

# COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS

Convener: Rev COLIN MORRISON

Secretary: Rev DAVID THOMPSON

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council for Congregational Life and Witness has met on two occasions since last year's General Assembly.
2. The report details:
  - (a) Two important themes: building the community of the church and bolstering the outward face of the church.
  - (b) The work of the following eight committees:
    - (i) Discipleship Committee (including the Good Relations Panel)
    - (ii) Global Mission Involvement Committee
    - (iii) Leadership Committee (including the Elders' Panel and Youth Assembly)
    - (iv) Outreach Committee
    - (v) Pastoral Care Committee
    - (vi) Worship Committee
    - (vii) Women's Strategy and Coordination Committee (including Presbyterian Women)
    - (viii) Youth, Children's and Family Strategy and Coordination Committee.
  - (c) The work of the Events, Training and Resources Coordination Panel.
  - (d) The work of the following four task groups
    - (i) Baptism Resources Task Group
    - (ii) Church Membership Resource Task Group
    - (iii) The Evangelistic and Discipleship Pathways Task Group
    - (iv) Developing Congregational Use of Social Media Task Group.
  - (e) Partnership with presbyteries.
  - (f) Preparations for transitioning to a more streamlined structure of committees, panels and task groups.

- (g) A snapshot of big picture developments across the Council's remit since 2015.
- (h) A programme of anticipated major events in 2019/20.
- (i) The ongoing challenge of effective communication with congregations.
- (j) Three other particular areas requiring further consideration.

### **Seeking simplicity on the other side of complexity**

3. It is often said there is a simplicity which lies on the other side of complexity that should be much sought. In many ways, that simplicity is what the Council for Congregational Life and Witness is pursuing, both in its own work and, more significantly, in its support for congregations in the development of their ministry and mission.
4. There are many facets to the life and witness of any congregation. Developing our life together as the people of God in a local church entails a complex mix of worship, pastoral care, discipleship, leadership, outreach and sharing in God's wider work in the world. It involves men, women, old, young, families, singles, members who are passing through all sorts of life circumstances, happy and sad. These useful ways of viewing church from a range of perspectives can, however, too easily become silos, overcomplicating our thinking and leaving us overwhelmed by demands. This is especially true at a time when many congregations are getting smaller and there are often fewer and fewer people to do what often seems like an ever-lengthening list of more and more things. In what is also a complex time of change for the church, a multiplication of new ideas, language and programming can further contribute to our feeling paralysed, rather than energised.
5. So, can we identify a simpler way in which all these facets, of what it is to be church, better overlap and interlock? Might we usefully strip church back to two things - an inward face of congregational life and an outward face of congregational witness? The Council for Congregational Life and Witness believes so. From June 2019, as agreed by last year's General Assembly, its existing complex structure of committees and panels will give way to two core committees – one for congregational life, the other for congregational witness. Further details can be found in paragraph 90 of this report. While the breadth and complexity of the Council's remit remains unchanged, the streamlining of the way it is delivered will enable a greater coordination of the work and simplicity of message.

### **Emerging and converging themes**

6. This greater coordination and simplicity is already materialising from the complexity of the Council agenda in the evolution of one emerging and converging theme. Both reflect priorities that pop up persistently in a variety of conversations and threads that God seems to be drawing together.

7. The first is largely an issue of developing a culture that needs to undergird all of congregational life. Building the community life of the church is an essential priority emerging in areas of pastoral life, discipleship, leadership, worship and, by extension, outreach. If we are to care for one another, walk with one another in the journey of faith, lead and follow together as one in a shared direction and worship with one another in ways that are more than mere consumerism, then we need to share life together at more than a superficial level. In a world that is lonely and fractured, that community will bear a witness to others.
8. The second reflects a convergence of work which will be particularly highlighted in the Council's alternative presentation on Tuesday evening of Assembly week. It is the need to bolster the outward face of the church. Several new Council resources and initiatives to be launched at this year's General Assembly take up this theme in a variety of ways. The Share resource, about which more details can be found under the report of the Outreach Committee (paragraph 37), will help congregations reflect on how to build relationships with those outside the church, the kind of community in which they can find a home and ways of inviting encounter with the gospel message. The Good Relations Panel have been addressing the issue of what it means to be a welcoming church. The Inside Out resource, detailed in the report of the Discipleship Committee (paragraph 16), will challenge congregations in the area of biblical hospitality and approachability by others who are often not like us in a variety of ways. The Youth, Children's and Family Strategy and Coordination Committee report details a resource, crafted specially to engage with unchurched children, which has been produced in conjunction with a series of books published by the Good Book Company (paragraph 67). The Go Deep, Go Wide initiative, aimed at enlivening congregational involvement in global mission, reported under the Global Mission Involvement Committee (paragraph 19), represents a recognition that in today's global village our reach of impact as congregations in mission can extend a lot further than it used to in simple, but significant, ways.
9. All of the above represents an important rebalancing of the Council'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.
10. In 2019/20, the Council will seek to identify significant ways in which to bring the priority of building the community life of the church before congregations and to build on the momentum created by the resources released to bolster the outward face of the church.

### **Accompanying the development of congregational life and witness**

11. The Council seeks to set itself in constant listening mode. As such, it derives direction from ongoing feedback from congregations, gathered in a variety of ways, including:

- General Assembly – at which there is careful consideration given to all views expressed.
  - Council meetings – at which ‘15 minute discussions’ have become a crucial way of testing and sharpening ideas with as wide a representation of congregations as possible outside of the General Assembly. Key aspects of each Council meeting are also disseminated to each presbytery with an invitation for comment.
  - Committee meetings – at which agendas are carefully shaped for facilitated discussion and meetings sharply focused on granting permissions to deliver pieces of work.
  - Presbytery events – where part of the evening gathers feedback on the three greatest challenges congregations find themselves facing.
  - Focus groups – in which smaller groups of key leaders are drawn together from a variety of congregational situations to inform agendas.
  - Major events – after which comments collected are fed forward to continue to help organising groups refine and nuance future programming.
  - Conversations – with a wide variety of those who are ministering on the ground all over the island.
12. Again, this year, the detail of the Council’s work has been divided for direction and delivery to committees, panels and task groups. The following section offers an overview of their work. Some of it represents elements that have become an established part of the Council’s output. Some is very much work in progress. Some is at an even more embryonic stage.
13. Once again, this year, Council invites and welcomes the comments of the General Assembly on what is being delivered, what is under discussion and what isn’t, but may need to be. It is committed to ongoing refinement, nuancing and fresh prioritisation of any aspect of its remit in response to the collectively expressed needs of congregations.

## **DISCIPLESHIP COMMITTEE**

14. This year saw the launch of two new resources for discipleship under the brand *Proximity*. As the name suggests, these resources are aimed at relational discipleship in ones or twos, rather than the larger group settings that are often both more prevalent in our church life and generally better resourced. With the launch of the first resource, *Seasons of life*, in September 2018, events in Belfast, Ballygawley, Ballymoney, Ballydown and Lucan offered insight into ways in which the tool could be used as well as some basic skills in one-to-one discipling. The second in the series came in January 2019. Entitled *Life in God’s Story*, it offers a framework for life-related discussion of the flow of the Bible story

and how it shapes our understanding of God's world and our place in it. Feedback on both resources has been positive. Two more titles in the series are planned for 2019/20.

15. A follow up to last year's Disciple Makers' Network was held in November 2018 in which a variety of congregational stories of progress in disciple making were shared. A second event is planned for Friday 21 June 2019 in Assembly Buildings, at which Mark Stirling of the Chalmers Institute will be the speaker. A Belfast-based Disciple Makers' Network is planned for 2019/20.
16. The Good Relations Panel, which reports to the committee, is launching what will be an important resource offering congregations a way of considering and developing their culture of welcome and inclusivity. Entitled, *Inside Out: Welcoming others as Christ has Welcomed us*, the resource takes the form of eight Bible studies with a variety of accompanying DVD material. Introductory sessions focus on biblical hospitality, becoming more aware of difference and developing a culture of welcome. They are followed by further sessions encouraging consideration of how to show God's welcome to those from another culture or country, adults with disabilities, and those who hold a worldview which we do not endorse, but who, as people, we want to befriend. The resource will be available as a download from the PCI website. Each part could be as a series on the theme, or as a standalone session.
17. The committee is giving attention to maintaining and developing the focus and particular contribution of the Transform event to the discipleship challenges and opportunities of the young adult season of life. Rachel Jones, author of *Is This It?* a recent book on young adult discipleship, has been invited to facilitate a group in sharpening and nuancing the young adult ministry agenda.

MARK GOUDY, Convener

## **GLOBAL MISSION INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEE**

18. The committee has been progressing two main areas of work this year.
19. The Go Deep, Go Wide initiative will be launched at the General Assembly. It aims to encourage congregations to identify and develop at least one relationship with a person, project or place in overseas mission in which they will go deep. Going wide involves gaining an overview of the breadth of global mission. Congregations will be encouraged to maximise the potential of the variety of denominational appeals which, year on year, open up an extraordinary window on what God is doing in the world. This simple framework, has been developed in conjunction with the Council for Global Mission It offers scope for future development in refreshing and reimagining congregational

involvement in global mission as an aspect of what it means to be global disciples in an increasingly smaller world.

20. The other major piece of work is to develop a suite of resources for congregations sending mission teams overseas. The aim is to provide a usable tool to enable teams to prepare well in advance, participate well as partners, and process and pass on the story of what God has done on return. These resources are planned for release in the autumn.
21. This year, a pilot project will see a PCI team, comprising twelve young adults, go to work in George, South Africa, in conjunction with the ministry of Sports Academy. The Council remains open to developing such denominational opportunities, especially with PCI global mission workers or partners, as demand arises and capacity allows. It has been pleasing to note that a number of young people have been facilitated to serve on PCI Summer Outreach Teams in Ireland by Csaba and Ilona Veres, PCI global mission workers in Romania. The young people quickly integrated and became valued members of the teams. Conversation with the Veres' has taken place to explore how this welcome development can be further facilitated in future.
22. The Youth and Children's Project remains a popular and effective vehicle in many congregations to stimulate global mission involvement. A comprehensive resource pack offers easy ways for congregations to share and promote engagement with the particular aspects of mission being promoted. The 2019/20 project will focus on the translation and provision of children's books for ministry undertaken by Derek and Jane French, PCI Global Mission Workers in Bilbao, Spain.
23. The Council reminds members of Assembly that the Concorde Fund remains available to PCI members to provide financial assistance for travel related to involvement in overseas mission. Details can be found on the PCI website.

TREVOR LONG, Convener

## LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE

24. The Emerge: Developing Younger Leaders initiative has entered its third year with significant momentum. With the aim of increasing accessibility, this year's programme was offered in two venues, Magherafelt and Belfast. It will conclude with a joint residential gathering in late June 2019. Numbers continue to increase in what is recognised as an important ministry of developing a new generation of leaders.
25. The PCI Intern Scheme has eight interns this year serving in a wide variety of congregational settings. Once again, congregational demand outstripped supply.
26. The Elders' Panel, which reports to this committee, has added more content to a significant resource offering elders outlines for use of

Scripture in pastoral visitation. These resources are available from the PCI website and have proved helpful in making elders' visits more than a perfunctory exercise. Work towards a revision of the Choosing New Elders resource is ongoing. Elders' training has been offered in Down and Dublin & Munster Presbyteries.

27. A comprehensive review of the children's and youth ministry training, undertaken by the Events, Training and Resources Panel, was approved by the committee. Recommendations will begin to be implemented in advance of the 2019/20 session. Publicity for the Children's and Youth Ministry Courses will be refreshed and updated to better capture the potential of this training for congregational leaders. Course content will be streamlined and focused, with teaching methodology reshaped, to better ensure it leaves more space for reflection on practice. A more flexible approach to regional training will allow for a variety of content. Careful allocation of staff time will strike a more finely tuned balance between Belfast-based, regionally delivered, and congregational training.
28. The committee has continued to find itself challenged by a discussion of how to create a more collaborative form of leadership in congregations in which many voices are offered an opportunity to be heard in shaping a more cohesive way forward for life and witness. This area seems to be emerging as a crucial foundation of finding focus and pursuing it with intentionality in all areas of congregational ministry and mission. Various proposals as to how to best promote and develop this theme in congregations have been tabled, but none has been found convincing. This key area for development will therefore become part of the leadership agenda of the new Congregational Life Committee after June 2019.

## YOUTH ASSEMBLY

*Co-chairs, Helen Hooks and Niamh Rankin, write:*

29. In February this year, over one hundred 15-25-year-olds from congregations right across the denomination gathered for the Youth Assembly. This year's theme was *The Anatomy of the Church: Many Parts, One Body*.
30. The main focus of the day was unity. Although delegates had come from all over the island of Ireland, participants were united as members of the Presbyterian Church, and most importantly, as the body of Christ. Discussions focussed on what unity looks like in reality. Three speakers addressed the topics of unity in our congregations, unity in our denomination, and unity as a people called to mission.
31. A large part of the discussion centred on unity across the generations, and the vital importance of good communication. However, the Youth Assembly Working Group was most excited and inspired by the feedback from section three – unity in mission. This arose from

- discussions held in the presbytery groups concerning mission in our various contexts.
32. There was an overwhelming desire for greater connection with those in presbytery groupings and a longing to put into practice possibilities arising from discussion for sharing in beyond individual congregations. This has inspired the working group to create a model and format for these conversations to continue.
  33. To develop this initiative, it will be important to link with presbyteries, to enable young people and young adults to work within existing structures. The aim is to channel the passion of delegates for working together with their neighbouring congregations, in order for them to grow in their faith and go out to reach others in their presbytery areas.
  34. Consequently, the Youth Assembly Working Group plans to partner with two or three presbyteries, to pilot a model of Youth Presbytery, mirroring the discussion format of our own Youth Assembly. The aim is to increase the engagement of young people with their presbyteries.
  35. Again, this year, the Youth Assembly Working Group is hosting a Fringe Event during the General Assembly. It will take up the theme of the Youth Assembly on developing and building unity, within congregations and beyond. The Fringe will take place on Wednesday 5 June 2019 at 6.15pm in the ground floor Conference Room, Assembly Buildings. A light tea will be served. Admission to the event is by ticket only so booking is essential and can be completed online at the PCI website or through the CLW office.

EMERSON MCDOWELL, Convener

## OUTREACH COMMITTEE

36. This year the committee's work has focused on envisioning and equipping kirk sessions and other key leaders in how to lead congregations to work together and gain confidence in reaching out to others. In March 2019, Andy Frost of Share Jesus International, was guest speaker at a series of regional events in Belfast, Richhill and Londonderry. He helpfully outlined practical ways in which congregations can recapture realistic steps towards reaching others with the gospel in a rapidly changing context.
37. A new resource, entitled Share, takes up the same theme. It will offer congregations a flexible way of engaging members in considering three key areas of building relationships with those outside of church, building a community in which others can experience and explore God's presence and truth and finding appropriate ways to offer encounter with the gospel message. The aim is to stimulate an understanding of mission that is realistic, achievable and capable of being owned by every member of the congregation. A mix of sessions allow the whole church the opportunity to receive challenge and encouragement in

the setting of a Sunday service, while material equipping for more detailed and practical out workings can be explored together in other more informal settings. Full details of the resource will be provided at the General Assembly and the Council encourages congregations to explore and prioritise its use in the coming church year.

38. Summer Outreach Teams for summer 2019 have been assigned to Mullingar, Castleblaney, Sion Mills, Abbey (Belfast), St Andrews (Bangor), Dungannon, Whitehouse, Seaview, Grange, County Cavan and Friendship House (Belfast). A new training and mentoring programme for team leaders has been put in place for this year.
39. The committee has also been in discussion with the Council for Mission in Ireland about other outreach team opportunities at different times of year, offering a different range of accompaniment in mission to congregations and with a possible all-age focus. Other alternatives for outreach teams are also under consideration.

STEPHEN RICHMOND, Convener

## PASTORAL CARE COMMITTEE

40. The committee continues to outwork their remit around a framework of developing congregational pastoral life that involves a pastoral core of a biblical understanding of life and the world, cultivating a culture of pastoral community among members and offering loving pastoral care in specific crisis situations. As this model, depicted as a pastoral life triangle, continues to be shared, it has been widely appreciated for its ability to summarise effective pastoral life in a simple and accessible manner. However, more work remains to be done in embedding this more holistic model of pastoral life across the denomination.
41. Pastoral Care Roadshows in Omagh and Dromore presbyteries were both well attended and appreciated. The roadshow model continues to prove effective in gathering a range of those involved in providing pastoral care in congregations for envisioning and encouragement.
42. The pastoral dimension of prayer ministry is another area the committee have been exploring. Following on from detailed exploration of how congregations are approaching this aspect of their work, an article in the November 2018 edition of the *Herald* offered stories of how two congregations express this ministry in their setting.
43. The committee continues to oversee the ministries of Fresh Light, the denominational counselling service, and the PCI Family Holiday. Both initiatives have undergone significant transition in recent years, but are now experiencing significant new life and seasons of fruitfulness.
44. New supervisors and counsellors have been recruited for Fresh Light and a further promotion of its ministry to congregations undertaken. It is hoped to build on that by producing a short DVD clip which will also highlight the ways in which Fresh Light can supplement pastoral

care in congregations and provide help for both members and non-members passing through difficult life circumstances.

45. Effective partnership with the Presbyterian Children's Society enables the PCI Family Holiday to continue to offer an environment in which families can spend time together over the Easter period enjoying a mixture of respite from the demands of life, a varied programme of activities, and time with God.
46. The Council notes that there is a significant decrease in requests from ministers to use the services of the Remarriage Panel. Resolution 1 seeks to explore the current need of the church for support in this area and how best that might be delivered. An associated issue, under the remit of the General Council, is clarity of communication of the church's guidelines regarding 'mixed marriages'. As both areas involve circumstances around marriage, it has been agreed to consolidate them in one resolution and, should the Assembly grant permission, to address them together.
47. The committee is aware that many pastoral issues arise as a result of the rapidly changing and increasingly complex society in which we live. Undoubtedly, under its remit of envisioning and equipping congregations for providing effective pastoral care, the Council will need to prioritise which of these require most immediate attention, also remaining aware that some of these issues are presently being explored in other areas of the General Assembly's work.
48. A significant new focus of the committee's discussion this year has been engaging with an initiative called Faith in Later Life. At present a UK mainland initiative, it aims to act as a hub around which the challenges and opportunities of evangelism, discipleship and pastoral life in the over-65 age bracket will be addressed and resourced. The committee is keen to see this theme further explored and ripened as a priority area for future development in congregational life and witness in Ireland's increasingly ageing society.

ALISTAIR BILL, Convener

## **WORSHIP COMMITTEE**

49. The committee's work this year centred on the construction and delivery of two main events.
50. The Organ in Contemporary Praise event was held on Saturday morning 26 January 2019 in Killead Presbyterian Church. For many congregations, the organ remains the primary and preferred accompaniment for praise in Sunday worship. In such situations, it can be easy to be locked into thinking that this restricts the choice of praise to traditional settings of psalms, hymns and songs. This pilot event opened up ways in which the organ can prove a more versatile instrument than is often imagined or explored. It offered examples of

ways in which organ music can be creatively harnessed in the service of more contemporary praise. The committee was encouraged by attendance and feedback and will explore other settings in which this event can be delivered.

51. A Worship Leaders' Training Day at Orangefield, Belfast, on Saturday 30 March 2019, was led by Sam and Sara Hargreaves of Engage Worship. They have already enriched the ministry of the denomination in two previous initiatives exploring whole-life worship and simple worship for smaller churches. The content of the day picked up on the outline of the Encounter Bible study resource launched in September 2018 and enabled anyone involved in shaping or leading worship to gain an expanded vision and imagination for their particular part in this vital aspect of congregational life.
52. The committee was encouraged by the use of the ASK prayer resource, comprising twelve postcard sized prompts for prayer for a variety of themes in congregational life and witness. Congregations embraced the flexibility of the resource and used it in a variety of ways. As the cards are undated, they remain a useful way of stimulating prayer for the coming church year for any congregation that has not yet used them.
53. A further strand of this committee's work involves progressing the production of a CD/MP3 resource providing musical accompaniment for congregations which do not always have access to a musician to lead praise.

JOHN MURDOCK, Convener

## **WOMEN'S STRATEGY AND COORDINATION COMMITTEE**

54. The challenge of locating women's ministry, as part of, rather than something that sits apart from, the rest of congregational life and witness, remains a work in progress. Attention is drawn to the continued availability of a women's ministry DVD clip previously provided to every minister and PW group. It helpfully points to a range of aspects of church life in which women's ministry often does, or can, make a specific contribution to the overall ministry and mission of the local church. Often, a simple linkage, drawing what is already happening in women's ministry into the development of congregational life or witness as a whole, could significantly multiply impact. A number of congregations are actively exploring their model of women's ministry. The resource and the discussion questions it poses, are recommended in such situations and copies are available from the Council office.
55. Looking forward, the committee is continuing preparations to launch an initiative called Side by Side in September 2019. The idea is to encourage women to develop their gifts in relational ministry

and mission in a whole variety of areas of congregational life and witness, including discipleship, pastoral care, leadership development, intergenerational ministry, evangelism and prayer.

56. The initiative will be launched with a series of regional events in the autumn. Simple materials encouraging and equipping women to participate will also be produced. Presbyterian Women will also promote this theme, as appropriate, through its programming, publications and social media.
57. The Council welcomes how this initiative continues to develop the vision for women's ministry through Presbyterian Women as well as resourcing congregations where the PW Group is not the only, or primary, vehicle for this work. The opportunity for the theme to be outworked in a variety of ways, which reflect many of the core areas of congregational life and witness under the remit of the Council, is also helpful as progress continues towards an increasingly joined-up strategy.

## **PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN**

58. The Council continues to commend the particular contribution of Presbyterian Women in its work of resourcing women's ministry in congregations. Equally, the way in which it encourages prayer and raises funds for the mission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, through generous grants to the Council for Mission in Ireland and Council for Global Mission, remains significant and is appreciated.
59. This year, PW Forums in September 2018 and February 2019 brought vision and enthusiasm to those who attended in the areas of developing biblical principles for leadership and the practice of relational discipleship.
60. The Annual Meeting and Evening Celebration on Thursday 9 May 2019 saw guest speaker, Helen Warnock, Principal of Belfast Bible College, open up this year's PW theme, 'He restores my soul' (Psalm 23:3). Once again, both opportunities bring together women from across Ireland to worship and celebrate all that God is doing in their lives and through his church.
61. The theme of restoration is developed for use in women's ministry settings in congregations through the annual Inspirations resource. Once again, it contains a carefully crafted range of accessible devotional materials drawn from Scripture and a range of resource ideas around which to plan a varied and imaginative programme.
62. The *Wider World* magazine has been given a fresh, new look and continues to provide its readership with a range of PW news, ideas for women's ministry, interviews, challenging articles and mission updates. In another new development, the magazine will also be available in digital copy from June 2019. This is part of the ongoing development

of the use of a wider range of mediums of communication, including Facebook and Instagram, which have also proved effective.

63. In addition to the funds raised for the two mission councils, the home dimension of the 2019/20 PW Project will support the development of Council for Social Witness specialist services in Thompson House, Carlisle House and Gray's Court. The overseas aspect of the appeal will provide finance to produce Christian literature for women in the Arabic speaking world.
64. At the October 2018 meeting of the Council, a resolution was passed enabling PW LINK finances to be included and audited within presbytery accounts in line with requirements relating to Charity Commission legislation. The Council is grateful to the Financial Secretary's Department for its advice in this matter and to presbytery clerks and finance agents, as well as LINK finance agents, for their help in accommodating the new arrangements.

DAVID THOMPSON, Acting Convener

## **YOUTH, CHILDREN'S AND FAMILY STRATEGY AND COORDINATION COMMITTEE**

65. The committee has received and considered feedback from two focus groups held in June 2018 aimed at identifying congregational priorities in supporting and assisting the development of children's, youth and family ministry. Crucial areas identified include:
  - (a) Programming: how to make a rota system of leaders work effectively;
  - (b) Doctrine: teaching key truths of God's Word in such a way as to lay solid foundations for following Jesus in the real world;
  - (c) Covenant Family: Identifying how to resource congregations to encourage and enable family ministry;
  - (d) Pathways: helping congregations develop their vision for evangelistic and discipleship pathways for children and young people that incorporate the contributions of age-related organisations and programmes into the wider life and witness of the congregation.
66. These priorities will be important going forward in shaping the Council agenda in children's, youth and family ministry. Reflection has already begun in assessing how best to respond in practical ways.
67. A three-session programme for children's ministry, aimed specifically at reaching unchurched children, has been released. This project is being developed in conjunction with the Good Book Company around a series of books entitled, *Eric says thanks*, *Eric says please* and *Eric says*

*sorry*. Originally developed for use in the setting of school assemblies, the books move from familiar events in the everyday world of an unchurched boy, through the simple concepts of thank you, please and sorry, towards biblical truths of God as provider and sustainer, understanding prayer, and repentance and forgiveness. This dynamic is key in effectively engaging with a growing number of unchurched children for whom we can assume no knowledge of basic Christian truth. As such, the books and resources model an effective means of outreach to unchurched children that needs to become increasingly common practice in mission to the upcoming generation. The resources produced to accompany the books will prove helpful in a kids' club or Messy Church environment. The themes of thanks and sorry also lend themselves to use as stand-alone sessions at Harvest and Easter. These resources are available for free download from the PCI website.

68. In the area of family ministry, the committee has recognised the value of Care for the Family's Kitchen Table Project in equipping parents of primary school aged children to share faith in the home. A very successful Starting Strong evening was held in March 2019 in Assembly Buildings, which addressed the challenges and opportunities of expressing everyday faith in everyday ways in the family. It also drew particular attention to the Kitchen Table Project resources. The Council will continue to promote both the theme and resources going forward. It is notable that a comparable set of resources, specifically aimed at equipping parents of post primary aged children, is not readily available. Work has commenced on exploring a resource which will provide a way in which congregations can begin to address this deficit.
69. A resource to help congregations assess which of a variety of models of young adults' ministry might best suit their circumstances is forthcoming. Work is also underway to better communicate directly to young adults the range of opportunities available to them through PCI including developing their leadership, mission, service, courses and discipleship events. All of these opportunities are offered with a very strong emphasis upon the need to be a committed contributor to the ministry and mission of the local church.
70. An ongoing conversation with Youth Link NI is progressing to try to narrow an identified gap between its training provision and congregational needs.
71. Useful meetings have been held with representatives of both the Girls' Brigade and Boys' Brigade NI. Both organisations play a prominent part in children's and youth ministry in many PCI congregations. The Children's Development Officer continues to contribute to the writing of resources for use in Girls' Brigade companies. The possibility of partnering with Boys' Brigade on an event exploring specific ministry to boys, is being explored.
72. Events play a significant part in this aspect of the Council's output. Little Day Out, Kids' Big Day Out, MAD weekend and Youth Night

continue to provide large scale, specialist ministry which supplements and builds upon the weekly work of congregations. Recent years have seen the development of suites of resources for use in congregations built around the themes developed at the events. This has proved popular for congregations, who have attended the events, by way of follow up, but the Council draws the attention of all congregations to an increasing bank of resources available from the PCI website that can provide ongoing material for children's and youth ministry leaders.

73. The Council ran two My Place gatherings in Drumreagh and Ballydown, stimulating thinking about inclusion of children with a variety of special needs in congregational life. Following two years of regional events, the next phase will involve capturing some simple top tips, drawn from the content, as an accessible guide to best practice.
74. A programme of round table gatherings for full time children's, youth and family workers continue to support those employed in this area in congregations. Discussion and feedback on a wide range of topics addressed also informs the Council of ongoing challenges on the ground.

SAM FINLAY, Convener

## **EVENTS, TRAINING AND RESOURCES COORDINATION PANEL**

75. The Events, Training and Resources Coordination Panel has initiated three important reviews. A review of payments to trainers, speakers and venues used in delivering events, has brought greater clarity and consistency to this area of budgeting. A review of the Children's and Youth Ministry courses will refresh publicity and refine and renew content as reported above under the Leadership Committee (paragraph 27). An events strategy and budget review is underway. It aims to bring greater clarity to the articulation of the purpose of events, allowing assessment of impact and effectiveness.
76. The Council keeps a careful eye on the number of congregations engaging with the programme and resources it provides. From March 2018 to April 2019, 380 out of 535 congregations had attended at least one Council-run programme, event or initiative. In addition, 230 congregations have purchased at least one core resource produced by the Council in the same period. Many congregations have engaged with the Council's output in multiple ways. These figures do not include the work of individual staff members with single congregations. This is an area of work Council is keen to develop and expand.
77. The Council is committed to running events relevant to congregations and their needs and producing high quality resources. Their unique value is that they are shaped by Irish Presbyterians for Irish Presbyterian congregations and so often prove a better fit than other events and

resources derived in, and for, other ministry contexts. However, every output of the Council remains under constant scrutiny so as to avoid stagnation and failure to re-imagine, where necessary, what is done and how it is delivered.

ROSEMARY HAMILTON, Convener

## BAPTISM RESOURCE TASK GROUP

78. This task group was set up at the October 2018 meeting of the Council. It has been commissioned with bringing forward a new suite of resources for a key moment in congregational life in which the parents are bringing infants for baptism, or adults are being baptised on profession of faith.
79. The February 2019 meeting of the Council discussed the task group's initial report and agreed the following outline be developed:

### Core content

80. A DVD clip explaining the Presbyterian understanding of baptism in a positive tone. This to be accompanied by a short leaflet with the same basic content.

Additional content to offer frameworks for stimulating five particular discussions:

- between minister and parents requesting baptism for their children;
  - between minister and an adult requesting baptism;
  - in kirk sessions, facilitating a better understanding of baptism;
  - in the congregational setting of a baptism service guiding the congregation (and particularly other children present) through what is happening;
  - among young people, facilitating a better understanding of God's grace at work in covenant families and in infant baptism.
81. The task group aims to complete its work by August 2020.

GARETH McFADDEN, Convener

## CHURCH MEMBERSHIP RESOURCE TASK GROUP

82. This task group was also set up at the October 2018 meeting of the Council which also included initial discussion of what is needed in this area. Addressing the opportunity of receiving new church members represents a key moment in church life. The need for a new resource arises from a number of angles. In terms of evangelism, reception as a full church member is a key moment in integrating those who

have come to faith into the wider body of the church. In the area of discipleship, there is a clear message to be reinforced that discipleship can only take place in the context of the body of Christ and not as an individual journey. As young people progress through youth ministry, the importance of church membership also needs to be clearly explained in terms of personal ownership of following Christ, commitment to the body of Christ and the appreciation of the support it provides by way of Christian community.

83. The February 2019 meeting of the Council discussed the task group's initial report and agreed the following outline be developed.

### **Format**

- Four sessions of 60-90 minutes.
- Simple discussion starter on session theme.
- Bible passage introducing the theme of the session.
- DVD clip of a story on the theme which opens up story-sharing by participants.
- DVD clip which carries the weight of introducing, in summary, the main teaching points of each session.
- Interactive written material which adds more content to the main teaching points.
- Closing section which aids personal reflection by participants and offers a short prayer for use in the group or individually.

### **Content (working titles)**

- **Believing:** Providing a summary of core Christian beliefs that are drawn from vows made by those admitted to the Lord's Table.
  - **Sharing:** Explaining what it means to participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.
  - **Living:** Emphasising the ongoing journey of following Jesus, including commitment, challenge, change, rhythms of devotion and witness.
  - **Belonging:** Emphasising the privileges and responsibilities of being a full church member, including worshipping, learning, serving, giving, and deciding together.
84. This Task Group also aims to complete its work by August 2020.

WILLIAM HENRY, Convener

## EVANGELISTIC AND DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAYS TASK GROUP

85. This task group was commissioned at the October 2018 meeting of the Council. The pathways by which congregations are seeking to reach others and accompany them on a journey towards faith in Christ and a lifetime of following him, is something that often needs to be approached with greater focus, clarity, flexibility and intentionality. There are at least four aspects to consider:
- How is the congregation ‘journeying out’ in mission? How are we going to reach others who no longer come to us?
  - How is the congregation helping people in ‘journeying in’ from evangelism to church life?
  - How is the congregation helping people in ‘journeying on’ in discipleship for growth and major life transitions?
  - How do we help congregations ask if they are ‘journeying fruitfully’? Is there intentionality about activities? Are there gaps in the pathways highlighted above? Is there connectedness between various organisations and activities? Do they need to downsize the amount of activities to avoid duplication and better focus on priorities? How are congregations actively accompanying individuals on their evangelistic and discipleship journeys?
86. An initial task group meeting has grappled with these issues and begun to consider options of what kind of resource may be of use to congregations. Once again, this task group aims to complete its work by August 2020.

JONATHAN MOXEN, Convener

### **Developing congregational use of social media**

87. A task group, which emerged from a Youth Assembly presentation and resolution to the General Assembly in 2017, completed its work in October 2018, and has been thanked and discharged. The importance of this aspect of congregational life and witness has been highlighted and actively promoted. A dedicated page on the PCI website has been established and one hundred free copies of the book *Church Online* by Laura Treener, made available to congregations.

**Presbytery partnerships**

88. The Council is glad to report progress in the planning and delivery of four specific training nights in conjunction with presbyteries in 2018/19. These have included:
- Ards Presbytery – with a wide-ranging focus on discipleship in church life;
  - Iveagh Presbytery – with a range of seminar options on small groups, men’s ministry and youth ministry;
  - Carrickfergus Presbytery – with a particular focus on outreach;
  - East Belfast Presbytery – with a focus on missional leadership in changing times for the urban church.
89. In every case, each presbytery has shaped the agenda of the evenings to address the particular priorities they identify as most important. Council staff have provided programming advice, publicity and personnel in delivery. The impact of each evening has been multiplied by inviting other key leaders from congregations to join ministers and representative elders. Congregations have the opportunity to discuss together the material delivered and think about how best it fits in their ministry setting.
90. The Council is excited by the potential of this growing partnership with presbyteries. Already dates have been set for similar evenings in Coleraine and Limavady, Route, Templepatrick and Newry presbyteries in 2019/20. Details for a further event in Derry and Donegal Presbytery are under discussion and the Council Secretary accepted an invitation to engage with members of Dublin & Munster Presbytery to assess how best the Council can offer support and equipping across the vast geographical area covered by its congregational spread.

**Transitioning to a more streamlined structure of committees, panels and task groups**

91. In 2017/18, the Council worked through a careful and consultative process designed to streamline its structure of committees, panels and task groups. Having sought the approval and support of the General Council and General Assembly for the proposal which emerged, a new structure will come into place from June 2019. By way of brief summary of what has been fully discussed and finally agreed, the new structure will see the following basic re-arrangement of direction and delivery of the remit.
- A Congregational Life Committee overseeing the development of the areas of leadership, discipleship, worship, pastoral life and prayer.
  - A Congregational Witness Committee overseeing the development of the areas of evangelism, community witness, good relations and global mission involvement.

- A Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee which will receive recommendations from the other two Committees (with additional input from the Children, Youth and Family Strategy Panel and Women's Ministry Strategy Panel) and prepare budgeted options for consideration by the Council.
  - Children, Youth & Family Strategy Panel and a Women's Ministry Strategy Panel offering age and gender specific input.
  - The Council as the final decision making body (under the General Assembly) receiving options for ongoing agendas and establishing priorities.
  - Time-limited task groups drawn together to work with staff to deliver major pieces of work.
92. Existing committees and panels have already been transitioning towards these new arrangements by compiling the work they have completed, considering what ongoing work remains to be finished and capturing what anticipated work needs to be transmitted for the consideration of the new committees. This careful preparation and clarity will aid a smooth transition.
93. The Council is grateful to conveners and all who have contributed to the progress of the work up to this point and expresses its thanks for their commitment.

### **Looking for fruitfulness**

94. Since the Council's inception in January 2015, each of the core areas of its remit have gained significant momentum through a very intentional means of resourcing congregations, developed around the following framework:
- Envisioning – presenting possibilities and painting pictures of different ways of doing things.
  - Equipping – providing resources and training directly to congregations and/or upskilling key leaders to develop effective practices of ministry and mission in the local congregation.
  - Enabling – journeying with individual congregations as they work out and work towards, realising their vision.
  - Events – supplementing local congregational ministry and mission with larger scale events of the kind which require specialist input.
95. At its February 2019 meeting, the Council reflected on the following snapshot of big picture developments in support of core areas of congregational life and witness within the last four years.

Area of remit	Envision: 'Big idea'	Equip: Resources available	Enable: Work more directly with congregations	Events: Major one-off or annual initiatives
<b>Discipleship</b>	Discipleshaping Church Settings 5000 (Worship) 72 (Service) 12 (Small Group) 3 (Relational)	Essentials DVD Bible study Proximity relational discipleship resources Mentoring DVD clip	Disciple Makers' Network	Conferences Discipleshaping Church Discipleshaping Preaching Discipleshaping Worship Transform (young adults' discipleship overnight)
<b>Pastoral Life</b>	Pastoral Life Triangle Core (Scripture) Community Care	Pastoral Triangle DVD clips	Presbytery-based training	
<b>Leadership</b>	Shared leadership and more collaborative decision-making	Valuable Leadership DVD clips Elders' and Kirk Session resources	Elders' training	Emerge:Developing younger leaders Intern Scheme
<b>Outreach</b>	Share Relationship Community Encounter	Share DVD resource* Inside Out DVD Bible study resource* Vision for Society		Overflow conference (Dave Male) Reach conference Share regional events (Andy Frost)

Area of remit	Envision: 'Big idea'	Equip: Resources available	Enable: Work more directly with congregations	Events: Major one-off or annual initiatives
Worship	Encounter Anticipate Appreciate Participate	Encounter DVD Bible study material		Worship leaders' training event Organ in Contemporary Worship event
Involvement in Global Mission	Go Deep, Go Wide initiative* Global disciples Deep - 'Live' link with a person, place or project Wide - denominational opportunities	DVD clip* Partnership and prayer materials*		
Congregational Prayer		Prayer Journeys Fruitful Congregations People of God ASK prayer cards		
Family ministry	Close to Home Contemporary expression of covenant theology	Close to Home DVD Bible study material Kitchen Table Project (Care for the Family)	Regional training	Close to Home launch evening Starting Strong evening

Area of remit	Envision: 'Big idea'	Equip: Resources available	Enable: Work more directly with congregations	Events: Major one-off or annual initiatives
Children's ministry		Models of Sunday morning children's ministry resource Toddler group resource Schools ministry resource ERIC resources Children's ministry basics DVD clips	Regional training	Kids' Big Day Out Little Day Out
Youth and Young Adults' ministry		Youth Fellowship resources Youth ministry basics DVD clips Models of Young Adult's ministry resource *	Regional training	MAD weekend Youth Night Youth Assembly
Women's ministry	Side by Side initiative*	Concept literature and DVD clip*	Regional events*	PW events & women's ministry celebration evening

\*Pending in 2019/2020

96. It should be noted that beneath and beyond what is listed above, is a wealth of other work including staff enabling individual congregations.
97. Council members were encouraged by what God has grown and trust members of the General Assembly will be as well. In keeping with the Council's theme of fruitful congregations, what is reflected above is the result of careful tending, planting and pruning. Not every area of the vineyard is cultivated in the same way. Season by season, some areas exhibit rapid growth, others show signs of stagnation. In still other aspects of the Council's work, we labour not quite knowing what God is doing in the moment. Some parts require further, patient, ripening. Others display early signs of a first fruits.

### **Good ground in which to plant**

98. The preparation for transition to a more streamlined structure is important because it should be anticipated that the period from June 2019 to June 2020 will be dominated by warming up the new committees and panels, as well as the Council, to function to deliver their particular parts of the jigsaw in a coordinated way. However, from experience and feedback gathered over the last number of years, the following programme of anticipated major events, in various areas of the Council's remit, has been approved for 2019/20:

#### Leadership

- A maximum of two elders' regional training events
- Emerge: Developing Leaders' programme
- Children's and Youth Ministry courses
- A maximum of three regional training events in a variety of formats to encompass elements of children's, youth and young adults' ministry

#### Pastoral Care

- A maximum of two Pastoral Care regional training events
- PCI Family Holiday

#### Worship

- Consideration of another regional Organ in Contemporary Worship event
- Consideration of another worship leader's training event

#### Discipleship

- One Disciple Makers' Network programme

#### Outreach

- Programme of Summer Outreach Teams (maximum 12)

#### Global Mission Involvement

- Consideration of one overseas team

## Youth Ministry

- MAD weekend
- Youth Night

## Children's Ministry

- Kids' Big Day Out (primary school aged children)
- Consideration of one Little Day Out or similar event (toddlers)

## Young Adults' Ministry

- PCI Intern Scheme
- Transform (discipleship event)

## Full-time Children's, Youth and Family Workers

- Full-time Children's, Youth and Family Workers' Round Tables (maximum 3)
- Annual retreat

## Women's Ministry

- Side by Side regional events (maximum 5)

## Equip Presbytery Evenings

- Maximum of five on themes decided by presbytery
- A bespoke response to equipping in the Dublin and Munster Presbytery in response to its particular geographical challenges

Two major denominational conference programmes (delivered in Assembly Buildings, Belfast, or regionally)

- Building the community life of the church.
- Bolstering the outward face of the church.

99. In transitioning to a more streamlined structure, the Council aims to continue to grow its work on the good ground already established. The new arrangements offer significant potential in increasing accountability, responsiveness to the expressed needs of congregations, more strategic budgeting and coordination of a wide remit both within the Council and with other Councils of the General Assembly.
100. The challenge will remain to be attentive to the leading of God's Spirit, discerning what he is doing among us, and being courageous in taking the kind of decisions that, in any given season, prioritises, and is willing to cease doing things as well as commence new initiatives.

### **The ongoing challenge of effectively communicating with congregations**

101. The Council continues to struggle with the challenge of communicating effectively with the congregations it is charged with supporting in their work. There is an ongoing struggle to keep key events and resources before the church. There has been some improvement in this area, and the introduction of a system in which every congregation has a

named person, in addition to the minister, dedicated to receiving and disseminating communications, is eagerly awaited. However, more remains to be done in developing existing mediums of communication and making the most of new possibilities.

102. Oversight of developing effective mediums of communication between councils and congregations and their members is the responsibility of the General Council. The Council for Congregational Life and Witness at its February meeting discussed this matter and recognised that there was still need for significant improvement in these areas. The work of the Council was suffering because of this, and some congregations were having difficulties in accessing online resources. The Council has expressed its view that there needs to be improvements in PCP's website and social media platforms. The Council welcomes steps taken by the Support Services Committee to address these issues, but reiterates the urgent need for progress.
103. One way of improving the publicity and communication of Council resources and events, that has already been pursued, is the recruitment of a Communications Intern. Their particular contribution would be in the gathering and production of content to be shared on social media. A post has been advertised commencing in September 2019. It is hoped that a suitable intern can be recruited. This is a one-year volunteer post, on an expenses only basis. It is envisaged that the Intern will work mainly within the Council for Congregational Life and Witness and in conjunction with the Creative Production Department, although their expertise will also be available to other Councils.

### **Three other particular areas requiring further consideration**

104. The Small and Fruitful initiative has been significant in helping identify the nature and capacity of the majority of congregations served by the Council. At its February meeting, the Council discussed what a next phase to the regional events in 2018, at which Karl Vaters was guest speaker, should involve. The feedback was inconclusive. However, this year has seen the opportunity to develop the theme and some basic material in a number of congregations, with a group of ministers and in the East Belfast Presbytery event referred to in paragraph 87. In every case, the material offered a stimulus for significant discussion, particularly among congregations who are experiencing transition from being a medium-sized to a small congregation. A number of helpful concrete steps about how to navigate such change, while retaining a focus on fruitfulness rather than being paralysed by fear, are beginning to emerge. They may form an important future conversation within congregations and with the Council for Mission in Ireland and Linkage Commission.

105. Last year's report highlighted the opportunity for congregations to invite Council development officers to come and work with their kirk session or other key leaders to train, share ideas, facilitate and stimulate conversations about any area of the Council's remit. Since then, there has been an encouraging upturn in congregations requesting this kind of support. One reason this particular strand of the work is increasingly important is that the challenge of time-poverty makes it more difficult for members to attend events outside the normal rhythms of congregational activities. The Council has more work to do in publicising these possibilities of working directly in the local congregation and finding an appropriate balance between this way of equipping, and regional and church wide conferencing and training.
106. In 2016, the General Assembly approved a framework for partnership work with other organisations. This has proved helpful in setting parameters for engaging in conversation, assessing approaches from others and proactively identifying opportunities. It is noticeable that the nature of such partnerships is changing from engaging in formal, ongoing relationships, to time limited, project centred collaboration. This greater nimbleness and flexibility is to be welcomed. It will be helpful for the Council to reflect further on the particular areas in which others may provide specialisms to supplement its work.

### **Fruitfulness in depth and breadth**

107. It is never an easy thing to measure spiritual fruitfulness. However, Scripture gives evidence that it shows itself in both depth and growth.
108. Paul, writing to the congregations in Galatia, spoke of the need for a growing depth in their congregational life expressed in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Let us pray and persevere for the building of such community in our congregational life together.
109. Reporting to congregations in Colossae, Paul also delights to tell them of a growing breadth to the gospel's reach – that, 'all over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing' (Colossians 1:6). For this bolstering of the outward face of our congregational witness and its impact, we also long and labour.

## APPENDIX

1. In 2002 the General Assembly established the Church Hymnary Trust Fund, under the Public Worship Committee of the Board of Communications, to operate under the following terms:  
That the General Assembly retain the balance of the amount accruing from the Church Hymnary Trust for the following purposes:
  - (i) The production of a new hymnary in electronic format.
  - (ii) Costs incurred in the launch of the new hymnary.
  - (iii) Cost incurred in the provision of the proposed resource centre.
  - (iv) Likely revision of the psalter.
  - (v) Possible supplements to the new hymnary.
  - (vi) Such other purposes in connection with public worship as the Assembly may approve.
2. Following restructuring in 2015, enabling the development of all aspects of the worshipping life of congregations is under the remit of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness. The Council has concluded that the uses for the fund itemised i–v above, have all been actioned, or are no longer relevant for the future development of key elements of public worship in congregations.
3. In an attempt to honour the spirit for which the fund was established, but to release monies for currently relevant purposes (and after consultation with the Clerk of Assembly), the Council is requesting that the General Assembly approve the widening of the application of item vi above to put the resources contained therein at the disposal of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness for the support and development of all aspects of the worshipping life of congregations.

## RESOLUTIONS

1. That the General Assembly instruct the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to review the provision made for guidance and support given to ministers asked to marry a couple where one or both individuals has been married before and is divorced, or, in situations of ‘mixed marriage’, and report to the 2020 General Assembly.
2. That the General Assembly place the resources contained in the Church Hymnary Trust Fund at the disposal of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness for the support and development of all aspects of the worshipping life of congregations.
3. That the report of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness be received