

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 1

Tuesday - 9.45 am

Convener: Very Rev Dr RL CRAIG
Secretary: THE CLERK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. On behalf of the General Assembly, the General Council has been conducting its business through eight General Assembly Committees and ten Task Groups. Inevitably, the report of the General Council to the General Assembly is the longest of the Annual Reports; to facilitate the business of the General Assembly, the report of the General Council will be received in five sections, as outlined in the timetable of business.

2. This year, some of the major work of the General Council has fallen into two categories – internal and external.

Internal.

3. Since its inception the work of the General Council has been overshadowed by the new structures regarding the administrative function of the denomination; that is, how the Councils and offices in the Assembly Buildings serve the mission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. To this end, the Priorities Committee has held two one-day conferences and one overnight conference at which all the Council Conveners, Secretaries and other non-aligned representatives reflected together regarding the Priorities of the General Assembly through its Councils. The five priorities, which should shape the resources of the Councils, are outlined in the report of the Priorities Committee.

4. Since 1990 the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has held four special residential Assemblies on the campus of the University of Ulster at Coleraine. Every congregation within the denomination has been invited to send three representatives to this year's residential Assembly in August where, gathered together, the theme of **Everyday Disciples** will be explored through praise, prayer, seminar and keynote address.

5. 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, as the Protestant denominations look back to the person of Martin Luther and the nailing of his 95 Theses on the door in Wittenburg. To mark this anniversary the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is holding three Reformation Celebrations (in Belfast, Dublin and Londonderry), as outlined in the report.

External.

6. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, as a Reformed denomination holds the confession of one, catholic and apostolic Church. Yet the relationship

of the denomination with other Christian Churches (within Ireland, across the U.K. and the world) could appear often to be haphazard and ad hoc rather than intentional. Relationships have been formed for a variety of reasons - historical, theological, missional. At this time, as other denominations have been reflecting on their practice and policy, the General Council has established, in response to the decision of last year's General Assembly, a Task Group to consider our relationships with other denominations, so that they might be more meaningful and mutually beneficial.

7. In common with all Christian Churches in the West, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has been coming to terms with the demise of Christendom and the reality of living in a pluralist society. One of the consequences of our changing society for the Christian Church is how to relate both to our secular society and to peoples of other faiths. This comes into sharp focus when the Church is asked to participate in civic events which have a religious dimension. Questions, regarding our witness, have to be addressed regarding participation in such events. It will take another year to bring a full report from the Doctrine Committee on this matter and, in the interim, the policy of the denomination is to continue with the current practice of participation.

8. To facilitate the ordering of business in the Assembly, the General Assembly Business Committee will report in its own right at the beginning and the end of the Assembly (9.30am on Tuesday and 12noon on Friday respectively). As at last year's Assembly, the main General Council report will be considered in five separate sections, as follows:

Section 1 (9.45am on Tuesday 6th June):

- Residential Assembly Task Group
- 500th Anniversary of the Reformation Task Group
- Historical Archiving Task Group
- Memorial Record

Section 2 (3.30pm on Wednesday 7th June):

- Priorities Committee
- Dialogue and Resources Task Group
- Moderator's Advisory Committee

Section 3 (4.30pm on Wednesday 7th June):

- Support Services Committee
- United Appeal Committee
- Charities Registration Task Group
- Use of Congregational Property Task Group
- Holding Trustees Task Group

Section 4 (3.30pm Thursday 8th June):

- Relationships with other Denominations Task Group
- Doctrine Committee
- Church Relations Committee

Section 5 (4.45pm Thursday 8th June):

- Engagement and Consultations Task Group
- Nominations Committee
- Guysmere Centre Task Group
- Ad Hoc Overtures

9. As always, this summary cannot be concluded without acknowledging the unstinting service of conveners, committee and task group members. Too many to name in person, they have given of themselves to both the Lord and His Church. In the past year, Joyce Anderson retired from the General Secretary's Department, after a lifetime of service within the Assembly Building; Susan Hamilton has replaced her and has been on a steep learning curve as she has embraced the work of the department. As the General Council records our debt to Joyce we welcome Susan on to the staff and assure her of our support and prayers.

10. As General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary, both Rev Trevor Gribben and Rev Jim Stothers have ably guided the Council through all of its business. Thanks to both of them for their time, support and wisdom.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE

INITIAL REPORT

Matters relating to the 2017 General Assembly (Tuesday morning 9.30am)

1. The General Assembly Business Committee has continued to review the work and arrangements of the General Assembly.
2. A draft Order of Business for 2017 was agreed and approved by the General Council. This includes the following:
 - (a) As last year a Friday morning has been included in the order of business.
 - (b) There will be alternative presentations on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons featuring respectively, the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, Listening to the Global Church, and the Council for Mission in Ireland. It is hoped that these alternative presentations will engage, inspire and enable the General Assembly to participate in aspects of its business in a more creative way.
 - (c) The General Council's report and business is divided into five sections over different days.
 - (d) The Arrangements Panel has appropriate matters in hand and a budget of £20,000 has been agreed for recommendation to the Assembly.
3. **The Wednesday night event** will be a prelude to the theme of the Special Assembly: *Everyday Disciples* and the Rev Vaughan Roberts will be the speaker. The Rev Rico Tice has been engaged for 2018.

4. **SPUD input to Assembly.** SPUD seek to be very much part of the Assembly; they will meet at the start of Assembly week to consider what contribution they can make to debate; are keen to provide stewarding on the Opening Night and Wednesday evening; and are planning an event at tea-time on the Wednesday themed around *Young People and the Church*.

5. **Appointment of Delegates to other Assemblies etc.** Delegates have been appointed to attend other Church Assemblies and meetings:

- Church of Ireland Synod 2017: The Very Rev Dr Ian McNie and an elder from the Dublin and Munster Presbytery.
- Methodist Conference 2017: The Very Rev Dr Frank Sellar and an elder from a Lisburn Congregation.
- Quaker Yearly Meeting 2017: The Rev Lorraine Kennedy-Richie.
- Presbyterian Church in Wales 2017: Rt Rev Dr Noble McNeely, accompanied by Mrs Florence McNeely

6. Consideration of appointments to the 2018 Church of Scotland General Assembly will this year take place as part of the report of the Relationships with other Denomination Task Group (at 3.30pm on Thursday's business). For completeness, the normal resolutions delegating power to the General Council to appoint delegates to the 2018 meetings listed in point 5 above along with the 2018 United Reformed Assembly (which meets every two years), will also this year be taken at that same point in the Assembly business.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE

SECOND REPORT

Matters relating to future General Assemblies (Friday 12 noon)

7. **Evening options for future General Assemblies.** As requested by last year's General Assembly, the Committee has undertaken further work including exploration of the viability of mid-week evening business sessions. General Assembly Business Committee Appendix 1 presents two options for decision at the 2017 General Assembly. The first option includes two evening sessions and the second three evening sessions, finishing with an Evening Celebration after the final session.

8. To produce these options the Committee considered a number of restrictions on arranging business. Among these were:

- Evening sessions should be engaging for working elders and younger people but also be proper business sessions.
- Having three full sessions in one day would be tiring, especially for those commuting long distances, so should be avoided.
- No business can be conducted before the Opening Night.
- The reception of corresponding members and delegates and the Lord's Supper should occur on the first day of business.
- There should be worship every day, but not immediately after lunch.

9. Having three evening sessions as well as the Opening Night and Evening Celebration requires meeting for a total of five evenings. Three evenings could be accommodated within a five-day General Assembly by using the last evening for business, but with the danger that people will be tired and miss it. Alternatively the Evening Celebration could be on the last night, after the Assembly has closed. Since the Evening Celebration has proportionally more people attending who have not been at business all week, it is likely to be less affected by tiredness than a business session would be and it would allow the end of the Assembly to be marked by celebration, mirroring the opening. Making use of the last evening in this way would free up enough space to remove all business from another morning.

10. **Named Additional Elders.** Last year's Assembly also asked the Committee to review the arrangements concerning representative elders and named additional elders. The arrangement last year was: *each Congregation be permitted to nominate an additional named Elder to sit and deliberate (but not vote) when the representative Elder is not available to attend* (2015 Reports p.7 and Minutes p.25).

11. Consideration was given to extending what was done last year by allowing two or more elders from the one congregation to be able to share the voting card: i.e. either, but not both, could vote. Discussion of the constitutional implications of this took place and this threw up considerable difficulties in making this extension. The Committee agreed that there be no change this year but recommends that from 2018 onwards each congregation be entitled to send one additional communicant member or ruling elder, aged 30 or under, to sit and deliberate alongside the representative elder.

REPORTS FROM OTHER CHURCH ASSEMBLIES etc

Methodist Conference 2016 Report

The Very Rev Dr J Stafford Carson reports:

1. The Irish Methodist Conference met in Portadown from 15th to 20th June, 2016. PCI was represented by Rev Principal Stafford Carson and Mr George Russell. As delegates, we were warmly received and had the opportunity to renew old friendships and to nurture current ones. Many of those who are now more senior in Methodist ministry expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be trained alongside Presbyterian students, and how the friendships formed at that stage have continued for a lifetime. The Presbyterian contribution to the Conference was significant in that Rev David Bruce led the worship and Bible study in a very thoughtful and challenging way at the start of each day of business.

2. Many of the issues which are debated in our General Assembly were reflected in the discussions and debates of the Conference. The nature of ministry, the re-structuring of the organisation of the church, the financial challenges facing the church, the need for mission and evangelism, as well as the "hot topic" of human sexuality, were all on the agenda.

3. The Methodist Church in Ireland is declining. In a recent five year period, the church membership declined by 4.3% from 15,503 full members in 2009 to 14,835 in 2014. The church leadership anticipates a continuing decline of around 2% per year. Currently there are 111 ministers in active duty and it is anticipated that 42 of these will retire in the next 10 years. The Methodist Church in Ireland needs around 7 new ministers per year to maintain its current level and, like PCI, they have had a smaller number of candidates offering themselves for ministry so that there is an anticipated shortfall of 20 ministers in the next 5 years. This represents a significant staffing shortage.

4. The Conference recognised that there are important issues that need to be addressed as a result of this decline. There is a need for significant re-structuring of circuits and it is proposed to reduce the 8 districts in Ireland to 3, with the appointment of 3 full-time District Superintendants. The Conference recognised that ministry is increasingly complex and challenging, with high levels of stress and resulting “burn out” among serving ministers. Many committed members of the church are “committed out” and there is a need to use the gifts and talents of a greater number of church members. The Methodist Church in Ireland faces significant challenges and difficult choices in terms of both human and financial resources.

5. Yet there remains within the church a great desire to see the kingdom of Christ advance. A number of speakers addressed the importance of evangelism and mission. “We used to have evangelists” said one, “but now we have pastoral workers.” Another responded by pointing out that the greatest weapon in our evangelistic armoury is pastoral visitation. Another speaker deplored the proliferation of church meetings leaving less time for outreach and evangelism.

6. The Conference also discussed a report entitled “Sexuality: Developing Good Conversation on Difficult Questions” and commended having a dialogue rather than a debate on these issues. The report clearly identified the question “How do we interpret Scripture?” as being central in this dialogue. This report was sent to district and local level for consideration and the Conference will continue to discuss this issue at future meetings.

URC General Assembly 2016

The Right Rev Dr Frank Sellar reports:

URC Assembly: Southport 8th-11th July 2016

1. The opening act of the General Assembly was most impressive. An open Bible was brought to the front as people stood and this affirmation was made “The highest authority for what we believe and do is God’s Word in the Bible, alive for his people today through the help of the Holy Spirit”.

2. 269 people from 13 Synods, half ministers, half elders, with 26 under 26 years of age, gathered to ‘represent, consult, participate and own’ the decisions of the Assembly which meets every other year. (The next Assembly is to meet in Nottingham 2018.) International and ecumenical guests were granted both full voting and speaking rights. Since most people stay in local hotels for the duration of the Assembly, attendance at all sessions was very good, enabling the theme of the church to be properly discussed and unfolded.

3. A number of interesting differences to our own General Assembly included the welcome number of black participants, the use of orange and blue voting cards, not as a 'yes' or no' but as a means of discerning the warmth or coolness of the assembly toward an issue, and the layout of the hall round tables rather than in rows, thus facilitating fellowship and interaction.

4. The URC elect not one but two Moderators (one lay, one ordained) two years in advance, and they share the chairing of Assembly and responsibilities thereafter equally. The Clerk and General Secretary are two distinct responsibilities (the Clerk being a regular minister who fulfils this role in an honorary capacity only for the duration of the Assembly) and members of Assembly were invited not to clap after speeches but only after presentation of reports.

5. One of the most moving parts of the Assembly for me was at a fringe event, when the Moderator of a Presbyterian Church in the Indian Sub-continent region highlighted the extreme dangers many of his church members face because of oppression socially, religiously and legally. His own church for example is protected by 20 armed police each Sunday. They and others like them need our prayers.

6. Matters under official discussion included the Mission Council's report 'Walking the Way-living the life of Jesus today – A fresh emphasis on making and releasing disciples within the United Reformed Church.' A memorandum of understanding was made between the URC and the Presbyterian Church of Korea. A very helpful Environmental policy for the URC was outlined and agreed. Support for a new international Nuclear Weapons ban treaty was given and the Marriage of same-sex couples was a major item on the agenda. Because of its historic polity, ('Congregational in day to day activity, Presbyterian when something is wanted!' as someone put it) the URC were at pains to point out that while the church as a whole does not express a single view on this subject, this resolution was designed to enable local congregations of the URC to marry same-sex couples if they were so wished. The resolution required a two-thirds majority to become policy, and after a tense debate gained 92% agreement, thus making the URC the first major church grouping in the British Isles to take this far-reaching step.

7. While appreciating the warm hospitality and learning much as a guest of the URC, when the Assembly Bible was ceremoniously removed at the end of the conference, following this decision on same-sex marriage, I was left wondering if the words contained in the Bible, previously affirmed as authoritative, were quite different from those I and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland know and respect, or if the United Reformed Church have sadly in effect swapped its highest authority from the Scriptures of Old and New Testaments to personal preference, ecclesiastical fudge and political correctness, resulting in having now no positively alternative message to say to secular society on this particular issue.

8. One sobering final thought though: *Could it be, Heavenly Father, that while we in PCI may not be guilty of this specific myopia, might we have different blind spots which are difficult for us to see...through failing to acknowledge how things important to us actually have become greater in our personal affections and in our congregations than the authority of your Word, causing us effectively to fail to submit to Jesus as Lord? Please grant us humility, help us discern, and thus become more obedient to You for your glory. Amen.*

Presbyterian Church of Wales General Assembly 2016

The Right Rev Dr Frank Sellar reports:

Eglwys Bresbyteraidd Cymru – Llandudno 11th-13th July 2016

1. I will long remember the splendid singing at this year's General Assembly in 'The Queen of Welsh resorts' Llandudno. Being part of the congregation was like being enveloped by a Welsh male voice choir. Worship was earnest, thoughtful and reverent. While all the business was conducted in Welsh, simultaneous translation was provided by head-sets for monoglot English speakers in a most sympathetic style.

2. The business of the Assembly was led by the Moderator Rev Dr Elwyn Richards, Minister of Berea Newydd, Bangor and on the final night Professor John Gwynfor Jones (79) was installed as his successor for the coming year. The Moderator's role can be filled by either a teaching or ruling elder. The Presbyterian Church of Wales is made up of 24,000 members, with 45 ministers serving an astonishing 620 congregations. While lay members play their part, this is a hugely stressful calling on clergy divided in multiple charges.

3. While the Assembly met in the Welsh speaking Seilo (Shiloh) church building, refreshments were served across the road in the equally large English speaking building shared between the Welsh Presbyterian Church and the United Reformed Church. Its minister, the Rev Neil Kirkham, gave a very helpful Assembly lecture on 'Leading in times of change', something hugely critical not only for Wales but also for ourselves in PCI. He posed the question "Would a business watch a decline for a century and do nothing about it"? When all is changing in society, church must be bold in relating to people in their contexts while also keeping in touch with God. We are to share Christ's vision for a renewed world and live it out with integrity, prepared to challenge culture and to reimagine a new future under his rule.

4. Items under discussion included Presbytery Visitation checklists, 'Challenges and opportunities for the churches post Brexit', and the best use and function of PCW's historic residential retreat centre 'Trefeca'.

5. Wales has a long standing relationship with the Presbyterian Church of India due to the missionary endeavours of the Rev. John Thomas Jones in 1841 and guests from India took part in the Assembly along with representatives from other Presbyterian churches in the British Isles as well as local Methodist, Independent, Roman Catholic and Baptist churches.

6. It was good to enjoy fellowship with this warm-hearted church and to pass on repeated good wishes to Professor Stephen Williams from those who held him and his father and grandfather before him in nothing but the highest regard.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE

APPENDIX 1

General Assembly Business Committee – Options for Evening Sessions

Option 1. Two evenings

- Start late on Tuesday morning at 10.30.
- Take a longer lunch on Tuesday to help cope with there being three sessions in one day.
- Move the first General Council Session to Tuesday afternoon.
- Move the council that would have an alternative presentation on Tuesday afternoon to the evening, along with its alternative presentation.
- Have no morning session on Wednesday, instead starting after lunch with business followed by worship.
- Have an evening session on Wednesday consisting of a report from a council accompanied by an alternative presentation.
- Move the Evening Celebration to Thursday evening
- This is the most that can be accommodated within a General Assembly that starts with the Opening Night on Monday and finishes with business on Friday during the day. It provides two new opportunities for working elders and younger people to be more involved in the business of Assembly.

Option 2. Three evenings

- This takes Option 1 and makes the following changes:
- Hold the Evening Celebration on Friday evening after the close of the Assembly.
- Have no morning session on Wednesday or Thursday, instead starting after lunch with business followed by worship.
- Out of the three evening sessions, have two (Tuesday and Thursday) with alternative presentations that will be interesting and engaging and one evening (Wednesday) with two council reports, maximising the amount of business in which working elders can participate.
- As Friday will now include the business from Thursday morning, lunch will be required.

This option maximises the opportunities for working elders and younger people to participate in the General Assembly.

The two timetables which follow are intended to help visualise what the 2017 General Assembly could have looked like with evening sessions. These timetables aim to keep sessions the same length and on the same days as the real 2017 timetable, but some changes to the order of sessions and occasionally to the day have been necessary to accommodate evening business and the priorities for working elders and younger people.

RA PATTON
Convener

Two evenings

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
09:30				9.30 General Council 4	9.30 Private business, Memorials, Trustees
10:00					
10:30		10.30 GABC 1, Reports of Presbyteries, Memorial Record, Reception of Delegates		10.45 Coffee	10.45 Coffee
11:00				11.15 Council for Training in Ministry	11.15 Linkage Commission
11:30		11.30 Intermission			
12:00		11.45 Worship incl. The Lord's Supper		12.15 Worship	12.00 General Council 5
12:30					
13:00		1.00 Lunch		1.00 Lunch	1.00 GABC 2
13:30					1.15 Lapsed business
14:00			1.45 General Council 3	2.00 CMI Alternative presentation	1.45 Closing worship
14:30		2.30 General Council 1			2.00 Finish
15:00			3.00 Worship	3.00 Coffee	
15:30		3.30 Coffee	3.45 Coffee	3.30 Council for Mission in Ireland	
16:00		4.00 Council for Social Witness	4.15 General Council 2	4.30 Council for Global Mission	
16:30					
17:00		5.15 Lapsed business	5.15 Lapsed business	5.45 Lapsed business	
17:30		5.30 Dinner	5.30 Dinner	6.00 Dinner	
18:00					
18:30					
19:00	7.00 Opening Night with worship	7.00 Council for Congregational Life and Witness	7.00 Council for Public Affairs		
19:30				7.45 Evening Celebration with worship	
20:00		8.00 CCLW Alternative presentation	8.00 Alternative presentation: Listening to the Global Church		
20:30	8.30 Finish				
21:00		9.00 Finish	9.00 Finish	9.15 Finish	

Three evenings

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
09:30					
10:00					10.00 Private business, Memorials, Trustees
10:30		10.30 GABC 1, Reports of Presbyteries, Memorial Record, Reception of Delegates			
11:00					11.15 Coffee
11:30		11.30 Intermission			
12:00		11.45 Worship incl. The Lord's Supper			11.45 Council for Training in Ministry
12:30					12.45 Lunch
13:00		1.00 Lunch			
13:30					
14:00			1.45 Alternative presentation: Listening to the Global Church	1.45 Council for Global Mission	2.00 General Council 5
14:30		2.30 General Council 1	2.45 Worship		
15:00				3.00 Worship	3.00 Coffee
15:30		3.30 Coffee	3.30 Coffee		3.30 Linkage Commission
16:00		4.00 Council for Social Witness	4.00 General Council 4	3.45 Coffee	4.00 GABC 2
16:30				4.15 General Council 3	4.30 Lapsed business
17:00					5.00 Closing worship
17:30		5.15 Lapsed business	5.15 Lapsed business	5.15 Lapsed business	5.15 Dinner
18:00		5.30 Dinner	5.30 Dinner	5.30 Dinner	
18:30					
19:00	7.00 Opening Night with worship	7.00 Council for Congregational Life and Witness	7.00 Council for Public Affairs	7.00 Council for Mission in Ireland	
19:30					7.45 Evening Celebration with worship
20:00		8.00 CCLW Alternative presentation		8.00 CMI Alternative presentation	
20:30	8.30 Finish		8.15 General Council 2		
21:00		9.00 Finish		9.00 Finish	
			9.15 Finish		9.15 Finish

2017 SPECIAL ASSEMBLY TASK GROUP

1. At the time of writing the Task Group organising the EVERYDAY DISCIPLES Special Assembly has met on 12 occasions, with several more meetings pending. Progress has been steady over recent months and is gathering momentum as the Special Assembly at Coleraine draws closer.

2. The Everyday Disciples Assembly Conference from 21st to 24th August 2017, is designed to provide delegates with a unique opportunity to explore the real challenges and opportunities of following Jesus today. It is planned to assist PCI to excite, equip and empower impactful disciples for everyday life.

3. Discussions are ongoing with the two keynote speakers, Ray Ortlund and Randy Pope, who will outline the general principles and themes of everyday discipleship, to help, inspire and encourage delegates in a context of worship. Ray Ortlund Jnr is Senior Pastor, Immanuel Church, Nashville and Regional Director of 'Acts 29 Movement'. Randy Pope is Lead Teacher, Perimeter Church, Atlanta and Director of 'Life on Life Ministries'. Arrangements are being made to ensure that the accommodation and transport requirements of our overseas visitors are met.

4. The Creative Production Department (CPD) has been highlighting the keynote speakers through the *Herald* and the PCI website. The Task Group appreciates the support of CPD in promoting the event.

5. Each of the morning and evening plenary sessions will be 'fronted' by a variety of colleagues, and praise will be led by members of the New Irish Orchestra and Choir.

6. The seminar programme is almost finalised at the time of writing, as follows:

- Disciples in family: **Mrs Sarah Holmes**, specialist in Christian family counselling and completing her doctorate in early childhood studies at Liverpool Hope University, (hosted by Graeme Thompson)
- Disciples who work and play: **Rev Christoph Ebbinghaus**, Kirkpatrick Memorial (hosted by Rick Hill)
- Disciples who think and engage: **Dr Paul Coulter**, lecturer at Belfast Bible College in Practical Theology, Missiology and Christian apologetics, (hosted by Mark Goudy)
- Disciples who worship : **Dr. David Montgomery**, IFES Ireland (host TBC)
- Disciples across the world : **Mr Stephen and Mrs Roz McIlwaine**, formerly missionaries in Jordan and Interserve, and members of Fitzroy congregation, (hosted by Richard Kerr)
- Disciples who really care: **Dr. Andrew Collins**, consultant psychiatrist at the Southern Health Trust and Christian counsellor, (hosted by Lachlan Webster)

7. Each seminar track will offer a foundational session (late morning, Tuesday and Wednesday) with the option of some specialised seminars offered in the late afternoons.

8. Informal, interactive 'wind-down' sessions with live music and a possible film night are being organised for each evening and a bookstall will operate during the event.

9. An 'Admin' sub-group is liaising with Ulster University, Coleraine, regarding accommodation and catering requirements, IT support, floor management logistics, budgetary issues, insurance cover, first aid etc. Several young people who have previously stewarded at MAD have agreed to assist with stewarding during the event. The Task Group appreciates the huge workload undertaken by Mr David Thomson in many of these areas.

10. **Registration booklets** have been sent to all ministers. Congregations can nominate up to three delegates (with some additional places where there are joint charges or other full time staff). **Residential fee** – £175 or €200 which includes overnight en-suite accommodation in the university and meals. **Non residential delegates** – £60 or €70. Delegates are encouraged to register either by return of post, or online through the PCI website as soon as possible. It is hoped that congregations will meet the costs of delegates attending.

11. A further information booklet is to be circulated during May to all registered delegates, and a delegate handbook will be provided during the event.

12. As arrangements are fine-tuned leading up to the event, prayers are appreciated for a good representative attendance from congregations across the island, for God to encourage and challenge all who attend and engage with the programme, and for fruitful follow-up post-event.

JOHN KIRKPATRICK and GORDON BEST, Co-Conveners

REFORMATION CELEBRATION TASK GROUP

13. Since its appointment by the General Council the Task Group has met on seven occasions to plan and prepare for the Celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation.

14. The event is being held on Tuesday 17 October in Dublin [Abbey Church]; Wednesday 18 October in Londonderry [Waterside Theatre]; and Thursday, 19 October in Belfast [Assembly Buildings]. Admission to all three evenings will be free of charge.

15. The group has adopted the title '**FAITH AT THE CROSSROADS – Rediscovering the Reformation**'. Each evening will follow a similar format but will also be adjusted to take account of the particular context in which it is being held.

16. **Dr. Conrad Mbewe** will be the keynote speaker at all three evenings. Dr. Mbewe has served as pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church in Zambia since 1987. He holds a Master of Arts (MA) in Pastoral Theology and a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Missions. He is the Chancellor of the African Christian University and has spoken at numerous conferences in both northern and southern hemispheres. His preaching ministry has led to him being described as 'the Spurgeon of Africa.' In August of last year he spoke at the opening meeting of the Bangor Worldwide Convention which was held in the Assembly Hall and chaired by the Moderator, Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar.

17. The group has engaged members of **New Irish Arts**, directed by Jonathan Rea, to lead the praise at all three venues. They have also invited Jonathan to rework/rearrange one of Martin Luther's hymns in order to make

it accessible to a wider audience. This will form part of the celebration and will subsequently be available to choirs and congregations. The evening will also include short video extracts from a BBC film made several years ago depicting the life of Martin Luther and a roundtable discussion exploring the relevance of the Reformation for today. Rev. Chris Kennedy will lead each evening and link the various parts together.

18. Arthur J Gallagher have kindly agreed to sponsor a printed programme which will include a number of 'take home' ideas with information on resources which can be used by families and congregations to learn more about the Reformation and its significance.

19. The group has also been working closely with PCI's Creative Production Department to promote and publicise the celebration over the next six months with articles in the *Herald*, promotional videos and other web-based media. There will also be opportunities to publicise the event at the General Assembly in Belfast and the Special Assembly in Coleraine.

20. The group hopes to have the bulk of its work done before the summer and then to make the event as widely known as possible throughout the church and the wider community.

21. It is our hope and prayer that FAITH AT THE CROSSROADS will inform, inspire and enthuse and will be a fitting celebration of the doctrines of grace which, as heirs of the Reformation, we gladly affirm and joyfully proclaim.

DAVID JOHNSTON, Convener

HISTORICAL ARCHIVING TASK GROUP

22. The Historical Archiving Task Group has met twice since the last General Assembly.

23. Strong Room - Further progress has been made on transferring appropriate material from the Strong Room on the ground floor of Assembly Buildings to the care of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland (PHSI). All the boxes belonging to congregations which have given permission have been opened and appropriate contents transferred to the care of the PHSI, along with Education Board minutes. It is intended to transfer copies of 'The Witness' newspaper soon.

24. Board and Committee records – Old Board and Committee minutes and other records are stored in various rooms on the first floor of Assembly Buildings in a haphazard and uncatalogued manner which means that it very difficult to find this material when necessary. Each department in Assembly Buildings has been asked to review this material with a view to identifying relevant Board and Committee minutes and other material that ought to be retained. This material will then be stored and recorded in such a way as to facilitate future reference.

25. Advice for Presbyteries – Advice has been drawn up and distributed to Clerks of Presbytery on the archiving of material.

JIM STOTHERS, Convener

MEMORIAL RECORD

The Rev George McKinney Eagleson, BA, BD, DMin, Minister Emeritus, First Donaghadee, died on 28th May 2016, in the eighty-ninth year of his age and the sixty-first year of his ministry. He was born at Belfast on 6th May 1928, one of four children (two boys and two girls) to William James Eagleson, a plant attendant, and his wife, Mary Anne McKinney. The family belonged to the congregation of Donegall Pass. Dr Eagleson attended McClure Street Primary School, Ormeau Road, and Botanic Gardens Primary School. On leaving school, at age fifteen, he worked for four years as a Junior Clerk with the Belfast and County Down Railway, and, for a year, as a Meteorological Assistant with the Air Ministry. With the tutelage of his minister, the Rev J J Mulligan, he prepared for further study at Trinity College, Dublin, graduating BA in 1951, and, later, in 1962, he graduated BD from the University of London. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Belfast on 30th May 1954, and served his assistantship in the congregation of Knock with the minister, the Rev R C Elliott. He was ordained and installed in the congregations of Cavanaleck and Aughtaine on 28th March 1956 by the Clogher Presbytery. In 1962 he moved to Strean, Newtownards, where he was installed on 15th February of that year. This was a time of population growth and extensive housing development in the town, so, to cater for the spiritual welfare of the people of the West Winds housing estate, Scrabo Church Extension congregation was established, opening in February 1972 under the care of Dr Eagleson, since the area lay within the parish boundaries of Strean. During his ministry, a new suite of halls was built at Strean, much of it with voluntary labour, and these were opened on 1st May 1975. New road development necessitated the demolition of the 'Brooklands' manse, and a new manse was erected on the glebe ground. After a ministry of twenty two years in Strean and twelve in Scrabo, he was installed in the congregation of First Donaghadee on 12th December 1984 from which he retired on 10th May 1993. Before retiring he researched and published a history of the congregation in 1992, in time for the celebration of the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of its founding. His thirst for knowledge, and commitment to life-long learning, led him to study for, and qualify as, a Doctor of Ministry. In the wider Church, he served as Moderator of the Synod of Armagh and Down, 1968, as Convener of the Union Commission, 1969-1978, and of the Appointments to Boards Committee, 1981-1984. In all of these spheres Dr Eagleson evidenced diligence, grasp of detail and humanity, ever conscious of the honour of the Lord whom he served. Dr Eagleson married his wife, Helen McLaren Hutchison, on 7th September 1954, who proved to be a constant helpmeet and companion over the years, playing her part in congregational life and witness, despite struggling with health problems in later years. She died in 2006. Dr and Mrs Eagleson leave behind three children, Rosemary, Colin and Heather, to whom, along with Dr Eagleson's remaining sibling, Eric, and the wider family circle, we extend our sympathy, giving thanks to God for the faith, witness and service of our brother, to Christ and His Church.

The Rev Barbara Ann McDonald, BEd, DipTh, Minister Emeritus, Caledon and Minterburn, died on 29th May 2016, in the sixty-seventh year of her age and the twenty-sixth year of her ministry. She was born at Belfast, on 23rd July 1949, the second of three daughters, to William James Kennedy,

pharmacist, and his wife Marion, née Murphy. The family were members of the Church of Ireland. Mrs McDonald attended Orangefield Primary School, and Strathearn Grammar School (1961-1968) where she was made Head Girl. Deciding on a career in education, she trained at Stranmillis Teacher Training College, 1979-1981, and taught in Sydenham Infant School, Belfast, for fifteen years. By this time, she and her sister, Maureen, had joined Bangor West Presbyterian congregation, where they were both actively engaged in the life and fellowship of the church, and their giftedness was recognised in their election and ordination as elders, in 1979 and 1983 respectively. Some years later, Mrs McDonald felt called to the ordained ministry, and pursued theological study at the Union Theological College, Belfast. She was licensed on 24th June 1990 by the Presbytery of Ards, and served as Assistant to the Rev Albert Sleith, Cregagh congregation, Belfast, where she was ordained to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament on 27th January 1991. In 1993 she was called to the linked charge of Caledon and Minterburn and installed as Minister on 19th March 1993. Her lively, warm, outgoing personality commended her to the people and a wide circle of friends, and her deep Christian faith and soul-care blessed the lives of those around her. She settled happily to ministry in this rural area and found personal happiness in her marriage to Robert McDonald, a local farmer, on 15th July 1996. Mrs McDonald retired on 31st August 2010. Sadly, she developed an aggressive form of cancer against which she fought bravely, but succumbed to the illness. Mrs McDonald did so in faith, believing in Him who was with her in this life and had prepared a place for her in the life of the eternity which He has promised. We give thanks for her ministry and commend her husband, Robert, sisters, Maureen and Jean, and wider family circle, to the care and comfort of Almighty God.

The Rev Edward Thompson Conn, BA, Minister Emeritus Second Donegore, died on 11th August 2016, in the ninety-first year of his age and the sixty-first year of his ministry. He was born at Belfast on 27th February 1926, the second of two sons, to David Thompson Conn, a grocer and fruiterer, and his wife, Martha Ann. The family were members of Mountpottinger congregation, East Belfast. Mr Conn attended Belfast High School, 1939-1944, where he enjoyed rugby, cricket and badminton. On leaving school he worked as a Clerk in the Shipping Office of the Ulster Weaving Company Ltd. Obeying the call of God to train for the Christian ministry he undertook further study and entered Magee University College, Londonderry, in 1948, and graduated BA from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1953. He completed his course in theology at the Assembly's College, Belfast, and was licensed by the Presbytery of Belfast on 2nd June 1955, serving as Assistant to the Rev James Andrew McQuitty, Minister of Dundonald congregation. He was called to the joint charge of Maguiresbridge and Lisnaskea, where he was ordained by the Presbytery of Clogher on 27th June 1956. He moved to the congregation of Second Donegore in 1965 where he was installed by the Presbytery of Templepatrick on 24th February. Mr Conn was an assiduous pastor to his people and held in great affection by them. Born with a hearing defect, and a cleft palate which required several corrective surgeries, and his experience of loss in the passing of his older brother, David Alexander, in his nineteenth year, through leukaemia, were setbacks which equipped him with a depth of understanding and empathy in his ministry to others. His pastoral gifts

were utilised in wider ministry as Convener of the Templepatrick Presbytery's Divine Healing ministry, through which many others in the wider area came to know and to appreciate his prayerful Christian compassion and humanity. He served as Presbyterian Chaplain to Holywell Hospital, Antrim, from 1968-1991. He was elected Moderator of the Synod of Ballymena and Coleraine for the year 1989-90, and served on the Board of Education of the General Assembly. He married Maud Stewart, a nurse in the Belfast City Hospital, on 3rd April 1967, and they had four children. Mrs Conn was a constant support to her husband in his ministry, but, sadly, in later years was invalided by a stroke. Mr Conn cared for his wife with exemplary dedication until her death on 18th February 2003. Through the years, Mr Conn kept up his interest in sport and enjoyed gardening, current affairs and politics. He retired on 30th September 1991 and settled at Donaghadee. We extend our prayerful sympathy to Mr Conn's children, Joan, Liz, David and Andrew and the wider family circle, in the assurance of faith that '...to live is Christ and to die is gain.' (Philippians 1:21)

The Rev John Douglas Mark, BA, MA, BD, Minister without Charge, died on 19th September 2016, in the sixty-eighth year of his age, having served in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland for almost twenty-eight of those years. He was born at Armagh on 20th May 1948, one of three children, two boys and a girl, to the Rev John Mark, minister of First Keady, and his wife Elizabeth, née McCarter. He was educated at Keady Primary School, 1952-1959, and the Royal School, Armagh, 1959-1967. Convinced of a call to the ordained ministry, he studied at Trinity College, Dublin, 1967-1971, graduating MA, and proceeded to New College, Edinburgh, to study theology, 1971-1974, from which he graduated with a BD. Returning home, he completed his studies at the Assembly's College, Belfast, and he was licensed on 15th June 1975 by the Presbytery of Armagh, and assigned as Assistant to the Rev James McAllister, minister of Megain Memorial, Belfast, where he was ordained on 4th January 1976 by the Presbytery of East Belfast. His first charge was the congregation of First Killyleagh where he was installed on 10th March 1978 by the Presbytery of Down and served until 31st October 1981, when he left to go to the United States of America, to join a collegiate ministry at Raeford, North Carolina. He returned in 1986, to the charge of Ballyhenry congregation, Belfast, where he was installed on 30th May 1986 by the Presbytery of North Belfast. He ministered there until he resigned on 31st August 1996, to take up a post with *Open Doors* international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches. In all of his work and witness Mr Mark exhibited a deep love for Christ and His Word, with a focus on preaching the Gospel and making disciples in fulfilment of the Lord's Great Commission. He cared for people, young and old alike, initiating a pastoral care ministry while in Ballyhenry. Mr Mark was married to Alison, née Black, on 6th July 1974. They had six children, Jonathan, Catherine, Olwyn, Andrew, Ruth and Peter, to whom, along with his brother, Jim, sister Pamela, and wider family circle, we extend our sympathy and prayers, giving thanks to God for the life and ministry of our brother.

The Rev John Terence McCullough, BA, Minister Emeritus, Toberdoney and Croaghmore, died on 25th September 2016, in the eighty-second year of his age and the fifty-second year of his ministry. He was born at Belfast on

10th September 1935, the middle child of a family of three boys and two girls (Stewart, Ruth, John, Brian and June) to John McCullough, a clerk, and his wife, Jean Caroline, née Colgan. He was raised in the family church of Oldpark, and, through the influence of a Sunday School teacher and his membership of the Life Boy section of the Boys' Brigade, he gave his life to Christ while attending Portstewart CSSM at the age of eight. He attended Carr's Glen Primary School followed by the Royal Belfast Academical Institution. On leaving school he went to Technical College and Art College for two years, intending to pursue a career in architecture. However, responding to the call of God to the ordained ministry, he was received by the General Assembly in 1957 as a student for the ministry and proceeded to study at Magee University College, Londonderry, and Trinity College, Dublin, graduating BA, in 1961. This was followed by theological study at the Assembly's College, Belfast. He was licensed on 18th October 1964 by the Presbytery of North Belfast and assigned as assistant to the Rev James Sheppard Woods, Whiteabbey, and ordained there on 12th May 1965 by the Presbytery of North Belfast. He was called by the congregation of Mosside and installed there on 24th August 1967 by the Presbytery of Route. His ministry was gospel-centred, presenting the claims and challenge of Jesus as Lord and Saviour especially to young people in the Crow's Nest fellowship. In the wider community he established a good relationship with the Moycraig Young Farmers Club. After six faithful years, he moved to the congregation of Strand, Belfast, where he was installed on 18th January 1973, by the Presbytery of East Belfast, where, with characteristic grace, he led his people through a period of renewal and change, including renovations to the church building and grounds in preparation for the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the congregation in March of that year. Four years later he moved to the congregation of Ballee, where he was installed on 23rd June 1977 by the Presbytery of Ballymena. He gave himself energetically to the building up of this church extension charge, culminating in the granting of full congregational status in 1986. In that year he moved to the united charge of Toberdoney and Croaghmore where he was installed on 27th March 1986 by the Presbytery of Route. Mr McCullough's gifts were called on more widely throughout these years. He served as Moderator of the Presbytery of Route 1970-1971, and as Convener of Live Wires, the General Assembly's church extension programme. For ten years he led the Portstewart CSSM. He also conducted coffee bar missions, and adult missions up and down the country. In these ways he strongly influenced young lives for Christ who have gone on to render Christian service in myriad ways. His year at Art College found fruit in his illustrations in many pieces of literature to which he was asked to contribute. He married Morag Wordrop Wilson Kerr of Hamilton, Lanarkshire, on 14th October 1961, whom he first met at a BB camp in Ayr in his teens, and who fully supported him in his ministry over the years, predeceasing him in 2010. They had three children, Martin, Morag Jean, and Moreen. To them, and Mr McCullough's surviving sister, June, we convey our sincere sympathy, and record our tribute to the life and witness of our brother who believed in giving only the best to the Saviour who gave his best for him.

The Rev Robert Nelson Stewart, BA, BD, Minister without charge, died on 12th November 2016, in the eighty-eighth year of his age. He was born at Belfast on 26th July 1929, the eldest of two children, (a sister Margaret) to James

Stewart, a Clerk, and his wife, Mary, née Nelson. The family were members of Bloomfield congregation, and Mr Stewart was educated at Strandtown Primary School, and Sullivan Upper Grammar School, Holywood. He studied Philosophy at the Queens University, Belfast, from 1947 to 1951, graduating BA, and, convinced of a call to the ordained ministry, he attended the Assembly's College, Belfast, from 1950, graduating BD in 1953. Assistantships in High Street, Antrim, and Strand, Belfast, gave him practical experience of ministry, and he was licensed by the Belfast Presbytery on 29th May 1953. On 26th June 1953, he married Georgina May Jardine, and they had two children, Peter, (now deceased) and Alison. Having a heart for overseas ministry, he was ordained by the Presbytery of Belfast on 20th September 1953, as a missionary to India, under the Foreign Missions Board of the Presbyterian Church. In November, he and his wife sailed for the State of Gujarat, in north-west India, to spend two years in language study at Parantij, before ministering to the congregation there, as well as to the people at Himmatnagar, to the north east. In 1956, he moved east, to the city of Serampore in the State of West Bengal, north of Calcutta, and ministered there until early 1959. Returning home in May 1959, he was called by the united congregations of Knowhead, Fahan, and Inch, and installed by the Presbytery of Derry on 11th June of that year. Having a particular interest in religious education, he applied successfully for the post of Senior Lecturer in the subject, at Stranmillis College, Belfast, and resigned his charge on 31st August 1961. Three years later he returned to his former congregations and was installed on 28th May 1964. After another four years, he was appointed as Sabbath School Organiser of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and, on demitting charge of his congregations, he was installed in the post on 3rd September 1968. In addition to his congregational work, for some years, from 1962, he acted as a Chaplain to the Territorial Army. Mr Stewart resigned as Sabbath School Organiser in September 1971 and took up an appointment in the state education sector. We give thanks to God for our colleague's varied ministry at home and abroad and assure his wife, Georgina, daughter Alison, and wider family circle, of our prayers for them in their bereavement.

The Rev David Clarke Caskie BA, MA, Minister Emeritus, Dun Laoghaire, died on 10th November 2016 in the eighty-third year of his age and the forty-seventh year of his ministry. He was born at Limavady on 5th June 1934 to Robert Caskie, a Farmer, and his wife, Anna, née Gray, the youngest of five brothers, James, Glenn, Earnie and Tom. The family attended Derramore congregation, Limavady, where Mr Caskie was fully involved, in later years becoming a teacher in the Sunday School. He was educated at Killybready Primary School and Limavady Grammar School. On leaving school he worked in his brother Tom's drapery shop in Limavady. He married Mabel Cochrane who also belonged to Derramore, on 13th January 1962, and they had four children, Paul, Robert, Siobhan and Aisling. Responding to the call of God to the ordained ministry he successfully applied to be received as a student by the General Assembly in 1960 and studied at Magee College, Londonderry, and Trinity College, Dublin, graduating BA in 1964. This was followed by theological study at New College, Edinburgh, finishing at the Assembly's College, Belfast, 1968-1969 and culminating in his licensing in Derramore 1st June 1969 by the Presbytery of Limavady. He was assigned as Assistant to the Very Rev Dr

Alfred Martin, minister of Lowe Memorial, Finaghy, where he was ordained 28th December 1969 by the Presbytery of Belfast South. In 1972 he received a call to the congregation of Kingstown (which became known as Dun Laoghaire after the General Assembly of June 1973) where he was installed on 12th May 1972 by the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster. Here he was to remain for his entire ministry. His love for Christ as Lord inspired his own love for people and his belief in the church as a loving Christian community. A warm-hearted pastor he and Mrs Caskie operated an open-door policy at the manse and gave help and support to many, both spiritual and practical. Mr Caskie retired on 17th May 2000 to the family home, 'Mullane', Limavady. He enjoyed music, singing, reading and gardening. We extend our sympathy to Mrs Caskie, and the wider family circle looking to the Lord through whom is the assurance of eternal life in the place of many mansions.

The Rev William James Brown, BA, BD, Minister without Charge, died on 31st December 2016 in the eighty-ninth year of his age. He was born at Dunseverick, Bushmills, on 1st of April 1928, one of two children to William James Brown, a farmer, and his wife, Margaret, née McCurdy. The family were members of Bushmills congregation and Mr Brown attended Dunseverick Primary School, and then Bushmills Grammar School. He worked for a time on his father's farm, but, feeling called to the ordained ministry, he attended Magee College, Londonderry, followed by Trinity College, Dublin, 1955-1959, graduating with a BA. He studied theology at the Assembly's College, Belfast, 1959-1961, graduating BD. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Route on 4th June 1961, and served his assistantship under the Rev Samuel Eaton, minister of McQuiston Memorial, Belfast, who, previously, had been minister of Bushmills 1950-1959. He also taught part-time at the College of Technology, Belfast. Two years later, he was called to be minister of the church extension charge of Craigy Hill, Larne, and was ordained and installed there on 23rd May 1963 by the Presbytery of Carrickfergus. During his ministry, the charge was erected to full congregational status in January 1965, the manse was built, and a church hall was opened in 1967. Mr Brown resigned from the charge on 30th September 1968 to take up a post in Religious Education, and moved to live in Holywood. Mr Brown married Phyllis Margaret Freeborn, née Harron, on 4th July 1961. They had two children, Roger and Alistair. To them, Mr Brown's sister, Jean, and the wider family circle, we extend our sympathy and prayers and give thanks for the ministry of their loved one.

The Rev John Hume, BA, Minister Emeritus, Dunluce, died on 22nd January 2017, in the ninety-second year of his age and the sixty-fifth year of his ministry. He was born at Gracefield, Ballymaguigan, County Londonderry, on 13th May 1925, only child of William Hume, a carpenter, and his wife Mary, née Gilmour. The family moved to live in Belfast, where they became members of Westbourne congregation in the east of the city. Mr Hume was educated at Mountpottinger Primary School, followed by Methodist College. He went on to study at Magee University College, Londonderry, and graduated BA from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1948. Responding to a sense of call to the ordained ministry he studied theology at New College, Edinburgh, and the Assembly's College, Belfast, 1949-1950. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Belfast on 26th May

1950, and served his assistantship with the Rev Eric Moses Borland in the congregation of Hamilton Road, Bangor. He was ordained in his first charge of Donagheady on 13th March 1952, by the Presbytery of Glendermott. After twelve happy and fruitful years there, he accepted a call to Dunluce and was installed on 17th September 1964, by the Presbytery of Route, where he ministered for nearly twenty-seven years until his retirement on 31st March 1991. Mr Hume assiduously fulfilled the traditional calling and duties of a Christian minister, visiting his people regularly, preaching the whole counsel of God, and providing pastoral care to young and old alike, with compassion and good humour, and playing his part in community life. Off duty, Mr Hume enjoyed playing golf and was interested in photography. For most of his ministry he was assisted and supported by his wife, Frances Olivia Waddell from Seskinore, Omagh, whom he married on 2nd August 1957, and who made her own considerable contribution to congregational life and work. They had four children, Mark, Jamie, Christopher and Lindy. We give thanks to God for our brother's long ministry and we offer our condolences and prayers to Mrs Hume and her family, as they mourn the loss of their loved one.

The Very Rev William Magee Craig, BA, MA, BD, DD, Minister Emeritus, First Portadown, died on 10th February 2017 in the ninety-ninth year of his age and the seventy-second year of his ministry. He was born at Comber on 1st August 1918, to Samuel Craig, a builder, and his wife, Margaret, née Magee. His father died of a fall from a ladder when William was only six weeks old, after which his mother returned to her family home at Carrickmannon, Ballygowan, to live with her brother and three sisters. Dr Craig was raised in the congregation of Ballygowan and educated at Carrickmannon Primary School and the Royal Belfast Academical Institution, 1931-1937. He went to Queen's University, Belfast, in 1937, to study Classics with the prospect of becoming a teacher, but, following personal conversion to Christ as Lord and Saviour, he decided to study for the ministry. He completed his studies in classics, graduating BA in 1941 and went on to the Assembly's College, Belfast, to read theology, graduating BD in 1944. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Comber on 21st May 1944 and assigned assistant to Dr William Corkey, minister of Windsor, Belfast. He was called by the congregation of Ebrington, Londonderry, where he was ordained on 22nd March 1945, and, the following year, he married Maud Macrory in Newtownards on 1st May 1946. Hearing good reports of his ministry, the, then vacant congregation of First Portadown made out a call, and, after a short delay, due to the birth of his daughter, Olive, he was installed as minister on 18th March 1948 by the Presbytery of Armagh. Dr Craig was a noted evangelical preacher and teacher, applying his classical studies and love for New Testament Greek to open the Scripture text Sunday by Sunday to his people with power in presentation and graciousness of spirit. The congregation grew numerically and spiritually as many responded to the preacher's winsome invitation to trust in Christ as Saviour and Lord. He accepted many invitations to preach and to conduct evangelistic missions far and near, though careful not to neglect his first responsibility to his own people. Many of his hearers can trace the beginning of their walk with Christ through hearing Dr Craig proclaim the Master's 'unsearchable riches'. Similarly, many can testify to his encouragement and support to study for the ministry and to take up missionary service. During his ministry no less than fourteen members of First Portadown

served shorter or longer periods as missionaries in many parts of the world. During the later 1970s controversy grew concerning the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's membership of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in particular about the political involvement of some of its agencies committed to 'liberation' theology. The murder of six Elim Pentecostal missionaries in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), some of whom were from Northern Ireland, touched a raw nerve at a time of political violence and controversy in the Province. As a member of the Campaign for Complete Withdrawal from the WCC, with others, Dr Craig spoke in the Assembly in support of the campaign, which led to the suspension of our Church's membership of the WCC in 1978 and withdrawal in 1980. He was Moderator of the Presbytery of Armagh 1976-1977 and Moderator of the Synod of Armagh and Down twice, in 1956 and 1969. In 1979 he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly and was awarded a DD by the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland. Dr Craig shared the commitment of others in the wider evangelical community to present believers mature in Christ, and, so became an ardent supporter of the Portstewart Convention held each June in a large marquee in the seaside town. He attended all the meetings of the convention annually and was a valued member of the Committee which he first joined in 1950, becoming Chairman in 1976 and serving until 1991. He was one of the speakers in 1971, 1974, and 1980, and a guest preacher at the Keswick Convention, Cumbria, in 1970 and 1973. Dr Craig retired on 31st December 1983. In retirement he completed his MA studies and graduated in 1987. He survived his daughter, Olive, and his wife, Maud, who predeceased him. We give thanks to God for our brother who has fought '...the good fight of the faith...' who is now '...absent from the body but present with the Lord,' and we extend our sympathy and prayers to his son Brian, son-in-law William, and the wider family circle.

The Rev Robert William Wylie (Bill) Clarke, BA, MA, Minister Emeritus, Trinity, Omagh, and Gillygooley, died on 12th February 2017, in the ninety-third year of his age and the sixty-eighth year of his ministry. He was born at Dunmaurice, Ballybay, County Monaghan, on 18th October 1924, the youngest of three children, (a brother Tom and a sister Nancy) to Robert William Clarke, a jeweller and clock maker, and his wife, Margaret, née Johnston. Robert, senior, was a well-known player of the bagpipes and of the uilleann pipes. The family belonged to Second Ballybay congregation, and Mr Clarke was educated at Hall Street National School, Ballybay, and, following the death of his father when he was nine, at the Masonic School, Dublin, 1936-1941. He studied English and French at Trinity College, Dublin, 1941-1945, graduating BA. Convinced of a call to the ministry, he studied theology at Edinburgh University, 1945-1947, taking his final year at the Assembly's College, Belfast, and was licensed by the Presbytery of Monaghan on 6th May 1948. He served his assistantship in McQuiston Memorial, Belfast, with the Rev Dr John Brooks McIlroy. During his time there, he met Alice Elizabeth McKee whom he married. They had a son, Liam, who became a well-known and successful journalist. In 1949 Mr Clarke was called to the congregation of Dundalk (united with Castlebellingham in 1926) with Carlingford, where he was installed by the Presbytery of Monaghan on 13th October 1949 as minister. He moved to Omagh in 1971 and was installed on 12th May, by the Presbytery of Omagh, in the congregation of Trinity, Omagh, which had been united with the congregation of Gillygooley on 1st October the previous

year. In the years following, a new organ was installed, and Mr Clarke oversaw the building of an extension to the church hall. During these years, Omagh and district were caught up in the division and violence of the Troubles which affected Northern Ireland as a whole. Mr Clarke played his part in promoting good community relations becoming involved in inter-denominational work, while also serving as a Chaplain at Lisanelly army camp. He was a member of several school Boards of governors, and of the Western Education and Library Board. In the Presbytery he was involved with the Ministry of Prayer for the Sick, bringing a pastoral and prayerful ministry to the lives of many who were burdened. From 1977 to 1978 he served as Moderator of the Synod of Derry and Omagh. Both his wife and son predeceased him. He retired on 30th April 1992. We extend our sympathy to his daughter-in-law Kathryn and wider family circle.

The Rev David Selwoode Graham, MBE, BA, DipEd, BD, MA, Minister Emeritus, First Magherafelt, died on 22nd February 2017, in the seventy-ninth year of his age, and the fifty-first year of his ministry. He was born at Belfast on 9th April 1938, the younger of two brothers, to David Graham, a cashier, and his wife, Emily Alice, née May. The family were members of May Street congregation. He was educated at Rosetta Primary School, and Annadale Grammar School, 1950-1956. He continued his education at the Queen's University, Belfast, graduating BA in 1959, when he returned to Annadale Grammar to teach French and German. He undertook further academic study, qualifying with a DipEd, in 1962. Responding to the call of God to the Christian ministry he entered the Assembly's College, Belfast, in 1963 to study for the ministry, finishing in 1966 with a BD. Mr Graham was licensed by the Presbytery of East Belfast on 5th June 1966 and assigned as Assistant to the Rev Dr John F Park, minister of Stormont congregation, where he was ordained on 11th December 1966. Shortly after his licensing, he married Joyce Rosemary Arlow, on 5th July 1966, and they had three children, Nicholas, Timothy, and Louise. A few years later, in 1970, he received a call from the congregation of First Magherafelt and was installed on 8th September 1970 by the Presbytery of Tyrone. There he remained until retirement, sharing his faith, preaching Christ, and exercising a compassionate ministry of pastoral care to his people as also to patients in the Mid-Ulster Hospital where he was a part-time chaplain. Mr Graham loved the Presbyterian Church and was extensively involved in the wider work of the Church. He was Convener of the Manpower Committee, 1973-1980; Moderator of the Synod of Derry and Omagh, 1978; Co-convener of the Central Ministry Fund, 1980-1983; Convener of the Union Commission, 1983-1990; Convener of the Church House and Assembly Hall Committee, 1994-1996; Convener of the Assembly Buildings Committee 1996-1997; Convener of the Board of Ministry and Pensions 1997-2003. In the wider community he sought to promote good relations across the religious and political divide, and he gave committed service as a member of the Board of Governors of the Rainey Endowed School, of which he became Chairman, as also of the North Eastern Education and Library Board, which he later served as Chairman. In 2007 he was awarded an MBE in recognition of his services to education. We give thanks for the witness and service of our brother so willingly given to Christ and His Church, and commend his wife, Rosemary, and their children, brother Derek, and wider family circle, to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the prayers of God's people.

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 2

Wednesday - 3.30pm

PRIORITIES COMMITTEE

1. As reported to the 2016 General Assembly, the Priorities Committee had drawn up a programme of work, for the period June – December 2016, to enable the Committee to fulfil its remit to assist the General Assembly in the prioritising of its work.

2. The Priorities Committee is made up of the Conveners and Secretaries of the General Assembly's Councils, along with a number of 'non-aligned' Ministers and elders of the Church. Facilitated by Mr Maurice McNicholl (an Elder in Culnady congregation), the Committee held a day-long meeting in June 2016, along with a two-day overnight meeting in October 2016, a further day-long meeting November 2016 and a 'normal' meeting in early February 2017.

3. Through this series of meetings members of the Committee have sought to listen to one another and to the Lord, seeking together to discern the priorities for the work of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland at General Assembly level, as delivered through its Councils, Committees and Panels. This has meant a significant commitment both by the members of Committee and by their facilitator and has produced the recommended priorities outlined in Priorities Appendix 1, set in the context of the remits of the General Assembly Councils, as outlined in the Code Pars 272-279.

4. These priorities were approved by the General Council at its meeting in March 2017, and are now presented to the 2017 General Assembly for consideration. If adopted by the Assembly, they are intended to shape the direction of travel of the Assembly's Councils over the next number of years. Some of the priorities will directly relate to a particular Council, based on the remits the General Assembly has given to its individual Councils as outlined in the Code. Other priorities will, however, have a direct relevance to more than one Council. In all of this, both the Priorities Committee, and more directly its Priorities Reference Panel, will continue to have an ongoing active role, as well as a watching brief, in the outworking of this process. Ultimately United Appeal allocations should reflect the General Assembly's priorities, balanced of course by the underlying requirement to deliver the remits also set by the General Assembly.

APPENDIX 1

THE PRIORITIES FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ITS COUNCILS

Introduction

The Committee identifies the following five priorities for the work of the General Assembly and its Councils, in the delivery of their remits.

These priorities statements are offered in absolute and prayerful dependence upon God who, in guiding us through his Word is our strength and life.

They are made, affirming our collective commitment to act together as a General Assembly under the guidance of God, establishing relationships of trust, and seeking to collaborate in the outworking of our mutual calling.

The Committee believes these priorities to be essential if the General Assembly is to respond effectively to Christ's call to mission and ministry in today's world, and it is convinced that the wide acceptance of these priorities will enable the General Assembly and its Councils to allocate their collective resources wisely.

1. **Leadership:** To develop effective leadership according to biblical patterns and expectations, in every sphere of the activities of the General Assembly and its Councils.
2. **Fruitfulness:** To invest in the revitalisation and fruitfulness of the Church's life and witness, in changing and challenging times.
3. **Discipleship:** To support local congregations in enabling their members to live as followers of Jesus in every relationship, everywhere they are and in every circumstance of life.
4. **Mission:** To become more fully an all-Ireland gospel-centred church, by taking opportunities to establish, nurture and resource reformed witness in areas where it is lacking.
To develop and nurture global partnerships which are consistent with the General Assembly's priorities.
5. **Community:** To engage with those from all backgrounds and beliefs, and to be active as a blessing in the community in practical caring initiatives.
To equip and support Congregations, Presbyteries and the denomination as a whole, to speak helpfully and effectively when the Church's voice needs to be heard in the public square.

TREVOR D GRIBBEN, Convener

DIALOGUE AND RESOURCES TASK GROUP

5. Since the 2016 General Assembly the Dialogue and Resources Task Group has held a series of regional workshops in November and February for ministers (in active service), full-time youth leaders and licentiates, with the

Rev Sam Allberry as the facilitator. The format of each workshop was the same, comprising a presentation by Sam Allberry, followed by round table discussion and Q&A.

6. What the Task Group found striking about all of the workshops was the tone of the debate in which they were conducted – it was pastoral, open and honest. A list of resources and a copy of Sam’s book *Is God anti-Gay?* were made available to all who attended. The overall attendance at the workshops was approximately one third of ministers. The March edition of the Presbyterian Herald carried a brief article by the Task Group Convener outlining both a description of the workshops and some of the key lessons.

7. In answer to the question “What next?” the Task Group is beginning to explore the possibility of putting together a course, similar in format to the Handling the Word Course, which could be available to Kirk Sessions who wish to be better equipped to offer pastoral support to individuals and families who are seeking to understand same-sex attraction in light of their faith in Christ. It will take the rest of the life of the Task Group to see such a project materialise.

8. In respect of transsexuality, so far the Task Group has only been able to give the issue some initial consideration and is therefore not in a position to make a substantive report. During the incoming year the Task Group, either directly, or perhaps through a more specialist sub-group, will be considering this matter.

ROBERT L CRAIG, Convener

MODERATOR’S ADVISORY COMMITTEE

9. The Moderator’s Advisory Committee met on two occasions during the year and transacted the business outlined below.

APPOINTMENT OF ASSESSORS

10. At the request of a number of Presbyteries, Assessors were appointed during the year under Par 172 of the Code.

THE POSITION OF MINISTERS EMERITI (RELEASED)

11. The 2016 General Assembly decided that when a Minister Emeritus is released from the responsibilities of full membership of Presbytery (either at their own initiative or at the Presbytery’s initiative) they are also automatically released from the responsibilities of full membership of the General Assembly. The Code was also changed to reflect this position.

12. This ‘dual releasing’ was not challenged either at the General Council or at the General Assembly. However, subsequently a number of retired Ministers have queried if in fact it could be permissible for a Minister Emeritus (Released) to simply be released from the responsibilities of full membership of Presbytery but remain a full member of the General Assembly.

13. While this is logically possible, (simply requiring a further amendment to the Code, chiefly adding Minister Emeritus (Released) into the membership of the General Assembly at Par 97), it ‘has never been done before’. Full Ministerial

members of the General Assembly have always been full Ministerial members of a Presbytery. Though this is of course not the case for perhaps most full ruling elder members of the General Assembly.

14. The Committee considered if it should recommend to the General Council that this matter be revisited at the 2017 General Assembly, or should the 2016 position remain unaltered. The Committee agreed that a report should go to the next meeting of the General Council for full discussion, with the following two options before the Council:

(a) That overtures be drawn up for presentation to the 2017 General Assembly to enable Ministers Emeriti (Released) to remain full members of the General Assembly.

OR

(b) That the position regarding Ministers Emeriti (Released) should remain as agreed by the 2016 General Assembly.

15. The General Council at its meeting in October 2016 overwhelmingly adopted option (b), therefore deciding not to revisit this matter at the 2017 General Assembly.

IMPLICATIONS OF A GRANT APPLICATION FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL OF A CONGREGATION:

16. The Clerk, the Rev Trevor Gribben reported that guidance was being sought from the a Congregation within the Presbytery of Colerain and Limavady (and from the Presbytery itself) regarding a proposed application for a significant capital grant from the Department of Education (NI). This would necessitate the setting up of a Youth Council linked to the Congregation and the leasing of Congregational property to that Youth Council, which would then be the body applying for the grant. The Clerk also reported that he had requested the General Assembly Solicitor to use his best efforts to draw up a Draft Constitution for such a Youth Council and a Draft Lease, which would both protect the interests of the Congregation and equate as far as possible to what is permitted within the law of the Church. These draft documents were tabled and considered by the Committee. During discussion it was noted that in the past a number of congregations have used a similar process, without necessarily being as thorough in seeking to protect the interest of the congregation. Following detailed discussion the following was agreed:

(a) That the Clerk will forward to the congregation the Draft Constitution and Draft Lease drawn up by the General Assembly's Solicitor and recommend to the Presbytery concerned that permission could be granted for this application.

(b) That the Clerk will instruct the General Assembly's Solicitor to look at the matter regarding necessary amendments to the Code to facilitate such grant applications and ensure necessary safeguards.

THE POSITION OF MINISTERS AND LICENTIATES WITHOUT CHARGE

17. At its meeting in September 2016, the Committee considered the position regarding the retention, or otherwise, of Ministers and Licentiate

without charge. It was noted that the Code was clear in Par 219, namely:

219(3) (a) *On accepting a full-time appointment which is not under the jurisdiction of the Assembly, a licentiate or minister without charge shall be deemed to have resigned from his position in the Church, except as hereafter provided; his resignation shall be reported by his Presbytery; and his name shall be removed from the Church's current records.*

-
- (ii) *The Presbytery shall exercise its jurisdiction over such licentiates and ministers in association with the appropriate Assembly Council, as prescribed in the Code, paragraph 74.*
 - (c) (i) *Should the Presbytery see reason for his retention as a recognised licentiate or minister without charge they shall seek authorisation of this from the Council for Training in Ministry or their appropriate committee.*
 - (ii) *It shall be a condition for retention as a recognised licentiate or minister without charge that he reports regularly to Presbytery as required, not less than annually, on his life and work, especially involvement in congregational life and Church work, in preaching, administration of the sacraments and conduct of marriages.*
 - (iii) *On this basis Presbyteries shall report each year to the Assembly through the Council for Training in Ministry on the circumstances of each licentiate or minister without charge under their care and the Assembly shall be asked to resolve on the retention on the Church's current records of those who should be continued as recognised licentiates or ministers without charge.*

18. During discussion it was recognised that in some cases, at least, the correct balance is generally not being struck between Par 219(3)(a) and 219(3)(c) (i). Some Presbyteries by their practice seem in fact to be reversing the position as outlined in the Code, by normally recommending that Ministers or Licentiates without Charge are retained as such unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so. Therefore, it was agreed to clarify the matter, by presenting the following resolutions to the General Council for decision:

- a) *It is recommended that a Minister without Charge who is in a "full-time appointment which is not under the jurisdiction of the Assembly" be deemed to have resigned from his/her position in PCI unless there are exceptional reasons to act otherwise.*
- b) *It is further recommended that the Council for Training in Ministry produce:*
 - (i) additional guidance for Presbyteries on reporting annually on Ministers without Charge;
 - (ii) a pro forma to be used by Ministers without Charge to report to Presbytery;
 - (iii) an amended form to be used by Presbyteries in their annual report, making it explicit that ministers without charge will normally be removed from the record unless presbytery has an exceptional reason for them to be retained.

- (iv) similar material to that stated in i-iii concerning licentiates without charge, but that in addition it be made clear that, if any is continuing actively to seek a call, that will qualify as an exceptional reason to retain him or her.

19. The General Council, at its meeting in October 2016, adopted these recommendations and transmitted them to the Reception of Ministers and Licentiates Committee for implementation.

20. At its meeting in February 2017, the Clerk brought to the Committee the issue of Ministers without charge, this time in relation to the Memorial Record and Memorial Roll of the General Assembly. It was noted that when a minister becomes a Minister without charge, he or she has by definition resigned their charge. Up until now it has therefore not been the practice, on the death of a Minister without charge, to include their name in the General Assembly's Memorial Record or Memorial Roll. However, family members may not be aware of this. After a full discussion, it was agreed to recommend to the General Council:

- (a) That in future, the General Assembly's formal Memorial Record (and Roll) will include the names of those who die as a Minister in active service, a Minister Emeritus, a Minister Emeritus (Released), a Minister without charge, or a Minister without charge (Retired).
- (b) That in future the Clerk's Office will, when notified with confirmation that a Minister without charge or Minister without charge (Retired) has died, send an email to ministers to inform them of the fact, but that the name would not be included in the Church Record page of the Herald.

The General Council, at its meeting in March 2017, adopted these recommendations.

REQUEST FOR USE OF ASSEMBLY HALL

21. The Clerk reported that a request to use the Assembly Hall in 2018 has been received by the Masonic Order's Provincial Grand Lodge of Antrim. He referred to copies of: the letter making the request; a clarifying email; reports on Freemasonry to the General Assemblies of 1992 and 1995, all of which had been previously circulated. The events in 2018 are to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the lodge. The Committee noted resolution 2 on page 34 of the 1992 General Assembly Minutes: 'That the General Assembly in the light of the Doctrine Committee's report on the beliefs and practices of Irish Freemasonry, disapprove of communicant members of the church being involved in Freemasonry. After discussion it was agreed to advise that the request by the Provincial Grand Lodge of Antrim to use the Assembly Hall be declined.

OVERVIEW OF THE 'MODERATOR'S DIARY'

22. It was agreed that the General Council be requested to set up a Task Group to review how the Moderator's time might best be used during their year in office and at the General Council meeting in March 2017, the following Task Group was appointed (to begin work after the 2017 General Assembly and report to the General Council in autumn 2017): Moderator, Clerk (Convener); Very Rev Drs Rob Craig and Frank Sellar; Rev Drs Liz Hughes and Trevor McCormick and Rev Uel Marrs; Revs Stuart Finlay and Robert Buick.

PUBLISHING LETTERS IN THE *HERALD* RELATING TO JUDICIAL CASES

23. It was noted by the Committee that a particular issue has arisen concerning certain letters that have been submitted to the *Herald* for publication relating to judicial cases which were either before, or had been before, a court of the Church. Up to this point it has been the position that letters written by a party to a judicial case should not be published when that case was before a court of the church.

24. After discussion, it was agreed that it be confirmed that correspondence to the *Herald* concerning a judicial case, including a formal preliminary inquiry, should not be published while the matter is before a court of the church; nor should any correspondence be published in the *Herald* that challenges or directly references a particular judicial decision of a court of the church. (This would not preclude correspondence regarding issues of general principle or policy being published.) The General Council affirmed this position at its meeting in March 2017, for implementation with immediate effect.

POSSIBLE PAPAL VISIT TO IRELAND IN 2018

25. The Committee had some initial discussion regarding the likelihood that the Pope would visit Ireland in 2018. The Clerk outlined possibilities being considered by the Roman Catholic Church for elements that this visit might contain. At the moment no proposals have been firmed up and indeed no visit had been confirmed. While it was premature to adopt a position regarding, for instance, a response to an invitation to the then Moderator to meet the Pope, any such matter would be brought to the Moderator's Advisory Committee at an appropriate time.

ISSUE OF LACK OF PROVISION FOR A CORRESPONDING ELDER OPPOSITE A MINISTERS EMERITUS

26. The Committee considered a letter which had been received from the South Belfast Presbytery. This addressed the fact that there are no corresponding elders against retired ministers in the General Assembly, or in Presbytery, which the Presbytery feels leads to an imbalance between elders and ministers. After discussion and report to the General Council, the Council agreed to accept the Committee's recommendation:

- That in the light of other proposed changes under consideration regarding those in attendance at the General Assembly, that the issue raised by the South Belfast Presbytery should not be progressed, recognising that the Presbytery could bring the matter forward to a subsequent General Assembly, at its own volition.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INCOMING MODERATORS OF MOVING THE PTFI GRADUATION DATE

27. The Clerk considered a letter which had been received from the Council for Training in Ministry, indicating that from 2018, for academic reasons, the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland, intends to hold its Graduation Service at the end of June. This means that an incoming Moderator would not receive an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree before their installation, but rather a few

weeks later. After discussion and report to the General Council, the Council agreed to accept the Committee's recommendation:

- That the academic reasons for moving the time of the PTFI Graduation to late June be supported, and the implications for the timing of the conferring of an honorary DD on an incoming Moderator be noted.

ISSUE OF RETROSPECTIVE GRANTING OF MINISTER EMERITUS STATUS

28. The Clerk explained the background to this matter, which has been raised by the North Belfast Presbytery. Ministers who retire directly from a congregation gain the status of Minister Emeritus of that congregation. Some Ministers finish their ministry in a congregation before retirement through being loosed, or on health grounds. At that point they become a Minister without charge and on retirement become a Minister without charge (retired), rather than a Minister Emeritus of a congregation. Often this is after decades of service in a congregation, and within a few years of retirement. Therefore in some cases a Minister, Presbytery or Congregation may wish the status of Minister Emeritus to be conferred. It was noted that there appear to be three particular categories of Minister to whom this might apply: loosed; resigned on health grounds; resigned for other reasons. After discussion and report to the General Council, the Council agreed to accept the Committee's recommendation:

- That a Task Group be set up by the Council in the autumn of 2017 to look into this and other related matters (reporting through the General Council to the 2018 General Assembly).

TREVOR D GRIBBEN, Convener

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 3

Wednesday - 4.30pm

SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE

1. At the time of writing the Support Services Committee had met on two occasions. Both meetings considered reports from its Finance, Human Resources, Property and Creative Production Panels, and from its IT Task Group.

FINANCE PANEL

2. At its October meeting, the Committee discussed and agreed the recommendations of the Finance Panel for rates of assessment for 2017 (see Support Services Appendix 1) having taken into account the projected end of year accounts of the various assessment funds for 2016 and budgets for 2017. Through adjustments to various rates of assessment, the Committee was able to maintain the same overall rates of assessment for 2017 as in 2016. This was despite an increase of £100k in the assessment for the Church House Repairs Fund which is intended to compensate for the less than projected income from retail lettings in the Mall and the current overdrawn balance on the refurbishment works. The agreed allocations to the various Assessment Funds are also set out in Support Services Appendix 1, with the details of the allocations through the Incidental Fund set out in Support Services Appendix 2. The Committee also agreed that the assessment rate for the PCI Pension Fund should remain at 24% to reflect the employer's pension contribution rate.

3. In regard to stipends, the Committee agreed increases to the Sterling and Euro Basic Ministerial Minimums of 1.5% and 1.0% respectively, having taking into account the annual inflation figures in each jurisdiction and current levels of assessable income. The Basic and Appropriate Ministerial Income rates for 2017 are as set out in Support Services Appendix 3. Similar percentage increases were agreed to the levels of Family Grants and to the levels of grants from the Retired Ministers Fund, the Widows of Ministers Fund and the Prolonged Disability Fund.

4. The Committee welcomed draft guidance approved by the Finance Panel outlining the annual reporting requirements to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. These requirements will apply for the year ended 31 December 2017 and will have to be submitted by 31 October 2018. Following a briefing session in Assembly Buildings in late October 2016, to which three representatives of each Presbytery were invited, the guidance was issued to Presbyteries for onward transmission to congregations.

5. At its March meeting the Committee reviewed the year end accounts of the various assessment funds and recommended their approval to the General

Council, noting that outturns for 2016 were generally better than those projected. It considered that the position of all Funds to be satisfactory. The Committee approved recommendations on the 2017 budgets for Recharged Support Services and also confirmed that the current expenses arrangements and rates for attendance at the General Assembly, Councils and Committees. It was agreed to undertake a review of these for 2018.

6. During the year the Panel approved the application of three Ministers to the Prolonged Disability Fund. The Committee also agreed an amendment to the rules of the Fund to reduce the deferred period (i.e. the period during which no benefit is payable) from twelve to three months, subject to the approval of the General Assembly. This change reflects the situation of some Ministers who find themselves in poor health and who do not wish to burden their congregations with payments due under the Prolonged Illness Guidelines but would prefer to allow their congregations to be free to issue a new call. Also in connection with the Fund, it was agreed that the definition of a Qualified Minister should be extended to allow beneficiaries of the Prolonged Disability Fund to retain their entitlement to the former annual bonus, if otherwise eligible, on retirement – under the current rules such Ministers are not deemed to be Qualified Ministers. A resolution covering these matters is attached and the updated Rules are included in Appendix 4.

7. At its April meeting, the Panel received a comprehensive report from the Financial Secretary on the draft unaudited Report and Accounts of the General Assembly for 2016. The auditors were expected to complete their work prior to a meeting with Church officers on 12th April: to date no substantive issues had emerged and no major changes had been sought. At the time of writing, the Panel therefore expects the Auditors to confirm that they are willing to state that the Accounts give a ‘true and fair view’.

8. The draft Report and Accounts for 2016 have been prepared in accordance with relevant Accounting Standards and are in a format that should satisfy the requirements of the Charity Commission, although formally the submission of the first set of new Accounts is scheduled for the 2017 financial year. Based on a combination of the Auditors’ work to date, the report of the Financial Secretary and the analysis undertaken by the Panel, the Panel recommended the approval of the 2016 Accounts to the General Council in their capacity as Charity Trustees and their submission to the General Assembly. This was agreed by the General Council at its April meeting.

9. The Panel noted the Summary of Congregations Annual Statistical Returns collated by the Financial Secretary’s Department for inclusion in the General Assembly Reports (see Support Services Appendix 5). In regard to membership, the statistics show a continuing decline in the number of “Families” and “Persons of All Ages.” Despite this decline, figures for congregational assessable income showed an increase of 1.5% in Northern Ireland and a slight decline of 0.4% in the Republic of Ireland. The Statistics include for the first time a split between the “Number on Rolls in Sunday School and Bible Classes” and “Attending Non-Uniformed Organisations for Children” – 17,500 and 20,628 respectively. The panel also noted the Summary of Presbytery Annual Financial Returns for 2016, with, at the time of writing, information still awaited from four Presbyteries (see Support Services Appendix 6).

10. The Committee agreed that approval should be given to the pre-65 retirements of the Revs D Chapman (Second Islandmagee), B McManus (Cloughwater), S J Hanna (Glendermott), H Robinson (Downshire), and A Bill (Saintfield Road, Belfast). In the case of the Rev D Chapman and Rev S J Hanna approval was granted by the General Council as both ministers retired prior to the General Assembly. An appropriate resolution is attached. Since the last General Assembly the following were granted leave to retire at or over age 65, by their Presbyteries; Rev S J Faris (Aghada and Cork), Rev J Gibson (Kingsmill and Jerrettspass), Rev Issac Thompson (First Cookstown), Very Rev Dr D I McNie (Trinity, Ballymoney), Rev D B Knox (Lambeg, Harmony Hill), Rev K A McBride (Orangfield) and Rev S A Finlay (Annalong).

11. The Committee discussed a change to the current arrangements for the appointment of Members Nominated Trustees to the PCI Pension Scheme (2009). At present, in accordance with arrangements agreed by the General Assembly in 2010, five of the twelve Scheme Trustees are Member Nominated: three are Ministers; one is a member of staff; and one is a deaconess, Irish mission worker or missionary. In order to ensure that all five places are taken up, the Committee agreed to a proposal for flexibility in the membership so that if one of the constituencies fails to nominate a member that it may be filled by an MNT from one of the other constituencies. With the agreement of the General Council a suitable resolution is appended.

12. The Panel considered a paper from the Financial Secretary on the implications for the PCI as an employer of the planned increase in the state pension age to 66 for both men and women. The new retirement age is to be phased in over the period December 2018 to October 2020. (A further increase to 67 is planned to be introduced between 2026 and 2028, but the government has indicated its intention to review the timing of this.) In 2010 the General Assembly passed a resolution: "That the General Assembly agrees the normal pensionable retirement age be kept in line with the male State Pension Age (Northern Ireland)". With hindsight this resolution could have been better worded as it is unclear how this would impact on a member's pension accrual, if at all, after December 2010. Meanwhile members are continuing to accrue pension benefits on the basis of retirement at age 65. The Panel agreed, subject to the approval of the General Council (which was granted), to advise the Pension Trustees of the employer's wish to increase the scheme pensionable retirement age to the state retirement age of 66 by October 2020.

13. As a separate matter the Panel considered the present requirements in the Code regarding the retirement of ministers. At the Panel's request, the General Council agreed to appoint a Task Group to undertake a review of references to the retirement of ministers in the Code and bring recommendations to the Council, along with necessary Code changes, for submission to the 2018 General Assembly.

14. The Committee endorsed a proposal from its Finance Panel to recommend to the General Assembly that the merits of adopting a 31st August financial year end rather than 31st December should be explored further. A change would ensure the financial year reflects the "church year" in terms of many church activities and it would also facilitate the preparation of Trustee Reports as part of the annual reporting arrangements. It is assumed the General Assembly will continue to meet in June. The General Council accepted a proposal for a period

of consultation with a further report to the 2018 General Assembly. Any change would not come into effect before 2020. A resolution seeking approval to explore this matter further, followed by a period of consultation, is attached.

15. Finally, the summaries of the annual statistical returns from Congregations and the finances of Presbyteries for 2016 are appended in Support Services Committee Appendices 5 and 6.

HUMAN RESOURCES PANEL

16. The Committee endorsed a recommendation from the Panel at its October meeting for an increase in the sterling and euro salary scales of administrative and executive staff of 1.5% and 1.0% respectively – the same increases as in the Basic Ministerial Minimum. An overview of current staffing is outlined in Support Services Appendix 7.

17. At its March meeting the Committee noted the Panel's agreement to a proposal from the Council for Social Witness to an increase in salaries designed to maintain the current monetary differentials between CSW posts in residential homes, given the increase in the National Living Wage to £7.50 in April 2017. This increase will place further financial pressure on our residential homes.

18. Throughout the year the Committee noted that work had progressed on the development of administrative and executive level "task lists" associated with the planned introduction of a new staff appraisal system.

19. The Committee also welcomed progress in developing a Tender proposal document for HR (and Health and Safety) support services to the Church to replace the existing current contract at the appropriate time.

PROPERTY PANEL

20. Much of the work of the Property Panel during 2016/17 has concerned the implementation of the General Assembly's decisions in 2016 on the improvement of conference facilities in Assembly Buildings involving the refurbishment of the ground floor and the associated closure of the Spires Shopping Mall. The Committee welcomed progress, including the appointment of Design Teams for the Mall and for the new exhibition space in the current reception area. Planning approval has been obtained and appropriate notices have been issued to Mall tenants. At the time of writing, six contractors had been shortlisted for tendering (with a seventh in reserve), following an advertisement in local newspapers and the completion of a Pre-Qualification Quality Assessment Report. A tender report should be available in early May and the Project is currently on schedule. Meanwhile discussions are to take place with Council Secretaries over the opportunities presented by the changes to the ground floor.

21. There have been positive responses with regard to potential funding sources, especially with reference to the planned Visitors Exhibition in the Reception area and the possible provision of accommodation for the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland. The general delay in setting a 2017-18 budget for Northern Ireland Departments and Agencies has meant that, at the time of writing, no grant aid had been committed.

22. At its April meeting, the Panel received an update from the Assembly Solicitor on compensation for tenants in the Mall. It endorsed the proposed settlement of a compensation claim from one of the longer standing tenants. It

noted that discussions were continuing with other tenants, which were unlikely to result in substantial claims. The Panel was unable to agree the Service Charge Budget for 2017, given the planned closure and changes to the Mall. Further discussions are to be held to explore the staffing and services required in the future and the associated financial implications for the Service Charge Budget. The retail units affected by the closure should all be vacated by early July 2017.

23. At its March meeting the Committee noted the Panel's review of the accounts of the Retired Ministers House Fund for 2016 and received a satisfactory update on the work of the Fund. At its April meeting the Property Panel agreed an increase in rents of 1.5% for the Retired Ministers House Fund properties, effective 1 April 2017.

24. Finally, the Committee was pleased to note a positive report on income from Assembly Buildings conference facilities and room hire, plus future bookings.

CREATIVE PRODUCTION PANEL

25. The Committee welcomed the appointment of the new Panel and its early work in devising organisational values for PCI, together with the identification of important messages for key audiences. At its March meeting the Committee endorsed new policies prepared by the Panel in respect of Press and Media and Social Media. Work is continuing on other policies, including a draft Magazine Policy.

IT TASK GROUP

26. The Committee welcomed the two reports it received from its IT Task Group. It noted that video recording and live streaming facilities had been permanently installed in the Assembly Hall and that work had been completed on a number of high priority projects. The Committee agreed at its March meeting that the time had come to replace the Task Group with an IT Panel. It agreed the remit of the Panel and the appointment of Mr Alan Meban as its Convener.

JOHN HUNTER, Convener

SUPPORT SERVICES

APPENDIX 1

2017 ASSESSMENT RATES AND ALLOCATIONS

The proposed rates of Assessment for 2017 are:

Assessment Band	Assessable Income (£)		Assessment Rate
	From	To	
1	0	10,999	0.00%
2	11,000	64,999	14.50%
3	65,000	129,999	10.75%
4	130,000	194,999	7.25%
5	195,000	259,999	3.50%
6	260,000	and above	0.00%

(Note: the above is unchanged from 2016)

It is proposed that amounts collected through the assessment system are allocated on the following percentages:

Assessment Fund	Projected Allocation for 2017 £	Projected Allocation 2017 %	Actual Allocation 2016
Central Ministry Fund	£1,800,000	41.76%	38.78%
Retired Ministers Fund	£400,000	9.28%	17.10%
Widows of Ministers Fund	£425,000	9.86%	6.84%
Prolonged Disability Fund	£25,000	0.58%	0.57%
Incidental Fund	670,000	15.55%	15.96%
Church House Repairs Fund	470,000	10.90%	8.44%
Special Assembly	25,000	0.58%	0.57%
Ministerial Development Fund	100,000	2.32%	2.28%
Sick Supply Fund	15,000	0.35%	0.34%
Students' Bursary Fund	380,000	8.82%	9.12%
TOTAL	4,310,000	100.00%	100.00%

SUPPORT SERVICES

APPENDIX 2

2017 INCIDENTAL FUND BUDGET

PAYMENTS TO OR ON BEHALF OF COUNCILS	£
(i) General Council	
General Work	2,500
Assembly Arrangements	20,000
Church Relations Committee	
- Irish Council of Churches	22,200
- Irish Inter-Church Meeting	11,000
- Conference of European Churches	5,100
- Comm Protestant Churches Europe	1,300
- World Comm Reformed Churches	13,000
- General Church Relations (expenses)	<u>1,500</u>
	76,600
(ii) Council for Public Affairs	
General Work incl conferences	500
(iii) Council for Congregational Life and Witness	
General Assembly Priorities	5,000
Good Relations Panel	<u>—</u>
	5,000
(iv) Linkage Commission	
General Work	6,500
Church Architecture Committee	<u>8,500</u>
	15,000
(v) Other Expenditure	
Moderator expenses allowance	28,000
Printing for General Assembly	9,000
Postage, admin and other	12,500
Insurance	5,000
Travel General Assembly and Councils etc.	9,500
Allowance to Congregations re Conveners	9,500

GENERAL COUNCIL

39

Legal fees	25,000
Costs of General Secretary's Department	332,682
Support Services Charges	101,000
Education Grants	9,600
UK Borders Agency	500
Presbyterian Historical Society	22,250
Youth Link	10,500
Churches Legislation Advisory	2,500
Peninsula Employment Law and Health and Safety	<u>17,300</u>
TOTAL	<u><u>691,932</u></u>

SUPPORT SERVICES**APPENDIX 3****2017 RATES AND ALLOWANCES****(a) Basic and Appropriate Ministerial Minimum**

	Northern Ireland		Republic of Ireland	
	2017	2016	2017	2016
	£	£	€	€
Basic Ministerial Minimum	25,659	25,280	39,165	38,777
After 1 years' service	25,916	25,533	39,557	39,165
After 2 years' service	26,173	25,786	39,949	39,553
After 3 years' service	26,430	26,039	40,341	39,941
After 4 years' service	26,687	26,292	40,733	40,329
After 5 years' service	26,944	26,545	41,125	40,717
After 6 years' service	27,201	26,798	41,517	41,105
After 7 years' service	27,458	27,051	41,909	41,493
After 8 years' service	27,715	27,304	42,301	41,881
After 9 years' service	27,972	27,557	42,693	42,269
After 10 years' service	28,229	27,810	43,085	42,657
After 11 years' service	28,486	28,063	43,477	43,045
After 12 years' service	28,743	28,316	43,869	43,433
After 13 years' service	29,000	28,569	44,261	43,821
After 14 years' service	29,257	28,822	44,653	44,209
After 15 years' service	29,514	29,075	45,045	44,597
After 16 years' service	29,771	29,328	45,437	44,985
After 17 years' service	30,028	29,581	45,829	45,373
After 18 years' service	30,285	29,834	46,221	45,761
After 19 years' service	30,542	30,087	46,613	46,149
After 20 years' service	30,799	30,340	47,005	46,537

(b) Family Grants

	2017	2016
Birth to 10 yrs	£362(€1,049)	£357(€1,039)
11 to 15 yrs	£546(€1,658)	£538(€1,642)
16 yrs and over		
– At school	£820(€3,066)	£808(€3,036)
– At university	£2,728(€5,115)	£2,688(€5,064)
Bands (joint incomes), Reductions		
– Nil up to	£29,160(€43,856)	£28,729(€43,422)
– Up to (£1 for every £5)	£39,230(€58,989)	£38,650(€58,405)
– Above (£1 for every £2)	£39,230(€58,989)	£38,650(€58,405)

(c) Retired Ministers, Widows of Ministers and Prolonged Disability Funds

Retired Ministers Fund maximum retirement pension for 2017 is £12,242

Widows of Ministers Fund maximum annuity for 2017 is £6,732

Prolonged Disability Fund maximum grant for 2017 is £12,130

SUPPORT SERVICES

APPENDIX 4

REVISED RULES FOR THE PROLONGED DISABILITY FUND

Ministers' Prolonged Disability Fund
(Initially adopted by the 2003 General Assembly, amended in 2006 and 2011, and the current version approved by the 2017 General Assembly)

RULES

The provision of benefits under these Rules, and their alteration and withdrawal, are entirely at the absolute discretion of the General Council (the Council) of the General Assembly (the Assembly) acting through the Support Services Committee (the Committee) or such committee or officers as the Council, with the approval of the Assembly, may determine; and, on appeal at the absolute discretion of the Judicial Commission.

No Minister or Licentiate who may, in accordance with these Rules, fulfil the criteria to be eligible to benefits shall be entitled as of right to do so.

These Rules are subject to the absolute discretion of the Council and, as the case may be, on appeal to the absolute discretion of the Judicial Commission, and should be so read and interpreted.

1. The Object

The object of the Ministers' Prolonged Disability Fund (the Fund) is to provide benefits according to these Rules to approved eligible Ministers and Licentiates of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) who are unable to fulfil their calling due to prolonged sickness or disability.

2. Property and Assets

The property and assets of the Fund shall be held by (and on behalf of) the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (as defined in Par 122 of the Code).

3. Administration

The administration of the Fund shall be supervised by the Council acting through the Committee or such committee or officers as the Council, with the approval of the Assembly, may determine. The expenses of setting up and administering the Fund shall be paid out of it.

4. Resources of the Fund

- (a) The Fund shall be made up of contributions assessed on congregations and agencies, bequests, donations, endowments and other income received for the benefit of the Fund.
- (b) Each congregation or agency of the Church shall pay a contribution to the Fund in respect of each eligible Minister and Licentiate serving in that congregation or agency at a rate which shall be determined annually by the Assembly on the advice of the Council.
- (c) If, in the judgement of the Assembly, the Fund shall no longer be required to meet the object in Rule 1 above, any remaining assets shall be transferred to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Pension Scheme (2009) or, at the request of the Council, such other Fund as the Assembly shall decide.

5. Rules of the Fund

The Rules of the Fund are made by the Assembly and no amendment shall be made unless notice of such amendment has been received by the preceding Assembly and the proposed amendment is thereafter approved by the Assembly.

Amendments required as a matter of urgency may be submitted to the Assembly for adoption as an Interim Act under the Code Par 112(9).

6. Eligibility to apply for Benefits

Ministers or Licentiates who are contributing members of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Pension Scheme (2009) and are under 65 years of age are eligible to apply for benefits from the Fund provided that, due to prolonged sickness or disability, they

- (a) resign or offer to resign any chaplaincy or other remunerated post (Code Par 221(1)); and
- (b) resign and are received as Ministers Without Charge under the care of the Presbytery (Code Par 220(4)).

An individual will cease to be eligible on the earliest of the following:

- (a) The date on which they cease to be a Minister of the PCI;
- (b) the date of their 65th birthday;
- (c) the date they die;
- (d) in the case of an applicant receiving benefits from the Fund, the date they undertake any other work without the knowledge and written consent of the Committee;
- (e) the date they retire and receive benefits from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Pension Scheme (2009).

BENEFITS

7. Incapacity Benefit

- (a) An Incapacity Benefit will be paid to approved applicants. The rate(s) of Incapacity Benefit shall be fixed each year by the Council on the recommendation of the Committee, but will not be related to the applicants' previous PCI remuneration or other emoluments but will reflect whether a post is full or part time.
- (b) Where approved applicants would, if they had not become eligible under Rule 6 above to apply for benefits, have qualified for Family Grants under Par 315(4) of the Code, the Committee, with the approval of the Council, may pay a Family Benefit to approved applicants. The rate(s) of benefits shall be fixed each year by the Council on the recommendation of the Committee and shall take account of Total Family Income.

8. Pension Contributions and Life Assurance Cover

Contributions to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Pension Scheme (2009) will be paid by the Fund on behalf of approved applicants who are in receipt of the Incapacity Benefit from the Fund. The level of income upon which the contributions will be based shall be fixed each year by the Council on the recommendation of the Committee made in the light of monies available in the Fund or reasonably to be expected; and

Life Assurance Cover will be maintained under the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Pension Scheme (2009) for those applicants in receipt of the Incapacity Benefit from the Fund subject to such cover in respect of the particular applicant or claimant continuing to be available at reasonable cost.

9. Deferred Period

- (a) The deferred period (the deferred period) is one during which no benefits will be payable to an approved applicant. The deferred period will run until the latest of:
 - (i) 3 months from the first day of incapacity;
 - (ii) the applicant resigning their charge due to prolonged sickness or disability and having been received as Minister Without Charge under the care of the Presbytery (Code Par 220(4)); and
 - (iii) the cessation of any payment to the applicant during their incapacity by the congregation, Central Ministry Fund or any other source within the PCI.
- (b) The deferred period will normally be a period of continuous absence, but the Committee may link periods of absence of at least 4 weeks' duration through incapacity from the same cause provided that the deferred period is completed within two years of the commencement of the first absence due to that incapacity.

10. Payment of Benefit

The Benefits become payable to an approved applicant on the first day after the end of the deferred period. The Incapacity Benefit is paid in arrears in equal calendar monthly instalments. A proportionate payment will be made for a period of less than a month.

The Benefits will be paid to an approved applicant for the duration of their incapacity, as long as the individual remains eligible and is under 65 years of age.

The Incapacity Benefit is payable in pounds sterling to the beneficiary's account in the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland. If a beneficiary requests payment in Euro, this will be based on the rates of exchange ruling on the dates of payment.

11. Notification of Changes

Anyone in receipt of the Benefit from the Fund must notify the Committee immediately of any change in their condition or circumstances, which would, or might, affect payment of benefit. For example, changes that must be notified would include:

- (a) the beneficiary taking on any work or employment whether paid or not
- (b) any change in the beneficiary's health, medical condition or prognosis

12. Proportionate Benefit

If a beneficiary, with the written approval of the Committee, is able to carry out any work on a reduced basis, they are entitled to a Proportionate Benefit.

The amount of Proportionate Benefit in any calendar year shall be calculated as follows:

$$\frac{(\text{Basic Ministerial Minimum minus Actual Earnings}) \times 100}{\text{Basic Ministerial Minimum}} = \%$$

In this Rule: 'Basic Ministerial Minimum' means the amount set under Code Par 314; and 'Actual Earnings' means all income from any work.

13. Linked Benefits Claims

In the event of a beneficiary returning to work and then being absent from work within 26 weeks of their return, the Benefits will resume from the date of the resumption of incapacity provided that the Committee is satisfied that both periods of incapacity are due to the same or a related cause.

14. Benefits during Retraining

Where, with the agreement of the Committee, a beneficiary undertakes retraining, the Benefits will continue to be payable for as long as the Committee at its discretion deems appropriate.

CLAIMING BENEFIT

15. Notification of Absence

An applicant or prospective applicant is required to notify the Committee, in writing, of their prolonged absence, due to incapacity, at least 6 weeks before the end of the deferred period. This will ensure that the process of claiming can commence. No Benefits will be paid for any period of time before written notice of the incapacity is received by the Committee.

16. Making a Claim

Claims must be submitted in the form requested by the Committee and must be made at least 4 weeks before the expected end of the deferred period. Benefits arising from approved claims will be paid from the end of the deferred period or the date of approval, if later due to late submission of claims.

17. Evidence Required

An applicant must provide the Committee with all information requested at any time by the Committee to enable their claim to be investigated and/or to be reviewed from time to time. The information requested shall include the following:

- (a) Proof of age.
- (b) Medical evidence to substantiate incapacity and continuing incapacity, including –
 - (i) evidence that the impairment is of sufficient severity and duration to satisfy the test of incapacity in Rule 18
 - (ii) evidence that the applicant/prospective applicant is under the continuing care of an appropriate medical practitioner
 - (iii) evidence which demonstrates to the satisfaction of reasonable medical opinion that all currently available appropriate treatment options have been thoroughly investigated and appropriately explained to the applicant/prospective applicant.

The applicant or beneficiary may be required to undergo medical examination by such medical practitioners or consultants at such times and places as the Committee may determine. The applicant will provide samples for any tests, including blood and saliva tests, if required. The Committee shall be entitled to accept responsibility for the cost of any medical examination and the costs incurred by the applicant or beneficiary in attending the examination.

Failure to comply with the provisions of this paragraph will entitle the Committee to decline a claim or cease the Benefits or take such other steps as it deems appropriate in the circumstances.

18. Eligibility for Benefits

Subject to the provisions of Rules 6, 9 and 17 an applicant will be deemed to be eligible for the Benefits if the Committee is satisfied that:

- (a) they are unable, by reason of illness or injury, to fulfil the material and substantial duties of their office in the PCI, and

- (b) they are unable, by reason of illness or injury, to follow any occupation for which they are reasonably fitted by virtue of their training, education or experience (whether as a Minister or Licentiate or otherwise).

19. Appeal

- (a) Any appeal against a decision regarding the grant, alteration, refusal or termination of Benefits from the fund shall be lodged within twenty-one days with the Convener of the General Council, who shall refer the appeal to the Judicial Commission, whose decision shall be final.
- (b) The notification of appeal shall state the grounds thereof and shall be accompanied by documentary evidence. Any party shall if requested by the Judicial Commission submit any additional documentary evidence.
- (c) The decision of the Judicial Commission on appeal shall be final and binding.

20. Administration and other Rules

- (a) Payments in respect of incapacity are made without any admission of legal liability in respect of such incapacity on the part of the PCI or any of its congregations or agencies
- (b) All correspondence in respect of this Fund shall be sent to:
The Financial Secretary,
Assembly Buildings,
2-10 Fisherwick Place,
Belfast BT1 6DW.

21. Interpretation

Headings are for ease of reference only.

SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE
APPENDIX 5
ANNUAL STATISTICAL RETURNS

TABLE ONE

PERSONS AND AGENCIES

	2015	2016	Increase	Decrease
Retired Ministers	236	240	4	0
Ministers in Active Duty	380	371	0	9
Retired Missionaries	15	16	1	0
Missionaries in Active Duty	40	39	0	1
Total Ministers and Missionaries	671	666	0	5
Licensings during year	19	12	0	7
Congregations	539	538	0	1
Total Families	97,731	95,895	0	1,836
Persons of All Ages	225,228	224,069	0	1,159
Contributors to FWO or Stipend	75,321	73,391	0	1,930
Baptisms	1,429	1,336	0	93
Admitted to Lord's Table				
for First Time	1,806	1,575	0	231
Communicants	98,674	97,943	0	731
Attended at Least One				
Communion during year	60,794	59,738	0	1,056
Ruling Elders in Kirk Session	6,039	5,903	0	136
Number on Rolls in Sunday				
School and Bible Classes (Note 1)	42,062	17,500	0	24,562
Attending Non-Uniformed				
Organisations for Children (Note 2)	0	20,628	20,628	0

Note 1. From 2011 to 2015 includes numbers enrolled in children's and youth ministries under control of Kirk Sessions. From 2016 only Sunday School and Bible Classes included.

Note 2. Only reported from 2016

TABLE TWO
CONGREGATIONAL INCOME

	2015		2016		N.I.	% Difference	R.of I.
	£	€	£	€			
Assessable Income (gross)	35,438,668	3,870,382	35,972,865	3,852,720	1.5%	-0.5%	
Building Fund etc	16,634,008	1,057,501	16,754,333	1,348,702	0.7%	27.5%	
Missions and Charities	7,525,324	524,321	7,515,712	479,513	-0.1%	-8.5%	
Raised from other sources	6,760,124	784,191	6,257,829	1,411,461	-7.4%	80.0%	
Organisational Income	6,015,307	247,004	5,914,038	238,001	-1.7%	-3.6%	
Total Receipts	72,373,431	6,483,399	72,414,777	7,330,397	0.1%	13.1%	

TABLE THREE
CONGREGATIONAL EXPENDITURE

	2015		2016		% Difference N.I.	% Difference R.of I.
	£	€	£	€		
Paid to ministers, other salaries and wages, allowances to ministers and others	18,253,221	1,576,085	19,060,597	1,588,296	4.4%	0.8%
Payments under Assembly Assessments	6,743,170	772,452	6,094,203	670,493	-9.6%	-13.2%
Building, Repairs etc.	16,527,363	1,208,836	14,362,399	971,513	-13.1%	-19.6%
United Appeal Schemes	3,209,481	254,934	3,162,260	235,729	-1.5%	-7.5%
Supplementary Schemes						
Other Religious and Charitable Objects	7,421,670	700,931	6,955,035	717,044	-6.3%	2.3%
Organisations	5,855,896	207,414	5,822,025	365,716	-0.6%	76.3%
General Expenses	11,100,315	1,386,515	10,752,713	1,497,291	-3.1%	8.0%
Total Payments	69,111,116	6,107,167	66,209,232	6,046,082	-4.2%	-1.0%

TABLE FOUR
CONGREGATIONAL FUND BALANCES

	Opening 2015		Closing 2015		% Difference	
	£	€	£	€	N.I.	R. of I.
Unrestricted Funds	25,453,423	2,364,960	27,075,211	2,919,068	6.4%	23.4%
Restricted Funds	83,563,138	7,629,850	90,044,237	8,382,106	7.8%	9.9%
Total Fund Balances	109,016,561	9,994,810	117,119,448	11,301,174	7.4%	13.1%

TABLE FIVE**MINISTERS' INCOME AND ALLOWANCES (SEE NOTES)**

	2015	2016	
	£	£	% Difference
Total Ministerial Income (active Duty - Note2)	11,490,633	11,607,735	1.0%
Stipend Paid	9,873,163	10,340,800	4.7%
Allowances			
Light, Heat, etc			
Ministerial Duties			
Total	2,671,236	2,630,561	-1.5%

Note 1. Figures for the Republic of Ireland have been converted into £STG using the average value of the Euro for the relevant year (£1/€1.2248)

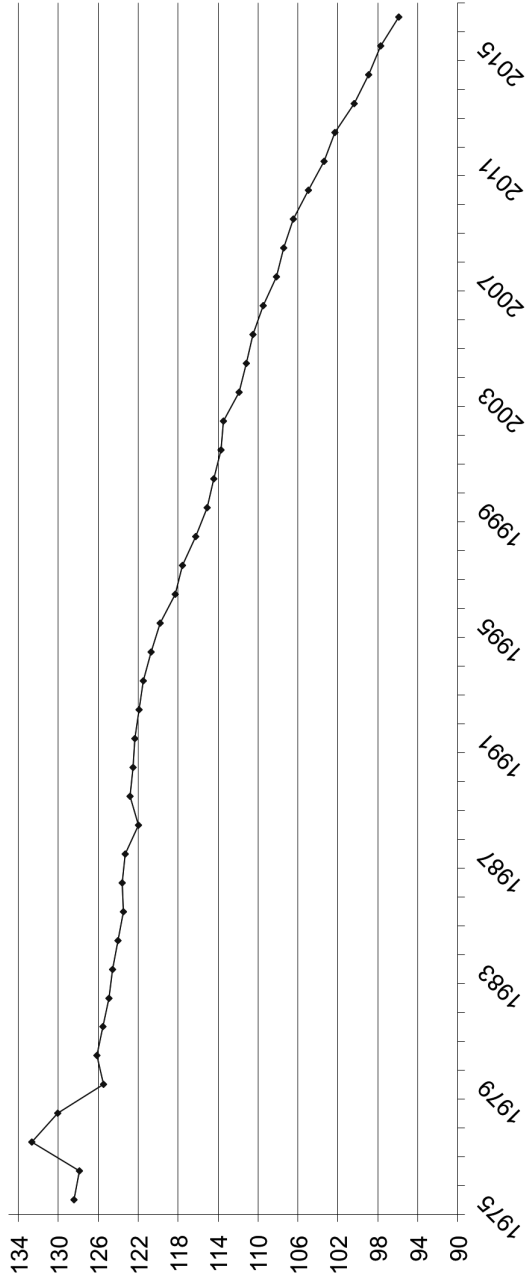
Note 2. This refers only to 344 ministers in charge of congregations, excluding Assistants, Chaplains, Missionaries, Professors, Administrative Officers and Ministers in recognised service in special work.

TABLE SIX**PERSONS**

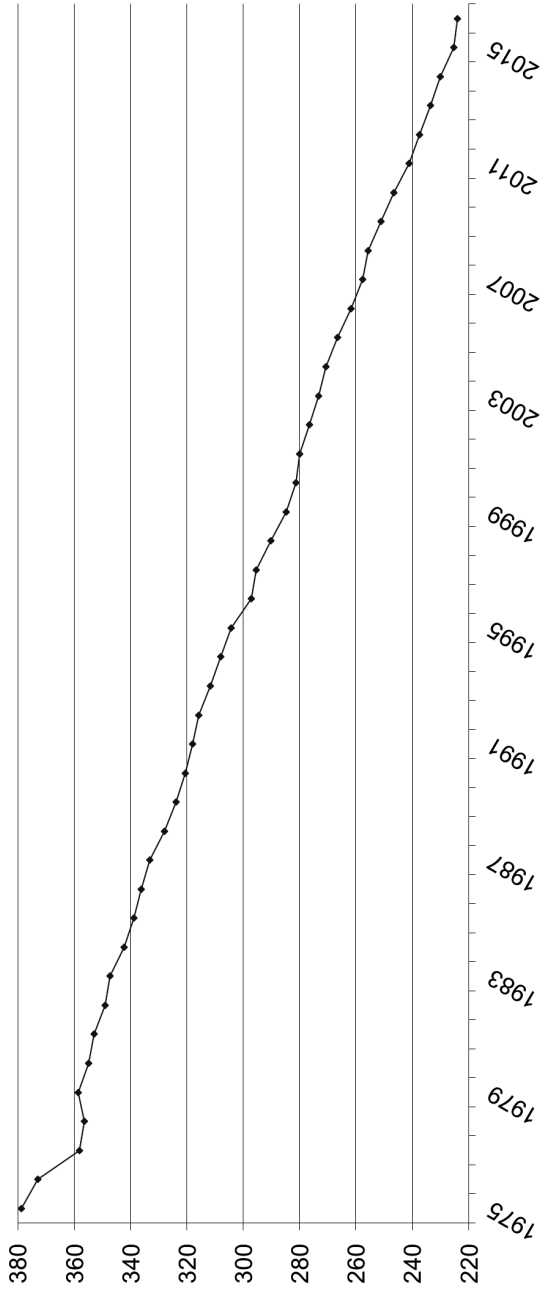
	2015	2016
Persons who are aged 18 and under	40,324	39,959
Average attendance at Sunday Worship - Morning	73,276	71,250
- Evening	17,317	17,035
Average attendance at Bible Study/Fellowship (Note1)	-	20,347

Note 1. Only reported from 2016

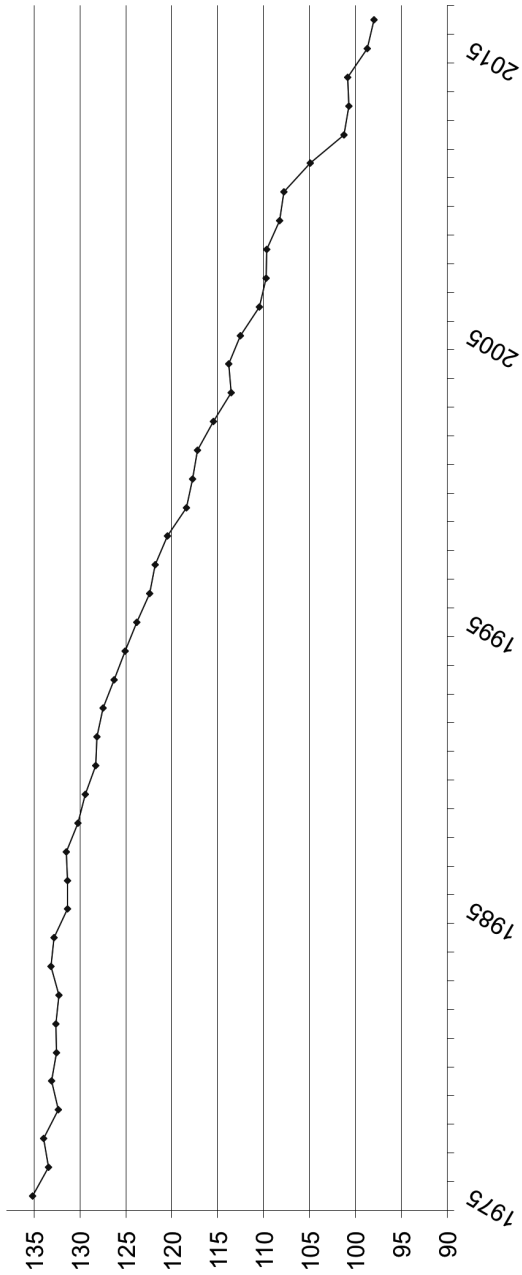
FAMILIES ('000)



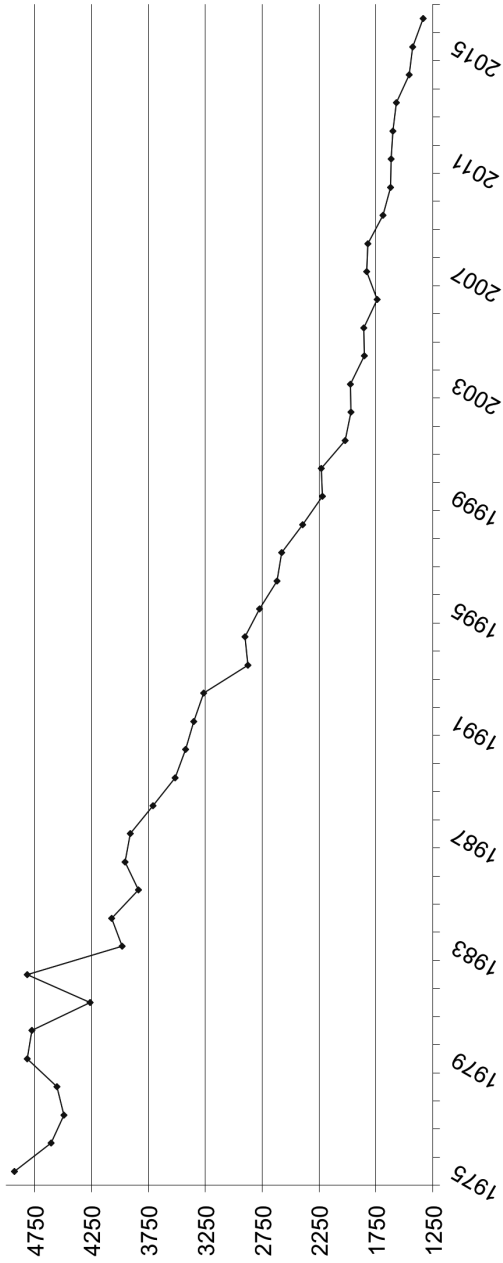
PERSONS ('000)



COMMUNICANTS ('000)



BAPTISMS



SUPPORT SERVICES

APPENDIX 7

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STAFFING

STERLING SALARY SCALES OF STAFF IN POST IN ASSEMBLY BUILDINGS ON 1 JANUARY 2017

EXECUTIVE POSTS

Scale 1 (£24,260 - £28,823)

IT Support Manager, (ITD)
Presbyterian Women Support Officer (CL&W)

Scale 2 (£27,397 - £32,957)

Property Support Officer (0.8 post) (FSD)
Children's Development Officer (CL&W)
Finance Manager (FSD)
Creative Production Support Officer
(including Editorial Responsibilities) (CPD)
Women's Ministry and PW Development Officer (CL&W)
Finance Manager (FSD)
Creative Production Support Officer (Press and Web) (CPD)
Payroll and Assessment Manager (FSD)
Personnel Support Officer (PD)
Youth Development Officer (CL&W)
"Taking Care" Programme Co-ordinator
Discipleship Development Officer (CL&W)
Mission Support Officer (Partnership) (MD)

Scale 3 (£30,654 - £37,361)

Assistant Residential and Supported Services Manager (CSW)
Mission Support Officer (Member Care) (MD)
Head of Creative Production (CPD)
Programme Development Officer (CL&W)
Public Affairs Officer (GSD)
Training Development Officer (CL&W)
Building Manager (PSD)
Mission Development Officer (CL&W)

Scale 4 (£33,786 - £42,210)

Senior Finance Manager (FSD)
 Head of Personnel (PD)
 IT Development and Support Manager (ITD)
 Residential and Supported Services Manager (CSW)

Scale 6 (£40,125 - £48,884)

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 (£45,527 - £58,562)

Clerk of Assembly and General Secretary
 Financial Secretary

ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED POSTS**Scale 1 (£13,808 - £15,947)**

Telephonist (0.4 post) (PSD)

Scale 2 (£14,857 - £17,182)

Administrative Assistant (CL&W)
 Administrative Assistant (0.7 post) (FSD)
 Personnel Assistant (0.74 post) (PD)
 Administrative Assistant, PW (CL&W)
 Administrative Assistant (GSD)
 Administrative Assistant (Job Share) (MD)
 'Taking Care' Administrator (CSW)
 Administrative Assistant (0.68 post) (Purchase Ledger) (FSD)
 Handyperson (PSD)
 Personnel/Administrative Assistant (0.8 post) (PD/CSW)
 Assistant Receptionist and Telephonist (PSD) (higher salary protected)

Scale 3 (£16,672 - £19,277)

Administrative Assistant (Sales Ledger) (job share 0.4 post)
 Senior Personnel Assistant (Job Share) (PD)
 Senior Administrative Assistant (job share 1.2 post) (CSW)
 Senior Administrative Assistant (0.5 post) (MD)
 Deputy Buildings Manager (PSD)
 Senior Administrative Assistant, PW (CL&W)
 Information Officer/Receptionist (0.6 post) (PSD)
 Senior Administrative Assistant (Partnerships)
 Senior Administrative Assistant (Member Care) (MD)

Scale 4 (£18,890 - £21,754)

Payroll and Administrative Assistant (1.77 posts) (FSD)
 Senior Administrative Assistants (x 2 job share) (CL&W)
 Senior Communications Assistant (Press and Web) (0.6 post) (CPD)
 Senior Administrative Assistant (0.6 post) (FSD)
 Senior Communications Assistant (Pub) (2 x 0.6 post) (CPD)
 Senior Administrative Assistant (CL&W)

Scale 5 (£20,668 - £23,861)

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 2 (ITD)
 Financial and Administrative Assistant (0.74 post) (FSD)
 IT Support and Development Officer (0.8 post) (ITD)

Scale 5 (Enhanced) (£22,825 - £26,093)

Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (CL&W)
 Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (MD)
 Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (CSW)

Scale 5 (Enhanced pt 25-33) (£22,825 - £27,397)

Senior Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (GSD)

**STERLING SALARY SCALES OF STAFF IN POST
 IN OTHER LOCATIONS ON 1 JANUARY 2017**

EXECUTIVE POSTS**Scale 2 (£27,397 - £32,957)**

College Registrar/Bursar, Union College
 College Librarian, Union College
 Minister/Ministry Co-ordinator, Kinghan Church (CSW)
 Chaplain in Residence (MD)
 University Chaplain UUI, (MD)
 Lecturer in Historical Theology, Union College
 Lecturer in Biblical Studies, Union College

Scale 4 (£33,786 - £42,210)

Dean of Ministerial Studies and Development (T in M)

Scale 5 (£37,361 – £45,527)

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

Scale 6 (£40,125 - £48,884)

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

Scale 7 (£45,527 - £58,562)

Principal of Union Theological College

ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED POSTS**Scale 1 (£13,808 - £15,947)**

Clerical Officer (5 p/t) OPS (CSW)
Receptionist (Term Time), Union College

Scale 2 (£14,857 - £17,182)

Clerical Officer - Carlisle House (part time) (CSW)
Clerical Officer, (1 FT and 3 PT) OPS (CSW)
Clerical Officer, Kinghan Church (part time) (CSW)
Custodian, Union College (T in M)
Library Assistant (part time), Union College

Scale 3 (£16,672 - £19,277)

Marriage and Guidance Co-ordinator (CL&W)
Administrative Assistant (part time), Union College
Senior Clerical Officer (part time), Carlisle House (CSW)
Senior Secretary, Union College (0.6 post)

Scale 4 (£18,890 - £21,754)

Administrator, Derryvolgie (MD)
Senior Secretary, (2 posts) Union College
Deputy Librarian, Union College

Scale 5 (Enhanced) (£22,825 - £26,093)

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

UNITED APPEAL COMMITTEE

1. The committee met on the following dates:
 - Friday 9 February – to review 2016 accounts, response to the Appeal and grants to Councils
 - Friday 31 March – to prepare for meetings with Councils in relation to their 2018 grants requests
 - Monday 3 April – to meet with Councils and discuss their budget submissions and then to consider recommendations to the General Council for the 2018 Appeal.

The 2016 Appeal

2. The Committee wishes to express its thanks to the Congregations who supported the United Appeal in 2016. When contributions for the 2016 Appeal were closed at the end of January 2017, £3,218,252 had been received from congregations towards the Appeal Target of £3,400,000, a shortfall of some £181,748. Once late contributions for the 2015 Appeal, trust fund income and donations were taken into account the shortfall against budgeted income was £53,984.

3. During 2016 the Council for Congregational Life and Witness returned previously allocated grants of £255,700. This was primarily due to timing of staff appointments to that Council following the restructuring from Boards to Councils.

4. In 2016 406 congregations (2015:361) met or exceeded their target of honour, 121 congregations (2015: 174) did not achieve their target and 8 congregations (2015: 8) had made no contribution when the accounts for 2016 were closed. The Committee would remind these congregations of their obligation under the Code Par 42.

5. The Committee was pleased to be able to pay in full the proposed allocation of grants of £3,527,600 to Councils for 2016.

6. Last year the Committee appealed to congregations, through Presbyteries, to remit the Appeal donations as they were received. While some Presbyteries clearly responded to this request the Committee have to report that 59% of 2016 donations (2015: 66%) were received by the Financial Secretary's Department in December 2016 and January 2017. Congregations should be aware that the United Appeal is distributed to the Mission Councils on a regular basis, spread throughout the year. In order for the Committee to meet its obligation to fund the running of the Mission Councils and prevent them from going into overdraft, a substantial United Appeal cash-flow reserve has to be maintained. A lesser reserve would be necessary if Congregations did not hold on to United Appeal donations until the year end. The Committee again appeal to Congregational Committees to please remit United Appeal donations as they receive them.

7. A number of years ago the United Appeal Board took the decision to introduce a phased reduction in the use of reserves but this was deferred pending the restructuring of Boards to Councils. Reserves have reduced by around £1m in the last 10 years. In 2016 reserves were reduced by £143,824 which was greater than the budgeted release of £89,600. The Committee realises it will not be

possible to continue to use reserves at this rate and is now seeking to bring the level of the Appeal and grants to Councils into line over the next few years.

Promotions

8. The Promotions Panel has endeavoured to make available suitable material to congregations to raise awareness of the Appeal. Despite their excellent work many Congregations remain somewhat ignorant of the work of the Appeal and its rationale to advance the cause of Christ at home and overseas. The Committee earnestly appeals to Ministers to promote the work of the General Assembly Councils through the use of the United Appeal for Mission resources: the 'Mission Together' leaflets, United Appeal articles in the *Herald* and the range of excellent downloadable resources on the PCI website. These are designed to keep members continually updated and informed.

9. The Committee expresses its thanks to the Creative Production department for its help in producing promotional material.

The 2017 Appeal

10. The General Assembly has already agreed to an Appeal of £3,460,000 for 2017 and this is outlined in Schedules I and II of this report.

The 2018 Appeal

11. The United Appeal Committee met on two occasions, once to complete some preparatory work and once to meet with the Councils and consider the 2018 budget requests submitted. Having given careful consideration to the budget requests and each Council's presentation the United Appeal Committee drew up the allocations outlined in Schedule IV, which were agreed by the General Council for submission to the General Assembly.

12. The Appeal is to be allocated to Presbyteries on the basis of 50% contributing families and 50% assessable income and for 2018 this is outlined in Schedule III. The Committee is aware that while the Appeal increase in recent years has been of an inflationary amount, the impact on Presbyteries and Congregations (if Presbytery use the same method of allocation) means that a Presbytery/Congregation allocation can vary from the previous year not only by the increase in the Appeal but also by the movement in its assessable income and contributing families in relation to other Presbyteries/Congregations. The Committee intends to review the method of allocation during this year and will report back to the General Council and General Assembly in 2018.

13. Grants to Councils will continue be allocated on the basis of 7.5% each month with 10% withheld pending the response to the Appeal.

14. The Committee is aiming to bring the level of grants awarded into line with the Appeal and reduce the use of reserves over the next few years and has budgeted accordingly for 2018 with £77,000 to be released. The Council for Congregational Life and Witness has indicated that it intends to return a further £150,000 of unused grants in 2017 and the Committee is proposing to add this to reserves but, and in addition to the £77,000, to release it over the next three years to help ease any impact on Council grants.

15. The Committee would thank the Financial Secretary's Department for its assistance in every area of the United Appeal's work.

16. The Committee is committed to the need for a United Appeal Sunday, and a suitable resolution is appended. The first Sunday in March is recommended as United Appeal for Mission Sunday. This date is chosen as it is close to the February Presbytery meetings when the Spring 'Mission Together' leaflets are distributed.

DAVID IRVINE, Convener

UNITED APPEAL COMMITTEE**SCHEDULE I**

Presbytery	Contributing Families 2015	Assessable Income 2015 £	United Appeal 2017 £
Ards	7,093	3,466,868	320,134
Armagh	3,625	2,137,937	180,215
Ballymena	6,857	3,486,081	315,584
Belfast North	4,389	2,132,682	197,524
Belfast South	2,881	1,834,866	149,382
Belfast East	5,084	3,258,737	264,552
Carrickfergus	4,472	1,967,026	191,918
Coleraine and Limavady	5,149	2,558,534	234,292
Derry and Donegal	4,803	2,064,667	203,949
Down	4,323	1,852,402	183,298
Dromore	4,554	2,236,518	206,023
Dublin and Munster	1,131	1,332,905	86,424
Iveagh	3,390	1,624,879	151,550
Monaghan	1,048	629,171	52,604
Newry	2,735	1,259,081	119,917
Omagh	3,184	1,516,832	141,919
Route	3,372	1,466,683	143,963
Templepatrick	3,794	1,650,366	161,985
Tyrone	3,437	1,672,010	154,767
	75,321	38,148,245	3,460,000

50% of the allocation for 2017 has been based on contributing families and 50% on Assessable Income. Assessable Income for Congregations in the Republic of Ireland have been converted to euro on the basis of the average exchange rate for 2015 of 1.3780.

UNITED APPEAL COMMITTEE**SCHEDULE II**

	2017
	£
MISSION IN IRELAND	1,050,000
GLOBAL MISSION	1,000,000
TRAINING IN MINISTRY	375,000
CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS	740,000
SOCIAL WITNESS	245,000
CREATIVE PRODUCTION	200,000
	<hr/>
	3,610,000
Income from donations etc	-38,000
Release from reserves	-112,000
	<hr/>
Appeal to Congregations	3,460,000

UNITED APPEAL COMMITTEE**SCHEDULE III**

Presbytery	Contributing Families 2016	Assessable Income 2016 £	United Appeal 2018 £
Ards	6,770	3,596,194	322,848
Armagh	3,559	2,148,429	181,298
Ballymena	6,897	3,517,370	322,337
Belfast North	4,110	2,148,167	194,425
Belfast South	2,670	1,819,601	145,341
Belfast East	4,880	3,383,452	268,231
Carrickfergus	4,370	1,954,699	191,941
Coleraine and Limavady	5,040	2,622,172	237,876
Derry and Donegal	4,708	2,074,805	205,390
Down	4,207	1,857,065	183,672
Dromore	4,413	2,247,262	206,098
Dublin and Munster	1,086	1,556,759	95,772
Iveagh	3,331	1,633,305	152,740
Monaghan	1,066	687,679	56,286
Newry	2,674	1,271,119	120,817
Omagh	3,253	1,539,345	146,663
Route	3,254	1,484,969	144,246
Templepatrick	3,692	1,714,431	164,989
Tyrone	3,411	1,730,944	159,030
	73,391	38,987,767	3,500,000

50% of the allocation for 2018 has been based on contributing families and 50% on Assessable Income. Assessable Income for Congregations in the Republic of Ireland have been converted to euro on the basis of the average exchange rate for 2016 of 1.2248.

UNITED APPEAL COMMITTEE**SCHEDULE IV**

	2018
	£
MISSION IN IRELAND	1,050,000
GLOBAL MISSION	1,050,000
TRAINING IN MINISTRY	370,000
CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS	720,000
SOCIAL WITNESS	245,000
CREATIVE PRODUCTION	230,000
	<hr/>
	3,665,000
Income from donations etc.	-38,000
Release from reserves	-127,000
	<hr/>
Appeal to Congregations	3,500,000

CHARITY REGISTRATION TASK GROUP

1. The Task Group continued to meet as required, monitoring progress regarding charity registration in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

2. The Task Group noted that the Charity Regulatory Authority in the Republic of Ireland (CRA) had called forward and registered the General Assembly centrally along with those individual congregations that already had a separate CHY number. The bulk of congregations, along with the Presbyteries, will be called to register at a later stage, with no time-scale yet set by the CRA.

3. The Task Group are aware that in the Republic of Ireland there was no religious designation in charity legislation. As a result, the Task Group plans to engage with the CRA regarding issues such as the removal of charity trustees, the role of bodies supervising congregations (i.e Presbyteries and the General Assembly) etc. These matters have been successfully resolved in Northern Ireland, but the Republic of Ireland's laws are different in some significant areas.

NORTHERN IRELAND

4. The Task Group noted that congregations had been registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's (CCNI), along with the General Assembly, and that, at the time of writing, the process of registering Presbyteries was ongoing.

5. It was noted that an appeal by an elder of a congregation against the CCNI's decision to call his congregation for registration, had been dismissed by the Charity Tribunal. The elder in question had himself submitted a trustee declaration but still felt it necessary to challenge the basis of the entire process through this appeal. Not only did this result in a significant amount of work for the General Assembly Solicitor, for which the Task Group and the General Council itself are extremely grateful, but the appeal will have cost the public purse a significant amount of money.

6. The Task Group noted that the Finance Panel of the Support Services Committee had issued, to all Presbyteries in Northern Ireland, detailed guidance notes for the use of congregations in making their annual financial returns to CCNI. The first of these returns will be relating to the 2017 financial year and so while some Presbyteries have already passed this guidance material onto their congregations, most will be doing so over the coming months.

7. The Task Group has agreed to engage with CCNI regarding other, non-financial, aspects of the annual examination of accounts by the congregation's appointed independent examiner, or, where appropriate, auditor. Further guidance will be issued to all congregations on these matters, including the need for the independent examiner to have sight of appropriate minute books.

JOHN HUNTER, Convener

USE OF CONGREGATIONAL PROPERTY BY OUTSIDE BODIES TASK GROUP

1. The Task Group was appointed at the April 2016 meeting of the General Council and has met five times.

2. The General Assembly authorised the General Council to receive the Task Group's report with power to implement its recommendations. It should be noted that at this stage, only the situation in Northern Ireland has been addressed and all the documentation should be read in that light. It is intended to address the situation in the Republic of Ireland soon.

3. Having received instructions from the General Council at its October 2016 meeting, the Task Group reported to the April 2017 meeting as follows.

4. Equality Policy (NI)

The Task Group finalised the Equality Policy for Northern Ireland. The title was amended to '*Equality Policy for Licensing the use, by Bodies other than the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, of Church Halls and other properties used for Direct Mission or Ministry Purposes.*' On 1st of November, 2016, the amended document was sent to Kirk Sessions on behalf of the Council, with an instruction to adopt the policy by no later than 31st January 2017 and to report that they have done so to the February 2017 meeting of their presbytery.

5. Adoption

It is recognised that some Kirk Sessions had difficulties in adopting this policy. The Clerk has received several queries about this and on 17th November, 2016, issued a 'Questions and Answers' document to try to address some of those difficulties. At the time of writing, all Kirk Sessions have adopted the Equality Policy.

6. Policy for Presbyteries

As an Assembly Hall Equality Policy already existed, a copy of this was sent to Presbyteries with a note that, if it owns property directly, it needs to adopt this policy, amending the title as appropriate.

7. Guidelines for Licensing (NI)

Guidelines for Licencing the Use of Congregational Premises were finalised by the Task Group. The title was amended to '*Guidelines for Licensing the use, by Bodies other than the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, of Church Halls and other properties used for Direct Mission or Ministry Purposes.*' On 1st November, 2016, the amended document was sent to Kirk Sessions in Northern Ireland for consideration and action.

8. Licence to Occupy (NI)

Licence to Occupy templates for both single and recurring use have been finalised by the Task Group and distributed to Kirk Sessions in Northern Ireland.

9. Equivalent Documentation for the Republic of Ireland

There are still some matters on which the Task Group is taking advice before issuing equivalent documentation for congregations in the Republic of Ireland.

T J STOTHERS, Convener

HOLDING TRUSTEE TASK GROUP

1. During the year, Presbyteries have been collating information from congregations regarding their holding trustees, title deeds and any investments in the name of Presbytery Education Boards. The Holding Trustee Task Group is grateful to office-bearers in congregations and Presbytery Clerks for undertaking this exercise.

2. For some, the exercise has presented challenges. In some cases, mainly due to changes in Presbytery bounds or uncertainty about the location of documents, legal assistance was sought to provide the information required and this led to a delay in completing the pro-forma. Some congregations have begun processes to resolve issues that have arisen through their participation in the exercise, for example, the appointment of additional named trustees or replacement of lost deeds.

3. At the time of writing this report, questionnaires were received from 449 congregations with 94 remaining.

4. The main reason for carrying out this survey was to ascertain the number of congregations with Presbytery Education Boards as their holding trustees. From the information received, it appears that approximately 40% of the 1,560 properties are held by Presbytery Education Boards. Some Education Boards also hold congregational investments with a total value of approximately £2.5m. This information will provide the context for the Task Group to examine the question that has been raised by Presbytery Clerks, often the Secretaries of Presbytery Education Boards, as to whether Presbytery Education Boards are fit for purpose as holding trustees of congregational properties and to seek advice regarding alternatives.

5. During the exercise, questions have been asked about the relationship between charity trustees and holding trustees, the appropriate 'body' to issue instructions to holding trustees, responsibilities and liabilities of holding trusteeship (both named individuals and Presbytery Education Boards). These issues will be raised with the Task Group when it meets to consider its main task.

ROBERT HERRON, Convener

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 4

Thursday – 3.30pm

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS TASK GROUP

INTRODUCTION

1. At the 2016 General Assembly there was debate regarding the principles by which the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) relates to other denominations, or indeed alters its relationship with other denominations. During this debate, it was noted that the Council for Global Mission had undertaken to produce a report regarding the principles to be followed in deciding whether to establish, or maintain, a missional partnership with another denomination. It was recognised that while this was an important type of relationship that PCI had with other denominations, it was not the only kind of denominational relationship which PCI may wish to enter into or maintain. The Clerk of Assembly therefore gave a commitment at the General Assembly that a two-strand approach would be followed during the 2016-17 year, namely:

- (a) A Task Group of the Council for Global Mission would produce a report on 'Principles for Global Mission Partnerships', which would be presented to that Council for consideration and approval. That report would then be forwarded to the Clerk of Assembly and would form part of a wider report on 'Relationships with other Denominations'.
- (b) The General Council would set up a 'Relationships with other Denominations Task Group' to produce that wider report regarding the principles by which the Presbyterian Church in Ireland relates to other denominations, or indeed alters its relationship with other denominations.

2. At the October 2016 meeting of the General Council, the following Relationships with other Denominations (ROD) Task Group was appointed:

Moderator, Clerk (Convener), Very Rev Dr Rob Craig; Rev Jonathan Boyd, Rev John Brackenridge, Very Rev Prof Stafford Carson, Prof John Gillespie, Rev Dr Liz Hughes, Rev Lorraine Kennedy-Richie, Rev David Leech, Very Rev Dr John Lockington, Rev Nigel McCullough, Very Rev Dr Trevor Morrow, Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson, Rev Mairisine Stanfield, Miss Anne Taylor, Mr Robin Tweed.

3. The Task Group has met on four occasions and has commissioned papers from some of its members to assist in carrying out its remit. The Task

Group is particularly indebted to the Very Rev Drs Stafford Carson and Trevor Morrow and the Rev Jonathan Boyd for their hard work in drawing up a range of both individual and collaborative papers. The Task Group also had before it reports from the Church Relations Committee and from the Clerk giving an overview of the current position regarding inter-church relationships both generally and specifically.

4. The Task Group has sought to establish some key foundational principles on which to base its work. These have focused firstly on an understanding of the reformed doctrine of the Church and secondly on the necessary commitment to both unity and truth with regard to inter-church relations. This important foundational work is summarised in ROD Appendix 1 - The Reformed Doctrine of the Church and Its Implications. (It would be useful if ROD Appendix 1 was read in full at this stage.)

5. The remainder of this report is based on the foundational thinking outlined in Appendix 1 and attempts to chart a way forward in regard to four significant matters:

- Recommendations regarding the different categories of inter-church relationship which PCI should use;
- Recommendations regarding Global Mission partnerships;
- Recommendations regarding the Inter-Church bodies to which PCI should belong;
- Specific recommendations regarding the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING CATEGORIES OF INTER-CHURCH RELATIONSHIP USED BY PCI

6. It is noted that, while a number of denominations consulted were considering this matter, none in fact have up to date and relevant categories used in relating to other denominations.

7. The General Assembly decided a significant number of years ago that no longer should ministers of any other denomination have direct access to the ministry of PCI i.e. there are no arrangements for direct interchangeability of ministry with any other denomination.

8. It is recognised that relationships with other denominations on the island of Ireland will always be more directly relevant and significant in nature to any other inter-church relationship. This is as a direct result of the presence of PCI congregations 'on the ground' in the same, or neighbouring, communities as congregations of other denominations.

9. It is further recognised that direct global mission partnerships again will always be different in nature to other inter-church relationships. This is as a direct result of these normally being a formal agreement in missional partnership. (See relevant sections of the report drafted by the Council for Global Mission, included in Appendix 2.)

10. **It is therefore recommended that** the following categories should be used by PCI in describing its relationships with other denominations:

- (a) Fraternal and/or Missional relationship in Ireland;
- (b) Direct Global Missional Partnership (outside of UK and Ireland);

- (c) Fraternal / Historic relationship (in GB, Europe and worldwide)
 - (i) Confessional
 - (ii) Other

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING GLOBAL MISSION PARTNERSHIPS

11. As indicated in the introduction, thanks are due to the Council for Global Mission for its work on drawing up a paper on 'Principles of Partnership in Global Mission'. This paper was received and affirmed by the Task Group without amendment and, although included in ROD Appendix 2, the credit for it is due to the Council for Global Mission.

12. **It is recommended** that the framework and principles contained in the report drafted by the Council for Global Mission (see ROD Appendix 2) be adopted.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE INTER-CHURCH BODIES TO WHICH PCI SHOULD BELONG

13. PCI currently relates to a significant number of other denominations through its membership of several Inter-Church bodies, as follows (inc. 'membership fees' where appropriate):

- (a) In Ireland:
 - (i) The Irish Council of Churches (ICC) – Protestant and Orthodox
 - (ii) The Irish Inter-Church Meeting (and Committee) – the ICC Churches meeting with the Irish Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church
 - Membership fee for ICC (inc work of IICM and IICC) – £32,800 (2016)
 - These bodies enable PCI to relate, at a denominational level, to a number of larger and smaller churches on the island of Ireland and increasingly have had a positive agenda.
- (b) Outside of Ireland:
 - (i) The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) – confessional
 - Membership fee for WCRC – £13,300 (2016)
 - WCRC provides an important forum for relationship with a significant number of denominations, many of whom share much in common with the emphases of PCI. This is true both in WCRC's European and 'developing world' dimensions.
 - However, some aspects of the overall direction of WCRC, both in its processes and its decisions, have proved difficult for PCI.
 - (ii) The Conference of European Churches (CEC) – Protestant and Orthodox
 - Membership fee for CEC – £5,100 (2016)
 - WCRC provides a forum for relationship with a significant number of denominations across Europe, though increasingly it seems focussed on the European Institutions and its work seems more and more distant from PCI.

- The ICC, as the National Council of Churches, also relates directly to CEC, though in a non-voting capacity.
- (iii) The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) - Protestant
- Membership fee for CCPE - £1,300 (2016)
 - PCI is one of the 98 churches have signed the Leuenberg Agreement since 1973, with some other Churches in other related forms of membership. Though CPCE claims to represent some 50 million Protestants, its ongoing work is more and more distant from PCI.
- (c) Other:
- (i) PCI, or its General Assembly Councils, relates to a number of denominations through shared membership of other bodies e.g. Development Agencies; YouthLink (NI); Safeguarding Bodies; etc.
- (ii) PCI, or its General Assembly Councils, relates to, and works in partnership with, a number of ad-hoc bodies and parachurch agencies and independent fellowships with an inter-church dimension e.g. CARE; Evangelical Alliance; Life (NI); etc.

14. It is recognised that while none of these inter-church bodies are perfect (and some indeed could be viewed as being quite remote from PCI, even at denominational level), nonetheless they provide a forum for relationship with a significant number of denominations, many of whom share much in common with the emphases of PCI. This is true in Ireland but also, as noted above, in WCRC, both in its European and 'developing world' dimensions.

15. There are other 'world confessional bodies' to which PCI could relate, most prominent among them being the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF), which could in some senses be viewed more in keeping with theological position of PCI. Some denominations maintain membership of both WCRC and WRF.

16. Links to other bodies, of an 'umbrella' or para-church nature, enable PCI to relate to and work alongside a number of smaller denominations, either directly or through the involvement of key leaders.

17. It is therefore recommended, in the light of the points outlined above, that:

- (a) PCI maintains its membership of the formal Irish inter-church bodies listed in 13(a) above;
- (b) PCI continues its membership of WCRC and concurrently explores membership of the World Reformed Fellowship, with a report coming to the 2018 General Assembly;
- (c) PCI reviews its membership of both CCPE and CEC (recognising that it could associate with CEC through the Irish Council of Churches), with a report coming to the 2018 General Assembly;
- (d) The General Assembly's Councils be encouraged to continue to develop strategic partnerships, often on an ad-hoc or project basis, with other denominations and parachurch organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND AND THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

18. Church of Scotland:

See Background Paper at ROD Appendix 3.

Based on ROD Appendix 3, it is recommended that the following practical steps towards mutual reform be taken:

- (a) That the General Assembly clearly and graciously state its own position in regard to human sexuality and marriage – for the benefit of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as a denomination and the integrity of PCI’s witness (see Appendix 3(A)).
- (b) That for 2018, the General Assembly accept any invitation for the Moderator and delegation to attend the Church of Scotland General Assembly, asking the Moderator to convey the Presbyterian Church in Ireland’s painful concern in a loving manner which calls the CofS along with PCI to ongoing reformation in obedience to the scriptures.¹ (See footnote below)
- (c) That the General Assembly show their commitment to reform within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland by being open to the Church of Scotland raising areas where PCI has been less than faithful to the Scriptures in the pursuit of justice or in the practice of grace.
- (d) That the General Assembly encourage all meetings between the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Church of Scotland, including at Council and/or Committee level, to have intentionality in terms of mutual encouragement to reform and greater obedience to Christ.
- (e) That the General Assembly encourage members of the Task Group to hold informal discussions with those within the Church of Scotland who are working for its reform and renewal, and coming from the ‘traditionalist view’, in order that the PCI might offer constructive support.
- (f) That the Relationships with other Denominations Task Group remain active for a further year and brings to the 2018 General Assembly a report which:
 - (i) considers further the outworking of its 2017 report and recommendations;
 - (ii) reviews the ways in which the Presbyterian Church in Ireland formally collaborates, or could in the future formally collaborate, with the Church of Scotland and what common ground is necessary for such collaboration;
 - (iii) Indicates the progress made towards mutual reform.

¹ The General Council, at its meeting on 13th April 2017, did not adopt recommendation (b) in paragraph 18, relating to the Church of Scotland. The appended resolution therefore reflects the mind of the Council, rather than the Task Group, in this matter.

19. Free Church of Scotland:

See Background Paper at ROD Appendix 4.

Based on ROD Appendix 4, **it is recommended:**

- (a) That the General Assembly encourage the development of a formal fraternal relationship with the Free Church of Scotland, through areas of mutual interest in the Councils of the respective Assemblies, with specific reference to the following:
- Church Planting
 - ETS and PCI College
 - Discipleship
 - Church Revitalisation
 - Global Mission

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS

APPENDIX 1

THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE CHURCH

The Nicene Creed defines the attributes of the church as “one, holy, catholic and apostolic”.

Viewing the church from the perspective of the gospel helps us to see how these attributes fit together. The saving truth of the gospel is to be believed and proclaimed to the nations. The gospel is also to be lived, because holiness, no less than truth, is a mark of the Spirit’s work. Further, this believing, proclaiming and living of the gospel takes place within a community. Those who are in Christ are joined together in an organism. There is a holy, spiritual order to God’s community.²

1. The church is **apostolic**, because it is founded on the apostolic gospel and called to fulfil the apostolic mission. The community of faith bears faithful witness to the apostolic message. This is a sacred trust. It is this that gives it continuity with the universal (catholic) church both in its sense of identity and its present mission. A reformed ecclesiology refuses to identify apostolicity with an on-going office of apostleship, with regard to the papal claims of Rome or the charismatic ministry of self-proclaimed prophets. A true church is recognised by its continuity with the apostolic proclamation of the gospel.

2. The holiness of the church means that life, as well as truth, marks Christ’s church. The behaviour of Christians in the world must be remarkable

2 Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 1995) Chapter 6.

enough to cause grudging admiration, astonished curiosity or threatening hostility (I Peter 2:12; 3:16; John 15:18). By God's election, redemption and calling, both individually and corporately, we are holy in Christ. God's people, who have been set apart from the world, are to be holy as God is holy not least in their pursuit of justice, the expression of their sexuality and in their practice of grace.

3. The **unity** of the church requires a new community, joined in common faith and life. The vital union of Christians with Christ demands our unity. Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-21 is crucial. It applies in two important respects:

- (a) The fragmentation and consequent lack of fellowship, harmony, and cooperation which appear on the ecclesiastical scene are a patent contradiction of unity exemplified in that to which Jesus referred when he said, "As you, Father, are in me and I in you."
- (b) The purpose stated in Jesus' prayer – "that the world may believe that you have sent me" – implies a manifestation observable by the world. Jesus prays for a visible unity that will bear witness to the world. The mysterious unity of believers with one another must come to visible expression so as to be instrumental in bringing conviction to the world.

We should not think of the unity for which Christ prayed apart from the unity in the bond of truth. Verse 21 must not be dissociated from verse 20. To divorce the unity for which Christ prayed from all that is involved in believing upon him through the apostolic witness is to separate what Christ placed together.

4. The unity and **catholicity** of the church are interdependent themes. The catholic character of the church flows from the fact that the church is a colony of heaven; it cannot conform to the social castes and sectarian goals that divide a fallen world, for it is the beginning of the new humanity in Christ. The principalities and powers of this present evil age seek to control our desires and hopes by dividing us according to its false catholicisms. In Christ every barrier that defines this present age – racial, socio-economic, generational, and political – disintegrates as the light of the age to come penetrates our darkness. The community of the church may be expressed in terms of the old and new covenants or the cultural diversity of the new humankind in Christ. Denominations were unknown for the first 400 years A.D. "*There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all*" (Ephesians 4:4-6). The reformers of the 16th century saw themselves as reformed catholics. Calvin consistently expressed his desire not to be schismatic nor sectarian. "He never stopped claiming his unshakeable attachment to the unity of the Catholic Church which he did not want to replace but restore".³ He is keen to show continuity with the historic visible church of Christ whom he describes as his mother

According to the Heidelberg Catechism (Q54), to affirm "one, holy, catholic and apostolic" church means "*I believe that the Son of God, through his Spirit and the Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. And of this community I am and always will be a living member.*"

3 Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, Edinburgh, T. and T. Clarke, 1987.

THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

Because some traditions offered different definitions of these attributes of the church (*attributa ecclesiae*), the Reformed recognised that, although necessary, these four attributes were insufficient to enable proper judgments to be made about the claims of other churches. Reformed theologians responded by articulating the doctrine of the ‘marks of the church’ (*notae verae ecclesiae*) in order to seek to explain how the true church could be recognised.⁴

During the Reformation period, Calvin discusses the *notae* in his *Institutes* and observes two such identifying marks, namely ‘the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution’.⁵ In Calvin’s debate with Cardinal Sadoletto he wrote ‘there are three things upon which the safety of the Church is founded, namely, doctrine, discipline, and the sacraments’.⁶ Calvin was clear about the function of the *notae*:

*For, in order that the title ‘church’ may not deceive us, every congregation that claims the name ‘church’ must be tested by this standard as by a touchstone.*⁷

These marks Calvin saw present in the Roman Catholic Church. To the Bishop of Naples he wrote “We indeed, Sadoletto, do not deny that those over which you preside are true churches of Christ but we maintain that the ‘Roman Pontiff’ (and the bishops) are savage wolves.”⁸ By this Calvin did not mean that he recognized individual believers within the Roman Catholic Church but in a letter to Socinus, he says, “When I say that remnants of the church remained in the Papacy, I do not restrict that to the elect who are dispersed therein, I judge that ruins of the broken church still exist there.”⁹

In the post-Reformation period, the Westminster Confession of Faith identifies the visible church as consisting of ‘all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children’ (25.2; Cf. WLC 62).¹⁰ The Confession also employs the marks of the true church, describing them as: (1) teaching and embracing the doctrine of the Gospel; (2) the administration of ordinances; and (3) the performance of public worship (25.4).

Like Calvin, the divines insist that no church is perfect: ‘The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error’ (25.5). Consequently, there are varying degrees of ‘more or less’ pure churches (25.4). The Confession also gives voice to the tragic reality that some churches no longer display these marks

4 P. D. L. Avis, “‘The True Church’ in Reformation Theology”, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 30 (1977), pp.319-45.

5 Calvin, *Inst.* 4.1.8.

6 John C. Olin, ed., *A Reformation Debate: John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p.63.

7 Calvin, *Inst.* 4.1.11.

8 ‘Reply to Sadolet’, John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, Library of Christian Classics, XXII, 241

9 ‘Letter to Socinus’, John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*; Johannes Calvini Opera, XIII, p.487

10 Within the Reformed tradition there is significant debate over how the terminology of the visible and invisible church is to be understood. See for example: John Murray, ‘The Church: Its Definition in Terms of “Visible” and “Invisible” Invalid’ in *Collected Writings of John Murray, Volume One: The Claims of Truth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), pp.231-36.

in any meaningful sense: they are so deeply compromised as to have become 'synagogues of Satan' (25.5).

THE OBJECTIVE VISIBLE CHURCH

In reformed ecclesiology, the church in which these attributes and marks are to be expressed is objective and visible.

- Insofar as the Lord alone knows who are truly his, the only church to which we are to relate is visible and is a mixture of 'wheat and tares'. Behind all evidences of visible unity in the body of Christ lies the original and largely hidden unity of that body in God's eternal election.
- This church needs organization. The church as an organism needs structure and accountability. The New Testament therefore prescribes church government.
- This visible church will be present in a place or territory in the world. The emphasis on a national church, the creation of parish boundaries, the role of those in civil society, and the application of the word of God to all of life contributes to this perspective.

In the 17th century, when the Westminster divines were summoned by 'The Long Parliament' the invitations were sent to members of the one Church of England. They were Erastians, Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Independents, but all part of the one church. The Scots came from the one Church of Scotland. Their first responsibility was to determine how the one visible church on these islands was to be governed.

Presbyterians in Ireland have essentially functioned within this ecclesiology. The first Presbyterian ministers in the North of Ireland were either chaplains from the national Church of Scotland or sought to become accepted into the Church of Ireland in the period known as *prescopalianism*. The divisions within the church, which subsequently led to denominational identity, were over authority. When Presbyterians believed that they were not free to practice their faith within the one national church, to preserve their integrity, they believed they had no option but to establish a distinct witness as a movement for reform.

Hence:

- The creation of presbyteries rather than accepting monarchical episcopacy without denying the validity of any such ordinations.
- The mission intent to provide places of worship for those with Presbyterian convictions, which explains the demography of the Presbyterian presence on the island.
- The rationale of the Irish Mission which was to make the scriptures known to Irish people and 'so permeate the whole mass with evangelical truth and so bring about a spiritual revolution from within'.
- The almost unanimous decision of the General Assembly, after the 1859 revival, not to re-baptise Roman Catholics who had chosen to become members of Presbyterian churches.
- The code of the PCI reflects this reformed understanding of the church.

SECTION 1 – THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

- (i) The one catholic and universal Church of Jesus Christ is both invisible and visible.

- (ii) The invisible Church consists of all those who have been, are being or shall be gathered into one under Christ, the Head.
 - (iii) (1) The visible Church consists of all those throughout the world who profess to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and to live obedient to God's Word, together with their children.
 - (iv) (2) The visible Church was established by the Lord Jesus Christ for the glory of the Father and the advancement of His Kingdom in the world. These great purposes are to be accomplished by the proclamation of the Gospel, by witness-bearing to the truth as it is in Jesus Christ and by the promotion of Christian fellowship and mutual edification among all believers.
 - (v) (1) Many particular Churches are included in the visible Church. Each of these consists of a congregation of persons who are associated for the administration and observance of ordinances according to the Scriptures or a number of such congregations under a common government.
 - (iv) (2) The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is thus a particular Church of the visible catholic or universal Church of Jesus Christ.
- We speak of the PCI as a branch of the visible church.
 - After the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, the PCI showed its commitment to interchurch mission through the visible church by becoming founding members of the Irish Council of Churches.

CURRENT ISSUES FOR THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND

1. The need for a more robust and reformed doctrine of the church.

Before we can begin to consider issues affecting our relationships with other churches, we need to have a clear understanding of the doctrine of the church to which we are committed. Currently it seems that within PCI there are different ecclesiologies which are held and which lead to a variety of practices and understandings about the mission and calling of the church and by implication denominations the PCI ought or ought not to be in fellowship with. This arises in part from a tension between the evangelical emphasis on a conversion experience and the expectation of evidence of regeneration as a criterion for church membership over and against the Reformed basis for church membership as a credible profession of faith.

Our first task must be a clear and practical articulation of what it means to be the Church of Jesus Christ in Ireland today.

In doing that, our Subordinate Standards are extremely helpful, and particularly Chapter XXV of the Westminster Confession of Faith. A careful consideration and explanation of this chapter is a necessary and helpful step in the task of educating our ministers, elders and members as we seek to be vibrant and transformative communities of Christ and work for the reform of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church.

The Westminster Confession of Faith affirms that the church is visible, universal and covenantal. It is also described as the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God. Following Cyprian, Augustine, the medieval church and the Reformers, the confession concludes that outside the church “there is no ordinary possibility of salvation”. A family, a household and a kingdom all require membership and identity with the larger group. We need to teach and affirm this high doctrine of the church and explain clearly the benefits, privileges and responsibilities of church membership, as well as encouraging the effective and fruitful exercise of the “ministry, oracles and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints”.

As a Reformed church, covenant theology is the ‘architectonic principle’ of our subordinate standards and it is fundamental to our confessional identity.¹¹ Consequently Reformed ecclesiology requires a proper understanding of the covenantal nature of the church. Hence the Confession insists upon identifying the visible church as consisting of “all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children” (XXV, 2; WLC 62).

The notion of God’s people in the old covenant that were marked with the sign and seal of circumcision, and how within it were reprobate idolaters so that only a few of those redeemed from Egypt entered the promised land, is not normally how we think of the church visible. John Calvin’s view that Christ’s one, holy, catholic and apostolic church was preserved in its darkest hour through the covenant sign and seal of baptism does not seem to resonate with us. It may also seem odd that he would begin his massive work on ‘the Church’ by saying “*There are many wolves within and many sheep without*”.

The visible church is not composed only of the regenerate; it is the covenant community where the Spirit brings to repentance and faith “those who are near (i.e. “you and your children”) and “all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Acts 2:39). We expect the baptized to grow up into Christ, coming to faith and maturing in that faith, within the communion of saints. Our criterion for church membership is “a credible profession of faith”.¹² In our desire to be genuinely evangelical and reformed, we should not ask for more than that.

11 B.B. Warfield, ‘The Westminster Assembly and Its Work’ in *The Works of B.B. Warfield* (Baker:1981) 6.56.

12 The officers of the church are the judges of the qualifications of those to be admitted to sealing ordinances As God has not endowed any of these officers with the power of reading the heart, it follows that the qualifications of which they are the judges are simply those of competent knowledge, purity of life, and credible profession of faith. [By “credible” is meant not that which convinces, but that which can be believed to be genuine.] It is their duty to examine the applicant as to his knowledge, to watch and inquire concerning his walk and conversation, to set before him faithfully the inward spiritual qualifications requisite for acceptable communion and to hear his profession of that spiritual faith and purpose. The responsibility of the act then rests upon the individual professor, and not upon the session, who are never to be understood as passing judgment upon, or as indorsing the validity of his evidences. A.A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, pp.645-646.

2. The need to maintain a commitment to both unity and truth.

Unity is intrinsic to the truth of the gospel. Unity and truth are not alternatives. The unity of the church is a unity in truth, the truth that is in Jesus Christ, as revealed in Holy Scripture. To confess Christ, therefore, is to confess the unity of his church and to be impelled to pray and work for its visible unity.

The process of comprehending this truth needs to be done “together with all the saints” (Ephesians 3:17-19). Understanding the truth is limited by history, culture, situation and experience, and is often distorted by sin. Divisions in the body of Christ impoverish our understanding of the truth. In conversation with others, we seek to become clearer in our understanding of God’s revelation and to walk more consistently, humbly, and joyfully in its light.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has a clear understanding of where the truth of the gospel is to be found: in the Bible as the supreme standard, and in the Westminster Standards as articulating fundamental doctrines which are founded on and agreeable to the Word of God. The PCI, as a part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, is committed to a public confession of apostolic faith. Unfortunately, the notion of Sola Scriptura has often been distorted so that Protestantism has been cut off from its own theological and ecclesiological history.

Holding to an understanding of truth as stated in a creed or confession allows for the clear, public expression of what we believe Christ has said and continues to say by the Holy Spirit through the scriptures. The public nature of such confessions and creeds serves the interests of transparency and integrity in our interchurch relations.

In a helpful book, *The Creedal Imperative*,¹³ Carl Trueman includes a chapter entitled “The Cultural Case against Creeds and Confessions”.

“Modern culture has not rendered creeds and confessions untrue; far less has it rendered them unbiblical. But it has rendered them implausible and distasteful. They are implausible because they are built on old-fashioned notions of truth and language. They make the claim that a linguistic formulation of a state of affairs can have a binding authority beyond the mere text on the page, that creeds actually refer to something and that that something has significance for all of humanity ... They [creeds and confessions] go directly against the grain of antihistorical, antiauthoritarian age. Creeds strike hard at the cherished notion of human autonomy and of the notion that I am exceptional, that the normal rules do not apply to me in the way they do to others.

Confessional Protestantism has a historic, creedal integrity; it takes history seriously; it refuses to assume that the latest pulp evangelical primer on postmodernism is an adequate basis for ditching the whole of its tradition; and it wants to take seriously what the church has said about the Bible over the centuries ..Reformed Orthodoxy, for example, has theological moorings in an intelligent interaction with, and appropriation of, the best theological and exegetical work of the patristic and medieval authors, as well as the correctives of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In fact, as I repeatedly tell my

13 Carl R. Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

students, if you hold to Reformed Orthodoxy, you can quite legitimately interact with and appropriate the best theology, West and East, from the Apostolic Fathers down to the present day, in your articulation of a truly catholic orthodoxy.”¹⁴

Passion for the truth of Christ impels us to reach out to the people of God everywhere. We are not a separatist church. We would like to be seen to be in partnership with our brothers and sisters in Christ who are part of the one, visible church of Christ on this island and around the world. We are committed to fellowship and mission together especially with those branches of the church that share our reformed and evangelical convictions. We will also seek to show solidarity in ministry, as far as possible, with those communities, who as part of the church catholic, bear witness to Jesus Christ as Lord, as expressed in the historic creeds of the church and with whom we share a common baptism.

We have been influenced by the voices that call for separation, but which fail to recognize and value the unity of the church. Our passion for the truth of Christ also calls us to reject any expressions of unity that dilute our unequivocal witness to Jesus Christ.

3. The need to recognise degrees of connection with other Christians.

A possible model for our interconnectedness in unity and truth is to base our network of relationships on those truths, which are a bond of fellowship and expresses our oneness in Christ as those who are catholic, evangelical and reformed.

- The historic creeds of the church provide an umbrella of *catholicity* both historically and with the visible church. This would be the basis of mutual acceptance and affirmation.
- Closer ties would be formed with churches that are *evangelical* and who embrace the material and formal principles of the reformation in terms of the doctrines of grace and the authority of scripture.
- Our most immediate and first relationships would be in practice with those churches which are *reformed* in theology and ecclesiology as expressed in their post reformational confessions.

While we value our historic links with other denominations in Ireland and Britain and believe that they are testimony to the unity of the church, we should also welcome the possibility of new relationships both at home and abroad and especially in the global south, which may re-energise and re-vitalize the ministry and witness of the PCI.

¹⁴ See more at: www.reformation21.org/shelf-life/is-the-reformation-over.php#sthash.bvegvf66.dpuf

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS

APPENDIX 2

PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP IN GLOBAL MISSION

1. PREAMBLE

Historically PCI's global mission partnerships have encompassed a wide range of activities and have had a broad geographical spread as PCI has sought to work with partner churches, mission agencies, and institutions around the world.

The current task is to draw up a set of principles or norms for denominational partnership in global mission. These principles have been developed and applied over many years of global mission engagement but now are being articulated with greater clarity. This will be helpful as PCI considers new or reviews existing partnerships.

The principles need to be sufficiently clear such that if a significant doctrinal or moral issue arises in the context of one of PCI's global mission partnerships, these principles will provide guidance should a review of the partnership be required. It is recognised however, that it is not possible to be definitive in terms of every potential issue that may surface, that there are numerous matters of conscience, and everyone tends to desire liberty on their particular issue.

2. CLASSIFICATIONS OF GLOBAL MISSION PARTNERSHIP

PCI, working through its Global Mission Council, has developed a broad range of missional relationships over the years with churches, agencies and institutions in the overseas context. Where these relationships lead at some point to the placement of PCI mission personnel and/or the provision of funding, the relationship is normally referred to as a **global mission partnership**. This form of engagement distinguishes the relationship from others that might be described as development, fraternal, confessional, historical, geographical, or ecumenical, whether arising from bilateral or multilateral, formal or informal relationships:

- **Development:** Where PCI relates to development agencies or NGO's with a view to dealing with social issues and alleviating global poverty, and where the main focus is on the provision of funding
- **Fraternal:** Where long-standing friendship is expressed through informal conversations between churches or agencies on a broad range of topics. These are often in the context of a communion of churches or agency network e.g. The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), Global Connections
- **Confessional:** Where churches get together because they subscribe to the same confessional statements and may wish to meet to celebrate or discuss matters relating to their common heritage
- **Historical:** Where for whatever reason two or more churches have a shared history of relating or serving together to tackle a common concern

- **Geographical:** where churches meet together to consider matters common to those sharing the same land mass. Eg. Irish Council of Churches
- **Ecumenical:** Where churches, especially those aware of their differences, have come together to discuss and work towards better understanding and unity in Christ

3. PARTNERING AS A DENOMINATION

Traditionally PCI, through its Global Mission Council, has initiated global mission partnerships at the denominational level, often relating to the largest Presbyterian/Reformed denomination in a country overseas. This is undertaken in the understanding that the most fruitful missional partnership takes place when PCI, its General Assembly, Presbyteries and Congregations, work together as a denomination. It involves Global Mission Council representatives initiating relationships along the lines of best practice guidelines on partnering. It relies upon such relationships having broad appeal in the wider church at home such that vision for global engagement is caught at all levels of church life. Congregations and presbyteries are then able to share in the partnership through prayer, giving to the United Appeal, hosting visitors from the partner, resourcing projects, 'serving as senders' of mission personnel and teams, and developing twinning relationships.

It should be noted, however, that the following partnership principles have been drawn up primarily with denominational partnering in global mission in mind. A further piece of work would be required to develop these for partnership in other contexts. e.g. A presbytery to presbytery, or congregation to congregation partnership/twinning.

4. PRINCIPLES OR NORMS OF PARTNERSHIP

It is recognised that when there is confidence in the gospel, there should be liberty in relating to people and Jesus is our example in this regard. When it comes to partnering there are very many opportunities around the world for engaging alongside like-minded partners in locations where we might make a difference. It is important, therefore, that there is a process of discernment when PCI comes to enter into partnership.

The following principles or norms may be looked at as a potential sieve or filter through which existing partnerships could be evaluated and new partnership opportunities processed.

- (a) PCI **normally** partner with other churches, agencies and institutions:
 - (i) In the Presbyterian or Reformed tradition. Those who subscribe and hold to the Westminster Confession or other Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries. So PCI asks, does the partner share PCI's Reformed tradition and practice?
 - (ii) Who see the Scriptures as the Supreme Rule of Faith and Order
 - (iii) Who are like-minded and with whom we have a sense of family. This is expressed through shared values, priorities and resources so that the partnership can be seen to have potential for mission. IE. To be going places with a focused missional agenda that has been prayerfully discerned. So together PCI seek God's mind as to what He is saying, keeping in focus:

- Common **values** of being honest, available, committed, patient, versatile, open to negotiation and change, accountable, transparent, and adopting an holistic approach
 - Common **priorities** such as reaching the unreached, discipling for transformation, leadership development, conflict resolution, poverty alleviation etc.
 - Opportunities for the sharing **resources**, including personnel, finance, and expertise
 - Possibilities for developing ongoing congregational and presbyterial mission involvement
 - Whether there are members of the overseas partner church already living, working and witnessing in Ireland
- (b) Where the nature of global mission partnership means that it can be just for a season and focussed on a particular task or short-term project. Normally, however, it is understood that missional partnerships take time to develop so PCI does not rush in to or jump out of partnership as a matter of course. It is seen as being more akin to family, where relationships ebb and flow, sometimes in focus and at other times less so.
- (c) With an emphasis on effective communication, not least through visits and consultations. This is enhanced for PCI when English is a shared language.
- (d) With a desire to avoid unhealthy, long-term, dependence of one partner upon the other, rather working towards genuine reciprocal relationships and inter-dependency where partners help each other to fulfil their calling. So, PCI asks, what is the likelihood of reciprocity and avoiding dependency?
- (e) Giving consideration to any other international partners that the potential partner already has, either through multilateral or bilateral relations.
- (f) Listening, learning, and receiving being seen as important as speaking, teaching and giving
- (g) Seeing the importance of being open to diversity, difference, and complementarity that will feed positively into the partnership so that partners can be stronger from working together. Encountering diversity and difference in this context should not require PCI to compromise on stated doctrinal beliefs. On occasions PCI may partner in the understanding that PCI would not be supportive of the partner's endorsement of practices not acceptable to PCI's interpretation of Scripture e.g. The receipt of lottery funding
- (h) Accepting one another just as we are as partners, yet recognising there is a learning from one another, sometimes through prayerful wrestling to find a way forward and with mutual admonishing and correcting that furthers transformation towards Christlikeness.
- (i) Recognising PCI may face a set of circumstances in a potential partner that would lead us not to enter into a new partnership, yet if the same set of circumstances arose in a longstanding partnership, while PCI may not approve of what had happened, but given liberty to serve and for the sake of the Kingdom potential in the partnership, PCI may choose

to continue in that relationship for a season, albeit carefully monitoring progress

- (j) PCI's focus primarily should be on mission and engaging in missional activities that PCI are invited and free to engage in through the partnership, not on activities that the partner may be engaged in that PCI may not approve of, though neither should these be ignored. An important question at this point is, "Does PCI's partner or potential partner fully understand and clearly value PCI for what it is, not simply for what PCI can bring or do?"
- (k) PCI and its personnel should be accepted for who they are and able to work with PCI's subordinate standards to the fore and with complete freedom. Any loss of such liberty may not only render service ineffective but the partnership untenable.
- (l) While serving under the authority of a partner church's leadership, PCI mission personnel should be honestly representing PCI in their day to day work, free to maintain and declare PCI's clearly held position on a particular matter, even if it is contrary to the view of partner, yet balancing this with their responsibilities when serving under the authority of the partner. Where PCI may differ with a certain position or activity of the partner, discernment will be needed in the context, not least where mission personnel are involved, so as to be able to say:
 - (i) "PCI disagree but have been given freedom to continue working unhindered"
 - (ii) "PCI disagree but find there is space for discussion and compromise"
 - (iii) "PCI disagree and can no longer work in this context"
 - It is recognised that the partner will likely have a view of a particular position adopted by PCI and as a result may wish to review or discontinue the partnership and/or the role of PCI personnel. In such circumstances, especially when a missionary's role is placed in jeopardy, PCI must keep to the fore our pastoral responsibilities for mission personnel.

IN CONCLUSION

This section of the report has sought to highlight that Global Mission Partnership is one way in which PCI relates to the wider Church. It also sets out norms, developed over many years, by which such partnerships are able to move forward with both the liberty and focus of the gospel. It is recognised that partnerships are more likely to be invested in deeply and thrive when these norms are clearly owned and shared. All global mission partnerships should be entered into, reviewed and developed on behalf of the General Assembly through the prayerful work of the appropriate Committees, Panels and Task Groups of the Council for Global Mission.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS

APPENDIX 3

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (CofS)

DECISION OF THE 2016 GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ITS FOLLOW-UP

1. The 2016 General Assembly received a report of a meeting held in Belfast in February 2016 between representatives of the PCI and the CofS. Following lengthy debate and after several amendments, the following resolution was passed:

“That the General Assembly note the worthwhile meeting which has taken place between representatives of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Church of Scotland; that the natural ongoing contacts and collaborations between Councils, Conveners and staff be maintained where appropriate; and that representatives of both denominations’ Church Relations Committees be encouraged to meet in the autumn of 2016 to discuss ongoing relationships.” (2016 General Assembly Minutes, page 92)

2. The proposed meeting took place on Monday, 5th December 2016 in Edinburgh, when the two Churches were represented by the following delegations:

- PCI: Very Rev Drs Rob Craig (General Council Convener) and Ivan Patterson (Church Relations, Chair); Revs John Brackenridge (Church Relations, Convener) and Trevor Gribben (Clerk)
- CofS: Very Rev John Chalmers (Principal Clerk), Rev Alison McDonald (Ecumenical Relations Convener), Rev Dr John McPake (new Interim Ecumenical Relations Officer) and Rev Derek Browning (Assembly Arrangements Convener, now also Moderator Designate)

3. The decisions of the 2016 PCI General Assembly were explained and discussed. It was noted that in light of the decisions, PCI was able to ‘maintain’ the natural ongoing contacts and collaborations between Councils, Conveners and staff, where appropriate, but that the General Assembly rejected the proposition that these be ‘encouraged and developed’. It was also noted that PCI had begun a process to agree the principles by which the PCI relates to other denominations, or indeed alters its relationship with other denominations.

4. While the CofS reps regretted the decisions taken by the PCI General Assembly they understood something of the depth of feeling in PCI. The CofS reps were encouraged by the wider process that PCI had entered into. It was recognised that though a PCI delegation would not be attending the 2017 CofS General Assembly, a CofS delegation would be invited to attend the 2017 PCI

General Assembly. There was some discussion relating to how welcome the CofS delegation would be, clear assurances given and general agreement that there was value in the normal CofS delegation coming.

5. PCI reps raised the issue of need to find a way to enable the PCI General Assembly to make its 'concern/disappointment' known to the CofS in a way that will both be clear and gracious, enabling the possibility of the 'annual symbolic decision to not send the Moderator' to no longer be necessary. This could give an 'outlet' for PCI to express its concern/disappointment and then to re-establish more normal relationships. The CofS reps indicated they understood, from the perspective of many in PCI, of the need to find some way of doing this. They indicated that the CofS would obviously receive anything that PCI wished to communicate, however it could produce a 'response' from a number within the CofS who were on the more 'radical wing'.

SOME IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

An open rebuke is better than hidden love! Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy. Proverbs 27:5–6 NLT-SE

The need for a Reformed catholicism

6. It has already been established that unity and truth are not alternatives with competing agendas. This is not a new idea in the Reformed tradition. The very word 'Reformed' is a reminder of the importance of pursuing truth constantly renewing our focus on apostolic teaching, the gospel itself and indeed all that God has revealed in Scripture. So when the Reformers continued as churches outside the Roman institution they did not abandon the word 'catholic' or write off the Roman church as a false church – they recognised that there were vestigia of the true church present but because they were not permitted to pursue the reformation and renewal of the church according to the scriptures they refused to succumb to papal authority. As Reformed catholics they held unity and truth together, rather than in tension.

7. In the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's (PCI's) relationship with other Christian communities, it could easily lose sight of what it means to be catholic, denigrating those churches deemed to be less pure, treating them as false churches or a dangerous influence threatening to drag us into error. To be reformed requires not being content with simply recognising vestigia in another community of faith. Instead, as those who claim to be reformed and ever reforming, PCI ought to be pursuing a greater purity, a greater faithfulness to Christ – and so fan into flame the embers of renewal both within PCI and in others.

8. PCI has historically adopted an approach of Reformed catholicism in its inter-church relations including the way it has related to other denominations which we considered to be in serious error. For instance when the Presbyterian Church in North America, with the support of men like Charles Hodge and RL Dabney, voted to defend the practice of slavery, Presbyterians in Ireland were appalled. They saw the slave trade as a systemic evil and contrary to the word of God. Nevertheless, they maintained a relationship with that church in the hope of reform. PCI has also been the recipient of patience and grace from other denominations during its own difficulties such as struggles with sectarianism and nationalism during 'the Troubles'.

9. This is a reminder of the need for what David Buschart calls the ‘humble recognition that all traditions of Christianity contain an admixture of truth and error, wisdom and weakness.’¹⁵ Error and weakness are often better identified from outside, meaning that others benefit from PCI being in relationship with them, as fellow Catholics, to help with their reform. Equally that PCI needs others to help it reform. Comparing dialogue and fellowship between denominations to sharing a meal in each other’s house, Kevin Vanhoozer writes, ‘We should check for pests in our own houses before pointing out the termites in those of our neighbours. Even better would be a situation where each house looked out and worked for the betterment of its neighbours.’¹⁶

Trajectories in the Church of Scotland (CofS)

10. The current debate in PCI over inter-church relations has been precipitated by what the CofS General Assembly has labelled the ‘Revisionist’ trajectory in relation to decisions about homosexuality (opposed by a ‘Traditionalist’ position). However, there is another, less publicised, trajectory of increasingly evangelical and reformed convictions that has not been reflected in the activity of the institution, particularly the decisions of the General Assembly, and consequently has been less visible to those who do not have relationships with people within the CofS.

(a) The Revisionist trajectory

- (i) **Holiness:** The presenting issue in the tensions that have arisen between PCI and the CofS is the ordination of people in same-sex relationships. PCI’s understanding of the Bible is that such relationships are outside of God’s good purposes for humankind and are sinful. The scriptures show that sexual immorality is a serious issue: it is one of the few things the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 absolutely prohibited and there are repeated warnings in the epistles and Revelation. While not seeking to hold a hierarchy of sin, the sanctioning and practice of this lifestyle by those in leadership publically undermines the witness of the church and its call to holiness. To quote NT Wright:

*the Church cannot sanction or bless same-sex unions; second, since the ordained ministry carries a necessarily representative function for the life of the Church, those who order their life in this way cannot be ordained.*¹⁷

- (ii) **Apostolicity:** Revisionists claim this disagreement is about interpretation, not authority. However, in 2013 the CofS General Assembly decided to ‘affirm the Church’s historic and current doctrine and practice in relation to human sexuality’ but ‘nonetheless permit those Kirk Session who wish to part from that doctrine and practice to do so.’ While the truth of the Bible was

15 David Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), p.28.

16 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), p.225.

17 N. T. Wright, ‘Rowan’s Reflections: Unpacking the Archbishop’s Statement’ in *Fulcrum*, 30th July 2009.

upheld, its authority was undermined. Some ministers are known to have publicly, in the presence of senior officials in the CofS, denied fundamental truths such as the resurrection, the uniqueness of Christ and that Christ died for our sins.

- (iii) **Unity:** The CofS itself is deeply divided over this issue. While the General Assembly has also largely voted consistently for Revisionist approaches there are significant numbers of ministers and elders who are dismayed at the direction the church is taking. Some have had enough and left. In his 2015 book *A Sad Departure*, Rev. David J. Randall lists 40 such ministers and 21 new congregations that have been established outside the denomination.
- (iv) **Catholicity:** Traditionalists on the 2011 Special Commission on Same-sex Relationships and the Ministry warned that,

As our ministry is answerable to the whole church, it would cause grievous damage to ecumenical relations were the Church unilaterally to ordain practising homosexuals. Were the Church to alter its rule on the ordination of ministers it would distance itself from the reality of what it means to be part of the Holy Catholic, or Universal, Church.

Following this, the Russian Orthodox Church has cut off ecumenical relationships while the Moderator of the Australian Presbyterian Church, after visiting the CofS General Assembly in 2015, reported that,

the malaise of the Church of Scotland is wider and deeper than this one issue. The majority has rejected the authority of God Himself in admitting to Christian ministry those living in such relationships ... I see no point in symbolically representing the Presbyterian Church of Australia at such an Assembly, when the basis of our fellowship, the Lordship of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, is so disregarded.¹⁸

The actions of the CofS are potentially schismatic, distancing it from the church catholic.

- (v) **Administration of the Word:** Herman Bavinck argues that the church is identified by the gathering of believers rather than the discernment of sincere faith in individuals. Because the gathering is marked by the administration of the Word, it ‘must be considered the foremost mark of the church [and] also includes the application of ecclesiastical discipline.’¹⁹ When false teaching is not dealt with by the institution and the General Assembly explicitly permits congregations and individuals to ignore what it has declared to be true teaching and practice, then ecclesiastical discipline is seriously compromised and this mark of the church is fading.

18 David Cook, www.presbyterian.org.au/index.php/resources/moderator-s-comments/8-the-church-of-scotland, posted 21st May 2015, accessed 27th February 2017.

19 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Volume 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. J. Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), pp.313-4.

(vi) **The Objective Visible Church:** While the Church is more than an institution, it is the institution which defines the boundaries and provides the collective, visible witness of its members – and it is the institution to which PCI relates as a denomination. While many members and elders in the CofS hold similar doctrinal and ethical views to PCI, the CofS General Assembly voted against a counter-motion to ‘Affirm the Church’s historic and current position that, according to God’s revealed will in Scripture, marriage between one man and one woman is the only right and proper context for sexual relations’ in 2014, then voted in 2015 to authorise congregations to depart from ‘the Church’s historic and current position’ by calling a minister in a same-sex civil partnership and also in the same year to extend approval to ministers in same-sex marriages.

(b) The evangelical and reformed trajectory

- (i) **Apostolicity:** The CofS has been for generations a predominantly theologically liberal church. When Eric Alexander began his ministry he reckoned one could have put all the evangelicals in a telephone kiosk. Despite this, those committed to reform and renewal such as Tom Allan, James S Stewart and William Still exercised ministries of infiltration within the CofS, because of their commitment to the national Kirk. Significantly, while the institution has become more liberal in its ethical judgements, there are signs that the church as an organism has become more theologically conservative. It has elected some more conservative moderators and at present ‘The Covenant Fellowship’ within the CofS reckons that one third of the 1,200 ministers in the Kirk are orthodox, reformed or evangelical.
- (ii) **Holiness:** On the issue of homosexuality, there are a significant number who disagree with the Revisionist trajectory. A consultation within the CofS in 2009 revealed that 2,160 elders, 307 members of Presbytery and 3 Presbyteries viewed the issue of ordaining someone in a committed same-sex relationship as a matter of heresy on a par with denying the resurrection while a further 6,273 elders, 802 Presbytery members and 24 Presbyteries said that carrying out such an ordination, while not heresy, would be ‘unjustifiable’.²⁰ When ruling elders were asked about whether homosexual activity was acceptable, and whether it would make a difference to who can be in a leadership role in the church the 22,000 who responded were divided 50:50. At the Presbytery level, individual members voted in a 3:2 ratios for various Traditionalist positions whereas the Presbyteries themselves voted 2:3, preferring Revisionist positions. While some have left, a greater number remain, sharing PCI’s views, ministering faithfully, hoping for reform and looking for support.

²⁰ Reported in the CofS 2011 General Assembly ‘Special Commission on Same-sex Relationships and the Ministry’, pp.5–12.

- (iii) **Unity:** While the Revisionist trajectory has moved the church far, there is now a sense that the changes have been too much for some and damaging to the church. Further change is currently opposed. If the trajectory of renewed orthodoxy continues the Revisionist trajectory may be reversed.
- (iv) **Catholicity:** A renewal of orthodoxy in some areas is evident in the CofS's interactions with other denominations through the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Like PCI, the CofS has argued against an unequivocal acceptance of the Joint Declaration on Justification by Faith issued by Lutherans and Roman Catholics and has done so on the basis of the classic reformed understanding of justification.

Tensions within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

11. In response to the decisions in the CofS General Assembly, the PCI General Assembly has voted for the last two years to decline invitations to send the Moderator to their Assembly. This is a contentious issue within PCI. If the denomination is to move forward with consensus on this issue then it is necessary to understand the different convictions driving the debate and consider how to constructively deal with concerns on both sides.

(a) Concerns expressed by some about not taking a stand

There are concerns that *continuing as usual* with the CofS will:

- (i) embolden those who might want to change PCI's position on homosexuality;
- (ii) confuse congregations within PCI;
- (iii) compromise PCI's faithfulness and witness;
- (iv) go against the will of the PCI General Assembly that has been established over the last two years by not sending the Moderator to the CofS General Assembly;
- (v) be hurtful for those who have already left the CofS over this issue, sometimes at great cost.

(b) Concerns by some about withdrawing from relationship

There are concerns that minimising PCI's relationships with the CofS will:

- (i) encourage a new and increasingly separatist ecclesiology within PCI;
- (ii) be interpreted by those within PCI who struggle with same sex attraction as a sign that their struggles cannot be spoken about within PCI and that the denomination wants to distance itself from the CofS;
- (iii) encourage a sense of self righteousness as a denomination, that 'we are better than others';
- (iv) prevent PCI from hearing different voices who could expose flaws that PCI is blind to, holding back necessary reform;
- (v) leave Traditionalists who have remained in the CofS abandoned.

(c) Summary

With a high view of the church, it is difficult to justify the existence of any denomination, including PCI, on exegetical grounds from scripture.

Writing about denominations, Kevin Vanhoozer, although recognising ‘that we do not have a satisfying account of what a denomination is,’²¹ distinguishes between three types:

- (i) Weak denominationalism where ‘some denominations become so nondoctrinal that they lose the gospel altogether, at which time faithful congregations are faced with the decision to remain as salt and light or to associate with some other group.’
- (ii) Radical denominationalism wherein people are tempted by ‘a sinful desire to hoard the marks of the one true church for one’s own congregations only,’ and ‘may be more inclined to exercise the nuclear option ... and push the proverbial button if doing so could make certain other denominations disappear.’
- (iii) Strong denominationalism which provides ‘a contextualization of the gospel’ and wherein people ‘are confident enough in their own skins to cooperate with other denominations.’²²
- (iv) These definitions capture a great deal of the varied concerns in PCI: that the CofS has a weak denominationalism that threatens its existence as a true church; and that PCI itself is moving towards a radical denominationalism that mirrors the factionalism and separatism of sections of American church life which has more in common with a baptist ecclesiology than anything Calvin and the Westminster Divines would recognise.

Principles for pursuing mutual reform

12. Ideally both the CofS and PCI would have a strong denominationalism so that the gospel would be faithfully proclaimed and both denominations would be comfortable dialoguing about difficult issues.

13. Dealing with radical denominationalism requires an allowance for differences and even error while still maintaining relationships. The alternative is to fall into the Donatist folly and develop a separatist attitude. Similarly, PCI needs to humbly recognise that the church visible is always and everywhere in need of reform and needs to be open to hearing the challenge and rebuke of others, including a call to reform from voices in the CofS who may see error in PCI that those looking from within are blind to.

14. This also includes how conversations about perceived doctrinal error and ethical concerns are conducted within PCI. They must always take place in a spirit of grace and humility that assures people that they are being heard. One way to do this as a denomination is to articulate and recognise the concerns people have about the pastoral implications of withdrawing from this relationship.

15. Dealing with weak denominationalism, there is the danger of thinking that no church or denomination can judge another unless they themselves are perfect. Ironically, like Donatism, this depends on the implicit assumption that perfection is possible. Churches and denominations need to lovingly confront and rebuke each other – even when those challenging their brothers and sisters are aware of their own sinfulness.

21 Vanhoozer, p.188.

22 *Ibid.*, pp.189–190.

16. The nature of weak denominationalism means that the institutions are not always necessarily the best place to engage in dialogue and encourage reform. Conversation and co-operation do not always have to happen on an institutional level. As Vanhoozer observes, ‘we need to distinguish between ecumenical unity – visible unity of an organizational kind – and evangelical unity, where the focus is on the gospel, which both unites (in Christ) and divides (cf. Luke 12:51).’²³ There are individuals and fellowships within the CofS with whom PCI is in theological and ethical agreement and who are in a position to work for reform from within.

17. PCI is well placed to engage with the CofS in a way that enables this process of mutual reform. Both denominations share a confession and a great deal of history and have cultural similarities, geographical proximity and a multi-dimensional existing relationship through denominational structures and personal friendships. This provides both the opportunity and the obligation to pursue unity and truth through mutual encouragement and loving rebuke.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS

APPENDIX 3(A)

A SUMMARY OF THE POSITION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND (PCI) REGARDING HUMAN SEXUALITY AND MARRIAGE

1. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) affirms that while a person’s sexuality is a very important part of their lives, it does not define who they are.
 - (a) People are more than their sexuality – they are first and foremost individuals both created and loved by the living God.
 - (b) Further, it is the clear position of PCI that same sex attraction (homosexual orientation) is in itself not sinful. However, PCI is equally clear that an active homosexual lifestyle is contrary to Scriptures and conflicts with the will of God for men and women. (1979 Assembly Reports.)
2. To assist the Church, PCI has produced pastoral guidelines in these matters (2006 Assembly Reports).
 - (a) These guidelines, along with the more recent seminars and resources for Ministers (and those planned for elders and other leaders) do not contradict or change PCI’s clear biblical and theological position. Rather they seek to assist Ministers, leaders and congregations, while holding firm to that position, to also provide a loving and grace filled welcome and support to all people, irrespective of sexual orientation.
 - (b) The deep pain and struggle felt by individuals and their loved ones in respect of the relationship between same sex attraction and a faithful

biblical lifestyle, is freely acknowledged. It is recognised that PCI has room for improvement as it seeks to develop more sensitive and effective pastoral care, both generally and with specific reference to those with same sex attraction and their families.

3. With regard specifically to marriage, PCI affirms that 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.

- (a) PCI therefore accepts this as the only basis on which marriage can take place within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
- (b) This position is consistent with both the teaching of Scripture (the Church's supreme standard) and the Westminster Confession of Faith (the Church's sub-ordinate standard – see Chpt 24:1).
- (c) PCI therefore supports the current legal definition of marriage within the law of Northern Ireland and opposes any redefinition of marriage.

4. Recognising that PCI affirms the biblical and confessional position of marriage as being exclusively between one man and one woman, the General Assembly has directed:

- (a) that Ministers and Licentiates of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland shall not conduct, nor assist in leading, services of marriage for same sex couples and that Presbyterian Church in Ireland premises shall not be used by others for such services;
- (b) that Ministers and Licentiates of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland shall not conduct, nor assist in leading, services of blessing, or any similar services, for same sex couples involved in either a civil partnership or civil marriage and that Presbyterian Church in Ireland premises shall not be used by any others for such services.

5. Implications for the qualification for leadership

- (a) All Candidates for the Ministry within PCI (as well as those Ministers seeking to transfer from another Church) are required to affirm the church's standards in these matters, as in others, before being received.

The applicant's form asks:

In 1979 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland received a report which stated:

“Christian teaching declares that the divine or holy use of the human sexual relationship lies in the marriage of a man and woman and in family life. Any other practice, whether heterosexual or homosexual, whether of persons married or unmarried, is a shortcoming or abuse.”

Do you adhere to this position?

Yes/No

- (b) PCI has made clear, on biblical and theological grounds, that an active homosexual lifestyle is contrary to Scripture. Those in ordained leadership are especially expected to model the Christian lifestyle as PCI understands it to be taught in the Scripture - the only infallible standard of faith and practice, guiding the Church in this as in all other issues.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS

APPENDIX 4

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

DECISION OF THE 2016 GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ITS FOLLOW-UP

1. The 2016 General Assembly received a report of a meeting held in Belfast in December 2015 between representatives of the PCI and the Free Church of Scotland (Free CofS). Following debate the following resolution was passed:

“That the General Assembly note the worthwhile meeting which has taken place between representatives of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Free Church of Scotland and welcome a natural development of a relationship with the Free Church of Scotland through areas of mutual interest in the Councils of the respective Assemblies.”
(2016 General Assembly Minutes, page 47)

2. The proposed meeting took place on Tuesday 6th December 2016 in Edinburgh, when the two Churches were represented by the following delegations:

PCI: Very Rev Drs Rob Craig (General Council Convener) and Ivan Patterson (Church Relations, Chair); Revs John Brackenridge (Church Relations, Convener) and Trevor Gribben (Clerk)
Free CofS: Rev. David Meredith, Mission Director; Rev. Alasdair M. Macleod, Mission Board Chairman; Rev. Malcolm Macleod, Assistant Clerk of Assembly; Rev. Iver Martin, ETS; Rev. John Nicholls, Moderator of the General Assembly.

3. Representatives of both churches reported on recent significant events in their respective denomination and the challenges of ministry in their respective contexts.

The Free CofS reps reported on the following areas of ministry and developments in the denomination:

- Church Planting
- The importance of discipleship
- New congregation's joining from other denominations, in particular arising from recent developments in the Church of Scotland
- Developments in global mission
- Developments in Edinburgh Theological Seminary and links with Glasgow University
- Membership of **International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)** – www.icrconline.com
- Membership of **World Reformed Fellowship**: <http://wrfnet.org>

PCI Reps summarised developments and significant issues in Ireland.

4. Follow-up:

The decision of the 2016 PCI was explained and discussed. The Free CofS reps welcomed the PCI decisions which were very much in line with their own thinking.

The meeting noted the mutual benefit of the discussion and agreed the following matters as areas of common interest as the basis for the natural development of relationships between both denominations:

- Church Planting
- ETS and PCI College
- Discipleship
- Church Revitalisation
- Global Mission

SOME BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS

1. The Free Church was a relatively small denomination, with approx. 12,000 members in 110 congregations in Scotland, arranged in 5 Presbyteries.

2. PCI has an ongoing relationship with the Church of Scotland but it is recognised that this should not preclude a parallel relationship with the Free Church i.e. such relationships for PCI would not be mutually exclusive.

3. While PCI had a clearly stated theological position regarding ordination, in that both men and women were eligible for ordination on the same basis to both the ruling and teaching eldership, in the Free Church only men were eligible for ordination. It is recognised that for some in PCI this poses a difficulty though it was acknowledged that PCI already related to other denominations with similar theological positions as the Free Church took on this issue.

4. PCI is a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), while the Free Church was not. The Free Church was however a member of the World Reformed Fellowship and the International Conference of Reformed Churches. Some denominations in these bodies were also connected to WCRC.

5. The Free CofS wished to widen its ecumenical reach and pursue meaningful relations with churches in the UK and beyond, especially churches from within our Presbyterian tradition. The Free Church 2015 General Assembly had agreed to instigate and pursue ecumenical relationships with the Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

6. It would not be appropriate to consider full interchangeability of ministry between the two denominations as PCI did not have that form of relationship with any other denomination and also the issue of ordination of women in PCI would make that undesirable from the Free Church's perspective.

7. Invitations to attend each other's General Assemblies could be one form of expressing a new relationship. However, that was not an initial priority for either denomination.

TREVOR D GRIBBEN, Convener

DOCTRINE COMMITTEE

1. The Doctrine Committee had two significant matters before it since the last meeting of the General Assembly.

2. Firstly, the Committee was asked to prepare a response for the General Council's consideration to the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) request that the PCI consider whether the WCRC should sign the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) previously ratified between Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Methodist representatives. The response of the Doctrine Committee is outlined in Appendix 1 to this report. It was received by the General Council at its October 2016 meeting and its recommendations adopted. This was subsequently forwarded to the WCRC as the position of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

3. The second matter before the Committee was the consideration of the issue of multi-faith prayer at civic events. The Committee's report is included at Appendix 2 to this report and was received at the March meeting of the General Council, when the following resolution was agreed:

Following consideration of the report of the Doctrine Committee, the General Council affirms that the 2007 Guidelines continue to be followed, but that further substantial reflection on the theological basis for involvement in multi-faith events be carried out by the Doctrine Committee, through the appointment of a dedicated Task Group, which should include a representative from each of the Councils for Public Affairs and Global Mission.

4. The Committee noted that the envisaged substantial reflection could be facilitated in a number of the following ways:

- (a) Holding an event to help orientate us to the complex issues involved in religious participation at civic events in our ever-evolving context;
- (b) Drawing on the resources of scholars who have first-hand familiarity with our context and who have relevant expertise - e.g. Richard Creighton who teaches theology in Nigeria, and whose doctoral research was on the political theology of Oliver O'Donovan;
- (c) Seeking funding for a graduate research position at Union College to examine the theological principles that would guide and shape Irish Presbyterian engagement in public life in the twenty-first century (which would help nurture PCI's own intellectual leadership in this complex issue);
- (d) Dialogue with other Christian groups not presently represented in such events (e.g. non-indigenous Pentecostal communities) to discuss their place and ours in civic society;
- (e) Dialogue with other Christian groups currently who are involved to see if a common response might be made;
- (f) Engagement with representatives of other religions to see if there is any similar discomfort.

J. STAFFORD CARSON, Convener

DOCTRINE COMMITTEE

APPENDIX 1

DOCTRINE COMMITTEE AND THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

The Doctrine Committee met on Friday 6th May and Friday 16th September 2016 to consider a request from the World Communion of Reformed Churches that the PCI consider whether the WCRC should sign the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) previously ratified between Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Methodists representatives.

The Background to the Request

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) was signed in 1999 by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) of the Roman Catholic Church after many years of ecumenical conversation. The central claim of the document is that it sets out an agreed position on justification rendering the mutual condemnations of the Reformation period no longer applicable. The World Methodist Council voted to adopt the document in 2006.

The WCRC has completed a dialogue with constituent churches on adopting the document. In addition to the ecumenical impulse underlying this process there are a number of additional motivations. First, the Reformation anniversary of 2017 offers the opportunity to make a bold public declaration. Second, as the “Personal Letter” from the leaders of the WCRC to the PCI makes clear, the ecumenical momentum anticipated from the original agreement has failed to develop and it is now hoped that WCRC involvement will breathe new life into the movement.

Finally, the proposal from the WCRC Executive includes, in addition to the signing the JDDJ, a suggested Statement of Association. This extensive document outlines some Reformed concerns.

The Response of the Doctrine Committee

The unanimous response of the Doctrine Committee is that the PCI should indicate to the WCRC that the JDDJ should not be ratified. The Committee based this conclusion on a number of factors:

- (a) The Committee are uneasy that the WCRC (and the PCI) might join a process that has been ongoing for many decades and in which PCI has not participated. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is a fundamental doctrine of the faith and while we commend others for their willingness to discuss these issues across historic boundaries, it would be unusual for the PCI to approve of a complex theological document which clearly addresses the concerns and conversations of other parties.

- (b) The approach of the document does not fit well with a Reformed confessional approach. The WCRC are clear in their correspondence with the PCI that the document represents a ‘method of differentiated consensus.’ The parties have agreed to a statement that leaves myriad central questions unanswered. In public statements on the doctrine of justification the PCI desires to be as specific and detailed as Scripture and her subordinate standards require. We should seek to say as much as we can about the grace of God with clarity and precision, not as little as we might be able to agree with others.
- (c) The Committee agree that, despite the intention to seek a ‘differentiated consensus’, serious questions remain about the theological exposition in the JDDJ. For example, the definition of justification is not agreed in the document. The parties simply agree to accept one another’s preferred definitions. These definitions may well be mutually contradictory. Furthermore, the meaning of ‘faith alone’ is not clear in the JDDJ. Indeed, the document states explicitly that justification is received in baptism: *‘We confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they are granted the gift of salvation, which lays the basis of the whole Christian life.’* While there may be qualifications that would enable the PCI to agree to such a statement, we do not believe that this is an appropriate form in which to confess our faith. After serious consideration of the JDDJ, the Statement of Association, and the personal correspondence from the WCRC Executive, the Doctrine Committee could not conclude that the JDDJ represents an authentically Irish Presbyterian public statement of the grace of God in Christ.
- (d) An overarching concern of the Committee concerns the ecumenical approach of the process. The PCI is being asked to approve of a ‘high level’ supra-national ecumenical statement. Yet the correspondence states that the JDDJ may never really have been accepted within the Vatican and it is now therefore necessary for the WCRC to ratify the JDDJ in order to support the work of ecumenical theologians within the Roman Catholic Church: *‘In their hands JDDJ can be useful as a lever that constantly helps to remind the Catholic side of the far-reaching commitments they had entered in’* (Matthias Zeindler). The Doctrine Committee believes as a matter of principle that ecumenical dialogue on this central question must begin at the local level before the ratification of supra-national agreements. Would it not seem odd to our near neighbours on this small island to discover that the PCI was willing to be a ‘lever’ within internal Roman Catholic discussions, yet had not opened conversations with Roman Catholic theologians in Ireland?
- (e) Finally, the Doctrine Committee believes this local ecumenical conversation is an urgent priority for the PCI. In an increasingly secular society we find ourselves making common cause with our Roman Catholic neighbours on many pressing moral concerns, including the definition of marriage and beginning and end of life issues. More than ever we need to be able to articulate the grace of God as profoundly

and as widely as is humanly possible. While we are grateful for the common stand we are able to make with others on moral issues, there is a divine imperative for a faithful Scriptural testimony to the grace of God in the cross of Christ.

Recommendations:

- (a) That the PCI indicate to the WCRC, for the reasons given above, that we do not wish the WCRC to ratify the JDDJ. In addition, the PCI has serious concerns that ratification will impair the public witness of both the WCRC and the PCI to the grace of God.
- (b) The Doctrine Committee requests General Assembly to consider appointing a theological commission to approach the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland for ecumenical discussions on our contemporary understanding of the grace of God in Christ.

DOCTRINE COMMITTEE

APPENDIX 2

MULTI-FAITH PRAYER AT CIVIC EVENTS

This paper attempts to outline the origin of the practice of participation in what is termed ‘multi-faith prayer’ and to summarise the Presbyterian Church in Ireland’s present involvement in such events. It explains the particular theological framework out of which this practice emerged and examines other rationales that might be employed in order to justify the involvement of a Reformed Church in such interfaith events. It is hoped that it may be the beginning of a sustained discussion of the matters of public theology that arise.

1. THE EVOLVING CONTEXT IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

The multi-faith prayer event is, increasingly, the preferred option for how religions, and the cultures formed by those religions, relate to one another in the public square.²⁴ Since the Doctrine Committee’s last consideration of this topic in 2007 the context has evolved on both sides of the border. Given that the speed of change is unlikely to slow it is appropriate that as a denomination we continue to reflect theologically on how the church relates to the ‘religious other’ in the public square.

24 In the United States, President Obama had a multifaith prayer service associated with his inauguration with Muslims, Hindus, Jews and Christians praying and reading from their scriptures. Amanda Ruggeri, ‘For President Obama, a somber, inclusive inaugural prayer service’, *US News*, 21st January, available at: www.usnews.com/news/obama/articles/2009/01/21/for-president-obama-a-somber-inclusive-inaugural-prayer-service.

There is nothing new about multi-faith prayer at civic events in the United Kingdom. Since 1966, the annual service for the 'Observance for Commonwealth Day' has taken the form of a multi-faith event. Now held in Westminster Abbey, this is the largest multi-faith gathering in the UK and includes Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu and Islamic prayers.²⁵ Most significantly, there has been discussion about the possibility of the next Coronation being a multi-faith service.²⁶ It is important that we begin a conversation about the possible implications of such a significant constitutional change.

In the Republic of Ireland, Presidential inaugurations and national events of remembrance also take the form of multi-faith services. For instance, the official programme for the remembrance event at Glasnevin is styled as an 'Interfaith Service' with participation from 'the Jewish, Islamic and Christian Faiths'.²⁷ Since the formation of the Republic there has been significant change in the religious element of such national events. Initially, a religious ceremony took place immediately prior to the inauguration of an Irish Presidency and it was exclusively denominational. For instance, in 1938, on the morning of his inauguration, President-elect Hyde attended worship in St Patrick's Anglican Cathedral whilst government ministers attended Votive Mass in the Pro-Cathedral. According to the London Times, there were also services in the principal Presbyterian and Methodist churches, as well as in the synagogue. Then in 1945 President-elect O'Kelly attended a Pontifical High Mass in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral. However in 1973, with the inauguration of President Childers, the service included participation from representatives of the four main churches.²⁸ This practice continued at the inaugurations of Presidents Ó Dálaigh and Hillery with an ecumenical service being held in the cathedral of the tradition

25 The orders of service are available on the website of the Abbey. See M. Braybrooke, *Interfaith Organizations, 1893-1979: An Historical Directory* (New York: Edward Mellon, 1980), pp.34-36. This year the only reference to the Lord Jesus in the liturgy was that his 'words' were used in the Lord's Prayer.

26 See Nick Spencer and Nicholas Dixon, *Who wants a Christian Coronation?* (London: Theos, 2015), available at www.theosthinktank.co.uk/publications/2015/09/01/who-wants-a-christian-coronation. See also Norman Bonney, *Monarchy, Religion and the State: Civil Religion in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the Commonwealth* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), pp.117-24.

27 The officiating representatives were: Rabbi Zalman Lent (Representative of the Jewish Community in Ireland), Imam Sheikh Hussein Halawa (Islamic Cultural Centre), Archbishop Michael Jackson (Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin), Brian Anderson (President of the Methodist Church in Ireland), Trevor Morrow (Former Moderator of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Ireland), Father Tom Carroll (Representative of the Greek Orthodox Church in Ireland), Archbishop Diarmuid Martin (Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin), Ms Síle Headen (Chaplaincy of the Humanist Association of Ireland). www.taoiseach.gov.ie/DOT/eng/Historical_Information/1916_Commemorations/Events/Glasnevin_booklet_for_web.pdf

28 At the beginning of 1973 the Fifth Amendment to the Irish Constitution saw the special position afforded to the Roman Catholic Church, and the recognition of the main Protestant denominations, Quakers and Jews removed from the Constitution. Article 44 of the Constitution now states: 'The State acknowledges that the homage of public worship is due to Almighty God. It shall hold His Name in reverence, and shall respect and honour religion'.

of the President-elect. At the inauguration of Patrick Hillery to his second term (December 1983) a religious service preceded the civic ceremony at Dublin Castle with the President-elect being prayed for by representatives of the four main churches (the then moderator, Tom Simpson, represented PCI), the Clerk of the Society of Friends, and the Chief Rabbi. Although this change had ostensibly been to cut costs in difficult economic circumstances, this was to become the pattern for future inaugurations. And so at the inauguration of Mary McAleese in 1997 there was participation from the four main churches (with Frank Sellar representing PCI), the Society of Friends and the Chief Rabbi.²⁹ Most recently, at the inauguration of Michael D Higgins' presidency (November 2011), the multi-faith participation was extended still further with nine 'concelebrants' leading a service that took the following order: Be Thou My Vision was sung and there were prayers and readings from the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin and the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin. There was a musical rendering of St Patrick's Breastplate, a Scripture reading by the head of the Methodist Church, the Lord's Prayer in Irish and a prayer by Trevor Morrow as a representative of the Presbyterian Church, followed by prayers from a Quaker and a Coptic Christian. After the singing of Make me a Channel of Your Peace there was a Jewish prayer from the Chief Rabbi, a reading from the Qur'an by a representative of the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland, and a statement from a representative of the Humanist Association of Ireland.

This was widely interpreted as an interfaith service.³⁰ Some did however recognise that it was designed to be a Christian service of prayer followed by blessings from Jewish and Islamic representatives and a moment of reflection to mark the humanist philosophy and secular aspects of Irish life.³¹

2. THE HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS OF MULTI-FAITH PRAYER

The distinction between 'interfaith prayer' and 'multi-faith prayer' is frequently employed, multi-faith prayer being defined as prayer in the presence of another religious group in which each group present their own prayers and explicitly do not join in the others' prayers.³² Such participation is often *serial*, with each group taking its turn to pray (perhaps in alphabetical or historical order of religion) while the others listen or participate as they feel appropriate. Multi-faith prayer may also be *simultaneous*, with each group allocated a different space

29 At this stage the wearing of formal morning dress was abandoned and the judges no longer wore robes and wigs.

30 See for example: www.irishtimes.com/news/fanfare-as-aras-prepares-to-welcome-new-resident-1.10032; www.independent.ie/irish-news/president-michael-d-promises-seven-years-of-new-ideas-26791169.html; <http://islamireland.ie/news/icc-gives-the-islamic-presentation-at-presidential-inauguration/>; www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/republic-of-ireland/republic-lost-its-way-laments-new-irish-president-28679943.html

31 www.independent.ie/irish-news/president-michael-d-promises-seven-years-of-new-ideas-26791169.html

32 S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Not Without My Neighbour: Issues in Interfaith Relations* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1999), pp.38-39. Michael Amaladoss, SJ, 'Inter-religious Worship', in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp.87-98.

to pray separately at the same event. Either way, the intention is that no prayers would actually be said together.³³ This is summarised according to the rubric of ‘being together in prayer’ as opposed to ‘praying together’. The aim is well captured by Ryan who describes ‘serial’ participation as ‘a situation in which people come together in full fidelity to their own faith and offer an expression of it while at the same time opening their hearts with sincere respect and interest to the faith of others’.³⁴

It is hard to overstate the importance of the example of Pope John Paul II for the widespread acceptance of multi-faith prayer.³⁵ In 1986 he assembled the first of the Assisi prayer vigils for peace and invited Muslims, Buddhists, Zoroastrians and others to participate in parallel prayer. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, it was ‘one of the most remarkable events in the spectacle-filled reign of Pope John Paul II’.³⁶ It did arouse considerable controversy and so, shortly afterwards, the Pope provided his theological rationale for multi-faith prayer in his Christmas address to the Curia.

We don’t come to pray together, but we come together to pray. As each religion prays, thus expressing its own faith, the others do not join in: they respect and silently give encouragement to those who are praying, and are in quiet solidarity with them on the basis of their own belief, and of the inner prayer that flows from it.³⁷

The Pope’s reasons were: (1) that the prayer gathering was a witness to the world that the main religions were committed to peace; and (2) the event was a work of the Holy Spirit because ‘every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present the heart of every person’. Four years later, John Paul II offered further reasons in the encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (Mission of the Redeemer):³⁸ (3) all people are created in God’s image and therefore share a fundamental unity; and (4) the *praeparatio* status of world religions means that God can bring the authentic prayers of those of other religions to fullness in Christ and his Church.

-
- 33 Gavin D’Costa, ‘Interreligious Prayer Between Christians and Muslims’, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 24 (2012), pp.1-14.
- 34 Thomas Ryan, *Interreligious Prayer: A Christian Guide* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 23. His inclusivist approach is based on his conviction that the Bible’s ‘overwhelming ... affirmation [is] that God is one and that God cares for all people’, p.7.
- 35 Arnulf Camps, ‘The Prayers for Peace at Assisi, October 27, 1986: What was Shared?’ in Jerald D. Gort et al, *On Sharing Religious Experience: Possibility of Interfaith Mutuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 257.
- 36 Francis X. Rocca, ‘Pope Benedict’s Interfaith Outreach’ *The Wall Street Journal*, 31st October 2011.
- 37 John Paul II, ‘Pope’s Christmas address to the Roman Curia: the world situation constitutes a pressing appeal for the spirit of Assisi, 22nd December 1986’, *Bulletin, Secretariat for Non-Christians* 64 (22/1) (1987): pp.54–55, 60, citing 59. See also: Pope John Paul II, ‘Opening Address in the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels’, in Assisi: World Day of Prayer for Peace, 27th October 1986 (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1987), p.88.
- 38 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), § 29. www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jpii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html

The nascent inclusivism of Roman Catholic theology had been embraced by the Second Vatican Council that, for the first time in conciliar history, had spoken about other religions in a positive, albeit guarded, manner.³⁹ At least five factors gave rise to a new optimism about the possibility of the salvation of non-Christians: the end of Christendom; two World Wars fought in the heart of Christian Europe; the Holocaust; the critique of missions from the viewpoint of secular modernity; and voices calling for reform within Catholicism.⁴⁰ The upshot was that the Roman Catholic Church now affirms the possibility of salvation for those who ‘sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience’.⁴¹ In other words, non-Christians may experience salvation apart from the sacramental mediation of the institutional church. Jews and Muslims can be saved, especially since their knowledge of God is based on biblical revelation, and there is also hope for Hindus and Buddhists who ‘search, among shadows and images’ for the unknown God who created them and who desires that they be saved.⁴² Indeed, salvation is possible for any who ‘seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience’.⁴³ It is not that non-Christian religions are regarded as salvific, but rather that the Holy Spirit is at work in them preparing non-Christians for the gospel through their institutions and practices (*praeparatio evangelica*). This inchoate salvation comes to completion in a post-mortem encounter with Christ in purgatory.⁴⁴

39 For the historical development of inclusivism within Roman Catholicism see Francis A. Sullivan, ‘Vatican II on the Salvation of Other Religions’, in *After Vatican II: Trajectories and Hermeneutics*, ed. James L. Heft (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 68-95. The inclusivism is also affirmed in the post-conciliar documents *Nostra aetate* (‘In our Time’ the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions, *Ad gentes* (‘To the Nations’ the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church) and *Gaudium et Spes* (‘Joy and Hope’ the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World).

See also Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969), 6:395: ‘And anyone who has let himself be taken hold of by this grace can be called with every right an “anonymous Christian”’. Hans Kung, ‘The World Religions in God’s Plan of Salvation’, in *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, ed. Josef Neuner (London: Burns and Oates, 1965), pp.51-53: ‘Since God seriously and effectively wills that all men should be saved and that none should be lost unless by his own fault, every man is intended to find his salvation within his own historical condition ... within the religion imposed on him by society. ... A man is to be saved within the religion that is made available to him in his historical situation. Hence it is his right and duty to seek God within that religion in which the hidden God has already found him’.

40 D’Costa explains this trend in his section of Gavin D’Costa, Paul Knitter, and Daniel Strange, *Only One Way? Three Christian Responses on the Uniqueness of Christ in a Religiously Plural World* (London: SCM Press, 2011), pp.8-12.

41 *Lumen Gentium*, 16. This text (‘Light of the Nations’) is a Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and is regarded as one of Vatican II’s principal documents.

42 Catechism of the Catholic Church, §§839-843.

43 *Lumen Gentium*, 16.

44 Contra the Westminster Larger Catechism: ‘Q. 60. Can they who have never heard the Gospel, and so, know not Jesus Christ, nor believe in him, be saved by their

In Great Britain, the Catholic Bishops' Conference in England and Wales also applauded multireligious prayer. Their reason was that such prayer served the unity of all people and their unity with God and it is thus part of the mission of the Church and an 'expression of love for our neighbour, and of respect for the integrity of the religions involved, and shows attentiveness to the universal presence of the Holy Spirit'.⁴⁵

The Church of England has also accepted multi-faith prayer, with varying degrees of qualification. In 1992 the Anglican Inter-faith Consultative Group provided theological principles and practical guidelines for Multi-Faith Worship.⁴⁶ Its understanding was that:

[F]aith groups observe respectfully while other believers worship and then take their own turn. This allows sacred texts, prayer and actions to be employed more freely across the faith groups represented, and allows those who wish to recognise areas of common experience and expression without offending those who do not believe they exist.

The Office on Inter-Religious Relations of the World Council of Churches and the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue together concluded that there was a case for multi-faith prayer.⁴⁷ The questions that lay behind their discussions were as follows:

When the natural human response in any given situation is to pray, and the context of that response is multireligious, what can we do together? How can we do it? Indeed, ought we to do it? And if we do, on what basis may we proceed?

Out of these discussions four possibilities emerged:

- (a) A shared multi-faith act with serial presentation from a number of different religious traditions. Although there may be a common theme, no attempt would be made to coordinate the presentations in order to make them cohere;
- (b) A contiguous act like what took place at the Days of Prayer for Peace in Assisi (1986 and 2002);
- (c) A multi-faith act in which 'the aim is to create, out of the resources of a multiplicity of religions involved, a prayer event that produces a "blended" or otherwise "combined" content which may be effectively "owned" in its entirety by each of the participating groups or their religious representative. Inevitably the only way this can be achieved is by taking the approach of the lowest common denominator'; and

living according to the light of nature? A. They who, having never heard the Gospel, know not Jesus Christ, and believe not in him, cannot be saved, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, or the Laws of that Religion which they professe; neither is there salvation in any other, but in Christ alone, who is the saviour only of his body the church'.

- 45 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2010), pp.57-65.
- 46 'Multi-Faith Worship? Report by the Interfaith Consultative Group of the General Synod of the Church of England (London: Church House Publishing, 1992).
- 47 *The Pro Dialogo Bulletin*, 98 (1998) contains the full text of the Bossey meeting in September 1997 and the concluding statement of the Bangalore meeting of 1994.

- (d) Careful planning to produce a ‘coherent-integrated interreligious’ event.⁴⁸

3. CHALLENGES TO PARTICIPATION IN MULTI-FAITH PRAYER

The widespread embrace of multi-faith prayer has not gone unchallenged, even amongst Roman Catholics whose understanding of other religions provides them with a theological basis for participation in such events. At the time of the first Assisi gathering, Joseph Ratzinger was one of the Pontiff’s closest advisors but he was uneasy about John Paul’s grand gesture and declined an invitation to be present at the multi-faith event. He later pondered over serious questions that had been ‘repeatedly’ raised:

Can one do this? Does this not give most people a false impression of common ground that does not exist in reality? Does this not promote relativism, the opinion that, fundamentally, the differences that divide ‘religions’ are merely penultimate? And is not the seriousness of faith being undermined thereby and God set farther away from us, in the end our forsakenness intensified?⁴⁹

Ratzinger acknowledged that there were ‘undeniable dangers’ with multi-faith prayer, not least because it was easily open to being ‘misinterpreted by many people’. His conclusion was that although such prayer was theologically permissible, if it was to take place at all, it must fulfil two basic conditions. First, it ‘can only exist as a sign in unusual situations, in which, as it were, a common cry for help rises up, stirring the hearts of men, to stir also the heart of God’. Secondly, ‘careful explanation’ was required in order to explain ‘what happens here and what does not happen’.⁵⁰ Tellingly, when, as Pope Benedict XVI, he met with some 300 religious leaders at Saint Francis Basilica in Assisi for the twenty-fifth anniversary of his predecessor’s World Day of Prayer, public prayer was conspicuously absent. The character of the meeting changed to emphasise the social benefits of the religions (and non-religions) working together to stand for peace against war and terrorism.

In the early 1990s there was great discussion about multi-faith prayer in the Church of England. In December 1991 more than 2,000 clergy signed an ‘Open Letter to the Leadership of the Church of England’ in protest at the multi-faith gathering in observance of Commonwealth Day.⁵¹ This appears to have led to the publication of a General Synod report on the matter that was debated in July 1992. The then Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, urged that more work be done on ‘the different underlying meanings of multi-faith worship’ in order to establish ‘a firm base in Christian theology and epistemology’. He recognised that in a multi-faith and multicultural society ‘the nature of a Civic Service’ would have to be reviewed. He was however insistent that ‘integrity’ required ‘that a single tradition of faith should determine the character of the

48 Marianne Moyaert and Joris Geldhof, *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogues: Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp.57-59.

49 Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), pp.106-07.

50 Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p.107.

51 *The Church Times*, 6th December 1991.

service'. Carey believed that 'What other people ask of us is integrity and that is what we ask of them'. He feared that if the Church's distinctive witness was confused by participation in multi-faith worship then the Church would no longer be respected by committed adherents of other religions.⁵²

4. MULTI-FAITH PRAYER AND REFORMED THEOLOGY

Any decision (and consequent guidelines) on participation in multi-faith prayer at civic occasions would be mindful of the fact that as a Reformed Church we do not share the particular doctrinal framework that provided a theological rationale for Roman Catholic involvement in such interfaith events. As we have seen with Pope Benedict, even some of those who subscribe to this Roman Catholic theological framework are so acutely aware of the dangers of such participation they think multi-faith prayer should only take place in exceptional circumstances. For those who do not accept that framework, the participation in an act so open to misunderstanding seems even harder to sustain.

Multi-faith prayer in the 'Spirit of Assisi' is completely in line with Rome's view that nature and grace are two independent realities. In what amounts to a dualistic scheme, socio-religious identity is seen as morally neutral and something that is supplemented and elevated by grace. In what leads to an implicit syncretism, the gospel brings pagan religion to its fulfilment and fruition. In complete contrast, within Reformed Theology, pagan religion is not ethically neutral but an expression of hostility to God. The grace of the gospel renews and restores nature not by supplementing it but by resurrection—hence the particular and exclusive character of the Christian religion within Reformed Theology.⁵³

Consequently, the endorsement of, or participation in, multi-faith prayer by those who embrace the Reformed faith would require significant and persuasive theological justification. Any discussion of what theological warrant there is for such practice would have to take into consideration at least two related theological topics: first, the nature of idolatry and, secondly, the view of religion's place within the public square.

Regarding the nature of idolatry, the Doctrine Committee's report on multi-faith events endeavoured to make a number of distinctions. It was careful to distinguish participation in such events from participation in interfaith worship. In regard to a Presidential inauguration it was claimed that such a context was 'not specifically religious'. A further presupposition was that 'the Old Testament polemic against idolatry and the use of the word "idolatry" in the New Testament does not cover the cases of all religions'.⁵⁴ This was understood as meaning that Judaism is 'clearly not' a case of idolatry and that it was 'difficult' to extend the word 'idolatry' to Islam.⁵⁵

52 Carey's remarks are available at www.glcarey.co.uk/Speeches/1992/MultiFaith.html

53 Herman Bavinck, 'Common Grace', trans. R.C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal*, 24 (1989), pp.47-52. For exposition of this see Brian G. Mattson, 'A Soft Spot for Paganism? Herman Bavinck and "Insider" Movements', *The Bavinck Review* 4 (2013): 32-43. Available at: https://bavinckinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/TBR4_03_Mattson.pdf

54 General Assembly Annual Report (Belfast: Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 2007), 7.

55 An example of this position would be Miroslav Volf in *Allah: A Christian Response* (New York: Harper, 2010) who believes that Christians and Muslims worship the

Further discussion and clarification is required of these assumptions because, as Daniel Strange has recently argued, the concept of idolatry is the seminal biblical tool through which to view ‘the religious other’ and it has sophisticated explanatory power that encompasses the entirety of the human experience.⁵⁶ He argues that idolatry is ‘perhaps *the* hermeneutical master key with which to unlock the nature of non-Christian religion and religions’.⁵⁷ Strange’s argument is that the gospel always subverts and fulfils the religions of the world.⁵⁸ This is especially the case when it comes to our understanding of Judaism and Islam.⁵⁹ Despite the many complexities in these matters, the Bible is nonetheless consistent in its message that in the world there are only two types of people: those whose worship of the Living God leads to life and those whose worship of idols lead to death. There is no middle ground. The ‘parasitic’ and ‘counterfeit’ nature of idolatry means that there is always a link between the idol and the truth it parodies.⁶⁰ As such, the question must be asked as to whether or not such multi-faith prayer involves idolatry.

same God but understand God in partly different ways. Perhaps the most important text for those who want to argue that Muslims worship the same God as Christians is Acts 17. The argument goes that Paul told the Athenians that what they worshipped in ignorance ‘I declare to you’. Paul supplied more information about the object of their worship. But it is significant that Paul here finds his point of contact with the Greek admission that there was an unknown deity. Paul did not take this approach with those worshipping Zeus or any other deity from the Greek pantheon. Instead those many different idols of Athens simply provoked his spirit.

- 56 Daniel Strange, *For Their Rock is Not as Our Rock: An Evangelical Theology of Religions* (Leicester: Apollos, 2014). For another recent treatment of idolatry see G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Leicester: IVP, 2008). Calvin addresses the question of whether or not Christians and Muslims worship the same God: ‘So today the Turks, although they proclaim at the top of their lungs that the Creator of Heaven and earth is God, still, while repudiating Christ, substitute an idol in the place of the true God’ (Inst. 2.6.4). Similarly Calvin writes: ‘Turks, Jews, and such as are like them, have a mere idol and not the true God. For by whatever titles they may honour the god whom they worship, still, as they reject [Jesus] without whom they cannot come to God, and in whom God has really manifested himself to us, what have they but some creature or fiction of their own’ (Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles ‘1 John 2:22-23’). The Directory for the Publick Worship of God produced by the Westminster Assembly speaks of the ‘blasphemies’ of Islam and the Confession itself is unequivocal that God’s speech is necessary for there to be any true religion and dependence on any other source constitutes idolatry (WCF 1.1). The Larger Catechism states that ‘all false worship’ is ‘spiritual prostitution’ (WLC 110). It therefore forbids ‘recommending, demanding, practicing, or in any way approving any religious worship not established by God himself ... Also forbidden are: any departure from the true worship of God ... whether by our own invention or received from some other tradition, and whether justified by ... good intentions, or any other excuse’ (WLC 109).

57 Strange, *Their Rock*, p.156.

58 Strange, *Their Rock*, p.273. Here Strange is relying on Hendrick Kraemer, ‘Continuity or Discontinuity’, in *The Authority of Faith* (London: OUP, 1939).

59 Strange, *Their Rock*, pp.303-33.

60 Strange, *Their Rock*, p.98.

Even leaving aside the issue of whether the object is the same in the purported worship of Christians, Jews and Muslims, there is also the question of whether or not what is going on is appropriate public worship. Such analysis would involve distinguishing between worshipping a false god (idolatry) and worshipping the true God but in an inappropriate way (e.g. a breach of the second commandment).⁶¹

The second significant area of theology influencing this discussion is the nature of religion within the public square. Within public theology, some Reformed theologians seek to justify such multi-faith practice by articulating a theory of principled pluralism. Within the context of PCI, one of the speakers at the first Church in the Public Square event (January 2014) was Jonathan Chaplain (Kirby-Laing Centre for Christian Ethics), a well-known advocate of principled pluralism.⁶² The ‘central aim’ of his view ‘is that the role of the state in a religiously diverse society is to maintain a public square equally open to contributions from many faiths rather than overtly prefer or privilege any one of them, even Christianity’.⁶³ Chaplain conceives of the national public square as neither *naked* (secular) nor *sacred* (Christian), but instead as *civil*.⁶⁴ As such he believes that on the national public stage the state should give equal rights to all religions and none. This would mean that at civic events each group could, if invited, come and make whatever contribution it deemed appropriate. The desire of principled pluralism is to endorse pluralism without succumbing to relativism. As such it is somewhat similar to what Abraham Kuyper advocated in his *Lectures on Calvinism* (1898). Perhaps most notably, this view has been espoused by Richard Mouw and Sander Griffioen in *Pluralisms and Horizons: An Essay in Christian Public Philosophy* (1993). Overall, the principled pluralist hopes to allow genuine difference to coexist without suppressing or minimising the firmly held convictions of any group.

Were principled pluralism to be embraced, one necessary implication is that the church should make no attempt to cling on to the residual privileges of her former cultural pre-eminence and instead accept her status as one minority among many. That would mean for example that at Remembrance Sunday events in Northern Ireland the church would have to *encourage* participation from other religions.

One of the difficulties with this position is that the public square does not necessarily become more welcoming and hospitable. In the Republic of Ireland multi-faith prayer in a supposedly ‘civil’ public square might mean that citizens

61 It is acknowledged that there can and may be overlap between a consideration of idolatry and question of the theology of worship.

62 See the details of the event at: www.presbyterianireland.org/Utility/About-Us/Councils/General-Council/Church-in-the-Public-Square.aspx

63 Jonathan Chaplain, ‘The Bible, the State and Religious Diversity: Theological Foundations for “Principled Pluralism”’, a paper delivered at a meeting of the Religion, Culture and Communication group of the Tyndale Fellowship, in Cambridge, July 2008. This is what Rowan Williams terms ‘procedural secularism’ in his ‘Secularism, Faith and Freedom’ in *The New Visibility of Religion*, eds. G. Ward and M. Hoelzl (London: Continuum, 2008), 45-47.

64 The Christian Nation model is what is espoused by Oliver O’Donovan in his *Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

who were conservative Tridentine Catholics could not, in conscience, attend the inauguration of their president because the ceremony would involve a religious role for Protestant clergy. Similarly, there would be some Muslims who would feel unable to attend because a Jewish religious leader was participating. It is worth noting that this would not have been the case under the arrangements for a presidential inauguration prior to 1983. Indeed, given that the Republic is a broadly secular state it could be argued that it is fitting that the religious element of any civic event, such as a presidential inauguration, should not have had a place in the state event itself.⁶⁵ Furthermore, if the goal behind this is to recognise the diversity which the various religions can bring to the public square, then the present arrangement is simply not inclusive or representative enough. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Scientologists, Pantheists and Sikhs appear to have been excluded from any serial participation in the inauguration. By way of illustration, on the basis of the 2011 census of Ireland, when compared to one of the participants in the multi-faith event (the Society of Friends), there are approximately fourteen times as many Pentecostals, ten times as many Hindus, eight times as many Buddhists, and six times as many Lutherans,⁶⁶ and yet these numerically significant minorities did not participate.

If it is argued that Christianity, Judaism and Islam are included on the basis that they are monotheistic religions (perhaps on the basis of a strict reading of the Irish Constitution's declaration that 'Almighty God' deserves worship (44.1), then the argument of principled plurality no longer applies and the question morphs into one of whether or not the name of 'Almighty God' is held in reverence, respect and honour by this kind of multi-faith prayer.

The exact nature of the place of religion within the Irish Constitution is hard to ascertain. For instance, in the Houses of the Oireachtas, at the commencement of each day's business the following Christian prayer is said by the Ceann Comhairle in the Dáil and by the Clerk in the Seanad:

Direct, we beseech Thee, O Lord, our actions by Thy holy inspirations and carry them on by Thy gracious assistance; that every word and work of ours may always begin from Thee, and by Thee be happily ended; through Christ our Lord. Amen.⁶⁷

The different constitutional settlement within the United Kingdom raises other issues for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's role in the public square in that state. In Northern Ireland there is, unlike England, no established religion.⁶⁸

65 The Constitution of Ireland (44.2) affirms that 'The State guarantees not to endow any religion'.

66 www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011pdr/Census_2011_Highlights_Part_1_web_72dpi.pdf

67 www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/a-misc/prayer.htm This collect is from the Litany of the Saints.

68 The Church of Scotland Act 1921 (Article 3 of Schedule 1) refers to the Church of Scotland as the national church of Scotland and as such the Kirk is recognized as being qualitatively different to other churches. It states: This Church is in historical continuity with the Church of Scotland which was reformed in 1560, whose liberties were ratified in 1592, and for whose security provision was made in the Treaty of Union of 1707. The continuity and identity of the Church of Scotland are not prejudiced by the adoption of these Articles. As a national Church representative of the Christian Faith of the Scottish people it acknowledges its distinctive call and duty

This is well illustrated by an interesting difference in Parliamentary procedure between Westminster and Stormont. In Westminster, every morning, the Speaker's Chaplain publicly says the following prayer:

Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of Parliament and all in positions of responsibility, the guidance of your Spirit. May they never lead the nation wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but laying aside all private interests and prejudices keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all mankind; so may your kingdom come and your name be hallowed. Amen.⁶⁹

Whereas at Stormont, per Standing Order 8 of the Assembly,

Before the commencement of business the Speaker shall announce the commencement of a period of two minutes silent prayer or contemplation. This period shall be known as Prayers; it shall take place in private and shall be the first item on the Order Paper for the day.⁷⁰

So, even though it is known as Prayers, it is not an explicitly and self-consciously Christian 'moment' and it is quite different from the prayers at the Houses of the Oireachtas.

However, for civic events that occur on the *national* stage in the United Kingdom, most frequently in London, the Protestant Reformed religion still has, at least in theory, a formal place in state institutions.⁷¹ It is in that context that any invitation to participate is considered and, if deemed appropriate, taken up in order to honour the name of Christ in the public square by witnessing to the truth of the Gospel and to pray for God's mercy and blessing to be upon the nation. However, as in the Republic of Ireland, if that event were to entail multi-faith prayer it would be necessary to provide a theological basis that would justify participation in an interfaith event so prone to misunderstanding.

5. CONCLUSION

The situation across the island is changing rapidly and the churches' inherited position in society continues to lose its influence and the support it once had.

It would appear that when the Presbyterian Church is invited to participate in civic events of a religious nature these will increasingly be conceived of as taking the form of the multi-faith prayer event. This raises significant challenges because, as we have seen, such events initially found their origin and justification in a theological system very different from our own. Even some who embrace that theological tradition recognise the highly problematic nature of involvement in such interfaith events. Others try to justify involvement in multi-faith prayer on

to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry.

69 www.churchofengland.org/our-views/the-church-in-parliament/speaker-s-chaplain/prayers-in-the-house-of-commons.aspx

70 www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/standing-orders/standing-orders/#a8

71 This view has been espoused by Oliver O'Donovan in *Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) and by the former Anglican Bishop of Rochester, Michael Nazir-Ali.

the basis of principled pluralism but, even setting aside any theological analysis, this in itself creates significant difficulties surrounding inclusivity.

Given that so many complex and interrelated matters of public theology converge in this issue it would be wise for us to encourage sustained theological discussion on how the Presbyterian Church should relate to the religious other in the public square. It would seem necessary to include within this an opportunity to reflect upon the nature of idolatry. Perhaps an initial response might be to convene a colloquium at which a number of different voices might make contributions. One thinks that theologians such as Gavin D'Costa, Jonathan Chaplain, Oliver O'Donovan and Daniel Strange would be able to stimulate and better inform our thinking and decisions about this difficult and increasingly pressing topic.

Recommendation:

Following consideration of this paper, the Doctrine Committee agreed that the 2007 Guidelines continue to be followed, but that a substantial reflection on the theological basis for involvement in multi-faith events be carried out by a task group or by the Doctrine Committee.

The Committee noted that the envisaged substantial reflection might be facilitated in the following ways:

- (a) An event could be held to help orientate us to the complex issues involved in religious participation at civic events in our ever evolving context;
- (b) We could draw on the resources of scholars who have first-hand familiarity with our context and who have relevant expertise - e.g. Richard Creighton who teaches theology in Nigeria, and whose doctoral research was on the political theology of Oliver O'Donovan;
- (c) Funding might be provided for a graduate research position at Union College to examine the theological principles that would guide and shape Irish Presbyterian engagement in public life in the twenty-first century (which would help nurture our own intellectual leadership in this complex issue);
- (d) Dialogue with other Christian groups not presently represented in such events (e.g. non-indigenous Pentecostal communities) to discuss their place and ours in civic society;
- (e) Dialogue with other Christian groups currently who are involved to see if a common response might be made;
- (f) Engage with representatives of other religions to see if there is any similar discomfort.

CHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE

1. Since the 2016 General Assembly the Church Relations Committee continued to have an overview of the various inter-church bodies to which the Presbyterian Church in Ireland belongs, namely the Irish Council of Churches, the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Council of European Churches. The Committee also received reports from the groups appointed to further conversations with both the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland. The Committee was updated on the discussions taking place in the Relationships with other Denominations Task Group, on which it is represented by the Committee Convener, Chairman and the Rev Lorraine Kennedy-Ritchie.

Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and Irish Inter-Church Committee (ICC)

2. Both the Irish Council of Churches Executive and the Irish Inter-Church Committee met on a regular basis throughout the year. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is represented on the Inter-Church Committee by the Committee Convener and the Clerk, with the Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson joining them on the ICC Executive. The Clerk also sits on the Joint Management Committee, with oversees the financial and practical affairs of both bodies.

3. The annual Inter-Church Meeting was held on Thursday 24th and Friday 25th November 2016 in Portarlinton in the Republic of Ireland, on the theme of *'Forsaken? The suffering of the churches in the Middle East'*. Everyone on the PCI delegation felt this was again an excellent and very worthwhile meeting, with high calibre input and helpful discussion sessions. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland group appointed to the 2016 ICCM was: Very Rev Dr Ian McNie, the Clerk, Rev John Brackenridge, Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson, Mrs Anne Deighan, Rev Dr Liz Hughes, Rev Uel Marrs, Rev Dr Peter McDowell and Rev John Seawright.

4. The 94th ICC AGM was held on Thursday 30th March 2017 in Belfast Central Mission of the Methodist Church. The theme of the AGM reflected that the Church is living and witnessing in a more uncertain social, economic and political atmosphere than could have been imagined. The AGM informed member Churches of our day-to-day work in that environment and also, with the help of Dr Gladys Ganiel, stimulated thought on how Churches might strengthen their united witness in the face of division and uncertainty. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland group appointed to the 2017 ICC AGM was: The Moderator, Clerk, Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson, Rev John Brackenridge, Rev Lorraine Kennedy-Ritchie, Rev Cheryl Meban, Mrs Valerie Stewart, Rev Steve Stockman, Rev Jim Stothers, Rev David Bruce, Mrs Linda Wray, Mr Lindsay Conway, Mr Gavin Norris, Very Rev Dr Norman Hamilton, Rev Stephen Johnston, Rev Tony Davidson and Mr Owen Wilson.

World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

5. The Clerk attended the 2017 meeting of European Council of WCRC, which was held near Dusseldorf on 24th March 2017, and which was largely preparation for the forthcoming full General Council meeting of WCRC later in the summer.

6. That 26th WCRC General Council meeting is being held in Leipzig from 29th June – 7th July 2017 and the 2016 General Assembly appointed the Clerk, and the Revs John Brackenridge and Cheryl Meban to represent the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, with the General Council being authorised to make adjustments if necessary. However, subsequently the General Council in October 2016 decided, on the unanimous recommendation of the Doctrine Committee, to oppose the association of WCRC to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). (See the detailed report of the Doctrine Committee, Reports p.101.) This association with the JDDJ is the significant focus of the WCRC General Council.

7. PCI submitted the details of the above delegation on 13th September 2016, this however was ‘lost’ by WCRC and only ‘found again’ on 15th March 2017. WCRC at that point rejected PCI’s delegation, as it does not conform to the following constitutional requirement:

In accordance with the Reformed understanding of church polity Art IX determines that at least 50% of the delegates must be lay people: “no more than half shall be ordained ministers”.

PCI was deemed not to have been met this requirement, and even after an ‘appeal’, when extenuating circumstances were presented, WCRC continued to reject the PCI delegation.

8. Following consideration at the General Council meeting in March 2017, on the recommendation of the Clerk and Church Relations Committee Convener, in the light of points above, and noting that the overall cost per delegate is going to be approx. £2,500, the General Council passed the following resolution:

That the formal PCI delegation be reduced to one person, namely the Clerk of the General Assembly, noting that the Rev Cheryl Meban can be in attendance, registered as a member of the outgoing Executive Committee and paid for by WCRC.

This will allow two of the original three delegates to be present at the Council, at a reduced cost of £2,500 (rather than £7,500) and, as there is only one person in the formal delegation, the constitutional restrictions do not apply.

Meeting with the Church of Scotland (CofS)

9. While the wider matter of relationships with the Church of Scotland is encompassed within the report of the special ‘Relationships with other Denominations’ Task Group, the Committee received a report on a positive meeting that had taken place between representatives of the Church of Scotland and PCI in Edinburgh on Monday 5th December 2016, with the following participants present:

PCI: Very Rev Drs Rob Craig (General Council Convener) and Ivan Patterson (Church Relations, Chair); Revs John Brackenridge (Church Relations, Convener) and Trevor Gribben (Clerk)

CofS: Very Rev John Chalmers (Principal Clerk), Rev Alison McDonald (Ecumenical Relations Convener), Rev Dr John McPake (new Interim Ecumenical Relations Officer) and Rev Derek Browning (Assembly Arrangements Convener, now also Moderator Designate)

10. The decisions of the 2016 PCI was explained and discussed. While the CofS reps regretted the decisions they understood something of the depth of feeling in PCI. The CofS representatives were encouraged by the wider process that PCI had entered into. All present felt this would help widen the focus beyond the 'presenting issue' that was causing current tension in relationships. It materialised that the CofS has not clearly thought through categories/strategy for relationships – like PCI most had simply grown up over the years and were a combination of historic relationships (both confessional and other) and current (or in some cases past) direct missional partnerships.

11. It was recognised that, though a PCI delegation would not be attending the 2017 CofS General Assembly, a CofS delegation would be invited to attend the 2017 PCI General Assembly. There was some discussion relating to how welcome the CofS delegation would be, clear assurances given and general agreement that there was value in the normal CofS delegation coming.

12. PCI reps raised the issue of need to find a way to enable the PCI General Assembly to make its 'concern/disappointment' known to the CofS in a way that will both be clear and gracious, enabling the possibility of the 'annual symbolic decision to not send the Moderator' to no longer be necessary. This could give an 'outlet' for PCI to express its concern/disappointment and then to re-establish more normal relationships. The CofS reps indicated they understood, from the perspective of many in PCI, the need to find some way of doing this. They indicated that the CofS would obviously receive anything that PCI wished to communicate, however it could produce a 'response' from a number within the CofS who were on the more 'radical wing'.

13. It was apparent that PCI and the CofS were both unhappy with the WCRC's proposed association of with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. There were major shared concerns both about the process of decision-making and the apparent 'predetermined conclusion'.

Meeting with the Free Church of Scotland

14. While again the wider matter of relationships with the Free Church of Scotland is encompassed within the report of the special 'Relationships with other Denominations' Task Group, the Committee received a report on a positive meeting that had taken place between representatives of the Free Church of Scotland and PCI in Edinburgh on Tuesday 6th December 2016, with the following participants present:

PCI: Very Rev Drs Rob Craig (General Council Convener) and Ivan Patterson (Church Relations, Chair); Revs John Brackenridge (Church Relations, Convener) and Trevor Gribben (Clerk)

Free CofS: Rev. David Meredith, Mission Director; Rev. Alasdair M. Macleod, Mission Board Chairman; Rev. Malcolm Macleod, Assistant Clerk of Assembly; Rev. Iver Martin, ETS; Rev. John Nicholls, Moderator of the General Assembly.

15. Representatives of both churches reported on recent significant events in their respective denominations and the challenges of ministry in their respective contexts. The Free CofS representatives reported on the following areas of ministry and developments in the denomination:

- Church Planting
- The importance of discipleship
- New congregation's joining from other denominations, in particular arising from recent developments in the Church of Scotland
- Developments in global mission
- Developments in Edinburgh Theological Seminary and the relationship with Glasgow University
- Membership of **International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)** – www.icrconline.com
- Membership of **World Reformed Fellowship** – <http://wrfnet.org>

PCI Reps summarised developments and significant issues in Ireland.

16. Ecumenical Relations: There was a general discussion over the theology and practice of ecumenism and ecumenical relations.

- (a) What criteria do we use as we consider initiating a conversation and developing a relationship with other denominations?
- (b) How do we evaluate existing relationships?
- (c) How to we develop new relationships?
- (d) What are the different levels at which we can have a meaningful, mutually-productive conversation?

17. There was general agreement that what matters on the ground is ultimately what makes a difference and that much of the responsibility for this rests with the local Minister and Kirk Session.

18. Follow-up: The decisions of the 2016 PCI was explained and discussed. The Free CofS reps welcomed the PCI decisions which were very much in line with their own thinking. The meeting noted the mutual benefit of the discussion and agreed the following matters as areas of common interest as the basis for the natural development of relationships between both denominations:

- Church Planting
- ETS and PCI College
- Discipleship
- Church Revitalisation
- Global Mission

JOHN BRACKENRIDGE, Convener

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 5

Thursday 4.45pm

ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATIONS TASK GROUP

Introduction

1. This is the second interim report to the General Assembly from this Task Group. The remit given by the 2015 General Assembly was: *A new Engagement and Consultations Task Group be formed to carry forward the examination of the issue of engagement (between Presbyteries and the new Councils and between Presbyteries and congregations) and that this group subsume the work of reviewing Consultations.*

2. The first part of this report is concerned with engagement between Presbytery and Congregations. It is an interim report as the issue of engagement between Presbytery and the Councils will constitute the major part of our work over the forthcoming year and will also by necessity have a bearing on how Presbytery relates to Congregations.

3. The second part brings the new Consultation Process for final approval at this year's General Assembly.

Improving Engagement between Presbytery and Congregations

4. The Report to the 2016 General Assembly was sent to Presbyteries for comment. Sixteen Presbyteries responded. The vast majority of comments were in agreement with the challenges outlined in it – the slide into congregationalism, the decline in attendance by some ministers and elders and lack of meaningful engagement between Congregations and Presbytery, the lack of reporting about Presbytery to Kirk Sessions, the negative attitudes of some Congregations which see Presbytery as merely judicial and not supportive, discerning little added value coming from Presbytery. There is work to be done here.

5. **Miscellaneous suggestions of good practice.** It is not all negative, however, as some Presbyteries have already begun a process of better engagement in their meetings and also with the Congregations within their bounds. Some good ideas are being shared, but without intentionality they will wither on the vine. It is hoped, therefore, that this process will encourage Presbyteries to take engagement seriously and act to introduce improvements. This will often be best achieved by introducing “one-degree” shifts, small but regular changes that cumulatively turn the ship around. It is intended to arrange a meeting soon with all the Clerks of Presbytery to talk through these ideas so that as far as possible all can be on the same page. The following are some recurring themes:

- Annual pulpit exchange
- Annual Presbytery fun days/Barbecues
- United evening services in summer
- Presbytery to meet in circles around tables rather than in rows
- Refreshments during the evening
- Communion in the Moderator's church with members of Session/ congregation invited along
- Prayer requests emailed to congregational prayer secretaries
- Pulpit prayers for vacant congregations and other Presbytery issues
- Book reviews in Presbytery
- Ministers sharing something of what they learnt on a study week/ sabbatical
- Annual elders training event organized by the Presbytery
- Launch a Presbytery web site
- Talk positively about Presbytery!
- Use occasional teaching opportunities in church to emphasise our wider church and the strengths of being part of Presbyterian family
- Congregations being supportive of each other instead of being competitive
- Presbytery better co-ordinates and informs congregations of prayer ministry teams/counselling/training that is available. Sharing and not duplicating resources.
- Vision days and strategy days

6. The Task Group is also considering a publicity campaign to highlight the strengths of being part of the Presbyterian family. A leaflet with the working title of "Better Together" is under consideration for widespread distribution. The Task Group is not naïve about the challenges in the current climate, especially among the younger generations, of getting people excited about being part of the Presbyterian family. Nevertheless it believes this is worth investing energy into this for the benefit of our Church and our individual members. There are strengths in our denomination that we need to celebrate.

7. What has kept the Task Group going has been a core belief that Presbytery, when done well, brings immense benefits to elders and ministers, and to congregations. Some members of the Task Group have been greatly impressed and influenced by an article by Paul Levy of the International Presbyterian Church (entitled *The Four C's of Presbytery*) where he speaks of Presbytery as a court, a college, a catalyst and an encouragement. He says, and the Task Group agrees with him, that Presbytery at its best, and when we make it a priority, "will benefit our congregations".

8. **Elders.** Many of the responses suggest that representative elders should be appointed for a minimum period of three years so that they become familiar with the processes of Presbytery and gain the confidence to contribute meaningfully to debates. A maximum of five years' service may also be appropriate so that representation is shared around different elders in each Kirk Session. This in itself should improve engagement. It is also apparent that very little of Presbytery business seems to be on Kirk Session agendas – room could be made for a short report on decisions made and on major points of discussion at Presbytery when Session meets.

9. **Presbytery Business Committee and Agendas of the main meetings.** A number of Presbyteries have a Business Committee which meets up to a week prior to Presbytery and this enables some of the non-controversial and routine business to be transacted and recommended to the main meeting for adoption. This is a great help in freeing up time within Presbytery for some of the meaningful engagement and discussion that is increasingly looked for.

10. A number of Presbyteries have mentioned making time for prayer within the meetings and passing on prayer points to Congregations. Some have held single issue meetings and training meetings or events which have been well supported. Others find it helpful to give Congregations occasional slots to inform the Presbytery of new initiatives, outreach events or even teaching series that have gone well.

11. While it is recognised that the Presbytery is a court of the church and that there are judicial and administrative aspects to be dealt with, other pastoral and theological elements can be introduced which ministers and elders would find stimulating and helpful in their ministry. There is a great opportunity to work smarter and equip better when we have the potential of so many leaders in one room, maximizing the possibilities Presbytery offers to network, communicate, train and engage.

12. A further and more radical consideration must be the role of Presbyteries as agents for missional strategy in their areas. Work by Presbyteries on “big picture” thinking appears to be limited and is usually precipitated by crisis due to steep decline and by then it is usually too late. There are various factors to this limitation: constraints of time and capacity for ministers and elders who are already overstretched; the creeping congregationalism and independence that sees such thinking as a threat rather than an opportunity to grow the Church as a whole; and the feeling that this is more the domain of the Linkage Commission. The Task Group will devote some further thought to this issue over the next year if that is the mind of the General Assembly: a resolution to test this is appended.

Consultations

13. A new Consultation Process, which has been piloted over the past year, is presented for adoption. Various factors have undergirded its development –

- The necessity of supportive accountability for Congregations
- An attempt to streamline the process as much as possible while doing it well
- The desire to widen the circle of meaningful engagement with a Congregation during a Consultation
- Encouraging Congregations to celebrate what is good while not ignoring the challenges
- Encouraging the leadership to address issues if necessary with outside help

14. One of the strengths of the Presbyterian Church is that we can draw on the support of others in Presbytery, yet a Consultation is often viewed a bit like a school inspection – something that is unwelcome, unwanted and bothersome. However, over the past number of years, as Visitation moved to Consultation, the framers of the process have sought to encourage a more positive, affirming attitude to these reviews of congregational life. Granted that they are often seen

as threatening by ministers, in the experience of the members of the Task Group they have tended to be carried out in a non-threatening and pastoral manner by colleagues in ministry who know their turn for Consultation will come!

15. The Task Group has sought to provide a new process which avoids being oppressive, having an agenda of targets, or speaking in terms of “success” or “failure”. While it has streamlined Consultations as much as possible, it is convinced that there is a need to ensure that Consultations are done well, and with a certain rigour and enthusiasm so that our members know that Presbytery cares and that it is seeking to be a good and wise steward of the resources that God has given. To be Presbyterian is to be accountable to each other, encouraging each other to be, by the grace of God, all that he purposes for us. The Consultation process is just part of the bigger picture of how we can better engage with each other as Presbyterians, as ministers and elders within Presbytery and also with Congregations and Councils.

16. A successful and meaningful outcome to a Consultation will depend on the Team undertaking it with the commitment it deserves, viewing it as a good opportunity to provide positive, objective feedback for the good of the Congregation. To add value to the process, Presbytery may appoint to the Team elders with appropriate gifting and availability of time – and these are not restricted to those who are currently serving as representative elders. Age and gender balance should also be important considerations in making up a Team.

17. To date Consultations have not been written into the Code, which has perhaps led to them being seen as “optional extras”. It is intended to bring Overtures to the 2018 General Assembly to give them the same status as Visitations used to have. In the meantime a resolution is appended which, if passed, will require that the new Consultations Process be applied by all Presbyteries from 1st January 2018.

18. There are four documents comprising the process (see Appendix 1). The Task Group is grateful to the Rev Jonathan Boyd who has put an immense amount of work into shaping them.

1. Presbytery and Consultation Team Resources and Guidance Notes
2. Kirk Session Guidance Notes and Consultation Questions
3. Minister/Associate Minister Guidance Notes and Consultation Questions
4. Review of Resources, Records and Policies (to be completed by Session and Committee)

They will be made available in electronic format. The Task Group is convinced that this is not information-gathering for its own sake but to help us as a Church fulfil the Great Commandment and the Great Commission of our Lord.

NORMAN CAMERON, Convener

ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATIONS APPENDIX 1

Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Presbytery Consultations

Presbytery and Consultation Team

Resources and Guidance Notes

Overview of Consultations

The purpose of Consultations

A Consultation is a process by which Presbytery enquires into the life of a congregation in order to discover:

- **encouragements** to celebrate, for the edification of the congregation and to inspire the rest of Presbytery;
- **challenges** faced by the congregation, so that Kirk Session can be directed and equipped to deal with the most pressing issues;
- any **concerns** that Kirk Session may be struggling to deal with, requiring the intervention of Presbytery.

The Consultation process

The process consists of a number of stages:

1. Presbytery should notify Kirk Session twelve weeks before a Consultation is due to take place. In preparation for the Consultation, Presbytery appoints a Consultation Team and the Kirk Session appoints a group of Congregational Representatives.
2. When the Consultation commences questionnaires are sent to the Kirk Session, Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable) and written replies returned to the Consultation Team within six weeks.
3. The Consultation Team meets with Congregational Representatives and, separately, with the Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable) for more focused discussions. This should take place within one month of the questionnaires being returned.
4. Based on this, the Consultation Team produces a Consultation Report for Presbytery summarising aspects of congregational life which can be celebrated, challenges faced by the congregation and, if necessary, any concerns for Presbytery to deal with. The report will recommend some issues for the Kirk Session to work on over the course of the next year.
5. Kirk Session then has one year in which to implement the recommendations of the Consultation Report. After this year, the Consultation Team will present a Follow-up Report to Presbytery and be discharged.

Guidance Notes

Coordinating Consultations

It is recommended that Presbytery appoint someone to coordinate Consultations on an on-going basis from year to year – a Presbytery Consultation Coordinator. This would make the process of setting up Consultations each year easier by maintaining a list of who has served on teams, which congregations are due for a Consultation, etc. and provide a way of passing on accumulated experience and dealing with common issues that may arise.

Frequency of Consultations

Consultations should occur at ten-yearly intervals.

No Consultations should be undertaken within two years of an installation of a new Minister.

In long-term Stated Supplies, Consultations should take place in the same manner as in settled situations.

Informing the Kirk Session of the Consultation

Presbytery shall inform the Kirk Session at least twelve weeks in advance of the Consultation.

The Consultation Team

The Consultation will be conducted by a Consultation Team appointed by Presbytery.

The team will consist of four-six members, at least two of whom should be Ministers. But ministers will not comprise more than 50% of the team; the rest shall ruling elders. Elders may be drawn from any congregation and do not need to be members of Presbytery.

The quorum for the Consultation Team will be three.

A Consultation Convener will be appointed to organise and chair all meetings of the Consultation Team, as well as writing and presenting all reports to Presbytery.

The Convener will be provided with the following documents by the Clerk of Presbytery or the Presbytery's Consultation Coordinator:

- *Presbytery and Consultation Team Resources and Guidance Notes* for the use of the Consultation Team,
- *Kirk Session Consultation Questions and Guidance Notes* to be sent on to the Kirk Session,
- *Review of Resources, Records and Policies* to be sent on to the Kirk Session for completion by Kirk Session and Congregational Committee,
- *Ministers and Associate Ministers Consultation Questions and Guidance Notes* to be sent on to the Minister and an additional copy to the Associate Minister (if applicable).

As well as examining the returned questionnaires:

- as many of the Consultation Team as possible are strongly advised to **visit a service** in the congregation,
- the Consultation Team will **meet with a group of eight-twelve Congregational Representatives**, up to four of whom will be ruling elders,
- the Consultation Team will **meet with the Minister** and Associate Minister (if applicable).

Inspections

A number of inspections will be carried out:

- All items on the **historical schedule** of the congregation.
- All **registers and minute books**. These should be checked by someone who is independent of the congregation to ensure that they are kept up to date and in good order. This could be someone from the Consultation Team.
- All church property should have up-to-date **safety certificates for electrical and gas installations**.

Gas and electric Inspections

- It is the responsibility of the congregation to arrange and pay for all necessary inspections.
- Approved contractors in Northern Ireland are those who are NICEC approved (electrical) and Gas Safe Registered (gas).
- Approved contractors in the Republic of Ireland are those who are on the Register of Electrical Contractors of Ireland (electrical) and on the Register of Gas Installers Ireland (gas).
- Manse safety inspections should take place every ten years.
- Church gas installations should be inspected annually.
- Church electrical installations should be inspected every five years.

Analysing the information in preparation for discussion

When the responses have been returned, members of the Consultation Team will individually examine the returns and record their impressions using their own copy of *Form 1: Individual Impressions* on page 9. The form lists eleven areas of congregational life which include the nine areas addressed by the questions to Kirk Session, a tenth area 'Property and Finance' relating to information gathered from the *Review of Resources, Records and Policies* and a final area 'Other'.

- Taking into account all the information gathered from the questionnaires and the visit to a service, the member should consider each area of congregational life.
- If there are signs of encouragements which could be celebrated and they would like to know more about these encouragements, they should tick the corresponding box in the green column headed 'encouragements'.
- If there are signs of challenges which the Kirk Session need to deal with and they would like to know more about these challenges, they should tick the corresponding box in the amber column headed 'challenges'.
- If there are both encouragements and challenges of interest, both columns should be ticked.
- There is also space in the final column to make notes on each area of congregational life to help discuss the impressions with the rest of the team later.

The Consultation Team will then meet to discuss its impressions. It is important that the views of all members of the team are heard and considered so that the process is not led by the views of the loudest or most senior member, so the Convener is encouraged to make sure that all members give their thoughts.

On the basis of this discussion and impressions from the visit to a service, the Consultation Team will agree on two or three areas of congregational life to discuss in more detail with the Congregational Representatives in order to find out more about encouraging aspects of congregational life which can be celebrated, challenges for the Kirk Session to deal with, and possible concerns for Presbytery to consider. The Convener will record these areas using *Form 2: Convener's Summary* on page 10.

- For each area of congregational life the Convener should tally the number of ticks for encouragements by each member of the Team and record this in the column headed 'Total encouragements'.
- For each area of congregational life the Convener should tally the number of ticks for challenges by each member of the Team and record this in the column headed 'Total challenges'.
- For each area of congregational life the Convener should add these two to record the total in 'Overall total'.
- The Convener should use these totals to get an idea of which areas of congregational life are of greatest interest and lead a discussion to decide which two or three areas to focus on and record these in the column headed 'List two or three areas of focus'.
- If there are any particular questions that the Team would like to ask in any of these areas they should be recorded in the column headed 'Note any specific questions you would like to ask during discussion'.

Discussion with Congregational Representatives

The Consultation Team will then organise separate discussion meetings with the Congregational Representatives, the Minister and the Associate Minister (if applicable). The order and timing of these would be at the discretion of the Team, but should happen as soon as reasonably possible.

The aim of this discussion is to hear the story of the congregation in a fuller way than written answers can provide. All Congregational Representatives should be encouraged to share their thoughts rather than allowing one or two confident people to dominate conversation. Some optional questions are provided on pages 15-18 for the Team to optionally make use of during discussions. The questions may be used as they are, used as inspiration to form new questions, or ignored entirely if the Team is happy to come up with its own questions. They are a resource to help the Team, not a rigid template to restrict it.

When the Consultation Team meets with the Congregational Representatives they should expect to find a group of eight-twelve people who are broadly representative of the congregation, its organisations and its ministries, consisting of:

- up to four ruling elders,
- at least two young people (no older than 25),
- a balance of genders.

The Minister should not be a part of the Congregational Representatives and will not be present during its discussion with the Consultation Team.

One of the elders will be appointed as Chairperson for the Congregational Representatives and be responsible for coordinating with the Consultation Convener to arrange meetings and exchange information. The Clerk of Session should send the Chairperson's contact details to the Consultation Convener.

Prior to the meeting, in order to help with preparation, the Consultation Convener must send the Chairperson:

- a copy of the Kirk Session's answers,
- a list of the two or three areas of congregational life to be discussed, and
- any specific questions that the Team intends to ask and has already prepared.

During the discussion with the Congregational Representatives each individual Consultation Team member will record their thoughts on *Form 3: Consultation Team Discussion Notes* on page 11.

- Each member of the Team should have one copy of this form for each area of focus for the discussion and record at the top which area the notes are for.
- It is important to discuss and record both encouragements to be celebrated and challenges to be dealt with, so there are two sections labelled 'Encouragements' and 'Challenges'.
- Below this there is one box for recording any concerns that the Team member thinks Presbytery may need to deal with instead of the Kirk Session.

Discussion with Ministers

The discussions with the Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable) should be quite relaxed and informal and provide an opportunity for ministers to be open about what they are finding encouraging or challenging, both in terms of ministry and home life. The emphasis here should be on listening and providing a pastoral environment.

To discern the pastoral needs it may be helpful to consider the circumstances of the Minister that may provide particular challenges to their well-being. This is a list of potential areas for conversation, but is by no means exhaustive:

- If they are in a Presbytery that is dispersed over a wide geographical area, how do they cope with isolation?
- If they are in a large congregation managing a team ministry, how do they cope with the potential frustrations of 'wasting time' on management rather than direct ministry?
- If they are in a linkage, how do they cope with the doubling up (or more) of organisations and the likely increased administrative and organisational burden they have to take on.
- If they have moved to an area that is culturally quite different to where they previously lived or ministered, how are they coping with the adjustment?
- Have there been or are there currently any family crises such as a sick parent?

Reporting to Presbytery

When all the discussions have been completed, the Consultation Team members will meet to discuss their individual impressions and agree on recommendations. The Consultation Convener will then write the Consultation Report using *Form 4: Consultation Report* on page 12.

There is space on the form for recording any encouragements or challenges which have arisen out of discussions but were not originally selected as areas to focus on.

The Report should recommend an aspect of congregational life which the Kirk Session should focus on developing over the next year. This could, for instance, be a challenging area which needs to be addressed, or an encouraging area with potential for greater fruitfulness. Recommendations for action should be as specific as possible to help give the Kirk Session direction and to make it easier for the Consultation Team to identify progress when preparing the Follow-up Report.

The Consultation Team or Consultation Convener must meet with the Minister and Clerk of Session to verbally inform them of the content of the Report prior to it being reported to Presbytery, while making it clear that the recommendations will still have to be agreed by Presbytery.

The Consultation Report will be presented verbally to Presbytery and a written copy submitted to the Clerk of Presbytery.

If the Consultation Report is approved by Presbytery, then the Clerk of Presbytery will send the Report to Kirk Session.

The Consultation Team will not present the Consultation Report to the congregation (or the Follow-up Report), nor is the Kirk Session required to do so. However, if the Kirk Session wish to share any of the contents or a summary, it is free to do so.

Follow-up

After one year the Consultation Team will consult with Kirk Session to hear about progress regarding the recommendations of the Consultation Report, then meet to discuss their views on this progress and agree on what should be reported to Presbytery.

The Consultation Convener will make a Follow-up Report to Presbytery. Providing that the Consultation Team is satisfied with progress made, this should be a brief verbal report.

If the Follow-up Report is approved then the Consultation Team will be thanked and discharged.

Example timelines

These are examples to help visualise the timing of the process, but are not intended to restrict when a Consultation should start or finish.

Starting in September

May Presbytery meeting:	Congregation chosen and Kirk Session informed of timeline.
September Presbytery meeting:	Consultation Team established and Consultation officially commences.
October:	Questionnaires returned. Consultation Team discusses questionnaires and chooses areas to focus on for discussion.
November:	Consultation Team meets with the Congregational Representatives, Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable). Consultation Team draws up its conclusions and the Convener writes the Consultation Report, then shows it to the Minister and Clerk of Presbytery.
December Presbytery meeting:	Consultation Report presented to Presbytery.

The Kirk Session then has one year to implement the recommendations of the Consultation Report. The results of this would be reported at the February Presbytery meeting.

Starting in February

November Presbytery meeting:	Congregation chosen and Kirk Session informed of timeline.
February Presbytery meeting:	Consultation Team established and Consultation officially commences.
March:	Questionnaires returned. Consultation Team discusses questionnaires and chooses areas to focus on for discussion.
April:	Consultation Team meets with the Congregational Representatives, Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable). Consultation Team draws up their conclusions and the Convener writes the Consultation Report, then shows it to the Minister and Clerk of Presbytery.
May Presbytery meeting:	Consultation Report presented to Presbytery.

The Kirk Session then has one year to implement the recommendations of the Consultation Report. The results of this would be reported at the September Presbytery meeting.

Form 1: Individual impressions

Each Team member needs one copy of this form.

Area of congregational life	Tick if you would like to know more because there are signs of		Make notes in this space if you wish
	encouragements	challenges	
A. Outreach			
B. Discipleship			
C. Leadership			
D. Worship			
E. Pastoral Care			
F. Mission			
G. Sacraments			
H. Relationships			
I. Staffing			
J. Property and Finance			
K. Other			

Form 2: Convener's Summary

Area of congregational life	Total encouragements	Total challenges	Overall total
A. Outreach			
B. Discipleship			
C. Leadership			
D. Worship			
E. Pastoral Care			
F. Mission			
G. Sacraments			
H. Relationships			
I. Staffing			
J. Property and Finance			
K. Other			
List two or three areas of focus	Note any specific questions you would like to ask during discussion		
1.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>		
2.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>		
3.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>		

Form 3. Consultation Team Discussion Notes

Each Team member needs a copy of this form for each area of congregational life discussed with the Congregational Representatives.

Area of congregational life discussed:

Encouragements to celebrate

Challenges for Kirk Session to deal with

Concerns for Presbytery to consider looking into a separate process

Form 4. Consultation Report

Which areas did discussion focus on?

1.

2.

3.

Encouragements to celebrate

Area 1:

Area 2:

Area 3:

Other:

Challenges for Kirk Session to deal with

Area 1: _____

Area 2: _____

Area 3: _____

Other: _____

Concerns for Presbytery to consider looking into in a separate process

Optional Discussion Questions

These questions are entirely optional and are provided to give the Consultation Team ideas for helpful questions to ask during discussions. They can be used as they are, modified, used as inspiration for the Team's own questions, or ignored entirely.

General questions

What has encouraged the congregation in the last five years?

What has been most challenging for the congregation?

How open is the congregation to change?

What evidence is there of this?

What further changes would you like to see happen?

What is the strategy, plan or vision for [insert area of congregational life being discussed]?

Who implements the strategy, plan, or vision?

How is the congregation involved?

What have the results been?

What challenges have you faced implementing the strategy and how have they been dealt with?

Why do people join your congregation?

Why do people leave the congregation?

A. Outreach

What brings unchurched people from the community into the church?

How does the church engage with the community, outside of the church?

How many adult professions of faith have there been in the last two years?

How has the local area changed in the last five years?

Are there intentional pathways to draw people in from being outsiders to members of the congregation? How have you seen this happen?

What proportion of children in church programmes would be churched compared to unchurched?

B. Discipleship

How well attended are Bible studies, prayer meetings and small groups?

What age groups are involved?

Why do people come (or not)?

What sort of resources, programmes, activities, and relationships have helped you to grow and mature in your own faith?

What role do the organisations you're involved with play in discipleship e.g. opportunities to make new disciples, helping disciples to grow, providing opportunities for disciples to encourage one another?

How are people prayed for and supported in work they do outside of church?

How are gifts related to ministry outside the congregation identified, celebrated, and encouraged?

How are young people encouraged to be involved in the life of the congregation as they move through their teenage years?

What opportunities are there for different generations to mix and encourage each other?

C. Leadership

How are people equipped to lead in church ministries?

What training events have leaders attended in the last two years?

How have these been helpful?

How does Kirk Session keep informed about organisations in the church and support their leaders?

How are new leaders recruited?

How do organisations plan for new leadership e.g. to prepare for when the BB captain retires?

D. Worship

How has the preaching helped you to understand the gospel better?

How has the preaching helped you to understand the implications of the gospel for life?

How has the preaching helped you to think about the application of faith to current affairs and contemporary culture?

What sort of diversity is there in the style of music, the themes covered by lyrics, and the general tone of praise?

How often do you celebrate the Lord's Supper? Is there ever any discussion about this?

If there was an area you'd like to see improve, what would it be?

How are children and young people ministered to on a Sunday morning?

How do you help young people transition from youth ministry to involvement in the wider ministry of the church e.g. adjusting from Bible Class to being in for the whole service?

What has worked well to engage people in prayer?

E. Pastoral Care

How does the congregation care for the Minister and his/her family?

What typically happens when a ruling elder calls with a member of their district on a normal pastoral visit?

How are members encouraged and equipped to care for one another?

If there was an area you'd like to see improve, what would it be?

What practical things do members do to love and support one another that have been found to be helpful?

F. Mission

What connections does the congregation have with missionaries and evangelists at home and overseas and how are they supported?

How do you partner with others in local and global mission?

What opportunities are there to pray together about local and global mission?

What has been the most memorable thing the congregation has done to learn about or support mission in the last five years?

How does the congregation hear about the wider work of the church that we support through the United Appeal for Mission?

How are members encouraged to support the work of the wider church by giving to the United Appeal for Mission?

G. Sacraments

What do you find most helpful about the way the Lord's Supper is celebrated?

What do you think could be improved?

How would you describe the tone or feel of Communion services?

How would you describe the invitation or welcome to the Lord's Table?

Why do you think people resist becoming communicant members?

What do you find most helpful about the way baptisms are carried out, from the point of enquiry through to the administration of the sacrament?

What do you think could be improved?

How is the congregation taught about the sacraments?

How are people prepared to become communicant members?

H. Relationships

How are disagreements and tensions handled in the congregation?

How are disagreements handled within groups such as the Kirk Session or organisations?

How have disagreements between groups handled e.g. between the Kirk Session and organisations?

What opportunities are there to develop relationships between members and do many people take advantage of them?

What challenges are there to improving relationships and fellowship within the congregation?

How do you partner with and support the work of other Presbyterian congregations?

How do you partner with and support the work of other local congregations?

How have you felt supported and encouraged by Presbytery?

How are members encouraged to pray for organisations within the congregation, other congregations, and the wider church?

I. Staffing

How could you see additional staff being helpful?

How do the staff equip the congregation to do the work of the church together, rather than merely doing the work for the congregation?

J. Finance and Property

What challenges have there been to congregational finances in recent years?

What teaching has there been on giving in the last two years?

Do you have a clear picture of what the congregation spends money on and why?

What would you like to change about your buildings and why? What challenges would there be to doing this?

What have you changed about your property in the last ten years? How has this benefitted the congregation?

Do you anticipate having to make any major expenditures relating to property in the next ten years? How are you preparing for this?

Presbyterian Church in Ireland
Presbytery Consultations

Kirk Session

Consultation Questions and Guidance Notes

Overview of Consultations

The purpose of Consultations

A Consultation is a process by which Presbytery enquires into the life of a congregation in order to discover:

- **encouragements** to celebrate, for the edification of the congregation and to inspire the rest of Presbytery;
- **challenges** faced by the congregation, so that Kirk Session can be directed and equipped to deal with the most pressing issues;
- any **concerns** that Kirk Session may be struggling to deal with, requiring the intervention of Presbytery.

The Consultation process

The process consists of a number of stages:

1. Presbytery should notify Kirk Session twelve weeks before a Consultation is due to take place. In preparation for the Consultation, Presbytery appoints a Consultation Team and the Kirk Session appoints a group of Congregational Representatives.
2. When the Consultation commences questionnaires are sent to the Kirk Session, Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable) and written replies returned to the Consultation Team within six weeks.
3. The Consultation Team meets with Congregational Representatives and, separately, with the Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable) for more focused discussions. This should take place within one month of the questionnaires being returned.
4. Based on this, the Consultation Team produces a Consultation Report for Presbytery summarising aspects of congregational life which can be celebrated, challenges faced by the congregation and, if necessary, any concerns for Presbytery to deal with. The report will recommend some issues for the Kirk Session to work on over the course of the next year.
5. Kirk Session then has one year in which to implement the recommendations of the Consultation Report. After this year, the Consultation Team will present a Follow-up Report to Presbytery and be discharged.

Guidance Notes

Being informed of a Consultation

Presbytery will inform the Kirk Session that a Consultation is to take place at least twelve weeks in advance.

Written questionnaires

The Consultation Convener will send two documents to the Kirk Session:

- *Kirk Session Consultation Questions and Guidance Notes*
- *Review of Resources, Records and Policies*

These should be completed and returned within six weeks.

The answers will help the Consultation Team to select two or three areas of congregational life for further discussion, in order to learn more about encouragements in congregational life to be celebrated, challenges that the Kirk Session will have to deal with to help the congregation be more fruitful, and potential concerns that may require intervention by Presbytery.

The Kirk Session should meet to discuss the *Questions for the Kirk Session* in this booklet and prepare answers. The Clerk of Session will then be responsible for completing the questionnaire and returning it. It may be appropriate to split the Kirk Session into small groups to consider individual sections of the questionnaire or there may already be existing committees within Kirk Session that have responsibility for some of these areas.

The *Review of Resources, Records and Policies* largely concerns the work of the Congregational Committee. The Kirk Session is responsible for it being completed correctly and returned, but it may be appropriate to have the bulk of the work carried out by the Congregational Committee or its officers. In addition to filling in answers, the *Review* also asks for copies of several documents and policies to be returned. A checklist is included at the end of the *Review*.

The Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable) will also receive questions to be completed separately and returned to the Consultation Team.

During this time it is strongly recommended that some or all of the Consultation Team also visit a service in the congregation.

Discussion with Congregational Representatives

Kirk Session will appoint a group of Congregational Representatives which is broadly representative of the congregation, its organisations and its ministries. It will meet with the Consultation Team to discuss the answers provided by Kirk Session. The reason for meeting with this group is to get a more detailed picture of the area of particular interest from a wider range of voices than just the Kirk Session.

This will be a group of eight-twelve people consisting of:

- up to four ruling elders,
- at least two young people (no older than 25),
- a balance of genders.

The Minister should not be a part of the Congregational Representatives and will not be present during their discussion with the Consultation Team.

One of the ruling elders should be appointed as Chairperson for the Congregational Representatives and be responsible for coordinating with the Consultation Convener to arrange meetings and exchange information. The Clerk of Session should send the Chairperson's contact details to the Consultation Convener.

Prior to the meeting between the Consultation Team and the Congregational Representatives, in order to help with preparation, the Consultation Convener must send the Chairperson:

- a copy of the Kirk Session's answers,
- a list of the two or three area of congregational life to be discussed,
- any specific questions that the Team intend to ask and have already prepared.

Discussion with Ministers

Ministers will each have an individual informal discussion with the Consultation Team. The order and timing of the discussions are at the discretion of the Consultation Team. The aim of this discussion is primarily pastoral, with the intention of supporting and encouraging ministers.

The Consultation Report

Following its discussions, the Consultation Team will prepare a Consultation Report for Presbytery containing encouragements to celebrate, challenges for Kirk Session to deal with, concerns for Presbytery to consider looking at in a separate process and recommended action for Kirk Session to take in the coming year. The recommendations could, for instance, relate to an encouraging aspect of congregational life which has the potential to be developed further, or to a challenge which the Kirk Session needs to address.

The Consultation Team or Consultation Convener must meet with the Minister and Clerk of Session to verbally inform them of the content of the Report prior to it being reported to Presbytery, while making it clear that the recommendations will still have to be agreed by Presbytery.

The Consultation Team will not present the Consultation Report to the congregation (or the Follow-up Report), nor is the Kirk Session required to do so. However, if the Kirk Session wish to share any of the contents or a summary, it is free to do so.

Final outcome

After Presbytery has approved the Consultation Report, the Clerk of Presbytery will send a copy to the Clerk of Session and the Kirk Session will then have one year in which to implement any recommendations.

At the end of this year, the Consultation Team will consult with the Kirk Session to hear about progress regarding the recommendations of the Consultation Report and present a Follow-up Report to Presbytery.

If Presbytery is satisfied with progress, this will conclude the Consultation process.

If Presbytery has concerns about the congregation, further action may be taken in a separate process, making use of information from the Consultation.

Example timelines

These are examples to help visualise the timing of the process, but are not intended to restrict when a Consultation should start or finish.

Starting in September

May Presbytery meeting:	Congregation chosen and Kirk Session informed of timeline.
September Presbytery meeting:	Consultation Team established and Consultation officially commences.
October:	Questionnaires returned. Consultation Team discusses questionnaires and chooses areas to focus on for discussion.
November:	Consultation Team meets with the Congregational Representatives, Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable). Consultation Team draws up its conclusions and the Convener writes the Consultation Report, then shows it to the Minister and Clerk of Presbytery.
December Presbytery meeting:	Consultation Report presented to Presbytery.

The Kirk Session then has one year to implement the recommendations of the Consultation Report. The results of this would be reported at the February Presbytery meeting.

Starting in February

November Presbytery meeting:	Congregation chosen and Kirk Session informed of timeline.
February Presbytery meeting:	Consultation Team established and Consultation officially commences.
March:	Questionnaires returned. Consultation Team discusses questionnaires and chooses areas to focus on for discussion.
April:	Consultation Team meets with the Congregational Representatives, Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable). Consultation Team draws up its conclusions and the Convener writes the Consultation Report, then shows it to the Minister and Clerk of Presbytery.
May Presbytery meeting:	Consultation Report presented to Presbytery.

The Kirk Session then has one year to implement the recommendations of the Consultation Report. The results of this would be reported at the September Presbytery meeting.

Questions for the Kirk Session

These questions should be discussed by the Kirk Session and the Clerk of Session should then complete the questionnaire and return it to the Consultation Convener within six weeks.

Kirk Session should also ensure that the *Review of Resources, Records and Policies* is filled in with the assistance of the Congregational Committee and returned within six weeks.

A. Outreach

1. Give a brief description of the community which you are seeking to reach and areas of encouragement and challenge.

2. What is Kirk Session's vision for outreach to the local community?

3. How is that vision demonstrated by Kirk Session and the congregation?

4. Please detail recent evangelistic initiatives undertaken. What has gone well and what has not?

B. Discipleship

1. Please give details of the Congregation's strategy for making disciples among people of all ages.

2. What have been the most helpful programmes/resources used recently to encourage people to grow in their faith?

3. How are people enabled to identify and exercise their gifts?

C. Leadership

1. What strategies are being used to develop leadership skills in the congregation?

2. Is there a good supply of leaders coming through for the various organisations and ministries or are there areas where this is a struggle?

3. What has Session done to help improve its own leadership skills recently?

D. Worship

1. Realising that the conduct of services is the Minister's responsibility, do you believe that services are encouraging, vibrant and helpful to the congregation and how is this demonstrated?

2. Who else beside the Minister would be regularly involved in helping lead services of worship?

3. What opportunities are there for corporate prayer in the life of the church and how well are those supported?

4. How do you make visitors and potential new members feel more welcome?

E. Pastoral Care

1. Has Session considered the *Three Models of Pastoral Care* booklet and discerned the best way forward?

2. What are the arrangements for delivery of pastoral care in the congregation?

3. Are individual ruling elders comfortable with the pastoral care element of their role and how does this work in practice?

4. How does the Kirk Session care for the minister and his/her family?

F. Mission

1. How important is the congregation's involvement in global mission and how is this demonstrated?

2. How is interest in mission in the whole of Ireland demonstrated?

G. The Sacraments

1. How are individuals admitted to the Lord's Table and how are new members followed up?

2. When was the Communion Roll last revised?

3. How does the Session deal with requests for baptism?

4. How does the Session seek to exercise loving discipline on an ongoing basis?

H. Relationships

1. How would you rank relationships within Kirk Session:

Excellent Satisfactory Poor

2. How would you rank relationships between the Kirk Session and the Minister:

Excellent Satisfactory Poor

3. Is the congregation united in purpose and vision and how is this demonstrated?

I. Staffing

1. Do you have any paid staff in addition to the Minister? If yes, please list them.

2. Have you considered whether you need additional staff and in which areas?

Any other comments for the Consultation Team's consideration:

Presbyterian Church in Ireland
Presbytery Consultations

Ministers and Associate Ministers

Consultation Questions and Guidance Notes

Overview of Consultations

The purpose of Consultations

A Consultation is a process by which Presbytery enquires into the life of a congregation in order to discover:

- **encouragements** to celebrate, for the edification of the congregation and to inspire the rest of Presbytery;
- **challenges** faced by the congregation, so that Kirk Session can be directed and equipped to deal with the most pressing issues;
- any **concerns** that Kirk Session may be struggling to deal with, requiring the intervention of Presbytery.

The Consultation process

The process consists of a number of stages:

1. Presbytery should notify Kirk Session twelve weeks before a Consultation is due to take place. In preparation for the Consultation, Presbytery appoints a Consultation Team and the Kirk Session appoints a group of Congregational Representatives.
2. When the Consultation commences questionnaires are sent to the Kirk Session, Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable) and written replies returned to the Consultation Team within six weeks.
3. The Consultation Team meets with Congregational Representatives and, separately, with the Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable) for more focused discussions. This should take place within one month of the questionnaires being returned.
4. Based on this, the Consultation Team produces a Consultation Report for Presbytery summarising aspects of congregational life which can be celebrated, challenges faced by the congregation and, if necessary, any concerns for Presbytery to deal with. The report will recommend some issues for the Kirk Session to work on over the course of the next year.
5. Kirk Session then has one year in which to implement the recommendations of the Consultation Report. After this year, the Consultation Team will present a Follow-up Report to Presbytery and be discharged.

Guidance Notes

Being informed of a Consultation

Presbytery will inform the Kirk Session that a Consultation is to take place at least twelve weeks in advance.

Written questionnaires for Kirk Sessions

The Consultation Team will send two documents to the Kirk Session:

- *Kirk Session Consultation Questions and Guidance Notes*
- *Review of Resources, Records and Policies*

These should be completed and returned within six weeks. This will help the Consultation Team to select two or three areas of congregational life for further discussion, in order to learn more about encouragements in congregational life to be celebrated, challenges that the Kirk Session will have to deal with to help the congregation be more fruitful, and potential concerns that may require intervention by Presbytery.

The Kirk Session should meet to discuss the *Questions for the Kirk Session* in the *Kirk Session Consultation Questions and Guidance Notes* booklet and prepare answers. The Clerk of Session will then be responsible for completing the questionnaire and returning it. It may be appropriate to split the Kirk Session into small groups to consider individual sections of the questionnaire or there may already be existing committees within Kirk Session that have responsibility for some of these areas.

The *Review of Resources, Records and Policies* largely concerns the work of the Congregational Committee. The Kirk Session is responsible for it being completed correctly and returned, but it may be appropriate to have the bulk of the work carried out by the Congregational Committee or its officers. In addition to filling in answers, the *Review* also asks for copies of several documents and policies to be returned. A checklist is included at the end of the *Review*.

During this time, some or all of the Consultation Team will also visit a service in the congregation.

Written questionnaires for Ministers

At the end of this document is a questionnaire for the Minister. If there is an Associate Minister then they will also receive a copy. Each Minister should individually complete their own questionnaire and return it to the Consultation Team.

Discussion with Congregational Representatives

Kirk Session will appoint a group of Congregational Representatives who are broadly representative of the congregation, its organisations, and its ministries. They will meet with the Consultation Team to discuss the answers provided by Kirk Session. The reason for meeting with this group is to get a more detailed picture of the area of particular interest from a wider range of voices than just the Kirk Session.

This will be a group of eight-twelve people consisting of:

- up to four ruling elders,
- at least two young people (no older than 25),
- at least two women,
- at least two men.

The Minister should not be a part of the Congregational Representatives and will not be present during its discussion with the Consultation Team.

Discussion with Ministers

Ministers will each have an individual informal discussion with the Consultation Team. The order and timing of the discussions are at the discretion of the Consultation Team. The aim of this discussion is primarily pastoral, with the intention of supporting and encouraging ministers.

The Consultation Report

Following their discussions, the Consultation Team will prepare a Consultation Report for Presbytery containing encouragements to celebrate, challenges for Kirk Session to deal with, concerns for Presbytery to consider looking at in a separate process and recommended action for Kirk Session to take in the coming year. The recommendations could, for instance, relate to an encouraging aspect of congregational life which has the potential to be developed further, or to a challenge which the Kirk Session need to address.

The Consultation Team or Consultation Convener must meet with the Minister and Clerk of Session to verbally inform them of the content of the Report prior to it being reported to Presbytery, while making it clear that the recommendations will still have to be agreed by Presbytery.

The Consultation Team will not present the Consultation Report to the congregation (or the Follow-up Report), nor is the Kirk Session required to do so. However, if the Kirk Session wish to share any of the contents or a summary, it is free to do so.

Final outcome

After Presbytery has received the Consultation Report the Kirk Session will then have one year in which to implement any recommendations.

At the end of this year, the Consultation Team will consult with the Kirk Session to hear about progress regarding the recommendations of the Consultation Report and present a Follow-up Report to Presbytery.

If Presbytery is satisfied with progress, this will conclude the Consultation process.

If the process has uncovered concerns about the congregation which have not been dealt with satisfactorily in the year since the Consultation Report, or fresh problems have arisen during this time, further action may be taken in a separate process. This may make use of information from the Consultation.

Example timelines

These are examples to help visualise the timing of the process, but are not intended to restrict when a Consultation should start or finish.

Starting in September

May Presbytery meeting:	Congregation chosen and Kirk Session informed of timeline.
September Presbytery meeting:	Consultation Team established and Consultation officially commences.
October:	Questionnaires returned. Consultation Team discusses questionnaires and chooses areas to focus on for discussion.
November:	Consultation Team meets with the Congregational Representatives, Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable). Consultation Team draws up its conclusions and the Convener writes the Consultation Report, then shows it to the Minister and Clerk of Presbytery.
December Presbytery meeting:	Consultation Report presented to Presbytery.

The Kirk Session then has one year to implement the recommendations of the Consultation Report. The results of this would be reported at the February Presbytery meeting.

Starting in February

November Presbytery meeting:	Congregation chosen and Kirk Session informed of timeline.
February Presbytery meeting:	Consultation Team established and Consultation officially commences.
March:	Questionnaires returned. Consultation Team discusses questionnaires and chooses areas to focus on for discussion.
April:	Consultation Team meets with the Congregational Representatives, Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable). Consultation Team draws up its conclusions and the Convener writes the Consultation Report, then shows it to the Minister and Clerk of Presbytery.
May Presbytery meeting:	Consultation Report presented to Presbytery.

The Kirk Session then has one year to implement the recommendations of the Consultation Report. The results of this would be reported at the September Presbytery meeting.

Questions for the Minister

These questions should be answered by the Minister alone and returned to the Consultation Convener within six weeks.

Name: _____

Congregation: _____

Position (circle one): Minister Associate Minister

1. What have been your priorities and emphases regarding leading the church over the past few years?

2. What has been the emphasis of your preaching/teaching and conduct of worship over the past year?

3. Do you feel part of Kirk Session and does Kirk Session work well as a team?

4. How do you divide your time between teaching, visitation, meetings, responsibilities outside the congregation and family life?

5. What sort of pastoral care do you and your family receive:

a. Within the congregation?

b. From the Presbytery?

6. How do you ensure your own walk with God is good?

7. How do you look after your physical and emotional health?

8. In order to further develop your ministerial skills and be spiritually refreshed, it is helpful to undertake in-service training and make use of sabbatical time.

a. Please list in-service training then you have undertaken in the last five years, including the dates.

b. Please provide the dates of your last sabbatical and details of what it involved.

Presbyterian Church in Ireland
Presbytery Consultations

Review of Resources, Records and Policies

Instructions

Overview

The *Review of Resources, Records and Policies* largely concerns the work of the Congregational Committee.

The Kirk Session is responsible for it being completed correctly and returned, but it may be appropriate to have the bulk of the work carried out by the Congregational Committee or its officers.

In addition to filling in answers, the *Review* also asks for copies of several documents and policies to be returned. A checklist is included on page 13.

It should be returned to the Consultation Team within six weeks of being received by the Kirk Session.

Inspections

A number of inspections will be carried out by the Consultation Team:

- All items on the historical schedule of the congregation.
- All registers and minute books. These should be checked by someone who is independent of the congregation to ensure that they are kept up to date and in good order. This could be someone from the Consultation Team.
- All church property should have up-to-date safety certificates for electrical and gas installations.

Gas and electric Inspections

- It is the responsibility of the congregation to arrange and pay for all necessary inspections.
- Approved contractors in Northern Ireland are those who are NICEC approved (electrical) and Gas Safe Registered (gas).
- Approved contractors in the Republic of Ireland are those who are on the Register of Electrical Contractors of Ireland (electrical) and on the Register of Gas Installers Ireland (gas).
- Manse safety inspections should take place every ten years.
- Church gas installations should be inspected annually.
- Church electrical installations should be inspected every five years.

Review of Resources, Records and Policies

Membership Profile

Trends in numerical strength

With the help of published statistics the following information should be obtained:

	10 years ago	5 years ago	Last year
Families claiming connection			
Contributing families			
Persons of all ages			
In Sunday School and Bible Class			
Communicants			
Communicants attending at least once in the last year			
Average Sunday attendance			

Comments:

Present congregational profile

<18	19-39	40-59	60-79	80+

Comments:

Organisations under control of the Kirk Session

Name	Total membership	% belonging to congregation

Comments:

Finances

With the help of published statistics the following information should be obtained:

	5 years ago		Last year		% change	
	Total	Per contributing family	Total	Per contributing family	Total	Per contributing family
Total income						
Assessable income						
Property						
Mission etc.						

Who audited the previous year's accounts?

List of Paid Staff (Ministers and others)

Name	Role

Are there contracts in place for all non-ministerial staff?

Comments:

Records

Current church records

Register	Kept by	Are all details correct?
Baptismal		
Communion Roll		
Marriage		
Graveyard/Burial		
Session Minutes		
Committee Minutes		
Bequests Schedule		
Historical Schedule		

Contact details

1. How is contact information for members of the congregation and of organisations stored?

2. How are these details kept up to date?

3. Have up-to-date details for church officers and congregational agents been provided to the relevant people in Assembly Buildings?

Historical Records and Artefacts

1. Have all items on the historical schedule been inspected and when?

2. Who carried out the inspection?

3. Are the storage arrangements satisfactory?

Comments:

Property and Insurance

Trustees and Deeds

Please attach confirmation from your solicitor stating the date of inspection of the items listed below and indicating whether the items are in order.

Property Trustees	Special responsibilities (if any)
Title deeds, leases, etc. held by the congregation	

Comments:

Insurance

1. Is there adequate property and personnel insurance, including public liability and indemnity insurance?

2. When were the insurances last reviewed?

Please attach a copy of your most recent schedule of insurance.

Maintenance of property

Property	Work in past 5 years	Current condition	Proposed work
Church			
Church halls			
Manse			

All property should receive regular gas and electrical inspections. Please attach a copy of the most recent gas and electrical safety certificates.

1. Have your insurers been informed of any renovation/extension work since the last insurance review?

Comments:

Policies

Policy	Do you have one?	Person in charge	Date of last review
Child Protection			
Health and Safety			
Food Hygiene			
Fire Safety			

Please attach a copy of each policy.

Child Protection Policy

1. Is the Kirk Session satisfied that all leaders of each children's/youth organisation know what to do if a concern about a child is brought to his/her attention?

2. Does each youth organisation comply with the recommended ratios of leaders to children as detailed in section 7.2 of the Child Protection Guidelines?

3. Have all new helpers since 2005 completed the appropriate application form?

4. Who stores completed application forms?

5. Where are the forms stored?

6. When did Taking Care training last take place?

7. Have you found any particular problems in complying with the Child Protection Guidelines?

Comments:

Health and Safety Policy

1. Are Risk Assessments for all premises and activities regularly completed?

Food Hygiene Policy

1. If you don't have a Policy, why have you considered it unnecessary?

Fire Safety Policy

1. Are there any properties not covered by the Fire Safety Policy? If so, list them.

2. Are there sufficient fire extinguishers for all premises?

3. When were they last tested?

Miscellaneous

1. When were all electrical appliances in the church building and church halls last PAT tested?

2. Are there sufficient people with First Aid Training in your organisations?

Copyright Licensing

1. Do you have an appropriate Copyright Licence?

2. What is your CCL number?

3. Please tick what cover you have

CCL	MRL	CLA	PRS	PPL	CVL

Disability Arrangements

1. What arrangements have been made by the Kirk Session and Congregational Committee for the more active participation of disabled people in congregational life? For example:

- (a) Access by people with mobility difficulties
- (b) Those who are deaf or hard of hearing
- (c) Those whose sight is impaired
- (d) Those who have a learning difficulty
- (e) Others

Environmental Issues

1. When was an environmental audit last carried out?

Final Checklist

Have you provided your most recent, up-to-date versions of the following documents?

	Letter from your solicitor stating the date of inspection of title deeds, leases, etc. and indicating whether the items are in order
	Insurance schedule
	Church gas safety certificate(s) (if applicable)
	Church electrical safety certificate(s)
	Manse gas safety certificate (if applicable)
	Manse electrical safety certificate
	Child Protection Policy
	Health and Safety Policy
	Food Hygiene Policy
	Fire Safety Policy

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

1. The Nominations Committee has met on four occasions since the last General Assembly.
2. At its meeting in September 2016 the Committee noted that during the previous year 17 out of 209 Direct Presbytery Representatives changed ('B' line), 6 out of 86 other members changed ('C' line). It was also noted that in the nominations which the Committee has influence over it was well within the figures for Ordained / Gender which the structures report indicated should be aspired to.
3. One major issue, particularly with smaller Councils and Committees, is to ensure places are filled as efficiently as possible, therefore:
 - (a) To ease the scramble to fill vacancies Conveners and Secretaries of Councils are being asked to ascertain each year prior to the March Presbytery meetings who will be resigning from Councils and Committees, and to report such to the Nominations Committee.
 - (b) It was also agreed to assist the process of filling convenerships that these are no longer required to be advertised in the *Herald* but that instead a web address be placed on the Church Record section of the *Herald*. It was agreed to ask Council Secretaries, when vacancies occur early in the year, to bring names to the Nominations Committee in the autumn so that they may be added to sit and deliberate with a view to appointment by the Assembly.
4. In seeking to clarify further the **process for filling vacancies** in the membership of Councils and Committees the following was noted:
 - (a) The Nominations Committee (NC) is responsible for taking the lead in this process.
 - (b) The process is (i) Council Conveners in notifying a vacancy indicate any particular expertise or experience that is desirable; (ii) NC look in the pool for suitable people having regard for a balance of experience, ordination, gender and age; (iii) Only if suitable people are not found in the pool are other names sought from NC and/or Council Conveners and Secretaries who supply names and relevant details of any to be considered; (iv) Conveners would normally be asked if they have any comments regarding the shortlist of those being considered for their Council/Committees.
 - (c) For practical reasons it was decided to appoint a panel to carry out this work between meetings of the NC and report back to the Committee with recommendations. This 'Membership' Panel will be refreshed each year.
5. Filling vacancies for **Council/Committee Conveners**. Work on replacing two Council and at least 6 Committee Conveners has been progressing well. The NC report that in one case there has been more than one applicant, in a few cases just one applicant. However, in at least half the cases there has been no application and so, after the closing date, and in consultation with the Council Conveners and Secretaries, the NC has approached people to consider taking on Convenerships. There is a role for members of the General Council and others to

encourage people to consider applying for vacancies as they arise - they are open to *all* communicant members of PCI.

6. A group was set up to look at the pool and considered the process for refreshing the pool.

(a) Current Membership of the Pool – It was reported in December that of the 342 people in the pool some 146 had not been used on Commissions, Councils or Committees and about one third of these were female. In light of this, and of the low rate of turnover in the previous year it was decided that there was no immediate need to refresh the pool with new people. However, in some cases the level of information supplied on the forms used in 2014 will make it difficult to identify an appropriate place for some of those in the pool to serve. It was decided to ask those in the pool who have not been used to date to indicate their willingness to remain in the pool and to complete an online survey to enrich the information available. The Committee is hopeful of a good response to this and to have a pool with more significant information from which to draw.

(b) **In the future** it is intended that for 2019 nominations ‘C’ line members will be asked if they are willing to serve their second term of 4 years. While it is hard to predict how many spaces will need to be filled, it is anticipated that those who step down will be replaced by those in the existing pool. **For 2023** a need to begin the process of seeking new nominations for the pool is foreseen.

7. A suggestion was made to the Committee that it should consider bringing to the General Assembly a proposal that a ‘D’ line be added to all Councils as a ‘quota’ which could then be used to address any imbalance arising from Presbytery nominations. In light of the Structures Review it was the unanimous view of the Committee not to do this. As reported last October, the NC had established that the balances of the nominations for which it is responsible are within the range to be aspired to in terms of ordination and gender. It will seek to focus the remit of nominating to the ‘C’ line, while having regard for a balance of experience, ordination, gender and age, on the nominations over which it has a direct say.

8. One area in the Structures Review which had not received much attention was the task of ‘providing a strategy for **increasing the number of younger people** on councils, committees, etc.’ A group has been set up to meet with others in relation to this. Initially four issues were identified (i) Where do we gather the names for the pool from? (ii) What are people asked to serve on – councils, committees, panels or task groups? (iii) What are the strategic areas for younger people to contribute to? (iv) What does meaningful participation look like for younger people? To explore these issues and to hear the voice of younger people a survey was conducted at the 2017 Youth Assembly. In light of this the following is offered as an initial approach or strategy:

(a) It is important that the voice of younger people be heard and be allowed to influence and shape the work of Councils and Committees. The Committee is encouraged by the strong desire of younger people to be heard and in particular the desire of those at the recent Youth Assembly to be involved and this means that the opportunity for involvement of younger people is real.

- (b) The challenge of achieving this is as much for congregations and presbyteries as it is for our councils. In seeking to fulfil the remit of developing a strategy for involving more young people the NC suggests the following.
- (i) encourage Councils and Committee to think ‘younger’ when appointing Panels and Task Groups;
 - (ii) when refreshing the pool, specifically target younger people who have already served on Panels and Task Groups;
 - (iii) gather details of younger people who have been at the Youth Assembly, served on Summer Teams etc. and pass this on for consideration for membership of Panels and Task Groups;
 - (iv) pull together good practice examples of younger people who have been involved at different levels and communicate this to other young people;
 - (v) encourage and challenge the Church over the involvement of younger people at Presbytery and Kirk Session level.

9. **Length of Conveners’ service:** In a few cases, where under the new structures a Commission, Council, or Committee carries out essentially the same work, then the maximum length of service permitted, including time under the previous structures is 7 years. The NC has already received one request for an extension to this maximum and will need to monitor this for where it may arise in other cases.

10. The Committee will meet again before the General Assembly and seek to fill outstanding vacancies and any which arise between the time of writing and the Assembly.

JONATHAN CURRY, Convener

GUYSMERE CENTRE TASK GROUP

1. During the past year it remained clear to the Task Group that, as previously reported, redeveloping the Guysmere site as a residential facility for the denomination was not a viable option.

- (a) The Task Group noted that the demand for a denominational Youth Centre or Conference Centre had previously been surveyed and it was the clear outcome that, while residential ministry of different types remained important, the denomination did not need its own centre.
- (b) The Task Group also noted that in 2012-13 professionals were consulted and asked to provide costs for a re-developed Guysmere. It was reported at that time that costs for a renewed building would be a minimum of approx. £700,000 plus professional fees plus vat – well in excess of £1million.
- (c) It was further noted that the centre when operational had for many years been subsidised from central funds (currently there is an accrued debt of £160,566) and that any redeveloped centre was unlikely to be economically viable. A continued subsidy from central (United Appeal) funds would almost certainly be required, as mid-week use of the centre would be very limited during most of the year.

- (d) In the past doubts were expressed regarding the willingness of PCI's congregations to underwrite these costs through further assessments (for the capital development) or through the United Appeal for an annual subsidy. It was concluded then that a re-development would not be wise, given that little interest had been shown in the denomination for running a residential centre, with none of the General Assembly's Councils expressing a commitment to, or indeed sufficient interest in, using a redeveloped Guysmere Centre. The Task Group concurs with this conclusion.

2. There was however a strong desire within the Task Group, if at all possible, to retain the Guysmere site for ministry and/or mission within PCI. Approaches therefore were made to the Council for Social Witness (CSW) to see if that Council would be interested or able to develop the site for supported living or some other form of social witness. After detailed discussion, and exploration over an extended period of time of a variety of uses, including consultations with potential funders and partners, the CSW concluded "*that the development would not be viable, in this current vacuum within funding streams.*"

3. As noted above, the Guysmere Centre has an accrued debt of £160,566, which continues to rise as its present 'moth-balling' incurs a cost of some £10,000 per annum to keep the buildings secure, insured etc. Therefore, in the light of the above, the Task Group concluded that to keep the 'spirit of Guysmere' alive the site should be sold and a fund established, under the control of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, to support ministry, mission and outreach, with particular emphasis on residential ministry among young people. Resolutions are appended to this effect.

IVAN J PATTERSON, Convener

GENERAL COUNCIL

RESOLUTIONS

Resolutions – General Assembly Business Committee (Initial Section) – 9.30am Tuesday morning:

1. That the Draft Order of Business for the 2017 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 a grant of £20,000 be made from the Incidental Fund to the Arrangements Panel of the General Assembly Business Committee.
4. That the Initial Report of the General Assembly Business Committee be received.

Resolutions – General Council**(Section 1: 9.45am Tuesday morning)**

5. That the General Assembly encourage all Congregations to pray for and fully support 'Everyday Disciples', the Residential General Assembly being held at the Ulster University, Coleraine from Monday 21st-Thursday 24th August, 2017.

6. That the General Assembly welcome the plans for the celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation through the 'FAITH AT THE CROSSROADS - Rediscovering the Reformation' evenings in October 2017 and commend these to all Congregations.

7. That Section 1 of the Report of the General Council (with the exception of the General Assembly Business Committee) be received.

Resolutions – General Council**(Section 2: 3.30pm Wednesday afternoon)**

8. That the priorities outlined in Priorities Appendix 1 be adopted as the priorities for the work of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland at General Assembly level, as delivered through its Councils, Committees and Panels.

9. That Section 2 of the Report of the General Council be received.

Resolutions – General Council**(Section 3: 4.30pm Wednesday afternoon)**

10. That for 2017, the Assessment Rates, along with the related allocation of funds, be as set out in Support Services Appendix 1 and that the rate of assessment for the Pension Fund be set at 24% of stipend paid in the year.

11. That the 2017 budgeted expenditure of the Incidental Fund be as set out in Support Services Appendix 2.

12. That the amended Rules of the Prolonged Disability Fund, as set out in Support Services Appendix 4, be approved and that those receiving a benefit from the Prolonged Disability Fund (and who were age 56 or over on 1st January 2015) retain entitlement in retirement to an amount equivalent to the former annual bonus, under Code Par 315(5).

13. That approval is given to the pre-65 retirements of the Revs Brian McManus (Cloughwater), Harry Robinson (Downshire) and Alastair Bill (Saintfield Road, Belfast) and that the General Council approval of the pre-65 retirements of Revs David Chapman (Second Islandmagee) and John Hanna (Glendermott) is noted.

14. That the arrangements approved by the General Assembly in June 2010 regarding the appointment of Members Nominated Trustees (MNT) to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Pension Scheme (2009) be amended to allow for an unfilled position in one of the MNT constituencies to be filled by a nomination to one of the other constituencies.

15. That approval be given to the Support Services Committee to explore the merits or otherwise of a change to the financial year end to 31st August and, if appropriate, to engage in a period of consultation with the wider Church and report back to the 2018 General Assembly.

16. That the United Appeal for 2018 be as set out on the Schedules to the report of the United Appeal Committee.
17. That the General Assembly encourage all Congregations to make use of the available United Appeal for Mission promotional materials and to mark the first Sunday in March (or other suitable Sunday) as United Appeal for Mission Sunday.
18. That Section 3 of the Report of the General Council be received.

Resolutions – General Council

(Section 4: 3.30pm Thursday afternoon)

19. That the recommendations regarding the categories of inter-church relationship used by PCI (see Par 10 of the Report of the Relationships with other Denominations Task Group) be adopted.
20. That the framework and principles contained in the report drafted by the Council for Global Mission (see Appendix 2 of the Report of the Relationships with other Denominations Task Group) be adopted.
21. That the recommendations regarding the inter-church bodies to which PCI should belong (see Par 17 of the Report of the Relationships with other Denominations Task Group) be adopted.
22. That the recommendations regarding the Church of Scotland (see Par 18 of the Report of the Relationships with other Denominations Task Group), with the exception of recommendation (b), be adopted.
23. That the recommendations regarding the Free Church of Scotland (see Par 19 of the Report of the Relationships with other Denominations Task Group) be adopted.
24. That the delegates to the United Reformed Church 2018 and the Presbyterian Church of Wales 2018 be recommended by the General Council to the 2018 General Assembly; and that the General Council be permitted to appoint delegates to the General Synod of the Church of Ireland 2018 and the Methodist Conference 2018, along with other delegates as required.
25. That a Theological Engagement Task Group be appointed to approach the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland for ecumenical discussions on the contemporary understanding of the grace of God in Christ; and that the membership of the group be as follows:
 - Principal JS Carson (Acting Convener), Professor of Systematic Theology, Rev Dr Martyn Cowan, Prof John Gillespie, Rev John Faris, Ms Zoe Hollinger, Rev Dr Michael McClenahan, Dr Patrick Mitchel, Very Rev TWJ Morrow, Rev John Seawright, Rev Joanne Smith
26. That the General Assembly agree that the 2007 guidelines for multi-faith events continue to be followed, but that further substantial reflection on the theological basis for involvement in multi-faith events be carried out by the Doctrine Committee, through the appointment of a dedicated Task Group of the Committee, with the group including a representative from each of the Councils for Public Affairs and Global Mission.
27. That Section 4 of the Report of the General Council be received.

Resolutions – General Council
(Section 5: 4.45pm Thursday afternoon)

28. That the General Assembly encourage Presbyteries to adopt some of the good practice suggestions outlined in the Report of the Engagement and Consultations Task Group in order to improve engagement in their meetings and also with Congregations.
29. That the General Assembly direct the Engagement and Consultations Task Group to consider and report back on the issue of the role of Presbyteries as agents for missional strategy.
30. That the General Assembly approve the new Consultations Process as in Engagement and Consultations Appendix 1 and direct that it be used by all Presbyteries from 1st January 2018 onwards.
31. That the following resignations be accepted (or noted) and appointments made:
 - (a) the resignation of the Rev AV Stewart as Convener of the Discipleship Committee on 3rd August, 2016 be noted, that he be thanked for his services, and that the _____ be appointed in his place;
 - (b) the resignation of the Rev RJ Hyndman as Convener of the Worship Committee be accepted, that he be thanked for his services, and that _____ be appointed in his place;
 - (c) the resignation of the Rev Dr JA Curry as Convener of the Leadership Committee be accepted, that he be thanked for his services, and that _____ be appointed in his place;
 - (d) the resignation of the Rev TC Morrison as Convener of the Youth, Children's and Family Strategy Coordination Committee be accepted, that he be thanked for his services, and that _____ be appointed in his place;
 - (e) the resignation of the Rev Dr Graham Connor as Convener of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness be accepted, that he be thanked for his services, and that the Rev TC Morrison be appointed in his place;
 - (f) the resignation of the Rev BD Colvin as Convener of the Home Mission, Irish Mission and Deaconess Committee be accepted, that he be thanked for his services, and that the Rev RI Carton be appointed in his place;
 - (g) the resignation of the Rev Stephen Simpson Convener of the Council for Mission in Ireland on 31st December, 2016 be noted, that he be thanked for his services, and that the Very Rev Dr FP Sellar be appointed in his place;
 - (h) the resignation of the Rev Andrew Faulkner as Convener of the Reception of Ministers and Licentiates Committee be accepted, that he be thanked for his services, and that _____ be appointed in his place;
 - (i) the resignation of the Rev Dr WJM Parker as Convener of the Ministerial Studies and Development Committee be accepted, that he be thanked for his services, and that the Rev Andrew Faulkner be appointed in his place.

32. That the nominations to the General Assembly Commissions, Councils and Committees (as tabled by the Nominations Committee) be approved.
33. That the General Assembly agree that the Guysmere Centre be sold at the appropriate time.
34. That General Assembly direct that, once all financial liabilities are settled, steps be taken to establish a 'Guysmere Fund' under the control of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, to support ministry, mission and outreach with an emphasis where possible on residential ministry amongst young people.
35. That the General Council be authorised to oversee the sale of the Guysmere Centre and the drawing up of the terms of the "Guysmere Fund", in consultation with the Council for Congregational Life and Witness.
36. That Section 5 of the Report of the General Council be received.

Resolutions – General Assembly Business Committee

(Second Section) – 12.00noon Friday:

37. That from 2018 onwards, the General Assembly shall include additional evening sessions, and consequential adjustments, as outlined in General Assembly Business Committee Appendix 1 – Option ## (Insert either Option 1 or Option 2).
38. That from 2018 onwards each congregation shall be entitled to send one additional communicant member or ruling elder, aged 30 or under, to sit and deliberate alongside the representative elder and that the current arrangements for 'named additional elders' shall cease.
39. That the General Assembly authorise the Clerk to make all necessary amendments to the 'Contents' and 'Index' pages of the Code to reflect changes agreed by the General Assembly; and to make appropriate consequential changes to date numbering and symbols in the Appendices.
40. That the Second Report of the General Assembly Business Committee be received.