

COUNCIL OF ASSEMBLY MAY 2019

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Approve for implementation the following elements of the Radical Action Plan as set out in the Report (*Section 3*):
 - a) the establishment of a Growth Fund of £20-£25m for the period 2020-2026 (*Section 3.4.1*);
 - b) the establishment of a total of around 12 regional Presbytery structures by the General Assembly of 2024 (*Section 3.4.2*);
 - c) the preparation of draft legislation for the General Assembly of 2020 to enable the establishment of networks, hubs and other additional forms of local church (*Section 3.4.3*);
 - d) a review of the size and responsibilities of Kirk Sessions (*Section 3.4.4*);
 - e) co-operation with other denominations in the provision of territorial ministry in accordance with section 3 of Act V, 2010 (*Section 3.4.5*);
 - f) the creation of a single, easy and accessible platform of faith and nurture resources (*Section 3.4.6*);
 - g) a flexible education, training and support programme for every person in the Church including material on leadership (*Section 3.4.7*);
 - h) initiatives to help the Church to engage those aged 40 and under (*Section 3.4.8*);
 - i) a reconfiguration of Ministries and Mission contributions (*Section 3.4.9*);
 - j) the exploration of changes to the current vacancy allowance, including the discontinuing of the current system of vacancy allowance for congregations and making this available to Presbytery along with the Presbytery Discretionary Allowance (*Section 3.4.10*);
 - k) the development of new ways to support congregations in long-term vacancies (*Section 3.4.10*);
 - l) the support of the General Trustees' initiative entitled 'Well-equipped Spaces in the Right Places' (*Section 3.4.11*);
 - m) the exploration of whether proceeds from the sale of redundant buildings following adjustment processes might in certain circumstances be applied for the benefit of a congregation other than the united or linked congregation concerned (*Section 3.4.12*);
 - n) the provision of support at a regional/local level to congregations including (*Section 3.4.13*):
 - i. buildings expertise
 - ii. safeguarding
 - iii. financial accounting
 - iv. local staff employment
 - v. developing effective partnerships
 - o) developing the most appropriate relationship between CrossReach and the broader work of the Unincorporated Councils and Committees (UCC) and the local church to enable this work to be sustainable and to flourish (*Section 3.4.14*); and
 - p) a refocus of the national office staff team so that there is a focus on equipping and

supporting local churches, including accessing the Growth Fund. (Section 3.4.15)

3. Instruct the Council to draw together a cross-departmental team to ensure that the Action Plan is implemented. (Section 3.4.16)
4. Instruct the Council to report annually to the General Assembly on the delivery of the Action Plan. (Section 3)
5. Encourage all General Assembly Councils and Committees to focus their activities from June–December 2019 on an effective implementation of the Action Plan. (Section 3.4.17)
6. Encourage a ‘season of prayer and preparation’ across the Church from September – December 2019. (Section 3.4.17)

Report

3. RADICAL ACTION PLAN

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 “Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed him” (Mark 1:17-18). From that moment at the edge of a Galilean lake, this call has encapsulated what Christian discipleship means: it is about following Jesus.

3.1.2 Following Jesus takes us in two directions at the same time. When asked what the greatest commandment was, “Jesus said, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39). These two commandments cannot be separated from one another. In the life of Jesus, we see him living out his love and passion for God at the same time as he lives out his love and passion for God’s world.

3.1.3 The call of the Church is to encourage people to follow Jesus: to discover for themselves the life-transforming power of the Gospel; to know what it is to be loved by and to love God; and to share that love with all those who we meet and with all of creation. The 2001 Report of the Special Commission on the primary purposes of the Church (*A Church without Walls*, stated¹):

‘Follow me.’ These two words of Jesus Christ offer us the purpose, shape and process of continuous reform of the Church at the beginning of a new Millennium and at any other time. The Commission has joked about making these two words the report to the General Assembly. The Church of Jesus Christ is about nothing more and

¹ [A Church without Walls](#) (General Assembly 2001, Report of the Special Commission anent Review and Reform)

nothing less than this. Like a computer icon, the words 'Follow me' carry within them the complex and comprehensive process of being God's people in God's world.

3.1.4 *A Church without Walls* influenced a generation of congregations across Scotland and indeed helped to pioneer reform in other parts of the world. However, a number of the recommendations made within *A Church without Walls* for structural change and realignment of resources at a national level were never fully implemented. The Radical Action Plan should be seen, in part, as an attempt to correct that imbalance.

3.1.5 Much has changed in the almost 20 years since *A Church without Walls* was written. Church life in Scotland, at least amongst most mainstream historical denominations, has become more precarious and fragile. There is increasing recognition that we simply cannot continue the way that we have been. Radical change is essential. However, this change must not be seen, first and foremost, as plotting a survival route for the Church but must focus instead on how we can, with others, share the Good News of Jesus Christ much more effectively.

3.1.6 One of the ways in which things have changed markedly over the last two decades is that the centre of the Church as a movement has shifted from the largely rich north to the global south.² When we talk of the Church getting smaller, it is important to remember that we are talking about what is happening in our part of the world. This means that our links to our sisters and brothers in faith in other parts of the world, and to the poorest and most marginalised, will be critical to our future. The World Mission Council *Special Report on*

² Of course, the reality is more complicated, particularly in the light of global flows of population. There are increasing levels of poverty in the global north and significant levels of affluence in the global south.

*Lessons for Scotland from Christian Faith in Africa*³, General Assembly 2018, provides some of that essential learning.

3.1.7 Concern about the future of the Church of Scotland, and of the church in Scotland, should not blind us to the amazing and faithful things that occur in every part of the land and in those other places across the UK and across the world. However, we need to be honest and say that too much of that wonderful work is happening despite our systems and structures rather than because of them. The Radical Action Plan hopes to help to reverse that reality.

3.1.8 An effective implementation of the changes which are needed will require courage, collaboration and generosity. It will involve an effective sharing of our resources and an ongoing commitment to stewardship. We need to do better both with what we have and to increase what is available by encouraging one another to give all that we can for the building up of the Kingdom of God. We believe in a God of abundance.

3.2 Background

3.2.1 The 2018 General Assembly was clear that radical change is necessary and instructed the Council of Assembly to return to the 2019 Assembly with a three-year Radical Action Plan. In October 2018, a Commission of Assembly was called in order to request a Special Commission to review the charitable governance structures of the Church. As a result this Action Plan has been developed in a manner that ensures that the Special Commission has full jurisdiction over the governance and structural elements of the Church. What follows is a Plan that has as its central theme the purpose of releasing resources to, and supporting, the local church, with the tasks presented below considered to be of the highest priority for action at this time. This is not a Strategic Plan; that may come out of the work of the Action Plan and will be the responsibility of any new governance structure

³ [*Special Report on Lessons for Scotland from Christian Faith in Africa*](#), General Assembly 2018

approved by the 2019 General Assembly. It is rather a series of activities which are designed to enable the Church of Scotland to create a more stable platform over the next three years. Due to the nature of the tasks identified, it is acknowledged that some of these activities will take longer than three years to implement fully. As the Action Plan goes to print, the work of the Special Commission continues. Therefore the timescales presented within this report are proposals, which could be subject to change dependent upon the conclusions reached by the Special Commission.

3.2.2 The Action Plan is designed to: liberate the local church to be as effective as possible; build the capacity of the church at a regional level to support local churches; and to streamline the national structures of the church, fulfilling tasks and functions which cannot sensibly and reasonably be undertaken locally or regionally.

3.2.3 In the development of the Action Plan, the Council has sought to be driven by a set of core values. These are: boldness, compassion, faithfulness, forgiveness, humility and kindness. The Council hopes these are evident both in the proposals which are being brought to the General Assembly for their consideration and decision and also in the spirit in which the Plan has been put together. The Plan is not perfect and, indeed, cannot be perfect: perfection belongs to God alone. It is, however, an attempt to address many of the blocks which have prevented, or held back, transformational change within the Church.

3.2.4 Consideration has also been given to the fact that we are dealing with an existing system and that it is imperative that the Action Plan does not cause more harm than good in terms of outcomes. In order to take the Plan forward there needs to be effective co-ordination between the Councils, Departments and Committees of the Church where many of these activities currently sit. Within the remit of work conducted at a national level, if an area or activity of a Council's or Department's work does not appear explicitly within this Plan, that does not mean that it is

not considered of importance or value to the Church. Individual meetings with representatives from Councils, Departments and Committees have helped to refine and inform the Plan.

3.2.5 Drafts of the Action Plan have been shared with the Special Commission throughout its development process and final drafting to seek to ensure that the Radical Action Plan is consistent with the recommendations of the Special Commission. This has been done in an effort to ensure that the General Assembly is able to make choices which allow us to move forward together.

3.2.6 As well as expressing its appreciation to the members of the Special Commission, the Council would also wish to put on record its thanks to all those who have worked together in the drafting and re-drafting of the Plan over the last year. The work did not get off to a good start. The first Presbytery conference in October was a difficult and painful experience. Since that moment, however, people have come together to work for change and the second Presbytery conference (January 2019) had a markedly different atmosphere and tone. Particular thanks should go to the Reference Group, bringing together people from across presbyteries, whose valuable work and insight has helped to shape what is now presented to the General Assembly.

3.2.7 The Council is also grateful for the many helpful and constructive comments about the Action Plan which it has received over the past year and, in particular, would wish to thank people for the prayers and spirit of generosity expressed by many which have carried us through some challenging times. What is offered now, is offered in a spirit of humility and collaboration.

3.2.8 Whilst plans (and strategies) are important to set the tone, to give direction and to remove key impediments to effective mission, any real change must be rooted in prayer and in listening, humbly, to the Spirit of God. It is about responding to the call to follow

Jesus, to go where Jesus would go and to encourage

others to do the same.

3.3 Tasks

	Task
Deliverance 2. a) and Section 3.4.1	To establish a Growth Fund of £20-£25m for a 7-year period to enable the local church to support new ways of doing church, deepening faith, sharing faith and engaging in the transformation of our communities.
Deliverance 2. b) and Section 3.4.2	To introduce new regional Presbytery structures which provide leadership and focus alongside practical support for local congregations, freeing them for mission and ministry.
Deliverance 2. c) and Section 3.4.3	To deliver new forms of church structures through new ways of doing church, including Presbytery Mission Initiatives through to Hub-Style ministries.
Deliverance 2. d) and Section 3.4.4	To review the size and responsibilities of Kirk Sessions with the aim of optimising them to a proportionate and effective number.
Deliverance 2. e) and Section 3.4.5	To work in collaboration with others, including other churches and organisations which share our values, to ensure that we work ecumenically in meaningful ways.
Deliverance 2. f) and Section 3.4.6	To create a single, easy and accessible platform of faith and nurture resources, beginning by drawing together what already exists before creating any new materials.
Deliverance 2. g) and Section 3.4.7	To co-ordinate flexible education, training and support programmes for all, covering the recognised ministries (Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Ordained Local Ministers, Auxiliary Ministers, Deacons and Readers), elders, volunteers, interested attenders etc. This will include work around leadership within the Church.
Deliverance 2. h) and Section 3.4.8	To develop a deliberate focus on engaging with/supporting those aged 40 and under.
Deliverance 2. i) and Section 3.4.9	To reconfigure Ministries and Mission contributions.

	Task
Deliverance 2. j) and k) and Section 3.4.10	To introduce changes to the current vacancy allowance, including: Discontinuing current system of vacancy allowance and adding aggregate value of vacancy allowance to Presbytery Discretionary Allowance (known as the '5%'). Re-imagining how vacancies are supported if a vacancy becomes more of the norm for a large percentage of congregations.
Deliverance 2. l) and Section 3.4.11	To support the General Trustees' initiative ' <i>Well-equipped Spaces in the Right Places</i> '.
Deliverance 2. m) and Section 3.4.12	To consider whether sale proceeds of redundant buildings arising out of unions or linkages to congregations might in certain circumstances be applied for the benefit of a congregation other than the united or linked congregation concerned.
Deliverance 2. n) and Section 3.4.13	To offer support at a regional/local level to congregations including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - buildings expertise - safeguarding - financial accounting - local staff employment - developing effective partnerships
Deliverance 2. o) and Section 3.4.14	To establish the most appropriate relationship which could exist between CrossReach and the broader work of the Unincorporated Councils and Committees (UCC) and the local church to enable this work to be sustainable and to flourish.
Deliverance 2. p) and Section 3.4.15	To refocus the national staff team to focus on equipping and supporting local churches, including accessing the Growth Fund.
Deliverance 3. and Section 3.4.16	To draw together a cross-departmental team to ensure that i.) a research and development function exists for the Church of Scotland and ii.) the Action Plan which stems from the General Assembly is delivered.

	Task
Deliverance 5. and 6. and Section 3.4.17	To encourage all national Councils and Committees to focus their activities from June – December 2019 on an effective implementation of the Action Plan; and To encourage a ‘season of prayer and preparation’ across the Church from September – December 2019.

3.4 Expanded explanation of tasks

3.4.1 2. a) To establish a Growth Fund of £20-£25m for a 7-year period to enable the local church to support new ways of doing church, deepening faith, sharing faith and engaging in the transformation of our communities.

3.4.1.1 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.1.1.1 The focus of the Action Plan is about supporting the whole Church, especially at a local level, to do the new things which we believe God is calling us to. It has to be about supporting, encouraging and learning from what is working (and what is not). A *Church without Walls* notes:

‘The Church ‘works’ where people join together, building relationships with each other and the community in which they belong. It is through these relationships that the Gospel is spread. In each place the Church is different. There is no one model that fits all. We rejoice in the diversity within Church. We celebrate and encourage it. This allows Church to be correctly resourced locally rather than ‘top down’ projects being implemented.’

3.4.1.1.2 A *Church without Walls* envisaged the establishment of a £7.5million *Community and Parish Development Fund* over a five-year period from 2002 to help to support the local church in this endeavour. The *Parish Development Fund* and its successor, the *Go For It Fund*, have both made a significant and positive contribution to the life of many churches and communities.

3.4.1.1.3 The Growth Fund is intended, in the spirit of A *Church without Walls*, as well as learning from the

Church of Scotland’s own experience and those of our ecumenical partners (such as the Church of England, the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA), and others), to continue and expand this process, deliberately using the Church’s limited reserves to encourage greater faith-sharing, innovation and creativity at local and regional levels. Jesus says: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:34). There are those who will caution that we need to keep hold of these reserves for a rainy day. The reality is, as many would point out, the roof is leaking and the rain has been coming in for some time in the life of the Church of Scotland.

3.4.1.2 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

3.4.1.2.1 Between May 2012 and February 2019, the *Go For It* Fund has supported 214 congregations in their mission, representing 16% of congregations. The projects funded are engaging churches in addressing the needs of their local communities and/or encouraging new ways of being church, with many examples of nurturing faith among young people, children and families. Through the duration of the Growth Fund, it would be planned to at least double the number of congregations being supported. This will help to support the reinvigoration of church life in every part of Scotland (and beyond), leading to greater community impact and church growth.

3.4.1.2.2 The number of applications in the specific sphere of Church planting has, however, been relatively few. The new Growth Fund will address this, allocating funds each year for initiatives to develop mission through new ecclesial communities and church planting. The Church needs to recognise that as many

congregations are likely to become smaller and unsustainable in future years, we need to be committed to establishing new church communities, both geographical and around communities of interest, to take their place. Whilst match-funding will be a part of the overall criteria of the Growth Fund, in line with other similar funds, this will not be a pre-requisite in order to attract applications with proposals focused on evangelism and church growth which find it harder to attract external sources of funding.

3.4.1.2.3 The Church is facing an enormous challenge around engaging and attracting children, young people and those under 40. This must be addressed. It is proposed that the Growth Fund would have a specific commitment to this area, particularly during its initial three years.

3.4.1.2.4 The work that the Church does locally in communities across Scotland and other parts of the UK alongside its engagement with partners across the World Church, makes a huge difference to the lives of hundreds of thousands of people every year. Through its multiple activities, the Church is addressing loneliness, poverty, climate change and injustice in a myriad of ways. The Growth Fund will support and encourage local congregations in this vital and life-changing work. This work not only makes a difference locally and regionally. It also helps to ensure that the Church's voice, increasingly speaking alongside those who suffer injustice, has an impact at a national level.

3.4.1.2.5 In recent years, the Church has consistently recognised the need to encourage people to develop and exercise their ministries, including consideration of the recognised Ministries of the Church. The Growth Fund should include a commitment to support the nurture and development of these ministries. Work will continue in support of the Decade for Ministry.

3.4.1.3 How we are going to deliver this

3.4.1.3.1 The Growth Fund is planned to deliver over a seven-year period, making use of reserves. In the current economic environment, the Fund should be

reviewed after three years. Work is being instigated, in conjunction with the Special Commission, in ensuring that the following proposals are affordable. In writing this Action Plan there is acute awareness of the Church's current financial picture and therefore due caution needs to be applied in terms of allocation of money. The Church cannot continue to operate with ongoing operational deficits and the viability of the Growth Fund will have to be predicated on the delivery of balanced operational budgets. Further, the Fund is entirely dependent on applications being of sufficient quality to make a recognisable difference. Therefore, currently it is envisaged that during the first three-year period, a grant allocation of up to £8million should be distributed, with the impact and sustainability of the Growth Fund evaluated at that stage. Funding over the 7-year lifecycle of the Growth Fund will be tapered, maximising grant allocation from the middle of the Fund's life (e.g. £1.5m in 2020; £2.5m in 2021; £4m in 2022; £5m in 2023; £4.5m in 2024 and 2025; £3m in 2026).

3.4.1.3.2 Funding will be allocated around a set of national criteria focused on growth, impact and sustainability with clearly agreed targets, learning closely from the Church of England's Strategic Development Funding. Regulations for the Fund will be published in the Supplementary Report alongside initial criteria.

3.4.1.3.3 Applications can come primarily from individual congregations, groups of churches and from presbyteries. Collaboration with other partners, including specifically ecumenical co-operation, will be encouraged. As regional structures are established, and capacity is increased, co-ordination and facilitation will be devolved. Presbyteries will be able, if they so wish, to utilise all (or a proportion) of the Presbytery Discretionary Allowance (currently 5%) to augment the impact of the Fund within their bounds.

3.4.1.3.4 Alongside national criteria, specific (and time-limited) funding programmes will be established within the overall Growth Fund to encourage and ring fence

work in areas which have been agreed as particularly significant. In the first three years, the Fund will aim to allocate 30% of the available funding to church-planting initiatives and 30% towards projects working with children, young people and families. The Growth Fund will also aim to ensure that there are successful applications from all areas where Church of Scotland congregations are active (throughout Scotland, the Presbytery of England and the Presbytery of International Charges).

3.4.1.3.5 Funding will be primarily revenue focused, with applicants able to apply for up to five years' funding. It is envisaged that capital support will be available in a number of cases as the work of the General Trustees progresses around developing 'well-equipped spaces in the right places' and how the sale of redundant buildings might best support the wider Church.

3.4.1.3.6 A national learning and training programme to assist potential applicants and projects in receipt of funding will be provided.

3.4.1.3.7 Staff currently employed nationally and regionally will be trained to support applicants. This will ensure that the Growth Fund does not result in increased national administration costs, and many church employed staff with a specific remit for supporting the Church's work at local and regional levels (including staff from all the current Councils as well as Stewardship and Finance and the General Trustees) will be better able to support innovative work.

3.4.1.3.8 In order to maximise the impact of the Growth Fund, it is essential that all initiatives build in a robust monitoring and evaluation plan which can measure progress against agreed goals and learn to develop and share its experiences, positive and negative, with others. The Fund will encourage the sharing of resources and expertise. For Presbytery-level projects, it is intended to develop a peer review programme where a team from another Presbytery would help to review and support the work being done, thereby

encouraging high quality sharing of experience and information.

3.4.1.4 Timescale

3.4.1.4.1 If plans for the Growth Fund are approved, a small team from across the Church will be established to lead on this work. Names will be brought by the Nominations Committee to a subsequent session of the 2019 General Assembly.

3.4.2 2. b) To introduce new regional Presbytery structures which provide leadership and focus alongside practical support for local congregations, freeing them for mission and ministry.

3.4.2.1 Background

3.4.2.1.1 Presbytery is the gathered life of the Church of Scotland in a particular area. It brings together, in a mutually accountable and supportive relationship, the recognised ministries and elders representing local Christian communities in parish, education, chaplaincy and national church administration. In Presbytery the leaders of the local church come together to:

- discern the Holy Spirit's leading of the Church in their context;
- respond appropriately to Christ's call to follow;
- oversee the work of the local church; and
- be responsible for discipline and good order.

3.4.2.2 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.2.2.1 Over the last number of years there have been various debates around the need for Presbytery Reform, without any clear consensus as to the most effective way to bring about any such reform. This is unsurprising given that presbyteries serve very different geographical, social and cultural constituencies: what might work in an island Presbytery would be unlikely to meet the requirements of a largely urban, central-belt constituency and vice-versa. We need to find ways to support this diversity.

3.4.2.2.2 This must not just be about creating bigger versions of what we already have. The emphasis needs

to be on enabling the ability to make good decisions driven by a clear sense of purpose and calling. In these new presbyteries there should be willing engagement by Presbyters who see in such participation a worthwhile and fulfilling task closely related to their vocation as minister, elder or deacon. Such presbyteries would plan for growth. Despite the challenges which will remain to be addressed, there is increasing consensus that:

- a) At a time of declining numbers and alternative ways of working, the current system often makes heavy use of people's time, energy, and finance as it requires 45 Moderators, Clerks, various Conveners, and Committees;
- b) Presbyteries which are small in terms of numbers can suffer from:
 - (i) a restricted range of talents and skills with people trying to cover a number of roles;
 - (ii) a lack of perspective, at times, with individuals being too close to each other;
 - (iii) due to matters occurring infrequently, a body of knowledge and experience in how to deal with things is not built up;
 - (iv) as the Discretionary Allowance (currently 5% of M&M) is a very small amount of money, there is no chance to have staff or other resources to underpin the life of the local church;
 - (v) few Presbytery Plan posts mean that opportunity for experiment or specialisation can be very restricted; and
- c) Presbyteries which are large in terms of numbers always need to be alert to:
 - (i) a lack of cohesive relationships and a common sense of identity;
 - (ii) a lack of co-ordination of resources to operate effectively and efficiently; and
 - (iii) a frustration that decisions taken nationally would be more effectively agreed at a regional level.

3.4.2.2.3 In order to deliver on aspects of the Action Plan, including proposals in the General Trustees' Report, the Growth Fund and other areas of work being presented to the General Assembly, it is recognised that larger and more effective administrative units are going to be required. It is not going to be possible to have a one-size fits all solution in terms of how these new presbyteries are formed. We need a way in which the best of what we currently have is maintained whilst ensuring we move to different structures than currently exist.

3.4.2.3 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

3.4.2.3.1 Through reducing the number of presbyteries (or creating groupings of presbyteries) and creating larger entities, these enlarged bodies would:

- become the natural place to which resources, funding, and decision-making are devolved;
- be able to employ and deploy staff to meet regionally identified needs and opportunities (e.g. around buildings, finance, church planting, partnership and mission);
- have the capacity to retain and make better use of a higher proportion of the funds raised in the area for the mission of the local church;
- have the increased capacity to support and encourage those who are in recognised ministries or are office-bearers, engendering resilience and the spirit to develop church life;
- free up time and energy for local mission including by reducing the administrative and legislative burden;
- have increased capacity to speak with a collective voice to other regional centres of influence in civic life;
- have the capacity to take risks and learn from mistakes; and

- need less input from the national offices, allowing a reduction in central spend, enabling increased devolution of funding and resources.

3.4.2.4 How we are going to deliver this

3.4.2.4.1 Past experience suggests that change in this area, although vital, will take time. As such, the Action Plan proposes an incremental approach, building upon the work which is already underway;

- Through facilitating and encouraging local initiatives within a number of presbyteries to join together. A target of three new such groupings is planned by summer 2020.
- By incentivising presbyteries to work together by offering them opportunities to have access to devolved resources when they have reached the appropriate scale and capacity.
- By the extension of Presbytery Review in which the current structures are encouraged to ask searching questions about their impact and future sustainability. Proposed legislation will be brought to the 2020 General Assembly providing a mechanism of superintending Presbytery life.
- Through establishing at the 2020 General Assembly a task-specific group with the remit of achieving the union (which failing, the linking) of presbyteries with a view to having around 12 “units” (either united presbyteries or presbyteries closely linked by areas of co-operation) by 2024.

3.4.2.5 Timescale

3.4.2.5.1 Although 2025 will be the deadline for the full implementation of a new regional structure to be in place, it is planned that the majority will have moved to this structure well in advance of that date. People have consistently spoken of the need for presbytery reform as foundational to many of the other changes that are required to ensure that the Church of Scotland is operating as effectively and efficiently as possible.

3.4.3 2. c) To deliver new forms of church structures through new ways of doing church, including Presbytery Mission Initiatives through to Hub-Style ministries.

3.4.3.1 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.3.1.1 In recent years there has been a growing acceptance across several denominations that traditional church life – sometimes known as inherited Church – needs to co-exist alongside new and different patterns of ministry, as a matter of necessity. Work is ongoing through the Joint Emerging Church Group⁴ on Pioneer Ministries⁵ and within the Ministries Council on Hub-Style Ministries⁶. All of this work needs to be brought together in a manner which enables congregations to explore and expand their horizons in a mission-based context.

3.4.3.1.2 Alongside this challenge of how new expressions of church can be enabled, there is the challenge of how churches with small memberships can be sustained, supported and released more effectively for mission. Presbytery Planning has determined, for the most part, that a presence is essential in many of these smaller communities. In addition to this, the General Trustees are working on a land and property plan which is concerned with ensuring that the Church’s physical assets are located in appropriate geographical settings.

3.4.3.1.3 In contexts where population levels and church memberships are low, sustaining a worshipping and witnessing congregation can be difficult if not impossible, because the Church’s expected structures require church buildings, a Kirk Session with a Moderator, a Session Clerk, a Treasurer, a Roll Keeper,

⁴ [Joint Emerging Church Group](#)

⁵ Ministries Council Report, [General Assembly 2015](#) (Sections 2.5 and 2.6)

⁶ Ministries Council Report, [General Assembly 2016](#) (Section 1.3)

a Safeguarding Co-ordinator and a Property Convener, at the very least. This can lead to parish churches being linked, united or closed with the loss of regular worship in the community. Such an approach is predicated on the view that a local congregation requires all these roles in order to witness and worship within a particular community, something which is clearly not the case. As is frequently highlighted, a different model is required, one which would offer a lighter burden than is currently possible under Guardianship. Many examples exist in other parts of the world, particularly in those parts of the world where the Church is expanding, without many of the elements that we often regard as essential.

3.4.3.2 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

3.4.3.2.1 Presbytery would have the possibility of converting an existing parish church into a Mission Initiative. This would mean that there could be many more worshipping communities in areas where the Church of Scotland is operating that can continue than would otherwise have been the case. This would be good for the life of the Church, the local worshipping community, and the wider community in these places. The intention would be to continue regular worship, at an agreed frequency, appropriate to the setting, along with some “ownership” of church life and pastoral care. This is not based on the assumption that there will be a church building, but neither is that ruled out. Once again, the model must be shaped by the local context.

3.4.3.3 How we are going to deliver this

3.4.3.3.1 Drawing on past practice and adapting current legislation, there is a legislative framework which would allow numerically small churches to exist and to exercise the mission of the church, while the requirements of Church and civil law are administered elsewhere, by a supervising or sponsoring congregation. Within a suitably resourced Presbytery, it could be possible that such initiatives would be resourced by the Presbytery.

3.4.3.3.2 This new structure, supporting both new initiatives and maintaining the worshipping and

witnessing life of small local congregations, could be enabled by amendments to current Acts of the General Assembly. These would be developed for the 2020 General Assembly.

3.4.3.3.3 Such a new structure is intended not simply to support congregations which already exist but to create a permissive and liberating environment for new church plants and the essential development of a wide range of fresh expressions of Church. Many of these will find the current framework and requirements of traditional congregations less than suitable and we must set them free for their primary missionary calling. In order to encourage fresh mission initiatives, learning should be taken from current initiatives such as Hub Style Ministry, Pioneer Ministry, Fresh Expressions, Path of Renewal, Chance to Thrive, etc. to ensure that appropriate and integrated support is available in a timely manner. Furthermore, the Church is conscious of the growing interest in digital Church and this is an area which needs further consideration and investment to complement the more contemporary worship practices.

3.4.3.3.4 Support could be delivered through the Growth Fund alongside learning adopted from the Joint Emerging Church Group’s Pioneer Ministry Report, in order to assist the development of new worshipping communities.

3.4.3.4 Timescale

3.4.3.4.1 Draft legislation will be brought to the General Assembly of 2020.

3.4.4 2. d) To review the size and responsibilities of Kirk Sessions with the aim of optimising them to a proportionate and effective number.

3.4.4.1 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.4.1.1 A rough calculation of the Church of Scotland today suggests that one in six of the active membership is now serving as a ruling elder. That is radically different from even reasonably recent history. For example, in 1938 parish records demonstrate that one congregation had 3500 members and 60 elders. The

latest Yearbook indicates that the same congregation has a membership of 300 and a Kirk Session of 40.

3.4.4.1.2 The numbers serving on Kirk Sessions were driven up as church membership declined for a number of reasons. However one of the primary causes was a practice which said there should be no more than 12 homes in an elder's district, based on the size of a typical Scottish household which was much larger than today. We might also add that increased longevity has also seen elders living longer, and as they were drawn from the post-war "builders" generation, they have a marked commitment to stick with the task they have been given.

3.4.4.1.3 The scale of Kirk Session membership to congregational membership has three main impacts. Firstly, it takes up a great deal of time and energy as a significant proportion of the local church is called to meetings. Secondly, we create meetings which are not well suited to leading the church in challenging times. Thirdly, bigger numbers can reduce the sense of trustee responsibility placed on individual trustees.

3.4.4.1.4 Also relevant here is the idea that many tasks which have become attached to eldership would be better shared across a wider group of people called and gifted to specific areas of work.

3.4.4.1.5 It must be recognised that in many smaller congregations the numbers of elders is often already very small. This proposal affirms that small Kirk Sessions (or their equivalent) can function well. This is a reality that is already experienced not only by many within the Church of Scotland but also in other denominations and in the Church in many other parts of the world.

3.4.4.2 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

3.4.4.2.1 Reducing the size of a Kirk Session would mean that:

- fewer person-hours are taken up with meetings;

- a meeting dynamic more suited to leadership and strategic decision making is developed;
- there is a clearer understanding of trustee responsibility; and
- there is a wider sharing of ministry across the congregation.

3.4.4.2.2 Enabling shorter terms of active service would mean that:

- those unable to commit to lifelong service in a role would be enabled to share and develop their gifts; and
- those not active in trusteeship/Session meetings would have time and energy freed to serve according to their gifts.

3.4.4.3 How we are going to deliver this

- Through producing a clearer description of the purpose and calling of elders, the purpose and functions of Kirk Sessions, and how those relate to Kirk Session membership and charity trusteeship;
- By sharing a range of examples and stories from Kirk Sessions which have adopted different ways of working (including rotation of service, smaller Sessions and alternative pastoral care models), and how they transitioned. This will include learning from other churches within the reformed family;
- Through investigating relevant factors then developing guidance for Kirk Sessions to determine their optimal size; and
- Through examining the issue of termed appointments to Kirk Sessions with suggestions of appointments spanning between three or five years. Reviewing the legislation required to enact this.

3.4.4.4 Timescale

3.4.4.4.1 Legislation allowing Kirk Sessions to admit new members on a fixed term basis will be presented to the General Assembly of 2019. Other changes can be incorporated in the new Church Courts Act to be

brought to the General Assembly of 2020. With Barrier Act procedure this would mean enactment in 2021.

3.4.5 2. e) To work in collaboration with others, including other churches and organisations which share our values, to ensure that we work ecumenically in meaningful ways.

3.4.5.1 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.5.1.1 The Church of Scotland is presently structured in parishes and presbyteries on the basis of our commitment to fulfil the Third Article Declaratory⁷:

“As a national Church representative of the Christian Faith of the Scottish people it acknowledges its distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry.”

3.4.5.1.2 The Councils and Committees of the Church are ancillary to this.

3.4.5.1.3 The 2010 General Assembly reaffirmed the Church of Scotland’s commitment to the Third Article Declaratory and “its commitment to be a national church with a distinctive evangelical and pastoral concern for the people and nation of Scotland” (Declaratory Act anent the Third Article Declaratory, Act V, 2010). The Action Plan is not advocating a move away from this commitment.

⁷ Article III. This Church is in historical continuity with the Church of Scotland which was reformed in 1560, whose liberties were ratified in 1592, and for whose security provision was made in the Treaty of Union of 1707. The continuity and identity of the Church of Scotland are not prejudiced by the adoption of these Articles. As a national Church representative of the Christian Faith of the Scottish people it acknowledges its distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry.

3.4.5.1.4 This understanding of the Church of Scotland’s vocation stands at the very core of our identity.

Nevertheless, we need to question seriously whether the Church of Scotland has the ability or resources to fulfil this in the ways that we have historically. Coming to terms with this reality is fundamental to shaping the future of the Church.

3.4.5.1.5 No matter what conclusion we reach on this, it is clear that, in the future, we will need to work more fully in co-operative partnership with churches and community partners that are willing to share with us. Co-operation, to a greater or lesser extent, has always been a feature of local church life. As we embrace the future, it has to become a core part of how we live out our vocation to be the people of God shaped by the mission of God and the values of the Kingdom of God.

3.4.5.1.6 In reaffirming the Church of Scotland’s commitment to the Third Article Declaratory in 2010, the General Assembly also reaffirmed its commitment to the Seventh Article Declaratory⁸:

“[t]he Church of Scotland remains committed to the ecumenical vision set out in the seventh Article Declaratory and, in pursuit of that vision, stands eager to share with other churches in Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland.” (Act V, 2010)”

3.4.5.1.7 The Church of Scotland needs to consider how it fulfils its vocation in co-operative partnership with the churches, para-church organisations and community partners that are willing to share with us. In so doing,

⁸ Article VII. The Church of Scotland, believing it to be the will of Christ that His disciples should be all one in the Father and in Him, that the world may believe that the Father has sent Him, recognises the obligation to seek and promote union with other Churches in which it finds the Word to be purely preached, the sacraments administered according to Christ’s ordinance, and discipline rightly exercised; and it has the right to unite with any such Church without loss of its identity on terms which this Church finds to be consistent with these Articles.

we will seek to ensure the presence of the Church of Jesus Christ in every part of Scotland and thereby fulfil our 'evangelical and pastoral concern for the people and nation of Scotland'.

3.4.5.2 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

3.4.5.2.1 A future Church would see us co-operatively sharing mission and ministry together with our partner churches. The impact of doing so would be considerable. An invitation to engage in co-operative partnership would open up the possibility of a genuine discussion as to how we fulfil our shared vocation to engage 'in Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland'. In acknowledging that we no longer have the resources to fulfil our vocation in isolation from others, we would potentially liberate ourselves to re-think thoroughly what it is to be the Church.

3.4.5.2.2 By working effectively with others we maximise resources, create significant opportunities for encounter and witness, and increase the number of individuals and organisations within wider society who support and are invested in the work of the Church. Perhaps most significant, however, are the opportunities which partnerships provide for renewal as we listen to, learn from and are shaped by what the Holy Spirit is doing through others. More specifically such activity might ensure:

- closer ecumenical ties;
- The Church of Scotland becomes widely known for its positive relationships and care for others;
- more people want to be involved with the Church;
- we spend less time and energy replicating resources, initiatives and services that already exist;
- we spend more time sharing good resources and learning from the initiatives of others;
- we are better able to identify gaps in support for local congregations and are better able to meet their needs;

- we are better able to access external resources to support the work of the local congregations; and
- our structures and systems will be transformed by our partnerships.

3.4.5.2.3 The impact of drawing upon resources and insights generated in other contexts has been a marked feature of life within the Church of Scotland in recent years. For example, *Alpha*, *Church Revitalisation Trust*, *Fresh Expressions*, *HeartEdge*, *Messy Church*, *Mission-shaped Church* and the global prayer initiative *Thy Kingdom Come* have all shaped the life of the Church in recent years. Each of these initiatives is derived from a context outwith the Church of Scotland. Furthermore, much of the most innovative and successful work in relation to equipping the ministry of the people of God: pioneer ministry, recruitment to ministry, training for ministry (traditional and pioneer), discipleship resourcing, church planting (renewal and new), etc., has been generated in other denominations or in a broader ecumenical context. We need to continue to engage in co-operative partnership with other churches and para-church organisations, and to draw upon the resources and insights generated. Where resources and insights have proven to be of value, we do not need to reinvent them.

3.4.5.2.4 In a similar spirit, a great deal of very good work undertaken by the Church, locally, regionally and nationally, happens through effective partnership. This is particularly true in the fields of social care, social justice and campaigning. The Church must, where appropriate, ensure that it retains its own distinctive and prophetic voice but must also seek to work with others, mindful of the fact that the Spirit of God is never limited to the life of the Church.

3.4.5.3 How we are going to deliver this

- a) Invite those churches willing to consider entering into co-operative partnership with us to a conference on the future of the Church in and of Scotland;

- b) identify specific areas within Scotland where we need to develop and deepen our ecumenical working, supporting other denominations in taking the lead whilst retaining our commitment within the Third Article Declaratory for all people;
- c) map the present (and projected future) demographics of Scotland in partnership with other churches with a view to establishing a vision for the Church in and of Scotland in 2030;
- d) adopt a deliberate approach to collaborative partnerships with other institutions and organisations sharing our values;
- e) create an effective forum for engaging with the churches in Scotland on an ongoing basis, which will include those whom we have traditionally engaged with and those with whom we have not traditionally engaged;
- f) engage with churches in Britain and Ireland on the shared challenges of partnership and mission with a view to enabling the better sharing of resources and insight; and
- g) engage with European and world partners on the shared challenges of partnership and mission with a view to enabling the better sharing of resources and insight.

3.4.5.4 Timescale

Work will commence and continue from June 2019 onwards.

3.4.6 2. f) To create a single, easy and accessible platform of faith and nurture resources, beginning by drawing together what already exists before creating any new materials.

3.4.6.1 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.6.1.1 The Church of Scotland has produced a wealth of resources over the years. This, however, has primarily occurred organically and, as a result, there is limited awareness overall of what exists and what

works. Rather than more resources being produced and at times duplicated, it is recommended that a period of gathering resources together is undertaken and then consideration given to hosting these resources on a single co-ordinated online point.

3.4.6.2 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

3.4.6.2.1 Reduction of people hours and finance spent on duplicating resources across the Church for, at times, an unclear audience, and by congregations seeking to identify the appropriate resources for them. The creation of a properly resourced, curated depository would mean that high quality resources are available to all at the time of need.

3.4.6.3 How we are going to deliver this

3.4.6.3.1 An exercise would be conducted in gathering together and evaluating current resource materials which are available at local, regional and national levels. An appropriate platform would be procured for materials to be managed and made available. This would be co-ordinated with the ongoing work of the revision of training materials.

3.4.6.3.2 Process to commence at the earliest opportunity once agreement has been reached on the Action Plan.

3.4.6.4 Timescale

3.4.6.4.1 Collation work will commence in June 2019.

3.4.7 2. g) To co-ordinate flexible education, training and support programmes for all, covering the recognised ministries (Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Ordained Local Ministers, Auxiliary Ministers, Deacons and Readers), elders, volunteers, interested attenders etc. This will include work around leadership within the Church.

3.4.7.1 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.7.1.1 Without new approaches to education, training, and support, the proposed structural and financial changes within the Action Plan will not be

sufficient to bring about effective culture change within the Church. Culture is not changed by recommendations or deliverances alone, but through the formation of women and men, the sharing of best practice and the teaching of new skills and approaches. A number of factors coalesce at this time around the introduction of new approaches including:

- the research-led commitment from Mission and Discipleship to provide resources for creating a new culture of discipleship;
- the research carried out by Ministries Council into Re-thinking Initial Training for Ministers of Word and Sacrament that has created a focus on whole-person formation and skills development;
- creation of Ascend for the support and development of those in the recognised ministries; increased learning from the Church in other parts of the world, particularly from areas where the Church is growing;
- the evidence of dynamic learning, growth, and discipleship seen in other denominations, which have been successful in creating new formational opportunities for members and those in recognised ministry;
- a desire on the part of members to speak with confidence about their faith;
- the desire across the Church for worship leadership training;
- a passion for mission and pioneering styles of ministry that belong to the whole people of God; and
- a renewed awareness of the need to form leadership where traditional patterns of ministry will not be available.

Alongside this learning, there is also a wide range of good practice gathered through the work of Priority Areas, Path of Renewal and the *Go For It* Fund.

3.4.7.2 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

3.4.7.2.1 A co-ordinated and flexible education programme would give members, elders, and those in recognised ministries the skills needed to respond to the changed Scotland of today with creativity and skill. It would root the Church in the priesthood of all believers and create a culture of discipleship in which we see the importance, not only of becoming, but of making disciples. We need to be intentional about nurturing, growing, and developing confident local leadership alongside the recognised ministries of the Church and allowing for more learning to happen in the local context. Changes to education and training, including worship leadership training, would enable the creation and maintenance of local Christian communities, whether or not they have access to traditional models of ministry. We would also hope to see the recognised ministries moving towards supporting the ministries of all God's people, with ministers being resourced, trained and equipped to help members and elders identify, release, and develop their gifts.

3.4.7.2.2 Flexible training, education and support should be available to the range of ministries, elders, paid staff, and volunteers on the basis of lifelong, continuous learning. Courses should respond to the need for developing best practice in collaborative team work; best practice in employment and support/supervision of paid staff; best practice in supporting and developing volunteers; and best practice in terms of supporting those with differing learning needs. It should be mindful of context and the learning by experience that occurs in community.

3.4.7.2.3 A shared gateway similar to the Ascend model, for use by members, elders, and recognised ministries would aid visibility and accessibility and encourage participation in learning from those seeking stand-alone learning opportunities or who wish to gain credit for modules that could lead to certificate, diploma or degree qualifications in the context of an agreed Formation Framework.

3.4.7.3 How we are going to deliver this

3.4.7.3.1 We need a model which helps people to grow in faith, to share their faith with greater confidence and which supports and develops leadership in the church at all levels, particularly at a local level. There is a need to provide and resource education and training for members and ministries to respond to change and to evolve a culture of lifelong learning and development.

To achieve this requires several steps including:

- working closely with learning and academic providers to create a menu of learning options that would offer flexibility in relation to time demanded, mode of delivery, certification, accreditation and validation with the potential to build on learning and qualifications if these are desired. Topics to be included might be discipleship, mission and pioneering, fresh expressions, children's and youth work, the role of eldership, and the identification and nurturing of congregational gifts;
- working with other denominations (such as the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Church of England and the United Reformed Church) to access and support their already well-developed resources and programmes;
- learning from the World Church in terms of support and training provision, with particular attention to Theological Education by Extension;
- developing the Ascend platform to offer more individual and corporate training and education opportunities for those in recognised ministry;
- providing ways in which people can learn and deepen their faith through a range of volunteering opportunities, such as the Young Adult Volunteers programme administered through the PCUSA;
- better resourcing the local as a place to identify, nurture, train and educate disciples and leaders; and

- continuing to seek to recruit individuals into the recognised ministries, in part through exposure to education and training programmes and accreditation of learning that is consistent with Ministries Council's Formation Framework.

3.4.7.4 Timescale

3.4.7.4.1 Training options will be presented to the General Assembly of 2021.

3.4.8 2. h) To develop a deliberate focus on engaging with/supporting those aged 40 and under.

3.4.8.1 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.8.1.1 In too many of our churches, children, young people and young adults are missing. This represents not only a challenge for the future of the Church, it means that we are failing to share the Gospel effectively with this age group. There is a need to rebalance the demographic within many, although not all, of our churches. Today, around 20% of Church of Scotland congregations report having no children, and the vast majority of adults in our population have not been introduced to church or faith as children. There is evidence that whilst this is a problem facing many denominations across the UK, the problem is particularly pronounced for the Church of Scotland. Therefore, we must learn new habits of engaging with adults whose only connection with the Church is through their encounter with us as individuals. This need is illustrated in the 2011 Census reporting on religious affiliation, in the 2016 Scottish Church Census, and from reports to the Mission and Discipleship Council through its work with children and young people.

3.4.8.1.2 Although it is responsible for a great deal of the most creative and innovative children's, youth and family work in the country, the Church is currently failing too many families as they struggle with many challenges including poverty, mental health and family breakdown. There is a need to address this reality as core to our commitment to share the good news of Jesus. Feedback at the Presbytery conference reaffirmed the challenges of building intergenerational churches, while

recognising that generalisations cannot be made, nor assumptions drawn, about the issues facing this age group.

3.4.8.2 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

3.4.8.2.1 Impact, or fruitfulness, would mean that there would be:

- more people aged 40 and under in the life of our churches;
- an increased awareness of discipleship and what it means to follow Jesus within this cohort;
- a more developed missional culture within our churches;
- New Worshipping Communities (NWC) focused on young people formed over a period of 5 – 7 years;
- more churches focused on being multi-generational; and,
- more churches supporting and nurturing families as they face the challenges and opportunities of this current age.

3.4.8.3 How we are going to deliver this

3.4.8.3.1 We will seek to achieve this through combining current good practice and encouraging increased innovation and experimentation:

- to learn from those churches that are exercising effective work with children, young people and families, including learning from churches in other parts of the world where the demography of congregations and leadership is much younger.
- the creation of a cohort of people, including ministers, to work with those in the 20s-40s age range would enable a process which allows the traditional models of Church to continue whilst supporting growth of more contemporary forms of worship.
- to continue to explore new forms of ministry which focus on children and young people with learning being adopted from other denominations and the World Church.
- this project, alongside pioneer ministry development and missional approaches growing

out of Path of Renewal congregations, will also allow for the support for new meeting places and times for Church to happen in an organic or cell-based way rather than the more traditional 'models' of dedicated buildings and Sunday services.

- to invite bids for the Growth Fund from congregations, and clusters of congregations and presbyteries where innovation, engagement, and growth feature, **or** where particular need has been identified.
- to encourage presbyteries to allocate ministries posts from within their plans to support this work.
- to prioritise funding nationally for training, mentoring and peer group development, enabling creative opportunities for young people to grow and develop in their faith.
- to invest in exploring digital strategies and the use of social media in engaging with this constituency.

3.4.8.4 Timescale

3.4.8.4.1 Shared work between Councils from June 2019, with an early focus on supporting local initiatives through the Growth Fund.

3.4.9 2. i) To reconfigure Ministries and Mission contributions.

3.4.9.1 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.9.1.1 In the context of the other sections within the Action Plan, finance is not in itself the core of activities but rather a resource for allowing change to happen and, for this reason, caution needs to be exercised. Put bluntly, if the financial system does not collect the amount required to meet current demands then the Church potentially finds itself unable to meet its commitments. Many of the proposals within this Action Plan seek to realign decision-making away from the national Councils and Committees and place it at regional level. However, this will take time and, in the short term, the system needs to continue to function until the other suggested changes have been implemented.

3.4.9.1.2 For the reasons outlined above, the tasks identified are designed to facilitate a direction of travel towards increased budgetary devolution. It is planned that further changes will be enacted in the next three to five years.

3.4.9.1.3 There is a widely held view that the current model of calculating Ministries and Mission contributions is in need of reform, although there is less agreement as to what an alternative (or set of alternatives) might look like. The aims of any changes should be to:

- free up funds for mission work at a local level;
- increase the amount of money available for mission as part of an income generation strategy; and
- devolve more decision-making to Regional Church/Presbyteries without duplicating effort and increasing administration costs.

3.4.9.1.4 The current system (which was established around 2005) is designed to collect monies from congregations in order to meet the Church's overall expenditure in the way in which the Church is currently structured. Other sections of this Action Plan and the work of the Special Commission propose different structures which, if accepted, would alter the amount of funding required centrally and would require more funds to be allocated regionally and locally. It is anticipated that, in the future, more of the Church's work will be financed locally or regionally and the changes proposed here, particularly with regard to the changes to vacancy allowance, are made with the intention of providing a framework which can be expanded in the future as more responsibility is devolved to presbyteries. This work has been conducted on the basis that the Church of Scotland continues to operate a Presbyterian, as opposed to purely congregational, model of working and that part of our commitment to one another is that congregations with higher levels of income will continue to support congregations where there is less money available.

3.4.9.1.5 In terms of current practice, the following points are worth highlighting:

- 44% of charges currently contribute more than the cost of a minister.
- from the 56% of charges which contribute less than the cost of a minister many of these, due to the fact they are vacant, are still paying more money into the system than the cost of any ministry received back.
- a third of congregations have more than a year's income in unrestricted reserves.

3.4.9.1.6 A range of alternatives to the current income-based system have been examined and are outlined below. However, what has been concluded is that the current income-based system remains the preferred core option, with adjustments to allow additional funds to pay for local mission and to encourage growth and impact locally. There needs to be a further stream of work that considers a more bespoke model, enabling resources to be grown and shared locally and regionally. In order for this to happen most effectively, the changes outlined in presbytery reform (paragraph 3.4.2) will be required. The issues below have been identified in relation to alternative models:

3.4.9.2 Membership

3.4.9.2.1 This is not consistently measured across all congregations and basing a contribution system on the number of members could act as a disincentive to increase membership. Further, a direct correlation does not exist between membership and financial giving.

3.4.9.3 Attendance

3.4.9.3.1 This is difficult to measure accurately, and would vary at different times of year (Christmas, Easter, summer in holiday resorts etc.) Again, direct correlations do not exist between attendance and financial giving.

3.4.9.4 Congregation decides what to pay

3.4.9.4.1 There is a significantly higher risk attached to this method and it would be difficult to predict budget at both at a local and national level.

3.4.9.5 Be-spoke weighting for each congregation based on attributes of nationally agreed criteria

3.4.9.5.1 In his 2017 Chalmers Lectures⁹, Rev Dr Doug Gay argues strongly for congregations which meet certain criteria to be treated differently in order to support growth. This is an area that requires further investigation in the near future, but would need to be operated at a Presbytery level.

3.4.9.6 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

3.4.9.6.1 A great deal of concern exists around the current system. It is clear that there needs to be a more obvious link between a congregation's contribution and the work undertaken locally. In time it is hoped that this would result in increased income. Presbyteries would also, in time, have more influence with a more flexible system and fewer decisions would be made and financed 'centrally'.

3.4.9.7 How we are going to deliver this

- Ministries and Mission contributions of individual congregations are currently capped at a maximum increase of 12% per annum. It is proposed that there will be a staged reduction of this maximum increase, so that after three years the maximum increase will be 3%.
- Limiting the maximum increase each year is seen as a better incentive than having a cap on the total amount paid by a congregation as such a cap would benefit only a small number of congregations.
- The interaction between the contribution system and the proposed Growth Fund has been considered and it is proposed that:
 - any grants awarded from the fund will not be treated as assessable income;
 - any additional income generated by a congregation to 'match' grants awarded will not be treated as assessable income. This could be viewed as a considerable

encouragement for congregations to engage in new and innovative work.

- Over a third of congregations have more than a year's unrestricted income held in reserves. It is not proposed that such funds are assessed in any way in the calculation of the contribution but such congregations should be encouraged to use those reserves as match funding should an application be made to the proposed Growth Fund.
- Once larger Presbytery structures are complete, bespoke funding models for congregations can be identified and managed at a regional level.
- Where a congregation wishes to support project work which is currently funded nationally then any additional funds raised for that purpose by that congregation will not be assessed as there will be a corresponding decrease in the work funded nationally.

3.4.9.8 Timescale

3.4.9.8.1 Revised Regulations will be brought to the General Assembly of 2020.

3.4.10 To introduce changes to the current vacancy allowance, including:

2. j) **Discontinuing current system of vacancy allowance and adding aggregate value of vacancy allowance to Presbytery Discretionary Allowance (known as the '5%').**
2. k) **Imagining how vacancies are supported if a vacancy becomes more of the norm for a large percentage of congregations.**

3.4.10.1 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.10.1.1 Within his Chalmers lectures, Rev Dr Doug Gay highlighted that the vacancy allowance is one of the key areas in the current system which is in need of reform. Vacancies, and the associated allowance, were

⁹ [2017 Chalmers Lectures](#)

historically experienced for short periods of time, between settled, longer ministries. Traditionally, the emphasis in a vacancy has been on keeping current activities and ministry running, with less emphasis on developing new work. A locum is usually appointed, offering a day or two per week 'in place of' the inducted Minister.

3.4.10.1.2 In the past decade, however, there has been a rapid and significant change: vacancies are now frequently measured in years, not months. In many charges there is little prospect that the charge will ever be 'filled' by an inducted Minister. 'Vacancy' as a concept is, in many places, unhelpful and may discourage energising missional activity. In the light of this there is a need to rethink the language and practice of vacancy.

3.4.10.1.3 The current vacancy allowance costs in the region of £3m per annum, with this projected to grow.

3.4.10.1.4 We need, instead, to consider what ongoing, thriving ministry will look like in congregations experiencing vacancy, and how it will be supported. Maintaining the status quo through locumships alone will be insufficient.

3.4.10.2 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

3.4.10.2.1 This proposal seeks to provide no less resource to charges without an inducted Minister, but gives presbyteries the responsibility, in collaboration with the relevant congregations, to determine what the best ways to provide effective ministry are. In some cases this may result in a range of staff being engaged to work across a number of charges bringing a range of expertise to bear encouraging joint working, enabling ministry among the whole people of God and stimulating new initiatives where feasible.

3.4.10.2.2 At the same time, those presbyteries who wish to continue the present practice in all or some vacancies within their bounds receive no reduction in

financial support. The proposal does, though, channel this support through the Presbytery.

3.4.10.3 How we are going to deliver this

3.4.10.3.1 A more flexible system of providing cover during vacancies will allow the cover to be appropriate to the individual circumstances of the congregation concerned. Examples of ways in which vacancies could be covered include:

- employing locums in similar fashion to the current structure;
- employing Presbytery-wide pastoral ministers to provide pastoral care to groups of vacant congregations;
- encouraging vacant congregations to share worship either with other vacant congregations or with neighbouring congregations which are not themselves in vacancy;
- allocating new forms of minister (pioneer or similar) to congregations which are in vacancy in order to develop new forms of worship; and
- pastoral care (and possibly pulpit supply) provided by elders with oversight from the interim moderator.

3.4.10.4 Timescale

3.4.10.4.1 As presbyteries move into larger regional structures, vacancy allowance will be allocated to presbyteries pro rata to the number of vacancies within each Presbytery rather than directly to congregations. This will, therefore, meet the aim of devolving more decision-making to regional church and also potentially increase funds available regionally for mission work. Alongside this devolution of resources there will be training and support to develop a range of ways in which vacancies might be supported.

3.4.11 2. I) To support the General Trustees' initiative 'Well-equipped Spaces in the Right Places'.

3.4.11.1 The General Assembly of 2018 encouraged the General Trustees to develop an Asset Plan for the

Church's estate with a view to recommendations being made to the Assembly of 2020. The General Trustees are currently finalising a consultation document for this work which will be brought forward to the 2019 General Assembly. Agreement has been reached that the Action Plan will work in concert with the General Trustees who will be the lead agency in terms of ensuring that the Church estate is one that has 'well-equipped spaces in the right places'.

3.4.11.2 Therefore, within the Action Plan, there will be signposting to the work of the General Trustees' report. Regular meetings between those co-ordinating the development of the Action Plan and the General Trustees have been occurring to ensure both areas of work complement each other.

3.4.11.3 Timescale

A consultation will be carried out by the General Trustees during 2019 with a report and recommendations brought to the General Assembly of 2020.

3.4.12 2. m) To consider whether sale proceeds of redundant buildings arising out of unions or linkages to congregations might in certain circumstances be applied for the benefit of a congregation other than the united or linked congregation concerned.

3.4.12.1 One goal of the Action Plan and the General Trustees' Land & Buildings Plan is that the various human and financial resources available to the Church are applied as effectively as possible in support of worship, mission, outreach and evangelism. Buildings and the proceeds arising from their sale are key elements in achieving this. If presbyteries are able to set clear strategic missional priorities which can identify those congregations which should be supported (and why) and the locations and buildings which are needed then monies could be applied for repair and improvement with a more confident focus than at present. This could justify a more directive approach by presbyteries, where possible, in re-allocating monies

within their bounds irrespective of the links between parish and building.

3.4.12.2 Currently, when a congregation sells a building the proceeds from the sale are primarily lodged for fabric purposes for the local congregation. It is right that the local congregation benefits from the sale of its assets, but it does mean that some congregations become resource-rich, for example because of a union in which a manse, church or set of halls has been sold. In many cases, other congregations with much more critical building or mission-related needs and opportunities may have limited access to resources to support their fabric or mission work. It is widely recognised that this is an issue that needs to be addressed if we are to remain honourable to our tradition as a church that is committed to sharing our resources with one another as required. There is also a requirement to ensure that funds can be more effectively used for fabric purposes so that buildings are a resource for mission. Congregational trustees have a duty to apply resources wisely and not to divest themselves of the means to meet their fabric maintenance obligations for their remaining buildings. However, where this can be done lawfully, congregations should be encouraged to share their financial resources to meet the identified needs of other congregations within the Presbytery.

3.4.12.3 Again, as with section 3.4.11 above, conversations with the General Trustees are taking place to ensure that this task complements the direction of travel that is being recommended within the General Trustees' initiative *'Well-equipped Spaces in the Right Places'*.

3.4.13 2. n) To offer support at a regional/local level to congregations including:

- **buildings expertise**
- **safeguarding**
- **financial accounting**
- **local staff employment**
- **developing effective partnerships**

3.4.13.1 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.13.1.1 Whilst support and expertise sit within the central offices in respect of areas such as law, finance and (through the General Trustees) property, a theme that has consistently arisen both within the work undertaken in consultation with local congregations, across presbyteries, and noted by the General Trustees, is the increasing legislative and administrative burden of 'being church' at the local level. This centres around matters connected with buildings, finance (in terms of presenting accounts etc.), employment matters, legislative requirements etc. The reality, presented by both congregations and presbyteries, is that many congregations no longer feel able to meet a number of the tasks that they are responsible for and feel ill-equipped to develop new ways of working in what is often a challenging and complex legislative environment. These changes have come about for a variety of reasons including: congregations getting smaller, office-bearers having less time to commit to such tasks, and the growth of civil legislation and responsibilities with which congregations have to comply. This has resulted in a frequently articulated desire for more wide-scale professional support to be made available to congregations.

3.4.13.2 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

3.4.13.2.1 Making this change will equip congregations to be more effective not only for the work that they are currently doing but for the work that many would like to undertake. It will:

- reduce the amount of time congregations and ministers have to spend on buildings issues, finance matters and legislative requirements and release people's skills and talents to deliver wider evangelism, mission and engagement;
- reduce the risk of work not being done (e.g. regular property maintenance), or not undertaken to a required standard;
- enable churches to overcome differences and to work together for change; and

- provide support to congregations as they seek to develop new models of community engagement, nurture faith and develop partnerships with faith-based and secular agencies.

3.4.13.3 How we are going to deliver this

3.4.13.3.1 It is evident that no 'one size fits all' in terms of how congregations can and should be supported. A number continue to have the necessary skills and professional expertise to fulfil their responsibilities whilst others struggle. This is one area in which it is believed that having larger Presbytery units would be a strength. Currently, the General Trustees are proposing the establishment of a bank of consultants to act as 'client project managers' and that presbyteries, in the context of buildings, should have paid professional expertise. This theme could be extended to accountancy, safeguarding and (where appropriate) HR advice.

3.4.13.3.2 This advice, in large measure, is going to need to be paid for and consideration needs to be given as to where funds can be found. Further, it is clear that not all models will fit all regions, for example, a rural Presbytery will have very different logistical challenges to an urban area. Therefore, it is recommended that different models are developed over time in respect of what is most appropriate to that regional context.

3.4.13.3.3 Therefore, it is recommended that as larger Presbytery units are formed, resourcing issues for the support of local congregations are considered if required and suitable local solutions are identified. Funding for these solutions will be considered as part of the creation of the larger Presbytery structure.

3.4.13.4 Timescale

3.4.13.4.1 Work will commence alongside the creation of larger Presbytery units.

3.4.14 2. o) To establish the most appropriate relationship which could exist between CrossReach and the broader work of the Unincorporated Councils and Committees (UCC) and the local

church to enable this work to be sustainable and to flourish.

3.4.14.1 Whilst also under consideration by the Special Commission, it is prudent to include CrossReach within the matters which the Action Plan seeks to address so that discussions around devolved responsibilities and future finance do not have unintended consequences for this significant area of the Church's work.

3.4.14.2 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.14.2.1 CrossReach represents approximately half the income and expenditure of the Church. When an overview is taken of the whole and complex work of all the UCC, it is recognised that there might be more effective and efficient ways to support the missional work of CrossReach, allowing a degree of autonomy not currently possible. This would free up senior managers' time to concentrate on the delivery of high quality, cost effective social care, as well as considering how local congregations might be better resourced by the expertise and knowledge that exists within CrossReach.

3.4.14.3 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

3.4.14.3.1 A more effective structure and relationship would:

- streamline processes around resourcing, reporting and governance which are both practical and proportionate;
- allow for a better, more defined and mutually supportive interaction with local churches and their own social care initiatives; and
- improve understanding of how historical liabilities impact on current operations and create opportunities to resolve these issues.

3.4.14.4 How we are going to deliver this

3.4.14.4.1 Through examination of different models of governance, resourcing and reporting which already exist between faith-based and secular organisations and their trading partners and subsidiaries we will identify which best practice models can be adapted to be fit for

purpose for the future. The senior managers within CrossReach should work collaboratively within a small working group specifically set up for this purpose which includes members of Council of Assembly and Social Care Council as well as external advisors. This group would bring forward proposals to a future General Assembly.

3.4.14.5 Timescale

3.4.14.5.1 An initial report for a decision in principle should be brought to the General Assembly of 2020. If agreed, a further 12 months' work should follow, putting the necessary arrangements in place which would satisfy the requirements of church and charity law. A report on progress would be made to the General Assembly of 2021 and a move to implementation within 12 months thereafter.

3.4.15 2. p) To refocus the national staff team to focus on equipping and supporting local churches, including accessing the Growth Fund.

3.4.15.1 This is an area which sits broadly within the remit of the Special Commission. The outcome of the Special Commission will need to be reflected within the structures that exist at a national level. These structures also need to reflect the changes necessary to deliver the Action Plan.

3.4.15.2 The national staff team, like those serving the Church in every place, is highly motivated and exceptionally committed. Many undertake their responsibilities out of a deep sense of calling to serve the Church and to follow Jesus.

3.4.15.3 There is a view that some of the work that is currently undertaken at a national level should be undertaken at a regional level. The lack of a properly resourced regional structure has meant that some of the work of the national offices is focussed on supporting congregations. On occasions the national office may not be best placed to fulfil this task. At the same time, it is important to recognise that a range of functions are most efficient and effective when they are carried out at a national level.

3.4.15.4 It is acknowledged that the outcomes of the Special Commission and Action Plan are highly likely to have an impact on the national structure. This will also include decisions about the future of the national church offices.

3.4.15.5 Timescale

3.4.15.5.1 Work will commence in June 2019.

3.4.16 3. To draw together a cross-departmental team to ensure that i.) a research and development function exists for the Church of Scotland and ii.) the Action Plan which stems from the General Assembly is delivered.

3.4.16.1 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.16.1.1 The Church of Scotland, in contrast to many other organisations and denominations, does not have any dedicated research or analysis function. Current practice is that work is undertaken or commissioned independently by the relevant parties (be it a Council or Department) with assorted mechanisms being used to share the outcomes of that work on a wider scale across the Church. A recurring critique is that the Church of Scotland has not given sufficient attention to reflecting on and learning from the outcomes of previous initiatives and projects.

3.4.16.1.2 Accompanying the issue of the lack of dedicated research focus, current practice suggests that in order for the Action Plan to be delivered in a consistent and effective manner there needs to be a co-ordinated, focussed approach to delivery. The Church has, perhaps especially in recent years, embarked on a wide variety of initiatives which have floundered either because they have been displaced by another initiative or because they have not been adequately supported through to fruition. There is a danger that the work becomes fragmented across the wider Church and the impetus of the Action Plan is lost.

3.4.16.1.3 The establishment of a cross-departmental team would ensure that relevant research, evaluation and experience could be held together, allowing much more effective learning and collaboration. This team would also be responsible for the overall co-ordination of the Action Plan.

3.4.16.1.4 Therefore it is proposed that a cross departmental team is put together for a dual purpose: ensuring that the Church of Scotland has a formalised mechanism for research, evaluation and monitoring, which will be vital due to the nature of the tasks being delivered by the Action Plan; and a change management function to ensure that the Action Plan and outcomes from the Special Commission can be delivered in a timely manner.

3.4.16.2 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

- The Action Plan will be driven forward and delivered within the given timescales with work streams being appropriately co-ordinated and discharged.
- Sufficient support is given to local congregations in order to be able to access new funds and ways of working.
- Resource (both finance and people) ceases to be duplicated across the central organisation.
- The Church has a dedicated, supported resource in terms of research and development.
- The Church of Scotland learns from innovators and initiatives, and shares that learning as widely as possible.

3.4.16.3 How we are going to deliver this

3.4.16.3.1 A dedicated cross-departmental team to be drawn together, although consideration needs to be given to what functions of this can be outsourced to other appropriate agencies. In terms of the change management function, there are a number of staff who currently deliver on a range of projects and programmes across the national church offices, for the different Councils and Departments of the Church. These

individuals need to be drawn together in order to support the delivery of the Action Plan.

3.4.16.4 Timescale

3.4.16.4.1 Team formed from June 2019 with a review at the end of the Action Plan regarding future direction for this area of work.

3.4.17 5. To encourage all national Councils and Committees to focus their activities from June–December 2019 on an effective implementation of the Action Plan; and

6. To encourage a ‘season of prayer and preparation’ across the Church from September–December 2019.

3.4.17.1 Why this issue needs to be considered within the Action Plan

3.4.17.1.1 The Action Plan should be thought of, first and foremost, as an act of faith. Whilst many other organisations deliberately reduce current activity to focus on the new at a time of agreed critical change, this is even more important for the Church. We are a people of faith, rooted in prayer. We are not called to be busier: we are called to be faithful in our efforts to follow Jesus.

3.4.17.1.2 The successful implementation of the Action Plan, especially in its start-up stage, is subject to a number of high level risks. These include:

- the Plan simply becomes another layer of work, competing with new and existing areas of activity, particularly at a national level. As such, its potential impact is diminished from the outset. If we are taking up a new thing, we need to be able to put down existing things; and
- putting the necessary steps for the Plan in place, even although these will be phased over a three-year period, will require significant time, focus, and energy. This needs to be seen as the priority if it is to be done well.

3.4.17.1.3 As such, it is suggested that National Councils and Committees: reduce their meeting cycle over the seven-month period from June – December 2019, focus on the development of the Action Plan in

their meetings, and make prayer and worship a core and foundational task of their time together. Of course, certain meetings will need to happen, and many already prioritise in this way. But we also need to recognise that our models of church do have a habit of generating unnecessary meetings!

3.4.17.1.4 At the same time, presbyteries and Kirk Sessions are encouraged to engage in a season of prayer and preparation during the period September – December 2019.

3.4.17.2 The impact we hope to achieve in delivering this

3.4.17.2.1 By doing this we hope to create a prayerful and worshipful sense of expectation that the Church of Scotland is seeking to do a new thing, reliant on the Spirit of God. We also hope to ensure that the Action Plan stands the best possible chance of succeeding. In addition, it is our ambition that if certain things have been laid down in the latter half of 2019, we won't necessarily feel the need to pick them all back up again in 2020. This could give a very different shape to the 2020 General Assembly. We want to focus on faithfulness, not busyness.

3.4.17.3 How we are going to deliver this

3.4.17.3.1 The reality is that this, in common with the rest of the Action Plan, can only be delivered by the good will of others across the Church. It will require common sense – no-one can be legalistic about this – but it could be transformative. *A Church without Walls* pointed out: *“It is difficult to change direction. The old routines, requirements and habits are instinctive. We often need to stop, stand back and reflect before we can reset our priorities. [It recommended that] the leadership in every area of church life institute the discipline of a period of retreat, rest and reflection to allow space for God to change us.”*

3.4.17.3.2 We will develop a simple set of resources to encourage Kirk Sessions in their prayer, reflection and planning.

3.4.17.4 Timescale

3.4.17.4.1 June – December 2019.

3.5 Conclusion

3.5.1 There is a range of additional measures which the Council has considered in compiling these proposals. Many of them have been addressed and will continue to need to be addressed. However, we have been mindful that the claim that everything should be a priority invariably means that nothing turns out to be a priority. What is offered, therefore, is a range of measures which, individually and collectively, can help to nurture a culture of change, renewal and transformation for the Church. This will not be an easy task – following Jesus never has been and never will. It will have to be undertaken with faith, humility and a desire to work together for the building up of God's Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.

3.5.2 In three years' time, by the grace of God and with the honest and prayer-filled endeavours of us all, it is hoped that we will be demonstrating increased signs of growth, will be more deeply aware of the call of Jesus Christ on our individual and collective lives, and will be better placed to take on the challenges which will lie ahead. Let's get to it.

3.5.3 Jesus said "Follow me."