

Summary Report

General Assembly 2018

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The General Assembly is the governing and decision-making body of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI). The 2018 meeting was held in Assembly Buildings, Belfast from Monday 4 June until Friday 8 June. Minutes and full reports can be found at www.presbyterianireland.org/generalassembly. A review of each day's proceedings can be found at www.presbyterianireland.org/news





Welcome

A very warm welcome to our fifth Summary Report, where you will find details of what was discussed and agreed at our 2018 General Assembly.

Listening to debates at the time, there were several moments when I became so inspired and moved by what I was hearing that I almost forgot to put the resolutions to receive formally the reports that we had been discussing!

The Clerk did his level-headed best to keep a watchful eye on me and I hope that no business was left suspended somewhere in the ether. Moderating this year's Assembly made me aware, as never before, of the incredible amount of work that the Church and its people does. Reading this report, I hope that you will get a sense of that too and the work that has taken place since our 2017 General Assembly.

Much was discussed this year and, like many General Assemblies before, there were moments of controversy as we sought the mind of Christ on some difficult subjects. One of the strengths of our system is the freedom of debate and the right to dissent if necessary. Personally speaking, I was very impressed by the spirit of those debates in particular.

Throughout our General Assembly I had the opportunity to highlight my core theme which is imperative for the year that lies ahead – 'Building Relationships: Christ's love compels us'. In my opening address I made the shape of the cross as I held out one arm stressing the importance of truth and holiness – and then the other as I emphasised love and unity. Balancing both brings us to a place of generous orthodoxy, where we have the confidence in Christ to reach out to others.

Warmest greetings.

Rt Rev Dr Charles McMullen

Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 2018-2019





Introduction

From our oldest congregation in Ballycarry, Co Antrim to our newest in Donabate, Co Dublin, established nearly 400 years later in 2010, ministers and elders from across Ireland came together in June for a week of fellowship, worship, prayer, Bible study, celebration and debate.

Alongside the introduction of some significant changes in the General Assembly's composition and timings – in an attempt to make debates more accessible and for younger voices to be heard (more on that inside) – we received reports from the Church's 124 councils, committees, panels and task groups, which led to around 100 resolutions.

We discussed a number of major issues facing the Church and society, which included assisted suicide and euthanasia, climate change, political stagnation in Northern Ireland and the recent referendum on the Eighth Amendment in the Republic of Ireland.

We also focused on the central calling of the Church at home and overseas – to proclaim and live out the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in a needy world – taking decisions that will set the direction for the life and ministry of PCI over the coming year and beyond. Some issues were controversial, specific theological questions for example, and the ending of the ceremonial link with the Church of Scotland.

In the following pages you will find a summary of some of the decisions that we took together and details of our work and witness in a more secular society. Our situation in this changing world and the mission of our Church was simply put in one of the reports before us.

Comments by one observer summed it up in just in four simple words: "Difficult task – Active hope". We need to accept and manage both realities, built first and foremost in the hope that we have in Jesus Christ and as beacons of his light.

Rev Trevor Gribben

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

Everyday Disciples

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



2017 Special Assembly

Ulster University's Coleraine campus was the venue for 'Everyday Disciples', PCI's Special Assembly which took place over four days in August.



Unlike the General Assembly, no formal business takes place as Special Assemblies are opportunities for church members to come together in a residential setting for a time of fellowship, worship and prayer, exploring and reflecting on a particular aspect of church life, faith or discipleship.



The fifth since 1990, around 600 Presbyterians from across Ireland explored what it means to be an 'everyday disciple' of Jesus Christ in the 21st century. Speakers from local congregations and other experts in their field delivered seminars on a range of topics. The two keynote speakers were Rev Randy Pope of Perimeter Church, Atlanta, Georgia and Rev Dr Ray Ortlund Jnr of Immanuel Church, Nashville, Tennessee.



Speaking at the time, the Moderator, Dr Noble McNeely, described being an everyday disciple as "the most exciting and amazing vocation anyone can be engaged in". He continued by saying that as Christians, Jesus calls us to be his disciples in all aspects of our lives. "The challenge for our Church is how we can all respond to Luke's call to 'deny ourselves and take up the cross daily...'," he said.

This year's General Assembly agreed that a task group be established in 2021 to 'prayerfully discern if there is an emerging theme for a residential Special Assembly to be held in 2024'.

Making the Assembly more accessible

Alongside the introduction of later evening sittings to make debates more accessible, the addition of an extra ‘under 30 representative’ that congregations could send to enable younger voices to be heard, were two significant changes to this year’s General Assembly.

Writing about her experience in the *Presbyterian Herald* as an under 30 rep, Nadine Knight from Moneydig Presbyterian Church said that she expected to spend her time “listening to reports and resolutions about the day-to-day running of the Church. I didn’t quite anticipate that it would make me question what I believe, what it means to be a Presbyterian or the role of the Church in modern day society – but it most certainly did!”

Nadine also took part in the Friday debate on the Doctrine Committee’s report. “I hadn’t intended to address the Assembly, nor did I have a speech prepared but after quiet contemplation and prayer, I felt sure that it was the right thing to do,” she said.

“Before I got up to speak I felt oddly calm and at peace but I must admit that by the time I was finished I was weak at the knees! It was quite a daunting experience as public speaking is



not something I often do. I didn’t want to be disrespectful to the Doctrine Committee but I did want to convey why I supported the amendment and I was truly humbled by the number of people who approached me afterwards to thank me for contributing to the debate...

“My experience of General Assembly has been both positive and rewarding. Jesus tells us in Matthew 18:20: ‘For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them’ and I felt that Jesus was very much at the heart of General Assembly.”

“I hadn’t intended to address the Assembly, nor did I have a speech prepared but after quiet contemplation and prayer, I felt sure that it was the right thing to do.”

Nadine Knight, under 30 representative, Moneydig Presbyterian Church

Conferencing at the heart of the city

In 2017 the General Assembly agreed to redevelop the ground floor of Assembly Buildings to create a new suite of state-of-the-art conference facilities. Work began that summer and was completed this spring. The new facilities were used for the first time at this year's General Assembly.

The historic landmark building at Fisherwick Place has been part of Belfast's cityscape since 1905. The administrative heart of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland was built in the gothic 'Scottish baronial' style, with a 40m high clock tower that houses the city's only operational peal of 12 bells. Long since surpassed by the towering surrounding buildings, its place as a unique conferencing and exhibition centre remains.

Although Assembly Buildings was built at the start of the 19th century, the redevelopment has created a 21st century conferencing complex that blends the historic with the latest technology and modern facilities.



With the 1,150-seater Assembly Hall at its heart along with the Board Room, Minor Hall and existing meeting rooms, the new ground floor Conference Room, Exhibition Centre and multiple syndicate rooms, all with state-of-the-art technology and Wi-Fi throughout, make the Assembly Buildings Conference Centre one of the most versatile facilities of its kind in Belfast.



New appointment



Raymond Robinson joined the Assembly Buildings' team as Facilities and Conference

Manager in June 2018.

Overseeing the office, conference and retail complex that comprises Assembly Buildings and Fisherwick Buildings, Raymond has responsibility for the safety and security of the complex. He also manages the development and marketing of the conference, retail facilities and visitor exhibition in keeping with the Christian ethos of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

To view the conference and exhibition centre, or for more information, contact Raymond Robinson at rrobinson@presbyterianireland.org

Ending paramilitary attacks

On United Nations' Universal Children's Day – 20 November – the Moderator Dr Noble McNeely joined other Church leaders in Ireland in calling for an end to all paramilitary attacks in Northern Ireland.

In their joint statement, the Church leaders emphasised in particular how these attacks continued to impact the lives and wellbeing of children and young people.

“At the heart of the vision for the peace process was the hope that children and young people might be protected from the violence that blighted the lives of previous generations. Sadly, too many in our society continue to be exposed to this violence at an early age, either as victims of direct attacks, or as members of families subjected to attacks or intimidation.

“Making our communities safe and welcoming places is the responsibility of all members of society. We need to ask ourselves whether the legacy of violent conflict here has caused us to feel

powerless to challenge the culture that supports the continuation of this type of violence...

“In this context, it is more important than ever that we seek to lend our support to initiatives that offer young people the chance to achieve their full potential and challenge those who seek to trap them in never-ending cycles of violence.”

“Making our communities safe and welcoming places is the responsibility of all members of society.”

Joint statement from Church leaders



Pictured in June 2017 are (L to R) Bishop John McDowell, President of the Irish Council of Churches; Archbishop Richard Clarke, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh; Archbishop Eamon Martin, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh; Dr McNeely; and Rev Dr Laurence Graham, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland.

Education: Could do much better...

The General Assembly noted with concern the situation in Northern Ireland's education system.

Members also called upon “politicians to set aside their differences to enable an Executive to be formed, to provide the clarity so urgently needed on an agreed way forward for the education system in the province.”

In a hard-hitting speech, PCI's convener of the State Education Committee, Andrew Brown, said that “Education is broken – this is the message we hear from or education authorities. Education is broken – this is the message we hear from our principals. Education professionals are at breaking point – this is the message we are hearing from their professional associations.”

Calling on Northern Ireland's politicians “to get back around the table, come up with a blueprint for getting us out of this mess...” he went on to say that morale was at the lowest point that he had seen in his two and half decades involved in the profession.

Highlighting the increased challenges faced by children with special education needs through underfunding and rationalisation, he also spoke of principals across the education sector who were facing incredible challenges, such as budget reductions over the next two years of 2%, 18% and 37%.

During his address, Mr Brown said that as the pressure rises to do more with less, something inevitably gets squeezed out – Religious Education. The General Assembly passed a resolution affirming the important role that RE plays in the spiritual, moral and intellectual development of children and young people.

“Education is broken – this is the message we hear from our principals.”

Andrew Brown, convener of the State Education Committee

Political and social issues to the fore

During the Council for Public Affairs session, the General Assembly discussed a range of issues that affect society across Ireland, including assisted suicide / euthanasia.

The General Assembly resolved to “strongly oppose any legislation which allows assisted suicide or euthanasia” and commended strongly palliative care, “calling on the governments in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to ensure the adequate resourcing of both research and delivery in this important area.”

In a substantial report on the issue, the Council warned that the normalising of assisted suicide and/or euthanasia would change the underlying social dynamic: “The message that would be sent in this case is that if you are sick or old and a burden, ending your life is something you ought to consider.”

“Strongly oppose any legislation which allows assisted suicide or euthanasia.”

General Assembly 2018

Speaking during the debate, Lindsay Conway, Secretary of the Council for Social Witness, which provides a range of services for older people and people with physical and learning disabilities, warned that the Assembly needed to be aware of the ‘slippery slope principle’, saying that in the Netherlands mental health issues

were now grounds for assisted suicide and euthanasia.

Talking about the political environment, Very Rev Dr Norman Hamilton, convener of the Council for Public Affairs, said, “It is clear to me that we are in an environment where we worship the ever-changing god of personal choice and political preference, and where the biblical commitment to the common good with shared national and community values has almost disappeared. This is one of the core reasons why the so-called ‘progressive’ politics of abortion and assisted dying / euthanasia are so deeply disturbing.”

Human identity

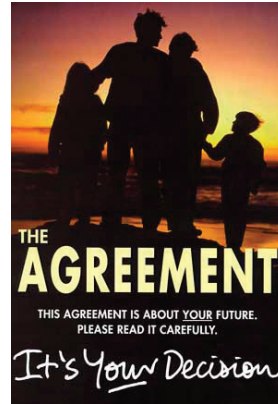
Members of Assembly heard from the Human Identity Task Group as it acknowledged the “urgent need to get good, accessible material from a biblical standpoint into the hands of PCI members” on the topic of gender identity.

One such resource will be a special printing of Vaughan Roberts’ book entitled *Talking Points: Transgender* with a customised PCI introduction. Copies will be circulated to each minister and congregation.



Belfast Agreement

April 2018 saw the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement.



In a statement on behalf of the Church, the Moderator, Dr Noble McNeely, said, “We tend to forget the difficult and challenging times that the dawn of 1998 brought and the fractious months that ran up to 10 April that year. I am sure that few people then could have imagined the genuine sense of optimism and hope that day would bring...

“As we look back, there was an obvious task of healing and reconciliation that required a spirit of generosity and goodwill. While we have seen much progress, that task still remains. Today we remember those victims and survivors who continue to look for answers and justice, and acknowledge the pressing need to find a way forward to deal with the legacy of the past...”

He concluded by saying, “I am thankful to God for how far we have come, for as we remember our calling as Christians to ‘seek the peace and prosperity of the city...’ (Jeremiah 29) and to pray for those in political leadership. I also pray for boldness and courage, so that they might renew their efforts to find a way forward for the good of all. Everyone involved in this critical endeavour can be assured of my prayers and the prayers of many across our denomination.”

Lack of political progress in NI

In a strongly worded resolution, the General Assembly expressed its “deep concern and frustration about the prolonged absence of an Executive in Northern Ireland, the resulting stagnation in public policy and the negative effects on the most vulnerable in society.”

It repeated its call for all involved in the political process to find a resolution “that established good and stable government based on good working relationships.”



Relationships with other denominations

During the General Assembly, members considered a number of areas regarding PCI's relationship with some inter-church bodies. It also discussed its relationship with the Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church (URC).

Given the Church of Scotland's general trajectory with regards to same-sex marriage, in recent years the General Assembly had resolved not to send the Moderator to the Scottish Assembly in Edinburgh.

With the Moderators of the Church of Scotland and URC in the House, discussion focused on a resolution that gave two options: that PCI should no longer accept invitations for the Moderator to attend both denominations' General Assemblies and in turn no longer issue invitations to attend PCI's General Assembly. The second option was to resume accepting invitations for the Moderator to attend the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and URC.

Explaining the background as to how the resolution had come to be brought, Rev Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly, said that, "Over the last number of years, PCI has held the unsustainable position of inviting colleagues from the Church of Scotland to the General Assembly, while at the same time, not sending PCI representatives to the Church of Scotland Assembly."

In a passionate debate on both sides, that underscored the significance of what was before members of Assembly, the resolution was decided by a standing vote, 255 votes to 171, not to send and receive delegations – 82 people registered their dissent.

The General Assembly also decided, almost unanimously, that where there were areas PCI could collaborate for mutual benefit with the Scottish Kirk and URC, then such collaboration should continue.



The Church of Scotland



In a statement issued after the debate, Mr Gribben said that for many on both sides of the debate it had been "a sad day" and that it was a "significant moment given our historic relationship with the Church of Scotland".

"It was also significant because it demonstrated that a majority of Assembly members felt that both denominations have drifted far from biblical truth in relation to marriage, and were in fact ignoring the authority of Scripture. Both are now moving towards a position where so-called same-sex marriage can be performed in the context of their worship services. Our Church is very clear that marriage, as defined in God's Word, is between one man and one woman and significantly it is God's Word that is authoritative."

Doctrine Committee reports

Three reports by the Doctrine Committee were discussed at the General Assembly – a response to the Church of Scotland’s paper ‘An Approach to the Theology of Same-Sex Marriage’, PCI’s participation in multi-faith civic events and a report on same-sex couples and the sacraments.

The convener of the Committee, Very Rev Principal Stafford Carson, told the Assembly that all three topics were connected, “...as they are indications as to how we as a Church are trying to respond biblically and theologically to the realities of life in our contemporary world.” The latter of the three reports proved to be considerably controversial.

The Committee had been asked to prepare guidelines for local congregations to address the issue of same-sex couples who may seek communicant membership, or who may request the baptism of a child.

The focus of the report was on the “specific theological question of what constitutes a credible profession of faith and how it is to be understood and applied in these particular pastoral circumstances.” Principal Carson highlighted that this applied to all who sought admission to the Lord’s Table, or the sacrament of baptism, but it

“We as a Church are trying to respond biblically and theologically to the realities of life in our contemporary world.”

Very Rev Principal Stafford Carson

was only this particular issue that the Committee had been asked to address.

An amendment asking that the General Council’s report be received without the Doctrine Committee’s appendix on a credible profession of faith was brought by Rev Cheryl Meban. After a lengthy debate the amendment was not carried and the full report was received, including the three sections of the Doctrine Committee’s report, which are now PCI’s formal position.

Multi-faith civic events

A resolution outlining the denomination’s position on multi-faith civic events in either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland was passed and is as follows:

- (a) The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, as a witness to Christ, affirms the God-given dignity of all people, from all faiths and none, on account of their bearing God’s image. Furthermore, we affirm our solidarity with all our neighbours in our common life together. However, as a Church committed to the Lordship of Christ, we decline to participate in interfaith worship or to acknowledge the ultimate claim of any state to control religious worship.
- (b) The Presbyterian Church in Ireland recognises that her leaders and members will consider participation in sequential multi-faith civic events where there may be opportunities to read the Bible, speak about God’s grace in Christ or pray for people in need. However, out of concern for God’s glory and the good of our neighbour, we decline to participate in nontrinitarian interfaith worship.



Presidential visit

In February the Moderator, Dr Noble McNeely, visited the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, at his official residence in Dublin, Áras an Uachtaráin.

The Moderator was invited to the Áras by President Higgins as part of his week-long tour of the Church's Presbytery of Dublin and Munster. The presbytery is one of 19 regional groupings of congregations that make up the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Speaking after the meeting, Dr McNeely said, "It was a privilege and a pleasure to spend some time with President Higgins this afternoon in the wonderful setting of his home, Áras an Uachtaráin.



"I was able to bring him the greetings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and had the opportunity of presenting him with a copy

of a special book called *The Presbyterians in Ireland: An illustrated history*, which tells the story of the Church, its history and people, their faith and contribution to Irish life down the centuries."

The presentation dedication in the book was in Irish and English and included two verses of Scripture from the Book of Proverbs. The Moderator was accompanied by his wife Florence and Stuart Ferguson, clerk of the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster.

Church-State dialogue

In January Dr McNeely led the Presbyterian delegation in a bilateral meeting with ministers in Dublin as part of a wider three-church grouping that involved representatives of the Church of Ireland and Methodist Church in Ireland.

The meeting took place in Government Buildings at the invitation of An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar TD, under the Church-State structured dialogue process.

The agenda for the meeting included: migration, direct provision and overseas aid, the impact of Brexit on Ireland and Northern Ireland, abortion and the Eighth Amendment to the constitution, homelessness, social housing and wider economic issues, and education issues.



Eighth Amendment Referendum

Following May's referendum on the repeal of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution of Ireland, the Church acknowledged the outcome with "a profound sense of sadness" adding that it was "not a day for celebration, but for quiet reflection."

Prior to the vote, Dr McNeely, along with former Moderator Dr Trevor Morrow and the Clerk of the General Assembly, Rev Trevor Gribben, wrote to ministers and congregations in the Republic of Ireland outlining the position of the Church in relation to the referendum.

The senior Church leaders said that in light of the Irish government's clear intention to introduce unrestricted access to abortion up to 12 weeks of pregnancy if the Amendment was repealed, the Church had concluded that "meaningful protection for the unborn can only be secured if the Eighth Amendment is retained..."

In a statement made immediately after the referendum, the senior ministers said that the country was living through "a defining moment"

in which the inherent value placed on human life was at stake.

In sentiments that were later reflected in a resolution of the General Assembly, they also strongly urged the government to keep the promise it made to the electorate to make abortions 'rare' in Ireland. Their statement concluded by saying, "We would encourage both the government and wider society to place a greater focus on the provision of world-leading, compassionate care for women, children and families, including comprehensive support in the perinatal period for those facing pregnancy crisis."

The General Assembly also commended the services of foster care and adoption among Church members who feel led to such ministry and service.

"We would encourage both the government and wider society to place a greater focus on the provision of world-leading, compassionate care for women, children and families, including comprehensive support in the perinatal period for those facing pregnancy crisis."

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Visit of Pope Francis

During this year's General Assembly, Rev Trevor Gribben presented a brief report to members on the visit of Pope Francis and the possibility of the Moderator being invited to meet him.

Mr Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly, said that while invitations had not yet been issued, an indication had been given that the Moderator would most likely be invited to be present at a state reception for Pope Francis and would briefly meet with him on that occasion.

He also said that the Moderator will most likely be invited to be present as a distinguished guest at the 'Festival of Families' that is being held in Croke Park. The indications were in keeping with the decision of the General Council that the Moderator would meet Pope Francis at an appropriate 'non-sacramental event'.

When the announcement was made in March that Pope Francis would attend the Roman Catholic Church's World Meeting of Families, Mr



Gribben said that he believed many people, south and north of the border, would be "very excited and encouraged by the news...I have no doubt that many others, of differing theological or even political views, will want to join with our Roman Catholic neighbours in welcoming the news..."

He concluded by saying that, "The attendance of Pope Francis at the World Meeting of Families will greatly enhance the affirmation of the place of the family at the heart of society, and that is to be welcomed."

Reformation 500 years on

During General Assembly week the Presbyterian Church in Ireland was asked for its view on news that members of the Catholic Church attending the World Meeting of Families would be granted papal indulgences.

In a statement issued by PCI, a spokesperson said that, "As a reformed Church we are clear that the one and only mediator between God and men and women is the Lord Jesus Christ.

"In him alone is to be found forgiveness of sin through his finished work on the cross. That forgiveness is freely available through the amazing grace of God for all who call upon the name of the Lord in simple believing faith. There is no need for indulgences, or anything similar, to know the liberating forgiveness of our great and gracious God.

"While we are theologically very different from the Roman Catholic Church, as we stress salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, we want to join with our fellow Roman Catholic citizens in welcoming Pope Francis to the World Meeting of Families, which will greatly enhance the affirmation of the place of the family at the heart of society."

FAITH AT THE CROSSROADS

REDISCOVERING THE REFORMATION

Celebrating the Reformation

The 31 October 2017 saw the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. That month upwards of 1,000 people attended the Church's celebration in three special PCI events.

Entitled 'Faith at the Crossroads: Rediscovering the Reformation', the events combined worship, reflection and discussion to celebrate the Reformation's impact, legacy and enduring importance, both locally and globally.

The events took place in Abbey Presbyterian Church, Dublin, Waterside Theatre, Londonderry and Assembly Buildings in Belfast. Each evening Dr Conrad Mbewe, pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church in Zambia, brought a global perspective to the Reformation, while New Irish Arts led worship, which included a new arrangement of one of Luther's hymns. Members of the public and guests from civic society also listened to 'round-table' discussions that reflected on this pivotal moment in European and church history.



Speaking in advance of the first event, the Moderator, Dr Noble McNeely said, "As a Church and as Presbyterians, we have a rich heritage that comes directly out of the Reformation and the reformed, or Protestant tradition. While this in itself is one significant reason to mark what Martin Luther did in 1517, there are also deeper and more profound reasons to give thanks.

"For at the heart of what we know today as the Reformation is Luther's momentous discovery that a person's salvation, that is being made right with God as if we had never sinned, was secured by believing in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Salvation wasn't achieved by doing good works, or by any other means, but trusting in Jesus' death and God's grace alone. As a result, this enabled men, women and children through repentance and faith to know their sins had actually been forgiven – wonderful reasons to celebrate."



Solidarity in Egypt

In celebrating the Reformation’s quincentenary, Dr McNeely was invited to a series of events in Cairo, attending as an act of solidarity with Christians in Egypt.

The November celebration was one of the largest Christian events to take place in the Middle East in recent years and was organised by the Protestant Churches of Egypt, which represents 16 officially recognised reformed denominations in the country.

The main service was held at Cairo’s Kasr El Dohara Evangelical Presbyterian Church and during his visit, along with other invited guests, the Moderator also met with political leaders and representatives of other churches. This included the Coptic Church of Alexandria’s Patriarch, Tawadros II.

Speaking on his return, Dr McNeely said, “For many Christians of all denominations across the Middle East, the outworking of their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ has resulted in violence, death and general persecution on a scale that has not been witnessed in many years.

“It was therefore important for the Church to be represented in Cairo...as we wanted to demonstrate our compassionate solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ, both in Egypt and across the Middle East, in the face of ongoing persecution.”



Marking the Reformation at Union

PCI’s Union Theological College marked the Reformation in two ways. ‘Luther 500’ was a two-day conference held in February 2017, which looked at the man, his teaching and legacy. The College also devoted its autumn seminar series to the anniversary.

In ‘The Unfinished Reformation’ speakers from both the reformed and Roman Catholic tradition looked at different aspects of the Reformation in four thought-provoking seminars.

Online course a first for Union

A new online course is being introduced by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Union Theological College.

The General Assembly heard that the postgraduate programme in Reformed Theology aims to enhance prior theological education by providing training for further ministerial development, or additional graduate research.

Introducing the new course at the Council for Training in Ministry's (CTM) alternative presentation, Dr Martyn Cowan, lecturer in Historical Theology, said, "Sometimes a person can go through a three-year theology degree and come out thinking that they're really only getting geared up to start. That's because so much of what went on was about clearing the ground and carefully laying foundations that one could spend a lifetime building on.



"This new programme is about building – cultivating gifts in order to produce a new generation of pastor-theologians," he said.

The course will be fully accessible online, resulting in either a recognised UK master's degree or postgraduate diploma and can be taken either full-time or part-time.

For more information on Union Theological College visit www.union.ac.uk



Ministry taster day held

PCI continues to ask ministers and other leaders to identify men and women to encourage them to explore whether God is calling them into this important vocation.

In a new initiative, PCI held a 'Ministry taster day' in December for anyone who wanted to find out more about serving God and studying for the ministry. Held at Union Theological College in Belfast, it is hoped that the initiative will lead to suitably-gifted people considering the possibility of ordained ministry.

At the General Assembly, CTM convener Rev Nigel McCullough explained that, "Although it is too late for this year's round of applicants, we expect a number of those who attended to apply in September." He also reported that there were only six applicants – four of whom were being recommended to become students for the ministry this year.



Bumpy roads and warm welcomes

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. In his own words, Dr Noble McNeely talks about his two weeks in Zambia with global mission worker Diane Cusick, the warmth of the people and of visiting projects and congregations of PCI's partner in the country, the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP).

Our first few days in Zambia involved much long-distance travel through the countryside and bush. The roads were generally good and Diane's 20-plus years of driving in Africa has stood her well!

Everywhere we went, very gracious people greeted us with a warm welcome – the CCAP's Moderator of the Synod of Zambia, Rev Abel Banda, for one and Synod Secretary, Rev Sevatt Kabaghe, who accompanied us on our travels.

Our visits were primarily to see schools and the nursery

education programme that Diane is developing. We met teachers who work with very limited resources, school committee members, some of the parents and the children, who were enthusiastic about school.

It was busy, but enjoyable, and we met so many very humble and committed people trying against the odds to improve the conditions of extremely poor people. Visiting some of the schools and health centres in remote locations in the bush, we met people often





living in squalid and extremely impoverished conditions.

Out of eight days travelling in Zambia's eastern provinces, four days involved long hours in Diane's Toyota Hilux. Some roads were tarmac, others were dirt tracks and extremely bumpy.

The highlight of the visit to Lundazi was our welcome to David McConaghy Church – named after Rev David McConaghy, who served as a missionary there from 1965 to 1971. We were privileged to spend time with him and his wife Maxine before we came to Zambia.

We were stopped on the outskirts of the rural town and in front of the car a procession formed to escort

us through the town to the church. When we arrived we discovered that the congregation held David in wholehearted esteem and were genuinely excited about the fact that the Moderator and his wife were visiting them from Ireland in their jubilee year. There were still some members who remembered the McConaghys.

That Sunday I preached at a service in the church that can only be described as 'an event'. The whole three and a half hours of worship and joyful praise was exceptional and immensely moving.

The service ended with a procession of singers dancing up the central aisle with gifts for Florence and myself as well as gifts

for us to take back for David and Maxine. This was overwhelming and both Florence and I were filled with emotion as we experienced the kindness and respect we received.

As I reflect on the visit, the warmth and the ability of the people we met was exceptional and their desire to be faithful to God is heartening.



Climate change

Some of PCI's overseas guests attending this year's General Assembly gave their own personal experiences of climate change in their countries as the General Assembly discussed a report on this crucial area.

The Council for Global Mission's Stewardship of God's Creation Panel developed a biblical position on the causes and effects of climate change while setting out seven principles of being good stewards of God's creation. It also looked at what practical action and lifestyle choices can be made by churches and its members to be good stewards as 'an essential aspect of discipleship'.

Rev Alfred Kanga, Deputy Secretary General of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, told members, "I want to assert that climate change is a global issue that is the result of human abuse of God's creation. This had led to the negative effect being experienced by developing countries and the developed as well..."

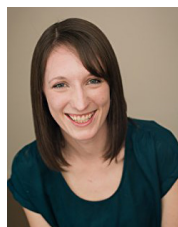
"Last month Kenya experienced unusual rains as a result of climate change which culminated in thousands of acres being destroyed, more than 100 people died and 3,000 people displaced. A dam burst and swept away many houses including a Presbyterian church."

He concluded by saying, "Since we love God and we belong to God then we should therefore treat his property with care and respect and repent for mistreating his lovely creation."

Convener of the Council, Rev Dr Liz Hughes, reminded the General Assembly, "We owe it to our brothers and sisters in Christ across our world to care about the issues which impact them so severely."



New appointment



Pip Florit joined the Mission Department team at the start of April 2018, as Mission Support Officer (Partnerships).

Her role includes a mix of local and international support for our partners in mission. This includes working alongside students from PCI's global partners and with agencies providing support for relief and mission projects around the world. She manages the Council for Mission in Ireland's grant making capacity, supporting applications for the Irish Mission and Mission Support funds of the Church.

Streams in the Desert

‘Listening to the Global Church’ has become a feature of recent General Assemblies. Looking at the experiences of overseas delegates and how God is at work in diverse ways across the world, this year’s presentation was entitled ‘Streams in the Desert’.



Opening the session, Rev Uel Marrs, Council for Global Mission Secretary, said, “God is constantly at work in his world today, doing new things, making a way where humanly we cannot see one, pouring out life-giving streams in the deserts...life-giving streams that are flowing through new initiatives they are witnessing, sometimes in the most adverse and challenging of wastelands.”

In a mix of interviews and video presentations, members of Assembly heard from partner Churches and organisations in South Sudan, India, the Middle East and North Africa.

The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan, Rt Rev Peter Gai Lual Marrow, described the situation in his country saying that “the people have suffered greatly because of the war. Many are starving, many have tried to leave the country.”

He said Christian denominations have joined together in the National Council of Churches to try to intervene and “bring hope to the people”. Thanking PCI for its support, he said “Your solidarity is an expression of your love.”

Christian satellite television network SAT-7 operates in the Middle East and North Africa. Its founder/CEO, Dr Terry Ascott, got the idea from seeing an Egyptian family living on a building site with nothing except a TV wired up to a neighbouring property. Inspired to set up the organisation, he saw it as a way to reach people in “closed homes, in closed countries.” Twenty-two years on, SAT-7’s audience has grown, as have the churches in the areas it broadcasts to.

For more information on PCI’s work overseas see www.presbyterianireland.org/globalmission

PW president in Middle East

In her January visit to Lebanon as president of Presbyterian Women (PW), Elma Leeburn met with a number of women from the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), PCI's partner Church in the Middle East.

Witnessing first-hand something of the life of the Church, she also learned of NESSL's work with refugees who have fled the conflict in Syria. A number of the Church's 39 congregations have closed due to the ongoing conflict.

Accompanied by colleagues from PCI, the group visited one of the six refugee schools that NESSL has set up. The schools were supported by the 2016 Youth and Children's Project, 'Journeys of Promise'.

During the trip, Elma also met with Rev Najla Kassab – who heads up women's ministry in NESSL – and spent some time with women from the wider church, including the Damascus congregation, which PW had recently supported.

"I was very richly blessed by my time in Lebanon. It was a fascinating and challenging experience, in particular meeting some refugee women and learning how the church is reaching out with the love of Christ," Elma said.

"Although we come from very different cultures, global borders are nothing to God. His heart is for people from every nation and it was a privilege to witness what God is doing in the Middle East."

For information on PW, a part of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's women's ministry, visit www.presbyterianireland.org/pw



New appointment

Suzanne Simpson joined the Council for Congregational Life and Witness staff team in January 2018.



Suzanne takes up the post of Presbyterian Women Support Officer with

specific responsibility for editing the *Wider World* magazine. Her other responsibilities include supporting the wide range of events, resources and activities that support the work of PW among women around the Church.

Senior chaplains pay tribute to PCI padres

For the first time the Chaplain of the Fleet attended the General Assembly and was presented to the Moderator, Dr Charles McMullen.

Speaking to the House, The Venerable Ian Wheately CB, QHC brought greetings from the Royal Naval Chaplaincy Service and his fellow heads of the armed forces chaplaincy.

Addressing the General Assembly, he said, “The decades-old strapline of the naval chaplaincy is to be ‘the friend and advisor for all on board’. In one sense, it is a ferocious brief, driving chaplains to get to know and relate to all of their people regardless of what they may or may

not believe. In another sense, it is merely modelling the love of God for all – reaching out, generous and loving – it is about ‘building relationship’.”

Following his address, the Moderator asked all in the House engaged in chaplaincy – be it forces, prisons, universities and colleges or healthcare – to stand. He then prayed for them. As in previous years, PCI’s forces chaplains were also presented to the Moderator.



Moderator visits the Chaplain General

In April, Dr Noble McNeely spent time with PCI army chaplains in England. He also visited the HQ of the Royal Army Chaplains’ Department where he met Rev Dr David Coulter, Chaplain General to Her Majesty’s Land Forces, the most senior chaplain in the British Army.

Dr Coulter paid tribute to PCI’s chaplains. “Along with Dr McNeely, I would like to acknowledge the immense contribution of the Church to the army over the years, with its six regular chaplains and two reserve chaplains who are currently serving, and like all our chaplains, they provide exemplary pastoral service to the men and women currently serving in the army... We hope that this tradition will continue and it encourages ministers to discern a call to military chaplaincy,” Dr Coulter said.



The mission at home

The wide-ranging work carried out by the Council for Mission in Ireland (CMI) was evident during this year's General Assembly.

The focus of the work of the Council is to develop the denomination's strategic priorities in all-age mission across Ireland and to plan major church-wide initiatives. This year resolutions concerned the review of the Home Mission scheme, healthcare chaplaincy, South Belfast Friendship House, Nightlight, the International Meeting Point as well as plans for rural chaplaincy.

"The world has always needed the gospel and will continue to do so, but for us as a branch of Christ's church, this era in Ireland – south and north – presents particular challenges," Council convener Very Rev Dr Frank Sellar told the General Assembly.



Describing the work of CMI as both "wide-ranging and compelling", Dr Sellar reiterated the commitment to mission throughout Ireland, and told members of Assembly not to be discouraged by the challenges.

"If someone had said to me 35 years ago that we might be about to construct a brand-new meeting place in Maynooth, I might have said 'inconceivable'. What, I wonder might yet be possible in the next number of years with renewed largeness of faith and vision?" he said.



Rev Keith McCrory at the site of the new meeting place in Maynooth.

Rural chaplaincy update

The General Assembly affirmed the work of the Strategy for Mission Committee in its proposals for the deployment of a rural chaplain. There is a general recognition of a unique spiritual need among the farming community – often including young men, and their families working in isolated locations, and in trying economic times.

Agencies, including Rural Support and the Ulster Farmers' Union, advocating on behalf of rural communities have encouraged the Church to progress this initiative. The initial intention is that a chaplain be appointed to work in three presbytery areas, focusing initially on the weekly livestock markets, seeking to build connections with farmers, and helping to make connections with local churches.

Concerns over healthcare chaplaincy

The General Assembly noted the Church's submission to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that expressed the Church's concern over the proposed introduction of a generic model of chaplaincy. The report presented to General Assembly acknowledged some of the strengths of a generic system, while also detailing a number of concerns of a move to such a system.

Belfast: A university city

With increasing numbers of students in Belfast, the provision of university chaplaincy within the city came under the spotlight, including the recommendation that the chaplaincy centre on Elmwood Avenue be retained for five years.

Outlining plans for the building's use, the new chaplain for Queen's University, Stranmillis and Union Theological College, Rev Dave Gray, said, "It's a very exciting opportunity," adding that there is a real desire to see engagement with

the wider university population. As well as staff fellowship, which is due to start soon, he also hopes to arrange student fellowship groups as well.

Professor Michael McClenahan also spoke of his excitement at the work being undertaken and stressed the importance of university chaplaincy and the opportunities it can bring, "There are so many international students, tourists and visitors in the city and university area. There is so much work for us to do," he said.

Belfast Conference

The work of the Belfast Conference in developing a vision for future Presbyterian mission in the city was encouraged by the General Assembly.

Formed in June 2016 and made up of delegates from each of the three Belfast presbyteries, its role is to look collaboratively into the growing needs of the city that might enable effective decision-making and advice around the allocation of resources regarding PCI's presence in the city.

The stark fact is that in one generation, PCI's presence in Belfast has declined by more than half. In an effort to gather momentum, the Conference has

identified four areas of need for the city.

Firstly, the needs of 'city centre workers and residents', thinking primarily of young professionals. Secondly, 'student needs', with particular consideration given to their increase within the city centre to approximately 60,000 in the near future. The third need identified as pertinent is the 'inner-ring and estates'; given the complexity related to social deprivation.

Bringing all of this together there is a need for specific 'leadership and ministry skills' to both understand and equip those seeking to respond to these needs.

For more information on the work of PCI's mission at home visit www.presbyterianireland.org/missioninireland

New appointment

Rev Dave Gray was appointed as chaplain in Queen's University, Stranmillis College and Union Theological College in October 2017.



He lives at PCI's Derryvolgie Halls where 88 students are resident during

term time. His role involves spiritual and pastoral support for Presbyterian students at university, but also for the entire university community, including academic and other staff whether they identify as Presbyterian or not.



The chaplaincy centre in Elmwood Avenue is undergoing significant changes this year under Dave's leadership, and will be a daily base for PCI's presence on the campus.

Difficult task – Active hope

There is no doubt that society, north and south, is becoming more secular. In Ireland's cities, towns and villages our congregations are working and witnessing in this challenging environment. These local congregations are the vital mission unit of PCI.

With a wide remit, the Council for Congregational Life and Witness (CCLW) seeks to support the ongoing life, mission and witness of PCI's 536 congregations in their work with all age groups.

Accompanying congregations in developing their calling to live out their life as communities of the people of God, it listens and responds to the needs of churches to encourage, envision, equip and enable them for this task.

In his report to the General Assembly, Council convener Rev Colin Morrison used the words 'Difficult task – Active hope' to summarise PCI's present situation for ministry and mission, borrowing

the phrase from a guest speaker at one of the Council's events. He said the Council strives to stimulate such hope and equip congregations in their life and witness to become more fruitful.

Talking about 'Difficult task – Active hope', he said, "We need to accept and manage both realities, built first and foremost in the hope that we have in Jesus Christ and as beacons of his light."

'Difficult task – Active hope'... "We need to accept and manage both realities, built first and foremost in the hope that we have in Jesus Christ and as beacons of his light."

Rev Colin Morrison, Council for Congregational Life and Witness convener

New appointment



Neil Harrison joined the CCLW team in January 2018.

As Mission Development Officer, Neil works mainly in CCLW to envision, equip and enable congregations to build relationships, develop community and show and share the message of God's good news in Christ.

In conjunction with the Council for Global Mission, he seeks to develop congregational involvement in global mission. Neil also serves the work of the Council for Mission in Ireland as a key player in the Belfast Conference, the Urban Mission Network and in congregational consultancy.

ESSENTIALS



A brand-new practical discipleship resource was launched at PCI's Special Assembly last August in Coleraine. Called 'Essentials', it's part of the Church's vision to resource whole-life disciples across the denomination.

Billed as 'an eight-week journey helping followers of Jesus to reflect on and live out the essentials of

discipleship', launching the resource, Dr Noble McNeely said, "Being a disciple of Jesus isn't one lifestyle choice amongst many, it is integral to who we are in him and we need to recognise what the essentials are to following Christ.

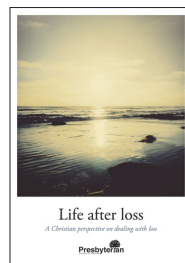
"To me it is the most exciting and amazing vocation anyone can be engaged in, and I hope this new and very practical resource will help to equip us effectively in reaching our full potential for Jesus each and every day."

Essentials has been designed specifically for the context of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and draws on a wide collection of voices, insights, teaching and testimonies from right across the denomination.

Life after loss

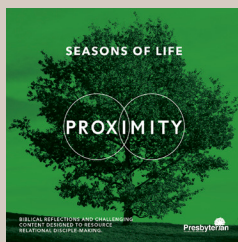
Congregations are caring communities made up of people facing and living through all kinds of challenges. 'Life after loss' has been written for Christians who have been bereaved.

This new resource aims to answer some of the questions asked about the loss of a loved one from the perspective of the Christian faith, the reality of being human and the biblical reality of grief. It is hoped that the questions answered here will bring a measure of comfort through time.



Upcoming resources

In the year ahead CCLW has a number of resources planned: 'Proximity', a discipleship resource; 'Encounter', a six-part DVD Bible study; and 'Ask', a series of postcard-sized prayer prompts.



For all resources go to www.presbyterianireland.org/resources

Family Holiday

The 'new' Family Holiday

PCI's Family Holiday scheme, whose future was once in doubt, has been reimagined, reshaped, relaunched – and has moved venue.

Promoted as a means of supplementing congregational social witness to those who have passed through a period of particular family difficulty, or are on the fringes of church life, the 2018 holiday was filled to capacity.

For many years the holiday took place in the Share Centre in Lisnaskea, County Fermanagh. This year the venue changed to Castlewellan Castle in County Down, a move that has been significant in creating an environment for a more intentional community experience.

Changes to the programme have also developed the potential to create a space for those who are



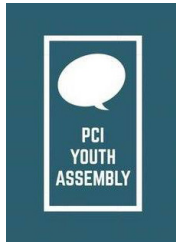
not Christians to experience a genuine Christian community.

Central to the overall reconfiguration has been the partnership with the Presbyterian Children's Society. Independent of the General Assembly, the Society helps Presbyterian children and families in need, which includes

supporting eligible families with a grant to enable them attend the Family Holiday.

This year 40 families took part in the four-day holiday, which was enjoyed by upwards of 140 people. The 2019 holiday will take place from 23 April to 26 April.





Celebrating 10 years of SPUD

PCI's Youth Assembly SPUD – which stands for 'Speaking, Participating, Understanding and Deciding' – celebrated its 10th anniversary at this year's General Assembly.

The 2008 General Assembly passed a resolution to enable young people to have a meaningful opportunity to be involved in decision-making at a denominational and local level.

Paddy Smyth, Youth Assembly delegate from Killinchy Presbyterian, thanked SPUD's founding members who had given young people a voice and the General Assembly for making space for their voices to be heard.

Owen Wilson, Youth Assembly delegate from Hill Street Presbyterian, expressed his gratitude for the Assembly's support over the years. He presented a challenge to members saying, "Our young people are passionate and they want to grow in their faith. How is your congregation allowing young people to grow in their faith and their involvement in your church?"

In a resolution, the General Assembly agreed to the change of name of 'SPUD' to 'The PCI Youth Assembly'.

"Our young people are passionate and they want to grow in their faith."

Owen Wilson, Youth Assembly delegate

Connecting the generations

This year's Youth Assembly fringe event focused on its theme for the year: 'Together – Connecting the Generations'. At the event, young and old gathered around tables to discuss their experience of passing on faith and to share ideas for connecting the generations.



Learning disability: 'More support needed'

The under-provision of support services for people with a learning disability in the post-19 age group was highlighted during the General Assembly.

Rev Peter Dickinson, convener of the Council for Social Witness (CSW) Disability Services Committee, spoke of the difficulty he and his family faced in trying to find a place in an adult care centre for his son. "Many young people, including our own son, had nowhere to go when they left special school in June – due to a lack of financial resources, there were no places available for them in adult centres. With so many competing needs to be met in society, young people with learning disabilities often find themselves at the back of the queue."

Mr Dickinson also stressed the need for a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly to legislate on these issues, highlighting that "learning disability has all too often been the first area to suffer cutbacks within governmental budgets."

CSW Secretary, Lindsay Conway, said, "As a Church supporting people with a learning disability, we will continue to raise our concerns at the slowness of change and the pressures on families."

Responsible for delivering an effective social witness service on

behalf of the Church and to the wider community in partnership with appropriate organisations, the Council will explore this issue with the Council for Public Affairs and relevant government departments.

For people with a learning disability in the post-19 age group, up to 50 residential care placements are available across the PCI's residential care homes, with day care facilities for a further nine individuals. Additionally, supported living placements for 12 tenants are provided in the Church's supported housing schemes.

Special presentation

In the CSW presentation to the General Assembly 'People matter to God' writer and broadcaster Ruth Sanderson presented a 'news-style report' on the Council's work.

Covering a number of areas, one video segment featured Judith Gillespie, former Deputy Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, describing safeguarding the vulnerable as a responsibility for everyone.

Outlining the scale of the issue of domestic abuse, she described the almost 30,000 incidents reported each year as "only the tip of the iceberg". Referring to safeguarding she said, "Every year around six people are murdered in domestic homicide situations. It's not pink and fluffy and soft stuff, it's homicide prevention." The presentation concluded with an 'expert panel' to answer questions, which included the CSW Residential and Supported Services Manager, Linda Wray, and the Health and Social Care Board's Regional Adult Safeguarding Officer, Joyce McKee.

Adult safeguarding – zero tolerance of abuse

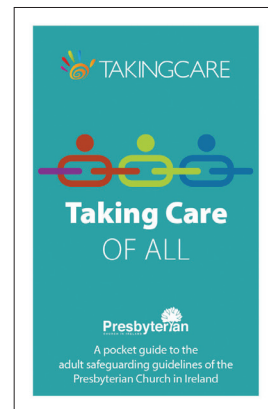
PCI’s Guidelines on Adult Safeguarding were launched in March at a special conference entitled ‘Taking care of all’.

Launching the guidelines, the Church sent out the clear message that it has a ‘zero tolerance approach’ of all forms of harm, abuse and exploitation – and that adult safeguarding is ‘everybody’s business’.

Over 300 people from congregations across Ireland came together for the conference to raise awareness of safeguarding those over 18. It was also an opportunity to launch a handy pocket-sized guide to its new adult safeguarding guidelines.

Speaking about the new guidelines, keynote speaker Joyce McKee, Programme Manager (Adult Services) for the Health and Social Care Board said, “It is vital that individuals and congregations know how to recognise the signs of abuse, how and when to refer someone to social services for support and assistance.

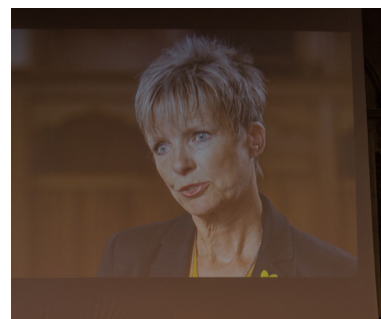
“As Christians we need to reach out, we need to listen, understand and act when needed. We need to think about how we voice our concerns to prevent abuse and exploitation from happening.



PCI’s new policy and guidelines are practical and demonstrate a genuine commitment to vulnerable members of our community who are at risk.”



(L to R) Pamela Marshall, convener of PCI’s Taking Care Committee; Rev Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly; and keynote speaker, Joyce McKee.



Trinity House opens

PCI's newest residential care home, Trinity House in Garvagh, was officially opened by the Moderator, Dr Noble McNeely, and three of the residents in December 2017.

The opening followed a £1.5 million 17-month redevelopment and refurbishment programme, which saw 20 residents from PCI's former care homes – Ard Cluan in Londonderry and York House in Portrush – relocate to the new home.

Helping some of the residents to cut the ribbon, Dr McNeely said,

“Trinity House will bring a very special social witness to the area, which is also a demonstration of God's love for people.

“As Christians we are called to reflect that love and it is no coincidence that the name chosen for the new home symbolically reflects this love and the coming together of the three homes into



one, while marking it with a distinct Christian identity. This love for others is also illuminated in the special signage in the reception area, which proclaims in large letters: 'People matter to God!.'”

Like all PCI homes, Trinity House welcomes residents from all denominations and seeks to provide care in a specifically Christian ethos and environment. The Council for Social Witness has overall management responsibility for the residential care homes and its other services.

With 50 en-suite rooms on one level, the new home increases the Church's overall residential care provision for older people in the north-west. It also has 16 rooms available for people living with a dementia and a dementia-friendly sensory garden, the third of PCI's residential care homes to have one.





Team player

Kenneth Downes has been a volunteer intern in the Council for Social Witness for just over seven years. To highlight 2018's Learning Disability Week, Kenneth agreed to share his experience working in Assembly Buildings.



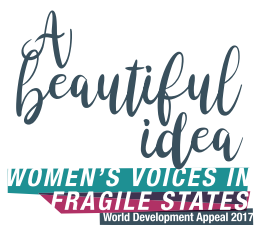
Working is an important part of my life. I like coming to work, and I do a range of jobs in Social Witness. I get the post and record and date stamp it. I also laminate and photocopy and answer the phone.

When I answer I say, "Good morning, Council for Social Witness, Kenneth speaking. How can I help you?" I like to answer in a professional way. I also welcome people at reception who are coming for meetings in our office – I shake hands and bring them up in the lift.

My favourite thing about working in Social Witness is meeting everyone in the office, they are very kind and caring and I like being part of the team. I love Assembly Buildings and coming to work makes me happy.

I also enjoy travelling to work and being independent. Outside of work I love football. I have supported Glentoran Football Club from when I was 11 years old, I also play for Bangor Castle Disability. I also enjoy going to the Boys' Brigade, where I am a warrant officer. I help with the Junior Section which is good fun.

I think it would be a good idea for other places to offer opportunities like the volunteer intern programme, working here is great. I would like to keep working hard in the Council for Social Witness, and continue to be happy at work and at home.



World Development Appeal

The 2017 World Development Appeal (WDA), 'A Beautiful Idea: Women's voices in fragile states', seeks to raise £500,000 or more for projects in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), one of the world's poorest and most fragile nations.

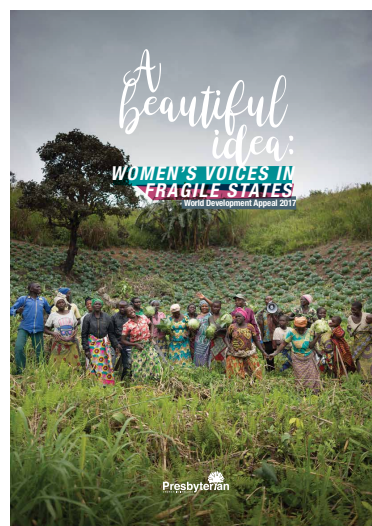
Launching the Appeal, Rev Dr Katherine Meyer, WDA convener said, "The 2017 Appeal will highlight partners who are working in the dangerous and difficult context of the DRC. Here they are addressing issues of gender justice as an important foundation for the peacebuilding and community development initiatives needed at every level of their troubled and fragile society."

One of the stories highlighted in the 2017 Appeal is that of a young Congolese woman called Hope, who speaks with courage about the sustained sexual violence that she endured and survived, her faith and continuing trust in God, and her ongoing, but often painful journey of healing. Hope is now working to provide the same support to other women that she received.

In a new strategic approach by the WDA, the next four years will now be linked together by the common theme of sustainable development in fragile states, with a particular focus on gender justice and the prevention of gender-based violence.

"In years three and four, we will return to the partners highlighted in years one and two, in order to receive from them a longer-term sense of how their work has developed, but also a realistic appraisal of the difficulties they have encountered," Dr Meyer said.

For more information on the Appeal visit www.presbyterianireland.org/world-development





United Appeal

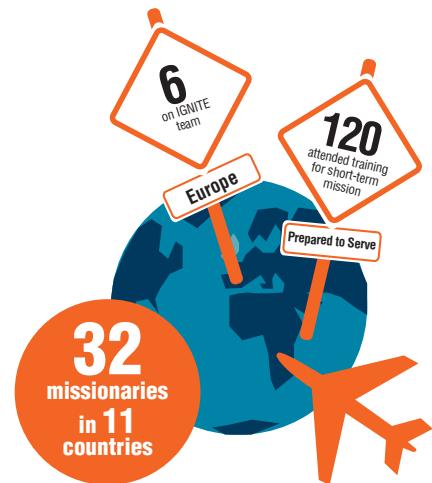
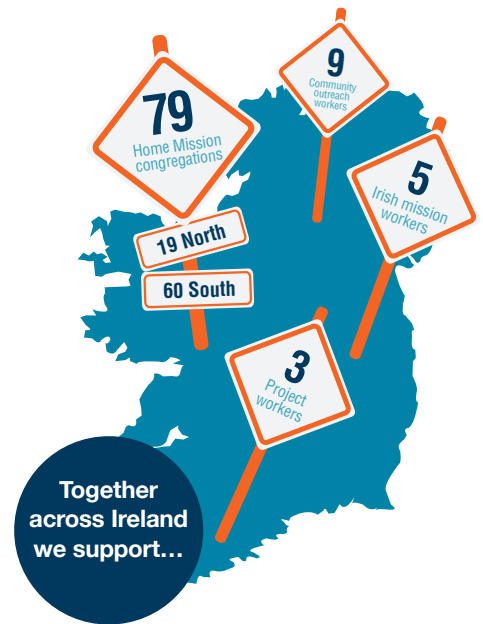
The United Appeal for Mission is Presbyterians doing together what none of us can do on our own, supporting mission and ministry at home and around the world.

It is down to the generous and sacrificial giving of Presbyterians from right across the island of Ireland that the United Appeal is able to support, resource and train individuals and ministries to build the kingdom of God at home in Ireland and overseas.

Hundreds of projects and programmes have benefited from the support of the United Appeal, carrying out their gospel mission amongst hundreds of thousands of people, showing the love and compassion of God and his church in action.

In January 2018, at the close of the 2017 United Appeal, PCI's contributing families had given £3,301,553 (€3,714,286). The United Appeal agreed for 2018 is £3,500,000 (€3,938,430).

Thank you to everyone who continues to prayerfully and sacrificially give to the gospel mission of the Church through the United Appeal.



To learn more about the United Appeal and to view specially created videos about the work supported visit www.presbyterianireland.org/unitedappeal

Some key dates for your diary

Tuesday 16 October 2018

Little Day Out

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

Druminnis Presbyterian Church

Tuesday 5 February 2019

Election of the Moderator-Designate

The Church's 19 presbyteries will meet independently across Ireland to select the Moderator-Designate who will be formally elected and installed at the General Assembly in June.

Saturday 6 April 2019

Kids' Big Day Out

PCI's chief annual event for children. An afternoon of interactive drama, worship and fun activities for primary school children.

Wellington Presbyterian Church, Ballymena.

Tuesday 23 April to Friday 26 April 2019

PCI Family Holiday

Castlewellan Castle and grounds, Co Down.

To view all upcoming events please visit:

www.presbyterianireland.org/events

Thursday 9 May 2019

Presbyterian Women Annual Meeting

Assembly Buildings, 2pm and 7.30pm

Thursday 23 May 2019

Union Theological College – PTFI Graduation

Degrees, diplomas and other awards are presented.

Students for the ministry are granted certificates which permit them to be licenced by their presbyteries. The Moderator-Designate will be awarded an Honorary Doctor of Divinity. This event takes place in the Assembly Hall, Assembly Buildings, Belfast.

Monday 3 June to Friday 7 June 2019

General Assembly 2019

Friday 25 October to Sunday 27 October 2019

MAD Weekend

MAD (which stands for 'Making a Difference' is a fun-filled residential youth event focused on helping 11 to 18 year olds 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 and 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.

ACCORDINGLY, WE AFFIRM Christian peacebuilding to be part of Christian discipleship and reassert the Church's calling to pursue a peaceful and just society in our day

WE SEEK a more reconciled community at peace with each other, where friend and foe, working together for the common good, can experience healing and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

PCI's Vision for Society statement is a timely word for today in this troubled land of Ireland.

We are saved by grace to relate to others with grace and this statement confirms our commitment to this – it is a statement of belief, confession, affirmation and inspiration.

Please read it, pray over it and let the Holy Spirit use it to guide you and your congregation to live as salt and light in your community. May we as a Church embrace the words of this statement to build bridges and bring hope to our broken society.

Statement welcomed and adopted by the General Assembly, June 2016

www.presbyterianireland.org/visionforsociety



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