



reduced in previous years as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the intention that there would be a phased increase to previous levels. The Synod approved the Standing Committee's proposal to set quota for 2024 at £715,000.

The Synod agreed a proposal from the Standing Committee that the next decennial review of the formula for diocesan representation on General Synod (including the number of Synod members) should be deferred until the membership statistics for the SEC for 2025 are available.

The Synod also received reports on the meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in Ghana in February 2023, on developments in lay learning, on new Master's courses to be offered by the Scottish Episcopal Institute and on the new Initial Ministerial Education 2 Programme for those in curacies. It also considered issues of health and safety and risk management and introduced as part of the diocesan Dean's congregational inspections a duty to review congregational risk registers and risk assessment records. The Synod concluded with a presentation by members of the Provincial Youth Committee.

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General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

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Introduction

The Assembly met on 20–25 May with the Right Rev'd Sally Foster-Fulton BA BD as Moderator. She is Head of Christian Aid in Scotland and has served as a Parish Minister in the Church of Scotland and in the Presbyterian Church (USA). The Rt Hon Lord Hodge DPSC was re-appointed by His Majesty as Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly for a second year. The Church has roughly 284,000 members (2021 figures) and around 1,200 charges.

Governance

The General Assembly approved the creation of a *Book of Confessions* forming the Church's subordinate standard. The Book, to include the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Scots Confession*, the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds and the 1992 *Statement of Faith*, must now be approved by Presbyteries under the Barrier Act 1697. This is significant because, if approved, it will change the position of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as the principal subordinate standard of the Church and would be a change from the practice of most other Presbyterian Churches.

Committee on Legal Questions

Youth representatives to Presbyteries

The Committee reviewed numbers of youth representatives appointed over the last few years and, having consulted as required, proposed that in future the new Scottish Presbyteries each be given the right to appoint up to four youth representatives, with the Presbyteries of England, International Charges and Jerusalem permitted to appoint one each, which would be in line with numbers of recent actual appointments. Provision has been made for an alternative allocation should the Presbyteries in the Highlands and Hebrides not be bringing an Overture for their amalgamation to the Assembly of 2023. The Committee also proposed that if one Presbytery did not use its full allocation, it be available for use by another Presbytery which perhaps could exceed its allocation.

Draft Church Courts Act

Comments had been received from Presbyteries from the ongoing consultation on the draft Church Courts Act.

Ministers and Deacons in Same Sex Marriages and Civil Partnerships Act (Act I 2015)

The Legal Questions Committee was instructed, in consultation with the Faith Nurture Forum and the Theological Forum, to undertake a review of the Ministers and Deacons in Same Sex Marriages and Civil Partnerships Act (Act I 2015) and to report to a future General Assembly. The Committee primarily considered the practical operation of the Act, noting that it was largely confined to the appointment of ministers and deacons in parish contexts, and consultation was undertaken as instructed.

With mixed-sex civil partnership now being a possibility, it was made clear that the Act applies to ministers and deacons in same-sex civil partnerships. Pioneer Ministers and Associate Ministers are now specifically included. The Act is extended to cover the appointment by Presbytery of an Interim Moderator with a process to permit a Kirk Session to request that the appointment does not proceed.

Same-sex marriage

The Office of the General Assembly had been processing applications by ministers and deacons who wished to apply to the Registrar General to be authorised to solemnise same-sex marriages, in terms of the Solemnisation of Same Sex Marriages Act (Act VI 2022). Over 100 people had now been authorised and Presbytery Clerks had been notified of the names of those in their Presbytery who were so authorised.

Presbytery Review

The Presbytery Review Act would be brought to the General Assembly of 2024. The idea of instituting a process of Presbytery Review was first raised on the

floor of the General Assembly in 2016 and a number of Presbyteries took part in initial pilots of the scheme during 2017 and 2018. Although the General Assembly of 2019 instructed the Committee to continue the pilots and to prepare legislation, the twin issues of Presbytery Reform and the COVID-19 pandemic meant that further development was put on hold until the Assembly of 2022, when the Committee was instructed to continue with the development of Presbytery Review, bringing the principles of Presbytery Review to the General Assembly of 2023 for Approval before bringing a Presbytery Review Act to the General Assembly of 2024.

Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021)

A sub-group of the Committee had produced Guidance which was being issued to Kirk Sessions that wished to make a request for review under section 3 of the Presbytery Mission Plan Act. The Office of the General Assembly was processing requests received; at the time of writing there were 25 requests for review across 11 Presbyteries, with two requests in addition from Presbyteries for assistance under section 2.2.4 of the Act. The Mission Plan Review Group was now fully appointed with 15 members, and all would be allocated several cases as work progressed on the reviews.

Readers solemnising marriages

Following a remit from the General Assembly of 2022, a Legal Questions Committee sub-group had consulted the Faith Nurture Forum and the Theological Forum on the issue of permitting Readers to solemnise marriages. For a number of reasons, that proposal was rejected.

General trustees

Various discussions were taking place regarding the Presbytery Mission Plans and the impact on the disposal of various properties, including historic churches. Discussion was also taking place regarding the proceeds of properties going into the Consolidated Fabric Fund and whether funds could be used for other purposes.

Ethical Oversight Committee

An advisory Ethical Oversight Committee (EOC) was established to help the Church of Scotland Investors Trust (COSIT) to focus on the theological and ethical background of what the Church should be investing in, to consider the complexities of the investment options and to be a space for intelligent conversations that could support the Trust to provide the investment managers with very specific briefs, in line with the Church's values.

Theological Forum

The Forum was instructed to explore options for widening access to ordained sacramental ministries within the Church in light of the principles contained

in the 2019 Report of the Sacramental Ministry Working Group and report to the General Assembly of 2024.

Additionally, the Forum was to explore the theology of transgender identities within the context of the Church's life and ministry, and report to the Assembly of 2024.

Safeguarding Committee

The Safeguarding Committee was to bring a Survivor Policy to the General Assembly of 2024. Implementation of the safeguarding policies of the Church continued to be enforced, along with training.

Faith Nurture Forum

It was noted that there were currently 34 probationers completing training for Full Time Ministry, Ordained Local Ministry and the Diaconate. The stipend scale for Ministers starts at £30,135 and, after five years' service rises to £37,032. Thirty-eight ministers retired in 2002 and 23 demitted (resigned). Act X 2004 was amended regarding training for ministry. The total number of planned ministry posts for 2024 remained at 600, plus 60 vacancies, and this was to be the basis for the next five years, subject to annual reporting and the agreement of the General Assembly.

Assisted dying

The Church of Scotland remains opposed to assisted dying; however, the Assembly voted to re-examine that position for the 2024 Assembly. The discussion came against the backdrop of the introduction of the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill to the Scottish Parliament for debate.

Faith Impact Forum

The Church has committed to confronting the legacy of the historical impact of slavery within it, noting that the Church had benefited financially from the proceeds of slavery and that the 1788 General Assembly had received proposals on the abolition of slavery from three Synods (Lothian and Tweeddale, Angus and Mearns, and Merse and Teviotdale). It was agreed that an 'apology' should be brought forward to a subsequent General Assembly.

The Forum had continued to develop work to realise the General Assembly's goal for the Church of Scotland to be a net zero carbon emitting organisation by 2030.

Church of Scotland Pension Scheme

As at 31 December 2022, The Church of Scotland Pension Scheme for Ministers and Overseas Missionaries (the 'Ministers Scheme'), The Church of Scotland

Pension Scheme for Staff (the 'Staff Scheme') and The Church of Scotland Pension Scheme for Ministries Development Staff (the 'MDS Scheme') (together referred to as the 'Schemes') collectively covered approximately 4,600 members. As at 31 December 2022, the Trustees held, in aggregate, total assets of approximately £352 million for the purposes of the Schemes. It was felt that the Scheme was in good health.

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