

# GENERAL COUNCIL

## SECTION 1

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

Secretary: THE CLERK

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

- Implementation Task Group
- Human Identity Task Group

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

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

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

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

## INTRODUCTION

### The Era of Covid-19

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

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

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

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

### **Restrictions and Mitigations**

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

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

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

## Governance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **GENERAL COUNCIL REPORT SECTION 1**

### **APPENDIX A**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

30 April 2021



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

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

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

TREVOR D GRIBBEN, Clerk of Assembly

June 2021

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ROY MACKAY, Convener  
TREVOR GRIBBEN, Secretary

## INITIAL REPORT – APPENDIX

### Reports from Other Church Assemblies etc

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

*The Very Rev Dr Ian McNie reports:*

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

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

## **Methodist Conference 2021 Report**

*The Very Rev Dr Noble McNeely reports:*

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

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

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

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

## **SUPPORT SERVICES**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2. Retirements

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

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

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

### 3. Congregational Assessments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **4. The Prolonged Disability Fund**

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **8. General Comments**

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

## **(B) ASSEMBLY BUILDINGS**

### **1. Staffing**

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

#### **Job Retention Scheme**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Review of staffing needs

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

A number of posts were identified as being vulnerable.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **General Comments**

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

## **2. Operations and Conferencing**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DAVID THOMSON, Convener Support Services Committee

CLIVE KNOX, Financial Secretary

## APPENDIX

### OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STAFFING

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

##### EXECUTIVE POSTS

##### Scale 1 (£25,745 – £30,587)

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

##### Scale 2 (£29,074 – £34,974)

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

##### Scale 3 (£32,530 – £39,647)

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

##### Scale 4 (£35,854 – £44,793)

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

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

**Scale 6 (£42,582 – £51,876)**

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

**Scale 7 (£48,314 – £62,147)**

Clerk of Assembly and General Secretary  
 Financial Secretary

**ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED POSTS**

**Scale 2 (£15,766 – £18,235)**

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

**Scale 3 (£17,692 – £20,457)**

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

**Scale 4 (£20,046 – £23,086)**

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

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

**Scale 5 (£21,933 – £25,322)**

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

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

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

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

Senior Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (GSD)

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

**EXECUTIVE POSTS**

**Scale 2 (£29,074 – £34,974)**

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

**Scale 3 (£32,530 – £39,647)**

Head of Academic Administration (Union College)



**Scale 4 (£35,854 – £44,793)**

Dean of Ministerial Studies and Development (Union College)

**Scale 5 (£39,647 – £48,314)**

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

**Scale 6 (£42,582 – £51,876)**

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

**Scale 7 (£48,314 – £62,147)**

Principal of Union Theological College

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

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

**Scale 2 (£15,766 – £18,235)**

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

**Scale 3 (£17,692 – £20,457)**

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

**Scale 4 (£20,046 – £23,086)**

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

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

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

## HOLDING TRUSTEE TASK GROUP

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

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

### Proposal

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

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

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

**Cost to congregations**

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

**Guidance regarding property transactions**

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

**PLEASE NOTE:**

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

The Code is clear regarding the decision-making process:

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

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

ROBERT HERRON, Convener

## MEMORIAL RECORD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Very Rev Dr DONALD PATTON

## **GUYSMERE DEVELOPMENT PANEL**

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



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

JIM McCAUGHAN, Convener

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

### **CHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

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

### **Within Ireland**

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

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

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

### **Further afield**

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

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

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

## **MODERATOR'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

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

## **DOCTRINE COMMITTEE**

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

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

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

## **CODE REPUBLISHING PANEL**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **PRESBYTERIAN CHILDREN'S SOCIETY**

*Mr Jason Nicholson (Executive Secretary) reports:*

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

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