

# GENERAL ASSEMBLY



# ANNUAL REPORTS





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### ORDER OF BUSINESS

- Notes:**
- (i) Business commences at different times each day. There are business sessions on the Monday and Tuesday evenings.**
  - (ii) An “Introduction to Assembly Business” will be given in the Assembly Hall on Monday at 11am.**
  - (iii) Communion will be held on Tuesday at 12pm and Worship on Monday and Wednesday at 11.30am and 2pm respectively.**
  - (iv) Figures in brackets refer to page numbers in the Annual Reports.**

#### **Monday**

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GA Business Committee –  
Initial Report

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Presbyteries

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Social Witness

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General Council (Section 1)

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Linkage Commission

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Mission in Ireland

#### **Tuesday**

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Trustees

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Global Mission

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General Council (Section 2)

---

General Council (Section 3)

---

Congregational Life and Witness

#### **Wednesday**

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Public Affairs

---

Training in Ministry

---

Listening to the Global Church

---

General Council (Section 4)

---

Overtures

---

GA Business Committee –  
Final Report

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## NOTES

## MONDAY, OCTOBER 4

### Assembly Buildings

**11.30am –**

Service of Worship  
Constitution of Assembly  
Moderator of the General Assembly

1pm

LUNCH

**2.00pm –**

1. GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE:  
Initial Report and Resolutions 1-5 (pages 9-13  
and 305).
2. Reports of Presbyteries (pages 146-151).

2.30pm

3. COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS: Report and  
Resolutions (pages 152-159 and 309).

(3.45pm)

Tea/Coffee Break.

**4.15pm –**

4. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 1 of Report and  
Resolutions 6-9 (pages 1-56 and 305-306).  
Executive Summary and Introduction; Support Services;  
Holding Trustees Task Group; Memorial Record; Guysmere  
Development Panel; Ad-hoc areas of work: Church Relations;  
Moderator's Advisory and Doctrine; Code Republishing Panel;  
Reports for Information only.

6.00pm

DINNER

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

## NOTES

**7.15pm –**

5. LINKAGE COMMISSION: Report and Resolutions (pages 160-175 and 309-310).

8pm 6. COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND: Report and Resolutions (pages 176-194 and 310).

(9pm) Close of Business

## **TUESDAY, OCTOBER 5**

**10am –**

7. TRUSTEES: Report and Resolutions (pages 195-213 and 310-311).

(10.30am) 8. COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION: Report and Resolutions (pages 214-230 and 311).

(11.45am) Short intermission.

**12 noon      **Sacrament of the Lord's Supper****

including the Memorial Roll.

1pm            LUNCH.

**2pm –**

9. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 2 of Report and Resolutions 10-16 (pages 57-113 and 306-307)  
Implementation Task Group; Human Identity Task Group.

(3.45pm) Tea/Coffee Break.

4.15pm 10. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 3 of Report and Resolutions 17-20 (pages 114-145 and 307).  
Decision Making and Dissent Task Group; Vows for Full Membership and Baptism Task Group; Supporting Families in Challenging Times Task Group.

Lapsed Business (if any).

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

## NOTES



6pm DINNER.

**7.15pm –**

11. COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS: Report and Resolutions (pages 230-249 and 312).

(8.30pm) Close of Business.

### **WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 6**

**10am –**

12. COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Report and Resolutions (pages 250-285 and 312-313).

(11.15am) Tea/Coffee Break.

- 11.45am.13. COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY: Report and Resolutions (pages 286-295 and 313-314).

1pm LUNCH.

**2pm –**

14. WORSHIP AND LISTENING TO THE GLOBAL CHURCH – **'People on the move'**

(3pm) Tea/Coffee Break.

- 3.30pm 15. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 4 of Report and Resolutions 21-27 (pages 130-145 and 308-309). United Appeal; Nominations Committee; Recommendations for new work for General Council; Making the General Assembly More Accessible Task Group.

16. OVERTURES: On the Books (pages 296-303).

17. OVERTURES: New Ad-Hoc (pages 303-304).

Lapsed Business (if any).

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

## NOTES

18. GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE:  
Final Report and Resolutions (to be tabled).

CLOSE OF ASSEMBLY.

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

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE

### A Guide to Assembly Procedure

1. **Members of Assembly** consist of all ministers in active duty or retired and some elders, ex officio, together with a representative elder from each established congregation plus other elders commissioned by presbyteries to correspond with the number of ministers serving in special appointments. The Assembly quorum is fifty members.
  - (a) Normally, deaconesses, licentiates, presbytery representatives of Presbyterian Women and youth, representatives of the Youth Assembly and some others are invited to 'sit and deliberate' as associates – i.e., to take part with members freely in debate but without voting. In addition to a representative elder, kirk sessions have normally been given permission to name a further person aged up to 30 years of age who may sit and deliberate. This person may be an elder or simply a communicant member. However, for the 2021 Assembly, as a result of numbers being limited by Covid-19, only voting members are able to be present.
  - (b) While members should bear in mind any opinions or concerns of their congregations, kirk sessions or presbyteries, neither ministers nor elders attend as 'delegates', obliged to vote as instructed by any of these. The Assembly should be a gathering of fully responsible, free Christian men and women, always open to spiritual guidance and information on a Church-wide basis, not a device for counting up decisions already made elsewhere.
2. **The Moderator** chairs the Assembly and is in charge of proceedings, but should not take sides in debates. Former Moderators may deputise from time to time, should the Moderator wish to take part in debate or to withdraw from the House.
  - (a) When the Moderator rises to speak at any point all other members must yield to the Chair.
  - (b) Members should stand when the Moderator enters or leaves at the beginning or end of proceedings. Members may enter or leave at any time during proceedings, but should do so with as little disturbance as possible. It is a courtesy in so doing to give a slight bow to the Chair.

- (c) The recommended form of address to the House is simply ‘Moderator’ (not ‘Mr.’ Moderator, etc). Speakers should face towards the House and the microphones, not towards the Moderator.
3. **Councils and Commissions:** Work for which the Assembly is responsible is generally entrusted to various General Assembly councils and commissions. These must each present a report to the Assembly. Councils normally have a number of General Assembly committees working under them, along with permanent panels and ad-hoc task groups. A Commission of Assembly is entrusted with the executive powers of the Assembly, within the terms of its appointment. Members of commissions, councils and General Assembly committees are appointed by the Assembly itself, on the nomination of the General Assembly’s Nominations Committee. Councils and commissions are led by a convener, supported by a secretary, with the latter often being a senior member of staff. In what follows the word ‘councils’ covers councils, commissions and the General Assembly Business Committee.
4. **Reports of Councils:** While the Assembly is obliged to ‘receive’ the report of each council, it does not ‘adopt’ or accept responsibility for the contents of any report. Reports carry only the authority of the council concerned and not of the Assembly.
- (a) If found too unsatisfactory the report, or a section of it, may be received and referred back. This is done by an amendment to the resolution “That the report of the [name of council] be received”. Any matter to which the Assembly is to be committed must be stated in a specific resolution. Resolutions should be kept to conclusions, rather than include arguments in support such as are appropriate to reports and speeches. Similarly, speeches in the Assembly carry the authority only of the speaker.
- (b) Reports are first of all ‘presented’ and the appended resolutions ‘proposed’ en bloc, usually by a council convener who will make a speech in support highlighting aspects of the council’s work. The resolutions are then ‘seconded’ en bloc, usually by another officer of the council, who again speaks in support and usually addresses a different aspect of the council’s work. There is then an opportunity for questions to be asked. Routine and non-controversial resolutions have been grouped into one consolidated resolution for each council, where appropriate.

5. **Questions to Commissions or Councils:** These should quite strictly be asked only for further information or explanation, whether of something in the report or not in the report but for which the council carries responsibility; they should not be rhetorical or debating ‘questions’ to score a point. Questions should be written out and placed in the box provided as early as possible during the Assembly. They may also be submitted by e-mail to the Deputy Clerk ([deputyclerk@presbyterianireland.org](mailto:deputyclerk@presbyterianireland.org)) in advance of the Assembly or during the Assembly, up to 15 minutes before the report in question is scheduled. Questions will normally be limited to two per person and ten minutes in all, unless the Moderator judge that a particular subject merits an extension of these limits.
6. **Resolutions of Councils:** These are then taken in succession, as printed at the back of the General Assembly Reports, and on occasion also in the Supplementary Reports. Resolutions are called by number. Those wishing to speak should at once come forward, or otherwise indicate to the Moderator their desire to speak: it will be helpful if they move in good time to sit on one of the seats reserved for the purpose on the front row, ready for the Moderator to call them. *Anyone seated in the gallery or an overflow room who wishes to speak, should follow the guidance given by the Moderator.* The final resolution of a council is “that the report of the [name of council] be received”. This is the point where members may discuss (not ask questions about) any matters in the report or for which the Council should bear responsibility, but which do not arise under any previous resolution.
7. **Timings during debate:** Unless otherwise arranged, speeches are limited as follows:
- |                                               |           |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Presenting a group of reports and resolutions | 7 minutes |
| Seconding a group of reports and resolutions  | 7 minutes |
| All other speeches                            | 4 minutes |
- (a) If lapsed business accumulates, these timings may be shortened.
- (b) A flickering light is given 1 minute before the end, a steady light for 30 seconds and a buzz when the time is up. Before commencing, speakers should announce their name and Congregation (or PW, under 30s representatives etc) and Presbytery. Apart from the proposer (or alternatively the seconder) having the right to speak again in closing the debate,

no one may speak twice in debating any one resolution or amendment, except to clarify some misunderstanding.

8. **Alternative format:** The Assembly may decide from time to time to conduct a particular item of business using an alternative format. This is usually on the recommendation of the General Assembly Business Committee. In such circumstances alternative rules of debate and timings may apply.
9. **Amendments:** These may be moved without prior notice by any member so as to change the terms of a resolution within its general scope but not so as to introduce another subject. Before debate on an amendment commences, the amendment must be given in writing to the Clerk's desk (or be submitted electronically to [deputyclerk@presbyterianireland.org](mailto:deputyclerk@presbyterianireland.org)).
  - (a) Amendments may be submitted to the Clerk of Assembly in advance of the business concerned, and if received in sufficient time and licensed by the General Assembly Business Committee, will take precedence over any other amendments.
  - (b) At least one day's notice must be given of an amendment which would substantially affect the scope of a motion or overture. A plea for the outright rejection of a resolution is not an amendment.
  - (c) An amendment, if seconded, must be dealt with before further debate on the original resolution or consideration of any further amendment. If passed, the amendment is then put as a substantive motion, when one more amendment may be considered. If the first two amendments are rejected, one more amendment may be considered before reverting to the original resolution.
10. **Additional resolutions:** When a matter is not covered by existing resolutions from a council an additional resolution may be submitted by any member or associate as notice of motion for license. Unless there are exceptional circumstances these should be received by the Clerk at least one week before the Assembly. Resolutions rescinding or reversing a previous decision of the Assembly require notice of motion to be first given and accepted at the preceding annual meeting. Those invited to sit and deliberate may 'present' resolutions or amendments in the usual way, but these must be formally proposed and seconded by a member of Assembly before being debated.

11. **Voting:** This will normally be by voice, when the Moderator calls for those in favour to say “Aye” and those against to say “No”. The Moderator may also call for a standing vote, with voting cards displayed, to be counted. A vote by ballot will be held when asked for by not fewer than twenty-five members or at the discretion of the Moderator, by the use of voting tickets, to be counted by tellers. As this is a voting member only Assembly, the votes of all those present will be counted, whether they are on the ground floor, the gallery or in overflow rooms. Proxy voting for an absent member is not allowed. A member who has spoken or voted against any decision may intimate his or her personal dissent or protest immediately after the decision has been pronounced, but does not thereby free himself or herself from obligation loyally to implement the decision taken.
  
12. **Overtures:** These are proposals for a change in the Code, the Church’s Constitution and Government. Changes in rules, of which notice has been given in the printed Reports, may be adopted forthwith if approved by a two-thirds majority, or without such notice if approved with no one voting against. If approved by a lesser majority it is ‘placed on the books’, to be decided upon at the following Assembly. This applies also to rules governing the Central Ministry Fund and other Ministry Funds. In the Basic Code, where immediate operation is desirable, the change may be adopted temporarily during the intervening year as an ‘Interim Act’. If an overture contemplates a significant constitutional change it must also be sent down to presbyteries to be voted on during the intervening year.
  
13. **Memorials:** These are petitions to the Assembly, usually from some person or body who is not a member of Assembly, such as a subordinate court of the Church, a Church member or group of members, or persons unconnected with the Church. Procedures and forms are laid down by which the circumstances of the memorial are outlined and a definite request or “prayer” is stated. A memorial is also the procedure by which someone, whether member of the Assembly or not, asks for exemption from some Church rule on the plea of special circumstances.







# GENERAL COUNCIL

## SECTION 1

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

Secretary: THE CLERK

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Since the report submitted for the 2020 General Assembly (and received by the 2020 Standing Commission of Assembly), the General Council conducted its business through two full meetings of the Council (one on MS Teams on 6 January 2021 and one in-person on 30 June 2021) and, with delegated authority by decision of the full Council, through 16 meetings of its Standing Committee. At the time of writing an additional full meeting of the General Council is planned for late August 2021.
2. This year the Council's report is presented in four separate Sections, each being presented at different times during the Assembly's business. The subsequent reports in these four sections outline the work carried forward by the Council, its Standing Committee and some of its other committees, panels and task groups. As well as important reports relating to the ongoing work of the Council, this year's General Council report also includes several significant task group reports.
3. Following the 2018 General Assembly, the **Implementation Task Group** was appointed to compile resources to assist kirk sessions regarding both the theology and practice of the Church's understanding of a 'credible profession of faith' and to provide guidelines for the pastoral care of same-sex attracted people and their families. At the Task Group's request, the 2020 General Assembly Standing Commission sent its reports down to Presbyteries for discussion and comment. This year's final report takes on board much of the feed-back and comes to the 2021 Assembly for approval (see General Council Section 2).
4. The **Human Identity Task Group** likewise had requested its 2020 Report be sent down to Presbyteries for discussion and comment. Its revised and expanded report takes on board Presbytery recommendations and is presented to the 2021 Assembly for approval.
5. In the report to the 2019 General Assembly, the Implementation Task Group referred to the issue of inconsistency in regard to vows taken at baptism and admission to full membership. The General Council appointed the **Vows for Full Membership and Baptism Task Group** to consider how best to clarify the vows taken at admission to full membership and at baptism. In this report the Task Group presents in three appendices, vows taken at admission to communicant membership and at the baptism of believers and of infants (see General Council Section 3).

6. The 2019 General Assembly agreed to continue with the experimental evening sessions in 2020. The General Council was instructed by the Assembly to form a task group to explore ways to make the General Assembly more accessible for those who find attending difficult. **Making the General Assembly More Accessible Task Group** was appointed; its make up included diversity in the age of its members and in their geographical location. Its detailed report, with a number of ideas, has been referred by the 2020 General Assembly Commission for consideration by the 2021 Assembly (see General Council Section 4) and is included for further consideration (see General Council Section 4).
7. The 2019 report of the **Decision Making and Dissent within The Presbyterian Church in Ireland Task Group** was sent down to presbyteries and received helpful responses from all nineteen presbyteries. The Task Group's final report to the Assembly followed detailed deliberation over the presbytery contributions and much rumination and discernment in its completion. The report includes ten recommendations for the consideration by the 2021 General Assembly, having again been referred by the 2020 Assembly Commission (see General Council Section 3).
8. The report of the General Council to the General Assembly is the longest of the Annual Reports and, to facilitate the ordering of business in the Assembly, it will be taken in four sections. The General Assembly Business Committee will, however, report in its own right at the beginning and the end of the Assembly (2.00pm on Monday and 3.30pm on Wednesday afternoon respectively). The separate sections of the report are as follows:

**Section 1 (4.15pm Monday 4 October):**

- Executive Summary and Introduction
- Support Services
- Holding Trustees Task Group
- Memorial Record
- Guysmere Development Panel
- Ad-hoc areas of work
- Church Relations, Moderator's Advisory & Doctrine
- Code Republishing Panel
- Reports for Information only

**Section 2 (2pm Tuesday 5 October):**

- Implementation Task Group
- Human Identity Task Group

**Section 3 (4.15pm Tuesday 5 October):**

- Decision Making & Dissent Task Group
- Vows for Full Membership and Baptism Task Group
- Supporting Families in Challenging Times Task Group

**Section 4 (3.30pm Wednesday 6 October):**

- United Appeal
- Nominations Committee
- Recommendations for new work for the General Council
- Making the General Assembly more accessible Task Group

## INTRODUCTION

### The Era of Covid-19

1. Since early March 2020, what we used to call ‘normal life’ has been changed in ways that none of us could have imagined. Our lives as individuals, as families and as church families have been turned upside down. Working from home, furlough, and even unemployment, have changed the lives of many. The shutting down of much of the infrastructure of society including, for long periods, the inability to join together for in-person services of worship, has shaken all of us, sometimes to our very core. Schools shut and parents became ‘home schoolers’, with children suffering not just academically but perhaps even more so through the lack of social interaction. The invisible Covid-19 virus brought severe illness and death to every community and every church family throughout this island and indeed throughout the entire world. The resultant restrictions meant long periods of isolation for many, hospitalisation without the support of family visits and funeral services, at times, with just a few people able to be present in person.
2. The impact on church life has been significant, at times, almost overwhelming. For long periods, ministers, elders and pastoral visitors were unable to be present with their people as they needed, and greatly desired, to be. Almost overnight, church services went ‘online’ with ministers and support teams having, to say the least, a ‘sharp learning curve’ with regard to digital technology and productions. Youth and children’s leaders had to find new ways of relating to those they were used to working with on a weekly, in-person basis.

At General Assembly level, Assembly Buildings closed down, with many staff furloughed, a significant number having to quickly transition to working from home and a smaller, but important, number having to keep coming into the building to facilitate essential work. Those who worked in the background for our General Assembly over this past period, men and women who will never appear at an Assembly rostrum, nor feature in the spotlight, literally went the second mile. The large team of staff who run our residential care homes had to keep going, at times in hugely stressful situations. Tribute must be paid both to the staff on the ground in these residential facilities and to the small senior management team who at times found themselves faced with new and almost impossible challenges on a

daily basis. The staff, whose task it was to ensure the care and safety of our global mission workers and keep in touch with our global mission partners, faced many challenges, especially in the early months of the pandemic. A small team sought to produce resources and host on-line events to assist in the equipping of our ministers and other leaders of congregational life and witness. Much innovation and creativity was necessary, as in the midst of much discouragement the team sought to encourage and share good practice.

As in our congregations and presbyteries, so at General Assembly level, our Church has faced huge challenges, but has also seen and known the Lord provide us with the soul refreshing manna of his grace fresh every morning. It has not been the way that would have been desired but, it has been a time when the love of Christ, through the selfless and dedicated service and care of his people, has been experienced.

### **Restrictions and Mitigations**

As a denomination, the challenges of the pandemic have, at times, been incredibly frustrating and wearying. The General Council and its Standing Committee have had an overview of the necessary Covid-19 restrictions and mitigations, though much of this work was carried forward by the Clerk of Assembly. Regular updates have been sent to all ministers in charges, along with vacancy conveners, stated supplies and clerks of presbytery. The Clerk has been able to work closely with his equivalent numbers in the other main churches and this mutual sharing has been invaluable. Small groups of staff and others have been brought together at various stages to produce guidance and documentation to assist congregations, especially with the significant challenges of 'opening up' in a safe and wise way.

In Northern Ireland, co-operation and partnership with the NI Executive has developed significantly and has been marked by regular meetings and genuine consultation with both Ministers and senior officials. This has meant that, apart from a very short period in November 2020, government has sought to assist churches to 'self-regulate', through regular access to direct advice from senior health and scientific officers and advisors, rather than imposing regulation on churches in an arbitrary manner.

In the Republic of Ireland, suffice to say, this has not been as positive an experience. Little meaningful consultation has taken place prior to government regulations and restrictions being imposed upon churches. While some progress has been made over the months, there has been little understanding of the ethos and practice of the reformed faith or the centrality of worship in the life of believers. This has resulted in Ireland having, at times, the most draconian restrictions placed upon churches in all of Europe, with believers unable to gather in-person for worship for a significantly longer period than anywhere else in these islands. This has been raised regularly at every level of government by PCI and all of the main churches but, sadly, often to no avail.

## Governance

Immediately before the first lockdown, on 19 March 2020, the General Council was able to have a full in-person meeting in the Assembly Hall. This enabled the Council to consider and put in place an interim system for governance and oversight of the General Assembly's Councils and Commissions. Standing Committees were set up for each Council and Commission and authority delegated to allow work to continue and decisions to be made (see 2020 Reports pages 10-12). These interim structures have had to function much longer than anyone could have envisaged, yet they have provided necessary leadership and allowed decision making to continue. At full meetings of all Councils in November 2020, and the General Council in January 2021, the remits and membership of the Standing Committees were reviewed, refreshed and renewed. Thanks are due to those who have carried the additional burden of meeting and taking decisions in these important bodies.

3. The General Council Standing Committee presented full reports on its work to the General Council meetings on 6 January and 30 June 2021. A number of committees, panels and task groups under the Council have resumed meeting again, taking up the responsibility for their areas of work. All Committees should be back to work in the autumn.
4. At the final meeting of the 2020 Standing Commission of the General Assembly in February 2021, following detailed consultation with all Presbyteries, the Commission put in place procedures to be followed if an in-person meeting of the 2021 General Assembly could not take place (see 2020 Reports pages 378-380). This included moving the 2021 General Assembly to the first week in October and giving responsibility to the General Council to take the decision as to whether that should be an in-person meeting or a meeting of an enhanced 2021 Standing Commission of the General Assembly.
5. At the in-person meeting of the full General Council on 30 June 2021, the Council considered this important remit and a paper submitted by its Standing Committee as to the best way to proceed. After a period of questions and debate it was decided, using its delegated authority, that the following should be the way forward:
  - Either a 2021 'Voting Member Only' General Assembly meet in October 2021
  - OR the nominated 2021 Standing Commission of the General Assembly meet in October 2021
  - That the full General Council meet on Monday 23 August 2021 to decide which option to take, with all Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries informed of the outcome as soon as possible afterwards.

The Council recognised that the absence of those who normally 'sit and deliberate' at the General Assembly is very regrettable. However, on the basis of clear advice regarding the anticipated requirement (or strong recommendation) for social distancing, a full 'normal' Assembly will simply not be possible. A 'Voting Member Only', though denied the input

of those who normally sit and deliberate, will at least have ministers and representative elders from every congregation, and so be able to make necessary decisions in a much more satisfactory manner than through a much smaller Standing Commission.

## **SOME OTHER AD-HOC MATTERS**

### **(A) The Alternating Ministry Scheme**

Following detailed discussions over a number of years, the Mission Partnership Forum (the body made up of representatives of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in Ireland which generally oversees the work of the Alternating Ministry Scheme and its existing three congregations), came to unanimous conclusions regarding the viability and future of the Scheme. The report of the MPF is included in Appendix A of this Section of the General Council reports. A further updated report, and appropriate resolutions, will be tabled at the October meeting of the General Assembly and at a similarly timed meeting of the Methodist Church's General Committee (which has delegated authority to act).

### **(B) Possible new areas of work**

At its meeting on 30 June 2021, the Council considered a paper from the Clerk of Assembly regarding some possible new areas of work that could be recommended to the General Assembly. A report, including the agreed recommendations, can be found in Section 4 of the Council's report.

### **(C) Retiring Conveners**

At this General Assembly, the Rev Dr Jonathan Curry retires as the Convener of the Nominations Committee. Jonathan has applied his gifts to this, at times, quite demanding convenueership and, working alongside two different Deputy Clerks, has set an excellent foundation for the important work of this committee.

*The Council Convener, the Very Rev Dr Noble McNeely, writes:*

The epoch of Covid-19 has been challenging and has dictated much of the business conducted by the General Council. It has, especially, been a demanding time for the Moderator and the Clerk of the Assembly as they have been engaged in the extra-curricular demands that have been imposed due to the pandemic. It is important to acknowledge the accomplished way the Moderator has represented the Church, during a year that has been far from normal. The additional demands on the Clerk have been huge and intense, requiring hours of work way beyond what is expected. The General Council recognises the leadership he has given and the astuteness demonstrated when difficult decisions have been required.

Despite being badly disrupted, the productive work in the General Secretary's office is appropriately recognised. The staff carried out the necessary administration either from home, or in the office, abiding by the



restrictions. Rev Dr David Allen took up his position as Deputy Clerk and, in spite of the abnormal circumstances, has undertaken his duties with ease and competence.

The Covid-19 period has been unprecedented and many inconceivable decisions were required related to the ongoing work of the General Assembly, the practice of parish ministry, regular Sunday worship, and the necessity for mitigations. The experience of the pandemic has forced upon us the need to reflect on the governance of the Assembly and to consider the structures and mechanisms which may be adopted for future crisis situations and possible restrictions. This matter will be considered, along with other new areas of work to be taken forward, during the debate on Section 4 of the General Council debate on Wednesday afternoon.

## **GENERAL COUNCIL REPORT SECTION 1**

### **APPENDIX A**

#### **Report on the implications of the Charities Regulator for the Alternating Ministry Scheme**

The Alternating Ministry Scheme was launched in the 1970s following many years of establishing the principle of cooperation between both traditions and, in the context of a fear of major decline in reformed witness in towns and cities, especially in the Irish Republic. A ‘Joint Committee’ was formed which supervised the operation of the Scheme until the formation of the ‘Mission Partnership Forum’ in 2005.

The Scheme gained more traction in the Republic of Ireland than in Northern Ireland, where there are no longer any AMS congregations. With the ending of the AMS arrangements in Wexford, Enniscorthy and Gorey in 2006 and Waterford in 2009, this left the present three united congregations of Galway, Limerick and Sandymount (Dublin).

In the Republic of Ireland, the Charities Act 2009 laid the groundwork for the establishment of a Charities Regulator, and the Charities Regulatory Authority was established in 2014. In Northern Ireland, the Charity Commission was established in 2009 under the Charities Act (NI) 2008.

The Methodist Church is pursuing registration as a single charity denomination with the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland authorities respectively, whereas, the Presbyterian Church has registered individual congregations as appropriate with the relevant charity authority. PCI has requested that the three congregations within the Alternating Ministry Scheme be not called forward at this time, due to inherent complications. However, registration cannot be held off for too much longer.

At a meeting of the Mission Partnership Forum earlier this year, the future of the AMS congregations was discussed at length in the light of the requirements of the Charities Regulator. Much thought had already gone

into this issue since the Charities Regulator was established and it became clear that the AMS would not be able to continue in its present form. In essence, it is not possible to have a congregation which is both PCI and MCI – it has to be one or the other, as two charities cannot control one entity.

Trevor Gribben (the Clerk of the General Assembly) and the late Dr John Stephens (former MCI Secretary of Conference) did a lot of groundwork with the financial departments of both churches and with PCI's General Assembly Solicitor. Two 'theoretical' possibilities emerged from their deliberations:

- (a) The three independent congregations could exist as stand-alone charities;
- (b) Every 7 years or so, each congregation could be wound up as one denomination's charity and a new charity of the other denomination created, with a transfer of assets.

There are considerable barriers to pursuing either of these possibilities. For example, neither denomination could legally commit the current levels of property, personnel and funding to an independent charity.

After much discussion around potential options, and with a heavy heart, the members of the MPF came to the conclusion that the only practical way forward was for the remaining AMS congregations to revert to denominational ownership and governance. It is hoped that whichever direction each congregation takes, some way can be found to maintain a 'soft link' between the departing denomination and its members.

The members of the MPF are working hard to facilitate a smooth and collaborative transition for the congregations concerned and the incumbent ministers. Meetings are to be held with the ministers and church councils to explain the rationale for these changes and to discern the most appropriate outcome for each congregation.

Factors such as the denominational allegiance of current members (which may be non-existent for many newcomers), current title to property, local presence of other congregations of either denomination, and the missional strategy of the respective denominations in the three locations concerned, are being taken into account.

Given the requirements of the Charities Regulator, the preferred timeline is to secure agreement in principle from the AMS congregations, MCI Conference and PCI General Assembly by October this year, with a view to effecting the transfer of responsibilities and any associated assets by December 2021, to tie in with the financial year end.

This paper was approved by the Mission Partnership Forum for transmission to the 2021 meetings of the PCI General Assembly and the MCI Conference.

TJ STOTHERS, PCI Secretary to the Council for Mission in Ireland  
M FORSYTH, General Secretary of the MCI Home Mission Department

30 April 2021

At its meeting on 27 May 2021, the General Council Standing Committee, considered the above paper and, acting with delegated authority of the General Council, passed the following resolution (which was subsequently reported to the full General Council on 30 June 2021):

*That the General Council Standing Committee note and concur with the conclusions of the Mission Partnership Forum (MPF) with regard to the future of the Alternating Ministry Scheme, and agree that the MPF be authorised to take the process forward as outlined.*

A similar resolution was passed on the same day by the General Committee of the Methodist Church.

TREVOR D GRIBBEN, Clerk of Assembly

June 2021

## **INITIAL REPORT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE**

1. The General Assembly Business Committee held its first in-person meeting on Thursday 17 June 2021, its area of work having been carried forward by the General Council Standing Committee up to that point. The General Council Convener, the Very Rev Dr Noble McNeely, took the Chair and welcomed the new Convener, the Rev Roy Mackay, to his first meeting.
2. The Rev Trevor Gribben, Clerk of Assembly, reported that the General Council Standing Committee had taken the decision that, for this year, the General Assembly Business Committee and the Arrangements Panel would merge. The Committee *made the following appointments*:
  - Rev Mervyn Burnside as Arrangements Convener (in place of Rev Andrew Thompson);
  - Mrs Florence McNeely as Hospitality Convener (Accommodation) from 2022 (in place of Mrs Daphne Patton);
  - Mrs Phyllis Spence continuing as Hospitality Convener (Catering), until after the 2021 Assembly.

*It was agreed* that the Clerk, the Committee Convener and the Panel Convener should identify and appoint a new Hospitality Convener (Catering), to begin at the 2022 Assembly, and to sit and deliberate until that point.

*It was also agreed* that Mr Raymond Robinson, Assembly Buildings Facilities and Conference Manager, be asked to sit and deliberate on the Committee and assist the various Conveners with the preparations for the Assembly.

3. The Clerk spoke to a paper that had been circulated previously entitled 'Planning for the October 2021 General Assembly'. After a period of questions and discussion, it was *unanimously agreed to recommend to the*

*General Council* that the October 2021 General Assembly should proceed either by 'Voting Member only' or by Assembly Commission, as outlined in the paper.

4. The Clerk spoke to a **Draft Order of Business** which had been circulated previously. During discussion it was noted that the Order of Business would need slight amendment if the Assembly took the form of a Commission, e.g., the Communion service would be replaced with a time of worship. It was agreed that the Order of Business be approved, with the Clerk being given authority to make any changes that were needed. Members will note that the 2021 Assembly will run from 11.30am on Monday 4 October until approximately 6pm on Wednesday 6 October. This amended timetable for meeting has been implemented because of the specific circumstances in which we find ourselves.
5. Other business:
  - It was agreed that the October 2021 General Assembly (in either format) be streamed;
  - A small group was set up to look into the options for catering and to report back;
  - The Convener and other officers would take forward detailed planning in a number of areas, though, until the decision was made if the Assembly would meet in the format of 'Voting Member Only' or 'Standing Commission', plans could not be finalised;
  - It was noted that the report of the Assembly Review Task Group had been forwarded to the 2021 Assembly for decision;
  - The Committee would meet again on the morning of Monday 23 August.

ROY MACKAY, Convener  
TREVOR GRIBBEN, Secretary

## **INITIAL REPORT – APPENDIX**

### **Reports from Other Church Assemblies etc**

#### **Quakers (Society of Friends)**

*The Very Rev Dr Ian McNie reports:*

1. The annual meeting of the Quakers (Society of Friends) oscillates between Belfast and Dublin but, due to the pandemic, like most annual church gatherings, was online from the 8–11 April.
2. The Clerk of the 'meeting' reported, "Our gathering is a testament to the way we have adapted to changed circumstances, and demonstrates the many positives we have been able to draw from adversity".

3. There are approximately 1,500 Quakers in Ireland meeting in 28 locations. Unlike the Reformed tradition, Quakers do not have confessions, creeds or sacraments, relying on ‘inner light’, as a result of silent contemplation through reading the Bible, poetry and other inspirational works, coupled with individual and corporate discernment. Rather than speak about ‘assembly members’ and ‘councils’, their vocabulary focuses on, ‘friends’ and ‘testimonies’.
4. This year their theme was, ‘A Time to Act Together in Faith and Hope’. Like our Assembly, visitors were welcomed at the outset of the conference and there was an enthusiastic Quaker welcome to the various Christian traditions and other faith groups that had been invited. Early on, a report was given on two pilgrimages Irish Friends made in 1652 and 2019, rehearsing a debt of gratitude they owed to the founding fathers and mothers. This report was, in reality, a summary of the history, growth and development of the Quaker movement over the years.
5. Quaker witness down through the years has had as its twin pillars, faith and action, believing that their spiritual imperative is to hear and seek to heal the wounds of the world, and that is part of being close to God. They reported that, in recent years, fresh energy has been injected into their well-established vehicles for social action and charitable outreach. In recent days during the pandemic, there was an enthusiasm to assist vulnerable families, children and prisoners.
6. The various daily sessions included an emphasis on: Ministry Oversight; Faith in Action; Connecting with Neighbours both locally and internationally; Sustainability; Peace and Social Justice; and addressing the Climate Emergency.
7. As a movement, the Quakers were encouraged to support campaigns that reflect their peace policies – ‘Stop fuelling war’ and a ‘Campaign to Stop Killer Robots’. There was great enthusiasm to sign an interfaith statement that urged UN member states and all people of goodwill ‘to commit to preserving meaningful human control over the use of force, and to enact a pre-emptive ban on fully autonomous weapons’.
8. During the week there was a public lecture entitled, ‘Resurrection and Personality’, where the Friends were encouraged to understand that ‘resurrection’ is the core of faith and that, in Jesus of Nazareth, a friend is available to us in the ordinary activities of life.
9. While the weightier issues of society dominated the week, Friends were encouraged to meet with like-minded others and share their thoughts on: ‘What I found on my 5km walk; share poetry, hobbies, craft work and readings from a variety of writings as diverse as *Quaker Life and Practice to Winnie-the-Pooh*’.
10. My overall impression was that within the Quaker movement there is a wide variety of ‘Friends’ who are passionate about many social issues, and that the structures of the movement provide a platform, both for an individual and a corporate response to those issues.

## **Methodist Conference 2021 Report**

*The Very Rev Dr Noble McNeely reports:*

The Methodist Church in Ireland Annual Conference was conducted online from 9-13 June 2021. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland was represented by Dr McNeely. Due to the Covid-19 mitigations the business meetings of the conference were conducted entirely through the medium of Zoom.

1. The constitution of the conference and the election and installation of the President were streamed from the Agape Methodist Centre on the Wednesday evening. The service was conducted by the outgoing President, Rev Dr Tom McKnight, assisted by the General Secretary, Rev Dr Heather Morris and Lay Reader, Mrs Hazel Loney. The service was conducted reverently but the nature of it was far removed from a normal service of installation and the decorum associated with such an event.
2. The Rev Dr Sahr John Yambasu was installed as the new President. Dr Yambasu is originally from Sierra Leone and is superintendent of St Patrick's Methodist circuit in Waterford. The theme for his year in office is 'People First, Under God'.
3. The business meetings of the Methodist Connexion opened each morning at 7.00am with a Bible study podcast by Mr Graham Philpott. The agenda each day was primarily business that related to the general oversight and governance of the church. A comprehensive report was delivered on the governance of the connexion which included many innovations and restructuring of the administration.
4. During the morning business an interesting feature was included which involved a pause for reflection. At this intermission a member of the conference gave a verbal reflection on their response to the conference. The thoughts conveyed were interesting and individualised, and expressed personal feelings about the spiritual state of the church and the conference.
5. Two special presentations were included on the Thursday and the Saturday of the conference on the theme of 'Faith and Order'. Live streamed from the USA, Dr Paul Chilcote, Professor of Historical Theology and Wesleyan Studies, Ashland, Ohio, delivered talks on the theme 'Connection as a Gift'. The two talks were entitled, 'God's Wide Embrace: Grace' and 'Our Wide Embrace: Connexion'. The main thesis was grace is for all and the church embraces all.
6. The programme for the conference included two evening sessions which were live streamed when various people formed discussion groups. The Thursday evening session was a discussion on the coronavirus pandemic and how the participants anticipated life in a post-pandemic world. The contributors shared how they had responded to the pandemic and their hopes for the church. The main concern was that the church in a post-pandemic world will continue to reach out to those who suffer most, especially those who have suffered mental illness, loneliness and poverty.
7. I was privileged to be one of the observers from other churches. On this occasion, due to the online nature of the conference, I was not required

to bring greetings from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Greetings were conveyed on behalf of the guests by Bishop Brendan Leahy (Roman Catholic Church) and Dr Nicola Brady (Irish Council of Churches).

8. The conference was well organised and participants seemed quite comfortable as they contributed to discussions and debates over Zoom. It was also quite relaxed as people enjoyed sitting at home, comfortable in their lounge chair or at their desk enjoying their occasional cup of coffee. I found it a little bizarre, and probably somewhat more intense, concentrating on the proceedings over Zoom. The fellowship and the spirit of a community in conference was missing. Mixing with the participants is a significant aspect of any conference or assembly and allows for much more interaction and sharing of views which encourage and inspire hope. The togetherness in worship was also a significant element that was missing.
9. The Conference held the election for the President of the Conference for 2022-23. The President designate is Rev David Nixon, Superintendent minister on the South East Leinster Circuit, who previously served as an overseas worker in Zambia. Mr Tom Wilson, former Principal of Abbots Cross Primary School, was designated as Lay Reader for 2022–24.
10. For a good overall perspective on the conference, the various sessions over the five days of the Methodist Conference can be viewed on Youtube. The next Conference of the Methodist Church in Ireland will be held from 8–12 June 2022.

## **SUPPORT SERVICES**

### **(A) FINANCE MATTERS**

#### **1. Charity Registration in the Republic of Ireland**

At the start of 2020 and prior to “lockdown” training sessions were held (in Lucan on 14 January 2020, Cootehill on 10 February 2020 and Letterkenny on 10 March 2020) to help congregations with the application process for charitable status with the Charities Regulator.

The training events were well attended and the response from congregations very encouraging. Thanks are expressed to the Charities Regulator for the assistance of their registration team.

Most congregations are now registered and the position at the time of writing is as follows:

	No. of congregations to be registered	No. of congregations registered	No. of congregations outstanding
Derry and Donegal	30	29	1
Dublin and Munster	28	25	3
Monaghan	32	31	1
Newry	2	2	0
TOTAL	92	87	5

In May 2021, guidance was issued to congregations to help them with the “next stage” which was to apply to the Revenue Commissioners for a charitable tax exemption. Following discussions with the Revenue Commissioners, a simplified procedure was agreed. The steps that each congregation need to complete depend on a number of factors but, in summary, each congregation needs to complete the following, or any, steps they have not completed to date.

- Step 1 – Apply for a tax registration
- Step 2 – Apply for Revenue Online Services (known as ROS) which is the Revenue Commissioners on-line communication and information system
- Step 3 – Apply for a charitable tax exemption.

Once this process is completed it will mean that all PCI congregations will be registered with their appropriate Charities Regulator, i.e., the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland or the Charities Regulator in the Republic of Ireland. They will also be registered as tax exempt charities with HM Revenue & Customs or the Revenue Commissioners as appropriate.

The process of “charity registration” has involved many hours of hard work for those given responsibility at congregational level and indeed that continues with the ongoing submission of an annual return etc. It is appropriate to record thanks to all those who have made this process run relatively smoothly.

## 2. Retirements

The General Council Standing Committee granted leave under Par 223(3) to the forthcoming pre-66 retirements of: Rev WJ Murdock (Killead & Loanends), Rev PE Dickinson (Muckamore), Rev JA Beattie (Second Broughshane), Rev W Sinclair (First Ballymena), Rev SA Little (Shore Street, Donaghadee), Rev S Stewart (Castlerock) and Rev RJ Beggs (McQuiston Memorial).

The following were granted leave to retire at, or over, age 65/66 in accordance with Par 223(1): Rev JR Dickinson (Carnmoney), Rev J



Campbell (First Newtownards), Rev R McM Mackay (Second Comber), Rev M Gault (Cooke Centenary), Rev M Deatherage (Ballina, Ballymote and Killala) and Rev R Kelly (Garvagh & Killaig).

### 3. Congregational Assessments

Congregations were offered the option to defer the assessment element of their quarterly direct debit collection for Quarter 2, 2020, Quarter 3, 2020, Quarter 4, 2020 and Quarter 1, 2021. While some congregations took up this option, some have subsequently repaid the amount deferred. At 31 December, 2020 the total amount deferred was £168K from 35 congregations. No specific timetable has been set for when congregations have to pay the amount deferred, with congregations simply being encouraged to repay as soon as they are able – the matter will be kept under review.

A detailed review of the requirements of the various Assessment Funds was undertaken for 2021 and the amounts to be collected have been reduced as compared to 2020.

	2021 Budget	2020 Actual	2020 Projection (in Sept 2020)	2020 Budget
Central Ministry Fund	1,200,000	1,633,900	1,585,600	1,600,000
Retired Ministers' Fund	0	326,792	326,600	330,000
Widows of Ministers' Fund	275,000	370,999	370,800	375,000
Prolonged Disability Fund	200,000	149,891	149,700	150,000
Incidental Fund	925,000	939,937	939,000	950,000
Church House Repairs Fund	525,000	519,661	519,300	525,000
Special Assembly	0	0	0	0
Ministerial Development	130,000	128,860	128,800	130,000
Sick Supply Fund	20,000	19,785	19,800	20,000
Students Bursary Fund	175,000	173,315	173,000	175,000
<b>TOTAL ASSESSMENTS (Excl Pension)</b>	<b>3,450,000</b>	<b>4,263,140</b>	<b>4,212,600</b>	<b>4,255,000</b>
Pension Fund	2,718,000	2,656,329	2,664,900	2,687,400
<b>TOTAL – Per Annual Accounts</b>	<b>6,168,200</b>	<b>6,919,469</b>	<b>6,877,500</b>	<b>6,942,400</b>

It is anticipated there will be no further assessment for the Retired Ministers' Fund which funds pensions in respect of pre-1978 ministerial service. As there are no longer any ministers retiring with pre-1978 service, no new retired ministers are being added to this fund. It is projected that the pension commitments of this fund will expire in or around 2035 and that there are sufficient cash reserves and investments to cover the remaining commitments (on the assumption investment values do not decline).

The reduction in assessments for 2021 has been given effect by reducing the Band 2 rate from 14.5% to 11.25%.

2021 ASSESSMENT TABLE			2021	2020
No	Start	End	Rate	Rate
1	0	11,000	0.00%	0.00%
2	11,001	65,000	11.25%	14.50%
3	65,000	130,000	10.75%	10.75%
4	130,000	195,000	7.25%	7.25%
5	195,000	260,000	3.50%	3.50%
6	260,000	above	0.00%	0.00%

What this will mean for each congregation is a reduction in their assessments of up to £/€1,755, i.e., £/€65,000 less £/€11,000 at 3.25%.

The pension scheme rate of assessment remains at 24% for 2021. See section 7 re the initial results of the triennial actuarial valuation of the pension scheme as at 31 December 2020.

#### 4. The Prolonged Disability Fund

Since June 2020 there have been three applications to the Prolonged Disability Fund. One has been approved (and the applicant is due to receive benefits from July 2021), one was subsequently withdrawn and an occupational health assessment is awaited in the other case. As at 31 May 2021, there were 10 ministers on the scheme.

#### 5. Basic Ministerial Minimum Stipend and Salaries for 2021

No increases were awarded for 2021. The basic ministerial minimums remain at £27,229 and €40,353. As a result, there is no increase in the pensions paid through the Retired Ministers' or Widows of Ministers' Funds, the grant from the Prolonged Disability Fund, or pulpit supply fees, all of which are based on this.

#### 6. Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2020

The accounts for the year ended 31 December 2020 have been prepared and Rev TD Gribben (Clerk), Mr David Thomson (Convener Support Services) and Mr Clive Knox (Financial Secretary), met with the auditors on 4 June to discuss the outcome of the audit. At the meeting a range of issues was discussed including any risk to ongoing income, the financial position of the pension scheme and the various account disclosures. The auditors made a number of "mandatory enquiries" regarding going concern, fraud or error, compliance with laws and regulations and any risks related to claims made under the Job Retention Scheme. No major issues have arisen.

In terms of the financial results for the year, the key points to note are as follows:

1. Before accounting for any change in the value of investments or any pension accounting adjustments, there was a surplus of income over expenditure of £2,360,022 compared to £2,242,772 in the previous year.
2. Overall income fell from £29,286,532 in 2019 to £28,208,405 in 2020.
  - (i) Income from assessments was £6,919,469 compared to £7,190,226 in 2019. While the rates of assessments were the same in both years, as previously agreed, “the nil rate band adjustment” was removed for 2020. This adjustment sought to ensure congregations (in joint charges or which were vacant) only received an appropriate proportion of the nil rate band in relation to their stipend. With its removal in 2020, all congregations now receive the full benefit of the nil rate, irrespective of their contribution to stipend and this had the impact of reducing assessments income by approximately £300K.
  - (ii) Contributions to the United Appeal were £3,235,397 in 2021 compared to £3,477,743 in 2019. Despite the reduction, this was considered to be a very encouraging response from congregations in what was clearly a challenging year.
  - (iii) Over £1m was received from legacies with significant amounts to the Irish Mission, Global Mission, Mission in Ireland and the Trustees’ Discretionary Fund.
  - (iv) £740,989 was claimed under the UK government’s Job Retention Scheme.
  - (v) The Council for Mission in Ireland received over £480K from the sale of various Home Mission properties and through various Presbytery schemes.
  - (vi) There was a considerable reduction in Assembly Buildings Conferencing income and challenges remain in collecting rents. A rent concession was given during “Lockdown 1” (Tuesday 24 March 2020 to Friday 12 June 2020) when non-essential retail was not allowed to trade.
  - (vii) Investment income was lower in 2020 as the dividend received from the General Investment Fund was 23p per share compared to 27.5p in 2019.
  - (viii) Income from the various Council for Social Witness residential and other facilities showed a modest increase on the previous year with occupancy remaining at a high level.
  - (ix) The previous year, 2019, included significant gains of over £1m from a number of property disposals including: Denegarh House and Global Mission, Mission in Ireland and Retired Minister House Fund properties.

3. Overall expenditure decreased from £27,043,760 to £25,848,383. The most significant element of this is expenditure on charitable activities which reduced from £26,840,777 to £25,732,431. This reflects a general scaling back of some Council activities during the pandemic and savings in staffing costs with some staff being on full time or part time furlough during 2020. The impact of an above inflation increase in minimum wage is continuing to impact on the Council for Social Witness which also provided a pay enhancement to staff during the peak of the pandemic.

Councils were awarded 90% of their “normal” United Appeal grants in 2020.

4. Overall there was a £844,218 increase in the value of investments with the General Investment Fund share price increasing from £11.6127 at 31 December 2019 to £11.7972 at 31 December 2020.
5. The overall Funds of the Church as shown on the Balance sheet increased from £69,071,971 to £77,804,012. This was principally due to the aforementioned surplus for the year along with:
  - (i) An increase in the value of investment of £844,218.
  - (ii) A reduction in the overall pension scheme liability of £6,006,162. The underlying pension investments, particularly the “Liability Driven Investment Funds”, performed strongly during 2020 and these provide a high degree of protection for the scheme’s funding position.

The General Council approved the accounts at its meeting on 30 June and the Clerk, Rev TD Gribben and Mr David Thomson, Convener of the Support Services Committee, were authorised to sign the accounts of behalf of the General Council.

## **7. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland Pension Scheme (2009)**

The Convener of the Support Services Committee received a letter from the Scheme Trustees on 24 June 2021 advising that the initial actuarial valuation results for the scheme, as at 31 December 2020, have been received. In summary, these are positive in terms of the scheme’s current funding position (i.e. in surplus) but indicate that the future service rate (i.e. the cost of providing benefits in the future) has increased. At present, the Church’s contribution rate is 24% and the member rate is 7% (as agreed at the last valuation as at 31 December 2017 and, indeed, the previous valuation as at 31 December 2014).

The Scheme Trustees sought the views of the church – the General Council Standing Committee discussed and a reply was sent back to the Trustees. While the actuarial valuation has to be completed within the statutory deadline of 31 March 2022, the plan is that a report and recommendation regarding funding rates (including rates of assessments on congregations) will be presented to the General Assembly in October.

## **8. General Comments**

During the pandemic the normal work of the Finance Department, which includes the payment of stipends, wages, pensions and ongoing bills and commitments, continued. All of this, along with additional workload in relation to the Job Retention Scheme, had to be carried on remotely for much of the time.

## **(B) ASSEMBLY BUILDINGS**

### **1. Staffing**

Thanks are due to many staff who have gone the extra mile, working in very challenging times and often less than ideal circumstances. Their efforts have enabled essential work to continue to be carried out, including the resourcing and support of congregations.

#### **Job Retention Scheme**

At the start of the Coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, the UK Government introduced a Job Retention Scheme which allowed claims to be submitted to cover the “wages” of employees and office holders placed on full time furlough. The main purpose of the scheme was to protect “jobs” and avoid the need for redundancies as a result of the impact of the pandemic.

PCI has availed of the benefits provided by the scheme. In the early stages of the pandemic some of the work of the various Councils was scaled back to what was deemed essential and some staff placed on full time furlough. From August 2020, the scheme was amended and this facilitated some staff resuming regular duties while remaining in the scheme on a part time furlough basis. The scheme is due to conclude on 30 September 2021.

The financial assistance available under the scheme has varied during its period of operation and in summary:

- Between March 2020 and July 2020, it covered 80% of wages, related national insurance and an element of pension contributions.
- During August 2020, it only covered wages to the extent of 80% and this reduced to 70% in September 2020 and then to 60% in October 2020 when it was due to cease.
- The scheme was subsequently extended and between November 2020 and July 2021 it covered 80% of wages. This reduces to 70% in July and then to 60% in August and September 2021.

In the period to end of July 2020, the amounts paid to staff etc. were “topped up” so that they continued to receive their normal pay but thereafter pay during any period of furloughed was restricted 80% in accordance with the requirements of the scheme.

Claims have to be submitted by PCI under the relevant employer PAYE Reference Scheme and the total amounts claimed by the Church from March 2020 to June 2021 are as follows:

PAYE Reference Scheme	Amount Claimed	Maximum no. claimed for in any month	No. claimed in June 2021
Assembly Buildings and other staff	900,704.74*	81	43
Assistant and Associate Ministers	122,358.53	20	2
Social Witness	36,091.39	10	0
Total	1,059,254.66		

(\* this figure mostly includes AB staff but also some Council staff at other venues and Deaconesses)

### Review of staffing needs

The Job Retention Scheme enabled jobs to be protected during the period of Covid restrictions, when the amount of work that could be carried out, or needed to be carried out, in different departments was greatly reduced. However, this period has also dramatically altered the scale of work and, even more significantly, the type of work, that some departments will have to carry forward during the next year or even years. A review was carried out of the staffing needs of each department once the job retention scheme ends and staff are back working their full contracted hours.

A number of posts were identified as being vulnerable.

Following periods of required consultation, a number of members of staff based in Assembly Buildings have therefore been made redundant. While this was clearly necessary because of changes in the working patterns of some departments, it was nonetheless regrettable and was challenging for all involved, especially the staff members directly affected.

One member of staff took voluntary redundancy at the end of October 2020 and one at the end of April 2021, and the cost of statutory redundancy and pay-in-lieu of notice was £14,650.68 and £1,724.87 respectively.

At the end of June 2021, a further 11 staff members were made redundant, two of which were on a voluntary basis. The total cost of statutory redundancy pay and pay in lieu of notice was £76,694.93.

The Councils/Departments where the redundancies occurred can be summarised as follows:

Council / Department	No.
CCLW	5
CSW	2
Reception	2
Global Mission	4
	13 *

(\* one member of GSD staff was also redeployed to a vacancy in another department)

### **General Comments**

During the pandemic the normal work of the Personnel Department, which includes recruitment and selection, investigations, reporting and other employment matters, continued. This extends to include not only staff based in Assembly Buildings but also in the Council for Social Witness residential facilities. There was a significant added workload in relation to the Job Retention Scheme and the aforementioned staffing review.

## **2. Operations and Conferencing**

From mid-March 2020, Assembly Buildings has been closed to public access. During the strictest period of lock-down only essential staff were permitted to be present in the building, with a gradual easing as the months went by – the building being accessible to staff for two days per week, then three days per week and from 1 September five days per week.

A skeleton staff was maintained in the Operations and Conferencing Department even during the period of tightest restrictions. This was necessary both to facilitate access to Assembly Buildings for essential staff and also to enable necessary health and safety preparations to be made for the phased return of staff to office working.

For a period of over a year from March 2020, most meetings of committees etc. were held by video-conferencing. Full in-person meetings of Assembly Councils were facilitated in the Assembly Hall in November 2020 and again in March 2021, and some of committees have resumed in-person meetings over recent months.

External Conferencing has not been possible in Assembly Buildings, with a few specific special exceptions, from March 2020. However, in line with the easing of restrictions by the Northern Ireland Executive, the General Council Standing Committee gave permission for conferencing and external meetings to resume, with necessary mitigations in place, from 1 August 2021.

## **3. IT and Creative Production**

The IT Department has had an even heavier work-load during lockdown than the normal significant workload it carries. The urgent facilitation of both home working and virtual meetings became, literally, an overnight requirement. This not only required the sourcing and preparation of necessary hardware, but also the development of new software tools and the ongoing support of staff and facilities literally spread throughout the country. This evolved into support for video-conferencing and training and a range of ‘hybrid’ meetings, with some attendees present in person and others using MS Teams.

Likewise, in the Creative Production Department, demands for online resources including video productions for use by congregations, significantly increased. While the production of certain physical resources was necessarily reduced (e.g. the *Herald* and other printed material), the overall production of resources increased.

DAVID THOMSON, Convener Support Services Committee

CLIVE KNOX, Financial Secretary

## APPENDIX

### OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STAFFING

#### **Sterling Salary Scales of posts in Assembly Buildings on 1 January 2021**

##### EXECUTIVE POSTS

##### **Scale 1 (£25,745 – £30,587)**

- IT Support Manager, (ITD)
- Presbyterian Women Support Officer (CLW)
- Operations and Maintenance Officer (PSD)

##### **Scale 2 (£29,074 – £34,974)**

- Property Support Officer (FSD)
- Children's Development Officer (CLW)
- Creative Production Support Officer (including Editorial Responsibilities) (CPD)
- Women's Ministry and PW Development Officer (CLW)
- Finance Manager (FSD)
- Creative Production Support Officer (Press and Web)
- Payroll and Assessment Manager (FSD)
- Personnel Support Officer (PD) x 2
- Youth Development Officer (CLW)
- Discipleship Development Officer (CLW)
- Mission Support Officer (Partnership) (MD)

##### **Scale 3 (£32,530 – £39,647)**

- Finance Manager (CSW)
- Mission Support Officer (Member Care) (MD)
- Head of Creative Production (CPD)
- Programme Development Officer (CLW)
- Public Affairs Officer (GSD)
- Training Development Officer (CLW)
- Mission Development Officer (CLW)
- Facilities and Conference Manager (PSD)

##### **Scale 4 (£35,854 – £44,793)**

- Senior Finance Manager (FSD)
- Head of Personnel (PD)



IT Development and Support Manager (ITD)  
 Head of Safeguarding (CSW)  
 Head of Disability Services (CSW)  
 Head of Older People Services (CSW)

**Scale 6 (£42,582 – £51,876)**

Deputy Clerk of Assembly and Deputy General Secretary  
 Secretary of the Council for Mission in Ireland  
 Secretary of the Council for Social Witness  
 Secretary of the Council for Global Mission  
 Secretary of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness

**Scale 7 (£48,314 – £62,147)**

Clerk of Assembly and General Secretary  
 Financial Secretary

**ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED POSTS**

**Scale 2 (£15,766 – £18,235)**

Administrative Assistant (0.54 post) (CSW)  
 Personnel Assistant (1.14 post) (PD)  
 Administrative Assistant, PW (CLW)  
 Administrative Assistant (Job Share) (MD)  
 Administrative Assistant (0.68 post) (Purchase Ledger) (FSD)  
 Operations and Maintenance Assistant (PSD)  
 Assistant Receptionist & Telephonist (PSD) (higher salary protected)

**Scale 3 (£17,692 – £20,457)**

Administrative Assistant (GSD)  
 Senior Personnel Assistant (Job Share) (PD)  
 Senior Administrative Assistant (job share 1.2 post) (CSW)  
 Senior Administrative Assistant (0.5 post) (MD)  
 Senior Administrative Assistant, PW (CLW)  
 Reception and Information Officer (PSD)  
 Taking Care Administrator (CSW)

**Scale 4 (£20,046 – £23,086)**

Senior Administrative Assistant (Partnerships) (MD)  
 Senior Administrative Assistant (Member Care) (MD)  
 Payroll and Administrative Assistant (1.77 posts) (FSD)  
 Senior Administrative Assistants (x 2 job share) (CLW)

Senior Communications Assistant (0.8 post) (CPD)  
 Senior Administrative Assistant (0.6 post) (FSD)  
 Senior Communications Assistant (Pub) (2 x 0.6 post) (CPD)  
 Senior Administrative Assistant (CLW)

**Scale 5 (£21,933 – £25,322)**

Senior Creative Production Technician (CPD)  
 Personal Assistant and Senior Administrative Assistant (MD)  
 Assistant Accountant (FSD)  
 Senior Personnel Administrator (PD)  
 Personal Assistant and Senior Administrative Assistant (job share) (GSD)  
 IT Support Officer x 3 (ITD)  
 IT Support & Development Officer (0.8 post) (ITD)  
 Payroll & Administrative Assistant (FSD)

**Scale 5 (Enhanced) (£24,223- £27,690)**

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

**Scale 5 (Enhanced pt 25-34) (£24,223 – £29,853)**

Senior Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (GSD)

**Sterling Salary Scales of posts in other locations on 1 January 2021**

**EXECUTIVE POSTS**

**Scale 2 (£29,074 – £34,974)**

College Librarian, Union College  
 Minister/Ministry Coordinator, Kinghan Church (CSW)  
 Chaplain in Residence (MD)  
 University Chaplain UUJ, (MD)  
 Lecturer in Historical Theology, Union College  
 Lecturer in Biblical Studies, Union College  
 Chaplain NI Prison Service and Coordinating Chaplain (Maghaberry)  
 Operations Manager (Union College)

**Scale 3 (£32,530 – £39,647)**

Head of Academic Administration (Union College)

**Scale 4 (£35,854 – £44,793)**

Dean of Ministerial Studies and Development (Union College)

**Scale 5 (£39,647 – £48,314)**

Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Director of Post-Graduate Studies  
(Union College)

**Scale 6 (£42,582 – £51,876)**

Professor of New Testament Studies, Union College (higher salary protected)  
Professor of Practical Theology, Union College (higher salary protected)  
Professor of Systematic Theology, Union College

**Scale 7 (£48,314 – £62,147)**

Principal of Union Theological College

**ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED POSTS****Scale 1 (£14,653 – £16,923)**

Clerical Officer (3 p/t) OPS (CSW) – Recorded as A2 on spreadsheet

**Scale 2 (£15,766 – £18,235)**

Clerical Officer – Carlisle House (part time) (CSW)  
Clerical Officer, (4 FT and 1 PT) (CSW)  
Clerical Officer, Kinghan Church (part time) (CSW)  
Custodian, Union College  
Library Assistant (part time), Union College  
Receptionist/Telephonist (Union College)

**Scale 3 (£17,692 – £20,457)**

Marriage and Guidance Co-ordinator (CLW)  
Senior Clerical Officer (part time), Carlisle House (CSW)  
Senior Secretary, Union College (0.6 post)  
Senior Secretary, Union College

**Scale 4 (£20,046 – £23,086)**

Administrator, and Personal Assistant to the Chaplain Derryvolgie (MD)  
Senior Secretary, Union College  
Deputy Librarian, Union College

**Scale 5 (Enhanced) (£24,223 – £27,690)**

Assistant Chaplain, QUB (MD)  
Resident Manager, Tritonville Close (Euro Scale) (CSW)

## HOLDING TRUSTEE TASK GROUP

(This report was remitted from the 2020 General Assembly Standing Commission for consideration and decision at the 2021 General Assembly.)

1. The Holding Trustee Task Group met on five occasions during the 2019-20 year.
2. Following the resolutions agreed by the 2018 and 2019 General Assemblies, and the advice of the General Assembly Solicitor, the proposal of the Holding Trustee Task Group is:

### Proposal

3. That the Presbytery Education Boards should cease to act as holding trustees for congregational property. Instead, two bodies should be set up, one would act as holding trustee for congregations within Northern Ireland, and the second would act as holding trustee for congregations in the Republic of Ireland.
4. These bodies would be limited companies, limited by guarantee and their function would be expressed to be that of acting as holding trustees for congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
5. A company limited by guarantee is the appropriate structure for a company which is not going to trade and is not incorporated to make a profit. This is different from the usual type of limited company which is set up to trade. Such a company is one limited by shares. The reporting and accounting obligations for a company limited by guarantee are much less onerous than for one limited by shares.
6. A company limited by guarantee requires the 'member(s)' of the company to give a guarantee to contribute a defined sum of money (usually £1) to the Company if it is being wound up because of insolvency. It is difficult to see how a company of this nature, carrying on the particular function for which it comes into existence, would face insolvency. In Northern Ireland, it is sufficient for the company to have just one member giving a guarantee.
7. The person to give the guarantee and be the member of the company might be nominated by the General Council.
8. Each Company would have two directors, perhaps the Clerk of the General Assembly and the Financial Secretary. These would be identified by their names, and not their office, but on the understanding that on leaving office they would retire as directors and be replaced by their successors. The constitutions of the Companies will provide that this is how the identity of the directors will be ascertained.
9. Each Company would appoint five or six persons in Assembly Buildings (authorised signatories) to have power to execute deeds on behalf of the Company. There would be a provision in the Constitution that a deed would be validly executed if signed by two of the authorised signatories. With five or six authorised signatories, it is anticipated that there would always be sufficient to execute any necessary deeds.

**Action Plan (for Presbyteries and Congregations)**

10. The Task Group is finalising a detailed action plan outlining the practical steps that need to be taken by congregations that have the Presbytery Education Board as the holding trustee for any part of the lands and buildings owned by the congregation: it is recommended that, when finalised, this document be distributed to congregations, presbyteries and Educations Boards.
11. It is recommended that a briefing seminar be held for clerks of presbytery, should the General Assembly approve the proposals.

**Cost to congregations**

12. The objective of the Task Group is to keep costs to a minimum, however, there will be legal costs involved in the registration process.
13. It is recommended by the Task Group that in cases of extreme difficulty, and with the recommendation of the appropriate clerk of presbytery, application may be made to the Incidental Fund to meeting, at its discretion, the costs of appointing one of the new companies as holding trustee. The acquisition of title is the responsibility of the congregation.

**Guidance regarding property transactions**

14. As a consequence of the Task Group's work, it has been realised that step-by-step guidance in connection with property transactions will be helpful for congregations and holding trustees; an appropriate guidance document is being drawn up: it is recommended that, when finalised, this document be distributed to congregations, presbyteries and Educations Boards.
15. It has also come to the attention of the Task Group that guidance on congregational borrowing may be helpful for congregations; it is recommended that the Task Group be requested to draw up guidance on congregational borrowing.
16. Following the approval of the General Assembly, the Holding Trustee Task Group will progress the proposal and recommendations outlined in the report.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

The Holding Trustee Task Group is not proposing any changes to the Code regarding the decision-making processes concerning congregational property.

The Code is clear regarding the decision-making process:

'it shall be the duty of congregational trustees to carry out the lawful directions given to them on behalf of the congregation by the **Congregational Committee.**' (Code para 57(1))

'transactions creating, transferring or affecting any estate or interest in congregational property shall not be entered into without the **authorisation of the congregation and the sanction of the Presbytery** being first obtained.' (Code para 57(2))

ROBERT HERRON, Convener

## MEMORIAL RECORD

The Rev Robert Gilbert Johnston, BD, MTh, Minister Emeritus, First Saintfield, died on 13 July 2020 in the eighty-sixth year of his life and the fifty-second year of his ministry. He was born at Belfast on 6 June 1935, the eldest of five children, to James Johnston, a stevedore, and his wife, Sarah, née Robinson. The family were members of Albert St congregation off the Shankill Road where Mr Johnston Jnr became involved in many of the activities of the Church. He joined the Boys' Brigade Company at the John White Memorial Congregational Church in Tennent St and, in February 1952, became one of the first winners of the Queen's Badge in Northern Ireland. He attended St Saviour's Primary School and, for a time, during World War II, Mullaghduh Primary School, Islandmagee. He was a talented footballer and played at B division level and later trialled for QPR when they were a Division 3 South Side. Primary school was followed by two years at Belfast Technical College, and he started work at Blackstaff Mill on the Springfield Road in August 1949. He forged a successful career there, and his ability was recognised when he was sent to London as a marketing manager in the mid nineteen-fifties. He joined Bayswater Presbyterian Church where he became an Officer in the Boys' Brigade Company and the church organist. On Sunday evenings he attended Westminster Chapel. It was there in February 1957 that he gave his life to Jesus as Lord and Saviour through the preaching of the Rev Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Becoming convinced of a call of God to the ordained ministry, but not having the requisite academic qualifications, he enrolled at night school to study for 'O' and 'A' levels. This opened the way for him to study for a BD and, subsequently, an MTh, at London Bible College, 1960 to 1964. Mr Johnston returned to Belfast in 1965 to continue his studies at the Queen's University 1965 to 1967, and the Assembly's College 1967 to 1968. He was assigned as student assistant to the Rev Denis Wilson Clarke of Maghera. On 2 September 1966, he married Hazel McLees from Scotland (at St David's Knightswood Church of Scotland in Glasgow), whom he had met while she too was studying at London Bible College, and they lived for a time in Maghera. In 1968 they moved to Belfast, with their firstborn, Stephen, where Mr Johnston served as assistant to the Rev James McAllister of Megain Memorial with particular responsibility for the Mersey Street Mission. He was licensed on 12 June 1968 by the Presbytery of Belfast South and was ordained on 16 December 1968, by the Presbytery of Belfast East. In 1970, the family, now with the addition of another son, Philip, moved to Kilkeel where Mr Johnston was installed on 24 June by the Presbytery of Mourne. Nine happy and fruitful years of ministry were spent in the Kingdom of Mourne where their daughter, Ruth, was born in 1974. The vacant congregation of First Saintfield issued a call to Mr Johnston in 1979 and he was installed there on 31 July by the Presbytery of Newry. Throughout his ministry Mr Johnston proved himself a dedicated servant of Christ. He was meticulous in his pulpit preparation and his preaching of the Gospel, doing the work

of an evangelist and teacher. A warm-hearted pastor, he was diligent in visitation of his people for whom he prayed in their homes and in his private devotions. The presbyteries in which he served benefitted from his wisdom and experience. As Convener of the Assembly's Committee for the Reception of Ministers, 1993-2000, he fulfilled this roll with sensitivity, insight and thoroughness. Mr Johnston retired to Portrush on 29 February 2000, and, like many of his colleagues, continued to conduct Sunday Services and other duties until ill-health overtook him. We thank God for his faithful ministry and partnership in the Gospel and extend to his wife Hazel, his children, Stephen, Philip and Ruth, surviving brother, James, and sister, Elizabeth, and the wider family circle, our sympathy as we commit them to the care of 'our Lord Jesus that great Shepherd of the sheep' with whom our brother now dwells according to His promise.

The **Rev William Warren Porter, BA, BD, DD**, Minister Emeritus, Moneydig, died on 2 August 2020, in the ninety-fourth year of his age and the sixty-first year of his ministry. He was born at Belfast on 2 March 1927, the sixth of ten siblings to William Porter, an Admiralty Policeman, and his wife, Helen, née White. The family attended St Patrick's Church of Ireland congregation on the Newtownards Road and Mr Porter received his early education at Mersey Street Elementary School. On leaving school he worked on the Co. Down Railway. A colleague in his work, Alec Johnston, invited him to the Bible Class in St. Patrick's Church where he was converted. Not long after, he felt the call to Christian ministry and, on leaving work, he studied at the Training School of the Society of the Irish, Dublin, from 1946 to 1950. He undertook a course of further study at the Free Church College, Edinburgh, from 1952 to 1955, and was chosen by the Senatus to spend part of it at the Free University of Amsterdam. From 1955 to 1958 he ministered in the Lisburn Road congregation of the Irish Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and then applied to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to be received as a minister. He served for a time as assistant to the Convener of First Bailieborough, Coroneary and Glasleck and, on being accepted by the General Assembly, he was licensed by the Presbytery of Cavan on 21 June 1960, then ordained by the same Presbytery on 6 July 1960, and installed as minister of the afore-mentioned congregations. During these years, he continued his theological studies and graduated BD from the University of London in 1961. After three years of service in the Presbytery of Cavan he accepted a call from the congregation of Killead, where he was installed on 30 January 1963 by the Presbytery of Templepatrick. This was a short ministry for he resigned on 23 September 1965 on being called by the Assembly's Government Committee as a Chaplain to the RAF. He served at St. Athan in S. Wales, RAF Episkopi in Cyprus, RAF Locking in Somerset, RAF Laarbruch in West Germany, RAF Cosford and RAF Lyneham in England. His greatest joy was in seeing those to whom he ministered coming to faith in Christ. He retired from the RAF in 1981 with the rank of Wing Commander and returned to parish ministry, being installed in Bellaghy and Knockloughrim by the Presbytery of Tyrone on 15 November 1981. Having developed a

taste for academic study, he undertook a course with the Open University graduating BA in January 1984. In 1986, he moved to what was to be his final charge in Moneydig, where he was installed by the Presbytery of Coleraine on 23 April remaining there until his retirement on 30 September 1993. Mr. Porter was not only a firm defender of the reformed faith but also an excellent contributor to the courts of the Presbyterian Church, especially the General Assembly. His ability to think on his feet and his deep knowledge of the law of the Church, served him and the Church at large well over many years. He was an avid reader and a conscientious pastor as well as a faithful preacher of God's Word. This commitment to the work and witness of the Presbyterian Church was recognised in 1990 with the conferral of a DD by the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland, particularly for his work on a revision of the Code. His wider community interests and commitments are reflected in his membership of the Orange Order for over seventy years in which he served as a past Assistant Grand Master and Grand Chaplain, and in his membership of the Freemasons which he defended against the accusation that it was a 'Secret Society' in a booklet entitled, *The Christian and the Craft: Objections to Freemasonry – A Christian assessment of their Validity*. He also published *Presbyterian Worship: An outline of its Essence and Expression*; *In Old Corglass: An outline of 250 years in First Bailieboro' Presbyterian Church*; and *Moneydig Presbyterian Church: 1836-1986*, one hundred and fiftieth anniversary souvenir. Mr Porter married Joan Margaret Bass on 26 June 1954. He had met Joan when she was working with the Irish Church Mission and she played an active role in supporting her husband in the various spheres of his ministry. They had three children, Sam, Ewan, and Ruth. To Mrs Porter and the family circle we express our sympathy on the passing of their loved one as we thank God for a brother 'who fought the good fight' who 'kept the faith' and who has 'finished the race' looking to 'the crown of righteousness', which the Lord awards 'to all those who have longed for his appearing.'

The Rev James Briggs, BD, BA, Minister Emeritus, Scarva Street, Banbridge, died on 7 August 2020, in the eighty-fourth year of his age and the forty-fifth year of his ministry. He was born at Lisburn on 8 October 1935, the third of five children (he had two older brothers and two younger sisters) to John Briggs, a joiner and builder's foreman, and his wife, Annie, née Spence. The family were members of Christ Church, Church of Ireland, in the town, where he was converted to personal faith in Christ in his teens through a Bible class. He attended Lisburn Central Primary School and Lisburn Technical College. On leaving school he was employed by the Workshop for the Blind on the Shankill Road, Belfast, before training alongside his father as an apprentice joiner. However, his commitment to his faith in Christ, and desire to share the Gospel, led him to train as an evangelist at Emmanuel Bible College, Birkenhead, from 1955 to 1958. He served with the Irish Evangelistic Band in the north and south of Ireland and travelled to Canada and America in 1963 to work with Christians in Action at Long Beach, California. While working in America he met



up again with Jean Hanna whom he had known in Lisburn through a prayer meeting, and who was working also with Christians in Action. Friendship turned to romance and they were married at Railway Street Presbyterian Church by the Rev Howard Cromie, on 16 January 1965. They had three children, Ruth, Naomi and Philip. For the first few years of their married life they worked together holding evangelistic missions with the Christian Workers' Union around Northern Ireland. Encouraged by the Rev Cromie, between 1966 and 1968 Mr Briggs studied part-time to gain 'O' and 'A' level qualifications and was accepted as a student for the ordained ministry. He studied at the Queen's University, Belfast, and the Assembly's College, from 1969, and graduated BD in 1974. From 1969 to 1973, he acted as student assistant to the Rev Howard Cromie in Railway Street, Lisburn, and then to the Rev RE Alexander, minister of Fitzroy Avenue, Belfast, from 1973 to 1976. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Dromore on 16 June 1974 and ordained by the Presbytery of Belfast South on 5 January 1975. Mr Briggs was called to the congregation of Scarva Street, Banbridge, and installed there by the Presbytery of Iveagh on 29 January 1976. He spent his whole ministry in this congregation and was a familiar figure in the local community. Mr Briggs was a diligent minister of Christ. He prepared thoroughly for his teaching ministry and sought to explain the Gospel and build Christians up in their faith and service. His earnest and caring manner commended him to his people as he visited and ministered to them. He was a wise counsellor and fine role model for young people. Students whom he mentored, and colleagues with whom he worked, appreciated his warm fellowship and encouragement. He continued to pursue his interest in academic study with the Open University and graduated BA in 1978. Mr Briggs retired on 31 December 2000, and for some years assisted the Rev Scott Woodburn, minister of Edengrove, Ballynahinch. We remember Mrs Briggs, her children, and Mr Briggs' two sisters, Marie and Sylvia, along with the wider family circle, in their loss, and commend them to 'the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort'.

**The Rev David Johnston, BA**, Minister Emeritus (Released), First Newtownards, died on 4 September 2020, in the eighty-sixth year of his age and the fifty-fourth year of his ministry. He was born at Dunminning, Glarryford, Ballymena, on 4 December 1933, the fifth of seven children to John Johnston, a postman, and his wife, May, née Magill. He was brought up in connection with the congregation of Killymurris, and attended Dunminning Primary School. On leaving school he was employed as a grocery assistant in Ballymena by the Co-op. However, he felt called into full-time Christian work and served with the Belfast and Londonderry City Mission from May 1955 to 1959 based in the Old Lodge Road district. He then studied for the ministry at the Magee University College, Londonderry, and Trinity College, Dublin, from which he graduated BA in 1963. In the same year he married Caroline Nicholl on 23 July 1963, and they had two children, Claire and Jane. In the autumn of 1963, he commenced his theological studies at the Assembly's College, Belfast. On

completion of his course he was licensed by the Presbytery of Ballymena on 6 June 1965. He was assistant to the Rev Joseph Dallas in the congregation of Westbourne, Belfast, and was ordained there by the Presbytery of East Belfast on 12 December 1965. He was called to his first charge at Donacloney where he was installed by the Presbytery of Iveagh on 20 January 1967. Following nearly seven years of ministry there, he moved to Sloan Street, Lisburn, and was installed on 15 November 1973 by the Presbytery of Dromore. His ministry in Lisburn was short for he was called to the large congregation of Orangefield, Belfast and, to the regret of his congregation, he was installed on 24 June 1976 by the Presbytery of East Belfast. First Newtownards called him in 1984 and he was installed there on 13 December by the Presbytery of Ards and ministered for fourteen years until retirement. During his time the church hall was extended and four rooms added and officially opened in March 1988. In March 1994, an electrical fault in the roof space caused a fire which gutted the interior of the Church. It was restored largely in the same style and dedicated by the Moderator, the Right Rev Dr John Ross, on 7 October 1995. In all of this activity Mr Johnston gave energetic and resolute leadership. A fine Christian, Mr Johnston preached the gospel of Christ crucified and exemplified the Christian way of life in all of his dealings. He learned his alliterative style of preaching from his good friend the Rev George Duncan of the Tron, Glasgow, to whom he always gladly acknowledged his debt. Like his Master, Mr Johnston was often among his people and by their side in the crises of life bringing the hope and encouragement of the Gospel. His warm personality and genuine spirit opened doors and hearts to him. He loved to be busy in the service of Jesus and was a faithful friend and wise counsellor to colleagues and younger ministers. He retired on 31 January 1999 but continued to minister in a part-time capacity for many years in the congregation of New Row, Coleraine as pastoral assistant. Many came to faith through his ministry whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. We give thanks to God for his exemplary Christian service and assure his wife, Carol, daughters Claire and Jane, his surviving sibling Ruby, and the wider family circle, of our prayers, confident that their loved one, our brother, enjoys 'the crown of righteousness' reserved for those who 'have fought the good fight...have finished the race' and 'have kept the faith.'

The Rev **Robert Noel Agnew**, Minister Emeritus, West Kirk, Belfast, died on 30 September 2020, in the seventy-seventh year of his age and the twenty-ninth year of his ministry. He was born at Moneysally, Kilrea, on 25 December 1942, one of two children, (a sister, Lily, now deceased) to Robert Agnew, farmer, and his wife, Jeannie, née Pollock. His parents were committed Christians who brought up their children in the faith. They were members of Churchtown congregation where the minister, the Rev John Joe Rainey, preached Christ as Lord and Saviour. As a lad Mr Agnew joined Kilrea BB company. In later years he became an Officer and maintained a life-long interest in Boys' Brigade work. He was a keen sportsman, gifted

at football and rugby and played for Limavady Firsts. He attended Kilrea Primary School and then Coleraine Inst 1954-1960. On leaving school, he trained at Stranmillis teacher training College, 1960-1963. He became an Assistant teacher at Limavady Central Primary School, and in 1971 he was appointed Principal of Culcrow Primary School, Aghadowey. In his student days he drifted from the Christian pathway but after some time returned with renewed vigour and conviction. He combined his new-found passion for Christ with a gift for singing and speaking, and travelled around the country with the gospel group, Pastures Green, conducting coffee bar missions, and speaking at church Services. His worth was recognised by his home congregation when he was elected an elder on 3 May 1981. Finding fulfilment in his service for Christ he became convinced of a call to the ordained ministry and proceeded to Union Theological College, Belfast, in 1986, to study theology. On completion of his course, he was licensed on 22 June 1989, by the Presbytery of Ballymena. He assisted the Rev Andrew Rutherford Rodgers at Dungannon where he was ordained on 23 January 1990. On 26 April 1991, he was installed as minister of Oldpark congregation, Belfast, by the Presbytery of North Belfast. In 1999, he moved to the joint charge of Bellaghy and Knockloughrim where he was installed by the Presbytery of Tyrone on 17 September. He returned to Belfast early in 2003 and was installed as minister of West Kirk on 31 January by the Presbytery of North Belfast. In all of these spheres he exercised an expository ministry teaching the truths of the Bible and calling his hearers to faith and discipleship. He enjoyed being among people and was a gifted personal worker. His friendly and caring manner enabled him to gain the confidence and trust of others and the right to speak directly into their personal situations. In the wider church he served on the central Youth Board and its Education and Mission Committee, and was Chairman of the Youthreach Festival 1990-1993. He retired on 31 July 2009 but continued to preach and to minister in many contexts. Outside of the structures of the Church he served as a member of the governing body of the Belfast City Mission for many years until 2002. A firm supporter of the Keswick at Portstewart Convention, he joined its management committee in February 1993 and encouraged students and young ministers to develop the expository style of ministry exemplified by the speakers. He was a keen deep-sea fisherman and knew many of the fishing communities in Counties Down and Donegal, as also in Scotland where he spent holidays often as a volunteer crew member. His love of sport afforded a variety of opportunities for Christian witness. He became a well-regarded chaplain with the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland (Ulster branch) and it was following practice for the Cookstown 100 motorcycle races on Friday, September 11, that he took a severe heart attack which led to his demise a couple of weeks later. We express our sympathy to Mr Agnew's cousins, the Pollock family, along with the wider family circle, as we give thanks to God for our brother's service. Saved by grace, this preacher of grace now enjoys the grace of the Lamb upon the Throne as one of the redeemed who serve Him evermore.

The Rev Frank Russell BA, BD, Minister Emeritus, Castlerock, died on 19 October 2020, in the eighty-seventh year of his age and the fifty-eighth year of his ministry. He was born at Belfast 12 July 1934, the second of three sons to Samuel Russell, a Civil Servant, and his wife Amy, née Oliver. A few years later the family moved to Dungannon and became actively involved in the life and witness of the local congregation. Mr Russell was educated at Killyman Primary School and then the Royal School, Dungannon, 1946-1952. He studied philosophy at the Queen's University, Belfast, 1952-1956, graduating BA. Persuaded of the call of God to the ordained ministry he took his theology course at the Assembly's College, Belfast, 1956-1959, which included a year at New College, Edinburgh, 1957-1958. He graduated BD from the University of London in 1959. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Dungannon on 31 May 1959 and then spent a year studying at Heidelberg University, Germany, and became fluent in German. On returning home, he served his assistantship to the Rev John Ferguson Park minister of Stormont, Belfast, and was ordained there by the Presbytery of Belfast on 15 June 1961. The congregation of Trinity, Letterkenny, called him in 1963 and he was installed there by the Presbytery of Donegal on 9 May. Eleven energetic years followed. He founded the Donegal Presbytery Youth Movement with the aim of bringing young people together and building them up in Christian faith and service. In this he was assisted by the Secretary, Rosemary Bell, whom he married on 23 March 1968. They had two children, Carole and David. His energies and pastoral gifts found further outlet in his chaplaincy work with the County Hospital. In 1974, he and his family left Letterkenny and moved to Dursley, Gloucestershire, England, where Mr Russell took up a post in a local secondary school teaching RE. Three years later they returned to Northern Ireland to settle at Castlerock where he was installed by the Presbytery of Coleraine on 7 October 1977 and from which charge he retired twenty years later on 8 September 1999. Throughout his ministry Mr Russell aimed to bring people together through religious and social gatherings and special events. During the summer, the Sunday Services at Castlerock were often crowded with visitors whom Mr Russell had encouraged through his visits to holiday sites in the area. In his preaching he sought to make the Bible relevant to everyday life and kept the attention of children with creative children's talks. Overseas trips to places such as Switzerland and Italy were organised for young people. Mr Russell also took an active interest in the work of Corrymeela in its ministry of reconciliation and he arranged an annual interdenominational Easter Dawn Service at Mussenden Temple, Downhill. Mrs Russell died suddenly in 1996 and in retirement Mr Russell married Hazel McBrine on 1 November 2001. They enjoyed many years of travel until Mr Russell's health began to deteriorate. We extend our sympathy to Mrs Hazel Russell, Carole, David, and the wider family circle as they mourn the passing of their loved one, sustained by the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

The Rev William Norman Duncan BD, MTh, Emeritus Global Mission Worker, died on 24 October 2020, in the eighty-sixth year of his age and the forty-eighth year of his ministry. He was born at Armagh on 12 June 1935, to Gordon Duncan, a Bread Server with the Ormeau Bakery, and his wife Elizabeth (Lilly), née Gregson. He had a younger sister, June, who died in 1990. They worshipped in the Mall congregation but in later years Mr Duncan senior was promoted to Deputy Manager of the Ormeau depot at Portadown and the family moved there and joined Armagh Road congregation. Mr Duncan was educated at the Armstrong Primary School and The Royal School, Armagh, 1948-1951. He left school aged fifteen to help his family and worked in his mother's home bakery and later as a trainee in Ewart's Linen Mill, Falls Road, Belfast. At the age of 16, he was so challenged by a talk given at a Young People's Convention that he gave his life to Christ. He grew spiritually and sensed the call of God to missionary service. Having left school without qualifications, he studied by correspondence course to gain admittance to Emmanuel College, Birkenhead, where he trained in preparation for missionary service from 1957 to 1959, followed by further study at London Bible College from 1960 to 1963, from which he graduated BD. During these years his friendship with Joan Quinn, whom he had known since primary school days, developed into romance. Joan trained as a nurse and attended the Faith Mission College, Edinburgh, also to prepare for missionary service. They were married on 15 August 1963 in Orangefield Presbyterian Church and after several months of Missionary orientation in the USA, they sailed to India in September 1964 with the Oriental Missionary Society (OMS – now One Mission Society). They were led to the city of Madras (now Chennai), capital of the state of Tamil Nadu on the east coast, where Mr Duncan taught for the next five and a half years at the Madras Bible College. Mr Duncan's vision was to train young indigenous Indian Christians to take the Gospel message to their own people. His main passion was Bible Teaching. Their three children, David, Esther and Stephen, were born in India. The family returned to Northern Ireland in 1970 and, realising that that a master's degree would better qualify him to teach in India, the family moved to Kentucky in 1970, where he studied at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, USA, and graduated MTh in 1971. The door to return to India did not open at that time, and God's purpose for them led Mr Duncan to apply to be received as a student for the Presbyterian ministry. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Armagh on 29 October 1972, and served as assistant to the Rev Ross Kirkpatrick Greer in Cooke Centenary congregation, Belfast. He was ordained by the Presbytery of East Belfast on 29 April 1973 and, in 1974, the congregation of Edengrove, Ballynahinch, called him as their minister, where he was installed by the Presbytery of Down on 30 May. His dedication to Bible teaching and prayer, as well as his warm-hearted personality and pastoral care, bore fruit and the congregation grew numerically and spiritually. In the work of the central Church he acted as Convener of the Irish Mission Committee 1991-1992. After twenty years as minister in Edengrove, God opened the

door for further ministry in India, and Mr Duncan was commended by the Overseas Board in September 1994 for work with Operation Mobilisation based at Hyderabad, and he travelled widely throughout the country to teach and encourage Christians. He visited the Presbyterian Church in North India and frequently was invited by the Bishop of Gujarat to teach there. When the term with OM came to an end in August 1998, opportunity for further service in India opened with the Overseas Board of our Church and with the Layman's Evangelical Fellowship (LEF), based in Chennai which encompassed the Gujarat Diocese of the Church of North India. Mr Duncan was engaged in teaching and training evangelists at the LEF's Bible School. He unexpectedly developed a writing ministry when his Indian students started transcribing his sermon audio tapes for publication, and asked for his assistance. Mrs Duncan helped in the editing and proof-reading, and this resulted in the publication of *Abraham's Journey of Faith; Esther: God is Still on the Throne – Studies in the Book of Esther*; and *Spiritual Warfare*, among other titles, translated into several languages. Mrs Duncan was also engaged in teaching English, and in ministering to women from the college and at retreats. Mr Duncan retired in June 2004 and he and Mrs Duncan returned home to settle at Belfast. They joined the congregation of Bloomfield, East Belfast, where Mr Duncan assisted the minister, the Very Rev Dr Frank Sellar, for some years. At home and abroad, his expository teaching ministry influenced thousands for Christ, many of whose names are no doubt written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and with whom he now sings the praises of the Lamb upon the throne. We give thanks to God for his life of faith and example of dedicated service to Christ, as we assure Mrs Duncan, their children and wider family circle of our prayers for them in their loss.

The Rev David Glover Bailie, BA, BD, ThM, Minister Emeritus (Released) West Church, Bangor, died 13 November 2020, in the ninety-second year of his age and the sixty-sixth year of his ministry. He was born at Carmorn, Toomebridge, 10 February 1929, the fourth of six children to Adam Bailie, Farmer, and his wife, Wilhelmina, née Thompson. He received his spiritual education in the congregation of Duneane and attended Staffordstown Primary School. In 1941 Mr Bailie progressed to Ballymena Academy and then, the Queen's University, Belfast, where he studied Philosophy from 1946 to 1950 when he graduated BA. Having decided to enter the Christian ministry, he studied at New College, Edinburgh, from 1950 to 1952, and Assembly's College, Belfast, 1952 to 1953, during which time he served as student assistant to the Rev John T Carson in Trinity, Bangor. In 1953, he graduated BD from Edinburgh and, following licensing by the Presbytery of Templepatrick 6 September 1953, he pursued a course of further study at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey, USA, gaining his ThM in 1954. On returning home, he was ordained by the Presbytery of Templepatrick, 28 November 1954, for missionary work in Gujarat, India, with the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. He travelled there in November of that year and his fiancée, Rhoda Elizabeth McLarnon, from Moneynick, Randalstown, followed him in 1955, and

they were married in Wilson College, Bombay, 25 November of that year. Over the next seven years they developed a life-long love for Gujarat and its people as they gave themselves wholeheartedly to a ministry in Sunday school work and of equipping and training the body of Christ, especially students, helping them to discover their giftings for service. They returned to Ireland in 1961 with their daughter Elizabeth and, after a period of deputation, Mr Bailie was installed as minister in West Church, Bangor by the Presbytery of Ards, on the 11 October. This cause was initiated by the Church Extension Committee of the General Assembly in response to growing housing development on the west side of Bangor. The first Services were held in Carnalea House, the home of Mr FC Tughan, until a church was opened across the road on the present site in 1963. Mr Bailie gave himself enthusiastically to the hard work involved in building up the congregation numerically and spiritually. His warm, welcoming and caring character and leadership drew people to the church. As his successor, Dr McMullen, says of him, ‘David was transparently gracious, consistent in his approach to ministry, generous in spirit, a Father-figure full of wisdom and a dear friend to all he encountered.’ The congregation is known for its healthy charismatic ministry developed by Mr Bailie following a visit to the congregation in February 1968 by the Rev Tom Smail, a friend from New College days, and an experience of renewal in the Spirit. This inspired a prayer ministry and Life in the Spirit seminars through which many were refreshed and strengthened in faith and service. With a passion for reconciliation and peace engendered by the divisions of the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland, Mr Bailie established cross community contacts and friendships and became a trustee of the Christian Renewal Centre in Rostrevor. In the wider church he served as Moderator of the Synod of Armagh and Down in 1992. He retired in 1998 but continued to offer pastoral ministry in the congregation of Ballygilbert and wrote a history, *West Church Journey*. To Mrs Bailie, her children, Elizabeth, Andrew and Mary, Mr Bailie’s surviving siblings, Elizabeth and Robin, and the wider family circle, we offer the assurance of our prayers in their loss as we celebrate the goodly heritage our brother has left behind and who is now ‘away from the body, and at home with the Lord.’

The Rev William John Roy Robinson BSc, BD, Minister Emeritus, McQuiston Memorial, died 16 December 2020, in the eighty-second year of his age and the forty-fourth year of his ministry. Born at Dunmurry 16 February 1938, he was the youngest of four children and only son of John Robert Robinson and his wife, Ellen Victoria, née Roy. He was brought up in Dunmurry congregation where he learned early to follow Jesus as Lord and Saviour especially through the work of the Sunday school, where he later became a teacher, and the Christian Endeavour. He attended Dunmurry Primary School and the Royal Belfast Academical Institution (RBAI). At the age of sixteen, he and his sisters experienced the sad loss of both parents and he went to live with an older married sister, Gloria. On leaving school he worked as a textile chemist with the Kilwee Bleaching Company, Dunmurry, and studied for a BSc part-time with the Queen’s

University, Belfast, from which he graduated in 1960. He had intended to study for the ordained ministry and, by way of preparation, assisted the Rev Alfred Martin at Lowe Memorial, Finaghy but, on learning that the Qua Iboe Mission, now Mission Africa, were looking for a science teacher at a new school in Nigeria he decided to put his study plans on hold and to answer this call. By this time a friendship with Lois Gweneth Sadler, whom he had met at a Christian Endeavour weekend at Castlerock, had developed into romance, and they were married on 23 February 1962 in Whiteabbey Presbyterian Church. Shortly afterwards, they sailed to Nigeria where Mr Robinson took up a post at Ochaja Secondary School, opened in 1960, in the Igala district of Kogi State. Mr Robinson settled quickly to the work there and served as Principal from 1963 to 1964. After three years he resigned from Qua Iboe and took up a Nigerian government post as Director of the School of Science and Technology at Kaduna Polytechnic in Kaduna State in the north-west of Nigeria. He published textbooks on Chemistry, Physics and Health Science, related to the curriculum of the department, and became a Fellow of the Royal Institute of Chemistry and of the Royal Society of Health. Mr and Mrs Robinson's two children, Clive and Alison, were born during these years. Returning home, Mr Robinson was received as a candidate for the ministry and began theological study at the Assembly's College, Belfast, in the autumn of 1971 and graduated BD in 1974. During this time, he served as student assistant at Lowe Memorial. The Presbytery of South Belfast licensed him 16 June 1974 and he was ordained by the Presbytery of East Belfast in Dundonald congregation 19 January 1975 where he was the full-time assistant. He moved to his first charge of Conlig, with Kilcooley which was then a church extension charge, in 1976, where he was installed 19 February by the Presbytery of Ards. The new church plant of Lisnabreen was added in 1978 and Kilcooley was erected to congregational status in 1979 with its own minister. A few years later, in 1981, Lisnabreen too was fully erected. During his ministry, stained glass windows from the former church building of Elmwood, Belfast, were transferred to the Conlig building. After ten years of steady ministry at Conlig, Mr Robinson moved to Belfast where he was installed in the congregation of McQuiston Memorial by the Presbytery of East Belfast 26 August 1987. Traditionally a large and well-attended congregation in a densely populated area, the 'Troubles' had significantly affected the area and brought new burdens and responsibilities to the work. The ongoing activity of the organisations prospered and the congregation celebrated the happy occasions of its centenary in 1992 and also that of the Boys' Brigade. In the work of the wider Church, he acted as Convener of the Retired Ministers' Fund 1987-1990 and of the Board of Ministry and Pensions 1990-1997. Mr Robinson brought to his ministry a strong faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour, a love for young people, gifts of teaching and organisation, and a strong work ethic. In all the spheres of his ministry Mrs Robinson was involved and supportive, contributing her own gifts of witness and friendship. Mr and Mrs Robinson retired in 2000 and enjoyed many happy years until ill-health restricted Mr Robinson's activities. We gladly give thanks to Almighty God for the life and ministry of our brother



and express our sympathy and prayers to his wife, Lois, son Clive, daughter Alison, sisters, Gloria and Joyce, and their wider family circle, confident in Him who is the resurrection and the life.

**The Rev Adrian Robert Adger, BA, Dip Fin Acc, BA, Dip Min,** Clough and Seaforde, died on 13 January 2021, in the fifty-seventh year of his age and the fifth year of his ministry. He was born at Gracehill on 9 March 1963, the elder of two boys, to William Adger, a Contracts Manager for McLoughlin and Harvey Building and Civil Engineers, and his wife Eileen, née Cuming. He attended Trinity congregation in Ahoghill with his family and was educated at Gracehill Primary School and Ballymena Academy followed by study at Stirling University for a degree in Accountancy with which he graduated in 1984. On returning home he continued his studies at the University of Ulster Jordanstown campus gaining a Diploma in Financial Accountancy and started as a trainee accountant with the firm of Deloitte, Haskins and Sells, Belfast. During his teenage years, he had drifted from the Christian pathway but, in the autumn of 1985, a near road accident brought him to personal faith in Christ and he became actively involved in church activities as a Sunday School teacher and a Youth Fellowship leader. Over the next few years, a call to full-time service strengthened. In 1991 he enrolled at Belfast Bible College and graduated DipTh in 1994. The Belfast City Mission (BCM) needed a missionary at Woodvale Mission Hall, Disraeli Street, and he was appointed to the role. A few years later, in 2000, he moved to Fairview Road Hall, Newtownabbey. He developed an interest in Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS) which supplies Christian books and training for pastors and students in Nigeria, and a trip to William Wheatley Theological College in Oloko, Abia State in 2007, opened up an opportunity for him to return two years later to lecture there for six months. He had resigned from BCM in September 2009 before going to Nigeria and it was not until 2011 that the way became clear to him that future service lay in the ordained ministry, and so, he began theological study at Union Theological College, Belfast, in September of that year. He was licensed at Trinity on 26 May 2013 by the Presbytery of Ballymena and served an assistantship to the Rev Robert Bell, Ballyclare, from that date. The congregations of Clough and Seaforde called him in 2015 and he was ordained and installed by the Presbytery of Down on 19 June. This time he had a help-meet with him in the person of Karen Anderson whom he married on 23 July 2013 and who complemented and supported him in his ministry. Mr Adger brought to his congregational ministry the experience of service in the Belfast City Mission and manifested the same evident dedication to his Lord and his people. A big man, six feet seven inches tall, he stood out in any crowd not only for his height but also for his evident spirituality and humanity. He was attentive and caring in all his duties which was reciprocated by the love and respect of those whom he pastored. As a faithful evangelist, a friend to those in need, and a wise counsellor, his Christian witness impacted the lives of many. It was therefore a great shock to be given a diagnosis of incurable

kidney cancer in 2017. Questions of How and Why gradually gave way to a determination to share his story and to bring the hope and the challenge of the Gospel to others. Two books followed – *Facing Cancer Standing Tall* and *Facing Cancer Standing Together*, as well as several videos, by which means his voice still speaks. We share with Mr Adger's wife, Karen, his brother Neil, and their wider family circle, in thanksgiving to God for the life and ministry of our brother who is more alive than ever in the presence of the risen and reigning Lord Jesus.

The Rev Thomas Veitch (Tom) Mawhinney, MBE, MA, Minister Emeritus (Released) Second Limavady, died on 17 January 2021, in the eighty-second of his age and the fifty-fourth of his ministry. He was born at Belfast on 12 March 1939, the youngest of four children, to Thomas Edward Mawhinney, a Master Butcher, and his wife, Mary Ellen, née Veitch, and was raised in connection with the congregation of Megain Memorial. His early education was at Strandtown Primary School. On leaving school he entered the world of work and in response to a conviction of a call to the ministry he prepared himself by attending night classes which enabled him to study at the Magee University College, Londonderry, from 1961, and to graduate BA from Trinity College, Dublin in 1965. During these student years, he married Lucinda Fields in Bloomfield Presbyterian Church on 9 June 1962. They had three children, Anna, Mark and the late David. Deciding for the Christian ministry, he studied theology at the Assembly's College, Belfast, 1965 to 1967, while at the same time serving as a student assistant firstly in Seaview congregation, 1965 to 1966, and then full-time in Bloomfield. He was licensed by the Presbytery of East Belfast on 5 June 1967 in his home congregation and ordained at Bloomfield on 3 December 1967 by the same presbytery. Three years later, he was called by the congregation of Second Limavady and installed there by the Presbytery of Limavady 2 October 1970, to which was added Myroe where he was installed 3 April 1974. Throughout his long ministry in both congregations, Mr Mawhinney became deeply involved in the lives of his people sharing the major events of their lives and ministering the challenge and the balm of the Gospel to them. He was a keen promoter of youth work and founded a Boys' Brigade Company in Second Limavady in which he acted as both Captain and Chaplain for many years. This was complemented by a Girls' Brigade Company founded by Mrs Mawhinney. Considerable improvements were made to the properties of both congregations during his ministry. Second Limavady built an additional new hall and the church building was redecorated and a new heating system installed. Myroe undertook a major renovation of the church and also erected a new hall. In these projects Mr Mawhinney gave untiring leadership and practical involvement. He played his part in the work of the Presbytery of Limavady and subsequently the new Presbytery of Foyle, and he was Moderator of the Synod of Derry and Omagh in 2001. His energies and expertise were available also to several of the schools in the district. He was, for a time, Chairman of Limavady Central Primary School and of Limavady High School as well as serving on

the Board of Governors of Drumachose Primary School, and he played a major role in the amalgamation of Dungiven High School with Limavady High School in 2001, to which he welcomed Prince Charles at the official opening. As a keen supporter of the Sharing Education initiative between protestant and catholic schools he was active in cross community work. In 2011, he was awarded the MBE in recognition of his services to education in Limavady. Exercising Christian compassion, he became a Director of the Dale Eakin Fund founded in 2000 to support the family of Dale Eakin who was born with a rare genetic disorder and who died in 2020. Mr Mawhinney retired in 2003. We express our sympathy to Mrs Mawhinney, daughter Anna and son Mark and their wider family circle in the assurance of Christian faith that death has lost its sting and the grave is overcome through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ in whom we have the victory.

The Very Rev David Joseph McGaughey, BA, DD, Minister Emeritus, Mourne, Kilkeel, died on 2 February 2021, in the eighty-third year of his age and the fifty-sixth year of his ministry. He was born at Armagh on 26 September 1938, one of four siblings to Joseph James McGaughey, a Head Instructor in the Ulster Special Constabulary, and his wife, Elizabeth, née Cochrane. He attended the Mall congregation and through the influence of his mother, he gave his life to Christ at the early age of ten. Through the years he developed a strong sense of Christian service. He was educated at the Armstrong Primary School, and the Royal School Armagh 1950 to 1957 where he was appointed a prefect, joined the school's Combined Cadet Force, becoming company sergeant major, and captained the First XV and First XI. On leaving school, he served for a year with the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC). Being convinced of a call to the Christian ministry, he studied full-time at the Magee University College, Londonderry, and Trinity College, Dublin, from which he graduated BA in 1962. While studying in Londonderry, he met Annie Marks McIlmoyle and they fell in love. They were married 4 August 1965 in Rasharkin Presbyterian Church and they were blessed with four children. Dr McGaughey entered the Assembly's College, Belfast in 1962, where he studied theology until 1965. During this period, he gained practical experience as a student assistant in Sinclair Seamen's church and, on being licensed by the Presbytery of Armagh on 6 June 1965, he was assigned as assistant to the Rev Howard Cromie in the congregation of Railway Street, Lisburn. While at Railway Street, Dr McGaughey instigated the founding of a Sunday night Youth Fellowship and a Friday night Youth Club. The linked congregations of Castledawson and Curran called him in 1968 and he was installed there by the Presbytery of Tyrone 22 February 1968, where he founded a Boys' Brigade, a Girls' Brigade and a Youth Fellowship. Five years later he was installed in the congregation of Mourne, Kilkeel, by the Presbytery of Newry, 6 September 1973, ushering in a long and settled ministry of thirty years. Dr McGaughey was a hard-working and conscientious pastor of his people who brought the comforts of the Gospel to everyone in the crises

of their lives. This was especially important during the Northern Ireland Troubles when so many of his own flock, and in the wider community, lost loved ones, friends and neighbours, in the violence of those times. Such was the confidence he inspired that the Democratic Unionist Party nominated him, unsuccessfully, to the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (established in 1997) as the Protestant representative to witness paramilitary arms being put beyond use. He was a forthright and passionate preacher of the Gospel in his own pulpit and in the more than forty evangelistic missions which he conducted, pointing many to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Under his leadership Mourne established a strong and enduring link with the David Gordon Memorial Hospital in Livingstonia, Malawi, and he was part of a team that built a children's ward there in 2002. He was a faithful and valued member of his presbytery and served as Moderator of the Synod of Armagh and Down in 1985. Dr McGaughey's qualities were recognised by the wider Church when he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly in 1994, and the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland conferred on him an honorary DD. He retired in 2003 and continued to minister widely until, more recently, ill-health began to take its toll. He wrote a short account of his life and ministry, *Content in the Lord's Service*, in which he nowhere mentions that he became Moderator of the General Assembly. He was content to witness in the spirit of John the Baptist who said of Jesus, 'He must increase; I must decrease.' We assure Mrs McGaughey, her children, Lynn, David, Hilary and Jane, Dr McGaughey's two surviving sisters, Maureen and Nancy, and the wider family circle, of our sympathy and our prayers as they mourn the loss of their loved one who is now 'present with the Lord.'

**The Rev William Henry (Billy) Peden, BA, Minister Emeritus (Released),** Megain Memorial, Belfast, died on 2 February 2021, in the ninety-sixth year of his age and the fifty-second year of his ministry. He was born at Belfast on 23 April 1925, the eldest of three children born to William H. Peden, a ship's engineer and plumber, and his wife, Dorothea, née Craig. He was brought up in the congregation of Bethany, in Agnes Street, Shankill, and educated at Woodvale Junior School, Glenwood Primary School, then the Belfast Boys' Model. On leaving the Model he studied at the Belfast Municipal Technical College, and Hendon Technical College, London, where he qualified in diesel and electrical engineering, and was then employed by the Ulster Transport Authority. In 1948, he married Margaret Campbell in Shankill Baptist Church, and in 1953, a daughter, Doris, was born, who later married the Rev John Parkes, minister at Donaghcloney, Woodlands, Carrickfergus, and St Andrew's, Bangor, successively. However, in a short time, joy turned to sadness when Mrs Peden died in 1955. Mr Peden sensed God's call to Christian ministry and attended the Bible Training Institute, Glasgow, 1958-1960, gaining a College Diploma, and became a missionary with the Belfast City Mission at Mayo Street Hall, Shankill, 1960-1964, in a district he knew well from his early years. Deciding to enter the ordained ministry, he studied at the Queen's University, Belfast, 1964-1965, followed by

training at the Assembly's College, Belfast, 1967-1969. During these years he assisted in Woodvale congregation, and in Richview, Donegal Road, 1965-1967. This was followed by an assistantship of four years in Saint Enoch's Church, Carlisle Circus, where he was licensed on completion of his studies 1 June 1969 and ordained 5 December 1969, on both occasions by the Presbytery of North Belfast. In 1971, this city man accepted a call from the linked County Antrim seaside and rural congregations of Glenarm and Cairnabana respectively, and he was installed there by the Presbytery of Ballymena on 10 September. He brought with him his new wife, Muriel Hunter, a nurse, whom he had married on 10 August. As a former missionary in Peru, Mrs Peden was well suited to support him in his ministry. Mr Peden commended his Lord in the pulpit Sunday by Sunday and in his faithful visitation of the homes in his charge. It was a happy and fruitful settlement in which long-lasting friendships were made. Seven years later he was called to Megain Memorial where he was installed by the Presbytery of East Belfast. Ministry in Belfast during the following years was challenging as the city was riven by inter-community strife. This created a movement of families out of the area which weakened the resources of the congregation. Mr Peden played his part in trying to defuse tensions on the Lower Newtownards Road, showing considerable courage and leadership in so doing. He was also responsible for the smaller charge of Mersey Street and the oversight of a succession of assistants who carried out the weekly duties of ministry. He published a short history of the congregation, *The Mersey Street Story; the Church in the Triangle: Mersey Street Presbyterian Church 1932-2007 the First 75 Years* (2007). The congregation of Megain Memorial was amalgamated with Mersey Street 1 July 1991. Mr Peden retired in 1990 and, like so many others, continued to minister part-time, firstly in Kells, and then Wellington, congregations in the Ballymena Presbytery. He knew the sadness of losing his first wife, Margaret, in 1955, his daughter, Doris, in 2006, his son-in-law, John, in 2009, and his wife, Muriel, on 12 October 2016. We offer our sympathy to his grandsons, Jonathan and Andrew, and the wider family circle, as they mourn his loss, and commend them to the Saviour whom their loved-one served so faithfully and found to be 'a very present help in trouble.'

**The Rev Wilfred John Alexander Armstrong, BA**, Minister Emeritus (Released), Second Broughshane, died on 21 February 2021, in the ninety-second year of his age, and the sixty-fourth year of his ministry. He was born at Londonderry 4 February 1940, the elder of two sons, to William Frederick Armstrong, a Grocery and Provision merchant, and his wife, Margaret Armour, née Conolly. The family were members of Great James Street congregation in the city. Mr Armstrong was educated at the Model Primary School, 1935-1942, and Foyle College, 1942-1947. He began tertiary level education at the Magee University College in 1947, and graduated BA from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1951. Having decided to train for the ordained ministry, he studied theology at New College, Edinburgh, 1951-1952, and then at the Assembly's College, Belfast, 1952-

1953. While at Assembly's College he assisted the Rev E M Borland, Hamilton Road, Bangor, and continued there following his licensing by the Presbytery of Derry, 13 December 1953. In 1954, he moved back to Edinburgh as an assistant in Richmond Craigmillar and two years later returned to Northern Ireland on being called to the congregations of Aughnacloy and Ballymagrane where he was ordained by the Presbytery of Tyrone 13 June 1957. He was to serve here until he was installed in the congregation of Second Broughshane by the Presbytery of Ballymena 3 September 1971. In both these spheres of ministry Mr Armstrong faithfully preached Christ crucified and through evangelistic missions and youth Coffee Bars saw individuals commit their lives to Christ as Saviour and Lord. Through the week he regularly visited the homes in his charge, carefully noting and learning names to ensure a personal touch to his pastoral work. His own life was personally enriched, and his ministry complemented, when he married Valerie Maud Denise Graham, 27 March 1967. He published a short history of Ballymagrane Presbyterian Church (1959). During his ministry in Broughshane, the congregation built an extension to the church hall and extended the centre aisle entrance porch of the church to incorporate a Choir Room on the ground floor and a Session Room above. A Young Women's Group was formed in which Mrs Armstrong took a particular interest. A Girls' Brigade was founded shortly after Mr Armstrong began his ministry in Broughshane and the new and improved facilities were fully utilised by a variety of organisations, not least for young people in whose welfare Mr Armstrong took a continuing and encouraging interest. He founded a Young People's Christian Endeavour, two members of which later went into the ordained ministry and another to work in the Faith Mission. Mr Armstrong retired 4 February 1995 but continued to minister in Wellington, and also at Ballee, Ballymena. We offer Mrs Armstrong, Mr Armstrong's brother, Henry, and the wider family circle, our sympathy and prayers in their loss, confident in the hope we have in the Gospel of resurrection through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Rev Alan Vincent Martin, BA, MPhil, Minister Emeritus, Abbey, Dublin, died 21 March 2021, in the eighty-eighth year of his age, and the sixty-first year of his ministry. He was born at Lylehill Manse, 24 June 1932, the eldest of four, (a brother and two sisters) to Walter Vincent Martin, Presbyterian Minister, and his wife, Agnes Thomson, née McKee. In 1941, the Rev Martin moved to Cliftonville congregation, Belfast, and the children were sent to live with their grandparents at Redrock, Armagh, for the duration of World War 2. Mr Martin Jnr., was educated at the Belfast Royal Academy, and at the Queen's University, Belfast, and Trinity College, Dublin, from where he graduated in Mental and Moral Science in 1956. By then, he was living in Dublin where his father had been installed as minister in Ormond Quay and Scots. Convinced of a call of God to the ordained Presbyterian ministry he studied at the Assembly's College, Belfast, and New College, Edinburgh. He was interested in Christian work among students and was licensed and ordained as Secretary to the Student Christian Movement Ireland (SCM) by the Presbytery of Dublin, 25 September 1959, in Ormond Quay and

Scots. He served in this capacity until 1961 and, on 3 September of that year, he was installed at Fortwilliam Park, Belfast, as assistant to the Rev John Thompson, later Professor of Systematic Theology at the Assembly's College. He married Frances Emily Cochrane, deaconess in Great Victoria Street congregation, on 3 September 1963 at Dundonald Presbyterian Church. Also in 1963, Mr Martin responded to a call from the Gujarat Church Council, India, for someone to set up a centre for College students at Ahmedabad, a role for which his experience with SCM made him an ideal candidate. So it was that, under the auspices of the Foreign Mission Board of our Church, Mr and Mrs Martin sailed for India on 26 October where, with the active support of his wife, Mr Martin served for five years working with students at Ellis Bridge. They created a student centre in their bungalow which was later accommodated in a former primary school building, providing recreational and pastoral facilities in a Christian ethos and where they fostered a new generation of local leaders. Mr Martin's brother, Thomson, also served in India as a bacteriologist in the Christian Medical College at Ludhiana. Returning home in 1968, the General Assembly highlighted Mr Martin's particular contribution to bridging the generation gap between young people and the Church of North India. He settled to parish ministry in the joint charge of Tullyallen and Mountnorris where he was installed by the Presbytery of Newry on 28 November. Their daughter, Anna, was born in 1973. The family moved to Dublin in 1973 when Mr Martin was installed in Abbey Church on 24 October by the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster, and where he remained for the next twenty-four years. His ministry extended beyond his own church to many inter-church and community projects. In Dublin's inner city where poverty, poor housing, and unemployment were much in evidence, Mr Martin and his congregation formed a working relationship with the social services, and St Francis Xavier's Church (run by the Jesuits). An ongoing fellowship between the two churches created a forum for them to meet together to learn about their respective ways of worship and faith understanding. During the economic slump of the early 1980s, Abbey congregation initiated a training project in the city to help the young unemployed and ex-prisoners. It was known as the 'Horticultural Workshop' and was run with government funding under the aegis of the Dublin and Munster Presbytery. In the mid-1990s Abbey congregation identified further opportunities for community outreach and Rev Katherine Priode Meyer was appointed as Community Minister. The Abbey Day Nursery was established for pre-schoolers from the local area, an initiative which continued for 27 years. Mr Martin became involved in further ecumenical partnership as an organizer and, from 1979-81, Chairperson, of the Glencree Centre for Reconciliation, Enniskerry, Wicklow. This work began in 1974 in response to the violence in the North, and brings together people from across religious, cultural and economic divides, to explore ways to better understanding and reconciliation. In addition, he served as Chairman of the Board of Management of Lindsay Road National School (1973-1997), and as a member of the Board of Governors of Mount Temple Comprehensive School, and as Presbyterian Chaplain in Trinity College Dublin and The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and Dublin City University. He was

a member of the All-Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism, a contributor to the publications of the Faith and Politics Group and the Committee for Scripture Use for the National Bible Society of Ireland. His inclusive and wide-ranging ministry gave expression to his focus of living the love of God and sharing the love of God. He gave service to the wider Church as Moderator of the Synod of Dublin and Munster in 1992, as Clerk of the Dublin and Munster Presbytery, 1991 to 1999, and as Co-Convener of the Church and Government Committee, 1989 to 1996. He retired on 30 June 1997. Retirement afforded opportunity for further study and engagement overseas. In 2003, he completed an MPhil in Reconciliation Studies at the Irish School of Ecumenics, an institution in which he had a long-standing interest and had for some time been a patron. His dissertation exploring the 'Ephesian Moment' or "the coming together of two cultures to experience Christ", surveyed the experiences of the growing number of congregations in the Republic of Ireland which were becoming more culturally mixed due to immigration. His contribution, *The Ephesian Moment*, was subsequently published by Dominican Publications in 2006 in a collection of essays entitled *No Longer Strangers, Cultural Integration in Church and Society in Ireland*. He returned to Gujarat in 2001 to report on the impact of the earthquake in Kutch and was part of the PCI delegation attending the meeting of The World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Accra, Ghana, in 2004. In 2013, as Chairman of the Friends of Sabeel, Ireland, he travelled to Jerusalem to take part in a conference of the organisation, which works for justice, dialogue and peacebuilding, in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. We give thanks to God for Mr Martin's witness and ministry, and in the faith of Christ risen and in the fellowship of His Church, we assure Mrs Martin, her daughter Anna, Mr Martin's brother Thomson, his sisters Joan and Lynda, and the wider family circle, of our sympathy and prayers in their loss.

**The Rev Joseph Nixon, BA**, Minister Emeritus (Released) Fourtowns and Poyntzpass, died on 30 June 2021, in the ninety-second year of his age and the thirty-eighth year of his ministry. He was born at Cookstown on 27 May 1930, one of five children, to Joseph Nixon, a linen lapper, and his wife Violet, née Lindsay. Mr Nixon Snr. moved his family to Belfast to seek work in the early 1930s. He joined the armed forces in WW2 but died in England before seeing active service. On leaving school Mr Nixon Jnr. worked in various jobs and settled at Ballynahinch with his first wife, Anne Mills, and their three children. Some years later he responded to the call of God to serve in the ordained ministry. He trained at the Assembly's College, Belfast, in the early 1970s, and was licensed by the Presbytery of Down on 15 October 1975. He was removed from the list of licentiates by the Presbytery of Down in 1976 when he emigrated to Australia with his wife and family. There, he studied for a BA at Deacon University, State of Victoria. He applied to the Presbyterian Church of Australia to be accepted as a prospective minister and, in 1981, wrote to the Presbytery of Down requesting he be reinstated as a licentiate of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. In 1981, the Presbyterian Church of Australia appointed Mr



Nixon assistant to the Convener of the Scots congregation in the city of Colac, south-west of Melbourne, in the state of Victoria, which was then meeting in the Saint Andrew's Uniting Church building. In 1982, on receiving confirmation from the Presbyterian Church of Australia that it was satisfied with his ministry, he was furnished with credentials by the Presbytery of Down on the recommendation of the Reception of Ministers and Licentiates Committee of the General Assembly. He was ordained on 1 October 1982 and installed as minister in the Scots congregation, Colac, by then meeting in their own building in Armstrong Street. He had responsibility also, as stated supply, for the Presbyterian congregations in the smaller towns of Seymour and Nagambie. Mrs Anne Nixon died in Australia and in 1990 Mr Nixon returned to Northern Ireland and was installed by the Presbytery of Newry in Fourtowns and Poyntzpass on 22 June 1990, where he ministered until his retirement on 31 October 1998. He returned to Australia in late 1999 where his children had remained, and married Margaret May Martin from Fourtowns, on 19 February 2000, in Geelong, both returning later to live in Northern Ireland. To Mrs May Martin, Mr Nixon's children, Paul, Christine and Hilary, along with his sister Betty and the wider family circle, we extend our sympathy and prayers in their loss and thank God for his service to Christ and the Church.

The Rev **Jacob Maurice Wade, BD, MDiv, DMin**, Minister Emeritus, Portavogie, died on 7 July 2021 in the sixty-eighth year of his age and the thirty-third year of his ministry. He was born at Donemana, 10 November 1953, one of a family of eight brothers and sisters to Jacob Morrow Wade, a forklift operator, and his wife, Rebecca, née McKinley. The family moved to Gortnessy and attended Gortnessey Presbyterian Church where Mr Wade Snr. became the caretaker. Maurice was educated at Gortnessy Primary School, and at Faughan Valley Secondary School from 1965 to 1969. On leaving school, aged fifteen, he worked in a timber yard in Londonderry and the accounts department of Mother's Pride bakery. At the age of twenty, he attended a Christian interdenominational youth meeting called 'The Plaiice' and around that time God the Holy Spirit brought him to saving faith in Christ. A request to take a Bible class motivated him to study at the Belfast Bible College, 1980 to 1983, where he met Nuala MacCullagh whom he married on 28 June 1985. They were blessed with two sons, Daniel and Peter. Convinced of a call of God to the ordained ministry, he was accepted as a student for the Presbyterian ministry, and he studied theology at Union Theological College, Belfast, and graduated with a Queen's University BD in 1988. He was licensed on 19 June 1988 and served as assistant to the Rev Dr Roy Magee in Dundonald congregation where he was ordained on 27 January 1989. The congregations of Second Newtownhamilton and Creggan called him as their minister in 1990 and he was installed there on 28 June by the Presbytery of Newry. After thirteen years of ministry in the rural setting of South Armagh, he moved to Portavogie where the Presbytery of Ards installed him on 29 August 2003. He was appointed stated supply at Cloughy in 2013, serving until 2017. Over the years,

Mr Wade continued to study and gained a DMin from the Reformed Theological Seminary, USA. He had a high view of preaching and prepared thoroughly for the pulpit. He carried out his pastoral duties diligently by encouraging his flock along the path of righteousness and, along with Mrs Wade, led ministries to the young people of their congregations. He supported the work of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) and, in 2016, and again in 2019, he and Mrs Wade travelled to Northern Kenya where he lectured in theology to students while Mrs Wade taught English. Mr Wade retired on 30 September 2019. We assure Mrs Wade, sons Daniel and Peter, Dr Wade's siblings and the wider family circle, of our prayers in their loss, and we give thanks to God for the witness and service of our brother to Christ who is our hope in life and in death.

Very Rev Dr DONALD PATTON

## **GUYSMERE DEVELOPMENT PANEL**

1. The normal activities and work of PCI in 2020 were seriously affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Guysmere Development Panel, along with other panels, was suspended during the government lock down. It was agreed that a small group of key people should be formed to meet virtually and maintain the impetus of the project. The following were invited to form the Guysmere Impetus Group:
  - JA McCaughan (Chairman, Guysmere Development Panel)
  - RJ Hyndman (Vice-chairman, Guysmere Development Panel)
  - J Smyth (Chairman of the Procurement and Capital Works sub-group)
  - B Pollock (Chairman of the Funding and Business Plan sub-group).
2. As the work of the group developed, the following two additional members were invited to join for operational reasons - P Hunter and J Knox.
3. Over the course of the year, the following matters have been investigated and actioned as appropriate:
  - Precedent Projects.
  - Potential funders.
  - Application to the Republic of Ireland DFA Reconciliation Fund.
  - Preparation of an application to the Dormant Accounts Fund.
  - Preparation of material to apply to Peace Plus (SEUPB).
  - Registration of Guysmere Trust as a Company Limited by Guarantee. The Company Number is NI674382 and the date of incorporation, 19 November, 2020. The trading address of the Trust is 2-4 Sea Road, Castlerock, Co. Londonderry BT51 4RE.
  - A Board of Directors was appointed by the General Council for Guysmere Trust Company Limited consisting of members of the Guysmere Impetus Group as listed above.

- Jeremy Knox, a member of the Guysmere Development Panel, was appointed as the treasurer of Guysmere Trust.
  - Insurance of Guysmere and Public Liability Insurance to be covered by PCI until such time as the contractor moved on to the site.
  - Members/Guarantors – there is a legal requirement for one panel member to be a Director. The Clerk of the General Assembly advised that the Convener of the Guysmere Development Panel (Jim McCaughan) should be appointed by the General Council as a Member. This was agreed by the Panel.
  - A two-minute Promotional video was commissioned.
  - Registration as a charity. An application has been submitted to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and, at the time of writing, a response is awaited.
  - Maintaining Awareness – the panel has sought to maintain awareness of the project.
  - A Bank Account was opened with Danske Bank.
  - The leasing of the Guysmere site from the Trustees of PCI was approved by the General Council in June 2021 and is currently being processed by the General Assembly solicitor.
  - Review and refocus the entire project. As part of this, the Panel refined its funding strategy and agreed that the approach would be to seek Benevolent Funding primarily, but not exclusively.
  - A complete revision of the Feasibility Study in the light of Brexit and Covid-19 pandemic.
4. The Impetus Group / Board of Directors has had 20 meetings in the course of the year.

JIM McCAUGHAN, Convener

## **OTHER AREAS OF WORK UNDER THE GENERAL COUNCIL**

### **CHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

The Church Relations Committee, in line with the decisions of the General Council, has not met since the 2020 report to the General Assembly, its work being carried forward by the General Council Standing Committee. The Convener of the Church Relations Committee, the Rev Nigel Craig, and the Clerk, have both participated as members of the Standing Committee, bringing to it any necessary reports and matters for decision.

### **Within Ireland**

Both the formal inter-church structures in which PCI is involved, as well as the informal contacts and co-operation that flow from these, have proved to be of great significance over the past year or more. The ability to co-ordinate approaches to government, both north and south, since the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic came to the fore in early 2020, has not only shared that burden but has made those approaches all the more effective. This has been especially true in Northern Ireland, where churches working together has proved immensely beneficial in developing ongoing and regular contacts with the Northern Ireland Executive, both at ministerial and official level. This has meant that a partnership approach has been to the fore between government and churches, marked by regular communication and information sharing and the ability, largely speaking, for the churches to regulate their own affairs in a coordinated way and on the basis of relevant public health advice and recommendations.

The work of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and the Irish Inter-Church Committee (IICC) has continued, though in-person meetings have not been possible. The work of the General Secretary, Dr Nicola Brady, has been simply exceptional, not only in carrying forward the work of the formal bodies, but in providing very effective support to the churches generally in a number of significant areas. The Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson, the current President of the ICC and Co-Chair of the IICC, has also played a significant role in assisting the churches to work together, often chairing ad-hoc meetings to facilitate discussion and cooperation on a range of issues.

During this past year, the Church Leaders Group (Ireland), on which the Moderator and Clerk both sit, has proved an invaluable forum for discussion and joint action, on both Covid and non-Covid related matters. The ability of the Moderator, the President of the Methodist Church, the ICC President, the Anglican Archbishop and Roman Catholic Archbishop, to speak together into the public square and to governments, has proved strategically very important throughout the past year. The Clerk and General Secretary of the Methodist Church serve as joint Secretaries to the Group and their close working relationship has enabled much to be achieved, in particular relating to the Northern Ireland Executive and the UK and Irish Governments.

### **Further afield**

The Clerk of Assembly has met regularly with his opposite numbers in the Presbyterian Church in Wales, the Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church. The ability to share together, particularly in relationship to Covid-19, has been beneficial. The Clerk and Moderator have also engaged in a number of 'UK and Ireland-wide' inter-church consultations and meetings.

The Clerk has participated in a number of meetings organised by the European Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), including its annual meeting in April of this year. He has also

kept contact with the WCRC generally and also with the Conference of European Churches (CEC). As in much of life, the ability to meet remotely on Teams and Zoom has in fact enabled more efficient contact between church leaders during the past year. The General Secretary of the WCRC, the Rev Dr Chris Ferguson, came to the end of his term of service earlier this year.

## **MODERATOR'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Moderator's Advisory Committee, in line with the decisions of the General Council, has not met since the 2020 report to the General Assembly, its work being carried forward by the General Council Standing Committee. This work has largely consisted of advising the Moderator and Clerk and appointing Assessors to sit with a number of Presbytery Commissions, at the request of the Presbyteries concerned.

## **DOCTRINE COMMITTEE**

The Doctrine Committee, in line with the decisions of the General Council, has not met since the 2020 report to the General Assembly. The Convener of the Committee sat as a member of the General Council Standing Committee and it was authorised to call the Doctrine Committee to meet, if necessary, but this was not required.

## **JUDICIAL COMMISSION, SPECIAL COMMISSION AND COMMISSION ON APPLICATIONS**

None of these three Commissions were required to meet since their last reports to the General Assembly.

## **CODE REPUBLISHING PANEL**

The Code republishing Panel normally reports to the General Assembly through the report of the Judicial Commission. As that Commission was not required to meet since the last Assembly, the following report is presented though the General Council, in its co-ordinating role.

*The Panel Convener, the Rev Dr Donald Watts, reports as follows:*

In June 2020, the Code Republishing Panel reported to the General Assembly Standing Commission as follows:

The Code Republishing Panel has met on sixteen occasions since the 2019 General Assembly, but has not been able to meet since 10 March 2020. As a result, though the Panel reported to the Judicial Commission on its work in October 2019, it has not been able to report in detail on the work it has done since.

Last year, the Panel presented the Assembly with an early draft of the first two proposed chapters for a new Code, viz.: General Principles and The Congregation. The latter included sections on 'The Kirk Session' and 'The Congregational Committee'.

Since then, work has entailed minor revision of those first two draft chapters, along with the production of drafts of three further chapters on 'The Minister', 'Office Holders other than Ministers' and 'The Presbytery'.

The draft chapter on 'The Minister' is broken down into sections on:

- Vocation of the Minister
- Training for Ministry
- Congregational Ministry
- Home Mission
- Special Work
- Associate Ministers
- Licentiates
- Ordained Assistant to the Moderator of the General Assembly
- Divorce and Re-marriage of a Minister
- Retirement, Resignation and Incapacity of Ministers

The draft chapter on 'Office Holders other than Ministers' is broken down into sections on:

- General
- Global Mission Workers
- Irish Mission Workers
- Deaconesses
- Auxiliary Ministers

The draft chapter on 'The Presbytery' is broken down into sections on:

- Purpose of Presbytery
- Membership of Presbytery
- Meetings of Presbytery
- Duties of Presbytery
- Administrative Role of Presbytery
- Vacancies in Congregations
- Vacancy for Associate Minister
- Nominations to Ministry
- Presbytery Services
- Ministers without charge and Licentiates

All the work done so far is subject to further revision as progress is made and a clearer picture is formed of the overall structure of the new Code.

Work has begun on a draft chapter on ‘The General Assembly’ (including councils etc.), to be followed by work on a draft chapter on ‘Church Courts’ – their jurisdiction and conduct of business.

The Panel was able to resume meetings in June 2021 and, at the time of writing, has met twice to continue work on the draft chapter on “The General Assembly”. It hopes to complete the draft of that chapter and a concluding one on “Church Courts, their jurisdiction and conduct of business” by the end of the year. It will then review the overall structure of the new Code and submit a revised draft to the Judicial Commission for submission to the General Assembly, 2022.

**Please note: The following body is not under the control of the General Assembly and its report is included for information only.**

## **THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND**

### **(REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2020)**

The Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland reports that throughout 2020 it has continued as best we could to promote the study of the historic Churches of the Presbyterian order in Ireland, and the contributions they have made to Irish society and the wider world.

1. The year 2020 has been one of exceptional difficulty for the Society. The Covid pandemic and successive lockdowns have meant that we have had to do things differently but at the same time have created new opportunities. During the first lockdown we were able to continue responding to e-mails and, from the beginning of August, a full service, apart from on-site visitors, has been operating. The closure of our on-site service enabled us to carry out work that would not otherwise have been done, e.g., a *Guide to Presbyterian Church Records* arranged by county was completed and published on our website and work was begun on getting McConnell’s and Barkley’s Fasti of ministers into electronic form – but with additional information. Since August, considerable progress has been made on cataloguing the backlog of books generously donated by deceased and other members of the Society’s Council.
2. We have continued to operate in line with the requirements of the Charity Commission, both in how our accounts are presented and also in meeting other requirements as they are notified to us. We have tried to do this carefully and we believe we have been able to operate as a responsible charity.

3. The annual grant from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland remains the main source of income for the Society, augmented by donations from individuals and the other historic Churches of the Presbyterian order, together with membership fees. Most of the expenditure items were of the same order as formerly, the major area being the cost of leasing and servicing the Society's premises. Expenditure continues to be prudently controlled so that the best value for money is obtained. All book orders from March for the Society's own publications and for second hand books have now been processed, so no income from this source has been lost. Probably because people had more time to browse the Internet, there was an uptake in orders from our on-line second-hand bookstore.
4. We have not been able to do everything as we would have liked but the Society is working hard to attract additional sources of funding to help us achieve things we cannot as yet afford and we hope to have some good news on this front in 2021.
5. While unable to deliver the excellent programme we had planned, the first of our series of talks is now on YouTube and we are working on getting the others on-line.
6. At the end of last year, we launched Dr Donald Patton's major work on Dr William Campbell, which includes the full text of his *Sketches of the History of Presbyterians in Ireland 1803*. Until now, our Society owned the only copy of this valuable manuscript and we believe it will attract a good deal of attention as we make it available to a wider public. We have cooperated with the Council for Mission in Ireland to produce a booklet entitled *Memorial to Chaplains in the Great War*, and we have also published a short booklet *The Last Seven Seconds – A Reflection on the Life of Private William McFadzean VC*, written by his great nephew, Nigel McFadzean. A further issue of *Heritage Magazine* was produced but, due to Covid-19, has not yet been distributed. Other publications are planned for the coming year.
7. The Society welcomes donations or bequests of books, pamphlets, congregational histories and suitable artefacts, minute books and old-style communion tokens. These may be deposited with the Society either as a gift or as an indefinite loan. We are delighted that an increasing number of congregational records are also being entrusted to our care, the most recent being some from the Cork area.
8. The Society continues to share information with other organisations, agencies and blogs, which help us to raise our profile and publicise our publications. We have almost 1,000 followers on Facebook which can be accessed via the blog icon on the home page of our website. This keeps a wider public informed about new books and events of Presbyterian interest.



9. The Society's website continues to be one of our principal means of communicating with the general public, and this is reflected by the numbers using it, and by the increase in Associate Membership. We work hard to improve the number and range of the articles on our history page, and in the updating of *A History of Presbyterian Congregations*. Copies of *The Bulletin* up to 2015 can now be viewed on the website.
10. Once again we record our warmest thanks to the Clerk of the General Assembly and to the Rev Jim Stothers, until recently Deputy Clerk of Assembly, who have given so much time and thought to the Society's activities. We also wish to thank our volunteers who help us out for a few hours each week, filing, indexing and transcribing records and preparing mailings. We will need more help than ever in the months ahead, and the Librarian would be glad to hear from anyone who might be able to do this for us or assist in any way.
11. In addition we wish to thank the small group consisting of the Chairman, Joint-Secretaries and Treasurer who were formally appointed to take the day to day decisions and 'manage' the Society until things have returned to normal, and to the formal Meeting of the Officers of the Society which has met regularly by electronic means and has kept Council members informed as fully as possible.
12. Most of all, we place on record our continued appreciation of Valerie Adams, our Librarian and Archivist, for all she does for the Society, and not least for all her adaptability and resourcefulness throughout this most difficult year.

**Please note: The following body is not under the control of the General Assembly and its report is included for information only.**

## **PRESBYTERIAN CHILDREN'S SOCIETY**

*Mr Jason Nicholson (Executive Secretary) reports:*

1. The Presbyterian Children's Society exists to support children in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. It works mainly through ministers, to alleviate poverty and financial hardship for eligible families and their children. This is facilitated mostly through regular and exceptional grants. Some additional (limited) help, through special initiatives, is offered to congregations to support their work with children and young people.
2. During 2020, despite the range of practical difficulties associated with Covid-19, approximately 862 children from 443 families in 212 congregations throughout Ireland were formally enrolled in the Society for help, by way of regular quarterly grants, with an additional 40 children from 16 other families receiving interim grant payments.

3. Exceptional grants, which address emergency situations, were also in great demand during the year, with 120 exceptional grants (mainly for the maximum grant of £600) being provided to Presbyterian families in a variety of demanding and stressful circumstances. The added financial pressures encountered by families as a direct result of the pandemic, was evident in many applications.
4. Special summer and winter grants, for families receiving the Society's regular quarterly grants, were paid at a rate of £80 per child. This resulted in every family assisted by the Society receiving total annual grants of between £1,100 and £1,700 depending on family size. Across all grant categories, the Society paid out over £658,000 for the benefit of Presbyterian children and their families.
5. The backgrounds of families helped by the Society continue to be diverse. Presbyterian children from family backgrounds of unemployment or low income, separation, divorce, bereavement, single parenthood or where a parent is in long-term hospital care, prison, or is disabled, are all aided by the Society. In every circumstance, the Society's focus is on helping children reach their full potential regardless of their background or financial limitations.
6. The Society was pleased to acknowledge the remarkable commitment of its congregational representatives, with the lengthy service of some stretching over many decades. The service and commitment of the Society's Board of Governors was also recognised.
7. Whilst the Society is not under the control of the General Assembly, it does work collaboratively with the ministers of our Church and enjoys a close, positive working relationship with a number of General Assembly councils. This partnership is much appreciated and heartily encouraged.
8. A range of congregational resources, including a suite of promotional films to help communicate the positive difference the Society makes to the lives of the families it supports, can be downloaded from the Society's website [[www.presbyterianchildrenssociety.org](http://www.presbyterianchildrenssociety.org)].
9. The Society's financial resources are independently supported by Presbyterian congregations and individuals, and the Society gives thanks to all those who support its work prayerfully, practically, and financially throughout the year. The Society welcomes enquiries about how it might assist children and families in need within any Presbyterian congregation, and commends its work for the continued prayerful and financial support of the Church.

# GENERAL COUNCIL

## SECTION 2

### IMPLEMENTATION TASK GROUP

1. The Implementation Task Group was formed by the General Council in response to the 2018 General Assembly resolution: ‘That appropriate training be offered to Kirk Sessions on the theology and practice of the Church’s understanding of ‘a credible profession of faith’ and the pastoral guidelines on homosexuality.’ The remit approved by the General Council was to put together ‘a resource to be used at Kirk Session level, with a clear pastoral tone.’ Subsequently the General Council agreed that the remit be broadened to include training on a general approach to ‘a credible profession of faith’ as well as lifestyle issues.
2. Two sub-groups were formed – one to work on a resource on ‘a credible profession of faith’ and the other to work on updating the 2007 pastoral guidelines on homosexuality.
3. To inform the work, the task group organised a presbytery consultation day held in January 2019, to which approximately 200 were invited of whom approximately 150 were directly from presbyteries. Approximately 190 attended on the day. Papers were presented on PCI’s position re “the question of homosexuality”, “credible profession” and “pastoral guidelines”, with each presentation followed by round table discussion. This feedback in turn was forwarded to the task group and was used to inform the group’s discussions and further shape the resources.
4. Two draft resources for kirk sessions were presented at the March 2020 meeting of the General Council and adopted as part of the General Council’s report to the Standing Commission of the 2020 General Assembly. These draft resources were (a) ‘Credible profession of faith and admission to the sacraments: a framework for discussion for kirk sessions’ and (b) ‘Guidelines for pastoral care of same-sex attracted people and their families’. The Standing Commission resolved that they be sent in booklet form to presbyteries for discussion and comment, with responses due by 31 January 2021, a date subsequently extended to 14 May 2021 due to Covid-19 restrictions, to ensure sufficient time was available for discussion.
5. The task group is pleased to report that all 19 presbyteries responded to the booklet. Some sought input from kirk sessions within their bounds, some asked for individual written anonymous comments from ministers and representative elders, some held ‘single agenda’ meetings and some appointed task groups to draft reports for their consideration. It is clear from the responses received that whatever method was used there was serious engagement with the materials.

6. It was suggested by some that while the genesis of both resources was in one General Assembly resolution and, while it was useful at the draft stage to have both in one booklet, each should be published separately when approved, since the ‘credible profession’ resource addresses the general subject of admission to the sacraments rather than a particular issue. The task group agrees with this and a recommendation is appended (recommendation 2).
7. **Credible profession of faith and admission to the sacraments: a framework for discussion for kirk sessions.** There was general approval of the resource’s approach, content and tone. Sixteen presbyteries expressed supportive views, e.g., ‘a good help in facilitating discussion’, ‘excellent, clear, concise, useful’, ‘well presented, bible based, great framework for discussion’, ‘generally worthwhile and helpful’, ‘combination of clarity and sensitivity, winsome pastoral tone’, ‘thoughtful, engaging’, ‘helpful discussion questions’, ‘warmly and clearly communicates the teaching of our church’, ‘a very good paper’, ‘carefully unpacks the issues’. Two presbyteries forwarded responses from kirk sessions and individual presbytery members without comment – these responses were fairly evenly divided between approval and criticism. One presbytery, plus one individual in another presbytery, requested that it be re-written, with the former expressing ‘alarm’ at the use of the word ‘credible’ – a view which appears to overlook the remit of the task group.
8. Some common themes emerged: the issue of how to accept special needs young people and adults into membership, the use of Matthew 13 and 18 in sections 3.3 and 3.4, and the reference in section 5.4 to services of thanksgiving/dedication.
  - 8.1 It is important to acknowledge and address how to accept special needs young people and adults into membership if they are not able to accept and articulate their faith in the same way as others, and the task group firmly believes this work should be done. However, it does not believe that it is the appropriate group to do it as it lacks specialism in this area. A recommendation is appended that another task group be appointed to address this subject (recommendation 3).
  - 8.2 While there was general appreciation of the use of both Matthew 13 and 18, a few queried the interpretation of Matthew 18 and one presbytery queried the interpretation of Matthew 13. In response, some minor changes and footnotes have been added to sections 3.3 and 3.4 to clarify the teaching in these sections. In addition, some changes have been made to section 3.1 to emphasise the positive and inclusive aim of the whole process and its pastoral nature. With regard to the expository nature of sections 3.3 and 3.4, one presbytery expressed a concern that ‘many of our elders are not readers’ and that a video resource might be useful. The task group had considered this and believed it could be useful, but decided not to proceed at the draft stage. It now recommends that, once the resource is approved by the General Assembly, a video be produced of the material in sections 3.3 and 3.4 (recommendation 4).

- 8.3 With regard to services of thanksgiving/dedication, it was noted that the current wording in the resource reflects the wording of the Book of Public Worship and therefore is consistent with what the General Assembly has already approved.
9. There were three requests for additional theological material, i.e., ‘a thoroughly scriptural picture of the church in New Testament theology’, ‘more guidance on what actually constitutes a credible profession’ and ‘a theological explanation about what credible faith is and how it functions within the covenant of grace.’ While the task group is sympathetic to such requests, it believes there is sufficient theological material already within the resource. Moreover, the purpose of the document is to be a training resource for use within kirk sessions and, as such, needs to be kept reasonably straightforward. It was decided, therefore, not to include further resources, apart from the one referenced at 8.2.
10. **Guidelines for pastoral care of same-sex attracted people and their families.** As with the ‘credible profession’ resource, there was substantial approval in terms of its approach, content and tone, e.g., ‘sensitively written’, ‘excellent resource’, ‘very helpful’, ‘genuine and useful’, ‘strikes a difficult balance between biblical teaching and sensitive pastoral care’, ‘a very good start’, ‘more strengths than weaknesses’, ‘well balanced, sensitive, empathetic, compassionate and a genuine expression of truth and love’, ‘very balanced and excellent overview’, ‘helpful resource’. This is not to say that positivity was universal, e.g., there was a comment that it is arrogant to define LGBT+ people as being in need of pastoral care without recognising they are well placed to offer it. However, a large majority of the comments were constructive even when improvements were requested.
11. Numerous helpful suggestions have been adopted, some to aid flow and clarity, and some to improve language and content. Among these are the following:
- The term ‘guidelines’ has been changed to ‘guidance’ because ‘guidelines’ carries a technical meaning within PCI.
  - A note has been added on the contents page to clarify that the stories in the document are illustrative.
  - A paragraph has been moved from section 3 into the last paragraph of section 2 as it relates more to background than to mental health: i.e., paragraph beginning ‘In relation to how some people are treated within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland...’
  - A possible ambiguity in the wording ‘non-celibate same-sex relationships are not consistent with the Word of God’ (last paragraph of section 4) has been removed by changing the wording to ‘sexual relationships between members of the same sex are not consistent with the Word of God’.
  - ‘Aggression’ (section 2) has been changed to ‘disagreement’, ‘juggernaut’ (section 3) to ‘pressure’, ‘force’ (section 7.5) to ‘insist’, ‘acceptance’ (section 8) to ‘welcome’.

12. In other places additions or subtractions have been made in response to comments.
  - Section 6, penultimate paragraph: a new sentence has been added after ‘However, as a Church we believe our identity should be defined primarily in terms of our humanity before God and not in terms of sexual desires’; i.e., ‘Other aspects of our perceived identities are not unimportant but for the Christian they are all subservient to our primary identity in Christ’.
  - Section 6, last paragraph: a new sentence has been added after ‘The problem for many within the Church is that while they would want to accept people in the name of Jesus Christ, there appears to be little middle ground’; i.e., ‘Recognising the problem of loneliness and the need for intimate, fulfilling but non-sexualised friendships the church has much to do in fostering such communities’; a footnote has also been added referencing Vaughan Roberts’ book ‘True Friendship’.
  - Section 7.1, last paragraph: a new sentence has been added before ‘The accepted danger of brief guidance is that it cannot cover every eventuality, nor should it try to’; i.e., ‘We acknowledge that there are many pastoral scenarios related to this area, for example, where a husband leaves his wife and children having “come out”’.
  - Section 7.5, penultimate paragraph: a new paragraph has been added before the paragraph beginning ‘Certain principles must be taken on board’; i.e., ‘It is likely that in some instances it may be the family rather than the actual person who seek pastoral care. It is important to journey with a family as they wrestle with the issues involved. Taking time to listen, to talk through with them the matters mentioned in this document and to pray for and with them can be immensely helpful as they think matters through and make choices that are likely to have long-term implications for family relationships.’
  - Section 7.5, last paragraph: a new paragraph has been added after the existing last paragraph; i.e., ‘As a final important note under this section, we highlight the lives of those who experience same-sex attraction yet live fulfilling and satisfying celibate lives in obedience to God’s word and commitment to the Lordship of Christ Jesus. This can be an extremely challenging and difficult journey and there is much to be learned from those who have walked such a path with grace, obedience and resilience.’
  - Section 8g, the examples have been removed as they appeared to cause some unnecessary distraction.
13. Some responses expressed a concern about how the resource would be perceived by a wider audience. While this is a valid concern, the resource needs to do what it sets out to do, which is to focus on equipping people to provide good congregational pastoral care, and not try to be all things to all people.

14. There were also various requests for additional materials, mostly about engaging with current culture, but all of these are beyond the remit of the task group.
15. The task group has reflected further on the issues of support for pastoral carers and referring on and recommends that a joint task group be formed to assist ministers and youth workers/leaders in the outworking of the pastoral guidance resource (recommendation 5).
16. The task group commends to the church the resource ‘Credible profession of faith and admission to the sacraments: a framework for discussion for kirk sessions’ (appendix A) and the resource ‘Guidance for pastoral care of same-sex attracted people and their families’ (Appendix B), with the prayer that they assist kirk sessions to deal with these important areas with wisdom, sensitivity and grace.

H A DUNLOP, Convener

## **IMPLEMENTATION TASK GROUP**

### **APPENDIX A**

#### **Credible profession of faith and admission to the sacraments** **A framework for discussion for kirk sessions**

1. The congregation as a community in which faith can be explored, experienced and expressed
  - 1.1. One of the joys of church life is accompanying individuals on a journey to exploring, experiencing and expressing faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord.
  - 1.2. Two particular moments in which this happens are when baptism is requested and people are coming into full communicant membership for the first time. Of course, these are but two moments in an ongoing culture of congregational life which creates an environment in which we are all constantly seeking to encourage one another in the challenge of living God’s way in every area of our lives.
  - 1.3. There is a particular role and responsibility for ministers and ruling elders to guide and shepherd the flock and to do so in a way that is loving. This role extends to conversations about admission to the sacraments.
  - 1.4. As in all areas of the life of the congregation, *‘ruling elders as members of Kirk Session... work together with the minister in the oversight and government of the congregation, for the upbuilding of God’s people in spiritual fruitfulness and holy concord, and for the extension of Christ’s kingdom among all people’* (The Code, paragraph 30, section 1).

For discussion

How do we as a kirk session take responsibility together for admitting to the sacraments? What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of how you do that?

## 2. Guiding and preparing others in exploring what it means to come into full church membership

- 2.1 Kirk sessions helping others explore and seek to understand what it means to come into full church membership and to express a credible profession of faith has been a long standing practice in PCI.

The Code describes how, *‘a minister shall encourage baptism of the children of all such as may make a credible profession of faith’*, and that, *‘a minister shall not decide on admission or refusal of a person to baptism without the authority of the Kirk Session’* (*The Code*, paragraph 83, sections 1&2).

Similarly, *‘the Kirk Session shall admit to the Lord’s Supper only those who have been baptised, who make a profession of faith in the Lord, and whose character is consistent with such a profession.’* *‘Persons proposing to take communion for the first time shall be carefully instructed by the minister. When the Kirk Session has satisfied itself as to their knowledge, soundness in the faith and Christian experience, their names shall be entered on the roll of communicants and be read to the congregation’* (*The Code*, paragraph 40, sections 1&2).

- 2.2 The precise details of how this happens will vary from congregation to congregation and depend on the particular circumstances and personality of those involved. However, it is important that conversations do take place and instruction is provided and that this is approached in an open, encouraging, positive tone. As this happens, a space is opened up for growing personal understanding of what is involved in knowing God as our heavenly Father, trusting Christ as Saviour and Lord, along with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth and empower us to live by it. If conducted well, real life implications of following Christ as Lord will surface in this conversation. Some will be general, but others may be very particular. Whatever time and care is taken by minister and kirk session is worth the effort, and occasionally awkwardness, if the whole congregation is to share the joy of those publically professing faith and coming to enjoy the privileges of full membership.

For discussion

What challenges do we as a kirk session face in helping others explore and express a credible profession of faith?

What might be the long-term benefits to our congregation of a kirk session adopting this approach?



### 3. Asking for too much? Looking for too little?

- 3.1 Helping others explore the nature of a credible profession of faith involves sensitively listening and encouraging reflection. The aim of this pastoral process is always inclusive – to enable a person to make a public profession of faith, depending on the grace of God. It is possible for our approach to ask for too much, such as proof of inner spiritual rebirth. We might also expect one who is making a profession to have attained a maturity of faith that is unrealistic. Similarly we might unwittingly look for a particular shape and language in the articulation of someone's story in how and when they came to faith. Equally, however, it is possible to be looking for too little. We shy away from our pastoral responsibility as elders if we fail to recognise that some professions might not be credible, when an area of their life seems openly and obviously at odds with the fruit of true faith in Christ and commitment to follow him as Lord.
- 3.2 The balance we strike in this task is crucial if we are not to needlessly discourage some, or carelessly encourage others, in entering into the privileges and duties of full church membership. The following material from Dr Martyn C. Cowan, Lecturer in Historical Theology at Union Theological College, helps us to consider where we might be imbalanced in our approach to credible profession of faith. It is based on two key passages of Scripture, Jesus' Parable of the Weeds in Matthew 13:24-30 and his teaching in Matthew 18:15-20.
- 3.3 Asking for too much (Read: Matthew 13:24-30)

*No one can see into the heart of another individual, and so elders should not attempt to distinguish those who are truly inwardly regenerate from those who are merely outwardly nominal. A Session can only make its decision on the basis of what it can see – it should seek neither a 'mere profession' nor an 'accredited profession', but instead a 'credible profession'.*

*In practice, this means that when Kirk Sessions are judging a profession of faith they must avoid the twin errors of what we will call 'indifference and rigorism'. With rigorism the bar is set too high and with indifference the bar is set too low. There is rich Scriptural testimony warning us about either of those errors.*

*We begin with the danger of rigorism. Here one significant passage to turn to is our Lord's parable of the wheat and the weeds in Matthew 13. There, Jesus describes himself as the kingly-farmer who is planting seeds that grow up as Christian believers – the sons of the kingdom (v. 38); these plants are the righteous who have God as their Father (v. 43). The boundaries of the field are vast – Christ's kingdom is growing around the whole world (v. 38).<sup>1</sup> Now while the master's servants were sleeping, an intruder came at night and sowed weeds in the field of wheat before*

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1 This line of interpretation which understands the phrase 'the field is the world' (v.38) as speaking of the church spread throughout the world follows the tradition of Augustine, Calvin, and the Westminster Assembly (WCF 25.5).

*slipping off into the darkness. According to Jesus, these weeds represent the children of the evil one [v.38].*

*Eventually the servants saw the problem with these weeds and spoke to the master about it [v.27]. The wise farmer knew right away that this is the work of a malicious enemy, who was hell-bent on trying to destroy the kingdom [v.28].*

*One of the main reasons behind the servants' confusion was that the weed in question was not just any kind of weed. These were not dandelions or thorns; this particular weed was called darnel. Darnel was the bane of wheat farmers because to begin with it is almost indistinguishable from wheat; in colour and height it looked just like the real thing. It is only with time that the differences start to emerge. It is only when it develops a seed head that you realise that Darnel is actually counterfeit wheat.*

*According to Jesus' parable not everything that looks like wheat is wheat. This parable is teaching us that in the visible church, growing right in amongst the good wheat, there will always be weeds. It is exactly what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21: 'Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord", shall enter the kingdom of heaven'.*

*That is what the Reformed tradition means when it says that the church will remain a 'mixed multitude' until the end of the age.<sup>2</sup> True and false believers grow up in the church, side-by-side. Just like darnel and wheat, sometimes it is very difficult to tell them apart.*

*In the parable, the master's servants had not yet understood the implication of this. Some of them were quick to volunteer to go and deal with the weeds. They said 'we'll physically uproot them' (v. 28). Now, you can't fault them for their zeal. There is no indifference here; they want to try to put everything right immediately. Their goal was good, but their method wasn't the master's. With great wisdom Jesus says 'no, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them' [v.29]. Our master says that we are to wait patiently until the harvest at the judgment. We must avoid the danger of rigorism. Jesus says let them exist side-by-side, as a mixed multitude, because I will not lose even one weak stalk of grain.*

*You see, at this stage of history, the servants cannot always distinguish between the weeds and the wheat. That means that overzealous servants who try to uproot all weeds might, inadvertently, damage the genuine crop. The danger of rigorism is that some of the wheat would needlessly be uprooted.*

### 3.4 Looking for too little (Read: Matthew 18:1-20)

*Let us now consider this second danger, indifference. With this approach, the bar is set too low: any profession is assumed to be adequate for admission to baptism or to the Lord's Table. One of the most significant passages that warns us against indifference is Matthew 18:15-20. This is*

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2 For this theme in Matthew's gospel see 7:15-20; 13:47-48; 22:11-13; 24:45-51; 25:1-3.

*found in a chapter which draws together a collection of Jesus' teaching on the church. In these verses, Jesus uses the language of 'binding' and 'loosing' in order to explain to the leaders of the church that they have been given 'the keys of the kingdom' which can lock and unlock (v.18). There should be no room for indifference because Christ himself has granted the leaders of his church the authority to open the door and close it on his behalf (cf. Matt. 16:19).<sup>3</sup> As servants of the King they undertake incredibly significant work, opening the door to church membership and then into the full privileges and duties of communicant membership.*

*As he teaches this, our Lord lays out a process for dealing with public sin. That process can eventually reach a point where the church is told about the sin (v.17). The Reformed church has understood this to mean the matter being brought to the elders in the courts of the church. There the elders decide the matter upon good and sufficient evidence. Jesus grants the church the power to discipline those who are unrepentant. In our Lord's words, those who refuse to listen to the church are to 'be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector'.*

*There are several things to note about the passage which speaks of the exercise of 'the keys of the kingdom'.<sup>4</sup> First, Jesus deals with church discipline in a discourse which calls us to a life of humility in which 'the little ones' are the 'greatest in the kingdom of heaven'. Therefore, following Jesus' method is not incompatible with humility [vv.1-4]. Secondly, the context in which these instructions are given is one in which Jesus warns us about our perennial temptation to treat sin as something relatively inconsequential [18:7-9]. Thirdly, we read about this process of discipline in a passage in which we are told that the Father has sent his Son to seek out those who wander away, and that restoration results in great joy [18:10-14]. We could summarise the first half of this chapter as teaching that the Church is a community divinely devised to counter our tendencies to go astray, excusing our behaviour, and not caring for those who are prone to stumble. Fourthly, having outlined a process that can, in some circumstances, result in excommunication, Jesus gives an incredible promise to his disciples. When they, or their successors, are faithfully engaged in this work as a court of the church their decisions reflect what God has already determined. Remember, the immediate context here is a matter of discipline [18:18-19]. Jesus Christ stands behind the elders that he has ordained both when they are opening and closing the door. How can this possibly be? Because Christ, by his Spirit, will be present amongst the elders whenever they are gathered together in the name, constituted to do his work, according to his word [18:20]. The King and head of the Church says, 'There I am among them'. Note, this is a promise which, in its specific context, applies to situations in which the church is making those difficult decisions. Lastly, these 'hard*

3 Of course, churches can err and so there is the right of appeal to a higher court of the church.

4 WCF 30.2,4.

*sayings' on church discipline are immediately followed by powerful words about the church being a community of grace that forgives others as Christ as forgiven us. If an individual refuses to listen 'to the church' they are to be treated as a 'Gentile or a tax collector' – the very people to whom the gracious call of the gospel goes out (9:9-11; 11:19). When our brother or sister repents, we are to be willing to forgive seventy-seven times over [18:21-35].*

*The notion of a credible profession of faith is the Reformed tradition's way of seeking to avoid these opposite dangers of either rigorism or indifference. It is an approach that endeavours to hold together all that Jesus says to us about who we are to regard as members of his church. It recognises that for the church of this age, spread across the world, wheat and weeds will grow together. It also submits to Jesus' teaching about the need for discipline. Not any and every profession is to be judged as credible. In this calling we are not left alone. The Lord of the church has given us his word. When elders are gathered together in his name to make hard and difficult decisions he is there amongst them.*

For discussion

In journeying with others towards exploring and expressing a credible profession of faith, does your process tend towards an 'asking for too much' or 'looking for too little' approach? How might you need to adjust what you do and how you do it to better reflect the teaching of Scripture and the church?

4. **What is involved in accompanying others on their journey towards exploring and professing faith?**
  - 4.1 There are three key areas involved in accompanying those seeking baptism or admission to full communicant membership to explore and profess their faith:
    - Their understanding of the basics of Christian faith relating to the profession of faith they will be making and the promises they will be taking
    - Their general consistency of life with that profession of faith
    - In exceptional cases, addressing any particular issues in which an area of their life seems openly and obviously at odds with Christian belief, lifestyle or values.
  - 4.2 The process of admission to the sacraments is something which sits within the wider ongoing means of discipleship which happen both before and after any conversation. As this specific conversation happens, it is not an all or nothing moment, but takes place as part of the ongoing ministry of the Word and community of God's people.
  - 4.3 Once the conversation opens, it is wise and respectful always to leave space for people to decide that proceeding is not for them at this moment.

- 4.4 There is no need to rush. Take time in allowing discussion of the three areas above. Explore each fully.
- 4.5 If particular issues in which an area of lifestyle seems openly and obviously at odds with Christian belief, lifestyle or values, explore how these can be wisely brought to a resolution allowing the profession of a credible faith. Be sensitive to individual circumstances, while at all times observing and respecting the teaching of Scripture and the standards and policies of the Church.<sup>5</sup> Allow time for due consideration and ensure clarity in all that is said and done. All this should be approached with a pastoral heart, and obviously with respect for the principle of confidentiality.
- 4.6 Acknowledge that your kirk session will not always get the decision right, as only God knows the heart of another individual. However, take confidence that when elders are gathered together in his name to make hard and difficult decisions he is there among you.

For discussion

What can we as a kirk session learn from the guidance offered in the section above?

## 5. Further suggestions for consideration

- 5.1 Having worked through the material so far, it may be that you are challenged as a kirk session about the need to change something you do, or the way that you do it. The following suggestions are offered for the consideration of congregations arising from the practice of others and the teaching of the church.
- 5.2 Rather than the conversation about admission to the sacraments and recommendation of candidates being undertaken by the whole kirk session or the minister alone, why not involve a small group of members of Session in this work who can then report back to the whole kirk session?

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5 The Code: The book of Constitution and Government of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland paragraph 104

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

(2) As such authority, the Assembly exercises the powers stated by this Code; and, in particular, it may – (a) deliberate upon and superintend matters which concern the whole Church in its doctrine, worship, witness, discipline and government, and declare the mind of the Church thereupon; (b) issue such directions and take such other action as it may find conducive to the welfare of the Church and the fulfilment of the Church's duties or the well-being of the community; and (c) deal with any matter, whether within or concerning the Church, which may arise and for which no other provision has been made.

(3) Decisions of the Assembly are final and binding upon the whole Church, but a member of the Assembly who dissents from a decision may require a statement of the fact of his dissent to be recorded in the minutes, although he shall not thereby free himself from obligation loyally to implement the decision so long as it stands unaltered.

- 5.3 Sometimes it may not be possible for parents to have their children baptised, because, on exploration of what is involved, they are unable to make a credible profession of faith. This need not be treated as the end of the matter. Guidelines approved by the General Assembly in 1974 addressing the area of Sacramental Discipline in the Baptism of Infants, encourage minister and kirk session to, ‘watch over all such cases so that [these children] might come to baptism as soon as profession of faith may properly be made by themselves if not by their parents.’ Could you keep a record of those families where children have not been baptised and find ways of prayerfully and pro-actively seeking to exercise particular pastorally sensitive evangelism in such situations?
- 5.4 The possibility of a Service of Thanksgiving (Dedication) for a Child where parents are not able to make baptismal vows is mentioned in the revised Statement on Baptismal Discipline following the 1973 debate in the Assembly, though the greatest forethought and care is urged. (‘Report of Doctrine Committee’, Reports to the General Assembly, 1974, pp.18, 22.) An outline for such a service is offered in the PCI Book of Public Worship page 24 which can be found on the PCI website [www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/Sacraments/Book-of-Public-Worship.aspx](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/Sacraments/Book-of-Public-Worship.aspx).

## 6. Suggested Prayer

Lord of the Church,

We give you thanks for your Fatherly love which tends and guides us in the life of our congregation;

We give you thanks for your redeeming love which offers salvation and life in Christ – reaching wide to embrace any, and all, who in sincerity and faith put their trust in him and acknowledge him as Lord of their lives.

We give you thanks for the Holy Spirit who opens to us the loving wisdom of the Word and helps us to walk in its grace and truth.

We thank you for your Church into which we are called, invited and find full expression of Christian faith and community.

We thank you for the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper in which we are reminded of your love and renewed in our walk with you.

We thank you for our calling as elders and our role as kirk session in the leadership of this congregation.

Help us, we pray, as we seek to accompany others in exploring and expressing a credible profession of faith as part of their journey of discipleship and church membership.

Help us to be wise, welcoming, warm and winsome in this task.

Help us to find balance in avoiding the twin pitfalls of asking for too much, or looking for too little.

Help us to help others to understand the Christian faith and embrace the Christian life, so that they, and we as a whole congregation, might share the joy of professing our faith in Christ together and so encourage one another.

Help us to be careful and prayerful in these aspects of our congregational life, to find fresh confidence in you as the one who is always among us as we gather as a kirk session to seek your will and further your work.

Lord of the Church,  
hear our prayer,  
for we ask it in Jesus' name.  
Amen

## **IMPLEMENTATION TASK GROUP APPENDIX B**

### **Guidance for pastoral care of same-sex attracted people and their families**

#### Contents

1. Tracy's story	2
2. Background to the updated guidelines	3
3. The need for pastoral guidance	5
4. Biblical foundations	9
5. Dispelling myths	13
6. Clarity in conversation	14
7. Pastoral care	15
i) Introduction	15
ii) The need for care in the use of language	16
iii) The importance of confidentiality	17
iv) Pastoral wisdom in a first conversation	17
v) Long term pastoral care	18
8. The Church being the Church	20
9. Resource List	23

This Guidance is aimed at kirk sessions and those who provide pastoral care within PCI congregations. It is not meant to be exhaustive but to offer some practical help in a sensitive area. Updated from the 2007 Guidelines they are also part of the outworking of Resolution 22 of the General Council Report 2018 which stated, "That appropriate training be offered to Kirk Sessions on the theology and practice of the Church's understanding of 'a credible profession of faith' and the pastoral guidelines on homosexuality."

The stories included in the document are simply for illustrative purposes and should be read as such. They are not meant to be detailed case studies and do not answer every question that may be asked of them.



## 1. Tracy's story

*Tracy lives in London. She knew she was gay from the age of 12 and came to terms with that through her teens. In her twenties she lived with her girlfriend, "just another gay person in London". It wasn't an issue for her. She really hated Christians and couldn't stand their homophobia. But when she first went to church, she was surprised at how wonderfully friendly everybody was. They didn't do all the things she expected, like patronise her or have heavy discussions with her about her views on the Bible. They weren't self-righteous or anything like that but asked about her, taking a real interest in getting to know her.*

*On later visits they remembered her name and details that she had told them and were obviously pleased that she was there. Through time Tracy became a Christian and now, for her, walking into church is like coming home. It's like arriving into a family home and being greeted by her family, only there are a lot more of them. She finds it wonderful.*

*Tracy has some close friends in the congregation who have two little boys that are very special to her. She sees the family almost every week, reads the Bible with Mum, plays with the boys. If she is feeling down, she goes to them. They include her in family events and trips. It is a very precious part of her life to be part of that family. And she feels very much part of the family. It has been a wonderful gift to her.*

*Her relationship with Jesus has grown and now she sees Him as the one fixed and solid point in her life that doesn't change. She can depend totally on Him. She is conscious that everything in life can be taken away from us, but Jesus can't. She says that she is definitely more content now she is a Christian.*

Surely this is the kind of experience Christians would want anyone to have on coming to church whether they are same-sex attracted or not. But often it is not!

## 2. Background to the updated guidance

The Pastoral Guidelines on Homosexuality were passed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in 2007 in response to the recognition of homophobic attitudes<sup>1</sup> within the church and the need to approach matters of human sexuality with a greater degree of pastoral understanding and care.

The current context is very different from 2007.

Same-sex marriage is now legal both in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. The Presbyterian Church exists in both jurisdictions and must take account of both contexts.

On a more personal level, there is much more openness to talk about matters of human sexuality in society and church. For a significant number of people in our churches same-sex attraction has come close to home with

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<sup>1</sup> 'The victimisation or diminishment of human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex.' Andrew Godard, Fulcrum 2006

a son, daughter, niece, uncle etc. coming out and the family having to come to terms with that. This can be traumatic for the individual, for the family and for the local congregation. What to say? What not to say? What to do? What not to do?

Public and private disagreement with those who take a contrary view to much of wider society has greatly increased.

*“One of the joys of church life is accompanying individuals on a journey to exploring, experiencing and expressing faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.”<sup>2</sup> As a church we recognise that some PCI congregations may have offered people the kind of love and care that Tracy experienced even before she became a Christian. However, this has not been true across the board. There is evidence from the stories of people who have spoken about their same-sex attraction that they have found their churches to be places of fear, hurt and rejection instead of places of pastoral understanding and care.*

In relation to how some people have been treated within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the 2007 Guidelines stated, “Within our church there is the need for both repentance and greater understanding. This calls for education, careful listening and discussion.” When we as a church treat people badly it is right to say sorry. We are sorry for the times when we have demonstrated a lack of understanding, caused hurt, ostracised, verbally abused or robbed individuals and families of hope. While we cannot apologise for holding a Biblical position on these matters, we should apologise for the times when we have not followed the example of the Lord Jesus in the way we have treated others.

This resource is to help ministers, elders and others providing pastoral care to be better equipped to show such pastoral care and this up-dated guidance is one step in that ongoing process.

### **3. The need for pastoral guidance**

It is clear that people of all ages who are same-sex attracted are often very reluctant to tell others because of fear, prejudice etc. Keeping their feelings hidden out of fear can have a significant impact on their mental health. The following is one person’s story but his experience is not uncommon. It highlights some of the issues faced and contrasts with Tracy’s story.

#### **Bob’s story**

*I was brought up in a strong, loving, Christian home and was very actively involved in a lively, evangelical Presbyterian church. I became a Christian when I was young and was well taught and have a real love for the Bible. I was very committed to the youth work in my church and tried to live for Christ and witness for Him inside and outside the Church.*

*During my teens I began to realise that I was different. I found myself attracted to boys rather than girls. I didn’t choose it to be so, it just was.*

*I resisted it, prayed against it. I understood well the Bible's teaching on homosexuality and wrestled to overcome my feelings and pretended to be like 'the lads'. Eventually in my late teens I confided in a Christian friend. He continued to talk to and pray for me over a number of years.*

*Knowing and respecting the church's teaching I practiced celibacy but felt alone, fearful and overwhelmed. The pressure of keeping it to myself, the feelings of shame, the guilt of feeling that I was living a lie and the fear of how the news would affect my parents and my church life eventually took its toll on my mental health. I had to take various medicines for depression and on one occasion came very close to committing suicide.*

*People in the church would crack jokes about 'Gays' and I just wanted to crawl into a hole. How could I open up to them when my struggles were joked about? I respect my minister and his teaching, but when homosexuality was mentioned in church the Biblical position of calling practising homosexuality sin was outlined without ever a word of compassion or understanding for people like me who were struggling so hard and hadn't chosen to feel the way I did.*

*One of my greatest struggles was that I had always been brought up to respect and to tell the truth. Yet here I was living and telling lies to protect my family and myself. Eventually I felt I had no other option but to tell my parents about my struggles. They were devastated and so were my friends at church. It is devastating when all who made you and shaped and directed your life turn on you.*

*I am not bitter, I still love my family and respect my church but when I really needed someone to listen to me without judgement, there was no one. I would love to be straight. It would cause so much less pain but for the sake of my own sanity I have eventually had to accept that I am gay. I am both a Christian who loves God and His word, but I am also gay.*

### **Mental Health matters**

Bob's story is not unique! Many in similar circumstances struggle with their mental health, including depression requiring medical help, engaging in substance abuse, self-harming, having suicidal thoughts and attempting suicide. Sadly, for some it not just an attempt. It is estimated that 1 in 4 of the population will suffer from mental health issues at some time in their lives.<sup>3</sup> For same-sex attracted people in Ireland North and South this proportion rises to 2 out of 3.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Mental Health First Aid Manual, N. Ireland. Published by The Public Health Agency 2008 p71

4 Through Our Minds – Exploring the Emotional Health and Wellbeing of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people in N Ireland, by Malachai O'Hara, Published by The Rainbow Project 2013. Supporting LGBT Lives: A Study of the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) People 2009. The study was carried out by the Children's Research Centre in Trinity College Dublin and the School of Education at University College Dublin, commissioned by the BeLonG To Youth Service and the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN).

Families, schools, places of work, churches, sports clubs etc. can all be difficult places for same-sex attracted people of all ages.

As a church we want to be aware of the impact words and actions can have on a person's mental wellbeing and to practice appropriate sensitivity.

The church ought to be a place in which people feel they are safe, heard, loved, cared for, valued, and are helped to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. In addition, where there are mental health struggles professional help may be required. The church should not be hesitant to refer on for appropriate medical care while continuing to be pastorally supportive.

### **Family tensions**

Coming out can also raise tensions and struggles within families.

'A bereavement' is a common description used by parents on hearing that their son or daughter is same-sex attracted. There is also a loss of face, and of friends. 'My son lost friends and so did I.' There can be a loss of place and respect within the church. Also, there is the shattering of hopes and dreams. 'I may never have a grandchild.'

It raises difficult questions for families.

- What happens when they come to stay? Can we have them to stay?
- How do we approach this with the grandparents?
- How can I show the same unconditional love to my child when I cannot agree with their lifestyle?
- Should we go to the wedding?

Some parents come to terms with the issue by accepting and endorsing the lifestyle of their son or daughter. The content of this document will suggest this does not have to be the way forward. Others feel they cannot do this and constantly live with the tension of wanting to show unconditional love to their son or daughter while not endorsing their lifestyle. This is extremely difficult, as it can be perceived as rejection.

### **One mother's experience.**

She told how her son had attempted suicide several times before he eventually 'came out'. There followed a grieving process before she came to terms with it, but still needs support. She found that she lost friends within the church and felt she had no one within the Presbyterian Church she could turn to for understanding and help. Only through external information and a support group independent of PCI was she able to find help. She found pulpit ministry difficult as it either only condemned same sex relationships or referred to people with same sex attractions in a negative light with little compassion or understanding for the struggle they go through. She has since found support in a different church.

### **The experience of other parents.**

*Their adult daughter got engaged to a woman and told them she was getting married, knowing that they could not endorse this decision because they*

*held firmly to a Biblical understanding of marriage. It caused tensions but the father backed off a bit to let things cool down. Both parents reassured their daughter that they loved her and respected her partner who came to their house, staying in a separate room. Their daughter didn't query this as it also held for her siblings in heterosexual relationships. The parents wrestled with whether to go to the wedding or not. In the end they wanted to preserve the relationship long-term and to reassure their daughter of their love, so decided to go on the understanding that they would take no active part in the wedding. They told a number of people in the church but not many, feeling that it wasn't their job to 'broadcast' their daughter's life. Those they told were generally sympathetic and sought to understand what it would be like to be in their shoes.*

Many from evangelical churches today are turning away from a Biblical understanding of marriage and sexuality because of the pressure of popular opinion. Others feel they have to change in order to be pastorally sensitive and supportive. Still others, because they have become convinced of a revisionist position. Faced with grandchildren or children who are dearly loved and are so loving, who love the Lord but also experience same-sex attraction, a number have adopted a revisionist point of view. In the face of human experience, it is Biblical understanding that seems to be giving way. The idea that sex is for marriage and marriage is between a man and a woman is perceived as no longer plausible. Yet God's word remains clear and unchanging.

It is important for Christian parents to love their children and be there for them even when they cannot endorse all their decisions in life. This is not just a same-sex matter. Many parents whose children are heterosexual can find themselves struggling to affirm their child's choice of partner or other choices in life.

Part of the cost of parenthood is to love and let go. Part of the cost of following Jesus is to love and not let go of His truth, yet to keep on loving.

#### **4. Biblical foundations**

As a church, certain core beliefs are foundational to our understanding of the world and ourselves including our sexuality and the expression of it. These are foundational in guiding how we treat people in general.

- 4.1 Firstly, based on the early chapters of Genesis we believe that we were created by God in His image as the height of His creation. The Psalmist describes us as *'fearfully and wonderfully made'* (Psalm 139:14). God entered into a covenant relationship with us in a way that He didn't with any other part of His creation and part of the intimacy of God's relationship with human beings is reflected in the marital union between a man and a woman.

In God's creation design, the covenant He made with human beings could only be fulfilled as they would become fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue (or govern) it (Genesis 1). Child-bearing was part of God's perfect original design and covenant in the one-man, one-woman relationship He created.

- 4.2 Secondly, we believe that we are all fallen beings, through the fall of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. Since then, every one of us is broken or fallen in our total humanity which includes our sexuality. As Prof Stephen Williams writes, ‘...we encounter in our own sexuality something unstable or fragile, unruly or disorienting, a cause for perplexity or anxiety.’<sup>5</sup>

This is so for those with heterosexual or homosexual attractions, so no-one can feel smug or superior nor victimise or diminish another simply on the basis of our common fallen sexuality.

However, it does raise significant questions about our sexual desires and how we act upon them. ‘How could something that feels so good be wrong?’ is not a point of guidance from God’s Word, nor is it appropriate to say, ‘Follow your heart,’ given that both Jeremiah and Hosea tell us that ‘the heart is deceitful’ (Jeremiah 17:9; Hosea 10:2) and Jesus Himself told us that ‘out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.’ (Matthew 15:19)

Our fallenness means that all of us suffer, in one way or another, from disordered love and desires, or to put it another way, love and desires that are not ordered according to God’s perfect blueprint.

Sexuality is part of that perfect creation. We are sexual beings and we can express that sexuality in appropriate ways according to God’s design whether we are married or single. The Lord Jesus Christ was the only perfect and utterly fulfilled human being who ever lived and yet He remained single. So, we reject the message so powerfully promoted by contemporary society that to be a fulfilled human being and to have fulfilled relationships they must involve sex.

God’s word has a high view of singleness and hence celibacy and speaks of how the single person is free from many concerns and better placed to ‘give themselves’ freely and fully to the Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:28-35)

The Song of Solomon (2:7; 3:5; 8:4) speaks against arousing or awakening sexual feelings until the appropriate time and context. This is a guide for those who are both homosexually and heterosexually attracted on how to honour God, their bodies and the bodies of others. Therefore, in the contexts when sex is excluded on Biblical grounds, we need to be careful not to awaken or arouse those feelings.

- 4.3 Thirdly, we believe that Jesus Christ came to redeem the world and ultimately to renew the whole of creation in new heavens and earth. On the cross Christ freed us from both the penalty and the power of sin. The Apostle Paul was able to write to the Romans that ‘...sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.’ (Romans 6:14) This is a promise and a calling. Those who are united to Christ Jesus by faith are no longer under the power or control of sin because they are now under grace. Those who are united to Christ need not be controlled by sexual desires, be they legitimate or otherwise.

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5 Prof Stephen Williams, *The Question of Homosexuality*, PCI, 2013

Of course, believers have not yet been freed from the presence of sin and so are subject to all kinds of temptations. Some are tempted in one way and some in another. James describes the process of such temptation: *'...each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death...'* (James 1:14-15).

But the cross and resurrection of Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in every believer leads them towards a life lived in obedience to God. Believers are enabled then to resist temptation in areas which God has ruled out-of-bounds in order that they may live holy lives. This is so of sexuality whatever a believer's attractions. By God's grace our failures can be forgiven and we can resist the temptations of our own sinful natures and those that come from our adversary the devil. In other words, we can resist temptations that come to us both internally and externally. This is the spiritual struggle all believers face but with God's help we can live in obedience to God's word.

Having taken the penalty and broken the power of our sin on the cross, Jesus rose again to give the offer of hope, new life and a redeemed future to all who repent of their sin and turn from it to believe and follow Him. Those who follow Christ have a living hope that one day all these struggles will be over, and He will make us new, pure and holy in every aspect of our being. Until that day He is continually transforming us through the power of His Spirit to live satisfied, joyful and obedient lives according to His truth.

- 4.4 Fourthly, there will be no human marriage in heaven because the perfect relationship towards which it points will have come to be. That is, the union of Christ, the Groom, with His Bride, the Church. Not even the best of human relationships come close to that one. All we have here, even sexual fulfilment, is just a shadow of what we will have in eternity.
- 4.5 In summary, we are created and dearly loved by God. But because of the Fall our attractions and desires are disordered. He accepts us as we are when we repent and come to faith in Christ, but He does not leave us as we are. Becoming a Christian is to enter into a life of obedience to Christ Jesus and His word, the Bible, and into a lifestyle which is a fruit of true faith in Christ and commitment to follow Him as Lord. But it is also a relationship of love with God that no other human relationship can come close to and which will be perfected in heaven.

While a person's sexuality is a very important part of their lives, it does not define who they are. Biblically, we as a church maintain that a person is defined in the first instance in terms of their relationship to God - creation in relation to Creator.

These are the core beliefs which undergird the position of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland that sexual relationships between members of the same sex are not consistent with the word of God, but they also emphasise the Church's position that love and hope is extended to all of us in Jesus Christ, irrespective of our sexuality.

## 5. Dispelling myths

Despite much greater understanding in society, there is still the need in some churches to dispel myths about same-sex attraction.

It is widely accepted that children are no more at risk from a person who is same sex attracted than from a person who is heterosexual. Homosexuality is not paedophilia.

Nor is a same-sex attracted person any more a sexual predator than someone with heterosexual desires. In fact, we often show our double standards by looking on ‘boys chasing the girls’ in a lustful way as a natural thing. Whereas a girl who does the same is looked on as ‘cheap’ and a person with same sex attractions as perverted.

Not everyone who experiences same-sex attraction is a gay activist. Many will never be seen at a Pride event or making a public statement but wish, simply, to get on with ordinary, everyday life. As Tracy said in our opening story, she was ‘just another gay person in London.’

Nor is everyone who is attracted to members of the same sex actively involved in a relationship. Some follow biblical guidance and choose the difficult path of life long celibacy.

Such myths can be hurtful, humiliating, degrading and condemning to those who experience same-sex attraction. They are also characteristic of the stereotyping and the lack of understanding that fuels homophobic attitudes.

From a different angle, it is a myth to say that if I do not accept your sexuality then I do not accept you as a person. That is simply not true to life as we know it. Many people will have friends with whom they do not agree on certain important points. We also have friends that have made life choices that we would not endorse, yet they are still our friends.

## 6. Clarity in conversation

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland maintains that in God’s plan sexual intimacy is part of the two-into-one intimacy shared in the marriage relationship and only to be exercised in that relationship.

*“Since the beginning of creation God, in His gracious purpose, provided marriage as the accepted way in which a man and a woman may come together as husband and wife. This is the only basis on which marriage can take place within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.”*<sup>6</sup>

As Prof Stephen Williams writes, *“The Bible’s concern is with the positive flourishing of human beings, whether it is in the area of sex or any other area. Boundaries within which the Christian tradition has celebrated sexual activity – marriage and marital fidelity – are meant to enhance, not to destroy, true freedom.”*<sup>7</sup>

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6 General Assembly Reports 2016: General Council Report Page 41 Para.19

7 Prof Stephen Williams, *The Question of Homosexuality*, 2013



Yet it is important for us to recognise that the desires for love (in all its aspects), intimacy, companionship etc. that move heterosexual couples towards marriage are the same desires that motivate those attracted to members of the same sex.

When a church states that it cannot agree with same-sex sexual relationships it is most often taken as rejection of the person because of their perceived identity, i.e., ‘I am gay! However, as a church, we believe our identity should be defined primarily in terms of our humanity before God and not in terms of sexual desires. Other aspects of our perceived identities are not unimportant but for the Christian they are all subservient to our primary identity in Christ. It would be helpful in conversation if we focused more on the whole person and did not make sexuality the focus of our understanding.

The ‘rights’ dominated culture surrounding ‘gay’ issues sends a message to the church that it is not acceptance as people that is being sought but rather endorsement of a way of life. The problem for many within the church is that while they would want to accept people in the name of Jesus Christ there appears to be little middle ground. Recognising the problem of loneliness and the need for intimate, fulfilling but non-sexualised friendships the church has much to do in fostering such communities.<sup>8</sup> It is undoubtedly true that our congregations need to be more like the church Tracy experienced than that of Bob.

## **7. Pastoral care**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This is not the place to discuss a full definition of pastoral care in a congregational context. At least in the congregational context, pastoral care involves holding the word of God in one hand and care for the person in the other and bringing the two together.

It is acknowledged at the outset of this section that the contexts in which pastoral care will be sought are many and varied. For example, not everyone who is same sex attracted struggles with it. They may not see any need for pastoral care for themselves but their family members may benefit from pastoral care. Others do struggle with same sex attraction and will seek pastoral care. Some people who are same sex attracted will, out of Biblical conviction, decide to live a celibate life but they too can benefit from the pastoral care and the support of their congregations. On the other hand, there are those who are comfortable with same sex relationships and feel (or see) no need for pastoral care.

There are broader questions here as to ‘what constitutes a same-sex sexual relationship.’ An arbitrary list of what is and what is not appropriate is unhelpful. Sexual desire in itself is God-given as we see in the Song of Solomon. But how sexual desires are to be acted upon is also subject to God’s Word as the section on Biblical Background brings out. We know

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8 There is much to be learned from the short book, ‘True Friendship’ by Vaughan Roberts, mentioned under Resources.

that sinful desires begin in the mind before they are given action, so part of the challenge of discipleship is to make our thoughts subject to God's Word, in order that we might act in ways that are biblically appropriate.

We acknowledge that there are many pastoral scenarios related to this area. For example, when a husband leaves his wife and children having 'come out'.

The accepted danger of brief guidelines is that they cannot cover every eventuality, nor should they try to. This guidance focuses mainly on those who struggle with their same-sex attractions.

It should also be noted that many of the issues raised concerning same sex relationships are similar to those faced by the church in relation to heterosexual relationships outside of a faithful married relationship.

## **7.2 The need for care in the use of language**

Pastoral care is inseparable from preaching of the word of God. A consistent approach is needed both in pulpit ministry and in one-to-one conversation. Compassion begins in the pulpit and works out from there. Unbalanced condemnation from the pulpit closes the door to compassionate care outside the pulpit and may have an adverse impact on a person's mental wellbeing.

We need to avoid unhelpful words or statements, such as 'Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve'; 'Love the sinner, hate the sin'. Such derogatory colloquialisms tend to lock the door to effective pastoral care before it is even open.

It is important for the person's family both to hear and be shown compassionate understanding of the feelings and struggles involved as well as the biblical issues.

A balanced proclamation of God's Word is essential. When we consider 1 Corinthians 6, we might conclude that there are more idolaters, slanderers and greedy people in our congregations than '*men who practice homosexuality*'. 1 Corinthians 6:9 (ESV)

## **7.3 The importance of confidentiality**

As in all pastoral care, keeping the pastoral conversation confidential is crucial. Even if the person has made their position public, any struggles they might have are still personal to them. Confidentiality also applies to what is shared by those close to the person, for example, their parents. Keeping confidentiality is critically important to the integrity of the person providing pastoral care and for creating a trusting pastoral relationship.

However, as in all pastoral care, absolute confidentiality cannot be promised. If the person is at risk of harm, for example, because of associated mental health concerns, other appropriate people should be informed (those providing pastoral care in a congregation should be trained and informed about this process for any pastoral situation). For further information on mental health such as depression or suicide see the resources listed at the end of these guidelines.

In addition, it may be appropriate for the person providing pastoral care to ask permission to share information with another suitable person rather than carry the burden of pastoral care alone.

#### **7.4 Pastoral wisdom in a first conversation**

For a person wrestling with their sexuality to come out and tell someone may have taken months even years. They will probably have gone through a long period of mental auditioning, weighing up different friends, family members, acquaintances, before deciding whom to tell. Even then it takes a great deal of courage to ‘come out’. The fear of rejection, loss of love, even hatred may be almost palpable at the point of disclosure. From that moment there is no retreat. It is therefore important that a minister, elder, leader, family member understands that their first reactions have the potential to crush or bring hope. The person will hear body language and attitude even more than words.

What the person does not need to hear:

- That they are imagining it
- That they are sick
- That they are a disgrace
- At this point they may not even need to hear what the Bible says about sexuality

What it may be helpful to hear:

- That they are loved
- That God’s love has not changed
- That they have displayed great courage in telling you
- That you appreciate the trust placed in you
- That you will seek to listen carefully and to understand what they have been going through

A useful principle to keep in mind is not to agree with anything you are not sure about.

#### **7.5 Long term pastoral care**

It is imperative to state that the role of pastoral care is not to insist a person with same sex attractions attends counselling. We recognise the danger of suggesting this person is sick and needs to be healed. All of us, in various ways are in need of the healing grace of Christ. There is evidence that while some people may discover a lessening in their same-sex attractions few people experience a full change.

It is also very important to state that heterosexuality is not a goal of the gospel. Nor does sexual attraction determine how we behave. Self-control is one element of the fruit of the Spirit. Sexual behaviour is certainly one area among many in which self-control is relevant to Christian discipleship.

While there are certain different approaches to pastoral understanding and care, the aim is helping people to discover what it means to live ‘a lifestyle

which is a fruit of true faith in Christ and commitment to follow Him as Lord' (see 4.5). This will take time, patience, love and support.

The work of caring for and growing disciples is lifelong. The Church of Jesus Christ does not expect believers to transform overnight into faithful disciples but to grow steadily in submission and obedience to Him. This is so for everyone, whatever their struggles may be.

*“Helping others explore what it means to express a credible profession of faith involves sensitively listening and encouraging reflection.”<sup>9</sup>*

*“In particular issues in which an area of lifestyle seems openly and obviously at odds with Christian belief, lifestyle or values, explore how these can be wisely brought to resolution allowing the expression of credible faith.”<sup>10</sup>*

There appears to be a small number of same-sex attracted people who have been able to marry an opposite sex partner and have a happy and fulfilled marriage.<sup>11</sup> However, anecdotally, the numbers appear to be small and in the light of this, getting married to someone of the opposite sex should not be presented as an easy 'solution' to someone who is same sex attracted because it could lead to greater problems and not less.

In some instances, it may be the family rather than the actual person that seeks pastoral care. It is important to journey with a family as they wrestle with the issues involved. Taking time to listen, to talk through with them the matters mentioned in this document and to pray for and with them can be immensely helpful as they think matters through and make choices that are likely to have long-term implications for family relationships.

Certain principles must be taken on board in all pastoral care and especially in this matter:

- (a) Quick prayers and chapter and verse sticking plasters are rarely helpful.
- (b) The pastoral carer must be aware and accepting of his/her own sexual brokenness.
- (c) The person being cared for should not be ostracised. Churches must continue to love and act in a Christ-like way towards even those who behave in ways seen as inconsistent with God's word.
- (d) It will be an encouragement to surround a person with love, family, ongoing pastoral care and also to help them to set and keep personal boundaries. This is just as helpful to those who are heterosexual.
- (e) We recognise, preach and practise the fact that our failures are not final.

As a final important note under this section, we highlight the lives of those who experience same-sex attraction yet live fulfilling and satisfying celibate lives in obedience to God's word and commitment to the Lordship

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9 Credible Profession of Faith and Admission to the Sacraments. PCI 2021 3:1

10 Credible Profession of Faith and Admission to the Sacraments. PCI 2021 4:5

11 Rosaria Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, Crown & Covenant Publications, 2014

of Christ Jesus. This can be an extremely challenging and difficult journey and there is much to be learned from those who have walked such a path with grace, obedience and resilience.

## 8. The Church being the Church

The church has a crucial responsibility to create an environment of love, understanding, welcome, patience, forgiveness, openness, truth, discipline and grace for people who experience same-sex attraction and their families. People are naturally drawn to where they are loved.

It is also crucial that we admit and regret our failures and inadequacies, especially the occasions when we have handled pastoral care badly and caused hurt and fear. Also, the past failure of our silence and lack of biblical guidance given on matters of sexual ethics.

Those with pastoral responsibility might:

- (a) Address sympathetically in services and teaching the struggles involved for individuals and their families.
- (b) Actively promote an atmosphere of understanding and welcome rather than fear and rejection.
- (c) Provide books, links to websites etc. to help individuals with same-sex attractions and their families and the congregation to be informed about the issues involved.
- (d) Actively promote church family intimacy and the inclusion of those with same-sex attractions, as in Tracy's story. Do we really know what it is to live as the church in community with mutual love and responsibility for one another?
- (e) Accompany those seeking baptism or admission to full communicant membership on their journey of exploring and professing faith, especially in the exceptional cases in which an area of their life seems openly and obviously at odds with Christian beliefs lifestyle or values.<sup>12</sup> Should such a situation arise, it is perhaps even more important for church members to actively show family love and care. Church members should not undermine decisions made by the leadership but could actively keep the door open with a person that they might be restored to fellowship.
- (f) Encourage the kind of open-door hospitality enjoyed by Tracy. This is equally the case for all singles. Surely this is the way we would want a member of our own family to be supported and loved.
- (g) Use inclusive language and be sensitive towards those who are single.
- (h) As discipleship often happens best in small groups, we might actively encourage small group/cell group involvement that includes openness and accountability for all.
- (i) Encourage the kind of spiritual friendship enjoyed by David and Jonathan in which brother leans upon brother or sister upon sister

in common commitment to the Lord.<sup>13</sup> As with friendships between a male and a female, wisdom and caution are necessary if there are feelings of attraction. A small, mixed group of supportive friends may help to provide a more healthy relational dynamic than just individuals.

- (j) In any congregation wisdom is required when offering one-to-one care to people of the opposite sex. Similar wisdom may be required with individuals who are same-sex attracted. In such situations, male-to-female or female-to-male might be more appropriate, or a greater age differential.
- (k) Actively help our Youth and Adult Groups to be informed and compassionate whilst still upholding the church's biblical position on this issue.
- (l) Make use of the key congregational resource of families and appropriate friendships to provide the kind community and family support Tracy received.
- (m) Especially for younger people, provide individual mentoring and nurturing from older, pastorally sensitive leaders outside their immediate family.
- (n) Journey with those who are experiencing mental health issues and encourage the seeking of professional help when required. (A list of resources on mental health and wellbeing can be found on the PCI website at [www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/Pastoral-Care-training-mental-health-awareness.aspx](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/Pastoral-Care-training-mental-health-awareness.aspx))
- (o) Explore the possibility of support groups (possibly linking several churches) both for those with same-sex attractions and their families.<sup>14</sup>
- (p) If a minister, group of elders or congregation feel out of their depth, don't opt for doing nothing. Actively seek out those who can provide care and help and refer on.

In summary, we should -

- Encourage a better identity, centred on Christ and not our sexuality.
- Pass on the truth and stand firm on the word God has revealed to us.
- Honour both marriage and singleness instead of making marriage superior.
- Be clear in our teaching, publicly and privately on the real cost of being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Were we to do these better as a church perhaps our pastoral care of all would improve!

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13 Our understanding of 2 Samuel 1v26 is the historical one i.e. that it speaks of a depth of filial 'spiritual friendship,' and not, as some suggest today, that David and Jonathan were in a same-sex relationship.

14 True Freedom Trust, among others, has established some of these on a clearly biblical footing and they have worked successfully. See Resources.

## 9. Resource List

The following suggested resources are broadly within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's position on same sex attraction.

### Websites/organisations:

**The True Freedom Trust:** [www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk](http://www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk)

A UK based evangelical organisation. Their website has a number of helpful resources for individuals dealing with gay/lesbian issues personally. There are also a number of helpful articles for Christian parents with children who identify as gay or who struggle with same sex attraction. They are available to call on +44 (0)151 653 0773 – personal support can also be requested via their website.

**Living Out:** [www.livingout.org](http://www.livingout.org)

A website resource for church leaders and individuals either struggling with same-sex attraction personally or wanting to encourage those who do. It features video stories of people talking about their experiences. The resources and videos are for equipping elders and others providing pastoral care.

**Rosaria Butterfield's website:** [www.rosariabutterfield.com](http://www.rosariabutterfield.com)

Rosaria Butterfield is the author of *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (see below for more details). Her website includes a study guide based on this book, various articles and a helpful frequently asked question page.

**Spiritual Friendship:** [www.spiritualfriendship.org](http://www.spiritualfriendship.org)

A website edited by Wes Hill and Ron Belgau which provides a blog providing “Musings on God, Sexuality and Friendship”.

**Talk by Rev Professor Stephen Williams**

The text of a talk by Rev Prof Stephen Williams on the subject of same sex attraction can be found here: [www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/Social-Issues/The-Question-of-Homosexuality.aspx](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/Social-Issues/The-Question-of-Homosexuality.aspx)

### Books

**A short introductory book with practical application**

*Is God anti-gay? And other questions about homosexuality, the Bible and same-sex attraction* by Sam Allberry (The Good Book Company, 2013).

A short, easy to read book on what the Bible says on same sex attraction with practical advice on pastoral care in the church and sharing Christ with gay friends.

### **A book on reaching out to gay people**

*Walking with Gay Friends: A journey of informed compassion* by Alex Tylee (IVP, 2007)

This book gives helpful advice on how to reach out with Christ's love to gay friends and also covers the practicalities of discipleship after conversion. The author has travelled that path herself.

### **A book on the value of friendship**

*True Friendship* by Vaughn Roberts (10Publishing, 2013)

The author is a Christian who has chosen to be celibate because of struggles with same sex attraction. He has written this short, helpful book on the biblical approach to friendship.

### **A book on mental health**

*Mindful of the Light* by Dr Stephen Critchlow (Instant Apostle 2016)

Because two out of three people who identify as gay experience mental health problems, anyone providing pastoral care should have some knowledge of mental health basics. This book, while not mentioning same sex attraction, helpfully covers common mental health problems from a pastoral Christian perspective. Further information on mental health can be found in the extensive resource list here: [www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/Congregational-Life/Mental-Health-Resources-List.aspx](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/Congregational-Life/Mental-Health-Resources-List.aspx)

### **Books with an autobiographical emphasis teaching from personal experience**

*Satisfaction Guaranteed: A future and a Hope for Same-Sex Attracted Christians* by Jonathan Berry and Rob Wood (IVP, 2016).

The authors share what they have learned from their journeys as Christians who have struggled with same sex attraction.

*The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith* by Rosario Butterfield (Crown and Covenant, 2012)

A biographical account of the author's conversion to Christ and move out of a lesbian lifestyle. Further resources from the author are available in the website listed above.

*Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* by Wes Hill (Zondervan, 2010)

This book describes the transforming grace of Jesus Christ and addresses issues such as overcoming loneliness for the same sex attracted Christian drawing from the author's own experience.



**Books providing further biblical understanding**

*A better story: God, sex and human flourishing* by Glynn Harrison (IVP, 2016)

This book makes the case that traditional Christian teaching on sex, marriage and human relationships is good news for today.

*The plausibility problem* by Ed Shaw (IVP, 2015).

This book helps us see how the Bible's teaching on same sex attraction seems unreasonable because of missteps in understanding, for example, 'your identity is your sexuality', 'celibacy is bad for you' and 'if you're born gay, it can't be bad to be gay'. The author is a Christian who has struggled with same sex attraction and has chosen to be celibate.

*What does the Bible really teach about homosexuality* by Kevin DeYoung (IVP 2015)

This book addresses the 'revisionist' position which is advocated by Christians who affirm same sex relationships with a revised interpretation of Scripture. The author provides a biblical case for the traditional view of marriage and effectively counters the common revisionist arguments.

*People to be loved: Why homosexuality is not just an issue* by Preston Sprinkle (Zondervan 2015)

This book explains the biblical position on same sex attraction while emphasising the grace and love of God for people who identify as gay.

*Mere Sexuality* by Todd Wilson (Zondervan 2017)

This book provides a foundational biblical understanding of sexuality with application for people who are same sex attracted. It includes teaching on understanding marriage and the importance of creating a strong friendship culture.

## HUMAN IDENTITY TASK GROUP

1. In the autumn of 2017, the General Council established the Human Identity Task Group as a means of seeking a Biblical and pastoral response to the complex and often difficult issues facing PCI members, families, ministers, congregations and wider society in respect of gender identity. The group consisted of a wide cross-section of people from theological, psychiatric, mental health, educational, youth work and public policy backgrounds.
2. From the outset, the task group was conscious of the urgent need to resource our denomination in order to help it navigate this publicly contested, highly nuanced and rapidly developing debate around gender identity. These issues are important but in congregational life what matters most is that those who struggle, and those close to them, receive good pastoral care that is full of God's love and truth. The group's focus therefore quickly became the production of pastoral guidelines.
3. In the meantime, while this publication was being produced, the task group sought and was given General Council approval to produce a customised version of Vaughan Roberts' short book on Transgenderism from the Talking Points series with a PCI introduction. 3000 copies of this book were printed and distributed to every minister and congregation at the 2019 General Assembly.
4. Draft "A Biblical Framework and Pastoral Care Guidelines for people who struggle with gender identity, and their families" was brought to the March 2020 meeting of the General Council and adopted as part of the General Council's report to the Standing Commission of the 2020 General Assembly. The Standing Commission resolved that they be sent in booklet form to presbyteries for discussion and comment, with responses due by 31 January 2021, a date subsequently extended to 14 May 2021 due to Covid-19 restrictions, to ensure sufficient time was available for discussion.
5. The task group is pleased to report that 18 of the 19 presbyteries responded to the booklet. Some sought input from kirk sessions within their bounds, some asked for individual written anonymous comments from ministers and representative elders, some held 'single agenda' meetings and some appointed task groups to draft reports for their consideration. It is clear from the responses received that whatever method was used there was serious engagement with the materials.
6. There was general approval of the resource's approach, content and tone: 'pastoral sensitivity commended', 'good, careful and balanced', 'helpful and timely', 'general content and tone to be commended' are some of the phrases presbyteries used.
7. On the other hand, a number of presbyteries took a critical view on the overall approach of the guidelines, however, this is contrary to the positive appraisal of a majority of presbyteries.
8. A significant number of presbyteries requested that the Biblical background section should be expanded. As this resource is meant to offer both a Biblical foundation and pastoral guidelines, these concerns are valid and are reflected in the greatly extended section on the Biblical foundation in

the revised guidelines. Several presbyteries mentioned the importance of preaching on this issue and that more clarity is needed on church discipline. Some presbyteries would even have liked a more critical analysis of the current cultural debate surrounding gender identity. The task group felt that these desires fell outside its remit.

9. Some presbyteries commented on the fact that the pastoral scenarios were overly optimistic and it would be good to include a situation where there was a less positive outcome. The point was made that there is a lack of specific guidance on pastoral care for parents – therefore a change in the title or adding this guidance is required. The title also needs to make clear that this resource is primarily for people who provide pastoral care and not for those receiving it. These comments have been taken on board and are reflected in the revised title ‘A Biblical Framework and Guidance for Pastoral Care of People who Struggle with Gender Identity.’ A number of other minor changes and edits were also made in response to various Presbytery comments.
10. The task group commends to the church “A Biblical Framework and Guidance for Pastoral Care of People who Struggle with Gender Identity” (Appendix A) with the prayer that they will guide and assist all of us to show the love of God with sensitivity, wisdom, truth and grace.

DANIEL KANE, Convener

## **HUMAN IDENTITY TASK GROUP APPENDIX A**

### **A biblical framework and guidance for pastoral care of people who struggle with gender identity.**

#### **Contents**

Introduction	4
Biblical background and foundation	6
The Contemporary Context	10
The need for pastoral guidance	14
Pastoral care: one to one	16
Pastoral care: as a church family	20
Scenario 1	23
Scenario 2	25
Scenario 3	27
Glossary of terms	29
Further resources	31

*Bible references are from the NIV and ESV versions.*

### **Introduction**

#### **Who is this resource for?**

This resource is for kirk sessions and anyone in a congregation who provides pastoral care to people who struggle with their gender identity and/or their families and others close to them. This includes ministers, deaconesses, pastoral workers, youth workers/leaders and elders who may be involved in providing one to one pastoral care. It also extends to the whole church family as they seek to be a caring fellowship. This resource is intended to help equip those who provide pastoral care rather than to be given to those in need of pastoral care.

**What do we mean by ‘people who struggle with gender identity’?**

People who struggle with their gender identity can experience discomfort or even distress due to a sense of ‘mismatch’ between their gender identity and their biological sex (the term used for someone medically diagnosed with this sense of distress is ‘gender dysphoria’ – see the glossary for more detail). This is related to the term ‘transgender’ which refers to people who have adopted a gender identity which is not the same as their biological sex. Not everyone who struggles with their gender identity identifies as transgender. There are many different experiences and many different responses. People do not choose this struggle and pursuing a particular path, for example, name change, wearing different clothing or hormone treatment, can be driven by an attempt to relieve intense and often intolerable gender dysphoria. The distress and suffering of the person are exemplified by the fact that this condition can lead to depression, anxiety and self-harm. Others who identify as transgender are comfortable with the changes they have made or are intending to make and do not feel a need for pastoral care. However, especially amongst young people, bullying can be a problem for those who make outward changes and are perceived to be different.<sup>1</sup>

**What is this guidance intended to do?**

Because of the many different experiences of people who struggle with their gender identity, from the outset, as in all pastoral care, the first response should be to listen to the person to understand. This guidance provides a basic understanding and practical ways to give pastoral support as well as Christian discipleship in this area in the longer term for those who profess faith in Christ. There is also guidance on providing pastoral care to family, and especially parents, of people who struggle with gender identity and also in the case where a family member has identified as transgender and this has led to family tensions.

Because pastoral care is not simply a one to one encounter but something the whole church family should be involved with, this guidance provides practical help in how best to provide care, support and discipleship from the pulpit and in the fellowship of the church family.

To ensure this guidance is easy and relatively quick to read, more detailed reading is referenced in the ‘Further resources’ guide. There is also a glossary of the terms which people providing pastoral care may encounter in this area.

This guidance is produced with significant input from expert practitioners in the areas of pastoral care, psychology and education. It should be noted that legislation and medical approaches are subject to changes and the guidance is as accurate as possible as of June 2021.

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1 ‘Evidence base’ article on the NHS Gender Identity Development Service website: <https://gids.nhs.uk/evidence-base> (accessed 11/02/2020). The article also states that, contrary to statements by some transgender groups, suicide is extremely rare. Therefore, statements about the danger of suicide should not be used to pressure anyone into adopting a particular view or pursuing a particular path but an awareness of possible mental health problems is paramount.

## Biblical background and foundation

### Introduction

Pastoral care must always be carried out with compassion for those who struggle, whilst also grounded in the light of God's truth. It is only in accepting and believing God's truth that we can also receive his grace through Jesus Christ and be transformed by the Holy Spirit. The Bible reveals our creator God's plan for humanity and speaks clearly to beliefs that are at odds with his created reality.

At the heart of the transgender experience is an internal sense that one's gender is at odds with one's birth sex. Attempts to deal with that incongruence have meant that some people have given a preference to their internal sense of gender as representing their true self over against the reality of their body. The reality of the body is set aside in favour of the desires and feelings of the internal self.

A biblical theology of the body, however, argues that one's body cannot be ignored but is crucial in determining our identity. Whilst the Bible does not speak directly to the issue of transgenderism as it is understood today, the biblical theology of the body is relevant to the current discussion, and an understanding of the biblical data can direct the church in developing its response to transgenderism. Regardless of the shifting cultural understanding of gender, the biblical witness to the sanctity of the human body must be affirmed.

### Creation

The creation of the man and the woman in Genesis 1:26,27 as the bearers of God's image, is the climax of God's creative activity. Humans are created in the "image of God" as male and female. Part of what it means to be made in the "image of God" is the role that humanity is given over creation as representatives of the authority of God. If humanity is meant to represent God over the earth, then human beings must fill the earth. Hence, God's first command to humanity is to be fruitful and multiply. Creation as male and female makes human fruitfulness possible and enables men and women to fulfil their calling. God's creation of humanity as male and female is, at least, because God intends for humans to reproduce. So the bodily aspect of maleness and femaleness is critical. This is true even though the Bible affirms celibacy as well as marriage because affirming celibacy does not change God's fundamental design of male and female. In addition, some couples are unable to have children but this is a symptom of life in a fallen world.

The biblical data (Genesis 2:7; 3:19) show that from the beginning there is a material aspect to the human constitution. The scriptural way of expressing this truth is not that man or woman has a body, but that man or woman is body.<sup>2</sup> Scripture does not represent the soul or spirit of human

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2 John Murray, *The Nature of Man in Collected Writings*, Volume 2 (Edinburgh; Banner of Truth Trust, 1977) 14.

beings as created first and then put into a body. The opposite is the case: “The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” (Gen 2:7). The bodily is not an appendage. In its creation, the body is intrinsically good. Our physicality, including our physical gender, is not to be demeaned nor neglected, for we are human beings whose experience of this world is as embodied creatures.

It can also be affirmed that God’s intention for humanity to be female and male may be related to the description of human incompleteness apart from a sexually-differentiated other. Genesis 2:18–25 describes the initial relationship between woman and man with God’s recognition that “it is not good for the man to be alone.” The creation of woman from man leads man to recognize himself as male just as he recognizes her as female. Man as male remains incomplete without his biologically sexual other, without whom neither she nor he could be known, or know themselves, as female and male.

So Genesis 1 and 2 state that God makes the man and God makes the woman. For this reason, we conclude that the Bible teaches “binary gender”; it teaches that there are two sexes. This creational design of God in Genesis is affirmed by Jesus Christ in Matthew 19:3-6:

“And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Jesus says that God made humanity either male or female. He reinforces this twice in his quotation of Genesis 2:24; there is “father” and “mother” in view, and “man” and “his wife”. In two short, but striking verses, Christ gives three separate, but connected, arguments for the reality of the two sexes, manhood and womanhood.

To the saints in ancient Corinth, a city that was rife with sexual confusion and idolatry, the Apostle Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 11 of important principles that should guide Christians living in that city. He says that Christians, whose identities are based on their bodies, should present themselves as a man or a woman. This section of Scripture contains some of Paul’s more complex expressions and phrases, but the central idea is clear – the sexes need to honour God’s design of their bodies by presenting themselves as a man or a woman.

“Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair it is her glory?” (1 Cor 11:14-15)

In a city where some people (temple prostitutes among them) took on different “gender expressions”, the church of Jesus Christ was called to be different. Men and women were to honour God by looking different from one another. This teaching echoes the expressed will of God for his old covenant people in Deuteronomy 22:5. God desires that men present themselves as men, just as women must present themselves as women.

## **Incarnation**

The doctrine of the Incarnation gives great honour to the human body. That the Word of God would become flesh and dwell among humanity (John 1:14) shows that the human body as created by God can embody the presence of God. Jesus was born, lived, and died a fully human life as God in the flesh, yet without sin. His resurrection was a bodily resurrection as a human being, the firstfruits of all those whom God will raise (1 Corinthians 15:20–23). The bodily ascension of Jesus indicates that the Incarnation endures forever as the Son retains full, and now glorified, humanity. Jesus forever remains the God-man.

All the experience of a human body, and all the differentiation a human body possesses in comparison with other human bodies, is clear in the life of Jesus. His body grew and matured with specific features that made Him identifiable to all who knew Him. He was born with an ancestry that marked Him as Jewish within Israel and the greater Roman world. He had physical characteristics that identified Him as male. He experienced all the limitations of a human body, including sleep, hunger, sweat, and pain. The Bible describes Jesus as a fully embodied human with all that goes with a body, from a genetic heritage to the everyday experiences of hunger and thirst.

## **Resurrection**

After his resurrection Jesus was a body that was identifiable, still bearing the scars of the crucifixion. Jesus is no less incarnate as the Risen Lord. In Luke 24 and John 20 Jesus proves that his resurrection is not just the resuscitation of a corpse nor the apparition of a spirit. His body can be touched. He eats with his disciples. His scars prove that he is the same Jesus who was crucified (Luke 24:37–43; John 20:20–27). This suggests that with our resurrection bodies we will still be personally identifiable. There is a continuity between our bodies now and our resurrection bodies, though they will be made different by the resurrection power and life of God.

This is confirmed by Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 15. Some within the Corinthian church were denigrating the body to the point of denying the truth or necessity of the resurrection. He defends the doctrine of the resurrection in light of the resurrection of Jesus (15:1–11), which guarantees the future resurrection of humans (15:12–34). Paul describes the resurrection through comparison with the body's present expression. Resurrected bodies will be continuous with present bodies just as a plant is continuous with the seed from which it springs. The mortal bodies are perishable and weak, but the resurrected bodies will be imperishable and powerful. The difference between the natural and glorified bodies is a difference of mortality, not a difference of embodiment.

God, who created humans as whole beings (comprised of body and an immaterial nature), intends for life in the age to come to be as whole beings. Redemption is not complete until our bodies are raised to life. The Bible presents human beings as whole unities, as bodies of dust initially



enlivened by the breath of God (Genesis 2:7) who will one day become bodies of glory energised by the Spirit of God. It is the resurrection even more than creation that highlights the sanctity of the human body. The Apostles' Creed insists that our ultimate hope is "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." Paul observes that although we groan in body and spirit now, "we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved." (Romans 8:23,24)

## **Conclusion**

The theology of the body as essential to our true self must be affirmed when dealing with gender incongruence. The desire of people who suffer gender dysphoria to find resolution by changing their body is a sign of the importance of the body to human identity.

In light of this biblical data, the ultimate aim in Christian discipleship is for each person to conform with the Lord Jesus Christ in every respect including coming to accept that the biological sex they were born with is a gift from God. Those providing pastoral care should have the same compassion Jesus had for people in this fallen world who were 'like sheep without a shepherd' (Mark 6:34). This can only be done by seeking God's grace in Jesus Christ and the wisdom to share his life transforming love and truth.

## **The Contemporary Context**

This section of the resource aims to give a brief understanding of the current situation in society. This situation is evolving as can be seen in constant news stories on transgender. It is important to be aware that, in providing pastoral care, making reference to stories in the popular media can be unhelpful for the person concerned or their families. What matters most is their own story and how God's story of his gracious, transforming love can shape their lives. However, understanding how society has arrived at this point is useful, especially in contrasting it with biblical values. The reality is, because of societal changes in the last few years, what was previously a very rare pastoral concern is a more common concern today, especially amongst younger people.

### **A societal shift in thinking about gender identity**

One of the most influential beliefs in society today is the rejection of 'given' identity in favour of 'self-identification'. The right to say – "I identify as" – is fast becoming one of the defining features of modern life. Identity is understood as fundamentally based on a person's freedom to choose his or her own meaning and form of life.

This is what has shaped the current debate around the nature and meaning of gender. The perception of gender (i.e. what is meant by male and female), previously determined by biological sex (i.e. physical characteristics such as sex organs, hormones and chromosomes), is now becoming more and

more reliant on the individual's perception of gender which may not correspond with their biological sex. Gender has become a contested term which now generally refers to the psychological, social and cultural aspects of being male or female. This has led to people identifying as 'transgender' which is to identify as the opposite gender to their biological sex. The term 'transgender' originated in the 1970s and medical procedures to change male or female characteristics were available shortly before then but the recent surge in the number of people identifying as transgender seems to be more to do with the rise of belief in self-identification. Recently, there has also been an increasing trend to claim that gender is fluid and not fixed.

The experience of those who have this struggle with the development of their gender identity is a hugely complex area calling for empathy and understanding as they are often confused, frightened and humiliated. Some people who were born male may not feel like a boy when they are older, or may prefer to dress in clothes or play with toys that other people say are "for girls". They may feel or say that they are a girl. In the same way, some children or young people who were born female might feel or say that they are a boy. Others might say that neither "boy" nor "girl" seems the right word for how they feel about themselves. Some adolescents who experience this difficulty in the development of their gender identity consider at some point having physical interventions such as puberty blockers. Young people who face these difficulties, and their families, can experience high levels of distress as their gender identity evolves. Puberty and the physical changes that it brings can be a distressing time for these young people.

Struggling with gender identity is not limited to younger people. Older people can experience this too, either as an ongoing struggle from when they were younger or something that happens later in life. This struggle used to be more evident in people who were older. Now, however, the focus has shifted to younger people.<sup>3</sup> This raises particular concerns because of children and young people under the age of 18 making potentially life altering medical changes before they reach adulthood.<sup>4</sup> More girls than boys identify as transgender.<sup>5</sup> This is possibly out of a drive to not identify with gender stereotypes.

There is deepening concern that the dominant force of society's view on transgender identity in the mainstream media, social media, legislation, policies and teaching in schools has an adverse influence on how young people think. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to speak against this prevailing worldview, even in academic studies.<sup>6</sup>

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3 NHS statistics illustrating the rise can be found here: <https://gids.nhs.uk/number-referrals> (accessed 11/02/2020)

4 Puberty blockers are a cause for concern: [www.transgendertrend.com/puberty-blockers](http://www.transgendertrend.com/puberty-blockers) (accessed 11/02/2020)

5 NHS statistics show a trend of nearly three times as many girls as boys with gender dysphoria: <https://gids.nhs.uk/number-referrals> (accessed 11/02/2020)

6 See for example: [www.theguardian.com/society/2018/oct/16/academics-are-being-harassed-over-their-research-into-transgender-issues](http://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/oct/16/academics-are-being-harassed-over-their-research-into-transgender-issues) (accessed 11/02/2020)

### **The current legal position in the UK and Ireland**

Currently, in order to be legally recognised in the UK as the opposite sex, individuals must live as that sex for two years and be medically diagnosed with gender dysphoria. The UK government is currently considering changes to the Gender Recognition Act, which could include ‘self-declaration’. In the Republic of Ireland, ‘self-declaration’ without medical intervention or assessment by the state has been in law since 2015 for any person over 18. In the two years following this change in the law, 230 people in the Republic of Ireland had been granted gender recognition certificates.<sup>7</sup>

‘Self-declaration’ is especially problematic when it leads to people who are biologically male wanting rights to access spaces for females such as bathrooms. Currently in the UK, no such accommodation is required by law for those who identify as transgender. In the Republic of Ireland, ‘reasonable accommodation’ is required which could include, for example, unisex bathroom facilities. However, schools<sup>8</sup> and other organisations often have their own policies which may allow biological males who identify as transgender access to bathrooms which were previously reserved for females.

### **The process of transition**

The following is a description of the potential transition process for someone who experiences a struggle with their gender identity. The description of this overall process is given here to provide information and insight without endorsing each course of action. As well as support offered by family, friends and church, there are a number of different levels of professional support for individuals. The number and type of interventions will vary from person to person both according to the intensity of their distress and their individual preferences.

#### *Psychological and social interventions*

The first level of support, which should be offered to anyone struggling with their gender identity, is offering a space to talk about and explore the way that they are feeling and reflect upon how this may impact on their day to day life. This may be done simply within a family, involving a counsellor, mental health professional (when under 18) or through a dedicated gender identity service. Often these early conversations involve thinking about the impact on how they feel about themselves, how this impacts on their relationships with other people, their social world and how this may impact on their educational or work environment. For

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7 Article in Irish Examiner: [www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/230-gender-recognition-certificates-issued-since-2015-450636.html](http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/230-gender-recognition-certificates-issued-since-2015-450636.html) (accessed 21/02/2020)

8 The Education Authority in Northern Ireland issued guidelines in October 2019 (see the further resources section for more details). These guidelines are not statutory and schools may produce their own guidelines. As of the date of publication of this resource, no central guidelines have been produced for schools in the Republic of Ireland but schools may produce their own guidelines.

those who also identify as followers of Christ there will be the additional challenge of attempting to navigate how this impacts on their faith and relationships within their local faith community.

Psychological and social interventions will usually take the form of attempting to resolve the impact of gender dysphoria through offering support to the individual and their family. When an individual finds that such support alone does not reduce their distress sufficiently they may choose to begin to identify more openly with their preferred gender. This might include:

- Changing their name to either a gender neutral one or one of preferred gender
- Making other people in the family/school or work community aware of their new name
- Asking to wear gender neutral clothing in school or wearing gender neutral clothing at home or work
- Beginning to talk to people around them about their gender identity experiences
- Starting to live openly within their preferred gender and socialise in that way
- Beginning to think about medical interventions

#### *Medical interventions*

A small number of persons experiencing gender dysphoria – that is not resolving despite psychological and social interventions – may choose to explore medical interventions. Any individual considering this course of action should be carefully assessed and monitored by mental health and medical professionals over a significant period of time. This is in order for the professionals to make a judgement as to whether they think intervention is appropriate for the patient. Medical interventions are a staged process with time and space to reflect before reaching a decision around progressing onto the next stage.

Medical interventions initially involve hormonal interventions with the first step being hormonal suppression during puberty (for younger persons usually over 16 years of age). There is the option of egg or sperm storage before the hormones are suppressed. Following this, again when assessed by professionals as appropriate, there can be an option of progressing onto cross-sex hormones. During this stage there is the introduction of hormones of the preferred gender which can allow some desired secondary sex characteristics to develop (e.g. for those identifying as male they may experience denser hair growth and lose body fat around the hips, for those identifying as females they may experience some breast development). Introduction of cross sex hormones is an option regarded as ‘partially irreversible’.

Finally, for the minority of persons experiencing gender dysphoria, when hormonal interventions fail to sufficiently resolve the distress, there can be the option of surgery to produce a physical body that more closely

resembles the gender they identify with. This course of action would be regarded as “irreversible”. In Northern Ireland surgery cannot be performed through the NHS until over 18 years of age.

## **The need for pastoral guidance**

### **Diversity and complexity in the experience of people with gender dysphoria**

This is a complex pastoral issue which nearly always involves more people than the person who is experiencing a struggle with their gender identity. The following highlights some of the reasons why great wisdom and compassion are needed in providing pastoral care.

There are a wide range of experiences of people with this struggle. To give but some examples, some struggle but don't pursue a change in gender identity, some may simply change their name, others may change how they dress and some may have hormone treatment and surgery. Some may wish to change back after taking steps to change their identity but find it impossible to do so after life altering surgery. We should not make assumptions about what people intend to do if they share with us that they struggle with their gender identity or it becomes apparent because they have taken a step, or steps, to change their gender identity.

People of all ages who struggle with their gender identity may be very reluctant to tell others because of fear and prejudice. Keeping their feelings hidden out of fear can have a significant negative impact on their mental health. Those who have taken steps to change their gender identity from their biological sex may also face difficulties. The steps they take may not resolve the mental health problems they may have. They may experience rejection from others around them because of the changes they have made. Their choices may also cause people close to them to struggle to come to terms with what they are doing.

It is important to be aware that sexuality and gender identity are not the same. Therefore, we should avoid talking about someone's sexuality when we mean their gender identity. Someone who identifies as transgender may or may not identify as gay or lesbian. People who are born with disorders of sex development<sup>9</sup> (a very rare occurrence) normally do not have the experience of gender dysphoria (see glossary and further reading).

### **The challenge for parents and others**

For parents there can be a major struggle of disagreeing with what their teenage or grown up child is doing and their innate love for their child. Difficult questions are raised like:

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9 Often labelled as 'intersex'

- Do we call them by their new name? Do we use their preferred pronouns?
- How can we show the same unconditional love for our child when we cannot agree with their lifestyle?
- How should we respond to relationships they form in their new gender identity?

Some parents come to terms with the issue by accepting and endorsing the choices of their child. Others feel they cannot do so and constantly live with the tension of wanting to show love to their child while not endorsing their choices. This is extremely difficult as it can be perceived as rejection. Keeping the lines of communication open is crucial even if the relationship becomes more distant.

It is important for parents to love their children and be there for them even when they cannot endorse all their decisions in life. This is not just a challenge faced by parents whose child identifies as transgender. Many parents whose children identify as gay or lesbian can find themselves struggling to affirm their child's choice of partner or other choices in life. Part of the cost of parenthood is to love and let go. Part of the cost of following Jesus is to love and not let go of his truth, yet to keep on loving.

For the wider church family, there is a similar challenge of being welcoming while not affirming every choice a person makes. The need for 'whole church' pastoral care is especially apparent in the case of a person who has taken very obvious and public steps to change their gender identity. But it is also important for the church family to care for and support someone who struggles with their gender identity and hasn't taken such steps, even if only a few people know because of the need for confidentiality.

Although there may be some differences in approach and circumstances, parents, other family members and those close to someone who has either identified as transgender or who is struggling with their gender identity, would benefit from applying the principles in this pastoral guidance. It will hopefully also be a reassurance to them that this is the recommended approach those providing pastoral care will take if and when they are able to meet the person.

## **Pastoral care: one to one**

### **Different scenarios**

How pastoral care is provided one to one for someone struggling with their gender identity, or someone close to them, will relate to a number of factors:

- If the person is a younger child, teenager (under 18), young adult or older person. If the person receiving pastoral care is under 18, pastoral conversations or prayer should always happen in a place where the adult providing pastoral care is visible to other adults (anyone providing pastoral care in this context must adhere to

the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Taking Care child protection guidelines).

- If the person is receiving medical advice or not.
- If the person has publicly taken steps to change their gender identity or not – and the extent of the steps they have taken (these range from a name change, dressing differently, hormone treatment to surgery).

### **A first conversation**

For a person wrestling with their gender identity but who has not taken any steps to change that identity, the decision to tell someone may have taken a long time. It is very likely they will have a fear of rejection and loss of love. It is therefore important that whoever they confide in, whether someone from the church, a family member or friend, understands that their first reactions have the potential to crush or bring hope. The person will pick up body language and attitude even more than words.

What the person does not need to hear:

- That they are imagining their feelings
- That they are sick
- That they are a disgrace

At this point they may not even need to hear what the Bible says about gender

What it may be helpful to hear:

- That they are loved
- That God's love has not changed
- That they have displayed great courage in telling you
- That you appreciate the trust placed in you
- That you will seek to listen and to understand what they have been going through

A useful principle to keep in mind is not to agree with anything you are not sure about.

### **The importance of confidentiality**

As in all pastoral care, keeping the pastoral conversation confidential is crucial. Even if the person has made a public change to their gender identity, what they share about their struggles is personal to them. Confidentiality also applies to what is shared by those close to the person, for example, their parents. Keeping confidentiality is critically important to the integrity of the person providing pastoral care and for creating a trusting pastoral relationship.

However, as in all pastoral care, absolute confidentiality cannot be promised. If the person is at risk of harm, for example, because of associated mental health concerns, other appropriate people should be informed (those providing pastoral care in a congregation should be trained and informed about this process for any pastoral situation). For further information on

mental health such as depression or suicide, see the resources listed at the end of this guidance.

In addition, it is wise for the person providing pastoral care to ask permission to share information with another appropriate person rather than carry the burden of pastoral care alone. This is especially the case in helping people who struggle with gender identity. It is unlikely the person providing pastoral care will have much experience or expertise in this area, even if they have read this guidance and the suggested resources.

### **Longer term pastoral care and discipleship**

The longer term aim of pastoral care is helping people to discover what it means to live a life faithful to God and then to help them live that life. In providing pastoral care, we can be preoccupied with what is right and what is wrong but the starting place is relationship building. Not all pastoral conversations will go as we would like. Relationship building can take time, patience, love and support. The work of caring for and growing disciples is lifelong. We do not expect believers to transform overnight into faithful disciples but to grow steadily in submission and obedience to Christ as they repent of sin and seek to grow in holiness. This is so for everyone, whatever their struggles may be.

As stated in the section on biblical foundations, the ultimate aim in Christian discipleship is for each person to conform with the Lord Jesus Christ in every respect including coming to accept that the biological sex they were born with is a gift from God. It may take years for a person to come to this acceptance and their struggles may never completely subside. This is true of any struggle to live according to God's ways in Christian discipleship. Therefore, anyone providing pastoral care and spiritual guidance requires commitment and patience.

Clearly the starting point is faith in Christ and expectations of people who do not profess faith in Christ are different. That is not to say that the biblical application of who we are does not apply to everyone but someone who does not profess faith is less likely to accept biblical direction for their lives. It may be the case that someone chooses a transgender identity over faith in Christ. In that case the long term approach is to pray for them and use the opportunities relationship building provides to reveal Christ to them in words, action and attitude.

As this is a struggle for their sense of identity, it will help for the Christian who struggles with their gender identity to understand their identity in Christ. Because this is an identity issue, without attacking their perceived gender identity, it can be helpful for them to know their identity is first in Christ if they have trusted in him and this takes precedence over and transforms all other labels of identity. Every Christian should realise more fully their sense of security in who they are in Christ because they are accepted by God and loved so much by him that Christ died for them. This will help any Christian not to seek their ultimate sense of security or acceptance in other ways of identifying themselves and to change how they think about other aspects of identity in light of his Lordship.



Principles for longer term pastoral care and discipleship are:

- (a) A deeper knowledge and understanding of the person's struggles with their gender identity through listening to them, those close to them, reading this guidance and further reading. At a basic level this includes understanding the terminology used – see the glossary for further information.
- (b) That we recognise that we cannot make the person's choices for them, we can only encourage them along the path of discipleship.
- (c) The pastoral carer must be aware of his/her own struggles in this or other related areas.
- (d) Quick prayers and chapter and verse sticking plasters are to be avoided.
- (e) Discipleship growth for believers over time should be nurtured, especially a growing biblical awareness of identity in Christ.
- (f) It will be an encouragement to surround a person with love, family, ongoing pastoral care and also to help them keep to what they have committed to in Christian discipleship.
- (g) We recognise, preach and practise the fact that failures and setbacks are often part of the discipleship journey for us all but that with God, forgiveness is possible and we can continue relying on his grace and strength.
- (h) The person being given pastoral care should not be ostracised (see further guidance in the section on pastoral care as a church family).
- (i) Those who provide pastoral care should be aware of their own limitations and knowledge, especially in the area of mental health.

### **The relationship between medical care and pastoral care**

Someone who struggles with their gender identity may already have contacted medical professionals. The advice from medical professionals may be in conflict with the longer term goal of Christian discipleship as described above. However, it is important to know that good practice medically is for the person to take the smallest steps possible to resolve the gender dysphoria with which they have been diagnosed. For example, that could be trying a name change for a period of time to see how that goes rather than the greater step of hormone treatment. Surgery is much further down the line.

Medical professionals should advise patients of the negative consequences of hormone treatment or surgery. It is important to be aware of this because someone who strongly desires to identify as a different gender may not be listening carefully to such advice. Exploring the implications with them could be helpful. Again, it is important to remember that ultimately it is their choice. All that good pastoral care can provide is to help them consider their choices well and to continue the pastoral relationship regardless of the choices made.

It is also very important to be aware of any associated mental health problems. People providing pastoral care should encourage someone who is struggling with their mental health to see their GP. Mental health awareness should be part of the training for anyone involved in delivering pastoral care (further resources are listed at the end of this guidance). While there is a long term goal in Christian discipleship, people providing pastoral care should be especially sensitive to any mental health difficulties and not expect or push for change too soon.

There is also the situation where someone comes to faith after having had extensive medical intervention and wishes to identify with their biological sex.

### **Pastoral care for people who de-transition from a transgender identity**

As more people transition to identify as transgender, a number have also had regrets about making physical changes whether through hormone therapy or surgery and wish to 'de-transition'. Not everyone has such regrets but those who do need pastoral care. Some changes may be difficult or even impossible to remedy and this can create challenges. For anyone who seeks to follow Jesus, their primary need is to know that, whatever struggles they have been through, their identity is foremost in Christ.

## **Pastoral care: as a church family**

The church has a crucial responsibility to create an environment of love, understanding, acceptance, patience, forgiveness, openness, truth, discipline and grace for everyone including those who struggle with their gender identity. The church fellowship should be like a good, loving parent making the church a safer, welcoming place.

### **Preaching and pastoral care**

Pastoral care is inseparable from the preaching of the Word of God. Often in preaching there is a temptation to forcefully engage in the 'culture war' against the trend to unquestioningly affirm transgender identity. However, the possibility that there are people listening who struggle with their gender identity or who know someone close to them experiencing such struggles must be considered. When the biblical position is presented in contrast to differing views, it should be done with a compassionate tone towards those who struggle.

It is also important to be factually accurate from the pulpit and to understand how language is used in this area (see the glossary for further information). This is not necessarily to affirm all the language used in this area but misunderstanding it or unintentionally misusing it will only further alienate people who may disagree with the biblical position.

Those who preach must remember that compassion begins in the pulpit and works out from there. Unbalanced condemnation from the pulpit closes the door to compassionate care outside the pulpit. Those who struggle with their gender identity, like those who experience same-sex attraction, should not be made to feel that they are being singled out. There are many different temptations and trials which people face in seeking to follow God faithfully.

### **Practical guidance for being a caring fellowship**

Every Christian is called to love other Christians and their neighbour, but those in leadership and those who have a particular responsibility for pastoral care and in youth work can lead by example. Doing this includes:

- (a) Promoting an atmosphere of understanding and acceptance of them as a person rather than fear and rejection.
- (b) Actively promoting church family fellowship and the inclusion of those who struggle with their gender identity. Living as the church in community with mutual love and responsibility for one another.
- (c) Encouraging open-door hospitality for everyone including practical arrangements.<sup>10</sup>
- (d) Being wise and sensitive in the use of names and pronouns. At an initial stage, to establish a relationship, it may be better to simply address someone who has identified as a different gender to their biological sex by their preferred name and pronouns. As the relationship develops, it would be helpful to have a conversation about this so that the person understands that your use of their preferred name and pronouns is out of courtesy rather than an affirmation of their changed sense of identity. Whatever approach is taken should take into account Christian conscience regarding speaking the truth in love with a strong sense of empathy for the struggles someone has with their gender identity.
- (e) As discipleship often happens best in small groups, actively encourage small group/home group involvement that includes openness and accountability for all. To this end, those in leadership should actively help youth and adult groups to be informed and compassionate

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<sup>10</sup> The use of toilets is an obvious area of concern. Providing a sign such as 'Toilet access for all' on a disabled toilet without obscuring the disabled toilet sign is a possible solution. In the UK, there is currently no legal obligation to allow people who identify as female but who are biologically male to use toilets designated for use by females (or vice versa). In the Republic of Ireland, steps that are reasonably practical should be taken to accommodate transgender people. Similar principles could be adopted for residential with young people where there is a concern over shared accommodation and wash facilities with private accommodation and bathroom being provided. It is best to discuss this with the people concerned first – especially the person with gender identity struggles and their parents if they are under 18. In providing consent forms for under 18's, it is useful to include a section where parents can mention concerns related to gender identity (or other concerns which are important for the leaders to know). Keeping the section general using wording such as 'Please provide any information that may be helpful for our leaders to know regarding your child' avoids creating undue attention to what is a relatively rare concern.

whilst still upholding the church's biblical position on this issue.

- (f) Explore the possibility of support groups (possibly linking several churches) both for those who struggle with their gender identity and their families.
- (g) Provide resources in the form of books, links to websites etc. to help individuals and their families and the congregation to be better informed about the issues involved.
- (h) If a minister, elders or others involved in pastoral care feel out of their depth especially in the area of mental health, don't opt for doing nothing. Actively seek out those who can provide care and help and refer on.
- (i) Accompany those seeking baptism or admission to full communicant membership on their journey of exploring and professing faith, especially in the exceptional cases in which an area of their life seems openly and obviously at odds with Christian beliefs, lifestyle or values.<sup>11</sup> Should such a situation arise, it is perhaps even more important for church members to actively show family love and care. Church members should not undermine decisions made by the leadership but could actively keep the door open with a person that they might be admitted to membership or restored to fellowship if church discipline was deemed necessary for someone who was already a member.
- (j) Be mindful that both adult and youth activities, particularly social events, should be truly inclusive. For example, it would be important to have quieter, smaller group activities as well as loud, large group games and sports. Be mindful of all personality types and areas of interest and promote a culture of interest and acceptance of all. It would also be important to be mindful of how difficult body image can be for anyone struggling with gender identity difficulties and be sensitive to this in any planned activities.

## Scenario 1

*The following is a fictional, illustrative scenario for pastoral care which presents a 'best case' story. As you read it, consider how the outcomes could have been less positive if best practice in pastoral care were not observed. In providing pastoral care, we rarely get it 100% right all the time and the best response when we do not is to say sorry and work on rebuilding the pastoral relationship. Bear in mind also, that even when best practice is followed, there are many factors outside the control of those who provide pastoral care.*

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11 Credible Profession of Faith and Admission to the Sacraments. Presbyterian Church in Ireland 2020. Section 4.

A young person (aged 16) in the youth fellowship you lead speaks to you privately and says that she wants no longer to be referred to as Gill but as John. She wants you to inform the group of this change. It doesn't take you entirely by surprise because you've noticed the way Gill dresses is ambiguous in terms of gender identity. Gill hasn't been part of youth fellowship for long. She was brought along by a friend who attends but has expressed a desire to follow Christ. Her parents do not attend church. As someone who provides pastoral care and discipleship for these young people how do you respond?

Initially, you realise the best thing you can do is listen. There is time to do this and you're in a public space where you can both be seen but not heard. You ask Gill if she can help you understand what brought about her decision to change her name. She tells you that she's felt for a long time that she is 'in the wrong body'. She's suffered from depression for which she has received some counselling. She believes her depression is related to her struggle with who she is meant to be and that she is meant to be a boy. Her parents have told her they love her no matter what. They've no problems with her name change as long as it makes her happy.

Having listened for a while and asked a few questions to help you understand better, you tell her it's important for her to know that God loves her and understands the struggles she is experiencing. You express to her that you are so pleased she is coming to the youth fellowship because of her interest in knowing God and the friendships she has there. You ask if she has made this known in school and she replies to say not yet. At this point, you say it would be good to chat more because it's a big step to take. You affirm Gill by telling her it's great that she has told you this and arrange a time to chat again soon. You ask her if you can speak to the minister about what she has shared with you so that you can know best how to support her, especially in her struggles with depression. She agrees and you breathe an inward sigh of relief that it's not all on your shoulders.

You meet with the minister who encourages you to keep meeting Gill but tells you to keep in touch and not to get out of your depth. You read the guidance and, thankfully, you see you've done okay so far by following general pastoral care principles you knew about already. But you realise that in this specific case there is going to be a challenge because, while you want to support and help Gill, biblically, you can't affirm her desire to change her gender identity.

Soon after, you meet Gill again. You ask her how she is and she says she feels fine at the moment. She asks if you have thought about her name change and telling the youth fellowship. You say it's not that you don't want to respect her wishes but it's important to take time to think these things through from the perspective of the Bible. You ask if she would be willing to do that. She looks a bit perplexed and says she didn't expect this. You're worried for a moment she's going to walk out on you but then you ask her if she wants to include her friend from youth fellowship too. She says yes and so begins a much prayed over process of meeting from time to time over a year or so to chat, study the Bible and pray.

In those conversations, you say that God wants us to know that, if we have trusted in him, we are loved and accepted because of Jesus and whatever we wish for or desire should be out of this place of safety and assurance. You also take time to explain from Genesis chapter one that, as a Christian, you believe God made people male and female and that a desire to change gender is at odds with what God has created.

During this time, eventually, Gill comes to a place where she accepts the biblical position. She now sees her identity centred on being in Christ and the assurance of being in that place with God has brought great peace to her. She is happy for the youth fellowship to engage with this biblical teaching too and specifically to share with them about her own journey. You're worried about how the youth fellowship will react, but you're pleasantly surprised at how accepting they are of Gill in her struggles. You're amazed that in Gill sharing what she does, how many other members of the youth fellowship open up about different struggles they have too. You tell Gill that this is down to God at work in her and her courage and conviction in following Christ.

## Scenario 2

*The following is a fictional, illustrative scenario for a caring church fellowship care which presents a 'best case' story. As you read it, consider how the outcomes could have been less positive if the congregational culture was different. Consider also how people in the congregation might respond pastorally if the response of the person who identifies as transgender had been different.*

Jamie is 25 and was born biologically male but has identified as female since late teenage years. Jamie prefers to be referred to as she/her.<sup>12</sup> Jamie has never been to church except for weddings and funerals. Jamie views church as 'transphobic' based on perceptions from the media but has a friend, Clare, at work who keeps asking Jamie to come and see church. Finally Jamie agrees to go.

There is a warm welcome before the service and Jamie enjoys the singing. Jamie even finds what the preacher has to say interesting and engaging. Clare notices that Jamie is relaxing and breathes a sigh of relief but as the service draws to a close, Clare is concerned about the social interaction afterwards. Normally Clare stays for tea and coffee but she's not sure about that today. While Jamie has made a lot of changes, Jamie's transgender identification is relatively obvious.

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12 For the purpose of this scenario, female pronouns will be used. This is not to affirm Jamie's choices of gender identification, rather it is to provide an empathetic understanding of Jamie's experience. Longer term, it is to be hoped that someone like Jamie would come to faith and, as a disciple of Jesus, come to a biblical understanding of gender identity.

Clare needn't have worried. As soon as the service is over, an older lady called Joan from the congregation comes over and says to Jamie, "Have you come here with Clare? You're very welcome". Jamie explains that Clare is a friend from work and has been asking for ages for Jamie to come to church. In the conversation, Clare notices that Joan is careful to use Jamie's name and not female pronouns. Later, in a conversation between the two of them, Joan tells Clare that she was fairly sure Jamie was transgender and because of that, she avoided using pronouns. Joan said she was thankful she could avoid any awkwardness because Jamie's name could be male or female.

The next week at work, Jamie tells Clare how enjoyable and welcoming church was. Jamie didn't feel judged and might even try it again sometime. This happens, and Jamie comes to church several times. Clare decides to take the next step and invites Jamie to her home group. Again, Clare is a little apprehensive about this step but she has a chance to speak with the group first. She tells the group to be sensitive to Jamie and help Jamie feel at ease. It helps that it's not the first time they've had someone who isn't a Christian come to the group.

The experience goes well and Jamie returns a second and third time. Clare decides that before Jamie's involvement with church continues much further, she needs to have an indepth conversation with Jamie about what the Bible says about transgenderism. She doesn't want Jamie to be put in the difficult position of being a minority of one against opposing views should the subject arise, so she decides it's better to have the conversation one to one.

They meet for coffee and, in the conversation, Clare carefully explains that God's grace is for everyone who believes but it means changes – and for Jamie, the most obvious and significant change would be addressing Jamie's transgender identification. Clare tells Jamie she's not saying this to impose her views or force a change but she wants to be open and honest about Christian belief based on what the Bible says. Jamie thanks Clare for her openness. Jamie is happy to agree to disagree with Clare because of the value of their friendship. And, in an answer to Clare's prayers, Jamie also agrees to disagree with the church's position but to keep coming because it has been such a positive experience. Clare's continued prayer is that Jamie would come to faith in Christ through encountering him through his people.

### Scenario 3

*The following is a fictional, illustrative scenario for pastoral care which presents a 'best case' story. As you read it, consider how the outcomes could have been less positive if best practice in pastoral care was not observed. In providing pastoral care, we rarely get it 100% right all the time and the best response when we do not is to say sorry and work on rebuilding the pastoral relationship. Bear in mind also, that even when best practice is followed, there are many factors outside the control of those who provide pastoral care.*

Following an evening service in the church focusing on 'suffering' you strike up a conversation with a middle aged woman named Jude who you do not know particularly well but have seen around the church at various events. She appears to be struggling but, despite some tentative questions from you, does not seem to want to talk anymore about it. You feel led to pray for Jude that an opportunity might come to try to get to know her a little better. In a few weeks' time you notice Jude sitting in church and decide to sit beside her. You learn that Jude previously attended another church for many years but, following the breakdown of her marriage, had left the church altogether for a short time before trying to find a church she could feel at home in. Jude and you appear to begin to relax in one another's company and you feel that over time a relationship is building.

One afternoon you get a phone call from someone within the church who has phoned to tell you that they have discovered Jude used to be a male before they 'came out' and their wife had subsequently ended the relationship. After prayer and reflection, you are able to recognise that this does not change your relationship with Jude and that, while you would like to be trusted with the journey she has been on in recent years, you have not been told first-hand about her history. You decide to not rush to do anything but again pray the opportunity will come up to speak to her about her life.

When you next see Jude in church you agree to meet for coffee and over coffee you gently explain that someone had passed on information about her past which (if it were true) must have been very difficult for her. You suggest that, if she wanted to, this was something you were happy to talk to her about. Jude looks really shocked, embarrassed and uncomfortable. She tells you that she thought this church may have been different from her last one but perhaps there was no place for her now that other people knew she had been born in a different body. You hasten to reassure Jude that the church cares about her and that she does have a place there, similar to everyone in the church family who all have their own sufferings and burdens to bear. You clarify that you are not intending to offer shame but to offer support.

Over time, through relationship with Jude, you become aware that she has legally changed her name and that she has had surgery to align her body to her identified gender. From what you learn this was a very difficult



path she felt she had no choice but to follow and lost her marriage and her home church in the process. As a result of all of this Jude has been battling a deep depression which is what led her back within the doors of the church. Jude would like to believe there is a God who can still love her, even if no one else can. You realise that Jude needs to experience God's love for her regardless of her gender identity and remind her that her identity in Christ surpasses any other identities she may have. You tell Jude that she is welcome in this church family and that you will continue to offer support and friendship to her, and that you are open to exploring further the impact her distress around her gender identity has had on her life. You reinforce that you are happy to be a fellow traveller on this journey, offering support along the way and engaging in Bible study together if this is something she would like to do.

You do not publicly share Jude's journey as this is a private matter and confidentiality is to be respected, but gain consent from Jude to share her struggle with the minister and some of the pastoral care team. You explain this would be done in the same way as you would when supporting any person with any pastoral care need within the church. In this way a number of people are aware of and praying that Jude comes to rediscover the love God has for her.

### Glossary of terms

The following is a glossary of words used in the context of gender identity.<sup>13</sup>

**Sex (biological sex)** – The definition of a person as male or female based upon sex organs, reproductive capacity and chromosomes. Surgery (often called 'transitioning') or the use of hormones does not alter biological sex.

**Gender identity** – A person's perception of having a particular gender, which may or may not correspond with their birth sex.

**Gender expression** – How a person expresses or publicly presents their subjective sense of gender.

**Sexual attraction/orientation** – Relates to who a person is attracted to based on their sex/gender in relation to other persons.

**Cisgender or Cis** – A contested term used to describe someone whose subjective sense of gender identity is the same as the sex they were at birth. The opposite of transgender. (cis = on the side of.)

**Gender** – This is becoming a more contested term and historically was often used interchangeably with sex. Today it is generally used to refer to the psychological, social and cultural aspects of being male or female and includes gender identity and expression.

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<sup>13</sup> This glossary is an edited version of the glossary which appears in the resource from the Evangelical Alliance, Transformed (used with permission).

**Gender dysphoria** – The discomfort or distress a person experiences due to a sense of ‘mismatch’ or incongruence between their gender identity and their biological sex.

**Gender fluidity** – Used by people who do not experience their sense of gender as fixed to either male or female but fluctuate on a continuum between the two.

**Gender Recognition Certificate** – A document allowing a person legal recognition under a new gender.

**Gender reassignment** – Medical intervention beginning with puberty blockers if appropriate and cross-sex hormones. Surgery can include complete hysterectomy, bilateral mastectomy, chest reconstruction or augmentation, genital reconstruction and certain facial plastic reconstruction.

**Genderqueer** – An umbrella term for gender identities which are not exclusively male or female. Other terms include non-binary, pan gender and polygender. In relation to this, Queer theory, as advanced since the early 1990s, has emphasised the socially-constructed nature of both gender and sexual identities.

**Intersex** – Intersex conditions are diagnosed and treated distinct from transgender and the two should not be conflated. Intersex is a term that describes conditions in which a person is born with ambiguous sex characteristics or anatomy – gonadal, genital or more rarely chromosomal – that do not allow clear identification as male or female sex.

**Non-binary** – An umbrella term used by those who don’t identify as male or female.

**Transgender** – This is an umbrella term to describe people whose gender identity is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were at birth. It is often shortened to ‘trans’.

## Further resources

The following resources are suggested for further reading.

### *Transformed: Understanding transgender in a changing culture*

This online booklet from the Evangelical Alliance provides a brief biblical and pastoral introduction to understanding transgender in a changing culture. It is available to download here: [www.eauk.org/resources/what-we-offer/reports/transformed-understanding-transgender-in-a-changing-culture](http://www.eauk.org/resources/what-we-offer/reports/transformed-understanding-transgender-in-a-changing-culture)

The Evangelical Alliance website also has two video stories highlighting the issues around pastoral care and people who identify as transgender.

*Transgender* by Vaughan Roberts (The Good Book Company, 2016)

A helpful short book (80 pages) explaining the complexities of the transgender questions from a biblical perspective with some brief pastoral advice in the last chapter.

*God and the Transgender Debate* by Andrew Walker (The Good Book Company, 2017)

A longer book than *Transgender* (176 pages) on what the Bible says on transgenderism including a pastoral response.

*Love Thy Body* by Nancy Pearcey (Baker Books, 2018)

A longer book (336 pages) on the practical theological importance of the body covering a number of related topics including transgenderism.

**The True Freedom Trust:** [www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk](http://www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk)

A UK based evangelical organisation. Their website has a number of helpful resources for individuals dealing with LGBT issues personally. They are available to call on +44 (0)151 653 0773 – personal support can also be requested via their website.

### **Education Authority guidelines**

The Education Authority (Northern Ireland) has produced guidelines for schools which are available here: [www.eani.org.uk/school-management/policies-and-guidance/supporting-transgender-young-people](http://www.eani.org.uk/school-management/policies-and-guidance/supporting-transgender-young-people)

The inclusion of this guidance document in this ‘further resources’ section is to provide information on what advice schools have been provided with. It was drawn up by a range of educational stakeholders, including the main churches. While not everyone may agree with everything contained within it, it represents the outcomes of much discussion and attempts to provide the consensual views of these stakeholders.

### **Resources on mental health**

Some people who struggle with their gender identity may have associated mental health problems such as anxiety or depression. Further information on mental health can be found in the extensive resource list here: [www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/Congregational-Life/Mental-Health-Resources-List.aspx](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/Congregational-Life/Mental-Health-Resources-List.aspx)

# GENERAL COUNCIL

## SECTION 3

### DECISION MAKING AND DISSENT WITHIN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND TASK GROUP

(This report was remitted from the 2020 General Assembly Standing Commission for consideration and decision at the 2021 General Assembly. The implementation dates have been adjusted accordingly.)

#### A. INTRODUCTION

1. The General Assembly in 2019 agreed that the report of the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group be sent down to presbyteries for discussion and comment. The presbyteries approached the request for comments in a number of ways. Some asked a task group to form a report which was debated at presbytery. Others considered the response over two presbytery meetings and a few arranged special meetings of presbytery and had round-table discussion inviting interested elders from congregations to take part.
2. The Task Group was pleased to have received responses from all 19 presbyteries and was encouraged by the manner in which the report was received, and by the constructive contributions that were offered in the replies.
3. The Task Group had suggested some relevant background papers in the 2019 report. The feedback from presbyteries highlighted some additional papers in particular which the Task Group noted.
  - (a) Papers listed in 2019 report:
    - 1974 Report re ‘A Brief Statement concerning Faith and Order’
    - 1981 Doctrine Committee Report re ‘Subscription to Creeds and Confessions’
    - 1990 Report of the Judicial Commission re ‘Liberty of Conscience’
    - 2014 Report of the General Board re ‘Freedom of Individuals to Express Opinions’
  - 2018 General Council Report (extracts)
  - (b) Additional papers highlighted by Presbyteries:
    - The 1979 Judicial Commission report re ‘Formula of Subscription’
    - The 1982 Judicial Commission Report re ‘Memorial of the Rev W.W. Porter’

- The 1988 General Assembly Minutes re Westminster Confession of Faith (the interpretation of the Pope as the Antichrist)
4. The presbyteries were asked some focused questions on section (C) of the 2019 report, which referred to ‘Areas in which greater clarity is needed and where there is room for improvement’. The presbytery responses highlighted some main issues for further consideration by the Task Group, namely:
    - (a) The need to improve how significant issues come to the General Assembly for decision – support was indicated for the introduction of a ‘Green Paper’ process.
    - (b) The need to re-examine how the General Assembly conducts its business - including the role of retired ministers in General Assembly decision making.
    - (c) The need to bring greater clarity regarding the standing of General Assembly decisions and the meaning and scope of dissent.
    - (d) The need to improve how General Assembly decisions/policies are communicated.
    - (e) The need to clarify how General Assembly decisions/policies can be changed.

## **B. TOWARDS A NEW PROCESS FOR BRINGING REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

5. It was noted that there was significant support for wider consultation prior to important decisions being made or policies finalised. More ‘conference style’ meetings to help shape policy were commended, as was a compulsory ‘Green Paper Consultation Stage’ prior to significant new policies being decided by the General Assembly. It was also noted that the volume of routine business, generated on an annual basis by Assembly bodies, leaves little space or time for strategic thinking and significant debate at the General Assembly each year.
6. ‘Conference style’ meetings could take a number of forms:
  - One large conference in the Assembly Hall with, say, 6-8 representatives from each presbytery, involving input from ‘experts’, facilitated discussion round tables and structured feedback.
  - A number of similar regional conferences, combining four or five presbyteries, allowing for a greater number of participants.
  - Presbytery-based conferences, with each congregation having a number of representatives. ‘Expert’ input could be by coordinated video presentations or even ‘live streamed’ input and interaction.
7. In light of this feedback from presbyteries, the Task Group considered a number of options regarding how the General Assembly receives reports and makes decisions and brings the following four recommendations for consideration by the General Council and, if agreed, by the 2020 General Assembly:

**Recommendation 1:**

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

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

**Recommendation 2:**

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

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

**Recommendation 3:**

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

- (a) together meet with the Lord – listening to his Word, coming to him in prayer and gathering at his Table;

- (b) consider strategic and significant policies and decisions (including formal Green Paper Reports);
  - (c) receive reports on a rotation basis from selected councils and commissions (mostly on a biennial basis);
  - (d) deal with essential annual business;
  - (e) greet and hear from representatives of partner Churches.
8. It was noted that even when the General Assembly sets a remit for a piece of work, a council or a dedicated task group carrying forward that remit may need guidance between meetings of the Assembly. This could include a need to consider adjusting the remit, guidance as to the scope of the recommendations to be brought to the General Assembly, or to find ways to address unforeseen consequences that have arisen during the process. This would require reflection by a body independent of the group taking forward the original remit. Such monitoring is especially important when issues are being considered that are potentially controversial, or may have significant impact on the Church.
9. The Task Group therefore concludes that a new General Assembly Committee is required, under the General Council, to fulfil this important role of monitoring and advising as outlined. This senior committee could also usefully encompass the roles currently carried out by the current Moderator's Advisory Committee. The Task Group therefore brings the following recommendation for consideration by the General Council and, if agreed, by the 2020 General Assembly:

**Recommendation 4:**

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

- (a) to take on the current remit of the Moderator's Advisory Committee;
- (b) to recommend to the General Assembly (or General Council) that a 'Green Paper Consultation Stage' be triggered (as outlined above);
- (c) to monitor the progress of remits set by the General Assembly;
- (d) to recommend to the General Council that a remit be adjusted, with the General Council having authority so to do;
- (e) to give guidance as to the scope of the recommendations to be brought to the General Assembly from a remit;
- (f) to address unforeseen consequences that have arisen during the process of carrying forward a remit.

**C. TOWARDS A NEW PROCESS FOR CONSIDERING REPORTS AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

10. It was agreed by presbyteries, and is unquestionably desirable, that every opportunity should be taken to enable wider and fuller participation by representatives during the General Assembly. The question of increased involvement by elders, women and younger people during the Assembly is being considered by the Making the General Assembly More Accessible

Task Group and it is expected that an agreed strategy to assist their participation will be recommended at the 2020 Assembly.

11. The question of business being done in private was given little support by presbyteries, and it was agreed that there should be no change in the present arrangement of all proceedings being conducted in public except for the business of the Judicial Commission or where issues relating to a specific individual are being addressed.
12. Many presbyteries suggested that there should be a greater use of electronic facilitation of Assembly business. For example, all reports, along with supplementary reports and minutes, should be provided in full electronic/digital format. The Task Group agreed that this is the direction of travel for the future, and brings a suitable recommendation below for consideration by the General Council and, if agreed, by the 2020 General Assembly.
13. It is recognised that Christ is always present in his Church and governs it by God's Word and Spirit. The General Assembly is the supreme court of the Church and, in humble obedience to Christ, it discharges its authority and governance responsibilities. It is imperative that the members of the General Assembly acknowledge the authority of the Assembly and fully respect the procedures and practice of the court. All members of the Assembly should be equally valued and feel their presence is significant and recognised. All those participating should be treated with proper regard and dignity.
14. Retired ministers are recognised for their experience and expertise and are of exceptional value to the Church. The pastoral work carried out in retirement, and the preaching ministry they continue to conduct is widely recognised. Many presbyteries depend on the availability of retired ministers to oversee vacancies and fulfil presbytery responsibilities. The contributions of retired ministers to the debates of the General Assembly are also recognised. Their wisdom and experience are invaluable and acclaimed. The question of their right to vote was the main issue that concerned presbyteries. The Task Group suggests a change regarding the voting rights of retired ministers and brings a suitable recommendation below for consideration by the General Council and, if agreed, by the 2020 General Assembly.
15. For the sake of good decision-making, all ordained ministers actively serving the Church, along with all representative elders, are reminded that they have an obligation to attend the courts of the Church and participate, as appropriate, in their presbytery and in the General Assembly.
16. In light of above points, the Task Group brings the following recommendations for consideration by the General Council and, if agreed, by the 2020 General Assembly:

**Recommendation 5:**

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



**Recommendation 6:**

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

**D. TOWARDS GREATER CLARITY REGARDING THE STANDING OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECISIONS AND THE MEANING AND SCOPE OF DISSENT.**

17. Overwhelmingly presbyteries concurred with the emphasis the Task Group gave to two key points which were noted in its report to the 2019 General Assembly, namely that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is both a confessional Church and a Presbyterian Church.
18. PCI is a confessional Church:
- (a) The Rule of Faith (Code Pars 10-14) states:
    - (i) *10. The Word of God as set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and the supreme standard of the Church.*
    - (ii) *11. It is the privilege, right and duty of every person to examine the Scriptures, and each individual is bound to submit to their authority. Having formed a definite conviction as to what the will of God is upon any subject, it is each person's duty to accept and obey it. In exercising this God-given right of private judgment, individual Christians are not to set their reason above the Word of God, or to refuse light from any quarter. Guided by the Holy Spirit, they are to use their reason to ascertain the divine will, as revealed in Scripture, and are to refuse to subject conscience to any authority except that of the Word of God. In the words of the Westminster Confession "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship."*
    - (iii) *12. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, as a witness for Christ, has adopted subordinate standards. In these are found what the Church understands the Word of God to teach on certain important points of doctrine and worship. These subordinate standards are a testimony for truth and against error, and serve as a bond of union for members of the Church.*
    - (iv) *13. The Confession of Faith (as approved by the Church of Scotland in her Act of 1647), and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, prepared by the Westminster Assembly of Divines, are the subordinate standards of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Accepting these subordinate standards, the Church holds that civil rulers must be obedient to Christ in their own*

*area of authority, yet they ought not to attempt, in any way, to constrain any person's religious beliefs or intrude upon their rights of conscience.*

- (v) **14. The Church alone** has the right to interpret and explain her standards, under the guidance of the Spirit of God.
- (b) The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, though a democratic Church in its decision-making processes, is not at liberty to simply change its core principles and policies as 'demanded' by the ever-changing culture in which it seeks to witness. Rather, the Church stands firm on the foundation of its supreme standard, with its primary loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ, the sole King and Head of the Church.
- (c) PCI's subordinate standards are "a testimony for truth and against error, and serve as a bond of union for members of the Church." Policies are developed and decisions taken within that doctrinal framework.
- (d) In the light of both feedback from presbyteries and further discussion, the Task Group has come to the view that there is a need for the 1974 report 'A Brief Statement concerning Faith and Order', to be updated with a contemporary statement on faith and order. The Task Group therefore brings the following recommendation for consideration by the General Council and, if agreed, by the 2020 General Assembly:

#### **Recommendation 7:**

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

#### 19. PCI is a Presbyterian Church

- (a) Key decisions are made by ministers and elders meeting together in 'representative gatherings' (Code Par 19):
  - 19(1) The Presbyterian Church in Ireland shall be governed by presbyters in representative assemblies, otherwise known as the courts of the Church. These courts comprise Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries and the General Assembly.*
- (b) The General Assembly is a coming together of ministers and representative elders from every PCI congregation (Code Par 104):
  - 104. (1) The General Assembly is the supreme court of the Church, representing in one body the whole Church, including all subordinate courts and particular congregations, and acting as its supreme legislative, administrative and judicial authority, in dealing with all matters brought before it.*
- (c) The General Assembly is not simply a meeting, but rather it is the Presbyterian Church coming together to make decisions together - with every congregation represented by its minister and representative elder, both of whom have full and equal voting rights in that decision-making process.

20. The fact that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is both a Confessional Church and a Presbyterian Church has certain clear implications. Chief among these are:
- the fact that “The Church alone has the right to interpret and explain her standards, under the guidance of the Spirit of God” (Code Par 14)
  - the fact that “Decisions of the Assembly are final and binding upon the whole Church...” (Code Par 104(3))
21. However, not every policy or every doctrinal statement, has the same standing. Some matters are part of PCI’s subordinate standards; some matters are set out in PCI’s constitution (the Code); and some matters are policy or statements agreed by the General Assembly, often following on from a detailed report and debate on the underlying biblical principles involved. Some policy matters or doctrinal positions may be outlined in all three of these ways – a sort of ‘triple lock’ of reference in the subordinate standards, inclusion in the Code and the subject of a detailed Assembly report and related decision.
22. The Task Group agreed that there is a need to be clear regarding the nature of specific decisions made by the General Assembly, therefore it brings two suitable recommendations below for consideration by the General Council and, if agreed, by the 2021 General Assembly.

### **The Meaning and Scope of Dissent**

23. It was agreed by the Task Group that the term dissent is misunderstood. The common use of dissent in the public square and in the media, as a difference of opinion or disagreement with a majority position or opposition to the policies of a governing body, is different from how dissent is defined in the courts of the Church. There is the need for education and clarification in regard to what it means to dissent within the General Assembly and other courts of the Church. Members of the General Assembly can dissent from a decision and express their dissent by recording their disagreement, but are obliged to implement the policy of the Church.
24. It was agreed that this be termed ‘formal dissent’ from decisions of the General Assembly and that this should be clarified by small amendments to the Code, and the insertion of the relevant sections of the Code in the guide to Assembly Procedure, the yellow pages of the Assembly Reports, as follows:

*Code Para 104(3)*

*“Decisions of the Assembly are final and binding upon the whole Church, but a member of the Assembly who dissents from a decision may require a statement of the fact of his **formal** dissent to be recorded in the minutes, although he shall not thereby free himself from obligation loyally to implement the decision so long as it stands unaltered.”*

*Code Para 147(6)*

*“Any member of the court may object to the adoption of any resolution by the court and, in the case of an inferior court, if the objection be not sustained may formally dissent and appeal to a superior court.”*

*Code Para 160(2)*

*“Formal dissent relieves of all responsibility for the taking of the decision incurred, but does not exempt members from obedience to any law or injunction of the Church, nor from the obligation to implement the decisions of Church courts, until these may have been reversed or altered by the processes of complaint or appeal, or other due consideration by the court.”*

25. To be clear, a presbytery or kirk session cannot formally dissent from a decision of the General Assembly. Indeed, the Code states that, “no inferior court has a right to review the proceedings of a superior or co-ordinate court.” (Code Par 21(4)). However, when generally discussing a decision of the General Assembly, a presbytery or kirk session could (for instance) resolve, without challenging that decision, to express its concern regarding the implementation of the decision and also seek guidance to assist in that regard.
26. The issue of more general dissent, especially in light of today’s culture, and how dissatisfaction with, or opposition to a policy can be expressed, is different for members of the Church and for those who are in the ordained leadership of the Church (both ministers and elders).
  - (a) Those who are in the wider membership of the Church have greater freedom to hold/promote views at variance with the formal position of the Church. They are not bound by subscription to PCI’s subordinate standards, nor have they taken on the responsibility and constraints of leadership. However, all members of the Church should seek in debate and discussion to “continue in the peace and fellowship of the people of God” (Code Par 6).
  - (b) For ministers and elders, debate and discussion can of course also take place outside the formal structures of the Church, both in private discussions and in more organised ways. However, ministers and elders have ‘subscribed’ and, through ordination vows, have taken on the responsibility and constraints of leadership. This has implications in relation to the freedom of ministers and elders to hold/promote certain views at variance with the clear position of the General Assembly.
  - (c) There are, however, some areas regarding which the PCI has decided that its ministers and elders can hold a different belief than that stated in the WCF, e.g., the role of civil magistrates (in the Code); the view of the Pope (by GA resolution); and a certain liberty of conscience regarding the ordination of women (Judicial Commission report and GA resolutions).

- (d) Generally speaking, any public debate involving ministers and elders of the Church should seek to avoid discourse that “gives rise, or may give rise, to scandal injurious to the purity or peace of the Church” (Code Par 132(1)(b)). Ministers and elders of the Church should ensure that by their public comments they do not bring the Church and its agencies into disrepute. Ministers and elders should also ensure that their public statements do not equate to an open declaration of their intention to take actions that would lead to defiance of, or disobedience to, the courts of the Church – contumacy as defined in Par 132(b) of the Code.
  - (e) In the light of both feedback from presbyteries and further discussion, the Task Group concluded that the principles enunciated in this report should replace the more limited 2014 report “Freedom of Individuals to Express Opinions”.
  - (f) Some presbyteries have raised the specific issue of the confidentiality of private sessions of presbytery and General Assembly. It should be noted that when a Church court sits in private, the only thing that can be communicated outside of that meeting is the decision arrived at during the private session. For any member, minister or elder, to break the confidence of a private session of presbytery or General Assembly is a direct defiance or disobedience to the courts of the Church.
27. In light of above points, the Task Group brings the following recommendations for consideration by the General Council and, if agreed, by the 2020 General Assembly:

**Recommendation 8:**

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

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

**Recommendation 9:**

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

**Recommendation 10:**

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

**E. TOWARDS IMPROVING HOW GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECISIONS/POLICIES ARE COMMUNICATED**

28. While it is recognised that this is an urgent matter, there is a need for the improved communication of General Assembly decisions and policies to be considered as part (albeit an important part) of an overall review of PCI’s communications strategy. Therefore, the matter is referred to the Communications and Strategy Task Group under the General Council.

**Recommendation 11:**

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

**F. TOWARDS CLARIFYING HOW GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECISIONS/POLICIES CAN BE CHANGED**

29. It is of the essence of church government within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland that members of the General Assembly be free to debate reports presented to the Assembly, oppose the conclusions of those reports and seek to have those conclusions rejected. Likewise, though obliged to loyally implement the decisions and policies of the General Assembly so long as they stand unaltered, members of Assembly are free to seek to overturn or alter those decisions or policies. Such debate and efforts to overturn or alter the policies of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland should, however, primarily take place within the General Assembly itself and through the procedures laid down in the constitution of the Church.
30. While through a competent memorial to the General Assembly a kirk session or presbytery can seek a change in the policy of the Church, that process can seem opaque to many, if not somewhat antiquated in its form. There is also a lack of clarity as to how members of the General Assembly can table additional resolutions to a particular Assembly report and exactly what issues these can and cannot address. Therefore, the Task Group brings the following recommendation for consideration by the General Council and, if agreed, by the 2020 General Assembly:

**Recommendation 12:**

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

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

NOBLE McNEELY, Convener

## **VOWS FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP AND BAPTISM TASK GROUP**

(This report was remitted from the 2020 General Assembly Standing Commission for consideration and decision at the 2021 General Assembly.)

1. In the report to the 2019 General Assembly the Implementation Task Group referred to the variety of vows that appeared to be used within the PCI at admission both to baptism and to full membership. The Implementation Task Group asked that steps be taken to clarify the vows to be used at admission to baptism and to full membership.
2. The General Assembly agreed the following resolution: The General Assembly instruct the General Council to appoint a task group to recommend how best to clarify the vows taken at admission to full membership and at baptism, with a report coming to the 2020 General Assembly.
3. At the meeting of the General Council on 10 October 2019 the Vows for Full Membership and Baptism Task Group was appointed, with the following membership:  
Moderator and Clerk; Convener of General Council (Convener); Rev Dr David Cupples and Mr Tom Finnegan (Council for Congregation Life and Witness); Very Rev Principal Stafford Carson, Prof John Gillespie, Rev Mairisine Stanfield (Doctrine Committee); Prof Drew Gibson (Professor of Practical Theology); Rev David Bruce (Secretary to a former revision group).
4. The task group met on four occasions, on 11 November and 9 December 2019, 27 January and 24 February 2020. It was agreed that the issue of various vows being used was prevalent in the church, and it was apparent that ministers were using a variety of resource material for the administration of baptism and for a service of admission of new communicants.

5. The task group consulted some recognised resources that are commonly used by ministers:
  - Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland (1940)
  - Book of Public Worship of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (1965)
  - Public Worship, an Experimental Revision (Public Worship Committee, PCI, 1989)
  - Book of Public Worship (Board of Mission in Ireland Worship Panel, 2011)
  - Book of Public Worship (Council of Mission in Ireland, 2016, on PCI website).
6. In addressing how best to clarify the vows taken at admission to communicant membership and at baptism the task group agreed to compose vows which expressed:
  - belief in the triune God
  - commitments made were dependent on the grace of God
  - the prayerful support of the congregation for those making the vows
7. The task group presents in the three appendices below the vows to be taken at admission to communicant membership, the baptism of infants and the baptism of believers, and recommends the use of these vows at services of admission to communicant membership and baptism.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **VOWS TAKEN AT ADMISSION TO COMMUNICANT MEMBERSHIP**

1. Introduction. What is the purpose of making vows at the time of membership?
  - 1.1 These vows are an expression of God's covenant with his people. This is an important milestone on a person's journey as a disciple of Christ, signifying both their commitment to God, and His to them. These vows mark the progress from baptism to full communicant membership of Christ's church.
  - 1.2 These vows are an individual's statement of belief in the triune God, and include commitments they will wish to make in His service. As such, they are not to be made without careful consideration, counting the cost.
  - 1.3 The taking of these vows marks a moment when a person publicly identifies as a follower of Jesus Christ. They confirm a person's membership of the church of Jesus Christ more widely, and this local congregation in particular.



## 2. The Vows

**In becoming a communicant member of the congregation:**

- (a) Do you believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? (I do)
- (b) Depending on the grace of God:
  - (i) Do you trust in Jesus Christ alone, as your Saviour from sin and as Lord of your life? (I do)
  - (ii) Do you promise to live as a follower of Jesus Christ, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit? (I do)
  - (iii) Do you commit as a communicant member of this congregation, to worship, serve, give and participate fully in its life and witness? (I do)

**Affirmation by the congregation to new communicant members.**

*(This could be read out by the minister, an elder or the entire congregation together.)*

As a community ruled by God the Father, redeemed by God the Son and led by God the Spirit, and in welcoming you as new members to this church, we too make these affirmations:

We affirm the apostles' faith and the covenant calling of our baptism to be the people of God.

To you we say, "Join us as we worship Him together".

We humbly share our commitment to live together as a community seeking to be obedient to Jesus in everything. There is no part of our life together which we refuse to submit to his Lordship.

To you we say, "Join us as we live for Him together".

We confidently declare our intention to be witnesses to Christ's transforming presence in our community and beyond, and commit to supporting this mission by praying, giving and working.

To you we say, "Join us as we serve Him together".

## **APPENDIX B**

### **VOWS TAKEN AT THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS**

**In presenting this child for baptism:**

- 1. Are you affirming your belief in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? (I am)
- 2. Depending on the grace of God:
  - (a) Are you trusting in Jesus Christ alone, as your Saviour from sin and as Lord of your life? (I am)
  - (b) Are you committed to living as a follower of Jesus Christ, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit? (I am)

- (c) Are you willing to provide a Christian home, and bring up your child in the worship and teaching of the church, so that he/she may come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour? (I am)
3. **Commitment by the congregation:**  
As we receive (name) into the fellowship of the Church, do you promise with God's help, to be faithful in prayer, spiritual nurture, Christian example and influence, for him/her and his/her family? (We do).

## APPENDIX C

### VOWS TAKEN AT THE BAPTISM OF BELIEVERS

#### **In presenting yourself for baptism:**

1. Do you believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? (I do)
2. Depending on the grace of God:
  - (a) Do you trust in Jesus Christ alone, as your Saviour from sin and as Lord of your life? (I do)
  - (b) Do you promise to live as a follower of Jesus Christ, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit? (I do)
  - (c) Do you commit as a baptised member of the Church, to worship, serve, give and participate fully in its life and witness? (I do)
3. **Commitment by the congregation:**  
As we receive (name) into the fellowship of the Church, do you promise to join with him/her in the life of prayer, worship and service that we, together, offer to God? (We do)

NOBLE McNEELY, Convener

## **SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN CHALLENGING TIMES TASK GROUP**

1. The Task Group - entitled “Supporting Families in Challenging Times” - consists of the Rev Richard Houston (Convener); Miss Karen Jardine (Secretary); the Moderator and Clerk of the General Assembly; Rev Joanne Smith; Rev Peter Dickinson; Rev Stephen Lowry; Mr Tom Finnegan along with academics and health and social care professionals from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
2. The stated purpose of the Task Group is to “review and develop our pastoral care for women and families affected by pregnancy crisis, pregnancy loss, the diagnosis of a life-limiting condition and other related circumstances and that this should include support for those caring for children and young people with disabilities”.
3. The Task Group identified three priority areas of, (i) training in ministry, (ii) education in congregations, and, (iii) resourcing for pastoral care, and its recommendations (below) were subsequently adopted by the General Assembly Standing Commission in June 2020:
  - (a) That the Task Group engage with the relevant departments in Union Theological College to discuss the provision and development of education for students who are training for pastoral ministry in a new ethical and moral context.
  - (b) That the Task Group liaise with the appropriate council(s) to ensure a cohesive approach to resourcing and educating congregations in their ministry and witness to families who are experiencing pregnancy crisis, pregnancy loss, the diagnosis of a life-limiting condition and other related circumstances.
4. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the Task Group has been unable to meet since February 2020 and will not have completed its work in the originally anticipated time-frame.
5. The Task Group was given permission by the General Council to resume its work by considering how the identified priority areas of, (i) resourcing, (ii) equipping and, (iii) signposting, might be progressed with a view to bringing forward concrete recommendations to the 2022 General Assembly.

RICHARD HOUSTON, Convener

# GENERAL COUNCIL

## SECTION 4

### UNITED APPEAL COMMITTEE

The Committee has met on three occasions during 2021:

- On 4 February 2021 to consider the response to the 2020 Appeal
- On 11 February 2021 to consider revised Council budgets for 2020 and 2021 with the view to recommending the level of an Appeal for 2021 to the General Assembly Standing Commission
- On 23 June 2021 to consider Council budget submissions for 2022 and to agree recommendations to the General Council for an Appeal and grants to Councils for that year.

Appendix 1 includes a summary of the Income and Expenditure Account for United Appeal (showing actual results for 2018, 2019 and 2020 and projections/budgets for 2021 and 2022).

#### A. THE 2020 APPEAL

At the meeting on 4 February 2021, the Committee considered the response to the 2020 Appeal and the financial outturn for that year. The accounts for 2020 show that £3,057,174 was received against the 2020 Appeal of £3,600,000. Despite this shortfall, the Committee acknowledge that this is still a significant response from congregations in the midst of a year largely dominated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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

- (a) 148 congregations contributed above their target (2019:167, 2018: 195, 2017: 219)
- (b) 181 congregations did not achieve their target (2019: 61, 2018:124, 2017:109)
- (c) 144 congregations contributed to their target exactly (2019:177, 2018:187, 2017: 188).

The accounts also showed that £165,388 had been received in 2020 relating to earlier years' Appeals (2019:£166,044, 2018:£118,943, 2017:£158,847).

At the time of writing a further £305,849 has been received as “late contributions” for the 2020 Appeal and therefore 93.4% of the Appeal has now been received.

The Committee noted that all Councils had been asked to prepare revised budgets for 2020 and 2021 at the end of 2020 and it was agreed to meet

again to consider these. It was also agreed to award Council grants for 2020 based on 90% of the grants agreed at the General Assembly in 2019 for the 2020 Appeal. This was consistent with the established practice of providing Councils with a monthly grant of 7.5% and retaining 10% pending consideration of the response to the annual appeal. It was also agreed that any further adjustment arising from Councils' revised budgets for 2020 and 2021 should be made when determining grants for 2021.

The following grants were approved for 2020:

	Grants 2020 (per GA Reports) £	Grants awarded for 2020 £
Mission in Ireland	1,065,000	958,500
Global Mission	1,065,000	958,500
Congregational Life and Witness	720,000	648,000
Training in Ministry	375,000	337,500
Social Witness	245,000	220,500
General – Creative Production	230,000	207,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,700,000</b>	<b>3,330,000</b>

## B. THE 2021 APPEAL

At the meeting of the United Appeal Committee on Thursday 11 February 2021, a detailed report on Council revised projections/budgets for 2020 and 2021 was considered. It was agreed to recommend grants to Councils based on these revised budget submissions and reflecting a “Covid-19 adjustment” (for cost savings and income changes) as follows:

	Normal Grants 2020 and 2021	Less: Grant awarded in 2020	Less: Covid-19 Adjustment	Grants for 2021
Mission in Ireland	2,130,000	(958,500)	(447,000)	724,500
Global Mission	2,130,000	(958,500)	(110,000)	1,061,500
Cong. Life and Witness	1,440,000	(648,000)	(390,000)	402,000
Training in Ministry	750,000	(337,500)	–	412,500
Social Witness	490,000	(220,500)	(45,000)	224,500
General – CPD	460,000	(207,000)	(130,000)	123,000
	<b>7,400,000</b>	<b>(3,330,000)</b>	<b>(1,122,000)</b>	<b>2,948,000</b>

It was also agreed to recommend that the normal level of the Appeal should be kept before congregations and therefore the Appeal for 2021 should be:

	£
Proposed Gross Appeal for 2021	3,600,000
Covid-19 Adjustment	<u>(300,000)</u>
Net Appeal for 2021	<u><u>3,300,000</u></u>

These recommendations were approved at a meeting of the Special General Assembly Standing Commission on 19 February 2021.

It was also agreed that a £300,000 Covid-19 adjustment should apply for the 2022 Appeal. This means that through the reduced level of grants in 2020 and the “Covid-19 Adjustments” to 2021 and 2022 Appeals, any “savings” as identified in Council revised budgets have been “passed down” to congregations.

Council revised projections for 2021 reflect some revisions to staffing levels, assume Council staff will return to normal duties from 1 September 2021 and the ending of income from the Job Retention Scheme which is due to finish at the end of September. The anticipated re-organisation costs have been shown as a cost within United Appeal rather than in individual Council budgets.

### C. THE 2022 APPEAL

The Committee met on 23 June 2021 to consider Councils’ budget submissions for 2022. These submissions included revised projections for 2021, budgets for 2022 and comparative figures for 2020. The submissions were accompanied by a letter explaining the rationale for the amount requested and any key assumptions made.

The normal practice when annual budget requests are submitted is that interviews are held with representatives of each Council. At those meetings the representatives are able to explain their Council’s requests and the Committee has an opportunity to ask any relevant questions. In light of ongoing Covid-19 restrictions interviews were not held and any queries were relayed to Councils via the Financial Secretary. The following are the key points identified from the request:

#### Mission in Ireland

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Request/ Grants	1,065,000	724,500	958,500	1,065,000

- (a) Capital Projects in 2021 include Maynooth £1m (new Church Building), Donabate £500k (Site), Greystones £200k (Church Extension) and in 2022 Donabate £1m (new Church Building) and Fermoy £100k (Repairs). These projects are to be funded from bequests received in 2020, amounts received from various Presbytery

Schemes (“amalgamation funds” i.e. Gt. Victoria Street, South Belfast and Fortwilliam), the proceeds from sale of Boyle Church and the proceeds from the sale of three Irish Mission Worker Properties (Mullingar, Letterkenny, Cork - estimated proceeds £700k).

- (b) A new Rural Chaplain to be appointed in September 2021. This was previously approved by the Priorities Reference Panel but the appointment has been delayed.
- (c) Additional staff at International Meeting Point (IMP2) (North Belfast) to be funded from Shankill Road Mission Fund.
- (d) Anticipated reduction in funding from Presbyterian Women.
- (e) Home Mission - Income from congregations budgeted to increase as some deaconesses have been furloughed in 2020 and 2021 and some new deaconesses have been commissioned in 2021/2022.
- (f) Mission Office costs reduced due to staff restructuring. These are charged 50% to Mission in Ireland and 50% Global Mission.
- (g) Budget for four Irish Mission Workers in 2022, one retired end of 2020.
- (h) Nightlight project ended during 2020.
- (i) Budgeted for improved uptake of Irish Mission Fund and Mission Support grants.

**Global Mission**

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Request/ Grants	1,000,000	1,061,500	958,500	1,065,000

- (a) 30 Global Mission workers supported in 2022. Covid-19 has caused travel restrictions and disruption to education of children.
- (b) Budgeted for increase in grants to partner churches to “normal” levels in 2022.
- (c) Anticipated reduction in funding from Presbyterian Women.
- (d) Wembley, London property rented and not sold as originally anticipated.
- (e) 44 Marlborough Park sold at end of 2020 which was slightly later than hoped but first potential buyer pulled out around start of pandemic.
- (f) Mission Office costs reduced due to staff restructuring. These are charged 50% to Mission in Ireland and 50% Global Mission.

**Congregational Life and Witness**

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Request/ Grants	640,000	402,000	648,000	720,000

- (a) Significant proportion of this Council's costs are its staffing team. Savings budgeted due to some staff restructuring.
- (b) Assumed activities will return to normal levels in 2022 with some resources being delayed to post Covid. Move to more digital resources but printed resources did generate some income.
- (c) Cost of "For Now" resource funded through designated "Familybooks Fund" and not through United Appeal.
- (d) Change to Counselling arrangements with first point of contact moved to CCLW office and then referred to counsellor.
- (e) Budgeting to return £50,000 to United Appeal at end of 2021.

### Training in Ministry

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Request/ Grants	375,000	375,000	337,500	375,000

- (a) Majority of Council funding (£357,000) goes towards Union Theological College.
- (b) Projections for UTC fee income based on estimated number and fee rates and a detailed analysis by course.
- (c) Transition to new arrangement with St Mary's has been deferred one year to September 2022. Budgeted for agreed support during transitional period from Incidental Fund and Trustees Discretionary Fund as approved by Assembly Finance & Staffing Commission (2019).
- (d) Significant repair issues re the Library and College heating system. Also new door access system required. These are to be part funded from bequest income.
- (e) Revised College Staff Team to include 3 Professors, 5 Lecturers, 2 Library staff and 6 Support staff including Head of Academic Administration and Head of Operations.

### Social Witness

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Request/ Grants	249,900	224,500	220,500	245,000

- (a) United Appeal funding is towards central CSW staff including Taking Care.
- (b) Some anticipated staff savings in 2021 (part year) and 2022 due to staff restructuring.
- (c) No direct United Appeal contributions to CSW projects (residential homes etc.).



- (d) Council retains substantial cash reserves although these are reducing as United Appeal Funding is not covering budgeted levels of expenditure.
- (e) The Council Secretary is due to retire on 31 October 2021. A recruitment exercise for a replacement is underway with a view to accommodating a handover period.

### Creative Production Department

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Request/ Grants	207,000	123,000	207,000	230,000

- (a) No income from Herald in 2021 but sufficient reserves to support normal “internal charge” for CPD staff time.
- (b) No changes to staffing levels anticipated with continued used of “bought in” resource budgeted.
- (c) Budget includes normal web site support costs (hosting fees and security licenses) and a provision for minor faults and basic updates. A major upgrade is planned but it is expected this will be funded through the Incidental Fund.

In summary, the requests received are as follows and, based on the Committee’s review along with other information received, the recommended grants for 2022 are as follows:

	Request Received £	Recommended Grants £
Mission in Ireland	1,065,000	1,065,000
Global Mission	1,000,000	1,000,000
Congregational Life and Witness	640,000	640,000
Training in Ministry	375,000	375,000
Social Witness	249,900	245,000
General – Creative Production	207,000	200,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,536,900</b>	<b>3,525,000</b>

For Councils it has been challenging to prepare budgets when the timing of any return to “normal” or the “new normal” remains unclear. In general terms, it has been assumed that the situation with the pandemic in 2022 will allow Councils to return to what might be considered a more normal range of activities. However, in some cases, this may mean a change to how activities are delivered with, e.g., an increasing use of digital formats for resources or in some cases as a means of delivering some events or training. Council budgets for 2022 reflect the full year impact of the staffing changes referred to above.

It is noted that the Council for Congregational Life and Witness is proposing to return unused grants of £50,000 at the end of 2021.

It is recommended that the Appeal for 2022 be:

	£
Proposed Gross Appeal for 2022	3,600,000
Covid-19 Adjustment	<u>(300,000)</u>
Net Appeal for 2022	<u><u>3,300,000</u></u>

MARTIN HAMPTON, Convener  
CLIVE KNOX, Financial Secretary

UNITED APPEAL						
ACTUAL ACCOUNTS FOR 2018, 2019 and 2020 and PROJECTIONS FOR 2021 and 2022						
	Actual 2018	Actual 2019	Actual 2020	Budget 2021	Projection 2021	Budget 2022
	£	£	£	£	£	£
THE APPEAL	3,550,000	3,600,000	3,600,000	3,600,000	3,600,000	3,600,000
COVID REDUCTION				-300,000	-300,000	-300,000
NET APPEAL	3,550,000	3,600,000	3,600,000	3,300,000	3,300,000	3,300,000
<b>INCOME</b>						
Congregations (current year) - Note 1	3,291,684	3,302,058	3,057,174	3,150,000	3,150,000	3,150,000
Congregations (prior years) - Note 2	118,943	166,044	165,388	170,155	305,000	150,000
Donations and Bequests	39,293	101,341	33,411	10,000	10,000	10,000
Income from Trust Funds	28,698	28,698	29,228	24,445	25,508	26,571
Investment Income		0	768	768	670	698
Bank Interest	6,487	8,867	7,986	7,500	5,000	5,000
	3,485,105	3,607,008	3,293,955	3,362,868	3,496,178	3,342,269
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>						
Redundancy Costs			15,386	90,000	90,000	
Promotional costs	16,874	8,463	4,554	10,000	10,000	10,000
	16,874	8,463	19,940	100,000	100,000	10,000
<b>Grants to Councils</b>						
Mission in Ireland	1,050,000	1,065,000	958,500	724,500	724,500	1,065,000
Global Mission	1,050,000	1,065,000	958,500	1,061,500	1,061,500	1,000,000
Congregational Life & Witness	720,000	720,000	648,000	402,000	402,000	640,000
Training in Ministry	370,000	375,000	337,500	412,500	412,500	375,000
Social Witness	245,000	245,000	220,500	224,500	224,500	245,000
General Council - Creative Production	230,000	230,000	207,000	123,000	123,000	200,000
	3,665,000	3,700,000	3,330,000	2,948,000	2,948,000	3,525,000
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>3,681,874</b>	<b>3,708,463</b>	<b>3,349,940</b>	<b>3,048,000</b>	<b>3,048,000</b>	<b>3,535,000</b>
<b>SURPLUS / (DEFICIT) FOR YEAR</b>	<b>-196,769</b>	<b>-101,455</b>	<b>-55,985</b>	<b>314,868</b>	<b>448,178</b>	<b>-192,731</b>
Gains / Losses on investments			303			
Returned by CCLW	90,000				50,000	
OPENING RESERVES	2,186,178	2,079,409	1,977,954	1,922,272	1,922,272	2,420,450
CLOSING RESERVES	2,079,409	1,977,954	1,922,272	2,237,140	2,420,450	2,227,719
<p>Note 1. The normal pattern of congregations forwarding their contributions to the annual Appeal is such that not all of these are received by the closing date of the Appeal. Some contributions are received after the closing date and are recorded in the following years as "prior year contributions".</p> <p>Note 2. While the response to the 2020 Appeal was encouraging the response to the 2021 and 2022 Appeals is uncertain at this stage as is the timing for the receipt of contributions from congregations (i.e. will these be received before the closing date for the appeals (which is usually around end of the January) or will there be an increase in late contributions. (i.e. received after the closing date) . It has been assumed that for both years the Net Appeal of £3,300,000 will be achieved (see figures below).</p>						
<b>Percentage of Appeal received</b>						
Congregations (current year) - Note 1	3,291,684	3,302,058	3,057,174	3,150,000	3,150,000	3,150,000
Congregations (prior years) - Note 2	166,044	165,388	305,000	150,000	150,000	150,000
	3,457,728	3,467,446	3,362,174	3,300,000	3,300,000	3,300,000
Percentage of gross appeal	97.4%	96.3%	93.4%	91.7%	91.7%	91.7%
Percentage of net appeal	97.4%	96.3%	93.4%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

## NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

1. The Nominations Committee has met once since the last General Assembly.
2. While members of the Committee had been able to interview conveners and identify nominations to fill the gaps early in 2019 we would like to thank the former Deputy Clerk for drawing together these recommendations for last year's Assembly
3. Those appointed to fill gaps in the past few years to serve a full four-year term would normally be contacted when they enter their fourth year. In light of the impact of Covid-19 on the ability of councils and committees to meet, it was decided to pause this process for 2021.
4. However, as usual there were a number of people who have stepped down as conveners and from memberships of councils and committees and needed to be replaced.
5. Nominations to convenerships are contained in an appended resolution while nominations to membership of councils etc. will be contained in the Nominations Booklet.
6. At the time of writing this report, the work of approaching folk to fill the vacancies remaining is underway. It is hoped that those gaps will be filled by the time the Nominations Booklet is printed. It is helpful if those intending to resign from membership of a council or committee give notice in good time for a replacement to be found for nomination to the following General Assembly, that is, by the preceding January. It should be noted that, apart from direct presbytery nominees and some ex-officio members, vacancies that arise during the year cannot be filled until the following General Assembly.

JONATHAN CURRY, Convener

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE GENERAL COUNCIL FOR NEW AREAS OF WORK

1. The General Council, in its overall coordinating role, has the responsibility to bring to the General Assembly recommendations for new areas of work that could be necessary or beneficial to take forward over the coming years. In considering what areas of work to recommend to the 2021 Assembly to be taken forward, two key factors were considered:
  - (a) Firstly, at every level PCI is still both ‘living with Covid’ and also attempting to reconfigure and revitalise ministry and mission in the aftermath of the last 15+ months – do we have the energy and capacity to engage in significant new areas of consideration, no matter how worthy in themselves? If we have some energy and capacity, what are the priorities?
  - (b) Secondly, the 2021-22 year is going to be shorter than normal, if that isn’t too Irish a statement! The 2021 Assembly will be in October 2021, and the 2022 Assembly most likely returning to normal in June 2022. That means any reports commissioned in October by the 2021 Assembly would have to be submitted for collation in mid-March 2022 – five months later. Should therefore any significant work commissioned by the 2021 Assembly aim to report to the 2023 Assembly, with a ‘work in progress’ brief report to the 2022 Assembly?
2. At this particular time, having come through the long months of the Covid-19 pandemic, at its meeting at the end of June 2021 *the General Council agreed to recommend to the 2021 General Assembly that the following areas of work to be taken forward:*
  - (a) A review of governance structures during the last period and the drawing up of recommendations to enable the 2022 General Assembly to put in place agreed governance structures and mechanisms for any future such situation which might arise.
  - (b) The drawing up of an overarching denominational communications strategy (planned work on this having to be set aside over the last period) – with an interim report to be brought to the 2022 General Assembly and full report to the 2023 General Assembly.
  - (c) An examination of the key principles and practicalities that will underpin a radical reconfiguration of ministry in the light of changing demographics and ministry and mission opportunities – with a report to be brought to the 2022 General Assembly.
  - (d) A detailed consideration of the subject of ‘virtual communion services’, to enable the General Assembly to come to a final and settled mind on the matter – with a report to be brought to the 2023 General Assembly.

TREVOR D GRIBBEN, Clerk of Assembly

## MAKING THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MORE ACCESSIBLE TASK GROUP

(This report was remitted from the 2020 General Assembly Standing Commission for consideration and decision at the 2021 General Assembly. The implementation dates have therefore been adjusted accordingly.)

1. The remit of the task group was given in the amended resolution 30 of the General Council at the 2019 General Assembly, ‘That the experimental evening session be continued in 2020 and that a task group be appointed to further consult and explore ways to make the General Assembly even more accessible for those who have found attending difficult.’
2. Changes to the Assembly should not inhibit its function as supreme court of the Church or hinder its voting membership of ministers and ruling elders from attending and making decisions, but the courts of the Church also make room for other voices such as young people and women and even among voting members of the court there are imbalances in attendance and participation. For example, it is easier for retired elders to attend than working elders; ministers speak considerably more often than elders; and it is harder for people outside the Greater Belfast area to attend. To ensure a range of voices were listened to, the Task Group included an elder and minister from the Republic of Ireland and from Northern Ireland outside the Greater Belfast area, two under 30s representatives, and the proposer of the amendment to resolution 30. To facilitate their attendance, the Task Group met on three Saturday mornings in Portadown. Consideration was given to feedback received from presbyteries, a congregation, and individuals, about the proposals brought to the 2019 Assembly, correspondence from ministers outside the Greater Belfast area, feedback from council conveners and secretaries, and ideas discussed at the General Council and the General Assembly Business Committee since 2015.
3. This report will be considered at the Assembly by people who are already able to attend because the present arrangements suit them. It is important to “look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4). Taking this attitude himself, Christ has richly blessed us through his sacrifice; how richly might the Church now be blessed if all at the Assembly adopted this attitude, seeking the benefit of others even when we might personally be inconvenienced, promoting a greater breadth of participation in the courts of the Church?
4. The task group identified several areas where accessibility could be improved:
  - (a) **Enabling attendance** by people who find it difficult to come because they work or study in the daytime on weekdays, particularly those who have to travel a large distance (para 5–6).
  - (b) **Encouraging attendance** when people are able but lack motivation (para 7).

- (c) **Enabling participation** in the Assembly by people who are unfamiliar with the business or the procedures (para 8–11), and by a greater range of people than it is possible to have speaking at the front (para 12).
- (d) **Encouraging participation** when people are not confident that their voice will be listened to (para 13).
5. Several models for enabling attendance by those who can't come in the daytime on weekdays were considered:
- (a) **Pre-2018** model with all business during the day.
- (b) **Four evenings** with one item of business each. On the basis of feedback from 2019, evening business would have to start later than 7pm so that people outside Belfast have time to arrive, but not finish any later than 9pm, so that there is time to get home, leaving room for only one item of business.
- (c) **Business on Saturdays.** To maximise the value of taking a day off as well as coming on Saturday, this model includes two items of evening business on the Friday. In contrast to model (b), the timing of these sessions is aimed at maximising the business that can be attended on a single day rather than increasing accessibility for people coming after work. This model also reduces the number of alternative presentations to two (one of which would be Listening to the Global Church). This enables the Assembly to be shortened, with the opening night on Wednesday evening, the midweek celebration on Thursday evening, the Lord's Supper on Friday morning, and the close of business taking place on Saturday afternoon. An example timetable is shown in Appendix 1.
6. To compare these models, 13 business items were counted (11 for councils, 1 each for Linkage Commission and Private Business). The number of sessions accessible by different groups of people under each model is shown in the following table (white shading indicates the model which provides the greatest accessibility for that group; black indicates the least). Saturday business clearly benefits the widest range of people while having the fewest drawbacks – all groups can attend at least five items of business – whereas in the pre-2018 model only one group can attend more than four sessions of business.

Model	Can attend only in the day	Can attend evenings and Saturday only	Can attend one weekday + Saturday	Can attend Saturday only
(a) Pre-2018	13	0	4	0
(b) Four evenings	10	4	3	0
(c) Saturday business	11	6	10	5

7. Each minister and elder vows at their ordination that they “accept the Presbyterian form of Church government to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and ... promise to yield submission in the Lord to the courts of this Church and to take your due part in the administration of its affairs” (The Code, 205(4)V and 212(5)(vi)). Congregations benefit when those called by God sacrifice their time in order to serve on kirk session. The higher courts of the church also call for sacrifice of time, but through this the wider church is blessed. The alternative, personally neglecting the courts or discouraging participation by others, would be a violation of ordination vows and a form of unfaithfulness to the Lord that weakens the Church. Ministers should encourage elders to attend, by instruction and example, and both should encourage other attendees. Informing the congregation and kirk session soon after the Assembly about the relevance and significance of the business, with comments from those who attend, could also help with this.
8. Those who do attend the Assembly may nevertheless find it difficult to participate because the publication of the Annual Reports in May leaves little time to become familiar with ~300 pages of reports and resolutions. Earlier publication is not possible, but the Assembly could be moved later, to the 3rd week of June, providing more time for reading and preparation.
9. Even with added time, the reports may be difficult to understand for those who have not been involved in the work of the councils during the year or at the previous Assembly. To equip attendees, presbyteries could hold a meeting after publication of the Annual Reports, allowing attendees to ask questions about reports and procedures. Direct Presbytery Nominees should be able to explain the business of their council. There are already opportunities to do this in a limited way at meetings of presbytery. If the Presbytery Representative Elder from a kirk session was also their General Assembly Representative Elder then that elder should be better informed, both to participate at the Assembly and implement decisions at the Presbytery level.
10. Understanding of issues could also be improved if councils ran local events during the year throughout Ireland, briefing attendees about their work and soliciting feedback. Changing terminology such as ‘memorials’ and ‘overtures’ to plainer language could also help. Further thinking along these lines would best be carried out by the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group and the Code Republishing Panel.
11. A well-prepared attendee may nevertheless find it difficult to speak at the Assembly. The Moderator promotes balanced debate with input from a range of people and range of views, but may have difficulty distinguishing between a young elder and an under 30s representative, or a voting member and an attendee with power to deliberate. Visual aids could help with this. Lanyards consisting of a coloured neck strap and a name badge, similar to the ones used for staff and visitors in Assembly Buildings, could indicate who people are, e.g., blue strap for voting members, red for non-voting. This could also help with greeting people at coffee times and could provide a storage pouch on the back of the badge for voting cards.



12. There will always be a limited number of people who can speak to an issue. To facilitate broader participation, especially from those who are nervous about speaking at the front, coloured cards could be provided as a way for attendees to express their views in an indicative manner while debate is still ongoing. Some other assemblies and conferences provide cards coloured red on one side and blue on the other which attendees hold at chest level (not up in the air like voting cards) during a discussion to indicate whether they are warming to the motion (red) or cool to it (blue). This would provide another way for people to participate and help the Moderator to judge whether more speeches are needed for or against a motion.
13. Struggles at the Assembly to facilitate and encourage more representative attendance and participation are a symptom of broader cultural issues in the Church that cannot be addressed solely at the Assembly. People will be more confident that it is worth participating during the week of the Assembly if they are confident that they have a meaningful say in the work that happens during the year through councils, commissions, and committees. Conveners and council secretaries have an important role in encouraging people to speak up at meetings, sharing out responsibilities, and allowing contributions meaningfully to shape the work. People will also be more confident that it is worth participating in the supreme court of the Church if they are confident that they have a meaningful say in the work of lower courts. Moderators of presbytery (and clerks) need to be proactive in encouraging people to contribute and giving them responsibilities. Ultimately this begins in congregations where ministers need to encourage and equip elders to participate at kirk session and shape the life of the local congregation, and provide ways for others to express their views for consideration by the kirk session.
14. **In the light of the above, the Task Group presented the following to the General Council on 19 March 2020 and these were agreed as Recommendations to the General Assembly (dates adjusted in light of report being dealt with by the 2021 Assembly):**
  - (a) That business be scheduled on Saturdays, along with the other changes to facilitate this, as described in paragraph 5(c).
  - (b) That ministers and elders carefully consider their moral obligation to participate in the General Assembly, and encourage attendance by example and instruction.
  - (c) That the General Assembly start on the third Wednesday of June.
  - (d) That each presbytery run an event each year between the publication of the Annual Reports and the start of the General Assembly to help attendees understand the content of the reports and the procedures of the Assembly, and that the Arrangements Panel of the General Assembly Business Committee work with the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to create a short video for use at this event, explaining Assembly procedures.

- (e) That each kirk session consider appointing the same person to be their representative elder at both presbytery and the General Assembly.
- (f) That the Arrangements Panel provide visual aids as described in paragraphs 11 and 12.
- (g) That conveners, moderators, and clerks at all levels reflect on how they encourage people to participate in the courts of the Church.
- (h) That these changes be trialled for a five-year period, beginning with the 2022 Assembly and a full review be carried out at the 2026 Assembly.

JONATHAN BOYD, Convener

## APPENDIX 1

### Example model of the Assembly with Saturday business

	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
10:00		10.00 GABC 1, Report of Presbyteries, Reception of Delegates	10.00 Linkage Commission	10.00 Private business
10:30				10.30 Coffee
11:00		11.00 General Council Section 1	10.45 Trustees, Nominations, Memorials 11.15 Intermission 11.30 Worship incl. The Lord's Supper	11.00 General Council Section 4
11:30				
12:00				
12:30		12.45 Lunch	12.45 Lunch	1.00 Lunch
13:00				
13:30		1.45 Alternative presentation: Listening to the Global Church	1.45 Alternative presentation	2.00 Council for Mission in Ireland
14:00				
14:30		2.45 Coffee	2.45 Coffee	3.00 Coffee
15:00				
15:30		3.15 Council for Training in Ministry	3.15 Council for Global Mission	3.30 General Council Section 5
16:00		4.15 Council for Social Witness	4.15 General Council Section 2	4.30 Lapsed business
16:30				
17:00		5.15 Dinner	5.15 Lapsed business	5.15 GABC 2
17:30			5.30 Dinner	5.30 Closing worship
18:00			7.00 Council for Public Affairs	7.00 Council for Public Affairs
18:30				
19:00		7.00 Opening Night with worship		
19:30				
20:00	8.30 Finish	7.45 Evening Celebration with worship	8.00 General Council Section 3	
20:30		9.15 Finish	9.00 Finish	
21:00				

## REPORTS OF PRESBYTERIES

The **ARDS PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev G.J. Kennedy is their Moderator; that the Rev J. McC. Auld, Minister Emeritus, RE Teacher, died on 28 April 2020; that the Rev David Johnston, Minister Emeritus (Released), of First Newtownards, died on 4 September 2020; that the Rev D.G. Bailie, Minister Emeritus (Released), of West Church, Bangor, died on 13 November 2020; that the Rev W.G. Cameron, Minister of Glasry & Kircubbin, retired on 30 April 2020; that the Rev James Campbell, Minister of First Newtownards, retired on 31 October 2020; that the Rev J.M. Browne, Minister of First Donaghadee, retired on 31 January 2021; that the Rev S.A. Little, Minister of Shore Street, Donaghadee, retired on 28 February 2021; that the Rev C.W.A. Jones, Minister of Regent Street, Newtownards, resigned his charge on 11 September 2020; that the Rev Lesley-Ann Wilson, Minister of Ballycrochan, resigned her charge on 31 October 2020; that the Rev M.R. Catney, Minister of Second Newtownards, was loosed from his charge on 7 January 2021 and was retained as a Minister without Charge under the care of Presbytery; that the Rev Andras Gilicze, presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and was installed to the charge of Carrowdore & Ballyfrennis and Ballyblack on 23 November 2020; that the Rev Christoph Ebbinghaus, presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and was installed to the charge of Hamilton Road, Bangor on 5 January 2021; that the Rev C.W.A. Jones, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ards and was inducted to the work of Chaplain to Her Majesty's Forces on 12 September 2020; that the Rev. Enrique Tagle-Aguiar presented credentials from the Presbytery of Carrickfergus having been assigned as Assistant to St. Andrew's, Bangor; that Mr R.R. Tregaskis was given credentials to the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs C.D. Mawhinney, Lesley-Ann Wilson and M.R. Catney; as an assistant, Rev Enrique Tagle-Aguiar; as licentiates, Mr Ben Johnston, Mr David Morrison and Mr Seth Wright; as students, Mr Paul Bradley, Mr Andrew Frazer and Mr Wallace Moore; that they held Consultations at Ballycrochan and First Donaghadee; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **ARMAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev P.W.A. McClelland is their Moderator; that the Very Rev Professor J.S. Carson, Principal of Union Theological College, retired on 31 December 2020; that the Rev Dr Z.J. Cole presented credentials from the Presbytery of Dromore and was inducted to the work of Lecturer in Biblical Studies on 20 August 2020; that Mr J.M. Haugh presented credentials and was received as licentiate transferring; that Mr J.U. Torrens was given credentials to the Presbytery of Down; that Mr R.J.E. Hill was licensed on 9 October

2020 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Iveagh; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev Dr J.W.P. McConnell; as licentiates, Mr J.T. Graham, Mr J.M. Haugh and Mr Philip Houston; as students, Mr Mark Hawthorne and Mr Scott McMenemy. that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of Congregations are being printed separately.

The **BALLYMENA PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev N.G. Mulholland is their Moderator; that the Rev W.J.A. Armstrong, Minister Emeritus (Released), of Second Broughshane died on 21 February 2021; that the Rev Dr D.A. Murphy, Minister of Cuningham Memorial, Cullybackey, retired on 4 June 2020; that the Rev M.J.O. Currie resigned his charge as Minister of Churchtown on 19 March 2020 having received and accepted a call from First Cookstown and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Tyrone; that the Rev D.C. Millar, Minister of Grange with Craigmore, was loosed from his charge on the grounds of medical incapacity on 30 June 2020 and became a Minister without Charge under the care of Presbytery; that Mr. R.W. McFaul, a licentiate under the care of Presbytery, having been reassigned to First Randalstown and Duneane, was given credentials to the Presbytery of Templepatrick on 22 June 2020; that under their care are: as a Minister without Charge, the Rev. D.C. Millar; as a licentiate, Mr. Chris Wilson; as Students for the Ministry, Messrs: M.J.K. Kelso, B. Abwa, M.R.T. Rodgers, M.J. Delaney and M.W.H. Houston; that no Consultations were held during the year; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **NORTH BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Dr W.J.M. Parker is their Moderator; that the Rev C.I. McKnight, Minister without Charge (retired) died on 6 April 2020; that the Rev R.N. Agnew, Minister Emeritus, West Kirk Belfast, died on 30 September 2020; that Rev J.R. Dickinson, Minister of Carnmoney, retired on 31 December 2020; that Rev Reuben McCormick, Minister of Ballysillan, resigned his charge on 16 June 2020 and was installed to the charge of Glengormley on 17 June 2020; that Dr J.N. McCracken was licensed on 27 September 2020 and given credentials to the Presbytery of East Belfast; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, the Revs Dr L.E. Carroll, Samuel Newell, W.A. Shaw and F.W. Vincent; as licentiates, Mr Peter Burke, Mr David McCarthy (formerly in an Assistantship); as students, Mr Stephen Gaston and Mr Matthew Horner; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of Congregations are being printed separately.

The **SOUTH BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev B.J. McCroskery is their Moderator; that the Rev M.S. Gault, Minister of Cooke Centenary, retired on 28 February 2021; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs Dr L.H. Eagleson, K.M. Mbayo

and Dr P.G. McDowell; as students, Mr P. Lutton; that the Rev J.D. Maxwell, Minister without Charge, ceased to have that status on 17 February 2021; that they held Consultations at Townsend Street; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **EAST BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev W.A. McCully is their Moderator; that the Rev W.J.R. Robinson, Minister Emeritus (Released), of McQuiston Memorial, died on 16 December 2020; that the Rev W.H. Peden, Minister Emeritus (Released), of Megain Memorial, died on 2 February 2021; that the Rev K.A. McBride, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 6 July 2020; that the Rev T.J. Stothers, Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly retired on 31 October 2020; that the Rev A.T.F. Johnston, Associate Minister of First Holywood, resigned his charge on 26 March 2020 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Down; that the Rev Christoph Ebbinghaus, Minister of Kirkpatrick Memorial, resigned his charge on 4 January 2021 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ards; that the Rev J. S. McCrea, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal and was installed to the charge of First Holywood on 25 November 2020; that Mr P.A. Boyd was licensed on 30 September 2020 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Dromore; that Dr J.N. McCracken presented credentials from the Presbytery of North Belfast and was received as a licentiate; that the Rev Andras Gilicze was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ards; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, the Rev J.M. Casement, the Rev W.J. Harshaw (retired), the Rev Dr D.J. Montgomery, the Rev Dr M.J. Welsh; as a licentiate, Mr Sam Bostock (formerly in an Assistantship), Dr J.N. McCracken; as Minister transferring, Rev M. Gilicze; as students, Mr N. Stewart and Mr A. Ferguson; that they held Consultations at McQuiston Memorial; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **CARRICKFERGUS PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev. N.W. Duddy is their Moderator; that the Rev W.A. Watson presented credentials from the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal and was installed to the charge of Cairncastle on 13 December 2020; that the Rev. M.F. Russell presented credentials from the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal and was installed to the charge of Ballycarry on 7 January 2021; that the Rev J.P. Moxen presented credentials from the Presbytery of Templepatrick and was installed to the charge of Ballyclare on 7 January 2021; that the Rev Enrique Tagle-Aguair (Transferring Minister) was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ards; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev T.N. Bingham; as Minister transferring, Rev L.C. Orban; as licentiates, Mr Campbell Mulvenny, Mr Gareth Keaveney; that Mr C.M.S. Barron (licentiate without charge), consequent on his ordination and installation to Whitehead Congregational Church, had his licence withdrawn with

effect from 18 October 2020; that there were no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations, in the prescribed format, are being published, printed and distributed as appropriate.

The **COLERAINE AND LIMAVADY PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev R.J. Collins is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr W.W. Porter, Minister Emeritus (Released) of Moneydig, died on 2 August 2020; that the Rev Frank Russell, Minister Emeritus of Castlerock, died on 19 October 2020; that the Rev T.V. Mawhinney MBE, Minister Emeritus (Released), of Second Limavady and Myroe died on 17 January 2021; that Mr N.J. O'Neill was licensed on 4 November 2020 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Dromore; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev Dr R.A. Kane; that there were no Consultations: that the Financial Reports are being printed.

The **DERRY AND DONEGAL PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev T.J. Bruce is their Moderator; that the Rev J.C. Teeney, Minister without Charge, died on 28 April 2020; that the Rev J.S. McCrea, Minister of Donemana, resigned his charge on 24 November 2020 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of East Belfast; that the Rev W.A. Watson, Minister of Carrigart and Dunfanaghy, resigned his charge on 12 December 2020 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Carrickfergus; that the Rev M.F. Russell, Minister of Leckpatrick and Donagheady, resigned his charge on 6 January 2021 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Carrickfergus; that Mr R.R. Tregaskis presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ards and was ordained and installed to the charge of Ramelton and Kilmacrennan on 26 November 2020; that Mr P.L. Poots presented credentials from the Presbytery of Iveagh and was ordained and inducted to the work of Carndonagh, Greenbank, Malin and Merville on 5 January 2021; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev S.W.K. Glendinning; that they held Consultations at Ray & Newtowncunningham; that the Financial Reports of Congregations are being printed.

The **DOWN PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev R.C. Patton is their Moderator; that the Rev R.G. Johnston, Minister Emeritus of First Saintfield, died on 13 July 2020; that the Rev W.N. Duncan, Missionary Emeritus, died on 24 October 2020; that the Rev A.R. Adger, Minister of Clough and Seaforde, died on 13 January 2021; that the Rev W.H. Higgins, Minister of First and Second Killyleagh, retired on 31 March 2020; that the Rev R.M. Mackay, Minister of Second Comber, retired on 30 November 2020; that the Rev A.T.F. Johnston presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and was installed to the charge of Killinchy on 27 March 2020; that Mr J.U. Torrens presented credentials from the Presbytery of Armagh and was ordained and installed to the charge of Second Saintfield on 18 June 2020; that the Congregations of First and Second Killyleagh were amalgamated on

30 January 2021 under the name Killyleagh Presbyterian; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev Dr B.C.G. Black; as a Student for the Ministry Mr T.A.R. Moore; that no Consultations were held during the year; that the Financial Reports of the Congregations are being printed separately.

The **DROMORE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev M. N. Davidson is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr Z.J. Cole, Moderator's Assistant in Maze, resigned his charge on 31 July 2020 and was received as a Minister without Charge; that Mr P.A. Boyd presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and was received as a licentiate; that Mr N.J. O'Neill presented credentials from the Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady and was received as a licentiate; that the Rev Dr Z.J. Cole, Minister without charge, was given credentials to the Presbytery of Armagh; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev W.J. Todd; as licentiates, Mr P.A. Boyd and Mr N.J. O'Neill and as students, Mr S. Kerr, Mr A. Martin and Mr T. Finnegan; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **DUBLIN AND MUNSTER PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Gary McDowell is their Moderator; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of Congregations are being printed.

The **IVEAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev N.J. Kane is their Moderator; that the Rev James Briggs, Minister Emeritus (Released) of Scarva Street, Banbridge, died on 7 August 2020; that Mr R.J.E Hill presented credentials from the Presbytery of Armagh and was received as a licentiate; that Mr P.L. Poots was given credentials to the Presbytery of Derry & Donegal; that under their care as licentiate is, Mr R.J.E. Hill; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **MONAGHAN PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev A.S. McQuade is their Moderator; that the Rev John Mann, Minister Emeritus (Released) of Ballina, Killala and Ballymote, died on 4 April 2020; that the Rev J.H. Hanson presented credentials from the Presbytery of Omagh and was installed to the Home Mission and inducted to the charge of Ballyhobridge, Clones, Newbliss and Stonebridge on 6 January, 2021; that under their care is, as Minister without Charge, Rev D.J.M. Boyle; that no Consultations were held and that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **NEWRY PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev R.J.A. McClure is their Moderator; that the Very Rev Dr D.J. McGaughey, Minister Emeritus of Mourne, died on 2 February 2021; that under their care



are: as Ministers without Charge, Rev B.A.H. Wilson and Rev A.D. Mullan; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of the congregations are being printed separately.

The **OMAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev R.S.G. Beacom is their Moderator; that the Rev Desmond Shaw, Minister Emeritus (Released) of Edenderry and Seskinore, died on 10 April 2020; that the Rev J.H. Hanson, Minister of Dromore and Drumquin, resigned his charge on 5 January 2021 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Monaghan; that under their care are, as students: Mr Jeff Gawn and Mr Graeme Read; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **ROUTE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Dr Nancy Cubitt is their Moderator; that the Rev Peter Douglas, Minister of Toberkeigh, resigned his charge on 30 September 2020 and was recommended to be a Minister without Charge under the care of Presbytery; that under their care are, as Ministers without Charge, Revs Peter Turton and Peter Douglas and as licentiate Mr R.A. Morrison; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **TEMPLEPATRICK PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev D.T. McNeill is their Moderator; that the Rev J.P. Moxen, Minister of Greystone Road, Antrim, resigned his charge on 6 January 2021 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Carrickfergus; that Mr S.P. Kennedy, a licentiate under the care of Presbytery, was ordained and inducted to the work of Global Mission Worker in Romania on 23 December 2020; that Mr R.W. McFaul presented credentials and was received as Licentiate; that under their care are: as Ministers without charge, Revs J.A. Gordon and J.L. Tosh; as Licentiates, Messrs .RW. McFaul and J.A. Porter; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **TYRONE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev W.A. Dickey is their Moderator; that the Rev R.M.P. Simpson, Minister of Orritor and Claggan, resigned his charge on 1 October 2020 and was retained as Minister without Charge; that the Rev M.J. O. Currie presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ballymena and was installed to the charge of First Cookstown on 20 March 2020; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs T.J. Conway, W.I. Ferris, and R.M.P. Simpson; as licentiates, Mr D.S.Bingham; that no Consultations were held during the year; that the Financial Reports of the congregations are being printed.

# COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS

Convener: Rev DAVID BRICE

Secretary: Mr LINDSAY CONWAY, OBE

1. *The Convener writes:* I hope I will be forgiven for the use of superlatives in this report, not because I am a new convener but because the work of our staff this past Covid-19 year warrants it. In keeping with all Councils of the General Assembly, the work of Social Witness has been disrupted by the assault of Covid-19 on our society and the restrictions that the various degrees of lockdown imposed on us. Where perhaps we differed was that the work of our homes and units became even more intense and vital. Just as emergency workers find themselves walking toward danger while all others run from it, so our staff became key workers in the fight against Covid-19. While others were furloughed, our staff “doubled up” taking on extra duties and shifts to keep residents safe. It has been humbling as a new convener to watch the professionalism, dedication and Christian compassion that our staff have shown to residents and their families. The heroic interventions by staff are too numerous to mention, their care and dedication has been immense.
2. In the midst of these circumstances our Secretary, Lindsay Conway, has been a tower of strength, a fount of wisdom and a reservoir of grace. These comments may appear to be platitudes but they are far from it, the truth is we could not have managed through this year without Lindsay’s depth of experience and decisiveness. Sadly, having successfully sailed us through to calmer waters and having served for 19 years, Lindsay is retiring. Over the years, Lindsay has guided us as a council through a staff and committee restructure that has made us fit for modern times, able to comply with the ever increasing professional standards required of us. He has created a new concept of Social Witness, the Taking Care Programme and coaxed our denomination to come on board. He has traveled the length and breadth of Ireland to take a personal interest in each of our facilities, the heads of homes are well known by him and the recurrent feedback I have observed is in the confidence they have of help being only a phone call away. In the midst of this, he has graciously given the impression that he has all the time in the world when a minister or congregation has needed his help. Lindsay has championed the ministries of compassion within our church, represented us to other professional bodies, and has never forgotten the centrality of Christ in all that he does. As a church we owe him a debt of gratitude, we are sorry to see him go but delight in the more restful, stressless days that lie ahead for him.

3. On 1 January 2021, I took over as Convener of the Council of Social Witness from Rev Dr Trevor McCormick. I would wish to record our thanks to Trevor for giving so much time and attention to the Council, his wise advice and steering of the Council through its decision making, sprinkled with humour and spiced with pointed questions, has been invaluable. Trevor's close working with our Secretary has offered exactly the support that was needed. His emphasis on Christian witness has kept the Council on track and ensured that our gospel purpose has not diminished.

**The Secretary to the Council made his final report to Council before his retirement in October:**

4. I recently went on a bit of a hunt to find the roots of Social Witness within PCI and I came across a report of the old Social Service Committee, presented to the General Assembly of 1953 – the year of my birth. The report stated – “The Committee have given attention to the various social problems of this busy and complex age. They have been impressed anew by the fact that the primary need of the world is to find a great faith to serve as a spiritual basis for the tremendous social tasks which confront us all. The Committee wish to assert afresh that this faith is to be found in the great social ideal of Jesus Himself – in the idea of the Kingdom of God. Christian people must learn to judge all their actions and all their social, economic, and political institutions, by the effect which they may have on the advance of the Kingdom of God in the world. If this were done, then the solution of most of our perplexing social difficulties would be in sight.” This report was a clear acknowledgement that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland was giving priority to reaching out to those on the margins and given the language of Social Service and not welfare, gives an illustration of some progressive thinking within the church. Move on 68 years and our church finds itself at the forefront of a worldwide pandemic that has had a catastrophic impact on Health and Social Care throughout the world. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is a key provider of Social Care Services and has had to confront head-on the human issues that the pandemic has created. I genuinely struggled to find the words that adequately describe what we have been going through over the past 15 months as a Social Care Provider, how we adapted to the new language of Lockdown, PPE, window visits, Covid Testing, fogging and vaccines, to name a few. That visiting, testing and vaccines would dominate our daily routines and cause so much conflict, worry and stress. For long periods of time our homes and units remained Covid free with outbreaks in a few of our homes. Although deaths as a result of the virus remain in single figures, there have been a number of residents and staff who have tested positive. We have worked hard at keeping a busy routine going at all times. Our priority was and is to keep residents, tenants and staff safe, and to prevent the spread of infection. I commend all the CSW staff who have worked

through these unusual times. Our staff have worked tirelessly to enable contact within the restrictions and have shared the challenges that both residents and families have experienced. We have all witnessed at first hand the dedication and commitment of all health and social care workers. The additional work and added pressure is taking its toll, with many of our staff simply exhausted. Please continue to support and encourage them, they have appreciated your support and prayers which I assure you make a difference. In particular, I have to thank the Executive Management Team – Denise Keegan, Jacqui Montgomery-Devlin, Caroline Yeomans, Laura Kelly and David Hooks. Together we have responded to the most challenging of times. Again, there are no words to adequately describe what has been the true sacrifice, nothing has been too little or too much. We have laughed and cried together over the months and have survived. Also to our Administration Team of Jennie Telford, Wilma Steele and Cathy Mullin who have supported us during these challenging months. A special thanks to Denise who has borne the brunt of the additional duties during the outbreaks in our homes. The whole team have had to manage extremely difficult staff situations, prolonged sickness of Home Managers and Care Staff, investigations and challenging RQIA reports. The Department of Health, the Health and Social Care Trusts, Supporting People, Probation Board and other partners and stakeholders have been generous in their support and in the provision of additional funding. Regrettably, Guidelines were sometimes being issued too late and were often confusing as each Trust interpreted them differently.

At my Commissioning Service on 12 September 2002, the then Moderator, Very Rev Dr Russell Birney, challenged me greatly when he referred to me entering a Ministry without walls. Words cogged from the Church of Scotland's report "Church without walls". I barely knew what he meant – nearly 19 years on, I fully understand what he meant. It has been my privilege to lead the work of the old Board of Social Witness and now the Council for Social Witness and serve the wider church. My presentation at my interview was "Mission impossible to Mission possible" – the challenge of bringing Social Witness from a number of standalone homes/units and pieces of work to a cohesive operation, with centralised functions. The Council of Social Witness is now a major player as a social care provider and plays its role in the wider social care sector.

The work has benefitted greatly from Board, Council and Committee members over the years, who have overseen the work and encouraged development. Personally, I have had the support of Social Witness Conveners – Rev Roy Vallely, Rev Bobby Liddle, Rev Dr Trevor McCormick and now Rev David Brice, also the support of three Clerks of the General Assembly, Dr Sam Hutchinson, Dr Donald Watts and the current Clerk Rev Trevor Gribben and have served 18 Moderators. I have enjoyed and gained much from my fellow Council Secretaries as we have journeyed together.

In calling me, God has equipped me, and my Saviour and Lord has walked with me every step of the way. I have been truly blessed over these years and could not have managed without the support of Norma, Fiona and Darren, Charles and my West Church family and the prayers and encouragement of so many. I hope I can continue to serve PCI in some way in the future.

### **Disability Services**

5. It is good to welcome Caroline Yeomans as the new Head of Disability Services, who took up her post on 4 January 2021.
6. These have been very challenging times over the past 16 months for staff. All services had to change the way they work due to very strict infection control procedures. Staff had to deal with the pressure of weekly testing, as well as keeping up with guidance that had been issued by the Department of Health. Tenants who usually visit day centres were in the service 24 hours a day. Care Staff have done a fantastic job since the Coronavirus outbreak, staying over their hours and working extra shifts. Staff are exhausted and Senior Management are trying their best to support them with time off and covering shifts. Major changes are happening very fast with a 16 week – 4 block plan to go back to normal visiting.
7. **Aaron House** – had a Covid outbreak in January and the passing of two residents – both residents had been in Aaron House for over 20 years. This has been a traumatic time for Aaron House, both residents and staff. Recruitment of staff was proving difficult. A lot of work has been put in to resolve the situation e.g. advertising on different media platforms, changing Job Descriptions to encourage more interest. RQIA Inspection went very well. They commended the person-centred approach in Aaron House and the sensitivity, empathy and compassion from staff.
8. **Lawnfield House** – A plan has been drawn up to move Lawnfield from seven permanent beds to ten by June and this target was hit by May. This target has now been increased to 12 beds by June. Lawnfield are trying to increase referrals for respite. Respite numbers were down, as the guidance related to Covid was to isolate for two weeks and, as respite is only funded by the Trust for two weeks, people were not wanting to leave their families to stay in a room isolating. The recent recruitment of new staff will greatly improve the ability to deliver a better service to residents. A recent Pharmacy Inspection commended new procedures that had been introduced.
9. **Willowbrook** – The Manager is off on long-term sick leave. Tim Higgins and David Farrow from Thompson House are helping out while the manager is off and the Head of Disability Services is visiting twice a week to oversee the work. A total review of policies and procedures has been undertaken and forwarded to RQIA.

10. **Peacehaven** – Negotiations continue to formalise the management of Peacehaven within the Council for Social Witness structures. The Head of Disability Services continues to provide oversight of staff and professional services. As a result of Covid a number of residents are displaying behaviours which challenge, which has resulted in Psychological and Psychiatric input being set in place.
11. **Kinghan Church** – The congregation met for the first time on 6 June 2021, having not met during the duration of the pandemic, but joined with Windsor Presbyterian, when regulations permitted. The future for the congregation is to integrate with another congregation. It is essential that any future ministry will include support to the whole denomination in the area of services to deaf people.

### **Older People Services**

12. Older People Services has borne the brunt of the Covid-19 crisis, with outbreaks in three of our homes. These resulted in the homes going into total lockdown and very specialist nursing and care procedures being put in place. Other homes have had both residents and staff testing positive and have had to self-isolate. Weekly testing for staff and monthly testing for residents added further to the pressure and stress in the homes.
13. The visiting restrictions of relatives in the homes has been the most contentious issue and has brought out both the best and worst in how families have dealt with this during the pandemic. Staff at all levels have acknowledged how difficult it is for residents to be separated from their loved ones and to miss out on significant celebrations.
14. Staff have ensured that the care of residents has remained the priority during the pandemic, ensuring that daily routines are kept as normal as possible. Many innovative activities have been devised by staff to keep residents stimulated and physically fit.
15. **CSW Heroes** – Covid has resulted in a dramatic change in the daily routine of all staff. All disciplines have been vital in keeping our residents and homes safe – new cleaning regimes, more administration, regular testing and more reporting to name a few. In recognition of this, staff were awarded an increase in pay, they have been given Easter Eggs, CSW Hero Water Bottles and a gift token at Christmas. In normal times the Convener would have recommended that Home Managers would have been thanked in person at the General Assembly.
16. **Maintenance** – Council have been advised that major maintenance will have to be undertaken in the next few years, as a number of our buildings are starting to show their age.
17. **Sale of Ard Cluan and York House** – Ard Cluan House in Londonderry has been sold. York House in Portrush remains on the market.

18. **New Developments** – Council have agreed that the proposed extension of Harold McCauley House in Omagh should undergo a new feasibility study before existing planning permission runs out. Proposed developments in Lucan and Ballybay remain on hold, but will remain on the Council Agenda.
19. **Training** – Consideration is being given to setting up a trainee programme so that individuals applying for jobs do not require previous experience. This could be linked with an entry scheme for schools to recruit young people and help them gain qualifications and experience. CSW also benefits from the Apprenticeship Scheme, which also attracts funding for employers. The production of a video is also being planned in conjunction with the Creative Production Department.
20. **Planning and managing the transition to the new normal for social care** – The Covid Crisis has brought into focus the true worth of the Social Care Sector. Residential and Nursing homes were very much under-supported in the early days of the pandemic, with 58% of deaths occurring in this sector. On occasions requests were made to admit Covid positive patients to a Covid free home. The Minister of Health in the Northern Ireland Assembly, Robin Swann, has launched a review of the Social Care with plans to create a career structure, and improved terms and conditions as the work moves forward into the future. It is essential that a response is given to any future consultation and the professionalisation of social care is supported.

### **Taking Care**

21. **Safeguarding** within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is well established both within the life and work of congregations and as a service provider within social care. There is a constant challenge for the small staff team in having to interpret and implement legislation and guidelines from two jurisdictions.
22. **Adult Safeguarding** – There has been much discussion regarding Adult Safeguarding in congregations, with clarity being sought on the role of the Designated Person and training opportunities. A PowerPoint presentation has been produced for use within Presbyteries, targeting local congregations and organisations.
23. **Taking Care 3** – this has not been completed as a result of Covid and the general pressure of work over the past year. There is now a clearer intention that Taking Care 3 will be an online information and advice facility, enabling regular updates and encouraging a more interactive service. The development of an APP and E-Training are actively being discussed.
24. **Safeguarding Training for Congregations and Ministers** – Since December 2020, training for Ministers, Designated Persons and leaders has been delivered via Microsoft Teams. This has been a significant challenge for the Head of Safeguarding and the Taking

Care administrator, as well as a major learning curve in delivering the training virtually, and training some of the Taking Care trainers to deliver in this way.

#### **Numbers Trained**

Designated Persons:	163
Ministers:	228
Foundation training sessions:	5
Refresher training sessions:	26

25. **Access NI and GARDA Vetting** – Although church and youth organisations were not meeting as a result of Covid, there was significant activity in congregations to recruit new leaders and review their policies and procedures. 281 GARDA vetting and 275 Access NI forms were submitted during this period.
26. **Adult Safeguarding in PCI Homes and Safeguarding Champion** – 13 adult safeguarding training sessions were delivered within the homes. The Head of Safeguarding, as Adult Safeguarding Champion, consistently works with the homes regarding safeguarding referrals to Social Services and has carried out a number of investigations in this role.
27. **Priorities for the coming year**
  - The development of Taking Care guidelines.
  - Review and development of all Taking Care training.
  - Review and development of the Taking Care website.
28. **Additional development work**
  - Adult Safeguarding training for congregations.
  - Provision of Onus (domestic abuse) training for churches, to enable them to become a ‘Safe Place’.
  - The development of trauma informed practice throughout CSW.
29. **Inter-Faith Committee of Safeguarding Board (NI)** – The Council Secretary is currently Chair and Head of Safeguarding and Deputy Chair of the Inter-Faith Committee. This committee discusses common areas of concern within the wider faith community and advises the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland.

#### **Specialist Services**

30. **Thompson House** – Covid has impacted on services in Thompson House and its ability to offer services, with no opportunity to gather together for group activities as a staff group or with residents. There was an outbreak of Covid-19 in November, five residents had to self-isolate in their bedrooms and five staff had to take time off at various times when they tested positive. During the outbreak there were staff shortages due to staff self-isolating, however this was managed with



staff working extra hours and using bank or relief staff, so the service was not seriously impacted during the outbreak. Occupancy levels remained high, enabling Thompson House to accommodate residents from another unit. All staff and residents are vaccinated and as government restrictions are easing, a Bible study titled ‘The Difference (Difference: The power of faith in a conflicted world (rln.global))’ is in the process of being organised. This will be facilitated by one of the project workers, who delivered the course in prisons while working with London City Mission. Whilst it has not been possible to deliver group courses, one-to-one work with residents has been maintained, with residents receiving assurance that they are being prayed for and Bible notes being sourced for those requesting them. Through Supporting People funding, the unit has secured the services of an artist to deliver art therapy sessions and has also paired with a Christian artist through Prison Arts Foundation.

31. **Carlisle House and Gray’s Court** – Carlisle House closed on 23 March 2020 and reopened on 1 June 2020, following the agreement by both Health Trusts. During Lockdown, the residential accommodation in Carlisle House had been offered as accommodation for medical and nursing staff in the Mater Hospital. A new Protocol was adapted consisting of:

- Working at 50% capacity
- Employing Admission Cohort System
- All admissions Covid Tested within 48 hours of admission
- Reduction of programme to 34 days
- Weekend working for therapeutic team
- Extensive daily sanitising programme.

There have been no cases of Covid-19 within the staff team or clients since Carlisle House reopened and remarkably client satisfaction levels have improved since the programme has been revised. Recruitment has been extremely difficult for some time, resulting in discussions with the Health and Social Care Trust. The Director of Addiction Services has prepared a major discussion paper “Carlisle House Review – Emerging from Covid-19” for discussion with the Trusts. Gray’s Court continued to provide a normal support service during the Covid crisis. The staff team and tenants produced a comic “Recovery”, with funding provided by Supporting People. The comic has been commended and has been well received within the homeless and criminal justice sectors.

32. **Mental Health Task Group** – The Task Group has not been finalised but priority will be given to its formation given the concerns of the growing mental health needs in the post Covid period.
33. **Fresh Start** – The programme is on hold until the lifting of restrictions within the Prison Service. There is a desire to expand the scheme into the female side at Hydebank Wood College and the Woodlands Centre.

# LINKAGE COMMISSION

Convener: T.J. LIVINGSTONE

Secretary: Rev R.K. GRAHAM

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report summarises the work of the Linkage Commission from April 2020-May 2021. Matters dealt with include the terms of leaves to call granted to charges, reviews of the financial terms in various leaves to call, and reports on the work of the internal panels of the Commission. Since April of 2020, the Linkage Commission has only been able to meet “face-to-face” on one occasion (November 2020 – socially distanced in Assembly Hall) while, for the rest of the period, the work of the Commission has been carried out by a Standing Commission. Thanks are due to that small group for sustaining the work of the Commission. The Commission is required, amongst other responsibilities, to determine conditions under which congregations shall be linked, vacant pastorates filled or supplied. When delegations from congregations attend meetings of the Commission seeking Leave to Call, the Commission must consider a range of factors, taking into particular account the use of resources both in terms of finance and of personnel. As previous reports have indicated, the Commission continues to believe that the number of congregations within PCI is too high to sustain the decreasing number of people attending our services. This sometimes creates debate when vacancies occur with the inevitable conflict between the understandable desires to retain meetinghouses with the reality of the decreasing financial sustainability of some of these congregations. We believe that these issues which have been prevalent in previous years have been exacerbated by the impact of Covid -19 on our congregations.

In addition to our regular meetings, a significant number of other meetings have been held with Presbyteries through their Mission Strategy Groups as together we seek to grasp the impact of changing demographics on our denomination. The Commission would encourage those Presbyteries who have, as yet, not established a Mission Strategy Committee to consider doing so, as those who have them have found them a useful asset as they seek to grapple with change.

### **Vacancies**

2. The Commission notes that a number of ministers who are approaching retirement age are taking steps to prepare their kirk sessions and congregations for the impending vacancy. This not only assists the work of incoming vacancy conveners but can also reduce concerns and timescales in filling the vacancy. This practice is to be encouraged. It is

of note that, as a result of this increased preparedness, the time between a vacancy occurring and the granting of Leave to Call has significantly reduced.

3. However, despite this welcome change the Commission is also aware that the Church is entering a period when for a few years there will be a reduction in the number of available licensed assistants. We have reflected on this for a number of years and its impact is beginning to be noticeable. This will inevitably increase the length of some vacancies.

### **Tenure Review Concept**

4. The Commission has been conscious that where Leave to Call is granted using Reviewable Tenure, which was approved as a Scheme by the 1998 General Assembly, some presbyteries and congregations have been expressing concern as to how such reviews should be carried out. To address these concerns, the Commission updated its Reviewable Tenure Guidelines during the previous year. Copies of the revised guidelines are now issued to vacancy conveners when Leave to Call is granted. Congregations in such situations are reminded of the requirement to draw up objectives/goals/aims within the first twelve months of the installation of a new minister. These will then form part of the assessment made in the subsequent Tenure Review. The Commission is planning to carry out a further review of Reviewable Tenure in 2021/22 to take on board lessons learned in current situations.

### **Dissolutions and Amalgamations**

5. The Commission has been dealing with the issue of dissolutions and amalgamations and related implications arising out of charitable status. Due to the manner in which the legislation was drafted setting up the Charity Commission and the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive, it has been necessary to seek approval through the Northern Ireland Courts for 'cy pres' schemes. The General Assembly Solicitor has done invaluable work on this, so that one of the agreed dissolutions has taken place and work is ongoing with respect to another dissolution and an amalgamation.

It is anticipated that the Commission will have to continue to address the sad reality of the need for more such dissolutions and amalgamations.

### **Church Architecture and Manses Panel**

6. The Panel continues to address issues where congregations whose property is listed wish to carry out adaptations to their property. In line with our Partnering Agreement with the Department for Communities, which was drawn up to assist in securing our ongoing Ecclesiastical Exemption, the Panel has to balance the building's listing with missional requirements. On occasions, this has required the Panel to seek substantial modifications to initial proposed schemes. However,

where the missional case outweighs the listing, then the Panel will make the necessary recommendations.

### **Additional Pastoral Personnel and Auxiliary Ministry Panel**

7. In the past year the Linkage Commission approved the creation of 19 new Additional Pastoral Personnel (APP) posts and the extension or amendment of 6 existing posts. There were no requests for Auxiliary Ministry posts.

‘Guidelines for Congregations and Presbyteries Regarding the Employment of Additional Pastoral Personnel’ incorporating ‘Guidelines for Kirk Sessions on General Employment Issues’ are available from the panel convener and the PCI website. The APP guidelines outline the necessary steps Kirk Sessions should take when considering the creation of an APP post. The approval of the HR support provider, presbytery and the Linkage Commission is required before any new APP post can be advertised.

The approval of the HR support provider, presbytery and the Linkage Commission is required to extend or amend an existing APP post. Kirk Sessions are asked to note carefully when an existing fixed-term contract concludes so that requests to extend an existing post are not made late.

With regard to job titles for APP posts, Kirk Sessions should note that the Linkage Commission allows flexibility in choosing a suitable job title for an APP post and “most titles will be considered by the Commission. However, the Commission will not give permission for the use of ‘Officer’ or ‘Pastor’ as a job title. Furthermore, the titles ‘Director’, ‘Associate’ and ‘Assistant’ will only be considered if the Kirk Session can justify that the job description strongly warrants the use of the title.” (Linkage Commission May 2018).

APP Salary Scales for 2021 were agreed by the Linkage Commission at its meeting in November 2020. In line with the ministerial minimum, it was agreed that there would be no increase in these scales. They are available from the panel convener and on page 192 of the Annual Reports 2020. Kirk Sessions are required to use the Salary Scales when creating a new APP post.

Guidelines for creating Congregational Auxiliary Ministry posts are available from the Convener of the APPAM Panel. Proposals to create such posts should normally come to the Linkage Commission through the presbytery. Auxiliary Ministers are commissioned to work, normally on a part time basis, under the supervision of a Minister of Word and Sacrament. While it is primarily a Ministry of the Word, some pastoral duties may be associated with such posts.

Before employing an organist (or similar), Kirk Sessions should draw up a statement of main terms and conditions, job description, personnel specification and advertisement. The approval of presbytery is required before creating such a post. Guidelines and templates are available

from the panel convener. The HR support provider should always be consulted.

Ministers are reminded to seek approval from presbytery and the Linkage Commission before undertaking paid public appointments ('Extra-Parochial Work'). This kind of work has been defined as 'Remunerated work outside of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland undertaken by a parish minister that amounts to more than six hours in any week.' A return form, available from the panel convener, should normally be returned before the appointment begins and then annually by 15 September.

During the 2019-20 year, the Panel considered the responses of presbyteries regarding the possibility of adding a higher Band C Salary Scale to existing Salary Scales. A paper outlining the key points made by presbyteries was submitted for consideration by the 2020 General Assembly. Having considered the paper, the 2020 General Assembly Standing Commission remitted the issue for consideration at the 2021 General Assembly. This now is included in Appendix 2 and a resolution is appended.

### **Parish Bounds Panel**

8. The Parish Bounds Panel has drawn up revised parish bounds for several congregations in the Presbyteries of North Belfast and South Belfast, and for a smaller number in the Presbytery of East Belfast, taking account of amalgamations that have taken place in recent decades. These drafts have been circulated to the relevant Clerks of Presbytery. The Panel will take account of comment from presbyteries and from the Belfast Conference, and intends to present new sets of parish bounds to the 2022 General Assembly.

### **Leave to Call a Minister**

9. This is only a summary, there may well be conditions to the Leave to Call, which are not recorded here. These might include Part-time, Reviewable Tenure, Restricted List, additional income for Minister etc. When a figure is set, the year denotes when Leave to Call was granted. This figure will increase automatically under the annual Stipend Review. The same is the case in respect to Ministerial Allowances.

Congregation	Stipend	Allowances
Clogherney	60% AMM +£1,500 (2020)	£3,745.20 (2020)
Sixmilecross	40% AMM +£600 (2020)	£2,496.80 (2020)
Dervock	AMM +£2,000 (2020)	£6,242 (2020)
Cunningham Memorial	£41,000 (2020)	£6,242 (2020)
Churchtown	AMM (2020)	£6,242 (2020)
Fisherwick	£39,000 (2020)	£6,242 (2020)
Derramore	33.33% of £41,000 (2021)	£2,081 (2021)
Drumachose	66.66% of £41,000 (2021)	£4,161 (2021)
First Derry	£30,000 (2021)	£4,161 (2021)
Monreagh	€12,898 (2021)	Euro Equivalent £2,081 (2021)
Ballycrochan	£34,000 (2021)	£6,242 (2021)
Orritor	58% AMM (2021)	£3,620.36 (2021)
Claggan	42% AMM (2021)	£2,621.64 (2021)
New Mossley	£14,000 (2021)	£6,242 (2021)
Ryans	25% of £34,000 (2021)	£1,560 (2021)
Ballygomartin	£22,000 (2021)	£6,242 (2021)
Brookvale	25% of £32,000 (2021)	£1,560 (2021)
Carnmoney	£47,000 (2021)	£6,242 (2021)
First Dunboe	£36,500 (2021)	£6,242 (2021)
First Newtownards	£37,000 (2021)	£6,242 (2021)
Kirkpatrick Memorial	£49,745 (2021)	£6,242 (2021)
Second Comber	£42,036 (2021)	£6,242 (2021)

### Reviewable Tenure Ministries

10. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Second Newtownards was terminated. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Townhill, Portglenone was extended for a further five years from 26 January 2021 or until there is a realignment of ministry in the area.
- Reviewable Tenure Ministry in First Rathfriland: the congregation was released from any tenure restriction from 26 January 2021.
- Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Second & Third Rathfriland: the congregations were released from any tenure restrictions, subject to the new linkage coming into being and the new financial arrangement being put into place.

**Stated Supply Arrangements**

11. During the past year the Commission has renewed a number of previous nominations for a further period in co-operation with the appropriate Presbytery. New Stated Supply arrangements in Raloo & Magheramorne were effected.

**Dissolutions of Linkages**

12. The linkage between Brookvale and Ryans was dissolved during the year.

**Congregations Linked**

13. Two new Linkages were agreed.

**Downshire Road & Ryans**

## Terms of Linkage:

- (a) That on 1 April 2021 or other suitable date, the congregations of Downshire Road Newry and Ryans be linked.
- (b) That each congregation shall maintain its separate identity with its own Kirk Session, Congregational Committee and Finances.
- (c) That each congregation shall have the right to appoint representatives to the Superior Courts of the Church.
- (d) That in the choice of a Minister, the two congregations shall act as one congregation and the two Kirk Sessions as one Kirk Session.
- (e) That the stated services each Sunday are:
  - (i) Downshire Road Newry 11.30am;
  - (ii) Ryans 10.00am; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
- (f) That the Stipends be:
  - (i) Downshire Road Newry: 75% of £34,000 (2021);
  - (ii) Ryans: 25% of £34,000 (2021);and the Initial Ministerial Allowances per annum:
  - (i) Downshire Road Newry: £4,682 (2021);
  - (ii) Ryans: £1,560 (2021) plus 15p per mile for Business Mileage.
- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of Downshire Road Manse be borne in the proportions:
  - (i) Downshire Road Newry: 75%;
  - (ii) Ryans: 25%.
- (h) That the Minister shall reside in Downshire Road Newry, Manse.

### Second & Third Rathfriland and Brookvale

- (a) That on 10 June 2021, or other suitable date, the congregations of Second & Third Rathfriland and Brookvale be linked.
- (b) That each congregation shall maintain its separate identity with its own Kirk Session, Congregational Committee and Finances.
- (c) That each congregation shall have the right to appoint representatives to the Superior Courts of the Church.
- (d) That in the choice of a Minister, the two congregations shall act as one congregation and the two Kirk Sessions as one Kirk Session.
- (e) That the stated services each Sunday are:
  - (i) Second & Third Rathfriland: 11.30 am;
  - (ii) Brookvale: 10.15 am; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
- (f) That the Stipends be:
  - (i) Second & Third Rathfriland: 75% of £32,000 [2020]
  - (ii) Brookvale: 25% of £32,000 [2020]
 and Initial Ministerial Allowances per annum:
  - (i) Second & Third Rathfriland: £4,682 [2020]
  - (ii) Brookvale: £1,560 [2020] plus 15p per mile for Business Mileage.
- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of Second & Third Rathfriland Manse be borne in the proportions:
  - (i) Second & Third Rathfriland: 75%
  - (ii) Brookvale: 25%.
- (h) That the minister shall reside in Second & Third Rathfriland Manse.

### Congregations Amalgamated

14. The 2019 General Assembly resolved as follows, “That the congregation of First Killyleagh be amalgamated with the congregation of 2nd Killyleagh no later than 31 December 2019, or other suitable date, on terms set by the Linkage Commission”.

### Terms of Amalgamation First & Second Killyleagh Presbyterian Churches

1. That the congregations of First and Second Killyleagh cease to exist as separate congregations on 30 January 2021 (or other suitable date) and on the same date the members of these congregations shall form a new congregation under the name Killyleagh Presbyterian Church.
2. That the Service times be 11a.m. and 7p.m.



3. That the two Kirk Sessions become one Kirk Session, and the two Committees become one Committee until new Committee elections are held.
  4. That the current trustees of each of the two congregations make application for a cy-pres scheme to apply the existing assets, including property, graveyards or lands not disposed of, for the benefit of the new congregation.
  5. That any expenses accruing through failure to dispose of properties, or through having to make buildings secure and insured, shall be the responsibility of the amalgamated congregation.
  6. That the Stipend of the new congregation be set by the Linkage Commission and Ministerial Allowances shall be: Car Allowance £3,745; Ministerial Duties Allowance £2,497 plus 15p per Business Mile.
  7. That assets, if any, held in any way for the benefit of the minister shall, subject to trust, be administered according to the law and guidelines of the Church.
15. The 2020 Standing Commission of General Assembly held on 3 September 2020 passed the following resolution “That the congregation of Kilcooley be, as appropriate, dissolved or amalgamated with the congregation of West Church, Bangor, on 31 December 2020, or other suitable date, on terms set by the Linkage Commission.”

#### **Terms of Dissolution for Kilcooley Presbyterian Church**

1. That the congregation of Kilcooley be dissolved on 31 December 2020 (or other suitable date).
2. That the members of Kirk Session become members of West Church, Bangor, (hereafter ‘West’) Kirk Session.
3. That the members of the Congregational Committee become members of West Congregational Committee, until new elections are held.
4. That the members of the congregation become members of West.
5. That all existing assets of the Congregation be transferred to West.
6. That the charitable purpose of West will include the mission of the Presbyterian Church in the Kilcooley estate and district.
7. That the costs and expenses relating to the assets of Kilcooley shall become the responsibility of West as from the Effective Date of a cy-pres scheme for the application of the assets of the Kilcooley congregation.
8. That the Stipend of West continue at the existing level.
9. That assets, if any, held in any way for the benefit of the minister shall, subject to trust, be administered according to the law and guidelines of the Church.

## REVIEWS, ALLOWANCES AND FEES PANEL

### Reviews

16. The Commission decided that, in the light of current circumstances, stipends due to be reviewed in March 2021 be postponed for 12 months.

### Supply Fee

17. The level of Supply Fee is determined by the Code, Par. 238, and for 2021 this is £110 (€160) or £73 (€107) where only a single service is supplied in one Congregation.

Expenses should be paid in accordance with the rate set for attendance at Assembly Councils, currently 15p per mile (14 cents per kilometre).

KENNETH BELSHAW, Convener

## CHURCH ARCHITECTURE AND MANSES PANEL

*Mr Brian Knox reports:*

18. In the past year, the Panel has met regularly and considered applications in accordance with Par 57(6) of the Code. Proposals included construction of new churches and extensions, halls, manses, demolition works, structural alterations, removal/adjustments of pews etc. to enable more appropriate access for wheelchairs, provision of new audio-visual systems, designs for memorials, windows, artificial lighting, and seating/furnishings requisite for public worship. Proposals are authorised, successively, by congregation, presbytery and Linkage Commission, to which the Panel is responsible when making recommendations. Enquiries and submissions for Church Architecture and Manses Panel should be sent to Graham Patterson, Property Support Officer, Assembly Buildings, 2-10 Fisherwick Place, Belfast, BT1 6DW.
19. Over the year the majority of the submissions were able to be dealt with by the Panel using the information provided, while others necessitated the request for more detailed explanation on/drawings of the proposal. The Panel was also able to meet congregational representatives when this was appropriate and were therefore of assistance on numerous occasions by making helpful comments and suggestions, which were appreciated by the congregations involved.

BRIAN KNOX, Convener

## APPENDIX 1

### Procedure to deal with Congregations that have received Leave to Call but have not been filled after 12 months.

#### 1. Introduction

Under Paragraph 273 (4) of the Code “*Where a congregation or linkage of congregations which has become vacant should, in the opinion of the Commission, be continued and agreement has been reached on the terms for a new ministry and the Commission is satisfied that the Manse(if any) is being put into suitable condition for the use of the Minister:*

- (a) *Leave to call shall be issued by the Commission on behalf of the Assembly, but*
- (b) *This leave shall be operative for 12 months only, after which, should the vacancy not have been filled, it shall be referred back to the Commission for the whole arrangement to be reconsidered.”*

The current practice has been that the Linkage Commission Secretary at each meeting of the Commission will advise the Commission of those Congregations with Leave to Call that are still vacant after 12 months. However, in practical terms, Presbyteries are not referring these situations back to the Commission nor is the Commission formally reconsidering the arrangement as outlined in the Code. This has resulted in some situations where vacancies of up to 3 years have remained in place.

This paper recommends that a new process be formally adopted by the Linkage Commission.

#### 2. Procedure to be Adopted by Presbyteries

- (a) Where a congregation(s) has received leave to call from the Commission and this has been in place for 12 months, the Presbytery concerned should refer the vacancy back to the Linkage Commission. In order that the Presbytery is informed, the Secretary of the Linkage Commission will:
  - (i) After 11 months has elapsed arrange to table this matter at the next available meeting of the Linkage Commission.
  - (ii) Following discussion he/she write to the Clerk of Presbytery and where appropriate to the Secretary of CMI to bring this to his/her attention.
  - (iii) The Presbytery and/or the CMI will be requested to respond to the Linkage Commission through the Commission Secretary within 2 months of the receipt of the request to refer back to the Commission as outlined in (b) to (e) below.

- (b) The Presbytery, in referring this back should indicate the steps which have been taken during the preceding 12 months to fill the vacancy e.g. expressions of interest received, candidates interviewed, candidates preaching on a list etc.
- (c) The Presbytery in its report may wish to offer comment as to why it believes the vacancy remains unfilled.
- (d) What, if any, considerations the Presbytery has given to other possible alignment/realignment of ministry to assist the vacant congregations.
- (e) Any recommendations which the Presbytery wishes to make as to how the vacancy might be progressed.

### **3. Procedure to be Adopted for Home Mission Congregations**

Where a congregation(s) is a member of the Home Mission Scheme, the views of the Council for Mission in Ireland should be sought at the same time by the Linkage Commission prior to a decision being taken as to the way forward.

### **4. Procedure to be Adopted by Linkage Commission**

- (a) Once the Linkage Commission receives the report from a Presbytery (and where appropriate the Council for Mission in Ireland), this will be considered in detail.
- (b) The Commission, following this consideration, may be content to allow the Leave to Call to remain in place for a further 6/12/15 months.
- (c) The Commission may decide to request a meeting with the Presbytery and the Kirk Session(s) concerned to discuss the vacancy and the Presbytery Report.
- (d) Following such meetings the Commission will decide to:
  - (i) Suspend the Leave to call to allow consideration of a possible realignment of ministry.
  - (ii) Allow the Leave to Call to remain in place for a further 6/12 months.
  - (iii) Withdraw the Leave to Call to allow the Presbytery time to reflect on options (this may not be a different outcome to (i)).
- (e) It is suggested that an Overture is brought to the General Assembly to amend Paragraph 273(4) (b) to read “operative for 15 months only”.

This will mean that when the Secretary writes at 12 months, the Presbytery/CMI will have 3 months in which to respond.

## APPENDIX 2

(The following paper was remitted by the 2020 General Assembly Standing Commission for consideration at the 2021 General Assembly.)

A paper on Band C Salary Scale was sent down to presbyteries for discussion and comment

(Minutes of General Assembly 2019, P.39, Resolution 1)

### APPENDIX 2 – SECTION A

The following are the responses to the Consultation document sent down to presbyteries together with a summary of these responses.

NOTE: the original paper is reproduced at Appendix 2, Section C.

#### Summary of Presbytery Responses

1. It should be noted that only 14 out of the 19 presbyteries responded to this Consultation.
2. Of the 14 responses, it may appear that the answers to some of the questions are contradictory, e.g., 6 agree on the need for a Band C, yet 10 say that there is a matter of principle that no one working in the same congregation should be paid more than the lead minister. This may be because it is felt that the ministerial stipend in such congregations will ALWAYS be greater than the AMM Scale.
3. Of the 14 responses, 9 questioned the current scale paid to deaconesses. This is beyond the remit of the Linkage Commission.
4. Again, a similar number made reference to payment of Irish Mission workers, which is also outside of the Commission's remit.
5. There is some support (6 Yes and 5 No) for the introduction of a Band C. Those who comment positively point to the need for flexibility to manage salaries, career progression and additional responsibilities. Those against, suggest that the need for such a Band is so small as to make its introduction unnecessary.
6. Some presbyteries would wish the matter of ministerial minimum also to be looked at in this context but again, that is NOT the remit of the Linkage Commission.

## APPENDIX 2 – SECTION B

These are the General Principles that the Linkage Commission drew up prior to determining its Resolutions to the 2020 General Assembly.

### General Principles

1. The Linkage Commission would point to the overarching theme in the creation of APP posts in that the management of such individuals lies with the Kirk Session. This management responsibility cannot be delegated to others.
2. However, it is possible to delegate in certain situations, where there is a plurality of APP posts in a congregation, a supervisory role to one of the posts.
3. Where a Kirk Session believes such a need exists, this would be a new post with some requirement for a Job Evaluation and no individual should be automatically regraded to such a post since it would be regarded as being a promotion. [The advice of Peninsula should be sought on this matter].
4. No post should be placed on a Band C where this would place an individual on a higher salary than the lead minister in THAT congregation. This is in line with Appendix 4 of the General Board Report to 2010 General Assembly which states that the figure should be “no higher than 95% of current minister’s stipend”.
5. Consideration needs to be given to the fact that while our deaconesses and indeed Licentiatees require to have theological training there is no such requirement for many of those holding APP posts who need not in fact be members of PCI. Again, some of these matters are beyond the remit of the Linkage Commission.
6. Where there is a perceived need to reward a few of these APP posts for performing a supervisory role, does this need to be addressed by the creation of a new Band C or can it be addressed by the payment of a ‘Responsibility Allowance’ which would be at the discretion of a Kirk Session and therefore not require a Job Evaluation or permission from the Commission?

### Options

1. **Do Nothing.** This will not address a sense of injustice on the part of a small number of congregations who feel they wish to reward their APP for the additional supervisory nature of their post.
2. **Introduction of a Responsibility Allowance.** This would be an allowance paid by the agreement of a Kirk Session in recognition of the few situations which merit the payment of such an allowance. Such Responsibility Allowances would be restricted to a figure of 5.5% of Basic Ministerial Minimum. This would address the

matter of recognition of task without the need to create a new Band C which, as already stated, may have few needing it.

3. **A new Band C.** The pros and cons have already been stated above for such a Band but it is felt that this is not the best way forward at this time.

A resolution based on the above principles and on option 2 is presented to the Assembly as the recommendation of the Linkage Commission.

## **APPENDIX 2 – SECTION C**

(For ease of reference, the following is the Paper presented to the  
2019 General Assembly)

Paper on Adding a Band C Salary Scale to the Recommended  
Salary Scales for Additional Pastoral Personnel.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to consider adding a new Band C Salary Scale to the Linkage Commission's Recommended Salary Scales for Additional Pastoral Personnel (APP).

### **Current Situation**

Whenever a Kirk Session wishes to create a new APP post, it is required to follow the guidelines produced by the Linkage Commission and to select an appropriate salary from the Recommended Salary Scales contained within the guidelines.

The current guidelines and salary scales were produced in 2011 to meet the needs of congregations at that time. The Recommended Salary Scales were originally based on the JNC Youth and Community Work Scale (2009) for the United Kingdom and have been updated annually in line with increases to the basic ministerial minimum. There are two bands.

The Band A Scale has six points: £18,685; £19,355; £20,031; £20,703; £21,558; £22,226 (€28,248; €29,260; €30,281; €31,298; €32,591; €33,599). These are the salary points for 2019 and are for 37.5 hours per week.

The qualifications for a Band A post are as follows: 'Obtained or working towards OCN level 2&3 qualifications, PCI Youth/Children's Ministry Course or similar qualification in the relevant field. Where this level of qualification is not held, demonstrated experience in this field of activity may be deemed equivalent.'

The level of responsibility for a Band A post is as follows: 'Mostly direct work with children, young people or adults under close regular supervision; low management responsibility for people or projects.'

The Band B Scale has five points: £23,306; £24,363; £25,455; £26,582; £27,352 (€35,233; €36,831; €38,480; €40,184; €41,347). Once again, these are the salary points for 2019 and are for 37.5 hours per week.

The qualifications for a Band B post are as follows: ‘Appropriate recognition of attainment or working towards undergraduate or postgraduate theological study or professional qualifications (including Youth & Community, teaching qualification or other related professional qualifications such as counselling or social work). Where this level of qualification is not held, demonstrated experience in this field of activity may be deemed equivalent.’

The level of responsibility for a Band B post is as follows: ‘General responsibility for specific areas of programme and ministry oversight; graduating to less closely supervised responsibility for programmes, strategy, volunteers or leaders.’

Notice that the Band B level of responsibility is ‘general responsibility for specific areas of programme and ministry oversight’ and ‘less closely supervised responsibility for ... volunteers or leaders.’

### **Emerging Situation**

Recent conversations with some APPs and Kirk Sessions have suggested to the Panel that there may be a need for a higher Band C Salary Scale.

The higher scale would be for those posts which involve the management of other employees (in distinction to Band B posts where the post holder has responsibility for volunteers or leaders) or which involve greater responsibility or expertise than is required for Band B posts. It would also provide a pathway for career progression for those APPs who see youth work, for instance, as a long-term career choice.

For instance, in the case of one congregation, the Kirk session wishes to employ someone to manage its other staff. Since the other staff are already on the Band B Scale, it may be appropriate for their manager to be on a higher pay scale to reflect this person’s management position.

The Panel can also foresee that a Kirk Session with, for instance, a large children’s and youth ministry may wish to employ someone to oversee both areas of ministry and to advise the Kirk Session on the ‘big picture’ (in distinction to Band B posts where the post holder has responsibility for specific areas of oversight). The minimum criteria for such a responsible position would be higher than for a Band B post to reflect that the person appointed is an expert in the field who is able to contribute to the formation of policy and to plan strategies and programmes on behalf of the session.

A proposed Band C Scale is as follows: £27,030; £27,540; £28,050; £28,560; £29,070; £29,580 (€40,905; €41,663; €42,420; €43,178; €43,935; €44,693).



**Points for Consideration**

The proposal raises a number of points for consideration including the following:

APPs on Band C will receive a salary which is higher than the basic ministerial minimum (BMM) which is currently £26,695 and €39,953. While it may be possible to set down a principle that no one appointed to a Band C post should receive a salary greater than the minister's stipend, it still introduces the possibility of an APP on Band C being paid significantly more than an associate minister in the same congregation or a minister in a neighbouring congregation who is on BMM. This may be deemed unacceptable to the Church, given the status ministers have in the Church as well as the training they must undergo before ordination and the duties they perform.

However, it should also be noted that it is already the case that APPs on Band B Point 5 in the UK and on Band B Points 4 and 5 in the ROI are receiving a salary which is higher than BMM.

It should also be noted that there is a difficulty comparing the remuneration paid to ministers and APPs, given that the minister is able to live in a manse without paying rent or rates and a stipend is not the same as a salary. An associate minister, however, does not live in a manse.

The proposed Band C Scale is also significantly higher than the remuneration paid to deaconesses and Irish Mission workers who may well match such APPs in terms of qualifications, experience, expertise and the work they do. Again, consideration should be given as to whether it is acceptable that some APPs could receive a higher salary than these other workers.

If the Church is unwilling to introduce a higher salary scale, it may be more acceptable to allow Kirk Sessions to award a 'management bonus' to those APPs in a management role. Therefore, a manager who is overseeing the work of two APPs on Band B Point 5 would receive a salary of Band B Point 5 plus a bonus to differentiate the manager's role from the other staff. However, even in this case, the manager's salary will still be higher than BMM.

Another point for consideration is that those appointed to a Band C post may have significant influence over a congregation's ministry without themselves being ordained or without having subscribed to the Church's Subordinate Standards. However, this is already the case with many APPs. A possible solution may be to introduce an accreditation process similar to the one for accredited preachers.

Despite the points raised above, the Church may still take the view that for some APP posts, there needs to be a salary which is commensurate with the qualifications and experience required.

# COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND

Convener: Very Rev Dr FRANK SELLAR

Acting Secretary: Rev JIM STOTHERS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report covers the period from June 2020 to June 2021.
2. The Covid-19 pandemic, associated government restrictions, and decisions taken by the General Council impacted the work of the Council in various ways and by varying degrees. The General Assembly has already been informed of some of the details of that impact in the Supplementary Report delivered to the General Assembly Standing Commission at its meeting in June 2020 (Minutes of the General Assembly, 2020, pages 28–30).
3. The Council congratulates its Secretary, Rt Rev Dr David Bruce, on his appointment as Moderator from June 2020, and the subsequent extension of that appointment for a further year. It expresses deep appreciation for the leadership God has enabled him, along with the Clerk of Assembly, Rev Trevor Gribben, to give in what have been difficult days for Christ's church and all the people who live on the island of Ireland. The Revs Jim Stothers and Robert Bell have taken on part-time responsibilities as Acting Secretary and Chaplaincies Secretary respectively.
4. The Council has sought, under God, to continue to deliver the six components of the CMI remit:
  - (a) Developing PCI's strategic priorities in all-age mission in Ireland, and planning initiatives at General Assembly level where appropriate.
  - (b) Considering new church development and church planting.
  - (c) Overseeing all aspects of the Home and Irish Missions, including the Irish Mission Fund.
  - (d) Overseeing the deployment and ongoing support of Deaconesses.
  - (e) Supporting a chaplaincy service in the forces, hospitals and hospices, and prisons.
  - (f) Supporting mission and ministry in Universities and Colleges through chaplaincy services.
5. Most meetings in connection with the Council over the past year have been conducted online. In total, the Standing Committee authorised by the General Council met eleven times between April 2020 and April

2021. Physical meetings of the Council were able to take place in November and June. Meetings of Committees, Panels and Task Groups were authorised from mid-November onwards – all took place online until May, when physical meetings were able to resume. It is likely that, for the future, there will be a mixture of online and physical meetings. The former are useful for the conduct of routine or urgent non-controversial business, but matters which need thoughtful discussion where all can participate fully and the ‘temperature’ of a larger meeting can be gauged really only work where everyone is in the same room.

6. Use has been made of the UK Government’s Job Retention Scheme. Staff have been placed on furlough at varying times and by varying degrees. This includes deaconesses and staff in Assembly Buildings, the International Meeting Point and South Belfast Friendship House. For most of the period when government restrictions applied, all Assembly Buildings Mission Department staff worked from home, with members taking it in turns to be in the office on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
7. Proposals concerning the Council committee structure will again be delayed until the return of Dr Bruce from his time as Moderator of the General Assembly to his regular duties.
8. Last year’s Supplementary Report indicated that the implementation of the Home Mission Review was postponed until January 2021 at least. This postponement has been continued, but steps are being taken to resume implementation, most likely in autumn 2021.
9. Revised budgets were submitted to the Financial Secretary, taking account of changes necessitated by the Covid restrictions.
10. It was not possible to hold Mission in Ireland Evenings in presbyteries. However, online material was prepared and distributed to Clerks of Presbytery for use locally on or around St Patrick’s Day. The Council is grateful to the members of the Creative Production Department for their assistance in this at short notice.
11. Difficulties have arisen in connection with the Alternating Ministries Scheme (AMS). The Charities Regulator in the Republic of Ireland will not allow one entity – an AMS congregation – to be controlled by two charities – the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI). The congregations affected are Galway, Limerick and Sandymount (Christ Church), Dublin. Through the Mission Partnership Forum both denominations have been looking at the matter. See the General Council Report for further information, page 7.
12. Mrs Pip Florit went on maternity leave in January and the Council offers its congratulations to her on the birth of Jonah. Most of her work is being covered by Mr Neil Harrison.
13. The Council is grateful to the Rev Johnston Lambe for convening the Property Panel alongside his position as Finance Panel Convener. It

welcomes the Rev Alan McQuade as the new Property Panel Convener and notes that he has a very relevant professional background in its field of work.

14. Due to the overlap between business conducted through the normal Council Committees and the special Standing Committee, this year's report is set out by the nature of the work, rather than reports from Committees. For the record, though, it should be noted that the Council Committees are convened as follows:
  - Home Mission, Irish Mission and Deaconess Committee: Rev Ian Carton – the Council expresses thanks to Mr Carton for his work on this committee, and for CMI in general, and wishes him well as he steps down from this position.
  - Healthcare, Prisons and Forces Chaplaincy Committee – Rev Robert Bell
  - Universities and Colleges Chaplaincy Committee – Rev Craig Lynn
  - Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee – Rev Ben Walker

## **WORK RELATING TO HOME MISSION, IRISH MISSION AND DEACONESSES**

### **Home Mission**

15. A request concerning the dissolution, or amalgamation with Tullamore, of Mountmellick congregation was considered. The Council is supportive in principle and referred the matter to the Linkage Commission.
16. Following the departure of the Rev Vicki Lynch, MCI appointed the Rev Stephen Hancock in August 2020 as Minister of Limerick under the AMS.
17. Both denominations agreed to transfer governance of Branial to MCI and of Taughmonagh to PCI, as agreed by the 2020 General Assembly Standing Commission (Minutes page 10).
18. Directory of Home and Urban Mission charges. Linked Congregations (in brackets) are not in the Home Mission. Ministers marked \* are called by the Council, as at June 2021.

MINISTER	CHARGE
<b>HOME MISSION</b>	
Rev Michael Anderson*	Arklow
Rev Gunther Andrich*	Irvinestown, Pettigo and Tempo
Rev Rodney Beacom*	Lisbellaw, Lisnaskea, Maguiresbridge and Newtownbutler
Rev Damien Burke*	Drogheda
Rev Andy Carroll*	Donabate
Rev David Clarke*	Sligo
Rev David Conkey*	Enniscorthy and Wexford
Rev Richie Cronin*	Trinity Cork and Aghada
Rev Al Dunlop*	Howth and Malahide
Rev Daryl Edwards*	Drum, Cootehill and Kilmount
Rev Helen Freeburn*	Galway (Alternating Scheme)
Rev Andrew Gill*	Blackrock and Bray
Rev John Hanson*	Ballyhobridge, Clones, Newbliss and Stonebridge (part-time)
Rev William Hayes*	Tullamore and Mountmellick
Rev Jean Mackarel*	Drumkeeran, Killeshandra, Cavan and Bellasis
Rev Dr Keith McCrory*	Maynooth
Rev Gary McDowell*	Greystones
Rev Roger McElnea	(Aughnacloy) and Ballymagrane
Rev Colin McKibben	(Convoy, Carnone, Donoughmore) and Alt
Rev Alan McQuade	(First Monaghan) and Smithborough
Rev Katherine P. Meyer*	Sandymount (Alternating Scheme)
Rev Alan Moore	(Cavanaleck) and Aughtentaine
Rev Susan Moore	(Kerrykeel, Milford) and Rathmullan
Rev William Montgomery*	Fermoy and Cahir

Rev John O'Donnell*	(Trinity Bailieborough) First Bailieborough, Corranearny , and Ervey
Rev Philip Poots*	Carndonagh, Greenbank, Malin, and Moville
Rev Jonathan Porter*	Dundalk
Rev Mark Proctor*	Naas (part-time) with chaplaincy at Tallaght Hospital
Rev Stephen Rea*	Carlow and Athy
Rev David Reid	(Ardstraw) and Douglas
Rev Daniel Reyes Martin*	Corboy and Mullingar
Rev Stephen Richmond*	Donegal and Stranorlar
Rev Rodney Thompson	(Badoney, Corrick) and Glenelly
Alternating Scheme	Christ Church, Limerick
Vacant	Ballina, Killala and Ballymote
Vacant	Carrigart and Dunfanaghy
Vacant	(1st Castleblayney, Frankford) and Corvalley
Vacant	(Waterside) and Fahan
Vacant	Inch
Vacant	Kells
Vacant	Kilkenny (Call issued to Rev Jonathan Currie on 15 June 2021)
<b>URBAN MISSION</b>	
Rev Rodney Cameron*	St Columba's, Lisburn
Rev Mervyn Gibson*	Westbourne
Rev William Harkness*	Great Victoria Street (part-time) with additional missional duties
Rev Robert Love*	Taughmonagh Church Extension
Rev Danny Rankin*	Strand, Belfast
Rev Lachlan Webster*	Craigavon
Vacant	Belvoir

**Irish Mission and Deaconesses**

19. William Workman resigned as an Irish Mission Worker after thirty-four years of service, most recently in Athy and Carlow. The Council took the opportunity at the June meeting to express personally to him its deep appreciation of his long commitment to the work of the Irish Mission.
20. Eileen Black retired as a deaconess after eight years of service, most recently in South Belfast Friendship House and Great Victoria Street congregation. The Council took the opportunity at the June meeting to express personally to her its profound sense of gratitude to her for her work as a deaconess over those years.
21. It had been agreed previously that three women would commence training as deaconesses at Union Theological College from September 2020. In the event only two suitable candidates were identified and the commencement of training had to be postponed for a year because of the pandemic. Further information may be found in the report of the Council for Training in Ministry on page 288.
22. Applications from congregations for the service of a deaconess continue to be received.
23. Three deaconesses have been commissioned and inducted: Paula Burrows in Ballygrainey, Louise Davidson in Bangor West, and Heidi England in Railway Street, Lisburn.
24. A number of deaconesses have been furloughed by varying amounts using the UK Government's Job Retention Scheme.
25. The 'normal retirement date' of the PCI Pension Scheme 2009 is now 66. The 'normal retirement from active service age' for ministers has also become 66. Irish Mission workers and deaconesses are enrolled in the PCI Pension Scheme (although they can then opt out) and so have the same 'normal retirement date' used in the calculation of their pensions. The Council agrees that it is appropriate that the 'normal retirement from active service age' for IMWs and deaconesses should increase to 66 in line with that for ministers. This does not mean that they cannot retire before that age, but that they will need permission from the Council. There are also some anomalies in the wording in the Code in respect of IMW and deaconess pensions and retirement. A relevant resolution is submitted with this report: relevant overtures may be found in the General Council report on page 303.

**Directory of Irish mission workers and the location of their service  
(June 2021)**

NAME	LOCATION
David Boyd	Adelaide Road, Dublin
Tom Dowling	Kilkenny
Keith Preston	International Meeting Point, Belfast
Philip Whelton	Arklow

**Directory of deaconesses and the location of their service  
(June 2021)**

NAME	LOCATION
Sonya Anderson	Shore Street, Donaghadee
Paula Burrows	Ballygrainey
Rachel Cubitt	Whiteabbey
Louise Davidson	Bangor West
Eleanor Drysdale	Wellington, Ballymena
Joanne Dunlop	Chaplaincy Team – Antrim and Craigavon Hospitals
Heidi England	Railway Street, Lisburn
Sharon Heron	International Meeting Point, Belfast
Roberta Irvine	Greystone Road, Antrim
Heather McCracken	Chaplaincy Team – Royal Victoria and Belfast City Hospitals
Tracey Nicholl	St James', Ballymoney
Michelle Purdy	Ballyclare
Hazel Reid	First Broughshane
Margaret Robertson	Elmwood, Lisburn
Rosemary Spiers	Greenwell Street, Newtownards



**International Meeting Point and South Belfast Friendship House**

26. See below, pars 74–76 and 77–79 respectively.

**Nightlight**

27. It had been intended to have a meeting with the Nightlight staff and volunteers shortly after the decision was taken last year to close the work. Due to the Covid restrictions this was postponed several times but eventually took place in June 2021. The Council places on record its gratitude to those who started this work many years ago, and who were part of it over the years.

## **WORK RELATING TO HEALTHCARE, PRISONS AND FORCES CHAPLAINCY**

**Healthcare chaplaincy**

28. Liaison continues with the five Health and Social Service Trusts in Northern Ireland, and with the Health Service Executive in the Republic of Ireland, concerning the provision of Presbyterian chaplaincy in hospitals across Ireland. Every possible opportunity is sought, in conjunction with the relevant authorities, to make this work as effective as possible, both within the hospital contexts themselves, as well as in terms of facilitating the pastoral ministry of parish ministers.
29. The Council places on record its most sincere appreciation of the work being done by those who serve as hospital chaplains – most of whom are serving as part time chaplains, in addition to their parish ministry – providing pastoral care and support to patients, families and staff, and ministering in situations of missional opportunity. Special tribute is due to all hospital chaplains, who have given outstanding service throughout the period of the Covid pandemic and the significant challenges it created for hospital chaplaincy.
30. The Very Rev Dr Godfrey Brown has retired after 56 years’ service as PCI Chaplain in Dalriada Hospital, and Rev Victor Sinclair after 46 years’ service as PCI Chaplain at Knockbracken Healthcare Park – in expressing the utmost appreciation to both of them for their faithful work, the Council recognises that the whole church is very much in their debt.
31. In conjunction with the Public Affairs Officer, a response was made on behalf of PCI to the SEHSCT Bioethical Consultation.

**Directory of PCI Healthcare Chaplains and the location of their service (June 2021)**

NAME	LOCATION
Rev Lindsay Blair	Altnagelvin Hospital
Rev David Clarke	Sligo University Hospital
Rev Richie Cronin	Cork University Hospital
Rev Dr David Cupples	South West Acute Hospital, Enniskillen
Rev Dr Tony Davidson	St Luke's; Mullinure and Longstone
Susan Dawson	Coordinating Chaplain, Dublin Hospitals
Rev Molly Deatherage	Mayo General Hospital
Rev Ken Doherty	Mater Hospital, Belfast
Joanne Dunlop (Deaconess Assistant to Chaplain)	Antrim Area Hospital and Craigavon Hospital
Rev Helen Freeburn	University Hospital, Galway
Rev John Gilkinson	Belfast City Hospital
Rev David Hagan	Cavan General Hospital
Rev Norman Harrison	Royal Group of Hospitals Northern Trust Lead Chaplain
Rev Keith Hibbert	Altnagelvin Hospital
Rev Jim Lamont	Letterkenny General Hospital
Rev Paul Linkens	Altnagelvin Hospital
Heather McCracken (Deaconess Assistant to the Chaplain)	Royal Group of Hospitals Belfast City Hospital Musgrave Park Hospital
Rev Roger McElnea	Tyrone and Fermanagh
Rev Keith McIntyre	Daisy Hill Hospital
Rev Stephen McNie	Monaghan General Hospital
Rev Jonathan Porter	Louth Hospital
Rev Dr Ivan Neish	Whiteabbey Hospital

Rev Jane Nelson	Tyrone County Hospital (now Omagh Hospital and Primary Care Complex)
Rev Leslie Patterson	Lagan Valley Hospital (locum)
Rev Owen Patterson	Downe Hospital
Rev Mark Proctor	Tallaght Hospital (Adelaide and Meath)
Hazel Reid	Causeway, Hospital, Coleraine
Rev Marlene Taylor	Belfast Trust (bank relief chaplain)
Rev Ivan Thompson	Bluestone Psychiatric Unit
Rev Alan Thompson	South Tyrone Hospital
Vacant	Dalriada
Vacant	University Hospital, Limerick
Vacant Rev Ernie Boggs (locum)	Ulster Hospital, Dundonald (appointment pending)

### Prisons Chaplaincy

32. The importance of prison chaplaincy is recognised by the NI Department of Justice and PCI chaplains are held in high regard. This vital opportunity for ministry and mission has continued through the Covid 19 period, even though, as in so many other areas of Christian ministry, access and opportunities for in-person contact have been significantly limited.
33. PCI is required to provide a chaplaincy service, funded by the NIPS in the three prisons in Northern Ireland. The Council pays tribute to the work of Rev Graham Stockdale, full time Coordinating Chaplain at HMP Maghaberry.
34. Whilst discussions have taken place regarding the introduction of a collaborative model involving the three main Protestant denominations pooling their resources for chaplaincy in HMP Magilligan, it was concluded that a denominationally based PCI chaplaincy approach should be our preferred option, and steps have been taken to fill that position. During the year, Rev Gary Aitchison was nominated to the NIPS for appointment as part-time chaplain in HMP Magilligan.
35. Mrs Heidi England completed her term as temporary part-time chaplain in Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison, and sincere thanks are due to her for the work she did during this period. The appointment of someone to fill this part time position on a permanent basis is now being actively pursued.
36. The Council notes the continuing real-terms reduction in allocation of Department of Justice funds to chaplaincy provision. While

understanding the budgetary constraints at government level, discussions between the NIPS and the main churches have continued regarding a more realistic subvention towards this work.

### **Directory of PCI Prisons' Chaplains and the locations of their service (June 2021)**

NAME	LOCATION
Rev Gary Aitcheson (pending NIPS processes)	HMP Magilligan
Rev Alan Boal	Mountjoy, Dublin
Rev Colin Megaw	Woodland's Juvenile Justice Centre
Rev Graham Stockdale	HMP Maghaberry (Coordinating Chaplain, full-time)
Vacant	Hydebank Wood College

### **Forces chaplaincy**

37. During the year the Revs Colin Jones and Simon Hamilton moved from part-time chaplaincy in the Army and Royal Naval Reserves respectively, into full-time chaplaincy in the same services.
38. Rev Norman McDowell retired as an Army Chaplain after 25 years' service.
39. The Council is delighted to report that Rev Dr Paul Swinn was appointed Honorary Chaplain to HM, the Queen, from April 2021.
40. During the past year, work on a booklet recognising the service of PCI chaplains during the Great War has been completed, and many thanks are due to Very Rev Dr Donald Patton for the diligence, hard work and historical expertise which he brought to this project. Whilst it had been hoped to distribute copies of the booklet through presbyteries last autumn, this proved difficult due to Covid restrictions. It is hoped that it might be appropriate to highlight this booklet as we approach Remembrance Day 2021.
41. Moderator's visits  
In September 2020 the Moderator was invited to attend and give one Bible Reading for our chaplains at their annual conference.

**Directory of Commissioned Chaplains within the Armed Forces  
(June 2021)**

NAME	LOCATION
Rev Mark Donald	Army Reserve (part-time)
Rev Simon Hamilton	Royal Navy (induction anticipated July 2021)
Rev Mark Henderson	Army
Rev Colin Jones	Army
Rev Ivan Linton	Army
Rev Graeme McConville	Army
Rev Michael McCormick	RAF
Rev Jonathan Newell	RAF
Rev Heather Rendell	Army
Rev Dr Paul Swinn	Army
Rev Brent van der Linde	Royal Navy
Rev Dr Philip Wilson	Royal Air Force

**Directory of part-time Chaplains to Youth Organisations sponsored  
by the Armed Forces**

NAME	LOCATION
Rev Joseph Andrews	Air Training Corps
Rev Dr Paul Bailie	Army Cadet Force (commissioned)
Rev Kenneth Crowe	Army Cadet Force (commissioned)
Rev Richard Graham	Air Training Corps
Rev Dr Ivan Neish	Air Training Corps
Rev Jane Nelson	Air Training Corps
Rev Prof Patton Taylor	Air Training Corps

**Police Chaplaincy**

42. A pilot scheme, initiated by the PSNI and involving chaplains from the main churches, has been run in the Ards/North Down area, with positive feedback from serving officers, senior management and chaplains themselves. Proposals for the roll-out of a province-wide chaplaincy structure centred on the 25 stations across N. Ireland where Local Policing Teams are based, now await approval by the Chief Constable. Clearly, much work remains to be done in terms of establishing a practical framework and operating ground rules for such chaplaincy before it moves forward.

**WORK RELATING TO UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES CHAPLAINCY**

43. There are 360,000 tertiary level education students across this island. PCI has 2 full-time chaplains in Belfast, in Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, and affords less than the equivalent of five days a week to all the rest. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland currently has no student chaplains in Dublin. In most universities or colleges apart from Belfast, Presbyterian chaplains manage a parish and can afford only half a day per week.
44. The Council continues to hold to the principles that:
- (a) chaplaincy should be missional as well as pastoral;
  - (b) the work of a chaplain ought to be rooted in the life of a local church.
45. It is recognised that universities are becoming ever more secular and that influence from groups such as Atheist Ireland is ever increasing, particularly in the Republic of Ireland. The Council and the denomination should therefore be prepared to think about and implement changes with regards to chaplaincy and student ministry to be able to respond to the rapidly changing university landscape.

**Covid-19**

46. In March 2020, the work and ministry of university chaplains changed dramatically because of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- (a) Rev. Dave Gray, Chaplain to Queen's University Belfast, Stranmillis University College, and Union Theological College, continued to work through the pandemic, given his key-holding responsibilities for Derryvolgie Hall. Some students remained there during the first lockdown with restrictions and mitigations in place to ensure everyone's health and wellbeing.
  - (b) Rev. Cheryl Meban, Chaplain to Ulster University was initially furloughed but, thankfully, was able to resume her duties at the start of the 2020/2021 academic year.

- (c) For all of our part-time chaplains, student ministry came to a sudden stop as access to campuses, students and organisations like Christian Unions ceased or was restricted.

### **Presbytery Engagement**

47. Meetings have taken place with representatives of the presbyteries of Derry and Donegal and Dublin and Munster to discuss current chaplaincy vacancies in Letterkenny and in all three universities in Dublin, respectively. The Council is encouraged that presbyteries are taking a lead role in talking about, thinking about, shaping and praying for chaplaincy, student ministry and universities and colleges within their bounds.

### **Belfast Partnership Group**

48. The Belfast Partnership Group brings together our two full-time chaplains in Belfast, local church leaders from churches in or close to the university areas (aka the university corridor) and members of the Universities and Colleges Chaplaincy Committee. This Group is an acknowledgement of the Belfast Conference's identification of student work as being one of its four main strategic priorities.
49. The Belfast Partnership Group exists to:
- (a) support, encourage and pray for our chaplains whilst also providing a forum for input into student ministry from local churches;
  - (b) develop a united strategy for chaplaincy and student ministry in Belfast.
50. In developing this new united strategy before the Covid-19 pandemic, the Belfast Partnership Group proposed to bring together the two full-time chaplains into one team and to add a third member to that team. This additional team member would:
- (a) oversee the development and implementation of a united strategy for Belfast;
  - (b) connect and work closely with local churches and presbyteries in nurturing, developing, pioneering and connecting student work.
51. At the most recent meeting, the Group unanimously agreed that a third member of the team was a priority for chaplains and churches in the area. This was recognised to be the case even more so now that the university area will be rejuvenated with the return of students at the start of the next academic year, the fact that Queen's has committed to face-to-face teaching and the expansion and the opening of many more student residences in the university corridor.
52. Whilst approval has not been granted by the Priorities Reference Panel for the third team member now, it is hoped that it will be recognised as an urgent priority in the future.

**Derryvolgie and Elmwood Avenue Management**

53. Thanks are expressed to the chaplain and team in Derryvolgie and to Graham Patterson, Property Support Officer for all their diligence and hard work during the last year.
54. There are currently 75 students in occupancy in DV Halls. It has been a challenging year financially as a number of students were given the opportunity to return home for at least one term. As a result, finances will just break even.
55. It is likely that the largest tenant, Clements Coffee in Elmwood Avenue, will vacate the premises in June 2021 which will have a significant negative impact on annual income. This rent is £24k per annum. More positively, the office spaces in the upper floors are occupied.
56. As a result of the loss of Clements as a tenant, a review will take place with a view to fulfilling the Assembly's request to have the Elmwood property operate at no financial cost to the Church.
57. A lighting programme of work to the rear of the Elmwood Property to facilitate the chaplaincy has been completed: this work was commissioned before the pandemic.

**WORK RELATING TO STRATEGY FOR MISSION  
COORDINATION**

58. Vacancy Assessment Groups have been appointed for Dunfanaghy and Carrigart, and for Ballina, Killala and Ballymote.
59. Representatives have been appointed to the Tenure Review Panels in Craigavon and in Enniscorthy and Wexford.

**Urban Mission Network**

60. Two events took place during the year:
  - (a) A webinar on 21 January with John Coulter: 'Fruitful Urban Mission over the long term';
  - (b) An in-person gathering on 2 June in Dundonald: 'Community leadership in the midst of conflict and tension'.

**Belfast Conference**

61. At the request of the Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee, the Belfast Conference provided comment on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of Urban Mission Status, with recommendations. The recommendations will be considered within the Home Mission Review.
62. Advisory comment has been given concerning New Mossley, Ballysillan, and Windsor.



63. Advisory comment has been given in connection with parish bounds within central and west Belfast.
64. A group is working on possibilities for mission in west Belfast.

### **Church Planting**

65. The conference postponed from 9 May 2020 has been rearranged for 7 May 2022 in the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Dundalk, with keynote speaker Scotty Smith.
66. A church planting strategy is being developed, looking particularly at two complementary pathways into this:
  - (a) For congregations (and also Presbyteries or CMI) that wish to plant a church;
  - (b) For individuals who have a desire to be church planters.

### **Church Revitalisation**

67. A Task Group has been established with the following remit:
  - (a) Understanding what constitutes a revitalisation. What are the questions/criteria that categorise a congregation as a revitalisation? How might this relate to the Home Mission Review pathway?
  - (b) How might we develop a model that includes pathway(s) and core principles for a revitalisation within PCI?
  - (c) Establishing a Revitalisation Hub/Network for PCI that could act as a portal of expertise and support. How might this support the Small and Fruitful initiative within CLW?
  - (d) What practical outcome might envision and inspire presbyteries to think creatively in a time of vacancy? For example, can we capture/package three stories of revitalisation from a variety of contexts within PCI that can be easily shared?
68. Consultation has taken place with the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to ensure that the focus of the Task Group does not extend into the CCLW remit concerning the re-birth and revitalisation of churches.
69. Members of the Task Group have been made available to the Linkage Commission for consultation in connection with Tenure Review procedures.

### **Rural Mission**

70. The Rural Chaplaincy pilot scheme has been under discussion for some time, but further progress was delayed as a result of Covid-19. However, at the time of writing, the Rural Chaplaincy Pilot is on the point of being advertised through the Church and it is hoped that someone will be in post by the autumn. The aim of this new initiative is to enable our Church to begin to address the very significant challenges

which face farmers, farming families and those living in a rural context – issues of isolation, challenges to mental health, economic pressures and changes in the regulatory and trading context.

71. The Council is pleased to note that over 100 articles have now been contributed from PCI to the column in the Belfast News Letter's 'Farming Life' and is grateful to all who contribute and are involved in this ministry.
72. Seeds of ideas for furthering rural mission are being considered in the following areas: mental health; connections with St Patrick; and engagement with GAA.

### **Night-time Ministry**

73. The Council is committed to a review of night-time ministry following the closure of Nightlight. A draft remit for an 'Exploring night-time ministry Task Group', has been drawn up, but before establishing such a group, there will be communication with clerks of presbytery to ascertain what night-time ministry (in the broadest understanding of the phrase) is already going on across presbyteries and congregations, and who is involved.

### **International Meeting Point**

74. The application to the Priorities Reference Panel for the creation of the post of Assistant Project Leader, to be based at the North Belfast site has been approved and, at the time of writing, the post is about to be advertised.
75. Uncertainty continues over the long-term future location of the South Belfast project currently located in rented premises at 133a Lisburn Road. The South Belfast Presbytery has generously funded this for several years now, but does not have the resources to continue. At the same time the Council is aware that, within the foreseeable future, it is likely that Mr Keith Preston, the Project Leader, will retire. Accordingly, a Task Group has been appointed to consider these matters, reporting through the Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee.
76. While government restrictions curtailed much of the work of IMP by varying degrees during the year, the project continues to make strong connections with hundreds of migrants each week both offering a variety of support ranging from the meals so generously supplied by a number of volunteer groups, through internet access to communicate with families at home, food-bank, clothing bank, helping with asylum requests and job applications, English language classes and weekly Bible classes. These connections are variously made at the Lisburn Road and Carlisle Circus sites, and online as appropriate.

**South Belfast Friendship House**

77. With the retirement of Deaconess Mrs Eileen Black, the Rev William Harkness has been solely responsible for the on-the-ground work of South Belfast Friendship House. The Senior Project Worker, Ms Eunice Moore, continues on furlough. Some of the work has begun to open up on a small scale.
78. The opportunity is being taken to review the work of Friendship House and consider the appropriate direction for it to take. Consultation by the Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee will take place with PW, the South Belfast Friendship House Management Panel, and the Home Mission, Irish Mission and Deaconess Committee.
79. The financial impact of the pandemic has meant that PW has, understandably, had to scale back significantly its funding of Friendship House. PW previously provided over 80% of the operational costs and, while some expenditure has been lower through the pandemic, it has meant that Council funds have had to be used to cover the shortfall. It is unlikely that PW will in the future have the resources to fund the work in the way it once did, which in turn means that the review referred to in the previous paragraph will have to take this into account.

**Finance and Property**

80. The accounts for 2020 show a credit balance at year end. A number of programmes and projects were not started or run as anticipated during the year. The Council is grateful to those who have remembered the work of the Council in their will, which results in the receipt of a number of bequests most years. Two of those received recently are particularly substantial and seen as providential through this time of financial uncertainty.
81. The Finance Panel thanks PW for its continued financial support and notes that this has been unavoidably reduced due to a very significant decrease in PW income through the year.
82. Projects
  - (a) Having been informed of an increase in costs of the building project in Maynooth, further funds have been put in place to enable it to go ahead.
  - (b) Monies have been ring-fenced for major projects in Greystones, Donabate and Dundalk.
  - (c) Some projects have been put on hold.
83. The previous Evangelist Pay Scale, which had lost its relevance, has been replaced by an 'Additional Mission Projects Personnel Scale.' This will apply to the existing and new IMP Assistant Project Manager posts.

84. A grant has been received from the Southern Association Widows Fund, which has been wound up. The amount is £217,629.73, subject to some small winding-up costs. The terms were that "...any amount remaining shall be paid to the Council for Mission in Ireland "CMI" of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, a registered charity, to be used by CMI to support the work of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland within its presbytery of Dublin and Munster". Discussions have begun with the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster about the principles to establish concerning the use of this money.

# THE TRUSTEES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND

Chairman: REV DR D. WATTS

Secretary: Mr CLIVE KNOX

1. The following is an extract from the Minutes of the proceedings of the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, at their Annual General Meeting held by video conference on 20 April 2021.
2. In accordance with the Trustees' Bye-Laws it was moved by Rev T.D. Gribben, seconded by Mr S. Johnston, and agreed that Rev Dr D. Watts be appointed Chairman until the 2022 Annual General Meeting of the Trustees.
3. The Statements of Account of the following for the year ended 31 December 2020 having been approved and signed by the auditors were laid before the Trustees:
  - The General Investment Fund
  - The Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland  
*(Incorporating The Commutation Fund, The Non-Participating Trusts Fund, The Magee Fund, The Tops Wilson Trust Fund, The Fire Insurance Trust Fund, The Fortune Mission Bequest, The Lindsay Memorial Fund, The McClure Trust Fund, The Local Bible Fund and various other Trust Funds).*
4. Moved by Mrs M Guiler, seconded by Mr S. Johnston and unanimously agreed that the Report and the Statements of Account be adopted, and in accordance with the Trustees' Bye-Laws lodged with the Clerk of Assembly to be laid before the General Assembly in October 2021.
5. The Trustees also received and examined the Accounts for 2020 of the John Getty Trust and accepted these for inclusion in the volume of Accounts to be submitted to the General Assembly.
6. The Trustees report that, in accordance with instructions issued by the General Council in March 2020 regarding church governance during the period of restrictions imposed during the initial coronavirus lockdown, a Standing Committee was appointed. It dealt with any necessary business during the period March to November 2020. Meeting of the full board of Trustees resumed via video conferencing on 15 November 2021 and at that meeting a full report of the business undertaken by the Standing Committee was received.

### Trust Funds

7. A summary Account of the various Trust Funds the Trustees manage is included in the Book of Accounts 2020. The following Trust Funds are distributed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Trustees.

As in 2020, the Trustees have agreed to recommend to the 2021 General Assembly that, where the terms of Trust permit, these should be distributed via the United Appeal rather than directly to various agencies.

**Mrs A M Davidson Trust:** The total income for 2020 available for distribution is £5,862.70. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

United Appeal	£5,862.70
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**Sir Wm V McCleery Estate:** The total income for 2020 available for distribution is £30,906.32. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

Central Ministry Fund	80%
Retired Ministers' Fund	10%
Widows of Ministers' Fund	10%

**Estate of Miss Irene Scott:** The total income for 2020 available for distribution is £6,342.02. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

United Appeal	£6,342.02
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**Estate of Miss Ida Mary McGeown:** The total income for 2020 available for distribution is £4,070.08. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

United Appeal	£4,070.08
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**Estate of Mr Victor Morrow:** The total income for 2020 available for distribution is £1,326.64. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

United Appeal	£1,326.64
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## THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH INVESTMENT FUND (commonly known as The General Investment Fund)

8. The General Investment Fund was originally established under the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 1964. It is a Common Investment Fund in which any charity connected with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland can invest.
9. Investments in the Fund or shareholdings tend to arise from trust funds, bequests or donations which often have particular terms or restrictions attached regarding the application of the capital and income.

10. Further details about the General Investment Fund, the investment performance and investment holdings, are available in a booklet available from the Financial Secretary's Department.
11. The Trustees have prepared the accounts of the General Investment Fund for the year ended 31 December 2020 in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice: Financial Statement of Authorised Funds (May 2014). These are included in the Book of Accounts presented to the General Assembly. These accounts provide detailed information regarding the Fund and in particular its performance, investment allocation, level of income and distributions during the year.

12. <b>Declaration of Dividend</b>	30.03.20	30.09.20
Number of shares qualifying	6,216,752	6,198,247
Income from investment for distribution and Tax recoverable less Administrative Charge and Investment Advisers' Fees	£646,562	£795,713
Dividend per share	10.00p	13.00p

13. During 2020, £10,059 was transferred out of the Dividend Equalisation Reserve, which is in accordance with the Scheme Rules, and the balance on the Reserve at 31 December, 2020 is £699,950.

14. The combined annual Dividend of 23.00p per share for 2020 is to be compared with 37.50p for 2019, 27.00p for 2018, 27.00p for 2017, 26.00p for 2016, 26.00p for 2015, 26.00p for 2014, 26.00p for 2013, 26.00p for 2012, 25.00p for 2011, 26.00p for 2010.

Valuation	31.03.21	31.03.20
	£	£
Valuation of Investments	74,268,483	61,206,633
Cash Balance / on Deposit	(366,707)	(196,679)
Dividend Equalisation Reserve	684,118	734,896
	<u>£74,585,894</u>	<u>£61,744,850</u>

No. of Shares Issued	6,157,419	6,211,308
Share Value	£12.1132	£9.9407

The shares in the Fund have, from 28 February 2017, been valued on a monthly basis and the monthly share prices are included in the audited accounts. The share value at the end of the last financial year, 31 December 2020 was £11.7972 per share (2019, £11.6127).

15. The Trustees meet with Investment Managers, Newton Investment Management Limited, three times a year to review investment performance. During 2020, there was a return of 4.16% compared to a benchmark negative return of 0.03%. Newton Investment Management Limited was appointed Investment Adviser to the Trustees Funds in June 2006 and from then to 31 December 2020, the General Investment Fund returned 7.38% per annum compared to the benchmark of 6.40%. After the end of the 2019 financial year there

was a significant decline in the value of the underlying Investment in the General Investment Fund as a result of the coronavirus pandemic but, as indicated above, the Fund's share price subsequently increased from £9.9407 as at 31 March 2020 to £12.1132 as at 31 March 2021 – an increase of 21.9%. When income is included the return during this period was 25.2%. The Investment Manager continues to monitor market movements and the Fund's underlying investments to, as far as possible, limit any adverse impact on the performance of the Fund from the ongoing pandemic.

#### 16. Change to the Withdrawal.

During 2020, the Trustees reviewed the current scheme withdrawal Rule as set out in Rule 19(1) which is:

*“The Trustees shall on receiving two months’ notice in writing from the trustees of a participating charity, or such shorter notice as the Trustees may in any particular case determine, withdraw as at any valuation date all or any of the shares attributed to that charity or such number of shares as shall be required to produce any sum of cash specified by the trustees.”*

This rule means that participating charities have to give two months' notice for any withdrawals from the Fund and as a result will not know the proceeds of sale until the relevant month end share valuation has been determined. This leaves a significant period of uncertainty as to the final proceeds. The Trustees, recognising this, have undertaken a review of the Rule. They note that while this rule also provides a significant degree of protection to the Fund and its participating charities, nevertheless, it would be possible to reduce the period of notice and still retain the protection the current rule provides. The Trustees propose that the rule be changed so that notice must be given before the month end valuation at which the disposal is to be valued.

This will require the following changes to the Scheme Rules:

##### RULE 19(1)

19(1) The Trustees shall on receiving notice in writing, before a valuation date, from the trustees of a participating charity withdraw as at that valuation date all or any of the shares attributed to that charity or such number of shares as shall be required to produce any sum of cash specified by the trustees.

*(This change reduces the period of notice)*

##### RULE 19(10)

19(10) The Trustees will use their best endeavours to forward the amount realised from any withdrawal to the trustees of the participating charity by the end of the month following the month in which notice was given.

*(This change gives the Trustees a period of one month to determine the share valuation at the end of the previous month)*



*and if necessary to realise investments to fund the proceeds of withdrawal)*

#### RULE 20(3)

20(3) The Trustees will use their best endeavours to determine the value of the Fund on any valuation date no later than 10 working days after the valuation date.

*(This change provides for an indication to participating charities of when a month end share valuation will normally be available – this is not included in the present rules).*

The Trustees note that the present rules include in Rule 19(9).

The Trustees shall not be bound upon any withdrawal to sell any investments forming part of the Fund if in their opinion it is inexpedient to do so, but may from time to time borrow such sums as they may think fit for the purpose of making any payment due to the trustees of a charity withdrawing shares under this paragraph, and may charge the Fund with the repayment of such sums.

The Trustees do not consider this change to be “controversial” as it will benefit participating charities by reducing the period of uncertainty regarding the valuation of any shares that are withdrawn from the Fund.

If the change is approved by the General Assembly it will then need to be submitted in accordance with the Rules of the Scheme to the Department for Communities.

### **Trustees Discretionary Fund**

17. On occasions the Trustees are notified of bequests where the terms may state they are for the “benefit of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland” or the “Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland”. The policy to date has been to allocate these to the Trustees Discretionary Fund which is invested in the General Investment Fund unless an immediate use is identified. The Trustees received bequests of £304,302 during 2020. A grant of £10,000 was distributed to Union Theological College as part of agreed transitional funding arrangements and a grant of £1,539 to the Stranahan Trust to support the grants awarded by that Fund to certain widows.

In accordance with advice received from the General Assembly Solicitor, and as reported to the General Assembly Special Commission in June 2020, the Trustees “take instructions from the General Council (or the General Council Standing Committee), or from the General Assembly (or its duly authorised Commissions), regarding allocations from the Trustees Discretionary Fund.”

**Crescent Church Loan Fund**

18. The Crescent Loan Fund was established following the sale of the Crescent Church premises in 1975 and provides low interest loans to congregations having short term financial problems.

The interest charged on new loans is at half the total of bank base rate plus 2%, presently 1.05%, and this is charged on the average balance outstanding over the term of the loan.

The maximum loan normally provided by the Fund is £50,000 and this has to be repaid normally within 3 years, although loans over 5 years can be provided in certain circumstances. Further information about loans from the Fund is available from the Financial Secretary's Department.

During 2020 the Trustees provided loans of £185,000 to 4 congregations and the loans outstanding at 31 December 2020 were £273,093. At that time the fund had £106,689 available to meet loan requests.

Recognising the potential impact the coronavirus pandemic could have on congregational finances, the Trustees did make available to congregations with the loans an option to defer their quarterly repayments.

**Retired Ministers' House Fund**

19. While the day to day administration of the Retired Ministers' House Fund falls under the Property Panel of the Support Services Committee, any legal documentation in relation to property transactions or loan agreements for the Fund are signed by the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. During the year the Trustees became aware that where a property was being purchased with joint funding from a bank and the Retired Ministers' House Fund that certain banks were not prepared to accept that the Fund would hold a second charge against the related property. While the Trustees were able to resolve this particular matter, they considered it appropriate, in light of increasing financial regulations around the provision of loans etc., to seek the opinion of the General Assembly Solicitor on such matters. His advice was that the Fund should suspend the granting on any new loans and seek Counsel opinion on what is a complex area of law. At the time of preparation of this report, the Trustees have just received an opinion from Counsel. This indicates that there is the possibility that the granting of loans would be regarded as a regulated activity and cannot be carried on without authorisation from the Financial Conduct Authority. Equity sharing arrangements do not appear to be subject to the same regulation. The Trustees will, in conjunction with the Property Panel, be giving further consideration to the advice received and the implications of this for the forms of assistance that the Fund is able to provide.

**Getty Bequest**

20. The allocation of grants out of the income of the Trust Estate of John Getty for the year ending 31 December, 2020 was as follows:

Overseas – Foreign	£2,330
Overseas – Jewish	£1,270
Home Mission	£3,070
Belfast City Mission	£2,330
TOTAL	£9,000

21. During the year the Trustees sought and received the permission of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland to establish a Cy-Pres scheme. This simplifies the administration of the Trust and more clearly defines how the Trust funds can be allocated by acknowledging that some of the original terms can no longer be fulfilled. It also clarified that the Trustees of the Fund are the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church and removes the need for the appointment of a Management Committee which previously was done annually by the General Assembly. A copy of the Cy-Pres Scheme is included in Appendix 1.

**Bequests**

22. The Trustees received a report of all bequests notified to the Church during 2020 and wish to record their deep gratitude for those who have decided to support the Church in this way.

**Ethical Investment Policy – Investments in Fossil Fuels**

23. In 2019, the Trustees received correspondence from Church members asking that they would disinvest from fossil fuel corporations. Following advice from the Clerk of the General Assembly, the Trustees agreed that this matter should be referred to the Stewardship of Creation Panel of the Council for Global Mission's Committee for Global Concerns, as this was the appropriate route through which any change to the General Assembly's present Ethical Investment Policy should be considered.
24. The Trustees draw attention to the report of the Stewardship of Creation Panel and its conclusions.
25. The Trustees submit the report included in Appendix 2 which they trust will be a helpful contribution to the debate on this matter. This follows engagement with the investments advisers to the General Investment Fund as to the practical outworking of implementing a policy restricting investment in fossil fuels.

**Trustees**

26. At the 2021 Annual General Meeting, Very Rev Dr D. Clarke and Rev Robert Cobain were due to complete their second terms as a Trustee of the new Trustee body established at the 2013 General Assembly. Due to the rescheduling of the General Assembly to October 2021, they remained in position to coincide with the appointment of their replacements.

Very Rev Dr D. Clarke and Rev C. Cobain were originally appointed to the former Board of Trustees in 2001. The Trustees wish to record their deep appreciation to both for their committed service and valuable contribution to the work of the Trustees.

The General Council previously decided that all nominees for appointment by the General Assembly, should come to the Assembly through its Nominations Committee. With regard to the Trustees, the Nominations Committee are to take this forward by:

*“...nominating Trustees to the General Assembly for appointment, following advice from the Clerk of Assembly and the Secretary of the Trustees.”*

Resolutions to appoint Rev Dr S.E. Hughes and Rev J. Farris are included in the Nominations Committee report.

**APPENDIX 1****CHARITIES ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2008  
THE JOHN GETTY WILL TRUST**

SCHEME OF THE CHARITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN  
IRELAND PURSUANT TO SECTION 29 OF  
THE CHARITIES ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2008

DATED 19 MARCH 2021

RELATING TO AMENDMENT OF THE TRUSTS AND  
ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHARITY KNOWN AS  
THE JOHN GETTY WILL TRUST IN THE MATTER OF THE  
JOHN GETTY TRUST

Scheme made by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland under section 29 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008

**WHEREAS**

1. By his last Will of the late dated 9th November 1859 (with Codicils dated 3rd June 1863, 6th September 1866, 12th November 1867, and 29th February 1872) the late John Getty (“the Testator”), formerly of Beech Park, Co. Antrim bequeathed the residue of his estate to trustees on certain charitable trusts as therein set out.
2. The Testator directed his trustees to apply the income from his residuary estate, in the following words

*“for the maintenance and support of the Ministers and Preachers of the Word of God, in connexion with the Home Mission, the Foreign Mission, the Jewish Mission, the Belfast Town Mission, or otherwise for the benefit of the said societies, so long as their object shall be to preach and propagate the Gospel according to the Doctrine of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and also for the purpose of providing premiums for diligent and deserving students of Divinity for the Ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland during their course of study in the Presbyterian College at Belfast, and for the support of, and in such payment to such missionary as hereinafter is mentioned. And I direct that the said rents, profits, income, dividends, and annual proceeds shall be applied for the use and benefit of the societies, and for the objects aforesaid, in such manner, shares, and proportions as a committee to be for that purpose appointed as hereinafter mentioned by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, shall from time to time direct.”*

3. The Testator further directed that the committee referred to in Recital 2, from the rents, dividends, and annual proceeds of the Testator's estate which it was from time to time entitled to receive from his trustees should, in the following words

*“apply a sum sufficient in their discretion for the maintenance and remuneration, or salary of a missionary to be employed in visiting and instructing the poor of all religious denominations in the town and neighbourhood of Larne, in the County of Antrim aforesaid, such missionary to be a licentiate of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and to be chosen and appointed, and from time to time removed at the discretion of the said committee. And I further declare my will to be, that the said committee shall yearly, and every year out of the said annual proceeds pay, or cause to be paid to the person who shall for the time being be such missionary as aforesaid, in addition to his salary or remuneration, the annual sum of ten pounds sterling to be by him applied in manner and for the purposes following, that is to say:- In the first place to maintain, paint annually, and otherwise keep in repair the head stone, tomb, and tomb stones of the burying places of my family at Larne aforesaid, the surplus to be applied in the purchase of religious tracts and books to be distributed by the said missionary for the time being, and in paying the rent of mission-houses or other fit place or places for holding religious meetings, and in defraying the necessary expenses of lighting, cleansing, and keeping in repair the said premises.”*

4. Probate of the testator's will and the codicils thereto was granted on 4th May 1894.
5. Since that time, the assets representing the Testator's residuary estate (“the Fund”) have been vested in the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland a company established by Royal Charter pursuant to the Irish Presbyterian Church Act 1871.
6. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland from time to time appoints a committee (“the Committee”) in accordance with the terms of the Testator's will, and annually the income of the Fund is distributed to certain societies of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland which now carry out the functions of what were formerly the Home Mission, the Foreign Mission, the Jewish Mission, the Belfast Town Mission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
7. The Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Committee believe:
  - 7.1 that it is no longer possible to carry out completely, and in accordance with the strict tenor of the terms of the Testator's will, the purposes for which the Fund was bequeathed by the Testator, in that

- 7.1.1 “the Ministers and Preachers of the Word of God, in connexion with the Home Mission, the Foreign Mission, the Jewish Mission, the Belfast Town Mission” are now supported through other funds of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland;
    - 7.1.2 the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has not for some considerable period of time, nor is it likely to, appoint a licentiate of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to visit and instruct the poor of all religious denominations in the town and neighbourhood of Larne. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has three congregations in the town of Larne and others in the surrounding area which actively seek to minister and reach out to the communities within Larne and in this way the purpose envisaged by the Testator is now met by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland;
    - 7.1.3 as the whereabouts of the graves of the Getty family in Larne are not now known and, despite searches for them, those graves cannot be located, it is not possible to maintain the graves of the Getty family in the manner prescribed in the Testator’s will;
  - 7.2 it is neither convenient nor necessary to administer the Fund by means of a committee and separate trustees, and that the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is able to carry out the functions of the Committee, and;
  - 7.3 that the mechanism for the appointment of new trustees as set out in the Testator’s will is no longer appropriate, and that the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as a body corporate with perpetual succession is the appropriate entity to act as the trustee of the Fund.
8. The Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has therefore proposed a Scheme to facilitate the better use of the Fund for the purposes set out in the Scheme, and that the Fund be applied by the Trustee the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as hereinafter set out.

## **NOW THEREFORE**

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, after due enquiry, under section 29 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008  
**HEREBY MAKES THE FOLLOWING SCHEME**

**INTERPRETATION**

1. In this Scheme the following expressions shall have the following respective meanings, namely:
  - (a) “The Trust” shall mean the trust regulated by the Trustee subject to the provisions of this Scheme
  - (b) “The Date of Commencement” shall mean the date on which this Scheme is approved and established by an order of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.
  - (c) “The Trustee” shall mean the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, being a company incorporated by Royal Charter pursuant to The Irish Presbyterian Act 1871 as trustee for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland
  - (d) “The Trust Purposes” shall mean the application of the income and capital of the Trust Fund for all or any of the following, in such proportion as shall from time to time seem appropriate to the Trustee:
    - The work of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in Mission in Ireland*
    - The work of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in Global Mission*
    - The 1996 Review Fund of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Belfast City Mission*
  - (e) “The Current Trustee” shall mean the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland being a company incorporated by Royal Charter pursuant to The Irish Presbyterian Act 1871
  - (f) “The Trust Fund” shall mean the real and personal property now vested in the Current Trustee set out in the Schedule hereto;

**PROPERTY OF THE TRUST**

2. The real and personal property set out in the Schedule hereto currently vested in the Current Trustee as trustee of the will trusts established by the will of John Getty deceased and to be vested in the Trustee subject to this Scheme shall henceforth be held, managed, sold, conveyed, granted, assigned, transferred, released, charged or otherwise dealt with or disposed of by the Trustee without the necessity of any connecting or continuing title or separate vesting other than under this Scheme and all conveyances, gifts, donations, bequests, dispositions, grants, securities and other deeds, documents instruments and writing whatsoever, which before the transfer of the Trust Property to the Trustee have been made granted, devised, bequeathed, executed or taken to, by, or in favour of the Current Trustees or their predecessors in office or any one or more of them or any person or persons on their behalf, shall be as valid and of as full force and effect in favour of the Trustee as if the same had been made, granted, devised, bequeathed, donated, executed or taken to, by or in favour of the Trustee.



**DISCHARGE OF FORMER TRUSTEES**

3. After the Date of Commencement, the existing trusts and provisions therein respectively contained shall be extinguished and declared null and void and of no effect but without prejudice to any act or thing lawfully done, right accrued or liability incurred thereunder before the appointment of the Trustee.
4. On the Date of Commencement, the Current Trustee shall proceed to pay and discharge out of the money in their hands all outgoing and liabilities due or payable by them up to the date of the appointment of the Trustee and prepare a final account commencing from the last account of all their receipts and disbursements and submit the same for audit to a competent person to be approved by the Trustee. Upon any such audit any net cash balances remaining in the hands of the Current Trustees or any other person or persons or corporate body on their account, shall be ascertained and certified and thereupon the same and all securities shall be held by the Trustee, for the Trust Purposes. All debts and other sums then accruing payable to the Current Trustee or recoverable by it shall thereupon and thenceforth accrue and become payable to or recoverable by the Trustee and all contracts and liabilities then binding upon them in respect of the property contained in Trust Fund shall thereupon and thenceforth to the same extent be payable by and recoverable from and binding on the Trustee and the Current Trustees shall cease to hold office in respect thereof and shall be released and discharged from and indemnified against all claims, demands, liabilities and obligations arising out of or attaching to the office of the Current Trustee as aforesaid. The receipt of the Trustee for any delivery, transfer or payment directed by this Scheme shall be a good discharge to the person or persons making the same and they shall not be answerable for the application of any property or funds so delivered, transferred or paid.

**APPLICATION OF THE TRUST FUND**

5. The Trustee shall hold the Trust Fund in trust for the Trust Purposes.
6. If the Trustee shall consider the sale, leasing, subletting or other disposal of any of the property contained in the Trust Fund to be in the interests of Trust Purposes, it shall be lawful for the Trustee to sell, lease, sublet or otherwise dispose of the said property or any part thereof accordingly either by public auction or private contract and the purchaser thereof shall hold the same freed and discharged from all and every the trust powers and provisions created hereby and shall not be bound to see to the application of the purchase money thereof, the receipt of the Trustee being a sufficient discharge to the payer for the same, and the Trustee is hereby empowered for that purpose to revoke, determine and make void all the trusts powers and provisions herein contained and generally to execute and do all such assurances and things as they shall think fit and further that the Trustee hereof shall stand possessed of the moneys to arise from any such sale or subletting as aforesaid

upon trust to pay the costs and expenses incurred in or about such sale or subletting and all rent, rates, taxes and other outgoings then due in respect of the said premises and after the payment thereof apply the residue of the said moneys for the Trust Purposes or invest the same as the Trustee in its absolute discretion shall think fit. The moneys arising from any such sale or subletting shall not be applied to any purpose other than the Trust Purposes.

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland may decide any question put to it concerning

- (a) The interpretation of this scheme; or
- (b) The property or validity of anything done or intended to be done under it.

*Sealed with the Official Seal of the  
Charity Commission for Northern Ireland*

## SCHEDULE

### Part 1

Investments – 38,465 shares General Investment Fund - value 31 December 2020 - £453,799

After payment of outstanding creditors Cash held at Danske Bank 95-01-21 value at 31 December 2020 - £17,152

### Part 2

The ground rents issuing out and payable in respect of the following properties:

5 Adelaide Park, Belfast	36 Kensington Park, Bangor
9 Adelaide Park, Belfast	64 Malone Road, Belfast
16 Adelaide Park, Belfast	4 Marlborough Park Cross Avenue, Belfast
18 Adelaide Park, Belfast	6 Marlborough Park Cross Avenue, Belfast
21 Adelaide Park, Belfast	8 Marlborough Park Cross Avenue, Belfast
5/9 Arthur Street, Belfast	10 Marlborough Park Cross Avenue, Belfast
Property at Arthur Pace, Belfast	12 Marlborough Park Cross Avenue, Belfast
11/13 Arthur Street, Belfast	18 Marlborough Park Cross Avenue, Belfast
15 Church Street, Belfast	20 Marlborough Park Cross Avenue, Belfast
71/73 North Street, Belfast	69 Marlborough Park North, Belfast
25/27 Donegall Place, Belfast	71 Marlborough Park North, Belfast
5/9 Donegall Street, Belfast	62 Marlborough Park South, Belfast
24 Kensington Park, Bangor	64 Marlborough Park South, Belfast
26 Kensington Park, Bangor	70 Marlborough Park South, Belfast
28 Kensington Park, Bangor	72 Marlborough Park South, Belfast
34 Kensington Park, Bangor	74 Marlborough Park South, Belfast

Transformer Upton Park, Belfast	221/223 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast
1/7 Upton Park, Belfast	225 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast
15/17 Upton Park, Belfast	227 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast
19/21 Upton Park, Belfast	229 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast
23/25 Upton Park, Belfast	231 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast
2/4 Ormonde Avenue, Belfast	233 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast
6/8 Ormonde Avenue, Belfast	235 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast
195/197 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast	237 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast
199 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast	239 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast
201 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast	241 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast
203 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast	9/11 Upton Park, Belfast
205 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast	Ormonde Avenue, Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast
207 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast	6/8 Queens Street, Belfast
213 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast	1 Serpentine Road, Belfast
215 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast	102 Whitewell Road, Belfast
217 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast	Throne Properties, Serpentine Gardens, Belfast
219 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast	22/30 York Road, Belfast

## APPENDIX 2

### INVESTMENTS IN FOSSIL FUELS

This paper is presented as additional information to assist the General Assembly in its consideration of the resolution submitted by the Council for Global Mission on disinvestments in Fossil Fuels.

#### 1. Background

In October 2019, the Trustees received a letter requesting that the Church follow the approach adopted by other Christian churches and disinvest from fossil fuels. On the advice of the Clerk of the General Assembly, the matter was referred to the Stewardship of Creation Panel of the Council for Global Mission as the appropriate body to consider the matter. The Trustees are aware that a report was presented by that Council to the General Assembly Special Commission in June 2020 and again in January 2021 but the Commission concluded that the matter should be considered by a full meeting of the General Assembly. The Trustees are aware that the report of the Stewardship of Creation Panel concludes, *“disinvestment from fossil fuels may be the only morally sustainable option”*, that *“Disinvesting from fossil fuels may provide opportunities for PCI to take the lead in investing in positive alternatives including renewable energy and clean technologies”*, and that *“it is therefore morally questionable to invest in companies deriving revenue from fossil fuels”*. The resolution presented by the Council for Global Mission to the Special Commission was that, *“In light of our responsibilities to be good stewards of creation, the General Assembly tasks the Trustees to review PCI’s present investment policies with particular attention to companies engaged directly and indirectly in fossil fuel production, with a view to divesting from such.”*

To assist the General Assembly in its consideration of the issue, the Trustees offer the following further analysis. This follows preliminary discussions with Newton Investment Management Limited, who are the investment managers for the General Investment Fund, regarding the practical implications of implementing a policy of divestment in companies involved in fossil fuels.

#### 2. Guiding Principles

The Trustees agreed that any proposals to the General Assembly should be guided by the following principles:

- acting in keeping with our Christian values; and
- acting as responsible investors which would mean encouraging positive change without acting in a manner that would be detrimental to overall returns.

### **3. Current Policy on Ethical Issues**

The Trustees already operate a policy which excludes investment in companies in the Alcoholic Drinks sector, the Tobacco sector and the Armaments sector. This policy extends to excluding companies that derive more than 10% of their turnover from any of these sectors.

Ethical screening is undertaken at two levels. Firstly, there are investments which are excluded because of their FTSE sector classification, i.e., “brewers and distillers and vintners”, “tobacco”, “alcohol”, “aerospace and defence sectors”. Secondly, these are supplemented by “financial data screens” (Newton use the EIRIS screening service) which aim to exclude other companies where 10% or more of their income or operations relate to such excluded activities.

### **4. Additional Complexity with Fossil Fuels**

Newton Investment Management Limited has indicated it would be feasible to extend the ethical policy to fossil fuels. It would be implemented by excluding what might be referred to as “direct investments” in the “Oil and gas sector” from the portfolio. Based on the fund position at 30 April 2021, this would exclude two investments which had a market value of £2,667,475 at that time out of a total portfolio valuation of £75,870,697, i.e., 3.52% of the portfolio. These investments have an estimated yield of 5.21%.

There are however other investments in the portfolio which might be regarded as “indirect investments” in fossil fuels. The extensive use of fossil fuels in power generation and all forms of transportation means that the economic impact stretches far beyond those companies engaged directly in the production of oil and gas. In addition to companies supplying the oil and gas industry with goods and services, there is an impact to be felt by vehicle and vehicle component manufacturers; vehicle retailers; airlines and other travel and transport businesses and their suppliers.

If the Church’s ethical policy is extended to the oil and gas sector, is it not necessary to consider as well whether it is still appropriate to be investing in an airline or any other major indirect user of fossil fuels? As these businesses do not sell fossil fuels directly, it would appear that the Trustees could continue to invest in them and still comply with the ethical investment policy. The Trustees are concerned that such an approach, of investing in major indirect users of fossil fuels, does not seem to be in keeping with the spirit of the resolution.

### **5. Recent Developments**

It is evident from the paper that Newton provided to a recent meeting of the Trustees, that momentum has built up for much more detailed information on ethical issues such as climate change from the professional investment community to inform better their clients. Newton, in association with other professional investment firms, has developed the Responsible Investment Report to address what are

referred to as ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) activities. An initial review of this report shows that detailed information on company activities is available to inform investors. Investors are using this information not just to make their investment decisions but also to influence changes in company strategy re climate change. Newton points to BP's commitment to move to net zero carbon emissions as resulting from shareholder engagement with the BP Board on aligning the company's strategy with the goals of the Paris Agreement.

## 6. Encouraging Positive Change

The additional complexity with fossil fuels referred to above ensures that change can only come about as the result of determined long term commitment to effecting those changes. Replacing fossil fuels will take many years to achieve. In these circumstances there is a case to be made that the greater impetus for change will result from an investment policy that is open to investing in companies that have a sustained commitment to move away from fossil fuels rather than a policy of disinvestment from the sector. Many of these companies have the scale to effect real progress in this direction. If this investment approach to the sector were to be adopted, the Trustees would want reassurance that the commitment by the company was genuine and that substantive progress was being made over time.

## 7. Impact On Returns

There is the potential for an adverse impact on performance in two ways. Firstly, the oil and gas sector is quite a substantial sector and comprised 3.52% of the portfolio (at 30 April 2021). Excluding companies from this sector will have some impact on overall performance but it is difficult to predict the outcome. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the sector has also historically generated valuable income for the fund. At our last meeting, Newton estimated a potential loss of £70k p.a. in income; however, given the size of our fund, Newton considered excluding the oil and gas sector may not necessarily adversely impact on capital performance. Our oil holdings do not generate much capital growth and it may well be feasible to make up the loss of income with some adjustments in other parts of the fund without a detrimental impact on overall performance.

## 8. Conclusion

The Trustees consider that there are two options:

- (a) that for ethical reasons the oil and gas sector is added to those sectors that the Trustees do not invest in, and that this applies equally to companies that derive more than 10% of their turnover from the sale of fossil fuels (*this is consistent with the approach adopted for other excluded sectors under the present Ethical Investment Policy*);

- (b) that for ethical reasons the Trustees are restricted from investing in the oil and gas sector or in companies that derive more than 10% of their turnover from the direct or indirect use of fossil fuels unless that company has demonstrated a clear commitment to reduce significantly its carbon footprint and progress is made towards that goal over time. It is the considered view of the Trustees that either option is in keeping with the original resolution. In addition it is, on balance, the considered view of the Trustees that if the desire is to effect positive change as quickly as possible then adopting option (b) is more likely to achieve that outcome.

# COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION

Convener: Rev S.E. HUGHES

Secretary: Rev W.S. MARRS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council for Global Mission is all about '*global disciples sharing God's heart for the world, declaring good news and demonstrating God's love*'. The Council is tasked with enabling the co-ordination and delivery of global mission as determined by the General Assembly (Code Par 115), and especially where it is beyond the ability of the local congregation and not falling under the remit of other mission councils, partners or agencies. This entails the development of a strategy on mission overseas, including partnership with overseas churches and sending global mission workers; promoting world development issues, including providing for an annual appeal; leading thinking on issues of global concern such as the environment, race relations, international relations (Code Par 278.3).
2. This report sets out the work of the Council for Global Mission from June 2020. Given the context of a Covid-19 pandemic, the areas of work covered were taken forward by the Global Mission Standing Committee, operating alongside the Council's new Assembly Committees which became operational from May 2020, with all meetings taking place by video-conferencing. The Council for Global Mission was able to meet face to face on 16 November 2020 and 14 June 2021 and reports as follows:
  - (a) **Global Mission** (Pars 3 to 17).
  - (b) **Global Development** (Pars 18 to 49).
  - (c) **Business and Finance** (Pars 50 to 54).

## GLOBAL MISSION

3. **Global Mission Workers:** The Council thanks God for the 29 global mission workers of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who, as his witnesses, serve in 11 countries around the world and for those who have been commissioned for service in the past year. Details of roles, locations, and global mission partners for those currently serving with the Council are found in Appendix A.



4. On Sunday, 23 December 2020, under the Integrate Programme of service, Steve Kennedy was ordained, inducted, and together with his wife, Rosie, commissioned by the Presbytery of Templepatrick for service in Romania with the Transylvania District of the Hungarian Reformed Church.
5. Memorial minutes were recorded in respect of the following former missionaries who passed away: Rev John Mann who served in Lebanon 1965–1975 and Malawi 1989–1999, died on 4 April 2020; Miss Rosemary Clements who served in Malawi 1982–1991, died on 3 August 2020; Rev Norman Duncan who served in India 1998–2004, died on 24 October 2020; Rev David Glover Bailie who served in India 1954–1961, died on 13 November 2020; Rev Alan Vincent Martin who served in India 1963–1968, died on 21 March 2021; and Mrs Margaret Jackson who served in India 1963–1969, died on 7 May 2021.
6. Covid-19: The advent of the pandemic led to the majority of global mission workers remaining in their countries of service, adjusting to local restrictions and endeavouring to continue their work. A small number who returned to Ireland for medical reasons or to facilitate the education of children, have been able to continue from a distance with significant elements of their work. International travel protocols have been drawn up and home assignments adjusted where necessary. After careful scoping, risk assessments and discussion with insurers, global mission workers were encouraged to be vaccinated, as far as possible, in their country of service. By June 2021, 72% had received their first vaccine.
7. Deputation: Most of the time it has not been possible to engage in face to face ‘deputation’ speaking engagements, although creative alternatives have been found. Following a number of training webinars to equip global mission workers in video recording, a series of videos under the banner of ‘Digital Dispatches’ has been made available on the PCI website. Initial feedback indicates that congregations have welcomed and made good use of these videos, using them in online and face to face services, and the plan is that these videos will be refreshed regularly.
8. Global mission worker prayer bulletins have continued to be produced monthly and global mission worker updates circulated to all ministers on three occasions over the past year. Articles focusing on global mission workers’ experiences during Covid-19 have featured in both the Herald and local press.
9. Global Mission Partnerships: A list of Global Mission Partnerships is provided in Appendix B. All of these partners have suffered adversity to one degree or another during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, especially where healthcare systems are weak and already struggling economies have been crippled by repeated lockdowns, with daily wage earners, widows, orphans, refugees and persecuted minorities suffering

the most. More than 3.5 million people have died from this disease and partners in South East Asia's second wave of Covid-19 have experienced a devastating impact, not least amongst ministers of the gospel as they continued to reach out to their congregations.

10. For some partners, however, Covid-19 has been just one of a number of crises faced in the past year. The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon is still dealing with the consequences of the Beirut explosion in August 2020, with serious economic instability and an ongoing refugee crisis. In addition to internal conflict, food insecurity, flooding and displacement, the 34th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan in November 2020 resulted in a split in the church that has paralysed the flow of much needed financial support from international partners to grassroot communities. The Presbyterian Church in Myanmar has been deeply impacted by the coup d'état there in February 2020 bringing the country to the brink of civil war. Over Easter 2021 the Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor and the Christian Church in Sumba, Indonesia, have experienced loss of life and the destruction of churches, schools and homes due to Cyclone Seroja.
11. Covid-19 restrictions have meant that no overseas visits have been made on behalf of the Council further to those reported in the 2020 General Assembly Report, nor have any visitors from overseas partners been hosted here in Ireland. In some cases, thanks to internet technology, it has been possible to sustain relationships with partners through video-conferencing. On a number of occasions in the past year, the Moderator has written to a partner church to express PCI's support during their time of crisis, and these expressions of solidarity have been warmly received.
12. Grants and emergency funding 2021: The Global Mission Standing Committee approved a schedule of grants totaling £58,889 for the support of partner projects in 2021 covering ten global mission partners around the world. The funding for these grants came from the United Appeal, the World Development Appeal, the Youth and Children's project and designated donations. Thanks to generous extra-mile giving, £53,288 was donated to emergency response projects of partners in Beirut, Lebanon following the Beirut explosion and £8,927 to partners in Timor and Sumba following Cyclone Seroja.
13. Miseen Cara: The Council for Global Mission has secured funding totaling €134,943 during 2020 through partnering with Miseen Cara, an international and Irish faith-based missionary movement, working with some of the most marginalised and vulnerable communities in the world. This funding is supporting the work of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Samburu Awareness and Action Project in Tuum for activities improving access to education particularly for girls, building community leadership and providing more opportunities for developing livelihoods. The United Mission to Nepal has also benefited from Miseen Cara funding, specifically an education project in the

Bahjang area of Western Nepal involved in training teachers, improving school water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, facilitating improvement of school management and governance systems and creating 'child-friendly' classrooms.

14. Global Leadership Training: Three Leaders in Training (LIT) remained within the UK during the pandemic in order to complete their studies that were being sponsored by the Lindsay Memorial Fund. Despite Covid-19 restrictions, each managed well, was followed up pastorally and all have now returned safely to their home countries: Mr Wamaka Nyondo achieved a Master's Degree in Sexual and Reproductive Health at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, returning to Malawi on 25 September 2020; Rev Elias Agola achieved a Master's Degree in Conflict Resolution at Queen's University, Belfast, returning to Kenya on 21 October 2020; Rev Anderson Juma achieved a Master's Degree in Social Research at Sheffield University, returning to Malawi on 28 January 2021.
15. The Global Mission Standing Committee approved a schedule of scholarships of £9,841 for the support of Leaders in Training from partner churches for 2021.
16. Looking forward: In preparing to emerge from the pandemic, the Global Mission Committee carries responsibility for bringing options to the Council when it comes to developing strategy for how PCI shares in the proclamation of the Good News overseas, especially through partnering and sending. It has looked carefully at its expenditure in this current COVID recovery phase 2021–22, identifying some key principles: the importance of walking by faith not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), trusting God to provide adequate funding for the global mission work He calls us to undertake; of listening keenly to congregations who fund the central work of the church; and of ensuring global mission partners, along with global mission workers, are listened to carefully when it comes to decision-making and priority setting.
17. While mindful of current funding challenges, this time of recovery is seen as a holding phase in which to sustain the number of global mission workers, global mission partners and grants, with budgets for 2021–22 having been set at the absolute minimum funding level required for the work to progress. This enables the Council to honour existing commitments both to global mission workers who are under the Call of God and of the Church, and to the partners with whom they serve. At the same time, key questions are emerging for the vision casting and strategic planning for partnering and sending in a reconstruction phase from 2023 to 2025 when more significant changes may be necessary. Guiding principles will need to be reviewed, especially when it comes to the place of prayer, discipleship, and communicating the story of mission. Questions will be addressed such as: Where to work? Who to work alongside? How to work together effectively? How to better resource the work? In considering this last question, it is hoped that in

consultation with the United Appeal Committee, the funding model for the sending of global mission workers will be reviewed.

HEATHER CLEMENTS, Convener

## GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

18. **World Development Appeal 2019:** The Appeal raised a total of £497,174 with funds being transferred to Christian Aid Ireland and Tearfund, except for £9,807 retained to promote the next appeal, and £30,000 allocated to partner church projects as follows:
  - £5,000 to the CCAP Livingstonia Synod Health Co-ordination Department, Malawi
  - £5,000 to Minority Focus, Nepal
  - £10,000 to the Evangelical Church of Halmahera, Indonesia
  - £7,000 to the Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor, Indonesia (Cyclone Seroja)
  - £3,000 to the Christian Church in Sumba, Indonesia (Cyclone Seroja)
19. With regard to development projects being supported in Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Angola, the Global Mission Standing Committee approved requests from Christian Aid and Tearfund to reallocate small portions of funding received with a view to covering emergency needs arising due to Covid-19.
20. **Moderator's Christmas Appeal 2020:** In April 2020, recognising the growing global impact of the Covid-19 crisis and anticipating a church wide appeal later in the year, the Global Mission Standing Committee approved an initial emergency response by PCI, advancing £60,000 to be split three ways between Christian Aid Ireland, Tearfund and PCI's partner churches and organisations.
21. Given the significant financial challenges unfolding within congregations during the pandemic, prayerful consideration was given to the nature and timing of the next church-wide appeal. The Global Mission Standing Committee presented a report with options in this regard to the General Assembly Standing Commission in September 2020 where it was agreed that instead of launching a World Development Appeal in October 2020, there would be a Moderator's Christmas Appeal launched at the start of Advent entitled, 'At Home for Christmas?' The aim of this Appeal was to express PCI's solidarity with the great needs found in the majority world due to Covid-19, pointing to its impact on national economies, healthcare systems, and the plight of refugees and migrant workers.
22. By June 2021 the Appeal had raised £361,306 with funds being split three ways between Christian Aid Ireland, Tearfund and PCI's partner churches and mission organisations as follows: Diakonia,

Transylvanian Reformed Church District, Romania; the Compassion Protestant Society, National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon; the Christian Church of Sumba, Indonesia; the United Mission to Nepal; the Livingstonia Synod Health Co-ordination Department, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Malawi; the Presbyterian Relief and Development Association, Presbyterian Church of South Sudan; and the Gujarat Diocese, Church of North India.

23. **World Development Appeal 2021:** Mindful of the 26th U.N. Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) taking place in Glasgow in November 2021, along with the report being brought to the Assembly encouraging fossil fuel divestment, the Council agreed that the World Development Appeal 2021 should adopt the broad theme of climate justice in a way that would highlight this issue as one of global Christian discipleship, as well as embracing young people who have been expressing great concern on the matter. It was further agreed that the lead project for the Appeal would be Christian Aid's partner in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission. The second project would be a Tearfund one in Haiti with their partner, FOKA (Fondasyon Kominote Kreyen An Aksyon (Christian Community Foundation in Action). Appeal resources focusing on the important issue of climate justice will be highlighted. It is planned that the launch of the Appeal will take place in Assembly Buildings on Thursday, 21 October 2021.
24. In July 2020 Dr David Bruce, PCI's Moderator, wrote to UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, to express PCI's deep concern over the UK Government's plans to merge the Department for International Development (DFID) with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), jeopardising support for the world's poorest communities at the time of the Covid-19 global pandemic. The Moderator's letter was followed up by a press release which gained local coverage in the newspapers and Rev Dr Liz Hughes addressed the matter on Sunday Sequence.
25. **Global Issues:** Four agents have been appointed by the Council for Global Mission, each with the important role of being a catalyst for the effective functioning of the Global Development Committee. They will seek to contribute to thinking from a biblical perspective on key global issues, promoting interest and action locally, endeavouring to recognise the implications for Christian discipleship. This may mean working with strategic partnerships, collaborating with other PCI Councils, and bringing updates to the Committee from time to time.
26. **Inter-cultural Relations:** Rev Helen Freeburn, agent for inter-cultural relations, is exploring a range of what are cross-cutting issues for PCI, in consultation with other Councils, especially the Council for Public Affairs.
27. Racism and inclusion are very challenging issues that appear in many forms and guises. Through following up on research initiatives, one aim is to keep abreast of the experiences of ethnic minorities in churches

on the island of Ireland, with a view to ensuring PCI's own house is in order before seeking to call society to account. In addition to grappling with issues such as colonialism, empire, and the spiritual battle against fear, prejudice, and segregation, PCI will need to reflect on the place of ethnic minorities in leadership roles within the Church.

28. Direct Provision Legislation (Republic of Ireland): Migrants require great resilience to endure the challenges of the current system of direct provision, despite the security it seeks to offer. What can PCI be doing to encourage the development and implementation of a new International Support System being put forward and respond more meaningfully to the related housing crisis affecting those given leave to remain in the Republic of Ireland?
29. Migration to the UK: The Global Development Committee looks forward to strengthening links with Embrace Northern Ireland, not least to glean up-to-date information on the current migration rules, with concern for the most vulnerable migrants and developments at the detention centre, Larne House. There is the possibility of around 130,000 UK passport holders coming to live in the UK from Hong Kong in the course of this year and the Church needs to consider how it will prepare for this.
30. £5,000 has been donated to Embrace Northern Ireland, being the third of three payments approved towards the funding of their development officer.
31. Churches of Sanctuary Movement: This movement seeks to encourage churches to consider how they provide a real welcome and hospitality, an important area of focus for PCI going forward. In this regard, congregations should be encouraged to take up the 'Home' Bible Study Series on the book of Ruth, perhaps as they plan Bible studies for the year ahead.
32. **International Relations:** Rev Dr Donald Watts is the agent for international relations where there is potential for wide-ranging engagement and for any one of a number of international situations to move centre-stage, e.g. Yemen, Myanmar, and the plight of the Uighurs in China. Nevertheless, the Committee recognises its need to prioritise and maintain focus, and for now that is on the Middle East, specifically Israel and Palestine, exploring sensitive yet effective means by which PCI can engage with this ongoing crisis.
33. The 'Faith and Freedom in the Middle East' Conference planned for April 2020 was cancelled due to Covid-19. Instead, the keynote speaker, Rita El-Mounayer, CEO of SAT-7, prepared a video message which was placed on the PCI website in early June, along with a blog entitled 'Faith & Isolation'.
34. Bethlehem Bible College ran a webinar on 13 June 2020 entitled, 'Hope and Resilience in a Broken World'. This took the place of the 'Christ at the Checkpoint' tenth anniversary conference which has been postponed indefinitely due to Covid-19.

35. In July 2020 Kairos Palestine, an international movement responding to a call to solidarity with Palestinians, published a statement entitled, “Cry for Hope: A call for decisive action”. In follow-up to this Kairos Ireland has run a series of webinars in 2021.
36. During 2021, as tensions in the region grew, Christian Aid Ireland held a webinar on Israel and Palestine featuring their partners, B’tSelem and Al Haq. They also held a breakfast briefing involving William Bell, Christian Aid’s Head of Middle East Policy and Advocacy, along with a representative of their partners in Gaza.
37. When it comes to making statements and lobbying government, the Global Development Committee acknowledges the many sensitivities associated with Israel and Palestine, the need to be able to back up statements with wise and well-informed comment, and to draw alongside diaspora communities here in Ireland. In wrestling with these questions, there is much need for prayer for both Israelis and Palestinians, and to facilitate learning in the wider church through events and seminars on related issues e.g. Christian Zionism.
38. **World Faiths:** Rev John Faris is the agent for world faiths. While in recent years the Mission Department has provided a limited number of copies of the prayer guide, ‘15 Days of Prayer for the Hindu World’ which is designed for use in and around Diwali each year, this year congregations were encouraged to order copies online via the following link: [www.15daysprayer.org.uk](http://www.15daysprayer.org.uk). Having given significant time to reporting on Islam in recent years, the focus moving forward will be on Hinduism, considering it in the Irish context but also listening to and learning from those overseas partners with significantly more experience of relating to those of other faiths. With regard to relating to Hinduism, there is much to learn from PCI’s longstanding partner, the Church of North India, Gujarat Diocese.
39. **Stewardship of Creation:** Rev Allen Sleith is the agent for stewardship of creation working on a number of fronts, also bringing a particular interest in eco-theology and having written an article for the summer 2021 edition of the *Presbyterian Herald* focusing on climate justice in the build up to the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26).
40. In response to an invitation from the Trustees (responding to a letter from members of Waringstown Congregation), the Council for Global Mission’s report to the General Assembly in 2020 invited a review of PCI’s investment policies, particularly in relation to fossil fuels. This report was remitted by the General Assembly Standing Commission to be considered by the General Assembly 2021 (See Appendix C attached).
41. Helpful conversations have been held with Stephen Trew who brought in the Private Members Bill which enabled the Church of Ireland to take the decision to divest from fossil fuels. He demonstrates how trustees of a company can maintain their highest fiduciary responsibility and still divest from fossil fuel extraction companies. According to the IEA (International Energy Agency), investments by oil and gas companies

in low-carbon initiatives represent less than 1% of their total capital expenditure, and even leading companies spend only 5% on projects outside of oil and gas. It is essential that oil majors transition to survive but they may not be the best investments for the future. Evidence is available that oil majors will be stuck with stranded assets that will put their operations at risk. Coal is already a stranded asset and oil and gas are increasingly at risk. In 2019 the Bank of England warned that \$20 trillion of assets were at risk. (source [www.theasset.com/article-esp/43697/transition-risk-becomes-more-real-for-oil-and-gas-firms](http://www.theasset.com/article-esp/43697/transition-risk-becomes-more-real-for-oil-and-gas-firms)).

42. It is hoped that discussion on the way forward can be facilitated with PCI's Trustees. How PCI invests is a reflection of the value that is being placed on God's creation and is an outworking of Presbyterians' discipleship as followers of Jesus Christ.
43. PCI is a member body of Eco-Congregation Ireland, making a grant of £600 in 2021, and represented at meetings by Rev Allen Sleith and Mr Joe Furphy. At present its focus has been on local initiatives, mainly in the Republic of Ireland. It was recognised that initiatives work best when they have taken root at local congregational level.
44. 'Climate Sunday' [www.climatesunday.org](http://www.climatesunday.org) is a Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) initiative, designating 5 September 2021 as Climate Sunday. The Council has agreed that PCI congregations should be encouraged to set aside one Sunday during the autumn, possibly their Harvest Thanksgiving Service, as Climate Sunday mindful that COP26 will take place from 1 - 12 November 2021.
45. Rev Allen Sleith and Dr Ethel White represented the Global Development Committee at the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) General Assembly Network Conference held online from 31 May to 1 June 2021. The theme was "Reconciled with creation: A call for urgent action on climate and biodiversity."
46. With regard to the Climate Change Bill of the Northern Ireland Assembly, concern was expressed that only a small proportion of the Bill is devoted to the details of climate change, the majority dealing with legalities and house-keeping. Rev Allen Sleith and Miss Karen Jardine, PCI's Public Affairs Officer, will be taking a closer look at the contents of the Bill, keeping in mind that any submissions need to be made by 15 July 2021.
47. **Looking forward:** In progressing work on global issues it is recognised that there is particular importance in listening to partners who are wrestling with these issues and being open to what the Holy Spirit is saying regarding the global church's deep concern for biblical justice as reflected in the vision of God's upside-down Kingdom of justice, equality, and dignity in Mary's song. Luke 1:52-53.
48. 'Principles of engagement' by which the Committee grapples with global issues need to be further developed and shared with the wider church, as does a protocol for dealing with particular global crises as and when they emerge, whether or not this results in a Moderator's Appeal.



49. The Global Development Committee received a paper outlining global issues, many of them intersecting, that the Committee will be considering in the autumn 2021, keeping in mind that each issue ought to be tied in with the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ. The challenge of getting key global issues discussed more widely in PCI congregations has been highlighted and needs to be revisited. A schedule of priorities will be brought to the General Assembly 2022.

LIZ HUGHES, Acting Convener

## BUSINESS AND FINANCE

50. **Finance:** The Council records its deep appreciation for the United Appeal funding received each year that makes possible so much of its work, together with the whole-hearted support and generous grant received annually from Presbyterian Women. Council for Global Mission accounts for the year 2020 indicate a net surplus of £164,075 on the Income and Expenditure Account, a figure that reflects the sale of fixed assets during the year. A United Appeal grant of £1,061,500 has been approved for 2021, with the Council requesting a grant of £1,000,000 in its budget for 2022.
51. **Property:** The sale of the property at 44 Marlborough Park North completed just prior to Christmas 2020 and net proceeds of £422,193 are reflected in the 2020 accounts.
52. **Staffing:** Whether working from home or office, or finding themselves furloughed, the Mission Department staff team have served with great dedication, flexibility and gracious resilience over this past year, ensuring the work of the Council has been able to continue steadily. Regrettably, mainly due to a lower volume of work during the Covid-19 pandemic, difficult decisions have been necessary and redundancies made. While a smaller staff team will take forward the work of the Council in the year ahead, the Mission Department's capacity will be reviewed as it responds to the new challenges and opportunities that undoubtedly lie ahead.
53. **Convenerships:** The Council expresses its deep appreciation to Rev Fiona Forbes who stepped down from the convenership of the Global Development Committee during 2020. While circumstances led to this convenership being much briefer than anyone wished, the Council acknowledges the tremendous amount Fiona brought to the role in a short time, not least in terms of hard work, spirituality and vision for grappling with global issues.
54. The Council very much values the prayers of the church as it looks forward to the appointment of a new Global Development Committee Convener and as the process gets underway for identifying a new Council Convener for appointment in 2022.

LIZ HUGHES, Convener

## APPENDIX A

### GLOBAL MISSION WORKERS

*Global mission workers: the names, spheres and category of service are listed below:*

#### INTEGRATE PROGRAMME – service of two or more years

##### **Brazil**

Naomi Keefe	2004	Outreach programme, The Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB), Recife
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##### **Great Britain**

Edwin and Anne Kibathi	2009	Ministry among East Africans in East London
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##### **KENYA**

Stephen and Angelina Cowan	1985 1989	Outreach and development work, Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), Tuum
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Naomi Leremore	1991	Development of Theological Education by Extension materials, PCEA, Nairobi
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Gary and Mary Reid	2000	Outreach and development work, PCEA, Olkinyiei
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##### **Central and Southern Africa**

Volker and JinHyeog Glissmann	2010	Consultant to Theological Education by Extension in TEEC – South Africa Music Teacher in Phoenix International Primary School in Blantyre - Malawi
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##### **Middle East**

Two global mission workers	2016	Theological education
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##### **Nepal**

Peter and Valerie Lockwood	2012	Programme Advisor United Mission to Nepal (UMN), Kathmandu
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Peter and Jayne Fleming	2017	Integral Development Advisor UMN, Kathmandu Teacher, Kathmandu International Study Centre
<b>Portugal</b>		
James and Heather Cochrane	2008	Church planting – Comunidade Pedras Vivas. Christian Presbyterian Church of Portugal (ICPP) in Senhora de Hora, Porto (since 2013)
Chris and Rachel Humphries	2019	Church planting – Comunidade Pedras Vivas Christian Presbyterian Church of Portugal (ICCP) in Senhora de Hora, Porto
<b>Romania</b>		
Csaba and Ilona Veres	2001 1993	Co-ordinator – SERVANT Mission of Diakonia, Cluj Mera children's project
Steve and Rosie Kennedy	2020	Outreach ministry with Cluj Christian Fellowship of the Tóvidéki congregation of the Hungarian Reformed Church (Transylvania District)
<b>Russia</b>		
Two global mission workers	2019	Theological education
<b>Spain</b>		
Derek and Jane French	2000	Student outreach with Grupos Biblicos Unidos (GBU), Bilbao
<b>Zambia</b>		
Diane Cusick	1995	Early Childhood Development Officer, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Zambia Synod (since 2016).

## APPENDIX B

### Global Mission Partnerships

*PCI is currently engaged in global mission partnership with the following churches, institutions and agencies:*

#### Europe

- The Christian Presbyterian Church of Portugal
- The Evangelical Reformed Church of Latvia (including the Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary)
- Faculté Jean Calvin, France
- Grupos Biblicos Unidos, Spain
- The Hungarian Reformed Church, in Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine
- St Petersburg Christian University, Russia

#### Africa

- The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Blantyre, Livingstonia, and Nkhoma Synods, Malawi
- Scripture Union, Malawi
- Theological Education by Extension Malawi
- The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Zambia Synod
- The Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Kenya
- The Presbyterian Church of South Sudan and Sudan (including the Presbyterian Relief and Development Agency, Nile Theological College, and Giffen Institute of Theology)

#### Middle East

- Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary
- The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (including the Near East School of Theology)

#### Asia

- The Christian Church of Sumba, Indonesia
- The Evangelical Christian Church of Halmahera, Indonesia
- The Protestant Christian Church of Timor, Indonesia
- The Church of North India
- The Presbyterian Church of Pakistan (including Gujranwala Theological Seminary)
- United Bible Training Centre, Pakistan
- United Mission to Nepal

- Association for Theological Education, Nepal
- Minority Focus, Nepal
- The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar

### **Caribbean and Latin America**

- The Presbyterian Church of Brazil

## **APPENDIX C**

### **‘Reviewing PCI’s Investment Policy’<sup>1</sup>**

“The Lord God put the man in the Garden of Eden to take care of it and to look after it.” Genesis 2:15 (Contemporary English Version).

The General Assembly of 2018 passed a resolution commending the Stewardship of Creation Report on Climate Change and encouraging congregations to consider how its conclusions might challenge lifestyle choices.

The Report has provided a biblical and theological foundation to guide PCI as it approaches issues relating to the care of God’s creation. It affirms God’s creation as being good and reflects on the importance of God’s people being good stewards of that same creation. This is understood as both an outworking of and a witness to the Christian faith. By implication, failure to look after the gift that God has entrusted to people conveys a disregard for God; as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

Further, climate change disadvantages PCI’s brothers and sisters in other parts of the world disproportionately. Those who live in more vulnerable locations or who do not have adequate safety nets are especially susceptible to the impact of rising sea levels, droughts and floods. If God’s people in the West are to carry out Jesus’ command to love their neighbour as themselves, serious consideration needs to be given to consumption and the impact it has on neighbours in the wider world.

Commending a report is one thing. How Presbyterians allow that report to change their practice is another. Perhaps most challenging is how it impacts lifestyle choices; not least regarding how money is invested. Indeed, in their use of money, God’s people demonstrate how seriously they take what they claim to believe regarding creation, stewardship and discipleship.

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1 Report referred to the General Assembly 2021 by the Standing Commission of the General Assembly, February, 2021

Presbyteries, congregations and individual members have raised this challenge; particularly, but not limited to, the investments we hold as a denomination. More specifically, the issue of investment in fossil fuels was raised in a letter from members of Waringstown congregation to the Trustees of PCI. This letter was in turn referred to the Stewardship of Creation Panel for consideration.

Over the past few years other Irish and European church bodies and PCI partners, including Christian Aid and Tearfund, have chosen to move towards divesting from fossil fuels. While this cannot in itself be a reason for PCI to do likewise, it does seem timely to examine PCI's policies in this regard.

Historically, PCI has chosen to divest from companies that could not be defended morally, including those in the armaments, gambling, alcohol and tobacco industries. These positions have necessarily evolved as PCI become more aware of the inherent moral inconsistencies. The same can be said of our growing understanding of climate change. Continuing to support investment policies which contradict our understanding of the damage being done to the earth clearly provides an inconsistent witness.

Scientists inform us that present fossil usage is a major contributor to global warming. Bob (Robert) White, Professor of Geophysics in the Department of Earth Sciences at the University of Cambridge and a member of Christians in Science says:

“It is increasingly clear that our use of oil and gas in the West is driving rapid climate change in the whole world... The effects of more extreme weather events will fall disproportionately on the very young and very old, on the poor and the marginalised in places such as sub-Saharan Africa. One quarter of the planet's population lives in poverty and is extremely vulnerable to changes caused by drought or flooding, to the failure of agricultural crops or to rising sea levels. If we take caring for our global neighbour seriously, we need to consider the impact of our lifestyles on them.”<sup>2</sup>

At the Paris Climate Conference of 2016 there was widespread agreement to address the climate “crisis” by holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change. Studies show that the carbon contained in existing fossil fuel using, if allowed to run its course, would take us beyond the globally agreed goals of the Paris Agreement.

Some have argued that divestment from fossil fuels is not possible because of the legal obligations that require trustees to act in the best interests of their members (fiduciary duty). However, on the other

hand some specialists in charity law have argued that carbon intensive investments may create a conflict between a church and its mission. In this case divestment from fossil fuels may be the only morally sustainable option.

Good stewardship of creation can have positive financial benefits for us too. Academic research and market trends suggest that divestment may not necessarily hurt our pockets. With the need to meet targets on greenhouse gas emissions, profit margins for fossil fuel companies may well be compromised. Government policies could also have an impact. For example, the United Kingdom government have made a commitment to phase out coal by 2025.

Divesting from fossil fuels may provide opportunities for PCI to take a lead in investing in positive alternatives including renewable energy and clean technologies. Examples may include solar and wind power, and the use of electric vehicles. Adequate investment in these areas is urgently needed to ensure a rapid transition to an economy which considerably reduces carbon.

In summary, PCI's investment policies must flow from a biblical basis and theology of creation, a commitment to God's world and to those whom Jesus Christ described as neighbours. The broad consensus of scientific thought supports the view that fossil fuel production contributes to climate change. It is therefore morally questionable to invest in companies deriving revenue from fossil fuels.

PCI's response should reflect a consistency of witness and provide a lead to church members and wider society. Most importantly, how PCI invest reflects how we value our Heavenly Father's creation and is an outworking of what it means to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

# COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS

Convener: Rev COLIN MORRISON

Secretary: Rev DAVID THOMPSON

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council for Congregational Life and Witness has met on two occasions since last year's General Assembly.
2. The report details:
  - (a) How the council has approached fulfilling its General Assembly remit during the interruption to all aspects of church life due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
  - (b) Main emphases and initiatives in accompanying congregations during the pandemic and lockdowns since June 2020.
  - (c) The programme delivered by Presbyterian Women.
  - (d) The framework for going forward from September 2021.
  - (e) Readjusted programme and priorities.
  - (f) Council learning from the pandemic period.
  - (g) Provision of support for the work of the council.
  - (h) From past to future: Transition rather than transformation.
3. Appendix: Report and recommendations of the Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee received and adopted at its meeting of 5 May 2021

### **Doing things differently. Doing different things**

4. Throughout the period of the Covid-19 pandemic the normal operations and ministry of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness have given way to a wider and more general role in supporting congregations and their members during this season of disruption.
5. The stop start nature of changing public health restrictions has caused major disruption to the life and witness of congregations. A further unanticipated and prolonged lockdown after Christmas, from which we are only just beginning to emerge, brought hopes of a resumption of more normal patterns of church life in early 2021 crashing down.
6. The council has set itself to be as nimble and agile as possible in responding to a very fluid situation to offer accompaniment, encouragement and support to congregations on their journey through



trying times. While congregations have faced the challenge of struggling to gain any momentum in their life, the council's challenge has been different. Constantly having to do things differently due to restrictions on meeting, staff furloughing and home working, and having to put any semblance of normal activity on hold so as to do different things, has created a relentless intensity to the work.

7. Throughout, the council has been proactive in listening and responding to what it hears of the diverse challenges faced by congregations. Despite the limitations of restrictions on in-person meetings, the council has maintained its regular pattern and number of meetings of full council and General Assembly committee meetings, often undertaken on Microsoft Teams. Panels have been called only where absolutely necessary to transact urgent matters of business. This has enabled members of each of these bodies to be kept up to date with latest initiatives and to shape the council's priorities through regular opportunities provided for feedback and discussion. More informal feedback via the digital programme of webinars, podcasts, digital conversations and presbytery *Fanning the Flame* events has supplemented and nuanced both listening and response.
8. In practice this has led to the council working in two to three month bursts of focused messaging and activity, picking up and seeking to develop and communicate on particular themes in a variety of ways to address emerging congregational needs for support.

### **Accompanying congregations during the pandemic and lockdowns**

9. From the last report of the council prepared for the General Assembly scheduled to meet in June 2020 to the present, main emphases, initiatives and activities have included the following:
  10. June to August 2020
    - Continuation of the *These Three Remain* initiative commenced in March 2020 at the onset of the pandemic. Animating, amplifying and making accessible the denominational story of the journey of congregations and their members through lockdown via blogs, podcasts, *Tides*, *Let's Pray* and *In This Moment* prayers;
    - Release of downloadable *Unprecedented* Zoom Bible studies specifically designed for use in digital gatherings;
    - *Blended* children's and youth ministry ideas shared via the PCI website;
    - Release of family prayer resource via the PCI website;
    - Release of *Proximity 3: Habits of a Lifetime* in print resource;
    - Creation of the *Redefined* section on the PCI website sharing stories of congregations approaching aspects of their life and witness differently in response to pandemic restrictions;
    - In this phase there was an emphasis on gradually moving beyond initial response to the pandemic into more regular resourcing,

equipping and preparing for an anticipated emergence from lockdown restrictions in September 2021. This improvement in the situation did not transpire as the spike in Covid-19 cases led to the resumption of restrictions.

#### 11. September to December 2020

- Transition from *These Three Remain* initiative to *Refined* branding to encourage a gradual shift of thinking from response mode to a receptivity to discernment and learning;
- Continuation of the core digital programme of podcasts, webinars, blogs, *Tides* and social media;
- Release of *Prism* Bible studies and *Open to God: Leading out of Lockdown* resource for leadership teams;
- Release of *Refined Digital Conference* and global mission worker *Digital Dispatches*;
- Gathering of formal and informal feedback to shape the next phase of resourcing congregations in the post-Christmas period.

#### 12. January to May 2021

- Emphasis on responding to feedback from the full meeting of the council in November 2020 and meetings of the Congregational Life and Witness committees in January 2021;
- The continuation of the core digital framework of podcasts, webinars, blogs, *Tides* and social media was also supplemented until Easter by a programme of small scale digital conversations hosted by staff with a focus on creating conversation among congregational leaders to encourage and envision in a particularly difficult period of ministry;
- Working in conjunction with the Moderator on the *For Now* initiative to provide every congregation with a simple means of reconnecting with families in their congregation;
- Working in conjunction with the Moderator on the *Sinking?* initiative to provide the church with some simple evangelistic material in digital format that they could encourage members to share;
- Working in conjunction with the Moderator on the *Fanning the Flame* initiative offering every presbytery in Northern Ireland a digital event in the month of May 2021 to which leaders in congregations under their care could be invited to participate to consider the challenges and opportunities of the return to more regular patterns of church life as lockdown restrictions eased. Events for presbyteries with congregations in the Republic of Ireland followed during the month of June to better coincide with the timing of the lifting of restrictions in that jurisdiction;
- Release of *Whole* digital Bible study material offering a framework for exploring a Christian perspective on well-being and *Encounters with Jesus* material for families;

- Provision of 5,000 free resources for congregational use with young people entitled *Shaken*, which offered an age-appropriate Christian perspective on mental wellbeing (funding from the Education Authority NI);
- Provision of 5,000 free resources for congregational use with children and families entitled *Jesus and Emotions*, which offered an age-appropriate Christian perspective on mental wellbeing (funding from the Education Authority NI);
- Provision of a free *Youth App* for use in retaining effective contact with young people during the pandemic and beyond (funding from the Education Authority NI);
- Partnering with the Presbyterian Children's Society to publicise grant funding available to congregations to enable Covid-19 response, and in particular the opportunity to purchase digital devices for families who needed such equipment for home schooling and to access online digital ministry;
- The commissioning of a piece of research into congregational children's and youth ministry across the Presbyterian Church in Ireland scheduled to take place in 2022 (funding from the Education Authority NI);
- Update to *Refined* section of the PCI website including ideas for being together again for children's ministry and youth ministry.

13. June to August 2021

- During the summer months, a scaled back digital programme continued to carry the main emphases of the *Fanning the Flame* initiative, encouraging congregations and their members to be getting ready, getting together and making preparations for getting restarted;
- An experiment in creating shorter, sharable social media content on the main themes of the *Fanning the Flame* initiative was piloted with a view to offering congregations some simple ways of sharing crucial messages with their members in preparation for the resumption of more normal patterns of church life;
- From August the council also publicised and encouraged the potential of a number of possibilities for staff engagement with individual congregations as they began to assess and adjust to where they find themselves and consider future rhythms of life and witness.

14. Throughout this period and as of time of writing, circumstances continue to dictate that the council works within the confines of the General Council decision that 'for the foreseeable future councils and departments will have to be focused primarily on meeting key essentials.'

15. In practical terms this means working with realistic expectations in present circumstances. Members of the General Assembly should

therefore understand that the council's overall output is much more streamlined than usual and appreciate that any activities undertaken have to be safe for anyone participating or involved in delivery. Wisdom about sustainability needs to be carefully applied in what remains a situation with few certainties, resulting in a consequent inability to plan ahead with any confidence in assuring delivery.

16. All of the council's ministries have to carefully observe up to date public health advice and operate within the limits of a now reduced staff team many of whom have been working reduced hours during the period of the Government Job Retention Scheme, often from home to comply with government advice. Activities cannot be restarted which may prove difficult to sustain if the future public health situation deteriorates and subsequent restrictions are quickly re-imposed. Therefore the focus for now continues to be on keeping delivery simple and grounded in response to immediate, presenting, congregational needs. For the present, output still needs to be deliverable digitally, or by download, and with a careful eye to budget.

### **Presbyterian Women**

17. The work of *Presbyterian Women* has continued under difficult circumstances ably guided and overseen by the PW Panel. The annual theme and home and overseas projects for 2020 have been extended for a further year. The *Wider World* magazine is being provided in shorter format as permitted by the General Council's denominational magazine policy in response to Covid-19. Ongoing use of social media and a webinar in February 2021 has been successful in harnessing digital mediums to encourage members. The *Annual Meeting and Celebration*, usually held in May, will be replaced by a pre-recorded digital conference in September 2021. Under General Council instruction and the guidance of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, the PW Panel will continue to take lead responsibility in shaping an appropriate response to the situation in support of PW groups and the wider work of resourcing other forms of women's ministry in congregations in the autumn and until the period of the pandemic passes.

### **Framework for going forward from September 2021**

18. As the impact of both the length and depth of the pandemic continues to disrupt normal patterns of being together in church life at all levels, planning a coherent council programme for the period from September onwards remains all but impossible.
19. Under normal circumstances, the remit of the Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee involves overseeing budget and encouraging greater coordination of the council's remit, messaging and resourcing of congregations. Undertaking its key role in shaping overall council programming, at its meeting on 5 May 2021 the committee received a

paper and adopted its recommendations for a flexible, interim plan for the period September 2021 to February 2022.

20. This framework is intended to shape the work of the Congregational Life and Witness Committees and other council panels during this period. The basic principles adopted are as follows:
  - That the primary focus of the council from September 2021 to February 2022 will be the continuation of the programme of accompaniment for congregations in their journey out of lockdown and enabling denominational learning from the pandemic, rather than the return to a more regular pattern of programmes, events and resource production.
  - The adoption of only short term planning up until February 2022.
  - A balance of realism about the challenges that lie ahead with a built in flexibility allowing the nimble development and delivery of a range of small scale, specifically targeted initiatives should changing circumstances allow and demand.
  - A review of the situation in January 2022, or before if appropriate, to assess and schedule a set of priorities for the period March to August 2022.
21. So as to give members of the General Assembly a full understanding of the deliberations and fine balances involved in the Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee's shaping of the framework for the council's work from September 2021 to February 2022, the full report and specific recommendations as received and adopted at its meeting of 5 May 2021 is reproduced as an appendix to the report. It also offers more detail on how the council will address some previously identified short and medium term priority pieces of work while navigating current circumstances.

### **Readjusted programme and priorities**

22. With the principle of the primary focus of the council from September 2021 to February 2022 established as being the continuation of the programme of accompaniment for congregations in their journey out of lockdown and enabling denominational learning from the pandemic, rather than the return to a more regular pattern of programmes and events, meetings of the Programme, Finance and Co-ordination Committee, Congregational Life Committee and Congregational Witness Committee, as well as the full meeting of the Council in June 2021, have sought to piece together an outline vision for the months ahead.
23. As a first significant step back into in-person events whenever that becomes practicable, under the working title of *Coming Back: Going Forward*, the council has adopted the priority of future gatherings delivered either regionally or in each presbytery. Their focus would be on facilitating reflection on the challenges faced by congregations as they resume more regular rhythms of church life, as well as opportunities

that are opening up to reimagine ministry and mission for the future. A resolution encouraging presbyteries and congregations to publicise and participate in these events is provided for the consideration of the Assembly. It is also anticipated that in-person events for youth groups and a specific investment in the support and development of leaders may also assume early importance as a greater degree of normality expands the scope for further council initiatives.

24. A particular focus on helping congregations in what seems likely to be an ongoing task of reconnecting with core and fringe members, those who previously attended organisations and activities, as well as their local communities, will also be sought to be addressed in a variety of ways.

### **Accompanying congregations and denominational learning**

25. The Congregational Life and Witness Committees have given consideration to the presenting needs of congregations for accompaniment and support as they emerge from lockdown restrictions as well as offering preliminary observations on areas for denominational learning which seem to be emerging as important.
26. In accompanying congregations in aspects of congregational life in their journey out of lockdown the following priorities were identified by the Congregational Life Committee.
  - Re-engaging with members and those who previously attended church activities, but especially with families with young children and young people.
  - Understanding why families with young children have not returned to worship. This may be due to stress, lack of provision of specific ministry for children, loss of the habit of coming, or a failure to appreciate the importance of the rhythm of public worship. The restoration of a simple model of Sunday morning children's ministry may be key to encouraging return.
  - The sharing of stories of what can be done and has been done by congregations as restrictions gradually ease.
27. In seeking to enable denominational learning from the pandemic in aspects of congregational life, the following key questions were identified:
  - As we emerge from the pandemic, how can we create realistic spaces in congregations in which leaders can facilitate conversation about what we have learned and reassessment of core congregational activities and programmes?
  - What have we learned about the central place of worship in the life of the church throughout this time and how can we continue to develop this in a way that meaningfully engages all ages?
  - What have we learned about utilising a wider range of means and people in the area of pastoral contact to connect with members and offer them effective pastoral care?

- What have we learned about both the potential and limitations of using digital ministry for worship, prayer, discipleship and leadership meetings?
  - What have we learned about the interaction of parents as primary disciplers alongside congregational children's and youth programming, and what does a healthy and effective rhythm of congregational life to support and develop that partnership look like?
28. Neither of these lists of priorities or questions in the area of developing congregational life can be considered definitive or exhaustive. They represent a snapshot of reflections at a particular stage on what is an ongoing journey which is far from over. Other priorities and perspectives will no doubt emerge and the council will continue to seek to listen and respond to future developments.
29. In accompanying congregations in aspects of congregational witness in their journey out of lockdown the following priorities were identified by the Congregational Witness Committee:
- The need to encourage and resource one-to-one witness by envisioning, encouraging and equipping members to share their faith by providing frameworks and a language to do so effectively. Encouragingly, there has been creativity shown in one-to-one witness by many church organisations during the pandemic and there is opportunity to harness and build upon that momentum.
  - The possibility of the church positioning itself to speak effectively and at an appropriate level of engagement into what is anticipated to be a longer term mental health crisis, especially among young people.
  - The possibility of reconnecting with fringe members as we emerge from lockdown restrictions with a sharper evangelistic edge.
30. In seeking to enable denominational learning from the pandemic in aspects of congregational witness, the following key questions were identified:
- How do we witness effectively to those who are housebound because of age or ill health?
  - How can we build a sustainable model of meeting practical community needs by drawing on what we learned from activities and initiatives undertaken during lockdown, alongside a process of community listening, to discern newly identified emerging needs?
  - How can we harness digital media for outreach that increase accessibility and allow an easier point of entry to encountering the gospel for some people, while not losing the primary place of deep in-person relationships in bearing effective witness?

- What has the pandemic experience taught us about the balance between equipping members for witness in their everyday and church-based evangelism courses and activities? What specific areas might equipping members for everyday witness demand in the aftermath of the pandemic?
  - As global disciples, how can we grow our interest and involvement in what God is doing in other parts of the world through the shared experience of what has been a global pandemic?
31. As in the area of congregational life above, neither of these lists of priorities or questions in the area of developing congregational witness can be considered definitive or exhaustive. They too represent a snapshot of reflections at a particular stage on what is an ongoing journey which is still unfolding. Other priorities and perspectives will no doubt emerge and the council will continue to seek to be alert to them and their implications for the mission of the church and its members.

### **Council learning**

32. It is important that in the future development of its General Assembly remit, the council also sets itself to learn from the experience of the period of the pandemic. Mirroring what has happened in congregational life, its routines and regular approaches to ministry have been disrupted and deconstructed.
33. The inability to easily recommence and simply restore previous programmes and events is disorientating, but it should be seen as a God-given moment to take stock of what is delivered and how.
34. Positive developments have already seen a growing ability to harness the potential of the added value of a digital platform of podcasts and webinars. Future programming may develop directly around these advances. Equally, the expertise gathered may be assimilated into programmes that were previously delivered entirely in-person, so that they now adopt a more hybrid approach to engaging with congregations and their members. The greater reach of digital ministry also makes it possible to begin to envisage new ways of effectively engaging with congregations who have often found themselves marginalised from physical events and gatherings by geographical location. Similarly, members who for a variety of reasons could often not commit to attend in-person gatherings, may also be able to be offered future training and resourcing in digital form. This could be a hugely significant gain.
35. The increasingly effective harnessing of social media to communicate with congregations and provide short, sharable content that they can pass on to their members has also been a positive development. This was a matter considered at the full meeting of the council in June 2021. A resolution is provided for the consideration of the Assembly intended to both encourage the council to develop this medium of communication and congregations in particular to maximise the potential of sharing the content created with their members.



36. Despite gains in the areas of digital ministry and social media, the council's work particularly suffers from the loss of in-person contact with congregations and their members. This has been, and continues to represent, a huge deficit. As opportunities open up, the restoration of meeting with and gathering congregations and their members remains a priority.

### **Provision of support for the work of the council**

37. The council and its staff are grateful to all who work in support services roles in Assembly Buildings for their work during the pandemic. The IT Department's enabling of home working ensured the council's ministry was able to continue in periods in which public health restrictions meant that staff were unable to work in the office. The relationship between the council and members of the Creative Production Department has been crucial in creating and developing digital engagement with congregations in a season in which there was no other alternative. The Financial Secretary's Department has provided wise and prudent advice in times of budgetary uncertainty, and the Personnel Department has created processes necessary to manage staffing arrangements in a season of massive disruption.
38. Nevertheless, the council has experienced the acceleration of some significant challenges that were of concern before the pandemic. It will be important to acknowledge those realities, learn from the lessons they further highlighted and move as quickly as possible to address them going forward.
39. In terms of budget and United Appeal allocation, there is a need to ensure that the General Assembly remit given to the council to support and enable the development of the life and witness of congregations as the bedrock of denominational life and witness, receives adequate future financial support within the overall allocation of the Appeal. This is particularly the case as the Council for Congregational Life and Witness has very limited reserves compared to other councils of the General Assembly and some of these have been further depleted in the provision of resources made free to congregations during the pandemic.
40. The move to a digital programme highlighted the challenge of the capacity of the IT department which was stretched in terms of ability to offer adequate support to key elements of the council's activities. Going forward, it will be important to ensure that the congregation-facing remit of the council does not suffer as a result of an imbalance of provision of such support to other ministries of the Church, particularly those based outside of Assembly Buildings.
41. The biggest impediment to the council's work remains inadequate channels of communication to congregations and their members. To quote from the council's report to the 2020 General Assembly,

*Inadequate channels of communication with congregations remains the single, largest, issue restricting the effectiveness of the council's work. Council welcome significant developments in the area of social media which have opened up its work to a wider audience. The promise of a revamped website, which will be easier to navigate for users, is also eagerly awaited. However, for the moment, the primary channel for all communication is through the minister. This fails to serve the needs of the council, ministers, congregations, members or the wider life of the denomination.*

*The council has done all that it can to circumnavigate these restrictions... however, council remains disappointed by the lack of progress in addressing the issue of communication. It strongly urges the General Council to address this matter without further delay, taking the necessary steps required to put in place mediums of communication which are fit for purpose as quickly as possible.*

42. Some further and interim progress has been made to provide a subscription based means of keeping members up to date with latest resources, programmes and upcoming events. Nevertheless, this area needs further urgent and adequate attention. Doing so will benefit the work of all the Councils and more importantly the support and development of all aspects of congregational life, witness and participation in the wider ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
43. Resolutions on the matters of the Council budget, provision of adequate support for its remit and encouraging congregations and their members to subscribe to the new E-quip ezine are appended to the report.

### **From past to future: Transition rather than transformation**

44. There has been a plethora of comment surrounding the pandemic and its likely impact on the future of the church, its life and witness. Those commentators, less shaped by the hype of the current moment and more steeped in the history of the church and who grasp the dynamics of both denominational and congregational change, recognise that church life is rarely transformed in an instant. Rather it tends to transition one or two significant steps at a time to gradually more fully become the body God wants it to be. That will be true for both local congregations as they come to express the life and witness of Christ in the post-pandemic world, and for the Council for Congregational Life and Witness as it is refashioned by its experience of both the challenges and opportunities brought to light by its journey through the period of the pandemic.
45. Already for the council there has been both progress and pain in that transitioning. Progress in adjusting to a completely different set of realities has only been possible due to the extraordinary creativity and flexibility of the staff team. Encouraged by so many in the wider church, they have set about their task of envisioning, equipping and enabling congregations and their members for local ministry and mission

in the strangest of times with dedication and determination despite working in circumstances which no one would choose. However, there has been pain experienced too, particularly in the loss of colleagues to redundancy. Their friendship and contribution to the work of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, some for decades, continues to be deeply valued and missed. Significant work lies ahead in finding ways to readjust to the deficit of the loss of their experience and efficiency.

46. There has been much that has been wearying, debilitating and troubling in this period for congregations, members, the council and its staff. However, against this shared experience of the pandemic, we look heavenward eager to grasp God's plans for the future. In the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

<sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

## APPENDIX

### **Report and recommendations of the Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee received and adopted at its meeting of 5 May 2021**

#### **Council Programming Priorities – September 2021 to February 2022**

1. Background and summary to the paper
  - 1.1 Given that many unknowns remain about what church life will look like until the end of 2021 and on into the early part of 2022, it continues to be difficult to plan with any certainty the kind of activities that the council delivers in a normal church year.
  - 1.2 Under these unusual circumstances, the crucial question is what should be envisaged by way of a framework to give shape and general direction to effectively fulfilling the council's General Assembly remit of supporting the development of the life and witness of congregations in the next season?
  - 1.3 The following proposals suggest such a way forward for the period September 2021 to February 2022. They recommend that the primary focus be a continuation of the emphasis of accompanying congregations in their journey out of lockdown and enabling denominational learning. They also make practical suggestions about the areas of in-person programmes and events, resource development, particular pieces of work requiring attention, the application of learning from the period of the pandemic to future council activities and staff development.

- 1.4 Throughout, a realistic flexibility is assumed with some margin to allow for a number of small-scale initiatives to be developed and delivered nimbly in response to emerging needs or as changing circumstances might permit. This facilitates the council in a potentially important role of giving a lead to the wider church in modelling the gradual return of the kind of gatherings that will build confidence that it is possible to be together again safely and in increasing numbers when the time is right and circumstances allow.
  - 1.5 The proposals envisage that circumstances as they relate to the continuing journey of wider society and the church out of pandemic restrictions be examined again by the Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee in early January 2022 or earlier if appropriate with a view to assessing and scheduling a suitable set of priorities for the period March to August 2022.
  - 1.6 If adopted, this proposal and its recommendations will determine the agendas of the Congregational Life Committee, Congregational Witness Committee, Children's, Youth and Family Panel and Women's Ministry Panel from September 2021 to August 2022. Some detail of what those agendas might contain is also included below. The broad principles will also apply to the work of Presbyterian Women, for example the circumstances under which in-person gatherings should resume.
- 2. Primary focus September 2021 to February 2022: Continuing the accompaniment of congregations in their journey out of lockdown and enabling denominational learning**
- 2.1 Continued accompaniment of congregations in their journey out of lockdown**
    - 2.1.1 The journey of congregations out of lockdown and into a post-pandemic world for ministry and mission might be expected to continue for some time.
    - 2.1.2 An initial phase will raise many practical presenting issues arising from ongoing restrictions e.g. how to set up and programme effectively for socially distanced children's ministry; how to continue to encourage and energise leaders working under still unfamiliar circumstances; how to navigate leadership tensions in kirk sessions; how to reconnect with the local community for mission and outreach; how to respond pastorally to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic across different ages and groups in the congregation?

2.1.3 A further phase will raise many questions about what might need to change in a variety of areas of church life; How to enable good endings to long standing ministries; how to develop models of viable and effective digital ministry or outreach; how to reconnect with those who are slow to re-engage with church etc.

2.1.4 Since March 2020, the council has sought to engage with and respond to presenting issues from congregations through its digital programme of blogs, podcasts, webinars, digital conversations and the Fanning the Flame presbytery initiative. The provision of ongoing support to accompany congregations as they gradually resume more regular patterns of church life and witness is the immediate priority. Going forward, it is envisaged that this will be delivered digitally, but also in person by staff working with individual congregations, through the provision of small scale events or through presbytery events, as gradual easing of restrictions allow.

## 2.2 Enabling denominational learning

2.2.1 The pandemic and its impact on church life has brought many questions, challenges and opportunities to light. There are lessons to be learned and learning to be embedded for a wide variety of particular settings for ministry and mission e.g. what does a healthy and effective rhythm of congregational life look like; what we are learning about the place of digital ministry or outreach alongside in-person gatherings and encounters; what have we learned about the central place of worship in congregational life through the pandemic experience; what have we learned about discipleship through the pandemic experience; what have we learned about the interaction of parents as primary disciplers and congregational children's and youth programming?

2.2.2 Again it is envisaged that a continuation of elements of digital and, if and when possible, in-person work could provide an effective platform for this priority.

### Recommendations

- That continued accompaniment of congregations in their journey out of lockdown be a primary focus of council work in the period September 2021 to February 2022.
- That enabling denominational learning be a primary focus of council work in the period September 2021 to February 2022.

### 3. Recommending in-person programmes and events

3.1 Challenges to staging in-person programmes and events might be expected to continue into 2022. For now and the foreseeable future, unanswerable practical questions include:

- What will be the positive impact of the vaccination programme on easing restrictions?
- What will it mean in practice for society to ‘learn to live with’ Covid-19 in the medium term?
- What events, other than worship, Bible study and prayer, will be allowed in the church sector in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland?
- What numbers will be allowed to gather indoors?
- What will be the impact of ongoing social distancing in reducing capacity on venues and its impact on the quality of event participation and interaction?
- What will be the impact of the continued need for wearing of facing coverings on willingness to participate in in-person gatherings and on the quality of interaction?
- What will be the capacity and ability of congregations to make their premises available for council use?
- What impact might the re-imposition of restrictions due to a future spike in infections have on events which had been planned and publicised?

3.2 There are a number of other considerations with which the council need to reckon. Again, these are largely unquantifiable for now. They include:

- The period required to give congregations time and space to prioritise re-establishing ministry among members and mission to their local community before encouraging participation in extra-congregational activity.
- The appetite and confidence of potential participants in coming to events beyond their own congregation.
- The risk and desirability of staging non-essential events beyond the local congregation in a situation where they may still represent a risk to public health.
- The impact of a reduced staff team on the ability to deliver programmes and events.

3.3 Additionally, events and programmes need a lead-in time which allows for planning, publicity and potential participants to sign up. It will not be possible to simply contract that lead-in time for most programmes and events.

- 3.4 Nevertheless, the council can also play a crucial role in taking a lead in gradually modelling the return of the kind of gatherings that show that it is possible to safely be together in larger numbers when the time is right and circumstances allow.

#### Recommendations

- That it be envisaged that in-person programmes and events in the next season of council activity will be severely curtailed, have to be assessed on an ongoing basis in terms of developing circumstances and in terms of what is deliverable with a shorter lead-in time.
- That existing programmes which rely on bringing groups together on a recurring basis should not be delivered in the period September 2021 to February 2022.
- That it will be important to assess which areas of church life, as it emerges from the pandemic, most require, or will benefit from, the return of well-managed and delivered in-person gatherings.
- Taking into account all of the factors identified above and any changes in circumstances surrounding the pandemic, that the council keep under consideration the possibility of staging a limited number of small-scale, in-person events for priority groups in the period September 2021 to February 2022. Initial events should maximise the possibilities of the capacity and safety of the space available in Assembly Buildings, Belfast, but exploration of regional possibilities should also be considered.

## 4. Resource development

### 4.1 Resources available in response to the pandemic

- 4.1.1 Since March 2020 significant Bible study resources have been produced, including *Prism*, *Unprecedented* and *Whole*, each of which enable congregations and their members to reflect upon the application of God's Word to aspects of their experience of the pandemic. Ten thousand resources for children and young people have also been made available free to congregations. A resource for leaders entitled *Opening up to God: Leading out of Lockdown* is also available, along with overstock of the *For Now* material provided in January 2021.
- 4.1.2 A substantial amount of pandemic specific material already exists. Therefore, it is not envisaged that any further major resources in this area be prioritised by the council.

## 4.2 Future resource priorities

4.2.1 Through its committees and panels during 2019/20, the council took stock of existing resources and identified the priorities for the next phase of resource production. This culminated in a set of priorities discussed and approved at a meeting of full council on 21 January 2020. These priorities became the content of the council's Report to the 2020 General Assembly, which was received by the General Assembly Standing Committee at its meeting of 19 February 2021.

4.2.2 It is recommended that in autumn 2021 the Congregational Life and Witness Committees and Children's, Youth and Family and Women's Ministry Panels revisit these priorities to determine which anticipated resources should take precedence and whether alternative or additional needs for resources have emerged during the hiatus caused by the pandemic.

## 4.3 Resources nearing completion

4.3.1 Major long-standing priorities to produce new resources on baptism and the Lord's Supper require the completion of video content and the approval of new vows for the sacraments which will come before the October 2021 General Assembly for approval to be completed.

4.3.2 A soft entry evangelistic resource for use with those in later life is in the process of content being finalised and moving to design stage.

4.3.3 An evangelistic and discipleship pathway resource, helping congregations to assess the role and value of regular activities, as well as identifying significant gaps in their ministry and mission, is ready to move to design stage. It would benefit from some reworking to take account of changed circumstances and the positive opportunity for a fuller consideration of streamlining and focusing of congregational activity as a result of the experience of Covid-19 restrictions.

## 4.4 Stocktake of existing resources

4.4.1 Work could be usefully undertaken to survey present resources asking if some need to be phased out, refreshed, updated or replaced with recommendations brought to the appropriate committee or panel.



**Recommendations**

- That no further major resources in response to the experience of the pandemic be prioritised.
- That in autumn 2021, the Congregational Life and Witness Committees and Children's, Youth and Family and Women's Ministry Panels revisit these priorities to determine which anticipated resources should take precedence and whether alternative or additional needs for resources have emerged during the hiatus caused by the pandemic.
- That resources in progress and nearing completion be progressed as a priority.
- That a survey of present resources be undertaken with recommendations as to which need to be phased out, refreshed, updated or replaced, be brought to the appropriate committee or panel.

**5. Particular pieces of work needing attention**

- 5.1 The following particular pieces of work which require prioritisation.
- 5.2 A decision will need to be taken in due course about what circumstances allow a reopening of the Fresh Light counselling ministry, presently suspended due to restrictions arising from Covid-19. This will also require careful consideration of other factors such as the need for venues in which to meet and the capacity of both staff and volunteers.
- 5.3 The formation of a new Marriage Panel has been approved by the General Assembly Standing Committee. Progress needs to be made to put in place arrangements for a smooth transition for this replacement for the Remarriage Panel.
- 5.4 At its last meeting, the Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee gave permission to explore the development of a centrally facilitated apprenticeship model for congregations as a replacement for the present PCI Intern Scheme.
- 5.5 General Assembly Standing Committee has approved the development of a General Assembly Under-30 delegate programme as a replacement for the previous Youth Assembly model.
- 5.6 It will be helpful to explore alternatives to the present format of any council programmes or events which involve residential elements in light of possible difficulties that might arise in future delivery in the aftermath of the pandemic.

- 5.7 The implications of a potential reduction in council staffing levels on capacity for programming will need to be carefully examined.
- 5.8 Circumstances arising from the pandemic forced the council to adopt a digital programme which comprised new ventures such as webinars, podcasts, digital conferencing and training, as well as expanded production of video and downloadable resources. There was also a significant increase in members signing up for the electronic Tides devotional and for PCI social media in general. The provision of a youth ministry app also represents expansion in a new direction.
- 5.9 It is unclear how engagement with this increase in digital ministry was a direct result of the inability to gather in-person, or how much of its impact will be long lasting as more normal patterns of church life return. Nevertheless, there is significant expertise and experience upon which the council can build to expand the reach of its work, especially, but not exclusively, to both younger generations and more geographically isolated congregations.
- 5.10 It might be envisaged that the next season of council activity will be conducted in a hybrid of in-person and digital formats. The council's existing programmes and events might be helpfully revisited with a view to asking which might be enhanced by digital content in future.

#### Recommendations

- That a decision be taken in due course about what circumstances allow a re-opening of the Fresh Light counselling.
- That arrangements for the commencement of the work of a new Marriage Panel be put in place for launch at the General Assembly in 2022.
- That the development of a centrally facilitated apprenticeship model for congregations as a replacement for the present PCI Intern scheme be explored.
- That arrangements for the development of a General Assembly Under-30 delegate programme as a replacement for the previous Youth Assembly model be put in place in anticipation of its launch at the General Assembly in 2022.
- That alternatives to the present format of any council programmes or events which involve residential elements, in light of possible difficulties that might arise in future delivery in the aftermath of the pandemic, be explored.
- That the implications of a potential reduction in council staffing levels on capacity for programming be carefully examined. That the council's experience of providing digital ministry during the pandemic be explored with a view to how future programming might be enhanced by digital content.

**6. Continuing to support and develop the staff team to adapt to changing roles and realities**

- 6.1 Much has changed for the council staff team since the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020. Furloughing, home working, a move to delivering and administrating digital programming and the need to take responsibility for areas of work beyond previous areas of experience and expertise have both reaped reward and taken their toll.
- 6.2 Looking forward, some staff have had additional areas of responsibility added to their job descriptions, others will need to be trained to take on specific new aspects of work should anticipated redundancies proceed. Established systems and ways of doing things will have to change if as much of the council's capacity as possible to serve congregations is to be preserved with downsizing.
- 6.3 It should be anticipated that time will need to be taken and training and support provided to enable a good transition to new working arrangements.

Recommendations

- That margin be preserved and a budget ringfenced to enable the continued support and development of the staff team to adapt to changing roles and realities.

**7. Review of the developing situation, opportunities and priorities from March 2022**

Recommendations

- That the Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee be provided with a paper in early January 2022, or before if changing circumstances deem appropriate, detailing, assessing and scheduling a suitable set of priorities for the period March to August 2022 based on the developing situation and information available at that time.

# COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Convener: Rev DANIEL KANE

Secretary: THE CLERK

## Introduction

The Council for Public Affairs is tasked with helping to develop the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's thinking on current issues and communicating the General Assembly's views in the public square, alongside developing relationships with legislators and decision makers on the island of Ireland, making representations to them on behalf of the Church and responding to consultations from them.

Despite the challenges presented by the global pandemic this work has continued apace and this report summarises the work of the Council from June 2020. The Council is deeply indebted to our Public Affairs Officer, Miss Karen Jardine, for her unstinting commitment to this role and her huge capacity for hard work. The gracious, Christ-like manner with which she engages across a wide spectrum of elected political representatives, government officials, representatives of various bodies and the leaders of other Churches and Christian groups is witness in itself to the grace of Christ. Thanks are also due to all who have served on Council, especially those who have carried out the additional workloads of convening the Committee and panels in this unusual and challenging year.

A key element of this work has been developing the Council's thinking following the *Building on Solid Ground* overnight in September 2019. "Graciously Confident Gospel Engagement in the Public Square – A Framework of Principles, Postures and Practices" is offered for consideration at Appendix A.

Following the Standing Commission of the General Assembly in 2020, the Council has amended its structures introducing two new Panels to complement and supplement the work of the State Education Committee, Peace and Reconciliation Panel and the Republic of Ireland Panel. The remit of the new Human Dignity Panel, convened by Rev JB Mullan, includes beginning and end of life, human rights, artificial intelligence, and matters relating to criminal justice. The new Welfare and Wellbeing Panel, convened by Rev D Stanfield, has a remit which includes welfare support, housing and homelessness, debt, ageing and loneliness.

Engagement with governments in both jurisdictions in relation to the pandemic has been primarily dealt with by the General Council and its Standing Committee. Nonetheless, the pandemic has also affected the work of the Council and aspects of PCI's engagement with government on wider issues. The Public Affairs Officer has been involved in a number of Irish Council of Churches/Irish Inter-Church Meeting

working groups on issues relating to ethics, academic research on clergy responses and services to vulnerable children and young people.

### **Consultation responses**

The Northern Ireland Executive was restored in January 2020 and with Ministers now in place many government departments and other bodies released consultations on policy and legislative proposals over the past 12 months. At its meeting in June 2021, the Council passed a resolution authorising the Council Secretary and/or Public Affairs Officer to arrange for the publication of consultation responses at an appropriate time, recognising there may be occasions when strategically it may be prudent and pragmatic for a response to remain private.

Over this period the Council has made submissions to a range of public consultations across both jurisdictions. A summary list is included at Appendix B and all published consultation responses can be found on the website at [www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/Categories/Public-Affairs.aspx](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/Categories/Public-Affairs.aspx). However, two are included in this report for information and to represent the type of work undertaken by the Council – a submission to the Oireachtas Committee on Justice to inform its consideration on the Dignity with Dying Bill (Appendix C), and a response to the Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework (Appendix D).

### **Legacy/Dealing with the Past**

Following the successful launch of *Considering Grace: Presbyterians and the Troubles* in 2019, plans had been in place to hold a conference exploring its themes in March 2020. This was understandably postponed and we were able to offer ‘Considering Grace: Unpacking the Impact’ as a digital conference in December 2020. This included keynote addresses from Canon David Porter, Chief of Staff to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and Very Rev Dr Stafford Carson, formerly Principal of Union Theological College. The resource for small group study prepared by David Thompson was launched, along with opportunity for Q&A at a panel discussion with *Considering Grace* authors, Dr Gladys Ganiel and Dr Jamie Yohanis; and the General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches, Dr Nicola Brady; and the keynote speakers. We are grateful to an external funding which has made much of this work possible. Work is ongoing in identifying ways in which *Considering Grace* can be utilised in the discussions around legacy and dealing with the past internally, and with civic society, government officials, and elected representatives within the UK, Ireland and Northern Ireland legislatures.

With the centenary of the creation of Northern Ireland and the partition of the island of Ireland being marked in 2021, the Peace and Reconciliation Panel has been planning an event to mark the contribution of PCI at this time, and specifically the use of Union Theological College (then Assembly’s College) to host the Northern

Ireland Parliament in its early years. Originally planned for May 2021, covid restrictions have resulted in this event being postponed until the autumn. “On These Steps” will include the following components:

- “On These Steps” – Historical Perspective – Professor Ian McBride
- “Stepping Back” – Musical and dramatic interlude reflecting 100 years ago
- “Stepping Forward” – Christian principles for imagining a better future across the island of Ireland for the next 100 years – Moderator Rt Rev Dr David Bruce
- “Stepping on” – Political perspective – response from political leaders on the island

“On These Steps” will be followed by a webinar series from October 2021–March 2022 seeking to unpack its themes for the wider Irish Presbyterian community, and encouraging thought on what it means to be Christian citizens on the island of Ireland for the next 100 years. The proposed series will include urban, working class loyalist communities; voices from the Republic of Ireland; perspectives from young people; and reflections from senior leaders in light of changing relationships north/south and east/west, as we face into the next 100 years.

Funding from the Department for Foreign Affairs has been secured to support “On These Steps” and the subsequent webinars.

The Peace and Reconciliation Panel has been closely following the discussions at UK Government, Irish Government and NI Assembly levels on legacy and dealing with the past. It is anticipated that the UK Government will bring forward legislation in the coming months, which may require a response from PCI. This may also require engagement with other groups including those connected to victims and survivors, academics, elected representatives, government officials and other interested parties.

## Education

PCI continues to work closely with the other Transferor Churches – Methodist Church in Ireland and Church of Ireland – on education matters through the Transferor Representatives’ Council (TRC). This includes ongoing engagement with the Education Authority on governor related issues, in partnership with local nominating congregations. PCI continues to be grateful to the hundreds of transferor governors who give of their time and energy to support schools in the controlled sector. The expected reconstitution of Boards of Governors is due in early 2022, but may be postponed until 2023 taking account of the impact of the covid pandemic on schools.

A significant amount of time has been spent engaging with the curriculum body CCEA on its new Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) hub which includes curriculum guidance and resources. Working together with other Churches and Christian organisations has been vital in seeking to uphold the statutory role of ethos in the delivery

of RSE in schools, at primary and post-primary levels. Pressure to introduce a mandatory, rights-based RSE curriculum for all schools will continue in the coming period, not least through the actions of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The TRC made a written submission and verbal presentation to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement linked to social disadvantage, taking the opportunity to highlight the support that many congregations provide to their local school communities.

There has also been engagement with the NI Assembly Committee for Education on the Catholic Religious Education Certificate, integrated education and the exemption for teachers from the Fair Employment Treatment Order.

The Independent Review of Education brought forward by the Department of Education in line with New Decade New Approach commitments is due to commence in the summer of 2021. The Review Team has 18 months in which to complete its work and is looking at the full range of education from nursery through to further education, governance and sectoral distribution.

The Committee proposes a conference in early 2022 to consider a vision for education and consider some of the big questions under scrutiny through the independent review. Such a conference would also consider the relationship between local churches and schools, and seek to encourage partnership and participation. It would be important to also have the Republic of Ireland dimension represented.

### **Republic of Ireland**

The Panel acts as something of a ‘catch-all’ for the full gamut of public affairs issues in Ireland. Responding to the Dying with Dignity Bill has been a big focus and it will continue to maintain a watching brief on this issue as it works its way through the Committee on Justice, and respond accordingly. Other expected legislative developments include proposals on hate crime and a review of equality laws.

The Panel has also been considering approaches to education and intends to continue that conversation in the coming months.

A major piece of research is being developed by the Irish Council of Churches, Vox Magazine and Evangelical Alliance on both sides of the border, to identify and capture the experiences of “new Irish” in churches across the island. It is hoped that PCI can engage fully with this work, and that it will prove helpful for the denomination both in terms of public affairs, but also the work of Global Mission and Mission in Ireland.

### **Dignity of Life**

Following the Standing Commission of the General Assembly in 2020, a panel on human dignity was established by the Council. Its remit

involves relating to government, statutory agencies and others, on beginning and end of life issues, human rights, artificial intelligence, and other areas. Its initial work has been mostly reactive responding to legislative change on abortion, proposals relating to a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, and engaging on the policy and public square aspects of the conversations on what has become known as ‘conversion therapy’.

PCI has supported the Private Member’s Bill introduced by Paul Givan MLA which is seeking to remove the provision to access an abortion following pre-birth diagnosis of non-fatal abnormality. Representation has also been made to relevant Parliamentary Committees at Westminster on the legislative proposals brought forward by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which give him power to make decisions relating to health and education, undermining the devolution settlement.

Following written submissions to the NI Assembly Health Committee on the Severe Fetal Impairment (Abortion) Amendment Bill, and to the NI Assembly Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights, representatives from PCI were invited to give oral evidence to both Committees.<sup>1</sup> In both instances PCI facilitated representation from other denominations or organisations on the same panel to present a combined response from a Christian perspective.

## **Welfare and Wellbeing**

A response was submitted to the consultation on a draft Mental Health Strategy 2021–2031. The submission highlighted the role that churches play in providing a primary environment for people to build meaningful relationships, have an opportunity to talk and receive pastoral support.

While most often pastoral care is provided by the minister, an increasing number of congregations have trained teams of volunteers as part of a network of pastoral support, while other activities and programmes delivered by local churches, or church volunteers, provide pivotal points of contact through which poor mental health, low mood or lower levels of wellbeing can be observed, support provided, and suitable interventions signposted. This might be through parent and toddler groups; youth leaders engaging young people and then with parents during drop-off and pick-ups; morning coffee times, lunch clubs or befriending groups for older people; through Christians Against Poverty offering support for people experiencing debt, courses in life skills and job clubs; or specific groups providing care to children and young people with disabilities and their families. There are countless other examples.

The response specifically drew attention to clergy support during times of bereavement, and especially those sudden deaths – through murder,

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1 Evidence to the Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights – 6 May 2021; Evidence to the Health Committee – 17 June 2021



suicide or accidental death – which can often have a significant ripple effect within families and communities.

The Panel has been considering future priorities, seeking to be proactive and upstream. It has identified “Loneliness” as a specific area of consideration, touching many different areas of public policy, including the challenges presented by an ageing population, poverty and the isolation that can accompany it, especially for those who live with, or care for someone with, a disability. The Panel proposes to first undertake a scoping exercise in Autumn 2021 to better understand the issues, and identify groups and organisations already at work in this area. Following the scoping exercise the Panel will come forward with recommendations to the Council.

### **Partnership Working**

The Council for Public Affairs has worked collaboratively with other Councils on a range of issues including the Council for Global Mission on proposals to merge the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with the Department for International Development, and the significant cuts to the aid budget. Drawing on the expertise of the Council for Social Witness, responses have been made to proposals for an Adult Protection Bill for Northern Ireland, a draft strategic framework to tackle the harm from substance abuse, and legislation relating to licensing laws. A response has also been made, in conjunction with the chaplain to Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, to a consultation on the establishment of a regional care and justice campus. These collaborations are crucial not only in highlighting the diversity of activity within PCI, but also to draw on significant professional experience and knowledge within the denomination.

Inter-church engagement continues to be an important part of PCI’s participation in the public square. Through the structures of the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting there has been significant engagement with government officials in the Republic of Ireland, UK and European Union on matters relating to peacebuilding, legacy, dealing with the past and more recently Brexit. A document called ‘The Unfinished Work of Peace’ has been drafted by the ICC/ IICM to capture the work of the legacy group, and better understand its position within internationally recognised peace-making and peace-building frameworks.

### **Changing relationships**

It is widely recognised that the decision of the UK to withdraw from membership of the European Union has had an impact on relationships not only with those two entities, but also between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, and Northern Ireland and its nearest neighbour in the Republic of Ireland. At the same time there has been considerable demographic change in Northern Ireland which the results of the Census held earlier in 2021 will only confirm in the

coming years. The decade of centenaries which has been shared across the island of Ireland, leading up to this year's 100th anniversary of partition and the creation of NI, provides an opportunity to reflect on the past and consider the shape of the future.

At its meeting on 16 June, the Council for Public Affairs had a discussion on how gospel principles along with the views, needs and aspirations of Presbyterian people across the island of Ireland might be best articulated within the context of these changing relationships.

This can present a number of challenges for the Council, not only in seeking to discern what is the appropriate input from a Presbyterian perspective, but even at times deciding if it is appropriate to engage with different bodies. For instance, there are biblical and reformed principles that PCI has a responsibility to articulate about the future of relationships in these islands, whatever those relationships might be. However, the mechanism through which this reformed Christian voice can be heard may mean PCI formally engaging with bodies like the Irish Government's Shared Island Unit. While some within PCI may question the involvement of our denomination with such initiatives most, however, will no doubt agree that the Church has a positive and important contribution to make for the common good of all people today and the generations to come.

### **Postures, principles and practices**

This paper comes out of the strategic planning conference led by Dr Nathan Mladin (Theos Think Tank) as a framework for the ongoing work of the Council. Given the complex and highly contested cultural space in which we live and the cross-cutting nature of the Council's work, the paper seeks to integrate this work more firmly in the mainstream of PCI's ministry and mission. It is also intended to act as a catalyst for in-house conversations and robust theological reflection enabling us to navigate some of the prevailing culture wars of today and identify some future priorities for PCI. There is also an urgency to engage and educate our young people and young adults in conversations so that they may be confident in their Christian witness within this ever-changing cultural landscape.

The Vision for Society Statement received by the General Assembly 2016 places peacebuilding at the heart of Christian discipleship and PCI, and calls us to:

- grace-filled relationships in the power of the Holy Spirit as ambassadors of Christ's kingdom in a broken and divided world;
- promote the counter culture of Jesus in a society where cultures clash;
- reassert the Church's calling to pursue a peaceful and just society in our day;
- seek a more reconciled community... working together for the common good.

As a Council our posture in the public square is to be:

- Bible-based and gospel-focused;
- built on kingdom values including compassion, grace and hope;
- collaborative within PCI and with other churches and organisations as appropriate;
- looking for opportunities to be “upstream”, influencing conversations in wider society;
- respecting the dignity of all humanity.

We do not minister in a vacuum and so we must be clear and faithful to the teaching and principles of the Bible, and truthfully compassionate in all our engagement with those beyond our walls.

## APPENDIX A

### **Graciously Confident Gospel Engagement in the Public Square “A Framework of Principles, Postures and Practices.”**

#### **1. The Council for Public Affairs**

The Council for Public Affairs has a broad, cross-cutting remit under the General Assembly of the PCI: receiving reports from its committee and panels; considering responses to public consultations; collaborating with other organisations on issues of mutual concern; and engaging with the media and public representatives on public policy issues and other matters of public concern. Its work is spread out across the State Education Committee and four panels namely the Republic of Ireland Panel, the Human Dignity Panel, the Peace and Reconciliation Panel and the Welfare and Wellbeing Panel. From time-to-time various ad hoc task groups supplement this work.

The Council does not, and should not, work in isolation. The life and witness of every facet of PCI contributes to, and impacts on, its role and function. The strategic work of the Council for Training in Ministry is potentially invaluable with regard to the effective preparation and equipping of ministers, deaconesses and others to contextualise the Word of God, thinking theologically about all aspects of life and engaging confidently with the contemporary context so that they can outline a biblical picture of human flourishing. The Council for Social Witness seeks to deliver an effective social witness service on behalf of PCI to the wider community, through the provision of residential care, nursing care, respite care and supported housing for vulnerable people including the elderly, those with disabilities and those transitioning

from the criminal justice system. The Council for Global Mission helps to lift our focus as a denomination from the island of Ireland to the work of developing mission overseas, and brings issues of global concern to the attention of the wider church, including those which have a local impact like multicultural relations and stewardship of creation. Through the work of chaplaincy under the Council for Mission in Ireland, PCI reaches into universities, hospitals, prisons and serves the armed forces, often connecting with people at their point of greatest need. The Council for Congregational Life and Witness has responsibility for encouraging and resourcing congregations to witness in their local communities where they are placed, facilitating discipleship in these contexts and providing strategic direction for ministry with young people. Congregations across the island of Ireland are points of light within local communities responding to local need through food banks, toddler groups, homework clubs, groups for seniors, debt counselling, and countless other ways. We are all part of the public square.

The public square across Ireland, is a contested, complex and rapidly changing cultural and moral landscape. Navigating these major shifts presents us, as a denomination, with huge ongoing challenges along with numerous opportunities to step into graciously confident gospel engagement in the public square. Speaking grace and truth into this fundamentally fluid landscape continues to be our discipleship imperative as followers of Jesus. The Council for Public Affairs has been building on the work of its overnight conference “Building on Solid Ground” in September 2019 with Dr Nathan Mladin (Theos Think Tank) by identifying a framework of principles, postures and practices that we in PCI should adopt as we seek to carry out this divine mandate of graciously confident Gospel engagement in the public square. It opens with a short analysis of why this is necessary and then proposes several characteristics and virtues which ought to inform all of us in this crucial task.

## **2. Public Theology**

Historically, the work of public theology has not attracted the same attention as some other expressions of the work and beliefs of the Church. This paper is a clarion call to reclaim the lost vision of public theology, emphasising the great value that should be placed on the discipline of seeking to understand the times, putting our finger on the cultural moment and doing theology in the current social, economic and political context in which we find ourselves. As a denomination we must urgently recover this vision of the Church as a countercultural community of Gospel-centred believers confidently taking their place in the public square.

In rising to this call, we must be deeply prayerful. Some legislation currently being framed by our law-makers is not as we would want, but as faithful followers of the Lord Jesus we are called to graciously

confident Gospel engagement in the public square, praying for the blessing and benefit of all in our society. At times we may feel justifiably angry, but we must be careful that this does not lead us into words and actions which bring shame on the name and reputation of Jesus. As Christians it is all too easy to be caricatured by what we are against, so let us resolve to be proactive, upstream thinkers who are biblically informed and culturally aware.

### 3. The rapidly changing public square

In a world now defined through the lens of identity politics and choices which, we are told are increasingly non-binary, we are ironically left with a set of binary options that boil down to this – if you are not for me you must be against me, and if you are against me, while of course you have the right to hold your personal beliefs, there is no place for you to articulate those in the public square. Which leads to the following analysis of the public square.<sup>2</sup>

#### a. *It is becoming much more diverse*

The Church does not have the same prominent role in society across Ireland as it once had. The old norms have been rejected and new philosophies and ideas are being promoted. In recent years, there has also been significant inward migration to both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland bringing new faith groups and cultures to our shores. Previously, there might simply have been an expectation that the Church would have some contribution to make to the big issues of the day. While faith still has a part to play in public conversations, there is no longer an automatic invitation. It must find its place and take its seat at the table along with everyone else.

#### b. *It is becoming smaller*

Paradoxically, although the public square is rapidly becoming more diverse, it feels like the public square is also getting smaller. There is an increasingly reported trend across academic institutions of ‘no-platforming’ – described by one person who found themselves in this position as “a recent surge in efforts to suppress the expression of views that people find offensive or immoral, and to punish those associated with those views.”<sup>3</sup>

Such is the extent of the phenomenon in England and Wales, that the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission issued guidance on it in 2019 with previous Commission Chair, David Isaac, commenting:

*“Holding open, challenging debates rather than silencing the views of those we don’t agree with helps to build tolerance and address prejudice and discrimination. Our guidance makes clear that freedom of speech in higher education should be upheld at every opportunity and should only be limited where there are genuine safety concerns or it constitutes unlawful behaviour.”<sup>4</sup>*

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4 Free speech to be protected at university | Equality and Human Rights Commission ([equalityhumanrights.com](http://equalityhumanrights.com))

The Queen's Speech in May 2021, outlining the UK Government's legislative programme for the next parliamentary session, included news of a bill to protect freedom of speech at universities. That this point needs to be made was probably unthinkable 10 or 15 years ago. More locally, and recently, debate on the changing nature of legislation on the provision of abortion services both north and south has generated conversation about who has a right to speak publicly on such issues. A picture of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland meeting with Church leaders sparked significant outcry on social media – abortion is a health and medical issue, not one where there is room to hear from those who hold views influenced by their religious belief, and in particular men. And yet the subject in hand is about the core of who we are as individuals and about matters of the dignity of human life – questions which cannot be answered solely by scientific reasoning.

*c. It is getting louder*

There is a readily available cacophony of voices at all times through social media, the internet, 24-hour news cycles – all shouting to be heard, with the loudest voices gaining the most traction. The place of public debate has become a zero-sum game where if you win, I lose and vice versa. The space for robust and balanced discourse, respectful listening and agreeing to disagree well, have all but been removed.

*d. The complexity of the cultural moment*

Against this backdrop of the changing public square, which although becoming more diverse is getting smaller and louder, we must also reflect on the complexity of this cultural moment. It would not take too long to fill a flipchart with some of the major issues of today, a diverse list including Brexit, climate change, migration, housing and homelessness, austerity and poverty, lack of educational aspiration, distrust of institutions (including organised religion). If we spent another 5 or 10 minutes, we would quickly begin to see the connections and correlations – spinning an impenetrable web.

Secular assumptions have now become confessional positions, most evident in the blurring lines between reporting facts and reporting opinions in the media. The proliferation of news channels and ways in which we receive news – print, radio, television, virtual, and through social media – are not politically neutral and influence not only what we hear, but how voices and perspectives are heard. Scratch the surface and just beneath there is a perception that people of faith really have nothing of value to speak into the public square, or offer society more generally. Reflecting frankly on our own denomination, the decisions taken in 2018 now act as a lens through which others view how PCI speaks in the public square.

In this context, our urgent task as disciples of Jesus is to reimagine public theology. Where do we go from here? In an increasingly hostile world, the temptation is to retreat, baton down the hatches and isolate ourselves from the world.

And yet, we continue to represent a significant group of people who continue to look to PCI to use its voice in the public square. We are also fully members of Irish community life, north and south, and have the same rights (and responsibilities) as others in a pluralist society to contribute and influence. The Gospel is a framework for life which is for the benefit of all, whether they believe it or not.

#### 4. The theology of exile

We must constantly remind ourselves that we are citizens of another kingdom – the Kingdom of God – and therefore we are living in exile. We belong to another place and are shaped by laws and values of another world, whose architect and builder is God. We live at the intersection of the ages where we recognise that we are not going to be able to bring in the Kingdom of God in all its wonderful fullness through our own efforts. Nonetheless we can have a restraining influence on sin by working for justice in a fallen and broken world. Jeremiah's letter to the exiles offers wise instruction in this regard, especially in chapter 29 v7,

*“Seek the peace and prosperity (welfare) of the city to which I have carried you into exile.*

*Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”*  
*Jeremiah 29:7 (NIV)*

Our duty to seek the “peace and prosperity of the city” is not to live in utopia, but rather a holistic apologetic to bring a little bit more of the Kingdom of God into the present age.

Some people used to say that Christians were in the ‘moral majority’. Whether or not that was true then, it is becoming evident we are now in the minority. With this minority status we must learn a whole new way of living, a whole new vocabulary and a whole new manner of relating to the public square. The ground beneath our feet has shifted in unimaginable ways and the Christian world-view is frowned upon and, at times, openly attacked.

So how are we to relate to this hostile environment? How are we to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city?” We need to develop a theology of living in exile in a way that we have never had to do before. This is uncharted territory for us all.

What are some of the principles, postures and practices we should be cultivating in our personal lives and in the life of our denomination as a framework for gracious, confident Gospel engagement with the public square?

- (a) *The necessity for us to cultivate a recovery of the virtue of prudence*

Prudence is the art of making God-honouring choices between relative “goods” and lesser “evils” for the sake of gaining something, rather than losing everything. It is a process of biblically informed moral

reasoning by which our Christian ideals are approximated to the contours of our fallen and sinful world. A prudent Christian will weigh up the practicalities of what we can achieve and reduce the scope of our goals because the world is fallen, i.e., an acknowledgement that it is not possible to get everything we would like and aiming for the best outcome in an imperfect set of circumstances. This means being willing to adjust our goals according to reality as we receive new facts and information. Obviously, this means that we need to draw relative moral distinctions leading to imperfect choices between a set of alternatives which are not what we would have wanted. In other words, making the best of the situation for the sake of saving something for the Gospel, rather than losing everything. Prudence combines intelligence, intuitive understanding, good sense, sympathetic understanding, a teachable spirit, caution (not indecision), and seasoned judgement.

This is becoming increasingly important for us as we engage with the public square as exiles, holding fast to our orthodox Christian position. We must be willing to learn how to navigate this complex and challenging territory in a wise and Christ-honouring way with great skill and adjust our goals according to reality. A recent example of this is the merits or otherwise of Paul Givan's "Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill" versus the abolitionist stance of complete repeal of the NI abortion regulations. For people with a strong pro-life belief this is a difficult call to make, distinguishing between what is bad and what is far worse. We need a huge amount of Godly-wisdom and Holy Spirit-anointing as we navigate this messy and challenging space and work to find approximate solutions to problems which are insoluble from a human perspective. This involves collaborating around critical issues to pursue important, but temporal goals, whilst at the same time always having a distinct sense of our own identity in Christ and a certain wariness of the fragile nature of this earthly city we now inhabit.

*(b) The necessity for us to cultivate a recovery of the virtue of civility*

The posture and tone we adopt in the public square really matters. Actions often speak louder than words. Our behaviour in the public square matters a great deal. Speaking civilly to our opponents is a Christian virtue and disagreeing well is a witness to the Gospel mandate to love our neighbour. We should always be respectful of others. Sadly, however, it is so easy for us to become so heated up about something that civility becomes a casualty in our conversation.

One part of our Reformed theology is that God is always sovereign and prominent, and our duty is to be faithful disciples of Christ as we live in exile. In other words, the Lord knows where history is going, which means we do not. So we must trust Him in the confusing times we are living through. It is true that our views are not considered to be mainstream any more when it comes to talking about human sexuality, marriage and the dignity of all human life from conception to its



natural end. We are going to find it increasingly uncomfortable to hold a view which is thousands of years old and considered by some to be bigoted and perhaps even dangerous.

Being civil is not an excuse to be evasive or uncertain about our beliefs or unclear about articulating them. This is all the more reason for us to be serious students of the culture and context of our exile. Sadly, history is littered with numerous examples of people who are not taken seriously in the public square because of their lack of charity and civility. If we want people to hear us, then the look on our faces and our whole demeanour are crucially important. In short, we need a much fuller radiance of the third Person of the Trinity and an acknowledgement that it is not all up to us – ultimately it is up to Him.

*(c) The necessity for us to cultivate a new public language and vocabulary*

We are a society comprising a whole mixture of different cultures. There is a diminishing culture of God-fearing people who believe the Bible, believe God's standards for living and believe in Jesus for salvation. There are those who live in a morally relative universe where there are no givens and no absolutes and ultimately no truth, who are not interested in what the Lord says in His Bible. When we leave the General Assembly and our church buildings and go out into the public square, we have entered a distinct and different place which no longer speaks our language, nor understands our vocabulary. We must be serious students of the culture and major philosophical trends around us, so that we can develop a public language which will appeal across different cultures and world views. A public vocabulary, as opposed to one only understood within the confines of our private conversations, which will make our message much more accessible across the board. Undoubtedly, this is a difficult task in the context of a rejection of what we perceive to be true and absolute.

This means we will need to engage in rigorous and robust theological discussion and debate both amongst ourselves, and with those who hold opposing points of view. We require this so that we can persuade and argue for the truth, have real dialogue and conversations. In fact, we probably need to be most engaged with those with whom we disagree most fundamentally.

## **5. On a pilgrimage**

We are on a pilgrimage in this temporary existence, whilst at the same time longing for our true home in another place. As we seek the peace and prosperity of the city of man, we must also be faithful Christians in a time not of our own choosing. This is a time for walking together unintimidated especially when we feel small and beleaguered. A time for rejoicing together in our momentary triumphs and a time for defiance in our momentary defeats. A time for persistent and reasoned arguments, never tiring of proposing a more excellent way so that our culture may flourish. And it is also a time for generosity towards those

who make us their enemy. It is a time of hope as we seek the air of another city, the New Jerusalem, which is our true home. Learning the language, and adopting the postures and tone, of graciously confident gospel engagement in the public square as those living in exile is not an easy task, but is not impossible. Whatever changes around us, one thing remains true – God’s love in Christ remains the core message which compels us, and introducing Jesus into our conversations and responses to the new world we inhabit through respectful dialogue must be paramount.

## COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS – APPENDIX B

### Consultation Responses December 2020 – May 2021

Date	Title	Organisation	Type	Responder	Pages
Dec 2020	Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill	Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Communities	Legislation	Council for Public Affairs and Council for Social Witness	2-4
Jan 2021	Oral evidence to Committee on 4th Feb 2021 <sup>5</sup> Dying with Dignity Bill	Oireachtas Committee on Justice	Legislation – Private Member's Bill	Republic of Ireland Panel	5-18
Jan 2021	Public Consultation on the Future of Media in Ireland	Future of Media Commission	Consultation	Republic of Ireland Panel	19-20
Jan 2021	Establishment of a Regional Care and Justice Campus	Department of Justice	Policy Development	Council for Public Affairs & Council for Mission in Ireland – Chaplaincy Committee	21-22
Feb 2021	A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland Oral evidence to Committee on 6th May 2021 <sup>6</sup>	Northern Ireland Assembly Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights	Legislative Development	Human Dignity Panel	23-27

<sup>5</sup> [committee-23204.pdf \(niassembly.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [committee-26338.pdf \(niassembly.gov.uk\)](#)

Feb 2021	Making Life Better – Preventing Harm and Empowering Recovery: A Strategic Framework to Tackle the Harm from Substance Use	Department of Health	Draft Strategy Consultation	Council for Public Affairs and Council for Social Witness	28-32
March 2021	Programme for Government: Draft Outcomes Framework	Northern Ireland Executive	Framework Consultation	Council for Public Affairs – conveners	33-38
March 2021	Draft Mental Health Strategy	Department of Health	Draft Strategy Consultation	Welfare and Wellbeing Panel	39-45
April 2021	Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2021	Houses of Parliament Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments	Legislation	Council for Public Affairs	46-48
April 2021	Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2021	House of Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee	Legislation	Council for Public Affairs	49-52
April 2021	Development of an Adult Protection Bill for NI	Department of Health	Legislative Development	Council for Public Affairs & Council for Social Witness	53-57
May 2021	Independent Review of Charity Regulator	Department for Communities	Independent Review	Council for Public Affairs	58-60
May 2021	Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill	Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Health	Legislation – Private Member's Bill	Human Dignity Panel	61-64
	Oral evidence to Committee on 17th June <sup>7</sup>				

## APPENDIX C

### Submission from the Republic of Ireland Panel of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to the Oireachtas Committee on Justice on the Dying with Dignity Bill 2020

#### Executive Summary

1. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has over 535 congregations across the island of Ireland, with almost a fifth of those in the Republic of Ireland. PCI offers this submission to the Committee on Justice based on the pastoral experience of its clergy, and informed by medical and legal expertise from within the denomination. The submission does not address every question in the *Framework for Committee Scrutiny of PMBs* but focuses on questions 4 and 8 under Part A, and questions 15–17 under Part B.
2. At its General Assembly annual meeting in June 2018, a paper was received establishing PCI's policy on the matter of Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide. It highlighted that "*intentional killing (as in euthanasia, assisted suicide and abortion) is wrong because it violates a profound moral order that human life really does matter and has innate value.*"<sup>8</sup> This belief provides the foundation for the content of this submission.
3. In addition, PCI notes that there is no support for this Bill from the Royal College of Physicians which in 2017 stated that, "The RCPI officially opposes the introduction of any legislation supportive of assisted suicide because it is contrary to best medical practice"<sup>9</sup>; or from the Irish Association for Palliative Care which has recommended that there should be no change in the law in order to legalise euthanasia.<sup>10</sup>
4. Rather than introducing this legislation more efforts should be placed on ensuring that palliative care pathways are readily available and accessible across the country, particularly in areas where service provision is inconsistent – often away from larger urban regions. It is our contention that investing in palliative pathways, rather than the proposals in this Bill, provide a better way of increasing dignity and peacefulness around the end of life in Ireland for qualifying patients.
5. The components that contribute to a peaceful and dignified death extend to other domains beyond the physical. Our experience from sitting beside countless bedsides as pastors is that social, emotional, financial and spiritual factors all contribute. How people have lived

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8 2018-PCI-Annual-Reports.pdf.aspx ([www.presbyterianireland.org](http://www.presbyterianireland.org)) (see pages 185–194)

9 Royal College of Physicians of Ireland Assisted Suicide – Position Paper December 2017, adopted by the Council of the Royal College of Physicians on 8th December 2017, avail available at <https://rcpi-live-cdn.s3.amazonaws.com/wup-content/uploads/2020/02/Assisted-Suicide-Position-Paper-2017.pdf>

10 Irish Association for Palliative Care Voluntary Euthanasia Discussion Paper March 2011, available at [www.iapc.ie/iapc-publications/voluntary-euthanasia-discussion-paper/](http://www.iapc.ie/iapc-publications/voluntary-euthanasia-discussion-paper/)

also affects how they approach and manage the final phase of their lives. By focussing so restrictedly on the physical aspects of dying, the Bill fails to take account of the other factors which contribute to a dignified and peaceful death and which mitigate or exacerbate human suffering and distress. With such a limited understanding of the human condition, and specifically on the nature of dignity and peaceful dying, how can the Bill succeed with its stated purpose?

6. The Bill, as currently drafted, has the potential to create a number of unintended consequences with significant safeguarding gaps, risks associated with extending the provision to anyone resident on the island of Ireland for at least one year, and the potential for societal alienation.
7. With regard to specific legal considerations, we consider that the Bill does not sufficiently vindicate the rights of citizens and is fundamentally flawed. The decriminalisation of suicide under the 1993 Act did not give rise to a constitutional right to end one's life. The Bill does not balance sufficiently the rights of all citizens – it leaves vulnerable members of our society open to abuse, duress or the weight of a perceived expectation that they will relieve others of the burden of caring for them; and it contains no robust or sufficient safeguards.
8. Moreover, the Bill is poorly drafted with defined terms lacking precision and thus open to either misconstruction or significant ambiguity. Different terms with similar meanings are used interchangeably in the proposed legislation, in a way that would give rise to significant uncertainty and confusion.
9. Improving the care needs of those approaching the end of life in a consistent manner, to help them to live as well as possible to the end of their lives, ought to be the focus. The true measure of any society is how it treats its most vulnerable and the Bill would increase, not lessen, their vulnerability. On that ground alone, the Bill should not proceed.

## PCI RESPONSE

### Background

1. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has over 217,000 members belonging to 535 congregations across 19 Presbyteries throughout Ireland, north and south. Just under a fifth of those congregations are in the Republic of Ireland, representing around 13,000 members, many from newcomer communities and with leadership from both men and women. As one of the minority churches in Ireland, PCI appreciates the opportunity to express its views with regard to the Dying with Dignity Bill 2020.
2. PCI Ministers, through service to their own congregations, and as members of their local communities, seek to provide appropriate and sensitive pastoral care at all stages of life, at those times which generate much joy and happiness as well as those times which are filled with grief

and sorrow. Many PCI clergy count it a real privilege to support and journey with families who are caring for a loved one coming towards the end of their life. Indeed, the restrictions placed on all of society over the past year to combat the global pandemic have been particularly difficult in this regard for clergy of all denominations seeking to care for and support, those experiencing bereavement.

3. Many of our members work in the health and social care sectors, and more still have experience of caring for a loved one as they approach their final days. This submission on the Dignity with Dying Bill 2020, which draws on medical and legal expertise from within the denomination, seeks to recognise the complexity of the issues, whilst reflecting these lived experiences.
4. The General Assembly is the supreme governing body of PCI, and represents all individual congregations and oversees the various councils and committees that deal with the day-to-day running of the various aspects of church life. The Council for Public Affairs is authorised by the General Assembly to speak on behalf of PCI on matters of public policy. The Republic of Ireland Panel considers such matters within that jurisdiction.
5. At the General Assembly annual meeting in June 2018, a paper was received establishing PCI's policy on the matter of Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide.<sup>11</sup> It highlighted that, "*intentional killing (as in euthanasia, assisted suicide and abortion) is wrong because it violates a profound moral order that human life really does matter and has innate value*".
6. The 2018 report concludes as follows:
 

*"The current laws [on the island of Ireland] on assisted suicide and the guidance that has been given for their administration continue to provide a fair, balanced and compassionate approach to a difficult and complex issue. Christians should resist the legalisation of assisted suicide and euthanasia while urging government and wider society to adopt the other options that are available for the alleviation of pain and suffering. Resources must be given generously to support palliative care research and delivery because of the need and vulnerability of those affected. Facilities like the Hospice Movement must be encouraged. Above all, the Christian community should take the lead in showing the prayerful, dignified, respectful care which assures people that they are valued and loved, even in the midst of pain and helplessness."*
7. Having set out this more general perspective, the rest of this submission deals more specifically with the issues arising from the Dying with Dignity Bill 2020 during this Committee Scrutiny stage of the legislation. The submission does not deal with every question in the *Framework for Committee Scrutiny of PMBS*<sup>12</sup> but primarily addresses

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11 2018-PCI-Annual-Reports.pdf.aspx ([www.presbyterianireland.org](http://www.presbyterianireland.org)) (see pages 185–194)

12 The Committee on Justice invites submissions on the Dying with Dignity Bill 2020. – Committee on Justice – 33rd Dáil, 26th Seanad – Houses of the Oireachtas

questions 4 and 8 under Part A: Policy and Legislative Analysis, along with questions 15, 16 and 17 under Part B: Legal Analysis.

### **Part A: Policy and Legislative Analysis**

**Question 4: How is the approach taken in the Bill likely to best address the policy issue?**

8. The Bill makes no clear statement as to why the law is required to change. It states its purpose as:

*“An Act to make provision for assistance in achieving a dignified and peaceful end of life to qualifying persons and related matters.”*

This prompts the following three distinct questions which are addressed in the following paragraphs:

- (i) Is the matter addressed in the Bill of real significance?
- (ii) Is the current law in Ireland in need of change to achieve the stated purpose of the Bill?
- (iii) Will the proposed changes to legislation be likely to achieve the stated purpose?

(i) **Is the matter addressed in the Bill of real significance?**

9. We would contend that improving the care needs of those approaching the end of life consistently across Ireland is an issue of major societal importance – to provide the expertise and support to help people live as well as possible to the very end of life. While Ireland has led the way in palliative care services, much still needs to be done to ensure that such care is readily available and accessible across our land. As many have said in different ways, the true measure of any society can be estimated in how it treats its most vulnerable, and ensuring that those made vulnerable through illness and distress are well supported is a priority for us all. This would be fundamental to our beliefs and understanding as representatives of the Presbyterian community in Ireland.

10. In this regard, our own statements in relation to this matter, for example as stated in paragraph 6 above, would concur with the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality – Report on the Right to Die with Dignity 2018:

*“The Committee is of the opinion that assisted dying should never be contemplated due to inadequate or insufficient supports or as a substitute for a holistic framework of care. The Committee supports the recommendations contained in the Palliative Care Services Three Year Development Framework (2017 to 2019) and urges the Minister for Health to ensure the recommendations are implemented in full.”<sup>13</sup>*

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13 [https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_justice\\_and\\_equality/reports/2018/2018-06-25\\_report-on-the-right-to-die-with-dignity\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_justice_and_equality/reports/2018/2018-06-25_report-on-the-right-to-die-with-dignity_en.pdf)



11. A holistic framework of care is the means we support to achieve a ‘dignified and peaceful death’ for more people in Ireland in contrast to changing the law in relation to Physician Assisted Suicide/Physician Assisted Euthanasia (PAS/PAE). To achieve the stated aim, we would support the expansion of holistic palliative care services as a priority.
12. We note those most involved in the care of the dying in Ireland, members of the Royal College of Physicians, are not supporting a change in the law or advocating that such a change would achieve the stated aims of the Bill.

*“That RCPI officially opposes the introduction of any legislation supportive of assisted suicide because it is contrary to best medical practice. That RCPI promotes a considered and compassionate approach to caring for, and proactively meeting the needs and concerns of patients who may be approaching the end of their life. That RCPI would as a body promote adherence to the Medical Council’s current Guide on Professional Medical Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners guidance on End of Life Care.”<sup>14</sup>*

The Irish Association for Palliative Care (IAPC) is an all-island body with the purpose of promoting palliative care nationally and internationally. The IAPC has recommended that there should be no change in the law in order to legalise euthanasia.<sup>15</sup>

**(ii) Is the current law in Ireland in need of change to achieve the stated purpose of the Bill?**

13. The Bill has as its objective the provision for terminally ill people to end their lives with legally-supplied medication or, in some cases, to have such drugs injected into them by doctors, based on the supposition that such a change in the law will achieve the goal of increasing dignity and peacefulness around the end of life in Ireland for qualifying patients. We contend that changing the law in this way will not achieve this aim.

*Physician Assisted Suicide*

14. Under the Criminal Law (Suicide) Act 1993 suicide ceased to be unlawful in Ireland. However, it remains unlawful to aid, abet, counsel or procure the suicide of another person. A person convicted of such an offence is liable to a sentence of imprisonment of up to fourteen years. The Act states, however, that *“no proceedings shall be instituted for an offence under this section except by or with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions”*.<sup>16</sup>

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14 Royal College of Physicians of Ireland Assisted Suicide – Position Paper December 2017, adopted by the Council of the Royal College of Physicians on 8th December 2017, avail available at <https://rcpi-live-cdn.s3.amazonaws.com/lup-content/uploads/2020/02/Assisted-Suicide-Position-Paper-2017.pdf>

15 Irish Association for Palliative Care Voluntary Euthanasia Discussion Paper March 2011, available at [www.iapc.ie/iapc-publications/voluntary-euthanasia-discussion-paper/](http://www.iapc.ie/iapc-publications/voluntary-euthanasia-discussion-paper/)

16 Criminal Law (Suicide) Act 1993, Section (4)

*Physician Assisted Euthanasia*

15. Currently there is no law specifically relating to PAE in Ireland. Deliberately ending the life of another person, with or without the victim's consent, constitutes murder and is contrary to the Criminal Justice Act 1964 and to common law.
16. Most modern societies regard with compassion people who take or attempt to take their own lives. They do not, however, regard suicide as something that is to be assisted, aided or abetted. Indeed, the high rates of suicide across Ireland are a matter of grave concern and reduction of suicide is a priority.<sup>17</sup> The existing law in Ireland reflects these values. It forbids assistance with suicide, while its requirement that no proceedings may be undertaken without the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions recognises that such offences are sensitive and that there could be exceptional circumstances in which a breach of the law does not call for prosecution in the public interest. This combination of deterrence with discretion ensures that the offence of assisting suicide is rare, while the serious penalties that the law holds in reserve to deal with malicious or manipulative assistance ensure that the small number of cases that do occur tend to be those where there has been much soul-searching, reluctance and genuine compassion on the part of the assister.
17. The Bill sends the social message to people who are seriously ill that taking their own lives can be an appropriate course of action and it removes the deterrent against malicious assistance. Where assistance with suicide has been legalised, the death rate from this source has been seen to rise steadily. In the US State of Oregon, for example, the number of legally assisted suicides has risen twelvefold since the law was changed. Oregon's 2019 official death rate from this source is the equivalent of over 300 cases of assisted suicides annually in the Republic of Ireland if the law were to be changed along the lines of Oregon's law.
18. Where PAE has been legalised, the death rate from this source is even higher than for PAS. In the Netherlands in 2019, one death in every twenty-five from all causes throughout the country resulted from legalised PAE.

The existing laws in this area in Ireland are not in need of change to achieve the intended aim. They combine deterrence of malicious or manipulative acts with discretion to deal appropriately with genuinely compassionate acts.

**(iii) Will the proposed changes to legislation be likely to achieve the stated purpose?**

19. The components that contribute to a peaceful and dignified death extend to other domains beyond the physical. Our experience from

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<sup>17</sup> *gov.ie* – Minister for Health and Minister for Mental Health extend National Suicide Reduction Strategy to 2024 ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie))

sitting beside countless bedsides as pastors is that social, emotional, financial and spiritual factors all contribute. How people have lived also affects how they approach and manage the final phase of their lives. By focussing so restrictedly on the physical aspects of dying, the Bill fails to take account of the other factors which contribute to a dignified and peaceful death and which mitigate or exacerbate human suffering and distress. With such a limited understanding of the human condition, and specifically on the nature of dignity and peaceful dying, how can the Bill succeed with its stated purpose?

### **Lack of evidence to support a law change**

20. There is no clear evidence this Bill will achieve the “dignified and peaceful end of life” as is its stated aim. There is, however, evidence that while palliative care improves quality of life, palliative care provision across Ireland is inadequate.<sup>18</sup> The impact of this is evidenced in our lived experience, particularly amongst our rural and border congregations where the experience mirrors that of the National Clinical Programme for Palliative Care review which found that:

*“Access to palliative care and supporting services varies according to age, socioeconomic considerations, geographic location and diagnosis. Inequities in service provision includes access to GPs and other healthcare professionals providing palliative care approach services.”<sup>19</sup>*

### **Evidence of unintended consequences undermining the stated purpose**

21. There is evidence from legislatures that have passed such laws that restrictions on the qualifying persons are often reduced following on from initial legislation. For example, children are now eligible to request euthanasia in both Belgium and Holland (over the age of 12) and just three years after Canada changed its law, a drive for extending the criteria for “physician assisted dying” to include minors and those with mental illness has begun.
22. The use of such legislation in other counties in relation to mental illness causes us particular concern. How can programmes seeking to reduce the high rates of suicide in Ireland not be undermined by such a change in the law?

### **Safeguards**

23. The lack of adequate safeguards for vulnerable people within the legislation is a major impediment to the Bill achieving its stated aim.

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18 Adult Palliative Care Services Model of Care for Ireland: The National Clinical Programme for Palliative Care, Royal Physicians of Ireland. Published April 2019 PowerPoint Presentation ([hse.ie](http://hse.ie))

19 PowerPoint Presentation ([hse.ie](http://hse.ie)) (page 25)

- Suggested safeguards cannot be clearly defined in law, or at least have not been in other jurisdictions
- Without such safeguards there is real risk of abuse and coercion
- The monitoring of safeguards in jurisdictions with such legislation as the Bill proposes is weak and the Bill deals with the issue of safeguards without any detail
- Doctors are given responsibility within the Bill to ensure safeguards are adhered to, yet they are not equipped to carry out such work.

### **The key role of doctors within the Bill**

24. The Bill relies on the medical profession to both adjudicate and to facilitate PAE and PAS in Ireland. Yet the evidence is that the majority of doctors in Ireland do not want to participate in such work. With a majority of doctors refusing to engage, requests for PAS/PAE would have to be considered by a minority of referral doctors with no first-hand knowledge of applicants as patients. This is likely to add additional distress and concern to patients and families at a particularly sensitive time in their lives, the exact opposite of the peaceful and dignified end of life that the Bill seeks to support.
25. While the Bill makes some provision for conscientious objection, we would express concern that doing so would not lead to any detriment professionally, for example, in access to promotion opportunities. On the other hand, there do not appear to be any safeguards in place to protect the mental health and wellbeing of those doctors and medical professionals who will be involved at any stage of the process.

### **Question 8: Could the Bill, as drafted, have unintended policy consequences, if enacted?**

26. One of our significant concerns with the proposed Bill is the potential for unintended consequences. The legislation represents such a break from the medical and legal norms of centuries that it is impossible to identify all the potential impacts that could result from such a radical change in practice and understanding as to the nature and value of human life and death. We focus on three areas, summarised under the following headings:
- (a) Safeguarding
  - (b) Joint Jurisdiction risks
  - (c) Societal inclusivity and alienation
- (a) **Safeguarding**
27. No requirement for prognosis is specified, opening the Bill up to be used indiscriminately in a wide variety of chronic long-term conditions such as Parkinson's disease, Schizophrenia, Multiple Sclerosis or Diabetes.

The Bill defines ‘terminal illness’ as “*an incurable and progressive illness which cannot be reversed by treatment*” and from which the person “*is likely to die as a result of that illness or complications relating thereto*”. This lack of requirement for an estimation of life expectancy is different, for example, from Oregon’s PAS law, which requires not only a diagnosis of terminal illness but also a prognosis of six months or less.

28. The only stipulation regarding the doctors involved in the process is that they have to be registered. No additional training is required. The attending medical practitioner can be the doctor who makes the terminal diagnosis whilst also the proponent of instigating PAS /PAE. This is a major conflict of interest and poses real concerns. One can speculate that if Dr Harold Shipman, from Manchester, had been able to operate under the terms of this Bill his activities may have gone on unchecked for much longer.
29. While the legislation requires patients to be informed of alternatives, it fails to detail how this should be done. This omission could lead to people choosing to end their lives without awareness of all the options that exist to mitigate suffering. The Bill does not make clear what informing a patient about alternatives actually means nor who is responsible for the informing. The information conveyed by a palliative care professional may be very different from that provided by an ardent advocate of PAS/E.
30. The Bill requires the person to have “*a clear and settled intention to end his or her own life*” and that a doctor considering such a request needs to be “satisfied” that this is the case. The Bill is unclear as to what it means by this term and how the degree of settled intent will be adjudged. We anticipate that most of these assessments will be carried out by doctors unknown to the patient, undervaluing further the worth of this assessment of intent as an adequate safeguard measure.
31. The Bill does not require any form of mental health assessment. The 2018 Joint Committee Report (from the Justice Committee) raises the importance of ensuring: “*that persons requesting such assistance are not doing so out of compulsion or because their decision-making capacity is compromised by illness, anxiety or depression?*”<sup>20</sup>  
The Bill ignores this point.
32. The Bill does not require the explicit exploration of issues relating to possible coercion, which poses the question as to how effectively an unknown doctor could be at assessing whether coercion is taking place or not. The potential for the Bill to be used inappropriately in a society where elder abuse is a sad reality, where coercion is hard to identify, and where seeking an early death could be understood to be a kind act for one’s relatives cannot be ignored. The 2019 official report of the Oregon Health Authority stated that six out of ten of those who took

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20 [www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/PROVIDERPARTNERRESOURCES/EVALUATIONRESEARCH/DEATHWITHDIGNITYACT/Documents/year22.pdf](http://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/PROVIDERPARTNERRESOURCES/EVALUATIONRESEARCH/DEATHWITHDIGNITYACT/Documents/year22.pdf)

their own lives with legally-supplied lethal drugs had stated that one of their concerns was being a “burden on family, friends/caregivers”.

**(b) Joint jurisdiction risks**

33. The Bill states, as one of its qualifying conditions for PAS/PAE, that an applicant must have been “*resident on the island of Ireland*” for at least a year. This would include the people from Northern Ireland where legally and professionally involvement in PAS and PAE could lead to imprisonment or being struck off the register to practice. This is likely to cause considerable confusion, legal uncertainty, stress and distress for both patients and professionals.
34. It also has the potential of causing some political tension if the legislation is seen as interfering in the care of patients in Northern Ireland where neither patients nor professionals have had their opinion sought around the need to provide support for families and patients choosing to travel across the border for PAS or PAE.

**(c) Societal inclusivity and alienation**

35. Modern Ireland prides itself on its inclusivity. However, historically minorities have not always been well tolerated. The Bill is likely to alienate a large minority of Irish society, including many Presbyterians, who disagree with such legislation because of firmly held ethical, religious and moral principles. While real alternatives to achieving the aim of the Bill exist which will not cause such alienation across our communities, could the Oireachtas not engage with these proven alternatives first to achieve the stated aim before proceeding with unproven changes to the current legal framework?

**Part B: Legal Analysis**

36. Moving to the Legal Analysis, for the reasons set out below we consider that the Bill does not sufficiently vindicate the rights of citizens and is fundamentally flawed.
37. Legislation cannot pass into law without being signed by the President. Having regard to the nature of this legislation it is very likely that the President, having consulted the Council of State, would refer the Bill to the Supreme Court for a determination as to its constitutionality. If the Supreme Court decides that any provision of the Bill is repugnant to the Constitution, then the President cannot sign the Bill and the Oireachtas must go back to the drawing board.
38. Where legislation is extremely vulnerable to a finding of unconstitutionality, as here, then very considerable scrutiny is appropriate. An analysis of the law as it stands suggests that there is little prospect of the constitutionality of the Bill being upheld.

**Question 15: Is the draft PMB compatible with the Constitution (including the ‘principles and policies’ test)?**

39. Article 40.3.1 Bunreacht na hÉireann provides:

*“The State guarantees in its laws to respect and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate the personal rights of the citizen.”*

Article 40.3.2 provides:

*“The State shall, in particular, by its laws protect as best it may from unjust attack, and in the case of injustice done, vindicate the life, person, good name, and property rights of every citizen.”*

40. Those provisions must be read in the context of the Constitution as a whole, McGee -v- Attorney General [1973] IESC2. The Constitution guarantees rights of general application for every citizen, not a limited class of persons, Fleming -v- Ireland [2013] IESC 19.

**Question 16: Is the draft PMB compatible with EU legislation and human rights legislation?**

41. Suicide is no longer a crime: s2(1) of the Criminal Law (Suicide) Act 1993, which provides that it is a crime to aid, abet, counsel or procure the suicide of another and that a prosecution may not be brought in that regard other than by or with the consent of the DPP. The decriminalisation of suicide under the 1993 Act did not, however, give rise to a constitutional right to end one’s life: *Fleming*. So, while there is a constitutionally protected right to life, there is no right to die, and there is a positive onus on the State to protect life. Article 2 of the ECHR has also been found not to confer any right to die: *Pretty -v- UK* (Application No. 2346/02).
42. The courts, in considering the precise issue sought to be addressed by the Bill, have expressed deep concerns as to the risks of abuse inherent in legislating for a right to die. As the Divisional Court stated in *Fleming -v- Ireland* [2013] IEHC 2,

*“The detailed evidence available to us demonstrates that the State has established an ample evidential basis to support the view that any relaxation of the ban would be impossible to tailor to individual cases and would be inimical to the public interest in protecting the most vulnerable members of society. The evidence from other countries shows that the risks of abuse are all too real and cannot be dismissed as speculative or distant. One real risk attending such liberalisation is that even with the most rigorous system of legislative checks and safeguards, it would be impossible to ensure that the aged, the disabled, the poor, the unwanted, the rejected, the lonely, the impulsive, the financially compromised and emotionally vulnerable would not avail of this option in order to avoid a sense of being a burden on their family and society. The safeguards built into any liberalised system would, furthermore,*

*be vulnerable to laxity and complacency and might well prove difficult or even impossible to police adequately (emphasis added)."*

43. The ECHR has also emphasised that the risks inherent in a system that facilitates access to assisted suicide "should not be underestimated" and that in such systems strict regulations are "all the more necessary", Haas -v- Switzerland (Application No. 31322/07).
44. *Fleming* suggests that no legislative scheme providing for PAS or PAE could pass constitutional muster in Ireland for the reasons expressed by the Divisional Court. Allowing, however, that on an interpretation of the Supreme Court judgment in *Fleming* it might be possible to legislate for PAS or PAE in a manner that sufficiently vindicated constitutional rights, is there any basis on which the Bill could conceivably meet the necessary standard of a most rigorous system of legislative checks and balances?
45. The Bill plainly does not meet this standard. It does not balance sufficiently the rights of all citizens – it leaves vulnerable members of our society open to abuse, duress or the weight of a perceived expectation that they will relieve others of the burden of caring for them; it contains no robust or sufficient safeguards. It does not meaningfully even acknowledge the inherent risks identified in *Fleming* and *Haas*, or sufficiently provide for such risks; and it cannot vindicate the right to life guaranteed under the Constitution.
46. The existing law is balanced and compassionate, providing as it does for discretion as to whether a person found to have aided, abetted, counselled or procured another's suicide should be prosecuted. By contrast, the Bill is contrary to public policy as clearly reflected in the Constitution and in decisions of the Courts interpreting its provisions.

**Question 17: Is there ambiguity in the drafting which could lead to the legislation not achieving its objectives and/or to case law down the line?**

47. In terms of the provisions of the Bill, it is poorly drafted, with defined terms lacking precision and thus open to either misconstruction or significant ambiguity. Different terms with similar meanings are used apparently interchangeably in the proposed legislation, in a way that would give rise to significant uncertainty and confusion.
48. By way of example, the term "healthcare professional" is so widely defined as to permit anyone styling him or herself as a healthcare professional to fall within the protections of the legislation, without any qualifications or accreditation. The term 'medical practitioner' is used, but not defined. The term 'doctor' is similarly used without any definition.
49. It is not possible to identify with any reasonable clarity what would constitute a terminal illness and the criteria applied to it are not



rigorous, as already identified above. For example, in some jurisdictions where PAS and PAE have been legislated for, depression has been found to constitute a sufficient basis for assisting the ending of life. The vagueness of the terminology here is likely to give rise to considerable uncertainty as to which medical conditions fall within the provisions.

50. Other examples of concern are that a qualifying person is to be “fully informed” of the palliative care options available but there is no requirement that he or she understand those options. The term “failing to make the decision” in Section 5(2) strongly reeks of duress or at least promotes an intolerance of indecision which may render the vulnerable even more vulnerable to the processes and supposed safeguards sought to be outlined.

### Conclusion

51. If the Oireachtas wishes to legislate for a regime of assisted suicide, then this Bill is not remotely an adequate means for any such fundamental legislative change. It is, in any event, impossible (as stated by the Divisional Court in Fleming) to protect the aged, the disabled, the poor, the unwanted, the rejected, the lonely, the impulsive, the financially compromised and emotionally vulnerable if legislating to permit assisted suicide, even with the most rigorous system of legislative checks and safeguards. The vulnerable in our society would be substantially at risk of abuse under the proposed regime.

52. As stated by the Divisional Court in Fleming,

*“The Court finds that the State has provided an ample evidential basis to support the view that any relaxation of the ban on assisted suicide would be impossible to tailor to individual cases and would be inimical to the public interest in protecting the most vulnerable members of society.*

*A further point of some importance is that if physicians were to be permitted to hasten the end of the terminally ill at the request of the patient by taking active steps for this purpose this would be to compromise – perhaps in a fundamental and far-reaching way – that which is rightly regarded as an essential ingredient of a civilised society committed to the protection of human life and human dignity. It might well send out a subliminal message to particular vulnerable groups – such as the disabled and the elderly – that in order to avoid consuming scarce resources in an era of shrinking public funds for health care, physician assisted suicide is a “normal” option which any rational patient faced with terminal or degenerative illness should seriously consider.”*

53. Accordingly, as submitted above, improving the care needs of those approaching the end of life consistently, to help them to live as well as possible to the end of their lives, ought to be the focus. The true measure of any society is how it treats its most vulnerable and the Bill would increase, not lessen, their vulnerability and on that ground alone should not proceed.

## APPENDIX D

### **Response of the Council for Public Affairs of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to the Northern Ireland Executive Consultation on the Programme for Government: Draft Outcomes Framework**

**MARCH 2021**

#### **Background**

1. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has over 217,000 members belonging to 535 congregations across 19 Presbyteries throughout Ireland, north and south. The Council for Public Affairs is authorised by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to speak on behalf of PCI on matters of public policy. Through its Council for Social Witness, the Church seeks to deliver an effective social witness service on behalf of PCI and to the wider community, through the provision of residential care, nursing care, respite care and supported housing for vulnerable people including the elderly, those with disabilities and those transitioning from the criminal justice system. The Council for Global Mission helps to lift our gaze as a denomination from the island of Ireland to the work of developing mission overseas, and brings issues of global concern to the attention of the wider church, including those which have a local impact like multicultural relations and stewardship of creation.
2. PCI welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework and notes the encouragement to those responding to think about what they might bring to the PfG Outcomes [page 8], particularly in terms of delivery and developing innovative approaches. The past 12 months have demonstrated perhaps more than ever that no one sector, statutory, business, voluntary, community or faith can operate in isolation. It is only through our collective efforts that the desired outcomes to facilitate societal wellbeing can be realised, with an environment created in which all of us can flourish and reach our full potential.
3. While church buildings have been closed many congregations, across all denominations and none, have demonstrated their heart for responding practically to those in need, building on existing relationships with their local communities, or developing new ones through befriending opportunities, support for foodbanks, volunteering with community organisations, meal deliveries, and providing premises as vaccination centres. It is hoped that these collaborative relationships can continue as we all begin to emerge from the restrictions placed on us because of the pandemic, and learn to navigate a new normal. PCI is more than willing to engage as a significant partner in the delivery of Programme for Government outcomes through the use of premises, partnering in the delivery of services and providing personnel.

**General comments on the outcomes framework**

4. On the one hand, there is little that can be disagreed with regarding the proposed draft outcomes outlined in the consultation document. Each of the outcomes covering every aspect of life in Northern Ireland articulates an aspiration which everyone can support. However, without an overarching vision for society, or an agreed set of values, there is a danger that they will stand alone without fully realising the synergies and connections between each one. For example, in the realm of education while of course our children and young people must be trained and equipped to be active participants in the labour market, we must not also lose sight of the value of education as something which is more than simply market-led.
5. In 2016, PCI articulated its own vision for society as 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]”*.<sup>21</sup>
6. We recognise that these outcomes are necessarily “high level” with the detail to be worked out by Ministers in their respective departments, working across departments as necessary. Each outcome refers to a number of strategies, some of which are not yet published and are being developed, while others are coming to the end of their time period. It is vital that these strategies are not developed in isolation and that there is intentional engagement with other departments and sectors which may be impacted, or which may have a contribution to make. For example, historically the areas of health and education have not worked well together whether due to silos, budgetary constraints or other factors. However, to give our children and young people the best start in life and provide the conditions where everyone can reach their potential and enjoy long, healthy, active lives, there must be more intentional and constructive engagement between departments and their key stakeholders. Rather than perceiving other sectors or departments as competitors in the allocation of scarce resources, collaborative working can facilitate more efficient and effective actions in order to realise these outcomes.
7. Blockages or obstructions to delivery that exist within the system must also be identified and mitigated to allow these outcomes to be realised. For example, as a service provider for adult residential care we have experienced a discrepancy in approach not only between Trust areas but also within Trusts. Anecdotally, through our pastoral work we are aware that individual care can also vary between Trusts. Key priorities and outcomes must have resonance for every day lived experience.

**Specific comments on the draft outcomes**

8. Our children and young people have the best start in life
  - (a) We welcome the focus on capability and resilience, which is required at all levels of society. We would suggest that building on social, cultural and environmental awareness should include and be mindful of spiritual awareness.
  - (b) We note that there is only one brief mention of Special Educational Needs (SEN) under this outcome despite the large number of children and young people who are impacted and the significant financial resources involved, and recommend a greater focus here, particularly for those transitioning from formal educational pathways.
  - (c) Ensuring access to “fit for purpose schools” must mean that schools which have been on the list for refurbishment or redevelopment for many years are not overlooked when it comes to area planning.
  - (d) There is a clear need for wider and more comprehensive early years provision. Providing the necessary support and interventions early in life can have a positive impact and reduce the need for interventions at a later stage.
9. We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment
  - (a) The impacts of climate change and the responsibility to call for climate justice are global issues with local implications. The past year has caused us to appreciate and value our local green spaces in a new way, and our collective imagination has been sparked to consider what might be possible to ensure that these continue to be sustained and enhanced for the generations to come.
  - (b) We believe that we are all called to be stewards of creation and that our everyday actions, lifestyle choices and behaviours have an impact wider than just ourselves. We support priorities that further sustainable development, effective stewardship and which make the places where we live and work more positive environments.
  - (c) In pursuing this outcome, efforts should be made to avoid unintended consequences, for example, introducing a regime of building regulations which result in it being unaffordable to build a house.
10. We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect
  - (a) We are concerned that issues of legacy remain unresolved, both in Northern Ireland, and with our neighbours in the rest of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland. The continued impasse over the issue of the victims’ payments scheme remains of grave concern to PCI.

- (b) Sectarianism, identity and legacy will always be contentious, and it would be naïve to suggest otherwise. However, acknowledging that they are difficult should not consequently mean that they are not addressed. Programmes and strategies like “Together: Building a United Community” go some way to making an impact, but much has been funded through additional monies into the NI budget, for example, as a result of the 2015 “Fresh Start Agreement” or from European funds.
  - (c) Resourcing this outcome from sustainable and recurrent funding provides a stability for the sectors involved and provides a stronger foundation for innovative approaches to tackling the issues arising as a legacy of the conflict, but also disadvantage and inequality in terms of welfare and poverty. Government should continue to collaborate with the voluntary, community and faith sectors in pursuing these outcomes.
  - (d) Promoting and protecting rights can only be of benefit to the people of Northern Ireland if an approach is found which seeks to build relationships across identities and communities rather than set them up in competition with each other. Respect reminds us of our inter-connectedness, and rights cannot be divorced from our relationships, and our responsibilities within those relationships. An overarching vision for society in Northern Ireland, or shared values, would provide a strong foundation from which this outcome could develop.
11. We all enjoy long, healthy, active lives
- (a) The number of strategies detailed at the end of this outcome demonstrate the widespread nature of this outcome, which encompasses us all from our first to final breath. The first priority area is described as “Access to Health” and this perhaps could be changed to “Access to Healthcare”. We do not underestimate the current challenges faced by the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland, and wish to commend them for their work and activities which have often gone above and beyond the call of duty in response to the global pandemic.
  - (b) Reform of health and social care must be transparent, properly resourced and well-communicated. Many of the reports which have already been undertaken in this regard have not yet been implemented and, rather than undertaking new reviews and initiatives, perhaps these could be revisited and their recommendations re-evaluated in light of how services have changed over the past 12 months.
  - (c) We welcome the focus on mental health and wellbeing and recommend that prevention is prioritised alongside early intervention. Partnership with the community, voluntary and faith sectors is vital in this regard, including finding ways of empowering and equipping people to promote mental health and wellbeing in their own spheres of influence.

12. Everyone can reach their potential
  - (a) We welcome the inclusion of capability and resilience in this outcome as these skills are just as important once we leave formal education and into adult life, as they are for our children and young people. Again, the past year has reminded us that life can be uncertain, building capacity and resilience amongst the population to better cope when life becomes difficult is a positive preventative measure. There is huge potential for churches to be able to play a part in this, especially in the context of engaging with parents whose children attend youth organisations and events, or older people who can access lunch clubs and other groups.
  - (b) While we agree that young people must be equipped to engage effectively with the labour market and have the right skills to meet demand, we would suggest that it is important not to lose sight of the view that education has a higher value than simply being labour market-led. Encouraging intellectual development also has wider societal benefits.
13. Everyone feels safe – we all respect the law and each other
  - (a) We reiterate our concern about the unresolved issues of legacy and the impact that legacy continues to have in communities across Northern Ireland, both rural and urban. Legacy exists, not only in unresolved crimes and quests for truth and justice, but also in the continued hold that paramilitary activity has on local communities, not least in continued incidences of intimidation and so-called “punishment attacks”.
14. We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives
  - (a) The response to the pandemic has demonstrated that as a society overall we are prepared to do what it takes to care for those who need our collective support. However, our lived experience of the pandemic has also highlighted the fact that our individual circumstances have a significant bearing on our ability to cope with the challenges of everyday life.
  - (b) PCI welcomes the key priority area which will highlight the improvement of quality of life for those of us with disabilities. However, this covers a broad spectrum from those disabilities that are visible, to those that are unseen; inclusive of physical, learning, sensory or mental health disabilities. While accepting that this is a high-level document, there is a danger that over-generalisation can mask opportunities to make a real and significant difference to the lives of many.
  - (c) PCI also believes that a caring society will intentionally protect people through all stages of their lives including good end of life care, and recommends that this is included as a priority area for this identified outcome. Access to good, well-resourced palliative care affords dignity to those reaching the ending of their lives

and provides necessary support to their families. Many of the organisations which provide this care outside of formal healthcare settings rely on philanthropic and charitable donations to sustain their operations. PCI therefore echoes the calls from others for a greater focus on palliative and end of life care within the PfG outcomes framework, which would be adequately resourced.

- (d) In addressing social issues such as social isolation and loneliness, PCI recommends greater collaboration between government departments, statutory agencies and organisations in the voluntary, community and faith sectors, utilising and building on existing social networks.

Rev DANIEL KANE, Convener, Council for Public Affairs

Rev TREVOR D GRIBBEN, Clerk of the General Assembly

# COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY

Convener: Rev N.J. McCULLOUGH

Secretary: Rev T.D. ALLEN

1. Despite the difficulties caused by Covid-19 much of the work of the Council has continued, albeit in a modified form.

## **Ministerial Training and Development**

2. Fourteen applicants were interviewed by three panels consisting of Revs Robin Aicken, Dr Paul Bailie, Gordon Best, Eddie Chestnutt, Michael Davidson, Daryl Edwards, Gary Glasgow, George McClelland, Alastair McNeely, Joanne Smith, Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson, Mrs Isobel McAuley, Miss Anne Taylor, Messrs Trevor Long, Roy Thompson.
3. Interviews for the ordained ministry were again held online rather than in person. While this was regrettable, the panels and applicants worked hard to make the process work. Having completed the process, fourteen students are being nominated to the General Assembly. Thirteen of these are due to commence their studies in September along with two who had deferred from last year.
4. In September 2021 there will be 35 students for the ministry studying at Union College. This is the highest number of students in College for several years and should be seen as an answer to the prayers of the church to raise up candidates for ministry. Nevertheless, the Council is aware of the large number of vacant congregations within the church and continues to ask God's people to make this a matter for ongoing prayer.

## **Flexible Pathways**

5. Flexible pathways were agreed for five of the ministry applicants this year with arrangements reflecting the range of theological education and pastoral experience of the candidates.
6. The Flexible Pathway Scheme was established at the General Assembly of 2019 as a two-year pilot, with a review to take place after that time. In considering a review, the Council has realised that during this period only two students were enrolled on flexible pathways in the first year of its operation, and five in the second. To date, none of these students have completed their training. While there are some indications of lessons that might be learned at this stage, there is insufficient data for conclusions to be drawn. Therefore, the Council is requesting permission to extend the pilot for two years, with a comprehensive review brought to the 2023 General Assembly.



**Summer Placements**

7. All of the current second year students were placed on summer assignments along with the first years. This was because they were denied this opportunity last summer due to COVID-19 restrictions.

**Licentiates**

8. Four Licentiates became eligible in September 2020 with one gaining eligibility in December.
9. It was agreed that any licentiates from the cohort eligible in September 2019 that have so far not secured a call have their period of eligibility extended until 31 May 2021. A licentiate from this cohort has been placed on furlough, with his period of eligibility paused until he returns to work. The intention is to give every licentiate a genuine 12 months of eligibility for a call.

**Post Ordination Conference**

10. Post-ordination training took place ‘virtually’ yet successfully on 11 and 12 May with Zack Eswine speaking on Spiritual Formation. Conferences are organised for 2022 with Marcus Honeysett and team from Living Leadership on the topic of leadership and 2023 with Gary Millar coming to speak on preaching.

**Preretirement Conference**

11. The conference planned for 2020 was cancelled due to Covid-19. It is hoped that two conferences will take place in 2021, one in September, and one in November.

**Students’ Bursary Fund**

12. *Rev. Adrian Moffett, Students’ Bursary Fund agent writes:*  
The Students’ Bursary Fund exists to make financial provision for students for the ordained ministry and their families during their time of study.
13. In the academic year September 2020 to June 2021, 21 students were in receipt of grants, all of whom are studying at Union Theological College, Belfast. The cost to the fund of grants, fees and all other expenses for this period was in the region of £383,000.
14. The Students’ Bursary Fund receives its income from offerings at services of licensing of probationers, of ordination and installations of ministers and other special services, and through personal and congregational donations as well as congregational assessment. Thanks are due to all members of the Church who generously support the Students’ Bursary Fund. As the restrictions necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic ease, those who have responsibility for planning a service of licensing, ordination and installation, etc. are asked to ensure full use is made of the Students’ Bursary Fund literature, especially the Gift Aid envelope.

(Experience has shown that where literature is handed out at an earlier service, those attending the special service are more likely to make use of the Gift Aid scheme.) When the restrictions are lifted, this literature will again be available from reception in Assembly Buildings.

### **Deaconesses**

15. A new cohort of student deaconesses are due to commence study in September. Heather Healy and Cathy Smith will follow a revised course that has a greater emphasis on student placements.
16. It is encouraging to note that our most recently trained deaconesses have all found posts in which to serve: Paula Burrows in Ballygrainey; Louise Davidson in Bangor West; Sylvia Santos-Bryce in Groomsport.

### **Union Theological College**

17. The College continues to teach out the final cohort of full-time students enrolled in the Queen's University degree. They will complete their studies and will graduate in the autumn. Some part time Queen's students remain. An intake of 16 ministerial students is due to begin studies in September 2021.
18. The arrangements for the undergraduate programme validated by St Mary's University, Twickenham are progressing and the first intake of students is planned for September 2022. The new BA in Theology, which has interim approval at time of writing, will once again enable the College to teach undergraduate students. Advertising for this course is planned to commence following final validation, likely in August.
19. Following a monitoring visit in March 2021, a favourable report on the College is on the QAA website.

### **Maintenance**

20. Some deterioration has been identified in the ceiling of the Gamble Library and the library has consequently been unable to be accessed by students. Repairs are being undertaken over the summer period so that it can operate normally next semester. In addition, a decision has been taken to replace the two boilers in the main building which are faulty and well past their expected life.
21. It is hoped that the repairs to the Gamble Library and the heating system can be carried out without using investments.

### **Staff Changes**

22. Mr Ken Brown retired as Bursar after six years of faithful service and wise counsel and we thank Ken for his valuable contribution to College life. It was decided to review the responsibilities of the Bursar and administrative needs generally. The following appointments were subsequently made: Karen Henderson as Head of Academic Administration and Alan McCormick as Operations Manager.

23. Professor Drew Gibson retires on 31 July 2021 from the chair of Practical Theology. Deep gratitude is due to Prof Gibson for the gracious and consistent service he has given to the College during his fifteen years in post. Dr Zach Cole has accepted a post in the USA and will leave in early August. Again gratitude is due to Dr Cole for the very significant impact he made on the students and the Church in his five years with PCI.
24. Rev David Leach has been appointed as Professor of Ministry and Director of the Institute for Ministry and starts on 1 August 2021. The Institute for Ministry will help the College develop its role as a training hub for the Church. The Council is looking forward to its development of the Institute for Ministry which, it is hoped, will also see collaboration with the Council for Congregational Life and Witness.
25. Following the retirement of Professor Gibson, Dr Alexander reducing hours and the resignation of Dr Cole, three lecturer positions have been advertised and appointments are in the process of being made.
26. Once again, the gratitude of the Church is due to the faculty and staff of the College who have undertaken an enormous amount of work in very challenging circumstances.

### **Reception of Ministers and Licentiates**

#### **27. Enquiries**

Ten people contacted the Convener during the year for information about transferring to the ministry of PCI. Four of these have, to date, followed through with formal enquiries. One of these has taken the subsequent step of completing an exploratory week with PCI.

#### **28. Transferring Ministers**

Rev Andras Gilicze, a minister in the Hungarian Reformed Church, having successfully completed all required of him in the transfer programme, was declared eligible to receive a call, and has been installed in the congregations of Carrowdore & Ballyfrennis with Ballyblack.

Rev Laszlo Orban, an ordained minister of the Hungarian Reformed Church (in Romania), having successfully completed all required of him in the transfer programme, was declared eligible to receive a call, and is currently seeking a call to a congregation.

Rev Enrique Tagle Aguiar, an ordained minister in Havana Baptist Church, Cuba, having been received as a Transferring Minister and assigned to First Carrickfergus, has been reassigned to an assistantship in St Andrew's Bangor, with a view to eligibility for a call on 1 October 2021.

Rev Mariann Gilicze, an ordained minister in the Hungarian Reformed Church, having been received as a Transferring Minister, was assigned to a two-year assistantship in Gilnahirk.

Rev Trevor Kane, an ordained minister in the Free Church of Scotland, having been received as a Transferring Minister, was assigned to a two-year assistantship in First Portadown.

Mr Mark Haugh, originally from Northern Ireland and theologically trained in the Presbyterian Church in America, having been declared of equivalent to Licentiate status in PCI, was interviewed and received as a transferor. He has been assigned to a two-year assistantship in the congregation of Vinecash. If the General Assembly approves the principle of licensing transferors who are determined to be equivalent to PCI Licentiate status, he will be licensed by the Armagh Presbytery.

**29. Applications to be received as Transferring Ministers**

Rev Jason Lingiah, an ordained minister in the United Free Church of Scotland, has completed an Exploratory Week in Ireland, but has not submitted a formal application to transfer to PCI.

**30. Ministers without Charge & Licentiates not in Assistantship**

Under the Code, Par 219(4), Presbyteries seek authorisation through the Committee for the retention of Licentiates not serving an assistantship under Code Par 219A, and of Ministers without Charge. The Committee is grateful to Clerks of Presbytery for making annual returns in good time so that requests may be received in time for recommendations to be included in the Report Book. In light of the Covid-19 situation it was decided that, for this year, no changes be recommended to the status of any retained ministers and licentiates.

**31. Requests for Permission to Preach in Vacancies**

There were no requests for Ministers from other denominations to preach in vacant charges.

**32. Transferring Licentiates**

During the year the situation regarding transferring licentiates was discussed. As there are a variety of practices in the churches that transferors come from, it was felt that all transferring licentiates, and those deemed to be equivalent to licentiates, should be licensed in the presbytery in which they serve their transferring assistantship.

The Council also believes that where a transferor does not reach the point of eligibility for call, the status of licentiate should lapse. A resolution to this effect is included.

**33. Recognised Ministries**

*Rev Dr WJP Bailie, Mission Africa, writes:*

Mission Africa (The Qua Iboe Fellowship) is in its 134th year of operation. Mission Africa continues to pray that God might continue to be pleased to use the mission for His sovereign purposes.

The mission concentrates on three areas of ministry: 1) evangelism and Church planting, generally in difficult places and circumstances; 2) the strengthening of the African Church through theological education; 3) medical and compassionate ministry, especially women, children and the elderly.

Our work has been hampered by the Covid-19 crisis, but the majority of our activities have now resumed.

As Chief Executive, I have responsibility for strategic planning; pastoral care of Missionaries; supervision of personnel and finance at home and overseas and partner relations with a variety of Churches and agencies. I am particularly involved in promoting theological education in Africa and police and military chaplaincy in Africa.

I am also grateful to report that my status as a Minister in Recognised Service permits me to play an active role within my Presbytery (Ards) and the Council for Training in Ministry and the subsidiary committees of the CTM (RMLC and APS/AMS). I am particularly glad to serve the Church through part-time teaching of Old Testament at Union Theological College, and ACF chaplaincy. I am currently vacancy convener for Second Ards.

34. *Rev Dr Ruth Patterson, Restoration Ministries, writes:*

Like everyone else, life has been very different for us in Restoration Ministries during this past year. I have continued with spiritual direction, usually via zoom or telephone. I have given a number of retreats/conferences also via zoom. In June of this year I gave my first face to face 6-day retreat in over 15 months. We keep in touch with our friends of the ministry around the world and have become increasingly challenged to be aware of and live in the present moment. As always prayer is our constant heartbeat and support.

### **Pastoral Care of Ministers and their Families**

35. The Council for Training in Ministry has a responsibility for encouraging and resourcing Presbyteries in their provision of pastoral care for ministers and their families. In March 2021 the Council launched the *Refresh Initiative* as a means to creating space for ministers to reflect, fellowship together, and be recharged, following the challenges of ministry in the midst of the pandemic.
36. Presbytery based *Refresh Groups* met across the church in April / May providing opportunity for listening and mutual support among small groups of ministers.
37. A *Refresh Week* followed (7-13 June) which included a *Refresh Morning Conference* on 9 June, addressed by the Moderator, Dr Andrew Collins, and Jonathan Lamb. 210 ministers registered for this conference, which was held in Assembly Buildings and was livestreamed to venues in Armagh, Ballymena, Drogheda and Londonderry.

### **Accredited Preachers and Auxiliary Ministers**

38. The 2020 Accredited Preacher Course was postponed and then combined with a 2021 course. As a result 18 candidates will attend the Intensive in Union College from 5 to 9 July 2021.
39. The teaching element of the 2020 Auxiliary Ministry course was completed in March 2021 and pastoral practice is currently ongoing.

A Service of Accreditation is planned to take place on Sunday 19 September 2021 in Elmwood Presbyterian Church, Lisburn.

### **Conciliation**

40. During periods of Covid-19 lockdown and tighter restrictions, the Conciliation Service was not called upon to provide any case support or training, although both were still available, as appropriate and possible within current regulations. Since March 2021, requests for both training and case support have resumed and conciliators have begun work again on several cases, with some course delivery also planned. Update and development training for conciliators continued remotely, with sessions held in November 2020 and April 2021. In order to expand the current pool of supervisors, four of the more experienced conciliators also undertook a supervision training session remotely with Rev Doug Baker.
41. Following Rev Jim Stothers' retirement as Conciliation Service Co-ordinator, Rev Dr David Allen has taken over this role and he brings considerable experience as a conciliator and Conciliation Panel member. Thanks and appreciation are due to Mr Stothers for all that he has contributed to the development and co-ordination of the Service.

**APPENDIX 1****SCHEDULE OF STUDENTS**

ARDS	Paul Bradley	Union
	Andrew Frazer	Union
	Wallace Moore	Union
ARMAGH	Mark Hawthorne	Union
	Scott McMenemy	Union
BALLYMENA	Billy Abwa	Union
	Martin Delaney	Union
	Matthew Houston	Union
	Matthew Kelso	Union
	Mark Rodgers	Union
NORTH BELFAST	Stephen Cairns	Union
	Stephen Gaston	Union
	Matthew Horner	Union
	Michael Wylie	Union
SOUTH BELFAST	Paul Lutton	Union
EAST BELFAST	Andrew Ferguson	...
	Neil Stewart	Union
DOWN	Ellis Hanna	...
	Thomas Moore	Union
DROMORE	Tom Finnegan	Union
	Stephen Kerr	Union
	Andrew Martin	Union
OMAGH	Jeff Gawn	Union
	Graeme Read	Union

## APPENDIX 2

### RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING MINISTERS WITHOUT CHARGE AND LICENTIATES NOT SERVING AN ASSISTANTSHIP UNDER CODE PAR 219A

Presbyteries have sought authorisation for the retention of the following as recognised licentiates or ministers without charge under Code Par 219(3)(c) (i), and the Council for Training in Ministry makes recommendation as detailed.

#### Ards

Rev C.D. Mawhinney to be retained as minister without charge  
Rev M.R. Catney to be retained as a minister without charge  
Rev L. Wilson to be retained as a minister without charge

#### Armagh

Rev J.W.P. McConnell to be retained as minister without charge for one year and that he be advised to apply to a local reformed denomination for reception under their care.

#### Ballymena

Rev D.C. Millar to be retained as a minister without charge

#### North Belfast

Rev Dr L.E. Carroll to be retained as minister charge  
Mr D. McCarthy to be retained as licentiate  
Rev S. Newell to be retained as minister without charge  
Rev W.A. Shaw to be retained as minister without charge  
Rev W.M. Smyth to be retained as minister without charge (retired)

#### South Belfast

Rev Dr L.H. Eagleson to be retained as Minister without charge  
Rev K.M. Mbayo to be retained as minister without charge  
Rev Dr P.G. McDowell to be retained as minister without charge

#### East Belfast

Mr Samuel Bostock to be retained as a licentiate  
Rev J.M. Casement to be retained as minister without charge  
Rev W.J. Harshaw to be retained as minister without charge (retired)  
Rev Dr D.J. Montgomery to be retained as minister without charge  
Rev Dr M.J. Welsh to be retained as minister without charge



**Carrickfergus**

Rev T.N. Bingham to be retained as a minister without charge

**Coleraine and Limavady**

Rev Dr R.A. Kane to be retained as minister without charge

**Derry and Donegal**

Rev S.W.K. Glendinning to be retained as minister without charge

**Down**

Rev Dr B.C.G. Black to be retained as minister without charge

**Dromore**

Rev W.J. Todd to be retained as minister without charge

**Monaghan**

Rev D.J.M. Boyle to be retained as minister without charge

**Newry**

Rev A.D. Mullan to be retained as minister without charge

Rev B.A.H. Wilson to be retained as minister without charge

**Route**

Rev P. Douglas to be retained as a minister without charge

Rev P. Turton to be retained as minister without charge

**Templepatrick**

Rev J.A. Gordon to be retained as minister without charge

Rev J.L. Tosh to be retained as minister without charge

**Tyrone**

Rev W.I. Ferris to be retained as minister without charge

Rev J.D. Montgomery to be retained as minister without charge

# OVERTURES

## OVERTURES ON THE BOOKS

### GENERAL

1. **Purpose** – tidying up: to give effect to the resolution of the General Assembly in 2018: ‘That the prayer of the memorial be granted and that the names of deaconesses, senior lecturers, auxiliary ministers, lay agents and missionaries under its care who, since its last report, have died, retired, resigned, or have been commissioned and/or appointed by Presbytery, with respective dates, be included, henceforth, in the annual report of Presbytery; and that the Clerk of the Assembly present overture(s) to the 2019 General Assembly to amend Par 260 of The Code, accordingly and to mirror additionally the requirements of Par 260(d).’ (MGA 2018 p44)

#### **Anent Par 260 of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 260 of the Code, the following sub-paragraphs be inserted after Par 260(e), and that subsequent sub-paragraphs be renumbered:

- (f) the names of deaconesses, senior lecturers, auxiliary ministers, lay agents and global mission workers under its care who, since its last annual report, have died, retired, resigned, or have been commissioned, inducted and/or appointed by Presbytery, with the respective dates;
  - (g) the names of deaconesses, senior lecturers, auxiliary ministers, lay agents and global mission workers under its care who, since its last annual report, have resigned their office, or have been suspended or deposed, or have been declared to be no longer holding their office;
2. **Purpose** – to change the age of entitlement to retire for congregational ministers from 65 to 66 and to remove the clause re retirement at 64 which is not essential to the meaning of the understanding of the paragraph.

#### **Anent Par 223(1) and (2) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 223(1) and (2) of the code, the number ‘65’ be deleted and the number ‘66’ substituted in its place.

**Anent Par 223(3) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 223(3) of the code, the words ‘congregations, including those who have reached 64 years of age,’ deleted and the word ‘congregations’ substituted in their place.

**COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY**

1. **Purpose** – tidying up: to remove a requirement for a presbytery to prescribe a student for the ministry a piece of trial before licensing – this paragraph should already have been removed following a resolution of the 2019 General Assembly (GAR 2009 p217, Appendix III Par 4 and MGA 2009 p84, Resolution 4.)

**Anent Par 207(3) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that Par 207(3)(first instance) of the Code be deleted.

2. **Purpose** – tidying up: to clarify that a reference of good health and character are required for former ministers and licentiates seeking to return to PCI.

**Anent Par 219(5)(a) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 219(5)(a) of the Code the word ‘good’ be inserted before the word ‘health’.

3. **Purpose** – tidying up: to make it clear that Par 219(5)(d) is not included in the reference to ‘foregoing sub-paragraphs’ in Par 219(6).

**Anent Par 219(6) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 219(6) of the Code, the words ‘foregoing sub-paragraphs,’ be deleted and the words ‘foregoing sub-paragraphs (5)(a)-(c),’ substituted in their place.

4. **Purpose** – to allow a means for ministers who have resigned from the ministry to have a route back in.

**Anent Par 220 of the Code**

It is hereby overtured that in Par 220 of the Code, the following sub-paragraph be added after Par 220(4):

- (5) When, under the foregoing sub-paragraph, a minister has resigned or is loosed from his charge, and neither becomes a minister without charge, nor receives credentials, application for restoration as a minister without charge, or to be declared eligible to receive a call on a temporary basis, may be made to the

Reception of Ministers and Licentiate Committee, following, as applicable, the same procedures as in Par 219(5).

#### **Anent Par 219A of the Code**

It is hereby overtured that in Par 219A of the Code, the following subparagraph be added after Par 219A(iv):

- (v) A licentiate who has resigned, or had license withdrawn, may make application to the Reception of Ministers and Licentiate Committee for restoration as a licentiate, or to be declared eligible to receive a call on a temporary basis, following, as applicable, the same procedures as in Par 219(5).

### **COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION**

**Purpose** – tidying up: in accordance with already agreed General Assembly policy, to replace, where appropriate, references to ‘missionary’ or missionaries’ with ‘global mission worker’ or ‘global mission workers’ and to update, where appropriate, references to ‘overseas mission’ to ‘global mission’ etc.

#### **Anent Par 72(d) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 72(d) of the Code, the words ‘missionary elders’ be deleted and the words ‘elders appointed as global mission workers’ substituted in their place.

#### **Anent Pars 72(e) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Pars 72(e) of the Code, the word ‘missionaries’ be deleted and the words ‘global mission workers’ substituted in its place.

#### **Anent Pars 115(1) and 115(2) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Pars 115(1) and 115(2) of the Code, the word ‘Overseas’ be deleted and the word ‘Global’ substituted in its place.

#### **Anent Par 199(1) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Pars 199(1) of the Code, the words ‘the overseas Mission field’ be deleted and the words ‘the work of global mission’ substituted in its place.

#### **Anent Pars 199(1)(b), 202(7) and Appendix 4A of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Pars 199(1)(b), 202(7) and Appendix 4A of the Code, the word ‘missionary’ be deleted and the words ‘global mission worker’ substituted in its place.

**Anent Pars 201(1), 202(3), 202(6), 278(4), 290(4), 290(6) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Pars 201(1), 202(3), 202(6), 278(4), 290(4), 290(6) of the Code, the word 'missionaries' be deleted and the words 'global mission workers' substituted in its place.

**Anent Par 278(3)(a) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 278(3)(a) of the Code, the word 'Overseas' be deleted and the word 'Global' substituted in its place.

**Anent Par 278(3)(b) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that Par 278(3)(b) of the Code be deleted and that the following be substituted in its place.

- (b) develop a strategy on global mission, including partnership with Churches outside Ireland, and sending personnel;

**Anent Par 289 of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that Par 289 of the Code be deleted and that the following be substituted in its place.

**289. Global Mission**

- (1) Global Mission is to be regarded as an integral part of the life and nature of the Church. The policy of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is to fulfil its calling to this work by acting in association with Churches and Societies round the world, as mutually agreed from time to time.
- (2) Individual works of global mission spring from personal experience of the love of God, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which in obedience to the Lord's command desires to make this love known to others, win them to faith in Christ and to his service and, by his grace, to enlarge and build up some part of the universal Church.

**Anent Par 290(1) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 290(1) of the Code, the words 'service overseas' be deleted and the words 'the work of global mission' substituted in their place.

**Anent Par 290(3) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 290(3) of the Code, the words 'an overseas' be deleted and the words 'a global mission' substituted in their place.

**Anent Par 290(5) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that Par 290(5) of the Code be deleted and that the following be substituted in its place.

- (5) When someone is called as a global mission worker, and the spouse does not receive a call, but desires to be recognised as participating in the work of mission, the Presbytery shall arrange that, at the service of ordination, installation, or commissioning, the spouse shall also be commissioned.

**Anent Par 291 of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that Par 291 of the Code be deleted and that the following be substituted in its place.

291. (1) While outside Ireland, the location and work of global mission workers shall be the responsibility of the partner Church or Society under which they are serving, in consultation with the global mission workers and the Council for Global Mission.
- (2) Global mission workers normally shall serve as members of the local Church concerned, and under its direction, discipline and control, but without prejudice to their relationship with the Council for Global Mission or to their continuing membership in a Presbytery of the Church in Ireland; and no decision of any Church court outside the Presbyterian Church in Ireland affecting their ecclesiastical status shall take effect in the Church until confirmed by the General Assembly.
- (3) The ordination, installation, commissioning, resignation or retirement and any investigation of a complaint or action affecting the ecclesiastical status in Ireland of global mission workers or full time workers of the Church serving outside Ireland, shall rest with the Presbytery in whose membership or under whose care they have been placed after full consultation with the Council for Global Mission.

**Anent Par 331(2) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 331(2) of the Code, the words 'an overseas missionary' be deleted and the words 'a global mission worker' substituted in their place.

**Anent Par 331(2)(b) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 331(2)(b) of the Code, the words ‘in the case of such a missionary, by the Council for Global Mission or in the case of such a ruling elder in special work other than as an overseas missionary by the appropriate Assembly Council;’ be deleted and the words ‘in the case of such a global mission worker, by the Council for Global Mission or, in the case of such a ruling elder in special work other than as a global mission worker, by the appropriate Assembly Council;’ substituted in their place.

**LINKAGE COMMISSION**

**Purpose** – tidying up: in light of advice from the General Assembly Solicitor: all overtures are in connection with ministerial income from manse property and from investments.

1. **Purpose** – to remove references to ‘glebe’

**Anent Par 82(3) and 82(4) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 82(3) and 82(4) of the Code, the word ‘glebe’ be deleted.

**Anent Par 137 of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 137 of the Code, the words ‘or glebe’ be deleted.

**Anent Par 195(11)(c) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 195(11)(c) of the Code, the words ‘with the glebe (if any)’ be deleted.

**Anent Par 195(11)(c)(iii) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 195(11)(c)(iii) of the Code, the words ‘outside the glebe area,’ be deleted.

**Anent Par 195(11)(c)(ii) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that Par 195(11)(c)(ii) of the Code be deleted and the following sub-paragraph be renumbered as (ii).

**Anent Par 225(3) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 225(3) of the Code, the words ‘or glebe’ and the word ‘, glebe’ be deleted.

**Anent Par 348(1) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 348(1) of the Code, the words ‘or glebe,’ be deleted.

**Anent Appendix 5 of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Appendix 5 of the Code, the words ‘together with the use of the glebe (if any)’ be deleted.

2. **Purpose** – to add definitions related to manse property and ministerial income

**Anent Par 137 of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 137 of the Code, after the definition of “church building” and “church premises”, the following definition be added:

“congregational property” means all property both real and personal held upon trust for a congregation and includes the church building and the manse property;

**Anent Par 137 of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 137 of the Code, after the definition of “financial year”, the following definition be added:

“Ministerial Investment Income” means any income derived from congregational property which is due and payable to the minister of the congregation by virtue of the terms of any trust or bequest and any income to which a minister of a congregation is entitled by virtue of being the minister of the congregation;

**Anent Par 137 of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 137 of the Code, after the definition of “solicitor or barrister” and “qualified as a lawyer”, the following definition be added:

“stipend” means the sum of (a) the Ministerial Investment Income (if any) and (b) the sum which, apart from the Ministerial Investment Income, a congregation resolves to pay to its minister, but that no Ministerial Investment Income shall apply under this definition if the minister was called to the charge before 5th June 2020;



3. **Purpose** – to include Ministerial Investment Income as Assessable Income

**Anent Par 235(1) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that in Par 235(1) of the Code, a new sub-paragraph (g) be inserted as follows (with subsequent sub-paragraph being renumbered as (h)):

- (g) Ministerial Investment Income received except where the minister was called to the charge before 5th June 2020, or was written into an earlier call by the Linkage Commission;

## NEW OVERTURES

### COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND

**Purpose** – tidying up: to bring the Code into line with changes in the PCI Pension Scheme.

**Anent Par 302(4)(b) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured that Par 302(4)(b) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

Upon appointment an Irish Mission worker will become a member of the PCI Pension Scheme (2009) but may subsequently opt out.

**Anent Par 302(4)(d) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured that Par 302(4)(d) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

An Irish Mission Worker who reaches 66 years of age is entitled to retire from service, but

- (a) may retire earlier with the permission of the Council for Mission in Ireland and
- (b) the appointment may be extended on an annual basis with the approval of the Council for Mission in Ireland.

**Anent Par 305(9) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured that Par 305(9) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

A deaconess who reaches 66 years of age is entitled to retire from service, but

- (a) may retire earlier with the permission of the Council for Mission in Ireland and
- (b) the appointment may be extended on an annual basis with the approval of the Council for Mission in Ireland.

**Anent Par 307(2) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured that Par 307(2) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

Upon appointment a deaconess will become a member of the PCI Pension Scheme (2009) but may subsequently opt out.

**LINKAGE COMMISSION**

**Purpose** – to revise the procedure followed by the Linkage Commission for congregations that have received Leave to Call but are still vacant after 12 months.

**Anent Par 273(4)(b) of the Code**

It is hereby overtured to the General Assembly that Par 273(4)(b) of the Code be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

This leave shall be operative for 15 months only, after which, should the vacancy not have been filled, it shall be referred back to the Commission for the whole arrangement to be reconsidered.

# **GENERAL COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS**

## **GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE (INITIAL REPORT)**

2pm Monday afternoon:

1. That the Draft Order of Business for the 2021 General Assembly be approved.
2. That the 'Guide to Assembly Procedure' (yellow pages) be approved with the appropriate General Assembly Standing Orders suspended, when necessary, to facilitate alternative presentations etc.
3. That at the 2021 General Assembly, permission be granted, where appropriate, to consolidate resolutions relating to Overtures; and that if a written request from ten or more members of Assembly is lodged with the Clerk before the time scheduled for debate on the consolidated resolution(s) relating to Overtures, then the item(s) specified in the written request will be removed from the consolidated resolution(s) and considered as separate resolution(s).
4. That a grant of £20,000 be made from the Incidental Fund to the General Assembly Business Committee.
5. That the initial report of the General Assembly Business Committee be received.

## **GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 1**

6. That the General Assembly express thanks to front-line workers in all sectors throughout the island of Ireland, whose dedication and sacrificial self-giving during the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic enabled essential services to be maintained and the vulnerable to be cared for in often stressful and challenging circumstances and situations.
7. That the General Assembly pay tribute to local ministers, elders and leaders for their dedicated and innovative service enabling congregational life and witness to continue in the ways that were possible during the long months of restrictions and shut-downs, and express thanks to those at Presbytery and General Assembly level whose support and encouragement was especially important during this period.

4.15pm Monday afternoon

### **HOLDING TRUSTEE TASK GROUP**

*(Note: Resolution 8 was originally submitted for consideration at the 2020 General Assembly and remitted by the Standing Commission to the 2021 General Assembly for decision.)*

8. That the proposal outlined in paragraphs 3-9 and the recommendations in paragraphs 10, 11 and 13-15, of the Holding Trustee Task Group be approved.
9. That Section 1 of the report of the General Council, with the exception of the Initial Report of the General Assembly Business Committee, be received.

## **GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 2**

2pm Tuesday afternoon

### **IMPLEMENTATION TASK GROUP**

10. That the resource ‘Credible profession of faith and admission to the sacraments: a framework for discussion for Kirk Sessions’ (Implementation Task Group– Appendix A) and the resource ‘Guidance for pastoral care of same-sex attracted people and their families’ (Implementation Task Group - Appendix B) be received and approved by the General Assembly.
11. That the resources be printed as two separate booklets for distribution to Kirk Sessions, with the cost charged to the Incidental Fund; and that a video be produced for distribution to Kirk Sessions of the material in sections 3.3 and 3.4 of the ‘Credible profession’ resource, with the cost charged to the Incidental Fund.
12. That the General Council be instructed to appoint a Task Group to address the issue of accepting special needs young people and adults into communicant membership, bringing a report coming to the 2023 Assembly.
13. That a joint task group be formed between the Council for Training in Ministry and the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to assist ministers and youth workers/leaders in the outworking of ‘Guidance for pastoral care of same-sex attracted people and their families’, and that the Council for Training in Ministry provides support for ministers in using ‘Credible profession of faith and admission to the sacraments: a framework for discussion for kirk sessions’.

**HUMAN IDENTITY TASK GROUP**

14. That the resource 'A biblical framework and guidance for pastoral care of people who struggle with gender identity' be received and approved by the General Assembly.
15. That the resource be printed as a separate booklet for distribution to Kirk Sessions with the cost charged to the Incidental Fund.
16. That Section 2 of the report of the General Council be received.

**GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 3**

4.15pm Tuesday afternoon

**DECISION MAKING AND DISSENT TASK GROUP**

*(Note: Resolution 17 was originally submitted for consideration at the 2020 General Assembly and remitted by the Standing Commission to the 2021 General Assembly for decision.)*

17. That the recommendations of the Report of the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group be adopted.

**VOWS FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP AND BAPTISM TASK GROUP**

*(Note: Resolution 18 was originally submitted for consideration at the 2020 General Assembly and remitted by the Standing Commission to the 2021 General Assembly for decision.)*

18. That the vows contained in Appendices A, B and C of the Report of the Vows for Full Membership and Baptism Task Group be approved as the authorised vows for use within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland for respectively:
  - admission to communicant membership on profession of faith;
  - use for the baptism of infants;
  - use for the baptism of believers.

**SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN CHALLENGING TIMES TASK GROUP**

19. That the Supporting Families in Challenging Times Task Group be granted permission to continue its work for a further year and bring concrete recommendations to the General Assembly in 2022.
20. That Section 3 of the report of the General Council be received.

## GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 4

3.30pm Wednesday afternoon

### United Appeal Committee

21. That the 2022 United Appeal and Grants be as set out in the report of the United Appeal Committee.

### Nominations Committee

22. That the following resignations be accepted, and appointments made:
- (a) the resignation of the Rev F.M.A. Forbes as Convener of the Global Development Committee, that she be thanked for her services, and that Rev R.C. Kerr be appointed in her place.
  - (b) the resignation of Rev R.I. Carton as Convener of the Home Mission Irish Mission Deaconess Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that the Rev D.T.R. Edwards be appointed in his place.
  - (c) the resignation of Rev Dr J.A. Curry as the Convener of the Nominations Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev T.W.A. Greer, be appointed in his place.
23. That the following appointments of General Assembly Trustees be made:
- (a) That the Rev Dr S.E. Hughes (Minister Emeritus, Whitehouse) be, and is hereby nominated and appointed by the General Assembly as a Trustee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in room of the Very Rev Dr D. Clarke, retired, and the appointment of the Rev Dr S.E. Hughes as a said Trustee due attestation is made by the signature of the Moderator of the General Assembly and the Clerk of the General Assembly in accordance with the provisions of the Irish Presbyterian Church Act, 1871.
  - (b) That the Rev J.G. Faris (Minister Emeritus, Cork & Aghada) be, and is hereby nominated and appointed by the General Assembly as a Trustee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in room of the Rev R. Cobain, retired, and the appointment of the Rev J.G. Faris as a said Trustee due attestation is made by the signature of the Moderator of the General Assembly and the Clerk of the General Assembly in accordance with the provisions of the Irish Presbyterian Church Act, 1871.
24. That the nominations to the General Assembly Commissions, Councils and Committees (as tabled in the separate Nominations Booklet) be approved.

### New Areas of Work

25. That the recommendations of the General Council in relation to new areas of work be adopted.

**Making The General Assembly More Accessible Task Group**

*(Note: Resolution 26 was originally submitted for consideration at the 2020 General Assembly and remitted by the Standing Commission to the 2021 General Assembly for decision.)*

26. That the recommendations of the Making the General Assembly More Accessible Task Group be adopted.
27. That Section 4 of the report of the General Council be received.

**COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS RESOLUTIONS****2.30pm Monday afternoon**

1. That the General Assembly express gratitude to all who have worked in PCI's care facilities during the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic, recognising the sacrificial service of both locally based staff and senior management that always put the care of residents to the fore.
2. That the General Assembly recognise the high level of additional funding provided by the governments in both jurisdictions for the provision of necessary additional equipment and staffing for the care sector in response to the ongoing challenges of Covid-19; however, recognising the under resourcing and lack of support for the care sector in the early months of the pandemic, call upon both the NI Executive and the Irish Government to put in place measures to ensure these mistakes are avoided in the future.
3. That the General Assembly welcome the review of the social care sector announced by the Minister of Health in Northern Ireland, and call upon all parties to take the hard decisions that will be required to implement long overdue and necessary change in this area and in the health service generally.
4. That the Report of the Council for Social Witness be received.

**LINKAGE COMMISSION RESOLUTIONS****7.15pm Monday evening**

*(Note: Resolutions 1 & 2 were originally submitted for consideration at the 2020 General Assembly and remitted by the Standing Commission to the 2021 General Assembly for decision.)*

1. That a Responsibility Allowance be introduced for those Additional Pastoral Personnel posts where a kirk session agrees there is a need to recognise the additional supervisory nature of a particular post. Such Responsibility Allowance to be restricted to a figure of up to 5.5% of Basic Ministerial Minimum.

2. That the General Assembly instruct the General Council to set up a Task Group with the remit to examine the relativity of salaries paid to Additional Pastoral Personnel, Deaconesses and Irish Mission Workers, to report to the 2022 General Assembly.
3. That the congregation of Mountmellick be dissolved on 31 December 2021 (or other suitable date) on terms set by the Linkage Commission.
4. That the Report of the Linkage Commission be received.

## **COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND RESOLUTIONS**

### **8.00pm Monday evening**

1. That the dedicated work of chaplains serving in hospitals, prisons, the forces, and universities and colleges during the restrictions and challenges of Covid-19 be recognised with sincere gratitude.
2.
  - (a) That the appointment of a part-time PCI Chaplain at HMP Magilligan be welcomed.
  - (b) That the opportunities for PSNI chaplaincy continue to be explored in conjunction with the other main churches.
  - (c) That the General Assembly welcome the anticipated launch of the Rural Chaplaincy Pilot Scheme.
3. That the General Assembly welcome the resumption of work on the implementation of the Home Mission Review.
4. That, following the closure of Nightlight, the General Assembly encourage the Council to explore the possibilities for its engagement in night-time ministry in Belfast and beyond.
5. That the General Assembly agree that the normal retirement age from active service for Irish Mission workers and deaconesses be 66.
6. That the Report of the Council for Mission in Ireland be received.

## **TRUSTEES RESOLUTIONS**

### **10am Tuesday morning**

1. That the following recommendations be adopted:
  - (a) regarding the Mrs A.M. Davidson Trust;
  - (b) regarding the Sir Wm. V. McCleery Trust;
  - (c) regarding the Miss Irene Scott Trust;
  - (d) regarding the Miss Ida Mary McGeown Trust;
  - (e) regarding the Victor Morrow Trust.



2. That the proposed change to the Rules of the General Investment Fund be approved and submitted to the Department for Communities as specified under the scheme rules.
3. That the Report of the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland be received.

## **COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION RESOLUTIONS**

10.30am Tuesday morning

*(Note: The substance of Resolutions 1 was originally submitted for consideration at the 2020 General Assembly and remitted by the Standing Commission to the 2021 General Assembly for decision. In light of further consideration in the interim period, it is presented to the Assembly in an updated form.)*

1. In light of PCI's responsibility to be good stewards of creation, the General Assembly direct the Trustees to employ a 'divest and engage' strategy in relation to companies producing or using fossil fuels, thereby divesting from those that derive more than 10% of their turnover from oil and gas extraction (the coal, oil and gas majors), and engaging with companies that derive more than 10% of their turnover from the use of fossil fuels, encouraging them to make clear commitments to the targets for global heating and carbon emission reduction as set out in the COP 21 Paris Agreement; reporting back to the 2022 General Assembly.
2. That the General Assembly give thanks for the generosity shown by congregations and members of PCI in supporting the Moderator's Christmas Appeal, despite a climate of financial uncertainty, and commend the 2021 World Development Appeal to all congregations.
3. That the General Assembly give thanks for the faithful witness of PCI's partner churches and mission organisations around the world, and commit to serve together with them in the mission of Christ's Kingdom, not least with those suffering greatly due to devastating variants of Covid-19, the wide-ranging impacts of climate change, or being isolated, persecuted minorities.
4. That the General Assembly give thanks for the resilience and creativity of PCI's global mission workers during times of global uncertainty, commend to congregations the 'digital dispatches' video series, and encourage further development of the Council's communications strategy, reporting to the General Assembly 2022.
5. That the report of the Council for Global Mission be received.

## **COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS RESOLUTIONS**

7.15pm Tuesday evening

1. That the General Assembly welcome the prioritisation of the Coming Back: Going Forward programme of in-person events envisaged by the Council for Congregational Life and Witness and encourage presbyteries and congregations to fully promote and participate in them as a key means of enabling reflection on the challenges faced in resuming more regular rhythms of church life and opportunities to re-imagine ministry and mission for the future.
2. That the General Assembly encourage the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to engage with the Creative Production Department to continue to develop short, simple, sharable content for congregations to make available to members via social media and to explore how to facilitate increasing congregational use of such material as an important means of challenge and encouragement in all aspects of their life and witness.
3. That the General Assembly recognise the remit it has given to the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to support and develop the life and witness of congregations as the bedrock of denominational ministry and mission, and also recognise that the Council has relatively limited reserves, and therefore encourage the United Appeal Committee to take note of this in making funding allocations in the years ahead.
4. That the General Assembly encourage the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, with the support of the IT Department, to attempt to maximise the ongoing potential of the gains of digital ministry honed and harnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic.
5. That the General Assembly welcome the development of the e-quip subscription e-zine as a means of improving communication of events, programmes and resources available to congregations and their members.
6. That the report of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness be received.

## **COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESOLUTIONS**

10am Wednesday morning

1. That the General Assembly encourage the Council for Public Affairs to continue to engage with the Northern Ireland Executive, and the Governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom, articulating gospel and Kingdom principles to those in authority.

2. That the General Assembly encourage the Council for Public Affairs to make submissions to, and interact with, statutory authorities and related bodies on this island, attempting as far as possible to reflect the views of members in both jurisdictions.
3. That the General Assembly express its continued support for the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland; its view that this is the best place for new policy and legislative decisions to be made within Northern Ireland; and express its grave concern about the undermining of the devolution settlement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland through the imposition of legislation on matters within the competency of the Northern Ireland Assembly, including abortion and the cultural package.
4. That the General Assembly express sincere appreciation to all those involved in education across the island of Ireland – governors and school managers, principals, teachers, classroom assistants, support staff and parents – for the many ways in which they have responded to the challenges experienced through the Covid-19 pandemic.
5. That the General Assembly commend the non-denominational Christian ethos of controlled schools as a sound framework for developing the educational, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing of children and young people.
6. That the report of the Council for Public Affairs be received.

## **COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY RESOLUTIONS**

11.45am Wednesday morning

1. That the following candidates, their nominations having been sustained by the Council for Training in Ministry, be formally accepted as students for the ordained ministry, and placed under the care of their presbyteries:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Congregation</b>	<b>Presbytery</b>
Daniel Ballantyne	Druminnis	Armagh
Jonathan Boyd	First Coleraine	Coleraine and Limavady
Ryan Higgins	Markethill	Newry
Jordan Jones	Hill Street, Lurgan	Armagh
Francine Magill	Scrabo	Ards
Josh McCance	Donabate	Dublin and Munster
Stephen McCleery	Greenisland	Carrickfergus
Keith McIlroy	High Kirk, Ballymena	Ballymena
John McKee	Mourne	Newry

Stuart McKimm	Donacloney	Iveagh
Jamie McMillan	Carnmoney	North Belfast
Samuel Scott	Eglinton	North Belfast
Myles Tyrell	Woodlands	Carrickfergus
Steven Woods	Railway Street, Lisburn Dromore	

2. That the Flexible Pathway Scheme be extended for two years, with review brought to the 2023 General Assembly.
3. That all Transferring Licentiates and Transferors deemed to be of equivalent status to a Licentiate be required to be licensed in the Presbytery in which they serve their transferring assistantship. The status of such Licentiates will lapse for Transferors who do not complete the transferring pathway to eligibility for call.
4. That the recommendations concerning those whose retention as licentiates and ministers without charge has been sought by presbyteries be adopted.
5. Consolidated Resolution:
  - (a) That the assessment for the Ministerial Development Programme be set to raise £130,000.
  - (b) That the assessment for the Students' Bursary Fund be set to raise £175,000.
6. That the Report of the Council for Training in Ministry be received.

## **RESOLUTIONS RELATING TO OVERTURES**

Wednesday afternoon

### **RESOLUTIONS RELATING TO OVERTURES ON THE BOOKS FROM 2020**

#### **General**

1. That the Overtures anent Par 260, and anent Pars 223(1) and (2) and 223(3) of the Code, having lain on the books for one year, be enacted as the law of the Church.

#### **Training in Ministry**

2. That the Overtures anent Par 207(3), anent Par 219(5)(a), anent Par 219(6), and anent Pars 220 and 219A of the Code, having lain on the books for one year, be enacted as the law of the Church.

**Global Mission**

3. That the Overtures anent Pars 72(d), 72(e), 115(1) and 115(2), and anent Pars 199(1), 199(1)(b), and 202(7), Appendix 4A, Pars 201(1), 202(3), 202(6), 278(4), 290(4), 290(6), 278(3)(a), 278(3)(b), 289, 290(1), 290(3), 290(5), 291, 331(2) and 331(2)(b) of the Code, having lain on the books for one year, be enacted as the law of the Church.

**Linkage Commission**

4. That the Overtures anent Pars 82(3), 82(4) and 137, anent Pars 195(11)(c), 195(11)(c)(iii), 195(11)(c)(ii), 225(3), and 348(1), anent Appendix 5, anent Par 137 (three of), and anent Par 235(1) of the Code, having lain on the books for one year, be enacted as the law of the Church.

**RESOLUTIONS RELATING TO NEW OVERTURES****Council for Mission in Ireland**

5. That the Overtures anent Par 302(4)(b), 302(4)(d), 305(9) and 307(2) of the Code be received and that, under Par 111 of the Code, they be made the rule of the Church.

**Linkage Commission**

6. That the Overtures anent Par 273(4)(b) of the Code be received and that, under Par 111 of the Code, they be made the rule of the Church.

# INDEX TO REPORTS 2021

<b>Assembly Commissions</b>		Memorial Record	28
Linkage	160	Reports for information only	
<b>Assembly Councils</b>		Methodist Conference (2021)	12
Congregational Life and Witness	230	Society of Friends	10
General (Section 1)	1	Overtures on the Books	
General (Section 2)	57	Council for Global Mission	298
General (Section 3)	114	Council for Training in Ministry	297
General (Section 4)	130	General	296
Mission in Ireland	176	Linkage Commission	301
Global Mission	214	Overtures New	
Public Affairs	250	Council for Mission in Ireland	303
Social Witness	152	Linkage Commission	304
Training in Ministry	286	Presbyterian Children's Society	55
<b>Specific Reports</b>		Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland	53
<b>Assembly Council Committees</b>		Presbytery Reports	146
Church Relations	49	Staffing (salaries)	22
Doctrine	51	Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland	195
Moderator's Advisory	51	<b>Overtures on the Books</b>	
Nominations	138	72	298
Support Services	13	82	301
United Appeal	130	115	298
<b>Council and Committee Panels</b>		137	301, 302
Guysmere Development Panel	48	195	301
Code Republishing Panel	51	199	298
<b>Council and Committee Task Groups</b>		201	299
Decision Making and Dissent	114	202	298, 299
Holding Trustees	26	207	297
Human Identity	88	219	297, 298
Implementation	57	220	297
Making the General Assembly More Accessible	140	223	296, 297
Supporting Families in Challenging Times	129	225	301
Vows for Full Membership and Baptism	125	235	303
		260	296
		278	299

289	299
290	299, 300
291	300
331	300, 301
348	302
Appendix 4	298
Appendix 5	302
<b>Overtures Transmitted</b>	
302	303
305	304
307	304
273	304
<b>Resolutions</b>	305







