**ITEM 1 - GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE (INITIAL REPORT)**

**SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT**

**Pre-Assembly meeting of the General Assembly Business Committee**

1. The General Assembly Business Committee met on Wednesday morning 29th September 2021 to consider the final practical arrangements for the General Assembly. The Committee also noted the ‘Nominations Booklet’, which had been drawn up by the Nominations Committee, and authorised its publication.
2. The main business of the Committee, was to consider, and license where appropriate, the supplementary business which had been submitted to the Clerk’s office by 11.00am on Monday 27th September, the deadline which had been communicated to all Assembly members. With a few small technical adjustments, the Committee agreed to licence all of the business submitted. The Committee also noted, as had been communicated to members of Assembly, the importance of having any significant amendments considered by the Committee and licensed prior to being considered by the Assembly, and thank those who took the time to submit their additional resolutions and/or amendments in advance.
3. Those who are eagled eyed amongst the membership of the General Assembly will note that this year the ‘yellow pages’ (pages x-xiv of the 2021 General Assembly Reports) are in fact white! This is due to the Printers not being able to access the required quantity of yellow paper to enable the Reports to be printed and delivered in time for distribution.
4. All members of the General Assembly will have received along with their Report Book, important information from the Convener of the Arrangements Panel (the Rev Mervyn Burnside). This included a section entitled ‘Covid Related Restrictions’. In the light of the ongoing relatively high level of infections in Northern Ireland, it is important therefore to highlight the following Covid related mitigations:
5. Once members have collected their voting card, they should proceed to the Assembly Hall where they will be shown to a seat which should be retained for the duration of the session. At the conclusion of each session ending at lunchtime and at dinnertime, members should exit the Assembly Hall as swiftly as possible, *taking with them all personal possessions,* so that the Hall can be sanitised.
6. Members are required to wear a face covering, unless exempted, when entering and exiting Assembly Buildings and when moving around the building. During the course of each session face coverings may be removed once seated, however, members are required to wear face covering, unless exempted, for the purpose of singing in the worship sessions.
7. If a member, or someone they live with, has coronavirus symptoms: fever, particularly a high temperature (i.e. 37.8 degrees or over), a continuous cough or loss of taste or smell, they should not attend Assembly Buildings.

1. Taking account of these two points, an amended form of Resolution 2 on page 305 was agreed by the General Assembly Business Committee is submitted below.

**Licenced Amended Resolution 2 (page 305):**

1. That the ‘Guide to Assembly Procedure’ (2021 General Assembly Reports, pages x-xiv) be approved with the appropriate General Assembly Standing Orders suspended, when necessary, to facilitate alternative presentations etc.; and that the Covid related mitigations 4(a) – (c), in the Supplementary Report, also be approved.

TREVOR D GRIBBEN

**REQUEST TO BE ENROLLED AS A MINISTER EMERITUS OF A CONGREGATION**

1. The General Council Standing Committee (acting by decision of the General Council on behalf of the Moderator’s Advisory Committee) considered a proposal from the Presbytery of Tyrone that the Rev Tom Conway be enrolled as Minister Emeritus of Culnady and Swatragh congregations.
2. The Standing Committee noted that due to ill health Mr Conway had resigned from these charges on 16th June 2018. The Committee also noted however that he remained a full member of Assembly because of his position as Clerk of Presbytery, but would be standing down from that role in early 2021, largely due to his ongoing ill health.
3. The Standing Committee noted the recommendation of the Moderator’s Advisory Committee to the 2018 General Assembly (2018 Reports pages 69 & 73) that “…. *normally a proposal to grant Minister Emeritus status under Code Par 226(a) will only be considered at the General Assembly that takes place after the minister concerned reaches the age of 60.”*  It was further noted that Mr Conway reached the age of 60 on 30th November 2020, just prior to the Presbytery of Tyrone forwarding its proposal to the Clerk of Assembly.
4. Therefore, the General Council Standing Committee agreed to support the proposal of the Presbytery of Tyrone to the next meeting of the General Assembly, that under Par 226(a) of the Code the Rev Tom Conway be enrolled as Minister Emeritus of the congregations of Culnady and Swatragh.

**Additional Resolution 4(a):**

That, under Par 226(a) of the Code the Rev Tom Conway be enrolled as Minister Emeritus of the congregations of Culnady and Swatragh.

(Note: As agreed by the 2018 General Assembly, two members of Presbytery of Tyrone must be present at the Assembly to formally propose and second this resolution.)

TREVOR D GRIBBEN

**ITEM 4 - GENERAL COUNCIL - SECTION 1**

**SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT**

**Permission to retire**

Since the 2021 Reports went to print, two additional requests were received from Ministers seeking permission to retire in advance of their 66th birthday. An appropriate resolution is appended.

**ACTUARIAL VALUATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND PENSION SCHEME (2009)**

(This Supplementary Report (which includes recommendations and an additional resolution) is tabled as indicated in the printed report of the Support Services Committee, 2021 General Assembly Reports, page 18, point 7.)

**INTRODUCTION**

1. The General Council was recently notified that the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Pension Scheme (2009) had received the preliminary actuarial valuation of the scheme as at 31 December 2020. The Scheme Trustees have forwarded a summary of the valuation result and sought the General Council’s views (in the capacity of “Scheme Employer”) to the outcome of the valuation.
2. An actuarial valuation is, in summary, an assessment of the financial position of the scheme at a particular point in time and aims primarily to identify:
* Firstly, the funding position of the scheme by comparing the value of the scheme’s investments with its liabilities (also known as technical provisions) based on a set of agreed assumptions. The liabilities represent an assessment of the pensions accrued by members to the date of the valuation and of the pensions currently being paid by the scheme. Where the assets exceed the liabilities, the scheme is in surplus and where the liabilities exceed the assets the scheme is in deficit.
* Secondly, the future funding rate (i.e. contribution rates) necessary to provide the pension benefits provided under the scheme rules.
1. A formal actuarial valuation of the scheme is undertaken every three years and has to be finalised within 15 months of the valuation date and therefore the current valuation needs to be completed by 31 March 2022.
2. It is important to note that the agreed rate of contribution by the “Scheme Employer” also normally determines the rate of assessment paid by congregations to the Pension Fund.

**ACTUARIAL VALUATION RESULT**

1. In summary, the preliminary actuarial valuation shows the following:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Previous Valuation 31 December 2017 | Current Valuation31 December 2020 |
| Assets | £184.0m | £263.5m |
| Technical Provision (or liabilities) | £177.20m | £220.5m |
| Surplus | £6.8m | £43.0m |
| Funding level | 104% | 120% |
| Employer Future Service Rate | 26.5% | 33.7% |

1. The key points to note from the preliminary results are:
2. The scheme is showing a surplus of £43m or a funding level of 120%
3. The ongoing cost to the Church of providing the scheme benefits has increased significantly to 33.7%
4. With regard to the previous valuation, as at 31 December 2017, it is noted that when this was being finalised it was agreed that the “Scheme Employer” would continue to pay contributions of 24% (rather than 26.5% as noted above) by using some of the scheme surplus and with members continuing to contribute 7%.
5. As noted above the preliminary valuation result indicates that the employer funding rate needs to increase to 33.7% (from the current rate of 24%). However, as a valuation is at a point in time, the scheme actuary has also advised the Scheme Trustees that yields (which are used in valuing scheme liabilities) have recovered to some extent since 31 December 2020 and the implied employer contribution rate as at 30 April 2021 would be 29.5% (rather than 33.7%). The scheme actuary has also provided an indication as to the impact on employer contribution rates if the surplus was eliminated over various time periods from 10 to 25 years.

**INVESTMENT STRATEGY REVIEW**

1. The Scheme Trustees have reported that they intend to undertake a further investment strategy review and have engaged professional advisers. This is important, as it could impact on the assumptions used in the actuarial valuation of the scheme and therefore change the overall results. The Scheme Trustees did undertake a review in 2017 and consulted with the “Scheme Employer” at that time. This review resulted in the introduction of what are known as Liability Driven Investments (LDI Funds) which are specifically designed to protect the funding position of the scheme and, in general terms, their value tends to move in line with the scheme liabilities which helps minimise any impact on a scheme surplus or deficit. The purpose of the current review is to explore whether additional changes should be made to further protect the funding position of the scheme. It is clear the current investment strategy, and in particular the move to LDI funds which was timely, has been significant in helping to achieve the scheme surplus at the most recent valuation. However, at present approximately 70% of the scheme’s investments are invested in a Legal & General ethical fund which are subject to market fluctuations and therefore expose the scheme to a higher level of risk. It may be that further diversification may be advised. A key challenge for the Scheme Trustees is to provide a level of return sufficient to cover the cost of scheme benefits while also protecting the funding position of the scheme and avoiding, in particular, adverse actuarial valuations which in turn could potentially lead to the need for increases in contribution rates.

**DISCRETIONARY INCREASES IN PENSION**

1. While the scheme provides an element of “inflation” protection with regard to annual increase in pensions there is also an element in respect of pre-1997 service for ministers where any annual increase is at the discretion of the Scheme Trustees. The Scheme Trustees have advised that the present valuation assumes an annual increase on 1% to this part of the pension.

**ANNUAL ACCOUNTS**

1. The annual accounts for the Pension Scheme for the year ended 31 December 2020 are included in the Accounts Book 2020. This book also includes the annual audited accounts for the Church. For those who take a keen interest in such matters, it is noted that the Church accounts, as required by current accounting regulations, include various disclosures in relation to the Pension Scheme. However, as the assumptions used for such accounting purposes are slightly different from those used for the purpose of the actuarial valuation of the scheme, the figures are not consistent.

**RECOMMENDATION**

1. The General Council Standing Committee has indicated to the Scheme Trustees, and recommends for General Assembly approval, that the employer funding rate remain at 24% (with the member contribution rate remaining at 7%) by utilising part of the scheme surplus (estimated at circ. £8/9m). The Scheme Trustees have advised that they would be willing to agree to this proposal but also that a cautious approach should be taken at this time as future valuations may not be so positive. It is also recommended that the General Assembly, in agreeing to this rate of contribution, accept that in finalising the valuation it may be necessary to utilise a further element of the scheme surplus to compensate for any change to the actuarial valuation assumptions arising from the investment strategy review. An appropriate resolution is appended.
2. The next formal valuation of the scheme will be as at 31 December 2023.

**THE PROLONGED DISABILITY FUND**

1. The Rules of the Prolonged Disability Fund provide in Clause 6 that “Ministers or Licentiates who are contributing members of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Pension Scheme (2009) and are under 65 years of age are eligible to apply for benefits from the Fund…...”. That rule also states that “An individual ceases to be eligible on the earliest of…”  a number of dates one of which is “the date of their 65th birthday”.  Furthermore, in Clause 10 the Rules states that “The Benefits will be paid to an approved applicant for the duration of their incapacity, as long as the individual remains eligible and is under 65 years of age”.
2. In light of the decision of the General Assembly, through its 2020 Standing Commission, to increase the age of retirement from 65 to 66 (ref Code Par 223) it is recommended that the Rules of the Prolonged Disability Scheme, and in particular Rules 6 and 10 are amended to reflect this change and that “65 years” and “65th birthday” are replaced with “66 years” and “66th birthday”. An appropriate resolution is appended.

**Licensed Additional Resolutions (page 306):**

7(a) That the General Assembly note the report of the Support Services Committee.

7(b) That the General Assembly agree that the “employer” contribution rate to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Pension Scheme (2009) should remain at the rate of 24% until the next valuation of the scheme as at 31 December 2023 and that the General Assembly support the Scheme Trustees use, if necessary, of a further element of the scheme surplus in finalising the investment strategy review for the scheme.

7(c) That under Par 223(3) of the Code leave to retire, on or after 31 October 2021, is given to the pre-66 retirement of the Rev Joseph Andrews (Ballee) and the Rev Dr Nancy Cubitt (Bushmills).

7(d) That the Rules 6 and 10 of the Prolonged Disability Scheme be amended to replace “65 years” and “65th birthday” with “66 years” and “66th birthday”.

DAVID W THOMSON

**Licensed Additional Resolution 8(a) (page 306):**

That the General Assembly does not support the implementation of mandatory vaccination in places of work, including those who work in health and social care, believing that such a requirement not only undermines the principle of informed consent but is a breach of the UNESCO Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights Article 6 paragraph 1 which states that: “Any preventive, diagnostic and therapeutic medical intervention is only to be carried out with the prior, free and informed consent of the person concerned, based on adequate information. The consent should, where appropriate, be expressed and may be withdrawn by the person concerned at any time and for any reason without disadvantage or prejudice.”

TW DAVID JOHNSTON

**Licensed Additional Resolution 8(b) (page 306):**

That the General Assembly, in view of the Republic of Ireland “having, at times, the most draconian [Covid-19] restrictions placed upon churches in all of Europe” (2021 General Assembly Reports page 4), register their opposition in principle to the implementation of vaccine passports (already operational in certain indoor settings) which the General Assembly believes are divisive, discriminatory and undermine the democratic principles of a free society.

ALASTAIR J DUNLOP

**Licensed Additional Resolution 8(c) (page 306):**

That the General Assembly express concern regarding the decision of the United Kingdom’s four Chief Medical Officers to set aside the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation on the mass vaccination of 12-15 year olds given the lack of sufficient clinical data on the safety of these novel vaccines for children and young people.

COLIN W MEGAW

**ITEM 10 – GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 3**

**SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT**

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

**AMENDED WORDING**

In light of discussion, and for the sake of greater clarity, the following revised wording is submitted to the General Assembly as replacement wording for paragraphs 26(b) and 26(c) of the Report of the ‘Decision Making and Dissent with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland’ Task Group:

26(b) For ministers and elders, debate and discussion can of course also take place outside the formal structures of the Church, both in private discussions and in more organised ways. However, ministers and elders have 'subscribed’ and, through ordination vows, have promised submission in the Lord to the higher courts of the church. This has implications in relation to the freedom of ministers and elders to hold/promote certain views at variance with either the subordinate standards, or the clear position of the General Assembly.

26(c) There are, however, some areas regarding which the PCI has interpreted and explained certain phrases in the WCF. e.g. the role of civil magistrates with respect to individual’s religious beliefs and rights of conscience (in the Code) and the question of whether the Pope is ‘the personal and literal fulfilment of the Antichrist’ (by GA resolution).

NOBLE McNEELY

**ITEM 12 - COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

**SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT**

**Legacy and Dealing with the Past**

1. The UK Government, through its recently published Command Paper, has indicated its intention to move away from the arrangements for dealing with the past as proposed, and agreed, in the Stormont House Agreement.
2. Through its Officers, and along with others, the Council for Public Affairs has been engaging with Government on these sensitive matters in an attempt to bring the voice, heart and mind of Christian theologians and pastors to this important debate.
3. Great disquiet at the current proposals has been expressed, both privately and in the media, stressing that whilst the Stormont House Agreement (SHA) was not perfect, it did set out a broader, four-strand framework to address legacy issues. We are on public record stating our support for all four key principles outlined in the SHA, especially the right of victims and survivors to seek due process and justice in the courts. What has been proposed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland denies victims and survivors that possibility.
4. Many victims and survivors come from our own Presbyterian family. For so many innocent people it is impossible to quantify the pain, suffering and generational hurt that they and their families have suffered as a consequence of unwarranted violence visited upon them.
5. The important Gospel values of healing, love, justice, repentance and hope for the future must continue to guide our thinking. There are some things we will never be able to forget, and indeed which we must try not to forget. Some victims of violence who have lost loved ones still seek justice, however unlikely such recourse through the courts might be. To remove that from them is to remove hope, and is antithetical to the gospel which unites both love and justice in the person of Jesus Christ. It may be enough for some that the remedy they crave will show on the balance of probabilities, that such and such a one perpetrated this act, even if the prospect of conviction in a criminal court “beyond all reasonable doubt” is now beyond our system of justice to deliver.

DANIEL J KANE

**Licensed Additional Resolution 5(a) (page 313):**

That the General Assembly receive the paper ""Graciously Confident Gospel Engagement in the Public Square - A Framework of Principles, Postures and Practices" (2021 General Assembly Reports, Appendix A, page 257) and strongly recommend that the strategic and theological challenges it presents are taken up at all levels across our denomination.

DANIEL J KANE

**Licensed Additional Resolution 5(b) (page 313):**

That the General Assembly share the concerns expressed by the Council for Public Affairs in its Supplementary Report on matters of legacy and dealing with the past and encourages the Council to engage further on these important issues.

DANIEL J KANE

**ITEM 15 – GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 4**

**SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT**

**Nominations Committee**

**Licensed Amended form of Resolution 24 (page 308):**

24. That the nominations to the General Assembly Commissions, Councils and Committees (as tabled in the separate Nomination Booklet) be noted and, where necessary, be approved.

TREVOR D GRIBBEN

**New Areas of Work**

**Licensed Amendment to Resolution 25 (page 308):**

**Add the following words at the end of Resolution 25:** “; *and that additionally the General Council be asked, in the light of the last period, to undertake* *a review of the Church’s response and to set out theological, moral and spiritual principles to guide the Church in any similar situation which could arise and report to the 2022 General Assembly.”*

TW DAVID JOHNSTON

**Making the General Assembly More Accessible Task Group**

**Licensed Amendment to Resolution 26 (page 309):**

**Add the following words at the end of Resolution 26**: “with the addition that the General Assembly begin with an Opening Service of Worship, which will include the installation of the Moderator, on Wednesday morning, with other business beginning on that afternoon.”

TREVOR D GRIBBEN

**Licensed Amendment to Resolution 26 (page 309):**

**Add the following words at the end of Resolution 26:** “; and that in 2022 the General Assembly begin on Wednesday 22nd June 2022.”

TREVOR D GRIBBEN