



Summary Report

General Assembly 2017

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The General Assembly is the governing and decision-making body of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The 2017 meeting was held in Assembly Buildings, Belfast from Monday, 5th June until Friday, 9th June. Minutes and full reports can be found www.presbyterianireland.org/generalassembly. A review of each day’s proceedings can be found at www.presbyterianireland.org/news





Welcome

Welcome to the 2017 General Assembly Summary Report.

As Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI), it is a privilege to serve Christ and the Church in ways that I never expected to – and welcoming you to this our fourth Summary Report is one of them.

In the coming pages you will find an overview of some of the issues that we discussed at this year's General Assembly and some of the decisions that we came to. Some of them affect the Church alone, while others concern issues that we face together in Ireland, north and south. We have also highlighted some of the work that the Church has undertaken since the previous Assembly in 2016.

Chairing the General Assembly as Moderator gave me an entirely new perspective of it. It also meant that for the first time in 40 years I actually attended every session right through to very end!

My opening night address was entitled 'Everyday Disciples', which is also the theme for my year in office and I hope to challenge and encourage the Church to live up to that calling by exploring what taking up the cross daily means in practice.

We live in a world where individualism prevails, but Christ teaches us the value of community and how we are to treat our neighbours. As everyday disciples, this is a constant challenge to us in our society. Christ tells His disciples they are to love their neighbours, even those who offend them and those who are strangers.

While this is a challenge, I believe that to be an everyday disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ is the most exciting and amazing vocation anyone can be engaged in.

My year as Moderator also coincides with the 500th anniversary of the Reformation – Martin Luther's remarkable initiative that started the wheels of transformation in the church that has had such colossal influence for five centuries.

I hope you find the 2017 Summary Report informative and interesting.

Rt. Rev. Dr. Noble McNeely

Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 2017-2018

Everyday Disciples

Special Assembly 2017 | Ulster University, Coleraine | 21-24 August





Introduction

The General Assembly of our Church is very much the Presbyterian family in Ireland coming together for a week of worship, prayer, Bible study, celebration, debate and decision-making.

As a Church we are involved in many aspects of day-to-day life across Ireland and the resolutions that came before our governing body – over 100 of them – reflected these and, in some cases, the concerns that we have.

This year was no different, as we discussed the important role that chaplaincy plays in society, north and south; the concerns that we have in relation to education proposals in the Republic of Ireland; and possible outcomes of the Citizens' Assembly's proposals on abortion.

Our plans to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, relationships with other denominations, the political situation in Northern Ireland and support for persecuted Christians around the globe were just some of the issues that came before the House.

Proposals that seek to alter the demographic of future General Assemblies and make them more accessible were agreed. We also discussed a detailed report that set out the principles by which the Church relates to other denominations, locally, nationally and globally. We also agreed to engage the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland in discussions around the contemporary understanding of the Doctrine of Justification. As a result, I think that this is the first time in recent memory that we have considered a formal church-to-church theological dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church.

All things considered, it was an interesting and productive week. I very much hope that this year's Summary Report will give you an insight to our discussions and the decisions that we took, while also looking at some of the things that happened over the past year.

Rev. Trevor Gribben

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



Vision for Society – update

Welcomed and received by the General Assembly last year, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Vision for Society Statement has been rolled out across its 537 congregations and their members – north and south.

The 146-word Statement seeks to act as a stimulus for the Church to engage with wider society, while enabling a deeper exploration of some of the implications contained in it for the everyday realities of following Jesus in a divided society.

The promotional roll-out of the Statement has included a front page cover story in the denominational publication, the *Presbyterian Herald*, five blogs (one on each of the statement's five paragraphs) the production of three short films, a specially written hymn, based on the words of the Statement, and a highly eye-catching hand-drawn poster from the 'illustrative faith' school of design.

Rev. Stephen Johnston, minister of Kilkeel Presbyterian Church and convener of PCI's Good Relations Panel, which is responsible for the Statement, said, "Peacebuilding will look different in my own community of Kilkeel, County Down as it will in Belfast, Dublin, Galway, or Cork, but its centrality to Christian discipleship remains the same wherever we are. It is my prayer that our Vision for Society Statement and our continued commitment to peacebuilding will bear much fruit."

For Vision for Society resources visit www.presbyterianireland.org/visionforsociety



Northern Ireland political situation

The General Assembly expressed its ‘serious disquiet about the damage being done to the fabric of Northern Irish society by the current political crisis...’

It also called for ‘all involved in the upcoming political talks to urgently seek resolution that establishes good government based on good working relationships, that confidence can be restored, instability minimised and major changes (including the Brexit negotiations) faced together.’

Since the collapse of Stormont in January, PCI – together with other Churches and on its own initiative – has spoken out about the political situation and encouraged political leaders to reach an agreement.

In January, the Moderator, Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar, took to the airwaves saying, “It is at times like these that we must be clear about the values upon which we want our society and institutions to be based. For both to function well, there must be integrity, a commitment to openness, generosity of spirit and cooperation for the common good...”

In March, after the Northern Ireland Assembly election, along with other Church leaders, Dr. Sellar urged newly-elected representatives to “place the common good at the centre of their approach.”

In early June, they called for a spirit of hope and continued peace-building and as the 29th June talks deadline approached, they wrote to political leaders. In the published letter they concluded by saying, “As Christians we recognise our responsibility to pray for you and for all those in political authority and no doubt you recognise your responsibility towards the people of Northern Ireland at this time...”

“This week we strongly encourage all the political leaders involved in the talks to go the extra mile to reach an accommodation, which establishes a sustainable administration that will work for the common good of all in our society.”

Approaching the autumn now, as a Church we continue to encourage all political leaders to go that extra mile.



Dealing with the past: New developments

In 2016, the General Assembly approved the setting up of a research project, which it is hoped will make a positive contribution to the ongoing discussion about how society deals with the legacy of ‘the Troubles’.

Entitled ‘Reconciliation through dealing with the past: Learning from Presbyterian responses to the Troubles’, the two-year project seeks to learn from the ‘people in the pews’ – especially those who have first-hand experience of being victims of the Troubles – and contribute to the wider discussion on dealing with the past.

The General Assembly was updated on progress, which included the establishment of a Task Group, along with a high-powered Academic Advisory Group and Reference Group to monitor the quality and progress of the research.

The Task Group had applied successfully to the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund and secured the partnership of the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice at Queen’s University, Belfast in delivering the research.

To identify potential interviewees, ministers had been asked to identify individuals who had been affected by events that took place during the period 1968-2000.

Rev. Tony Davidson, convener of the Task Group, told the Assembly that the process had already been a healing one, “Even in approaching people, pastors have shared with me how the process has been one of healing as many have realised that the wider church is interested in their story and wants to acknowledge them...

“However, in taking the initiative, it allows others to come alongside us, to listen to us and humbly discern how God has worked in us and through us, but also taught us and admonished us; then we can look forward to the future with the hope of healing and deliverance.”



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



Queen's University
Belfast

Education and faith

Education in the Republic of Ireland – specifically the Education and Skills minister’s proposals for changing the rules on school admissions to faith-based schools – came before the General Assembly.

Currently when a denominational school is oversubscribed, it may give priority in admissions to children of families of a particular religious denomination to ensure that the ethos of the school is maintained.

The Assembly discussed the consequences of Minister Richard Bruton’s four possible policy options, which presented potential problems as they would either diminish, or remove the role of faith in determining admissions to oversubscribed faith-based schools.

Speaking during the debate, Eleanor Petrie, chair of the Education Sub-Committee of PCI’s Republic of Ireland Panel, explained that the proposals had come about due to Atheist Ireland and groups promoting non-faith education pushing to remove church control from primary schools.

“The argument of these groups sounds broadly plausible – replacement of church-run education with a standard state education allowing for faith formation outside school time...

“In our faith schools the ethos of reformed faith runs like a seam – not a 30-minute class that can easily be removed. But at its heart, this is replacement of one truth in the lives of our children – that there is one Trinitarian God and that salvation is achieved through belief in the sacrifice of Jesus – with another: that there is no God.”

The General Assembly called on the Irish government to ensure that its policy protects minority rights and enables ongoing access to, and the sustainability of, schools with a Protestant ethos.

New schools’ body welcomed

The formation of the new Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC) in Northern Ireland, which the Church has been pressing for many years, was welcomed by the General Assembly.

The CSSC will advocate for all schools in the controlled sector (schools transferred to state control in the 1920s by PCI, the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church) and assist in planning for the schools’ estate, while working to raise standards and aspirations.

Andy Brown, who is convener of PCI’s State Education Committee, said that for the first time since the creation of the State, CSSC will also articulate an ethos for the sector, based upon the values of a non-denominational Christian environment.

The creation of CSSC was “something to be welcomed, something to celebrate and something to be wholeheartedly and actively supported,” he said.

Concerns for Eighth Amendment

Following April 2017's decision by the Citizens' Assembly in the Republic of Ireland to recommend that abortion be permitted in a wide range of circumstances, the General Assembly expressed its 'deep concern' regarding possible amendment to *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, the Constitution of Ireland.

Speaking in the debate, the Very Rev. Dr. Trevor Morrow, convener of PCI's Republic of Ireland Panel, said, "There has been enormous pressure from sections of Irish society to rescind Article Eight. The Citizens' Assembly has offered propositions that are so radical, it is beyond anything David Steele introduced in 1967 in the UK Parliament with all its implications...It is in fact an advocacy for abortion on demand.

"As such, I would urge this Assembly to express our deep anguish and distress that such legislation and practice should take place on this island in the Republic..."

Reflecting the pro-life position of the Church, the Assembly called on the Irish government to provide the best possible care and support for women experiencing crisis pregnancies. It also authorised the General Council to make a submission on behalf of PCI to the Joint Oireachtas Committee which is considering the Citizens' Assembly's proposals.

Council for Public Affairs convener, Very Rev. Dr. Norman Hamilton made the point that abortion in the Republic of Ireland is a constitutional issue, while in the Northern Ireland it affects criminal law and health guidelines. "In both jurisdictions it isn't clear what is being proposed. As a Church we want to maintain a coherent biblical position, yet also be sensitive to the views of our people," he said.

"The Citizens' Assembly has offered propositions that are so radical, it is beyond anything David Steele introduced in 1967 in the UK Parliament."

Very Rev. Dr. Trevor Morrow



Changing times

During the annual week-long gathering, 1,000 ministers and elders from the Church's 500-plus congregations across Ireland are entitled to attend. For some, as the General Assembly meets during the working day, taking part can often prove difficult.

With this in mind, the Assembly passed two resolutions that it is hoped will widen accessibility to future meetings and broaden the demographic of those entitled to attend, especially for working elders, young people and younger adults.

In seeking to broaden the demographic and age profile of those entitled to attend, congregations will now be able to send an additional member, or elder, who will be aged 30 or under.

It was also agreed that in 2018 business would also be conducted on two evening sessions, enabling, it is hoped, more people to attend.



Changes to Assembly Buildings



In 2016 the General Assembly agreed to proceed with the creation of additional conferencing facilities, and flexible meeting and exhibition space on the ground floor of Assembly Buildings.

Taking this forward, the Spires Shopping Mall closed at the end of June 2017 to facilitate this significant redevelopment. Work commenced in August and should be completed by the spring of 2018.



Voting in congregations

While over 100 resolutions were discussed at the Assembly, it also received petitions. Licenced by one of the Church's 19 presbyteries, they are formally known as 'Memorials' and usually come from a person, or body, who is not a member of the General Assembly. For the first time in many years two came before the House.

One Memorial concerned a request to break the long-established tradition of recorded financial giving being the prerequisite to voting in congregations. While many give sacrificially to the work and ministry of their local church, their offering, for various reasons, is not recorded. As a result, they cannot vote for elders, members of the congregational committee, or on other matters.

It was agreed that a Task Group be formed to look at this matter in more detail – in particular the qualifications for voting in congregations – and report to the 2018 General Assembly.

THE CHURCH IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

On being human...

In the autumn of 2016, as part of PCI's Church in the Public Square series, Union Theological College hosted six thought-provoking and well-attended seminars that touched on some of the most topical moral and ethical issues of the day.

The seminars provided an opportunity to reflect on what it means to be a human being in the 21st century by exploring the essence and uniqueness of human life. Over an eight-week period, academics and professionals working in a variety of disciplines in Ireland and the UK addressed a number of topics from gender identity and sexuality, to human rights and end of life issues.

Speaking about the events at the time, College Principal, Very Rev. Dr. Stafford Carson, welcomed the opportunity to explore such

a diverse range of subjects and hoped that the seminars would contribute to ongoing public discussion around these topics.

"This series of seminars is designed for people who are interested in thinking more deeply about a range of issues that are all connected with 'being human,'" Principal Carson said.

"Debates surrounding abortion and assisted dying are based on our understanding of the essence of human life. Today advances in technology, for example, mean

that we may soon be capable of so modifying and enhancing human capabilities that we have to redefine what we mean by 'being human'...Added to these are all the questions surrounding human sexuality, gender identity and human rights, areas that the seminars will discuss."

You can read the introductory blogs by all the speakers and a recording of each seminar at www.presbyterianireland.org/publicsquare

Professor Williams retires

Professor Stephen Williams was honoured for his work as Professor of Systematic Theology with a standing ovation after he addressed the Assembly for the last time before his retirement.

The Moderator Rt. Rev. Dr. Noble McNeely said, "Twenty-three years is a long time, but we are grateful to have been able to benefit from your service for so long. During that time, you have shaped the thinking of countless students, contributed significantly to the theological understanding of the entire Church and humbly modelled what it means to be a follower of Jesus."



Reflections on a year in ministry

With 17 ministry students already at PCI's Union Theological College and only five due to start training in September 2017, the General Assembly encouraged congregations to pray concerning applications for the ordained ministry.



In an article for the *Presbyterian Herald*, 28-year-old Nathan Duddy reflected on his first anniversary as minister of Arklow Presbyterian Church, where he was ordained minister of this County Wicklow congregation in 2016.

“We are a small congregation, yet we are made up of so many different nationalities, ages, and backgrounds. At the same time, we are made up of so many fragile stories, which mesh our family together.

“These stories, for me as the minister, sum up the life and essence of our church. Stories of redemption as we see folk come to know Jesus as Redeemer and Saviour, stories of value as those who felt completely worthless suddenly see how good the Father is.

“As we reflect fully, we also want to look forward with anticipation. We have just started a small food bank due to the growing need in

our community, and as we grow in this place we want to continually be aware of the needs in our town.

“As usual we are continually blown away with excitement at what our Irish mission worker Philip Whelton is doing through the drop-in facilities for kids and young mums – all of whom are from the wider town.

“Ultimately we are here in Arklow to see the kingdom of Jesus Christ come and expand. We are not a social club...but an outpost full of salt and light. We seek to be pioneers in Arklow, joining with other churches as we seek to see Arklow transformed by the incredible love of Jesus.”



Rev. Dr. McClenahan

The General Assembly approved the appointment of Rev. Dr. Michael McClenahan as Professor of Systematic Theology.

Originally from Lisburn in County Antrim, Professor McClenahan holds MA degrees from Oxford in



Jurisprudence and Theology. He pursued research in the United States at Yale (2004-2006) and was a graduate research student at Yale Divinity School, a fellow of the Jonathan Edwards Center at the university and a graduate fellow of Jonathan Edwards College.

He was licentiate assistant minister in Greenwell Street Presbyterian Church in Newtownards, County Down (2007-2010) and subsequently minister of Knappagh and Lislooney Presbyterian churches in County Armagh (2011-2015).

A contributing online editor for various theological resources, he also lectured in Christian doctrine for a number of years at the Cornhill Training Course in Belfast.

Relationships with other denominations

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has relationships with other denominations, mission partners and inter-church bodies, both locally and globally. The General Assembly discussed recommendations that set out the principles by which PCI will seek to relate to them.

In recommendations regarding the Church of Scotland, the Assembly agreed some practical steps towards mutual reform. One such move was for PCI to ‘clearly and graciously state its own position in regards to human sexuality and marriage – for the benefit of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as a denomination and the integrity of PCI’s witness.’

The recommendations also included a demonstration of the Church’s commitment to reform by being open with the Scottish Church where PCI ‘has been less than faithful to the Scriptures in pursuit of justice or in the practice of grace.’

In speaking to the report, Rev. Trevor Gribben, Clerk of Assembly and PCI’s General Secretary, said that the Task Group that presented the report to the General Council and the Council itself, “are very clear in their view that the Church of Scotland has departed from the clear teaching of Scripture on the matter of same-sex relationships, both with regard to the ordained leadership of the Church and

the direction of travel towards permitting ministers to marry people of the same gender...

“We also recognise that we in PCI are not without sin and in those areas in which we have been or are less than faithful to Scripture, we should be open to similar gracious biblical correction.”

In another resolution, members agreed to ‘encourage the development of a formal fraternal relationship with the Free Church of Scotland.’ The General Assembly also agreed to explore membership of the World Reformed Fellowship and review its membership of two European bodies.

“We also recognise that we in PCI are not without sin and in those areas in which we have been or are less than faithful to Scripture, we should be open to similar gracious biblical correction.”

Rev. Trevor Gribben

Scottish General Assembly

Unlike previous years, there was no recommendation to nominate the Moderator to attend the Scottish General Assembly in 2018. However, an amendment to send the Moderator was lost 139 votes to 221.



The Church of Scotland

Gracious dialogue

The Dialogue and Resources Task Group was set up to listen and provide pastoral guidance and resources in regard to same-sex attraction.

The Task Group reported that it held a series of 10 regional workshops for ministers, licentiates, and full-time youth leaders, with the aim of considering how the Church could improve its pastoral care for individuals and families seeking help or advice.

The well-known Anglican pastor from England, Rev. Sam Allberry, author of *Is God Anti-Gay?* who is himself same-sex attracted, facilitated the workshops and Q&A sessions.

Speaking about the group's work and his own journey, former Moderator, Very Rev. Dr. Rob Craig, who convenes the group, said, "I have been learning not to think and speak of homosexuality as an

issue – for I have encountered real people who have been wrestling to understand who they are in light of their faith in Christ."

Dr. Craig explained that early on in the task group's work, they began using the phrase 'gracious confidence', which became a guiding principle. "On the one hand we want to affirm our confidence in the gospel of Christ and the teaching of Scripture, while on the other, we want always to be gracious in our relationships with everyone."

He also said that conversations had with Christian people whose theological understanding of same-sex attraction differed to PCI's were "challenging and informative".

"I have been learning not to think and speak of homosexuality as an issue – for I have encountered real people who have been wrestling to understand who they are in light of their faith in Christ."

Very Rev. Dr. Rob Craig

Theological reflections

The General Assembly agreed to engage with the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland in discussions around the contemporary understanding of the Doctrine of Justification. This would be the first time in recent memory that PCI has considered a formal church-to-church theological dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church.

The Assembly also approved the creation of a Task Group to undertake a 'substantial reflection' on the theological basis for the denomination's involvement in multi-faith events.

Reformation 500

With its origins in the Scottish migrations to Ulster in the early part of the 17th century, Irish Presbyterianism has a rich heritage. The oldest congregation dates back to 1613, less than a century after Martin Luther nailed his famous 95 theses to Castle Church door in Wittenberg, beginning what we call ‘the Reformation’.

In his opening address to the 2017 General Assembly, the Moderator Rt. Rev. Dr. Noble McNeely described the ramifications of what happened on 31 October 1517 as “Luther’s remarkable initiative that started the wheels of transformation in the church that has had such colossal influence for five centuries.”

The Reformation’s quincentenary is a cause for celebration and the Church is marking this seminal event in a number of ways. In February, Union Theological College, in partnership with Queen’s University Institute of Theology, held a well-attended two-day conference entitled ‘Luther 500’. The *Presbyterian Herald* has also run a series of articles on different aspects of the Reformation.

In October at ‘Faith at the Crossroads: Rediscovering the Reformation’ PCI will hold three celebratory events in Dublin, Londonderry and Belfast. With music from New Irish Arts, the speaker at each event will be Dr. Conrad Mbewe, pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church in Zambia.



Visit to Hungary

As Moderator, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar joined 40 church leaders from denominations from across the world in Debrecen, eastern Hungary for the Hungarian Reformed Church’s 500th anniversary celebration. Speaking at a reception following the main celebration, Dr. Sellar said, “The central truth that the gospel tells us is not what we must do, but what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has done for us.

“This was so refreshing that it made a deep impression and many people found salvation and hope as they put their faith in Christ. Contemporary society also needs the light of the gospel...”

Moderator visits Naval Service

During a weekend of engagements as Moderator in County Cork last December, Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar visited the Irish Naval Service at its base at Haulbowline in Cork Harbour.

During his visit, Dr. Sellar met officers, NCOs and ratings on LÉ James Joyce (P62), one of the Service's three offshore patrol vessels, which had returned to the naval base three months earlier after being deployed in the Mediterranean.

“My visit was an opportunity to strengthen the links that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has with all branches of the Irish Defence Forces. It was also an occasion when I could pay tribute to the Naval Service for its sterling humanitarian work in the

Mediterranean, where its members have rescued 15,000 migrants in the last two years.”

Since 1958, the Irish Defence Forces has supported United Nations' peacekeeping missions in the Middle East and elsewhere. This service has not been without cost, with 85 members of the Defence Forces having given their lives during its various UN peacekeeping roles.

You can find all PCI news at www.presbyterianireland.org/news



WWI centenary commemorations

Having begun his moderatorial year representing the Church when he attended the principal centenary commemorations of the Battle of the Somme at the Ulster Memorial Tower in Thiepval, France last year, Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar represented the Moderator during General Assembly week in Belgium at another Great War anniversary.

The 1917 Battle of Messines Ridge was the first time that soldiers from both unionist and nationalist traditions in Ireland – 36th Ulster Division and 16th Irish Division – fought side by side during the First World War. In memory of those who lost their lives 100 years ago, Dr. Sellar, alongside Most Rev. Dr. Richard Clarke (Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh), Most Rev. Eamon Martin (Catholic Archbishop of Armagh) and Methodist President Rev. Bill Mullally laid a wreath together.



Moderator calling...

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is an all-Ireland Church made up of 537 congregations. Grouped together in 19 regional presbyteries, each year the Moderator makes a week-long tour to three of them.

Writing in the PCI blog about his year in office, Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar said that his presbytery tours were an “opportunity to see the Church at work.”

A **presbytery** is a court of the Church responsible for the corporate oversight of the congregations assigned to it by the General Assembly, the ministers and elders connected with it, and the advancement of Christ’s kingdom in general within its bounds.

As Moderator, he had the opportunity to see ‘the Church at work’ in three very different places, each with its own unique challenges and circumstances, witnessing first-hand the work of the Church on the ground, encouraging congregations, meeting ministers, local business people, police officers, farmers, and visiting schools.

In October, Dr. Sellar and his wife Claire spent a week visiting

the Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady and in November he was in the mainly urban Presbytery of North Belfast where he made headlines around bonfires. In February, he toured the Presbytery of Newry.

“Each week-long tour gave us invaluable insights into the life and witness of the Church and community in three very different parts of the country – each area with their own distinctiveness, flavour and challenges,” Dr. Sellar wrote in his blog.

“October’s tour was sentimental, as I grew up in the area: 36 engagements in eight days, preaching in four congregations (two each Sunday like most weeks), and participating in a midweek presbytery celebration.

“During all three tours – and throughout the year – it was wonderful to see fresh and innovative expressions of church; the diversity of what is being done on the ground, from youth groups to working with children

with special needs in a genuinely everyday cross-community way, to seeing the blessing of social projects that meet people where they are at.”

From a presbytery perspective, acting North Belfast Presbytery clerk, Trevor Long, said in advance of the tour, “We are still walking through the legacy of conflict and have many interface areas, some of which the Moderator will visit. At the same time, we hope to show Dr. Sellar how the churches have been at the forefront of peace-building and reconciliation in this part of the city,” he said.

“While all our congregations are making a difference on the ground, some are experiencing incredible growth and renewed vibrancy. I want the Moderator to be encouraged by that, but also know the realities that we face as we faithfully preach the gospel and reach out to our local communities in the name of Jesus.”

“Each week-long tour gave us invaluable insights into the life and witness of the church and community in three very different parts of the country – each area with their own distinctiveness, flavour and challenges.”



Of hope and bonfires

During his North Belfast Presbytery tour, the Moderator, Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar gave the 2016 Ulster University Chaplaincy Lecture, entitled ‘A City of Hope, Leadership and Compassion’, on its Belfast campus.

In it he offered an alternative to today’s secular commentary as a way for the city to live in hope and flourish. It was his views on bonfires, in one small part of his lecture, however, that lit up the headlines.

Dr. Sellar said, “They are not bonfires fuelled by inclusiveness, respect and healing, but a means by which we pass on to succeeding generations the sins of our fathers.”

Writing in the *Belfast Telegraph* a few days later, he explained that, “Bonfires in themselves are not sinful. But they can become sinful when instead of positively celebrating culture, they are hijacked to inculcate triumphalism and fear. When negativity is passed on from one generation to the next that is wrong, because sectarianism is sinful – a cancer that eats away at the very core of our hearts.”

The Church in changing times

From Bushmills in County Antrim, to Aghada in County Cork, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is a living body of around 225,000 individuals in a mix of 536 rural and urban congregations, the oldest dating from 1613, the youngest from 2010.

Centrally, through the Council for Congregational Life and Witness (CCLW), PCI supports and encourages congregations across Ireland in living out their calling as the people of God – building His kingdom in their own communities and growing in faith as disciples of Jesus Christ – in many different ways.

Church life and the church's place in society are changing, which raises hard questions about the way congregations function and engage. Issues like re-imagining contemporary women's ministry as an integral part of congregational life and how best to equip congregations and their members to rise to the challenge of evangelism in 21st century Ireland are all being worked through. Equally important is looking at discipleship and the implications of following Jesus as His disciple in a still divided society.

In fresh ways, the Church, through CCLW, is supporting congregations to walk through these challenges and opportunities through events, resources, research and new programmes, often using new technology and placing fresh emphasis on existing mediums like DVDs.

During CCLW's alternative presentation to the General Assembly, entitled 'Fellow workers with God who makes things grow', Council convener Rev. Dr. Graham Connor said, "...the growing confident secular context in which we work puts enormous pressure on Christians in this island to lose hope in the gospel and in the sovereignty of God and His determination to complete His building, yet we are encouraged to know that many of the Scriptures were delivered to people who were under much greater pressure than we are today."

In moving forwards, a strong focus continues to be placed on developing resources to build up congregations through facilitating discipleship and making disciples, providing a vision for smaller congregations and those in transition in a changing world and a strong emphasis on leadership, both equipping and developing emerging leaders, while developing the 'Growing in Fruitfulness' initiative piloted last year.

"...the growing confident secular context in which we work puts enormous pressure on Christians in this island."

Rev. Dr. Graham Connor

Small and fruitful

An important aspect of CCLW's work that was also reported to the General Assembly was 'A vision for small and fruitful' – an examination of existing congregational capacity for developing life and witness across PCI.

Developing this vision, Rev. Dr. Graham Connor said, "70% of our congregations have fewer than 150 'active' communicants, we could describe these as small. The story of the people of God in Scripture and in history clearly shows that small can be fruitful.

"I believe that this piece of work which we hope will 'under God nurture small congregations in identifying encouraging steps towards more fruitful life and witness' could be of great mutual benefit to the vast majority of our congregations across the island of Ireland."



New appointment

A key role for the Council for Congregational Life and Witness is to develop a broad range of programmes, events and projects for all ages. Richard Russell was appointed in January 2017 as Programme Development Officer to manage and coordinate the delivery of these. From his previous work in the public and private sectors, Richard brings extensive experience of programme management to the role.



Rural chaplaincy initiative

A new chaplaincy scheme, which focuses on rural chaplaincy, made urgent by the increasing isolation often felt by those working on farms, is to be piloted by PCI, following the green light given by the General Assembly.

Rev. Ben Walker, convener of the Council for Mission in Ireland's Strategy for Mission Committee, told the Assembly how it has been considering the issue of rural chaplaincy/mission over the past year. "In Matthew chapter 9 we read of Jesus going through the cities and villages, teaching, proclaiming the gospel, healing affliction. We are committed to the strategy of reaching cities... but a city strategy is never to be to the detriment of those who live rurally."

With over a third of Ireland's population is described as rural

– over 2.25 million people, Mr. Walker said, "Farmers often work alone and struggle with the issues of isolation and financial stress... With the compassion of Christ we would seek to provide pastoral care for farmers and into this rural economy.

"Pastoral care with gospel intentionality, for we believe that chaplaincy is missional and that the best we can give to farmers (or anyone) is to see them personally embrace the good news as it is found in God's Son, Jesus," he said.

"...we believe that chaplaincy is missional and that the best we can give to farmers (or anyone) is to see them personally embrace the good news as it is found in God's Son, Jesus."

Rev. Ben Walker

On parade

For the first time in recent years, PCI's forces chaplains were welcomed to the General Assembly in uniform.



Chaplaincy challenges – and opportunities

The General Assembly also heard of the issues chaplaincy faces, especially the challenge from the atheist lobby, which has questioned the appropriateness of public money being used to pay for chaplaincy provision in the Republic of Ireland's universities. Members also heard of the financial constraints affecting chaplaincy provision in Northern Ireland.

While universities are just one facet of chaplaincy currently provided by PCI – plans to develop chaplaincy at the rapidly expanding campus at Ulster University in Belfast were also discussed – chaplaincy also takes place in other settings such as hospitals, prisons, sports clubs and the armed forces.



In an alternative presentation on chaplaincy, Joanne Dunlop, deaconess and hospital chaplain, said, "My great passion is that people will encounter a living Jesus... my heart is that people will know Jesus in this life." A former prisoner, who returns to visit those in prison, told the General Assembly, "God uses prisoners to minister to other prisoners... The Lord has restored what I lost, 10 times over."

Rural mission

The General Assembly heard that a team of Presbyterians, who have a heart for the countryside, have been writing a fortnightly column since January in Northern Ireland's biweekly agri journal *Farming Life*.

'Good News for the countryside' offers personal reflections on faith and rural life with a strong gospel message. Talking about the column in January, one contributor, Rev. Kenny Hanna, of Second Dromara, said, "This is a wonderful opportunity to proclaim the gospel and we are so very grateful to Ruth Rogers, the editor of *Farming Life*, for running with this and being so enthusiastic about it. We all hope people will be encouraged by it and that it bears much fruit."



The PCI Family Holiday

Back in August 2015, Rev. Lachlan Webster, minister of Craigavon Presbyterian Church, was asked if he would speak at the 2016 PCI Family Holiday – he did and it impacted him greatly. So much so, as he writes here, he is now helping to run the annual Easter event.

The PCI Family Holiday was a real success with over 170 people enjoying a wonderful week together at the Share Centre on the banks of Upper Lough Erne in the idyllic County Fermanagh.

Despite running every Easter for the past two decades, in recent years the future of the holiday had come into question due to increasing costs and other factors. A new working group was appointed by the Church who, as well as running the 2017 holiday, embarked on a full-scale review of the event, in order to examine its place in the life of PCI.

Review done, the working group was able to cast a clear vision for the long-term future. Part of

this vision involved making some changes to help bring sustainability, as well as significant reductions in the cost, in order to make the holiday more accessible to those on a tight budget. The biggest change proposed was the relocation of the holiday in 2018 to Castlewellan Castle, County Down.

“We firmly believe that the Family Holiday is an indispensable part at the compassionate heart of the wider PCI family.”

Many attending the holiday each year do so from a place of personal or family heartache and often this is the only holiday they will have in the year. To those who come, the week is often a green pasture in the middle of a desert, a quiet stretch of water in the middle of storm and a place where Christ lovingly and compassionately restores souls. Because of this, we firmly believe that the holiday is an indispensable part at the compassionate heart of the wider PCI family.

The event itself could not run without the partnership of the team at the Presbyterian Children’s Society (PCS) to whom the whole Church owes a great debt of gratitude. With the significant

The Church at its best

As part of his year as Moderator, Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar spent a day at this year’s Family Holiday in County Fermanagh with his wife Claire and youngest daughter Ruth.

Dr. Sellar said of the PCI Family Holiday, “This is our Church at its best, bringing people together of all ages and backgrounds, from south and north, a place of refreshing and regeneration, physically and spiritually – especially for parents, I think – a place where you see our Church in microcosm. It was a wonderful experience. We came home having witnessed a genuine sense of togetherness, love, joy and support, all in Christ’s name.”

financial savings the changes will make, more PCS supported families will be able to attend and be blessed during this special week.

One of the most vital things to aid the success of the holiday, however, is the link that ministers play between the event and potential attendees in their congregations. I would ask that all ministers prayerfully and carefully consider who in their congregations they could encourage and support to attend the holiday in 2018.

By working together we believe we can develop and expand this wonderful event, building on its rich heritage and future-proofing this key ministry in the life of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.



Presbyterian Children's Society

The Presbyterian Children's Society is a charity and has been supporting the



Church's pastoral care for families since 1866 through financial grants provided by the generosity of individual Presbyterians and congregations.

Kids' Big Day Out

There was something a little different about PCI's Kids' Big Day Out this year, as members of the drama company 'Play it by Ear' helped with the storytelling.

Every year children, leaders and volunteers from all over PCI come together to take part in the denomination's chief annual event for children. This year's theme, 'God's Big Story', saw 500 primary school children look at the one big story running through the Bible, the story that holds it all together: God's plan of rescue for His people.



Journeys of Promise

Every year PCI's children and young people get involved in a special project. 'Journeys of Promise' was the 2016/2017 Youth and Children's project.

The situation in Syria and resulting refugee crisis in Lebanon provided the project's backdrop, alongside PCI's relationship with churches and partners in the region – the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) and Open Doors.

The project highlighted stories of displaced young people and children who had fled their own countries. In Lebanon money raised supported NESSL's building of a refugee camp school and the employment of Syrian teachers. It also supported Open Doors' efforts to provide Bibles and resources for children and young people's programmes in the camps and in Syria.

JOURNEYS
OF PROMISE



Greetings from Syria

The Moderator of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, Rev. Fadi Elia Dagher, thanked PCI for its support.



National Evangelical Synod
of Syria & Lebanon

Speaking at the General Assembly, he said, "In the past five years, churches have been destroyed, congregations relocated, elderly and children dead and suffering. Yet our Christian faith has kept us rooted in the region where Christ also suffered.

"Your support has been a cornerstone that enabled us to remain steady and strong in our witness for the Word of God; and in ministering to the needy, sick and homeless."

Dementia care: Call for funding

It is estimated 19,000 people in Northern Ireland and 47,000 people in the Republic of Ireland are living with dementia. By 2051 this number is expected to treble in Northern Ireland, while estimates for the Republic predict 130,000 cases of dementia by 2041.

The General Assembly noted the rise in the number of residents with dementia across PCI's residential care homes and called on government in both jurisdictions to provide adequate funding and resources for those residents.

With an increasing number of enquiries about dementia care in

recent years, PCI currently has 35 beds allocated within the Church's homes for those with dementia and a further 16 coming on-stream later this year.

Addressing the Assembly, PCI's Residential and Supported Services Manager Linda Wray said that the Church has taken a number of

steps to help those with dementia and their carers. This has included creating dementia gardens, adapting interiors and the training of all staff in dementia care. "Unfortunately we don't receive any additional funding to provide this specific care," she said.

New dementia garden opens

In May, PCI's 35-bed Corkey House in north Belfast, one of PCI's six residential care homes for older people, became the first to have its own purpose-built dementia-friendly garden. While many of the residents do not have dementia, the garden has been specially designed to provide a relaxing and safe place for those who do.

The new garden incorporates many features, including highly fragrant and colourful plants that provide sensory stimulation, safe pathways and raised bedding areas for residents to garden themselves.



Christmas Cracker

‘Christmas Cracker’ is a respite event for adults with a learning disability, run by an increasing number of congregations and supported by the Council for Social Witness.

Now in its eighth year, guests are able to get involved in various arts, craft and indoor sporting activities, enjoy hand massages and refreshments. There are also carols and a short devotional time. Run over the course of an afternoon, the aim is to have fun and provide often much-needed respite for families and carers. This year Hillsborough Presbyterian ran a ‘Summer Cracker’ for the first time.

Around 1 in 50 people in Northern Ireland have a learning disability. PCI provides residential care, residential respite care, day care and supported living for adults with a learning disability in a number of locations.



Garvagh update

As PCI homes Ard Cluan in Londonderry and York House in Portrush plan to relocate to Garvagh, tribute was paid to the work and witness of staff in both homes. Rev. John Seawright, convener of the Older People’s Services Committee, also announced the new name of the home – Trinity House, which is symbolic of the coming together of three homes and marking it with a clear Christian identity.

Opening in the late autumn of 2017, 16 rooms will be available for people living with dementia. Trinity House will also have a dementia-friendly garden.

Adult Safeguarding

PCI has been at the forefront of protection guidelines for children for the past 20 years, particularly with its Taking Care programme, which promotes good practice and excellent training for congregations. The new ‘Adult Safeguarding Policy and Guidelines’ represents the next stage in the Taking Care initiative.

Lindsay Conway, Secretary of the Council for Social Witness, emphasised that the new guidelines are not just aimed at older people, or those with disabilities, “It is for all adults at risk of harm, abuse, exploitation or neglect.” He stated that safeguarding was everyone’s business and encouraged church members to strive to be aware of the issues within their congregations.

When the policy and guidelines are published, training will follow and will be specific to this new material.

Overseas tour

Every year the Moderator undertakes an overseas tour. In November 2016, Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar spent 10 days in the highest nation on the earth – Nepal.

He described it as “wonderful privilege to visit such a beautiful country.”

The primary purpose of a Moderator’s overseas tour is to bring encouragement and pastoral support to the Church’s global mission workers in the country and PCI’s partners.

On this occasion Dr. Sellar also saw first-hand the post-earthquake emergency relief, reconstruction and development activities that PCI had contributed to.

Based in the Nepali capital, Kathmandu and accompanied by his wife Claire and youngest daughter Ruth, Dr. Sellar travelled widely during his trip, visiting the Rupandehi district, which borders northern India, to see a number of projects supported by PCI’s partner, United Mission to Nepal (UMN). In western Nepal he visited the United Mission Hospital in Tansen.

“It was a privilege to be with our friends and global mission workers, the Lockwoods and the Coulters, high in the Himalayas witnessing again how God had strategically

placed people in the right place at the right time. It is one thing to read about them in our prayer bulletins at home, it is quite another to spend time with them and actually see the great work that they do,” Dr. Sellar said on his return.

Talking about the humanitarian relief effort, the Moderator said, “We witnessed first-hand the real life-changing benefit that the last Moderator’s Appeal had brought to people on the ground post 2015 earthquake...Seeing the physical connection between what had been sacrificially given and the blessing that had flowed from it...gave me confidence to launch the current Moderator’s Appeal for famine relief in East Africa. The women of the agricultural cooperative we visited in Rupandehi, south-west of Kathmandu, are a testament to this.

“I was profoundly touched to see the fantastic work being done in ordinary communities.” He praised the solid dedication of UMN, and the cooperatives, which “have given women independence and dignity.”

Dr. Sellar said that he had been “incredibly humbled” to meet indigenous followers of Christ and have the opportunity to spend time with them. He described them as being “sold out in the love of Christ Jesus, people who are passionate about sharing their faith and reaching out, even to those who have persecuted them.”

During his visit, he preached at Kathmandu International Christian Congregation, at Aashish Presbyterian Church in the capital and gave a seminar at the Nepal Theological Academy. He also participated in a forum with various faith leaders at a peace conference, exploring how community relationships might be healed and restored.

You can read Dr. Sellar’s series of blogs ‘Postcards from Nepal’ at www.presbyterianireland.org/blog



“It was a privilege to be with our friends and global mission workers, the Lockwoods and the Coulters, high in the Himalayas witnessing again how God had strategically placed people in the right place at the right time.”



Staying in Europe

With the UK and the European Union negotiating the terms of Brexit, the General Assembly encouraged the Church to continue to develop its church planting strategy, ‘especially in the European context’.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has 30 global mission workers working in partnership with churches and organisations in 11 countries around the world – nine of them serving in continental Europe. Outworking and demonstrating the love of Christ to those around them, especially through humanitarian, education and social projects, this work – since 1841 – has included church planting.

As the Assembly discussed the Council for Global Mission’s report,

its secretary Rev. Uel Marrs spoke of PCI’s rich history in church planting especially in Asia and Africa, highlighting the recent church planting undertaken in partnership in Kenya with the Presbyterian Church of East Africa.

“It is, however, not just about these remote and hard places, the challenge to church plant is closer to home, right here in Europe, as we see the great need for re-evangelisation of post-Christendom Europe,” he said.

“...the challenge to church plant is closer to home, right here in Europe, as we see the great need for re-evangelisation of post-Christendom Europe.”

Rev. Uel Marrs

Expressing solidarity

In May, following April’s bomb attacks on Coptic Christians in Egypt, the Moderator, Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar, was able to express his solidarity with Coptic Church of Alexandria Patriarch, Tawadros II, at an event in Dublin.



Leadership in the crucible

In the spirit of Hebrews 13:3, which says, “Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves are suffering,” the General Assembly passed a resolution urging all ministers and congregations, through listening, biblical reflection, prayer, advocacy, visits, finance and special events, to stand with and learn from persecuted churches around the world.

Council for Global Mission convener, Rev. Dr. Liz Hughes said, “Persecuted believers teach us that the Christian faith has suffering right at its heart in the cross of Christ with a resulting call to follow – sometimes in miraculous deliverance and more often in faithful endurance.”

In a special presentation entitled ‘Listening to the Global Church – Leadership in the crucible’, the General Assembly also heard from

Christians from overseas who were experiencing persecution. Speakers from Syria, Malawi and Hungary told the Assembly of their experiences and how their churches are persevering and overcoming challenges.

One Middle East minister said, “When Jesus said to the disciples ‘do not be afraid, I am here, I am with you,’ this encouraged them and it also encourages us.”

Dr. Hughes also spoke of her February visit to northern Iraq, where displaced Christians found themselves in an almost impossible situation. She told the Assembly of the women she met in one of the refugee camps and how they had to flee after ISIS painted the Arabic letter ‘N’ – standing for ‘Nazarene’ or ‘Christian’ – on their homes.

Special conference on Middle East

In January, the Church held a one-day conference entitled ‘Hope Unexpected – Lessons from the life of the church in the Middle East’. The conference heard stories of unexpected hope amidst ongoing despair, fear and destruction in the region.

Organised and run in conjunction with the Bible Society in Northern Ireland, the conference heard of the challenges and opportunities faced by the church in the Middle East from Dr. Mike Bassous, General Secretary of the Bible Society Lebanon.



Iberian insight

Language student Laura Mulligan attends Ballinderry Presbyterian Church. She spent the past year in Portugal and Spain and reflects on her time working alongside PCI's global mission workers on the Iberian Peninsula.

Arriving in Portugal in early September 2016, Laura served for a few months alongside James and Heather Cochrane on the church plant in Senhora da Hora – ‘Comunidade Pedras Vivas’, where she was involved in teaching English, friendship evangelism, youth work and women’s ministry.

In January 2017, she moved to Donostia-San Sebastian in northern Spain to work alongside Derek and Jane French. Here she was involved in student ministry and translation work. She returned to Ireland in the summer of 2017.

“I arrived in Donostia-San Sebastian on 22nd January to begin my work with Grupos Biblicos Unidos, an organisation that brings the gospel to university students, in the north of Spain.

“Most of my time was spent mentoring the students and encouraging them through times of fellowship and of study to deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ. I lived in the university halls, which gave me plenty of opportunity to witness to the students.

“I was full of anticipation for this next step, but at the same time I was nervous about spending so long away from my family. I was reminded that God is always the one who is at work.

“When the time came at the end of June and I said my goodbyes (or *Agur* in the Basque language), I was truly heartbroken to leave Donostia-San Sebastian and all of the great friends I made there.

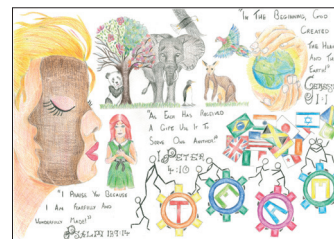
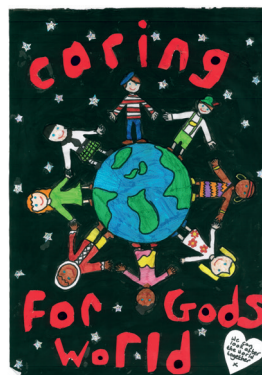
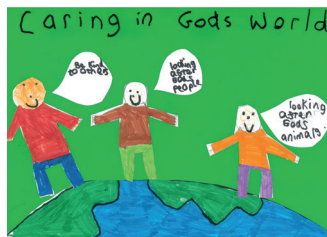
“These months have been a time in which God has pushed me out of my comfort zone in so many ways; the challenges have been great, but God has always been greater.”



Caring in God's world

To mark the 2016/2017 Fit for Purpose theme – ‘a community of global concern’ – the Moderator held an art competition to encourage PCI’s children and young people to think creatively about it.

One hundred entries on the competition theme ‘Caring in God’s world’ were received in the four age categories from across the Church and across Ireland with eight-year-old Amelie Gray, from Bangor West Presbyterian Church, taking the top spot.



Creation care

The General Assembly heard that significant progress had been made by the Stewardship of Creation Panel on developing a biblical position on the stewardship of God's creation in relation to creation care, which includes climate change.

East Africa Appeal

Following the worst drought to hit East Africa in over half a century, in March the Moderator launched a Special Appeal to support the international relief effort in the region.

Launching his church-wide appeal, Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar said that he wanted to encourage PCI members to respond in a generous and timely way, as they had on many previous occasions.

“Parts of South Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia have all suffered two seasons of prolonged dry spells and crop failures, leaving a shocking 16 million people at risk. Famine was declared in parts of South Sudan in February – making it the first official famine in any part of the world in the past six years,” he said.

With millions of people at risk of food shortages and possible starvation, on launching the Appeal the Church immediately released £60,000 (€69,100) to be distributed to its partners – Christian Aid, Tearfund and the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan’s Relief and Development Agency – who were already engaged in longer-term sustainable development work in the affected regions.

As of August 2017, the Moderator’s Special Appeal for East Africa had raised £576,582 (€638,609).



Photo: Christian Aid Ireland

RECLAIMING HOPE

World Development Appeal 2016

World Development Appeal

Central and South American projects are the focus of this year's World Development Appeal.

Aiming to raise £500,000, or more, the beneficiaries of PCI's Appeal, the 36th in its current form, are sustainable development projects based in El Salvador and Brazil.

"This year's Appeal highlights the additional challenges created for sustainable development in post-conflict situations. At the same time, we continue to focus on all the ways in which the effects of climate change continue to make themselves felt in almost every aspect of sustainable community development," explained Rev. Dr. Katherine Meyer, convener of the World Development Committee.

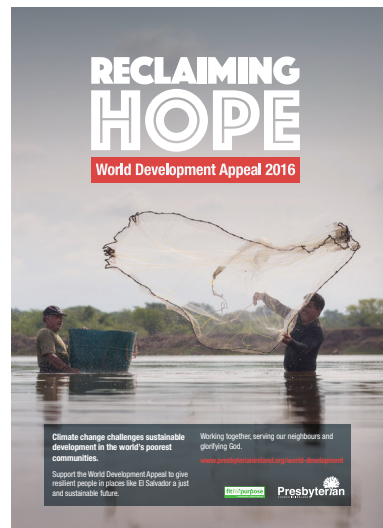
PCI's partner in El Salvador is the Programme for Capacity-Building and Reconstruction in El Salvador. Known as PROCARES, the organisation is working with returning refugees – 25 years after

the civil war ended – who are building their own future through the El Zompopero Cooperative Society shrimp farm.

The 2016 Appeal will also support ACEV (Evangelical Action) in Brazil, which is working with some of the country's most isolated populations in the semi-arid north-east of the country through the provision of wells, their maintenance and agricultural training.

Last year congregations across Ireland raised over £559,140 (€632,383) for projects in Bangladesh and Ethiopia, among others.

For further information on this year's World Development Appeal visit www.presbyterianireland.org/worlddevelopment



"We want to thank you for your interest in us. We know the work of the Presbyterian Church and we know that you have solidarity with us and that you give, so we can have a better life."

Berta Aguirre, Director, PROCARES



SPUD

PCI's Youth Assembly SPUD, which stands for 'Speaking, Participating, Understanding and Deciding', focused on social media in a presentation to the General Assembly.

A survey from the Youth Assembly highlighted that 98% of young people are on Facebook, 82% use it many times a day and 80% use it to share their faith online.

Helen Hooks gave examples of good practice within PCI. She pointed to the closed Facebook page for parents being used in Saintfield Road Presbyterian, and the prayer WhatsApp group being used in St. Andrew's in Bangor, with 36 members from the age of 12 up to 76.

She also referred to the weekly emails/posts from Knock Presbyterian – the first, 'Preparing for Sunday', introduces the passage to be dealt with that week, and the second, 'Remembering Sunday', gives a recap of the sermon, along with tips for applying the principles throughout the week and beyond.

A number of suggestions have been made by the Youth Assembly, which include forming a task group to run a social media training event for the Church in 2018.



Intergenerational church

In January this year, over 100 young people met together at the SPUD Youth Assembly. At that Assembly, the young people expressed a desire to be an inter-generational church, to be more involved in the life and leadership of the Church. They also talked about their desire to engage in honest and sensitive conversations around mental health.

Assembly fringe – young people and the Church

A well-attended SPUD evening fringe event tackled themes such as inter-generational connections and younger leadership involvement in PCI in a mix of upfront input and round-table discussion. Practical stories and examples of good practice in a variety of congregational settings were also shared.



Everyday disciples

During his opening address to the 2017 General Assembly, the Moderator, Rt. Rev. Dr. Noble McNeely, told the General Assembly, “I believe to be an everyday disciple is the most exciting and amazing vocation anyone can be engaged in. If it is not then we have to question the commitment we have made to Christ.”

During the forthcoming year ‘Everyday disciples’ is the theme that the Moderator intends to

develop. He will also challenge the Church in how it responds to Luke’s call (9:23) to “deny ourselves and take up the cross daily.”

To help inspire and equip members to greater discipleship, Presbyterians gathered on Ulster University’s Coleraine campus in August 2017 for a Special Assembly. Entitled ‘Everyday Disciples’, over 650 people came together for four days of worship, teaching and fellowship.

Everyday Disciples

Special Assembly 2017 | Ulster University, Coleraine | 21-24 August



Essentials

ESSENTIALS

As part of the Church’s vision to resource whole-life disciples across PCI, new ways to help people discover afresh what regular engagement with God and discipleship looks like are being developed – ‘Essentials’ is the latest.

This new practical discipleship resource has been developed specifically for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and aims to help followers of Jesus reflect on and live out the essentials of discipleship.

Drawing on a wide collection of voices, insights, teaching and testimonies from across Ireland, this multi-session course has been designed to work best in small groups, midweek settings or specific courses within congregations. The new resource includes eight specially produced films of around 15 minutes, which are packed full of Bible teaching, personal testimony and practical application.

PCI’s Discipleship Officer, Rick Hill, explained that ‘Essentials’ will help to equip and resource every member of a congregation for their ministry. “It is designed to unpack how it is essential for disciples to come to Jesus and respond to His call. It’s also about helping people to be participants rather than passengers in the kingdom of God so that we can not only benefit the Church, but impact society,” he said.

For more information see www.presbyterianireland.org/essentials

Communicating the Message

First and foremost the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has the good news of Jesus Christ to proclaim. It also has news and information, resources and events to communicate to its 500-plus congregations and the public square. Throughout the last year PCI has invested significantly in how it communicates to the Church and wider world.

Through the *Presbyterian Herald*, the denomination's main publication, and alongside PCI's online presence www.presbyterianireland.org – integrated with its principal social media platforms @pciassembly and @pcimoderator on Twitter and from June 2017, Facebook – PCI tells its story.

Due to the volume of traffic the website experiences every day and the greater availability of downloadable resources PCI now provides, the website must be responsive and user friendly.

To meet this increasing demand, over the last year the Church has invested in redesigning and rebuilding its virtual presence, to enable users to find the information they need in a faster and more user-friendly way.

With access to a wider variety of prayer resources, including daily devotionals, users can read reports from PCI global mission workers, keep up to date with the latest PCI news and events and read the new PCI Blog. The most visited part of the website is the enhanced 'find

a church' facility, followed by the resources section.

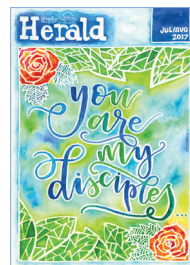
The changes have been more than cosmetic. Between 400 and 600 people visit the site each day and with over 50% of users accessing their digital content via smartphones and tablets, the design of the site needed to reflect this growing trend.



While PCI has had an online presence since 1996, the *Presbyterian Herald* has a publication heritage going back to 1843. Following a previous General Assembly decision to initiate a strategic review of PCI's three main publications – the *Herald*, *ReachOut* and *Presbyterian Women's WiderWorld* – a new look *Presbyterian Herald* landed in the pews at the start of 2017.

Incorporating parts of PCI's former mission magazine *ReachOut*, which ceased publication at the end of 2016, *Presbyterian Herald* Editor, Sarah Harding said at the time, "Now, united together, we can bring the great work being done on our island to an even wider readership. We also seek to engage with new readers and through the recent publications survey, we got to hear what they want from a denominational magazine and take those views on board."

Subscriptions to the *Presbyterian Herald* have increased by just under 10% since the start of 2017, while more than 5,000 people engage with PCI via Twitter and Facebook.



United Appeal

The United Appeal for Mission is at the very heart of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Every aspect of the Church's mission depends, to some extent, on it.

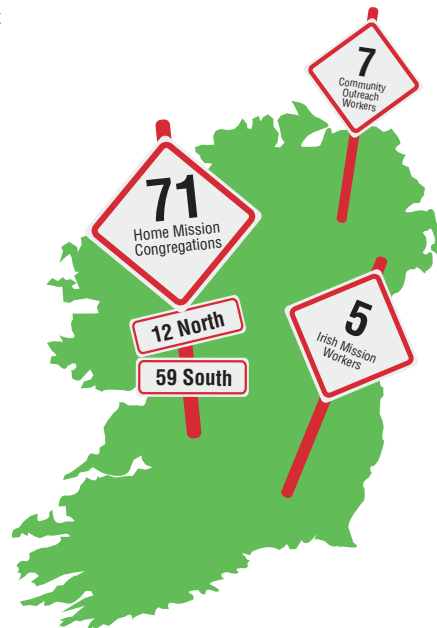
Aside from the incredible work individual congregations are doing in their own communities, United Appeal helps them and individuals to build God's kingdom through youth and children's ministry, social action and the training of leaders.

In fact, hundreds of projects and programmes at home and overseas are supported by it, demonstrating God's love and compassion in action to hundreds of thousands of people – and it is down to the generous support of ordinary Presbyterians the length and breadth of Ireland.

When the 2016 United Appeal closed in January 2017 contributions received from PCI's 73,300-plus contributing families totalled £3,218,252 (€3,558,844). The United Appeal agreed for 2017 is £3,460,000 (€3,826,177).

To everyone who continues to sacrificially give to the Church's gospel mission through the United Appeal – thank you.

To view a video created for United Appeal Sunday 2017 visit www.presbyterianireland.org/unitedappeal



Some key dates for your diary

25th September 2017

The Unfinished Reformation

A series of Union Theological College evening seminars held in on four consecutive Mondays from 25th September, continuing on 2nd, 9th and 16th October 2017. For details and cost see www.union.ac.uk/events

12th October 2017

Little Day Out

An event for under 5s to encourage congregations to broaden their view of ministry with 0-4 year olds.

17th-19th October 2017

Faith at the Crossroads – Rediscovering the Reformation

Three opportunities to share in this free special celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Organised by the Church, the events take place in Dublin (17th), Londonderry (18th) and Belfast (19th).

7th December 2017

'Me too'

First in a new series of evenings focusing on how to include children with special additional needs in church.

6th February 2018

Election of the Moderator-Designate

Presbyteries will meet across Ireland to select the Moderator-Designate who will be formally elected and installed as Moderator of the General Assembly in June.

To view all upcoming events please visit:
www.presbyterianireland.org/events

20th, 22nd and 23rd February 2018

A Vision for Small and Fruitful

Regional events on ministry and mission in a small church with Karl Vaters.

25th April 2018

Whole Life Worship Conference

Assembly Buildings, Belfast.
Connecting Sunday to Monday to Saturday.

26th April 2018

Simple Worship in the Smaller Church

Regional events on leading worship in the smaller church.

Thursday, 10th May 2018

Presbyterian Women Annual Meeting

Assembly Buildings, 2pm and 7.30pm.

Saturday, 21st May 2018

Kids' Big Day Out

The denomination's chief annual event for children.
Wellington Presbyterian Church, Ballymena.

Monday, 4th June - Friday, 8th June 2018

General Assembly 2018

Friday 26th - Sunday 28th October 2018

MAD Weekend

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

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WE
MEMBERS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND

*saved by grace
and called by God*
to grace-filled relationships
in the **POWER** of the *holy spirit*
AS AMBASSADORS OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM
IN A BROKEN AND DIVIDED WORLD;

BELIEVE
THAT THE *good news* OF JESUS CHRIST
challenges & equips us
to develop **RADICALLY NEW ATTITUDES**
and relationships with our neighbours
THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE OF IRELAND.

WE CONFESS

our failure TO LIVE AS BIBLICALLY *faithful*
Christian peacebuilders
AND TO PROMOTE THE
counter culture of Jesus
in a society where **cultures clash.**

WE AFFIRM
Christian peacebuilding
to be part of *Christian discipleship*
& *reassert* THE CHURCH'S CALLING
to pursue a *peaceful & just society*
in our Day

WE SEEK
A more *reconciled community*
at **PEACE** with EACH OTHER,
where friend & foe, working together
for the *common good*
CAN EXPERIENCE HEALING:
& the **Grace** of our Lord **JESUS CHRIST**



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