



The Church of Scotland

# PRESBYTERY MISSION PLANNING ACT: GUIDANCE & CODE OF PRACTICE V1.4

FAITH NURTURE FORUM | CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

# GUIDANCE & CODE OF PRACTICE ACCOMPANYING THE PRESBYTERY MISSION PLAN ACT (ACT VIII 2021) V1.4

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Faith Nurture Forum (“the Forum”), and the General Trustees, after consultation with the Legal Questions Committee are empowered to issue Guidance on the implementation and operation of the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (‘the Act’). The Guidance shall include a Code of Practice (1.1(k); 13).

This first edition is not a comprehensive Guide covering all aspects. The Guidance and Code are likely to go through multiple editions as the Presbytery Mission Planning process advances and as the Church grows in knowledge and experience.

At this early stage, it is important to restate the priority of the Church which Presbyteries, together with the General Trustees and the Faith Nurture Forum, must deliver using this Act. The Act is a means to this end which is the Church’s participation in Christ’s mission. Therefore, this first edition begins with those sections of the Act which focus on that Mission and aims at being a Code which will enable effective mission in practice. It is useful to restate the Five Marks of Mission here:

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Further reflection from the Church’s Theological Forum, on the Five Marks of Mission, can be found [here](#).

## 2. OVERVIEW

2.1 The Act requires that the Presbytery, the Forum and the General Trustees (‘the Trustees’) work together to prepare and approve an Approved Mission Plan. **Each Presbytery must have an Approved Mission Plan in place no later than 31 December 2022 (1.1.1(c); 2.0).**

2.2 There is provision in the Act for Presbyteries who are working towards a union to develop a shared Mission Plan which can be approved ahead of the date of union. This builds in the wider possibilities for reshaping church life which is provided by the removal of Presbytery boundaries and the using of Ministry posts across a wider area, for example, the provide a specialised ministry across the whole of the “new” Presbytery.

Once approved, the Mission Plan must be implemented.

2.3 Each year, the Mission Plan must be evaluated and developed in rolling form so that it remains an accurate, comprehensive and up to date Mission Plan for the shape of church life in the next five years, recognizing that a rapidly changing world requires the Church to adapt and review its mission.

2.4 The Act states the purposes for which it was enacted in its preface. This preface should be referred to whenever the Act is interpreted or applied. In short, the driver is the effective mission of the local church as measured against the ‘Five Marks of Mission’ (see also 1.1.1 (i) and (n); 2.2.1) and this Guidance. **If it cannot be reasonably demonstrated that a proposed Presbytery Mission Plan (PMP) furthers the effective mission of the local church, then it does not satisfy the basic requirement of the Act.**

2.4 The Act provides the Presbytery, the Forum and the Trustees with the means to:

- prepare a Mission Plan (2.1-2.2)
- approve a Mission Plan so that it becomes an Approved Mission Plan (2.2.6)
- evaluate and develop a Mission Plan (2.4)
- implement a Mission Plan (4-10)

2.5 A Mission Plan may be reviewed on limited grounds by a Mission Plan Review Panel (3; Schedule).

2.6 In summary, the PMP Act requires the Presbytery to use its knowledge, experience and understanding to make decisions and take actions by the end of 2022 and each year thereafter. It also offers the Presbytery a wide range of options to reshape church life within its bounds. In doing so, it must work with and obtain the approval of the Forum and the General Trustees. The Presbytery, the Forum and the Trustees must act in accordance with Church law, follow a fair and reasonable process and consider all, but only, relevant material facts. Please take note of what is said below on Consultation and Partnership

2.7 The General Trustees are a key part of this process, and further information can be found on their work [here](#). Some Presbyteries are working with the General Trustees' Land and Property Toolkit and others have appointed, or are exploring the appointment of, a Buildings Officer who will be a critical part of the process.

## 2.8 GLOSSARY

MDS: Ministries Development Staff

PPMA: Presbytery Mission Plan Act, Act VIII, 2021

PPTG: Presbytery Planning Task Group (in Faith Nurture Forum)

OLM: Ordained Local Minister

## 3. GETTING READY

3.1 The first thing to do is read right through the Act – click [here](#). The Act has been carefully and skilfully drafted and approved by the 2021 General Assembly. Given its scope and complexity, it is written in an accessible style.

3.2 Three preparatory steps will help in your reading of the Act:

- read the Preface. It's all about Mission! It's important to get to grips with the Preface since it explains the background to the Act and what the Church intends to achieve through it. This will help you to understand the detail as well as the objectives of the Act.
- work through the structure of the Act without trying to master the detail. Use the version which you can access through the Church's website [here](#). The version at this link has been colour-coded, and laid out, so that you can easily see the major components of the process of preparing, approving, developing and implementing a Presbytery Mission Plan. They follow a logical pattern.
- read the definitions. Section 1.1 defines all the key terms used in the rest of the Act. Familiarity with these definitions will ease your understanding of what follows.

3.3 Then you need to be clear how many ministry posts the Presbytery has been allocated. **This is the maximum number of ministry posts which will be funded by the Parish Staffing Fund.** This was reported to the General Assembly in the Faith Nurture Forum’s Supplementary Report, and a copy of the table can be obtained by emailing [Presbyteryplanning@churchofscotland.org.uk](mailto:Presbyteryplanning@churchofscotland.org.uk). As well as inducted ministers, this includes ‘appointments’ other than those funded locally by a congregation or by the presbytery (1.1(b))

3.4 Now you are ready to begin something new. Whatever the Presbytery Plan may have been prior to 01 June 2021, it is now redundant. The General Assembly of 2021 has approved transition provisions to cover the gap before a Mission Plan is approved, but these provisions should be used with an eye towards that future plan.

3.5 You might want to consider at this stage how you involve Kirk Sessions and indeed congregations in a discussion about the Mission Plan process. If they understand what is required and can help frame the methodology then there is a much better chance of positive interaction.

3.6 It is also helpful to give a timetable to Kirk Sessions – when (and how) will they be consulted, what are the dates for feedback, when will drafts come to Presbytery meetings for consideration.

## 4. THE PRIORITY OF MISSION

4.1 Mission in the local church is the beating heart of the Act. A draft Mission Plan which does not demonstrably prioritise mission will not be approved.

4.2 Section 2.1.1 of the Act states the overarching purpose of the whole Mission Planning process – to shape and resource the Church’s engagement with Christ’s Mission. “Mission” is defined in section 1.1(n) with reference to the Church’s Five Marks of Mission. That definition is supplemented by this, and subsequent, guidance. The “Five Marks of Mission” are restated in the Act at section 1.1(l).

“Shape of church life” is defined in section 1.1(r). This covers every aspect of local church life for which the Presbytery is responsible.

Section 2.1.1 also sets out the four principal requirements which must be met to achieve the purpose of Presbytery Mission Planning. Broadly, these relate to local mission, territorial ministry, use of ministry posts and new ways of being church. However, there is no substitute for reading and applying these carefully. When the Presbytery seeks approval for the Mission Plan, it must be able to demonstrate that it has met these requirements.

4.3 The General Trustees are required to advise on the suitability of church buildings (1.1(g)) for that Mission. Presbyteries are required to categorise buildings into one of two categories:

a) to be retained beyond the five years from the date at which the Mission Plan is approved or annually reviewed, or;

(b) to be sold, let or otherwise disposed of by a specified date which is within five years from the date at which the ecclesiastical building is first categorised as (b).

## 5. PRIORITISING MISSION – CODE OF PRACTICE

5.1 Moving from theory to practice – from good intentions to effective mission – is not easy. Congregations and ministers will offer genuinely-held analysis and conclusions which are sometimes in conflict.

5.2 To assist Presbyteries, the Forum and the Trustees, the Code of Practice has been prepared. This too will evolve. The presumption is that the Code will be applied. If, at any stage in the Mission Plan process, it is not applied, then this must be justified in accordance with the Five Marks of Mission as they relate to the particular local context.

5.3.1 Presbytery, the Forum and the Trustees must prioritise Mission (as defined in sections 1.1 (l) and (n) through the PMP process. No area of church life is exempt (see section 1.1(r)). Everything in this Code of Practice should be read in the light of, and is subordinate to, section 2.1.1.

5.3.2 Communities: Every community of every size in every location within Scotland is part of a Church of Scotland Parish. While population should no longer be the only principle in shaping Presbytery Plans, it still remains the starting point. Our calling as a church is not primarily to resource congregations: it is mission to everyone in the land.

5.3.3 Ecumenism: “The Commission readily acknowledges that reaching the people of Scotland is an ecumenical task and one to which the Church of Scotland contributes along with other denominations as partners in the gospel.” If a particular community is well served by another denomination, there may be no need for the Presbytery to duplicate that. Where a community is equally well served by the Church of Scotland and another denomination the Presbytery should explore what local possibilities there might be for recognising each other’s ministry so that resources can be used elsewhere. The General Assembly of 2021 instructed the Forum, when developing principles for Presbytery Mission Planning, to include a principle of ecumenical working, bearing in mind the Lund Principle, affirming that churches should act

together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately. That same deliverance also encouraged the forming of Local Mission Communities and regional Covenant Partnerships as outlined in the report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee ([here](#)).

5.3.4 The poor: The General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed that the gospel imperative is priority to the poor. At a time when resources are scarce, it is tempting to take away from the most marginal communities where churches are often very fragile and small. However pressing the reasons may be locally, this must be resisted because it makes a mockery of the gospel and the repeated commitments of the General Assembly. However, as in every part of the Church, this does not mean that existing patterns of ministry should not be evaluated and reviewed and different forms of church life introduced.

5.3.4 Whole people of God: One aim of the Act is to assist the church in making the most effective use of paid ministries. However, this takes place in the context of the ministry of the whole people of God. The Special Commission on the Third Article Declaratory, in 2010, noted that “the living out of the commitment of Article III may well involve an increasing number of communities where the ministry is exercised largely by the eldership and membership of the Church, albeit under the oversight of an ordained minister.” (8.5.6) Therefore a further principle to guide Presbyteries in their deployment of ministries is how they might be used to encourage and enhance the ministry of the whole people of God. This sharing of talents may be across a wider area than a parish – some Presbyteries are developing the idea of Mission Districts, on which more information will be available later.

5.3.5 Congregations: The church has “a commitment to maintain worshipping, witnessing and serving Christian congregations throughout Scotland.” One of the ways in which the gospel finds visible expression is in committed congregations under the power of the Holy Spirit. They both express the gospel and commend the gospel. In their Planning, Presbyteries will identify congregations that are outward looking, which engage with their communities and the wider church and consider how they might build on these strengths.

5.3.6 Mixed economy: Whilst affirming the importance of the Parish system and recognising the importance of a sense of ‘place’ the General Assembly stated that this needs to be expressed in a variety of ways. Martyn Percy, an Anglican scholar, says: “For the Church to find its place in the modern world, it will have to create new spaces for new communities and different opportunities for differentiated niche groups.” While in many communities the sense

of place is best expressed in something physical and tangible, that is not universally true. The Church will need, for example, to discover how to relate to those whose belonging is primarily through networks or the virtual world.

5.3.7 Financial responsibility: Presbytery Mission Planning does not mean ensuring that congregations which make a net contribution to central funds take priority. Nonetheless a degree of financial realism is required and it is appropriate that some consideration is given to congregational financial responsibility. Some congregations are more generous than comparable ones and all congregations are expected to make a financial contribution appropriate to their means. At present one third of congregations are net contributors and two thirds are net receivers. However, per capita giving can be much higher amongst some of the poorest congregations than it is in some of the wealthiest. It is essential for Presbyteries to consider the complex financial picture and allocate ministerial resources to congregations that take their financial stewardship seriously. The Presbytery, Forum and Trustees should also take account of the effect of a Mission Plan on the aggregate amount of Ministry and Mission Contributions which the Presbytery's congregations remit to the national Church.

5.3.8 Buildings: There is a connection between ministry and church buildings, although that connection is neither uniform nor universal. At a national level there is a consensus that the Church of Scotland has too many buildings, numerous buildings that are underutilised, buildings that are too large for present day needs and buildings that are in the wrong place. At a local level however, almost every church building is deemed essential by those who worship there week by week. There is no simple solution to this problem. The starting point however should be mission. Presbyteries will want to consider which buildings are essential and useful for the mission they envisage, and offer to local parties means by which they might look more objectively at the bricks and mortar which they possess. The General Trustees will support Presbyteries in developing their mission plans. Presbyteries are encouraged to make use of the General Trustees Land and Buildings Toolkit, and other assessment tools which will be available.

## 6. CONSULTATION AND PARTNERSHIP

6.1. It is vital that Presbyteries, Ministries Congregations, and Kirk Sessions work together in constructing Mission Plans – the best plans will be achieved through consensus and shared vision. This will not always be achievable in every situation, but it should be the clear starting point for the process.

6.2. Parish Ministers and Ministries colleagues, and those involved in fabric decisions, will have a key role in assisting congregations to explore Mission Planning. Where there are Ordained Local Ministers or Readers involved, they should also be consulted. The days of thinking that matters can be dealt with ‘after we’ve moved on/retired’ are past, as the Church of Scotland does not have the luxury of time at her disposal, and there is a strong likelihood that congregations who cannot take part in planning processes will be left stranded when their Minister does leave. For Mission Planning to have a realistic prospect of achieving what is essential, Ministers, Ordained Local Ministers, Readers, Deacons and MDS staff will need to be willing to be flexible in regard to their changing roles and mission.

For some that will mean a willingness to move to a new situation altogether. For many others it will be a willingness to take on new responsibilities and/or to work in more formal and wider partnerships with other colleagues. It might mean engaging in training and acquiring new skills. This is challenging and potentially costly, and what has encouraged the Forum in the past few years has been the evidence of that willingness in the lives of numbers of Ministry colleagues in rural, island, town and urban settings. It will be an essential question to all to consider the question about whether where they are now is where God needs them to be. And if they cannot physically “move on” they might reflect on how they can stay in the same place but reshape their pattern of service.

6.3. Office bearers should be encouraged to consider how the Five Marks are exhibited in the life and witness of the congregations; look at the mission opportunities for the parishes; look at the how Ministries and congregational witness might be shared in the area; and consider how buildings might be shared or adapted. They should be encouraged to open conversations with neighbouring congregations and also to consider opportunities for ecumenical partnerships at an informal as well as formal level.

- 6.4. Presbytery representatives should meet with the office bearers at an early stage in the process to outline the likely availability of Ministries resources and to provide help and support in identifying existing and potential mission opportunities in the congregation and community. In the light of this, strengths and weaknesses of the congregation and its built heritage should also be explored.
- 6.5. An essential part of the planning process is to put mission first, then consider people and congregational structures – ministries requirements and unions, linkages and various team formations – and finally buildings. Buildings must be seen to serve the mission of the Church, not the other way round.
- 6.6. Congregational groupings should move towards fewer decision-making bodies and fewer buildings, with effective numbers of office bearers. **Multi-linkage charges should be strongly discouraged**, as congregations in various forms of partnership need to be sharing vision for mission and life, and a requirement for too many office bearers drains the energies of Ministry leadership with the potential for miscommunication, divergence of vision and lengthening decision-making processes.
- 6.7. Once there is an Approved Mission Plan, for either the Presbytery, or an area within it, work can begin on adjustment. Any proposed Bases of Adjustment should be sent to the Faith Nurture Forum through its Presbytery Planning group for advice and to enable appropriate involvement of the General Trustees, and to check conformity with developing Presbytery Mission Plans. The task here is **advisory**, rather than one of seeking concurrence; early approaches are welcomed. Please use the email [presbyteryplanning@churchofscotland.org.uk](mailto:presbyteryplanning@churchofscotland.org.uk).
- 6.8. The Act also requires that where local appointments are being made by Presbyteries, the job description and contract of employment have been approved by the Human Resources department in the national office in order to ensure consistency and fairness across Presbyteries; similar roles have developed in different Presbyteries, with significantly different terms and conditions.
- 6.9. Any changes to the Mission Plan will require the concurrence of the Forum and the General Trustees, and early dialogue on this is recommended.

- 6.10. Presbyteries and congregations should be encouraged to think beyond their boundaries, especially in the light of future changes to Presbyteries through the reform process, but also to recognise that these boundaries do not necessarily present a barrier to mission.

***Edinburgh, 18 June 2021***

***Presbytery Planning Task Group, Faith Nurture Forum, with input from the General Trustees***