



GENERAL ASSEMBLY



ANNUAL REPORTS

ORDER OF BUSINESS

- Notes:** (i) **Business commences at 10am on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. There are business sessions on Friday evening.**
- (ii) **Communion will be held on Friday at 11.45am and Worship on Thursday at 12.15pm.**
- (iii) **Figures in brackets refer to page numbers in the Annual Reports.**

Wednesday

Opening of General Assembly

Thursday

GA Business Committee –
Initial Report

Presbyteries

General Council (Section 1)

Social Witness

Public Affairs

General Council (Section 2)

Friday

General Council (Section 3)

General Council (Section 4)

Councils and Commissions
not presenting verbally

Judicial Commission – Code
Republishing

Mission in Ireland

General Council (Section 5)

Saturday

Private Session – Judicial
Commission etc.

Trustees

General Council (Section 6)

Training in Ministry

General Council (Section 7)

Overtures

GA Business Committee –
Final Report

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21

Assembly Buildings

7pm

Service of Worship

Constitution of Assembly

Moderator of the General Assembly

THURSDAY, JUNE 22

10am

1. GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE:
Initial Report and Resolutions 1–4 (pp. 4–6 and 401)
2. REPORTS OF PRESBYTERIES: (pp. 215–221)
3. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 1 of Report and
Resolutions 5–7 (pp. 1–25 and 401)
Executive Summary and Introduction; Pastoral Leadership Task
Group; General Assembly Opening and Installation of Moderator
Report; Principal Appointment

11.30am

4. Reception of Visiting Delegates

12.15pm

5. WORSHIP

1pm

LUNCH

2pm

6. COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS:
Report and Resolutions (pp. 222–236 and 406)

Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.

2.45pm

7. COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS:
Report and Resolutions (pp. 237–258 and 406–407)

3.45pm REFRESHMENT BREAK

4.15pm

8. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 2 of Report and Resolutions 8–12 (pp. 26–54 and 402)
Doctrine Committee; Brief Statement on Faith and Order; Virtual Communion; Decision Making and Dissent Task Group

5.45pm DINNER

7.45pm

9. Evening Celebration

(9.15pm) Close

FRIDAY, JUNE 23

10am

10. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 3 of Report and Resolutions 13–15 (pp. 55–60 and 402–403)
Membership and People with Intellectual Disabilities Task Group

10.30am

11. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 4 of Report and Resolutions 16–18 (pp. 61–102 and 403)
Communications Strategy Task Group; Pandemic Response Task Group

11.30am INTERMISSION

Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.

11.45am

12. Assembly Communion Service

1pm LUNCH

2pm

13. COUNCILS/COMMISSIONS NOT PRESENTING
VERBALLY:

Council for Congregational Life and Witness (pp. 259–282 and 407); Council for Global Mission (pp. 283–306 and 408); Linkage Commission (pp. 307–324 and 408)

2.45pm

14. Listening to the Global Church

3.45pm REFRESHMENT BREAK

4.15pm

15. JUDICIAL COMMISSION:
Report and Resolutions (pp. 365–379 and 409–410)
Code Republishing Task Group

5.45pm DINNER

7.15pm

16. COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND:
Report and Resolutions (pp. 325–364 and 410–411)

8.15pm

17. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 5 of Report and
Resolutions 19-21 (pp. 103–150 and 403)
Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group

(9pm) Close

Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.

SATURDAY, JUNE 24

10am

18. Private Session – JUDICIAL COMMISSION:
Report and Resolutions (pp. 365–379 and 409–410)
Special Judicial Commission (p. 378 and 410); Commission on
Applications (p. 379 and 410)

10.30am

19. TRUSTEES:
Report and Resolutions (pp. 380–385 and 411)

11am

20. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 6 of Report and
Resolutions 22–29 (pp. 151–187 and 403–404)
Support Services Committee; United Appeal Committee; Initial
Pension Scheme Review Panel; Holding Trustees Task Group;
Guysmere Panel

1pm

LUNCH

2pm

21. COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY:
Report and Resolutions (pp. 386–396 and 411–412)

3pm

22. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 7 of Report and
Resolutions 30–40 (pp.188–214 and 404–406)
Nominations Committee; General Assembly Advisory Committee;
Church Relations Committee; Ad Hoc Business (inc. Memorials
(pp. 412–413)); Reports for information – PHSI and PCS
23. Overtures (pp. 397–400 and 413–414)
24. Lapsed Business (if any)
25. Final Report of the General Assembly Business
Committee

CLOSE OF ASSEMBLY

Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.

REVISED GUIDE TO ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE

Using this Guide

In this guide you will find definitions and explanations of important elements of the General Assembly.

If you want to know how to do something at the Assembly such as asking a question:

- You will also find practical guidance in boxes with bullet points.

Each section finishes with guidance in italics about where to find further information.

Reports of Councils and Commissions

Almost all of the time of the General Assembly is taken up with the reports of councils and commissions, as they report on what they have been doing throughout the year and what they hope to do in the future.

These reports are contained in the Annual Reports, or 'blue book', that is issued before the Assembly, and is also available to download from the PCI website immediately before the Assembly. It is important to read the reports in advance.

The Assembly cannot carry out the work of the Church directly, so it entrusts this to different councils and commissions.

Councils normally have a number of committees working under them, so there are separate sections in council reports for the work of these committees.

A commission has been entrusted with the power of the Assembly in its particular area of responsibility.

Members of councils and commissions are appointed by the Assembly itself. These appointments are contained in the Nominations Committee report of the General Council. A separate booklet is printed with the names being proposed to the Assembly. Councils and commissions are led by a convener, and supported by a secretary.

At the start of each session, a member of the Assembly (usually the convener of the council or commission) will speak about the written report and propose the resolutions – this is known as 'presenting' the report. Then another member of that council or commission will speak and will second the resolutions.

If the council or commission needs to report some things that happened after the main report was written, these are included in the Supplementary Reports booklet - this should be read in conjunction with the main blue book.

Every report must be 'received' by the Assembly. This does not mean that the Assembly agrees with everything that the report says, nor that it accepts responsibility for what a report contains. Rather, it means that the council or commission has presented its report to the Assembly in an acceptable way, and that the Assembly has received the report from the council or commission. The report does not have the authority of the Assembly, only that of the council or commission.

If a member of the Assembly believes that something important is not covered in any of the existing resolutions from a council or commission, they can submit an additional resolution.

From the 2023 Assembly, some reports will only be presented in written form (GA Reports 2021 p.117 Recommendation 3c).

These reports will normally be formally proposed and seconded without speeches. There will be opportunity for genuine questions for clarification (as on page x below). Debate on the resolutions will only be permitted by the Moderator where a resolution is being opposed or an amendment considered. If debate takes place, it will follow the process outlined below.

In 2023, the following council reports will be presented in this format on Friday 23 June at 2pm – CCLW; CGM; and Linkage.

If you want to submit an additional resolution:

- You should send the additional resolution to the Clerk of the Assembly in writing at least one week before the Assembly – email to clerk@presbyterianireland.org
- You will need a proposer and seconder for the resolution. If you are a member of the Assembly, you are able to propose or second it yourself. If you are not a member of the Assembly, you may 'present' a resolution, but only Assembly members can propose and second.
- If you want to rescind or reverse a previous decision of the Assembly then you must give notice of this at one annual meeting of the General Assembly, and then bring your resolution to the next annual meeting.

You can find further information on councils and committees in the Code Pars 268–310.

You can find further information on reports and resolutions in Pars III–V of the General Assembly’s Standing Orders and the Code Pars 144–7.

Ordering of Business

Each session of business is normally ordered in the following sequence:

- Speech by the proposer of a report and accompanying resolutions
- Speech by the seconder
- Questions
- Debate on each resolution
 - Speeches may be made about the resolution
 - Amendments may be proposed, although this is the exception
 - Speech by proposer of the amendment
 - Speech by seconder of the amendment
 - Questions about the amendment
 - Debate about the amendment
 - Closing speech by the proposer or seconder of the amendment
 - Vote to make the amendment the substantive resolution
 - which will still need to be debated and voted on
 - The proposer or seconder may close debate on the resolution with a speech
 - Vote on the resolution
 - Any dissent is recorded
- Debate on the final resolution ‘That the report be received,’ following the same sequence as above.

Timings during debate

Presenting a group of reports and resolutions	7 minutes
Seconding a group of reports and resolutions	7 minutes
All other speeches	4 minutes

Questions

After the report has been presented and seconded, there is an opportunity for questions to be asked about anything in the reports and speeches.

Questions must be strictly asking for information about something in the report or speeches, or something not in the report but on a topic under the council's or commission's area of responsibility. A question should not be asked to score a point, or to make a speech.

If you wish to ask a question:

- You can ask without giving any advance warning, but you will get a better answer if you submit your question in advance.
- If submitting your question in advance you should write it out and place it in the box provided at the front of the hall, or you can submit it by email to deputyclerk@presbyterianireland.org.
- You should do this at least 15 minutes before the report in question. The more notice you give of a question, the more time there will be for the person responding to provide you with a full and accurate answer.
- Make sure that you are sitting in the main part of the hall, not the public gallery.
- Before asking your question, you should come up to the front in good time, and sit in the seats reserved for speakers, close to the microphone. By doing so, the Moderator will know that you want to speak and will invite you to do so when it is your turn - don't wait in your own seat.
- If the Moderator stands up again to speak while you are speaking, you must stop and listen to the Moderator.
- Normally, no one is able to ask more than two questions on any report, and the total time for questions is limited to 10 minutes.

You can find more information on Questions in the Code Par 153.

Debate

After questions have been asked and answered, the resolutions from the council or commission are debated and voted on one at a time. The resolutions are numbered and printed in the Resolution Booklet.

In the debate, speeches are made either in support of, or in opposition to a resolution.

The final resolution of every report is 'that the report be received.' This is the opportunity for speeches to be made (but not ask questions about) on any matters in the report or for which the council or commission should bear responsibility, but which are not included in any previous resolution.

If you wish to speak in a debate:

- Make sure that you are sitting in the main part of the hall, not the public gallery.
- Come up to the front in good time and sit in the seats reserved for speakers, close to the microphone. By doing so, the Moderator will know that you want to speak and will invite you to do so when it is your turn – don't wait in your own seat.
- If the Moderator stands up again to speak while you are speaking, you must stop and listen to the Moderator.
- To make sure everyone has a fair chance to speak, you can only speak once to each resolution, and there is a strict time limit on speaking. Those who present and second reports and resolutions are normally allowed up to seven minutes; other speeches are usually limited to four minutes, although these timings may be reduced by the Moderator if there is a backlog of business. There are two lights to help you know when your time is running out. The red light turns solid and a buzzer sounds when your time is up. You must stop speaking at this point.

You can find further information on Debate in the Code Par 148-155.

Voting

When the Moderator thinks that a resolution has been sufficiently debated, they will move the Assembly to vote on it. Only voting members can vote.

There are three ways a vote can happen :

- Most votes are voice votes. The Moderator will ask everyone in favour of the resolution to say 'Aye', and then ask everyone opposed to it to say 'No'.
- If the voice vote is close, then the Moderator may call for a standing vote. First, everyone in favour will be asked to stand while holding up their voting cards. Then everyone opposed will be asked to stand while holding up their voting cards. A rough count will be taken by the Moderator. Only people on the ground floor of the hall can vote. Anyone in the public gallery will not be able to vote, so it is important that you are seated on the ground floor.
- If this vote seems close, then the Moderator may call for a card vote. When you arrive at the Assembly, you will have been given a voting card with tear-off strips for yes and no. During the vote, tellers will move throughout the ground floor with voting boxes. Put one voting strip into the box – either yes or no. The tellers will then count the votes and report the result to the Moderator.

Sometimes, the Moderator may decide to go straight to a card vote. A card vote must happen if 25 people ask for it.

Proxy voting for a member of the Assembly who cannot be present is not allowed.

You can find further information on Voting in the Code Pars 156-160.

Dissent

After a vote, you may disagree with a decision the Assembly has made.

If you feel very strongly that a bad decision has been made, then you can register your dissent in the minutes. However, if you are a minister or elder, even when you disagree, you still have a responsibility to loyally implement the decisions of the Assembly.

If you wish to register your dissent:

- Speak to the Deputy Clerk immediately after the vote has taken place.
- You can then sign a statement that the Deputy Clerk will print, which says that you dissent from the decision the Assembly has just taken.
- This is then recorded in the minutes.

You can find further information on Dissent in the Code Pars 104 and 160.

Amendments

As well as voting yes or no to resolutions, members of the Assembly can also amend resolutions.

An amendment is a change to the wording of a resolution. This may clarify what the resolution states or substantively change what is being proposed, but it cannot introduce another subject and it cannot be an outright negation of the original resolution.

When a valid amendment is proposed and seconded at the Assembly, then:

- Debate about the original resolution is paused
- The proposer and seconder may each give a speech about the amendment
- The Assembly may ask questions about the amendment in the same way as with a resolution
- The Assembly may debate the amendment
- Either the proposer or seconder may give a closing speech
- The Assembly votes on the amendment

If the vote on the amendment passes, then the amendment becomes the substantive resolution and debate continues about whether to pass that amended resolution.

If the vote does not pass, then the original resolution is not altered and debate about it resumes.

If you want to propose an amendment:

- You must submit the Amendment in writing to the Clerk of the Assembly, either in writing to the Clerk's desk or by email to deputyclerk@presbyterianireland.org
- You must have a proposer and seconder for the amendment
- You must give at least one day's notice if your amendment substantially affects the scope of a resolution or overture.
- You cannot introduce another subject in your amendment or propose outright negation of a resolution.
- You may propose an amendment during debate if it does not substantially affect the scope of a resolution or overture.
- If you propose an amendment sufficiently in advance, the General Assembly Business Committee may licence it and it will then take precedence over other amendments.
- If you speak to the proposer and seconder of the original motion in advance, they may accept your amendment without the Assembly voting on it. If it is not accepted and you still wish to propose the amendment then, if you notify the Clerk, it will appear in the supplementary reports. If an amendment is accepted before the Assembly starts, then the updated resolution can be distributed in supplementary reports.

You can find further information about amendments in the Code Pars 148–152 and Par VI of the General Assembly's Standing Orders.

Memorials

Memorials are requests made to the Assembly, usually by a person or body who is not a member of the Assembly – a presbytery, a church member or group of members, or a group of people not connected with the Church. If you are not a member of the Assembly, you are able to bring a memorial.

Procedures and forms are laid down to be used in bringing memorials.

If you wish to submit a memorial:

- You should contact your Clerk of Presbytery or the Clerk of the General Assembly (clerk@presbyterianireland.org) for advice
- It is advisable to first present your memorial to a lower court of the church such as your Presbytery. If the lower court supports the memorial then you will be able to present it to the Assembly with their support. If they do not support the memorial it is less likely that the Assembly would be supportive.

You can find further information on Memorials in the Code Pars 147(5); 217(5)(a)&(b); 262.

Overtures

Overtures are special resolutions which are used to change the Code, which is the constitution of the Church.

Some overtures are printed in the blue book. If these are agreed by a two-thirds majority, they will be adopted immediately. Others which have not had such notice, will be adopted if no one votes against. If overtures do not achieve the preceding majorities, they are 'placed on the books' for one year, and decided on by the following Assembly. This also applies to the rules governing the Central Ministry Fund and other Ministry Funds.

In the Basic Code, where it's desirable that the proposed changes come into operation immediately, the change can be adopted temporarily during the intervening year as an 'Interim Act'. If an overture is submitted that would result in a significant constitutional change, it must also be sent to presbyteries to be voted on during the intervening year.

You can find further information on Overtures in the Code Pars 111 and 112.

Alternative Format Items

At each Assembly, one or two items of business will have an alternative format. This will often include presentations with speakers or videos which highlight the work of a council, for example, Global Mission Workers, or Mission in Ireland or Social Witness staff. Often there will be no formal resolutions or debates during these sessions, but they provide important updates on the work of the Church through its councils.

Further information on the General Assembly can be found in the Code Pars 97–112.

The Code is available at www.presbyterianireland.org/thecode

The General Assembly's Standing Orders can be found in the Code.

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 1

Convener: Very Rev Dr J.N.I. McNEELY

Secretary: THE CLERK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. On behalf of the General Assembly, the General Council has been conducting its business through eight General Assembly Committees and seven Task Groups. The Council met on 27 October 2022, 22 March 2023, 18 April 2023 and one Special Meeting by MS Teams on 5 December 2022.
2. The General Assembly in 2022 received a number of interim reports from General Council Committees and Task Groups. The Assembly this year will be presented with Committee and Task Group reports of great substance which demand detailed scrutiny and consideration.
3. The **Doctrine Committee** offers a long report on two issues: firstly, an updated ‘Statement of Faith and Order’ and secondly, on the issue of ‘virtual communion services’ (see General Council Section 2). The **Decision Making and Dissent Task Group** completes its report on the ‘Freedom of those in Ordained Leadership to Promote Opinions at variance with the clear position of the General Assembly’, addressing mainly the issue of expressing opinions in the traditional and social media (see General Council Section 2).
4. The **Membership and People with Intellectual Disabilities Task Group**, in an informative report, reaffirms the principles presented to the 2022 Assembly and proposes the adoption by the Assembly of these principles regarding the acceptance of young people and adults with intellectual disability into communicant membership (General Council Section 3).
5. The **Communications Strategy Review Task Group** has completed its work in presenting a comprehensive report, for approval by the Assembly, on a Communications Strategy for the Church (General Council Section 4). The report of the **Pandemic Response (Theological, Moral, Spiritual) Task Group** reflects the intensive work carried out in considering how the Church may be guided in any similar situation to that caused by the Covid pandemic (General Council Section 4).
6. A very detailed report including intricate analysis is presented to the Assembly by the **Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group**. This report is coming forward as a Green Paper Report to be sent to presbyteries for consultation (General Council Section 5).

7. Future structures for **Church Relations and Priorities** were reviewed as requested by the 2022 Assembly. It is recommended that the two areas of work be carried out by two panels respectively. When the Interim Church Relations Committee met on 15 November 2022, the membership included Rev Dr Paul Bailie. The Committee members were saddened to learn of the sudden passing of Paul on the same day of the meeting. The General Council recognises the valuable service and significant input he made to the business of the Council and the wider Church.
8. During the year the Council received notice from the **Financial Secretary**, Mr Clive Knox, of his intention to retire at the end of the summer 2023. The Council approved a job description and personnel specification and appointed an interview panel to carry forward the selection process. Unfortunately, after short listing and interview, an appointment was unable to be made. At the time of writing, the post is being re-advertised and Mr Knox has graciously agreed to extend the date of his retirement until the end of 2023.
9. The report of the General Council to the General Assembly is the longest of the Annual Reports and to facilitate debate will be taken in 7 sections, each with a separate proposer and seconder. These sections are as follows:

Section 1 (Thursday morning)

- General Introduction
- Pastoral Leadership Task Group
- Report on the Opening of the General Assembly and Installation of the Moderator
- Report regarding the appointment of the Principal of Union Theological College

Section 2 (Thursday afternoon)

- Doctrine Committee
- Decision Making and Dissent Task Group

Section 3 (Friday morning)

- Membership and People with Intellectual Disabilities Task Group

Section 4 (Friday morning)

- Communications Strategy Review Task Group
- Pandemic Response (Theological, Moral, Spiritual) Task Group

Section 5 (Friday evening)

- Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group

Section 6 (Saturday morning)

- Support Services Committee
- United Appeal Committee
- Initial PCI Pensions Review Panel
- Holding Trustees Task Group
- Guysmere Panel

Section 7 (Saturday afternoon)

- Nominations Committee
- General Assembly Advisory Committee
- Church Relations Committee
- Ad hoc Business (including Memorials)
- Overtures
- Reports for Information (PHSI and PCS)

10. The General Council has been efficiently served and judiciously guided by Rev Trevor Gribben, the General Secretary and Rev David Allen, Deputy General Secretary. The Council is indebted to both of them for their devotion to their jobs and the wise council they provide to ministers and members throughout the Church. The demands upon them are enormous and they put in many extra hours in serving the Church. The Council recognises the devotion to their offices is inspired by the personal desire to sacrificially serve Christ and his Church. The staff in the General Secretary's Department are also recognised for the efficient administration and reliable support they provide for the Council.

The Clerk of Assembly writes:

11. This Assembly marks the **retirement of the Very Rev Dr Noble McNeely** from the role of Convener of the General Council after five years of service. During this period of service Noble has literally gone the extra mile in fulfilling the wide-ranging responsibilities which go with the convenership of the Assembly's senior council. Noble has been faithful in both attending and chairing a wide range of formal meetings as well and being available to be consulted and participate in numerous conversations that assist in the overall decision-making process. He has also 'volunteered' to convene or chair a number of task groups and appointment panels, bringing his wisdom and experience to a wide range of issues and appointments. The period of his convenership included the years when the work of the Assembly and its Councils was disrupted by the restrictions surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. This was an incredibly demanding time for all concerned, when new processes and procedures had to be put in place and when at times weekly (and on occasions daily) meetings were required. In

those challenging days, Noble's cool and considered approach and counsel served the Church well. While no doubt Noble will still contribute to the wider work of PCI in many ways, as he stands down as General Council Convener we would wish him well in this particular phase of retirement.

INITIAL REPORT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE

1. The Business Committee has continued to review the work and arrangements of the General Assembly.
2. A Draft Order of Business for 2023 was drawn up by the Clerk on the basis agreed by the General Assembly and the Committee, with a final draft tabled at the General Council. This includes the following:
 - (a) Having initially considered the possibility of extending the 2023 General Assembly by an extra day, due to the volume of business, the Business Committee recommended to the General Council that this would not be necessary – largely because the final Code Republishing report would not be coming to the Assembly in 2023.
 - (b) All business sessions will commence each day at 10am. (Thursday, Friday and Saturday). There will be the Evening Celebration on Thursday and one evening business session held on Friday, with business scheduled to conclude on Saturday afternoon. As in previous years, the General Council business is split over a number of sessions.
 - (c) There will be only one 'alternative presentation' on, Friday afternoon, "Listening to the Global Church".
 - (d) This year, as previously agreed by the General Assembly, some reports will be presented in written form only (see GA Reports 2021 p.117 Recommendation 3c). These reports will normally be formally proposed and seconded without speeches. There will be the opportunity for genuine questions for clarification. Debate on the resolutions will only be permitted by the Moderator where a resolution is being opposed or an amendment considered. This year, the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, the Council for Global Mission and the Linkage Commission will be presented in this format on Friday, 23 June during the afternoon session. The Yellow Pages introduction to Assembly procedure in the Reports have been amended appropriately.
 - (e) Friday's Communion will be served by elders as we return to the pre-Covid format.
 - (f) All Assembly sessions, apart from the Private Session, will be live streamed unless otherwise notified. For the 'Listening to the Global Church' session, overseas personnel may contribute via Teams or Zoom but sufficient advance notice must be given to the IT department.

- (g) A Lanyard system, as at last year's Assembly, will continue to be used to assist with the identification of members. Lanyards will be needed for entrance to the ground floor for all business meetings.
 - (h) The Private Session will be held on Saturday morning at 10am. The Loop system, as presently configured, needs to be switched off during the Private Session since it is available to the whole building. The Business Committee has agreed that there can be no change at present but will further investigate options.
3. In line with the decision of the 2022 General Assembly, the General Assembly Advisory Committee considered the business coming to the 2023 Assembly and is not recommending any additional items be taken in private session, other than the normal Judicial reports.
4. The General Assembly passed the following resolution (2022 Minutes, p. 31):
- “29. That the General Assembly receive Notice of Motion to enable changes to the opening of the General Assembly, and related ‘knock on changes’ to be discussed at the 2023 General Assembly; and instruct the General Council, following recommendations from the General Assembly Business Committee, to report to the 2023 General Assembly, presenting options for that Assembly’s consideration”
- A detailed report fulfilling this remit was drawn up by the Business Committee for consideration by the General Council. Following discussion, it was agreed that it be transmitted to the General Assembly, along with a recommendation from the Council and this is included, and will be discussed, as part of Section 1 of the General Council report.
5. **The Arrangements Panel** has appropriate matters to hand and a budget of £20,000 has been agreed for recommendation to the General Assembly.
6. **Registration** will be in the Conference Area from Thursday morning and exhibitions of PCI Councils and partner bodies will be located there.
7. **The Thursday Evening Celebration** will be addressed by Rev Jonty Rhodes, Minister of Christ Church Central Leeds (Presbyterian).
8. **Praise** at this year's worship will be co-ordinated by Mr Dave Whitcroft, and this will enable musicians from various PCI congregations to lead our praise.
9. An **under 30s fringe event** is planned for 6pm on the Thursday evening.
10. **The General Assembly Reports** have been produced in printed versions as normal. Digital versions of the Annual Report Book will also be available via the website for this year's General Assembly. Due to the scale of material going to the General Assembly, it has become too difficult to move to a full electronic/digital format for 2023. This will be considered further during the incoming year.
11. The Creative Production Department continues to develop the General Assembly pages of the website. A General Assembly Portal will contain all information relating to the event

12. A number of reports from other Church Assemblies are recorded in an Appendix to this report, and others will be included in Supplementary Reports.

ROY MACKAY, Convener

APPENDIX

REPORTS FROM OTHER CHURCH ASSEMBLIES ETC.

Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends (Quakers): 11–14 August 2022 – Stranmillis College, Belfast

The Very Rev Dr Noble McNeely reports:

1. The Society of Friends held their Ireland Yearly Meeting from 11 to 14 August 2022. This was their first in person national gathering following the Covid pandemic restrictions. The meeting took place during one of the hottest weeks of the summer in the splendid grounds of Stranmillis College, Belfast. Having been a student at Stranmillis, the afternoon and evening strolls through the beautiful gardens and familiar paths brought back rich memories of student life and college friends.
2. The theme for the convention was ‘Hope, Renewal, Healing’ and the scripture verse which launched the meeting was from Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” Like other denominations on the island, the meeting was attended by Friends from across Ireland and other Quakers from various countries joined the meeting and contributed by Zoom. Participants were present from European countries and the USA. Local representatives were warmly welcomed from the Jewish community, the Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland, and I was invited to bring greetings from the PCI.
3. The business sessions throughout the Yearly Meeting included set times for meditation and reflection. The opening session included ‘Epistles’ from other Yearly Meetings. These included epistles from the Britain Yearly Meeting and other meetings from across the world. Most reports referred to the effects of Covid and the challenge of recovery from the pandemic. The African and Latin America meetings emphasised the need to draw nearer to God and were positive about renewed hope. There was recognition that attendance at meetings for worship throughout Ireland had fallen during the pandemic and there was concern that recovery was slow.
4. The first evening session had Zoom input from Barbara Luetke (USA) who described her ministry of writing Quaker historical novels. She explained how she used her approach to writing as a means of outreach.
5. The second day of the Yearly Meeting was primarily on the subject of Quakers in the world. There were contributions from Friends from

across the globe addressing female discrimination, climate warming and world justice issues. Esther Mombo of St Paul’s University, Kenya spoke eloquently about the discrimination of women in Africa and the legacy of such from the days of colonialism. She shared how women were gathering in prayer meetings with a cross section of people from churches and how they together were challenging the patriarchy that was prevalent. These meetings were also making an impact in communities and provided opportunities for outreach.

6. The writer and artist Lynn Finnegan gave a public lecture on ‘Embodying the Quaker Testimonies in Service of a Living Planet: The Challenge of Asking Beautiful Questions’. The tenet of the lecture related to how people communicate; how one talks about a subject affects how one thinks of it. She quoted Parker Palmer’s concept of the ‘tragic gap’. This is the gap between what is and what could be. The moral is that one should not jump to one side, but stand in the gap for the gap is where the action is.
7. The Society of Friends is committed to the promotion of peace, exploring and sharing creative nonviolent approaches to conflict and alternative approaches to violence. The session on Peace in Europe and Beyond heard from Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge who suffered a year of solitary confinement in Apartheid South Africa. She testified to how she sought to challenge the military doctrine that prevailed which was ‘to achieve peace we must prepare for war’. She exhorted the meeting to be advocates who prepare for peace.
8. I was very warmly received by Quakers from every corner of Ireland and my impression was that the Irish Society of Friends is a close fellowship of people striving to maintain a visible witness on the island. They are a people passionate about societal issues and are exercised about how to address the problems of contemporary culture.

General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Wales: 4-7 September 2022 – Cardiff

The Very Rev Dr David Bruce reports:

1. As PCI’s representative, I received a warm welcome at the Welsh General Assembly, which I was able to attend in person. The meetings were held in the buildings of a Welsh-speaking congregation in the Canton area of Cardiff. At the opening session, I was welcomed by the Moderator, Rev Evan Morgan, who then invited me to bring the greetings of not only our own Church, but to speak on behalf of the churches in Britain and Ireland which had been invited to send delegates. Most members of Assembly attended in person, but it was a hybrid meeting permitting some members to speak and vote using Zoom.
2. It is fair to say that the Presbyterian Church in Wales continues to face a serious decline in numbers, with many very small congregations struggling to continue their work. The challenges of older buildings, declining memberships, post-Covid adjustments, rapidly rising costs and a long-

standing reluctance to close congregations and sell buildings (which in turn become a major drain on central resources) combine to present a deep set of problems for the leadership of the Church. The newly appointed General Secretary of the denomination, Rev Nan Wyn Powell-Davies, will approach these demanding matters with energy and wisdom.

3. There were extensive debates about proposed changes to the pension scheme for ministers and workers which has become unaffordable, just as there were surrounding the future of two centrally owned and run residential facilities. This is a denomination with a strong sense of its history, much of which is identified with days of revival in the past, and the hard decisions facing it today are an evident burden to the people. There was an outstanding presentation on the spiritual care of people with dementia – an initiative called “GOLUD” led by the women’s ministry group of the Church. There may be useful synergies to explore in this field for PCI and PCW, along with helpful conversations between those engaged in ministry development and mission.
4. Approximately 100 delegates attended sessions of the Assembly, with two public lectures and a Moderator’s Service of worship which were open to all. All business was conducted in Welsh, with simultaneous translation provided into English for those who did not have the language.
5. We thank God for the long partnership between our denominations, and pray for our brothers and sisters in Wales as they seek to respond with grace and wisdom to a deeply demanding season in their life and work.

**Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends (Quakers):
13–16 April 2023 – Tallaght, Dublin**

Rev John Faris reports:

1. It was my honour and pleasure for the third time to represent the Presbyterian Church in Ireland at the Ireland Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends (Quakers), which was held this year in the Dominican Retreat Centre, Tallaght, Dublin, 13–16 April. Although very different from us in structure and doctrines, there are interesting verbal similarities which may go back to the formation of both traditions in the 17th century. They, like us, have “clerks” and “elders” and a democratic ethos in governance means that every meeting is minuted. Unlike our practice of delaying approval until much later, a clerk will read the minute of each part of business as it is completed, and approval is given there and then, subject to corrections.
2. The Quaker commitment to compassion and social justice was evident, as for example in a presentation by Shane Whelehan of Quaker Service, outlining their work with prisoners and their families in Northern Ireland. Support is offered to prisoners in solitary confinement and to those struggling with thoughts of suicide. The strong tradition of non retaliation is drawn on in a programme which addresses the causes of violence.
3. Ruth Garvey Williams, editor of *Vox Magazine*, not herself a Quaker, gave a challenging and encouraging overview through Zoom of how church

communities of all backgrounds throughout Ireland are doing after the pandemic. “Ordinary people are doing extraordinary things.” She reported that Isaiah 60:1–4 is often quoted in different places. “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.”, “Lift up your eyes and look about you...” Christians are adapting from assumptions of power to commitments to serve. She suggested that the danger of fighting culture wars is that people fight back; “it is better to fight for rights of others than for our own.”

4. A thoughtful discussion took place on why those attending meetings seem reluctant to speak. While participation is welcomed, many spoke of the value they found in the silences. A suggestion I made that scripture could be a helpful pump-primer seemed to find acceptance by some.
5. The practice of long silences in worship and the ethos of kind, respectful listening to those with whom we may disagree are contributions which the Friends offer to the wider body of Christ and are worthy of imitation.

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP TASK GROUP

1. The Implementation Task Group, appointed to ‘put together a resource to be used at Kirk Session level with a clear pastoral tone’, produced resources which were approved by the 2021 General Assembly following consultation with Presbyteries.
2. A joint Pastoral Leadership Task Group between the Council for Training in Ministry and the Council for Congregational Life and Witness was appointed by the 2021 General Assembly, with the remit ‘to assist ministers and youth workers/leaders in the outworking of “Guidance for pastoral care of same-sex attracted people and their families.’ Subsequently the 2022 General Assembly granted permission for the Task Group remit to be expanded to incorporate training and resources regarding gender identity.
3. Under the convenorship of the Rev Albin Rankin, the Task Group organised four regional events that have taken place between January and March 2023 called *Equip to care: pastoral care around gender identity and same sex attraction*. The events were hosted in First Ballymoney, Donemana, First Portadown and Assembly Buildings.
4. Expert input for these events was provided by Growing Young Disciples and Love for Life, two organisations with whom PCI and PCI congregations have already worked in recent years. In November 2022, congregations were invited to send a group of three people, at least one of whom should be pastorally involved directly with young people and/or young adults.
5. The attendance at the four events was very encouraging with numbers capped for two of the events as maximum capacity had been reached. The feedback from those attending was also positive, in the main. As anticipated, there were some critical comments reflecting differing approaches and attitudes to the issues of sexual attraction and gender identity.

6. A waiting list was opened for those unable to secure places at the event hosted in Assembly Buildings and, at the time of writing, the Task Group plan to host an event on 10 May 2023 in Assembly Buildings for those who have not been able to attend one of the initial events.
7. A meeting with the Clerks of Monaghan and Dublin and Munster Presbyteries identified that a two-event strategy would be preferable in terms of extending the resource to congregations in the ROI. A provisional timetable is being drawn up and appropriate changes made to the format and delivery of content reflecting the context of ROI. The congregations in ROI will be invited to send up to three representatives, at least one of whom should be pastorally involved directly with young people and/or young adults. It is hoped that these two events will be held at the end of September/start of October.

ALBIN RANKIN, Convenor

REPORT REGARDING POSSIBLE CHANGES TO THE OPENING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE INSTALLATION OF INCOMING MODERATORS

Background

1. The following paragraph was included in the final report of the General Assembly Business Committee to the 2022 General Assembly (2022 Minutes, page 31):
 3. *Related to this, but in many ways a separate matter, the Business Committee agreed to license a Notice of Motion for consideration at this 2022 Assembly, to enable the 2023 Assembly to decide if it wished to make any changes to the opening of the Assembly, with related 'knock-on changes'. This Notice of Motion is tabled as Resolution 27, again to test the mind of the Assembly. It should be stressed that if this notice of motion is received by this 2022 Assembly, it only means that the issue will be debated in 2023 and the earliest any changes (if agreed that year) could take effect would be in 2024.*
2. In response, the General Assembly passed the following resolution (2022 Minutes, page 31):
 29. *That the General Assembly receive Notice of Motion to enable proposals for changes to the opening of the General Assembly, and related 'knock-on changes' to be discussed at the 2023 General Assembly; and instruct the General Council, following recommendations from the General Assembly Business Committee, to report to the 2023 General Assembly, presenting options for that Assembly's consideration.*

3. The General Assembly Business Committee requested the Clerk of Assembly to consult with others and draw up a draft options report for its consideration. In this report three possible options were identified.

OPTION 1 – A ‘Refreshed Continuity Model’

Continue to have an ‘Opening Night’ of the General Assembly, the evening before ‘business sessions’ begin.

- This could be refreshed by looking at the content, guest list etc.
- There could be further encouragement of members of Assembly to attend – but it is likely that it would continue to be an opening of the General Assembly with very few members of the General Assembly present.
- The use of the evening as an outward looking and civic society focused event could be maximized – but is this really an opening session of the General Assembly?

OPTION 2 – A ‘Refreshed 2021 Model’

Have an ‘Opening Session’ of the General Assembly on the first morning of the General Assembly, as was forced upon us by the post-pandemic restrictions in 2021.

- This could be refreshed by looking at the content.
- It is likely that a much larger number of members of the General Assembly would be present – but it would likely be a much more in-house event rather than civic society focused.
- Representatives of civic society could of course be invited to attend – but probably fewer would be free to be present at a day-time event, though some key representatives would likely attend (Lord Lieutenant etc.)

OPTION 3 – A ‘Different Approach’

Let the General Assembly open with the Outgoing Moderator in the Chair.

- Begin with a short time of worship, including reflection on the outgoing theme and year.
- Some business could then be conducted.

Have an Installation Service for the Incoming Moderator later that day or even later in the week

- New refreshed format – but of course doing what is constitutionally necessary.
- It is likely that a much larger number of members of the General Assembly would be present, as they were already up and running – though they might go home!

- Visiting delegates could be welcomed (in a refreshed and shorter way) and civic guests could be invited to attend (a smaller focused list) – with a reception afterwards.
4. Following consideration of these options, the General Assembly Business Committee requested the Clerk, along with the Very Rev Dr David Bruce (immediate past Moderator) and the Rev Jonathan Boyd (convener of former Making the General Assembly More Accessible Task Group) to further work up Option 3, in preparation for a report to the General Assembly.
 5. At a special meeting of the General Assembly Business Committee held on Monday 3 April 2023, a previously circulated report, largely unpacking Option 3, was discussed and after some small amendments, it was agreed that this be recommended to the General Council for transmission to the 2023 General Assembly as the way forward regarding changes both to the opening of the General Assembly and the installation of the incoming Moderator. At the General Council meeting held on Tuesday 19 April 2023, the Council adopted the recommendation of the General Assembly Business Committee and agreed to transmit it to the 2023 General Assembly for final decision.

Recommended way forward regarding the Opening of the General Assembly and the Installation of the Incoming Moderator

(A) Advantages of moving the Installation of the Incoming Moderator

1. Moving the installation of the Moderator away from the start of the meetings of the General Assembly has a number of potential advantages, namely:
 - (a) The outgoing Moderator would approach the task of chairing most/many of the business meetings of the Assembly with the benefit of a full year's experience in the role.
 - (b) They would bring the specific insight following their close involvement with the work of each Council.
 - (c) They would have the opportunity at the start of the Assembly to combine their reflections on the past year with the space to apply God's Word to the specifics of the church's current position, and to do so from a position of knowledge. Their address need not, therefore be a swan song.
 - (d) The separation of this setting the scene for the work of the week, from the act of installing a successor (which could happen towards the end of the Assembly) would provide a more solid platform for the outgoing moderator to complete their term of office.

2. Installing the incoming Moderator later in the week, would also present a number of clear opportunities for the church.
 - (a) It would present the Assembly with an opportunity to rethink its understanding of the election/appointment process, including the act of installation.
 - (b) At present the incoming Moderator is installed by prayer, led by the outgoing Moderator, but this is not described as a Prayer of Installation, and there is no liturgical marker to demonstrate what is happening. It is then followed by a handshake or hug, which while valuable is a more personal act.
 - (c) Separating the opening of the Assembly from the act of installation presents us with an opportunity to offer a clearer, simple liturgical framework to reflect what we are seeking to do, before God. (See below for an illustrative example).

**(B) Towards a new model of practice
(see illustrative time-table in Appendix 1)**

3. **Opening of the General Assembly**

This would take place on the opening morning of the General Assembly and would be conducted by the current (outgoing) Moderator. Overseas and visiting delegates would be present, but not civic guests, who would be invited to be present for the installation of the new Moderator.

This could take a form along the lines of the following:

Call to Worship

Reading of Acts 15:1–4

Constitution of the General Assembly:

The Lord Jesus Christ is the sole King and Head of the Church. He is ever-present in the Church and governs it by his Word through the ministry of teaching and ruling elders. Out of concern for the proclamation of the gospel, the well-being of the Church, and the honour of Christ, we meet now in general assembly as the supreme court of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. As ministers, disciples, and servants we are here to welcome one-another, hear reports of what God has been doing, and make important decisions under the guidance of the Spirit. Let us pray for this great task...

Prayer of Constitution

Praise

Scripture Reading

Sermon (primarily bringing a ‘word in season’ for the Church, illustrated from the Moderator’s past year)

Prayer

Praise

Leading into business

4. Installation of the Incoming Moderator

It is suggested that this should happen in the late afternoon of the second day of the Assembly, thereby enabling the current (outgoing) Moderator to moderate at many of the Assembly business sessions, but not leaving it too late in the Assembly (see illustrative time-table in Appendix 1).

A small number of key Civic guests would be invited to be present (sitting on the floor of the Assembly), along with small number of invited representatives of the incoming Moderator's congregation, family and friends (seated in a reserved area in the gallery). Others could of course also be present in the free seating in the public gallery.

Former Moderators would not robe but would proceed the current (outgoing) Moderator into the Assembly Hall, and be seated towards the front, signifying the continuity of the office of Moderator. The current (outgoing) Moderator would also be accompanied into the Assembly Hall by their Chaplains, along with the Clerk and Deputy Clerk of the Assembly.

The service would be largely conducted by the current (outgoing) Moderator, assisted by their Chaplains, as appropriate, but would also have active involvement of some former Moderators. For illustrative purpose, this could take the following form:

Approach to God

Welcome (especially to Civic Guests)

Call to worship

Hymn of praise

Prayer of adoration and confession

Brief final words of thanks by Current (outgoing) Moderator

Hymn of thanksgiving

Election and installation of the new Moderator

The Clerk of Assembly gives a short description of the role of General Assembly Moderator and reports on that year's Nomination process

Formal proposal and seconding of the appointment of the new Moderator (Clerk and Deputy Clerk)

An affirmation from the Assembly that they wish to proceed to appoint their new Moderator.

Praise (during which the new Moderator, accompanied by their Chaplains, is escorted in by two former Moderators)

Outgoing Moderator informs Incoming Moderator of their appointment

An affirmation/vow taken before God and the Assembly.

Having accepted the call of the General Assembly, do you promise, through God's grace, to be faithful in your ministry as Moderator, ensuring that the proceedings of the Assembly are conducted in a fitting and orderly manner, representing the

Church in public in a way that honours the name of Christ, and fulfilling all other duties and opportunities falling to you as a minister of Jesus Christ?

I do.

Prayer of Installation (Incoming Moderator kneels and congregation stand)

Aaronic Blessing sung

New Moderator stands for the Declaration of Installation (by outgoing Moderator)

NN, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sole King and Head of the Church, and by authority of this Assembly, through prayer you have been installed to the position of Moderator of the General Assembly for the ensuing year.

As a sign of this I, as outgoing Moderator, on behalf of the General Assembly, extend to you the right hand of fellowship.

Incoming Moderator takes the Chair and formally bows to the Assembly

Incoming Moderator leads the Assembly in saying the Apostles' Creed

Praise

The Word of God

Scripture Reading

Sermon (by a former Moderator)

Prayer (by a former Moderator)

Praise

Benediction (by new Moderator)

5. Recommendation:

The General Council recommend that this new model (Option 3) for the opening of the General Assembly and the Installation of the Incoming Moderator be implemented from the 2024 General Assembly onwards.

ROY MACKAY, Convener, General Assembly Business Committee

TREVOR GRIBBEN, Clerk of Assembly

APPENDIX 1 – ILLUSTRATIVE TIME-TABLE

THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Tea & Coffee available prior to Business	Tea & Coffee available prior to Business	Tea & Coffee available prior to Business
10.00 OPENING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY	10.00 Business Session 6	10.00 PRIVATE SESSION: ~ Judicial Commission ~ Any other referred business
10.45 Reception of Visiting Delegates	Business Session 7	Business Session 12 11.30 intermission
11.15 Initial Report of Business Committee	12 Noon POSSIBLE 'ALTERNATIVE SESSION'	11.45 GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMUNION SERVICE
Presbytery Reports		
Business Session 1		
1.00-2.00 LUNCH	1.00-2.00 LUNCH	1.00-2.00 LUNCH
Business Session 2		2.00 Business Session 13
Business Session 3	Business Session 8	Business Session 14
	Business Session 9	Lapsed Business (if any)
3.45-4.15 Refreshment Break	4.00-4.30 Refreshment Break	Final report of GA Business Committee
Business Session 4	4.30pm INSTALLATION OF NEW MODERATOR	Close of Assembly
Business Session 5		
5.45-7.15 DINNER	5.30 - 7.00 Assembly Reception & Dinner break	
ASSEMBLY CELEBRATION	7.00 Business Session 10	
	Business Session 11	
9:15 CLOSE	9.00 CLOSE	

REPORT OF THE PRINCIPAL'S APPOINTMENT PANEL

1. The General Council at its meeting on 5 December 2022 received a report from the Council for Training in Ministry, regarding the post of Principal in Union Theological College. The current Principal, Rev Prof Gordon Campbell, was appointed for three years commencing on 1 January 2021 with his principalship due to end on 31 December 2023. The Council for Training in Ministry recommended that, at the completion of Principal Campbell's tenure, another internal three-year appointment be made.
2. The General Council accepted that recommendation and approved a draft Job Description which was almost identical to the one used in Principal Campbell's appointment. It was noted that only ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland would be eligible to apply for the position (Code 309(3)).
3. The General Council appointed the following 'Principal's Appointment Panel' to take forward the recruitment process, on the basis of the agreed Job Description, and instructed it to bring a recommendation to the General Council for nomination to the General Assembly of 2023:
 - Convener of the General Council, Very Rev Dr Noble McNeely (Chair)
 - Clerk of Assembly, Rev Trevor Gribben (Convener)
 - Convener of Council for Training in Ministry, Rev Nigel McCullough
 - Secretary of Council for Training in Ministry, Rev Dr David Allen
 - Convener of Union College Management Committee, Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson
4. Following advertisement, short-listing and interview, the Principal's Appointment Panel unanimously recommended to the General Council that the Rev Prof Michael McClenahan be nominated to the 2023 General Assembly for appointment as Principal of Union Theological College for a three-year term, commencing on 1 January 2024.
5. The Panel further recommended to the Council that the UTC Management Committee, in consultation with the Clerk of Assembly, take initial steps to identify and prepare for any necessary staffing adjustments required as a consequence of this prospective appointment, recognising that final decisions, (including any potential appointment(s)) will be dependent on the 2023 General Assembly's decision regarding the appointment of a new Principal.
6. Both of these recommendations were agreed by the General Council at its meeting on 22 March 2023 and an appropriate resolution is brought to the General Assembly for decision.

TREVOR D. GRIBBEN, Panel Convener

MEMORIAL RECORD

The Very Rev Dr Andrew (Andy) Rutherford Rodgers, MA, DD, Minister Emeritus, Dungannon, died on 29 June 2022, in the ninety-second year of his age and the sixty-fifth year of his ministry. He was born in Magheragall Manse, Lisburn, on 4 October 1930 to the Rev Thomas Rodgers and his second wife Alice, and grew up with four older siblings from his father's first marriage. The family moved to Belfast on his father's retirement in 1949. Dr Rodgers was educated at Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School, Inchmarlo Preparatory School, Wallace High School, the Royal Belfast Academical Institution and Renshaw's Shaftesbury House Tutorial College. He went on to study at Magee Theological College and Trinity College, Dublin (graduating BA, later converted to MA). He was licensed by the Belfast Presbytery on 28 May 1957, assisting in Ulsterville. He was ordained on 12 November 1957 by the Cavan Presbytery and given charge of the congregations of Ballyhobridge, Belturbet, and Clones, to which was added the congregation of Stonebridge on 2 February 1961 following the dissolution of Belturbet. He was installed by the Presbytery of Tyrone in the congregation of Dungannon on 19 May 1965, where he served until his retirement on 31 October 1996. He was Moderator of the Synod of Derry and Omagh in 1983 and Moderator of the General Assembly in 1993, when he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland. In his first charge he had had to help people with the difficulties that arose from the terrorist 'border campaign' of the 1950's, but the grief and pain he encountered in Dungannon during 'the troubles' was amplified in extent and duration, particularly in pastoring families that had members injured or killed. In doing 'the work of an evangelist' (2 Timothy 4:5), he spared no effort in preaching publicly and speaking personally to men and women about their need to respond positively to the call of Christ upon their lives. There was not an aspect of contemporary ministry to which he did not give himself with zeal and enthusiasm, whether in the pulpit, in the home, the hospital or the community. During his moderatorial year he sought to minister in particular to border farming communities and into the aftermath of particular situations such as the Shankill Road bombing. He and his wife Helen, née White, developed a pastoral concern for manse families throughout the Church, and for missionary families abroad. Dr Rodgers had a particular interest in education and served on the Board of Governors of almost every school in the Dungannon area. After retirement he became Pastoral Assistant (or as he called it, 'geriatric assistant') in 1st Cookstown and served as Chairman of the Union Commission from 1997 to 2006. Helen pre-deceased him in 2019. With their three children, Alison, John and David, seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, we give thanks to God for our brother. "And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

The Rev Dr William (Bill) O'Neill, MA, BD, STM, PhD, Minister Emeritus, Howth & Malahide, died on 30 June 2022, in the ninety-eighth year of his age and the sixty-sixth year of his ministry. He was born in Woodvale Park at the top of the Shankill Road in Belfast on 5 July 1924, the eldest of nine children, two girls and seven boys, to John O'Neill, a textile mill foreman, and his wife Sophia, née Dyer. Leaving elementary education at fourteen to pick up work and help support his parents and siblings, he found employment variously as a butcher's boy, then in Emerson's Spinning Mill, Doagh Flax Spinning Company, as a machineman in James Mackie & Sons, an iron turner with Short Brothers & Harland, a timekeeper in Belfast Harbour Commissioners, and in the accounts department of Fairbairn, Lawson, Combe, Barbour. Towards the end of this time he re-entered education, studying at Shaftesbury House Tutorial College ('Renshaw's'); Magee Theological College; Trinity College, Dublin (graduating BA, later converted to MA); the Presbyterian College, graduating BD from Queen's University, Belfast; and Union Theological Seminary, New York, on a Fulbright Scholarship, graduating STM (Master of Sacred Theology). He was licensed by the Belfast Presbytery in Lowe Memorial, Finaghy, on 5 July 1953, assisting in First Ballymacarrett and Rutgers, Broadway, New York, where he had his name in lights when he preached at Sunday services! He was ordained as a Chaplain to the RAF on 1 July 1956 with service in particular in Cyprus and Iraq. He was installed by the Presbytery of Dublin in the congregations of Athy and Carlow on 25 February 1960, and then by the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster in the congregation of Howth & Malahide on 28 November 1963, where he served until his retirement on 30 June 1999. His style of ministry was traditional: he always conducted worship in his full robes with the addition of his doctorate hood for weddings and special days. His sermons were infused with his huge love of history, and with humour and interesting insight. He had an 'open door' policy in the manse, encouraging everyone and anyone to walk in at any time – which made for interesting and chaotic mealtimes for the family. He was Joint Convener of the Assembly's TV and Broadcasting Committee from 1965 to 1978 and Moderator of the Synod of Dublin in 1975. He was the Presbyterian representative on the Irish Council for Radio and Television affairs, a member of the Board of Governors of The High School, Dublin, and for over 55 years an Irish Times Correspondent. Personal interests included football, a good murder-mystery, gardening, his greenhouse, Howth, and his five grandchildren. Dr O'Neill married Margaret (Madge) Titterington in Drumbo Presbyterian Church on 20 February 1960: she pre-deceased him in 2015 after fifty-five years of marriage. To their three children, Michael, Anne and David, his surviving sibling Kenneth, and the wider family circle, we extend our sympathy and prayers, sharing with them in thanksgiving for the life and ministry of our brother.

The Rev Dr James (Jim) Frazer, BSc, BD, DD, Minister Emeritus, Ballywillan, died on 1 October 2022, in the ninetieth year of his age and the sixty-second year of his ministry. He was born, the youngest of four siblings, on the Doagh Road in Belfast on 23 March 1933, to William Frazer, a plumber in Harland & Wolff shipyard, and his wife Evelyn, née Johnston. He grew up in difficult times through the 1930s and then the Second World War. His home congregation was Whiteabbey, before moving to play the organ in Abbot's Cross. He attended Grosvenor High School from 1944 to 51, and then went on to achieve a scholarship to Queen's University Belfast, graduating BSc in Civil Engineering in 1954; next attending the Presbyterian College, followed by Princeton Theological Seminary, graduating BD in 1959. His father's early death in 1952 had led to him becoming a Christian, and ultimately to his call to ordained ministry. Following assistantships in Sinclair Seamen's, First Presbyterian Church, Trenton, New Jersey, and First Presbyterian Church, Rockaway, New Jersey, he was licensed by the Belfast Presbytery in Abbot's Cross on 26 July 1959 and served in Trinity, Bangor until he was ordained by the Coleraine Presbytery and installed in the congregation of Ballywillan on 21 September 1961. He served his entire ministry there faithfully as pastor and friend, retiring on 10 September 2000. He was renowned for his short, simple sermons and memorable children's addresses, and had a particular love of the Psalms. A sabbatical in Princeton in 1979 added a new perspective to his ministry, including the development of youth work, contemporary music in worship and a pastoral ministry to holidaymakers, with consequent increased attendances at Ballywillan, particularly over the summer season. He was Moderator of the Synod of Ballymena and Coleraine in 1988 and his ministry was recognised by the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland, which made him a Doctor of Divinity in 2001. The citation described him as a Builder of Cars, a Builder of a House, a Builder of Bridges, a Builder of the Church. He was chaplain to Hopefield Hospital from 1961 until its closure in 1983 and after his retirement became a Friend of Willowbrook, the Church's supported housing scheme for people with a learning disability. Along with a great sense of humour and a mischievous personality, his personal interests included motor cars, chess, and golf. Dr Frazer married Maureen Beattie on 18 June 1970 in First Lurgan – as a couple they would often be found in one of the many coffee shops on the north coast – indeed it was in one of them that they first met. Their shared thinking led to many of the developments in Ballywillan. We express our sympathy to her, to Andrew, James, Evanne, Janice and Jonathan, and to the extended family, praying that they will know the comfort and grace of God.

The Rev Dr William John Paul Bailie, BA, BD, MPhil, PhD, FHEA, in Recognised Ministry as Chief Executive of Mission Africa, died on 15 November 2022, in the fifty-fifth year of his age and the twenty-eighth year of his ministry. He was born very prematurely to William and Joan on 11 November 1963 and was not expected to live. The Lord had other plans. Childhood was spent along with his brother Mark in Helen's Bay

and in membership of Ballygilbert congregation. Paul never liked being a child and the first indication of what would become a trademark sign was when, on his seventh birthday, he asked for, and received, a three-piece suit. But two years later another, infinitely more significant event took place when he came to profess his faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ through a school teacher, and it was this Saviour who would be not only the motivation for his life, but the very purpose for which he lived. He always looked back with much appreciation to the influence of both the teachers and the Scripture Union in his school of Sullivan Upper. It became his plan to join the police but, due to his poor eyesight, that was not possible and he went to Queen's University, Belfast, to study Semitic studies and English. It was here he would meet some of his best and closest friends for life. He followed his primary degree with a Masters. He had intended to reapply for the police under the graduate scheme, but here again the Lord intervened as Dr Bailie sensed a call to the Christian ministry. His love for Africa began on his first visit to Kenya when aged nineteen. Not many years later another love developed, that for Anne Forde, whom he first met at Castlewellan in 1989. Following his proposal on safari in Kenya, they were married in Greenwell Street in 1994, where he had already been placed as an assistant, and where he was ordained the following year. It was there also that his funeral took place. With their chief desire to honour and serve the God they loved, in 1997 they followed his call to service in Kenya to teach in the Presbyterian College of East Africa, where he later became Academic Dean. In Kenya he demonstrated his characteristic openness, interest and respectfulness for all the different sorts of people that he met. His attitude earned respect not only for himself but for the faith which he professed. They returned home in 2003 and he commenced his doctoral studies while awaiting God's next step for their lives. That would come with the opening in Mission Africa for a new Chief Executive Officer. Regular travel in Nigeria called for further courage, and faith in God's protection as banditry on the roads was common. As work in Nigeria became more and more difficult, Dr Bailie developed a vision for work in other countries in the region. Continuing work at home has included lecturing in Union Theological and Belfast Bible Colleges, and service within the structures of the General Assembly and the Ards Presbytery and through radio broadcasting. Other interests included the armed services and the police, photography, drama and range shooting. His greatest joy came in declaring the good news of God's redeeming love towards us sinners and inviting men and women to trust in his Saviour. Dr Bailie's usual goodbye to people was 'The Lord bless you'. We pray that blessing for his wife Anne, and the wider family circle at this time.

The Rev Dr David Chapman, LLB, BA, MA, MTh, PhD, Minister Emeritus, Second Islandmagee, died on 15 November 2022, in the seventy-first year of his age and the forty-third year of his ministry. He was born in Belfast on 8 August 1952 to David Chapman, a letterpress printer, and his wife Ruby (née McMeekin), and was elder brother to Charlotte. His home congregation was Westbourne on the Newtownards Road. He was a keen

member of Christian Endeavour and spent his eighteenth birthday at the CE world convention in Canada in 1970. He attended Beechfield Primary School from 1957 to 1964 and Royal Belfast Academical Institution from 1964 to 1971, being the first Beechfield pupil to go to Inst, with which he kept up a lifelong association. He went on to receive degrees at the University of Manchester (LLB, and, aged 64, PhD), Mansfield College, Oxford (BA then MA) and Queen's University, Belfast through Union Theological College (MTh). Following licensing by the East Belfast Presbytery on 10 June 1979, he was ordained as Assistant Minister in St Andrew's, Belfast on 20 January 1980. On 27 March 1981 he became Assistant to the Convener in the Dublin and Munster Presbytery congregations of Naas, Athy and Carlow, which was followed by installation in the Home Mission and induction to the charge on 4 May 1982. After five years of ministry there he was installed by the Carrickfergus Presbytery as minister or Second Islandmagee on 20 March 1987. When he was at St Andrew's, the Presbyterians and Methodists shared the same building and it was there he met Ruth Woods, a member of the Methodist congregation. A long-distance relationship developed with David moving to Naas, Athy and Carlow, and Ruth completing her studies. They married in St Andrew's in 1984. Dr Chapman was formal and traditional in worship but along with that came a sense of humour and a fun loving approach to life. Over the years he was always willing to get involved – enjoying outings and weekends away with the young people. He had a heart for people – this was seen in the time he took with them, happy to talk about everything and anything and often displaying his own wide range of knowledge. Perhaps most treasured by the members of Second Islandmagee were his kindness and compassion which gave evidence of his caring shepherd heart for the people that God had called him to pastor. Something that was key to the harmonious, indeed enthusiastic amalgamation of First and Second Islandmagee in 2022 was the various ways in which he prepared his own congregation for that event, gradually drawing the members of both congregations into sharing activities, including Sunday worship, and into deeper fellowship with each other. His nieces and nephews, travel, reading – particularly detective novels – and watching football were among his interests. His continued commitment to the life of the church was demonstrated by his usual attendance at presbytery, just less than two weeks before he died. We commend Ruth and the wider family circle to the care and compassion of Almighty God.

The Rev James Fleming Barnes, BA, MDiv, Minister Emeritus, May Street, Belfast, died on 1 January 2023, in the eighty-seventh year of his age and the thirty-ninth year of his ministry. He was born in Belfast on 29 April 1936 to James Barnes, and his wife Mary, née Donaghy, with a brother John (who has predeceased him) and a sister Irene. He attended Grosvenor High School from 1948 to 1950, leaving at the age of fourteen to earn some income as a millwright. He met Myrtle McIvor at the Orpheus dance hall in York Street and they married in London in 1956. That same year he joined the Merchant Navy, moving on to the Life Guards (Household

Cavalry), from which in 1960 he received a medical discharge due to injury. Further employment was in hospitality, including becoming Maitre D' in both the Stormont and Culloden Hotels. The family, now including four children, immigrated to Canada in 1972, where he used his mechanical skills in the car industry. Mr Barnes loved the Lord for most of his life, and recalled in particular responding as a teenager to the altar call every evening in a mission tent. He had felt a call to ordained ministry for many years and eventually in 1977 the call was so compelling that he applied, and was accepted, to train as a Lay Minister in the United Church of Canada. He was appointed to serve in three small congregations in Guilds while studying part-time. In due course he received degrees as a mature student at the University of Windsor (BA in 1980) and the University of Toronto (MDiv in 1984). From 1981 he had the pastoral charge of Ivan and then he was licensed and then ordained by the United Church of Canada in 1984, serving in the pastoral charges of Springfield (1984–1985) and Hyatt Avenue, London (1985–1990). All these congregations were located in Ontario. Returning to Northern Ireland, Mr Barnes fulfilled a short assistantship in First Carrickfergus and was then installed by the South Belfast Presbytery as minister of May Street congregation on 1 May 1991. He continued there until retirement on 30 June 2000. Mr Barnes and his wife retired to Bangor and, while there, they were a great encouragement to the ministers of First Bangor. Other qualities people discerned in him were how relational and pastoral he was, and well as being practical, hospitable, gentle and caring. Myrtle predeceased him in 2016. His friends were pleased when he found love again with Elizabeth Doran, whom he married in 2019 in West Kirk, both having joined that congregation, and, living off the Shankill Road, they looked out for the needs of their elderly neighbours. Again, the minister of West Kirk found Mr Barnes, and his wife, a source of great encouragement. To Elizabeth, and to his sons and daughters, James, Dianne, Jeffrey and Ingrid, as well as his grandchildren and great grandchildren, we extend our sympathy, and thank God for the life and witness of a latter-day Barnabas – a 'son of encouragement' (Acts 4:36).

The Rev Dr Robert Neville Brown, BA, PhD, Religious Education Lecturer Emeritus, died on 10 January 2023, in the eighty-eighth year of his age and the sixty-second year of his ministry. One of three brothers and three sisters, he was born at Dungannon on 29 July 1935 to Frank Brown, a farmer, and his wife Charlotte, née Neville, members of Dungannon congregation. He attended the Royal School, Dungannon from 1948 to 1953, going on to Queen's University, Belfast (1953–57), where he graduated BA in Modern History. It was during that time that he became involved with the Presbyterian Community Centre at Queen's which was then led by Rev Ray Davey. Through this his interest in cross-community work and inter-church relations grew and he became one of the founding members of the Corrymeela Community. Following acceptance as a candidate for the ordained ministry, he studied from 1957 for three years, two at the Presbyterian College, with one, in-between, at New College,

Edinburgh, with assistantships in Kilmakee Seymour Hill and in Lowe Memorial Finaghy. After licensing by the Tyrone Presbytery on 5 June 1960, he gained a place at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Geneva and received a Diploma in Ecumenical Studies from the University of Geneva in 1961. Returning to Ireland, he was ordained as Moderator's Assistant in Ballygilbert by the Ards Presbytery on 16 April 1961, moving to a further ordained assistantship in 1962 in First Lisburn. He was installed by the Templepatrick Presbytery as Minister of Crumlin on 1 December 1964 where he served for seven years. In the early years of the troubles he worked in the Upper Falls, being involved in area peace talks. He remained actively involved in inter-church relations, representing the Presbyterian Church in Ireland at the Irish Council of Churches, the British Council of Churches, the World Council of Reformed Churches, and the World Council of Churches. On 20 February 1972 he became a Religious Education Lecturer, in Stranmillis College and, having become Head of Department and a member of the Board of Governors, served there until his retirement at the end of August 2000. In addition, he served as Chairman of the Christian Education movement; Secretary and Chairman of the Religious Education Council; Chief Examiner for the Northern Ireland Curriculum Council/Council for the Curriculum Examinations Assessment. He was guest lecturer at the Irish School of Ecumenics in Dublin and also at Belfast Bible College and had involvement in the production and presentation of a series of local TV religious programmes. He was awarded a PhD by Queen's in 1981. Dr Brown served the General Assembly as Co-Convenor of the Inter-Church Relations Board (1967–74) and as Convenor of the Theological Education Committee (1975–78), the Office of Deaconess Committee (1976–78), as Acting Deputy Clerk (1976–77) and the Magee Fund Scheme Committee (1979–86). He was Clerk of the Templepatrick Presbytery from 1965 to 1972. He married Sheelagh Mawhinney in 1972. We extend our condolences to her and to their twin sons Martín and Colin, and to the wider family circle, praying that, in their grieving they may know the hope and consolation of Christ.

The Rev Thomas James (Jim) Hagan, FIMLS, BD, Minister Emeritus, Donacloney, Co Down, died on 20 January 2023, in the eighty-eighth year of his age and the fifty-eighth year of his ministry. He was born in Toronto, Canada, on 23 May 1935 to William Hagan, a mechanical engineer, and his wife Violet (née Rodgers) and was younger brother to Margaret. In 1939 the family returned home to the farm at Dromara and they became members of Second Dromara. His father joined the army and was rescued off the beaches of Dunkirk, but after the war couldn't settle, and he left the family home permanently when Mr Hagan was fourteen. When gathering potatoes one day a nurse said to him, "Jim, you need to be saved." This led to his conversion. Eventually the farm at Dromara was sold and a house bought at Ravenhill Avenue, Belfast. The family joined Ravenhill where the minister, Dr Fitch, had a profound influence on him. He joined the 100th Belfast Company of The Boys' Brigade, going on to feature in the formidable Old Boys' athletics team. Having attended Dromara Primary

School, Mr Hagan went on in 1948 to Lisburn Technical College, becoming a bio-medical scientist and a Fellow of the Institute of Medical Laboratory Sciences. However, he felt the call to ordained ministry and at the age of twenty-six began his studies, which he took very seriously, gaining his BD from Queen's University through the Presbyterian College. He served an Assistantship at Richview and was licensed by the East Belfast Presbytery on 2 June 1965. On 6 July he married Eva Dobbin in Carryduff and then on 8 December was ordained as Assistant to the Convener in 1st Bailieborough, Corraneary and Glasleck by the Monaghan Presbytery. Further ministries were in Adelaide Road, Dublin (1967–70), Scarva Street, Banbridge (1970–74), as Irish Mission Superintendent (1974–76), in Woodvale Park (1976–85) and Donacloney from 1985 until his retirement on 30 November 2004. He was Moderator of the Synod of Armagh and Down in 1990. All these moves from country to town and city, and back to country, represented profound upheavals for the family and his beloved wife Eva. He was also a Chaplain to the Territorial Army. In all these settings, there was the busyness and the demand of constant preparation for services. He was a conscientious visitor and constantly available to those in need. There was also the cost of ministry. He was a man of courage and conviction who, coming from a conservative evangelical background, and compelled by the love of Jesus, brought a profound paradigm shift to some of the places he served. That brought opposition, but he persevered, gradually bringing people with him and winning their affection. He was equally at home among people from the Faith Mission, the Roman Catholic Church, and charismatic circles. After 'retirement' he preached regularly in various vacancies, mostly in the Republic of Ireland. Latterly he and Eva put down roots in Newmills (Co Down). For her, their children, David (Minister of First Castleblayney, Frankford and Corvally), Robert, Jane and Richard, and the wider family, we pray the grace and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rev J.S. STOTHERS, Convener

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 2

DOCTRINE COMMITTEE

REMIT PART 1

Introduction

Through the report of the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group, the Doctrine Committee was directly instructed by General Assembly:

‘to draw up an updated and contemporary ‘Brief Statement concerning Faith and Order’, for consideration and adoption by the General Assembly, ideally in 2023’ [*General Assembly Annual Reports* (Belfast, 2021), 120, Rec. 7.]

Following this introduction, and in respect of the remit, the first part of the Report of the Doctrine Committee offers a new, updated *Statement of Faith and Order*. The Committee anticipates that this document may play an important educational role in the life of the denomination by serving ‘as a framing document for the understanding of PCI’s existing subordinate standards.’ The Committee also anticipates it serving as a means to ‘equip those preparing for ordination, or already serving as teaching and ruling elders, with the historical and theological insight to interpret the subordinate standards of the church in the contemporary world’ [*General Assembly Annual Reports* (Belfast, 2022), 8, 4. (C) (ii).]

The new *Statement* is intended to introduce Irish Presbyterian convictions about the teaching of Scripture – as an introduction to, not a substitute for, the Subordinate Standards of the Church. The Committee hopes that this new Statement will serve to highlight the non-sectarian Reformed and catholic nature of the Subordinate Standards, as well as their call to wholehearted Christian living.

STATEMENT OF FAITH AND ORDER

Preamble

1. As an expression of their belonging to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, Reformed Churches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries set out their convictions about the teaching of Holy Scripture in confessions of faith and catechisms.

2. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland came to use as the confession of its faith the Westminster Confession and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. It is to the Westminster Confession that office bearers subscribe as a confession of their faith, according to the General Assembly's formula: 'I believe the Westminster Confession of Faith, as described in the Code, Chapter I, paragraphs 12-14 to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and as such I subscribe it as the confession of my faith', and in full personal trust in and commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The Confession and Catechisms are accepted as subordinate standards, and they serve as a bond of union for members of the Church on certain important points of doctrine and worship. The statements of the Confession are not the last word on any of these important truths. The Word of God as set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament is 'our only infallible rule of faith and practice'.
3. It is important to note that the Westminster Confession was designed as a document for national religious uniformity that deliberately reflects the breadth of the Reformed tradition, allowing for liberty of conviction on many matters. The Confession was written with a desire to embrace within one Church all those who were united in the fundamentals of the Reformed faith, with full awareness of the breadth of that tradition. The Confession derives from a particular time and place. This is reflected in its content and emphases and therefore requires careful contextual interpretation from Reformed Christians today. Since human thought and language are inadequate to comprehend great theological mysteries (such as the nature of God, or the person and work of Christ), the Confession itself teaches that all 'controversies of religion' must, ultimately, be resolved by 'the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture' (WCF 1.10).
4. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland therefore in practice has allowed a wise liberty of conviction in matters which do not enter into the substance of the faith. To insist that every sentence contained in the Confession must be interpreted in line with one particular stream of Reformed thought would divide the Church into innumerable fragments. What the Confession offers is a mature expression of the system of Reformed theology to which office bearers subscribe. It is ultimately the responsibility of the General Assembly to rule on the appropriateness of any interpretation of the Confession of Faith.

Statement

5. Our fundamental doctrines include the supremacy of the Word of God in Holy Scripture in all matters of faith, worship and conduct; the doctrine of God the Holy Trinity; the deity and humanity of Christ – His role as mediator and His threefold office as Prophet, Priest and King; the fallen condition of humanity and the reconciliation and restoration of men and women through the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ; the deity, personality and work of the Holy Spirit; the Church and its missionary task; the sovereignty of divine grace; the necessity of faith, repentance and practical godliness; and the final triumph of the rule of God in mercy

and judgement. We accept a Presbyterian order of Church government as founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, in which ministers are ordained to ministry of Word and Sacrament, ministers and ruling elders together oversee the Church through its courts and all members share in responsibility and service together, according to their gifts and calling.

6. To lay out the doctrines of the Christian faith, the Church universal has long used a threefold resource: the Apostles' Creed; the Ten Commandments; and the Lord's Prayer. For the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to set out its particular convictions about faith and order in the same way is especially appropriate, given how the Westminster Larger Catechism and Confession of Faith, among our subordinate standards, explain the fundamental doctrines. Beginning with the doctrine of Scripture, and some other important preliminaries, they go on to explore and expound key matters for Christian faith that emerge from the Apostles' Creed, Ten Commandments and Lord's Prayer, as the following Table shows in detail: columns four and five list relevant chapters of the Larger Catechism and Confession of Faith respectively. [This Table significantly reflects another demonstrating '[s]ubstantial agreement of Creed and Catechism' found in John R. Bower (ed.), *The Larger Catechism: A Critical Text and Introduction* (Grand Rapids, 2010), 23.]

		Doctrines	WLC	WCF
Our Foundation and Supreme Standard		The necessity of Holy Scripture and its supreme authority as the only infallible rule of faith and practice.	1–4	1
The Apostles' Creed	I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,	God as Holy Trinity and his all-sufficient sovereignty in creation, providence, and redemption.	4–30	2–6, 9
	and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord,	The person and work of Jesus Christ, the God-Man, the mediator of the covenant, our prophet, priest and king.	30–45	7–8
	who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,	Christ's virgin birth and his ministry on earth during his humiliation.	46–47	8
	suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried,	His suffering and atoning death upon the cross.	48–49	8

		Doctrines	WLC	WCF
	He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead,	His humiliation in death and exaltation in his bodily resurrection.	50	8
	He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty:	His ascension and ongoing ministry in his exaltation as our prophet, priest, and king.	51–55	8
	From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.	His future return to judge the world and the reality of hell.	56	33
	I believe in the Holy Spirit;	The work of the Holy Spirit, particularly in applying the benefits of the redemption accomplished by Christ.	57–59	2
	The holy catholic Church;	The one true Church of Jesus Christ in earth and heaven.	60–64	25, 31
	The communion of saints;	The Christian life lived out in union and communion with Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit, in the fellowship of the people of God in earth and heaven.	65–66	26
	The forgiveness of sins,	The application of redemption to the believer in justification, adoption and sanctification.	67–83	11–14
	The resurrection of the body;	The general resurrection at the return of Christ.	84–88	32–33
	And the life everlasting. Amen. [Hymn 377, The Irish Presbyterian Hymnbook (Norwich, 2004)]	Union and communion with Christ in glory.	89–90	32–33

		Doctrines	WLC	WCF
The Ten Commandments		The centrality of the moral law of God in every aspect and sphere of life: loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving neighbour as ourselves.	91–153	19, 23, 24
The Lord's Prayer		The worship of God and the importance of the ordinary means of grace in congregational life and witness.	154-177	21-22
		A commitment to a life of prayer, service and devotion to God.	178-196	21

These fundamental doctrines, which we believe on the authority of the Word of God, may also be set out in the following way:

7. There is one eternal God who reveals Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is the Creator and Ruler of all, the world's only heavenly King and Saviour, the source of all goodness in the created order.
8. God's sovereign grace and love are decisively revealed in Jesus Christ, the only Son of the Father. He is true God and true man, in His words and deeds and in His atoning death and His resurrection to reign as living Lord in the glory of God, the Father.
9. God is present in and with his people by the Holy Spirit, who is given through Christ to enlighten them and to enable them by grace to live in fellowship with Him and with their brothers and sisters in Christ.
10. Human beings were created by God in his image, male and female, to rule over the creation and to reflect the gracious and holy character of his creator. Through distrust and disobedience human beings have marred this image. Our relation to God – our whole being, body and mind and spirit – and our human societies are all so affected by sin that we live under the judgment of God and are completely unable to restore ourselves.
11. But God in His redeeming grace has chosen and called human beings personally to fellowship with Himself. Those so elected and called are awakened to repentance, justified by faith alone, reconciled to God and to one another and reborn to a new life of faith, hope and love. This is a life not of self-righteousness or of claims to perfection, but of continual dependence on the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit, to give us joyful assurance of salvation.

12. The one true Church is a fellowship of all in heaven and on earth who are so awakened, reconciled and reborn. This Church is sometimes more, sometimes less visible in the actual Churches, of which the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is one. Church members are called to attend to and obey God's Word and to receive by faith the Gospel Sacraments. To them, together with their children, God's promises belong. They are called to live together as Christ's people, sharing their gifts both spiritual and material. And they are called to bear witness by their words and actions to the whole society in which they are placed, testifying to the mercy of God in Christ and to the righteousness and good order which are His purpose for society. Church members should be concerned both for their local situation, the proclamation of the Kingdom of Christ in all the world and the visible unity in truth and love of the one Church of Jesus Christ.
13. The only King and Head of the Church is the Lord Jesus Christ. All the Church's members have a real share and responsibility in its life and work, according to their calling and gifts. Some are called and ordained to the office of the ministry of the Word and Sacraments and others with them to oversight in the Church, for the building up of the whole people of God for their mission and service in the world. The Presbyterian form of Church government seeks to enable such partnership.
14. The divine purpose of renewing creation, judging all in righteousness and mercy and overthrowing all evil will be fully realised at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ in triumph before all the world, establishing God's final kingdom in which His people will live with Him in eternal joy.
15. Christian believers are those who have been called by God the Father, redeemed by God the Son and made alive by God the Holy Spirit. Their life is to be lived out in union with Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit in the fellowship of the people of God.
16. Jesus Christ is the pattern of faithful human living before God. He is the true Servant to be imitated. The duty believers have to love God in every aspect of life with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love their neighbour as themselves, is made manifest in their devotion to God and in the witness of faithful Christian discipleship.
17. As Christians practise the discipline of self-examination and confession, they are especially guided by the teaching of the Ten Commandments as they are explained by Christ and his apostles. Christians hold one another accountable to:
 - (a) worship God alone, living all of life to His glory, renouncing all idolatry and all inordinate loves that might lead us to trust in any other help;
 - (b) worship God in humility, being reticent in either describing or picturing God, recognising that right worship is best supported not by our own innovative practices but through the living preaching of the Word and the faithful administration of the Sacraments;
 - (c) eliminate from both speech and thought any blasphemy, irreverence or impurity;

- (d) observe the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, being faithful in gathering with the people of God;
- (e) give honour toward those set in authority over us and practise mutual submission within the community of the Church;
- (f) eradicate a spirit of anger, resentment, callousness, violence or bitterness and instead cultivate a spirit of gentleness, kindness, peace and love; recognise and honour the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death;
- (g) maintain chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant;
- (h) practise right stewardship of the goods we have been given, showing charity to those in need and offering generous support of the Church and its ministries;
- (i) pursue truth, even when such pursuit is costly, and defend truth when it is challenged, recognising that truth is necessary for goodness and that its preservation matters;
- (j) resist the pull of envy, greed and acquisition and, instead, cultivate a spirit of contentment with the gifts God has given us.

[This summary of the moral law is an adapted version of *ECO Essential Tenets* (ECO A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, 2020).]

REMIT PART 2

Introduction

1. The second part of the report and its remit have their ultimate origin on 31 March 2020, when the following material featured in formal guidance sent from the General Secretary's office to all ministers:

Queries Regarding Communion

A few colleagues have been in touch regarding the issue of Communion, and specifically whether or not it is possible in the Reformed tradition to hold a 'virtual communion service'. I have consulted with relevant officers of the Doctrine Committee and they indicate that, "*We think many of the elements of public worship are appropriate in an online context, but there are some elements that are just not transferable.*" The clear consensus is that communion is one of those aspects of worship that is inappropriate to attempt to replicate virtually. **Therefore the formal advice is that, within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 'virtual communion services' should not be held.** This does not underestimate the place of the Lord's Table within our shared life as believers, but as the

members of the Doctrine Committee consulted indicated, “*Our view is that we should be lamenting the Lord’s grave providence that has resulted in so many Christian congregations no longer meeting.*”

The pandemic context for this formal advice should not be forgotten, notably the element of lament highlighted therein at having to forsake meeting together or exhorting one another, in community, to love and good works (Heb 10:24-25). This advice was subsequently confirmed at the meeting of the General Council Standing Committee on 8 April 2020 and later, following further discussion, ratified by the General Assembly Standing Commission on 3 September 2020. The advice therefore remains that online communion services ought not to take place. This guidance notwithstanding, and as is true within the Reformed family generally (see appendix), Irish Presbyterians may hold a range of views, with equal fervour and conviction, on the propriety or otherwise of virtual participation in the Lord’s Supper.

2. In this context, and in due course, the Doctrine Committee was tasked by the Church with investigating the matter further. The 2021 General Assembly endorsed the General Council’s proposal (GA Reports 2021, p. 139, (2) (d)) that the following task be remitted to the Doctrine Committee:

A detailed consideration of the subject of ‘virtual communion services’, to enable the General Assembly to come to a final and settled mind on the matter – with a report to be brought to the 2023 General Assembly.

In producing its report, the Doctrine Committee has interpreted the remit thus: sufficiently resourcing the General Assembly, by its report, as to inform and facilitate its deliberations on the matter. For the Committee, the matter is complex and has necessitated highlighting in a preparatory way manifold theological and practical issues involved in properly assessing ‘virtual communion services’ and online worship more generally. In order for the Church to reach any “final and settled mind on the matter” – whether for or against the practice, or in agreement to disagree – in the Committee’s view careful consideration of these issues, in their complexity, is required and should be undertaken by the Church, following preliminary debate in General Assembly, via a process of theological reflexion, learning and action patterned on the pastoral cycle. The present report therefore uses this cycle to assist the Assembly in reflecting on Presbyterian experience of worship and virtual worship (including communion), in light of Scripture and of our Reformed Standards, and to make some recommendations (by way of resolution) as to how the Church might embark on such a process of discernment, should the Assembly so decide.

In-person assembly for worship is normative and desirable

3. In both the Old and New Testaments, in-person gathering together characterised the people of God's response to the Lord's presence among them as their God. In light of their summons to be God's people, Israel under the old covenant would congregate in worship as the Lord's assembly (e.g. Num 16:3; Ps 22:22), for communal acts of feasting, sacrifice, pilgrimage and other worship activity like praying or singing. Gathering together happened in a variety of spaces, including the home, but most were places of public assembly – at the shrine or in the Tabernacle, Temple or synagogue – and involved joining the festive throng, whether in God's house (Ps 42:4) or in extraordinary assembly, like that described in Neh 8.
4. Under the new covenant, and in fulfilment of the invitation to the nations to come also, Jew and Gentile assembled as the Church through faith in Jesus in every place where the gospel took root: thus when Paul by letter instructed the Corinthians, for example, about presenting issues from their common life in their particular place, he took for granted that they met together as a church. In Paul's guidance on their celebrating the Lord's Supper together (1 Cor 11:18, 20), he rebuked the 'private suppers' of the haves who get drunk, while the have-nots look on and go hungry (1 Cor 11:21), and promoted eating together in unity and fellowship as the body of Christ, properly discerned as corporate (1 Cor 11:29, 33), in which all members share together in the one loaf and one cup (1 Cor 10:16–17). In the same letter, the importance of congregating, forming a community and sharing mutual relations also underlies a metaphor like being a Temple that God's Spirit indwells (1 Cor 3:16).
5. Paul's letters to particular churches and individuals, especially through sending and receiving of greetings (2 Cor 13:13), often invoke the wider fellowship of those in 'the church(es) (of God)' (1 Cor 11:16, 22; 16:19) – or 'the Lord's people' (1 Cor 16:1, 15) – who call on the name of the Lord Jesus in every place. Thus when Paul addresses misuse of the Supper in Corinth, and to regulate it recalls what he received from the Lord and passed on to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:23–26), we rightly understand this to apply across all Pauline churches and those founded by other apostles. This raises the question of whether Paul also understood proper discernment at the Supper of the one unified body of Christ, to which all believers belong (1 Cor 12:27, 29), to include communion with the whole Church everywhere or with those who had died in the Lord.

Sometimes in-person worship is impossible.

6. From Pentecost onwards, in-person public assembly for Christian worship has been the norm everywhere that Christians have been free to meet together in larger (Ac 2:44, 46a) or smaller gatherings (Ac 2:46b). Yet throughout the Church's history, this pattern has been repeatedly disrupted by circumstances such as persecution, imprisonment, plague, famine or war.
7. The impossibility of being present in person with individual co-workers or with gathered house-church communities already emerges for authors of

the New Testament letters. When, for instance, Paul as founder apostle and his associate, Timothy, were prevented by Paul's imprisonment (Phil 1:7, 13–14) from travelling to rejoin the Philippian converts, as Paul longed to do (Phil 1.8; 4.1), Paul's letter to the Philippians had to serve as a form of surrogate presence and communication with the gathered church. For delivering a letter there was no mail service: so a trusted co-worker like Phoebe (Rom 16:1) or Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), to whom the pastoral task could be devolved with confidence, physically delivered a letter from the apostolic team, reading aloud their written communication in person to the church, when it gathered for worship, and doubtless going on to manage the outcomes through discussion and action.

8. By making use of a trusted letter-bearer, Paul resorted to the best means to hand, in his day, for staying in touch and maintaining his apostolic instruction to the gathered church or his pastoral care for it, whenever he was prevented from being physically present with his converts. Just as this first-century solution of letters to churches gave Paul an available mode of presence-in-absence with them, so for a physically-absent twenty-first-century pastor, a direct contemporary solution, through the technology now available, would be virtual presence with gathered worshippers via video-link.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, congregational worship services became available in the digital space.

9. Not only did the recent Covid-19 pandemic prevent pastors from communicating with or caring for their congregation in person; compliance with the public health measures meant that congregations could not safely assemble together – just as workforces or staffs could not. However, the two-year emergency was not in train for long before providers of digital technology were marketing it for use in the workplace as the means to bring together, virtually, collaborators unable to interact physically, thus overcoming lockdown quarantine via remote connectivity. Indeed, so far-reaching was this transformation that rival providers scrambled to improve the capabilities or diversify the options of their particular digital product. The same technology became available, simultaneously, as an enabler of social and associative interaction of all kinds, including – providentially – for the life of the Church. Congregations were unable to gather in one place, and many though not all of their members, became equipped with the necessary hardware and software, acquired the requisite skills to use them and thus went online.
10. For many decades, public worship had been accessible via radio or, less frequently, in televised form. Gathered congregations had welcomed radio listeners to their ordinary (if adapted) services of worship. Much less frequently, special services had been broadcast to TV viewers but everyone had probably watched some: one thinks especially of Songs of Praise. In these contexts, scattered listeners or viewers had experienced a form of virtual participation and presence. Now, however, in a new democratised way video was added to audio for combined digital transmission – by livestreaming, or as recordings for asynchronous viewing – and this did

and does not require public broadcasters but may be undertaken by those in our congregations able to use the relevant technology.

11. Via the internet, the gathered worship of PCI congregations became digitally accessible to members physically unable to be present, including for example those members with no prospect for health reasons of ever returning in person, or those who were serving in mission, short- or long-term, far from their home church. For such people, this participation could approximate to being together in worship with their brothers and sisters and be experienced as a lifeline or an enrichment. The lifeline could be grasped by those for whom illness or unavoidable absence, or in some contexts pressure and even life-threatening danger, made it impossible to assemble for worship and enjoy fellowship with other believers in one corporate community. The enrichment could be felt by those whose Christian faith was edified as they joined remotely in hearing Scripture locally read and expounded or as they prayed or praised in concert with, but separated from, the gathered congregation.
12. Equally, digital participation opened new access to visitors for whom remote watching was a less daunting first step of discovery than crossing the meeting-house threshold in person for the first time. By digital means, public worship now had a new reach or outreach that took its corporate witness to the Gospel well beyond the walls of the church building. Some congregations have seen marginal members reconnect or previously-unconnected seekers discover their congregational life, overcoming estrangement or reluctance, or simple ignorance, and begin to feel the draw of the visible and tangible church and to get involved in person, as the next step after initial online engagement.
13. Wherever congregations have persisted in offering digital access to worship post-pandemic, some or all of the above advantages may have continued to be felt. For all such congregations, it will be important to understand who watches online and the reasons why they do not normally, or not yet, congregate physically. It will also be helpful to establish whether like online gamers – who, as friendships with other gamers grow, often opt to meet socially and physically – online worshippers may also be choosing to enhance fellowship by joining the physical congregation.

Disadvantages of remote virtual participation were experienced in worship services.

14. In the ordinary way of things, to be human is to be embodied and also socially-related creatures: we possess physicality, as individuals, and we experience physical proximity to one another in relationship. Both aspects are in play when we gather together publicly, on the Lord's Day, for Christian worship. In so doing, individual believers unite together corporately in praising, praying and otherwise actively participating liturgically in unison.
15. However, compliance by Churches with public health guidance during the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic and related lockdowns made such in-person worship impossible. Once restrictions were eased or

lifted, congregations returned to in-person worship to varying degrees and at varying speeds. For those who had been able to access them, virtual worship services had offered some shared experience with fellow believers – and something was much better than nothing – but to the degree that it was incomplete, and merely an approximation of in-person assembly, it was unsatisfying and pointed up something that, as embodied social beings, made one body in Christ, we humans had lost and whose retrieval would require renewed in-person corporate worship.

16. Virtual worship services had entailed a form of presence-in-absence. While virtual reality technology was valuable, through its capacity to create a form of surrogate presence approximating to in-person presence, and to enable some elements of interaction, it remained deficient by offering remote worshippers something less than what is experienced when believers congregate in worship. The bodily absence to us of our fellow-believers made us remote to one another's senses: for instance, we couldn't look each other in the eye, read each other's body language accompanying verbal communication or shake one another's hand. Nevertheless, the continuing livestreaming of worship or delayed viewing of recorded services, in many congregations, suggests that virtual participation, even if not viewed as ideal, is not considered temporary but that technologically-assisted worship is now widely taken to be a valid and genuine ongoing mode of regular congregational worship.
17. Given this dual reality, it is profitable to inquire about that which makes in-person worship more advantageous to worshippers, or more ideal, and about what by comparison may be the limitations upon worshippers' engagement in online services, making them less than ideal. For the worshipper present in the congregation, the following would seem to be characteristic:
 - Participating physically in a gathered congregation, with its corporate identity and its togetherness;
 - Partaking in public worship in the meeting-house, in one place at one time and in context of what precedes or follows the worship service;
 - Experiencing the benefits of the corporate dimension of in-person gathered worship, including the atmosphere, vibes, emotional engagement or social dynamics;
 - Joining in unison and in interactive fellowship with one another and before God through the collective hearing of Scripture read and preached and corporate liturgical acts such as singing, praying or sharing in the pronouncement of the benediction, dismissal and sending out;
 - Responding in concert with other worshippers and sharing in a sense of collective solemnity;
 - Interacting with other members and attendees through welcome, encounter, conversation, relation-building and mutual affirmation or care.

Without denying that virtual worship also permits a level of engagement with corporate worship that participants find genuine, the following confines would seem to apply to online involvement:

- Seeing on screen those leading congregational worship, yet remaining entirely invisible to them (unless they can see on screen those watching live online, and assuming privacy is not infringed by this);
- Not seeing the worshipping congregation or being seen by them;
- Remaining absent bodily from the gathered congregation and its interpersonal interactions;
- Perceiving the act of worship itself only partially, because of what audio and video cannot fully display or convey;
- Being separated in time as well as space from the gathered congregation, if watching asynchronously;
- Being less than fully involved, by not sharing in the collective congregational experience or voice;
- Being less than fully engaged, through the impossibility of shared interaction or through passive watching;
- Finding concentration or attention difficult, due to interference from the remote context where viewing is taking place.

We should reflect on the theology and practice of the Lord's Supper.

18. **Our theology.** To the question "what is the Lord's Supper?" the Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) replies like this: "It is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in his church, to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of his mediation" (WLC 162). Granted that we should recognise an element of mystery in our communing with the Lord and one another, and contemplate in humble reverence how this helps us grow in grace, we may profitably ask what is meant by "signify, seal and exhibit".
19. **A sign.** In the Supper, in the power of the Spirit, believers by their eating and drinking participate in Christ crucified and his benefits, according to the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF 29.5, 7). The bread is the sign of Christ's broken body and the wine is the sign of his shed blood (Mt 26:26-28; 1 Cor 10:16) and, in sharing them, there is "a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified" (WCF 27.2). Calvin describes the purpose of this mystical participation in Christ's body and blood (1 Cor 10:6) as being "to confirm for us the fact that the Lord's body was once for all sacrificed for us that we may now feed upon it, and by feeding feel in ourselves the working of that unique sacrifice" (Institutes I.v.17.1).
20. **A seal.** As believers follow Christ's command and join actively in the Supper's remembrance and reenactment of Christ's death for us – much as Israel in the Passover meal commemorated their covenant Lord's deliverance of them from slavery – the Holy Spirit gives assurance that we are constituted as God's new covenant people and (as the hymn puts it) "ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven."

21. **An exhibit.** In the Supper, Christ's saving death is also made visible and tangible to our senses as we see, touch, smell and taste elements that have no efficacy of their own but that, by" the work of the Spirit and the word of institution" (WCF 27.3), minister the grace of Christ to our sensory perception even as we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26).
22. In ordinary celebration of the Supper, it is through physical assembly round the Table that communicants together enjoy the benefits of the atoning death of Christ, their mediator, signified, sealed and exhibited to their faith by the Spirit, as they hear the Words of Institution and feed on the elements. In this context they also tangibly and visibly show one another "mutual love and fellowship, as members of the same mystical body" (WLC 168; cf. WCF 29.1). In relation to these aspects of our Reformed faith, the question arises as to whether or to what extent virtual communion may enable Christ's mediation, as celebrated in the Supper, to become effective in equivalent ways.
23. One aspect of this relates to Christ's presence. In opposition to the Roman Catholic view that Christ descends, in substantial transformation of the bread and wine, Luther's view was that the ascended Christ, through his omnipresence, could nonetheless be present from heaven in, with or under the elements. For Calvin or Zwingli, the risen and ascended Christ is present only in heaven, until his Second Coming, and therefore directly present only to those believers, following their death, who are absent from the body and present with the Lord (cf. 2 Cor 5:8) illocally (as theologians might say), as disembodied spirits awaiting bodily resurrection: at the Supper, believers are taken up to and united with Christ in the power of the Spirit to be nourished by him. The question is whether Christ is made any less present by the Spirit to believers who participate digitally than to those physically part of the gathered congregation.
24. Another aspect relates to believers' presence to one another. Even as the Confession conceives of the Supper as corporate in nature, and not for any "not then present in the congregation" (WCF 29.3), the Westminster Directory for Public Worship envisages the physical Table "decently covered, and so conveniently placed, that the communicants may orderly sit about it, or at it" (WDPW 8). [NOTE: Although this Directory has no particular status within PCI it is quoted, here and below, for its relevance.] The minister having read the words of Christ's institution and performed the manual actions, the bread and cup are given to the communicants, the implication being that they serve one another. In light of ongoing congregational provision of online worship generally, seen as valid in spite of its less-than-ideal aspects – including believers' physical separation from one another (as noted above) – the question arises as to whether in-person and online worshippers may be deemed validly present to one another, as members of the one body of Christ.
25. **Our practice.** When John Calvin and associated theologians first articulated from Scripture, according to our Reformed faith, what God in Christ requires of us and provides for us in public worship, they argued

for the necessary preaching of the Word and administration of the Supper as means of grace to be provided on each and every Lord's Day. Thus weekly communion took place in Basle and Strasbourg. There were also fortnightly or monthly celebrations in some other settings. Yet already in Calvin's time, and in his Swiss context, inter-cantonal politics trumped theology for distinguishing Reformed commemoration of the Lord's death from the Roman mass (typically daily for the religious or annually for the people): Geneva's magistrates insisted on quarterly celebration of the Lord's Supper instead, as in Zürich, at Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and Rogation.

26. Obligated to acquiesce, Calvin to the end of his life continued to advocate weekly worship that unites Word and Sacrament; but almost from the start, early Presbyterians in Geneva would therefore hear the Word preached often, on Lord's Days and also through the week, yet partake of the Supper only infrequently by comparison. For Irish Presbyterians, a blend of evolving practices left their mark over time, whether English (monthly or bi-monthly) or Scottish (infrequent communion seasons) and with local exceptions this gradually settled into a generally twice-yearly pattern of high days, with preparatory pre-communion, leading to Lord's Day celebration of the Supper itself, and a follow-up thanksgiving (with some opportunity for greater regularity, where the Supper was scheduled on different Lord's Days in different local congregations).
27. Today, pre-communion or post-thanksgiving worship is all but forgotten. Meanwhile, celebration of the Lord's Supper has increased in frequency in some congregations. This may have its origin in the 1979 report *The Frequency of Communion*, by the Public Worship Committee, commissioned by the General Assembly in 1978. This report commends frequent practice of communion within "genuine encounter with the Living God in worship", by analogy with preaching or prayer, and was "sent down to Kirk Sessions with the request that they study it and discuss it together." However, forty-five years on, somewhat infrequent Communion remains the experience of many Irish Presbyterians today – a reality that does not reflect the vital status of the Supper for believers' growth in grace to which our Reformed Standards testify. Interestingly, the Directory envisages that congregational leaders will determine what practice of the Supper is "most convenient for the comfort and edification of the people committed to their charge." Is serious reflexion on our theology and practice of the Supper throughout the Church now overdue? Ironically, those who by contrast commemorate the Lord's saving death Sunday by Sunday in Ireland – in various non-Presbyterian denominations or streams – prove to be more Reformed than we in their understanding and practice of the Supper, whatever may be their theology generally.
28. We may note how, worldwide, many Presbyterian denominations now commemorate the Supper more frequently – often monthly and at specific liturgical high-points in the church year. As a repeating Sacrament, and as a means of grace that accompanies the Word, the Supper like the Word, according to our Reformed faith, is "effectual to salvation" for us (SC 89-92) by the working of the Spirit through our faith. This raises the question

whether “perpetual remembrance” of Christ’s atoning death in the Church (WCF 29.1), whereby believers “have their union and communion with him confirmed” (WLC 168), might imply a need of this Sacrament as great as our need for God’s Word and call for a passion for feeding on Christ by faith, at his Table, equal to our hunger for the hearing and preaching of the Word.

29. The renewed blessing of being able to assemble for worship physically and without restriction itself provides a welcome stimulus to Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries and General Assembly to listen afresh to Scripture and to our subordinate Standards and to reassess the role of the Supper in our spiritual nourishment and assurance and in our discipleship and service. It may be opportune to ask whether our rather rare recourse to the Supper – in contradistinction to our frequent hearing of the Word – is sufficient for our growth in grace, as our tradition makes provision for us to do when the Directory states also that “[t]he communion, or supper of the Lord, is frequently to be celebrated; but how often, may be considered and determined by the ministers, and other church-governors of each congregation, as they shall find most convenient for the comfort and edification of the people committed to their charge” (WDPW 8). Ought we to follow Christ’s example much more often, setting aside bread and wine so as to feed on Him spiritually, by faith, so that the Spirit might seal to us the benefits of his redeeming sacrifice? Through tangible symbols of his broken body and shed blood, should we share repeatedly or regularly in “mutual love and fellowship each with other” (WLC 168)? Has the time come to reconsider whether a “spiritual oblation (or offering) of all possible praise unto God” for Christ’s “one offering up of Himself” (WCF 29.2), at the Lord’s Table, should form part of our weekly sacrifice of praise?
30. An affirmative answer to such questions might lead to regular Irish Presbyterian worship undergoing some radical restructuring to accommodate enhanced recourse to this Sacrament. New life and vitality have already significantly impacted Presbyterian worship services, in recent decades, with the arrival of new forms of praise and a new joyfulness and informality or the more active contribution, alongside the minister, of members exercising their giftedness for the good of God’s people. These changes also found expression – perhaps first and foremost – in home groups and small groups of various kinds, or in weekends away focussed on discipleship, fellowship and worship. In this context the innovation of more informal celebrations of the Supper unsurprisingly also arose, bringing with it new questions of authority or presidency. While the Church has neither encouraged nor made provision for such celebrations of the Supper, this development could be seen as communicants’ hunger to feed on Christ by faith, and its encouragement as meriting consideration.
31. For one kind of communicant – confined to their home and unable physically to assemble with the worshipping congregation – the Code does make special provision by envisaging the creation, in miniature, of something approximating to the gathered congregation. In expecting Kirk Sessions to exercise oversight of “the public administration in a

congregation of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper," paragraph 40.5 deems it desirable that they "encourage opportunities by which communicants who are housebound may also partake in the sacrament from time to time," occasions for which "one or more persons representing the main congregational fellowship should be present to share with the minister and individual communicant." In contexts where communion for all members is already infrequent, such provision will likely be less regular still. In such cases, one may ask whether shut-in communicants are being implicitly denied access to a means of grace whereby our Lord would nourish their faith through fellowship with him and with their fellow-believers.

How might celebration of the Lord's Supper in the digital space sit with our practice?

32. Unless or until the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is celebrated frequently by Irish Presbyterians, only a small number of the fifty or more services that a typical Presbyterian congregation might make available digitally, in a given year, may in practice include gathering round the Lord's Table. Therefore as things stand currently, virtual communion may remain an uncommon or unusual component of virtual worship. Nevertheless, wherever and whenever practised, its relation to in-person congregational celebration of the Supper should be carefully considered. Two examples are given here, with the second flowing from the first.
33. **The one and the many.** As spoken in the Words of Institution and shown in the accompanying manual actions of breaking the bread and raising the cup, the symbolism of shared participation in the Lord's Supper entails communicants together eating from one loaf or drinking from one cup (as noted above). Typically, however, these are found only on the Lord's Table, at which the celebrant acts for the Lord Jesus who presides, reenacting the Lord's setting them aside from common use and making them symbols of his body and blood and speaking for the Lord through the prayer of consecration. Following these words and actions, and for practical reasons relating both to health and safety concerns and to the need to facilitate potentially large numbers of communicants, individual participants within the gathered congregation around the Table do not break bread from one loaf or drink from one cup but receive, instead, individual pieces of bread (albeit from one plate) and individual glasses of wine or a substitute (albeit from one tray). Yet their distribution among the many is nonetheless understood to derive from a common origin and to bespeak their union in communion with Christ and one another. This relation of the one to the many may help when considering whether and how the communicant geographically separated from the community and digitally present might witness these words and actions and eat and drink worthily or beneficially, in concert with those gathered round the communal Table.
34. **Regulation, hospitality and self-examination.** In respect of a first profession of faith and of becoming a communicant member of the Church, and also of ongoing participation in communion, some regulation of attendance at the Table is practised. Thus the Code addresses the ordinary congregational practice of receiving new communicants "into the fellowship of the

Church in the presence of the congregation” (40.2), understood as a gathered congregation, and devolves to Kirk Sessions to “keep a roll of communicants” (40.2), “admit to privileges” (including membership of the congregation) those who partake of the Supper (40.3) and, in addition (40.4), “record attendance of communicants” whenever the Lord’s Supper is celebrated.

35. Nevertheless, our practice of an open Table includes an invitation to partake given to all present “who love the Lord in sincerity and truth” (The Code 84.2). [NOTE: This is the practice of the Leuenberg Fellowship, to which PCI belongs, as enabled by the Leuenberg Agreement, which PCI helped to achieve, whereby members of all Protestant Churches in Europe – Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican and Independents – are welcome at one another’s communion services, whatever their precise understandings of the Lord’s Supper]. Here, the responsibility of self-examination according to Paul’s rule (1 Cor 11:28–32; 2 Cor 13:–7) falls on the individual who contemplates coming to the Table in response to Christ’s invitation. The Larger Catechism helpfully commends proper preparation for coming to the Supper and outlines transparent self-assessment as the means. This spiritual discipline – “by serious meditation, and fervent prayer” (WLC 171) – guides believers honestly to diagnose their spiritual need, “in earnest hungering and thirsting after Christ” (WLC 174) to come to the Supper and receive comfort and encouragement, having their faith in Christ renewed and their obedience to Christ strengthened.
36. Whenever General Assembly celebrates and livestreams the Lord’s Supper, the same appeal to spiritual discernment and worthy reception is made to in-person or online communicants alike, in context of eucharistic hospitality (or a welcome to the Table) for non Presbyterians present who love the Lord in sincerity and truth and for all who may be participating remotely. At congregational level, by analogy, similar arrangements might govern provision for assembling, round a laptop computer, infirm believers confined to their rooms, or new believers in prison – both unable to join gathered congregations – along with elders or fellow-believers, forming with them a community of faith in miniature, so that these communicants like their brothers and sisters in physical assembly may feed on Christ together apart, and do so worthily.

GORDON CAMPBELL, Convener

APPENDIX

SOME RESOURCES FOR CONSIDERING VIRTUAL COMMUNION

Largely experimental comment, mainly in context of lockdown

The Issues

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Presbyterian Church in Canada: Committee on Church Doctrine, Providing Communion Using Technology (2012) Providing Communion Using Technology (presbyterian.ca)

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For a PCUSA congregation practising virtual communion, see: Virtual Communion Preparation Guide – Westminster Presbyterian Church Westminster Presbyterian Church | Serving God and others with open mind, hands and heart – Virtual Communion Preparation Guide (westminsterpeoria.org)

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REPORT OF THE DECISION MAKING AND DISSENT TASK GROUP

1. The Decision Making and Dissent Task Group (DM and DTG) met on 14 November 2022 and on Tuesday 4 April 2023, with members of the task group participating in-person and on-line.
2. The Task Group focused on the two outstanding issues before it, which were referred to in the concluding remarks of the 2022 General Assembly Report of the DM and DTG, namely:

During the next year the Task Group will seek to take account of the work of the Doctrine Committee as it draws up the new 'Brief Statement concerning Faith and Order'. The Task Group will also be giving further consideration to the issue of ministers or elders who serve in public roles in other organisations or bodies, which may on occasions promote a very different position to that of PCI.

3. The Task Group received a draft from the Doctrine Committee of the revised 'Brief Statement concerning Faith and Order'. The document was reviewed and comments were conveyed to the Doctrine Committee. The final document will be presented to the 2023 General Assembly by the Doctrine Committee, through the General Council, for discussion and adoption, and this will contain both the statement and an understanding of its purpose and use within PCI. The Task Group was satisfied that the new format and revised content will serve the purpose of equipping those preparing for ordination and assist the church to interpret its subordinate standards.
4. The Task Group considered again the section of its 2022 Report to the General Assembly on the '*Freedom of those in Ordained Leadership to Promote Opinions at variance with the clear position of the General Assembly.*' Particular attention was given to section 4 of the report (2022 GA Reports pages 7–10) and the Task Group affirms the following five updated points.
 - 4.1 **The Task Group affirms** the need to enable and indeed encourage biblically and theologically informed discussion and debate within the church, and especially within its ordained leadership.
 - 4.2 **The Task Group affirms**, and draws attention to, the following statements in the Code, including the rule of faith which state:
 - (i) *The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, as a witness for Christ, has adopted subordinate standards. In these are found what the Church understands the Word of God to teach on certain important points of doctrine and worship. These subordinate standards are a testimony for truth and against error, and serve as a bond of union for members of the Church. (Code Par 12)*
 - (ii) *The Presbyterian Church in Ireland adheres to the fundamental doctrines of the faith, set out in the Supreme and Subordinate*

Standards of this Church. Do you promise to teach them and defend them to the utmost of your power, against all error? (Code Par 212 (3)(v) – questions to a candidate for ordination)

- 4.3 The question arises as to public comment upon or debate surrounding doctrinal, moral or administrative positions which are held by PCI, possibly by resolution of the General Assembly, but which may not be referenced specifically in the subordinate standards of the Church.

The Task Group affirms the following five key points:

- (i) Code Par 11 states: *“In exercising this God-given right of private judgment, individual Christians are not to set their reason above the Word of God, or to refuse light from any quarter. Guided by the Holy Spirit, they are to use their reason to ascertain the divine will, as revealed in Scripture, and are to refuse to subject conscience to any authority except that of the Word of God...”* Thus, the Presbyterian form of Church government rests upon debate, prayerful discernment, and decision to ascertain the divine will.
- (ii) The primary *fora* within which such debate and discernment takes place is the courts of the church. This is not to preclude discussion or debate elsewhere, but to honour and acknowledge that “The Church alone has the right to interpret and explain her standards, under the guidance of the Spirit of God.” (Code, Par 14).
- (iii) Ministers and elders therefore should ensure that any public statements they might wish to make in connection with matters under consideration by the courts of the church are both personal to them and provisional upon any decision taken by such courts.
- (iv) Similarly, in private discussion or as part of debate in wider groups outside the courts of the church, ministers and elders should approach such matters in a spirit of grace and humility, acknowledging their ordination vow to “yield submission in the Lord to the courts of this Church” and to “preserve the peace and unity of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as part of the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ” (Code Par 212(5) for ministers and Par 205(4) for elders). It would therefore not be appropriate for an ordained minister or elder to fail to implement a decision taken by the courts of the church, or publicly to promote a view which undermines a stated position of the church, whether doctrinal, moral, or administrative.
- (v) A kirk session or a presbytery may seek to alter formally a policy or decision of the Church by presenting a Memorial to the General Assembly. The Task Group welcomes the planned revision and simplification of this process in the Republished Code to make this process clearer and therefore more accessible.

4.4 Often the point is made that not all elders are members of the General Assembly and therefore don't have direct input into the taking of decisions and setting of policy by the Assembly.

- (i) **The Task Group affirms** that while this is clearly the case, nonetheless the Code makes it clear that all in ordained leadership are bound by decisions of the General Assembly.

Par 104. (1) The General Assembly is the supreme court of the Church, representing in one body the whole Church, including all subordinate courts and particular congregations, and acting as its supreme legislative, administrative and judicial authority, in dealing with all matters brought before it.

(2) As such authority, the Assembly exercises the powers stated by this Code; and, in particular, it may -

(a) deliberate upon and superintend matters which concern the whole Church in its doctrine, worship, witness, discipline and government, and declare the mind of the Church thereupon;

.....

(3) Decisions of the Assembly are final and binding upon the whole Church.....

- (ii) Therefore, *the Task Group affirms* that when significant issues are to be decided by the General Assembly, it is important that the processes for wider debate and scrutiny are followed as agreed by the 2021 General Assembly (see 2021 General Assembly Reports, pages 114–125 ‘Report of the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group’). This will often include both ‘pre-legislative scrutiny’ and formal consultation with presbyteries prior to the final adoption of significant new or amended policy by the General Assembly.
- (iii) As part of the process of wider consideration, especially at kirk session level, it will be important to equip and assist Ministers in the role of facilitation of such discussions. This will include both an understanding of the issue under consideration and the scope of relevant discussion.

4.5 In our ever-changing public square, an elder or a minister of the church can have easy access to traditional media or social media to express opinions, which at times may be contrary to the policy or decision of the General Assembly. The views expressed on such media may be personal or the position adopted by a group of which the minister or elder is a part. There is, however, a responsibility to be clear at all times that this is the capacity in which the person is speaking and that they are not representing the Church’s position. In this regard, **the Task Group affirms the following four key points:**

- (i) For those in Ordained Leadership who oppose a decision of the Church, it is appropriate that they should primarily use the processes available through the Courts of the Church, to express their questions and concerns, recognising, however, that inferior courts are bound by decisions of superior courts and, indeed, do not have the right to review the proceedings of a superior court (Code Par 21(4)).
 - (ii) When expressing opinions in the traditional or social media which are contrary to the Church's position, especially in regard to significant or sensitive issues, there is a difference between, in response to a question, stating a personal view consciously held (while making clear it is a personal view and not the Church's position) and seeking to proactively use traditional or social media to undermine/challenge/change the settled position of the Church. The former can be an acceptable exercise of the individual's freedom of conscience when asked a personal view, especially so when that view is expressed with wisdom, sensitivity and grace. The latter can, however, go beyond individual freedom of conscience and rather can be seen as seeking to use traditional or social media to undermine both the Church's settled policy on an issue and also the Church's own processes for debate and decision making. This is not an appropriate course of action for ordained leaders in the Church. The Task Group recognises the need for particular discernment and wisdom when ordained leaders are representing outside organisations on traditional and social media.
 - (iii) The way to change the policy of the Church is through the processes provided by the Church, chiefly through Memorial and notice of motion to rescind a previous decision – these are being updated and hopefully enhanced as part of the process of republishing the current Code.
 - (iv) Evidently, certain internal groupings within the Church have been encouraged to make use of traditional or social media to campaign against the settled policy of the Church and indeed for individual leaders to go further and directly defy the law of the Church. Such tactics or behaviour are clearly unacceptable for ordained leaders who have promised before God to yield submission in the Lord to the courts of the Church.
5. For completeness in the Task Group's report to the 2023 General Assembly, and specifically to keep before the Church the matters that the General Assembly has already decided upon, Appendix 1 of the report outlines the Task Group's previous recommendations that were adopted by the 2021 General Assembly and, as such, represent agreed General Assembly policy.

NOBLE McNEELY, Convener

APPENDIX 1

DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE 2021 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Introductory Notes:

1. At the 2019 General Assembly the General Council tabled a report it had commissioned entitled ‘Decision Making and Dissent within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland’ (see 2019 GA Reports, pages 24–30). On recommendation of the Council, the 2019 General Assembly agreed to send this report down to Presbyteries for comment.
2. Following this consultation exercise with Presbyteries, the 2020 General Assembly Standing Commission received a report from the General Council’s Decision Making and Dissent Task Group, with a total of twelve recommendations. The Standing Commission noted the report and remitted it to the 2021 General Assembly for full consideration and decision, with the implementation dates have been adjusted accordingly. The report was received by the 2021 General Assembly and all of its twelve recommendations were adopted. These are listed below, and the full report can be found in the 2021 GA Reports, pages 114–125 and a record of the adoption of the recommendations found in the 2021 GA Minutes, page 37.

(A) TOWARDS A NEW PROCESS FOR BRINGING REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Recommendation 1:

That from the 2022 General Assembly onwards, subsequent to each General Assembly, up to two sets of regional or presbytery ‘conference style’ meetings be held – a first set could be held in the summer/autumn after the General Assembly and a second set could be held during the late winter/spring preceding the next General Assembly. These regional conferences could, in any particular year:

- (a) reflect on specific matters remitted by the General Assembly and/or on the implementation of new policies decided by the General Assembly (first set of conferences);
- (b) give preliminary consideration to strategic and significant policies and issues (first set of conferences);
- (c) be forums for discussion and giving guidance regarding matters coming to the General Assembly prior to recommendations being finalised (second set of conferences);
- (d) be an opportunity to be informed about and consider significant issues prior to decision-making at the General Assembly (second set of conferences).

Recommendation 2:

That from the 2022 General Assembly onwards, where a significant change of policy is being considered, or a new policy being proposed (especially where the matter is strategic or potentially controversial), there should be a formal Green Paper consultation stage prior to recommendations for decision coming to the General Assembly. A Green Paper consultation stage would:

- (a) be triggered by the General Assembly (or by the General Council), following recommendation from a newly constituted General Assembly Advisory Committee;
- (b) include the drafting of a Green Paper consultation document outlining the background to the matter, the reasons necessitating new policy/decisions, an analysis of options that could be considered, etc.;
- (c) involve consideration of the Green Paper consultation document at one or more of the following levels – regional, presbytery, kirk session;
- (d) result in a Green Paper report to the General Assembly, which itself would authorise the drawing up of a full policy report for consideration and decision at the subsequent Assembly.

Recommendation 3:

That from 2023, the General Assembly should continue to meet annually, but for a shortened period, to:

- (a) together meet with the Lord – listening to his Word, coming to him in prayer and gathering at his Table;
- (b) consider strategic and significant policies and decisions (including formal Green Paper reports);
- (c) receive reports on a rotation basis from selected councils and commissions (mostly on a biennial basis);
- (d) deal with essential annual business;
- (e) greet and hear from representatives of partner Churches.

Recommendation 4:

That a new General Assembly Advisory Committee be constituted by the 2021 General Assembly:

- (a) to take on the current remit of the Moderator's Advisory Committee;
- (b) to recommend to the General Assembly (or General Council) that a Green Paper consultation stage be triggered (as outlined above);
- (c) to monitor the progress of remits set by the General Assembly;
- (d) to recommend to the General Council that a remit be adjusted, with the General Council having authority so to do;
- (e) to give guidance as to the scope of the recommendations to be brought to the General Assembly from a remit;

- (f) to address unforeseen consequences that have arisen during the process of carrying forward a remit.

(B) TOWARDS A NEW PROCESS FOR CONSIDERING REPORTS AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Recommendation 5:

That the General Assembly Business Committee appoint a dedicated Task Group to consider cost and, with the approval of the General Council, implement a system for the provision of full electronic/digital reports for the General Assembly.

Recommendation 6:

That, from the 2022 General Assembly onwards, retired ministers will be required to opt to remain full members of the courts of the Church – with automatic retention as full members at the point of retirement, and then thereafter each retired minister be required to request annually to be retained.

(C) TOWARDS GREATER CLARITY REGARDING THE STANDING OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECISIONS AND THE MEANING AND SCOPE OF DISSENT.

Recommendation 7:

That the Doctrine Committee be instructed to draw up an updated and contemporary *Brief Statement concerning Faith and Order*, for consideration and adoption by the General Assembly, ideally in 2023.

Recommendation 8:

That the Judicial Commission's Code Republishing Panel be instructed to insert into the Code appropriate definitions outlining three different types of General Assembly decision:

- (a) Decisions that are binding and must be followed (these will include both provisions inserted into the Code and other binding decisions adopted by Assembly resolution).
- (b) Decisions that are in the form of guidelines that should be followed in all but exceptional circumstances, the exception having to be justified to a superior court if required.
- (c) Decisions that are in the form of guidance, that is, good advice that should be taken into consideration.

Recommendation 9:

That once Recommendation 8 is implemented, the General Assembly Business Committee shall ensure that there is clarity regarding the standing of all resolutions coming to the General Assembly for decision.

Recommendation 10:

That on the basis of par 26(e) above, the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group be instructed to draw up a comprehensive report, for consideration by the 2022 General Assembly, on the *Freedom of those in Ordained Leadership to Promote Opinions at variance with the clear position of the General Assembly*.

(D) TOWARDS IMPROVING HOW GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECISIONS/POLICIES ARE COMMUNICATED**Recommendation 11:**

That the Communications and Strategy Task Group should aim to bring a comprehensive report on a communications strategy for PCI (including how General Assembly decisions and policies are communicated) to the 2023 General Assembly, with the General Council being authorised to take any necessary interim decisions.

(E) TOWARDS CLARIFYING HOW GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECISIONS/POLICIES CAN BE CHANGED**Recommendation 12:**

That the Clerk of Assembly, in consultation with the Judicial Commission's Code Republishing Panel, be instructed to report to the 2022 General Assembly (including tabling overtures to amend the Code if appropriate) to clarify and simplify Assembly procedures so that a clear process is in place whereby the General Assembly can be requested to:

- (a) consider reviewing or changing a current policy or area of work;
- (b) consider developing a new policy or area of work;
- (c) consider making a specific exception to a particular policy;
- (d) consider making a statement on a particular issue of concern.

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 3

MEMBERSHIP AND PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES TASK GROUP

1. Remit

The remit of this Task Group was broadened at the General Assembly in 2022 as follows (additions underlined):

“...to address the issue of accepting young people and adults with an intellectual disability into communicant membership, and the implications for such membership for them and their families. bringing a report to the 2023 General Assembly.”

2. Task Group membership and meetings

Leslie Addis, David Bruce (Chair and Secretary), Lindsay Conway (Convener), Peter Dickinson, Trevor Gribben, Jill Harshaw, Graham Hawthorne, Donna Jennings, Stephen Lowry, Gareth MacLean.

Several members of the Group are themselves parents of children, young people or adults with Intellectual Disabilities, and / or are involved professionally in Special Needs Education.

The Task Group met on seven occasions: 13 December 2021; 24 January 2022; 21 February 2022; 28 March 2022; 27 October 2022; 28 November 2022; 6 April 2023 (by email circulation, for approval of the final draft of the Report).

3. Introduction

The Task Group was made aware from its first meeting of the stories which capture the combination of family pain and gospel challenge before the Church, brought to us in the lives of people with varieties of intellectual disability. Names have been changed to protect anonymity in these three examples:

- Michael is a young adult with an intellectual disability who lives at home with his parents. As a family, they have moved to a new place and have started to attend the local Presbyterian congregation. On transferring their membership, Michael’s parents were welcomed by name at a service of communion as transferring members, along with several others, but Michael was not mentioned. While his parents are sure that no slight was intended, it would have been a great encouragement to them, Michael and the whole fellowship if

he had been included in the welcome as a member of the covenant community through his baptism with the same affection and enthusiasm as the rest.

- Julie's intellectual disability means that her needs are complex. She is unable to walk or speak. Her parents and siblings have structured family life around Julie's needs, including building an extension to accommodate her chair, hoists and other essential facilities. Those who meet Julie for the first time find the encounter challenging and, as a result, many struggle to maintain relationships with the family. As committed Christians, Julie's family are active members of their Presbyterian congregation. They quietly wish for greater understanding of the texture of their daily lives, a deeper sense of welcome and some accommodation of their specific needs as Julie comes with them to church on Sundays. The latest issue has been whether Julie can attend Youth Club, especially as one of the leaders has apparently expressed reservations.
- Billy loves coming to church and, since he was a teenager, is a regular at the bowling club, the youth club and Sunday service where he enjoys being part of the welcome team at the door. His intellectual disability does not restrict him from walking to the church or interacting with the people he meets. His mum isn't a member but pops in occasionally. Billy wants to become a member of the church which has increasingly become the centre of his life outside his home. He has not been baptised as an infant. How should the minister and kirk session respond to Billy's story?

4. **Process of the Task Group's work**

The Group acquainted itself with work previously undertaken by the General Council to revise the vows taken:

- (a) by parents at the baptism of their infant children
- (b) by believers at their baptism
- (c) by candidates on admission to communicant membership of the church.

The Group was referred to specialist work in the field of Intellectual Disability and faith. Of particular note were the following:

- (a) John Swinton. 'Restoring the Image: Spirituality, Faith and Cognitive Disability.' *Journal of Religion and Health*, March 1997.
- (b) Donna Jennings. 'Those who seem to be weak: The role of Disability within a Missional Framework.' OMF International, March 2019.

Both Jill Harshaw and Donna Jennings (members of the Task Group) are closely involved with the work of Tio (tioassociates.org). This organisation highlights how God asks us to treat people who are often perceived as weaker and of lesser value. It works to see people with intellectual disabilities valued, honoured and supported in the Church and in society.

5. Membership of the church

- (a) How does PCI understand and apply the law of the church on membership of a congregation? Specifically in relation to the work of this Task Group, the outworking of kirk session responsibilities regarding baptism, the reception of new communicants, and maintaining congregational membership lists (voting or otherwise) have been examined.
- (b) General practice across the denomination is that individuals become members of the church on profession of faith. New members take personal ownership of their parents' baptismal vows as they consider and prepare for communion. If they have not previously been baptised as infants, they may be baptised as believers on their own profession of faith and will take vows accordingly. Thereafter, recorded attendance at communion and financial contributions to the funds of the congregation are understood to be measurable indicators of their commitment to the life and work of the congregation and an (albeit imperfect) testimony to a life of discipleship.
- (c) There was strong agreement in the Group that those within the covenant community, with an Intellectual Disability who are attending church ought not to be excluded from membership of the church, even though they may not have the capacity to meet all, or perhaps any, of the expectations of membership as described above.
- (d) In the Interim report to the General Assembly in 2022, the Group stated:
 - (i) Some people who have intellectual disabilities have no capacity to process language or to consider cognitive propositions. Admitting them to communicant membership therefore requires careful theological, pastoral and practical consideration for a local church leadership.
 - (ii) On the basis of their baptism (if they are baptised as infants) they have already been admitted into the covenant community – and this is surely secure. They ought not to be subsequently excluded on the basis of their intellectual disability.
 - (iii) There is a significant growing awareness of the needs of families who care for people with intellectual disability and, in particular, their sense of exclusion in society generally. Many parents have had to add the tasks of campaigner and advocate to care-giver and family member.
 - (iv) The Church may well (usually inadvertently) make this sense of alienation worse, when her calling must surely be to make it better. (GA Reports 2022, p.55)
- (e) There must be a call on congregations to affirm both the individual and their family, demonstrating an actual, tangible commitment to integrate them into the active life and fellowship of the church that they, like all members, might be blessed and be a blessing by their presence and participation.

6. Theological considerations

Some essential points of theological reflection emerging from PCI's confessional heritage were explored in support of the basic premise that people with Intellectual Disabilities ought not to be implicitly or explicitly excluded from meaningful involvement in, or membership of, the church.

- (a) Baptism and Communicant Membership
 - (i) There is a covenantal continuity between the sacraments of baptism and communion, marked by multiple responses to grace through life, all resting upon the prime movement of God toward us in Christ.
 - (ii) The vows taken at Baptism and at admission to the Lord's Table at Communion, rest firstly and firmly upon God's grace. (God has loved you in Christ, and sent him to die in your place). The vows then move towards the implications which flow from this prior movement of God toward us. (Believe in him, follow him and be his disciple in the world). This movement of God's commitment to us leading to our commitment to him is reflected in the central covenantal affirmation throughout Scripture, "I will be your God, you will be my people".
 - (iii) The Group noted a frequent disconnect between this theology of covenant and grace we historically espouse, and a theology sometimes experienced in congregational life which may be neither covenantal nor resting on grace. For example, some may experience their acceptance into membership as functionally conditional upon their verbalised professed faith, or their record of service in the church – communicating the impression that these are the reasons for Christ's acceptance of them.
- (b) In the interim report to the General Assembly in 2022, the Group stated:
 - (i) A person who has intellectual disabilities and who is able to understand and participate in the taking of vows, ought to be welcomed and fully included in any processes for admission to communicant membership, including baptism if they are not already baptised. Sensitive accommodation of the programme of preparation to their needs ought to be made by those facilitating it.
 - (ii) A baptised person who has intellectual disabilities and who is unable to understand or participate in the taking of vows, could be welcomed into communicant membership by the kirk session on the basis of an affirmation of the baptismal vows of their parent(s). A form of words based on the baptismal vows agreed by the General Assembly can be formulated. This could include a congregational affirmation and commitment of support for the new communicant and their family. Any necessary adjustments to the Code or the Book of Common Worship would follow.

- (iii) A person who has intellectual disabilities and who is unable to understand or participate in the taking of vows, and has not been baptised, may be baptised and admitted to communicant membership on the basis of the vows of their believing parent(s). (GA Reports 2022, p.56)

The Task Group reaffirms this position, and in the appended resolutions to this Report, invites the General Assembly to adopt these principles. Members of the Task Group will be ready to participate through the Council for Congregational Life and Witness in the formulation of appropriate resources referred to in the Resolutions, including the drafting of vows using appropriate all-ability language.

- (c) Position regarding membership of those who are not baptised, and/or whose parents are not believers.
 - (i) At the time of the interim report in 2022, the Group stated that it had not come to a clear mind on the question of inclusion in membership of people with an Intellectual Disability who have not been baptised and do not have believing parents, but expressed the hope that a way might be found to welcome and affirm them.
 - (ii) The Group maintains that while formal membership of the church will not be the appropriate step for a family to take at this point, a welcome of them into the life of the church will be a critical aspect of its discipleship and a strong indicator of the credibility of its witness. The testimony of a church which offers affirmation, encouragement, and tangible support for families of people with an Intellectual Disability is deeply powerful. Our prayer is always that such testimony may be the means of drawing such families to faith in Christ, so that they may experience the fullness of his grace, including in the providence of God, full membership of the Church.

7. A time to welcome

- (a) The place of timely congregational celebrations as markers of grace and affirmation of membership were noted and supported by the Group – especially when these include people with Intellectual Disability. These can be informal moments based on personal or family reasons to celebrate, liturgical as part of the regular worshipping life of the congregation, or (where appropriate) sacramental at baptism and communion.
- (b) Questions were asked (referencing actual stories from families of their experiences in PCI congregations) about whether we see these times of welcome as reinforcing a pastoral practice which effectively (even if unintentionally) excludes.

- (c) Some key features of these informal and liturgical moments of affirmation ought to be:
 - (i) Expressing a genuine attitude of welcome to the parents, wider family and the individual with intellectual disability, whether they are communicant members of the congregation or not.
 - (ii) Affirming that such welcome assumes belonging to this community, whether full communicant members or not.
 - (iii) Explicit inclusion of those whom we, in conformity with our supreme and subordinate standards, understand to be within the covenant of grace.
- (d) There is a recognition that the necessary shifts in approach associated with these features of congregational welcome and inclusion may involve encouraging an attitudinal change on the part of leaders, including ordained and organisation leaders. The production of relevant resources to assist in raising awareness and providing patterns of good practice will be required.

LINDSAY CONWAY, Convener

DAVID BRUCE, Chairman

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 4

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY REVIEW TASK GROUP

1. Introduction

The Task Group was appointed with the following remit:

The Communications and Strategy Task Group aims to bring a comprehensive report on a Communications Strategy for PCI (including how General Assembly decisions and policies are communicated) to the 2023 General Assembly.

2. Process

- (a) The Task Group met on eight occasions. It sought to engage directly with each of the Councils of the General Assembly and, in addition, organised a series of online discussions to which leaders in congregational settings across all presbyteries were invited. Specific time early in the process was allocated to meet with the Head of Creative Production, the Press Officer and the Public Affairs Officer, and with a number of conveners.
- (b) Included in membership of the Task Group were people with relevant experience in corporate communications, web design, journalism and parish ministry.

3. Executive Summary

- (a) The Task Group was aware of a long-standing commitment to improve communications across all departments in Assembly Buildings, and was able to trace many positives as the several phases of restructuring were implemented across the Boards and subsequently Councils of the General Assembly. That said, it was also clear that the time has come to enhance PCI's professional capacity in this field, so that Councils and, where necessary, Presbyteries and other bodies can be better supported in their work. Such an investment in the development of skills available to the Church in communications must include:
 - (i) Messaging in the public square
 - (ii) The improvement of internal and external systems for communication
 - (iii) Enhancing the use of digital media and the web.

- (b) The Task Group makes specific recommendations as follows:
 - (i) The creation of a Communications Department
 - (ii) The appointment of a Head of Communications
 - (iii) A necessary adjustment to the work of existing departments to reflect this fresh approach
 - (iv) Commissioning work to design and build a new PCI public website and to provide improved technologies to support specific groups within PCI (in particular: staff, ministers, committees and presbytery groups)
 - (v) The reallocation of departmental budgets to finance these new arrangements.

4. Understanding the Remit

Is a Communications Strategy necessary?

- (a) *The General Assembly.* The General Assembly will, from time to time, take decisions which are of interest and relevance both to the Church and wider society. The accurate communication of these decisions, both internally to presbyteries, kirk sessions and congregations and externally to wider society, requires skilled insight and the use of multiple distinct channels. Without a strategy for communications, unclear or confused messaging is likely.
- (b) *General Assembly Councils.* Councils act as the executive bodies of the General Assembly. Their effective work depends upon clearly defined priorities for the denomination which are then resourced. Clear communication between Councils (“cross-cutting” matters of mutual concern) and from Councils to and from presbyteries and kirk sessions is key to the fulfilment of their various remits. A clear communications strategy would greatly assist Councils in determining what is said, when it is said, and to whom. This recognises that the communications needs of staffed departments within Assembly Buildings are different from the outward facing aspects of communications with presbyteries and congregations.
- (c) *Presbyteries and congregations.* The Code states that:

The Presbytery is the body primarily responsible for corporate oversight of the congregations and causes assigned to it by the General Assembly, and of the ministers and elders connected with it, and the advancement of Christ’s kingdom generally within its bounds. (Code par 69 (1))

Accurate communication of current General Assembly policies, procedures and regulations will be essential for presbyteries to fulfil this basic remit. Similarly, ownership and commitment to PCI’s denominational policies and priorities will assist congregations in their shared enterprise of mission and ministry in Christ’s name.

5. What the Task Group heard from Councils and others

The Task Group thanks those who engaged helpfully with its work, and highlights the following important themes which emerged:

- (a) *Ministers*. Ministers agree that they are the primary landing point for communications from the Councils of the General Assembly. Some are content with this – indeed feel it important that they know everything which is being said, and are happy to pass it on as appropriate. Others become frustrated with the volume of material arriving via post, email and social media channels, and have found it challenging to direct it consistently to the person or organisation which needs to have it within the congregation.

Information needs to reach its intended target audience in congregations. This must be significantly improved as part of any PCI communications strategy.

- (b) *Website*. There is a widespread feeling that the PCI website, while helpful in the breadth of its content, is difficult to navigate, not easy to search for specific resources and inadequate for particular functions, especially:
- (i) accessing a straightforward summary of what PCI believes
 - (ii) providing a major evangelistic opportunity which is not currently fulfilled
 - (iii) providing a workable “find a church” facility
 - (iv) facilitating online giving and payments
 - (v) facilitating booking for events
 - (vi) offering a separate dedicated and secure area for congregational leaders.

The provision of a new, central and public-facing website for the denomination is an essential priority, and the necessary investment to secure its creation and maintenance must be made. It is however clear that a single website will not be able to service the entire communication and information needs of the multiple and disparate groups involved in the various operational aspects of PCI. The remit of the proposed Communications Department will include consultation, research and reporting to satisfy the communication and information needs of all groups and Councils within PCI, and to coordinate the implementation and maintenance of their online presence, both within and, where necessary, beyond the central PCI website.

It is clear that a completely new PCI website is required, and ought to be the first major project undertaken in implementing a communications strategy.

- (c) *Printed and digital resources.* Printed and video resources, especially from the Council for Congregational Life and Witness are of good quality and broadly welcomed. Different views were expressed on the form or necessity for a denominational magazine in its current form. In general it is recognised that PCI communications generally are still very paper-based; The Blue Book (Assembly Reports), The Directory, Accounts, meetings papers etc.

It was further recognised that the production of printed resources (indeed all resources) includes several separate functions which require differing skills-sets:

- (i) the commissioning, writing and editing of content
- (ii) design, including layout
- (iii) production
- (iv) distribution, including processing of orders and (where relevant) invoicing.

Not all of these functions may (or should) be found in one location or Council, although there is an essential need for solid, uninterrupted workflows to be established between the functions described for this kind of communication to work effectively.

The commissioning and editing of new material for publication ought to be seen as a ministry or mission function.

The tasks of design, production and distribution of such materials is a service function.

A communications strategy will reflect these distinct functions.

- (d) *Societal changes.* Externally PCI struggles to communicate its ethos and heart. Amidst a growing suspicion of tradition and institutions, the Church is seen by many as an irrelevant anachronism, even though its message of redemption and life in Christ is anything but.

In a world where image, style, diversity and youthfulness are celebrated, the Church can be perceived as monochrome, tone-deaf and out of touch.

The 2018 General Assembly decision on credible profession of faith is but one example of the significant public relations and communications challenges faced by PCI, in affirming its confessional position on matters which require contemporary application. Advocating in support of General Assembly decisions in an often hostile public square may include, but must not be limited to, careful briefing of the Moderator as the chief public spokesperson for the Church. The use of multiple channels of communication from credible sources with an informed voice can assist with this.

- (i) Long reads – including opinion pieces online or in the press
- (ii) Short reads – including blogs and tweets
- (iii) Statements – on specific matters of public interest or government policy, followed by broadcast and streamed media engagement.

A communications strategy which honestly addresses these realities and assists in equipping the Church to meet them will be essential to the future mission of PCI.

- (e) *Priorities.* The General Assembly through its Councils produces a vast amount of diverse material, from weekly prayer bulletins, to videos of Global Mission Workers and technical regulatory guidance for congregational treasurers or managers of residential homes. Each week there are multiple agendas and papers for courts, committees and panels. All this communication is important – some indeed is essential and even urgent for the effective running of the Church.

In light of this volume and diversity of outputs, the setting of agreed priorities is essential for an effective communications strategy to emerge, to minimise the likelihood of

- (i) confused messaging
- (ii) administrative errors
- (iii) entities within the Church appearing to act at cross-purposes.

Further, it can seem to those charged with delivering the many varied outputs, that each council has their own independent objectives, and each marked as “urgent”. If everything is a priority, nothing is a priority.

The setting of, and management of, priorities must be a central element in an emerging communications strategy.

- (f) *Training.* Key personnel across all departments will benefit from training in both the rationale behind communications decision making, and the means to deliver it.

The investment of time in training and equipping staff, including the gaining of trust and permission from each Council must be integral to any communications strategy.

- (g) *Advisory.* At certain times, a congregation, presbytery or council may be required to offer comment on matters of general interest or concern to the general public. Just as the Press Officer can and does provide assistance in such circumstances, the need for additional similar specialist advice and expertise regarding communications and public relations would be of genuine benefit to the wider church.

The provision of expert advice to the courts and councils of the Church when required at significant moments including crises or other times of heightened public interest must be included in a communications strategy.

6. Recommendations.

- (a) The creation of a Communications Department.
 To address the needs outlined above, it is recommended that a new Communications Department be created as the hub for the multiple communications needs of the General Assembly and its Councils. This department would include the following main functions:
- (i) Devising and implementing a Communications Strategy based upon, but not restricted to, the contents of this report
 - (ii) Support and oversight of Press and Media (with the Press Officer re-located to this Department)
 - (iii) Support and oversight of Creative Production (with the current Creative Production Department being wound up)
 - (iv) The coordination of communications across all Councils, according to denominational priorities.
- (b) The creation of the post of Head of Communications.
 It is recommended that a post of Head of Communications be created, to lead the Communications Department.
- (i) A draft Job Description is included in Appendix 1 to this Report
 - (ii) The Head of Communications would help to further define and implement and continuously review PCI's Communications strategy.
- (c) Proposed Communications Department set-up costs and Budget.
 Draft costings for the creation of a Communications Department, including any staffing implications, have been examined by the General Assembly Advisory Committee, and are referenced in that Committee's section of the General Council Report.
- (d) Website re-build.
 A draft timeline for this project is included in Appendix 2. The main needs are as follows:
- (i) An easily accessible summary of what PCI believes as a Church
 - (ii) The presentation of the Gospel must be easily and obviously accessible for enquirers
 - (iii) "Find a Church" function, with mapping assist
 - (iv) Greatly enhanced searchability
 - (v) Ease of use for the many categories of users and visitors

- (vi) Security, especially for any restricted areas. Member access areas for ministers/leaders, and/or the development of a dedicated app
 - (vii) Agreed policy on updating content – content management functions spread across Councils within agreed parameters
 - (viii) Workable systems for payments, donations, booking for events, subscriptions, ordering of resources
 - (ix) Road-testers drawn from serving ministers as part of the build process, from the earliest stages.
- (e) Proposed website re-build set-up costs and budget.
The General Assembly has previously agreed that a redesigned website be provided, and that these costs be met from the Incidental Fund.
- (f) Publications
It is recommended that responsibility for the editing of a denominational magazine (*Presbyterian Herald*) be re-located within the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, while the design and production functions be located within the Communications Department.
- (g) Transitional arrangements
It is recommended that the implementation of recommendations a-f above, subject to General Assembly approval, be overseen by the Clerk of Assembly, in consultation with the Convener and Secretary of the Communications Strategy Review Task Group, the Financial Secretary and others as necessary.

DAVID BRUCE, Convener

APPENDIX 1

PROPOSED COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT

Draft Job Description, Head of Communications

Job Title:	Head of Communications
Council:	General Council (Communications Department)
Salary Scale:	Scale E4 (£38,494 – £48,091) - to be agreed by Job Evaluation Panel
Responsible to:	The Clerk and General Secretary

Main functions of the role:

To contribute to the Christian ministry and mission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) through the delivery of the duties outlined.

To be an active member of the General Assembly's staff team, contributing to the effective administration of its functions and assisting in the development of strategies and plans for the delivery of its agreed objectives in a manner in keeping with the Christian ethos of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

To have lead responsibility for the strategic direction of PCI's internal and external communications, for the oversight of its delivery, and for the leadership of the Communications Department as a Support Services Department.

To advise and work alongside key leaders and the General Assembly's Councils generally to devise and implement communications strategies for specific ongoing activities, and new initiatives and projects.

Responsibilities and duties:

The Communications Department

To ensure that the strategic objectives relating to communications, agreed by the General Assembly and/or its General Council, are delivered.

To line manage and oversee the work of the staff in the Communications Department.

To prepare (in liaison with the Financial Secretary's Department) and manage the annual budget of the Communications Department.

Communications Strategy Development

To develop, implement and review on an ongoing basis, a communications strategy for the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and its Councils and Departments, including digital and traditional media communications, plans and campaigns designed to raise visibility, awareness and understanding of PCI, its mission and values, both internally and externally.

Internal and External Communications

To ensure the consistent delivery of communication of PCI's mission and values across all channels of internal and external communications.

To ensure that the various internal and external channels and content of PCI communications are maintained and promoted at all times.

To have lead responsibility for the development of PCI's internal communications, assisting the General Assembly and its Councils in communicating key messages and decisions to leaders, congregations and members.

To work closely and collaboratively with colleagues in the General Assembly's Councils in supporting the delivery of communications, publications and resources for which they have responsibility.

Digital Media

To lead the design, delivery and development of a new central website for PCI, within an agreed timeframe.

To have overall responsibility for strategic leadership and management of PCI's digital channels, including websites, social media channels, email marketing and intranet, identifying opportunities to increase and improve PCI's digital presence, increasing the effective use of these channels in a manner in keeping with the Christian ethos and doctrinal position of PCI.

Publications and Resources

To oversee the work of PCI's Creative Production Officer in the delivery of publications and resources, both for internal and external purposes, as required and in a manner in keeping with the Christian ethos and doctrinal position of PCI.

Along with PCI's Creative Production Officer, to develop and seek to maintain a corporate brand for the General Assembly and its Councils and to offer advice to Presbyteries and Congregations, as appropriate.

Along with PCI's Creative Production Officer, to provide in-house creative support to General Assembly Councils.

Press and Media

To oversee the work of PCI's Press Officer in developing a proactive media stance in relation to day-to-day matters, in the provision of effective and appropriate response to media enquiries and, as necessary, in the area of crisis management.

Along with PCI's Press Officer, to work closely with the Moderator, Clerk of Assembly and PCI's Public Affairs Officer in the communication of key messages 'in the public square', in a manner in keeping with the Christian ethos, policies and doctrinal position of PCI.

General

To contribute to good team working relationships and to the Christian ethos of the Communications Department and within Assembly Buildings.

To contribute to the overall organisational effectiveness and to perform any other duties as deemed appropriate by the Clerk of the General Assembly in line with the requirements of the General Assembly.

APPENDIX 2

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT – PROJECT PLANNING PROCESS

Research and goal setting 2–4 weeks

- (a) Research:
 - (i) Competitor analysis / best practice (e.g. other governing bodies.)
 - (ii) Target audience groups (groups, roles, ages, etc).
 - (iii) Content needs audit (groups, roles, ages, etc).
 - (iv) Search and route planning (how will people find what they are looking for).

- (b) Agreement of Goals:
 - (i) What do we hope the website will accomplish?
 - (ii) Who are the audience(s) we would like to target?
 - (iii) What is the primary purpose of the website?

Note 1: It is assumed that the outcome of this exercise will include proposals to build a new Website, Intranet and Extranet.

Note 2: This stage will be best achieved with the use of external, specialist consultancy support.

Planning the website, intranet and extranet (high-level layout) 4–6 Weeks

- (a) Undertake User Experience (UX) and User Interface (UI) design exercise.
- (b) Creation of wireframes (basic navigation and design structure) and sitemap (content areas).
- (c) User testing and feedback on design concepts.

Note 1: The “end user” testing (Stage 6 below) should be undertaken by at least some of the team who are involved with planning the site in Stage 2 (i.e. “is the finished article what we envisaged?”).

Note 2: This stage will be best achieved with the use of external, specialist consultancy support.

Designing website, intranet and extranet layout (detailed design) 4–6 Weeks

- (a) Agree character of the website, intranet and extranet (what impact do we want to convey).

- (b) Agree primary content style of the website, intranet and extranet (e.g. ecclesiastical or common language) and content type (news, stories, events, resources, etc).
- (c) Agree layout and navigation of the website, intranet and extranet.
- (d) Obtain pictures, videos, content types.

Writing and/or obtaining the content (ongoing) 12+ weeks

- (a) Create news, events and story led content (full content, brief headline content, metadata, etc).
- (b) Consider call-to-actions.
- (c) Publish content to the website, intranet and extranet frameworks (as soon as available).

Note 1: This stage may be going on simultaneously with the other development and planning steps underway.

Developing the website, intranet and extranet 12–14 weeks

- (a) Agree the underlying technology and Content Management System (CMS).
- (b) Provide detailed brief for designers / developers.
- (c) Assign a Project Manager to run the project with a focus on agreed deliverables (internal PCI and external supplier) and ensuring secure development practices are adopted.
- (d) Full testing of key user journeys (usability).
- (e) Full penetration testing (security audit).
- (f) Full testing of content (readability of words and style).

Testing and launch 4–6 weeks

- (a) Policy development (roles, responsibilities, etc).
- (b) User training.
- (c) Intense internal / external testing.

Note 1: The “end user” testing at Stage 6 should be undertaken by at least some of the team who are involved with planning the site in Stage 2 above (i.e. “is the finished article what we envisaged?”).

Hosting and maintenance

- (a) Establish hosting contract with a suitable supplier.
- (b) Establish support and maintenance contracts with a suitable supplier.

PANDEMIC RESPONSE (THEOLOGICAL, MORAL, SPIRITUAL) TASK GROUP

Introduction

1. During the 2021 General Assembly, a licensed amendment was passed, asking the General Council: “in light of the last period [referring to the period of the Covid-19 pandemic], to undertake a review of the Church’s response and to set out theological, moral and spiritual principles to guide the Church in any similar situation which could arise and report to the 2022 General Assembly.”
2. The General Council appointed a Task Group, convened by Miss Karen Jardine and chaired by the former Moderator, Very Rev Dr David Bruce. With its first meeting held on 7 December 2021, the Task Group has met a further 15 times in order to complete its work. Recognising the significant work required under its remit the Task Group presented an interim report to the 2022 General Assembly (GA Reports 2022, pp.68–77) with a view to presenting a final report to the General Assembly in 2023.
3. The interim report anticipated that this final report from the Task Group would:
 - (a) Capture PCI’s story of the Covid Pandemic
 - (b) Identify key learning for the denomination
 - (c) Frame any proposals requiring decisions by the courts of the Church.
4. The incidence of Covid-19 (SARS-CoV-2) presented a unique set of challenges for the entire world when it was declared a ‘public health emergency of international concern’ by the World Health Organisation at the end of January 2020, and a pandemic on 11 March 2020. The pandemic has been experienced globally with almost 7 million related deaths¹ and over 864 million cases worldwide.² At the time of writing, the number of recorded deaths relating to Covid-19 in the Republic of Ireland is over 8,100³ with 5,060 Covid-19 related deaths recorded in Northern Ireland up to 31 December 2022.⁴ It is widely accepted that without government intervention, notwithstanding its limitations and weaknesses, these figures would be higher.
5. It is important to acknowledge that in the earliest of days of the pandemic much was unknown. Reports from countries where Covid-19 was already spreading made for unpleasant viewing as hospitals were overwhelmed. As the pandemic reached these shores both the UK and Irish governments

1 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Deaths – Our World in Data [accessed 28 March 2023]

2 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Cases – Our World in Data [accessed 28 March 2023]

3 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Deaths – Our World in Data [accessed 28 March 2023]

4 Excess mortality and Covid-19 deaths in Northern Ireland – December 2022_0.pdf (*nisra.gov.uk*) [accessed 28 March 2023]

were preparing to ease anticipated pressures on mortuaries and cemeteries. While the term ‘unprecedented’ has undoubtedly become over-used as a descriptor, it certainly captures the mood of the response by governments and other agencies in those early days.

6. Living through the Covid-19 pandemic was novel and unlike anything most people on the island of Ireland had experienced before. While the lived experience of the Covid-19 pandemic across the island of Ireland differed dependent on individual and family circumstances, the experience of being ‘locked down’ and restricted from everyday activities created a context exacerbated by widespread feelings of isolation and social disconnect. In addition, many families lost loved ones as a result of Covid-19 infection whilst others of all ages continue to live with the consequences of Long Covid.
7. As the Task Group completes its report three years on from these initial developments, the experience of living through the pandemic appears similar to that of navigating through fog or climbing a mountain with multiple false peaks. Each time an end to the crisis looked like a possibility, a new summit appeared in the form of new variants, reintroduced restrictions, and renewed uncertainty. While at the time of writing, much of this uncertainty has receded, Covid-19 continues to have an impact across the island of Ireland and around the world.

Methodology/Process

8. The Task Group sought to approach its work of review using the following framework:
 - (a) Understanding the context of PCI within which the pandemic has been experienced.
 - (b) Understanding that the review has been approached largely with the benefit of hindsight. From March 2020 onwards, the situation regarding Covid-19 was constantly changing. Decision-makers within PCI were required to respond to Government policies developed in two different jurisdictions, combined with little knowledge or awareness of how long the pandemic would continue. Along with the rest of society, PCI was confronted by an unparalleled situation, and had to respond in real time with the information available to hand.
 - (c) Recognising that for at least the first half of the period in which the Task Group conducted its work, the pandemic and its impact on the work and witness of congregations and councils was ongoing, with final restrictions for congregations only lifted in April 2022.
 - (d) The requirement in the Task Group remit, to draw out ‘theological, moral and spiritual principles’ has been understood as an encouragement to explore the issues thoroughly and collectively rather than prescriptively under these three headings.

9. The Task Group commenced its thinking by inviting the proposer and seconder of the licensed amendment to meet in person, providing an opportunity for them to explain their rationale in making their proposal to the General Assembly.
10. In order to capture PCI's story of the Covid-19 pandemic the Task Group met with representatives from each of the denomination's Councils. Each was asked to reflect on their response to the pandemic relating to the responsibilities under their remit, the impact on their work and witness and any lessons that they would take into the future. A summary of these engagements is provided at Annex A.
11. The Task Group also met with groups of parish ministers reflecting rural congregations in Northern Ireland, urban congregations in Northern Ireland and a mix of congregations in the Republic of Ireland. They were asked how their congregations responded to the restrictions of lockdown, what missional opportunities presented during this time, their assessment of communication with Assembly Buildings staff and across presbytery, emerging evidence of recalibration of church life, and the personal and pastoral impact on ministry. A summary of the key themes of this engagement is provided at Annex B.
12. In line with the remit to review the Church's response the Task Group engaged with a number of other groups of Presbyterian people who were engaged in 'frontline' work during the pandemic including healthcare chaplains, those involved in education, and those working with the economically vulnerable. A summary of these engagements is available at Annex C.
13. Additionally, following specific requests from the proposers that were deemed useful to the remit of the Task Group, representatives of the Task Group met with two individuals, one with expertise on matters relating to risk management and a medical professional with concerns about the outworking of government policy with regard to its pandemic response, and consequently the response from PCI. At their request their contributions remain confidential.
14. Members of the Task Group prepared papers on matters relating to providence, historical precedent, pastoral care, and worship. This assisted the consideration of theological, moral and spiritual principles which guide the Church in its decision-making.
15. From time to time those with an interest in the work of the Task Group submitted articles for its consideration and these were circulated to all members. No requests to meet were refused and no information was withheld from the Task Group.
16. During the course of its deliberations a number of key issues of concern were raised and presented to the Task Group regarding PCI's pandemic response. In summary these include:
 - (a) An acknowledgement that while the pandemic presented unique and difficult challenges, these were not so critical as to merit all of the public policy measures which were introduced by governments.

- (b) An understanding that the measures introduced were economically and socially detrimental to society and that alternative ‘minority’ proposals were ignored. It was suggested that by its acceptance of restrictions on gathering to worship, the Church acquiesced to these measures. Specifically, it is argued that the state went beyond its God-given responsibility and hindered the mission and ministry of the Church in restricting the gathering for public worship, and in preventing the Church fulfilling its calling to pastoral and diaconate care.
 - (c) A perception that the media created an ethos of heightened fear over the pandemic and effectively silenced any questioning of public policy. It was suggested that this fear-driven narrative went unchallenged by the Church.
 - (d) That there was learning from the past to be drawn on in terms of how the Church worldwide has behaved historically in times of similar pandemics which was not adequately referenced or used to inform PCI’s response.
17. The Task Group thanks all those who took time to meet and engage with its work, and acknowledges the breadth of views represented, including those critical of the response of the Church.

Interim Report

18. Through its interim report to the General Assembly in 2022, the Task Group attempted to outline an understanding of what the world was like as society entered into the period of the pandemic – the prevailing cultural norms and political narratives. Significant events and crises do not happen in a vacuum. Common elements in both jurisdictions included:
- (a) Instability in government – more significant in Northern Ireland which had just restored its Executive several weeks prior to the announcement of lockdown, having been in abeyance for nearly 3 years, but also important in the Republic of Ireland in which a new coalition government had yet to be formed following elections in February 2020.
 - (b) A general erosion of trust and accountability in public and political authorities – a possible consequence of a so-called ‘post-truth’ culture. The rise in propagation of conspiracy theories before and during the pandemic shaped a context in which many people became suspicious of the integrity of political decisions and decision-makers. The Task Group notes that this also made it more difficult to raise legitimate concerns and questions about perceived government overreach into many areas of life and work. This was compounded by the introduction of legislative restrictions which sat uneasily with the prevailing Western liberal norms of personal autonomy and self-determination.

- (c) In both jurisdictions health systems were struggling with challenges around strategic planning, investment, and workforce development. Legitimate fears that the health services might collapse became a major consideration in determining public policy responses.
19. Other themes and matters contained within the interim report are taken up elsewhere in this report to the General Assembly.

Capturing PCI's story

20. A fuller review of PCI's story is available through the material contained in the Annexes to this report. Some of the significant themes emerging are discussed below.

Creativity and Flexibility

21. No aspect of the work and witness of PCI centrally or at congregational level was left untouched by the pandemic and the restrictions which were put in place by the governments in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Across the work and witness of the denomination this challenge was met by adapting to work from home, utilising new technologies and navigating the impacts of government regulation in residential accommodation.
22. The Council for Congregational Life and Witness took responsibility for supporting congregations through initiatives like These Three Remain which included blogs and podcasts and devotional material. This Council has been active in providing assistance for congregations finding their way back to normal activities following the lifting of restrictions. The Council for Training in Ministry along with the Moderator, supported the Refresh initiative which encouraged small groups of ministers to meet in each Presbytery for mutual support and prayer, and organised a Refresh Week in June 2021 to enable ministers to take time out for their own spiritual and physical well-being.
23. Individual congregations reached out missionally and practically to their local communities building on programmes which were in place pre-Covid, or by identifying new opportunities, sometimes in partnership with other organisations and local churches.
24. People found innovative ways of meeting together as restrictions allowed. The use of 'drive-in' services, mainly in rural areas, is an example of this.

Governance

25. When it became clear that it would not be possible for the General Assembly to meet in person in June 2020, a number of temporary measures were drawn up following a virtual special meeting of the General Assembly in April 2020. It was agreed to appoint a 2020 Standing Commission of the General Assembly through which essential decisions could be made and

transmitted to the wider Church. When it became clear that no meeting of the General Assembly could be held later in 2020, other less urgent decisions were deferred to the meeting of the 2021 General Assembly. Standing Committees for each Council (including the General Council) were established and other interim measures put in place for presbyteries.

26. At the 2021 General Assembly which was held in October of that year with all voting Ministers and Elders able to be present in person, but with the normal non-voting participants absent (e.g. those who normally 'sit and deliberate', visiting delegates etc) a resolution was passed establishing:

A review of governance structures during the last period and the drawing up of recommendations to enable the 2022 General Assembly to put in place agreed governance structures and mechanisms for any future such situation which might arise. [GA Reports 2021 p.139]

27. The appointed Pandemic Response (Governance) Task Group reported to the 2022 General Assembly [GA Reports 2022, p59 – 67] and made recommendations if the following meetings could not be held in person – General Assembly, Councils and Commissions, presbytery and kirk session. There were also recommendations relating to the election of elders and other interim measures relating to congregations. The 2022 General Assembly approved these proposals.

Engaging with Government

28. Much of PCI's engagement with both governments on matters relating to the pandemic was taken forward by the Clerk through the General Council Standing Committee, and often in conjunction with representatives from the other denominations, and indeed other faith groups. Here the experience of interaction and engagement, North and South, diverged.
29. In Northern Ireland much of the interaction was based on engagement, partnership and relationship. As reported in 2022:

Direct contact with relevant government officials including the Chief Medical Officer, Chief Scientific Advisor, and NI Executive Ministers took place on a regular basis. Such engagement generally involved officials from the other major denominations and the Executive Office established an informal 'faith forum' which included representatives from smaller denominations, and other faith groups. These engagements were invaluable, providing opportunities for consultation in advance of major decision-making, and evolved into partnership working, with churches and faith groups able, for the most part, to self-regulate through guidance and advice. As relationships developed, PCI, along with other churches, had opportunities to advocate on a range of issues including access to cemeteries and availability of PPE within social care settings. [GA Reports 2022 p.73]

30. By contrast in the Republic of Ireland engagement was much more limited and formal with significant decisions being made and simply reported to PCI and the other churches, without prior consultation. As the 2022 report noted:

Engagement took place through the Department of the Taoiseach and was much more limited and formal in comparison to the experience in the Northern Ireland context. Meetings often took place after significant decisions had been made, with the basis for discussion focused on the impact of decisions that had already been made. This was compounded by a lack of understanding amongst government officials of how worship is conducted within a reformed, never mind uniquely Presbyterian, context, and the nature and merit of activities associated with such acts of worship. Statutory restrictions within the Irish context were much more detailed than in the North, and in place for a longer period of time, a cause of much frustration and weariness for some. [GA Reports 2022 p.73]

31. There were those in leadership within PCI who were angered by the approach of both governments, the consequent restrictions, and the perceived impact on the work and witness of our congregations. This imposition of restrictive policies, often without consultation or nuanced understanding particularly in the Republic of Ireland, contributed to an abiding sense of frustration and weariness among ministers and elders.
32. Government responses were often cited as being ‘led by science’. Whilst science can and does provide important evidence for policy makers, and offers a persuasive rationale for action, it cannot answer all the questions which are presented at significant times of national crisis. Experience in this pandemic has shown that misinterpretations of scientific data can be made, for example in decisions surrounding the location of Covid-19 positive hospital patients in care homes for the elderly without adequate assurances that the virus would not spread amongst a deeply vulnerable section of the population. Scientific advisors and policy makers need to be certain, as far as they are able, that their apparently objective evidence is accurately translated into social policy decisions and subsequent legislation. Here the Church has a unique role to play in engaging with policy makers by speaking firmly into the pastoral and spiritual implications for such decisions.
33. The Task Group recognises the presence of multiple vested interests in the shaping of government policy. Where such interests are commercial in nature the necessity for governments to vigorously apply their own rules in best practice regarding procurement is of paramount importance.

Finance

34. In the face of the onset of Covid-19 restrictions, including the work from home mandate and the various restrictions on meeting together for worship, immediate concerns within local congregations and also centrally, turned to finance. There was uncertainty about the capacity of

congregations to sustain their income, pay any staff they employed and meet their assessments. Financial support schemes from both governments became an important vehicle through which personnel centrally, and in congregations, could remain in employment whilst not being able to carry out their usual functions. The UK Government Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, or the 'furlough scheme' as it became known, played an important part in this regard. The equivalent scheme in the Irish Republic (The Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme) was of less value to congregations, being aimed at businesses with measurable turnover which could show a 25% reduction within a timeframe. The primary rationale for utilising these schemes was to protect jobs and prevent the need for redundancies as a result of the pandemic.

35. Views expressed to the Task Group echo those which have been raised on the floor of the General Assembly as to whether furlough was the most appropriate course of action in all circumstances. Some furloughed staff told the Task Group that they appreciated the liberty to be able to focus primarily on the needs of family members, either through the responsibilities of home-schooling children, or caring for vulnerable family members who were shielding or required support in other ways. However others felt unnecessarily curtailed, suggesting that this was a missed opportunity, particularly for those involved in youth work or other pastoral roles to be present and available for young people both inside and outside the church at a confusing and difficult time. It was suggested to the Task Group that missional opportunities may have been missed as a consequence.
36. The General Council Standing Committee made a number of decisions to support congregations at this time, including the option of deferral of payment of congregational assessments. Steps which the Committee took at every stage were reported to the General Assembly in 2021 and 2022.

Frontline

37. Many people associated with PCI found themselves on the 'frontline' throughout the pandemic. This includes, but is not limited to, staff employed in residential facilities and those supporting them through the Council for Social Witness, medical and healthcare workers, teachers, retailers, and of course clergy. Many were engaged in a new 'frontline' of home schooling, often juggling work and other caring responsibilities.
38. The Task Group commends those who worked on these frontlines, and continue to do so, frequently at personal cost and often as a visible outworking of their faith. On the one hand the challenge presented by the pandemic was universal, but how it was experienced was very much dependent on individual circumstances. The saying 'same storm but different boats' became particularly apt.

Global

39. This was a 'global' pandemic. PCI continues to learn from the perspective of its global partners in terms of responding to the immediate crisis, but also understanding the pandemic through the lens of poverty, limited

governmental support, and lack of even basic medical infrastructure. Tellingly, the Task Group heard that in some situations Covid-19 was far down a list of other urgent priorities faced by our partners, which included civil war, economic crisis and other health-related catastrophes. For many in the global church restricted worship is a way of life. Understanding the global context helped to bring perspective to the situation as we found it here on the island of Ireland.

Supporting the vulnerable

40. It quickly became clear that those in the most vulnerable categories of society would be most severely impacted by the restrictions. Families caring for loved ones with disabilities, physical and intellectual, found that their usual support services ceased almost immediately, and were among the last activities to be restarted. This caused significant distress to their loved ones who would normally avail of those services, but also compounded pressure on families who no longer had access to respite care.
41. The economically vulnerable, the lonely, those experiencing mental or physical ill-health were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. PCI congregations reached out to these vulnerable groups through their existing foodbanks or debt counselling services, lunch clubs or PW groups, and many other ways.

Lessons from history

42. Pandemics, epidemics or plagues are, of course, not new phenomena. Reflecting on the response of the Church throughout history to these situations reminds us that not only can they be catalysts for the significant advance of the cause of the gospel, but that the Church has a deep reservoir for dealing with epidemics. Whilst each situation is unique, patterns from previous pandemics and epidemics demonstrate Christian people providing practical pastoral care, along with spiritual nourishment, when many others had fled. A summary paper by Rev Dr Marty Cowan on historical responses to previous pandemics is included at Annex D.

IDENTIFYING KEY LEARNING

1. Acknowledge

43. The Task Group acknowledges the following:
 - (a) We live in a fallen world where the curse of sin and death is evident, and experienced by all people, everywhere (Romans 5:12). Christian people are not immune from the effects of this in their response to any given situation not least because, like all people, they are limited in their capability, knowledge and understanding (1 Cor. 13:12).
 - (b) In the midst of such turbulent times and seasons, we rest on the assurance of the sovereignty of God and his loving providence and that in times of disturbance, distress and disorientation, “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

- (c) In acknowledging the providence of God, we recognise that he is working out his purposes at all times but that there are moments, such as in a period of pandemic, in which we, like the Psalmists (e.g. Psalms 44, 106) and prophets (e.g. Jeremiah 32, Isaiah 63) are driven to ask more directly his intent or purpose. Such a call exhorts us to examine our own lives, and that of our surrounding culture more closely, addressing the question as to why we may be under God's judgement, as for example in Deuteronomy 32. A constant call to God's people is to respond to this in genuine acts of repentance, as envisaged in 2 Chronicles 7.
- (d) The many differing responses to this time of crisis, as articulated to the Task Group and evident in society, are reflective of the diversity in circumstance, conviction, temperament and background within God's human creation.
- (e) In this pandemic, the blessing of God's common grace has led people who do not believe, even those who may be hostile to faith, to do what is good, right, beautiful and merciful, and for this God's people are thankful (Romans 2:14f). We have also witnessed the opposite, with reports emerging of those who used the pandemic for self-serving and profiteering ends, often at significant cost to the public purse, and also public confidence in decision-making. For this God's people cry out to Him for mercy and justice.
- (f) While Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 are written in the context of the internal relationships in the Church they point us to times when it is morally necessary to set aside our own rights to promote the welfare of all and demonstrate love for our neighbour.
- (g) Within the context of an evolving situation there are undoubtedly decisions that may have been made differently had circumstances been different e.g. with the luxury of more time in which to make decisions, or having more complete information. It is widely acknowledged that in the early days of the pandemic decisions were being made on the back of imperfect and incomplete information. This was the case for everyone involved – political leaders, scientists, public health professionals and church leaders alike. Those in leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland during this time and specifically the Moderator, Clerk, Council Conveners and Secretaries, along with the General Council Standing Committee bore a heavy burden of responsibility with regard to decision-making on behalf of the denomination, in very uncertain times. Often decisions, particularly those in relation to the closure of church premises and restrictions on public worship (voluntarily in the North and required legislatively in the South), had to be taken quickly in light of the information provided by government ministers, key advisors, civil service officials, and statutory agencies. While in retrospect there are things that could have been done differently, such decisions were made with integrity, and for the safety, welfare and protection of the Church and her witness.

- (h) Leaders within PCI did not make decisions in isolation. Indeed, they were made against a backdrop and context of what was happening across the rest of the UK and Ireland. Public confidence became a value in itself. While some may be of the view that going against the grain of government advice, guidance and legislation would have been a prophetic act, this must be balanced against the risk that such a choice may have put people's health at risk, and further marginalised the perception of the Church in the public square and compromised her witness as servants of Christ in a world of need.
- (i) Within local congregations, kirk sessions, committee members, ministers and other leaders carried specific responsibilities to provide spiritual leadership and to deal with the practical outworking of the restrictions. Often this responsibility fell to a small group of individuals. PCI ministers carried the heavy burden of concern for their people, never more so than in dealing with bereavements and funerals and other pastoral issues such as illness or unemployment. Practical challenges relating to online services within congregations varied greatly depending on technological infrastructure in the local area, and technological capability within the congregation. Often the burden of this fell upon ministers whose technical knowledge was at best incomplete. In addition, new ministers were arriving in their charges and seeking to get to know their people without being able to visit them in their homes, or ministers were preparing to leave their charges on retirement, yet unable to mark these times with their people, each faced unique demands which the Task Group acknowledges.
- (j) In 'normal times' congregations which gather for corporate public worship on a Sunday, are scattered during the rest of the week in workplaces, within families, and other places which form the warp and weft of life. During the pandemic many Presbyterian people were engaged in frontline roles in health and social care, retail, providing education in schools or at home, caring for vulnerable family members and other ways. The Church marks with respect and appreciation their selfless service as disciples of Christ.
- (k) Reflecting such texts as Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 14 and crystallised in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, a consistent principle emerging from the Task Group's considerations was the importance of a holistic approach to health and wellbeing that prioritises spiritual welfare, as well as physical, mental and emotional. This was not only evident through the care provided in PCI's residential accommodation, but also the service delivered by healthcare chaplains even against the backdrop of restricted access to patients, their families and medical staff. In common with healthcare staff in all disciplines, they carried a major burden. The work of PCI's University, Prisons and Military chaplains continued quietly and effectively throughout the pandemic, and is recorded with appreciation by the Church.

- (l) The opportunities for the Moderator and Clerk working in partnership at national level through the Church Leaders' Group (Ireland) and more locally with other congregations or organisations within the community, became an invaluable part of PCI's responses to the pandemic, enabling the Churches to make common cause to legislators, thus amplifying the Churches' voice at a critical time.
- (m) Although there have been many medical and scientific advances throughout the centuries, they cannot master everything. Despite these advances, society is still no closer to being master of its own fate. Whilst contemporary society is led to believe that perfect solutions are always possible, this is in fact rarely the case. The need of a Saviour is as real today as it ever has been (comparing texts such as Genesis 11:1-9, Deuteronomy 30:11-18, Proverbs 30:1-4, and Romans 10:5-13).

2. Lament

- 44. A consistent theme emerging from the Task Group's many conversations with others and internal deliberations has been 'Lament'. Lament is surely the biblical response to what is confusing and apparently meaningless suffering. Most often in such times God's people turn to the Psalms of Lament (e.g. Psalms 5, 7, 13, 69) recognising that in our disorientation we may, by God's grace, be re-orientated within the purposes of God, finding ourselves transformed.
- 45. Lament is almost always accompanied by repentance. Through the pandemic we can see again a world that is out of sync, that the world is both beautiful and broken. As one of the papers prepared by members of the task group on the matter of providence stated:

It is significant that Jesus' ministry began and ended with a call to repentance. The prophets, with John the Baptist as the greatest, all had repentance as the core of their message. This pandemic was, therefore, a wakeup call, the megaphone of God to the church and to the nations. We have developed daily and cultural liturgies which express what we consider to be most important to us. They are the values of our lives. Our lifestyles are based on accumulating stuff, which makes our capitalism work, and we aspire after success and personal pleasure in which the self takes centre stage and allows the enemy to perpetrate the notions of the hidden persuaders to embrace consumerism and greed. This is under judgment. The pandemic too reveals the chaos of the human race in which we are complicit. We have abused the resources over which we were given responsibility. We have abused our biological nature which reflects the divine image and we have become indifferent to our spiritual vocation. The Pandemic is therefore saying personally and corporately we are going the wrong way, we need to turn around, to repent, to live differently.

- 46. Having considered the essential place of lament in the spiritual formation of God's people, and bearing in mind the following: Job 2:11-13, John 11:33-36, Rom.12:15, the Task Group offers these reflections:

- (a) We lament the times when our collective and individual response to the pandemic was sinful, governed first by the voices of the media rather than listening primarily to God in his Word. Being caught up in the fear generated by media and others may have resulted in responses which were focussed on ourselves, rather than on Christ and his broken world (Hebrews 12:1–3).
- (b) We lament that many families lost loved ones as a result of Covid-19 infection, or continue to live with the realities of the implications of Long Covid. PCI upholds the sanctity of human life at every stage and recognises the extraordinary distress and pain that results from the loss of a loved one. Any loss of life is to be grieved, as are the lost opportunities and consequences of living with a life-limiting illness.
- (c) We lament the severe restrictions placed upon our people in the conduct of funerals, limited initially to attendance by a handful of relatives in outdoor settings. We grieve with ministers and people who were not able to mourn the loss of their loved ones in the ways in which they expected and needed.
- (d) We lament the lost opportunities for corporate, public, gathered, worship including our inability to meet together in fellowship and to participate fully in the sacraments. This has been a source of much anguish among us. This was particularly so for congregations in the Republic of Ireland which experienced longer and harder periods of lockdown. Whilst in Northern Ireland closures were, on the whole, voluntary rather than mandated in legislation, this did not make the inability to meet together for worship and fellowship any easier to bear.
- (e) We lament the restrictions placed upon families seeking to visit loved ones in residential care, not only in PCI accommodation but in care facilities across this island. It was upsetting and painful for families who could not visit relatives for long periods of time, many of whom anecdotally observed the detrimental impact that the lack of social interaction had on their family members.
- (f) We lament the ‘locust years’ (Joel 2:25) and recognise that for many of our children and young people in particular, the loss of two years of ‘normal’ periods of education, social interaction and development will continue to have an impact for many years to come, not least with regard to their mental and emotional health. This was also played out in their spiritual education and formation, missing out on opportunities for teaching and learning within Sunday School, Youth Fellowships, uniformed and non-uniformed organisations.
- (g) We lament that many employed members of staff were placed on furlough, including many pastoral staff and youth workers within congregations, those involved in chaplaincy in various contexts, and members of staff in Assembly Buildings. While some, especially those with young children, appreciated the time to spend in support of family during these unique circumstances, for others it became a major source of frustration that they could not be among the

people they would normally seek to serve. We lament that significant missional opportunities open to local congregations, being the hands and feet of Jesus in communities through compassionate ministries, practically demonstrating a gospel of love that casts out all fear (1 John 4:16–18), were lost due to staff being placed on furlough.

- (h) We lament that those who are most vulnerable in our society were most severely impacted by the restrictions. Families caring for loved ones with disabilities, physical and intellectual, found that their usual support services ceased almost immediately, and were among the last activities to be restarted. This caused significant distress to their loved ones who would normally avail of those services, but also compounded pressure on families who no longer had access to respite care.
- (i) We lament the shortfalls in public leadership when these became evident in both jurisdictions. There was an entirely appropriate public backlash in instances where those who were seen to be developing guidance and framing legislation did not appear to follow their own guidelines and regulation. For many who had made significant sacrifices this was extremely difficult to observe, and represents a deplorable breach of trust.
- (j) We lament that, for some, the pandemic presented an opportunity to take advantage of the situation for the purposes of profiteering. Following the prophetic voice of Amos (chapters 2 and 8) such practices should be called out and rightly named as a sinful disgrace.
- (k) We lament that it has become increasingly difficult to air differing views in public – on matters relating to the pandemic and indeed other areas – without running the risk of being demonised. This is unhelpful and closes down conversations. Also, an inhospitable public space does not create the circumstance in which failure can be admitted honourably without unnecessary condemnation.

3. Offer

47. The Task Group offers the following theological, moral and spiritual principles which may help to guide the Church should any similar situation arise in future and which might be more broadly helpful as we face some of the more ‘ordinary’ trials of life together:

- (a) In the midst of turbulent times and seasons we can rest on the assurance of God’s sovereignty, his loving providence and that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). It is important to hold on to this truth, particularly when confronted with unprecedented events that can disturb, cause distress and disorientate.
- (b) The pandemic has brought into sharp relief how fallen and broken the world is. Through this we hear again the call to repentance, to live differently – a call which was central to the message of prophets, such as Amos, and a call which marked the beginning and end of

Jesus' ministry (as he validated and expanded John's ministry (Mark 1) and commissioned the disciples for theirs (Luke 24:44–49). Our understanding of repentance must also recognise what we may have personally or corporately contributed to a response to the pandemic which does not meet God's standards. In line with historical precedent a corporate call to prayer and fasting may be appropriate.

- (c) The gospel speaks hope to fear and declares that in Christ there is victory over death (1 Corinthians 15). Whilst holding on to these foundational truths it is important that those who are deeply fearful in times of crisis are offered the pastoral space to articulate their concerns, doubts and fears, as the Psalmist does in, for example, Psalms 13 and 27. These and other Psalms remind us that God is just as willing to hear our doubts and fears as he is our hopes and dreams. In the honesty of such questioning we begin to come to terms with the mystery of God and what he might be saying to us. The gospel declares that in Christ there is victory over death. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55). This is the ultimate riposte to a society seeking to master its own destiny through scientific advancement, or being able to buy its way out of any predicament.
- (d) The texture of the relationship between PCI and any government emerges from our reflection upon Scripture, including the role of the Old Testament prophets, the fearless rhetoric of John the Baptist, Paul's teaching in Romans 13 and the warnings of the book of Revelation. Such principles are enumerated in our Subordinate Standards (e.g. WCF 23), and are expounded further through our learned experience of history on this island. Just as the state ought not to constrain or intrude upon a person's liberties to worship and serve Christ, so too the Church is mindful of its obligations to honour the authorities that exist which have been established by God, even though at times their decisions appear to us to be deficient. It is one thing for gathered, corporate, public worship to be paused for a time for some special reason; another for worship to be forbidden altogether. In the providence of God during this pandemic, whilst not substitute for meeting together, digital technology provided a means to engage with one another. Openness to considering new ways of being the Church, and to adapt accordingly, is a necessary discipline when coping with a major crisis and with the steadily evolving social context in which the church today lives.
- (e) Those in leadership are often privy to more information than they are able to publicly share. It is important that leaders – both centrally and congregationally – are given the space and trust to make decisions, whilst continuing to be transparent and accountable. At the same time opportunities to express and debate minority views must be provided. The recommendations of the Pandemic Response (Governance) Task Group as adopted by the 2022 General Assembly (GA Reports 2022, pp.59–67) reinforce those accountability mechanisms.

- (f) The pandemic has highlighted the importance of discipleship – equipping believers to live out their faith outside of the walls of the church building. As the letters to Timothy and that from James remind us, such equipping should continue to be a priority for church leaders so that when faith is tested it produces perseverance.

Recommendations

48. In light of its review the Task Group puts forward the following recommendations:
- (a) That those assessing and making decisions in any similar circumstance in the future consider when it is appropriate to voluntarily set aside our own rights and privileges as believers in order to facilitate the common good (Philippians 2:5-8).
 - (b) That in a time of crisis, the Church through its most representative instrument (as deemed appropriate by the circumstances), takes time to reflect upon her vision, affirming those matters of doctrine and practice which are essential to her calling mission and existence, while courageously and by faith, adapting to circumstances which confront her, under the guidance of the Spirit of God.
 - (c) That those with responsibility for the governance of the Church examine the mechanisms put in place for PCI during the Covid-19 pandemic, and take note of the report to the General Assembly in 2022 from the Pandemic Response (Governance) Task Group; also noting the importance of balancing the need for safety of its members, accountability for decision-making, good governance and the reputation of the Church before a sceptical world.
 - (d) That in a time of crisis, where the Church has access to government ministers and officials, as well as advocating for its own members, the responsibility to be a prophetic voice and raise issues and concerns on behalf of the poor, the marginalised and the voiceless remains uppermost in her mind.
 - (e) That in a time of crisis the importance and value of holistic care is highlighted by the Church to decision-makers including elected representatives, government officials and other statutory authorities. Such care for the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the person must extend beyond our shores and borders to the poorest parts of the world.
 - (f) That in a time of crisis working with other Christian denominations, and co-belligerence with others as appropriate, should be a key component of the Church's interaction with government.
 - (g) That even as in the midst of bitter providence we give thanks, so too when in the providence of God, it appears that the crisis is ending, time is taken to offer thankfulness to him, and to draw from the wisdom gathered through the journey to invest in the future

worship, fellowship and mission of the Church, humbly and joyfully welcoming new insights into our faith and practice brought about by this disruption.

KAREN JARDINE, Convener

ANNEX A

Views and perspectives from the proposer and seconder, and also PCI Councils

This Annex highlights the engagement of the Task Group with the proposer and seconder of the licensed amendment, and PCI's Councils.

- (a) Rev David Johnston and Rev Dr Graham Connor – proposer and seconder of the licensed amendment:
 - (i) In what ways was our Christian response different to the response of the rest of society?
 - (ii) Has PCI been too risk averse, and how might a developed “theology of risk” shape thinking and responses?
 - (iii) Did PCI use its voice to, and engagements with, government to speak up for those who did not have such access and were significantly adversely impacted by the effects of lockdowns?
 - (iv) As church buildings closed, was there sufficient emphasis on encouraging church members to be salt and light, engaging proactively with their neighbours and others in their local communities?

- (b) Council for Global mission
 - (i) We have been in a global pandemic which has impacted our global mission partners as much, if not more, than ourselves here on the island of Ireland.
 - (ii) There is much to learn from our global partners, and their response to the pandemic and, if we are serious about partnership, we must be open to this learning.
 - (iii) Was PCI too focused on what was happening within the UK and Ireland, with less emphasis on challenging governments on what was happening in other parts of the world e.g. reduction in international development aid flowing from the UK, or the global availability of vaccines?
 - (iv) There are emerging principles relating to partnership, and enhanced community which are people focused

- (c) Council for Social Witness
 - (i) The situation has been constantly changing and developing and so it is important to remember that all of society has been hit with an unparalleled situation that we have been trying to address as best we could, with no awareness of the longevity of the pressing issues.
 - (ii) The holistic nature of care provided in PCI residential homes is unique, and the faith element has continued to be a priority of care. In what ways can PCI continue to promote the spiritual as an element of holistic care?
 - (iii) The challenge of what seems like a simple request, e.g. to visit a loved one, can have hugely significant implications for staff and other residents if not managed appropriately. A pre-pandemic corollary might be when residential facilities sought to manage outbreaks of gastroenteritis and associated conditions.
 - (iv) Whilst maintaining connections between local congregations and residential homes within their community may have proven to be challenging to maintain in recent times, this continues to be a vital relationship and efforts to reinvigorate those links should be encouraged.

- (d) Council for Mission in Ireland
 - (i) Recognising the significant impact of lockdown on key areas of work including International Meeting Point and South Belfast Friendship House is very important.
 - (ii) Echoing comments from CSW, within hospital chaplaincy there was encouragement to recognise that nourishing the spiritual is key to holistic care. PCI has a role to play in keeping this at the forefront of policy development in health and social care.
 - (iii) There was an encouragement to reflect on how the furlough scheme had been used throughout PCI, and specifically in the context of all areas of chaplaincy, and whether different decisions might have been made.
 - (iv) There was an encouragement to consider what learning opportunities might arise for new models of mission and engagement.

- (e) Council for Congregational Life and Witness
 - (i) There was a different reaction to the first (March – June 2020) and second lockdowns (January – April 2021). The first was perceived as ‘refreshing’ in terms of novelty and a chance to step away from normal routines and pressures. The second was much more difficult with a greater degree of uncertainty, an increase in mental health issues, burnout and ultimately disengagement.

- (ii) There was disparity in terms of:
 - experience between congregations in Northern Ireland and those in the Republic of Ireland;
 - Skills in digital ministry, with more pressure where these did not readily exist;
 - Capacity of kirk sessions to respond to ever-evolving situations.
 - (iii) During the pandemic, many congregations were focused on reaching out to the local community in different ways. As some sense of normality returns there is some temptation to become inwardly focused. Finding the balance between congregational “life” and “witness” continues to be a consideration, including confidence to articulate this.
 - (iv) Those returning to church services can be roughly divided into three groups – a third committed attendees, a third regular or intermittent attendees, and the remaining, peripheral.
- (f) Council for Public Affairs
- (i) The restoration of the NI Executive and Assembly in January 2020 was timely in ensuring that decision-making relating to the Covid-19 pandemic was devolved to an appropriate level.
 - (ii) The differing approaches of the governments in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland was indicative of evolving attitudes towards the churches. In particular the UK and Irish Governments were more likely to engage on a multi/inter-faith basis, rather than simply with the churches.
 - (iii) There was some concern that the pandemic was being used to bury difficult decisions by government. For example, the decision of the Westminster government to merge the Department for International Development with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and consequently strip back the international aid budget was taken at a time when normal means of scrutiny were less readily available.
 - (iv) While the impact of the pandemic has been significant it is important to remember that over this period another significant development was unfolding – that of the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement between the EU and UK, and the NI Protocol.
- (g) General Council
- (i) The General Council Standing Committee became an important vehicle for the denomination’s pandemic response, providing accountability for the Clerk/General Secretary and allowing decisions to be made more quickly. However it is recognised that there was a democratic deficit with this approach in that it lacked presbytery representation.

- (ii) The tension between those who believe that governance has become overly centralised against the responsibilities and roles of presbyteries is acknowledged. It is important that this is continually monitored with the role of the central body to equip and resource congregations kept to the fore.
 - (iii) The use of the UK Government Job Retention Scheme (furlough) was used centrally and congregationally. There were mixed views about the merits of this, and questions raised about whether missional opportunities, particularly in local congregations, may have been missed.
 - (iv) Debate in the 2021 General Assembly, and again in 2022, provided opportunities for a divergence of opinion on these matters to be discussed and debated.
- (h) Council for Training in Ministry
- (i) As with other parts of PCI the rhythms and patterns of CTM were significantly disrupted including a one-year delay for those intending to commence the Accredited Preacher Scheme in 2020; a one-year delay in the start of Deaconess training; cancellation of the pre-retirement conference in 2020; and an impact on the numbers applying for ordained ministry. The undergraduate degree with St Mary's University, Twickenham, was postponed by one year. The choice was to pause everything or to continue with things in a less optimal way.
 - (ii) UTC staff worked hard to make things work well, and while CTM was still able to carry out activities, a deficit has been caused by the inability to build and sustain relationships between students, between students and staff and amongst faculty.
 - (iii) There is a recognition that the Church ministry students are being trained into, is different from that before the pandemic, but it is still unclear what this looks like. The post-pandemic church has not yet settled and the new pattern will not be the same everywhere. Future ministers need to be more agile and be able to become better at reading culture.
 - (iv) The developing digital era will require appropriate resourcing of UTC to ensure that it can keep abreast of developments and remain on a par with similar theological colleges in terms of what it can offer.

ANNEX B

Views and perspectives from PCI ministers

The Task Group held three focus groups with ministers in urban settings in Northern Ireland, in rural settings in Northern Ireland, and those working in the Republic of Ireland. Each group was asked to consider the following areas:

- How congregations responded to lockdown
- Opportunities to engage with the local community
- Communication with Assembly Buildings staff and across presbytery
- How church life has changed
- What practices or activities have been retained
- The impact on ministry

Some of the key themes emerging are included below.

1. How congregations responded to lockdown

Online is not a substitute for gathered worship, but the opportunity to livestream services provided a different way to connect. The experience and skill in using technology was mixed, and online streaming was more challenging if the relevant expertise did not exist within the congregation, or the broadband infrastructure was not readily available.

While the first lockdown was novel, the second lockdown in winter 2020/2021 hit much harder with an increase in pastoral needs, particularly relating to mental health.

There has been an accelerated change in terms of nominal attendees drifting off, while some older or more vulnerable medically have not returned to church in person.

2. Opportunities to engage with the local community

Experiences across congregations were mixed. Some were able to continue to support ministries like foodbanks, whilst others encouraged neighbour to neighbour witness and service. For others it was difficult to engage with people outside of the church.

3. Communication with Assembly buildings staff and across presbytery

Gratitude was expressed to the Clerk and his leadership and guidance, with regular communication on the ‘big picture’ appreciated. However there was also a view that PCI had been weak in its engagement with government and forgot about the importance of public worship. Particularly in the Republic of Ireland where restrictions were harsher and imposed for

longer there was a question over whether more could have been done to push back.

Some felt that relationships amongst colleagues in presbytery had been strengthened and were more united but, on the other hand some felt that presbytery was not to the fore.

Resources developed and shared across the denomination were hugely appreciated.

4. How church life has changed

It was recognised that emerging from the pandemic offered a ‘golden moment’ but it was unclear how that could be best harnessed. There is a real impact in terms of attendance and in terms of commitment. Some volunteers have taken the break provided by the pandemic as an opportunity to reconsider their roles and have decided to step back. In congregations with less overall capacity this has had a significant impact.

5. What practices or activities have been retained

There was a recognition of wanting to strike a balance of still making church services accessible to those unable to attend, whilst not making ‘online worship’ a regular alternative for those who could easily join an in-person service of worship. Different approaches are being taken with some recording the service and uploading later in the day.

6. Ministry impact

A weariness beyond simple tiredness or exhaustion was evident amongst those who took part in the focus groups. This should be an area of pastoral concern for PCI centrally. Some of this was a result of managing different perspectives on the pandemic from within congregations. Also doing everything online meant that time between meetings, including travel time, which allowed for thinking/headspace was sorely missed. There was a pressure to be seen to be working, and also the torment of comparison particularly as it was possible to easily see what was happening within other congregations.

ANNEX C

Views and perspectives from the ‘front line’

The Task Group engaged with Presbyterian people who were engaged in ‘frontline’ work during the pandemic including those who provided services to people who were economically vulnerable, healthcare chaplains and those working in education. Some of the emerging themes are recorded below.

1. Economically vulnerable

Despite the pandemic, the three most common reasons why people find themselves in a debt crisis have not changed, and these are mental ill-health, low-income and relationship breakdown. The pandemic added new pressures including the uncertainty of furlough for low income households, lack of access to Free School Meals, greater pressure on relationships alongside an increase in reported instances of domestic abuse. In effect, the global Covid-19 pandemic shed light on the hidden epidemic of poverty across the island of Ireland. Churches are uniquely placed to provide a unique perspective of Christian hope into these difficult situations.

2. HealthCare chaplaincy

HealthCare chaplaincy is the frontline of service and mission within a secular organisation. Given the restrictions on visiting within hospitals, chaplains had an opportunity to provide a vital lifeline to patients through the provision of care packs (often supported by local congregations), or providing end of life care. There were also significant opportunities to provide support to hospital staff who were appreciative of the presence of chaplaincy staff. The importance of spiritual wellbeing alongside physical, emotional and mental wellbeing was highlighted. Chaplaincy provides for an important avenue for ministry and mission in a post-Christian world.

3. Education

There was a wide variation on how families were resourced at home for learning, particularly amongst those in primary school. Similarly there was a huge variation in provision for those children who attended school because their parents were essential workers. Those groups in society for whom things were already going badly were impacted in a much more devastating way by the pandemic. This was seen in children from low-income households, and those children and young people with special educational needs who were unable to access usual supports, and for whom disruption to normal routines was more impactful. It was also difficult for those in exam years with delayed decisions proving to be particularly challenging. The pandemic has raised to the fore the question of what role we expect schools to play in the life of a child and what responsibility lies at home.

ANNEX D

A historical survey of the church's response to pandemics

A historical consideration of the church's response to serious epidemics is worthwhile for a variety of reasons, but in this context two seem especially noteworthy. The first is to show how on some occasions the church's response to an epidemic has been so striking that it significantly advanced the cause of the gospel. The second is that the church has a deep reservoir of resources for dealing with epidemics, both for understanding something of God's purposes in these events and in providing appropriate means of response.

1. Two examples of how an appropriate response to a pandemic can serve to advance the gospel

Two illustrations will serve to confirm how the church's response to the gospel can have a very positive lasting legacy. The first concerns the epidemics which occurred in the second and third centuries. Rodney Stark argues that the actions of Christians during the Antonine and Cyprianic plagues help to explain the extraordinary growth of the early church.⁵ Christians showed extraordinary acts of kindness and sacrificial love in caring for the sick and the dying. Consequently, many found themselves drawn to a gospel message which offered consolation in this life and hope for the world to come.

The second example is from the so-called Great Plague which came to London in the summer of 1665 and which claimed the lives of nearly one in five of the population. As the plague spread, many conformist episcopalian clergy fled the city. By contrast, many dissenting ministers, who had been ejected from their pulpits in 1662 under the Act of Uniformity, remained and occupied the pulpits left empty by either the flight or death of their incumbents e.g. the Presbyterian minister Thomas Vincent. As Gary De Krey argues, the legacy of the actions of dissenting clergy during the crises ought not to be underestimated: '[w]hen young and old alike found their needs met by nonconformist clergy, their dissenting identity was formed in almost unbreakable moulds'.⁶

These examples from the early church and the seventeenth century illustrate the powerful and lasting impact that a countercultural response may have during an epidemic for the sake of the cause of the gospel. Building on the analysis of these two examples of epidemics, two questions are pertinent. First, to what extent did the distinctives of Irish Presbyterian belief and practice contribute to both our understanding of the recent pandemic and

5 Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco, 1997), 73, 79.

6 Gary S. De Krey, *London and the Restoration, 1659–1683* (Cambridge, 2005), 91.

the mobilisation of the resources of the church in response? Secondly, to what extent has the response of the church to the needs of young and old alike in this crisis formed the identity (for good or ill) of Irish Presbyterians?

2. The promise of retrieval of both the beliefs and practices of the church in previous pandemics

A historical survey will show something of the heritage of resources which we have to draw from, both for seeking to understand something of God's purposes in these events and in providing an appropriate means of response, particularly a corporate response. The church has engaged in similar acts of retrieval of the wisdom and understanding of past generations on various occasions. For example, Reformed Christians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries frequently cited Cyprian's third-century sermon about the plague sweeping the empire entitled 'On Mortality'.⁷ Some of the writings of the Reformation and Post-Reformation theologians have the potential to offer similar help and guidance for our contemporary context given that they contain sophisticated responses to some of the most pressing questions raised by any epidemic: (1) what (if anything) is the meaning of such providential events, particularly in terms of God's fatherly discipline of his people and his punishment of the wicked; (2) what are the requirements of both Christian love and prudence, for example, is it permissible to flee from the plague; and (3) what are the specific requirements incumbent upon Christian ministers and civil rulers in times of epidemic. These resources offer more than simply doctrinal responses to a pandemic but also include liturgical responses, both personal and corporate, for example, Zwingli's Pestlied (Plague Song) and the prayer of repentance for use in time of plague in the Genevan Liturgy. Like our own day, for the pastors in Geneva, the plague of the 1540s 'laid bare important questions of pastoral protocol, strategy, and theology that the ministers debated over the next three decades.' Their mature pastoral and theological reflection upon this was articulated in Beza's Questions Regarding the Plague (1579).⁸

Many of the questions with which we continue to grapple in the wake of the most recent pandemic are ones which Reformed Christians have sought to answer in the past. Although these resources emerged in contexts very different from our own, they do provide a significant resource to help assess our own response to the pandemic and formulate answers to the pressing questions which have emerged about how we might respond to similar circumstances in the future.

3. A survey of early Protestant responses to epidemics in the British and Irish context

7 Stephen M. Coleman and Todd M. Rester (eds), *Faith in the Time of Plague: Selected Writings from the Reformation and Post-Reformation* (Glenside, 2021).

8 Scott Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536-1609* (Oxford, 2013), 285–6, 288.

Since the fifth century, Christians in these islands typically understood epidemics by recourse to the idea of what is termed ‘judicial providentialism’ and responded by holding special services and fasts.⁹ Such theology and practice did, however, develop significantly in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras. The English Protestant church provided liturgies for use during times of plague in the Book of Common Prayer.¹⁰ For example, in 1552 in the wake of ‘the sweat’, a viral disease with a high mortality rate, the Edwardian regime added a new collect (included in subsequent editions) asking God ‘to withdraw from us thy plague and grievous sickness’.¹¹ In addition to this, for the more severe epidemics of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, special prayers were formulated. For instance, in 1563, following the worst outbreak of plague for a century (killing almost 25% of the population of London), Queen Elizabeth issued a call for special services and liturgies.¹² These extraordinary calls to prayer and repentance were often composed with an awareness of the need to mitigate risk e.g. by shortening the length of sermons, or even the stipulation that prayer be restricted to private households in afflicted areas.¹³ Instruction about how to respond to the plague as divine discipline was given in the books of homilies of the English Church.¹⁴ In the seventeenth century this understanding was promoted in the pulpit by the jeremiad, a type of sermon which lamented the sins of the nation and demanded reformation in order to avert further punishment.¹⁵

In Scotland, the Kirk had ‘The Order of the General Fast’ in its constitution. Used at national, regional, and local levels, fear of pestilence was one of the most frequently cited causes of a fast.¹⁶ Fast days focused on prayer and sermon attendance became an important part of the religious culture of Scottish Presbyterians in the seventeenth century.¹⁷ In Ireland fasting took place in response to waves of plagues during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁸

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- 9 Natalie Mears, ‘Special Nationwide Worship and the Book of Common Prayer in England, Wales and Ireland, 1533–1642’, in Natalie Mears and Alec Ryrie (eds), *Worship and the Parish Church in Early Modern Britain* (Farnham, 2013), 33.
- 10 Alasdair Raffee, ‘Nature’s Scourges: The Natural World and Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings, 1541–1866’, *Studies in Church History* 46 (2010), 237–47.
- 11 Brian Cummings (ed.), ‘In the Time of any Common Plague or Sickness’, in *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford, 2013), 266.
- 12 Richard Mackenney, *Sixteenth Century Europe: Expansion and Conflict* (New York, 1994), 84.
- 13 Cited in Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 164.
- 14 *The Books of Homilies: A Critical Edition*, ed. Gerald Bray (Cambridge, 2015), 79, 308
- 15 Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999), 157.
- 16 W.I.P. Hazlett, ‘Playing God’s Card: Knox and Fasting, 1565–66’ in Roger A. Mason (ed.), *John Knox and the British Reformations* (Aldershot, 1998), 176–98; John Knox, ‘The Order of the General Fast’, in Works, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh, 1846), 6.391–422.
- 17 Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven, 2002), 343–52.
- 18 Raffee, ‘Nature’s Scourges: The Natural World and Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings, 1541–1866’, 237–8; See Robert Steele, *A Bibliography of Royal Proclamations of the Tudor and Stuart Sovereigns, 1485–1714*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1910), 2. Nos 266, 381, 485, 554.

The Westminster divines composed a Confession of Faith which expressed the fullness of God's providential rule by recourse to the distinction, common in post-Reformation theology, between God's preservation of creation, his concurrent activity in sustaining creation, and his government of it (5.1).¹⁹ The Confession recognised that whilst believers and unbelievers endure the same providential circumstances, God has different purposes for them therein. In a fallen world, God is at work exercising his judgement against sin in the events of providence (5.6). However, for believers, in the same dark and difficult experiences of this life, God has many purposes which may include, among others, fatherly chastisement of sin designed 'that they may be humbled and [raised up] to a more close and constant dependence' (5.5). This idea is repeated later in the Confession as it speaks of how believers may experience God's fatherly 'displeasure' and, as a result, suffer 'temporal judgements' (17.3). Consequently, there is a need for humble self-examination and, where necessary, repentance. Once again, fasting is understood to play a significant role in this. It is taken to be one of the occasional elements of the worship of God (21.5), and, according to the Larger Catechism, is one of the duties required by the second commandment (Q&A 108).

With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 the government and established churches of the British Isles continued the practice of summoning the nation to pray during times of epidemic. For Presbyterians there often was controversy over the role of the state in appointing such fasts.²⁰ The Westminster Confession deals with some of the relevant factors which gave rise to this disquiet in its treatment on the relationship between the church and the civil magistrate (21.1-4). Thus, in the later seventeenth century, Irish Presbyterians called fasts in addition to those proclaimed by the government and they viewed the observance of such fasts as 'a barometer of the spiritual health of the community'.²¹ Andrew Holmes has examined the practice within Irish Presbyterianism to show how the various fasts reveal what Presbyterians thought about God and his relationship to the created order. He identified four themes: (1) divine sovereignty; (2) the sinfulness of man; (3) the intelligibility of providence; and (4) covenant theology.²²

During the Reformation and post-Reformation eras across England, Scotland, and Ireland it was assumed that the plague was as an act of providence and that it was within God's purview to withdraw the plague. Furthermore, these epidemics were understood, in at least some sense, to

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- 19 Michael McClenahan, 'Providence: Confidence in God's Purpose to Perfect His People', in William R. Edwards, John C.A. Ferguson, and Chad Van Dixhoorn (eds), *Theology for Ministry: How Doctrine Affects Pastoral Life and Practice* (Phillipsburg, 2021), 71-88.
- 20 Alasdair Raffe, *Culture of Controversy: Religious Arguments in Scotland, 1660-1714* (Woodbridge, 2012), 55.
- 21 Raymond Gillespie, *Devoted People: Belief and Religion in Early Modern Ireland* (Manchester, 1997), 49; see also Robert Whan, *The Presbyterians of Ulster 1680-1730* (Woodbridge, 2013), 196-7.
- 22 Andrew R. Holmes, *The Shaping of Ulster Presbyterian Belief and Practice, 1770-1840* (Oxford, 2006), 79-80.

be an expression of God's justice or fatherly discipline. This theology and the practice of fasting served to reframe the existence of an epidemic and invested it with providential meaning.

4. Public fasting in Britain and Ireland with specific reference to three significant pandemics in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries
There were three significant pandemics which would arise in the next three centuries: the Great Plague of Marseilles; the nineteenth-century cholera outbreaks; and the so-called Spanish Influenza. Important developments may be discerned in how the churches in the British Isles responded to each successive epidemic.

In 1720 there was widespread concern that the plague in Marseilles would spread to Britain. The government responded by issuing proclamations for public fasts.²³ However, a transition can be observed in the response to the various deadly waves of cholera in the nineteenth century. A national day of fasting was ordered in 1832 but not all embraced it. This was for a variety of reasons (not least the idea that political reform rather than prayer was the necessary response), and this marked the beginning of the decline of such public fasts.²⁴

In Ulster, the Seceders had continued to prioritise fasting in the eighteenth century but the practice had declined in the Synod of Ulster because of 'the influence of liberal theological opinion within the Synod'. However, after the ejection of the Remonstrants, the Synod of Ulster returned to the practice of appointing days of fasting. Consequently, when cholera spread to Ulster in the 1830s, Presbyterians in the Synod of Ulster held days of fasting and repentance.²⁵ The same theology and practice is discernible in responses to the Irish famine. When a national fast and humiliation was observed throughout the United Kingdom in March 1847 for 'the removal of those heavy judgments which our manifold sins and provocations have most justly deserved', Belfast Presbyterian ministers preached relevant sermons.²⁶ As Holmes points out, the famine 'reminded Presbyterians that God was also the judge of the world and that their sins called for repentance'.²⁷

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- 23 Charles F. Mullett, 'The English Plague Scare of 1720-23', *The History of Science Society 2* (1936), 484-516; Raffee, 'Nature's Scourges', 240.
- 24 Richard J. Janet, 'Providence, Prayer and Cholera: The English General Fast of 1832', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 51.3 (1982), 297-317; Williamson, 'State Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings: Public Worship in Britain 1830-1897', *Past & Present* 200.1 (2008), 121-74.
- 25 Holmes, *Shaping and Practice*, 82, 84, 87.
- 26 Peter Gray, 'National Humiliation and the Great Hunger: Fast and Famine in 1847', *Irish Historical Studies*, 32 (2000), 193-216.
- 27 Holmes, *Shaping and Practice*, 88.

A significant departure from this providentialism took place in the second half of the nineteenth century, with Boyd Hilton arguing that the doctrine of providence was increasingly questioned in the wake of the Irish famine.²⁸ Owen Chadwick identified the government's refusal to appoint a national fast for the severe cholera in October 1853 as a decisive development.²⁹ The providentialist approach was, however, not abandoned by all. When the fourth wave of the cholera pandemic struck in 1866, the Anglican bishop of Liverpool, J.C. Ryle, wrote *The Hand of the Lord!*, insisting that it, 'like every other pestilence, is a *direct visitation from God*'. The primary cause of cholera, according to this most influential English evangelical, was not bad sanitation but national sins and in response, the nation needed to repent.³⁰

The so-called Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918–1919 resulted in at least 50 million deaths. In Ireland perhaps 23,000 lives were lost to a disease which particularly affected those aged 20–40.³¹ This epidemic led to the closure of schools and Sunday schools.³² There is only scant information about how the Irish Presbyterians understood this pandemic. This accords with David Fergusson's claim that at the national day of fasting there was little attempt to attribute divine causality.³³ According to Niall Johnson, the British churches 'did not see God as having a direct role in the pandemic and they were trying to reconcile modern views of science and medicine with religion'.³⁴ Subsequent to this, as John Coffey explains, through the course of the twentieth century 'official expressions of belief in providence had gone into sharp decline'.³⁵ Under the influence of such secularisation, many came to view events such as pandemics as something to be explained by scientists rather than by recourse to providence and divine judgment.

5. Matters worth considering from this historical analysis

Epidemics have frequently raised significant questions for both individuals and the church to address. The example of Geneva shows how it can take many years to grapple with the issues about what constitutes an appropriate response by church and state to an epidemic. Many of our contemporary questions have been addressed in different contexts in the past, and the

28 Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988), 112-14, 250-1.

29 Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols (London, 1966-70), 1,490; Williamson, 'State Prayers', 143.

30 J.C. Ryle, 'The Hand of the Lord!' *Being Thoughts on Cholera* (London, 1866), 5, 7-8, 11.

31 Cairtriona Foley, *The Last Irish Plague: The Great Flu Epidemic in Ireland* (Dublin, 2011).

32 Patricia Marsh, *The Spanish Flu in Ireland: A Socio-Economic Shock to Ireland, 1918-19* (London, 2021), 189.

33 David Fergusson, *The Providence of God: A Polyphonic Approach* (Cambridge, 2018), 210ff.

34 Niall Johnson, *Britain and the 1918-19 Influenza Pandemic: A Dark Epilogue* (Abingdon, 2006), 151.

35 John Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation: Deliverance Politics from John Calvin to Martin Luther King Jr.* (Oxford, 2014), 206.

retrieval of these resources has the potential to help to inform, in some manner, our response. This survey has shown how for many centuries the church applied a doctrine of judicial providentialism to times of plague and epidemic. The evidence would suggest that many in the contemporary church are, at the very least, hesitant to adopt this doctrine. It is worth considering to what extent this is driven by a deliberate theological shift in our understanding of the doctrine of providence as opposed to a perhaps unwitting reflection of the increasingly secularised view of sickness and death in the wider culture. Given that fasting has been characteristic of the response of Irish Presbyterians to previous pandemics it is worth considering whether or not it would be appropriate for the church to call its members to a time of fasting and corporate repentance. These questions are posed in the context of the point made at the beginning of this paper: that is to say, history demonstrates that when the church makes an appropriate response to a severe epidemic it has the potential to be a striking and lasting testimony to the power of the gospel.

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 5

RECONFIGURATION OF MINISTRY TASK GROUP GREEN PAPER REPORT

Remit

An examination of the key principles and practicalities that will underpin a radical reconfiguration of ministry in the light of changing demographics and ministry and mission opportunities

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 The Task Group recognises that the denomination has entrusted it with work that is both major and vital. In bringing this report, it has consulted presbyteries and other denominations on the island of Ireland and Great Britain, and is thankful to all who have contributed. The Assembly will be aware from the remit at the head of the report that the task is not to carry out a radical reconfiguration of ministry. Rather to examine the principles and practicalities that will underpin any such future work that the Assembly does.

1.2 As this is a new and major work, the Task Group has been advised that Green Paper consultation should take place prior to a final report to the 2024 General Assembly – see General Assembly Reports 2021, p.116.

Recommendation 2:

That from the 2021 General Assembly onwards, where a significant change of policy is being considered, or a new policy being proposed (especially where the matter is strategic or potentially controversial), there should be a formal ‘Green Paper consultation stage’ prior to recommendations for decision coming to the General Assembly. A Green Paper consultation stage would:

- a) be triggered by the General Assembly (or by the General Council), following recommendation from a newly constituted General Assembly Advisory Committee;*
- b) include the drafting of a ‘Green Paper Consultation Document’ outlining the background to the matter, the reasons necessitating new policy/decisions, an analysis of options that could be considered, etc.;*
- c) involve consideration of the ‘Green Paper Consultation Document’*

at one or more of the following levels – regional, presbytery, kirk session;

- d) *result in a ‘Green Paper Report’ to the General Assembly, which itself would authorise the drawing up of a full policy report for consideration and decision at the subsequent Assembly.*

- 1.3 What follows in this report is an attempt to unpack the issue and give background material to aid understanding of it.

Options are outlined, along with the thinking of the Task Group in moving towards a preferred option in some areas. However, none of this is being presented as something that is signed, sealed and delivered, rather, at most, it should be seen only as what the Task Group considers as the direction of travel most likely to achieve an effective reconfiguration of ministry necessitated by current circumstances.

Following the General Assembly of 2023, there will be consultation and reflection across the denomination, after which the Task Group will bring a definitive report to the General Assembly of 2024 with resolutions for debate and decision.

Section 2: Demographics, Statistics, Opportunities and Challenges

2.1 PCI figures

Detail of 10-year changes were given in the Task Group’s report to the 2022 General Assembly (GA Reports 2022, p80). A section of this is included in Appendix 1. Also included in this appendix is Figure 1, a map showing distribution of PCI congregations. Further information has also been received from presbytery reports.

Together, these show that PCI membership is:

- Declining in number
- Aging in composition
- Concentrated in the north-east of the island of Ireland.

Since the report to the 2021 General Assembly, figures for the year 2021 have become available. These show continuing decline in the number of contributing families – down 4,000, or 6.5%, on 2020. The effect of Covid on these figures cannot be estimated.

2.2 Northern Ireland Census

The Task Group is indebted to Edgar Jardine, for his analysis of demographic change in Northern Ireland over the last 50 years. Edgar’s full report is contained in Appendix 2, with the conclusions below.

Conclusions

- 2.2.1 The population of Northern Ireland continues to grow and is expected to be in excess of 2 million by the next Census in 2031.
- 2.2.2 The religious affiliation of the population is changing, with those describing themselves as Roman Catholic exceeding those

describing themselves as Protestant for the first time in 2021. However, there is a rapidly growing part of the population that does not identify with either of the two main religious blocks. This is particularly the case in the Local Government Districts with the highest Protestant populations, i.e., Ards and North Down, and Lisburn and Castlereagh.

- 2.2.3 The number declaring a religious affiliation is considerably greater than total numbers actually affiliating to one of the denominations. This is seen in the difference between the number of people identifying as Presbyterian in the Census (316,103 in the 2021 Census), and the number of people recorded in PCI Statistics as claiming connection with the denomination (196,334 in 2021). This phenomenon has attracted the descriptor of “Cultural” Protestants/Catholics.
- 2.2.4 A key characteristic of the population going forward is the rapidly increasing number of older people, while the number of children/young adults is predicted to decline. Furthermore, the aging population will be supported by a relatively static workforce, increasing the dependency ratio across the population as a whole.
- 2.2.5 Households are becoming smaller – in 1991, the average household size was 3.55 persons. In 2021, this had reduced to 2.44 persons per household, reflecting the increase in the number of single person households.
- 2.2.6 The population has become more diverse. The 1971 Census found that just one person in 100 was born outside the UK/RoI. This had increased to 6.5 per 100 by the date of the 2021 Census.
- 2.2.7 The distribution of the enumerated population born outside the UK/RoI differs across Local Government Districts. In 2021, 6.6% of the population in the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon LGD were born in EU and non-EU European countries compared to just 1.3% in Derry City and Strabane.

The opportunities and challenges for ministry and mission from these figures are significant, notably:

- The increase in the population seen alongside the decline in numbers of Presbyterians
- The increase in numbers of older people and single-person households
- The increase in those born outside UK/RoI and their distribution
- The number of people who claim affiliation with Presbyterianism (and other denominations), but do not appear to be affiliated in any way in practice
- The increase in the number of people who claim no religious affiliation

2.3 Republic of Ireland Census

- 2.3.1 The Census in RoI was delayed from 2021 to 2022 due to Covid-19.

Unfortunately, only a very brief summary of results has been released at the time of writing, with further detail not due until 29 June 2023. No figures on religion have been released from the 2022 census. Further information has been gleaned from the 2016 census and the 2021 Yearbook.

- 2.3.2 The population of the Republic of Ireland is increasing and is now 5.1 million, the highest since 1841.

This is an increase of 361,000, or 7.6%, since the last census in 2016. The rate of increase is twice that of the last census period of 2011-2016.

The population of all 26 counties has increased since 2016, most notably in Leinster. In the previous census period, the population declined in Mayo and Donegal.

The increase of 361,000 is accounted for by net inward migration of 190,000, and a natural increase of 171,000 in total, or 28,500 per year.

In the 2011-2016 period, there was total net outward migration of 25,000, and a natural increase of 39,500 per year.

It is projected that by 2041, the population of RoI will be 6 million.

- 2.3.3 The population is living longer.

The Republic of Ireland has the highest life expectancy in the European Union, at 82 years, and this is rising.

The over-65 population has grown by 35% in the past 10 years, and this is expected to continue.

- 2.3.4 The number of non-Irish nationals is increasing.

In 2021, there were 645,000 non-Irish nationals living in Ireland, an increase of 17% since 2016.

- 2.3.5 The population of Dublin in 2021 was 1.43 million, or 28.5% of the population. Dublin and the Mid-East region together account for 43% of the population.

- 2.3.6 The Roman Catholic population in Ireland is reducing as a proportion of the total population.

In 2016 it was 78.3% of the population, the lowest ever recorded. This is due to higher numbers of no religion, and other religions.

- 2.3.7 Those describing themselves as no-religion increase by 75% from 2011 to 2016, comprising 9.8% of the population in 2016. Numbers in this category are higher in the 20-30 age group, and in large urban settlements, notably Dublin and Cork.

2.3.8 The number of Presbyterians fell by 400 between 2011 and 2016, to 24,200. This is 0.5% of the population. This figure is significantly higher than numbers recorded in PCI figures. Making allowance for non-PCI Presbyterians, it is roughly twice as high.

Presbyterians are older on average than the general population.

Almost one-quarter of Presbyterians live in Donegal, and one-tenth live in Monaghan.

2.3.9

Some of the opportunities and challenges for ministry and mission in the Republic of Ireland are similar to those in Northern Ireland

- The increase in population
- The increase in older people
- The increase in those born outside RoI
- The percentage of people who claim to be Presbyterian, but do not appear to be affiliated in any way in practice
- The increase in people with no religion.

2.3.10

There are additional challenges and opportunities

- Large areas and populations where there is no Reformed witness
- Large areas where there is no PCI ‘island of strength’ from which to base pioneer work or church planting
- Many existing congregations in RoI are small, and a significant number of charges receive augmentation.

Section 3: Ministry

3.1

The Task Group understands ‘reconfiguration of ministry’ to mean more than simply training more ordained ministers or changing their distribution.

This also includes wider equipping of Church office-bearers and members, along with a re-examination of other forms of called and paid staff deployed in congregations.

3.2 PCI is self-evidently ‘presbyterian’ – overseen by elders. While ministers are teaching elders, with special calling (Code Par 16(2)), ruling elders are also ordained, and together they form the leadership team in congregations, and make up the membership of the courts of the Church.

The Church’s understanding of ministry, not least in the context of a radical reconfiguration, must reflect this.

- 3.3 Currently, PCI also has the commissioned offices of deaconess and auxiliary minister, along with the role of Irish mission workers (although there has been no recruitment of these for a number of years and no more is planned) and the Accredited Preacher Scheme. Congregations also employ a wide variety of additional pastoral personnel.
- 3.4 There are currently 14 women serving as deaconesses, six of whom are part-time, in congregational ministry, chaplaincy, and the International Meeting Point.
- 3.5 There are currently no auxiliary ministers serving in that capacity. The Auxiliary Ministry Scheme (AMS) began in 2014. The Scheme was established to provide flexible ministry in congregations and pioneer settings, but with potentially much less finance needed than ordained ministry or additional pastoral personnel (APP). While the standard of training and those qualified are considered to be excellent, only three posts were established, and it is undoubtedly true that the Scheme has not gained traction in the denomination. Whatever the reasons for this, the Church still needs flexible, finance-light ministry and mission options. Other denominations have sought to provide this in various ways – non-stipendiary ministers, ordained local ministers, part-time, late-entry ministry.
- 3.6 God does not limit the action of His grace and the entrusting of His gifts only to those of His people who are ordained to word and sacrament, hold other church offices, or are employed by congregations. Rather, He entrusts these things to His people.
- 3.7 In many of our congregations, there is an over-reliance on ministers and other paid staff, with an accompanying under-use and undervaluing of ruling elders and believers. This is to the detriment of the ministry and mission of the Church, and the work of the Kingdom.
- 3.8 As stated above, this report seeks to address this by recognising that a reconfiguration of ministry must deal comprehensively with the configuration of ordained ministers, but also must look beyond that, to ministry and mission that has much wider involvement of ruling elders and the people of God. This will involve providing training and equipping, as well as opportunities for service.

Section 4: Principles

- 4.1 The principles that should undergird a radical reconfiguration of ministry are listed here, grouped under three headings, although it is recognised that there are areas of overlap. No list of this nature can be exhaustive, however, the following are considered to be essential.

Theological Principles

Principle One – The Glory of God and the Primacy of Christ

Principle Two – The Importance of Fruitfulness

Principle Three – We are a Presbyterian Church

Attitude/Mindset

Principle Four – The need for discernment and openness to God’s leading of His people, and obedience in following His leading

Principle Five – To fully grasp opportunities and face challenges, the deployment, configuration and role of ordained ministers must be revised

Principle Six – Any reconfiguration of ministry should prioritise future effectiveness of ministry rather than managing decline

Principle Seven – We should be where the people are, and meet them where they are

Church polity and practice

Principle Eight – The Church’s ‘machinery’ should serve its ministry and mission

Principle Nine – In order to be effective, reconfiguration must be collaborative, involving all levels of the denomination

Theological Principles**Principle One – The Glory of God and the Primacy of Christ**

- 4.2 The primary purpose of humanity is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Consequently, all that we do should be to glorify God, and that burden for His glory is what ultimately must drive His people, in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- 4.3 The Church is the Lord Jesus Christ’s, He is the King and Head of the Church and it is only from Him and by being in Him that we have life. Consequently, all that we do should be in submission to the Lord Jesus, at His command, instruction and leading, and with the awareness of our complete dependence upon Him – not least any consideration of ministry and a reconfiguration of it. He is sufficient.
- 4.4 It has often been said that the Lord’s last command should be His Church’s first concern. The Great Commission, to go into all the world and make disciples, must not only be primary in the mission of the Church, but must be central in any reconfiguration of ministry - seeing the lost saved, and believers built-up must always go hand-in-hand. In addition, the whole flow of Scripture expresses God’s will to secure a people for Himself, with that people serving as His light, His instrument in His world. This is true of His people in the Old Testament and the New.

- 4.5 Any future reconfiguration of ministry must be done prayerfully, in a spirit of humility, with repentance, seeking His glory above all. This is His work, we pray that He will do it, and that in His mercy, He will be pleased to use PCI as one of His instruments. We must seek to be instruments that are suitable for Him to use.
- 4.6 The outcome is not in doubt. While the denominational figures are discouraging and society in Ireland is moving away from the truths of the Bible, the Lord Jesus remains the King of kings and Lord of lords. His work is complete, His victory is secure, He is building and will build His Church – on the island of Ireland as in the rest of His world – and He will return in glory to this world, when every knee will bow to Him and every tongue will confess that He is Lord.
- 4.7 All of this is true. However, these truths, and many more, do not in themselves mean that PCI will stop declining, nor do they mean that while standing on these truths we can stay just as we are, and do only what we have been doing. The Lord will build His Church in Ireland, but in doing so He may choose to use other parts of His Church, and He may allow PCI to decline further – He is Lord, and this is all in His hands.
- 4.8 PCI is not, and never has been, a pure and perfect Church. Our exercise of ministry, and our burden for mission to those around us, have never been all that the Lord has wanted them to be. We are fallen and sinful, frail and weak. Even to the limited extent that we know our own hearts, we are fickle, mixed in our motives, spoiled by self-interest, falling far short of loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. This is true for us individually and corporately – hence the need for repentance. The exercise of ministry and mission in PCI has never been isolated from our sin, it has been affected by it. If we are to be faithful to the Lord and the commission He has given us, we must follow Him, radically, sacrificially, single-mindedly, setting aside anything that self-interest has caused us to consider sacred. Our exercise of ministry and our prioritisation of mission, must be fit for purpose – the Lord’s purpose – in being and doing what He wants us to be and do on the island of Ireland in the present and future, in keeping with His Word, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the joy of the Lord.

Principle Two – The Importance of Fruitfulness

- 4.9 Since its inception in 2015, the Council for Congregational Life and Witness adopted a central theme of Fruitful Congregations. The theme was shared extensively throughout the denomination and quickly gained acceptance as a useful way of capturing the purpose and nature of congregational life and witness. It represents both challenge and encouragement, asking each congregation to be intentional in considering and developing how they are both planting and watering the seed of gospel ministry and mission in each core area of their life and witness.

4.10 The Council offered the following vision of basic elements that make for a fruitful congregation which found traction in a wide variety of local situations. Fruitful congregations:

- Place encounter with the living God at the centre of their life (worship element)
- Are shaped by understanding their life and witness as part of God's unfolding story of redemption, rather than their own internal desires and preferences (purpose element)
- Are led to lean forward into the future not back into the past (leadership element)
- Develop their life as a community of God's people (crucial foundation of all aspects of life and witness)
- Move the vision of membership from belonging to church, to longing to be followers of Christ in every aspect of life (intentional discipleship element)
- Make an impression for God locally and globally through outreach and involvement in God's wider activity in the world (missional element).

These aspects of developing a culture of fruitfulness should not be read as a sequence of ordered steps, but rather represent the interlocking elements of a rounded approach to a healthy contemporary expression of church life. No congregation will be able to develop in all areas at once, but each needs to discern prayerfully their own starting points and priorities in deepening their overall ministry and mission.

4.11 Further work shows that most PCI congregations operate from a relatively small core of members in terms of hands-on delivery of ministry and mission. While this is clearly true and congregations will be aware of it, it is not always acknowledged or reflected in the ministry and mission of congregations. Rather than adapting ministry and mission, the response can often be that fewer people do more and more, seeking to maintain programmes that have been unchanged for years. While this allows kirk sessions to avoid taking difficult decisions about congregational programmes, it results in leaders becoming discouraged and worn-out, and it perpetuates programmes of ministry and mission that are no longer effective in today's world.

4.12 Fruitfulness in congregational life and witness requires facing current realities and adopting a renewed focus and intentionality about core activities in both ministry and mission, whatever the size of church.

4.13 The figure of contributing families, while important to assessing financial sustainability, is much less suitable for understanding the crucial resource of 'able and willing people' required to sustain and develop congregational life and witness. Finances, and even reshaping for effective missional presence, can be addressed, but once the capacity of membership to be active in ministry and mission falls significantly, a tipping point is reached,

after which there is little prospect of renewal whatever desire and vision is expressed. Many congregations which used to be large or medium sized continue to try to run a programme of activities that they will soon no longer be able to sustain because their reducing active membership and increasing age profile means there is no leadership pipeline providing a next generation of leaders.

- 4.14 The denomination needs to wrestle with the issue of what it looks like to develop financially sustainable models of small and fruitful congregations. In an increasingly secular Ireland, and significantly aging and reducing Presbyterian community, this may well be the medium-term configuration of congregational size.
- 4.15 It is important to acknowledge that congregational mission to others requires healthy patterns and practices of ministry in community among existing members that result in enthusiasm for Christ and His cause. Quite simply, without depth of root, it is naïve to expect lasting fruit in outreach or evangelism.

Principle Three – We are a Presbyterian Church

- 4.16 PCI does not believe in or practice the distinction between the clergy and the laity. Ordination to the eldership is the key distinction in the denomination. Elders, ruling and teaching, exercise oversight in the Church through its courts of Kirk Session, Presbytery and General Assembly.
- 4.17 While the theological position is clear, in the practice of ministry and mission, there has been, to varying degrees across the denomination, an over-emphasis on the position and role of the minister/teaching elder, and an under-emphasis on the position and role of the ruling elder. The story of a new minister asking an elder to lead in prayer, only to be met with the reply, ‘Your reverence, I’m a joiner, and you’re a minister. If there’s a door to be hung, I’ll do it. If there’s a prayer to be prayed, you can do it,’ may be apocryphal, but it is told for a reason.
- 4.18 Any reconfiguration of the reduced number of ministers, must include consideration of the role of the other elders and their involvement in ministry and mission. The Code states the following in Par 30:
- (a) The duty of ruling elders as members of Kirk Session is to work together with the minister in the oversight and government of the congregation, for the upbuilding of God’s people in spiritual fruitfulness and holy concord, and for the extension of Christ’s kingdom among all people. In exercising this leadership, the Kirk Session shall oversee and work along with other members who have leadership roles in the congregation.
 - (b) Ruling elders, by their calling, share equally with ministers in responsibility for practical witness both within the congregation and in the wider world.
 - (c) In the discharge of their duties each elder should be assigned by the Kirk Session pastoral responsibilities and/or other leadership roles in the congregation.

- (d) The Kirk Session, along with the Minister, should seek to ensure that all elders are equipped to fulfil their duties.

The statements in the Pastoral Epistles regarding the eldership, are to elders rather than being limited to teaching elders. Not least is what is also written in 1 Peter 5, where all elders are described as under-shepherds of our Lord Jesus.

This is a theological issue, but also is one of mindset and attitude. It will also necessitate a significant programme of equipping of eldership for ministries such as leading worship, pastoral care, conducting funerals etc.

Attitude/Mindset

Principle Four – The need for discernment and openness to God’s leading of His people, and obedience in following His leading

- 4.19 The Lord speaks to us primarily through His Word.

The Holy Spirit takes what is in the written Word and applies it to specific circumstances, prompting and leading His people. The Church must pray for this to happen, encourage it and expect it to happen. The Church must also be able to corporately test the will and leading of God without quenching or thwarting the Spirit and, when it believes the Lord is leading in a particular way, it must respond in faith and obedience. PCI, in its procedures and practices, must be able to encourage and facilitate this hearing, praying, thinking, seeking God – and more than that, be able to translate this into action for the Lord, led by the Lord, in obedience to the Lord. This needs PCI to pray as Samuel did, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening’ (1 Sam 3:10), and in response it will need openness and boldness, while still maintaining accountability and oversight.

While circumstances and conditions for ministry and mission in Ireland have changed radically in recent decades, the configuration of approaches, congregational presence and deployment of ministers and other workers has not. Additionally, the planting of only a handful of new congregations suggests the need for greater flexibility, boldness, and openness, coupled with the developing of robust processes of accountability and oversight. This will inevitably involve stepping out in faith to a greater extent than may have existed in the recent past. It will require a mix of courage, imagination and willingness not to shy away from difficult conversations and decisions.

Principle Five – To fully grasp opportunities and face challenges, the deployment, configuration and role of ordained ministers must be revised

- 4.20 In stating this principle, the Task Group is not implying a change in the theological understanding of the ordained minister or teaching elder as contained in the Bible or the Code.
- 4.21 Demographic figures show that the island of Ireland has changed and is changing significantly, in both jurisdictions. This means that the context in which PCI carries out ministry and mission has changed and is changing significantly. This provides both opportunities and challenges.

4.22 The Church dare not neglect the opportunities the Lord has placed before us to serve Him on this island today. To do so, for whatever reason, would be to fail Him in the commission He has given us, and in doing so to disregard our primary calling.

4.23 The most recent PCI figures highlight some of the challenges that we face as a denomination.

By 2027, PCI will have 62 fewer ministers than vacant charges. This is approximately 20% of the charges in the denomination. Some of the implications of this are longer vacancies, less functional presbyteries, and the capacity of and expectations upon ministers being stretched.

The number of families contributing to the denomination's congregations is also down by a similar percentage over the past ten years.

4.24 The Church has a number of options for how it responds to these opportunities and challenges.

It could leave the configuration of ministry largely unchanged and hope that this pattern is adequate to grasp the new opportunities offered to us to serve the Lord.

Included in this would also be the hope that the number of ordained ministers increases to a level that reduces and, in time, eliminates the deficit. Accompanying this would be a renewed emphasis on prayer in response to what the Lord says in Matthew 9:38, asking Him to send out workers into His harvest field. A moot theological point, not for examination here, is whether the Lord's answer to those prayers would be limited only to raising up ordained ministers, or whether it might involve the raising up of other workers in addition to ordained ministers.

4.25 Alternatively, the Church could come to the position that the opportunities that exist, and the challenges faced are so significant, that it is necessary to change the configuration of ministry throughout the Church in a way, and to an extent, that it has not done previously. Hopefully, this too, would be accompanied by a greater emphasis on prayer in response to what the Lord says in Matthew 9:38.

4.26 This would be accompanied by re-visiting how flexible, lower-cost ministry can be provided such as through bi-vocational, non-stipendiary ministry etc, and greater equipping and use of ruling elders and others.

4.27 In the immediate future, the Church faces the challenge of having to do five things simultaneously:

- close some churches
- manage some declining churches which will reach the end of their life cycle
- support other declining churches to grow again
- support growing churches
- plant new churches.

In terms of church planting, PCI is still on a steep learning curve. Our structures, systems and culture are still largely organised around a maintenance model of congregational ministry. We lack vision, skills and a dedicated resource stream for church planting. We have no recognised ministry path specifically associated with this, and we have no bespoke provision for pioneers and church planters within our education for ministry pathways.

- 4.28 The Church has not yet reached a mind on reconfiguration. As stated previously, this Task Group does not have that remit, and the Assembly has not considered whether to embark on a reconfiguration of ministry, radical or otherwise.
- 4.29 However, in the course of undertaking its remit, the Task Group has firmly come to the mind that such a reconfiguration is necessary and urgent, believing that the option of leaving the configuration of ministry unchanged is extremely unwise. Not to radically reconfigure ministry would be to neglect the enormous opportunities that the Lord has given us for ministry and mission on the island of Ireland, and to ignore the decline in membership and ministers within the denomination.
- 4.30 Any reconfiguration of ministry will require change, a radical reconfiguration all the more so. The Task Group is aware that this would be challenging for the denomination, particularly for those affected by it more acutely. This cannot be taken lightly. Nevertheless, as in all of life, change must be faced, embraced and managed, while supporting those who experience it most. The loss must be owned and shared by the entire denomination, as we bear one another's burdens.
- 4.31 Depending on the extent of any reconfiguration, there will be changes in the context in which some ordained ministers serve, with consequent changes in roles. There will also need to be consideration of how those who are not ordained to Word and Sacrament can be more involved in ministry and mission.

Principle Six – Any reconfiguration of ministry should prioritise future effectiveness of ministry rather than managing decline.

- 4.32 As stated above, PCI has lost 20%, or 17,000, of its contributing families in the ten years to 2020, and will have a deficit of 62 ministers in 5 years. The 2021 figures show a further decline of 4,000 contributing families compared to 2020, a fall of 6.5% in one year. While there may well be Covid related factors in this figure, at the very least, it reinforces the direction of travel.

The temptation for a denomination in such a situation is to reconfigure ministry to preserve its remaining resources and to manage further, some might add 'inevitable', decline.

- 4.33 To yield to this temptation would be to ignore a number of things.
The Church's calling is not to preserve what it has and slow the decline of what already exists. It is to reach out and evangelise, to be salt and light, to be ambassadors of Christ, to make disciples. All of these and more, point to looking out, reaching out, engaging with those around us that we might share Christ and His good news. This is diametrically opposed to pulling up the drawbridge, and putting the money under the mattress or, more biblically, digging a hole and burying it. The Church cannot afford to fall into this temptation, as the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 5:13, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot". Rather, as the Lord calls us to, we are to use the resources He has entrusted to us for His glory.
- 4.34 Taking this approach would also ignore the truth that decline across the denomination is not universal.
There are congregations that are growing, regardless of how that is measured.
There are congregations that are fruitful and are becoming more fruitful. Some of these are growing, some are stable, some are declining in numbers. However, all of these are fruitful congregations. This fruitfulness must be maintained, supported and developed.
- 4.35 It would also be to ignore the opportunities that the Lord has given us for ministry and mission in Ireland today.
- 4.36 Linking congregations must not simply be seen as a 'resource driven marriage of convenience', where two separate congregations now share a minister so that they can continue to do the same things for longer while they continue to decline. Rather, it should emphasise the ability to do more for the Lord together, to work together, to share resources, to join in initiatives for ministry and mission, and for the stronger to help the weaker.
- 4.37 Collective strength for ministry and mission may also be achieved by developing other groupings of three or more congregations with one or two ordained ministers supported by other forms of ministry. This will allow a pooling of critical mass of members for ministry and mission purposes beyond the Sunday worship service. This model may also allow ministers in a group of congregations to specialise in developing particular aspects of congregational ministry or mission, e.g., discipleship, youth ministry, local outreach.
- 4.38 Closing congregations. There must be an increasing recognition that there are too many PCI congregations and that some are reaching, or have reached, the end of their life-cycle.
PCI will not be physically present in the current form of ministry and mission everywhere we have been in the past – this is neither possible nor desirable. Some of our existing forms of ministry and mission are outdated and no longer appropriate, therefore it cannot be desirable to retain them.

In some existing places, we will be physically present in continuing ways, but in other existing places we will be physically present in new ways.

In some existing places, where congregations cease to exist, our presence will only be through whatever an existing neighbouring congregation can provide.

In light of this, we must actively explore and attempt new ways of being present in both ministry to members and mission to communities.

- 4.39 Overall presence needs to be assessed in an ongoing way, as it is a dynamic of the Spirit and changing ministry and missional opportunities, rather than a pre-determined certainty that can be guaranteed and future-proofed by any congregation, presbytery or the denomination.

As such, reconfiguring ministry and congregational presence will involve a messy mix of forward planning, addressing unanticipated circumstances such as vacancies, learning from things that have not worked and approaching with expectancy things that might work.

- 4.40 A review of finance will also be inescapable in this. The balance of the proportion of available finance that is allocated to sustaining ministry, new ministry and venture projects must be examined, as must who controls its use – General Assembly, presbytery or congregation.

Principle Seven – We should be where the people are, and meet them where they are

- 4.41 The ministry of Paul in Acts illustrates this principle. On his missionary journeys, he physically went to where the people were. Disciples are people. If we are called to make people into disciples, we must physically be where the people are and not simply where ‘our own’ people are.

Paul also met with people where they were, in that he brought the good news of Jesus to them, with application that was specific to them – compare, e.g., Acts 13:15ff in Pisidian Antioch, and Acts 17:22ff in Athens. We must speak the Word of God to the people of this island with specific application, understanding the rapidly changing society, and the increasing differences within it, and applying the Word of God to it by our words and deeds.

- 4.42 This denomination is the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. It is clear from the distribution of Presbyterians across the island that for whatever reasons we have not been effectively spreading or maintaining a reformed witness across the island.

- 4.43 We also acknowledge that not only are we a declining denomination, but we are also an aging one.

PCI is not effectively meeting upcoming generations on this island where they are, nor to any large extent seeing them become disciples of the Lord Jesus. For the sake of the Kingdom, we must seek to reach beyond our existing styles and forms of church culture so as to engage with generations whose styles of worship and learning may be significantly different. Failure to do so will mean we make the gospel and its implications for life and

living inaccessible. In some places, this may mean recognising that an existing work has reached the end of its life-cycle, ceasing it, and doing something new. In other places, this may mean starting a new work in the same area as an existing work, but separate from it.

4.44 All of this will involve new forms of pioneer ministry and mission, which are flexible, and can be sustained, repeated and resourced. Previous work within PCI has considered issues such as

- The eastern seaboard (following the European route E01 from Larne to Rosslare)
- Ireland's six major cities – Belfast, Dublin, Londonderry/Derry, Limerick, Galway, Cork
- Population centres with no other reformed witness
- Places where the Presbyterian Church has had an historic presence
- Forming and strengthening the Presbyterian presence in the fifty most populated towns in Ireland
- Developing sustainable and repeatable models of new church development
- More broadly speaking: urban mission, migrants' mission and rural mission, new people groups within presbytery areas.

These perspectives and priorities will need to be revisited, acknowledging that they may have changed and, in some cases, will be in conflict with one another when decisions have to be made. Any mature reconfiguration will need to involve a balance of the consideration of the factors above.

Church polity and practice

Principle Eight – the Church's 'machinery' should serve its ministry and mission

4.45 A strength of PCI is that it is a long-standing denomination, and has a well-developed ecclesiology and polity.

There are clear and settled supreme and subordinate standards, in the Old and New Testaments, and the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. The Code has been developed and refined over many years, to be in accordance with our understanding of Scripture, and to include long experience and what we pray is wisdom that the Lord has granted.

4.46 While all of this is good and a blessing, one danger for a Church such as PCI is that we can become overly focussed on the procedure involved in our denominational function, and that in doing so, it can become distracting and even an end in itself for some. Where this becomes the case, it impedes the ministry and mission of the Church, and reduces its effectiveness in going and making disciples.

One further danger of such a well-developed and multi-layered system of representative democracy and accountability can be a lack of speed, agility and flexibility. Put simply, it can take ages to get some things done. This is increasingly important where the Church is called to make disciples of

people who are living in a fast-changing society. Urgent action is needed if we are to grasp the opportunities and meet the challenges that we face.

Principle Nine – In order to be effective, reconfiguration must be collaborative, involving all levels of the denomination

- 4.47 Moving to a new configuration of ministry will be pursued as a shared journey between congregations and sessions, presbyteries, and the appropriate councils and commissions of the General Assembly. Each of these must be suitably equipped to play their own particular roles in achieving reconfiguration, while also working together and supporting the others in playing their roles. It must be realised that reconfiguration is a shared enterprise across the whole Church, at every level.
- 4.48 From the top down, the Assembly, its councils and commissions will take decisions that affect presbyteries, sessions and congregations; and presbyteries will take decisions that affect sessions and congregations.
- 4.49 This will allow for consistency across the Church, and the provision of a ‘constituted body’ which is trusted with final authority to make decisions about individual cases where there is not overall consensus about the future.
- 4.50 From the bottom up, congregations and sessions will be given space, support and resources to put into action new Bible-based, Spirit-led thinking and initiatives, with suitable oversight and accountability. The role of the higher courts in this is to accompany, encourage, facilitate and ensure that various resources are available, including advice, training, finance, some of which may be local, and some central.

Section 5: The Practicalities

- 5.1 This section contains the bulk of the information that it is intended presbyteries will discuss between the 2023 and 2024 General Assemblies. Options are presented for discussion and, in some cases, the Task Group’s preferred direction of travel, or preferred option is stated. In doing so, the Task Group is in no way seeking to constrain the Assembly. Timescales are also drafted in Table 1 at the end of this section

Reconfiguration of ministry should be primarily presbytery shaped and implemented, congregationally focussed and denominationally enabled and facilitated.

5.2 Presbytery shaped and implemented

- 5.2.1 Every presbytery should be required to draw up a plan for future presence for ministry and mission in their area, the timing of which is set-out in Table 1 below.

There appear to be few alternative options to this, apart from something that is shaped and implemented at General Assembly level, and the Task Group does not believe this would be desirable, viable or effective.

The issue of Presbytery Realignment

5.2.2

The Task Group believes that as part of this Green Paper process, the issue of presbytery realignment should be discussed by the denomination, with consideration given to reducing the number of presbyteries to, for example, fifteen, thirteen, eleven, nine or seven.

Factors in favour of realignment and reduction in the number of presbyteries include:

- Realignment of presbyteries before reconfiguration will facilitate longer term thinking and action, and the necessary capacity and collective expertise to deliver it. This is a direct application of Principle 8, that the Church's machinery should serve its ministry and mission.
- New, larger presbyteries may be more able to make strategic, objective and radical decisions about reconfiguration of ministry and mission than smaller ones which, due to more local factors, may be inclined to favour pragmatic options which will be less effective for long-term ministry and mission.
- The number of current and projected vacancies means that there are relatively few serving ministers in some presbyteries. Even now, this is affecting the ability of these presbyteries to provide effective ministry and mission in their areas. This will become more acute over the next number of years and will be a significant negative factor in any attempt to plan for, and implement, future ministry and mission.
- Presbytery based reconfiguration of ministry will have to be unfolded as a process rather than a one-off action. It will be worked out over a considerable number of years. During that period, it will not be feasible to realign presbyteries, meaning that, if this is not addressed now, the current situation will remain static for an unhelpfully long period of time.

Factors in favour of retaining the current 19 presbyteries include:

- To undertake such a realignment prior to a reconfiguration of ministry and mission may be distracting from the main task, which is urgent and vital
- It may be challenging for newly formed presbyteries to carry out reconfiguration of ministry and mission while they are in the early days of their formation

- Some in the denomination identify strongly and have a deep affinity with their current presbytery, some of which have been in place for many years
- Larger presbyteries will require more capacity for the duties of the Clerk. It may be necessary to appoint Deputy Clerks and Treasurers/Finance Conveners. Some presbyteries have already done this.

5.2.3 In setting out the options in this Report, the Task Group is mindful that presbytery boundaries are drawn by the Church in order to make its ministry and mission more effective.

5.2.4 The Task Group encourages the Church to view presbytery realignment positively, believing that it will facilitate more effective, long-term ministry and mission in PCI.

Appendix 4 shows the number of charges in each presbytery and the current number and proportion of vacancies.

5.3 Congregationally Focussed

5.3.1 The main purposes of reconfiguration are contained in the principles in this report, not least

- To seek to live out the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus, and bring honour to Him on this island, and to do so prayerfully, humbly, repentantly and in the assurance of His finished work
- to grasp opportunities for ministry and mission
- to foster fruitfulness in congregations
- to be future-focussed, seeking to set the trajectory that will determine the denomination's presence on this island for years to come
- to reach the next generation for the Lord Jesus and address the issues of aging and decline in the denomination.

The Task Group believes that these can best be achieved through being congregationally focused.

5.3.2

Congregationally focussed Presbytery Plans for future presence of ministry and mission in their area may involve any or all of the following:

- Supporting growing congregations
- Supporting declining congregations to grow again or revitalise
- Supporting congregations that have reached, or are reaching, the end of their life-cycle to end well
- Creating clusters of congregations for the implementation of fresh mission
- Creating deferred linkages
- Linking congregations with a ministry and missional purpose that goes far beyond two congregations perceiving their link as nothing more than sharing the same minister
- Merging congregations
- Closing congregations and:
 - Starting a new work in that area
 - Allowing another congregation use of the property in order to extend its work
 - Disposing of the property, with the proceeds and other assets being used for other ministry and mission opportunities
- Beginning a new work in an area without closing an existing congregation
- Ministers being called under the Home Mission to areas of presbytery-designated work
- Presbyteries employing additional pastoral personnel for work in their areas

5.3.3 In seeking to reconfigure ministry and mission, presbyteries must be mindful of the importance of fruitfulness, as expressed in Principle Two above.

5.3.4

Every Presbytery Plan will be required to include and prioritise at least one area of new or pioneer work within each presbytery.

Identification of these may originate in congregations or in presbyteries.

This is an important matter for prayer, and presbyteries must seek to be open to how the Lord is prompting and where He is at work. Support for this will be given by the denomination.

- 5.3.5 At the boundaries of presbytery areas, neighbouring presbyteries should readily cooperate to achieve congregationally focussed reconfiguration. Every Presbytery plan will involve considering this.
- 5.3.6 Presbytery Plans will be dynamic, meaning that they will be kept under review in order to be responsive to current situations in presbytery areas. This will mean that there is ongoing interaction between presbyteries and the denomination enabling and facilitating processes (see 5.4).

The Issue of Specified Numbers of Ordained Ministers in each Presbytery

- 5.3.7 The Task Group is mindful that the remit given to it by the Assembly includes the word ‘radical’. If an actual reconfiguration is to be both presbytery shaped and implemented, and radical, it will depend on presbyteries producing and implementing Reconfiguration Plans which are radical. This could be promoted and encouraged by assigning a specified number of ordained ministers to each presbytery, and allowing presbyteries to determine the priorities and distribution of these within their own areas.
The Task Group believes that a denominational conversation should take place about this, which would feed into its report to the 2024 Assembly.

There appear to be two options in this:

Option A: for a specified number of ordained ministers to be allocated to each presbytery. Presbyteries would then assign these based on their own priorities.

Option B: a ‘softer’ version of this would be to allocate an indicative number to each presbytery, with the final number agreed after discussion.

Factors in favour of moving to a specified number of charges include:

- Allowing the denomination to take an overall view of ministry and mission across the whole island of Ireland
- Providing a more planned distribution of the provision of resources rather than allowing what some have described as ‘market forces’ to be determinative
- Increasing the impetus within presbyteries to establish and implement ministry and mission priorities in their own areas rather than acting in a piecemeal way

- Encouraging greater involvement in ministry and mission of teaching elders and leaders, and providing a stimulus for equipping and training.

Factors in favour of retaining current practice:

- This is a major change in mindset and practice and will produce many questions in presbyteries and ministers in particular
- Navigating the practicalities of moving to a new system would be challenging.

There are other issues that would be part of such a discussion, such as:

- The role of CMI through the Home and Urban Mission
- An exploration of whether a presbytery should be able to call a minister to work within its bounds
- The need to positively support our ministers in any period of transition.

The Task Group believes that one of the dangers of the denomination conducting a reconfiguration of ministry is that it will not be radical enough to grasp current and future opportunities for ministry and mission. Having specified numbers of ordained ministers in each presbytery, if handled thoughtfully and sensitively, has the potential to move the denomination in that direction. Therefore, the Task Group includes it in the Green Paper for discussion prior to its report to the 2024 Assembly, with the recommendation that it be implemented.

5.4 Denominationally enabled and facilitated

The denomination will seek to enable and facilitate presbyteries in drawing up, working out and reviewing these plans.

5.4.1

A group will be established to meet with presbyteries and their reconfiguration task groups to provide training, support, and advice, and to accompany presbyteries in the drawing up, development and ongoing review of their plans to ensure that they meet the requirements of denominational reconfiguration.

This group will also have a role to interact with presbyteries in the allocation of finance for new work – see 5.4.3 below.

The Task Group recommends that this should be a Committee of the General Council, as its remit covers areas of responsibility of Linkage Commission, the Council for Mission in Ireland and the Council for Congregational Life and Witness. All three of these should be represented on the Committee.

It is envisaged that each presbytery will meet with the Committee annually in the ongoing process of reconfiguration.

5.4.2

Documents will be produced including the following:

- A handbook with guidance and good practice on carrying out a reconfiguration
- Accounts of positive reconfiguration
- A toolbox containing options available to presbyteries.

5.4.3

Financial support will be made available to facilitate new work. The Task Group believes that this is an important direction of travel.

This may be facilitated through a new fund being established, or the reallocation or redefinition of existing funds.

If this additional finance comes on stream at the end of the current Assembly Buildings assessment, and is of a similar amount, the overall burden on the Church will be unchanged, but it will allow the focus of our giving to be significantly realigned.

The body created in 5.4.1 would interact with presbyteries and would have responsibility for allocation of this finance.

More work will be needed on how this can be achieved, if agreed by the Church. However, the Task Group is asking in the Green Paper for the Church to discuss the matter in principle.

Further detail on Finance is included in Appendix 3.

5.4.4

New forms of ministry and flexible pathways will be developed to facilitate new work in particular.

This will build on the work contained in CTM's Flexible Pathway Report and CMI's Church Planting Report to the 2023 Assembly.

5.4.5 The equipping for ministry and mission of elders, leaders, additional pastoral personnel and congregational members is also part of this. The existing movement towards flexible, broad-based, modular training offers great potential for this, making use of a variety of delivery methods and extending geographical reach and flexibility.

Table 1 contains a summary of suggested actions and the timescale for them

Date	Action
Sept 2023	Green Paper report and accompanying document sent to presbyteries. Consultation process takes place
June 2024	Final Task Group report to General Assembly with resolutions for decision, including: Establishment of a 'body' to oversee the writing and implementation of the Presbytery Reconfiguration Plan process Design and delivery process of denominational communication Decision by Assembly re presbytery boundaries Decision by Assembly re specified numbers of ordained ministers in each presbytery Decision by Assembly re finance for investment in reconfiguration and new mission work Draft Reconfiguration Handbook; Toolbox appended to report
September 2024 - June 2025	Presbyteries realigned, if decision taken at 2024 Assembly. New boundaries agreed at 2025 Assembly Facilitators and presbyteries trained for presbytery reconfiguration planning process Clear communication of what is happening and why across the denomination Further development of training for elders, leaders etc.
September 2025 – June 2026	Presbytery Reconfiguration Plans written and agreed
September 2026 onwards	Presbytery Reconfiguration Plans enacted Reconfiguration finance available from January 2027
Sept 2027	Mechanism for annual review of Presbytery Mission Plans ready for implementation
By June 2028	First annual review of Presbytery Mission Plans

NOTE OUTLINING PROCEDURES AND TIME-LINE TO BE FOLLOWED FOR CONSULTATION

As the RMTG report is the first to follow the Green Paper process, this note is written to outline the procedure and timeline for it.

Date	Action
June 2023	Green Paper Report submitted to the General Assembly, and sent down for consultation process
September/October 2023 Presbytery	Presbyteries set up small groups to consider and respond to report. Initial consideration given
October/November 2023	Regional meetings for discussion and reflection, facilitated by Task Group members
By 31 December 2023	Presbytery groups finalise report to presbytery, and responses are submitted to Task Group
January – March 2024	Task Group writes final report
June 2024	Final report with resolutions brought to Assembly

Presbyteries will note that the Green Paper sets out background, outlines options and gives the direction of travel the Task Group considers necessary in some areas if the denomination is to grapple with the hard realities it now faces.

It is expected that debate will centre on some of the practicalities of a radical reconfiguration of ministry, so it is important that presbyteries address these in responses to the Task Group, to allow the report to be refined and resolutions drawn up.

Presbyteries are asked to give particular attention to material contained within the grey boxes in the report, especially in Section 5 which contains information on the following issues:

- Presbytery reconfiguration plans (5.2.1)
- Presbytery realignment (5.2.2)
- Potential changes in congregational distribution (5.3.2)
- Pioneering or new work (5.3.4)
- Specified numbers of ordained ministers in each presbytery (5.3.7)
- The establishment of a group under the General Council (5.4.1)
- Finance (5.4.3 and Appendix 3)

At the regional meetings, members of the Task Group will give a presentation on the Green Paper, provide clarification, and facilitate discussion. It is hoped this will assist presbytery groups in drafting a response to presbytery, and the Task Group in finalising its report.

It is important to stress that the denomination no longer has the luxury of ignoring the need for a radical reconfiguration of ministry. Therefore, continuing to approach the situation as we are at present is not an option. Rather, a more strategic and structured way of doing so will need to be approved by the General Assembly and implemented consistently across the Church in future. This will involve all presbyteries sharing both the painful realities of having become a smaller church, but also the gain of being able to approach ministry in fresh ways for the future. The Task Group has produced the Green Paper having attempted to consider all the issues at play in a balanced and coordinated way. As yet, not every practicality has been fully addressed, however the process requires that what is suggested is not simply rejected, but that if desired, presbyteries advance viable alternatives or amendments in its place.

APPENDIX 1

Report of the Task Group to the General Assembly of 2022 GA Reports 2022 p80

The Group noted some matters including:

- (a) statistics, in and of themselves, give only a limited picture of congregations and presbyteries, as they cannot give insight into fruitfulness, vision, faithfulness, revitalisation etc, however, they are not completely without value
- (b) the denomination is in numerical decline. Contributing families have declined by 20% across the denomination over the past ten-year period
- (c) the decline is greatest in Belfast, Down and Antrim; and least in the Republic of Ireland and west of the Bann

Area	%
Armagh	10%
North Belfast	41%
South Belfast	40%
Carrickfergus	30%
Derry and Donegal	6%
Dublin and Munster	0%
East Belfast	25%
Monaghan	5%
Omagh	11%
Tyrone	12%

- (d) there have been significant reductions in contributing families in large towns, in most cases exceeding the presbytery average

Area	Number Of Contributing Families	Decline %
Antrim	249	-6%
Armagh	123	-25%
Ballymena	482	-17%
Bangor	567	-20%
Carrickfergus	441	-35%
Coleraine	297	-25%
Larne	489	-36%
Lisburn	594	-29%
Newtownards	477	-27%
Portadown	73	-1%

- (e) the denomination is predominantly made up of small congregations:
- 43% of congregations have less than 75 people attending one communion
 - 34% of congregations have 75-149 people attending one communion
 - 21 % have 150–299 people
 - 2% have over 300 people
- (f) there has been very little reconfiguration of ministry over the past 10 years. During this period, the total number of congregations has declined by seven [-1.3%], with one church planted and one more in process, and eight lost due to amalgamations and closures.
- (g) the number of ordained ministers is declining. By 2026, there will be approximately 62 more vacancies than ministers to fill them, assuming there is no change in the number of charges. In denominational terms, one-sixth of charges will be vacant.



Figure 1: Distribution of Presbyterian Church in Ireland congregations

APPENDIX 2

Report on the Demographic Change in Northern Ireland 1971–2021, following the NI Census of 2021 – Edgar Jardine

Introduction

1. The Peace and Reconciliation Panel of the Council for Public Affairs asked for some analysis which would provide an insight into the recently published Northern Ireland 2021 Census statistics. This work links into the PCI Task Group which has been established with a remit to examine “the key principles and practicalities that will underpin a radical reconfiguration of ministry in the light of changing demographics and ministry and mission opportunities.” The Deputy Clerk has identified the following information which would be useful to the Task Group:
 - (a) The % change and numbers change in religion at each census 1971-2021 for all of NI.
 - (b) Population age change in each census 2001-2021 by number and percentage, for all NI.
 - (c) Population change per district between 2011 and 2021.
 - (d) The percentage of the population per district whose national identity is European [a combined figure for all European countries] excluding UK and Irish in 2021.

This paper attempts to address these questions, drawing mainly on 2021 and previous decennial data, but also incorporates data from other sources which provides a broader context in which to understand the changes observed.

The long view

2. As the graph below shows, the population of Northern Ireland was in excess of 1.4 million in 1850 after which it experienced 50 years of constant decline before remaining relatively stable for a further 50 years at around 1.25 million. The second half of the 20th century saw a rapid increase in population which has continued in the first two decades of the 21st century with a current population of just under 2 million.

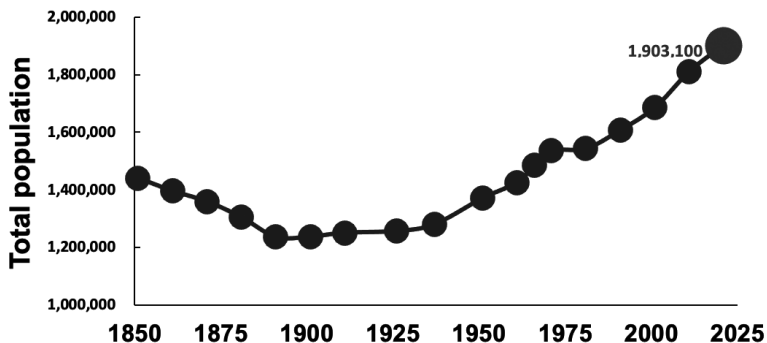


Figure 2: Total Population from 1850 projected to 2025

3. The first observation from Table 1 is that the population of Northern Ireland increased in each Census from 1971 to 2021 (1981 is an exception due to a campaign of non-cooperation¹), reaching just short of 2 million in 2021. The data demonstrates major changes in the number of the enumerated population who claim affiliation to a particular denomination with significant increases in Roman Catholics, those affiliating to the smaller Christian and non-Christian denominations and in those who do not have or do not state a religion. While the percentage of the latter group has more than doubled between 1971 and 2021 (Table 2), the “Other Religions” category now accounts for over 8% of the enumerated population compared to less than 6% in 1971 and the Roman Catholic proportion of the population now stands at 42% compared to 31% 50 years ago.

¹ The 1981 Census was subject to a campaign of non-cooperation in some areas, which included the murder of a Census enumerator in Gobnascale, which affected the accuracy of the Census count in that year.

Table 1: Population of Northern Ireland and religious affiliation 1971–2021

Year of enumeration	All denominations	Roman Catholic	Presbyterian	Church of Ireland	Methodist	Other religions	None/ Not stated
1971	1,519,640	477,921	405,717	334,318	71,234	87,938	142,511
1981 ¹	1,481,959	414,532	339,818	281,472	58,731	112,822	274,584
1991	1,577,836	605,639	336,891	279,280	59,517	122,448	174,061
2001	1,685,267	678,462	348,742	257,788	59,173	107,249	233,853
2011	1,810,693	738,033	345,101	248,821	54,253	119,239	305,146
2021	1,903,178	805,151	316,103	219,788	44,728	155,896	361,512

Table 2: Percentage of Northern Ireland by religious affiliation 1971–2021

Year of enumeration	All denominations	Roman Catholic	Presbyterian	Church of Ireland	Methodist	Other religions	None/ Not stated
1971	1,519,640	31.5%	26.7%	22.0%	4.7%	5.8%	9.4%
1981 ¹	1,481,959	28%	23%	19%	4%	7.6%	18.5%
1991	1,577,836	38.4%	21.4%	17.7%	3.8%	7.8%	11%
2001	1,685,267	40.3%	20.7%	15.3%	3.5%	6.4%	13.9%
2011	1,810,963	40.8%	19%	13.7%	3%	6.7%	16.9%
2021	1,903,178	42.3%	16.6%	11.6%	2.4%	8.2%	19%

4. Within the main Protestant denominations, those claiming a Presbyterian affiliation account for 16.6% of the population in 2021 compared to 26.7% in 1971 which represents a reduction of just short of 90,000 people. Put another way, the enumerated Presbyterian population is one third smaller now than 50 years ago. The Church of Ireland has suffered a similar proportionate decline in numbers across the 50-year span and now accounts for 11.5% of the population, compared to 22% in 1971, while the numbers in the smaller Methodist denomination have declined from just over 71,000 in 1971 to 44,700 in 2021, representing a reduction of 37% over the period. Methodists made up 2.35% of the enumerated population in 2021, just half of the 1971 position (4.69%).
5. The number of people declaring affiliation to PCI in successive Censuses is considerably greater than the numbers recorded in PCI statistics and the gap is widening; in 1990 the number recorded in PCI statistics was around 95% of the population claiming PCI affiliation in the 1991 Census. Since then, the percentage has declined so that by 2020 the corresponding figure was around 63%.
6. In contrast to the decline in the main Protestant denominations, there has been a steep rise in those who affiliate to “Other denominations” (88,000 in 1971 and 156,000 in 2021) or whose religion is “None” or “Not stated” (142,000 in 1971 and 361,000 in 2021). “Other denominations” include a wide range of Christian (6.9%) and non-Christian religions (1.3%). To summarise, the responses to the Religion question in 2021 is as follows:
Just under one person in five (19.0%) either had ‘no religion’ (17.4%) or ‘religion not stated’ (1.6%).

The equivalent percentages for the main religions were:

- Catholic (42.3%)
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland (16.6%)
- Church of Ireland (11.5%)
- Methodist (2.4%)
- Other Christian denominations (6.9%)
- Other non-Christian Religions (1.3%).

Table 3: Changes in membership of selected denominations 1971–2021

Denomination/ Year	Baptist	Brethren	Non-Subscribing Presbyterian	Reformed Presbyterian	Free Presbyterian
1971	16,653	16,480	3,975	3,904	7,337
1981	14,318	12,158	3,373	3,202	9,621
1991	19,484	12,446	3,213	3,184	12,363
2001	18,974	8,595	1,233	2,238	11,902
2011	18,513	6,776	646	1,660	10,068
2021	16,051	4,864	1,096	1,735	8,433

Table 4: Religion of upbringing 2001–2021

Religion/Religion of upbringing	2001 Number	2001 %	2011 Number	2011 %	2021 Number	2021 %	2021 Current Religion	2021 %
Catholic	737,440	43.8	817,400	45.1	869,800	45.7	805,200	42.3
Protestant and other Christian related	895,400	53.1	875,700	48.4	827,500	43.5	711,000	37.4
Other religions	6,600	0.4	16,600	0.9	28,500	1.5	25,500	1.3
None	45,900	2.7	101,200	5.6	177,400	9.3		
All usual residents	1,685,300	100	1,810,900	100	1,903,200	100		

How did other smaller Protestant denominations fare?

7. While there are multiple “denominations” recorded by respondents to the Census, the next Table examines the position on other “Presbyterian” denominations, together with two of the larger minority groups, Baptists and Brethren. Table 3 shows that, while the Baptists and Brethren were in a broadly similar place in 1971 with around 16,500 members, by 2021 the Brethren denomination had declined to just under 5,000. In contrast, Baptists are in a similar position in 2021 to that recorded in 1971, albeit with a noticeable decline since 2011 after rising to 19,500 by 1991. Both the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian (NSP) and Reformed Presbyterian (RP) membership were just below 4,000 in 1971. By 2021 the NSP membership had declined by more than two thirds to just under 1,100 while RP membership was 44% of its 1971 level. In contrast, Free Presbyterian membership continued to increase between 1971 and 1991 and while membership has declined by a third (almost 4,000) since then, by 2021 membership was around 1,000 higher than in 1971.

Religion of upbringing

8. Census forms have included a question on “Religion of upbringing”. Data derived from this question is used by, among others, employers when monitoring fair employment practices among their employees. The results demonstrate the gap between those who were brought up within a particular denomination and those who continue to claim affiliation.

The analysis in Table 4 for the three main groups (Catholic, Protestant and other Christian, including Christian related) and Other religions, shows the gap between those who were brought up in a particular religion and those who claim current affiliation. The key finding from this analysis is that while those whose religion of upbringing was Roman Catholic was just 3.4% greater than those claiming current affiliation, the gap for Protestant and Other Christian religions was 6.1%, demonstrating a greater “falling off” among those whose upbringing was Protestant.

What do we know about the “Nones” and “Not stated” groups?

9. Dr Gladys Ganiel, in a recent paper to a workshop sponsored by Evangelical Alliance NI, looked in some detail at Census respondents who did not state a religion or claimed no religion. She noted that “historically Catholic countries tend to maintain higher levels of religious identification than historically Protestant ones”. While more analyses will be published in due course, the 2021 Census demonstrates that the Local Government Districts (LGDs) in which people of Protestant backgrounds are a majority have higher levels of “no religion” than those which are predominantly Catholic. Table 5 demonstrates this quite clearly. Thus, the three LGDs with the highest percentage of “No religion” respondents are Ards and North Down, Lisburn and Castlereagh and Antrim and Newtownabbey. This, and other data, suggests that the majority of those reporting “No religion” come from a Protestant background. For example, while the Department of Education statistics show that 94% of pupils in Catholic Maintained

schools identify as Catholic (and 1% as Protestant), in Controlled schools just 64% identify as Protestant (and 8% as Catholic). More than 1 in 4 pupils in Controlled schools score as “No religion” compared to 1 in 20 in Catholic Maintained schools. The lower incidence of people from a Catholic background declaring that they have “No religion” may be a result of the significance attached to the baptism of children whose parents may not be practising, the strong links between the church and school and the significant influence of the GAA in the Catholic community.

Table 5: 2021 Northern Ireland Census: Religious Identification by Area

REGION	‘NO RELIGION’ %
Northern Ireland	17%
Antrim and Newtownabbey	23%
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	15%
Belfast	22%
Causeway Coast and Glens	15%
Derry City and Strabane	8%
Fermanagh and Omagh	8%
Lisburn and Castlereagh	24%
Mid and East Antrim	22%
Mid Ulster	8%
Newry, Mourne and Down	11%
Ards and North Down	31%

- Dr Ganiel refers to data from recent NI Life and Times surveys to illustrate how the “No religion” group vary over time and between different age groups. The general trend is for younger people to be more likely to say they have “No religion” and for the aggregate percentage across all ages to increase over time. Ganiel goes on to refer to American research which reaffirmed “the importance of family socialisation as a major factor in whether or not young people remain in the faith or disaffiliate”.

Table 6: No Religion by Age, NI Life and Times 2019–20212

YEAR/AGE	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All
2019	24%	37%	25%	24%	12%	9%	20%
2020	36%	41%	32%	25%	20%	21%	28%

Dependency ratio

11. A major demographic influence for the future is the changing structure of the NI population. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate how the population has “aged” since 1926 and Table 7 demonstrates how this will change in the future. While the 1926 data demonstrates a pyramidal distribution with large numbers of people in the younger and working age groups and relatively fewer in each age band in older age groups, the 2021 data tell a different story. The demographic profile in 2021 reflects the fact that families are smaller and life expectancy is increasing with the result that there are increasingly fewer people of working age to support the growing elderly population. This has implications for pension provision, demands of the health service and social care. Population projections from 2018 up until 2056 in Table 7 show that while the under 16 age group will decline by in excess of 40,000, the working age population remains relatively constant while the number of pensionable age will increase by 150,000. Within the older age groups, which have the highest health and social care needs, those aged 75-89 years are projected to double while people aged 90 and over will quadruple from 13,000 in 2018 to 52,000 by 2056.

2 Data collection for NI Life and Times went to mainly online collection on 2020 and 2021 which may have influenced the results.

Figure 2: Demographic structure of the NI population in 1926

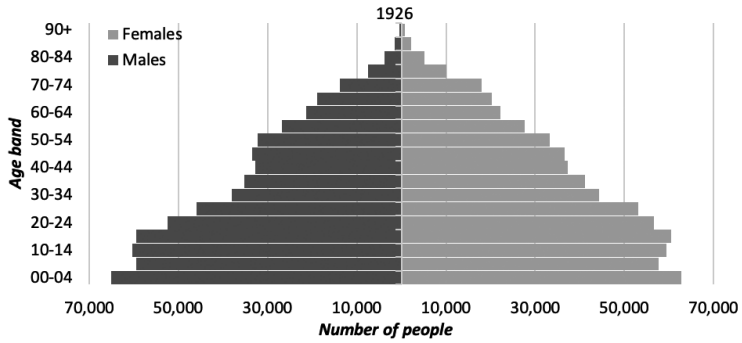


Figure 3: Demographic structure of the population 2021

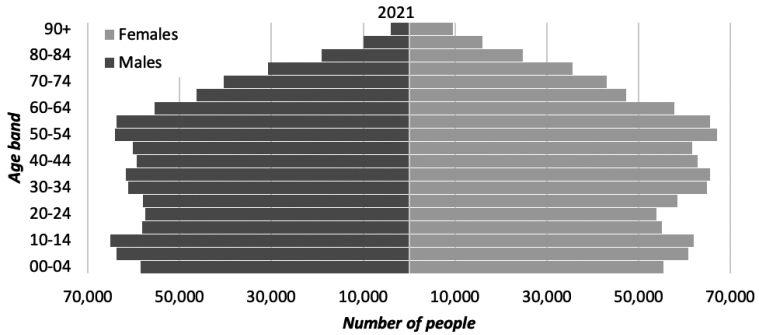


Table 7: Projected population (000's) by sex and age, Northern Ireland 2018 to 2056

SELECTED AGE GROUPS	2018	2021	2026	2031	2036	2041	2046	2051	2056
Children (under 16)	394	397	376	357	349	351	357	358	351
Working age	1,177	1,206	1,238	1,229	1,212	1,200	1,209	1,191	1,174
16-29	330	321	327	339	336	319	304	297	300
30-44	365	372	371	352	341	348	359	356	339
45-64	485	492	493	488	487	490	476	464	464
Pensionable age	311	307	338	381	417	438	430	446	461
65-74	170	176	205	229	234	220	218	230	233
75-89	125	138	163	181	205	232	248	245	247
90+	13	14	17	21	26	29	35	44	52

Changing household size

12. Not unrelated to the demographic profile in the changing household size over time. This is illustrated in Table 8 which documents the continuing increase in the number of households and the corresponding decrease in average household size over the past 50 years. As the size and structure of the population has changed, so has the demand for additional homes. [Single occupancy?]

Table 8: Number of households and average household size 1971–2021

Census Year	Number of households	Annualised % growth	Average household size
1971	427,400	1.38	3.55
1981	462,300	0.79	3.20
1991	530,400	1.38	2.97
2001	626,700	1.68	2.69
2011	703,300	1.16	2.54
2021	768,900	0.90	2.44

Country of birth

13. Fewer than 1% of births were outside of NI in 1971. This rate remained relatively stable until 2001 when the proportion of births outside NI almost doubled with further steep rises in 2011 and 2021 where births outside NI reached just short of 7%.

Table 9: Place of birth 1971-2021

Year/ Country of birth	All usual residents	Within UK/ROI	Outside UK/ROI	Outside UK/ROI %
1971	1,536,065	1,503,625	15,048	0.98
1981	1,490,493	1,448,346	16,315	1.09
1991	1,588,794	1,552,623	17,299	1.09
2001	1,685,267	1,654,708	30,559	1.81
2011	1,810,863	1,729,410	81,453	4.50
2021	1,903,176	1,778,890	124,286	6.53

14. Table 10 explores the data further by analysing in more detail the Country of Birth for the enumerated population in the 2021 Census. This shows that 93.4% identified NI, GB or ROI as their country of birth with 6.5% citing countries outside the UK/ROI. Of these, 3.5% were born in other European (EU) countries while just 0.2% were born in other European (non-EU) countries and 2.8% were born elsewhere in the world.

Table 10: Country of birth for the enumerated population in the 2021 Census

Country of birth	Number	%
All usual residents	1,903,200	100
Northern Ireland	1,646,300	86.5
Great Britain	92,300	4.8
Republic of Ireland	40,400	2.1
Outside UK/ROI	124,300	6.5
Europe (other EU countries)	67,500	3.5
Europe (other non-European countries)	3,700	0.2
Other countries in the world	53,100	2.8

15. In 2021, the largest numbers of people living in Northern Ireland who were born outside the United Kingdom and Ireland were born in Poland (22,300), Lithuania (10,500), India (6,900), Romania (6,600) and the United States (5,000). Over the last decade (2011–21) there have been large percentage increases in people living in Northern Ireland who were born in Syria, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Nigeria, Spain, and East Timor – all of which have at least doubled in number from 2011.³

Tables 11 and 12 analyse the number and percentage of births outside the UK/ROI from the most recent Census and compares the position with data from the 2011 Census on the basis of common Local Government District (LGD) boundaries. (The new local government structures were introduced in 2016.) The particular focus of these Tables are people who were born in Europe, split between EU and non-EU countries.

3 Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland – Statistical bulletin – Country of birth ([nisra.gov.uk](https://www.nisra.gov.uk))

Table 11: Country of birth at LGD level (2021)- NI, ROI, Europe Other EU, Europe Other Non-EU and All European countries

Geography	All usual residents	Europe: United Kingdom: Northern Ireland	ROI	Europe: Other EU countries	Europe: Other non-EU countries	All European (exc UK/ ROI) Population %	%
Northern Ireland	1,903,173	1,646,276	40,357	67,451	3,689	71,140	3.8
Antrim and Newtownabbey	145,662	128,626	1,417	4,183	225	4,408	3.0
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	218,656	186,924	4,142	13,490	555	14,045	6.6
Belfast	345,416	289,630	6,421	12,991	971	13,962	4.0
Causeway Coast and Glens	141,747	127,171	1,931	2,733	149	2,882	2.0
Derry City and Strabane	150,755	133,068	6,402	1,790	168	1,958	1.3
Fermanagh and Omagh	116,812	99,086	5,676	4,065	163	4,228	3.6
Lisburn and Castlereagh	149,109	129,673	2,295	3,741	285	4,026	3.7
Mid and East Antrim	138,994	122,795	1,058	5,530	199	5,729	4.1
Mid Ulster	150,289	129,409	2,524	9,353	246	6,599	4.4
Newry, Mourne and Down	182,074	157,780	6,451	6,353	411	6,764	3.7
Ards and North Down	163,659	142,114	2,040	3,222	317	3,539	2.2

16. The number of births from European countries outside the UK and ROI varied significantly across LGDs in NI in 2021 (Table 11). While 3.8% of the NI enumerated population in 2021 were born in European countries outside of the UK/ROI, this varies from 6.6% in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon (ABC) to 1.3% in Derry City and Strabane. Therefore, ABC, with two thirds of the population of Belfast has a similar number of residents born in European countries outside the UK/ROI. Four LGDs: Belfast, Derry City and Strabane, Fermanagh and Omagh and Newry, Mourne and Down – account for 62% of those who were born in the ROI.
17. The change in the composition of the enumerated population between 2011 and 2021 is illustrated in a comparison of Tables 11 and 12. The number of people born in EU and non-European countries increased from almost 43,000 to over 71,000 in 2021, an increase from 2.4% to 3.8% of the enumerated population. With the exception of Derry City and Strabane, all other LGDs experienced significant increases in the percentage of people who were born in European countries outside of the UK/ROI. These tables illustrate the increasing diversity of the NI population.

Table 12: Country of birth at LGD level (2011)- NI, ROI, Europe Other EU, Europe Other Non-EU and All European countries

Geography	All usual residents	Europe: United Kingdom: Northern Ireland	ROI	Europe: Other EU countries	Europe: Other non-EU countries	All European (exc UK/ROI)	%
Northern Ireland	1,810,863	1,608,853	37,833	45,290	1,917	42,707	2.4
Antrim and Newtownabbey	138,567	124,343	1,479	2,828	156	2,984	2.2
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	199,693	177,634	3,507	7,690	240	7,930	4.0
Belfast	333,871	294,751	6,130	8,609	527	9,1367	2.7
Causeway Coast and Glens	140,877	127,560	2,056	2,256	113	2,369	1.7
Derry City and Strabane	147,720	131,025	6,626	1,677	69	1,746	1.2
Fermanagh and Omagh	113,161	98,051	5,311	3,116	62	3,178	2.8
Lisburn and Castlereagh	134,841	119,628	1,944	2,407	179	2,586	1.9
Mid and East Antrim	135,338	122,993	1,109	2,963	111	3,074	2.3
Mid Ulster	138,590	123,212	2,250	6,786	107	6,893	5.0
Newry, Mourne and Down	171,533	151,058	5,469	4,794	167	4,961	2.9
Ards and North Down	156,672	138,508	1,1971	2,164	186	2,350	1.5

Conclusions

18. The population of Northern Ireland continues to grow and is expected to be in excess of 2 million by the next Census in 2031.
19. The religious affiliation of the population is changing with those describing themselves as Roman Catholic exceeding those describing themselves as Protestant for the first time in 2021. However, there is a rapidly growing part of the population who do not identify with either of the two main religious blocks. This is particularly the case in the LGDs with the highest Protestant populations, i.e., Ards and North Down and Lisburn and Castlereagh.
20. The number declaring a religious affiliation is considerably greater than total numbers affiliating to one of the denominations, attracting the descriptor of ‘cultural’ Protestants/Catholics.
21. A key characteristic of the population going forward is the rapidly increasing number of older people while the number of children/young adults is predicted to decline. Furthermore, the aging population will be supported by a relatively static workforce, increasing the dependency ratio across the population as a whole.
22. Households are becoming smaller. In 1991 the average household size was 3.55 persons. In 2021 this had reduced to 2.44 persons per household, reflecting the increase in the number of single person households.
23. The population has become more diverse. The 1971 Census found that just one person in 100 was born outside the UK/ROI; this had increased to 6.5 per 100 by the date of the 2021 Census.
24. The distribution of the enumerated population born outside the UK/ROI differs across LGDs. In 2021, 6.6% of the population in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon LGD was born in EU and Non-EU European countries compared to just 1.3% in Derry City and Strabane.

APPENDIX 3

FINANCE

1. While recognising that it is not the only factor in enabling pioneer work, church planting and new projects, the Task Group is aware that finance plays an important part. Along with other action stated above, if the Church is to fulfil the principles of ministry and mission, it must wisely invest financially in this aspect of the Lord's work.
2. At present, PCI:
 - (a) Assesses money from congregations for the Central Ministry Fund [CMF]. In 2023, it is likely that in the region of £1,100,000 will be collected for this fund, with around £1,500,000 expenditure from it.
 - (b) The object of the Central Ministry Fund is to receive and distribute monies intended for the support of ministers and agents of the Church in accordance with such rules as may be approved from time to time by the Assembly [Code 123(1)]. This includes Augmentation of ministers whose stipends are inadequate from local congregations.
 - (c) Has money for mission projects through CMI Irish Mission grants. Grants are often used to support the employment of non-ordained people in mission work. Recent figures for this are:

YEAR	£
2015	£57,353
2016	£109,423
2017	£140,473
2018	£117,056
2019	£215,850
2020	£168,531
2021	£136,613
2022	£114,221 (anticipated)

- (d) Is assessing money from congregations for the Assembly Buildings refurbishment to repay the 'internal overdraft' on this. Over the past five years, just over £2,500,000 has been raised, with £500,000 proposed for 2023. At this rate, the overdraft should be repaid by the end of 2026.

- (e) Raises money through the United Appeal for mission. In 2023, the appeal seeks to raise £3,500,000, with the following grants approved.

	£
Mission in Ireland	1,065,000
Global Mission	900,000
Congregational Life and Witness	640,000
Training in Ministry	375,000
Social Witness	245,000
General – Creative Production	200,000
TOTAL	3,425,000

3. The Task Group believes that, as a direction of travel, an additional £500,000 per year should be allocated to pioneer work, church planting and ‘new projects’ which are part of Presbytery Reconfiguration Plans.
4. Further work is needed on the following:
 - (a) What is the best way to achieve this - is it through supplementing and redefining existing funds, or creating a new one?
 - (b) Who would administer the Fund, be its ‘gate-keeper’, set its priorities and strategy?
 - (c) How would the current Irish Mission Grant scheme be related to it?
 - (d) Will a reconfiguration of ministry and mission allow for a reduction in the assessment for CMF?
 - (e) What legal advice and changes to the Code would be needed for any developments that are agreed?

APPENDIX 4**VACANCIES BY PRESBYTERY**

Presbytery	Number of Charges	Number of Vacancies	% of Charges which are vacant	% of PCI vacancies
Ards	28	5	18%	7%
Armagh	20	5	25%	7%
Ballymena	28	5	18%	7%
Belfast North	20	2	10%	3%
Belfast South	17	6	35%	9%
Belfast East	23	4	17%	6%
Carrickfergus	17	4	24%	6%
Coleraine and Limavady	27	5	19%	7%
Derry and Donegal	25	5	20%	7%
Down	17	2	12%	3%
Dromore	19	1	5%	1%
Dublin and Munster	22	3	14%	4%
Iveagh	18	3	17%	4%
Monaghan	13	4	31%	6%
Newry	13	1	8%	1%
Omagh	19	4	21%	6%
Route	16	2	13%	3%
Templepatrick	17	4	24%	6%
Tyrone	18	2	11%	3%
TOTAL	377	67		100%

Figures correct as of January 2023

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 6

SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE

Introduction

The Support Services Committee met in October 2022 and April 2023. However, between the formal meetings, there was a considerable amount of business overseen by members of the Committee.

(A) ASSEMBLY BUILDINGS DEPARTMENTS

Human Resources

1. A new Head of HR, Sarah Leung, was appointed. A number of significant staffing challenges and changes due to staffing shortages remain in the department, but some HR staff recruitment is underway and a revised structure for the department has been drawn up. Recruitment generally across PCI has been particularly challenging, mainly in relation to posts under the care of the Council for Social Witness.

Property

2. The Committee reviewed the Retired Minister House Fund (RMHF) in the light of legal advice and agreed that existing loans would be allowed to run their course, but that the Fund would no longer provide loan assistance. It also considered some tidying up of regulations to clarify responsibilities in relation to renting and equity sharing arrangements. Some changes to the Fund were considered so that the Fund will provide up to 50% contribution of the value of the property up to a revised limit of £150,000. A rent increase of 7% on RMHF properties was agreed. A resolution is appended to delegate authority to the General Council to approve the amended rules of the RMHF on behalf of the Assembly.

A large number of conferences have been held this year and there is an encouraging level of forward bookings. Income from conferencing increased in 2022 and income from commercial rents remained stable. Costs, however, have increased due to several factors, including health and safety legislation impacts.

Lighting in Assembly Buildings is a particular issue, and the Committee considered an engineer's report outlining options for moving to LED lighting, which could cost around £220,000. The Committee agreed to

recommend to the General Council that, for both financial and operational reasons, the upgrading be done as a single exercise rather than being phased over a number of years, and proposed that it should be funded by adding the costs to the Church House Repair Assessment. This approach was agreed by the General Council, subject to the support of the Priorities Reference Panel which was subsequently forthcoming. A resolution to this effect is presented for decision by the Assembly.

Creative Production

3. Ongoing support over a wide range of activities to the various PCI Councils continued. It was agreed to increase the annual price of the *Presbyterian Herald* to £18 for 2023 subscriptions. The Communications Task Group is making several recommendations which will impact on CPD.

Information Technology

4. IT continued to deliver many projects in addition to maintaining routine business. Phishing and other attacks are increasing significantly and considerable time is being invested to mitigate threats. On security, there are almost constant attacks, requiring best practice and processes and new firewalls were implemented. The new staffing structure has bedded in well and this has enabled staff to take on additional responsibilities and provide cover for core tasks.

(B) FINANCE

Congregational Assessments

5. The Committee considered in detail the budgets for the respective assessment funds, along with the balances in each of these. A key consideration in looking at these was the impact of any salary and stipend increases which would also need to be met by congregations. In the light of the pressures arising from stipend and salary increases, the Committee recommends that the aggregate level of assessments for 2023 be kept the same rate as 2022. This means that some funds will be running a deficit and therefore using up brought forward balances, which is not sustainable in the longer term. However, as the level of assessable income was slightly higher than anticipated, it is now projected that the assessment income for 2023 will be £3,499k compared to an original budget of £3,460k but this is dependent on the actual exchange rate used to convert Euro receipts.

A summary of the rates of assessment and the fund allocation is attached at Appendix 1.

The assessment for the Pension Fund is to remain at 24% of a minister's stipend.

Pay and stipend increase for 2023

6. The Committee was very aware of the current inflationary pressures and wanted to recognise these, whilst at the same time, being mindful of affordability at both congregational and central level. Proposals were taken to the October meeting of General Council and it was agreed that an increase of 5% would be awarded along with a one-off payment of £500/€500.

Accounts

7. The Committee reviewed the financial statements for 2022 and recommended to the General Council that they be approved. Overall income was up from £27,296,095 in 2021 to £28,299,624 in 2022. Overall expenditure also increased from £25,537,177 to £29,821,326, although this includes the payment out of donations received toward the Ukraine Crisis Appeal and World Development Appeal, which are also included in the increased income. The main underlying cost increase is within the Council for Social Witness and, particularly, in the residential facilities as a result of increases in the living wage, increased use of agency staff, higher insurance, food and utility costs etc. There was a significant deficit in 2022 of £1,756,112 compared to a surplus in 2021 of £1,618,720, with the pressures in CSW being the main contributor to this. The Council for Social Witness is taking steps to address the matter.

The General Council agreed that only a small number of printed copies of the Annual Book of Accounts for 2022 should be produced with an electronic copy being available on the Church website.

Pensions

The following ministerial retirements have been noted.

Name	Congregation	Retirement Date	Pre 66
Rev C.U. Bradley	Armagh Road	31/03/2023	–
Rev S. Newell	Without Charge	15/05/2023	–
Rev C. Morrison	Eglington	30/06/2023	–
Rev D. Henry	First Lurgan	10/09/2023	–
Rev P. McBride	Scarva and Loughbrickland	30/09/2023	Yes
Rev B. Brown	Raphoe & Ballindrait	31/10/2023	Yes
Rev W.B. Boyd	Kells & Eskylane	01/02/2024	Yes
Rev K. Duddy	Woodvale	22/05/2024	Yes

DAVID THOMSON, Convenor

APPENDIX 1

BUDGETED ASSESSMENT INCOME REQUIREMENTS FOR 2023

(with comparison to 2022 actual and budgeted income)

	Budgeted Income Requirement 2023 £	Allocation 2023 %	Budgeted Income 2022 £	Projected Income 2022
Central Ministry Fund	1,100,000	31.80%	1,162,111	1,200,000
Retired Ministers' Fund	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Widows of Ministers' Fund	225,000	6.50%	231,727	250,000
Prolonged Disability Fund	225,000	6.50%	186,476	200,000
Incidental Fund	900,000	26.01%	857,982	925,000
Church House External Work	500,000	14.45%	463,818	500,000
Ministerial Development *	100,000	2.89%	106,478	115,000
Sick Supply Fund	10,000	0.29%	13,981	15,000
Students' Bursary Fund *	400,000	11.56%	440,605	475,000
TOTAL ASSESSMENTS (Excl Pension)	3,460,000	100.00%	3,463,178	3,671,000

* Assessments set by the Council for Training in Ministry

RATES OF ASSESSMENT FOR 2023 (same as for 2022)*(applied to assessable income for 2021)*

Band	Income from	Income to	Rate
1	0	11,000	0.00%
2	11,001	65,000	11.25%
3	65,001	130,000	10.75%
4	130,001	195,000	7.25%
5	195,001	260,000	3.50%
6	260,001	and above	0.00%

APPENDIX 2

BASIC MINISTERIAL MINIMUM FOR 2023 (and other rates)

	Northern Ireland		Republic of Ireland	
	2023 £	2022 £	2023 €	2022 €
1. BASIC AND APPROPRIATE MINISTERIAL MINIMUM				
Basic Ministerial Minimum (BMM)	29,234	27,842	42,795	40,757
After 1 year's service	29,526	28,120	43,223	41,165
After 2 years' service	29,818	28,398	43,651	41,573
After 3 years' service	30,110	28,676	44,079	41,981
After 4 years' service	30,402	28,954	44,507	42,389
After 5 years' service	30,694	29,232	44,935	42,797
After 6 years' service	30,986	29,510	45,363	43,205
After 7 years' service	31,278	29,788	45,791	43,613
After 8 years' service	31,570	30,066	46,219	44,021
After 9 years' service	32,862	30,344	46,647	44,429
After 10 years' service	32,154	30,622	47,075	44,837
After 11 years' service	32,446	30,900	47,503	45,245
After 12 years' service	32,738	31,178	47,931	45,653
After 13 years' service	33,030	31,456	48,359	46,061
After 14 years' service	33,322	31,734	48,787	46,469
After 15 years' service	33,614	32,012	49,215	46,877
After 16 years' service	34,906	32,290	49,643	47,285
After 17 years' service	34,198	32,568	50,071	47,693
After 18 years' service	34,490	32,846	50,499	48,101
After 19 years' service	34,782	33,124	50,927	48,509
After 20 years' service	35,074	33,402	51,355	48,917

	Northern Ireland		Republic of Ireland	
	2023 £	2022 £	2023 €	2022 €
2. RETIRED MINISTERS' FUND				
Pension (maximum)	13,948	13,284	stg converted	stg converted
3. WIDOWS OF MINISTERS' FUND				
Pension (maximum)	7,671	7,306	stg converted	stg converted
4. PROLONGED DISABILITY FUND				
Grant (maximum)	14,027	13,359	stg converted	stg converted
5. REGIUM DONUM				
Annual Payment	360	360	stg converted	stg converted
6. SUPPLY FEES				
Two or more services	118	112	162	160
Single service (at 2/3rd of above)	79	75	108	107
Travel – mileage rate	18p	15p	22c	22c
7. VACANCY CONVENERS' FEES				
Supply Fee plus				
< 100 Families + 0%	118	112	162	160
100<200 Families + 5%	124	118	118	168
200<300 families +10%	130	124	123	176
300+ Families + 15%	136	129	129	184
Travel – mileage rate	18p	15p	26c	22c

	Northern Ireland		Republic of Ireland	
	2023 £	2022 £	2023 €	2022 €
8. EXPENSES				
Ministers' Car Allowance	4,020	3,829	5,842	5,564
Ministers' Taxable (Duties/Manse) Allowance	2,681	2,553	4,414	4,204
Associates' Car Allowance	4,020	3,829	*	*
Associates' Taxable Duties Allowance	2,234	2,128	*	*
Associates' House Allowance (CMF Max)	1,000	1,000	*	*
Licentiates' Car Allowance (80%)	3,217	3,064	*	*
Licentiates' Duties Allowance (42%)	1,127	1,073	*	*
Ordained Assistants' Travel Allowance	4,020	3,829	*	*
Ordained Assistants' Duties Allowance	1,127	1,073	*	*
<i>*Would be based on a % of ministers' ROI allowances</i>				
9. OTHER				
Ignored for Augmented Grant Par.316(2)(d)(i) (i.e. 52 weeks supply fee)	6,136	5,845	8,840	8,424
Ignored for Augmented Grant Par.316(2)(d)(ii)	2,400	2,400		

	Northern Ireland		Republic of Ireland	
	2023 £	2022 £	2023 €	2022 €
10. FAMILY GRANTS				
Category 1. Birth to final year primary school				
– Child Allowance	412	392	616	587
– Tuition Grants	0	0	509	485
Category 2. Secondary School				
– Child Allowance	603	574	911	868
– Tuition Grants	0	0	857	816
Category 3. Further and Higher Education (to 24)				
– Child Allowance	904	8861	1,340	1,276
– Tuition Grants	2,190	2,086	4,284	4,080

The above are maximum amounts as reductions apply above certain income levels.

APPENDIX 3

INCIDENTAL FUND BUDGET FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

	2023 Budget £	2022 Actual £
PAYMENTS TO/ON BEHALF OF COUNCILS		
(i) General Council		
General Work	7,500	1,325
General Council programme costs	5,000	947
Assembly Arrangements	20,000	21,018
Irish Council of Churches	22,166	22,166
Irish Inter-Church Meeting	10,918	10,918
Conference of European Churches	5,033	4,735
Comm Protestant Churches Europe	1,300	(10,700)*
World Comm Reformed Churches	13,000	13,000
Guysmere Development Panel (balance of £75k)	–	60,700
<i>*Release accrual for priors year as no fee payable</i>		
(ii) Council for Public Affairs		
General Work	2,000	1,672
Education Grants	10,000	10,736
(iii) Linkage Commission		
General Work	7,000	6,980
Church Architecture Committee	9,000	8,750

	2023 Budget £	2022 Actual £
OTHER COSTS		
Costs of General Secretary's Department	471,760	433,440
Transitional grant re Communications Strategy Review Task Group	10,000	
Support Services Charges	185,000	164,455
Moderator expenses allowance	40,000	25,306
Printing for General Assembly	15,000	14,568
Postage, admin and other	25,000	23,985
Insurance	18,500	16,658
Travel General Assembly and Councils etc.	15,000	3,964
Allowance to Congregations – re Conveners	6,500	10,200
Legal fees	32,000	24,788
UTC Support Services rebate	60,000	60,000
UK Borders Agency	1,000	–
Presbyterian Historical Society	23,000	23,000
Youth Link	11,523	11,523
Peninsula Employment Law and Health and Safety	20,000	18,411
TOTAL	<u>1,047,200</u>	<u>982,545</u>

APPENDIX 4

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STAFFING

Sterling Salary Scales of posts in Assembly Buildings on 1 January 2023

Listed below are staff that are currently on the General Council Executive and Administrative scales.

EXECUTIVE POSTS

Scale 1 (£27,640–£32,839)

- Senior Infrastructure Engineer x 2 (IT)
- Operations and Maintenance Officer (PSD)

Scale 2 (£31,214–£37,549)

- Children's Development Officer (CLW)
- Creative Production Support Officer (including Editorial Responsibilities) (CPD)
- Women's Ministry and PW Development Officer (CLW)
- Finance Manager (FSD)
- Press Officer (GSD)
- Payroll and Assessment Manager (FSD)
- HR Executive (PD) x 2
- Youth Development Officer (CLW)
- Mission Support Officer (Partnership) (MD)
- IT Network Storage and Security Manager
- IT Operations and Services Manager
- IT Senior Analyst Developer

Scale 3 (£34,925–£42,566)

- Property Support Officer (FSD)
- Finance Manager (CSW)
- Mission Support Officer (Member Care) (MD)
- Head of Creative Production (CPD)
- Programme Development Officer (CLW)
- Public Affairs Officer (GSD)
- Congregational Life Development Officer (CLW)
- Mission Development Officer (CLW)
- Head of Conferencing and Operations (PSD)

Scale 4 (£38,494–£48,091)

Senior Finance Manager (FSD)

Head of Safeguarding (CSW)

Scale 5 (£42,566–£51,871)

Head of Human Resources (PD)

Head of IT (ITD)

Scale 6 (£45,717–£55,695)

Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly and Deputy General Secretary

Secretary of the Council for Mission in Ireland

Secretary of the Council for Social Witness

Secretary of the Council for Global Mission

Secretary of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness

Scale 7 (£51,871–£66,722)

Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary

Financial Secretary

ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED POSTS**Scale 2 (£16,927–£19,577)**

HR Assistant (0.6 post) (PD)

Operations and Maintenance Manager (PSD)

Assistant Receptionist and Telephonist (PSD) (higher salary protected)

IT Support Technician (IT)

Scale 3 (£18,995–£21,963)

Senior Administrative Assistant (0.4) (GSD)

Senior HR Assistant (Job Share) (PD)

Senior Administrative Assistant (job share 1.2 post) (CSW)

Senior Administrative Assistant, PW (CLW)

Taking Care Administrator (CSW)

Administrative Assistant (0.5 post) (Purchase Ledger) (FSD)

Senior Administrative Assistant (MD)

Scale 4 (£21,522–£24,785)

Payroll and Administrative Assistant (.77 post) (FSD)

Senior Administrative Assistants (x 2 P/T) (CLW)

Senior Administrative Assistant (0.6 post) (FSD)

Senior Communications Assistant (1 x P/T) (Pub) (CPD)

Senior Communications Assistant (1 x P/T) (Press and Web) (CPD)

Senior Administrative Assistant (CLW)

Scale 5 (£23,547–£27,187)

Senior Creative Production Technician (CPD)
 Personal Assistant and Senior Administrative Assistant (MD)
 Assistant Accountant (FSD)
 Senior HR Administrator (PD)
 Personal Assistant and Senior Administrative Assistant (job share) (GSD)
 Payroll and Administrative Assistant (FSD)

Scale 5 (Enhanced) (£26,066–£29,729)

Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (CLW)
 Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (MD)
 Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (CSW)

Scale 5 (Enhanced pt 25-34) (£26,006–£32,051)

Senior Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (GSD)

Sterling Salary Scales of posts in other locations on 1 January 2023**Scale 1 (£27,640–£32,839)**

Rural Chaplain
 Executive Academic Administrator (Union College)

Scale 2 (£31,214–£37,549)

Lecturer in Biblical Studies (OT), Union College
 Lecturer in Biblical Studies (NT), Union College
 Lecturer in Practical & Pastoral Theology
 Senior Executive Academic Administrator, Union College
 College Librarian, Union College
 Operations Manager, Union College
 Minister/Ministry Co-ordinator, Kinghan Church (CSW)
 Chaplain in Residence (MD)
 University Chaplain UUJ, (MD)
 Chaplain NI Prison Service and Co-ordinating Chaplain (Maghaberry)

Scale 3 (£34,925–£42,566)

Lecturer in Historical Theology, Union College

Scale 5 (£42,566–£51,871)

Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Director of Post-Graduate Studies, Union College
 Professor of Ministry and Director of the Institute for Ministry, Union College

Scale 6 (£45,717–£55,695)

Professor of Systematic Theology, Union College

Professor of New Testament Studies

Principal of Union Theological College

ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED POSTS**Scale 2 (£16,927–£19,577)**

Clerical Officer – Carlisle House (part time) (CSW)

Clerical Officer, (5 FT and 2 PT) (CSW)

Clerical Officer, Kinghan Church (part time) (CSW)

Custodian, Union College

Library Assistant (part time), Union College

Receptionist/Telephonist (Union College)

Scale 3 (£18,995–£21,963)

Senior Clerical Officer (part time), Carlisle House (CSW)

Academic Administrator (to the Principal), Union College

Academic Administrator (to the Bursar), Union College

Clerical Officer, (CSW)

Scale 4 (£21,522–£24,785)

Administrator, and Personal Assistant to the Chaplain Derryvolgie (MD)

Scale 5 (£35,861–£41,435)

Resident Manager, Tritonville Close (Euro Scale) (CSW)

Scale 5 (Enhanced) (£26,066–£29,729)

Assistant Chaplain, QUB (MD)

UNITED APPEAL FOR MISSIONS COMMITTEE

The Committee has met on four occasions since the last meeting of the General Assembly in June 2022

- On 9 February 2023 to consider the response to the 2022 Appeal
- On 31 March 2023 to prepare for interviews with Councils regarding their grant requests for 2024
- On 3 April 2023 to review Council budget submissions for 2024 and to agree recommendations to the General Council for an Appeal and grants to Councils for that year
- On 20 April 2023 to make final adjustments to the 2024 Appeal following decisions taken at the General Council meeting on 18 April 2023 (see note below)

Appendix 1 includes a summary of the Income and Expenditure Account for United Appeal showing actuals results for 2022 and projections / budgets for 2023 and 2024.

(A) THE 2022 APPEAL

At the meeting on 9 February 2023, the Committee considered the response to the 2022 Appeal and the financial outturn for that year. The accounts for 2022 show that £3,168,277 was received against the 2022 Net Appeal of £3,300,000 (being a gross Appeal of £3,600,000 less a Covid-19 reduction of £300,000). Despite this shortfall the Committee acknowledge that this is still a significant response from congregations.

At that time 27 congregations (2021: 53, 2020: 71, 2019: 39, 2018: 38, 2017: 27) had not contributed to the Appeal and their targets totalled £86,589 (2021: £237,216, 2020: £356,628, 2019: £202,088, 2018: £171,708, 2017: £133,605). In addition;

- (a) 148 congregations contributed above their target (2021: 148, 2020: 148, 2019: 167, 2018: 195, 2017: 219)
- (b) 111 congregations did not achieve their target (2021: 176, 2020: 181, 2019: 161, 2018: 124, 2017: 109) and
- (c) 168 congregations contributed to their target exactly (2021: 154, 2020: 144, 2019: 177, 2018: 187, 2017: 188).

The accounts also showed that £224,018 was received in 2022 relating to earlier years' Appeals (2021: £313,890, 2020: £165,388, 2019: 166,044, 2018: £118,943, 2017: £158,847).

At the time of writing a further £87,399 has been received as "late contributions" for the 2022 Appeal and therefore 98.8% of the Appeal has now been received.

The Committee approved the following grants for 2022

Mission in Ireland	1,065,000
Global Mission	1,000,000
Congregational Life and Witness	640,000
Training in Ministry	375,000
Social Witness	245,000
General – Creative Production	200,000
Total	<u><u>3,525,000</u></u>

The net impact of this was that in 2022 the United Appeal Fund had an overall deficit of £83,769 – this included £35,000 of grants returned by the Council for Congregational Life and Witness. Reserves at the end of 2022 were £2,267,057 and this is required to fund the monthly grants to Councils in 2023 of 7.5% of the amounts approved by the General Assembly with 10% held back pending consideration of the response to the Appeal.

(B) THE 2023 APPEAL

The June 2022 General Assembly agreed that the Appeal for 2023 should be £3,500,000 and the following grants were approved for 2023 but are subject to the response to the Appeal.

Mission in Ireland	1,065,000
Global Mission	900,000
Congregational Life and Witness	640,000
Training in Ministry	375,000
Social Witness	245,000
General – CPD	200,000
Total	3,425,000

If the Appeal for 2023 is achieved this will be sufficient to pay the above grants in full.

(C) THE 2024 APPEAL

At its meeting on 9 February 2023, the Committee agreed a range of assumptions that Councils should use in preparing their budgets for 2024. These included assumptions about cost of living increases, inflation and specific assumptions in relation to anticipated increases in electricity and gas prices as well as insurance premiums. The accuracy of these assumptions will impact on the actual outturn for 2024.

The Committee met on 3 April 2023 to discuss with Councils their budget submissions for 2024. These submissions included revised projections for 2023, budgets for 2024 and actual figures for 2022. The submissions were accompanied by a letter explaining the rationale for the amount requested and any key assumptions made. The Committee would like to express appreciation to Council Secretaries, Conveners and Finance Managers for their hard work in preparing these submissions.

The following are the key points identified from the requests.

Mission in Ireland

	2024 Request	2023 Approved	2022 Actual	2021 Actual	2020 Actual
Request/ Grants	1,100,000	1,065,000	1,065,000	724,500	958,500

- (a) The outturn for 2022 was better than anticipated due to a delay in both the purchase of a new manse in Kilkenny and the commencement of the Maynooth new church building.
- (b) 2023 includes significant capital projects totalling £2,870,000 – Maynooth £2,250,000 (Church Building), Greystones £200,000 (Ancillary Rooms to rear of Church) and Kilkenny £420,000 (new manse).
- (c) 2024 includes £500,000 for a Taughmonagh manse although this is subject to the outcome of the CMI Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee and Linkage Commission decisions regarding the future of the congregation. The provision of support for Donabate is still on the Council's agenda but not within the timescale of their submitted request.
- (d) The Council reported that it had been encouraged by the appointment of a Minister to oversee a special Ministry project in West Belfast and by the work of the International Meeting Point in both North and South Belfast which continues to develop.
- (e) There has been a good level of uptake for Mission Support and Irish Mission Fund Grants albeit some projects have not commenced due to lack of applicants.

- (f) Some minor changes to staffing arrangements within the Mission Office have been approved with the department's costs charged 50% to Mission in Ireland and 50% Global Mission.

The Committee recommended to the General Council that a grant of £1,080,000 be awarded to the Council for Mission in Ireland for 2024 i.e. a reduction of £20,000 from the requested amount.

Global Mission

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Request/ Grants	900,000	900,000	1,000,000	1,061,500	958,500

- (a) Overall the outturn for 2022 was better than anticipated.
- (b) It is anticipated that 23 Global Mission Workers will be supported by the Council in 2024.
- (c) There is an increased emphasis on grants to support new leaders who know the language and culture.
- (d) The Council has anticipated a grant from Presbyterian Women of £70,000 in both 2023 and 2024.
- (e) The Wembley London property is currently rented out and this will be reviewed at end of lease in 2024.
- (f) Some minor changes to staffing arrangements within the Mission Office have been approved with the department's costs charged 50% to Mission in Ireland and 50% Global Mission.
- (g) The Council bank balance at the end of 2023 (£215,588) will be needed to cover the anticipated deficit in 2025.

The Committee recommended to the General Council that a grant of £900,000 be awarded to the Council for Global Mission for 2024.

Congregational Life and Witness

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Request/ Grants	660,000	640,000	640,000	412,500	648,000

- (a) The outturn for 2022 was better than anticipated and the Council returned £35,000 to United Appeal.
- (b) Unlike other Councils, this Council does not have other sources of income and is heavily reliant on their United Appeal Grant. The Assembly passed a resolution in October 2021 asking the United Appeal Committee to recognise this and to take account of it in its funding allocation.

- (c) The level of the annual pay rise for 2023 and other cost pressures means that the Council's deficit for 2023 will be higher than budgeted this time last year although it still projects a small amount of cash reserves at the end of 2024.
- (d) The Council reports the denomination has diminished in terms of leaders and engagement with, and participation of, young people as a result of the Covid pandemic and the Council will continue to prioritise this area of work.
- (e) Fresh Light Counselling and the PCI Family Holidays have been relaunched.
- (f) The 2022/23 church year has not seen a return to a regular level of activity and the Council continues to reassess the needs of the local church as it emerges from the pandemic.

The Committee recommended to the General Council that a grant of £660,000 be awarded to the Council for Congregational Life and Witness for 2024.

Training in Ministry

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Request/ Grants	386,250	375,000	375,000	402,000	337,500

- (a) The transition to new arrangements with St Mary's University (SMU) was deferred one year to September 2022, and it is now anticipated that the number of students may be lower than previously budgeted. The College is exploring introducing "Hybrid" teaching arrangements for undergraduate students to encourage interest – although this is not the same as on-line lectures and requires different arrangements to be in place.
- (b) The Council is also exploring increasing the level of income from PhD students through partnership arrangements.
- (c) The above places some significant financial pressures on the College. It is now anticipated that the transitional period to a breakeven position is likely to be extended. The Council is considering various options and it is anticipated that it may make a separate proposal to the General Council in this regard.

The Committee recommended to the General Council that a grant of £380,000 be awarded to the Council for Training in Ministry for 2024.

Social Witness

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Request/ Grants	463,169	245,000	245,500	224,500	220,500

- (a) 2022 was an exceptionally difficult year financially for the Council with losses of £1.7m incurred. This was due in part to significant staffing, heat and light, catering and insurance cost pressures.
- (b) The Council has agreed a plan to correct the situation which includes the introduction of top-up fees and addressing underoccupancy issues in some homes.
- (c) The Council is in an overdrawn position at the end of 2022 but income is anticipated from the sale of some properties and the realisation of investments.
- (d) The Council has indicated that it needs, at least temporarily, to increase its staffing resource with regard to Taking Care / Adult Safeguarding to ensure procedures, documentation and training are updated to be in line with relevant requirements.

The Committee recommended to the General Council that a grant of £400,000 be awarded to the Council for Social Witness for 2024 i.e. a reduction of £63,169.

General Council – Creative Production Department

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Request/ Grants	236,200	200,000	200,000	123,000	207,000

- (a) The outturn for 2022 was better than anticipated.
- (b) The Budget includes 6 members of staff (2 F/T and 4 P/T) although there is one vacancy at present.
- (c) Bought in services in relation to the web site and social media have been included in the budget.
- (d) The re-development of the website is still required but is dependent on the completion of the Communications Strategy Review.
- (e) The *Presbyterian Herald* returned to 10 issues in 2022 and the price of the Magazine was increased to £1.80 for 2023. The Herald Account contributes to the overall costs of the department and there is some concern about increasing production costs and a reduction in number of subscribers.

The Committee recommended to the General Council that a grant of £230,000 be awarded to the Creative Production Department for 2024 i.e. a reduction of £6,200.

GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING 18 APRIL 2023

At a meeting of the General Council on 18 April 2023 the above grant proposals, totaling £3,650,000, and an Appeal amount of £3,600,000 for 2024 were presented and initially agreed.

However, the General Council at a later item of business then received a report from the Communications Strategy Review Task Group and a report from the General Assembly Advisory Committee on related funding matters. The recommendations in these reports were accepted by the General Council for presentation to the General Assembly. In summary, if the recommendations are approved by the General Assembly a new Communications Department will be established with a new Head of Communications appointed. Most of the existing Creative Production Department staff will transfer to the new Communications Department other than the staff involved with editing the *Presbyterian Herald* magazine who will transfer to the Congregational Life and Witness Department. The proposals recommend that the new Communications Department is funded through the congregational assessment system. This all had implications for the United Appeal Committee's initial proposals for the level of grants to Councils and the Appeal for 2024. The Committee was asked to meet and consider necessary adjustments to its original proposals.

The Committee met on 20 April 2023 and now recommends to the General Assembly the following grants for 2024:

	Request Received 2024 £	Adjustment 2024 £	Recommended Grants 2024 £	GA Approved Grants 2023 £
Mission in Ireland	1,100,000	(20,000)	1,080,000	1,065,000
Global Mission	900,000	–	900,000	900,000
Congregational Life and Witness	660,000	25,000	685,000	640,000
Training in Ministry	386,250	(6,250)	380,000	375,000
Social Witness	463,169	(63,169)	400,000	245,000
General – Creative Production	236,200	(236,200)	–	200,000
TOTAL	3,745,619	(300,619)	3,445,000	3,425,000

The Committee recommends that the Appeal for 2024 should be £3,400,000 compared to £3,500,000 for 2023 i.e. a 2.86% decrease.

MARTIN HAMPTON, Convener
CLIVE KNOX, Financial Secretary

APPENDIX 1**APPEAL ACCOUNTS (Estimates and Actuals)**

	2024 £	2023 £	2022 £
THE APPEAL			
Gross Appeal	3,400,000	3,500,000	3,600,000
Covid-19 Reduction	–	–	-300,000
Net Appeal	3,400,000	3,500,000	3,300,000
INCOME			
Congregations (current year)	3,275,000	3,350,000	3,168,277
Congregations (prior years)	100,000	85,000	224,018
Income from Trust Funds	28,000	28,000	27,635
Investment Income	1,000	1,000	1,151
Donations and Bequests	10,000	10,000	10,780
Bank Interest	5,000	5,000	6,448
TOTAL INCOME	3,419,000	3,479,000	3,438,309
EXPENDITURE			
Promotional Costs	10,000	10,000	957
GRANTS			
Mission in Ireland	1,080,000	1,065,000	1,065,000
Global Mission	900,000	900,000	1,000,000
Training in Ministry	380,000	375,000	375,000
Congregational Life and Witness	685,000	640,000	640,000
Social Witness	400,000	245,000	245,000
General – Creative Production	0	200,000	200,000
Total Grants	3,445,000	3,425,000	3,525,000
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	3,455,000	3,435,000	3,525,957

	2024 £	2023 £	2022 £
SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)	-36,000	44,000	-87,648
Grants Returned – CCLW	–	–	35,000
Gain on Investments	–	–	-4,667
Added /(Deducted) to/(from) reserves	-36,000	44,000	-57,315
Reserves at start of year	2,311,057	2,267,057	2,324,372
Reserves at end of year	2,275,057	2,311,057	2,267,057

RESPONSE TO THE APPEAL			
Receipt in year for Appeal	3,275,000	3,350,000	3,168,277
Late receipts	100,000	100,000	85,000
	3,375,000	3,450,000	3,253,277
% of Appeal for year	99.3%	98.6%	98.6%

INITIAL PCI PENSION SCHEME REVIEW PANEL

1. INTRODUCTION

At a meeting of the General Council on 27 October 2022, it was agreed that a review of the present PCI Pension Scheme (2009) should be undertaken. The Council subsequently agreed to take this forward in two stages i.e.

STAGE 1: An initial report to the 2023 General Assembly which would enable members of the General Assembly to understand the key issues.

This stage to be undertaken by an ‘Initial PCI Pension Scheme Review Panel’ with the following membership: David Thomson (Convener), Clive Knox (Financial Secretary), Jeremy Eves, Douglas Crowe, Rev David Irvine, Rev Richard McIlhatton and Rev Trevor Gribben (Clerk).

STAGE 2: If the 2023 General Assembly agrees to proceed, a more comprehensive report would be presented to the 2024 General Assembly including options for future pension arrangements.

This stage to be undertaken by an enhanced PCI Pension Scheme Review Panel made up of the initial Panel supplemented by additional members, as agreed by the 2023 General Assembly. External consultants would be commissioned to assist in drawing up this fuller report, which is why an initial report back to the 2023 General Assembly is being made.

The Initial PCI Pension Review Panel (the Panel) met on 3 February and 9 March 2023 and reports as follows.

2. PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

At the outset it is important to note that the current funding position of the PCI Pension Scheme (2009) remains strong and the benefits earned by members to date secure. Any further review of the present pension arrangements (i.e. Stage 2) will be a decision of the General Assembly and indeed any recommendations coming out of that review would be subject to further General Assembly approval and consultation with members. It is also important to note that should any change to the current pension arrangements eventually be agreed that these would only apply to future service and that benefits earned to date are protected.

The nature of a Defined Benefit Scheme, like the PCI Pension Scheme (2009), is such that the funding position and future cost of the scheme can fluctuate from time to time and the future financial risk related to such schemes rests almost entirely with the “scheme employer” (essentially the General Assembly and its congregations) and not with the scheme members.

There is a significant risk that the ongoing cost of the scheme (in relation to both or either past or future membership) could increase to a level that may not be affordable or sustainable. The nature of pension schemes is that liabilities are being created that may last for some 50 years and, consequently, a long-term view of funding is required.

The Panel therefore, considers that the General Assembly needs to prepare for such an eventuality and carry out a review to consider the options and consequences. Such a review should be seen as part of normal good governance and it is better to undertake this at this time rather than being forced into a change should an adverse scheme funding position arise.

In addition, the Panel also considered that it would be useful to review the benefits and flexibility available through Defined Contribution Schemes.

3. GENERAL STATUS OF DEFINED BENEFIT PENSION SCHEMES

Defined Benefit Pension Schemes, by definition, determine in advance the pensions payable to its members and therefore, regardless of factors such as number of members in the scheme, longevity of members, interest rate changes, stock market movements etc., effectively guarantee that the stated pensions will be paid. This places a large risk on the scheme employer and, consequently, the vast majority of such schemes in the private sector have either been closed to new members, closed to existing members or are in the process of being wound up. The remaining active defined benefit pension schemes are mainly in the public sector.

The annual report of the Pensions Regulator in 2022 shows that the status of defined benefit pension schemes in the charity sector was:

Fully open	5%
<i>(this includes the current PCI Scheme)</i>	
Closed to new members	38%
Closed to existing and new members	56%
<i>(with existing benefits protected)</i>	
Being wound up	<u>2%</u>
	100%

4. OVERVIEW OF THE PCI PENSION SCHEME (2009)

Noted below are some key features of the current PCI Pension Scheme.

- (a) It is a Defined Benefit Scheme meaning that the actual pension payable is defined, based on pensionable earnings and years of service. It is not a “Final Salary” scheme but what is referred to as a “Career Average Revalued Earning Scheme”. (The rate of annual revaluation for contributing members is determined by the increase in the Retail Prices Index).
- (b) Ministers, Licentiatees, staff on General Council Executive or Administrative scales, Irish Mission Workers, Deaconesses and Global Mission Workers are eligible to join.
- (c) The current member contribution rate is 7% with the Church, mainly through congregations, contributing 24%.

- (d) The current pension accrual rate or rate at which members earn pension is 1/70th of pensionable pay which, in broad terms, means if a member remains in the scheme as a contributing member for 35 years, they will retire with a pension equal to approx. one-half (35/70th) of their average revalued pensionable earnings.
- (e) Death in service benefits include a 4 times pensionable pay lump sum, a refund of member contributions, a spouse's pension and, if applicable, a child's pension.
- (f) The scheme retirement age is in line with the male UK state pension age, currently 66 but, as previously agreed by the General Assembly, to follow increases in the male state pension age).
- (g) The scheme is managed by a Board of 12 Trustees, 7 of whom are employer nominated and 5 member nominated. The employer nominated representatives include the Clerk, Financial Secretary, Convener of the Support Services Committee, Convener of its Finance Panel, plus 3 others nominated by the employer

Alternative pension arrangements are presently in place for members of staff who do not meet the eligibility criteria for the PCI Pension Scheme (2009).

5. THE FUNDING POSITION OF THE PCI PENSION SCHEME (2009)

It is a requirement that a full actuarial valuation of Defined Benefit Schemes is carried out at least every three years. A triennial valuation of the scheme is a type of “health check” and serves two purposes:

- (a) **Firstly**, to establish whether the pension benefits that members have earned to date (the scheme's liabilities) are covered by the scheme's assets at that date.

If the assets exceed the liabilities the scheme is in surplus and if vice-versa it is in deficit. The results of the last two triennial valuations and the two more recent interim valuations were as follows.

	2022 £m	2021 £m	2020 £m	2017 £m
	Interim	Interim	Triennial	Triennial
Scheme Assets	(See Note]	301.6	263.5	184.0
Technical Provisions (Liabilities)		220.2	217.9	177.2
Scheme Surplus		81.40	45.6	6.8
Funding Level		137%	121%	104%

Note: These figures are not yet available but will be included in the final report to the General Assembly

If the scheme was in deficit at any stage, additional “deficit funding contributions” would be required and this would most likely mean additional contributions by the scheme employer, chiefly congregations.

- (b) **Secondly**, to determine what the future rate of contributions needs to be in order to provide the scheme benefits that will be earned by members in the future, based on certain assumptions. The last valuation determined that the required rate would be 40.7% of pensionable salaries (33.7% from the employer and 7% from members). However, it was agreed to retain a contribution rate of 31% (24% employer and 7% from members) with the cost of this being met from the scheme surplus.

Therefore, while the scheme is showing a surplus, this was at a point in time and based on contributions to, and liabilities at, that date. However, as noted above, the surplus does not cover future income and liabilities. When those are added in, the future cost of the scheme is increasing and hence the indication at the last valuation that a contribution rate of 40.7% was needed.

The outcome of the 2020 valuation was reported to the October 2021 General Assembly. The ongoing cost of the scheme was reported as were the views of the Scheme Trustees that a cautious approach should be taken as future valuations may not be so positive.

The next triennial valuation of the scheme is as at 31 December 2023 and it is hoped initial results would be available for the June 2024 General Assembly.

6. WHAT OPTIONS DOES THE CHURCH HAVE IF THE CURRENT SCHEME BECAME UNAFFORDABLE?

The Panel is aware that the costs of continuing to fund the current scheme could rise, perhaps significantly, and these higher costs may need to be paid continually over a very lengthy future period. That, in turn, raises the question of “affordability” both currently and in future decades.

At this stage the Panel has not formed a view on how “affordable” might be defined and ultimately this would be a matter for the General Assembly to decide, but relevant questions might be

- Even if market conditions were favourable and no increase in funding was needed, can the Church (mainly congregations) continue to afford to pay 24% in the medium to longer term?
- What would be the response if the required contribution rate from the Church had to rise to say 34% (as suggested at the last triennial valuation) or even higher? On pensionable pay of say £35,000, that would cost an additional £3,500 per year and that cost would be ongoing.
- Would the Church be prepared to consider even a modest increase from 24%?

If it was considered that the current scheme could become unaffordable, the Church will have to consider alternative options. There are no recommendations at this stage and the reason the Panel is proposing a more detailed review is to consider in more depth what the options are. For illustration however, they might include:

- (a) Closing the scheme completely to new and existing members and introducing a new more affordable scheme (*Note: This would not remove the obligation to continue to pay existing pensioners or the benefits earned by current contributing or deferred members (i.e. those who are no longer in service) when they retire i.e., contributions to the “closed scheme” may still be required*)
- (b) Closing the scheme to new members only and introducing a new more affordable scheme for such members (i.e., current members would remain in the scheme)
- (c) Reducing the scheme benefits to make the scheme more affordable by, e.g., reducing the accrual rate from its current rate of 1/70th e.g., to 1/80th, 1/90th or even 1/100th but this would impact on members’ pension benefits
- (d) Asking members to increase their contribution rate
- (e) Increasing the retirement age
- (f) Buying out the existing benefits with an insurance company (although this is likely to be very expensive)

If the scheme was closed, the Church would have to then introduce a Defined Contribution Scheme. These schemes, which are now almost standard in the private sector, are normally based on members’ and employers’ contributions being invested and the proceeds used to buy a pension and/or other benefits at retirement. (The key differences between Defined Benefit and Defined Contribution schemes are summarised in Appendix 1 and the Pro and Cons of both types of scheme in Appendix 2).

7. RELATED ISSUES

If, after consideration, the General Assembly ultimately decided to introduce a new scheme and the existing scheme was closed, member contributions into the existing scheme would cease and agreed member and employer contributions made instead, into the new scheme. As noted at the start of this report, pension benefits earned to the date of any change would be protected and would not be transferred into any new pension arrangement.

The scheme employer would remain responsible for contributions into the closed scheme as this scheme would still have responsibility for paying existing pensioners and benefits which have been earned by contributing members and deferred members when they retire. The Church would therefore continue to carry a financial risk.

It is recognised that there are other related issues to be considered, apart from the cost of running the scheme e.g.;

- (a) The extent to which a Defined Benefit Scheme is an important part of the package offered to those serving with the Church
- (b) Whether similar, or even improved, pension benefits could be obtained for less cost
- (c) Whether the flexibilities available through Defined Contribution Schemes would be of advantage to members
- (d) Whether other additional flexibilities need to be considered.

These would also be considered if a further review is agreed to.

8. OPTIONS FOR THE WAY AHEAD

At this stage there are essentially two main options

- (a) Without undertaking a fuller review, on the basis of the information outlined above, to maintain the status quo recognising that the Church continues to carry the full risk of providing the defined benefits and the affordability of the scheme could become an issue at any triennial valuation.
- (b) To undertake take a fuller review and consider alternative options, with decisions then being made on how to proceed, probably by the 2024 General Assembly.

The Panel recommends that the General Assembly authorize undertaking a full review (Stage 2).

APPENDIX 1

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A DEFINED BENEFIT AND DEFINED CONTRIBUTION SCHEME

Defined Benefit Scheme (PCI Scheme)	Defined Contribution Scheme
<p>Member's Pension The pension earned under the scheme is based on a member's pensionable pay and an accrual rate</p>	<p>Member's Pension The member's pension will depend principally on the level of contributions, the rate of investment returns and the annuity rates at the point of retirement</p>
<p>Spouse's Pension Currently 50% of pre-commuted sum (i.e. before any lump sum is taken)</p>	<p>Spouse's Pension Will depend on the annuity choice made by the member at retirement</p>
<p>Investments and Risk The investment risk lies entirely with the scheme employer</p>	<p>Investments and Risk The investment risk lies entirely with the member as the scheme employer is simply making contribution into the members "pension pot"</p>
<p>Scheme Employer Cost The scheme employer's contribution can fluctuate between triennial valuations</p>	<p>Scheme Employer Cost The scheme employer contribution rate is set at an amount determined by the scheme employer and does not fluctuate unless the scheme employer decides to change it. There is no need for a triennial valuation.</p>
<p>Member Contribution Rate Set by the scheme employer. The member cannot vary their contribution rate or pay in additional contributions.</p>	<p>Member Contribution Rate This can be set by the member providing it complies with minimum current auto enrolment requirements. Often a minimum rate is set by the scheme employer. The member can normally vary their contribution as they are simply paying into their own pension pot.</p>

Defined Benefit Scheme (PCI Scheme)	Defined Contribution Scheme
<p>Pension Flexibility If a member wants to take advantage of the current pension flexibility arrangements they need to transfer their benefits out to a defined contribution scheme outside of the Church Scheme.</p>	<p>Pension Flexibility The member is able to avail of the current pension flexibility arrangements.</p>
<p>Scheme Management Defined Benefits schemes are costly to administer and highly regulated requiring triennial valuations, and compliance with the Pension Regulator's rules</p>	<p>Scheme Management As a general rule, DC Schemes do not require the same level of management and oversight and are differently regulated.</p>
<p>Death in Service Benefits Lump sum of four-times pensionable salary and refund of the member's contributions plus spouse 50% spouses. Child Pension of 25% also provided (max 4 children)</p>	<p>Death in Service Benefits Separate policy outside of an individual's "pension pot". Level of cover would have to be agreed but could be at a similar level.</p>

APPENDIX 2

PROS AND CONS DEFINED BENEFIT AND DEFINED CONTRIBUTION SCHEMES

DEFINED BENEFITS SCHEMES

PROS

- The member earns an amount of pension each year and has a good idea of what their pension will be in retirement i.e. it is defined
- Such schemes are often perceived to be better
- The amount of any spouse's pension is normally defined as a percentage of the member's pension
- Death in service benefits are normally better (but this does not necessarily have to be the case)

CONS

- The member cannot vary their contributions should they want to secure additional pension benefits
- The cost of the scheme rests with the scheme employer
- The contribution rates can vary from valuation to valuation
- Such schemes are expensive to administer and are heavily regulated
- Members cannot avail of the current pension flexibility arrangements within the scheme

DEFINED CONTRIBUTION SCHEMES

PROS

- The scheme employer contribution rate to the scheme remains stable
- Members can vary their contributions should they want to secure additional pension benefits
- Such schemes are less expensive to administer and are differently regulated
- Members can avail of pension flexibility arrangements

CONS

- The member does not know what their pension will be until retirement (but pension pots can be restructured near retirement to stabilise expected benefits) i.e. the pension is not defined
- Any pension or annuity a member takes at retirement will depend on annuity rates at the time. Therefore, members with the same size of pension pot may not receive the same pension
- The investment risk rests with the scheme employer
- Members probably need more financial advice annually

HOLDING TRUSTEE TASK GROUP

1. Following the decision of the 2021 General Assembly that Presbytery Education Boards should cease to act as holding trustees for congregational property, and the agreement of the 2022 General Assembly to the Articles of Association, the new holding company has been registered.
2. Initially it was thought that a separate company would be needed for congregations in the Republic of Ireland; this has not been necessary, so one company has been registered in Northern Ireland to act as holding trustees for congregations in both jurisdictions. The name of the company is: **THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND HOLDING TRUSTEE COMPANY.**
3. In the Articles of Association, the Clerk of the General Assembly and the Financial Secretary are the members of the company. They are identified by their names, and not their office, but on the understanding that on leaving office they will retire as members and be replaced by their successors. It is proposed that the Deputy Clerk and the Property Support Officer be appointed directors (resolution attached); again, they will be identified by their names, and not their office, but on the understanding that on leaving office they will retire as directors and be replaced by their successors.
4. The members are appointing six persons in Assembly Buildings as authorised signatories to have power to execute deeds on behalf of the company. A deed will be validly executed if signed by two of the authorised signatories.
5. Congregations whose property is held by Presbytery Education Boards must pass a resolution appointing the new company as holding trustee (alternatively, they may pass a resolution appointing three or more named individuals as holding trustees). Congregations with named individuals as holding trustees have the option of staying with named trustees or appointing the new company as holding trustee.
6. A step-by-step guide has been prepared for congregations which includes a template document known as: **Memorandum of Choice and Appointment of Trustee.** This document is a legal provision of the Trustee Appointment Act 1850 which **must be completed and registered by a solicitor** to replace, as holding trustee of congregational property, the Education Board with the new company.
7. Arrangements are in place to brief Presbytery Clerks on overseeing the process and the actions required before congregations are asked to appoint **THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND HOLDING TRUSTEE COMPANY** as the holding trustee of congregational property.
8. Presbyteries and congregations are asked to complete this process by 31 December 2023.

ROBERT HERRON, Convener

GUYSMERE DEVELOPMENT PANEL

1. Introduction

The project remit from the 2019 General Assembly states:

“that the proposed redevelopment of Guysmere, as outlined in the Feasibility Study, be permitted to proceed to the next stage i.e. the capital project development (technical and funding) which allows the local promoting group sufficient time to work through all of the activities required to refine and define its preferred option, and to secure both planning consent and also the required capital funding to effectively deliver the project.”

2. Capital Funding Strategy

The three areas which require capital funding for the successful completion of this project are:-

- (a) The technical project development costs (undertaking feasibility, business case, business planning, project design, site assessments and securing RIBA 3 status i.e. in receipt of full planning permission) – budgeted at £300k.
- (b) The capital project development costs (construction, consultants’ and statutory fees, fit out and fixtures and fittings).
- (c) Contribute to operational costs (either direct or indirect costs associated with project delivery or service provision). This would include programming/animation and service development.

We have always been conscious of the difficulties of securing funding for a faith-centred project as many funders are specifically secular and exclude any faith-based projects. It follows that there is pressure to qualify or weaken the clear faith-based vision at the heart of the project.

In Summer 2022, the directors of Guysmere Trust agreed that the Trust would not be willing to dilute its mission focus and that this will guide the delivery of the project, how it might be funded and who the Trust would partner or work with.

3. The route ahead

With this policy established it appeared that the path ahead was to:

- Appoint an integrated design team
- Draw up a specification for the proposed centre
- Hold a design contest
- Appoint architects
- Agree plans

- Launch fundraising phase (having appointed a Project Development Manager as outlined in our report to the 2022 General Assembly)

However, our expected route had to be reconsidered when we were approached by representatives of a body who were interested in partnering with us.

Having met with two of our directors at the Guysmere site, the interested party confirmed that they were very keen to pursue this possibility. They also confirmed that they were aware of a major funder who has launched a scheme which could potentially provide 100% of the construction costs (estimated at c.£6 million).

In consultation with the potential partners, we submitted an Expression of Interest to the funder in December. The response from the funder was positive and we have been moved forward to the next stage in that process.

We have also prepared for negotiations with our potential partners to ensure that we can proceed with such an arrangement in a way which would not compromise our vision for the centre.

However, the representative of the body who would have taken part in these negotiations has been off work for personal reasons and currently there is no deputy to step into the role.

This has meant that we have been unable to progress the application for funding; we have been unable to proceed with a design; without a design we cannot work towards the launch of a fundraising campaign (for the technical and operational costs : see Section 2 above).

It is most unfortunate that, at this stage, we are not able to report on what this partnership would entail.

4. Project Viability

For the project to be viable we need to:

- (a) Have a realistic strategy to raise the technical project development costs [budgeted at £300k]
- (b) Have a realistic strategy to obtain the capital project development costs [which could be met in full through the potential partnership mentioned above]
- (c) Have a realistic strategy to raise the funds required to contribute to operational costs, as outlined above, to support the centre through the initial phase of operation until it becomes self-sustaining
- (d) To provide a realistic business case for the long-term operation and maintenance of the centre.

A Financial Sustainability Plan was shared with the General Council.

5. Feasibility Study

An up to date Feasibility Study has been completed.

6. Public meeting organised by Castlerock Community Association

A public meeting was arranged by Castlerock Community Association in Christ Church Hall on 25 October 2022 to provide an update on the Guysmere project. About 80 people, representing a cross-section of the community, were present. Jim McCaughan gave a report on the current situation and the meeting was then opened up for questions. It was very evident that those present were eager to see the project succeeding.

7. Next steps

- (a) Engage in negotiations with our potential partners at the earliest opportunity
- (b) If agreement is reached, to expedite our application to the funder
- (c) To appoint an integrated design team to draw up a specification
- (d) To appoint a Project Development Manager
- (e) To launch the fundraising phase of the project

8. Conclusion

The directors of Guysmere Trust are eager to engage in negotiations with our potential partners. We realise that the present delay must come to an end, but consider that the opportunity of attaining 100% funding for the capital construction phase encourages patience.

The Impetus Group / Board of Directors has had 11 meetings in the last 12 months.

JIM McCAUGHAN, Convener

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 7

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

1. The Nominations Committee met on 27 October 2022 and noted that convenerships of three councils and three committees were due to be replaced at the General Assembly in 2023. The Committee agreed steps to bring nominations for these positions.
2. The Committee is mindful that the pool from which Nominations Committee nominees are drawn has become depleted. Whilst a survey was issued to ministers prior to the 2022 Assembly nominations, the number of responses was disappointing. The Committee believes that renewed effort is needed to encourage suitable people to offer service and recommended to the General Council that a short promotional video be produced for use in congregations, along with an article in the *Presbyterian Herald* and other effective means of communication. The General Council, at its October 2022 meeting, agreed this recommendation, at a charge to the Incidental Fund of up to £1,500.
3. The Nominations Committee met on 15 December 2022 and received recommendations from the work of interview panels on the appointment of five of the six convenerships. All recommendations received the approval of the Committee as follows:
 - (a) Under Council for Training in Ministry – the Ministerial Studies and Development Committee: **Rev Eddie Chestnutt**
 - (b) Under Council for Training in Ministry – the Reception of Ministers and Licentiates Committee: **Rev Lachlan Webster**
 - (c) Council for Training in Ministry Convener: **Rev Andrew Faulkner**
 - (d) Council for Congregational Life and Witness Convener: **Rev Albin Rankin**
 - (e) Council for Social Witness – Older People’s Services Committee: **Ms Joyce McKee**

Regarding the sixth convenership, that of the State Education Committee under the Council for Public Affairs, following advertisement and interview, no recommendation was brought.

4. The Nominations Committee met again on Thursday, 6 April 2023 and, following advertisement, received recommendations on the work of two interview panels on the appointment of two further vacant convenerships. These recommendations received the approval of the Committee as follows:

(a) Under the Council for Social Witness – The Taking Care Committee:
Very Rev Dr Norman Hamilton

(b) General Council Convener: **Very Rev Dr David Bruce**

A re-advertisement for the post of Convener of the State Education Committee under the Council for Public Affairs received no applicants. However, Miss Karen Jardine, Public Affairs Officer, has agreed to act in this role during the incoming year. This received the approval of the Nominations Committee.

5. The term of the convenership of the Council for Mission in Ireland was due to end at the 2023 General Assembly. However, at the request of the Council, the Nominations Committee agreed to recommend an extension of one year, in light of personnel changes within the Council.
6. Several other vacancies have occurred within the membership of various Councils and Committees and steps have been taken to fill these. A very few remain outstanding, and it is expected that these will be filled ahead of the meeting of General Assembly.
7. Plans to make a promotional video on the opportunities to serve on Councils and Committees, as referred to in paragraph 3, are ongoing and it is hoped to complete this ahead of steps to refresh the pool of potential nominees later in the year.

TOM GREER, Convener

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1. The General Assembly Advisory Committee met on Tuesday 14 March and Wednesday 12 April 2023 to fulfil its remit.
2. At its meetings the Committee noted and discussed a number of matters relating to the forthcoming 2023 General Assembly. This included an overview of the draft programme; if any additional items of business should be taken in private (none are being recommended); the business likely to be sent down to Presbyteries in 2023/24.
3. The Committee took time to consider in detail the reports received from Presbyteries regarding Ministers without Charge and Licentiates not in Assistantships under their care, this area of work having been transferred by the General Assembly to the Committee and General Council from the Council for Training in Ministry. The Committee's summary report to the to the General Council, and through it to the General Assembly, is contained in Appendix 1.
4. The Committee also took time to consider in detail the reports received from Presbyteries regarding Ministers Emeritus under their care. This is a new area of work following the decision of the General Assembly that all Ministers Emeritus are now required to indicate annually to their Presbytery if they wish to retain that status, and fulfil the responsibilities

that go with it, or become a Minister Emeritus (Released). The Committee's summary report to the General Council, and through it to the General Assembly, is contained in Appendix 2.

5. Future structures for the areas of Church Relations and Priorities

(a) The 2022 General Assembly Reports stated (page 85, par 4):

The General Council has agreed to review the areas of Church Relations and Priorities during the incoming year. To facilitate this, the 2022 General Assembly, is being asked to appoint two small focused Church Relations and Priorities Committees, to bring forward recommendations for future structures in these areas, while at the same time overseeing these areas of work during the incoming year.

(b) Both of these Committees have now met and drawn up proposals for consideration, as follows:

Church Relations:

- (i) It was noted that the Council for Global Mission is the body within PCI which has an active and ongoing relationship with many of the Churches who are members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), the Council of European Churches (CEC) and the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE).
- (ii) It was also noted that the situation in Ireland/UK is, however, different in relation to the Irish Council of Churches (ICC), the Irish Inter-Church Committee (IICC) and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM).
- (iii) Therefore, the following outline proposals were agreed:
 - That the Council for Global Mission monitor the global and European inter-church bodies of which PCI is a member (WCRC, CEC and CPCE).
 - That a Panel under the General Council be appointed to monitor the Irish/UK inter-church bodies of which PCI is a member (ICC, IICC and IICM). Suggested membership: Moderator and Clerk; Panel Convener and other ICC Executive member; one representative each from the Councils for Public Affairs, Congregational Life and Witness and Global Mission.
 - That the General Council, retain its coordinating role, including both the appointment of PCI members to all inter-church bodies and, when necessary, consideration of any proposed membership of other inter-church bodies.

Priorities:

The following outline proposals were agreed:

- (i) That the general remit with regard to the General Assembly Priorities should now rest with the General Assembly Advisory Committee.

- (ii) That the work of the independent Priorities Reference Panel continue as at present.
- (c) Recommended way forward:
 - (i) That in regard to Church Relations, the General Council supported the outlined proposals in principle, with the General Assembly Advisory Committee taking on the coordinating role (referenced in the third bullet point in iii) and the Church Relations Panel (referenced in the second bullet point in iii) being a panel of the General Assembly Advisory Committee.
 - (ii) That in regard to Priorities, the General Council supported the outlined proposals be supported in principle, with the Priorities Reference Panel being made up as follows:

Clerk of Assembly (Convener), Financial Secretary (Secretary), Convener of the General Council, Conveners of Support Services Committee and the United Appeal Committee plus up to two additional co-opted members of the General Council.

Mandatory Maximum Retirement age for Ministers from their Charges

6. Par 223 of the current Code includes the ‘normal retirement age’ for Ministers as being 66 when it states: “223. (1) A minister who reaches 66 years of age is entitled to retire from the active duties of the ministry, with the emoluments accruing to a retired minister from the funds of the Church, if:”. The General Assembly has decided this age, previously 65, should rise in line with the UK State Retirement Age, which is due to increase to 67 in a phased way “between 2026 and 2028”.
7. Par 223 of the Code also includes a ‘mandatory maximum age’ for Ministers as being 70 when it states: “223. (5) In any event a minister shall retire not later than his 70th Birthday.”
8. The question has been asked as to whether this ‘mandatory maximum retirement age’ should also rise in line with the ‘normal retirement age’ (presumably to 71 and then to 72) or even beyond that, given both the shortage of Ministers and the desire of some to continue in a charge.
9. Following detailed discussion, including consultation with the Financial Secretary, the Committee agreed to recommend to the General Council and it agreed to recommend to the General Assembly that the ‘mandatory maximum retirement age’, as stated in Code Par 223(5), be stated as being five years beyond PCI’s normal retirement age. This change, if agreed by the General Council and accepted by the 2023 General Assembly (through an appropriate overture) would have the immediate effect of moving the mandatory maximum retirement age for ministers from 70 to 71.

Financial Implications of the Strategic Review of Communications

10. The Clerk of Assembly and Financial Secretary presented and spoke to a paper outlining the financial implications of the outworking of the strategic review of communications (see Appendix 1.A of this report). Please note

that a separate report regarding the strategic review will be considered by the General Assembly at Section 4 of the General Council Report. The paper regarding financial implications is only relevant if the Assembly adopt the recommendations of the strategic review.

11. Following detailed discussion, *the Committee agreed to recommend to the General Council, and it agreed to recommend to the General Assembly, that the funding proposals set out in E1(a)–(c) in Appendix 3, for the establishment of a new Communications Department (and the move of Presbyterian Herald editorial oversight to the Congregational Life and Witness Department) be agreed. All subject to General Assembly approval for the new Communications Department.*

Correspondence from the Council for Training in Ministry

12. The Committee considered a letter from the Council for Training in Ministry (CTM), relating to the current transitional funding arrangements of Union Theological College, which had been put in place previously by the General Council. The main thrust of the letter was a request from CTM to extend the period of transitional support to Union Theological College.
13. Following detailed discussion, the Committee agreed to recommend to the General Council, and it was agreed, that the requests of CTM contained in its letter of 6 April 2023 be supported, namely:
 - (a) That the transitional support offered to the College by the Church be extended until September 2028, namely:
 - (i) The annual Support Services rebate of £60,000.
 - (ii) The additional grant from the Students' Bursary Fund of £1000 per student p.a.
 - (iii) The annual grant of £30,000 from the Trustees' Discretionary Fund.
 - (b) That a grant from the Trustees' Discretionary Fund of up to £20,000 for the installation of a dedicated recording room in College, to be considered.
 - (c) That a cash overdraft be approved for the Council for Training in Ministry of £35,000.

Trustees' Discretionary Fund

14. The fund known as the Trustees' Discretionary Fund is the fund in which undesignated gifts/legacies etc. received by the General Assembly (or its holding Trustees) are invested and held. Following legal advice, the General Assembly has resolved that grants from this fund should be allocated by decision of the General Council, or indeed of the General Assembly itself. The General Council subsequently agreed that the Clerk of Assembly and Financial Secretary should report to the General Assembly Advisory Committee in regard to possible grants, and the Committee should then

bring recommendations to the General Council for decision. This normally happens in the March/April period each year, when the outcome of the United Appeal annual funding round is being finalised.

15. The Clerk and Financial Secretary tabled a summary document for the Committee’s consideration (see Appendix 3). Following detailed discussion, *the Committee agreed to recommend to the General Council, and it was agreed that* the following grants be made from the Trustees Discretionary Fund:

Council for Social Witness (“One-off Funding”)	(30,000)
Transitional Communication Strategy Review funding	(10,000)
Towards UTC Recording Studio	(20,000)
UTC – further 3 years’ transitional funding 01.09.25 to 31.08.28	(90,000)

Note: these grants include the allocations referred to in point 13 above, in relation to UTC.

Other business

16. The Committee considered a Memorial from the Presbytery of South Belfast and decided not to forward a formal comment for consideration at the General Assembly. The Committee also advised the Moderator and Clerk regarding a number of items of correspondence.
17. At the time of writing, discussions are ongoing regarding the future role of Youth Link NI. Meetings have been held involving senior representatives of PCI, the Methodist Church and the Church of Ireland, who along with the Roman Catholic Church were the founding Churches of Youth Link. The appropriate officers of PCI’s Council for Congregational Life and Witness are involved in the detail of these discussions, which involve considering the necessary ‘repositioning’ of Youth Link in the overall youth sector in Northern Ireland because of decisions taken by statutory authorities, are likely to arrive at a conclusion over the next number of months, and certainly in advance of the 2024 General Assembly. Therefore, an appropriate resolution is appended delegating power to the General Council to enable it to make any necessary decisions on behalf of the General Assembly. The other denominations are ensuring that similar bodies to PCI’s General Council also have delegated authority to make any necessary decisions.

TREVOR D GRIBBEN, Convener

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

APPENDIX 1

MINISTERS WITHOUT CHARGE AND LICENTIATES NO LONGER SERVING IN ASSISTANTSHIPS UNDER PAR 219A OF THE CODE

1. Each year presbyteries are required to complete returns regarding Ministers without Charge and Licentiates no longer serving in Assistantships. The documentation about this was previously dealt with by the Reception of Ministers and Licentiates Committee under the Council for Training in Ministry. However, at the General Assembly 2022, it was agreed that this would now be carried out by the GA Advisory Committee, under the General Council (GA Reports 2022, p.262).

Requirements for retention

2. Code Par 219(4)(b) states:

The Presbytery shall seek authorisation annually through the Council for Training in Ministry, or its appropriate committee, for those it wishes to retain on the Church's current records as recognised licentiates or ministers without charge. The Council shall consider such requests and ask the Assembly to resolve on its recommendations.

3. Code Par 219(4)(c) states:

It shall be a condition for retention that they report regularly to Presbytery as required, not less than annually, on their life and work, especially involvement in congregational life and Church work, in preaching, administration of the sacraments and conduct of marriages, and on whether they have actively been seeking a call.

(Note: Emphasis added. Also the Code is yet to be updated re the change in now reporting to the GA Advisory Committee and the General Council.)

4. The GA Advisory Committee has considered the returns from presbyteries and brought the following recommendations to the General Council, for transmission to the General Assembly.

Ards	<p>Rev M. Catney not be retained</p> <p>Rev C.D. Mawhinney to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev L. Wilson to be retained as minister without charge</p>
Armagh	<p>Rev J.W.P. McConnell to be retained as minister without charge for one year only, to allow opportunity to seek and obtain a call</p>
Ballymena	<p>Rev C. Millar not be retained</p> <p>Rev D. McCaughey to be retained as minister without charge</p>
North Belfast	<p>Rev Dr L.E. Carroll to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Mr David McCarthy to be retained as licentiate</p> <p>Rev Samuel Newell to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev W.A. Shaw to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev W.M. Smyth to be retained as minister without charge (retired)</p>
South Belfast	<p>Rev J. Burnett to be retained as minister without charge</p>
East Belfast	<p>Rev J.M. Casement to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev W.J. Harshaw to be retained as minister without charge (retired)</p> <p>Rev W.G. Hamilton to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev Dr D.J. Montgomery to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev Dr M.J. Welsh to be retained as minister without charge</p>
Carrickfergus	<p>Rev T.N. Bingham to be retained as minister without charge</p>
Coleraine and Limavady	<p>Rev Dr P. Fleming to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev Dr R.A. Kane to be retained as minister without charge</p>

Down	Rev Dr B.C.G. Black to be retained as minister without charge
Dromore	Rev W.J. Todd not be retained
Monaghan	Rev D.J.M. Boyle to be retained as minister without charge
Newry	Rev A.D. Mullan to be retained as minister without charge Rev B.A.H. Wilson to be retained as minister without charge
Route	Rev Peter Douglas to be retained as minister without charge
Templepatrick	Rev J.A. Gordon to be retained as minister without charge Rev D. Paul to be retained as minister without charge Rev J.L. Tosh to be retained as minister without charge
Tyrone	Rev W.I. Ferris to be retained as minister without charge

APPENDIX 2

MINISTERS EMERITUS

1. The 2021 General Assembly resolved:

That, from the 2022 General Assembly onwards, retired ministers will be required to opt to remain full members of the courts of the Church – with automatic retention as full members at the point of retirement, and then thereafter each retired minister be required to request annually to be retained.

(Recommendation 6 of the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group, 2021 Reports page 119)

2. In response to this, the 2022 General Assembly to put in place a process whereby this responsibility is carried out by Presbyteries and reported to the General Assembly, through the General Assembly Advisory Committee under the General Council:

Resolution 21, GA Reports 2022, p.262

21. That from the 2022 General Assembly onwards, the General Assembly Advisory Committee (under the General Council) be given responsibility for receiving reports from Presbyteries in relation to both Ministers without Charge and Ministers Emeritus.

3. The GA Advisory Committee has considered the returns from presbyteries and asks the General Council to note that the following ministers emeritus have requested released status, and been granted such by their presbytery.

Ards	Cameron, Bill Carlisle, John Gray, David Montgomery, Richard
Ballymena	Simms, James
Coleraine and Limavady	Clarke, James
Derry and Donegal	Young, Gilbert
Down	Conkey, Sam Gordon, Wilson McIlwrath, David
Dromore	Gibson, Brian Scott, Malcolm

Dublin and Munster	McCurdy, Charles McKay, Girvan
Belfast, East	McIntyre, Hastings McKay, Ivan Whitley, Dennis
Belfast, North	Campbell, W. McB. McMillen, B.
Belfast, South	Boden, Derek John Hart, Ian Hughes, Brian McCullough, J. Cecil Newell, Kenneth Sinclair, Victor Wilson, Henry
Iveagh	Clarke, Arthur Sanderson, Bill
Monaghan	Anketell, Sam
Omagh	Honeyford, John
Tyrone	Coburn, Trevor

The Committee also noted that the Rev Trevor Wilson had been granted released status by the Presbytery of Templepatrick earlier in the year.

4. The Committee would bring to the attention of the General Assembly that ministers emeritus become released when such requests are received and processed by their presbytery. The PCI database will be updated when presbytery reports are received by the General Secretary's Department.

APPENDIX 3

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY REVIEW FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

(A) Creative Production Department

The current staffing complement in the department is as follows;

Executive members of staff

- Head of Creative Production (Full -time)
- *Herald* Editor (4 days per week)

Admin members of staff

- a 5 day per week post
- a 3½ day per week post
- a 4 day per week post
- and there is also a temporary 4 days per week post

The department is funded through a grant from United Appeal and a charge to the *Presbyterian Herald* magazine based on an estimate of staff time involved in its production.

The departmental budgets for 2023 and 2024 as recently submitted to United Appeal (with comparative figures for 2022) can be summarised as follows:

	2022 £	2023 £	2024 £
Income			
United Appeal Grant	200,000	200,000	236,200
Internal Charge to <i>Herald</i> magazine Note 1	80,000	80,000	88,000
Other Income (incl PHSI publications)	6,346	7,000	7,000
Total Income	286,346	287,000	331,200
Expenditure			
Salaries	187,309	209,526	211,849
Management Charge (support services)	36,259	39,000	40,000
Professional Fees	33,976	36,800	37,540
Internal Rent (re office space)	27,872	29,850	30,500
Other	11,791	11,680	11,470
Total Expenditure	297,207	326,856	331,359
Surplus / (Deficit)	(11,861)	(39,856)	(159)

Note 1 – current basis of calculation would indicate approx. 60% on “editing” and 40% on “production/publishing – see later.

The above deficits have been funded from existing reserves – no reserves are left at end of 2024.

(B) Outcome of Strategy Review – Proposed Communications Department

The review is proposing that a new Communications Department be established with the following staffing complement

Executive members of staff:

- A Head of Communications (probably Executive Scale E4) NEW POST.
- a Creative Production Officer (existing post).
- a Press Officer (existing post) – transferring from General Secretary’s Department.

Admin members of staff:

- a 5 day per week post (existing post).
- a 3 ½ day per week post (existing post).
- and there is the possibility that some further admin support might be required but this will be reviewed once the Head of Communications is in post.

(C) Resultant Staffing Changes

If the new Communications Department and its proposed staffing structure is approved then:

- (a) A new Head of Communications will need to be appointed.
- (b) The existing Press Officer will move from the General Secretary's Department to the new Communications Department.
- (c) The staff involved with “editing” the *Presbyterian Herald* magazine (two members of staff, one Executive and one Admin) will transfer to the Council for Congregational Life and Witness. That Council will take on responsibility for the magazine. As 100% of the hours worked by these staff members is not presently charged to the *Presbyterian Herald* it is hoped that they would also be available to support the more general ‘editorial type work’ of the Council.
- (d) The remaining Creative Production Department Staff will move to the new Communications Department

(D) Financial Implications

If the above changes are approved this has implications for:

- (a) The Congregational Life and Witness Department with two additional members of staff transferring into the Department.
- (b) The cost of the new Communications Department and how this is funded.

This provides an opportunity to consider how the new Communications Department should be funded and in particular whether this should be through the United Appeal or whether this should be funded in a similar way to some other support departments.

Costs related to staff transferring to CCLW

The figures below (annual amounts) include the gross pay, employer's national insurance and employer's pension. They do not include any “office overheads” especially in terms of office space (internal rent) as it is assumed they can be accommodated within the present CCLW offices.

	2023 £	2024 £
Executive Staff Member	40,788	41,184
Admin Staff Member	28,776	28,931
Total	69,554	70,115

Estimated cost of the new Communications Department

	2023 £	2024 £
As noted in Section 1 the cost of the current Creative Production Department (CPD)	326,856	331,359
Adjustments		
Less <i>Herald</i> staff transferred to CCLW (as above)	(69,554)	(70,115)
Less Temporary CPD Admin member of staff (Note 1)	(19,615)	(20,053)
Add new Head of Communications (estimate)	60,000	61,000
Add Press Officer	54,147	55,150
Additional office space (1 Exec room) Note 2	8,000	8,000
Estimated Cost	359,834	365,341

Note 1. as noted earlier there is the possibility that some further admin support might be required but this will be reviewed once the Head of Communications is in post.

Note 2. It will be necessary to provide an additional office as there will be 3 Executive members of Staff in the new Communications Department and there is only space for two in the existing office accommodation.

(E) Proposals

It is proposed the changes noted below, from a financial perspective, apply from 1 January 2024 and any additional necessary interim/transitional costs arising in 2023, and specifically in relation to the Head of Communications, be charged to the Incidental Fund or funded in another way.

The new arrangements mean that the *Presbyterian Herald* magazine will be “edited” within the Council for Congregational Life and Witness and “produced/published” within the new Communications Department.

1. Proposal

(a) Staff Transferring to CCLW

It is proposed that the additional staff transferred to CCLW fall within that Council's budget and that the Council make an internal charge (which is likely to equate to a significant proportion of the related staff costs) to the "Herald Magazine Account" for "editing" the magazine. This is similar to the present arrangements with the Creative Production Department – the difference being that the charge would only be for "editing".

This would avoid any significant additional net costs falling to CCLW and indeed any additional demand on United Appeal – although some minor adjustments may be required.

(b) Fund the New Communication Department Funded through Assessments

It is proposed that the new Communications Department be funded through congregational assessments similar to the General Secretary's Department (which currently includes the Press Officer) and not be funded through the United Appeal (which the current Creative Production Department is).

However, the amount to be funded through assessments would take account of the fact that the new Communications Department would make an internal charge to the *Presbyterian Herald* account for the cost of "producing/publishing" the magazine. This would reflect staff time involved in this.

(IMPORTANT NOTE – It is not expected that the new charge from CCLW for "editing" the magazine and from the new Communications Department for "producing/publishing" would exceed the current charge made by the Creative Production Department – any charges will need to have regard to the level of magazine "profit").

The impact of all of this is that it would increase the amount that needs to be funded through assessments by circa £270k (being the estimated cost of the department of circa £360k less the cost of the existing press officer of circa £55k which is already funded through assessments and less the charge for "producing/publishing" the magazine, say £35k).

This amount would be collected by including it as part of the Incidental Fund Assessment.

If this is agreed it would be up to the Support Services Committee of the General Council when considering the level of assessments for 2024 to work out how this might be collected through the present system. That Committee would make every effort to alleviate the impact of this transitional change by adjusting other assessments where possible and recognising that in 2026 (with a fair wind!!) the assessments for the Assembly Building Repair Fund (circa £500k per year) should cease as the internal overdraft for the former refurbishment works will have been paid off.

(c) **Adjustment to United Appeal For 2024**

It is proposed that the United Appeal to congregations for 2024 be adjusted to remove the Creative Production Department. The proposed grant to CPD for 2024 is £230,000 (after a small adjustment to their request). A small additional amount of United Appeal funding, estimated at £25,000, will need to be allocated to CCLW to cover shortfall in the cost of the transferring staff. The proposed Appeal is £3,600,000 (subject to formal approval by the General Council). This would be reduced to £3,395,000. The United Appeal Committee would need to work through the implications of this.

2. An Alternative Option

An alternative to the Proposal would be that the new Communications Department is funded entirely through United Appeal. This would increase the request from £230k to circa £350k.

This would in turn have implications for the level of the Appeal which e.g. for 2024 would have to increase from £3,600,000 to approx. £3,720,000. If not, it could impact on the general allocation of grants to other Councils or indeed for the use of United Appeal reserves.

Another option would be for the new Communications Department to be funded through the United Appeal and Assessments as a joint funding model. However, this is not considered a suitable option and it will simply lead to confusion and a level of complexity that is not helpful.

Neither of these options is recommended.

REPORT OF THE CHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE

“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!”
(Psalm 133:1)

Irish Council of Churches (ICC)

1. PCI has been well represented at the meetings of the Irish Council of Churches Executive and associated gatherings, as well as at the Irish Inter Church Meeting over the past year. We congratulate Dr Damian Jackson, who has been appointed General Secretary of ICC, and commend him for all the work that has been undertaken in the past year. The Moderator, Right Rev Dr John Kirkpatrick, and Clerk of the General Assembly, Rev Trevor Gribben, have been actively involved in contributing valuable insights during the year to ICC/ ICCM meetings.
2. The many initiatives include the development of a toolkit for congregations entitled ‘Every nation, tribe and people? A Handbook for Churches in Ireland’, which aims to help congregations to develop their understanding of racism and inclusion, and to support them to improve inclusion within the congregation.
3. In a wider context, Church leaders have had fruitful meetings during the year with various government and civic leaders, and highlighted important issues including the effects of the Cost of Living Crisis. Church leaders also attended the Funeral Service of Queen Elizabeth II, and it has been noted that during this time the place of faith was reported on in a very positive manner.
4. It is with gratitude for his service that we note the sudden passing of an extremely valued and committed member of the Interim Church Relations Committee, the Rev Dr William John Paul Bailie, on 15 November 2022. The Committee is grateful to have had his insights and wisdom, and we convey our prayers and condolences to his wife, Anne, and extended family.
5. On 22 January, there was a Service held in St. Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast, for the Centenary of ICC and the 50 year anniversary of the Ballymascanlon Talks. This was a good service and was attended by delegates from over 16 church denominations.
6. The 100th Annual Meeting of the Irish Council of Churches took place on 30 March, at St Mary’s Cathedral, Limerick. Very helpful speakers inspired dialogue and reflection and PCI was very well represented with many delegates. This Reflections looked back and indeed forward and much of the discussion after these focused on the issue of Biblical illiteracy and the need for God’s Word to be known and shared. It was noted during this meeting that last year’s AGM of March 2022, with the keynote address by Rev Dr Tony Davidson on the ‘Unfinished Work of Peace’, was very helpful and appreciated.
7. Rev Barry McCroskery has been nominated to the ICC Executive.

8. The recruitment of a new Programme Officer is currently taking place, this role will continue to develop the peace building and reconciliation work of ICC/ IICM and build relationships with other churches, including new and migrant led churches.

Irish Inter-Church Committee/ Meeting (IICC / IICM).

9. The Irish Inter Church Meeting, met at Dromantine Conference centre on 11 November 2022, with the theme ‘Creatively reconfiguring our post-pandemic understanding of church’. This was a fruitful, insightful and stimulating conference, with input from various speakers and time to meet together. Reflection was given to looking back over the last few years of the pandemic, how it affected the church here and abroad and looking forward. We heard input and insights from young people as well as from speakers around the world. Many issues were raised including the strain on mental health, especially with young people, and how connection now is of critical importance, and indeed reconnection.
10. As we shared, people noted how the Lord seems to be saying to us again to trust Him in the midst of any storms, to rest in Him, to respond with faith not fear, to give ourselves to others, go out of our places of comfort, remembering how as a church we are not simply to say to others ‘Come and See!’, but also we must indeed ‘Go out and be the church!’.
11. The Irish Inter-Church Committee met in September 2022 and had a fruitful meeting and has also met again in Rostrevor on 23 February 2023. There are various plans being developed to mark the 25th anniversary of the Belfast Agreement.

World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) – Europe Committee

12. This is meeting from 4–6 May 2023, in Thessaloniki, Greece. The Clerk of the General Assembly, Rev Trevor Gribben has been nominated to attend.

Conference of European Churches (CEC)

13. The Convenor of the Church Relations Committee, Rev H.M. Freeburn, has been nominated to be PCI’s representative to the Council of European Churches General Assembly, taking place in Tallinn, Estonia, 14–20 June 2023. This will explore the theme “Under God’s blessing – Shaping the future”.
14. At a time of instability in Europe, when Ukraine is suffering under invasion and war, the CEC General Assembly will gather European church delegates together, as CEC President Rev Christian Krieger comments, “the CEC Assembly will be a significant moment of prayer, fellowship and reflection for the life and witness of the churches in Europe.” The Assembly will be hosted by CEC Member Churches in Estonia, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church of Estonia.

Theological Dialogue with Representatives of the Irish Bishops Conference

15. One of the PCI representatives, Very Rev Dr T. Morrow, has noted that “the Covid Pandemic sadly caused these profitable and helpful meetings not to take place. They are to be rescheduled at a convenient time.”

General

16. Since the last meeting of the General Council, the Clerk of Assembly has renewed conversations with his opposite number in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (USA). These contacts, previously reported to the General Council and General Assembly, were in abeyance during the Covid period, but at the time of writing, are being followed up by a number of Zoom meetings involving relevant office-bearers. A fuller report will be given in Supplementary Reports.
17. The General Assembly tasked the Church Relations and Priorities Committee (2022 General Assembly Reports, page 85, par 4) to bring forward recommendations for future structures, while at the same time overseeing these areas of work during the year. Following discussion at the Church Relations Committee, the Rev Trevor Gribben, has reported to the General Assembly Advisory Committee regarding proposals for restructuring, and these will come to the General Council as part of that Committee’s report.

HELEN M. FREEBURN, Convener

MEMORIAL OF THE PRESBYTERY OF SOUTH BELFAST (MEMORIAL ONE)

To the Venerable the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to meet in Belfast on 21 June 2023.

The Memorial of South Belfast respectfully showeth:

That the ministers in membership of a Presbytery as set out in the existing Code, Par 61, as follows:

- (a) the ministers in active duty of the congregations assigned to it by the Assembly or retired from active duty with the consent of the Assembly, apart from those designated Minister Emeritus (Released);

.....

- (c) chaplains to the Forces, ordained ministers and elders serving under the Council for Global Mission and other ministers serving under any Assembly Council in special work outside Ireland, who have been installed or inducted to their charge by Presbytery or have retired from active duty with the consent of the Assembly, apart from those designated Minister Emeritus (Released);

- (d) associate ministers, ordained assistant ministers and ministers in special work (including Church Extension charges) located within the Presbytery as members of its congregations, where called by authority of the Assembly;

- (e) associate ministers, ordained assistant ministers and ministers in special work retired from active duty with the consent of the Assembly, apart from those designated Minister Emeritus (Released);

.....

- (h) ministers or ruling elders associated with congregations in the Presbytery who are ex-officio members of Assembly;

.....

- (j) such other ministers or ruling elders as the Assembly may from time to time determine.

That the impact of a rigorous implementation of the previous paragraph over the last decade has been to relegate some ministers who are not working under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, who are involved in ministry of a teaching and pastoral nature, to the status of 'minister without charge'.

That this has excluded those ministers from membership of Presbyteries and therefore Presbytery is deprived of the valuable contribution that such ministers could otherwise be able to provide.

Presbytery requests that the General Assembly instruct the General Council to reexamine this situation and report back to the 2024 General Assembly And memorialists, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Adopted by the Presbytery of South Belfast at its meeting in Richview on 7 March 2023.

REV CORRINA HERON, Moderator

REV MORRIS GAULT, Clerk

MEMORIAL OF THE PRESBYTERY OF MONAGHAN

To the Venerable the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to meet in Belfast on 21 June 2023. The Memorial of the Presbytery of Monaghan respectfully showeth:

That it is often very difficult for voting members of Presbytery to choose between candidates standing to be Moderator of the General Assembly due to the limited information that is made available about the candidates.

That it would be beneficial if a mechanism could be found for candidates standing in the election to make available to voting members a short summary of their own priorities and emphases in mission and ministry to enable voting members to make informed decisions when they cast their vote.

That this request for consideration to be given to enable more informed decision making by Presbyters in the choice of Moderator, is consistent with other efforts in recent years to make the General Assembly more accessible.

Memorialists, therefore, pray your Venerable Assembly to instruct the General Council to review the process by which the Moderator of the General Assembly is elected to ensure more information is available, and report back to the 2024 General Assembly.

And memorialists, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Adopted by the Presbytery of Monaghan at its meeting in First Monaghan on 2 May 2023.

REV JOHN O'DONNELL, Moderator

REV DARYL EDWARDS, Clerk

MEMORIAL OF THE PRESBYTERY OF SOUTH BELFAST (MEMORIAL TWO)

To the Venerable the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to meet in Belfast on 21 June 2023.

The Memorial of the South Belfast Presbytery respectfully showeth:

That in 1973 the General Assembly agreed to the ordination of women to the ministry, making this the 50th year anniversary of the Church's decision.

That other significant anniversaries are also approaching, including the 100th anniversary of the decision taken at the 1926 General Assembly, when it was agreed that women shall be eligible for election as ruling elders on the same basis as men.

As such, the Presbytery requests that the General Assembly make plans to use the opportunity to encourage women in leadership roles within our denomination on the same basis as men, and to explore what can be done to facilitate more women exploring a call to ordination in the future.

Presbytery requests that the Assembly instruct the General Council to set up a committee to carry out these tasks and to report back, with proposed plans, to the 2024 General Assembly.

And memorialists, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Adopted by the Presbytery of South Belfast at its meeting on 2 May 2023 in Kilmakee.

REV BARRY MCCROSKERY, Acting Moderator

REV MORRIS GAULT, Clerk

REPORT OF THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND FOR 2022

(For information only)

Very Rev Dr Donald Patton writes:

The Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland reports that throughout 2022 it has continued to promote the study of the historic Churches of the Presbyterian order in Ireland, and the contributions they have made to Irish Society and the wider world. We have taken the opportunity, following the lifting of restrictions imposed because of Covid, to achieve this through our programme of talks, and lectures, and through our publications and website. It was not possible to run a Field Trip this year.

1. We have continued to operate in line with the requirements of the Charity Commission, both in how we present our accounts and also as we seek to meet other requirements as they are notified to us. We have tried to do this with great care and we believe we have been able to operate as a responsible charity.
2. The annual grant from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland remains the main source of income for the Society, augmented by donations from the other Churches of the Presbyterian order, membership fees, (especially from Associate Members who join on-line via our website). In addition we received a substantial grant from the Department of Communities under their Languages Capital Project for new digital equipment and for the erection of shelving for our picture collection as well as money from the Ulster-Scots Agency to erect additional mobile shelving for our records. The Society is very grateful to the Agency's Chief Executive Officer, Mr Ian Crozier, for his cooperation and assistance.
3. The major areas of expenditure were the leasing and servicing of the Society's premises. Expenditure continues to be carefully controlled, quotations are obtained before significant items of expenditure are approved, and all areas are examined regularly for economies, so that the best value for money is obtained.
4. The Society is grateful for the use of the premises in Assembly Buildings which are conveniently located and well-appointed. It commends members of staff in Assembly Buildings for their cheerful helpfulness.
5. The programme of talks and lectures continued as normal this year and we were able to resume the Allen lecture but decided not to run the Field Trip in June because of continuing hesitations about close gathering on a coach. To compensate for the cancellation of the Field Trip we commissioned a video on the development of Presbyterianism in Belfast narrated by the Rev Dr Bert Tosh. This has been uploaded to our YouTube channel.
6. The Annual General Meeting took place at Newtownbreda in March. The Very Rev Dr Godfrey Brown and Mr James Moffett retired as Joint

Secretaries, after decades of service, and were replaced by the Revs Scott Moore and Jim Stothers. After similarly long service, Mr Derek Alexander retired as Treasurer and was replaced by Mr Stephen Johnson. The three retirees were made Vice Presidents, bringing that number up to eight. The Society is profoundly grateful to all three for the immense amount of work they did for it.

7. During the year, the Publications Committee produced:
- The annual *Bulletin*
 - *Forgotten Covenanters: The Rise and Fall of the Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Church* by Dr William Roulston
 - *Wonderful Years – Memories of Jamaica over the Years* by former PCI missionary Claire Trueman. Publication was in cooperation with PCI's Council for Global Mission and included a launch on 7 December in Assembly Buildings, with a video-link to Claire in Jamaica.

Three other publications are progressing and are intended for publication in 2023.

8. We are very grateful to our Presbytery Historical Agents for how they publicise the work of the Society locally. We are at present examining how they can do this more effectively and how best we can continue to support them.
9. The Society welcomes donations of books, pamphlets, congregational histories, minute books and suitable artefacts, such as old-style communion tokens, as well as congregational records and other archives of Irish Presbyterian interest. These may be deposited with the Society either as a gift or on indefinite loan. Of particular note among new accessions of records this year are additional congregational records from Crumlin Road, Townsend Street and Ulsterville Presbyterian Churches, records for Drumlee Presbyterian Church and papers of the late Rev Dr Gordon Gray as well as an additional deposit of his photographs of Presbyterian churches in Ireland.
10. The Society continues to share information with other organisations, agencies and blogs, which help us to raise our profile and publicise our publications. We now have over a thousand followers on Facebook which can be accessed via the blog icon on the home page of our website. This keeps a wider public informed about new books and events.
11. The Society's website (www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com) continues to be one of our principal means of communicating with the general public, and this is reflected by the numbers using it, and joining the Society as Associate Members. The format and content of the website are under review. Web resources include:
- Back issues of *Bulletin* of the PHSI over five years old
 - Histories of Congregations
 - Minister Lists/Fasti/Student Lists
 - Presbyterian Magazines

- First World War Roll of Honour
- Out-of-Print Booklets
- Transcripts of Lectures
- Indexes to Records
- Audio Recordings

We work hard to improve the number and range of the articles on our history page, and in the updating and presentation of A History of Congregations.

12. We have continued to try to work through our Action Plan, but the amount of other work has made this slower than we had hoped.
13. We continue to be very grateful to our volunteers who help us out for a few hours each week, filing, classifying library books, indexing and transcribing records, and preparing mailings. If you can offer help with this please contact the Librarian, Miss Valerie Adams. We pay tribute to Valerie Adams, our Librarian and Archivist, for all she does for the Society, and not least for all her adaptability and resourcefulness throughout the year, particularly in preparing funding applications and ensuring that the work is completed on time and within budget.

REPORT OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

(For information only)

Mr Jason Nicholson (Executive Secretary) reports:

1. The Presbyterian Children's Society exists to support children in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. It works mainly through ministers to alleviate poverty and financial hardship for eligible families and their children. This is facilitated mostly through regular and exceptional grants. Some additional (limited) help, through special initiatives, is offered to congregations to support their work with children and young people.
2. During 2022, approximately 851 children from 434 families were formally enrolled in the Society for help, by way of regular quarterly grants, with an additional 38 children from 17 other families receiving interim grant payments.
3. The demand for exceptional grants, which are provided to address emergency or crisis situations, increased on the previous year, with a total of 136 exceptional grants being provided to help support Presbyterian families in a variety of challenging circumstances. The need for help was a result of (among other things) reduced working hours, illness, and the sharp increase in the cost of living.

4. A special summer grant of £80 per child was paid to families receiving the Society's regular quarterly grants, with an increased special grant of £90 paid per child to families in the winter.
5. To respond to the impact of the pandemic on the mental health and well-being of many Presbyterian children and young people, and to help encourage greater participation from them in congregational life, a Small Grant Scheme was developed. This scheme provided small grants of up to £300 to local Presbyterian congregations to help with the cost of delivering family-oriented workshops and activities. The applications from congregations were varied and creatively sought to re-engage young people and their families. A total of £15,446 in grants to congregations was provided as a result of the scheme.
6. Across all grant categories (including the Small Grants Scheme), the Society paid out almost £703,000 for the benefit of Presbyterian children and young people. This represented an increase of almost £21,000 on the previous year.
7. The backgrounds of families helped by the Society remains diverse. Presbyterian children from family backgrounds of unemployment or low income, separation, divorce, bereavement, single parenthood or where a parent is in long-term hospital care, prison, or is disabled, are all aided by the Society. In every circumstance, the Society's focus is on helping children reach their full potential regardless of their background or financial limitations.
8. The Society was pleased to acknowledge the astonishing commitment of its congregational representatives, with the lengthy service of some stretching over many decades.
9. Whilst the Society is not under the control of the General Assembly it does work collaboratively with the ministers of our Church and enjoys a close, positive working relationship with a number of General Assembly councils. This partnership is much appreciated and heartily encouraged.
10. A range of congregational resources to help illustrate the positive impact of the work of the Society is available from the Society's website [www.presbyterianchildrenssociety.org].
11. The Society's financial resources are independently supported by Presbyterian congregations and individuals, and the Society gives thanks to all those who support its work prayerfully, practically, and financially throughout the year. The Society welcomes enquiries about how it might assist children and families in need within any Presbyterian congregation and commends its work for the continued prayerful and financial support of the Church.

Note: The Presbyterian Children's Society and the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland are not under the control of the General Assembly. The reports are included for information purposes only.

REPORTS OF PRESBYTERIES

The **ARDS PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Mairisine Stanfield is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr Paul Bailie, Minister in Recognised Service with Mission Africa, died on 15 November 2022; that the Rev Enrique Tagle-Aguiar, Assistant Minister of St Andrew's, Bangor, resigned his charge on 3 September 2022 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of East Belfast; that the Rev Graeme Fowles, presented credentials from the Presbytery of South Belfast and was installed to the charge of Shore Street, Donaghadee on 18 March 2022; that the Rev James Rogers presented credentials from the Presbytery of Carrickfergus and was installed to the charge of Ballygrainey on 3 February 2023; that Mr Paul Bradley was licensed on 18 September 2022; that Mr Andrew Frazer was licensed on 9 October 2022 and given credentials to the Presbytery of East Belfast; that Mr Wallace Moore was licensed on 16 October 2022; that Mr Thomas Moore presented credentials from the Presbytery of Down, and Mr Neil Stewart presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and both were received as licentiates; that Mr Seth Wright was given credentials to the Presbytery of Derry & Donegal; that Mr David Morrison was given credentials to the Presbytery of Templepatrick; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs Craig Mawhinney, Lesley-Ann Wilson, Mark Catney; as licentiates, Mr Paul Bradley, Mr Thomas Moore, Mr Wallace Moore and Mr Neil Stewart; as students, Mrs Francine Magill, Mr Jack Neilly; that they held Consultations at Ballywalter, Ballygilbert, and Greenwell Street, Newtownards; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **ARMAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev I.R. Abraham is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr A.D. Davidson, Minister of First Armagh, retired on 31 July 2022; that the Rev S.N. Hawthorne resigned his charge on 1 September 2022 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of North Belfast; that the Rev T.D. Kane, Minister Transferring, was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ballymena; that Mr M.F. Hawthorne was licensed on 11 November 2022 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Iveagh; that Mr Jeffrey Gawn presented credentials from the Presbytery of Omagh and was received as a licentiate; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Rev Dr J.W.P. McConnell; as licentiates, Messrs Jeffrey Gawn and Mark Haugh; as students, Messrs Daniel Ballantyne, Jordan Jones, Scott McMenemy and Alex Richardson; that they held Consultations at Second Keady and Drumhillery; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **BALLYMENA PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Dr A.M. Bates is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr T.C. Ballentine, Minister Emeritus of Grange, died on 20 April 2022; that the Rev W. Sinclair, Minister of First Ballymena, retired on 30 April 2022; that the Rev J.C. Simms Minister

Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 31 January 2023; that the Rev J.T. Blue resigned his charge as Minister of Rasharkin on 16 August 2022 having received and accepted a call from Second Broughshane; that the Rev J.T. Blue was installed to the charge of Second Broughshane on 17 August 2022; that the Rev T.D. Kane, having presented credentials from the Presbytery of Armagh, was installed to the charge of Glenwherry on 21 October 2022; that Mr M.R.T. Rodgers was licensed as a Probationer for the Christian Ministry on 25 September 2022 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Tyrone; that Mr M.J. Delaney was licensed as a Probationer for the Christian Ministry on 16 October 2022 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Carrickfergus; that Mr C. Wilson, a Licentiate under the care of Presbytery, having received and accepted a Call to Greystone Road Antrim was given credentials to the Presbytery of Templepatrick on 2 September 2022; that Mr K.D. McIlroy was given credentials to the Presbytery of Route; that under their care are: as a Minister without Charge, the Rev J.D. McGaughey; as a student, Dr M.W.H. Houston; that no Consultations were held during the year; and that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **NORTH BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev I. Cahoon is their Moderator; that Rev G.J. Jordan presented credentials from the Presbytery of Tyrone and was installed to the charge of Ballygomartin on 29 April 2022, that Rev D.T. Moore presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and was inducted to ministry in special work in West Belfast on 1 September 2022; that Rev Stuart N. Hawthorne presented credentials from the Presbytery of Armagh and was installed to the charge of Carnmoney on 2 September 2022; that Mr Stephen Gaston was licensed on 30 October 2022 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Templepatrick; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, the Revs Dr L.E. Carroll, S. Newell, and W.A. Shaw; as a licentiate, Mr David McCarthy; as a student, Mr Sam Scott; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of Congregations are being printed separately.

The **SOUTH BELFAST** Presbytery report that the Rev C.E. Heron is their Moderator; that the Rev J.F. Barnes, Minister Emeritus of May Street, died on 1 January 2023 and the Rev Dr R.N. Brown, Minister Emeritus Lecturer in Stranmillis College, died on 10 January 2023; that the Rev J.T. Lamb, Minister of Townsend Street, retired on 16 September 2022; that the Rev I.S. McDowell, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 4 October 2022, the Rev W. P. H. Erskine, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 8 November 2022, the Rev D.J. Boden, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023, the Rev I. Hart, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023, the Rev B.R. Hughes, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023, the Rev Dr J.C. McCullough, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023, the Very Rev Dr K.N.E. Newell,

Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023, the Rev V. Sinclair, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023, the Rev J.H. Wilson, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023; that the Rev G. Fowles, Minister of Kilmakee, resigned his charge on 17 March 2022 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ards; that the Rev D.J. Gray resigned as Chaplain of Q.U.B., S.U.C. and U.T.C. on 14 May 2022 and the Rev J.R. Burnett, Minister of Lowe Memorial, resigned his charge on 29 May 2022; that the Rev D.J. Gray was installed to the charge of Cooke Centenary on 15 May 2022; that the Rev N.D. Craig presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and was inducted as Chaplain of Q.U.B., S.U.C. and U.T.C. on 20 November 2022; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Rev J.R. Burnett; as transferring Minister, Rev E. McCroskery; that the Rev P.G. McDowell, Minister without Charge, ceased to have that status on 7 February 2023; that they held Consultations at McCracken; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **EAST BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev J.W. Frazer is their Moderator; that the Rev R.J. Beggs, Minister of McQuiston Memorial, retired on 31 July 2022; that the Rev J.H. McIntyre, Minister Emeritus, became Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023; that the Very Rev Dr I.A. McKay, Minister Emeritus, became Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023; that the Rev D.T. Moore, Minister of Knock, resigned his charge on 31 August 2022 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of North Belfast; that the Rev E. Tagle-Aguair presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ards and was installed to the charge of Mountpottinger on 4 September 2022; that Mr N. Stewart was licensed on 2 October 2022 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Ards; that Mr A. Frazer presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ards and was received as a licentiate; that Mr S. Kerr presented credentials from the Presbytery of Dromore and was received as a licentiate; that the Rev N.D. Craig was given credentials to the Presbytery of South Belfast; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs J.M. Casement, W.G. Hamilton, W.J. Harshaw (retired), Dr D.J. Montgomery and Dr M.J. Welsh; as licentiates, Mr S.Bostock (formerly in an assistantship) Mr P. Lutton, Dr J. N. McCracken, Mr A. Frazer and Mr S. Kerr; as a transferring Minister, Rev Mariann Gilicze; as a student, Mr A. Ferguson; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **CARRICKFERGUS PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Andrew Watson is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr David Chapman, Minister Emeritus of Second Islandmagee, died on 15 November 2022; that the Rev Terence Richard Graham (Minister Without Charge) became Minister Emeritus of the congregation of Joymount by resolution of the General Assembly on 25 June 2022; that the Rev James Rogers, minister of Ballynure, resigned his charge on 2 February 2023 and was given

credentials to the Presbytery of Ards; that the Rev John Philip Stanbridge presented credentials from the Presbytery of Route and was installed to the charge of Joymount on 3 February 2023; that the Rev Gary Glasgow resigned his charge on 24 November 2022 was given credentials to the Presbytery of Route; that Mr Martin Joseph Delaney presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ballymena and was received as a licentiate; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, the Rev Thomas Neil Bingham; as licentiate, Martin Joseph Delaney; as students, Mr Myles Tyrell, Mr Stephen McCleery; that they held a consultation at Ballynure; that the Financial Reports of congregations, in the prescribed format, are being published, printed and distributed as appropriate.

The **COLERAINE AND LIMAVADY PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev James Hyndman is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr James Frazer, Minister Emeritus (Released) of Ballywillan, died on 1 October 2022; that the Rev Robert McMullan, Minister of New Row, Coleraine retired on 30 April 2022; that the Rev James Clarke, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 28 February 2023 that Mr Philip Boyd, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Dromore and was ordained and inducted to the work of Moderator's Assistant in Portrush on 1 May 2022; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs Dr R. A. Kane and Dr T. P. Fleming; as a student Mr Jonathan Boyd; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **DERRY AND DONEGAL PRESBYTERY** report the Rev Graeme Orr is their Moderator; that the Rev K.J.C. McConnell, Minister Emeritus (Released), of Dunfanaghy & Carrigart died on 29 May 2022; that the Rev G.P. Young, Minister Emeritus of Greenbank and Moville, became Minister Emeritus Released on 7 February 2023; that the Rev Colin Jones presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ards and was installed to the charge of First Derry & Monreagh on 25 March 2022; that the Rev Craig Wilson presented credentials from the Presbytery of Derry & Donegal and was installed to the congregations of Burt & Inch on 2 September 2022; that the Rev Robert Orr presented credentials from the Presbytery of Omagh and was installed to the congregations of Leckpatrick and Donagheady on 2 December 2022; that Dr Seth Wright presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ards and was ordained and installed to the charge of Donemana on 8 April 2022; that no Consultations were held; that Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **DOWN PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev A.D. Burke is their Moderator; that credentials were received from the Presbytery of Templepatrick for Rev J. Boyd and he was installed in the congregation of Killyleagh on 5 May 2022; that Mr T.A.R. Moore was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ards; that Mr A. Martin presented credentials from the

Presbytery of Dromore and as received as licentiate; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev Dr B.C.G. Black; that as a Student for the Ministry, Mr E.G.D. Hanna; that they held a consultation at Carryduff; that the Financial Reports of the congregations are being published.

The **DROMORE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Graham Stockdale is their Moderator; that the Rev R.D. Larmour, Minister Emeritus, of Magheragall, died on 10 March 2022; that the Very Rev Dr D.J. Bruce, Secretary of the Council for Mission in Ireland, retired on 12 November 2022; that the Rev Dr J. Richardson, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 1 March 2022; that the Rev Dr P. Swinn, Military Chaplain, was released from active duty and became a Minister without Charge under the care of Presbytery on 13 May 2022 and was recognised as a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 25 June 2022; that the Rev B. Gibson, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023; that the Rev Dr M. Scott, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023; that Mr A. Martin was licensed on 23 October 2022 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Down; that Mr S. Kerr was licensed on 30 October 2022 and given credentials to the Presbytery of East Belfast; that Mr P. Boyd, a licentiate under the care of Presbytery, was given credentials to the Presbytery of Coleraine & Limavady; that Mr J. O'Neill, a licentiate under the care of Presbytery, was given credentials to the Presbytery of Tyrone; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev J. Todd; as a licentiate, Mr M. Kelso; as students for the ministry, Mr T. Finnegan and Mr S. Woods; that they held Consultations at St Columba's and Ballinderry; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **DUBLIN AND MUNSTER PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Richard Houston is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr William (Bill) O'Neill, Minister Emeritus of Howth and Malahide, died on 30 June 2022; that the Rev Katherine Meyer, Minister of Sandymount, retired her charge on 30 April 2022; that the Rev Purvis Campbell, Minister of Christ Church Rathgar, retired his charge on 31 October 2022; that they held a Consultation at Abbey: that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **IVEAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev A.M. Boreland is their Moderator; that the Rev James (Jim) Hagan, Minister Emeritus of Donacloy, died on 20 January 2023; that Mr M.F. Hawthorne presented credentials from the Presbytery of Armagh and was received as a Licentiate; that under their care are: as licentiates, Mr R.J.E. Hill and Mr M.F. Hawthorne; as students, Mr S.P. McKimm and Mr J. Burke; that Consultations were held in Tandragee, Loughbrickland and Scarva congregations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **MONAGHAN PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev John O'Donnell is their Moderator; that the Rev S. Anketell, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023; that the Rev S. McNie, Minister of Ballyalbany and Glennan, resigned his charge on 16 June 2022 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Templepatrick; that the Rev D. Hagan, Minister of Clontibret and Middletown, resigned his charge on 29 September 2022 and was installed as the Minister of First Castleblayney, Frankford and Corvally on 30 September 2022; that under their care is: as Minister without Charge, Rev D. Boyle; that they held Consultations at First Castleblayney, Frankford and Corvally; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **NEWRY PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev S.A. Finlay is their Moderator; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Rev B.A.H. Wilson and Rev A.D. Mullan; as students, Mr J.D. McKee, Mr R.W.R. Higgins and Mr M.B. Banks; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of the congregations are being printed separately.

The **OMAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev E.T. Frazer is their Moderator; that the Rev C.F.D. Clements, Minister of Second Castlederg and Urney, retired on 29 October 2022; that the Rev Dr W.D. Cupples, Minister of Enniskillen, retired on 31 January 2023; that the Rev H.J. Honeyford, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023; that the Rev R.N. Orr, Minister of First Castlederg and Killeter, resigned his charge on 1 December 2022 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal; that Mr R.W. McFaul presented credentials from the Presbytery of Templepatrick and was ordained and installed to the charge of Clogherney and Sixmilecross on 20 May 2022; that Mr J.M. Gawn was licensed on 22 October 2022 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Armagh; under their care as a student is: Mr G.T. Read; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **ROUTE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev D.J. Irvine is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr N. Cubitt, Minister of Bushmills, retired on 31 December 2022; that the Rev M. Barr, Minister Emeritus, became Minister Emeritus (Released) on 1 March 2022; that the Rev J.P. Stanbridge, Minister of Ballycastle and Croaghmore, resigned his charge on 2 February 2023 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Carrickfergus; that the Rev G.W.M. Glasgow presented credentials from the Presbytery of Carrickfergus and was installed to the charge of First Kilaughts and Armoyn on 25 November 2022; that Dr K. McIlroy presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ballymena and was received as a licentiate; that under their care is: Minister without Charge, Rev P. Douglas; that the Rev P. Turton, Minister without Charge, ceased to have that status on 3 May 2022; that they held a Consultation at Bushmills; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **TEMPLEPATRICK PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev A.W. Moore is their Moderator; that the Rev T.H. Wilson, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023; that the Rev D.J. Paul, Minister of Crumlin, resigned his charge on 30 April 2022 and was retained as a Minister without Charge; that the Rev D. Steele, Minister of Dundrod, resigned his charge on 27 June 2022; that the Rev J. Boyd, Minister of HydePark and Lylehill, resigned his charge on 4 May 2022 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Down; that the Rev J.E. Sloan, Minister of O.C. Randalstown, resigned his charge on 29 June 2022 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Tyrone; that the Rev S. McNie presented credentials from the Presbytery of Monaghan and was installed to the charge of Muckamore on 17 June 2022; that Mr C. Wilson, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ballymena and was installed to the charge of Greystone Road, Antrim on 2 September 2022; that Mr D. Morrison, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ards and was installed to the charge of Killead and Loanends, on 9 September 2022; that Mr S. Gaston presented credentials from the Presbytery of North Belfast and was received as a licentiate; that Mr R.W. McFaul, as licentiate under their care, was given credentials to the Presbytery of Omagh; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs J.A. Gordon, D.J. Paul and J.L. Tosh; as licentiates, Mr Billy Abwa and Mr S. Gaston; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **TYRONE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Mervyn Lindsay is their Moderator; that the Very Rev Dr Andrew Rodgers, Minister Emeritus of Dungannon, died on 29 June 2022; that the Rev Trevor Coburn, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 21 November 2022; that the Rev Jonathan Sloan presented credentials from the Presbytery of Templepatrick and was installed to the charge of First and Second Moneymore on 30 June 2022; that Mr James O'Neill presented credentials from the Presbytery of Dromore, and was ordained and installed in the charge of Carland and Newmills on 14 December 2022; that under their care are: as a Minister without Charge, Rev Ivan Ferris, as a licenced assistant, Mr Mark Rodgers; that they held no Consultations during the year; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS

Convener: Rev DAVID W. BRICE

Secretary: Mr DERMOT PARSONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council report reflects the work of the Council for Social Witness, showing how wider issues affecting social care, and society generally, have impacted on the services that support vulnerable people, and through the Taking Care programme, on the life of the Church. The themes of safeguarding, improving policies and procedures that direct care for vulnerable people, achieving financial stability and supporting the staff teams, have run through the work of the Council this year and were taken into account when Council discussed and agreed a one-year 2023–2024 Business Plan.
2. Specialist Services Committee oversees the work in the Council’s Criminal Justice and Addictions services. The aftermath of the Covid pandemic has presented new opportunities and challenges and the services have responded well.
3. The Taking Care Committee oversees the safeguarding work in congregations, with review of existing training materials achieved this year. Adult safeguarding work in congregations is underway, and with a temporary new post, the Council is well-positioned for a necessary comprehensive review of safeguarding policy and procedure.
4. Older People’s Services Committee has responsibility for the work in the Care Homes in Northern Ireland and Tritonville supported living service in Ireland. The easing of Covid restrictions is welcome, though services continue to experience major staffing-related challenges.
5. Disability Services Committee oversees the work of the services provided to people with a disability, and the Kinghan Mission for the Deaf Community. Changing demand and needs, financial stability and the necessity to improve facilities have been prominent in this year’s work. The pattern of usage at Lawnfield House now more fully reflects demand for its services, and work continues to align Peacehaven with other disability services.

Council Convener’s Report

6. The delight of my year as Convener has been the opportunities to visit our homes since the relaxing of Covid restrictions, sometimes Council members have joined me. In planning for this, I wondered what my role would be? Would it reflect the “relational plus” methodology of our

reconstructed management of CSW? [Face to face meetings with our home managers and staff with our senior management team and conveners have significantly increased in the past 18 months alongside many good governance protocols.] Indeed, I was reminded that as a representative of the Church which “owned” each unit, governance responsibilities could not be neglected. So a remit was formulated that included observation and enquiry about safety, hygiene, ethos, resident and staff feedback and quality of environment followed by a written report to the relevant regional manager. In return we were promised tea, scones/cake!

7. Here are some of my lasting memories. **Willowbrook** – the delight and excitement of a lady who in her part time job with a local supermarket had been promoted to “the till.” **Trinity House** – a new resident in their first week without anxiety or homesickness enjoying her new-found friends around the lunch table. **Aaron House** – a member of staff kneeling on the floor alongside one of our residents who require one-to-one care using sensory therapy to get the full engagement of that resident; such patience, such dedication. **Corkey House** – a tableful of male residents full of jokes and craic, much better than sitting in a room on their own. **Adelaide House** – a resident whose physical and mental health was transformed by our cook sitting down with them to establish a restricted but tasty dietary menu. **Lawnfield House** – a wonderful setting with views of sea and mountain, the most diverse accumulation of personal hoists, wheel chairs and mobility aids that I have seen in one building, a couple of our residents, non-verbal, but clearly and expressively happy. **Harold McCauley House** – a wonderful midday meal, a crowded activity room for daily devotions, the enjoyment taken by residents in worship, the reminiscence of a railway worker now in his 90s.
8. My “tour” is not yet complete hence not all our services have been mentioned.
9. These “highlights,” truth be told, are easy to find any day of the week in our homes but I also know the effort and the constant labouring at all levels to make it so. The training, the reporting, the systems of accountability, the patience, the love, the compassion, the vision to improve and achieve better skills and services, the investigations when things go wrong. So as I visit I am glad to be able to pray with the manager or senior staff member on my visit, I am glad to listen to their suggestions for improvement. I am glad that as an organisational team we have, in this past year, embraced the message of Christian humility. Of this, you will hear more in our Secretary’s report.
10. I cannot complete my part of this report without commending two of our Conveners who stood down during the year due to altered Ministry demands, Rev Nigel Reid (Older People’s Services Committee) and Rev Keith Hibbert (Taking Care Committee). They have been exemplary in their concerns and interest of their respective committees, we owe them our deep appreciation and thanks for all that they oversaw and did.

Secretary's Report

11. For the second year, I refer to huge challenges in the work of the Council for Social Witness, some of which are pandemic related. It has been a tough year for our senior team as they have systematically tackled long-standing problems, many of which stem from wider challenges in health and care – we are not immune to staffing problems, the results of hospital pressures and surging cost of living pressures for services and staff alike. Some challenges have felt deeply personal for us and, as a group, we have prayed that these times will pass. I acknowledge, though, that some sector-wide matters have hit us harder owing to limited internal preparedness for difficult times.
12. Last year for CSW there was a sense of generational change. This has moved into a different phase as new working practices, new management approaches and deep learning for staff teams become embedded. Introducing what amounts to a new culture is difficult – it requires leaders to act firmly to identify changes needed, challenge past culture where necessary and give the team hope that the future really will be different. Now, we are at a point where the finishing touches are being applied to the robust foundations needed for rebuilding.
13. Persistence has characterised this year. Our managers have established new ways to work and have implemented them repeatedly across the services with real effect. We are confident that our residents and tenants are better, and more effectively, cared for now than a year ago.
14. Our three professional Regional Managers, Caroline Yeomans, Jayne Bellingham and Wendy Kelly, are strong in values. They have progressively worked to establish arrangements to deliver quality in services, including:
 - Robust, focused monthly oversight visits to services generating improvement plans
 - Structured approaches to providing essential learning opportunities for care and management staff, in line with our ethos
 - Refreshed focus on ensuring that PCI's values are evident in all services
 - A suite of regular audits to support safe practice
 - Clarity about safe staffing levels to provide good care
 - Support for service managers, including monthly supervision, to ensure their development and well-being.
15. Strengthening practice has been costly and challenging, but enduring benefits are emerging. In homes where regulatory compliance was poor in early 2022, we have had encouraging RQIA inspection reports. The management team now reflects a greater understanding of what is needed to provide quality care and are spontaneously identifying areas for improvement.

16. In prayer and practice, with the valuable oversight of our Convener, Rev David Brice, our management team has focused on servant leadership. If it is to be evident that people matter to God, those people being our service users and staff, we will only achieve that through humility. Richard Sibbes, the 17th century Puritan, describes the challenge perfectly:
- “Weakness with watchfulness will stand, when strength with too much confidence fails. Weakness, with acknowledgement of it, is the fittest seat and subject for God to perfect his strength in; for consciousness of our infirmities drives us out of ourselves to him in whom our strength lies.”
17. The ending of public sector Covid-related payments has revealed weaknesses in underlying financial performance. This has been exacerbated by external factors such as staffing challenges that have driven exorbitant agency staff costs; rising energy and food costs, and pressures on external funding bodies. Internally, it is evident that reliance on certain services to cover deficits elsewhere is not sustainable. A range of financial performance measures are being implemented including:
- Council for Social Witness has approved an increase in top-up fees for residents which, while still well below sector norms, will contribute substantially to financial stability
 - Meetings are underway with statutory funders to address areas where funding may not meet service costs
 - Viability of all services will be kept under close review, with monthly financial performance reporting
 - Weekly occupancy reporting arrangements are in place.
18. Planning for long-term maintenance of our buildings is now underway, and a project to improve arrangements for storage and retrieval of key archive records commences imminently.
19. It has also been an important year for the Taking Care programme, led by Jacqui Montgomery-Devlin, another leader strong in values. Face-to-face training has become possible once more. This, alongside continuation of online learning sessions where more effective, has ensured that safeguarding awareness continues to rise across congregations. The increasing number of volunteers delivering training is a reflection of the importance of this work to congregations.
20. Key in showing the love of God for people is the Taking Care programme, and our work to ensure that churches are safe places for children and all adults. Recognising deficits in our policies and procedures, we will recruit into a temporary Training and Development post in Taking Care. This should allow Jacqui to be freed up from much of her operational role to lead development of an appropriate safeguarding framework for the denomination.

21. The Council has again recognised the volatility in social care and has adopted a realistic annual Business Plan for 2023 (Appendix A).
22. Persistence and endurance continue to be key in our work, and the Council is thankful for the work of our office team, Elaine Glass, Gail Gamble, Cathy Mullin, Wilma Steele and our intern Kenneth Downes in supporting the staff team. Much like the future Scots king, Robert the Bruce in the winter of 1306, watching the spider repeatedly trying to complete its web, we too persist to achieve success.
23. The Council continues to seek guidance for the steps ahead, and for the future of our work I am holding to words in Isaiah 58 verse 10 onwards:
“...if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.”

SPECIALIST SERVICES COMMITTEE (SSC)

24. The Committee, with grateful thanks to God, acknowledges and commends the commitment and work of all the managers and personnel at Carlisle House, Gray’s Court, and Thompson House, and also the central role Mr Dermot Parsons, Director of Social Witness and Caroline Yeomans, SSC Regional Manager, and the CSW Office staff, fulfil each day.
25. Last year’s adoption of a Risk Management Approach (RMA) is beginning to bear fruit.
26. In support of current objectives, SSC resolves to strengthen ties with North Belfast Presbytery by seeking input from a representative on the Committee.

Thompson House

27. With Covid restrictions easing the unit has recommenced visits to facilitate relatives, group activities and meetings with Probation Officers.
28. Thompson House occupancy rate has increased from 93% to 97.25% since last year, with all 19 rooms currently occupied.
29. Service Users’ offences status range from lifers, domestic violence, Sch.1, car crime, GBH, theft and robbery backgrounds.
30. The spiritual ethos within Thompson House remains high, with Bible studies entitled ‘The Difference’ remaining at the core of group activities offered to Service Users. Other funded treatments offered include therapies based around art and music.

31. Throughout the year Thompson House Staff and the residents have been blessed through tangible support from Glengormley PW, First Broughshane, West Kirk, Bangor and Joymount congregations.
32. Current funding levels remain a concern – therefore SSC will seek to engage robustly with external funding sources to address this issue.

Carlisle House

33. Over the past year Carlisle House was contracted to operate at 66% capacity (i.e. 66 clients engaged in the programme over 12 months). End of year statistics confirm that 81 service users were admitted, which equates to 15% intake above the set target.
34. The Substance Misuse Treatment Rehab Programme had an overall 79% completion rate with 64% completing the full 34-day programme, with 15% transferred to community treatment prior to completion, and the remaining 22% not completing the programme.
35. Staffing levels remain adequate as a result of operating at 60% capacity. Recruitment of a Substance Use Practitioner is currently live, with a new agreed pay scale in place.
36. An inspection of Carlisle House by RQIA is due imminently.

Gray's Court

37. Gray's Court continues to operate at full capacity under the supervision of one full-time and one part-time staff member. The project is currently returning to normal post Covid with opportunities both within and outside the project for face-to-face engagement with therapeutic courses and personal development activities.
38. Service users are able to avail of the new weekly Post Rehab Hub provided by Carlisle House in partnership with Extern.

JOHN STANBRIDGE, Convener

TAKING CARE COMMITTEE

39. It has been a real achievement to rebuild our Volunteer Training Team as activity levels increased as Covid restrictions eased, and we are delighted that 15 new volunteer trainers have come forward. This reflects the increased importance that people in our churches now attach to safeguarding as a part of congregational life. Together with the 13 existing volunteer trainers, this is a strong potential training team.
40. The news that a temporary Training and Development Post will come into effect is welcome. This will enable our Head of Safeguarding to review the overall development needs within the Taking Care Department and safeguarding practice.

41. The development of Adult Safeguarding in recent years, the need to update present Taking Care Guidelines and also the prospect of extensive work needing to be done to correlate Safeguarding Guidelines with church governance means that there is a distinct possibility that our Taking Care office will require additional resourcing.
42. In conjunction with the above, the Council has decided that it would be best served if the Taking Care Committee became a panel, which would provide more scope to bring personnel on board who have a professional expertise in this area. A resolution is appended.

DAVID BRICE, (for) Convener

DISABILITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

43. The Committee would like to begin its report by acknowledging the huge (and often unseen) amount of work performed by all members of staff across all units and homes. We commend and thank each member of CSW, and in this report especially, each member of Disability Services for their commitment, dedication, and compassion for those under their care.
44. **Aaron House** continues to run at full occupancy, enjoying 13 permanent residents. Some residents have begun to return to external day services after a long period of closure due to Covid. This is proving to be a difficult transition for some.
45. RQIA inspections continue and any recommendations made are addressed and met by a team of dedicated and professional staff. Some new IT equipment will be provided and installed to help administrators and team leaders, along with some building safety improvements being completed by Choice Housing Association.
46. Staffing remains an issue, despite a hugely successful leaflet drop in the local area, and new appointments made. We are grateful for the support of HR in focusing on new appointments. Aaron House is now under the oversight of Jayne Bellingham.
47. **Willowbrook** continues to run at full (or almost full) capacity, enjoying up to nine permanent tenants. Engagement with the Trust continues to explore supporting tenants with additional issues – strengthening and developing staff training with an eye on the potential future of Willowbrook.
48. RQIA inspections continue and any recommendations made are addressed and met by a team of dedicated and professional staff. A flexible staff rota has been implemented that moves with the needs of the tenants. Willowbrook remains under the oversight of Jayne Bellingham.
49. **Lawnfield House** continues to run at full capacity, enjoying 17 permanent residents in residential care, and two tenants in our domiciliary care supported living, with a great demand for respite requests.

50. A fire risk assessment was carried out, which guided managers on steps to mitigate risk. This is both a staff training issue and a building issue and a plan has been agreed to implement necessary improvements.
51. The South Eastern Trust have recently put in place a formal contractual agreement for the care for our two tenants in domiciliary care. This support package will be well defined and will require additional hours and training of staff.
52. RQIA inspections continue and any recommendations made are addressed and met by a team of dedicated and professional staff. Staffing remains an issue and HR remain focused on new appointments. Lawnfield remains under the oversight of Jayne Bellingham.
53. **Peacehaven** continues to run at full capacity, enjoying 17 permanent residents. The home enjoyed recent visits from Simon Harris TD, and the Moderator of the General Assembly. Some remedial action is being taken to address structural/building issues and a budget has been agreed for 23/24. Peacehaven remains under the oversight of Caroline Yeomans.
54. **Kinghan Church.** Discussions are ongoing between KC and the Disability Services Committee regarding the future of their partnership with Windsor Presbyterian Church. Services continue to be held in both KC and Windsor, led by various preachers and speakers. During the week, broader links have been established through the office in an almost advice centre-like way, proving to be of great blessing to the local deaf community. It is essential that local staff, Judith Lyness and Claire Nicholson, are commended and supported in their roles. KC is now under the oversight of Jayne Bellingham.
55. It is wonderful to consider a report that is not dominated by Covid, however the effects and consequences of Covid still linger and present challenges. Policies and procedures continue to be reviewed and revised, necessary for both good practice and to give assurance to RQIA, which is a large task for management. Engagement with an external provider will help immensely with this.
56. Of particular focus is a desire and drive from CSW to emphasise the Christian ethos of our services and to highlight our motivation to provide these services in the name of Jesus. Discussion will continue, along with regular visits of the homes, to enquire how best to do this. One of the obvious ways in which this could be achieved, however, is better involvement and engagement from local congregations and Presbyteries in which our services reside. A Presbytery approach would be ideal and plans to consult with Clerks of Presbytery will give a better overview of where services exist and which congregations might become involved, and how (for example: Presbyterian Women groups). It would also be helpful if the Moderator of the General Assembly could include Disability services into their itinerary.
57. Liaising with Presbytery and local congregations might also reveal how congregations might begin thinking about how to engage with those families and individuals living with disability in their areas and how to welcome them into a worshipping community of faith.

58. Finally, staffing within the homes remains a challenge and recruitment continues through the service: clerical officers, team leaders, managers, interim managers, cooks. What has proved helpful is the establishment of a staffing model to determine staffing levels within homes determined by residents' specific needs. Recruitment drives have had a mixture of success in different areas. Our huge thanks to the HR department in PCI for the large number of hours dedicated to resolving issues around this.

STEPHEN LOWRY, Convener

OLDER PEOPLE'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

59. The new year brought a welcome full complement of three Regional Managers to CSW that enabled a settled work pattern of visits and reports of each home. Home managers went through Management training throughout the year and our extensive care audit controls have bedded in. The outcome has been greater preparedness for RQIA inspections based on safer care practice.
60. The greatest challenge has been staff vacancies, in care and senior roles, in common with the entire sector. Some of our homes have not been able to fill all their vacant beds due to staff shortages and we have had to make considerable use of agency staff at significant expense. These factors have obliged us to restructure our funds with a particular emphasis on top-up fees. Such increases are regrettable but the alternative would be closure of some of our very fine homes and it should be noted that the new top-up fees remain very much lower than the sector average.
61. Residents prior to April 2023 will not be significantly affected by these rises as they apply only to new incoming residents. Top-up fees for these existing residents will only increase by the same percentage as the increase from our Trust funders.
62. The relaxing of Covid restrictions has allowed our Council Convener to commence home visits and it is hoped our new Committee Convener will also engage in these visits, as they greatly assist in reinforcing our Presbyterian identity within the ethos of our homes. Our homes report some reduction of clergy led services since Covid and it is an important aim of the OPS committee to review and renew such practices in the coming year. It has been gratifying to see well attended daily devotions in many of our homes led by staff members.

DAVID BRICE, (for) Convener

APPENDIX A – BUSINESS PLAN 2023–24

Objective number	Proposed 2023 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner
Council wide objectives				
1	Review CSW structures, implementing structures that will deliver good governance, encourage accountability and uphold the Christian ethos of the services.	Proposal for Taking Care Committee to reform as a Panel Proposed paper on the future direction of committees and panels developed Implementation of formal service visits by conveners /committee members	Jan 2024	David Brice / Dermot Parsons
2	Develop a robust systematic review of Policies and Procedures. Update and implement current Policies and Procedures	Ongoing work in progress. This is being monitored by RQIA and is as an urgent objective to be met – serious compliance issue.	July 2023	Dermot Parsons for oversight; full CSW Senior team involvement
3	Develop and implement a coherent system of: Recruitment Retention, with a targeted recruitment approach.		Jane 2024	Sarah Leung

Objective number	Proposed 2023 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner
4	Develop an existing partnership with Triangle Supported Employment to provide work for adults with disabilities in our services.		Jan 2024	Jayne Bellingham
5	Review and develop the PCI ethos across all services and develop the embedding of the ethos across all. Includes writing Policy on the Spiritual care of residents, as required by the Regulations.		Jan 2024	Dermot Parsons for oversight; Analysis and proposals from; Caroline Yeomans, Wendy Kelly and Jayne Bellingham
6	Refresh and clarify the roles of the local support committees. Write clear terms of reference.		Dec 2023	David Brice / Dermot Parsons
7	Training needs analysis: Services Exec Team Volunteers Committees and Panels		Dec 2023	Jayne Bellingham

Objective number	Proposed 2023 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner
8	Engage with internal and external stakeholders to inform the development of a maximum of two new CSW projects.		Jan 2024	Caroline Yeomans
9	Pilot disability auditing in local congregations – multiple presbyteries; analysis of data and trends to assess for future development.		Jan 2024	Jayne Bellingham
10	To draw up and implement plans to ensure that CSW finances reflect good stewardship		Dec 2023	Dermot Parsons
Taking Care and Safeguarding				
11	Update Taking Care Guidance		Aug 2023	Jacqui Montgomery Devlin
12	Establish a programme for training and development for safeguarding and have this implemented	Proposal for a Training and Support Officer post is agreed	Aug 2023	Jacqui Montgomery Devlin

Objective number	Proposed 2023 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner
13	Develop and implement an adult safeguarding policy for churches	This is written but not finalised or implemented	Aug 2023	Jacqui Montgomery Devlin
14	Develop next steps for Trauma Informed Practice model	Initial training with Executive team, Thompson House and Trinity House completed.	Jan 2024	Jacqui Montgomery Devlin
15	Identify the full range of policies required across the denomination to ensure satisfactory safeguarding arrangements		Sept 2023	Jacqui Montgomery Devlin
16	Prepare paper outlining Taking Care resource needs for 2024-6		Jan 2024	Jacqui Montgomery Devlin
17	Work to establish new Taking Care Panel and initiate policy development work		Oct 2023	Jacqui Montgomery Devlin
Service Specific				
18	Thompson House Develop a business proposal to formalise the currently informal outreach and aftercare arrangements.		Sept 2023	Caroline Yeomans and David Farrow

Objective number	Proposed 2023 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner
19	Carlisle House Develop the capability to tender for the services (University of Ulster evaluation due June 23)		June 2023	Caroline Yeomans and David Cuthbert
20	Carlisle House Develop the proposal for a service model including post programme support, consideration of an activity therapist and development of experienced staffing complement		Dec 2024	Caroline Yeomans and David Cuthbert
21	Corkey and Trinity House Develop the services to look at supporting older people with more complex needs. Investigate formal arrangements with the 2 Trust areas for potential funding and training support.	A partial model exists, developed with NHSCT put on hold due to covid/changes in management	Oct 2023	Caroline Yeomans, Wendy Kelly and Jayne Bellingham
22	Aaron House Review the range of services delivered.		Sept 2023	Caroline Yeomans

Objective number	Proposed 2023 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner
23	Willowbrook Team development to learn to work alongside more complex individuals; needs analysis with NHSCT to identify potential future work.		Jan 2024	Jayne Bellingham
Buildings and Maintenance				
24	Ensure that robust arrangements for fire and water safety are in place across CSW services.		June 2023	Dermot Parsons
25	Develop a costed renewal and replacement program for CSW Services		Dec 2023	Dermot Parsons
26	Develop and implement a comprehensive routine maintenance program across CSW services.		Dec 2023	Dermot Parsons

COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Convener: Rev DANIEL KANE

Secretary: Rev TREVOR GRIBBEN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council for Public Affairs is tasked with helping to develop the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's thinking on current issues and communicating the General Assembly's views in the public square. It also works hard at developing relationships with legislators and decision makers on the island of Ireland, even in the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive, and makes representations to them on behalf of the Church, whilst also responding to various public consultations. A list of these is included in Annex A. The Council has continued to keep the theme of graciously confident gospel engagement to the fore in its work.
2. The Council for Public Affairs has met in-person on two occasions since last year's General Assembly, with its Committee, Panels and Task Group also meeting in-person and via MS Teams. The report below summarises the work of the Council over the last period.
3. The Council expresses its deep appreciation and gratitude to Miss Karen Jardine, Public Affairs Officer who is an immense asset to our denomination bringing theological rigour and Gospel compassion to this demanding and strategic role. We are massively in her debt.
4. Dr Andrew Brown has brought a massively informed and deeply passionate understanding to his convenership of the State Education Committee helping us navigate this hugely contested space in the public square. We are hugely indebted to Andrew for his insightful and courageous leadership and thank him for his selfless and visionary service.

Graciously Confident Gospel Engagement

5. On 1 April 2023, the Council held a morning on Graciously Confident Gospel Engagement in the Public Square. The keynote speaker was Dr Nathan Mladin from the organisation Theos. Dr Mladin had previously spent time with the Council at its overnight conference in September 2019. He encouraged Christ-like engagement with culture which is incarnational in that Christian people are present in all spheres of society, scattered across many different vocational frontlines and spaces and kenotic in that Christian people use their power for the flourishing of others. A panel discussion with representatives from the public sector, private sector and the field of community development explored these themes within their specific contexts.

STATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

6. The State Education Committee expresses its sincere appreciation to governors, principals, school leadership teams, teachers, classroom assistants and support staff as they have continued to support the education, welfare and well-being of children and young people against the challenges of chronic and sustained underfunding, and the continuing fallout from the Covid pandemic in relation to educational and social outcomes. Many of those involved in education go above and beyond the call of duty, and the debt to them in terms of their time and commitment cannot be repaid.
7. Against that background, the SEC continues to be encouraged to hear our denomination is providing unconditional support to local schools. Since our conference in January 2022, we have heard of an increased interest in education matters at Presbytery level, with events being run to inform ministers and elders, and to equip those serving in education. There have also been many examples of continuing support for local congregations through prayer, personnel, infrastructure and financial assistance. Whether it be gifts for staff at Christmas or quietly giving significant sums to support Special Educational Needs or underachievement, our Church continues to demonstrate the symbiosis between faith and education at the micro as well as the macro level.
8. Following on from the 'PCI Talks Education' conference in January 2022 which focused primarily on the role of PCI congregations in the controlled schools' sector, SEC chose to focus its meetings during the year on two other sectors – integrated schools and special schools. Two elders, one the principal of a controlled integrated primary school, and another former teacher within the integrated sector were invited to present to SEC and discuss the challenges and opportunities, and the role of the Church.
9. Another elder, this time a senior leader within a special school, was also invited to speak with SEC and share some of his experience within his own context and the wider context. He offered a challenge for PCI members to engage with special schools, many of which serve wide geographical areas, and suggested that some PCI people might consider applying to serve as governors on the boards of special schools as representatives of the Department of Education, or the Education Authority.
10. Having served as Vice-Chair, Dr Andrew Brown took up the role of Chair of the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) in September 2022 for a 3-year period. TRC remains the main vehicle by which PCI, the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland work together on matters relating to education, particularly in respect of the role of transferor governors in controlled schools, but also on matters of policy including, for example, on Religious Education (RE), the development of Jointly Managed Church Schools, and Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE). The other PCI representatives on TRC are Rev Dr Colin McClure, Mr John Wilkinson OBE, and Miss Karen Jardine.

11. Over the course of this year, the education secretaries from the three denominations, along with the TRC Chair, have been meeting with the education spokespeople of the main political parties. These meetings have been primarily about relationship building, particularly with recently elected MLAs, and also provide a good opportunity to discuss matters like RE, the place of collective worship, the teaching of RSE, and the value which a non-denominational Christian ethos brings to schools.
12. Representatives from TRC met with the former Education Minister, Miss Michelle McIlveen MLA, in July, September and again in October, prior to her departure from office at the end of that month. These meetings provided an opportunity to discuss a range of policy issues with the Minister.
13. TRC has agreed to sponsor research through the Stranmillis University College Centre for Research on Educational Underachievement (CREU) which will identify good practice with regard to the relationship between the transferor churches and local schools, particularly concerning educational underachievement. The research will include a clergy questionnaire and it would be encouraging if there was a positive response from Presbyterian ministers. This research builds on the CREU *Beyond the Stereotype* report published last year which considered strategies to tackle educational underachievement primarily in rural communities, a project also sponsored by TRC.
14. As chair of TRC, Dr Brown has joined with other education chiefs to meet with elected representatives and NIO Minister, Mr Steve Baker MP, to highlight the chronic underfunding of the education system in Northern Ireland, especially when compared to the rest of the United Kingdom.
15. TRC has also been closely monitoring the recent Judicial Review¹ on the teaching of RE in controlled schools and the provision of collective worship.

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PANEL

16. The Panel completed its work on the *Beyond These Steps* initiative in June 2022. This was a series of seminars engaging with loyalist communities, young adults and those living in border areas, following on from the *On These Steps* event held in September 2021 at Union Theological College to mark the centenary of the creation of Northern Ireland and partition of the island of Ireland. The final seminar brought together Council Conveners and Secretaries, giving them an opportunity to discuss what had been heard and discerned through both projects. A report, 'Gracious Gospel Confidence in a Changing Landscape', is included at Annex B which seeks to share this learning more widely throughout PCI. The Council expresses its thanks to the Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund for its financial support towards these initiatives.

1 [2022]NIQB53Final - Approved.pdf ([judiciaryni.uk](https://www.judiciaryni.uk))

17. The Panel has continued to prioritise the work of *Considering Grace: Presbyterians and the Troubles*. Copies of the book were delivered to outgoing MLAs by post, or in-person, prior to the elections to the NI Assembly in May 2022. The use of *Considering Grace* as a resource for the wider denomination has been a key objective for the book and the Panel was pleased to hear that the Professor of Ministry and Director of the Institute for Ministry at UTC has agreed to include the book on the reading list for ministry students during their summer assistant placement between first and second year. An event hosted by the Department of Foreign Affairs in Iveagh House in March 2023 provided an opportunity both to share the work of *Considering Grace* with an audience in Dublin, and to thank formally the DFA for its support. Participants in the event included the Moderator, Rt Rev Dr John Kirkpatrick, Heather Humphreys TD, Dr Jamie Yohanis (co-author with Dr Gladys Ganiel who was unable to attend) and Mr Ruairí de Búrca, the Director General of the DFA. Extracts from the book were read by Rev Dr Tony Davidson and Miss Karen Jardine.
18. In September 2022, the Council made a submission to the Seanad Public Consultation Committee on the constitutional future of the island of Ireland, an initiative led by Senator Mark Daly in his role as Leas-Chathaoirleach (Speaker). The aims of the consultation were three-fold – the hear the voice of all communities and traditions in Northern Ireland on their vision for the future; identify criteria for a referendum and learning lessons from other referenda here and in other jurisdictions; and identify social and economic opportunities and challenges that should be considered. The Council’s submission was informed by PCI’s work over many years in seeking to build good relationships and further peace and reconciliation across these islands but also by the *Beyond These Steps* initiative. The Council Convener and Public Affairs Officer were subsequently invited to attend a hearing of the Committee in October 2022. In both written and oral submissions the Committee was encouraged not to presume a pre-determined direction of travel, but instead to focus on the hard work of reconciliation, that space which exists between mercy, trust, justice and peace, alongside the challenging work of engaging hearts and minds.
19. The 25th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement is being marked by political leaders from across the world, local elected representatives and wider civic society. The Moderator and other PCI representatives have attended a number of related events during this period.
20. On the one hand, the Agreement paved the way for Northern Ireland to transition from decades of armed conflict to more peaceful times. At its heart was a focus on relationships, internally between local political parties, and looking further out between political leaders and institutions not only in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, but also across these islands, East and West. The Agreement recognised that we live together on this island in two jurisdictions with multiple political and cultural identities.

21. On the other hand, aspects of what was included as part of the Agreement were difficult for many who had experienced injury, loss and trauma as a result of the Troubles. The prisoner release scheme was particularly painful, and the continued wrangling over legacy only serves to re-open old wounds. For many of those who had dedicated a life of service to the RUC, changes to policing in NI were also challenging to accept.
22. PCI congregations have been encouraged to recognise this anniversary by reflecting on the Vision for Society Statement, received by the General Assembly in 2016, remembering and giving thanks for the achievements but also acknowledging the pain which has accompanied it for some.
23. Throughout the past year there have been a number of engagements with the PSNI both centrally and at a more local level, providing an opportunity to raise issues of concern as well as recognising areas of positive working relationships.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND PANEL

24. The Panel has continued to meet to consider matters in the public square pertaining to the Republic of Ireland. In March 2023, the Panel expressed its thanks to Mrs Eleanor Petrie who has served as an education specialist on the group for a number of years and has decided to stand down.
25. Education has been a particular focus of discussion for the Panel as it considers the different approaches throughout the jurisdiction. A citizens' assembly on the future of education in Ireland is anticipated in the coming months.
26. Many of the challenges faced by the education system in Northern Ireland are shared in the Republic of Ireland. There are particular issues around the availability of supply teachers, particularly in areas where housing costs are exceptionally high. Another significant area of concern raised with the Panel is the prevalence of extreme pornography available for pupils to view on their mobile devices, and shared with their friends and peers. This has a significant impact on their mental and emotional health and wellbeing, with potential consequences into adult life. As Boards of Management will be renewed later this year, the Panel will be undertaking an exercise with presbyteries regarding schools of Presbyterian patronage and ensuring that records are up to date.
27. The Panel submitted a paper to the Minister for Health, and the Oireachtas Health Committee on the proposal to create buffer zones, or safe access zones, around all healthcare facilities in the Republic of Ireland that can potentially provide termination of pregnancy services, not just those that actually do so. The General Scheme included an extensive list of potentially prohibited activity including silent prayer, and will also introduce a 100m buffer zone/safe access zone around healthcare facilities. While there are provisions to allow activities within church buildings to remain unregulated, there would be implications should a congregation within the

buffer zone wish to display pro-life material outside the building, although still on the premises. Additionally, the annual March for Life, the largest demonstration in Dublin, would most likely face severe restrictions as it would pass by a number of healthcare facilities along the designated route. A copy of this submission is appended to the report for information at Annex C.

28. The Panel considered a proposal on ‘welcoming the stranger’ which recognised that a number of congregations within PCI are involved in welcoming asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants, and that there would be benefit in sharing stories and experiences. Following engagement with other Council Secretaries, PCI’s Mission Development Officer has been tasked with taking this initiative forward.

HUMAN DIGNITY PANEL

29. The Panel has continued to monitor developments relating to abortion legislation, introduction of safe access zones and other matters relating to its work. In November 2022, Union Theological College hosted a number of events over a weekend looking at issues relating to bioethics.
30. The Panel has also been considering how it can be ‘upstream’. The question of what it means to be human is pertinent in society in a number of ways and not just in relation to questions of gender and sexuality. The increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in many areas of life including employment, healthcare and the criminal justice system, is a matter which the Panel has identified for consideration.
31. A submission was made to a consultation on the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility and the Public Affairs Officer has continued to engage with the Executive Office on the development of its strategy seeking to eliminate violence against women and girls.

WELFARE AND WELLBEING PANEL

32. The Council expresses its thanks to Rev David Stanfield who initially convened the Welfare and Wellbeing Panel but had to stand down due to a period of ill-health. Mr Mark Baillie, elder in 1st Holywood, was subsequently appointed to this role and has taken on the responsibility with insight and energy. Unsurprisingly, an area of specific concern for the Panel has been the cost of living crisis. The Public Affairs Officer has been part of an Evangelical Alliance NI co-ordinated initiative which has met with political parties on this issue. This has been a good opportunity to highlight ways in which PCI congregations support those in financial crisis through foodbanks, Christians Against Poverty debt advice and counselling, and also through everyday activities like lunch clubs and providing warm spaces.

33. On the Panel's recommendation, the Council wrote to the former Minister for Communities, Ms Deirdre Hargey MLA, before she left office in October 2022, to express concern about the lack of uplift on the Supporting People programme, which supports some aspects of work within the Council for Social Witness. An increase to the funding of Supporting People, the first in 15 years, was subsequently announced, and while this helps to plug a gap it doesn't resolve many of the significant issues which remain.

Partnership Working

34. CPA continues to collaborate with other PCI Councils as required, working with the Council for Social Witness in responding to relevant consultations, and is represented on the Global Development Committee.
35. Opportunities for inter-church engagement through the structures of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) continue to prove invaluable on matters relating to legacy, the evolving relationship between the UK and the EU and wider research projects which draw in the experience of academics across Ireland and further afield through the Dublin City University Centre for Religion, Human Values and International Relations.

DANIEL KANE, Convener

APPENDIX A

Consultation Responses and Submissions April 2022–March 2023

Date	Title	Organisation	Type	Responder
April 2022	Public Consultation on Charity Classification	Charity Regulator (RoI)	Policy Consultation	Council for Public Affairs
April 2022	Draft Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026	Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland	Consultation	Council for Public Affairs and Council for Social Witness
May 2022	Reform of Adult Social Care	Department of Health (NI)	Policy consultation	Council for Public Affairs and Council for Social Witness
September 2022	Public Consultation on the Constitutional Future of the island of Ireland	Seanad Éireann	Public consultation – written and verbal presentation to Committee	Council for Public Affairs
November 2022	Draft Strategic Plan Actions for Delivery 2022–2027	Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority	RQIA	Council for Public Affairs and Council for Social Witness
November 2022	Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services (Safe Access Zones)) Bill 2022 – General Scheme of Bill	Minister of Health, Dáil and Committee on Health	Written Submission on draft general scheme	Council for Public Affairs
December 2022	Increasing the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility in NI from 10 years to 14 years	Department of Justice	Policy consultation	Council for Public Affairs and Prisons Chaplaincy Committee
January 2023	Corporate Plan 2023–2025	Northern Ireland Policing Board	Consultation	Council for Public Affairs
February 2023	Strategic Agenda and Engagement Strategy	Charity Commission for NI	Consultation	Council for Public Affairs

APPENDIX B

Gracious Gospel Confidence in a changing landscape

1. In 2021, the Council for Public Affairs presented its paper on Graciously Confident Gospel Engagement. It sought to provide a brief analysis of the ‘public square’ across the island of Ireland, and identify a framework of principles, postures and practices that we in PCI should adopt as we seek to carry out this divine mandate of graciously confident gospel engagement.
2. Against that backdrop, this paper brings together learning, with relevance to PCI more widely, from two key projects of the Council’s Peace and Reconciliation Panel. The Panel’s work on Dealing with the Past through the publication of *Considering Grace: Presbyterians and the Troubles* at the end of 2019, and the ‘On These Steps/Beyond These Steps’ initiative in 2021/2022 (both funded through the Department for Foreign Affairs’ Reconciliation Fund) have provided opportunities to listen and reflect more broadly on the changing landscape of the island of Ireland.

A changing landscape

3. At the time of writing, the results of the 2022 Census in the Republic of Ireland are not yet available. However, data from the 2021 Census in Northern Ireland has started to emerge and makes for interesting analysis. This includes some of the following points (with thanks to Edgar Jardine for his assistance in compiling this material):
 - (a) The population of Northern Ireland continues to grow and is expected to be in excess of 2m by the next Census in 2031.
 - (b) The religious affiliation of the population is changing with those describing themselves as Roman Catholic exceeding those describing themselves as Protestant for the first time in 2021. However, there is a rapidly growing part of the population who do not identify with either of the two main religious blocks. This is particularly the case in the Local Government Districts with the highest Protestant populations i.e. Ards and North Down, and Lisburn and Castlereagh.
 - (c) The number declaring a religious affiliation is considerably greater than total numbers affiliating to one of the denominations, attracting the descriptor of “Cultural” Protestants/Catholics.
 - (d) A key characteristic of the population going forward is the rapidly increasing number of older people while the number of children/young adults is predicted to decline. Furthermore, the ageing population will be supported by a relatively static workforce, increasing the dependency ratio across the population as a whole.
 - (e) Households are becoming smaller – in 1991 the average household size was 3.55. In 2021, this had reduced to 2.44 persons per household, reflecting the increase in the number of single person households.

- (f) The population has become more diverse. The 1971 Census found that just one person in 100 was born outside the UK/RoI; this had increased to 6.5 per 100 by the date of the 2021 Census.
 - (g) The distribution of the enumerated population born outside the UK/RoI differs across LGDs. In 2021, 6.6% of the population in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon LGD was born in EU and Non-EU European countries compared to just 1.3% in Derry City and Strabane.
4. It can be expected that some of this will be reflected in the 2023 census results for the Republic of Ireland in respect of a decreased affiliation with formal religion, and a rise in those stating they have no religion. The 2016 Census indicated that the Irish population was getting older and, like Northern Ireland, this trend is expected to continue, with associated impact on age dependency. In 2016, the Census revealed that the number of non-Irish nationals living in Ireland (535,475) had reduced slightly from the previous Census in 2011 (544,357). At the time, it was observed that non-Irish nationals and those with dual nationality were now well established in Irish society.

Looking back: Considering Grace and On These Steps

- 5. In November 2019, PCI published *Considering Grace: Presbyterians and the Troubles*, an account of around 120 Presbyterian people and how their faith shaped their responses to violence and its aftermath.
- 6. Presbyterian ministers, victims, members of the security forces, emergency responders, healthcare workers and ‘critical friends’ of the Presbyterian tradition were among those to provide insights on wider human experiences of anger, pain, healing, and forgiveness.
- 7. It also includes the perspectives of women and people from border counties and features leading public figures, such as former Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon of the SDLP, Jeffrey Donaldson of the DUP, Garda Commissioner Drew Harris, and former Victims Commissioner Bertha McDougall.
- 8. It was hoped that *Considering Grace* would contribute to the process of ‘dealing with the past’ by pointing towards the need for a ‘gracious remembering’ that acknowledges suffering, is self-critical about the past, and creates space for lament, but also for the future.
- 9. A series of launch events in November 2019, and an online conference in December 2020, were used to unpack the themes emerging from the book and provide opportunities for those attending to respond.
- 10. In September 2021, *On These Steps*, held at Union Theological College sought to mark the creation of Northern Ireland, and partition on the island of Ireland, by acknowledging the role that PCI played in hosting the first NI Parliament at the College. This event included contribution from the then Moderator, Very Rev Dr David Bruce, Irish academic historian Professor Ian McBride, and a panel discussion with the DUP First Minister, SF Junior Minister and ministers from the UK and Irish governments.

11. *On These Steps* was notable for a number of reasons, not least because it was one of the only events during the centenary year which saw participation from the NI Executive parties, and the Governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom. It also provided an opportunity for PCI to publicly acknowledge, and speak into, the shifting relationships between the governments of the UK and Ireland, and also the NI Executive due to changing demographics, and the implications of the UK's decision to exit the European Union.
12. In his contribution, recognising the reality of mistrust, division and violence once endured, former Moderator Dr Bruce asked:

“...does the gospel provide a basis for hope for the future as we stand at this crossroads, regarding each other across the way, 100 years on? There are some things we will never be able to forget, and indeed which we must try not to forget. Victims of violence who have lost loved ones still seek justice, however unlikely such recourse through the courts might be. To remove that from them is to remove hope, and is antithetical to the gospel, which unites both love and justice in the person of Jesus Christ.”
13. Reflecting on reconciliation he went on to say:

“Reconciliation is not soft or forgetful. Setting the past aside as if it didn't happen is no basis or foundation for healing. Reconciliation that has the grit and grip to re-write a life is that which names a wrong as the wrong that it is, whether perpetrated by the state or by an agent of terror. Such naming and then acknowledgement of a wrong presents a choice to those at the table. If they have the courage and good sense and moral backbone to repent of it, to lament that it ever took place, to say so and face the guilt that lies at its heart, then a door is opened to a new future...”

“North, south, east and west on these islands present us with a web of opportunities to grow – economically, culturally, spiritually, if we have the vision for it. In a post-Brexit, Protocol environment some of this has been made more complicated, but if anything it has been made more urgent. We must work tirelessly to sort out the new configurations of our cultural, commercial and spiritual connections. No shortcuts. No quick fixes. No buck-passing. Just gritty determination to get the detail done... Whatever a new Ireland resembles, it will not be because someone was victorious, while another was defeated. If it looks like that, it won't be a new Ireland...”

Looking out: Beyond These Steps

14. *On These Steps* was only ever the beginning of a conversation, and one which needed to reach out into other parts of PCI. This led to the development of *Beyond These Steps* – a seminar series bringing this conversation to Presbyterian people in PUL communities, border communities, and to

young adults within the denomination. A final seminar sought to present the themes emerging from these listening exercises, and provide time and space for PCI leadership to think through the implications for the denomination over the next period of time.

15. Each seminar followed a similar pattern. The Moderator (Rev Dr T. Davidson in Ballykeel) provided an opening reflection linking the event at UTC with the conversation that was about to take place. This was followed by a panel discussion which involved Presbyterian ministers and members, and also a 'critical friend' who could bring an external perspective. Members of the audience at each seminar were also invited to share reflections and ask questions.
16. The following themes were emerging from the PUL community's seminar:
 - (a) It is important for the 'drawbridge' to be down in terms of the relationship between church and community, with opportunities to share lives and through that to share the gospel.
 - (b) Communities aren't simply dealing with one challenge but multiple challenges including social disadvantage, influence of paramilitaries, backdrop of constitutional issues, substance abuse. The Church isn't there to 'fix' all of those but it is important that local church leaders and congregations are aware of the presenting challenges, and opportunities, in the communities in which they serve.
 - (c) Supporting communities through education by participating on boards of governors and offering support in other ways, e.g. providing volunteers or offering financial resource is an important role.
 - (d) Recognising the impact of changing demographics NI has in these areas, which feeds in to a narrative about future relationships across these islands – north/south, east/west.
 - (e) There are missional and gospel opportunities for the Church as it encourages informed debate and engagement, alongside support for, and seeking to build up, local communities.
17. Moving to the discussion with young adults a number of points were raised including:
 - (a) The cost of living crisis is having a significant impact on opportunities for financial independence including the ability to move out of the family home.
 - (b) Social media means that young people are only seeing headline politics but not having an opportunity to understand the nuance behind a story. Social media has also had an impact on attention span, expectation of instant actions and reactions, and also a propensity to boredom.
 - (c) A recognition that being part of PCI engenders a sense of belonging and being part of something bigger, whilst acknowledging that there is a perception of a diminishing loyalty amongst young people to PCI as a denomination.

- (d) Importance of championing areas of work within churches that demonstrate a generosity of spirit, adopting a servant heart and engaging with the marginalised – rediscovering PCI's prophetic voice and the power of prayer to transform.
 - (e) There is a greater distrust amongst younger people of politicians and institutions, which can also translate to the Church. Political instability, economic uncertainty and the continued fallout from the pandemic make it difficult for young people to think about the future.
18. The seminar with border communities involved input from Monaghan, Donegal and Newry. Some of the emerging themes included:
- (a) The need to re-humanise conversation in the public square – not just around relationships across these islands but also more generally to address the lack of civility in public and political discourse.
 - (b) An acknowledgement that whilst not perfect, the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement fostered a sense of hope which has now dissipated and will be difficult to recapture. In spite of this, it is important to acknowledge where we have come from – in the context of 100 years we are 25 years on from the Agreement. We are better but it is taking longer than we would have liked and it is crucial for us as Christians to express hope.
 - (c) A recognition that dealing with the past and legacy continues to be challenging – the past must be remembered sensitively.
 - (d) When speaking of reconciliation it is important not to confuse political reconciliation with gospel reconciliation, although of course the latter speaks to the former.

Looking forward: what next?

19. In June 2022, Council Conveners and Secretaries came together to discuss what had been heard through both projects, *On These Steps and Beyond These Steps*. The key themes emerging from that day are highlighted below:
- (a) **Majority to minority**
The 2021 Census results for Northern Ireland show that there are now more people identifying as 'no religion/not stated' (19%) than identifying as Presbyterian (17%). There is no longer an automatic place for PCI, or the other Christian churches, within the public square. This has implications for policy areas in which PCI has historically had significant input and influence, for example, in the sphere of education. We were in a position of power once, but we need to re-learn and understand this new perspective, including how PCI is perceived by wider society. Learning to adapt to this 'minority' status whilst continuing to engage with gracious gospel confidence in the public square should be a key priority for PCI.

(b) Understanding identity

National identity has become drawn into Christian identity – to defend one is to be seen to defend the other. This is becoming more prevalent and overt within US culture, but is something that has been pervasive on the island of Ireland for hundreds of years. How does PCI answer the question – what does it mean to be a good citizen of this country?

But we also need to be honest in acknowledging the perception of PCI identity held by others – a ‘grey, male-dominated organisation, that is not forward thinking’.

(c) Speaking into the public square

In understanding this new place in the public square, PCI retains a responsibility to both commend and criticise the governments on these islands, recognising that increasingly this will be perceived as a clash with culture and may not be heard favourably. Where should PCI’s priorities be in speaking into the public square - what is ‘ours to do’, and what are the tools we need to do it?

(d) Reaching beyond ourselves

Experiencing wider engagement outside of Presbyterianism in the public square will help us to learn how we are seen outside of ourselves. How Presbyterian people are equipped to live out their faith on their frontlines – within their families, in their workplaces, local community organisations – is a key question to be addressed. There are still massive opportunities to share the good news of the gospel.

We also need to recognise that the world is coming to us – asylum seekers and refugees are on our doorsteps and we are learning to relate to these newcomers across the island.

(e) Relationships*(i) Across these islands*

Whatever the constitutional future and relationships across these islands PCI’s call remains the same – to continue bringing the good news of the gospel into society, being salt and light in the communities in which we have been placed.

(ii) With others

Where are the new collaborations and partnerships through which PCI can engage on matters of general concern, without the fear of being ‘guilty by association’? On the other hand, positive relationships have been built with other Churches and denominations, particularly through the Irish Council of Churches and Irish Inter Church Meeting.

(iii) With working class communities

Working classes communities are not synonymous with 'loyalist' communities and PCI needs to be aware of these distinctions, recognising that one-size does not fit all in terms of gospel-oriented mission. The perception of PCI as a 'middle-aged, middle-class, grammar school institution' must be acknowledged, alongside a perception that those attending our churches are simply commuters/consumers disconnected from the communities in which their church buildings are located. This is a caricature for sure, but a perception which we must work hard against. Uniformed organisations like BB and GB continue to provide a connection into local communities but this doesn't necessarily translate into other areas of church life.

(iv) With young adults

Young adults who are most politically engaged tend to be at the extremes. They are also most likely to have disengaged from 'organised' religion including PCI. This age group is also more likely to reject what have been the binary political norms of 'orange and green'.

(f) Reflecting on our past

Although as a society we are 25 years on from the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and diminishing levels of violence, it is only recently that the impact of inter-generational trauma is beginning to be understood as one of the legacies of our past. This can be experienced by individuals within families directly impacted, but there is also a sense in which as a community/society we are all affected in some way. This should always be part of our understanding when engaging with local congregations and communities across Ireland.

(g) Living as a Christian citizen on these islands for the next 100 years

We need to be always considering what future we want for our children and grandchildren – a society in which they can flourish. For PCI, an important element of this must be protection for religious freedom, and the right to practice religion publicly including expressing it to others.

20. Responding to this changing landscape with gracious gospel confidence is for PCI as a whole, not just the Peace and Reconciliation Panel, or the Council for Public Affairs. Keeping the 'drawbridge' down between our congregations and local communities; rediscovering PCI's prophetic voice and the power of prayer to transform; and helping to re-humanise public discourse are just some of the challenges which must be faced.

21. This is only the beginning of a conversation, one which may make us uncomfortable, and may ask us, in the words of the Psalmist, to search our own hearts. But it is a vital conversation to engage in if we are to begin to better understand ourselves and our place on this island we call home. As geo-political and demographic dynamics around us shift, our call as Christian people to engage with culture and the communities in which we live, work and witness remains the same: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

**Submission from the Republic of Ireland Panel
of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's
Council for Public Affairs on the
Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services (Safe
Access Zones)) Bill 2022 – General Scheme of Bill**

November 2022

Introduction

1. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has over 530 congregations across the island of Ireland, with almost a fifth of those in the Republic of Ireland. The Council for Public Affairs is authorised by the General Assembly to speak on behalf of PCI on matters of public policy, and the Republic of Ireland Panel is delegated to do this for matters in that jurisdiction.
2. PCI is grateful for the opportunity to draw the Minister's attention to certain concerns regarding the Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services (Safe Access Zones)) Bill 2022 – General Scheme of Bill, and recognises that the draft legislation is not about opening up another debate about the nature and provision of abortion services in Ireland.
3. PCI also acknowledges that the matters under consideration through this legislation are not only sensitive but cut across the lives and personal experiences of women and their families who have experienced a crisis pregnancy situation in the past, or who may do so in the future. This is not simply a theological or academic exercise for the Church as many of our members and their families have experienced a pregnancy crisis and tackled difficult decisions, with the support of our ministers and church communities. As a denomination we continue to actively consider how we can better support women and their families who face such challenges.
4. We think it is important that women should be protected from harassment. We do not object to the intention of this law. But we are concerned the law as proposed and framed is unnecessary, impractical, and likely to be counter-productive, undermining public order and curtailing the freedoms of expression and religion that are necessary for a constitutional republic.

General Comments

5. Before commenting on specific aspects of the draft legislation PCI makes the following observations on the difficulties experienced in other jurisdictions with regard to passing similar legislation.
6. Firstly, the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly, shortly before the May 2022 election, has been referred to the UK Supreme Court by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, on the basis that clause 5(2)(a) of the Bill² disproportionately interferes

with Articles 9, 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights³. A decision of the Supreme Court on the matter has not been delivered.

7. Secondly, just last month at Westminster, Labour MP Stella Creasey tabled an amendment to the UK Government's Public Order Bill, which introduced an 'offence of interference with access to or provision of abortion services'.⁴ Following a free vote with cross-party support the amendment was inserted into the Bill. However, less than a week later, on Monday 24 October, the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire, Jeremy Quinn MP, tabled a written statement which included the following:

“Section 19(1) of the Human Rights Act provides a mechanism to notify Parliamentarians if a statement cannot be made that a clause is compatible with the ECHR, but this does not fetter the right of Parliament to legislate in such a way, should it wish.

I am unable, but only because of clause 9, to make a statement that, in my view, the provisions of the Bill are presently compatible with Convention rights but the Government nevertheless wish to proceed with the Bill.”⁵

8. The Bill was debated in the House of Lords on Tuesday, 1 November 2022, and Baroness Fox of Buckley, a long-standing pro-choice campaigner made the following comments:

“Finally, no matter how much we despise protesters, we must have consistency in lawmaking. So why have so many on the Opposition Benches been celebrating the Government's acceptance of amendments banning protests around abortion clinics? As a long-standing pro-choice campaigner, I believe that it is totally vital that women are able to safely access reproductive healthcare services. If they are being obstructed or harassed, we have public order laws to deal with this, and we should deal with them harshly. However, as we have already heard, Clause 9 criminalises and bans seeking to influence, advising or persuading, attempting to advise or persuade, or otherwise expressing an opinion.

Many of us may feel little sympathy with people who are viewed as anti-abortion cranks. However, as Big Brother Watch notes, this sets a precedent that will inevitably lead to attempts to prevent speech, expression, information sharing and assembly in relation to other controversial and unpopular causes. It is also worth noting that at least five councils with PSPO buffer zones around abortion clinics have banned silent prayers. This institutes a law of genuine thought crime and betrays any commitment to religious freedom, and we should totally oppose it.”⁶

3 Reference by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland – Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) (Northern Ireland) Bill – The Supreme Court

4 Public Order Bill (*parliament.uk*)

5 Public Order Bill: Clause 9 and ECHR – *Hansard* – UK Parliament

6 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2022-11-01/debates/8DA53248-F268-4906-8902-6417C0A06E08/PublicOrderBill#contribution-EBCBEFFE-0F98-419C-BD09-B4D295374B89>

9. Such background is helpful in underlining that PCI's opposition to this legislation does not stem from a desire to see women in difficult circumstances intimidated as they seek to access specific support. Indeed, we deplore any situation where a woman seeking a termination, or medical staff involved in the provision of abortion services, are harassed or subjected to behaviour which would compound their distress. There should, however, be freedom to protest, and freedom to share opinions in a reasonable, lawful, and peaceful manner. This in itself is not harassment. While women should have a clear path to access services, others should be able to exercise their fundamental right to a reasonable expression of opinion.

Comments on the General Scheme of Bill

10. Head 3 provides for the designation of a safe access zone around a healthcare premises. Encompassing as it does any healthcare premises, not simply those which provide services relating to abortion, along with the 100m extent of the zone, makes this a very general provision which may have unintended consequences.
11. The exception provided for in Head 5 for places of worship means that the Bill does not "prohibit conduct which would otherwise be lawful, which occurs within a place of worship". The explanatory note goes on to indicate that this applies only to indoor environments and not the exterior grounds of a place of worship. While many Christians gather regularly (often weekly) in venues, which may include schools or community centres as well as purpose-built chapels or churches, for corporate worship, many do not make a distinction between which activities or parts of their lives are designated as 'worship' and those which are not. The approach suggested by this legislation may have the unintended consequence of constraining freedom of religion by limiting worship to designated locations.
12. One of the activities prohibited by the draft legislation is "displaying or distributing, or attempting to distribute, any text, or images intended to, or which could reasonably be considered likely to, influence a person's decision to access termination of pregnancy services". By this definition it would not be possible for a local church to publicly advertise on a noticeboard on the exterior grounds of a place of worship any material which might promote a pro-life counselling programme, pastoral support for pregnant women who are potentially struggling, or other associated material. These are not hypothetical concerns. Crisis pregnancy does not always lead to termination and the longstanding reasonable, pro-social counselling services offered by churches for women who have decided to continue with pregnancy through complex difficulties should not be constrained by the legitimate concern to also protect the freedom of women who elect for whatever reason to pursue a termination.
13. Some questions that we think it would be useful to consider include:
 - (a) Could this legislation prevent a place of worship from publicly displaying biblical texts on its exterior grounds which refer specifically to life before birth?

- (b) Does this impinge on Article 9 rights, considering the necessity of the law can be disputed?
 - (c) Does it contravene Article 10 rights since it offers no accounting for the duties and responsibilities of free expression, ruling them out entirely?
 - (d) How does it stand in the light of 44.2.1 of Bunreacht ne hÉireann considering the existing public order legislation?
14. There are many contexts in which a religious organisation might want to promote their teaching which could be construed as contributing to debates about abortion law, but which are actually intended for another purpose. To cite an obvious example, in Psalm 139:14, the poet sings “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” This is a verse that might fall under suspicion in the bill as currently established, but it is also a verse that would serve as a cornerstone for ministry to any group of people who struggle with self-image issues, ranging from teenagers to those suffering from addictions.
15. Head 4 lists 14 specific types of activity which will be prohibited including displays of different types of material, offering or attempting to offer counselling, or trying to communicate in a way which would dissuade a person from accessing services. The risk is that the Bill will not merely propose to inhibit harassment and intimidation and the wrongful actions of third parties interfering with a right to access abortion services, but may have the effect of restricting any conduct, no matter how benign, within a safe access zone on the grounds that it would amount to a criminal offence. A friend or relative who wishes to encourage a person seeking termination of pregnancy to reconsider their decision may fall foul of this legislation should such a conversation take place within the designated 100m zone area.
16. As proposed, the Bill intends to protect those who wish to access termination services to which they are legally entitled to avail. But aside from projected concerns about the way that it may limit legitimate and pro-social expressions of religious belief, there are concrete democratically positive actions that appear to be consequentially affected by the proposal. The March for Life in Dublin is one of the largest public demonstrations in the nation each year. Given that the current designated route for public demonstrations within Dublin city passes by two maternity hospitals, might this proposed legislation effectively render this march illegal? This event allows thousands of citizens to express their deeply-held ethical and political convictions in peaceful protest. An objection based on ECHR Article 11 seems likely here. If such expression is curtailed in this instance, why might it not be curtailed in other instances as political will and the cultural climate shifts? No bill can be considered progressive or enlightened if, in the hands of a more authoritarian government, it could serve as precedent for the further dilution of civil liberties. This is the very point which Baroness Fox of Buckley made during the House of Lords debate on similar provisions on 1 November 2022.

17. Any law that interferes with the right to free expression must be demonstrably necessary, and proportionate. Yet An Garda Síochána have stated that existing public order laws offer sufficient remedies in the case of harassment or intimidation.⁷ Indeed, the Garda Commissioner stated in a letter to the Minister for Health that “no incidence of criminality has been reported or observed”. The necessity of the bill is thus called into question.
18. If passed, the proposed legislation would disproportionately engage the resources of An Garda Síochána, which are already under significant pressure. One can only imagine the difficulty of policing this law. That, in itself, is not a reason to oppose any legislation, but when combined with the apparent questions about its necessity and its significant issues around proportionality and extendibility, we worry that this bill will in fact diminish the peace of the public square. If this legislation is brought forward it would be useful to also have an assessment of the potential impact on An Garda Síochána, including the resource implications.
19. As we read this bill, there is no clear distinction between those who are in attendance properly, lawfully and in a sensitive and appropriate fashion and those who are engaged in conduct which is undoubtedly offensive. To create a space free of harassment is noble. To create a space free of any political expression is not. Furthermore, as it presently stands, there is no mechanism for appeal. The freedom of conscience lies at the heart of Presbyterian belief and practice. We are grateful to live in a society which is hospitable to voices that are inhospitable to us! What is a constitutional republic if not a place where people are free to express their deepest perspectives on important matters. There is a responsibility on the citizen to speak with care and respect for those with whom they disagree - a principle explicitly articulated in our Scriptures – we must be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks about the reason for the hope we have but we must do so “with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15)), but there are laws in place that allow the authorities to deal with anti-social and harassing behaviour. Protecting the rights to access termination services can be achieved without diminishing the rights to free expression.

Conclusion

20. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is committed to a pro-life for the whole-of-life position. We opposed the initial 8th Amendment because in a large part we felt that it was an example of legislative over-reach in response to a passing cultural moment.⁸ Regardless of our positions on the larger fundamental questions raised by this topic, our concern here is primarily addressed to the form of the proposal. We feel it is informed by a sincere desire to help women and their families in crisis which arrives at

7 Jennifer Bray, “Existing Laws Adequate to Deal with Abortion Protests, Says Garda Commissioner,” the *Irish Times*, September 26, 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/existing-laws-adequate-to-deal-with-abortion-protests-says-garda-commissioner-1.4031727>.

8 Jennifer Wade, “1982: Irish Council of Churches Opposed Anti-Abortion Amendment,” *The Journal.ie*, December 28, 2012, <https://www.thejournal.ie/1982-irish-council-of-churches-opposed-anti-abortion-amendment-709821-Dec2012/>.

a misguided and unwise proposal. That the bill relates to questions of the right to life is distinctly secondary to how it relates to the right of freedom of expression.

21. There is no formal ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland or its congregations in the Republic of Ireland that gather outside the sites addressed in this bill and we are even not aware of any informal ministry that might be affected. We are not seeking space to protect our practices as Presbyterians. Rather, as Christians, we are motivated to protect others' freedom of expression.
22. This bill appears to create a precedent for the limitation of speech in public, which is the heart-beat of any constitutional republic. Its necessity is questionable. Its proportionality doubly-so. It offers no measure for appeal. If implemented, it will take up considerable policing resources at a significant cost to An Garda Síochána's social capital. It is likely to be robustly challenged on a range of grounds in a number of venues. If it survives those cases, it will serve as an even stronger precedent for further dilution of the citizen's right to state unpopular opinions in public if and when Ireland is governed by less moderate leaders.
23. We urge the Minister and the Committee to reconsider this legislation, and it is our recommendation that it is withdrawn completely.

COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS

Convener: Rev COLIN MORRISON

Secretary: Rev DAVID THOMPSON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council for Congregational Life and Witness has met on two occasions since last year's General Assembly.
2. The report details:
 - (a) How the Council has approached its remit of seeking to support the development of the life and witness of congregations amid the uncertainties arising from the remaining shadow of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic during 2022/23.
 - (i) The work of the following committees and panels:
 - (ii) The Congregational Life Committee
 - (iii) The Congregational Witness Committee
 - (iv) The Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee
 - (v) The Children's, Youth and Family Panel
 - (vi) The Presbyterian Women's Panel and Women's Ministry Panel.
 - (b) New Council initiatives: Landscape projects.
 - (c) Details of the Presbytery listening exercise to commence from September 2023.

Aligning with realities in 2022/23

3. Perhaps more than any other Council of the General Assembly, the Council for Congregational Life and Witness continues to be most directly impacted by the uncertainties arising from the remaining shadow of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as it seeks to re-establish a regular rhythm of operation and activity. The Council takes its lead from the needs of congregations, and seeks to move in parallel with the priorities and pace set by the regular rhythm of activities in the life and witness of the local church. For the Council to be trailing behind that agenda would be to fail to provide adequate support. For it to be too far ahead, would be to lose touch with realities on the ground. Even in normal times, achieving the right balance is extraordinarily challenging as congregations find themselves in different places in terms of circumstances for ministry and mission and move at a variety of paces dependent on all sorts of internal factors. As congregations undertake their own bespoke journeys out from under the shadow of the

impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the possibility of effective alignment across the denomination is an almost impossible task. While there are emerging commonalities of both challenge and opportunity, there also remain marked differences, most notably around the different capacities that arise from variety of congregational size, staffing, and simple ability to bounce back from what has been such a significant hiatus in church life.

4. Rather than be paralysed by these realities, the Council set itself to approach its work in 2022/23 with a desire to recapture a greater sense of regular rhythm, while remaining open and agile to the need to be responsive to whatever unforeseeable circumstances unfolded. More particularly, the Council deliberately arranged its activity in two distinct phases between September 2022 and summer 2023 in anticipation of the likely situation experienced by churches on the ground in the two halves of that church year.
5. Recognising that the rebuilding of congregational capacity for activities beyond Sunday worship would be gradual from the restart of the new church year in September 2022 to the end of the calendar year, the Council limited its level of programming in this period to allow space for congregations to get their weekly rhythms and routines up and running again. Particular emphasis in this phase was focused on encouraging and supporting leaders and running events to accompany the work of seeking to reconnect with young people. Two events for elders were held, one focusing on reshaping models of pastoral care, the other on elements of pastorally reconnecting with young people, fringe members and those most personally impacted by the effects of the pandemic. Regional training for children's and youth ministry leaders was delivered on two occasions with the aim of encouraging and equipping for regathering children, young people and their families in church life. There was also one event for young people.
6. From January 2023, the Council increased its level of activity in programming and events in support of what was anticipated would be a gathering momentum in congregational activity and engagement. Four further in-person and one online training events for children's and youth ministry leaders were delivered. Hybrid programmes for younger leaders and in the area of encouraging evangelism were delivered. Further events for children and young people were offered.
7. Very little of what the Council provided in either period represented a return to what had been offered before the pandemic. There has been a very deliberate re-imagining of output in direct response to feedback from those in congregations on the ground as to what kind of outcomes they require from support offered. The potential of new initiatives and approaches developed during the period of the pandemic, such as podcasting and online training, were also integrated into the way the Council seeks to deliver its remit. This has been a fertile season of experimentation and learning.

8. Throughout this period, significant work behind the scenes brought some important projects back on stream such as the *Fresh Light* counselling ministry and *PCI Family Holiday*. Administrative staff have embraced whole new ways of working, creating crucial efficiencies given the reduction in the size of the team. Executive staff have significantly expanded work with individual congregations, helping leaders in congregations address needs they have identified in areas such as pastoral care, discipleship, leadership, outreach, involvement in global mission, ministry among children, young people and their parents. Alongside this more formal and structured engagement, encouragement provided in telephone conversation, over a cup of coffee or in signposting resources and opportunities has been deeply appreciated.
9. It is always difficult to quantify the impact of any ministry, whether undertaken at personal, congregational or denominational level, but in terms of more formal engagement, in the six months from September 2022 to March 2023, 239 congregations have engaged with at least one Council run programme or event, or purchased a Council produced resource. This compares favourably with pre-pandemic figures. Given the messy realities of the backdrop to restoring both congregational and Council activity, this quantitative assessment represents an encouraging measure of increasing and effective realignment.
10. Realigning the Council's work has also required a careful resetting of operations for the future. This has involved regularising the functioning of the Council's committee and panel structure, along with considered reflection on capacity, budget and balance across the remit given by the General Assembly. As the Council has sought to remain open to God's leading, it has seen some longstanding ways of doing things draw to a close, while the harnessing of new possibilities suggests the gradual dawning of new horizons for the future. The reports from the committees and panels that follow reflect in greater detail some of the specifics of that journey so far.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE COMMITTEE

11. The Congregational Life Committee oversees the Council's work of supporting congregations in developing in the areas of leadership, discipleship, worship and pastoral life. It has considered how best to fulfil its remit of accompanying congregations in these core areas of congregational life in the next season of ministry, leading to a number of priorities and initiatives.
12. In the area of developing the next generation of leaders it is envisaged that the Emerge younger leaders' programme for over 18s will resume in 2023/24. For 2022/23 it had been paused to allow for a *Stepping Forward, Stepping Up* programme in which the age for participation had been deliberately lowered to 16 to offer congregations a way of supporting those who may have been urged into leadership roles a little earlier than

normal due to gaps arising from the loss of leaders during the period of the pandemic. This one-off initiative and reduction in age range was an appropriate response to those particular circumstances, but on balance, a return to the previous arrangement is judged most appropriate going forward.

13. The *Apprentice* programme, which offers congregations an opportunity to advertise opportunities and a monthly ministry basics training scheme delivered in conjunction with the Council for Training in Ministry's Institute for Ministry, has completed a fruitful first year. Recruitment of congregational apprentices remains challenging and mirrors a general decline in apprentices across the faith-based sector. Eight apprentices participated in the training opportunity, offering a good platform on which to continue to build.
14. An initiative to refresh and encourage elders in their calling has also been agreed. Informed by a survey of elders conducted across all 19 presbyteries, it will take the primary form of two or three regional in-person gatherings for elders. These gatherings will also be live streamed, providing a further option for individual elders to join from home, or kirk sessions to participate together as a group from church premises. The format will be a mix of encouragement from Scripture, specific input on leadership, and time for discussion. Material from the programme will also be recorded to be packaged and released for use in congregations.
15. A future programme around equipping for a facilitative style of leadership that enables greater engagement, involvement, ownership and sharing of leadership responsibility, especially in the area of enabling congregational change, has also been agreed. Entitled *Leading Edge*, the themes for five sessions, to be offered across a church year as a programme, or for standalone participation as individuals might chose, are as follows: Leading from a place of acceptance; Leading in disorienting times; Leading well with others; Leading without having to feel in control; Leading for a change.
16. In the area of discipleship a conference entitled *Disciple-shaping Church Today* has been agreed. The conference to be held in Assembly Buildings, Belfast, will provide ministers, church leaders and interested others with an opportunity to reflect and recalibrate the conversation around what it looks like to build a disciple-shaping congregational life in ways that are both biblical and practical. The format will offer a mix of plenary content and a variety of models for discussion aiming to address why discipleship is difficult today and how we might shape forms of Bible engagement, worship and community that grow disciples to follow Jesus in our present age. It is proposed that video material of core content will be captured and circulated in a format that would maximise a variety of use in congregational settings. Feedback from the conference will also help the Committee reset how it can best fulfil its remit of supporting congregational discipleship in the light of the impact of the interruption of the pandemic to the basic rhythms of following Jesus in the lives of many members.

17. The Committee has reaffirmed the priority of resourcing in the area of encouraging congregational prayer life. Under the working title of *Teach us to pray*, the primary focus of the resource will be to encourage confident, biblically shaped participation in prayer within the corporate settings of worship and other gatherings. A supplementary resource will offer suggestions for a range of ways in which members might be gathered for corporate prayer.
18. The new *Digital Worship Hub* was formally launched in March 2023 on the PCI website. The hub offers a range of resources and ideas for those who construct and lead services of worship and the early response among that constituency has been positive. Initial content will be regularly updated with new material, which will be highlighted via social media and other channels of communication, to keep the existence of this resource bank before the Church.
19. Plans for a series of pastoral equipping evenings in May 2024 are now in place. The three sessions will be delivered in collaboration with Andrew Collins (Biblical Counselling UK) and will provide envisioning, equipping and encouragement for anyone who is involved in providing pastoral care in a congregational setting.
20. Two major pieces of work on the sacraments delayed by the disruption of the pandemic have now been completed. A new *Into Full Church Membership* resource, designed for use with those considering becoming members of the Church offers printed and video material for stimulating discussion. Initial feedback from users has been positive. A new suite of materials on baptism offers a variety of printed and video material that enables this theme to be explored with those considering baptism, but also offers opportunities to enable congregations as a whole to gain a fuller understanding and deeper appreciation of the sacrament.
21. A downloadable role description for the recruitment of congregational treasurers has also been created. It is hoped this will be helpful in simply and concisely setting out the roles and responsibilities of this important office to those who might be approached to consider stepping into this vital ministry of congregational life.
22. Throughout the period of the pandemic a number of resources for use in the area of congregational life have been released. Given the haphazard resumption of more regular congregational activity, these may have got lost in the moment. They include a downloadable resource for small group leaders entitled, *Leading small groups*, and *Expressions*, an eight-session resource for use in small group settings in homes or church premises, covering a variety of aspects of discipleship and mission. *The Proximity* resources also offer a tried and tested format for one-to-one or small group work with all ages. The third in the series entitled, *Habits of a lifetime*, explores basic rhythms of the Christian life such as Bible reading, prayer, worship, community, service, generosity and rest. Its release was untimely in that it coincided with the start of the pandemic in March 2020, but its subject matter may be more timely than ever given the need to regroup ourselves in the simple practices of following Jesus together in the context of the life of the local church.

23. The *Back Together Again* booklet, launched in August 2022 to coincide with the resumption of more regular patterns of church life in the first full year after the lifting of pandemic restrictions, remains a short, helpful framework to help congregations reflect on the place of community in church life. Copies are now available free on request.
24. The *Tides* devotional initiative continues to retain and attract significant numbers of subscribers. Members can sign up to receive content Monday to Friday each week at www.presbyterianireland.org/tides
25. All of these resources can be viewed at and ordered from the PCI website.

PHILIP McCREA, Convener

CONGREGATIONAL WITNESS COMMITTEE

26. The Congregational Witness Committee oversees the Council's work of supporting congregations in developing in the areas of local outreach, evangelism and involvement in global mission.
27. In the area of developing evangelistic edge, an experimental *Sharing Faith* programme, delivered in a four-part hybrid in-person/online format, enabled participants to gain confidence in evangelism. The format and content were well received by participants and the initiative offers the Committee opportunity for further reflection on how to equip church members to help others comprehend the Christian message and how it relates to their everyday lives and experiences.
28. A collaborative project will see the annual *UK Evangelism Conference* held in London, Edinburgh and Manchester brought to Assembly Buildings, Belfast for the first time on Saturday 30 September 2023.
29. Four resource projects are being pursued. The previously released Share material, aimed at encouraging congregational engagement in local outreach and evangelism, is being repackaged to increase its potential for use in a small group setting. An evangelism resource, specifically shaped for use in rural contexts, is being developed in conjunction with PCI's Rural Chaplain Rev Kenny Hanna. A simple resource to encourage those unfamiliar with the Bible to consider its truth for their lives is being scoped in conjunction with the Bible Society NI. In the area of encouraging lively congregational engagement and involvement in global mission, a *Go Deep, Go Wide* booklet will be launched to coincide with the start of the new church year.
30. The potential of facilitating training in the art of Bible storytelling for evangelistic purposes along with the *Simply the Story* ministry is being pursued with a possible training programme being offered in January 2024.

31. An *Impact* summer outreach team programme is planned for July and August 2023 with four congregational venues in Belfast (Ravenhill, West Kirk, Abbey, Monkstown and Great Victoria Street/Friendship House), two in Londonderry (Glendermott and Kilfennan) as well as Seskinore, First Monaghan and County Cavan (Cootehill and Bailieborough groups of churches). Recruiting leaders and team members after a three year break due to the interruption of the pandemic is not without its challenges, although it is hoped that these can be overcome to see this important programme reestablished.
32. A Global Mission Involvement Task Group has been thanked and discharged having completed its remit of overseeing the completion of work which was previously initiated by the Global Mission Involvement Committee whose previous standalone remit has now been absorbed into the Congregational Witness Committee. New arrangements are in place to create good communication of priorities for engaging congregations in aspects of global mission emerging from the Council for Global Mission. These will then be prioritised and appropriately packaged for access by congregations.
33. The Committee also spent fruitful time discussing the missional implications of the 2021 Northern Ireland census figures. These indicate significant societal and demographic changes that congregations need to note if they are to shape missional engagement for the communities in which God has placed them to be his witnesses.
34. Again, during the period of the pandemic a number of resources for use in the area of congregational witness and encouraging involvement in global mission have been released that congregations may not yet have had opportunity to use. These include the *All the Days of My Life* evangelistic resource which focuses particularly on reaching those in later life, and ongoing resourcing connected to the Blaze initiative, intended to stimulate awareness of and participation in global mission among children and their families in the context of the whole congregation.
35. A page on the PCI website offers material for reflection on how congregations might reconnect with their local community for mission and evangelism following the interruption to previous patterns of engagement caused by the pandemic. Entitled *Getting Going Again*, its simple structure is a helpful framework for reflection and discussion, especially in congregations where it is becoming clear that some previous ways of being present in their community cannot be re-established or are no longer as effective as they once were.
36. All of these resources can be viewed at and ordered from the PCI website.

STEPHEN RICHMOND, Convener

PROGRAMME, FINANCE AND COORDINATION COMMITTEE

37. The Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee has a crucial role in helping the Council manage and balance its large remit, a budget reducing in real terms and limited staff capacity. These are all significant factors increasingly impacting the scale and scope of Council activity moving forward.
38. In planning Council programming for the church year 2022/23, the Committee foresaw that congregational activity beyond Sunday services and other very basic ministries would only gradually begin to regain momentum as churches edged out from under the shadow of the disruption of the pandemic. Recognising this reality, and intentionally leaving space for congregations to restore their own ministry activity, Council events and programmes in 2022/23 have been small scale, experimental and aimed at supporting and accompanying congregations as they undertake their own variety of journeys forward.
39. A series of events and programmes intentionally designed to support and encourage leaders in a variety of areas have been well attended and warmly appreciated.
40. It is noticeable that events intentionally designed to support the attempts of children's and youth ministry leaders to reconnect with children and young people and build momentum in regathering their groups have been less successful in achieving this intent. This is particularly the case in the area of ministry among young people, where congregations also report depleted numbers, diminished levels of engagement and loss of consistency of participation. Further reflection on this situation and whether it represents a temporary or irreversible trend will be monitored, however it will mean that from 2023/24, Council events for young people will be intentionally simpler, shorter and scaled for smaller numbers. These gatherings will continue to offer significant opportunities for young people and youth groups to come together around a quality programme for mutual encouragement and building up of faith.
41. The Committee have also approved the development of a more regional approach to events. This will mean the design and delivery of simpler, smaller events in different locations, rather than a return to complex, large scale events in the same venue every year. Specifically they have agreed:
 - That the Council sets itself in principle to pursue a more regional approach to events and programming.
 - That the Council encourages further, informal experimentation with a more regional approach to events and programming as opportunities present themselves and where deemed appropriate, particularly on the basis of the experience of experiments in 2022/23 and 2023/24.

- That the concept of formally developing four defined regional hubs be explored with presbyteries as part of the Council's Presbytery listening exercise to be conducted from September 2023 (see paras 94-99).
42. The Committee have also received reports and updates on three specific projects.
 43. The *Fresh Light* counselling ministry resumed in September 2022 after a period of suspension due to the Covid-19 pandemic and after significant operational restructuring. The new systems put in place are working smoothly and the service is operating at full capacity while retaining a waiting time for counselling that is much shorter than statutory services or other comparable volunteer ministries. A number of suggestions as to how the ministry could be both focused and developed are to be explored, although it is recognised that these opportunities are only part of a deeper and wider strategic discussion of the limitations of Council budget and capacity.
 44. The *PCI Family Holiday*, run in conjunction with the Presbyterian Children's Society, resumed at Easter 2023 after a three-year interruption due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It quickly reached capacity. It is encouraging to see more congregations appreciating the opportunity the holiday provides as a space for pastoral renewal, refreshment in family discipleship and an environment in which the Christian faith can be gently experienced and sensitively expressed. Costs have risen significantly since the holiday was last delivered in 2019 and the budget will have to be carefully monitored going forward.
 45. At time of writing, engagement with the Education Authority (NI) continues around the details of an offer of funding applied for as part of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland attaining the status of a Regional Voluntary Youth Organisation. Application for core funding relates to costs of managing the operational component of PCI operating as an umbrella body for congregations. This will enable Education Authority funded opportunities to enhance their children's and youth ministry. It is also hoped funding will be available to retain three of six previously Education Authority funded Regional Project Worker posts designed to improve the flow of information between the Council and congregational contacts designated to receive communication. Funding has also been sought to provide some free sessions for use in youth fellowship style settings. Delays in approving funding due to budget uncertainties in the education sector have made this a frustrating, protracted, complicated and time-consuming process. Funding is now only being made available for one year, rather than the three-year period previously indicated by the Education Authority. This means gaining momentum in this project may be slower than previously hoped and the scope of what can be achieved in the medium to long term is totally dependent on what future funding, if any, is made available. Considerable wisdom needs to be exercised to make the best of this opportunity within the current uncertain circumstances.

46. A further project launched during the period of the pandemic was the PCI Marriage Panel. The Panel's role is to offer support to ministers in the areas of pastorally addressing requests for remarriage and inter-church marriage. The Council draws attention once again to the availability of its ministry that can be accessed by contacting the Council for Congregational Life and Witness office.
47. After careful ongoing consideration of the post-pandemic backdrop to church life against which Council events and programmes are taking place, the Committee have approved the following basic outline schedule of events and programmes for 2023/24, with appropriate flexibility granted to adjust finer details as evolving circumstances may dictate. Members of Assembly will receive dates and details in due course.

Description	Area of remit/desired outcome	To be decided
Area of remit: Congregational Life		
Elders' Refresher evenings	Envision, encourage and refresh existing elders in their calling	
Pastoral skills course	Envision and equip those involved in pastoral ministry	
'Discipleshaping Church Today' conference	Reset the discipleship conversation post pandemic and give simple models of approach delivery in congregations	
Emerge	Envisioning and equipping next generation of younger leaders	
Apprentice training	Envisioning and equipping next generation of younger on leaders in basics of ministry	
Leading Edge	Envisioning and equipping for congregational leadership	
Area of remit: Congregational Witness		
Sharing Faith	Envision and equip participants for evangelism in church context and everyday life	Adopt annual or biannual scheduling.
Evangelism Conference	Envision and equip participants for evangelism in church context and everyday life	

Description	Area of remit/desired outcome	To be decided
Area of remit: Children's Ministry		
Regional Kids' Big Day Out	Supplement children's discipleship ministry in congregations	
Area of remit: Youth Ministry		
Regional Events for 11-15s	Supplement congregational discipleship for 11-15s with high quality, accessible event to which leaders can bring groups.	
Youth Discipleship Initiative for 16-18s	Supplement congregational discipleship for 16-18s with a high-quality programme which engages and stretches participants with the intention of rooting conviction in following Christ and the ability to apply Christian truth to life appropriate to this age and stage of faith development.	
Full Time Youth Workers' gatherings	Create environment for encouragement and development of F/T Youth Workers employed by PCI congregations.	
Summer Teams 16+	Provide discipleship and mission opportunities experienced as part of the witness of a local congregation in context.	Reassess for 2024 on basis of numbers participating in summer 2023.
Area of remit: Children's and Youth Ministry Leaders' training		
Foundations	Encouragement, discussion and basic skills training for children's and youth ministry leaders	

Description	Area of remit/desired outcome	To be decided
Area of remit: Family Ministry		
Family Holiday	Supplementing support given by congregations to families in challenging situations/pastoral evangelism	
Regional Family Festival	Supplementing work of congregations with fringe families in pastoral evangelism	Reassess for 2024 on basis of number of congregations participating in May 2023.
Area of remit: Women's Ministry		
PW Forums	Envisioning and equipping leaders for ministry among women	
PW Annual Conference	Envisioning and encouragement in women's ministry	
Area of remit: Landscape Project		
Faith in later life morning conference	Introduce new strand of work/envision and equip congregations in discipleship, evangelism and leadership among those in later life	

48. Some programmes that had been previously anticipated to commence in 2023/24 have been paused and a degree of flexibility and margin has been maintained which continues to allow the Council to be agile in response to a changing situation.
49. Members of Assembly are reminded that the most effective way to keep up to date with all the events, programmes, resources and opportunities for congregations and their members is to subscribe to receive the *E-quip* ezine at www.presbyterianireland.org/equip
50. The Committee is exploring what steps can be taken to ensure prudent financial management against the backdrop of an annual budget allocation from United Appeal that remains static while costs continue to rise. It has also been agreed that immediate steps be taken to:
 - Budget for simpler, shorter, smaller events and programmes while retaining quality and significance;
 - Price events and programmes more realistically, without ‘pricing the Council out of the market’;
 - Better balance resource production costs with pricing and anticipated income from sales.

JANE NELSON, Convener

CHILDREN’S, YOUTH AND FAMILY PANEL

51. The Children’s, Youth and Family Panel contributes age and ministry specific input to Council strategy, programing, events and resources in support of the development of congregational life and witness among children, young people and parents.
52. A newly constituted panel was recalled on November 2022 following incorporation of its work into the more streamlined structures under which the Council operated during the period of the pandemic. This first meeting set the scene as to what was happening in this area of the Council’s remit and helped members gain a feel for their role as panel members.
53. A further meeting in February 2023 reflected on the picture for ministry among young people at congregational level in the wake of the impact of the pandemic. Some common themes and observations, notable because they seem to suggest significant changes in the circumstances and practice of ministry among young people, included:
 - A breakdown of regularity in patterns of attendance by young people;
 - Leaders having to work much harder to achieve even minimal participation and response;
 - The balance between providing an environment for building relationships and having conversations with young people and taught content delivered as part of a programme has shifted towards the former as young people seem less able or willing to engage with the latter;

- The gap between ministries that are primarily for discipleship and those aimed at outreach may be widening and unable to bear the burden of a dual emphasis effectively;
 - Numbers are smaller and allow for pursuing small group or one-to-one ministry with greater intentionality;
 - There is a need to equip leaders for a one-to-one approach, whether in discipleship or evangelism;
 - There is demand for ‘plug it and play’ programming from busy leaders who may lack time or confidence in their ability to construct their own material;
 - There is noticeable decline in parental intentionality in encouraging church involvement by their young people.
54. In many ways these congregational trends are magnified when it comes to the likely levels of participation of young people in Council events and programmes. This has already been evident in response to some Council initiatives in 2022/23.
55. Having gained this overview of present circumstances for ministry among young people, a further phase of work unfolded around addressing the three questions below, in answer to which, the following priorities to carry forward and shape future Council messaging and priorities emerged.
- What are the main purposes of youth ministry?
 - To enable an engagement with Scripture that develops a life of faith in which Jesus is Lord;
 - To enable fellowship that connects young people into the worshipping community of the whole church;
 - To enable young people to reach out to share their faith with their peers.
 - In what ways can congregations work towards those goals?
 - Creating spaces and suitable environments in which leaders have materials to teach the Bible well;
 - The whole congregation modelling what it means to be a Christian community which serves and reaches out;
 - Intentionally loving young people as part of the all-age family of the church;
 - Creating a greater sense of celebrating becoming a member of the church and belonging to the congregational family;
 - Giving young people opportunities to serve and gain ownership of being part of the whole church community;
 - Promoting, or providing, opportunities for young people to reach out to their peers.
 - What things could the Council do to help churches turn vision and aspiration into practice?

- Sharing simple stories of good practice to envision and inspire others, perhaps with particular emphasis on being an intergenerational church;
 - Bringing leaders together for encouragement;
 - Training for leaders in small group and one-to-one approaches;
 - Encouraging young people in owning Christian faith with conviction and having confidence to share the gospel with their peers;
 - Informing and equipping parents to get to grips with the realities their young people are facing and how they might support them.
56. The following additional insights emerged that will also be helpful in framing future Council activity:
- Following the interruption of the pandemic and experimental phase of activity in 2022/23, the Council should learn from experience and carefully protect the things that still seem to have traction and significance for congregations;
 - The Council needs to free itself from past priorities in activities which no longer seem to have traction and significance for congregations. This will enable it to not only tinker with doing the same things differently, but to strike out to do different things;
 - It is important in messaging to begin with a vision that a smaller, less well-resourced, church can own and then scale up the same basic principles for bigger, better resourced situations;
 - For many years, the Council's resources have largely been prioritised and apportioned to the running of large-scale events, however the season in which they seemed to be most effective in supporting and stimulating ministry among young people is drawing to a close. In part that is due to the fact that these events functioned as valuable additional 'icing on the cake' in a time when many congregations were better resourced for their own ongoing ministry among young people. It is now 'the cake' of regular local church youth ministry that requires greater focus, attention and direct support;
 - The Council should embrace the opportunity to reassess priorities and reapportion resources, rather than have any sense of failure associated with any shift to smaller, simpler, more significant initiatives if that is what is required by congregations going forward;
 - It is important that the main purposes of youth ministry identified become the lens through which to understand the Council's priorities going forward and the touchstone against which decisions about apportioning of focus, time, money and resources are tested;
 - The way in which these priorities are communicated to congregations and applied by them will need to allow for a range of ministry circumstances;

- It will be important to begin to use the outcome of this strategy discussion to rebalance, reshape and refocus Council messaging, capacity and activity as opportunity allows from this point onwards.
57. The Panel will meet again in May to devote time to a similar strategic discussion of future priorities in supporting congregations in children's ministry.
 58. At its meeting of 14 March 2023, the Council approved a three-year partnership with *Growing Young Disciples*. This is the outcome of actioning a major, longstanding, priority identified in the area of youth ministry to be more intentional in promoting and supporting the development of discipleship among young people. This arrangement follows the framework and process for establishing partnerships with organisations in support of congregational life and witness agreed by the General Assembly in 2017.
 59. The specific purpose of this partnership is that *Growing Young Disciples* would contribute significant input to content and shaping of initiatives aimed at supporting and developing a number of discipleship initiatives among 11–18 year olds. This would involve:
 - Partnering in shaping and delivering discipleship content for three annual regional events for 11–15 year olds;
 - Partnering in shaping and delivering content for an annual hybrid discipleship programme for 16–18 year olds;
 - Partnering in shaping and delivering discipleship content for PCI Summer Outreach Teams programme.
 60. Engaging *Growing Young Disciples* to facilitate a strategic review of PCI's priorities and provision in support of congregational youth ministry among ages 11–18 which had previously been discussed, has been paused due to the present unsettled and uncertain circumstances around youth ministry that remain as a result of the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic.
 61. Two significant resources in the area of children's, youth and family ministry were provided by the Council during church year 2022/23. 52 is a family devotional resource produced by the Bible Society (NI) and was made available to congregations at reduced cost. Five new sessions in the free Bitesize series of resources for youth fellowships downloadable from the PCI website, were made available on the theme of the Church.
 62. Members of Assembly are reminded of the opportunity to attend the Under 30s delegates fringe event at the General Assembly on Thursday 22 June 2023 from 6pm in the ground floor conference area. A panel of under 30 delegates will give their reflections on the Assembly and its business. A light tea is provided and it is essential that those wishing to attend sign up in advance at www.presbyterianireland.org/under30

DAVID CROMIE, Convener

PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN PANEL AND WOMEN'S MINISTRY PANEL

63. The Presbyterian Women Panel continues to oversee the ministry of Presbyterian Women, reporting initiatives and activities to the Council.
64. The September 2023 forum was postponed due to the death of Her Majesty the Queen. Its theme, *Stronger together*, became the focus for the February 2023 forum at which the main speaker was Donna Jennings of Evangelical Alliance.
65. The annual theme for 2023/24 is *Being transformed*. This will be picked up in both the annual Inspirations resource and as the focus of the PW Annual Conference which has been moved to Thursday 4 May 2023 due to a clash with the coronation of His Majesty the King. The keynote speaker at the conference is Ali Calvin. The *Inspirations* resource can be ordered from the PCI website.
66. The Home Projects for 2023/24 have been designated as REACH Mentoring for Young People which focuses on offering mentoring programmes for young people aged 9–18 years in schools in the Armagh, Down and Craigavon areas, and Biblical Counselling Ireland, an organisation based in churches in the Dublin area and which is closely linked to Adelaide Road Presbyterian Church.
67. The Overseas Project for 2023/24 has been designated to provide support to the SAT-7 Christian broadcasting ministry.
68. Presbyterian Women continues to provide significant prayer and financial support for the work of the Council for Mission in Ireland and Council for Global Mission, as well as deaconess training.
69. At the beginning of the pandemic both the Women's Ministry Panel and the Presbyterian Women Panel were suspended as part of the streamlining of the Council's structures. When it was possible to begin moving towards normal working, the Presbyterian Women Panel was recalled and continued with work it had begun pre-pandemic to broaden its messaging, encouraging and resourcing beyond PW groups, further developing this to take into account the increasing diversity of forms of women's ministry which the pandemic restrictions had accelerated. On Thursday 20 October 2022, a morning for members of both the Women's Ministry Panel and Presbyterian Women Panel was facilitated with the aim of enabling reflection on the period of the pandemic and its impact on the future shape of ministry among women in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as we go forward. At the end of the morning, attendees were asked whether the development and support of women's ministry is still best served by having two panels, or whether a single, newly constituted panel with a refreshed remit, might offer a better way forward. In principle, there was general support for exploring the possibility of a single panel. That being the case, the Women's Ministry Panel, the membership of which was also in need of being significantly refreshed, has not been recalled. A decision as to

whether or not to do so needs to be reached as part of a wider revisiting of the structures for most effectively incorporating Presbyterian Women within the Council for Congregational Life and Witness.

ESTHER PARKER, PW President

NEW COUNCIL INITIATIVES: LANDSCAPE PROJECTS

70. At its meeting of 11 October 2022, the Council approved a series of new initiatives under the broad heading of ‘landscape projects’. They represent an attempt for the Council to more directly support an increasing number of congregations in addressing a series of common circumstances and contexts for life and witness they find themselves facing.
71. While the pandemic changed conditions in which congregations undertake ministry and mission, in many cases it only accelerated trends that were already evident beforehand. Four such trends in a significant number of congregations are:
 - A reduction in congregational size, leadership and capacity to deliver aspects of life or witness;
 - Loss of a critical mass of young people required for a sustainable programme of youth ministry;
 - The dwindling of numbers in longstanding programmes for children’s ministry with little prospect of those forms of engagement being likely to attract new participants;
 - The reality that all of our congregations have an increasing percentage of total membership in later life.
72. These trends represent a change in the landscape in which congregations exercise life and witness. To ignore them and continue to minister as if they were not realities will only exacerbate the issues. Something more than a pottering in the existing congregational garden, tweaking what has always been done, is required in many congregations. A more significant landscaping of activity in ministry and mission needs to be explored in which doing a completely different thing, rather than merely attempting to do the same thing differently, is attempted. Such change is not easily envisioned, shaped, owned and implemented in any congregation. It is often helped by external stimulation of vision, patient accompaniment, ongoing encouragement and assistance in assessing progress. The Council is well placed to facilitate these aspects of supporting congregational change, particularly as it draws upon its wider knowledge of what is happening around the network of congregations that make up the denomination.

73. Under the envisioning and enabling dimensions of the Council's work, four specific landscape projects have been commenced which will develop and unfold over a number of years with the hope that they will gradually help shape new models that congregations could adopt, or adapt, to their particular needs and circumstances.
74. The four projects envisaged are as follows:

Landscape Project 1: Better together?

Addressing the challenges and opportunities of reduction in congregational size and capacity and the possibilities of sharing aspects of life and witness with other PCI neighbours.

75. To progress this project the Council has committed to:
- Explore effective practice of existing joint charges;
 - Invite input from beyond PCI on multi-congregational approaches to life and witness;
 - Identify and develop next steps in imagining a range of formal and informal possibilities in sharing aspects of life and witness between congregations for greater effectiveness in ministry and mission. These might include:
 - New ways of single congregations joining with neighbours for elements of discipleship, age-specific ministry, local outreach;
 - Releasing a percentage of collective ministerial time in a group of churches to invest in new opportunities;
 - How a group of churches might come together to supplement shared ministry by utilising an accredited preacher, auxiliary ministry or collectively employing a part-time staff member;
 - Invite up to five pilot projects to receive CLW facilitation and support commencing from September 2023;
 - Aim to capture and share a range of stories that offer new models of shared presence for ministry and mission on the ground.
76. The first phase of implementation of this project has involved an invitation being extended to all congregations via an email to all ministers to be pilot projects in exploring and developing a particular project in life or witness with a neighbouring congregation. This came with the offer of Council facilitation and support commencing from September 2023. The additional possibility of a follow up conversation in a number of presbyteries was also extended. To date, this has produced one potential pilot project involving two congregations in the Coleraine and Limavady Presbytery.
77. An initial scoping meeting to explore effective practice of shared ministry in existing joint charges was held on 23 March 2023. Feedback and learning will inform the next steps of this journey.

Landscape Project 2: Local youth ministry partnerships

Addressing the challenges and opportunities of congregational situations in which a number of neighbouring PCI churches find themselves with too few young people for effective youth ministry, but where working together would provide a critical mass for a viable group and leadership team.

78. To progress this project the Council has committed to:
- Advertise and seek to identify up to five pilot projects from January 2023;
 - Facilitate conversation among neighbouring kirk sessions and/or youth leadership teams about a partnership model;
 - Support the development of a suitable shared programme;
 - Provide encouragement and support the assessment of progress throughout the year;
 - Provide a programme grant of £250 in the first year, along with ideas to supplement local programme delivery by harnessing of specialist provision e.g. *Made for more, Love for life* etc.
 - Signpost future funding possibilities;
 - Encourage next steps and increasing congregational ownership;
 - Aim to capture and share a range of stories of new models of partnership in local youth ministry.
79. The first phase of implementation of this project has involved an invitation being extended to all congregations via an email to all ministers to be pilot projects in exploring and developing a local youth ministry partnership with a neighbouring congregation. This came with the offer of Council facilitation and support commencing from September 2023. The additional possibility of a follow up conversation in a number of presbyteries was also extended. This has produced three potential pilot projects involving congregations in the Omagh, Monaghan and Derry and Donegal presbyteries.

Landscape Project 3: Starting over

Addressing the challenges and opportunities of rebuilding children's ministry from scratch with parents and families intentionally engaged and involved where numbers of church connected children have dwindled.

80. To progress this project the Council has committed to:
- Provide a regional Family Festival event in May 2023 to which congregations will be encouraged to bring unchurched parents and children on the fringes of church life and activities;
 - Facilitate a conversation on reaching unchurched parents and children engaging PCI congregations and other agencies;
 - Identify and develop next steps in this area.

81. The first phase of implementation of this project has involved a helpful initial scoping conversation on challenges and opportunities in reaching unchurched parents and children, involving representatives from a variety of PCI congregations and other agencies that work with unchurched families.
82. A new and experimental Family Festival event on Saturday 13 May 2023, to which congregations will be encouraged to bring unchurched parents and children on the fringes of church life and activities, has been advertised.
83. Next steps will involve identifying how to build on the learning from these initiatives.

Landscape Project 4: Faith in later life

Addressing the challenges and opportunities of an ageing society and church membership.

84. To progress this project the Council has committed to:
 - Continue to promote the *All the Days of My Life* resource as a means of evangelism to this demographic;
 - Deliver a morning conference in 2024 that would explore:
 - Discipleship in later life – the primary challenges of following Jesus in later years;
 - Leadership in later life – how to stay fresh in leadership and harness the wisdom of experience available to the church;
 - Outreach to those in later life – recognising and responding to an increasing mission field.
 - Identify and develop next steps in this area.
85. The first phase of implementation of this project has involved the ongoing promotion of the *All the Days of My Life* resource as a means of evangelism to this demographic.
86. A recent podcast on discipleship featured content that encouraged congregations to think further about those in the active retired phase of life.
87. A *Faith in Later Life* morning conference is planned for church year 2023/24 with dates to be confirmed.
88. Next steps will involve identifying how to build on the learning from these initiatives.
89. Against the backdrop of present circumstances in the wake of recovery from the impact of the pandemic, it is difficult to gain congregational enthusiasm, ownership and the energy for implementation of any new initiative. Interest has exceeded uptake of the first two projects in particular, but the Council remains committed to patiently progressing these important initiatives which offer support and encouragement to congregations and desperately needed fresh vision for ministry and mission within the denomination against the backdrop of a rapidly changing context in church and society.

Presbytery listening exercise

90. The following resolution passed by last year's General Assembly gave permission to the Council to conduct a presbytery listening exercise.

That the General Assembly encourage the Council for Congregational Life and Witness in embarking on a two-year listening exercise across all 19 presbyteries from September 2023 to enable it to better resource the whole church and to understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and that presbyteries participate fully in this important initiative.

91. Following consultation with the Clerk of the General Assembly, it has become clear that it is anticipated that there are a number of matters from a variety of councils of the General Assembly to which presbytery will need to respond in the latter part of 2023. This being the case, to ensure the best outcome of the listening exercise, the Council has agreed that this process be extended from two years to three years.
92. It is envisaged that the means of undertaking this work needs to be 'process light' for presbyteries, but 'people engaging', allowing both depth and breadth of reflection, feedback and participation. As such, a three-stage process is envisaged in which phase one involves a simple questionnaire being sent to every congregation in the presbytery asking them to respond with the major challenges and opportunities they are experiencing in sustaining and developing their life and witness. A second phase will involve a conversation between a small group appointed by presbytery and a small Council team reflecting further together to make sense of the feedback received. The emerging picture across the presbytery would then be compiled into a simple summary document enabling a third phase in which presbytery as a whole would be invited to reflect upon the summary paper and add to it as they see fit. This would then become the final document from which the Council and presbytery could arrive at some steps forward in partnership to envision, equip and enable congregations in their life and witness.
93. To enable the Council to fulfil its role in phase two of the process, a small panel will be drawn together to meet with the designated presbytery group. This group will include Council staff but also a range of others selected for their ability to listen well and help capture patterns of what is emerging in conversation.
94. The Council Secretary has been in touch with a variety of presbytery clerks to seek to identify up to six presbyteries willing and ready to participate in the initiative in the first year.
95. Presbytery participation in this process is crucial if the Council is to fulfil its General Assembly remit to support the development of congregational life and witness in partnership with presbyteries. The Council anticipates that the quality and outcome of its work can be significantly enhanced by working in tandem with presbyteries to directly address presenting issues facing congregations within their bounds. Nevertheless, all involved might anticipate that the outcome will not suggest easily implementable, one size

fits all solutions, as even within each presbytery there is often significant variation of context, capacity and circumstances facing congregations grouped together on the basis of geography, rather than homogeneity.

Aligned with divine purposes

96. The report began with the account of a Council grappling to realign with the realities of the congregations on the ground whose life and witness it endeavours to serve and support. Going into September 2023, the commencement of the presbytery listening exercise will further commit and equip the Council to do so. However, the most important alignment of all in any ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ is to set ourselves to fall in with what we see and sense God by his Spirit to be both doing among us and prompting us towards.
97. Galatians 5:25 stresses the crucial importance of that, reminding us that, 'since we live by the Spirit', we need to 'keep in step with the Spirit.' With a necessary combination of ongoing patience, expectancy, humility, boldness and prayerful attentiveness to his leading, the Council for Congregational Life and Witness looks forward to supporting the development of the life of congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as they step into his future for them in playing their part in the growth of his kingdom across Ireland.

COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION

Convener: Rev S.A. McCracken

Secretary: Rev W. S. Marrs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The work of the Council for Global Mission could be summed up in the strapline, ‘global disciples sharing God’s heart for the world, declaring good news and demonstrating God’s love’. As such, it reflects both the Great Commission and the Great Command, and recognises the call to authentic fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ all around the world. The Council is tasked with enabling the co-ordination and delivery of global mission as determined by the General Assembly (Code Par 115), and especially where it is beyond the ability of the local congregation and not falling under the remit of other mission councils, partners or agencies. This entails the development of a strategy on mission overseas, including partnership with overseas churches and sending global mission workers; promoting world development issues, including providing for an annual appeal; leading thinking on issues of global concern such as the environment, race relations, international relations (Code Par 278.3).
2. This report sets out the work of the Council for Global Mission from June 2022. The Council for Global Mission was able to meet face to face on 19 October 2022 and 15 March 2023 and reports as follows:
 - (a) **Global Mission Committee** (Pars 3 to 16).
 - (b) **Global Development Committee** (Pars 17 to 26).
 - (c) **Business and Finance Panel** (Pars 27 to 30).

GLOBAL MISSION COMMITTEE

3. The Global Mission Committee recognises that mission is not just one “task” among many that the Church does, but part of the Church’s very nature. PCI is one small part of the universal church with gifts to give and receive within the global body of Christ. The Committee desires that through the work of its panels and task groups many would come to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Global Mission Workers

4. The Council thanks God for the 21 global mission workers of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who, as his witnesses, serve in 9 countries around the world. In the past year Minutes of Appreciation were recorded

for the following global mission workers who resigned from the Council: Peter and Valerie Lockwood who served in Nepal from June 2012 to April 2022; Chris and Rachel Humphries who served in Portugal from November 2018 to January 2023; and Peter and Jayne Fleming who served in Nepal from October 2017 to February 2023. Details of roles, locations and global mission partners for those currently serving with the Council are found in Appendix A.

5. Memorial minutes were recorded in respect of the following missionaries who passed away: Mrs Winifred (Joan) Duncan, Missionary to India 1998–2004; Mrs Olive Maxine McConaghy, Missionary to Malawi/Zambia 1963-71; Miss Pat Wilson, Missionary to Jamaica 1988–89; and Rev Dr William John Paul Bailie, Missionary to Kenya 1998–2005.
6. Deputation: Face to face deputation speaking engagements have been possible again with the lifting of Covid restrictions. The continued release of new, updated Digital Dispatches videos from PCI's global mission workers every six months has highlighted their work and points for prayer. Some of these videos feature Blaze the bee by way of encouraging children and families across PCI to explore what it means to be a global disciple and engage more fully in God's global mission. global mission worker prayer bulletins are available monthly, along with Mission Connect updates in the *Presbyterian Herald*.
7. The Global Mission Workers' Panel was requested to carry out a review of the cost of sending global mission workers and the possibility in the future of co-funding alongside United Appeal funding. This was not a cost-cutting exercise but motivated by a desire to consider how congregations might be encouraged to have greater ownership and engagement in sending and supporting global mission workers. The development of deeper relationships with global mission workers would, in turn, also have the potential to cultivate ongoing relationships with global mission partners, resulting in mutual support in terms of prayer, understanding and encouragement. The Global Mission Committee plan to consult with the United Appeal Committee about any future potential for co-funding.

Global Mission Partnerships

8. A list of Global Mission Partnerships is provided in Appendix B. The Committee is deeply aware of the varied and ongoing impacts on PCI's partners of the Covid pandemic, the war in Ukraine, recent earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, and Cyclone Freddy in Malawi.
9. Overseas visits took place during the past year with the following undertaken to meet with partners, attend conferences, visit projects and share in the pastoral support and encouragement of Global Mission Workers:
 - Rev Uel Marrs to Singapore to meet with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar and their international partners, 1–4 August 2022.

- Rev Richard Kerr, along with Chris Nelson (Videographer) and Glen Mitchell and Suzanne Simpson (Tearfund) to Beirut, Lebanon, for a communications visit regarding the 2022 World Development Appeal. Richard Kerr also met with leadership of the Near East School of Theology (NEST) and the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), 5–12 September 2022.
 - Rev Uel Marrs to Utrecht, Netherlands, for the EUKUMINDO General Assembly and Study Day, 14–17 September 2022.
 - Rev David McCullagh to Malawi for the 50th anniversary celebrations of Scripture Union Malawi, 17–24 October 2022.
 - Rt Rev Dr John Kirkpatrick (Moderator) and his wife, Joan, to Hungary and Ukraine to meet with representatives of the Hungarian Reformed Church and Hungarian Reformed Church Aid, 17–21 October 2022.
 - Prof Gordon Campbell to the Faculté Jean Calvin for a programme of intensive teaching, 27 November–5 December 2022.
 - Rev Uel Marrs to Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) International Mission Conference, 30 January–6 February 2023.
10. The following visits were due to take place in the first half of 2023:
- Revs Uel Marrs and Dario Leal to visit the Christian Presbyterian Church of Portugal (ICPP) leadership in Lisbon and the ICPP Pedras Vivas Congregation, Porto, 28 April–1 May 2023
 - Rev Richard Kerr, along with Ruth Cooke (Christian Aid Ireland) and Chris Nelson (Videographer), to visit Sierra Leone for a communications visit regarding the 2023 World Development Appeal, 20–27 April 2023.
 - Helen Johnston to Nepal for the UMN General Assembly and to visit the Bajhang Cluster, 27 April–13 May 2023.
 - Rt Rev Dr John Kirkpatrick, Moderator, and Rev Uel Marrs to visit the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), 14–21 May 2023.

Global Mission Partnership Grants

11. The Council approved a schedule of 2023 grants totalling £91,500 for the support of 20 partner projects covering 13 countries. The funding for these grants comes from the United Appeal, the World Development Appeal and designated donations.
12. **Misean Cara.** The Council for Global Mission received funding totalling £195,722 during 2022 through partnering with Misean Cara, an international and Irish faith-based missionary movement, working with marginalised and vulnerable communities. This funding is supporting the work of: The Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Samburu Awareness and Action Project in Tuum improving girls' education, building community leadership and developing livelihoods; The United Mission to Nepal

(UMN) improving school management and governance systems, creating ‘child-friendly’ classrooms, training teachers and improving water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in Bahjang District.

Global Mission Relationships

13. PCI is currently engaged in global mission partnerships with 24 churches, institutions and agencies in 21 countries. See Appendix B. When reporting on global mission strategy to the General Assembly 2022, it was indicated that the Committee would undertake a piece of work looking at some of PCI’s distinctives in partnership. The PCI Global Mission Relationships Report, Appendix C builds on the ‘Principles of Partnership in Global Mission’ Report to the General Assembly in 2017. It sets out three forms of denominational relationship in global mission that the Council have found it helpful to identify, primarily for internal use, namely: partner, companion and network. The Report also recognises that relationships are fluid and there may be movement between these categories. The next step in the process is to develop a “sieve” which will be the tool used to assess global relationships and consider which category each may fall into: partner, companion or network.

Global Leaders in Training Scholarships

14. In 2022, the Council approved a schedule of scholarships for 2023 totalling £25,553 in support of Leaders in Training from ten partner churches in six countries.

Church Planting and Evangelism

15. In the course of the year, the Committee has been implementing the findings of the Church Planting and Evangelism Report 2021, with a task group engaging in consultation with global mission workers involved in church planting in Southern Europe. Moving forward, it is recommended that there be ongoing collaboration with the Council for Mission in Ireland, especially in the areas of selection and training of church planters and with the Council for Congregational Life and Witness on communication with and engagement of congregations. A task group has worked on the role description of a volunteer field worker for church planting in Europe with particular emphasis on mentoring and pastoral care. This role will be finalised in the second half of 2023 in tandem with the restructuring of some staffing roles in the Mission Department.

Strategy for 2023-25

16. The Global Mission Committee will continue to explore options over the next year for PCI’s strategy for declaring the Good News beyond the shores of Ireland; looking at the where (countries), who (partners) and how (people) of global mission. In particular, it will take forward a conversation with the United Appeal Committee regarding options for the co-funding of Global Mission Workers. The Global Mission Partnership Panel will be reviewing the best way to assess partnership potential. The Global

Mission Worker Panel will examine the costs and benefits of appointing Regional Liaison Workers, and work will be progressed on church planting in collaboration with the Council for Mission in Ireland.

HEATHER CLEMENTS, Convener

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

17. In mission, God's people are invited to partner with him in his work of reconciling, restoring, and building his kingdom. This includes seeking to address some of the major global issues of the day. To that end, the Global Development Committee is tasked with leading thinking on a number of key global issues, including stewardship of creation, relationship with people from other cultural backgrounds, understanding world faiths and international issues, particularly in the Middle East. In addition, the Committee facilitates an annual World Development Appeal. Agents have been appointed to coordinate the work in each of these five areas.
18. Conflict, natural disaster, persecution and economic hardship on a global scale provide the backdrop to this report. Wars in Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, and the Horn of Africa, together with totalitarian regimes have created an unprecedented displacement of people. Tens of thousands of people seeking refuge have made Ireland their home, and PCI congregations and members have opened their hearts and lives, homes and places of worship to provide a welcome. The experience of some of those who have joined our congregations is the focus of a significant report from the Inter-Cultural Relations Task Group.
19. Christian communities in many parts of the world endure isolation, discrimination and persecution. The complex context of the Middle East is a case in point and an International Relations Task Group is exploring this.
20. Climate change and its impact on the most vulnerable, challenges us to consider our own choices in a world where there are increasingly more extreme weather patterns. A Stewardship for Creation Task Group is looking at these issues.
21. The role of other Faiths and their impact on and interaction with brothers and sisters in Christ, not least some of PCI's traditional partners, is the issue in focus for the World Faiths Agent.
22. The **World Development Appeal**, taken forward each year by a task group convened by the WDA Agent, Rev Liam Rutherford, provides an opportunity for PCI to respond to the need in a practical way. The World Development Appeal for 2022, with a primary focus on the Tearfund supported Tahaddi project in Lebanon, has raised £440,008 to date. This project, supporting displaced and vulnerable communities in Beirut, touches on issues of migration and serves to illustrate how Christian communities in the Middle East serve within a context of the dominant

religion of Islam. The secondary project was a Christian Aid supported one in South Sudan. Christian Aid and Tearfund have each been allocated £150,000 from the funds received to date.

23. The World Development Appeal for 2023 will be looking further at displaced communities. This time it will be in Sierra Leone and the lead partner is Christian Aid. A team, including a videographer, were due to visit the project site in late April. The secondary project is with Tearfund in Bangladesh, and further projects in Nepal, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and the Middle East will receive support.
24. The Moderator's Appeal for Ukraine has raised an unprecedented £1,515,208. This is being split three ways between Christian Aid, Tearfund and Hungarian Reformed Church Aid and all funds have now been distributed. The Moderator visited the Hungarian Reformed Church in October 2022, seeing the work first-hand and making a short visit into Transcarpathia in Ukraine where he met church leaders. He has also written to congregations to thank them and provided an article on the PCI Website, "Hungarian and Ukrainian Churches say 'thank you'" (22.12.2022).
25. The Crisis Task Group met in the aftermath of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria. It was decided not to launch a Moderator's Appeal but rather strongly encourage support for the work of relief and rebuilding through Christian Aid and Tearfund, and through the UK Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC). A donation was also sent to our partner denomination in Syria, the National Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL). PCI congregations were encouraged to pray for the situation.
26. The 2022 General Assembly agreed a Plan of Work for the Committee over the next three years. Major strides have been taken as follows:
 - (a) Following on from the Irish Inter-Church Meeting report entitled "Exploring Race and the Churches in Ireland", an Inter-Cultural Relations Task Group was set up to listen to, document and provide lessons from the first-hand experiences of black and minority ethnic people in congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
 - (i) The Task Group has meticulously carried out its remit and a substantial report of its findings are attached as Appendix D. In it, black and minority ethnic members share how they became part of PCI congregations, including their positive and negative experiences, and provide important pointers for learning for the denomination.
 - (ii) Given the importance of this report and its findings, it is imperative that it gets adequate attention and exposure to the wider church. Feedback will also be provided to those who contributed.
 - (iii) The Committee expressed gratitude for this work to Rev Helen Freeburn, Inter-Cultural Relations Agent, and all those involved in the Task Group.

- (b) The International Relations Agent, Rev Dr Donald Watts is leading a Task Group with an emphasis on exploring and providing recommendations on “How best can PCI show solidarity with, provide support for, and learn from Christian Communities in the Middle East”.
 - (i) This Task Group has met a number of times, and the shape of a report is beginning to emerge, which will delineate the Middle Eastern countries being examined, the key issues about which PCI ought to be aware, and how PCI might move towards constructive engagement. A conference on these issues may be a possibility in 2024.
- (c) Under Stewardship of Creation, Rev Allen Sleith is convening a task group to engage in a consultation on creation care and climate change with the wider denomination, and ensure dialogue with those parties most adversely affected by efforts to address climate change.
 - (i) This Task Group notes that their work is in the context of a good Creator and a good creation. A range of ways of conducting a survey are under consideration, as are partners, both local and global. In addition, resources for Creation Sunday are being prepared with the aim of them being made available on the PCI website.
- (d) The World Faiths agent, Rev John Faris, continues to keep a watching brief on issues relating to world faiths, especially in the context of Hinduism and the challenge more extreme forms pose for PCI’s partner church in India.
 - (i) World Prayer Guides are a helpful way of deepening understanding and encouraging prayer for people of other faiths. These include guides for the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh worlds and are available from the publisher in both hard-copy and to download: www.worldprayerguides.org.uk

RICHARD KERR, Convener

BUSINESS AND FINANCE PANEL

Finance

27. The Council records its deep appreciation for the United Appeal funding received each year that makes possible so much of its work, together with the generous grant received annually from Presbyterian Women. Council for Global Mission accounts for the year 2022 indicate an operating surplus of £127,990 on the Income and Expenditure Account. From 1 January 2023, Global Mission Worker - Ireland allowances were increased by 5%. Due to the cost of living crisis, a one-off cost of living/inflationary allowance of £500 was paid to single Global Mission Workers and £750 to married couples. A United Appeal grant of £900,000 has been approved for 2023,

with the Council requesting the same amount for 2024. In the course of the year restricted donations of £613,062 were received, including Irish Aid funding through Mísean Cara of £195,722 for partner church projects.

Property

28. The Council continues to own three properties as follows: two three-bedroomed apartments at 5 Osborne Mews, Osborne Park and 12 Oakdene, 16 Annadale Avenue. They are regularly maintained and well used mainly by global mission workers, interspersed by some short-term rentals. A semi-detached house at 214 Grasmere Avenue, Wembley continues to be rented out on a tenancy agreement that extends to 31 January 2024.

Staffing

29. In the process of emerging from the Covid pandemic and at what is not an easy time to be recruiting, the staffing of the Mission Department has been under review with the aim of rebuilding capacity to a level that can effectively fulfil General Assembly remits. Working in this challenging context, the Council is very grateful to the small Mission Department Staff Team that has served with dedication, adaptability and resilience. In the course of the year the Council also expressed its deep appreciation for two long-serving members of staff: Beverley Moffett, Senior Administrative Assistant, who finished work on 9 September 2022; and Nehru Dass, Finance Manager, retiring in mid-2023.

Convenership

30. Rev Stephen McCracken was welcomed to the role of Convener of the Council for Global Mission, following the conclusion of Rev Dr Liz Hughes' convenership at the 2022 Assembly.

STEPHEN McCracken, Convener

Romania

Csaba and	2001	Co-ordinator – SERVANT Mission of Diakonia, Cluj
Ilona Veres	1993	Mera children's project
Steve and Rosie Kennedy	2020	Outreach ministry with Cluj Christian Fellowship of the Tóvidéki congregation of the Hungarian Reformed Church (Transylvania District)

Russia

Two global mission workers	2019	Theological education
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Spain

Derek and Jane French	2000	Student outreach with Grupos Biblicos Unidos (GBU), Bilbao
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Zambia

Diane Cusick	1995	Early Childhood Development Officer, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Zambia Synod (since 2016).
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APPENDIX B

GLOBAL MISSION PARTNERSHIPS

PCI is currently engaged in global mission partnership with the following churches, institutions and agencies:

Europe

- The Christian Presbyterian Church of Portugal
- The Evangelical Reformed Church of Latvia (including the Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary)
- Faculté Jean Calvin, France
- Grupos Biblicos Unidos, Spain
- The Hungarian Reformed Church, in Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine
- St Petersburg Christian University, Russia

Africa

- The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Blantyre, Livingstonia, and Nkhoma Synods, Malawi
- Scripture Union, Malawi
- Theological Education by Extension Malawi
- The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Zambia Synod
- The Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Kenya
- The Presbyterian Church of South Sudan and Sudan (including the Presbyterian Relief and Development Agency, Nile Theological College, and Giffen Institute of Theology)

Middle East

- Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary
- The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (including the Near East School of Theology)

Asia

- The Christian Church of Sumba, Indonesia
- The Evangelical Christian Church of Halmahera, Indonesia
- The Protestant Christian Church of Timor, Indonesia
- The Church of North India
- United Bible Training Centre, Pakistan
- United Mission to Nepal

- Association for Theological Education, Nepal
- Minority Focus, Nepal
- The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar
- Caribbean and Latin America
- The Presbyterian Church of Brazil

APPENDIX C

GLOBAL MISSION COMMITTEE

PCI Global Mission Relationships

Introduction

1. At the heart of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's (PCI) engagement in global mission is the principle of relationship, one that likewise reflects PCI's worship of a triune God. From our earliest days as a denomination in the sending of missionaries and connecting with local churches around the world, PCI have wanted to build relationships of mutual respect and care with partner churches, united missions, mission agencies and institutions, recognising that as members of the one body of Christ we are family.
2. As we move into the 21st Century and the increasing secularization of the world, PCI want to be a church that continues to remain effective in sharing in God's global mission while building and strengthening global partnerships. The dynamics of the world have changed since the Coronavirus pandemic, as has the global mission endeavour. There has been a growth in the adoption of digital communication, meaning that PCI's partnerships are more accessible than ever before, but this shift can make us less engaged as digital communication cannot replace face-to-face meetings. Global communities have been impacted not only by the health effects of the pandemic, but also by the movement of people, impacting attendance and commitment levels in the global church. As PCI, we want to remain effective in the work we have been called to do for the sake of the Kingdom of God.
3. One of the values of each global mission partnership is that it expresses an evangelical heartedness. Each partner PCI engages with in mission works to proclaim the good news of the gospel in their own cultural context. PCI's desire is to support and encourage where we can, as well as listen and learn from global mission partners, gaining understanding of their context, practice and mission reach.
4. With the changing nature of the world, PCI's gospel partnerships will be as important as ever. There is a growing sense of communities becoming more isolated given the growing polarisation in politics, leading to fear and mistrust. We therefore want to approach current and potential partnerships with spirit-led enthusiasm and discernment so that PCI engages in mission that supports local efforts and brings learning and deeper partnership to the church in Ireland.
5. Building on the 2017 report to the General Assembly entitled 'Principles of Partnership in Global Mission' we continue to recognise the seven types of relationships stated, namely, development, fraternal, confessional, historical, geographical, ecumenical, and global mission, whether arising from bilateral or multilateral, formal or informal relationships. There now

needs to be a greater understanding of what it means to be in partnership in each, not least when it comes to global mission relationships.

Forms of Global Mission Relationships

6. Appreciating PCI's historic relationships, while addressing the current limitations of staffing capacity to administer partnership relations as well as funding challenges, we recognise three forms of partnering that allow us to engage in global mission. Each form will have its own uniqueness. Our desire is for evangelical heartedness to be evident in each of these relationships.
7. **Partner in Global Mission:** The deepest form of relationship is that of *partner* in global mission, where partnership is potentially a longstanding two-way relationship at the Reformed denominational or institutional level. It is where each partner listens to and learns from the other, discerning each other's needs and responding in a meaningful way, going deep in its financial, prayerful and/or personnel support. There is the potential for twinning and exchange of teams at the congregational or presbyterial level. Where the living relationship wains it moves to being viewed as historical.
8. **Companion in Global Mission:** We recognise that some relationships are only for a season, not as strong as others and do not fulfil the above description of a partner. These relationships are more likely with local mission agencies or independent institutions in the country. They can be defined as *companion* relationships which are beneficial for PCI and the companion. In these relationships PCI and the companion can open conversations regarding ministry and mission opportunity, with the possibility of providing prayerful and practical support, not least through annual grant opportunities. They are likely to be more project focused with Memorandum of Understanding facilitating collaboration on initiatives, although not excluding personnel, but less likely to lead to direct congregational involvement.
9. **Network in Global Mission:** There has been a shift in missional opportunities, particularly in church planting but not exclusively, where a group of agencies and churches relate as a *network*. These network relationships allow like-minded (evangelical but not necessarily reformed or confessional) mission practitioners to discuss, plan and resource mission work where this type of approach is required. Based on this kind of collaboration, PCI may send global mission workers to be involved in initiating work, and grant/project funding would be more likely to be channelled directly through them.

The Way Forward

10. In approaching our global mission relationships in the next five years, the Global Mission Committee, through its Global Mission Partnership Panel will undertake a series of reviews and evaluations. For new opportunities in partnership, whilst not unmindful of who PCI is, the Committee will seek to identify the God inspired initiatives, gifting and needs in mission

of the partner through listening exercises that allow the voice of potential partners be heard. From this it will be discerned which form of partnership best fits, drawing up a partnership agreement or Memorandum of Understanding as and when helpful.

11. Engagement will continue with PCI's current partners through correspondence, online meetings and visits, both sending and receiving. This will give opportunity for prayerful support and grant funding. It is hoped that any visits from overseas partners would extend to become more grass roots with PCI families hosting visitors in their homes so that the impact of the visit goes beyond the formal meetings.
12. Adapting to these new forms of partnership, the following table provides guidance on how engagement takes place at different levels, across the work of the Global Mission Committee.

	Grants	Visits/ meetings	Invitations	Communications	Personnel
Partner	Prioritised	Every 3-5 years (where possible)	General Assembly priority	Proactively encouraged in <i>Herald</i> , social media, dispatches	Prioritised, short-term or long-term
Companion	Eligible	As opportunities arise	Potential	Where appropriate	Eligible, short-term
Network	Eligible	Not necessary	Not essential	Where appropriate	Not required

13. From time to time the Committee will review the current designation of relationships to see if they are still appropriate for the partner and PCI. Although not necessarily time restricted, it may be the case that those PCI relate to at certain times transition between these forms of partnership due to the ebb and flow of relationship and missional engagement. Working through the 'Sieve Process' the Committee will determine where the partner is placed in our partnership structure, and it may be that they move within that structure. Once again, the desire is to ensure PCI is relating in a way that is appropriate and brings blessing to the global church.

APPENDIX D

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Exploring Race and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Task Group

Please note that the introduction and methodology have been summarised.

Introduction

1. The Council for Global Mission at its meeting of 28 March 2022 agreed the following:

“Directly responding to the issues raised by the Irish Inter-Church Meeting report entitled “Exploring Race and the Churches in Ireland”, and specifically those responses from members of PCI, a task group will be set up with an emphasis on hearing the first-hand experiences of black and minority ethnic people in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. A report of these findings will be presented at the 2023 General Assembly.”
2. In response to this a task group was established with the following members: Rev Helen Freeburn (Convenor), Rev Brent van der Linde, Rev Elsy McCroskery, Rev Ivan Steen, Rev William Hayes, Theo Douglas and Michael Potter.
3. The remit of the Task Group was defined as follows:
 - To hear and record first hand experiences of black and minority ethnic (BME) members of PCI.
 - To determine the opportunities and challenges faced by BME people who are members of PCI.
 - To write up a report highlighting experiences of BME in PCI.
 - To provide recommendations as to how PCI can better ensure the flourishing of BME people within all aspects of PCI.
4. The Task Group met on seven occasions and the hearing exercise took place from November 2022 to January 2023.

Methodology

5. Data collection was undertaken using an online survey, focus groups and one to one interviews.
6. Focus groups were held in person in three locations and another online. The survey form was available online, passed to or emailed to individuals and made available at focus groups. The first part of the form collected personal details to assist with contextualising the data when collected and for comparative analysis. The second part of the form comprised the core research questions, as follows:

7. The main questions addressed were:
 - (a) How did you become involved in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland? Please describe your journey to joining the church.
 - (b) What has been good about being part of the church?
 - (c) What challenges have you found with the church?
 - (d) What can church leaders do to encourage people to be more involved with the church?
 - (e) Is there anything else you want to say?
8. Full details of the questionnaire and the questions asked at the focus groups are available on request from the Mission Office.

Terminology

9. There was some discussion with regard to the various terms in use, such as 'minority ethnic', 'ethnic minority', 'black and minority ethnic' (BME) and 'black, Asian and minority ethnic' (BAME). Indeed, there was acknowledgement that our shared identity is in Christ and being in the image of God and of all areas of identity, this is the most important. The use of such terminology can threaten to separate out groups of people within the body of Christ.
10. However, the task group was established to investigate the experiences of people who are or are considered to be ethnically different to the local or majority population and some form of terminology to define potential participants was needed. In the event, accepting all its limitations, 'black and minority ethnic' was used.

Ethical considerations

11. Participants were assured of confidentiality. No information would be used in the final report that could identify them as individuals or reference made to specific congregations.
12. Participants were assured that the information collected would be stored securely, would only be available to the task group members and would only be used for the purposes of the research. Following the conclusion of the task group's work, the information collected will be destroyed.
13. Participants were provided with multiple means for contributing to the research, to ensure such contributions were provided in an environment in which they felt comfortable. Contributions could be made at a focus group, one to one interview, return of a questionnaire handed or sent to them or completion of a questionnaire online.
14. Every effort was made to ensure that participants were not interviewed by their own church leaders. Where church leaders were present, they absented themselves for the 'challenges' question or were separated in breakout groups.

Communications

15. Communication in relation to a call for evidence for the work of the task group was the responsibility of the Council for Global Mission, which was to contact congregations through presbyteries.
16. **Findings – Quantitative:** Personal characteristics are available for 26 individuals. This cannot be regarded as representative; therefore, no inferences can be made with regard to the data that can be generalised or to identify specific themes for particular identities or regions.
17. **Findings – Qualitative:** The following is derived from focus groups, one to one interviews and returned questionnaires.

Pathways to joining the church

18. A majority of the participants related experiences relevant to the Republic of Ireland. In this case, if someone were seeking a church and were not Catholic, the choices in most locations are more limited. In this regard, the answer for some has been that they are from a Protestant church background and the local Presbyterian Church is the nearest or only option, “It was the church I found.” In these cases, therefore, there was no initial attraction to a particular church, initial attendance being circumstantial.
19. Certainly, the majority of respondents had attended some form of reformed church in their home country and the Presbyterian tradition was the closest in form, structure, theology or practice to their home church. As one participant said: “It felt like my church back home.” In some cases, a relative, spouse or friend was already attending a particular church, creating the access point. In some cases, a church member gave a personal invitation to attend. For refugees or people seeking asylum in Belfast, the International Meeting Point has provided a route to church attendance.
20. For those who stated what attracted them to the church, factors were theological, environmental or relational, but in some circumstances, contradictory. While one individual was put off by a church full of “old people”, another expressed they felt more comfortable in a small congregation of “elderly people”. One was attracted by the strong biblical, evangelical and missional stance of the church. There were contradictory views on how they felt about the church: One participant said: “It’s the best church I have been to.”, while another stated, “Were I not a follower of Jesus already, these is nothing in the church that would attract me to faith in Jesus.”
21. Diversity was an important factor for some, being more comfortable where there was more of a mixture of people from different backgrounds. For others, relationships in the church were a reason for attraction, “The way people love each other.”

Good experiences

22. Almost all of the responses on what was good about the church were relational. For example, no comment was made about the standard of preaching, music, structure or content of services, etc. One participant mentioned that the theological position of the church accorded with what they were used to. Beyond that, all positive comments were about environment, human interaction and relationships.
23. In some cases, there was some familiarity, “similar to my church at home”, or a place where faith can be shared with people with similar values. While one enjoyed being in a small, intimate church, for some, the ethnic diversity of the church was something to be celebrated, especially where there are others of the same ethnicity. In one case, having a prayer group in his first language was helpful.
24. Almost all referred to the importance of connection and relationships formed in the church, some describing the church as family, “we are like brothers and sisters.” This was particularly important for refugees and people seeking asylum, who may have lost family members or left them behind. People from different backgrounds have varying approaches to relationships and how to define them, but there was a sense of being brothers and sisters in Christ that was cherished. Indeed, despite cultural and theological differences, it was acknowledged that ‘common ground’ could be found in the church.
25. In some cases, this was contrasted with a sense of isolation or separation in society outside of the church environment, “Without church, I wouldn’t have made friendships in Northern Ireland and I would have been very lonely.”
26. A sense of belonging, being included and fellowship were emphasised as positive and the formation of friendships with people who ‘celebrate one another’. Churches were described as ‘welcoming’, ‘caring’, ‘accommodating’ and having a ‘sense of community’. One participant said that “You don’t need to be alone in anything in life.” For some, the church environment provides comfort, (particularly mental) wellbeing and peace: “My soul rests in this church.”
27. The role of church leaders in supporting individuals was raised and, in particular, participants were pleased to be asked to take part in services and to help out with activities. This was seen as a sign of acceptance. Being approached to take part or being voted onto committee, council or kirk session provides a sense of belonging.
28. Food was a source of enjoyment for some, such as being asked to provide tea or coffee for a service, or to cook. There was particular delight in being asked to provide food from their own cultural background and to receive compliments.
29. The values of the church were celebrated, in particular, the readiness of the churches to support those in need, specifically, refugees. Charitable giving was also mentioned, but a will to serve God in different capacities was key.

Challenges

30. The challenges shared by participants were primarily the obverse of the benefits. In this case, the lack of depth of human relationships and interaction were identified. Some reported an initial reluctance of local people to accept people from a different ethnic background coming in to the church, which settled with time. There were instances of shallowness in a token “how are you?” Locals were not seen to be as relational as people from other cultures, with a focus on process and timekeeping, rather than human interaction.
31. For some, there was a sense that the spiritual life of the church is not as deep as it could be. A lack of commitment to fundamental aspects of Christian living was identified, along with activities being on a ‘superficial’ level.
32. A number of participants felt that they struggled to form and develop relationships outside the church and were isolated in wider society, “It’s hard to make friends with local people.” In some circumstances, this extended to people from church not engaging with them when not in the church building.
33. Participants were asked directly about racism. Participants were often reluctant to answer the question, but almost all had experienced forms that were subtle, such as a reluctance by some church members to sit next to them, or inconsiderate comments, “People do not think what they say is racism.”
34. A number of participants reported direct racism, in some cases the response from church leaders was poor or counter-productive. In some cases, it was simply a lack of understanding. One reported how the view that things are different for someone from a minority ethnic background was dismissed by a minister. Some participants felt incidents of racism were handled badly by the church. One person reflected that: “I still hurt and continually seek God in the matter.”
35. The intersectionality of race and gender was also expressed. The church was said by one participant to have a ‘white male focus’, reporting being actively discouraged from greater participation in the spiritual life of the church. A number of female participants felt they were only seen as wives of their husbands, rather than as individuals themselves, which, it was acknowledged, could affect women of the majority ethnicity, but can have greater salience for a sense of rejection if being from a minority ethnic background.
36. Another participant stated that she has never been asked to speak about her country or her culture. This contrasts with people from Northern Ireland who are working overseas being asked to talk about their work and experiences.
37. Two participants reported that they had been ill, but had not been visited in hospital by other members of the church (with the exception of the minister). This generated some sadness, as it made those individuals feel they did not belong and were not cared about by their church.

38. A number of participants referred to the challenges of adjustment to a different environment. This refers to the broader cultural surroundings of society as well as the culture of the church itself. As one participant stated, “For foreign nationals, everything is foreign. They should not have to be the ones reaching out.”
39. In one case, coming from a non-Christian background meant adjustment to and navigating the Christian faith also. This meant a greater need for the basics of the teaching of the church to be explained in more detail. There is also a need for awareness that when people are serving in various ministries, they may be encountering and learning new cultural references, for example, when working with children and young people.
40. Being different can also mean views can be received differently by others, as one said, “It’s sometimes difficult to speak one’s mind and not be judged.” While most challenges were recognised in terms of relationships between the local culture and those coming from elsewhere, it was also recognised that there were concerns that groups from a single minority ethnic group can also be exclusive. In this case, one form of inclusion providing for a particular culture or language can inadvertently exclude others.
41. Challenges unrelated to integration or ethnicity were also expressed, such as attendance levels at groups due to being too busy, lack of worship leaders with musical skill, lack of members involved in different ministries and lack of funds for ministry work. The impact of Covid was also mentioned, which is a universal challenge, but for identities without local support networks, this will have increased isolation and disconnection. One respondent stated that services were too early, which made attendance difficult where there was no access to transport.

Moving forward

42. Suggestions as to what the church leadership can do to encourage people to participate and be included reflected a deepening of what people found good in their churches and addressing the things that were difficult. In this sense, the solutions were also overwhelmingly relational.
43. The starting point was to regard people from elsewhere as any other member of the body of Christ, that we are ‘all God’s people’,
“Just see people from other countries as your own people.”
“Don’t see colour. See Christ and see one unity.”
44. On the other hand, there was a plea to recognise, provide for and celebrate difference. Opportunities to talk about one’s culture, attentiveness to the needs of people of different cultures and a need for ‘cultural intelligence’ were suggested. Understanding of unconscious bias and resistance to the tendency to ‘other’ people from different backgrounds are needed.

45. Participants also called for church members to live out the gospel. Church members should 'be more Christ-like outside church', or 'practice a spirit of humanity'. Ordinary members of the church, in addition to the minister, should be visiting the sick and the bereaved. There should be more prayerful support for people in need. The church should also support people who have encountered racism outside the church.
46. People from other backgrounds want to be approached and asked to do things in the church, with the understanding that they may make mistakes. But this is a part of belonging, "Trust us that we can lead a fellowship." People go where they are accepted, "Why would I go to a church where no-one cares about me?" As well as being encouraged to become involved, it was suggested there could be more opportunities to engage, with more events, perhaps at Presbytery level, where people can interact with members from other churches.
47. One respondent struggles when services are in English only. The individual noted there was provision for some languages but not for others, for example whole services or parts of services being offered in a language other than English, and this might be extended to other languages.

Additional comments

48. Participants were invited to tell the task group anything else they thought important. Mostly, this was reiteration or extension of what had already been discussed: identify struggling families and assist them, understanding of different cultures, Christian fellowship to extend beyond the church building, the insidious nature of casual racism and the meaning of 'belonging'. It was also asked whether cultural understanding was taught in ministers' training at Union College and whether more ministers from other backgrounds would be helpful in this regard.
49. Two respondents suggested that English language classes might be provided. One of these also extended this to other practical skills learning, such as sewing or computers.

Challenges and Considerations

50. While there was significant qualitative information drawn from the experiences of participants, no inferences could be made with regard to differential experiences in relation to geography, ethnic identity or status (i.e. UK or Irish nationality, residency, refugee or asylum, etc.) due to the limited number of participants. The majority of participants were recruited by the task force members themselves, rather than in response to the call for evidence. In this respect, a review of communications for the project would be appropriate. However, while the number, spread and diversity of participants was not sufficient to be statistically significant, qualitative themes were repeated across different contexts and therefore can be accepted as broadly representative.

51. Anecdotally, some participants were deterred from participation due to vulnerability. In some cases, this is connected to being in the asylum process. For others, it is a wish not to be seen as being ungrateful or challenging the church. For others still, authorities such as church hierarchies reflect places of power and are best avoided. One participant commented:

“In most African cultures, people do not like talking about such sensitive issues, as the majority of African people tend to be suspicious and also would fear what might be said afterwards.”
52. Most of those who have responded to the task group have been relatively empowered, with very good proficiency in English language. It probably is the case that the views of more vulnerable or less empowered people in the church have been missed.
53. The task group was convened to hear evidence with a view to ensuring the church is sufficiently welcoming and inclusive. This means hearing what is going well, but also the difficulties people face due to their identity or background. In many cases, participants have been reluctant to express challenges within the church, perhaps to avoid compromising their own church leaders or to appear ungrateful for the support they may have received already. There may also be cultural influences where there is less of a tradition of complaint, or even backgrounds where challenge may be dangerous.
54. The task group was asked to gather the experiences of people from minority ethnic backgrounds. While this should be the focus of any hearing process, there is also significant expertise and knowledge among those who work with people from diverse backgrounds which might be captured for any extension of the hearing process. This would be particularly important where there are more transient congregations or where people are more vulnerable and reluctant to come forward. People may also come from backgrounds where they would not be used to being consulted or views sought, so the research process may seem alien. The use of peer researchers would be of particular benefit, which would help with access, cultural understanding and language barriers.
55. While the rationale for the hearing exercise is to discover the experiences of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, there may be merit in investigating the views of majority or ‘white’ churchgoers. This may provide insights into the concerns that could lead to attitudes and behaviours that may exclude or make people who are different feel unwelcome.
56. A significant theme from the hearing exercise was the different approaches to relationships and interaction. In the majority of cases, participants were from high context cultures, i.e. where the emphasis is on relationships and group identity, encountering a ‘western’ or low context culture where individuality and autonomy are important. This was described by one participant in terms of ‘ubuntu’. While there are many interpretations of this term, it can be briefly summarised as an African concept where people are human only through their interaction with others, with an emphasis on

community and relationship. In this regard, many participants will have come from a background where group activities are important, as opposed to a practice of ministers or elders visiting individual families.

57. Participants shared views according to their own experiences. While some of the observations and suggestions can be generalised, others may be contextual. It is recognised that there are examples of good work going on in churches in this area and there are opportunities for other churches to learn from those processes and experiences. For example, the International Meeting Point emerges as an important source of support and a conduit to church attendance. In addition, while there were suggestions that churches could provide English language classes, this is already happening in some places, providing opportunities for befriending and support from church members. These are models of practice that can be examined, adapted and adopted in other areas. Opportunities to meet, share experiences and learn from each other are to be encouraged.
58. The status of participants also affects their experience and commitment to church attendance and participation. Someone who has moved here for work or has refugee or settled status may have a different relationship with the church than someone who is seeking asylum. For the latter, this may be a transitory stage in their life, reflected in how long they may stay at a particular church, and some have even been advised (erroneously) that church membership might favour them in their application for asylum. Such diversity means that different strategies may be adopted by different churches, from integration to practical support.
59. An important consideration is the extent and nature of integration. This has been extensively debated outside the church context and has relevance for the work of the Task Group. On the one hand, there is a view that people coming from elsewhere need to integrate and, in some cases, assimilate, into the host society. On the other hand, there is a risk of losing one's connection with a home country, language or culture, particularly for succeeding generations. The balance may look different for people in different situations. Integration, acceptance and belonging are outcomes that require reciprocal actions and attitudes. Ultimately, all within the body of the church have the same identity in Christ and carry the image of God. As one individual commented, "I am not a minority in my Father's house." As such, there was some resistance to being considered a 'minority' at all. However, within this common identity, there are different cultural and social practices that require acceptance and understanding.
60. A final point is that, from the point of view of some participants, the witness of the church does not always penetrate far beyond the church building. In fact, in many circumstances, church leaders have been very active in addressing discriminatory practice outside the church. Ultimately, there is still learning for all members of the church in terms of words and deeds in support of people coming here and in challenging prejudice.
61. As we learn and share, we surely will be further blessed as together, as one family, of people from every tongue, tribe and nation we serve Christ together, and flourish together in faith, obedience and service.

LINKAGE COMMISSION

Convener: Rev R.K. GRAHAM

Secretary: Mr W.K. BELSHAW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report summarises the work of the Linkage Commission from April 2022–March 2023. Matters dealt with include the terms of leaves to call granted to 33 charges, reviews of the financial terms in various leaves to call, and reports on the work of the internal panels of the Commission. The Commission is required, among other responsibilities, to determine conditions under which congregations shall be linked, vacant pastorates filled or supplied. The Commission continues to believe that the number of congregations within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is too many to sustain, given the decreasing number of people attending our services. When a vacancy occurs, it is understandable that every congregation wants things to continue the way they have always been, and thus seek permission to call their own minister. However, given the decrease in the number of ministers available to be called, alongside the decreasing numbers in our pews, the Commission has to think long and hard about each situation before granting leave to call. The present and future viability of each congregation must be closely examined. The Commission recognises the conflict that can arise between the desire of a congregation to retain their meetinghouse, and the reality of decreasing financial sustainability. It is fair to say that issues of decline that have been prevalent in previous years have been exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19.
2. In addition to our regular meetings, we have held a significant number of meetings with Presbyteries through their Strategic Mission Groups, as together we seek to grasp the enormity of the changing demographics within our denomination. The Commission encourages all Presbyteries to continue to assess the viability of every congregation within its bounds.

Vacancies

3. The Commission notes that a number of ministers who are approaching retirement age are taking steps to prepare their kirk sessions and congregations for the impending vacancy. This not only assists the work of incoming vacancy conveners but can also reduce concerns and timescales in filling the vacancy. This practice is to be encouraged. It is of note that, as a result of this increased preparedness, the time between a vacancy occurring and the granting of Leave to Call has significantly reduced.

4. However, despite this welcome change, the Commission is also aware that the Church has entered a period when for a few years there will be a reduction in the number of available licensed assistants. This will inevitably increase the length of some vacancies.

Tenure Review Concept

5. One of the tools in the box of the Commission that is used in granting Leave to Call is that of Tenure Review. While some congregations look at a Tenure Review in a negative light, others who have been given Leave to Call under a Tenure Review have found it to be a really useful and encouraging aid to ministry. It has helped them to assess and reassess their ministry. When a minister is called under a Tenure Review, the kirk session is to sit down with the minister and draw up goals/objectives/aims within the first twelve months of ministry. These will form part of the assessment made in the subsequent Tenure Review. Copies of the Tenure Review guidelines are given to the Convener of the vacancy and the Clerk of Session by the Secretary of the Commission on the day that a congregation is given leave to call with a Tenure Review. The Commission would remind ministers in a Tenure Review that a copy of the goals/objectives/aims is to be lodged with the Clerk of Presbytery and the Convener of the Linkage Commission.

Dissolutions and Mergers

6. The Commission has been dealing with the issue of dissolutions and mergers and related implications arising out of charitable status. Due to the manner in which the legislation was drafted setting up the Charity Commission and the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive, it has been necessary to seek approval through the Northern Ireland Courts for 'cy pres' schemes. The General Assembly Solicitor has done invaluable work on this, so that one of the agreed dissolutions has taken place and work is ongoing with respect to another dissolution and an amalgamation/merger.
7. It is anticipated that the Commission will be presenting a request for a further dissolution or merger. If so, this will appear in the Supplementary Reports.

Reviews, Fees and Allowances

8. During the past year Mr W.K. Belshaw, who convened the Reviews, Fees and Allowances Panel, was appointed to the position of Secretary to the Commission. We appreciate all the work that he carried out for the Commission in his role within this Panel. The Commission has appointed Rev Dr S.D.H. Williamson as Convener of Fees, Reviews and Allowances.

Church Architecture and Manses Panel

9. One of the callings of Scripture is for God's people to present themselves as workmen approved, and that is certainly true of Mr Brian Knox, the Convener of the Church Architecture and Manses Panel. Brian has served the Lord and the Church with passion and dedication for over 40 years. He has travelled the length and breadth of Ireland selflessly, giving advice to presbyteries and congregations. He has carried out all his duties with diligence and with grace. We record a huge thank you to Brian for his faithful service, and pray that he and Evelyn may be blessed with many years of retirement. The Commission has appointed Mr Willie Watt as Chairperson of the Church Architecture and Manses Panel.

Leave to Call a Minister

10. This is only a summary, there may well be conditions to the Leave to Call, which are not recorded here. These might include Part-time, Reviewable Tenure, Restricted List, additional income for Minister etc. When a figure is set, the year denotes when Leave to Call was granted. This figure will increase automatically under the annual Stipend Review. The same is the case in respect to Ministerial Allowances.

Congregation	Stipend	Allowances
Newmills, Co. Tyrone	50% AMM plus 10% (2022)	£3,191 (2022)
Carland	50% AMM plus 10% (2022)	£3,191 (2022)
Dun Laoghaire	€AMM (2022)	€9,768 (2022)
Joymount, Carrickfergus	£41,000 (2022)	£6,382 (2022)
Ballygrainey	£33,500 (2022)	£6,382 (2022)
Ballyroney	70% AMM (2022)	£4,467.40 (2022)
Drumlee	30% AMM (2022)	£1,914.60 (2022)
First Rathfriland	£33,500 (2022)	£6,382 (2022)
Toberkeigh	60% AMM (2022)	£3,829.20 (2022)
Ramoan	40% AMM (2022)	£2,552.80 (2022)
First Kilraughts	£24,500 (2022)	£4,467.30 (2022)
Armoy	£10,500 (2022)	£1,914.70 (2022)
Belmont	£40,000 (2022)	£6,382 (2022)
Burt	32% €AMM (2022)	€3,125.76 (2022)
Inch	6% €AMM (2022)	€586.08 (2022)
Gortnessy	£6,000(2022)	£1,148.62 (2022)
Regent Street, Newtownards	£37,000 (2022)	£6,382 (2022)

Congregation	Stipend	Allowances
New Row, Coleraine	£40,000 (2022)	£6,382 (2022)
Knock	£55,000 (2022)	£6,382 (2022)
First Ballymena	£41,000 (2022)	£6,382 (2022)
Waringstown	£41,000 (2022)	£6,382 (2022)
Lowe Memorial	£42,000 (2022)	£6,382 (2022)
Ballyalbany	€28,000 (2022)	€7,326 (2022)
Glennan	€8,500 (2022)	€2,442 (2022)
Hilltown	40% AMM (2022)	£2,552.80 (2022)
Clonduff	60% AMM (2022)	£3,829.20 (2022)
McQuiston Memorial	£35,500 (2023)	£6,701 (2023)
First Saintfield	£40,000 (2023)	£6,701 (2023)
Raloo	60% AMM (2023)	£4,020.60 (2023)
Magheramore	40% AMM (2023)	£2,680.40 (2023)
Gardenmore, Larne	£42,000 (2023)	£6,701 (2023)
Strabane	60% AMM (2023)	£4,020.60 (2023)
Sion Mills	40% AMM (2023)	£2,680.40 (2023)

Reviewable Tenure Ministries

- Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Greenisland: the congregation was released from any tenure restriction from 28 September 2022.
Reviewable Tenure Ministry in High Street, Holywood was extended for a further seven years from 24 May 2022.
Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Naas was extended for a further five years from 28 September 2022.
Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Ravenhill: the congregation was released from any tenure restriction from 22 November 2022.
Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Great Victoria Street, Belfast was extended for 12 months from 24 May 2022.
Reviewable Tenure Ministry of Associate in First Ballymena was extended for up to 12 months from 22 November 2022 or until the vacancy was filled.

Stated Supply Arrangements

- During the past year the Commission has renewed a number of previous nominations for a further period in cooperation with the appropriate Presbytery. New Stated Supply arrangements in Castlerock, Second Dromara and Whitehead were effected.

Dissolution of Congregations13. **Wexford & Enniscorthy**

“That the congregations of Wexford and Enniscorthy be dissolved on 31 December 2023, or other suitable date, on terms set by the Linkage Commission. That the assets realised be distributed according to rules.”

Ballymote

“That the congregation of Ballymote be dissolved on 31 December 2023, or other suitable date, on terms set by the Linkage Commission. That the assets realised be distributed according to rules.”

Armoy & Ramoan

“That the current Linkage between the congregations of Armoy and Ramoan be dissolved with effect from 31 May 2022.”

Congregations Linked

14. Three new Linkages were agreed.

Toberkeigh and Ramoan*Terms of Linkage:*

- (a) That the congregations of Toberkeigh and Ramoan be linked on 1 July 2022 or other suitable date.
- (b) That each congregation shall maintain its separate identity with its own Kirk Session, Congregational Committee and Finances.
- (c) That each congregation shall have the right to appoint representatives to the Superior Courts of the Church.
- (d) That in the choice of a Minister, the two congregations shall act as one congregation and the two Kirk Sessions as one Kirk Session.
- (e) That the stated services each Sunday are: (i) Ramoan 10.30am; (ii) Toberkeigh 12.00 noon or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
- (f) That the Stipends be: (i) Toberkeigh: 60% of £ A.M.M. (2022); (ii) Ramoan: 40% of £ A.M.M. (2022); and Initial Ministerial Allowances per annum: (i) Toberkeigh: £3829 (2022); (ii) Ramoan: £2553 (2022) plus 15p per mile for Business Mileage (2022).
- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of the Toberkeigh Manse be borne in the proportion: Toberkeigh: 60%; (ii) Ramoan: 40%.
- (h) That the Minister shall reside in the Toberkeigh Manse.

First Kilraughts and Armoy*Terms of Linkage:*

- (a) That the congregations of First Kilraughts and Armoy be linked on 1 July 2022, or other suitable date.
- (b) That each congregation shall maintain its separate identity with its own Kirk Session, Congregational Committee and Finances.
- (c) That each congregation shall have the right to appoint representatives to the Superior Courts of the Church.
- (d) That in the choice of a minister, the two congregations shall act as one congregation, and the two Kirk Sessions as one Kirk Session.
- (e) That the stated times of the services are: (i) Armoy: 10.30am; (ii) First Kilraughts: 12.00 noon or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
- (f) That the Stipends be: (i) First Kilraughts: £24,500; (ii) Armoy: £10,500 (2022); and Initial Ministerial Allowance per annum: (i) First Kilraughts: £4467 (2022); (ii) Armoy: £1915 (2022) plus 15p per mile for Business mileage (2022).
- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of First Kilraughts Manse be borne 100% by the congregation of First Kilraughts.
- (h) That the Minister shall reside in the First Kilraughts Manse.
- (i) That the directions of the Linkage Commission with regard to the redundant Armoy Manse be observed.

St Johnston, Ballylennon, Burt and Inch*Terms of Linkage:*

- (a) That on 30 June 2022, or other suitable date, the congregations of St Johnston, Ballylennon, Burt and Inch be linked.
- (b) That each congregation shall maintain its separate identity with its own Kirk Session, Congregational Committee and Finances.
- (c) That each congregation shall have the right to appoint representatives to the Superior Courts of the Church.
- (d) That in the choice of a minister, the four congregations shall act as one congregation, and the four Kirk Sessions as one Kirk Session.
- (e) That the stated times of the services are: Burt 9.45am; St Johnston 11.00am; Ballylennon 12.30pm; Inch 11.00am; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the four Kirk Sessions.
- (f) That the Stipends shall be: (i) St Johnston 30% of €AMM; (ii) Ballylennon 32% €AMM; (iii) Burt 32% €AMM; (iv) Inch 6% €AMM and Initial Ministerial Allowances per annum: St Johnston €2930.40 (2022); Ballylennon €3125.76 (2022); Burt €3125.76 (2022); Inch €586.08 (2022) plus 22 cents (2022) per Business mile.

- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of St Johnston Manse be borne in the proportion of St Johnston 30%; Ballylennon 32%; Burt 32%; Inch 6%.
- (h) That the minister shall reside in St Johnston Manse.

Congregations Merged

15. During the year there were no congregations merged.

Leave to Call Withdrawn

16. Gortnessy

REVIEWS, ALLOWANCES AND FEES PANEL

Reviews

17. In accordance with Par. 236 (2) of the Code, and arising out of other circumstances, the Reviews, Allowances and Fees panel reviewed the stipend of the following congregations:

Ards	First Bangor	No Change
	Bangor West	No Change
	Conlig	No Change
Armagh	Mall, Armagh	No Change
	Loughall	No Change
	Hill Street, Lurgan	No Change
	Tartaraghan	No Change
Ballymena	Trinity, Ahoghill	No Change
	Ballyloughan	No Change
	High Kirk	No Change
	Wellington	No Change
North Belfast	Whitehouse	Increase £1000
South Belfast	Newtownbreda	No Change
	Windsor	No Change
East Belfast	Gilnahirk	No Change
Carrickfergus	First Islandmagee	No Change
	Second Islandmagee	No Change
Coleraine and Limavady	Burnside	No Change
	Terrace Row	No Change

Dromore	Second Dromara	No Change
	Banbridge Road, Dromore	No Change
	Elmwood	No Change
	Sloan Street, Lisburn	Increase £1000
	Maghergall	No Change
	Maze	Increase £1500
Dublin and Munster	Abbey, Dublin	No Change
	Drogheda	Year 1 Increase €2000
		Year 2 Increase €1500
		Year 3 Increase €1500
	Galway	No Change
	Howth & Malahide	No Change
Iveagh	Naas	No Change
	Second & Third Rathfriland	No Change
	Loughbrickland	No Change
	Scarva	No Change
Monaghan	Cootehill	No Change
	Drum	No Change
	Kilmount	No Change
Newry	Bessbrook	No Change
	Cremore	No Change
	Fourtowns	No Change
	Poyntzpass	No Change
	Kilkeel	No Change
	Mourne, Kilkeel	No Change
Route	St James's, Ballymoney	No Change
Templepatrick	Muckamore	No Change
Tyrone	First Magherafelt	No Change

Supply Fee

18. The level of Supply Fee is determined by the Code, Par. 238, and for 2023 this is £118 (€170) or £79 (€113) where only a single service is supplied in one congregation.

Expenses should be paid in accordance with the rate set for attendance at Assembly Councils, currently:

NI – 18p per mile

ROI – 26 cents per mile/16 cents per kilometre

STEPHEN WILLIAMSON, Convener

CHURCH ARCHITECTURE AND MANSES PANEL

19. The Panel continued to consider applications from congregations wishing to make changes to properties in accordance with Par 57(6) of the Code. These ranged from construction of new churches, halls and manses, demolition works, structural alterations, etc., to the removal of pews enabling improved wheelchair access, provision of new audio-visual systems, designs for memorials, windows, artificial lighting, seating/furnishings requisite for public worship. Proposals are authorized successively by congregation, presbytery and Linkage Commission.
20. When considering applications from congregations which seek to make adaptations to Listed buildings, the Panel had to balance the building's Listing with the congregation's missional requirements in line with our Memorandum of Understanding/Partnering Agreement with the Department for Communities, which was drawn up to assist in securing our ongoing Ecclesiastical Exemption. On some occasions over the past year this has required the Panel to seek certain modifications to initially proposed schemes however, when the Panel considered that the missional case outweighed the Listing, appropriate recommendations were made.
21. The Panel has also been involved with a variety of manse accommodation matters and in responding to requests for rental of vacant manses. The approvals of congregation, presbytery and Linkage Commission are required and the completion of appropriate legal agreements is essential. Following a change to the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 in the Republic of Ireland (ROI), legal advice was needed on how it impacts renting vacant manses in the ROI. Presently the permitted grounds for terminating a tenancy agreement do not cover a church wanting to recover a property for use itself by a minister and their family if they have been in occupation for six months or longer. Linkage Commission agreed that future applications to rent manses in

the ROI be suspended unless it is unlikely they will get leave to call in the short to medium term future. This matter was referred to the ROI Public Affairs Committee to lobby the government in what appears to be a gap in the legislation inadvertently prejudicing religious bodies.

BRIAN KNOX, Convener

ADDITIONAL PASTORAL PERSONNEL AND AUXILIARY MINISTRY PANEL

22. In the past year the Linkage Commission approved the creation of 37 new Additional Pastoral Personnel (APP) posts and the extension or amendment of 20 existing posts. There were no requests for Auxiliary Ministry posts. Approval was given for one minister to undertake Extra-Parochial Work.
23. ‘Guidelines for Congregations and Presbyteries Regarding the Employment of Additional Pastoral Personnel’ incorporating ‘Guidelines for Kirk Sessions on General Employment Issues’ are available from the panel convener and the PCI website. The APP guidelines outline the necessary steps kirk sessions should take when considering the creation of an APP post. The approval of the HR support provider, presbytery and the Linkage Commission is required before any new APP post can be advertised.
24. The approval of the HR support provider, presbytery and the Linkage Commission is required to extend or amend an existing APP post. Kirk sessions are asked to note carefully when an existing fixed-term contract concludes so that requests to extend an existing post are not made late.
25. With regard to job titles for APP posts, Kirk Sessions should note that the Linkage Commission allows flexibility in choosing a suitable job title for an APP post and “most titles will be considered by the Commission. However, the Commission will not give permission for the use of ‘Officer’ or ‘Pastor’ as a job title. Furthermore, the titles ‘Director’, ‘Associate’ and ‘Assistant’ will only be considered if the kirk session can justify that the job description strongly warrants the use of the title.” (Linkage Commission May 2018)
26. APP Salary Scales for 2023 were agreed by the Linkage Commission at its meeting in November 2022. Increases are in line with the agreed increase in ministerial minimum. They are available from the panel convener and kirk sessions are required to use the Salary Scales when creating a new APP post.
27. Guidelines for creating Congregational Auxiliary Ministry posts are available from the Convener of the APPAM Panel. Proposals to create such posts should normally come to the Linkage Commission through the Presbytery. Auxiliary Ministers are commissioned to work, normally on a part time basis, under the supervision of a Minister of

Word and Sacrament. While it is primarily a Ministry of the Word, some pastoral duties may be associated with such posts.

28. Before employing an organist (or similar), kirk sessions should draw up a statement of main terms and conditions, job description, personnel specification and advertisement. The approval of presbytery is required before creating such a post. Guidelines and templates are available from the panel convener. The HR support provider should always be consulted.
29. Ministers are reminded to seek approval from presbytery and the Linkage Commission before undertaking paid public appointments ('Extra-Parochial Work'). This kind of work has been defined as 'Remunerated work outside of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland undertaken by a parish minister that amounts to more than six hours in any week.' A return form, available from the panel convener, should normally be returned before the appointment begins and then annually by 15 September.

BRIAN MCMANUS, Convener

PARISH BOUNDS PANEL

30. As reported last year, the Panel, following consultations with the Presbyteries of Down and Ards, new parish bounds are recommended, as set out in Appendix 1.
31. It was envisaged this time last year that new parish bounds for the Presbytery of Dublin & Munster following the dissolution of the congregation of Mountmellick would have to be left until a further revision of other parts of the Presbytery. However, this has proceeded more rapidly than anticipated, mainly due to the help of the Rev Richie Cronin of Cork, and new parish bounds are recommended, as set out in Appendix 2.
32. The following congregations have recently been merged:
 - First and Second Islandmagee (Carrickfergus Presbytery)
 - Dromore with Drumreagh (Route Presbytery)
33. Following consultations with the relevant Presbyteries, new parish bounds are recommended, as set out in Appendix 3.

JIM STOTHERS, Convener

APPENDIX 1

Parish Bounds within the Down and Ards Presbyteries.

DOWN

Killyleagh 2023

From Skate Rock (543517) by straight line to Castle at Castleisland (517486), by straight line to junction at Pikestone on Downpatrick/Killyleagh Road (495490), thence by Pikestone Road to crossroads at Crossgar/Killyleagh Road (Cluntagh) (482525), thence to Ballywillin Road (480540), thence to Derryboye Road (468546), thence to Derryboye Crossroads (479564), thence to Clay Road (494579), thence to Killyleagh/Killinchy crossroads (518573), thence by Ballymorran Road to Ballymacarron House at Strangford Lough (531575), thence to Skate Rock (542517), including Ringdufferin and Island Taggart.

ARDS

West Church, Bangor 2023

From where Bryan's Burn flows into the sea (49038211) along Bryan's Burn to the Belfast Road near the West Circular Road fly-over (48888085), thence along the West Circular Road to the boundary of Clandeboye Heights Estate (49073855) thence along this boundary to its junction with the south boundary of the Clandeboye Heights Estate (48938015) thence along the south boundary to the Clandeboye Road (49238010) thence along the Clandeboye Road to the Rathgael Road (4889 7966) thence along the Rathgael Road to the Belfast Road (47798008) thence along the Belfast Road to the West boundary of Spring Hill Ward (47678003) thence along West boundary of Spring Hill Ward to the Crawfordsburn Road (47278157) thence along Crawfordsburn Road to Ballymullan townland boundary (47338159) thence north along the Ballymullan townland boundary to the railway (47328206) thence in a straight line to the promontory on the West side of Swineley Bay (47408245), thence along coast to where Bryan's Burn flows into the sea (49038211).

APPENDIX 2

Parish Bounds within the Dublin and Munster Presbytery

DUBLIN AND MUNSTER

Note: The following congregations no longer exist as PCI entities: Clontarf; Ormond Quay & Scots; Donore; Christ Church, Sandymount; Limerick; Mountmellick; Waterford. These are still shown for reference with their names struck through.

Abbey 2023

Northern Boundary: Santry, Finglas to Blanchardstown

Western Boundary: Blanchardstown, Castleknock through Phoenix Park to Islandbridge to Old Kilmainham;

Southern Boundary: Old Kilmainham, James Street, Dame Street, Nassau Street and Grand Canal Street to Grand Canal; via Grand Canal Dock to River Liffey;

Eastern Boundary: River Liffey to Talbot Memorial Bridge; via Amiens Street to River Tolka; via river to Drumcondra; via Drumcondra Road to Santry.

Adelaide Road 2023

Northern Boundary: Junction of South Circular Road and Old Kilmainham, James Street, Dame Street, Nassau Street and Grand Canal Street to Grand Canal; via Grand Canal Dock to River Liffey;

Eastern Boundary: River Liffey at Grand Canal Quay along river, then coast to Sydney Parade Avenue;

Southern Boundary: Sydney Parade Avenue to Ailesbury Road, Eglinton Road, Sandford Road, Charleston Road, Castlewood Avenue, then by line through Eamonn Ceannt Park to Kildare Road to Long Mile Road to Naas Road;

Western Boundary: Naas Road at Long Mile Road to Tyrconnell Road, Emmet Road, to Junction of South Circular Road and Old Kilmainham.

St Andrew's, Blackrock 2023

Eastern Boundary: Sydney Parade Avenue at coast to Seapoint;

Northern Boundary: Sydney Parade Avenue, Ailesbury Road, to Rover Dodder at Beaver Row, to Clonskeagh Road;

Western Boundary: Along R 825 Clonskeagh Road, Goatstown Road, Drummartin Road to Luas tramline at Kilmacud Stop (O 185273);

Southern Boundary: Luas tramline at Kilmacud Stop (O 185273) by

Benildus Avenue and Blackthorn Avenue to Leopardstown Road, Monkstown Road, Alma Road to Seapoint.

Clontarf & Scots 2023

Northern Boundary: Santry; Coolock Lane to Coolock;

Eastern Boundary: Coolock via Springdale Road to Raheny, via Howth Road to shore; via shore at Howth Road to Dublin Port;

Southern Boundary: Dublin Port via River Liffey to Talbot Memorial Bridge;

Western Boundary: Talbot Memorial Bridge via Amiens Street to River Tolka; via river to Drumcondra; via Drumcondra Road to Santry.

Christ Church, Rathgar 2023

Northern Boundary: Naas Road at Long Mile Road to Kildare Road, then by line through Eamonn Ceannt Bark to Castlewood Avenue, Charleston Road, Sandford Road, Eglinton Road, to Anglesea bridge;

Western Boundary: Naas Road at Long Mile Road to Dublin/Kildare boundary near Steelestown (N 986251), then along county boundary to Dublin/Wicklow county boundary near Brittas at (O 018215);

Southern Boundary: Dublin/Wicklow county boundary near Brittas at O 018215, along country boundary to where it meets the R115 road (O 131197), then by straight line to Luas tramline at Kilmacud stop (O 185273);

Eastern Boundary: Anglesea Bridge, then along River Dodder to R 825 Clonskeagh Road, Goatstown Road, Drummartin Road to Luas tramline at Kilmacud Stop (O 185273).

Arklow 2023

From Cahore Point (T 225474), by line to Wexford/Carlow county boundary where it meets L2021 at Clonegal Bridge on the River Derry at S 917609, then north along Wexford county boundary to where it meets Wicklow county boundary, then along Wicklow county boundary to where it meets the N81 road, to Baltinglass (excluding Baltinglass town), by line to junction of R115 and R755 near Laragh (T 144967), by line between Ashford and Rathnew to coast north of wastewater treatment plant at T 310959, then along coast to Cahore Point (T 225474).

Athy 2023

From Kildare/Wicklow county boundary at Poulaphouca (N 949087), by line to Kilcullen, then by road (R413) to meet M7 at N 787130, then along M7 to junction with M8 at S 346854, then by line to Laois/Kilkenny country boundary northernmost point northeast of Swan at S 546828, then following Laois/Kilkenny boundary south east to where

it meets the N78 at Crettyard (S 586771), then by line to Castledermot to Baltinglass (excluding Baltinglass town) and then by N81 road to Kildare/Wicklow county boundary at Poulaphouca (N 949087).

Bray (St Andrew's) 2023

Military Road south of Killiney; Loughlinstown; Golden Ball; Dublin/Wicklow county boundary where it meets the R115 road (O 131197), Glenree; Rocky Valley to coast at 'The Pulpit' (O 289156).

Carlow 2023

From where Laois/Kilkenny county boundary meets the N78 at Crettyard (S 586771) east by line to Castledermot to Baltinglass (including Baltinglass town), then south along N81 to Wicklow/Carlow county boundary, continuing along County Carlow all the way clockwise to where the Carlow, Kilkenny and Louse borders meet (S 634 717), then along Kilkenny/Laois county boundary to where it meets the N78 at Crettyard (S 586771).

Cork and Aghada 2023

Counties Kerry and Cork, excluding area bounded by, and excluding, Charleville, Buttevant, Mallow and Youghal.

Dun Laoghaire 2023

Northern Boundary: From Luas tramline at Kilmacud stop (O 185273), along Benildus Avenue, Blackthorn Avenue to Leopardstown Road, Monkstown Road, Alma Road to Seapoint.

Western Boundary: Luas tramline at Kilmacud stop (O 185273) by straight line to Dublin/Wicklow county boundary where it meets the R115 road (O 131197)

Southern Boundary: Dublin/Wicklow county boundary where it meets the R115 road (O 131197) to Golden Ball, Loughlinstown, Military Road.

Eastern Boundary: Coast from Seapoint to Military Road south of Killiney.

Fermoy and Cahir 2023

The area of County Cork bounded by, and including, Charleville, Buttevant, Mallow and Youghal. All County Tipperary and County Limerick. Area of County Waterford west of a line from Carrick-On-Suir to Bunmahon.

Galway 2023

All County Galway and County Clare.

Greystones 2023

From Wicklow county boundary where it meets the R115 road (O 131197), Glencree; Rocky Valley to coast at 'The Pulpit' (O 289156), then south along coast to point north of wastewater treatment plant at T 310959, then by line to R115 and R755 near Laragh (T 144967), to Wicklow county boundary to where it meets the N81 road, to Baltinglass (excluding Baltinglass town), north along N81 road to Kildare/Wicklow county boundary at Poulaphouca (N 949087), then by line to junction of R115 with R759 (O 129112), to Wicklow county boundary at O 131197

Kilkenny 2023

All County Kilkenny. Area of County Laois south of M7 motorway from where it crosses the Tipperary/Laois county boundary to the junction with the M8 at S 346854, then by line to Laois/Kilkenny country boundary northernmost point northeast of Swan at S 546828. Are if County Waterford east of a line from Carrick-On-Suir to Bunmahon.

Mullingar 2023

All County Westmeath and area of County Roscommon south of M6 motorway.

Naas 2023

From Dublin/Kildare boundary near Steelestown (N 986251), east along county boundary to Dublin/Wicklow county boundary near Brittas at O 018215, the along country boundary to where it meets the R115 road (O 131197), then south along R115 to junction with R759 (O 129112), then by line to Kildare/Wicklow county boundary at Poulaphouca (N 949087), then by line to Kilcullen, then by road (R413) to meet M7 at N 787130, then along M7 to Kildare/Laois boundary at N 620074, then along county boundary north to Grand Canal south-east of Edenderry at N 659313, then by line to Straffan, then by line to Dublin/Kildare boundary at Grand Canal at N 972295, then south along county boundary to Steelestown (N 986251).

Tullamore 2023

All County Offaly. County Laois north of M7 motorway

Wexford and Enniscorthy 2023

County Wexford excluding area north of a line: From Cahore Point (T 225474) to Wexford/Carlow county boundary where it meets L2021 at Clonegal Bridge on the River Derry at S 917609.

APPENDIX 3

Parish Bounds within the Carrickfergus and Route Presbyteries

CARRICKFERGUS

First Carrickfergus 2023

From shore (415873) along North Street to St Brides Street (414877) to North Road (414878) to Milebush Corner (409897) thence along Middle Road to point in line with Sunnylands Avenue 406896 thence southwards to Sunnylands Avenue (407886) thence along Sunnylands Avenue to Sandes Court 408882 thence along Sandes Court and by line, to east of housing, to Clipperstown Halt 405877) thence along Woodburn Road to Middle Road (393887) thence along Middle Road to Troopers Lane Road (387870) thence along Troopers Lane Road to Railway (387868) thence along railway to Whinfield Lane (379862) thence along Whinfield Lane to Shore Road (384853) and straight to foreshore.

Downshire, Carrickfergus 2023

From point on Marshallstown Road east of Oakfield Drive at 415901 by line south to meet Prince Andrew Way east of Glynn Park Close at 418890, then by line to point on Barn Road 420882, east along both sides of Barn Road following Coronation Road (excluding housing but including Victoria Primary School), then Princes Way (excluding housing) to Victoria Road (422884) then south to Larne Road, east along Larne Road (excluding housing) to Trailcock Road (432888), along Trailcock Road to junction with Dromore Road (431891), then by line to junction of Beltoy Road with Killlyglsass Road (433908), to junction of Beltoy Road and Marshallstown Road (432909), along Marshallstown Road to point east of Oakfield Drive at 415901.

Joymount, Carrickfergus 2023

From Lough Shore (415873) along North Street to St Brides Street (414877) to North Road (414878) to Milebush Corner (409897), thence along Marshallstown Road to point east of Oakfield Drive at 415901. Then by line south to meet Prince Andrew Way east of Glynn Park Close at 342389, then by line to point on Barn Road 420882, east along both sides of Barn Road following Coronation Road (both sides but excluding Victoria Primary School), then Princes Way (both sides) to Victoria Road (422884) then south to Larne Road, east along Larne Road (both sides) to Trailcock Road (432888), along Trailcock Road to junction with Dromore Road (431891), then by line to junction of Beltoy Road with Killlyglsass Road (433908), along Dalways Bawn Road to Castle Dobbs Road (442911), thence along Castle Dobbs

Road to Larne Road (441897) thence along Larne Road to Road leading to Kilroot Burying Ground (447900), thence along this road to shore (452888).

Woodlands, Carrickfergus 2023

From Woodburn Crossroads (393887) along Woodburn Road to Clipperstown Halt (405877), then by line to east of housing to Sunnylands Avenue – at Sandes Court (408882) then by Sunnylands Avenue northwards to meet Middle Road (407886) then along Middle Road westwards to Woodburn Crossroads (393887).

Islandmagee 2023

Islandmagee peninsula north of line from Black Head (488934) to Ballystrudder Road (473931), to Slaughterford Road (473928), to Slaughterford Bridge over railway line, along railway line to Ballycarry Station (464946).

ROUTE

Drumreagh 2023

From River Bann at Ballinacree (C 905 247) to junction of Managher Road and Curragh Road (C 885 254) to junction of Coolyvenny Road and Castleroe Road (C 870 260) to junction of Managher Road and Ballylintagh Road (C 861 258) along Ballylintagh Road to the Black Bridge on the Macoquin River (C 853 254), north along the Macosquin River to point on river at C 849 259, then by line to the site of the old Dromore Presbyterian Church (C 854 263), by line to point on Castleroe Road at C 867 267, by line east to point on Curragh Road at C 886 267, then along Curragh Road to junction with Managher Road (C885254), to River Bann at Ballinacree (C 905 247) along road past Balnamore (C 918 252) through Enagh and Drumskea to Claughey Bridge (C 956 219), excluding Drumskea, Claughey and Ballnamoney, along the Moneycannon Road and including Moneycannon and Cabra to Cabra Old School (C 932 215), along the Plains Road and including Maddykeel bye-way to Mr John H. Scott's to River Bann (C 912 178), and down the Bann to Ballinacree (C 905 247).

COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND

Convener: Very Rev Dr FRANK SELLAR

Secretary: Mr RICK HILL

INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The report covers the period from July 2022 to March 2023.
2. The Council marked the retirement of the Very Rev Dr David Bruce on 12 November 2022, expressing its sincere appreciation for the significant contribution he made to the Church's mission in Ireland. We are delighted that Mr Rick Hill has since taken up the position of Council Secretary and the work of the Council continues with energy and enthusiasm.
3. Rev Daryl Edwards began his term as Convener of the Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee, while Rev Johnston Lambe became Convener of the Home Mission, Irish Mission and Deaconess Committee. The Council is extremely thankful for all its Committee Conveners and is indebted to each of them for their work as they serve the Council with diligence, vision and enthusiasm.
4. The Council continues to deliver the six components of its remit with dependence on God:
 - (a) Developing PCI's strategic priorities in all-age mission in Ireland, and planning initiatives at GA level where appropriate.
 - (b) Considering new church development and church planting.
 - (c) Overseeing all aspects of the Home and Irish Missions, including the Irish Mission Fund.
 - (d) Overseeing the deployment and ongoing support of deaconesses.
 - (e) Supporting a chaplaincy service in the Forces, Hospitals and Hospices, and Prisons.
 - (f) Supporting mission and ministry in Universities and Colleges through chaplaincy services.
5. With restrictions from the Covid pandemic easing, most meetings reverted to in-person with a facility to join online. The Council met twice in person for routine business and once online to progress an urgent matter.

6. Working patterns within the Mission Department have returned to normal, with the provision for some home-working arrangements where agreed. The Council is well-served through the staff working within the Mission Department, while operating with reduced staffing capacity owing to the departure of Beverley Moffett and a reduction in hours of the previously full-time Mission Support Officer (Partnerships).
7. Amidst the transition of key office-bearers and the shifting back to more normal patterns of working, this report will show that progress has been continued in the ongoing work of the Council, with some new developments. To allow the incoming Secretary time to bed into the role, it was felt that it would not be helpful to progress proposals concerning the Council committee structure in time for this Assembly. However, following recent discussions, it is intended to bring a full outline of a revised committee structure to the 2024 Assembly.
8. The main focus of the Council's report to the Assembly in 2023 is:
 - (a) The outworking of the Home Mission Review. Implementation has been taking place and some adjustments have been made.
 - (b) The significant work of the Church Planting Panel under the Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee, with a Church Planting Strategy appended and the provision of a specific path for church planters and mission pioneers proposed.
 - (c) The ongoing work of Mission Projects that operate under the Council's work oversight, including the well-established work within International Meeting Point and South Belfast Friendship House, as well as newer, pioneering mission projects in West Belfast and Rural Chaplaincy.
 - (d) The committed work of all our chaplains and the Council's ongoing commitment to support their vital ministry.
9. The Council is encouraged by the support given to it via the United Appeal for Mission and is thankful for the evidence of how the Holy Spirit is working through so many people in a wide variety of roles across this island to enable more people to come to know Jesus and find their place within his Church.

HOME MISSION, IRISH MISSION AND DEACONESS COMMITTEE

Home Mission

Directory of Home and Urban Mission charges as at March 2023.
Linked Congregations (in brackets) are not in the Home Mission.

Minister	Charge
Home Mission	
Rev Michael Anderson	Arklow
Rev Gunther Andrich	Irvinestown, Pettigo and Tempo
Rev Rodney Beacom	Lisbellaw, Lisnaskea, Maguiresbridge and Newtownbutler
Rev Damien Burke	Drogheda
Rev Andy Carroll	Donabate
Rev David Clarke	Sligo
Rev Richie Cronin	Trinity Cork and Aghada
Rev Jonathan Currie	Kilkenny
Rev Al Dunlop	Howth and Malahide
Rev Daryl Edwards	Drum, Cootehill and Kilmount
Rev Helen Freeburn	Galway
Rev Andrew Gill	Blackrock and Bray
Rev John Hanson	Clones, Stonebridge, Ballyhobridge and Newbliss (part-time)
Rev William Hayes	Tullamore
Rev Dr Keith McCrory	Maynooth
Rev Gary McDowell	Greystones
Rev Jean Mackarel	Drumkeeran, Killeshandra, Cavan and Bellasis
Rev William Montgomery	Fermoy and Cahir
Rev Philip Poots	Moville, Greenbank, Carndonagh and Malin
Rev Jonathan Porter	Dundalk
Rev Mark Proctor	Naas (part-time) with chaplaincy at Tallaght Hospital

Minister	Charge
Rev Stephen Rea	Carlow and Athy
Rev Daniel Reyes Martin	Corboy and Mullingar
Rev Stephen Richmond	Donegal and Stranorlar
Vacant	Ballina, Killala, Ballymote
Vacant	Carrigart and Dunfanaghy (part-time)
Vacant	Enniscorthy and Wexford
Vacant	Kells
Vacant	(Waterside) and Fahan
Urban Mission	
Vacant	Belvoir
Rev Rodney Cameron	St Colomba's, Lisburn
Rev Mervyn Gibson	Westbourne
Rev William Harkness	Great Victoria Street (part-time) with additional missional duties
Rev Robert Love	Taughmonagh
Rev Danny Rankin	Strand, Belfast
Rev Lachlan Webster	Craigavon

10. At time of writing there remain six vacancies within the Home Mission.
11. The vacancy of Dunfanaghy and Carrigart has been advertised but as yet no candidate has been appointed at the time of writing.
12. Following significant consideration, it was felt that the current situation in Enniscorthy and Wexford would benefit from a fresh approach. At the recommendation of Presbytery, services of worship were suspended since January 2023 and a resolution is brought elsewhere in this Assembly to dissolve the charge. A Task Group of Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee has begun work on future plans for the South East of Ireland.
13. Regarding the current vacancy in Ballina, Killala and Ballymote: following engagement with Presbytery and the Vacancy Assessment Group from Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee, closure of Ballymote is recommended and a Temporary Assistant to the Convener has been assigned for a 6-month period to provide ministry in the other two congregations.

14. The Committee was delighted that a gathering for Home Mission Ministers was organised in Athlone on 1–2 March 2023 with input from the Very Rev Dr Frank Sellar and Rev Laurence Graham (MCI). Feedback has been extremely positive regarding this venture and it is hoped to repeat this again in the future.

HOME MISSION REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION TASK GROUP

15. The implementation of the Home Mission Review has been ongoing, with special thanks to Pip Florit, Mission Support Officer (Partnerships), for her work. A draft schedule of assessments has been drawn up and Presbytery Clerks have been written to regarding upcoming Consultations with a request that CMI representation be included in this process to avoid duplication of work for ministers, elders and Presbytery.
16. A team of mentors has been identified and invited to be involved in the accompaniment process for ministers within the Home Mission. Ministers have been informed of this mentoring opportunity.

IRISH MISSION WORKERS AND DEACONESSES PANEL

17. The Irish Mission Worker and Deaconess Panel has been re-established with a new chairperson and the Council commend the work of Helen Johnston with the deaconesses and Irish mission workers.
18. Agreement was made with Mr Keith Preston that, having reached the normal age of retirement in 2023, he will remain in post until 2 March 2024. We continue to encourage the work of all the Irish mission workers.
19. During the year, Induction services were held for Sylvia Santos Bryce, who began work as deaconess in West Church, Ballymena, and Roberta Irvine in Elmwood, Lisburn. Following the installation of a new minister in Shore Street, Donaghadee, the Committee confirmed the appointment of Sonya Anderson as deaconess.
20. It was with great sadness that the Council recorded the death of Mrs Michelle Purdy on 26 August 2022, who served with distinction as deaconess in the congregation of Ballyclare. We want to thank God for Michelle's life and witness; for the influence she was and for the kind, considerate, caring and passionate way she served her Lord.

21. The Council received applications from two congregations for deaconesses, both of which were circulated to serving deaconesses with no applications received.
22. There are two deaconesses in training at present who are both continuing towards completion of their second year of study and placement.

PAUL JAMIESON, Convener

Directory of Irish mission workers and the location of their service (March 2023)

Name	Location
David Boyd	Adelaide Road, Dublin
Tom Dowling	Kilkenny
Keith Preston	International Meeting Point, Belfast
Philip Whelton	Arklow

Directory of deaconesses and the location of their service (March 2023)

Name	Location
Sonya Anderson	Shore Street, Donaghadee
Paula Burrows	Ballygrainey
Rachel Cubitt	Whiteabbey
Louise Davidson	West Church, Bangor
Eleanor Drysdale	Wellington, Ballymena
Joanne Dunlop	Chaplaincy Team – Antrim & Craigavon Hospitals
Heidi England	Railway Street, Lisburn
Sharon Heron	International Meeting Point, Belfast
Roberta Irvine	Elmwood, Lisburn
Heather McCracken	Belfast Health and Social Care Trust with additional duties in chaplaincy in Musgrave Park Hospital
Tracey Nicholl	St James', Ballymoney
Hazel Reid	First Broughshane with additional duties in chaplaincy in Causeway Hospital
Sylvia Santos Bryce	West Church, Ballymena
Rosemary Spiers	Greenwell Street, Newtownards

INTERNATIONAL MEETING POINT MANAGEMENT PANEL

23. The work on both the Lisburn Road and Carlisle Circus sites continue to provide encouragement and we thank all of the staff, under the leadership of Keith Preston for all their hard work. It should be noted that engagement in English classes, bible studies, Alpha and lunches have all seen a significant increase this year.
24. Shirley McGonigle has settled into her role well as Assistant Project Leader at the North Belfast site. The Committee is thankful for the support of the North Belfast Mission fund and indebted to a band of volunteers.
25. The lease for the Lisburn Road property has been resolved for the next three years and the Committee wishes to thank and acknowledge the Presbytery of South Belfast for their very generous support over the years. While the Presbytery will continue to support an additional staff member, they are no longer able to cover the cost of the rental of the property meaning that the Council will seek to meet the shortfall in the running costs, which will be a challenge in this incoming year.
26. It was agreed to request that Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee conduct a strategic, considered and detailed review both of future direction of migrant ministry within Ireland and the future management arrangements of International Meeting Point's current projects.

STEPHEN SIMPSON, Convener

SOUTH BELFAST FRIENDSHIP HOUSE MANAGEMENT PANEL

27. The Committee is grateful to the team of Rev William Harkness, Carol Reid and all the volunteers who carry out a busy programme of activities. The work of the house continues to be well received in the local community with a variety of needs being met through it.
28. There have been some developments in the work of the team throughout the past year, with Friendship house being designated as a warm space and some new work beginning with asylum seekers based in local hotels.
29. A PCI Impact Team is being planned for the summer, particularly focused on teenage work.
30. The Committee is thankful for the continued support of PW in this project.

MARK SPRATT, Convener

WEST BELFAST SPECIAL MINISTRY MANAGEMENT PANEL

31. Rev David Moore was installed into the Home Mission on 1 September 2022 and inducted into Special Ministry in West Belfast. The initial strategy document for this Project sets out the vision as follows:

...that PCI would seek to establish at least one vibrant worshipping community in West Belfast, as opportunities emerge through prayer, building relationships and the leading of the Holy Spirit.
32. A Management Panel has been established to offer oversight to this work and has met several times. There is encouragement regarding the early stages of this work, particularly in the relationships that are being established. While there is a desire to begin recruiting a core team to help with this work, there is also understanding that this may take some time.
33. There is opportunity for an exhibition during the West Belfast Festival on the history of Presbyterianism in the area. Financial support has been found to cover this.
34. The Panel commends the work and rejoices that the financial needs are being met. Work has begun to recruit a part-time additional outreach worker to help specifically with ministry to refugees in the area, which was part of the original proposal regarding this ministry.

BEN WALKER, Convener

JOHNSTON LAMBE, Committee Convener

STRATEGY FOR MISSION COORDINATION COMMITTEE

Home and Urban Mission

Vacancy assessments

35. The Committee facilitated assessments of Home Mission congregations that are vacant, namely Ballina, Killala and Ballymote; Enniscorthy and Wexford; and Fahan (linked with Waterside). A resolution regarding the future of Ballymote will be dealt with elsewhere at this Assembly. A temporary assistant to the convener will focus on Ballina and Killala for a number of months before future arrangements are explored.
36. In line with the recommendations of the Vacancy Assessment Report regarding Enniscorthy and Wexford, a resolution regarding the dissolution of these congregations will be dealt with elsewhere

at this Assembly. As part of this process, the Council Secretary met with members of the current congregations along with the Vacancy Convener and other CMI representatives. A South East of Ireland Task Group has been established to draw up proposals for future work in the area.

37. A vacancy assessment report was also produced and approved by the Committee regarding Fahan. The recommendations regarding future ministry in this congregation and its surrounding area are being explored with the Kirk Session and Presbytery Vacancy Commission in collaboration with the Linkage Commission, with the hope that this could progress soon.
38. The Committee continues to respond to a number of requests from Presbyteries and the Linkage Commission seeking comment regarding vacancies and ministerial deployment.

Urban Mission Network (Facilitator: Neil Harrison, Congregational Witness Development Officer)

39. A group of 14 Ministers benefitted from a 3-day fact-finding visit to London in June 2022. This summer conference was hosted by the London City Mission where the group engaged in training from LCM's staff and also visited some projects within local congregations. This opportunity received extremely positive feedback.
40. The Network met in Scrabo in February for a morning gathering and is currently planning a Conference in Londonderry from 5-7 June where the speaker will be John Risbridger.

CHURCH PLANTING PANEL

41. It is clear that considerable vision, desire and need is being recognised by the church to be more active in the work of Church Planting and the Panel has begun to receive more requests from congregations and Presbyteries to help them explore such possibilities. Following significant engagement in last year's Church Planting Conference, the Panel have sought to follow up on any attendee who expressed a desire to learn more about opportunities for church planting within PCI.
42. To enable more guidance to be offered to Presbyteries, congregations and individuals, the Panel have put considerable work into the development of a strategy for church planting within PCI. This Strategy Paper was approved by the Council earlier this year and is appended to the Council's report (see Appendix 1), with its focus on two main areas. Firstly, guidance is offered for congregations and presbyteries in navigating the initial steps involved in church planting. Secondly, a process has been developed to help individuals who feel called to church planting.
43. On this point, the Panel recognise that no specific pathway exists for church planters and have sought to develop a clear process that involves

the recruitment, assessment, apprenticeship, training and support for such a role. This has included engagement with the Council for Training in Ministry and has involved the exploration of developing such a role as a ‘called office’ within the church to enable a greater level of accountability.

44. Rather than ‘reinvent the wheel’, the Panel is proposing to re-purpose the current called role of ‘Missional Auxiliary Ministry’ for such people who can act as Mission Pioneers. A clearly defined process with defined mechanisms for assessment, apprenticeship and accountability has been developed and approved by the Council. This is contained in Appendix 2 and brought as a resolution to this Assembly to seek approval for this direction.
45. To develop other practicalities in the Church Planting Strategy, a ‘Church Planters Network’ has been developed, meeting for the first time in March 2023, a ‘Taster Day’ to help identify potential church planters is planned for Autumn 2023 and it is hoped that a church planting handbook will be published soon.

MARTIN MCNEELY AND TOM GILLIAM, Co-Conveners

BELFAST CONFERENCE

46. The conference has continued to consider and provide advisory comment on areas of ministry and mission in Belfast. In particular, the focus of the conference’s work this year has involved meeting with the Mission Standing Committees of the three Belfast Presbyteries regarding the missional priorities of each.
47. Following referrals from Presbyteries, advisory comment was passed on to the Linkage Commission regarding the vacancies in three congregations.
48. Conversations have taken place regarding a pilot project in partnership with the Belfast City Mission, but this has not progressed as yet.
49. With the current chairperson stepping back, Rev Colin Morrison has been appointed as the next convener.

ALASTAIR DUNLOP, Chairperson

REIMAGINING TASK GROUP

50. The Reimagining Task Group is seeking to produce resources that help offer imaginative possibilities for future ministry and mission to congregations facing uncertainty in vacancy situations.
51. The Task Group is producing a draft booklet for use in vacancies that might enable creative thought. Initial ‘road-testing’ of the material has shown it to be helpful, with minor refinements being made.

52. A 'revitalisation tool box' is also being developed in conjunction with some already-existing resources within the Council for Congregational Life and Witness.

KATHRYN VINER, Convener

MISSION GRANTS PANEL

53. The Mission Grants Panel has continued to receive and approve, as appropriate, various applications over the course of the year. The Panel notes that some posts have been difficult to fill.
54. A number of grants were approved, including towards community outreach workers in the Inishowen group and First Ballynahinch. Some grants were also approved for outreach projects by Presbyteries and congregations, which the Panel wish to encourage.
55. Recommendations were also approved regarding ways that the Panel could encourage different models of mission. These include some posts being set as 5-year terms rather than 3; the option of giving decreasing grants each year to encourage congregational buy-in and sustainability; a training budget being included in applications to better equip personnel; an induction for all workers with Mission Department staff and the production of a brochure to highlight examples of creative mission projects.
56. Following agreement by the Council, the Irish Mission Fund Grant and the Mission Support Grant will be merged into one single grant fund in the future retaining the ethos of both. The Panel continue to encourage an uptake in grants.

KENNY HANNA, Convener

Other strategic matters

57. The development of migrants' ministry across Ireland is becoming of increasing strategic importance to the Committee. Consideration is being given to whether the International Meeting Point becomes a wider 'brand' within PCI and how works of a similar ethos could be developed in other cities in collaboration with Presbyteries.
58. At the request of the Home Mission, Irish Mission and Deaconess Committee, a task group is being established to "conduct a strategic, considered and detailed review of future direction of Migrant Ministry within Ireland and the future management arrangements of International Meeting Point's current projects."
59. Following a request by the Republic of Ireland Panel from the Council for Public Affairs, the Secretary was invited to a conversation regarding developing a more strategic approach to the area of helping congregations respond effectively and helpfully to migrants. Several Councils were represented at this discussion due to the cross-cutting

nature of this conversation and consensus emerged that the Council for Mission in Ireland would be well placed to take this forward. The Council have approved that this should become a focus of the Council's work and an initial forum event under the heading of 'Welcoming the Stranger' is being planned for later this year.

60. A conversation took place with previous participants in night-time ministry. The Committee agreed that future projects should be 'locally led and denominationally supported' and suggested that a forum style event could be held later in the year to highlight good practice in this area.

DARYL EDWARDS, Committee Convener

HEALTHCARE, PRISONS AND FORCES CHAPLAINCY COMMITTEE

Healthcare Chaplaincy

61. The Committee maintains ongoing contact with the five Health and Social Service Trusts in Northern Ireland, and with the Health Service Executive in the Republic of Ireland, concerning the provision of Presbyterian chaplaincy in hospitals across Ireland. The Committee continues to support a denominationally based approach to healthcare chaplaincy, and is pleased to report that this approach is being followed in the majority of Trusts. However, chaplaincy roles in specialised healthcare settings may, of necessity, often be generic.
62. The healthcare chaplains exercise an extremely important and much appreciated pastoral ministry to patients, families and hospital staff and, through the respect in which they are held and the work they do, have significant ministry and missional opportunities. The Committee seeks to support all our chaplains – both those working in full time roles as well as those exercising this ministry in part time roles which are in addition to their congregational commitments.

Directory of PCI Healthcare Chaplains and the location of their service (March 2023)

Name	Location
Rev Lindsay Blair	Altnagelvin Hospital
Rev David Clarke	Sligo University Hospital
Rev Richie Cronin	Cork University Hospital
Rev Dr David Cupples	South West Acute Hospital, Enniskillen
Susan Dawson	Coordinating Chaplain, Dublin Hospitals

Name	Location
Rev David Clarke	Mayo General Hospital
Rev Ken Doherty	Mater Hospital, Belfast
Joanne Dunlop	Antrim Area Hospital and Craigavon Hospital (Deaconess Assistant to Chaplain)
Rev Helen Freeburn	University Hospital, Galway
Rev John Gilkinson	Belfast City Hospital (full time)
Rev David Hagan	Craigavon Area Hospital
Rev Norman Harrison	Royal Group of Hospitals (pt) Northern Trust Lead Chaplain (pt)
Rev Stephen Hibbert	Altnagelvin Hospital
Rev Ross Kernohan	Altnagelvin Hospital
Rev Jim Lamont	Letterkenny General Hospital
Heather McCracken	Royal Group of Hospitals & Belfast City Hospital (Deaconess Assistant to the Chaplain) Musgrave Park Hospital – Chaplain (pt)
Rev Roger McElnea	Tyrone and Fermanagh
Rev Keith McIntyre	Daisy Hill Hospital
Rev Jonathan Porter	Dundalk District Hospital
Rev Dr Ivan Neish	Antrim Area Hospital
Rev Jane Nelson	Omagh Hospital & Primary Care Complex
Rev Leslie Patterson	Lagan Valley Hospital (temporary cover)
Rev Owen Patterson	Downe Hospital
Rev Mark Proctor	Tallaght Hospital (Adelaide and Meath)
Hazel Reid	Causeway Hospital, Coleraine
Mrs Claire Sellar	Ulster Hospital, Dundonald
Rev Marlene Taylor	Belfast Trust (Bank relief chaplain)
Rev Ivan Thompson	Bluestone Psychiatric Unit
Rev Alan Thompson	South Tyrone Hospital
Vacant	Knockbracken Healthcare Park
Vacant	Dalriada

63. A 'Chaplains Connect' morning was held in January, which proved a valuable opportunity to meet with and encourage healthcare chaplains. The exchange of experiences and challenges, sharing of good practice, and benefit of mutual encouragement made it worthwhile. Consideration will be given to the provision of similar events in the future.
64. A short proforma for healthcare chaplains to report on the particular encouragements and challenges in their situation was developed and completed forms have been considered by the Committee. This will help the Committee to support chaplains as effectively as possible.
65. Advice has been provided regarding the appointment of Presbyterians to generic chaplaincy positions, as well as the practical outworking of the 6 hours per week limit on extra parochial work.
66. The Committee noted the death of Rev James Hagan who has served as chaplain in Craigavon Area Hospital for many years, and conveyed its sympathy and support to his family.
67. In the Southern Trust, Rev David Hagan was appointed to a part time chaplaincy role at Craigavon Area Hospital, and has also become Vice President of the NIHCA. Discussions are anticipated, in conjunction with the Dublin and Munster Presbytery, regarding the possible creation of a full-time chaplaincy post for the hospitals in the greater Dublin area.
68. Among several appointments to chaplaincy positions in the Health and Social Care Trusts, the Committee was delighted to note the appointment by the South Eastern Trust of Mrs Claire Sellar to a part time Presbyterian chaplaincy post in the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald, a position which had been vacant for a lengthy period.

Prisons chaplaincy

Directory of PCI Prisons' Chaplains and the locations of their service.
(March 2023)

Name	Location
Rev Alan Boal	Mountjoy, Dublin (part-time)
Rev Gary Aitcheson	HMP Magilligan (part time)
Rev Rodney Cameron	Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison (part-time)
Rev Lesley-Ann Wilson	Woodland's Juvenile Justice Centre (part-time)
Rev Graham Stockdale	HMP Maghaberry (Coordinating Chaplain, full-time)

69. The Committee pays warm tribute to the work of all our prison chaplains, recognising the heavy demands placed on them, the challenges faced by them, and the opportunities for fruitful ministry and mission on the frontline.
70. In November, the Director of the Northern Ireland Prison Service hosted an appreciation lunch for all prison chaplains – indicative of the respect in which our chaplains are held, the recognition of the work they do, and the positive support of the NIPS.
71. A ‘Chaplains Connect’ gathering was organised in February, providing an important opportunity for our chaplains to meet in order to share experience and encouragement, and to emphasise the importance which our church attaches to this work.
72. The Committee continues to be encouraged by the work of Rev Graham Stockdale in HMP Maghaberry, while being mindful of increased administrative demands on his work. The placement of two ministry students alongside Graham as part of ongoing or summer placements has been a positive development, with thanks due to the Council for Training in Ministry for their partnership in this.
73. Rev Lesley-Ann Wilson has settled into her work at the Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre energetically and innovatively, as she seeks to maximise the opportunities for vital work with vulnerable young people.
74. The Committee is grateful for the continued funding provided for prison chaplaincy by the NI Department of Justice, while also welcoming any additional subvention of funds towards this work.

FORCES CHAPLAINCY PANEL

Directory of Commissioned Chaplains within the Armed Forces (March 2023)

Name	Location
Rev James Burnett	Royal Navy Reserve (part time)
Rev Mark Donald	Army Reserve (part-time)
Rev Simon Hamilton	Royal Navy
Rev Mark Henderson	Army
Rev Ivan Linton	Army
Rev Graeme McConville	Army
Rev Michael McCormick	RAF
Rev Edward McKenzie	Army Reserve
Rev Jonathan Newell	RAF

Name	Location
Rev Heather Rendell	Army
Rev Dr Paul Swinn	Army Reserve
Rev Dr Brent van der Linde	Royal Navy
Rev Dr Philip Wilson	Royal Air Force

Directory of part-time Chaplains to Youth Organisations sponsored by the Armed Forces

Name	Location
Rev Joseph Andrews	Air Training Corps
Rev Kenneth Crowe	Army Cadet Force (commissioned)
Rev Richard Graham	Air Training Corps
Rev Michael Rutledge	Air Training Corps
Rev Prof Patton Taylor	Air Training Corps
Rev Scott Woodburn	Air Training Corps

75. The Panel has found it helpful to meet our full time forces chaplains via Microsoft Teams, arranging to meet with one chaplain at each meeting. This has enabled the panel members to get to know the chaplains better, to understand the nature of their work, and to appreciate the critical opportunities for Christian encouragement, support and witness among those serving at all ranks. PCI forces chaplains are held in the highest regard as they serve in a wide variety of extremely challenging contexts with valuable opportunities for frontline mission.
76. In recognising these vital opportunities for ministry and mission, the Panel believes that it is important that this work should be highlighted to our whole church on a regular basis. To enable this, a new Remembrance Day video was made available in time for Remembrance Day 2022. This has been produced in longer and shorter forms, which we hope will make it helpful for use both in Sunday Services and mid-week gatherings.
77. The sudden passing of Rev Dr Paul Bailie was noted, given his service as chaplain to the Army Cadet Force.
78. Of our nine full time serving chaplains, two were serving in overseas deployment during the past year.
79. In March, the Forces Panel Convener accompanied the Moderator on a visit to some of our chaplains.

ROB CRAIG, Convener

RURAL CHAPLAINCY PANEL

80. The Panel is encouraged by the continued development of this work by the Rural Chaplain, Rev Kenny Hanna, and the impact that the pilot project has made among farmers, farming families and the rural community – not least through Kenny’s work within local farmers’ marts and in his contacts with other farm support organisations and throughout the agri-food industry.
81. The breadth of the work and the challenge of an ever-increasing workload as a result of the project’s impact should be noted, with over half of the congregations in the four presbyteries of the project having been visited by the Chaplain.
82. There has been an effective presence at agricultural shows in Castlewellan and Markethill, and plans are in progress to extend this to the shows at Saintfield and Lurgan in 2023. Services aimed at the whole rural community and creative weeknight events involving other rural support agencies have been well supported, with positive feedback, in a number of locations. A Rural Chaplaincy Rally was held in Rathfriland in November.
83. The following principles have been determined to enable a clear and sharp focus on the work of this pilot project within the four Presbyteries of the pilot project:
 - (a) Bringing additional team members on board with appropriate training to help grow the capacity of this work.
 - (b) Developing depth and building on good connections through the running of a short-term evangelistic course in a Livestock Mart.
 - (c) Focus work within the four target Presbyteries to help create sustainability beyond the 3-year pilot period.
 - (d) Explore opportunities in marts where there is less connection.
 - (e) Considering the Rural Chaplain as a pioneer who begins missional activity that can be handed on to local congregations, particularly at agricultural shows or outreach events. This would enable work to multiply.
84. With the pilot project now into its second year, the Panel has agreed to begin the work of preparing for the review of this 3-year project, with a need to develop mechanisms for conducting this evaluation against the strategic plan established at the beginning of the project.

NIGEL REID, Convener

Police Chaplaincy Pilot Scheme

85. Whilst this project, initiated by the PSNI has received the encouragement and support of the senior PSNI management, Covid seriously restricted the impact of the pilot scheme in North Down, and there has been no further development to report.

ROBERT BELL, Committee Convener

UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES CHAPLAINCY COMMITTEE

86. There are 360,000 tertiary level education students across this island. PCI has two full-time chaplains in Belfast, in Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland currently has no chaplains in Dublin.

Directory of PCI Universities and Colleges Chaplains and locations of their service. (March 2023)

Name	Location
QUB	Rev Nigel Craig
UU, Jordanstown and Belfast	Rev Cheryl Meban
UU, Coleraine	Rev Dr J Coulter
UU, Magee	Rev Graeme Orr
University College, Galway	Rev Helen Freeburn
NUI, Maynooth	Rev Dr Keith McCrory

87. Much of the Committee's work in the autumn focused on recruitment for chaplaincy roles in Belfast. Rev Nigel Craig was installed as Chaplain for Queen's University, Stranmillis and Union Theological College on 20 November 2022, with Mrs Lyndsay Ballantine being appointed as Assistant Lay Chaplain. The Committee has been delighted by how the new team have commenced their work, as they have developed a range of connections, events and activities to engage students on campus. Key aspects of new work include Advent and Lent services, staff prayer lunches and a reading group all in the Elmwood Avenue premises.
88. While the work of our part-time chaplains is positive, the Committee is troubled that the denomination provides less than a total equivalent of five days a week to third level chaplaincy outside of Belfast. Most pressing in the Committee's concern is student ministry provision within Dublin and it has sought to engage with the Dublin & Munster Presbytery regarding this gap.

89. Given the changing landscape in the Republic of Ireland with regards to faith-based involvement in public institutions, the Committee understands that the traditional model of an institutional denominational chaplain may not be the most effective approach for reaching students with the gospel. Rather, in line with previous reports, the Committee feel it is important to link student ministry more closely to a local congregation and wish to explore the possibility of non-ordained student ministry positions who could work under the oversight of a local congregation while seeking to reach out missionally to students.
90. The Committee continues to hold to the principles that chaplaincy should be missional as well as pastoral and the work of a chaplain ought to be rooted in the life of a local church. For these reasons, the Committee's preference is to establish a Dublin Student Ministry Project which would be based in a local congregation (or group of local congregations) rather than an institution. A Dublin Student Ministry Task Group is being established to explore this and will include representatives from the Dublin and Munster Presbytery. This will allow local churches, in partnership with the Committee, to explore possibilities and move forward together. A worker could then be sought to develop this opportunity.
91. Similarly, the Council Secretary, along with two local PCI ministers, met with representatives from the Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland chaplaincies to discuss the provision of chaplaincy services in Letterkenny Institute of Technology. A more shared and joined-up approach to chaplaincy, as well as ways to proceed in future when tenders become available, was discussed. While a joint tendering bid between denominations, where duties, time and finances are divided, is a possibility, it was felt that this could be overly complex and cumbersome. Rather, the options are to allow one denomination to act as lead chaplaincy partner and seek to foster good local relationships to enable access or alternatively, PCI could tender for future chaplaincy positions in its own right. The Committee is willing to explore either option, including tendering, if necessary, should opportunities arise.
92. The Committee offers its prayerful thanks to all our university chaplains, both part-time and full-time, who are serving faithfully as they engage in mission and ministry to students.

Belfast Partnership Group

93. The Belfast Partnership Group has only met once to date this year, mainly due to the changing team dynamics at Queen's. However, it was helpful to use this as a forum for developing relationships and drawing in other groups who are contributing to student ministry in Belfast.
94. While a previous proposal to add an additional member to the chaplaincy team in Belfast is seen as a missional priority, no progress was made on this due to other recruitment needs. It is still hoped that

a student staff worker would liaise with chaplains, local churches, student groups and other Christian organisations to facilitate mission to students in Belfast.

THE DERRYVOLGIE AND ELMWOOD AVENUE MANAGEMENT PANEL

95. Derryvolgie is fully occupied by students and we are indebted to the new Chaplain and his team for all their hard work. In light of ever-increasing costs, the rental fee for student rooms for the new academic year will be increased from £115 to £120 per week.
96. Elmwood offices are currently fully occupied and a new tenant is currently being sought for the cafe space to work with the Chaplaincy in its mission. In the meantime, the Panel has been encouraged by the increased use of the ground floor space for some student events and activities during the week.

JOHNSTON LAMBE, Convener

CRAIG LYNN, Committee Convener

FINANCE PANEL

97. The accounts for 2022 are satisfactory, with a small surplus at year end mainly due to monies held in relation to manses in home mission congregations. The panel is aware that as we enter a new fiscal year there is increased pressure on the finances of the Council due to rising salary costs and general increases.
98. The accounts also reveal that the planned capital expenditure has not yet begun and will roll over to the current year. It is hoped that projects in Dundalk and Greystones will be completed soon and projects in Maynooth and Galway will commence in 2023.
99. The Council continues to be grateful to those who have generously remembered its work in their wills, as well as for personal and congregational donations. Such generous contributions are of significant benefit to the work of the Council.
100. The Council is indebted to all members of the Church who support the work of the United Appeal, and in particular, the work of the Council of Mission in Ireland. Thanks are also expressed to the PW for their continued financial contribution.
101. A new lease has been agreed for the Lisburn Road property for the next three years. The Panel wishes to acknowledge the generous support of South Belfast Presbytery for this project and their continued contribution to the salary of a staff member. The Panel however, note

that as funding from South Belfast for the rental of property ended on 31 December 2022 this has now to be carried by the Council.

102. Following a number of meetings regarding a long-planned and much-delayed project in Maynooth, the Council agreed “to be a blessing to the congregation of Maynooth by supplementing the remaining shortfall via an additional grant of £1.25m with the understanding that the congregation proactively and diligently seek to realise potential funding opportunities.”
103. The Panel encourages all Home Mission congregations to review their church and manse insurance status and if they need any consultation to contact the CMI office.
104. The Panel wishes to thank Nehru Dass for his work on the finances and all his guidance to the Panel and wish him well in his upcoming retirement.

JOHNSTON LAMBE, Convener

PROPERTY PANEL

105. The Property Panel continues to work in close partnership with the Finance Panel to support the grants application and approval process in relation to church property matters. Over the past year, the Panel has continued to support a considerable number of congregations with a variety of building and property requirements. Guidance has been given in relation to new building projects, minor refurbishments, general building repairs and property valuations for acquisition and disposals. This has been applied to meeting houses, halls and manses.
106. The Panel continues to review its membership with the intention of maintaining a balance of Council members with other members of PCI who might bring particular professional experience to the Panel’s work. To this end we have sought to add Panel Members from a legal background within the Republic of Ireland.
107. The Property Panel has carried out a number of consultations with congregations within the Home Mission. Work on Greystones Church is ongoing with completion due soon, plans have been agreed for a new building project in Maynooth with work commencing soon and a grant has been set aside for manse repairs in Galway. Home and Urban Mission congregations are encouraged to make contact for support and guidance should they require advice in any property matter.
108. Some general building repairs have been completed in a small number of congregations, with conversations ongoing regarding necessary repairs in others. Following negotiations, an offer was accepted for the former manse in Fermoy, with the hope this will be completed in due course.

109. The Panel continues to be concerned that as buildings age, associated maintenance costs may increasingly become a drain on financial resources which could otherwise be used in direct gospel ministry. However, as buildings themselves are a valuable asset for settled gospel ministry, the Panel looks forward to further serving the Church as it faces the challenges ahead.
110. The Panel wishes to record its thanks to our Property Support Officer, Mr Graham Patterson, for all his diligent work and guidance.

ALAN McQUADE, Convener

APPENDIX 1

CMI CHURCH PLANTING STRATEGY

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has a long and rich history of church planting however it is recognised that there has not been momentum in planting in recent years. Therefore, there is a need to re-envision the denomination and raise the profile of church planting across PCI so that individuals and congregations who feel called to church plant, realise that there are opportunities and recognised pathways within PCI to do this.

This report considers and suggests how a strategy for church planting in PCI could be developed under the following headings:

- (a) Church planting: re-envisioning
- (b) Planting pathway for places
- (c) Planting pathway for people.

This is helpfully illustrated by a strategy diagram represented in Appendix 1A.

1. Church Planting: Re-Envisioning

Raising the profile of church planting in PCI needs to consider the whole denomination including presbyteries, congregations and individuals. Some suggestions include:

- 1.1 **Prayer:** The CPP launched a prayer initiative in 2019 titled 'New life, new people, new places' that gained traction through Mission Ireland Events and was profiled at the General Assembly. The CPP will consider other ways to encourage prayer for church planting including utilising 'Let's Pray'.
- 1.2 **Conferences/events:** The 'A time to plant' conference took place in May 2022 as a significant opportunity to profile church planting. This was well attended by a broad cross-section of the denomination and the feedback overwhelmingly stated that people appreciated the opportunity to gather, discuss and dream about how church planting might grow in PCI.
- 1.3 **Discussion Tool:** The CPP would like to develop a reflective tool for presbyteries and/or congregations to consider where God might be leading them to be involved in church planting. A tool like this was used at 'A time to plant' which could be re-shaped and made available.
- 1.4 **Stories:** PCI has encouraging stories of church planting over the past 15 years, including some very recent examples. The CPP should consider ways of sharing these stories as an encouragement and inspiration to the wider denomination.

- 1.5 **Conversations:** Personnel from within CMI are available to facilitate conversations about church planting with individuals and groups.
- 1.6 It is hoped that re-envisioning the denomination for church planting will encourage presbyteries and congregations to identify new places for planting, and inspire individuals to become involved in church planting. As such, the remainder of this report highlights a pathway for each of these scenarios.

2. PLANTING PATHWAY FOR PLACES

This section outlines the key elements that a congregation, presbytery or CMI should consider when thinking about a new place to plant a church and relates to the light grey section in Appendix 1A. It acknowledges that church planting raises a variety of questions for leaders, and PCI does not have a specific set of guidelines or process to refer to for assistance. As such the CPP has developed a church planting congregational handbook to guide bodies through the process of church planting which is presented below and titled 'We would like to plant a church'. It is noted that this draft is a helpful starting point and may benefit from the input of other PCI bodies such as the Linkage Commission, General Council and the Council for Training in Ministry.

'WE WOULD LIKE TO PLANT A CHURCH'

Planting Pathway Handbook for a congregation/presbytery/CMI

Churches planting churches is considered an important aspect of PCI's church planting strategy. Here are two stories of how this has happened in PCI over the past few years.

Example 1: Donabate Presbyterian planting a church in Balbriggan

Donabate recognised there were several towns close by without a church presence. With CMI support they recruited a Community Outreach Worker to explore possibilities for planting. Balbriggan was selected as there were already a few families living there who were travelling to church in Donabate. One of these families opened their home for a regular Bible study and they were able to connect with families through organising a summer Bible club. Balbriggan began monthly church services in a local community before launching weekly services in 2020, led by the Community Outreach Worker. Balbriggan is a 20-minute drive from Donabate. From an outsider's perspective it operates like two separate churches but it is one congregation meeting in two locations with a shared minister, elders and financial structure

with the day to day leadership being led by the planter. The Community Outreach Worker is now on a flexible ordination pathway placed in the Balbriggan church plant under the oversight of Donabate Presbyterian.

Example 2: West Kirk Presbyterian planting Grace and Hope Church

Crumlin Road Presbyterian was amalgamated with West Kirk and the resources from the sale of the property were allocated towards beginning a new work in the area. West Kirk received an Assistant Minister to begin exploring what a new expression of church might look like through the Hopelink Centre at Carlisle House, owned by North Belfast Presbytery. The Presbytery partnered with International Meeting Point to open an ‘Op Shop’ in the area and this became a focal point for meeting the community and inviting people into Bible studies. The Assistant Minister was ordained as Associate minister in West Kirk congregation and planted Grace and Hope Community Church in 2022.

1. PREPARING THE WAY

We believe that Jesus builds His Church. Being involved in the building of the Church is a privilege and grace God gives to individuals and local churches.

- 1.1 **See a need:** Church planting begins with seeing a need. This could be a large area of housing or a town nearby that lacks a reformed witness. Take a drive around the towns and villages in a 10 mile radius and look out for where there is no church presence.
- 1.2 **Start to pray:** Having identified a need the starting point of any church planting activity is prayer. If you feel called to be involved in church planting, the place to begin is to pray. It might be just one or two praying; or a group of elders; or the whole congregation.
At an appropriate stage, mobilising prayer in the wider church is vital. The ‘Let’s Pray’ weekly e-mail reaches hundreds of people and is an important vehicle for having people pray in informed ways. Depending on what stage of the church planting process a church finds themselves in, it might be wise to keep the group who are praying relatively small. In some cases, new ministries and risk-taking gospel work are best left to germinate and take root without the expectations of a whole congregation or presbytery or denomination weighing on them.
- 1.3 **Survey the land:** Depending on the circumstances and resources, it may be helpful to explore place(s) to plant in an area and consider engaging missionally. Examples of this could be prayer walking, a bible study in a hotel, summer bible club, an Alpha course.
- 1.4 **Begin exploratory conversations – you’re not reinventing the wheel:** This needs to take place internally first. Is the congregation prepared to give away energy and resource to another place beyond the walls of your congregation in ways that will be sacrificial?

There will also be external people who can help. The Council for Mission in Ireland is best-placed to advise you of similar initiatives. Most things have been tried before and the reality is men and women have been trying to reach the people of Ireland for hundreds of years. There are expressions of church (even Presbyterian ones!) to be found in the most unlikely of places.

When starting out on the journey to church planting or at least thinking about church planting, here are some questions you might ask?

- (a) Who can we talk to who might be able to help?
- (b) Who is already working in the area we have in mind?
- (c) Who has tried or is trying something similar elsewhere?
- (d) Who at the Council for Mission in Ireland might be able to advise us?
- (e) Who knows what's happening in PCI and the wider evangelical community?
- (f) Who has been involved in new church development or church planting where a church didn't form? (They may have the best lessons to pass on).
- (g) Are there any conferences that might be helpful?
- (h) Are there training or courses for church planting launch or core groups?

2. GETTING STARTED

2.1 Seeking permission

2.1.1 Presbytery

No new church can be established as a congregation in PCI without the formal support and permission of its presbytery. Engaging presbytery at an appropriate early point helps to mobilise prayer, think strategically and grow support for a new church. It will be helpful to keep presbytery informed well before you are seeking formal permission.

The appropriate people to contact are the Presbytery Clerk and the Convener of the presbytery's mission committee. This contact should be made at an early stage. It could be that you are asked at some stage to make a report to the wider presbytery on the project.

Grant-making panels and committees of the wider church always ask for endorsement from presbytery on grant application forms.

Wider presbytery involvement in the oversight panels and groups for new churches has been a feature of some of the most recent new churches in PCI. This presbytery-wide collaboration is encouraged.

2.2 Seeking support

2.2.1 Council for Mission in Ireland

The Council for Mission in Ireland (CMI) has responsibility for overseeing mission in PCI. They have a key role in any church planting endeavours. PCI generally does not attempt to plant churches centrally but its role is to encourage congregations and presbyteries who are seeking to do it.

Even at the earliest stages of considering church planting, it's worth having a conversation with someone at CMI to let them know your early thinking. That might be the Council Secretary, the Mission Development Officer, or the Convener of the Church Planting Panel.

PCI-wide oversight and vision casting for church planting is led by the Church Planting Panel. It is made up of people from across the denomination with experience and passion for starting new churches. The panel aims to serve the church by mobilising prayer, encouraging the development of church planters, envisioning congregations and developing networks of like-minded people within and outside PCI. The panel encourages any congregations considering church planting or wanting to support it to make contact

When it comes to formal aspects of establishing new congregations CMI has a vital role. It sees how new churches fit into the wider picture of mission within our church. It is asked for comment from the Linkage Commission on the appointment of staff in new churches.

CMI can offer the following things:

- (i) Support in developing a strategy for the work.
- (ii) Help shape a role for someone to lead and coordinate.
- (iii) Offer access to funding to recruit someone.
- (iv) General accompaniment and support for the journey.

CMI has funding from which grants are made for Additional Pastoral Personnel (APP) such as Community Outreach Workers. These are granted over a limited period of time on application to, and assessment by, the Mission Grants Panel. More information and application forms are available from the Mission Support Officer in CMI. APPs are normally financed through a combination of local sources and CMI through its Mission Grants Panel.

2.2.2 Staffing

At some stage the church plant is likely to need to be staffed. That could be with a non-ordained Community Outreach Worker. Such individuals may enter a flexible pathway to ordination at a later stage, or they could develop a pioneering work and then hand it over to an ordained minister to lead towards maturity, so

they are released to begin a new pioneer work elsewhere. It could be that it is appropriate to appoint a part- or full-time worker for the endeavour. That could be in the form of a bi-vocational worker.

All non-ordained staff appointments in PCI need to go through the Additional Pastoral Personnel and Auxiliary Ministry Panel and have the oversight of Peninsula Services. These are important features of accountability and oversight the church uses for the protection of employees and employers. At a very early stage, it's worth being familiar with the APP processes. These help churches to consider aspects of employments like salary, working hours, job description, line-management etc. These processes are laid out in the document 'APP Guidelines' developed and circulated by PCI's APP panel. As there are many forms to fill and steps to follow, it is worth identifying someone with time and experience to do this work, and start this early.

Ordained ministers of PCI have been appointed as church planters in the last two PCI congregations to have been constituted fully. In both cases, they were appointed to lead a church plant without any guarantee that this would lead to a fully constituted congregation. This is not the only way to plant a church but it may be one that is deemed wisest in your situation. Calling an ordained minister will involve Presbytery, Council for Mission in Ireland and the Linkage Commission. An ordained minister is normally financed by a combination of local sources and the Central Ministry Fund. An ordained minister is not an 'employee' in employment law and so Peninsula should not be contacted and employment terms such as 'job description' should not be used. That said, local leadership should set clear expectations and a remit for the call.

3. USEFUL CONTACTS

- Council for Mission in Ireland Secretary
- Church Planting Panel Conveners
- Mission Development Officer
- Mission Grants – Mission Support Officer

To get in touch either:

Email: mission@presbyterianireland.org or

Tel: (028) 9041 7265 (NI) / (048) 9041 7265 (RoI)

3. PLANTING PATHWAY FOR PEOPLE

The CPP recognises that the Council for Training in Ministry (CTM) have an ordination pathway. This has identified a number of individuals with a potential giftedness and call into church planting. These individuals have been directed into placements and assistantships to allow them to explore and grow in this further which is very encouraging.

The Church Planting Panel would propose that CMI support this by developing a planting pathway for individuals for whom an ordination pathway is unlikely to be the starting point of their church planting journey. Such individuals may enter a flexible pathway to ordination at a later stage, or they could develop a pioneering work and then hand it over to an ordained minister to lead towards maturity, so they are released to begin a new pioneer work elsewhere.

This section outlines the key elements necessary for developing a planting pathway in CMI for an individual seeking to begin a pioneering work, and make suggestions for how each could be progressed. It relates to the dark grey section of Appendix 1A.

3.1 Recruitment within the Council for Mission in Ireland

There are a number of existing places or events within and outside PCI, that offer potential opportunities to identify and recruit individuals interested in church planting such as:

- (a) The PCI Ministry Taster Day at UTC
- (b) CLW networks such as the PCI Apprentice Programme and Emerge Leadership Training
- (c) PCI student chaplaincy
- (d) Ordained ministers and Assistant ministers, via direct communication and/or the General Assembly. This should include encouragement to share the information with their congregations
- (e) Union College ministry students, non-ministry students, Deaconesses and Auxiliary Ministry graduates
- (f) Existing PCI youth workers, Community Outreach Workers and other APPs
- (g) PCI Church planting conference attendees
- (h) Parachurch agencies that employ or relate to Presbyterians with leadership giftings such as: Youth for Christ, Scripture Union, CU Ireland, Exodus and Crown Jesus Ministries
- (i) Theological and Missional Training courses such as: Belfast Bible College; Irish Bible Institute; Cornhill Belfast and Forge Ireland.

It was agreed that the networks above should be used to promote a 'PCI Church Planter Taster Day' facilitated by CMI. This would give more focussed information about church planting in PCI with the majority of input and experience coming from the contribution of current PCI church planters. The CPP has developed a list of self-diagnostic questions individuals should ask themselves before considering church planting. These have been adapted for the PCI context as a potential tool for early self-discernment for anyone considering church planting. This might prove useful in CMI's recruitment stage.

3.2 Profiling and Assessment

It is widely accepted that the key human factor in the successful development of new churches is leadership. A number of leadership characteristics are broadly agreed as important in leading a church plant and considered important for our context. These should be assessed by CMI in a way that emphasises proven experience i.e. not on 'what would you do?' but 'what have you done?'. Some of the following mechanisms could be used:

- (a) An application form plus two employer references and two Christian leader references.
- (b) One informal interview with someone with church planting experience. Relevant questions would be provided for this. Interviewer will report back to CMI.
- (c) A short placement in a planting congregation with assessment.
- (d) Formal Panel interview with representatives from CMI: This could include a verbal presentation, questions related to the criteria in Appendix 3, leading of a group discussion and testing of 'team dynamics'.

It was agreed that any process must discern a clear commitment to Presbyterianism, its form of church government as elder led, and agreed subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith. It was also agreed that the process should weighup the cost involved in church planting. It was suggested that given the unique challenges and isolation of church planting, that married couples could be offered a reflective tool that helps them consider their individual roles in church planting, and ensure that the spouse is at least willing to be a fully committed church member. The CPP has developed an informal tool that could be given to couples as a helpful opportunity for them to self-reflect before committing to church-planting.

3.3 Induction Process

Once individuals have been assessed as having the required leadership characteristics for church planting, CMI will arrange an induction process and signpost towards suitable training. This could include:

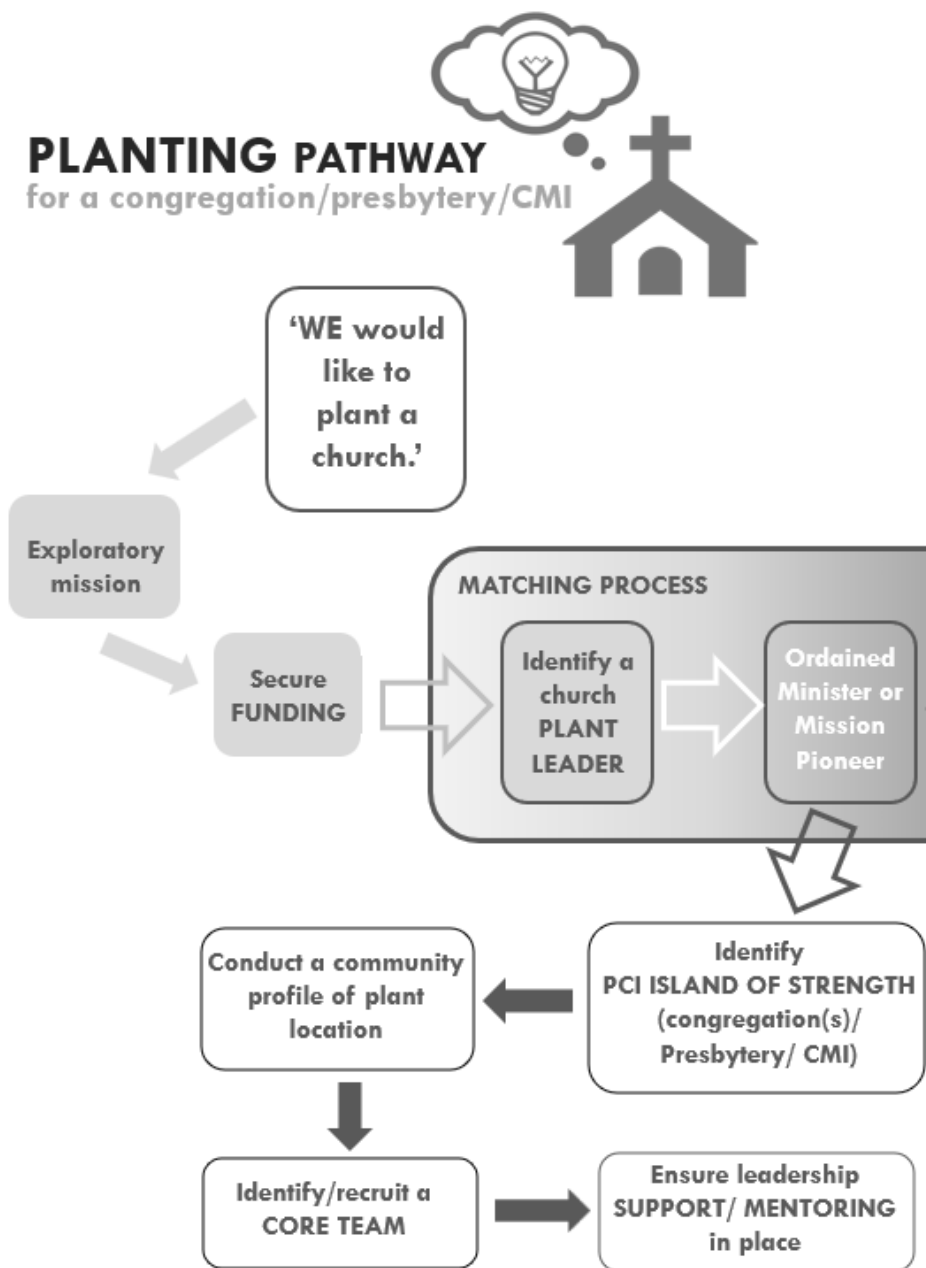
- 3.3.1 Engagement with the Council for Training in Ministry regarding training in missional practice and other aspects of ministry that may give credit towards ordination at a later date.
- 3.3.2 Signposting to credible training programmes for them to choose from such as:
 - (a) **City to City UK (CTC): Incubator** (2-year training programme. The Free Church of Scotland (FCOS) has adapted this training for the UK context. The incubator programme is spread over two years and includes 16 full day sessions. Beginning with theological foundations, the course increasingly focuses on leadership development.
 - (b) **Crosslands: Missional Church and Church Planting Track Bundle.** Over the course of 8 modules, students will learn how the gospel impacts and shapes our church communities as you seek to make disciples and reach people where you live, work and minister. This training is for church members, interns and elders who want to be equipped for discipleship and ministry. Union Theological College is establishing a partnership with Crosslands in order to offer some of their training courses in Belfast.
 - (c) **Forge Ireland Pioneer Training [1 year].** The Forge Pioneer Course is a leadership training and mentoring programme for those who sense that God might be leading them into creating new expressions of church.

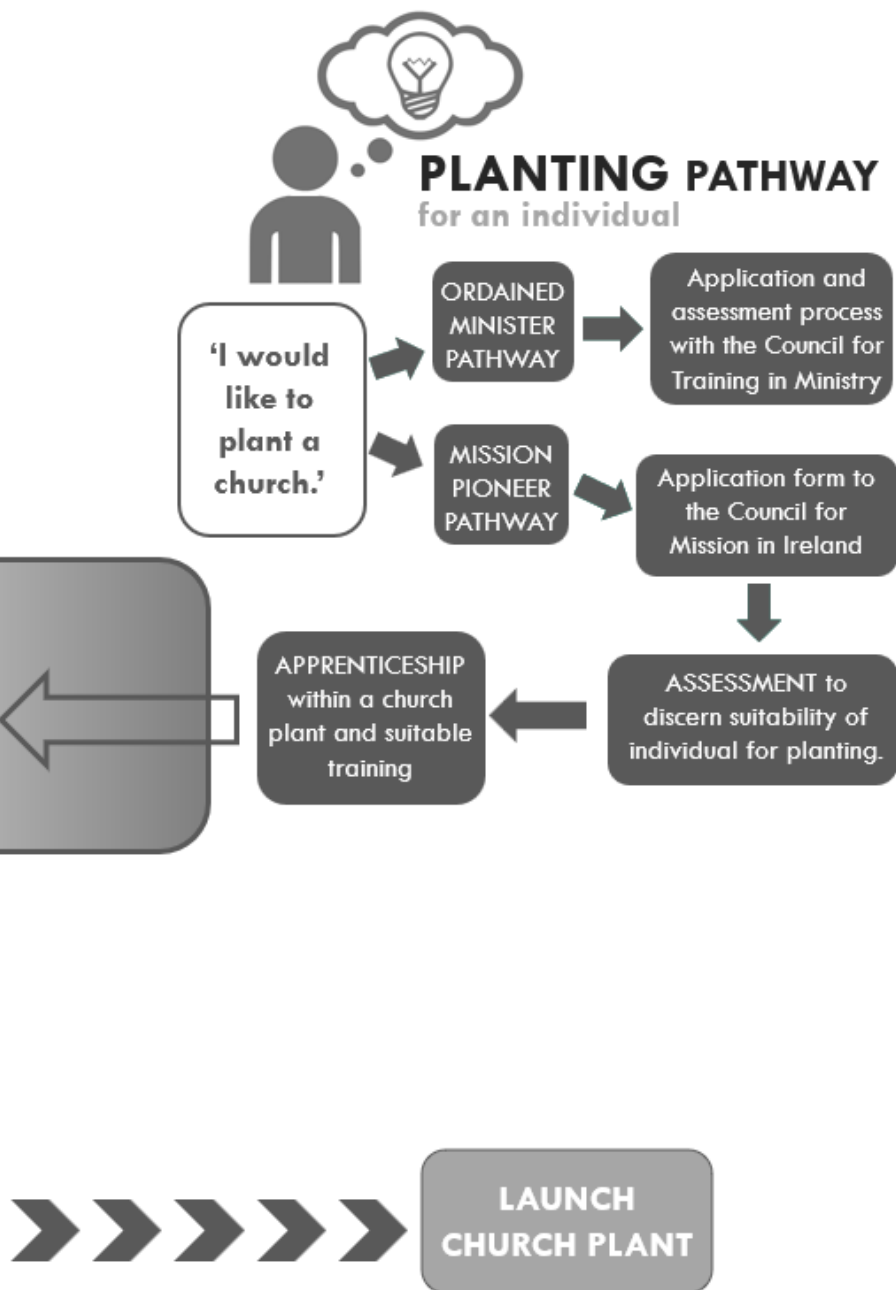
The Church Planting Panel considers CTC Incubator training to be excellent. In seeking to develop PCI training, which could involve the input and experience of CMI, it was suggested that several PCI ordained ministers, with an interest in planting, be encouraged to participate in CTC training. This creates the potential for them to be able to assist in the delivery of PCI church planting training, along with existing practitioners within the denomination.

3.4 Apprenticeship

Individuals should be placed in a church planting apprenticeship at the earliest opportunity. For the first year this should be working alongside an experienced church planter. In the second year the individual should be given some time to explore new opportunities for pioneering a new work under supervision. The

APPENDIX 1A: Church Planting Strategy Diagram





CPP suggests that CMI should look to identify HUB congregations that are located strategically and are resourced centrally, to provide planting experience for individuals on this pathway and short-term placements for those considering church planting.

3.5 Support Structures

It is important to have structures of support in place for church planters given the unique challenges and isolation it presents. Some support structures and suggestions noted are:

- 3.5.1 **Presbytery:** Expertise and experience may exist within a presbytery to offer ongoing support to a church planter but it is noted that this expertise is not widespread in PCI.
- 3.5.2 **PCI Church Planters Network:** Research has revealed that regular peer support increases the success of new churches by 135%. CMI will develop a network for new church planter leaders for the purpose of peer-support and encouragement. Collaboration with and signposting to CCLW will be sought for aspects of equipping related to congregational life and witness.
- 3.5.2 **Levels of support:** the following three levels of direct support for church planters are considered important and should be established through collaboration between presbytery, the parent church and CMI:
 - (a) **Line management:** this will be an individual or group local to the plant that provide accountability and goal setting for its progress. Sometimes difficult conversations happen in line management hence the church planter is less likely to open up regarding struggles or insecurities.
 - (b) **Mentoring:** usually with an older more experienced individual. Their role is to always be on the planter's side, encouraging and praying for them at every step. Like a grandfather role, cheering on but not setting goals.
 - (c) **Coaching:** The key difference between mentoring is that coaching involves setting goals that will be reviewed in 4-6 weeks.

APPENDIX 2

REPORT FROM CHURCH PLANTING PANEL REGARDING MISSIONAL AUXILIARY MINISTERS ACTING AS MISSION PIONEERS

INTRODUCTION

1. Since its inception, the Council for Mission in Ireland has recognised the need to identify and release workers to be involved in the sphere of evangelistic outreach or church planting. Following training for such service, these workers may receive a Call to a defined area of work. In the past, this has included Ministers, Irish Mission Workers and Deaconesses.
2. To help and enable the development of new congregations in areas that lack a strong reformed witness, the Church Planting Panel see the need to identify suitable pioneer evangelists and church planters to work in this way across Ireland. In its discussions, the Panel has discussed the helpfulness of those engaging in new church development being ‘called workers’ rather than employees. This would help to increase the degree of assessment, apprenticeship and accountability for such individuals, as well as enhance the recruitment of those with gifts for this area of service through having a recognised role and office.
3. Currently, the Code makes provision for this kind of work under the heading of ‘Auxiliary Ministry’. In accordance with paragraph 277.4, the Council for Mission in Ireland may call auxiliary ministers “to recognised work in Ireland and allocate them to spheres of service.” Missional Auxiliary Ministry occurs when an auxiliary minister works under the auspices of either a presbytery or the Council for Mission in Ireland in assisting with church planting and similar outreach work.
4. The Church Planting Panel believes that this could be a helpful mechanism in pioneering mission work and new church development, therefore it proposes that the office of Missional Auxiliary Ministers would be used to help identify appropriate individuals to serve in areas of pioneering mission. This shouldn’t be viewed as the only tool in the box; however, the calling of such workers does follow the direction of travel outlined in CMI’s ‘Church Planting Strategy’.

Application and Assessment

5. To help develop a pool of Missional Auxiliary Ministers who would act as Mission Pioneers in various settings across Ireland, a process of application, assessment and apprenticeship would be developed by the Council for Mission in Ireland.
6. To be considered to work under the Council for Mission in Ireland in this capacity, it would be necessary to submit an application form and provide three references, including one from their Minister on

behalf of kirk session. Recommendation would also be sought from a candidate's Presbytery.

7. In accordance with the Code's requirements for 'Called Workers', candidates must be communicant members of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and be in alignment with its theological positions; have a sense of vocation under the call of God to the special service of Jesus Christ and his Church; and be approved in respect of character, ability, health and education by the Council for Mission in Ireland.
8. Once an application is received from an individual meeting these requirements, the Council for Mission in Ireland would follow an agreed process in order to assess the suitability of any candidate for pioneering mission. This process (outlined more fully below) would include discussions, placement and formal interview. Two deadlines would be set each year to enable assessment to be completed in time for apprenticeship to commence in either the September or January that follows.

Apprenticeship and Training

9. Following the completion of the initial assessment process which will include consideration of previous training and experience, each candidate will normally be placed in an apprenticeship within a church-planting environment identified by and agreed with the Council for Mission in Ireland. This apprenticeship would last for an agreed amount of time and could happen in a part-time capacity with a minimum of 10 hours' involvement each week, meaning that it could be combined with continued employment or ongoing training. A report from the supervising minister will be required on completion of any apprenticeship.
10. To better equip candidates, the Council for Mission in Ireland will require that suitable training is undertaken. The training deemed necessary for each candidate will be determined by CMI, with possible flexibility for ongoing training to overlap with early phases of work. Such training may include Modular intensives organised by the Institute for Ministry, courses such as Handling the Word or Accredited Preaching Course, bespoke guidance in church planting or missional practice developed by the Council for Mission in Ireland or signposting to other credible and identified training programmes.

Deployment and Call

11. On completion of application, assessment and apprenticeship, a body from the Council for Mission in Ireland will give final approval on candidates. Each approved candidate will become part of a pool ready to be appointed to local work as opportunities arise.
12. When such opportunities become available, a mission pioneer could be called by the Council for Mission in Ireland and placed in local work that has been identified in collaboration with a Presbytery or

congregation. The Council for Mission in Ireland can issue a Call to any person appointed to such a post in order for that Call to be sustained by the relevant presbytery.

13. Each worker would benefit from the guidance of a supervising Minister and work under the oversight of a kirk session and the support of the Church Planting Panel. Where no kirk session already exists within a pioneering context, a joint body from Presbytery and CMI would offer oversight and support.

Finance and Support

14. Missional Auxiliary Ministry roles will be joint-funded by the Council for Mission in Ireland and local funds for an initial 5-year period. Such roles will be placed initially at Band B4 of the APP Salary Scale. The Council for Mission in Ireland is prepared to fully fund the initial 2 years, if necessary, with decreasing amounts anticipated to be required in years 3-5 as local funds grow. Beyond the initial 5 years, additional support could be sought through a CMI Mission Grant to supplement any finance within a developing church plant.
15. The Council for Mission in Ireland will offer support to each worker through its Church Planters Network or via a process of Accompaniment and Mentoring within the Home Mission.
16. As any new work develops, Missional Auxiliary Ministers may enter a flexible pathway to ordained ministry along the way. It is also possible that they could be released to develop a new pioneering work elsewhere, handing an already established church plant over to an ordained minister to lead towards maturity.

PROCESS OF APPLICATION, ASSESSMENT AND APPRENTICESHIP OF MISSIONAL AUXILIARY MINISTERS TO ACT AS MISSION PIONEERS

STAGE 1: Application

To be considered to work under the Council for Mission in Ireland in the capacity of Missional Auxiliary Ministry, the following is necessary: A completed application form;

- (a) Three references, including one from a candidate's minister on behalf of kirk session;
- (b) Endorsement by Presbytery.

Two deadlines would be set each year to enable assessment to be completed in time for apprenticeship to commence in either the September or January that follows.

STAGE 2: Assessment

In order for the Council for Mission in Ireland to approve any candidate to serve in this capacity, the following is necessary:

- (a) Initial discussion with applicant to assess experience and discuss process.
- (b) Short placement in a planting congregation with assessment.
- (c) Formal interview with representatives from CMI to include verbal presentation, set questions and a case study test to assess team dynamics.
- (d) Name agreed by the Council for Mission in Ireland.

In accordance with the Code's requirements for 'Called Workers', candidates must be communicant members of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and be in sympathy with its theological positions; have a sense of vocation under the call of God to the special service of Jesus Christ and his Church; and be approved in respect of character, ability, health and education by the Council for Mission in Ireland.

STAGE 3: Apprenticeship

Following the completion of the initial assessment process, each candidate will be placed in a church-planting apprenticeship, ideally within a 'Hub congregation' who have been identified by CMI as having experience in church-planting. This apprenticeship will last for an agreed time period (6–12 months) and involve working alongside a current church-planting initiative to help develop experience. Each apprenticeship may happen in a part-time capacity with a minimum of 10 hours involvement each week to be combined with continued

employment or ongoing training. A report from the supervising minister will be required on completion of any apprenticeship.

STAGE 4: Training (Ongoing)

To better equip candidates, the Council for Mission in Ireland will require that each Mission Pioneer undertakes suitable training. The Council will determine what levels of training are necessary, but this may include specific courses agreed with the Institute for Ministry, courses such as Handling the Word or Accredited Preaching Course, bespoke training in church planting and missional practice offered within CMI or signposting to other credible and identified training programmes such as:

- City to City UK: An incubator programme spread across 2 years including 16 full day sessions exploring theological foundations and leadership development.
- Crosslands: A course of 8 modules focused on how the gospel impacts and shapes church communities in seeking to make disciples and reach people.
- Forge Ireland Pioneer Course: A one-year leadership training and mentoring programme for those seeking to develop new expressions of church.

It should be noted that flexibility will be offered in terms of the timing for training, meaning that it could overlap with the early phases of new work.

STAGE 5: Deployment

On completion of application, assessment and apprenticeship, a body from the Council for Mission in Ireland will give final approval on candidates. Each approved candidate will become part of a pool ready to be appointed to local work as opportunities arise. When such opportunities become available, a mission pioneer could be called by the Council for Mission in Ireland and placed in local work that has been identified in collaboration with a Presbytery or congregation. Each worker would work within the Home Mission, while benefitting from the guidance of a supervising Minister under the oversight of a kirk session.

Each role will be joint-funded by the Council for Mission in Ireland and local funds for an initial 5-year period. The Salary Scale will be initially placed at Band B4 (£29,110 / €43,042), with moneys ring-fenced each year by CMI to part-fund up to 3 posts at any one time. CMI is prepared to fully fund the initial 2 years, if necessary, with decreasing amounts anticipated to be required in Years 3–5 as local funds grow.

Beyond the initial 5 years, additional support could be sought through a CMI Mission Grant to supplement any finance within a developing church plant. Consideration may also need to be given to an allowance for housing in some cases should the pioneer work require relocation for a worker.

STAGE 6: Ongoing Support

Each Mission Pioneer will also be offered additional accompaniment and support through the Council for Mission in Ireland, such as:

- **Church Planters Network:** A network of accompaniment for those currently and actively involved in leading PCI church planting congregations and initiatives. It offers pastoral accompaniment and strategic input through peer learning and training input.
- **Coaching or Mentoring:** Experienced and wise mentors who can offer support, guidance and prayer support will be assigned to each worker.

JUDICIAL COMMISSION

Convener: Rev NORMAN CAMERON

Secretary: CLERK OF ASSEMBLY

**(Paragraph 1 of the Report to be taken in private,
at 10am on Saturday morning)**

1. Since the last meeting of the General Assembly, in June 2022, the Judicial Commission has had no appeals or references before it. Therefore, for the first time in a number of years, the Commission did not have to meet to deal with these matters.

CODE REPUBLISHING

**(Remainder of Report to be taken in public,
at 4.15pm on Friday afternoon)**

2. Since the last meeting of the General Assembly, in June 2022, the Judicial Commission has held two special meetings, on Tuesday 8 November 2022 and Wednesday 15 March 2023, to deal with the ongoing work of Code republishing, with a small amount of routine business also being conducted. A detailed report of these two special meetings follows.
3. At a **Special Meeting of the Commission held on Tuesday 8 November**, when all members of the Commission's Code Republishing Panel were in attendance, the Commission had before it for consideration the Draft Republished Code which had been sent down to Presbyteries for discussion and comment in the autumn period. The Commission took significant time to work through the draft, giving comments and recommendations to the Code Republishing Panel, which it was asked to take on board, along with the comments that would be forthcoming from Presbyteries. The Commission also considered some initial matters raised by a few Presbyteries and gave guidance to the Panel.
4. At a **Special Meeting of the Commission held on Wednesday 15 March 2023**, when members of the Commission's Code Republishing Panel were in attendance, the Commission received a detailed update report from the Panel (see Appendix 1). The Judicial Commission recognises that this is but a summary of a huge amount of work, involving numerous meetings and discussions, carried out by the Code Republishing Panel. While realising that there are still issues to be resolved, and a significant piece of work still to be completed, the Commission would express its thanks, and no doubt that of the whole Church to each active member of the Panel and especially its Convener, the Rev Dr Donald Watts, the joint Secretaries, the Rev Jim

Stothers and the Rev Dr David Allen and the General Assembly Solicitor, Mr Stephen Gowdy.

From the report of the Code Republishing Panel in Appendix 1, the Commission would draw the attention of the General Assembly to the following points:

- (a) The Judicial Commission noted the progress that had been made by the Panel since its last meeting with the Commission (Appendix 1, pars 1–3), and also noted the recommendation regarding ‘The Way Forward’ (Appendix 1, pars 4(a)–(g)). Following discussion, the Commission agreed to support the revised timetable and to request the General Council to adopt it, on behalf of the General Assembly, using delegated authority under Code Par 272(3).

Note: this revised timetable was subsequently agreed by the General Council (at its meeting on 22 March 2023) on behalf of the General Assembly, using delegated authority under Code Par 272(3).

- (b) The Judicial Commission noted with appreciation the work of the Panel in drawing up the two schedules, one of Regulations and the other of Guidelines, relating to Regulations or Guidelines referred to in the revised Code (See Appendix 1A). Subject to the decision of the General Council regarding adopting the new timetable, these would be circulated to Presbyteries, along with the Second Draft of the Republished Code, no later than 31 August 2023.

Draft sections of the republished Code will be included in Supplementary Reports relating to ‘Duties in respect of provisions of the Code, Regulations, Guidelines and Guidance’.

Note: The General Council (at its meeting on 22 March 2023) considered the best way forward to deal with the numerous ‘guidelines/guidance’ (that are not currently referred to directly in the Republished Code) but have been approved by the General Assembly over the last years and decades. The Council agreed that the following two resolutions be transmitted to the General Assembly for decision:

- *That a new ‘Guidelines Review Task Group’ be appointed to examine all existing General Assembly ‘guidelines/guidance’ (that are not currently referred to directly in the Republished Code) and report at the latest to the 2025 General Assembly as to whether each of these continue to be required (perhaps in an updated form) and if so whether they should be categorised as ‘regulations’, ‘guidelines’ or ‘guidance’, in line with the categories agreed by the 2021 General Assembly.*

- *That the membership of the 'Guidelines Review Task Group' be as follows: General Council Convener (Convener), Clerk of Assembly, Deputy Clerk (Joint Secretary), Rev Jim Stothers (Joint Secretary), Mrs Avril Heenan and Rev Jonathan Boyd.*
 - *With power to consult relevant officers of Councils and/or the Assembly as and when appropriate.*
- (a) The Judicial Commission noted the decisions which had already been taken by the General Assembly from 2019 onwards with regard to the republishing of the Code (Appendix 1, pars 6–10) and draws these to the attention of both Presbyteries and the General Assembly.
- (b) The Commission also noted the Panel's engaged response to the various comments coming forward from Presbyteries (Appendix 1, pars 11–12), and would express thanks to the ministers and elders in the Presbyteries of the Church who have been involved in this significant consultation exercise.
5. The Code Republishing Panel referred a number of matters to the Judicial Commission for guidance (Appendix 1, pars 13–16) and the Judicial Commission responded as follows:
- (a) Regarding the Draft Republished Code Par 17.4 (Appendix 1, par 13), the Commission recommended that the wording drafted by the Code Republishing Panel be adopted, namely:
- “Any person who at any time qualified as a barrister or solicitor shall not be permitted -----”
- (b) Regarding the Draft Republished Code Par 15 (Appendix 1, par 14), the Commission recommended that the wording drafted by the Code Republishing Panel be adopted, namely:
- “It is no requirement of the communion service that there be an elder to distribute the elements.”
- (c) Regarding the Draft Republished Code Par 266.1 (Appendix 1, par 15), the Commission recommended that the wording drafted by the Code Republishing Panel be adopted, namely:
- “266.1 The minister chairing the meeting shall invite the qualified voters to propose and second as follows:
266.1.1 where the congregation has heard the List for Hearing directly, one or more ministers whose names are on the List for Hearing; or
266.1.2 where the congregation has heard through a Hearing Committee, the Sole Nominee, and that person only.”
- These three matters are being brought to the General Assembly for decision and appropriate resolutions are appended.

6. The Judicial Commission also noted the matter that the Code Republishing Panel had referred to the General Council, see Appendix 1B.

Note: The General Council (at its meeting on 22 March 2023) having considered the letter from the Code Republishing Panel, agreed that the following resolution be transmitted to the General Assembly for decision:

That in the Republished Code the distinction between resigning from the duties and the office of the eldership be removed.

APPENDIX 1

CODE REPUBLISHING PANEL REPORT TO JUDICIAL COMMISSION: 15 MARCH, 2023.

Progress since last meeting with the Judicial Commission

1. The Code Republishing Panel of the Judicial Commission has again been meeting weekly since the beginning of January. This has been mainly to deal with two outstanding matters – (a) to finalise the schedules of regulations and guidelines to be published with the draft Code; (b) to consider the responses to the first draft which had been sent to Presbyteries in August.
2. After the last meeting of the panel with the Judicial Commission on 8 November, 2022, the panel met to consider the outcome of that discussion and some responses already received from Presbyteries. It was clear that there was some misunderstanding as to what was expected of Presbyteries, so the Panel offered to arrange two meetings, one in Magherafelt and the other in Banbridge, to which anyone, especially those spearheading the work within their Presbytery, was invited to attend. These took place on 22 and 29 November. Most Presbyteries were represented and many expressed appreciation of these meetings, although it was reported to one Presbytery that the meetings “did not allay our concerns they aggravated them”!
3. The panel also recommended to the General Council that, in view of the difficulties being experienced by some Presbyteries, the final date for receiving responses be extended to 8 February, 2023. This was agreed by the General Council and the decision conveyed to Clerks of Presbytery by the Clerk of Assembly. In fact many Presbyteries did respond by the beginning of the year and all Presbyteries had submitted comments by early February, although a few still refer to “interim” comments. This has enabled the panel to look in detail at the earlier submissions and to read through the later, often more lengthy, responses in order to gain a sense of the important issues which arise in them. All the responses will of course be read in detail before a report is submitted to the General Assembly. It had become clear to the panel that to fully respect the length and

complexity of some of these responses, the second draft of the Code could not realistically be finalised before May. At its meeting on 14 February, the panel therefore decided to submit the following recommendation to the Judicial Commission as the way forward:

The Way Forward

4. Having considered the responses of Presbyteries, and following detailed discussion, it was agreed that the panel would recommend to the Judicial Commission that the following revised timetable be agreed and that the General Council be asked to adopt it, on behalf of the General Assembly, using delegated authority under Code Par 272(3):
 - (a) That a final draft of the Republished Code should not be brought to the 2023 General Assembly.
 - (b) That the Code Republishing Panel be instructed to report on progress to the 2023 General Assembly, bringing to it, for decision, any significant outstanding issues that require clarification.
 - (c) That the Code Republishing Panel be instructed to finalise a Second Draft of the Republished Code as soon as practicable following the 2023 General Assembly.
 - (d) That the Second Draft of the Republished Code (with tracked changes from the first draft) be sent to Presbyteries (by no later than 31 August 2023 – this will be in electronic form, with ten printed copies also provided), with Presbyteries instructed to focus on substantive issues and to return any further necessary comments to the Code Republishing Panel by 15 November 2023.
 - (e) That the Code Republishing Panel, having considered and taken account of any relevant comments from Presbyteries, be instructed to table a Final Draft of the Republished Code to the Judicial Commission for consideration, prior to transmission to the 2024 General Assembly.
 - (f) That, following discussion and amendment as necessary, the 2024 General Assembly send the Republished Code down to Presbyteries for consideration under the Barrier Act.
 - (g) That, dependent on the outcome of the Barrier Act process, the 2025 General Assembly adopt the Final Republished Code, which would come into effect on 1 January 2026.

Schedules of Regulations and Guidelines

5. Two schedules, one of Regulations and the other of Guidelines, have now been prepared. These relate to Regulations or Guidelines referred to in the revised Code (See Appendix 1A). Most of these already exist or are taken out of the present Code. The Commission may wish to note that in the Regulations relating to Presbytery services, the recommendation is that in all cases Presbytery is constituted prior to the service. Members of the

Commission may be aware that the General Council is appointing another panel to consider the many other documents which the General Assembly has approved in some form, but that is not within the scope of this panel's work.

Decisions Already Taken by the General Assembly

6. In order to recognise the “significant outstanding issues that require clarification” (b), the panel would first remind the Judicial Commission of decisions already taken by the General Assembly. It is clear from the responses of some Presbyteries that these have not always been recognised.
7. **In 2019**, the panel reported to the Assembly that in order to fulfil its remit there should no longer be a section on the Basic Code and then Rules, but one unified document. This is why PC Par 24 on rules does not appear in the revised Code.
8. The panel also sought the guidance of the Assembly on the need for a provision to co-opt ruling elders and ministers to a Kirk Session. The Assembly agreed that co-option is not necessary. (Annual Reports, 2019, pp.315–318; Minutes, 2019, p.69)
9. **In 2021**, as a recommendation of the General Council's Decision Making and Dissent Task Group, the panel was “instructed to insert into the Code appropriate definitions outlining three different types of General Assembly decision” (Assembly Reports, 2021, pp.123, 307; Minutes, 2021, p.37). The three types of decision are Regulations, which must be followed; Guidelines, which are to be observed unless there are exceptional reasons not to; and Guidance, which is offered as advice. This has been done, see RC Par 344, and reported in the Annual Reports, 2022, pp.193-194; Minutes, 2022, p.35.
10. **At the 2022** Assembly it was also agreed that the panel should present a new set of less confrontational procedures to be used in inquiries and discipline. (Annual Reports, 2022, pp.194, 266; Minutes, 2022, p.35)

Presbytery Consultations

11. The responses by Presbyteries following the invitation issued by the last Assembly to discuss and comment on the draft revised Code has been very helpful to the panel. Sometimes Presbyteries have picked up on things inadvertently omitted in the drafting, which have now been restored. On other occasions the panel has been prompted to look more closely at some wording, to ensure that the meaning is clear and consistent with the present Code and practice. In some cases Presbyteries have effectively proof read the text and that will be useful when the panel approaches the final stages of publication. It must also be recognised, however, that some changes suggested by Presbyteries would either add to the present Code or significantly change its meaning. They have not been adopted. Other suggestions are really a matter of personal preference in relation to grammar and mode of expression. While they will be looked at by the panel they will not necessarily be adopted.

12. The responses which have been read in detail to date have raised some important issues which the panel will need to report to the General Assembly for their consideration. The guidance of the Judicial Commission would, however, be appreciated at this stage. There may, of course, be other concerns which arise for the panel as the work progresses and where necessary these too will be referred to the Commission. The panel is, of course, also aware that members of the Commission are likely to have issues they wish to raise.

Issues on which the panel would value guidance

Chapter 1

13. **RC Par 17.4. “Any person who at any time qualified as a barrister or solicitor shall not be permitted ...”** This comes from PC Pars 19(5); 340(1). The phrase “at any time” was added to clarify current practice in the Judicial Commission and other Church courts. Several Presbyteries are concerned that someone with a legal background is excluded, even though they have not practised law for many years. This was however tested at the General Assembly some years ago.

Chapter 2

14. **RC Par 51. “It is no requirement of the communion service that there be an elder to distribute the elements.”** This sentence appears in the present Code, PC Par 40(5)(b), but in a sub-paragraph referring to communion at home. In the new Code it is a more general statement but in the view of the panel it is an important clarification.

Chapter 5

15. **RC Par 266.1 (NOTE NEW WORDING).** “The minister chairing the meeting shall invite the qualified voters to propose and second as follows:
- 266.1.1 where the congregation has heard the List for Hearing directly, one or more ministers whose names are on the List for Hearing; or
- 266.1.2 where the congregation has heard through a Hearing Committee, the Sole Nominee, and that person only.”
- This involves a significant change as, at present, anyone on the kirk session’s list for hearing may be proposed. To the panel it does, however, seem logical that when the Hearing Committee has narrowed the field to one candidate, a decision should be made on that candidate alone. The present Code allows the congregation to propose and second at the Election Meeting any person who was on the List notwithstanding that the Hearing Committee only brought one name to the congregation. However, under Linkage Commission

Guidelines, the names of the other candidates on the List can only be announced to the congregation at the Election Meeting, and that is clearly insufficient time to allow the members of the congregation to give proper consideration as to whether they wish to propose and second another name on the List. An alternative is to review the Linkage guidelines to allow earlier disclosure of the names of the candidates on the list.

For the information of the Judicial Commission

16. **RC Pars 33-35.** This section on the temporary or permanent cessation of a ruling elder's membership of Kirk Session understandably raised for some Presbyteries the question as to why there should be a distinction between resignation from the duties of the eldership and the office of the eldership. The panel appreciates the point raised but considers any change to be beyond its remit, so has asked the General Council to give this further consideration. (See Appendix 1B)

DONALD J. WATTS, Convener

March, 2023

APPENDIX 1A

SCHEDULES OF REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES

Schedule 1 – List of Regulations

(The only regulations currently listed are those directly referred to in the Revised Code)

Paragraph	Item
Definitions	Regulations for Part-Time Ministry Scheme
43.14	Regulations for the disqualification of an Elder from acting as a Charity Trustee
43.25	Regulations for prohibited activities in Church Buildings
80.2	Regulations for transfer of congregational property
126.1, 407.1	Regulations for the Training of a Minister
131, 132	Regulations for Authorised Vows Taken on Admission to Communicant Membership and a Baptism
168.2, 184.3, 191.3, 283, 287, 291, 297, 301	Regulations for Presbytery Services Global mission worker commissioning service Deaconess commissioning service Auxiliary minister commissioning service Ordination etc. of ministers Licensing Ordination etc. of ruling elders
230.3	Regulations for Presbytery Returns to the General Assembly
313.2, 401.6	Regulations for appointment of Clerk of Assembly and other GA Appointments
354.1 and 400	Regulations for Membership of Councils and Committees including Nominations Committee
423	Regulations for Constitution of PW
467	Regulations for Council for Training in Ministry Review Procedures

Schedule 2 – List of Guidelines

(The only guidelines currently listed are those directly referred to in the Revised Code)

Paragraph	Item
27.1 and 30.1	Guidelines for presbyteries for approving Elders-Elect
164	Guidelines for Prolonged Disability Fund Rules
192.1, 192.2, 194.1	Guidelines for Auxiliary Ministry – Congregational and Missional
313.1	Guidelines for appointment of Moderator of General Assembly
396	Guidelines for additional paid employment or appointment for ministers

APPENDIX 1B**LETTER TO GENERAL COUNCIL**

Dear Noble,

As you may remember the General Assembly in 2019 agreed that the republished Code did not need to provide for the co-option to Kirk Sessions of ministers or elders. Following on from that the panel did not include the need for Presbytery Clerks to keep for three years a list of “elders without charge”, as it doesn’t seem to have any purpose. While Presbyteries seem generally happy with that, the question has been asked as to why a distinction continues to be made between resigning “the duties of the eldership in a congregation” and “the office of the eldership in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland”. The panel feels that it would be beyond its remit to leave either possibility out, but recognises the validity of the question. Therefore, it was decided to refer the matter to the General Council for further consideration.

I am attaching the most up-to-date version of the proposed revised Code as there are some amendments to the one you will have seen. The significant one is the addition of Par 35.4 to reaffirm that when an elder resigns “the duties” he/she is deemed to have resigned “the office” after three years. While that can be done without the administrative burden of a formal list, the panel recognises the importance of it being done. Otherwise someone, years after they resign from any active role in the Church, can still claim to hold the office of elder in PCI. While it is unlikely, that could result in considerable reputational damage to the Church.

While that has been dealt with, the wider question still remains. Is it really necessary for someone to be allowed to resign the duties in the congregation, especially when the status is, as in the present Code, a temporary one for three years? More recent changes to the Code which allow for “elder emeritus” status, under certain conditions, and for “temporary release” from the duties of the eldership may also be relevant to the discussion.

The panel is not expecting a reply in time to make changes to the next draft of its work, which is being prepared for the upcoming Assembly, but does feel that this is worthy of consideration.

Yours as always,

Donald

TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT CESSATION OF A RULING ELDER'S MEMBERSHIP OF KIRK SESSION

Temporary release from the duties of the Eldership

32. A ruling elder may ask the Kirk Session to be released from the duties of the eldership in a congregation for a specified time, and the Kirk Session may grant that request. A ruling elder thus released may not attend, speak or exercise a vote in the Kirk Session until that elder resumes the duties of the eldership in the congregation.
- 32.1 When a Kirk Session releases a ruling elder it shall take immediate steps to remove the name of that elder as a charity trustee of the congregation and, should that elder resume the duties of the eldership, take steps to include the name of that elder as a charity trustee.

Suspension or Removal from the Duties and/or Office of the Eldership

33. Any formal complaint made against a ruling elder shall be referred to and dealt with by the Presbytery which shall consider the matter and take such steps as to it seem appropriate.
- 33.1 A ruling elder, against whom a complaint is being investigated by Presbytery, may be temporarily suspended from the duties of the eldership and, if so suspended, shall not act during that investigation.
- 33.2 If as a result of an investigation, a ruling elder is permanently removed from the office of the eldership or is excluded from Church privileges, he or she shall cease to be a ruling elder of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
- 33.3 Where an elder is permanently or temporarily removed or suspended from the office of the eldership, the Kirk Session shall take immediate steps to remove the name of that elder as a charity trustee of the congregation; but if an elder, who is temporarily removed resumes the duties of the eldership, the Kirk Session shall take steps to include the name of that elder as a charity trustee.

Retirement

34. A ruling elder may request to retire from the duties of the eldership on attaining the age of 65, or due to special circumstance. In such event Presbytery may, in consultation with the Kirk Session of the congregation, grant the request and if the elder so wishes, deem the elder to be an 'elder-emeritus' of the congregation.
- 34.1 A ruling elder who wishes to retire shall request to do so in writing to the Clerk of Kirk Session who shall transmit such request to the Clerk of Presbytery for decision.
- 34.2 An elder emeritus of a congregation retains that status only so long as he or she remains a member in good standing of that congregation.

- 34.3 An elder emeritus may, with the consent of the Presbytery, resign from the office of the eldership in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
- 34.4 When any elder has been permitted to retire, the Kirk Session shall take immediate steps to remove that person's name as a charity trustee of the congregation.

Resignation

- 35. A ruling elder may, with the consent of the Presbytery, resign the duties of the eldership in a congregation or the office of the eldership in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
 - 35.1 A ruling elder who wishes to resign either the duties or the office, shall request to do so in writing to the Clerk of Kirk Session who shall transmit such request to the Clerk of Presbytery for decision.
 - 35.2 Where a ruling elder has received a disjunction certificate, the Clerk of Session of the issuing congregation shall report this to the local Clerk of Presbytery and that elder shall be deemed to have resigned from the duties of the eldership in that congregation.
 - 35.3 The Kirk Session shall take immediate steps to remove the name of an elder as a charity trustee of the congregation whose resignation has been accepted by Presbytery.
 - 35.4 An elder who has resigned from the duties of the eldership shall be deemed after three years to have resigned from the office of the eldership in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, unless otherwise resolved by Presbytery.

SPECIAL JUDICIAL COMMISSION

Convener: Rev N.A.L. CAMERON

Secretary: THE CLERK

It was not necessary for the Special Judicial Commission to meet

COMMISSION ON APPLICATIONS

Convener: THE CLERK

It was not necessary for the Commission on Applications to meet.

THE TRUSTEES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND

Chairman: Rev Dr D. WATTS

Secretary: Mr CLIVE KNOX

1. The following is an extract from the Minutes of the proceedings of the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, at their Annual General Meeting held on 25 April 2023.
2. In accordance with the Trustees' Bye-Laws it was moved by Mr R. Tweed, seconded by Mr A. McAdam, and agreed that Rev Dr D. Watts be appointed Chairman until the 2024 Annual General Meeting of the Trustees.
3. The Statements of Account of the following for the year ended 31 December 2022 having been approved were laid before the Trustees:
 - The General Investment Fund
 - The Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland
(Incorporating The Commutation Fund, The Non-Participating Trusts Fund, The Magee Fund, The Tops Wilson Trust Fund, The Fire Insurance Trust Fund, The Fortune Mission Bequest, The Lindsay Memorial Fund, The McClure Trust Fund, The Local Bible Fund, The John Getty Will Trust and various other Trust Funds).
4. Moved by Mr N. Bennett, seconded by Mr J. Mason and unanimously agreed that the Report and the Statements of Account in accordance with the Trustees' Bye-Laws be lodged with the Clerk of Assembly to be laid before the General Assembly in June 2023.

Trust Funds

5. A summary account of the various Trust Funds the Trustees manage is included in the Book of Accounts 2022. The following Trust Funds are distributed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Trustees. As in 2022, the Trustees have agreed to recommend to the 2023 General Assembly that, where the terms of Trust permit, these should be distributed via the United Appeal rather than directly to various agencies.

Mrs A.M. Davidson Trust: The total income for 2022 available for distribution is £6,882.30. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

United Appeal

£6,882.30

Sir Wm. V. McCleery Estate: The total income for 2022 available for distribution is £35,932.68. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

Central Ministry Fund	80%
Retired Ministers' Fund	10%
Widows of Ministers' Fund	10%

Estate of Miss Irene Scott: The total income for 2022 available for distribution is £7,444.98. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

United Appeal	£7,444.98
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Estate of Miss Ida Mary McGeown: The total income for 2022 available for distribution is £4,777.92. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

United Appeal	£4,777.92
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Estate of Mr Victor Morrow: The total income for 2022 available for distribution is £1,557.36. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

United Appeal	£1,557.36
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John Getty Will Trust

6. In accordance with the scheme approved by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland dated 19 March 2021, the allocation of grants out of the income of the Trust for the year ending 31 December, 2022 was as follows:

Global Missions	30%	£3,250
1996 Review Fund	10%	£1,000
Mission in Ireland	30%	£3,250
Belfast City Mission	30%	£3,250
TOTAL	100%	£10,750

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH INVESTMENT FUND (commonly known as The General Investment Fund)

7. The General Investment Fund was originally established under the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 1964. It is a Common Investment Fund in which any charity connected with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland can invest.

8. Investments in the Fund or shareholdings tend to arise from trust funds, bequests or donations which often have particular terms or restrictions attached regarding the application of the capital and income.
9. Further details about the General Investment Fund, the investment performance and investment holdings, are available in a booklet available from the Financial Secretary's Department.
10. The Trustees have prepared the accounts of the General Investment Fund for the year ended 31 December 2022 in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice: Financial Statement of Authorised Funds (May 2014) as amended in June 2017. These are included in the Book of Accounts presented to the General Assembly. These accounts provide detailed information regarding the Fund and in particular its performance, investment allocation, level of income and distributions during the year.

11. Declaration of Dividend	30.03.22	30.09.22
Number of shares qualifying	6,144,705	6,161,850
Income from investment for distribution and Tax recoverable less Administrative Charge and Investment Advisers' Fees	£574,551	£1,085,379
Dividend per share	10.00p	17.0p
12. During 2022, £4,056 was transferred from the Dividend Equalisation Reserve, which is in accordance with the Scheme Rules, and the balance on the Reserve at 31 December, 2022 is £731,260.		
13. The combined annual Dividend of 27.00p per share for 2022 is to be compared with 26.00p for 2021, 23.00p for 2020, 27.50p for 2019, 27.00p for 2018, 27.00p for 2017, 26.00p for 2016, 26.00p for 2015, 26.00p for 2014, 26.00p for 2013, 26.00p for 2012.		
Valuation	31.03.23	31.03.22
	£	£
Valuation of Investments	76,492,252	78,866,429
Cash Balance / on Deposit	(683,610)	(292,292)
Dividend Equalisation Reserve	731,260	735,316
	<u>£76,539,902</u>	<u>£79,309,453</u>
No of Shares Issued	6,132,354	6,164,502
Share Value	£12.4813	£12.8655

The shares in the Fund have from 28 February 2017 been valued on a monthly basis and the monthly share prices are included in the audited accounts. The share value at the end of the last financial year, 31 December 2022 was £12.2209 per share (2021, £13.3155).

14. The Trustees meet with Investment Managers, Newton Investment Management Limited, three times a year to review investment performance. During 2022, there was a negative return of 5.50% compared to a benchmark negative return of 6.40%. Newton

Investment Management Limited was appointed Investment Adviser to the Trustees' Funds in June 2006 and from then to 31 December 2022, the General Investment Fund has returned 6.90% per annum compared to the benchmark of 6.0%.

Registration with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland

15. As reported last year to the General Assembly in March 2022, the Trustees were invited by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland to apply to have the Presbyterian Church Investment Fund (also known as the General Investment Fund) registered as a charity in Northern Ireland. The application was submitted on 28 March 2022 and the Trustees still await the Commission's decision.

Trustees' Discretionary Fund

16. On occasions the Trustees are notified of bequests where the terms may state they are for the "benefit of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland" or the "Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland".

In accordance with advice received from the General Assembly Solicitor and as previously reported to the General Assembly the Trustees "*take instructions from the General Council (or the General Council Standing Committee), or from the General Assembly (or its duly authorised Commissions), regarding allocations from the Trustees' Discretionary Fund.*"

No bequests were received in 2022. During 2022 the following grants were paid:

- £30,000 to Union Theological College as part of agreed transitional funding arrangements
- £21,518 in respect of the Limerick manse
- £94,019 to Union Theological to assist with the installation of a door access system

Crescent Church Loan Fund

17. The Crescent Loan Fund was established following the sale of the Crescent Church premises in 1975 and provides low interest loans to congregations having short term financial problems.

The interest charged on new loans is at half the total of bank base rate plus 2%, presently 3.125%, and this is charged on the average balance outstanding over the term of the loan.

The maximum loan normally provided by the Fund is £50,000 and this has to be repaid normally within 3 years, although loans over 5 years can be provided in certain circumstances. Further information about loans from the Fund is available from the Financial Secretary's Department.

During 2022 the Trustees provided a loan of £30,000 to one congregation and the loans outstanding at 31 December 2022 were £172,369. At that time the fund had £213,625 available to meet loan request.

Bequests

18. The Trustees received a report of all bequests notified to the Church during 2022 and wish to record their deep gratitude for those who have decided to support the Church in this way.

Investment Manager to the General investment Fund

19. Newton Investment Managers were originally appointed investment managers to the General Investment Fund in 2006 and, as reported elsewhere in this report, the Fund has shown above benchmark performance since then. The Trustees assessment is that that Newton have provided a high quality service.
20. However, as reported to last year's General Assembly, the Trustees appointed "bfinace", a London based consultancy firm to assist with a tendering process to review the appointment of an investment manager. That process concluded with the formal appointment of CCLA Investment Management Limited in February 2023 and with the transfer taking place at the beginning of April 2023.
21. During this process the Trustees were saddened to learn of the unexpected death of Mr Oliver Larminie, Newton Investment Manager, who had been the Trustees' main point of contact and who attended the regular performance review meeting. The Trustees have expressed their sympathy to his wife and colleagues at Newton.
22. As part of CCLA's appointment, the Trustees have confirmed their investment policy and associated investment restrictions. In summary CCLA will not directly invest in companies:
 - Deriving more than 10% of their revenue from the extraction of oil and gas (this is defined as revenue derived from oil and gas extraction and production and oil and gas refining); derives more than 5% of their revenue from the extraction of energy coal or tar sands; companies whose principal business is the generation of electricity, that have not demonstrated the ability to align their business with the Paris Climate Change Agreement; extractives or utilities sector companies where productive engagement is not believed to be possible.
 - Producing landmines, cluster bombs, chemical biological weapons, and /or nuclear weapons
 - Having significant involvement (>10% of revenue) in alcohol, gambling, pornography, tobacco, high interest lending, non-military weapons, or strategic military sales.

The Trustees consider that this not only reflects resolutions previously approved by the General Assembly, but is also consistent with a socially responsible investment policy.

The Rev John Forsythe Endowment

23. As part of the winding up of the Presbyterian Widows' Fund Association, the John Forsythe Endowment has been transferred to the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland under a scheme approved by the Department for Communities. Under the Scheme the assets of the Fund transfer to the Trustees with the income to be used for the benefit of the "wives and children of ministers and deceased ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who are physically disabled or in chronic ill health".

Trustees

24. At the 2023 General Assembly Mrs M. Guiler and Mr N. Bennett will have completed their second terms as Trustees having been appointed in 2012. The Trustees wish to record their deep appreciation to both for their committed service and valuable contribution to the work of the Trustees.

The General Council previously decided that all nominees for appointment by the General Assembly should come to the Assembly through its Nominations Committee. With regard to the Trustees, the Nominations Committee are to take this forward by:

"...nominating Trustees to the General Assembly for appointment, following advice from the Clerk of Assembly and the Secretary of the Trustees."

Resolutions to appoint _____ and _____ are included in the Nominations Committee report.

COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY

Convener: Rev N.J. McCULLOUGH

Secretary: Rev Dr T.D. ALLEN

Convener's Introduction

1. The Council's work has continued through its committees and panels.
2. The current Principal of the College, Professor Gordon Campbell, is due to complete his term at the end of this year. As the appointment of a Principal is a General Assembly appointment, the General Council is bringing a nomination for a new Principal to this Assembly. Thanks are due to Professor Campbell for his service and leadership.
3. A significant number of Committee and Panel conveners have completed their term of service and are stepping back from their roles:
 - (a) Rev Albert Baxter has completed his term convening the Reception of Ministers and Licentiates Committee and the Nominations Committee is bringing a proposal that Rev Lachlan Webster become Convener after the Assembly.
 - (b) Rev Andrew Faulkner has completed his term convening the Ministerial Studies and Development Committee and the Nominations Committee is bringing a proposal that Rev Eddie Chestnutt become Convener after the Assembly.
 - (c) Mr Ossie McAuley has served on the Accredited Preacher and Auxiliary Ministry Panel since its inception and Rev Andrew Conway is taking over the convenership of that Panel from June 2023.
 - (d) Rev Robin Brown has completed his service in the Deaconess Training and Selection Panel and Rev Angus Stewart is taking over that role after the Assembly.
 - (e) Mrs Mary Potter completed her term convening the Conciliation Panel and we are very grateful that Rev Paul Jamieson has stepped into that role.
4. The Council is grateful for the leadership and service of all who have served in these roles and for those who will provide leadership going forward.
5. The Council deeply regrets the death of Rev Dr Paul Baillie who was a part of the Recognised Ministry Scheme, an adjunct lecturer in Union College and who served on both the Reception of Ministers and Licentiates Committee and the Accredited Preacher and Auxiliary Ministry Panel. We are deeply grateful for Paul's humble and willing service.

MINISTERIAL STUDIES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

6. Four students commenced ministerial training this autumn, giving a total of 23 students currently in training.

Applications for Ordained Ministry

7. Thirteen candidates for ordained ministry were interviewed by panels consisting of Eddie Chestnutt (Chairperson), Gareth McFadden (Chairperson), Alistair McNeely (Chairperson), Angus Stewart (Chairperson), Robin Aicken, Mary Alexander, Paula Burrows, Joe Campbell, David Clarke, Lorna Curry, Alan Dickey, Colin Dickson, Sam Finlay, Gary Glasgow, Mark Johnston, Trevor Long, Stephen McNie, Joanne Smith, Elizabeth Stewart, Deborah Webster.
8. Having completed this process, ten candidates are being nominated to the General Assembly to commence training for ordained ministry.
9. A review was carried out on the flexible pathway scheme, with the report in Appendix 2 below.
10. The committee continues to be thankful to God for the quality of candidates for ministry who are received each year. There is still a great need for local ministers and church leaders to encourage those with potential ministry gifts to explore the possibilities of applying for ordained ministry. This is consistently the most significant influence on the candidates who come forward.
11. The Assignments Panel does a critical work in carefully placing students in assistantship placements. This year the panel has been augmented by the addition of Revs Corrina Herron and Damien Boyle.
12. A Biblical language review has been undertaken by Faculty and a report was presented by Prof Campbell intended to consolidate the learning for students. Languages are now introduced separately rather than concurrently and intensives comprise one week at the start of the semester instead of two.

Routes to Ministry

13. As Union Theological College no longer teaches a Religious Studies 'A' Level, the committee explored alternative ways for applicants to gain access to non-academic award bearing ministerial training. After consultation with the Principal, it has been decided that the Flexible Pathway Panel should examine this on a case-by-case basis, with the emphasis being on the applicant demonstrating an appropriate level of competence.

Licentiates

14. Professor of Ministry, David Leach, is conducting, alongside the committee, a review of licentiate training. It is hoped that the good

work being done here can be built upon, and that a programme of continued training for licentiates prior to eligibility for call can be further developed.

15. Three licentiates become eligible in Autumn 2023.

Post-ordination Conferences

16. Gary Millar is the main speaker this year on the topic of preaching, with Zach Eswine returning for the 2024 event.

Pre-retirement Conferences

17. Two conferences are likely to be required each year for the next few years due to the increasing numbers of retiring ministers. This event is consistently appreciated by those who attend.

ANDREW FAULKNER, Convener

Students' Bursary Fund

Rev. Adrian Moffett, Students' Bursary Fund agent writes:

18. The Students' Bursary Fund exists to make financial provision for students for the ordained ministry during their time of study.
19. In the academic year beginning September 2022, 23 students are in receipt of grants, all of whom are studying at Union Theological College, Belfast. The cost to the fund of the grants, fees and other expenses for this academic year is in the region of £435,000.
20. The Students' Bursary Fund receives its income from offerings at services of licensing of probationers, of ordination and installation of ministers and other special services, and through personal and congregational donations, as well as congregational assessment. The support of the Church in these ways is gratefully acknowledged. Those who have responsibility for planning a service of licensing, ordination and installation, etc. are asked to ensure full use is made of the Students' Bursary Fund literature, especially the Gift Aid envelope. (Experience suggests that where literature is made available at an earlier time, such as on the Sunday before the special service, those attending are more likely to make use of the Gift Aid Scheme.) The literature is available from Assembly Buildings.

DEACONESS SELECTION AND TRAINING PANEL

21. Two student deaconesses continue to make good progress through the second year of their Deaconess Training Programme. Heather Healy is currently on placement in Dunmurry and Cathy Smith in Islandmagee. The feedback from their supervising ministers has been very positive.

22. Their time in college is also proving very profitable and thanks are expressed to Dr Olwyn Mark and Prof David Leach for their supervisory role.

ROBIN BROWN, Convener

UNION THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

23. The Management Committee wishes to put on record its thanks to all who have contributed to another successful year in the life and work of Union Theological College. It has been another busy year and we are especially indebted to the Academic and Administrative staff for their willingness to ensure that all is done decently and in order. The atmosphere throughout the College reflects good working relationships, which in turn makes for a pleasant place to work, study and visit.
24. The Gamble Library celebrated its 150th year anniversary at an event on 27 March 2023. The event highlighted the superb library facilities and the significant contribution made to theological learning over the years. The Librarian, Joy Conkey, and her staff continue to offer an outstanding service to the College and Church and we record our indebtedness to them.
25. The first year of the new BA in Theology, validated by St Mary's University, Twickenham, has been received very positively by students and while numbers were fewer than hoped for, applications have been received for 2023/2024. As the College does not have access to the UCAS system of application to undergraduate study, an outside agency has been engaged to help promote the degree. The agency will also help us to market the various other opportunities for study which are available.
26. The College Teaching and Learning Strategy 2020–25, includes as a core principle that “we will work in engaged partnership with students, external experts, collaborative partners and stakeholders”. To advance that principle, in addition to the partnership with the Kirby Lang Centre, similar partnerships have been formed with Crosslands and the Davenant Institute.
27. The work of the College continues to be kept under scrutiny through the Periodic Review and inspection by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. These are ongoing at the moment of writing.
28. Various protocols are now in place regarding Health and Safety, First Aid and College maintenance. A building condition survey is awaited.

Finance

29. The committee is appreciative of the transitional financial arrangements that have been in place to support Union as its relationship with Queen's University Belfast came to an end, to allow it to establish a viable financial model going forward - this has proved invaluable. These arrangements are due to end in September 2025.
30. It had been hoped that at that point, the College would return to a positive financial operation. However, it has recently become apparent that this is now very unlikely to be the case, due to a number of reasons:
- As a result of Covid, the BA degree, validated by St Mary's University, Twickenham, was delayed by one year, and growth in enrolment has been lower than anticipated
 - Salaries have increased more than was forecast
 - Support services charges have increased more than was forecast
 - Property maintenance and utilities have increased more than was forecast.
31. The committee is grateful to the General Council for the extension of the transitional support for a further three years, and is confident that this will allow the College to return to a positive operating position.

IVAN PATTERSON, Convener

RECEPTION OF MINISTERS AND LICENTIATES COMMITTEE

32. The Committee has met four times since the 2022 General Assembly.

Enquiries

33. Fourteen people (from eight countries) contacted the RMLC during the year seeking information about transferring to the ministry of PCI. The Committee has been speaking with seven enquirers who have followed up with a clear intention of desiring to pursue the matter – this includes one who has formally applied and who will be formally interviewed shortly.

Transferring Ministers

- (a) Rev Enrique Tagle Aguiar, an ordained minister in Havana Baptist Church, Cuba, having been granted eligibility for call on 1 April 2022, was installed as Minister of Mountpottinger Church on 4 September 2022.
- (b) Rev Trevor Kane, an ordained minister in the Free Church of Scotland, having been granted eligibility for call on 1 June 2022, was installed as Minister of Glenwherry Church on 21 October 2022.

- (c) Mr Mark Haugh, originally from Northern Ireland and theologically trained in the Presbyterian Church in America, is currently serving as Assistant to the Convener of Vinecash and has, on 1 February 2023, been granted eligibility to apply for a Call.
- (d) Rev Mariann Gilicze, an ordained minister in the Hungarian Reformed Church, serving as Assistant Minister in Gilnahirk since December 2020, is in process of completing her final review with the Committee.
- (e) Rev Elsy McCroskery, an ordained minister in the Protestant Evangelical Church of Timor, was received as a Transferring Minister on 18 January 2022, and commenced Assistantship in Windsor Church on 1 June 2022.
- (f) Dr Stephen Moore, Lecturer in Old Testament at Union College, has been accepted by the Committee as a Transferring Licentiate. Dr Moore grew up in PCI and has status equivalent to a licentiate in both the Church of England and the International Presbyterian Church. He is due to start an 18-month assistantship on 1 July 2023, in a congregation yet to be decided.

Requests for Permission to Preach in Vacancies

34. Rev Stephan van Os (Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand) having served also with PCI (1983 – 2014), on retirement from PCANZ requested permission to preach in PCI vacancies – this request accompanied by a letter of support from the Clerk of the Presbytery of Monaghan – and, having supplied all information required of him, was interviewed by RMLC on 1 February 2023 and granted permission to preach in vacancies in the Presbytery of Monaghan.

Review of Procedures for Transferring Ministers

35. A working group has been set up to review all procedures for prospective Transferring Ministers from the point of initial enquiry through to installation in a PCI congregation.

ALBERT BAXTER, Convener

Recognised Ministries

Rev Dr Ruth Patterson, Restoration Ministries, writes:

36. Restoration Ministries continues to work quietly in the background through Spiritual Direction, Faith and Friendship Groups and the facilitating of retreats throughout the island as well as local reflection days. As ever, prayer is the vital heartbeat of who we are and what we seek to do.

PASTORAL CARE OF MINISTERS AND THEIR FAMILIES PANEL

37. The Code of the Church recognises that while Presbytery is a ‘court’ of the church it is also a place of ‘fellowship’. Over the past year the panel has been exploring ways in which the Council for Training in Ministry can better encourage and resource each of the nineteen presbyteries as they seek to fulfil their role of providing pastoral care for the ministers within their fellowship, and their families.
38. Following on from the Refresh Initiatives of 2021 and 2022, the panel collaborated throughout the year with the Moderator, Rt Rev Dr John Kirkpatrick, to plan and host an event for Presbytery representatives in May 2023. This event, held in Assembly Buildings, offered an opportunity to share good practice, to learn from one another, and to listen to a keynote address given by the Moderator.

NIALL LOCKHART, Convener

ACCREDITED PREACHER AND AUXILIARY MINISTRY PANEL

Auxiliary Ministers Scheme

39. There are no plans for any further courses in the immediate future. This is due to the ongoing absence of AMS posts being created.

Accredited Preacher Scheme

40. 2022-23 Course: this has now finished with fifteen candidates having successfully completed the course. The Service of Accreditation will be held in First Antrim Presbyterian Church on 21 May 2023 at 6.30pm. Also, two trainee deaconesses attended the teaching element of the course in July 2022
41. 2023-24: No course will take place this year. This pause is to allow time to evaluate the course, including the number of active Accredited Preachers that are in existence, their spread around the Presbyteries and the regularity with which they are used in leading worship.

Handling the Word

42. This course is being reorganised and redeveloped under the new title of “Sharing God’s Word”. It particularly aims to help leaders prepare talks for youth fellowships, Bible classes, small groups etc.

OSSIE McAULEY, Convener

CONCILIATION PANEL

43. The Conciliation Service continues to provide opportunities for parties/individuals within the Presbyterian Church who find themselves in conflict to discover constructive, transformational and creative approaches to resolve disputes. The service is currently involved with cases within our denomination. The Conciliation Service exists to assist Presbyterians in dispute to find resolution, to work through issues and restore broken relationships. We acknowledge from Scripture that disputes and conflicts are part of our life in the Church, (Matthew 18:15–17, Acts 15:1–34). We also acknowledge believers have resources for handling conflict when it arises.
44. Most disagreements are resolved by people speaking directly to each other, however, on some occasions this simply does not work and it is necessary to use conciliation to help people work through issues. Conciliation provides opportunities to discover resolution, by facilitating difficult conversations. Issues can be discussed in a ‘safe space’ enabling parties to discover creative and transformational methods to deal with conflict, resolving disagreement and restoring relationships.
45. The Conciliation Service is also proactive in seeking to prevent conflict evolving and currently offers six information workshops/seminars:
 - Understanding Conflict and its Causes
 - Healthy Decision Making
 - Managing Change Effectively
 - Living with Difference
 - Skills for Handling Conflict
 - Facilitating Difficult Conversations
46. The uptake of these workshops/seminars is mainly by individual requests from kirk sessions or presbyteries who avail of these opportunities.
47. To ensure conciliators offer the best service possible, and the Conciliation Service remains current and transparent, we provide two training events for conciliators every year. The Conciliation Service continues to provide training for Licentiates, delivering practical conciliation training to develop awareness and understanding.
48. The Conciliation Panel would encourage you to use the Conciliation Service if there are conflicts or difficulties in relationships within your congregation. This confidential service can make a significance difference working with parties to resolve conflict. The Panel would encourage you to seek support at an early stage to prevent conflict escalating. May I take this opportunity to thank all current conciliators for their hard work and commitment to the service.

PAUL JAMIESON, Convener

APPENDIX 1**SCHEDULE OF STUDENTS**

ARDS	Francine Magill	Union
	Jack Neilly	Union
ARMAGH	Daniel Ballantyne	Union
	Jordan Jones	Union
	Scott McMenemy	Union
	Alex Richardson	Union
BALLYMENA	Matthew Houston	Union
NORTH BELFAST	Stephen Cairns	Union
	Samuel Scott	Union
EAST BELFAST	Andrew Ferguson	Union
CARRICKFERGUS	Stephen McCleery	Union
	Myles Tyrell	Union
COLERAINE & LIMAVADY	Jonathan Boyd	Union
DOWN	Ellis Hanna	Union
DROMORE	Tom Finnegan	Union
	Steven Woods	Union
DUBLIN & MUNSTER	Josh McCance	Union
IVEAGH	Stuart McKimm	Union
NEWRY	Matthew Banks	Union
	Ryan Higgins	Union
	John McKee	Union
OMAGH	Graeme Read	Union

APPENDIX 2

FLEXIBLE PATHWAY REVIEW

1. The Flexible Pathway Review Panel met three times – 23 September, 11 October 2022 and 22 February 2023 and consisted of Andrew Faulkner, Nigel McCullough, David Leach, David Allen, Joanne Smith and Rick Hill.
2. It was agreed that the training currently given to ministry students is excellent and the panel is keen to affirm the role of UTC and the highly qualified and committed faculty there. Anything that is proposed should only be seen as a way of extending the delivery of this training to people in different situations.
3. The need for flexibility in ministry training is in order to serve the purposes of the Church's mission, in light of: the current shortfall of ministers; the need to facilitate church planting or missional efforts on the ground; the fact that some applicants have considerable theological education and ministry and mission experience, and some are embedded in ministry and mission situations where it is important they remain.
4. Since the introduction of flexible pathways, the Flexible Pathway Panel has been able to deal with those who are accepted as ministry students having already attained theology qualifications and/or ministry experience in a way that seems to be helpful. Students have benefitted from exemptions due to prior learning and experience, and from opportunities to fulfil the Assembly's requirements through summative assessment, as well as through more traditional learning and assessment. This has provided opportunities to do further academic study, explore experience in other forms of ministry such as chaplaincy, have extended time in assistantship congregations, or have pathways of shorter duration. The Council is minded to continue with this, as it believes it brings benefits to students and the Church.
5. Greater clarity of thought is required in cases where applicants are already serving in roles that it may be beneficial for them to be ordained into. There is currently only one student in this position but a small number of others are anticipated. In principle, the Council is keen to allow such students to continue to serve in these roles alongside training for ministry. This requires individual pathways, and can be better facilitated through the recent introduction of remote learning. There are issues that the Council is addressing in these cases, none of which are insurmountable, to enable students to benefit as fully as possible from training. These include:
 - How can remote learning take place most effectively?
 - How can a peer group be established when a student is not full time at UTC?

- How can mentoring continue to take place within the ministry setting?
6. It is recommended:
 - (a) That the Flexible Pathway Scheme pilot be extended, to allow ministry students the opportunity to request a flexible training pathway, taking account of prior theological education and ministry and mission experience.
 - (b) That the Flexible Pathway Panel should consist of: Convener of MSDC (Convener), Prof of Ministry (Secretary), the chair of the interview panel that has an applicant requesting a flexible pathway, and two current supervising ministers.
 - (c) The following procedure should be used when a request for a flexible pathway is received:
 - (i) Faculty discusses each request, with the Prof of Ministry bringing a report to the Flexible Pathway Panel.
 - (ii) The panel brings a recommendation to the Ministerial Studies and Development Committee, which brings a recommendation to the Council.
 - (iii) The Council brings a recommendation in its report to the Assembly on the appropriate way forward.
 7. For students in the exceptional cases of possible remote learning, a local group of peers/mentors will be established to accompany them through their period of study. These students will also attend week-long intensive modules in UTC as part of their training.
 8. The panel also considered whether flexibility should be available to applicants with regard to current age requirements. However, as this lies outside of the remit of panel, this is perhaps something that could be looked at elsewhere.

OVERTURES

CURRENTLY ON THE BOOKS

GENERAL COUNCIL

Purpose – to give greater flexibility regarding the procedures for the commissioning of representative ruling elders to the General Assembly.

Anent Par 102(4) of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 102(4) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

That for all meetings of the General Assembly the commission of each representative ruling elder shall be lodged with the Clerk of Assembly.

COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS

Purpose – three overtures to update the Code in regard to changes previously agreed whereby the work of the ‘Re-marriage Panel’ has been reviewed and ongoing areas of responsibility now sit under the ‘Marriage Panel’.

Anent Par 85(5) of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 85(5) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

Where difficulty arises as to whether a marriage by the Church is advisable, the minister may consult with his Kirk Session or avail of the support offered by the Marriage Panel of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness before agreeing to celebrate the marriage.

Anent Par 85(6) of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 85(6) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

A minister should not join in marriage a member of the Church with one holding beliefs or having a Church membership incompatible with the Christian witness of the Protestant Reformation, until careful instruction has been given in the doctrines and obligations of our evangelical faith, and potential pastoral and practical considerations have been explored for which support is available from the Marriage Panel on request.

Anent Par 85(7) of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 85(7) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

While this Church does not prohibit the marriage of a divorced person or persons, it is strongly recommended that a minister does not join in marriage a person who has been divorced without having sought to explore potential pastoral and practical considerations for which support is available from the Marriage Panel on request. In the case of a divorced minister wishing to remain in office after re-marriage the approval of Presbytery shall be obtained.

LINKAGE COMMISSION

Purpose – to enable the terms ‘merge’ and ‘merger’ to be used by PCI in reference to what is currently referred to as ‘amalgamate’ and ‘amalgamation’. This will bring the language in the Code into line with the language in the civil sphere (e.g. of the Charity Commission) and greatly clarify and simplify the necessary legal steps. Provision is also being made (in the overture relating to Par 106) for a congregation to merge with either a Presbytery or with the General Assembly, which in certain rare cases would facilitate the legal transfer of assets.

Anent Par 35 of the Code

It is hereby overtured that in Par 35, a new sub-paragraph (i) be added in the following terms:

- (i) as charity trustees of the congregation, where applicable, execute the vesting declaration required by the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2006 to carry into effect a resolution of the General Assembly for the merger of the congregation with another congregation or charity.

Anent Par 57(3) of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 57(3) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

When deciding upon the terms of any merger or dissolution the Linkage Commission shall have power to recommend the future ownership or dispersal of property and assets belonging to both or either congregation and congregational trustees shall seek to carry out such recommendations given to them by the Commission.

Anent Par 106 of the Code

It is hereby overtured that in Par 106, a new sub-paragraph (i) be added in the following terms:

sanction the merger of a congregation with another congregation, [or with the Presbytery which has jurisdiction over the congregation, or with the General Assembly]

Anent Par 128(5)(a) of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 128(5)(a) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

...whether the case is one for continuance, linkage, merger, dissolution, porting or other special provisions as may be appropriate, including dissolution of existing linkages for alternative arrangements;

NEW OVERTURES

GENERAL COUNCIL

Purpose – to update the Code to reflect the decision of the 2022 General Assembly to transfer reporting responsibilities, in relation to ministers without charge and licentiates not in placements, from the Council for Training in Ministry to the General Council.

Anent Par 219(4)(b) of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 219(4)(b) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

The Presbytery shall seek authorisation annually through the General Council, or its appropriate committee, for those it wishes to retain on the Church's current records as recognised licentiates or ministers without charge. The Council shall consider such requests and ask the Assembly to resolve on recommendations;

Purpose – to update the Code to reflect the decision of the 2023 General Assembly, if agreed, that the mandatory maximum retirement age for ministers be five years beyond PCI's normal retirement age.

Anent Par 223(5) of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 223(5) be deleted and the following be substituted in its place:

In any event a minister shall retire not later than five years beyond PCI's normal retirement age.

Purpose – to update Par 72(i) of the Code to reflect the decision of the 2021 General Assembly requiring an 'opt-in' system rather than an 'opt-out' system in relation to the retention of Ministers Emeritus.

Anent Par 72(i) of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 72(i) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

- (i) annually review the position of each Minister Emeritus and following each review may release a retired minister from the responsibilities of full membership of Presbytery (and thereby also of the General Assembly), whom it shall then designate as Minister Emeritus (Released). A decision to so release is appropriate when:
 - i. a Minister Emeritus requests to be released;
 - ii. a Minister Emeritus fails to request to be retained;
 - iii. there is a lack of capacity to fulfil the responsibilities of membership of Presbytery; or
 - iv. there is a failure to attend Presbytery for a period of twelve months without appropriate reason.

COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY

Purpose – to update one further paragraph of the Code in line with the PTFI Supplemental Charter granted in 2021.

Anent Par 118(3) of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 118(3) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

“The Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland, established by Royal Charter, dated 25th October, 1881, and supplemented by its Supplemental Charter of 2021, shall consist of the Principal and other professors appointed by the Assembly, together with such other persons as may be appointed by the Assembly on the proposal of the Faculty, and is empowered by the said Charter to grant degrees.”

RESOLUTIONS

GENERAL COUNCIL

GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE (INITIAL REPORT)

10am Thursday morning

1. That the Draft Order of Business for the 2023 General Assembly be approved.
2. That the 'Guide to Assembly Procedure' (yellow pages) be approved with the appropriate General Assembly Standing Orders suspended when necessary to facilitate alternative presentations etc.
3. That a grant of £20,000 be made from the Incidental Fund to the Arrangements Panel of the General Assembly's Business Committee.
4. That the initial report of the General Assembly's Business Committee be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 1

Thursday morning

THE OPENING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE INSTALLATION OF INCOMING MODERATORS

5. That the new model for the opening of the General Assembly and the Installation of the Incoming Moderator (Option 3 in the report on pages 11–12) be adopted and implemented from the 2024 General Assembly onwards.

PRINCIPAL APPOINTMENT

6. That the Rev Prof Michael McClenahan be appointed as Principal of Union Theological College for a three-year term, commencing on 1 January 2024.
7. That Section 1 of the report of the General Council, with the exception of the Initial Report of the General Assembly Business Committee, be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 2

4.15pm Thursday afternoon

DOCTRINE COMMITTEE

8. That the General Assembly commend the Statement of Faith and Order to the whole Church.
9. That the General Assembly, in the post-pandemic context with its extension of congregational worship into the digital space, task the General Council with putting in place a process of discernment through Church-wide reflexion, in order to explore implications a) for ministry of Word and Sacrament and, b) for fellowship, discipleship and body life in the local Church.
10. That in light of the witness of Scripture and of our Reformed Standards, the General Assembly, through Presbyteries, encourage Kirk Sessions to consider more frequent provision for believers' growth in grace and faith, through spiritual nourishment by the Lord at Holy Communion.

DECISION MAKING AND DISSENT

11. That the General Assembly adopt the affirmations contained in paragraph 4 of the report of the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group (pp. 47–50) as the Church's position.
12. That Section 2 of the report of the General Council be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 3

10am Friday morning

MEMBERSHIP AND PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES TASK GROUP

13. That the General Assembly adopt the principles outlined in paragraph 6 (b) i–iii of the 2023 Report of the Membership and People with Intellectual Disabilities Task Group (pp. 58–59).
14. That the General Assembly, instruct the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, to produce appropriate resources for congregational leaders which will be tailored to the needs of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and will address the issues in the 2023 Report of the Membership and People with Intellectual Disabilities Task Group, including:
 - (a) guidance for congregational leaders to assist in their work of welcoming people with intellectual disabilities, and acting in support of their families.
 - (b) Vows/affirmations expressed in language and form appropriate for the situations outlined in paragraph 6(b) i–iii, for inclusion in the Book of Common Worship.

15. That Section 3 of the report of the General Council be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 4

10.30am Friday morning

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY REVIEW TASK GROUP

16. That the recommendations in paragraph 6 of the report of the Communications Strategy Review Task Group (pp. 66–67) be adopted.

PANDEMIC RESPONSE (THEOLOGICAL, MORAL AND SPIRITUAL) TASK GROUP

17. That the recommendations in paragraphs 48(a)–(g) of the report of the Pandemic Response (Theological, Moral and Spiritual) Task Group be adopted.
18. That Section 4 of the report of the General Council be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 5

8.15pm Friday evening

RECONFIGURATION OF MINISTRY TASK GROUP

19. That the Green Paper report of the Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group be sent for consultation with the Church, with Presbyteries following the procedure and time-line outlined in the accompanying note (see page 127).
20. That, following a period of consultation, the Task Group brings a final report to the 2024 General Assembly.
21. That Section 5 of the report of the General Council be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 6

11am Saturday morning

SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE

22. That for 2023, the Assessments Rates, along with the related allocation of funds, be as set out in Appendix 1 to the Report (pp. 154–155) and that the rate of assessment for the Pension Fund be set at 24% of stipend paid in the year.
23. That the 2023 budgeted expenditure for the Incidental Fund as set out in Appendix 3 be approved.

24. That the cost of the replacement of the lighting system in the Assembly Buildings be funded by adding the costs to the Church House Repair Assessment.
25. That authority be delegated to the General Council to enable it to approve the amended rules of the RMHF during the ensuing year on behalf of the General Assembly.
26. That under Par 223(3) of the Code, leave to retire pre-66 be given to:
 - Rev Patricia McBride (Scarva and Loughbrickland), on or after 30 September 2023
 - Rev B. Brown (Raphoe & Ballindrait), on or after 31 October 2023
 - Rev W.B. Boyd (Kells & Eskylane), on or after 1 February 2024
 - Rev K. Duddy (Woodvale), on or after 22 May 2024

UNITED APPEAL COMMITTEE

27. That the Appeal and Grants for 2024 be as set out in the report of the United Appeal for Mission Committee (p. 172).

INITIAL PCI PENSION SCHEME REVIEW PANEL

28. That the General Assembly agree to proceed to a full review of the PCI Pension Scheme (2009), including options for future pension arrangements, with a comprehensive report being presented to the General Council for transmission to the 2024 General Assembly with the cost of the review being a charge on the Incidental Fund.
29. That Section 6 of the report of the General Council be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 7

3pm Saturday afternoon

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

30. That the following resignations be accepted, and appointments made:
 - (a) The resignation of Rev A. Faulkner as Convener of the Ministerial Studies and Development Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev W.E. Chestnutt be appointed in his place.
 - (b) The resignation of Rev A.A.P. Baxter as Convener of the Reception of Ministers and Licentiates Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev L.W. Webster be appointed in his place.
 - (c) The resignation of Rev N.J. McCullough as Convener of the Council for Training in Ministry, that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev A. Faulkner be appointed in his place.
 - (d) The resignation of Rev T.C. Morrison as Convener of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev A.C. Rankin be appointed in his place.

- (e) The resignation of Rev N.J.E. Reid as Convener of the Older People's Services Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that Ms Joyce McKee, be appointed in his place.
 - (f) The resignation of Rev K.H. Hibbert as Convener of the Taking Care Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that Very Rev Dr T.N. Hamilton be appointed in his place.
 - (g) The resignation of Very Rev Dr J.N.I. McNeely as Convener of the General Council, that he be thanked for his services, and that Very Rev Dr D.J. Bruce be appointed in his place.
 - (h) The resignation of Dr A. Brown as Convener of the State Education Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that Ms Karen Jardine act in that role for one year.
 - (i) That Very Rev Dr F.P. Sellar be re-appointed as Convener of the Council for Mission in Ireland for one further year.
31. That Mr Stewart Wilson (Elder, Templepatrick) be, and is hereby nominated and appointed by the General Assembly as a Trustee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in room of Mr Norman Bennett, retired, and the appointment of Mr Stewart Wilson as a said Trustee due attestation is made by the signature of the Moderator of the General Assembly and the Clerk of the General Assembly in accordance with the provisions of the Irish Presbyterian Church Act, 1871.
32. That Mr Michael McKinstry (elder, First Donegore) be, and is hereby nominated and appointed by the General Assembly as a Trustee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in room of Mrs Marjorie Guiler, retired, and the appointment of Mr Michael McKinstry as a said Trustee due attestation is made by the signature of the Moderator of the General Assembly and the Clerk of the General Assembly in accordance with the provisions of the Irish Presbyterian Church Act, 1871.
33. That the nominations to the General Assembly Commissions, Councils and Committees (as tabled in the separate Nominations Booklet) be approved.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

34. That the recommendations in the report regarding ministers without charge and licentiates no longer serving in assistantships be approved (pp. 195–196).
35. That the report regarding ministers emeritus released be noted (pp. 197–198).
36. That the recommendations in the report of the General Assembly Advisory Committee (regarding the way forward in relation to Church Relations and Priorities, page 191) be approved.
37. That the recommendations of the General Assembly Advisory Committee relating to the Mandatory Retirement age of Ministers from their Charges, (page 191 par 6 and following), be approved.

38. That the recommendations of the General Assembly Advisory Committee relating to the Financial Implications of the Strategic Review of Communications (pp. 199–204) be approved.
39. That the General Council be authorised to take any necessary decisions relating to Youth Link NI, with full delegated authority of the General Assembly.
40. That Section 7 of the General Council Report be received.

PRESBYTERY REPORTS

Thursday morning

1. That the Reports of Presbyteries be received.

COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS

2pm Thursday afternoon

1. That the General Assembly commends Council for Social Witness managers and staff for their commitment to achieving excellence in care for residents, service users and relatives throughout the challenging 2022–23 year.
2. That the General Assembly welcome the commitment and work of the Council for Social Witness to place its finances on a long-term sound footing.
3. That the General Assembly welcome the planned work to update and develop safeguarding arrangements for the denomination.
4. That the General Assembly welcome the Council for Social Witness's work to ensure that the Christian ethos of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is evident in all its services and activities.
5. That the General Assembly agree that the current Taking Care Committee be reconstituted as the Taking Care Panel, under the Council for Social Witness.
6. That the report of the Council for Social Witness be received.

COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

2.45pm Thursday afternoon

1. That the General Assembly note the key themes emerging from the 'Gracious Gospel Confidence in a Changing Landscape' report, which encourages the Council for Public Affairs in its engagement with the political structures in Northern Ireland, and the Governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

2. That the General Assembly:
 - (a) call on the governing authorities in Northern Ireland to prioritise the most vulnerable in society in their budgetary decisions in the midst of the cost of living crisis;
 - (b) call on the Northern Ireland Executive departments to work collaboratively towards the development and implementation of effective anti-poverty measures which address the root of the problem rather than its symptoms;
 - (c) call on the Department for Communities to raise the Supporting People budget to ensure that effective housing support can be provided to some of the most vulnerable people living in Northern Ireland;
 - (d) commend the invaluable work of many congregations and faith-based organisations in seeking to address the implications of the cost of living crisis.

3. That the General Assembly:
 - (a) commend the ongoing dedication and commitment of those who serve on school boards of governors in Northern Ireland and boards of management in the Republic of Ireland, particularly where the timeframe for these responsibilities has been extended;
 - (b) encourage all Presbyterians to take an interest in the education of children and young people and prayerfully consider serving on boards of governors or boards of management, whether as transferor or church representatives, parent representatives, or by other means;
 - (c) recognise and commend the vital work carried out in Special Schools across the island of Ireland and encourage congregations to make real and meaningful links with such schools in their areas.

4. That the General Assembly express concern about the proposals contained in the Irish Government's 'General Scheme of the Health (Termination of Pregnancy (Safe Access Zones))' Bill which may create a precedent for the curtailing of free speech and the limitation of the expression of faith in public.

5. That the report of the Council for Public Affairs be received.

COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS

2pm Friday afternoon

1. That the report of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness be received.

COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION

2pm Friday afternoon

1. That the General Assembly commend the ‘Exploring Race and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Report’ (Appendix D) and encourage presbyteries to examine the report, considering its implications for congregations.
2. That the General Assembly receive with appreciation the PCI Global Mission Relationships Report (Appendix C) and encourage the Council for Global Mission to take forward its review and evaluation of partnerships, whilst continuing to listen, learn and journey humbly alongside PCI’s partners in God’s global mission.
3. That the General Assembly give thanks for the dedicated witness and endeavour of PCI’s global mission workers, for the generous resourcing of this and every aspect of the Council for Global Mission’s work through the United Appeal, and encourage the strengthening of communication with and participation by the wider church.
4. That the General Assembly give thanks for the remarkable and sustained generosity of congregations and members of PCI in support of the World Development Appeal 2022 and the Moderator’s Appeal for Ukraine, despite the current cost of living crisis, and commend the 2023 World Development Appeal to all congregations.
5. That the report of the Council for Global Mission be received.

LINKAGE COMMISSION

2pm Friday afternoon

1. That the congregations of Wexford and Enniscorthy be dissolved on 31 December 2023, or other suitable date, on terms set by the Linkage Commission. That the assets realised be distributed according to rules.
2. That the congregation of Ballymote be dissolved on 31 December 2023, or other suitable date, on terms set by the Linkage Commission. That the assets realised be distributed according to rules.
3. That the revised bounds for the Down, Ards, Dublin and Munster, Carrickfergus and Route Presbyteries, as set out in appendices 1–3, be approved.
4. That the congregations of Great Victoria Street and Windsor be merged on 31 December 2023, or other suitable date, on such terms as set by the Linkage Commission.
5. That the report of the Linkage Commission be received.

JUDICIAL COMMISSION RESOLUTIONS

RESOLUTIONS RELATING TO CODE REPUBLISHING

4.15pm on Friday afternoon (in public)

Resolutions coming from the Judicial Commission

1. That the General Assembly agree that the following wording be included in the Draft Republished Code (see Recommendation 5(a) in the report of the Judicial Commission, page 367):

“Any person who at any time qualified as a barrister or solicitor shall not be permitted -----”
2. That the General Assembly agree that the following wording be included in the Draft Republished Code (see Recommendation 5(b) in the report of the Judicial Commission, page 367):

“It is no requirement of the communion service that there be an elder to distribute the elements.”
3. That the General Assembly agree that the following wording be included in the Draft Republished Code (see Recommendation 5(c) in the report of the Judicial Commission, page 367):

“The minister chairing the meeting shall invite the qualified voters to propose and second as follows:

 - where the congregation has heard the List for Hearing directly, one or more ministers whose names are on the List for Hearing; or
 - where the congregation has heard through a Hearing Committee, the Sole Nominee, and that person only.”

Resolutions coming from the General Council (Judicial Commission Report, notes pp. 366–367)

4. That a new ‘Guidelines Review Task Group’ be appointed to examine all existing General Assembly ‘guidelines/guidance’ (that are not currently referred to directly in the Republished Code) and report at the latest to the 2025 General Assembly as to whether each of these continue to be required (perhaps in an updated form) and if so whether they should be categorised as ‘regulations’, ‘guidelines’ or ‘guidance’, in line with the categories agreed by the 2021 General Assembly.
5. That the membership of the ‘Guidelines Review Task Group’ be as follows: General Council Convener (Convener), Clerk of Assembly, Deputy Clerk (Joint Secretary), Rev Jim Stothers (Joint Secretary), Mrs Avril Heenan and Rev Jonathan Boyd.

With power to consult/co-opt relevant officers of Councils and/or the Assembly as and when appropriate.

6. That in the Republished Code the distinction between resigning from the duties and the office of the eldership be removed.

RESOLUTION RELATING TO THE GENERAL WORK OF THE JUDICIAL COMMISSION

10am on Saturday morning (in private)

1. That the report of the Judicial Commission be received.

SPECIAL JUDICIAL COMMISSION

10am on Saturday morning (in private)

1. That the Report of the Special Judicial Commission be received.

COMMISSION ON APPLICATIONS

10am on Saturday morning (in private)

1. That the Report of the Commission on Applications be received.

COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND

7.15pm Friday evening

1. That the General Assembly affirm the importance of church planting throughout the island of Ireland and that the recommendations outlined in the Church Planting Strategy and Process papers in Appendices 1 and 2 of the Council for Mission in Ireland report be approved.
2. That the General Assembly note the work of the South East of Ireland Task Group in drawing up plans for new church development in this area and encourage its progress
3. That the General Assembly note plans for the ongoing implementation of the Home Mission Review and re-affirm its direction of travel.
4. That the General Assembly give thanks for the work of all our Healthcare, Forces, Prisons, Rural and Universities Chaplains, recognising the call that they have to this special area of ministry and service.
5. That the General Assembly note that the developments in ministry and mission to university students within Dublin and the Republic of Ireland more generally are viewed as a key priority for the Council for Mission in Ireland, particularly in regards to the deployment of personnel and in collaboration with local Presbyteries.
6. That the General Assembly encourage the Council for Mission in Ireland in its plans to develop a more strategic approach to migrants' ministry, in collaboration with the Council of Global Mission and the Council of Congregational Life and Witness where appropriate.

7. That the General Assembly, noting the retirement of Very Rev Dr David Bruce as Council Secretary on 12 November 2022, express its appreciation for his immense contribution to Mission in Ireland throughout his 15 years of service.
8. That the report of the Council for Mission in Ireland be received.

TRUSTEES

10.30am Saturday morning

1. That the following recommendations be adopted:
 - (a) regarding the Mrs A.M. Davidson Trust;
 - (b) regarding the Sir Wm V. McCleery Trust;
 - (c) regarding the Miss Irene Scott Trust;
 - (d) regarding the Miss Ida Mary McGeown Trust;
 - (e) regarding the Victor Morrow Trust.
2. That the General Assembly encourage the Trustees to continue developing a socially responsible investment position and welcomes the extended restrictions which are now being applied.
3. That the Report of the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland be received.

COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY

2pm Saturday afternoon

1. (a) That the following candidates, their nominations having been sustained by the Council for Training in Ministry, be accepted as students for the ordained ministry, and placed under the care of their presbyteries:

Name	Congregation	Presbytery
Christine Craig	Kilbride	Templepatrick
Dave Dickinson	Central [Carnmoney]	North Belfast
Nathan Donnell	Elmwood	Dromore
Peter Huey	Bloomfield	East Belfast
Karen Jardine	Bloomfield	East Belfast
Glen McBride	Clarkesbridge & First Newtownhamilton	Newry
Stephen McCombe	St Andrew's, Belfast	East Belfast
Colin McKay	First Magherafelt	Tyrone
Cillian McNamara	Dun Laoghaire	Dublin and Munster
Ashley Parks	First Lisburn	Dromore

- (b) That the following pathways be approved:
- (i) Dave Dickinson
 - recommendation for licensing in September 2023
 - remain in Central for the duration of ministry training
 - amended pathway, the duration of which will be reviewed in May 2024, in order to assess capacity for training alongside ministry duties
 - mentoring from an experienced PCI minister appointed by CTM throughout training
 - (ii) Glen McBride
 - amended pathway with three-year duration
 - first year assistantship with QUB chaplain
 - long-term placement to begin in second year
 - (iii) Ashley Parks
 - amended three-year pathway
 - long-term placement may begin in second year
2. That the report of the Flexible Pathway Panel be received and its recommendations adopted.
3. Consolidated Resolution:
That the assessment for the Ministerial Development Programme be set to raise £100,000.
That the assessment for the Students' Bursary Fund be set to raise £400,000.
4. That the Report of the Council for Training in Ministry be received.

MEMORIAL OF THE SOUTH BELFAST PRESBYTERY (MEMORIAL ONE)

Saturday afternoon

1. That the Memorial be received and its prayer granted.

Proposer: Morris Gault

Seconder: Derek McKelvey

MEMORIAL OF THE MONAGHAN PRESBYTERY

Saturday afternoon

1. That the Memorial be received and its prayer granted.

Proposer: Albert Higgins

Seconder: Alan Mitchell

MEMORIAL OF THE SOUTH BELFAST PRESBYTERY (MEMORIAL TWO)

Saturday afternoon

1. That the Memorial be received and its prayer granted.

Proposer: Ruth Patterson

Seconder: William Harkness

RESOLUTIONS RELATING TO OVERTURES

Saturday afternoon

On the Books

1. That the Overture anent Par 102(4) of the Code, having lain on the books for one year, be enacted as the law of the Church.
2. That the Overtures anent Par 85(5), 85(6) and 85(7) of the Code, having lain on the books for one year, be enacted as the law of the Church
3. That the Overtures anent Par 35, 57(3), 106 and 128(5)(a) of the Code, having lain on the books for one year, be enacted as the law of the Church.

New Overtures

4. That the Overture anent Par 219(4)(b) of the Code be received and that, under Par 111 of the Code, be made the rule of the Church.
5. That the Overture anent Par 223(5) of the Code be received and that, under Par 111 of the Code, be made the rule of the Church.
6. That the Overture anent Par 72(i) of the Code be received and placed on the books.
7. That the Overture anent Par 72(i) of the Code be made an Interim Act.

8. That the Overture anent Par 118(3) of the Code be received and placed on the books.
9. That the Overture anent Par 118(3) of the Code be made an Interim Act.

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