



Summary Report

General Assembly 2019

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The General Assembly is the governing and decision-making body of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The 2019 meeting was held in Assembly Buildings, Belfast from Monday 3 June until Friday 7 June. Minutes and full reports can be found www.presbyterianireland.org/generalassembly. A preview of each day’s proceedings and other news stories can be found at www.presbyterianireland.org/news



Welcome

Welcome to our Summary Report of the 2019 General Assembly. Throughout these pages you will find details of what was discussed and agreed, along with some of the events and initiatives that took place in the year preceding it.

My abiding personal memory of this year's General Assembly was the sense of optimism and hope that springs from a belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I was impressed by the tone of many of the discussions relating to last year's decisions and I was equally glad to hear that the task groups appointed at the previous Assembly are optimistic about their future work in this regard.

My core conviction is that the gospel is good news and will result in good deeds. I was impressed by the reports and speakers, many of them reminding us of the good deeds done in the name of the Church locally and denominationally.

I have also been encouraged by being reminded of the generosity of our Church to worldwide disasters and the willingness of our ordinary people to be involved in mission locally and overseas. We are a Church which is committed to the enjoyment of life for all, and the reminder that 'life always matters'.

I have chosen 'Enjoying God' as my theme for my year in office. The reason is simply that I believe the encounter with God and that relationship which Jesus desires with us is the most fundamental need for everyone. I want to remind the Church to enjoy God and to have confidence in him, even when life and our context seems to be changing.

I hope you find our Summary Report interesting.

Yours in Christ

Right Reverend Dr William Henry

Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 2019-2020





Introduction

In the first week of June Presbyterians from across Ireland – ministers who have been called by their congregations, elders who have been elected by their brothers and sisters in Christ – meet together in General Assembly to listen, question, debate and take decisions jointly. This year was no different.

I attended my first General Assembly as an assistant minister in 1987, but for those who have never sat in the public gallery, or watched our proceedings live streamed, I hope that this Summary Report will give you a feel for what was discussed. It also highlights key aspects of our work between this Assembly and last year's.

Across the 26 sessions we discussed around 110 reports from PCI's various councils, task groups and committees. We considered over 100 resolutions on a range of public issues from Northern Ireland's political situation and concerns over social care services, to praising school governors. We also welcomed opportunities to participate in the public life of the Republic of Ireland. There were church-related matters too.

Some of those stemmed from decisions taken last year. These included decision making and dissent within the denomination and guidance for congregations around membership. We had special alternative presentations on different aspects of migration in 'People on the move', and in 'Life always matters' we focused on the dignity of human life.

Members of Assembly discussed guidelines for planting new churches and resources that will support PCI's growth in different ways, and were updated on a significant project that explores how Presbyterians responded to the Troubles.

In all that we do, at the heart of the Church, is our central calling to proclaim and live out the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in a constantly changing world. I hope that in the coming pages you get snapshot of that calling and its outworking, through the life and ministry of PCI.

Rev Trevor Gribben

Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Brexit

In November 2018 ahead of the special meeting of the European Council, which endorsed the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration on the future relationship between the UK and the EU, the leaders of the main Churches in Ireland issued a joint statement in relation to Brexit.

The Moderator, Dr Charles McMullen, along with the leaders of the Church of Ireland, Roman Catholic Church, Methodist Church in Ireland, and Irish Council of Churches, acknowledged the legitimate aspirations of those who voted to leave the European Union and those who voted to remain.

In their statement, the senior churchmen talked about the improving and deepening relationships between the people of the island, and between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom over the last 30 or so years.

“We also pray at this time that the inevitable tensions, which the Brexit negotiations and their outworking will entail, will not be allowed to undermine the quality of relationships and mutual understanding which are both so important in enabling all of us to work together for the common good.”

They concluded by saying, “Regardless of the outcome of this process, as peoples and communities who share this island, we will remain closely related and will have to both get along together and work together in this changing and somewhat uncertain world that lies ahead. This calling will be helped immensely as we all strive to listen and relate to one another in the context of mutual respect and even growing trust...”

For the full statement and all PCI news see www.presbyterianireland.org/news



Following the Withdrawal Agreement's endorsement by the European Council, the UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, attended 'round-table discussions' with groups from across society at Queen's University, Belfast. The main Churches were represented by the Moderator, Dr Charles McMullen, Rev Trevor Gribben, Joint Secretary to the Church Leaders Group (Ireland), and Rev Brian Anderson, President of the Irish Council of Churches.



ASSEMBLY
BUILDINGS
CONFERENCE CENTRE
BELFAST

Supporting conferencing in Belfast

In the 12 months since the new conferencing facilities were completed in Assembly Buildings, local, national and international organisations have used the Belfast venue.

Raymond Robinson, Facilities and Conference Manager, said there have been many highlights during the year that has seen just under 40,000 people attend various meetings.

“What we do is part of the DNA of the Church in that we seek to build positive relationships that allows us to demonstrate our faith. A servant-hearted approach to business that delivers the best experience for each client,” he said.

Outside PCI’s own conferences, Biblica, the International Bible Society, visited Assembly Buildings for a week in October and June, with their main Bible Translators Group, while the Bible Study Fellowship hosted weekly Bible studies through Word in the City in the new ground floor conference facilities.

“The Irish Women’s and Irish Men’s Conventions took place in October and March filling the Assembly Hall, and for their first major conference outside of the United States, the Ligonier Ministries USA Conference was held here in September,” Mr Robinson explained.

Church groups and Christian ministries aren’t the only organisations that have utilised the conferencing suite. The 20th Worldwide International 360 Virtual Reality Panoramic Photography and Video Conference, for example,

came for four days. Various government departments regularly use the facilities, while March saw the Consumer Council hold its annual Consumer Parliament at the city centre venue. They will return in 2020.



New PCI exhibition opens

In March 2019 PCI's visitor exhibition opened in Assembly Buildings. It tells the story of Presbyterianism in Ireland over the last four centuries and the work of the Church at home and overseas today.

Across different stand-alone interpretive themed panels and interactive exhibits, visitors can walk through a brief history of Presbyterianism in Ireland. From the arrival of Scottish Presbyterians in Ulster some 400 years ago, to the founding of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in 1840, they will also discover the work, mission and ministry of the Church today.

Over 30 special artefacts are displayed, many of which have been loaned by the Presbyterian

Historical Society of Ireland. There are also interactive exhibits and audiovisual installations.

Speaking at the official opening, the Moderator, Dr Charles McMullen, said that the exhibition had been made possible by a significant investment in the project by Belfast City Council – and wasn't just for Presbyterians interested in their own history.

“While we are an all-Ireland Church, the administrative heart of the denomination is here in Belfast

and we want to be supportive of the city that we are a part of in so many different ways. In this building we welcome people from across these islands and from around the world, and while we have been able to provide them with some information, we have not been able to really tell them of our Church's rich history and its contribution to society across Ireland, until now,” Dr McMullen said.



Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Emmet McDonough-Brown, who officially opened the exhibition, the Moderator Dr Charles McMullen, and the Deputy Lord Lieutenant for Belfast, Dr Philip McGarry.



UNION THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

New pathway to ministry

After a number of years of smaller intakes of ministry students, 13 were recommended to the General Assembly in June. This represents a significant increase in ministry students for September 2019.

Their names were contained in the report of the Council for Training in Ministry, which also highlighted that many applicants for the ordained ministry are part of a growing trend where they have previous theological training and ministry experience within local churches. The system at present is, however, not sufficiently flexible enough to take such training and experience fully into account.

The General Assembly, therefore, gave permission for the Council to pilot the 'Flexible Training Pathways' scheme, reporting back to the 2021 General Assembly. It is expected that most candidates will follow the current five-year training pathway in its entirety. The Council said that it 'wants to be responsive to the way God has already gifted, taught and used people before they have applied for ministry.'



“The support offered to students is unparalleled... I love Union, and I pray it continues to be blessed.”

Olivia Nicholl, Youth Assembly task group member, and first year UTC student, describing her college experience to the General Assembly

New courses at Union

As PCI's Union Theological College (UTC) looks to the future, following April's decision by Queen's University, Belfast (QUB) to end its 92 year link with the College and close the University's Institute of Theology, UTC announced a range of new courses during the General Assembly.

The College is developing its student base through online and campus based courses, with an initial 10 new courses – seven being fully online in September 2019. The courses, in a variety

of subjects, will be at master's degree level, as well as graduate and postgraduate certificate and diploma level. A PhD will also be offered.

The Council's report stated that the 'potential to develop this work is significant and this could prove to be a great resource for the global church as well as having the potential to provide income for the College.'

For more information see the College website www.union.ac.uk

Union looks to the future

In December 2018, when the general direction of travel became clear with regards to QUB's relationship with the College, PCI established a review task group to look at options for the College, the training of ministers and what financial savings might be made.

In June, the General Assembly agreed to appoint a Finance and Staffing Commission that will enable the necessary decisions to be taken during the forthcoming transitional period in the life of the College. It will also draft proposals regarding UTC's future to be brought to the General Assembly for decision.

Union College and Queen's University

In December 2018 Queen's University, Belfast announced that it was suspending undergraduate programmes in Theology for the forthcoming academic year following an internal review of its Institute of Theology. In April Queen's announced that it would end its 92 year link with Union Theological College and close the Institute.

In a detailed and robust response, a report by the Council for Training and Ministry (CTM) to the General Assembly concluded that the review had been 'based on a flawed and confused review process that did not permit engagement on the substantial issues; lacks supporting evidence for its claims and conclusions [and] did not adequately or respectfully include Union College in its consultations.'

Addressing the Assembly, CTM convener Rev Nigel McCullough said, "We do not believe that the decision to sever the link was arrived at after a full and robust review process."

Mr McCullough explained that when the four other colleges involved in the Institute of Theology stepped back from involvement in teaching undergraduates, Queen's conducted a strategic review in 2016. A central concern then was the ability of a single college to deliver a sufficiently diverse undergraduate degree programme.

"Union College worked with the University at that time and the agreed solution was a BA in Theology, which comprised 70% Union modules and 30% modules drawn from other Queen's departments. This programme was due to commence in September 2018, and indeed it did, and it was the agreed solution to the diversity concern," he said.

The review that came in 2018 "was entirely unexpected, considering the fact that the BA in Theology had not even begun... We feel that no review would have taken place were it not for the reaction to last year's Assembly." Mr McCullough was referring to the intense reporting and public comment that followed some of the decisions taken at the 2018 General Assembly.

He also said that as a major stakeholder, no opportunity was given to the College to respond to the report, or its conclusions, before key decisions were taken.

While the ending of the relationship was 'highly regrettable' the Council and the College said that they were committed to ending it well and are 'in no doubt that an exciting future for the College lies ahead.'

Following April's announcement, Rev Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, said that while disappointing, Queen's and UTC were committed to ensuring the very best education provision for existing undergraduate students as they completed the remainder of their studies.

He also praised the College's staff and academic theologians who were of the "highest standing, some of whom are indeed world leaders in their field..."

For the full statement and other news about Union Theological College see www.presbyterianireland.org/news

2018 revisited

This year members looked at progress on some of the more controversial areas that were debated in 2018. These included decision making and dissent and guidance for congregations in relation to communicant membership for same-sex couples and a ‘credible profession of faith’.

The Implementation task group was established to take forward the Assembly’s remit that ‘appropriate training be offered to kirk sessions on the theology and practice of the Church’s understanding of a credible profession of faith and the pastoral guidelines on homosexuality.’

Work began last year and included a presbytery consultation day. Its purpose was to enable a greater number of people to input to the task group’s work and for members to hear and consider the views of a wider group of people. Six representatives from each of PCI’s 19 regional presbyteries, and others, were invited – 190 attended.

The General Assembly agreed that the task group would present a

resource on ‘credible profession’ and draft pastoral guidelines for consideration at the 2020 General Assembly. These would be sent to presbyteries for comment, with final consideration taking place at the 2021 Assembly.

It was recognised by many speakers that last year’s decision had caused hurt for many members of the Church. Clerk of the Assembly, Rev Trevor Gribben said, “If as a Church, by the way we’ve done our business, by the fact that perhaps we didn’t have a holistic report last year and caused hurt and pain, we should say sorry.

“But we should also struggle, as we have to do as Bible believing Christians, with the full balance of God’s Word and try to apply that

truth in a loving way to a world that is fallen, broken and in pain.”

Task group convener, Very Rev Dr Alistair Dunlop, told the General Assembly, “We must not be dismissive of people, or judgmental. People matter to God, all people, including our own members and families who live with same-sex attraction. They deserve the best we can offer in terms of genuine listening, prayerful support, and the intentional ordering of our congregations as real communities of welcome, grace and love.”

Decision making and dissent

Following some intense media attention after decisions taken at last year’s Assembly, the General



Council accepted that clarification was necessary regarding decision making and dissent within PCI. As a result it established a task group to draw up a report on 'Presbyterian decision making and the place of dissent'.

The General Assembly considered the report and agreed to send it down to presbyteries for discussion. General Council convener, Very Rev Dr Noble McNeely, said, "We trust that when the report is sent to presbyteries that the questions included will be addressed comprehensively and the responses will guide the task group and enable it to bring a report and possible recommendations to the 2020 Assembly."

Guysmere Centre

From 1929 until recently PCI's site at Guysmere, Castlerock in County Londonderry, was used as the denomination's youth centre for the development and discipleship of the Church's young people. Owing to health and safety concerns, the centre has been mothballed and not used for some time. The General Assembly has debated the site's possible future over a number of years – and again this year.

"...by the fact that perhaps we didn't have a holistic report last year and caused hurt and pain, we should say sorry."

Rev Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the Assembly

The 2018 General Assembly asked the local Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady to draw up a feasibility study for the potential use of Guysmere and bring it – along with definitive recommendations – to this year's General Assembly.

The Assembly agreed to proceed with the redevelopment plans to the next stage, which means the Church will provide, if necessary, up to £75,000 to continue with the feasibility assessment. A robust business case and business plan will then be brought back for it to consider, before building work could commence.

Relationships with other denominations

Having looked at relationships with other denominations, the General Assembly agreed to continue PCI's membership of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Council for European Churches.

Following meetings with the United Free Church of Scotland, the Assembly agreed to explore 'future natural areas of collaboration'. A similar resolution was agreed in relation to the Evangelical

Presbyterian Church of the United States of America.

During the year delegations were welcomed from the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland. The Church Relations Committee reported that it was agreed, in line with a previous resolution of the General Assembly, that 'we ought to continue to enable complementary working within our respective Churches where this was thought to be mutually beneficial.'

Church of Scotland

The South Belfast Presbytery brought a Memorial – or petition – to the Assembly, asking it to accept a 'Notice of Motion'

to rescind its 2018 decision to no longer invite the Scottish Moderator to PCI's General Assembly and to resume sending PCI's Moderator to the Scottish General Assembly. If accepted it would have meant a full debate in 2020 on the matter. The Memorial was, however, decisively defeated: 187 to 358.



Sharing God's heart for the world

Global Mission 'is all about global disciples sharing God's heart for the world, declaring good news and demonstrating God's love.'

Introducing the Council for Global Mission's (CGM) report and speaking to its resolutions, Council convener, Rev Dr Liz Hughes, said that matters such as climate change, the diminishing number of Christians in the Middle East and how we relate to those who have migrated to Ireland are "directly related to our responsibilities as global disciples."

Quoting from the report of the World Faiths Panel, she added, "The peoples of the world have come to Ireland and there are multicultural, multi-faith communities literally on our doorstep. The Christian church needs a renewed confidence in its message and a similar confidence to adapt its methods so the gospel message is effectively communicated."

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has a long tradition and strong commitment to global mission since the first missionary was sent out from the denomination in 1841. Today the Church directly supports 28 global mission workers on four continents who have a clear outreach focus to their work. A General Assembly resolution praised their work and the generous resourcing by congregations through the United Appeal for Mission, and 'extra-mile' giving.

CGM Secretary, Rev Uel Marrs, explained that the development of Christian leaders is an ongoing priority for the Council. Currently scholarships are being provided for 24 Leaders in Training from seven countries.





People on the move

Migration is a reality for an unprecedented 244 million people globally. While some move by choice, others are escaping war, persecution or natural disasters.

'People on the move' was the title of this year's 'Listening to the Global Church', when the General Assembly heard stories from Malawi, Iran, Mongolia, Greece and Ireland of the plight of migrants and how churches are responding.

Rev Dimitris Boukis, General Secretary of the Greek Evangelical Church, told of people opening up their own houses and the Church opening up guesthouses in response to the migrant crisis. In



this way, a relatively small number of people – there are around 3,500 Greek Protestants – were able to host more than 300 families.

Calling people on the move a great gift from God, he said, "We have found out that the more you give, the more appreciative you are of what you receive."

Talking of ongoing work in the local context, Rev David Bruce, PCI's Mission in Ireland Secretary, spoke about the International Meeting Point in Belfast and the many congregations who have been providing hospitality, foodbanks, English language classes and much more.

"People on the move are on our doorstep. Our command to go need not necessarily involve a plane journey to a far-off land. It may simply involve a walk down the street to the shop, or outside a church building, because the world has come to live in our place," he said.



Moderator appeals

Since the 2018 General Assembly over £500,000 (€545,000) has been raised as a result of two Moderator special appeals: £387,000 (€425,000) in response to October's earthquake and typhoon which hit the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, and a further £164,000 (€180,110) for March's appeal following Cyclone Idai, which impacted Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi.

Rev Alex Maulana, General Secretary of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Synod of Blantyre, told the Assembly of the devastating impact of the cyclone on Malawi. It left 82,000 people homeless with crops and livelihoods destroyed.



World Development Appeal

The 2018 World Development Appeal (WDA), ‘Seeking Safety’, continues the Appeal’s focus on the challenges of sustainable justice in fragile states, with a particular focus on gender justice and the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV). WDA18’s featured project focuses on a safe house for women, Casa Noeli dos Santos, in the city of Ariquemes in Brazil.

Setting the scene at November’s launch, the convener of the WDA Committee, Rev Fiona Forbes, said, “The work of sustainable development is not simple. It is



hard work. It is most often long-term as it seeks to build within communities a shared vision for a future different to that which tradition or cultural norms might dictate. It is a work of faith and courage, of endurance and of hope, and hope is something the safe house provides for the women and their children who have sought safety there.”

The congregational appeal highlights the work of Christian Aid partner, the National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil, which seeks to tackle and prevent gender-based violence, particularly against women. GBV is particularly pervasive in Brazil.

Christian Aid’s head of country in Brazil, Sarah Roure, was in Belfast for the launch and knows the safe house, which has supported some 1,500 women

since opening in 2010.

The Appeal seeks to raise £500,000 (€545,000), or more, to support a number of Christian Aid and

Tearfund projects alongside Casa Noeli dos Santos. These consist of projects supported by Christian Aid partners in Angola – including a ‘Promoting positive masculinities’ programme for boys and young men. This year’s appeal will also continue to fund Tearfund partnered projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

For more information on the Appeal visit www.presbyterianireland.org/world-development



Window on the Middle East

The complex issue of identity in the Middle East from a Christian Arab perspective was the focus of a special conference held in November. The keynote speaker was the author and academic dean of Nazareth Evangelical College, Dr Yohanna Katanacho.

'Hard pressed, not crushed, a window on the Christian experience in the Middle East' was the latest in a series of events organised in recent years where the Church heard from different Christians living out their faith in the context of the Middle East.

Born in Jerusalem, Dr Katanacho lives in Nazareth and describes himself as a Palestinian Evangelical Christian. Starting with the Arabs in the Bible to the subsequent and often overlooked rich Christian

Arab heritage and identity that emerged, he went on to talk about the rise of Islam and beyond, and finally to the Reformation and recent 'Arab Spring'.

Speaking of Christianity in the region, Dr Katanacho said, "We don't just want to survive, we want to love Jesus and take the gospel to our neighbours. By the grace of God the Arab church has existed for centuries, sometimes it is not easy to take a stand for Christ... If we suffer, let it be. But we want

our brothers and sisters around the world to honour Jesus Christ, to honour his will for the church in the 21st century.

"People ask me 'what will happen to Christians in the Middle East?' It is the wrong question. I ask what will happen to the Middle East without Christians! Our concern is for the church in Europe. When we kneel down and pray we know we will lay down our lives for Jesus – will you?"



"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair."

2 Corinthians 4:8

Sowing seeds, planting community

There are over 530 congregations in PCI – and all of these churches were started, or ‘planted’, at some time in the past. Today PCI continues to reach out.

Church planting should be nothing more than the normal, everyday activity of congregations – this is the dream of PCI’s new Church Planting Panel co-convenor, Tom Gilliam.

The elder in Maynooth Presbyterian Church, which was itself a church plant of Lucan Presbyterian Church 12 years ago, was speaking during business relating to the Council for Mission in Ireland (CMI).

Mr Gilliam encouraged members of Assembly to be devoted to pray for countless people across the island to find new life in Christ and for gifted and passionate individuals to be raised up to lead new church plants.

Highlighting the initiative ‘New Life, New People, New Places’, CMI convener, Very Rev Dr Frank Sellar, said, “We are supportive of

the presbyteries of North and South Belfast as they work alongside the emerging project in the Berry Street building and a separate initiative of Carnmoney Presbyterian in the city centre...”

Carnmoney’s minister, Rev John Dickinson, said, “For the last three years, our congregation has been on a journey of planting a church back into the centre of Belfast.”

Known as Carnmoney Central, this new, vibrant and growing worshipping community began meeting in the MAC with nine people in October 2016. From April 2017 it met in Assembly Buildings for two years, before moving to its permanent home, the former May Street Presbyterian Church. Today between 60 and 100 people attend.





IMP 2

The Council reported that a second International Meeting Point (IMP) would be opened in north Belfast.

Funded by United Appeal for Mission and the South Belfast Presbytery, the first IMP was set up in 2010. It provides a food and clothing bank, a bicycle workshop,

a daily lunch club and English language classes to migrants and asylum seekers in the city from over 30 different countries – a place of safety and belonging.

The General Assembly heard that steps have been taken to open a second IMP at Carlisle Circus in the north of the city. The project will

include a charity shop for young mothers and carers and English language classes. The pilot will run for a year as a project of the North Belfast Presbytery, with CMI input and support.



“Chaplaincy is mission, where a fresh boundary of gospel connection is created with people who are curious about Christ.”

Rev David Bruce, CMI Secretary

University chaplaincy

In discussing the report of the Universities and Colleges Chaplaincy Committee, CMI Secretary, Rev David Bruce, acknowledged how the role of the chaplain has changed saying, “Chaplaincy is mission, where a fresh boundary of gospel connection is created with people who are curious about Christ.”

Describing the changing face of university culture, committee convener, Dr Maureen Bennett, called upon members of Assembly to encourage their presbyteries to address the significant ministry opportunities afforded by their



proximity to university campuses. She also urged members of Assembly to become less preoccupied with those within the Church and more concerned with the world outside, asking presbyteries to support its chaplains with intention and action.

£1/2 million raised for mission

Presbyterian Women (PW), launched its new women's ministry theme and unveiled its two special projects for 2019/2020 at its annual conference in May 2019. It also reported that the previous year saw 465 Presbyterian Women's groups across Ireland raise over £500,000 (€545,000) for mission at home and overseas.

Through the PW's Mission Fund, the Special Home Project for this year will support the work of PCI's Council for Social Witness through Thompson House, which provides supported housing for male ex-offenders; Carlisle House, a residential substance misuse treatment centre; and Gray's Court, which is a move-on supported living project. Carlisle House, for example, hopes to purchase exercise equipment to aid residents' rehabilitation.

The Special Overseas Project will support the publication in Arabic of a devotional book to help young Christian girls grow daily in their relationship with God. The initiative comes on the back of the 2018 visit to Lebanon by Presbyterian Women representatives, where they met staff from a Christian publishing house in Beirut.

Incoming PW President Karen Craig, of Killfennan Presbyterian Church in Londonderry, said that she was excited by the theme



'Restore' which is based on Psalm 23. "Our theme for this year reminds us that our God is in the business of restoration. He will and does restore our souls," she said.



Side by Side

A new initiative called Side by Side was announced at the General Assembly. This seeks to encourage women to develop their gifts in relational ministry and mission in a whole variety of areas, including discipleship, pastoral care, leadership development, intergenerational ministry, evangelism and prayer.

Rural initiatives – update

In its 2018 report to the General Assembly, the Council for Mission in Ireland acknowledged that there was a general recognition of a unique spiritual need among the farming community – often including young men and their families – working in isolated locations, and in trying economic times.

With the encouragement of organisations like Rural Support and the Ulster Farmers' Union, the Council has progressed this initiative over the last year. At this year's General Assembly members heard that agreement in principle has been reached to proceed towards the appointment of a rural chaplain.

This specialist rural position will be for three years and the pilot scheme will run across four of the Church's 19 presbyteries – the presbyteries of Armagh, Down, Iveagh and Newry, which are located in the south-east of Northern Ireland.

“Rural churches have been part of the backbone of Presbyterianism for generations and are still central to the community as they seek to respond to contemporary challenges. Wherever I have travelled, again and again I have been impressed by the faithfulness and dedication of God’s people.”

Outgoing Moderator Dr Charles McMullen, reflecting on his year in office to this year's General Assembly

Rural column reaches half century

In November 2018, 'Good News for the Countryside', the fortnightly column in the *Farming Life*, which is written by Presbyterians who have a heart for the countryside, marked a significant milestone with the publication of its 50th column.

As part of a rural initiative by the Council for Mission in Ireland, in nearly 30,000 words, the contributors – who include ministers, retired ministers and others from a rural or farming background – offer personal reflections on faith and rural life, with a strong gospel message.





Serving in the summer

Each year, around 90 to 100 young people volunteer to take part in PCI's Summer Outreach Teams. Commissioned by the Moderator for what God has called them to over the summer months, the teams spend a week supporting the ministry and outreach of local congregations across Ireland.

The teams are drawn from different congregations and work with children, teenagers and adults in the community, showing and sharing the good news of Jesus. Applying in the spring to join that year's Summer Teams, those taking part need to be 16 and over.

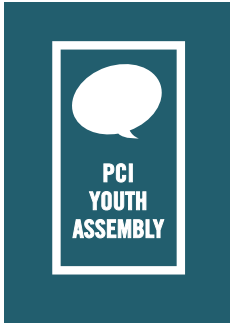
Speaking at June 2018's commissioning service, the Moderator, Dr Charles McMullen said, "I was so very taken by the level of enthusiasm and how upbeat everyone was. I also found it personally moving in that these teenagers and young people were giving up part of their summer for an adventure of faith, serving Christ and serving others as the church in action."

One of the teams went to Ballyweaney Presbyterian Church in County Antrim, a few miles from

the village of Cloughmills. Local minister, Rev Kenny Henderson, said that it was the third year that a team had supported them "with a range of activities that we wouldn't be able to do as well if it wasn't for these fantastic young people.

"Each afternoon they helped us with our holiday Bible club for children four and over, then for older children and teenagers later on in the day we have had a great series based around some well-known TV programmes: 'The Great Ballyweaney Bake Off' and 'DIYSOS'. This has been fun and a really engaging way of sharing the good news as members of the team were able to bring a gospel message and share their testimonies, talking about the cross and the way of salvation."





THE ANATOMY OF THE CHURCH

MANY PARTS, ONE BODY

Many parts, one body

PCI's Youth Assembly fringe event took place midway through this year's General Assembly, with young and old gathering together for fellowship, food, and discussion around the evening's theme: 'The anatomy of the church – many parts, one body.'

Outlining their plans to meet and seek greater engagement with local presbyteries, Youth Assembly co-chair Niamh Rankin encouraged the Church to pray for and support their work, saying, "We want to connect people across and within our presbyteries, because together we can make a massive impact for God."

Paddy Smyth, a member of the Youth Assembly Working Group, explained how they plan to hold three presbytery gatherings over the coming year. These meetings will discuss ideas and explore how they can work closer together, to give young people a meaningful way of having a voice in the Church.



Shining a light on addiction

As a Church we are called to demonstrate God's love for people, which means putting our faith into practical action and simple Christian caring. It is a powerful social witness of the gospel and can be seen day in, day out, through the work of PCI's 500-plus congregations.

The Council for Social Witness (CSW) seeks to deliver an effective social witness service on behalf of the Church and to the wider community in partnership with appropriate organisations. Council convener, Rev Dr Trevor McCormick, said that the services often 'shone a light' in a dark world.

He said that there was a pattern of drug misuse, for example, which leads to addiction, mental health issues, criminal activity and further drug abuse. "An increasing number

break this cycle by taking their own lives," Dr McCormick explained.

The convener pointed out that in the year up to March 2019 there were 7,490 drug seizures in Northern Ireland, a 9% increase on the previous year, with 3,306 drug related arrests – a 6% increase. Figures for the Republic of Ireland show that fewer than 20% of adults reported using any illicit drug during their lifetime in 2002-03, but by 2014-15 this had risen to nearly a third of respondents.

As regards deaths by suicide, in 2017 there were 305 recorded in Northern Ireland and 392 in the Republic. "In this darkness we are shining a light through our specialist services work, particularly in Carlisle House, Gray's Court, Thompson House and our partnership with Flourish, a suicide prevention initiative.

"Being one of only two drug rehabilitation units in Northern Ireland, Carlisle House is not only a vital service but a place of Christian witness..." Dr McCormick said.



“We are running out of ways to say that the health service is on its knees and that social care is not fit for purpose.”

Lindsay Conway, CSW Secretary.

Concerns expressed over NI Assembly

The CSW report presented ‘a kaleidoscope of care and witness that has been undertaken’ by PCI. It also highlighted a number of concerns. The Council’s Disability Services Committee, for example, stated that it ‘continues to be concerned about the impact of welfare reform on individuals and families living with disability on a day-to-day basis. The lack of a working Stormont Assembly only serves to make life more difficult for such families, compounding the pressures upon them as additional support measures are not being explored, proposed or implemented.’

The Council was also concerned that ‘the infrastructures and institutions within social care are broken and no longer fit for purpose.’ In a resolution, the General Assembly expressed ‘real concern that in the absence of the Northern Ireland Assembly vital legislation and appropriate funding is being denied to essential health and social care services.’

CSW Secretary, Lindsay Conway, said, “We are running out of ways to say that the health service is on its knees and that social care is not fit for purpose. We have pleaded, we have begged, we have tried to shame them into action, and still we have no Assembly at Stormont.”

New appointment



Melanie Bowden joined the Council for Social Witness in May 2019 as Head of Disability Services.

A qualified adult nurse with experience working in a number of positions across Northern Ireland, mainly in the independent sector, one of Melanie’s first management positions over 20 years ago was as the manager of PCI’s Sunnyside House in Bangor. As Head of Disability Services, she is responsible for the overall management of PCI’s supported living, residential, day care and respite services for people with an intellectual impairment that involves over 60 staff across five locations. Melanie also coordinates the ‘Christmas Cracker’ respite programme with congregations for adults with a learning/intellectual disability.

Mental health

CSW plans to establish a task group to address issues of mental health, as part of its strategic objectives for 2019.

Explaining the importance of addressing mental health issues, Lindsay Conway, CSW Secretary, said, “This month’s *Lancet* states there has been an alarming rise in the rates of self-harm.”

He said a *Lancet* psychiatry study found in 2014 that 6% of people had self-harmed, up from 2% in 2000, with the highest rate in those aged 16-24. “The number getting help is now only 50%...We need to give more support. We need to be there at the coalface.”

New appointment



Jacqui Montgomery-Devlin joined the Council for Social Witness in May 2019 as Head of Safeguarding.

Jacqui is a qualified social worker with 30 years’ experience of working within the statutory, private and voluntary sectors. Over the last 20 years she has been with Barnardo’s NI, focusing on child protection and safeguarding, developing and managing practice and training surrounding child abuse and child sexual exploitation. In PCI she leads Taking Care, the name given to the denomination’s safeguarding policy and programme, which aims to create and promote a safe environment for everyone in PCI’s congregations and the Church’s various services that are run by the Council.

Scamwise

This year’s Assembly passed a resolution recognising the work of the Scamwise partnership in Northern Ireland, encouraging congregations to use its resources

Lindsay Conway said, “I want to encourage every congregation to become aware of the risk for those who are vulnerable and susceptible to being financially abused – because that’s what scams are.”

If you can spot a scam, you can stop a scam

Use the scam test

- Seems too good to be true
- Contacted out of the blue
- Asked for personal details
- Money is requested

for help and information, or to report a scam visit

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scamwiseNI
PARTNERSHIP

Life always matters

The dignity of human life was the focus of one of this year's alternative presentations. Entitled 'Life always matters', the presentation provided an insight into the challenges surrounding child and adolescent mental health, dementia and palliative care.

During the Council for Public Affairs presentation, Dr Caroline Thompson, a consultant clinical psychologist in the Belfast Trust, told of how many young people feel they can no longer cope, and that the referral rate in her area has increased by 30% in the last 12 months, with almost 1000 referrals a year.

Anxiety, OCD, school refusal, gender identity, depression and suicidal thoughts are among the problems they experience. Mark Kernohan, project director of Christian charity The Big House, also talked about how anxiety is a major issue for young people.

With the Alzheimer's Society estimating that 20,000 people in Northern Ireland are living with the condition, in another area relating to human dignity, Norma Picking, manager of PCI's Adelaide House residential home in Belfast, pointed out how just taking time to listen, finding out about the person's history and what they like to do can make such a difference to their quality of life.

The leading palliative care consultant with the Western Trust, and director of Project ECHO with Hospice UK, Professor Max Watson spoke of the challenges facing end of life care. He made the point that the Church should not just oppose euthanasia legislation and promote improved funding, but take action. "Our appeal to Parliament will be much stronger if backed up with practical demonstrations of the outworking of our belief that life always matters."

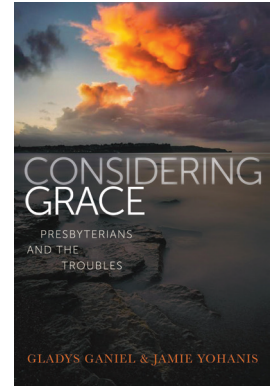
Three Presbyterian elected representatives joined the panel discussion. They shared their views on these issues and how they manifest themselves in their constituency and wider policy issues. The MLAs were Stewart Dickson (Alliance), Gordon Lyons (DUP) and Roy Beggs (UUP).

Life *always* matters



Considering Grace

In 2016 the General Assembly asked the Council for Public Affairs to explore how Presbyterians responded to the Troubles from 1968 to 2000. The aim of this significant undertaking has been to tell a wider story than has been available to date, to acknowledge both what is good, but also reflect upon the times when Presbyterians failed to be faithful peacemakers.



The General Assembly received an update on the project and welcomed the agreement that had been reached to publish the findings of the research in a book towards the end of this year. Entitled *Considering Grace*, it will be part of a number of resources that can be used to encourage other Presbyterians to tell their stories in a safe and supportive pastoral environment.

The book has been co-authored by Dr Gladys Ganiel of the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice at Queen's University, Belfast, with Dr Jamie Yohanis, who conducted interviews with over 100 people. This group included ordained ministers, security forces personnel, victims and survivors, ex-combatants, emergency responders, quiet peacemakers and politicians. Among the interviewees were people who have left the denomination as well as critical friends.

“Some stories are heartbreaking and tear jerking. Grown Presbyterian ministers and elders will cry. Some stories are heart-warming and grace filled. Some stories are heart challenging and deeply disturbing...” said task group convener, Rev Tony Davidson.

“As a denomination we have listened carefully and prayerfully to the voices of people who up to now have not had an opportunity to tell their story publicly. Moreover the book is just one contribution to our response to the past.”

“Some stories are heartbreaking and tear jerking... Some stories are heart challenging and deeply disturbing.”

Rev Tony Davidson, Dealing with the Past Project Task Group convener

Human rights

The General Assembly commended a paper on human rights. Based on biblical principles, the paper seeks to establish a framework that will assist the Council for Public Affairs as it responds to rights-based issues in the public square.

Reflecting on a Christian approach to contemporary thinking on human rights, the report makes the point, amongst many, that ‘too much of [the] current public debate and discourse is focused on individualism over and against the common good; on autonomy over the legitimate needs and concerns of others; with litigation and conflict becoming early ports of call over the painstaking work of building consensus.’

Dealing with the past – Legacy

In October 2018, PCI published its response to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland’s legacy public consultation ‘Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland’s Past’.

In its 2,800 word submission, PCI called out both the deficiencies it saw in the current arrangements and the limitations of the institutions set out in the consultation paper. At the same time the Church proposed revisions of the proposals to enable them to be a means of improving the current arrangements.

As the Church stated in October, the status quo was not acceptable and a new approach was needed. It also warned that a rejection of the proposals would likely set the issue back for many years – if not forever – adding even more distress to victims and survivors.

While recognising the limitations in the proposals, members of Assembly acknowledged that with some modification, the proposals presented ‘a potential opportunity to contribute to bringing a measure of healing to society in Northern Ireland.’

In the same resolution, the General Assembly reiterated that ‘any one-sided suite of measures, which fuels a culture of recrimination at the expense of reconciliation and the restoration of broken relationships, will have failed.’

New appointment



Karen Jardine joined PCI in February 2019 as the denomination’s Public Affairs Officer.

Providing support to the Council for Public Affairs, Karen assists the Church with its work in the public square by helping to develop thinking on issues of public policy.

Karen spent nearly 10 years at the Northern Ireland Assembly, where she supported MLAs in their committee work. Prior to that she was public policy officer with Evangelical Alliance in Northern Ireland.

An elder in Bloomfield Presbyterian Church, Karen is a Geography and International Relations graduate of the University of St Andrews. She also has a master’s degree in Political Lobbying and Public Affairs from Ulster University.

Pastoral police visits

In January Dr McMullen led a senior Church delegation to the Policing Board for Northern Ireland, and throughout his year in office he also met police officers in various locations in Northern Ireland.

On a visit to Ardmore police station in Newry he spoke of 'society's debt to police officers' while praising their 'selflessness' and 'vital role they play in keeping us all safe'; a sentiment he expressed on each visit.

"When I met with representatives of the Policing Board I said that as a community, we all share a responsibility to support the PSNI and its officers. My visits to various police stations are practical reinforcements of those sentiments and a desire to listen, encourage and pray.

"These visits were primarily 'pastoral' and grew out of a genuine desire of our Church to thank police officers for their selflessness and the vital role that they play in keeping us all safe. I wanted to convey to them, and their senior commanders, that along with the technical and support staff, they are valued," he said.



National Police Memorial Day

In September 2018 the Moderator gave the sermon at the National Police Memorial Day Service, which honoured the courage and sacrifice of police officers from around the United Kingdom.

Attended by over 2,000 people, including the Home Secretary, serving and retired police officers of all ranks and family members of those who lost their lives in the line of duty, they heard Dr McMullen speak on the Parable of the Good Samaritan – looking at it through the eyes of the various protagonists.

"If it becomes a question of setting an example for others to follow, then let me take this opportunity to praise the professionalism, the standards and the sense of duty of our police forces throughout the United Kingdom."

The Moderator ended by saying that it had been a privilege "to remember those who have shown such sacrificial love and to salute those who continue to do the same in all police forces, wherever they serve across these islands."

In praise of school governors

Following the reconstitution of Northern Ireland's boards of governors in primary and post-primary schools, a resolution affirming the role of transferor governors in the preservation of a Christian ethos within the controlled schools' sector was passed by the General Assembly.

Reporting on a busy year, PCI's State Education Committee said that the reconstitution, with the appointment of over 1,600 transferor governors, had been a great investment in time.

The governors represent the interests of PCI, Church of Ireland and Methodist Church in Ireland and have done so since the 1930s. The Churches nominate governors to serve on the school boards, which are 'church-related schools' owing to the fact that in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, the Protestant Churches transferred their school buildings, pupils and staff into state control (hence the terms 'transferor'

and 'controlled'). They did so on the understanding that the Christian ethos of these schools would be maintained in perpetuity.

During last century's transfer process, the Church leaders at the time stressed that it was not simply buildings which were being transferred, but a concept of education directly informed and shaped by Christian teaching and values.

PCI Public Affairs Officer, Karen Jardine, said the reconstitution has seen some take on the role of governor for the first time. "There are others who have given years,

even a lifetime, of service in this role and we do not underestimate the time and commitment involved in supporting principals, and teachers, dealing with complex pastoral concerns or handling budgets stretched to breaking point," she said.



Absence of devolution

In a resolution on the political situation in Northern Ireland, for the second consecutive year, the General Assembly expressed 'its deep concern and frustration about the prolonged absence of an Executive in Northern Ireland, the resulting stagnation in public policy and the negative effects on the most vulnerable in society...' The General Assembly repeated its call 'for all involved in the political process to find a resolution that establishes good and stable government based on good working relationships.'

Beyond ourselves

At the heart of the Church is its central calling to proclaim and live out the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in a constantly changing world. This witness, and the service that accompanies it, happens day in and day out in PCI's congregations across Ireland.

The Council for Congregational Life and Witness (CCLW) seeks to support the ongoing life, mission and witness of congregations in their work with all age groups through assisting in development, offering training, providing and signposting models of good practice.

The Council also has the responsibility for encouraging and resourcing congregations in sharing the hope of the gospel in their communities. With this in mind, the Council presented the first alternative presentation of this year's General Assembly.

Entitled 'Beyond ourselves', the session was a general challenge to congregations to be proactive in reaching beyond their existing membership and the wider local community. It also detailed a number of new resources that will help local congregations to go beyond themselves.



Introducing the presentation, Council convener, Rev Colin Morrison, reflected on the need for a new approach to church growth. "Our congregations cannot depend on the kind of generational reproduction of members which was common in the past.

"We need to get beyond ourselves, carefully balancing our focus, time, energy, effort and resources between our congregation's life and its witness," he said.

Renewed priorities

CCLW's report to the General Assembly spoke of two essential facets of church life that overlap and interlock: an inward face of congregational life and an outward face of congregational witness.

Rev Colin Morrison said that building the community of the congregation was an ongoing need in areas of pastoral life, discipleship, leadership, and outreach. "In a world that is lonely and fractured, such a community will be a witness to others."

Rev David Thompson, CCLW Secretary, explained the need to bolster the outward face of the church, saying, "We find ourselves placed to bear witness in a rapidly changing society – one which, on some levels, is hostile to our message. We have to confront and overcome a fear of showing Christ's love and sharing the message of the gospel."

“Our congregations cannot depend on the kind of generational reproduction of members which was common in the past.”

Rev Colin Morrison

Convener, Council for Congregational Life and Witness

New resources

Resources highlighted for the year ahead included: ‘Share’ with its focus on helping churches to engage members in a conversation about how they can build relationships, cultivate community and invite others to encounter Jesus. The ‘Go Deep, Go Wide’ initiative seeks to aid congregations to develop a lively, ongoing involvement in global mission, while ‘Inside Out’, which has its genesis in the Council’s remit for developing good relations, explores

what it means to be a welcoming church. The final resource has been developed in conjunction with the Good Book Company. Entitled *Eric Says*, it will help congregations introduce gospel truths to children who do not attend church.

It is hoped that the resources represent an important rebalancing of CCLW’s overall remit between an emphasis on helping the local church develop the inward face of its congregational life and the outward face of its congregational witness.



Further information on all of these are available at www.presbyterianireland.org/resources

Moderator's 'Criminal Justice Day'

For the first time, PCI's principal partners in its work in the criminal justice system came together to look at different aspects of the Church's work in this important area.

Organised by the Council for Social Witness, the 'Moderator's Criminal Justice Day' brought together the Head of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Deputy Governor of Maghaberry Prison and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland's Assistant Director and Director of Rehabilitation. The aim of the day was to strengthen relationships while providing an insight into the work of each other's agencies in the context of PCI's engagement at specific points in the criminal justice system.

Hosted by the Moderator, Dr Charles McMullen, at Thompson House, the denomination's approved hostel for offenders in north Belfast, those attending then spent the afternoon at HMP Maghaberry. At the prison they had the opportunity to meet with the prison governor, senior staff, prison officers and prisoners – along with members of the chaplaincy team led by PCI's new lead chaplain, Rev Graham Stockdale.



Pictured at Maghaberry Prison are (left to right) Ronnie Armour, Director General of the Prison Service, the Moderator, Dr Charles McMullen, and Maghaberry Governor, Dave Kennedy



New appointment

Rev Graham Stockdale was appointed coordinating chaplain in HMP Maghaberry in June 2018.

Licensed to preach in First Antrim Presbyterian Church in 1992, he was ordained the following year and has served as an assistant in the Shankill Road Mission and First Ballymacarrett Presbyterian Church and in parish ministry in Counties Tyrone and Down, and north Belfast. From 2011-2018 he served in various chaplaincy roles in the Southern Area Hospice Services in Newry, Maghaberry Prison and at Hydebank, working with young offenders.

PCI, through the Council for Mission in Ireland, also provides a prison chaplaincy service in Northern Ireland at Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison and Woodland's Juvenile Justice Centre and is seeking to appointment a chaplain to HMP Magilligan. There is also a PCI chaplain working in Mountjoy Prison in Dublin.

Playing an active role

In one resolution PCI welcomed opportunities for the Church to participate and seek to influence policy for the good of all in society, while acknowledging the increasing secularisation of the public square in the Republic of Ireland.

A Council for Public Affairs report to the General Assembly acknowledged that while an all-Ireland Church, 'Presbyterians may be a small minority in the Republic of Ireland but their distinctive witness and influence continues to be recognised in the public square...'



The report highlighted some of the occasions where senior Presbyterians had either been invited to, or had taken an active role, in state/political events. In November 2018, for example, former Moderator, Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson, participated in the inauguration of Michael D. Higgins

as President of Ireland. In January, the Moderator Dr Charles McMullen attended an event to mark the centenary of the first meeting of Dáil Éireann.

In July PCI plays its part in the annual National Day of Commemoration in Dublin, when the nation remembers Irishmen and Irishwomen who lost their lives in past wars, or on service with the Irish Defence Forces with the United Nations.

During the year Dr McMullen also led a PCI delegation to the Oireachtas, where he met members of the Dáil and had lunch with An Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Fearghaíl. In October 2018 he joined Church leaders in a meeting with An Tánaiste Simon Coveney TD.

The Church is also a very real and integral part of the life of so many communities across Ireland, as congregations live out and share the hope of the gospel.



Armistice centenary

The Moderator, Dr Charles McMullen, represented the Church at a number of special services to mark the centenary of the ending of the First World War.

On Remembrance Sunday Dr McMullen led the prayers in a Christian act of worship at the annual Act of Remembrance at the Cenotaph at Belfast City Hall. He also attended the official Northern Ireland commemoration at St Anne's Cathedral. That week, as part of his East Belfast Presbytery tour, he laid a wreath at a community act of remembrance.

Visit of Pope Francis

In August 2018 the Moderator, Dr Charles McMullen, joined members of the Irish government, civic, community and other church leaders in Dublin Castle for the state reception held for Pope Francis.

Pope Francis was in the Republic of Ireland for the final two days of the World Meeting of Families. “Back in March, at the time of the formal confirmation of the visit, as a Church we recognised that this would be something that would bring great joy to our Roman Catholic neighbours and friends and as such it was something that we wanted to welcome,” Dr McMullen said.

“The visit of Pope Francis to Ireland for the World Meeting of Families will greatly enhance the affirmation

of the place of the family at the heart of society and that has to be a good thing. I am personally very pleased that our Church has been able to accept the invitation to the reception and I am looking forward to it. Should there be an opportunity to meet Pope Francis in Dublin Castle, I would also very much welcome that in the context of building good relations.”

In the event, that opportunity didn't arise.



Theological engagement

The Theological Engagement task group reported that it met five times since March 2018 with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church using the contents of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, which was approved by the Lutheran and Catholic Churches, to engage in a wider conversation on differing understandings of the grace of God in Christ.

The task group reported that the discussions 'have been informative, animated and enlightening. Both delegations have appreciated the cordial spirit in which the conversations have progressed and the genuine attempts to understand each other's position.'



United Appeal

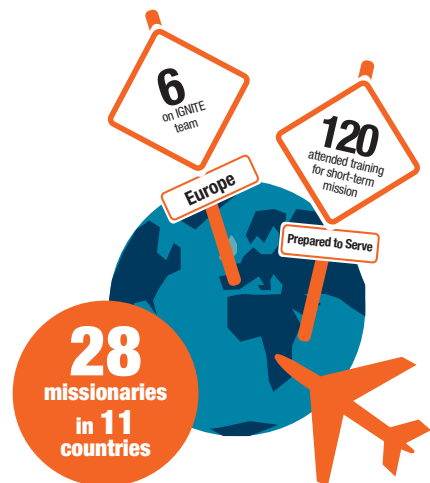
The United Appeal for Mission is Presbyterians doing together what none of us can do on our own, supporting mission and ministry at home and around the world.

It is down to the generous and sacrificial giving of Presbyterians from right across the island of Ireland that the United Appeal is able to support, resource and train individuals and ministries to build the kingdom of God at home in Ireland and overseas.

Hundreds of projects and programmes have benefited from the support of the United Appeal, carrying out their gospel mission amongst hundreds of thousands of people, showing the love and compassion of God and his church in action.

When the 2018 United Appeal closed in January 2019, contributions received from PCI's contributing families across its 500-plus congregations totalled £3,291,684 (€3,566,000). The United Appeal agreed for 2019 is £3,550,000 (€3,845,000). For 2020, the General Assembly approved a United Appeal of £3,600,000 (€3,899,000).

Thank you to everyone who continues to give prayerfully, and sacrificially, to the gospel mission of the Church through the United Appeal.



To learn more about the United Appeal and to view specially created videos about the work supported visit www.presbyterianireland.org/unitedappeal

A life-changing visit

For this year’s Moderator’s overseas visit, Dr Charles McMullen spent 10 days in Jordan, meeting with church leaders, PCI’s mission partner organisations and those working in the region. It was a visit that he later described as ‘challenging’ and ‘life-changing’.

The annual overseas visit is an important part of the Moderator’s year and for the Church as a whole. The primary purpose is to contribute to the developing and strengthening of relationships with partner churches and organisations, and to encourage those serving there, seeing their work for God’s kingdom first hand.

PCI has a growing association with the region going back many years. “My visit was very much an opportunity to build new relationships and strengthen existing ones, especially with longstanding partners in the region. I also wanted to offer pastoral support and encouragement to

those working there, not least those who have connections with Ireland, Dr McMullen explained.

On a visit to one of PCI’s partner organisations, he met board members and students at the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary. While there he led the students from across the Middle East and parts of Africa in a devotional. He also preached in an Arab evangelical congregation and an international English-speaking church in the capital.

Accompanied by his wife Barbara, they were based in the capital Amman and travelled to a number of refugee projects run by local churches and the Bible Society of

“One refugee was so traumatised after a bruising encounter with ISIS that they still could not talk about their experience...”

Jordan. At one, they played with the children, prayed with their parents and read Scripture together, hearing some harrowing stories of flight and the physical violence that they had endured along the way.

“One refugee was so traumatised after a bruising encounter with ISIS





that they still could not talk about their experience...I read Isaiah 61 and prayed as we prepared to leave....

“Did I take in the enormity of each story? There was such brokenness, but also forgiveness: laughter through the tears; hope in the midst of despair; generous hospitality, although they had nothing to give. My own faith seemed so shallow as I read, and yet God’s Word is always relevant and powerful. As I left these three homes, another Scripture, 2 Corinthians 6, came to mind: having nothing and yet possessing everything,” he said.



Generational hope

In March Dr McMullen went to northern Greece, and the Greek Evangelical Church near Thessaloniki, to look at how they have been supporting refugees from Syria. The PCI delegation also brought suitcases of clothes to help the refugee programme.

“We found ourselves in a Church that had been founded almost 100 years ago by Greeks fleeing from Asia Minor, who received help along the way from the citizens of Aleppo. Now, all these years later, the people of Aleppo have arrived on their doorstep as refugees. Such is the community memory of gratitude passed down through the generations, the Greek Church is providing them with food, clothes, accommodation and rehabilitation.”



The General Assembly heard first hand of this support from the Greek Evangelical Church’s General Secretary, Rev Dimitris Boukis, during the ‘Listening to the Global Church’ presentation.

Some key dates for your diary

Disciple Makers Network 2019-2020

Four training events aimed at envisioning, equipping and enabling congregations to develop cultures of discipleship. 7.30pm–9.45pm: 30 Sept, 25 Nov, 27 Jan, 23 Mar. Booking essential.

Assembly Buildings, Belfast

Union College 2019 Autumn Seminars

Theology for All: Six Thursday evening seminars covering a variety of topics that will include, for example, 'The reliability of the Bible' and 'What is the Bible and how can it help us?' £10 per seminar (£50 for the series), 17/24 Oct and 7/14/21/28 Nov.

Details www.union.ac.uk.

Union Theological College, Belfast

Saturday 7 September 2019

Side by Side

The Side by Side events this autumn will begin to explore a variety of expressions of what women's ministry can look like in your church for women of all ages and stages of life. The event will also be repeated in Richhill (21 Sept), Ballymena (5 Oct), Londonderry (19 Oct).

Assembly Buildings, Belfast

Friday 25 to Sunday 27 October 2019

MAD Weekend – 'God's story in the headlines'

MAD (which stands for 'Making a Difference') is a fun-filled, residential, youth event focused on helping 11 to 18-year-olds grow in their relationship with Jesus.

Ulster University, Coleraine

January to June 2020

Emerge 2020

A learning community for young and emerging leaders from within PCI to come together over five gatherings for teaching, training and shared learning. Dates: Fri 24 Jan, Sat 29 Feb, Sat 21 Mar, Sat 25 Apr, Fri/Sat 19/20 Jun). Details: www.presbyterianireland.org/emerge.

Ballymena and Belfast

Tuesday 4 February 2020

Election of the Moderator-Designate

The Church's 19 regional presbyteries will meet independently across Ireland to select the Moderator-Designate who will be formally nominated, elected and installed as Moderator for 2020/21 at the General Assembly in June.

To view all upcoming events please visit:
www.presbyterianireland.org/events

Friday 27to Saturday 28 March 2020

Transform 2020

A weekend conference for young adults from across PCI packed full of Bible teaching, worship, seminars and discussion.

Details: www.presbyterianireland.org/transform.

Carnmoney Central, May Street, Belfast

Saturday 4 April 2020

Kids' Big Day Out

PCI's chief annual event for children. An afternoon of interactive drama, worship and fun activities for primary school children.

Wellington Presbyterian Church, Ballymena

Tuesday 14 April to Friday 17 April 2020

PCI Family Holiday

Castlewellan Castle and grounds, Co Down

Thursday 7 May 2020

Presbyterian Women Annual Meeting, 2pm and 7.30pm

Assembly Buildings, Belfast

14 May 2020

Little Day Out

An event for under 5s to encourage congregations to broaden their view of ministry for younger children.

Castle Espie Wetland Centre, Co Down

Friday 29 May 2020

PTFI Graduation

Presentation of degrees, diplomas and other awards by the Presbyterian Theological Faculty Ireland. Students for the ministry are granted certificates which permit them to be licensed by their presbyteries. The Moderator-Designate will be awarded an Honorary Doctor of Divinity.

Union Theological College, Belfast

Monday 1 June to Friday 5 June 2020

General Assembly 2020

Assembly Buildings, Belfast

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