REPORTS

TO

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

2025

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Rev. ANDREW R. ALLAN DipTh. .....*Retiring Moderator*
Rev. GRAEME CRAIG, B.Sc. ……..…….....*Principal Clerk*
Rev. MURDO A.N. MACLEOD, B.A. …….....*Assistant Clerk*
Mr MURRAY MACKAY, BAcc (Hons) ATT CTA ....……..……....*General Treasurer*
LINDSAYS LLP, Edinburgh ……..…….....*Law Agents*

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I.

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS & NOMINATIONS

(A) ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS

1. Introduction

Each day we should ask ourselves, what have I done today to advance the Lord's Cause? This is a very legitimate and necessary question. After a day of 'Committee work', we may feel that it is difficult to say we have done anything spiritual or productive to further the Lord's Cause. However, just because the work done may have been Financial, Legal, or organising something as apparently mundane as sourcing a new banner for the General Assembly, it does not mean it was not a spiritual work.

Whether it is in business, political parties, government, or a local sports team, each must have a business or organisational structure, or they just will not function properly. The Church is no different.

The Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee, along with the other Standing Committees, are instrumental in the smooth running of the denomination. However, appointment of personnel to these Committees can often be challenging, with some reluctance on the part of some of our men on the one hand, and the simple lack of men on the other. Therefore, as a denomination, we need to pray the Lord of the harvest that He will send labourers into the fields, recognising that not all labourers are preachers of the Word; some will be called to more administrative roles.

The Committee are again thankful for all who have assisted in any way with the work of the Gospel in our denomination.

In accordance with standing Order 1.5, the Committee notified Presbyteries of their representation in the Assembly.

In accordance with Act II Class II 2002, the Committee nominated a Moderator–Designate.

2. General Assembly

2.1 Location

For the past two years the General Assembly has been very comfortably accommodated in the Partick Free Church (Continuing) church and hall. The Committee are very thankful to all those in the Southern Presbytery who have assisted, in a whole variety of ways, to make this location such a success. The Committee would also like to place on record the ready assistance and co-operation of many people in preparing for the General Assembly of 2025.

2.2 Assembly Officer

The Committee are grateful to Mr Alan Blaney for agreeing to undertake the role of Assembly Officer for a second year. They are also very grateful to his various assistants for the time they so freely give to help the Assembly.

2.3 Assembly Commissioners' Expenses

In accordance with Act I Class II 2001, the Committee notified Presbyteries that they had set the maximum rate for Assembly Commissioners' expenses, which are paid from Central Funds through Presbyteries, at £180 (£230 for Commissioners resident in the Outer Isles, £460 for Commissioners from Overseas within Europe and £600 for Commissioners from Overseas outwith Europe). It was agreed to cap the total amount

made available from Central Funds for Commissioners from the Presbytery of the United States of America at £3,000.

2.4 Assembly Timetable

The timetabling of the Assembly follows a similar pattern each year, for obvious reasons. The Committee, in giving guidance to the Assembly Clerks' Department, review matters each year and suggest changes where appropriate.

Following the last Assembly the Committee received a request that the printed Reports be set out in the same order as they are dealt with in the Assembly timetable. The Committee were generally sympathetic and agreed to make an effort to have the two matters better aligned.

The Committee also received a suggestion that, in future, the role of the Convener of the Assembly Business Committee be divided between two people, with one person being responsible for timetabling matters, whilst the other would deal with introducing visiting delegates to the Moderator. On reflection the Committee resolved to make no change to the present practice.

It is anticipated that the Assembly will have completed their business by lunchtime on Thursday, allowing most Commissioners sufficient time to return home that day.

2.5 Assembly Catering

Moving to a different location in 2023 meant that new arrangements were required for catering. Over the last two years a group of ladies from the various Congregations within the Southern Presbytery have kindly undertaken to provide the catering for the Moderator's reception, as well as lunch on Tuesday and Wednesday. This arrangement has worked well and will be repeated this year. It became apparent during the Assembly of 2023 that the arrangements for the evening meal were proving to be more challenging, with transport issues being particularly difficult. In order to remedy this situation a firm of external caterers provided the evening meals on Tuesday and Wednesday of Assembly week last year. This proved to be very successful and the same company, *Regis Banqueting*, will provide catering for this year's General Assembly.

2.6 Assembly Broadcasting

We hope to be able to broadcast the Assembly proceedings, as in recent years, on Zoom, using the Partick facilities.

2.7 Assembly Banners

The Committee resolved, following representation at the General Assembly, to replace the banners used at the Assembly following the adoption of a new denominational logo, and, in the case of the external banner, due to some wear and tear after 25 years in service.

2.8 Commemoration of the Division of 2000

This year marks the passing of a quarter century since the sad events of 2000. The Committee agreed to mark this during the Assembly with an Address by Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod. Whilst the years have rolled by, we believe that the stand taken at that time for the Headship of Christ is as relevant and pressing as ever it was. We have cause to be thankful to the Lord for His manifold provision and gracious preservation during these intervening years and we continue to look to Him to supply all our need "according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

2.9 1700th Anniversary of the Nicene Creed

It was brought to the attention of the Committee that this year marks the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed of 325 AD which clarified for the Church the Biblical doctrine of the Holy Trinity. It is a matter of sorrow that these precious truths continue to be attacked and undermined, and we need to maintain

vigilance and hold fast to the faith once delivered to the Church. Consideration was given to marking the occasion by a special Address but time constraints rendered that impracticable. However, given the importance of the anniversary, the Committee do anticipate that appropriate reference will be made to the matter during the course of the Assembly.

3. Assembly Clerks' Department

The Committee are, once again, indebted to Mr Murdo Murray (Stornoway), for all the work he undertakes on behalf of the Department. Quietly, behind the scenes, he organises the preparation and printing for Committees and the General Assembly. His assistance is all the more valuable as it is discharged with cheerful efficiency, and the whole Church owes him an enormous debt of gratitude.

Mrs Isobel Ann Macleod, Snizort, will continue to serve as Assembly Office Manager.

4. Meetings of the Commission

During the past year there was no urgent business to be brought before the Commission of Assembly, and therefore the Commission did not meet. Whilst the Commission of Assembly will continue to be available to meet under the terms of its appointment, if required, for urgent business, it is hoped that meetings will continue to be infrequent.

5. Panel of Consultants

The General Assembly of 2024, in light of the recently approved Safeguarding Policy, resolved to disband the Panel of Consultants Anent Allegations of Sexual Impropriety Involving Adults.

6. Review of Memoranda of Procedure

It is one of the stated functions of this Committee to review the Memoranda on Procedure of all other Standing and, where appropriate, Special Committees. Due to a variety of reasons this had not been actively pursued until 2023 but over the past two years both Group 1 and 2 Committees have submitted their Memoranda, and these have been duly reviewed. This current year it will be the turn of Group 3 Committees and the Special Committee on Psalmody. Thereafter, the Committee will consider whether this process needs to be continued and will report thereanent to the next General Assembly.

7. Committee Meetings

All Standing Committees of Assembly meet during the year at Inverness, Free Greyfriars, in their Westhill building. The rooms are very comfortable and and there are other areas for socialising and refreshments between meetings. The Committee are grateful to the Deacons' Court for the use of their building for the meetings, and also for the hospitality given to members of Committees.

(B) GENERAL ASSEMBLY LOCATION

1. Introduction

The General Assemblies of 2023 and 2024 tasked the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee to investigate the practical aspects of holding a General Assembly in Edinburgh. In doing so, the Committee noted that potential points of principle relating to the location of the General Assembly had been raised at the Assembly. Therefore, the Committee consulted with one individual not currently serving on the Committee but known to be firmly of the persuasion that the General Assembly should be held in Edinburgh.

This Report considers Biblical, theological, historical and practical issues that will, hopefully, help guide the Church in its decision as to where to locate its meetings of General Assembly. The Committee considered two locations for the Assembly: Edinburgh and Glasgow. For the purposes of comparison, the Committee, in consultation with brethren in Edinburgh, considered our Edinburgh Congregation's building in Arthur Street, Edinburgh, and Ferniehill Evangelical Church, also in Edinburgh, together with our Partick

Congregation's buildings in Glasgow. It was quickly concluded that the Edinburgh building in Arthur Street, Edinburgh, was not suitable.

The Committee are aware that in the choice of location brethren are concerned with such things as:

1) The significance of Edinburgh as the capital city, where the seat of the branches of civil government are located.

2) The symbolic significance of having the Assembly in the same city as the seat of civil power, as this relates to the Establishment Principle.

3) Historic Precedents: in our lifetime and until recently, the Assembly has always met in Edinburgh.

4) Practical matters including cost to the Church, availability of helpers, catering, and the ease with which delegates can attend both our Assembly and others in Edinburgh.

2. Biblical Help

The Church in the Old Testament resided first in families and had no centralized structure or obvious formal organization until the days of Moses. When Israel was redeemed from Egypt, God covenanted with her at Sinai (Exodus 19ff) and gave her laws for civil and religious life. Israel was both the Covenant people of God and thus the Church, while she was also a nation.

The Church existed in the wilderness with the Tabernacle in the midst of the camp. The tribes were appointed to pitch around the Tabernacle, but at this point there was no prominent tribe of rule, although a priority is shown in that the camp of Judah was pitched on the East side of the Tabernacle (Numbers 2). In the Old Testament Law, a prediction was made of a time when God would choose a place to establish a central place of worship (Deut. 12:5ff), and that a king would reign over God's people (Deut. 17:14ff).

When Israel entered into the land, the Tabernacle came to reside firstly at Gilgal, and then at Shiloh (1 Sam. 1-4). At length, the Temple was erected in Jerusalem in the days of Solomon (1 Kings 8:4). From that point Jerusalem was the centre of both civil and religious life in Israel. Ecclesiastical and civil power were distinct and yet co-ordinate, and both throne and Temple were typical of the work and reign of the Messiah who would come. Ecclesiastical rule was principally linked to the Priests and the tribe of Levi and various Sanhedrins functioned locally, with the great Sanhedrin governing from Jerusalem. But at this time there does not appear to have been something synonymous with what we recognize as a General Assembly of elders for the government of the Church.

In the New Testament, the Church on earth and also in heaven is revealed to be the fulfilment of the typical Jerusalem and Zion in the Old Testament (Heb. 12:22, Rev. 21). Christ is the Priest who has put an end to sacrifice and who from the right hand of God reigns over His Church as her only King. The significance of the city of Jerusalem on earth has given way to the Church, the city of God among the nations.

The government of the New Testament Church becomes clear. A plurality of elders are to be elected by the people in each local Congregation for its shepherding and government (Acts 14:23, Tit. 1:5).

Provincial Synods or General Assemblies find their warrant from the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, where Apostles and elders assembled to deliberate and issue an authoritative declaration for all the local congregations. However, while this Council took place at Jerusalem, that city no longer had the power of civil rule in the Roman Empire and its spiritual significance had transferred to the Church. In the first century it was an outpost and far from the seat of civil power in the Roman Empire.

3. Theological Principle

We recognize from the above, and confess as a Church, in accordance with the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the Biblical relation between Church and State. This is commonly known as the Establishment

Principle and requires the recognition of two independent governments in Church and State which are both to rule in their own province by the Law of God. The State, with the sword, is to administer justice, and the Church, with the keys of the kingdom, is to administer ecclesiastical government and discipline. Neither is to encroach upon the independent jurisdiction of the other, but they are to rule with an interdependence, and God requires the civil power to establish the true religion (Isa. 49:23). Nations are to obey God, laws are to be righteous according to the commandments of God, and magistrates are to kiss the Son in submission and obedience to Him (Psalm 2:10-12).

A symbolic illustration of this, and something therefore desirable, would be to have both the seat of civil and ecclesiastical rule in the capital city of a given country. There are also potential benefits to this as the Church in her General Assembly could raise a local prophetic voice to the civil power and the civil ruler would have ease of access to the Church in her General Assembly. However, while this may be desirable and illustrative of a theological principle, it is not the principle itself and could in no way be considered binding upon the Church as a requirement.

4. Church History

It is of interest to observe the practice of the Church as she grew and developed from the first century in relation to her gathering in ecclesiastical Councils and Assemblies. Doing so, we will note the interaction between Church and State powers in the calling of Synods and Councils consistent with the principle of religious establishment. At the same time, we discover that the location of the Church's synods was not tied to the seat of centralized civil power. The Early Church Councils were held in a variety of places – Nicea 325 AD & 787 AD, Constantinople 381 AD, 553 AD, 680 AD, Ephesus 431 AD, and Chalcedon 451 AD. While many of these were either in or near to the seat of power in the Eastern Empire, they were not held exclusively in the seat of this civil power.

In addition to these Early Ecumenical Councils, others were held in the Western Church. Many of these were held in Rome, e.g. the Lateran Councils, but the Church also met in Lyons and Vienne in France, Constance in Germany, and Basle in Switzerland.

We see the same practice of variety in Synod and Assembly location in the history of the Reformed Church. An example of this would be the Synod of Dordt, which did not meet in the seat of Dutch civil power. Also, in Scotland the General Assembly met in a variety of places such as Montrose 1599, Aberdeen 1605, and Glasgow 1638. While the location of the General Assembly in later centuries came to be consistently in Edinburgh, it was not always the case. Furthermore, other conservative denominations in Scotland which hold firmly to the Establishment Principle have recognized this, such as the Free Presbyterian Church, who have historically varied the location of their Synod between Glasgow, Inverness and elsewhere.

5. Practical Considerations

While the Church may have a preference as to where to meet in General Assembly, she is not bound to meet in any one place. This opens an approach to the issue that will take account of practical considerations and allow a more pragmatic decision. Our Church has two predominant options for the location of her Assembly; either Edinburgh or Glasgow. For the purposes of comparison, the Committee, in consultation with brethren in Edinburgh, have considered Ferniehill Evangelical Church to be a suitable venue along with our own Partick Congregation's buildings in Glasgow. The cost to the Church for hiring Ferniehill in Edinburgh for 2026 was not discussed, but it is believed that it would be a modest fee, or, perhaps, a donation, as was the case with Liberton Kirk.

It should be noted that regular relocation is not practical for the Assembly Clerks' Department and should be avoided if at all possible.

What follows is an attempt to weigh these practical issues to provide assistance in the choice.

1. Edinburgh

a) Advantages

- Edinburgh is the capital city of Scotland where the seat of civil power is located, and where, for previous centuries, the General Assembly has predominantly met.
- It has the advantage of symbolically illustrating the principle of religious establishment.
- It has the advantage of making it easier for visiting delegates who also attend the Assemblies of other Churches which meet in Assembly in Edinburgh.

b) Disadvantages

- At a time of financial challenges, Ferniehill Evangelical Church, or another venue in Edinburgh, comes at a cost to the Church.
- The number of people in Edinburgh to assist with the set up and practical management of the General Assembly has reduced over the years and a considerable strain will be placed on the minister and available members.

2. Glasgow

a) Advantages

- Glasgow has historically hosted the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and to meet there would be in line with historical precedents.
- Glasgow has the advantage of having three congregations of the Free Church (Continuing). Consequently, there are many more people in Glasgow to assist and share with the set up and practical management of the Assembly, compared to Edinburgh.
- Partick has a suitable building which served the needs of the Assembly well in 2023 and 2024.
- The use of this building does not come at an extra cost to the Church.

b) Disadvantages

- The Assembly meeting in Glasgow would make it more difficult for delegates from other Churches to attend both our own Assembly and any others they need to attend that are meeting concurrently in Edinburgh.
- Parking around our church building in Partick, whilst adequate in 2023 and 2024, would appear to be more difficult than at Ferniehill or another facility that may be rented in Edinburgh.

3. Equalities

- Catering costs and accommodation costs for Commissioners are likely to be similar.
- Space additional to the area where the Assembly proceedings will take place is similar at both venues.
- Both venues are of similar size.
- Public transport provision is broadly similar.

6. Conclusion

The Committee, having duly considered the pros and cons of each venue, and especially the arguments on principles, conclude that the Partick buildings in Glasgow will serve the Church best for the time being as a venue for the General Assembly. However, the Committee, being conscious of the desirability that the General Assembly be held in Edinburgh, will recommend that the option of Edinburgh should remain open if circumstances change. The recommendation will be that the venue be reassessed every five years. This maintains a degree of stability for the Assembly Clerks' Department and ensures that the entire membership of the Committee has changed since the last assessment.

(C) NOMINATIONS

The Committee, having duly considered the returns from Presbyteries in regard to the filling of impending vacancies in Committees, agreed to recommend the lists of Committees and Clerks to the General Assembly as in the proposed deliverance. A note of other Special Committees for which nominations have not been sought is added for convenience.

CALUM MACLEOD, *Convener*
GAVIN BEERS, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

(A)

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report (A) Assembly Arrangements of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee and thank the Committee, especially the Convener and the Assembly Clerks' Department;

2. The General Assembly thank Mr Murdo Murray for his continued willingness to assist in helping in the preparation and printing of papers for Committees and the General Assembly;

3. The General Assembly are grateful to Mrs Isobel Ann Macleod, Assembly Office Manager, for her assistance during the General Assembly;

4. The General Assembly thank the Minister and Congregation of Partick, Glasgow, for kindly affording the use of their buildings for the Assembly, and other friends in the Southern Presbytery for their assistance;

5. The General Assembly thank Mr Alan Blaney, Assembly Officer, and his assistants, for making their services available to the Assembly;

6. The General Assembly welcome the practical arrangements made both for the Assembly itself and the Moderator's reception;

7. The General Assembly approve of the arrangements made for the public broadcasting of the Assembly;

8. The General Assembly thank all those who contribute to the efficient functioning of the various Committees of Assembly, especially the respective Committee Conveners and Clerks;

9. The General Assembly note the acquisition of new Assembly banners;

10. The General Assembly note with interest the ongoing review of the Memoranda on Procedure of the various Committees;

11. The General Assembly thank the Deacons' Court of Inverness, Free Greyfriars, for the use of their Westhill building for the meetings of Standing Committees of Assembly;

12. The General Assembly note the 25th anniversary of the sad events of 2000, express thanks to the Almighty for His gracious provision over these years and seek His grace to serve Him humbly and faithfully in the coming years;

13. The General Assembly note the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed of 325 AD which clarified and asserted for the Church the true Scriptural doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and give thanks for that rich heritage of truth handed down to us from those who have gone before.

(B)

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report (B) General Assembly Location of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee and thank the Committee, especially the Convener;

2. The General Assembly appoint the General Assembly of 2026 to meet within Partick Free Church (Continuing), Glasgow;

3. The General Assembly, desirous that the General Assembly be held in Edinburgh but conscious of the present practical difficulties, principally the lack of manpower, further appoint the General Assembly to meet in Glasgow for the foreseeable future;

4. The General Assembly, desirous that the General Assembly be held in Edinburgh, reassess the location of the General Assembly every fifth year, with the next reassessment to be brought to the General Assembly in May 2030.

(C)

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report (C) Nominations of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee and thank the Committee, especially the Convener and Clerk;

2. The General Assembly appoint Standing and other Committees and Clerks to these Committees in accordance with the following lists:

3. The General Assembly appoint Standing and other Committees and Clerks to these Committees in accordance with the following lists:

GROUP 1
FINANCE & SUSTENTATION
LEGAL ADVICE &
PROPERTY

Ministers	*Elders*
Mr Thomas J. Buchanan, *Convener*,	Mr David W. Norris, *Vice-convener*,
Legal Advice & Property Committee [3]	Legal Advice & Property Committee [4]
Mr James I. Gracie, *Convener*,	Mr Gordon Furzer, *Vice-convener*,
Finance & Sustentation Committee [2]	Finance & Sustentation Committee [4]
Mr Raymond A. Kemp [1]	Mr Donald Buchanan [3]

The General Treasurer is *ex officio* an Adviser to the Finance & Sustentation Committee
The Principal Clerk is *ex officio* an Adviser to the Legal Advice & Property Committee
A General Trustee member is *ex officio* an Adviser to the Finance & Sustentation Committee

GROUP 2
PUBLIC QUESTIONS, RELIGION & MORALS
PUBLICATIONS
TRAINING OF THE MINISTRY & ADMISSIONS

Ministers
Mr Calum Smith, *Convener*, Publications Committee [4]
Mr Iain Smith, *Vice-convener*, Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee [3]
Mr E. Trevor Kirkland, *Convener*, Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee, and *Vice-convener*, Publications Committee [3]
Mr Jorge Ruiz Ortiz [3]
Mr David M. Blunt, *Convener*, Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee, and *Vice-convener*, Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee [2]
Mr Brent C. Evans [2]

Elders
Mr Charles M. Greenewald [4]
Mr George MacMillan [4]
Mr John Campbell (Snizort), [2]
Mr Duncan MacSween [2]
Mr Alan Wilson [1]

The Editor of the *Free Church Witness* is *ex officio* an Adviser to the Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee
The Magazine Editors are *ex officio* Advisers to the Publications Committee
The Principal of the Seminary is *ex officio* an Adviser to the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee

GROUP 3
WELFARE OF YOUTH & EDUCATION
HOME & FOREIGN MISSIONS
ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS & NOMINATIONS
ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

Ministers
Mr A. James MacInnes, *Convener*, Home & Foreign Missions Committee, and *Vice-convener*, Ecumenical Relations Committee [4]
Mr Robert McCurley, *Vice-convener*, Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee [4]
Mr Murdo A.N. Macleod, *Convener*, Ecumenical Relations Committee, and *Vice-convener*, Home & Foreign Missions Committee [3]
Mr Hugues Pierre [3]
Mr David S. Fraser, *Convener*, Welfare of Youth & Education Committee [1]

Elders
Mr Alasdair Nicolson, *Vice-convener*, Welfare of Youth & Education Committee [4]
Mr Norman Smith [4]
Mr John Campbell (Shettleston), [3]
Mr Randall Taylor [2]
Mr Calum Macleod, *Convener*, Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee [1]

The Editor of *The Explorer* is *ex officio* an Adviser to the Welfare of Youth & Education Committee
The Assistant Clerk of Assembly, the Moderator of the immediately preceding Assembly and the Moderator of the last-but-one Assembly are *ex officio* Advisers to the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON PSALMODY

Ministers
Mr James I. Gracie, *Vice-convener* [2]
Mr Calum Smith, *Convener* [1]

Elders
Mr Charles M. Greenewald [4]
Mr Iain A.C. MacPherson [4]
Mr Donald Martin [1]

CLERKS TO COMMITTEES

Mr Murdo Murray, *Clerk*, Finance & Sustentation Committee
Mr Murdo Murray, *Clerk*, Legal Advice & Property Committee
Rev. Calum Smith, *Clerk*, Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee
Mr Donald Macleod, *Clerk*, Publications Committee
Rev. Andrew R. Allan, *Clerk*, Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee
Mrs Isobel A. Macleod, *Clerk*, Welfare of Youth & Education Committee
Rev. Stuart Farmes, *Clerk*, Home & Foreign Missions Committee
Rev. Andrew R. Allan, *Clerk*, Psalmody Committee
Assistant Clerk, *Clerk*, Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee
Principal Clerk, *Clerk*, Ecumenical Relations Committee
Mr John N. Gillies, *Clerk*, General Trustees

Other Committees have been appointed by the General Assembly as follows:

GENERAL TRUSTEES

Dr Andrew Naylor (Outer Hebrides Presbytery), *Chairman*
Mr Lindsay MacCallum (Northern Presbytery), *Vice-chairman*
Mr Murdo MacDonald (Northern Presbytery)
Mr Thomas MacInnes (Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery)
Mr John N. Gillies (Southern Presbytery)

II.

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

Introduction

In heaven there will only be one Church. Though it is a "house of many mansions", there will be no divisions and no special rooms for different denominations. There is one Church of Jesus Christ, "purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). They are the elect of God, effectually called by the Father, washed in the blood of the Son and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. They are to be found in all denominations, sometimes in the most surprising of places. Every human denomination has defective beliefs and practices. Even the best of Churches have tares among the wheat.

Our Lord explained, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt.13:47-50) Essentially, the kingdom is the Church of Christ.

The situation in Scotland and abroad is one which we have inherited from our fathers. We can be fatalistic and do nothing about it. We can simply wring our hands and say it is beyond our powers to help in any way. Men are sinners and they spoil everything they do. Even born-again Christians come short of God's standard and therefore all they are involved in is defective. But there are certain duties laid upon us. As individuals we are to mortify the flesh and strive after holiness. Further, as Churches we are to be constantly reforming and seeking to return more and more to the ideal set before us in the Word.

Christ has emphasised His desire that the Church should be one. In His High Priestly prayer He said the following, "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:19-21). Christ prayed for Church unity and even used the Trinity as a model, adding, "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:22-23).

Unity is vitally important but it is not a unity which involves serious compromise and ignores truth and morality. No Church of Christ should tolerate immorality or heresy in its midst. There must be a separation from blatant wickedness, from serious error in doctrine, and from the Antichrist. Yet there must be a burden and concern to express the unity for which Christ prayed. It is a unity in righteousness and truth.

Different denominations arise as a result of controversies in the history of the Churches. After separation both bodies evolve and change. As sinners we have pride in our own Church, cover our own faults, having difficulty identifying them, and find it easy to see the faults in others. Small matters of interpretation or practice which would never have led to a division in a Church in the first place can keep two bodies from uniting.

So what can we do? We can certainly try to appreciate what is good in other Churches. We can recognise them as Christian Churches. We can encourage them in their mission to serve the Lord. We can show love and appreciation, pray for them and wish them God's blessing.

We are thankful to have fraternal or brotherly relations with other Churches here in Scotland and also abroad. This Committee seek to foster these relations with similar Churches. We sometimes have opportunities to help, to encourage, to support and even occasionally to challenge sister Churches to be more faithful.

Ecumenical Bodies

Affinity

Our denomination continues to have an active role in the work of Affinity with Rev. Timothy McGlynn representing the FC(C) on the Council of Affinity. The wish of some to consider the possibility of Affinity morphing into The Gospel Coalition UK (TGC-UK) caused a stir last year. It has become clear that such a transformation is unlikely to occur as the role of Affinity is very different to that of TGC. While many of the Council members of Affinity are likely to play some part in the facilitation and eventual formation of a TGC-UK, the bodies will remain distinct from one another.

The biennial Affinity Theological Conference took place in Northampton under the title *Great God of Wonders* with the subtitle, *The God who is and the God who acts*. The subjects and speakers were as follows: *The Power and Personhood of God* by Mostyn Roberts; *Faith and Reason: Reflections on Belief in God* by Robert Letham; *The God of Unchanging Glory: From Nicaea to Hegel and Back* by Dr Thomas Brand; *The Weaknesses of Christ: Their Theological and Pastoral Significance* by Dr Stephen Duby; and *Plurality and Pretence* by Michael McClenahan. The 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea and the defeat of the Arian heresy added a historical backdrop to the subject of the doctrine of God.

In an article by Rev. Stephen Steele of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland in the Winter 2024 issue (Issue 87) of Affinity's *Foundations* magazine, he names a senior FC(C) minister and a Presbytery (USA) of the denomination. Dr D.J. Maclean, the editor of the magazine, in his introduction to this edition of Foundations, writes:

> *Stephen Steele continues his examination of historical views on the original text of scripture. He previously argued (Foundations 85 Winter 2023) that leading theologians around the time of the Westminster Assembly were not committed to word for word identification of the Textus Receptus with the original manuscripts of scripture. Building on this, Steele now turns his attention to the founding fathers of the Free Church of Scotland. Again, he seeks to demonstrate that they, far from viewing the Textus Receptus as sacrosanct, argued for the superiority of alternative readings of the original text… Any alternative understandings of the Free Church Fathers, or indeed any scholarly response to Steele's first article, would be most welcome in Foundations. Foundations is an academic journal committed to dialogue within the range of views permitted by the Affinity basis of faith. As an academic journal, one of Foundations' roles is to provide an avenue for dialogue on areas of doctrine where Affinity members hold differing perspectives.*

This article has come to the attention of the Committee and it may be that some individual may wish to contribute to *Foundations* on the ongoing discussion.

International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) provides a useful forum for contacts with reformed Churches throughout the world. Being probably the most conservative of the Churches connected with the ICRC, the FC(C) is able is able to remind the constituent members of the ongoing relevance of many of the principles which underlie the Scottish Reformation and show their abiding relevance today. The Conference's magazine, *Lux Mundi*, is produced electronically on a biannual basis and the download link is circulated around the Church. This provides information on member Churches as well as information on the work of the Conference Committees. Through the Conference, its publications and email requests for prayer and diaconal support, the ICRC helps in building relationships with other reformed Churches. Knowing what is happening elsewhere can also highlight dangers which are to be

avoided. The next quadrennial meeting of the ICRC is scheduled for mid-October 2026, to be hosted by the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea. The Committee have agreed to send one delegate to this Conference, the Clerk to the Committee.

European Conference of Reformed Churches (EuCRC)

The EuCRC held its latest conference at Yarnfield Park, England, in September 2024 on the theme of preaching. Rev. Timothy McGlynn, who is on the organizing Committee of the Conference, was one of the four speakers, and his address on "Preaching Christ from all the Scriptures" was well received. He was accompanied by Rev. Graeme Craig. While the lectures were useful, the main benefit of the meeting was the interaction with delegates from other Churches. A useful meeting was held between the Church's delegates and the CGKN representatives which helped greatly in gaining an understanding of their situation. As well as encouragement being given to the CGKN delegates, practical advice on the basis of experiences from the events surrounding 2000 was also offered. In addition, contact was also made with other Churches the Committee had been seeking to contact. It was also encouraging to hear, amongst other things, of small reformed Churches in Turkey and Switzerland.

United Kingdom

Associated Presbyterian Churches

Ongoing contacts with the APC are largely at a personal level, with various ministers assisting with supply and invitations to attend the School in Theology. The APC no longer have an Assembly as their brethren in Canada recently joined the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada. Thus, they no longer have a meeting at which they receive delegates. Their Scottish Presbytery continues and it is expected that they will send a delegate to the Assembly this year.

Church of England (Continuing)

Although from a somewhat different background to the FC(C), the Church has maintained links with the CoE(C) since 2000. Indeed, they were the first Church to send support and a delegate after the division of 2000. Rev. Philip Lievesley was well received last year and he is expected to return again this year.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England & Wales

Last year's delegate from the EPCEW, Rev. Stephen Dancer, who sadly passed away at the beginning of 2025, informed the Assembly of the difficulties they had been experiencing over the last few years. Several Congregations have left the EPCEW and this has continued into 2025. It appears that the issues are more to do with personality and Church order than theology. In particular, it appears that those who have left the EPCEW have embraced a form of Presbyterianism which sees the local Congregation and Session, as opposed to the Presbytery, as the radical Court of the Church. Given the weakness of Presbyterianism in England, this development is a cause of sadness to the Committee. The Committee had hoped to be able to send a delegate to their 2025 Presbytery meeting, but in the event this hope was not fulfilled.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland

Rev. Trevor Kirkland represented the Church at a Presbytery meeting of the EPCI in 2024. As well as contacts at the School in Theology, a delegate is expected to attend this year's Assembly.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

While links with the RPCI are maintained, these are mainly through the exchange of delegates. Contacts are also fostered through the School in Theology, preaching and personal interactions.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland

Apart from the exchange of delegates, there have been no formal or informal contacts between the Church and the RPCS in the last year. However, the Convener represented the Church at a recent RPCS Presbytery meeting.

Dutch Churches

Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland

When the CGKN Synod in 2022 reaffirmed their rejection of women in office in the Church, the event, rather than dealing with the question, became an occasion for those in favour of women office-bearers taking things into their own hands and ordaining women as Elders. Within a short time around 40 of the 181 Churches in the CGKN had rebelled against the Synod finding. This precipitated a crisis, as there seemed to be no clear way of dealing with the problem within the CGKN system of government, especially when whole Classes could not be relied on to act. (This is not helped by the fact that Dutch Reformed Churches view themselves as federations of Churches with the Congregation being the radical Court and the Classis a broader, though not superior Court!) It would appear that the roots of the difficulties are to be found in the adoption by some of a false hermeneutic which seeks to reinterpret Scripture in the light of contemporary culture. This has led to the embracing of the idea of women office-bearers and even the approval of homosexuality (including the opening of membership, office and blessings to homosexuals) by other Dutch Churches, such as the NGK, the denomination to which the former Liberated Churches belong. The fact that some CGKN jointly worship with NGK Churches appears to only have helped the spread of the poison of false hermeneutics and unscriptural practices.

The 2024 CGKN Synod, which began meeting in November and has had three sessions of meetings to date, has been unable to resolve the crisis. Initially there was a proposal to "ring fence" the rebellious Congregations in their own Classes, which would not be allowed to send delegates to their Synod, but this was withdrawn. All appeals against the 2022 Synod ruling were decisively rejected at the Synod meeting in January, as were the pleas of those advocating women in office to wait until a study on hermeneutics was published. At the same meeting all the overseas delegates spoke firmly of the need to maintain Biblical principles and deal with the problem. Rev. Graeme Craig, representing the FC(C), gave a brief history lesson on the devastating effects of liberalism in Scotland due to the loss of the authority of Scripture and warned the Synod that unless the matter was dealt with, the Netherlands would soon become a spiritual wasteland as Scotland is today. His remarks were well received and were an encouragement to many of the conservative brethren within the CGKN.

When the Synod met at the end of March there was a proposal to separate into two groups, which would enable the conservative Churches to have no responsibility for the actions of the others. This was not to be a formal split but two groups under one umbrella with various shared interests. Although this proposal gained around 62% support in the Synod, it was not enough to change the Constitution of the CGKN. In the event, the Synod agreed to close the meeting "conditionally" and that it would only open again under certain conditions, including "that the deviated Churches must indicate in large numbers that they will return within the framework of synodal decisions taken". At the time of writing it appears to many that a split is inevitable. It is unclear if the Synod will meet again in June or what is to happen.

Whilst a division in the Lord's cause never appears helpful, the brethren in the CGKN have been reminded that if a split does occur, those adhering to Scripture and seeking to faithfully uphold constitutional Synod decisions will not be the ones to blame. It is to be hoped that those who advocate the biblical position of the rejection of women in office may be enabled to stand firm and that the witness of the CGKN to biblical truth may be maintained.

The Committee, especially through their Clerk, maintain a watchful brief on the situation and encourage the brethren to remember the CGKN in prayer.

Gereformeerde Kerken (GK)

The Gereformeerde Kerken (Hersteld) in the Nertherlands (DGKN) or The Reformed Churches (Restored) in the Netherlands united with the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) on the 4th October 2024 to form the Gereformeerde Kerken (Reformed Churches). Both of the uniting Churches had their origin in the

Liberated Churches but separated from them due to modernising influences within it. The united body, which has a membership of around 3000 souls uses a Bible translation based on the Masoretic Text and the Textus Receptus and mainly Psalms are used in sung praise. The DGKN have appreciated contact with the Committee, most recently at the EuCRC meeting in September 2024, and a proposal was expected to come before the Synod in October to maintain contact with the FC(C). It is hoped that opportunities will arise for more discussion in the future and that this will lead to the formalising of relations between our respective Churches. The GKN were admitted to the ICRC in 2022.

Gereformeerde Gemeenten (GG)

Following personal contacts with ministers of the GG, and then a letter from the Committee seeking to establish a relationship with the GG, the Convener and Clerk of the Committee had a useful meeting with two representatives of the GG in December 2024. The wide-ranging discussion allowed opportunity for a better understanding of the respective positions, challenges and encouragements that both Churches face. The GG are a conservative, confessional denomination holding to the three Forms of Unity with around 110,000 baptised and confessing members. In some of their Congregations there can be a reluctance among many of the people to partake of the Lord's Supper and lack of assurance can also be a big problem. In many ways, parallels can be seen with the situation in parts of the Highlands of Scotland 100 years ago, but, whereas in the Highlands there was always a clear Christ-centred and gospel-offer emphasis in the preaching week by week, this does not always appear to be the case in some Congregations of the GG. They have a shortage of Ministers with around 60 ministers in Charges. Around 60 Congregations are vacant. In public worship they sing only Psalms and use the Dutch equivalent of the AV, the Statenvertaling. The GG Committee are due to report to their Synod in September 2025 on the matter of a relationship with the FC(C) and the Committee await the outcome of their discussions.

Hersteld Hervormde Kerk (HHK)

The HHK or Restored Reformed Church is a large Dutch Church, which has 118 Congregations and around 60,000 members. It is a conservative, confessional denomination, which emerged when the Dutch Reformed Church merged with the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The HHK was formed over issues concerning the Confession and ethics. After some difficulties in maintaining contact with the HHK, the Committee were pleased to hear of contact between representatives of the FC(C) and the HHK at the recent EuCRC meeting. Subsequently, the Committee were informed that the HHK are in the process of making decisions regarding international contacts and a response to the FC(C) approach will be given in due course.

Other European Churches

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central & Eastern Europe

The Committee made first contact with the RPCCEE in 2023 after their admission to the ICRC and informal contacts at the 2022 ICRC meeting. They were also present at the EuCRC meeting in September 2024. Although no firm progress has been made, it is expected that there will be more openings for contacts in the coming year which may lead to a close relationship with this confessional Church based in Hungary, Romania and Ukraine, who adhere to the Westminster Confession of Faith but also to the Heidelberg Confession and Second Helvetic Confession for historical reasons.

North American Churches

Canadian Reformed Churches (CRC)

The CanRef, a daughter Church of the GKN(v), was instrumental in the ICRC's attempts to call their mother Church back to a Scriptural position regarding women in office in the Church. For this they are to be commended. There has been little contact with the CRC over the last year, but this does not mean that such relationships are unimportant. A delegate was present from the CRC at the 2023 General Assembly. It had been hoped that it might have been possible to send a delegate to the CanRef Synod which was due to be held in British Columbia in May, had there been someone supplying Nobleford, Alberta, who was available, but sadly this was not the case.

Free Reformed Churches of North America

The Assembly welcomed a delegate from the FRCNA in 2023. Most contacts with the FRCNA are maintained through the Presbytery of the USA who occasionally have men from the FRCNA preaching within their Congregations. They are like-minded in outlook and practice to our own Church. The Committee were saddened to hear of the recent passing of Mr Connor Keuning who often represented the FRCNA at the Assembly.

Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)

The HRC are very similar to the FRCNA, though they come from a different background within the Dutch Churches. There is close co-operation between them, including the holding of Synods in the same place and at the same time. In 2023 they were represented at the General Assembly.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

The Committee are concerned to maintain close connections with the OPC and intend to send Mr Randall Taylor, St Louis, as a delegate to their Assembly in June 2025. Like many of the American Presbyterian churches, they subscribe to the system of doctrine of the Confession as opposed to the whole doctrine of the Confession. This leads to an unhelpful theological and practical breadth amongst office-bearers. In recent years a number of issues have caused concern, and having delegates at their Assembly who can observe proceedings, as well as encourage a more consistent doctrinal and conservative position, is helpful. The Committee relies heavily on those members who are based in the USA for understanding the situation in North America generally and with individual denominations in particular.

Presbyterian Reformed Church (USA)

The PRC, begun as an indigenous American Church, had its roots in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. They appear to have a similar constitutional basis to our own Church, having the same views on worship and the Civil magistrate as the FC(C), both of which are uncommon in North America. Over the last year there has been more contact, with the Principal Clerk attending the PRC Presbytery meeting in Stockton last May. In addition, a Zoom meeting between the Ecumenical Relations Committees of both Churches proved useful. It is also expected that Rev. Romesh Prakashpalan will attend this year's PRC Presbytery in New Jersey, USA. Such contacts help to strengthen the bonds of fellowship and may eventually lead to closer ties.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)

The RPCNA has become two Churches, with their Canadian brethren forming the RPCC. The Committee have had no formal links with the RPCC, and over the past year have had little contact with the RPCNA, except on a personal basis. They do, however, value their links with the RPCNA and their commitment to exclusive Psalmody.

United Reformed Churches of North America

It had been hoped to send a delegate to the URCNA Synod meeting in California in June 2024, but logistics meant that this was not possible. Meanwhile, contacts continue on a personal basis.

Australian Churches

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

The PCEA has its roots in the response of colonial Presbyterians in Australia to the events of the Disruption of 1843. Thus, the PCEA is the only Church to have what is essentially an almost identical background and constitution to the Free Church. The General Assembly enacted the Federal Relations Act with the PCEA in 1952, and this Act *inter alia* provides mutual eligibility of Ministers and allows the Churches to send and receive corresponding Members to their respective highest Courts.

The presence of Rev. Robin Tso as a Corresponding Commissioner at last year's Assembly, together with a number of retired FC(C) ministers supplying St. George's, Sydney, shows that bonds between the FC(C)

and the PCEA have been strengthened. Indeed, earlier this year, the Principal of the Seminary had a useful meeting with the PCEA's Training of the Ministry Committee who were interested in investigating how the FC(C) Seminary could possibly assist them in the training of their divinity students. At the time of writing the outcome of this meeting is unknown, but the fact that such an enquiry should be made is to be welcomed as a token that the PCEA is now following a more conservative trajectory than it has done for some time.

The PCEA have been affected in recent years by an increasing number of vacancies and a lack of men training for the Ministry. At present, five of their eleven Congregations are vacant. This should be a matter of concern and prayer. Thankfully, on a more positive note, it appears that with the changes in outlook and personnel within the PCEA, the divisions which had arisen amongst the more conservative Presbyterians are now beginning to heal. It is the prayer of the Committee that this would continue to the strengthening of the Church in Australia.

Australian Free Church

Rev. John Nelson of the Australian Free Church has been a frequent visitor to the Assembly over the past 25 years. The AFC is a small Church which arose following a dispute in the PCEA, and the Committee are thankful to note that there appears to be significant progress in restoring fellowship between these Churches. The Committee's hope and prayer is that the Lord may open the way for them to come together.

Southern Presbyterian Church

The Southern Presbyterian Church, based in Tasmania, is very similar to the FC(C). Indeed, this small denomination currently has two former FC(C) Ministers engaged in ministry in that Church. The Committee are pleased to note that relations with the PCEA are strengthening, and they look forward to further developments. Given the small size of this Church and the geographical distance, it is difficult to maintain relations except on a personal level.

African Churches

Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Africa (GKSA)

Over the years the Church has maintained contact with the GKSA. Although some time ago their Synod resisted the temptation to follow modern culture as opposed to Scripture, and open the office of Minister or Elder in the GKSA to women, it appears that the same spirit of rebellion which has been evident in the CGKN has also manifested itself in the GKSA. This is causing problems and the Committee received a communication from the GKSA asking how such problems would be tackled amongst ourselves. Given that the GKSA form of Church government follows the Dutch Reformed as opposed to the Scottish Presbyterian model, it is difficult for the Committee to give any meaningful procedural advice. However, the Committee believe that, as was done with the CGKN in 2023, the Assembly should write to the GKSA Synod warning them of the error of allowing women in office as contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture, pointing out the danger of tolerating such practices, and the hermeneutic underlying it, and calling them to faithfully adhere to Biblical practice and discipline. Such a letter is included in the proposed Deliverance. In addition, the Committee believe that someone should be sent to the next GKSA Synod due to be held in early 2026 so that due representation can be made and the more conservative element in the GKSA encouraged to maintain a faithful stand against error.

Other Churches

Over the years the Committee have maintained contact with a variety of churches, including the Maranatha Bible Presbyterian Church, Singapore, and the Pilgrim Covenant Church, Singapore. There is little to report other than that contacts continue on a personal basis.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations and thank the Committee, and especially the Convener and the Clerk;

2. The General Assembly thank Rev. Timothy McGlynn for his ongoing work on the Council of Affinity;

3. The General Assembly note that the next meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches is due to take place in South Korea in October 2026 and approve the sending of one delegate to the Conference, namely, Rev. Graeme Craig, Clerk to the Committee;

4. The General Assembly thank Rev. Timothy McGlynn and Rev. Graeme Craig for attending the recent meeting of the European Conference of Reformed Churches and note that the meeting provided a useful forum for meeting with brethren from other Churches;

5. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts with the Associated Presbyterian Churches;

6. The General Assembly, being grateful for the ongoing relationship with the Church of England (Continuing) and their support since 2000, look forward to welcoming a representative from them at the Assembly;

7. The General Assembly learn with concern of the recent difficulties within the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England & Wales and note that these appear to surround issues of personality and Church order as opposed to doctrine; nevertheless they grieve with their brethren in the EPCEW over the weakening of the cause of confessional Presbyterianism south of the border, encourage them to maintain a robust Presbyterianism with the Presbytery as the radical Court of the Church, as that which follows the outworking of the principles of Church government in Scripture, and is, therefore, best designed by the King and Head of the Church for her security and welfare, and assure them of the Church's prayerful concern for them in their current situation;

8. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland;

9. The General Assembly note their ongoing relationship with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland;

10. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland;

11. The General Assembly note with concern the report that the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland continue to struggle to deal with the problem of responding to the fact that in over 20% of their Congregations there has been the ordination of women to office contrary to the decision of the 2022 CGKN Synod. While thankful that the recent Synod decisively rejected all appeals against this decision, and that it was indicated that there was a need to return to adherence to Synod decisions, the General Assembly remain concerned that, thus far, proposals to deal with the matter appear to seek to maintain a semblance of unity in the face of defiance of the Synod and do not clearly indicate to those involved that where there is such open defiance of lawful decisions by the Synod, the embracing of a false and dangerous hermeneutic and open rejection of clear scriptural teaching, those who maintain such things cannot remain a part of the Federation. The General Assembly call all their brethren in the CGKN to reject the aforementioned errors and encourage all those who are seeking to maintain a testimony to Biblical principles and faithful hermeneutics within the CGKN to maintain their testimony to truth whatever the price, as that which is most glorifying to God and for the welfare of the Lord's cause in the Netherlands;

12. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts made between the Committee and the Gereformeerde Kerken and look forward to links between them and the Church being strengthened;

13. The General Assembly note the contacts made with the Gereformeerde Gemeenten and await their response with interest;

14. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts made between the Committee and the Hersteld Hervormde Kerk (HHK), and look forward to links with them being strengthened;

15. The General Assembly encourage the Committee to pursue the formalising of a relationship with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central & Eastern Europe;

16. The General Assembly note the relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches and regret that this year they were unable to send a delegate to their Synod;

17. The General Assembly appreciate the ongoing contacts with the Free Reformed Churches in North America and pray the Lord will bless their labours for Him;

18. The General Assembly are grateful for the ongoing contacts with the Heritage Reformed Congregations and pray God's blessing on their work and witness;

19. The General Assembly note the ongoing relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and commend the Committee for seeking to have a representative present at their Assembly so that the Church might be a positive influence on them;

20. The General Assembly note that there have been ongoing contacts with the Presbyterian Reformed Church (USA) and pray that these may lead to a closer bond of fellowship in the future;

21. The General Assembly note that the RPCNA has established a separate sister Church in Canada, and are thankful for their commitment to exclusive psalmody in the Public Worship of God;

22. The General Assembly value the ongoing relationship with the United Reformed Churches of North America;

23. The General Assembly are thankful for their relationship with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and, noting the manpower difficulties they are facing, pray that the Lord of the Harvest would raise up for them labourers for the work of the Ministry;

24. The General Assembly are encouraged to note that there has been a strengthening of bonds between the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and both the Australian Free Church and the Southern Presbyterian Church, and pray that this may continue further in coming years;

25. The General Assembly, noting with concern the developments in the Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika with a number of Churches ordaining women to office as Elders, resolve to send a delegate to their next Synod meeting due to be held in 2026; furthermore, they resolve out of brotherly concern to write to the Synod in the following terms:

> The General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) express their appreciation of the relationship they have had with the Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika over many years. They are concerned to learn of the difficulties being confronted by the GKSA in that a number of Congregations have ordained women as Elders contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture and as affirmed by decisions of Synod. They urge the Synod to remain firm in their adherence to the Biblical teaching that while women were created equal to men as being made in the image

of God, Genesis 1:27, and are equally saved by grace through Christ, Galatians 3:28, yet this equality does not imply an identity in everything, but rather, both in nature and in the Church, there are differing roles, and that while the role of women in the Church is to be valued and respected, that the offices in the Church are not open to women, 1 Timothy 2:9-15; 1 Corinthians11:1ff; 14:34. They warn that the adoption or tolerance of any false hermeneutic which would seek to set aside the instructions of Scripture and fit in with the spirit of the age is not only offensive to the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Prophet and King and Head of the Church, but will sooner or later lead to the adoption or toleration of other sins and, ultimately, the loss of the Gospel itself.

The Assembly know all too well the difficulties and pain that standing for truth and righteousness can bring, and that it may bring with it the spectre of division. However, the Assembly respectfully remind the GKSA that the key to true unity is to maintain unity in the truth and to deal with those whose departure from the truth is the following of a divisive course. Without this there is no real unity and it can only lead to further departures from the truth in other areas, for "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

The General Assembly assure the GKSA of their continued prayers for them in these difficulties;

26. The General Assembly thank the Committee for maintaining contact with a variety of Churches and for the important work of expressing the catholicity of the visible Church and being an encourager of like-minded Churches throughout the world.

III.

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS

1. Introduction

The Committee are of the opinion that they have achieved very little by way of tangible results. This is not due to any lack of commitment or endeavour by those on the Committee but arises from other sources.

Some of the material the Committee deals with is so detailed and requires such great care in producing that it cannot be rushed. But this is not the only problem. It is not uncommon for the Committee to have to function with almost half its membership absent – this for a variety of legitimate reasons. But even when work is progressed it can take a considerable time before it is brought to completion. Why should this be so when our Committee is made up of diligent and hard-working members? The main reason is that the burden is falling on men who are already stretched to the limit. Committees are trying to function as though they were representing a large denomination whilst operating within a Committee structure that has failed to take cognisance of the depleted number of ministers and elders available. The remedy does not lie within the remit of this Committee, but something has to be done so that men are not continuing to be burdened in such a way that they become weary in well-doing or that their primary work as Gospel preachers is detrimentally affected.

The Committee would like to express their deep gratitude to the previous and present Clerks to the Committee, Rev. David M. Blunt and Mr Donald Macleod. They would also like to thank those men who have produced booklets and books for publication. They also note the kind offer of prayer from the American brethren and would value the prayers of the Church for this Committee.

2. Magazines

The oversight of the Church's magazines is one of the Committee's main responsibilities, and invariably the production and distribution of the magazines take up more than half of the Committee's annual expenditure. The magazines reflect the position of our Church, in its doctrine, worship, discipline and government, and are aimed principally at our people, yet we are thankful that they also reach Christians belonging to other Churches. During the past year, a new edition of the *Good News* magazine was published.

2.1 Editors

The Committee are grateful to Rev. David M. Blunt, Editor, and Rev. James Clark, Rev. Trevor Kirkland and Rev. A. James MacInnes, as Assistant Editors of the *Free Church Witness*, for their diligent labours in preparing edifying and stimulating material for the readership each month. Having been reappointed in 2021 their four-year term has now come to an end.

The Committee are recommending to the Assembly that Rev. David M. Blunt be reappointed as editor of the *Witness* for a further four-year term. Further, the Committee inquired of Rev. James Clark and Rev. Trevor Kirkland as to their willingness to continue in their current role as assistant editors. Assured that they are, they have reappointed them for a further four-year term. We encourage the people of our Church to remember these men in their prayers, that the Lord would guide them and enable them in their work.

In September, Rev. A. James MacInnes informed the Committee of his intention to resign as an Assistant Editor of the *Witness*. The Committee have not as yet been able to appoint a replacement and encourage the Church to pray that the Lord will give guidance.

2.2 Production

The Committee continue to be indebted to Donald Smith Graphic Design for the design and layout of both

magazines and the helpful way in which Mr Smith collaborates with the editors. Printing of the magazines remains with HelloPrint.

The Committee will continue to obtain quotes periodically from alternative graphic designers and printers, to ensure that these significant costs are kept as low as is possible while still allowing for a reasonable level of service. The Committee apologise to Congregations and individual subscribers for the late arrival of the magazines on a number of occasions during the past year. These delays are generally due to factors beyond the Committee's control.

The Committee are thankful to all who have contributed material to the magazines during the past year, whether in response to requests from the editors and assistant editors or as news items. The Committee have noted requests made at the General Assembly and by members of the Committee for there to be a greater variety of contributors to the *Witness*. The Editor does encourage the Assistant Editors to approach all ministers for articles as appropriate, but often their requests bear little fruit. The magazine, and we believe the Church, benefit from the different gifts and graces that individuals possess, even in their writing. Therefore, if individuals are asked to write an article, the Committee request that they seek to do so, producing the article according to the word count suggested and the deadline set.

The Committee remain grateful to Miss Anne MacAulay, who prepares the Puzzles Page in *The Explorer* magazine each month and marks the entries sent in by the children. The Committee were grieved to learn of the passing of a family member during the year necessitating her stepping down from the work for a period of time. The Committee were delighted that Mrs Naomi Blaney was willing to step in to assist and trust that she enjoyed the Lord's blessing while engaged in this work. The Committee were heartened that Miss MacAulay was able to return in due course and we trust that she will continue to know the Lord's blessing in her work.

The editors of both magazines rely upon the grammatical skills of the proofreaders each month, and often benefit from their comments and the advice they give when there is occasion to do so. The Committee express their continued indebtedness to the proofreaders: (*Witness*) Rev. Raymond Kemp, Mr Donald Macleod, Mrs Marion Macleod, Mrs Isobel Scott; (*Explorer*) Mrs Maryanne Gillies, Miss Sandra Mackay, Mrs Joan Nicolson.

The Committee are grateful to Mr Derek W. MacLean for his willingness to make the material in the Church magazines available in audio form for the benefit of the visually impaired, as and when this service may be requested.

2.3 Circulation

Most magazine subscriptions fall due at the beginning of the calendar year. Circulation figures for the *Witness* at mid-April 2025 (with equivalent figures for 2024) were:

Category	**2025**	**2024**	**Change**
Congregational Bulk Orders	357	390	-33
Individual Subscriptions	53	53	0
Individual Gift Subscriptions	18	16	2
Airmail Subscriptions	51	46	5
Predicted Total Subscriptions for Year	479	505	-26
Copies by sale or return	0	0	0
Copies sent free of charge	119	119	0
Predicted Total Circulation for Year	598	624	-26

Although the costs for the printing and distribution of the magazines increased again in 2024, the Committee did not increase subscription rates for 2025, there having been a 25% price increase as recently as 2021. It is, however, likely that subscription rates for 2026 will rise.

As well as once again encouraging Congregations to do what they can to maximise the uptake of the magazines locally, the Committee remind Congregations that free copies of the magazines may be obtained in addition to their regular orders for distribution beyond the Congregation. Congregations should let the Distributor know how many extra copies are required each month (contact details are found on the inside front cover of the *Witness*).

Congregations are reminded that *The Explorer* magazine is available free of charge for Sabbath schools to order with plenty of spare copies available each month.

During the past year, the problem of slow-paying Congregations was addressed resulting in all Congregations remitting their subscriptions by the end of October. This year, at the date of writing, all but three Congregations have paid in full, leaving a total of £840 outstanding. These outstanding sums will be followed up in due course. Congregations are reminded that congregational bulk order subscription payments are due by the end of February.

2.4 Content Review

During the past year the Committee received correspondence regarding the design and layout of the *Witness* magazine. The Committee made enquiries, received feedback and then compared the *Witness* with other comparable publications. The Committee considered the matter and came to the conclusion that the design and layout of the magazine should remain as it is. As regards content, the Editors are guided by the current magazine policy set by the Assembly. The Committee and the editors continue to welcome feedback on the magazine from subscribers and readers at any time.

2.5 Subscriptions and Distribution

The Committee continue to be grateful to Mrs Elizabeth Nicolson (Snizort) for the efficient way in which she carries out her work as Subscriptions Secretary, and the contact she maintains with readers of the magazines. The Committee received notice from Miss Katrina Mackay (Ayr) that she wishes to stand down as Magazine Distributor by the end of this year. The Committee thank Miss Mackay for her diligent work as Magazine Distributor and wish her God's blessing for the future. The Committee are seeking someone to take on these duties and would welcome a volunteer to do this. Ideally, this would be someone in the Inverness or surrounding area or in a hub, such as Glasgow. The Committee would encourage the Church to pray that a suitable replacement would come forward.

The Committee received a request from Pulpit Books in South Korea requesting permission to translate and republish articles from the *Witness* into Korean. The Committee welcome this interest and will look into this further. The Committee also received an inquiry from Cameroon regarding *The Explorer* from an Elder in Cameroon. The Committee welcome this interest and will evaluate this in due course. The Committee urge the Church to pray that these inquiries would lead to the blessing of souls overseas.

2.6 Good News Magazine

A new edition of the *Good News* magazine was published towards the end of 2024, despite some uncertainty over the likely demand. In the end, demand outstripped expectations and a total of 14,000 copies were ordered. The Committee encourage all our Congregations to consider making use of the *Good News* magazine as an evangelistic tool in their localities. The Committee would encourage the Church to pray that the distribution of these magazines will be blessed to those who receive them.

3. Publications

3.1 Booklets

Finding Out About Series

The various booklets in the *Finding Out About* series, the first of which was published in 2010, are at the following stages of development:

Title	Author	Status
The Five Points of Calvinism	Rev. John W. Keddie	Published (2010)
The Lord's Supper	Rev. John Morrison	Published (2011)
Baptism	Rev. John Macleod	Published (2015)
Worship	Rev. James Clark	Published (2015)
Presbyterianism	Rev. David M. Blunt	Published (2017)
Elders	Rev. John W. Keddie	Ready for Publication
Deacons	Rev. John W. Keddie	Ready for Publication
Church Membership	Rev. William Macleod	No further progress / Currently suspended.
Marriage	Rev. Graeme Craig	Ready for Publication
Funerals	Rev. James I. Gracie	Text finalised and to be made press ready
Scripture/The Bible	Rev. John Morrison	Text in preparation
The Sabbath/Lord's Day	Rev. Jonathan Mattull	Text in preparation
God's Covenant	Rev. Robert McCurley	Text in preparation

The booklets on *Elders, Deacons* and *Marriage* have been finalised and are now ready for publication. Prices for printing are being sought, and it is hoped that these titles will be published soon. Work on the other projected titles has been suspended at the Committee level, apart from the work on *Funerals*. The text of the *Funerals* booklet has now been finalised, and it will hopefully be published later this year. The Committee encourage the authors who are preparing other texts for consideration by the Committee to continue with their work.

3.2 Books

History of the Division of 2000

Unfortunately, little real progress has been made over the last year. Further proofreading is ongoing and, when complete, a foreword, preface, acknowledgements, glossary, bibliography and index(es) will be added. After all legal considerations have been satisfied, it will be ready for presentation to the General Assembly for publication. The Committee would remind the Church that this work is painstaking and attention to detail is paramount.

Subordinate Standards & Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland

This project goes back some years. The initial stage involved the digitising of the relevant documents. At their October 2021 meeting the Committee were informed that this work had been completed and that the files had been forwarded to Rev. John Keddie for proofreading and review. Mr Keddie presented a draft of the complete work in October 2022, having spent some 260 hours working on it. Work on compiling and checking the wording of the scripture proof texts for the Shorter and Larger Catechisms has been completed and it is hoped that work on the proof texts for the Confession will be completed shortly. Once the layout of the publication has been finalised there will need to be a careful proofreading of the whole content.

Principles, Beliefs and Practice of the FC(C)

Rev. Trevor Kirkland and Rev. Raymond Kemp are continuing to work on the text of this document, the purpose of which is to identify and explain the Church's principles, beliefs and practice, both for our own

people and those belonging to other denominations. There is nothing new to report on this project.

The British Embassy to the Holy See: A Reappraisal

Work on *The British Embassy to the Holy See* document has been ongoing for a number of years now. In one sense the subject is inexhaustible as there are always developments in the Roman Catholic Church and its worldwide diplomacy, both covert and overt. The Committee were conscious that work on this document was slow and decided to seek editorial help from outside the denomination. This work is ongoing.

3.3 Storage, Distribution and Retail of FC(C) Publications

Unfortunately, the retail of the Committee's publications via the Church website has been stalled by the lack of a payment platform. The Committee hope to rectify this as soon as practicable in order that online orders may commence. The Clerk is currently updating the relevant section of the website with the inventory held in Dores. This unfortunately takes time and is a painstaking process.

4. Website and Social Media

4.1 Website

The logins given to the Website Digital Content Editor (Rev. Andrew Allan) and the Clerk to the Committee (Mr Donald Macleod) have resulted in updates to the website appearing much quicker. Mr Sam Gerdt, however, remains the primary administrator of the website. The Committee is indebted to Mr Gerdt for his work on the website.

4.2 Social Media

In mid-April, the Church's Facebook page had 2,263 followers, compared with 2,010 at the beginning of April 2024. The Church's Twitter account had 1,157 followers in mid-April, compared with 1,058 at the beginning of April 2024. When new material, such as intimations and reports of Church events, is uploaded onto the Church's website, Facebook and Twitter are used to highlight it and provide a link to it.

The Committee thank Rev. David M. Blunt, Social Media Overseer; Mr Derek W. MacLean, Digital Content Editor (Facebook platform); and Mr Alastair Manderson, Digital Content Editor (Twitter platform) for their contributions to these platforms.

5. Spring Conference

Around sixty people gathered from all over the North of Scotland and beyond to attend the 2025 Spring Conference which took place on 18th April in Inverness, Greyfriars Free Church, Westhill - the same venue as the previous year.

The theme of the Conference was 'Faithfulness to God in a Changing World'. The speakers, Rev. Greg MacDonald and Rev. Murdo MacIver, presented lively and well-researched lectures under this theme to an appreciative audience. Both men stimulated their hearers to remain faithful to the Lord in an ever-changing world.

In between the lectures, Mr David Keddie, Duthil-Dores, led a Psalmody Class, and gave practical advice to improve Congregational singing.

The Committee thank all who helped with this year's Conference, and in particular the following: Mr Lindsay MacCallum, for his work as booking secretary; Mr Derek W. Maclean, for broadcasting and recording the addresses; Mrs Joan Nicolson and Mrs Ruth Keddie, for organising and running the children's programme and also providing the morning and afternoon refreshments. The Committee thank the Inverness Congregation's Deacons' Court for graciously granting the use of their building. The Committee also thank Rev. Andrew Allan for chairing the Conference and for producing this section of the Report for the General Assembly.

As usual, the Committee will review the Conference in depth at their June meeting, but initial indications are that the addresses were well received and led to profitable discussion. The addresses at the Conference were broadcast on Zoom, allowing people unable to be present at the venue to hear them live. The provision of a Zoom link is not meant to be a substitute for actual attendance at the Conference, however, as well as enjoying the benefit of partaking in its worship and fellowship. The Committee therefore continue to encourage ministers to promote attendance at the Conference by people in their congregations.

The Committee also thank the Clerk to the Committee, Mr Donald Macleod, for his input into the organisation of the Conference.

The addresses given at the 2025 Conference are available on the Westhill SermonAudio page in both audio and video format. It is expected that the audio recordings will be made available on the Church website in due course.

6. Publications Committee of Presbytery of the US

We are grateful to Rev. Jonathan Mattull (St. Louis) for the following Report on the work of the US Presbytery's Publications Committee during the past year:

Dear Brethren

Greetings to you, brothers. Thank you for remembering us before the throne of grace. We give thanks to the Lord for his help, and we pray that the Lord will uphold you as you seek to serve him. If we can be of service to you, please let us know.

By God's grace, we are presently developing a standard Spanish translation of *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*. There is one in current circulation, however we have received feedback that the translation is not as good as we would desire. With the number of Spanish speakers throughout the world as well as the door the Lord has opened to our Presbytery in Mexico, we have commissioned a translation into Spanish of this excellent work. Please pray that it would be used of God for the converting and edifying of souls.

The Lord provided help in producing *A Pastor's Memorial to His Former Flock* by John MacDonald of Calcutta. The sermons and addresses of this son of 'The Apostle of the North' provide sound, rich, and edifying meditations. We pray that it will be useful to promote the cause of Christ in the English-speaking world, and draw attention to the Reformed and experimental themes so precious to us.

There are a number of works that we continue to make progress on. The book by Rev. Gavin Beers is nearing completion. This book traces the history of the Second Reformation through the Revolution Settlement, including an assessment of the Reformed Presbyterian testimony.

We thank the Lord that *The Master's Trumpet* continues to be produced each quarter. The Lord has upheld and maintained us. He is good.

As always, we request your prayers that God would continue to provide and direct us in the publishing of edifying material for the promotion of his praise. We pray for you. If there are particular matters we can remember, please let us know.

With kindest regards

Jonathan Mattull

7. Annals of the Free Church of Scotland 1900-2000

Unfortunately, for various reasons, little progress has been made on this project. Discussions will nevertheless continue, and we would hope to be in a position to bring news of real progress to the next Assembly.

8. Media Officer

The Committee are thankful to Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod, the Church's Media Officer, for his work over the past year. They trust that he will continue to enjoy the Lord's help in performing this role, which he does alongside his many other duties.

HENRY J.T. WOODS, *Convener*
LINDSAY MACCALLUM, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Committee on Publications, and thank the Committee and especially the Convener, Vice-convener and Clerk;

2.1 The General Assembly thank Rev. David M. Blunt for his work as Editor of the *Free Church Witness*, together with Rev. James Clark, Rev. Trevor Kirkland and Rev. A. James MacInnes as Assistant Editors;

2.2 The General Assembly reappoint Rev David M. Blunt as Editor of the *Free Church Witness* for a further period of four years;

2.3 The General Assembly note that Rev. James Clark and Rev. Trevor Kirkland have been reappointed by the Committee as Assistant Editors of the *Free Church Witness* for a further period of four years;

2.4 The General Assembly note the resignation of Rev. A. James MacInnes as Assistant Editor of the *Free Church Witness* magazine and pray that the Committee will be able to appoint a suitable replacement soon;

2.5 The General Assembly thank Rev. A. James MacInnes for his work as Editor of *The Explorer* and pray that he will continue to know the Lord's help in this role;

2.6 The General Assembly thank Mr Donald Smith of Donald Smith Graphic Design for his work on the design and layout of the *Free Church Witness*, *The Explorer* and the *Good News* magazines;

2.7 The General Assembly thank all those who write articles for the Church's magazines;

2.8 The General Assembly thank Miss Anne MacAulay for her work in providing the Puzzle Page for *The Explorer*. They thank Mrs Naomi Blaney for stepping in to cover for Miss MacAulay;

2.9 The General Assembly thank the proofreaders of the magazines for their work;

2.10 The General Assembly note that subscriptions to the *Free Church Witness* continue to decline. They encourage the Committee and Congregations to do what they can to extend its readership and reach;

2.11 The General Assembly pray that the Lord will guide the Committee in their oversight of the content of the Church magazines;

2.12 The General Assembly thank Mrs Elizabeth Nicolson for her diligent work as Subscriptions Secretary for the magazines;

2.13 The General Assembly thank Miss Katrina Mackay for her diligent work as Magazine Distributor and pray that a suitable replacement will come forward to take over the role as Miss Mackay steps down;

2.14 The General Assembly welcome the new issue of the *Good News* magazine, and pray that the Lord will bless its distribution to the good of many souls;

2.15 The General Assembly welcome the interest shown in the magazines from overseas and pray that such interest would bear fruit to the Glory of God;

3.1 The General Assembly welcome the progress on various titles in the *Finding Out About* series and pray that their forthcoming publication will prove a blessing to many. They urge the Committee to bring the booklet on *Church Membership* to publication as soon as possible, and pray that the Lord will guide the Committee as they work towards that end;

3.2 The General Assembly note that progress on the final proofreading of the *History of the Division of 2000* has been slow. They urge the proofreaders to progress this work as quickly as possible;

3.3 The General Assembly note the slow progress made in the preparation for publication of the *Subordinate Standards & Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland*. They urge the Committee to bring this work to completion as soon as practicable;

3.4 The General Assembly note the ongoing preparation of a handbook on the *Principles, Beliefs and Practice of the FC(C)*;

3.5 The General Assembly note that further material has now been added to the document *The British Embassy to the Holy See: A Reappraisal*. They encourage the proofreaders in their work and urge the Committee to bring this work to a state of readiness for publication as speedily as possible. They pray that the editorial assistance necessary to progress the work will be found;

3.6 The General Assembly note the ongoing delay in getting the retail section of the Church's website up and running. They urge the Committee to bring this to fruition as quickly as possible;

3.7 The General Assembly are thankful that a number of Congregations, Courts and Committees of the Church are now making use of the new burning bush design approved by the 2022 General Assembly as the denominational emblem. They encourage remaining Congregations, Courts and Committees to do so where possible;

4.1 The General Assembly encourage the Committee to continue to develop the Church website to its full potential;

4.2 The General Assembly are grateful to Rev. David M. Blunt, Editorial Overseer, and Rev. Andrew R. Allan, Website Digital Content Editor, for their work on the website, and all who over the past year provided new content for it;

4.3 The General Assembly are pleased that the Church's Facebook page and Twitter account have both increased their following over the past year. They thank Rev. David M. Blunt, Social Media Overseer, Mr Derek W. MacLean, Digital Content Editor (Facebook platform), and Mr Alastair Manderson, Digital Content Editor (Twitter platform), for their work in maintaining an appropriate presence for the Church on social media;

5. The General Assembly note that the Spring Conference took place on 18th April. They thank Rev. Andrew Allan for chairing the Conference, Rev. Greg MacDonald and Rev. Murdo MacIver for their

addresses, and all who contributed to the organisation and running of the Conference. They pray that the Committee will be guided in their review of the Conference and that it will continue to be a spiritually profitable event for our people. They urge ministers to promote the Conference in their Congregations;

6. The General Assembly rejoice with the Publications Committee of the Presbytery of the United States of America to see their further projects come to fruition. They pray that the Lord will bless the Committee's worthy efforts to promote our Reformed and Presbyterian heritage;

7. The General Assembly note the slow progress from the Working Group on the Annals. Nevertheless, they are grateful to Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod for his efforts in this important work and trust that the Group will be directed by the Lord as they endeavour to carry this project forward;

8. The General Assembly thank Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod for his work as Media Officer.

IV

REPORT

OF THE

WELFARE OF YOUTH & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

1. Introduction

The welfare of our youth and their education continues to be a matter of immense importance to the current generation and those who shall follow. The need for greater effort and commitment is seen with every passing day. The pervasive influence of philosophical and practical ideals promoted by "Critical Theory" throughout society in general and the educational establishment in particular must not be ignored. However, what is needed is more than pious handwringing. We must institute a determined and disciplined effort to secure the welfare of future generations and their ability to think clearly and biblically despite the current adverse spiritual conditions faced by the Church.

2. Sabbath School Syllabus

Mr Donald Macleod, Point, continues to provide great help to the work of the Church by printing, collating and posting out the updated Sabbath School Workbooks to Congregations.

3. Sabbath School Exams

Sabbath School teachers and pupils diligently maintained Bible Classes and Sabbath Schools throughout the 2024-25 Session and are to be warmly commended for their faithfulness. The exams attracted thirty entrants in all. The split of participants was sixteen from Grade 2 (Junior), and fourteen from the Bible Class Grade. The Bible Class Prize was jointly shared by Katie Bell & Hannah Keddie (both from the Duthil-Dores Congregation) and the Grade 2 Prize Winner was Marybeth MacDonald (Stornoway). A full list appears as an Appendix to this Report.

The Committee commend all who entered the exam and congratulate the Prize Winners. The winners receive a plaque and a book. The Committee, as always, are most grateful to those who give of their time to prepare, print and distribute the examination papers, and those who mark them.

4. Maurine Murchison Memorial Prize

The memorising of Scripture portions and books of the Bible (depending on the Grades) by young people in the Church is both a personal blessing and of societal benefit. The expanded number of grades set for memorisation by the young people appears to be popular with those taking part. A child can only complete each grade once but may complete a grade outside their age bracket if they have not completed it before.

Grade One (Pre-school) - John 3 v 16 - 18

Grade Two (Pre-school) - Isaiah 40 v 30 -31

Grade Three (P1) - Psalm 23

Grade Four (P2) - The Books of the New Testament & Psalm 100

Grade Five (P3) - Psalm 121 & Hebrews 11 v 4 - 6

Grade Six (P4) - Psalm 103 & 1 John 1

Grade Seven (P5) - Isaiah 53 & Psalm 133

Grade Eight (P6) - The Books of the Old Testament & Psalm 84

Grade Nine (P7) - Matthew 5 v 1 - 13 & Psalm 67

Grade Ten (S1) - Psalm 24 & Ephesians 6 v 10 -18

Grade Eleven (S2) - Ephesians 1 verses 1-12 & Psalm 46

The past year saw five children complete Grade 3, seven complete Grade 4, four complete Grade 5, one complete Grade 6, two complete Grade 8 and one complete Grade 10. Amongst these achievements it should be noted that several boys and girls completed two or more Grades in the year.

5. Shorter Catechism Diploma Scheme

This year saw one child complete the Bronze award (1-38), two complete the Silver award (39-81) and one complete the Gold award (82-107).

6. Camps 2024

The 2024 camp at Badaguish, led by Rev. Greg MacDonald and Rev. Thomas Buchanan, went well and was deemed a great success by all those involved. One senior camper broke a collarbone during cycling, but he was able to remain at camp for the week. However, we must continue to pray for the safety of campers and leaders as they participate in a variety of outdoor activities during the camps. Talks focused on "The Sabbath" for the Senior group, and the Juniors considered the "Reasons why Christ came".

The 2025 camp will again return to Badaguish. This year it has been decided to book four lodges, to allow for more campers. These camps are a great encouragement to young people and their families and have allowed friendships to form which last long after the young people attend the camps. The number of bookings is encouraging, with campers for the senior group currently outnumbering the junior group. There is a great team of leaders planned for the year ahead, with a mix of new and experienced people participating in the camp. There are several new campers expected this year, which is most encouraging.

7. Youth Conferences 2024-25

The Committee commend the young people for their role in organising the Conferences on their own, which has undoubtedly helped to make these events as popular as they have been amongst the target age group. The Youth Conference at the Windmill Centre in Arbroath for young people aged 16-25 returned, due to increased demand for these events amongst the young people. A desire for two events each year seems clear at this time, and the intention is to facilitate this in the years ahead by ensuring that funds are secured and available to allow for early booking of venues. Sadly, due to booking issues, Arbroath is not available in 2025.

The gathering at Ratagan Youth Hostel, Glenshiel, continues to be popular, attracting strong support despite what might be seen by some as its somewhat remote location. In March, twenty-five young folk gathered to hear Rev. Graeme Craig give a series of talks on Creation and Evolution. This venue has been booked to provide a second Conference this year, due to the Windmill Centre in Arbroath being unavailable.

8. Education

The pressing need for a return to a genuinely Christian education system is becoming more and more apparent with every passing year. While we remain grateful to Christian teachers within the state system for their tireless efforts to provide a positive school experience for their pupils, the so-called "Progressive Agenda" of the current Scottish Government is increasingly open in its opposition to Biblical principles and beliefs. The Committee has sought to provide modest grants to Christian home-schooling families and to several faithful Christian schools known to them. However, the need now is for a focused effort to support and expand the work of Christian education.

The Promotion of Christian Schools in Scotland.

1. The need for denominational commitment to supporting Christian schools throughout the land.

We have, in a measure, sought to do this on a limited and occasional basis, supporting schools as and when we have felt able. However, if we are to get behind this important work then we must take time to look at a

more regular pattern of giving by the denomination. Undoubtedly, the most desirable way ahead would be to provide denominational schools throughout the land. However, we are clearly not of a size to be able to do such a thing at this time, though we remain open to such a scenario should the Lord change the situation to allow such a vision to be attainable.

Nevertheless, the fact that we have no likelihood of such a scenario becoming practicable in the near future does not mean that we should abandon all efforts to secure Reformed Christian education throughout Scotland. The alternative, which is readily available to us, is to give regular financial support to faithful Christian schools with a confessionally Reformed position, such as Providence Christian School (Stornoway) and the growing number of Melville Knox Schools, in Aberdeen, Glasgow (Parkhead and Kelvingrove), and Highland (Invergordon), by providing regular monthly payments to these schools.

Regular support of £300 per month to each school would provide much-needed support and enable the schools to budget with a little more security regarding their regular funding streams. In the short term this would support worthy efforts to provide Christian education across the land and also give a ready avenue for the denomination to be active in the area of Christian education.

2. Congregational efforts to support nearby Christian schools with smaller monthly amounts to add to the regular support from Central Funds.

This local support would help to make the sense of congregational interest both practical as well as prayerful. This would have the added advantage of fostering closer links between our local Congregations and their nearest Reformed Christian school.

Depending on the size and ability of the Congregation, an amount in the region of £50-£100 per month should be possible and would be greatly appreciated by such schools. In addition to this it would increase the visibility of such Christian schools in the eyes of Christian parents and thus promote participation in these schools by a rising generation of Free Church (Continuing) parents and their families.

3. Individual support of schools and also of sponsoring individual pupils to be able to attend Christian schools to aid both the schools and Christian families who might need such support.

The level of support would be something for individuals and couples to consider prayerfully and provide appropriately, as ability allows and opportunities arise.

While this return to the historical position of the Free Church is long overdue, it will no doubt seem radical or even unachievable to some. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that at the Disruption, when around 700 church buildings as well as over 400 manses had to be built, the Free Church built over 700 schools at the same time. This fact alone shows that our Free Church fathers did not view sustaining the ministry and providing Christian education as competing options to be set one against the other. Instead, we see clearly that those men considered these things as equally vital to the long-term spiritual welfare of the Church and nation. An initial sum of £300 per month per school might provide a suitable starting point. We commend the investigation of this essential change to Presbyteries, the Finance & Sustentation Committee, and other bodies interested in the spiritual future of Scotland. If a good number of our local Congregations, as well as committed individuals, made this a target for the years ahead, the good would be multiplied and the overall effect increased greatly.

9. Clerk

The Committee wish to record their deep thanks to their Clerk, Mrs Isobel A. Macleod, for her invaluable work on behalf of the Committee.

TIMOTHY J. MCGLYNN, *Convener*
MURDO A.N. MACLEOD, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Welfare of Youth & Education Committee and thank the Committee, especially the Convener and Vice-convener;

2. The General Assembly thank Mrs Isobel Ann Macleod for her work as Clerk of the Welfare & Youth Committee;

3. The General Assembly commend to the Church the Sabbath School and Bible Class workbooks;

4. The General Assembly thank those who so freely give of their time to teach in the Sabbath Schools throughout the Church;

5. The General Assembly record their thanks to those involved in preparing, setting and marking the annual Sabbath School and Bible Class examination papers;

6. The General Assembly commend the Maurine Murchison Memorial Prize and congratulate those who participated this year;

7. The General Assembly commend the Shorter Catechism Diploma Scheme and encourage Kirk Sessions and Sabbath School Superintendents to continue to promote it. They congratulate those who successfully participated in the Diploma Scheme this year;

8. The General Assembly thank all those involved in organising and running the annual Youth Camps at Badaguish and commend this work to the prayerful and practical support of the Church;

9. The General Assembly continue to encourage the Committee to do all it can to support Christian Education, whether in the home or in Christian schools;

10. The General Assembly commend all Christian Educators, whether involved in Christian schools, State schools or Christian home-schooling, to the prayers of the Church;

11. The General Assembly instruct the Finance & Sustentation Committee to investigate the viability of supporting confessional (*Westminster Confession of Faith*) Christian Schools on a monthly basis, and report to the General Assembly in 2026;

12. The General Assembly commend the work of confessional Christian schools to our Congregations and encourage them to make such schools a matter of regular prayerful and practical support, with a view to God's long-term blessing upon the schools and our society;

13. The General Assembly commend to members and adherents the vital work of supporting confessional Christian education in the land of Scotland and encourage those able to support schools and pupils to consider how they may best ensure such benefits for the rising generations;

14. The General Assembly thank Mr Donald Macleod, (Point) for his efforts in printing and posting the Children's Workbooks and Teachers' notes and commend him to the prayerful support of the Church;

15. The General Assembly encourage the Committee in their efforts to establish an annual Youth Conference and commend such efforts to the prayerful support of the wider Church.

APPENDIX

Sabbath School and Bible Class Examinations 2024-2025

The following is a list of all who took part in the examinations and the prize winners:

Bible Class Grade

14 took part in the examination (previous year — 14)

Joint Prizewinners:	Katie Bell, Hannah Keddie
Cross	Owen MacDonald, Kenneth Iain Macleod, Alastair Macleod Morrison
Duthil-Dores	Lois Brooks, Hannah Keddie, Katie Bell, Joanna Brooks, Calvin Nicolson, Annabell Nicolson
Lochalsh & Strath	Seumas MacInnes
Stornoway	George Kenneth MacDonald, Peter MacDonald, Joel MacKenzie
Tarbat	Duncan-John Macleod

Sabbath School Grade 2

16 took part in the examination (previous year — 19)

Prizewinner	Mary Beth MacDonald
Cross	Bethany Macleod
Duthil-Dores	Jack Bell, Abigail Keddie, Alick Donald Nicolson
Inverness Greyfriars	Amelia Maclean
Lochalsh & Strath	Catherine MacInnes
Stornoway	Mary Beth MacDonald, Jack Alan Macleod, Grace Macleod, David Gillies, Talitha MacKenzie
Tarbat	Eilidh Macleod, Lachlan Macleod, Lily Grace Macleod, Ellie Joy Mackay, Charles Keir Mackay

Maurine Murchison Memorial Prize

12 took part (previous year — 20)

Grade 3	Ballyclare & Doagh	Bethany Blaney
	Lochalsh & Strath	Seumas MacInnes
	Snizort	Peigi Beth Stewart, Maisie Macdonald, John Macleod
Grade 4	Ballyclare & Doagh	Benjamin Blaney, Bethany Blaney
	Lochalsh & Strath	Catherine MacInnes, Coinneach MacInnes, Seumas MacInnes
	Partick	Micah Alan Mackay, Elis Eira Mackay
Grade 5	Ballyclare & Doagh	Abigail Blaney, Benjamin Blaney
	Duthil-Dores	Beth Bell
	Lochalsh & Strath	Coinneach MacInnes
Grade 6	Ballyclare & Doagh	Abigail Blaney

Grade 8	Lochalsh & Strath	Catherine MacInnes, Coinneach MacInnes
Grade 10	Lochalsh & Strath	Seumas MacInnes

Catechism Diploma

4 took part (previous year — 39)

Gold:	82-107	Atlanta	Geneva Evans
Silver:	39-81	Atlanta	Cordelia Evans
		Ballyclare & Doagh	Abigail Blaney
Bronze:	1-38	Atlanta	Eleanor Evans

IV

REPORT

OF THE

FINANCE & SUSTENTATION COMMITTEE

1. Introduction

Once again, the Committee have reason to be thankful to the Lord and our faithful people for the temporal blessings our denomination has experienced over the last year. Such goodness is not deserved, and one wonders, when the Lord continues to encourage us in at least being able to financially sustain a Gospel ministry in so many places where there would be no such ministry without us, whether the Lord has a blessing for us yet in our beloved Scotland. However, it is also encouraging that we can help in so many other lands outwith Scotland.

The Committee reminds all Standing and Special Committees of Assembly of the role of the Finance & Sustentation Committee, in that they are not Assembly Executives able to make ultimate decisions on financial matters. Like every Committee of Assembly, they are bound to work within the framework of the decisions of the General Assembly itself. Thus, the Committee can only release funds to support projects already approved by the General Assembly. This ensures a secure and transparent financial process with accountability. The Committee can fund any aspect of a project, for example, any expenditure deemed necessary by the relevant Committee to run the project. However, the project itself must have prior approval by the General Assembly. Except in exceptional circumstances, the Committee will not release funds to any Committee unless it can be shown that the General Assembly has, at least tacitly, approved the expenditure.

2. Actual Results versus Budget

Despite the budget for 2024 projecting a surplus of just £6,987, we are thankful to the Lord that a surplus of £102,587 was reported for the year (compared with a surplus of £121,092 [before revaluations of fixed assets] in 2023).

The substantial variation from the projected deficit in 2024 was because of a variety of factors including:

- Total income exceeding the prudent budget by £41,385;
- Donations to the Central Building Fund were £6,774 more than had been anticipated;
- The Special Committee on Psalmody had budgeted £9,000 for a reprint of the Psalter but only incurred costs of £1,876;
- Legal fees of £5,000 had been set aside for work which has not been undertaken;
- Expenditure of £5,000 had been set aside for remedial work at Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness, but was not incurred;
- Grants of £15,865 were paid out to congregations in the year, which had not been expected;
- Due to the resignation of the Home Mission Worker during the year, the costs associated with his salary, NIC and pension were £5,149 less than budgeted;
- A net profit of £3,371 had been set aside for the *Good News* magazine and another FC(C) publication which was not incurred;
- Due to the personnel changes associated with the financial administrator's role during the year, salary, NIC and pension costs were £3,571 more than had been budgeted for;
- The total expenditure on stipends, NIC and pensions was £11,313 less than had been anticipated;
- Due to unexpectedly higher interest rates than at the time of the preparation of the budget, interest received was £13,269 more than had been budgeted.

3. Income

As can be seen from page 12 of the accounts, total income for 2024 was £851,374 (2023: £798,068). The breakdown of that figure is analysed across pages 20-21 of the accounts, where Congregational Remittances are reported as £701,231 (2023: £684,950).

Two legacies totalling £51,421 were received in 2024 (2023: £10,000 specifically for foreign missions work). £1,000 was specifically for foreign missions; the other £50,421 was returned to the local Congregation. The Committee would draw the attention of the Church to the leaflet, *Remembering the Church in your Will*, which should be available in each Congregation.

Once again, the figures are very encouraging. Despite an ageing demographic in both pulpit and pew, Congregational Remittances have remained remarkably stable these last five years.

A detailed analysis of the Congregational Remittances since 2015 brings to light a maybe unexpected encouragement and reason for thankfulness to our most high God.

Year	Total Income	Congregational Remittances	Donations	Legacies	Other
	£	£	£	£	£
2015	742,009	620,107	112,576	0	9,326
2016	878,566	657,819	215,601	1,000	4,146
2017	786,131	644,529	140,068	0	1,534
2018	895,576	651,448	187,320	56,523	285
2019	976,582	655,607	196,691	121,837	2,447
2020	800,060	680,225	119,135	0	700
2021	792,919	689,493	79,378	0	24,048
2022	772,081	690,117	81,358	0	606
2023	759,926	684,950	50,559	10,000	14,417
2024	804,477	701,231	51,790	51,421	35.

It can be seen from the above table that Congregational Remittances appear to have been generally on an upward trend since at least 2015, until the small dip in 2023. The donations column shows a marked decline – but the majority of what makes up this figure are payments by Congregations with Stewardship mortgages. It might be looked upon as disappointing, that when mortgages have been paid off normal remittances have not increased, but it is probably better to look at this in a positive light and thank God for the way these Congregations were able not only to pay off their mortgages but also to continue to support the normal Congregational Remittances during those years. Jehovah-Jireh.

4. Gift Aid

Total Gift Aid tax reclaimed and credited centrally was £144,292 (2023: £147,345). It should be noted that this represents 20.68% (2023: 21.43%) of all Congregational Remittances. An additional £27,854 (2023: £24,884) was reclaimed in the year via Gift Aid but was returned to local Congregations.

It is important to maximise the claim made under Gift Aid, and the Committee would encourage the Church to promote this within each Congregation. The Deacons' Court should, on an annual basis, seek to remind those who have made Gift Aid claims within their Congregation to ensure they are still eligible to do so. This would be an ideal opportunity to encourage any amongst the Congregation not claiming Gift Aid on their contributions to do so.

The Committee are grateful to Congregational Treasurers for recording and submitting the necessary information to the Financial Administrator to claim Gift Aid.

5. Expenditure

As detailed on page 12 of the accounts, total expenditure for 2024 was £748,787 (2023: £676,976). A more detailed analysis of what makes up the majority of those costs can be found in note 7 on page 22 of the accounts.

In 2024 payroll costs were £481,874 (2023: £479,066) an increase of £2,808 (less than 1%) compared to 2023. It should be noted that compared to 2020, when payroll costs were £598,537, this represents a decrease of £116,663 – testimony to the fact that we no longer have a Resident Lay Agent or Home Mission Worker, and have six fewer ministers in receipt of stipend. Payroll costs represent 68.7% (2023: 69.9%) of Congregational Remittances. As payroll/stipend costs make up such a large proportion of expenditure, an analysis of this since 2015 is detailed, as following:

Year	Total Payroll Costs	Percentage of Ordinary Remittances	Percentage of Ordinary Expenditure	Stipend Level	Ministers	HMW-*RLA	Admin Staff
	£	%	%	£	No.	No.	No.
2015	561,137	90.5	80.0	19,500	21	2	2
2016	552,171	83.9	78.1	20,000	21	2	2
2017	538,379	83.5	76.8	20,000	20	2	2
2018	561,252	86.2	76.4	20,500	20	2	2
2019	584,513	89.2	76.6	20,500	22	2	2
2020	598,537	88.0	83.3	20,500	22	2	2
2021	571,268	82.9	79.1	21,000	21	2	2
2022	521,501	75.6	74.7	22,000	18	1	2
2023	479,066	69.9	74.3	22,000	16	1	2
2024	481,874	68.7	66.2	23.500	16	0	2

*Resident Lay Agent – Retired 2021; Home Mission Worker – Resigned 2024.

The above table clearly identifies that:

- after reaching in 2019 the highest number of serving ministers (22) since 2000, in 2023 and 2024 we are now at our lowest level ever. Aside from 2007 when there were 18 serving ministers, and 2011 where we had 19, the denomination has generally had between 20 and 21 serving ministers;
- this year, the total payroll costs represent 66.2% of ordinary expenditure. Prior to that, it was between 74.3% – 83.3% (ignoring the outliers on both extremes, it narrows down to 74.7% – 80.0%);
- as the payroll has gone down over the past few years, total payroll costs have dropped from being 89.2% of remittances in 2019 (22 ministers, 26 total staff) down to 68.7% of remittances in 2024 (16 ministers, 18 total staff).

Based on the current stipend of £23,500, the total cost of a minister, including Employers National Insurance and pension contributions, has now risen to £29,095, due to the large, expected hike in employers NIC from April 2025. It is evident therefore that following on from the depleted ministry which we have, there has been a substantial reduction in payroll costs these past two years.

6. Support of Mission Work

The denomination continues to support the work of the Gospel, both within Scotland and in relation to its various missionary endeavours furth of Scotland. Over the past year a sum totalling £83,273 (2023: £92,782) was given, as follows:

	2024	**2023**
	£	£
International Mission to Jewish People (CWI)	1,000	1,000
Zambia	996	996
Sri Lanka	28,348	22,101
Spain	565	0
Spanish Student Support	8,350	7,750
France	5,775	1,000
Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon	10,136	15,536
Home Mission	23,928	28,605
Gospel Fund	0	10,093
Committee Expenses	4,175	5,701

7. Net Assets

At the end of 2024, the total net assets of the denomination amounted to £1,560,896 (2023: £1,458,309) – an increase of £102,587 (2023: £246,725) or 7.03%.

The breakdown of this figure is seen in page 13 of the accounts and in the corresponding supporting notes (11, 12, 13 and 14) to the financial statements.

The funds which make up this £1,560,896 are detailed in note 16 (on page 27 of the accounts). It can be seen from that note that £58,417 represent restricted funds, £771,341 are designated funds and £731,138 are unrestricted general funds.

8. Loans

As reported at the General Assembly in 2023, the two remaining Stewardship loans (totalling £98,428) were paid off in full by the denomination on 15 February 2023. These two loans were taken in-house on an interest free basis on more favourable terms. At the time, based on the rates in place then, it was calculated this would save the Congregations (and ultimately the denomination) at least £17,000 in interest over the lifetime of the loans.

The Committee commend both Congregations involved for their servicing of these in-house loans. Whilst one of these Congregations has maintained their ordinary monthly remittances, the other, due to financial constraints, had to suspend their remittance contribution to Central Funds.

As well as those two loans, there are another six (2023: five) congregational loans currently in place. A total of £240,063 (2023: £256,198) was owed to the denomination in respect of these loans at 31 December 2024.

9. Properties

As reported to last year's General Assembly, the denominational property at 85 Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness, was undergoing some necessary improvement works which necessitated an application to Highland Council for a building warrant. This application has not, at the time of writing, been submitted to Highland Council.

10. Budgetary Planning

The Committee are grateful to Clerks and Conveners of Standing and Special Committees of Assembly for the timely submissions of their 2026 Draft Budgets. The Committee, having approved all the Draft Budgets, noted the projected deficit of £48,032 and recommend that the 2026 Draft Budget (Ref: page 40 of the *Annual Financial Report and Supporting Documents*) be approved by the General Assembly. As is customary, there will be an opportunity at the General Assembly for Conveners of Standing and Special Committees to be questioned regarding specific details of their respective Committee Budgets.

The Unclassified Budget includes provision for payroll costs for the 16 current ministers and 2.5 Students.

The Committee express their thanks to Innes & Partners Ltd for the audit of the denomination's 2024 accounts and recommend to the General Assembly that they be reappointed as auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2025.

11. Annual Analysis of Congregational Accounts

The Committee thank the General Treasurer for his analysis of Congregational Accounts and Statistical Schedules (Ref: pages 41-45 of the *Annual Financial Report and Supporting Documents*). This detail is provided to help give a realistic 'snapshot' of the current situation, to encourage prayerful concern throughout the Church, and to assist in future planning.

12. Congregational Monthly Remittances

The Committee appreciate the commitment of Congregational Treasurers, each of whom, in addition to local responsibilities, liaises with the Financial Administrator at the beginning of each month.

The General Treasurer must forward updated Congregational Remittance figures for inclusion in the *Free Church Witness* magazine at the beginning of every month. Additionally, in January, the final figures for the whole of the previous year must be confirmed for submission to the Church's auditors. It is important that these figures from each Congregation are confirmed by the Congregational Treasurer, and any discrepancy brought to the attention of the Financial Administrator, as soon as practicable.

The Committee ask that Congregational Treasurers advise the Financial Administrator in advance of any period when they will not be available to confirm these figures.

13. General Treasurer's Department

Once again, we find ourselves deeply appreciative of the invaluable role played by the General Treasurer's Department. Our gratitude to our General Treasurer, Mr Murray Mackay, is almost a yearly tradition, but its significance only grows with time. His meticulous management of our financial resources, his diligent finalisation of the denominational accounts, and his effective collaboration with our accountants for their approval, underscore his crucial role in this area of the denomination's witness.

Similarly, the Committee are thankful for the diligent services of Mrs Donna Norris, Financial Administrator. When Mrs Muriel Smith resigned from the post, the Committee were left to find someone to fill her very capable boots. It was recognised that this would be no easy task. However, after advertising the post and conducting interviews, the Committee appointed Mrs Donna Norris as the new Financial Administrator. This appointment has proven to be very successful. Mrs Norris is diligent, always approachable, and willing to help and assist those seeking advice.

The Committee are thankful to the Lord for providing the personnel of the department with their individual skill sets to ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the Church's finances.

(B) SUSTENTATION

14. Stipend Review

Each year, the Committee has to review the ministerial stipend. The Committee, taking note of comments made on the floor of last year's General Assembly, appointed a 'Stipend Review Advisory Panel' (Panel), consisting of three General Trustees together with two retired ministers, to bring recommendations on the level of the ministerial stipend. The five members of the Panel were as follows: Rev. William Macleod (Rtd), Rev. Kenneth Macdonald (Rtd), along with Messrs. Andrew Naylor, John N. Gillies and Murdo MacDonald, *General Trustees*. The Committee thank these men for their valuable input in this matter.

The last increase in ministerial stipend was in July 2024. The Committee, taking into consideration the Panel's Report, are recommending that the ministerial stipend be increased to £25,000 as of 1 July, an increase of £1,500, with a *pro rata* salary increase for employees. The total payroll cost for each minister will be £31,000.

15. Congregations under Special Arrangements

The Committee commend the Congregations of Ayr, Ballyclare & Doagh, Harris, Knock & Point, North Uist & Grimsay, Poolewe & Aultbea, and Shettleston to the prayerful concern of the Church.

A summary of the Annual Reports received from these Congregations is appended to the Report.

The Special Arrangements' status of Kilmuir & Stenscholl and Poolewe & Aultbea have now lapsed, due to no Sustentation Fund Schedules being received by the Committee. The Committee commend these two Congregations to the prayers of the Church.

16. Sustentation Fund Schedules

Shettleston FC(C)

The Congregation of Shettleston is recommended for continuance on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with paragraph 19 of the Committee's Deliverance.

Proposed Linkage – Bracadale & Duirinish FC(C) and Kilmuir & Stenscholl FC(C)

The Committee received a Sustentation Fund Schedule application from the Free Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron which had in view a proposed linkage between the Congregations of Bracadale & Duirinish and Kilmuir & Stenscholl. The Committee considered the application on the basis that the General Assembly would receive the Petition and grant its crave for the consolidation of the two Congregations.

Conditional on the Assembly consolidating the two Congregations, the Committee have no objections to the application for acceptance onto the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, for the period of up to two years of vacancy, and thereafter for a period of 5 years from commencement of a settlement, subject to the Congregation promising to remit a minimum of 77% of Equal Dividend to Central Funds.

17. Supply Fees and Expenses

The Committee review Supply Fees and Expenses triennially. The next review will take place in 2026. The Committee refer ministers and Deacons' Courts to Act IV, 2023 for the current applicable rates.

Mileage and fuel rates allowance remain unchanged at 32 pence per mile.

18. Changes to Ministerial Personnel

Inductions

Rev. Romesh Prakashpalan	To the pastoral charge of Fredericksburg	8 November 2024

Translations

Rev. Murdo MacIver	from Poolewe & Aultbea, to Free Greyfriars	30 August 2024

Register & Rolls:

Probationers:

Joshua David Cochrane	Licensed by Presbytery of United States	11 November 2021

Register of Ministers without Charge — eligible for call — as at 1st March 2025

Rev. Stuart Farmes

Roll of Resigned Ministers

Rev. John J. Harding

Rev. Sherman Isbell

Rev. Bert Pohl

19. Pulpit Supply

With the increasing number of vacancies in the denomination, the task of pulpit supply is becoming more challenging. The Committee wish to express their appreciation for the collective effort undertaken by our retired ministers and elders and those outside the denomination, who have provided valuable pulpit supply throughout the Church over the past ecclesiastical year. Their service continues to make a significant impact on our Congregations, and we are truly indebted to them for being willing to give their time this way.

JAMES I. GRACIE, *Convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Finance & Sustentation Committee and thank the Committee, especially the Convener and Clerk, for their stewardship of the financial affairs of the Church during the past year;

2. The General Assembly acknowledge with thanksgiving the goodness of Almighty God in the provision for the financial needs of the Church during the past year;

3. The General Assembly exhort Congregations to remit, in a timeous manner each month, a minimum of 75% of ordinary income to Central Funds wherever possible, to ensure financial support for the Gospel ministry;

4. The General Assembly thank each individual and every Congregation for their sacrificial support of the Gospel ministry, missionary interests, and other activities of the denomination;

5. The General Assembly note the significant amount of income reclaimed through the Gift Aid Scheme and encourage each Congregation to promote the benefits of using the scheme wherever possible;

6. The General Assembly declare an Equal Dividend of £25,000 from 1st July 2025;

7. The General Assembly inform all Congregations that the total payroll cost from 1 July 2025 for each minister is £31,000;

8. The General Assembly thank the Stipend Review Advisory Panel for their supporting role to the Finance & Sustentation Committee;

9. The General Assembly endorse the recommendation of the Finance & Sustentation Committee that the Draft Budget for 2025 be approved with a projected deficit of £48,032;

10. The General Assembly remind all Standing and Special Committees of Assembly that the Finance & Sustentation Committee can only release funds in support of a project if that project has prior General Assembly approval, except in exceptional circumstances;

11. The General Assembly reappoint Innes & Partners Ltd, Chartered Certified Accountants, of 9 Ardross Street, Inverness, Scotland, IV3 5NN as Church Auditors for the year ending 31 December 2025, and thank them for the audit of the 2024 accounts;

12. The General Assembly thank Congregations and Presbyteries for the prompt submission of Statistical Schedules and attested Accounts to the General Treasurer;

13. The General Assembly thank Congregational Treasurers and Church Courts for managing financial affairs at a Congregational level. They draw the attention of all Congregational Treasurers to the importance of confirming, in a timeous manner, the accuracy of figures forwarded to them monthly by the Financial Administrator, with specific attention being given to the year-end 31st December figures;

14. The General Assembly are thankful to the Lord for the financial assistance given to those Congregations who are servicing denominational loans;

15. The General Assembly note the delay anent improvement works to the property at 85 Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness;

16. The General Assembly thank Mr Murray Mackay, General Treasurer, for his invaluable advice and management of the finances of the Church;

17. The General Assembly welcome Mrs Donna Norris to the post of Financial Administrator, and are thankful for her commitment to serve the Church in this capacity;

18. The General Assembly encourage a prayerful concern for all our Congregations and the challenges faced at a local level, especially those Congregations under Special Arrangements;

19. The General Assembly direct that the Congregation of Shettleston continue, for a period of up to two years of vacancy, on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, and thereafter for a period of 5 years from commencement of a settlement, subject to the Congregation promising to remit a minimum of 60% of Equal Dividend to Central Funds;

20. The General Assembly note the Committee's Report anent the possibility of a linkage between the Congregations of Bracadale & Duirinish and Kilmuir & Stenscholl and further note the Committee's recommendation that the proposed consolidated Congregations/Charge be placed on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, for the period of up to two years of vacancy, and thereafter for a period of 5 years

from commencement of a settlement, subject to the Congregation promising to remit a minimum of 77% of Equal Dividend to Central Funds;

21. The General Assembly direct ministers and Deacons' Courts/Finance Committees to Act IV, 2023 for the current applicable rates anent Supply Fees and Expenses;

22. The General Assembly express their appreciation to all who have assisted with pulpit supply over the past year and crave God's blessing upon their labours in the Gospel.

APPENDIX

Annual Report from Congregations on Special Arrangements

The following are summaries of the Reports submitted to the Finance & Sustentation Committee by the various Congregations for whom Special Arrangements were in place during 2023.

Ayr

While thankful for the renewal of Special Arrangements being granted to Ayr by the 2024 General Assembly, it is fair to say that 2024 was a more challenging time for the Congregation. The numbers connected with the Congregation or with whom the Congregation have a contact remained roughly the same, but the attendances suffered somewhat for a variety of reasons. Despite this, the finances improved somewhat, for which thanks are given. The witness continues and people in the surrounding area are aware of the Church's presence. What is needed, as elsewhere, is for the Lord to work in lives.

The number of communicants decreased by one, due to a member, having moved away, joining a Congregation near her new home. Attendances were reasonable for the first half of the year, but caring duties and ill-health affected a significant number of members in the second half. Thankfully, attendances have improved at the beginning of 2025, though they remain somewhat down. Currently they average around 21 in the morning, 14 in the evening and 12 at the Prayer Meeting. The relocation of two members in Arran to Ayr has been a help. Including the Minister, there are now around 30 souls connected with the Congregation, 15 members, 8 adherents and 6 children, from 15 households. This does not include contacts.

The Minister, together with two divinity students, spent a week doing door-to-door outreach which was beneficial to the students and the ongoing work in the area. Some useful contacts were made. The locality is needy but such needs open doors and often people are willing to listen. Around 1,100 copies of the *Good News* magazine were distributed last year, as well as 1,000 TBS Calendars in December. The Sabbath School and children's work continue. Other avenues are also being explored to make inroads into the community.

Financially, income increased by 8.6%. Remittances increased by £266 to £18,445 or 78.5% of the current Equal Dividend. It is hoped that this percentage can be maintained in 2025. The Deacons' Court are also looking to see how the building can be improved to make better use of the facilities available.

The Congregation value the financial and prayerful support of the wider Church. They look to the Lord to bless his word in coming days.

Ballyclare & Doagh

Congregational life continues, with services held on the Lord's Day at 11.30 am and 6.00 pm, a Thursday evening Prayer Meeting at 8 pm, and a number of fellowships designed to enable men to talk about specific spiritual matters.

The Congregation are thankful, not only for preservation, income and expenditures, but also for having the opportunity to continue to witness. They were delighted to see visitors throughout the past year and those who come regularly, Sabbath by Sabbath, are always appreciated.

The Congregation are ever thankful for their Elders and Deacons and pray the Lord will reward them for their work and add to their number.

As the Congregation looks at the past, they always have an eye to the year ahead. In anticipation, they have ordered some 500 copies of the *Good News* magazine for distribution. A regular door-to-door work has been carried out and will continue as the Lord enables.

The Congregation thanks the denomination for its continued support throughout the year.

Harris (Leverburgh)

The Congregation are thankful for a settled ministry over another year, as well as a most suitable place of worship following recent refurbishment. There has been a fall in the average number attending Sabbath morning and evening services, which is now around 11 and 9 respectively. It is however encouraging that three people from the local APC Congregation attend when they do not have supply themselves. Six members normally attend the Prayer Meeting. The Kirk Session would be encouraged by more consistent Church attendance, particularly amongst the adherents, and also that new people would come out to the services. Support from local Congregations at Communion seasons has been appreciated.

The Congregational website features recorded sermons, Gaelic psalm singing and devotional articles. There were around 4,500 visitors to the website last year, and almost 4,000 visits to the Soundcloud platform. Whilst one has to be cautious as to what to read into these figures, it is nevertheless encouraging that the witness of the Congregation appears to be appreciated by many people, both within our own nation, and from several countries overseas.

As with other Congregations, electricity bills have remained high, with a further small increase compared to the previous year. The Congregation are thankful for the ongoing availability of accommodation for the Minister; however, it has been necessary to carry out various minor works in the manse over the past year, with more major repairs expected soon. It has therefore been necessary for the Congregation to retain more funds for local expenses, but, despite this, remittances to Central Funds were down by only 1.6% – equating to 70% of ordinary remittances. Furthermore, the Congregation remitted £1,000 towards repayment of the loan received from the denomination.

The Congregation appreciate the support of the denomination through the provision of Special Arrangements and commend the work in South Harris to the wider church.

Knock & Point

The Knock & Point Congregation continues with a vacant pulpit. At a recent Congregational meeting, it was decided by unanimous vote of those present to await the licensing of a student.

Over the past year the Congregation has remained in good spirits. Appreciation has been expressed for visiting pulpit supply which has been drawn from a number of Church-wide Presbyteries. Rev. George MacAskill [APC, Rtd] has also helped out at regular intervals. The question of pulpit supply is a taxing one. During the last year some of the retired men from within the Presbytery experienced a considerable number of illnesses, adding to the problem of supply.

The Congregation is dependent on pulpit supply, despite it being taxing on their finances. It is prohibitive in terms of cost for the Congregation to take men from the mainland, except it be with a view to a call. Along with this, the Manse and Church property have considerable running costs.

Attendance is regular among members and adherents. The weekly prayer meeting sees all members present, other than one who is housebound. Sadly, the Congregation lost two of its members during the last year, which has seriously affected givings. However, there was also encouragement with a new male member with considerable precenting skills.

The monthly Manse fellowship is also well attended and allows for free debate and discussion. Services continue to be broadcast via Zoom and later uploaded to YouTube. Sadly, the Sabbath School is currently in abeyance. There are no children coming through for that situation to change any time soon. The lack of young families and young people is a cause for concern regarding the Congregation's future.

The Congregation are thankful to the Lord for His manifold blessings. The Congregation requires the prayerful support of the wider church and the understanding of the Finance & Sustentation Committee regarding the enormous cost of pulpit supply.

North Uist & Grimsay

The Congregation have one elder of their own and two General Assessors appointed by the Presbytery in 2016. They have no deacons. At the end of 2024 there were nine communicants, ten supporting adherents and fourteen households. One housebound communicant passed away during the year.

There are two Sabbath services (12.00 noon & 6.00pm) and a Prayer Meeting on Thursday (3.00pm). The usual two Communions were held during the year, in April and September.

Attendances at the services during 2024 were little changed compared to 2023. There were twelve regular attenders at the Sabbath noon service, eleven at the evening service, and seven at the Prayer Meeting.

In 2024, the Congregation's ordinary income was £24,478 (£23,882 in 2023), an increase of £596 or 2.5%. The remittance to Central Funds was £14,500 (£17,250 in 2023), a decrease of £2,750 or 16%. This figure represented 59% of net ordinary income (72% in 2023), a decrease of 13%. The decrease was due to a large sum owing to SSE for heating and lighting in the church building which the Congregation paid off during 2024.

In 2024, the Congregation remitted £2,600 to the Central Building Fund (£4,095 in 2023), a decrease of £1,495 or 37%.

The Congregation have a website with recorded sermons and both evangelistic and other articles. They welcomed a number of holiday visitors during 2024. They distribute free copies of the Church magazines to several people beyond the Congregation and to the local library, nursing home and surgery. The minister and elder conduct worship in the nursing home every sixth Sabbath afternoon.

There is no further news from the Congregation's solicitor regarding their application to have the title to the Paible church registered in the Land Register of Scotland.

The islands of North Uist, Grimsay and Berneray have a population of around 1,600. There are four Presbyterian denominations locally, plus a Community Church. The population is ageing, and where there are families there is little appreciation of the importance of nurturing the young in biblical truth.

May it please the Lord to hear the Congregation's prayers, speak to sinners of their need of salvation and revive His work in the midst of the years (Hab. 3:2).

Poolewe & Aultbea

The challenging climate of true spirituality in our land today continues to prove difficult for all congregations seeking to uphold a solid, faithful and biblical witness. The community of Poolewe & Aultbea is no exception to what has sadly become the norm in our beloved Scotland.

The Congregation have experienced a difficult year as they find themselves without a minister over them. The Congregation continue to be fragile and aged. The Communion Roll currently consists of four members, of which only two are active at the means of grace.

Overall attendance at the means of grace remains low, with five to eight attending services on the Lord's Day. There is currently only a mid-week service during a period of residential supply, and on a regular basis the two active members join online with other Congregations.

With the financial viability of the Congregation uncertain going forward, they would like to thank the

Finance & Sustentation Committee for their patience and understanding at this time.

With the continued discouragement in difficult times the Congregation remain thankful and prayerful. They continue to acknowledge the Lord's goodness in having wonderful facilities in the church building at Heatherlea, Aultbea. The Congregation are thankful that the door has remained open for the preaching of the gospel, even though supply is difficult for this remote Congregation. The Congregation would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have been willing to 'come over and help' with supply in recent times.

It is the ongoing prayer of the Congregation that things would soon change in God's will. The urgent prayer is that this Congregation's witness would be sustained, and the Lord's cause maintained through its presence in the community. We would ask the denomination to pray much for the Congregation in these difficult days.

Shettleston

Not much has changed in the Shettleston Congregation since the previous Assembly. There is a small but determined group of believers who continue to meet week by week. As we write, the mid-week meeting is still conducted by Zoom, but the Congregation has been encouraged by the Presbytery to recommence their mid- week prayer meeting in person shortly. By the time this Report appears before the Assembly it is anticipated that the meeting will have been in person for some weeks, having been conducted by one of our students who will have been undertaking a period of residential supply, and staying in the Manse along with his family,.

The Manse is now suitably furnished for supply to use, although currently most of the supply comes from the local area. The Congregation are extremely grateful to local ministers and preachers who undertake supply, and to the elders who step in on occasion.

The storm of 24th January caused substantial damage to the Manse chimney. Quotes are being sought to repair the damage, and it is anticipated that the bill will extend to five figures. Inevitably, the Congregation will be seeking help from the denomination to meet the cost of this repair.

Please continue to remember the office-bearers, members, and adherents, as they seek to maintain a reformed witness in the east end of Glasgow, and that they may be able to extend a Call to a minister shortly.

VI

REPORT

OF THE

LEGAL ADVICE & PROPERTY COMMITTEE

1. Introduction

The Legal Advice & Property Committee have again sought to fulfil their remit throughout the past year. Though acting with a reduced agenda compared to previous years, some of the items before the Committee are of great significance for the wider Church and so have required much care and attention to detail from the Committee. The Committee are both conscious of and thankful to the Lord for his continued upholding, both during and between meetings of the Committee. They rejoice that in this, as in all areas of our Christian profession, the Lord is both our King and Brother.

2. Review of Act XVI, 2023 — Act anent Safeguarding Policy

The Committee's 2024 Report to the General Assembly recognised the difficulties within the Safeguarding Policy in navigating the fine line between pastoral responsibilities for the flock and civic duty to report criminal activity.

Some concern being expressed on the Assembly floor over certain possible interpretations of the policy, combined with a desire to ensure that the independence of the Church is upheld, the Committee conducted a review of the existing Safeguarding Document in its entirety. Further, certain individual concerns raised within the Southern Presbytery, and passed on *simpliciter* by the Presbytery, were looked at with care. The Safeguarding Document has therefore had a careful review and update, but this is not to be understood as a fundamental rewrite. The Committee considered this unnecessary, due to the diligent work of the original preparers of the document, to whom thanks are due.

2.1 Changes to note – In order to best facilitate the particular adjustments made, the Committee highlight the following:

Preamble

With an added Preamble the Committee have highlighted the continued imperative for pastoral care and made clear that safeguarding is not, nor can be, a replacement for due pastoral care. Indeed, the preamble highlights the primacy of pastoral care as the first duty of elders and ministers in such contexts. Further, the preamble duly notes the limit of state power, and that no State has the right to criminalise biblically warranted behaviour.

Safeguarding Officer

The document has been updated to reflect the common practice that the Safeguarding Officer is usually the minister of the Congregation, though this is not a requirement of the policy.

Victim to complainant

A further change the Committee draw to the attention of the General Assembly is the adjustment in language where the word 'victim' has been replaced with 'complainant'. This is not to reduce the seriousness with which any complaints are taken, but it is to properly safeguard the rights of those being complained against, to ensure their presumption of innocence is not breached.

2.2 Implementation

As previously, the Committee are recommending that the Policy be disseminated to all portions of the Church within the bounds of Scottish Presbyteries. Presbyteries and works outwith Scotland may consider

the principles of this policy as they relate to the situation within their own bounds. In this regard, Section 14.1 of the policy highlights the expected implementation of the policy in all applicable contexts, and to this section courts and committees are referred. In particular, the Committee would ask the wider Church to note the requirement for an annual recording of compliance with the Policy.

The Committee remain thankful to Dr Andrew Naylor for his continued willingness to act as the National Safeguarding Co-ordinator.

The Committee recommend the repeal of Act XVI (Class II) 2023, Act anent Safeguarding Policy.

3. Registration of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land (RCI)

RCI is a register of landowners, managed on behalf of (governmental) Scottish Ministers, which commenced in April 2022. The majority of properties with titles held in the name of local trustees need to be registered on this database. Failure to register is an offence potentially incurring a penalty of £5,000. It is therefore the recommendation of the Committee that the General Assembly inform local Trustees of their responsibilities in this matter and advise them to appoint solicitors to carry out this registration if necessary. It is not anticipated that the cost is overly burdensome for Congregations to bear, with one recent example, known to the Committee, costing less than £100.

4. Trusts & Succession (Scotland) Act 2024

A 'Working Party on Trustees' was appointed in 2011 by the Legal Advice & Property Committee to consider the responsibilities and duties resting on Local Trustees in light of the then prevailing legislation, as a result of which, at the 2015 General Assembly, Act X — Act anent General Trustees, was enacted.

The Scottish Law Commission had published its recommendations in its *Report on Trust Law*, and this was reflected in the draft Trusts (Scotland) Bill in 2017. This draft Bill had not been given priority for debate by the Scottish Parliament to enable enactment. Therefore, the Committee agreed to monitor the situation but to place the matter in abeyance and dissolve the Working Party on Trustees until such a time as the new Bill was passed.

After some 20 years of proposals, deliberations, a report by the Scottish Law Commission and debate in the Scottish Parliament, the Trusts and Succession (Scotland) Act 2024 passed into law on 31 January 2024. Therefore the Committee revived the Working Party on Trustees.

The Act marks the biggest reform of Scottish trust law in over a century. In the event, the long-awaited passing of the Act has been something of an anticlimax, as no substantive new law actually came into force on 31 January.

The Act modernises the law on trusts and consists of two parts. Part 1 implements the extensive recommendations set out in the Scottish Law Commission's *Report on Trust Law.* Part 2 of the Act implements changes recommended by the Scottish Law Commission's *Report on Succession*. This has been the first review and overhaul of trust law in Scotland for over a century. Prior to this, the Trusts (Scotland) Act 1921 has been the governing piece of legislation on Scottish trust law.

Part 1 of the trust provisions has not yet been enacted, and these will require regulations from the Scottish ministers to bring them into force. The Scottish Government is yet to confirm when the majority of part 1 of the Act will be coming into force. Part 2 automatically came into force at the end of April of this year.

5. United Kingdom Visas for Overseas Ministers

The Committee gave close attention to the issue of UK Congregations being able to call an otherwise eligible minister, but not a UK citizen, furth of the United Kingdom. This would require interaction with United Kingdom Visas/Immigration and Border Agency legislation. In short, at present it seems entirely possible for Congregations to proceed with such a call, but there are significant hurdles to work through.

Acceptance with the Border Agency depends on various factors. The first is to satisfy the Agency that this appointment would not deprive any UK worker of employment. Given the current shortage of ministers both within and outwith our denomination, this ought to be capable of proof. However, it also requires evidence of attempts to fill the vacancy within the United Kingdom, usually by advertisements in the national press. To this end it may be helpful if a list of vacant charges was placed on the official Church website, which would also serve the purpose of encouraging particular prayer for our vacant Congregations. A second requirement is to meet an acceptable standard of renumeration. At present levels the stipend appears to be sufficient to meet this.

Any visa granted in this context would incur a cost - and last only three years. At the end of three years the migrant worker must reapply for a further three-year visa or leave the country, again incurring a cost. After a minimum of five years the migrant worker may apply for permanent residency.

Further, the denomination itself must register with the Border Agency as a Sponsoring Body, able to sponsor the application for admission to the country. Perhaps, contrary to instinct, it seems it would be detrimental to any application were the Church to apply for such status without a live application being processed As such, the Committee request authority from the Assembly to process such an application whenever necessary.

In relation to costs, the Committee propose that Visa application costs for overseas ministers to enter the United Kingdom should be borne centrally by the denomination, with other costs being the responsibility of the Congregation.

GREG MACDONALD, *Convener*
THOMAS J. BUCHANAN, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Legal Advice & Property Committee and thank the Committee and in particular the Convener and Clerk for their diligence;

2. The General Assembly approve the following amended Safeguarding Policy, and direct each office-bearer of Presbytery, Kirk Session, Deacons' Court and members of Standing & Special Committees of Assembly to be fully conversant with this Act of Assembly:

SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Preamble

The following document provides the framework for Safeguarding Procedure to be followed within the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). Safeguarding is a measure taken to protect someone in a vulnerable position. The policy outlines the steps that office-bearers of the Church are to follow in the event of any safeguarding matter arising. It is given without prejudice to either the complainant(s) or the alleged perpetrator(s). Safeguarding is different from existing pastoral care and duty. Nothing in the following document is to be taken as a replacement for, nor in any sense superseding, due pastoral care. Whilst in the vast majority of cases safeguarding and pastoral care are able to co-exist, the duty of an elder or minister must first of all be to exercise their pastoral role in any safeguarding situation, in fulfilment of their calling to shepherd the flock entrusted to their spiritual care.

Legitimate areas of safeguarding concerns operate in the locus of alleged criminal activity. Where no crime is alleged, safeguarding does not apply. Where crime is alleged, safeguarding in no way

replaces pastoral care. Ministers and elders cannot satisfy themselves that having followed the safeguarding procedures adopted by this Church they have thereby fulfilled their pastoral burden too. Yet, notwithstanding, it is the biblical duty of ministers and elders of this Church to report a crime committed against a vulnerable person(s), in accordance with safeguarding. The two matters are distinct, though at times overlapping. A matter may be of pastoral concern without involving safeguarding. No safeguarding matter should ever be without pastoral care and counselling for all involved.

The Church recognises that according to the Word of God the Civil Magistrate is also a Minister of God for good.(Romans 13:4) Nevertheless, where the Civil Magistrate exceeds the bounds of his proper sphere, in criminalising biblically-warranted behaviour, the Safeguarding Policy does not apply. Likewise, the Church must not exceed the bounds of her proper sphere, in intruding into matters rightly the locus of the Civil Magistrate.

Safeguarding Statement

1. The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) is committed to taking all practicable steps to promote and safeguard the well-being of each individual child or vulnerable adult, or any other person who could potentially be at risk whilst participating, directly or indirectly, in the Church's various activities.

2. The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) acknowledges the requirement in civil law to have a clearly defined Safeguarding Policy, which is practicable, readily available for reference, and regularly reviewed.

3. The Church recognises the significance and value of each individual, and wholly endorses the Scriptural position that every person, including all children, is precious before God.

4. The General Assembly shall appoint a National Safeguarding Coordinator, who, unless otherwise named, shall be the Principal Clerk of Assembly. Local Safeguarding Officers shall be appointed by their respective Kirk Sessions, who, unless otherwise named, shall be the Kirk Session Clerk. The role of the National Safeguarding Coordinator is to liaise with Disclosure Scotland as necessary. Ideally, the National Safeguarding Coordinator will also be the Lead Signatory with Disclosure Scotland.

5. Recognising that the Church has always been called to the due exercise of pastoral care, it seeks to nurture positive loving relationships within which individuals and families can thrive, primarily through preaching and pastoral work, encouraging, educating, and enabling parents, who have primary responsibility for the care and instruction of their own children, to raise them in the *'nurture and admonition of the Lord'* (Ephesians 6:4). The best preventative to the need of safeguarding is pastoral care. A significant strand of that encouragement, education, and enabling of parents, is to promote healthy, supportive, loving, biblical marital relationships across all Church activities, chiefly through preaching and pastoring, seeking to ensure that neither parent, nor any child within the home, or elsewhere, nor any other person, is exposed to, or at risk of, any form of domestic abuse or indeed, abuse of any description.

6. The Church is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment and facilities where everyone, individually and as members of a family unit, can actively participate in church life. There is an overall emphasis upon integration not separation, and therefore supervision and care of children, unless by specific agreement, is primarily the responsibility of parents or carers.

7. The Church, when it provides specific, focused activities for families and children, will ensure

that those responsible are appointed appropriately and made familiar with all the nuances of the Safeguarding Statement and Procedure, as well as their own particular responsibility to promote well-being and safety. Recruitment or appointment to positions will involve Criminal Records' Disclosure, providing a suitable reference. Those recruited/appointed to supervisory or care positions are responsible for providing the Church with the appropriate disclosure under the 2011 PVG scheme together with a suitable reference.

8. In the event of any allegation and/or complaint being made known, the local Safeguarding Officer must implement the safeguarding procedures. Likewise, any office-bearer who has concerns in any area of safeguarding must refer the matter to the Safeguarding Officer.

9. Overall responsibility for safeguarding within the Church belongs to the General Assembly, through its Legal Advice & Property Committee. The General Assembly is responsible for ensuring that the correct policy and practice are formulated and communicated, as appropriate, to each Synod, Presbytery and Committee. Each Presbytery is then responsible for ensuring that each Congregation within its bounds is implementing both policy and practice appropriately. This means that it is primarily the local Congregation, through the Kirk Session, which will be practically implementing safeguarding on a daily basis. For ease of communication each Kirk Session will appoint a named local Safeguarding Officer, who unless otherwise named, will be the minister.

10. **The local Kirk Session shall ensure that all active office-bearers are in possession of a hard copy of the Safeguarding Policy & Procedure and that they have familiarised themselves with the same.**

11. **An annual entry should be made in Kirk Session minutes to record that every active elder and deacon within the congregation has confirmed that he has read and familiarised himself with these documents and is regularly updating himself as to their content. Presbyteries should ensure, during annual examination of records, that such an entry is recorded in relevant Kirk Session minutes.**

Safeguarding Procedure

1. Introduction

1.1. This Safeguarding Procedure defines the steps that are to be taken by the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), hereafter referred to as 'the Church', to minimise the risk of abuse and when responding to any allegation of abuse, against or involving any person within the Church community.

1.2. The Church recognises that not all young people reach maturity at the same stage or age, and that, in general, as a young person advances toward adulthood, he or she becomes less dependent upon the care of parents, assuming increasing responsibility and autonomy in decision-making. Yet, for the purpose of good practice in safeguarding, any individual under the age of 18 years is regarded as a child and deemed to be vulnerable. Different legal definitions of a child exist. Scots Law generally defines a child as less than 16 years of age;, but Section 97 of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007 defines a child as an individual less than 18 years of age.

1.3. 'Adults at Risk' or 'Protected Adults' are persons who have attained the age of 16 years, who find it difficult to keep themselves or their property safe and might be more vulnerable to harm from other people because of a disability, illness, or mental disorder/infirmity.

1.4. The Church recognises that ***any person*** within the church community may be at risk, not just

children or vulnerable adults. By its very nature, abuse often goes unseen. This document seeks to highlight that, while the Church seeks to promote and further the cause of Christ on the earth, as it is made up of sinners, the Church should never regard itself as being immune from perpetrators of abuse being found within its bounds. Being aware of this, it is the responsibility of the Church and her members to respond biblically to both complainant and alleged perpetrator, should any such case arise.

2. **Risk of Abuse**

2.1 In this imperfect, fallen world, it is recognised that there will always be abusers in the world, and that they will prey on weaker or more vulnerable members of society. Therefore, certain individuals are at an increased risk of abuse because of their particular vulnerabilities or personal circumstances.

2.2 Abuse can take different forms, from aggressive assault to more subtle manipulation and coercion. Abuse need not be physical and includes bullying and intimidation.

2.3 The Church has a responsibility to respond where abuse is apparent or suspected, both pastorally and in terms of safeguarding, whether that abuse may have happened within the scope of Church activities or not. Being made aware of abuse, which has occurred in any setting, is sufficient reason, and places a duty upon the Church to respond following the practice detailed in this document.

3. Minimising and Reducing Risk

3.1. The Church facilitates the gathering and interaction of individuals and families in order to worship God. Except when specific activities, deemed 'Regulated Work', are provided by the Church, parents or carers remain responsible for supervising the welfare of their own children.

3.2. No indication is to be given to parents or carers that responsibility will be accepted to provide specific care or support to any child or individual outwith specific activities.

3.3. There will be occasions when unaccompanied children and/or vulnerable adults will choose to attend and participate in non-specific Church activities as part of the gathered congregation. In such a scenario, the attendance of children and/or vulnerable adults at events, open to all, does not constitute these activities 'Regulated', as their attendance is incidental.

3.4. The General Assembly shall appoint a National Safeguarding Coordinator who, unless otherwise named, will be the Principal Clerk of Assembly. The role of the National Safeguarding Coordinator is to liaise with Disclosure Scotland as necessary. Ideally the National Safeguarding Coordinator will also be the Lead Signatory with Disclosure Scotland.

4. **Church Activities, Regulated Work and non-Regulated Work**

4.1. Church activities are defined as any Church function of the Church being undertaken, including worship services, Courts, Committees, Youth Fellowships, missionary outreach, etc., which the Church can reasonably be held to have organised, and therefore has a responsibility to safeguard all persons taking part.

4.2. Regulated Work is where the Church provides care and/or support to someone who might be deemed vulnerable, whether in a paid or voluntary position. Regulated Work occurs when a representative of the Church is ***'caring'*** for a person, younger than 18 years, or who is recognised to be a vulnerable adult. Regulated Work includes, but is not limited to, Crèche, Sabbath School, Youth Camps, Spring Conferences, Youth Conferences, etc.

4.3. Supervision and care of children, unless by specific agreement, are the responsibility of parents or carers.

4.4. This protocol does not apply to parents or families caring for their own children, though principles of good practice will continue to be relevant.

4.5. Because a parent asks a friend, who is a member (whether communicant or otherwise) of the Church, to look after his or her child, it does not follow that the friend is acting on behalf of the Church, or that the Church accepts any responsibility for this. This is *non-regulated work* and is regarded as an informal private arrangement.

5. Appointment of local Safeguarding Officer

5.1. Each Kirk Session, Presbytery and Committee involved in Regulated Work shall, for ease of communication, appoint a named local Safeguarding Officer.

5.2. The local Safeguarding Officer shall, in all normal circumstances, be the minister of the congregation or an existing member of its Church courts. The Presbytery Safeguarding Officer shall, in all normal circumstances, be the Moderator or an existing member of its Court. The Safeguarding Officer for Standing Committees of Assembly shall, in all normal circumstances, be the Convener or an existing member.

5.3. The identity of the local Safeguarding Officer is to be clearly stated on safeguarding information distributed within the court or committee's area of responsibility.

5.4. The local Safeguarding Officer is not solely responsible for promoting and implementing good practice. This rests upon the entire Session, Presbytery or Committee. The local Safeguarding Officer has a duty to ensure that safeguarding matters are raised, and that decisions and outcomes are appropriately communicated and followed through.

6. Appointment of Worker for Regulated Work

6.1 Any individual who represents the Church in Regulated Work is considered a worker – even when that person is not paid.

6.2 No individual is entitled to represent the Church as a worker who has not been first approved by the local Kirk Session, Presbytery or Committee for this activity.

6.3 It is not always necessary that a worker be a communicant member, but the Kirk Session must establish that he or she is in sympathy with the practice and doctrine of the Church.

6.4 In order to be approved, a prospective worker must have been known to his or her local Kirk Session (or equivalent) for a minimum of 6 months.

6.5 When the Kirk Session has not known a prospective worker for more than two years, or the applicant is from outwith the denomination, he or she must provide details of two individuals who can provide a character reference. In such circumstances, consideration should be given to requesting written reference(s) from these named persons, to ensure that the applicant is suitable for the post.

6.6 Protecting Vulnerable Groups' Scheme (PVG Scheme) Disclosure must be completed prior to beginning in the role. It is not appropriate for someone to begin work before a Disclosure certificate is received which confirms that he or she is not disqualified. It is a criminal offence to knowingly recruit any individual to work from which he or she has been disqualified.

6.7 A Disclosure certificate will only reveal if the candidate has a history of offending or has previously been reported as at high risk of offending within the United Kingdom. A Disclosure certificate does not guarantee a candidate's suitability. Suitability for a particular role must be assessed separately by representatives of the court or responsible committee, and include written references, if required.

6.8 It is good practice to have a reserve worker available. This would mean recruiting, as above, an additional person(s) who would be available, at short notice, to stand in. It is not acceptable for someone who has not first completed the recruitment process to 'stand in' at the last minute. In the event of there being no suitable approved worker then the planned activity must be postponed or cancelled.

6.9 A person who has not yet reached 18 years may be appointed as an assistant worker but must always work under supervision and not be left in sole responsibility. No PVG Disclosure is required until someone reaches the age of 18, at which time a PVG Disclosure must be required, as above. There are no permitted exceptions.

6.10 A hard copy of Section 15 ***Summary for all those involved in Church activity and those undertaking regulated work*** must be given, by the relevant local Safeguarding Officer, to each worker prior to his or her commencing work. The name and contact details of the local Safeguarding Officer are to be stated clearly on this document.

7. Disclosure Scotland and Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scheme.

7.1 A Disclosure from the PVG Scheme can only be requested with the permission of the candidate. Failure to give permission will invalidate a candidate's application.

7.2 Only an approved signatory whose details are registered with Disclosure Scotland can complete the Disclosure request. Each Presbytery is to have a designated representative, and his or her contact details may be obtained from the Presbytery Clerk.

7.3 There are 3 types of PVG Scheme Disclosures – the ***'Scheme Membership'*** Statement, ***'Scheme Record'*** and ***'Scheme Record Update'***.

- ***'Scheme Membership'*** is not linked to specific organisations so Disclosure Scotland will not provide the Church with a relevant Disclosure statement.
- The ***'Scheme Record'*** is to be applied for if the individual is not already a PVG Scheme member. Alternatively, the ***'Scheme Record Update'*** is to be applied for if the individual is an existing member of the PVG Scheme, even if this membership originated in relation to a different organisation.
- The relevant form, ***'Application to Join PVG Scheme'*** or ***'Existing PVG Scheme Member Application'***, must also be completed.

7.4 A Disclosure Certificate that is applicable and relevant to the 'regulated work' position proposed, must be obtained and produced, for the purpose of demonstrating that the applicant is suitable for undertaking that specific strand of 'regulated work' within the denomination. A Disclosure Certificate which has been obtained for other work within the Church or for work with another body is inadmissible and should not be accepted.

7.5 Those requiring a PVG check or examining a PVG document from a potential 'worker', should ***always*** consult the current PVG guidelines which are available on the Scottish Government website, prior to reaching a decision on a person's suitability for a specific role.

7.6 Disclosure Scotland does not impose minimum timescales for seeking PVG updates. It is recommended that consideration be given to reviewing PVG membership after ***three*** years in the case of a new 'worker' coming into the denomination.

8. How to respond to allegations of, or suspected cases of, abuse.

8.1 The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) takes allegations of abuse (whether observed or perceived) against members, adherents, office-bearers, or ministers within its ecclesiastical bounds seriously. We recognise that we have a biblical responsibility to respond timeously to any concerns that are raised and to manage each situation pastorally and effectively while investigations are underway.

8.2 It is never appropriate to simply dismiss any concern or allegation on the basis that one may think it unlikely to have occurred, as it may not be the responsibility of the person hearing the complaint to establish its legitimacy. Neither is it ever appropriate to simply dismiss a matter on the basis that reporting it may cause personal embarrassment, resulting in inconvenience, or potentially bring the denomination into disrepute.

8.3 It is desirable, but not essential, to have the consent of the individual who may be the complainant in order to report and respond. In certain cases it may be inappropriate and prejudicial to seek consent from the parent(s) or carer(s). However, parents or carers who have the primary responsibility for an individual are not to be excluded and should be fully informed whenever possible.

8.4 Should an adult report an historical incident of alleged abuse from when he or she was a child that is not directly related to Church activity, it should be received with the utmost Christian care and compassion. Every support necessary should be given, and the advice of the local Safeguarding Officer should be sought, to direct the report to an appropriate investigating agency (e.g. Police Scotland or Social Work). However, regardless of the passage of time, if the alleged perpetrator still occupies a position within Church activities, the Safeguarding Procedures outlined in this document should be implemented without delay.

8.5 An individual who has acted in good faith by reporting concerns shall not be disadvantaged, marginalised or treated in any other discriminatory manner by any person within the denomination, regardless of whether the matter is proved or not.

8.6 An individual may state that he or she is unwilling to make an allegation of abuse and may choose not to disclose sensitive personal information unless the individual worker agrees to keep the matter confidential. However, the worker may not be in a position to provide such a guarantee. Assurances must be given that personal and sensitive information will only be disclosed to those who have an essential role in dealing with the matter.

8.7 Contact details of those who will act as a first point of contact must be clearly advertised within the church building. Named persons will include:

- The local Safeguarding Officer
- The Minister / Interim Moderator
- The Session Clerk
- The Presbytery Clerk

8.8 Any allegation made against members or adherents should be reported, in the first instance, to the local Safeguarding Officer or a member of the Kirk Session, either by the person making the

allegation or by someone acting on their behalf. Ordinarily, the local Safeguarding Officer should inform the minister of any such allegation being made.

8.9 Any allegation made against an elder or deacon should be reported, in the first instance, to the minister or interim moderator, who in turn must inform the local Safeguarding Officer.

8.10 Any allegation made against a minister or interim moderator should be reported, in the first instance, to the local Safeguarding Officer, who must in turn inform the Presbytery Clerk. If the minister also happens to be the local Safeguarding Officer, the person making the allegation must immediately approach the Presbytery Clerk, failing whom another member of Presbytery.

8.11 Any allegation made against the local Safeguarding Officer should be reported, in the first instance, to the minister / interim moderator.

8.12 The local Safeguarding Officer must keep a full and accurate written record of allegations, as well as the contact details of those involved. To ensure consistency of approach across the denomination, two pro forma reporting forms are available as appendices 'B' and 'C' to this document and should be used to record all relevant details. The details must be clear, legible, preferably typed, and be kept safe and confidential. Again, in order to adopt a consistent approach across the Church, the local Safeguarding Officer should be guided by the ***FIVE R's*** which are suggested as good practice in such cases. They are:

1. ***RECOGNISE*** – Abuse can take many forms, and a fuller though not exhaustive description is given in **Appendix A.** If you are concerned, raise these concerns with someone who can help identify/investigate whether abuse is taking place or not. The person you speak to should immediately recognise the gravity of the matter raised and approach it with prayerful dependence upon the Lord, seeking wisdom to deal with it appropriately.

2. ***RESPOND*** – to the allegation by listening sympathetically and non-judgementally. An allegation may be a very hard thing for the complainant to disclose and it is important that they feel they are being respected and their concern taken seriously, and that help is at hand. Make time to listen, do not dismiss, minimise or exhibit indifference. If you have observed, or suspect abuse, do not ignore it. Be sensitive and courageous to raise your concerns with any potential victim. It may be the very lifeline they need to finally disclose a deeply distressing matter for them. An appropriate caring response could have a most positive effect on any victim or suspected victim of abuse. Where consultation with the National Safeguarding Coordinator has been sought, they may seek emergency intervention if appropriate and without delay (potentially involving the Police and/or Social Work Department). On an allegation being made, the Kirk Session, in consultation with the local Safeguarding Officer, will assess whether any immediate action is required in order to ensure the safety of all parties involved.

3. ***RECORD*** – It is advisable that a comprehensive record of all concerns or allegations be made by the person identifying or receiving them. Such a record *must* be made by the Safeguarding Officer. Keep written notes, recording them as soon as practicable after the matter is made known to you or identified by you. The following are essential:

- The date when the allegation(s) was made
- The location(s) where the abuse allegedly occurred
- The name of the alleged victim(s)
- The name of the alleged abuser(s)

- The nature of the abuse, using the individual's own words, as much as possible
- The names and contact details of potential witnesses

4. ***REPORT*** – The person receiving the initial contact or making the first observation should without undue delay report the matter to the relevant local Safeguarding Officer or member of the Kirk Session. It is then their responsibility, where appropriate, to collate and report the details to the Kirk Session and/or the National Safeguarding Coordinator, unless a member of the Kirk Session is implicated in the allegations. The National Safeguarding Coordinator may decide to include reporting the matter to Presbytery or indeed to other outside appropriate agencies. A perception of disbelief, secrecy and 'cover up' must be avoided and all parties receiving any report of abuse must remain open and fair-minded. While guarding confidentiality wherever possible, all parties should cooperate fully with any other Court or body to whom the allegation is reported.

5. ***REASSURE*** – The complainant should be reassured through the appointment of an appropriate individual (SPOC – single point of contact), either male or female, best placed to act as a support to the complainant. The individual may or may not be a member of the Court, but another person in the congregation who may be identified as best placed to support the complainant. Equally, there is a biblical responsibility to provide reassurance/support to the accused person, at least until such time as the case is disposed of, and to the worker/individual who raised the matter initially. It should weigh heavily on the minds of all parties involved, that they are representatives of Christ's Church on earth and, as such, should treat all persons involved in these grievous matters, whether complainants, suspects, witnesses or responders, as Christ gave example in the Scriptures. Neither the alleged victim, alleged perpetrator, original informant, nor any witnesses, should be left feeling isolated, unsupported or uncared for.

9. Church Court or Committee Responding to Allegations of Abuse or Suspected Cases of Abuse.

The majority of concerns that do not meet the statutory thresholds for referral to external agencies can be resolved informally through constructive discussion and in line with Matthew 18:15-35. However, it is recognised that, for a variety of reasons, resolution via such dialogue will not always be possible or appropriate. The following seeks to establish a robust process for dealing with complaints or concerns that have not or cannot be resolved through informal discussion.

9.1 The various stages of ecclesiastical discipline are defined in *The Practice of the Free Church of Scotland* and should be followed as appropriate.

9.2 In common with other Presbyterian denominations in Scotland, congregations typically consist of communicant and baptised members. The member can potentially be deprived of certain privileges and blessings should they be brought under discipline over some transgression. Should the member be involved in church activities where opportunity of abuse can arise, then the Church can remove that person from such a position.

9.3 The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) will not respond to complaints that are made anonymously or made through social media. Further, requests for anonymity that could potentially compromise the integrity of an investigation will be denied, unless compelling reasons can be given.

9.4 Other than in an emergency situation whereby the local Safeguarding Officer, in consultation with the National Safeguarding Coordinator, consider immediate intervention by social services or the police necessary, the initial examination of any allegation or suspicion of abuse rests with the

Kirk Session, solely in order to determine if the matter meets the statutory thresholds for referral to external agencies. In either case, the Session will proceed on the proper pastoral basis that is their primary duty under Christ. Where concerns appear to cross the threshold of recognised criminal activity, the Church will act as the handmaid of the state insofar as to pass on to the relevant authorities the concerns raised.

9.5 The Session should immediately convene for the sole purpose of considering the nature of the allegation. They should investigate fully, without prejudice, timeously, and without undue delay.

9.6 During any investigation, should the alleged perpetrator be in a position of responsibility in the congregation, it may be necessary and appropriate to advise that individual to withdraw from all duties for the duration. Withdrawing from duties at this stage of the process must not be taken to imply guilt. Should the allegation or suspicion of any abuse be made against any member of the Kirk Session, including the Minister, it is imperative that that person takes no part in the process of dealing with the case. This should be reflected appropriately in the Session minutes.

9.7 In consultation with the local Safeguarding Officer, the Session may consider whether any resolution can be arrived at between the two parties without implementing formal procedures. A resolution cannot be arrived at without the approval of all parties.

9.8 The Kirk Session should carefully consider and examine all the available evidence relating to the allegation. The Kirk Session should also appreciate that ecclesiastical law and civil/criminal law may diverge considerably in the definition of certain aspects of what constitutes abuse. It is not for the Kirk Session to be dismissive of civil/criminal law definitions on the various types of abuse which may arise within the orbit of the Church's responsibility.

9.9 If a Session is made aware that a breach of civil/criminal law has occurred, there is an obligation on the Kirk Session, through the local Safeguarding Officer and National Safeguarding Coordinator, to report that matter to the appropriate investigating authorities as soon as possible. The Church must recognise that, where any criminal allegations are made, they are not a competent investigating body and must refer such allegations immediately to the police, social services or both. That is not to say that the Church will not investigate the very same matter, but the Church will investigate it as a potential sin, and not as a crime, except insofar as any crime may also be a sin.

9.10 If the Kirk Session deem an allegation to fall under the authority of civil/criminal law, they should support the local Safeguarding Officer in referring the matter to the National Safeguarding Coordinator for further advice. Thereafter, the National Safeguarding Officer, under the direction of the Kirk Session, will report the matter to the appropriate agency/agencies (Disclosure Scotland, Social Services, Police Scotland).

9.11 If a Kirk Session decide on receipt of the allegation that there are grounds for a civil or criminal investigation, then the local Safeguarding Officer will communicate appropriately with both the complainant and the accused to keep them as fully informed as possible, providing all necessary steps to support them through this difficult process.

9.12 Should the investigation remain within the orbit of ecclesiastical discipline, the decision of the Session will be conveyed to both parties. They will be informed of their right of appeal through the appointed means set out in the *Practice of the Free Church of Scotland*.

9.13 Subsequent to the conclusion of an ecclesiastical or civil case, the Church has an ongoing pastoral responsibility and duty of care for the complainant and family, and also for the accused and

family, and for those reporting and investigating the allegation, as well as for the wider Church community.

9.14 To enable and assist Kirk Sessions, local Safeguarding Officers and the National Safeguarding Coordinator are to adopt a consistent approach across the Church, with implementation of the ***FIVE R's*** suggested as good practice in such cases. While these are ***similar*** to the good practice recommendations (***FIVE R's***) detailed at ***8.12*** of this document, it is emphasised that they ***are not identical*** **but relate specifically to the role and responsibilities of the Church Courts** when responding to a report of abuse received by them. They are:

1. ***RECOGNISE*** **–** Abuse can take many forms, and a fuller though not exhaustive description is given in **Appendix A** If you are concerned, raise these concerns with someone who can help identify/investigate whether abuse is taking place or not. The person you speak to should immediately recognise the gravity of the matter raised and approach it with prayerful dependence upon the Lord, seeking wisdom to deal with it appropriately.

2. ***RESPOND*** – to the allegation by listening sympathetically, reading reports and analysing evidential material, with an open mind, non-judgementally and without any preconceptions. An allegation may be a very hard thing for the complainant to disclose and it is important that they feel they are being respected, that their concern is being taken seriously, and that help is at hand. Make time to listen, do not dismiss, minimise or exhibit indifference. If you have observed or suspect abuse, do not ignore it. Be sensitive and courageous to raise your concerns with any potential victim. It may be the very lifeline they need to finally disclose a deeply distressing matter for them. An appropriate caring response could have a most positive effect on any victim or suspected victim of abuse. Where consultation with the National Safeguarding Coordinator has been sought, they may seek emergency intervention if appropriate and without delay (potentially involving the Police and/or Social Work Department). On an allegation being made, the Kirk Session, in consultation with the local Safeguarding Officer, will assess whether any immediate action is required in order to ensure the safety of all parties involved.

3. ***RECORD*** – The Kirk Session or relevant Court must keep careful records of everything they do as a consequence of receiving the allegations of abuse or any suspicion of abuse. This can be done either within the session minutes or as a separate case file. All documents, statements and any other applicable evidence are to be kept as a factual record and are not to include statements of the opinions of the Court, only what the facts of the case/the evidence presented reveals.

4. ***REPORT*** – The Kirk Session and/or the local Safeguarding Officer will, on initial receipt and assessment of the allegation, where the matter meets the statutory thresholds for referral to external agencies, report it to the Church's appointed National Safeguarding Coordinator for appropriate advice. This may or may not include reporting to Presbytery or indeed to other outside appropriate agencies. The Kirk Session should not be secretive or defensive, and while guarding confidentiality wherever possible, should cooperate fully with any other Court or body to whom the allegation is reported.

5. ***REASSURE*** – The Kirk Session or other relevant Court has both a moral and pastoral responsibility to provide all necessary reassurance and support to the complainant. This might be through appointing an appropriate individual (SPOC – single point of contact) who may or may not be a member of the Court but who may be best placed to support the complainant. Where appropriate, the Court also has a pastoral responsibility to provide reassurance/support to any alleged abuser until such time as the case is disposed of, and to the worker/individual who raised the matter initially. It should weigh heavily on the minds of these brethren that, as

members of a Church Court, they are Christ's ambassadors in His Church and should treat all persons involved in these grievous matters as Christ gave example in the Scriptures. Neither the alleged victim, alleged perpetrator, original informant, nor any witnesses, should be left feeling isolated, unsupported or uncared for.

10. Reporting to Disclosure Scotland.

10.1 A legal duty to make a referral (report allegations or substantiated abuse) to Disclosure Scotland is placed upon organisations under the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007 when;

i. an individual doing Regulated Work has done something to harm a vulnerable person.

ii. AND - the impact is so serious that the organisation has (or would) permanently remove the individual from regulated work.

10.2 When a worker is, or would have been, removed from regulated work as above, then a report is to be made to the National Safeguarding Coordinator.

10.3 Such referral to Disclosure Scotland shall not be made, other than by the National Safeguarding Coordinator.

11. Working with Offenders

11.1 It is not inappropriate, or inconsistent for someone, who has in the past been the perpetrator of abuse to become, upon a satisfactory profession of faith, a communicant member in good standing.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

11.2 The Church recognises that Saving Faith exercised by an individual not only delivers from guilt and shame before God, but has such an impact as to transform and change their whole character. However, the Church also notes that the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007 ***permanently excludes*** a person who has previously been barred from any future work with children or vulnerable adults. Given both the seriousness of such cases where this permanent barring is likely to be applied, and most importantly, the biblical principles for the church both to live peaceably with all men, and to seek to have a good report from them that are without, the Church will not consider any such debarred individuals for positions deemed to be regulated work. Disclosure Scotland maintains a register of excluded individuals which the Church may consult as necessary.

11.3 Where specific concerns exist about the risk that a particular individual attending a Congregation may currently pose to children or vulnerable adults, the Kirk Session is to consider entering into a contract with him or her, which clearly defines specific boundaries about his or her conduct and access to different parts of the Congregation's facilities. For example, a contract could state that to promote the safety and well-being of all parties involved, he or she was not to leave the main worship area unaccompanied while the Sabbath School children are in class, and/or that he or she must not sit in the area of the church building allocated for the children. It could be appropriate to specify which toilet facilities may or may not be used.

11.4 Such a contract, whether communicated verbally or by writing, must be clearly recorded in the relevant Court's permanent records.

11.5 Setting such a contract promotes the safety and well-being of the individual, together with the rest of the Church.

11.6 An individual who has a criminal record but is not specifically barred from working with vulnerable individuals may be accepted as a worker if they are otherwise assessed as suitable.

12. Confidentiality

12.1 For ease of communication, each Kirk Session, Presbytery and Committee involved in Church Activity or Regulated Work will appoint a named local Safeguarding Officer, ***who unless otherwise named, will be the*** **minister or** ***Clerk, as applicable.***

12.2 Every allegation of abuse must be handled with great sensitivity and not discussed with anyone other than those involved by necessity in the process of following this procedure. Any trauma experienced by a victim of abuse can be greatly amplified by anxieties that confidentiality may not be maintained, and it is similar with the trauma experienced by any person subject to a false allegation.

12.3 To ensure confidentiality, if the alleged abuser is a member of any relevant Court, steps must be taken by that Court to ensure that the alleged abuser plays no part in any discussion relating to the allegation.

12.4 No statement is to be made to the press, except by agreement of the relevant Church Court, who must consult with the Church Media Officer.

12.5 Information provided through the assessment and disclosure process must only be shared with those who need to see it for the purpose of recruitment or appointment.

12.6 Disclosure documents are not to be retained, but the name of the subject, disclosure type, specific reference number and the recruitment decision taken are to be entered into the permanent records of the relevant Court or Committee.

13. Review

13.1 The Safeguarding Statement and Procedure can be reviewed at any time by the Legal Advice & Property Committee and will be re-examined at least every five years by the General Assembly, through its Legal Advice & Property Committee.

13.2 Any query, comment or suggestions for improvement relating to the Safeguarding Statement and Procedure can be directed to the Legal Advice & Property Committee.

13.3 Presbyteries are to ensure annual compliance with the Safeguarding Statement and Procedure as part of the regular supervision of each Congregation within its bounds.

14. Implementation of the Safeguarding Procedure

14.1 The introduction of the recently reviewed Safeguarding Procedure will be implemented across the wider Church as approved by General Assembly with immediate effect. The General Assembly allow a period of four months during which every Church Court and Committee will read, disseminate, and review their own responsibilities in regard to this procedure and will take all necessary steps to implement it without delay. An entry will be made in every appropriate minute recording that this task has been completed, and particular attention will be given at the annual visitation of records to ensure such a record is present.

15. Summary for all those involved in Church activity and those undertaking regulated work.

15.1 This section comprises a summary of the above document for those involved in Church activity and those undertaking regulated work, giving details of their own personal responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. This information is to be provided to each worker by the local Safeguarding Officer prior to commencing work.

15.2 Safeguarding relates to providing and maintaining a safe environment within which every person has an opportunity to thrive. The information provided here sets out your personal responsibilities as an individual who is involved in providing care and support as part of the Church's activities.

15.3. Compliance with the procedures herein detailed is mandatory, in order to ensure that safeguarding measures are implemented in every sphere of Church activity and the potential for abuse is eliminated.

15.4 In the event that someone observes what appears to be abuse, or an allegation is made to you regarding abuse, then this must be responded to. If you suspect, witness, or a report is made to you concerning abuse, then you, as a member and representative of the Church, have a Christian duty to respond, though you may request assistance from a colleague as you go through this process.

15.5 Your duty is not to commence an investigation or establish the legitimacy of any concern prior to reporting but, rather, to provide a robust and safe reporting mechanism for any potential victim of abuse in accordance with the principles of the Safeguarding Policy.

15.6 It is never appropriate to simply dismiss a matter on the basis that you think it is unlikely to have occurred. Nor is it ever appropriate to simply dismiss a matter on the basis that reporting it may cause personal embarrassment, result in inconvenience, or potentially bring the Church into disrepute.

15.7 It is not necessary to have the consent of the individual who may be the victim of alleged abuse in order to report and respond. Nor is it necessary to have the consent of the parent(s) or carer. Depending upon the nature of the allegation, it may be inappropriate and prejudicial to seek consent from the parent(s) or carer. However, parents or carers who have primary responsibility for an individual are not to be unnecessarily excluded and should be fully informed of the allegation whenever possible.

15.8 Should an adult report an historical incident of alleged abuse from when he or she was a child that is not directly related to Church activity, it should be received with the utmost Christian care and compassion. Every support necessary should be given and the advice of the local Safeguarding Officer should be sought to direct the person reporting the incident to an appropriate investigating agency (e.g. Police Scotland or Social Work). However, regardless of the passage of time, if the alleged perpetrator still occupies a position within Church activities where any other person may be at risk, the Safeguarding Procedures outlined in this document should be implemented without delay.

15.9 An individual who has acted in good faith by reporting concerns shall not be disadvantaged, marginalised, or treated in a discriminatory manner by any person within the denomination, regardless of whether the matter is proved or not.

15.10 An individual may state that he or she is unwilling to make an allegation of abuse and may choose not to disclose sensitive personal information unless the individual worker agrees to keep the matter confidential. However, it is not possible for a worker to provide such a guarantee, as it is the responsibility of the worker who hears the allegation to report that information as set out within

the terms of the Safeguarding Procedure. Assurances must be given that personal and sensitive information will only be disclosed to those who have an essential role in dealing with the matter.

15.11
As first receiver of any report of abuse – ***remember*** the ***FIVE R's*** to guide you:
RECOGNISE
RESPOND
RECORD
REPORT
REASSURE

As a member of any Church Court receiving the report of abuse – ***remember*** the ***FIVE R's*** to guide you:
RECOGNISE
RESPOND
RECORD
REPORT
REASSURE

15.12 If you are the person receiving any report of abuse, always seek the support and direction of the local Safeguarding Officer unless that person is implicated in the abuse.

15.13 Please address any questions or concerns, in the first instance, to your ***local Safeguarding Officer***, who is:

Name: .....

Address: .....

Telephone: .....

Email: .....

Your ***National Safeguarding Coordinator*** is Dr Andrew Naylor, but he should not be approached directly by yourself without first contacting your local Safeguarding Officer.

Name: Dr Andrew Naylor MBE

Address: 18 Ferry Road, Leverburgh, Isle of Harris, HS5 3UA

Telephone: 01859 520200

Email: andrewnaylor@doctors.org.uk;

APPENDIX

FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT THE FOLLOWING DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE APPLY

Definitions of Abuse

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child, adult at risk or any other person who, though not officially 'at risk', may find themselves in a vulnerable situation. Somebody may abuse

or neglect a child, adult at risk or any other person by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. They may be abused in a family, or in an institutional or community setting; by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger. They may be abused by an adult or adults or a child or children. There are many different ways in which people suffer abuse. The list below is, sadly, not exhaustive.

Physical Abuse - Actual or likely physical injury to a child, adult at risk or any other person, or failure to prevent physical injury to them. To inflict pain, physical injury or suffering to any such person.

Neglect - Where adults fail to care for a child, adult at risk or any other person in their care and protect them from danger, seriously impairing health and development. A person's well-being is impaired and their care needs are not met. Neglect can be deliberate or can occur as a result of not understanding what someone's needs are.

Emotional Abuse - The persistent, emotional ill-treatment of a child, adult at risk or any other person that affects their emotional and behavioural development. It may involve conveying to such a person that they are worthless and unloved, inadequate, or that they are given responsibilities beyond their years.

The use of threats, fear or power gained from another adult's position to invalidate the person's independent wishes. Such behaviour can create very real emotional and psychological distress. All forms of abuse have an emotional component.

Sexual Abuse - Involves forcing or enticing a child, adult at risk or any other person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not that person is aware of what is happening. This includes non-contact activities, such as involving such persons in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging them to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Any non-consensual sexual act or behaviour, inappropriate or uninvited touching or unwelcome physical contact which may be perceived by the person as having a sexual motive.

Domestic Abuse - Any form of physical, verbal, sexual, psychological or financial abuse which might amount to criminal conduct, and which takes place within the context of a relationship. The relationship will be between partners (married, cohabiting, civil or otherwise) or ex-partners. The abuse may be committed in the home or elsewhere, including online. It also embraces coercive, controlling, threatening or intimidating behaviour that places the victim in a psychological condition, whereby they will submit to courses of action or choices that they would not usually have made, had the abusive behaviour not been exhibited.

It can occur between adults who are or have historically been in a relationship, or between any other family members. It can affect anybody regardless of their age, gender, sexuality or social status. It is rarely a one-off incident. Usually there is a pattern of abusive and controlling behaviour where an abuser seeks to exert power over their family member or partner.

Financial Abuse - The inappropriate use, control, misappropriation, embezzlement or theft of money, property or possessions.

Discrimination - The inappropriate treatment of a person because of their age, gender, race, religion, cultural background, sexuality, or disability.

Institutional Abuse - The mistreatment or abuse of a person by a regime or individuals within an institution. It can occur through repeated acts of poor or inadequate care and neglect, or poor professional practice or ill-treatment. The church as an institution is not exempt from perpetrating institutional abuse.

Cyber Abuse – The use of information technology (email, mobile phones, websites, social media, instant messaging, chatrooms, etc.) to repeatedly harm or harass other people in a deliberate manner.

Self-harm - Self-harm is the intentional damage or injury to a person's own body. It is used as a way of coping with or expressing overwhelming emotional distress. An individual may also neglect themselves, which can result in harm to themselves.

Historic Abuse - Historic abuse is the term used to describe disclosures of abuse that were perpetrated in the past. Many people who have experienced abuse do not tell anyone what happened until years later, with around one third of people abused in childhood waiting until adulthood before they share their experience.

While it is not possible to be prescriptive about the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect, the following list sets out some of the indicators which might be suggestive of abuse:

- unexplained injuries on areas of the body not usually prone to such injuries
- an injury that has not been treated/received medical attention
- an injury for which the explanation seems inconsistent
- a child or adult at risk discloses behaviour that is harmful to them
- unexplained changes in behaviour or mood (e.g. becoming very quiet, withdrawn or displaying sudden bursts of temper)
- inappropriate sexual awareness in children
- signs of neglect, such as undernourishment, untreated illnesses, inadequate care.

It should be recognised that this list is not exhaustive and the presence of one or more indicators is not in itself proof that abuse is taking or has taken, place.

It is important to bear in mind that there might also be other reasons why some or most of the above are occurring.

3. The General Assembly inform local Congregational Trustees of their responsibilities in regard to the Register of Controlling Interests, and advise local Trustees to appoint solicitors to carry out this registration if necessary;

4. The General Assembly note the Trusts & Succession (Scotland) Act 2024 and instruct the Committee to continue its remit in this regard, in particular to monitor as and when Part 1 of the Act comes into force and inform local Congregational Trustees of legislative changes thereanent;

5. The General Assembly note the Report in relation to the possible calling of overseas ministers, and

    i. give the Committee authority to register the Church as a Sponsoring Body when need arises.

    ii. instruct the website editor to maintain a listing on the Church website of current vacant charges for the prayerful interest of the wider Church.

iii. approve the cost for any such visa applications being borne centrally by the Church.

iv. encourage any Congregations and Presbyteries seeking to call a minister from overseas to seek advice from the Committee to assist them in processing the application.

VII

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC QUESTIONS, RELIGION & MORALS

Introduction

The Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee exists to address those moral issues that confront the Church and the Christian in the public square. The Report details a number of issues that we are faced with in modern society. There is constant agitation to legalise what previous generations rightly rejected. What is shocking to many is how irrational a number of these demands are. While one could detail the social and political causes for this agitation, few will delve beneath the surface of things to locate the real cause, preferring instead a superficial, psychological answer.

However, the unspoken reason for this agitation is the loss of Gospel influence. We must therefore face the central question. What is lost when the Gospel is lost across society?

Consider the following remarks (lightly edited) by the Puritan Thomas Brooks (1608) in his farewell sermon preached in 1662. Ask yourself, Is this not true of Scotland and the United Kingdom in general?

1. *When the Gospel goes, peace, plenty, and trading go* (2 Chronicles 15:3,5 & 6 compared).
'Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest.' Why? They had priests; but they were Jeroboam's priests, as you may see. 'Have ye not cast out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the nations of other lands? so that whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, the same may be a priest of them that are no gods (13:9).'

A little business will buy a priesthood, and so they are said to be without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law. Mark what follows, 'And in those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city, for God did vex them with all adversity'. [In other words, as gospel prosperity declined, so material prosperity declined.]

2. *When the Gospel goes, safety and security goes*
The ark was taken away, and when that was taken away, their strength and safety was gone. When the Jews rejected the gospel, the Romans came and took away both their place and nation (John 11:48). About forty years after, Titus and Vespasian took away their city. They cried, 'If we let him thus alone, the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.' And this was the ready way to bring the Romans upon them.

3. *When the Gospel goes, civil liberty goes*
When the Jews slighted the gospel, and turned their backs upon it, they quickly became bond-slaves to the Romans.

4. *When the Gospel goes, the honour and glory, the splendour and beauty of a nation goes*
It is the Gospel that is the honour and glory of a nation, and when that goes, all the glory goes. As old Eli said, when the ark was taken away, 'The glory is departed from Israel' (1 Sam. 4:22). 'Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit' (Jer. 2:11-13) - that is, the worship of God into the traditions of men. What is it that lifts up one nation above another but the gospel? Above all nations of the earth, England hath been lifted up to Heaven.

> 5. *When the Gospel goes, all soul-happiness and blessedness goes*
> The Gospel, you know, is the means appointed by God to bring souls to an acquaintance with Christ, to an acceptance of Christ, to an interest in Christ, to an assurance that he is theirs, and they are his. Now, when this goes, all soul-happiness and blessedness goes.
>
> 6. *When the Gospel goes, the special presence of God goes, for that still goes with the gospel*
> There is a general presence of God, as the Psalmist speaks. 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (Ps. 139:7) This presence of God reacheth from heaven to hell; in that sense, God is included in no place, nor excluded out of any place. But alas! what is this general presence? When the Gospel goes, the special presence of God goes.

Because Brooks' analysis was a biblical one, it has abiding validity. Who in our own day cannot say that we are seeing the same problems? Economic decline; loss of freedom and liberty; irrationality abounding where men and women believe they are in the wrong body; violence being carried out against those who disagree with the whole 'woke ideology'. People find themselves arrested for questioning the prevailing ideology, while others are sacked from their posts.

This Report then serves as a reminder that the Church must be alert and free to speak the truth to those who are taking our culture into greater wickedness. The Committee are to be commended for their work in seeking to alert the Church to the issues that we all face.

Issues Considered

The number of issues that come within the Committee's remit and which could potentially be taken up by them is vast. Their chief attention is given to moral matters and particularly those that are currently before the Scottish Parliament. Most of the issues considered by the Committee during the past year were once again continued from the previous year. In many cases there has been little development. The Report therefore consists largely of brief updates on these matters.

Gender Recognition

Last year we reported on how the Scottish Government's Gender Recognition Reform Bill had faltered. The Bill was approved at Holyrood, but it was blocked by the UK Government under the Scotland Act 1998. While the Scottish Government may still have an ambition to proceed with it or similar legislation at some point in the future, we are content to report on the Bill this year in the past tense. We should take encouragement from that and pray to the Lord for further deliverances.

Transgenderism

The idea that people can change their gender to match what they perceive themselves to be psychologically has become something of a fad. It is simply the return of Gnosticism, which maintains that the material is irrelevant and feelings are everything. The Committee, viewing this to be a matter of considerable importance, have agreed a 'Statement on Gender and Transgenderism' which is appended to the Report. We thank Rev. David M. Blunt for his work on this Statement.

Conversion Therapy

This matter has been driven forward by activists who appear to have an unexplained goal in mind. There is a growing recognition that without a specific definition of 'conversion therapy' it is virtually impossible to ban it. Westminster has been trying for five years to produce a legislative ban and has thus far failed. Activists are not satisfied with the current criminal law but are demanding something additional to it that will cover Church activities. And therein lies the problem.

In Scotland efforts to produce a legal ban have halted, out of fear of a judicial review. The Scottish Programme for Legislation 2024-2025 made no reference to conversion therapy. The Irish Government, after a number of attempts, has halted its pursuit of the matter for now. Again, we are encouraged that

providence has thwarted attempts to introduce what will effectively be a gag upon the Church. The Committee are keeping a watching brief and hope yet to produce a response on the subject when practicable.

Assisted Suicide

The Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill was introduced at Holyrood by Liberal Democrat MSP Liam McArthur on 27 March 2024. Since then its progress has been slow, and the Bill is not due to complete Stage 1 until 23 May. At some point after this MSPs will vote on the Bill's general principles. The Committee are actively corresponding on this matter and intend to contact MSPs nearer the time of the vote.

Events in Scotland have been somewhat overtaken by those at Westminster. A Private Members' Bill was introduced there by the Labour MP Kim Leadbeater on 16 October 2024. The Bill passed its second reading on 29 November but since then it seems that concern among MPs has grown. Various adjustments have been made at the Committee stage, many of which are concerning. We prayerfully await the outcome of these deliberations.

Abortion

Following the passing of the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) (Scotland) Act 2024, the Committee wrote to the First Minister, Mr John Swinney, regarding 'Safe Access Zones', expressing their disapproval of this legislation. They continue to keep a watching brief on this matter. We note that a retired Minister in Northern Ireland has been charged for preaching near or within such a zone. The Christian Institute has taken on his case to test the current law.

Climate Change

The Committee have kept this subject on their agenda. We note that while numerous political leaders are promoting the need for increased expenditure and legislation to combat what they perceive to be a problem with the earth's climate, other individuals are opposing the entire agenda on a scientific and economic basis. It is of interest that the new leader of the Conservative Party has announced the abandonment of the party's commitment to reach 'net zero' by 2050. The Committee will continue to note developments.

Lord's Day Issues

The keeping of the Lord's Day is an imperative. There has recently been an extension of Sabbath shopping on the Isle of Lewis. Despite widespread objection to the opening of its Stornoway store on the Lord's Day, the first such opening being on 17 November, Tesco has refused to alter its policy. We are thankful for the ongoing protests and the encouragement of those who have refused to do their main shopping at Tesco and are now patronising shops that close on the Lord's Day. The Committee are fully aware of the importance of the Sabbath and encourage Presbyteries to write to political representatives when local breaches of God's Day occur.

E. TREVOR KIRKLAND, *Convener*
LINDSAY MACCALLUM, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee and thank the Committee, especially the Convener, Vice-convener and Clerk;

2. The General Assembly commend the work of the Committee to the prayers of our people. They encourage Church Courts to take up matters of moral and spiritual concern as appropriate, and to notify the Committee of any issues which may be of relevance to the wider Church and which might benefit from being considered in greater depth;

3. The General Assembly note that the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill has not been able to proceed any further, and express their thanks to the Lord for His merciful providence in this;

4. The General Assembly welcome the 'Statement on Gender and Transgenderism' produced by the Committee. They commend the Statement to the use of the Lord's people and encourage the Committee to circulate it as appropriate;

5. The General Assembly note the Committee's ongoing concern over proposed bans on conversion therapy and request prayer to our Almighty God that such a law will not be passed anywhere within the United Kingdom. They are encouraged that difficulties in implementing such a ban are becoming increasingly obvious to legislators;

6. The General Assembly note the Committee's intention to contact MSPs to urge them to affirm the value of all human life by voting against the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill. They encourage the Committee in this, and pray that the Lord, in whose hand the hearts of all men are, will turn MSPs who are minded to support the Bill away from a decision which would lead to more deaths by suicide;

7. The General Assembly note with sadness that the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) (Scotland) Bill was passed at Holyrood on 12 June 2024 and received Royal assent on 22 July. They encourage the Committee to continue to highlight the national scandal of abortion, and commend to the prayers of the Church the various efforts being made in the UK to bring this evil to an end;

8. The General Assembly note the Committee's continuing interest in the issue of climate change, and look forward to the appearance of more material considering this and other topical subjects from a Biblical perspective;

9. The General Assembly lament the increasing desecration of the Lord's Day throughout our land and encourage Presbyteries to take up local violations. They exhort our people to be steadfast in keeping the Sabbath holy and commend to all God's people a day of rest and its benefits to man;

10. The General Assembly urge prayer for Christian members of the various parliaments in the United Kingdom, that the Lord may grant them strength and boldness in asserting biblical teaching and bearing witness to the Lord Jesus Christ;

11. The General Assembly appeal to governments throughout the United Kingdom, and in particular at Holyrood and Westminster, to recognise that they are ordained of God and accountable to Him, to acknowledge the truth that "righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34), and to begin to repeal ungodly legislation.

APPENDIX

Statement on Gender and Transgenderism

The Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee are responsible for representing the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)'s view on matters of spiritual and moral concern.

The Committee believe that, among the many topical issues, one in particular demands that the Church state its position. The subject of gender and transgenderism has profound implications for individuals, for our society, and even for reality. The topic is undoubtedly controversial, but it cannot be ignored.

Gender

It is vital to understand what 'gender' is and how it relates to sex. Some consider gender from a psychological standpoint and others from a biological one. As a Christian Church, we believe that it must be viewed chiefly from a Biblical perspective. The Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God, the only rule to direct us and the measure of all things moral and spiritual.

We believe that the following points are significant concerning gender:

1. *Gender exists by God's design*

The World Health Organisation defines gender as "a social construction relating to a set of norms, roles and relationships that is founded on social mores, laws, processes and policies based on labels of masculinity and femininity." This says that gender develops differently according to culture and evolves over generations. It is essentially a human idea and there is nothing absolute about it.

Such ideas of gender conflict with Christian teaching. In the opening chapter of the Bible, we learn of man's origin, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him: male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27). God made man to exist in two distinct sexes, male and female.

After God had created the first man, He provided for his welfare. "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Genesis 2:18). Man was formed to be a social animal. Causing Adam to sleep, God took one of Adam's ribs, made a woman and brought her to Adam (Genesis 2:22). Woman was so-named because she was "taken out of" Man (Genesis 2:23). Man exists in two distinct sexes, male and female, and two distinct genders, man and woman.

The difference between the two sexes is the basis for marriage. In His wisdom God made the woman that she would be "an help meet" for the man (Genesis 2:18). Adam was not complete without Eve as his wife. She was "of the man" and "for the man" (1 Corinthians 11:8,9). A Christian writer said, "As God by creation made two of one, so again by marriage He made one of two."

The two sexes are opposite to each other and yet compatible. To fulfil His purposes in the world, and for the good of mankind, God designed man and woman with a natural, wholesome and mutual attraction between them. Remarkably, it has become unpopular to say this, but it must be said nonetheless.

The two sexes and two genders benefit each other by the fact of being different from each other. So-called 'same-sex marriage' is a contradiction in terms; such unions are futile, and can never amount to marriage. It is clear evidence of God's judgement when the attraction is no longer for the opposite sex and gender, but for the same (Romans 1:22-27).

2. *Gender depends upon our sex*

Sex is assigned by God to each individual at conception. Because sexual identity is located in the body, a midwife or doctor can recognise a newborn baby's sex. Yet sexual identity is not simply a matter of a

difference in external characteristics. Underlying the physical difference is a genetic difference.

Most cells in our bodies contain 'chromosomes' carrying genetic material. A baby's sex is determined by the chromosome make-up at conception. The father and mother contribute one sex chromosome each to the baby's genetic material. A male has one 'X' and one 'Y' chromosome, and a female two 'X' chromosomes. The man's contribution determines whether the child is a boy or a girl.

Because of the link between sex and gender, gender also is assigned by God at conception. Gender identity is located in the mind rather than in the body, so there is a sense in which gender can also be said to be learned. Our understanding of our gender identity develops in childhood through instruction and example, especially from parents. This shows us the importance of the Biblical model for the family. Father and mother model male and female roles respectively, the one to boys who are growing up to be men and the other to girls who are growing up to be women.

Sex and gender are both binary: each of them is a duality or pair. For this reason, sex and gender have been used interchangeably. Today, gender is increasingly being used with reference to a range of gender identities, in the belief that a person's natal sex characteristics do not necessarily indicate that person's gender identity.

3. *Gender is expressed in specific roles*

In terms of sex, a person is either male or female. In terms of gender, a person is either a man or a woman. Another way of expressing the difference is that a person is either masculine or feminine. In marriage, as God has ordained it, we see better than anywhere else the specific gender roles of men and women. There is plurality and unity, "they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). There is diversity and equality: the roles of men and women differ, yet they are of similar importance.

The sexual difference between man and woman is necessary for procreation, but the complementary nature of the whole range of differences between them allows for mutual flourishing generally. Both man and woman were made bearing God's image (Genesis 1:27), yet they do so as counterparts. God's glory is fully reflected between the man and the woman.

The covenant relation between Christ as the Husband and the Church as His Bride is instructive for the gender roles in marriage. There is to be a benevolent headship on the husband's part, with sacrificial and protective love of his wife. This is to be matched by a devoted submission on the wife's part, with willing subjection to her husband (Ephesians 5:22-29).

The different roles of men and women in marriage, the family, and society are not to be explained as simply a matter of tradition. They are inbuilt in mankind, because God has created men and women to be different. Interference with God's pattern will have harmful results. We are bound to say that the blurring of gender roles in recent decades has paved the way for what we witness now: the blurring of gender identities.

Transgenderism

The term 'transgender' refers to people who claim a gender identity that does not align with their birth sex. The philosophy of 'transgenderism' maintains that what people feel about their gender is determinative, even though their feelings may conflict with their anatomy. People are told that they can 'cross over' to their preferred gender. Those who try to do this are termed 'transwomen' or 'transmen', and it is insisted that they must have the rights and privileges which belong to their chosen gender.

Our objection to transgenderism has nothing to do with a hatred of such people. It is solely to do with truth. The Bible brings clarity to subjects which, if considered apart from its infinite wisdom, lead only to confusion.

We believe that the following points are significant concerning transgenderism:

1. *Individuals may experience dissatisfaction with their gender*

The term 'gender 'dysphoria' describes the unhappiness which some people feel, particularly at a young age, regarding the difference between their biological sex and their preferred gender identity. Reason, however, must come before our feelings. The fact is that someone cannot be 'born in the wrong body'. This language does at least remind us that we have a soul as well as a body.

Christ said that in the resurrection people "neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30). Some interpret this to mean that in eternity we shall be 'genderless'. They argue that if that is our final state then we cannot be made subject to binary definitions of sex and gender here, but may choose our gender identity. Yet Christ was simply teaching that as the angels are not married, neither shall we be in the next world. He was not saying we shall cease to be male or female, men or women, masculine or feminine.

Some transgender people insist on using pronouns matching their chosen gender, accusing those who refer to them by pronouns matching their actual gender of 'misgendering'. It is instructive that many languages assign genders to parts of speech, especially nouns and pronouns. While English became largely genderless centuries ago, the third-person singular personal pronouns – 'he', 'she', and 'it' – remain. The pressure to use 'preferred pronouns' or 'gender-neutral' language must be resisted. To use them is to bear false witness and deny reality.

The condition known as 'intersex' is not the same as transgender. A person does not become intersex but is born like that. At birth, the person may have some male anatomical characteristics and some female, or the anatomy of one sex outside and the opposite sex inside. At puberty, the person may produce a hormone associated more with the sex opposite the one assigned at birth. The intersex condition is wrongly used to support the idea that sex is not binary but a spectrum, and gender likewise. It is said that it should be up to individuals where they choose to sit on the 'gender spectrum'. Gender ought to be a matter of scientific fact, not personal preference.

2. *Our gender cannot be changed*

Gender self-identification has become a harmful craze. People are told that their dysphoria can be medically 'fixed'. Surgery and hormone therapy can alter someone's physical appearance, making a man look more like a woman and vice versa, yet the term 'sex change' is a misleading one. No amount of medical intervention can change a person's sex. Trillions of cells in the body defy this. It is biologically, physically and emotionally impossible. The only change that can happen is a change in persona.

If we challenge transgenderism we may be condemned as 'transphobic', yet we must continue to oppose the idea of 'gender change'. It challenges the created order. To live as the opposite sex dishonours the God who made us and gender reassignment surgery desecrates the body He gave us. The Bible teaches that human beings are a coherent whole, with body, soul, and spirit. We do not simply inhabit our bodies; they are part of who we are, as the resurrection will reveal. We are to serve God with our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Transgender ideas have influenced the thinking of the establishment. Over the last twenty years, several Western countries have passed laws recognising people in their new gender identity. In the UK, the Gender Recognition Act was passed at Westminster in 2004. Since then, a man who has fathered children can obtain a birth certificate stating that he was born female. Objective reality has been replaced by fantasy. It is telling that advocates for transgenderism make little or no appeal to science. In their minds, feelings outweigh biology.

3. *People ought to be affirmed in their God-given gender*

Sadly, the 'trans' movement has gained a foothold within the visible church. In 2018, the Church of England published a document containing guidelines for services celebrating the completion of 'gender transitioning' by Anglicans who identify as transgender. This affirms a person's self-identification, and not Scripture, as authoritative. At its 2023 General Assembly, the Church of Scotland instructed its Theological Forum to explore the theology of transgender identities. Again, this ignores God's authority over man. It panders to our sinful desire to be independent of God, doing as we please to our hurt, and not as He commands for our good.

Sympathy must be shown to individuals who are struggling with their biological gender. The aim, however, should be to encourage them to accept their actual identity rather than strive against it. People tempted to live as the opposite sex need help to come to terms with reality. Showing the love of Christ to people who are transgender must include telling them of their need for repentance, as it must for everyone else. God calls us to live in harmony with how He has created us. This will be challenging for some, but pursuing an identity contrary to our created one will lead to much deeper distress.

Conclusions

The root cause of the current gender confusion is sin, which is rebellion against God. His righteous law is ignored in favour of man's wicked inventions. The consequence is very serious. When people continue to reject God, He ultimately rejects them, giving them over to a mind that is empty of judgement (Romans 1:28-32).

We should be very thankful to God, who reigns over this world, that moves in Scotland to make gender change easier have thus far failed. The Scottish Government's Gender Recognition Reform Bill aimed to simplify the process whereby people can obtain a certificate giving legal recognition to a change in their gender, and have the sex recorded on their birth certificate changed. From the age of sixteen, a person's legal gender would effectively become a matter of self-identification. The Bill was approved in December 2022 but the UK Government blocked the Bill from going for royal assent, because of a perceived conflict with UK equality law.

The Scottish Government sought a judicial review of the UK Government's action, but this was rejected by the Court of Session. In December 2023 the Scottish Government said it would not appeal the ruling but would not withdraw the Bill. The final report of the Cass Review of gender identity services for children and young people was published in April 2024 and has caused some to rethink gender change. The Prime Minister has said that the block on the Bill will remain.

We believe that divine providence has worked to frustrate this Bill. We pray that the Lord will continue to thwart it and every other scheme that threatens the physical, moral and spiritual well-being of vulnerable individuals. In the end, what we all need is salvation from sin through Jesus Christ. In Him, we discover our true identity and are enabled to fulfil the end for which God created man, which is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

VIII

REPORT

OF THE

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON PSALMODY

The Book of Psalms is part of the Word of God, given by inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, and has been given to us, not only for reading and singing in private and family worship, but especially for use in Public Worship. All one hundred and fifty of the Metrical Psalms are to be sung. We are not to avoid any of them for any reason. Some Psalms, for example, Psalms 12 and 109, are known as imprecatory Psalms, as they include the calling down of God's wrath upon the enemies of God's people. In Metrical Psalm 139:21, the Psalmist declares, "Do not I hate all those, O Lord, that hatred bare to thee?" This is not personal vengeance, but the Psalmist indicating his identification with the insult caused to God by sin, and the fact that he will not permit it to go unpunished. Moreover, it is the Spirit of Christ who inspired the Psalmist, and we can say therefore that here is Christ himself, by the Spirit, through the Psalmist, speaking in the Psalms. Anyone who has difficulty singing the imprecatory Psalms should consider that it is ultimately God Himself that is speaking and showing how the people of God should view sin and rebellion against him and his cause.

Others may find it difficult to sing the Psalms that speak about war. The Psalmist fought with sin during his lifetime – a fight that the people of God are continually engaged in as long as they are in this world – as well as fighting many just battles against his enemies. These battles point forward to his great antitype, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the battle upon the Cross at Calvary. There He met with the justice of God for the sins of His people, and also defeated the powers of darkness, for, "having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15).

It is important to remember that uninspired hymns are excluded from the worship of God because they are of merely human composition and are therefore not spiritual, in the sense that they are not the product of the Holy Spirit. All the Psalms are, however, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and are the only "spiritual songs" we are to sing when worshipping God. We must have a clear warrant from Scripture for everything that we do when it comes to the worship of God (WCF Ch 21, Sect 1). This includes the praise that is used.

As a denomination it is necessary that we continue to use the 1650 edition of the Scottish Psalter. No other version of the Metrical Psalms has ever come anywhere near in keeping to the thought, sense and meaning of Scripture.

The Committee are grateful to Mrs Sohana McKenzie for continuing to supply copies of the popular *Worthy to be Praised* series of CDs. Another excellent resource has been produced by Rev. & Mrs William Scott, called *Learning to Sing the Psalms*, and is supplementary to the *Worthy to be Praised* series of CDs. It would also be a useful manual for Precentors to have.

Although a work to record the metrical Psalms in the spoken word was undertaken by Rev. & Mrs William Scott, for personal reasons they are no longer able to make progress with it. It was hoped that others from our Congregations may be able to continue this work. However, the Committee are delighted that the Presbytery of the United States have shown a very keen interest in taking full responsibility for this project themselves.

It is the remit of the Committee to endeavour to extend the use of the Psalter as much as possible. Over the last year almost one hundred *Staff Psalters* have been sold. The Committee will consider whether to order more copies and at what price to sell them.

The Committee would also like to encourage Psalmody classes for adults and children, perhaps over the winter months if possible, either within the bounds of Presbyteries or within individual Congregations.

The Committee are still considering the suggestion of compiling an index, preferably at the back of the Psalter, listing the tunes into groups that are appropriate for the particular Psalm sung.

The Committee wish to express their thanks to all Congregational Precentors in their respective Congregations for their commitment, sometimes over many years, and would encourage others to exercise the gift they know God has given them to sing God's praise with His grace in their hearts.

Calum Smith, *Convener*
James I. Gracie, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Special Committee on Psalmody and thank the Committee, with special thanks to the Clerk;

2. The General Assembly encourage the Special Committee on Psalmody to promote the use of Psalmody to organisations such as schools and other Church bodies where there is a desire for it;

3. The General Assembly encourage Presbyteries to have Psalm-singing classes throughout their bounds;

4. The General Assembly encourage the Special Committee on Psalmody to pursue the completion of the Metrical Psalms in spoken form and wish to thank the Free Presbytery of the United States of America for undertaking this important work;

5. The General Assembly thank Congregational Precentors for leading the praise throughout the denomination and encourage others to stir up the gift of God within them.

IX

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOME & FOREIGN MISSIONS

1. Introduction

The work of preaching and spreading the Gospel will always be central to the Church, and so a strong, biblically-based local Church is vital as the basis for reaching out to others. At this time in our history we may feel we are not best equipped to support mission work, at home or overseas, due to lack of manpower and resources, but that may be because we have forgotten the One in whose hand are "the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10). We may indeed be limited in what we as a Church can do, but that surely should not mean we do nothing!

The Lord has prospered some of our efforts in other lands and, indeed for reasons that may be beyond our understanding, we see much more encouraging signs that the Lord is blessing His cause outwith our bounds than in our beloved Scotland. However, we need to continue to faithfully proclaim the Word wherever our lot is cast, with zeal and faith and looking to the One who has promised to "supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). It is good to remind ourselves that, as one writer put it, "Where passion for God is weak, zeal for mission will also be weak."

2**. Europe**

Navarre & Aragon

During the year under review, the work within the bounds of the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon has continued with the help of the Most High. The Committee are thankful to the Lord for the desire expressed by Rev. Camon Tomé, Portugal, to minister in our denomination and look forward with prayerful interest to reports of the conclusion of his required course of study in Church History & Church Principles.

The Committee are aware of a proposal to translate the *Free Church Witness* magazine into Portuguese and at the time of writing await further developments in this area.

Due to the cancellation of last year's School in Theology, some brethren from the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon were able, through the Committee's willingness to transfer funds allocated for attendance at the School, to attend a conference in Budapest organised by Westminster Seminary UK. Rev. Timothy McGlynn kindly organised this visit which seemingly proved beneficial and was greatly enjoyed.

During the course of the year the Committee were made aware of difficulties that have arisen for some brethren in regard to the 'Ministry Support Fund'. It was resolved to approach, in the first instance, the Finance & Sustentation Committee and request permission for the unused budgeted funds allocated for Home Mission Work to be redirected to support the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon. This would be done by crediting £2,000 per month towards its 'Ministry Support Fund' for the seven month period June – December 2025, and thereafter for the full year ending 31 December 2026. It was not possible for the Finance & Sustentation Committee to approve this reallocation of funds without General Assembly approval and the Committee are now seeking this approval. The Committee will give further consideration to this matter and expect to bring further proposals to a future General Assembly.

3. Sri Lanka

In the past year (June 2024) a member of the Committee, Rev. Timothy McGlynn, accompanied by his wife (at her own expense) visited the mission in Sri Lanka. This proved to be a worthwhile visit, not only for Mr McGlynn who had the opportunity to see firsthand the ongoing work of the Lord under Rev. S.N.V.

Partheepan, but was also a great encouragement to the various Congregations in Sri Lanka that he was able to attend and preach in. Such visits are vital for the home Church to be fully informed, and also of course an encouragement to our brother labouring, sometimes in very difficult and indeed lonely circumstances, in that mission field. Rev. A. James MacInnes, although not presently a member of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee, has been a regular supporter and visited in November 2024. Having a deputy visiting on a more regular basis is really helpful, as he is able to see and understand best how the work is developing, and also, of course, gain a clearer insight into problems that arise from time to time.

Arising from a desire by some, who aspire to be preachers and pastors, for more Reformed theological training, Mr Partheepan has established a forum whereby this would be possible. In 2024 the General Assembly noted that funding was in place for a six-month trial period, which commenced in February 2024, to allow for theological training in the Hatton district, south of the present areas of operation in Sri Lanka. Whilst Hatton is no longer the location for this work, it continues to be known as Melville Theological Institute (MTI). The Committee are seeking to clarify the 2024 Finding of Assembly to reflect the fact that approval has been granted for the work of MTI, rather than what was previously known as 'the work in Hatton'.

The work of MTI continues with lectures provided not only by Mr Partheepan but also additional online teaching by some of our own ministers both in the United Kingdom and America. Material from the John Knox Institute website, to which several of our ministers have contributed, is also utilised. Specific topics are to be covered as proposed by the Kirk Session. There are currently ten students attending. These students receive a monthly grant generously provided by the Presbytery of the United States of America. Due to the need to support their families, the students would struggle to attend to their studies without the support they receive from the United States Presbytery. The evangelist, who for some years was employed by the Reformed Protestant Mission, has been replaced by two part-time workers, both of whom are students at MTI.

The work at Re-annan farm continues, and while of a different nature to the usual Gospel work, it nevertheless meets a need in that country by providing employment, and, in due course, we trust also financial support for the work of the Mission.

There has been interest from a small Baptist Congregation at Kilinochchi seeking to be incorporated into the Mission. The Committee, obviously guided by Mr Partheepan, are supportive of this new venture. The Kirk Session, with the support of the Board, have now purchased the church building at Kilinochchi and are now appealing for funds to assist in this work. The Committee are thankful for the large and generous financial support already received from individuals for this purchase.

The Committee are currently considering how it might be possible to implement a better way of ensuring Mr Partheepan's maintenance grant can be proportionately related to the ministerial stipend in the home Church.

During the course of the year, Rev. Kenneth M. Macdonald resigned from the Kirk Session of the Reformed Protestant Mission, Sri Lanka, and has been replaced by Rev. Timothy J. McGlynn. The Committee thank Mr. Macdonald for his assistance over a number of years and are grateful to Mr McGlynn for his willingness to help in this way.

It has been with thankfulness that the Committee received £2,000 following the appeal in *The Explorer* magazine for Miss Jansie's Preschool (known more formally as Selvanagar Preschool) and also for Christian friends in Singapore who provide some funds for the running of the Knox Christian Preschool.

The Committee continue to follow with interest the work of Karis Care, who provide assistance to families caring for those with disability, and commend this ministry of compassion to the wider Church. Funding for this work is dependent on a matching income basis only.

The Committee are delighted that Mr Partheepan hopes to attend this year's General Assembly and spend time in Scotland reacquainting himself with the home Church and praying friends. It is also hoped that he may be able to visit Australia in 2026 and meet with brethren in the PCEA, with a view to their becoming involved in the work of the mission.

4. North America

The Presbytery of the United States of America have been greatly encouraged in recent times, not only by attendances at public worship but also by the amount of interest shown in the witness of the Church. Their annual all-age conference continues to be well attended and is a means of encouragement to many who, because of great distances between Congregations, do not have much opportunity to meet with like-minded brethren. At the last Conference there were visitors from Canada, part of a group formed by the Presbytery into a Preaching Station of our Church. An application has recently received the support of the Presbytery for the Congregation to be raised to a fully sanctioned charge and they await final approval from this year's General Assembly. Through what is, in many ways, a mysterious providence, this Preaching Station, at Nobleford, Alberta, is presently without a Pastor and under the care of Rev. Gavin Beers, who serves as their Interim Moderator. They are a gathering of around 100 souls and, amazingly for those of us in Scotland, the vast majority are under 60 years of age! They have now purchased their own church building.

During the course of the year, Rev. Romesh Prakashpalan was inducted as minister of the new Congregation in Fredericksburg,Virginia.

Sadly the services at Smiths Falls have now ceased and the Congregation has been dissolved. The remaining funds were kindly donated to the fledgling work in Nobleford, Alberta.

5. Clerk

Following the last Assembly the Committee welcomed a new Clerk, Rev. Stuart Farmes, who has become increasingly familiar with the different areas of responsibility and is due the thanks of the Assembly.

KENNETH M. MACDONALD, *Convener*
WILLIAM MACLEOD, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee and thank the Committee, especially the Convener and the Vice-convener;

2. The General Assembly thank the Clerk of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee, Rev. Stuart Farmes, for his labours on their behalf;

3. The General Assembly note with interest the continuing work within the bounds of the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon and prayerfully remember Rev. Camon Tomé, Braga, Portugal as he looks to complete his prescribed course of studies;

4. The General Assembly note with interest the possibility of having the *Free Church Witness* magazine translated into Portuguese by Mr Heraldo Almeida and thank him for his endeavours;

5. The General Assembly note that, due to the cancellation of the 2024 School in Theology, part of the budget assigned for brethren from the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon to attend the School in Theology was used instead to allow their attendance at the Reformed Colloquium in Budapest organised by Westminster Seminary, UK. They thank Rev. Timothy McGlynn for organising this;

6. The General Assembly authorise the sum of £2,000 per month to be credited towards the 'Ministry Support Fund' operated by the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon, for the seven-month period June

– December 2025, and thereafter for the full year ending 31 December 2026 – a budgetary increase of £24,000 for that year;

7. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the ongoing work of the Church in Sri Lanka and especially the selfless contribution made by Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan, and continue to pray for the Lord's upholding of him;

8. The General Assembly note that Rev. Timothy McGlynn and his wife visited Sri Lanka in June 2024, and Rev. James MacInnes later in the year, and express thankfulness for their willingness to do so;

9. The General Assembly note an interest from a small Baptist Congregation in Kilinochchi with a view to possible incorporation into the Mission at a future date. They note the purchase of the church building in Kilinochchi, the very generous donations which have been made, and support the request for raising necessary further funds church-wide for the improvement of the building;

10. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the establishing of Melville Theological Institute, a continuation of the previously approved work in Hatton, under the auspices of the Church and under the leadership and guidance of Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan;

11. The General Assembly note with prayerful interest that two students, currently studying at Melville Theological Institute, have replaced the former full-time Evangelist and continue that work on a part-time basis;

12. The General Assembly note the ongoing development of Ra-annan farm and its usefulness in feeding the needy and raising funds to support the work of the Gospel;

13. The General Assembly note the need for a more formal mechanism in raising Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan's maintenance grant and approve a *pro rata* relation between a stipend increase and his maintenance grant payment;

14. The General Assembly are thankful for the funds raised through the appeal in *The Explorer* for Miss Jansie's Preschool (known more formally as Selvanagar Pre-school) and funds raised from friends in Singapore for the Knox Christian Preschool;

15. The General Assembly, noting the good work being undertaken by the Selvanagar Pre-Christian School, grant approval for this work and funding thereof for the remainder of 2025 and for the sum of £2,200 to be reallocated to the Home & Foreign Missions Committee 2026 draft budget thereanent;

16. The General Assembly commend the work of Karis Care and approve the continued funding of this work on a matching income basis;

17. The General Assembly note the resignation of Rev. Kenneth M. Macdonald from the Kirk Session of the Reformed Protestant Mission, Sri Lanka, and the subsequent appointment of Rev. Timothy J. McGlynn, and thank both men for their assistance;

18. The General Assembly note with thankfulness Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan's presence at the Assembly and pray for continued help from above as he visits various Congregations throughout the UK;

19. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the progress, under God, that is being made amongst our brethren in the Presbytery of the United States of America;

20. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the formation and growth of the preaching station in Nobleford, Canada;

21. The General Assembly note with regret that services in Smiths Falls have ceased and that the Congregation is now dissolved, and are thankful that the Congregation kindly donated their remaining funds to the Preaching Station at Nobleford, Alberta;

22. The General Assembly note with gladness the induction of Rev. Romesh Prakashpalan to the pastorate of Zion Presbyterian Church, Fredericksburg, and pray the Lord's blessing on the Congregation and Pastor.

X.

REPORT

OF THE

TRAINING OF THE MINISTRY & ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE

1. Introduction

The Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee is a Standing Committee of Assembly. As its name suggests, the Committee have a two-fold remit. It is responsible for the approval of Candidates for the Ministry of the Free Church (Continuing) and their academic training. It is also responsible for the processing of Applications for Admission from Ministers and Probationers of other denominations who may desire to join the Free Church (Continuing). A third area of responsibility, connected to the other two, is the oversight of the Free Church Seminary.

Such a committee suggests that we regard the ministry as having a significant place in our Church's life. Are there any ways in which we can measure how important that place is? There are perhaps three.

One way is to consider the *financial resources* we allocate to the ministry. A striking statistic is that 70% of our denomination's ordinary expenditure goes towards the payroll costs for our ministers, principally their stipends but also national insurance and pension contributions. The figure was higher until recently: over the last few years the number of ministers in pastoral charges has declined, leaving us with seven vacancies at present.

The Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee's budgeted expenditure for 2025 is almost £20,000 and the bulk of this goes on student grants. Our Church ordinarily requires Candidates for the Ministry to study full-time – itself an indication of the importance the ministry has in our view. We desire to see our vacant Congregations provided with pastors. The Committee would rejoice to be budgeting more for student grants and no doubt the Finance & Sustentation Committee would feel the same about stipends!

A second way to measure the importance we attach to the ministry is to consider the *human resources* we employ in it. We believe in a full-time ministry – a life gladly given up to prayer, preaching the Gospel and pastoring God's people. This is a great undertaking, and who is sufficient for it? In the end, only God can prepare a man for the ministry, yet the man must also prepare himself. It is only with much prayer, humbling and heart-searching that anyone ought to offer himself for this work. If he is accepted by the Church, then others will be involved in helping him to prepare for the ministry, through several years of intensive and extensive training.

When an inward call is discerned it must receive an outward confirmation from the Church. The form to be completed when applying for recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry deals, among other things, with the grounds of the application. It examines the applicant's sense of call, asking, "What are your motives in seeking to study for the Christian ministry?" and, "What has led you to conclude that you personally are called to the Christian ministry?"

The Kirk Session's section of the form emphasises the dedication required in fulfilling the ministerial calling and the bearing it will have upon a man's dependants. Regarding a single applicant, the Session is asked what it can state of "the applicant's commitment to the self-denying service and lifestyle required in the pastoral ministry". Regarding a married applicant, the Session is asked what it can state about "the extent to which the applicant's wife is in sympathy with the Application and the commitment of both parties to the self-denying service and lifestyle required in the pastoral ministry".

The final recommendation of an Application to the "favourable consideration" of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee belongs to the Presbytery. In its section of the form it is asked to comment on "the applicant's understanding of a Call to the Ministry with its self-denying lifestyle and service".

The form is aiming, with these and other questions, to ensure that the applicant, if accepted as a candidate, may be able ultimately in the will of God to answer with a sincere "Yes" an important question put by presbyteries to Probationers before their ordination. The question is: "Are not zeal for the honour of God, love to Jesus Christ, and desire of saving souls, your great motives and chief inducements to enter into the function of the holy ministry, and not worldly designs and interests?" Here we have the essence of what the Church desires in her ministers in terms of their spirituality and priorities.

At ordination the Church sets a man apart to the work of the ministry. It provides him with a Stipend which should be sufficient to enable him to give himself wholly to his calling (1 Tim. 4:15). The latest available figures show us that the FC(C) has thirty ministers in the UK, sixteen of whom are in Charges, and just over 1,000 people, made up of communicant members, adherents and children. This amounts to one minister for every thirty-three souls, and one minister in a pastoral Charge for every sixty-three souls. Not so long ago one congregation in the Isle of Lewis had the same number of people served by just one minister.

It is a sign of the times we live in that most of our congregations are now small, yet we can still finance ministers for them. Our society is materially rich but spiritually it has become poor. Our people are to be commended for their generous giving, without which the number of ministers we have, and wish to have, could not be sustained. We long that, through the Gospel preached by our ministers, many poor souls might become rich in the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 8:9)!

In the immediate aftermath of the division of 2000, the Church had to send a student to Northern Ireland for his ministerial training. As soon as it was practicable we set up our Seminary, which opened in September 2003. It is staffed solely by our ministers. We believe this to be the best arrangement because we are convinced it follows the biblical pattern. "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

The Seminary staff have a considerable commitment. The Principal and four of the five lecturers are serving pastors, meaning that they must combine their Seminary duties with the care of their congregations. The lecturers must prepare course material, give tutorials, and be available for consultation by students. The Principal is responsible for the administration, producing reports for the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee and liaising with outside bodies. We are persuaded that in each case what is done is very much a "labour of love" (Heb. 6:10).

A third way to measure the importance we attach to the ministry is to consider the *spiritual resources* we devote to it. This is the key to its success. It is the most challenging measure for us all. Like everything in the Kingdom of God, the divine blessing is essential if the work of the ministry is to bear fruit. It is a calling to be undertaken only by men who have grace and continue to seek grace. Paul was made a minister "according to the gift of the grace of God", and grace was given to him that he should "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:7,8).

The "God of all grace" (1 Pet. 5:10) has made infinite resources available to the ministry: they belong to the fullness that is found in Christ (John 1:16). How are these resources obtained? By *prayer*. Ministers know that if their preaching is to enjoy God's favour they must be constantly at the throne of grace. "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). Like Paul, we value the support of the Lord's people. "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified" (2 Thess. 3:1).

It is very encouraging, as well as humbling, when ministers hear petitions made for them and their work at the congregational prayer meeting. We commend regular prayer, both public and private, for our ministers. Is the Seminary also remembered in our prayer meetings, and our pulpits and our homes? If it is, then the benefit will not be confined to the staff and students: by praying we will have a greater sense of involvement in the Seminary's work. In a real sense, it represents our denomination's future.

In that connection, do we pray fervently that God would raise more men for the ministry? Christ exhorts us to do this. "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:37,38). The Head of the Church has His eye on these new labourers. They may be men already taking services, and who will later be led to consider the ministry. They may be men who have never conducted a service, but who will experience a desire to do so. Or they may be men who as yet have had no thought of such things.

These three measures help us to assess how important the ministry is to us as a Church. All in all, we believe that it is central to God's purpose of grace in the world. The Free Church minister, Robert Macdonald (1813-93), wrote: "The ministry is sometimes spoken of as a mere human arrangement – a thing to be continued or abolished at pleasure, and which depends for success solely on the talent and genius of the men who discharge its duties. In reality, however, it is a *divinely appointed* instrumentality, an ordinance of Christ. The vessels may be earthen, not golden, yet they are God's vessels notwithstanding; and he has been pleased, in the riches of his grace, to put the treasure therein for saving ends."

This year's Report covers the usual subject areas and the Seminary Report is appended. A Supplementary Report will appear separately.

2. Funding for Candidates for the Ministry

The 2024 General Assembly encouraged the Committee to investigate the possibility of new sources of funding for those training for the Ministry, and to report thereanent to the General Assembly of 2025.

At their June meeting, the Committee considered an approach to The Bonar Trust, a registered Scottish charity, to ascertain if our Divinity Students would qualify for financial assistance. It was agreed that, in the first instance, Rev. Trevor Kirkland, the Seminary Principal, and the Clerk to the Committee would work together to fill out the online application form with proposed answers and draft a covering letter explaining how the Church trains its ministers. Thereafter the two documents were circulated to the members of the Committee, who were encouraged to identify any other possible source or sources of financial help that may be available.

The Committee approved the answers in the application form. It was agreed that the Seminary Principal would make an application for the Free Church (Continuing) to be recognised as a *Training Church*. It was also agreed that the Clerk would make contact with the Divinity Student likely to benefit most from any financial assistance which might be forthcoming, to inform the student of this possible new source of funding. The Clerk would also suggest to the student that he make himself familiar with The Bonar Trust's protocol should it transpire that he would make an application in due course.

A submission for the Church Leader-In-Training Programme Questionnaire was made in March. Subsequent correspondence from the Trust Administrator indicated that the model which the Trust currently supports for training is one where a ministry candidate is placed in a local church where they receive training under the supervision of a minister, alongside their theological studies. This would need a completed Questionnaire from each individual "training church" rather than just one which covers the denomination or Seminary. The Trust would also need a completed grant application form from each individual candidate, outlining their financial needs. In summary, any application to The Bonar Trust must be on a congregational level not a denominational one.

Although there are clearly some differences between our model for training ministers and the one envisaged by the Trust, the differences do not appear to be such as would preclude a potential application being made. Other Presbyterian bodies have Congregations which have successfully applied to the Trust. At the end of the day, if a Congregation wish to be recognised as a "training church" whose students are trained at our own Seminary and are under the Assembly's Committee for training for the ministry, they are free to do so. This would involve some commitment on the part of the local Congregation to provide some practical training, which is something that in theory should be happening anyway. The deadline for applications for the 2025-26 year is 30th April and the Trust notifies applicants regarding the outcome of their application in June.

3. Practical Training for Candidates for the Ministry

Whilst the academic training of Candidates for the Ministry is vital, it has long been recognised that there is, in addition, a need for practical training. The Seminary have, over the years, provided Preaching Classes (providing feedback on sermons preached), Student Placements and practical Evangelism Modules. In addition, students have often sat in on local Church Courts, undertaken pastoral visitation with the Minister and provided pulpit supply, either occasionally or for a period of time.

More recently the Seminary have only been able to provide the Evangelism Module by way of practical training. A lack of UK-based students, and also logistics, has led to the Preaching Classes being discontinued. The Student Placements were stopped after a difficulty arose almost twenty years ago. While there is a general expectation that the student's Minister will help with practical training, this is more on an ad hoc basis. As nothing is precisely mandated it can lead to either the matter slipping under the radar, or the students being tied up with studies and preaching to such an extent that it is difficult locally to attend to the practical training of students. This is something that has been drawn to the attention of both the Committee and Seminary by those seeking to pastor the students within their Congregations. The Committee believe that much is to be gained from the provision of practical training and that, given the limitations of the Seminary and the fact that students are resident at home, more of the practical training should be provided by the local Minister or in the Congregation, with the assistance, if it is felt required, of neighbouring Congregations. There is also a role for Presbytery involvement, as has sometimes happened in the past.

The Committee believe it would be useful to set out what they envisage should be expected by way of practical training. This is set out in the policy guidelines below and in the guidelines found in the deliverance.

Practical training provided by the Seminary

This is under the supervision of the Lecturer in Apologetics & Pastoral Theology. It should consist of:

– Preaching Classes when practical to arrange;
– the Evangelism Module;
– other practical training as arranged.

Practical training provided locally

This is primarily the responsibility of the Minister and Session of the Congregation to which the student belongs. It is recognised that what is provided may vary depending on the locality and local needs. It may include:

– Pastoral / Hospital visitation with the Minister / Elders;
– sitting in on local Church Courts in the latter years of study;
– local evangelism;
– preaching with feedback from the Minister;
– cultivation of spiritual life and piety;
– leading or assisting in local programmes of activity as arranged.

During the Seminary term, the student should be devoting most of his time to his studies. However, some time should be given to practical training locally, at least three to five hours per week. Thus, during this time, the Minister of the local Congregation should not view the student as his assistant. Outside term time there may be opportunities for continuing this training, depending on the student's circumstances.

Should more practical training be done locally, this would render a stricter enforcement than hitherto of Act XX 1985 para 6, which seeks to restrict the amount of preaching students engage in during Seminary term-time.

It should be the case that there is a degree of liaison between the lecturer in Pastoral Theology and the student's own minister.

The above should not preclude students taking on periods of resident supply outside term time, as long as their own minister is content with the arrangement.

In many ways, what is suggested is nothing new, but, having received feedback from the ministers of divinity students, it is felt that to set out more clearly and formally such arrangements in terms of policy guidelines may be useful. The policy is primarily for UK students, although the guidelines may be found helpful elsewhere. The Committee will keep the policy under review.

4. Training for non-English-speaking Candidates for the Ministry

The 2024 General Assembly noted that the Committee had begun to investigate how they may provide training for possible Divinity Students whose first language is French or Spanish and whose English is such that they are not able to complete the usual Course of Training at the Seminary. The Assembly encouraged the Committee to apply themselves thereanent with all speed and to bring matured proposals to the 2025 General Assembly.

At their October meeting the Committee considered a report from the Seminary Principal, following consideration of the matter by the Seminary. After further consideration of the subject at their March meeting, the Committee agreed to make the following proposals to the General Assembly regarding training for non-English-speaking divinity students:

(1). The Seminary should not be expected to teach in any language other than English, it being impracticable to translate materials for teaching and then for marking.

(2). Where possible Candidates for the Ministry should learn in English.

(3). Overseas Candidates for the Ministry for whom English is not their first language should be allowed additional time for their examinations.

(4). Candidates for the Ministry from North America, South America, Europe and Sri Lanka who do not have sufficient English should be taught in their own languages by those conversant with the relevant languages and under terms that would lead to a restricted licence.

(5). Should a Kirk Session or Presbytery which is under the supervision of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee desire to have Candidates for the Ministry trained in their own language as opposed to English, then the relevant Court shall seek the assistance of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee in fulfilling their desire, with a view to the said Committee seeking the advice and approval of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee, that the said Committee may bring matured proposals on training of such Candidates for the Ministry for particular Mission fields to the General Assembly for final authorisation. This is not intended to replace Act XVII 2024, which, in the view of the Committee, should remain in place.

(6). A student who cannot speak English should receive a restricted licence that would enable him to serve in his native language, but which would render him ineligible to receive a Call to a Congregation outside the general mission field for which he has been trained and licensed;

5. Roll of Students

The complement of students in training is as follows (private students in italics):

Three Year Diploma Course	**Four Diploma Year Course**
Second Year:	*Mr Thiago Gomes, Brazil*
Third Year: Mr Alan Blaney, Northern Ireland	Mr Kevin Norman MacDonald, Scotland Mr Fabien Garat, France
Fourth Year:	Mr Joel Suarez, Spain

Six Year Diploma Course – Part Time

First Year: *Mr Gerdus Human, South Africa*

Second Year: *Mr Christian Lou, Spain*

Fourth year: Mr Paul Pontacq, France

Students under Act XIX 2017

Mr Jacob Carne, USA

It should be noted that Mr Christian Lou is a member of the Church who is in the process of making Application for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry.

Mr Tyler Ray completed his studies at the Seminary last year and was issued with a Completion Certificate on 4th July.

At the time of writing, no further Applications for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry have been intimated to the Committee.

At their October meeting the Committee reappointed their External Examiners to the Seminary.

6. Applications for Admission

The 2024 General Assembly received an Application for Admission to the Ministry from Rev. Camon Tomé and admitted him as an ordained minister of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) with effect from his signing of the Formula, to be arranged by the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon. Mr Tomé was required to complete the prescribed Course in Scottish Church History, Church Principles and Church Practice before he would be eligible for a Call. By the beginning of March, he had completed 37% of the Course. Mr Tomé continues to supply the Braga Congregation in Portugal.

The 2024 General Assembly also received an Application for Admission to the Ministry from Rev. Romesh Prakashpalan and admitted him as an ordained minister of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) with effect from his signing of the Formula, to be arranged by the Free Presbytery of the USA. The Assembly recommended that he completes the prescribed Course in Scottish Church History, Church Principles and Church Practice, and on a voluntary basis he had completed 5% of the Course by the beginning of March. Mr Prakashpalan was inducted to the Fredericksburg Congregation in Virginia, USA, on 8th November 2024.

The 2022 General Assembly admitted Rev. Stuart Farmes as an ordained minister of the Free Church of

Scotland (Continuing), requiring him to complete the prescribed Course in Scottish Church History, Church Principles and Church Practice before he would be eligible for a Call. At their March meeting, the Committee were informed that Mr Farmes had completed the Course. His name has now been transferred to the Register of Ministers without Charge eligible for Call.

At the time of writing, no further Applications for Admission have been received by the Committee, and none have been intimated to the Committee.

The Committee have given some consideration to the protocol to be used when interviewing potential divinity students and ministers and probationers seeking admission. It was agreed that when any of the aforementioned make an application, the Clerk is to inform them that they are likely to be orally examined on the document *The Right of Continued Protest*.

7. Additional Training for Applicants for Admission

The 2024 General Assembly came to the following finding regarding additional training for applicants for admission to the ministry:

"The General Assembly, whilst noting that it is for the Assembly receiving an Application for Admission to direct what additional training a successful Applicant may be required to fulfil before becoming eligible for a Call,

1. reaffirm that it is the remit of the Training of Ministry & Admissions Committee to advise the General Assembly on what training may be required by an Applicant, taking account of the range of subjects currently required of those training for the ministry;

2. direct that all Ministers and Probationers making a successful Application for Admission shall, ordinarily, be required to complete a course in Scottish Church History & Church Principles at the Free Church Seminary before they are eligible to receive a Call;

3. instruct Presbyteries to provide to the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee any observations they may have as to whether an Applicant would benefit from further training;

4. direct that it is the responsibility of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee to supervise the studies of those successful Applicants undertaking such studies, and that it is the Committee who shall decide when such studies have been satisfactorily competed and shall inform the Principal Clerk of Assembly thereanent;"

At their October meeting the Committee took up the subject and the following points were noted:

1) All Ministers without Charge are under the supervision of the Presbytery where they reside. The Principal is in contact with those doing the Course and seeks to provide support as required.

2) It is for the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee to supervise the studies of those Ministers who are required to undertake further study and for the said Committee to determine when such studies have been completed and to inform the Principal Clerk thereanent.

3) Customarily the Minister has had to fulfil the Church History & Principles Course but not sit an exam. Given that the Course contains many assignments which must be completed to fulfil the course, this would not appear to be unreasonable. Were a more intensive course arranged involving a variety of subjects (as has happened in the past) then examination passes have been required.

8. Application Forms

The 2024 General Assembly encouraged the Committee in their revision of the form for Application for

Admission to the Ministry (last revised in 2000) and the form for Application for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry (last revised in 2010). At their March meeting, it was agreed that the Clerk would compile a list of questions that need to be on the forms and circulate them to the Committee for their approval. A draft of the questions required for the revised Application for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry form has now been drawn up. When finally revised and approved, the list will be forwarded to Mr Murdo Murray to create the forms. The revised forms will be digital and editable so that applicants can fill them in on their computers or similar devices. The ease with which such forms can be shared electronically makes things easier for the Church courts involved and for the Committee. It might be added that such forms also eliminate the difficulties caused by poor handwriting, of which we can all be guilty. It is hoped that the Committee will be able to complete their work on the forms by their June meeting.

9. The Seminary

The Committee express their sincere thanks to the Seminary staff for their labours over another academic year. The new session began at Westhill in September as usual and the opening evening was well attended. The Evangelism Module is due to be held in Edinburgh in April. The Seminary have indicated that they are open to the Module being held in other places, as long as there is a resident Minister who is able to lead the outreach, oversee the students and give them general pastoral advice during the time when no evangelism is being undertaken. The Seminary Report prepared by the Principal is appended to this Report.

In early January, Rev. Henry J.T. Woods informed the Committee of his intention to retire from his post as Lecturer in Apologetics & Pastoral Theology at the Seminary as from the forthcoming General Assembly. As Mr Woods has been in the post since 20th April 2007, this is a significant development for the Seminary.

The Committee met on 14th January and agreed to accept Mr Woods' resignation, with both sadness and deep appreciation for his long and valued service. It is hoped that at the General Assembly it will be possible to express the Church's gratitude to Mr Woods in a tangible way. The Committee have taken the steps required by Assembly legislation. Presbyteries were circulated informing them of the impending vacancy and were invited to submit to the Committee one or more nominations for the post of Lecturer in Apologetics & Pastoral Theology, with a note of their qualifications. The returns received from Presbyteries are the subject of a Supplementary Report.

10. Constitution of the Seminary

The 2024 General Assembly encouraged the Committee to complete the updating of the Constitution of the Seminary so that it might be brought before the 2025 General Assembly. The initial work was carried out by Rev. John W. Keddie during his time as Principal of the Seminary. Input was also received from the late Rev. John MacLeod, a former Clerk to the Committee. This work was then completed by the current Seminary Principal. It is essentially an updating of the Constitution of the College as set out in Act IV (Class 2) 1979 to take account of the new circumstances the Seminary finds itself in since the events of 2000. During this review a number of Acts of Assembly were noted to be completely irrelevant to the current arrangements for the Seminary and it is proposed to repeal these, along with the 1979 Constitution. At a meeting in April the Committee agreed a text which is found in the deliverance.

One item noted during the review was that under Act IX (Class 1) 1861 it falls to the Committee "to originate and prosecute before the Church Courts processes against any of the Professors for heresy or immorality, and to make necessary inquiries for that purpose". The Committee believe that, given the changes since 2000, it may be of value to consider in the coming year whether this power given to the Committee should remain, either in whole or in part.

11. Quinquennial Visitation of the Seminary

At their October meeting the Committee noted that they had last undertaken a Quinquennial Visitation of the Seminary in February 2018. It was agreed that another Visitation should be held as soon as is practicable. Setting a date has not proved easy: ideally, the Visitation would take place when the UK students are present

for 'Seminary Days' and when as many as possible of the Committee can manage to attend. It is now hoped to conduct the Visitation on 3rd February 2026 (D.V.). The format and timing will be confirmed after further discussion between the Convener, the Seminary Principal and the Clerk.

DAVID M. BLUNT, *Convener*
IAIN SMITH, *Vice-convener*

SEMINARY REPORT

If the work of faithful Ministers is essential for the well-being of the Church and advancement of the cause of Christ, then the training of men for that work is critical. Divinity Students must be trained to the highest academic standards, yet there must also be an equal concern for their spiritual cultivation, as well as an emphasis that they are being trained for the work of preaching and pastoring. They are to become experts in theology, the defence of the faith, and the original languages, and learn the lessons taught from the history of the Church. All this, however, will be of little use if it does not motivate them to personal godliness and prepare them to become physicians of the soul, both in and out of the pulpit. It is with such high and lofty goals that the Seminary lecturers seek to discharge their work. How they and the students under their care need the prayers of the Church so that they would be able to fulfil the trust the Church has placed in them!

Over the last year there has been an increasing number of enquiries from individuals throughout the world who are seeking training which is not merely academic but also maintains an emphasis on experimental preaching. Sadly, this emphasis appears to be lacking in many seminaries and colleges today, especially if the training is from a confessionally-conservative position. Thus, although the Seminary is small, and due to logistics operates through distance learning, its presence is fulfilling a real need, not only for the FC(C) but also for others. It is in many ways a ministry arm of the Church, helping to influence others and spread the reformed faith throughout the world. For example, it is expected that in 2025 a student from East Asia who is involved in a missionary work supported by many in the Church will begin studies.

Over the 2024-2025 Session, there have been eight students undertaking the Diploma Course, all with a view to the Ministry. Of these, five are FC(C) students, with two of them from the UK and three from the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon. Another student is an FC(C) member from Spain, who is studying whilst awaiting the opportunity to apply for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry. There are two private students, one from Brazil and one from South Africa. With eight students at various stages in their studies who are undertaking the Course over three, four or even six years, the need for flexibility as well as co-ordination is evident. However, the Seminary, led by the Principal, have risen to the challenge and are thankful to be of service to the Lord.

While this last session has been fairly routine, the Seminary are always looking to improve the way things are done. Some consideration has been given to lengthening the three 'Seminary Days' – sessions when students and lecturers are together. This could allow more time for teaching and contact with each lecturer, as well as enabling a more collegiate atmosphere to develop amongst the students. This is in addition to time spent together at the School in Theology, the Evangelism Module (held this year in Edinburgh) and the General Assembly. To an extent this is dependent on logistics and the Seminary Committee will consider the matter at their next meeting in June once a new lecturer is appointed.

The Seminary Committee were saddened to hear of the impending retirement of Rev. Henry J.T. Woods as Lecturer in Apologetics & Practical Theology. Mr Woods has served the Church and Seminary in this role for eighteen years and has dedicated much time and energy to the training of his students. Indeed, for many years, while resident in Beauly, he and Mrs Woods provided accommodation and edifying 'table talk' to the students, providing much invaluable, practical, pastoral advice. The appreciation of the Seminary and the wider Church for Mr & Mrs Woods will be expressed during the Assembly (D.V.).

The Seminary again record their appreciation to the Deacons' Court of Inverness, Free Greyfriars for making their facilities available for housing the Seminary Library and for teaching, and the holding of public meetings. They also thank Rev. John Keddie, who continues to serve as the Seminary Librarian. Enquiries concerning the Seminary Library, should, in the first place, be directed to him.

Due to the increased number of Diploma Students, the Seminary are only taking on men from within our own Church for the *Certificate in Theological Studies*.

It is hoped that Volume VIII of the annual *Seminary Journal* will be available around the time of the Assembly. The Journal remains a useful volume of papers and it is intended to seek to increase interest in it from further afield.

GRAEME CRAIG, *Principal*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee and thank the Committee, especially the Convener, Vice-convener and Clerk;

2. The General Assembly thank the Principal and Lecturers of the Seminary for their continued faithful labours in the instruction of our Divinity Students. They commend the staff and students to the prayers of our people;

3. The General Assembly thank the External Examiners appointed by the Committee for their continued important service in ensuring the integrity of the teaching in the Seminary;

4. The General Assembly note with satisfaction the progress of the Divinity Students, both from the UK and overseas, and thank God for upholding and enabling them in the pursuit of their studies;

5. The General Assembly note the progress made by the Committee in investigating the possibility of new sources of funding for men training for the Church's ministry, and in particular the approach made to The Bonar Trust. They further note that it is up to local Congregations whether they may wish to be involved with The Bonar Trust;

6. The General Assembly, noting that whilst the primary responsibility for the practical training of Candidates for the Ministry lies with the relevant Lecturer in the Seminary, recognise the necessity of this being supplemented within the student's own local setting under his own Minister and Session, and direct that such practical training shall follow the policy guidelines below:

   (1). The Seminary shall be responsible for the provision, where practical, of both a Preaching Class and an Evangelism Module and other activities as arranged.

   (2). Local Ministers and Kirk Sessions shall be responsible for providing opportunities for practical training suitable to their own circumstances and the student's needs. This shall include, but not be limited to, feedback on preaching, opportunities for local evangelism, pastoral visitation and attendance at Church Courts, the cultivation of spiritual piety, etc.

   (3). The Minister shall be responsible for supervising the training and shall report to the Lecturer in Apologetics & Pastoral Theology at the beginning of December and June each year. The Minister may seek the assistance of other ministers in the fulfilment of this remit. Presbyteries also have a locus in this area.

   (4). Students shall undertake regular, weekly, local practical training throughout the Seminary Session, which, during term-time, shall be a minimum of three to five hours per week on average.

Ministers and Divinity Students are reminded of the provisions of Act XX 1985 para 6;

7. The General Assembly direct that the following principles shall apply regarding training for non-English-speaking divinity students:

(1). The Seminary should not be expected to teach in any language other than English, it being impracticable to translate materials for teaching and then for marking.

(2). Where possible Candidates for the Ministry should learn in English.

(3). Overseas Candidates for the Ministry for whom English is not their first language should be allowed additional time for their examinations.

(4). Candidates for the Ministry from North America, South America, Europe and Sri Lanka who do not have sufficient English should be taught in their own languages by those conversant with the relevant languages and under terms that would lead to a restricted licence.

(5). Should a Kirk Session or Presbytery which is under the supervision of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee desire to have Candidates for the Ministry trained in their own language as opposed to English, then the relevant Court shall seek the assistance of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee in fulfilling their desire, with a view to the said Committee seeking the advice and approval of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee, that the said Committee may bring matured proposals on training of such Candidates for the Ministry for particular Mission fields to the General Assembly for final authorisation. Notwithstanding these provisions, the General Assembly reaffirm Act XVII 2024.

(6). A student who cannot speak English should receive a restricted licence that would enable him to serve in his native language but which would render him ineligible to receive a Call to a Congregation outside the general mission field for which he has been trained and licensed;

8. The General Assembly note that when the Committee are to interview potential Candidates for the Ministry or ministers and probationers making Application for Admission, the Clerk to the Committee will inform the applicants that they are likely to be orally examined on the document *The Right of Continued Protest*;

9. The General Assembly note the points made by the Committee regarding additional training for successful Applicants for Admission;

10. The General Assembly note the progress made by the Committee in their revision of the forms for Application for Admission to the Ministry and Application for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry;

11. The General Assembly note the progress made by the Committee in updating the Constitution of the Free Church Seminary. They approve a revised Constitution for the Seminary and enact in the following terms:

CONSTITUTION
OF THE FREE CHURCH SEMINARY

1. *Preamble*

As the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) is in continuous descent from the Free Church of 1843, so too is the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) Seminary. The Free Church Seminary is heir to the theology, principles and traditions of the Disruption Church and of the Colleges instituted in the period of her early evangelical fervour. Although Lecturers and a Principal

were appointed to undertake the training of the students who had joined the Disruption Church, no formal constitution was considered for some years, until the New College in Edinburgh was completed. Act V, 1852, is the basic piece of General Assembly legislation but is not in itself a complete constitution, and various Acts had to be passed at later dates in order to regulate some aspects of the College's life and activities. The Constitution framed in this document is not an independent charter for the College (hereinafter designated Seminary). It is inclusive of existing legislation and is incorporated in an Act of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).

2. ***Of the Seminary***

1. The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) Seminary shall be a non-residential Seminary, Reformed, Evangelical and Presbyterian. Its aim shall be to produce a fully equipped ministry, prepared in all the disciplines of the Reformed tradition.

2. The Seminary shall not be an independent body corporate: it shall be under the exclusive control of, and shall be responsible to, the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) acting through its General Assembly and Committees appointed by that Assembly.

3. Doctrinally, the Seminary shall be committed to an unswerving loyalty to the authority of the inspired Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and a commitment to the whole doctrine contained in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Academically, it shall be loyal to the Disruption policy of maintaining a high standard, comparable normally to that of the universities, in its curriculum, teaching and examinations.

4. Details of the post-2000 history of the Seminary, together with information about the lecturers, Seminary courses and other requirements, together with the requirements of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee shall be contained in a *Seminary Handbook.* In addition, the timetable for each Session and the scale of fees for non-denominational and other private students shall be separately obtainable from the Clerk to the Seminary Committee every year.

5. The following subjects shall be taught:–

(1) *Three Year Course*

First Year:–

- Church History and Principles (1)
- Pastoral Theology (1)
- Hebrew and Old Testament (1)
- Greek and New Testament (1)

Second Year:–

- Church History and Principles (2)
- Pastoral Theology (2)
- Hebrew and Old Testament (2)
- Greek and New Testament (2)
- Systematic Theology (1)

Third Year:–

- Hebrew and Old Testament (3)
- Pastoral Theology (3)
- Systematic Theology (2)

(2) *Four Year Course*
First year:–
- Church History and Principles (1)
- Greek and New Testament (1)
- Pastoral Theology (1)

Second Year:–
- Church History and Principles (2)
- Hebrew and Old Testament (1)
- Greek and New Testament (2)
- Pastoral Theology (2)

Third Year:–
- Greek and New Testament (3)
- Hebrew and Old Testament (2)
- Systematic Theology (1)

Fourth Year:–
- Hebrew and Old Testament (3)
- Systematic Theology (2)
- Pastoral Theology (3)

6. Practically, the Seminary shall be committed to producing able ministers of the New Testament, in connection with which it shall be concerned to produce good preachers, pastors and evangelists as well as devout men of God.

3. *Of the Lecturers*
1. The number of Lectureships in the Seminary and the subjects attached to them, and the appointment of a Principal, shall be determined by legislation enacted from time to time by the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). All Lecturers shall be ordained ministers of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), and shall be appointed by the General Assembly of that Church, in accordance with the Church legislation in force at the time of their appointment.

2. The duties of the Lecturers shall be, in general, to teach their subjects conscientiously and competently in accordance with the requisite standards and with the curriculum approved by the General Assembly and published in the *Seminary Handbook*; to co-operate with each other, formally in Seminary Committee and informally in the life of the Seminary, so as to promote its internal welfare and its external prestige; and by their labours in their chosen fields of study to edify the Church and to defend the Christian faith and life.

3. Each Lecturer shall, at the time of his appointment and at other times as circumstances may require, prepare programmes of studies for his classes within the framework of the Seminary curriculum and in consultation with the Seminary Committee and the relevant standing committee of the General Assembly, the aim of such consultation being to ensure that a proper balance is preserved within the curriculum and to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. As and when requested, he shall furnish the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee with a record of classwork covered, objectives and achievement in research and any work published by him.

4. Charges of heresy or immorality against any Lecturer shall be dealt with in accordance with

the principles and practice of the Free Church (Continuing) in relation to such charges against ministers. Charges of failure to comply with academic duties shall be considered by the Seminary Committee and referred, if necessary, to the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee of the Church.

5. Each Lecturer shall be entitled to a new computer on appointment, an annual allowance for books relating to his department and the remuneration of reasonable out of pocket expenses in attending meetings at the Seminary. In the organisation of his own department in his teaching and studies he shall enjoy traditional academic freedom within the framework of the Seminary standards and the curriculum.

6. In his academic work, both in his teaching and in his studies, each Lecturer shall maintain, during his tenure of office, the standards of application and achievement expected of him by the Church which appoints him, by the students who look to him for instruction, and by any outside bodies which may from time to time assess the performance of the Seminary as a whole.

7. The Lecturers, being ministers of religion and the senior members of a theological Seminary, are called to promote, by all suitable means, the spiritual life of the students under their charge.

4. ***Of the Principal***

1. The office of Principal dates from mention of it in Act V of 1852, but it was not defined or described in that Act or in subsequent legislation. By precedent, the Principal shall be appointed by the General Assembly, and shall be a minister of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), but shall not necessarily be a Lecturer in the Seminary.

2. In general, the Principal's authority and duties shall be confined to those administrative and representational responsibilities which are inherent in the title and office. More particularly, he shall preside at meetings of the Seminary Committee where he shall have a deliberative and a casting vote; he shall implement decisions of the Seminary Committee when and as required of him by virtue of his office; he shall represent the Seminary Committee or the Seminary at ceremonies or on other occasions when necessary or desirable; and he shall use his official and personal authority to maintain the internal discipline of the Seminary; and he shall attend to all correspondence and administrative matters which naturally devolve upon him as Principal. In the absence of the Principal the most senior Lecturer in terms of years of service in the Seminary shall preside at meetings of the Seminary Committee and otherwise deputise for the Principal.

3. Like the Lecturers, the Principal shall be responsible to the Church, through the General Assembly, for his actions and conduct during his tenure of office, and the same rules and procedures that apply to Lecturers shall apply to him.

4. When by virtue of his office the Principal deals with universities and other outside bodies or parties, he shall uphold the witness, dignity and prestige of the Seminary without detriment to good relations, and also shall take note of any actions or proposed actions, on the part of others which could either benefit or prejudice the Seminary.

5. The Principal shall attend the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee meetings as Adviser and shall submit an annual report with any recommendations to the Committee.

5. ***Of the Seminary Committee***

1. The Seminary Committee is defined in Act XIX 2003 as amended by Act XIV 2004, as "consisting of the Principal and Lecturers". The Principal shall ordinarily be the Chairman of the Committee and a Clerk shall be appointed by the Seminary Committee from among its

number, but not the Principal.

2. Act V 1852 vests in the Seminary Committee "the ordinary discipline of the Seminary" and "the regulation of the Library subject to such rules as the Assembly may lay down according to the laws of the Church". References to the Seminary Committee in later legislation are few, and do not add materially to the foregoing.

3. In practice its powers and responsibilities as a corporate body shall be exercised mainly in the ordering of academic life and in fulfilling its original function of maintaining the ordinary discipline of the Seminary. Like the Lecturers who compose it, it shall ultimately be responsible to the General Assembly but it shall have joint and/or parallel responsibility with the Committee designated by the Assembly to supervise the training of the ministry. Its relations with that Committee or any other Church committees shall be prescribed by Assembly legislation. In matters within its competence it shall transact business, or shall act as a channel of communication, with outside institutions and parties.

4. The responsibility for maintaining doctrinal and academic standards, which shall lie with the Principal and Lecturers severally, shall also attach to them corporately in the Seminary Committee.

5. The general supervision of the routine administration of the Seminary, both in its internal affairs and in external relations with the Church, the General Trustees and the Committees, in so far as it is not regulated by Assembly legislation shall be a natural function of the Seminary Committee. The finances of the Seminary shall not be within its direct jurisdiction or control except for:

- moneys explicitly bequeathed, donated or assigned to it for its exclusive use;
- moneys generated by activities within its competence; and
- accrued balances from the aforementioned sources.

The Seminary Committee shall keep accounts of its use of any such funds and the accounts shall be subject to an annual audit by the Church auditors.

6. In the exercise of its powers and the discharge of its duties the Seminary Committee shall have the same rights and privileges as are normally enjoyed by other bodies in the same category. It shall regulate its own procedures and deliberations and its mode of conducting business: corporately, it shall enjoy the same degree of academic freedom as do the individual Lecturers who compose it: it can appoint a Clerk and other officers for the more efficient implementation of its decision and fulfilment of its functions.

7. In the event of a prolonged absence of a Lecturer, the Seminary Committee shall be responsible in the first instance for making arrangements among the other lecturers for carrying on his duties. The Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee shall be notified of any such prolonged absence of a Lecturer and temporary arrangements made.

8. The "ordinary discipline of the Seminary" originally vested in the Seminary Committee had particular reference to the firm but benevolent disposition of order in the life and labours of the Seminary, at all levels, and especially amongst the students. Formally, this order shall be expressed and upheld by means of written regulations in a *Seminary Handbook* which shall be known to all students, and by decisions and recommendations of the Seminary Committee transmitted to the students as a body. Informally, order and harmonious relations shall be nurtured by friendly intercourse and Christian fellowship between all the members of the collegiate body. If the regulations or resolutions are disregarded or violated by a student or

students, the Seminary Committee shall have primary jurisdiction: in the case of disharmony between a Lecturer and one or more of his students, the Seminary Committee shall have an appellate function. Act VI, 1979 gives Free Church Students a right to appeal to the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee in a prescribed manner.

9. In matters academic, such as, for example, the conduct of examinations, and in administrative and financial affairs, the Seminary Committee can make representations to, or transact business with, or be represented on, appropriate Standing Committees in accordance with existing Assembly legislation.

10. In the ordinary course of its duties and for special reasons within its competence, the Seminary Committee can enter into communication or otherwise maintain relations with other theological, academic and official institutions at home or abroad; and also with such public authorities as the work and welfare of the Seminary and its staff or students may require.

6. *Of the Students*

6.1 *Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) Students*

1. The Seminary shall exist primarily for the training of Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) Students who are admitted in accordance with regulations and procedure laid down from time to time by the General Assembly. The recognition of Candidates for the Ministry shall be the granted by the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee and shall not be a function of the Seminary Committee.

2. Students who are not of the Free Church (Continuing) but whose Church connections and personal characteristics are acceptable to the Free Church (Continuing) have always been admitted to the Free Church Colleges since Disruption times but under certain conditions which varied from time to time.

3. The qualifications for the admission of Free Church students shall be determined by the General Assembly. Traditionally, a university degree or its equivalent has been an indispensable preliminary requirement for enrolment in the Seminary but legislation makes allowance for the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee to recognise special cases such as mature students who may have had other valuable training and experience, or professional qualifications.

6.2 *Extra-Denominational and Private Students*

1. The responsibility for admitting extra-denominational (i.e. non-Free Church (Continuing)) students is vested in the Seminary Committee by Assembly legislation: the students must satisfy the Seminary Committee that their spiritual and academic qualifications are such as to enable them to benefit from a course in the Free Church Seminary.

2. Extra-denominational students shall be approved by their Churches and recommended by them as suitable for theological training, and it shall be the responsibility of these Churches to arrange for the pastoral oversight of their students while they attend Seminary. In all such cases fees shall be payable on a scale determined from time to time by the Seminary Committee.

3. The Seminary Committee may, at its discretion, in addition to extra-denominational students, admit students who wish to study in a purely private capacity. Free Church (Continuing) members seeking such private Student status shall not be admitted without due consultation with the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee and without indicating to them the requirements with regards to Presbytery and Exit examinations, should they wish later to be recognised as Candidates for the Ministry. In all such cases fees shall be payable on a scale determined from time to time by the Seminary Committee. At its discretion the Seminary

Committee may in exceptional cases modify a student's fees in cases of real need.

4. It shall normally be required of private students to pursue the entire syllabus including Discourses and Examinations, with the exception of exemption from one of the languages, at the discretion of the Seminary Committee, and if the lecturers deem that to be an advantage to the student. Their course shall be over three or four years as agreed by the Seminary Committee. At the sole discretion of the Seminary Committee private students may be allowed to study part of the course.

5. In the case of a private student who has completed the course and who subsequently applies for recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), it shall be for the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee to determine what further training at the Seminary may be required in accordance with Assembly legislation and the Seminary Committee shall direct any such Student directly to consult with the Clerk to the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee.

6. All the students who enrol at the Seminary shall be understood to profess faith in Christ and obedience to Him and be members of a Church in good standing. The cultivation of the devotional life shall be as much their responsibility as that of the Lecturers. In their academic studies the students shall be expected to take full advantage of the opportunity offered to them so as by their diligence and labour to become "able Ministers of the New Testament."

7. During their attendance at Seminary courses all students shall be expected to behave with the decorum worthy of their profession and their aspirations, and to comply with the internal code of regulations of the Seminary. By virtue of their age and their academic or other attainments they shall be expected to act, and can expect to be treated, not as pupils, but as junior members of the collegiate community, with certain privileges accorded to them such as a common room and other facilities or amenities within the resources of the Seminary. Complaints by individual students shall be dealt with in the first instance, if at all possible, by a Lecturer in private. If this procedure does not satisfy the student, he can submit his complaint to the Seminary Committee in writing.

8. In cases of private students studying by distance learning the qualifications for admission of such students to the courses, or parts of the courses, shall be the same as for extra-denominational or private students as outlined in paragraph 6.1.3 above. The acceptance of all such students shall be at the discretion of the Seminary Committee, which shall also agree what scheme and period of study and fees would be appropriate. In such cases rules in the conduct of examinations and what certificates of completion of studies, class certificates or Seminary Diploma, shall be clearly established.

6.3 *Corporate life of the Seminary*

Transcending all such organisational and administrative arrangements for order and harmony within the Seminary shall be the bond of Christian fellowship and dedication to the Lord's cause which unites teachers and taught, and the students are expected to do all in their power to enrich, as well as to seek enrichment in, the corporate life of the Seminary.

7. *Of the Library*

1. The stock of books known as the "Seminary Library" shall be held by the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) General Assembly.

2. It shall be the duty of the Seminary Committee to frame regulations governing the use of the Library by Lecturers, students and other parties; to make arrangements for any cataloguing of the books; and to arrange the different sections of the Library in such a way as to promote easy

access combined with safe custody. It shall be customary for the Seminary Committee to appoint one of its members as Librarian.

3. The stock of books shall be maintained in reasonable condition, and additions shall be made to it by an annual allocation to the Library from Church funds as part of the Seminary budget. The Library shall also be in a position to receive bequests and donations whether of books or money. Rare or valuable books, together with manuscripts and other papers of importance shall be housed separately with suitable safeguards, to be consulted only within the Seminary under the supervision of the Librarian.

4. Under the terms of the Churches (Scotland) Act, 1905, Lecturers, ministers and students of the Free Church have free access to the New College Library, Edinburgh, and the use of catalogues and books therein. In addition, Free Church (Continuing) students have free access to the Library facilities of the Highland Theological Seminary, Dingwall, by agreement with the Principal of that Seminary.

8. ***Of Property***

1. The Seminary owns no heritable property.

2. All moveable property within the Seminary provided for its use (apart from the personal effects of Lecturers and students) shall be vested in the General Trustees of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).

3. Lecturers shall be provided with computer hardware and software as appropriate to their needs, provided by the Church as part of the funds allocated to the Seminary. They shall also be reimbursed all expenses incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of their duties.

4. The Seminary Committee is empowered by the General Assembly to act on behalf of the Seminary in accepting responsibility for the custody and use of moveable property in accordance with the agreement between the Seminary and the Trustees. The assumption of this responsibility by the Seminary Committee does not relieve Lecturers and students of individual responsibility for the careful use of moveable property and equipment.

5. Replacements of, and additions to, moveable property used by the Seminary shall be obtained through procedures laid down in Assembly legislation or in the decisions of competent Standing Committees. New items shall be entered on the inventories as soon as they are delivered to the Seminary.

6. No use can be made of the Seminary facilities without the knowledge and consent of the Seminary Committee, together with the Deacons' Court of Greyfriars Free Church (Continuing), Inverness.

Act IV 1979 is hereby repealed.

The following Acts no longer relevant to the Seminary are hereby repealed:
1970, Act XXIII - Act anent Regulations for College Library
1980, Act XXII - Act anent Post-Graduate Course in College
1982, Act XXIX - Act anent Regulations for College Library (amending Act XXI II, 1970)
1986, Act XIX - Act anent College Finances – amending Act IV 1979
1986 Act XX - Act anent Expenditure on Private Students
1988, Act XXI - Act anent Conditions of Employment of Professors

1995, Act XVI – Act anent Institution of College Board
1998, Act XIX - Act anent Appointment of College Professors
1998, Act XX - Act anent Filling of College Chairs
1999, Act XXIII - Act anent Validation of B.Th. Degree
1999, Act XXV - Act anent Procedure on Appointment of College Principal;

12. The General Assembly express their sincere gratitude to Rev. Henry J.T. Woods for his excellent service as Lecturer in Apologetics & Pastoral Theology over the past eighteen years;

13. The General Assembly note the intention of the Committee to conduct a Quinquennial Visitation of the Seminary in February 2026 (D.V.). They direct the Committee to report thereanent to the General Assembly of 2026;

14. The General Assembly, aware of the need we have for more ministers now and in future years, request our people to beseech the great King of the Church that He would call suitable men from among us into His service in our Congregations as preachers and pastors.

XI.

REPORT

OF THE

GENERAL TRUSTEES

1. The Remit of the General Trustees

The General Trustees have important responsibilities in relation to the Trust Estate of the denomination; that is the monetary and property assets which the Trustees hold on behalf of the Church. Their duties derive partly from civil law – including the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 – and partly from relevant General Assembly legislation (Act X 2015 and Act VIII 2016).

2. The recent work of the General Trustees

Statutory Responsibilities

The General Trustees were represented at the annual meeting with the Church's Auditor for the preparation of the Annual Denominational Accounts, and related matters. They subsequently fulfilled their statutory responsibility in relation to signing off the Accounts and OSCR Return.

Transfer of Title Deeds

Transfer of Title for the Bracadale & Duirinish manse has yet to be completed.

Safeguarding & Archiving of Church Documents and Records

The General Trustees note that some progress has been made in moving towards the collation of important documents in a secure, central location.

Risk Assessment

The Denominational Risk Register was reviewed prior to the Audit planning meeting. It was adopted following some minor amendments to the section relating to the area of Safeguarding. The General Trustees note that a detailed review of the *Safeguarding Policy* is currently being undertaken and is likely to be referred to in the Legal Advice & Property Committee's Report.

It is vital that all ministers, office bearers, and others who may hold positions of responsibility at denominational, or congregational or local level, familiarise themselves with the relevant requirements of the Risk Register on an annual basis.

Congregational OSCR Registration

The Audit Management Report for 2024 highlighted that a number of Congregations were still not individually registered with OSCR (Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator), thereby placing themselves at risk of not complying with relevant laws and regulations.

The Auditor did however note that progress had been made in this regard and the General Trustees commend those Congregations that have obtained OSCR registration over the past year, or who are working towards it. It is hoped that these Congregations will be able to lend support and advice to other Congregations at a Presbytery level, as required.

On a related matter, the Auditor recommended that after individual Congregations have acquired OSCR registration, that they make application to HM Revenue & Customs seeking recognition as a charity for tax purposes to enable them to reclaim Gift Aid. Individual Congregations are to maintain an aggregated weekly record of all Gift Aid contributions received, to provide a clear audit trail for HMRC purposes.

3. 85 Old Edinburgh Road

An update regarding the property at 85 Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness, will be provided in a Supplementary Report distributed at the General Assembly.

4. Personnel

In accordance with the current age restrictions for General Trustees, the term of service for Mr Lindsay MacCallum will terminate at the rising of the General Assembly 2025.

In accordance with Act VII – Act anent Appointment of Additional General Trustee 2024, the Southern Presbytery have nominated Mr Alastair Manderson as a General Trustee from the rising of the General Assembly.

5. Thanks

Thanks are due to Mr Lindsay MacCallum at the conclusion of eight years of service as a General Trustee. The denomination owes him a great debt of gratitude for all his labours for the Lord's cause.

The General Trustees express thanks to Mr Murray Mackay, *General Treasurer*, for his guidance and professional advice over the year. The support given to the General Trustees has been done willingly and in addition to his other responsibilities in connection with the work of the denomination.

Thanks are also recorded to Mr John N. Gillies for his conscientious fulfilment of duties as Clerk.

ANDREW I. NAYLOR, *Chairman*
LINDSAY M. MACCALLUM, *Vice-chairman*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the General Trustees and thank the General Trustees for their continuing work on behalf of the denomination;

2. The General Assembly note the position regarding the transfer of Title for the Bracadale & Duirinish manse;

3. The General Assembly note the observations of the General Trustees with respect to the safeguarding and storage of important denominational documents and records;

4. The General Assembly note that the denominational Risk Register has been reviewed in accordance with the recommendation of the Church's Auditor;

5. The General Assembly direct individual Presbyteries, Congregations and Church Courts to familiarise themselves with the Risk Register, and to take cognisance of the requirements pertaining to them;

6. The General Assembly note that by failing to obtain OSCR registration, Congregations are at risk of not complying with relevant laws and regulations. They commend those Congregations who have successfully completed OSCR registration over the past year, and encourage other Congregations to work towards achieving registration as soon as practically possible;

7. The General Assembly note the recommendation of the Church's Auditor that individual Congregations, after having acquired OSCR registration, seek from HM Revenue & Customs recognition as a charity for tax purposes, and encourage Congregations to work towards this as soon as practically possible;

8. The General Assembly thank Mr Lindsay M. MacCallum following conclusion of his term of service as a General Trustee;

9. The General Assembly approve the Roll of the Board of Trustees from the rising of the 2025 General Assembly as follows:

Dr Andrew I. Naylor, Harris (Chairman); Murdo MacDonald, Poolewe & Aultbea;
Mr Thomas MacInnes, Portree; Mr Alastair Manderson, Knightswood;
Mr John N. Gillies, Partick;

10. The General Assembly thank Mr John N. Gillies for his services as Clerk and Mr Murray Mackay for his professional advice and guidance to the General Trustees.

11. The General Assembly approve the appointment of an additional General Trustee to serve for a period of five years, elected on a rotational basis from each Presbytery, with effect from the rising of the 2025 General Assembly;

12. The General Assembly thank Mr John N. Gillies for his services as Clerk, and express their gratitude to Mr Murray Mackay for his professional advice and guidance.

MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS

OF THE COMMISSION

OF THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

(CONTINUING)

On Tuesday 1st October 2024 and Tuesday 4th March 2025 there was no business to bring before the Commission and therefore the Commission did not meet.

STANDING ORDERS OF ASSEMBLY

As revised and classified by Act VIII, 1853; and amended by Act VIII, 1855; Act VI, 1856; Act III, 1857; Act X, 1858; Act III, 1859; Act III, 1860; Act X, 1861; Act IV, 1864; Act IV, 1865; Act IX, 1866; Act VIII, 1868; Act I, 1873; Act I, 1876; Act I, 1885; Act IV, 1888; Acts VI, and VII, 1889; Acts IX, XIII, XIV, 1890; Act V, 1891; Act V, 1893; Act VII, 1894; Act IX, 1896; Act X, 1907; Act X, 1908; Act VIII, 1909; Act V, 1911; Act VIII, 1912; Act IV, 1913; Act V, 1913; and findings of 26th May 1916, 30th May 1921, 16th November 1921 and 29th May 1923 and Act III, 1926; finding of 31st May 1927; Act V, 1929; Act VII, 1930; Act VIII, 1931; Acts VIII, IX and X, 1933; Act III, 1936; Act VII, 1937; Act II, 1940; Act II, 1947 and Act IX, 1948; finding of 25th May 1950; Act VII, 1950; finding of 22nd May 1952; Act IV, 1954; Act VI, 1961; Act I, 1963; Act VII, 1963; finding of 19th May 1964; Act I, 1965; Act II, 1966; finding of 26th May 1966; Act XIV, 1967; Act I, 1968; Act IV, 1968; Act II, 1969; Act III, 1969; Act IX, 1970; Act XXV, 1973; Act I, 1975; Act XXXVII, 1975 amended by Act XI, 1980 and Act XXIII, 1977; Act XIV, 1978; Act II, 1979 amended by Act XII, 1980 and Act XXIII, 1979 and Act VIII, 1982; Act II, 1984; Act VIII, 1987; Act III, 1989; Act III, 1992; Act VIII, 1993; Act XXVI, 1993; Act XVI, 1995; Act I, 1996; Act III, 1996; Act IV, 1997; Act II, 1998; finding of 22nd May 1998; Act XX, 1999; finding of 10th May 1999; Act XXII, 2001; Act III, 2002; Act III 2008; Act X 2012; Act I, 2013; Act II, 2014; finding of 25th May 2016, Act I, 2018.

It is ordered —

I. AS TO REPRESENTATION OF PRESBYTERIES

1. That all Commissions, transmitted to the Clerk of Assembly, shall be revised by him, in so far as regards their regularity in point of form, and that the Clerk shall prepare a Report on the subject and submit the same to the Committee appointed by the Assembly for the revising of Commissions.

2. That the Clerk of the Assembly shall furnish all Presbytery Clerks with printed copies of the form of Commission to Representatives hitherto in use, and also printed copies of the bona fide Certificates to be used by Kirk Sessions, according to Act VIII, Assembly 1853, and Act IX, Assembly 1863, for certifying elders who are chosen to be Commissioners to the General Assembly.

3. That there shall be attached to Commissions a statement, certified by the Presbytery Clerk, of the number of charges in each Presbytery at the date of the Commission, and of any changes that have taken place during the previous year.

4. That Clerks of Presbyteries shall send intimation to the Clerk of Assembly on the death of a colleague, or of the induction of a colleague immediately after that event has taken place.

5. That the Assembly Arrangements Committee at its stated meeting in October shall ascertain the effects as regards representation of any changes in Presbyteries which may have occurred in the course of the previous year, by the death or removal, or by the induction of Colleague-ministers, or by the sanctioning or the reduction of charges by the preceding General Assembly or its Commission, or by any other cause, and shall immediately thereafter intimate to the Presbyteries concerned what will be their representation in the ensuing General Assembly.

6. That the decision of the Assembly Arrangements Committee, so intimated to Presbyteries, shall be subject to review by the General Assembly, if appealed against or dissented from.

7. That should any question arise between the month of January and the meeting of Assembly, not

provided for by these Orders, the Assembly Arrangements Committee shall meet for the consideration and disposal of such questions.

II. AS TO THE TRANSMISSION TO THE CLERK OF ASSEMBLY FOR THE COMMITTEE ON BILLS,

COMMISSIONS, OVERTURES, RETURNS TO OVERTURES AND PETITIONS

1. That the names and full postal addresses of the Representatives of Presbyteries shall be transmitted by Presbytery Clerks to the Clerk of Assembly not later than the first day of May in each year, so far as they have been elected by that time.

2. That all Commissions shall be sent up by Clerks of their respective Presbyteries, so as to be in the hands of the Clerk of the General Assembly at least one week before the Assembly meets.

3. That all Overtures from Presbyteries and Synods, passed by the first day of May, be sent to the Clerk of Assembly not later than that date each year, in order that they may be duly arranged and printed, at the expense of the Assembly, for the use of the members, and that said Overtures be in the form of certified extracts from the Minutes of the Court by which the Overtures are transmitted.

4. That Presbyteries shall transmit to the Clerk of Assembly their Returns to Overtures not later than the first day of May in each year; that said Presbyterial Returns shall consist of certified extracts from the Minutes of Presbytery; and that a separate leaf of paper shall be used for the Return on each Overture sent down by the General Assembly.

5. That papers and cases intended to be transmitted to the Assembly through the Committee on Bills, shall be laid before that Committee by the Clerk of Assembly, and parties concerned shall be in attendance at that meeting.

6. That all such papers shall be printed by the Clerk, except such papers as he may consider undesirable to print; that papers not printed shall be submitted in manuscript; and that if the Committee does not endorse the view of the Clerk, the papers shall forthwith be printed for the use of the Assembly.

7. That these regulations shall not apply to Petitions for authority to sell congregational property, which Petitions shall not be transmitted through the Bills and Overtures Committee, but in the case of those addressed to the General Assembly shall be forwarded through the regular channels so as to be in the hands of the Principal Clerk not later than 28th February in each year. In the case of such Petitions addressed to the Commission of Assembly, they shall be forwarded so as to be in the hands of the Principal Clerk not later than one month before the date of the meeting of Commission to which it is proposed to submit them. The Principal Clerk shall lay each Petition before the Committee on Custody of Titles with a view to a report thereon being timeously prepared.

III. AS TO COMMITTEE FOR BILLS AND OVERTURES

1. That the Committee on Bills and Overtures appointed by the Assembly at their first diet, shall meet at the close of the first sederunt that day, and again if necessary on the following day before the meeting of Assembly.

2. That there shall be no other meeting of the Committee except by leave of the Assembly on special cause shown.

3. That the Committee shall see that all papers presented to them in Cases from Inferior Courts, whether forming part of the Record, or produced in evidence before said Courts, have been duly dated and numbered by the Clerk of said Courts, and marked with his initial; and that the Committee shall not receive

any paper which is not authenticated, unless upon special cause shown, to be reported by them to the General Assembly.

IV. AS TO PRINTING PAPERS IN CASES COMING UP TO THE ASSEMBLY

1. That all papers coming before the Assembly — viz. Memorials, Petitions (excepting those for power to sell property), Applications, References, Complaints and Appeals, with Extracts of Minutes of Inferior Courts, relative thereto, as also Reasons of Complaint or Appeal; and in cases of Libel with the Defences and Evidence adduced — which are passed by the Inferior Court before the first of May, shall be transmitted in manuscript to the Clerk of Assembly not later than that date in each year, in order to be printed in sufficient numbers for the use of the members of Assembly; and that papers passed by the Inferior Courts at a later date shall be transmitted to the Clerk without delay.

2. That all such papers shall be printed by the Clerk, except any papers which he considers may lead to discussions in the Committee on Bills and Overtures; that he shall retain these in manuscript, and submit them in that form to the Committee, and that a list of them shall be appended to the volume containing the papers passing the Clerk.

3. That in cases of discipline brought before the Assembly by reference from a Presbytery or Synod, or by complaint by a minority of the Court, the expense of printing shall be borne by the Assembly Arrangements Committee; in other circumstances by the Complainer or Appellant; and that in all other cases, such as Petitions, References not in Causes, Memorials, etc. the expense shall be borne by the party having interest in same, or desiring a deliverance from the Assembly.

4. That all such papers be printed in a form corresponding to pages of the volume of Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland.

5. That all such papers shall be stitched together, and provided with an alphabetical index; and that a copy thereof shall be placed in the hands of each member of the Assembly.

6. That a copy of every printed paper shall be kept by the Clerk of Assembly to be bound up and kept among the Records of Assembly.

V. AS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. Devotional Exercises

1. That a bell shall be rung for one minute; and members shall take their places in the House before the Moderator takes the Chair; that the Assembly Hall doors shall be closed each day during the opening exercises to prevent interruption by persons entering the House during that time; and that the Assembly shall spend the first hour or more of the first diet of the second full day of their meeting in devotional exercises.

2. That any proposal for a pause in the Assembly's proceedings with a view to engage in special devotional exercise, shall be made to the Assembly only through the Moderator.

2. Business Committee and Committee for Printing the Acts

1. That the Assembly shall, at their first diet, appoint a Committee to arrange the Business of the House (other than the Report A of the Assembly Arrangements Committee, which hereafter shall be considered at the first sederunt of the Assembly, the proposed Deliverance on said Report to be free from the application of Standing Order V.3.4); that the Business Committee shall be prepared to make their first Report to the Assembly at the first diet of the first full day, immediately after the report of the Committee

on Bills and Overtures has been read; and further, that the Business Committee shall report from time to time to the Assembly till the whole business has been disposed of.

2. That the Business Committee shall in their Report indicate such petitions as are of routine nature; that motions and amendments regarding such petitions shall be handed in and read by the Clerk before the first adjournment on the day before they are intended to be moved; and that if at the time of consideration of such a Petition there is no objection to it being classified as of a routine nature, the motion regarding it will be formally moved and seconded.

3. That the Assembly shall, at their first diet, appoint a Committee for printing the Acts of Assembly and that the Committee shall arrange that the Acts be divided into two classes — Class I: those which have passed the Barrier Act; Class II: Acts which are of General Interest to the Church.

3. Reports of Committees

1. That the Reports of all Committees reporting to the General Assembly (excepting only (1) that part of the Report of the Youth Committee which sets forth the results of the Youth Examinations, and (2) any report from the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committees which complies with Standing Order VI.5.10) shall, together with Deliverances to be proposed, be transmitted for printing to the Clerk of Assembly not later than the first day of April. All Reports, inclusive of the Report in terms of Standing Orders VI.5.l0, shall be stitched together, and sent to Commissioners to the General Assembly not later than ten days before the meeting of the Assembly.

2. That Reports shall not be engrossed in the Record, but, after being printed, a copy of each, certified by the Clerk as being that given in to the Assembly, shall be kept in retentis, and the Reports shall be appended to the printed volume of the Acts and Proceedings of Assembly.

3. That verbal Reports shall not be received, and no Sub-Committee shall give in any Report to the Assembly.

4. That amendments to the proposed deliverances on the Report of the Committee on Assembly Arrangements may be moved without previous notice and amendments relating to Ecumenical Relations shall be handed to the Clerk and read by him before the adjournment of the first sederunt; that amendments to Reports to be taken during the second and third sederunts shall be handed in and read by the Clerk before the suspension of the second sederunt: amendments to deliverances on all other Reports shall be handed in and read by the Clerk before the first adjournment on the day before they are intended to be moved.

5. That paragraphs of a proposed Deliverance on the Report of a Standing Committee shall be numbered, and the mover shall not be required to read it when it is already in the hands of members of Assembly.

6. That no paragraph of a proposed Deliverance on the Report of a Standing or Special Committee shall be deemed competent unless it contain, or be accompanied by, any information which is essential for its implementation

7. That when any Committee is appointed during the Assembly's sittings it shall be competent to move amendments to the proposed Deliverance on its report without previous notice.

8. That it shall be competent for commissioners to give notice in writing of questions to be put to the person presenting a Report to the General Assembly — this without prejudice to the right to add supplementary questions or the right of members generally to propose questions from the floor.

4. The Reading of Speeches and Length of Speeches

1. That in the discussion of any subject brought before the Assembly, by Overture or by the Report of a Committee, it shall not be allowable, without leave granted by the House, for any member to read his speech from a Manuscript prepared previously to the discussion, except in the case of a member introducing an important subject to the attention of the House.

2. That, previously to the discussion of any question which does not arise upon or contemplate the approval or disapproval of the Report of a Committee, the House shall determine, in such manner as may seem expedient, the order of priority belonging to the motions given notice of, and that, when a motion approving of a Report has been made and seconded, the House shall determine in the same manner the order of priority belonging to any other motions given notice of.

3. That in the discussion of any question the proposer of each motion may address the House for not longer than 15 minutes, and the seconder for 5 minutes; and no subsequent speaker shall address the House for a longer period than 5 minutes; and that these limits shall be exceeded only when the Moderator shall have ascertained that the House desires any speaker to continue, and shall intimate the ascertained desire to that effect.

4. That when a Convener, not being a member of Assembly, is permitted to present his Committee's Report, the Convener and the mover of the Deliverance shall be required to come to an arrangement by which their combined speeches shall not exceed the time normally granted to the mover of a motion in terms of Standing Order V.4.3, or as that Order may be amended by this or any subsequent Assembly. It shall be competent for the person who presents a Committee's Report to answer questions relating to the Report and to reply to the discussion, even if he be not a member of Assembly.

5. That a member of the Assembly in moving or seconding an amendment shall confine himself to the matter of the amendment, and shall have the right to speak at a later stage to other matters in the Report and other amendments, provided that the total time taken in speaking shall conform to Standing Order V.4.3.

5. The Conducting of Causes

1. That Counsel shall not be heard at the Bar in any Causes which may come before the House.

2. That when a Presbytery acquiesces in the sentence of a Synod, it shall not be entitled to appear as a separate party at the Bar of the Assembly, but the members of Presbytery may nevertheless be heard as members of Synod.

3. That in no case shall there be more than two speakers for each party at the Bar, including the reply to which the appellant or complainer shall be entitled; and when there are more than two parties, there shall only be one speaker, and one speech for each, besides the reply — it being understood that where there is more than one complainer, each shall be considered as a different party only in case of its appearing to the Assembly that the complaints rest upon distinctly separate grounds.

4. That, previously to hearing the parties in any Cause, the Clerk shall read the following announcement, — viz., "The members are reminded that justice requires the pleadings as at the Bar to be heard by all those who vote in the Cause, and that, in particular, no member ought to vote against either side of the Bar who has not heard the pleadings on that side".

5.(1) That the Clerk of Assembly shall not issue the papers to the members of Assembly, with reference to cases which he thinks require to be conducted with closed doors until specially instructed by the Assembly

to do so; but he shall report such cases to the Convener of the Business Committee, for its information immediately after its appointment;

(2) That the Business Committee shall, in their first Report, specify any case which, in their judgment, requires to be conducted with closed doors; and any case which does not appear to them of that character, although the Clerk may have reported it as such;

(3) That, in all cases thus reported on by the Business Committee the Assembly shall itself determine, by a special deliverance, at what stage of the proceedings the papers shall be issued to the members; and

(4) That in every case which the Assembly appoints to be conducted with closed doors, the instruction to issue the papers shall be accompanied by a special exhortation to the members to keep them private.

6. Motions and Votes

1. That every motion, whether original or amended, if not already in the hands of the Clerk, shall be given into the Clerk in writing, as soon as it shall have been made to the House.

2. That the person who makes the first motion shall be entitled to the privilege of giving a reply, in which new matter must not be introduced; and that thereafter the debate shall be held to be definitely closed, and no other person shall be entitled to speak excepting with regard to the manner of putting a vote.

3. That all motions after the first that are truly amendments on the first motion shall be disposed of in accordance with Standing Order No. V.6.6 and that when an amendment raises an issue different from that in other amendments, it shall be dealt with as a direct counter-motion.

4. That where there are only two motions before the House, the question put to the vote shall be second or first motion.

5. That when there are three motions, the first question shall be, whether the second or third motion shall be put as amendment against the first; and the second question shall be, whether the first motion or the amendment so fixed shall be the decision of the House.

6. That when there are more than three motions, the first question shall be whether the last proposed shall be put as the amendment, and so till only three remain, when the procedure shall be as prescribed in the immediately preceding sub-section.

7. That in Causes, it shall not be competent to move an amendment to the motion, unless it be of such a nature as to decide the case, or to forward it in its progress.

8. That when any proposal has been submitted in the Report of a Committee any motion for approval of such proposal shall take precedence of any counter-motion or amendment.

9. Any motion seeking the approval of the General Assembly for the commitment of additional expenditure in excess of £500, over and above that already budgeted for by any relevant Committee and accepted by the Finance & Sustentation Committee, shall be deemed incompetent unless (a) an attempt shall have been made to ensure that the Finance & Sustentation Committee have had due time to give the matter consideration at their regular meetings and (b) advice thereanent from the Finance & Sustentation Committee is available to the Assembly

7. Mode of taking the Vote

1. That on a division being called for, all parties who are not members, but have the privilege of

entering the House, shall withdraw.

2. That on a division being called for the Clerk shall announce that no member ought to vote against a motion or amendment who has not been in attendance during the discussion thereof; that thereafter no one shall be permitted to enter the House till the vote has been taken and the result declared; that two or four Tellers shall be appointed by the Moderator, drawn equally from supporters of each motion before the House; and that these Tellers shall take their place at the Clerk's table. But when the issue of a vote by show of hands is not immediately obvious the Tellers shall count the votes seat by seat taking up their positions at the ends of each seat in turn in order to do so.

3. That the vote shall, in the discretion of the House, be taken either by calling of the Roll or by a show of hands, or by card.

4. That as soon as the vote shall have been taken, the Tellers shall report the state of vote to the Clerk of Assembly, who shall write it down, and announce it to the House.

5. That the Report of the Tellers, when announced to the House, shall be held as final and conclusive, and not subject to any revision by scrutiny or otherwise.

8. Dissents

That no dissents against any deliverance of the Assembly shall be given in until the matter in which it is pronounced is, for that sederunt, disposed of, the Minutes are completed and adjusted, and the House is ready to proceed to other business.

9. Drafts of Declaratory or Interim Acts and Overtures

That the Draft of any proposed Declaratory or Interim Act, as also the Draft of any Overture which it is proposed to transmit to Presbyteries for their opinion in terms of the Barrier Act, shall be laid on the Table of the Assembly, and printed and circulated among the members, at least one diet before a motion be made for the passing of such Declaratory or Interim Act, or for the transmission of such Overture to the Presbyteries of the Church.

10. Letters addressed to the Moderator

That all letters addressed to the Moderator for the purpose of being communicated to the Assembly, shall, in the first instance, be laid by him before the Business Committee, who shall advise the Moderator as to the way of disposing of them.

11. Deputations from other Churches, etc.

1. That the list of corresponding Churches and Societies shall be as determined by the General Assembly from time to time on the recommendation of the Assembly Arrangements Committee.

2. That deputies from corresponding Churches or Societies shall forward their commission or letters of introduction so as to reach the Clerk of Assembly not later than the first day of May in each year; and he shall submit the same to the Business Committee so that arrangements may be made for the deputies to address the General Assembly.

3. That deputies from Churches and Societies other than those aforesaid shall likewise forward Commissions or letters of introduction to reach the Clerk of Assembly not later than the first day of March, and he shall report the same to the Commission of Assembly meeting in that month, who shall be empowered to decide which of the deputies shall be received by, and invited to address the Assembly. In the

event of failure of the Commission to meet, the Assembly Arrangements Committee shall meet at the earliest opportunity, and shall decide which deputies shall be received by, and invited to address the Assembly.

4. That in the case of strangers who may be desirous of being introduced to the Assembly and addressing the House, notice thereof shall be conveyed to the Moderator, who shall report the same to the Business Committee, that they may advise in the matter.

12. Visitation of Synod Records, and Examinations of Minutes of Committees

1. That the Synod Books shall be called for at the first diet of the Assembly, and that a Committee or Committees shall be appointed for visiting the same, who shall fill up a schedule with the information required by the Assembly regarding each book — said schedule to be returned when the Report of the Visitors shall be called for.

2. That a copy of the Report, as sustained by the Assembly, shall be transmitted to the Synod, and engrossed in their Record.

3. That the Minutes of Committees and the Foreign Board shall be laid annually on the Table of the Assembly, and visited in the same manner as the Synod Books.

13. Printing of Assembly's Proceedings, etc.

1. That the Minutes of Commission, together with roll of matters to be taken up on the following days, and lists of members of Committees, be printed and placed in the hands of the Members of Assembly on the opening day.

2. That when a motion is duly seconded, and in possession of the Assembly it shall not be competent to make any alterations upon it without the permission of the House, excepting in the shape of an amendment, or second or third motion, as the case may be, regularly proposed to the Assembly.

14. Minutes

That the minutes adopted at any of the diets be read over and approved of only at a morning diet, with the exception of the Minutes of the last day of the Assembly's sittings, which Minutes shall be read over and approved of before the rising of the Assembly.

15. Standing Orders

That the Standing Orders be read, or, by vote, be held as read immediately before the appointment of the Business Committee, and that they be printed in the first day's proceedings.

16. Conduct of Commissioners

That courtesy demands that all diets of the Assembly be attended by Commissioners, and that private meetings should not be held during the sederunts of the Assembly.

17. Declaration of Interests

That it is the duty of any member or party having an interest or close personal relationship relating to business under consideration to disclose and declare that interest or close personal relationship. Furthermore, the Moderator, Convener or Chairman shall take due cognizance of the appropriateness or otherwise of an individual or individuals having an interest or close personal relationship being present during consideration of such business and, if the member or party having an interest or close personal

relationship, having been requested to withdraw do not withdraw voluntarily for the duration of consideration of the business in which he has an interest or close personal relationship, the Moderator, Convener or Chairman shall call for the appointment of a committee or sub-committee comprising all members, other than those having an interest, to deal with the business in question during a period of suspension and to report back with recommendations immediately after the suspension.

VI. AS TO COMMITTEES

1. Types of Committee

That the business of the Church between one Assembly and the next ensuing shall be carried on by Standing Committees and Special Committees.

2. *Standing Committees*

1. That Standing Committees shall comprise three Groups

2. That the Groups shall be arranged as follows:

Group 1: Legal Advice & Property — *Adviser: Principal Clerk*

Finance & Sustentation — *Adviser: General Treasurer, one of the General Trustees*

Group 2: Public Questions, Religion & Morals — *Adviser: Editor of Witness*

Publications (including defence of Church Principles) — *Editorial Team as Advisers*

Training of the Ministry & Admissions — *Principal of the Seminary*

Group 3 Welfare of Youth & Education — *Adviser: Editor of Explorer*

Foreign & Home Missions

Assembly Arrangements & Nominations — *Advisers: Assistant Clerk of Assembly, Moderator of immediately preceding Assembly, Moderator of last but one Assembly.*

Ecumenical Relations

These groups shall have stated meetings on the same dates as appointed by the General Assembly for the meeting of the Commission of Assembly but shall also meet, as may be necessary, on dates additional to those dates.

3. Each Group shall comprise four members from each Synod, two Ministers and two Elders, and each Presbytery shall, in so far as is practicable, be represented on each group of Committees. In addition Groups 2 and 3 shall include one Minister and one Elder from the Presbytery of the USA. The Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon shall have one representative on the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee and shall have one representative on Group 3 Committees.

4. That every person nominated to Group 1, 2, or 3 of Standing Committees must serve on all the Committees of the Group.

5. That the General Assembly shall each year appoint the Convener and Vice-convener of each Standing Committee, due regard being had to effective working and continuity of policy. In the event of the death or

resignation of the Convener of any of the Standing Committees, the Vice-convener shall forthwith become the Convener, and in the event of the death or resignation of the Vice-convener or his succession to the position of Convener in the circumstances described above, the Committee shall forthwith appoint one of their number in room and place of the said Vice-convener so departing from office, but any Vice-convener so appointed by the Committee shall hold office only until the second-last day of the meeting of the next-ensuing General Assembly.

3. *Special Committees*

1. That these shall be appointed by the General Assembly.

2. That Special Committees shall comprise the following:

2.1 A Psalmody Committee which shall have a Membership comprised of one Minister or Elder from each Presbytery, nominated by Presbyteries on the ground of special knowledge of and practical experience in Psalmody. It shall also include a Minister or Elder from the Presbytery of the USA.

4. Nominations to Committees

1. That of the Standing and Special Committees, a certain number of members, in normal conditions those who have served longest on the Committee, shall retire annually, so that within four years the membership of each Committee shall be changed throughout, and these retiring members shall not be eligible for appointment to the same Standing Committee for at least one year from the date of their retirement aforedescribed; and that in the event of the death or resignation of a member of a Committee before his four years' service have expired, the Assembly Arrangements and Nominations Committee are empowered to nominate to the Assembly, or to its Commission, a substitute who will complete the unexpired portion of the period of service of the member in whose place he has been appointed.

2. Although in terms of Standing Order VI.4.1 above any individual who has served on a group of Committees shall not be eligible to serve on the same group of Committees without a one-year break, that shall not preclude his potential eligibility for service on another group of Committees following, though not concurrent with, his service on the first group.

3. That resignation of membership of one of the Standing or Special Committees shall be intimated to the Convener of the Assembly Arrangements and Nominations Committee; that resignation from one Committee in a Group of Standing Committees shall involve resignation from the other Committees in that Group; and that any member of a Standing or Special Committee who shall, without good reason to be stated by him to, and sustained by, the Assembly Arrangements and Nominations Committee, have failed to attend any of the meetings of the relevant Committee during the period between the last General Assembly and the meeting of the Assembly Arrangements and Nominations Committee for the purpose of Standing Order VI.4.9 shall be deemed to have resigned his membership of that Committee.

4. That when a member who represents a Presbytery on a Group of Standing Committees resigns his membership of Standing Committees or ceases to be an office-bearer of a Congregation within the Presbytery which he represented, then that individual loses his membership of Standing Committees and the Presbytery is permitted to appoint in his stead another office-bearer who shall take his place on the said Committees until the ensuing General Assembly at which time the Assembly Arrangements and Nominations Committee shall make recommendations with regard to the filling of the vacancy as set out in paragraph VI.4.9. below. In such circumstances, the individual appointed as a temporary replacement by the Presbytery shall be eligible to be nominated to serve for a full four year period.

5. In the event of a member of a Special Committee not completing his four-year term of office a

replacement shall be made by the Assembly Arrangements and Nominations Committee and reported on to the ensuing General Assembly.

6. That not later than the first day of January in each year the Principal Clerk of Assembly shall furnish to the Clerk of each Presbytery a list of the members of the Standing and Special Committees, indicating thereon which members of these Committees will retire from office at the next-ensuing Assembly and which members may have died or become disqualified.

7. That each Presbytery of the Church shall forward to the Principal Clerk of Assembly by the first day of November of each year a list of names of such Elders, within their bounds (along with their designations, full addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses; together with a note of previous service, if any, on Committees, or their suitability for service on a Standing or Special Committee), as they desire to submit for the information of other Presbyteries, and being known by them to be eligible, suitable and available for nomination to vacancies on Standing or Special Committees. The Principal Clerk shall collate all these returns and forward a list of the names of the Elders so recommended to the Clerk of each Presbytery at the same time (viz. the first day of January each year) as he forwards the names of existing members of the Standing and Special Committees showing which members fall to be replaced.

8. That each Presbytery shall, not later than the last day of February next ensuing, furnish to the Principal Clerk of Assembly the names of Ministers and Elders (not necessarily members of Presbytery) recommended by the Presbytery as suitable for appointment to Standing and Special Committees, these lists not to contain more names than the known number of vacancies. The Principal Clerk shall forthwith cause these lists to be laid before the Assembly Arrangements and Nominations Committee.

9. That not later than the first day of April the Assembly Arrangements and Nominations Committee shall select, out of the names submitted by Presbyteries, as many Ministers and Elders as shall fill the vacancies of the various Standing and Special Committees, and shall recommend these to the General Assembly, and the names so recommended shall, not later than the first day of May, be communicated by the Assembly Arrangements and Nominations Committee to the Clerk of Assembly, and shall be included in the papers to be printed. That part of the Report of the Assembly Arrangements and Nominations Committee which relates to nominations to Standing and Special Committees shall be submitted separately from any Report dealing with other aspects of their remit.

10. The Assembly Arrangements and Nominations Committee, in making their nominations, shall take due cognisance of the recommendations of Presbyteries and shall (1) take special cognisance of the recommendations of potential Committee members by the Presbyteries of which these men are members; (2) have regard to fitness for the work of the particular Committee or Committees for which the persons are to be nominated; (3) have regard to as even a distribution of influence as possible over the Church; (4) have regard to economy in relation to the expense connected with attendance at meetings of Committees; (5) in the specific case where no suitable eligible individual from a particular Presbytery or Synod is available to be nominated to fill a particular vacancy on a Standing or Special Committee, it shall be competent for the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee to nominate an individual from another Presbytery or Synod, so as to ensure that a full complement of members is maintained on each Committee.

11. That it shall be competent for any Member of Assembly to move an amendment or amendments to the recommendations of the Assembly Arrangements and Nominations Committee, provided that notice of such amendment shall have been given to the Clerk of Assembly in writing, not later than the second last day of the Assembly, and provided that such amendments are in accordance with the provisions of Standing Orders VI.4.1-4 above.

12. That the appointment of Clerks to each Committee or Special Committee shall be made by the General Assembly, such appointments being made with due regard to such special requirements as may be peculiar

to the Committees concerned and the suitability of the skills of the individual appointed. The Clerk appointed need not be drawn from the membership of the Committee.

13. That Advisers to Committees as detailed in Standing Order VI.2.2 above shall have entitlement to be present at all meetings of Committee and shall have a right to participate in the deliberations of the Committee but shall have no vote.

14. That each Standing and Special Committee shall produce and maintain an up-to-date Memorandum on Procedure to serve as a guide to members as to how the Committee should proceed in terms of the Laws and Practice of the Church.

15. That each Committee named in Standing Orders VI.2.2 and VI.3.2 above shall, for the purposes of legislation existing prior to the General Assembly of 2001, be deemed to be the Standing or Special Committee the remit of which is included in the remit of the Committee referred to in Standing Order VI.2.2 or VI.3.2 above.

16. That in the selection of Ministers and Elders to form any *Ad hoc* Special Committee, which is to report to a subsequent Assembly, the Assembly shall not be restricted to its own members.

17. That when the appointment of an *Ad hoc* Special Committee has been resolved on, the Committee shall not be nominated until the following day, except in cases the urgency of which does not admit of a day's delay.

18. That no Committee shall sit while the Moderator is in the Chair at any diet of the Assembly's meeting.