

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 4

UNITED APPEAL COMMITTEE

The Committee has met on three occasions during 2021:

- On 4 February 2021 to consider the response to the 2020 Appeal
- On 11 February 2021 to consider revised Council budgets for 2020 and 2021 with the view to recommending the level of an Appeal for 2021 to the General Assembly Standing Commission
- On 23 June 2021 to consider Council budget submissions for 2022 and to agree recommendations to the General Council for an Appeal and grants to Councils for that year.

Appendix 1 includes a summary of the Income and Expenditure Account for United Appeal (showing actual results for 2018, 2019 and 2020 and projections/budgets for 2021 and 2022).

A. THE 2020 APPEAL

At the meeting on 4 February 2021, the Committee considered the response to the 2020 Appeal and the financial outturn for that year. The accounts for 2020 show that £3,057,174 was received against the 2020 Appeal of £3,600,000. Despite this shortfall, the Committee acknowledge that this is still a significant response from congregations in the midst of a year largely dominated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

At that time, 71 congregations (2019:39, 2018:38, 2017:27) had not contributed to the Appeal and their targets totalled £356,628 (2019:£202,088, 2018:£171,708, 2017: £133,605). In addition:

- (a) 148 congregations contributed above their target (2019:167, 2018: 195, 2017: 219)
- (b) 181 congregations did not achieve their target (2019: 61, 2018:124, 2017:109)
- (c) 144 congregations contributed to their target exactly (2019:177, 2018:187, 2017: 188).

The accounts also showed that £165,388 had been received in 2020 relating to earlier years' Appeals (2019:£166,044, 2018:£118,943, 2017:£158,847).

At the time of writing a further £305,849 has been received as “late contributions” for the 2020 Appeal and therefore 93.4% of the Appeal has now been received.

The Committee noted that all Councils had been asked to prepare revised budgets for 2020 and 2021 at the end of 2020 and it was agreed to meet

again to consider these. It was also agreed to award Council grants for 2020 based on 90% of the grants agreed at the General Assembly in 2019 for the 2020 Appeal. This was consistent with the established practice of providing Councils with a monthly grant of 7.5% and retaining 10% pending consideration of the response to the annual appeal. It was also agreed that any further adjustment arising from Councils' revised budgets for 2020 and 2021 should be made when determining grants for 2021.

The following grants were approved for 2020:

| | Grants 2020 (per GA Reports) £ | Grants awarded for 2020 £ |
|---------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Mission in Ireland | 1,065,000 | 958,500 |
| Global Mission | 1,065,000 | 958,500 |
| Congregational Life and Witness | 720,000 | 648,000 |
| Training in Ministry | 375,000 | 337,500 |
| Social Witness | 245,000 | 220,500 |
| General – Creative Production | 230,000 | 207,000 |
| TOTAL | 3,700,000 | 3,330,000 |

B. THE 2021 APPEAL

At the meeting of the United Appeal Committee on Thursday 11 February 2021, a detailed report on Council revised projections/budgets for 2020 and 2021 was considered. It was agreed to recommend grants to Councils based on these revised budget submissions and reflecting a “Covid-19 adjustment” (for cost savings and income changes) as follows:

| | Normal Grants 2020 and 2021 | Less: Grant awarded in 2020 | Less: Covid-19 Adjustment | Grants for 2021 |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Mission in Ireland | 2,130,000 | (958,500) | (447,000) | 724,500 |
| Global Mission | 2,130,000 | (958,500) | (110,000) | 1,061,500 |
| Cong. Life and Witness | 1,440,000 | (648,000) | (390,000) | 402,000 |
| Training in Ministry | 750,000 | (337,500) | – | 412,500 |
| Social Witness | 490,000 | (220,500) | (45,000) | 224,500 |
| General – CPD | 460,000 | (207,000) | (130,000) | 123,000 |
| | 7,400,000 | (3,330,000) | (1,122,000) | 2,948,000 |

It was also agreed to recommend that the normal level of the Appeal should be kept before congregations and therefore the Appeal for 2021 should be:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | £ |
| Proposed Gross Appeal for 2021 | 3,600,000 |
| Covid-19 Adjustment | <u>(300,000)</u> |
| Net Appeal for 2021 | <u><u>3,300,000</u></u> |

These recommendations were approved at a meeting of the Special General Assembly Standing Commission on 19 February 2021.

It was also agreed that a £300,000 Covid-19 adjustment should apply for the 2022 Appeal. This means that through the reduced level of grants in 2020 and the “Covid-19 Adjustments” to 2021 and 2022 Appeals, any “savings” as identified in Council revised budgets have been “passed down” to congregations.

Council revised projections for 2021 reflect some revisions to staffing levels, assume Council staff will return to normal duties from 1 September 2021 and the ending of income from the Job Retention Scheme which is due to finish at the end of September. The anticipated re-organisation costs have been shown as a cost within United Appeal rather than in individual Council budgets.

C. THE 2022 APPEAL

The Committee met on 23 June 2021 to consider Councils’ budget submissions for 2022. These submissions included revised projections for 2021, budgets for 2022 and comparative figures for 2020. The submissions were accompanied by a letter explaining the rationale for the amount requested and any key assumptions made.

The normal practice when annual budget requests are submitted is that interviews are held with representatives of each Council. At those meetings the representatives are able to explain their Council’s requests and the Committee has an opportunity to ask any relevant questions. In light of ongoing Covid-19 restrictions interviews were not held and any queries were relayed to Councils via the Financial Secretary. The following are the key points identified from the request:

Mission in Ireland

| | 2022 | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 |
|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------|-----------|
| Request/ Grants | 1,065,000 | 724,500 | 958,500 | 1,065,000 |

- (a) Capital Projects in 2021 include Maynooth £1m (new Church Building), Donabate £500k (Site), Greystones £200k (Church Extension) and in 2022 Donabate £1m (new Church Building) and Fermoy £100k (Repairs). These projects are to be funded from bequests received in 2020, amounts received from various Presbytery

Schemes (“amalgamation funds” i.e. Gt. Victoria Street, South Belfast and Fortwilliam), the proceeds from sale of Boyle Church and the proceeds from the sale of three Irish Mission Worker Properties (Mullingar, Letterkenny, Cork - estimated proceeds £700k).

- (b) A new Rural Chaplain to be appointed in September 2021. This was previously approved by the Priorities Reference Panel but the appointment has been delayed.
- (c) Additional staff at International Meeting Point (IMP2) (North Belfast) to be funded from Shankill Road Mission Fund.
- (d) Anticipated reduction in funding from Presbyterian Women.
- (e) Home Mission - Income from congregations budgeted to increase as some deaconesses have been furloughed in 2020 and 2021 and some new deaconesses have been commissioned in 2021/2022.
- (f) Mission Office costs reduced due to staff restructuring. These are charged 50% to Mission in Ireland and 50% Global Mission.
- (g) Budget for four Irish Mission Workers in 2022, one retired end of 2020.
- (h) Nightlight project ended during 2020.
- (i) Budgeted for improved uptake of Irish Mission Fund and Mission Support grants.

Global Mission

| | 2022 | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| Request/ Grants | 1,000,000 | 1,061,500 | 958,500 | 1,065,000 |

- (a) 30 Global Mission workers supported in 2022. Covid-19 has caused travel restrictions and disruption to education of children.
- (b) Budgeted for increase in grants to partner churches to “normal” levels in 2022.
- (c) Anticipated reduction in funding from Presbyterian Women.
- (d) Wembley, London property rented and not sold as originally anticipated.
- (e) 44 Marlborough Park sold at end of 2020 which was slightly later than hoped but first potential buyer pulled out around start of pandemic.
- (f) Mission Office costs reduced due to staff restructuring. These are charged 50% to Mission in Ireland and 50% Global Mission.

Congregational Life and Witness

| | 2022 | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 |
|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Request/ Grants | 640,000 | 402,000 | 648,000 | 720,000 |

- (a) Significant proportion of this Council's costs are its staffing team. Savings budgeted due to some staff restructuring.
- (b) Assumed activities will return to normal levels in 2022 with some resources being delayed to post Covid. Move to more digital resources but printed resources did generate some income.
- (c) Cost of "For Now" resource funded through designated "Familybooks Fund" and not through United Appeal.
- (d) Change to Counselling arrangements with first point of contact moved to CCLW office and then referred to counsellor.
- (e) Budgeting to return £50,000 to United Appeal at end of 2021.

Training in Ministry

| | 2022 | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 |
|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Request/ Grants | 375,000 | 375,000 | 337,500 | 375,000 |

- (a) Majority of Council funding (£357,000) goes towards Union Theological College.
- (b) Projections for UTC fee income based on estimated number and fee rates and a detailed analysis by course.
- (c) Transition to new arrangement with St Mary's has been deferred one year to September 2022. Budgeted for agreed support during transitional period from Incidental Fund and Trustees Discretionary Fund as approved by Assembly Finance & Staffing Commission (2019).
- (d) Significant repair issues re the Library and College heating system. Also new door access system required. These are to be part funded from bequest income.
- (e) Revised College Staff Team to include 3 Professors, 5 Lecturers, 2 Library staff and 6 Support staff including Head of Academic Administration and Head of Operations.

Social Witness

| | 2022 | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 |
|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Request/ Grants | 249,900 | 224,500 | 220,500 | 245,000 |

- (a) United Appeal funding is towards central CSW staff including Taking Care.
- (b) Some anticipated staff savings in 2021 (part year) and 2022 due to staff restructuring.
- (c) No direct United Appeal contributions to CSW projects (residential homes etc.).

- (d) Council retains substantial cash reserves although these are reducing as United Appeal Funding is not covering budgeted levels of expenditure.
- (e) The Council Secretary is due to retire on 31 October 2021. A recruitment exercise for a replacement is underway with a view to accommodating a handover period.

Creative Production Department

| | | | | |
|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 2022 | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 |
| Request/ Grants | 207,000 | 123,000 | 207,000 | 230,000 |

- (a) No income from Herald in 2021 but sufficient reserves to support normal “internal charge” for CPD staff time.
- (b) No changes to staffing levels anticipated with continued used of “bought in” resource budgeted.
- (c) Budget includes normal web site support costs (hosting fees and security licenses) and a provision for minor faults and basic updates. A major upgrade is planned but it is expected this will be funded through the Incidental Fund.

In summary, the requests received are as follows and, based on the Committee’s review along with other information received, the recommended grants for 2022 are as follows:

| | Request Received £ | Recommended Grants £ |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Mission in Ireland | 1,065,000 | 1,065,000 |
| Global Mission | 1,000,000 | 1,000,000 |
| Congregational Life and Witness | 640,000 | 640,000 |
| Training in Ministry | 375,000 | 375,000 |
| Social Witness | 249,900 | 245,000 |
| General – Creative Production | 207,000 | 200,000 |
| TOTAL | 3,536,900 | 3,525,000 |

For Councils it has been challenging to prepare budgets when the timing of any return to “normal” or the “new normal” remains unclear. In general terms, it has been assumed that the situation with the pandemic in 2022 will allow Councils to return to what might be considered a more normal range of activities. However, in some cases, this may mean a change to how activities are delivered with, e.g., an increasing use of digital formats for resources or in some cases as a means of delivering some events or training. Council budgets for 2022 reflect the full year impact of the staffing changes referred to above.

It is noted that the Council for Congregational Life and Witness is proposing to return unused grants of £50,000 at the end of 2021.

It is recommended that the Appeal for 2022 be:

| | £ |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Proposed Gross Appeal for 2022 | 3,600,000 |
| Covid-19 Adjustment | <u>(300,000)</u> |
| Net Appeal for 2022 | <u><u>3,300,000</u></u> |

MARTIN HAMPTON, Convener
CLIVE KNOX, Financial Secretary

| UNITED APPEAL | | | | | | |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| ACTUAL ACCOUNTS FOR 2018, 2019 and 2020 and PROJECTIONS FOR 2021 and 2022 | | | | | | |
| | Actual 2018 | Actual 2019 | Actual 2020 | Budget 2021 | Projection 2021 | Budget 2022 |
| | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| THE APPEAL | 3,550,000 | 3,600,000 | 3,600,000 | 3,600,000 | 3,600,000 | 3,600,000 |
| COVID REDUCTION | | | | -300,000 | -300,000 | -300,000 |
| NET APPEAL | 3,550,000 | 3,600,000 | 3,600,000 | 3,300,000 | 3,300,000 | 3,300,000 |
| INCOME | | | | | | |
| Congregations (current year) - Note 1 | 3,291,684 | 3,302,058 | 3,057,174 | 3,150,000 | 3,150,000 | 3,150,000 |
| Congregations (prior years) - Note 2 | 118,943 | 166,044 | 165,388 | 170,155 | 305,000 | 150,000 |
| Donations and Bequests | 39,293 | 101,341 | 33,411 | 10,000 | 10,000 | 10,000 |
| Income from Trust Funds | 28,698 | 28,698 | 29,228 | 24,445 | 25,508 | 26,571 |
| Investment Income | | 0 | 768 | 768 | 670 | 698 |
| Bank Interest | 6,487 | 8,867 | 7,986 | 7,500 | 5,000 | 5,000 |
| | 3,485,105 | 3,607,008 | 3,293,955 | 3,362,868 | 3,496,178 | 3,342,269 |
| EXPENDITURE | | | | | | |
| Redundancy Costs | | | 15,386 | 90,000 | 90,000 | |
| Promotional costs | 16,874 | 8,463 | 4,554 | 10,000 | 10,000 | 10,000 |
| | 16,874 | 8,463 | 19,940 | 100,000 | 100,000 | 10,000 |
| Grants to Councils | | | | | | |
| Mission in Ireland | 1,050,000 | 1,065,000 | 958,500 | 724,500 | 724,500 | 1,065,000 |
| Global Mission | 1,050,000 | 1,065,000 | 958,500 | 1,061,500 | 1,061,500 | 1,000,000 |
| Congregational Life & Witness | 720,000 | 720,000 | 648,000 | 402,000 | 402,000 | 640,000 |
| Training in Ministry | 370,000 | 375,000 | 337,500 | 412,500 | 412,500 | 375,000 |
| Social Witness | 245,000 | 245,000 | 220,500 | 224,500 | 224,500 | 245,000 |
| General Council - Creative Production | 230,000 | 230,000 | 207,000 | 123,000 | 123,000 | 200,000 |
| | 3,665,000 | 3,700,000 | 3,330,000 | 2,948,000 | 2,948,000 | 3,525,000 |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURE | 3,681,874 | 3,708,463 | 3,349,940 | 3,048,000 | 3,048,000 | 3,535,000 |
| SURPLUS / (DEFICIT) FOR YEAR | -196,769 | -101,455 | -55,985 | 314,868 | 448,178 | -192,731 |
| Gains / Losses on investments | | | 303 | | | |
| Returned by CCLW | 90,000 | | | | 50,000 | |
| OPENING RESERVES | 2,186,178 | 2,079,409 | 1,977,954 | 1,922,272 | 1,922,272 | 2,420,450 |
| CLOSING RESERVES | 2,079,409 | 1,977,954 | 1,922,272 | 2,237,140 | 2,420,450 | 2,227,719 |
| <p>Note 1. The normal pattern of congregations forwarding their contributions to the annual Appeal is such that not all of these are received by the closing date of the Appeal. Some contributions are received after the closing date and are recorded in the following years as "prior year contributions".</p> <p>Note 2. While the response to the 2020 Appeal was encouraging the response to the 2021 and 2022 Appeals is uncertain at this stage as is the timing for the receipt of contributions from congregations (i.e. will these be received before the closing date for the appeals (which is usually around end of the January) or will there be an increase in late contributions. (i.e. received after the closing date) . It has been assumed that for both years the Net Appeal of £3,300,000 will be achieved (see figures below).</p> | | | | | | |
| Percentage of Appeal received | | | | | | |
| Congregations (current year) - Note 1 | 3,291,684 | 3,302,058 | 3,057,174 | 3,150,000 | 3,150,000 | 3,150,000 |
| Congregations (prior years) - Note 2 | 166,044 | 165,388 | 305,000 | 150,000 | 150,000 | 150,000 |
| | 3,457,728 | 3,467,446 | 3,362,174 | 3,300,000 | 3,300,000 | 3,300,000 |
| Percentage of gross appeal | 97.4% | 96.3% | 93.4% | 91.7% | 91.7% | 91.7% |
| Percentage of net appeal | 97.4% | 96.3% | 93.4% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

1. The Nominations Committee has met once since the last General Assembly.
2. While members of the Committee had been able to interview conveners and identify nominations to fill the gaps early in 2019 we would like to thank the former Deputy Clerk for drawing together these recommendations for last year's Assembly
3. Those appointed to fill gaps in the past few years to serve a full four-year term would normally be contacted when they enter their fourth year. In light of the impact of Covid-19 on the ability of councils and committees to meet, it was decided to pause this process for 2021.
4. However, as usual there were a number of people who have stepped down as conveners and from memberships of councils and committees and needed to be replaced.
5. Nominations to convenerships are contained in an appended resolution while nominations to membership of councils etc. will be contained in the Nominations Booklet.
6. At the time of writing this report, the work of approaching folk to fill the vacancies remaining is underway. It is hoped that those gaps will be filled by the time the Nominations Booklet is printed. It is helpful if those intending to resign from membership of a council or committee give notice in good time for a replacement to be found for nomination to the following General Assembly, that is, by the preceding January. It should be noted that, apart from direct presbytery nominees and some ex-officio members, vacancies that arise during the year cannot be filled until the following General Assembly.

JONATHAN CURRY, Convener

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE GENERAL COUNCIL FOR NEW AREAS OF WORK

1. The General Council, in its overall coordinating role, has the responsibility to bring to the General Assembly recommendations for new areas of work that could be necessary or beneficial to take forward over the coming years. In considering what areas of work to recommend to the 2021 Assembly to be taken forward, two key factors were considered:
 - (a) Firstly, at every level PCI is still both ‘living with Covid’ and also attempting to reconfigure and revitalise ministry and mission in the aftermath of the last 15+ months – do we have the energy and capacity to engage in significant new areas of consideration, no matter how worthy in themselves? If we have some energy and capacity, what are the priorities?
 - (b) Secondly, the 2021-22 year is going to be shorter than normal, if that isn’t too Irish a statement! The 2021 Assembly will be in October 2021, and the 2022 Assembly most likely returning to normal in June 2022. That means any reports commissioned in October by the 2021 Assembly would have to be submitted for collation in mid-March 2022 – five months later. Should therefore any significant work commissioned by the 2021 Assembly aim to report to the 2023 Assembly, with a ‘work in progress’ brief report to the 2022 Assembly?
2. At this particular time, having come through the long months of the Covid-19 pandemic, at its meeting at the end of June 2021 *the General Council agreed to recommend to the 2021 General Assembly that the following areas of work to be taken forward:*
 - (a) A review of governance structures during the last period and the drawing up of recommendations to enable the 2022 General Assembly to put in place agreed governance structures and mechanisms for any future such situation which might arise.
 - (b) The drawing up of an overarching denominational communications strategy (planned work on this having to be set aside over the last period) – with an interim report to be brought to the 2022 General Assembly and full report to the 2023 General Assembly.
 - (c) An examination of the key principles and practicalities that will underpin a radical reconfiguration of ministry in the light of changing demographics and ministry and mission opportunities – with a report to be brought to the 2022 General Assembly.
 - (d) A detailed consideration of the subject of ‘virtual communion services’, to enable the General Assembly to come to a final and settled mind on the matter – with a report to be brought to the 2023 General Assembly.

TREVOR D GRIBBEN, Clerk of Assembly

MAKING THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MORE ACCESSIBLE TASK GROUP

(This report was remitted from the 2020 General Assembly Standing Commission for consideration and decision at the 2021 General Assembly. The implementation dates have therefore been adjusted accordingly.)

1. The remit of the task group was given in the amended resolution 30 of the General Council at the 2019 General Assembly, ‘That the experimental evening session be continued in 2020 and that a task group be appointed to further consult and explore ways to make the General Assembly even more accessible for those who have found attending difficult.’
2. Changes to the Assembly should not inhibit its function as supreme court of the Church or hinder its voting membership of ministers and ruling elders from attending and making decisions, but the courts of the Church also make room for other voices such as young people and women and even among voting members of the court there are imbalances in attendance and participation. For example, it is easier for retired elders to attend than working elders; ministers speak considerably more often than elders; and it is harder for people outside the Greater Belfast area to attend. To ensure a range of voices were listened to, the Task Group included an elder and minister from the Republic of Ireland and from Northern Ireland outside the Greater Belfast area, two under 30s representatives, and the proposer of the amendment to resolution 30. To facilitate their attendance, the Task Group met on three Saturday mornings in Portadown. Consideration was given to feedback received from presbyteries, a congregation, and individuals, about the proposals brought to the 2019 Assembly, correspondence from ministers outside the Greater Belfast area, feedback from council conveners and secretaries, and ideas discussed at the General Council and the General Assembly Business Committee since 2015.
3. This report will be considered at the Assembly by people who are already able to attend because the present arrangements suit them. It is important to “look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4). Taking this attitude himself, Christ has richly blessed us through his sacrifice; how richly might the Church now be blessed if all at the Assembly adopted this attitude, seeking the benefit of others even when we might personally be inconvenienced, promoting a greater breadth of participation in the courts of the Church?
4. The task group identified several areas where accessibility could be improved:
 - (a) **Enabling attendance** by people who find it difficult to come because they work or study in the daytime on weekdays, particularly those who have to travel a large distance (para 5–6).
 - (b) **Encouraging attendance** when people are able but lack motivation (para 7).

- (c) **Enabling participation** in the Assembly by people who are unfamiliar with the business or the procedures (para 8–11), and by a greater range of people than it is possible to have speaking at the front (para 12).
 - (d) **Encouraging participation** when people are not confident that their voice will be listened to (para 13).
5. Several models for enabling attendance by those who can't come in the daytime on weekdays were considered:
- (a) **Pre-2018** model with all business during the day.
 - (b) **Four evenings** with one item of business each. On the basis of feedback from 2019, evening business would have to start later than 7pm so that people outside Belfast have time to arrive, but not finish any later than 9pm, so that there is time to get home, leaving room for only one item of business.
 - (c) **Business on Saturdays.** To maximise the value of taking a day off as well as coming on Saturday, this model includes two items of evening business on the Friday. In contrast to model (b), the timing of these sessions is aimed at maximising the business that can be attended on a single day rather than increasing accessibility for people coming after work. This model also reduces the number of alternative presentations to two (one of which would be Listening to the Global Church). This enables the Assembly to be shortened, with the opening night on Wednesday evening, the midweek celebration on Thursday evening, the Lord's Supper on Friday morning, and the close of business taking place on Saturday afternoon. An example timetable is shown in Appendix 1.
6. To compare these models, 13 business items were counted (11 for councils, 1 each for Linkage Commission and Private Business). The number of sessions accessible by different groups of people under each model is shown in the following table (white shading indicates the model which provides the greatest accessibility for that group; black indicates the least). Saturday business clearly benefits the widest range of people while having the fewest drawbacks – all groups can attend at least five items of business – whereas in the pre-2018 model only one group can attend more than four sessions of business.

| Model | Can attend only in the day | Can attend evenings and Saturday only | Can attend one weekday + Saturday | Can attend Saturday only |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) Pre-2018 | 13 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| (b) Four evenings | 10 | 4 | 3 | 0 |
| (c) Saturday business | 11 | 6 | 10 | 5 |

7. Each minister and elder vows at their ordination that they “accept the Presbyterian form of Church government to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and ... promise to yield submission in the Lord to the courts of this Church and to take your due part in the administration of its affairs” (The Code, 205(4)V and 212(5)(vi)). Congregations benefit when those called by God sacrifice their time in order to serve on kirk session. The higher courts of the church also call for sacrifice of time, but through this the wider church is blessed. The alternative, personally neglecting the courts or discouraging participation by others, would be a violation of ordination vows and a form of unfaithfulness to the Lord that weakens the Church. Ministers should encourage elders to attend, by instruction and example, and both should encourage other attendees. Informing the congregation and kirk session soon after the Assembly about the relevance and significance of the business, with comments from those who attend, could also help with this.
8. Those who do attend the Assembly may nevertheless find it difficult to participate because the publication of the Annual Reports in May leaves little time to become familiar with ~300 pages of reports and resolutions. Earlier publication is not possible, but the Assembly could be moved later, to the 3rd week of June, providing more time for reading and preparation.
9. Even with added time, the reports may be difficult to understand for those who have not been involved in the work of the councils during the year or at the previous Assembly. To equip attendees, presbyteries could hold a meeting after publication of the Annual Reports, allowing attendees to ask questions about reports and procedures. Direct Presbytery Nominees should be able to explain the business of their council. There are already opportunities to do this in a limited way at meetings of presbytery. If the Presbytery Representative Elder from a kirk session was also their General Assembly Representative Elder then that elder should be better informed, both to participate at the Assembly and implement decisions at the Presbytery level.
10. Understanding of issues could also be improved if councils ran local events during the year throughout Ireland, briefing attendees about their work and soliciting feedback. Changing terminology such as ‘memorials’ and ‘overtures’ to plainer language could also help. Further thinking along these lines would best be carried out by the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group and the Code Republishing Panel.
11. A well-prepared attendee may nevertheless find it difficult to speak at the Assembly. The Moderator promotes balanced debate with input from a range of people and range of views, but may have difficulty distinguishing between a young elder and an under 30s representative, or a voting member and an attendee with power to deliberate. Visual aids could help with this. Lanyards consisting of a coloured neck strap and a name badge, similar to the ones used for staff and visitors in Assembly Buildings, could indicate who people are, e.g., blue strap for voting members, red for non-voting. This could also help with greeting people at coffee times and could provide a storage pouch on the back of the badge for voting cards.

12. There will always be a limited number of people who can speak to an issue. To facilitate broader participation, especially from those who are nervous about speaking at the front, coloured cards could be provided as a way for attendees to express their views in an indicative manner while debate is still ongoing. Some other assemblies and conferences provide cards coloured red on one side and blue on the other which attendees hold at chest level (not up in the air like voting cards) during a discussion to indicate whether they are warming to the motion (red) or cool to it (blue). This would provide another way for people to participate and help the Moderator to judge whether more speeches are needed for or against a motion.
13. Struggles at the Assembly to facilitate and encourage more representative attendance and participation are a symptom of broader cultural issues in the Church that cannot be addressed solely at the Assembly. People will be more confident that it is worth participating during the week of the Assembly if they are confident that they have a meaningful say in the work that happens during the year through councils, commissions, and committees. Conveners and council secretaries have an important role in encouraging people to speak up at meetings, sharing out responsibilities, and allowing contributions meaningfully to shape the work. People will also be more confident that it is worth participating in the supreme court of the Church if they are confident that they have a meaningful say in the work of lower courts. Moderators of presbytery (and clerks) need to be proactive in encouraging people to contribute and giving them responsibilities. Ultimately this begins in congregations where ministers need to encourage and equip elders to participate at kirk session and shape the life of the local congregation, and provide ways for others to express their views for consideration by the kirk session.
14. **In the light of the above, the Task Group presented the following to the General Council on 19 March 2020 and these were agreed as Recommendations to the General Assembly (dates adjusted in light of report being dealt with by the 2021 Assembly):**
 - (a) That business be scheduled on Saturdays, along with the other changes to facilitate this, as described in paragraph 5(c).
 - (b) That ministers and elders carefully consider their moral obligation to participate in the General Assembly, and encourage attendance by example and instruction.
 - (c) That the General Assembly start on the third Wednesday of June.
 - (d) That each presbytery run an event each year between the publication of the Annual Reports and the start of the General Assembly to help attendees understand the content of the reports and the procedures of the Assembly, and that the Arrangements Panel of the General Assembly Business Committee work with the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to create a short video for use at this event, explaining Assembly procedures.

- (e) That each kirk session consider appointing the same person to be their representative elder at both presbytery and the General Assembly.
- (f) That the Arrangements Panel provide visual aids as described in paragraphs 11 and 12.
- (g) That conveners, moderators, and clerks at all levels reflect on how they encourage people to participate in the courts of the Church.
- (h) That these changes be trialled for a five-year period, beginning with the 2022 Assembly and a full review be carried out at the 2026 Assembly.

JONATHAN BOYD, Convener

APPENDIX 1

Example model of the Assembly with Saturday business

| | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | |
|-------|-------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| 10:00 | | 10.00 GABC 1, Report of Presbyteries, Reception of Delegates | 10.00 Linkage Commission | 10.00 Private business | |
| 10:30 | | | | | 10.30 Coffee |
| 11:00 | | 11.00 General Council Section 1 | 10.45 Trustees, Nominations, Memorials 11.15 Intermission 11.30 Worship incl. The Lord's Supper | 11.00 General Council Section 4 | |
| 11:30 | | | | | |
| 12:00 | | | | | 12.00 Worship |
| 12:30 | | | | | |
| 13:00 | | 12.45 Lunch | 12.45 Lunch | 1.00 Lunch | |
| 13:30 | | | | | |
| 14:00 | | 1.45 Alternative presentation: Listening to the Global Church | 1.45 Alternative presentation | 2.00 Council for Mission in Ireland | |
| 14:30 | | | | | |
| 15:00 | | 2.45 Coffee | 2.45 Coffee | 3.00 Coffee | |
| 15:30 | | 3.15 Council for Training in Ministry | 3.15 Council for Global Mission | 3.30 General Council Section 5 | |
| 16:00 | | | | | |
| 16:30 | | 4.15 Council for Social Witness | 4.15 General Council Section 2 | 4.30 Lapsed business | |
| 17:00 | | | | | |
| 17:30 | | 5.15 Dinner | 5.15 Lapsed business | 5.15 GABC 2 | |
| 18:00 | | | 5.30 Dinner | 5.30 Closing worship | |
| 18:30 | | | | 5.45 Finish | |
| 19:00 | | 7.00 Opening Night with worship | 7.45 Evening Celebration with worship | 7.00 Council for Public Affairs | |
| 19:30 | | | | | |
| 20:00 | | | 8.00 General Council Section 3 | | |
| 20:30 | 8.30 Finish | | | | |
| 21:00 | | | 9.00 Finish | | |
| | | 9.15 Finish | | | |