

**FOR INFORMATION**

The following body is not under the control of the General Assembly.  
The report is included for information only.

**PRESBYTERIAN CHILDREN'S SOCIETY**

*Dr Paul Gray (Executive Secretary) reports:*

1. The Presbyterian Children's Society exists to support Presbyterian children in Ireland. It works mainly through ministers to alleviate poverty and financial hardship for these children and their families. This is done mostly through regular and exceptional grants. The Society is currently assisting approximately 760 children in 390 families in over 200 congregations throughout Ireland.
2. The year 2017 has been extremely busy for the Society. There was a major upsurge in applications and a further 75 families were accepted for regular help. Exceptional grants totalled 173 which was the highest number of exceptional grants ever recorded, the previous highest being 124 in 2014. Most exceptional grants given are between £500 and £600. Every new regular grant application will cost the Society between £1100 and £1600 depending on the family size. Almost all applications for grants are processed on the day they are received.
3. The Society was involved in assisting a number of families in financial need attend the PCI Family Holiday. The Society has been involved in helping families attend the holiday since 1994 and greatly values this sphere of cooperation with the staff and Council for Congregational Life and Witness.
4. The Society has produced a range of new resources this year. Details are available on the Society's website [www.presbyterianchildrenssociety.org](http://www.presbyterianchildrenssociety.org). All resources are available from the Society and two sets of eleven pop-up stands which tell the story of the Society over 150 years are available to congregations for loan.
5. Whilst the Society is not under the control of the General Assembly, it works closely with the Church through its ministers. It is also working with relevant General Assembly councils to ensure congregations have appropriate resources to equip them in helping families in financial need.
6. The Society's work is independently supported by Presbyterian congregations and the Society gives thanks to all those who support the Society prayerfully, practically and financially throughout the year. The Society also welcomes enquiries about how it might assist children and families in need within any Presbyterian congregation. Finally the Society commends its work for the continued prayerful and financial support of the Church.

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## **PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND**

*The Very Rev Dr John Lockington writes:*

1. The Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland reports that throughout 2017 it has continued to promote the study of the historic Churches of the Presbyterian order in Ireland through its programme of talks, lectures and visits, and through its publications and website.
2. We have continued to operate in line with the requirements of the Charity Commission, both in how we present our accounts, and also as we try to meet the other requirements as they are notified to us. We have tried to do this with great care, and we believe we have been able to operate as a responsible charity.
3. Last year, we reported the difficulties we have had to face living with uncertainty regarding our future accommodation. That same situation has remained with us during the greater part of the year. Uncertainties over funding and how best to design the accommodation in Assembly Buildings to care for our library and archives within the constraints of the budget have tested us. At the end of the year however things began to happen with great rapidity. A special Meeting of Council was held on 21st November when the following resolution was passed unanimously, following a paper ballot:

*The Council of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland accepts the invitation of the Commercial Use of Assembly Buildings Task Group, under the General Council, to move back to Assembly Buildings, subject to the premises being made suitable for our requirements, with security of tenure and conditional on funding being made available.*

4. This meeting endorsed the decision of an earlier Special Meeting on 12th October, 2016 that the Chairman (Dr Donald Patton) the Joint Secretary (Dr Godfrey Brown) and the Treasurer (Derek Alexander) should represent the Society in negotiation about the move, and added the name of Dr John Lockington. The representatives were thanked for their work to date, and Dr Patton emphasised that they would do their best to forward the project recognising the constraints within which they would have to work.
5. Since that time a great deal of detailed work has been done. We have not been able to do everything we would have liked to do, but we see in what is being offered to us a real opportunity to move forward as a society, and to offer a much better service to the churches, and to the wider public in a variety of ways. We will still need to seek additional sources of funding in order to build upon what we are being given,

and to achieve things which as yet we cannot afford, and especially the provision of additional rolling shelving for our growing archive material.

6. The new location at the main entrance to the Assembly Buildings will, we believe, increase our contact with the members of the Presbyterian Church who come to the Church offices or the Assembly Hall as well as those people who attend conferences. It will make the Society accessible to the thousands of visitors to Belfast who stay in the increasing number of local hotels.
7. The mammoth task of removal will make it necessary to close our library for a period of time and to curtail the services we are able to offer.
8. Once again this year we had an excellent programme of lectures, and other less formal events, and have been pleased to see attendances well maintained, and in some cases significantly increased, drawing in quite a number of new people. It was particularly pleasing to see a capacity audience for the Robert Allen Lecture in May on the subject of the Prof Davey trial for heresy. Events also included a visit to Culturlann (the former Broadway Church) and our Field Trip which took us this summer to East Tyrone.
9. During the year, apart from the publication of the *Bulletin*, we were not able to go into print again until the very end of the year, when Dr Godfrey Brown's booklet, *The Last of the Seceders*, was produced. A number of pieces of writing relating to lectures this past year either have been or will soon be printed by their respective authors. We have also been working hard on some time-consuming tasks which will hopefully blossom into print, or find a place on our website during the forthcoming year. Work has also progressed on the adoption of a revised publication policy.
10. Thanks to funding from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, via the Ulster Scots agency, the Ulster Historical Agency with the support of this Society has published a very attractive pocket History and Heritage Trail called "The Story of the Presbyterians in Ulster." This can be obtained from the Society.
11. The move to Assembly Buildings will enable us to be involved more fully with the development of the Reception Area, our nearest neighbour, where it is intended that exhibitions about the work and witness of the Presbyterian Church, as well as its history will be on display. We continue to work closely with the Task Group identifying suitable material for display.
12. The Society welcomes donations of books, pamphlets, congregational histories and artefacts, minute books and communion tokens. These may be deposited with the society either as a gift or as an indefinite loan. We hold many Synod and Presbytery records, and are delighted that a growing number of congregational records are also being entrusted to our care.

13. The Society continues to share information with other organisations, agencies and blogs which help us raise our profile, and publicise our publications. We now have 470 followers on Facebook, which can be accessed via the blog icon on the home page of our website. This keeps a wide public informed about new books or events.
14. We continue to follow through on the Action Plan resulting from our Away Day in early 2016, and regularly monitor in how far we are achieving its goals. There have been a number of solid achievements which we have already put into practice. In some cases we have fallen behind, often because of the uncertainties to which we have already referred.
15. A draft of proposed changes to the Constitution to ensure better governance and to meet the requirements of the Charity Commission was approved by Council on 18th January 2017 and adopted by the Annual General Meeting on 23rd March 2017.
16. The Society's website continues to be one of our principal means of communicating with the general public, and this is reflected by a regular increase in numbers using it, and joining the Society as associate members. We continue to make significant improvements in the number and range of articles on our history page, and in our updating and presentation of the *History of Presbyterian Congregations*. All our *Bulletins* up to 2011 are now on the website and can be viewed by members.
17. We are really grateful to all our volunteers who help us out for a few hours each week – filing, classifying library books for the electronic catalogue, indexing and transcribing records, preparing mailings. We will need more help than ever in the months ahead, and our librarian would be glad to hear from anyone who might be able to do this for us. We would also thank all who give talks, write booklets, articles and reviews, and assist in many others ways. Most of all we would pay tribute to our Librarian and Archivist, Valerie Adams, for her magnificent work on our behalf, and her enormous enthusiasm and vision for the Society.
18. We would urge all members of our denomination to consider joining our Society, to invite others to become members, buy our publications, and support our various events. As most Presbyteries now have Historical Agents we hope this will strengthen our links with many more congregations. Our aim is to serve the Church in promoting knowledge and understanding of its rich history. If anyone would like a speaker for their Church or organisation, we will do our best to arrange it.

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## **OLD AGE FUND, WOMEN'S FUND AND INDIGENT LADIES' FUND**

*The Rev Paul Erskine reports:*

1. The Directors report that, during the last financial year which ended 31st December 2017, 106 beneficiaries (49 in the Old Age Fund, 33 in the Women's Fund and 24 in the Indigent Ladies' Fund) received grants.
2. The changes in beneficiaries during the year is as follows:

Beneficiaries receiving Quarterly Grant	Old Age Fund	Presbyterian Women's Fund	Indigent Ladies' Fund	TOTAL
At 1 January 2016	38	28	19	85
New Grants provided	6	2	4	12
Deaths	(2)	(1)	–	(2)
Grants no longer required	(1)	–	–	(1)
At 31 December 2017	41	29	23	93
Beneficiaries receiving one-off donations	5	3	1	9
Deaths and Grants no longer required (as above)	3	1	–	4
Number of Beneficiaries receiving assistance during the year	49	33	24	106

3. The total distribution of the Funds in Grants, Donations and Gifts was £175,947 (£77,834 from the Old Age Fund, £53,840 from the Women's Fund and £44,273 from the Indigent Ladies' Fund).
4. An annual grant of £1,440, paid quarterly, was sent to beneficiaries during the year (2016: £1,440).
5. A 'Special Gift' of £360 (2016: £360) was sent to every beneficiary prior to Christmas.
6. During the year the Directors responded sympathetically to various problems which had been brought to their attention. They gave one-off donations, as needed, to assist in particular cases where immediate financial aid was more appropriate than annual grants. Ministers are asked to bear in mind the possibility of help from these funds in similar cases connected with their own congregations.
7. The Directors assure the Church that all monies that come to the Funds are carefully and wisely spent.

8. The Directors of the Funds deeply appreciate the kindness and thoughtfulness of those who have remembered the work of the Funds either by gift or bequest, and hope that their example may encourage others to support this vital aspect of the Church's outreach.
9. The Directors of the Funds wish to thank the Staff for the sensitive and sympathetic way in which they carried out the efficient administration of the Funds during the year.