



# Summary Report

*General Assembly 2016*

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The General Assembly is the decision-making and policymaking body of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The 2016 meeting was held in Assembly Buildings in Belfast from Monday, 6th June until Friday, 10th June. Full reports can be found at [www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/General-Assembly/General-Assembly-2016/2016-Assembly-Reports](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/General-Assembly/General-Assembly-2016/2016-Assembly-Reports)





# Welcome

## Welcome to the 2016 General Assembly Summary Report.

This is our third annual report, which attempts to give a flavour of some of the decisions that we came to and the discussions that were had at this year's General Assembly. It also highlights some of the work that has been undertaken by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, since our 2015 Assembly.

Our Church's Fit for Purpose theme for this year is that we aim to be 'a community of global concern'. We sought to give that some sort of shape during the worship services at the General Assembly by looking at the Old Testament prophet Jonah.

As someone tasked by God to share in the concern the Lord who made the sea and the land has for this world with others, Jonah is a perfect model how not to go about it! Jonah loved the grace of God when it was for himself, but resented it when it was offered to others who were not like himself! We would never be like that. Would we?

What is inescapable is that, as people who have experienced God's grace through the cross, we are never permitted to be isolationists. As we have been blessed so we are called to bless others, learning from and sharing with our brothers and sisters in the worldwide church; participating with them in the urgent task of world evangelism, stewardship of the earth's resources; and challenging injustice, poverty and oppression in Jesus' name.

God bless you richly as together, in the Holy Spirit's power, we seek to be a community of global concern.

**Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar**

Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 2016-2017





## Introduction

This year's General Assembly opened as it has done for many, many years on a Monday evening with the installation of our new Moderator. Following a decision taken last year, however, business concluded on Friday, allowing us an extra day to debate and discuss the issues and resolutions before us. This year there were over 90 resolutions.

Given the scope of our activity as a Church, with congregations from Bushmills in County Antrim, to Aghada in County Cork, it is perhaps understandable there was much to discuss. Physical testament to this was the fact that this year's Annual Reports from the Church's various councils – affectionately known as 'the Blue Book' – was one of the largest in recent years and covered over 340 pages.

Much concerned internal Church business, charities' legislation for example, commercial use of Assembly Buildings and options for meetings of future Assemblies.

At the same time we discussed some of the pressing social, moral and public issues of the day. Areas where the Church, in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ and His kingdom, can make a unique contribution and give voice to the concerns of many people, both within and outside our denomination.

We considered why and how the Church should play its part in dealing with the past and fostering reconciliation as it witnesses for Christ in the public square. We changed the way in which we solemnised marriage and discussed abortion for the first time in many years. We also heard first hand of the desperate plight of refugees in Greece, and one denomination's inspiring response to it.

Busy, productive and sometimes challenging - the General Assembly was all of these things and I hope this Summary Report will give you an insight to our discussions and the decisions that we took.

**Rev. Trevor Gribben**

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



# Dealing with the past, looking to the future

On the first full day of the General Assembly, the Council for Church in Society focused on dealing with the past and building the Church's Vision for Society in the first of this year's 'alternative presentations'.

Entitled 'Honouring Christ in the Public Square – Building a vision for society', the presentation encouraged the Assembly to consider why and how the Church should play its part in dealing with the past and fostering reconciliation as it witnesses for Christ in the public square.

Deeply personal and poignant contributions were made by Northern Ireland's first Victims Commissioner, Bertha McDougal, whose husband, a part-time police officer in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, was murdered in Belfast in 1981. Rev. John Hutchinson spoke about his time in prison before becoming a Presbyterian minister, the love of God and power of forgiveness.

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## Council for Public Affairs

At the request of the Council for Church in Society, the General Assembly approved a change of name to the Council for Public Affairs.

## Church in the Public Square

The fourth Church in the Public Square conference entitled 'Economic Hope: A biblical road map for a just society,' took place in October 2015, and was organised in association with the Cambridge-based Christian social reform think tank, the Jubilee Centre.

The conference looked at the relational dimension of major economic issues and a possible road map for tackling them in a way that could create a more just society.

"By using the biblical road map and viewing all of life through a relational lens which pursues just means to achieve a more relational society, we can develop a new economic framework in a way that reflects God's intentions for our personal and national life," Dr. Michael Schluter, founder of the Jubilee Centre explained.

## THE CHURCH IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

# Researching for a better future

The failure to find a consensus on dealing with the past in November 2015's Fresh Start Agreement exposed the continuing hurt and pain of many people affected by the Troubles.

In its report, the Council for Church in Society's Dealing with the Past Task Group posed the question, 'will we wait for others to make progress in dealing with the past? Or will we take the risk of prophetically and pastorally examining our own history, and offering what emerges for the benefit of our Church, the wider church and the common good?'

The General Assembly's response was to approve a research project, proposed by the Council, to address the question 'How did Presbyterians respond to the Troubles?'

Rev. Tony Davidson, convener of the Dealing with the Past Task Group, said that the project "will uncover a wider story about Presbyterian responses to the Troubles than have been available. It also seeks to recognise that which is good, and to identify and reflect upon the times when the Church failed to be faithful peacemakers. Doing so will enable us to contribute more effectively to the wider societal discussion on dealing with the past."

The 18-month project will begin with those who are connected to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

and who have first-hand experience of being victims and survivors of the Troubles on both sides of the border. Along with others, ministers who were involved in pastoring victims and survivors and in peacebuilding work, will be invited to take part.

It is hoped that ultimately the project will enable PCI to self-reflect and build trust in the public square and help wider society to address the legacy of the past.



# Vision for Society

The General Assembly approved a revised version of the General Assembly's 1994 Peace Vocation, entitled 'Vision for Society'.

Talking about the 146-word statement, Council convener, Very Rev. Dr. Norman Hamilton said, "This is a symbol of our desire that this statement will both be a stimulus for our engagement with wider society, as well as a powerful symbol that this is a calling of the whole Church to a highly important aspect of Christian and biblical witness.

"I hope this will send a strong and positive message to political parties and others that the Church is committed to playing its part in helping to build better relationships in civic life and in local communities."

WE, MEMBERS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND,  
saved by grace  
and called by God to grace-filled relationships,  
in the power of the Holy Spirit  
as ambassadors of Christ's kingdom  
in a broken and divided world;

BELIEVE that the good news of Jesus Christ challenges and equips us to develop radically new attitudes and relationships with our neighbours throughout the whole of Ireland.

WE CONFESS our failure to live as biblically faithful Christian peacebuilders and to promote the counter culture of Jesus in a society where cultures clash.

ACCORDINGLY, WE AFFIRM Christian peacebuilding to be part of Christian discipleship and reassert the Church's calling to pursue a peaceful and just society in our day.

WE SEEK a more reconciled community at peace with each other, where friend and foe, working together for the common good, can experience healing and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

# Centennial year

2016 marked two seminal events in Ireland's history, which the Church both reflected on and commemorated – the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme.

In January, in Assembly Buildings in Belfast, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland made a major contribution to this particular centenary year, with the fifth conference in its Church in the Public Square series. Its theme was 'The Future of Our Past: Remembering and Reassessing 1916'.

Attended by over 350 people, the event explored the events of 100 years ago and discussed how they came to exert such a central place in how Ireland views its past and present.

It also looked at wider questions around current relationships in Ireland that have been shaped by the events of 1916 and addressed

ways in which conversations about the future could be reformed.

Dr. Fearghal McGarry of Queen's University and Philip Orr, historian and playwright, set the historical context and impact on Irish society at the time. Commentators Dr. Ruth Dudley Edwards and Eamonn Mallie responded to the talks, looking at the long-term political and cultural legacy of both events.

The keynote speakers were former Moderator Dr. Trevor Morrow – the Church's last moderator to be based in the Republic of Ireland and Heather Humphreys TD, a fellow Presbyterian from County Monaghan and Minister of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

In a further contribution to the public debate, a seminar entitled 'Remembering 1916 – Martyrdom and Sacrifice' was given by Open University Professor of Religious History, John Wolffe.

*“By exploring our shared history we can better understand and respect the differing traditions on this island.”*

**Heather Humphreys TD**  
Minister of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht



## Commemorating the events

Moderator, Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar, took part in the official centenary service at the Ulster Memorial Tower at Thiepval, France.

Dr. Sellar joined members of the royal family, civic and political leaders and Ireland's church leaders, along with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Most Rev. Justin Welby. During the service, Dr. Sellar led those gathered in the Lord's Prayer. The Church was also officially represented at the State Commemoration in Dublin and other commemorations in Northern Ireland.

In commemorating the Easter Rising, Dr. Trevor Morrow officially represented the Church in a measured and reflective event at

Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin. Here a Remembrance Wall, listing the 489 names of the men, women and children who lost their lives during the Rising, was unveiled. Dr. Morrow also participated in an act of Christian worship.

Dr. Ian McNie represented the Church at a special event at Dublin's Grangegorman Military Ceremony, to remember the 107 members of the British Army who lost their lives.



### Moderator's reflection

Reflecting on his visit to the battlefield, Dr. Sellar said, "To look out on the fields of barley in the region of the Somme, interspersed with poppies on that 1st July 2016 was a hugely poignant experience – just imagining the suffering, noise, loss and bloodshed on that very location 100 years to the day.

"The Somme changed the lives of countless thousands and indelibly shaped whole communities in Ulster and throughout the island of Ireland. It was a time of terrible carnage and incredible heroism.

"For many families, like my own, the events of 1916 are still personal. For me, as we paused to remember those who had died and reflected on their loss, it was also an enormous privilege and honour to represent the Church at such an historic occasion."



# Social Witness: New developments

The Book of Acts recalls the apostle Paul reminding his brothers and sisters in Ephesus of these words spoken by the Lord Jesus, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” They are perhaps one of the best known quotes from the Bible.

Since its foundation, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has encouraged an active ‘social witness’, ministering to the physical needs of people in a practical way that demonstrates God’s love.

Managed by the Council for Social Witness, today PCI provides social care and other services for a diverse range of people in 17 locations across Ireland. This includes supporting and caring for older people and people with learning and physical disabilities. The Church also works with people with addictions and with offenders.

This year the Church announced two significant new developments that broadens and deepens its commitment to this important area of ministry: the purchase of the

former Four Seasons care home in Garvagh, County Londonderry, which will create a new residential care home for older people, including those with dementia; and an expansion of services for people with a learning disability in County Wicklow.

The £1.5 million redevelopment and refurbishment of the home in Garvagh will increase overall residential care for older people, with the creation of 50 ensuite rooms. It will also involve the relocation of services from our Londonderry and Portrush residential care homes, Ard Cluan House and York House, which were both built in the 19th century and no longer provide opportunities for improvement.

*“As the continued well-being of our residents is our priority, this relocation to Garvagh is an exciting opportunity for the future as we are committed to improving the standard of our residential care.”*

**Lindsay Conway,**  
Council for Social Witness



## New work in Wicklow

At this year's General Assembly a welcome opportunity to expand services for people with a learning disability was announced.

This will involve adding Peacehaven Trust's three residential properties for adults with a learning disability in Greystones, County Wicklow, to PCI's service provision.

The Church already provides services for people with a learning disability in Northern Ireland, which includes residential respite care, day care and supported living schemes. This decision will increase PCI's service provision in the Republic of Ireland.

*“With a view to ensuring the continued and enhanced delivery of Peacehaven’s services to residents, present and future, I am absolutely delighted that we are consolidating our activities into those of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.”*

**Geoffrey Hanan**, Peacehaven Trust

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## 20th anniversary for Aaron House

Aaron House, PCI's residential home for people with profound learning and physical disabilities in Dundonald, celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2015 with a day of activities for the residents, their families, staff and friends.





## Honouring the work of our chaplains

In a Council for Mission in Ireland resolution, the General Assembly commended the work of PCI's chaplains in healthcare, prisons, the armed forces, universities and colleges to the Church for 'prayer, both privately and at services of worship'.

The chaplains are part of the mission and ministry of the Church and includes full or part-time chaplains: 54 in hospitals, 4 in prisons, 15 in the forces and 10 in universities and colleges – all of whom have opportunities to serve tens of thousands of students, patients, forces' personnel and prisoners in Jesus' name. During the course of his year in office, moderator Dr. Ian McNie visited forces, and prison chaplains to encourage and support their ministry.

As part of Prisons' Week in November, he visited Maghaberry Prison in County Antrim. The Church currently has both full and part-time chaplains serving in Magilligan, Maghaberry, the Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre in Bangor, and Hydebank Wood. Presbyterian ministers also visit in prisons in the Republic of Ireland.

In April, Dr. McNie visited the Infantry Training Centre in Catterick, north Yorkshire, where he was able to meet with a range of serving soldiers, from recruits to training and support staff.

He then flew to Germany to visit the Headquarters of British Forces Germany at various locations within its Westfalen Garrison in North Rhine-Westphalia. Dr. McNie was able to meet with some soldiers during a meal in the cookhouse, but for most of his visit he met with the chaplains.

"It was very encouraging to see the spiritual impact that our chaplains are making in the lives of our troops, and the invaluable links that have been established between soldiers and their families, whether in barracks or back home," Dr. McNie said.

## Growth at IMP leads to new staff

Set up in 2010, the International Meeting Point (IMP) provides a valuable service to visitors from a wide range of backgrounds and nations. Around two thirds of people are from overseas and many are in or have come through the asylum system. The remaining third are local people, many of whom are on the margins of society.

The drop-in centre sees between 60 to 100 people come through its doors each day, with over 15,000 lunches being served over the course of a year. The centre offers a number of services, from computer facilities with internet access to English classes with 9 teachers and 40 volunteers teaching over 70 students.

A solicitor also offers pro bono advice with assistance from volunteers from the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. As its name suggests, it is, however, a place for people to meet.

Funded by United Appeal and the South Belfast Presbytery, the IMP's continued success and growth led to the appointment in May of a third member of staff, Henry Coulter as Assistant Project Leader.

# Bringing light in the darkness

To be a Church that involves itself in God's mission it must have eyes to see and then intentionally choose to take the many opportunities for mission and ministry in communities across Ireland.

Nightlight, a team of specialist evangelists whose ministry is to Belfast's nightlife, is one such opportunity for mission.

The project involves groups of volunteers reaching into the Golden Mile, the Cathedral Quarter and the Odyssey areas of the city, mainly at the weekends. They encounter young people, city workers, partygoers, homeless people, rough sleepers, concert audiences, security staff and many others. Each story is different, and in each case the gospel is shared, sometimes with a hot drink of tea, always with love and compassion.

The birth of Nightlight goes back to 1989 when the South Belfast Presbytery directed Rev. Bill Moore, minister of Taughmonagh Presbyterian, to undertake a pilot scheme, leading a group onto the streets in the early hours of the morning.

After two years the pilot project came to an end because there was too much work for someone already committed to parish ministry. It was subsequently decided that the project should become a recognised part of PCI's outreach in the area and in 1995 a full-time director, John Luke, was appointed. John retired in December 2012 and now Nightlight employs two full-time personnel: Brian Simons and Linzie Cobain.

In February Dr. McNie joined them on the cold city streets. The work can be extremely volatile, with no two evenings the same. Volunteers step out in faith each evening, trusting themselves to God's protection.



# Listening to the Global Church

‘Listening to the Global Church’ brought guests and their stories from overseas. The Council for Global Mission’s presentation was subtitled ‘The Welcoming Church’ and highlighted the right of people to refuge from conflict and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland’s responsibility to be a people of generous hospitality.

Opening the session, Council convener Rev. Dr. Liz Hughes said, “This year at our General Assembly we once again adopt an attitude of listening to and learning from our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world...

“They speak from their hearts of what it means for the Church to be a community that extends a warmth of welcome and displays a generosity of spirit.

“We will discover from those on the front line how they are embodying Christ’s unconditional love, love without discrimination or distinction. We hear the refugee, and those on the move for whatever reason.”

A pastor of a church in Athens vividly brought home the refugee crisis in Europe. Rev. Dimitris Boukis, from the Greek Evangelical Church, told the Assembly of its efforts to respond to the refugee crisis so that Christ could be seen through them.

As early as the 1990s the Church began to see the first immigrants coming to Greece from Iran. This

led to the opening of a Church-run refugee centre in Athens. Last year Greece witnessed 50,000 people arriving a month, with over 800,000 passing through Greece during the past 16 months.

“You can understand how big the problem was for society and government. The Church has to redefine how we do mission...The Church only had two missionaries, so we were not ready for such an influx,” Rev. Dimitris Boukis told the Assembly.

“We decided as a Church to work like the Good Samaritan. We need to allow ourselves to be exposed and let them see Christ through us... We don’t have all the answers – we still have a lot of questions, but this is a great challenge for the church of Christ. In the old days we were sending missionaries out, but now people are coming to us and they’re outside our doors”, he said.

The Church responded in many ways, such as providing free Internet provision and free electricity to people (while others were charging €5 per hour). The United Nations Refugee

Department asked the Church to help and it started a children’s programme. The Church also began to make guesthouses for as many families as it could. Rev. Dimitris Boukis’ aim is for his Church to host 1,000 immigrant people.

Encouraged by such a demonstration of faith and love for the stranger, the Assembly heard from Rev. Kathryn Viner, minister of Malone Presbyterian Church, who had visited refugee camps and projects in Greece.

The Assembly also heard firsthand from Aleppo, through Ulster University chaplain, Rev. Cheryl Meban, who read an email from partners in the shattered city, highlighting the harrowing situation there.

From further afield members heard a report from fellow Presbyterians Rev. Ling Zaw, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Myanma and Rev. Edina Navaya from Malawi, Vice Moderator of the Blantyre Synod, who spoke of the devastating effects of climate change.



*“We decided as a Church to work like the Good Samaritan. We need to allow ourselves to be exposed and let them see Christ through us.”*

**Rev. Dimitris Boukis** from the Greek Evangelical Church

Closer to home, the General Assembly welcomed a local believer who shared about his conversion to Christianity from Islam. He spoke of the warm welcome that the Church in Northern Ireland had given him.

A minister from our denomination, who has a largely international congregation, encouraged the Church to be welcoming, unconditionally. “Our welcome should have no strings attached,” he said.



## Global Mission Menu launched

To highlight the many ways which congregations and the denomination can engage in this year’s Fit for Purpose theme and detailing the many resources available, PCI has produced the *Global Mission Menu*.



Writing in the foreword (before being called to overseas service in the Middle East) Rev. Colin Dickson, convener of PCI’s Global Mission Involvement Committee, wrote, “A key aim of this booklet is not just to highlight how we as Presbyterians might engage in mission, but to remind us of who we are: a people of global concern.”

## World Development Appeal

Sustainable development projects in Bangladesh and Ethiopia are the focus of PCI's 2015 World Development Appeal (WDA).

The annual appeal began in 1980 and gives Presbyterians across Ireland the opportunity to respond to the needs of the poorest and most marginalised of the world's people.

The 2015 Appeal, Forecast: Hope! highlights some of the world's poorest communities and focuses on the serious impact that climate change is already having on their lives and livelihoods.

The WDA will support the Bangladesh Nazarene Mission, which is working with those most at risk close to the Bay of Bengal, helping local communities and women, in particular, to become more resilient in the face of climate change. It will also support the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. The Church is developing a new agricultural base for the women of Chewaka district through support and training programmes.

In 2014 Presbyterian congregations raised over £560,000 (€649,944) for 2014's World Development Appeal, which focused on partners in Haiti and Burma/Myanmar.

Welcoming the launch of the 2015 Appeal, Moderator, Very Rev. Dr. Ian McNie, said, "I thank God for my Presbyterian brothers and sisters across Ireland and for their continuing generosity...we can be assured of the difference that our giving will make to many communities and countless families in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and elsewhere."

Further information on this year's World Development Appeal and Appeal resources can be found at [www.presbyterianireland.org/world-development](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/world-development).



## A community of global concern

In his opening address to the General Assembly as Moderator, Dr. Sellar used the Old Testament story of Jonah - who was sent by God on a mission that he did not want to go on – to introduce the theme for his year in office: ‘A Community of Global Concern’.

The theme is taken from ‘Fit for Purpose’, a five-year programme that began in 2012 that seeks to inspire and encourage creative thinking on how the Church focuses on important aspects of Christian Witness.

During his address he called the Church to be a ‘community of global concern’ “learning from and sharing with our brothers and sisters in the world church, while recognising with them those issues of concern for our stewardship of the world’s resources where together we must challenge injustice, poverty and oppression in Jesus’ name.”

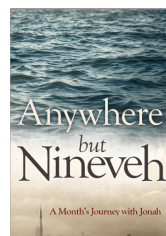
Talking of the world we find ourselves in today, Dr. Sellar said, “...every time any species of plant or animal is obliterated, or the sea and dry land subjected to rising temperatures due to selfish human activity... the poorest peoples of this world suffer most...”

“This year, may we as the people of God repent of our lack of care for these critical issues and with His strength as a branch of Christ’s church in this island at this time, be a community of Global concern.”



A six-part Bible Study resource entitled ‘God’s Mission – Our Mission’ has been produced to support individuals and congregations to explore what the Bible says about mission and God’s heart for the nations.

### ‘Anywhere but Nineveh’



Those attending this year’s General Assembly received a copy of ‘Anywhere but Nineveh’, courtesy of this year’s Moderator, Dr. Sellar - its author.

Published by Christian Focus and written for the Assembly, the Bible study guide is about Jonah, a believer who is reluctant to do what God had called him to do. Dr. Sellar used Jonah’s journey during his opening address, which was also carried across the talks given during the lunchtime worship services.

Along with Dr. Chris Wright’s address on ‘Being a community of Global concern’, each talk is available to listen to on the PCI website:  
[www.presbyterianireland.org/  
 Resources/General-Assembly/  
 General-Assembly-2016](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/General-Assembly/General-Assembly-2016)

# Developing and growing fruitful congregations

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland isn't just a part of local community life and an integral part of wider society – it is much more than that.

PCI is a community of 225,000 people seeking to build God's kingdom in their own communities, growing in faith as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that the good news of the gospel can be shared.

In 1 Corinthians 3:6, the apostle Paul reminds the church in Corinth of the dynamics of fruitful congregational life when he writes, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. This vision of how fruitfulness happens is both a challenge and an encouragement.

Developing fruitful congregations through effective resourcing and training, set against the backdrop of a changing society, changing church and changing patterns and rhythms of lives of members falls to the Council for Congregational Life and Witness.

The Growing in Fruitfulness initiative was unveiled at the General Assembly. The initiative seeks to offer congregations a way of introducing a specific vision of fruitfulness into their life and witness. As communities of

God's people that are making an impression for Him, locally through outreach, and through involvement in His wider activity in the world.

The initiative also places an encounter with the living God at the centre of congregational life.

As Council convener, Rev. Dr. Graham Connor told the General Assembly, "We believe that God's call to fruitfulness in the local church is presently the best way of capturing the purpose and nature of congregational life and witness. We hope that in the incoming year we can get alongside congregations who want to explore the cultivation and growth of this fruit."

Several substantial pieces of work have been required to reshape a number of programmes, services and events offered by the Council. In every case, the aim has been to build on existing good work and safeguard and develop it for the future. An extensive consultation with all 19 presbyteries across Ireland was part of the initial process.

*"PCI is a community of 225,000 people seeking to build God's kingdom in their own communities, growing in faith as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that the good news of the gospel can be shared."*





## Developing emerging leaders

A new programme that aims to harness the leadership development potential of a variety of existing PCI activities and networks has been developed this year. Equip – The Emerging Leaders’ Programme has been designed to engage more directly with congregations in their task of developing younger leaders in the context of ongoing church life. The new programme will start later on in 2016.

## Close to Home

In developing congregations as an all-age family, a DVD Bible study resource has been produced. *Close to Home* enables congregations to capture some of the teaching on the subject of covenant family that has emerged over recent years.



## Men: Developing ministry and mission

In the past there has been a specific focus on devising a strategy for women’s ministry. To date, there has been no similar vehicle for examining and developing ministry and mission to men. During engagement with presbyteries, many expressed the view that this is a crucial area, and work is underway to see how best PCI can address this particular part of church life.

## New appointment

The process of integrating Presbyterian Women into the Council of Congregational Life and Witness has been an important piece of work. To continue developing women’s ministry in congregations, **Pauline Kennedy** has been appointed as Women’s Ministry and PW Development Officer.



Pauline will support the ministry of Presbyterian women and assist in the development of strategy and the

coordination of women’s ministry in general, equipping and enabling women to know that they are valued by God and that their identity in Christ has real purpose, with His mission at its core.







# Transform: A fresh way to equip the next generation

Transitioning into adulthood can be a challenging time on so many different levels, so a new two-day discipleship initiative called Transform has been created.

In April around 120 young adults from as many as 50 congregations across Ireland took part in the first event. Explaining the thinking behind the new initiative, Discipleship Development Officer Rick Hill said, “As a Church, we recognise both the challenges and opportunities that lie within the transitional times of young adulthood, which is why we have created this fresh event.

“With all that is going on in their lives, it is a critical stage for many twenty-somethings who often wonder whether to stick around in church, or make a break for it.”

Transform has been designed to better connect young adults together, equip them for their everyday lives and inspire them about the part they have to play in the church going forward.

“We have some amazing young adults in our congregations who we need to nurture, equip and support as they continue on their spiritual journey at a time when life begins to change radically. We need to rediscover and share with the young adult generation what a disciple of Jesus might look like in different everyday situations,” said Rick.

Main sessions took place in The Mac, and involved trigger talks, seminars, and live music, as well as time for discussion, chillout activities and space to connect with others.





## Daily digital devotional

In April 2016 PCI launched 'Tides', a digital prayer resource that kick-started a brand new rhythm of devotions in the Church. The initiative seeks to help individuals discover afresh what regular engagement with God and His Word can mean for their lives.

Compiled by a team of 12 writers – a combination of ministers and lay people from a mix of ages from within the PCI family – over 13 weeks Tides explored the life and times of Joshua, Caleb, Nehemiah, Daniel and Paul and how true disciples reveal characteristics such as vision, passion, prayer and mission in their lives.

The series has been part of PCI's vision to better resource congregations, to help God's people discover afresh regular engagement with Him and His Word – and so far, nearly 2,000 people have subscribed.

A new 12-week devotional, exploring a brand new series focusing on the life of Christ and how that challenges His disciples to follow in His footsteps every day began in the autumn.

To sign up visit:  
[presbyterianireland.org/prayer](http://presbyterianireland.org/prayer)

You can also join the conversation on twitter by following [@tidesdaily](https://twitter.com/tidesdaily) or [#tidesdaily](https://twitter.com/tidesdaily).

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### New appointment



**Rick Hill** is PCI's Discipleship Development Officer. Appointed in August 2015, Rick has spent the last 10 years in youth ministry. In this new role, he seeks to help and support congregations to develop a key focus on discipleship. Through training, resources and events, Rick hopes to raise awareness of the critical need for discipleship and provide practical tools to equip disciple-makers across the denomination.

# SPUD

PCI's youth assembly held a fringe event at this year's General Assembly, unpacking some of the issues that had been raised on the SPUD Overnight weekend earlier in the year.



The theme of the Overnight was living well in a strange land and involved a study of the book of Daniel, which led to discussions on living life well in today's society. Sixty young people from across the denomination discussed a range of cultural issues, including sexuality, secularism, selfies and science, which they brought to the fringe event.

Over the course of the hour they unpacked three of the subjects with members of the Assembly that significantly impact young people today: the 'selfie culture' of self-obsession and vanity; sexuality and Christian community. Through round-table discussions, those attending were challenged to think about how these issues impacted young people and how they should be responding.

The aim of SPUD, a Church-wide initiative that stands for Speaking, Participating, Understanding, Deciding, is to connect 15 to 25-year-olds with the real decision-making, encouraging participation at both a denominational and a local level.

[www.presbyterianireland.org/spud](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/spud)



## Working together to protect children

Taking Care is the name of PCI's child protection policy and programme. Its aim is to create and promote a safe environment for children, young people and leaders.

In 2005, PCI, Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland along with the uniformed organisations – Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade, Scouts NI and Girlguiding Ulster – came together to develop a joint approach to child protection, which explains the working relationship between the three Churches and the uniformed organisations.

In June, the three Churches came together with representatives from uniformed organisations to launch a revised edition of 'The Common Protocol' leaflet for the protection of children.

"With over 30,000 leaders and 120,000 children and young people involved in activities across the Church annually, we are hugely committed to keeping our children and young people safe, and our leaders well informed and well trained," Deborah Webster, PCI's Taking Care Programme Coordinator, said.

[www.presbyterianireland.org/takingcare](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/takingcare)



- Approximately 120,000 children and young people attending PCI youth and children's organisations
- Since police checking was introduced 10 years ago, Taking Care has processed 18,000 police checks through Access NI and Garda Vetting
- 140 training sessions, on average each year
- 28 volunteers have completed the Accredited Taking Care Trainers' course, accredited by Union College

# Assembly affirms that ‘human life begins at conception’

In reviewing its position on abortion, the General Assembly received a report designed to assist it in setting out its position on abortion.

The task group that drafted the report was drawn from across the denomination, including medical professionals and theologians, both women and men, who sought to discern the best of biblical guidance and teaching on this complex issue.

Following the debate, the General Assembly reaffirmed its position, that ‘human life begins at conception and that from that moment the human embryo should be treated in a manner in accordance with full human dignity.’ It also restated its ‘opposition to abortion on demand for purely social reasons, or as a means of birth control.’

Council for Church in Society convener, Very Rev. Dr. Norman Hamilton, said that it was important that the Church aligned theology with deep compassion. “This is an incredibly painful and very real human subject that touches on so many fundamental issues, that it needs to be considered and discussed with the utmost sensitivity and compassion.

“While it has been a generation since the Church has discussed this, we felt that it was important that we reflected again, especially at this particular time, in light of the current public debate,” he said.

Summarising the report, Professor Stephen Williams of the Church’s Union Theological College in Belfast, who was a member of the group, said, “Our conclusions are based in our belief in the unique value of human life, which includes both mother and child. We argue that abortion is justified when pregnancy endangers the life of the mother. We are not convinced that abortion is justified on the basis that an unborn child has a life-limiting condition, though our paper does address the complexities of the condition of anencephaly.”

The General Assembly also stated the need for ‘readily accessible and appropriate care in the perinatal period for every woman, child and family should be a high priority for society. It also resolved to ask the governments of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to ‘ensure such provision.’

*“This is an incredibly painful and very real human subject that touches on so many fundamental issues.”*

**Dr. Norman Hamilton,**  
Convener, Council for Church in Society



# Commercial use of Assembly Buildings

Many Presbyterians feel an attachment with the Assembly Hall and Buildings, where for 20 years there have been commercial premises on the ground floor.

The General Assembly discussed a number of options for the commercial use of the ground floor and was asked to agree new proposals to redevelop the ground floor premises and to use them for the Church's own purposes.

The option chosen will deliver superior conference facilities with additional flexible meeting and exhibition space that could be creatively used for either ministry or mission.



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## Church of Scotland

Although the Assembly voted not to send the Moderator, Dr. Frank Sellar to the Scottish Assembly in 2017, representatives of both churches did meet during the past year. The Assembly agreed to maintain natural contacts and collaborations between the councils, and staff of both denominations.

## Charitable status

Every congregation in Northern Ireland has now become a registered charity with the Charity Commission, as required by law; and every elder is now a charity trustee. As a result, the report of the task group to the Assembly was concerned with some of the finer details from Northern Ireland, such as a retired minister's membership of presbytery.

# Union Theological College review

Union Theological College is the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's principal body for the training of its ministers prior to ordination.

As part of the Christian community of faith, the College seeks to serve Christ and every branch of His Church by providing teaching in biblical, theological, historical, pastoral and mission studies to students, irrespective of denominational background.

In 2009 a review of Union Theological College took place and since then, bit by bit, the recommendations have been put in place, including the appointment of a Principal with executive responsibility, and the restructuring of the departments within the College.

Back then it was envisaged that, alongside professors and senior lecturers, there would be full-time junior lecturer posts. This has now been realised and Dr. Zachary Cole and Dr. Martyn Cowan have been appointed as lecturers in Biblical Studies and Historical Theology respectively.

Rev. Jim Stothers, secretary of the Council for Training and Ministry, said, "It says a lot for the reputation of our Church's College that there was a strong international interest in these posts. Having our own college allows us to shape the training of not only ordained ministers, but also that of deaconesses, auxiliary ministers and accredited preachers and, through them, the Church, for at least a generation."

The function that Union Theological College performs, and its strategic location adjacent to the Queen's University campus, also provides the potential for witness and engagement at the heart of academic life in Ireland.

There is a price, literally, to pay, however, in the upkeep of an historic building and recent years have seen necessary expenditure on the external stonework.



Dr. Martyn Cowan



Dr. Zachary Cole

# Pastoring the pastors

Under the leadership of the Council for Training in Ministry's Pastoral Care to Manse Families Panel, PCI provides pastoral care to its ministers in a variety of ways.

## New candidates for ministry

**This year's General Assembly saw five candidates accepted as students for the ministry while, at the other end of the process, the previous month saw 14 students complete their course and receive their Certificate for Licensing, ready to commence full-time work in a congregation.**

That is not the end of their training and development, however. Training is an important element of a licentiate assistantship under the supervision of their 'boss' in a local congregation, and at Union Theological College under the Director of Ministerial Studies and Development, Rev. Dr. David Allen.

Following a call and ordination, there are five years of post-ordination training. The Ministerial Development Scheme gives opportunities to all ministers to undertake sabbaticals and in-service training.

In April, the Panel held its second forum to look at this key area of ministry. Presbytery representatives responsible for pastoral care to ministers met to share experiences, discuss common issues and pray for each other. A former GP and psychiatrist also provided professional insight and advice.

Pastoral care varies from presbytery to presbytery. In some a minister acting as Pastor Pastorum – literally Pastor of Pastors – has this responsibility. In others a

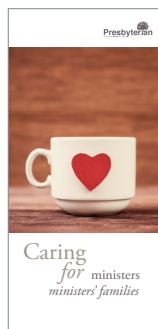
team of people share the role, while in some it becomes part of the moderator of presbytery's duties for their year in office.

Panel convener, Rev. Gabrielle Farquhar,

explained that, "As a Church we are committed to providing effective pastoral care to our ministers and how, as a Church, we pastor to our pastors is crucially important.

"The important thing is that there is a committed resource for people to turn to, and that pastoral care is undertaken professionally and compassionately, encouraged and supported," Mrs. Farquhar said.

*"As a Church we are committed to providing effective pastoral care to our ministers and how, as a Church, we pastor to our pastors is crucially important."*



# People matter to God

The Church's approach to caring for the elderly was highlighted at this year's General Assembly and in a new resource that offers guidelines for those involved in the pastoral care of older people.

The Council for Social Witness presented 'People matter to God', one of three alternative presentations at this year's General Assembly, which began with a video about the work and ministry of Sunnyside House in Bangor, County Down – one of PCI's six residential care homes for older people.

Following the video presentation, a number of people took to the stage to talk about different issues that affect older people. Stephen Gowdy, General Assembly solicitor, talked of the need to protect our older people, not least when it comes to making wills and planning for the cost of nursing care provision. The Assembly also heard from George Clarke, Head of the Police Service's Public Protection Branch.

Joyce McKee, of the Health and Social Care Board, talked about the global phenomenon that is elder abuse, saying, "We need to be supporting, befriending and defending our older people."

Closing the presentation, Linda Wray, PCI's Residential and Supported Services Manager, asked that congregations afford to our older people dignity, respect, independence, rights and equality, and that they ensure older people do not feel isolated or excluded.



Former Moderator Very Rev. Dr. Ian McNie paid a Christmas visit to Adelaide House, the Church's residential home in south Belfast, where he met 105-year-old Mrs. Eileen Nutt (pictured) and 102-year-old Mrs. Anne Carlton.

## Even in your old age I will carry you

In an aging population, developing pastoral care of the Church's older generation is important. *Even to old age I will carry you* is a new resource that has been produced by the Council for Congregational Life and Witness that offers guidelines for those involved in the pastoral care of older people.

Accompanying the 60-page booklet are downloadable discussion questions available from [presbyterianireland.org/resources](http://presbyterianireland.org/resources) which are designed to further equip those involved in pastoral care for older generations.



# Pastoral concern for farming communities

The pressures the farming industry faces and how the Church can respond on the ground pastorally were the focus of meetings with farmers and farming representatives led by the Moderator, Dr. Ian McNie.

At a working breakfast in Belfast in September, Dr. McNie met the then Deputy President of the Ulster Farmers' Union, Barclay Bell, and other farming community representatives. In April, he also met agri-students and staff, dairy, beef and pig farmers from counties Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan on a pastoral and fact-finding visit to Teagasc Agricultural College, Ballyhaise, in County Cavan.

“Farming communities and the people who farm have for many generations been the backbone of Ireland. Our meetings were an important opportunity to learn

more about the pressures that those working in all farming sectors are under, so that ministers and elders, who are often the first point of contact for those who are facing difficulties, are better informed and equipped to respond pastorally” said Dr McNie.

With local churches often at the heart of rural community life, in a letter to ministers to make them aware of the issues that had been raised, Dr. McNie asked congregations to place an additional focus on both prayer and support for all those who farm and the issues they face.



Dr. McNie with UFU reps

## Blood and organ donation

Over the past few years in Northern Ireland changes to the system of organ donation has been discussed. Experts have consistently emphasised the need for increasing public awareness to be at the core of any efforts to boost organ donation rates.

Recognising that PCI must play its part, the General Assembly passed a resolution encouraging Church members across Ireland to join the Organ Donor Register in their jurisdiction and to advise their families and close friends of their decision. The General Assembly also asked the Church's Council for Church in Society to liaise with others in the promotion of blood and organ donation.





# The Grace of Giving

*Be Joyful – Be Generous*

## Be Joyful – Be Generous

For some, discussing money and parting with it doesn't come easy, yet there are approximately 2,000 verses in the Bible that do talk about money, wealth and possessions – around a third of Jesus' parables relate to it. As Christians, our giving is a response to the grace that God extends to us.

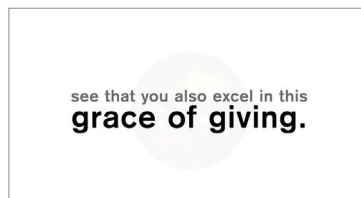
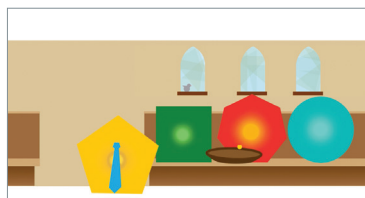
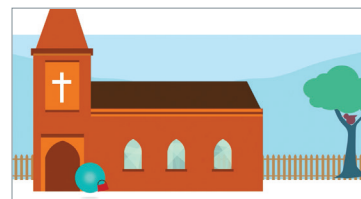
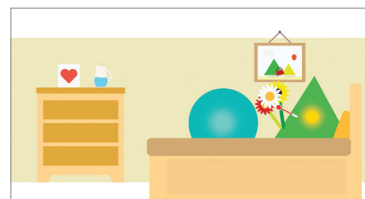
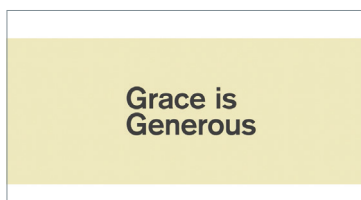
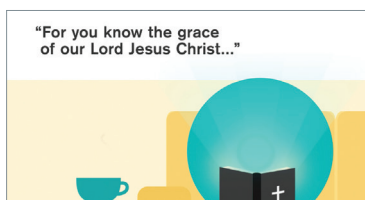
The Grace of Giving initiative encourages Presbyterians to prayerfully and sacrificially consider their response to what God has

done for them and how they can be a part of building His kingdom at home and overseas.

The vision of our local church is to share the good news of Jesus with our community, to reach out to a world in need and to make disciples of all nations. We can all play our part in this vision by giving of our time and talents.

**To view a video created for The Grace of Giving initiative visit:**

[www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/United-Appeal/Videos](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/United-Appeal/Videos)



## Give: A new resource for young adults



The Bible teaches us that a church whose members sow generously can expect a rich harvest. In a new leaflet produced for students, Hayley Cullen of First Portadown Presbyterian Church encourages fellow young adults to think about how they can give "a small proportion to the God who has provided me with all that I have."

"As a student, I know that money is something that dominates our concerns. Surely I can't be in the situation to claim that I can't give back to my church! It's my opportunity to give a small proportion to the God who has provided me with all that I have.

It is very easy for me to state this in theory but the reality of deciding to give requires action. I believe that it is important to start small. Success will lie in developing a habit of how to organise my finances."



# United Appeal Together getting things done

When we see God's plan, we can then put our faith into action as we give what we have joyfully and graciously.

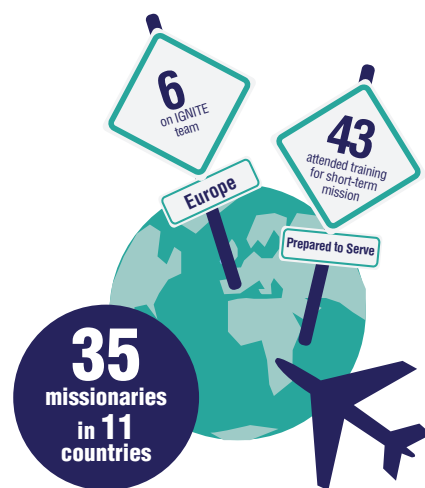
Through the annual United Appeal for Mission, the generosity of PCI members demonstrates in a very practical way their love, concern and compassion for those in need.

Presbyterians are a generous people and without the United Appeal, the Church would not be able to do much of what it does in the vital work of its gospel mission.

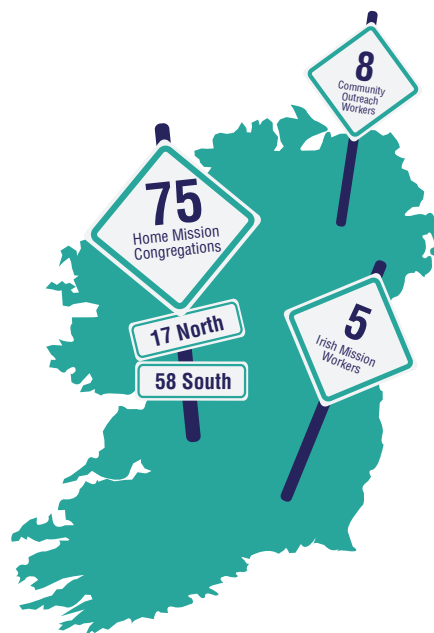
In 2016 the United Appeal will contribute £3,331,911 (€3,848,517)

to resourcing ministries at home in Ireland and overseas. Every aspect of our Church's mission depends to some extent on United Appeal. Hundreds of projects and programmes are helping to advance God's Kingdom, showing His love in action to hundreds of thousands of people.

To all who contribute to the life and mission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland – thank you.



To view a video created for United Appeal Sunday 2016 visit:  
[www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/United-Appeal/Videos](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/United-Appeal/Videos)



# Milestones in Presbyterian life

2016 marked a number of significant centenary anniversaries in relation to the Battle of the Somme and the Easter Rising.

It also saw the Moderator attend many services of thanksgiving for the life and witness of a number of congregations as they celebrated significant milestones in the life of the local church.

Arklow Presbyterian Church in County Wicklow celebrated its centenary. First Larne's 300th anniversary was commemorated as was Ballee Presbyterian's 40th.

In April 2016, Dr. McNie took part in the golden jubilee celebrations of Abbey Presbyterian in Monkstown, County Antrim, leading him to make this observation:

"I have been invited to a number of similar celebrations during my time as Moderator. Last year I shared in celebrating 400 years of Presbyterian witness in Holywood. Next month I will be in First Garvagh celebrating their 375th anniversary and that same weekend I will be in County Donegal to mark 180 years of witness of Alt Presbyterian Church.

"Whether we are celebrating 50 or 150 years doesn't really matter. What matters is that Christian folk began a work. They preached the gospel, welcomed the stranger, listened to God and watched Him move. Above all else they were faithful in all of this."



# Meet the Dicksons

Rev. Colin Dickson and his wife Marjorie have begun a new assignment at the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary in the Jordanian capital Amman



Colin will be Academic Coordinator and Lecturer in Practical Theology, while Marjorie has been appointed as an Assistant in the Seminary's library.

Colin, who was ordained as a minister in December 2006, served along with Marjorie in the congregations of Cavanaleck and Aughentaine in the Presbytery of Omagh for seven years, until December 2013. Throughout that year they sensed a call to missionary service overseas.

PCI currently supports 35 adults engaged in mission in varying ways, serving in 11 countries in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe. In addition, around 140 Presbyterians from 70 congregations across Ireland are serving with around 30 independent mission agencies in over 55 countries worldwide.



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## Faith in the Furnace and the refugee experience

**Given the increasing plight of refugees resulting from the situation in the Middle East, in November 2015 two conferences 'Faith in the Furnace – Challenges facing the Church in the Middle East' and 'The Refugee Experience – Challenges facing the Church at home' were held by PCI.**

Both gave greater insight into how local churches in the Middle East, especially in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, were coping with the challenges they faced. The conference also looked at what churches in Ireland can do to stand with their brothers and sisters in Christ in the midst of conflict. The principal speaker was Rev. Farouk Hammo,

Senior Pastor, Baghdad Presbyterian Church and was held in association with Open Doors.

At the second conference on refugees, representatives from the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers explained the UK's asylum and refugee system. There was also a session on how churches can best help and support new refugees who arrive here.

PCI's Global Mission Secretary, Rev. Uel Marrs, also reported on his visit to Lebanon. During his visit he saw how the local church was responding to the crisis in Syria and how many refugees fleeing conflict were turning to Christ having 'come through the furnace'.

## Some key dates for your diary

### **Saturday 24th September 2016**

#### **Global Mission – People in Focus**

Hear what God is doing in His world. Hosted by UTV's Paul Clarke with reports from mission personnel from Italy, Brazil and Nepal.

### **Monday 26th September 2016**

#### **The Church in the Public Square – On Being Human**

A series of seminars to reflect on what it means to be a human being and to address a number of important contemporary issues. The sixth and final seminar takes place on 11th November.

### **Friday 28th October – Sunday 30th October 2016**

#### **MAD Weekend**

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

### **Thursday 2nd February – Friday 3rd February 2017**

#### **Union Theological College – Luther Conference**

A two-day conference to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

### **Monday 5th June – Friday 9th June 2017**

#### **General Assembly 2017**

### **Monday 21st August – Thursday 24th August 2017**

#### **Residential Assembly - Everyday Disciples**

At the campus of Ulster University, Coleraine, ministers, elders and other key congregational leaders and personnel will explore the necessity for followers of Jesus to be effective disciple-makers in their various spheres of everyday life.

**To view all upcoming events please visit:**

[www.presbyterianireland.org/events](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/events)

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### **Photography credits:**

General Assembly 2016 photographs by Jamie Trimble

Other contributors include: Chris Nelson, David Cavan, Mark Hawthorne and Nick Patterson



## *Vision for Society*

WE, MEMBERS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND,  
saved by grace  
and called by God to grace-filled relationships,  
in the power of the Holy Spirit  
as ambassadors of Christ's kingdom  
in a broken and divided world;

BELIEVE that the good news of Jesus Christ  
challenges and equips us  
to develop radically new attitudes and relationships  
with our neighbours throughout the whole of Ireland.

WE CONFESS our failure  
to live as Biblically faithful Christian peacebuilders  
and to promote the counter culture of Jesus  
in a society where cultures clash.

ACCORDINGLY, WE AFFIRM Christian peacebuilding  
to be part of Christian discipleship  
and reassert the Church's calling  
to pursue a peaceful and just society in our day.

WE SEEK a more reconciled community  
at peace with each other,  
where friend and foe,  
working together for the common good,  
can experience healing  
and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.



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