

Lessons learned from the Church of Scotland:

The reasons for, and consequences of, our failure as an Orthodox Alliance in Scotland to take united meaningful action at the decisive point in 2013.

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27 June 2024

Section 1 – Purpose of the paper (3)

Section 2 – Lessons learned from the Church of Scotland (4-18)

- 2.1 High-level summary (4-5)
- 2.2 The Church of Scotland and the Church of England (6-7)
- 2.3 The decisive point in the Church of Scotland – 2013 (8-9)
- 2.4 Reasons for our failure as an Alliance to take united meaningful action at the decisive point in 2013 (10-13)
- 2.5 Consequences of our failure as an Alliance to take united meaningful action at the decisive point in 2013 (14)
- 2.6 Ten years on from 2013 (15-18)

Section I – Purpose of the paper

The LLF Report to the July 24 Synod proposes ten draft commitments *‘through which the whole Church can continue to pursue the implementation of the motions previously passed by Synod...’*

Two of these commitments are clearly contrary to the canons and doctrine of the Church of England (CofE).

6. Prayers – we are committed to the experimental use of standalone services of PLF...
8. Ministry – we commit to exploring the process for clergy and lay ministers to enter same-sex civil marriages...

If the July 24 Synod endorses these commitments, the CofE will have reached the decisive point.

The decisive point is when the trajectory of travel is expressed in a decision that changes practice on the ground.

A growing number of Churches around the world, facing the same issues, have passed the decisive point.

Looking at these Churches, *there is not a single example of such a decision being reversed*, including where due process to enact the decision in Church Law took years, or where there was a commitment to ‘review the decision’ at a later date, for example after a trial period. The arguments ‘nothing has been formally decided yet’ or ‘this is for a trial period’ *have, in every case, proved vacuous.*

Indeed, all the evidence from these Churches indicates that the decisive point is the catalyst to the progressive agenda gaining rapid and unstoppable momentum.

The fact that the CofE has arrived at the decisive point later than most Churches around the world is testament to the organization and effectiveness of the Alliance and the CEEC. And also, the implications of such a decision for the status of the CofE in the global Anglican Communion.

The purpose of this document is to help persuade Alliance churches in the CofE to take united meaningful action at the decisive point.

The case is made by reflecting on the facts of what happened in the Church of Scotland (CofS), in particular our failure as an Alliance to take united meaningful action at the decisive point in 2013, and the far-reaching consequences of that.

While trusting the Lord’s sovereignty, as an Alliance in Scotland, could we have done more to secure a meaningful structural settlement? As a leader of one of the churches that left the CofS, my personal view is yes.

Section 2 – Lessons learned from the Church of Scotland

2.1 High-level summary

The decisive point in the CofS was 2013.

Reasons for our failure as an Alliance to take united meaningful action at the decisive point:

- Failure to agree on the decisive point.
- Failure to appreciate what was at stake.
- Failure to understand and agree what constituted meaningful structural settlement.
- Failure to agree what constituted united meaningful action.
- Failure to appreciate that without united meaningful action, there would be no meaningful structural settlement.
- Failure to see through the Establishment rhetoric.
- Failure to adequately prepare our local churches.
- Fear of taking action because of the consequences.
- Security of tenure / self-interest.

Consequences of our failure as an Alliance to take united, meaningful action at the decisive point:

- No meaningful structural settlement was secured.
- The Alliance broke apart.
- The strong evangelical churches left the CofS, one by one, and with them the next generation of leaders.
- The progressive agenda in the CofS gained rapid and unstoppable momentum, reflected in Church Law:
 - Ministers and Deacons in Same Sex Civil Partnerships and Same Sex Marriages Act 2015
 - Solemnisation of Same Sex Marriage Overture 2022

Ten years on from 2013:

- The CofS has become one of the leading progressive Churches in the world.
- In 2022 the CofS departed from the Westminster Confession as its subordinate standard.
- The advance of the progressive agenda in the CofS has been mirrored by dramatic decline. On every metric, the CofS is in crisis, facing the real prospect of extinction.
- The Alliance churches that remained in the CofS have, over time, dwindled in influence and gospel clarity.
- Scotland has become the most secular country in the UK, and a world leader in progressive ideology. Of the many contributing factors, one is the advance of the progressive ideology in the CofS as the established Church in Scotland.
- For a time the CofS was feted by the Scottish Establishment, largely because it supported their progressive agenda, but is now increasingly seen as irrelevant.
- The Church renewal movement that has emerged in Scotland in the last 10-15 years is cause for optimism, but has come at very significant cost.

2.2 The Church of Scotland and the Church of England

(i) Both historic and established

Both the CofS and the CofE have been at the heart of the life of their respective nations for centuries.

The CofS is regarded by many Presbyterian Churches around the world as the mother Church. The CofE is the mother Church of the Anglican Communion, a group of separate Churches that are in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and for whom he is the focus of unity, first among equals.

Both the CofE and the CofS are established Churches, though in different ways. In addressing the General Assembly of the CofS in 2024, the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke about the implications of this:

“Coronations are constitutional statements, as well as religious services. The Coronation in 2023 took place in a UK that is far more diverse than 1953, and Scotland plays an enormous role in fostering and reflecting that diversity. As established churches, albeit in different ways, the Churches of Scotland and England have a duty to protect the diversity of our nation, and the free practice and flourishing of all faiths and beliefs in England and in Scotland... The Coronation reaffirmed that our privileges as the Church of Scotland and Church of England, are, in fact, obligations. As the King said and the liturgy proclaimed, we are not here to be served, but to serve. We must reflect in our General Synod and in our Church Assembly, the diversity of our nation. That is essential.”

“Our two Churches may in one sense or another be established, but we are not state churches. We do not seek popularity, but we are disciples of Christ. Every Christian remains called in Luke's words to repudiate themselves to take up the cross and to follow Christ. The discipleship of individual and church is an absolute. There is never a moment when any other loyalty can compete with that owed to God in Christ. All churches share that. Loyalty to God comes before nation, culture, race, or any other claim. Our Churches are in but not of the world, including the world of the state, with that temptation so often before us.”

(ii) Free Church of Scotland

In 1843, Thomas Chalmers led a movement of 450 ministers out of the CofS to form the Free Church of Scotland. The presenting issue that precipitated the Disruption (the term used to describe the process that began the Free Church) was external interference in the appointment of ministers. There were, however, many other linked factors, including the pervasive and increasingly powerful influence of moderatism in the CofS through the early decades of the nineteenth century.

In 1900 the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland united with the majority of the 19th-century Free Church of Scotland to form the United Free Church of Scotland. A small section of the Free Church of Scotland rejected the union and remained as the Free Church

of Scotland. The majority of the United Free Church of Scotland united with the CofS in 1929.

Today, the orthodox Free Church of Scotland is growing and has become a haven for a number of the churches and ministers who left the CofS, and for a significant proportion of the emerging generation of leaders. The Free Church is an important part of the Church renewal movement in Scotland, with an increasing public profile, bolstered by the fact that the Deputy First Minister of Scotland, Kate Forbes, is a member of the Free Church.

(iii) *Anglicanism and Presbyterianism*

One of the differences, relevant to the matter in hand, is oversight. In a Presbyterian denomination, there is no recourse to alternative oversight, either within the denomination or outside.

(iv) *Shared cultural context*

While there are differences, Scotland and England share a similar cultural context, for example the progressive ideology in national life.

(v) *Strong progressive agendas*

The progressive agenda in the CofS and the CofE are similar in focus and strength. In both denominations it is the majority view. The voting patterns in the General Assembly and Synod are remarkably similar and consistent.

(vi) *Respective Alliances contending for orthodoxy*

In the CofS the Alliance contending for orthodoxy was called *Forward Together*. While sharing broadly similar objectives with the Alliance in the CofE, it was much less organized and focused.

(vii) *Different timeframes*

The decisive point in the CofS was in 2013, more than ten years ago. It's difficult to gauge what difference this makes. With the acceptance of same-sex marriage as part of the social fabric in the UK, and the progressive agenda having moved on to gender identity, it might be more difficult to contend for an orthodox view on human sexuality. At the same time, the evidence for what has happened in Churches around the world that have embraced the progressive agenda, is compelling evidence not to, or at least to ensure there is meaningful structural settlement.

2.3 The decisive point in the Church of Scotland – 2013

Like most Western denominations, the debates in the CofS on human sexuality focused on

- (a) whether ministers should be permitted to be in same-sex relationships / civil partnerships / marriages and
- (b) whether blessings / civil partnerships / marriages of same-sex couples should be permitted in CofS churches.

While the debates on these strands ran concurrently to an extent, as in most Churches, in terms of coming to decisions, one preceded the other. In the CofS, (a) preceded (b). The important point, however, is that the substance of the matter is the same.

The following extract is taken from an analysis written in 2013

The decision of the 2013 General Assembly

- *In May 2013, the General Assembly (GA) (the highest court / decision-making body in the Church of Scotland (CofS) made a decision which permits people in same-sex relationships to be ministers in the CofS.*
- *The practical consequences of this decision will be seen clearly in two areas. First, at the point of selection for training for ministry, an individual in a same-sex civil partnership will now be eligible for selection. Second, at the congregational level, a Kirk Session will be permitted to have as its minister a person who is in a same-sex civil partnership.*
- *Some have said that the GA decision is an acceptable and realistic compromise, on the basis that the default position of congregations remains traditional, orthodox, but allowing individual congregations – by decisions of their Kirk Sessions – to depart from the CofS’s traditional position. But whatever words are used, the GA has decided, in principle and in practice, to permit people in same-sex relationships to be ministers in the CofS.*
- *We recognise that the presenting issue is one of great sensitivity, and are deeply conscious of these sensitivities. Sadly, this has become a defining issue in our culture, whether in the political arena, education or the Church. We have never sought to make this the issue; rather we are responding to those who have.*
- *But the real issue, and it is important to see beyond the presenting issue to the real underlying issue, is what this decision says about the CofS’s view of the authority of the Bible and the gospel. The GA decision rejects the authority of the Bible, because it undermines the Bible’s teaching on marriage and calls good what the Bible clearly calls sin. It rejects the gospel, because in affirming what the Bible calls sin, the need for forgiveness and the power of the Holy Spirit leading to a transformed life is set aside. It is as serious as that.*
- *In summary, the GA has decided, in principle and in practice, to permit those in same-sex relationships to serve as ministers, and so has decided, in principle and in practice, to depart from the Bible and the gospel.*

- *Why was this year's GA so significant? Many will argue that the CofS has always wrestled with diversity and tensions. The GA decision was so significant, because, if this decision is confirmed, which we believe it will be, the CofS, for the first time, formally in its laws and regulations, will have rejected the Bible and the gospel on a matter where Scripture is absolutely clear and consistent. At the time, the media nationally and internationally, rightly in our view, recognised this as an historic decision.*
- *Moreover, in our view, this decision is not a surprise, but rather confirmation of a long-term shift away from the Bible and the gospel in the CofS and reflects the true state of the CofS on the ground.*

Everything happened exactly as described above.

2.4 Reasons for our failure to take united meaningful action at the decisive point in 2013

(i) Failure to agree on the decisive point

With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that 2013 was the decisive point in the CofS. Everything changed from there.

Prior to the decision in 2013, successive General Assemblies had 'signaled' what was ahead, in particular the 2011 General Assembly. A *Special Commission on Same-Sex Relationships and the Ministry* (set up in 2009) reported. In its deliverance, the Assembly was asked to vote on one of two trajectories, either to (a) affirm the historic traditionalist position of the Church on marriage and human sexuality, or (b) turn and face in a revisionist (progressive) direction, with an openness to affirming same-sex relationships in the future. A sizeable majority supported (b). Following that decision, the Assembly agreed to set up a *Theological Commission on Same-Sex Relationships and the Ministry* to examine the theological justification of the two trajectories, and report to the 2013 General Assembly.

In the week following the 2011 General Assembly, a meeting of the Alliance and the churches / networks they represented was held at St George's Tron Church in Glasgow. Over 500 attended, the largest ever gathering of the Alliance. It was clear that the room was divided, some arguing that the decisive point had been reached; others urging restraint until the Theological Commission reported in 2013. The majority of the Alliance did not see 2011 as the decisive point. Within this group were those who wanted to wait and see what happened. There were also those who considered that the 2011 decision was decisive, but needed the time between 2011-2013 to prepare their churches.

Though in the numerical minority, the churches that saw 2011 as the decisive point included the strongest churches in the Alliance. They began to take steps to leave the denomination, and did so before 2013. While their actions were entirely understandable, and indeed set the course for other churches to follow in time, there is no doubt that their loss significantly impacted the strength and ability of the Alliance.

As an Alliance in the CofE, you remain strong, are in a position to agree on the decisive point and take meaningful action together.

(ii) Failure to appreciate what was at stake

It was the churches that took steps to leave after 2011 that had the clearest grasp of what was at stake. As evidence of this, they expressed their opposition to the General Assembly decision through meaningful action. Their courage stood out, but at that time most of the churches in the Alliance were not ready to do that.

When it came to 2013, more churches were aware of what was at stake in terms of their future, the future of the CofS, and the emerging and future generations of leaders, but the Alliance was much weaker by 2013. In some sense we had lost heart.

As a leader of one of the strong churches (in terms of numbers, unity on the issues etc.) I regret not seeing clearly enough that many of the churches in the Alliance were dependent on our advocacy and actions on their behalf. These churches were never going to be in a position to leave and needed the stronger churches to act together on their behalf.

You are so much better organized than we were with excellent material that expresses clearly what is at stake for the CofE and the cause of the gospel in England, the Global Anglican Communion, and the world Church.

(iii) Failure to understand and agree what constituted meaningful structural settlement

In the letter from the Alliance to the House of Bishops (11 Dec 2023), reference was made to what constitutes meaningful structural settlement – “oversight, training, licensing and appointments that are aligned with current doctrine and practice”. Elsewhere, John Dunnett / CCEC has referred to “a structural rearrangement of the Church of England for orthodoxy to flourish” and “a legally secure structural settlement, without theological compromise”. The Ephesian Fund, and arrangements for alternative spiritual oversight, helpfully pave the way for this, but are only provisional measures.

In the Alliance in Scotland, while having some discussion around settlement of this nature, these discussions were never developed or pursued with anything like the degree of rigour that you are.

(iv) Failure to agree what constituted united meaningful action

Through the period 2009-2013, the Alliance in Scotland worked hard to defend and affirm the orthodox position. Our efforts focused on the important Assembly debates. We sought to communicate our position through written and digital media. It became clear this strategy, while important, was not enough. We were always in the minority in debates and in key votes (voting patterns hardly changed at all through the period) and needed to do more. In retrospect, what was needed was united meaningful action. Meaningful actions are money, oversight and people. And united action has much more impact. In Scotland, we were not able to agree on this at the time. We were perhaps naïve, thinking orthodoxy would prevail, or people would be persuaded by our arguments which were biblical and true to the gospel. They weren't persuaded. Looking back, robust theological reflection on the legitimacy of meaningful action would have helped persuade us that this was a justifiable approach.

CCEC has done an excellent job in making provision for such action through the Ephesian Fund and alternative oversight arrangements. This is way ahead of where we were.

Again, with the benefit of hindsight, one of our greatest strengths as an Alliance was the people in our churches. Most of the younger people in the Church of Scotland were in the Alliance networks and churches. That included most of the emerging and future leaders. While we had begun to develop a new strategy for training, which we would have pursued whether in or outside the CofS, we did not communicate this. The advocacy of the generation of emerging

and future leaders would have been powerful, a united voice making it clear that they could not, and would not, train in the CofS without meaningful structural settlement.

(v) *Failure to appreciate that without united meaningful action, there would be no meaningful structural settlement*

This is perhaps a repeat of (iv) above, but of such importance that it merits repetition. We simply failed to appreciate that without united meaningful action, there would be no meaningful settlement.

Though manifestly untrue, the mantra of ‘unity in diversity’, or ‘unity strengthened through diversity’ is very strong and persuasive to many, including those with orthodox views. In the CofS, there was a recognition that the Church was divided on the issue and there needed to be some form of pseudo-structural recognition / accommodation for this. This became increasingly clear with successive polarizing debates.

The solution in the CofS was the principle of the “mixed economy”, an “opt in” or “opt out” mechanism, whereby diverse views or positions could be embraced in one structure.

At the 2013 General Assembly when the decision was made to allow ministers to be in same-sex relationships, the initial proposal was to make the progressive position the formal position of the CofS, with an “opt-out” for traditionalists. That may not have passed the vote. The master stroke was a counter-motion to affirm the historic traditionalist position as the CofS formal position, with an “opt-out” for progressives. The Assembly was persuaded that a consensus had been reached, and the vote duly passed.

In the days immediately following this decisive Assembly, there were discussions around taking meaningful action, but there was little impetus or appetite for it. Many were pleased with the ‘solution’.

In the CofE, the LLF reset proposals from the Bishop of Leicester, now lead bishop for the LLF process, first brought to the General Synod in February 2024, while acknowledging the inherent divisions and need for some form of structural arrangement, seem to be in the same realm as the solution that was found (and proved to be wholly inadequate) in the CofS.

The widespread desire for this kind of structural solution, along the lines of the “mixed economy” means that without united meaningful action from the Alliance, it is very likely to prevail, as it did in the CofS.

(vi) *Failure to see through the Establishment rhetoric*

Time and again, many of us were taken in by the Establishment rhetoric, particularly from those who would have identified with the Alliance constituency. Too often, hope was placed in them to use their positions of influence to promote orthodoxy, but at best they were neutral.

(vii) Failure to adequately prepare our local churches

When we met together as an Alliance of leaders, we failed to acknowledge that while we were united in our commitment to meaningful action as a group of leaders, many of us had not prepared our local churches to take such action. The issues that had become all-consuming for us, figured to a far lesser extent with most people on the ground in local churches. Facing up to this, and helping churches which needed more time, would have helped. Speaking personally, the most significant thing that happened in our church was getting people to watch the debates in the General Assembly. It was then that they realized the state of the denomination.

(viii) Fear of taking action because of the consequences

There was widespread fear. At one level, it was fear of taking action that might be breaking Church law or compromising trustee responsibilities. Or fear of reputation, or being ostracized. Fear for people in our churches, particularly those working in certain professions. Fear of hypocrisy, when our own lives were marked by sin in so many ways. And the fear of losing church buildings, homes and livelihoods if it came to that. And the impact on our families.

(ix) Security of tenure / self-interest

In the CofS, many of us as ministers had unrestricted tenure. This meant that we were relatively safe until we retired. Likewise, the churches we led, until our retirement initiated a vacancy or potential readjustment. Moreover, the CofS, while pursuing its progressive agenda, did everything they could to appease orthodox churches, anything to avoid a movement of churches leaving the denomination. If you kept your head down you were left alone. If as a minister you held security of tenure, the temptation to do that was very real.

With incumbents in the CofE who have the living of a parish, a similar situation might pertain.

2.5 Consequences of our failure to take united meaningful action at the decisive point in 2013

While it would be wrong to conclude that what happened post 2013 was solely due to our failure as an Alliance to take united meaningful action, it was a key factor.

(i) *There was no meaningful structural settlement*

There was no meaningful structural settlement. Instead, those holding to an orthodox view were appeased by conscience clauses and various iterations of a mixed economy.

(ii) *The Alliance broke apart*

The Alliance in Scotland quickly broke apart.

(iii) *The strong evangelical churches left the Church of Scotland, and with them the next generation of leaders*

The strong evangelical churches left the CofS, and with them the next generation of leaders. There was no coordinated leaving process, and in numerical terms the number of churches that left was small, around 20 in the first wave (from 2013-2015). Yet the impact over time was significant, given the strength of the departing churches. They were the churches with the young people. They were the training churches. The CofS Establishment was able to deal with the departing churches one by one, through a body euphemistically titled the National Cohesiveness Task Force. Most churches left without buildings and assets, but with the prize possession, people.

After a period of consolidation, and for many the acquisition of buildings, the churches that have left the CofS are now established and thriving, training leaders and planting new churches. A number have joined the Free Church of Scotland, others have affiliated with different groupings or remained independent.

(iv) *The progressive agenda in the Church of Scotland gained rapid and unstoppable momentum*

The progressive agenda in the CofS gained rapid and unstoppable momentum. Very soon the legislation permitting ministers to be in same-sex marriages was enacted (Ministers and Deacons in Same Sex Civil Partnerships and Same Sex Marriages Act 2015), followed by legislation permitting ministers and churches to conduct same-sex weddings (Solemnisation of Same Sex Marriage Overture 2022).

2.6 Ten years on from 2013

- (i) ***The Church of Scotland has become one of the leading progressive Churches in the world, in 2022 departing from the Westminster Confession as its subordinate standard.***

While the issue of same-sex marriage has been the dominant presenting issue in the CofS, the strong revisionist undercurrents are now being seen in other areas, most significantly in its confessional position. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) was adopted by the CofS in 1647 as its subordinate standard on matters of doctrine, and ratified by Acts of Parliament in 1649 and 1690. Through the influence of the CofS, the Westminster Confession became established as the dominant Confession of Presbyterian churches worldwide. The CofS can legitimately be regarded as the “mother Church” of Presbyterian Churches worldwide.

At the 2022 General Assembly, the CofS reaffirmed its commitment to be a “confessional” Church, while at the same time agreeing to rank the Westminster Confession alongside a number of other Confessions or doctrinal statements. Taken together, this “portfolio” of Confessions will define what the Church of Scotland believes. The idea is that everyone can assent to something, unity through diversity. As to which other Confessions or doctrinal statements will be included, the Theological Forum will advise the Church. The year 2022 will be remembered in history as the date the CofS *de facto* departed from the Westminster Confession as its subordinate standard, in contravention of the second Article Declaratory which states:

The principal subordinate standard of the Church of Scotland is the Westminster Confession of Faith approved by the General Assembly of 1647, containing the sum and substance of the Faith of the Reformed Church.

The next largest Protestant denomination in Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, one of the 44 Provinces and Churches which make up the Global Anglican Communion, has followed a virtually identical path to the Church of Scotland. Within Global Anglicanism, it is one of the leading revisionist Churches, with strong links to the Episcopal Church in the USA.

In 2021, the CofS and the Scottish Episcopal Church signed the St Andrew’s Declaration, affirming their partnership and common trajectory. In 2022, the CofS and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland signed the St Margaret’s Declaration, expressing ecumenical partnership.

While many of the West’s historic denominations are heading in a liberal or revisionist direction, few, if any, in the world are as advanced as the CofS.

- (ii) ***The advance of the progressive agenda has been mirrored by dramatic decline. On every metric, the Church of Scotland is now in crisis, facing the realistic prospect of extinction within a generation.***

While the CofS is a leading progressive Church in the world, at the same time it is in crisis, facing the realistic prospect of extinction within a generation.

The facts about decline speak very powerfully, a picture that is the same as other Churches around the world that have followed a progressive path.

For a helpful analysis see: *Ready to Harvest: The end of the Church of Scotland*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sr_0io98-uA

Here is a brief summary of what has happened as the progressive agenda has advanced in the CofS:

- The 2019 Radical Action Plan endorsed a reduction in the number of ministers and congregations by 40%.
- The CofS has an estate in the range of 4,500 to 5,000 buildings to maintain and pay for. As part of its Radical Action Plan, the CofS is engaging in a programme to dispose of a significant number of its assets, church buildings and houses. With church buildings, an ecclesiastical exemption, in Scots Law, means that redundant church buildings can be transformed for multi-use.
- As at December 2023, there were 259,200 members of the CofS (4.8% of the population of Scotland). The number has been reducing steadily since the high point in the 1950's of 1.3 million. In the last 10 years, since 2013, the number of members has fallen by 35%, a significant acceleration in decline.
- The number of members actually attending church in person is 61,560 (24% of members). The average age of those attending church is 62 with 59% of members aged 65 or over.
- In 2022 the Assembly Trustees stated ominously that “*professions of faith and baptisms have almost baselined*” (the baseline is zero).
- In 2023 the Assembly Trustees reported that the vast majority of ministers are over the age of 50 and it is estimated that 40-50% of them could retire in the next 10 years.
- While reducing the number of ministers overall as part of its Radical Action Plan, in recent years the CofS has invested significant resources in recruiting and training the next generation of leaders. An important gauge of spiritual health is recruitment to ministry.

- The Report of the Faith Nurture Forum in 2022 gave this devastating analysis:

“We have seen a significantly lower number of Enquirers this year come forward into Discernment overall.” The statistics are: 36 (2021), 65 (2020), 93 (2019). The number of full-time Ministry Candidates accepted in 2021 was 15. Across all five years of training, the combined total of full-time Ministry Candidates, Probationers, Ordained Local Ministers and Deacons across the entire denomination is 61. Given the size of the Church of Scotland, these numbers are very small. And most significantly, the trend is one of decline. While the Pandemic is cited as a factor, the main reason for decline identified by the Faith Nurture Forum is the age profile of those in active membership of the Church of Scotland: *“...the proportion of active members who are of an age to consider and explore the call to full-time Ministry has been much reduced. For any form of recruitment, there has to be a pool of people from which to actively recruit. When we talk of recruitment in terms of ministry, we are not only bringing faith, belief and vocation into the equation, we are also expecting active participation in the life, worship and witness of the Church over a period of time, as well as a sense of call, and the evidence of gifts and skills for ministry.”*
- On finances, the headlines from the Assembly Trustees Report in 2024:

Only 29% of the charges are paying for the cost of the ministry they receive.

The budget for 2024 is a deficit of £8.1 million. *“If deficits continue without further and more fundamental actions then the only means of paying core costs including Ministers’ stipends and staff salaries will be from the Church’s General Fund. Based on our revised assumptions using updated data available to us, the general fund will be extinguished by 2032. As Trustees of the charity there is no option but to ensure an end to deficit budgets and to have a plan to achieve this.”*

(iii) The Alliance churches that remained in the Church of Scotland, over time, dwindled in influence and gospel clarity.

Following the 2013 General Assembly, with the loss of the strong evangelical churches (now focusing on leaving the CofS) the Alliance, as it was, broke up. The Alliance churches that remained in the CofS were broadly divided into two groups: (1) those who remained by conviction; (2) those who had no option but to remain because of their circumstances. Two new groups were formed around this time – *The Church of Scotland Evangelical Network (COSEN)* and *Covenant Fellowship Scotland*. Both were committed to renewal from within. Initially feted by the CofS establishment, they quickly dwindled in influence. A number of the churches that remained have since closed (including the church whose minister began Covenant Fellowship), or merged with other churches, impacting their gospel clarity. A few, particularly in the Highlands and Islands, have remained orthodox. Also, a number of ministers who wanted to leave, but couldn’t take their churches with them, moved to jobs in churches outside the CofS or in parachurches. Others retired early.

(iv) *Scotland has become the most secular country in the UK and a world leader in progressive ideology.*

The 2022 Scotland Census found that 51.1% of people in Scotland identify as having no religion, which is the first time a majority of the population has not identified with a religion. This is a significant increase from 2011, when 36.7% of people identified as not religious. The decline in Christianity, particularly among Protestants, is a major factor in this change. This compares to 36.7% in England (2021 figures).

The Census found the number of people who identified with the CofS had slumped by more than a third over the decade, falling from 32.4% of the population in 2011 to 20.4%, or 1.1 million people, in 2022.

In 2019 celebrants from the Humanist Society officiated at more weddings than in the CofS.

This reflects the new ideology that has come to dominate and define Scottish life and culture, the interpretation of the world through the lens of social justice, identity group politics and intersectionalism. Scotland is a world leader in this new ideology, along with countries like New Zealand and Canada.

There are many factors in the rapid advance of this new ideology in Scotland, one of which is the advance of the progressive ideology in the CofS, the established Church in Scotland.

For a time, the CofS was feted by the Scottish Establishment, largely because it supported their progressive agenda, but is now increasingly seen as irrelevant.

(v) *The Church Renewal movement in Scotland is cause for optimism, but has emerged at very significant cost.*

The Church Renewal movement and strategy that has emerged in Scotland over the last 10-15 years is cause for optimism, but has emerged at very significant cost.

The evangelical churches who left the CofS are at the heart of the Renewal movement, but it took 10 years to regroup, purchase buildings, etc.

The Renewal movement is small and fragile.

The evangelical churches that remained in the CofS are not part of the Renewal movement and strategy.