THE PRINCIPAL

ACTS

OF THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

CONVENED AT GLASGOW MAY 2024

WITH THE

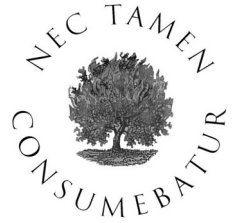
MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THAT ASSEMBLY

AND THE

REPORTS SUBMITTED TO THAT ASSEMBLY

AND THE

MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMISSION
OF THE PREVIOUS ASSEMBLY



FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (Continuing)
MMXXIV

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THE PRINCIPAL

ACTS

OF THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (Continuing)

MAY MMXXIV

CLASS I — ACTS WHICH HAVE PASSED THE BARRIER ACT

None

CLASS II — ACTS WHICH ARE OF GENERAL INTEREST TO THE CHURCH

Act I — Act anent Loyal and Dutiful Address to His Majesty The King

(No 1 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

TO THE KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY
The Loyal and Dutiful Address of the General Assembly
of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

May it please Your Majesty.

We, the Ministers and Elders of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) met in General Assembly this 21st day of May 2024, humbly desire to express to Your Majesty our continuing loyalty to Your Majesty's person and throne.

As the Word of God would instruct us, we take pleasure in continuing to remember Your Majesty in our public and private prayers. We appreciate the enormous burden that is placed upon Your Majesty as King of Great Britain & Northern Ireland and as Head of the Commonwealth. We also pray regularly for the peace and prosperity of our nation so that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ may be freely proclaimed.

Much prayer has been offered up following Your Majesty's cancer diagnosis. We pray that with careful treatment, rest, and the blessing of the Lord, Your Majesty may make a complete recovery and enjoy a long and successful reign. We were saddened also to hear of the illness of HRH the Duchess of Rothesay and we commit her and HRH the Duke of Rothesay and their family to the Lord on regular occasions.

The Lord our God is a God who is not silent and has many ways to speak to people. He speaks through His Creation, displaying something of His power, wisdom and Godhead. He speaks through His Providence as the One who has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. With our God there are no accidents or coincidences, rather the outworking of what He has decreed from all eternity. Therefore, we believe that the God of Heaven is speaking to Your Majesty, the Royal Family, and our nation, reminding us all of our mortality and the urgent need to be prepared for eternity.

Following the horrific attack on the people of Israel on 7th October by the Islamic terrorist group Hamas, that left 1,400 Jews killed and many taken hostage, we are deeply saddened by the rise of anti-Semitism that can be seen at the weekly demonstrations held in many of our cities. We believe that many of the pro-Palestine demonstrators seem to be followers of a false religion which publicly calls for the extermination of the Jews. It further reinforces the fact that Islam's impact is growing in the UK and it is having a detrimental impact upon our society. Our society needs to be reminded that our God is a jealous God who will not tolerate any competitors and is One who will visit us in judgement for our sin. We are also concerned that the international community seems unable to provide any effective means of dealing with Hamas and preventing bloodshed in Gaza. True peace in the Middle East and throughout the world will only come when rulers and nations bow the knee before the Prince of Peace, having embraced God's way of peace with himself through Jesus Christ.

The lack of political stability in the UK is one of concern for us. God reveals his Law and Gospel in the Holy Bible. The Bible would teach that, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people", Proverbs 14:34. One sad result of poor governance is a rapid turnaround of leaders.

With a UK General Election expected soon there is an urgent need for the nation to return to its Christian roots and heritage. God's Law is being replaced by man's opinion, the Lord's Day is being desecrated at a wholesale level, and as a result British society is collapsing at an alarming rate. Dysfunctional family life is the norm, discipline in our schools is increasingly difficult to maintain with many teachers leaving the profession as

a result, our law courts and police struggle to deal with the volume of work, and our prisons have to release prisoners early due to overcrowding. The moral and spiritual state of our nation should prompt us to seek the Lord that He may grant us repentance.

We mourn the drive in our parliaments to promote abortion and euthanasia. We are reminded in Proverbs 8:36, "All they that hate me love death". The desire to kill the unborn and the terminally ill and elderly stems from ungodliness which is rampant in our nation today. We are thankful that the Bible furnishes us with a solid foundation for the understanding of the sanctity of human life, whether it is of infants in the womb or of those who may be ill or elderly and who may be in need of the services of the health and caring professions.

We pray that all human life would be valued and may the blessing of God rest upon Your Majesty and all members of the Royal Family.

So pray Your Majesty's most loyal subjects, the Ministers and Elders of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) in General Assembly convened.

Act II — Act anent Equal Dividend

(No 2 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

The General Assembly declare an Equal Dividend of £23,500 from 1 July 2024.

Act III — Act anent Special Arrangements for Congregation of Ayr

(No 3 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

The General Assembly direct that the Congregation of Ayr continue on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, for a period of 5 years, subject to the Congregation promising to remit a minimum of 75% of Equal Dividend to Central Funds.

Act IV — Act anent Special Arrangements for Congregation of Ballyclare & Doagh

(No 4 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

The General Assembly direct that the Congregation of Ballyclare & Doagh continue on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, for a period of 5 years, subject to the Congregation promising to remit a minimum of 75% of Equal Dividend to Central Funds.

Act V — Act anent Special Arrangements for Congregation of Knock & Point

(No 5 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

The General Assembly direct that the Congregation of Knock & Point continue on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, for a period of 5 years from commencement of a settlement (subject to the requirements of Act XIII, 1983), contingent upon the Congregation's promise to remit a minimum of 85% of Equal Dividend to Central Funds.

Act VI — Act anent Roll of Board of Trustees

(No 6 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

The General Assembly approve the Roll of the Board of Trustees until the rising of the 2025 General Assembly as follows: Dr Andrew I. Naylor, Harris (Chairman); Mr Lindsay MacCallum, Kiltearn (Vice-chairman); Mr Murdo MacDonald, Poolewe & Aultbea; Mr Thomas MacInnes, Portree; Mr John N. Gillies, Partick.

Act VII — Act anent Appointment of Additional General Trustee

(No 7 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

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.

Act VIII — Act anent Death-in-Service Scheme

(No 8 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

The General Assembly approve the following Death-in-Service Scheme and direct that it be operated in the following terms:

1. The Church shall maintain a ring-fenced Death-in-Service account with funds not less than the Equal Dividend plus corresponding employers NIC costs in any year.

2. Any beneficiary of the Fund shall be added to the Church's payroll for the duration of the payout to fulfil the Church's obligations to His Majesty's Revenue and Customs' PAYE Scheme.

3. Each minister in service shall be encouraged to inform the Treasurer's Department of his nominated beneficiary. The General Treasurer will keep this information in the strictest confidence.

4. In exceptional circumstances, and upon application being made by the Executor of the Will, consideration shall be given to paying the full balance of the moneys into the Estate of the deceased person as a lump sum.

5. The Death-in-Service account shall be used to fund the Scheme as necessary. If the Death-in-Service account be depleted by the payment of Death-in-Service benefit(s) under the Scheme, payments to the Death-in-Service account shall recommence until such time as a sum equivalent to at least the Equal Dividend plus corresponding employer's NIC costs has been restored.

6. In the event of retirement from the ministry due to terminal illness, payment of the benefit shall commence (effective from the date of retirement) upon a report being received from the Church's Chief Medical Officer.

7. Death-in-Service benefit of an amount equal to one times salary shall similarly be paid to each of the beneficiaries of the Church at the time of his/her death, and upon the equivalent terms as above.

Act IV (Class II) 2019 is hereby repealed.

Act IX — Act anent Appointment of General Assessors to the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon

(No 9 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

The General Assembly receive the Petition of the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon and grant its crave and appoint Rev. William B. Scott, Rev. Graeme Craig, Rev. A. James MacInnes, Rev. Davide Ratti and Mr Alastair Manderson, General Assessors to the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon.

Act X — Act anent Representation on Standing Committees of Assembly of the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon

(No 10 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

The General Assembly receive the Petition of the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon anent Representation on Standing Committees of Assembly and grant its crave and amend Standing Order VI.2.3 with the addition of the following:

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.

Act XI — Act anent raising of Braga Preaching Station to a Sanctioned Charge

(No 11 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

The General Assembly receive the Petition of the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon and grant its crave and raise the Braga Preaching Station to a fully Sanctioned Charge.

Act XII — Act anent Union of Dumfries with Partick

(No 12 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

The General Assembly receive the Petition of the Free Southern Presbytery anent Union of Dumfries and Partick and grant its crave and unite the Congregation of Dumfries and Partick under one Kirk Session and one Deacons' Court, the united charge to be known as Partick.

Act XIII — Act anent raising Fredericksburg Preaching Station to a Sanctioned Charge

(No 13 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

The General Assembly receive the Petition of the Presbytery of the USA and grant its crave and raise the Fredericksburg Preaching Station to a fully Sanctioned Charge.

Act XIV — Act anent Admission of RPCNA Congregation of Dallas

(No 14 of Class II)

Glasgow, 21st May 2024

The General Assembly receive the Petition of the Dallas RPCNA Congregation and grant its crave. They admit the Congregation of Dallas RPCNA as a fully Sanctioned Charge, the Congregation to be known as Dallas.

Act XV — Act anent Admission of Camon Tomé

(No 15 of Class II)

Glasgow, 22nd May 2024

The General Assembly receive the application from Rev. Camon Tomé and admit 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. They instruct the Clerk of Assembly to include Mr Tomé's name on the Roll of Resigned Ministers and to transfer it to the Register of Ministers eligible for Call on receipt of an Extract Minute from the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee certifying that he has completed the prescribed Course in Scottish Church History, Church Principles and Church Practice.

Act XVI — Act anent Admission of Romesh Prakashpalan

(No 16 of Class II)

Glasgow, 22nd May 2024

The General Assembly receive the application from Rev. Romesh Prakashpalan and admit 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. They instruct the Clerk of Assembly to include Mr Prakashpalan's name on the Register of Ministers eligible for Call on receipt of an Extract Minute indicating that he has signed the Formula. Further, they recommend that Mr Prakashpalan completes the prescribed Course in Scottish Church History, Church Principles and Church Practice.

Act XVII — Act anent Studies for Spanish-speaking Students in Latin American Mission Field

(No 17 of Class II)

Glasgow, 22nd May 2024

The General Assembly receive the overture of the Free Presbytery of the USA anent studies for Spanish speaking students and grant its crave to the extent that the General Assembly, noting the urgent need for the provision of theological education for Spanish-speaking-only Candidates for the Ministry within the Latin American Mission Field of the Free Presbytery of the USA hereby authorise the Free Presbytery of the USA thereanent to assess and approve theological training for Spanish-speaking-only Candidates for the Ministry before the commencement of their training, or for the Spanish-speaking-only Applicants for Admission requiring further training: and furthermore that such training be undertaken through Reformed Theological Institutions that provide instruction in Spanish (or assistance for Spanish speakers), requiring that such students sit the required exit examinations and satisfactorily complete the courses in Scottish Church History, Free Church Principles and Free Church Practice; and that furthermore the General Assembly direct the Training of the Ministry and Admissions Committee to arrange for the translation of the exit exams and the requisite courses in Scottish Church History, Free Church Principles, and Free Church Practice into Spanish, and direct that the Free Presbytery of the USA proceed to trials for licence for a candidate whose training has been in the aforementioned terms, successful completion of which shall lead to him being inelligible to receive a Call outwith the bounds of the Latin American Mission Field of the Free Presbytery of the USA.

Act XVIII — Act anent Repeal of Act XIX, 2001 and Act XIII, 2002

(No 18 of Class II)

Glasgow, 23rd May 2024

The General Assembly hereby repeal Act XIX, 2001 (No. 19 of Class II) and Act XIII, 2002 (No. 13 of Class II), and disband the 'Panel of Consultants anent Allegations of Sexual Impropriety involving Adults'.

Act XIX — Act appointing Commission of Assembly

(No 19 of Class II)

Glasgow, 23rd May 2024

The General Assembly did, and hereby do, nominate and appoint a Commission consisting of all members of Assembly, with the addition of Rev. John Morrison named by the Moderator: - TO BE A COMMISSION of this General Assembly with power to the said Commission or their quorum which is declared to be any fifteen or more of their number, whereof eight at least are always to be Ministers, to meet and convene at Inverness on the first Tuesday of October and the first Tuesday of March next to come at seven o clock in the evening, and oftener when and where they shall think fit and convenient, and with power to choose their own Moderator: and the General Assembly fully empower the said Commission or their quorum above-mentioned to cognosce and finally determine as they shall see cause in every matter referred to them or which shall be referred to them by or in virtue of any Act or Order of the Assembly, and everything contained in and conform to the instruction given, or to be given, by the General Assembly and to advert to the interests of the Church on every occasion, that the Church do not suffer, or sustain any prejudice which they can prevent, as they will be answerable. Provided always that, save as hereafter stated, this general clause be not extended to particular affairs as processes before Synods or Presbyteries that are not of universal concern to, or influence upon, the whole Church. And it is hereby appointed that no private processes be determined except at the stated diets and that what shall be determined at one diet of the Commission with relation to private causes, shall be unalterable by any other diet thereof, and shall stand and continue in force until disapproved by the General Assembly. And further, the said Commission are hereby empowered to receive and fully dispose of applications that may be forwarded to them for raising preaching stations or suppressed charges to fully sanctioned charges, for consolidating congregations into one charge, for the appointment of Ministers Overseas and Foreign Missionaries, in the Mission Fields of the Church, and to receive any reference and appeal that shall be made to them from Synods in matters of doctrine, and ripen such affairs for next General Assembly and to contribute what they can to the suppression of vice and immorality, and to give all needful advice and assistance to

Synods, Presbyteries and Committees of Assembly upon application to them for that end. And the said Commission are hereby strictly prohibited and discharged to meddle in any other matters than what are committed and referred to them as above-mentioned. And in all their actings they are to proceed according to the Acts and Constitution of this Church and do nothing contrary thereto, or to the prejudice of the same, declaring that, and for all their actings, they shall be accountable to and censurable by next General Assembly, as they shall see cause. And this Commission shall continue and endure until another Commission is appointed. And members are required to attend the diets of the said Commission.

Act XX — Act appointing next General Assembly

(No 20 Class II)

Glasgow, 23rd May 2024

The General Assembly appoint the next General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) to meet in Glasgow on Monday 19th May 2025 years at 6 o'clock in the evening.

Acts of the Commission of Assembly

None

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MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (CONTINUING),

HOLDEN AT GLASGOW, 20TH MAY MMXXIV

20TH MAY
Monday
Evening

At Glasgow and within Partick Free Church (Continuing) there the 20th day of May 2024 years at 6 o'clock evening *Sess. 1.*

1. Assembly Constituted

Which day the Ministers and Elders, Commissioners from Presbyteries appointed to meet this day, were convened, and after sermon from Rev. Gavin Beers, *Retiring Moderator*, who preached from Ephesians 5:18

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit

the General Assembly was duly constituted, and the names of Commissioners, having been presented in a printed list were acknowledged as correct and allowed to stand as follows:

WESTERN SYNOD

Outer Hebrides Presbytery

2. Roll of Assembly

MINISTERS	ELDERS
Mr James Clark, Harris	Mr Colin Crichton, 11 Swordale, Point,
Mr Iain Smith, Harris (Rtd)	Isle of Lewis, HS2 0PB
Mr Kenneth M. Macdonald, Scalpay (Rtd)	Mr Calum Macleod, 'Water's Edge',
Mr David M. Blunt, North Uist & Grimsay	Braighe Road, Stornoway,
Mr Greg MacDonald, Cross	Isle of Lewis, HS2 0BQ
Mr Raymond A. Kemp, Scalpay	Dr Andrew I. Naylor, 18 Ferry Road,
	Leverburgh, Isle of Harris, HS5 3UA

20TH MAY
Monday
Evening

2. Roll of Assembly (Cont.)

Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron

MINISTERS	ELDERS
Mr John W. Keddie, Bracadale (Rtd)	Mr John Campbell, 10 Pat Gordon Place, Portree, Isle of Skye, IV51 9AB
Mr Murdo A.N. Macleod, Snizort	Mr Iain A.C. MacPherson, 10 Storr Road, Portree, Isle of Skye, IV51 9LR
Mr A. James MacInnes, Lochalsh & Strath	Mr Alastair Nicolson, 4 Balmeanach, The Braes, Portree, IV51 9NH

MAINLAND SYNOD

Northern Presbytery

MINISTERS	ELDERS
Mr Robert Josey, Resolis (Rtd)	Mr Lindsay MacCallum, 5 Salvesen Crescent, Alness, Ross-shire, IV17 0UJ
Mr Henry J.T. Woods, Kilmorack & Strathglass (Rtd)	Mr Colin MacDonald, 14 Glenburn Drive, Inverness, IV4 4ND
Mr John Macleod, Duthil-Dores (Rtd)	Mr Murdo MacDonald, 4 Ormiscaig, Aultbea, IV22 2JJ
Mr Timothy J. McGlynn, Aberdeen	Mr Ian Martin, 12 Sandalwood Avenue, Inverness, IV2 6GR
Mr Davide Ratti, Duthil-Dores	Mr Graham Sinclair, Glenview, Upper Latheron Farm, Latheronwheel, Caithness, KW5 6DT
Mr Murdo MacIver, Poolewe & Aultbea	
Mr Thomas J. Buchanan, Brora	

Southern Presbytery

MINISTERS	ELDERS
Mr David S. Fraser, Shettleston (Rtd)	Mr John Campbell, 9 Glentaner Drive, Moodiesburn, G69 0HW
Mr William Macleod, Knightswood (Rtd)	Mr David Chin, 31 Caltrop Place, Stirling, FK7 7XS
Mr Graeme Craig, Ayr	Mr Fabien Garat, 7 rue Saint-François d'Assise, 64000, Pau, France
Mr E. Trevor Kirkland, Ballyclare & Doagh	Mr John N. Gillies, 19 Falkland St, Glasgow, G12 9PY
Mr James I. Gracie, Edinburgh, Free St Columba's	Mr Murray Mackay, 1 Lennox Road, Lennoxtown, Glasgow, G66 7HN
Mr Andrew R. Allan, Partick	Mr Alastair Manderson, 12 Islay Drive, Old Kirkpatrick, West Dunbartonshire, G60 5EP
Mr Calum Smith, Knightswood	

Southern Presbytery (Cont.)

MINISTERS	ELDERS
	Mr George McMillan, 18 Amochrie Drive, Paisley, PA2 0BE
	Mr James Millar, 1 McAdam Way, Dalmellington, East Ayrshire, KA6 7FD
	Mr Norman Smith, 27 Ripon Drive, Glasgow, G12 0DU

SYNOD OF NORTH AMERICA

Presbytery of the United States of America

MINISTERS	ELDERS
Mr Warren E. Gardner, Atlanta (Rtd)	Mr Christopher P. Reeder, 6577 Highway 11, Sunset, South Carolina 29685, USA
Mr Robert D. McCurley, Greenville	Dr James Wanliss, 5 Wood Leaf Trail, Travelers Rest, South Carolina 29690, USA
Mr Gavin Beers, Mebane	
Mr Brent C. Evans, Atlanta	
Mr Jonathan D. Mattull, St. Louis	
Mr Craig J. Scott, Hunt County	
Mr J. Logan Shelton, Auburn-Opelika	

PRESBYTERY OF NAVARRE & ARAGON

MINISTERS	ELDERS
Mr Jorge Ruiz Ortiz, Rubí	Mr Paul Pontacq, 21 rue du Cabaliros, 64510, Bordes
Mr Hugues Pierre, Pau	Mr Heraldo Almeida, Rua irmãos de Sousa, 7, 2.º frente, 4715-246, São Vitor, Braga

BY CERTIFICATE FROM THE HOME & FOREIGN MISSIONS COMMITTEE

MINISTERS	ELDERS

FEDERAL RELATIONS ACT — 1952

MINISTERS	ELDERS
Mr Robin Tso	

20TH MAY
Monday
Evening

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

3. Thanks

The General Assembly record their thanks to the Retiring Moderator for his sermon and his services in the Chair.

4. Election of Moderator

The General Assembly then proceeded to elect a Moderator, when it was moved, seconded and agreed that the Assembly appoint Rev. Andrew R. Allan, *Minister at Partick*, to be their Moderator. Intimation of his appointment was then made to Mr Allan, who, having been introduced and welcomed, took the Chair and thanked the Assembly.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

5. Standing Orders

The Standing Orders as in the print be taken as the Standing Orders of this Assembly.

6. Committees to Expedite Business of the House

The General Assembly then proceeded to appoint Committees to expedite the business of the House.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

6a. Committee on Bills, Overtures etc. and Business Committee

The General Assembly appoint a Committee on Bills, Overtures, Petitions & Commissions and a Committee to arrange the Business of the House consisting of:

Messrs: Henry J.T. Woods, David M. Blunt, Raymond A. Kemp, Greg MacDonald, Graeme Craig, Murdo A.N. Macleod, and Brent C. Evans, Ministers; with Messrs Andrew I. Naylor, Norman Smith, and Lindsay MacCallum, Elders. Rev. Henry J.T. Woods, Convener of Bills, Overtures, etc. Committee and Rev. Greg MacDonald, Convener of Business Committee.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

6b. Committee to Prepare Loyal & Dutiful Address

The General Assembly appoint a Committee to prepare a Loyal & Dutiful Address to His Majesty The King consisting of:

Messrs: Andrew R. Allan, Gavin Beers, William Macleod, David M. Blunt, Timothy J. McGlynn, James I. Gracie, David S. Fraser, Kenneth M. Macdonald, Greg MacDonald, and John W. Keddie, Ministers; with Messrs James Millar, George McMillan, David Chin, and Colin MacDonald, Elders. Rev. Andrew R. Allan, Convener.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

6c. Committee to Visit Records

The General Assembly appoint a Committee to visit Synod, Presbytery & Committee Records consisting of:

Messrs: John Macleod, E. Trevor Kirkland, John W. Keddie, Raymond A. Kemp, William Macleod, Iain Smith, James I. Gracie, Jonathan D. Mattull, Henry J.T. Woods, Murdo A.N. Macleod, Davide Ratti, Murdo MacIver, Timothy J. McGlynn, Craig J. Scott, Thomas J. Buchanan, J. Logan Shelton, and A. James MacInnes, Ministers; with Messrs Alastair Manderson, Colin Crichton, Calum Macleod, John Campbell (Shettleston), Ian Martin, Christopher Reeder, Murray Mackay, Iain A.C. MacPherson, and Murdo MacDonald, Elders. Rev. E. Trevor Kirkland, Convener.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

20TH MAY
Monday
Evening

The General Assembly appoint a Committee to prepare a Minute on Deceased Ministers & Elders consisting of:

6d. Committee to Prepare Minute on Deceased Ministers & Elders

Messrs: Calum Smith, David S. Fraser, Iain Smith, and Murdo MacIver, Ministers; with Messrs Colin Crichton, Murdo MacDonald, John Campbell (Snizort), and John N. Gillies, Elders. Rev. Calum Smith, Convener.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

6e. Committee on Printing Acts of Assembly

The General Assembly appoint a Committee on Printing Acts of Assembly consisting of:

Messrs: Greg MacDonald, E. Trevor Kirkland, David M. Blunt, Jorge Ruiz Ortiz, and Hugues Pierre, Ministers; with Messrs Lindsay MacCallum, Graham Sinclair, Paul Pontacq, Heraldo Almeida, and Murray Mackay, Elders. Rev. David M. Blunt, Convener.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

7. Appointment of Assembly Officer

The General Assembly appoint Mr Alan Blaney as Assembly Officer.

8. Report of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee (A) Assembly Arrangements

The General Assembly then took up the Report of the Committee on Assembly Arrangements & Nominations (A) Assembly Arrangements, with the exception of paragraph 2.2, which being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

It was moved seconded and agreed that

Finding

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report (A) Assembly Arrangements of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee with the exception of para. 2.2, and thank the Committee, especially the Convener and the Assembly Clerks' Department;

2. The General Assembly express their gratitude to Mrs Isobel Ann Macleod, Assembly Office Manager, for her assistance during the General Assembly;

3. 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;

4. The General Assembly thank the Minister and Congregation of Partick, Glasgow, for kindly affording the Committee the use of their buildings for the Assembly;

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 with interest the ongoing review of the Memoranda on

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Procedure of the various Committees;

8. (Cont.)

10. 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;

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

9. Appointment of Precentor — The General Assembly appoint Mr Colin Crichton as Precentor.

10. Adjournment — The General Assembly did then adjourn to meet again in this place on Tuesday at 9.30 o'clock forenoon, whereof public intimation having been given, the Sederunt was closed with prayer.

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At Glasgow and within Partick Free Church (Continuing) there the 21st day of May 2024 years at 9.30 o'clock forenoon Sess. 2.

1. Assembly Constituted — The General Assembly did again convene and was constituted with devotional exercises.

2. Moderator's Address — The Moderator then addressed the Assembly on the subject

Blessed Mourners

The Moderator was thanked for his address.

3. Minutes — The Minutes of the previous day's Sederunt were read and approved.

4. Report of Committee on Bills, Overtures, Petitions & Commissions — The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Committee on Bills, Overtures, Petitions & Commissions which was given in by the Convener in the following terms:

> At Glasgow and within Partick Free Church (Continuing) there on Tuesday 21st May 2024 years, the Committee on Bills, Overtures, Petitions & Commissions appointed by the General Assembly met and was constituted.

1. It was noted that all relevant Commissions from Presbyteries had been received and were in order and that all certificates were to hand.

2. The Committee had before them nine letters, six Petitions, one Overture, three Supplementary Reports, and two Applications for Admission. The Committee agreed to recommend that all the papers be passed into the Assembly apart from a communication from a private individual anent the Petition of the Dallas RPCNA Congregation. The Committee recommend that this communication be not received for the following reasons:

   a. The author has no clear locus in the matter or locus is at best tenuous and historic.

   b. The communication casts aspersions on the procedures of an outside body; further there is no evidence of these procedural concerns first being taken up with the said outside body.

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4. Report of Committee on Bills, Overtures, Petitions & Commissions (Cont.)

c. The communication is criticising the procedures of an outside body regarding a type of procedure which is unknown to this Church and which she does not recognise as relevant to the matter contained in the Petition.

d. The matters complained of in the communication appear to have been clarified and any allegations or aspersions against the procedures of the outside body rebutted by a response to it from the Elders at Dallas, which response appears to indicate that the author of the communication does not possess a clear and full account of the facts.

e. Further, the communication has been widely circulated by blind carbon-copying the same email which was addressed to the Moderator and Assembly Clerks. It is discourteous to the Assembly to widely circulate a communication to others before the Assembly of her Bills & Overtures Committee have had sight of it, never mind considered it in any way.

Given, however, that the communication has been widely circulated, the Committee have agreed with the suggestion of the Assembly Clerks that, for the sake of openness, the Clerks made both the communication and the response available to Members of the House on the understanding that they have not been received by the Assembly and shall not be included with the Assembly Papers.

3. The Committee noted that the two Applications for Admission together with the Supplementary Reports thereanent, and the Supplementary Report (B) of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee should be taken in Private and the papers treated as Private Papers.

4. The meeting was closed with prayer.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Bills & Overtures etc. Committee; *Finding*

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Business Committee which was given in by the Convener. 5. Report of Business Committee

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Business Committee. *Finding*

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Committee appointed to prepare a Loyal and Dutiful Address to His Majesty The King, which was given in by the Moderator. The Report was adopted and in accordance therewith, the Address as underwritten was agreed to and appointed to be duly signed and transmitted with a letter from the Clerk. 6. Loyal & Dutiful Address

Glasgow 21st May 2024

TO THE KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY

The Loyal and Dutiful Address of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

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6. Loyal & Dutiful Address (Cont.)

May it please Your Majesty.

We, the Ministers and Elders of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) met in General Assembly this 21st day of May 2024, humbly desire to express to Your Majesty our continuing loyalty to Your Majesty's person and throne.

As the Word of God would instruct us, we take pleasure in continuing to remember Your Majesty in our public and private prayers. We appreciate the enormous burden that is placed upon Your Majesty as King of Great Britain & Northern Ireland and as Head of the Commonwealth. We also pray regularly for the peace and prosperity of our nation so that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ may be freely proclaimed.

Much prayer has been offered up following Your Majesty's cancer diagnosis. We pray that with careful treatment, rest, and the blessing of the Lord, Your Majesty may make a complete recovery and enjoy a long and successful reign. We were saddened also to hear of the illness of HRH the Duchess of Rothesay and we commit her and HRH the Duke of Rothesay and their family to the Lord on regular occasions.

The Lord our God is a God who is not silent and has many ways to speak to people. He speaks through His Creation, displaying something of His power, wisdom and Godhead. He speaks through His Providence as the One who has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. With our God there are no accidents or coincidences, rather the outworking of what He has decreed from all eternity. Therefore, we believe that the God of Heaven is speaking to Your Majesty, the Royal Family, and our nation, reminding us all of our mortality and the urgent need to be prepared for eternity.

Following the horrific attack on the people of Israel on 7th October by the Islamic terrorist group Hamas, that left 1,400 Jews killed and many taken hostage, we are deeply saddened by the rise of anti-Semitism that can be seen at the weekly demonstrations held in many of our cities. We believe that many of the pro-Palestine demonstrators seem to be followers of a false religion which publicly calls for the extermination of the Jews. It further reinforces the fact that Islam's impact is growing in the UK and it is having a detrimental impact upon our society. Our society needs to be reminded that our God is a jealous God who will not tolerate any competitors and is One who will visit us in judgement for our sin. We are also concerned that the international community seems unable to provide any effective means of dealing with Hamas and preventing bloodshed in Gaza. True peace in the middle east and throughout the world will only come when rulers and nations bow the knee before the Prince of Peace, having embraced God's way of peace with himself through Jesus Christ.

The lack of political stability in the UK is one of concern for us. God reveals his Law and Gospel in the Holy Bible. The Bible would teach that, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people", Proverbs 14:34. One sad result of poor governance is a rapid turnaround of leaders.

With a UK General Election expected soon there is an urgent need for the nation to return to its Christian roots and heritage. God's Law is being replaced by man's opinion, the Lord's Day is being desecrated at a wholesale level, and as a result British society is collapsing at an alarming rate. Dysfunctional family life is the norm, discipline in our schools is increasingly difficult to maintain with many teachers leaving the profession as a result, our law courts and police struggle to deal with the volume of work, and our prisons have to release prisoners early due to overcrowding. The moral and spiritual state of our nation should prompt us to seek the Lord that He may grant us repentance.

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6. Loyal & Dutiful Address (Cont.)

We mourn the drive in our parliaments to promote abortion and euthanasia. We are reminded in Proverbs 8:36 "all they that hate me love death". The desire to kill the unborn and the terminally ill and elderly stems from ungodliness which is rampant in our nation today. We are thankful that the Bible furnishes us with a solid foundation for the understanding of the sanctity of human life, whether it is of infants in the womb or of those who may be ill or elderly and who may be in need of the services of the health and caring professions.

We pray that all human life would be valued and may the blessing of God rest upon Your Majesty and all members of the Royal Family.

So pray Your Majesty's most loyal subjects, the Ministers and Elders of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) in General Assembly convened.

7. Report of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations, which being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

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, while noting Affinity's decision to facilitate efforts to establish TGC-UK, welcome the continued work of Affinity in fostering strong inter-church and evangelical para-church dialogue, with a view to advancing the cause of Christ throughout Great Britain and Ireland;

3. The General Assembly commend *Lux Mundi*, the e-publication of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, and encourage its dissemination as a means of giving information regarding the reformed Churches throughout the world;

4. The General Assembly, noting that the European Conference of Reformed Churches is due to meet in September 2024 at Stone, England, and the desirability of being represented at that meeting, appoint Rev. Timothy McGlynn and Rev. Graeme Craig their voting delegates to the next meeting of the European Conference of Reformed Churches;

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

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

7. The General Assembly note the contacts with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England & Wales and pray for God's blessing on their work and witness;

8. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland and thank Rev. Trevor Kirkland for representing them at their recent meeting;

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7. Report of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (Cont.)

9. The General Assembly commend the Committee for their most appropriate response to the approach made by the Free Church of Scotland;

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

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

12. The General Assembly note that the Assembly of 2023 wrote to the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, with concern regarding reports of difficulties being experienced by them due to the ordination of women to office in some of their Churches, contrary to the decision of Synod, and further expressed concern at their discussing the opening of the office of Deacon to women. They further note that these issues are due to be discussed at their Synod which meets during 2024 and 2025. They assure the CGKN of their continued prayers for them, that they may be able to deal with these issues in a Biblical way, and that they may be kept faithful in a day of backsliding and compromise with the spirit of the world. They appoint Rev. Graeme Craig as a delegate to the next Synod of the CGKN;

13. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts made between the Committee and the De Gereformeerde Kerken (hersteld) (DGKN), and rejoice to hear of the hoped for union between the DGKN and the GKN. They look forward to links between the Church and the united body being strengthened;

14. The General Assembly thank the Committee for approaching the Gereformeerde Gemeenten and await their response with interest;

15. 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;

16. The General Assembly are grateful to learn of the establishment of a truly Reformed and Presbyterian Church in Central and Eastern Europe, and encourage the Committee to pursue the formalising of a relationship with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central & Eastern Europe;

17. The General Assembly note the relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches and that they were represented at the 2023 General Assembly;

18. The General Assembly are grateful for the ongoing contacts with the Free Reformed Churches in North America and pray God’s blessing on their work and witness;

19. The General Assembly appreciate the ongoing contacts with the Heritage Reformed Congregations and pray the Lord will bless their labours for Him;

20. 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 that the Church might be a positive influence on them;

21. The General Assembly note that there has been little progress in strengthening relationships between the Presbyterian Reformed Church (USA) and the FC(C), but hope and pray that the exchange of delegates this year may prove of benefit to all;

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7. Report of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (Cont.)

22. 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;

23. The General Assembly value the ongoing relationship with the United Reformed Churches of North America, and note with regret that due to geographical distance it has not been possible to send a delegate this year to the Synod of the URCNA;

24. The General Assembly are thankful for their relationship with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and look forward to welcoming a Corresponding Commissioner in terms of Act I, 1952. They note the manpower difficulties they are facing, pray that the Lord of the Harvest would raise up labourers for the work of the Ministry, and are thankful that some of the Church's retired ministers have been able to provide extended periods of supply to assist them in their witness;

25. 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;

26. The General Assembly note with regret that the Committee has ceased correspondence with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia;

27. The General Assembly welcome the attendance of a Delegate from the Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika and pray that God would bless the work of their Churches in that land;

28. 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.

8. Letters

(a) Australian Free Church

The General Assembly took up consideration of a letter from the Australian Free Church.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

The General Assembly thank the Australian Free Church for their letter, are grateful to hear of improving relations between them and other like-minded churches in Australia, express appreciation of their prayerful regard for the work and witness of the Church and reciprocate Christian greetings.

(b) Affinity

The General Assembly took up consideration of a letter from Affinity.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

The General Assembly thank Affinity for their informative letter and reciprocate Christian greetings.

(c) Associated Presbyterian Churches

The General Assembly took up consideration of a letter from the Associated Presbyterian Churches.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

The General Assembly thank the Associated Presbyterian Churches for their letter, and reciprocate Christian greetings.

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The General Assembly took up consideration of a letter from the Canadian Reformed Churches.

(d) Canadian Reformed Churches

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

The General Assembly thank the Canadian Reformed Churches for their letter, and their encouragement to persevere in the truth in the face of the ongoing moral and spiritual decline mutually faced, and reciprocate Christian greetings.

(e) Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland

The General Assembly took up consideration of a letter from the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

The General Assembly thank the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland for their letter and reciprocate Christian greetings.

(f) Free Reformed Churches of North America

The General Assembly took up consideration of a letter from the Free Reformed Churches of North America.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

The General Assembly thank the Free Reformed Churches of North America for their letter and shared Christian heritage and reciprocate Christian greetings.

(g) Heritage Reformed Congregations

The General Assembly took up consideration of a letter from the Heritage Reformed Congregations.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

The General Assembly thank the Heritage Reformed Congregations for their letter pointing to the Lord as the builder of His Church, even in dark days, and reciprocate Christian greetings.

(h) Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

The General Assembly took up consideration of a letter from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

The General Assembly thank the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland for their letter, assure them of the prayer that the Lord of the Harvest would send out labourers for His glory, are thankful to hear of mission work in various parts of Europe, and reciprocate Christian greetings.

9. Petition from the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon anent Appointment of General Assessors

The General Assembly took up consideration of a Petition from the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon anent Appointment of General Assessors in the following terms:

Unto the venerable the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) indicted to meet in Glasgow on 20 May 2024 the Petition of the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon humbly sheweth that:

Whereas the Presbytery has been recently erected and has only two Congregations;

Whereas the Presbytery has only two Ministers in active service and four Ruling Elders within the Bounds;

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Whereas the appointment of General Assessors has, hitherto, been of immense assistance in the effective functioning of Presbytery;

Wherefore

May it please your venerable Court to take these premises into consideration and appoint General Assessors to the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon for the forthcoming year, or do otherwise as in their wisdom they deem best

9. Petition from the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon anent Appointment of General Assessors (Cont.)

And your Petitioners will ever pray.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

The General Assembly receive the Petition of the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon anent Appointment of General Assessors and grant its crave. They appoint Rev. William. B. Scott, Rev. Graeme Craig, Rev. A. James MacInnes, Rev. Davide Ratti and Mr Alastair Manderson, General Assessors to the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon.

10. Petition from the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon anent Representation on Standing Committees of Assembly

The General Assembly took up consideration of a Petition from the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon anent Representation on Standing Committees of Assembly in the following terms:

Unto the venerable the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) indicted to meet in Glasgow on 20 May 2024, the Petition of the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon humbly sheweth that:

Whereas the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon is a Presbytery of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing);

Whereas it is of benefit to the Church that, where practicable and relevant, every Presbytery of the Church should have representation on Standing and Special Committees of the General Assembly;

Whereas it is admitted that, for many of these Committees, the presence of members of the Presbytery on such Committees would not be relevant or of advantage to the wider Church either through ignorance of the particularities of Scottish life and circumstances or because the Presbytery, being overseas, have effectively no locus in the business of such Committees;

Whereas the presence of members of the Presbytery could be useful and relevant for the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committees in particular, as well as three of the four group 3 Committees;

Wherefore

May it please your venerable Court to take these premises into consideration and amend Standing Order VI.2.3 with the addition of the following:
"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."

or do otherwise as in their wisdom they deem best.

And your Petitioners will ever pray.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

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10. (Cont.)

Finding

The General Assembly receive the Petition of the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon anent Representation on Standing Committees of Assembly and grant its crave and amend Standing Order VI.2.3 with the addition of the following:
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.

11. Order of the Day — Reception of Delegates

There was an Order of the Day at 1.45 o'clock for the reception of Delegates.

The following Delegates were introduced to the Moderator and invited to address the Assembly:

Rev. John W. Keddie	— Scottish Reformation Society
Rev. John Roger	— Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland

The Moderator conveyed the thanks of the Assembly to the Delegates.

12. Report of the Finance & Sustentation Committee

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Finance & Sustentation Committee, which being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

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 in 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 £23,500 from 1st July 2024;

7. The General Assembly inform all Congregations that the total payroll cost from 1 July 2024 for each minister is £28,307;

8. The General Assembly endorse the recommendation of the Finance & Sustentation Committee that the Draft Budget for 2025 be approved with a projected deficit of £35,235;

9. The General Assembly reappoint Innes & Partners Ltd, Chartered Certified Accountants, of 9 Ardross Street, Inverness, Scotland, IV3 5NN as Church Auditors for the coming year (2024), and thank them for the audit of the 2023 accounts;

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

11. The General Assembly thank all 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;

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

13. The General Assembly note the improvement works carried out on the denominational property at 85 Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness;

14. The General Assembly thank Mr Murray Mackay, General Treasurer for his invaluable advice and dedication shown to the financial well-being of the Church;

15. The General Assembly thank Mrs Muriel Smith for her continued commitment to serve the Church in her position as Financial Administrator;

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

17. The General Assembly direct that the Congregation of Ayr continue on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, for a period of 5 years, subject to the Congregation promising to remit a minimum of 75% of Equal Dividend to Central Funds;

18. The General Assembly direct that the Congregation of Ballyclare & Doagh continue on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, for a period of 5 years, subject to the Congregation promising to remit a minimum of 75% of Equal Dividend to Central Funds;

19. The General Assembly direct that the Congregation of Knock & Point continue on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, for a period of 5 years from commencement of a settlement (subject to the requirements of Act XIII, 1983), contingent upon the Congregation's promise to remit a minimum of 85% of Equal Dividend to Central Funds;

20. The General Assembly are thankful that the Congregation of Brora have been placed on the Equal Dividend Platform in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, having promised to submit a minimum of 100% of Equal Dividend;

21. The General Assembly approve the following Death-in-Service Scheme and direct that it be operated in the following terms:

    1. The Church shall maintain a ring-fenced Death-in-Service account with funds not less than the Equal Dividend plus corresponding employer's NIC costs in any year.

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12. Report of the Finance & Sustentation Committee (Cont.)

2. Any beneficiary of the Fund shall be added to the Church's payroll for the duration of the payout to fulfil the Church's obligations to His Majesty's Revenue and Customs' PAYE Scheme.

3. Upon the death of a minister in service, and upon notification being received by the General Treasurer from the relevant Presbytery Clerk, a sum equivalent in total to the Equal Dividend at the time of death shall be paid in twelve monthly instalments over the following year into the account of a nominated beneficiary.

4. Each minister in service shall be encouraged to inform the Treasurer's Department of his nominated beneficiary. The General Treasurer will keep this information in the strictest confidence.

5. In exceptional circumstances, and upon application being made by the Executor of the Will, consideration shall be given to paying the full balance of the moneys into the Estate of the deceased person as a lump sum.

6. The Death-in-Service account shall be used to fund the Scheme as necessary. If the Death-in-Service account be depleted by the payment of Death-in-Service benefit(s) under the Scheme, payments to the Death-in-Service account shall recommence until such time as a sum equivalent to at least the Equal Dividend plus corresponding employer's NIC costs has been restored.

7. In the event of retirement from the ministry due to terminal illness, payment of the benefit shall commence (effective from the date of retirement) upon a report being received from the Church's Chief Medical Officer.

8. Death-in-Service benefit of an amount equal to one times salary shall similarly be paid to each of the beneficiaries of the Church at the time of his/her death, and upon the equivalent terms as above.

Act IV (Class II) 2019 is hereby repealed;

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.

13. Report of the General Trustees

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the General Trustees which, being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Chairman of the Trustees, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report and thank the General Trustees for their continuing work on behalf of the denomination;

2. The General Assembly note with gratitude the completion of transfer of Title for the Partick and Duthil-Dores manse properties and further note the position regarding the Bracadale & Duirinish manse;

3. The General Assembly express their thanks to Rev. & Mrs William B. Scott for donating items of historical interest to the denomination;

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13. Report of the General Trustees (Cont.)

4. The General Assembly note the observations of the General Trustees with respect to the safeguarding and archiving of important denominational documents and records;

5. The General Assembly note that Trustees Indemnity Insurance cover has been put in place for the General Trustees;

6. The General Assembly note that a denominational 'Risk Register' is now held by the denomination and thank the General Trustees, and the General Treasurer, for their work in compiling this;

7. The General Assembly note that information and guidance relating to the 'Risk Register' has been circulated to Presbyteries and Deacons' Courts, and direct that local Trustees take cognisance of the requirements pertaining to their own Congregations;

8. The General Assembly urge local Trustees to familiarise themselves with their legal duties and responsibilities, and note the resources highlighted in the Report;

9. The General Assembly note that by failing to obtain OSCR registration, Congregations are at risk of not complying with relevant laws and regulations. They direct Congregations, in conjunction with local Presbyteries, to work towards achieving OSCR registration, including securing the necessary training in relation to the responsibilities of local Congregational Treasurers;

10. The General Assembly approve the Roll of the Board of Trustees until the rising of the 2025 General Assembly as follows:

Dr Andrew I. Naylor, Harris (Chairman); Mr Murdo MacDonald,
Poolewe & Aultbea; Mr Thomas MacInnes, Portree;
Mr Lindsay MacCallum, Kiltearn (Vice-chairman);
Mr John N. Gillies, Partick;

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.

14. Petition from the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon anent raising Braga Preaching Station to a fully Sanctioned Charge

The General Assembly took up consideration of a Petition from the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon anent raising Braga Preaching Station to a fully Sanctioned Charge in the following terms:

Unto the venerable the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) indicted to meet in Glasgow on 20 May 2024 the Petition of the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon humbly sheweth that:

Whereas a Preaching Station in Braga (Portugal) was erected by the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon on 27th of June 2022, having its own Kirk Session;

Whereas the Preaching Station of Braga now has one active ruling Elder resident in the area;

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14. Petition from the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon anent raising Braga Preaching Station to a fully Sanctioned Charge (Cont.)

Whereas the Preaching Station would greatly benefit from the services of a resident Minister;

Whereas in God's providence there is a possibility of a suitable person being available to minister in Braga, undertaking a tent-making ministry there;

Whereas the Kirk Session have indicated that they are favourable to Braga becoming a fully sanctioned charge within the bounds of the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon;

Whereas the Presbytery is fully supportive of Braga becoming a fully sanctioned charge within their bounds;

Whereas the existing financial arrangements for the work within the Presbytery would continue as heretofore, with no additional burden being placed on the central finances of the Church should a Minister be settled in Braga;

Whereas the work in Portugal would be a tent-making ministry, with no additional burden being placed on the central finances of the Church;

Wherefore

May it please your venerable Court to take these premises into consideration and raise the Preaching Station of Braga to a fully Sanctioned Charge with a right to call a Minister, or do otherwise as in their wisdom they deem best

And your Petitioners will ever pray.

1.

Extract Minute of Braga Kirk Session

At Rubí, and by digital conference, on Monday 22nd April 2024, the Kirk Session of Braga Free Church (continuing) met and was constituted with prayer.

Inter alia
The Session noted the Petition prepared by the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon asking that the Congregation of Braga be raised to that of a sanctioned Charge with permission to call a minister on a tent-making basis. The Session affirmed its support of this petition.

Extracted from the Kirk Session minutes by
A.J. MacInnes, *Clerk*

2.

Extract Minute of Braga Deacons' Court

At Rubí, and by digital conference, on Monday 22nd April 2024, the Deacons Court of Braga Free Church (continuing) met and was constituted with prayer.

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14. Petition from the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon anent raising Braga Preaching Station to a fully Sanctioned Charge (Cont.)

Inter alia
The Deacons Court noted the Petition prepared by the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon asking that the Congregation of Braga be raised to that of a sanctioned Charge with permission to call a minister on a tent-making basis. The Session affirmed its support of this petition.

Extracted from the minutes of the Deacons Court
by A.J. MacInnes, *Clerk*

3.

Extract Minute of Braga Congregational Meeting

At Rubí, and by digital conference, on Tuesday 7th May 2024, the Kirk-Session of Braga Free Church (continuing) met and was constituted with prayer

Inter alia
The Session met with the Congregation, and after the reading of Ephesians 4:1-12 and prayer, the Congregation were invited to show they support of the Petition prepared by Presbytery asking the General Assembly to raise the Congregation to a sanctioned charge with permission to call a minister. The Congregation unanimously supported the Petition.

Extracted from the Kirk Session minutes
by A.J. MacInnes, *Clerk*

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

The General Assembly receive the Petition of the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon and grant its crave and raise the Braga Preaching Station to a fully Sanctioned Charge.

15. Petition from the Free Southern Presbytery anent Union of Dumfries with Partick

The General Assembly took up consideration of a Petition from the Free Southern Presbytery anent Union of Dumfries with Partick in the following terms:

Unto the venerable the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) indicted to meet in Glasgow on 20th May 2024 the Petition of the Free Southern Presbytery humbly sheweth that

Whereas the Congregation of Dumfries have been vacant since the retirement of Rev. William B. Scott on 28th February 2006;

Whereas the Congregation is now in a weakened state numerically and the holding of the services in their current location is not convenient for those connected with the Congregation;

Whereas the ongoing use of the current venue in Lockerbie for services is unclear;

Whereas the members in Dumfries have expressed a desire to be united with Partick with a view to worshipping there whenever they are able so to do;

Whereas the Kirk Session, Deacons' Court and Congregation of Dumfries have expressed a desire to seek union with another Congregation;

Whereas the Kirk Session, Deacons' Court and Congregation of Partick are favourable to this proposal;

Whereas, should circumstances change, a union would facilitate the resumption of

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15. Petition from the Free Southern Presbytery anent Union of Dumfries with Partick (Cont.)

Services in the south west of Scotland, should God in his gracious providence permit; wherefore

may it please your venerable Court to take these premises into consideration and unite the Congregations of Dumfries and Partick under one Kirk Session and one Deacons' Court, the united Charge to be known as Partick

or do otherwise as in their wisdom may seem best

and your Petitioners will ever pray etc.

1.

Extract Minute of Dumfries Kirk Session

At 4 Muir Drive, Larbert, on 7th May 2024 at 9.45pm, the Dumfries Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) Kirk Session met and was constituted.

inter alia
The Interim-Moderator reported that the members at the AGM on 6th April, inst, unanimously agreed to request that a petition from the Presbytery be directed to the General Assembly to conclude a union between Dumfries and Partick congregations and that all moveable property be deposited with Partick Kirk Session.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that the Deacons' Court acquiesce with this request.

Extracted from the Records of the Kirk Session of Dumfries
by John Campbell, *Session Clerk, pro tem*

2.

Extract Minute of Dumfries Deacons Court

At 4 Muir Drive, Larbert, on 7th May 2024 at 9.45pm, the Dumfries Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) Kirk Session met and was constituted.

inter alia:
The Interim-Moderator reported that the Kirk Session had acquiesced with the request of the members met at their AGM on 6th April that the Presbytery petition the General Assembly to unite Dumfries Congregation to Partick Congregation and that all remaining Dumfries funds and records and moveable property be lodged with Partick.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that the Deacons' Court acquiesce with this request.

Extracted from the Records of the Deacons' Court of Dumfries
by John Campbell, *Clerk of Deacons' Court, pro tem*

3.

Extract Minute of Dumfries Congregational Meeting

At Lockerbie and within Ebenezer Hall, Bridge Street, Lockerbie, on Saturday, 6th April 2024, at 3pm, Dumfries Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) met at 3pm as duly intimated.

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15. Petition from the Free Southern Presbytery anent Union of Dumfries with Partick (Cont.)

inter alia
Despite our efforts over the years, we have not added permanently to the numbers attending, indeed, they are now reduced to 3 worshippers. On this account, the membership has felt the time has come to seek union with another congregation. Approaches have been made to Partick and the Presbytery are favourably disposed. We are asked formally at this meeting to agree to the union we have asked for and do so in the following terms:-

The members of Dumfries Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) were asked concerning their desire for union with Partick.

It was moved, seconded and agreed unanimously that the congregation, because of the depleted membership, request the Presbytery to petition the General Assembly to approve a union with the Partick Congregation.

Extracted from the Records of the Kirk Session of Dumfries
by John Campbell, *Session Clerk, pro tem*

4.

Extract Minute of Partick Kirk Session

At 2-4 Thornwood Terrace, Glasgow, G11 7QZ, on Tuesday 19th March 2024, the Kirk Session of Partick Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) met and was constituted.

inter alia
The Session took up consideration of an Extract Minute from Rev David S Fraser Interim Moderator, of the Dumfries congregation anent a proposed union of the Dumfries and Partick congregations.

After deliberations it was moved, seconded and agreed that the Session are favourably disposed towards the request subject to the approval of the Congregation at a soon to be arranged Congregational meeting.

Extracted from the records of Partick Free Church (Continuing)
Kirk Session by Rev Andrew R Allan, *Session Clerk*

5.

Extract Minute of Partick Deacons' Court

At Partick Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), 2-4 Thornwood Terrace, Glasgow, G11 7QZ on Wednesday 8th May 2024, the Deacons' Court of Partick Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) met *pro re nata* and was constituted.

inter alia:
The Court took up consideration of the communication received from the Partick FCC Session Clerk regarding correspondence from the interim-moderator of the Dumfries FCC congregation anent a proposed Union between the two congregations. Having been previously carefully discussed at Kirk Session level, it was moved, seconded and agreed that the Court were favourably disposed to such a union.

Extracted from the records of the Partick Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)
Deacons' Court Records by Murray Mackay, *Clerk*

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15. Petition from the Free Southern Presbytery anent Union of Dumfries with Partick (Cont.)

6.

Extract Minute of Partick Congregational Meeting

At 2-4 Thornwood Terrace, Glasgow, G11 7QZ, on Wednesday 3rd April 2024, the Kirk Session of Partick Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) met with the Congregation according to appointment and was constituted.

inter alia

The Moderator referred to a proposal received from the Kirk Session of the Dumfries congregation seeking a union of the two congregations. After discussion it was moved, seconded and agreed that the congregation approve the proposed union.

Extracted from the records of Partick Free Church (Continuing)
Kirk Session by Rev Andrew R Allan, *Session Clerk*

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

The General Assembly receive the Petition of the Free Southern Presbytery anent Union of Dumfries and Partick and grant its crave and unite the Congregation of Dumfries and Partick under one Kirk Session and one Deacons' Court, the united charge to be known as Partick.

16. Petition from the Presbytery of the USA anent raising Fredericksburg to a fully Sanctioned Charge

The General Assembly took up consideration of a Petition from the Presbytery of the USA anent raising Fredericksburg to a fully Sanctioned Charge in the following terms:

To the Reverend the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

The Petition of the Free Presbytery of the United States of America humbly shows that:

Out of concern for the good of the congregation of Fredericksburg, Virginia, and the surrounding area of Northern Virginia, and for the well-being of the Church generally, we are constrained to draw the attention of your reverend Court to the following matters affecting the status of the Fredericksburg Preaching Station:

Whereas the Presbytery erected the Fredericksburg Preaching Station in the Summer of 2023;

Whereas there is a desire among the members and adherents of the Preaching Station to see the Congregation further established and stabilized;

Whereas the overseeing Session and Deacons' Court of the Preaching Station believe that the raising of the Preaching Station to that of a fully sanctioned charge would mean greater stability for the work;

Whereas the Preaching Station holds two Sabbath services with attendance at Sabbath services reaching as high as fifty-five people;

Whereas the Preaching Station is strategically located in Northern Virginia and in close proximity to the key metropolitan center of Washington DC and its surrounding towns to the south;

Whereas raising the Preaching Station to a fully sanctioned charge would provide the opportunity for calling a minister and facilitate in the election of elders and deacons;

Whereas the Fredericksburg Preaching Station is financially self-supporting, does not participate in the sustentation fund, is not dependent upon the central funds of the denomination, and provides financial support for its stated supply;

16. Petition from the Presbytery of the USA anent raising Fredericksburg to a fully Sanctioned Charge (Cont.)

Whereas the existing financial contributions of the Preaching Station would enable them to make realistic provision for a permanent minister;

Whereas the erection of a fully sanctioned charge would give strong encouragement to the people in the Fredericksburg Preaching Station, and commend their cause to other interested parties in the area and the community in which they are located, as being a work of permanence;

Whereas it would be of encouragement and help to the Presbytery as a whole to add to the number of ministers and elders with a seat on Presbytery; and

Whereas it is appropriate for Presbyteries to recommend to the General Assembly the sanctioning of charges;

Wherefore may your venerable court take these premises into consideration, and grant the consideration of raising the Fredericksburg, Virginia, Preaching Station to that of a fully sanctioned charge. Or do otherwise as in their wisdom may seem best.

And your Petitioners will ever pray.

1.

Extract Minute of Deacons' Court of Fredericksburg Preaching Station

At Liberty, S.C., within 269 Garvin Road, there and by conference call on Saturday, February 24, 2024, at 1:40 p.m., the Deacons' Court of Fredericksburg Preaching Station met and was constituted with prayer.

inter alia

The Deacons' Court noted their unanimous support for raising the Fredericksburg Preaching Station to a fully sanctioned Charge.

Extracted from the Records of the Deacons' Court by:
Wayne I. Vernon, Jr., *Cl. Eccl. Fredericksburg*

2.

Extract Minute of Kirk Session anent Congregational Meeting of Fredericksburg Preaching Station

At Stafford, Virginia, within 3270 Titanic Drive, there and by conference call, on Friday, March 8, 2024, at 7:15 p.m., the Congregational meeting of Fredericksburg Preaching Station was opened with prayer.

inter alia

Rev. Beers presented the Congregation with the petition to Presbytery to raise the work to a fully sanctioned charge. After the Petition was read in the audience of the Congregation, Members and Adherents were invited to subscribe their names to it. Support for the petition was unanimous, with all the communicant members and adherents present at the meeting signing the petition. The Congregation then sang from the end of Psalm 90.

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16. Petition from the Presbytery of the USA anent raising Fredericksburg to a fully Sanctioned Charge (Cont.)

[There was also submitted with this extract a Petition to Presbytery in similar terms to the Presbytery's Petition signed by 12 Members and 10 Adherents.]

Extracted from the Records of the Kirk Session by:
Wayne I. Vernon, Jr., Cl. *Eccl. Fredericksburg*

Finding

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

The General Assembly receive the Petition of the Presbytery of the USA and grant its crave and raise Fredericksburg Preaching Station to a fully Sanctioned Charge.

17. Petition from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America Congregation of Dallas anent Admission

The General Assembly took up consideration of a Petition from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America Congregation of Dallas anent Admission in the following terms:

To the Venerable the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) indicted to meet in Glasgow on Monday 20th May 2024, the Petition of the Dallas, Texas, U.S.A. Congregation humbly sheweth that:

Whereas we are a congregation committed to the Biblical and Reformed principles of the historic Church of Scotland;

Whereas we are committed to the original Westminster Confession of Faith and not to the various revised versions of the Westminster Confession found in America;

Whereas our doctrine, worship and practice aligns perfectly with the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), more so than the denomination we are presently affiliated with;

Whereas we presently use the 1650 Psalter and read from the KJV in worship, and also practice Communion seasonally, at a Table and with one cup and one loaf;

Whereas our former minister has applied to join the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) and intends to move to Fredericksburg, Virginia to minister to a church plant;

Whereas we desire our next Minister to share in these commitments to doctrine and practice, and few candidates of like convictions are currently ministering in the denomination we are presently affiliated with;

Whereas our remaining elders are unanimous in their agreement to lead the congregation to associate with the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing);

Whereas our remaining elders have reviewed the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)'s Questions and Formula, and are prepared to affirm the Questions and to sign the Formula;

Whereas we are located in the Dallas Metro area which has a huge population that is greatly in need of a Biblical and Reformed Witness in doctrine, worship and practice;

We, the undersigned, members of the congregation of Dallas, Texas, U.S.A. hereby apply for admission to the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).

Dated March 17, in the year of our Lord 2024.

Communicant Members:

DANNY MORIEL	APRIL MORIEL
BRYAN SANDERS	KNECHOL SANDERS

NICK SCHOENEBERGER — LAURA SCHOENEBERGER
JONATHAN SMUTS — KELLY SMUTS
RICHARD ARMOR — ADAM ARELLANO
CALEB DE WAAL — KATHRYN DE WAAL
WARREN FURCHES — CINDY PRICE
TERRINIKA ANDERSON — BRADY ANDERSON
MAXWELL SCHOENEBERGER — DUFF T. MILIS
ANDREW SILVA — JENNIFER SILVA
JACOB OPPELT — TYANNE OPPELT
MARIO JIMINEZ — HERBERT SCHUENEMAN
DARLENE SCHUENEMAN — NOAH CHALKER
LEVI MANRING — AUTUMN MANRING
SHERIDAN PRAKASHPALAN — CYNTHIA SCHAFER
ABIGAIL KIM — ROBERTO DANIELS
IVETTE DANIELS — RICARDO DANIELS

Aherents:
LEONARD FLORY — BONNIE FLORY
IFEANYI KALU — FELICIA KALU

1.

Extract Minute of Free Presbytery of USA

At Greenville Presbyterian Church, Taylors, South Carolina, and within 400 East Main Street, there on Wednesday, March 27, 2024, at 1:05 p.m. Eastern Time, after devotional exercises conducted by the Retiring Moderator from Acts 1:1-14, the Free Presbytery of the United States of America met and was duly constituted.

inter alia
Application from Dallas Reformed Presbyterian Church Congregation.

Presbytery took into consideration an Application for Admission to the denomination from the Dallas Reformed Presbyterian Church Congregation. It was moved, seconded and agreed that Presbytery supports the application; they forward it as a Petition to the General Assembly with a recommendation that the Congregation be admitted as a Congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing); that the Congregation be placed under the supervision of the Free Presbytery of the United States of America. The Presbytery authorized the Clerks' Department to forward a Report setting out the basis of this recommendation and directed that it be forwarded with the Petition. Rev Craig J Scott was appointed to appear in support of the Petition.

Extracted from the Records of the Free Presbytery of the
United States of America by:
Christopher P. Reeder, *Assistant Clerk*

2.

Report of the Presbytery of USA to the General Assembly regarding the Petition from Dallas, Texas

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17. Petition from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America Congregation of Dallas anent Admission (Cont.)

The Presbytery of the United States of America gives its full support to the petition from the RPCNA congregation of Dallas, Texas. Presbytery has formed an acquaintance with the two elders of the congregation through their attendance at meetings of the Presbytery. Furthermore, when the Session in Dallas was in the process of asking their congregation to consider petitioning for reception into the FC(C), they asked Presbytery to send a delegation to meet with the congregation. Presbytery was able to send Mr. Beers and Mr. Scott to meet with the congregation to conduct an information meeting. Mr. Beers gave a presentation to the congregation on the history, practice and principles of the FCC and Mr. Scott dealt with some of the differences in principles practice between the FCC and the RPCNA. A substantial time was allocated to fielding questions from the congregation.

Following the visit, the local elders visited with members of the congregation and appointed their own congregational meeting for further discussion before moving toward a congregational vote to transfer into the FC(C). A large majority voted in favor and after the vote, the whole congregation was willing to unanimously sign the petition. The local elders worked with members of the US Presbytery of the FC(C) at each step of the process, requesting counsel and providing all information on what they were doing. The way in which the elders conducted the process is commendable, they manifested both clear commitment to principle and a deep pastoral care for their flock.

In giving its support to the crave of the petition, Presbytery notes the following points:

1. The elders have been motivated by sound principle in their desire to lead the congregation into the FC(C).

2. The elders are prepared to sign the Formula.

3. The steps undertaken have been marked by prayerfulness, with first the Session and then the congregation keeping a day of fasting and prayer for the Lord's blessing and direction in regard to petitioning for admission to the FC(C).

4. The congregation is appreciative of the testimony of the FC(C).

5. Unity has been maintained within the congregation. 85% of the members present at the congregational meeting voted in support of petitioning to join the FC(C), and after the vote carried, all of the members present signed the petition. The petition has also now been signed by members who were absent from the congregational meeting and by two new families who have joined the church.

6. The Midwest Presbytery of the RPCNA, within whose bounds the Dallas congregation is situated, met on April 27th, and their clerk communicated the following decision: "That the MWP notes that the Dallas congregation has petitioned to be received into the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), and requests to be informed of the outcome of the petition after the FCC General Assembly meets." A private individual also communicated that the Midwest Presbytery made the following additional decisions: "That the Moderator of the Midwest Presbytery prepare and present a letter to the Dallas RP congregation, to be read publicly, affirming the presbytery's love for the congregation and the years of fellowship enjoyed between us," and "MWP recommend to Trustees of Synod that the Dallas congregation be released with their assets upon being received by the FCC GA in May 2024, D.V."

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7. Rev. Romesh Prakashpalan has served the Dallas congregation as its minister, and has tendered his application for admission to our denomination as a minister. Mr. Prakashpalan is in the process of moving his family to Fredericksburg, VA, where he will soon take up labors as pulpit supply. The Dallas congregation, if received, will need an interim moderator, and Presbytery recommends Rev. Craig Scott.

Respectfully submitted,
Brent C. Evans, *Principal Clerk of Presbytery*

17. Petition from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America Congregation of Dallas anent Admission (Cont.)

3.

Communication from RPCNA Mid West Presbytery to the Presbytery of |USA

Our Presbytery met today concerning the Dallas RP Congregation. We took the following action:

That the MWP notes that the Dallas Congregation has petitioned to be received into the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), and requests to be informed of the outcome of the petition after the FC(C) General Assembly meets.

If you could pass this on to the FC(C) G.A as well let us know the outcome of this matter at your 2024 meeting. Thank you.

Andrew Barnes
Clerk - Midwest Presbytery, Assistant Clerk - Synod of the RPCNA

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

The General Assembly receive the Petition of the Dallas RPCNA Congregation and grant its crave. They admit the Congregation of Dallas RPCNA as a fully Sanctioned Charge, the Congregation to be known as Dallas. *Finding*

The General Assembly took up consideration of paragraph 2.2 of the Report of the Committee on Assembly Arrangements & Nominations (A) Assembly Arrangements, which being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

18. Report of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations (A) Committee – section 2.2

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt paragraph 2.2 of the Report of the Committee on Assembly Arrangements & Nominations (A) Assembly Arrangements; *Finding*

2. The General Assembly appoint the General Assembly of 2025 to meet within Partick Free Church (Continuing), Glasgow;

3. The General Assembly continue the remit of the Committee in investigating a possible location in Edinburgh for a future General Assembly.

The General Assembly did then adjourn to meet again in this place at 6.30 o'clock evening, whereof public intimation having been given, the Sederunt was closed with prayer.

19. Adjournment

21ST MAY
Tuesday
Evening

At Glasgow and within Partick Free Church (Continuing) there the 21st day of May 2024 years at 6.30 o'clock evening *Sess. 3.*

1. Assembly Constituted

The General Assembly did again convene and was constituted with devotional exercises.

2. Report of the Welfare of Youth & Education Committee

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Welfare of Youth & Education Committee which, being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

3. Order of the Day — Presentation of Awards

There was an Order of the Day at 6:45 o'clock evening for the Presentation of the Sabbath School & Bible Class Awards. The following award winners were introduced to the Moderator, suitably addressed and presented with their award:

Thomas Keddie, *Duthil-Dores* Bible Class Grade
Katie Bell, *Duthil-Dores* & Seumas A. MacInnes, *Lochalsh & Strath*
Joint Winners of the Sabbath School Grade

2. Report of the Welfare of Youth & Education Committee (Cont.)

Finding

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

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;

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;

8. The General Assembly encourage the Committee to investigate the possibility of providing a prize for memorizing the Catechism in other languages;

9. The General Assembly express their deep gratitude to those whose efforts make the camps possible year by year, in particular, all the cooks, helpers and leaders without whom this important work would not be possible;

10. The General Assembly commend the ongoing work of the camps to the prayerful and practical support of the Church;

11. The General Assembly commend the ongoing efforts to establish annual Youth Conferences and commend such efforts to the prayerful support of the wider Church;

12. The General Assembly commend the efforts of the young people involved in the organising Committee for the Youth Conferences;

13. 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;

2. Report of the Welfare of Youth & Education Committee (Cont.)

14. The General Assembly commend all those involved in Christian Education, whether Christian schools or Christian home-schooling, to the prayers of the Church;

15. The General Assembly instruct the Committee to investigate the possibility of increasing the denomination's role in advancing Christian Education and providing Christian schools throughout the land.

There was an Order of the Day at 7.30 o'clock evening for the reception of Delegates.

4. Order of the Day — Reception of Delegates

The following Delegates were introduced to the Moderator and invited to address the Assembly:

Rev. J.C. Potgeiter — Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika
Rev. Robin Tso — Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
Mr Jonathan Arnold — Trinitarian Bible Society

The Moderator conveyed the thanks of the Assembly to the Delegates.

The Convener of the Business Committee made a statement.

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Special Committee on Psalmody, which being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

5. Psalmody Committee Report

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

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 and to the Convener;

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 communication between the Special Committee on Psalmody and the present publisher of the Sol-fa Psalmody in order to make future purchases;

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

5. The General Assembly encourage the Special Committee on Psalmody to pursue the completion of the Metrical Psalms in spoken form;

6. The General Assembly thank Congregational Precentors for leading the praise throughout the denomination and encourage others to "stir up the gift of God" which is in them (2 Tim. 1:6).

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The General Assembly then called for the Supplementary Report (A) of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions which being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

6. Supplementary Report (A) of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Supplementary Report (A) of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions and thank the Convener and Clerk;

2. The General Assembly rejoice in the interest expressed by Ministers and Congregations in Brazil in joining the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing);

3. The General Assembly hereby authorise, if required, that the Home & Foreign Missions Committee send up to three individuals to visit ministers and congregations in Brazil interested in joining the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) and direct the Finance & Sustentation Committee to adjust the Committee's current budget thereanent.

7. Adjournment

The General Assembly did then adjourn to meet again in this place on Wednesday at 9 o'clock forenoon, whereof public intimation having been given, the Sederunt was closed with prayer

22ND MAY
Wednesday
Forenoon

At Glasgow and within Partick Free Church (Continuing) there the 22nd day of May 2024 years at 9 o'clock forenoon Sess. 4.

1. Assembly Constituted

The General Assembly did again convene and was constituted with devotional exercises.

2. Devotional Exercises

The General Assembly continued to engage in devotional exercises, when the following took part at the request of the Moderator:

Raymond A. Kemp, Christopher P. Reeder, Graeme Craig, Murdo MacIver, Fabien Garat, J. Logan Shelton, Colin MacDonald, Murdo A.N. Macleod, E. Trevor Kirkland, John Campbell (Shettleston)

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the previous day's Sederunts were read and approved.

4. Report of the Committee on Public Questions, Religion & Morals

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Committee on Public Questions, Religion & Morals which being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

It was moved and seconded that

First Motion

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

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;

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4. Report of the Committee on Public Questions, Religion & Morals (Cont.)

3. The General Assembly note the Committee's ongoing concern for the right of parents to exercise biblical discipline in the training of their children, with the benefits this has for wider society. They encourage the Committee to persevere in raising this issue with government;

4. The General Assembly note the Court of Session ruling concerning the Gender Recognition Reform Bill, and that this ruling was not appealed by the Scottish Government. They urge the people of our Church and Christians throughout our land to continue in prayer that this unwarranted and harmful legislation will be abandoned, and that the ideology behind it will be rejected by governments and society throughout the UK;

5. The General Assembly note that the Committee have not thus far produced a public statement on transgenderism, and the reason for this. They pray that the Lord will continue to grant the Committee guidance as they keep the subject under review;

6. The General Assembly note that the Committee have not thus far produced a document highlighting the threat to the work of the Church and Christian conversion posed by a possible ban on so-called 'conversion therapy'. They pray that the Lord will give the Committee guidance as they maintain a watching brief on the issue;

7. The General Assembly note the Committee's intention to contact MSPs to urge them to protect the unborn by voting against the Abortion Services Safe Access Zones Bill. They encourage the Committee in this, and commend to the prayers of the Church the various efforts being made to bring the evil of abortion to an end;

8. 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 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;

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 note the Committee's interest in the issue of climate change, and look forward to the appearance of further material considering this subject from a Biblical perspective;

11. 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;

12. 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.

It was also moved, seconded that

Paragraph 9 of the proposed Deliverance be amended to read as follows: *Second Motion*

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4. Report of the Committee on Public Questions, Religion & Morals (Cont.)

The General Assembly lament the increasing desecration of the Lord's Day throughout our land and direct all Presbyteries to have Lord's Day Issues on their Agenda as a standing item, encourage them to continue to take action, as required, when breaches of the fourth Commandment within their bounds are highlighted, and direct them to report any breaches which may be of a more national significance to the Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee. 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.

With the permission of the House, and his seconder, the mover of the first motion accepted the second motion.

Wherefore

Finding

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

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 the Committee's ongoing concern for the right of parents to exercise biblical discipline in the training of their children, with the benefits this has for wider society. They encourage the Committee to persevere in raising this issue with government;

4. The General Assembly note the Court of Session ruling concerning the Gender Recognition Reform Bill, and that this ruling was not appealed by the Scottish Government. They urge the people of our Church and Christians throughout our land to continue in prayer that this unwarranted and harmful legislation will be abandoned, and that the ideology behind it will be rejected by governments and society throughout the UK;

5. The General Assembly note that the Committee have not thus far produced a public statement on transgenderism, and the reason for this. They pray that the Lord will continue to grant the Committee guidance as they keep the subject under review;

6. The General Assembly note that the Committee have not thus far produced a document highlighting the threat to the work of the Church and Christian conversion posed by a possible ban on so-called 'conversion therapy'. They pray that the Lord will give the Committee guidance as they maintain a watching brief on the issue;

7. The General Assembly note the Committee's intention to contact MSPs to urge them to protect the unborn by voting against the Abortion Services Safe Access Zones Bill. They encourage the Committee in this, and commend to the prayers of the Church the various efforts being made to bring the evil of abortion to an end;

8. 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 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;

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4. Report of the Committee on Public Questions, Religion & Morals (Cont.)

9. The General Assembly lament the increasing desecration of the Lord's Day throughout our land and direct all Presbyteries to have Lord's Day Issues on their Agenda as a standing item, encourage them to continue to take action, as required, when breaches of the fourth Commandment within their bounds are highlighted, and direct them to report any breaches which may be of a more national significance to the Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee. 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 note the Committee's interest in the issue of climate change, and look forward to the appearance of further material considering this subject from a Biblical perspective;

11. 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;

12. 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.

5. Order of the Day — Reception of Delegates

There was an Order of the Day at 11.30 o'clock forenoon for the reception of Delegates.

The following Delegates were introduced to the Moderator and invited to address the Assembly:

Rev. Stephen Dancer — Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England & Wales
Rev. Archie McPhail — Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland

The Moderator conveyed the thanks of the Assembly to the Delegates.

The Convener of the Business Committee made a statement.

6. Report of the Committee on Publications

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Committee on Publications, which being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

1.1 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;

1.2 The General Assembly note that Mr Donald Macleod has now taken up the role of Clerk to the Committee, and pray that he will know the Lord's help in this role and thank Rev. David M. Blunt for his service as Clerk *pro tem*;

2.1 The General Assembly thank Rev. David M. Blunt for his work as Editor of the *Free Church Witness*;

2.2 The General Assembly thank Rev. Trevor Kirkland, Rev. James Clark and Rev. James MacInnes for their work as Assistant Editors of the *Free Church Witness*;

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6. Report of the Committee on Publications (Cont.)

2.3 The General Assembly note that Rev. A. James MacInnes has now taken up his role as Editor of *The Explorer*, thank him for his work thus far, and pray that he will continue to know the Lord's help in this role;

2.4 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* magazine;

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

2.6 The General Assembly thank Miss Anne MacAulay for her work in providing the Puzzle Page for *The Explorer*;

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

2.8 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;

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

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

2.11 The General Assembly thank Miss Katrina Mackay for her diligent work as Magazine Distributor;

2.12 The General Assembly express their hope that the new issue of the *Good News* magazine will be published soon, and pray that the Lord will bless its distribution to the good of many souls;

2.13 The General Assembly welcome the report from Mr Joel Suarez regarding the feedback on the Spanish translation of the *Free Church Witness* magazine, especially the encouraging news of its reception in South America. They encourage Mr Suarez in his ongoing labours and pray the Lord would guide and bless him in them;

2.14 The General Assembly thank the Trinitarian Bible Society for permission to use their Spanish translation for Scripture quotations in the Spanish edition of the *Free Church Witness* magazine;

3.1 The General Assembly note the information regarding the various titles in the *Finding Out About* series, and the continued lack of progress with the majority of them. They urge the Committee to bring the booklets on *Elders* and *Deacons* to publication as soon as possible, and pray that the Lord will guide the Committee as they work towards publication of the booklet on *Funerals*;

3.2 The General Assembly note that there has been progress on the final proofreading of the *History of the Division of 2000*;

3.3 The General Assembly note the progress made in the preparation for publication of the *Subordinate Standards & Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of*

Scotland. They thank Rev. John Keddie for his diligent work on this project and pray that the Lord will assist the Committee as they seek to bring the project to completion;

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;

3.6 The General Assembly note the delay in getting a payment platform operational on the Church website to enable retail of the Committee's publications. 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 give thanks to the Lord for the provision of the new Church website with its added capabilities and encourage the Committee to further develop its 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 29th March. They thank Rev. John Keddie for chairing the Conference, Rev. Thomas Buchanan and Rev. James Gracie for their addresses, and all who in any way 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 progress from the Working Group on the *Annals*. 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;

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

6. (Cont.) There was an Order of the Day at 2.30 o'clock for the reception of Delegates.

7. Order of the Day — Reception of Delegates

The following Delegates were introduced to the Moderator and invited to address the Assembly:

Rev. Philip Lievesley — Church of England (Continuing)
Rev. Michael Ives — Presbyterian Reformed Church

The Moderator conveyed the thanks of the Assembly to the Delegates.

8. Report of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee, which being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Vice-convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

It was moved and seconded that

First Motion

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee and thank the Committee, especially the Convener and Clerk;

2. The General Assembly thank the Principal and Lecturers of the Seminary for their continued, innovative adaptation of their tuition to the needs of our students and pray for their continued grace and strength for their vital service;

3. The General Assembly thank the Exit Examiners appointed by the Committee for their continued effective and important service in ensuring the integrity of the teaching in the Seminary;

4. The General Assembly note with satisfaction the progress of all the students, local and overseas, thanking God for their dedicated pursuit of their studies;

5. The General Assembly encourage 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;

6. The General Assembly note that the Committee have 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, and encourage them to apply themselves thereanent with all speed and to bring matured proposals to the 2025 General Assembly;

7. The General Assembly note that two Applications for Admission are expected to come before them at this Assembly;

8. 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;

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8. Report of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee (Cont.)

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;

9. The General Assembly encourage the Committee in their revision of the Forms for Application for Admission and Application for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry;

10. The General Assembly encourage the Committee to complete the updating of the Constitution of the Seminary so that it may be brought before the 2025 General Assembly.

It was also moved and seconded that

Numbers 8.2 and 8.3 be deleted and replaced with the following: *Second Motion*

8.2 direct that all Ministers and Probationers making Applications for Admission shall be required to satisfy the Presbytery receiving their application as to their familiarity with, support of, and commitment to, Free Church principles. Presbyteries are free to avail themselves of the support of the Seminary lecturer in Church History and Principles in carrying out this instruction.

8.3 further direct that any deficiency in this area be brought to the attention of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee in order that they may recommend to the General Assembly any further studies deemed necessary.

And that number 8.4 be amended by the deletion of the word “successful”.

It was also moved and seconded that

The General Assembly add a new number 9 in the following terms and the subsequent paragraphs be re-numbered accordingly: *Third Motion*

The General Assembly direct that all Presbyteries receiving a competent Application for Admission from either a Probationer or Minister inform all other Presbyteries of the Application as a courtesy.

On a vote being taken between the third motion and the first motion the first motion was declared carried by a majority. *Vote*

On a vote being taken between the second motion and the first motion the second motion was declared carried by a majority.

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8. Report of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee (Cont.)

Finding

Wherefore

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee and thank the Committee, especially the Convener and Clerk;

2. The General Assembly thank the Principal and Lecturers of the Seminary for their continued, innovative adaptation of their tuition to the needs of our students and pray for their continued grace and strength for their vital service;

3. The General Assembly thank the Exit Examiners appointed by the Committee for their continued effective and important service in ensuring the integrity of the teaching in the Seminary;

4. The General Assembly note with satisfaction the progress of all the students, local and overseas, thanking God for their dedicated pursuit of their studies;

5. The General Assembly encourage 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;

6. The General Assembly note that the Committee have 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, and encourage them to apply themselves thereanent with all speed and to bring matured proposals to the 2025 General Assembly;

7. The General Assembly note that two Applications for Admission are expected to come before them at this Assembly;

8. 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 Applications for Admission shall be required to satisfy the Presbytery receiving their application as to their familiarity with, support of, and commitment to, Free Church principles. Presbyteries are free to avail themselves of the support of the Seminary lecturer in Church History and Principles in carrying out this instruction;

    3. further direct that any deficiency in this area be brought to the attention of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee in order that they may recommend to the General Assembly any further studies deemed necessary;

    4. direct that it is the responsibility of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee to supervise the studies of those Applicants undertaking such studies, and that it is the Committee who shall decide when such studies have

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been satisfactorily competed and shall inform the Principal Clerk of Assembly thereanent;

8. Report of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee (Cont.)

9. The General Assembly encourage the Committee in their revision of the Forms for Application for Admission and Application for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry;

10. The General Assembly encourage the Committee to complete the updating of the Constitution of the Seminary so that it may be brought before the 2025 General Assembly.

The General Assembly did then adjourn to meet again in this place at 6.30 o'clock evening, whereof public intimation having been given, the Sederunt was closed with prayer.

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At Glasgow and within Partick Free Church (Continuing) there the 22nd day of May 2024 years at 6.30 o'clock evening Sess. 5.

The General Assembly did again convene and was constituted with devotional exercises.

1. Assembly Constituted

There was an Order of the Day at 6.45 o' clock when there was presented to the Moderator, *Regis Banqueting*, the catering team. The Moderator expressed the thanks of the Assembly for their much appreciated services and presented them with a suitable token of the Assembly's gratitude.

2. Order of the Day — Presentation for 'Regis Banqueting'

There was an Order of the Day at 6.50 o' clock when there was presented to the Moderator, *Mrs Muriel Smith*, who is retiring from her post as the denominational Financial Administrator. The Moderator expressed the thanks of the Assembly, and the Church at large, to Mrs Smith and presented her with a suitable token of the Church's gratitude.

3. Order of the Day — Presentation for Mrs Muriel Smith, Financial Administrator

The General Assembly called for the Report of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions, which being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

4. Report of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions, and thank the Committee;

2. The General Assembly note that Mr Donald John Morrison has served as Clerk to the Home & Foreign Missions Committee for many years. They note Mr Morrison's resignation as Clerk and thank him for his faithful service;

3. The General Assembly note that Rev. Stuart Farmes is expected to be appointed as Clerk to the Home & Foreign Missions Committee and commend him to the prayers of the Church in this new role;

4. The General Assembly note the encouraging development of the Ministry Support Fund of the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon, and commend its support to the wider Church;

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4. Report of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions (Cont.)

5. The General Assembly note the opportunity given for fellowship and to develop fraternal bonds through inviting Ministers and Divinity Students from the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon to attend the annual School in Theology;

6. The General Assembly note the financial support that has been provided to facilitate local Congregational conferences within the bounds of the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon, and commend to the Congregations of the Presbytery the wisdom of continuing to invite speakers from other Presbyteries of the Church;

7. The General Assembly note the initiative to encourage learning of the Scriptures and Shorter Catechism in European languages and commend the development of a suitable scheme;

8. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the recent outreach services at Anglet, and commend Mr Pierre and the Congregation at Pau to the prayers of the Church;

9. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the establishment of regular services at Valencia, and commend Mr Ruiz and the Congregation at Rubí to the prayers of the Church;

10. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the ordination of an elder in Braga and commend the Congregation at Braga to the prayers of the Church;

11. The General Assembly commend the work of Miss Marjanne Hendriksen in developing Christian Education in Zambia. They affirm support for this vital work amongst the children in the Christian schools;

12. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the ongoing developments in the work in Sri Lanka under the care of Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan. They commend Mr Partheepan for his tireless service and commit both him and his wife Dinogee, together with their daughter Diyaththika, to the prayers of the Church;

13. The General Assembly note that an Administrator has been employed by the Reformed Protestant Mission, Sri Lanka, since 2016, with funding provided through the Committee's budget, and hereby authorise the post of Administrator and the funding thereof;

14. The General Assembly commend Mr Beniel Jayolasingtan, Deacon, the Evangelist, Piratheepan, and the Administrator Jayram to the prayers of the Church;

15. The General Assembly note the development of Karis Care as a means of providing practical support to disadvantaged families with disabled children, and commend it to the generosity and prayers of the Church;

16. The General Assembly note the generous provision made for the purchase and development of Ra-annan Farm and commend this project to the prayers of the Church;

17. The General Assembly note the ongoing work in both Knox Christian Preschool and Selvanagar Preschool. They express thanks for the generous support from Singapore and readers of *The Explorer* magazine, and commend the preschool teachers and children to the prayers of the Church;

18. The General Assembly note that funding is in place for a six-month trial period, having commenced in February 2024, to allow for theological training in the Hatton district, south of the present areas of operation in Sri Lanka. Subject to a positive recommendation for the work being received by the Committee from the Kirk Session, the General Assembly sanction the work in Hatton hereafter, and authorise funding for the remaining five months of 2024 at an overall cost of £625;

19. The General Assembly note that steps are being taken to ensure that the different parts of Reformed Protestant Mission, Sri Lanka, are appropriately registered according to Sri Lanka law;

20. The General Assembly encourage the Home & Foreign Missions Committee to continue in consultation with the Finance & Sustentation Committee to ensure that, as far as possible, the funding arrangements for the Mission work in Sri Lanka, including caring for the future personal needs of Mission Personnel, may be managed at a local level with appropriate input from Assembly Committees;

21. The General Assembly acknowledge the generous support provided for Reformed Protestant Mission, Sri Lanka, and commend the ongoing work to the prayers and practical generosity of the Church;

22. The General Assembly express their thankfulness for the Congregation in Smiths Falls, and commend its ongoing needs to the prayers of the Church;

23. The General Assembly note the ordination and induction of Rev. Logan Shelton to Auburn-Opelika and commend Mr Shelton and the Congregation to the prayers of the Church;

24. The General Assembly note the induction of Rev. Craig Scott to Greenville, Texas, and commend Mr Scott and the Congregation to the prayers of the Church;

25. The General Assembly note the developments in the new preaching station in Nobelford, Alberta, and commend the work to the prayers of the Church;

26. The General Assembly note the developments in the new preaching station in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and commend the work to the prayers of the Church;

27. The General Assembly give thanks for the outreach in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, and commend the Congregation to the prayers of the Church;

28. The General Assembly note the development of the North American annual Family Conference and commend this to the prayers of the Church;

29. The General Assembly note the ongoing work of Grange Press, encourage the Presbytery of the United States of America in developing this work, and commend it to the prayers of the Church;

30. The General Assembly note the forward thought given by the Presbytery of the United States of America toward the development of an indigenous Church and commend the Presbytery to the prayers of the Church;

31. The General Assembly note with appreciation the work undertaken by those who serve as assessor elders on the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon and various Kirk Sessions in the developing mission work;

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4 Report of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions (Cont.)

32. The General Assembly commend the work of International Mission to Jewish People to the prayers and practical generosity of the Church;

33. The General Assembly commend the practice of organising, as practicable, mission support groups within local Congregations;

34. The General Assembly commend the practice of remembering the mission work of the Church through a bequest.

5. Order of the Day — Reception of Missionary Delegates

There was an Order of the Day at 7.30 o'clock evening for the reception of Missionary Delegates.

Rev. Hugues Pierre, Pau, France, was introduced to the Moderator and invited to address the Assembly.

Mr. Joseph Steinberg, International Mission to Jewish People, was introduced to the Moderator and invited to address the Assembly.

Rev. A. James MacInnes, Reformed Protestant Mission, Sri Lanka, was introduced to the Moderator and invited to address the Assembly.

Rev. Jorge Ruiz Ortiz, Rubí, Spain, was introduced to the Moderator and invited to address the Assembly.

The Moderator conveyed the thanks of the Assembly to each of the Delegates, and after devotional exercises Rev. Kenneth M. Macdonald led the General Assembly in prayer.

6. Overture from the Presbytery of the USA anent Studies for Spanish-speaking Students

The General Assembly took up consideration of an Overture from the Presbytery of the USA anent Studies for Spanish-speaking Students in the following terms:

Unto the Venerable the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) indicted to meet in Glasgow on 20th May 2024 the Overture of the Free Presbytery of the United States of America humbly sheweth that,

Whereas the church is under obligation by both biblical and ecclesiastical mandate to provide thorough training for the gospel ministry;

Whereas we are under equal obligation for the training of men who would pursue the ministry on the foreign field;

Whereas there are presently men desiring to pursue the ministry within the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) who are primarily or exclusively Spanish speakers;

Whereas these men desire to labor in Spanish-speaking nations;

Whereas a Spanish-speaking ministry is a needed and strategic effort to reach the nations of the world and overthrow Antichrist's kingdom, Spanish being the fourth most-spoken language in the world, and the majority of Spanish speakers living in countries dominated by Roman Catholicism and its false gospel;

Whereas there is currently no way according to current legislation to train Spanish speakers apart from having them first learn English in order to train within our own seminary;

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6. Overture from the Presbytery of the USA anent Studies for Spanish Speaking Students (Cont.)

Whereas this current demand to become proficient in theological English would unnecessarily delay theological training among Spanish speakers;

Whereas God may call some men to the ministry who in his providence cannot become sufficiently proficient in English to receive effectively theological training in English;

Whereas there are Reformed theological institutions that provide ministerial training in Spanish or with assistance to Spanish speakers;

Whereas, in accordance with Act XIX (2017), every theological student, regardless of the theological institution attending, is required to sit the exit exams for our Free Church Seminary courses, ensuring oversight of the learning for our students;

Whereas in accordance with Act XIX (2017), every theological student, regardless of the theological institution he attends, is required to take the courses on Scottish Church History [including the history of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)], Free Church Principles, and Free Church Practice, ensuring that the doctrine, practice, and heritage other denominations ignore is nonetheless included in the theological training of our students;

Whereas the Free Presbytery of the United States may be able to assist with identifying qualified translators for said exit exams and courses, and, as needed, providing them with remuneration;

Whereas Act XXXIX (1975) authorized the Board to direct the Presbytery of Kaffraria to proceed to trials for licensure for a candidate whose training had been in terms of regulations approved by the Presbytery of Kaffraria, successful completion of which would lead to him being ineligible to receive a Call outside the bounds of that Presbytery;

Wherefore it is humbly overtured that the General Assembly allow a given presbytery that is seeking to train up a Spanish-speaking ministry to assess and approve theological training for Spanish-speaking candidates for the ministry before the commencement of their training, or for Spanish-speaking applicants for admission requiring further training; and furthermore that such training be undertaken through Reformed theological institutions that provide instruction in Spanish (or assistance for Spanish speakers), requiring that such students sit the required exit examinations and satisfactorily complete the courses in Scottish Church History, Free Church Principles, and Free Church Practice; and that furthermore the General Assembly direct the Training of the Ministry and Admissions Committee to arrange for the translation of exit exams and the requisite courses in Scottish Church History, Free Church Principles, and Free Church Practice into Spanish.

Or do otherwise as in their wisdom they deem best.

It was moved and seconded that

First Motion

The General Assembly receive the Overture of the Presbytery of the USA and grant its crave that they allow a given presbytery that is seeking to train up a Spanish-speaking ministry to assess and approve theological training for Spanish-speaking candidates for the ministry before the commencement of their training, or for Spanish-speaking applicants for admission requiring further training; and furthermore that such training be undertaken through Reformed theological institutions that provide instruction in Spanish (or assistance for Spanish speakers), requiring that such students sit the required exit

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Evening

examinations and satisfactorily complete the courses in Scottish Church History, Free Church Principles, and Free Church Practice; and that furthermore the General Assembly direct the Training of the Ministry and Admissions Committee to arrange for the translation of exit exams and the requisite courses in Scottish Church History, Free Church Principles, and Free Church Practice into Spanish.

6. Overture from the Presbytery of the USA anent Studies for Spanish-speaking Students (Cont.)

It was also moved and seconded that

Second Motion

The General Assembly receive the overture of the Free Presbytery of the USA anent studies for Spanish speaking students and grant its crave to the extent that the General Assembly, noting the urgent need for the provision of theological education for Spanish-speaking-only Candidates for the Ministry within the Latin American Mission Field of the Free Presbytery of the USA, hereby authorise the Free Presbytery of the USA thereanent to assess and approve theological training for Spanish-speaking-only Candidates for the Ministry before the commencement of their training, or for the Spanish-speaking-only Applicants for Admission requiring further training; and furthermore that such training be undertaken through Reformed Theological Institutions that provide instruction in Spanish (or assistance for Spanish speakers), requiring that such students sit the required exit examinations and satisfactorily complete the courses in Scottish Church History, Free Church Principles and Free Church Practice; and that furthermore the General Assembly direct the Training of the Ministry and Admissions Committee to arrange for the translation of the exit exams and the requisite courses in Scottish Church History, Free Church Principles, and Free Church Practice into Spanish, and direct that the Free Presbytery of the USA proceed to trials for licence for a candidate whose training has been in the aforementioned terms, successful completion of which shall lead to him being ineligible to receive a Call outwith the bounds of the Latin American Mission Field of the Free Presbytery of the USA.

Vote

On a vote being taken between the second motion and the first motion the second motion was declared carried by a majority

Wherefore

Finding

The General Assembly receive the overture of the Free Presbytery of the USA anent studies for Spanish speaking students and grant its crave to the extent that the General Assembly, noting the urgent need for the provision of theological education for Spanish-speaking-only Candidates for the Ministry within the Latin American Mission Field of the Free Presbytery of the USA hereby authorise the Free Presbytery of the USA thereanent to assess and approve theological training for Spanish-speaking-only Candidates for the Ministry before the commencement of their training, or for the Spanish-speaking-only Applicants for Admission requiring further training; and furthermore that such training be undertaken through Reformed Theological Institutions that provide instruction in Spanish (or assistance for Spanish speakers), requiring that such students sit the required exit examinations and satisfactorily complete the courses in Scottish Church History, Free Church Principles and Free Church Practice; and that furthermore the General Assembly direct the Training of the Ministry and Admissions Committee to arrange for the translation of the exit exams and the requisite courses in Scottish Church History, Free Church Principles, and Free Church Practice into Spanish, and direct that the Free Presbytery of the USA proceed to trials for licence for a candidate whose training has been in the aforementioned terms, successful completion of which shall lead to him being ineligible to receive a Call outwith the bounds of the Latin American Mission Field of the Free Presbytery of the USA.

The Convener of the Business Committee made a statement.

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The General Assembly met in Private.

Private Session

The General Assembly took up consideration of an Application for Admission from Rev. Camon Tomé together with the Supplementary Report (A) of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee thereanent.

7. Application for Admission from Rev. Camon Tomé & Supplementary Report of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee

The Clerk was instructed to keep a copy of the Application and the Supplementary Report *in retentis.*

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Supplementary Report (A) of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee, and thank the Committee, especially the Convener; *Finding*

2. The General Assembly receive the Application for Admission from Rev. Camon Tomé and admit 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. They instruct the Clerk of Assembly to include Mr Tomé's name on the Roll of Resigned Ministers and to transfer it to the Register of Ministers eligible for Call on receipt of an Extract Minute from the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee certifying that he has completed the prescribed Course in Scottish Church History, Church Principles and Church Practice.

It was moved, seconded and agreed to suspend Standing Orders.

8. Suspension of Standing Orders

The General Assembly took up consideration of an Application for Admission from Rev. Romesh Prakashpalan together with the Supplementary Report (B) of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee thereanent.

9. Application for Admission from Rev. Romesh Prakashpalan & Supplementary Report of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee

The Clerk was instructed to keep a copy of the Application and the Supplementary Report *in retentis.*

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Supplementary Report (B) of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee, and thank the Committee, especially the Convener;

2. The General Assembly receive the Application for Admission from Rev. Romesh Prakashpalan and admit 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. They instruct the Clerk of Assembly to include Mr Prakashpalan's name on the Register of Ministers eligible for Call on receipt of an Extract Minute indicating that he has signed the Formula. Further, they recommend that Mr Prakashpalan completes the prescribed Course in Scottish Church History, Church Principles and Church Practice.

The General Assembly met in Open Court. *Open Court*

Intimation being made to Mr Prakashpalan anent his admission to the Ministry of the Free

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Church of Scotland (Continuing) the Moderator called upon Rev H.J.T. Woods to lead the Assembly in prayer commending both the unavoidably absent Mr Tomé, and Mr Prakashpalan to the Lord and seeking God's blessing upon them.

9. (Cont.)

10. Adjournment

The General Assembly did then adjourn to meet again in this place on Thursday at 9 o'clock forenoon, whereof public intimation having been given, the Sederunt was closed with prayer.

23RD MAY
Thursday
Forenoon

At Glasgow and within Partick Free Church (Continuing) Kirk there the 23rd day of May 2024 years at 9 o'clock forenoon Sess. 6.

1. Assembly Constituted

The General Assembly did again convene and was constituted with devotional exercises.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the previous Sederunts were read and approved.

3. Order of the Day — Reception of Delegates

There was an Order of the Day at 9.30 o'clock for the reception of Delegates.

The following Delegate was introduced to the Moderator and invited to address the Assembly:

Rev. Dr. Iain Wright — Orthodox Presbyterian Church

The Moderator conveyed the thanks of the Assembly to the Delegate.

4. Report of the Legal Advice & Property Committee

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Committee on Legal Advice & Property, which being printed and in the hands of Members, was referred to by the Convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

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 note that prescribed body status has been conferred on the denomination by the Scottish Government, allowing all Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) ministers to solemnise marriage without the need for individual registration;

3. The General Assembly hereby repeal Act XIX, 2001 (No. 19 of Class II) and Act XIII, 2002 (No. 13 of Class II), and disband the 'Panel of Consultants anent Allegations of Sexual Impropriety involving Adults' and thank the members thereof for their willingness to serve;

4. The General Assembly note that denominational insurance cover, tailored to meet the needs of the Church, is now in place;

5. The General Assembly note the Committee's ongoing work on the Safeguarding Policy and await proposed updates or amendments at a future General Assembly.

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Forenoon

The General Assembly met in Private

Private Session

The General Assembly then called for the Supplementary Report (B) of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions which being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

5. Supplementary Report (B) of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions

The Clerk was instructed to keep a copy of the Report *in retensis.*

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Supplementary Report (B) of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions, and thank the Committee;

2. The General Assembly note the resignation of Mr. Donald John Morrison from the position of Home Mission Worker;

3. The General Assembly record their appreciation of the work undertaken by the Home Mission Worker over more than 20 years, praying that the Lord of the Harvest will yet follow with blessing every expression of the glorious Gospel;

4. The General Assembly note the necessity of reviewing how the Committee can best support the work of Home Mission and Church Extension and direct the Committee to report thereanent to a future Assembly.

Against which judgement Rev. David S. Fraser entered his dissent.

The Moderator led the General Assembly in prayer.

Open Court

The General Assembly met in Open Court.

6. Report of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee (B) Nominations

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee (B) Nominations, which being printed and in the hands of members, was referred to by the Convener, who addressed the Assembly thereanent.

Finding

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

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

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

GROUP 2
Additional member – only on the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee:
Rev. Jorge Ruiz Ortiz [4]

GROUP 3
Additional member:
Rev. Hugues Pierre [4]

Wherefore

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6. Report of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee (B) Nominations (Cont.)

GROUP 1

FINANCE & SUSTENTATION
LEGAL ADVICE &
PROPERTY

Ministers
Mr Thomas J. Buchanan, *Vice-convener*,
Legal Advice & Property Committee [4]
Mr James I. Gracie, *Convener*,
Finance & Sustentation Committee [3]
Mr Raymond A. Kemp [2]
Mr Greg MacDonald, *Convener*,
Legal Advice & Property Committee [1]

Elders
Mr David Chin, *Vice-convener*,
Finance & Sustentation Committee [4]
Mr Donald Buchanan [4]
Mr Donald MacDonald (Stornoway) [1]
Mr George McMillan [1]

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
One of the General Trustees is *ex officio* an Adviser to the Finance & Sustentation Committee

GROUP 2

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

Ministers
Mr Iain Smith, *Vice-convener*,
Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee [4]
Mr E. Trevor Kirkland, *Convener*,
Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee [4]
Mr Jorge Ruiz Ortiz, Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee only [4]
Mr David M. Blunt, *Convener,* Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee [3]
Mr Brent C. Evans [3]
Mr Henry J.T. Woods, *Convener*,
Publications Committee [1]

Elders
Mr John Campbell (Snizort) [3]
Mr Duncan MacSween [3]
Mr Alan Wilson [2]
Mr Lindsay MacCallum, *Vice-convener*,
Publications Committee, and *Vice-convener*,
Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee [1]
Mr John M. King [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

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6. Report of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee (B) Nominations (Cont.)

GROUP 3

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

Ministers
Mr Murdo A.N. Macleod, *Vice-convener*, Welfare of Youth & Education Committee [4]
Mr Hugues Pierre [4]
Mr William Macleod, *Convener*, Ecumenical Relations Committee, and *Vice-convener*, Home & Foreign Missions Committee [2]
Mr Kenneth M. Macdonald, *Convener*, Home & Foreign Missions Committee [1]
Mr Timothy J. McGlynn, *Convener*, Welfare of Youth & Education Committee, and *Vice-convener*, Ecumenical Relations Committee [1]
Mr Gavin Beers, *Vice-convener*, Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee [1]

Elders
Mr John Campbell (Shettleston) [4]
Mr Randall Taylor [3]
Mr Calum Macleod, *Convener*, Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee [2]
Mr Gordon Furzer [1]
Mr Iain A.C. MacPherson [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* [3]
Mr Calum Smith, *Convener* [2]

Elders
Mr Donald Martin [2]
Mr Derek W. Maclean [1]
Mr Christopher Reeder [1]
Mr Graham Sinclair [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:

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6. Report of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee (B) Nominations (Cont.)

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)

7. Report of the Committee anent Visitation of Records

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Committee anent Visitation of Records which was given in by the Convener in the following terms:

Records were available from the following Courts and Committees:
Mainland Synod, Western Synod, Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon, Northern Presbytery, Outer Hebrides Presbytery, Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery, Southern Presbytery, Presbytery of USA, Finance & Sustentation Committee, Legal Advice & Property Committee, Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee, Ecumenical Relations Committee, Welfare of Youth & Education Committee, Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee, Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee, Publications Committee, Special Committee on Psalmody, The Seminary and the Board of General Trustees.

The following record was not to hand:
Home & Foreign Missions Committee

The following were correct in form and substance and neatly kept and are to be attested:
Mainland Synod, Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon, Northern Presbytery, Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery, Southern Presbytery, Presbytery of USA, Finance & Sustentation Committee, Legal Advice & Property Committee, Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee, Welfare of Youth & Education Committee, Special Committee on Psalmody and the Board of General Trustees.

The following were also correct in form and substance and neatly kept and it is recommended that they be attested on the assumption that these minor points are attended to:

Presbytery of the Outer Hebrides (Meetings not recorded as closing in prayer)

Ecumenical Relations Committee (Minute of 7th March 2023 unsigned and incorrectly numbered)

Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee: (Attention is drawn to the need for more consistency in the keeping of Minutes and in a reduction of spacing between items)

Publications Committee: (Missing Minute of 21st April 2023)

Seminary: (Minutes of 6th February 2023 and 9th June 2023 incorrectly numbered)

Western Synod: Whilst the Record is correct the Committee recommend that due thought be given to the necessity for annual presentation of Synod Records whilst Synods continue to be in abeyance.

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It was moved, seconded and agreed that

7. Report of the Committee anent Visitation of Records (Cont.)

Finding

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report;

2. The General Assembly authorise the attestation of all the Records examined once the deficiencies noted in the Report have been made good;

3. The General Assembly direct that the Records of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee be presented to the next General Assembly;

4. The General Assembly note the recommendation of the Committee anent the annual presentation of Synod Records whilst Synods continue in abeyance and direct the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee to consider this matter and report to the next General Assembly;

5. The General Assembly remind all Courts and Committees that the rule for re-numbering of Records is as follows: Committees after the General Assembly, Kirk Sessions after Presbytery approval, Presbyteries after the date of Synod.

8. Report of Committee on Printing Acts of Assembly

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Committee on Printing Acts of Assembly, which was given in by the Convener and adopted as follows:

Class I ACTS WHICH HAVE PASSED THE BARRIER ACT

None

Class II ACTS OF GENERAL INTEREST TO THE CHURCH

Act I Act anent Loyal and dutiful Address to His Majesty the King

Act II Act anent Equal Dividend

Act III Act anent Special Arrangements for Congregation of Ayr

Act IV Act anent Special Arrangements for Congregation of Ballyclare & Doagh

Act V Act anent Special Arrangements for Congregation of Knock & Point

Act VI Act anent Roll of Board of Trustees

Act VII Act anent Appointment of Additional General Trustee

Act VIII Act anent Death-in-Service

Act IX Act anent Appointment of General Assessors to the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon

Act X Act anent Representation on Standing Committees of Assembly for the Free Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon

Act XI Act anent raising of Braga Preaching Station to a Sanctioned Charge

Act XII Act anent Union of Dumfries with Partick

Act XIII Act anent raising of Fredericksburg Preaching Station to a Sanctioned Charge

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8. Report of Committee on Printing Acts of Assembly (Cont.)

Act XIV Act anent Admission of RPCNA Congregation of Dallas

Act XV Act anent Admission of Rev. Camon Tomé

Act XVI Act anent Admission of Rev. Romesh Prakashpalan

Act XVII Act anent Studies for Spanish-speaking Students in the Latin American Mission Field

Act XVIII Act anent repeal of Act XIX, 2001 and Act XIII, 2002

Act XIX Act appointing Commission of Assembly

Act XX Act appointing next General Assembly

9. Report of Committee anent Deceased Ministers & Elders

The General Assembly then called for the Report of the Committee appointed to prepare a Minute anent Deceased Ministers and Elders which was submitted by the Convener, approved and ordered to be engrossed as follows:

It is with deep regret that the General Assembly record the death of the following Minister and Elders:

MINISTERS

Rev. David Compton, Toronto (Rtd)

Rev. David Compton was born in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island in 1931. He came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ at a young age and became increasingly conscious of a call to the ministry. It was during his teenage years that he first became associated with the Free Church of Scotland; an association that would prove life-long. David married Peggy Anne Morrison in 1958 but sadly she died from leukaemia in 1963. In 1967 he entered the Free Church College and it was during this time that he met and married Flora MacKenzie, from Lochcarron. They returned to Prince Edward Island where he was ordained and inducted in 1970 and ministered there in the Western Charge for seven years. He was translated to Toronto in 1977, where he ministered faithfully until 1992 when failing health compelled his early retirement. Mr Compton associated himself with the Free Church (Continuing) in 2000 and for many years assisted with preaching in our Smiths Falls Congregation. To all who knew him it was clearly evident that he dearly loved his Saviour, whose name and cause was central and pre-eminent in his life. Like all God's people his death was precious in the sight of the Lord (Psalm 116:15). We commend his widow Flora and six children to the God of all grace.

ELDERS

Mainland Synod

Peter Thurlow, Edinburgh, Free St Columba's
Walter Wright, Knightswood

Western Synod

Malcolm Macleod, Kinloch
Peter Matheson, Bracadale & Duirnish
Angus Shaw, Snizort

10. Protestations

Protestations were called for but none was given in.

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The General Assembly then proceeded to appoint their Commission.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

11. Appointment of Commission

Finding

The General Assembly did, and hereby do, nominate and appoint a Commission consisting of all members of Assembly, with the addition of the name of Rev. John Morrison, named by the Moderator: - TO BE A COMMISSION of this General Assembly with power to the said Commission or their quorum which is declared to be any fifteen or more of their number, whereof eight at least are always to be Ministers, to meet and convene at Inverness on the first Tuesday of October and the first Tuesday of March next to come at seven o'clock in the evening, and oftener when and where they shall think fit and convenient, and with power to choose their own Moderator: and the General Assembly fully empower the said Commission or their quorum above-mentioned to cognosce and finally determine as they shall see cause in every matter referred to them or which shall be referred to them by or in virtue of any Act or Order of the Assembly, and everything contained in and conform to the instruction given, or to be given, by the General Assembly and to advert to the interests of the Church on every occasion, that the Church do not suffer, or sustain any prejudice which they can prevent, as they will be answerable. Provided always that, save as hereafter stated, this general clause be not extended to particular affairs as processes before Synods or Presbyteries that are not of universal concern to, or influence upon, the whole Church. And it is hereby appointed that no private processes be determined except at the stated diets and that what shall be determined at one diet of the Commission with relation to private causes, shall be unalterable by any other diet thereof, and shall stand and continue in force until disapproved by the General Assembly. And further, the said Commission are hereby empowered to receive and fully dispose of applications that may be forwarded to them for raising preaching stations or suppressed charges to fully sanctioned charges, for consolidating congregations into one charge, for the appointment of Ministers Overseas and Foreign Missionaries, in the Mission Fields of the Church, and to receive any reference and appeal that shall be made to them from Synods in matters of doctrine, and ripen such affairs for next General Assembly and to contribute what they can to the suppression of vice and immorality, and to give all needful advice and assistance to Synods, Presbyteries and Committees of Assembly upon application to them for that end. And the said Commission are hereby strictly prohibited and discharged to meddle in any other matters than what are committed and referred to them as above-mentioned. And in all their actings they are to proceed according to the Acts and Constitution of this Church and do nothing contrary thereto, or to the prejudice of the same, declaring that, and for all their actings, they shall be accountable to and censurable by next General Assembly, as they shall see cause. And this Commission shall continue and endure until another Commission is appointed. And members are required to attend the diets of the said Commission.

12. Thanks

The thanks of the General Assembly were accorded to the Moderator for the excellent manner in which he discharged the duties of the Chair; to Rev. Gavin Beers for his assistance to the Moderator; to the Principal Clerk; the Assistant Clerk; to Rev. Greg MacDonald as Convener of the Business Committee; to Mr Colin Crichton and Andrew I. Naylor, Precentors; to Mr Alan Blaney, Assembly Officer, and his assistants Mr Kevin Norman MacDonald, Mr David Craig, Mr Thomas Craig, Mr Angus Nicolson and Mr Donald Williamson; to Mrs Isobel Ann Macleod, Assembly Office Manager, and Mr Murdo Murray for secretarial work before and during the Assembly; to Miss Joan MacDonald, Inverness, for her skills in scripting the Loyal & Dutiful Address; to Mrs

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12. Thanks (Cont.)

Debbie Allan and her team of assistants and *Regis Banqueting* for catering services; to Rev. Andrew Allan for liaison work and assisting with many practical details; to Donald Williamson for photographic services; to Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod, for liaison with the Media; to Partick Free Church (Continuing) for their kind welcome and for the use of their buildings; to all who extended hospitality to Members of the General Assembly; and to the Christian Public for their support.

13. Appointment of Next General Assembly

The General Assembly proceeded to appoint the time and place of the next General Assembly.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that

Finding

The General Assembly appoint the next General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) to meet in Glasgow on Monday 19th May 2025 years at 6 o'clock in the evening.

14. Minutes

The Minutes of this day's Sederunt were read and approved.

15. Close

The General Assembly was dissolved with prayer, the singing of Psalm 122 and the Apostolic Benediction.

REPORTS

TO

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

2024

Rev. ANDREW R. ALLAN DipTh. .....*Moderator-Designate*
Rev. GAVIN BEERS B.Sc. .....*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

In the days of His humiliation, our Lord frequently applied the Hebrew method of emphasis by the use of repetition. We read that he used phrases such as, "Verily, verily…", "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem…", "Simon, Simon…", and "My God, My God…" The Apostle Paul, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" himself, and having been taught at the feet of Gamaliel, was, no doubt, very familiar with this Hebrew method too. Being an expert in the Law, he would be well aware of the injunction repeatedly given to Moses to: "…make them after the pattern, which was showed thee in the mount" (Exodus 25:40; cf. 26:30, 27:8, & Numbers 8:4). It is evident, therefore, that God is jealous of how we approach Him in worship, and it is no surprise to see Paul exhorting the Corinthian Church to "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40).

The Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee, likewise, conscious of this pattern of orderliness in God's economy, and that He is "not the author of confusion" (1 Cor. 14:33), seek to arrange things in the administration of His Church on earth so that all we do as a denomination is done "decently and in order." In endeavouring to achieve that, the Committee has enjoyed a good measure of harmony over the past year, with all the decisions having been unanimous.

In accordance with Standing Order I.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

In May 2023, as a result of a decision of the previous Assembly, the General Assembly met in Glasgow and was very comfortably accommodated in the Partick Free Church (Continuing) Church building and hall. Initial fears concerning the size of the venue and possible parking difficulties proved unfounded. The Committee are very thankful to all those in the Southern Presbytery who assisted, in a whole variety of different ways, to make this new 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 2024.

2.2 Location 2025

The General Assembly of 2023 instructed the Committee to undertake a thorough investigation of the practicality of the 2025 General Assembly being held in Edinburgh. Accordingly, steps were taken to identify a suitable location, and in the autumn of 2023 a potential venue came to our attention: a church building on the south side of the city. An approach was made to the Congregation in question, and it was agreed that, in the event of a positive response being received, several members of the Committee would visit the premises in order to gauge its suitability. A favourable reply to our enquiries was received, but not until April of this year. By that time, due to other pressures, it proved impossible to arrange a site visit. Therefore, the Committee are unable to recommend an Edinburgh location for the 2025 General Assembly. Accordingly, they are recommending that the General Assembly of 2025 be held in Partick Free Church (Continuing), Glasgow. Meantime, the Committee will continue to consider the practicalities of an Edinburgh venue for the 2026 General Assembly, and will report thereanent to the General Assembly of 2025.

2.3 Assembly Officer

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

2.4 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).

2.5 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, reviews matters each year and suggest changes where appropriate. At the time of writing, it is still unclear how many visitors and delegates may be able to attend the Assembly from outwith the Church. This will obviously affect the number of speakers, who may be less in number than on previous occasions. 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.

2.6 Assembly Catering

Moving to a different location in 2023 meant that new arrangements were required for catering. A group of ladies from the various Congregations within the Southern Presbytery kindly undertook to provide the catering for the Moderator's reception, as well as lunch on Tuesday and Wednesday. All agreed that this was a considerable success, and similar arrangements are in place for this year. The arrangements for the evening meal proved more challenging, with transport issues being particularly difficult. Following discussion, it was agreed to arrange for outside caterers to provide the evening meals on Tuesday and Wednesday of Assembly week. These will be served at the usual time in the adjacent church hall.

2.7 Assembly Broadcasting

It is intended to broadcast the Assembly proceedings, as in recent years, on Zoom, using the Partick facilities.

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 of papers 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. Clerk to Home & Foreign Missions Committee

The Committee are happy to report that Rev. Stuart Farmes has agreed to serve as Clerk to the Home & Foreign Missions Committee. They are very grateful to the former Clerk, Mr Donald J. Morrison, for his many years of faithful and devoted service to the Committee.

6. Panel of Consultants

The General Assembly of 2023 were informed that there was ongoing consideration being given to the future role of the *Panel of Consultants Anent Allegations of Sexual Impropriety Involving Adults*, whose

membership has been noted by the Assembly annually. The Legal Advice & Property Committee are currently engaged in a wide-ranging review of this whole area and are expected to bring forward proposals regarding the Panel to this General Assembly.

7. Review of Memoranda on 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. The General Assembly of 2023 noted that, for various reasons, this had not been pursued in recent times. With the approval of the Assembly, the Committee commenced a review in 2023, beginning with Group 1 Committees. This current year, all Group 2 Committees will submit their Memoranda on Procedure for review. Once a complete cycle of review of all Committees has been completed, the Committee will consider whether the practice should be continued and report thereanent to the following General Assembly.

8. Committee Meetings

All the Standing Committees of Assembly meet during the year at Free Greyfriars, Inverness, in their Westhill building. The rooms are very comfortable and commodious with good breakout areas 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) 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, etc., for which nominations have not been sought through the Committee is added for convenience.

CALUM MACLEOD, C*onvener*
A. JAMES MACINNES, *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 express their gratitude to Mrs Isobel Ann Macleod, Assembly Office Manager, for her assistance during the General Assembly;

3. 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;

4. The General Assembly thank the Minister and Congregation of Partick, Glasgow, for kindly affording the Committee the use of their buildings for the Assembly;

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 with interest the ongoing review of the Memoranda on Procedure of the various Committees;

10. 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;

11. The General Assembly appoint the General Assembly of 2025 to meet within Partick Free Church (Continuing), Glasgow;

12. The General Assembly continue the remit of the Committee in investigating a possible location in Edinburgh for a future General Assembly.

(B)

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

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
Mr Thomas J. Buchanan, *Vice-convener*,
Legal Advice & Property Committee [4]
Mr James I. Gracie, *Convener*,
Finance & Sustentation Committee [3]
Mr Raymond A. Kemp [2]
Mr Greg MacDonald, *Convener*,
Legal Advice & Property Committee [1]

Elders
Mr David Chin, *Vice-convener*,
Finance & Sustentation Committee [4]
Mr Donald Buchanan [4]
Mr Donald MacDonald (Stornoway), [1]
Mr George McMillan [1]

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 Iain Smith, *Vice-convener*, Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee [4]
Mr E. Trevor Kirkland, *Convener*, Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee [4]
Mr David M. Blunt, *Convener*, Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee [3]
Mr Brent C. Evans [3]
Mr Henry J.T. Woods, *Convener*, Publications Committee [1]

Elders
Mr John Campbell (Snizort),[3]
Mr Duncan MacSween [3]
Mr Alan Wilson [2]
Mr Lindsay MacCallum, *Vice-convener*, Publications Committee, and *Vice-convener*, Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee [1]
Mr John M. King [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 Murdo A.N. Macleod, *Vice-convener*, Welfare of Youth & Education Committee [4]
Mr William Macleod, *Convener*, Ecumenical Relations Committee, and *Vice-convener*, Home & Foreign Missions [2]
Mr Kenneth M. Macdonald, *Convener*, Home & Foreign Missions Committee [1]
Mr Timothy J. McGlynn, *Convener*, Welfare of Youth & Education Committee, and *Vice-convener*, Ecumenical Relations Committee [1]
Mr Gavin Beers, *Vice-convener*, Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee [1]

Elders
Mr John Campbell (Shettleston), [4]
Mr Randall Taylor [3]
Mr Calum Macleod, *Convener*, Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee [2]
Mr Gordon Furzer [1]
Mr Iain A.C. MacPherson [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* [3]
Mr Calum Smith, *Convener* [2]

Elders
Mr Donald Martin [2]
Mr Derek W. Maclean [1]
Mr Christopher Reeder [1]
Mr Graham Sinclair [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:

PANEL OF CONSULTANTS ANENT ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL IMPROPRIETY INVOLVING ADULTS

Mr Colin MacDonald (Dores)
Dr Andrew Naylor
Mrs Marion Macleod (Glasgow)
Mrs Maurine Murray (Brora)

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

Ecumenical relations are very important. Any Church in the present day which has no ecumenical relations with other Churches is schismatic. Ideally, there should be one visible Church in each country, and, indeed, across the whole world. There is one invisible Church composed of the born-again elect of God who have been "purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). In early New Testament times there was one true visible Church. When they had disagreements they called a synod or council in Jerusalem to sort out the contentious matters (Acts 15). The Apostles, as authoritative leaders under Christ, had some difficult problems with which to deal. These included Judaisers who taught that the Old Testament ceremonial law had to be observed; individuals who had given up their employment because they expected the imminent return of Christ; a member who was living in an immoral relationship with his stepmother, and drunkenness at the Lord's table. These matters were to be handled with appropriate teaching, and if necessary with faithful and loving Church discipline. In this way the unity and orthodoxy of the Church was preserved.

Interestingly, it was, however, envisaged that the Church would, after some time, become corrupt, dominated by the Antichrist. Eventually Zion would become the harlot Babylon and the godly were warned, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities" (Revelation 18:4-5). Godly separation was required. This occurred in the Sixteenth Century, and the Reformation took place as the Protestants were forced to separate from the corrupt Medieval Church.

Following the Reformation there were new problems. The Pope had been a unifying figure in the pre-reformation Church. Now without his authority, different Churches with contrasting beliefs emerged in the various countries, and indeed within certain countries. Lutherans and Anglicans, with their partial reformation, continued the hierarchical form of government which they inherited from Rome, and replaced the Pope with the king or prince as the overall earthly head of the Church. Reformed and Presbyterian Christians saw the power as residing in Christ but exercised through office-bearers elected by the congregations. Anabaptists rejected the national Churches and set up their own very separatist congregations.

As time passed, unfaithfulness and worldly compromise in the national Churches led to the expulsion of godly protesters who then formed their own independent Churches. In our own country there was a division in 1690 when some Covenanters would not accept the Revolution Settlement. In the Eighteenth Century there were several more separations. In the Nineteenth Century the Disruption of 1843 occurred, as our fathers protested against state interference in the running of the Church and were forced to withdraw from the Establishment. Sadly, that purified Church was soon corrupted by liberalism. This led to further division with the result that three small Confessional, Psalm-singing-Churches are now descended from the Free Church of Scotland. There is also one Confessional, Psalm-singing Church claiming descent from the Covenanters. These four Churches are similar in the fundamentals, so this is a far from ideal situation. It is difficult to resolve, as each have their own distinctive history and traditions and believe themselves more faithful than the others. At a minimum, our duty is to respect and appreciate one another. It is good to welcome delegates from the Associated Presbyterian Churches and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland to our Assembly. The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland takes a more separatist stand.

Outside of Scotland, we are glad to have warm relationships with many Churches, some very similar to ourselves and others less similar. We have had help and encouragement from these Churches in the past

and we wish to encourage them as sister Churches. From time to time we send delegates to their assemblies and synods.

Ecumenical Bodies

Affinity

Following a recent change in the structure of Affinity, they are now run as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation with a board of Trustees drawn from an Advisory Council. The Advisory Council has oversight of the actions of the Trustees who form the Executive of the organisation. The FC(C), as a Corporate Member, has a representative on the Advisory Council appointed by the Committee, namely Rev. Timothy McGlynn. He is a member of the Advisory Council, though he is not a Trustee.

Over the last year or so there have been discussions between the The Gospel Coalition (TGC) and Affinity. (The Gospel Coalition [TGC] in the USA began in 2005, as an initiative from Don Carson and Tim Keller, and brings together Churches which are generally reformed, confessional and complementarian, but it has affiliated organisations in other countries and regions [e.g. Canada and Australia]). These talks were initially conducted between Trustees of Affinity and representatives of TGC International, looking to see whether it was possible to work together or if a closer linkage was feasible between TGC and Affinity which would effectively result in Affinity morphing into TGC-UK.

In August 2023 a paper entitled *Affinity: A closer partnership with The Gospel Coalition?* was distributed to all members of the Advisory Council, to inform them of what had taken place and to set out the position as it appeared at that time to those who had been involved in the talks. This described in general the background of the two bodies, and went on to outline some of the advantages, disadvantages, and key issues to be considered and the need for prayer in everything.

Advantages envisaged by the discussion paper

- *to form Affinity into a more distinctively reformed confessional network*
- *to broaden Affinity's appeal across the evangelical scene in the UK with the possibility of drawing in more individuals and groups already connected with TGC USA*
- *to provide Affinity with a well-known and trusted brand that more people would follow*
- *to create efficiencies in the back office*
- *to provide a library of useful material to share to make Affinity's site more valuable*
- *to connect TGC with the resources in written content and speakers that Affinity already have to attract more members and support*
- *to show visible unity among a larger group of Christians worldwide*
- *to create a rallying point for mission*
- *to enable Affinity to be better informed of global trends and matters of concern for the Church across the globe*

  The advantages for TGC itself would be similar, with a greater expression of gospel unity in particular with new connections in the UK and access to Churches and Church leaders for mutual encouragement, ministry and support.

Disadvantages acknowledged in the discussion paper

- *It could alienate some members who believe TGC is too narrow, or too broad*
- *The unique identity and history of Affinity (and BEC) would be less prominent*
- *Affinity could get labelled on one side or the other in more US-based culture wars*
- *There may be costs involved with no real benefits in terms of income*

This paper was discussed by the Affinity Advisory Council on the 11th and 12th of September 2023. Although unable to be present in person at that meeting, Mr McGlynn was provided with remote access to listen to and participate in this important discussion. At the meeting it was clear that although there was much sympathy for the wish to see the formation of a TGC-UK, there was a large degree of concern as to

the feasibility of changing Affinity, which is a meeting place for representatives of various evangelical and largely Reformed Churches and other groupings, into a TGC-UK. It was agreed to discuss the matter more fully and come to a decision on the way ahead at the next Advisory Council meeting which was due to be held in Glasgow on 18th and 19th March 2024.

Recognising the importance of the matter and wishing to involve Rev. Kenneth Macdonald, a Committee member and former Convener of the Committee, it was agreed that both he and Mr McGlynn would represent the FC(C) at the Glasgow meeting. However, with Mr Macdonald travelling to Sydney to supply in our sister denomination, Rev. James I. Gracie kindly agreed to attend in his place.

At this meeting the matter was proposed initially by Graham Nicholls, *Director of Affinity*, and then addressed by Tim Savage of TGC International, one of the founding members of TGC USA in 2005. Both men spoke warmly and sincerely regarding advocating a linkage between the two groups, seeing the long-term advantages to be vastly greater than any perceived disadvantages. However, as the members of the Advisory Council of Affinity and observers from the corporate partners discussed the matter, it soon became clear that the concerns regarding the form of TGC and that of Affinity did not make for the simple transferring of one body (Affinity) into that of another (TGC-UK). The Presbyterians and others representing larger, diverse bodies noted that their role was to represent the views of their denominations and groupings, and therefore they were not in a position to take such a step without first seeking approval from those they represented.

Nevertheless, it was also pointed out that the original founding of TGC in 2005 had not been between denominations but between men from denominations and independent congregations representing none but themselves. It was pointed out that if TGC-UK were to proceed on that basis then there would be no problem, as each man would be accountable for his own participation and that no denomination or grouping would be required to approve such a step. It would simply be like someone joining a group such as the Banner of Truth Trust or the James Begg Society, etc., placing no representative requirement upon such men other than that they be expected to do that which was consistent with their own Confessional vows. As the TGC Statement of Faith is, if anything, more openly Reformed and Complementarian, this was not seen as posing a difficulty for any individual who chose to take part in such a group.

As a result, the Affinity Advisory Council agreed to aid in the facilitating of a TGC-UK, and it was agreed that the members of the Advisory Council would be invited to take part in setting up the TGC-UK Board, but that they would be invited as individuals and not as representatives of anyone or anything other than themselves. At the same time, Affinity would continue fostering strong inter-Church and evangelical para-Church dialogue, seeking to advance the cause of Christ throughout Great Britain and Ireland.

International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

With the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) meeting quadrennially, there is little to report for the past year. The Conference's magazine, *Lux Mundi*, is now produced electronically on a biannual basis and the download link is circulated around the Church. Through the ICRC there is an ability to share urgent prayer requests from member Churches, as well as appeals for diaconal support. In this way the Conference can be seen to be of real practical value. In addition, the links with individuals made at Conference meetings do lead to ongoing contacts which help in the understanding of the situation in the reformed Churches throughout the world. The next meeting of the ICRC is scheduled for mid-October 2026, to be hosted by the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea.

European Conference of Reformed Churches (EuCRC)

The Conference of the EuCRC which had been arranged for June 2020 in the Netherlands is now eventually to take place in England at the Yarnfield Park Training & Conference Centre, Stone, Staffordshire, from 10-13 September 2024. Rev. Timothy McGlynn is on the organising Committee. The theme of the Conference is "Preaching" and the organising Committee note that "Much of contemporary evangelicalism

has experienced a loss of confidence in preaching as the God-ordained means of bringing sinners into the Kingdom and building them up in holiness. At times parts of the Reformed community have expressed the same doubts. As those committed to the authority of the God-breathed Scriptures, however, we believe that the Spirit-empowered preaching of God's Word is essential for the life, growth and health of the Church. The papers to be given at our conference will address different aspects of preaching in a scriptural and practical way, with the aim of strengthening our confidence in preaching and improving our practice of preaching." The 2023 General Assembly appointed Rev. Graeme Craig and Mr McGlynn as voting delegates and it is proposed that this be reaffirmed. In addition, there is an open invitation to others, especially ministers, to attend the conference at their own expense. A total of four papers will be presented by the following, with discussion thereafter:

1. Rev. Simon Arscott (IPC) — 'Expounding the Word of God'
2. Rev. Timothy McGlynn (FCC) — 'Preaching the whole Christ from all the Scriptures'
3. Prof. Maarten Kater (CGK) — 'Doctrinal, ethical and catechetical preaching'
4. Rev. Stephen Roger (EPCI) — 'Preaching to the heart'

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 exchange of delegates at respective Assemblies also takes place.

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. It is expected that they will have a delegate at this year's Assembly.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England & Wales

Mr Falko Drijfhout of the EPCEW was a delegate to the 2023 General Assembly. Since then there has been little contact with the EPCEW, except on a personal level.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland

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

Free Church of Scotland

The Committee have had an approach this year from the Free Church of Scotland asking if they could meet their representatives to consider how best to promote the Christian good of Scotland. The Committee are, of course, happy to meet and talk with them, as they are with any group. They did, however, feel very strongly that they must tell them from the start that they could not meet with them without raising and discussing the wrongs of the past. Many of us have personal and painful memories of how we were forced out of the Church which we loved, for simply requiring that our Church follow her own disciplinary procedures. Since that time, sadly, the Free Church has moved dramatically from its beliefs, practices and especially its worship. Every office-bearer of the Free Church prior to 2010 had vowed to "assert, maintain and defend the purity of worship as presently practised in this Church", but then voted at the Assembly that year by a majority to break their ordination vows and change the worship. The Committee are saddened at the changes that have taken place in the Free Church. They await a response from them with regard to further talks.

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. This follows from the decision of last year's Assembly to discontinue the informal discussions with them, as there seemed little likelihood of closer links being forged. Informal contacts on a personal basis do continue, however, and it is hoped that these may prove helpful.

Dutch Churches

Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland

Last year, the General Assembly noted with concern reports of difficulties being experienced by the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland due to the ordination of women to office in some of their Churches, contrary to the decision of their 2019-22 Synod, and the Assembly further expressed concern at their discussing the opening of the office of Deacon to women. A letter was sent from the Assembly encouraging the CGKN to maintain the Biblical view that Scripture forbids the opening of office in the Church to women, and reminding them that, notwithstanding the apparent difficulties which may be caused, the key to true unity is to maintain unity in the truth and deal with those whose departure from it is a divisive course. The next Synod of the CGKN is due to have a number of meetings over coming months, and it is expected that the FC(C) will have a delegate present during the Session which meets in January 2025. At the time of writing it is unclear what the outcome of these meetings will be. God willing, the CGKN hope to be able to send a delegate to the 2025 General Assembly.

De Gereformeerde Kerken (hersteld) (DGKN)

The De Gereformeerde Kerken (hersteld) (DGKN) or The Reformed Churches (Restored), are a group of Churches which separated from the GKN(v) or Liberated Churches around 2003, due to drift in the latter. In 2009 there was a division in the DGKN leading to the formation of the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (which was admitted to the ICRC in 2022). Both Churches have been pursuing unity, and it is expected that by October 2024 they will become one body again. The united body will have around 3,000 members, though it is thought this may be augmented considerably in coming years due to the decline in the GKN(v). The DGKN have appreciated contact with the Committee, and a proposal is expected to come before their Synod in October to maintain this 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.

Gereformeerde Gemeenten (GG)

Over a number of years individual members of the Committee have had personal contacts with ministers of the GG, particularly through Hudson Taylor Ministries. The GG are a conservative, confessional denomination. This appreciation of working together with like-minded brethren led the Committee to write to one of those known to be on their inter-church relations Committee, with a view to establishing contact with them. He has brought this correspondence to their Committee and a response is awaited.

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 over issues concerning the Confession and ethics. Given that apart from initial contacts there has been little further communication between the Committee and the HHK, the Committee wrote to them with a view to strengthening links between the Churches and a response is awaited.

Other European Churches

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central & Eastern Europe

The Committee made contact with the RPCCEE last year after their admission to the ICRC and informal contacts at the 2022 ICRC meeting. 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 and also the Heidelberg Confession and Second Helvetic Confession for historical reasons.

North American Churches

Canadian Reformed Churches (CRC)

The CRC, 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 last year's General Assembly.

Free Reformed Churches of North America

The Assembly welcomed a delegate from the FRCNA last year. 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 likeminded in outlook and practice to our own Church.

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. Last year 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 a US-based FC(C) delegate to their Assembly in June 2024. 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, appear to have a very similar constitutional basis to our own Church. Whilst the bringing together of the PRC and the FC(C) may at present prove difficult for various reasons, it is believed that should the Presbytery of the USA become a daughter Church of the FC (C) based in North America, this would, in practice, provide a better opening for unity, with the PRC Congregation in Stockton, England, possibly becoming part of the FC(C). The PRC are meeting in Stockton at the end of May 2024 and the Committee have appointed the Principal Clerk as their delegate. It is expected that a North American-based delegate of the PRC will be present at this Assembly, and such contacts can only help overcome perceived difficulties in the way of closer relationships.

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 have meant that this is 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 Court. Although not often seen working in practice, this year it is expected that the PCEA will have a Corresponding Commissioner present, the first since before 2000.

The Committee are thankful to note that after a period when a less conservative influence was affecting the PCEA, the situation is reversed, and that the bonds between the Churches appear to be strengthening. This is seen, for example, in the fact that a number of retired Ministers have or are arranged to provide supply in St George's, Sydney, during their vacancy. At the time of writing, Rev. Kenneth Macdonald is in Sydney and is due to represent the Church at the Synod of the PCEA in early May.

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, there have been the beginnings of the healing of divisions which had arisen amongst the more conservative Presbyterians. 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 24 years. A small Church, having arisen following a dispute in the PCEA, the Committee are thankful to note that their appears to be significant progress in restoring fellowship between these Churches, and 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 has currently two former FC(C) Ministers as those 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.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia

In recent years the Church had some contact with the EPC(A), and the possibility of their students being trained at the Free Church Seminary was explored. Whilst the Seminary were happy to provide tuition, the EPC(A) did not pursue the matter and there has been little contact since. Over the years they had been sending men for training to the Seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, and it is believed that they have chosen to remain more under the influence of the Protestant Reformed Churches, rather than that of the PCEA or the FC(C). Already a small denomination, this outlook has weakened that body further. The Committee no longer have contact with the EPC(A).

African Churches

Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Africa (GKSA)

Over the years the Church has maintained contact with the GKSA. Thankfully some time ago they resisted the temptation to follow modern culture as opposed to Scripture, and open office in the GKSA to women. It is expected that they will be represented at this Assembly.

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 contacts continue on a personal basis.

WILLIAM MACLEOD, *Convener*
TIMOTHY J. MCGLYNN, *Vice-convener*

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, while noting Affinity's decision to facilitate efforts to establish TGC-UK, welcome the continued work of Affinity in fostering strong inter-church and evangelical para-church dialogue, with a view to advancing the cause of Christ throughout Great Britain and Ireland;

3. The General Assembly commend *Lux Mundi*, the e-publication of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, and encourage its dissemination as a means of giving information regarding the reformed Churches throughout the world;

4. The General Assembly, noting that the European Conference of Reformed Churches is due to meet in September 2024 at Stone, England, and the desirability of being represented at that meeting, appoint Rev. Timothy McGlynn and Rev. Graeme Craig their voting delegates to the next meeting of the European Conference of Reformed Churches;

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

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

7. The General Assembly note the contacts with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England & Wales and pray for God's blessing on their work and witness;

8. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland and thank Rev. Trevor Kirkland for representing them at their recent meeting;

9. The General Assembly commend the Committee for their most appropriate response to the approach made by the Free Church of Scotland;

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

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

12. The General Assembly note that the Assembly of 2023 wrote to the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, with concern regarding reports of difficulties being experienced by them due to the ordination of women to office in some of their Churches, contrary to the decision of Synod, and further expressed concern at their discussing the opening of the office of Deacon to women. They further note that these issues are due to be discussed at their Synod which meets during 2024 and 2025. They assure the CGKN of their continued prayers for them, that they may be able to deal with these issues in a Biblical way, and that they may be kept faithful in a day of backsliding and compromise

with the spirit of the world. They appoint Rev. Graeme Craig as a delegate to the next Synod of the CGKN.

13. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts made between the Committee and the De Gereformeerde Kerken (hersteld) (DGKN), and rejoice to hear of the hoped for union between the DGKN and the GKN. They look forward to links between the Church and the united body being strengthened;

14. The General Assembly thank the Committee for approaching the Gereformeerde Gemeenten and await their response with interest;

15. 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;

16. The General Assembly are grateful to learn of the establishment of a truly Reformed and Presbyterian Church in Central and Eastern Europe, and encourage the Committee to pursue the formalising of a relationship with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central & Eastern Europe;

17. The General Assembly note the relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches and that they were represented at the 2023 General Assembly;

18. The General Assembly are grateful for the ongoing contacts with the Free Reformed Churches in North America and pray God's blessing on their work and witness;

19. The General Assembly appreciate the ongoing contacts with the Heritage Reformed Congregations and pray the Lord will bless their labours for Him;

20. 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 that the Church might be a positive influence on them;

21. The General Assembly note that there has been little progress in strengthening relationships between the Presbyterian Reformed Church (USA) and the FC(C), but hope and pray that the exchange of delegates this year may prove of benefit to all;

22. 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;

23. The General Assembly value the ongoing relationship with the United Reformed Churches of North America, and note with regret that due to geographical distance it has not been possible to send a delegate this year to the Synod of the URCNA;

24. The General Assembly are thankful for their relationship with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and look forward to welcoming a Corresponding Commissioner in terms of Act I, 1952. They note the manpower difficulties they are facing, pray that the Lord of the Harvest would raise up labourers for the work of the Ministry, and are thankful that some of the Church's retired ministers have been able to provide extended periods of supply to assist them in their witness;

25. 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;

26. The General Assembly note with regret that the Committee has ceased correspondence with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia;

27. The General Assembly welcome the attendance of a Delegate from the Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika and pray that God would bless the work of their Churches in that land;

28. 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

It can be quite discouraging to have to begin a Report with a confession that not a lot has changed since the previous year, but the reality is that the Committee have still not brought anything they have been working on to a point where it can be published. The sad reality is that we are depending on an ever-decreasing pool of men who are able to assist with the production of publications. We have plenty of materials in the pipeline – indeed too much for us to cope with – but we are struggling when it comes to those who are able to proofread what has been done. Some things have been hampered due to differences of opinion that have arisen in connection with one proposed booklet, resulting in it being shuttled back and forth from one Committee to another. It is difficult to know what can be done to circumvent such a situation.

We are happy to report however that the Presbytery of the United States of America has been doing sterling work over the past year and has brought forward a number of important publications, details of which may be seen in the body of the Report. We commend our brethren for their diligent work in this regard.

We would like to thank our new Clerk Mr Donald Macleod (Point) and Rev. David M. Blunt for his guidance in settling Mr Macleod into the post of Clerk to the Committee. Thanks are due to them both for the production of this year's Report.

And finally, I would like to thank all the members of the Committee who have diligently sought to serve it over the last year.

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.

2.1 Editors

The Committee are once again grateful to the editors of the *Free Church Witness* and *The Explorer*, as well as the editorial team of the *Free Church Witness*, for their labours in writing and obtaining and preparing material for the magazines. 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.

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 in London.

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 occasions during the past year. These delays are generally due to factors beyond the Committee's or the distributor'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 *Free Church 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, they are encouraged to see their duty to do so, and to produce the article according to the word count suggested and the deadline set.

The Committee are 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. 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. During the year, the Committee received the resignation of Mr Maurice Grant from his role as proofreader due to his failing health. The Committee thank Mr Grant for his diligent work over many years. The Committee welcomed Mr Donald Macleod as proofreader in Mr Grant's stead and wish him the Lord's blessing in the work. The Committee express their continued indebtedness to the other proofreaders: (*Witness*) Rev. Raymond Kemp, 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 2024 (with equivalent figures for 2023) were:

Category	**2024**	**2023**	**Change**
Congregational Bulk Orders	390	410	-20
Individual Subscriptions	53	60	-7
Individual Gift Subscriptions	16	21	-5
Airmail Subscriptions	46	32	14
Predicted Total Subscriptions for Year	505	523	-18
Copies by sale or return	0	2	-2
Copies sent free of charge	119	113	6
Predicted Total Circulation for Year	624	636	-12

The Committee would bring particular attention to the increase in Airmail subscriptions. This is primarily due to an increased order from the Preaching Station in Alberta, Canada. We pray that the *Witness* magazine would be blessed to the brethren there.

Although the costs for the printing and distribution of the magazines increased again in 2023, the Committee did not increase subscription rates for 2024, there having been a 25% price increase as recently as 2021. It is, however, likely that subscription rates will be raised for 2025.

As well as once again encouraging Congregations to do what they can to maximise the uptake of the magazines locally, the Committee remind them that free copies of the magazines may be obtained in addition to their regular orders for distribution beyond their Congregation. The Distributor should be

informed as to how many extra copies are required each month (contact details are to be found on the inside front cover of the *Witness*).

Congregations are reminded that *The Explorer* is available free of charge for Sabbath schools to order. At the recent Dores FC(C) Youth Conference it was disappointing to learn that there were some FC(C) children who had never seen *The Explorer* magazine. While there may be a number of reasons for this, Congregations are encouraged to be aware and thoughtful about ensuring all the younger people are provided for. It is a fact that children like to feel included and that they can look forward to something for each of them in the Church's publications each month. For example, if there is a family with multiple children, perhaps thought could be given to ordering extra copies of *The Explorer* so that the children do not have to share (or fight over!) the one copy that comes to the home with the *Witness*. There are plenty of spare copies of *The Explorer* available each month.

During the past year, the Committee were made aware that the Subscriptions Secretary was being frustrated in her duties by some Congregations who delayed payment of their bulk order. This really ought not to be happening, unless for some exceptional reason. The Committee have resolved to address this matter over the coming year. At the date of writing, 22 Congregations have paid in full, 1 has submitted partial payment and 4 have yet to pay. This leaves a total of £2,250 outstanding. 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 gave further consideration to a proposed questionnaire produced by Rev. David Fraser with the aim of assessing the views of readers on the content of the magazines, and particularly the *Witness*, in order that a review of the Assembly's Editorial Policy for the magazine could be advanced. Having considered the matter, it was decided that the content of the magazines, as a general rule, should be left with the editors, as they are guided by current policy. The Committee and the editors continue to welcome feedback on the magazines 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. Likewise, the Committee are thankful to Miss Katrina MacKay (Ayr) for her diligent work as Magazine Distributor, which includes operating a Royal Mail Online Business Account and on occasion printing leaflets for insertion into the magazines.

2.6 Spanish Translation of the *Witness*

In July 2022 Mr Joel Suarez, who is studying at the Free Church Seminary in preparation for the ministry, informed the Committee of his desire to translate the *Free Church Witness* into Spanish to reach the Spanish-speaking people of our Church. This was to be a digital version, with the aim of making it available, not only to our own Congregation in Spain, but potentially well beyond the initial target audience. The Committee gave their approval to this project and rejoiced recently to learn of reports that the magazine has been well received in Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela. It seems clear that there is indeed a hunger for the Reformed faith and our Presbyterian principles in lands that are still blighted by the darkness of Rome. The Committee are greatly encouraged by this and would covet the prayers of the Church, that Mr Suarez's labours in this venture would indeed be owned of the Lord and blessed to many beyond our shores. The Committee thank the Trinitarian Bible Society for granting permission for the use of their Spanish translation of the Scriptures in the *Witness* magazine. Currently, Spanish editions of the June 2023 and the July-August 2023 issues are available on the Church website.

2.6 Good News Magazine

A new edition of the *Good News* magazine was prepared towards the end of 2023 but has not yet been published due to uncertainty over the likely demand. The Committee hope to be in a position to proceed

with publication later in the year, and they encourage Congregations in Scotland to consider making use of the magazine as an evangelistic tool in their localities.

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	Almost ready for final proofreading.
Deacons	Rev. John W. Keddie	No further progress / Currently suspended.
Church Membership	Rev. William Macleod	No further progress / Currently suspended.
Marriage	Rev. Graeme Craig	No further progress / Currently suspended.
Funerals	Rev. James I. Gracie	Text submitted and with PQRM Committee
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

Until the booklets on *Elders* and *Deacons* have been published, work on the other projected titles has been suspended at the Committee level, apart from the work on *Funerals*. The Committee do however encourage the authors who are preparing texts for consideration by the Committee to continue with their work.

The Committee have given significant attention to the *Funerals* document over the past year. The document has now been proofread and will soon be passed to Rev. James Gracie for further comment. It is intended to take up this matter again in June with the possibility of the draft being sent to Presbyteries for their comments prior to publication.

3.2 Books

History of the Division of 2000

At the time of writing, the Introduction and ten chapters (out of twenty-five) have been proofread and returned to the principal author, Rev. James Gracie. 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 these works are painstaking and attention to detail is paramount. The Committee are also conscious of the fact that one of the key persons involved has recently passed away, and they are agreed that, in the circumstances, publication would not be appropriate at present. Therefore, it was decided to hold back publication for at least a year.

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. This work included only the references to the proof texts, and not the proof texts themselves, and the Committee upon reflection decided to require their inclusion, and instructed the Convener and the then Clerk to add the words of the proof texts to the draft. It is only fair to say that Mr Keddie considered that to be unnecessary as in his opinion, it would swamp the main text, significantly expand the book, and delay its production.

Mr Keddie's careful work, with the proof text references only, in an approximately A5 format with a reasonable font size, at least for the main documents, would be a volume of some 430 pages. For comparison, the 1933 Free Church edition is 390 pages, even though it uses a smaller page size and includes the scripture proofs in full; it uses smaller font sizes, however. The 1985 Free Presbyterian edition, which has a slightly larger page size than Mr Keddie's draft and includes the scripture proofs in full, is 438 pages; it lacks some of the authoritative documents, however.

Further progress has been made on this important project since then. Following on from last year's Report, the Committee is pleased to be able to say that the work on collecting the words of the proof texts of the *Shorter Catechism* and *Larger Catechism* is now complete, and that work on the *Confession of Faith* has begun.

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. However, the document is now in a form which requires editing and proofreading, and although the men appointed to do this, like many others, are busy men, we would encourage them to try to devote some time to this longstanding project.

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 reasonably practical in order that online orders may commence.

4. Website and Social Media

4.1 Website
During the past year, it was realised that the Website Digital Content Editor did not have sufficient privileges within the website design environment to fully perform the tasks he needed to do. It was also realised that Mr Sam Gerdt was, in effect, a single point of failure and, were he to be incapacitated for any reason, there would be no way to administer the website. The Committee were also mindful of the responsibility and demand falling on Mr Gerdt and his time. Therefore, Mr Gerdt was asked to provide two further administrator logins in order to ease his responsibilities somewhat. These logins have been given to the Website Digital Content Editor (Rev. Andrew Allan) and the Clerk to the Committee (Mr Donald Macleod). Mr Gerdt, however, remains the primary administrator of the website. The Committee is indebted to Mr Gerdt for his work on the website.

4.3 Social Media
At the beginning of April, the Church's Facebook page had 2,010 followers, compared with 1,670 (2023). The Church's Twitter account had 1,058 followers, compared with 958 (2023). 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

The 2024 Spring Conference took place on 29th March in the Greyfriars Free Church, Westhill, Inverness, the same venue as the previous year. This year the theme was 'Last Things'. The Committee thank the two speakers, Rev. Thomas Buchanan (Brora) and Rev. James Gracie (Edinburgh), and Rev. John Keddie (Rtd), who kindly chaired the Conference.

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 Deacons' Court for graciously granting the use of the Greyfriars Free Church.

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. Approximately between 60 and 70 people of all ages attended the Conference, which is up on last year's figure of around 40 to 50 attendees. The addresses at the Conference were broadcast using 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, and 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 2024 Conference are available on the Church website.

6. Publications Committee of Presbytery of the USA

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

> Following is a brief update of the work of our Presbytery's Publications Committee. The prayers of the Church and their support are much appreciated. We continue to pray for you and give thanks to the Lord for his mercies.
>
> The Lord provided us with the opportunity to print an edition of John Bunyan's *The Greatness of the Soul*. Through financial support and volunteer labour, we have been able to make this volume available at an affordable price in order to encourage purchasing it and passing it out to encourage men to consider well their great need.
>
> We have revised our Shorter Catechism Deck, a card deck incorporating all 107 questions and answers as a tool for learning and reviewing the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. We expect that these will be available later this year.
>
> We have been privileged to assist with the reprinting of our beloved Scottish Psalmody. We expect that the newest reprint will be available this April.
>
> We give thanks to the Lord that *The Greek New Testament, Textus Receptus, Reader's Edition* has continued to sell well. Beyond individual purchases, it appears that some Bible colleges have

recommended this volume to their students. We have about 200 copies left, and we are in process of correcting several mistakes discovered since the first printing, none of which affect the actual Biblical text itself.

We are in process of producing a book by Rev. Gavin Beers relating the historic Scottish covenants of the 17th century to our own denomination. It traces the history of the Second Reformation through the Revolution Settlement, including an assessment of the Reformed Presbyterian testimony. In the main, it is answering an objection we encounter here, namely that the Free Church is a compromised Church due to the Revolution Settlement. We pray that God will use this book to answer that objection and vindicate his cause. It is in the final stages of review.

We are nearing completion of a small but weighty work of John Brown of Wamphray on the nature of the Church. It is made up of 32 theses on the doctrine of the Church never before translated from the original Latin. It covers familiar material, doing so in a clear and cogent manner, faithful to the Bible and our beloved standards.

There are a number of other projects in various stages of development. The work of *The Master's Trumpet* continues: a new issue being produced every quarter. We attribute all to the Lord's mercy and blessing. We are few and limited. God is good. Our sufficiency is in him.

Prayer is coveted that the Lord would sustain our small effort and bless it to his glory in our day and in generations to come. The prayers of the brethren are appreciated.

For contact information, it should be noted that the Convener of the Committee is Rev. Robert McCurley and the Clerk is Mr John Uselding.

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

Sadly, for a variety of reasons, the *Annals* project has suffered repeated delays. One of the principal difficulties has been the number of changes in interested personnel on both sides of the divide. This has meant that useful contacts have been lost and has led, at times, to the project being temporarily sidelined in the constant struggle for competing priorities. However, in recent times contact has been renewed and there is now a real prospect of the material being made available on the Ecclegen website constructed by Rev. Ronald C. Christie. Discussions will continue in coming months 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

1.1 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;

1.2 The General Assembly note that Mr Donald Macleod has now taken up the role of Clerk to the Committee, and pray that he will know the Lord's help in this role and thank Rev. David M. Blunt for his service as Clerk *pro tem*;

2.1 The General Assembly thank Rev. David M. Blunt for his work as Editor of the *Free Church Witness*;

2.2 The General Assembly thank Rev. Trevor Kirkland, Rev. James Clark and Rev. James MacInnes for their work as Assistant Editors of the *Free Church Witness*;

2.3 The General Assembly note that Rev. A. James MacInnes has now taken up his role as Editor of *The Explorer,* thank him for his work thus far, and pray that he will continue to know the Lord's help in this role;

2.4 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* magazine;

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

2.6 The General Assembly thank Miss Anne MacAulay for her work in providing the Puzzle Page for *The Explorer*;

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

2.8 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;

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

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

2.11 The General Assembly thank Miss Katrina Mackay for her diligent work as Magazine Distributor;

2.12 The General Assembly express their hope that the new issue of the *Good News* magazine will be published soon, and pray that the Lord will bless its distribution to the good of many souls;

2.13 The General Assembly welcome the report from Mr Joel Suarez regarding the feedback on the Spanish translation of the *Free Church Witness* magazine, especially the encouraging news of its reception in South America. They encourage Mr Suarez in his ongoing labours and pray the Lord would guide and bless him in them;

2.14 The General Assembly thank the Trinitarian Bible Society for permission to use their Spanish translation for Scripture quotations in the Spanish edition of the *Free Church Witness* magazine;

3.1 The General Assembly note the information regarding the various titles in the *Finding Out About* series, and the continued lack of progress with the majority of them. They urge the Committee to bring the booklets on *Elders* and *Deacons* to publication as soon as possible, and pray that the Lord will guide the Committee as they work towards publication of the booklet on *Funerals*;

3.2 The General Assembly note that there has been progress on the final proofreading of the *History of the Division of 2000*;

3.3 The General Assembly note the progress made in the preparation for publication of the *Subordinate Standards & Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland*. They thank Rev. John Keddie for his diligent work on this project and pray that the Lord will assist the Committee as they seek to bring the project to completion;

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;

3.6 The General Assembly note the delay in getting a payment platform operational on the Church website to enable retail of the Committee's publications. 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 give thanks to the Lord for the provision of the new Church website with its added capabilities and encourage the Committee to further develop its 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 29th March. They thank Rev. John Keddie for chairing the Conference, Rev. Thomas Buchanan and Rev. James Gracie for their addresses, and all who in any way 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 progress from the Working Group on the *Annals*. 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 are matters of huge importance. Society is becoming increasingly detached from the Christian message and in few places is this more apparent than in matters relating to our young people. Scottish Government policy has focussed on them with determination, seeking to break the family ties established by God and to replace them with state-imposed overseers through their failed 'Named Person' scheme. We rejoice that such a misguided piece of legislation was overturned. However, we must not imagine that that ends the matter for those who seek to turn the hearts and minds of our children from God to Government.

The home is foundational to the welfare of children, and we should re-emphasise the family unit as God's ordained arena for the raising of the next generation. Nevertheless, we must also recognise the privilege given to us to support families in this great calling of bringing up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The folly of 1872, when our Free Church Fathers handed over Church schools to the state, is becoming ever more apparent. The Church needs to recover its vision for the establishment of Christian schools in every parish for the nurturing of rising generations. In recent times many state schools have become places of atheistic indoctrination rather than providing a well-rounded education. The Church in Scotland needs to take up the challenge of rebuilding the walls that have been broken down over decades. The systematic assault on the hearts and minds of our children must not go unchallenged any longer.

2. Sabbath School Syllabus

The updated Sabbath School workbooks offer excellent material for Sabbath Schools. The Infant (Grade One) material is on a three-year cycle, with the other grades on a four-year cycle. The use of Church materials for the instruction of our youth in Bible Classes and Sabbath Schools is heartily commended to our Congregations. Nevertheless, we understand that some Congregations seek the flexibility of using materials produced elsewhere and trust that the wise and prayerful use of good quality material will benefit the young people attending our Congregations.

3. Sabbath School Exams

Sabbath School teachers and pupils have once again been busy throughout the past year. The exams attracted 33 entrants in all, 8 more than last year. Of these, 19 were from the Junior Grade 2 (14 in 2023), and 14 from the Bible Class Grade (11 in 2023). The Bible Class Prize Winner was Thomas Keddie (Dores) and the Grade 2 joint Prize Winners were Katie Bell (Dores), and Seumas A. MacInnes (Ardelve) A full list appears as an Appendix to this Report.

The Committee commend all who entered the exams 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 also to those who mark them.

4. Maurine Murchison Memorial Prize

This scheme continues to encourage young people to memorise Scripture and is warmly commended to parents and teachers for the children under their care. This year we saw twenty children from seven different Congregations completing a total of twenty-seven grades between them.

5. Shorter Catechism Diploma Scheme

Learning and reciting the Catechism continues to be in three stages and is generally done over three years: Bronze: Q1 -38; Silver: Q39-81 and Gold: Q82-107, with those attaining the Gold Award receiving a leather-bound Bible. Miss Abigail Blaney from the Ballyclare & Doagh Congregation completed the Bronze section.

In addition to this, an interesting suggestion has been made to consider starting a European Language category to allow participants to recite the Catechism in French, Spanish, Portuguese or other languages, to encourage a more outward looking and missionary-minded Church for the years ahead.

6. Camps 2024

The camps made a welcome return to Badaguish, with a record number of campers. Those attending included Free Church, Reformed Presbyterian, Free Presbyterian and Baptist campers, as well as a strong attendance from our own young people. In total, 23 junior campers and 17 seniors were present for the week, along with three day-campers on the Saturday. The three day-campers tried to book for the Junior Boys' Camp but there simply was no room left, so a 'taster' session was arranged for the Saturday. There was also one additional senior boy who attended for a single night. It is hoped that it might be possible to book a fourth lodge to allow for additional places. This will add significantly to the cost but will also allow for greater participation and therefore potentially greater income due to more campers attending.

Due to a lack of eligible drivers, it was only possible to hire a single minibus, which was great for the budget but problematic for logistics. The use of Rae Macdonald's family 10-seater, which Rev. Thomas Buchanan was then insured to drive, helped greatly. Three of the men are keen to pursue their minibus driving qualification through Committee funding. They are looking into this and hope to have completed it by the time of this year's camp.

7. Youth Conferences 2023-2024

Ratagan Youth Hostel, Glenshiel, saw around 40 young people gather in October 2023, to hear Rev. Thomas Buchanan speak on the subject, *Declaring the Glory of God*. The importance of the Regulative Principle was stressed in the talks and a most profitable time was had by all. Those who helped to make this as beneficial as it proved to be were: Mrs Ming Shu Chin, Sohana Mackenzie, Joan Nicolson, Mr Neil Smith, Rev. James MacInnes, and finally Rev. Thomas Buchanan. These times have proved edifying and encouraging for those who attend and also for those who assist in providing a time for spiritual growth and warm fellowship in a safe and supportive environment.

The young people returned to Ratagan in March of this year and enjoyed the preaching of Rev. Murdo MacIver who spoke on the topic, *Godly Living in a Godless World*. The cooking of Sohana Mackenzie and Joanne MacIver was greatly appreciated, as around 30 gathered for the event. The reports of those who attended were warm in their expressions of delight at the teaching received and fellowship enjoyed over the weekend.

An important change has taken place, with those attending forming a committee to oversee the arrangements for Ratagan and for a second Conference in Arbroath. The young folk are to be commended for their willingness to take up responsibilities in this way and they are supported by the Committee as required. The current committee consists of Susie Macdonald, Felicity Macleod, Hugh Macdonald and Angus Nicholson.

8. Christian Education

The Committee continue to provide modest grants to Christian home-schooling families and to several faithful Christian schools known to them. To further encourage Christian Education, as previously reported, the Committee have prepared a Report on Christian Education Resources which is on the Church's website for public access and download.

However, it is important to say that this is an area where we must increase our efforts greatly. If we do not grasp the opportunity to set up Christian schools in our land, we may lose the next generation before we realise it. While we acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty in these matters, we must never use that as an excuse for procrastination or indolence. The work that has been done by Providence Christian School in Stornoway and the Melville-Knox Christian Schools' group is commendable, but it needs the prayerful and committed financial support of the whole Church. To this end this denomination and other branches of the Church of Christ throughout Scotland need to prioritise Christian education far more than has been the case for the past 150 years. The Church of the Reformation in Scotland, and the early years of the Free Church, stand as a marvellous testimony to the role of the Church in this vital endeavour.

TIMOTHY J. MCGLYNN, *Convener*
NORMAN SMITH, *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;

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;

8. The General Assembly encourage the Committee to investigate the possibility of providing a prize for memorizing the Catechism in other languages;

9. The General Assembly express their deep gratitude to those whose efforts make the camps possible year by year, in particular, all the cooks, helpers and leaders without whom this important work would not be possible;

10. The General Assembly commend the ongoing work of the camps to the prayerful and practical support of the Church;

11. The General Assembly commend the ongoing efforts to establish annual Youth Conferences and commend such efforts to the prayerful support of the wider Church;

12. The General Assembly commend the efforts of the young people involved in the organising Committee for the Youth Conferences;

13. 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;

14. The General Assembly commend all those involved in Christian Education, whether Christian schools or Christian home-schooling, to the prayers of the Church;

15. The General Assembly instruct the Committee to investigate the possibility of increasing the denomination's role in advancing Christian Education and providing Christian schools throughout the land.

APPENDIX

Sabbath School and Bible Class Examinations 2023-2024

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 — 11)

Prizewinner:	Thomas Keddie
Cross	Owen MacDonald, Annie MacDonald, Kenneth Iain Macleod
Duthil-Dores	Lois Brooks, Hannah Keddie, Thomas Keddie, Callum Arie Morrison, Calvin Nicolson, Anna Marie Morrison
Stornoway	George Kenneth MacDonald, John MacDonald, Peter MacDonald, Katie MacKenzie, Joel MacKenzie

Sabbath School Grade 2

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

Joint Prizewinners	Katie Bell, Seumas A. MacInnes
Aberdeen	Ava MacLennan, Ella MacLennan
Cross	Bethany Macleod
Duthil-Dores	Katie Bell, Joanna Brooks, Abigail Keddie, Annabell Nicolson, Alick Donald Nicolson
Inverness Greyfriars	Amelia Maclean
Lochalsh & Strath	Seumas MacInnes, Catherine MacInnes
Stornoway	Mary Beth MacDonald, Jack Alan Macleod, David Gillies
Tarbat	Duncan-John Macleod, Eilidh Macleod, Lily Grace Macleod, Ellie Joy Mackay, Charles Keir Mackay

Maurine Murchison Memorial Prize

20 took part (previous year — 13)

Grade 1	Ballyclare & Doagh	Abigail Blaney, Benjamin Blaney, Bethany Blaney
	Partick	Elis Eira Mackay
Grade 2	Ballyclare & Doagh	Abigail Blaney, Benjamin Blaney, Bethany Blaney
	Partick	Elis Eira Mackay
	Snizort	Peigi Beth Stewart, Annabel Macleod, Tormod Macleod, Maisie Macdonald, John Macleod
Grade 3	Ballyclare & Doagh	Abigail Blaney, Benjamin Blaney
	Partick	Micah Alan Mackay, Elis Eira Mackay
	Stornoway	Kate Morrison, Grace May Macleod
Grade 4	Aberdeen	Ava Maclennan, Ella Maclennan, Harriet Maclennan, Oliver McPhee, Caleb McPhee

	Ayr	Summer Hall, Lottie Anderson
	Ballyclare & Doagh	Abigail Blaney
Grade 5	Duthil-Dores	Abigail Keddie

Catechism Diploma

39 took part (previous year — 3)

Gold Plus: 1-107	Greenville	Luther Matarazzo
Gold: 82-107	Atlanta	Eden Ray
	Greenville	Luther Matarazzo, Andrew Pike
Silver: 39-81	Atlanta	Geneva Evans
	Auburn-Opelika	Sarah James Ketcham, Seaborn Ketcham
	Greenville	Luther Matarazzo, Mary Reeder, Philip Reeder
	Mebane	Micah Beers, Luke Law, Micah Law, Eliana Law, Ethan Uselding
Bronze: 1-38	Atlanta	Cordelia Evans, Knox Greenewald, Owen Womble
	Auburn-Opelika	Grace Ansley, Thomas Ketcham
	Ballyclare & Doagh	Abigail Blaney
	Greenville	Peter Broberg, Thomas Broberg, Emma Carney, Nora Ekpo, Simeon Ekpo, Eva Matarazzo, Lady Matarazzo, Luther Matarazzo, Olivia Setzer
	Mebane	Jessie Law, Silas Law, Talitha Law, Kaylan Unverferth, Hannah Strawn, Kaitlyn Strawn
	Nuevo Laredo	Mateo Martinez Barbosa, David Falciola Garza, Pedro Falciola Garza, Sherlyn Perez Olarte, Keila Perez Osorio, Genesis Ruiz Uvalle

IV

REPORT

OF THE

FINANCE & SUSTENTATION COMMITTEE

1. Introduction

In a day of economic crisis, where the cost of living after Covid-19 has risen significantly, we have reason to thank the Lord for his continued provision for the denomination. Our people continue to give liberally, and the various Committees of the denomination seek to use finances sensibly and prudently. The Committee express their thanks for this.

As we move forward, the most significant expense will be maintaining the Gospel ministry. However, we cast ourselves upon the Lord, who has promised to supply all our needs *according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:19).

The following sections (2 to 9) pertain to the denominational accounts included within the *Annual Financial Report and Supporting Documents* appended to the Committee Reports.

2. Actual Results versus Budget

Despite the budget for 2023 projecting a surplus of just £331, we are thankful to the Lord that a surplus of £121,092 (before revaluations of fixed assets) was reported for the year (compared with a surplus of £69,792 in 2022).

The substantial variation from the projected deficit in 2023 was because of a variety of factors including:

- total income exceeding the prudent budget by £130,000;
- the Special Committee on Psalmody had budgeted £8,000 for a reprint of the Psalter which did not occur;
- legal fees of £5,000 had been set aside for work which has not been undertaken;
- repair work at Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness, costing more than £4,600 than that which was budgeted for, and student grants being £10,060 in excess of budget (as a result of two students rather than one);
- the audit fee being £6,410 more than had been budgeted for.

3. Income

As can be seen from page 12 of the accounts, total income for 2023 was £798,068 (2022: £804,846). The breakdown of that figure is analysed across pages 20-21 of the accounts, where Congregational Remittances are reported as £684,950 (2022: £690,117).

One legacy (specifically for foreign missions work) of £10,000 was received in 2023 (2022: £nil). 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.

During the year £12,149 was received by the denomination in full and final settlement of a student loan debt.

Despite the small overall decrease in last year's income, the figures, when taken in a wider context, are very encouraging. Despite an ageing demographic in both pulpit and pew, Congregational Remittances have remained remarkably stable these last four 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

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 £147,345 (2022: £148,362). It should be noted that this represents 21.43% (2022: 21.38%) of all Congregational Remittances. An additional £24,884 (2022: £20,167) 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 2023 was £676,976 (2022: £735,054). 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. It can be seen from there, that most of this reduction relates to Payroll/stipend costs.

Last year, Payroll costs were £479,066 (2022: £521,501) a decrease of £42,435 (8.1%) compared to 2022. It should be noted that since 2020, when payroll costs were £598,537, this represents a decrease of £119,471 – testimony to the fact that we no longer have a Resident Lay Agent and have six fewer ministers in receipt of stipend. Payroll costs represent 69.9% (2022: 75.6%) of Congregational Remittances. As payroll/stipend costs make up such a large proportion of expenditure, an analysis of this since 2015 is also detailed over the page.

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

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

The above table clearly identifies that:

- after reaching in 2019 the highest number of serving ministers (22) since 2000, that in 2023 we are now at our lowest level ever. Aside from in 2007 when there were 18 serving ministers, and 2011 where we had 19, the denomination has generally had between 20 and 21 serving ministers;

- the total payroll costs represent between 74.3% – 83.3% of ordinary expenditure. 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 69.9% of remittances in 2023 (16 ministers, 19 total staff).

Based on the current stipend of £22,000, the total cost of a minister, including Employers National Insurance and pension contributions, is £26,420. 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. Revaluation of Denominational Properties

Further to the advice and recommendation of the auditors, the General Treasurer, on behalf of the General Trustees, undertook a major piece of work in obtaining revaluations for the properties held by the denomination. The result is the £125,633 gain on revaluation of fixed assets seen on the face of the Statement of Financial Activities on page 12 of the accounts – a further explanatory note is included within the notes to the accounts at note 11 on page 25.

7. 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 financial expenditure totalling £92,782 (2022: £100,594) was given as follows:

	2023	2022
	£	£
International Mission to Jewish People (CWI)	1,000	1,000
Zambia	996	966
Sri Lanka	22,101	26,534
Spain	0	2,544
Spanish Student Support	7,750	7,750
France	1,000	2,725
Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon	15,536	0
Home Mission	28,605	29,293
Gospel Fund	10,093	26,812
Committee Expenses	5,701	2,970

8. Net Assets

At the end of 2023, the total net assets of the denomination amounted to £1,458,309 (2022: £1,211,584) – an increase of £246,725 (2022: £69,792) or 20.4%. More than 50% of this increase relates to the revaluation of the Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness property, and the church buildings on Thornwood Terrace, Glasgow.

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 £1,458,309 are detailed in note 17 (on page 27 of the accounts). It can be seen from that note that £59,827 represent restricted funds, £794,689 are designated funds and £603,793 are unrestricted general funds.

9. Loans

As reported at the last General Assembly, 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 loans whilst maintaining their ordinary monthly remittances.

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

A student loan debt of £7,817 has been written off as a bad debt in the 2023 Church accounts.

10. Properties

The Committee have begun a programme of necessary improvement works to the denominational property at 85 Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness. At the time of writing this Report, the property has had the old timber roofline and guttering on the house, dormers, and flat roof extension removed, and replaced with PVC fascia, shiplap soffit, deep capability guttering, downpipes, and eaves guards.

This phase of the work is almost complete; the replacement of an old skylight with a new standard velux window is yet to be carried out. This has met with considerable delay; because of building control

legislation it has become necessary to submit a building warrant application to Highland Council. The work will recommence immediately upon approval of the application.

11. Budgetary Planning

The Committee are grateful to Clerks and Conveners of Standing and Special Committees of Assembly for their timely submissions of their 2025 Draft Budgets. The Committee, having approved all the Draft Budgets, noted the projected deficit of £35,235 and recommend that the 2025 Draft Budget (Ref: page 38 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 2023 accounts and recommend to the General Assembly that they be reappointed as auditors for the coming financial year.

12. Annual Analysis of Congregational Accounts

The Committee thank the General Treasurer for his analysis of Congregational Accounts and Statistical Schedules (Ref: pages 39-43 of the *Annual Financial Report and Supporting Documents*). This detail is provided to help give a realistic 'snapshot' of the current situation, to encourage a prayerful concern throughout the Church, and to assist in future planning.

13. 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 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 periods when they will not be available to confirm these figures.

14. General Treasurer's Department

Where would we be without the valuable work of the General Treasurer's Department? This department tirelessly ensures that all our finances are in good order. Our General Treasurer, Mr Murray Mackay, is meticulous in his work. He gives invaluable advice to this Committee and other Committees and Congregations throughout the Church. The Committee are thankful to have his expertise and professionalism to enable them to navigate the labyrinth of financial laws, of which there is a need for awareness.

Similarly, the Committee are thankful to have the diligent services of Mrs Muriel Smith as Financial Administrator. Mrs Smith is always approachable and willing to offer help and assistance to those who seek it.

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

15. Stipend Review

The Committee carried out their annual review of stipend in accordance with their Memorandum on Procedure. The last increase in ministerial stipend was in July 2022. The Committee, after lengthy and detailed consideration, are recommending that the ministerial stipend be increased to £23,500 as of 1 July, with a *pro rata* salary increase for employees. The total payroll cost for each minister will be £28,307.

In making this recommendation, the Committee are aware of the impact of such an increase on the denomination's overall budget, but given the denomination's cash deposit position, together with a significant rise in the cost of living since the last increase in 2022, the Committee determined that such a rise is warranted.

During discussions, concerns were expressed that a formula, or set of yardsticks for determining stipend levels on a year-on-year basis, was not clearly in place. The Committee will give this matter consideration in the coming year.

16. Congregations under Special Arrangements

The Committee commend the Congregations of Ayr, Ballyclare & Doagh, Brora*, Harris, Kilmuir & Stenscholl, 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 Congregation of Brora, as of 2 April, are no longer under special arrangements (see section 17, paragraph 3).

17. Sustentation Fund Schedules

The following Congregations are being recommended for continuance on the Equal Dividend Platform (EDP) under Special Arrangements in accordance with paragraphs 17, 18 and 19 of the Committee's deliverance – Ayr; Ballyclare & Doagh; Knock & Point.

When the Congregation of Knock & Point were admitted to the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements by the General Assembly in 2022, they became subject to Act XIII, 1984, whereby a vacant Congregation's entitlement to call a minister is limited to two years from the date on which the Schedule is passed by the Sustentation Committee. With the Congregation still being vacant, another schedule was required to be submitted to the Committee for consideration.

The Committee are pleased to report that the Congregation of Brora, having been under special arrangements for a period of 10 years, have now been admitted onto the Platform at 100% of Equal Dividend. This is not only an encouragement to the Congregation but also to the Committee, and the Church at large.

18. Death-in-Service Scheme

The current Death-in-Service Scheme was approved by the General Assembly in 2019. The Committee revisited the terms of the scheme and recognised that when a payment is made to a beneficiary on the death of a minister or employee of the denomination, His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) may view such a payment(s) to be subject to PAYE legislation, thereby increasing the individual's tax liability, as well as the Church possibly becoming liable for N.I. contributions.

To fulfil the Church's obligations to HMRC, viz. the PAYE scheme, the Committee recommends to the General Assembly that Act IV, 2019 be amended to read in accordance with paragraph 21 of the deliverance.

19 Changes to Ministerial Personnel

Deaths

Rev. David Compton	Toronto (Rtd)	9 November 2023

Ordinations & Inductions

Rev. J. Logan Shelton	to the pastoral charge of Auburn-Opelika	13 October 2023

Inductions

Rev. Craig Scott	To the pastoral charge of Hunt County	16 November 2023

Resignations

Rev. Thomas I. Budgen	Kilmuir & Stenscholl	28 May 2023

Translations

Rev. Calum Smith	from Bracadale & Duirinish, to Knightswood	11 November 2022

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 2024

Nil

Roll of Resigned Ministers

Rev. John J. Harding

Rev. Sherman Isbell

Rev. Bert Pohl

Rev. Stuart Farmes

20. 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.

21. Pulpit Supply

The Committee record their appreciation for the work undertaken by our retired ministers, elders and others, who have provided such assistance throughout the Church over the past ecclesiastical year.

JAMES I. GRACIE, *Convener*
MURDO MACIVER, *Vice-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 in 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 £23,500 from 1st July 2024;

7. The General Assembly inform all Congregations that the total payroll cost from 1 July 2024 for each minister is £28,307;

8. The General Assembly endorse the recommendation of the Finance & Sustentation Committee that the Draft Budget for 2025 be approved with a projected deficit of £35,235;

9. The General Assembly reappoint Innes & Partners Ltd, Chartered Certified Accountants, of 9 Ardross Street, Inverness, Scotland, IV3 5NN as Church Auditors for the coming year (2024), and thank them for the audit of the 2023 accounts;

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

11. The General Assembly thank all 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;

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

13. The General Assembly note the improvement works carried out on the denominational property at 85 Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness;

14. The General Assembly thank Mr Murray Mackay, General Treasurer for his invaluable advice and dedication shown to the financial well-being of the Church;

15. The General Assembly thank Mrs Muriel Smith for her continued commitment to serve the Church in her position as Financial Administrator;

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

17. The General Assembly direct that the Congregation of Ayr continue on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, for a period of 5 years, subject to the Congregation promising to remit a minimum of 75% of Equal Dividend to Central Funds;

18. The General Assembly direct that the Congregation of Ballyclare & Doagh continue on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, for a period of 5 years, subject to the Congregation promising to remit a minimum of 75% of Equal Dividend to Central Funds;

19. The General Assembly direct that the Congregation of Knock & Point continue on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, for a period of 5 years from commencement of a settlement (subject to the requirements of Act XIII, 1983), contingent upon the Congregation's promise to remit a minimum of 85% of Equal Dividend to Central Funds;

20. The General Assembly are thankful that the Congregation of Brora have been placed on the Equal Dividend Platform in accordance with Act XVIII, 1998 — Act anent Sustentation Fund, having promised to submit a minimum of 100% of Equal Dividend;

21. The General Assembly approve the following Death-in-Service Scheme and direct that it be operated in the following terms:

    1. The Church shall maintain a ring-fenced Death-in-Service account with funds not less than the Equal Dividend plus corresponding employers NIC costs in any year.

    2. Any beneficiary of the Fund shall be added to the Church's payroll for the duration of the payout to fulfil the Church's obligations to His Majesty's Revenue and Customs' PAYE Scheme.

    3. Upon the death of a minister in service, and upon notification being received by the General Treasurer from the relevant Presbytery Clerk, a sum equivalent in total to the Equal Dividend at the time of death shall be paid in twelve monthly instalments over the following year into the account of a nominated beneficiary.

    4. Each minister in service shall be encouraged to inform the Treasurer's Department of his nominated beneficiary. The General Treasurer will keep this information in the strictest confidence.

    5. In exceptional circumstances, and upon application being made by the Executor of the Will, consideration shall be given to paying the full balance of the moneys into the Estate of the deceased person as a lump sum.

    6. The Death-in-Service account shall be used to fund the Scheme as necessary. If the Death-in-Service account be depleted by the payment of Death-in-Service benefit(s) under the Scheme, payments to the Death-in-Service account shall recommence until such time as a sum equivalent to at least the Equal Dividend plus corresponding employers NIC costs has been restored.

    7. In the event of retirement from the ministry due to terminal illness, payment of the benefit shall commence (effective from the date of retirement) upon a report being received from the Church's Chief Medical Officer.

8. Death-in-Service Benefit of an amount equal to one times salary shall similarly be paid to each of the employees of the Church at the time of his/her death, and upon the equivalent terms as above.

Act IV (Class II) 2019 is hereby repealed.

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

The work in Ayr has continued to be consolidated and has known some encouragements in 2023. The numbers connected with the Congregation, or with whom the Congregation have a contact, continue to increase, and it is not uncommon for people from the surrounding area to come and worship from time to time. Obviously, this needs to be translated into regular attendance, but it indicates that people from the local community are aware of the Congregation and are open to attending. Although overall there has not been a great change numerically, it is hoped that with God's blessing there may be growth in 2024.

The Minister, together with the 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.

One individual who began attending church two years ago has now professed faith. Meanwhile, one member living away was given a disjunction certificate, whilst another has relocated to England although remains connected with the Congregation. Average attendances are 22 in the morning and 17 in the evening, with 12 at the Prayer Meeting. Including the Minister, there are now around 30 souls connected with the Congregation: 16 members, 8 adherents and 5 children, from 15 households. This does not include contacts.

Financially, income was down slightly. There was a not-unexpected decrease in donations from those outside the Congregation. However, remittances remained stable at £18,000 or 82% of the Equal Dividend. It is hoped that this can be maintained in 2024.

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

One of the strengths of the denomination is that of mutual support. This is a matter for which the Congregation are very grateful and thankful for. While the number of wage earners in the Congregation is limited, and remains the same, as some of them are self-employed, any change in their circumstances has a significant impact. The Congregation have sought to ensure that they contribute above their required annual rate, while at the same time striving to build sufficient capital to enable the purchase of a manse at some point. This is to secure a ministry for the future. The Congregation rejoice that they have been able to sustain their givings to the level they have.

Spiritually, congregational life flourishes as the Lord enables. One particular aspect is that of regular fellowships, which take the form of a question meeting. These are well attended, and the men of various ages participate to much benefit.

The Congregation have of course a student in the ministry who is in his second year. A further application for the ministry has been received and is working its way according to the usual procedure. They are

thankful that the Lord has been pleased to use them, even in this way, for the overall benefit of the denomination. They rejoiced in the celebration of marriage, as one member got married during the year and transferred to a Congregation in Scotland.

The recent addition of infants to the Congregation continues to encourage and delight.

Outreach by the Congregation continues by both personal and collective means. Each year the Congregation leaflets the entire surrounding area with tracts and invitations. The Congregation prays that such witness bears fruit.

Brora

Place of Worship

The Congregation continue to avail themselves of the Scout Hall in Brora for public worship on the Sabbath. Thankfully, in-person midweek meetings, held in the same location, have recommenced after an interruption of many years. The Zoom facility has remained for the midweek meeting, as it is necessary due to the large geographical area covered by those in the Congregation.

It continues to be the prayer of the Congregation that the Lord in his goodness and in the advancement of his cause would give them a building of their own. This is desired for a greater visible presence, and for the establishment of firmer roots, not just in Brora but also in the East Sutherland area of the Highlands of Scotland.

Manse

The Congregation continue to be thankful for the provision of a manse. It is hoped that some building work on the manse, that is urgently needed, will now finally be completed this year, after some delay. The Congregation acknowledge the invaluable financial help given to them by the denomination, Congregations, and individuals.

Congregation

The Congregation are deeply thankful for the provision of a minister. They continue to remember the vacant Congregations of the denomination. There were a number of encouragements throughout the past year in the form of members added to the Communion Roll. The Congregation continues to benefit from believers associated with the FC(C) moving into the local area. This has greatly helped in making the people of Brora more aware of the Congregation.

Vision

The Congregation are very much burdened for the local area and wider East Sutherland. A number of projects for outreach are being considered. They have been encouraged that an opportunity arose in the local primary school where the Minister has been well received. They continue to pray for perseverance in prayer and work, and continue to look to the Lord for every increase in the work of His Kingdom.

Harris (Leverburgh)

The Congregation remain thankful for the provision of a settled ministry over another year. The typical attendance at Sabbath morning and evening services remained similar to the previous year, at around 15 and 12 respectively, although in recent months illness has adversely affected attendance. Seven members normally attend the midweek Prayer Meeting.

Two Communion Seasons were held in the Congregation and there is hope that at future Communion Seasons it will be possible for more visitors to attend from other Congregations.

The Congregational website includes recordings of Sabbath sermons and Prayer Meeting addresses, as well as brief devotional readings for different age groups. The Soundcloud platform, to which the sermons are uploaded, saw a 45% increase in numbers compared to the previous year. The majority of the ‘visitors’ are

from the UK, but several other countries have been significantly represented, including USA, Spain, Pakistan and Ukraine. It is the prayer of the Congregation that God's Word will prove a blessing to all who hear it by these means.

The Congregation experienced a significant increase in energy bills over the past year, with an almost doubling of electricity costs for both church and manse. Despite this, remittances to Central Funds were maintained at the previous year's figure – equating to 77% of ordinary remittances. The Congregation remain thankful for the support they receive under Special Arrangements, as well as previous financial assistance towards improvements of the church building. In this regard, the Congregation remitted £1200 towards repayment of the loan during the year and will endeavour to continue making modest repayments as other commitments permit.

The work in South Harris is commended to the prayers of the wider Church.

Kilmuir & Stenscholl

The year under review proved to be a challenging one for the small Congregation of Kilmuir & Stenscholl. In May 2023, Rev. T. Budgen demitted the charge in order to accept a Call to Launceston, Southern Presbyterian Church, Tasmania. The Congregation were able to remit slightly more to Central Funds than in the previous year but they have little by way of reserves. In common with other Congregations, increased energy bills will bring additional challenges in the coming year.

However, there have been encouragements. The numbers attending services have remained stable and the Congregation continue to be warm and welcoming. A particular cause for thanksgiving is the fact that the young couple referred to in last year's Report have both professed faith, one of them also being baptised. We are undoubtedly living in a 'day of small things' but nevertheless the Lord is still at work; calling His people out of darkness into his own 'marvellous light'.

The Congregation have enjoyed several periods of residential supply and have also, on occasion, joined with the Snizort Congregation by Zoom. A new Congregational Treasurer has recently been appointed and the property continues to be well maintained. Despite setbacks, this small band in the north end of Skye continue to look to the Lord and covet the prayers of the wider Church.

Knock & Point

The Congregation continues vacant at present. A number of men have been invited to preach for consideration regarding their suitability as preacher and pastor. A call was signed by the Congregation to one man who decided to sist proceedings. Others were not ready to be considered by the Knock & Point Congregation.

The Congregation seems to be in a healthy state with names having been added to the Communion Roll at each of the last four Communion Seasons. One major problem is the availability of men for pulpit supply. Four of the six retired men residing within Presbytery bounds are in their 80s and not all of these are available for Supply.

The Congregation also enjoys a monthly fellowship held in the Swordale manse property. The attendance at all Church services continues to be consistent. There is an annual visit from the TBS where the speaker delivers a message, as well as delivering a report on TBS work in various places. Evangelistic services are held, usually in July. The Home Missions Worker does regular outreach work. Entire services are broadcast live to a chosen audience and sermons are uploaded later to YouTube.

The finances are healthy for a small Congregation and the agreed remitted figure is being met regularly. The last of the 'children' are now beyond Sabbath School age and no young families are presently attending.

There is no immediate financial need regarding church properties. The church building is in first class condition and the Swordale manse is in relatively good order for an old building. The greatest need, as in all Congregations in the denomination, is for a powerful movement of the Holy Spirit to bring spiritual and eternal realities to bear on the conscience of the surrounding district.

North Uist & Grimsay

Office-bearers

The Congregation have one elder of their own and are grateful for the help of the two General Assessors who were appointed to the Congregation by the Presbytery in 2016. They have no deacons of their own. At the end of 2023 there were eight communicants, eleven supporting adherents and fourteen households.

Worship

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

Attendance

Attendances at the services during 2023 were slightly reduced compared to 2022. There were thirteen regular attenders at the Sabbath noon service and eleven at the evening service; the regular number attending the Prayer Meeting was eight.

Outreach

The Congregation have a website (www.northuistandgrimsayfcc.org) providing details of their services and recordings of sermons preached in the congregation. The site sometimes leads to holidaymakers in North Uist attending the services. It was encouraging for the Congregation to be able to welcome a number of visitors during 2023.

The Congregation receives ten free copies of the Church magazines each month for circulation beyond the Congregation. Copies are sent to the local library in Benbecula, the nursing home in Carinish, and the surgery in Lochmaddy; the rest are passed on by the minister and congregation to their contacts. The same is done with copies of the *Good News* magazine.

Worship in the nursing home at Carinish, which the minister and elder conduct every sixth Sabbath afternoon and which had been suspended due to Covid-19, was resumed at the beginning of 2023. The minister made visits as appropriate to people from the Congregation and others who were spending time in the local hospital at Balivanich, in Benbecula. He is thankful that he is welcome to visit in many homes beyond those represented in the Congregation.

Property Loans

There are two outstanding loan balances: the capital loan payment of £25,000 made by the Church to Stewardship on 15th October 2015 and the deposit capital payment of £23,000. The Congregation have continued collections for the Central Building Fund, as they have benefited from this Fund themselves. The outstanding balance on the deposit capital loan at 1st January 2023 was £12,930.00. During 2023 the sum of £4,095.00 was paid towards the balance, leaving a closing balance at 31st December 2023 of £8,835.00.

Future

There are many discouragements today. Many of the godly witnesses in the islands have been taken home to glory. Communities tend to be ageing, and where there are families, the parents generally do not appreciate the importance of bringing up their children in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Sadly, the young are no longer in receipt of any consistent biblical instruction in the schools. All in all, the spiritual climate is a bleak one.

In times such as these, believers need to be like David, who, when in a situation of great difficulty, "encouraged himself in the Lord his God" (1 Sam. 30:6). The God of the covenant is unchangeable in His being, steadfast in His love and faithful to His promises. When it pleases Him, He is able to make "the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water" (Isa. 41:18). Praying, working and looking for such a day was never more needed!

Poolewe & Aultbea

As is common with all Congregations in our denomination, 2023 has been another challenging year as the Congregation continues to seek God's grace to maintain a truly Reformed Christian witness in a community which evidences a lamentable combination of ignorance, apathy, and antagonism to the things of God.

On Lord's Day 10th December 2023, the Congregation marked the first anniversary of moving into its most suitable new church building at Heatherlea, Aultbea. The Congregation are extremely thankful to the Lord for His marvellous provision and remain very grateful for the indispensable support of the Finance Committee and the generosity of the wider denomination, without which the financing of the new church build would not have been possible.

The Congregation remains fragile and aged, and suffered the loss of a faithful communicant member who was called home in December 2023. This leaves the Communion Roll at seven, two of whom are permanently housebound. Attendances at the public means of grace have remained low but stable throughout 2023, with 7-9 attending services on the Lord's Day, and 2-4 at the midweek service.

Despite a small decrease in freewill offering contributions, the Congregation has again been able to meet its agreed financial commitments for the year.

No immediate encouragements have been evident, but it remains a fervent prayer that the Lord would use the building as His light in the community and use it to draw sinners into His kingdom, through the faithful preaching of the Gospel there.

Their prayer is that the Lord will sustain the witness of the Congregation in the community despite the obvious challenges.

Shettleston

By the time this Report appears before the Assembly it will be nearly two years since the Congregation has been without a pastor. During that time some people have left but new people have been attending and joined the Congregation.

There is a small but committed group of members and adherents who make up the Congregation who are determined to seek the Lord that He might provide them with a pastor in due season.

Sabbath services continue as before, relying on a steady handful of supply preachers who faithfully fill the pulpit and bring God's Word week by week. The mid-week prayer meeting is taken by one of the elders and is conducted by Zoom. There is an early morning Saturday prayer meeting and an evangelistic leaflet has been prepared to be distributed locally in due course.

Work is ongoing at the Manse to prepare it for the new occupants.

The office-bearers and Congregation covet the prayers of the brethren as they seek to keep a gospel light shining in the east-end of Glasgow.

VI

REPORT

OF THE

LEGAL ADVICE & PROPERTY COMMITTEE

1. Introduction

The Legal Advice & Property Committee have sought to fulfil their remit throughout the past year. Whilst in many ways it has been a quieter time for legal matters than previously, the Committee are nonetheless aware of the responsibilities placed upon them and are 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 refuge and our strength.

2. Marriage Authorisation – Prescribed Body Status

For six years the Committee have been reporting to the General Assembly on the slow process of the Church's application to be prescribed under the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 through the Scottish Parliament. The Committee are therefore delighted to report that in July 2023 Scottish Ministers agreed that the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) could be prescribed.

According to procedure, a draft Scottish Statutory Instrument (SSI) was then prepared under the 1977 Marriage (Scotland) Act so all FC(C) celebrants would be authorised to solemnise mixed sex marriage, without having to obtain individual authorisations, triennially, from the Registrar General of Births, Deaths and Marriages for Scotland. In accordance with usual practice, an Equality Impact Assessment and a Policy Note to accompany the SSI were forwarded to the Committee for comment – . No comments were made on either document.

The Committee were informed that the SSI had been made (i.e. signed) and laid before the Scottish Parliament on 21 September 2023 (SSI Legislation Ref: 2023 No. 266 MARRIAGE). In a seamless transition, National Records of Scotland removed the names of FC(C) celebrants from the Register of marriage celebrants on 1 December 2023 and by virtue of the aforementioned SSI, prescribed body status was conferred on the FC(C), and her ministers are now automatically able to solemnise mixed sex (i.e. biblical) marriages.

The Committee, once again, wish to express their grateful thanks to Mr Maurice Grant for his faithful work over many years in ensuring that individual authorisation licences were renewed timeously for our ministers. The Committee also thanks their current Clerk, Mr Murdo Murray, for taking over and pursuing this work to its conclusion.

This provision is a genuine help to the work of the Church, and indicative of the acceptance by the civil authorities of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) within the ecclesiastical landscape of our nation. It continues to grieve us greatly that false and perverted marriages are written into the laws of our land. This in no way changes our position on the definition of marriage, founded upon God's unbreakable Word.

3. Panel of Consultants anent Allegations of Sexual Impropriety Involving Adults

With the 2023 General Assembly's approval of Act XVI — Act anent *Safeguarding Policy*, the Committee turned their attention to the closely-related matter of the *Panel of Consultants anent Allegations of Sexual Impropriety involving Adults* (hereafter referred to as the Panel). The Committee's remit was to establish whether the Panel still had a functioning role when considered against the recently enacted *Safeguarding Policy*. Membership of the Panel has been noted annually in the deliverance of the Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee (B) Nominations Report to the General Assembly.

The Panel was appointed in 2001, with a membership of six, *to act as consultants in cases of special difficulty regarding allegations of sexual impropriety involving adults*. The appointment was made in accordance with the General Assembly's resolution in Act XIX, 2001 — Act anent Procedures for Dealing with Sexual Impropriety Involving Adults, subsequently amended by Act XIII, 2002 — Act amending Act XIX 2001 — anent Procedures for Dealing with Sexual Impropriety Involving Adults.

References to the Panel, within the above-named Acts of Assembly are as follows:

> Act XIII, 2002 (amendment to Act 2001) Section 4(b) Specific Arrangement.
> "In addition, the Church shall appoint a panel of experienced persons, both male and female, which can be consulted by a Kirk Session or Presbytery in cases of special difficulty."
>
> Act XIX, 2001 section 5.
> "The Presbytery or the Kirk Session can request the attendance of one or more of the panel of consultants to be present during the investigation and formal process which will be in accordance with *The Practice of the Free Church of Scotland*."

It is the Committee's understanding that the Panel have not been consulted by any Kirk Session or Presbytery in recent years, or indeed since its inception in 2002, neither has any Kirk Session or Presbytery requested the attendance of a panel member during an investigation. The selection process used, and the qualifications required for membership of the Panel, are also somewhat unclear. It is also the Committee's understanding that the Panel was established solely for the benefit of Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries, i.e. not to advise or support a complainer through Church Court procedures. The support facility for a complainant is addressed in Act XIII, 2002 section 4(a) Specific Arrangement:

> *If a complainant wishes to discuss her concern or is unsure of procedural arrangements, the relevant Church Court will consider the appointment of one or more women advisers whom she can contact confidentially. The adviser will assist the complainant, as to procedure only, in notifying the Clerk of the relevant Church Court of all allegations. The adviser may be invited by the complainant to accompany her at any subsequent interview or hearing. It is for the relevant Church Court to determine whether the allegations are to be processed to a formal hearing, and to give prior notice of the complaint to the alleged abuser, the rights of all parties being reserved.*

The Committee understand that the Panel had been appointed with a view to advise Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries from their own specific field of expertise, and not on ecclesiastical procedures. The Committee therefore examined whether the *Safeguarding Policy* and supporting documents, clearly set out for Church Courts the procedures to follow when an allegation of abuse has been made that may be civil/ criminal in nature, without having to consult the Panel.

In particular, the Committee's view is that paragraphs 8 and 9 of the *Safeguarding Procedures* safeguarding document (the Five R's) are sufficiently detailed for Church Courts to safely navigate their way through the appropriate process.

The Committee therefore concluded that the Safeguarding Policy (Act XVI, 2023), together with its supporting documents, clearly explains for Church Courts, without ambiguity, the procedure to follow if a breach of civil/criminal law is suspected or has occurred, and the obligation of Kirk Sessions through their Local Safeguarding Officers and National Safeguarding Coordinator to report that matter to the appropriate investigating authorities.

The Committee cannot overemphasise that for a Church Court to be assured correct safeguarding procedures are being followed, both from an ecclesiastical and civil/criminal perspective, it is essential for every Elder and Deacon to familiarise themselves, on a regular basis, with these documents. Presbyteries should ensure, during annual examination of records, that such an entry is recorded in relevant Kirk Session Minutes.

The Committee therefore recommend to the General Assembly that the *Panel of Consultants anent Allegations of Sexual Impropriety involving Adults* be disbanded forthwith, together with the repeal of Act XIX, 2001 — Act anent Procedures for Dealing with Sexual Impropriety Involving Adults, and Act XIII, 2002 — Act amending Act XIX 2001 — anent Procedures for Dealing with Sexual Impropriety Involving Adults.

4. Church Insurance

The Committee are pleased to report that the denomination has purchased the following insurance coverage from Access Insurance, effective as of 14 December 2023 – Public and Products Liability; Employers Liability; Trustees' Indemnity; Reputational Risks; and Legal Expenses. The Policy has been designed to meet the specific needs of the Church and ensures that adequate protection has been provided. Church-wide activities such as the General Assembly, Spring Conference and Youth Camps have been included. The Committee request that all Standing Committees take note of this provision to avoid any unnecessary doubling of insurance provision for any activities under their purview.

The provision of Trustees Indemnity Insurance was taken out for and on behalf of the General Trustees. Further information in this regard will be provided in the General Trustees Report.

5. Safeguarding Policy

The Committee recognise that the *Safeguarding Policy* deals with difficult matters, seeking to navigate the fine line between pastoral responsibilities for the flock, and civic duty to report criminal activity. For this reason, the Committee continue to review the document, but are not yet in any position to bring forward updates or amendments.

GREG MACDONALD, *Convener*
MURDO MACIVER, *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 note that prescribed body status has been conferred on the denomination by the Scottish Government, allowing all Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) ministers to solemnise marriage without the need for individual registration;

3. The General Assembly hereby repeal Act XIX, 2001 (No. 19 of Class II) and Act XIII, 2002 (No. 13 of Class II), and disband the 'Panel of Consultants anent Allegations of Sexual Impropriety involving Adults' and thank the members thereof for their willingness to serve;

4. The General Assembly note that denominational insurance cover, tailored to meet the needs of the Church, is now in place;

5. The General Assembly note the Committee's ongoing work on the Safeguarding Policy and await proposed updates or amendments at a future General Assembly.

VII

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC QUESTIONS, RELIGION & MORALS

Introduction

We live in a time when everything seems to be changing, and some things at a remarkable pace. Technology is one example. We hear a lot about such things as Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing, blockchain, genome editing and nanobots, and probably struggle to make much sense of any of them. Innovations such as these have momentum behind them, both financial and political. They will undergo further development and have an impact on society, whether for good or for ill.

What is unquestionably detrimental to our society is the *moral* change that has occurred over the last few generations. The nature of the change is indicated by a term coined in the 1960s, namely, 'the permissive society'. This moral transformation, although distinct from technological advances, is not unconnected to them. Technology may be morally neutral, but those who originate it, operate it, or make use of it are not. In the fallen world in which we live, the sad fact is that devices which have great potential to benefit mankind can also be utilised for evil purposes.

The increase in immorality in recent decades has coincided with the growth of the mass media and latterly social media. These media have made a significant contribution to the spread of sinful behaviour, especially among teenagers. According to Ofcom, the government-approved regulatory authority for broadcasting and telecommunications, by the age of twelve, 97% of children in the UK now possess a mobile phone, with nearly a quarter of five-to-seven-year-olds having one. If parents and guardians are not diligent in their supervision, children may be in danger from immoral content on the internet and harmful influences on social media channels. Such is the concern that there were reports in April that UK ministers are considering banning the sale of smartphones to children under sixteen.

It ought to be a warning to any society when many of its youngest members appear to be disillusioned, disoriented and fearful about the future. Statistics show a rise in mental health problems, sexual assault and suicide among young people, with material viewed online often being cited as a factor. A report published by Public Health Scotland in 2022, covering the period 2011 to 2020, found that suicide was the leading cause of death across the 5-24 age group, accounting for a quarter of the total. While the suicide rate per head is lower among this group than for older age groups, the trend is upward. This does not bode well for our nation.

The moral deterioration can be traced to the *spiritual* change which has taken place in our country. The results of the 2022 census of Scotland relating to religion have not yet been published, but data are available from the annual Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, which is funded chiefly by the Scottish Government. Since 1999, the Survey has interviewed a representative random sample of the population annually. In 2015, the data showed that for the first time a majority of Scots were not religious, the proportion being highest in the youngest age bracket. Two-thirds of people said that they did not attend religious services. The picture was not uniform among the churches, however. The Church of Scotland showed a substantial decline, affiliation to it having halved since 1999, whereas the Roman Catholic Church and the 'Other Christian' category were unchanged.

The lesson to be learned here is that churches can have no hope of retaining the allegiance of their people unless they are seen to stand for something definite. The apostle Paul shows us what that 'something definite' is when he describes the church as "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). He is of

course referring to the church's relation to, and duty towards, the Word of God. Christ affirmed it as truth (John 17:17), and so must His Church.

There is ample evidence by now that the Church of Scotland has more regard for modern secular thought than for the teaching of the Scriptures. This was exemplified by the remark of one Commissioner at the Kirk's 2011 General Assembly, which voted to allow ministers in same-sex relationships to be inducted into pastoral charges: "We now know better than the Bible". When the Kirk is dismissive of God's inspired Word and unable to speak clearly on right and wrong, why should anyone pay heed to it?

This attitude to the Bible is not new and has long had consequences for the Kirk's relation to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, with its thoroughly Scriptural teaching. In 1910, the Church of Scotland altered its Formula of subscription. The effect was that, while office-bearers were required to accept the Westminster Confession as the Church's Confession, they were not required personally to believe any more than "the fundamental doctrines contained therein". In 1926, in the fifth of nine articles declaratory of her constitution, the Church of Scotland officially acknowledged "due regard to liberty of opinion in points which do not enter into the substance of the Faith", and the words used in ordination and induction services since then have reflected that. Neither the "fundamental doctrines" nor the "substance of the Faith" were defined.

In 1986, the General Assembly passed a Declaratory Act in which it formally disassociated itself from certain statements in the Confession. By 2018, the former Principal Clerk and past Moderator Dr Finlay Macdonald could state, with alarming candour: "The Church is not well served by a subordinate standard that, let's be honest, is not taken seriously across the Church." The implication was that the problem is with the Confession when it actually lies with the Church. Because the Kirk no longer takes her Confession seriously, people do not take the Kirk seriously.

The 2023 Church of Scotland General Assembly approved an overture from its Theological Forum to replace the Westminster Confession as the Church's subordinate standard with a 'Book of Confessions' containing five subordinate standards, and potential for additions over time. The book consists of the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Scots Confession, Westminster Confession and the 1992 Statement of Faith. (The last of these documents is similar in content to the Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed; while it has more detail, it makes no direct reference to Christ's virgin birth, His burial or His ascension.) The book has been sent to presbyteries for their approval, under the Barrier Act.

If the book is finally approved, would it mean that the Kirk has finally identified the 'fundamental doctrines' of the Christian faith? Not exactly. The first paragraph of the revised Formula of subscription simply identifies the *location* of these fundamental doctrines, without defining them. "I believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds." These creeds certainly contain important doctrines, yet Roman Catholicism can affirm them too. The precious 'solas' of the Reformation are not to be found in these creeds, nor the doctrines of grace.

The revised Formula continues: "I promise to be guided in my life and doctrine by the Book of Confessions of this Church." Because the Confession of Faith will remain a subordinate standard of the Church, the Forum believes that this confessional reform will strengthen the Reformed nature of the Church. This represents either extraordinary optimism or wilful blindness, as the Confession will no longer be the Kirk's *principal* subordinate standard and her office-bearers will no longer have to make vows concerning it or subscribe to it. In reality, this is just a further retreat from the Reformation. Changes of this sort will not improve the spiritual condition of the Church of Scotland, and neither will they do so for any other denomination. They incur God's displeasure and invite His judgements.

The changes we see in the church and the world remind us of Solomon's observation concerning mankind: "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many

inventions" (Ecc. 7:29). What must the Lord's people do when unwelcome moral and spiritual changes are happening? Surely the same things that we ought to be doing at all times: trusting in the Lord and pouring out our hearts before Him; holding to the truth and walking in the old paths. Our encouragement is in the God who never changes and is sovereign. He made the world out of nothing, He preserves and governs the whole creation, and He has redeemed the Church through the blood of His dear Son.

In a time of change, it is reassuring to know that *our triune God rules the world in His providence*. "For God is the King of all the earth...God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness" (Ps. 47:7,8). This universal and invincible dominion surely tells us that God is well able to fulfil all the promises He has made concerning His Church. With our physical eyes, we see the nations in rebellion against God, yet with the eye of faith we perceive the hand of God in history, preserving and advancing His cause.

In a time of change, it is comforting to know that *our Lord Jesus Christ rules the church in His grace.* "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21). Christ is the Head of a people who have been renewed by His Spirit and are joined to Him by faith. He brings them into a willing subjection to Himself. He strengthens them against every foe and they get the victory over each one in the end. The Church can say with confidence, "...the LORD is our king; he will save us" (Isa. 33:22).

God is ever at work, and we believe that He is at work in Scotland now, despite the many discouragements. He causes the gospel to be published in all the world, and He gathers His people out of every land. Over time His rule is seen everywhere. "Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him" (Ps. 72:11). This being God's promise, it is what we must pray for, labour for and hope for, fighting the good fight in these dark days.

Matthew Henry said of the Church and her Lord: "Such an army, under such a commander, will at length carry all the world before them." May the Lord hasten it in His time!

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.

1. Child Discipline

The Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Act 2019 came into force on 7th November 2020. It prohibits parents from using *any* form of corporal punishment with their children, including a gentle smack, and covers carers, visitors and holidaymakers. The result is that the law of the land in this area is now in conflict with God's law. According to Scripture, physical chastisement, when rightly used, is a means for good. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (Prov. 22:15). As opportunity affords, the Committee will continue to make the Scottish Government aware of the detrimental effect the lack of proper discipline is having on the behaviour of children in general.

In far too many areas of life, the state is going beyond its rightful sphere and reaching into the domain of the family. Perhaps the most brazen example of this was the 'Named Person' scheme, which would have seen a 'state guardian' appointed for every child under eighteen in Scotland. We should remember how the Scottish Government had to scrap the scheme finally. The smacking ban is similarly unwarranted. It would be good to see the God-given right and duty of parents to chastise their children in a reasonable way recognised, and this legislation revoked.

2. Gender Recognition

Last year we reported on how the Scottish Government's Gender Recognition Reform Bill, which had been approved by a large majority in the Scottish Parliament on 22nd December 2022, had begun to falter. The Bill aims 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 accordingly. Applications must be granted if the conditions which are minimal are met. A person's legal gender, even for those as young as sixteen, would effectively become a matter of 'self-identification'. The bill was backed by 'trans' groups and their supporters but opposed by several women's groups, on the basis that it poses a threat to women's identity and safety. We particularly abhor the apparent willingness of the Scottish Government, by this and other legislation, to promote gender confusion among children.

On 16th January 2023, the UK Government indicated that it would use its powers under the Act setting up the Scottish Parliament to block the Bill from going for royal assent, on the grounds of a perceived conflict with UK equality law. On 12th April 2023, Humza Yousaf, the First Minister, indicated that his government would seek a judicial review of the UK Government's action. The case was heard in the Court of Session on 19th & 20th September, and in its ruling delivered on 8th December, the Scottish Government's legal challenge was rejected.

Can we now speak of this Bill in the past tense? Not yet. On 20th December, Shirley-Anne Somerville, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, announced that the Scottish Government would not appeal the ruling, but would also not withdraw the Bill from parliament. She said: "For the avoidance of doubt, this Bill is not in the bin and is waiting an incoming UK Government that has more respect for devolution." As we noted last year, providence has intervened in a remarkable way concerning this Bill. We should take encouragement from that, and pray that it will do so again.

3. Transgenderism

By 'transgenderism' is meant the idea that people can change their gender from the one that matches their sex to the one that corresponds to the opposite sex. Associated with this is the demand that 'transwomen' should have the rights and privileges belonging to women, and likewise 'transmen' the rights and privileges belonging to men. This is even though sex itself cannot change, it being a matter of biology: sex is evident in the very cells which make up our bodies. To adopt a gender identity which is contrary to one's sex is to infringe the ninth commandment. According to the *Shorter Catechism*, the ninth commandment requires "the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man" (Q.77).

Transgenderism is closely linked to gender recognition. The Committee have been of the view that the issue of transgenderism is of sufficient importance that it may warrant a public statement on behalf of the denomination. However, the lack of clarity regarding the fate of the Gender Recognition Reform Bill is not helpful and means that some caution is required. The subject will be kept under review.

4. Conversion Therapy

The Scottish Government is seeking to legislate the banning of so-called 'conversion practices', but their plans have been delayed. In March 2022, the Scottish Government set up an Expert Advisory Group on Ending Conversion Practices, and its report and recommendations were published in October last year. The plan was to introduce a Bill to the Scottish Parliament by the end of 2023, but this was watered down to a consultation.

A consultation document outlining the government's proposals was published in January, with a foreword by Emma Roddick, Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees. She states that these conversion practices "aim to change or suppress a person's sexual orientation or gender identity", and that the government's focus is on "protecting people from harm". She says that its approach will ensure that "fundamental rights already enjoyed by people in Scotland, such as freedom of religion and the right to family and private life, are upheld".

What is meant here by "protecting people from harm"? The language cannot refer to conversion practices which use violence, as these are already illegal; likewise most – and perhaps all – medical and surgical treatments and psychological therapies. We know that some who are pressing for a ban want it to be a comprehensive one, such that even so-called 'talking therapy' is outlawed. If this happens, then despite the reassurance about freedom of religion, the Church's work of prayer and preaching may be under threat. The call that Peter gave to the people gathered near the temple must continue to be issued to all: "Repent ye therefore, and be *converted*, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

It is not known when the results of the consultation will be published, and precisely what form any 'ban' on conversion practices will take. The Committee agreed last year that a document should be drafted pointing out the dangers posed to Christian conversion by the sort of ban the government appears to have in mind. However, the delay in the appearance of any firm proposals means that the wisest course at present is for the Committee to maintain a watching brief on the issue.

5. Abortion

In May 2022, Gillian Mackay MSP lodged a proposal for a Member's Bill to introduce 'buffer zones' around healthcare settings that provide abortion services. The effect of her Abortion Services Safe Access Zones (Scotland) Bill would be to prevent pro-life protests in an area measuring 200 metres from an abortion clinic. The bill was introduced on 5th October 2023. The 'impact assessment' of the bill on the Scottish Government website states that the Bill contributes to the following 'National Outcomes':

- We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination;
- We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe; and
- We are healthy and active.

This is surely a perverse assessment of a Bill which, if it becomes law, will potentially criminalise people who are determined to respect, protect and fulfil the right to life of the most vulnerable of our fellow human beings. The likely effect of this Bill would be that some women who might otherwise have been dissuaded from having an abortion will now not be. The 'impact' of this on the unborn children concerned – though our society may wish to deny it – is that their lives will be brought to an untimely and cruel end. Those who insist on labelling even silent witness outside abortion centres as 'harassment' and 'intimidation' might care to think about that. We must remember that there is also an 'impact' on the mothers – one which is deliberately ignored because of its inconvenience to the 'positive' narrative of 'choice' and 'rights'. It is there in the shame that will not go away and the scars that do not heal.

Sadly the way was opened for this Bill in December 2022, when the UK Supreme Court ruled that legislation setting up buffer zones in Northern Ireland does not "disproportionately interfere" with protesters' rights. It is not yet known when the Bill will proceed further. The Committee have agreed to keep a watch on its progress, with the intention of contacting MSPs as and when appropriate, to urge them to protect the unborn by voting against the Bill. We pray that this legislation will yet fail.

6. Assisted Suicide

On 10th October 2022, Liam McArthur MSP won sufficient support from MSPs to officially introduce his proposed Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill to the Scottish Parliament. The title is something of a misnomer, as what is envisaged is not simply the ending of life-prolonging treatment, but doctor-assisted suicide. The Bill was finally introduced on 27th March and will now be subject to committee scrutiny before it is debated, probably in the autumn. The Committee have not yet had the opportunity to consider the proposed legislation.

It is often argued that people who endure debilitating conditions have little or no quality of life, and the sufferers themselves may be tempted to think that. God is the judge of these things, however. We must be guided by the sixth commandment, which says, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exod. 20:13). Suicide may put us

into a far worse eternity. We ought to be very sympathetic to the suffering, but compassion should show itself in caring, not killing.

It was sad, although not altogether surprising, that at the 2023 Church of Scotland General Assembly a motion from the Theological Forum restating the Church's long-held opposition to assisted dying was defeated. A countermotion carried which recognised the existence of "a range of theological views and ethical opinions" on assisted dying within the Church. The Faith Impact Forum was instructed to work with the Theological Forum and other relevant parties to explore the range of views and opinions and report to a future Assembly.

We are thankful that although the Bill has considerable support in Parliament, there are some significant voices against it. The present and the previous First Minister have indicated their opposition, as has Emma Roddick, Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees. Sue Webber, a Conservative MSP, acknowledged recently: "I was pro-assisted [suicide] until I got in here ... being in that role of legislating I don't think I would be able to feel comfortable knowing that one person has died because of a decision that I've taken." We pray that more of our politicians will begin to see things that way, and resist the clamour for assisted dying.

The Committee intends to contact MSPs nearer the time of the debate and urge them to affirm the value of all human life by voting against the Bill.

7. Lord's Day Matters

For several years the Committee has had 'Lord's Day Matters' as a standing item on its agenda. Periodic requests are made to Presbyteries that they report any notable infringements of the Sabbath within their bounds, so that the Committee are aware of them and able to take them up if appropriate. This is not at all meant to replace the actions of Presbyteries, who are primarily responsible for responding to such matters. No particular issues were reported during the past year.

8. Climate Change

At their meeting in October, the Committee agreed to make 'Climate Change' a standing item on their agenda. The Editor of the *Free Church Witness* magazine was requested to contact Dr James Wanliss, an elder in our Greenville Congregation (South Carolina), and ask him to write an article on the subject for the magazine. A brief article appeared in the April issue, for which we are grateful to Dr Wanliss, and we hope that further material may appear. Given the prominence of this issue in the public discourse, Christians need to be informed on the subject, and armed with the teaching of Scripture concerning the future for our planet. The truth is that we need not fear 'climate change' so much as the harmful things governments may do in their vain attempts to limit it.

The Scottish Government's policy on climate change states that, if Scotland's target of "net zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045" is to be met, "a rapid transformation across all sectors of our economy and society is required." From what we have seen already in Scotland and elsewhere, this transformation could involve such things as carbon taxes, inflated domestic energy prices, curbs on personal travel and even changes to our diet.

We must ever beware of what is called 'government overreach', and the erosion of our civil liberties. Governments have a tendency to want to control everything, and something as existential as the climate provides them with the perfect opportunity to do that *and* justify it. Could the transformation involve silencing those who are regarded as 'climate deniers' – including those who warn that extreme weather events may have more to do with God's displeasure against sinful nations, than with the Industrial Revolution and its benefits for mankind?

9. Funerals

Last year we reported that, at the request of the Publications Committee, the Committee had considered two subjects raised within the Publications Committee in connection with the draft of a document on Funerals by Rev. James Gracie. The subjects were practice at funerals and cremations. The Committee set up a sub-committee to look at these subjects and report to the Committee. The Committee have now agreed on some suggested rewording of the text and some further possible adjustments, and their suggestions have been forwarded to the Publications Committee. It is understood that the draft that emerges will then be considered by Mr Gracie.

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10. Conclusion

John Newton has some suitable words for us as we fight the Christian fight in an evil day, whether as individual believers or together in the fellowship of the Church:

> Why are we called soldiers – but because we are called to a warfare! And how could we fight, if there were no enemies to resist? The Lord's soldiers are not merely for show, to make an empty parade in a uniform, and to brandish their arms when none but friends and spectators are around them. No, we must stand upon the field of battle – we must face the fiery darts – we must wrestle (which is the closest and most arduous kind of fighting) with our foes! Nor can we well expect wholly to escape wounds, but the leaves of the tree of life are provided for their healing. The Captain of our salvation is at hand, and leads us on with an assurance which might make even a coward bold – that, in the end, we shall be more than conquerors through Him who has loved us!

May the Lord hear the prayers of His people in our land and have mercy upon church and nation.

DAVID M. BLUNT, *Convener*
LINDSAY M. 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 Clerk, Convener, and Vice-convener;

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 the Committee's ongoing concern for the right of parents to exercise biblical discipline in the training of their children, with the benefits this has for wider society. They encourage the Committee to persevere in raising this issue with government;

4. The General Assembly note the Court of Session ruling concerning the Gender Recognition Reform Bill, and that this ruling was not appealed by the Scottish Government. They urge the people of our Church and Christians throughout our land to continue in prayer that this unwarranted and harmful legislation will be abandoned, and that the ideology behind it will be rejected by governments and society throughout the UK;

5. The General Assembly note that the Committee have not thus far produced a public statement on transgenderism, and the reason for this. They pray that the Lord will continue to grant the Committee guidance as they keep the subject under review;

6. The General Assembly note that the Committee have not thus far produced a document highlighting the

threat to the work of the Church and Christian conversion posed by a possible ban on so-called 'conversion therapy'. They pray that the Lord will give the Committee guidance as they maintain a watching brief on the issue;

7. The General Assembly note the Committee's intention to contact MSPs to urge them to protect the unborn by voting against the Abortion Services Safe Access Zones Bill. They encourage the Committee in this, and commend to the prayers of the Church the various efforts being made to bring the evil of abortion to an end;

8. 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 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;

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 note the Committee's interest in the issue of climate change, and look forward to the appearance of further material considering this subject from a Biblical perspective;

11. 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;

12. 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.

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. It has been given to us not only for reading, but principally for use in public worship. The Psalms are also supposed to be sung. The Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and His disciples are thought to have sung the 'Hallel' Psalms (Psalms 113-118) after the institution of the Lord's Supper, followed by Psalms 145 and 136.

As a denomination it is imperative 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 would like to thank all who have contributed to the work of providing the necessary equipment and personnel for the *Worthy to be Praised* series of CDs. These have been received favourably by many within and outwith the denomination. The Committee thank Mrs Sohana McKenzie for her work in copying these CDs as and when required. Special thanks are of course due to Rev. & Mrs William Scott for their work in promoting the singing of the Metrical Psalms throughout our denomination.

Mr Scott has also recorded the first thirty of the metrical psalms in spoken form, but feels he is unable to finish the work. The Committee are looking for two or three others to take over this work and complete the one hundred and fifty Psalms in spoken form. The Committee are informed that the American brethren are also interested in undertaking a similar work of recording the Metrical Psalms in spoken form, which the Committee are very encouraged to hear. It is the remit of the Committee to endeavour to extend the use of the Psalter as far as we can. In this regard we have purchased one hundred new Staff Psalters – thirty of which have already been sold. The Committee would also like to encourage Psalmody Classes for adults and children, either within the bounds of their respective Presbyteries or within individual Congregations.

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

The Committee wish to express their thanks to Congregational Precentors for using their gifts in the service of the Lord throughout our Congregations, and would encourage others to exercise the gift God has given them.

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 and to the Convener;

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 communication between the Special Committee on Psalmody and the present publisher of the Sol-fa Psalmody in order to make future purchases;

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

5. The General Assembly encourage the Special Committee on Psalmody to pursue the completion of the Metrical Psalms in spoken form;

6. The General Assembly thank Congregational Precentors for leading the praise throughout the denomination and encourage others to "stir up the gift of God" which is in them (2 Tim. 1:6).

APPENDIX

2 took part in the 2024 Psalmody Test and gained awards as shown:

Portree
Grade 1: Benjamin Ross, Ruth Ross

IX

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOME & FOREIGN MISSIONS

1. Introduction

The thought of mission can enthuse and motivate, and yet also be overwhelming. The need is so great, both in Scotland and throughout the nations. Given our own smallness, it is tempting to conclude that our Church should pray that the Lord will increase our very limited resources and multiply our already overstretched workers – and until that happens, not venture out far. However, it is important to recognise that the command to take the Gospel out to all nations is not given to people who have the necessary resources. Rather, this command is given by the One who has all resources at His disposal, "… all things were created by him, and for him" (Colossians 1:16), and "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore …" (Matthew 28:18,19).

It is upon this basis and with this confidence that we venture out – praying that as we go, the Lord will provide for His cause in our own society, and wherever else we may be able to serve Him.

2. European Mission

Navarre & Aragon

Presently ministers in the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon serve in a tent-making capacity which places an obligation upon each to raise his own income through other employment. Understandably, this has placed a burden upon men which can distract from the ordinary demands of the ministry.

The Congregations of the Presbytery are not yet at a level of financial stability to provide men with a stipend. Therefore, the Presbytery have initiated a Ministry Support Fund, through which it has been possible to provide a payment to ministers whose income would otherwise fall below the level of the UK stipend. The Ministry Support Fund is provided with an income from the Congregations of the Presbytery, as well as individuals outwith the Presbytery who wish to encourage this work. Promotion of the Ministry Support Fund in the *Free Church Witness* magazine has resulted in occasional gifts from individuals and congregations. Encouragingly, there are also several regular monthly contributions. Funds from the UK are received by the General Treasurer's Department and transferred to the Presbytery in a single monthly payment.

To ensure that the total personal income is accounted for, the Ministry Support Fund pays one month in arrears. The fund has been operational since September 2023.

Should the number of ministers serving within the Presbytery increase, the demand upon this fund is expected to increase. To raise awareness within the wider Church about the work of the Presbytery, articles have and will continue to appear in the *Free Church Witness*. A series of articles will introduce the ministers and divinity students.

Presently, there are two French-speaking individuals studying for the Ministry, Mr Paul Pontacq and Mr Fabien Garat, together with Mr Joel Suarez, who is Spanish-speaking. Two of them have been granted recognition as Candidates for the Ministry of the FC(C). The other will hopefully have his application for recognition completed shortly after the Assembly. Encouragingly, there are other men with an interest in applying for recognition.

The Committee have been conscious of the importance of encouraging cohesion between the Presbytery and

other parts of the Church. Over the past few years, the Committee have provided resources to encourage the three Congregations of the Presbytery to arrange conferences with visiting preachers from the Scottish Church. The Committee have also sought to support the Presbytery by paying for Divinity Students to attend the School in Theology. Both ventures have proved successful. The School in Theology has provided an excellent opportunity for learning, as well as interaction with colleagues throughout the Church.

Rather than continuing to pay for the cost of local conferences, the Committee have agreed to widen the invitation to the School in Theology in 2024 to include the ministers of the Presbytery. It is hoped, however, that the annual conferences will continue and that the local Congregations will begin to provide the costs for them.

The Committee draw the attention of the wider Church to the need for prayer that the Lord would raise up those within the Church with the linguistic ability to work with brethren from other nations. Presently the need is for French, Spanish and Portuguese.

To encourage the learning of the Shorter Catechism in European languages, the Committee have communicated with the Welfare of Youth & Education Committee with the hope of developing a Catechism & Scripture memory award, similar to the scheme presently operated by them, except the answers must be given in either French, Spanish or Portuguese. It is hoped that this will be ready by 2025.

Rubí, Barcelona, Spain
The Congregation in Rubí is served by Rev. Jorge Ruiz and two elders, Mr Wilson Calle and Mr Ernest González. There is an outreach under the guidance of the Kirk Session in Valencia. Between both parts of the Congregation there are 38 communicant members, with an average morning attendance of 50.

Rev. William Macleod addressed a conference in Rubí in February, during which time Mr Pierre from Pau was a second speaker.

Pau, France
The Pau Congregation is served by Rev. Hugues Pierre and two elders, Mr Fabien Garat and Mr Paul Pontacq. On average 20 attend each service. Rev. William Macleod also addressed a conference in Pau in February. The Lord's Supper is held every third month, with preparatory services in the days preceding. The Congregation expect to invite a visiting preacher to assist at one of their communion seasons per year.

A monthly outreach has commenced in Anglet, where there is a small but encouraging attendance of around seven. Anglet is located on the Atlantic coast more than one hour from Pau.

Braga, Portugal
The Congregation of Braga has been strengthened by the ordination of a local elder, Mr Heraldo Almeida. Other elders are assessors appointed by the Presbytery. Around 24 people gather each Lord's Day to worship.

Rev. Kenneth Macdonald spoke at a conference in Braga in October 2023, and Rev. Graeme Craig is expected to attend in October 2024.

The Congregation of Braga have been encouraged through having Pulpit Supply provided by Rev. Camon Tomé, who is currently a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB). Mr Tomé has made an Application for Admission through the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon and it is anticipated that his Application will come before the General Assembly. The Congregation have also brought a Petition to be established as a fully-sanctioned charge with permission to call a minister.

3. International Mission

a. Zambia

The Committee are pleased to continue making a financial contribution to the work of Marjanne Hendriksen who promotes and develops Christian Education in Zambia, primarily though supporting local schools and teachers.

b. Sri Lanka — Reformed Protestant Mission

Following the disruption caused by the economic crisis and civil unrest reported to the General Assembly in 2023, Sri Lanka has returned to a measure of stability. Costs have not returned to previous levels, but at least the excessive inflationary increases have stopped. Sufficient fuel, at a price, is available to enable transportation, industry, and power generation.

Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan continues his tireless labours in advancing the Gospel in his native land. He is supported by Mr Beniel Jaylosanigtan, a local Deacon, and assessor elders from Scotland. The Reformed Protestant Mission, Sri Lanka, employs an evangelist, Piratheepan, and an administrator, Jayram.

Rev. Partheepan attended the General Assembly in 2023, when he was also able to make 12 deputation visits to various Congregations across the country. It is anticipated that Rev. Partheepan will visit the General Assembly in 2025, this being a significant anniversary in the history of the Church. Consideration is being given to arranging for Rev. Partheepan to visit Australia in 2026, there being a number of Congregations there, particularly within the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, who could be interested in the development of the work in Sri Lanka, and perhaps willing to support the mission financially.

There have been some changes in workers, with an administrator / evangelist who had been part of the mission team deciding to seek alternative employment. This was a positive decision, and the young man remains within the Congregation. A new worker has been appointed, Jayram, who with his wife and children have moved into available property next to the church in Vavuniya. This allows Jayram to also serve as Church Officer, which role also became vacant after the previous Church Officer relocated to seek employment.

In the adjustments relating to the new administrator, it was discovered that no General Assembly Finding can be identified that relates to the appointment of the original administrator, who had been in post since 2016. The present Committee can give no explanation for this omission, but ask that the General Assembly regularise this situation by approving the post.

The Congregations in Mullaitheevu and Vavuniya remain reasonably stable in terms of weekly attendance.

Karis Care is a project that has been developed by providing practical support for low income families with disabled children. Presently, ten families are assisted with personal sanitary products (something which is very expensive in Sri Lanka) and occasional food aid. There is no welfare provision in Sri Lanka and families often struggle with the ongoing costs of caring for a disabled relative. Families receiving support are in the community around the Church in Mullaitheevu and have been selected according to need; most of these are Hindu. Delivering the monthly aid parcels, which costs the mission £150 each month, allows an opportunity to speak with the family about the Gospel.

Ra-annan Farm is a 5-acre coconut plantation approximately 10 miles from the mission station in Mullaitheevu. A generous supporter of the mission has provided the necessary funds to purchase the farm. This is a new development which was not anticipated at the time of the last year's Assembly. The impetus for this development came from the donor, and the potential benefits were immediately apparent to the Deacons' Court, who approved the project.

The name Ra-annan relates to the Hebrew word for flourishing, as in Psalm 92:12, "The righteous shall

flourish like the palm tree..." It is hoped that under God's blessing, the 320 coconut palms on Ra-annan Farm will flourish with a harvest that will provide the mission with a source of income. There is a weekly offering gathered by the local Congregations, but given the relative poverty of the community, it is not a significant amount in terms of the mission budget. Therefore, the mission is almost entirely dependent upon financial support sent from abroad. Generating an income through Ra-annan Farm offers a first step toward financial sustainability, but perhaps more importantly, it will allow the people of Mullaitheevu the dignity of providing for mission work in their own community.

The coconut palms, upon maturity, will produce a regular monthly harvest. It is anticipated that this will begin in 24 months and then continue for up to 20 years. Thereafter, palms that are too high to harvest conveniently can be sold for timber and to make space for a new plantation. Meanwhile, other low-level crops are anticipated, with peanuts and bananas having been planted in recent months.

Necessary renovation of a partially-constructed house upon the farm has been undertaken with the generous provision made by two Congregations, one within our own Church and the other from Singapore. This property will provide accommodation for a farm supervisor who will be given an allotment space within the farm for personal produce. Income from other crops is expected to cover operating costs, and income from the coconuts will be used for the development of the mission.

The mission operates two preschools. These facilities provide preparatory learning for young children. One preschool, Knox Christian Preschool, located in Mullaitheevu, is funded by supporters from Singapore. The other, Selvanagar Preschool, located in a small village outside Vavuniya, and referred to as Miss Jansie's Preschool in *The Explorer* magazine, is funded through the Committee's budget. An appeal through *The Explorer* has provided funds to build a toilet, and with sufficient money left over for some other small developments at the school. It is hoped that involvement in this appeal will serve to interest readers of *The Explorer* in the work of mission.

Encouraging new opportunities have arisen in Hatton, hill country south of the present areas of operation. Having an ideal climate with regular rain, Hatton is renowned for the production of tea. This is a labour-intensive industry in which workers are not highly paid. Additional funds were requested from the Finance & Sustentation Committee to allow for an initial six-month period during which Rev. Partheepan will visit monthly to provide theological lectures and develop contacts.

The Kirk Session of the Reformed Protestant Mission will assess the effectiveness and suitability of continuing these lectures toward the end of this trial period, and make a recommendation to the Committee. In the event that a positive recommendation from the Kirk Session is supported by the Committee, funding for the remaining five months of 2024, at a cost of £125 each month, together with the provision of £1,620 for a further 12 months in 2025 as set out in the budget for 2025, is being requested of the General Assembly as per the deliverance.

The initial response has been encouraging, with local believers enthusiastic to gain a theological education.

Having outgrown the terms of the original trust registration, it has been resolved to renew the registration for the Mission. In this process there must be a distinction between the religious activity of the Mission, the educational provision made through the preschools, and the income generation of Ra-annan Farm. The Deacons' Court have agreed to register the Church in the name of Rev. Partheepan, Mr Beniel Jayolasingtan (Deacon), and Rev. James MacInnes. The preschools and the farm are to be registered in the names of Rev. Partheepan and Mr Jayolasingtan. It is expected that this process, which necessitates the assistance of a suitable lawyer, will be concluded during 2025.

The executive of the Committee met with representatives of the Finance & Sustentation Committee to discuss caring for the future personal needs of mission personnel. However, planned progress did not

develop due to the volume of work before the Committee.

Initial steps have been taken to redesign a suitable website, in Tamil and English, for the Mission, and it is hoped that this will be completed later in 2024.

The Committee are very thankful for the generous provision made by the Church for this work. The final accounts for 2023 show that overall expenditure for Sri Lanka was £23,103. However, because there was an income of £17,234 specifically for the work in Sri Lanka, the cost to the denomination was only £5,869.

Rev. James MacInnes visited the mission in November 2023, and it is anticipated that he will give a report to the Assembly.

4. North America

Smiths Falls, Canada

A Report on the future work in Smiths Falls is presently being developed by the Kirk Session for future presentation to the Committee, after which a Report shall be presented to the General Assembly.

Presbytery of the United States of America

The Committee's oversight of the Presbytery of the United States is more by way of giving support as required, and in recent years no assistance has been given. They are also a conduit for the Church to be provided with a report from the Presbytery and this is presented below

The Presbytery are thankful to God for its continuing connection with the wider denomination and continue to labour and pray that God would bless the testimony and heritage of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) throughout the United States. It was a particular privilege to have one of our own ministers elected to serve as Moderator of the General Assembly in 2023.

The last year in the Presbytery has been one of encouragement and growth. The preaching stations in Auburn-Opelika and Hunt County (Greenville), Texas were raised to fully-sanctioned Charges, and with the admission of Rev. Craig Scott and the ordination of Rev. Logan Shelton, these two Congregations were settled with their own ministers.

In addition, the Presbytery raised two new preaching stations, in Fredericksburg, Virginia and Nobleford, Alberta, Canada. Services have continued weekly in both locations, with Rev. Paul Backhurst serving as permanent pulpit supply in Nobleford. This group began with around thirty people and has grown to a regular attendance nearing one hundred. They have the use of a suitable building and are in negotiations with a Strict and Particular Baptist Church that no longer meets, to purchase the property.

The pulpit in Fredericksburg has been supplied by various ministers and students. Rev. Romesh Prakashpalan (RPCNA) has recently accepted an invitation to be become resident pulpit supply from April 2024, and is making Application for Admission to the FC(C) at this General Assembly. In March, the Presbytery also received a petition from the Fredericksburg preaching station requesting to be raised to a fully-sanctioned Charge. There are presently around 35-40 people attending worship services each week. The Presbytery also received a Petition from a Congregation in Dallas, Texas, desiring to be admitted to the FC(C) and have forwarded the Petition to the General Assembly.

The Presbytery currently have one official FC(C) Divinity Student under their care – Mr. Tyler Ray. Another student, Mr. Jacob Carne, who has studied at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and has completed two years of membership in our Greenville Congregation, has applied to be recognised as a Candidate for the Ministry. In addition, expressions of interest have been received from other ordained ministers who would like to make Application for Admission in the future, and the Presbytery have recently established a practice for standard thorough assessment of men who make such a request to them.

The Preaching Station in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, continues to encourage, and a number of visits have taken place throughout the last year with conferences and communion seasons being held. There are currently around forty people connected with this work, but they lack regular pulpit supply. The Presbytery invite the denomination to join them in prayer for a man to go to Nuevo Laredo full time to minister to the saints there. Any help of available men from Scotland to supply the pulpit for a period of weeks would be welcome, as local men are able and willing to provide live translation in the services.

The Presbytery held their annual Family Conference in Lexington, Kentucky, August 2023 and were delighted to be able to have Rev. David Blunt as a visiting speaker from Scotland who preached a series of messages on the source, fruit, and evidences of salvation. Other messages from ministers in the Presbytery included "Seeing the Unseen", "The Biblical Identification of The Antichrist", "Jesus & Our Sicknesses", and "The Life of John Eliot." All conference addresses are published on the US FCC Presbytery YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/@uspresbyteryfcc3817. The conference had its all-time highest attendance last year numbering three hundred and fifty. Registration for 2024 has opened and many people have signed up from as far away as the UK. Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan is scheduled to be the visiting speaker in August 2024.

Grange Press Trust, the Presbytery's publishing arm, continues to publish its quarterly periodical, *The Master's Trumpet*. The digital Psalm singing albums, and the *Shorter Catechism Deck*, for memorization, continue to sell well, with the latter being recently republished in improved quality. The *Greek New Testament Reader* based on the Received Text of Scripture has seen successful sales and all costs of publication have been recovered. The 1650 Psalter with explanatory notes by John Brown is also selling well. Other books in line to be published include John Brown of Wamphray on the *Nature of the Church*, Gisbertus Voetius' treatment on musical instruments in worship; and a work on *The Free Church's Heritage in relation to the Covenanters* by Gavin Beers. Further details about Grange Press are available on its website, www.grangepress.com.

With the significant growth of the Presbytery over the last number of years, preparations are being made toward establishing an indigenous denomination in the USA. There are presently seven Congregations within the borders of the United States with one preaching station seeking to be raised to a fully-sanctioned Charge and another Congregation seeking admission into the FC(C). We also have two preaching stations just over our Southern and Northern borders in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, and Nobleford, Canada respectively. The Presbytery are thinking ahead and aware that there is much groundwork required before an indigenous denomination could be established. The initial aim would be to have three Presbyteries with four Congregations in each, and a Synod formed from these three Presbyteries. We solicit the prayers and guidance of the Church in Scotland as we consider this possibility.

5. The Jews

As in previous years the Committee has allocated £1,000 to support the work of IMJP (International Mission to Jewish People) and would encourage local Congregations and individuals to support this ministry.

6. Mission Support

The Committee are aware of a mission support group in Stornoway that meets regularly to receive updates concerning the Church's mission work, to pray for it, and raise financial support. The Committee are thankful for all who express an interest in the work of mission and for the opportunity through the *Free Church Witness* magazine to provide information on ongoing developments.

7. Mission Bequests

Two generous bequests were received for Mission work. One for the sum of £10,000 was specifically for European Mission and allocated to the Ministry Support Fund of the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon. No specific instruction was given regarding the other bequest of £1,000 which was allocated to the Sri Lanka mission, to be divided between Karis Care and the new developments in Hatton.

8. Home Mission

An update on 'Home Mission' will be provided in a Supplementary Report distributed at the General Assembly.

A. JAMES MACINNES, *Convener*
KENNETH M. MACDONALD, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions, and thank the Committee;

2. The General Assembly note that Mr Donald John Morrison has served as Clerk to the Home & Foreign Missions Committee for many years. They note Mr Morrison's resignation as Clerk and thank him for his faithful service;

3. The General Assembly note that Rev. Stuart Farmes is expected to be appointed as Clerk to the Home & Foreign Missions Committee and commend him to the prayers of the Church in this new role;

4. The General Assembly note the encouraging development of the Ministry Support Fund of the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon, and commend its support to the wider Church;

5. The General Assembly note the opportunity given for fellowship and to develop fraternal bonds through inviting Ministers and Divinity Students from the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon to attend the annual School in Theology;

6. The General Assembly note the financial support that has been provided to facilitate local Congregational conferences within the bounds of the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon, and commend to the Congregations of the Presbytery the wisdom of continuing to invite speakers from other Presbyteries of the Church;

7. The General Assembly note the initiative to encourage learning of the Scriptures and Shorter Catechism in European languages and commend the development of a suitable scheme;

8. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the recent outreach services at Anglet, and commend Mr Pierre and the Congregation at Pau to the prayers of the Church;

9. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the establishment of regular services at Valencia, and commend Mr Ruiz and the Congregation at Rubí to the prayers of the Church;

10. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the ordination of an elder in Braga and commend the Congregation at Braga to the prayers of the Church;

11. The General Assembly commend the work of Miss Marjanne Hendriksen in developing Christian Education in Zambia. They affirm support for this vital work amongst the children in the Christian schools;

12. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the ongoing developments in the work in Sri Lanka under the care of Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan. They commend Mr Partheepan for his tireless service and commit both him and his wife Dinogee, together with their daughter Diyaththika, to the prayers of the Church;

13. The General Assembly note that an Administrator has been employed by the Reformed Protestant

Mission, Sri Lanka, since 2016, with funding provided through the Committee's budget, and hereby authorise the post of Administrator and the funding thereof;

14. The General Assembly commend Mr Beniel Jayolasingtan, Deacon, the Evangelist, Piratheepan, and the Administrator Jayram to the prayers of the Church;

15. The General Assembly note the development of Karis Care as a means of providing practical support to disadvantaged families with disabled children, and commend it to the generosity and prayers of the Church;

16. The General Assembly note the generous provision made for the purchase and development of Ra-annan Farm and commend this project to the prayers of the Church;

17. The General Assembly note the ongoing work in both Knox Christian Preschool and Selvanagar Preschool. They express thanks for the generous support from Singapore and readers of *The Explorer* magazine, and commend the preschool teachers and children to the prayers of the Church;

18. The General Assembly note that funding is in place for a six-month trial period, having commenced in February 2024, to allow for theological training in the Hatton district, south of the present areas of operation in Sri Lanka. Subject to a positive recommendation for the work being received by the Committee from the Kirk Session, the General Assembly sanction the work in Hatton hereafter, and authorise funding for the remaining five months of 2024 at an overall cost of £625;

19. The General Assembly note that steps are being taken to ensure that the different parts of Reformed Protestant Mission, Sri Lanka, are appropriately registered according to Sri Lanka law;

20. The General Assembly encourage the Home & Foreign Missions Committee to continue in consultation with the Finance & Sustentation Committee to ensure that, as far as possible, the funding arrangements for the Mission work in Sri Lanka, including caring for the future personal needs of Mission Personnel, may be managed at a local level with appropriate input from Assembly Committees;

21. The General Assembly acknowledge the generous support provided for Reformed Protestant Mission, Sri Lanka, and commend the ongoing work to the prayers and practical generosity of the Church;

22. The General Assembly express their thankfulness for the Congregation in Smiths Falls, and commend its ongoing needs to the prayers of the Church;

23. The General Assembly note the ordination and induction of Rev. Logan Shelton to Auburn-Opelika and commend Mr Shelton and the Congregation to the prayers of the Church;

24. The General Assembly note the induction of Rev. Craig Scott to Greenville, Texas, and commend Mr Scott and the Congregation to the prayers of the Church;

25. The General Assembly note the developments in the new preaching station in Nobelford, Alberta, and commend the work to the prayers of the Church;

26. The General Assembly note the developments in the new preaching station in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and commend the work to the prayers of the Church;

27. The General Assembly give thanks for the outreach in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, and commend the Congregation to the prayers of the Church;

28. The General Assembly note the development of the North American annual Family Conference and

commend this to the prayers of the Church;

29. The General Assembly note the ongoing work of Grange Press, encourage the Presbytery of the United States of America in developing this work, and commend it to the prayers of the Church;

30. The General Assembly note the forward thought given by the Presbytery of the United States of America toward the development of an indigenous Church and commend the Presbytery to the prayers of the Church;

31. The General Assembly note with appreciation the work undertaken by those who serve as assessor elders on the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon and various Kirk Sessions in the developing mission work;

32. The General Assembly commend the work of International Mission to Jewish People to the prayers and practical generosity of the Church;

33. The General Assembly commend the practice of organising, as practicable, mission support groups within local Congregations;

34. The General Assembly commend the practice of remembering the mission work of the Church through a bequest.

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT (A)

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOME & FOREIGN MISSIONS

Over the years some of the Church's Ministers have had the opportunity and privilege of ministering in Brazil. The Puritan Project does much good. It holds an annual conference, promotes experimental preaching, Psalm-singing in worship and Puritan books.

Brazil is a large country, similar in size to the United States. The language spoken is Portuguese and the population numbers 215 million. In the past, like the rest of South America, it was solidly Roman Catholic but that has changed over recent years with Protestant churches growing rapidly. Interestingly, one of those who began the spread of the Gospel in Brazil was a Scotsman, Dr Robert Kalley, whose work in Madeira led to the Free Church having a mission and a Minister on that island in the days after the Disruption. In God's providence it was persecution in Madeira that led to Dr Kalley and many converts heading to the Americas and ultimately to his work in Brazil.

Today the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB) has around 750,000 members, growing from 500,000 in the last twenty years. It is generally evangelical, with the two largest groups in it being the Charismatic wing and the Arminian fundamentalist wing. There is a small but growing theologically liberal party, and also what is mockingly called the Neo-Puritan group. This is composed of around 150 Ministers and Congregations and they delight in experimental preaching and are moving towards purity of worship, with Psalms only in their services. They are a minority who are somewhat persecuted by the majority. One minister who trained at Greenville Seminary in the USA on returning to Brazil was initially refused ordination as he was regarded as "too Confessional".

Members of the Committee were contacted recently by a Minister from this denomination. He and others had been in contact with a North American denomination with a view to leaving the IPB and joining them. The idea was that a presbytery could be formed in Brazil and that this would make it easier for those who desired a purer Church and freedom, for example, to fence the Lord's Table, to be able to do so. The Brazilians did not want to form a new Church but to be part of an existing Church and to benefit from the counsel, wisdom and advice of a Synod or Assembly, and of senior brethren. Eventually after six months of negotiations it was decided not to proceed, as this Church, though strong on some points, was rather weak on others. At this stage one of the Committee was contacted, wondering if there was a Church in Scotland whom they could join. It was suggested that the FC(C) could be that Church and with this suggestion they were delighted.

The Minister from Brazil who was leading the negotiations is well trained, with several degrees. He is well-read and has been involved in the translation of several Puritan and similar English authors into Portuguese. He was ordained in 2019 to a Church plant with around 25 members. His Congregation now has 135 members and adherents. They reckon that five to ten other Ministers and Congregations would be keen to join the Free Church (Continuing) at this stage, but he is hopeful that over a period of time many more would join. The idea is that as the group expanded they could form two presbyteries and at that stage they could become an independent sister Church.

This group are not looking for financial help as they have self-supporting Congregations. They wish wholeheartedly to subscribe the Westminster Confession of Faith and the other Westminster Standards. They believe the Pope to be the Antichrist and hold to a six-day creation. They believe that only "inspired materials of praise" should be sung in public worship. They still occasionally use a piano but are happy to get rid of this. They wish to be more Scriptural and faithful in the way the Lord's Supper is observed and apply proper Church discipline. They believe in keeping the commandments, including keeping the Sabbath

day holy. They have been given a copy of the Questions addressed to Ministers when they are ordained, and the Formula which has to be signed, and with these they are very happy.

The Committee have given serious consideration to their request. They have decided that it is best simply to notify this Assembly, but feel that it would be wise to give some further time to considering this development. It is expected that one or possibly two Applications for Admission from Ministers will be in the hands of the Clerk of the Committee by the time the Assembly meets, and that Petitions from their Congregations for Admission will follow in due course. The Committee believe that initially at most only two Applications and potential Petitions should be dealt with through the usual procedures, with them being processed by the Home & Missions Committee acting *in loco synodi* and the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee in time for them to be disposed of at the October meeting of the Commission of Assembly. Further Applications for Admission or Petitions from Congregations for Admission could then be disposed of by the 2025 Assembly. It should be noted that the Committee are of the view that there are sound providential reasons for dealing with the initial Applications at the October Commission, as opposed to waiting until the 2025 General Assembly, and that these should be given due weight by the Assembly.

Should Applications be forthcoming, and the Commission of Assembly receive and admit Ministers and Congregations, the Committee would then have to consider how a Presbytery might function in Brazil. In laying the groundwork for the initial development of the work there, the ultimate goal would be the setting up of a sister Church in Brazil as soon as it were practicable.

Given the need for all parties to be fully informed and to prevent misunderstandings and do due diligence, the Committee believe it is of the utmost importance that a visit be made to Brazil early in September by up to three Ministers to meet with the interested parties in Brazil. The Committee have informed the Finance & Sustentation Committee and requested that additional funding be allocated to the Home & Foreign Missions Committee budget to allow for this unexpected and unforeseen development. Although the cost may be around £3,000, the Committee believe that it is a small price to pay in the longer term for what could be a significant step in strengthening the work of the Kingdom of Christ in Brazil, and in aiding the cause of reformation and a return to sound Biblical doctrine and worship which is scriptural and God-honouring.

WILLIAM MACLEOD, *for the Committee*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Supplementary Report of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions and thank the Convener and the Clerk;

2. The General Assembly rejoice in the interest expressed by Ministers and Congregations in Brazil in joining the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing);

3. The General Assembly note that Applications for Admission from Ministers from Brazil are currently or may soon be in the hands of the Clerk of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee, and direct that at most only two Applications for Admission from Ministers in Brazil be processed for consideration at the October meeting of the Commission of Assembly;

4. The General Assembly note that Petitions for Admission from Brazilian Congregations are likely to be forthcoming and direct that at most only two such Petitions from Brazil, should they be received by the Principal Clerk, be considered at the October meeting of the Commission of Assembly;

5. The General Assembly hereby discharge the Commission of Assembly from taking up any further Applications for Admission or Petitions for Admission from Brazilian Congregations, but direct the Principal Clerk of Assembly to inform any such applicants that their Applications will be held over and disposed of, DV, at the General Assembly of 2025;

6. The General Assembly hereby authorise the Home & Foreign Missions Committee to send up to three Ministers to visit Ministers and Congregations in Brazil interested in joining the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), and direct the Finance & Sustentation Committee to adjust the Committee's current budget thereanent.

X.

REPORT

OF THE

TRAINING OF THE MINISTRY & ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE

1. Introduction

While the Committee are thankful that there are two UK-based students currently in training, they are conscious that they know of no new prospective Candidates for the Ministry coming forward. At present in Scotland the Church is facing a situation where eight eligible Congregations stand vacant with only 15 occupied charges. Even if those UK students in training and Ministers without Charge are taken into account this still leaves five vacancies. This lack of pastors should deeply concern all and should be a matter of urgent prayer that the Lord of the Harvest would thrust out labourers into his harvest.

2 Funding

Following a recent meeting of a member of another Committee with a member of a body which provides funding for those in training for the Ministry, the Committee were encouraged to make contact to ascertain if it might be possible to help secure additional funding for those training at the Seminary. These investigations are at an early stage and the Committee, while jealous of the Church's own independence and freedoms, will consider in due course whether this is an avenue worth exploring further.

3. Training for those without sufficient English

Over the last number of years, the Committee have been conscious of the difficulties encountered by those Divinity Students coming from French and Spanish-speaking backgrounds for whom English is not their first language. In addition, they are aware of potential Students from the Mission of the Free Presbytery of the USA in Mexico whose deficiency in English is such that training would need to be provided in Spanish. At their meeting in March they also had before them the draft of an Overture from the Free Presbytery of the USA thereanent.

The question of how to provide for such students is not an easy one to resolve. The Committee are aware of the private Spanish-speaking Seminary run by Rev. Jorge Ruiz Ortiz, *Minister at Rubí*, and have wondered over the last few years if there was a way of integrating his course with the Seminary so as to provide a means of helping Spanish-speaking Students. It may be that Rev. Hugues Pierre, *Minister at Pau*, could also assist with French-speaking students. Given the need to thoroughly investigate the matter, to liaise with the Seminary and any potential foreign language speaking tutors, and to develop competent legislation, if desired, the Committee have had no time to make progress. The Committee believe that it would be wrong to rush into hastily-devised legislation but hope that they may be in a position to bring mature proposals to the next Assembly.

4. Roll of Students

The complement of students in training is as follows (private students in italics):

Three Year Diploma Course		**Four Diploma Year Course**
First Year:		*Mr Thiago Gomes, Brazil*
Second Year:	Mr Alan Blaney, Northern Ireland	Mr Kevin Norman MacDonald, Scotland *Mr Fabien Garat, France*
Third Year:		Mr Joel Suarez, Spain
Fourth Year		Mr Tyler Ray, USA

Six Year Diploma Course – Part Time

First Year: *Mr Christian Lou, Spain*

Third year: Mr Paul Pontacq, France

It should be noted that Mr Christian Lou and Mr Fabien Garat are members of the Church who are in the process of making Application for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry.

5. Applications for Admission

During the year the Committee received three Applications for Admission, who will all have been interviewed by the time the Assembly meets. Subsequent to interview, one of the Applicants, sensing a call to a Congregation in another denomination, withdrew his Application. The other two Applications will be the subject of Supplementary Reports.

6. Additional Training for Ministers and Probationers Admitted to the Ministry

Last year the General Assembly instructed the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee to investigate the suitability of requiring additional training for such Ministers and Probationers as may make application for Admission to the Ministry of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) and report back to the next General Assembly. In considering this matter, the Committee noted that the question of whether any successful applicant should be prescribed additional training is ultimately a matter for the General Assembly granting admission. In such circumstances the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee can only make recommendations to the Assembly on the basis of their knowledge of the applicant. Hitherto, no specific guidelines have been given to the Committee and the question of the necessity of any guidance from the Assembly was considered.

It has been generally recognised that many Applicants have been required to undertake a course in Scottish Church History & Church Principles, to ensure that they are sufficiently familiar both with the history and background of the Church and those principles which are held dear by the Church and which each office bearer is pledged to assert, maintain and defend. The Committee is fully in agreement that this is in many cases required. They are also aware that there have been and continue to be occasions when tuition in other subjects should be required. Given the caveats above, the Committee believe that it would do no harm for the Assembly to state that ordinarily the Course in Scottish Church History & Church Principles should be undertaken. This would be a positive guide to the Committee leading them to advise future Assemblies to direct such training to be undertaken unless it was clear that it was unnecessary.

At the same time, it would also guide future Applicants to note that unless they are conversant with the subject, they are likely to be asked to undertake the Course and that it may therefore be expedient to begin studies as soon as possible. At present the Clerk of the Committee or the Principal of the Seminary tends to give such advice informally. Advice from the Assembly thereanent would help give a more solid basis to such advice. It is believed that the proposed Deliverance does not interfere with the current freedom the Committee has in advising the Assembly on the matter, but rather clarifies the situation for all parties concerned. Were reference to possible further training requirements included on the Application Form, this would alert the Applicant to this matter and help prevent delays in studies being undertaken. In addition, were Presbyteries to provide any observations regarding the usefulness to the Applicant of further training, this would be of help to the Committee in assessing the need for further training.

Ordinarily, it is only on the completion of any prescribed Course of study that the successful applicant becomes eligible to receive a Call. The Committee have no issue with this, but on considering the matter they noted two things:

Firstly, the Committee noted that it is unclear as to who decides that the Course of study has been completed

and who is responsible for informing the Principal Clerk of Assembly thereanent. The Committee do not believe that this should be the province of any one individual but that it should be the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee who determine such, much in the same way as they issue Completion Certificates to students before they can be taken on Trials for Licence.

The Committee are also conscious that the Church owes a duty of care to those who have been admitted and who are undergoing further training. Whilst those on the Roll of Resigned Ministers, Register of Ministers Without Charge Eligible for a Call, and Roll of Probationers are under the supervision of the Presbytery of the Bounds where they reside, it is believed that alongside this there should be more support provided by the Committee. At present the Principal of the Seminary informally provides some support, but the Committee are of the view that it should be made part of the Committee's remit. This would in no way remove any of the rights or responsibilities of Presbyteries, but would clarify and formalise the Committee's role. At present questions about the progress of such individuals in their studies are informal and the raising of the matter, if at all, depends on the degree of interest in the matter shown by the Convener.

7. Application Forms

With the increasing diversity amongst those making application for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry and application for Admission to the Ministry of the Church, the Committee have found that the Application Forms presently in use are inadequate. More detailed investigation is often required in regard to previous studies, especially in regard to those furth of Scotland. More enquiry also needs to be made into the suitability of any Applicant's spouse for supporting her husband in the work of the ministry, as failure here can bring a promising ministry to a halt. In addition, it is important for the Committee to be aware of any Applicants' English language skills as well as their native and second language abilities. Moreover, problems relating to physical and mental health which may hinder the ability to engage fully in ministry must also be considered. The Committee, aware of these things, intend to revise the forms in the coming year.

8. The Seminary

The Committee are thankful again for the calibre of the Seminary Lecturers and their willingness to adapt to the range of student abilities and backgrounds. In addition to helping co-ordinate the running of the Seminary, the Principal is now assisting the Lecturer in Church History & Church Principles with the teaching of the *Practice*. He is also assisting the Lecturer in Apologetics & Pastoral Theology with the Evangelism Module. The Committee are heartened to see the restoration of the Evangelism Module and note that the time spent with the Principal is also used to provide informal advice on pastoral ministry. Given today's challenges such help is a necessary part of training and its reintroduction is to be commended. The Seminary Report is appended below.

9. Constitution of the Seminary

The updating of the Constitution of the Seminary has been on the Committee's agenda for some time. Although a draft was produced, the Principal has only recently had ready access to some of the information required to check what has been drafted. It is hoped that a final draft of the Constitution will be set before the 2025 General Assembly.

DAVID S. FRASER, *Convener*
DAVID M. BLUNT, *Vice-convener*

SEMINARY REPORT

As Timothy was exhorted to pass on what he learned from Paul to "faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also", so the Seminary Lecturers seek to serve the Lord and his Church by faithfully passing on what they have learned from others, that the faith once delivered to the saints might be maintained and published to coming generations. The confusion in doctrine and practice which exists in the professing Church of the

21st Century highlights the ongoing need for an educated ministry which is faithful to the confessional and experimental heritage of the Church and to the Scriptures themselves. Conscious of the need for the Lord's upholding and protection from error, the Lecturers seek to remain faithful to the charge placed upon them by the Church and her Lord and covet the prayers of the Lord's people.

Over the 2023-2024 Session there have been eight students undertaking the Diploma Course, all with a view to the Ministry. Of these, five are now FC(C) Students, two from the UK, and one from the USA, France and Spain respectively. Two others are FC(C) members, one from France and one from Spain, who are studying whilst awaiting the opportunity to apply for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry, and finally one is a private student from Brazil. With eight students at various stages in their studies and 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.

For most of the Lecturers this last year has been fairly routine. The increasing use of technology has meant that the contact between Lecturer and students has become more regular, even although there are less 'Seminary Days' than before 2020. The amount of contact varies from Lecturer to Lecturer, and the Principal seeks to keep abreast of the situation in order that a balance is struck and communication is maintained throughout the Seminary.

This last year saw the reintroduction of the Evangelism Module. By arrangement with the Lecturer in Apologetics & Pastoral Theology, the Principal undertook to lead this Module. A week of outreach was conducted in August 2023. The Students were exposed to a variety of situations and found the work most helpful and stimulating while being confronted with new and challenging situations. Such was the impact of the week that the Students were more than happy to repeat the Module in April 2024. Whilst Students readily gain experience in preaching, there is a need to encourage them in learning and developing some of the skills required in leading outreach, and an annual Evangelism Module is an important way of obtaining them.

In addition to providing outreach experience, the week with the Principal also enabled him to provide some of the informal tutoring in Pastoral Theology and a 'Preaching Class' which was hitherto provided by Mr Woods. This proved useful to the students as well as helping to cement the bonds between them. Whilst the overseas students did not benefit from such sessions, the Principal hopes to discuss with their Ministers how such additional informal training and outreach opportunities can be provided for them.

The Seminary again record their appreciation to the Deacons' Court of the Inverness Congregation. In addition to making their facilities available for housing the Seminary Library, and for teaching and the holding of the annual opening and closing meetings, they have also provided accommodation and hospitality in their manse for students and lecturers. This has been greatly appreciated and has also eased the organising of Seminary Days.

Rev. John Keddie 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 on the *Certificate in Theological Studies Course*.

It is hoped that Volume VIII of the annual *Seminary Journal* will be available around the time of the Assembly. This remains a useful volume of papers and it is intended to make efforts to increase interest in the Journal from outwith the Church.

The Seminary are grateful to the Lord's people for remembering them in prayer.

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 and Clerk;

2. The General Assembly thank the Principal and Lecturers of the Seminary for their continued, innovative adaptation of their tuition to the needs of our students and pray for their continued grace and strength for their vital service;

3. The General Assembly thank the Exit Examiners appointed by the Committee for their continued effective and important service in ensuring the integrity of the teaching in the Seminary;

4. The General Assembly note with satisfaction the progress of all the students, local and overseas, thanking God for their dedicated pursuit of their studies;

5. The General Assembly encourage 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;

6. The General Assembly note that the Committee have 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, and encourage them to apply themselves thereanent with all speed and to bring matured proposals to the 2025 General Assembly;

7. The General Assembly note that two Applications for Admission are expected to come before them at this Assembly;

8. 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;

9. The General Assembly encourage the Committee in their revision of the Forms for Application for Admission and Application for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry;

10. The General Assembly encourage the Committee to complete the updating of the Constitution of the Seminary so that it may be brought before the 2025 General Assembly.

XI.

REPORT

OF THE

GENERAL TRUSTEES

1. The Remit of the General Trustees

The role of the General Trustees is to manage the Trust Estate of the denomination, i.e. the assets in funds and property which the Trustees hold on behalf of the Church. Their duties derive partly from civil law – including the Charities and Trustees Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 – and partly from relevant Assembly legislation. Their responsibilities to the Church are set out in Acts of the General Assembly (Act X 2015 and Act VIII 2016).

2. The recent work of the General Trustees

Statutory Responsibilities

The General Trustees have fulfilled their statutory responsibility in relation to signing off the Annual Denominational Accounts and OSCR Return. In addition, they have dealt with a number of other issues over the past year, as detailed below.

Transfer of Title Deeds

Transfer of Title to the local Trustees has been completed in respect of the Partick and Duthil-Dores manse properties.

Transfer of Title for the Bracadale & Duirinish manse currently remains in the hands of the locally appointed law agent.

Items of Historic Interest

A number of items of historic interest were gifted to the denomination by Rev. & Mrs W.B. Scott. These include four lithograph prints which are now displayed in the Partick Church building.

The General Trustees, on behalf of the denomination, thank Mr & Mrs Scott for this gesture.

Safeguarding & Archiving of Church Documents and Records

The General Trustees note the current situation whereby important Church documents and records are stored in different locations and recommend that these be collated in a central, secure location.

Trustees Indemnity Insurance

Following discussion with the Legal Advice & Property Committee, it was agreed to purchase suitable Trustee Indemnity Insurance for and on behalf of the General Trustees in the event of them becoming liable for any damages, costs and expenses arising from an unlawful act.

3. Risk Assessment

A denominational 'Risk Register' was completed, and this will be reviewed regularly, at least on an annual basis, in keeping with the Auditor's recommendation.

In 2023 the General Trustees, in conjunction with the General Treasurer, compiled two documents in relation to risk assessment: 'Risk Register – Master Checklist' and 'Risk Register – Guidelines & Recommendations'.

The above documents were circulated to the four Scottish Presbytery Clerks in October 2023, with advice that they be forwarded to local Deacons' Courts for their information and further action as appropriate. It is

recommended that at the annual examination of Congregational Records, evidence be sought that appropriate action has been taken by local trustees in relation to relevant requirements of the 'Risk Register'.

It is important that local office-bearers (who by reason of their capacity as such would usually be deemed to be local trustees) familiarise themselves with the 'Guidelines & Recommendations' document so that they can better understand their powers and duties, and fulfil their responsibilities in accordance with relevant Civil and Church legislation. The General Trustees also highlight the following documents which contain further information on this topic:

a. Guidance and Good Practice for Charity Trustees
https://www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/guidance-and-good-practice-for-charity-trustees/

b. The Charities and Trustees Investment (Scotland) Act 2005
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2005/10/contents

c. The Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2006/218/regulation/11/made

4. Congregational OSCR Registration

The Audit Management Report for 2023 stated that individual Congregations not being registered with OSCR (Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator) constituted a Priority 1 Risk; i.e. a fundamental absence or failure of key control procedures requiring immediate action. The auditors stated that there was a risk that such Congregations were not complying with relevant laws and regulations.

The General Trustees, having given careful consideration to this matter, recommend that Congregations should work towards individual OSCR registration. It is expected that support and advice may be available at a Presbytery level from Congregations that have already registered with OSCR. In November 2023 the General Treasurer circulated a generic version of the Annual Accounts' template which could be used as a basis for suitable accounts for each Congregation. It should be noted that, being generic, it seeks to cover all potential matters which our Congregations come across – and as such, those sections which are irrelevant to any particular local Congregation can just be deleted. It is hoped that this will help facilitate compliance with the necessity of fund accounting reporting as required by the OSCR process.

It should also be noted that neither the General Trustees nor the General Treasurer have the capacity to assist local Congregations across the denomination in compliance with these matters. The General Trustees remind local Congregations that a pro forma OSCR registration template is available.

The General Trustees appreciate that some Congregations will not have the necessary skill set locally to undertake the annual accounts, and it may be necessary to engage the services of an accountant. Where this is the case, the resultant exemption from water charges as a result of being OSCR registered may help offset any professional fees incurred.

5. Personnel

There are currently five denominational General Trustees; two of whom represent the consolidated Northern Presbytery and one representing each of the other three Scottish Presbyteries. The term of service of one of the Northern Presbytery Trustees will terminate in 2025 in accordance with the current age restrictions for General Trustees.

Act XV – Act anent General Trustees 2014 requires that the Board of General Trustees will normally consist of five members, three of whom will represent a quorum. The current number of Scottish Presbyteries means that it will no longer be possible to achieve this requirement.

The General Trustees propose that the current representation on the Board of General Trustees remains as at present until the rising of the General Assembly in 2025. Thereafter it is proposed that the four existing Presbytery representatives are supplemented by an additional General Trustee for a five year term, nominated on a rotational basis by each Presbytery.

6. Thanks

The General Trustees express their sincere thanks to Mr Murray Mackay, *General Treasurer*, for his professional advice and guidance over the past year. This has always been given willingly and in a timeous fashion, and is greatly appreciated. They also record thanks to Mr John N. Gillies for carrying out his duties as Clerk in such a conscientious manner.

ANDREW I. NAYLOR, *Chairman*
LINDSAY M. MACCALLUM, *Vice-chairman*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report and thank the General Trustees for their continuing work on behalf of the denomination;

2. The General Assembly note with gratitude the completion of transfer of Title for the Partick and Duthil -Dores manse properties and further note the position regarding the Bracadale & Duirinish manse;

3. The General Assembly express their thanks to Rev. & Mrs William B. Scott for donating items of historical interest to the denomination;

4. The General Assembly note the observations of the General Trustees with respect to the safeguarding and archiving of important denominational documents and records;

5. The General Assembly note that Trustees Indemnity Insurance cover has been put in place for the General Trustees;

6. The General Assembly note that a denominational 'Risk Register' is now held by the denomination and thank the General Trustees, and the General Treasurer, for their work in compiling this;

7. The General Assembly note that information and guidance relating to the 'Risk Register' has been circulated to Presbyteries and Deacons' Courts, and direct that local Trustees take cognisance of the requirements pertaining to their own Congregations;

8. The General Assembly urge local Trustees to familiarise themselves with their legal duties and responsibilities, and note the resources highlighted in the Report;

9. The General Assembly note that by failing to obtain OSCR registration, Congregations are at risk of not complying with relevant laws and regulations. They direct Congregations, in conjunction with local Presbyteries, to work towards achieving OSCR registration, including securing the necessary training in relation to the responsibilities of local Congregational Treasurers;

10. The General Assembly approve the Roll of the Board of Trustees until the rising of the 2025 General Assembly as follows:

Dr Andrew I. Naylor, Harris (Chairman); Mr Lindsay MacCallum, Kiltearn (Vice-chairman);
Mr Murdo MacDonald, Poolewe & Aultbea; Mr Thomas MacInnes, Portree;
Mr John N. Gillies, Partick;

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 3rd October 2023 and Tuesday 5th March 2024 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.

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.