

Paper N1

Church Life Review progress report

Church Life Review

Basic information

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Action required	For information only.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update Assembly on the revised process and general progress of Church Life Review Phase Two (Design).
Main points	A revised approach will be taken to the Church Life Review (CLR), consisting of a single Steering Group overseen by a sub-committee of the Business Committee. Subsequent revisions have been made to the approach to CLR workstreams, including an increased role for external consultants and the establishment of living labs. Progress has been made in accordance with the revised approach and a plan for delivery is in place.
Previous relevant documents	Papers N1 and N2, General Assembly 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	Business Committee, General Secretariat, Synod Representatives, CLR contributors and stakeholders.

Summary of impact

Financial	Budgetary implications of the revised approach are estimated to be covered by the existing CLR allocation.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. Background

- 1.1. The work of the previous Church Life Review (CLR) Group concluded following the completion of Phase One. Phase Two (Design) has now commenced.
- 1.2. Three task groups were planned on the strength of General Assembly 2023 Resolutions 48, 49, and 51. These three task groups aligned with the CLR's three workstreams: finance resource sharing, employment of lay workers, and provision of shared support services.

- 1.3. Too few nominations and applications were received to populate the three task groups, requiring a revised approach. As this revised approach was taking shape, the Programme Manager commenced in role.

2. Phase two objectives

- 2.1. The primary objectives of CLR Phase Two are to investigate new ways of working in each of the three workstreams, analyse the outcomes of these investigations, and then deliver a set of recommendations to an extraordinary session of General Assembly in November 2025. The emphasis of Phase Two is on exploration and design, giving scope for creative responses to emergent change.

3. Revised approach – CLR structure

- 3.1. A revised approach to the CLR was approved by the Business Committee on 16 April, 2024. The three task groups will be replaced by a single Steering Group, responsible for guiding the content of the Church Life Review. This Steering Group will be overseen by a Church Life Review Sub-Committee, drawn from the Business Committee. Any substantive changes to the agreed programme process will be referred to the Business Committee in its full composition.
- 3.2. The Steering Group will be composed of eight experienced individuals who have an interest in all three Church Life Review workstreams. The Steering Group will inform the work of the CLR, support the Programme Manager and General Secretary with events and consultations, oversee work led by external consultants, inform and advise on the development of living labs, secure additional capacity where necessary, and prepare reports and recommendations for General Assembly in November 2025 following the conclusion of its investigations and trials. The Steering Group will not be expected to undertake the bulk of the work themselves, but to guide and inform the process.
- 3.3. The CLR sub-committee will be responsible for day-to-day programme governance, including monitoring progress and budget.
- 3.4. The CLR will be supported by a wider informal consultative network, consisting of interested individuals who will be drawn into key conversations based on their skills and expertise. This network will include individuals who applied to one of the original task groups and remain interested in contributing to the CLR.

4. Revised approach – CLR workstreams

- 4.1. The new approach to programme structure requires a new approach to the work itself. The CLR consists of three workstreams: financial resource sharing, employment of lay workers, and provision of shared support services. The aim of all this is to unburden local churches, equipping them for future flourishing.
- 4.2. The work in the financial resource sharing workstream will mostly be carried out by external consultants, who will undertake feasibility studies on three models of resource sharing, and report back to the Steering Group. Conversations with consultants are ongoing. Expert consultants will bring with

them professional financial and legal expertise. Care will be taken to ensure that any consultants engaged by the CLR are properly briefed and understand the nuances of the context.

- 4.3. For the support services and lay worker employment workstreams, the Steering Group will collaborate with key stakeholders to devise new ways of working, and test these ideas through living labs, designed and run in collaboration with Synods. The living labs will enable the CLR to trial new models on the ground, and see how they work for local churches. They may also be one of the ways in which we might discern how God is moving.
- 4.4. The shared support services workstream is closely related to a piece of ongoing work in the Admin and Resources team around a compliance resource portal for local churches, to replace the PLATO handbook. An initial questionnaire to local churches is planned. Following this, a set of resources will be prepared, and Synods will be invited to a consultative event to consider the new resources and other ways to unburden local churches. This conversation will inform the work of the shared services workstream. The relationship between these work items will evolve over time.

5. Consultative events

- 5.1. There is a commitment to making the Church Life Review process transparent and inclusive. There will therefore be a number of formal and informal consultative events throughout Phase Two.
- 5.2. A finance consultation took place on 13 June, 2024. Synods were invited to send three representatives; members of the Steering Group, applicants to the original finance task group, and a number of other individuals were also in attendance. The aims of the event were to:
 - discuss and shape a vision for what new models of resource sharing might look like and enable, in line with the Values and Principles agreed by General Assembly 2023 (Resolution 47)
 - reach common ground on three models of resource sharing for external consultants to explore through feasibility studies.
- 5.3. Future events will include a shared support services consultation with Synods (referenced in 4.4 above), to take place after local churches have responded to an initial questionnaire. Initial information about the questionnaire was shared in the May 2024 News Update. No date for this event has yet been fixed, but it is intended to take place around October 2024.

6. General progress update

- 6.1. In addition to the work outlined above, we have:
 - seven confirmed Steering Group members
 - a full complement of five sub-committee members
 - an outline plan for how we will use consultants efficiently and to maximum benefit
 - programme documentation and processes in line with best practice.

7. **Next steps**

7.1. The major next steps are:

- ongoing meetings of the Steering Group and sub-committee throughout 2024 and 2025
- delivery of programme communications as progress continues
- contracting and briefing consultants in Summer 2024
- planning and delivering an initial set of living labs in Q3 and Q4 2024
- managing a portfolio of ongoing investigations, including feasibility studies and living labs
- receiving and analysing the outcomes of investigations in mid-2025
- delivering a set of recommendations to General Assembly in November 2025.

8. The Church Life Review is considering complex and interrelated matters; iteration and evolution will be necessary. Amongst this complexity, we are committed to making the Church Life Review a transparent and inclusive process. Changes and updates will be communicated as the programme evolves.