

**Strictly embargoed until 12.30**  
**Check against delivery**

**Wednesday, 18 February 2026**

**Seconding speech of the General Council's Report (Section 2) to the Special General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland meeting in Assembly Buildings, Belfast, by the Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly, Rev Peter Gamble.**

Moderator, in seconding the adoption of the report and its appended resolutions, I have several matters that I wish to bring to the attention of the House, following on from the Special General Assembly last December. Moderator, the fact that we are holding a second Special General Assembly only two months after the previous one is in itself an indication of the significance of the situation the denomination is in. That said, we need to continue to plot a course which was set in December and which, in the purposes of Almighty God, will bring honour to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, be for the good of the saints, and a blessing to our society.

First, in relation to the timeline for the appointment of the Clerk, if agreed, and the future role of Assistant Clerk. The Clerk of Assembly is both a called Office, called only by the General Assembly, and an employed position. In the employment context, this will entail the usual 6-month probation, with, it is anticipated, continued mentoring by the present Acting Clerk. Ideally, this will conclude at the end of this calendar year, thus enabling the present Acting Clerk to move into his agreed future role as Assistant Clerk, with responsibility for reconfiguration. All of this is subject to agreement.

Second, an uplift in the profile and therefore the allocation of money and people to Safeguarding for the denomination. The Safeguarding Department has now been set up. The staff are working very hard, and with great effectiveness. Policies and procedures are being updated, with documents being improved. Naturally, it will take time for matters to bed in, with appropriate staffing levels being addressed. Recruitment of a Head of Department and suitably equipped officers, including a Safeguarding Lead, is being progressed. This Department, as was agreed at the Special General Assembly in December of last year, will be paid for through assessments. The bottom line is, if we want to do safeguarding well, and we do, it will cost money.

Third, an assessment of the posture of the denomination in terms of its ceremonial presence, and by extension, the look and feel of our General Assembly in June this year has also been considered. This includes looking at the expectations of the kind of leadership our Moderator Designate might exercise. Ceremonial elements of the June, 2026 Assembly centre around the Service of Installation of the incoming Moderator. Though there was a limit to what could be reduced, and matters such as dress code is left to the individual to decide, there won't be a formal procession of former Moderators, though guests will still be invited.

There will be a slight change to how Council reports are presented to the Assembly, seeking to give a more overtly spiritual thrust to reports, as the motivating force behind our work. In doing so, at the June Assembly all Councils be given the opportunity to speak to their reports as well as presenting them in writing. In doing so, the Assembly will run from Tuesday 9 – Friday 12 June, to facilitate more opportunities for worship, prayer and fellowship.

The Moderator-Designate, Rev Richard Kerr, will take up his responsibilities in June. In doing so, we look forward to his leadership, with an emphasis on prayerful, pastoral support in this time of transition. We know that he will build on the leadership that you, Moderator, have given to the denomination. We assure both you and Mr Kerr of our continued prayers.

A root and branch look at Governance, Culture and Integrity, with principles provided by the Doctrine Committee was agreed in December. Recognising that the inquiry instigated by the Charity Commission under powers given to it by statute, will include an examination of how we make decisions and manage our work, the Task Group has been appointed and will begin its work very soon.

In addition, another Task Group has been appointed and is already beginning its work on the examination of the use of Non-Disclosure Agreements, as part of settlement arrangements for employees leaving the organisation.

The preparation of Safeguarding materials, including policies and procedures for use in congregations, and the examination of the protocol for use in safeguarding cases which involve ministers and leaders, are in progress. The latter will be reported to the Assembly in June 2026, following review by ministers and Kirk Sessions. Support of measures regarding Adults at Risk of Harm, and an examination of the necessity for a Survivor Redress scheme are all on the Safeguarding Development Committee's current and future agendas. This Committee meets next week.

Moderator, PCI is seeking to learn from the past, recognising that past failings have damaged our witness for Christ, and caused hurt. This Assembly is but a stage on the way forward. As such, I second the adoption of the report of the General Council and the appended resolutions.

**Ends.**