

# COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS

Convener: Rev Dr GRAHAM CONNOR  
Secretary: Rev DAVID THOMPSON

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council for Congregational Life and Witness has met on two occasions since last year's General Assembly.
2. The report details:
  - (a) Some of the key questions in congregational life and witness to which the Council is seeking to apply itself.
  - (b) A particular emphasis on production of a range of DVD material intended to envision and equip congregations in a variety of aspects of life and witness.
  - (c) Main outputs of the Council Committees and Panels.
  - (d) Reflections on the need to prioritise work and streamline messages.
  - (e) Obstacles to development of the Council's remit in the areas of engaging presbyteries, structures and participation, communication with congregations and the absence of a coordinated approach to stimulating congregational prayer for the ministry and mission of the wider Church.
  - (f) Opportunities in envisioning for fruitfulness in small congregations, equipping and enabling congregations entering a new phase of ministry by harnessing the Growing in Fruitfulness material and developing partnerships with other organisations offering specific, specialist, support in enabling congregations in aspects of their life or witness.
3. Two appendices set out an overview of main activities, training and events offered by the Council in core areas of congregational life and witness and a *PCI Counselling Framework of Theology, Ethics and Practice* referred to in the report.

## FELLOW WORKERS WITH GOD WHO MAKES THINGS GROW

4. The Council for Congregational Life and Witness, its Committees, Panels, Task Groups and Organising Groups continue to develop and deliver a wide range of resources, training, events, programmes and facilitation for congregations and their members. In a variety of ways, these expressions of the Council's remit aim to support and encourage congregations across the island of Ireland in living out their calling as the people of God.

5. As the Council moves into its third year, it shows many encouraging signs of beginning to make sense of the agendas inherited from the previous structures and to strike out in new ways.

6. As the Biblical image of the Council's theme of fruitfulness reminds us, it is not always easy to see and understand what God is doing at any given point in time. We offer our service to Him prayerfully as His fellow workers, expecting that He will work in us and through us in His way and at His pace. We humbly remember that, '*he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow*' (1. Corinthians 3:7). In that spirit of dependence and expectation, this report offers an overview of what is happening and what the Council is able to discern from what it sees.

### **CLEARING THE GROUND FOR FRUITFULNESS - ASKING THE HARD QUESTIONS**

7. Another of the Bible's pictures of fruitfulness reminds us that the work of growing a vineyard often begins by '*digging up the ground and clearing it of stones*' (Isaiah 5:2). Often ministry and mission has the feel of that back-breaking work. This is especially true when we are called to address uncomfortable questions about what we have always done and the ways we have always done it. Equally challenging is trying to imagine what we might do differently and what that might look like.

8. The Council and its Committees are bravely asking, and in some cases beginning to address, hard questions arising from the realities of congregational life and witness in this season of change in Church and society. These include:

- What does covenant family ministry look like today? (Launch of Close to Home resource and development of follow-up materials)
- How do we reach unchurched children and young people? (REACH conference 20 May 2017)
- Which models of Sunday morning children's ministry and worship might be most effective in a range of congregational settings today? (Resource for discussion with DVD material in production)
- How can we re-imagine contemporary women's ministry as an integral part of congregational life and witness, whether through Presbyterian Women or in other ways? (First stage of the formation of an ongoing strategy for women's ministry)
- What are the realities of being an Elder today? (Survey of Elders and initial responses being explored)
- How can we help congregations develop emerging leaders? (EMERGE Developing Younger Leaders' pilot programme, January-June 2017)
- How can we maximise the missional potential of Parent and Toddler groups in reaching unchurched families? (Resource published August 2016)
- How do we equip congregations and their members to rise to the challenge of evangelism in contemporary Ireland? (Overflow Conference 9 March 2017)
- How do we help congregations develop global mission involvement as a vital part of congregational life and witness? (Short DVD resource for congregations planned)

- How do we support congregations in helping members grapple with real issues in areas such as mental health? (Resource for discussion with DVD material in production)
- How do we change the conversation about worship in congregations from personal style and preference to substance and participation in a meeting with the living God? (Resource for discussion with DVD material in production)
- How can we help congregations make the most of the opportunity of Harvest? (Harvest Big Sing Event 16 September 2017)
- How can following Jesus become what it was always meant to be, a process in which disciples make disciples? (Disciple Makers Network and 'Essentials' resource)
- What are the discipleship implications of following Jesus in a still divided society? (DVD clip and discussion starter on PCI Vision for Society Statement)

9. These are just some of the questions being addressed by the Council Committees. None of them have easy answers and the Committee Conveners, members and staff are to be commended for not shying away from the challenges they raise.

10. In all of this we look to the Lord, grateful of His invitation, *'if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to Him.'* (James 1:5). But more than that, we also anticipate the outworking of His promise, that through His Spirit's work, He will do *'immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.'* (Ephesians 3:20).

### **OPENING OUR EYES AND LOOKING AT THE FIELDS – CHANGING THE CONVERSATION. FIRING THE IMAGINATION**

11. One of the most requested forms of congregational resourcing emerging from the Council's engagements with all nineteen presbyteries during 2015/16 was DVD material. There is a widespread recognition that we need to move beyond theorising about what things might look like to what they do look like when congregations step out in faith.

12. DVD clips which capture the stories of those congregational journeys out of 'the way we have always done things' into 'trying a different way', have exercised significant influence in the denomination in recent years. As local stories, grounded in the realities of the culture and structures of Irish Presbyterianism, they have that extra ring of authenticity and power of possibility. They arise and speak out of our situation and fold back into it more readily than stories imported from elsewhere around the globe.

13. The Council requested significant funding from United Appeal to produce a range of DVD material. This work is now under way and includes the following projects:

Short clips on a series of aspects of congregational life and witness

- Issues of Pastoral Care
- Close to Home
- Family Ministry
- Mentoring
- Congregational Outreach
- Global Mission Involvement
- A discussion starter on Women's Ministry
- A discussion starter on the PCI Vision for Society

Bigger projects

- Essentials – part of a discipleship resource for use in local congregations
- Models for Sunday morning Children's Ministry – part of a discussion starter
- Series of clips on aspects of leadership in the Church
- Series of clips on approaching and participating in worship as an encounter with God

14. These clips will be rolled out gradually over the period of the next twelve months. They will be flexibly produced for use in a range of settings in congregational life and are offered as an attempt to change the conversation from 'what isn't working any more' to 'what might be worth trying'.

### **SOWING FOR A VARIED CROP**

15. The Council's Committees and Panels oversee the development of fruitful congregational life and witness across a wide range of areas. The following section highlights some of the main outputs of this work.

## **DISCIPLESHIP COMMITTEE**

16. This year has seen the ongoing development of the *Discipleshaping Church* agenda in a number of ways.

17. *Tides* remains a popular devotional in electronic format. It is planned to expand contributors and continue to develop the range of topics addressed, while attempting to increase exposure, particularly through social media.

18. The *Disciple Makers' Network* has been delivered in two locations, Ballygawley and Belfast. Attracting groups of key leaders from around fifty congregations, it has created significant momentum, widening and deepening the discipleship agenda in congregations. It is hoped to make available some of the resources piloted for congregations which participated in the initiative for wider use.

19. *Essentials* is a DVD Bible study resource usable in a variety of congregational settings. It offers the opportunity to focus on core elements of being and making disciples. It will be available for congregational use from late August.

20. Following Jesus is a multifaceted, daily challenge and opportunity expressed in a range of relationships, settings, circumstances and stages of life. The Committee's work expresses that in a variety of ways, all aimed at growing disciples.

21. *How to be a Close to Home congregation*, a DVD Bible Study resource launched in September 2016, has been used by many congregations in a wide variety of settings. It helps ground and illustrate the realities of covenant theology as a key expression of discipling children and young people in home and church life. The Council continues to commend its use to congregations and draws their attention to follow up resources found on the PCI website.

22. *Transform*, an event aimed at helping young adults explore and express elements of what it means to follow Jesus at their particular age and stage of life, was held from 7/8 April 2017 in the Crescent Arts Centre, Belfast. The theme of gospel transformation was unpacked through a series of talks, seminars and visits to mission projects. Two regional *Transform* events were also held in Londonderry and Monaghan.

23. Exploration of a piece of work involving envisioning and equipping congregations to develop more intentional ministries of children and youth discipleship has also been commenced.

24. The aspect of Christian generosity continues to be addressed under the *Grace of Giving* banner and a range of literature has been refreshed and continues to be available for congregational use.

25. The *Good Relations Panel* has focused on promoting the PCI Vision for Society Statement for congregations and their members through a series of blog posts, short DVD clips, posters and prayer cards. A DVD Bible study resource will follow, enabling a deeper exploration of some of the implications of the statement for the everyday realities of following Jesus in a still divided society.

26. Moving the denomination on to a more disciple-making footing involves significant culture change for congregations. It is a gradual process and requires intentional, patient and courageous leadership from ministers, elders and other leaders.

27. The Council welcomes the Priorities Committee's identification of discipleship development as a key dimension of the next season of denominational life and witness and looks forward to exploring how it can continue to stimulate congregational thinking and practice in what it means to become a *Discipleshaping Church*.

DAVID THOMPSON, Acting Convener

## GLOBAL MISSION INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEE

28. June 2017 sees the drawing to an end of the *Fit for Purpose* theme, 'A Community of Global Concern'. Throughout 2016/17, the Committee has worked with the Council for Global Mission to promote the theme and suggest a range of ways in which congregations could access and harness the momentum it

offered in developing their global mission involvement.

29. The *Global Mission Menu* was deliberately designed to have a shelf life that stretched beyond the *Fit for Purpose* theme. It highlights in one place many ways in which individuals and congregations can be envisioned, equipped and engaged in God's global mission. The Council continues to commend it to congregations exploring how to renew and refresh their participation in what God is doing in His wider world.

30. *Prepared to Go*, a one-day training event preparing individuals and teams for short-term overseas mission, was held on 8 April 2017. While the quality of the content of this event is high and always greatly appreciated by those who attend, the Committee has observed that numbers remain small. Exploration of whether this event represents the best means of equipping those going overseas is required.

31. Similarly, the *Ignite Romania* team attracted small numbers. Again, whether denominational short-term mission teams remains a priority area for the development of congregational global mission involvement is in question.

32. The *Youth and Children's Project* continues to provide an important vehicle for raising awareness of global mission and engaging with aspects of what God is doing in the wider world for many congregations. The 2017/18 Project will support the work of PCI missionary Diane Cusick in the development of early years education projects in Zambia. A corresponding local element will focus on provision of youth and children's material for the new church building in Maynooth.

33. The Committee have taken some time to reflect on what feels like an important juncture in how the Council envisions, equips and enables congregations for global mission involvement. As a number of the paragraphs above indicate, some of the time-honoured ways in which this aspect of church life and witness has been promoted and developed in the past seem to be losing traction. Such trends suggest the need for re-evaluation and re-imagining the task in light of changes in both global mission and patterns and rhythms of congregational life and witness.

34. The Committee have identified a need to raise the profile of global mission in congregations and suggest a range of simple ways of gaining momentum in this area of witness. A DVD resource is planned for use in Kirk Sessions, Mission Committees or other congregational settings.

TREVOR LONG, Convener

## LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE

35. Leadership development is another area identified by the Priorities Committee in its report to the Assembly. In congregational life and witness, leadership takes many forms, including formally elected leaders such as ministers and elders, other leaders of organisations – paid and unpaid – and those who show leadership potential. Christian leadership is about godly character, gifting and competence, but also demands understanding the congregational context in which the role is exercised.

36. Much light can be gleaned from many quarters of the ever-expanding body of leadership literature and models of leadership in public, private and voluntary sectors. Leadership in the church of Christ in local expression, however, will always be a distinctive opportunity to show Christ-likeness and will always offer the particular challenge of leading in a very differently constituted organisation – the diverse congregation of God’s people which is the Body of Christ.

37. The Leadership Committee is committed to continuing to find ways of expressing and promoting what it means to lead in the complex mix of today’s culture, with a conviction to enable the changes necessary to be tomorrow’s church, while at all times mirroring the character of Christ.

38. A series of six short DVD clips, with accompanying devotional and Bible study materials are in production. They aim to offer a flexible leadership development tool that will be usable in a range of congregational settings.

39. Kirk Session is obviously a key component in leadership in any congregation and the *Elders’ Panel* has been responding to the outcome of a survey of elders identifying what they consider to be the most pressing issues in developing their leadership. This has led to specific work on updating the *Prepared to Lead* material and the production of a specific resource for Clerks of Session, as well as Elders’ Roadshows in Dromore and Iveagh Presbyteries.

40. *SPUD* and the *Intern Programme* continue to offer opportunity for younger members of the church to test and hone their gifting as leaders. Both of these initiatives are increasingly and intentionally shaped with a leadership development edge.

41. *Emerge* is a pilot programme aimed at partnering with congregations in developing younger members they identify as having potential leadership gifts. Three weekend gatherings are supplemented by a residential overnight. Learning on the scheme is put to work back in congregational leadership settings. Reflection on this practice is then shared and built upon as the whole group learns from one another’s experiences.

42. The *Children’s Ministry Course* and *Youth Ministry Course* continue to prove popular with those who discern their gifting in these areas of ministry and who are able to commit to intensive programmes of study. Youth and Children’s *Road Trips* offer one-night training opportunities. This year a partnership with the Council for Training in Ministry has seen the inclusion of Road Trip seminars on self-harm and young people and social media.

43. A planned *Sharpening Your Interpersonal Skills* course failed to attract the necessary numbers of participants. The Committee will continue to consider how the valuable contribution of this material might be delivered in different, more accessible, forms.

JONATHAN CURRY, Convener

## OUTREACH COMMITTEE

44. The Outreach Committee has adopted a twin focus for its work: exploring how to envision, equip and enable the church for evangelism and community witness in contemporary Ireland.

45. The *Overflow* conference, held on 9 March 2017, offered delegates the opportunity to reflect on contemporary evangelistic realities and gather some ideas for encouraging congregations and their members in the church's task of sharing the gospel. The Committee plans to create some flexible follow up material from the day to disseminate more widely and take the conference conversation into congregations.

46. Following initial discussion and feedback gathered at a meeting of the full Council, the Committee has begun to explore the area of community witness. Under a working title of *Present*, which draws on the concept of incarnational mission, a framework is being constructed to help congregations develop ways of being present to bear witness in their communities.

47. The definition of community witness being unpacked is as follows:

*Community witness is a means of congregations being present in their neighbourhood or networks as a means of:*

- *showing God's love;*
- *sharing His wisdom for living;*
- *spreading the hope to be found in Him.*

48. Early reflection on feedback from both Council and Committee suggests that the Church is struggling to make sense of the relationship between evangelism and social outreach and the distinctive contributions of both to the mission of God.

49. Two main priorities identified in the area of community witness are helping congregations in understanding their neighbourhood as it is today and how to develop community witness among unchurched families.

50. Council notes the Priorities Committee's identification of the area of being active to bless the community in practical caring initiatives as one which requires particular focus in this season of the Church's witness. The Committee will reflect further on the issues which have surfaced in the area of congregational community witness and move towards resourcing congregations as they engage in this area.

51. The Committee oversees the *Impact* summer team programme. Helpful work has been undertaken to develop the processes of selection of venues and preparing and supporting team leaders and members. A more thoroughgoing review is planned during 2017/18 which will consider opportunities for expanding the types of teams that are offered.

STEPHEN RICHMOND, Convener

## PASTORAL CARE COMMITTEE

52. The Pastoral Care Committee continues to sow a vision for the pastoral life of the local congregation. What has become known as the 'Pastoral Life Triangle' encompasses a pastoral core of the framework for understanding life found in Scripture, a pastoral community, or environment, in which to support one another in the church along with a focus on specific pastoral care in response to particular situations of need.



53. One way in which this more holistic understanding of pastoral life is being promoted is through its inclusion in an updated version of the basic Pastoral Care Training Course. Regional Pastoral Care training, including this wider emphasis, has been delivered in Comber and Coleraine and was well supported in both venues. A DVD clip introducing the Pastoral Triangle into congregational thinking is also planned.

54. Having considered how best to build on the momentum around the issue of the Church and mental health raised by the previous *Breaking the Silence* initiative, the Committee has focused on ways to envision and equip the local congregation in ministering to those suffering in this way. This important issue is now included as an element in regional pastoral care training. An extensive piece of work has also involved the compilation of useful websites, books, articles, basic information and providers of mental health services on the PCI website as a place to which those providing pastoral care can go for guidance and support. A Bible study and discussion guide with DVD material for use in congregations is also in production.

55. Offering pastoral care to those who have been bereaved continues to be a focus for training. The Committee commissioned a reprint of the booklet, *Life after Loss: A Christian perspective on dealing with loss*, and commends it again to those offering pastoral care in such circumstances.

56. The Council's report to last year's General Assembly noted with regard to the *PCI Family Holiday* that, *'significant work remains to be done to create a sustainable funding model and to maximise the potential of the Holiday to supplement congregational social witness.'*

57. This year's Holiday was held from 17 to 21 April 2017 at the Share Activity Village, Lisnaskea. With the Council's active encouragement, the Organising Group have made significant efforts to better publicise the potential of this annual event for congregations as an opportunity to supplement and build upon their life and witness. Examples suggested included making use of the Holiday as an Easter week for the congregation, or subsidising families on the margins of church life to attend with others from the congregation to build on relationships established in a mission setting. At time of writing, it appears that very few congregations have responded to these ideas.

58. The Council hopes that an ongoing financial deficit accruing to this event has been significantly reduced by new budgetary arrangements. Nevertheless, without the continuing generous subsidy of the *Presbyterian Children's Society* enabling around a dozen families to attend free of charge each year, the event would not be viable.

59. The Council will continue to both build on the innovations introduced to maximise the potential of this initiative and reflect on its contribution to supplementing the life and witness of local congregations.

60. A *Pastoral Care and Counselling Task Group* was assigned the responsibility of addressing the resolution of last year's General Assembly with regard to *PCI Counselling*. The remit given by the Assembly was as follows:

That the Council for Congregational Life and Witness is directed to appoint a Pastoral Care and Counselling Task Group to:

- (i) further engage with the Association of Christian Counsellors and explore alternative options for accreditation of a denominational counselling service by December 2016;

- (ii) examine the support needed, and that can be provided, to enhance the provision of pastoral care in congregations;
- (iii) explore other bodies to which those requiring support additional to congregational pastoral care might be signposted;
- (iv) receive a final report from the PCI Counselling Review Task Group carefully detailing the nature of the service provided in support of congregational pastoral care by PCI Counselling up to this point.

61. The Committee notes the diligent, demanding and detailed work undertaken by the Task Group in a very short period of time to fulfil this remit. This has involved engaging with, among others, the Association of Christian Counsellors, the General Assembly Solicitor and Insurer, those who provide pastoral care in congregations and the PCI Counselling team.

62. The Task Group has left no stone unturned in examining the implications of continued affiliation of *PCI Counselling* to the *Association of Christian Counsellors (ACC)* following their issue of a Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy, the wider implications of which call into question the compatibility of the Association's position with that of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Having failed to receive clarification on a number of issues raised in correspondence with the ACC, the Task Group further engaged with the Association by sending a *Presbyterian Church in Ireland position paper on the principles and practice of PCI Counselling with regard to the issue of same-sex orientation with particular reference to the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK issued to counselling services affiliated to the ACC*. An invitation for office bearers of ACC to meet with representatives of the Task Group to discuss the issue was also extended. Again, correspondence failed to gain satisfactory clarity on some of the issues involved and the offer of a meeting was declined by ACC.

63. At its meeting of 23 November 2016, the Pastoral Care Committee recommended that, *'the Task Group carefully detail the benefits to PCI Counselling provided by an affiliating body and only pursue affiliation if it proves absolutely necessary for governance purposes and legal protection of the service.'* This recommendation was approved by a full meeting of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness on 29 November 2016.

64. Investigation of these issues with the General Assembly Solicitor and Insurance provider showed that no governance purpose was provided and no legal protection accrued from affiliation of the counselling service. Consequently, it was decided not to pursue affiliation of any future service.

65. The Task Group received the latest statistics and snapshot of the provision of support offered by *PCI Counselling*. It also commissioned a survey to examine the nature of support desired by congregations to supplement pastoral care in areas which are complex and require specialist attention. A range of those directly involved in providing pastoral care in congregations across all nineteen presbyteries were contacted and invited to respond to a brief questionnaire. Results showed that a counselling style ministry was the preferred option. The strong opinion was also that any future provision be more closely tied to ongoing pastoral support provided by the congregation.

66. While this work was continuing, the counselling service was closed for a short period because of a lack of clarity around the restriction placed on counsellors by the ACC's Memorandum of Understanding. Further work by the Task Group enabled the reopening of the Counselling service in January 2017 by providing safe boundaries within which it could operate during the period of continued uncertainty and instability while these matters were under investigation.

67. The Task Group brought all of these strands of its work together in the compilation of a *Framework of Theology, Ethics and Good Practice (Appendix 2)* along with a series of recommendations to move towards a re-launch of the denomination's counselling ministry in September 2017. Its report and recommendations, as set out below, were approved and adopted by the Pastoral Care Committee at its meeting of 9 March 2017 and by a full meeting of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness on 14 March 2017. Steps are already in motion to implement the necessary pieces to complete this jigsaw.

- (a) That future affiliation of the denominational counselling ministry be not pursued as it is not absolutely necessary for governance purposes and legal protection of the service.
- (b) That present affiliation to the Association of Christian Counsellors be allowed to lapse in January 2018 and that a brief letter of thanks be sent to the Association for the ways in which they have contributed to the ministry of PCI Counselling since its inception in 1992.
- (c) That the *PCI Counselling Framework of Theology, Ethics and Good Practice* be approved as the foundational document for the denominational counselling ministry.
- (d) That any benefits previously provided by being an affiliated service be provided for. These include:-
  - (i) Counselling code of ethics and practice - to be subsumed into the PCI Counselling Framework of Theology, Ethics and Good Practice.
  - (ii) Complaints procedure – that further work to be undertaken.
  - (iii) Training – that this continues to be drawn from a range of providers.
- (e) That the denominational counselling ministry be promoted primarily, but not exclusively, as supplementing congregational pastoral provision and linked more closely to developments in that area through the Pastoral Care Committee. That this include offering clients the option of their Minister, or other congregational agent of pastoral support, being informed of the progress of their counselling process.
- (f) That the following pieces of work be undertaken to prepare for a re-launch of the service in September 2017
  - (i) Consideration of new name
  - (ii) Complete rebranding and rewrite of publicity material and Operating Manual
  - (iii) Communication with all presently involved in PCI Counselling as to the details of the Council decision with an opt in or opt out date of 31st May 2017
  - (iv) Approval of training schedule reflective of new service for 2017-2019

- (v) Refresh of application and interview process for counsellors, including decision concerning necessity of requirement of membership of a PCI congregation for any counsellors recruited after 31 May 2017
- (vi) Publicity to recruit new counsellors
- (vii) Re-launch of service with careful consideration of volunteer starting capacity
- (g) That the Pastoral Care and Counselling Task Group stay in place to sign off on the pieces of work contained in section (e) above.
- (h) That the following timetable of key actions be progressed.
  - (i) Email communication with counselling team immediately following Council meeting
  - (ii) Meeting for counselling team called before Easter 2017
  - (iii) Paragraph included in Council Report to General Assembly detailing steps taken with the PCI Counselling Framework of Theology, Ethics and Good Practice appended
  - (iv) Further Task Group meeting to sign off on matters arising under section (f) above
  - (v) Relaunch of the denominational counselling ministry in September 2017

68. The last two years have proved a long and challenging journey for everyone involved with this issue and the Pastoral Care Committee and Council as a whole have been conscious of, and grateful for, the patience and prayers of all involved in the delivery of *PCI Counselling*. Throughout, there has been a constant awareness of the delicate balances to be struck between the needs of helping clients, remaining true to the teaching of Scripture, ensuring the necessary protections for those involved in counselling and arriving at a sustainable future service. The Pastoral Care Committee and Council are pleased to have found a way to navigate a very complex situation to achieve appropriate provision of a ministry to help individuals who need the kind of specialist support which is beyond that which any congregation is equipped to offer through the normal practice of pastoral care. Both believe that the work of the Task Group provides a balanced foundation upon which the denominational counselling ministry can go forward with the confidence of clients, counsellors and the whole Church.

ALISTAIR BILL, Convener

## WORSHIP COMMITTEE

69. The present phase of the Committee's work is focused on delivering a number of key resources and events.

70. Work continues on the *Encounter* DVD Bible study resource. Aiming to refocus the congregational worship conversation on substance rather than style, this resource will equip congregations to enable members to reflect on what it means to participate in worship and to benefit from a greater awareness of the flow of the different elements involved.

71. The Committee partnered with the Council for Training in Ministry to deliver an event on 10 May 2017 exploring Reformed Worship in contemporary expression.

72. *Worship Academy* will take place from 17-19 August 2017. Based in Wellington Presbyterian Church, Ballymena, participants will be developed in their musical gifting, theological appreciation and ability to lead in congregational worship. It was particularly pleasing to have participants in last year's *Worship Academy* lead praise at Youth Night. The Committee identifies this as a crucial channel of leadership development in this area of church life.

73. The *Big Sing* planned for Saturday 16th September 2017 in Assembly Buildings, Belfast, will take up a harvest theme and offer congregations a way of intentionally developing their Harvest Services or additional gatherings. As in previous events, a pack of materials is now available in advance of the event to allow organists, musical directors, choirs and musicians to familiarise themselves with the compositions before coming on the day. Packs are available from the Council office.

74. The Committee is beginning to explore the area of models for corporate congregational prayer. A discussion of this issue at a meeting of the full Council has provided feedback to build upon.

75. One initial response to stimulate the development of congregational prayer was a partnership with the Good Book Company to offer their book, *Five Things to Pray for Your Church* by Rachel Jones at a discounted price. This has proved a very worthwhile initiative with so many congregations taking up the offer that the publisher needed to authorise a further print run of the book.

76. The Committee will continue to explore ways to promote and resource congregations for prayer.

JAMES HYNDMAN, Convener

## **YOUTH, CHILDREN'S AND FAMILY STRATEGY AND COORDINATION COMMITTEE**

77. The Committee has begun to outwork the Youth, Children's and Family strategy outlined in last year's report to the General Assembly.

78. The major focus has fallen on developing the area of reaching unchurched children and young people. The Committee recognised that this is a necessary parallel and counter-balance to the *Close to Home* emphasis which falls largely on discipling those who grow up in covenant families.

79. Focus Groups with those in PCI congregations who work in this area of mission, and with a range of parachurch agencies, helped shape content and format for the *Reach* morning conference held on 20 May 2017 in Assembly Buildings, Belfast. The Committee plans to reflect on feedback from this event, draw upon material recorded and shape a series of next steps to encourage congregations in this aspect of witness.

80. The Committee has also received reports on ongoing resourcing of the church in the area of family ministry and is working towards producing material to stimulate congregational approaches to young adults' ministry. It has received

an initial report on opportunities and ideas for developing ministry in schools. These will be areas of particular focus during 2017/18.

81. The Council approved a partnership with the *Presbyterian Children's Society* at its November Meeting. This has led to a range of outcomes including, inclusion of the Society's work in denominational prayer resources, publicising its missional potential in Council communications to congregations and collaboration on the content of a card highlighting its ministry to key congregational workers.

82. A paper exploring the potential and contribution of *Youth Link* in supporting congregational youth work has been commissioned. Ways of maintaining regular communication with major providers of children's and youth work in congregations who operate under the auspices of Kirk Session are being explored.

83. Large Council run events such as *Kids Big Day Out*, *MAD* and *Youth Night* provide important supplementary ministry to that which takes place week by week in local congregations. Organising Groups are continuing to develop resources that accompany the events. In this way, congregations who participate can derive further benefit from the attendance of children and young people through using materials that harness the momentum of the events in an ongoing way back in their children's or youth ministry.

84. *Youth Night* will be held on Saturday 10 June 2017. The theme is '(un) faithful' and will unpack the message of the book of Hosea.

85. Following last year's review, the *SPUD* initiative has been reshaped for 2016/17. A new format saw a well attended Youth Assembly meeting in Assembly Buildings on 28 January 2017. Topics for discussion this year included social media, mental health and the Church and young people. The *SPUD* Working Group has been developing the feedback from the Youth Assembly with a focus on a variety of ways to highlight and embed their perspectives in both congregational life and the policy shaping life of the denomination. Council welcome this creativity of approach as an important contribution to an emerging wider picture of finding viable vehicles for youth and young adult participation in the Church at all levels.

86. A *SPUD* residential is another new element. Running during Assembly week, it is intended to enable and encourage greater participation by *SPUD* delegates in the overall life of the Assembly and its debates.

87. The Council will take stock of these new aspects of the *SPUD* initiative after the Assembly, but are encouraged by the early signs of renewal.

88. Alongside its strategy role, this Committee is charged with ensuring that elements of ministry and mission to children, youth, young adults and families are coordinating with, and being incorporated into, the core areas of Council output in discipleship, global mission involvement, leadership, outreach, pastoral care and worship. The Committee has conducted an overview of Council agendas and outputs and is satisfied that the key strategic elements of children's, youth, young adult and family life and witness are emerging and taking shape organically within the Council's overall work.

COLIN MORRISON, Convener

## WOMEN'S MINISTRY STRATEGY AND COORDINATION COMMITTEE

89. Following the approval of last year's General Assembly of the new structures for incorporating women's ministry and Presbyterian Women into the work of the Council, the Women's Ministry Strategy and Coordination Committee and the *PW Panel* have quickly established a shared vision and close working relationships.

90. A joint Away Day explored models for women's ministry emerging in congregations. A vision for *Presbyterian Women* as part of a larger women's ministry and integrated more closely with the overall life and witness of the local congregation was shared at the PW Forum on 10 September 2016 and then further disseminated via PW LINKs. The potential of this vision has been welcomed and gained widespread acceptance. First steps in working it out are now beginning to be taken.

91. For the Women's Ministry Strategy and Coordination Committee, a crucial first step will be to sow a vision for a variety of models of women's ministry at congregational level. They plan to do so by producing a short DVD clip aimed at starting a discussion in congregations about ways of developing and integrating women's ministry.

92. It is important to stress that this resource is not just for women in the congregation, *PW Groups* or those involved in other expressions of women's ministry. It will be most productive when it births a conversation engaging both those involved in women's ministry and the Kirk Session and minister. By starting a conversation about an approach to women's ministry which draws upon and re-enforces the priorities of the whole congregation, the potential of the contribution of women's ministry will be maximised.

93. The *PW Panel* is charged with the oversight and development of *Presbyterian Women* in tandem with the overall emphases of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness. Early developments in this partnership include a wider consideration of the Council's emerging direction in choosing annual *PW* themes, an ongoing re-imagining of the annual 'Inspirations' resources pack, and the development of the evening programme of the Annual Meeting.

94. The *PW theme* for 2017/18 is 'Grow and bear fruit'. It offers a very obvious link to the Council's fruitful congregations theme.

95. The *PW Project* for 2017/18 is to support the Deaconess Training Fund. Again, given the valuable work of deaconesses in the life and witness of both congregations and the ministry and mission of the wider Church, an obvious link to key congregational emphases suggests itself. The continued appreciation of the whole Church is due to *PW Groups* for their significant and generous annual contribution to the ministry and mission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland at home and overseas.

96. Where possible, Council and *Presbyterian Women* encourage congregations to maximise the opportunities of this increasingly coordinated approach to develop and re-enforce the integration and contribution of women's ministry in the life and witness of the whole congregation.

97. The Council pays tribute to the work of those involved in the Committee, *PW Panel* and the various other groups that oversee all aspects of the work of the organisation. They have shown vision, flexibility and enthusiasm in realising the potential of the new arrangements.

VALERIE STEWART, Convener

### MANAGING A MATURING HARVEST

98. In its first two years, the Council has quickly built and gained momentum in a wide range of areas. Its work has significantly grown and expanded.

99. It is exciting to see the way in which congregations are engaging with, and appreciating, so many initiatives which seem to be ‘scratching where they itch’. A rough calculation shows that 293 out of 537 congregations have engaged with at least one programme, event or initiative run by the Council in the last year. Many have engaged in multiple ways. This figure does not include use of resources or the work of individual staff members with single congregations.

#### **Bigger does not always mean better**

100. The Council’s expansive remit provides both opportunity and challenge. The opportunity is to coordinate previously disconnected elements of life and witness and react to congregational need in a more coordinated way. The challenge is that the necessary coordination requires careful prioritisation and alignment. Such a process is no more easily achievable, or popular, at Council level than it is in any congregation. Particularly in the aftermath of a significant restructuring, it is challenging. Nevertheless, it will be a necessary part of the next phase of the Council’s life for at least four reasons.

101. Firstly, because congregations are increasingly reporting that they are overwhelmed by the amount of messages coming from the Council. While what is offered is a menu to choose from rather than a diet to be swallowed whole, Council is aware of the unintended negative effect of overload on already stretched congregations.

102. Secondly, administrative capacity is limited. Despite the outstanding ministry of the administrative staff team, it cannot be expected to ever-expand its capacity to deliver more and more programmes and events.

103. Thirdly, Executive Staff, who are the Council’s primary resource, will best be utilised in the service of the Church by delivering on carefully identified essential priorities, rather than ranging across a wide variety of areas without ever embedding any of them in congregational life and witness.

104. Fourthly, the Council will not be able to achieve the necessary coordination and integration of key themes intended by restructuring without slowing down to create space for conversations to identify overlaps.

#### **Pruning for priorities**

105. Inevitably, we are entering into a season which requires careful pruning so that what the Council does *‘might be even more fruitful’* (John 15:2). If everything is a priority, then nothing is a priority.

106. The Council set out the following framework to last year’s Assembly as a means of forming an agenda and way of setting priorities on a year to year basis.



**(a) Framework for forming an agenda**

This will emerge from the following perspectives in interaction with one another:

- (i) A sharper focus in the primary role of resourcing congregations and subsidiary role of supplementing congregational activities
- (ii) A fuller picture of the present with an eye to participation in the existing programme with the number of congregations involved as the key focus
- (iii) A fresh look at presbytery engagement feedback, developing Committee themes, converging and diverging themes, the need to give a lead towards necessary change and making meaning and signalling shifts in the landscape of congregational life and witness
- (iv) A realistic vision which maps types of congregation, operates within capacity to fulfil priorities, acknowledges changes in rhythms of church life, sets expectations and offers a balanced programme of bigger and smaller events.

**(b) The next phase of the Council's life and agenda setting**

This will involve a gradual rebalancing of Council outputs, retaining a wide range of possible resourcing options, but also the flexibility to choose particular elements on a year to year basis.

107. In addition to this framework, the General Assembly's Priorities Committee has been working to identify overarching priorities for all the Councils and aspects of the denomination's work. This will add an additional, 'bigger picture', filter to the Council's agenda setting.

108. The Council welcomes this development and notes that a similar series of priorities are emerging from the Council's own deliberations, its engagement with Presbyteries and the Priorities Committee process. This can be no accident. It represents a strong, collectively discerned sense of the direction in which God by His Spirit seems to be leading us.

109. There is a moment not to be missed, in which we need to allow God to re-shape congregational life and witness for the challenges of the place and time in which we find ourselves. The ability of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to offer appropriate support to that process will ultimately rise or fall by our collective willingness to set and trim our sails to catch the wind of the Spirit.

110. Up until now the Events, Training and Resources Panel has been helping the Council develop and improve its effectiveness in programming, event management and coordination. The Council now envisages that it will have a key role in helping prioritise and shape the annual agenda of work.

## **WEEDS APPEARING AMONG THE WHEAT – OBSTACLES TO DEEPENING IMPACT**

### **Engaging Presbyteries**

111. The way in which the Council has sought to listen to the Church has been crucial and will continue to be so. This happens through facilitative

methods of conducting Council and Committee meetings, informally through staff conversations with those ministering in a variety of situations, but also more formally through engagement with presbyteries.

112. At last year's General Assembly the following resolution was passed, aimed at building upon Council engagements with all nineteen Presbyteries during 2015/16:

*That the General Assembly instruct the Council of Congregational Life and Witness to send each Presbytery the feedback from their engagement event and request that Presbyteries consider its content and engage with the Council in shaping priorities for future support and resourcing in their area.*

113. At time of writing four presbyteries have responded with helpful feedback and suggestions of how the Council might provide relevant, focused, support and encouragement to congregations in their area. Conversations with these presbyteries have already started and it is hoped this will lead to specific and locally shaped input from the Council in at least three presbyteries in 2017/18.

114. Council recognises that presbyteries are increasingly burdened by the demands of managing multiple complex vacancies, commissions, consultations and a host of other basic responsibilities of oversight of congregations within their bounds. However, many of the activities listed above are reactive, rather than proactive. The Council desires to work in partnership with presbyteries to make it as easy as possible for them to develop their role as regional hubs for envisioning, equipping and enabling of congregations under their care. Inevitably, if a way to make this happen cannot be found, the Council will find itself working directly with congregations and on a regional, rather than presbytery, basis. Both eventualities would be unfortunate, in that they would further dilute our Presbyterian polity and identity and rob presbytery of the encouragement gained from proactively developing ministry and mission within their bounds.

115. To attempt a more focused and easily accessible engagement with presbyteries, Resolution 2 asks that the General Assembly instruct the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to proactively engage with at least three presbyteries per year on a rotational basis to provide an agreed and accessible programme to envision and equip congregations within their bounds. If agreed, the Council will proactively commence this process in 2018/19.

### **Structures and participation**

116. The Council has a vast number of Committees, Panels, Task Groups and Organising Groups. Having operated this system for over two years, it is questionable whether the present structure best serves delivery of the Council's remit to support congregations in their life and witness. The difficulty of breaking out of silos is in part responsible for the mushrooming of Council material and messages highlighted above. As levels of participation in the central structures of the Church continue to fall, the task of recruiting members to this number of bodies is cumbersome and burdensome. The nature of ongoing participation required by Committee membership, in comparison with more focused and time-limited input to a Task Group undertaking a specific piece of work, does not help make the former an attractive proposition or engaging experience.

117. It is also noticeable that a number of key convenerships have simultaneously fallen vacant. These include convenership of the Council, and of

the Worship, Leadership and Discipleship Committees. The convenership of the Global Mission Involvement Committee has previously changed hands. All of this has happened within three years of what were anticipated as five year terms of service.

118. Conveners have stepped down for a variety of reasons and the Council records its thanks to all those who have served in this way and wishes them well for the new priorities of the next season of their ministries in the service of their congregations and other aspects of the work of the wider Church. However, filling the vacancies has become an increasingly difficult task.

119. As a consequence of these observations of structural impediment to the work, Resolution 3a asks the General Assembly to encourage the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to engage with the General Council to reflect on the structure of Committees, Panels, Task Groups and Organising Groups that best ensures appropriate accountability and ability to deliver its remit to envision, equip and enable congregations for their life and witness.

### **Communication issues**

120. The last year has shown the Council's ability to develop its remit effectively being hampered in two further significant ways. Firstly, there is a need to improve the PCI database so that all future communication to congregations need not be directed through the minister. Secondly, there is a need to have an effective online booking and registration facility for Council events.

121. Both of these issues fall under the remit of the General Council which is tasked with ensuring that support services are being provided to the Councils. efficiently and effectively and dealing with any related policy issues. For the moment, activities are bounded by the constraints of the existing situation.

122. Therefore Resolution 3(b) requests that the General Assembly encourage the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to engage with the General Council to take necessary steps to improve mediums of communication with congregations and facilities for online booking and registration.

### **A coordinated approach to stimulating congregational prayer**

123. Paragraph 74 above highlights an important Council discussion about stimulating congregational prayer. The general issue has been passed to the Worship Committee for further development. However, it is also observable that there is a lack of coordination and a mushrooming of information for prayer going to congregations via a variety of channels and mediums from the Councils of the General Assembly.

124. Having inherited oversight of the compilation of the annual *Prayer Handbook* last year, the Council observes that, as only part of the vast amount of requests for prayer for the work of the wider Church generated for congregational use, it is necessary to review the effectiveness of this situation.

125. Resolution 4 asks that the General Assembly encourage the General Council, on its behalf, to appoint a Task Group, involving representation from the Council for Congregational Life and Witness and other relevant bodies to examine streamlined options for providing information for congregational prayer for denominational mission and ministry and bring recommendations to the 2018 General Assembly.

## SEED FALLING ON GOOD SOIL – RIPENING THE FRUITFUL CONGREGATIONS THEME

### Ripening the fruitfulness agenda – The Growing in Fruitfulness Initiative

126. The Council notes the Priorities Committee’s focus on investing in the revitalisation and fruitfulness of the Church’s life and witness in changing and challenging times. It enthusiastically welcomes the opportunity to deepen and embed this theme in congregational life and witness as the overall focus of its work.

### A vision for small and fruitful

127. Times are both changing and challenging for congregations. The Council has undertaken an examination of existing congregational capacity for developing life and witness across the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The aim has been to gain an impression of overall congregational strength to express God’s life and witness as the local body of Christ so as to more realistically envision, equip and enable the denomination for ministry and mission. A further breakdown of the analysis by presbytery will help nuance content and application of regional training and events.

128. Acknowledging that none of the existing range of available statistics tell the whole story of any congregation, and that they reflect a varying degree of accuracy, the figure for *Attendance at One Communion* has been selected. The thinking is that it is closer to reflecting the ‘core membership’ of a congregation than the figures for Families, Contributors to Weekly Freewill Offering, Persons of All Ages or numbers on Communion Roll.

129. ‘Core membership’ is understood as those who regularly attend Sunday morning worship and either presently serve in the activities of congregational life and witness, or are most likely to be able and willing to do so.

130. It is recognised that this analysis does not take account of age profile and is no indicator of the spiritual temperature of a congregation. Neither can it account for an increasing trend in a few areas to actively associate with the life and work of a congregation but not become a communicant member. In some other areas, the figure for attendance at one communion exaggerates the size of the congregational core due to a culture of only attending on communion Sundays. Where necessary, local knowledge of congregations and presbyteries can account for these peculiarities.

131. While acknowledging these limitations, the Council believes this analysis represents an important snapshot of the configuration of congregations within the denomination and indicator of present capacity for ministry and mission. As such, it gives a sense of the variety of starting points for reshaping congregational life and witness for the changing challenges we face, a necessary qualifier of unrealistic expectations, but also an appreciation of what exists to build upon.

132. Using 2015 statistics, the denomination as a whole shows a ‘congregational core’ of 60,967.

The Presbytery breakdown is as follows:

Ards	5,109
Armagh	3,449
Ballymena	4,922
Belfast North	2,769
Belfast South	2,240
Belfast East	3,681
Carrickfergus	2,807
Coleraine and Limavady	5,004
Derry and Donegal	5,528
Down	2,645
Dromore	2,939
Dublin and Munster	1,571
Iveagh	2,698
Monaghan	1,591
Newry	2,073
Omagh	3,445
Route	3,052
Templepatrick	2,678
Tyrone	2,766

At congregational level, the following picture emerges:

<b>Congregational Core</b>	<b>Congregations</b>	<b>%</b>
Under 75	<b>190</b>	<b>35</b>
75-149	<b>188</b>	<b>35</b>
150-224	<b>89</b>	<b>17</b>
225-299	<b>38</b>	<b>7</b>
300-374	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>
375+	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>
Unrecorded	<b>15</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>537</b>	

133. These figures show 35% of congregations evidencing a 'congregational core' of under 75 members. A further 35% show a figure of under 149 members. If the Council's support for congregational life and witness is to be contextually appropriate and realistic of capacity to deliver on the ground, then it will have to grapple with a significant part of its work involving encouragement of small congregations for fruitful life and witness. These congregations include rural and urban situations, those that have always been small and those who have become smaller, those whose demographic reality means they will always be small and those whose changing context for mission evidences significant potential for numerical growth.

134. The numerical size of a congregation or the scale of its programme of activities in ministry and mission is not, in itself, an indicator of fruitfulness. Large, medium and small sized congregations can all be intentional about being fruitful in their own contexts. They can aim to fully utilise their God-given capacity for deepening their life together and being effective witnesses in their sphere of influence.

135. Unhelpful comparisons and unrealistic expectations do not create environments of hopefulness, rather they usually result in sowing unnecessary discouragement. Scripture brims with examples of how God's Kingdom grows from small beginnings. Council believes this to be a particular Kingdom perspective that needs to be further explored and developed for the present encouragement of many congregations.

136. An initial Council discussion has begun to identify the challenges and opportunities of being fruitful in a small congregation.

137. The Council has authorised a particular piece of work under the theme 'a vision for small and fruitful'. It trusts that, under God, it will nurture small congregations in identifying encouraging steps towards more fruitful life and witness.

### **Congregations entering a phase of new Ministry**

138. Another area in which the Council is increasingly finding itself responding to requests for support is where congregations are entering a phase of new ministry. Particular challenges appear to be arising around the changes that come with the commencement of a new ministry of Word and sacrament. This season manifests the difficulty of a transition which involves both the ending of a ministry with which congregations have become familiar and the opportunity provided to refresh and renew vision for the future. This 'in between' space seems to be presenting itself as both fertile ground for necessary change, but also rocky ground in terms of genuinely embedding it.

139. Embedding the kind of culture change required in congregations for the changing and challenging times in which the Church finds itself is a recurring theme in the Council's conversation with leaders. Moving from envisioning for a different way of seeing things, to equipping for a different way of doing things, to enabling a different way of being church is not easy, quick or straightforward. It requires extraordinary grace, wisdom, patience and resilience.

140. To begin to better understand this dynamic, a focus group of ministers in their first charge has been arranged for 25 May 2017, with the accent on listening to one another and trying to discern what can be learned about the journey of congregational change. It is hoped to continue this conversation with a view to exploring how the Council can be of practical assistance and support in this particular phase of congregational life. One emerging possibility is in the potential application of the *Growing in Fruitfulness* material.

### **The Growing in Fruitfulness initiative**

141. In its report to last year's Assembly, the Council committed itself to continuing to find ways of developing, articulating and cultivating the Fruitful Congregations theme at all levels of Church life.

142. A one year initiative, under the banner, *Growing in Fruitfulness*, was rolled out through twelve regional training nights offering congregations suggestions of how they might use a mixture of flexible materials for prayer, sermons and Bible studies to introduce the theme. A variety of ways to engage whole congregations in discerning God's priorities for the next season of their church life and witness offered a way of focusing congregational energy. The Council staff also provide signposting to ideas and stories to enable congregations to implement the development of cultures and practices which, under God, begin to prepare the ground for a local expression of growing fruitfulness. All of the materials can be viewed online on the PCI website at [www.presbyterianireland.org/fruitfulcongregations](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/fruitfulcongregations)

143. The Council also committed last year to set *'itself to be a learner in this initiative. Rather than anticipate what its longer term strategy should be, it will engage in a period of reflection on learning gained through partnering with congregations in the initiative before consideration of next steps.'* It is grateful for what it has learned from the thirty or so congregations which it has had the privilege of starting to journey with in this way.

144. One possible application of the model and material suggests itself in the specific circumstances of the period following the establishment of a new ministry referenced above. It may prove particularly useful in helping a congregation and new minister to focus the momentum arising from a new phase of life and witness in a number of collaboratively discerned areas. The material and process offered by the initiative would lend themselves to a Council partnership with congregations in which the latter would work through the preaching and teaching resources provided, allowing the Council to offer focused input at the point of facilitating members in choosing priority areas for the cultivation of fruitful practices of ministry and mission. The Council looks forward to further exploring this possibility in the months ahead.

### **A Framework for Partnerships for enabling Congregations in their Life and Witness**

145. The Council has discussed the desirability of identifying a limited number of partnerships with other organisations which would provide specific enabling for congregations in specialist areas of their life and witness in which the Council does not have capacity to develop expertise.

146. The following framework, defining and setting out requirements for partnership and a range of ways of outworking such relationships is offered:

#### **Definition of a Partner Organisation**

147. A partner organisation is one which supplements the provision of the Council for Congregational Witness by sharing specific, specialist support in enabling congregations in their life or witness.

148. Requirements for entering into partnership:

- (a) The partner organisation's correspondence with the primary doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
- (b) The partner organisation's ability to offer support at congregational level for the life and witness of local church ministry and mission.

- (c) The partner organisation’s provision of a specialism in ministry or mission which complements, supplements or augments congregational enabling offered by the Council for Congregational Life and Witness.
  - (d) The proposal for partnership be presented to a meeting of the Council of Congregational Life and Witness for approval and reported to the General Assembly.
  - (e) The partnership is terminable by either party at any time.
149. Potential outworking of partnerships:
- (a) Partnership on specific projects and/or pieces of work.
  - (b) Inclusion of congregationally focused projects and/or pieces of work in Council communication.
  - (c) Inclusion of congregationally focused projects and/or pieces of work in Council prayer points.
150. Resolution 1 asks that the General Assembly welcome this framework for partnership working.

## CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS

### APPENDIX 1

**Overview of main activities, training and events offered by the Council during 2016/17 in core areas of Congregational Life and Witness**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Date(s)</b>
PW Forum	Assembly Buildings	10 September 2016
Close to Home Launch	Assembly Buildings	21 September 2016
Commission to Care	Assembly Buildings	24 September 2016
FFP People in Focus	Assembly Buildings	24 September 2016
Children’s Ministry Course	Union Theological College	September to December 2016
Youth Ministry Course	Union Theological College	September 2016 – March 2017
Disciple Makers Network	Assembly Buildings	A series of 4 meetings September 2016 – March 2017
Disciple Makers Network	Ballygawley Presbyterian	A series of 4 meetings September 2016 – March 2017
Pastoral Care Training	1st Comber Presbyterian	1 October 2016



Road Trip	2nd Randalstown	6 October 2016
Handling the Word	Union Theological College	A series of 6 evenings October/November 2016
Road Trip	Exodus, Londonderry	13 October 2016
Road Trip	Ballygawley Presbyterian	20 October 2016
Elders' Roadshow	Harmony Hill Presbyterian	20 October 2016
MAD Weekend	Ulster University, Coleraine	24-30 October 2016
Growing in Fruitfulness (Southern)	Abbey Presbyterian, Dublin	8 November 2016
Growing in Fruitfulness (Belfast)	Cooke Centenary Presbyterian	10 November 2016
Youth Ministry Course Residential	Castlewellan Castle	11-13 November 2016
Growing in Fruitfulness (Border)	1st Armagh Presbyterian	15 November 2016
Growing in Fruitfulness (Antrim)	Greystone Road Presbyterian	17 November 2016
Transform on the Road	Strand Road, Londonderry	18 November 2016
Growing in Fruitfulness (Central)	1st Comber Presbyterian	22 November 2016
Growing in Fruitfulness (North West)	Main Street, Garvagh Presbyterian	24 November 2016
Transform on the Road	Monaghan	25 November 2016
Growing in Fruitfulness (Southern)	Abbey Presbyterian, Dublin	26 January 2017
SPUD Big Gathering	Assembly Buildings	28 January 2017
Summer Impact Team Leaders' Training	Assembly Building	4 February 2017
PW Forum	Assembly Buildings	4 February 2017
Growing in Fruitfulness (Belfast)	Cooke Centenary Presbyterian	9 February 2017
Growing in Fruitfulness (Antrim)	Greystone Road Presbyterian	21 February 2017
Growing in Fruitfulness (Central)	2nd Comber Presbyterian	23 February 2017
Growing in Fruitfulness (Border)	1st Armagh Presbyterian	28 February 2017

Growing in Fruitfulness (North West)	Main Street, Garvagh Presbyterian	2 March 2017
Overflow Evangelism conference	Assembly Buildings	9 March 2017
Transform	Crescent Arts Centre, Belfast	7-8 April 2017
Prepared to Go	Assembly Building	8 April 2017
PCI Family Holiday	Share Centre, Lisnaskea	17-21 April 2017
PW Annual Meeting	Assembly Buildings	4 May 2017
Kids' Big Day Out	Wellington Presbyterian	13 May 2017
Ministry Certificates Graduation	Knock Presbyterian	17 May 2017
Reach	Assembly Buildings	20 May 2017
SPUD Assembly Residential	Derryvolgie Hall	5-8 June 2017
Youth Night	Assembly Buildings	10 June 2017
Full-time Workers' residential	Carrickdale	14-15 June 2017
Impact Training Day	Assembly Buildings	17 June 2017
Teams Commissioning Service	Assembly Buildings	17 June 2017
Impact Summer Team	Ballyweaney	1-9 July 2017
Impact Summer Team	Mullingar	7-16 July 2017
Impact Summer Team	Donegal Town	15-23 July 2017
Impact Summer Team	Abbey, Monkstown	22-30 July 2017
Impact Summer Team	Seaview	29 July-6 August 2017
Impact Summer Team	Whitehouse	5-13 August 2017
Impact Summer Team	St Andrew's, Belfast	5-13 August 2017
Ignite Team	Romania	10-22 August 2017
Impact Summer Team	Friendship House	12-19 August 2017
Impact Summer Team	Dungannon	12-19 August 2017
Worship Academy	Wellington Presbyterian	17-19 August 2017
Impact Summer Team	Grange	12-20 August 2017

## CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS

### APPENDIX 2

#### PCI Counselling Framework of Theology, Ethics and Practice

1. **A FRAMEWORK FOR THE MINISTRY OF PCI COUNSELLING**
  - 1.1 This document sets a framework within which the ministry of PCI Counselling will be provided. It seeks to ensure that:-
    - 1.1.1 It is informed by the doctrinal and ethical principles to which the Presbyterian Church in Ireland adheres. This is not to say that the Christian counsellor must explicitly advance all of these positions. It is to say that they cannot offer counselling which actively supports or encourages a client whose expressed wish is to be helped in a direction which is explicitly contrary to those principles.
    - 1.1.2 It locates PCI Counselling as primarily a supplement to the pastoral life of a congregation, providing a level of counselling expertise beyond the pastoral care normally offered by Ministers, Elders and Pastoral Care teams.
    - 1.1.3 It ensures that the service provided operates within generally recognised standards of counselling ethics and practice, as set out in section 6.
  - 1.2 The framework cannot address every situation or issue that may arise in the delivery of the ministry, but it offers boundaries within which the standards of the Church, the practice of counsellors and the wellbeing of clients can be respected and held in tension with integrity.
2. **FOUNDATIONS: DEFINING THE NATURE OF COUNSELLING OFFERED**
  - 2.1 In understanding the nature of the ministry provided, it is helpful to clarify the distinction between three things: (a) pastoral counselling; (b) formal Christian counselling; and (c) counselling undertaken by Christians.
  - 2.2 PCI Counselling is a form of (b) formal Christian Counselling.
  - 2.3 It differs from (a) pastoral counselling in at least three ways. Firstly, it is not counselling undertaken by a pastor or within a pastoral relationship. Secondly, it involves a level of expertise and knowledge which the pastor or pastoral counsellor may not possess. Thirdly, it proceeds by a method which is appropriate to a counselling service or relationship and not by methods which may be appropriate in pastoral counselling. We are aware that these statements are very general, subject to qualifications and make hard-and-fast distinctions which

do not always apply. However, our aim here is not to unpack them in detail; it is to state in general terms that, as a matter of principle, we distinguish between what we are calling pastoral counselling and what we are calling Christian counselling.

- 2.4 PCI Counselling also differs from (c), counselling undertaken by Christians. Broadly speaking, Christians operate both in distinctive ways and in ways which are in common with other people or bodies, who or which may not have a religious affiliation. By ‘counselling undertaken by Christians’, is understood a type of counselling which Christians may offer in common with others, which does not proceed from Christian principles and where Christian convictions have no bearing on the formal approach to counselling. Of course, in many cases, individual PCI Counsellors may operate in a way indistinguishable from other, including non-religious, counsellors. However, when PCI Counselling is considered as a specific institution or body set up by and in PCI, this means that it has a specific foundational theological basis.

### **3. THE FORMAL THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PCI COUNSELLING**

- 3.1 The formal theological basis for PCI Counselling is provided by the recognised standards of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as set out in *The Code, Chapter 1, Section 3, The Standards of the Church*.
- 3.2 Other documents approved by the General Assembly with doctrinal or ethical application to any particular issue that might arise in counselling, also act as guides to counselling boundaries and practice.

### **4. A CORE BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK FOR APPROACHING LIFE ISSUES**

- 4.1 The Council for Congregational Life and Witness, under which the ministry of PCI Counselling is offered, has adopted an overall core biblical framework for addressing pastoral life issues. Although the practice of pastoral care and counselling may be outworked by different methodology, the general framework within which they operate as expressions of Christian ministry is the same.
- 4.2 This core biblical framework is drawn from the plotline of the story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The key events framing Christian understanding of life issues are creation, fall, redemption and restoration. Each part of the Bible’s unfolding story informs Christian pastoral life and counselling. Essential applications of this framework include the following:
- 4.3 Creation. God made everything and it was good. He made human beings, male and female, in his image. We are relational beings because we are made in the image of God. People have great value because they were made by God. The creation accounts offer valuable insights into how God intended life and the world should be.
- 4.4 Fall. Humankind fell into sin and the resulting brokenness of the world is the reality in which we now live. This is the root cause of all human problems. Those problems fall into three general categories – they

could be the result of our own sin, the result of the sin of others, or simply the suffering associated with living in a fallen world that is not the direct result of our sin or the sin of others. In every case, Christians understand that life and the world is no longer the way it is supposed to be. The Bible's varied descriptions and depictions of sin and its effects offer valuable insights for Christian counselling.

- 4.5 Redemption. Salvation from sin and its effects is offered through the work of Christ on the cross. Christ's redemption enables the forgiveness of our sin. It empowers those who follow Christ to struggle against sin and its effects in their lives. Christ also helps us forgive others just as we have been forgiven. While full redemption from sin and its effects is not possible in this life, Christ's work offers the possibility of radical change through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- 4.6 Restoration. The Christian hope is that all things will finally be restored in Christ. Again, the Biblical picture of that restored life and world offer valuable insights into human wholeness and wellbeing that Christian counselling works towards.
- 4.7 In the ministry of Christian counselling we come not by ourselves but as representatives of Christ with the Holy Spirit at work in and through us. We come motivated by the love of God and with the benefit of the wisdom of His Word. We come recognising the deep realities of problems caused by living as fallen people in a fallen world. We come with the promise of transformation that Christ can bring to human situations. And we come with a sure and certain hope that the effects of sin, even if it is not fully erased now, will one day be gone when all things are restored by God.
- 4.8 While this framework will not be imposed on clients in a coercive or manipulative way, it offers core parameters of what it means to address the issues they raise within a context of Christian understanding.

## **5. PCI COUNSELLING AS A SUPPLEMENT TO CONGREGATIONAL PASTORAL LIFE**

- 5.1 The primary role of PCI Counselling is to offer a necessary, specialist, supplementary ministry to that delivered by congregations in their pastoral ministry or in mission to those encountered in their witness.
- 5.2 As such, while the two ministries are in many ways distinct, it is important to maintain a close relationship between them. Consequently, those clients referred by any congregation for counselling should be offered the option of their Minister, or other primary agent of pastoral support, being kept informed of the progress of their journey.
- 5.3 This may happen by the recipient of support keeping the Minister, or other primary agent of pastoral support, up to date themselves and/or allowing their counsellor to make suggestions as to what ongoing pastoral support they or the congregation could usefully offer. The content of any disclosure will be agreed with the client.
- 5.4 Should a client not want to take up the option of their Counsellor making direct contact with the Minister or other primary agent of pastoral support, their wishes will be respected and confidentiality observed.

## 6. FRAMEWORK OF COUNSELLING ETHICS AND GOOD PRACTICE

- 6.1 The following basic, recognised standards of counselling ethics and good practice shall be observed by all involved in the delivery of the ministry of PCI Counselling.
- 6.2 Counsellors will be appropriately trained to deliver the ministry provided.
- 6.3 Counsellor well-being, good practice and development.  
Counsellors will commit to:
  - 6.3.1 Only operating when they are physically, psychologically and spiritually fit to do so;
  - 6.3.2 Recognising and working within the limits of their competence;
  - 6.3.3 Ensuring accurate note taking and record keeping of counselling sessions;
  - 6.3.4 Making themselves available for regular supervision and support
  - 6.3.5 Regularly attending training and any updates on changes impacting the service provided;
  - 6.3.6 Complying with and operating within any legal requirements;
  - 6.3.7 Responding to any complaint and fully co-operating within any investigation procedure;
  - 6.3.8 Notifying PCI of any reason why they are not fit to practice.
- 6.4 Counsellor-Client Relationship.  
Counselling ministry depends upon establishing and maintaining trust and good relationships. To this end, counsellors shall commit to:
  - 6.4.1 Exhibiting essential qualities of respect, empathy, integrity, honesty, transparency, resilience and commitment to appropriate application of biblical wisdom, grace and truth;
  - 6.4.2 Supplying clear and transparent information about the service being provided, including the conditions under which the client or counsellor may terminate the service;
  - 6.4.3 Agreeing a clear contract establishing the boundaries of the counselling ministry to take place;
  - 6.4.4 Respecting privacy and confidentiality, while dealing appropriately with any situation in which clients may be in danger of causing harm to themselves or others or in which the law requires disclosure;
  - 6.4.5 Collaborating with clients and regularly reviewing the progress of the counselling process;
  - 6.4.6 Showing appropriate sensitivity to client culture, beliefs or understanding and avoiding coercive or manipulative approaches
  - 6.4.7 Being especially aware of those not well equipped to take decisions for themselves;
  - 6.4.8 Observing PCI's policies for protection of children and vulnerable adults;
  - 6.4.9 Working in the best interests of the client and minimising any distress, harm or suffering that may result unintentionally from the process;

- 6.4.10 Discussing with the client and obtaining their consent for any referral and subsequent disclosure of information, save in those situations when the law requires disclosure to be made.

## **COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS**

### **RESOLUTIONS**

1. That the General Assembly welcome the Framework for Partnerships for enabling congregations in their Life and Witness.
2. That the General Assembly instruct the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to proactively engage with at least three Presbyteries per year, on a rotational basis, to provide an agreed and accessible programme to envision and equip congregations within their bounds.
3. That the General Assembly encourage the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to engage with the General Council to:
  - (a) reflect on the structure of Committees, Panels, Task Groups and Organising Groups that best ensures appropriate accountability and ability to deliver its remit to envision, equip and enable congregations for their life and witness;
  - (b) identify and take the necessary steps to improve mediums of communication with congregations and facilities for online booking and registration.
4. That the General Assembly encourage the General Council, on its behalf, to appoint a Task Group, involving representation from the Council for Congregational Life and Witness and other relevant bodies, to examine streamlined options for providing information for congregational prayer for denominational mission and ministry and bring recommendations to the 2018 General Assembly.
5. That the Report of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness be received.

**FOR INFORMATION**

The following body is not under the control of the General Assembly. The report is for information only.

**PRESBYTERIAN CHILDREN'S SOCIETY**

*Dr Paul Gray (Executive Secretary) reports:*

1. The Presbyterian Children's Society exists to support Presbyterian children in Ireland. It works mainly through ministers to alleviate poverty and financial hardship for these children and their families. This is done mostly through regular and exceptional grants. The Society is currently assisting approximately 700 children in 370 families in over 200 congregations throughout Ireland.

2. The year 2016 was a significant one for the Society as it celebrated its 150th year. To mark this occasion a number of special events were organised and publications produced. Minister Simon Hamilton MLA opened the Society's exhibition 'Generations of Generosity' in the Linenhall Library and Minister Heather Humphreys TD launched the Society's DVD 'Taking the Edge Off'. In addition to these events there were regional events for the Society's secretaries, breakfast events for ministers, lectures, and a reunion of some of the 'girls' from Johnston House, the Society's children's home which closed in 1985. The year was very successful and culminated in a special Service of Thanksgiving and Celebration with the Moderator of the General Assembly and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young people.

3. The Society produced a range of new resources this year including a DVD which is available from the Society's website [[www.presbyterianchildrenssociety.org](http://www.presbyterianchildrenssociety.org)] and an information pack 'A Journey of Generosity and Giving through the Generations'. A history book on the Society was also published. All these resources are available from the Society and two sets of eleven pop up stands which tell the story of the Society over 150 years are available to congregations for loan.

4. Whilst the Society is not under the control of the General Assembly it works closely with the Church through its ministers. It is also working with relevant General Assembly Councils to ensure congregations have appropriate resources to equip them in helping families in financial need.

5. The Society's work is independently supported by Presbyterian congregations and the Society gives thanks to all those who support the Society in any way throughout the year. The Society also welcomes enquiries about how it might assist children and families in need within any Presbyterian congregation. Finally the Society commends its work for the continued prayerful and financial support of the Church.