative (or Advisory) Voting

8.7.2.1 Indicative or advisory voting would allow the views of youth representatives and other non-voting participants to be expressed. Effectively, this means taking a poll of the non-voting representatives prior to the actual vote. It would be expected that the use of this option would be confined to more significant issues. Technically it would be a relatively simple matter to effect this when requested by the Assembly. This is the practice of the PC USA General Assembly in regard to Advisory Delegates. According to its website: *"Advisory delegates "are persons who are active members in one of the constituent churches or councils of the General Assembly..... who are selected to attend the meeting of the General Assembly in an advisory role so that the Assembly may be assured of hearing and taking cognizance of their special viewpoints..... Though advisory delegates do not have the privilege of voting on business in the assembly business meetings, they have other opportunities to make their views known. They participate in the debates in business sessions and are polled prior to the votes on many issues to determine their advice."*

Recommendations:

- that the Committee reflect upon and explore further the possibilities of online and hybrid formats for the General Assembly.
- that the Committee consider whether non-voting Assembly participants should be able to cast an indicative vote.

8.7.3 Preparation of Commissioners

8.7.3.1 Prior preparation in reading the Reports and ensuring familiarity with General Assembly practice is crucial for Commissioners to put their best into, and get the best from, their General Assembly engagement. In the past many Presbyteries have facilitated gatherings of Commissioners to review Reports and consider the practicalities of the General Assembly. We encourage this but also recognise that recent years have demonstrated the possibilities afforded by the online webinar. In addition to the technical knowledge to engage in the Assembly, how to request to speak, vote and so on, there is a need, and indeed an expressed desire, to engage in the issues coming to the Assembly in a prior and robust way.

Recommendations:

- that all reporting bodies expecting to bring significant business to the General Assembly consider hosting a 'preparatory webinar', open to all, thereby enabling participants to engage in conversation about key issues coming to the Assembly, with a view to making the subsequent debate better informed; the timing of the webinars to be coordinated by the Assembly Trustees Webinar Group.
- that all Presbyteries review their provision of training and preparation of Commissioners prior to each General Assembly.

8.7.4 Documentation and Media

8.7.4.1 In 2018 the Assembly Arrangements Committee outlined a 5-year plan towards a 'less paper' Assembly; then the Covid-19 pandemic required greater reliance on online documentation. The Committee will always seek to honour requests for Assembly Reports and other documentation in different formats to assist those with particular needs but in future will only provide printed material on specific request.

8.7.4.2 Over recent years we have experimented with various ways to bring Reports to Commissioners. Feedback suggests that the pre-recorded video presentations by Conveners were appreciated by those who watched them but the viewing statistics suggest that relatively few Commissioners made use of this facility.

8.7.5 Remits Document

8.7.5.1 'The Remits Booklet' is available soon after the Assembly and can be a useful tool in shaping the work of Standing Committees & Presbyteries. Over recent years the format has been altered to better categorise the matters to be progressed.

Recommendation:

- that the Committee revise the Remits document to make it visually appealing, perhaps also augmenting it with other media, in order to encourage, support and enthuse the wider church in working through the decisions of the General Assembly.

8.8 Monitoring Implementation of Decisions

8.8.1 The Special Commission on the effectiveness of Presbyterian Governance, noted that the effectiveness *'as manifested in the Church of Scotland has, for many years, been compromised by a lack of connection between local, regional and national that is both robust and responsive. Decisions enthusiastically endorsed by General Assemblies often do not transfer to the other bodies within our structure. Equally, local and regional initiatives infrequently find a national platform. Our lines of communication are at best intermittent. We do not tend to learn from each other, share best practice, or learn from painful mistakes.'*

8.8.2 The Assembly Business Committee has within its remit this monitoring role and has kept under review the implementation of instructions to Forums, Committees, Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions. The robustness of this work has been tempered by the acknowledgement of extreme pressures through the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of priority matters. Revision of 'The Remits Booklet' will go some way to ensuring that remits are implemented, and heighten awareness of times when they are not. The Committee continues to encourage all reporting bodies to limit the number of deliverance sections to be debated.

8.9 Act IX 1697 - The Barrier Act

The Special Commission on the effectiveness of Presbyterian Governance noted, *'It is not for nothing that our chief piece of legislation is called the Barrier Act enacted by the 1697 General Assembly. That being said, the purpose of the Barrier Act is not, ironically, to prevent change, but rather to ensure proper consultation across the Church about change.'* Not all changes are covered by the Act, but only those concerned with matters of doctrine, worship, discipline and government. Good consultation and communication about prospective change in any of these matters is essential in order that legislation is not enacted without having broad support within the Church or without full consideration of its impact having been undertaken. In the spirit of a reformed Church which must always be reforming it is important that we from time-to-time review how we achieve the sort of mature reflection which is needed before such changes are made.

Recommendation:

- that the Legal Questions Committee carry out a review of the effectiveness of the Barrier Act as a means of ensuring the necessary scrutiny and broad acceptance of proposed changes to matters of doctrine, worship, discipline and government within the Church.

8.10 Language

8.10.1 The Assembly of 2009 instructed all Councils and Committees *'to ensure that Assembly reports are accessible to commissioners and designed to facilitate informed decision making'*. The 2013 Assembly agreed to rename the Acts of Assembly giving prominence to the purpose rather than date and number, and to depart from the use of the word 'anent'. There is more that could be done to transact business in plain English. Many of those consulted spoke of being lost and confused by the language used at Assembly and urged that plain English be adopted; a few expressed, however, argued that, rather than simplifying the language, there should be more training in the terms used. We recommend a both/and solution.

Recommendations:

- that the Committee simplify the language and structure of deliverances wherever possible, while recognizing that a technical term may capture a nuanced meaning in a concise way.
- that the glossary of terms used by the Assembly be made available to Commissioners and kept under review by the Committee.

8.11 Overture Process

8.11.1 As Presbytery restructuring and reform continues it will be increasingly important that Presbyteries can bring items of business to the General Assembly. The Committee welcomes the proposed revision of the Overture process contained in the Legal Questions Committee's current draft of the Church Courts Act.

8.12 Theological Reflection on GA

8.12.1 In recent times there have been podcast reflections on the day's events sharing General Assembly business with the wider church and world. One suggestion arising from the Presbytery consultations is to have a guest 'theologian in residence' from another denomination and perhaps a different part of the world; this might provide reflection during the Assembly and facilitate reflective conversations by Commissioners and others.

Recommendation:

- that a podcast team be established, drawing on the experience of the Communications Department and other producers, to create a daily audio podcast reflection hosted by a Delegate, Visitor or other guest, using existing resources in order to minimize costs.

8.13 Communication and Connectedness

8.13.1 Many of the issues arising from conversations with Presbyteries are ultimately concerned with internal communication in the Kirk. At the root of General Assembly Reform is a desire for greater connectedness between the Assembly and the Presbyteries, and a commitment to collaborate and communicate between meetings. Early in the life of the new larger Presbyteries we need to create a greater sense of connectedness to the General Assembly, both in terms of ensuring accountability and providing opportunities to share good practice and good news stories.

8.13.2 With skills honed by necessity in recent years, we encourage development of the use of various media formats including video in sharing good news stories and good practice, thus ensuring effective and consistent messaging through all our structures.

8.13.3 Internal communication is an aspect touching upon so many areas of the vast jigsaw that the Church must bring together. The Committee wishes to commit to working alongside others in facilitating strong links in the time between meetings of General Assembly among the Standing Committees and Presbyteries, thereby promoting a sense of shared mission and ministry.

Recommendations:

- that all Committees, Forums and other reporting bodies be encouraged to consider how to develop regular communication with the wider Church using all appropriate media formats.
- that the Committee consider how to ensure, once all the larger Presbyteries are established, that time is allocated during the General Assembly for a proportion of them to report each year on their work.

9. APPOINTMENT OF PRINCIPAL CLERK

9.1 Following Dr Whyte's intimation of his retirement with effect from June 2022, the Steering Group comprising members from the Assembly Business Committee and the Assembly Trustees, along with a Stakeholder Panel, engaged in a rigorous recruitment process. We are grateful to all who applied, and pleased to support the formal nomination to be brought by the Assembly Trustees that Rev Fiona Smith, minister at Ness Bank Church in Inverness, be the next Principal Clerk of the General Assembly.

10. FASTI ECCLESIAE SCOTICANAE

10.1 Volume XII of the Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae, the listing of every Church of Scotland minister since the Reformation, has now been published. The new edition was edited by Roy Pinkerton, a retired academic, assisted by Alison Murray, an elder at Linlithgow: St Michaels and a former personal assistant to a succession of Moderators. The hardback book covers the period from 1 October 1999 to 30 September 2020 and costs £30 plus post and packing. It can be purchased by sending your full postal address to fasti@churchofscotland.org.uk. Your order will be sent out together with instructions about payment.

11. REVIEW OF THE ROLE OF THE MODERATOR

11.1 This work is ongoing. The majority of former Moderators have been interviewed at length and the process of transcribing interviews should be concluded by June 2022. Themes are emerging from the interviews which will help to shape the questions we intend to put to ecumenical partners, Presbyteries, politicians and the media.

In the name of the Committee

DONALD G B MCCORKINDALE, *Convener*
SUSAN J PYM, *Vice-Convener*
GEORGE J WHYTE, *Secretary*

Addendum

Rev Dr George J Whyte

The Committee pays tribute to Rev Dr George Whyte, Principal Clerk to the General Assembly and Secretary to the Assembly Business Committee, who retires in June.

George Whyte, who graduated BSc BD from the University of Glasgow after a secondary education at Paisley Grammar, was ordained as an elder at the age of 21. Dr Whyte has an on-going and life-long connection with the Boys' Brigade. Following a year with Strathclyde Police, in 1981 he was ordained and inducted as Parish Minister of Kilchrenan and Dalavich with Muckairn (Argyll). He went on to serve as Parish Minister of Glasgow: Langside before a move to the east as Parish Minister of Edinburgh: Colinton. Dr Whyte served as Convener of the Board of Ministry from 1996, and in 2008 was appointed to the full-time position of Clerk to the Presbytery of Edinburgh. Alongside his work with the Presbytery, in 2011 he was appointed part-time Depute Clerk of the General Assembly. In 2014 Dr Whyte stepped in, at very short notice, to be Acting Principal Clerk when the Very Rev Dr John Chalmers became Moderator of the General Assembly. In 2017 Dr Whyte became Principal Clerk to the General Assembly, as well as being Secretary to the Moderator, to the Assembly Business Committee and to the Legal Questions Committee. He was the creative mind behind Heart and Soul held in Princes Street Gardens. Dr Whyte was appointed Chaplain-in-Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen in 2019.

All Principal Clerks face challenges in their day-to-day work but very few will have had to face the enormity of supporting the Kirk through a global pandemic whilst facilitating and encouraging Presbytery Reform. In these worrying and demanding times, he has held the Church together, helped and encouraged us all with new methods of communication such as Zoom and Teams meetings, culminating with the first ever online General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland. The legalities and technologies of such were bewildering but he pressed on with determination and vigour.

Prior to the pandemic leading to closed doors at 121, Dr Whyte's office was a welcome space to find sound advice, sensitivity and diplomacy with a dash of his excellent sense of humour. His knowledge of the Church, its people and his understanding of the Church's place in Scotland and beyond has served us greatly. We are indebted to George for his years of service to his beloved Church. He has been wonderfully supported by his wife Moira who has made her own significant contributions over the years. We wish George and Moira great joy, health and happiness as they begin this new chapter of their life together.

DONALD G B MCCORKINDALE, *Convener*
SUSAN J PYM, *Vice-Convener*

Mrs Susan J Pym

Susan Pym completes her term as Vice Convener at this Assembly. Susan has served the Assembly Business Committee and its predecessor the Assembly Arrangements Committee well for six years, and has shared her enthusiasm, encouragement and hard work. The 'in conversation' tent at Heart and Soul was her initiative and proved to be an important part not only of the event, but in opening up discussion in a wide range of often very difficult subjects. As a Presbytery of England elder, Susan has often been able to help Scottish ministers to see a bigger picture. With only three months between her appointment as Interim Vice Convener and the beginning of Covid-19 restrictions, Susan adapted brilliantly to the online world, not least in being the one who has pushed all the right buttons to have votes gathered and counted by the 'Assembly Hub' at online Assemblies. In convening the small team reviewing the role of the Moderator, Susan has contributed so much, often unseen. Family bereavement prevented that work progressing as she would have liked, and we are glad that she will remain as a co-opted member of that working group. In the meantime we say a formal thank you, to a much valued member of the Committee.

DONALD G B MCCORKINDALE, *Convener*
GEORGE J WHYTE, *Secretary*

Appendix A

REPORT OF THE SCOTTISH BIBLE SOCIETY

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.' John 8:12 (NIV)

Immediately following the dark days of the Second World War, Bible Societies from about 12 different countries came together to form the United Bible Societies. After so many lives had been turned upside down and broken by the devastating effects of war, they recognised that they could achieve far more by collaborating. This display of unity for the sake of the Gospel has borne much fruit and in May last year we were able to mark the 75th anniversary and be inspired and encouraged to keep going – in a world devastated by the pandemic and, in many places, war.

As I write, Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues with relentless violence. The Bible Society in Ukraine continues its work, providing the churches with the Bibles they need as part of their humanitarian support for those in dire need. The United Bible Societies are coordinating a response to those Bible Societies in neighbouring countries who are requesting more Ukrainian Bibles to serve the needs of refugees. When people must leave their homes quickly and in fear, they are eager to replace their Bible. Others are looking for a source of hope, they long to find light in the darkness and turn to the Scriptures for help. We praise God that in the midst of the trauma stories reach us of light and life.

We are hugely grateful to individuals and congregations who have generously supported our appeals to provide Bibles where they are needed. In addition to supporting the requests for Ukrainian Bibles we have also been able to help other Bible Societies with their work in:

- Malawi (Bible translation and youth engagement resources)
- Middle East (Bible distribution in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria)
- Nigeria (translation of the Bible into the Okun language)
- South Sudan (Bible distribution and core presence funding)
- Algeria and Morocco (encouraging persecuted Christians looking for Bibles)

As we continue to navigate the various stages and waves of the pandemic here in Scotland, we have been able to serve congregations with several different resources to help people of all ages engage with the Bible in a meaningful way.

A variety of inter-generational resources were produced during the year: *Grace Gatherings*, *Christmas Journeys and Wonder Walks*. These encouraged and helped families and friendship groups to explore the Bible together, particularly around Christmas and Easter. The resources included podcasts, games to play, questions to think about and most importantly some Bible texts to read and ponder together.

Following on from the popular *Dear Theo* publication and resources for young people and in partnership with illustrator Jason Ramasami, we have produced *Joseph and the Triumph of Grace*. The first part of the book is the story of Joseph told through illustrations. Then the Genesis text, in the easy-to-read New International Readers Version (NIRV), highlights the golden line of God's grace in the life of Joseph and allows the reader to follow God's grace through all of Bible history.

Earlier this year *10 Must Know Bible Stories*, an educational resource for teachers and schools that helps unpack Bible stories in a classroom setting came into the Scottish Bible Society fold. We are currently exploring how to best take this forward along with the Bibleworld Books resources.

Bible-based Trauma Healing has continued to grow throughout the year. In 2021 all courses were held online but in 2022 we have seen in-person facilitator training residential courses commence again. Many churches are finding this a helpful resource to support people who have experienced any kind of challenge and pain in their life. Having this available during and beyond the pandemic has been a gift appreciated across the globe.

Light and Life is the Gospel of John presented in an attractive magazine style. Beautifully illustrated it helps readers to engage with the life of Jesus in a fresh way. The style allows space for the reader to pause and consider the relevance and significance of this historical text.

We pray that these contemporary 'translations' of the Bible for people here in Scotland, with their rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives on the world, will have a real impact. Alongside this we continue to support the translation of the Bible into those languages that currently do not have any part of the Bible. If people are to discover the light and life that only Jesus Christ can bring, then they must have the Bible in their heart language and be able to engage with it. May there be an ever-growing number of people who follow Jesus and find they have 'the light of life'.

Appendix B

PROPOSED CHANGES TO STANDING ORDERS

Standing Order 5 - Committee on Commissions: Delete the words "(unless a hard copy has been previously requested)".

Standing Order 15 - Order of Business: Delete the second sentence and substitute "The Assembly Business Committee shall prepare and circulate electronically before the commencement of the Assembly, a proposed Order of Business for the Assembly".

Standing Order 20 - Delete the existing wording and substitute "**Materials for Assembly Members:** Requests for permission to distribute material electronically to Assembly Members shall be submitted to the Assembly Business Committee before the commencement of the Assembly, and requests received thereafter shall be submitted to the Procedure Committee. Any other Committee concerned should be informed and supplied with electronic copies, if available, of the material to be distributed."