

# GENERAL ASSEMBLY



# ANNUAL REPORTS





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### ORDER OF BUSINESS

- Notes:** (i) **Business commences at 10am on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. There are business sessions on Friday evening.**
- (ii) **Communion will be held on Saturday at 12 noon**
- (iii) **Figures in brackets refer to page numbers in the Annual Reports.**

#### Thursday

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OPENING OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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GA Business Committee – Initial Report

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Presbyteries

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Congregational Life and Witness

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General Council (Section 1)

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Public Affairs

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Global Mission

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Evening Celebration

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#### Friday

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General Council (Section 2)

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General Council (Section 3)

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Councils not presenting verbally

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Judicial Commission – Code Republishing

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INSTALLATION OF NEW MODERATOR

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Linkage

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Councils not presenting verbally

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General Council (Section 4)

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#### Saturday

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Private Session – Judicial Commission etc.

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General Council (Section 5)

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Overtures

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GA Business Committee – Final Report

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Communion Service

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## THURSDAY, JUNE 20

### Assembly Buildings

*Refreshments will be available prior to business*

**10am**

#### **Opening of the General Assembly**

Constitution of the Assembly and Opening Worship

**10.45am**

1. Reception of Visiting Delegates

**11.30am**

2. GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE:  
Initial Report and Resolutions 1–6 (pages 3–5 and 281)
3. REPORTS OF PRESBYTERIES:  
Report and Resolution (pages 101–106 and 286)

**12pm**

4. COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS:  
Report and Resolutions (pages 107–145 and 286)

*1pm*

*Lunch*

**2pm**

5. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 1 of Report and Resolutions 7–11 (pages 1–46 and 281–282)  
Executive Summary and Introduction; Decision Making and Dissent Task Group; Monaghan Memorial Task Group; Communications Review and New PCI Website Task Group; Guysmere Panel; Doctrine Committee

*Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.*

**3pm**

6. COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Report and Resolutions (pages 146–153 and 286–287)

*4pm Refreshment Break*

**4.30pm**

7. COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION: Report and Resolutions (pages 154–190 and 288)

**5.30pm**

8. MEMORIALS TRANSMITTED (pages 94–95 and 288–289)

*6pm Dinner Break*

**7.30pm**

9. EVENING CELEBRATION

*(8.45pm) Close*

## **FRIDAY, JUNE 21**

*Refreshments will be available prior to business*

**10am**

10. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 2 of Report and Resolutions 12–13 (pages 31–46 and 282)  
Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group
11. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 3 of Report and Resolutions 14–17 (pages 47–68 and 282–284)  
General Assembly Advisory Committee

*[Should Items 10 and 11 finish early, Item 17(a) ]*

*Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.*

1pm Lunch

**2pm**

12. LISTENING TO THE GLOBAL CHURCH

**2.45pm**

13. JUDICIAL COMMISSION: Report and Resolutions  
(pages 274–277 and 289)  
Code Republishing Task Group

4pm *Brief intermission (Assembly seated by 4.15pm)*

**4.30pm**

14. INSTALLATION OF THE NEW MODERATOR

5.30pm 15. *Dinner Break (inc. Assembly Reception for invited guests)*

**7.30pm**

16. LINKAGE COMMISSION: Report and Resolutions  
(pages 191–204 and 289)

17(a). Reports not presented verbally:  
COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND: Report and Resolutions  
(pages 205–244 and 289–290); GENERAL COUNCIL TRUSTEES:  
Report and Resolutions (pages 245–249 and 290)

17(b). Reports not presented verbally:  
COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS: Report and Resolutions  
(pages 250–263 and 290–291); COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN  
MINISTRY: Report and Resolutions (pages 264–273 and 291–293)

18. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 4 of Report and  
Resolutions 18–22 (pages 69–71 and 284–285)  
Nominations Committee; Guidelines Review Task Group

*Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.*

## **SATURDAY, JUNE 22**

*Refreshments will be available prior to business*

### **10am**

#### **19. PRIVATE SESSION**

Judicial Commission: Report and Resolution (pages 274–277 and 293); Special Commission Report and Resolution (pages 278 and 293); Commission on Applications Report and Resolution (pages 279 and 293); Any additional business referred to the Private Session

#### **20. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 5 of Report and Resolutions 23–27 (pages 72–100 and 285)**

United Appeal Committee; Support Services Committee; PCI Pensions Review Panel; Ad-hoc Reports

#### **21. OVERTURES ON THE BOOKS: Report and Resolutions (pages 280 and 294)**

#### **22. Lapsed Business (if any)**

#### **23. Final Report of the General Assembly Business Committee**

*11.45am      Brief Intermission*

### **12pm**

#### **24. GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMUNION SERVICE**

**CLOSE OF ASSEMBLY**

*Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.*

## REVISED GUIDE TO ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE

### Using this Guide

In this guide you will find definitions and explanations of important elements of the General Assembly.

*If you want to know how to do something at the Assembly such as asking a question:*

- *You will also find practical guidance in boxes with bullet points.*

Each section finishes with guidance in italics about where to find further information.

### Reports of Councils and Commissions

Almost all of the time of the General Assembly is taken up with the reports of councils and commissions, as they report on what they have been doing throughout the year and what they hope to do in the future.

These reports are contained in the Annual Reports, or 'blue book', that is issued before the Assembly, and is also available to download from the PCI website immediately before the Assembly. It is important to read the reports in advance.

The Assembly cannot carry out the work of the Church directly, so it entrusts this to different councils and commissions.

Councils normally have a number of committees working under them, so there are separate sections in council reports for the work of these committees.

A commission has been entrusted with the power of the Assembly in its particular area of responsibility.

Members of councils and commissions are appointed by the Assembly itself. These appointments are contained in the Nominations Committee report of the General Council. A separate booklet is printed with the names being proposed to the Assembly. Councils and commissions are led by a convener, and supported by a secretary.

At the start of each session, a member of the Assembly (usually the convener of the council or commission) will speak about the written report and propose the resolutions – this is known as 'presenting' the report. Then another member of that council or commission will speak and will second the resolutions.

If the council or commission needs to report some things that happened after the main report was written, these are included in the Supplementary Reports booklet - this should be read in conjunction with the main blue book.

Every report must be 'received' by the Assembly. This does not mean that the Assembly agrees with everything that the report says, nor that it accepts responsibility for what a report contains. Rather, it means that the council or commission has presented its report to the Assembly in an acceptable way, and that the Assembly has received the report from the council or commission. The report does not have the authority of the Assembly, only that of the council or commission.

If a member of the Assembly believes that something important is not covered in any of the existing resolutions from a council or commission, they can submit an additional resolution.

From the 2023 Assembly, some reports are only presented in written form (GA Reports 2021, p.117, Recommendation 3c).

These reports will normally be formally proposed and seconded without speeches. There will be opportunity for genuine questions for clarification (as on page ix below). Debate on the resolutions will only be permitted by the Moderator where a resolution is being opposed or an amendment considered. If debate takes place, it will follow the process outlined below.

In 2024, the following council reports will be presented in this format on Friday evening – CMI; Trustees; CSW; CTM.

**If you want to submit an additional resolution:**

- You should send the additional resolution to the Clerk of the Assembly in writing at least one week before the Assembly – email to [clerk@presbyterianireland.org](mailto:clerk@presbyterianireland.org)
- You will need a proposer and seconder for the resolution. If you are a member of the Assembly, you are able to propose or second it yourself. If you are not a member of the Assembly, you may 'present' a resolution, but only Assembly members can propose and second.
- If you want to rescind or reverse a previous decision of the Assembly then you must give notice of this at one annual meeting of the General Assembly, and then bring your resolution to the next annual meeting.

*You can find further information on councils and committees in the Code Pars 268–310.*

You can find further information on reports and resolutions in Pars III–V of the General Assembly’s Standing Orders and the Code Pars 144–7.

## **Ordering of Business**

Each session of business is normally ordered in the following sequence:

- Speech by the proposer of a report and accompanying resolutions
- Speech by the seconder
- Questions
- Debate on each resolution
  - Speeches may be made about the resolution
  - Amendments may be proposed, although this is the exception
    - Speech by proposer of the amendment
    - Speech by seconder of the amendment
    - Questions about the amendment
    - Debate about the amendment
    - Closing speech by the proposer or seconder of the amendment
    - Vote to make the amendment the substantive resolution
      - which will still need to be debated and voted on
  - The proposer or seconder may close debate on the resolution with a speech
  - Vote on the resolution
  - Any dissent is recorded
- Debate on the final resolution ‘That the report be received,’ following the same sequence as above.

## **Questions**

After the report has been presented and seconded, there is an opportunity for questions to be asked about anything in the reports and speeches.

Questions must be strictly asking for information about something in the report or speeches, or something not in the report but on a topic under the council’s or commission’s area of responsibility. A question should not be asked to score a point, or to make a speech.

**If you wish to ask a question:**

- You can ask without giving any advance warning, but you will get a better answer if you submit your question in advance.
- If submitting your question in advance, you should write it out and place it in the box provided at the front of the hall, or you can submit it by email to *deputyclerk@presbyterianireland.org*.
- You should do this at least 15 minutes before the report in question. The more notice you give of a question, the more time there will be for the person responding to provide you with a full and accurate answer.
- Make sure that you are sitting in the main part of the hall, not the public gallery.
- Before asking your question, you should come up to the front in good time, and sit in the seats reserved for speakers, close to the microphone. By doing so, the Moderator will know that you want to speak and will invite you to do so when it is your turn - don't wait in your own seat.
- If the Moderator stands up again to speak while you are speaking, you must stop and listen to the Moderator.
- Normally, no one is able to ask more than two questions on any report, and the total time for questions is limited to 10 minutes.

*You can find more information on Questions in the Code Par 153.*

**Debate**

After questions have been asked and answered, the resolutions from the council or commission are debated and voted on one at a time. The resolutions are numbered and printed in the Resolution Booklet.

In the debate, speeches are made either in support of, or in opposition to a resolution.

The final resolution of every report is 'that the report be received.' This is the opportunity for speeches to be made (but not ask questions about) on any matters in the report or for which the council or commission should bear responsibility, but which are not included in any previous resolution.

**If you wish to speak in a debate:**

- Make sure that you are sitting in the main part of the hall, not the public gallery.
- Come up to the front in good time and sit in the seats reserved for speakers, close to the microphone. By doing so, the Moderator will know that you want to speak and will invite you to do so when it is your turn – don't wait in your own seat.
- If the Moderator stands up again to speak while you are speaking, you must stop and listen to the Moderator.
- To make sure everyone has a fair chance to speak, you can only speak once to each resolution, and there is a strict time limit on speaking. Those who present and second reports and resolutions are normally allowed up to seven minutes; other speeches are usually limited to four minutes, although these timings may be reduced by the Moderator if there is a backlog of business. There are two lights to help you know when your time is running out. The red light turns solid and a buzzer sounds when your time is up. You must stop speaking at this point.

*You can find further information on Debate in the Code Par 148–155.*

**Voting**

When the Moderator thinks that a resolution has been sufficiently debated, they will move the Assembly to vote on it. Only voting members can vote.

There are three ways a vote can happen :

- Most votes are voice votes. The Moderator will ask everyone in favour of the resolution to say 'Aye', and then ask everyone opposed to it to say 'No'.
- If the voice vote is close, then the Moderator may call for a standing vote. First, everyone in favour will be asked to stand while holding up their voting cards. Then everyone opposed will be asked to stand while holding up their voting cards. A rough count will be taken by the Moderator. Only people on the ground floor of the hall can vote. Anyone in the public gallery will not be able to vote, so it is important that you are seated on the ground floor.

- If this vote seems close, then the Moderator may call for a card vote. When you arrive at the Assembly, you will have been given a voting card with tear-off strips for yes and no. During the vote, tellers will move throughout the ground floor with voting boxes. Put one voting strip into the box – either yes or no. The tellers will then count the votes and report the result to the Moderator.

Sometimes, the Moderator may decide to go straight to a card vote. A card vote must happen if 25 people ask for it.

Proxy voting for a member of the Assembly who cannot be present is not allowed.

*You can find further information on Voting in the Code Pars 156–160.*

## **Dissent**

After a vote, you may disagree with a decision the Assembly has made.

If you feel very strongly that a bad decision has been made, then you can register your dissent in the minutes. However, if you are a minister or elder, even when you disagree, you still have a responsibility to loyally implement the decisions of the Assembly.

### **If you wish to register your dissent:**

- Speak to the Deputy Clerk immediately after the vote has taken place.
- You can then sign a statement that the Deputy Clerk will print, which says that you dissent from the decision the Assembly has just taken.
- This is then recorded in the minutes.

*You can find further information on Dissent in the Code Pars 104 and 160.*

## **Amendments**

As well as voting yes or no to resolutions, members of the Assembly can also amend resolutions.

An amendment is a change to the wording of a resolution. This may clarify what the resolution states or substantively change what is being proposed, but it cannot introduce another subject and it cannot be an outright negation of the original resolution.

When a valid amendment is proposed and seconded at the Assembly, then:

- Debate about the original resolution is paused
- The proposer and seconder may each give a speech about the amendment
- The Assembly may ask questions about the amendment in the same way as with a resolution
- The Assembly may debate the amendment
- Either the proposer or seconder may give a closing speech
- The Assembly votes on the amendment

If the vote on the amendment passes, then the amendment becomes the substantive resolution and debate continues about whether to pass that amended resolution.

If the vote does not pass, then the original resolution is not altered and debate about it resumes.

**If you want to propose an amendment:**

- It was agreed for the 2023 General Assembly that: “Substantive proposed amendments which have not been submitted to the Business Committee for licensing in advance of the Assembly meeting, will only be permitted at the discretion of the Moderator, if they genuinely arise in the course of debate or if they relate to additional resolutions tabled in Supplementary Business. (Resolution 2(a), p.401)”.
- The Business Committee requested and the General Council agreed that this policy should also apply in 2024, and a resolution is included in the General Council Report.
- All supplementary business, including any proposed amendments etc., should be submitted to the Clerk in advance for licensing by 12:00 noon on Friday, 14 June, 2024 at the latest.
- Any amendment must be submitted in writing to the Clerk of the Assembly. If an amendment genuinely arises in the course of debate, or if it relates to additional resolutions tabled in Supplementary Business, it must be submitted either in writing to the Clerk’s desk or by email to *deputyclerk@presbyterianireland.org*
- You must have a proposer and seconder for the amendment.
- You cannot introduce another subject in your amendment or propose outright negation of a resolution.
- If you speak to the proposer and seconder of the original motion in advance, they may accept your amendment without the Assembly voting on it. If it is not accepted and you still wish to propose the amendment then, if you notify the Clerk, it will appear in the Supplementary Reports. If an amendment is accepted before the Assembly starts, then the updated resolution can be distributed in Supplementary Reports.

*You can find further information about amendments in the Code Pars 148–152 and Par VI of the General Assembly’s Standing Orders.*

## Memorials

Memorials are requests made to the Assembly, usually by a person or body who is not a member of the Assembly – a presbytery, a church member or group of members, or a group of people not connected with the Church. If you are not a member of the Assembly, you are able to bring a memorial.

Procedures and forms are laid down to be used in bringing memorials.

### **If you wish to submit a memorial:**

- You should contact your Clerk of Presbytery or the Clerk of the General Assembly ([clerk@presbyterianireland.org](mailto:clerk@presbyterianireland.org)) for advice
- It is advisable to first present your memorial to a lower court of the church such as your Presbytery. If the lower court supports the memorial then you will be able to present it to the Assembly with their support. If they do not support the memorial it is less likely that the Assembly would be supportive.

You can find further information on Memorials in the Code Pars 147(5); 217(5)(a)&(b); 262.

## Overtures

Overtures are special resolutions which are used to change the Code, which is the constitution of the Church.

Some overtures are printed in the blue book. If these are agreed by a two-thirds majority, they will be adopted immediately. Others which have not had such notice, will be adopted if no one votes against. If overtures do not achieve the preceding majorities, they are 'placed on the books' for one year, and decided on by the following Assembly. This also applies to the rules governing the Central Ministry Fund and other Ministry Funds.

In the Basic Code, where it's desirable that the proposed changes come into operation immediately, the change can be adopted temporarily during the intervening year as an 'Interim Act'. If an overture is submitted that would result in a significant constitutional change, it must also be sent to presbyteries to be voted on during the intervening year.

*You can find further information on Overtures in the Code Pars 111 and 112.*

## **Alternative Format Items**

At each Assembly, one or two items of business will have an alternative format. This will often include presentations with speakers or videos which highlight the work of a council, for example, Global Mission Workers, or Mission in Ireland or Social Witness staff. Often there will be no formal resolutions or debates during these sessions, but they provide important updates on the work the Church through its councils.

Further information on the General Assembly can be found in the Code Pars 97–112.

The Code is available at [www.presbyterianireland.org/thecode](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/thecode)

The General Assembly's Standing Orders can be found in the Code.

# GENERAL COUNCIL

## SECTION 1

Convener: VERY REV DR D.J. BRUCE

Secretary: THE CLERK

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. On behalf of the General Assembly, the General Council has been conducting its business through a slightly revised structure of five permanent committees and (in the current year) seven Panels or Task Groups. The Council met on 12 June 2023 (special meeting); 26 October 2023; 16 January 2024 (special meeting); 21 March 2024; 16 April 2024, with (at the time of writing) a further special meeting scheduled for 24 May 2024.
2. The addition of special meetings noted above signify not only the large volume of business before the Council this year, but the importance of several major issues which will be brought to the 2024 General Assembly. The work of the Council will be debated in 5 sections across the three days of the Assembly meetings, as follows:
  - (a) In Section 1 (Thursday 20 June) the further work of the **Decision Making and Dissent Task Group** will be debated, following the referral back to the Council of one affirmation from the report received in 2023. Matters referred to the Council in a 2023 **Memorial of the Monaghan Presbytery** looking at information provided about nominees for Moderator of the General Assembly will be brought to the Assembly. The work of the **Guysmere Panel** and the **Doctrine Committee** will also be considered. Initial work on the development of a **Communications Strategy** and plans for the re-build of the PCI website following the appointment of a new Head of Communications (see par.9 below) will be considered.
  - (b) In Section 2 (Friday 21 June morning) a major report following the Green Paper process with Presbyteries during the year looking at the work of the **Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group** will be debated. This Report with its ten recommendations flowing from responses to the Green Paper, represents a manifesto for visionary change for the denomination, the implications of which (if passed) will set the agenda for a number of additional pieces of work in coming years.

- (c) Section 3 (Friday 21 June, morning) will debate the report of the newly formed **General Assembly Advisory Committee**, which began its work in June 2023. The Committee plans the meetings of the General Assembly, offers comment and advice on matters raised by other Councils, in addition to the work of the **Church Relations Panel**, and the **Priorities Reference Panel**. This year, the Committee will report on a number of potential implications of the Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group report, in addition to some specific issues raised with it by several Councils, including the Council for Training in Ministry and the Council for Social Witness.
  - (d) Section 4 (Friday 21 June evening) will report on the work of the **Nominations Committee**, including thanks to outgoing Conveners, and the appointment of their successors. These key appointments are essential to the efficient and effective running of the work of Assembly Councils. Over the years when the General Assembly passes resolutions it can change the law of the church, offer guidance of a more general nature, or if needed, specify some guidelines for action in particular circumstances. A **Guidelines Review Task Group** was formed to collate all these previous decisions and present them in a coherent form. A progress report on this work will be presented.
  - (e) Section 5 (Saturday 22 June morning) will consider reports from the **United Appeal Committee**, the **Support Services Committee**, and a Panel commissioning a review of the **PCI Pension Scheme**.
3. At the General Assembly last year steps were still being taken to appoint a successor to Mr Clive Knox as PCI Financial Secretary. The Council has been delighted to welcome Mr Ken Swarbrick to this role during the year, and wish him well as he takes up his responsibilities.
  4. Following a restructuring of aspects of the work of Creative Production, a new Department of Communications has been formed under the leadership of Mr Mark Neale. This Department will help to streamline all aspects of the internal and external communications of the church – a vital task in a rapidly changing world. This will include work to rebuild the entire PCI website.
  5. Without the dedicated work of the General Secretary's Department, many of the central functions of the church would grind to a halt. The Council records its appreciation for the able assistance of the administrative team in the office, who act in support of the Council's work. The Council is carefully steered by the General Secretary, Rev Trevor Gribben, and the Deputy General Secretary, Rev Dr David Allen. They each serve the church with dedication and deep commitment, far beyond the requirements of the role, and the entire church is in their debt.
  6. For ease of reference, the five sections of the General Council report to the General Assembly referred to in paragraph 2 above, are listed below in summary form below. Each section will have a separate proposer and seconder, followed by questions and debate.

**Section 1** (Thursday afternoon)

- General Introduction
- Decision Making & Dissent Task Group
- Monaghan Memorial Task Group
- Communications
- Guysmere Panel
- Doctrine Committee

**Section 2** (Friday Morning)

- Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group

**Section 3** (Friday morning)

- General Assembly Advisory Committee

**Section 4** (Friday evening)

- Nominations Committee
- Guidelines Review Task Group

**Section 5** (Saturday morning)

- United Appeal Committee
- Support Services Committee
- PCI Pension Scheme Review Panel

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

1. The Business Committee has continued to review the work and arrangements of the General Assembly.
2. This year, the Opening Meeting of the General Assembly, and the later Installation of the Incoming Moderator have new formats. Arrangements for the Opening Meeting have been prepared in line with the decision of last year's Assembly (2023 Reports pp.13-15). The Order of Service for the Installation of the Incoming Moderator on Friday afternoon has been prepared, with only a few minor changes, in line with the example Order of Service which was presented to last year's General Assembly. Both new formats will now be our models of practice for future years.

3. A Draft Order of Business for 2024 was drawn up by the Clerk on the basis agreed by the General Assembly and the Committee, with a final draft tabled at the General Council. This includes the following:
  - (a) All business sessions will commence each day at 10am (Thursday, Friday and Saturday). There will be the Evening Celebration on Thursday and one evening business session held on Friday. This year, business is scheduled to conclude on Saturday morning and will be followed by the General Assembly Communion Service at 12 noon. As on previous years, the General Council business is split over a number of sessions.
  - (b) There will only be one ‘alternative presentation’ on Friday afternoon, “Listening to the Global Church”.
  - (c) As previously agreed by the General Assembly, some reports will be presented in written form only (see General Assembly Reports 2021, p.117, Recommendation 3c). These reports will normally be formally proposed and seconded without speeches. There will be the opportunity for genuine questions, in advance, for clarification. Debate on the resolutions will only be permitted by the Moderator where a resolution is being opposed or an amendment considered. This year, the Council for Mission in Ireland, the General Assembly Trustees, the Council for Social Witness and the Council for Training in Ministry will be presented in this format on Friday, during the evening session.
  - (d) The livestreaming of all Assembly sessions, apart from the Private Session, was discussed at the Business Committee. The question was raised if the livestreaming of all meetings hindered debate? The Appendix entitled, Appendix 1, “Livestreaming of General Assembly Meetings” outlines the areas considered by the Committee. On the recommendation of the Business Committee, the General Council agreed that the current practice of livestreaming should continue.
  - (e) The Private Session will be held on Saturday morning at 10am.
4. In line with the decision of the 2022 General Assembly, the General Assembly Advisory Committee considered the business coming to the 2024 Assembly and has recommended that “at the 2024 General Assembly all resolutions of the Council for Training in Ministry relating to named individuals be taken in the Private Session on Saturday morning.” A resolution to this effect is appended.
5. It was agreed for the 2023 General Assembly that:

“Substantive proposed amendments which have not been submitted to the Business Committee for licensing in advance of the Assembly meeting, will only be permitted at the discretion of the Moderator, if they genuinely arise in the course of debate or if they relate to additional resolutions tabled in Supplementary Business. (Resolution 2(a), p.401)”.

As two large reports will come before this Assembly i.e. Code Republishing and Reconfiguration of Ministry, the Business Committee requested that the General Council agreed that this policy should again apply. A resolution to this effect is appended. All supplementary business, including any proposed amendments etc be submitted to the Clerk in advance for licensing by 12:00 noon on Friday, 14 June, 2024 at the latest.

6. The Business Committee requested that the General Council take steps to bring to the General Assembly an appropriate resolution to reverse its decision relating to the General Assembly meeting on a Saturday, to take effect from 2025 onwards. A resolution is appended. To be taken with General Council Section 1 on Thursday afternoon.
7. The Business Committee was asked by the General Council to consider the Assembly meeting on an earlier week in June. The Committee was generally of the opinion that it would be better not to go back to the “old model” when we used to meet during the week beginning with the first Monday in June. Therefore, the Committee proposed that the General Assembly should meet in the week containing the second Monday in June. This was accepted by the General Council and a resolution is appended to this effect. To be taken with General Council Section 1 on Thursday afternoon.
8. The **Arrangements Panel** has appropriate matters to hand and a budget of up to £25,000 has been agreed for recommendation to the General Assembly.
9. **Registration** will be in the Conference Area from Thursday morning and exhibitions of PCI Councils and partner bodies will be located there.
10. The **Thursday Evening Celebration** will be addressed by Mr John Risbridger. John formerly served as Pastor in the ‘Above Bar Church’, Southampton. Currently, he is chair of the Evangelical Alliance Council and member of the Board. He will be known to many as a Christian Conference speaker. Please note the earlier time of 7.30pm for the beginning of the Evening Celebration.
11. **Praise** will be led by Mr Dave Whitcroft and musicians from PCI congregations.
12. The **General Assembly Reports** have been produced in printed version as normal. An electronic format of the reports was released to ministers around the time material went to the printer. Due to the scale of material last year and for this year, and the even more important fact that all members of Assembly do not have access to a “tablet” device, it was decided not to move to a full electronic/digital format alone for 2024. This will be considered further for the future.
13. A General Assembly web page will contain all information relating to Assembly week.
14. One report from other Church Assemblies is recorded in an Appendix to this report, and others will be included in Supplementary Reports.

ROY MACKAY, Convener

## APPENDIX 1

### LIVESTREAMING OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETINGS

#### Introduction

At our last meeting of the Business Committee, the current policy regarding livestreaming of Assembly meetings was raised. The question was briefly discussed as to whether or not we should continue with this approach ie livestreaming of all meetings with the exception of Private Sessions and, when appropriate, the introduction of chaplains to the Assembly.

It was agreed at the last meeting of the General Council that the Business Committee should bring a report on the matter to the next Council meeting in March.

GABC RESOLUTION 6: (Report of the GABC to the General Council – 26 October, 2023)

“That the issue of livestreaming of every session of the General Assembly be examined by the Business Committee, with a report to be brought back to the March meeting of the Council”.

#### 1. Points in favour of continuing with the current practice

- (a) Meetings of the General Assembly are held in public, with a few exceptions. The current practice of livestreaming is consistent with this approach so that what we do is openly seen. In an increasingly technical age, livestreaming is appropriate to this policy.
- (b) Any further reduction in the livestreaming of meetings could create an impression that the Church is restricting public access and retreating from the public square.
- (c) The current policy allows a ‘wider audience’ to see how the Church conducts its business.
- (d) Should members of the Assembly not be able to be present at all meetings, then there is still the opportunity to keep informed of debates and decisions. This would also be helpful for Ministers Emeriti.
- (e) Interested and committed members of the Church are able to see how our church debates and reaches its decisions. This leads to a better informed membership and, perhaps, a more cohesive church.

#### 2. Points suggesting that the current practice should be changed

- (a) The livestreaming of meetings actually restricts participation and debate i.e. some members have felt reluctant to speak when sensitive matters were being discussed knowing that everything was livestreamed and in turn recorded.

- (b) Livestreaming of most meetings has the potential to allow members to be more selective regarding the meetings they will actually attend as they can watch the proceedings from a distance.
- (c) There is the potential for points to be taken out of context as the listener does not have to sit through a whole debate. This, in turn, could mean that issues are reported without a full understanding of the wider context.
- (d) Why should we feel obliged to livestream most of our Assembly meetings in the interest of openness? Our meetings are open to the public and the press. Those genuinely interested have an opportunity to be present and observe. It may be worth asking if most institutions/ organisations livestream all their business meetings or give selective examples?
- (e) To cease livestreaming most meetings can still allow for the livestreaming of particular meetings with a wider public interest e.g. The Installation of the Moderator and the Evening Celebration.

### **3. Technical matters**

Would it be possible to livestream meetings but for a selected audience i.e. full members of Assembly? Could a code or pass be issued which allows members only to gain access on screen to Assembly proceedings?

- It seems that the above is possible but complex. Our current operating facilities would not easily manage such a situation. Further, there could be considerable cost involved.
- To restrict access to full voting members would exclude others who attend and participate at Assembly while unable to vote. The question of who would have access to a restricted system could also be challenging.

## APPENDIX 2

### REPORTS FROM OTHER CHURCH ASSEMBLIES

#### **General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Wales: 10–12 July 2023 – Carmarthen**

*The Very Rev Dr John Kirkpatrick writes:*

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Wales was held in Carmarthen, July 10–12, 2023.

It was my privilege to represent the PCI on this occasion. I would like to record my appreciation of the warmth of the welcome that I received.

The Presbyterian Church of Wales describes its story as follows:

“One of the largest Christian denominations in Wales, with some 14,000 members and around 475 churches. Our aim is to worship God and to spread the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Also known as the Calvinistic Methodist Church and ‘The Connexion’, the Presbyterian Church of Wales was born out of the Methodist revival of the 18th century.

The Presbyterian Church of Wales has around 35 ministers and 35 Christian workers. It also owns and runs two training centres, Coleg y Bala and Coleg Trefeca, and has strong links with other church and denominations, particularly with its ‘daughter’ church, the Presbyterian Church of India.”

The General Secretary Nan Powell-Davies, prayer for a sense of unity within the church was clearly evident in the meetings of the Assembly. Being a smaller church gathering there was a definite family feel that enhanced the discussions and decision making. In common with all mainline denominations the backdrop of the Assembly was that of a church in an increasingly secular society and seeking ways to both reach and serve the people of Wales, especially the Welsh speaking communities.

Considering the 475 churches and only 35 ministers gives us reason to reflect on methods and means of ministry. A number of Presbyteries have already taken steps to appoint a pioneer, who will adopt various roles, ranging from: church planting; to working in the Arts community; to café outreach; to creation ministry and there will be more to come. At the Assembly, those pioneering were able to share stories of where they believed God was calling them to work and how people were already being touched by the Gospel. Evidence of the generosity of the denomination was demonstrated by the response to the Ukrainian refugees and the gift of £150,000 to Christian Aid. The overseas mission story is strongly connected to India.

Greetings were also shared by the Rev Dr C. Chawngmgingliana, the President of the Mizoram Synod, one of the Presbyterian Church of India representatives, who was present at the conference. We were reminded of the ongoing tribal troubles in Manipur, where hundreds of churches have been damaged and burnt down, killing many people.

It was an encouraging time as the church demonstrated a willingness to face the realities both within and without the church in the spirit of faith and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **REPORT OF THE DECISION MAKING AND DISSENT TASK GROUP**

1. The Decision Making and Dissent Task Group held two meetings to consider the outstanding work before it. This piece of work related to just one of the affirmations contained in the 2023 General Assembly Report, which had been referred back to the General Council for further consideration. (All other affirmations had been adopted in June 2023 and are now General Assembly policy.) The affirmations being (the key text to be considered underlined):
  - (iv) Similarly, in private discussion or as part of debate in wider groups outside the courts of the church, ministers and elders should approach such matters in a spirit of grace and humility, acknowledging their ordination vow to “yield submission in the Lord to the courts of this Church” and to “preserve the peace and unity of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as part of the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ” (Code Par 212(5) for ministers and Par 205(4) for elders). It would therefore not be appropriate for an ordained minister or elder to fail to implement a decision taken by the courts of the Church, or publicly to promote a view which undermines a stated position of the Church, whether doctrinal, moral, or administrative.
2. At its meeting on Friday 19 January 2024, with all members in attendance (either in person or on-line) with one exception, the Task Group held some initial discussion, including consideration of possible ways forward.
3. The Rev Mark Neilly, the proposer of the amendment at the 2023 General Assembly that referred affirmation (iv) back for further consideration, joined the meeting via MS Teams. Mr Neilly explained the thinking behind his amendment and indicated that he had consulted with other colleagues who had similar views. He presented some possible options for a rewording of the underlined bit of sub-paragraph (iv) (see point 1 above).
4. After a time of questioning and discussion Mr Neilly left the meeting. The Task Group considered the points he had made and after a period of discussion agreed on a possible updated draft. It was agreed that the Task Group would reflect further and meet again on MS Teams on Friday 16 February 2024 to confirm (or indeed further amend) the updated draft for transmission to the General Council.

5. The Decision Making and Dissent Task Group met again on MS Teams on Friday 16 February 2024, with all members in attendance. Members of the Task Group, having had an opportunity to consider the updated draft over the intervening weeks, took time to discuss it further. The Task Group adopted a slightly amended recommended draft (to replace the underlined section in (iv) in point 1 above) for forwarding to the General Council, and through it to the General Assembly, as follows:

“It would therefore not be appropriate for an ordained minister or elder to fail to implement a decision taken by the courts of the church, or publicly to promote a view which undermines the Church, or opposes the stated policy of the Church.”
6. It was also agreed to recommend to the General Council that the entire Decision Making and Dissent decisions of the General Assembly be listed in an appendix to the Council’s 2024 report to the Assembly.
7. **At the meeting of the General Council held on 21 March 2024**, the report of the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group was received and following discussion the Council adopted the following slightly amended final draft (to replace the underlined section in (iv) in point 1 above) to be forwarded for final decision to the 2024 General Assembly, as follows:

“It would therefore not be appropriate for an ordained minister or elder to fail to implement a decision taken by the courts of the Church, or publicly to promote a view which undermines the Church or opposes the stated policy of the Church on any matter apart from when the General Assembly has by resolution recognised liberty in the exercise of conscience on a specific matter, which exercise should be characterised by grace and humility.”
8. The General Council also agreed that, for ease of reference, one ‘Decision Making and Dissent Decisions Compilation Document’ (those already taken in 2022 and 2023 and the draft in point 7 above) would be published together – see Appendix 1. If the draft in point 7 is amended at the Assembly the compilation document would of course be changed (see Affirmation 3(iv) in Appendix 1).

NOBLE McNEELY, Convener

## APPENDIX 1

### COMPILATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECISIONS RELATING TO DECISION MAKING AND DISSENT

#### SECTION A – DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE 2021 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

##### Introductory notes:

- (a) At the 2019 General Assembly the General Council tabled a report it had commissioned entitled ‘Decision Making and Dissent within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland’ (see 2019 GA Reports, pages 24–30). On recommendation of the Council, the 2019 General Assembly agreed to send this report down to Presbyteries for comment.
- (b) Following this consultation exercise with Presbyteries, the 2020 General Assembly Standing Commission received a report from the General Council’s Decision Making and Dissent Task Group, with a total of twelve recommendations. The Standing Commission noted the report and remitted it to the 2021 General Assembly for full consideration and decision, with the implementation dates having been adjusted accordingly. The report was received by the 2021 General Assembly and all of its twelve recommendations were adopted. These are listed below, and the full report can be found in the 2021 GA Reports, pages 114–125 and a record of the adoption of the recommendations found in the 2021 GA Minutes, page 37.

#### A. Towards a new process for bringing reports and recommendations to the General Assembly

##### Recommendation 1:

That from the 2022 General Assembly onwards, subsequent to each General Assembly, up to two sets of regional or presbytery ‘conference style’ meetings be held – a first set could be held in the summer/autumn after the General Assembly and a second set could be held during the late winter/spring preceding the next General Assembly. These regional conferences could, in any particular year:

- (a) reflect on specific matters remitted by the General Assembly and/or on the implementation of new policies decided by the General Assembly (first set of conferences);
- (b) give preliminary consideration to strategic and significant policies and issues (first set of conferences);

- (c) be forums for discussion and giving guidance regarding matters coming to the General Assembly prior to recommendations being finalised (second set of conferences);
- (d) be an opportunity to be informed about and consider significant issues prior to decision-making at the General Assembly (second set of conferences).

**Recommendation 2:**

That from the 2022 General Assembly onwards, where a significant change of policy is being considered, or a new policy being proposed (especially where the matter is strategic or potentially controversial), there should be a formal ‘Green Paper Consultation Stage’ prior to recommendations for decision coming to the General Assembly. A ‘Green Paper Consultation Stage’ would:

- (a) be triggered by the General Assembly (or by the General Council), following recommendation from a newly constituted General Assembly Advisory Committee;
- (b) include the drafting of a ‘Green Paper Consultation Document’ outlining the background to the matter, the reasons necessitating new policy/decisions, an analysis of options that could be considered, etc.;
- (c) involve consideration of the ‘Green Paper Consultation Document’ at one or more of the following levels – regional, presbytery, kirk session;
- (d) result in a ‘Green Paper Report’ to the General Assembly, which itself would authorise the drawing up of a full policy report for consideration and decision at the subsequent Assembly.

**Recommendation 3:**

That from 2023, the General Assembly should continue to meet annually, but for a shortened period, to:

- (a) together meet with the Lord – listening to his Word, coming to him in prayer and gathering at his Table;
- (b) consider strategic and significant policies and decisions (including formal ‘Green Paper Reports’);
- (c) receive reports on a rotation basis from selected councils and commissions (mostly on a biennial basis);
- (d) deal with essential annual business;
- (e) greet and hear from representatives of partner Churches.

**Recommendation 4:**

That a new ‘General Assembly Advisory Committee’ be constituted by the 2021 General Assembly:

- (a) to take on the current remit of the Moderator’s Advisory Committee;
- (b) to recommend to the General Assembly (or General Council) that a ‘Green Paper Consultation Stage’ be triggered (as outlined above);
- (c) to monitor the progress of remits set by the General Assembly;
- (d) to recommend to the General Council that a remit be adjusted, with the General Council having authority so to do;
- (e) to give guidance as to the scope of the recommendations to be brought to the General Assembly from a remit;
- (f) to address unforeseen consequences that have arisen during the process of carrying forward a remit.

**B. Towards a new process for considering reports at the General Assembly****Recommendation 5:**

That the General Assembly Business Committee appoint a dedicated Task Group to consider cost and, with the approval of the General Council, implement a system for the provision of full electronic/digital reports for the General Assembly.

**Recommendation 6:**

That, from the 2022 General Assembly onwards, retired ministers will be required to opt to remain full members of the courts of the Church - with automatic retention as full members at the point of retirement, and then thereafter each retired minister be required to request annually to be retained.

**C. Towards greater clarity regarding the standing of General Assembly decisions and the meaning and scope of dissent.****Recommendation 7:**

That the Doctrine Committee be instructed to draw up an updated and contemporary “Brief Statement concerning Faith and Order”, for consideration and adoption by the General Assembly, ideally in 2023.

**Recommendation 8:**

That the Judicial Commission's Code Republishing Panel be instructed to insert into the Code appropriate definitions outlining three different types of General Assembly decision:

- (a) Decisions that are binding and must be followed (these will include both provisions inserted into the Code and other binding decisions adopted by Assembly resolution).
- (b) Decisions that are in the form of guidelines that should be followed in all but exceptional circumstances, the exception having to be justified to a superior court if required.
- (c) Decisions that are in the form of guidance, that is, good advice that should be taken into consideration.

**Recommendation 9:**

That once Recommendation 8 is implemented, the General Assembly Business Committee shall ensure that there is clarity regarding the standing of all resolutions coming to the General Assembly for decision.

**Recommendation 10:**

That on the basis of par 26(e) above, the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group be instructed to draw up a comprehensive report, for consideration by the 2022 General Assembly, on the "Freedom of those in Ordained Leadership to Promote Opinions at variance with the clear position of the General Assembly".

**D. Towards improving how General Assembly decisions/policies are communicated****Recommendation 11:**

That the Communications and Strategy Task Group should aim to bring a comprehensive report on a communications strategy for PCI (including how General Assembly decisions and policies are communicated) to the 2023 General Assembly, with the General Council being authorised to take any necessary interim decisions.

## **E. Towards clarifying how General Assembly decisions/policies can be changed**

### **Recommendation 12:**

That the Clerk of Assembly, in consultation with the Judicial Commission's Code Republishing Panel, be instructed to report to the 2022 General Assembly (including tabling overtures to amend the Code if appropriate) to clarify and simplify Assembly procedures so that a clear process is in place whereby the General Assembly can be requested to:

- (a) consider reviewing or changing a current policy or area of work;
- (b) consider developing a new policy or area of work;
- (c) consider making a specific exception to a particular policy;
- (d) consider making a statement on a particular issue of concern.

## **SECTION B – DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE 2023 AND 2024 GENERAL ASSEMBLIES**

### **Introductory notes:**

At the 2023 General Assembly the affirmations contained in paragraph 4 of the report of the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group (pp47-50) were adopted as the Church's position, with exception of the affirmation outlined in the then paragraph 4.3(iv), which was referred back to the General Council for further consideration. The 2024 General Assembly, having received a further report from the General Council, adopted the revised affirmation listed below, now in 1.3(iv).

The affirmations below presented by the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group, have been adopted by the General Assembly and, along with the decisions outlined in Section A (above) are a summary of the General Assembly's position in regard to Decision Making and Dissent.

### **Affirmations adopted by the General Assembly**

The following affirmations relate to the 'Freedom of those in Ordained Leadership to Promote Opinions at variance with the clear position of the General Assembly':

**Affirmation 1** – *The Task Group affirms* the need to enable and indeed encourage biblically and theologically informed discussion and debate within the church, and especially within its ordained leadership.

**Affirmation 2** – *The Task Group affirms*, and draws attention to, the following statements in the Code, including the rule of faith which state:

- i. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, as a witness for Christ, has adopted subordinate standards. In these are found what the Church understands the Word of God to teach on certain important points of doctrine and worship. These subordinate standards are a testimony for truth and against error, and serve as a bond of union for members of the Church. (Code Par 12)
- ii. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland adheres to the fundamental doctrines of the faith, set out in the Supreme and Subordinate Standards of this Church. Do you promise to teach them and defend them to the utmost of your power, against all error? (Code Par 212 (3)(v) - questions to a candidate for ordination)

The question arises as to public comment upon or debate surrounding doctrinal, moral or administrative positions which are held by PCI, possibly by resolution of the General Assembly, but which may not be referenced specifically in the subordinate standards of the Church.

**Affirmation 3** – *The Task Group affirms* the following five key points:

- i. Code Par 11 states: “In exercising this God-given right of private judgment, individual Christians are not to set their reason above the Word of God, or to refuse light from any quarter. Guided by the Holy Spirit, they are to use their reason to ascertain the divine will, as revealed in Scripture, and are to refuse to subject conscience to any authority except that of the Word of God...” Thus, the Presbyterian form of Church government rests upon debate, prayerful discernment, and decision to ascertain the divine will.
- ii. The primary fora within which such debate and discernment takes place is the courts of the church. This is not to preclude discussion or debate elsewhere, but to honour and acknowledge that “The Church alone has the right to interpret and explain her standards, under the guidance of the Spirit of God.” (Code, Par 14)
- iii. Ministers and elders therefore should ensure that any public statements they might wish to make in connection with matters under consideration by the courts of the church are both personal to them and provisional upon any decision taken by such courts.
- iv. Similarly, in private discussion or as part of debate in wider groups outside the courts of the church, ministers and elders should approach such matters in a spirit of grace and humility, acknowledging their ordination vow to “yield submission in the Lord to the courts of this Church” and to “preserve the peace and unity of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as part

of the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ” (Code Par 212(5) for ministers and Par 205(4) for elders). It would therefore not be appropriate for an ordained minister or elder to fail to implement a decision taken by the courts of the Church, or publicly to promote a view which undermines the Church or opposes the stated policy of the Church on any matter apart from when the General Assembly has by resolution recognised liberty in the exercise of conscience on a specific matter, which exercise should be characterised by grace and humility.

- v. A Kirk Session or a Presbytery may seek to formally alter a policy or decision of the Church by presenting a Memorial to the General Assembly. The Task Group welcomes the planned revision and simplification of this process in the Republished Code to make this process clearer and therefore more accessible.

Often the point is made that not all elders are members of the General Assembly and therefore don't have direct input into the taking of decisions and setting of policy by the Assembly.

**Affirmation 4** – *The Task Group affirms* that while this is clearly the case, nonetheless the Code makes it clear that all in ordained leadership are bound by decisions of the General Assembly.

Par 104. (1) The General Assembly is the supreme court of the Church, representing in one body the whole Church, including all subordinate courts and particular congregations, and acting as its supreme legislative, administrative and judicial authority, in dealing with all matters brought before it.

(2) As such authority, the Assembly exercises the powers stated by this Code; and, in particular, it may -

(a) deliberate upon and superintend matters which concern the whole Church in its doctrine, worship, witness, discipline and government, and declare the mind of the Church thereupon;  
.....

(3) Decisions of the Assembly are final and binding upon the whole Church.....

- i. **Therefore, the Task Group affirms** that when significant issues are to be decided by the General Assembly, it is important that the processes for wider debate and scrutiny are followed as agreed by the 2021 General Assembly (see 2021 General Assembly Reports, pages 114-125 ‘Report of the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group’). This will often include both ‘pre-legislative scrutiny’ and formal consultation with Presbyteries prior to the final adoption of significant new or amended policy by the General Assembly.

- ii. As part of the process of wider consideration, especially at Kirk Session level, it will be important to equip and assist ministers in the role of facilitation of such discussions. This will include both an understanding of the issue under consideration and the scope of relevant discussion.

**Affirmation 5 – *The Task Group affirms*** In our ever-changing public square, an elder or a minister in the Church can have easy access to traditional media or social media to express opinions, which at times may be contrary to the policy or decision of the General Assembly. The views expressed on such media may be personal or the position adopted by a group of which the minister or elder is a part. There is, however, a responsibility to be clear at all times that this is the capacity in which the person is speaking and that they are not representing the Church's position. In this regard, *the Task Group affirms* the following four key points:

- i. For those in Ordained Leadership who oppose a decision of the Church, it is appropriate that they should primarily use the processes available through the courts of the Church, to express their questions and concerns, recognising, however, that inferior courts are bound by decisions of superior courts and, indeed, do not have the right to review the proceedings of a superior court (Code Par 21(4)).
- ii. When expressing opinions in the traditional or social media which are contrary to the Church's position, especially in regard to significant or sensitive issues, there is a difference between, in response to a question, stating a personal view consciously held (while making clear it is a personal view and not the Church's position) and seeking to proactively use traditional or social media to undermine/challenge/change the settled position of the Church. The former can be an acceptable exercise of the individual's freedom of conscience when asked a personal view, especially so when that view is expressed with wisdom, sensitivity and grace. The latter can however go beyond individual freedom of conscience and rather can be seen as seeking to use traditional or social media to undermine both the Church's settled policy on an issue and also the Church's own processes for debate and decision making. This is not an appropriate course of action for ordained leaders in the Church. The Task Group recognises the need for particular discernment and wisdom when ordained leaders are representing outside organisations on traditional and social media.
- iii. The way to change the policy of the Church is through the processes provided by the Church, chiefly through Memorial and notice of motion to rescind a previous decision – these are being updated and hopefully enhanced as part of the process of republishing the current Code.

- iv. Evidently certain internal groupings within the Church have been encouraged to make use of traditional or social media to campaign against the settled policy of the Church and indeed for individual leaders to go further and directly defy the law of the Church. Such tactics or behaviour are clearly unacceptable for ordained leaders who have promised before God to yield submission in the Lord to the courts of the Church.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW**

### **(AS AGREED AT THE 2023 GENERAL ASSEMBLY)**

1. The 2023 General Assembly received the report of its Communications Review Task Group and on its recommendation made a number of significant decisions. These included:
  - (a) The creation of a Communications Department as the hub for the multiple communications needs of the General Assembly and its Councils. This department would include the following main functions:
    - i. Devising and implementing a Communications Strategy, based upon but not restricted to, the contents of this report
    - ii. Support and oversight of Press and Media (with the Press Officer re-located to this Department)
    - iii. Support and oversight of Creative Production (with the current Creative Production Department being wound up)
    - iv. The coordination of communications across all Councils, according to denominational priorities.
  - (b) The creation of the post of Head of Communications to lead the Communications Department.
  - (c) The rebuild of the PCI central Website, seeking to achieve:
    - i. An easily accessible summary of what PCI believes as a church
    - ii. The presentation of the Gospel must be easily and obviously accessible for enquirers
    - iii. 'Find a Church' function, with mapping assist
    - iv. Greatly enhanced searchability
    - v. Ease of use for the many categories of users and visitors
    - vi. Security, especially for any restricted areas. Member access areas for ministers/leaders, and/or the development of a dedicated app.
    - vii. Agreed policy on updating content – Content Management functions spread across Councils within agreed parameters
    - viii. Workable systems for payments, donations, booking for events, subscriptions, ordering of resources
    - ix. Road-testers drawn from serving ministers as part of the build process, from the earliest stages.
  - (d) The *Presbyterian Herald*, relocating responsibility for the editing of a denominational magazine to within the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, while the design and production functions be located within the new Communications Department.

2. Steps have been taken during the last year to implement all of these decisions;
  - (a) The new **Communications Department** formally came into being on 1 February 2024, with relevant staff moving from the Creative Production Department.
  - (b) Mr Mark Neale was appointed Head of Communications and took up his post on 1 February 2024. As well as overseeing the day to day work of the Department, he has begun the process of developing a strategy for communication within the denomination, initially by holding face to face meetings with a wide range of people in PCI. Another priority has been seeking to progress the development of the new central PCI website (see c below).
  - (c) A Task Group, led by the Head of Communications, has been established to take forward the delivery of the new PCI central website, as outlined in 1(c) above. Professional expertise has been commissioned and once the initial scoping exercise has been completed and comprehensive brief drawn up, the Task Group will be tendering for a web company to develop and build the new website.
  - (d) The editorial function of the *Presbyterian Herald* has been relocated to the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, with oversight and advisory groups coming into being. Significant planning has been undertaken to ensure a smooth interaction is maintained with the Communications Department, which remains responsible for the design, production and advertising and sales functions of the *Presbyterian Herald*.
3. As with any change, thanks are due to the staff involved in this transition. The staff in the new Communications Department, the leadership team in the Council for Congregational Life and Witness and the *Herald* editorial staff, have worked hard to ensure the smooth transition to the new structures agreed at the 2023 General Assembly .

TREVOR D. GRIBBEN, Clerk of Assembly

## MONAGHAN MEMORIAL TASK GROUP

1. A meeting of the Task Group took place on Monday 8 January 2024, with the following members in attendance: Clerk of Assembly and General Council Convener, Mr Joe Campbell (Task Group Convener), Very Rev Dr Rob Craig, Revs Robert Herron and Andrew Gill, Mr Brian Craig, Mrs Elizabeth Warden and Mr Trevor Long.
2. The Task Group considered a background document which included the Monaghan Memorial, the General Assembly's current policy and processes in relation to the nomination and election of Moderator and anecdotal experiences of sister denominations.
3. In the ensuing discussion a number of points became clear:
  - (a) There is a danger if each nominated person were to provide more information, how much more, what information would be helpful, would this additional information be a manifesto to which they may, if elected, be held?
  - (b) There is often a gap between what ministers know about a nominated minister and what an elder may know. Often at Presbytery an elder will look to see how their minister is voting and follow their lead.
  - (c) Clerks of Presbytery in sending out agenda and information might not highlight the need for members to prayerfully further research information on each nominated minister to guide their voting.
4. The Task Group were joined via MS Teams by two representatives of Monaghan Presbytery, Mr Albert Higgins and Rev John O'Donnell. Each was given time to explain the reason for the Memorial and to suggest ways in which the current system might be improved or replaced. There was a very positive and helpful discussion and after 40 minutes the Monaghan Representatives were thanked for their Memorial, for their participation in the meeting and the spirit in which they had engaged.
5. After further discussion the Task Group considered three options that attend to the spirit of the Monaghan Memorial and improve the current process;
  - (a) Information on each nominated minister contained in the Church's Directory be clearly set out, removing abbreviations, and stating clearly current charge/charges, presbytery, and any additional current roles within the Church.
  - (b) That nominated ministers be asked to write a 100-word biography.
  - (c) That nominated ministers be asked to write a comment on current hot button issues facing the Church.
6. The Task Group agreed unanimously to recommend option A to the General Council (and this was agreed for transmission to the 2024 General Assembly), as the other options have within them too many weaknesses to provide a viable way forward. An appropriate resolution is presented to the Assembly.

JOE CAMPBELL, Convener

## DOCTRINE COMMITTEE

The Doctrine Committee was not required to meet during the last year.

MICHAEL McCLENAHAN, Convener

### GUYSMERE DEVELOPMENT PANEL

#### 1. Introduction

The project remit from the 2019 General Assembly states:

*“that the proposed redevelopment of Guysmere, as outlined in the Feasibility Study, be permitted to proceed to the next stage i.e. the capital project development (technical and funding) which allows the local promoting group sufficient time to work through all of the activities required to refine and define its preferred option, and to secure both planning consent and also the required capital funding to effectively deliver the project”.*

#### 2. The Current estimate of costs:

- i. Planning and Development Phase to bring the project to RIBA Stage 3 – £ 300,000
- ii. Employ staff for the fund-raising part of our project – £ 200,000
- iii. Capital delivery i.e. the construction of the new facility. As plans have not yet been drawn up, it has not been possible to make an accurate estimate of the final costs, but they are expected to be over £6 million. – £6 million+
- iv. To resource the staffing and running of the centre during the first 5 years of operation @ £ 150,000 p.a. – £ 750,000

#### 3. Long term sustainability

Following extensive research into precedent projects, it is clear that a centre of this scale needs to be multi-functional and attract the patronage of a range of market sectors, if it is to be sustainable.

Guysmere Trust, in collaboration with key partners, will take forward a Development Proposal with the following 3 key elements:

**Element 1 : Exploring Ulster's Christian Heritage.**

There is a growing local and international Faith Tourism market including church and student groups – particularly from N. America – who are keen to visit, study, explore, share and experience faith. There is also a significant demand from churches and groups in Ireland and the UK for a residential and conference centre on the North coast which is suitable for retreats, conferences, events and courses.

In developing this element of our project, we will work closely with Tourism Northern Ireland, Tourism Ireland and also with private sector tour operators specialising in Faith and Cultural Tourism.

**Element 2 : Learning from C.S. Lewis: his Roots and Legacy.**

C.S. Lewis was born in Belfast and held academic positions in English Literature at both Oxford and Cambridge universities. Today there is a global interest in his life, writings, theology and apologetics. His boyhood holidays in Castlerock with his mother and brother were a formative influence and it seems likely that they rented Bathview Villa, which was on the site of Guysmere, for the first of these.

The Trust will collaborate with Union Theological College, Belfast and other bodies who share this interest to develop a C.S. Lewis centre at Guysmere with a Scholar in Residence.

**Element 3 : Discovering the Ulster-Scots – their History, Faith and Culture.**

The story of the Ulster-Scots people is an inspiring record of how their faith and culture has shaped Ireland and the New World. The Rev WF Marshall MRIA was elected to the Royal Irish Academy in 1942 in recognition of his masterly contribution to the study of the Ulster dialect. He was closely involved with Guysmere during his years as minister of Castlerock Presbyterian Church (1928–54).

The Trust will collaborate with The Ulster-Scots Agency to explore and present this international influence and make Guysmere a significant stop on the North Coast stretch of the Wild Atlantic Way.

**Providing A Valuable Community Asset**

This initiative is widely welcomed across the Castlerock community and the facilities at Guysmere will be available to the local Castlerock community for events, meetings, exhibitions and outdoor sports.

**4. Course of Action:**

- (a) Finalise MOUs (Memorandum of Understanding) with Union Theological College and The Ulster-Scots Agency. [Further MOUs may be formed with other bodies who share aspects of our vision]

- (b) Incorporate these MOUs into the Feasibility Study, the website and the promotional video
- (c) Fundraise for the Planning and Development Phase
- (d) Appoint an integrated design team to oversee the construction phase
- (e) Planning. An application has been made for Pre-Application Discussion (PAD) with the Planning Department in Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
- (f) Draw up a specification for the proposed centre
- (g) Hold a design contest
- (h) Appoint architects
- (i) Agree plans
- (j) Appoint a Project Development Manager and launch the fundraising phase

#### **5. Feasibility Study**

An updated Feasibility Study will be able to be completed when the MOUs with Union Theological College and the Ulster-Scots Agency have been finalised.

#### **6. Conclusion**

As this report is written, fundraising for Phase 1 has already commenced. The Impetus Group / Board of Directors has had 14 meetings in the last 12 months.

JIM MCCAUGHAN, Convener

## MEMORIAL RECORD

The Very Rev David Henry Allen, MA, BD, DD, Minister Emeritus, New Row, Coleraine, died on 21 June 2023, in the ninety-first year of his age and the sixty-third year of his ministry. He was born in Edenderry, Portadown, on 10 June 1933 to his father Arthur and mother Nan, and grew up with an older sister Lottie and younger brother Cecil. He was educated at Edenderry Public Elementary School, followed by Portadown Technical School and Renshaw's Shaftesbury House Tutorial College. The family were members of Seagoe Parish Church and there he was influenced for Christ within the family, and especially by a godly aunt and uncle. He was very involved in church life through the Church Lads' Brigade. He was converted to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in his late teens through a Billy Graham evangelist, TW Wilson, at a meeting in Thomas Street Methodist Church. Through a men's Bible class associated with First Portadown, he came under the influence of the Rev WM Craig. He joined the congregation and, having served his time as an electrician in Hamilton Robb Linen factory, felt the Lord calling him into the Presbyterian ministry. He trained at Magee College, Trinity College, Dublin, where he gained a BA, and later converted to an MA; he also studied at New College, Edinburgh, and the Presbyterian College, Belfast, being awarded a BD. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Armagh on 26 July 1959, serving in Dundonald. He was ordained on 23 February 1961 by the Presbytery of Coleraine and given charge of the congregation of Main Street, Garvagh, with the addition of Killaig on 12 February 1977. He was installed by the same Presbytery in the congregation of New Row, Coleraine, on 22 November 1979, where he served until his retirement on 6 September 1998. He was Clerk of the Presbytery of Coleraine from 1972 to 1985, Moderator of the Synod of Ballymena & Coleraine in 1983, and Moderator of the General Assembly in 1996, when he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from The Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland. In Garvagh during the troubles, he did his part in the community night watches to deter terrorist attacks but one terrible event that marked him occurred in Bridge Street in 1974 when he ministered to a local UDR soldier who was dying following a bomb attack. Dr Allen's warm personality put people at ease wherever he went, and he also used his technical skills as an electrical engineer to help people in practical ways. He was gifted as a caring pastor, but also with an ability to present the gospel clearly. This was recognised in the many invitations he received to conduct evangelistic events throughout Ireland. The Boys' Brigade at every level was also an important element in his ministry, and on retirement he was made an Honorary Vice-President of the Northern Ireland District. He served on several General Assembly boards and committees, convening the Board of Evangelism and Christian training from 1997-2000 and the Board of Mission in Ireland from then until 2004. In retirement he was busy with The Boys' Brigade and the TBF Thompson Trust, and with his garden. In 1960 he married Miss Florence Wilson in Newmills Presbyterian Church, Co Down. They have two sons,

Philip and Geoffrey, and four grandchildren. To them, and to the wider family, we extend our sympathy and remember one who was described by one of his elders as “a man of God, a wise counsellor, and a man of great wisdom”.

**The Rev John Magilton Maddock, BA**, Minister Emeritus (Released), Carryduff, died on 15 July 2023, in the ninety-fourth year of his age and the seventieth year of his ministry, being at the time the minister with the longest period of ordained service, traditionally ‘The Father of the House’. Born in Newtownards on 27 November 1929 to Hugh and Evelyn Maddock and as a younger brother to Tom, he was called after his maternal grandfather, John Magilton, an elder in Greenwell Street. It was there that Mr Maddock was converted at eleven years old at a mission run by the Belfast City Mission, on whose Board of Governors he was later to serve for many years. He attended Castle Gardens, and then Regent House schools. When asked one day in class what he hoped to be, he answered ‘a Presbyterian minister’. After completing his studies in Magee College, Trinity College, Dublin (where he graduated BA in 1951), and New College, Edinburgh, he was licensed by the Ards Presbytery on 19 July 1953. The same Presbytery ordained him for special work in Australia under the Board of the Colonial and Commonwealth Mission on 25 June the next year. However, his father died suddenly on the evening he was to begin the journey to Australia and he didn’t go. Instead, he undertook work in Oldpark and in Sinclair Seamen’s, until being called to the united charge of Union Road, Magherafelt, and Lecumpher and was installed there by the Tyrone Presbytery on 8 December 1955. It was during his nine years there that he married Moira Irwin (whom he had met while working in Sinclair Seamen’s) and that their children David, Lorna and Lyn were born. His presentation of the Gospel was received with much appreciation. He was installed in Newington by the North Belfast Presbytery on 24 June 1964. During his time there he ministered to an ever-dwindling congregation as, with the Troubles at their height, families moved away. The locality became a no-man’s-land between the New Lodge Road and Tiger’s Bay. Incidents took place nightly. Murder, injury, destruction and fear were the reality. He was at the scene of the Cavehill Road bomb five minutes after it exploded and helped attend the dying. He buried murder victims and visited many injured church members in hospital. Despite all this he said that some of his happiest days were spent in Newington. After eleven years he was installed in Carryduff by the East Belfast Presbytery on 20 June 1975 and his work as both preacher and pastor was gratefully appreciated until his retirement on 30 June 1995. Mr Maddock’s ministry spread beyond his congregations. He was Moderator of the Synod of Belfast in 1985 and was on the Panel of Evangelists, conducting about a dozen Gospel Missions in congregations throughout Ireland. He was Secretary of Logos Ministries International (LMI) for thirty-five years. As one who had studied in Scotland, he organised the annual ‘Scottish Breakfast’ reunion for thirty years and attended without break for forty-six. His other interests included participation in sport – rugby, football, skiing, canoeing

– continuing to do thirty press-ups every morning at the age of ninety. He also had a gift for pen-and-ink drawing, and an appreciation of music ranging from four-part harmony to an online playlist. It was a particular joy for him to see how his children and grandchildren grew to serve the community and especially their involvement in the church and in mission agencies, most notably with LMI. His advice to a newly-installed minister once was ‘Love them in the Name of Jesus’. He exemplified this in his own life. With Moira and the family we give thanks to God for him and we commend them to the grace and comfort of Christ.

**The Rev David Neville Gray, BA, BD, Minister Emeritus (Released),** Portaferry, died on 5 August 2023, in the seventieth year of his age and the forty-fifth year of his ministry. He was born in Bangor, Co. Down, to John McKenzie Gray, a state-registered chiropodist, and his wife Dorothy Eileen (née Irwin) on 2 February 1954. His home congregation was First Bangor. He attended Ballyholme Primary School and Bangor Grammar School. He graduated BA from Queen’s University, Belfast in 1975, and BD from the University of Edinburgh in 1978. His theological education was completed at the Presbyterian College, Belfast, in 1978. Following licensing by the Ards Presbytery on 18 June that year, Mr Gray’s assistantship was served in Cregagh, where he was ordained on 14 January 1979. He was installed by the Derry Presbytery to his first charge – the cross-border linked congregations of Ballyarnett and Knowhead – on 2 April 1981. Six years later he was installed as Minister of First Comber by the Down Presbytery on 1 September 1987, where he served for over eleven years, becoming a minister without charge in 1999. He entered a new sphere of ministry when he was inducted by the East Belfast Presbytery as Associate Minister in Belmont on 21 October 2001. This was followed by a return to his home presbytery, which installed him as Minister of Cloughy and Portaferry on 14 June 2004, continuing from June 2013 in Portaferry alone. He retired on 31 July 2016 and became Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023. His ministry touched the lives of countless people within the congregations in which he served, and many others elsewhere. In retirement Mr Gray joined Conlig where he became a valued member and would assist the minister when he needed pulpit supplies. He was also a consistent encourager, sharing from his experience and offering helpful advice. He married Valerie Patricia Shaw in Bangor Abbey on 13 August 1977. They had a son Paul and daughter Julie Anne and he was a much-loved father-in-law to Victoria and Rick. To them, to his grandchildren Ben, Emma, Emilia and Sophia, we offer our sympathy and pray that they may know the comfort and grace of God.

**The Rev Averil Anne Stevenson, BD, Minister Emeritus (Released),** Kirkcubbin, died on 27 October 2023, in the eighty-eighth year of her age and the thirty-fifth year of her ministry. She was born in Belfast to James and Anne Kenyon on 14 April 1936, a sister to Brenda. She was baptised, admitted to the Lord’s Table, and married (to Corden Stevenson)

in her home congregation of Knock. She attended Strathearn School, Victoria College, the Belfast Shorthand Institute, Rupert Stanley College of Further Education and Union Theological College where she obtained her BD through Queen's University Belfast in 1986. Employment included working as a shorthand typist with London and Scottish Assurance Corporation Ltd and as a researcher with Irish Marketing Surveys. The profound cumulative influences of a Christian home, Sunday School, church and a Crusader class all contributed to her gradually coming to faith, which, after some hesitation, she publicly professed in 1974. After her family had grown up she became convinced that God was calling her into ordained ministry. Her own reluctance held her back, but in the end, in her own words, "God left me no choice... God had much more wisdom than I in the matter." Mrs Stevenson was licensed at Tullycarnet (where she was a member from 1985) by the East Belfast Presbytery on 16 June 1988 and was ordained as Assistant Minister in Windsor by the South Belfast Presbytery on 22 January 1989. During the vacancy that occurred while she was there, she also worked as Chaplain in the Royal Victoria Hospital. Her time in Windsor was followed by periods assisting the minister in Garnerville and in the Gamble Library at Union Theological College. A Call from the congregations of Kirkcubbin and Portaferry led to her installation there by the Presbytery of Ards on 1 June 1994. A realignment meant that she continued in Kirkcubbin solely from 5 December 2001 until her retirement on 30 June 2003, after which she and Corden resumed their involvement in Garnerville, and then more recently joined Portstewart where they had moved to an apartment on The Promenade. Her epilepsy, with which she had been diagnosed as a child, had given her husband certain caring responsibilities throughout their marriage, but in these later years those responsibilities were reversed as his health deteriorated. Her life and ministry were characterised by empathy, love and a practical directness and, despite many difficulties, a sense of humour. She and Corden had four children together: Neil, Sheila, Maureen, and Eileen. We pray that they and the wider family will know the peace of God, and that alongside precious memories of a wife and mother, have a confidence that she has been received by her Lord with the words "Well done, good and faithful servant." (Matthew 25:21)

**The Rev Girvan Christie McKay, LTh, BD, MTh, Minister Emeritus** (Released), Tullamore and Mountmellick, died on 9 January 2024, in the ninety-fifth year of his age and the fifty-fifth year of his ministry. He was born in Bolivia, South America, on 14 August, 1929. His parents William and Janet (née Fisher) were missionaries there. From there the family moved to Spain, then Portugal and then back to Scotland where their home was destroyed by the Luftwaffe during the Second World War. Not long after the war, and already a good linguist, he worked as a newsreader in occupied Germany where as well as English and German, the radio station broadcast in Italian. Returning to the United Kingdom, he ran a Berlitz language school in Manchester where he joined St Aidan's Presbyterian Church, Didsbury. He also went along to An Comunn Gàidhealach, the

Scottish Gaelic Society. It was there that he met Máire Coxon, and they married in 1959, afterwards moving to Fair Isle in Shetland. Mr McKay had already undertaken some preaching and in Fair Isle this was developed more formally. Having been educated at Oporto British School, Portugal; Troon, Ayrshire; and Hillhead High School, Glasgow, he completed a student assistantship in Garthdee, Aberdeen and at Christ's College Aberdeen became a Licentiate in Theology, University of Aberdeen in 1969. In the same year he graduated from London University as a Bachelor of Divinity, 1969. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Aberdeen in the Church of Scotland on 24 April, 1969, which then ordained him on 24 August the same year, installing him as minister of St Andrew's Scots Church, Temperley, Buenos Aires. There he enabled the congregation to transform from a small ex-pat Scottish community to a vibrant Spanish-speaking church at heart of its community. While there he graduated Master of Theology from Union Faculty of Theology, Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1973. On 1 January 1974 he became minister of Broadford Parish on the Isle of Skye. He was received by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and was installed as minister of Kilkenny and Waterford by the Presbytery of Dublin & Munster on 23 June 1977 and then as minister of Tullamore and Mountmellick by the same Presbytery on 7 July 1983. He retired on 31 August 1996 to live in Tullamore with Máire and had a long list of interests that meant he continued to be active. He was sometime teacher of New Testament Greek at Buenos Aires Bible Institute and authored several publications in Spanish and Scottish Gaelic. With Máire and their sons Ruairidh, Conall and Somhairle we affirm, in yet another of the languages that Mr McKay knew, Esperanto, words that he himself trusted: "*Nur bono kaj favoro sekvos min en la dauro de mia tuta vivo*" (Psalm 23 verse 6a).

J.S. STOTHERS, Convener

# GENERAL COUNCIL

## SECTION 2

### RECONFIGURATION OF MINISTRY TASK GROUP

#### Remit

*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.*

#### 1. Introduction

Since the General Assembly of 2023, the Task Group has been working through the Green Paper process. It has met with representatives of all 19 presbyteries, and has received and considered their responses. The Task Group thanks presbyteries for their participation in the Green Paper process.

The Task Group has met on seven occasions since the 2023 General Assembly.

#### 2. Our dependence on God and need for prayer

Throughout its work, and in its interactions with presbyteries, the Task Group has been mindful of its, and the denomination's, dependence upon God.

Everything good that we have and are comes from Him, entirely a result of the grace of God. PCI is part of His Church, the Lord Jesus is its Head, and we have life only as we are united to Him. Without Him we are lost, and unless He works, nothing of eternal value can be achieved.

It is in this context that the Task Group brings this report, and calls on the Church to receive it and act on it, emphasising our need of humble dependence on God, exemplified above all by prayer. Our need to call on Him, to plead with Him to work in and through us is obvious, and there is strong encouragement from the Task Group that any future action by the Church is based on the foundation of humble dependence and prayer, and the knowledge that unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.

### 3. Principles

The following nine principles were put forward in the Green Paper, without any suggestion that they are exhaustive. [GA Reports 2023 p109]

#### Theological Principles

Principle One: The Glory of God and the Primacy of Christ.

Principle Two: The Importance of Fruitfulness.

Principle Three: We are a Presbyterian Church.

#### Attitude/Mindset

Principle Four: The need for discernment and openness to God's leading of His people, and obedience in following His leading.

Principle Five: To fully grasp opportunities and face challenges, the deployment, configuration and role of ordained ministers must be revised.

Principle Six: Any reconfiguration of ministry should prioritise future effectiveness of ministry rather than managing decline.

Principle Seven: We should be where the people are, and meet them where they are.

#### Church polity and practice

Principle Eight: The Church's 'machinery' should serve its ministry and mission.

Principle Nine: In order to be effective, reconfiguration must be collaborative, involving all levels of the denomination.

While some presbytery responses sought to critique, elaborate and add to these, there was no widespread objection to them. As such, the Task Group agreed to affirm them. It can be seen from this report that in places some of these are reiterated, with some slight expansion.

### 4. The Purpose of the Report and any future Reconfiguration

PCI is a reformed Church, but always reforming.

Consequently, the Task Group considers this report, and any reconfiguration of ministry, not simply to be a response to the reduction in the number of ministers in the denomination at present, and the decline in membership, significant though these may be. Rather, it is a response to questions that flow from the fact that the Church is to be constantly reforming, and seeking to better align itself with the will of God. These must include: what does God want us to be and do as part of His Church now and in the future; where does He want to lead us; how best can we serve Him as part of His Church, primarily in the context of our presence on the island of Ireland.

These are emphasised in the Principles put forward in this report, not least the following two:

Principle Two: The Importance of Fruitfulness.

Principle Six: Any reconfiguration of ministry should prioritise future effectiveness of ministry rather than managing decline.

The Task Group believes that it is important for the wider denomination to recognise this, as it observes that some in our denomination perceive the only purpose of the exercise to be a way of adjusting the deployment of ministers and the configuration of charges in order to manage decline. While the reduction in the number of ministers and members does need to be managed, this is not what the Task Group considers to be the only, nor the most important, purpose of this report and its recommendations. Rather, they are an attempt to adapt our configuration of ministry in light of the current decline in ministers and members, but also to reimagine our mission and seek, under God, to realise the potential of what He may do under a new configuration which focuses on using the resources He has entrusted to us as effectively as possible for ministry and mission.

The recommendations that follow are an attempt to prompt us to be constantly reforming, to become more and more what God wants us to be, doing more and more what God wants us to do for Him in His world, being His people.

Any reconfiguration of ministry cannot neglect the responsibilities and duties of the Church in its obedience to its Lord, including: the worship of God; the prophetic proclamation of His Word; the need to shepherd the flock, and prepare God's people for acts of service; the service of each other and those around us in His name; being salt and light by deed and word; reaching those who are lost with the good news of Jesus; and addressing the issue that there are large parts of the island where we have a limited presence, especially in the provinces of Munster and Connacht.

As a Presbyterian Church, we are led by elders, teaching and ruling, and our belief in the priesthood of all believers must also lead us to develop how church members can minister to each other, under the oversight of the eldership.

These things are of a profoundly different nature and magnitude to merely adjusting the denomination to the fact that we have fewer ministers and members than we have had in the recent past. These things are not primarily about denominational management, rather they are about gospel imperatives, going right to the heart of what we are as a Church and what our Lord has called us to be and do in His Name.

Further, while we always need to respond obediently to the Lord's command to pray that He will send out workers into His harvest field, we must recognise that those workers may not all be ministers of Word and Sacrament. The solution to us being and doing what the Lord wants, is not necessarily having 35–40 more ministers, or every congregation that wants

‘a minister of their own’ getting one. Again, our response must be much deeper than that, if we are going to minister as He would have us, and grasp the opportunities for mission and evangelism that exist across this island, especially in the areas that are more challenging for us, and where we have limited presence.

While recognising that there is a trend of reducing resources, the report seeks to stimulate the denomination to address the issues around where and how PCI is going to be present for ministry and mission in the future, and how is it going to fulfil the responsibilities the Lord has placed upon us as part of His Church.

## 5. Practicalities and Recommendations

A central plank of the 2023 Report was that:

Reconfiguration of ministry should be primarily presbytery shaped and implemented, congregationally focussed and denominationally enabled and facilitated. [GA Reports 2023 p119]

The Task Group is persuaded that this should be the central pillar of reconfiguration of ministry.

### 5.1 Presbytery Shaped and Implemented

#### *Recommendation 1:*

1. That every presbytery should produce, for submission to the Linkage Commission, a reconfiguration of ministry and mission plan that:
  - (a) Seeks to enhance the fruitfulness and effectiveness of ministry and grasp opportunities for mission.
  - (b) Identifies any charges which have less than 60% of the presbytery average of contributing families, and where the ten-year decline in the number of contributing families is 140% or more than the presbytery average.

While, in a presbytery plan, consideration will be given to the provision of ministry in all charges, where a charge falls into the above category, the ministry provision of the charge will be placed under review with active consideration given to a change in ministry provision.

It should be noted that in such cases, there will be not a predetermined outcome, as consideration must also be given to any particular ministry and mission priorities that may be present in that context. These factors will be highlighted in a presbytery’s deliberation as it follows the steps outlined in Appendix A and the documents that will be produced to accompany it.

Presbyteries should be mindful of the need to establish charges that are not only sustainable into the future, but also make the charge more effective for ministry and mission in that area. This latter point is worthy of note, as it may be, for example, that a merger of two congregations provides a much more effective vehicle for ministry and mission in an area – the reality that we are able to do more together.

- (c) Identifies the areas of potential for Presbyterian new church development, including, for example, population growth or an area in a presbytery where a clear PCI presence is lacking, and places these areas in a category of missional priority. Each presbytery should bring forward a proposal for at least one new church development as part of its reconfiguration plan. Where more than one area of work is included, the presbytery should prioritise these in its plan.

Account will be taken of presbyteries that already have such a new work, or plans for it.

A template for the production of a presbytery configuration of ministry and mission plan is in Appendix A, along with the timetable for the revision of plans.

It is suggested that after the 2024 Assembly, all similar documents are reviewed with the aim of aligning the language and perspectives used.

2. That this process be facilitated by the Linkage Commission, with the specific input of denominational perspectives from, e.g., CMI and CLW.

This will involve:

- (a) The Commission accompanying presbyteries as they produce, implement and revise ministry and mission plans.
- (b) In the initial phase of planning, a reduction of at least 35–40 charges across the denomination, to be achieved through the interaction of the Linkage Commission with presbyteries. This will bring the current situation into a better balance with estimated capacity of ordained Ministers.
- (c) Developing new areas of work in presbytery areas.

The Task Group believes that these will predominantly involve endeavours that are designed to lead to new church development.

It should be noted that while not all new church development will be led by ordained ministers, it is likely that some will. This will result in a reduction in the number of ministers available to minister in existing charges. Hence the statement in 2(b) above that in the initial planning phase a reduction of at least 35–40 charges will be needed.

The production and progression of these plans will, in effect, be a presbytery's proposal for ordained ministry allocation for the following five years, and will include a rationale for it. Enabling this process will only require the Commission to exercise the powers that are already given to it in the Code.

3. That the convener of the Linkage Commission Reconfiguration Committee [LCRC] ensures that there is adequate representation of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness on the Committee in its interactions with presbyteries.
4. That allowance be made for presbyteries that have already drawn up presbytery plans and are already reducing, and have recently reduced, the number of charges.
5. That presbytery plans will normally be revised at five-yearly intervals, in accordance with the timetable in Appendix A.

The report to the 2023 Assembly stated the following in the hope that it would be seen as a toolbox for presbyteries [GA Reports 2023 p122]:

Congregationally focussed Presbytery Plans for future presence of ministry and mission in their area may involve any or all of the following:

- Supporting growing congregations
- Supporting declining congregations to grow again or revitalise
- Supporting congregations that have reached, or are reaching, the end of their life-cycle to end well
- Creating clusters of congregations for the implementation of fresh mission
- Creating deferred linkages
- Linking congregations with a ministry and missional purpose that goes far beyond two congregations perceiving their link as nothing more than sharing the same minister
- Merging congregations
- Closing congregations and:
  - Starting a new work in that area
  - Allowing another congregation use of the property in order to extend its work
  - Disposing of the property, with the proceeds and other assets being used for other ministry and mission opportunities
- Beginning a new work in an area without closing an existing congregation
- Ministers being called under the Home Mission to areas of presbytery-designated work
- Presbyteries employing additional pastoral personnel for work in their areas

In light of engagements with presbyteries, it is important to emphasise that because reconfiguration plans will be presbytery driven, it is presbyteries that will be primarily responsible for which tools they choose.

Presbyteries should also note the recently produced Reimagining Ministry document and now issued by the Linkage Commission to all vacancy conveners available here: ‘Reimagining Ministry – Presbyterian Church Ireland’ ([www.presbyterianireland.org](http://www.presbyterianireland.org)).

In the planning for the provision of ministry in congregations, it is important that presbyteries are mindful not only of the configuration of ministers of Word and Sacrament, including part-time ministry, but also of:

- the ministry of elders and church members
- auxiliary ministers
- mission pioneers
- accredited preachers
- deaconesses
- stated supply
- assistants to the minister or vacancy conener
- and additional pastoral personnel

## 5.2 The Issue of Specified Numbers of charges in a presbytery

The Report to the 2023 Assembly stated [GA Reports 2023, p.123];

The Task Group is mindful that the remit given to it by the Assembly includes the word ‘radical’. If an actual reconfiguration is to be both presbytery shaped and implemented, and radical, it will depend on presbyteries producing and implementing Reconfiguration Plans which are radical. This could be promoted and encouraged by assigning a specified number of ordained ministers to each presbytery, and allowing presbyteries to determine the priorities and distribution of these within their own areas.

The Task Group believes that a denominational conversation should take place about this, which would feed into its report to the 2024 Assembly.

Having undertaken a denominational conversation, the Task Group recognises that not only is there a current need to reduce the number of charges in the denomination by at least 35-40, but that this must be accompanied by new church development, and account being taken of the need to plan and configure ministry in a dynamic way that takes account of the ever-changing context in which ministry takes place, the fresh opportunities that will emerge for mission, and future changes in the number of ministers in the denomination.

Rather than assigning a specified number of charges to each presbytery, the Task Group believes that the needs in the above paragraph can best be met by the Linkage Commission interacting with presbyteries in the production, implementation and revision of reconfiguration plans.

It should be noted that for charges where leave to call is granted, ministers will be called in the normal way.

As stated in Recommendation 1, point 4, allowance will be made by the Linkage Commission in cases where presbyteries have already reduced the number of charges.

### 5.3 Denominationally Facilitated

Having consulted with presbyteries, the Task Group believes that the establishment of a new denominational body would be counter-productive, as it would need a remit, powers, and an understanding of where it sits in relation to existing bodies. It would also add an additional layer of administration.

The Task Group believes that the Linkage Commission already has an appropriate remit and powers in order to facilitate denominational reconfiguration. Also, in recent years, the Commission has been working with some presbyteries as they have sought to reconfigure ministry.

To further resource the Commission as it fulfils this role, the following is recommended:

#### *Recommendation 2*

That the group within Linkage Commission which deals directly with this will be its Reconfiguration Committee [LCRC]. This will consist of the members of the Business Panel, along with three other members appointed by the Commission. The Reconfiguration Committee may also, at the invitation of the convener, be supplemented by people with specific expertise who will sit and deliberate, from both within and without the Commission.

That a post of Convener of the Reconfiguration Committee, is created, remunerated on the same basis as the Commission Convener. The convener of this Committee will lead in the interaction between the Commission and presbyteries.

That the convener of the LCRC ensure that there is adequate representation of CLW on the Committee in its interactions with presbyteries.

#### 5.4 The Issue of Presbytery realignment

The 2023 Report stated [GA Reports 2023, p.120] that:

the Task Group believes that as part of this Green Paper process, the issue of presbytery realignment should be discussed by the denomination, with consideration given to reducing the number of presbyteries to, for example, fifteen, thirteen, eleven, nine or seven.

Following consultation across the denomination, the Task Group still believes that presbytery realignment will facilitate more effective, long-term ministry and mission in PCI.

However, in light of presbytery responses, it believes that to act on this now would distract from, and delay, the more urgent and important task of reconfiguration on the ground. Therefore, it brings the following recommendation:

##### *Recommendation 3*

That no realignment of presbyteries be undertaken at this time, but that the General Council be asked to consider the issue in 2032, with a view to a possible realignment in 2034. It is recognised that some presbyteries currently feel they lack capacity to effectively fulfil their role. Where a presbytery believes that consideration should be given to it being realigned before this, it should write to the General Council stating this.

That being said, the Task Group asks presbyteries to be mindful of the role of the Linkage Commission regarding the movement of congregations and ministers from one presbytery to another. Presbyteries should be aware of this in producing configuration of ministry plans.

#### 5.5 Finance

The Task Group strongly believes that the denomination should make provision for investment in reconfiguration of ministry and mission as described in this report.

This will involve resources for greater investment in new church development, both people and plant, and facilitating the process at a presbytery and denominational level [for example, the appointment of a Convener of the LCRC].

It is beyond the remit of the Task Group as to what mechanism is used to achieve this in practice, as the sources of finance will involve CMI, CMF and Linkage.

The Task Group believes that additional finance for new church development should be seen as separate from the work of revitalisation of existing charges. Finance for revitalisation can already be allocated

to this through CMF when, for example, the Linkage Commission gives permission for the continuance of ordained ministry in a charge where the congregation(s) cannot afford to support the minister, with the shortfall being made up by augmentation from CMF. In addition, CMI mission grants are also available to support Additional Pastoral Personnel.

*Recommendation 4*

That the Assembly agree in principle that new church development is a heightened priority for the denomination and that additional finance be allocated to it; and that the General Council bring a report and proposals for how this may be achieved to the 2025 Assembly.

## **6. The Green Paper Process**

Other issues arising from the Green Paper Process

### **6.1 Restructuring and streamlining of denominational structures and resources**

Many presbyteries in their responses stated that consideration should be given to resources used at a denominational level, with the aim of streamlining this through restructuring.

It is beyond the remit of the Task Group to address this apart from the following recommendation:

*Recommendation 5*

That the General Council be asked to conduct a review of denominational-level structures, resources and buildings, including those at Assembly Buildings and Union College.

### **6.2 The Training of ministers and training for ministry**

Much of the consideration of the Task Group has been centred on the distribution or configuration of ordained ministers. This is valid, as one impetus for the establishment of the Task Group was the recognition that the denomination has fewer ministers than has recently been the case, and consequently more vacant charges.

However, in considering the distribution of ordained ministers, ministry in a wider sense within the denomination cannot be ignored, and the part played by ruling elders, and members of the Church.

Regarding ordained ministers, PCI has periodically reviewed the requirements of training, the last review being in 2009. In light of the period that has elapsed since then, and of the need for ordained ministers to be equipped for effective ministry, the Task Group makes the following recommendation:

*Recommendation 6*

That the General Council establish a review of the training of ministers of Word and Sacrament.

Regarding elders and members.

While God calls and equips people to the ministry of Word and Sacrament as teaching elders of the Church, He also calls and equips ruling elders, and grants gifts to all His people. These are to be used in the upbuilding of His Church and in its ministry and mission in His world.

The Task Group believes, and has noted in some presbytery responses, that the ministry of ruling elders and members should be enhanced, not to the detriment of teaching elders, but to allow the Church to function more effectively. To facilitate this, it brings the following recommendation:

*Recommendation 7*

That presbyteries and kirk sessions should be aware of and use resources that already exist in order to enhance their role individually and corporately including, for example, Handling the Word, the Accredited Preacher Scheme and equipping in pastoral care.

**The issue of Congregational Buildings that become redundant, especially those that are listed and/or have graveyards.**

A number of presbyteries raised the issue of meeting houses that may become redundant, especially those with graveyards. The Task Group recognises that this may become a significant challenge across many parts of the denomination and draws attention to the report of the General Council to the General Assembly of 2015 [GA 2015 reports pp.29–31].

## **7. Implementation**

The reconfiguration process proposed in this report will require significant innovation and investment. Innovation, because while it operates within current structures, it will require a different way of approaching contemporary circumstances, challenges and opportunities. The work will be one of transitioning the mindset and mechanisms of decision and delivery of the denomination from an existing way of determining congregational presence for ministry and mission, allocation of resources for mission and apportioning ordained ministers across the island, to something more responsive to ever changing contexts. Investment of money, time and energy, because implementing and sustaining the work envisaged is a task so significant and of such scale that it must become central to the future functioning of the denomination at every level – Assembly, presbytery and congregation.

*Recommendation 8*

That the General Council ensures that steps are taken for the effective transition from the vision to reality of the recommendations in this report by, for example, the appointment of an Implementation Steering Group.

*Recommendation 9*

That, in order to create capacity for the production of reconfiguration of ministry and mission plans, presbytery consultations are suspended for three years.

**8. Conclusion**

The Task Group is thankful for the support of the wider denomination in enabling it to draw up this report. It commends to the Lord those who, if the Assembly determines, will take forward this work. In asking that the Task Group be thanked and discharged, having completed the particular remit given to it, attention is drawn to the need to reapportion focus, time, capacity - and where necessary available finance - to ensure that vision becomes reality. This will require careful planning, preparation and process to achieve alignment and synchronisation, as it will involve a variety of different participants.

**APPENDIX A****Template and Timetable for the production of a presbytery configuration of ministry and mission plan**

## Notes

1. Dates in the timetable are indicative – the Task Group recognises that presbyteries have different numbers of congregations, so time scales may vary. Also, that some presbyteries have started the process of reconfiguration and, consequently, may enter it at different points.
2. The Task Group recommends that the process of implementing this report includes the production of documents to accompany this timetable, including:
  - (a) A document to gather data from congregations, such as an amended version of CMI's 'Seven Ps' document
  - (b) A letter from presbyteries to kirk sessions
  - (c) A letter from Linkage Commission to presbyteries.
3. The Task Group suggests that consideration is given by parties involved to aligning documents used in presbytery consultations, reconfiguration of ministry, seeking permission to call at Linkage, so that congregations only have to complete one form, not several.

	Date [Indicative]	Prayer requested across congregations and at presbytery meetings		
<p>Prayer</p> <p>1. Establish a Working Group with responsibility of implementing steps 2-8</p>	<p>By 31 October 2024</p>	<p>Membership – Ministers and elders [not necessarily representative or corresponding elders] May also have non-ordained sit and deliberates Max 8 people</p>	<p>Convened by someone whose congregation is less likely to be seriously affected by any reconfiguration. Be aware that some people may have direct interests in discussions, as it may affect their congregations. People may have to step out of meetings as a result.</p>	<p>LCRC convener available</p>
<p>2. Be aware of remit and aims</p>	<p>By 30 November 2024</p>	<p>Accompanied by document from LCRC to presbyteries</p>		
<p>3. Contact all congregations</p>	<p>By 30 November 2024</p>	<p>Letter from presbytery to sessions sharing information on process Data gathering process – e.g. Seven Ps document or other questionnaire requesting information from sessions</p>	<p>This may involve the presbytery working group meeting with kirk sessions, as is the case with the Seven Ps document.</p>	

4. Gather data	By 28 February 2025	<p>i. Return of congregational forms to Working Group</p> <p>ii. Additional working group research</p>	<p>Congregational forms will prompt review congregations regarding data</p> <p>Additional data gathered by Presbytery working group, e.g., population data and trends, areas that may be mission areas etc</p>	LCRC convener available
5. Conversations with all sessions	By 30 June 2025	<p>Conversations take place between presbytery working group and sessions, after working group has considered responses</p>	<p>Consideration of data – figures and stories</p> <p>Sharing possible options, seeking initial reactions of sessions.</p> <p>Conversations should be ordered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– current vacancies</li> <li>– likely future vacancies where retirements are within five years</li> <li>– those who may be directly affected</li> <li>– all others</li> </ul>	Liaise with LCRC convener
6. Meet with LCRM	By 31 December 2025		<p>Draft report has been forwarded to convener of LCRC prior to meeting. Plan is discussed</p>	
7. Refine report in light of meeting with LCRC	By 28 February 2026			Liaise with LCRC convener

<p>8. Special Presbytery Meeting</p>	<p>By 30 April 2026</p>	<p>Attended by 5 people [clerk of session, treasurer, secretary, presbytery representative elder, minister] from every congregation</p>	<p>Draft report presented. Purpose of meeting: – information to whole meeting – discussion – Separate meetings with specific congregational representatives after main meeting, for congregations particularly affected</p>	<p>Convener of LCRC available for meeting, if desired</p>
<p>9. Revise report and meet with LCRC</p>	<p>By 30 September 2026</p>	<p>Report revised in light of previous presbytery meeting. Meeting with LCRC</p>	<p>Agreement re final report before it goes to presbytery for approval. Any amendments made following meeting with LCRC.</p>	<p>Liaise with LCRC convener and meet with LCRC</p>
<p>10. Presbytery meeting</p>	<p>By 31 December 2026</p>	<p>Full presbytery meeting</p>	<p>Approval of report sought from presbytery</p>	<p>Convener of LCRC available for meeting, if desired</p>
<p>11. Further discussion with LCRC, if needed</p>		<p>If presbytery amends report</p>	<p>Consultation with convener LCRC, and possible meeting with LCRC</p>	
<p>12. Presbytery meeting, if necessary</p>			<p>If necessary, for presbytery to consider amended report in light of consultation with LCRC.</p>	

**Timetable for review of Presbytery Plans**

Review to take place in the year 2031	Armagh Derry and Donegal Dublin and Munster Iveagh Monaghan Newry Omagh
Review to take place in the year 2032	Ballymena Carrickfergus Coleraine and Limavady Route Templepatrick Tyrone
Review to take place in the year 2033	Ards East Belfast North Belfast South Belfast Down Dromore

# GENERAL COUNCIL

## SECTION 3

### GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the General Assembly, the General Assembly Advisory Committee (GAAC) met on four occasions – Monday 4 September 2023, Thursday 14 December 2023, Tuesday 12 March 2024 and Wednesday 10 April 2024 to carry forward both its core remit and other matters referred to it by the General Council. This year each of these meetings were lengthy and dealt with a significant range of important, and often complex, issues. Thanks are due to the members of the GAAC for their diligence in dealing with this heavy work-load.
2. Taking forward matters arising from the decisions for the 2023 General Assembly
  - (a) **Monaghan Memorial**

The prayer of the Memorial which had been accepted by the 2023 General Assembly was noted, namely:

*Memorialists, therefore, pray your Venerable Assembly to instruct the General Council to review the process by which the Moderator of the General Assembly is elected, to ensure more information is available, and report back to the 2024 General Assembly.*

The Clerk introduced this item, referring to the paper that had been circulated previously in which the membership of a possible Task Group was suggested for consideration as being:

- Ex-officio: Clerk of Assembly and General Council Convener
- Task Group Convener
- Two Clerks of Presbytery – from different types of Presbytery
- Two ministers – one experienced, one newer
- Two elders – from different types of Presbytery

The following membership was recommended to (and subsequently appointed by) the General Council:

Clerk of Assembly and General Council Convener, Joe Campbell (Task Group Convener), Trevor Long, Robert Herron, Rob Craig, Andrew Gill, Brian Craig and Elizabeth Warden.

- (b) **Appointment Interview Panel for Head of Communications post**  
An Interview Panel was appointed to take forward this task, with authority granted to the General Council Convener and Clerk to appoint alternates as necessary.
- (c) **Consideration of policy regarding amendments to General Assembly resolutions**  
Following discussion on a pre-circulated paper, the Committee was generally of the mind that the resolution at 2023 promoted informed debate for all members. In addition, it was noted that there needed to be a clear demonstration that any exceptional amendments put forward at the Assembly were in fact prompted by new information in the proposers or seconds presenting speeches. The Committee's view would be communicated to the General Assembly Business Committee and the General Council to inform their deliberations.
- (d) **Outstanding piece of work relating to Decision Making and Dissent**  
Following discussion on a pre-circulated paper, it was recommended to (and subsequently agreed by) the General Council that this be referred to the current Task Group to take forward.

3. **Significant issues likely to involve Presbyteries in 2024/25:**

- (a) The Clerk highlighted the role of the Committee in recommending to the Assembly that regional conferences are used for specific reports.
- (b) For 2024/25 the following may be important to note:
- Under the Code Republishing Panel – Republished Code is due to be sent down to presbyteries under Barrier Act;
  - Under the Reconfiguration of Ministry Report - there is likely to be considerable work for presbyteries.

The GAAC therefore recommended, and the General Council subsequently accepted, that there should be no additional regional conference this year.

4. **Implementation of some recommendations of the Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group**

The March 2024 meeting of General Council requested that the GAAC offer guidance as to the implementation of the following recommendations of the Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group, if adopted by the 2024 General Assembly:

*Recommendation 5*

That the General Council be asked to conduct a review of denominational-level structures, resources and buildings, including those at Assembly Buildings and Union College.

*Recommendation 6*

That the General Council establish a review of the training of ministers of Word and Sacrament.

*Recommendation 8*

That the General Council ensures that steps are taken to ensure that there is an effective transition from the vision to reality of the recommendations in this report by, for example, the appointment of an Implementation Steering Group.

The proposals of the GAAC for implementation were agreed by the General Council at its April meeting and are outlined in GC Resolutions 14(a)–(c) and should be read in conjunction with the report of the Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group.

5. During the year the GAAC also considered a number of **matters that came to it from other Councils** and recommended ways forward to the General Council, which were subsequently agreed by the Council. These included:
  - (a) The Council for Training in Ministry (CTM) raised two matters which it felt needed to be considered at denominational level, namely:
    - UTC Building: It was agreed that minor but necessary short-term repairs to the physical infrastructure of Union Theological College continue to be carried forward by the UTC Management Committee, where necessary in consultation with, and with the approval of, the Priorities Reference Panel; and in light of the anticipated necessary property expenditure in the region of £3 million, the future requirements and provision of buildings for PCI's theological education be part of the remit of the proposed General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel and its Ministerial Training Review Sub-Panel – see GC Resolution 15(a).
    - UTC Professors: Professor Gordon Campbell is retiring towards the end of August 2024, which will leave only two professorial posts at UTC – see GC Resolution 15(b).
  - (b) The **Council for Mission in Ireland (CMI)** requested a small change to its current committee structure and the GAAC recommended to the General Council, and it was agreed, that this be approved, effective from the 2024 General Assembly.
  - (c) Two matters were considered relating to the Council for Congregational Life and Witness (CCLW)
    - It was agreed that remits of General Assembly bodies should be examined – see GC Resolution 15(c).

- The 2023 General Assembly instructed CCLW to draw up a report providing practical guidance for kirk sessions on the outworking of the 2023 decisions in relation to membership for those with intellectual disabilities. This was also to include illustrative vows for admission to membership for people with intellectual disabilities. CCLW forwarded its report (entitled ‘Welcome, inclusion and embrace of those with intellectual disabilities and their families’) to the General Council for guidance as to how it should be processed at the 2024 General Assembly. The GAAC recommended, and the General Council subsequently agreed, that the report be included as an appendix to the CCLW report with vows being seen as illustrative for ministers and kirk sessions; and that the General Council Convener and Secretary be mandated to speak at CCLW debate in support of the report. It was also agreed by the General Council that, if accepted by the General Assembly, illustrative vows be included as an Appendix in the Book of Public Worship.
6. **Consideration of Presbytery reports on Ministers Emeritus and Ministers without Charge**
- (a) The Committee took time to consider in detail the reports received from Presbyteries regarding **Ministers without Charge and Licentiates not in Assistantships** under their care. This piece of work is largely noting and confirming the decisions taken by Presbyteries. A summary report is included in Appendix 1.
  - (b) The Committee took time to consider in detail the reports received from Presbyteries regarding Ministers Emeritus under their care. All Ministers Emeritus are required to indicate annually to their Presbytery if they wish to retain that status, and fulfil the responsibilities that go with it, or become a Minister Emeritus (Released). A summary report is included in Appendix 2.
7. **Land at Primrose Lane Lucan (Lucan Centre)**
- (a) During the year the GAAC considered matters relating to the PCI owned land at Primrose Lane Lucan (Lucan Centre), initially at its meeting on 14 December 2023 in the light of correspondence received and then, at the request of the General Council, at its meetings on 12 March and 10 April 2024. At these meetings the GAAC had before it detailed reports, including those commissioned from a firm with commercial estate agency experience in the greater Dublin area. Legal advice was also taken as appropriate. The Committee’s task was, following detailed discussion, to bring considered recommendations to the General Council for its decision.

- (b) **A Special Meeting of the General Council was held on 16 January 2024**, and a report was received from the GAAC regarding the PCI owned land at Primrose Lane Lucan (Lucan Centre). This report contained both the background to the Lucan Centre lands and the explanation of recent developments (a summary of which is included in Appendix 3 of this report), along with options for consideration by the Council.
- (c) **The General Council formally agreed to deal with this as an exceptional matter**, arising between meetings of the General Assembly, and therefore to act on behalf of the General Assembly as authorised by Code Par 272(3). Following detailed debate and discussion, the General Council exercising the delegated authority of the General Assembly:
- i. Concurred that the 2008 General Assembly Resolution was null and void (see Appendix 3) as it could not be implemented.
  - ii. Agreed to maximise the asset by taking the time-limited opportunity to sell all of the PCI owned land at Primrose Lane (Lucan Centre) to the Developer, with a recommendation being brought to the 2024 General Assembly that a proportion of the funds realised be allocated for ministry and mission within the bounds of Dublin and Munster Presbytery.  
(Note: this latter clause to recognise ‘the spirit’ of the 2008 Assembly decision.)
  - iii. Appointed and authorised the following group to oversee and finalise negotiations relating to the sale, including having authority to accept a final offer from the developer and to agree an appropriate time-scale for implementation:
    - General Council Convener, Support Services Convener, Clerk of Assembly (Convener) and Deputy Clerk of Assembly
- (d) Subsequent to the decisions of the General Council in January 2024, the officers of the Council, the GAAC and the General Council itself have responded to a number of pieces of ‘reactive correspondence’. This included a letter from the Presbytery of Dublin & Munster which was considered in detail and responded to by the GAAC. The General Council, at its March meeting noted and overwhelmingly supported (with two people voting against) the response of the GAAC.
- (e) At the April meeting of the General Council, the Clerk reported verbally that a Heads of Agreement for the sale had been signed by the purchaser and by PCI, as the vendor, subject to contract. The Heads of Agreement contain a variety of clauses, including:
- that a non-returnable deposit would be paid by the developer
  - the contract is conditional on the developer receiving planning permission

- the developer will have six months to submit a request for planning permission
- all planning costs to be covered by the developer
- the developer must complete within 24 months of signing the contract
- a minimum period of 12 months has been inserted where PCI will retain full access and use of the site and centre from the date of signing of the contract.

#### 8. **Matters relating to the Council for Social Witness**

Throughout 2023 and 2024, growing financial pressures within the Council for Social Witness (CSW) were monitored by the officers of the Support Services Committee whose reports were considered by the GAAC. A confidential written report was tabled at the April meeting of the General Council – see Appendix 4. It was agreed that the officers of the Support Services Committee continue to monitor the situation in the short to medium term; and that the wider issues relating to CSW be included in the remit of the proposed General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel – see GC Resolution 15(d).

#### 9. **Ad-Hoc Business conducted by the GAAC**

During the year the GAAC considered a number of matters and brought appropriate recommendations to the General Council for consideration. These included:

- (a) **2024 General Assembly Private Session and Supplementary Business**
- The Committee agreed to recommend that certain matters in relation to the Council for Training in Ministry be taken at the 2024 General Assembly in Private Session, and an appropriate resolution is included with the Initial Report of the General Assembly Business Committee (on Thursday morning).
  - The Committee also agreed to recommend that, in line with the practice at the 2023 General Assembly, all supplementary business, including any proposed amendments etc, be submitted in advance for licencing and inclusion in the Supplementary Reports Booklet. Again, an appropriate resolution is included with the Initial Report of the General Assembly Business Committee (on Thursday morning).
- (b) **Church Relations** – The report of the Church Relations Convener, the Rev Helen Freeburn, is included in Appendix 5. A separate fuller report is included in Appendix 6 regarding taking forward PCI's relationship with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (USA), with a related resolution – see GC Resolution 16.

- (c) **Remit of the General Assembly Advisory Committee** – In light of the extended remit of General Assembly Advisory Committee, it was agreed that Avril Heenan and Norman Cameron be co-opted to the Priorities Reference Panel. It was also agreed that the Convener of the Church Relations Panel be invited to sit and deliberate at all meetings of the GAAC.
- (d) **Theological Engagement Task Group** – It was recommended to (and subsequently agreed by) the General Council that the mandate of the Theological Engagement Task Group be renewed and that its membership be appropriately refreshed.
- (e) **Funding Matters**
- The GAAC recommended to the General Council, and it was agreed, that £54,000 be transferred to the Council for Congregational Life and Witness from the Special Assemblies Fund, for use in the Present Initiative and Presbytery listening exercises, with any surplus funds to be returned at the end of these initiatives.
  - The GAAC recommended to the General Council, and it was agreed, that the ‘Trustees’ Discretionary Fund’ be renamed the ‘General Assembly Discretionary Fund’ with immediate effect.
- (f) **Memorials coming to the 2024 General Assembly**
- A Memorial from the Kirk Session recommending that the name of First & Second Markethill Congregation be changed to Markethill is supported by the Presbytery of Newry and the GAAC recommended, and the General Council agreed, to support a resolution to the General Assembly that its prayer be granted.
  - A Memorial from the Revs John Hanson and Alan McQuade has been transmitted by the Monaghan Presbytery with the recommendation that its prayer be not granted. Following discussion, and in the light of the view of the Presbytery of Monaghan, the GAAC recommended, and the General Council agreed, to oppose a resolution to the General Assembly that its prayer be granted.

## APPENDIX 1

### MINISTERS WITHOUT CHARGE AND LICENTIATES NOT IN ASSISTANTSHIPS UNDER PAR 219A OF THE CODE

1. Each year presbyteries are required to complete returns regarding ministers without charge and licentiates no longer serving in assistantships. The documentation about this was previously dealt with by the Reception of Ministers and Licentiates Committee under the Council for Training in Ministry. However, at the General Assembly 2022, it was agreed that this would now be carried out by the GA Advisory Committee, under the General Council (GA Reports 2022, p.262).

#### Requirements for retention

2. Code Par 219(4)(b) states:

*The Presbytery shall seek authorisation annually through the General Council, or its appropriate committee, for those it wishes to retain on the Church's current records as recognised licentiates or ministers without charge. The Council shall consider such requests and ask the Assembly to resolve on its recommendations.*

3. Code Par 219(4)(c) states:

*It shall be a condition for retention that they report regularly to Presbytery as required, not less than annually, on their life and work, especially involvement in congregational life and Church work, in preaching, administration of the sacraments and conduct of marriages, and on whether they have actively been seeking a call.*

The GA Advisory Committee has considered the returns from presbyteries and brought the following recommendations to the General Council, for transmission to the General Assembly.

Presbytery	Name
Ards	Rev A Ditty to be retained as minister without charge Rev CD Mawhinney to be retained as minister without charge Rev L-A Wilson to be retained as minister without charge
Armagh	Rev JWP McConnell to be retained as minister without charge
Ballymena	Rev DA McMillan to be retained as minister without charge
North Belfast	Rev Dr LE Carroll to be retained as minister charge Mr D McCarthy not be retained as licentiate Rev S Newell to be retained as minister without charge Rev WA Shaw to be retained as minister without charge Rev WM Smyth to be retained as minister without charge (retired)
South Belfast	Rev J Burnett to be retained as minister without charge
East Belfast	Rev JM Casement to be retained as minister without charge Rev WG Hamilton to be retained as minister without charge Rev WJ Harshaw to be retained as minister without charge (retired) Rev Dr DJ Montgomery to be retained as minister without charge Rev Dr MJ Welsh to be retained as minister without charge
Carrickfergus	Rev TN Bingham to be retained as minister without charge
Coleraine and Limavady	Rev Dr RA Kane to be retained as minister without charge
Derry and Donegal	Rev SR Richmond to be retained as minister without charge

Presbytery	Name
Down	Rev Dr BCG Black to be retained as minister without charge Rev RC Patton to be retained as minister without charge
Iveagh	Rev PG Cleland to be retained as minister without charge
Monaghan	Rev DJM Boyle to be retained as minister without charge
Newry	Rev AD Mullan to be retained as minister without charge Rev BA Wilson to be retained as minister without charge
Route	Rev P Douglas to be retained as minister without charge
Templepatrick	Rev K Campbell to be retained as minister without charge Rev JA Gordon not be retained as minister without charge Rev D Paul to be retained as minister without charge Rev JL Tosh to be retained as minister without charge
Tyrone	Rev WI Ferris to be retained as minister without charge

## APPENDIX 2

### MINISTERS EMERITUS

1. The 2021 General Assembly resolved:  
*That, from the 2022 General Assembly onwards, retired ministers will be required to opt to remain full members of the courts of the Church - with automatic retention as full members at the point of retirement, and then thereafter each retired minister be required to request annually to be retained.*  
(Recommendation 6 of the Decision Making and Dissent Task Group, 2021 Reports, p.119)
2. In response to this, the 2022 General Assembly put in place a process whereby this responsibility is carried out by Presbyteries and reported to the General Assembly, through the General Assembly Advisory Committee under the General Council:  
*Resolution 21, GA Reports 2022, p.262*
  21. *That from the 2022 General Assembly onwards, the General Assembly Advisory Committee (under the General Council) be given responsibility for receiving reports from Presbyteries in relation to both Ministers without Charge and Ministers Emeritus.*
3. The GA Advisory Committee has considered the returns from presbyteries and asks the General Council to note that the following ministers emeritus have requested released status, and been granted such by their presbytery.

Presbytery	Name
Ards	Kennedy, WA
Armagh	Moore, TA
Belfast North	Dallas, JS Simpson, K
Belfast East	Drysdale, RD Hornby, R
Coleraine and Limavady	Gordon, RN Irwin, DS Kerr, AMcM Kingsmore, B Lindsay, TS Simpson, GD Waring, WJ Wilson, RJ
Derry & Donegal	Latimer, D
Down	Cole, AA
Dublin & Munster	Hunter, CM
Omagh	Casement, JL Neill, RSK
Templepatrick	Patton, WD

## APPENDIX 3

### LAND AT PRIMROSE LANE LUCAN (LUCAN CENTRE)

#### 1. Background

- (a) The Presbyterian Church in Ireland owns land at Primrose Lane in Lucan village. This is where the former ‘Lucan Youth Centre’ was based, the facility now known simply as the ‘Lucan Centre’. The land has a number of buildings on it, which have been renovated and/or constructed over the years. There is a large proportion of the site which is in grass.
- (b) The former Board of Youth & Children’s Ministry decided a long time ago to close the Lucan Youth Centre and recommended to the General Assembly that owning and running residential youth facilities should no longer be part of the central work of the Church. This was agreed by the General Assembly and remains the position.
- (c) The 2008 General Assembly passed the following resolution:  
That the General Assembly (a) instruct the Board of Social Witness to enter discussions with South Dublin County Council in order to develop sheltered accommodation on part of the Lucan site and (b) agree to transfer the remainder of the site with the residential facilities to the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster.
- (d) This remained the formal position of the General Assembly since 2008 i.e. the Board of Social Witness (now Council for Social Witness) were to seek to develop sheltered accommodation on part of the Lucan site and then transfer the remainder of the site with the residential facilities to the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster.
- (e) However, over the years since 2008, the Board of Social Witness (and its successor, the Council for Social Witness) has been unable to come to a mutually acceptable arrangement with any housing association, as envisaged in the 2008 decision of the General Assembly. Some years ago, the Council for Social Witness (CSW) went further and indicated that this was no longer a priority or a desire of the Council, as another care scheme in the Greystones area was agreed by the General Assembly as the way forward for provision of a significant Council for Social Witness facility within the Dublin area.
- (f) As a result, the 2008 General Assembly Resolution cannot be implemented as it has not proved possible to fulfil part (a) and therefore part (b) (which was contingent on part (a) being fulfilled) cannot proceed. The resolution therefore was in practice null and void.

## 2. Recent Developments

- (a) The land owned by PCI at Primrose Lane Lucan is in one sense 'land locked'. The access to it is by travelling up Primrose Lane, a narrow residential roadway. While current and previous use, as a residential centre with a large amenity area laid out in grass, is acceptable to planners, and a possible low density sheltered accommodation development could have been acceptable, a larger scale housing development on the site would not be permissible. This is because, although housing development is needed in the general area, access via the narrow residential Primrose Lane would not be acceptable for a housing development.
- (b) However, in late 2023 approaches have been made by a Developer who is currently developing a new housing scheme on land adjacent to the PCI owned site. The Developer has a separate approved access road onto his current site, and could literally extend his development across the boundary onto the PCI owned site, if he was able to purchase it, thereby overcoming the 'Primrose Lane access' problem. This is a very significant change because although the current PCI owned site is theoretically valuable as a site for housing development, its value can only in fact be realised by someone who has this alternative approved access to it.

## APPENDIX 4

### CONFIDENTIAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS MATTERS

1. As previously reported, during the last two years the Council for Social Witness (CSW) made significant operating losses in its provision of residential and related services. The situation has been monitored by the Financial Secretary and the officers of the Support Services Committee with regular meetings being held during 2023 with the officers of CSW. A number of initial steps were agreed to begin to turn around the situation and the General Council in November 2023 agreed to extend the CSW ‘internal overdraft limit’ to £3million, recognising that this amount would still be covered by the CSW’s reserves and assets.
2. The officers of the Support Services Committee met on Thursday 4th April 2024 to receive a further update on the financial position of the Council for Social Witness (CSW) and to examine the position at the end of the 2023 financial year. The following was noted:
  - The ‘internal overdraft’ at 31 December 2023 was approx. £2.6million, within the £3million limit, but larger than had been anticipated, largely because the sale of York House (redundant CSW property in Portrush) had been delayed, and was now anticipated to complete in November 2024, which will realise approx. £700,000. In addition, CSW will benefit from a ‘part-share of a residual legacy’, which will realise approx. £250,000. These two amounts, along with the anticipated sale of a property at York Road Belfast, will reduce the ‘internal overdraft’ by over £1million.
  - Significant steps were taken to turn around the 2023 financial position in the second half of that year, in relation to a number of residential units, one indeed now showing an operating profit for the year and others greatly reducing the level of loss being made in the second half of the year. However, a number of residential units continued to make a substantial loss in the second half of 2023. The nett result was an overall loss during 2023 of some £2million, which makes up the bulk of the £2.6million ‘internal overdraft’ figure.
  - Through the steps that have been put in place, along with further steps that are being implemented, the projections for 2024 show a further significant reduction in overall losses. However, significant losses were still projected for a small number of residential units. This means that there is likely to be an overall projected loss for 2024 of some £260,000. While this is a very significant turn around from 2023, nonetheless it is still a projected loss and is unsustainable.

3. The officers of the Support Services Committee recognise the significant work carried forward by the senior management team of CSW to begin to turn around the very difficult financial position. This has taken its own toll on senior staff, who have often been carrying forward this work in the context of significant staff vacancies both at local and regional levels. Thanks are due to the efforts being put in by the CSW Council Secretary, Council Convener, Finance Manager and Regional Managers, supported by the HR Department who have been allocating extra resource to seek to fill vacancies.
4. The officers of the Support Services Committee concur with the conclusions of the senior officers of CSW that some of the residential units under CSW management are simply not financially viable. While in a small number of cases ongoing negotiations with funding bodies might be able to turn this around in a workable time-scale, it is recognised that in a small number of other cases there are no realistic solutions. In the former category of units, successful negotiations with funders may avoid difficult decisions having to be taken. However, in the latter category it is recognised that difficult decisions will have to be taken by CSW in the very near future.
5. The Clerk of Assembly, on behalf of the office-bearers of the Support Services Committee, is in the process of writing to the officers of CSW both to encourage them in the work they have been doing and also to encourage CSW to take the necessary difficult decisions in regard to the small number of units which are simply neither financially viable at present nor moving into the future.

## APPENDIX 5

### CHURCH RELATIONS REPORT

1. Jesus' words are clear, "therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19–20).
2. What wonderful words to carry in our hearts, as we continue with humility, love and by God's grace, to reach out with others and see the Great Commission being fulfilled on this island and to the ends of the earth.

#### General

3. Local churches continue to partner, serve and pray alongside other believers as the body of Christ, reaching out together with the Good news of Jesus in many varied ways.

#### Church Leaders Group

4. The Church Leaders Group visited Rome at the joint invitation of the UK and Irish ambassadors to the Holy See, to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. They led a joint service at the Waldensian Evangelical Church in Rome's Piazza Cavour, participated in a seminar attended by members of the diplomatic corps reflecting on the legacy of the Agreement, and also met a delegation of the South Sudan Council of Churches.
5. During the year, the church leaders have been able to meet with Chris Heaton-Harris, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, sharing their concerns at the cuts which have led to great suffering for the most vulnerable in society, and they have met with the leadership of each of the political parties in Northern Ireland.
6. In a statement issued on 2 February 2024, they welcomed the anticipated restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland and their joint statement concluded by saying, "As in these coming days our political parties seek to move forward together, acting for the common good and governing for all, they do so with the support and prayers of many in our society, ourselves included."

#### ICC (Irish Council of Churches) & IICM (Irish Inter-Church Meeting)

7. The panel congratulates Rev Karen Campbell (PCI) on her appointment in December 2023, to the position of Good Relations Officer within ICC. In this role she will lead inter-church engagement in peace-building and reconciliation, through implementation of the 'Unfinished Work of Peace' strategy that underpins this aspect of ICC and IICM's work. Rev Campbell

said “I am grateful to ICC and IICM for this opportunity. Since the gospel centres on resurrection, I am looking forward to engaging with key issues that will encourage full resurrection flourishing on this island. I will eagerly find connection points with migrant-led churches and see how they are invigorating expressions of faith that will disciple and encourage us, and connect with local inter-church groups to support them in their work building reconciliation and peace in their communities.” In a broken and divided world, the work of healing and reconciliation, of hope and good news is indeed vital and so we commend and pray for Rev Karen in this important work as she seeks to serve Christ in this capacity, to the glory of God.

8. Connected to this area, a Handbook for a church’s journey of Inclusion is being launched in April 2024 by ICC. By God’s grace this will be a helpful and inspiring resource for churches as they seek to be Spirit filled communities, where people of every nation, tribe, people and tongue grow in Christlikeness together, and in learning, service and witness, where God has planted them.
9. The panel also would like to note and congratulate the Very Rev Dr Charles McMullen on his appointment as the incoming Vice-President of ICC. He was installed in this role at the AGM on the 11th April 2024 and will serve for two years. Bishop Sarah Groves (Moravian Church) is the current President and Dr McMullen will be moving into the Presidency of ICC in the spring of 2026.
10. In the interest of being good stewards and using the resources God gives wisely, the sale of an ICC owned building, the Inter-church centre in Belfast is currently being processed.
11. In 2023, ICC celebrated 100 years since its formation, and IICM (Irish Inter Church Meeting) 50 years, since the ‘Ballymascanlon Talks’, which brought together Protestant and Catholic Churches across the island in the midst of the Troubles and led to the formation of IICM.
12. Hence, the 33rd **Irish Inter Church Meeting** (19–20 October) took place under the theme ‘Our Reconciling vision of Hope: Fifty years since the Ballymascanlon Talks’. Rev Dr Donald Watts shared as one of the speakers on the history, challenges and blessings regarding inter-church relations on the island of Ireland for the gospel of Christ. In a panel discussion those present were challenged with a call to have deeper relationships rooted in Jesus and the good news.

### **European Links**

13. In June 2023, PCI was represented in Tallinn, Estonia, at the **Conference of European Churches (CEC)** General Assembly, which had over 300 participants, the theme being ‘Under God’s blessing - Shaping the future’, and was hosted by the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church of Estonia.

14. The terrible war in Ukraine loomed large in the background and delegates were challenged and encouraged to pray as they listened to church leaders ministering on the ground in Ukraine, who shared about the challenges and how God is sustaining them. Delegates also were able to listen to journalists share from Ukraine and Russia (many currently living in exile).
15. There were many times of worship and prayer, speakers and fellowship time. It was reported that “the keynote speakers reminded the churches that theology is public...Churches must heed the call of God in Jesus Christ to be agents of hope, prepared publicly to bear the scars of unjust suffering. This means holding out without fear the reconciling life of resurrection hope in Christ who calls us to take responsibility, under God’s blessing, for shaping the future.”
16. The Clerk of Assembly is a member of the European Executive of the **World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)** and will be attending its annual meeting in Zurich from 13–15 June 2024.
17. The Convener of the General Council and former Moderator, the Very Rev Dr David Bruce, will represent PCI at the 9th General Assembly of the **Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)**, to be held in Sibiu Romania, from 27 August to 2 September 2024.

#### **Other Fellowship Links**

18. A meeting last June with both PCI and EPC (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, USA) representatives proved fruitful and inspiring and the continuation of the building of links between PCI and EPC received approval and agreement at GA 2023. This is currently being taken forward – see GAAC Appendix 6.
19. In November 2023, a fraternal meeting for fellowship took place with representatives from the Church of Ireland and PCI and the Report from GA 2023 from the Pandemic Response Task group was shared and a helpful conversation ensued concerning some of the current challenges to ministry within the churches.

Rev HELEN M FREEBURN,  
Church Relations Convener

## APPENDIX 6

### RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

1. The 2023 General Assembly received the following supplementary report and passed the resolution:

- **Church Relations**

As reported on page 207, paragraph 16 of the Reports, the Clerk of Assembly has renewed conversations with his opposite number in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (USA). On Wednesday 14 June, a further online meeting took place involving senior representatives of PCI and EPC(USA). Those present were:

- **EPC (USA) Representatives**

Rev Joe Kim, (Incoming Moderator)

Rev Alan Trafford, (Chair of the EPC's Fraternal Relations Committee)

Rev Andrew Smith, (Director of the Resound Project, Central EPC in New York City, former PCI)

Rev Dr Dean Weaver, (Stated Clerk/President EPC)

(Rev Rosemary Lukens, outgoing Moderator, new Chair of the National Leadership Team was unable to be present due to a last-minute commitment.)

- **PCI Representatives**

Rt Rev Dr John Kirkpatrick (Moderator)

Rev Dr Sam Mawhinney (Moderator Designate)

Very Rev Dr David Bruce (former Moderator and incoming General Council Convener)

Rev Helen Freeburn (Convener Church Relations)

Rev Trevor Gribben (Clerk of the General Assembly)

This was a very positive meeting, in which each set of representatives spoke of the distinctives, ethos and ministry and mission priorities of their denomination. It was agreed by all present that further dialogue and engagement would be very valuable and it was envisaged that this could lead to the two denominations cooperating together in mutually beneficial ways.

**Additional 2023 Resolution:** That in the ensuing year further engagement take place between representatives of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and representatives of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (USA) and that the General Council bring a full report, with recommendations, to the 2024 General Assembly regarding the way forward in future relationships

2. A number of categories of inter-denominational relationship were agreed by the 2017 General Assembly, as follows:

**RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS TASK GROUP**  
(2017 Reports, pp.73–74)

**Recommendations regarding categories of inter-church relationship used by PCI**

6. It is noted that, while a number of denominations consulted were considering this matter, none in fact have up to date and relevant categories used in relating to other denominations.
7. The General Assembly decided a significant number of years ago that no longer should ministers of any other denomination have direct access to the ministry of PCI i.e. there are no arrangements for direct interchangeability of ministry with any other denomination.
8. It is recognised that relationships with other denominations on the island of Ireland will always be more directly relevant and significant in nature to any other inter-church relationship. This is as a direct result of the presence of PCI congregations ‘on the ground’ in the same, or neighbouring, communities as congregations of other denominations.
9. It is further recognised that direct global mission partnerships again will always be different in nature to other inter-church relationships. This is as a direct result of these normally being a formal agreement in missional partnership. (See relevant sections of the report drafted by the Council for Global Mission, included in Appendix 2.)
10. It is therefore recommended that the following categories should be used by PCI in describing its relationships with other denominations:
  - (a) Fraternal and/or Missional relationship in Ireland;
  - (b) Direct Global Missional Partnership (outside of UK and Ireland);
  - (c) Fraternal / Historic relationship (in GB, Europe and worldwide)
    - (i) Confessional
    - (ii) Other

(These categories were adopted by the 2017 General Assembly, Minutes page 50 resolution 22)

3. **It is recommended that**, following further contact with EPC(USA) an appropriate report and resolution be brought to the 2025 General Assembly to formalise a relationship (Fraternal – Confessional) and that (if possible) a representative of EPC(USA) be invited to be present at the 2025 General Assembly.

4. The following is a link to the EPC(USA) Website for information:  
*<https://epc.org/about/>*

# GENERAL COUNCIL SECTION 4

## NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

1. The Nominations Committee has met on three occasions since the last General Assembly.
2. Members of the Committee have been able to interview applicants for convenorships and to identify nominations to fill the gaps in the several Councils and Committees. However, in all of this they are most grateful for the continual administrative support provided by staff from the General Secretary's Department.
3. During the year production was completed of a promotional video – 'Serve with PCI' – which encouraged church members to offer themselves for service on General Assembly Councils and Committees. Online links to this video and to a digital Expression of Interest Form were circulated to ministers in the hope that they would share these with their congregations and encourage applications by suitably interested and gifted people.
4. The results flowing from the above-mentioned process have been disappointing, yielding a total of 17 Expressions of Interest from 13 persons, 7 of whom are ministers or Licentiates. Whilst grateful for each of these, it does seem that the current system of recruitment has reached a ceiling, and that consideration should be given to reviewing its effectiveness. If it were not for the possibility of appointing some whose current term of service has reached completion onto a different Council or Committee, a number of our Councils and Committees would find themselves short of membership.
5. Since the last Assembly vacancies have arisen for the convenorship of several Councils and Committees. These have been duly advertised, and the process of interview and nomination followed through in each case.
6. Nominations to the membership of Commissions, Councils and Committees will be contained in the Nominations Booklet provided at the General Assembly, and the retirement and appointment of conveners are included in the resolutions.
7. We are thankful to those who have indicated their willingness to fill the vacancies that have arisen during the year; however, it would be helpful if those intending to resign from membership of a Council or Committee would give notice in good time for a replacement to be found for nomination to the following General Assembly. Ideally, notice should be given by the preceding January.

TOM GREER, Convener

## GUIDELINES REVIEW TASK GROUP

1. During the work of republishing the Code, it was recognised that in the past when the General Assembly adopted ‘guidelines’ there was an ambiguity as to their standing. Therefore, the 2022 General Assembly adopted new definitions for ‘Regulations’, ‘Guidelines’ and ‘Guidance’, as follows:
  - (a) *Provisions of the Code, which represent the law of the Church and, as such, are binding upon all members of the Church, Congregations, Courts of the Church, Commissions and Committees of the Assembly, and all other agencies of the Church. These must be obeyed and observed without equivocation and without exception.*
  - (b) *Regulations of the General Assembly, which must be adhered to by all, wherever and whenever they apply.*
  - (c) *Guidelines which are not compulsory but set out how the General Assembly considers members, Congregations and Courts of the Church should proceed in circumstances to which the guidelines apply. If, in exceptional circumstances, they are not strictly followed there should be compelling reasons for diverging from them.*
  - (d) *Guidance, which is offered by the General Assembly as advice to be considered by members, Congregations and Courts of the Church in coming to decisions.*

(See 2022 General Assembly Reports, pages 193–194)

2. The 2023 General Assembly put in place a mechanism to sort existing General Assembly ‘guidelines/guidance’ (that are not currently referred to directly in the Republished Code) into these categories, as follows:
  - (a) That a new ‘Guidelines Review Task Group’ be appointed to examine all existing General Assembly ‘guidelines/guidance’ (that are not currently referred to directly in the Republished Code) and report at the latest to the 2025 General Assembly as to whether each of these continue to be required (perhaps in an updated form) and if so whether they should be categorised as ‘regulations’, ‘guidelines’ or ‘guidance’, in line with the categories agreed by the 2021 General Assembly.
  - (b) That the membership of the ‘Guidelines Review Task Group’ be as follows: General Council Convener (Convener), Clerk of Assembly, Deputy Clerk (Joint Secretary), Rev Jim Stothers (Joint Secretary), Mrs Avril Heenan and Rev Jonathan Boyd (Killyleagh). With power to consult/co-opt relevant officers of Councils and/or the Assembly as and when appropriate.

(See 2023 General Assembly Minutes, pages 51–52)

3. The Guidelines Review Task Group has met twice during the first part of 2024 with significant work also being carried forward by members, often working in pairs, outside of these formal meetings, to carry out an initial sort of what is a significant amount of material. The process underway is seeking to carry the following sort with all existing material:
  - Clearing out – removing material that is not relevant or does not fall into any of the categories
  - Editing or (where necessary) factually updating existing material
  - Categorisation of each part of the material
  
4. As work has progressed material is being grouped under five headings:
  - i. material that is obviously **redundant**;
  - ii. material that can be **accepted** as it is;
  - iii. material that needs only to be **updated for terminology** etc., and will be updated by the Task Group;
  - iv. material that needs to be **revised** but must be **referred** to the Assembly;
  - v. material where there is uncertainty about the where it falls and therefore needs to be **discussed** on this basis.
  
5. The Task Group is aiming to report to the 2025 General Assembly. It is important to note that the General Assembly that year would only debate matters that need to be updated/clarified, but that the substantive matters in documents would not be revisited.
  
6. Following agreement of the General Assembly on categorisation in 2025 (or if necessary because of the scale of the task, in 2026) an online resource will be produced, to allow for access and availability to the newly categorised regulations, guidelines and guidance. Consideration will also be given to which documents are available for public access, and which are reserved for ministers/elders etc.

DAVID BRUCE, Convener

# GENERAL COUNCIL

## SECTION 5

### UNITED APPEAL COMMITTEE

The United Appeal Committee has met on three occasions since the 2023 General Assembly:-

- (a) 13 February 2024 to consider the response to the 2023 Appeal
- (b) 5 April 2024 to prepare for interviews with Councils regarding their grant requests for 2025
- (c) 8 April 2024 to review Council budget submissions for 2025 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 results for 2023 and projections / budgets for 2024 and 2025.

#### 1. The 2023 Appeal

At the meeting on 13 February 2024 the Committee considered the response to the 2023 Appeal and the financial outturn for that year. The accounts for 2023 show that £3,037,036 was received against the 2023 Appeal target of £3,500,000. The Committee acknowledges that this response from congregations is challenging and perhaps reflective of the significant financial pressures on congregations and members.

At that time 62 congregations (2022 - 27, 2021 -53) had not contributed to the Appeal. In addition;

- 169 congregations contributed above their target (2022 – 148, 2021 – 148)
- 131 congregations did not achieve their target (2022 – 111, 2021 - 176)
- 164 congregations contributed to their target exactly (2022 - 168, 2021 – 154).

The accounts also show that £94,531 was received in 2023 relating to earlier years (2022 – £224,018, 2021 – £313,890). At the time of writing however, a further £133,013 has been received as “late contributions” for the 2023 Appeal.

Higher than expected interest and two large bequests were also received during the year therefore 96.0% of the Appeal has now been received.

The Committee therefore agreed to pay the 2023 United Appeal grants in full, specifically

<b>Council</b>	<b>Grant</b>
Mission in Ireland	1,065,000
Global Mission	900,000
Congregational Life and Witness	640,000
Training in Ministry	375,000
Social Witness	245,000
General – Creative Production	200,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<u><u>3,425,000</u></u>

Following these payments, the overall net deficit to the United Appeal Fund was £74,093. Reserves at the end of 2023 amounted to £2,197,679.

## **2. The 2024 Appeal**

The June 2023 General Assembly agreed that the Appeal for 2024 should be £3,400,000 and the following grants were approved for 2024, subject to the response to the Appeal.

<b>Council</b>	<b>Grant</b>
Mission in Ireland	1,080,000
Global Mission	900,000
Cong. Life & Witness	685,000
Training in Ministry	380,000
Social Witness	400,000
General – CPD	–
	<u><u>3,445,000</u></u>

It is important to note that even if the Appeal for 2024 is achieved in full, it will not be sufficient to pay the above grants in full and the Committee will be reliant on either further use of reserves or sustained high levels of interest on retained funds.

## **3. The 2025 Appeal**

At its meeting on 13 February 2024 the Committee also agreed a range of assumptions that Councils should use in preparing their budgets for 2025, including a projected UA Target for 2025 of £3.3m, and agreed a ‘Commissioning Note’ for Councils.

The Councils prepared and submitted their budgets during February/March 2024 and the Committee met on 5 April 2024 to review the submissions. These submissions included revised projections for 2024, budgets for 2025 and actual figures for 2023. The submissions were accompanied by a letter explaining the rationale for the amount requested and any key assumptions made. The Committee would like to express appreciation to Council Secretaries, Conveners and Finance Managers for their hard work in preparing these submissions.

The Committee then met with representatives from each the Councils to discuss the bids and seek any necessary clarification. The following are the key points identified from the requests.

### Mission in Ireland

	2025 Request	2024 Approved	2023 Actual	2022 Actual	2021 Actual
UA Grants	1,100,000	1,080,000	1,065,000	1,065,000	724,500

- (a) The Council is aware that the developing 'Reconfiguration of Ministry' proposals have the potential to provide funds for capital projects. UA funding is not used for capital projects.
- (b) Church planting projects are ongoing in Wexford, Donegal, West Belfast and Balbriggan.
- (c) A new project to identify 'Mission Pioneers' is underway in consultation with Presbyteries.
- (d) Changes in funding arrangements mean that the International Meeting Point is now the single largest draw on CMI United Appeal funding.
- (e) The uptake of Irish Mission Fund grants has been so positive the fund is now oversubscribed for 2024.

### Global Mission

	2025 Request	2024 Approved	2023 Actual	2022 Actual	2021 Actual
UA Grants	900,000	900,000	900,000	1,000,000	1,061,500

- (a) UA Grant is the Council's primary source of income although the Council has anticipated a grant from Presbyterian Women of £70k in both 2024 and 2025.
- (b) It is anticipated that 22 Global Mission workers will be supported by the Council in 2025.
- (c) There is an increased emphasis on grants to support new leaders who know the language and culture.

- (d) The Wembley London property is currently rented out but the Council plans to realise this property at the end of the current lease term in Jan 2025.

### Congregational Life and Witness

	2025 Request	2024 Approved	2023 Actual	2022 Actual	2021 Actual
UA Grants	660,000	660,000	640,000	640,000	412,500
Pres Herald	28,600	25,000			

- (a) The request for 2025 is split into 2 elements, with £28,600 being previously agreed for 2025 in relation to the move of the *Presbyterian Herald* in 2024.
- (b) Unlike other Councils this Council does not have significant other sources of income and is heavily reliant on their UA Grant. The Committee encouraged the Council to consider use of the Family Books fund for some of the costs of resource production.
- (c) Approximately 90% of the Council's UA grant request is used for staff related costs.
- (d) The Council reports the denomination has diminished in terms of leaders and engagement with, and participation of, young people as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Council will continue to prioritise this area of work.

### Training in Ministry

	2025 Request	2024 Approved	2023 Actual	2022 Actual	2021 Actual
UA Grants	380,000	380,000	375,000	375,000	402,000

- (a) Outturn for 2023 was largely as budgeted.
- (b) Student numbers have been lower than projected for the 2023/24 academic year. These lower than expected numbers impact on income levels for the duration of the courses.
- (c) Interest in the undergraduate programme for September 2024 has been strong and a 'Ministry Taster Day' in February 2024 also produced positive levels of interest. The funding impact of the potential increased ministry students will not be seen until September 2025.

- (d) The Council is also exploring increasing the level of income from PhD students through further partnership arrangements.
- (e) The College is facing significant financial pressure both in operating and capital costs.

### Social Witness

	2025 Request	2024 Approved	2023 Actual	2022 Actual	2021 Actual
UA Grants	590,497	400,000	245,000	245,500	224,500

- (a) CSW continued to face exceptionally difficult financial pressures in 2023. Discussions are ongoing in relation to addressing these and separate proposals will be brought to General Council in this regard.
- (b) CSW is in an overdrawn position at the end of 2023 but income is anticipated from the sale of some properties and an identified bequest.
- (c) The CSW UA bid relates to Assembly Buildings staff who are not recharged to the care homes, the Taking Care staff and the PCI Carecall contract.

### Summary

Having reflected on the outcomes from the 2023 Appeal, projections for 2024 and the levels of requests from the Councils, the Committee concluded that it would recommend to the Council that the Appeal target for 2025 should be £3,300,000 compared to £3,400,000 for 2024 (2.94% decrease).

Given the disparity between the level of requests submitted by Councils and the projected level of funding available, the UA Committee struggled with a challenging grant allocation process. The Committee once again commends the work being done through the Councils across our denomination, our island and indeed across our world. In making the proposals below, the UA Committee recognises that there will be difficult decisions to be made by Councils.

A summary of the requests received is set out below alongside the Committee's proposed adjustments and proposed grants for 2025.

	Council Requests 2025 £	Proposed Adjustments 2025 £	Proposed Grants 2025 £	Approved Grants 2024 £
Mission in Ireland	1,100,000	-10% (110,000)	990,000	1,080,000
Global Mission	900,000	-10% (90,000)	810,000	900,000
Congregational Life and Witness	688,000	-	688,000	685,000
Training in Ministry	380,000	-10% (38,000)	342,000	380,000
Social Witness	590,487	-5% (29,524)	560,963	400,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,658,487</b>	<b>-7.3% (267,524)</b>	<b>3,390,963</b>	<b>3,445,000</b>

MARTIN HAMPTON, Convener  
KEN SWARBRICK, Financial Secretary

## APPENDIX 1

UNITED APPEAL 2025						
	Request Received 2025 £	Proposed Adjustment 2025 £	Proposed Grant 2025 £	Revised Forecast 2024 £	Budget (per GA) 2024 £	Actual 2023 £
<b>APPEAL</b>	3,300,000		3,300,000	3,400,000	3,400,000	3,500,000
<b>INCOME</b>						
Congregations (current year)	3,100,000		3,100,000	3,100,000	3,275,000	3,042,288
Congregations (prior years)	100,000		100,000	100,000	100,000	94,531
Income from Trust Funds	28,000		28,000	28,000	28,000	28,698
Investment Income	1,000		1,000	1,100	1,000	1,109
Donations and Bequests	10,000		10,000	10,000	10,000	161,226
Bank Interest	20,000		20,000	20,000	5,000	33,688
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>3,259,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,259,000</b>	<b>3,259,100</b>	<b>3,419,000</b>	<b>3,361,540</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>						
Promotional Costs	10,000		10,000	10,000	10,000	5,381
Reorganisation cost						
	10,000	0	10,000	10,000	10,000	5,381
<b>GRANTS</b>						
Mission in Ireland	1,100,000	-110,000	990,000	1,080,000	1,080,000	1,065,000
Global Mission	900,000	-90,000	810,000	900,000	900,000	900,000
Training in Ministry	380,000	-38,000	342,000	380,000	380,000	375,000
Congregational Life and Witness	688,000	0	688,000	685,000	685,000	640,000
Social Witness	590,487	-29,524	560,963	400,000	400,000	245,000
General - Creative Production				0	0	200,000
Earmarked						5,252
<b>TOTAL GRANTS</b>	<b>3,658,487</b>	<b>-267,524</b>	<b>3,390,963</b>	<b>3,445,000</b>	<b>3,445,000</b>	<b>3,430,252</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>3,668,487</b>	<b>-267,524</b>	<b>3,400,963</b>	<b>3,455,000</b>	<b>3,455,000</b>	<b>3,435,633</b>
<b>SURPLUS ( DEFICIT)</b>	<b>-409,487</b>	<b>267,524</b>	<b>-141,963</b>	<b>-195,900</b>	<b>-36,000</b>	<b>-74,093</b>
Gain on Investments						4,716
<b>Added /( Deducted) to/(from) reserves</b>	<b>-409,487</b>	<b>267,524</b>	<b>-141,963</b>	<b>-195,900</b>	<b>-36,000</b>	<b>-69,377</b>
Reserves at start of year	2,001,779		2,001,779	2,197,679	2,197,679	2,267,056
<b>At end of year</b>	<b>1,592,292</b>	<b>267,524</b>	<b>1,859,816</b>	<b>2,001,779</b>	<b>2,161,679</b>	<b>2,197,679</b>

## SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE

### Introduction

The Support Services Committee had its stated meetings in October 2023 and April 2023, with an additional meeting to consider finance in May 2024. Between the formal meetings, there was a considerable amount of business overseen by members of the Committee.

### (A) ASSEMBLY BUILDINGS DEPARTMENTS

#### Human Resources

1. As of mid-January 2024, the HR department is now fully staffed. This is the first time since May 2022. Staff turnover across PCI continues to be challenging – in the year to 1 March 2024 there were 135 new starts and 90 leavers. Most of this activity was with the Council for Social Witness (CSW) with a 15.2% labour turnover rate. In April 2024, there were 14 active HR cases (disciplinary, tribunals etc), taking up a large amount of time.

#### Property

2. The Committee reviewed the Retired Minister House Fund and agreed to a 7.7% rent increase effective from 1 April 2024, in line with the NIHE. The previously agreed changes to the rules are being processed by the General Assembly solicitor.

A large number of conferences were held during the year and there is an encouraging level of forward bookings. In 2023, conference income amounted to a net £217K. There is a considerable amount of ongoing maintenance in Assembly Buildings and some issues to be dealt with, not least with water ingress into the Financial Secretary's office and Moderator's Office. A detailed investigation into the source of the ingress is ongoing and it is hoped that this will be resolved shortly to avoid stonework damage. The previously agreed lighting project has been completed.

#### Creative Production

3. To offset the predicted ongoing rising costs of producing the *Presbyterian Herald*, it was agreed that the planned price of £2.20 per edition (or £20 yearly subscription) previously agreed for 2025 be brought forward to 2024.

Following the decision of the 2023 General Assembly, a new Department for Communications was established from 1 January 2024 and the Creative Production Department ceased to be under the oversight of Support Services.

**Information Technology**

4. The IT department continued to deliver many projects in addition to maintaining routine business. As from the beginning of March 2024, the IT department is also back to full strength. On cyber security, there are almost constant attacks, and these are becoming quite sophisticated. The Committee had a lengthy discussion about risks and how these can be mitigated.

**(B) FINANCE****Accounts**

5. The Committee has had to consider several important topics during the year regarding finance, including working with the Council for Social Witness in addressing the issues it is facing. Consequently, it was not possible for the annual accounts for 2023 to be brought before the Committee and the General Council in time to be included in this report. The accounts will therefore be presented as a supplementary report to the 2024 General Assembly.

**Congregational Assessments**

6. The Committee considered in detail the budgets for the respective assessment funds, along with the balances in each of these. A summary of the fund allocations for 2024 and 2023 together with the proposed rates of assessment is set out in Appendix 1. Key considerations in looking at these were the inflationary impacts being faced by congregations, together with salary and stipend increases.

The Committee also reviewed the Incidental Fund and the budget for 2024, along with 2023 actual figures, is at Appendix 3. A summary of the rates of assessment and the fund allocations will be included in the supplementary finance report.

**Pay and stipend increase for 2024**

7. The Committee was very aware of the current inflationary pressures and wanted to recognise these, whilst at the same time, being mindful of affordability at both congregational and central level. Proposals were taken to the October meeting of General Council and it was agreed that an increase of 5% would be awarded .

**Pensions**

8. The following ministerial retirements have been noted (ministerial retirements from the scheme have been notified since the Committee's report to the General Assembly in June 2023).

Name	Congregation	Retirement Date	Approval Sought
Rev J Kirkpatrick	Portrush	30/09/2023	No
Rev RA Liddle	Legacurry	30/09/2023	No
Rev L Addis	Woodlands, Carrickfergus	07/10/2023	No
Rev R Greer	Minister Emeritus	04/11/2023	No
Rev S Thompson	Minister Emeritus	28/12/2023	No
Rev J Brackenridge	First Lisburn	31/12/2023	No
Rev R Herron	Trinity Omagh and Gillygooley	31/12/2023	No
Rev R J McCullough	Minister Emeritus	29/01/2024	No
Rev R Love	Taughmonagh	31/01/2024	No
Rev D Rankin	Strand	30/04/2024	No
Rev G Campbell	UTC	21/08/2024	No
Rev DH Gilpin	Moira	30/09/2024	Yes
Rev TP McCullough	Townhill	31/10/2024 (on or after)	Yes
Rev L Keys	West, Ballymena	31/12/2024	No
Rev JG Trueman	Banbridge Road, Dromore	31/01/2025	Yes
Rev C McMullen	Bangor West	22/03/2025 (on or after)	Yes
Rev D Kane	West, Ballymena	31/07/2025 (on or after)	Yes
Rev NAL Cameron	High Kirk	31/08/2025 (on or after)	Yes

## APPENDIX 1

### BUDGETED ASSESSMENT INCOME REQUIREMENTS FOR 2024 (with comparison to 2023 actual and budgeted income)

	Budgeted Income Requirement 2024	Allocation 2024	Actual Income 2023	Budgeted Income 2023
	£	%	£	£
Central Ministry Fund	1,250,000	33.08	1,128,759	1,100,000
Retired Ministers' Fund	Nil	0.00	Nil	Nil
Widows of Ministers' Fund	225,000	5.95	227,014	225,000
Prolonged Disability Fund	175,000	4.63	228,351	225,000
Incidental Fund	900,000	23.81	908,462	900,000
Church House External Work	450,000	11.90	504,696	500,000
Ministerial Development *	25,000	0.66	102,466	100,000
Sick Supply Fund	5,000	0.13	10,119	10,000
Students Bursary Fund *	400,000	10.58	403,758	400,000
<b>TOTAL ASSESSMENTS (Excl Pension)</b>	<b>3,780,000</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>3,513,625</b>	<b>3,460,000</b>

**RATES OF ASSESSMENT FOR 2024**

<b>Band</b>	<b>From (£)</b>	<b>To (£)</b>	<b>Rate (%)</b>
1	0	11,000	0
2	11,000	65,000	11.5
3	65,000	130,000	11.0
4	130,000	195,000	7.5
5	195,000	260,000	3.75
6	260,000	Above	3.75

## APPENDIX 2

### BASIC MINISTERIAL MINIMUM FOR 2023 (and other rates)

	Northern Ireland		Republic of Ireland	
	2024 (£)	2023 (£)	2024 (€)	2023 (€)
<b>1. BASIC AND APPROPRIATE MINISTERIAL MINIMUM</b>				
Basic Ministerial Minimum (BMM)	30,696	29,234	44,935	42,795
After 1 year's service	31,003	29,526	45,384	43,223
After 2 years' service	31,310	29,818	45,833	43,651
After 3 years' service	31,617	30,110	46,282	44,079
After 4 years' service	31,924	30,402	46,731	44,507
After 5 years' service	32,231	30,694	47,180	44,935
After 6 years' service	32,538	30,986	47,629	45,363
After 7 years' service	32,845	31,278	48,078	45,791
After 8 years' service	33,152	31,570	48,527	46,219
After 9 years' service	33,459	31,862	48,976	46,647
After 10 years' service	33,766	32,154	49,425	47,075
After 11 years' service	34,073	32,446	49,874	47,503
After 12 years' service	34,380	32,738	50,323	47,931
After 13 years' service	34,687	33,030	50,772	48,359
After 14 years' service	34,994	33,322	51,221	48,787
After 15 years' service	35,301	33,614	51,670	49,215
After 16 years' service	35,608	33,906	52,119	49,643
After 17 years' service	35,915	34,198	52,568	50,071
After 18 years' service	36,222	34,490	53,017	50,499
After 19 years' service	36,529	34,782	53,466	50,927
After 20 years' service	36,836	35,074	53,915	51,355

	Northern Ireland		Republic of Ireland	
	2024 (£)	2023 (£)	2024 (€)	2023 (€)
<b>2. RETIRED MINISTERS' FUND</b>				
Pension (maximum)	14,646	13,948	stg converted	stg converted
<b>3. WIDOWS OF MINISTERS' FUND</b>				
Pension (maximum)	8,055	7,671	stg converted	stg converted
<b>4. PROLONGED DISABILITY FUND</b>				
Grant (maximum)	14,728	14,027	stg converted	stg converted
<b>5. REGIUM DONUM</b>				
Annual Payment	360	360	stg converted	stg converted
<b>6. SUPPLY FEES</b>				
Two or more services	124	118	179	170
Single service (at 2/3rd of above)	83	79	119	113
Travel – mileage rate	18p	18p	26c	26c
<b>7. VACANCY CONVENERS' FEES</b>				
Supply Fee plus				
< 100 Families + 0%	124	118	179	170
100<200 Families + 5%	130	124	188	179
200<300 families +10%	136	130	197	187
300+ Families + 15%	143	136	206	196
Travel – mileage rate	18p	18p	26c	26c

	Northern Ireland		Republic of Ireland	
	2024 (£)	2023 (£)	2024 (€)	2023 (€)
<b>8. EXPENSES</b>				
Ministers' Car Allowance	4,221	4,020	6,134	5,842
Ministers' Taxable (Duties/Manse) Allowance	2,815	2,681	4,635	4,414
Associates' Car Allowance	4,221	4,020		
Associates' Taxable Duties Allowance	2,346	2,234		
Associates' House Allowance (CMF Max)	1,000	1,000		
Licentiate's Car Allowance (80%)	3,378	3,217		
Licentiate's Duties Allowance (42%)	1,183	1,127		
Ordained Assistants' Travel Allowance	4,221	4,020		
Ordained Assistants' Duties Allowance	1,183	1,127		
			<i>These figures would be based on a percentage of a ministers' ROI allowance</i>	
<b>9. OTHER</b>				
Ignored for Augmented Grant Par.316(2)(d)(i) (i.e. 52 weeks supply fee)	6,448	6,136	9,308	8,840
Ignored for Augmented Grant Par.316(2)(d)(ii)	2,400	2,400		
<b>10. FAMILY GRANTS</b>				
<b>Category 1. Birth to final year primary school</b>				
– Child Allowance	433	412	647	616
– Tuition Grants	0	0	534	509
<b>Category 2. Secondary School</b>				
– Child Allowance	633	603	957	911
– Tuition Grants	0	0	900	857
<b>Category 3. Further and Higher Education (to 24)</b>				
– Child Allowance	949	904	1,407	1,340
– Tuition Grants	2,300	2,190	4,498	4,284

The above are maximum amounts as reduction apply above certain income levels.

**APPENDIX 3****INCIDENTAL FUND BUDGET FOR THE YEAR ENDED  
31 DECEMBER 2024**

	2024 Budget (£)	2023 Actual (£)
<b>PAYMENTS TO/ON BEHALF OF COUNCILS</b>		
<b>(i) General Council</b>		
General Work	23,170	12,688
Assembly Arrangements	25,000	21,408
Irish Council of Churches	23,270	22,166
Irish Inter-Church Meeting	11,460	11,838
Conference of European Churches	5,280	5,067
Comm Protestant Churches Europe	1,370	1,370
World Comm Reformed Churches	13,650	13,000
Guysmere Development Panel (balance of £75k)	–	–
<b>(ii) Council for Public Affairs</b>		
General Work	3,600	998
Education Grants	9,000	8,670
<b>(iii) Linkage Commission</b>		
General Work	7,800	7,480
Church Architecture Committee	9,000	9,000

	2024 Budget (£)	2023 Actual (£)
<b>OTHER COSTS</b>		
Costs of General Secretary's Department	450,800	439,585
Support Services Charges	194,300	172,077
Moderator expenses allowance	42,000	37,925
Printing for General Assembly	15,800	12,258
Postage, admin and other	26,300	12,274
Insurance	19,400	19,648
Travel General Assembly and Councils etc.	15,800	4,783
Allowance to Congregations- re Conveners	6,800	8,400
Legal fees	33,600	18,000
UTC Support Services rebate	60,000	60,000
UK Borders Agency	1,100	-
Presbyterian Historical Society	24,200	23,000
Youth Link	12,100	11,753
Peninsula Employment Law and Health and Safety	21,000	18,659
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,055,800</b>	<b>952,047</b>

## APPENDIX 4

### OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STAFFING

#### **Sterling Salary Scales of posts in Assembly Buildings on 1 January 2024**

Listed below are staff that are currently on the General Council Executive and Administrative scales.

#### EXECUTIVE POSTS

##### Scale 1 (£29,022 –£34,481)

Senior Infrastructure Engineer x 2 (IT)  
Operations & Maintenance Officer (PSD)  
Recruitment Executive (HR)

##### Scale 2 (£32,775–£39,426)

Children’s Development Officer (CLW)  
Editorial Officer (CLW)  
Women’s Ministry and PW Development Officer (CLW)  
Finance Manager (FSD)  
Press Officer (Comms)  
Payroll and Assessment Manager (FSD)  
HR Executive (HR) x 3  
Youth Development Officer (CLW)  
Mission Support Officer (Partnership) (MD)  
IT Network Storage and Security Manager  
IT Operations and Services Manager  
IT Senior Analyst Developer

##### Scale 3 (£36,671–£44,694)

Property Support Officer (FSD)  
Finance Manager (CSW)  
Mission Support Officer (Member Care) (MD)  
Creative Production Officer (Comms)  
Programme Development Officer (CLW)  
Public Affairs Officer (GSD)  
Congregational Life Development Officer (CLW)  
Mission Development Officer (CLW)  
Head of Conferencing and Operations (PSD)

**Scale 4 (£40,419–£50,496)**

Senior Finance Manager (FSD)  
 Head of Safeguarding (CSW)  
 Head of Communications (Comms)

**Scale 5 (£44,694–£54,465)**

Head of Human Resources (HR)  
 Head of IT (ITD)

**Scale 6 (£48,003–£58,480)**

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

**Scale 7 (£54,465 - £70,058)**

Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary  
 Financial Secretary

**ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED POSTS****Scale 2 (£18,646–£20,566)**

HR Assistant (0.6 post) (HR)  
 Operations and Maintenance Assistant (PSD)  
 Assistant Receptionist and Telephonist (PSD) (higher salary protected)  
 IT Support Technician (IT)

**Scale 3 (£19,945–£23,061)**

Senior Administrative Assistant (GSD)  
 Senior HR Assistant (HR)  
 Senior Administrative Assistant (job share 1.2 post) (CSW)  
 Senior Administrative Assistant, PW (CLW)  
 Taking Care Administrator (CSW)  
 Senior Administrative Assistant (MD)

**Scale 4 (£22,598–£26,024)**

Senior Administrative Assistant (FSD)  
 Senior Administrative Assistants (1 x P/T) (CLW)  
 Senior Administrative Assistant (1 x P/T) (CLW)  
 Senior Administrative Assistant (CLW)

**Scale 5 (£24,724–£28,546)**

Senior Communications Technician (Comms)  
 Personal Assistant (MD)  
 Senior HR Administrator (PD)  
 Personal Assistant and Senior Administrative Assistant (job share) (GSD)  
 Payroll and Administrative Assistant (FSD)  
 Payroll and Administrative Assistant (.77 post) (FSD)

**Scale 5 (Enhanced) (£27,306–£31,215)**

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

**Scale 5 (Enhanced pt 25-34) (£27,306–£33,654)**

Senior Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (GSD)

**Sterling Salary Scales of posts in other locations on 1 January 2024****Scale 1 (£29,022–£34,481)**

Rural Chaplain  
 Executive Academic Administrator (Union College)

**Scale 2 (£32,775–£39,426)**

Lecturer in Biblical Studies (OT), Union College  
 Lecturer in Biblical Studies (NT), Union College  
 Lecturer in Practical & Pastoral Theology  
 Lecturer in Theology  
 Senior Executive Academic Administrator, Union College  
 College Librarian, Union College  
 Operations Manager, Union College  
 Minister/Ministry Co-ordinator, Kinghan Church (CSW)  
 Chaplain in Residence (MD)  
 University Chaplain UUJ, (MD)  
 Chaplain NI Prison Service and Co-ordinating Chaplain (Maghaberry)

**Scale 3 (£36,671–£44,694)**

Lecturer in Historical Theology, Union College

**Scale 5 (£44,694–£54,465)**

Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Director of Post-Graduate Studies, Union College  
 Professor of Ministry and Director of the Institute for Ministry, Union College

**Scale 6 (£48,003–£58,480)**

Professor of Systematic Theology  
 Professor of New Testament Studies  
 Principal of Union Theological College

**ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED POSTS****Scale 2 (£18,646–£20,556)**

Clerical Officer – Carlisle House (PT) (CSW)  
 Clerical Officer, (4 FT and 3 PT) (CSW)  
 Clerical Officer, Kinghan Church (part time) (CSW)  
 Custodian, Union College  
 Library Assistant (part time), Union College  
 Receptionist (Union College)

**Scale 3 (£19,945–£23,061)**

Senior Clerical Officer (Job Share), Carlisle House (CSW)  
 Clerical Officer (CSW)

**Scale 4 (£22,598–£26,024)**

Administrator, and Personal Assistant to the Chaplain Derryvolgie (MD)

**Scale 5 (Enhanced) (£27,306–£31,215)**

Assistant Chaplain, QUB (MD)

**Euro Salary Scales of posts in other locations on 1 January 2024****ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED POSTS****Scale 5 (Euro €37,654–Euro €43,507)**

Resident Manager, Tritonville Close (Euro Scale) (CSW)

## **PCI PENSION SCHEME REVIEW PANEL**

1. The 2023 General Assembly received a preliminary report from an initial panel set up to recommend a way forward with regard to a review of PCI's central pension provision. The Assembly agreed "to proceed to a full review of the PCI Pension Scheme (2009), including options for future pension arrangements....", with the cost of the full review being a charge on the Incidental Fund.
2. The Pension Scheme Review Panel has carried forward this remit during the past year. It had been anticipated that the review may have been able to be finalised for report to the 2024 General Assembly. However, progress has been slower than anticipated. This has been largely due to the change in personnel, with the retirement of the Financial Secretary, combined with some other significant pieces of work that have had to be prioritised within the Finance Department. The General Council therefore agreed that a comprehensive report should be presented to the Council during the 2024/25 year, for transmission to the 2025 General Assembly.
3. While the review process is taking longer than anticipated, one advantage is that the Panel will have available to it the outcome of the latest statutory triennial valuation of the current scheme, which took place on December 2023 and should be available in May 2024. The Panel is in the process of appointing professional advisers to guide its thinking as it draws up options and recommendations for the 2025 General Assembly.

DAVID THOMSON, Convener

## **MEMORIAL OF THE KIRK SESSION OF THE CONGREGATION OF FIRST & SECOND MARKETHILL**

The Memorial of the Kirk Session of the congregation of First and Second Markethill respectfully showeth:

That the congregation known as 'First and Second Markethill' was established in 1919; since then there has been only one Presbyterian congregation in Markethill; that the congregation is commonly referred to in the community as 'Markethill'; and that the Kirk Session for the facilitation of the work of the gospel in the community desire that the name of the congregation be changed to 'Markethill'.

That under the Code Par 106(e) the General Assembly is the only court of the Church which can exercise powers to change the name by which congregations shall be known.

Memorialists, therefore, pray your Venerable Assembly to change the name of the congregation of 'First and Second Markethill' to 'Markethill'. And memorialists, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Adopted by the Kirk Session at its meeting on Tuesday, 19 September 2023

REV NORMAN L SMYTH, Moderator

MR KEN TOAL, Clerk

Licensed by the Presbytery of Newry at its meeting on 3 October 2023 and transmitted to the General Assembly with the strong recommendation that its prayer be granted.

REV SA FINLAY, Moderator

REV WDS MCCULLAGH, Clerk

## **MEMORIAL OF THE REVS JOHN HANSON AND ALAN McQUADE**

To the Venerable the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to meet in Belfast in June, 2024.

The Memorial of Revs John Hanson and Alan McQuade of Monaghan Presbytery, respectfully showeth:

That there is a lack of consistency in the approach taken by Kirk Sessions regarding the admission to baptism of the children of unmarried parents.

That there is a lack of credibility in the profession of faith of unmarried parents when they state in the baptismal vows that Jesus Christ is their Saviour from sin and Lord of their lives, that they are committed to living as followers of Jesus Christ, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit and that they are willing to provide a Christian home and bring up their child in the worship and teaching of the church.

That the practice of the baptism of children be consistent with the Order of Service of Marriage in which it is stated that marriage is the place for the highest expression of love between a man and a woman and marriage is the place for the ordering of family life, where children may enjoy the security of love and heritage of faith.

That the prohibition on the baptism of the children of a same sex couple be extended to include the children of a heterosexual couple who are not married.

Memorialists, therefore, pray your Venerable Assembly to ask the General Council to set up a task group to examine the issue and report back.

And Memorialists, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

JOHN H HANSON

ALAN MCQUADE

Licensed by the Presbytery of Monaghan as its meeting in Clontibret (Braddox) on 14 November, 2023, and transmitted with the recommendation that its prayer be not granted.

REV DR G. CLINTON, Acting Moderator

REV D. EDWARDS, Clerk

## REPORT OF THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND FOR 2023

**(For information only)**

*Very Rev Dr Michael Barry writes:*

The members of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland Council nominated by the General Council report that throughout 2023 the Council has continued to promote the study of the historic Churches of the Presbyterian order in Ireland and the contributions they have made to Irish society and the wider world.

It has continued to achieve this through a programme of talks and lectures, through its publications and website, and through resuming the annual Field Trip.

1. It has continued to operate in line with the requirements of the Charity Commission, both in how it presents the accounts and it seeks to meet other requirements as they are notified. It has tried to do this with great care and we believe it has been able to operate as a responsible charity.
2. The annual grant from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland remains the main source of income for the Society, augmented by donations from the other Churches of the Presbyterian order, membership fees, (especially from Associate Members who join on-line via our website).
3. The major areas of expenditure were the leasing and servicing of the Society's premises. Expenditure continues to be carefully controlled, quotations are obtained before significant items of expenditure are approved, and all areas are examined regularly for economies, so that the best value for money is obtained.
4. The Society is grateful for the use of the premises in Assembly Buildings which are conveniently located and well-appointed. It commends members of staff in Assembly Buildings for their cheerful helpfulness.
5. The programme of talks and lectures continued as normal this year – among the topics covered were: 'Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs', 'Presbyterians and print in 18th century Ulster' and 'James Kirkpatrick, c.1676–1743 and the First Non-Subscription Controversy'. We are pleased to report that the Society was able to resume the annual Field Trip which this year was to churches and sites in the Route Presbytery.
6. The Annual General Meeting took place at Belmont in March. This included the reappointment of the Revs Scott Moore and Jim Stothers as Joint Secretaries, and of Mr Stephen Johnston as Treasurer.

7. During the year, the Publications Committee produced:
  - The annual *Bulletin*
  - *Archibald McIlroy 1859–1915, Ulster Scots Storyteller, Businessman and Churchman*, by the Very Rev Dr Donald Patton
  - *The Journal of the Rev Andrew George Malcolm (1782–1823), minister first at Dunmurry and then in Newry*, by the Rev Dr John Nelson.

Other publications are progressing and are intended for publication in 2024.

8. We concur with the Council's gratitude to its Presbytery Historical Agents for how they publicise the work of the Society locally and with its intention to continue to support them in doing so.
9. It should be noted that the Society welcomes donations of books, pamphlets, congregational histories and suitable artefacts such as old-style communion tokens as well as congregational records and other archives of Irish Presbyterian interest. These may be deposited with the Society either as a gift or on indefinite loan. Almost all new accessions of records received have been fully catalogued. Of particular note among new accessions this year are:
  - The records of Hamilton Road Bangor Presbyterian Church, 1898–1981.
  - Minutes of Templepatrick Presbytery, 1795–1990.
  - Baptism register of Ulsterville Presbyterian Church, Belfast, 1902–74.
  - Bound illustrated presentation album containing an address to the Rev Thomas A. Smyth and Mrs Smyth from Great Victoria Street Presbyterian Church, Belfast, to mark the semi-jubilee of his ministry in the congregation, 1897–1922. Included in the album are watercolours of Great Victoria Street, Clogherney and Newmills Presbyterian churches.
  - Books from the library of the late Wolsely Knox of Dungannon.
10. The Society continues to share information with other organisations, agencies and blogs, which help to raise its profile and publicise its publications. A meeting with staff at Union Theological College explored how the Society and College could co-operate more effectively, for example, having students visit the exhibition in the reception area of Assembly Buildings and the Society's library and archive and giving the Gamble Library's librarian the opportunity to speak about its resources at the annual Robert Allen lecture held in College. The Society now has over a thousand followers on Facebook which can be accessed via the blog icon on the home page of the website. This keeps a wider public informed about new books, talks and other events relating to the history of Irish Presbyterianism.

11. The Society's website ([www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com](http://www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com)) continues to be one of the principal means of communicating with the general public, and this is reflected by the numbers using it and joining the Society as Associate Members. Web resources include:
  - Back issues of Bulletins of the Society over five years old
  - Histories of presbyterian congregations
  - Minister lists/Fasti/Student lists
  - Presbyterian magazines
  - First World War Roll of Honour
  - Out-of-print booklets
  - Transcripts and audio recordings of lectures
  - Indexes to records
  - County guides to presbyterian congregational records

The Council works hard to improve the number and range of the articles on the history page, and in the updating and presentation of *A History of Presbyterian Congregations*. We are very grateful to the Very Rev Dr John Lockington who has researched the information required to update the latter for many years, and to the Very Rev Dr Donald Patton who has now taken over this role.

12. The Council has continued to work through our Action Plan as best as possible with the limited resources at hand.
13. We express gratitude to the team of volunteers who help out each week, filing, classifying library books, indexing and transcribing records, and preparing mailings. If you can offer help, even if only for a few hours a week, please contact the Librarian, Miss Valerie Adams.
14. We pay tribute to Valerie Adams, the Librarian and Archivist, for all she does for the Society, and not least for all her adaptability and resourcefulness throughout the year.

## PRESBYTERIAN CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

### (For information only)

*Mr Jason Nicholson (Executive Secretary) reports:*

1. The Presbyterian Children's Society exists to support children in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. It works mainly through ministers to alleviate poverty and financial hardship for eligible families and their children. This is facilitated mostly through regular and exceptional grants. Some additional (limited) help, through special initiatives, is offered to congregations to support their work with children and young people.
2. During 2023, approximately 889 children from 440 families were formally enrolled in the Society for help, by way of regular quarterly grants, with an additional 22 children from 11 other families receiving interim grant payments.
3. A total of 102 exceptional grants, to address emergency or crisis situations, were provided to help support Presbyterian families in a variety of challenging circumstances. The need for help was a result of (among other things) reduced working hours, illness, and the continued increase in the cost of living.
4. A special summer grant of £80 per child was paid to families receiving the Society's regular quarterly grants, with an increased special grant of £90 paid per child to families in the winter.
5. To respond to the challenges facing many of our children and young people in regard to their mental health and well-being, and to help support congregational pastoral care, a Small Grant Scheme was developed. This scheme, delivered in partnership with Eden Consultancy, provided small grants to ten local Presbyterian congregations to deliver educational workshops for parents and carers. A total of £4,799 in grants to congregations were provided as a result of the scheme.
6. The Society supported 21 eligible Presbyterian families to attend the PCI Family Holiday, grants totalling £10,775.
7. Across all grant categories (including the Small Grants Scheme and PCI Family Holiday), the Society paid out almost £695,351 for the benefit of Presbyterian children and young people.
8. The backgrounds of families helped by the Society remains diverse. Presbyterian children from family backgrounds of unemployment or low income, separation, divorce, bereavement, single parenthood or where a parent is in long-term hospital care, prison or is disabled, are all aided by the Society. In every circumstance, the Society's focus is on helping children reach their full potential regardless of their background or financial limitations.
9. The Society was pleased to acknowledge the astonishing commitment of its congregational representatives, with the lengthy service of some stretching over many decades.

10. Whilst the Society is not under the control of the General Assembly it does work collaboratively with the ministers of our Church and enjoys a close, positive working relationship with a number of General Assembly councils. This partnership is much appreciated and heartily encouraged.
11. A range of congregational resources to help illustrate the positive impact of the work of the Society are available from the Society's website [[www.presbyterianchildrensociety.org](http://www.presbyterianchildrensociety.org)].
12. The Society's financial resources are independently supported by Presbyterian congregations and individuals, and the Society gives thanks to all those who support its work prayerfully, practically, and financially throughout the year. The Society welcomes enquiries about how it might assist children and families in need within any Presbyterian congregation and commends its work for the continued prayerful and financial support of the Church.

*Note: the Presbyterian Children's Society and the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland are not under the control of the General Assembly. The reports are included for information only.*

## REPORTS OF PRESBYTERIES

The **ARDS PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev G.J. Simpson is their Moderator; that the Rev David Gray, Minister Emeritus (Released) of Portaferry, died on 5 August 2023; that the Rev Avril Stevenson, Minister Emeritus (Released) of Kircubbin, died on 27 October 2023; that the Rev N.W. McAuley, Minister of Greenwell Street, Newtownards, retired on 29 February 2024; that the Revs W.J. Carlisle, W.G. Cameron, D.N. Gray and R.J.Montgomery, Ministers Emeritus, became Ministers Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023; that the Rev Dr C.I. Dickson, Associate Minister of West Church, Bangor, resigned his charge on 5 May 2023 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster; that the Rev Aaron Ditty, Minister of Scrabo, Newtownards, resigned his charge on 8 August 2023 and was retained as a Minister without Charge; that the Rev A.E. Tolland, presented credentials from the Presbytery of South Belfast and was installed to the charge of Regent Street, Newtownards on 31 March 2023; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs C.D. Mawhinney, Lesley-Ann Wilson and Aaron Ditty; as licentiates, Messrs P.W. Bradley, T.A.R. Moore, Wallace Moore and J.N. Stewart; as students, Mrs Francine Magill and Mr Jack Neilly; that they held Consultations at Trinity, Bangor and Hamilton Road, Bangor; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **ARMAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev J. Smith is their Moderator; that the Rev C.U.R. Bradley, Minister of Armagh Road, Portadown, retired on 31 March 2023; that the Rev D.S. Henry, Minister of First Lurgan, retired on 10 September 2023; that the Rev T.A. Moore, Minister Emeritus, became a minister Emeritus (Released) on 6 February 2024; ; that the Rev P.L. McKelvey, Minister of Loughgall and Tartaraghan resigned his charge on 27 April 2023 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Route; that Mr J.M. Haugh was ordained and installed to the charge of Waringstown on 8 September 2023; that Mr Scott McMenemy was licensed on 11 June 2023 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Iveagh; that under their care is: as Minister without Charge, Rev Dr J.W.P. McConnell; that they held Consultations at Second Keady and Drumhillery; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **BALLYMENA PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev T.P. McCullough is their Moderator; that the Rev W.B. Boyd, Minister of Kells and Esklyane, retired on 29 February 2024; that the Rev D.A. McMillan, Minister of Clough, resigned his Charge on 31 December 2023 and became a Minister without Charge; that the Rev J.E. McDowell, having presented credentials from the Presbytery of Carrickfergus, was installed to the charge of First Ballymena on 21 April 2023; that the Rev J.D. McGaughey, a Minister without Charge under the care of the Presbytery, was installed to the charge

of Carnlough-Cushendall and Newtowncrommelin on 3 November 2023; that Dr M.W.H. Houston was licensed as a Probationer for the Christian Ministry on 18 June 2023 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Carrickfergus; that under their care is: as a Minister without Charge, Rev D.A. McMillan; that the Rev D.C. Millar, Minister without Charge, ceased to have that status from 24 June 2023; that no Consultations were held during the year; and that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **NORTH BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev M.S. Rutledge is their Moderator; that the Rev T.C. Morrison, Minister of Eglinton retired on 30 June 2023; that the Revs J.S. Dallas and K. Simpson, Minister Emeritus, were made Minister Emeritus (Released) on 6 February 2024; that Mr D. Dickinson was licensed on 17 September 2023; under their care are: as Ministers without Charge the Revs Dr L.E. Carroll and W.A. Shaw; as Licentiate, Mr S. Cairns, and Mr D. Dickinson; as Students, Mr S. Scott and Mr S. Gaston; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of Congregations are being printed separately.

The **SOUTH BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev D.J. Gray is their Moderator; that the Rev R. Love, Minister of Taughmonagh, retired on 31 January 2024; that the Rev A.E. Tolland, Minister of Newtownbreda, resigned her charge on 30 March 2023 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ards; the Rev W. Harkness resigned his charge on 14 June 2023 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of East Belfast; that Dr J.N. McCracken, presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and was ordained and installed to the charge of Finaghy-Lowe Memorial on 18 June 2023; Mr P. Lutton, presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and was ordained and installed to the charge of Newtownbreda on 26 January 2024; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev J.R. Burnett; as a Transferring Minister, Rev E. McCroskery; that the congregations of Windsor and Great Victoria Street were merged on 15 January 2024; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **EAST BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev J.M. Warburton is their Moderator; that the Rev J.M. Maddock, Minister Emeritus (Released), of Carryduff, died on 15 July 2023; that the Rev R.D. Drysdale, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 6 February 2024; that the Rev R. Hornby, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 6 February 2024; that the Rev M.L. Gray, Minister of Ravenhill, resigned his charge as on 1 June 2023; that the Rev M.L. Gray was installed to the charge of Knock on 2 June 2023; that the Rev W. Harkness presented credentials from the Presbytery of South Belfast and was installed to the charge of Belmont on 15 June 2023; that the Rev P.A. Boyd presented credentials from the Presbytery of Coleraine and

Limavady and was installed to the charge of McQuiston Memorial on 15 September 2023; that the Rev D.H. Thompson presented credentials from the Presbytery of North Belfast; that Dr J.N. McCracken was given credentials to the Presbytery of South Belfast; that Dr S.L. Bostock was given credentials to the Presbytery of Down; that Mr P. Lutton was given credentials to the Presbytery of South Belfast; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, the Revs J.M. Casement, W.G. Hamilton, W.J. Harshaw (retired), Dr D.J. Montgomery and Dr M.J. Welsh; as licentiates Mr A Frazer and Mr S.J. Kerr; as a Transferring Minister, the Rev M. Gilicze; as students, Mr A. Ferguson, Mr P Huey, Miss K. Jardine and Mr S. McCombe; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **CARRICKFERGUS PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Mark Russell is their Moderator; that there were no deaths; that the Rev Leslie James Addis, Minister of Woodlands, retired on 7 October 2023; that the Rev J.E McDowell resigned his charge as Minister of Ballylinney on 20 April 2023 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ballymena; that the Rev Ben Johnston, Minister of Second Donegore, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Templepatrick and was installed to the charge of Gardenmore on 2 February 2024; that Mr M.J.K. Kelso, licentiate assistant Sloan Street, Lisburn, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Dromore and was ordained and installed to the charge of Ballynure on 12 January 2024; that Dr M.W.H. Houston presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ballymena and was received as a licentiate; that under their care are: as a Minister without Charge, Rev T.N. Bingham; as licentiates, Mr M.J. Delaney, Dr M.W.H. Houston; as students, Mr Myles Tyrell, Mr Stephen McCleery; that during the year no Consultations were completed; that the Financial Reports of congregations, in the prescribed format, are being published, printed and distributed as appropriate.

The **COLERAINE AND LIMAVADY PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev G. Aitcheson is their Moderator; that the Very Rev Dr D.H. Allen, Minister Emeritus of New Row, Coleraine died on 21 June 2023; that the Rev Dr S.D.H. Williamson, Minister of Ballywillan, retired on 31 August 2023; that the Very Rev Dr J.A. Kirkpatrick, Minister of Portrush, retired on 31 August 2023; that the Revs: Dr R.N. Gordon, D.S. Irwin, A.McM. Kerr, Dr B. Kingsmore, T.S. Lindsay, G.D. Simpson, J. Waring, R. Wilson, Minister Emeritus, became Minister Emeritus (Released) on 6 February 2024; that the Rev T.A.S. Graham, Minister of Banagher, resigned his charge on 15 June 2023 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Tyrone; that the Rev P.A. Boyd, Assistant Minister of Portrush, resigned his charge on 14 September 2023 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of East Belfast; that the Rev J.D. McKane, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Dromore and was installed to the charge of New Row, Coleraine on 24 March 2023; that the Rev Dr T.P. Fleming, a Minister under Care of the

Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady was installed to the Charge of Castlerock on 23 February 2024; that under their care are: as a Minister without Charge, Rev Dr R. Kane; as a student, Mr J. Boyd; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **DERRY AND DONEGAL PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev S.J. Moore is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr B. Brown, Minister of Raphoe & Ballindrait, retired on 31 October 2023; that the Rev S.J. Richmond, Minister of Donegal & Stranorlar, resigned his charge on 7 September 2023 and that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev K.G. Patterson, Rev S.J. Richmond; that no Consultations were held during the year; that Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **DOWN PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev A.T.F. Johnston is their Moderator; that the Rev A.A. Cole, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 6 February 2024; that the Rev R.C. Patton, Minister of Trinity Boardmills, resigned his charge on 4 September 2023 and was retained as a Minister without Charge; that Dr S. Bostock, presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and was ordained and inducted to the charge of First Saintfield on 27 June 2023; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs Dr B.C.G. Black and R.C. Patton; as licentiate, Mr A.W.T. Martin; as a student, Mr E.G.D. Hanna; that they held a consultation at Raffrey; that the financial reports of congregations are being printed.

The **DROMORE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev F.M.A. Forbes is their Moderator; that the Rev R.A. Liddle, Minister of Legacurry retired on 30 September 2023; That the Rev John Brackenridge, Minister of First Lisburn retired on 31 December 2023; that the Rev S.W. Moore, Minister of 1st Dromara, resigned his charge on 13 January 2024 and was retained as a Minister without Charge; that Dr K.D. McIlroy, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Route and was ordained and installed to the charge of First Dromore on 15 December 2023; that Mr G.T. Read presented credentials from the Presbytery of Omagh and was received as a licentiate; that Mr M.J.K. Kelso was given credentials to the Presbytery of Carrickfergus; that under their care are: as a Minister without Charge Rev S.W. Moore; as a licentiate Mr G.T. Read; that the Rev James Todd, Minister without Charge, ceased to have that status on 7 March 2023; that they held Consultations at Railway Street; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **DUBLIN AND MUNSTER PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev D.P. Burke is their Moderator; that the Rev G.C. McKay, Minister Emeritus of Tullamore and Mountmellick died on 9 January 2024; that the Rev C.M. Hunter, Minister Emeritus, was made Minister Emeritus (Released) on 6

February 2024; that the Rev Dr Colin Dickson presented credentials from the Ards Presbytery and was inducted to the charge as Assistant Minister of Adelaide Road on the 6 May 2023; that the Rev C.H. Deering presented credentials from the Presbytery of Omagh and was installed to the charge of Dun Laoghaire on 19 May 2023; that Mr J.W. McCance was licensed on 18 June 2023; that the Rev Daniel Reyes Martin, Minister of Mullingar and Corboy resigned his charge on the 15 December 2023 and was given credentials to the Monaghan Presbytery; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **IVEAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Mark McMaw is their Moderator; that the Rev B. Martin retired from the charge of Anaghlonge and Garvagh on 31 October 2023 and became a Minister Emeritus from 1 November 2023; that the Rev P.A. McBride retired from the charge of Loughbrickland and Scarva on 30 September 2023 and became a Minister Emeritus from 1 October 2023; that the Rev R. McKibbin resigned from the charge of Donaghmore and Glascar effective from 31 March 2023; that the Rev P. Cleland resigned from the charge of Drumgooland and Killinamurry effective from 31 August 2023; that the Rev R.M. Moody presented credentials from the Presbytery of Route and was installed to the charge of First Rathfriland on 14 September 2023; that under their care are: as a Minister without Charge, Rev P. Cleland; as licentiates, Mr Richard J.E. Hill, Mr M.F. Hawthorne and Mr S.I. McMenemy; as students, Mr Stuart P. McKimm and Mr James Burke; that Consultations were held in Gilford, Tullylish, Castlewella and Leitrim congregations; that the Financial Reports of the congregations are being printed.

The **MONAGHAN PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev David Hagan is their Moderator; that the Rev Daniel Reyes Martin, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster and was installed to the charge of Clontibret and Middletown on 16 December 2023; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge Rev Damien Boyle; that they held consultations at Ballyhobridge, Clones, Newbliss and Stonebridge; that the financial reports of congregations are being printed.

The **NEWRY PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev N.L. Smyth is their Moderator; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Rev B.A.H. Wilson, Rev Dr A.D. Mullan; as students Mr J.D. McKee, Mr R.W.R. Higgins, Mr M.B. Banks, Mr G.A.N. McBride; that they held consultations at Mountnorris and Tullyallen; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **OMAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev G.M. Andrich is their Moderator; that the Rev Robert Herron, Minister of Trinity, Omagh and Gillygooley retired on 31 December 2023; that the Rev J.L. Casement and Rev R.S.K. Neill, Ministers Emeritus, became Ministers Emeritus

(Released) on 7 November 2023; that the Rev Clark Deering, Minister of Fintona and Ballynahatty and Creevan resigned his charge on 18 May 2023 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster; that Mr G.T. Read was licensed on 2 July 2023 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Dromore; that they held no Consultations: that the financial reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **ROUTE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev S.A. McCracken is their Moderator; that the Rev R.M. Moody, Minister of Garryduff and Dunloy, resigned his charge on the 14 September 2023 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Iveagh; that the Rev P.L. McKelvey, having presented credentials from the Presbytery of Armagh was installed to the charge of Toberkeigh and Ramoan on 28 April 2023; that Dr K.D. McIlroy was given credentials to the Presbytery of Dromore; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev P. Douglas; that they held a consultation at First Ballymoney; that the financial reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **TEMPLEPATRICK PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev G. McFadden is their Moderator; that the Very Rev Dr W.D. Patton, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 6 February 2024; that the Rev J.A. Gordon, Minister without Charge, ceased to have that status on 6 February 2024; that the Rev Ben Johnston, Minister of Second Donegore, resigned his charge on 1 February 2024 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Carrickfergus; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge Rev J.L. Tosh, Rev D.J. Paul, Rev Karen Campbell; as licentiates Mr Billy Abwa, Mr Steve Gaston; as a student Ms Christine Craig; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **TYRONE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev John Martin is their Moderator; that the Rev T.A.S. Graham, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady and was installed to the charge of Lecumpher and Union Road on 16 June 2023; that under their care are: as a Minister without Charge, Rev Ivan Ferris; as a Licensed Assistant Mr Mark Rodgers; that they held Consultations at Maghera; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

# COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS

Convener: Rev ALBIN RANKIN

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) The background to the present season of supporting congregational life and witness.
  - (b) Particular pieces of work directly commissioned by or reporting to the Council:
    - (i) The *Present* initiative
    - (ii) Presbytery Listening Exercise
    - (iii) Landscape Projects
    - (iv) Redrafting of the constitution of Presbyterian Women
    - (v) Partnership with Love for Life
  - (c) The work of the following committees and panels:
    - (i) The Congregational Life Committee
    - (ii) The Congregational Witness Committee
    - (iii) The Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee
    - (iv) The Children's, Youth and Family Panel
    - (v) The Presbyterian Women's Panel and Women's Ministry Panel.

### Unravelling and unfolding

3. The present season of church life is one in which it might be said that well worn ways of doing things are unravelling quicker than new ways of approaching them are unfolding. In many cases that leaves us struggling to make sense of the moment in which we find ourselves. Our discomfort with that can tempt us to either inertia or impatience. Neither reaction serves the work of God's kingdom well.
4. Instead, it is important to pay ever closer attention to what God seems to be doing among us in the present. That is no easy task. To set ourselves to approach doing so requires hearts, ears, eyes and wills open to the

stirrings and promptings of the Holy Spirit, whether they be small, gradual, unsettling or potentially liberating. Both a letting go and a letting come are involved, elements of both often at work in the very same season.

5. These realities are at play in the ministry of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness in supporting the development of the regular weekly rhythms of the spiritual life and witness of congregations all across Ireland.
6. The past year has been one of carefully paying attention; testing widely what God seems to be saying; listening to congregations and presbyteries; looking to see what seems to be growing as well as what seems to be slowing; being willing to pause and reflect when the way ahead is not yet clear. The report that follows exhibits elements of all of that and is offered to the General Assembly in a spirit of humbly seeking God's ways that we might walk in them for his glory and the increasing fruitfulness of the life of his Church

## **PARTICULAR PIECES OF WORK DIRECTLY COMMISSIONED BY OR REPORTING TO THE COUNCIL**

### ***Present initiative***

7. At its meeting on 10 October 2023, the Council approved a denomination wide initiative in the area of envisioning and encouraging congregations and their members in their life and witness. Entitled *Present*, the initiative will be launched to coincide with this year's General Assembly and will continue for the three following church years 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27.
8. The spark for this initiative has been the need for an appropriate response to some themes that are constantly emerging from the Council's conversation and contact with congregations. These include:
  - The need to move beyond the immediate past, but a feeling of being unable to fully enter into an unfolding future;
  - The need to re-establish among members the value of spending intentional time before God;
  - The need to rebuild the community life of the people of God;
  - The need to refresh the outward witness of the church;
  - The need to encourage a more positive mood in church life.
9. The initiative represents a Council response to the remit given to it by the General Assembly to:
 

'support the ongoing life, mission and witness of congregations in their life and work with all ages; through casting vision; assisting in developing training; providing and signposting models of good practice and resourcing in key areas.' Code para. 276 (3)

10. It sits alongside current Council responses to that remit and in parallel to the ongoing three-year listening exercise across all 19 presbyteries (see paragraphs 25-30).
11. The simplicity of the initiative is twofold.
12. Firstly, it hangs on a single word, present. The picture of being actively present will be offered to congregations as something around which to reflect and re-centre their life and witness in four particular ways:
  - Being *present* in this season of life and witness;
  - Being *present* to God as his people;
  - Being *present* for one another in God's family of the church;
  - Being *present* where God has placed us to be his witnesses.
13. Secondly, the initiative demands nothing novel or extra. Rather, it encourages congregations to give attention to what God is already doing and where he might be prompting the simple development of existing core congregational activity in the areas of worship, pastoral life, discipleship and witness. As such, each congregation is invited to engage with the theme of the initiative in whatever ways seem best in their particular circumstances or season of church life.
14. For the denomination as a whole, the initiative invites us to re-find ourselves as Irish Presbyterians in this present moment. It seeks to encourage a fusion of the rich theological tradition we are bringing with us from our story and where we are trying to go with the contemporary expression of that faith and practice in the story in which we find ourselves today.
15. The encouragement to be present to God as his people, is a re-emphasis of our understanding of the centrality of the means of grace:
 

*'The outward and ordinary means by which Christ gives to us the benefits of redemption are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer.'* (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q.88)

However, it is also an invitation to explore the shape of rhythms and activities that facilitate our commitment as members of a congregation today to engage with God together in worship, engaging with Scripture and prayer as the ways in which we hear his voice and receive his grace for our lives.
16. The encouragement to be present for one another in God's family of the church is a re-emphasis of our understanding of communion of the saints:
 

*Saints... being united to one another in love... have fellowship in one another's gifts and graces... are obligated to perform the duties, public and private, which are conducive to their mutual good, both spiritually and physically... are obligated to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God and in performing such other spiritual services as are directed to their mutual edification, and also in bringing relief to one another in material things, according to their various abilities and necessities.* (Westminster Confession Chapter 26 The Communion of Saints)

However, it also draws us to consider the shape of rhythms and activities that facilitate our commitment as members of a congregation today to be a community that lovingly gives and receives from one another's gifts, pastorally, in discipleship and in working together for God's glory.

17. The encouragement to be present where God has placed us to be his witnesses is a re-emphasis of our understanding of the witness of the visible church.

*To this catholic visible church Christ has given the ministry, Scriptures and ordinances of God, for the gathering and strengthening of the saints in this life, till the end of the world.* (Westminster Confession Chapter 25 The Church)

Nevertheless, it also prompts us to think about the shape of rhythms and activities that facilitate our commitment as members of a congregation today to engage in the practice of outreach and evangelism, longing to see others gathered into the life of Christ's church.

18. This initiative is not offering a quick fix for all the ailments of the church, a silver bullet solution to all of the contemporary challenges we face, or something into which to try to shoehorn all the aspects and activities of church life.
19. Neither will it be a 'here today, gone tomorrow' theme. Rather, in extending the initiative over three consecutive years, congregations and members will have time and space to become familiar with the idea, choose how to harness it in their life and witness and gradually perceive what God is doing in and through its contribution to their ministry and mission.
20. The initiative will seek to gain traction and build momentum across the period of its life as follows:
  - Year one (2024/25) – primary focus on building denominational and congregational awareness and understanding of the theme;
  - Year two (2025/26) – primary focus on resourcing congregations with a range of ways to engage with the initiative;
  - Year three (2026/27) – primary focus on gathering and sharing stories of how congregations have grappled with ways of being present.

What, if anything, follows beyond this three-year period will be determined in the light of what has been learned along the way.

21. It is important to stress that the *Present* initiative will not take the form of anything we have previously done before as a denomination. It is not a programme, planning exercise or prescription, but rather the gathering of a narrative that encourages celebration, creativity and connectedness in congregational life and witness.
22. As such the main carrier for the theme will be stories intended to encourage, promote reflection, fire imagination and offer illumination. These stories will be threaded through a variety of existing PCI channels of communication – articles in the *Herald*, social media, podcasts, *Tides* and a limited release of video material. Existing and forthcoming Council resources will also be integrated into the initiative where appropriate. A

section on the PCI website will house all associated materials for ease of access.

23. In year two, a number of handles, allowing the themes of the initiative to be picked up in a variety of ways by congregations and carried as part of their journey of the development of their congregational life and witness, will be made available. It is anticipated that these might include resources for prayer around the theme and sub themes, as well as simple frameworks for kirk session and/or small group discussion. Most resources are anticipated as being offered as free downloads.
24. In year three, the major focus will fall upon the gathering and sharing of a wide variety of stories that express how congregations have engaged with the themes of the initiative. It is anticipated that one means of gathering these stories may be to ask each presbytery to nominate some congregational stories for inclusion, thereby ensuring a wide variety of expression of how congregations from right across the denomination have seen God at work among them through the initiative.
25. The Council has carefully and prayerfully constructed the concept behind the Present initiative, giving time this year to discussing and gathering ideas in all of its committees and through sharing the idea with the other Councils of the General Assembly. It has intentionally sought to address some significant aspects of church life, but to do so with a simplicity intended to maximise accessibility and adaptability so as to enable the widest possible participation across the denomination.
26. What will unfold is as yet unknown and is in God's hands. A resolution is before the Assembly, inviting its support of the initiative and encouraging congregations to harness the potential it offers to envision and enable the development of their life and witness.

### **Presbytery Listening Exercise**

27. The following resolution passed by last year's General Assembly gave permission to the Council to conduct a presbytery listening exercise  
*That the General Assembly encourage the Council for Congregational Life and Witness in embarking on a two year listening exercise across all 19 presbyteries from September 2023 to enable it to better resource the whole church and to understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and that presbyteries participate fully in this important initiative.*
28. Due to the need to prioritise work transmitted to presbyteries from the General Council in the areas of the revision of the Code and the reconfiguration of ministry in the period September to December 2023, the first year of the Council's listening exercise could only commence from January 2024. The result is that the process has had to be extended by a further year with five presbyteries participating in this church year and seven to follow in 2024/25 and another seven in 2025/26.
29. The listening exercise has commenced in the presbyteries of Carrickfergus, East Belfast, Monaghan, Newry and North Belfast. Already it has proved helpful in enabling reflection in individual presbyteries as to what are

the particular challenges and opportunities of congregations under their oversight. The process also helps inform the Council as to both local and denominational priorities for supporting the development of congregational life and witness.

30. Following on from the listening exercise, presbyteries and the Council will partner to co-design and co-deliver appropriate, bespoke responses to the priorities identified. This will commence from September 2024 with the first five presbyteries to have completed the process.
31. It is notable that the responses emerging from the exercise are very definitely tailored by local observation and needs identified by individual presbyteries. These have included, focusing on the need to recapture confidence among members in a variety of areas of ministry; envisioning and equipping in particular areas of congregational life and witness; sparking a presbytery initiative aimed at more generally encouraging congregations and their members in this season of ministry; harnessing Council resources and specialisms to supplement presbytery capacity to complete an important piece of strategic work intended to enable more effective presbytery oversight of emerging realities in congregations under their care. The Council has been encouraged by this variety of outcomes to the process and welcomes the range of emerging opportunities to supplement and support presbyteries in their vital role of encouraging congregations in their life and witness.
32. The first phase of the exercise has been deliberately designed to be process light but people engaged. This has proved successful, enabling both presbyteries and the Council to harness limited time and capacity for maximum effect and impact. The Council will be formally approaching seven more presbyteries to engage in the listening exercise in 2024/25 and it is hoped that the encouraging experience of those who have completed the exercise so far will promote enthusiastic participation.

### **Landscape projects**

33. As congregations emerged from the aftermath of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council approved a series of new initiatives aimed at exploring and seeking to enable congregations to respond to significant changes to the landscape in which aspects of their life and witness was taking place. The aim was that these projects would slowly and gradually develop over a period with the hope that they will help shape a range of new models that congregations could adopt or adapt to their needs and circumstances. The response to the four aspects of this initiative has been varied.
34. **Landscape Project 1: Better together?**  
Addressing the challenges and opportunities of reduction in congregational size and capacity and the possibilities of sharing aspects of life and witness with other PCI neighbours.

Only two congregations responded to the offer of Council facilitation and support. This has produced one pilot project which moved towards implementation with minimal ongoing input required from the Council. Two gatherings to explore effective practice of shared ministry in existing joint charges have been held, one in Belfast and one in Monaghan. There may be potential to develop this strand of work in future.

**35. Landscape Project 2: Local Youth Ministry Partnerships**

Addressing the challenges and opportunities of congregational situations in which a number of neighbouring PCI churches find themselves with too few young people for effective youth ministry, but where working together would provide a critical mass for a viable group and leadership team.

Several groups of neighbouring congregations responded to the offer of Council facilitation and support. Some have followed through on this direction of travel, others have not. Where implementation occurred, it required minimal ongoing input from the Council. More significantly, examples of a number of groups of neighbouring congregations and/or presbyteries beginning to engage in joint youth ministry in the way envisaged by the project are emerging in a variety of locations. The Youth Development Officer is actively following up on these developments with a view to offering appropriate support from the Council and to gathering stories which may be shared at a later date.

**36. Landscape Project 3: Starting over?**

Addressing the challenges and opportunities of rebuilding children's ministry from scratch with parents and families intentionally engaged and involved where numbers of church-connected children have dwindled.

A helpful initial scoping conversation on challenges and opportunities in reaching unchurched parents and children involving representatives from a variety of PCI congregations and other agencies that work with unchurched families, was held in 2023. A second *Family Festival* event is planned for 18 May 2024 at Spruce Meadows, Lisburn, in follow up to last year's very successful experiment. Congregations will again be encouraged to bring unchurched parents and children on the fringes of church life and activities to spend time together at an event at which the Council takes the strain of delivering a quality programme. More work remains to be done in this area as an aspect of continuing the development of the church's thinking and practice in reaching unchurched families.

**37. Landscape Project 4: Faith in later life**

Addressing the challenges and opportunities of an ageing society and church membership.

The promotion of the *All the days of my life* resource as a means of evangelism to this demographic continues. A morning conference entitled *Age of Opportunity* will take place in Assembly Buildings, Belfast on Thursday 16 May 2024. Delivered in conjunction with the *Faith in Later Life* ministry, material recorded will also be made available for sharing

more widely to stimulate the imagination of congregations for more proactively pursuing discipleship and evangelism to those in this stage of life.

38. In each case, the particular models, themes and aspects of life and witness commenced through the landscape projects will be integrated into the future work of the relevant committees or panels of the Council.

### **Redrafting of the Constitution of Presbyterian Women**

39. A small group made up of the Presbyterian Women office bearers and two other members bringing a wider perspective on the variety of expressions of ministry among women emerging in PCI congregations, have undertaken work to redraft the constitution of Presbyterian Women.
40. There are two particular drivers for this work at this time. Firstly, the Council did not reconstitute the Women's Ministry Panel as operations recommenced following the interruption of the pandemic. Instead, the Presbyterian Women Panel has continued to assume oversight of the support and development of women's ministry generally, which includes delivery through Presbyterian Women groups in congregations as well as other emerging forms of ministry among women. This integrated approach has proved very effective and fruitful. Having consulted with both the Presbyterian Women Panel and members of the previous Women's Ministry Panel, the Council are now moving towards a new agreed arrangement in which one panel – a reconstituted version of the Presbyterian Women Panel – will continue to oversee the support and development of all expressions of congregational ministry among women. There is particular urgency in undertaking this work because the membership of the existing Presbyterian Women Panel is lapsing as terms of tenure expire.
41. Secondly, it is now widely recognised and accepted that the world of women's ministry is changing and that there is an opportunity for Presbyterian Women to reshape its constitution to harness the best of its longstanding, proven, beneficial organisational and denominational features, while also gaining from the momentum and energy of the greater variety of ways in which women's ministry is being expressed on the ground in congregations. Early signs of this fusion being expressed and bearing fruit in events, publications and resources are already overwhelmingly encouraging.
42. The process so far has seen the small group of the office bearers of Presbyterian Women and others arrive at a redrafted constitution. It has been received by both the Presbyterian Women Panel and the Council for Congregational Life and Witness and can be found in appendix 1 of the report. As the constitution of Presbyterian Women forms part of the Code of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the General Assembly exercises final authority to receive and adopt the content of the redraft. A resolution to that effect is brought to the Assembly.

43. Should the General Assembly receive and approve the redrafted constitution, work will commence on a Presbyterian Women framework for congregational women's ministry, which will replace the existing Presbyterian Women guidebook. Adding detail and examples to the broad brush strokes of the constitution, it will offer a variety of models of women's ministry in congregations which will comprise existing good practice from the guidebook, with a latitude to apply it wisely and with greater flexibility to suit local circumstances.

### **Partnership with Love for Life**

44. At its meeting on 26 October 2023 the General Council passed the following resolution arising from the completion of the work of the Pastoral Leadership Task Group which had delivered a programme of events intended to enable leaders and members of the church to better understand the culture of sexuality as it relates to the world of young people and respond to the pastoral implications encountered in church settings:

*That the General Council encourage the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to propose that Love for Life become a recognised partner organisation (under the framework agreed by the General Assembly in 2017 for provision of specialist supplementation of the core remit of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness) so that they can deliver specialist equipping and resourcing on request to congregations and/or presbyteries in the area of work covered by the remit of the Task Group.*

45. The following framework and process for establishing partnerships with organisations in support of congregational life and witness, referenced in the resolution of the General Council, was agreed by the General Assembly 2017.
- Definition of a partner organisation  
A partner organisation is one which supplements the provision of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness by sharing specific, specialist support in enabling congregations in their life or witness.
  - Requirements for entering into partnership:
    - (i) The partner organisation's correspondence with the primary doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
    - (ii) The partner organisation's ability to offer support at congregational level for the life and witness of local church ministry and mission.
    - (iii) 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.

- (iv) The proposal for partnership be presented to a meeting of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness for approval and reported to the General Assembly.
  - (v) The partnership is terminable by either party at any time.
  - Potential outworking of partnerships:
    - (i) Partnership on specific projects and/or pieces of work.
    - (ii) Inclusion of congregationally focused projects and/or pieces of work in Council communication.
    - (iii) Inclusion of congregationally focused projects and/or pieces of work in Council prayer points.
46. Exploratory conversations have taken place with Love for Life. The ministry meets the requirements for entering partnership and has much to offer that supplements and augments congregational enabling offered by the Council for Congregational Life and Witness.
47. At its meeting on 6 March 2024, the Council for Congregational Life and Witness agreed that Love for Life become a recognised partner organisation with the specific purpose of delivering specialist resourcing and equipping of congregations and/or presbyteries in the area of relationships and sexuality. Initially, the outworking of the partnership will involve raising awareness among congregations of existing resources and other services that are currently offered by Love for Life. From that starting point further ways of developing the partnership will be explored.

## CONGREGATIONAL LIFE COMMITTEE

48. The Congregational Life Committee oversees the Council's work of supporting congregations in developing the areas of leadership, discipleship, pastoral life and worship. Major aspects of its work in the last year, along with forthcoming activities, are summarised below.

### Leadership development

49. The Committee discussed an observable leadership deficit across congregations large and small. There is a widespread reduction in leadership capacity in congregations as a result of many members taking the opportunity to step back from serving during or following the pandemic. Discerning how to address the tension between genuine time poverty and basic commitment to serve as a mark of discipleship remains challenging. It is recognised that the quality of congregational life and witness, and its ability to develop, is in large part determined by the availability, mindset, attitude and aptitude of leaders.
50. Against the backdrop of these trends and general trajectory, the Council has intentionally focused and invested in encouraging leaders as congregations continue to re-establish their life and work in the immediate wake of the

changes experienced as they emerge from the aftermath of the pandemic. There has been a significant appetite for leadership development as evidenced in uptake of a variety of events and programmes commissioned and delivered by the Committee in this area.

51. The *Refresh* initiative sought to refresh and encourage elders in their calling. Three gatherings took place in Magherafelt, Belfast (also live streamed) and Limavady. The format offered a mix of encouragement from Scripture, specific input on the roles and responsibilities of eldership, and time for discussion. Material from the programme was recorded and is being packaged and released for use in individual kirk sessions. It will lend itself to use in kirk session meetings or elders' away days.
52. Feedback gathered was overwhelmingly positive and indicated both the need for this initiative in this particular season of church life and the appetite for further resourcing and encouragement for the eldership.
53. In response, the Committee have agreed the following initiatives for 2024/25:
  - more proactively promoting the possibility of staff facilitation of an away day, morning or evening, for elders;
  - the production of four simple, downloadable, postcard sized resources for use as short kirk session devotionals around the four responsibilities of elders as highlighted at the *Refresh* event – knowing, feeding, leading and protecting the flock;
  - another event for elders, live streamed to maximise reach.
54. The uptake for the 2023 live stream was more than anticipated and significantly extended the reach of the event. Unfortunately, a number of technical issues, entirely beyond Council's control, resulted in some participants not being able to access the livestream and the quality of streaming being impaired. Steps will be taken to ensure that these wrinkles can be ironed out for the next live stream.
55. A number of other aspects of encouraging and supporting the development of eldership are also emerging. These include:
  - arranging the life of kirk session to be more intentionally collaborative, as a ministry that is shared rather than individual in nature;
  - proactively developing the leadership role of kirk session and giving confidence in navigating change;
  - cementing the crucial relationship between minister and kirk sessions;
  - revisiting material for training new elders to refresh elements of content and format.

These will be further examined, prioritised and addressed in due course as capacity allows.

56. *Leading Edge* is a new programme seeking to equip those in a variety of leadership roles for a more facilitative style of leadership aimed at enabling greater engagement, involvement, ownership and sharing of leadership responsibility, especially in the area of congregational change. The themes for five sessions delivered in five mornings across the church year were:

Leading from a place of acceptance; Leading in disorienting times; Leading well with others; Leading without having to feel in control; Leading for a change. The programme had a cohort of nine enthusiastic participants and feedback was affirming of the need for a forum to unpack these leadership challenges. It is planned to run the programme again in 2024/25.

57. The *Apprentice* programme offers congregations an opportunity to advertise apprentice posts and access for those serving as apprentices to a monthly ministry basics training scheme delivered in conjunction with the Council for Training in Ministry's Institute for Ministry. The training programme had eight participants this year and promotion for 2024/25 has already commenced.
58. In the area of developing the next generation of leaders, the *Emerge* younger leaders' initiative has returned as a residential overnight, rather than a programme delivered on a number of dates throughout the year. The residential will be held in Derryvolgie Hall from 14-15 June 2024, with Phil Knox of Evangelical Alliance UK as the keynote speaker. Ensuring a pipeline of a new generation of leaders is crucial to the denomination's future at many levels and congregations are encouraged to send emerging leaders to have their leadership gift encouraged and further enabled.

### **Deepening discipleship**

59. The Committee observed that activity in the area of discipleship beyond Sunday worship has been slow to gain momentum in congregations after the interruption of the pandemic. Some congregations have moved to a more interactive midweek meeting on church premises, rather than returning to home groups. There is also increasing evidence that the total number signed up to be part of home groups significantly exceeds those who regularly attend.
60. For these reasons, the Committee deemed it wise not to simply recommence programmes offered previously in the area of supporting the development of discipleship in congregations. Instead, a conference entitled *Discipleship Church Today* took place in Assembly Buildings on Tuesday 24 October 2023. The format offered a mix of plenary content, alongside a variety of forums for discussion aiming to address why discipleship is difficult today and how we might shape forms of Bible engagement, worship, and community that grow disciples equipped to follow Jesus in our present age.
61. Plenary content from Andrew Fellows, author of *Smuggling Jesus back into the Church: How the Church became worldly and what to do about it* (IVP), addressed the theme of why discipleship is particularly difficult today, picking up the idea of cultural super-values which are subtle, but pervasive, in shaping society, followers of Jesus and the life of the church in the ways of the world, rather than the ways of Christ.
62. Many commented in feedback that Andrew's two addresses, tackling the challenges facing the church in the task of making and shaping disciples today, were the most helpful aspect of *Discipleship Church Today's* programme.

*“Discipleship doesn’t begin in a vacuum. The members of my congregation have already been very extensively disciplined or formed by the culture in which they live. I need to work harder at pointing this out to my people and ‘demolishing’ the worldly worldview with the Word of God.”*

*“The struggle is real when it comes to the uphill battle that is cultural values today but it’s so much more important than it ever was that the church faces this head on.”*

*“The teaching from Andrew was most helpful: he solidified many ideas that have been floating around for a while, and it’s so useful to have the language to discuss these issues and to equip us to fight against wrong values and to help others to do so too.”*

*“Teaching from Andrew Fellows really framed the discussion well. Very grateful for his anthropological overview of the issues. Completely agree this is a worldview or super-value issue.”*

63. The call to be a church which proactively engages in culture watch, seeking to better understand the times in which we are living and the various super-values which shape our values in society, resonated deeply with those present.
64. There is a strong sense from feedback that church leaders, members, and whole congregations need to be well equipped to engage in culture watch activity. In answer to the question, what was most likely to engage and equip members to keep looking to Jesus and live with radical Christ-like distinctiveness in today’s world, resources for group use in congregations, relevant training for leaders in specific aspects of developing discipleship and accessible apologetics material emerged as the priorities.
65. Consequently, the committee have commissioned the following next steps:
  - Video material of core content of the event to be tailored to make it usable in a congregational setting and offered as a free download from the PCI website.
  - The following package of resource production in tandem with mini events be pursued and delivered collaboratively across intersecting areas of the Council remit.
    - A group discussion resource on reading our culture and living counterculturally to be developed for launch at the General Assembly in June 2026 and released for use in congregations for the start of the following church year in September 2026. The resource is envisaged as a collaborative project involving elements of discipleship (Congregational Life Committee remit) and missional living, apologetics and evangelism (Congregational Witness Committee remit), with specific input to content from young adults (18–25 element of Children’s, Youth and Family Panel remit).
    - As an investment in helping leaders in congregations to further explore the concept of culture watch, as well as a way of informing the content of the resource, a number of small-

scale forums to be held during the period 2024-2026. These to include: regional gatherings; an age specific gathering of young adults; a gathering for full time youth workers; a gathering to hear other voices, including relevant councils within PCI, partner organisations, and those identified as well placed to help shape the conversation and content of the resource.

- Feedback from the forums at the *Discipleshaping Church Today* event, on Bible engagement, congregational community and discipleship in worship, be used to shape the selection of stories in the Present initiative and in the general work of the Council in stimulating discussion and sharing ideas across the denomination, as well as informing engagement with congregations and presbyteries.
66. The Committee also looks forward to the release of a new resource for use in the next church year in the area of prayer. It seeks to encourage confident, biblically shaped participation in prayer within the corporate settings of worship and other gatherings. Its particular focus is on gradually enabling church members reluctant to pray aloud to find their voice in prayer. Supplementary resources will offer suggestions for a range of ways in which members might be gathered for corporate prayer.
67. The *Tides* devotional, offering a framework for the daily discipline of reading, reflecting upon, and responding to Scripture, continues to grow, both retaining and attracting significant numbers of subscribers.

### **Pastoral life**

68. This year has seen a growing demand from congregations to help them explore effective forms of pastoral ministry. Staff engagements have involved seeking to give greater confidence to those who deliver pastoral care, alongside thinking about alternative models to the traditional division of members into elders' districts by which congregations can achieve a comprehensive pastoral strategy.
69. In response to this area of demand, a series of three pastoral equipping evenings entitled *Confident to Care* and delivered in collaboration with Andrew Collins (Biblical Counselling UK), were planned for May 2024. Within days of release of publicity, these sessions were fully booked. It is hoped to run this programme again in autumn 2024.

### **Worshipping life**

70. The Committee observes that many congregations report significant reductions in numbers and regularity in attendance at public worship. There seems to be particular disengagement among young people and young adults. The overall picture among young families is more varied.
71. The *Digital Worship Hub* on the PCI website continues to offer a range of resources and ideas for those who construct and lead services of worship. Launched last year, initial content is being supplemented and updated with new material, which is highlighted via social media and other channels of communication to keep the existence of this resource bank before the

church. Congregations have already benefited from suggestions for praise to be used around the seasons of Remembrance, Harvest and Christmas.

72. The Committee records its thanks to Rev W.J. Murdock who is standing down, having overseen the first phase of this work. A successor is being sought to build on the excellent platform he has established.

### **Membership and people with intellectual disability resource**

73. Last year's General Assembly passed a resolution instructing the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to produce resources for congregations in addressing the area of membership and people with intellectual disability, specifically:
- (a) guidance for congregational leaders to assist in their work of welcoming people with intellectual disabilities, and acting in support of their families;
  - (b) vows/affirmations expressed in language and form appropriate for addressing those presenting for membership who exhibit a variety of abilities of understanding for inclusion in the Book of Common Worship.
74. Having consulted with members of the General Council Task Group from which this work originated, as well as some who contributed to the General Assembly's debate on the matter, a document was presented to the Committee and approved. It can be found in appendix 2 of the report entitled, *Welcome, inclusion and embrace of those with intellectual disabilities and their families*. A resolution is before the Assembly proposing that the guidance contained in the Membership and Intellectual Disability resource be approved and that the framework of vows suggested for illustrative purposes be adopted and inserted as an appendix to the Book of Common Worship.

PHILIP McCREA, Convener

## **CONGREGATIONAL WITNESS COMMITTEE**

75. The Congregational Witness Committee oversees the Council's work of supporting congregations in developing the areas of local outreach, evangelism and involvement in global mission (with content informed by the Council for Global Mission). Major aspects of its work in the last year, along with an emerging future agenda, are summarised below.
76. In an increasingly secular society in which familiarity with the good news of the gospel has receded and the church finds itself edged towards the margins of society, congregations and their members being envisioned, equipped and enabled to bear witness to Christ is ever more challenging and crucial.
77. The Congregational Witness Committee continues to grapple with ways in which to undertake this task. These involve both trying to make sense of

what is happening in the big picture analysis of cultural trends, alongside small scale experiments in finding new ways to help the church engage and evangelise in the changing local and global communities in which it finds itself.

### **Reshaping of the post of Congregational Witness Development Officer**

78. As part of an internal staff restructuring, Neil Harrison transferred from the post of Congregational Witness Development Officer to work full-time for the Council for Mission in Ireland and Council for Global Mission from 1 July 2023. The Congregational Witness Committee records its thanks for Neil's work in the post and appreciation of his ongoing diligence in completing some pieces of work already commenced before his move to the mission councils was envisaged.
79. This restructuring created a full-time vacancy in the post of Congregational Witness Development Officer, working exclusively for the Council for Congregational Life and Witness at no additional cost to the Church. In re-examining the priorities and potential offered by this post, the Council has placed a greater emphasis on supporting the development of evangelism among congregations and their members. The new post was advertised and filled by Jonny McClune, an elder in Saintfield Road congregation, who commenced work on 26 February 2024.
80. The first phase of the new post holder's crucial work will involve taking time to become widely envisioned by, and deeply embedded in, current thinking and literature in the areas of community witness, cultural apologetics and evangelism. This task will be undertaken with a parallel priority of gaining a feel for the variety of practical realities and contexts for witness in which congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and their members find themselves today.
81. From this platform, options will be brought forward for a range of specific initiatives and themes aimed at encouraging, envisioning and equipping the contemporary witness of the church. After consideration by the Committee, emerging priorities identified and agreed will become the framework for a new agenda of work.
82. The aim is that this process will enable the Congregational Witness Development Officer to help the Committee and Council as a whole, to gain a firm grasp on the realities of the current context for evangelism and map out some achievable steps to equipping congregations and their members to share Jesus today. None of this is easy, but it is absolutely essential, and members of Assembly are asked to particularly remember this unfolding work in prayer.
83. At time of writing another meeting of the Committee is scheduled for 23 April 2024. At this meeting emerging priorities in supporting the development of outreach and evangelism will be considered.

**Congregational outreach and evangelism**

84. In terms of outputs from the Committee, a number of initiatives have been progressed this year.
85. The previously released *Share* material, aimed at encouraging congregational engagement in local outreach and evangelism, has been repackaged to increase its potential for use in a small group setting.
86. An evangelism resource, specifically shaped for use in rural contexts, is being developed in conjunction with PCI's rural chaplain Rev Kenny Hanna. It will have four sections based on the seasons of the year - autumn, winter, spring and summer, relating each to particular seasons of life experience. The content is a mix of video story and simple framework for evangelistic discussion centred on a passage of Scripture. It is hoped the resource will be available for use at the start of the next church year.
87. The *All the days of my life* evangelistic resource, which focuses particularly on reaching those in later life, will be re-promoted at the *Age of Opportunity* event on 16 May 2024.
88. Training in the art of Bible storytelling for evangelistic purposes took place in Union Theological College in January 2024. Delivered in conjunction with the Simply the Story ministry, it proved popular, despite the intensive week long schedule. Further exploration of how this approach might be used in ministry and mission among non-readers, children and in the setting of all age worship services is underway.
89. A simple resource to encourage those unfamiliar with the Bible to consider its truth for their lives, has been scoped in conjunction with the Bible Society NI, but is paused because of capacity issues.

**Impact summer outreach programme**

90. The *Impact* summer outreach team programme in summer 2023 attracted only 29 participants operating in three Belfast congregations and one Londonderry congregation. Teams in Seskinore, First Monaghan and the Cootehill/Bailieborough group of churches were cancelled due to lack of applicants. Identifying team leaders also proved a problem and the Council made a significant financial loss on this programme.
91. More positively, a new format of enhanced teaching and worship in the morning, alongside congregational outreach in the afternoon and evening proved helpful, and feedback from participants and congregations who hosted teams was overwhelmingly positive.
92. Having taken stock of last year's realities, the programme for summer 2024 aims to gradually rebuild momentum in this aspect of work with a Belfast hub serving in West Kirk, Abbey (Monkstown) and Great Victoria Street/South Belfast Friendship House and a second Londonderry hub serving in Kilfennan congregation. It is hoped that numbers of participants can be increased and the financial deficit reduced. This is one of a number of Council programmes and events for young people which are under review by the Children's, Youth and Family Panel (see paragraphs 98-100).

### **Encouraging congregational involvement in global mission**

93. A *Being Global Disciples* booklet, aimed at encouraging lively congregational engagement and involvement in global mission, was launched in June 2023. Congregations are encouraged to make use of it in deepening and developing their contribution to God's larger work of global mission.
94. Resources as part of the *Blaze* initiative, intended to stimulate awareness of and participation in global mission among children and their families in the context of the whole congregation, continue to be released three times per year.
95. A report will be received from the Council for Global Mission at the 23 April 2024 meeting as to their priority areas for encouraging congregational global mission involvement in 2024/25.

STEPHEN RICHMOND, Convener

## **PROGRAMME, FINANCE AND COORDINATION COMMITTEE**

96. The Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee oversees the management of the Council's large remit, limited staff capacity and a budget that is reducing in real terms. As such, it plays a crucial role in apportioning priorities, time and finance.

### **Overview of events and programmes**

97. The committee was pleased to note that numbers of individuals and congregations participating in Council events and programmes are encouraging. In many aspects of the Council's work this greater stability and degree of predictability means that many of last year's events and programmes have a level of traction that suggest that they should be repeated with some changes to venue and format.
98. In total, at time of writing 194 congregations had participated in at least one Council event or programme between September 2023 and March 2024.
99. Events and programmes for young people aged 11 plus remain the most challenging in terms of securing participation. This has led to a number of cancellations and a significant drop off rate in levels of participation as programmes have progressed. In response to these trends, the Committee authorised that the following steps be taken in 2024/25:
  - Events for 11-16s - That the Youth Development Officer actively engage with presbyteries with a view to offering to co-design and enable effective local delivery of up to three Explore type events for 11-16s in conjunction with the presbytery.

- Programme for 16-18s - That the Follow programme for 16-18s in present format be paused and that a simple, one-off, non-residential discipleship event for 16-18s be considered and if deemed viable, actively pursued.
  - Impact teams - That trends in numbers participating in Impact summer teams in summer 2024 be carefully noted with a view to a strategic decision being made regarding their continuation or otherwise in present format in summer 2025.
100. A wider review of Council events and programmes for young people has also been commissioned. The process will take particular account of the following critical factors, strategic priorities identified by the Children's, Youth and Family Panel and potential alternatives to current Council practice:
- (a) Critical factors:
- reducing numbers of young people actively involved in core discipleship activities in many congregations;
  - reducing capacity of congregational leadership in ministry among young people;
  - the prevailing trends in the culture of youth engagement in events and programmes beyond school and sports settings and how these priorities, along with an increase in part-time working, impact on the potential participation of young people in denominationally provided activity.
- (b) Strategic priorities identified by the Children's, Youth and Family Panel:
- the strategic importance of denominational events and programmes for young people as identified by the recent review of priorities for supporting the development of ministry among young people in congregations undertaken by the Children's, Youth and Family Panel, along with overall Council capacity for delivery and budget for events and programmes.
- (c) Potential alternatives to current Council practice:
- alternatives to current Council practice offered by other denominations and/or parachurch ministries;
  - alternatives to current Council practice that might involve working more directly with and through presbyteries, or congregational islands of strength, to co-design and deliver events and programmes;
  - the possibilities of signposting young people to participating in a range of age-appropriate events and programmes offered by other ministries identified as consistent with PCI's theology, practice and ethos.
101. The recommendations of the review will be reported to the Children's, Youth and Family Panel, with final recommendations to be reported to the Council at its meeting in spring 2025.

102. The Committee have also approved the development of a more regional approach to events and use of online provision where it extends reach and accessibility. This has been progressed in terms of Explore youth evenings, elders' *Refresh* evenings, *Family Festival* and *Kids' Big Day Out* events, and *Foundations* training evenings for children's and youth leaders. So far, the response has been generally encouraging in terms of gaining a wider participation from congregations and their members who have appreciated the opportunity of greater accessibility to Council activities.
103. The Council has also proactively engaged with the Dublin and Munster Presbytery by way of a survey which seeks to assess the best ways of resourcing congregations in this presbytery area which covers a wide geographical spread. Further engagement with presbytery will arrive at a range of options.

### Projects

104. The Committee oversees a number of projects delivered under the auspices of the Council.
105. *Fresh Light*, the denominational counselling ministry, continues to flourish both in terms of support offered to clients and the maintenance of a relatively short waiting list. This fine balance is achieved by the excellent management of the project. The Committee approved the appointment of a recruitment panel to oversee and develop a variety of pathways towards becoming a counsellor with Fresh Light. A number of applications to volunteer as counsellors have been received and it is hoped that these will enable an increase in capacity, a better geographical spread for provision of in-person counselling and a move towards providing online counselling where geography or circumstances dictate its necessity. Dr Lena Morrow, operating in a consultancy role for the Council, has been key to enabling many of these developments. The Assembly is indebted to her for this ministry.
106. The *PCI Family Holiday*, run in conjunction with the Presbyterian Children's Society, resumed at Easter 2023 after a three-year interruption due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It quickly reached capacity. Costs have risen significantly since the holiday was last delivered in 2019. At time of writing provision for the Easter 2024 event are well under way with places fully booked.
107. The PCI Marriage Panel, whose role is to offer support to ministers in the areas of pastorally addressing requests for remarriage and inter-church marriage, remains available to ministers.
108. Editorial responsibility for the *Presbyterian Herald* magazine formally passed to the Council for Congregational Life and Witness on 1 February 2024 as per the decision of the 2023 General Assembly. The period February to May 2024 represents a transitional period in which the existing systems of gathering *Herald* content and design and production are continuing. It is hoped that by June 2024 sufficient progress in putting in place new arrangements for editorial oversight will have been made to

allow a gradual transitioning towards a refresh of operations, magazine purpose and content. At time of writing, a convener and members for a *Herald* Oversight Panel are being recruited. The panel will report on an annual basis to the Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee.

109. Engagement with the Education Authority (NI) around the details of an offer of funding applied for as part of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland attaining the status of a Regional Voluntary Youth Organisation remains paused due to unresolved budgetary issues in the education sector and as the outcome of a funding review is awaited.

### **Council budget**

110. This year the Committee spent considerable time considering what steps can be taken to ensure prudent financial management against the backdrop of a static budget allocation from United Appeal while costs continue to rise. Steps agreed included:

- budgeting for simpler, shorter, smaller events and programmes while retaining quality and significance;
- pricing events and programmes more realistically, without pricing members out of participation;
- better balancing resource production costs with pricing and anticipated income from sales;
- outsourcing to reduce costs where possible;
- where possible in publicity congregations should be encouraged to subsidise participation of members as an investment in the development of their life and witness, especially in the case of children, young people and families;
- events and programmes for children, young people and young adults should be prioritised for subsidy by the Council where it is judged that this is necessary and with a ceiling of 25% apportioned where required;
- resources commissioned by the Council should avoid duplication with what is readily available by exhibiting a uniqueness that arises from an Irish Presbyterian context and containing bespoke content that folds back accessibly and with relevance into congregational life and witness in the denomination;
- given the expense involved in production of video clips, they should be deployed to apply teaching via real life story, rather than to deliver Bible teaching that can be accommodated in print, rather than on screen.

111. Through careful management and allocation of the Council budget based on the principles above, finance has also been ringfenced to fund the Present initiative over the next three years (see paragraphs 5–24).

### **Exploring presbytery partnership as the primary means of supporting the development of congregational life and witness**

112. The Committee considered and approved a proposal to actively explore a gradual shift towards the primary means of the support the Council offers for the development of congregational life and witness being delivered in future through partnership with presbyteries.
113. This is an important strategic consideration which involves respecting the principle of presbytery as a key element of presbyterian polity, in particular with regard to the life and witness of congregations under its oversight. However, reality demands that the practical outworking of that function also be considered against the background of increased workflow for presbytery arising from a number of directions and reducing capacity to undertake work in partnership with the Council.
114. This question is particularly pertinent at present as a result of the outworking of the Presbytery Listening Exercise (see paragraphs 25-30) being conducted across all 19 presbyteries in the course of the next three years. Enabling follow up will require the careful creation of a sustainable model of partnership with presbyteries so as to co-design and co-deliver outcomes.
115. Further work remains to be done to scope possibilities that can be implemented given current realities.

JANE NELSON, Convener

## **CHILDREN'S, YOUTH AND FAMILY PANEL**

116. The Children's, Youth and Family Panel contributes age and ministry specific input to Council strategy, programming, events and resources in support of the development of congregational life and witness among children, young people and parents.
117. Over the past two years the Panel has taken a step back to re-examine how best the Council can support the development of ministry among children, young people and families in what is an increasingly changing set of circumstances for ministry to, and mission among, these groups.
118. Last year's Assembly report contained details of the strategy and priorities that emerged in shaping Council support for congregational ministry among young people. This year, similar exercises have been undertaken in the areas of Council support for congregational ministry among children and families.
119. In the area of ministry among children, the following priorities emerged in carrying forward and shaping future Council messaging and activity.
  - (a) The main purposes of children's ministry:
    - teach the Bible to children along with the fundamentals of the Christian faith;

- connect children with God – both bringing them to faith (evangelism) and developing faith (discipleship);
  - equip the church family to create an environment and be the kind of community in which faith is fanned into flame;
  - approach children’s ministry so as to encourage holistic development.
- (b) Ways of working towards those goals:
- develop well run children’s ministry with good resources, allowing connection with God, in contrast to a haphazard approach which shades into little more than babysitting;
  - develop a safe, loving, age appropriate and attractive environment for ministry among children;
  - develop a loving, child and family inclusive, faith community across generations and locate children’s ministry activities as part of the all-age curriculum for the whole church as appropriate. Experience of Sunday morning must be positive, accessible and all age inclusive, serve families and show that children are actively embraced and welcomed;
  - teach using language and concepts in ways that are understandable and accessible to children, enabling them to grasp real life application;
  - equip parents to be primary disciplers by talking more intentionally about what this looks like in practice.
- (c) Things the Council could do to help churches turn vision and aspiration into practice:
- identify and share reviews of resources that congregations are using in children’s ministry that will work best in different contexts so that congregations can select what seems best in their setting;
  - give skills and confidence for leaders to engage well with children (including those with special needs);
  - gather, package and share ideas that inspire others through what congregations are trying – via video, podcast, social media - effectively finding ways to operate as the hub of an informal network;
  - marketing the offer to facilitate conversations with individual congregations, both formally as part of a process, or informally as a second pair of eyes and ears on what practitioners are seeking to develop and pursue.
- (d) A number of other important insights emerged in further discussion:
- the crucial level at which the Council needs to be operating is in adding value to volunteer led development of children’s ministry that is short of a ‘professionalisation’ that is unattainable in most congregations;

- even the best intentioned congregations and leaders are finding it difficult to carve out time to think about what they are doing and how they might move towards doing it differently because there is so much involved in keeping existing basic provision running;
  - the Council needs to both accompany congregations on their journeys and provoke them to adopt new paths;
  - there is a need to better connect in our thinking, messaging and congregational practice the partnership between parents, children's ministry leaders and the whole worshipping congregation;
  - equipping parents could include training, resources, opportunities to be together with other parents, ideas shared for families to participate as a family in church life e.g. be on the welcome team rota together.
120. In the area of supporting congregations in ministry among parents, the following priorities to carry forward and shape future Council messaging and activity emerged.
- (a) The main purposes of ministry among parents:
- give confidence, vision and understanding to help parents and the broader congregational family;
  - equip parents to be disciplers of their children;
  - create environments in which parents can be encouraged and equipped.
- (b) Ways of working towards those goals:
- using intentional language and practices; work on mindset so as to create a culture of passing on faith;
  - create spaces and places – both formal and informal – in which a community of parents can gather and form;
  - provide realistic and accessible tools and stories for Christian parenting, along with modelling good practices;
  - recognise milestones in growing up from childhood to adolescence to young adulthood and help parents and families navigate them through teaching, conversation and story;
  - try to strike a better balance between 'tailored' and 'together' activity in church life, which includes times when parents and families are very intentionally accommodated and times when they are part of the whole church family.
- (c) Things the Council could do to help churches turn vision and aspiration into practice:
- create video stories capturing different stages in family life and parenting which could act as discussion starters with the addition of a few simple questions;

- create stories to inspire churches and families with accessible, attainable possibilities and things to try;
  - host or signpost events to equip and inspire parents, delivered regionally or among a neighbouring group of churches;
  - market existing PCI resources better and signpost others, including a brief synopsis of what they are and how they work and/or reviews from those who have used them. Host this on an online forum.
- (d) A number of other important insights emerged in further discussion:
- there is an unlearning of previous mindset and practice among parents of deferring the primary place for the spiritual development of their children to church activities rather than acknowledging that family and home life is key;
  - parenting sits as a specific calling within a wider development of adult discipleship;
  - the word ‘parenting’ may be off-putting and guilt inducing;
  - it is important to be very careful in choosing language and adopting tone and tenor for what we say in this area and to be mindful of how it is heard in a whole range of family situations, including unbelieving parents and children, those who have an unbelieving spouse etc.;
  - the cementing of the idea of a partnership between parents, children’s and youth ministry leaders and the whole congregation remains key;
  - there may be an opportunity to build on our understanding and practice of baptism. While that could provide a place to start with new parents, it is acknowledged that this may not prove a healthy pastoral approach in addressing parents whose covenant children may not be following in the ways of the Lord;
  - signposting the work of Care for the Family, Legacy and the Kitchen Table Project and/or pursuing more formal ministry partnerships with such groups which align with PCI’s ethos and theology, may be a way of harnessing particularly profitable specialisms.
121. Having completed this big picture strategy overview, the Panel turned its attention to existing Council resources, training, events and programmes that facilitate the attaining of the priorities identified.
122. In the area of supporting congregational ministry among children, the Council already offers a wide range of resources and activities that remain relevant and have traction in contributing to this goal. Additional proposed responses identified included:
- further work on reviewing curriculums for children’s ministry to be posted on the website and kept updated;

- an ongoing campaign using social media, the *E-quip* ezine and *Presbyterian Herald* magazine to promote both the resources available on the PCI website and the possibility of the Children's Development Officer facilitating discussion/training in an individual congregation, group of neighbouring congregations or presbytery;
  - two new Children's Ministry Basics clips – constructing an all-age worship service and delivering an effective children's address;
  - stories shared via video, podcast, *Herald* etc. of Christian congregations trying new approaches to children's ministry;
  - explore the Faith in Kids organisation as a potential partner in the area of children's discipleship and progress work on a mini children's discipleship group resource.
123. In the area of supporting congregational ministry among young people, the Council already offers resources and activities that remain relevant in contributing to this goal, however their level of traction is variable against the backdrop of the current challenges facing the church in engaging with young people. Additional proposed responses identified included:
- identify and offer to work with congregations in up to two local areas per year to help them establish young leader programmes for 16–18-year-olds;
  - promote the Stir resource, currently being piloted in three congregations, as a way of reaching young people, especially those from outside the church or who are not exposed to mature faith. It might also prove effective as a way to equip Christian young people to reach their unchurched friends;
  - identify and offer to work with two or three presbyteries per year to establish local networks of volunteer leaders for communication, local mutual support if desired, and training on occasions;
  - develop a simple resource to help leaders grasp the essential elements of discipleship and run effective discipleship groups;
  - develop a resource hub on the Youth Ministry section of the PCI website which highlights select quality agencies and resources that are useful to youth leaders, especially in areas we do not have capacity or expertise to deliver in PCI but which we have identified as needs in our congregations;
  - produce a web page and downloadable PDF offering small, achievable actions intended to engage and integrate young people into the life of their congregation.
124. In the area of supporting congregational ministry among parents and families, the Council already offers some resources and activities that are relevant in contributing to this goal. However, this is an area which is both increasingly important while also difficult in terms of achieving traction in congregational life. It is also recognised that the needs, challenges and

opportunities of Christian parenting are different for those with children aged 0–11 and those who are now teenagers. Consequently, two sets of responses are proposed as follows.

- (a) Supporting families with children aged 4–11;
    - an annual event addressing Christian parenting for families with children 4–11 years.
    - stories shared via video, podcast, Herald etc. of Christian parenting and congregations and parents working in partnership;
    - an ongoing campaign using social media, the E-quip email, Herald to promote both the resources available on the PCI website and the possibility of the Children’s Development Officer facilitating discussion/training in an individual congregation, group of neighbouring congregations or presbytery.
  - (b) Supporting families with young people aged 11–18:
    - record three additional sessions under *Faith in Your Teens* series currently housed on the PCI website, addressing key issues commonly faced by parents of teens in church;
    - develop a resource hub on the Family Ministry section of the PCI website which highlights agencies and resources that are useful to parents of teenagers.
125. The church is facing a particularly challenging season in terms of engaging children, young people and their families. This is evident at congregational level where numbers show a visible decline and achieving regular participation in even core activities of church life, such as worship, is increasingly difficult. Addressing the complex set of circumstances faced defies easy answers for congregations or the Council in its ministry of supporting their work. Members of Assembly are asked to particularly remember this area of church life in prayer.
126. Events and programmes for families being progressed for 2024/25 in the areas of ministry among children, young people and include:
- *Kids’ Big Day Out* – supplementing congregational discipleship ministry among children;
  - *Family Festival* – supplementing the work of congregations with fringe families;
  - *Explore* events for 11–16s - supplementing congregational discipleship ministry among young people;
  - *Impact* summer outreach teams – providing discipleship and mission opportunities for young people;
  - *Foundations* – leaders’ training in children’s and youth ministry, delivered in-person and online;
  - Full time children’s, youth and family worker gatherings and retreat – encouraging and developing the ministry of those employed in PCI congregations;

- An event on Christian parenting – seeking to gain traction in this area of family ministry.

DAVID CROMIE, Convener

## PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN PANEL

127. The Presbyterian Women Panel continues to oversee the support and development of all aspects of women's ministry, reporting initiatives and activities to the Council. It has been an encouraging year in terms of engagement of congregations and members with a variety of events and resources.
128. A Saturday morning event for women on 9 September 2023 in Assembly Buildings, Belfast, explored the theme of *Caring Together*, opening up contemporary aspects of caring together for young people, caring together about mental health and caring together in addressing pregnancy loss.
129. At the *Changing Seasons* event in Kilfennan Presbyterian Church, Londonderry, on Saturday 10 February 2024, the theme of following Jesus while navigating a variety of seasons of life was explored.
130. Both events were well attended by women of all ages and feedback from participants was very positive. Recordings of main talks and seminars can be accessed and used by those involved in women's ministry.
131. The annual theme for 2024/25 is *Entrusted*. This will be picked up in both the annual *Inspirations* resource and as the topic of the annual conference which is taking place in Assembly Buildings, Belfast, on Saturday 11 May 2024. The keynote speaker is Amy Orr-Ewing. The *Inspirations* resource, offering a variety of flexible material for use in developing this theme in Presbyterian Women groups and congregations, can be ordered from the PCI website.
132. The Home Project for 2024/25 will support the work of the Prison Fellowship.
133. The Overseas Project for 2024/25 has been designated to provide support to the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Women's Guild to develop a range of aspects of their ministry among women.
134. The *Wider World* magazine has been redesigned and rebranded as *Inspire* and continues to provide a wide variety of content intended to inform and encourage ministry among women.
135. Presbyterian Women continues to provide significant prayer and financial support for the work of the Council for Mission in Ireland and Council for Global Mission, as well as deaconess training.
136. As noted above (paragraphs 37–41) important work has been taking place to update and redraft the constitution of Presbyterian Women.

ANN WILSON, PW President

## APPENDIX 1

### REGULATIONS – CONSTITUTION OF PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN

1. **Name:** The name of the organisation shall be Presbyterian Women, incorporating the former Presbyterian Women's Association and the former Young Women's Groups, and may also be referred to as PW.
2. **Motto:** Women living for Jesus.
3. **Aim:** Presbyterian Women exists to encourage, envision and equip effective ministry among women of the congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, enabling women to:
  - Grow in the knowledge and love of God;
  - Care for one another;
  - Reach others with the gospel;
  - Use their gifts to serve the wider work of the local congregation;
  - Support the mission of the wider church in Ireland and across the world.
4. **Organising for ministry among women in congregational life:** Presbyterian Women encourages each congregation to shape a form of ministry among women which best suits local circumstances and serves the aims above, as well as accessing the benefits of the wider denominational network of Presbyterian Women. In every case the ministry should operate under the authority of the kirk session.
5. **Encouraging ministry among women at presbytery level:** In each presbytery leaders of ministry among women in congregations should maintain a LINK group to coordinate the bringing together of women from congregations within its bounds for the purposes of fellowship, learning and mutual encouragement. LINK groups must appoint a treasurer to ensure financial accountability and a secretary to be responsible for effective communication. Other members of the group can be appointed as desired to deliver other aspects of the work. Appointments should be for not more than a 3-year term.
6. **Presbyterian Women Panel:** A Presbyterian Women's Panel, reporting to the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, will oversee the development of strategy and coordination of the work of encouraging, envisioning, equipping and enabling effective ministry among women of the congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
  - (a) It will be responsible for the organisation's finances, including:
    - the Mission Fund;
    - allocation of grants;
    - projects delivered in consultation with other finance raising bodies within PCI;
    - income and expenditure relating to publications

- (b) It will work on behalf of the organisation with other Councils and Committees of the General Assembly.
  - (c) It will be consulted on Council staffing arrangements as they relate to Presbyterian Women.
  - (d) Membership will comprise:
    - Moderator, Clerk, Convener of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, Secretary of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness;
    - Panel Convener (serving for 5 years);
    - 8 members (serving for 4 years, not serving for more than 2 consecutive terms);
    - President of PW, Home Vice President of PW, Overseas Vice President of PW (serving while they are office bearers);
    - Women's Ministry and Presbyterian Women's Development Officer (sit and deliberate).
7. **Finance:** The financial year of PW shall end on 31st December. A statement of income and expenditure shall be submitted to the Annual Meeting of Presbyterian Women. A report and statement of annual accounts shall be submitted to the PW Panel, the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, the General Assembly and, if appropriate, other relevant Councils. Access to a copy of the accounts will be provided online and in hard copy to any member or group on request.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Welcome, inclusion and embrace of those with intellectual disabilities and their families**

One of the wonders of the church of Jesus Christ is that it is made up of a kaleidoscope of people, each one with a unique story marked and shaped by the grace of God. Convergence and unlikely unity come from having experienced the love of Christ and embraced his call to be part of his family.

There are many challenges to living out this reality in the local congregation, to become a people genuinely able to appreciate, but transcend, a whole variety of differences to live together in love, grace and truth.

The 2023 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland addressed one aspect of this challenge, adopting principles intended to welcome, embrace and include those with intellectual disabilities. Of course, there is always a journey to be made from principles to practice, and in this case because every individual circumstance is different, travelling that route will mean different things, for different people, in different circumstances. What follows is a series of pointers for congregational leaders to assist

in their work of welcoming those with intellectual disabilities, and being proactive in offering love and support to their families.

### **A challenge to embrace not evade**

Read the following challenging stories which capture the combination of family pain and gospel challenge before the Church, brought to us in the lives of people with varieties of intellectual disability. Names have been changed to protect anonymity. Reflect on the questions that follow each story and how things might have been handled differently.

*Julie's intellectual disability means that her needs are complex. She is unable to walk or speak. Her parents and siblings have structured family life around Julie's needs, including building an extension to accommodate her chair, hoists and other essential facilities. Those who meet Julie for the first time find the encounter challenging and, as a result, many struggle to maintain relationships with the family. As committed Christians, Julie's family are active members of their Presbyterian congregation. They quietly wish for greater understanding of the texture of their daily lives, a deeper sense of welcome and some accommodation of their specific needs as Julie comes with them to church on Sundays. The latest issue has been whether Julie can attend youth club, especially as one of the leaders has apparently expressed reservations.*

- Q. How might those in Julie's congregation better come to understand the particular challenges faced by her and her family?
- Q. How might the issue surrounding Julie's attendance at youth club be practically addressed?

*Michael is a young adult with an intellectual disability who lives at home with his parents. As a family, they have moved to a new place and have started to attend the local Presbyterian congregation. On transferring their membership, Michael's parents were welcomed by name at a service of communion as transferring members, along with several others, but Michael was not mentioned. While his parents are sure that no slight was intended, it would have been a great encouragement to them, Michael and the whole fellowship if he had been included in the welcome as a member of the covenant community through his baptism with the same affection and enthusiasm as the rest.*

- Q. Why might the congregation Michael and his parents joined have omitted to welcome Michael as well as his parents?
- Q. Given that Michael, unlike his parents, is not transferring to his new church as a communicant member of his previous congregation, what welcome and affirmation of his membership might have been offered?

*Billy loves coming to church and, since he was a teenager, is a regular at the bowling club, the youth club and Sunday service where he enjoys being part of the welcome team at the door. His intellectual disability does not restrict him from walking to the church or interacting with the people he meets. His mum isn't a member but pops in occasionally. Billy wants to*

*become a member of the church which has increasingly become the centre of his life outside his home. He has not been baptised as an infant.*

Q. How is Billy's situation different than Michael's?

Q. How should the minister and kirk session respond to Billy's story?

It is easy to get tied up in knots in trying to unravel the answers to the questions posed in response to these very real situations experienced by those with intellectual disabilities and their families. It can be convenient to dismiss them as irregular occurrences in a congregation's life, or to evade them on the basis of a finely woven but inflexible theological proposition. Despite all their complexity, we need to find ways of unravelling the issues they represent and embracing those with intellectual disability and their families by expressing the love of Christ in what may often prove to be small, simple, but profoundly meaningful ways. This will involve aspects of welcome and inclusion.

### **Creating a culture of welcome**

Welcome is better experienced than described. We know it when we feel it, because welcome is a felt thing. We either feel it, or we don't. We are made to feel welcome. It is something others make for us, but it is something that can't be faked.

Welcoming those with intellectual disabilities and creating a supportive environment for their families is no different. It requires:

- a **stepping back** to listen and appreciate how others feel and experience what might be second nature to us;
- a **stepping into** the shoes of someone whose story is different than ours so as to empathise with their particular challenges;
- a **stepping up** to do what we can to make that person feel at home.

Little things can make a big difference in including or excluding. A number of helpful resources can help us explore what it looks like to craft a culture of welcome. Spend time with these resources and prayerfully consider what it would look like in your congregation to take some simple steps towards welcoming those with intellectual disabilities and supporting their families.

### **Inside Out: Welcoming others as Christ welcomes us**

This series of downloadable Bible studies and accompanying video materials produced by PCI explore what it means to be a welcoming church. Session six, entitled *Another Capability* takes up the story of David and Mephibosheth from 2 Samuel 9:1–13 to unpack how we can be protective of the most vulnerable in church life in ways that are appropriate to their needs while including them in such a way that enables them to grow, develop and reach their potential.

The accompanying video features Aaron's story and offers an insight into what it has been like for him and others with a variety of additional needs to be welcomed and integrated into the family of his congregation.

*[www.presbyterianireland.org/insideout](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/insideout)*

### **Children's ministry basics: Including children with special needs**

This clip offers practical help to organisational leaders about a range of ways they can seek to be welcoming and inclusive of children with additional needs in children's ministry settings.

*<https://vimeo.com/388899302/b389d5ddb9>*

### **Care for the family: Supporting families of children with additional needs**

A downloadable booklet offering insight and practical suggestions as to ways in which congregations can support families of children with additional needs.

*<https://faith-in-the-family.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/031-18-CFF-Church-Leaders-Additional-Needs-Guide-Proof-14-3-18d.pdf>*

This section of the Care for the Family website offers a range of helpful links and opportunities for support.

*[www.careforthefamily.org.uk/support-for-you/family-life/parent-support/additional-needs-support/](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/support-for-you/family-life/parent-support/additional-needs-support/)*

### **Intentionality of inclusion**

There is a significant growing awareness of the needs of families who care for people with intellectual disability and, in particular, their sense of exclusion in society generally. The Church must avoid inadvertently acting in ways that makes this sense of alienation worse. Her calling must be to facilitate appropriate inclusion.

Our congregational life must affirm both the individual with intellectual disability and their family, demonstrating an actual, tangible commitment to integrate them into the active life and fellowship of the church that they, like all members, might be blessed and be a blessing by their presence and participation.

Church life is punctuated by informal moments of personal or family celebration in weekly services, along with more formal occasions such as baptism and admission to the Lord's Supper. Both serve as important markers of grace and affirmations of membership and, where appropriate, are significant elements of inclusion. In relation to those with intellectual disabilities and their families, when thoughtfully approached and appropriately pitched, they contribute to the setting of a sensitive and supportive pastoral environment.

### **Approaching informal moments of inclusion and affirmation**

Some key features of informal moments of inclusion in church life and affirmation ought to involve frequently finding ways to:

- (a) Express a genuine attitude of welcome to the parents, wider family and the individual with intellectual disability, whether they are communicant members of the congregation or not.
- (b) Affirm that such welcome assumes belonging to this community, whether full communicant members or not.
- (c) Explicitly include those whom we, in conformity with our supreme and subordinate standards, understand to be within the covenant of grace.

### **Approaching the more formal inclusion of church membership**

When it comes to approaching the more formal processes of church membership, inclusion of those with intellectual disabilities may present greater challenges, depending on their capacity to understand. In practice this will require adopting a pastoral sensitivity to particular circumstances, without unintentionally undermining the Church's understanding of what is normally required to become a full member of the body of Christ and rightly participate in the sacraments. Essentially this is a matter of exercising careful and prayerful discernment to achieve a Christlike fullness of grace and truth.

On the one hand, it is important to remember that it is part of the ministry of Kirk Session to actively enable those who have been baptised to explore their profession of faith, express it in becoming full members of the church and experience the blessing of partaking in the Lord's Supper.

The Code paragraph 39, sub-section 3 states:

*The Kirk Session shall nurture and pastor all baptised persons in the congregation, not yet in full communion; and shall in due time seek to lead them to full confession of their faith by their partaking of the Lord's Supper.*

This duty must also extend to those with intellectual disabilities.

Nevertheless, subsequent paragraph 40, sub-section 1 requires that:

*The Kirk Session shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have been baptised, who make a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus, and whose character is consistent with such a profession.*

In doing so the next paragraph outlines how this normally happens:

*Persons proposing to take communion for the first time shall be carefully instructed by the minister. When the Kirk Session has satisfied itself as to their knowledge, soundness in the faith and Christian experience, their names shall be entered on the roll of communicants and be read to the congregation. Such communicants should be received into the fellowship of the Church in the presence of the congregation.*

This process reflects the general practice across PCI, that individuals become members of the Church on profession of faith by taking personal ownership of their parents' baptismal vows as they consider and prepare for communion. If they have not previously been baptised as infants, they may be baptised as believers on their own profession of faith and will take vows accordingly. Thereafter, recorded attendance at communion and financial contributions to the funds of the congregation are understood to be measurable indicators of their commitment to the life and work of the congregation and an, albeit imperfect, testimony to a life of discipleship. Full church membership also enables a range of other ways of participating in and contributing to aspects of church life such as electing elders or choosing a minister.

It may not prove possible to follow these regular processes in the case of those with intellectual disability, nor for them to meaningfully engage with all the rights and privileges of membership. Nevertheless, those within the covenant community, with an intellectual disability who are attending church ought not to be excluded from being affirmed as full members of the church, even though they may not have the capacity to meet all, or perhaps any, of the expectations described above.

Some people who have intellectual disabilities have no capacity to process language, consider cognitive propositions, or take vows. Admitting them to communicant membership by following regular process and practice will not be possible. Doing so, will require adopting an approach that carefully balances theological, pastoral and practical consideration for local church leadership.

An important starting point is to acknowledge that the vows taken at baptism and at admission to the Lord's Table at Communion rest firstly and firmly upon God's grace, namely that God has loved you in Christ and sent him to die in your place. The vows then move towards the implications which flow from this prior movement of God towards us that we believe in him, follow him and live as his disciples in the world. This movement of God's commitment to us leading to our commitment to him is reflected in the central covenantal affirmation throughout Scripture, "I will be your God, you will be my people".

While there can never be a one size fits all approach, the following principles adopted by the General Assembly offer a framework for approaching each individual situation, enabling appropriate responses in the area of admission to the sacraments:

- A person who has intellectual disabilities and who is able to understand and participate in the taking of vows, ought to be welcomed and fully included in any processes for admission to communicant membership, including baptism if they are not already baptised. Sensitive accommodation of the programme of preparation to their needs ought to be made by those facilitating it;

- A baptised person who has intellectual disabilities and who is unable to understand or participate in the taking of vows, could be welcomed into communicant membership by the kirk session on the basis of an affirmation of the baptismal vows of their parent(s);
- A person who has intellectual disabilities and who is unable to understand or participate in the taking of vows, and has not been baptised, may be baptised and admitted to communicant membership on the basis of the vows of their believing parent(s). These also include a congregational affirmation and commitment of support for the new communicant and their family;
- For a person with an intellectual disability who is unable to understand or participate in the taking of vows and who has not been baptised and does not have believing parents, formal membership of the church will not be the appropriate step for a family to take at this point. However, congregational welcome of them into the life of the church will be a critical aspect of its collective discipleship and a strong indicator of the credibility of its witness;
- Some examples of a simpler form of words based on vows agreed by the General Assembly are offered below as a guide to Ministers. They provide substantial content and a framework from which to enable the crafting of wording more particularly appropriate to the person being baptised and/or welcomed into membership and in affirming their family.

### **The powerful testimony of embrace**

Our fear of those whose circumstances are different than ours can cause us to keep our distance from those with intellectual disability and their families, avoiding candid pastoral conversation about the circumstances with which they are living. This can be exacerbated by our inability to absorb the realities of pain or discomfort, nervousness about saying or doing the wrong thing or of exercising pastoral flexibility in our desire to be faithful.

The testimony of a church which moves towards those who experience such circumstances in love, offering affirmation, encouragement and tangible support is deeply powerful. Our prayer must always be that such testimony may be the means of drawing such families to faith in Christ, so that they may experience the fullness of his grace, including in the providence of God, full membership of the Church.

#### **Illustrative vows**

1. **Wording for a range of simpler vows and affirmation for use in receiving those with intellectual disabilities into communicant membership**

A person who has intellectual disabilities and who is able to understand and participate in the taking of vows, ought to be welcomed and fully included in any processes for admission to communicant membership. Some examples of a simpler form of

words based on vows agreed by the General Assembly are offered below, providing substantial content and a framework from which to enable the crafting of wording most appropriate to the person being welcomed into membership and in affirming their family. In each case the set of questions are intended to give opportunity for affirmation of personal belief and response, as well as commitment to the family of the Church. The three options below are suggested on a variety of capacities to articulate faith and verbally respond.

### Option 1

#### Vows

- The Bible tells us about God. Do you believe what the Bible says about him?
- The Bible tells us about Jesus Christ. Do you believe what the Bible says about him?'
- The Bible tells us how a follower of Jesus should live. Do you want to live that way, with God's help?'
- The Bible tells us Jesus invites us to be part of his family, the church. Will you join us on Sundays and in the other things we do together?'

#### Words of affirmation

*[Name], we affirm God's covenant promises on your behalf and say welcome to God's family of the Church.*

*[Names of parents, other siblings and/or family members present], we commit ourselves as a church family in this place to walk with you in supporting name in their life of faith and worship from this moment.*

#### Prayer

### Option 2

#### Vows

- *[Name], the Bible tells us about God. Do you believe what the Bible says about him?*
- *[Name], the Bible tells us about Jesus Christ. Is Jesus your friend?*
- *[Name], are you glad that Jesus is with you all the time?*
- *[Name], do you want to be part of God's family, the Church?*

#### Words of affirmation

*[Name], we affirm God's covenant promises on your behalf and say welcome to God's family of the Church.*

*[Names of parents, other siblings and/or family members present], we commit ourselves as a church family in this place to walk with you in supporting name in their life of faith and worship from this moment.*

#### Prayer

**Option 3****Vows**

- *[Name], God loves you. Are you glad about that?*
- *[Name], Jesus is your friend. Are you glad about that?*
- *[Name], we want to be your friends in this church. Do you want to be our friend too?*

**Words of affirmation**

*[Name], we affirm God's covenant promises on your behalf and say welcome to God's family of the Church.*

*[Names of parents, other siblings and/or family members present], we commit ourselves as a church family in this place to walk with you in supporting name in their life of faith and worship from this moment.*

**Prayer**

2. **Words of introduction and affirmation for receiving a baptised person who is unable to participate in the taking of vows into communicant membership on the basis of an affirmation of the baptismal vows of their parent(s).**

A baptised person who has intellectual disabilities and who is unable to understand or participate in the taking of vows, can be welcomed into communicant membership by the kirk session on the basis of an affirmation of the baptismal vows of their parent(s). A form of words based on the baptismal service agreed by the General Assembly are offered below, providing substantial content and a framework from which to enable the crafting of wording most appropriate to the person being welcomed into membership. This includes a congregational affirmation and commitment of support for the new communicant and their family.

**Words of introduction**

*[Name(s) of parent(s)], today you are affirming the vows you made in presenting name of communicant to be received for baptism. In so doing, you are trusting in the steadfast love of God, who faithfully keeps his promises. Today, we celebrate God's love and faithfulness to his promises in receiving name of communicant to be received into communicant membership of the Church of Jesus Christ.*

**Words of affirmation**

*[Name], we affirm God's covenant promises on your behalf and say welcome to God's family of the Church.*

*[Names of parents, other siblings and/or family members present], we commit ourselves as a church family in this place to walk with you in supporting name in their life of faith and worship from this moment.*

**Prayer**

3. **Words for service for baptism and reception into communicant membership for a person unable to participate in the taking of vows on the basis of an affirmation of the profession of faith of their parent(s).**

A person who has intellectual disabilities and who is unable to understand or participate in the taking of vows, and has not been baptised, may be baptised and admitted to communicant membership on the basis of the vows of their believing parent(s). A form of words based on the baptismal service agreed by the General Assembly are offered below, along with Words of reception as a communicant member. These provide substantial content and a framework from which to enable the crafting of wording most appropriate to the person being baptised and welcomed into membership. A congregational affirmation and commitment of support for the new communicant and their family are also offered.

**Words of introduction**

*[Name(s) of parent(s)], today you are presenting name of communicant to be received for baptism and to be received into communicant membership of the Church of Jesus Christ. In so doing, you are claiming God's covenant promises on their behalf.*

**Words for use in baptism**

*[Name], I baptise you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen*

*The blessing of God, Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be upon you and abide in you forever.*

**Words of reception as a communicant member and affirmation**

*[Name], we affirm God's covenant promises on your behalf and say welcome to God's family of the Church.*

*[Names of parents, other siblings and/or family members present], we commit ourselves as a church family in this place to walk with you in supporting name in their life of faith and worship from this moment.*

**Prayer**

# COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Convener: Rev DANIEL KANE

Council Secretary: Rev TREVOR GRIBBEN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council for Public Affairs is tasked with helping to develop the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's thinking on current issues and communicating the General Assembly's views in the public square. It also works hard at developing relationships with legislators and decision makers on the island of Ireland, even in the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive, and makes representations to them on behalf of the Church, whilst also responding to various public consultations. A list of these is included in Annex A.
2. Miss Karen Jardine's time with us as Public Affairs Officer has been a stunning display of multiple competencies. She brought a whole constellation of gifts to this strategic role. We miss her and pray that her gifts will be as fruitful in ordained ministry as they have already been serving God through our gracious, confident Gospel engagement in the public square.
3. We are deeply thankful to God to have Dr Rebecca Stevenson (or Bex as she prefers to be known) sitting in the Public Affairs Officer's chair since her appointment in November 2023. We offer her our warmest congratulations on her appointment and welcome her to the team. We pray that God will give her a deep and powerful portion of the Apostle's holy ambition to see Christ and Biblical teaching more and more respected in all sectors of our society. May love "abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment" (Philippians 1:9) in her life and may she never cease to be thrilled with the truth we find uniquely in Jesus.
4. The Council for Public Affairs has met in person on three occasions since last year's General Assembly, with its Committee, Panels and Task Groups also meeting in-person and via MS Teams. The report below summarises the work of the Council over the last period.

## STATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

5. This has been another busy year for all school leaders, governors, teachers, classroom assistants and support staff. As a denomination we express our thanks to all of those involved in education and encourage congregations to continue to engage positively with their local schools.

6. Thanks are also due to Dr Andy Brown who completed his extended time as Convener of the State Education Committee in June 2023. Dr Brown has been an excellent and tireless ambassador for the cause of local church engagement in schools and regularly represented PCI in meetings with Ministers of Education, elected representatives, departmental officials, statutory bodies and other organisations. We are pleased that he continues to serve the cause of education as Chairperson of the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC), which brings together the interests of PCI, the Methodist Church in Ireland, and Church of Ireland in this area.
7. We are also delighted that Dr Rebecca Stevenson is now the Education Secretary for the denomination. She has quickly appraised herself of many of the pertinent issues currently live within primary and post-primary education in Northern Ireland and is already making a positive contribution on behalf of PCI and through the TRC.
8. The Committee would like to place on record its deep gratitude to Miss Karen Jardine, who has served as interim convener for the State Education Committee for the last year.

### **Relationships and sexual education**

9. In June 2023 the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland introduced legislation to Westminster which would impose curriculum content in respect of Relationship and Sexuality Education in post-primary schools in NI on matters relating to abortion and the prevention of early pregnancy. At the time PCI expressed its concerns regarding the manner in which the Secretary of State was interfering in devolved responsibilities. Along with TRC colleagues, meetings were held with the Department of Education, CCEA and MLAs from a range of parties, before a public consultation on the proposed amendments to the RSE curriculum was launched. PCI and TRC both submitted responses to the consultation – see Annex B. Following consideration of all the submissions, in January 2024, the Department of Education published the approach which schools should adopt in implementing the Secretary of State's legislation. The guidance can be read at [www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/circular-202401-guidance-amendments-relationship-and-sexuality-education](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/circular-202401-guidance-amendments-relationship-and-sexuality-education)
10. School ethos retains a prominent place with regard to curriculum content and delivery. The DE circular also includes the following points which transferor governors in post primary schools may wish to consider should their school be updating or reviewing its RSE policy in light of these changes:
  - Teachers and pupils are not prevented from exploring moral, ethical and spiritual issues during the delivery of RSE alongside the age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate teaching and associated learning resources;
  - The Department requires all grant-aided schools to have an RSE policy and taught programme that has been developed on the ethos of their school and in consultation with staff, governors, parents and pupils;

- The Board of Governors and Principal continue to have autonomy over when, how and who is involved in curriculum delivery, aligned with the ethos of the school;
  - The curriculum affords a large degree of flexibility to schools in how they develop and deliver their RSE taught programme.
11. Parents who wish to make a request for a pupil in any of years 8–11 to be excused from these new compulsory components of RSE (on prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion) can do so directly to the principal but are not required to give a reason. For pupils in year 12, whilst a parent can make a request for a pupil to be excused, the pupil must also confirm that they have no objections to being excused.
  12. A statement from PCI on the Department’s guidance and consultation response was issued in January 2024 which criticised the Secretary of State’s pick-and-mix approach to devolution, with changes to RSE taking precedence over issues like underachievement and funding. The statement also welcomed the Department’s recognition of the importance of school ethos, alongside the vital role played by governors in relation to setting policy on RSE. The State Education Committee and TRC will continue to monitor the implementation of these curriculum developments.

### **Education Authority Board membership**

13. Since the establishment of the Education Authority, the Transferor Churches (Church of Ireland, Methodist, Presbyterian) have each had one seat on the Board, with a fourth seat that rotates between the Church of Ireland and PCI. It was anticipated that the Board would be reconstituted for a new 4-year term beginning 1 April 2024 but the Department of Education has decided to postpone this by one year and has requested nominations to fill places for this one-year extension.
14. The Church of Ireland has agreed to revert back to two seats for PCI and so the nominations which have been submitted, and accepted by the Department, are Rev Robert Herron OBE to serve for one further year, alongside Mr John Wilkison OBE (former principal of Dromore High School and PCI representative on TRC). Rev Herron’s continued exemplary service on the EA Board since its inception in 2016 is much appreciated and we know that both he and Mr Wilkinson will contribute effectively to the EA Board and its work.

### **Reconstitution of boards of governors**

15. In February 2024 the Transferor Representatives’ Council issued a letter advising that the Education Authority would be requesting nominations for Transferor Governors to controlled schools. The letter encouraged prayerful identification of governors who will serve the local school, church and community as witnesses for Jesus Christ, sharing their faith and giving of their time and expertise. In order to support congregations in their nominations, and to share the current issues concerning the relationship between faith and education, three seminars have been organised by TRC to take place in various locations during April 2024.

**Shared and Integrated Education**

16. The Acting Convener took part in a discussion on Sunday Sequence on Sunday 21 January relating to a report that suggested churches were responsible for a lack of diversity in schools in Northern Ireland. Also in January, the State Education Committee made a submission to the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Inquiry into Integrated Education. The submission acknowledged the positive contribution that many integrated schools have made to society, whilst also highlighting the important role of Shared Education and the imperative of parental choice.

**Transferor Representatives' Council**

17. TRC has continued to make representation on a range of matters relating to education continuing to work on proposals for Jointly Managed Church Schools; sponsoring research through Stranmillis University College on local church engagement with schools; with seats on a number of departmental working groups including on Area Planning and Special Educational Needs. Additionally, representatives from TRC attended the launch of the report of the Independent Review of Education.
18. In October 2023 TRC intervened in an appeal brought by the Department of Education in respect of a Judicial Review (JR87) which held that the RE curriculum in controlled primary schools was not sufficiently objective, critical and pluralistic, and was in breach of the ECHR rights of a child and her father. In April 2024 the Court of Appeal upheld that the RE curriculum in controlled primary schools was not sufficiently objective, critical and pluralistic. However, the Court also ruled that exclusively Christian-focused religious education taught at primary schools in Northern Ireland does not breach human rights law. This was due to the existence of the unqualified statutory right of parents to have their child excused wholly or partially from attendance at religious education or collective worship. Noting that in this case the parents had chosen not to exercise that right. The Court of Appeal Judgement is detailed and merits careful consideration. However, we are heartened by the Court's view that there was no breach of the relevant Protocol of the European Commission on Human Rights.

**PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PANEL**

19. The Panel has continued to prioritise the work of 'Considering Grace: Presbyterians and the Troubles'. In particular, the Panel is seeking to establish the 'next steps' to establish a follow up resource drawn from the book. This resource will be for individual churches to use and would allow congregations to practice collective lamenting, taking seriously the trauma and grief expressed in the book. In March 2024 the Panel approached Rev Karen Campbell and discussed the idea of a resource with her, she recommended a 'suite' of resources such as hymns or prayers. In producing

this resource Karen would study collectively a number of Psalms with various parties from the *Considering Grace* book and this study would be through the lens of collective trauma, these would then be used by Karen as she develops the resources. At time of writing, the Panel are in discussion with Karen and other PCI Councils to finalise the plan for the resource. It is the Panel's intention that this resource, once completed, would be introduced to the Presbyteries for example, through a service of lament.

20. The Panel are also considering other additional outcomes from *Considering Grace*, these may include the production of a photographic record of all memorials; and a historical record digitizing all PCI Statements relating to the Troubles.
21. In March 2024 the Panel made a submission to the Northern Ireland Executive Office Consultation on a Strategy for Victims and Survivors of the Troubles/Conflict. The consultation aims to ensure that Strategy will work towards an enduring vision of, '*a trauma informed society that addresses the needs of victims and survivors*' through a number of key principles and values. This was done by examining three pillars, 'Past, Needs, and The Future. The Council's submission was informed by PCI's work over many years in seeking to build good relationships and further peace and reconciliation across these islands but also by the *Beyond These Steps* initiative and *Considering Grace*.
22. In April 2024 the Panel made a submission to the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery consultation on the future of its Trauma Informed Approach. The focus of the consultation is to ensure that the Commission embeds a trauma informed approach when providing information to those affected by the Troubles. The Council's submission was informed by PCI and the Panel's work, highlighting the findings of *Considering Grace* and reaffirming the significant role that reconciliation can have in restoring relationships and in leading to a better future.
23. As part of his visit to the Monaghan Presbytery the Moderator was invited on a tour of the Monaghan Peace Campus which was under construction at the time of visiting. This campus will host a charity set up to help children affected by The Troubles and store artifacts belonging to the 'Project Children.'
24. Throughout the past year there have been a number of engagements with the PSNI both centrally and locally. These have provided opportunities to raise issues of concern as well as recognising areas of positive working relationships, with the Moderator attending the Reference, Engagement and Listening (REaL) event in February 2024.

## REPUBLIC OF IRELAND PANEL

25. The Panel has continued to meet to consider matters in the public square pertaining to the Republic of Ireland, this has included matters relating to constitutional change, the definition of family and assisted dying.
26. In November 2023, PCI was invited to address the Oireachtas Joint Committee on assisted dying, with the Very Reverend Dr David Bruce and the Public Affairs Officer, Dr Rebecca Stevenson attending via Zoom to represent PCI. In April 2024 the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Assisted Dying recommended that the government should introduce legislation for Assisted Dying.
27. Education has continued to be a particular focus of discussion for the Panel, many of the challenges faced by schools in Northern Ireland are also shared by schools in the Republic. The Panel has discussed issues including the difficulties in recruiting short term supply teachers; the upcoming reform of The Leaving Cert; the provision of support for students with special educational needs; fee paying faith schools.
28. The Panel has continued to monitor the ‘mica scandal’ after the Moderator reported, following a visit to the Donegal Presbytery, that this was the significant negative impact on those impacted. Manses, along with the clergy houses of other denominations, have been excluded from the Mica redress scheme. The Panel has sought further clarity on this issue and how it can best assist congregations.
29. In March, the Panel wrote to all active ministers in the Republic of Ireland advising them of the proposed 39th amendment which referred to Articles 41.1.1 and 41.3.1 and 40th amendment to Articles 41.2.1 and 41.2.2 which were to be decided by national referendum on the 8 March. This letter expressed disappointment in the vague and confusing wording of the proposed change. It reaffirmed PCI’s position on the definition of marriage and highlighted concerns surrounding the term ‘durable relationships’ as a new term for defining family. The letter also raised concerns regarding the ambiguity and lack of clarity contained within amendment 40, highlighting that it is unlikely to introduce any meaningful change which could have benefited society as a whole. Both proposed amendments were defeated.

## HUMAN DIGNITY PANEL

30. The panel has continued to monitor developments relating to assisted dying legislation. Following developments in the Isle of Man, Scotland and the recommendations from the Oireachtas Joint Committee to legislate for assisted dying, a task group has been established to bring forward a coherent and compassionate biblical approach to this sensitive pastoral issue for the General Assembly’s consideration and approval in due course.
31. The task group will be chaired by Rev Daniel Kane with representatives from the Council of Public Affairs, with additional medical and legal expertise provided by relevant experts.

## **WELFARE AND WELLBEING PANEL**

32. The Panel has continued to monitor the major issues that affect welfare and well-being; this includes issues such as poverty and homelessness. The Panel has discussed the cost-of-living crisis and role of the Presbyterian Children's Society in providing grants to families in need.

### **Partnership Working**

33. The CPA agreed that the Public Affairs Officer and the Press Officer should support the Belfast Presbyteries in responding to a consultation from Belfast City Council on Proposed City Centre Byelaws, after concern was raised that they could impact on freedom of speech and religion.
34. CPA continues to collaborate with other PCI Councils as required, working with the Council of Social Witness on financial provision for care homes and with the Council of Congregational Life and Witness on issues relating to RSE.
35. Opportunities for inter-church engagement through the structures of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) continue to prove invaluable on matters relating to legacy, the evolving relationship between the UK and the EU and wider research projects which draw in the experience of academics across Ireland and further afield through the Dublin City University Centre for Religion, Human Values and International Relations. At the time of writing the report, PCI had been asked to send representatives to an event on Artificial Intelligence in Mansion House in Dublin.

## APPENDIX A

### Consultation Responses and Submissions April 2023–April 2024

Date	Title	Organisation	Type	Responder
June 2023	House of Lords Secondary Legislative Scrutiny Committee Consideration of the Relationships and Sexual Education (Amendment) Regulations 2023	House of Lords Secondary Legislative Scrutiny Committee	Legislative Scrutiny Response	Council for Public Affairs
November 2023	Consultation on Relationships and Sexual Education	Department for Education	Policy Consultation	Council for Public Affairs
January 2024	Call for Evidence on Integrated Evidence	Northern Ireland Affairs Committee	Committee Call for Evidence	Council for Public Affairs
March 2024	Proposed City Centre Byelaws	Belfast City Council	Policy Consultation	Belfast Presbyteries
March 2024	Strategy for Victims and Survivors of the Troubles/Conflict	The Executive Office Northern Ireland Assembly	Policy Consultation	Council for Public Affairs
April 2024	Implementing a Trauma Informed Approach	Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery	Policy Consultation	Council for Public Affairs

# COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION

Convener: Rev S.A. McCracken

Secretary: Rev W.S. Marrs

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The work of the Council for Global Mission is encapsulated in the strapline, '*global disciples sharing God's heart for the world, declaring good news and demonstrating God's love*'. As such, it reflects both the Great Commission and the Great Command, and recognises the call to authentic fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ all around the world. The Council is tasked with enabling the co-ordination and delivery of global mission as determined by the General Assembly (Code Par 115), and especially where it is beyond the ability of the local congregation and not falling under the remit of other mission councils, partners or agencies. This entails the development of a strategy on mission overseas, including partnership with overseas churches and sending global mission workers; promoting world development issues, including providing for an annual appeal; leading thinking on issues of global concern such as the environment, race relations, international relations (Code Par 278.3).
2. This report sets out the work of the Council for Global Mission from June 2023. The Council for Global Mission was able to meet face to face on 18 October 2023 and 20 March 2024 and reports as follows:
  - (a) **Global Mission Committee** (Pars 3 to 18).
  - (b) **Global Development Committee** (Pars 19 to 38).
  - (c) **Business and Finance Panel** (Pars 39 to 43).

## GLOBAL MISSION COMMITTEE

3. The Global Mission Committee recognises that mission is not just one "task" among many that the Church does, but part of the Church's very nature. PCI is one small part of the universal church with gifts to give and receive within the global body of Christ. The Committee desires that, through the work of its panels and task groups, many would come to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord.
4. Involvement in global mission allows PCI to walk alongside brothers and sisters in Christ in different parts of the world, many of whom are facing persecution for their faith. Philippians chapter 2 is a reminder of the challenge to live as part of the body of Christ, by being like-minded, having

the same love, being one in spirit, being of one mind and walking humbly with those we encounter in partner churches, missions and institutions globally. The Committee has reviewed its missional relationships over the year and has been reflecting on the need to walk humbly with, listen to and learn from global partners.

### **Global Mission Workers**

5. The Council thanks God for the 21 global mission workers of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who, as his witnesses, serve in 9 countries around the world. Details of roles, locations and global mission partners for those currently serving with the Council are found at Appendix A.
6. Calls to global mission service with the Transtibiscan District of the Reformed Church in Hungary were issued to Csaba and Ilona Veres.
7. Memorial minutes were recorded in respect of the following missionaries who passed away: Mrs Agnes (Nessie) Welshman, Missionary to Malawi 1973–75; Miss Muriel Joy Gowdy, Missionary to Nepal 1992–2003; Mr James (Jim) Henry Rutherford, Missionary to Nepal 1998–99.
8. Deputation: Global Mission Workers on home assignment have had the opportunity of speaking in many churches highlighting their work and thanking congregations for their prayerful and financial support. The continued release of new ‘Digital Dispatches’ videos from PCI’s Global Mission Workers every six months have provided updates on their work and points for prayer. At least two of these videos each year feature ‘Blaze the Bee’ by way of encouraging children and families across PCI to explore what it means to be a global disciple and engage more fully in God’s global mission. Global Mission Worker prayer bulletins are available monthly, along with Mission Connect updates in the *Presbyterian Herald*.
9. The Global Mission Workers’ panel completed its review of how to support the sending of global mission workers, considering options for a co-funding approach alongside United Appeal funding. Consultation with the United Appeal Committee on this matter is ongoing.
10. Detailed guidelines have been drawn up for Global Mission Workers’ Sabbatical leave. A task group has been set up to investigate the concept of ‘regional worker’ in the global context as there is potential for such a role to expand the capacity of PCI’s global engagement in terms of building partnerships, not only deepening established relationships but exploring new ones as well.

### **Global Mission Relationships**

11. The Committee is deeply aware of the varied and ongoing impacts of war and civil unrest on a number of PCI’s partners and endeavours to highlight these for the prayerful concern of the wider church through the *Presbyterian Herald* and ‘Let’s Pray’.

12. The General Assembly in 2023 received a report on the categorising of PCI's global mission relationships, acknowledging that additional work in the form of a "sieve" process was needed to assess, evaluate and categorise partners and potential partners. A task group has met on four occasions to undertake this work and the list of partners, companions and networks is provided in **Appendix B**. The next stage of the work is to evaluate what resources are required to ensure these relationships can be meaningfully sustained.
13. Overseas visits took place during the past year with the following undertaken to meet with partners, attend conferences, visit projects and share in the pastoral support and encouragement of Global Mission Workers:
  - Rev Uel Marrs to Hungary and Ukraine to attend the Hungarian Reformed Church Partners' Consultation on Ukraine, 13–17 July 2023.
  - Rev Uel Marrs to Germany to attend the Eukumindo General Assembly in Wuppertal, 4–9 Sept 2023.
  - Rev Richard Kerr to Beirut, Lebanon, to participate in the LSESD 25th Anniversary Conference, 26 Sept–2 Oct 2023.
  - Rev Colin Dickson to Jordan and Egypt, including a visit to the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary and the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Cairo, 19–27 Oct 2023
  - Mrs Pauline Kennedy, Women's Ministry and PW Development Officer, to CCAP Zambia Synod, 20–29 Nov 2023.
  - Revs Stephen McCracken and Uel Marrs to Church of North India, Gujarat Diocese, 6–15 Nov 2023.
  - Rev Brian and Mrs Jean Gibson to Kenya for the PCEA Theological Education by Extension 40th Anniversary Celebrations, 3–23 Nov 2023.
  - Rev Dr Sam Mawhinney (Moderator) and his wife, Karen, to Kenya to meet with PCI global mission workers and representatives of the PCEA, 17 Nov–2 Dec 2023.
  - Rev Liam Rutherford, along with Mr Chris Nelson (Videographer), and Mr Chris Thompson and Mrs Jade Farmer (Tearfund) to Rwanda, for a communication visit regarding the 2024 World Development Appeal, 6–14 March 2024.
14. The following visits are due to take place later in 2024:
  - Rev Stephen McCracken and Mrs Heather Clements to Malawi to attend the CCAP 100th Anniversary, 24 and 25 August 2024 and visit with CCAP Malawi Synods.
  - Rev Uel Marrs to Germany to attend the Eukumindo General Assembly in Stuttgart, 11–14 Sept 2024.

- Rev Uel Marrs to South Korea to attend the Lausanne Congress, Seoul, 24–28 Sept 2024.

### **Global Mission Partnership Grants**

15. The Council approved a schedule of 2024 grants totalling £111,500 for the support of 20 partner projects covering 15 countries. The funding for these grants comes from the United Appeal, the World Development Appeal and designated donations.
16. The Council for Global Mission received funding totalling €157,862 during 2023 through partnering with *Misean Cara*, an international and Irish faith-based missionary movement, working with marginalised and vulnerable communities. This funding is supporting the work of The Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Samburu Awareness and Action Project in Tuum improving girls' education, building community leadership and developing livelihoods; The United Mission to Nepal (UMN) improving school management and governance systems, creating 'child-friendly' classrooms, training teachers and improving water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in Bahjang District.

### **Global Leaders in Training Scholarships**

17. In 2023 the Council approved a schedule of scholarships for 2024 totalling £20,739 in support of Leaders in Training from ten partner churches in six countries.

### **Strategy for 2023-25**

18. The Global Mission Committee's focus is on proclaiming the gospel but in the context of a fast-changing world, the question to be kept before the Committee is of "How?" and of weighting between the traditional emphasis of sending global mission workers overseas and supporting partners in their training of national leaders and local mission initiatives. The Global Mission Committee will continue over the next year to seek God's guidance as to where priorities ought to lie going forward. This will be undergirded by the work of the Global Mission Partnership Panel to complete the review of resourcing our relationships with partners, companions and networks as well as determining how these relationships can be developed to become deeper and more meaningful. The Global Mission Workers Panel will explore and report on the concept of appointing regional liaison workers.

HEATHER CLEMENTS, Convener

## GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

*“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are attentive to their cry”.* Psalm 34:15

19. Throughout scripture there are many examples of God being attentive to the voice of His people. We are told in Exodus 3:7 that God saw the misery of His people and heard their cry as a result of their slavery in Egypt. As an extension of His attentiveness, God invites His people, to be aware of, and to be attentive to, those in need around them. Jesus pointed out in Matthew 25:40 that “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”
20. Over this past year the Global Development Committee has sought to listen to the voices of God’s people and those facing challenging situations. This is particularly so in two significant reports (Appendix C and D) which resulted from listening to the Christian Community in the Middle East and listening to members of PCI regarding how they understand creation care and climate change.
21. The Committee continues to seek to discern God’s voice as it considers the implications of these reports and the wider work of the Committee.
22. The Committee is deeply grateful for the support of the denomination for the **World Development Appeal**. The final total for the 2022 Appeal with a primary focus on Lebanon was £486,896. The current total of the 2023 Appeal, which led with a focus on palm oil plantations in Sierra Leone, is £435,458 (as of 27 March). Payments of £175,000 each have been made to Christian Aid and Tearfund. The annual 5% allocation to partner churches has also been made, with £25,178 being allocated to five projects covering Malawi, Kenya, Nepal, Syria and Lebanon.
23. Work for the 2024 Appeal is well under way and a visit to the lead project in Rwanda with Tearfund took place from 6–13 March. The purpose of the trip was to observe, gather stories, and film Church-led community development projects with an emphasis on food security. Rev Liam Rutherford, World Development Agent, who was part of that visit, drew attention to the important contribution made by local churches in Rwanda to the work of reconciliation and rebuilding following the 1994 genocide.
24. Additional protocols and guidance regarding the World Development Appeal are being developed. These include how PCI best works with its partners, Christian Aid and Tearfund, and how best to communicate the breadth of projects to the wider church.
25. A constructive meeting was held with Mr Sean Copeland (CEO) and Mrs Emma Lynch (Church Engagement and Education Manager) of Tearfund Ireland in November 2023 to discuss the potential for mutual cooperation. At present PCI only relates officially to Tearfund UK, specifically through their Northern Ireland office. It was agreed that pursuing a partnership with Tearfund Ireland – in addition to Tearfund UK – would be desirable.

26. A further £24,379.60 has come in for the **Moderator's Appeal for Ukraine**. This has been disbursed equally between the three development partners, Christian Aid, Tearfund and Hungarian Reformed Church Aid.
27. The highlight of the work on Global Issues this year has been the culmination of significant work by two task groups.
28. The **Task Group on the Middle East**, under the supervision of the International Relations Agent, Rev Dr Donald Watts, was given the remit by the 2022 General Assembly of "*How best can PCI show solidarity with, provide support for, and learn from Christian Communities in the Middle East*".
29. This task required listening to the voices of our Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East. A major highlight was the hosting of a conference entitled God's Church in Egypt: Challenges, Calling and Creativity which took place on 2 February 2024 in Assembly Buildings. The keynote speaker was Dr Anne Zaki, Professor of Preaching and Practical Theology at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, Egypt. The conference was well attended and feedback was very positive. Dr Zaki also spoke at a number of other events during her stay.
30. As an outcome of this conference and the wider listening exercise, an important report has been written for the General Assembly and is found in Appendix C. We are deeply grateful to all the members of the Task Group for their time and effort in bringing this assignment to completion.
31. The **Stewardship of Creation Task Group** also undertook an important piece of work. Rev Dr Allen Sleith, Stewardship of Creation Agent, led this task group as they engaged in a consultation on creation care and climate change with the wider denomination, ensuring dialogue with those parties most adversely affected by efforts to address climate change.
32. A survey was developed, circulated and almost 1,200 responses were returned. In addition, a number of focus groups were held with particular interest groups, including young people and farmers, and semi-structured interviews with those involved in the construction industry.
33. The resulting data is included in an accessible and comprehensive report in Appendix D. We recognise the amount of work involved in getting this report to this stage and would want to commend and thank all the members of the Task Group for their commitment to the task.
34. The **Intercultural Relations Agent**, Rev Helen Freeburn, continues to keep a watching brief on a continually changing landscape of immigration, government legislation and the important matter of welcome and integration of people from other countries and cultures into congregations and communities.
35. The Irish Council of Churches launched *From Every Nation? A Handbook for a congregation's journey from welcome to belonging*, at their AGM on 11 April. This resource, undergirded with theological insights, is designed to equip churches with an understanding of diversity and inclusion, which will in turn support them as they integrate people from other cultural backgrounds into their congregations.

36. Members of the Committee attended the constructive Council for Mission in Ireland led “Welcoming the Stranger” Conference in Drogheda in September. Reflecting on the 2023 report to the General Assembly entitled “Exploring Race and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland” the Committee note that listening to the voices of those who have come to Ireland from other countries and cultures is incredibly important.
37. Following Rev John Faris’ resignation as **World Faiths Agent**, it was agreed to shift the focus towards the persecuted church and appoint a **Persecuted Minorities Agent**. It is hoped to identify and appoint someone in the near future.
38. World Prayer Guides are a helpful way of deepening understanding of and praying for people of other faiths. These include guides for the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh worlds and are available from the publisher in both hard-copy and to download: [www.worldprayerguides.org.uk](http://www.worldprayerguides.org.uk)
39. With the completion of a number of significant reports, the Global Development Committee will now consider its scope of work for the next 3–5 years. There is a range of global issues with local interest that are clamouring for attention. Setting clear priorities and parameters is vital. The Committee values prayerful support going forward as it seeks God’s guidance and direction.

RICHARD KERR, Convener

## BUSINESS AND FINANCE PANEL

### Finance

40. The Council records its deep appreciation for the United Appeal funding received each year that makes possible so much of its work, together with the generous grant received annually from Presbyterian Women. Council for Global Mission accounts for the year 2023 indicate an operating surplus of £52,889 on the Income and Expenditure Account. From 1 January 2024, Global Mission Worker – Ireland allowances were increased by 5%. A United Appeal grant of £900,000 has been approved for 2024, with the Council requesting the same amount for 2025. In the course of the year restricted donations of £379,952 were received, including Irish Aid funding through Mísean Cara of £37,788 for partner projects.

### Property

41. The Council continues to own three properties as follows: Two three-bedroomed apartments at 5 Osborne Mews, Osborne Park and 12 Oakdene Lodge, 16 Annadale Avenue. They are regularly maintained and well used mainly by global mission workers, interspersed by some short-term rentals. It is planned to refurbish the kitchen at 12 Oakdene towards the end of 2024. A semi-detached house at 214 Grasmere Avenue, Wembley continues to be rented out on a tenancy agreement that extends

to 31 January 2025 at which point it has been agreed that the property be sold.

### **Communication and promotion Strategy**

42. A report on communication and promotion strategy for the Council for Global Mission is at the first draft stage and will be further developed in the year ahead in collaboration with Mark Neale, PCI Head of Communications. It is planned that a final report will be brought to the General Assembly in 2025.

### **Staffing**

43. Over the past year, filling vacancies on the Mission Department Staff Team has proved challenging, very often requiring two or three rounds of advertising and interviewing before a suitable candidate can be found. Looking back over the past year, we are thankful that a number of vacancies have now been filled: Anna Currie was appointed as Senior Administrative Assistant, commencing work on 5 June 2023; Joyce Craig commenced work as PA to the Council for Mission in Ireland Secretary on 4 March 2024; and Donald Garvie commenced work on Tuesday, 19 March in the role of Mission Support Officer – Partnerships (part-time) providing maternity cover for Pip Florit. In the course of the year the Council expressed its deep appreciation for one member of staff, Christine Craig, PA to the Council for Mission in Ireland Secretary, who finished work on 9 September 2023.
44. Deep appreciation is extended to all the Mission Dept staff for their dedicated service and for being willing to go the ‘extra mile’ to ensure work is completed, especially at times when the department has been short-staffed.

STEPHEN McCRACKEN, Convener

## APPENDIX A

### GLOBAL MISSION WORKERS

*Global mission workers: the names, spheres and category of service at the time of writing (April 2024) are listed below:*

#### INTEGRATE PROGRAMME – service of two or more years

##### **Brazil**

Naomi Keefe	2004	Outreach programme, The Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB), Recife
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##### **Central and Southern Africa**

Volker and	2010	Consultant to Theological Education by Extension in TEEC – South Africa
JinHyeog Glissmann		Music Teacher in Phoenix International Primary School in Blantyre – Malawi

##### **Great Britain**

Edwin and Anne Kibathi	2009	Ministry among East Africans in East London
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##### **Hungary**

Csaba and	2001	Outreach and church planting in the location of Bodaszölö
Ilona Veres	1993	in partnership with the Reformed Church in Hungary (Transtibiscan district) in Hajdúböszövény – Calvin Square Congregation (since 2024)

##### **Ireland**

James and Heather Cochrane	2008	Final Home Assignment from Portugal having completed an outreach and church planting ministry in partnership with the Christian Presbyterian Church of Portugal (ICPP) in Senhora de Hora, Porto (since 2013)
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**Kenya**

Stephen and	1985	Outreach and development work, Presbyterian
Angelina Cowan	1989	Church of East Africa (PCEA), Tuum
Naomi Leremore	1991	Development of Theological Education by Extension materials, PCEA, Nairobi
Gary & Mary Reid	2000	Outreach and development work, PCEA, Olkinyiei

**Romania**

Steve and Rosie Kennedy	2020	Final Home Assignment having served in an outreach ministry with Cluj Christian Fellowship of the Tóvidéki Congregation of the Hungarian Reformed Church (Transylvania District).
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**Russia**

Two global mission workers	2019	Theological education
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**Spain**

Derek and Jane French	2000	Student outreach with Grupos Biblicos Unidos (GBU), Bilbao
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**Zambia**

Diane Cusick	1995	Early Childhood Development Officer, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Zambia Synod (since 2016)
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## APPENDIX B

### GLOBAL MISSION RELATIONSHIPS

*PCI is currently engaged in global mission relationships with the following churches, institutions and agencies:*

#### Partners (12)

- The Hungarian Reformed Church
- Christ the Saviour Presbyterian Church, Poland
- The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon
- The Presbyterian Church of East Africa
- The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (Malawi and Zambia Synods, General Assembly, ZTU)
- The Christian Church of Sumba, Indonesia
- The Evangelical Christian Church of Halmahera, Indonesia
- The Protestant Christian Church of Timor, Indonesia
- The Church of North India (General Assembly and Gujarat Diocese)
- The United Mission to Nepal
- The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar
- The Presbyterian Church of Brazil

#### Exploratory partnerships (2)

- The Greek Evangelical Church
- The Presbyterian Church of Guatemala

#### Companions (16)

- The Christian Presbyterian Church of Portugal
- The Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary, Latvia
- Faculté Jean Calvin, France
- St Petersburg Christian University, Russia
- Scripture Union, Malawi
- The Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary
- The Near East School of Theology, Lebanon
- The United Bible Training Centre, Pakistan
- The Association for Theological Education, Nepal
- Minority Focus, Nepal
- The Student Christian Organisation of Malawi
- PakMission, Pakistan
- The Cross Reformed Centre, Nepal

- Al Bashir, India
- Thimar (formerly LSESD), Lebanon
- The Theological Education by Extension College (TEEC) South Africa

**Network (1)**

- Northern Spain Church Planting Network (including Grupos Biblicos Unidos, Andamio and Bilbao International Church)

## APPENDIX C

### REPORT OF MIDDLE EAST TASK GROUP 2024

#### Remit

1. In 2022, the Council for Global Mission reported to the General Assembly that it intended, through its Global Development Committee, to appoint a Task Group to explore the question, “how best can PCI show solidarity with, provide support to, and learn from Christian communities in the Middle East?” and report to the General Assembly in 2024 (General Assembly Reports, 2022, p.129). This plan was commended by the General Assembly (General Assembly Minutes, 2022, p. 36, resolution 4). This was not an entirely new piece of work as a panel of the Council had been meeting since 2016 to consider how PCI could better understand, learn from and relate to the churches in the Middle East. It did, however, give the work new focus.

#### Conference, 2015

2. In November, 2015, the Council for Global Mission held an important conference in Assembly Buildings, in co-operation with Open Doors. The invitation to attend read, *“The Arab Spring, the rise of ISIS, the conflict in Syria have all brought great changes in the Middle East. In a place where Christians are in a minority and being put under increased pressure, how are the local churches coping? What can we in Ireland do to stand with our brothers and sisters in Christ there? What can we learn from them, especially as we prepare to welcome refugees here? And what are the practicalities of getting involved with refugees who arrive here?”* The invitation was a useful reminder that in relating to the churches of the Middle East we are not just thinking of believers who maintain their faith in difficult circumstances far away, but also how to welcome and learn from the many who come, sometimes due to persecution or for economic reasons, to live and worship with us here in Ireland.
3. The day was really organised as two Conferences. In the afternoon the challenge under the title, “The Refugee Experience,” was largely to the church at home. The morning was entitled, “Faith in the Furnace - Challenges facing the Church in the Middle East.” There were two main speakers. Rev Farouk Hammo, Senior Pastor at Baghdad Presbyterian Church, told his exciting and inspiring story of maintaining the witness of the Church in dangerously challenging times, and Rev Uel Marrs, PCI Global Mission Secretary, reported on a recent visit to Lebanon. Rev Farouk Hammo had a remarkable story to tell of how God may strengthen the faith of his church through adversity. The numbers in the Baghdad Congregation had dropped dramatically due to the violence and persecution of Christians since the Iraq wars, but at the same time Christian families, along with others, were coming into Baghdad from more dangerous areas, particularly around Mosul where there had been

a relatively strong Christian presence. The Baghdad congregation set up a school to welcome and help the internally displaced families to settle. In many ways God was strengthening his church through this time of intense challenge.

4. The situation in Lebanon and Syria was different yet similar. Not so long ago there had been a strong Christian presence in Lebanon, but it had dispersed through violence in the region and also economic catastrophe. At the same time many Syrian refugees were moving into Lebanon to escape the violence of their own country and for their family's safety. The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) responded with social outreach programmes and teaching for Lebanese people, but also reaching into the Syrian refugee camps. Uel Marrs was impressed and excited by the Christian community's dedication to the gospel through difficult times.

#### **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS PANEL, 2016–2022**

5. It was with the 2015 conference in the background that the panel, mentioned earlier, was set up to guide the then Global Concerns Committee. Its remit was to consider how international relations should affect PCI's work in global mission. The panel quickly narrowed down its initial work to consider how best to support and learn from the church in Syria, which inevitably included Lebanon as there is one Synod of Syria and Lebanon. There were three key reasons for this:

- **The conflict in Syria is on-going** and the disruption in the area intense. The United Nations Human Rights Office estimated that 306,887 civilians – 1.5% of the total pre-war population – were killed between March 2011 and March 2021 due to the conflict. The BBC also reports that half of Syria's pre-war population of 22 million have had to flee their homes. Some 6.8 million are internally displaced while 6 million are abroad, with neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey hosting 5.3 million of them.
- While there are many other conflicts in the world which inevitably create difficulties for the churches' witness, some of the churches in Syria, notably in Damascus and Bloudan, trace their origins back to **the work of Irish Presbyterian Missionaries in the mid-19th century**. The Rev William Graham began work in Damascus in 1843. Some of that story is told in *Into all the World*, a history of the overseas work of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 1840–1990, edited by Dr Jack Thompson (see pp.136–140). More recently the focus of PCI's mission work in that area moved to Beirut in Lebanon. The Rev John Mann worked there until 1975 and the Rev Dr Cecil McCullough with his wife Dorothy stayed, through much conflict, until 1984. Cecil was teaching in the Near East School of Theology (NEST).
- PCI has developed an active partnership with NESSL and there is already a useful sharing of ideas. Most recently, in 2023, the then Moderator, Rt Rev Dr John Kirkpatrick, visited Lebanon along with the Rev Uel Marrs to encourage the churches and learn more of

their creative work in spreading the gospel in difficult times. With learning in mind, the panel in 2017 invited Dr Mike Bassous, General Secretary of the Bible Society of Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, to be the keynote speaker at a Conference: *Hope Unexpected – Lessons from the life of the church in the Middle East*. Once again Dr Mike Bassous inspired participants with positive reports of the church in Lebanon, and more widely in the Middle East, reacting to the challenge of violent displacement and economic hardship.

6. While the main focus of the panel's work remained on **Syria and Lebanon**, it became clear that it would be impossible to really grasp the situation of the churches in the area without some understanding of the plight of **Palestinian Christians in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories**. The churches throughout the region relate closely to one another and give support to one another. For many years PCI has had links with Bethlehem Bible College and members have gone to spend time there. More recently a number of Irish Presbyterians have attended the biannual "Christ at the Checkpoint" Conference, encouraged to do so by the Council for Global Mission. This takes place in Bethlehem, a short distance from the main checkpoint separating Israel from the West Bank. For those who have been it has proved an eye-opening experience, not only in the astute theological discussion but in the visits to Palestinian and Bedouin villages which are always part of the programme. The insecurity in which so many people live is impossible to describe.
7. To help its understanding the panel invited one of the speakers at the 2018 "Christ at the Checkpoint" Conference to be the speaker at a weekend of events here in Ireland, including a Conference in Assembly Buildings under the title, *Hard pressed – not crushed*. The Rev Dr Yohanna Katanacho is an Israeli Palestinian Christian who is Academic Dean of Nazareth Evangelical College and also teaches in Bethlehem Bible College. He explored the question of identity, telling a powerful story of growing up in East Jerusalem but without any animosity towards his Jewish neighbours. As a theologian he has also explored, among other things, a theology of the land. Dr Katanacho concluded: "I hope that what people take away from today is that Christ is the best starting point for understanding our identity and for designing a politics of love that takes justice seriously without advantage, without stereotyping or discriminating. I can't separate justice from the logic of love, if it is separate it becomes injustice. The Cross is the ultimate expression of justice and love."
8. Speaking of Christianity in the Middle East, Dr Katanacho said, "We don't just want to survive, we want to love Jesus and take the gospel to our neighbours. By the grace of God the Arab church has existed for centuries, sometimes it is not easy to take a stand for Christ, but we will continue to survive by the grace of God. If we suffer, let it be. But we want our brothers and sisters around the world to honour Jesus Christ, to honour his will for the Church in the 21st century. People ask me 'what will happen to Christians in the Middle East?' It is the wrong question. I ask what will

happen to the Middle East without Christians! Our concern is for the Church in Europe. When we kneel down and pray we know we will lay down our lives for Jesus – will you?”

### **MIDDLE EAST TASK GROUP, 2022–2024**

9. It was with the background just outlined that the Task Group appointed in 2022 began to explore its remit. One of the first questions was to decide the extent of the area to be covered by the term, “the Middle East” – there are many definitions! Initially the Task Group thought of an area similar to that through which Abram and his semi-nomadic family seem to have travelled – from Ur, to Haran, to Canaan and on into Egypt (Genesis 11.31–12:16). This would roughly cover the present-day countries of Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, the occupied Palestinian territories and Egypt. On further reflection the group decided to include Iran in its initial discussions as having a profound influence on the whole area. Iran is also reputed to have the fastest growing Christian community in the region. Clearly the task of the group is to narrow down the possibilities and suggest specific ways for PCI to “show solidarity with, provide support to, and learn from Christian communities” in this area.
10. Perhaps it is important before going any further to make one very significant point. In relating to Christian communities in the Middle East, Western churches must be sensitive to the fact that Christian communities have been present in these lands since Pentecost. So, in whatever manner we choose to relate into the Christian communities, there is much to be learned, humbly, from those who trace their faith back to biblical times.
11. **Syria** is a country with a population of approximately 19 million, for whom the strongly predominant religion is Islam. It has suffered greatly from war, which began in 2011 with protests as part of the wider Arab Spring, led to the rise of ISIS and escalated into a full-blown conflict which has been going on for 13 years. As a result, deaths are estimated at 1-2 million people and over half the population has been displaced. Currently, the infrastructure has collapsed, the country is fragmented and its future unstable. Further tragic suffering was caused by the earthquake of 6th February, 2023.
12. The Christian population is believed to have fallen significantly below the pre-war figure of 10% to around 2.5%. Of the Christians that remain, the majority are Orthodox – both Eastern and Oriental and Catholics also represent a significant group. A 2015 study estimates some 2,000 Muslims converted to Christianity in Syria, most of them belonging to some form of Protestantism. However, by 2021 it is estimated that approximately two-thirds of Syrian Christians had left the country. All figures used are estimates as no census has taken place in recent years.
13. **Lebanon**, which used to be regarded as part of Greater Syria but eventually became an independent sovereign state, has a population of approximately 5.5 million and has the most religiously diverse society within the Middle East. There are around 18 recognized religious groups, of which Islam is significantly in the majority. Christianity is the second largest religious

group in the country. The Lebanese Constitution provides for freedom of religion provided that the public order is not disturbed. For this reason, many people fleeing religious mistreatment and discrimination in neighbouring states have immigrated to the country.

14. In recent years the Christian community, which used to make up at least one-third of the country's inhabitants, has decreased very significantly. The reasons for this decline, mainly due to emigration, involve a cocktail of various crises which include: the aftermath of civil conflict, the covid pandemic, climate change, the port explosion of 2020, along with political and economic collapse. Sadly 80% of the population now live below the poverty line, unemployment rates are soaring, and fuel, water and electricity shortages are common.
15. Despite the economic collapse, Lebanon is a country with one of the highest refugee intakes in the world. It has been referred to as the refugee capital of the world, with one in every three members of the population being a refugee and one in every three, a Syrian refugee. The country hosts around 1.5 million refugees who fled the civil war in Syria, alongside a long-term displaced Palestinian community of over 200,000 people.
16. Lebanon is on the brink of becoming a 'failed state' and so it is not surprising that 90% of all graduates are choosing to leave the country for better opportunities and more stability, including those who are trained as future leaders for the church. Of the Christians that remain 65% are Catholic and 30% Orthodox. The country's Presbyterian Christians are mostly Arabic-speaking or of Armenian descent (whose families immigrated following the Armenian genocide of 1915–1918).
17. Despite the statistics above, the story of the **Christian community in Syria and Lebanon** is not all negative: God is at work in both Lebanon and Syria, transforming lives by His grace and hope can be found even in the darkest places. Many people, including Christians, have chosen to stay, to try to make a difference and ensure that the Christian light in their land remains a permanent symbol of peace and blessing to their communities. The Church, full of faith, hope and love remains.
18. Historically PCI has had a long association with the Church in Syria and Lebanon. Following the work of PCI and other missionaries since the mid-19th century, a Synod was organised in 1920 known as The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL). Today it has around 12,000 members from around 40 congregations covering the two countries. The Synod continues to support schools, a hospital, a seminary called The Near East School of Theology (NEST), and other social service programmes. It is a long-standing partner of PCI. NESSL holds on to a vision of being an oasis in the desert, of irrigating the land with justice and peace, fighting hostility with love and praying for its enemies. Other partners of PCI include The Bible Society of Lebanon, Syria and Iraq and SAT-7 who have studios in Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey and the UK with an International HQ in Cyprus. It broadcasts powerfully into the whole of the Middle East and North Africa and The Lebanese Society for Education and Social Development (LSESD).

19. **Iraq.** It may seem strange that having begun this report with an account of the visit to PCI of the Rev Farouk Hammo, senior pastor at Baghdad Presbyterian Church, there is little being said about the churches in Iraq. Prior to the first Gulf War Christians in Iraq, mainly of the Syriac tradition, were estimated to number about one million but during the second Gulf War many fled for safety from ISIS. Some remained within the country and found safety in Baghdad or parts of southern Iraq, but EU research suggests the current number of Christians in the country is around 500,000. Only a very small number of these belong to one of the five churches forming the Assembly of Evangelical (Presbyterian) Churches in Iraq. The Task Group thought it best to develop support for the Christians of Iraq through NESSL and the Evangelical Church of Egypt, both of whom have contacts there.
20. **Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.** As the task group goes about its aim of showing solidarity with, listening to, and learning from the Christian Communities of the Middle East, it must recognise the consequences of the ongoing conflict within Israel and the Gaza Strip. The report is being written while the invasion of Gaza by Israeli Defence Forces is ongoing, with horrific consequences for the civilian population of Gaza. That, of course, was in response to the unspeakable carnage of the Hamas incursions into Israel on 7 October 2023 and the taking of Israeli hostages. It is important at this time to remember and express solidarity with the small but loyal Palestinian Christian community, particularly in Gaza, but also in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The Task Group considers that further thought must be given as to how best to express our common Christian faith, that it might encourage all sides towards a peace based on justice; a lasting peace that may lead to reconciliation.
21. It has also been important to listen to the Christian Churches in this area who are suffering constant persecution of various forms. The number of churches being affected directly or indirectly is hard to assess, let alone to truly and deeply empathise with them. There is a tendency to move on to the next news item or conflict, or to dismiss it in relation to our own history or theology. This means that the continuing lessons that could be learnt from those going through direct and enormous persecution are forgotten or ignored. It has been estimated that pre Covid-19 there was only a 2% Christian population in this area, and that number is diminishing.
22. Thankfully it can be seen through history that the church has not been destroyed but in fact emboldened during times of persecution, and often God has done new and reformative things through suffering churches.
23. **Iran.** The constitution of Iran defines the country as an Islamic republic, with the official state religion being Twelver Ja'afari Shia Islam. The penal code punishes proselytising by non-Muslims with the death sentence; "enmity against God" and "insulting the Prophet or Islam" are also punishable by death. The legal situation for Christians worsened in February 2021 when President Rouhani signed amendments to articles 499 and 500 of the penal code introducing prison sentences for those guilty of "insulting Islam" and undertaking "deviant activity" that "contradicts or interferes with

the sacred law of Islam”. Christians are often imprisoned on charges of engaging in propaganda against the Islamic regime or sectarian activities.

24. According to the constitution, Christians are one of the few religious minorities that are permitted to worship and form religious societies “within the limits of the law”, but this does not include converts from Islam. The government considers any citizen who cannot prove that they or their family were Christian prior to 1979 to be Muslim.
25. The law prevents Muslim citizens from changing or renouncing their religious beliefs. Christian converts are not legally allowed to register themselves as Christians and are not entitled to the same rights as recognised members of Christian communities. Converts to Christianity are viewed with deep suspicion as they are seen as an attempt by western countries to undermine Islam and the Islamic regime of Iran. On November 3, 2021, Iran’s Supreme Court ruled that Christian participation in house churches does not amount to a violation of national security prosecutable under articles 498 and 499 of the Islamic Penal Code. These articles, which prohibit membership in groups that “aim to perturb the security of the country,” are often used to prosecute Christians in Iran. However, it is well documented that prosecutions do continue.
26. Despite this the Christian community is growing in Iran, largely within the House Church movement. This remarkable story is told in the book “Too Many to Jail” by Mark Bradley, 2014. Iran’s new Christians tend to be young, many under thirty years of age. They were born after the Islamic revolution and due to the influence of satellite TV live throughout the country, not just in larger towns.
27. One other factor to note is the growth of an Iranian Christian diaspora. Due to persecution many Christian converts, particularly young people, have left the country. Some are now living in Ireland and worshipping in Presbyterian churches. In the newly merged congregation in South Belfast there is a nucleus of about 70 people from an Iranian background and others from the Middle East. Translation is now two-ways; from English to Persian and Persian into English so that people can, for example, lead prayer in their own language. Some may remember the inspiring interview at the 2023 Assembly when Rev Ivan Steen spoke to Ali about his experience of settling in Belfast.
28. **Jordan.** The Kingdom of Jordan has a population of approximately 10 million people, although less than 2% are Christian. The Jordanian Government allows the practice of Christianity, but encouraging conversion to the Christian faith is illegal. It is also illegal for a Muslim to convert to Christianity. The Christian communities in Jordan are represented by the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches, the Catholic church, Latin church, the historic Evangelical churches such as the Anglican and the Lutheran, the more recent Evangelical churches such as, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Assemblies of God, Church of the Nazarene, Baptist and Free Evangelical.

29. It is important to note that those in the Christian community in Jordan have the freedom to practice their faith, but without the freedom to proselytize. For the Evangelical community in the Middle East, this is a constant challenge and many envy the freedom in the West to publicly distribute Christian literature and Bibles, verbally witness to their faith in every sphere of life and actively engage in evangelism anywhere, at any time.
30. Christians in Jordan live under a dominant religion and many experience various forms of persecution or discrimination on a daily basis. This has a serious impact upon the emotional, spiritual, and physical aspect of the life of every Christian and especially the refugees in Jordan. Colin Chapman, in an article, "Christians in the Middle East – Past, Present and Future," published in *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, is clear that "Muslims for their part, have lived for around 13 centuries with the assumption that 'Islam must rule' (al-islam la budda a yarkum) and have felt it utterly natural that Muslims should rule over Christians." The result now among the Christian people in Jordan is psychological and emotional trauma, and persecution at various levels, in every sphere of life, work, family and community. This is also apparent among the refugees fleeing persecution from ISIS, of whom many attend Evangelical Arab congregations. Christians living under Muslim dominance and authority, even if it is perceived as moderate, can find no lasting respite.
31. This is not to present the Arab Christian community and particularly the Arab Evangelical community as a marginalized group, weak and helpless, struggling to live under Islamic domination. Rather Arab Christians display resilience under persecution, patience in suffering, acceptance of hardship and a commitment to discipleship with joy. However, that is accompanied by a measure of weariness, lament, insecurity, hopelessness, fear, trauma, despair, and loss, as they live under a dominant religion.
32. **Egypt.** The last country the Task Group considered was Egypt, which has the largest Christian population in the Middle East. To learn about the Christian Community there Dr Anne Zaki, Associate Professor of Preaching and Practical Theology at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo was invited to be the speaker at a Conference held once again in Assembly Buildings. This was under the title, *God's Church in Egypt – Challenges, Calling and Creativity*.
33. Egypt is home to the largest Christian population in the Middle East. While it is impossible to determine precise numbers, it is estimated that Christians make up 10% of the population. Taking into account the large and growing underground church, this puts the number of believers at somewhere between 10 and 15 million.
34. The Coptic Orthodox Church is the largest Christian denomination, and traces its heritage back to the Apostle Mark. Protestant (evangelical) churches make up the second largest grouping. There are thought to be around 2 million evangelicals, including Presbyterians, Anglicans, and other evangelical churches. The Evangelical Synod of Egypt is the

largest protestant denomination, with around 500,000 members. The denomination was founded by Presbyterian missionaries from America and Scotland in the mid-1800's. Catholics are small in number in Egypt, but they exert significant influence through involvement in social services, such as schools and hospitals. Similarly, although Christians are only a tenth of the population, they control about a quarter of the Egyptian economy.

35. Comparative to the rest of the region, Christians in Egypt have enjoyed relative freedom to practice their faith, though there have been significant and severe state restrictions on evangelical activity. As a result of this, Egyptian Christians have learned to “practice presence” among their majority Muslim neighbours, which involves “living aloud” the good news of Jesus when speaking aloud has not been possible. There are reports of many Muslims coming to faith in Christ through the faithful presence of the churches, despite it being illegal to convert and causing great personal risk.
36. While there has existed a climate of fear for many years, the events following the ‘Arab Spring’ has led to greater boldness among the churches. At the *God’s Church in Egypt* conference at Assembly Buildings in February, Dr Anne Zaki reported on the creative ways the churches have responded to the uncertainty left in the wake of the first and second Egyptian revolutions (2011 and 2013). Most encouraging is the significant expansion of the Evangelical Presbyterian Seminary (EPS), which since 2011 has planted campuses in Alexandria and in numerous cities along the Nile. This has led to a dramatic increase in the number of students, including a significant number from other backgrounds via the new online provision.
37. When asked how the PCI might stand in solidarity with and show support to the churches in Egypt, Dr Zaki was very clear that our presence in the region was not what was needed. Indeed, Dr Zaki spoke quite frankly about how Western interference has at times damaged the Christian witness among her majority Muslim neighbours. Her response underscores a paradigm shift needed in our thinking; we must recognise that the Egyptian Church is now a sending church. Indeed, the Egyptian churches have a vital role to play in proclaiming the good news of Jesus throughout the Middle East.
38. Dr Zaki suggested that the best way for the PCI to show solidarity and support is to increase our awareness of the plight of Christians in the Middle East; to send visitors to see the situation first hand and to report back; and, most of all, to pray for this “forgotten church” and its continued witness. In particular, Dr Zaki commissioned us to pray: (1) that young Egyptians will stay to serve the church in Egypt; (2) for courage for the church to live as salt and light; (3) for God to raise up political leaders with wisdom and integrity.
39. Acknowledging the leading role of the Egyptian churches requires that we adopt a listening posture, recognising that there is much for the PCI to learn about Christian witness in the Middle East but also our witness to a changing Ireland. Further dialogue with our fellow Presbyterians in

Egypt might: equip us to better understand the complexities of the region; inspire us to respond creatively to challenges at home; teach us how to better understand and witness to our growing Muslim population; show us how to better minister to and support refugees and asylum seekers on our doorstep.

40. Aside from the Presbyterian witness in Egypt, there is much for the PCI to learn from the united Christian witness of all the Egyptian churches. Two powerful stories shared by Dr Zaki will serve as an example.
  - (a) The first happened on 11 November 2011, during the reign of the Muslim Brotherhood, when violence against Christians was rife. Despite the obvious threat on their lives, the Coptic, Protestant, and Catholic churches planned to hold an all-night prayer meeting in one of the historic cave churches in Cairo. They had hoped for as many as 20,000 to turn up; in the end, the number gathered for prayer was 70,000.
  - (b) The second happened after the horrific attack on Christian churches on 14 August 2014, known as ‘Black Wednesday’. Rather than retaliate and risk an escalation of violence, the leader of the Coptic Church called on all Christians to forgive their oppressors. He broadcast this message: “Let them burn our churches. We are offering our churches as burnt sacrifices to God. The church is not bricks and mortar. We are the living stones. We forgive.” The next day churches across Egypt hung flags with the words “we forgive” and Christians were found on the streets cleaning up after the violence inflicted upon them.
41. Dr Zaki shared these stories to remind us that the church is called to follow the example of the crucified, not the crusaders.
42. One other comment from Dr Zaki may help to bring some elements of our thinking together. It was noted previously that when the first PCI missionaries began work in Syria one of the churches they planted was at Bloudan. The Presbyterian Church is still there, part of NESSL. More recently, two brothers grew up in that church. They both went to train for ministry in the Evangelical Theological Seminary at Cairo and then returned to become pastors of churches in two areas of Syria which then present difficulties for the growth of Christian communities. Clearly work begun by PCI 180 years ago is still bearing fruit. One is reminded of the parable recorded by Mark: “*The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.*” (Mark 4:26–27).

### **Recommendations for future engagement**

43. So how should PCI move forward to fulfil its calling to “show solidarity with, provide support to, and learn from Christian communities in the Middle East?” Clearly it will not be possible to do everything that one might want to with the limited resources available, although in God’s

hands our resources are always more plentiful than may at first appear. The suggestions of the Task Group are in two sections:

44. **Geographical:** While not ignoring any of the Christian communities in the Middle East, the Task Group suggest a focus on the following geographic areas:

- **Lebanon and Syria** – As already stated PCI already has close links with NESSL, NEST and other organisations working in these countries. Recently Presbyterian Youth, Presbyterian Women and various appeals have supported work there, not least among refugees. It is recommended that existing links should be encouraged and strengthened.
- **Jordan and Egypt** – For years PCI has been involved with partners in encouraging emerging leadership and training students. In the Middle East there has been an ongoing relationship with both NEST in Lebanon and the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS). It seems clear that the Evangelical Church of Egypt, also known as the Synod of the Nile, particularly though the Evangelical Presbyterian Seminary, is one of the main Christian communities training and sending leaders to support Christian communities throughout the Middle East. Building up relationships with these bodies would be an effective way to learn from and offer support to the much wider Christian community.
- **Israel/Palestinian Occupied Territories** – Already PCI has important links with the Palestinian Christian community, as outlined above. It is suggested that those contacts should be continued and strengthened, while at the same time trying to better understand other positions e.g. that of Messianic Jews in Israel.
- **Iran** – The suggestion here is not for work in the country, which is not feasible at the present time, other than through SAT-7, but to keep a watching brief on what is happening there, which seems exciting. This is probably best done by building relationships, as is already happening, with those who have fled the country and are now living with us. The Task Group commend the work that is ongoing in congregations and through International Meeting Point and would urge that it be strengthened.

**Methodological: How might this work be carried forward?**

45. **Prayer** – This should be the first and greatest priority, remembering Dr Anne Zaki's prayer requests that young people should remain to strengthen the churches in the Middle East; that the Churches might have courage to live as salt and light; and that God may raise up political leaders of integrity. It is obvious that PCI's prayers at this time should also include an end to violence on all sides in the Israel-Hamas conflict, with a release of hostages and freedom to supply humanitarian aid. Of course, the Bible calls us constantly to pray for justice, compassion, mercy and peace in all contexts. Therefore, at an appropriate time, there should be a call to a day of prayer for the Middle East.

46. **Presence** – Those who have come to visit us here invariably encourage short visits to experience the life and pressures of Christian communities in the Middle East. The Task Group recommend that where it is safe and possible such visits should be encouraged. Already it happens, e.g. through partner consultations in Lebanon/Syria and the “Christ at the Checkpoint” conferences, but further opportunities should be explored especially in the Egyptian context. It should also be remembered that many Presbyterians experience Christian communities in the Middle East without being part of any official visit. Their experiences should be explored, with consideration given to how best their stories might be told.
47. **Partnership** – It is an important principle that PCI should work alongside others; both churches and para-church groups. Sometimes this is more difficult than it seems, but in addition to longstanding relationships with NESSL and NEST, there are already strong ties with Middle Eastern Bible Societies who have an important influence in the area. PCI also partners with SAT-7, whose broadcasting in four languages throughout the region is inspiring and has had immense impact in places where no other medium is able to reach. These ties should be strengthened. In encouraging emerging leadership, current conversations exploring the work of the Langham Partnership are to be welcomed.
48. **Practical Support** – The reality is that many Christians in the Middle East live in appalling poverty and churches in the area struggle to find the resources for the mission that is all around them. With violence in so many areas it is not surprising that millions of refugees, migrants, widows and orphans need support. There is also the continual threat of drought, earthquake, fire and flood – just as there has been from biblical times. PCI has been a generous and outreaching Church in the past and should remain so, expressing its support through partner churches and agencies in the region, and through its development partners, Christian Aid Ireland and Tearfund. As Paul reminded the Christian community in Corinthian – “Remember that the person who plants few seeds will have a small crop; the one who plants many seeds will have a large crop. You should each give, then, as you have decided, not with regret or out of a sense of duty; for God loves the one who gives gladly.” (2 Corinthians 9:6–7)

## APPENDIX D

### The Stewardship of Creation Task Group

#### CLIMATE CHANGE SURVEY REPORT

#### Introduction

1. With the ongoing challenge of being good stewards of God's creation, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) through its Council for Global Mission, wanted to hear from its members regarding climate change in order to gain a baseline understanding of thinking, perceptions and positions within the denomination. The Task Group leading this research were asked to take into account specific groups within PCI, including ministers, young people, and those impacted by measures taken to mitigate climate change such as farmers.
2. This report should not be viewed in isolation but as part of a number of important initiatives that PCI has taken to consider ways it can better look after the environment. In 2018, the General Assembly passed a resolution commending the Council for Global Mission's Stewardship of Creation Report on Climate Change. The 2018 report provided a biblical foundation to guide PCI as it approaches issues relating to the care of God's creation. It also set out seven principles of good stewardship of God's creation and stated that *'being a disciple of Jesus means to obey Him in all aspects of discipleship, including prayer, church involvement, evangelism and in care of creation.'* (GA 2018, p.308, para 4f). Here is an extract from the 2018 General Assembly Report that relates to this (GA 2018, p.287, para 42–45):
  42. *The Stewardship of Creation Panel, following its interim report to the 2017 General Assembly, has developed a more comprehensive report for the 2018 General Assembly. The Panel, led by Convener, Rev John Hanson, is to be commended for their work.*
  43. *It is important to acknowledge that while the vast majority of scientists agree on human induced climate change, there is a significant and vocal dissenting voice. However, the Panel encourages all PCI members to be open to being challenged by this issue and to view it as an essential aspect of discipleship.*
  44. *The Panel believes that it is important that the trust, energy and spirit of the paper communicates the need for God's love through the respect and care for God's property and highlighting love for one's neighbour, both near and far. This is especially the case for people who are vulnerable. Those in poverty are most likely to bear the brunt of adverse climate conditions.*
  45. *Caring for God's creation and loving one's neighbours are core discipleship principles which must be reflected in Christian lifestyles. Small and incremental steps in adjusting how one lives including reducing, reusing and recycling, can make a significant difference.*

3. Three years later, following a resolution to the 2021 General Assembly, PCI's Trustees were instructed to divest from companies that derived more than 10% of their turnover from oil and gas extraction – they have since done so. The resolution also called for engagement with companies to encourage investment in different types of renewable energy. In the same year, in the run up to the global climate change conference, COP26 in Glasgow, PCI encouraged its congregations to set aside a Sunday to focus on God's creation and humanity's responsibility to be good stewards of it.
4. The Task Group would like to thank all those who spent time completing the survey and for the many useful suggestions and comments. Thanks, are also due to those who conducted, and those who participated in, the focus groups and interviews. It is hoped that this report and its recommendations, will help to shape the next steps around how PCI and its members can best engage with the issue of climate change and creation care.

### **Methodology**

5. In order to fulfill its remit, the Task Group thought it important that the research methods used should be both 'wide' and 'deep'. It was agreed that a digital survey would be the most efficient way of listening to the width of PCI's members across the island of Ireland, regarding their thinking, perceptions and positions around climate change. Where possible, support was provided to those without skills or online access. Given that the term 'climate change' can be understood in different ways, it was clearly defined from the outset to ensure participants were aware what the survey was asking them to consider:

*The term "climate change" is used in this questionnaire to refer to human induced changing weather patterns, global temperature rises, and related issues including sea-level rises, species decline and forced migration.*

6. In order to help ensure that the responses were representative of a wide range of people, and to forestall 'self-selection' and 'snowballing', the Task Group identified nine congregations in urban, suburban and rural locations. These 'focused' congregations agreed to be particularly intentional in encouraging their members to complete the survey by advertising it at gathered times and midweek programmes, and through their other communication channels.
7. The survey was live from 20 September to 31 October 2023 and a total of 1,196 responses were submitted. 49% of respondents were female and 50% were male. One submission noted that it was a group response representing the views of 13 ladies in the over 65 age category. The survey received submissions from 209 congregations. The survey was anonymous however the Task Group accepts that responses from ministers, taken together with the identity of their congregation, reduced their anonymity. This was unavoidable as the Task Group were asked to consider the views of ministers as a group. Raw survey data has been held confidentially, accessible only to the members of the Task Group.

*I think that's where the survey's been helpful because... it's started a lot of people talking more about stuff, which has been good.*

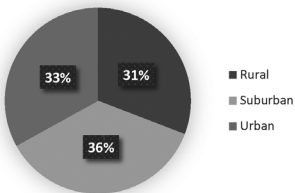
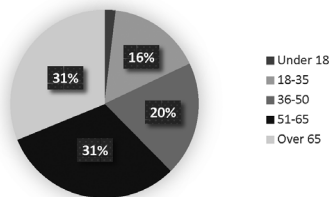
8. As the survey mostly consisted of 'closed' questions, it was agreed that the research would benefit from additional data collection methods that allowed deeper interaction with smaller groups of people. Focus Group discussions were therefore carried out with farmers and young people as both groups had been identified as of particular interest within the remit of the research. Alongside this, a number of semi-structured interviews were carried out with individuals who indicated they would be happy to be involved in this way.
9. The questions for the digital survey are included in Appendix 1, and those used during the focus groups and semi-structured interviews in Appendix 2.

### **Survey results**

10. The survey results are presented below following the order of the questions within the survey. The data was also filtered using demographic data such as age, gender and church role, to identify any significant differences from the data set as a whole. Where differences were identified, they are noted under the relevant question heading.

**Select the age group you belong to.**

2% of respondents were aged under 18, 16% were 18-35, 20% were 36-50, 31% were 51-65 and 31% were aged over 65

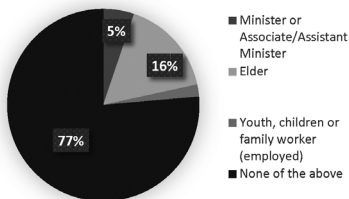


**Which of the following options best describes the location of your congregation?**

31% of respondents identified the location of their congregation as rural, 36% were suburban and 33% were urban.

**Do you hold any of the following leadership positions in your congregation?**

76% of respondents indicated that they held no leadership position within their congregation, 5% held the position of a Minister or Associate/Assistant Minister, 17% were elders and 2% held the position of a youth, children or family worker.

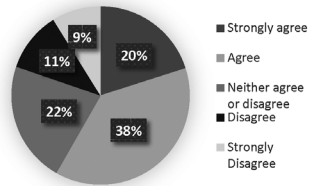




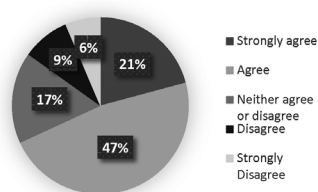
**To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements:**

- **Climate change is a threat to my health and lifestyle**

58% of respondents said that they strongly agree or agree that climate change is a threat to their health and lifestyle, 22% said that they neither agree nor disagree and 20% of respondents said that they disagree or strongly disagree.



*...there's been more flooding locally, and more people connected with it here, either members or people who know people who've been affected by flooding...*

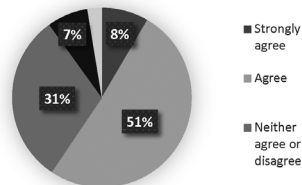


- **My actions contribute to climate change**

68% of respondents said that they strongly agree or agree that their actions contribute to climate change, 17% said that they neither agree nor disagree and 15% said that they disagree or strongly disagree.

- **I know what actions to take to address climate change**

59% of respondents said that they strongly agree or agree that they know what actions to take to address climate change, 31% said that they neither agree or disagree, 10% said that they disagree or strongly disagree.



**Which of the following concerns you most about the impact of climate change?**

The most popular choices when asked about what concerns individuals most about the impact of climate change were impacts on future generations (25%), increase in global inequality and poverty (20%) and more extreme weather events (19%).

*And probably people have started to realise, as I said before, that it's not just down to, you know, big corporations and big countries to do stuff...*

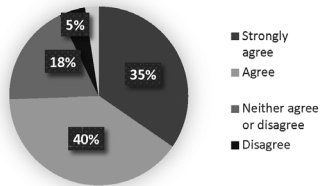
**Who do you believe has most responsibility for addressing climate change?**

The most popular choices when asked who has the most responsibility for addressing climate change were governments, businesses/ industry, and churches.

**To what extent do you agree with the following statements:**

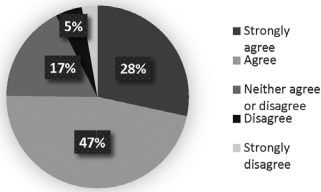
- **My understanding of biblical faith underpins my concern for the environment**

75% of respondents said that they strongly agree or agree that their understanding of biblical faith underpins their concern for the environment, 18% said that they neither agree or disagree and 7% said that they disagree or strongly disagree.



The following demographical differences were noted:

- For those **aged under 35**, 69% said they strongly agree or agree, 22% neither agree or disagree and 9% disagree or strongly disagree.
- For those in **leadership positions**, 83% said they strongly agree or agree, 10% neither agree or disagree and 6% disagree or strongly disagree.
- For **rural respondents**, 70% said they strongly agree or agree, 20% neither agree or disagree and 10% disagree or strongly disagree
- For **farming/agriculture respondents**, 66% said they strongly agree or agree, 23% neither agree or disagree and 12% disagree or strongly disagree

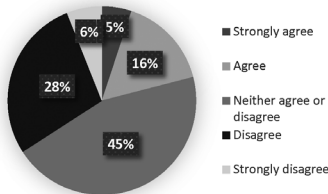
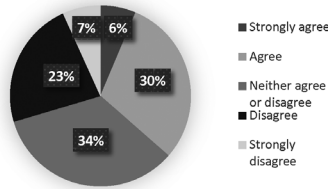


• **Making environmentally sustainable life choices is part of my Christian life**

75% of respondents said that they strongly agree or agree that making environmentally sustainable life choices is part of their Christian life, 17% said they neither agree or disagree and 8% said they disagree or strongly disagree,

• **Creation care is regularly taught in my church**

36% of respondents said that they strongly agree or agree that creation care is regularly taught in their church, 34% said that they neither agree or disagree and 30% said that they disagree or strongly disagree.



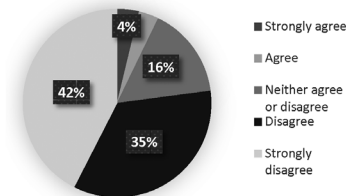
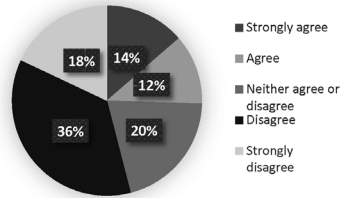
• **My church family is doing enough to address climate change**

21% of respondents said that they strongly agree or agree that their church family is doing enough to address climate change, 45% said that they neither agree or disagree and 34% said that they disagree or strongly disagree.

*Probably in our church there was a bit of an attitude of, you know, really, 'Us changing something isn't really going to make a difference, so let's just not bother'*

• **A focus on climate change within the church is a distraction from evangelism**

26% of respondents said that they strongly agree or agree that a focus on climate change within the church is a distraction from evangelism, 20% said they neither agree or disagree and 54% said that they disagree or strongly disagree.



• **There is no point taking action on climate change because the earth will be destroyed in the final judgement**

7% of respondents said that they strongly agree or agree that there is no point taking action on climate change because the earth will be destroyed in the final judgement, 16% said they neither agree or disagree, and 77% said that they disagree or strongly disagree.

**Does your church encourage you to:**

The most frequently reported actions that the church encourages members to take are: living out our faith in ways that care for the environment (21%), reducing waste at church (21%) and understanding a Biblical basis for creation care (20%).

**What holds you back, as an individual, from doing more to address climate change?**

People reported that the main things that hold individuals back from doing more to address climate change are: not knowing what action to take (28%), the financial cost of making changes (27%), and a lack of time (15%).

**What holds your congregation back from doing more to address climate change?**

People reported that the main things that hold congregations back from doing more to address climate change are: not knowing what action to take (17%), lack of concern among the congregation (16%), and lack of awareness among the congregation (14%).

**Do you, or anyone in your household, work in a field that is likely to be strongly impacted by climate change?**

24% reported that they, or someone in their household, work in a field that is likely to be strongly impacted by climate change. These included: farming/agriculture 14%, construction, 4%, energy 3%, and travel 2%.

*But there's a lot of attitudes in the construction industry... that are wrong... 'Sure this won't make a difference in my lifetime, so let's just work away'.*

*Help to shatter the illusion that farmers are opposed to fixing climate change.*

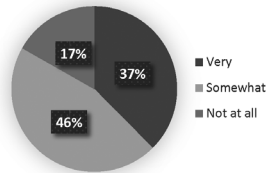
**If you are likely to be impacted by measures to address climate change:**

• **How concerned are you about this?**

Of those working in a field that is likely to be strongly impacted by climate change, 38% of respondents said they were very concerned, 46% were somewhat concerned and 17% were not at all concerned.

The following demographical differences were noted:

- For **under 35's**, 45% are very concerned, 41% somewhat concerned and 14% not at all concerned.
- For **farming/agriculture respondents**, 38% are very concerned, 48% somewhat concerned and 14% not at all concerned.

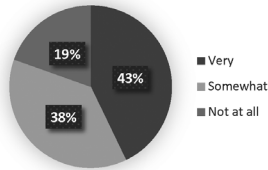


• **How supportive are you of these measures?**

Of those working in a field that is likely to be strongly impacted by climate change, 81% of respondents said that very or somewhat supportive, and 19% said that they were not at all supportive of measures to address climate change.

The following demographical differences were noted:

- For **under 35's**, 68% are very or somewhat and 32% are not at all supportive.
- For **farming/agriculture respondents**, 83% are very or somewhat supportive and 18% are not at all supportive.



*We need the church to support farmers to do what they wish, which is to care for the world.*

*Are people morally happy with what they are paying for goods – the real cost of the exploitation of land and goods?*

**Suggestions and comments summary**

11. A large number of respondents (263) put forward suggestions for action at individual, congregational, presbytery and denominational levels. These ranged from reducing, recycling, repurposing or reusing resources to engaging with government. Various ideas for energy use, conservation and generation were put forward, as well as suggestions for reducing polluting road and air travel. Ways of using church-owned buildings and land in more eco-friendly and sustainable ways were put forward.
12. Respondents proposed changes to shopping habits such as buying more second-hand, eco-friendly and Fairtrade products; demanding the use of less plastic packaging; and exchanging rather than buying goods (school uniforms, for example). Some advocated eating local, seasonal and home-grown food and, more controversially, less meat. Individuals also recommended negotiating discounts on bulk purchases of both food and energy. Further suggestions included avoiding investment in fossil fuels, and using eco-friendly office supplies and internet servers. Encouraging litter picking was a recurring theme.

13. A number of respondents pointed to how awareness of, and involvement in, creation care might be increased at congregational and presbytery levels: by offering training to leaders, signposting resources, appointing a “congregational champion” or “PCI resource person”, or perhaps through the formation of “eco-groups”. The formation of an “expert advisory body” was also suggested.
14. Suggestions were made of potentially useful resources including printed and online sources of information and helpful organisations. Respondents articulated a desire for biblical teaching relating to creation care, for help in navigating the science involved, and for sign-posting to practical action. It was suggested that information around creation care should be integrated into existing means of communication rather than ‘siloed’ within separate, additional resources.
15. Comments ranged from those which were appreciative of the survey and encouraged denomination-wide action, to those which questioned the balance and usefulness of the survey. While many comments expressed deep concern about anthropogenic climate change, none could be said to be alarmist. Scepticism focused primarily on theological and scientific objections: climate action was seen by some as a dangerous distraction from saving souls; others pointed to the complexity involved and questioned the scientific consensus on the causal link between climate change and human activity. A mistrust of ‘mainstream’ media was sometimes expressed and there was a reliance on online sources of information. It was striking that those who dismissed anthropogenic climate change as a conspiracy often underlined their commitment to creation care and protecting the environment. The tone of comments, although sometimes reflecting a degree of frustration, was gracious and respectful throughout.

### **Interviews and focus groups**

16. A number of survey respondents who have family members working in fields likely to be impacted by climate change or by measures to address climate change indicated their willingness to be contacted by email. A Focus Group made up of farmers was brought together and semi-structured telephone interviews were held with individuals involved in the construction industry. Two Focus Groups were also conducted with young people. Notes from the Focus Groups are tabulated in Appendices 3, 4 & 5.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

17. All research is limited by the resources of the research team and the Task Group recognises that its work could have been extended wider and deeper through more interviews and focus groups with different demographics. The Task Group however, is satisfied that it has heard from a sample that is sufficiently representative of the overall membership, and in so doing has fulfilled its remit to gain a baseline understanding of thinking, perceptions and positions around climate change within PCI.

18. Reflecting on the responses from the survey, interview comments and focus group discussions, it is possible draw the following conclusions about the thinking, perceptions and positions around climate change within PCI:
19. The majority are concerned about climate change. Slightly less concern was noted amongst those aged under 35 years old.
20. Most, including those who are sceptical about human-induced climate change, accept the need to care for God's creation and are making lifestyle choices that reflect this. A strong majority understand creation care to be an important part of their Christian discipleship.
21. A significant minority state that creation care is regularly taught in their church but fewer believe that their church family is doing enough to address climate change.
22. A minority believe that a focus on climate change within the church is a distraction from evangelism.
23. There are significant numbers within PCI who have not yet formed an opinion about climate change and the degree of human responsibility for it.
24. Further engagement with those aged under 35 may be helpful to better understand lower levels of concern about climate change among this age group and to help refine PCI's response for this group.
25. It is clear from these findings, and in particular from the numerous suggestions and comments received, that there is a need for sound biblical teaching relating to God's creation and human responsibility for its care. There is also a strong demand for well-grounded information that will generate awareness of, and involvement in, creation care at both individual and congregational levels. PCI could equip people in this regard by helping them to access, recognise and navigate scientific research that is peer-reviewed and trustworthy.
26. This report therefore makes the following recommendations:
  - (a) That the Council ensure that promotion and awareness-raising of creation care across PCI is integrated into its communication strategy.
  - (b) That a creation care conference that offers input regarding the theological basis of creation care, and relevant scientific material, be delivered for PCI during 2025. Efforts should be made to ensure this is accessible to as many people as possible within PCI and in particular, those aged under 35 years old.
  - (c) That physical and/or online resources for PCI be developed offering information on creation care along with signposting to existing resources.
  - (d) That the Council engage with the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to collaborate on the following communication and resourcing for congregations.
  - (e) The inclusion of creation care as an aspect of discipleship within future resourcing where appropriate.

- (f) That congregational resourcing and promotion for Creation Care Sunday is reviewed and refreshed annually.
- (g) That the Council engage with the Council for Public Affairs and offer assistance in its role of advocating in the public square on matters related to climate change and creation care.
- (h) That the Council engage with the Council for Training in Ministry to offer support in developing theological training in creation care for ministers.
- (i) That consideration be given to creating a dedicated role for someone to promote and coordinate matters related to creation care for the denomination.

### **Appendices**

27. The full colour report, including the appendices, can be downloaded from the webpage [www.presbyterianireland.org/stewardshipofcreation](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/stewardshipofcreation) or QR code.



# LINKAGE COMMISSION

Convener: Rev R.K. GRAHAM

Secretary: Mr W.K. BELSHAW

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report summarises the work of the Linkage Commission from April 2023-March 2024. Matters dealt with include the terms of leaves to call granted to 24 charges, reviews of the financial terms in various leaves to call, and reports on the work of the internal panels of the Commission. The Commission is required, among other responsibilities, to determine conditions under which congregations shall be linked, vacant pastorates filled or supplied. The Commission continues to believe that the number of congregations within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are too many to sustain, given the decreasing number of people attending our services. When a vacancy occurs, it is understandable that every congregation wants things to continue the way they have always been, and thus seek permission to call their own minister. However, given the decrease in the number of ministers available to be called, alongside the decreasing numbers in our pews, the Commission has to think long and hard about each situation before granting leave to call. The present and future viability of each congregation must be closely examined. The Commission recognises the conflict that can arise between the desire of a congregation to retain their meeting house, and the reality of decreasing financial sustainability. It is evident that some congregations are beginning to ask hard questions of their viability and future, and are willing to engage with the Commission to look at new ways of doing ministry.

In addition to our regular meetings, we have held a significant number of meetings with Presbyteries through their Strategic Mission Groups, as together we seek to grasp the enormity of the changing demographics within our denomination. The Commission encourages all Presbyteries to continue to assess the viability of every congregation within its bounds.

### **Vacancies**

2. The Commission notes that a number of ministers who are approaching retirement age are taking steps to prepare their kirk sessions and congregations for the impending vacancy. This not only assists the work of the incoming vacancy convener but could reduce the timescales in filling the vacancy. While this practice is to be encouraged, congregations must be aware of the shortfall in ministers to be called, which may mean that, despite their best efforts, some will experience a longer period of vacancy than anticipated.

### **Reimagining Ministry**

3. At the October meeting of the Linkage Commission, members took time to consider the booklet “Reimagining Ministry”. This is a resource to help kirk sessions in vacant situations to think outside the box. The Commission believes that this is a really helpful tool, and asked that the Commission Convener makes this available along with the Commission documents to all vacancy conveners.

### **Tenure Review Concept**

4. One of the tools in the box of the Commission that is used in granting Leave to Call is that of Tenure Review. While some congregations look at a Tenure Review in a negative light, others who have been given Leave to Call under a Tenure Review have found it to be a really useful and encouraging aid to ministry. It has helped them to assess and reassess their ministry. When a minister is called under a Tenure Review, the kirk session is to sit down with the minister and draw up goals/objectives/aims within the first twelve months of ministry. These will form part of the assessment made in the subsequent Tenure Review. It has come to light that not all kirk sessions are sitting down with their new minister and setting these goals. This can leave the review much more difficult to complete. Copies of the Tenure Review guidelines are given to the Convener of the vacancy and the Clerk of Session by the Secretary of the Commission on the day that a congregation is given leave to call with a Tenure Review. The Commission would remind ministers in a Tenure Review that a copy of the goals/objectives/aims is to be lodged with the Clerk of Presbytery and the Convener of the Linkage Commission.

### **Dissolutions and Mergers**

5. One of the sad duties of the Linkage Commission is to give guidance to Presbyteries who have congregations within their bounds who are approaching the end of their life cycle. Through a dissolution or merger, we encourage congregations to end well. We recognise the pain that is involved in leaving the meeting house that has been the family place of worship for generations. However, we know the blessing that is experienced as members become part of a larger congregation and worshipping community. We are grateful to Mr Stephen Gowdy, the General Assembly Solicitor, for the help and guidance he gives, as all the legal entities of the dissolution or merger are drawn together.

### **Church Architecture and Manses Panel**

6. The Church Architecture and Manses Panel continues to meet on the Tuesday before the full meeting of the Linkage Commission. The busy agenda deals with items from improvements to church property to the letting of vacant manses. Government legislation makes the letting of manses more difficult, and we are thankful for the work and wisdom of Graham Patterson our Property Support Manager. Another area that is far

from straightforward is that of church buildings that are listed, and need huge amounts of money spent on them and have a dwindling congregation, and thus have no long term future. The question has been asked, ‘Who wants to buy such a building?’. It is fair to say that if the congregation has merged with another congregation, then that merged congregation does not want the responsibility of looking after the redundant building. The Panel continues to work hard to try and find a way forward for such a situation.

### Leave to Call a Minister

7. This is only a summary – there may well be conditions to the Leave to Call, which are not recorded here. These might include Part-time, Reviewable Tenure, Restricted List, additional income for Minister etc. When a figure is set, the year denotes when Leave to Call was granted. This figure will increase automatically under the annual Stipend Review. The same is the case in respect to Ministerial Allowances.

Congregation	Stipend	Allowances
Enniskillen	AMM plus £2,000 (2023)	£6,701 (2023)
Fahan	50% €AMM (2023)	€5,128 (2023)
Ballynure	£37,000 (2023)	£6,701 (2023)
Clontibret	80% €AMM (2023)	€8,204.80 (2023)
Middletown	20% AMM (2023)	£1,340.20 (2023)
First Dromore	£36,000 (2023)	£6,701 (2023)
Carnlough & Cushendall	35% AMM (2023)	£2,345.45 (2023)
Newtowncrommelin	35% AMM (2023)	£2,345.45 (2023)
St John's Newtownbreda	£45,000 (2023)	£6,701 (2023)
Loughgall	£18,000 (2023)	£3,350.50 (2023)
Tartaraghan	£18,000 (2023)	£3,350.50 (2023)
Ballylinney	£38,500 (2023)	£6,701 (2023)
Castlerock	60% AMM (2023)	£4,020.60 (2023)
Eglinton	£35,500 (2023)	£6,701 (2023)
West Church Bangor Associate	AMM (2023)	£6,254 (2023)
Ravenhill	AMM (2023)	£6,701 (2023)
Legacurry	£44,000 (2024)	£7,036 (2024)
Ballywillan	£45,000 (2024)	£7,036 (2024)
Woodlands, Carrickfergus	£42,000 (2024)	£7,036 (2024)
First Armagh	£30,000 (2024)	£5,277 (2024)

Congregation	Stipend	Allowances
Tassagh	£10,000 (2024)	£1,759 (2024)
Scрабо	AMM (2024)	£7,036 (2024)
Cladymore	£10,000 (2024)	£1,759 (2024)
Portrush	£42,000 (2024)	£7,036 (2024)

### Reviewable Tenure Ministries

8. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Second Newtownhamilton & Creggan was extended for a further five years from 26 September 2023.
9. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Windsor. The congregation was released from any tenure restriction upon the merger of the congregation of Great Victoria Street into the congregation of Windsor on 15 January 2024.
10. Reviewable Tenure Ministry of the Associate in First Ballymena was not renewed but brought to an end on 31 March 2024.

### Stated Supply Arrangements

11. During the past year the Commission has renewed a number of previous nominations for a further period in co-operation with the appropriate Presbytery. New Stated Supply arrangements in Ballee, Second Dromara, Drumgooland & Kilkinamurry, Newtownstewart & Gortin, Rasharkin, Spa & Magherahamlet and O.C. Randalstown were effected.

### Dissolution of Congregations

12. During the year, no congregation was dissolved.

### Dissolution of Linkages

13. The linkage between Waterside and Fahan was dissolved on 23 May 2023.
14. The linkage between Cladymore and Tassagh was dissolved on 23 January 2024.

### Congregations Linked

15. Two new linkages were agreed.

#### First Armagh & Tassagh

##### *Terms of Linkage:*

- (a) That the congregations of First Armagh and Tassagh be linked on 23 January 2024.

- (b) That each congregation shall maintain its separate identity with its own Kirk Session, Congregational Committee and Finances.
- (c) That each congregation shall have the right to appoint representatives to the Superior Courts of the Church.
- (d) That in the choice of a Minister, the two congregations shall act as one congregation and the two kirk sessions as one Kirk Session. That the stated service times each Sunday are:
  - (i) First Armagh 11.45am
  - (ii) Tassagh 10.15am; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
- (e) That the Stipends be set when Leave to Call is granted on the following ratio:
  - (i) First Armagh 75% of Stipend
  - (ii) Tassagh 25% of Stipend
 and Initial Ministerial Allowances per annum;
  - (i) First Armagh £5,277 (2024)
  - (ii) Tassagh £1,759(2024) plus 18p per Business Mile.
- (f) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of First Armagh Manse be borne in the proportions:
  - (i) First Armagh 75%
  - (ii) Tassagh 25%
- (g) That the Minister shall reside in First Armagh Manse.

### **First & Second Markethill and Cladymore**

#### *Terms of Linkage:*

- (a) That the congregations of First & Second Markethill and Cladymore be linked on 23rd January 2024.
- (b) That each congregation shall maintain its separate identity with its own Kirk Session, Congregational Committee and Finances.
- (c) That each congregation shall have the right to appoint representatives to the Superior Courts of the Church.
- (d) That in the choice of a Minister, the two congregations shall act as one congregation and the two kirk sessions as one Kirk Session.
- (e) That the stated service times each Sunday are:
  - (i) First & Second Markethill 11.30am
  - (ii) Cladymore 10.15am; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
- (f) That the Stipends be:
  - (i) First & Second Markethill 75% of £40,000
  - (ii) Cladymore 25% of £40,000
 and Initial Ministerial Allowances per annum;

- (i) First & Second Markethill £5,277 (2024)
- (ii) Cladymore £1,759(2024) plus 18p per Business Mile.
- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of First & Second Markethill Manse be borne in the proportions:
  - (i) First & Second Markethill 75%
  - (ii) Cladymore 25%
- (h) That the Minister shall reside in First & Second Markethill Manse.

### **Congregations Merged**

16. The 2023 General Assembly resolved as follows, “That the congregation of Great Victoria Street and Windsor be merged on 31 December 2023, or other suitable date, on such terms as set by the Linkage Commission.”

#### **Terms of Merger for the congregations of Great Victoria Street and Windsor**

- (a) That the congregation of Great Victoria Street be merged into the congregation of Windsor on 15 January 2024. The name of the merged congregation will for an interim period be known as Windsor, with the recommendation of the new name being brought to the General Assembly 2024.
- (b) That the two kirk sessions become one kirk session and the two Congregational Committees become one Committee until new Committee elections are held.
- (c) That all existing or future assets, including legacies and bequests subsequent to the merger, including property or lands not disposed of, become the property of the merged congregation.
- (d) That the merged congregation will remain responsible for any liabilities of the former congregations.
- (e) That the Ministers Stipend be £40,000 commencing 1 February 2024.
- (f) That the minister lives in Windsor Manse.

The Linkage Commission further agreed:

- 17. That the restriction of the Tenure Review on Windsor be removed upon the merger of the two congregations on 15 January 2024.
- 18. The 2023 General Assembly resolved as follows, “That the congregation of Kirkcubbin be merged into the congregation of Glastry on 31 December 2023, or on other suitable date on terms set by the Linkage Commission”.

#### **Terms of Merger for the congregations of Kirkcubbin and Glastry**

- (a) That the congregation of Kirkcubbin be merged into the congregation of Glastry on 31 December 2023, or other suitable date under the

name “Glastry”.

- (b) That the two kirk sessions become one kirk session and the two Congregational Committees become one Committee until new Committee elections are held.
- (c) That all existing or future assets, including legacies and bequests subsequent to the merger, including property or lands not disposed of, become the property of the merged congregation.
- (d) That the merged congregation will remain responsible for any Kirkcubbin liabilities.
- (e) That the Stipend of the merged congregation be settled when Leave to Call is granted by the Linkage Commission

### **Leave to Call withdrawn**

19. No congregation had their Leave to Call withdrawn.

## **REVIEWS, ALLOWANCES AND FEES PANEL**

### **Reviews**

20. In accordance with Par. 236(2) of the Code, and arising out of other circumstances, the Reviews, Allowances and Fees panel reviewed the stipend of the following congregations:

<b>Presbytery</b>	<b>Congregation</b>	<b>Stipend</b>
<b>Ards</b>	Greyabbey	No Change
<b>Armagh</b>	Craigavon	No Change
<b>Ballymena</b>	Ballykeel	No Change
	High Kirk	No Change
	West Church	No Change
<b>North Belfast</b>	Rosemary	No Change
<b>South Belfast</b>	Malone	No Change
	McCracken Memorial	No Change
<b>East Belfast</b>	Bloomfield	No Change
	Castlereagh	No Change
	Garnerville	No Change
	Granshaw	No Change
<b>Carrickfergus</b>	Woodlands	No Change

Presbytery	Congregation	Stipend
Coleraine and Limavady	Ballysally	
	Ballywatt	No Change
	First Garvagh	No Change
	Hazelbank	No Change
Derry and Donegal	Ballyarnett & Knowhead	No Change
	Magheramason	No Change
Down	Downpatrick & Ardglass	No Change
	Kilmore	No Change
Dromore	Cargycreevy & Loughaghery	No Change
	Legacurry	No Change
Dublin and Munster	Clontarf & Scots	No Change
	Maynooth	No Change
Iveagh	Garvagh & Anaghlon	No Change
Monaghan	Clones, Stonebridge, Ballyhobridge & Newbliss	No Change
Newry	Annalong	No Change
Route	First Ballymoney	No Change
Templepatrick	First Ballyeaston	No Change
Tyrone	Castledawson & Curran	No Change
	Dungannon	No Change

### Supply Fee

21. The level of Supply Fee is determined by the Code, Par. 238, and for 2024 this is £124 (€179) or £83 (€119) where only a single service is supplied in one congregation.

Expenses should be paid in accordance with the rate set for attendance at Assembly Councils, currently:

NI – 18p per mile

ROI – 26 cents per mile/16 cents per kilometre

## **CHURCH ARCHITECTURE AND MANSES PANEL**

22. The Panel continued to consider applications from congregations wishing to make changes to properties in accordance with Par 57(6) & Par 82(4) of the Code. These ranged from construction of new churches, halls and manses, demolition works, structural alterations, etc., to the removal of pews enabling improved wheelchair access, provision of new audio-visual systems, designs for memorials, windows, artificial lighting, seating/furnishings requisite for public worship. Proposals are authorized successively by congregation, presbytery and Linkage Commission.
23. When considering applications from congregations which seek to make adaptations to Listed buildings, the Panel continue to balance the building's Listing with the congregation's missional requirements in line with our Memorandum of Understanding/Partnering Agreement with the Department for Communities, which was drawn up to assist in securing our ongoing Ecclesiastical Exemption.
24. The Panel has also been involved with a variety of manse accommodation matters and in responding to requests for rental of vacant manses. The approvals of congregation, presbytery and Linkage Commission are required and the completion of appropriate legal agreements is essential. The maximum period to rent a manse is six months (after which permission must be sought again). Presbyteries in Northern Ireland have been notified of the legal advice received from the General Assembly solicitor that congregations should not publicly advertise the letting of their manses via an Estate Agent and/or other forms of public notice in Northern Ireland. Private lettings are still permitted.
25. The Panel have also encouraged Presbytery Clerks that in periods of vacancy and consultation, it is recommended that congregations should seek the advice of a thermal energy assessor to improve, where possible, the energy efficiency of their manses and make necessary improvements in line with their available finances. Congregations should ideally plan and budget accordingly for anticipated new EPC regulations that legislates for landlords and developers to provide accommodation that meets a minimum thermal standard in order for it to be sold or let.

WILLIAM WATT, Chair

## **ADDITIONAL PASTORAL PERSONNEL AND AUXILIARY MINISTRY PANEL**

26. In the past year the Linkage Commission approved the creation of 34 new

- Additional Pastoral Personnel (APP) posts, the extension or amendment of 13 existing posts and the creation of 1 Auxiliary Ministry post.
27. 'Guidelines for Congregations and Presbyteries Regarding the Employment of Additional Pastoral Personnel' incorporating 'Guidelines for kirk sessions on General Employment Issues' are available from the panel convener and the PCI website. The APP guidelines outline the necessary steps kirk sessions should take when considering the creation of an APP post. The approval of the HR support provider, presbytery and the Linkage Commission is required before any new APP post can be advertised.
  28. The approval of the HR support provider, presbytery and the Linkage Commission is required to extend or amend an existing APP post. kirk sessions are asked to note carefully when an existing fixed-term contract concludes so that requests to extend an existing post are not made late.
  29. With regard to job titles for APP posts, kirk sessions should note that the Linkage Commission allows flexibility in choosing a suitable job title for an APP post and "most titles will be considered by the commission. However, the Commission will not give permission for the use of 'Officer' or 'Pastor' as a job title. Furthermore, the titles 'Director', 'Associate' and 'Assistant' will only be considered if the kirk session can justify that the job description strongly warrants the use of the title." (Linkage Commission May 2018)
  30. APP Salary Scales for 2024 were agreed by the Linkage Commission at its meeting in November 2023. They are available from the panel convener and the PCI website. kirk sessions are required to use the Salary Scales when creating a new APP post.
  31. Guidelines for creating Congregational Auxiliary Ministry posts are available from the Convener of the APPAM Panel. Proposals to create such posts should normally come to the Linkage Commission through presbytery. Auxiliary Ministers are commissioned to work, normally on a part time basis, under the supervision of a Minister of Word and Sacrament. While it is primarily a Ministry of the Word, some pastoral duties may be associated with such posts.
  32. Before employing an organist (or similar), kirk sessions should draw up a statement of main terms and conditions, job description, personnel specification and advertisement. The approval of presbytery is required before creating such a post. Guidelines and templates are available from the panel convener. The HR support provider should always be consulted.
  33. Ministers are reminded to seek approval from presbytery and the Linkage Commission before undertaking paid public appointments ('Extra-Parochial Work'). This kind of work has been defined as 'Remunerated work outside of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland undertaken by a parish minister that amounts to more than six hours in any week.' A return form, available from the panel convener, should normally be returned before the appointment begins and then annually by 15 September.

BRIAN MCMANUS, Convener

## PARISH BOUNDS PANEL

34. Four decisions of the 2023 General Assembly had implications for parish bounds. These decisions and associated recommendations are set out in the following four paragraphs.
35. That the congregations of Wexford and Enniscorthy be dissolved on 31 December 2023, or other suitable date, on terms set by the Linkage Commission. That the assets realised be distributed according to rules. [MGA 2023, page 45, Resolution 1.] Following consultation with the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster, and with the Council for Mission in Ireland, it is recommended that the previous parish bounds of Wexford and Enniscorthy be designated a Presbytery Mission Area.
36. That the congregation of Ballymote be dissolved on 31 December 2023, or other suitable date, on terms set by the Linkage Commission. That the assets realised be distributed according to rules. [MGA 2023, page 45, Resolution 2.] Following consultation with the Presbytery of Monaghan, new parish bounds are recommended for Sligo and for Ballina and Killala; and, following consultation with the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster, new parish bounds are recommended for Corboy, as set out in Appendix 1.
37. That the congregations of Great Victoria Street and Windsor be merged on 31 December 2023, or other suitable date, on such terms as set by the Linkage Commission. [MGA 2023 page 45, Resolution 4.] Following consultation with the Presbytery of South Belfast, new parish bounds are recommended for Malone and Fisherwick, as set out in Appendix 2. It is also recommended that the parish bounds of the newly merged congregation (at the time of writing designated ‘Windsor’) be the same as the previous parish bounds of Great Victoria Street. Presbytery is to give further consideration to the unallocated area within the previous parish bounds of Windsor, which lies towards Richview.
38. That the congregation of Kirkcubbin be merged into the congregation of Glastry on 31 December 2023, or on other suitable date on terms set by the Linkage Commission. It is recommended that the two previous sets of parish bounds be merged into one.

JIM STOTHERS, Convener

## APPENDIX 1

### Parish Bounds for Ballina & Killala, Sligo, and Corboy

**MONAGHAN**

Sligo 2024

From Sligo/Leitrim boundary at coast, by line to Kinlough, then along south shore of Lough Melvin to meet Leitrim/Fermanagh boundary at G 937508, then along County Leitrim boundary to where it meets County Cavan at H 035394, then by line to Dowra, to Leitrim/Roscommon boundary in Lough Allen, south along this boundary to point at M 944 975, then by line west to meet Roscommon/Sligo boundary at M 780 975 and continuing along this boundary to the Sligo/Mayo boundary, and following it to the N17, north along the N17, the L4503 to meet the R294, and then by line to Portavade and along coast to Sligo/Leitrim boundary.

#### **Ballina & Killala 2024**

All of Co. Mayo and that part of county Sligo west of a line from Portavade to the junction of the L4503 with the R294, west of Tobercurry, and then along the L4503 and N17 to the Sligo/Mayo border.

### **DUBLIN AND MUNSTER**

#### **Corboy 2024**

All of Co. Longford; Co. Roscommon south of a line drawn from a point on the county boundary at M 944 975 to a point at M 780 975 and north of M6 motorway.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Parish Bounds for Malone, Fisherwick, and Windsor**

#### **SOUTH BELFAST**

##### **Malone 2024**

From point on Malone Road between Derryvolgie Avenue and Windsor Park (J 3310 7185) between backs of houses to Lisburn Road between Derryvolgie Avenue and Windsor Park (J 3256 7204), north along Lisburn Road to point at J 3264 7218, then by line to point opposite south-east corner of football stadium (J 3235 7227), along boundary of football stadium and playing fields to Boucher Road (J 3189 7244) to M1 Motorway at J 3167 7253. South along M1 Motorway to J 3017 7087, by line to Beechmount Park (J 3085 7043) along Beechmount Park to Lisburn Road (J 3089 7038) to Priory Park (J 3085 7034), south, excluding housing in Priory Park, then east along golf club boundary to Harberton Park (J 3175 6995) along Drummond Park and line extending to Shrewsbury Park to Balmoral Avenue (J 3218 7044) to point on Malone Road between Derryvolgie Avenue and Windsor Park (J 3310 7185).

**Fisherwick 2024**

From junction of University Road and University Square (J 3347 7276) along University Square to Botanic Avenue (J 3371 7273) and College Park footpath to Botanic Gardens (J 3369 7258) along boundary to River Lagan (J 3409 7228) up the river to a point where a line extended from the end of the Bladon Drive would meet it (J 3409 7038) and thence by Bladon Drive to Malone Road (J 3268 7075), north along Malone Road to point on Malone Road between Derryvolgie Avenue and Windsor Park (J 3310 7185), between backs of houses to Lisburn Road between Derryvolgie Avenue and Windsor Park (J 3256 7204), north along Lisburn Road to City Hospital boundary at Dunluce Avenue (J 3308 7271), then housing on both sides of Lisburn Road (but excluding City hospital) to Bradbury Place over railway (J 3350 7303), along University Road to University Square (J 3347 7276).

**Windsor 2024**

From Bradbury Place at J 3350 7303 west along railway line to follow railway line to nearest point to Westlink A12 at J 3291 7346, north along Westlink A12 to Grosvenor Road (J 3302 7385), to Great Victoria Street (J 3352 7390), along Great Victoria Street to Bruce Street (J 3356 7360), along Bruce Street, then Bankmore Street to Maryville Street Street (J 3384 7353), along Maryville Street (excluding buildings) to Donegall Pass (J 3377 7324), along Donegall Pass (excluding buildings) to Shaftsbury Square (J 3357 7320), then to railway line at Bradbury Place at J 3350 7303.



# COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND

Convener: Very Rev Dr FRANK SELLAR

Secretary: Mr RICK HILL

## INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The report covers the period from July 2023 to April 2024.
2. There have been no changes within any of the Committee Conveners, with each continuing to serve with passion, vision and commitment in their respective remits. Mr Rick Hill has continued his work as Secretary to the Council with diligence.
3. With prayerful dependence, the Council seeks to deliver the components of its remit:
  - (a) Developing PCI's strategic priorities in all-age mission in Ireland, and planning initiatives at GA level where appropriate.
  - (b) Considering new church development and church planting.
  - (c) Overseeing all aspects of the Home and Irish Missions, including the Irish Mission Fund.
  - (d) Overseeing the deployment and ongoing support of deaconesses.
  - (e) Supporting a chaplaincy service in the Forces, Hospitals and Hospices, and Prisons.
  - (f) Supporting mission and ministry in Universities and Colleges through chaplaincy services.
4. The Council met twice in person for routine business and once online to progress a pressing matter. Most meetings of the Council and its various Committees, Panels and Task Groups were held in-person with a facility to join online.
5. The Staff Team has at times operated at reduced capacity in the past year following the departure of Miss Christine Craig as Personal Assistant in September 2023 and some challenges in recruitment. However, the Council is well-served through the staff working within the Mission Department and now functions at healthier staffing levels following role adjustments and recruitment. Miss Anna Currie has bolstered the administrative team and Mrs Joyce Craig began working in March 2024 in the role of Personal Assistant. Mr Neil Harrison now reports fully to the Mission Department in his role as Mission Development Officer, helping to increase the Council's executive function. Mrs Pip Florit commenced Maternity Leave in March 2024, with Mr Donald Garvie taking up the post of Mission Support Officer (Partnerships), Maternity Cover, soon after.
6. This annual report will reveal progress in the ongoing work of the Council,

particularly in new developments within some Home Mission vacancies and strategic matters relating to Church Planting, the International Meeting Point and Rural Chaplaincy. Proposals were brought to the General Council regarding a minor reconfiguration of the Council's Committee structure. These relate to the merging of the Healthcare, Prisons and Forces Chaplaincy Committee and the Universities and Colleges Chaplaincy Committee into one collective Committee for Chaplaincy. This was agreed by the General Council and the newly merged Committee is reflected within the Nominations booklet.

7. The main focus of the Council's report to the Assembly in 2024 is:
  - (a) Developments in Home Mission congregations, particularly in relation to vacancies and the implementation of the Home Mission review.
  - (b) Recommendations regarding future arrangements for the International Meeting Point and the Rural Chaplaincy Project.
  - (c) The committed work of all our chaplains and the Council's ongoing commitment to support their vital ministry.
8. The Council continues to be thankful for the support given to it via the United Appeal for Mission and is encouraged by the clear ways in which the Holy Spirit is at work through such a variety of people serving across this island and pointing people to Jesus.

*The Council Secretary writes:*

9. At this Assembly, the Very Rev Dr Frank Sellar completes his term as Convener of the Council, extended by one year due to the handover of Council Secretary. The Council is indebted to the significant contribution Frank has brought over the past six years, particularly in the wisdom, vision and graciousness he has exhibited in this role. It was clear that Frank carried the Council's work deeply in his heart and, while no doubt he will continue to support, encourage and pray for the church's mission in Ireland, we want to wish him well as he lays down these duties and seeks other areas of future service.

## **HOME MISSION, IRISH MISSION**

## AND DEACONESS COMMITTEE

### Home Mission

Directory of Home and Urban Mission charges as at April 2024.

Minister	Charge
<b>Home Mission</b>	
Rev Michael Anderson	Arklow
Rev Gunther Andrich	Irvinestown, Pettigo and Tempo
Rev Rodney Beacom	Lisbellaw, Lisnaskea, Maguiresbridge and Newtownbutler
Rev Damien Burke	Drogheda
Rev Andy Carroll	Donabate
Rev David Clarke	Sligo
Rev Richie Cronin	Trinity Cork and Aghada
Rev Jonathan Currie	Kilkenny
Rev Al Dunlop	Howth and Malahide
Rev Daryl Edwards	Drum, Cootehill and Kilmount
Rev Helen Freeburn	Galway
Rev Andrew Gill	Blackrock and Bray
Rev John Hanson	Clones, Stonebridge, Ballyhobridge and Newbliss (part-time)
Rev William Hayes	Tullamore
Rev Dr Keith McCrory	Maynooth
Rev Gary McDowell	Greystones
Rev Martin McNeely	Fahan (with additional missional duties)
Rev Jean Mackarel	Drumkeeran, Killesandra, Cavan and Bellasis
Rev William Montgomery	Fermoy and Cahir
Rev Philip Poots	Moville, Greenbank, Carndonagh and Malin
Rev Jonathan Porter	Dundalk
Rev Mark Proctor	Naas (pt) with chaplaincy at Tallaght Hospital

Minister	Charge
Rev Stephen Rea	Carlow and Athy
Vacant	Ballina and Killala
Vacant	Ballycastle
Vacant	Carrigart and Dunfanaghy (with additional missional duties)
Vacant	Corboy and Mullingar
Vacant	Donegal and Stranorlar
Vacant	Wexford Church Re-Development
Vacant	Kells
<b>Urban Mission</b>	
Rev Rodney Cameron	St Colomba's, Lisburn
Rev Mervyn Gibson	Westbourne
Rev Danny Rankin	Strand, Belfast
Rev Lachlan Webster	Craigavon
Vacant	Belvoir
Vacant	Rathcoole
Vacant	Taughmonagh

10. At the time of writing there were ten vacancies within the Home and Urban Mission. Rev Stephen Richmond resigned his charge in Donegal and Stranorlar in September 2023, while Rev Daniel Reyes Martin resigned from the charge of Corboy and Mullingar in December 2023. Assessments of both charges have been completed and progress is anticipated.
11. Following the retirement of Rev Robert Love, the congregation of Taughmonagh was declared vacant in February 2024. The Council is engaging with the South Belfast Presbytery regarding next steps.
12. Rev Martin McNeely was installed in the Home Mission and inducted into the charge of Fahan (with additional missional duties) on 3 March 2024.
13. Following the closure of the congregations of Enniscorthy and Wexford, proposals outlining future plans for the South East of Ireland were approved by the Linkage Commission, with the post of 'Wexford Church Re-Development' duly advertised. Interviews were conducted and a Church Planting assessment was satisfactorily completed, with a call issued by the Council to Rev David Curran in March 2024. It is hoped this work will commence in September 2024.
14. With regards to ongoing vacancies, the vacancy of Dunfanaghy and Carrigart continues to be advertised with no candidate yet appointed, while

the vacancy in Ballina and Killala is being considered by the Presbytery of Monaghan following the closure of Ballymote. Recommendations have been offered by the Council and a temporary Assistant to the Convener will offer consistency and support in the coming months.

15. Two applications were received from congregations seeking to enter the Home and Urban Mission. Following endorsement from the relevant Presbyteries, the congregations of Ballycastle and Rathcoole were received into the Home (and Urban) Mission in January 2024. The Council is working with the leadership of both congregations to consider the most appropriate next steps with regards to their ministry and mission.
16. The Council was represented on Presbytery consultation panels in Trinity Cork and the Clones group, and on a Tenure Review Panel in St. Columba's.
17. An annual gathering for Home Mission Ministers took place in County Meath on 23–24 April 2024, with the Moderator and his wife in attendance, alongside Bible teaching from Bishop Ken Clarke. This has been considered a worthwhile venture and will become an important feature of the Council's support for ministers within the Home Mission in the future.
18. The Home Mission Review Implementation Task Group has now completed its work with a direction of travel set in terms of pathway assessments, follow-up regarding accompaniment and mentoring of ministers. This piece of work will now become a standing item on the Committee's agenda and be actioned by the Mission Development Officer. The Task Group, and in particular Mrs Pip Florit, were thanked for their work and discharged.
19. A team of mentors has begun to offer accompaniment for Ministers within the Home Mission, where desired. All ministers in new Home Mission charges will now be assigned a mentor for the first two years of their charge.
20. Following approval of the role of 'Mission Pioneer' by the 2023 General Assembly, a process of recruitment, application and assessment was agreed by the Committee. There was an encouraging number of applicants in response to advertisement for this new role and, after initial interviews, five individuals were assigned pathways of apprenticeship and training which are now to be undertaken. It is envisaged that these individuals will be ready to be deployed into new missional roles from the Autumn onwards.

## **IRISH MISSION WORKERS AND DEACONESSES PANEL**

Directory of Irish mission workers and the location of their service (April 2024)

Name	Location
Tom Dowling	Kilkenny
Keith Preston	International Meeting Point, Belfast
Philip Whelton	Arklow

#### Directory of deaconesses and the location of their service (April 2024)

Name	Location
Sonya Anderson	Shore Street, Donaghadee
Paula Burrows	Ballygrainey
Rachel Cubitt	Whiteabbey
Louise Davidson	Deaconess Without Charge
Eleanor Drysdale	Wellington, Ballymena
Joanne Dunlop	Chaplaincy Team – Antrim and Craigavon Hospitals
Heidi England	Railway Street, Lisburn
Sharon Heron	International Meeting Point, Belfast
Roberta Irvine	Elmwood, Lisburn
Heather McCracken	Belfast Health and Social Care Trust with additional duties in chaplaincy in Musgrave Park Hospital
Tracey Nicholl	St James', Ballymoney
Hazel Reid	First Broughshane with additional duties in chaplaincy in Causeway Hospital
Sylvia Santos Bryce	West Church, Ballymena
Rosemary Spiers	Greenwell Street, Newtownards

21. The Irish Mission Worker and Deaconess Panel has continued in its work, ably supported by Ms Helen Johnston who offers important support to current deaconesses and Irish mission workers.
22. Mr David Boyd retired as an Irish Mission Worker in November 2023 and was thanked for his many years of service. Permission was granted to Mr Keith Preston to further extend working in his role for up to one more year until March 2025.
23. Mrs Louise Davidson became a Deaconess Without Charge in February 2024 and is assisting with the ongoing work in South Belfast Friendship House on a part-time, temporary basis.

24. A process for Three-Year Review for Deaconesses and Irish Mission Workers has been updated, which is hoped to be rolled out in Autumn 2024.
25. A gathering was organised for Irish Mission Workers, Deaconesses, Community Outreach Workers and Mission Project staff on 13-14 May 2024, with input from James and Heather Cochrane.
26. The Panel noted an update from the Deaconess Selection & Training Panel (CTM) regarding the progress of the two deaconesses currently in training, who are both progressing towards completion of their course of study and placement. An advertisement for deaconess training did not produce a sufficient pool of applicants in order to progress the process, therefore the commencement date of training has been moved to September 2025 leaving time to readvertise this opportunity. An information day will be held in Union Theological College in June 2024 to promote this.

PAUL JAMIESON, Convener

## **INTERNATIONAL MEETING POINT MANAGEMENT PANEL**

27. The International Meeting Point Mission Project continues to bear much Kingdom fruit and yield many testimonies of God at work, which is a great encouragement.
28. The Panel is indebted to the staff and volunteers working under the leadership of the Project Leader Keith Preston. The Panel is deeply appreciative of the dedication and hard work of the whole IMP team, particularly as they engage with the increasing opportunities which come with the growing number of visitors to the Project, and reach out through English classes, meal provision, Bible studies, Alpha Courses, advice services and the provision of food and clothing. The Panel is also indebted to the Council Secretary and Mission Department Staff for their dedicated support of the IMP Project.
29. The Panel records its gratitude to South Belfast Presbytery for the very significant investment, including finances, made during the past 10 years of the work in South Belfast. The Panel also records its deep appreciation for the support of the North Belfast Presbytery Mission Fund to the work in North Belfast.
30. The International Meeting Point Project is the largest single draw on the Council's United Appeal allocation. The costs of the South Belfast site are now being fully funded by Council, due to the ending of the South Belfast Presbytery's annual donations. This additional financial cost makes it necessary for additional funding to be sought to replace the previous contributions of South Belfast Presbytery towards both property and personnel.
31. A strategic review with regard to the future direction and development

of migrant ministry within Ireland and the management arrangements of International Meeting Point's current projects has been conducted by a Task Group under the Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee.

32. The Panel commends to the prayers of the Church, the entire IMP Project, including staff and volunteers.

STEPHEN SIMPSON, Convener

## **SOUTH BELFAST FRIENDSHIP HOUSE MANAGEMENT PANEL**

33. The past year has been one of significant change within South Belfast Friendship House. Rev William Harkness left his post following his call to a new congregation in June 2023, creating a vacant Project Leader position. In the interim period the work of the project was excellently maintained through the dedication of the Children's Worker, Mrs Carol Reid, ably supported by Rev Lesley-Ann Wilson and a team of volunteers.
34. Following advertisement and interviews, Mr Robert Dalzell was appointed to the role of Mission Project Leader in October 2023. Some of this role also relates to the congregation of Windsor in aspects of youth and children's ministry under the direction of Rev Ivan Steen, with 20% of time and costs apportioned.
35. The work of the house has developed well since this appointment with the weekly offering of programmes serving the local community particularly among children. Some policies and procedures were refreshed in regards to volunteer induction and Taking Care checks.
36. There are plans to add a new teenage programme in due course with volunteers being sought to develop this. A PCI Impact Team is being planned for the summer, particularly focused on teenage work.
37. Mrs Carol Reid commenced a period of Maternity Leave in January 2024 and Miss Abbi White began in the role of Children's Worker (Maternity Cover) from February 2024. The team is also currently being supplemented by Mrs Louise Davidson working on a part-time, temporary basis.
38. The Panel is thankful for the continued support of PW in this project.

ELLEN HILLEN, Convener

## **WEST BELFAST SPECIAL MINISTRY MANAGEMENT PANEL**

39. The work of Rev David Moore has been encouraging with progress including the establishment of a small core team who meet regularly together and a weekly Bible study on the Falls Road.
40. An Exhibition was held as part of a local festival in August 2023 sharing

about Presbyterian history in West Belfast with good attendance and engagement from across the community. This was followed up in February 2024 to re-launch a book on the history of Presbyterianism in West Belfast, with good connections made.

41. Miss Toni Basset has been appointed as a part-time worker to work among refugees in the area for up to 16 hours per week. This work has focused on developing relationships among migrant families.
42. Occasional Sunday worship services have been held, including a Carol Service and a Palm Sunday celebration. It is hoped to develop these into more regular gatherings in the year ahead.
43. Financial arrangements continue to grow, with donations now almost covering 50% of the post.

BEN WALKER, Convener

JOHNSTON LAMBE, Committee Convener

## **STRATEGY FOR MISSION COORDINATION COMMITTEE**

44. The Committee held an ‘away day’ in September 2023 to reflect more fully on the current strategic priorities of the Council. Reports were considered regarding missional need in the Republic of Ireland, church planting and migrants ministry, with the following 4 priorities identified at a subsequent meeting and affirmed as key facets of the Committee’s priorities in the coming years:
  - (a) Responding to the rapid expansion of the major cities of Ireland, in particular Dublin and its outer ring, with a greater resourcing of ministry and mission via the provision of ministers, additional mission roles and mission projects.
  - (b) Helping potential resource congregations to consider the part they can play in the planting of new congregations.
  - (c) The commitment to strengthening the core of existing Home Mission congregations including eldership, membership, property and enabling of mission, in collaboration with other councils as appropriate.
  - (d) The strategic development of mission among migrants across Ireland.
45. While some of the above priorities will be transmitted to other Committees and Panels within the Council, point (a) related to responding to the rapid expansion in Ireland’s population in our resourcing, has become a standing item on the Committee’s agenda. Following consideration of an initial discussion paper, it was agreed the Council would research additional resourcing of ministry and mission in strategic locations in the Republic of Ireland and consult with representatives of the Dublin and Munster Presbytery to help discern next steps towards this.

46. Assessments were carried out in several Home and Urban Mission congregations, namely the vacancies Corboy and Mullingar, Donegal and Stranorlar, and Taughmonagh, as well as consulting with Donabate regarding future ministry requirements in Balbriggan.
47. With regards to the Urban Mission Network, a group of 14 ministers, deaconesses and outreach workers attended a 3-day conference in Londonderry in June 2023. Led by John Risbridger, this was a time of encouragement and fresh thinking for leaders who may feel isolated as they serve in challenging places. The Network also met in Strand in November for a morning gathering led by Andy Prime and again in February in Ballyloughan led by Carl Knightly, with both events attended by 30–40 people and greatly appreciated.
48. Following encouragement from the General Assembly for the Council to develop a more strategic approach to migrants' ministry, an initial 'Welcoming the Stranger' event was held in Drogheda in September 2023 with around 60 people in attendance. This led to some helpful discussions, with a similar forum-style event being considered for the future, elsewhere on the island.

## **CHURCH PLANTING PANEL**

49. The Panel continues to consider how to best envision the denomination regarding the importance of new churches. To that end, a church planting handbook was launched in the autumn with hard copies distributed to Presbytery Clerks and a digital version made available online. This sets out a vision for church planting with next steps for both individuals and congregations to consider.
50. An encouraging development has been the launch of a new Church Planters' Network, specifically for those involved in leadership within current and active church plants within the PCI. Three network days were held in the last year with input offered by Rev Keith McCrory and Rev James and Mrs Heather Cochrane. Feedback has been positive and it is felt by the Panel that this will be an important form of accompaniment in the years ahead for those engaged in church planting.
51. A 'Church Planting Taster Day' was held in Belfast on 21 October 2023, with over 80 people in attendance and encouraging engagement. The morning involved a mix of Bible teaching, personal stories and practical advice, as well as highlighting the new handbook and pathway for a Mission Pioneer. A similar event will be planned elsewhere in Ireland in the year ahead.
52. Some of the teaching content from the Taster Day highlighted the idea that church planting helps to 'reduce the distance' in terms of people's proximity to the gospel and accessibility to the church. In particular, the Panel believes that new church development within the PCI will reduce

geographical distance (developing our presence in towns which lack a strong reformed witness), reduce generational distance (engaging younger people more effectively) and reduce cultural distance (intentionally shaped models tailored to specific demographics).

53. Missiologist Peter Wagner wrote that “the single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches.” While some may wonder if the resourcing of new churches is at the expense of maintaining existing congregations, it would be a mistake to assume we need to choose between church planting and church renewal. Strange as it may seem, the planting of new churches can help to revitalise older churches in the vicinity and renew the whole body of Christ, as they produce new converts and even new leaders who may end up in more established churches for various reasons. Our attitude as a denomination to new church development may be a litmus test of whether our mindset is geared to our own institutional turf or to the overall flourishing of God’s kingdom. Therefore, it would be unhelpful to become too focused on personal loss at the expense of wider gains, trusting that the planting of new church communities might well be one of the key ways we remain missionally faithful for generations to come across this island.

MARTIN McNEELY and TOM GILLIAM, Co-Conveners

## **MISSION GRANTS PANEL**

54. The Mission Grants Panel approved a number of grant applications over the past year, with funding given towards outreach personnel in Glendermott, High Street Antrim, Maynooth, New Mossley, Portstewart and Trinity, Cork and Aghada.
55. Some adjustments to the on-boarding and ongoing development of community outreach workers have been made, with all new workers meeting with the Mission Development Officer in their first three months of post and a training grant of £300 offered for use in the first three years.
56. The volume of requests has significantly increased and, having reached capacity in the current budget, new grant applications have been paused for the rest of 2024.
57. Some posts have proved difficult to fill and the Panel maintains the principle that a grant offer is valid for one year. If the grant has not been drawn down at the end of one year due to difficulties in recruiting staff, CMI will conduct a review with the applicant. An extension of one further year may be offered.
58. Recommendations will be considered with regard to the process of grant provision, with particular considerations regarding the number of application windows, the assessing of priorities and adjustments in the percentage of grant funding offered to non-home mission congregations.

59. Recommendations were also approved regarding ways that the Panel could encourage different models of mission. These include some posts being set as 5-year terms rather than 3; the option of giving decreasing grants each year to encourage congregational buy in and sustainability; a training budget being included in applications to better equip personnel; an induction for all workers with Mission Department staff and the production of a brochure to highlight examples of creative mission projects.
60. The Irish Mission Fund Grant and the Mission Support Grant have now merged into one single grant fund, in line with a Council decision, and the capacity to support church planting or pioneer mission projects has been increased through the reallocation of some Irish Mission Funds.

KENNY HANNA, Convener

## **BELFAST CONFERENCE**

61. The Conference has continued to consider and provide advisory comment on areas of ministry and mission in Belfast. In particular, the Conference reflected upon how it might enable its advisory comment to land better in a congregation with some adjustments in practice agreed.
62. Following referrals from Presbyteries, advisory comment was passed on to the Linkage Commission regarding the vacancies in two congregations.
63. With the current Chairperson stepping back, it is hoped a new Chairperson will be identified by the autumn.

ALASTAIR DUNLOP, Chairperson

## **REIMAGINING MINISTRY TASK GROUP**

64. The Task Group has sought to develop a tool that offers imaginative possibilities for ministry and mission. Following significant work, the Task Group produced a booklet entitled 'Reimagining Ministry', in collaboration with the Linkage Commission, to assist kirk sessions and vacancy conveners trying to imagine a different future where necessary. This was passed to the Linkage Commission for it to distribute as appropriate.
65. A toolkit of resources is also being prepared in conjunction with the Council for Congregational Life and Witness.
66. Given that its substantive work had been completed and direction of travel set in terms of future collaboration with another council, the Task Group was thanked and discharged with its Convener becoming a 'sit and

deliberate' member of the Committee until the toolkit is completed.

KATHRYN VINER, Convener

## **MISSION AS A MINORITY TASK GROUP**

67. This Task Group seeks to research and reflect on helpful principles and practices for the effective mission of our church in areas where Presbyterians represent a significant minority and the predominant cultural background is from the Catholic, Nationalist or Republican (CNR) community. In doing so, the Task Group will aim to share recommendations with the Committee that can be actioned and shared widely in due course as appropriate.
68. The initial work of the Task Group focused on collating examples of good practice from within PCI that could guide the Council in its future, as well as reflecting on theology and doctrine.
69. An event hosted by the Moderator in April 2024 entitled 'Confident as a Minority' gave the Task Group an opportunity to reflect further on its work before any final report was agreed. A paper summarising this research with a number of identified principles and associated practices, along with recommendations, is currently in draft form and it is hoped will be completed in due course.

DAVID MOORE, Convener

## **IMP FUTURE TASK GROUP**

70. The remit of this Task Group was to conduct a strategic, considered and detailed review of the future direction of Migrant Ministry within Ireland and the future management arrangements of International Meeting Point's current projects. The key focus was to determine the best staffing arrangements post-retirement of the current Project Leader, as well as consider how similar ministries could develop elsewhere in Ireland.
71. The Task Group met with staff members of the International Meeting Point and consulted with some volunteers and Panel Members to help form an accurate assessment of need. The Task Group was encouraged by the clearly growing and developing work within the International Meeting Point in both locations in Belfast.
72. Recent statistics suggest that the need regarding migrants and those seeking asylum continues to grow significantly, not just in Belfast but across the whole island. The Task Group considers reaching out to those making Ireland their new home a God-given opportunity for the church today and believes that developing new IMP centres is of the utmost and urgent importance.
73. Central to the effectiveness of the International Meeting Point is the mix

of meeting social needs of migrants while keeping evangelism central. Maintaining this healthy balance between social action and gospel proclamation is both key to the fruitfulness of IMP and vital to protect in the future. This approach is described by the ‘Cape Town Commitment’ that arose from the 2010 Lausanne Congress: *“Integral mission is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world, we betray the Word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the Word of God, we have nothing to bring to the world.”*

74. Some key aspects of structure, sustainability and staffing became clear to the Task Group and these are outlined in the full report in Appendix 1. The following recommendations were made:
- (a) A Framework Document be drafted to help clarify in writing the Core Values, Mission Statement and Key Ethos of IMP.
  - (b) That the structure outlined is adopted and implemented as a revised operating framework for IMP.
  - (c) IMP currently operates at high-costs however, maintenance of the current level of staffing provision is of utmost importance. To see development in new areas, both the provision of facilities and the identification of some local funding will be essential.
  - (d) Recruitment for the role of a new IMP Project Leader should be in sufficient time for a period of overlap to take place with the current Project Leader.

## **RURAL CHAPLAINCY REVIEW PANEL**

75. A Review Panel was established with representatives from the Rural Chaplaincy Panel included. The Panel invited feedback from various individuals and bodies who had experienced the work of Rural Chaplaincy directly, such as the four Presbyteries within the Pilot Project and key service users such as the Ulster Farmers’ Union, the Rural Support Agency and Local Livestock Markets. The Panel also met with volunteers from within the Rural Chaplaincy Team before meeting with the Rural Chaplain himself.
76. It was evident that the Rural Chaplaincy Pilot Project has been very positively received across the rural community, including in local congregations, the Agri-business sector, various Livestock Markets and a wide variety of other personal contacts. There was widespread endorsement of the Rural Chaplain himself, including his winsome personal nature, his proactivity in

the role, his sensitivity in pastoral interactions and his deep-seated passion for witnessing for Christ. It should be stated that the panel did not receive a single negative comment regarding the Rural Chaplain and his work, and it was clear that everyone engaged with would want to see the Project continue.

77. Reflections were offered to the Panel relating to the scope of the current work, strategic areas for future focus going forward and the development of this work elsewhere. More detailed feedback, along with some specific observations in regards to both continuation and new development, are outlined in the full report in Appendix B, with the following recommendations made by the Panel:
- (a) That the Council for Mission in Ireland continue the Rural Chaplaincy Pilot Project in the form of an ongoing scheme, with the current post of Rural Chaplain made permanent.
  - (b) That the Council for Mission in Ireland invite each of the four Presbyteries in the Pilot Project to consider whether they wish to continue being part of the Scheme going forward.
  - (c) That the Rural Chaplaincy Panel be re-populated, with each participating Presbytery invited to nominate one representative.
  - (d) That Presbyteries who desire a Rural Chaplaincy Project to develop within their bounds contact the Council for Mission in Ireland to explore the possibility.
  - (e) That the Rural Chaplain continues to be proactive in the development of a volunteer team to help support and develop the ongoing work.

DARYL EDWARDS, Committee Convener

## **HEALTHCARE, PRISONS AND FORCES CHAPLAINCY COMMITTEE**

### **Healthcare Chaplaincy**

78. Healthcare Chaplains continue to exercise an extremely important and much appreciated pastoral ministry to patients, families and hospital staff, and through the work they do and the respect in which they are held, they have significant ministry and missional opportunities.
79. It is the responsibility of the Committee to maintain supportive contact and encouragement with all our chaplains, as they serve within the Health Trusts in Northern Ireland, and under the Health Authority in the Republic of Ireland - some working in full time roles, as well as the majority who exercise this ministry in part time roles which are in addition to their congregational commitments.

**Directory of PCI Healthcare Chaplains and the location of their service (April 2024)**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
NAME	LOCATION
Rev Lindsay Blair	Altnagelvin Hospital
Rev David Clarke	Sligo University Hospital & Mayo General Hospital
Rev Richie Cronin	Cork University Hospital
Susan Dawson	Coordinating Chaplain, Dublin Hospitals
Rev Ken Doherty	Mater Hospital, Belfast
Joanne Dunlop	Antrim Area Hospital and Craigavon Hospital (Deaconess Assistant to Chaplain)
Rev Helen Freeburn	University Hospital, Galway
Rev John Gilkinson	Belfast City Hospital (full time)
Rev David Hagan	Craigavon Area Hospital
Rev Norman Harrison	Royal Group of Hospitals (PT) Northern Trust Lead Chaplain (PT)
Rev Stephen Hibbert	Altnagelvin Hospital
Rev Ross Kernohan	Altnagelvin Hospital
Rev Jim Lamont	Letterkenny General Hospital
Heather McCracken	Royal Group of Hospitals & Belfast City Hospital (Deaconess Assistant to the Chaplain) Musgrave Park Hospital – Chaplain (PT)
Rev Roger McElnea	Tyrone and Fermanagh
Rev Keith McIntyre	Daisy Hill Hospital
Rev Dr Ivan Neish	Antrim Area Hospital
Rev Jane Nelson	Omagh Hospital and Primary Care Complex
Rev Leslie Patterson	Lagan Valley Hospital (temporary cover)
Rev Owen Patterson	Downe Hospital
Rev Jonathan Porter	Dundalk District Hospital (interim)

Name	Location
Rev Mark Proctor	Tallaght Hospital
Hazel Reid	Causeway Hospital, Coleraine
Mrs Claire Sellar	Ulster Hospital, Dundonald
Rev Marlene Taylor	Belfast Trust (Bank relief chaplain)
Rev Ivan Thompson	Bluestone Psychiatric Unit
Rev Alan Thompson	South Tyrone Hospital
Vacant	Dalriada
Vacant	University Hospital, Limerick
Vacant	Knockbracken Healthcare Park

80. The Committee seeks to support all our chaplains and is most grateful to those chaplains who have recently retired from their responsibilities in healthcare chaplaincy, and welcomes those who have recently been appointed. Positive and encouraging feedback was received from a number of serving chaplains.
81. Recognising that our healthcare chaplains are serving in a context where significant and complex ethical issues may arise, a half-day Healthcare Chaplaincy Conference was held on 26 April 2024, with both theological and medical input from a range of contributors.
82. The Committee is also aware that those considering healthcare chaplaincy are now required to obtain appropriate professional experience and qualifications, and has begun to look at the idea of a Chaplaincy Taster Day in the autumn of 2024.
83. Health Trusts in Northern Ireland are in the process of rolling out a new software system called Encompass. The following would be most helpful to healthcare chaplains in regards to this:
- (a) For ministers to ask members of their congregations to tell medical staff they are Presbyterian on admission, so that this information can be completed on the system.
  - (b) PCI members are encouraged to request a visit from the hospital chaplain.
  - (c) Individuals in PCI congregations are encouraged to inform their own minister that they are in hospital and on discharge from hospital.
  - (d) Ministers are encouraged to visit congregational members if informed by the chaplain.
84. In the Greater Dublin area, the following changes in healthcare chaplaincy were considered:
- (a) With Mrs Susan Dawson due to retire from her role later this year,

the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster are considering plans for a different approach, with the likely appointment of a Lead Chaplain (6 hours per week) whose role would involve the support and organisation of Presbytery appointed hospital visitors.

- (b) Rev Mark Proctor's hours in Tallaght University Hospital have been reduced to no more than one day per week, in order to enable him to focus more fully on congregational ministry in Naas. Engagement is ongoing with Tallaght Hospital with regards to financial adjustments.

### Prisons Chaplaincy

Directory of PCI Prisons' Chaplains and the locations of their service. (April 2024)

Name	Location
Rev Alan Boal	Mountjoy, Dublin (part-time)
Rev Gary Aitcheson	HMP Magilligan (part time)
Rev Rodney Cameron	Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison (part-time)
Rev Lesley-Ann Wilson	Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre (part-time)
Rev Graham Stockdale	HMP Maghaberry (Coordinating Chaplain, full-time)

85. The Committee pays warm tribute to the work of all our prison chaplains, recognising the heavy demands placed on them, the challenging context in which they work, and the opportunities for fruitful ministry and mission on the frontline.
86. Reports received from our prison chaplains have reflected the brokenness of many situations but also included encouragements from successful Alpha courses and those attending worship on a regular basis, as well as special events at Christmas and Easter.
87. Some ministry students have been placed with Rev Graham Stockdale in HMP Maghaberry, which has proved to be a mutually positive and helpful arrangement.
88. The Annual Prisons' Week Service which took place in October had raised issues of concern due to a multi faith element which had been introduced without the prior knowledge of our chaplains. Following a meeting with Mr Stephen McCourt (NIPS) involving the Council Secretary and Rev Stockdale, as well as Church of Ireland and Methodist chaplains, the Committee is persuaded that our serious concerns have been heard and understood, and that the issues will be addressed in a much more acceptable manner.

89. The Committee is appreciative of the continued funding provision by the NI Department of Justice towards prison chaplaincy.

## **FORCES CHAPLAINCY PANEL**

### Directory of Commissioned Chaplains within the Armed Forces (April 2024)

Name	Location
Rev James Burnett	Royal Navy Reserve (part-time)
Rev Mark Donald	Army Reserve (part-time)
Rev Mark Henderson	Army
Rev Ivan Linton	Army
Rev Graeme McConville	Army
Rev Michael McCormick	RAF
Rev Edward McKenzie	Army Reserve (part-time)
Rev Jonathan Newell	RAF
Rev Heather Rendell	Army
Rev Dr Paul Swinn	Army Reserve
Rev Dr Brent van der Linde	Royal Navy
Rev Dr Philip Wilson	Royal Air Force

### Directory of part-time Chaplains to Youth Organisations sponsored by the Armed Forces

Name	Location
Rev Joseph Andrews	Air Training Corps
Rev Kenneth Crowe	Army Cadet Force (commissioned)
Rev Richard Graham	Air Training Corps
Rev Keith Hibbert	Army Cadet Force Chaplain
Rev Norman McDowell	Air Training Corps Chaplain
Rev Michael Rutledge	Air Training Corps
Rev Prof. Patton Taylor	Air Training Corps

90. The Panel seeks to maintain regular pastoral contact with our serving Forces chaplains, continuing to find it helpful to meet some of our chaplains via Teams. This has become a regular feature of Panel meetings, providing an excellent opportunity for Panel members to get to know our chaplains and a positive way of expressing our encouragement and gratitude for the

work they are doing.

91. It is clear that PCI forces chaplains are held in high regard as they operate in a variety of challenging contexts and grasp valuable opportunities for frontline mission. The Panel also recognises that several of our chaplains can be separated from their families for lengthy periods of time, with the inevitable pressure this imposes on them and their families.
92. The Panel believes that it is important that the work of our Forces chaplains should be held before the church at regular intervals, particularly in the current climate of global conflict. The recently developed Remembrance Day video is an example of a resource that can be used by congregations to do so.
93. The Panel consulted with two of our most senior chaplains – Revs Heather Rendell (Army) and Rev Philip Wilson (RAF) – to reflect on issues of Diversity and Inclusion, especially in terms of a recent document detailing Personnel Specifications for Chaplaincy in the Armed Services. Both chaplains spoke knowledgeably about the document, current chaplaincy practices and attitudes within the three services. They offered positive reassurance that this document was an attempt to create a protocol of what current practice is, and that, if anything, it actually strengthens and protects the role of chaplains.
94. In February 2024, Rev Simon Hamilton was discharged by the Navy from his role as a Naval Chaplain.
95. The Convener of the Panel continues to maintain very close contact with all of our chaplains, supporting and encouraging them in the demands which their work places on them, as well as representing our church at various chaplaincy consultation and advisory meetings.

ROB CRAIG, Convener

## **RURAL CHAPLAINCY PANEL**

96. The Rural Chaplaincy Pilot Project continues to make very a significant impact among farmers, farming families and the rural community. The Panel is encouraged by reports of work in local farmers' marts, Bible Study groups which have emerged in local communities, special Christmas events, as well as contacts with farm support organisations and agri-food businesses.
97. This work is led with enormous energy, passion and vision by Rev Kenny Hanna, assisted by a team of volunteers who bring their faith, experience and skills to the task. There is a breadth to the work and an ever-increasing workload as a result of the project's impact.
98. With the pilot project now well into its third year, a Review Panel was

appointed, whose findings are shared elsewhere in the Council's report.

NIGEL REID, Convener

### **Police Chaplaincy Pilot Scheme**

99. This pilot scheme in North Down was initiated by the PSNI and received the support of senior management, however, its impact has stalled and there are no further developments to report. The Committee will seek to engage with those who were involved in the initial Pilot scheme in order to explore any possible way forward.

ROBERT BELL, Committee Convener

## **UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES CHAPLAINCY COMMITTEE**

Directory of PCI Universities and Colleges Chaplains and locations of their service. (April 2024)

Name	Location
Rev Nigel Craig	QUB, Stranmillis and Union Theological College (full-time)
Rev Cheryl Meban	UU, Belfast (full-time)
Rev Dr John Coulter	UU, Coleraine (part-time)
Rev Graeme Orr	UU, Magee (part-time)
Rev Helen Freeburn	University College, Galway (part-time)
Rev Dr Keith McCrory	NUI, Maynooth (part-time)

100. The Committee continues to affirm the strategic nature of student ministry and the important role all our university chaplains have as they engage in mission and ministry in this context.

101. A 'Connect' event for University Chaplains was held on 26 January 2024, which gave an opportunity for fellowship, prayer and a sharing of good practice. The Committee will plan for this on an annual basis.
102. Full-time chaplains were asked to submit annual end of year reports from last year, which included both reflections on recent work and priorities for the year ahead. These were received and approved by the Committee, with some minor amendments, and will become an annual expectation.
103. The chaplaincy team at QUB continues to be encouraged as they work well with students at Derryvolgie and on campus. The team is now operating from an office in the Chaplaincy centre on Elmwood Avenue, with the opening of the Sojourn Coffee Shop on the ground floor creating extra student footfall and opportunities of engagement. The new development of a Sunday evening worship service held in Union Theological College has seen an encouraging response, which sits alongside the ongoing 'Vital' programme at Derryvolgie later on Sunday nights.
104. Rev Cheryl Meban continues in her work at UUB with her priorities this year being focused on connecting and building community among students, particularly through personal interactions, student lunches and a weekly book club.
105. The Belfast Partnership Group was paused to allow opportunity to re-evaluate the group's purposes and consider other mechanisms to support our full-time chaplains. A forum-style gathering will be piloted later in the year to explore specific themes related to student ministry, with the participation of local churches.
106. The Committee is encouraged by the work of our part-time chaplains, while being aware of the obvious limitations due to the timeframe of their roles. Following discussion with some part-time chaplains, the Committee will seek to provide a clearer steer in terms of strategic priorities for those serving in a part-time role.
107. In regards to future development of chaplaincy provision, the Committee has been acting on its desire to develop our student chaplaincy provision within Dublin and appointed a Task Group under the Convenership of Rev Andrew Gill to draw up clear proposals. The Committee also notes the increasing numbers of students at the Magee campus of the University of Ulster in light of developing conversations with representatives of the Derry and Donegal Presbytery.

## **DUBLIN STUDENT MINISTRY TASK GROUP**

108. This Task Group has the remit to draw up firm proposals regarding the shape of student ministry in the city of Dublin and bring forward a plan of action to the University and Colleges Chaplaincy Committee.
109. In its initial work, the Task Group noted that it is over 15 years since a Presbyterian chaplain served Full-Time in University Chaplaincy in Dublin

and there was a desire to develop PCI's student ministry provision in Dublin.

110. The work of the Task Group focused on identifying the needs, aims and potential models for effective Chaplaincy in Universities and Colleges in Dublin. In doing so, it sought to engage with Christian students from various institutions and student leaders from parachurch ministries, as well as engage with some Christian staff. This engagement took place via a mix of face-to-face meetings, informal conversations and written responses.
111. The following needs were identified by the Task Group as being of vital importance when it comes to student mission in Dublin:
  - (a) **Missional Presence:** In diverse and multi-cultural institutions, there is a need to develop our missional presence within university life. Both statistically and anecdotally, a greater proportion of students today are now disconnected from the church than in previous generations. This presents a need for a response that points students to Jesus and provides evangelistic opportunities for the gospel to be encountered in word and deed.
  - (b) **Pastoral Response:** Significant pastoral needs were identified within the student population, particularly in the area of mental health, but also in issues relating to loneliness, isolation, academic struggle, and general advice for living.
  - (c) **International Growth:** Dublin is a rapidly changing landscape, with the international student population in one university growing to such an extent that 1 in 6 students now come from outside the European Union. Such students are often particularly searching for friendship, fellowship and opportunities to engage with activities on campus.
  - (d) **Church Visibility:** A lack of formal Presbyterian presence is detrimental to our witness as a church. Chaplaincy offers the opportunity to help change any negative or false perceptions of the church through productive and constructive presence on campus, something needed in contemporary Irish society.
112. The Task Group believes that proactive steps should be taken to seek the development of a Presbyterian chaplaincy presence among Universities and Colleges in Dublin. In terms of a model, three main options have been considered:
  - (a) **Traditional Chaplaincy Model:** Seeking the appointment of a Full-Time, Ordained Chaplain within one of the Universities.
  - (b) **Lay Student Ministry Model:** Bypass the need for official institutional approval by operating student ministry out of a local congregation.
  - (c) **Hybrid Team Approach:** This option would focus on the development of a varied approach to Chaplaincy across Dublin, with points of coordination and connection. It would seek to identify a Lead Chaplain who would be an Ordained Minister already serving in the wider area and could be appointed to an official Chaplaincy role

within a university. While this would be on a part-time basis, similar to other PCI Chaplaincy positions elsewhere in Ireland, and thus limited to no more than six hours per week, there could also be the opportunity of identifying suitably gifted and experienced Assistant Lay Chaplains, or Student Workers based in a local congregation but also operating under the direction of the Lead Chaplain.

113. The 'Hybrid Team Approach' is the Task Group's preferred option in offering both a connection with an institution as well as effective ministry to students. The Committee affirmed this approach, underlining the importance of suitable training for any Lay Assistant Chaplains or volunteers. The Task Group will await feedback from the Dublin and Munster Presbytery before agreeing a final report.

ANDREW GILL, Convener

## **THE DERRYVOLGIE AND ELMWOOD AVENUE MANAGEMENT PANEL**

114. There is much to be encouraged by in the ministry at Derryvolgie. The halls are meeting all costs with a full complement of students. It is hoped that the overdraft will be cleared in this year. Following consideration, fees are being held at the same price for next year.
115. In Elmwood Avenue, all the offices are occupied and there is now a coffee shop tenant on the ground floor. 'Sojourn', owned by Mr Harry McNeely, opened on 29 February 2024 and has already brought benefits to the work of Chaplaincy.
116. A full review of service charges has been completed and all tenants have been appraised of these changes. The Panel believes all of these changes will benefit the financial position of the Elmwood Avenue centre.

JOHNSTON LAMBE, Convener

CRAIG LYNN, Committee Convener

## **FINANCE PANEL**

117. The Panel is pleased to report that, while slightly disguised by agreed Capital spends, the Council has maintained a positive financial position with most of the work operating well within budget. However, with increased costs due to both property and personnel, continued prudence is required.

118. As a Council, we continue to be extremely grateful for the support of the United Appeal for Mission and the faithful giving of PCI congregations to it, despite the challenging climate across the wider church. Thanks are also expressed to the PW for their continued financial support. Such financial support enables much of the Council's work and the Panel also notes, with thankfulness, those who have contributed to the Council's work through individual donations and bequests.
119. With the long-planned Maynooth new church building project progressing well, almost all monies committed to the project have now been drawn down. In the ongoing support of Home Mission congregations, a number of grants were made for repairs, full details of which are found in the Property Panel Report.
120. It is anticipated that the Council will realise income from the sale of some properties in the year ahead, which will ensure there is capacity for planned expenditure for developing ministry opportunities. It is the Panel's desire to continue to grow, where possible, the Capital account to meet growing demands.
121. Thanks are due to the Urban Mission Trust of the North Belfast Presbytery for the support of a worker in North Belfast IMP and the long-standing financial support of South Belfast Presbytery is acknowledged. However, the Panel notes that the Council will now carry all the costs for IMP South following the culmination of funding from South Belfast Presbytery towards a staff worker's salary. Budgetary adjustments have been made to accommodate this in the short-term while additional funding streams are being explored.
122. Following the retirement of an Irish Mission Worker, this salary cost has been re-allocated to church planting and pioneer mission work. This is in line with a historical decision to allocate the salary costs of retiring Irish Mission Workers to the Mission Support Fund.
123. Financial support for the Special Ministry Project in West Belfast has been encouraging, with almost half of the total costs being met through donations.
124. Helpful progress has been made in relation to managing the costs of the Elmwood Avenue building. The opening of a coffee shop on the ground floor alongside a review of service charges from other tenants will benefit the financial position going forward.
125. The Panel wishes to acknowledge the contribution of Mr Nehru Dass over many years of service, thanking him for his faithful, tireless and efficient work as Finance Manager. Thanks are due to the new Finance Manager, Mrs Lindsay Munro, for all her efforts as she has settled quickly into the role.

JOHNSTON LAMBE, Convener

## PROPERTY PANEL

126. The Property Panel has been seeking to support a number of congregations with a variety of building and property requirements. This has involved offering guidance in relation to new building projects, minor refurbishments, general building repairs and property valuations for acquisition and disposals. This has been applied to meeting houses, halls and manse.
127. The Panel benefits from the significant experience and professional expertise of its members and has added new members with a legal background within the Republic of Ireland.
128. Having encountered significant delays in previous years, the long-planned Maynooth new church building project is progressing well and expected to be completed by the summer of 2024. This has been enabled by a significant capital grant allowance from the Council. Work in the reconstruction of ancillary rooms in the church building in Greystones was completed in 2023 to the satisfaction of the congregation.
129. Some general building repairs have been completed in a small number of congregations, with conversations ongoing regarding necessary repairs in others. These include the repair of windows in Cahir and a repair grant to Drogheda for the repair and replacement of the windows and doors in the manse and the replacement outside lights in the church building. A Capital Grant was awarded to Dundalk to make up the shortfall between the purchase price of the current manse, costs to make it suitable and interest charged less the sale price for the former manse. Support was also given with regards to manse repairs in Galway.
130. Investigative work has been carried out in relation to the properties in some congregations. In Trinity, Cork, an architect has been instructed to prepare a schedule of remedial works for the halls to make them more habitable for on-going ministry, while cost estimates are ongoing to consider necessary building improvements in Tullamore.
131. The former Enniscorthy meeting house and manse are currently on the market for sale and an offer was accepted to purchase a property as a manse in Wexford Town, with the sale expected to complete soon. The Panel is also assisting Donabate in their explorations in regards to future property to assist in their church planting work in Balbriggan.
132. The congregation of Fahan have been supported in the rental of a property as a temporary manse while they proactively seek a permanent manse in Buncrana. Sourcing suitable properties in the Inishowen peninsula has been challenging due to defective mica blocks and the resulting upward pressure on property values, however a potential property has now been identified and an offer made.
133. The Panel carries a concern about the importance of good maintenance on existing buildings to ensure they are not a drain on financial resources but continue to be valuable assets for gospel ministry. In that vein, the Panel seeks to serve the Church in facing the challenges ahead, with Home and

Urban Mission congregations encouraged to make contact for support and guidance should they require advice in any property matter.

134. In all of this work, the Panel is thankful for the diligent work of our Property Support Manager, Mr Graham Patterson.

ALAN McQUADE, Convener

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **REPORT ON THE FUTURE STRATEGY, STRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY OF IMP**

#### **Introduction**

The remit of this Task Group has been to conduct a strategic, considered and detailed review of the future direction of Migrant Ministry within Ireland and the future management arrangements of International Meeting Point's current projects. The key focus of this is to determine the best staffing arrangements post-retirement of the current Project Leader, as well as considering how similar IMP-style ministries could develop elsewhere in Ireland in the future. The Task Group has met with current staff members of the International Meeting Point as well as consulting with some volunteers and Panel Members to help form an accurate assessment of need.

#### **Need**

The Task Group was encouraged by the clearly growing and developing work within the International Meeting Point in both locations in Belfast. It is evident that a significant number of people are being reached through this Project and God is blessing the work.

It has also become clear that the need is continuing to grow significantly in the area of migrants and those seeking asylum, not just in Belfast but right across this island. Statistics of the last few years in Ireland might suggest that reaching out to those who are making Ireland their new home is one of the greatest God-given opportunities that the Church has today. While

caution needs to be given to how statistics are presented and how migrants are categorized, the two graphs below show the recent rapid increase in migration into Ireland (South and North). In the Republic of Ireland in particular, the number of applications for asylum rose from 9,571 in 2021 to a remarkable 81,256 in 2022!

There are immense opportunities for ministry across Ireland today and the Task Group believes that seeking to develop new IMP centres is of the utmost and urgent importance.

## Strategy

The Task Group believes that central to the effectiveness of the International Meeting Point is the mix of meeting social needs of migrants while keeping evangelism central. Maintaining this healthy balance between social action and gospel proclamation is both key to the fruitfulness of IMP and vital to protect in the future. This approach is described by the ‘Cape Town Commitment’ that arose from the 2010 Lausanne Congress:

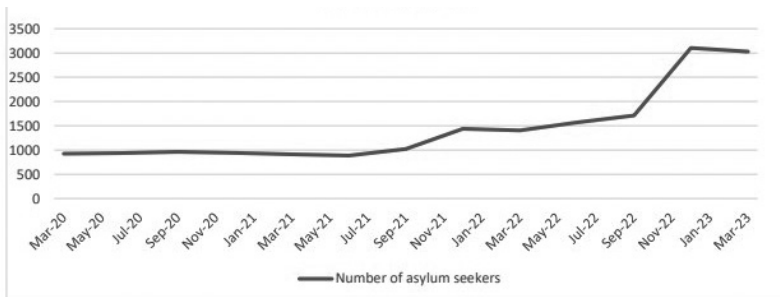
“Integral mission is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world, we betray the Word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the Word of God, we have nothing to bring to the world.”

However, protecting this isn’t automatic, thus the Task Group feels it vital to capture the ethos of the International Meeting Point in a Framework Document that includes a set of values. This will help both to maintain the current direction and replicate it elsewhere.

Some other aspects of strategy have become clear:

- (a) Centrally Managed: The work of the International Meeting Point goes beyond the capacity of any one congregation. Thus, there is benefit in the church organising this centrally in a coordinated way,

## Number of asylum seekers in receipt of asylum support in Northern Ireland

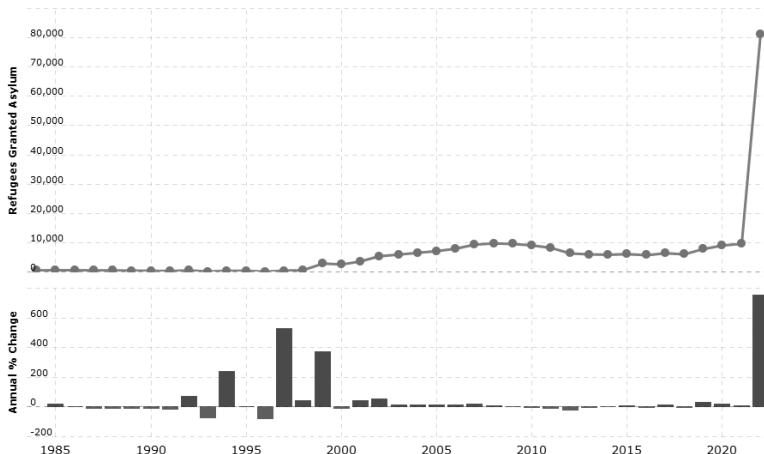


without replacing the local witness of a congregation but rather to inform, model and dovetail with it. It is felt the structures of the Council for Mission in Ireland continue to offer a helpful source of oversight and management.

- (b) **Active Congregational Support:** Similarly, the ministry of IMP is strengthened by congregations, both in close proximity and further afield, who partner in the work by providing volunteers, offering meals, practically supporting and building relationships.
- (c) **Local Buy-In:** There needs to be a checklist of local support for an International Meeting Point to flourish, including Presbytery buy-in and the identification of suitable premises to house the work in a cost-effective way. While the work will require a network of local congregations to be involved to various degrees, there is also need for a clearly linked and involved local congregation to intentionally dovetail closely with the work.
- (d) **Flexibility:** While a core ethos should be captured, it will be important to be flexible in applying those values within individual situations rather than employing a copy and paste approach. For example, it was acknowledged that there were differences in the models used in North and South Belfast, each shaped with the local context in mind.
- (e) **Bigger Picture:** There is a clear opportunity for this kind of ministry to be replicated elsewhere in Ireland as we seek to respond positively and compassionately as a church to increasing patterns of immigration across our island. It might be helpful to track the government’s movement of migrants within Ireland and seek to

### Republic of Ireland asylum applications

From:  To:



respond to it by considering where else an International Meeting Point could be established.

### **Structure**

The Task Group considered several potential approaches to the future IMP structure, with the below mapping out a preferred direction of travel.

Some additional comments about structure and locations:

- While growth is desired, current staffing levels are stretched to capacity.
- Minimum staff required in South seems to be three. North is currently operating well at 1.5 role, but if growth continues, this may need to grow to two FT roles.
- Every Presbytery involved should have a representative on the Management Panel.
- IMP should not have formal relationship with or be the work of single congregations.
- Any IMP ministry should be located in an urban environment on key arterial routes.

### **Staff and skills**

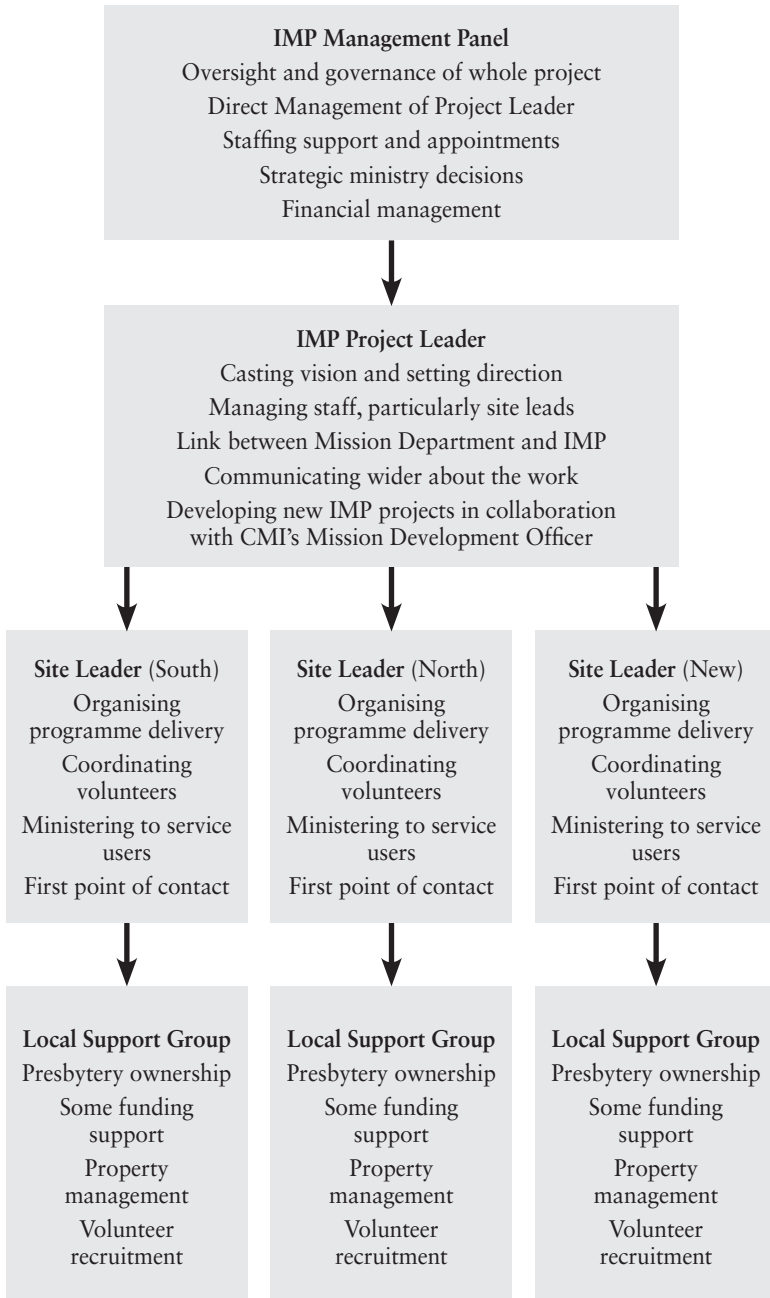
#### **Nature of Role:**

While the Task Group does not see it as necessary that a Project Leader be an Ordained Minister, it is recognised there have been benefits of the current Project Leader being a 'called worker' of the church. Given the specific skill-set and experience that would be important to be found in a Project Leader, it is felt it would be wise to avoid unnecessarily narrowing the potential field of applicants by insisting on this as an essential criterion, with the understanding that the most suitable candidate for the job be appointed. The Task Group also believes that it would be helpful for any new Project Leader to benefit from a period of overlap before the retirement of the current Project Leader.

#### **Ethos, Abilities and Experience:**

*Spiritual:* A devoted follower of Jesus Christ, whose life speaks of a deep love for God.

*Vision:* Ability to cast vision that draws people into the work and sets the temperature.



*Leadership:* The kind of person that others want to follow with a big picture mindset.

*Cross-cultural:* A heart for and experience in working with people from diverse cultures.

*Approachable:* Pastoral sensitivity and relational wisdom with staff, volunteers and users.

*Pioneer:* A groundbreaker with a can-do, go-ahead attitude.

*Clarity:* Ensuring that mission goals are being delivered with faithfulness and excellence.

*Communication:* Clear communication with team internally and wider promotion externally.

*Evangelistic:* A clear ethos of gospel proclamation in both word and deed.

*Organisation:* A good grasp of project management and the ability to be well-organised.

### **Sustainability**

While it is evident there is significant need for IMPs throughout Ireland, the following factors will be key for any development in new places:

- (a) A clear need
- (b) A local vision
- (c) The right people
- (d) Resource via property and finance

The following key principles should be in place for any new project to develop:

- Request or invitation from a Presbytery to the Council for Mission in Ireland to help
- Local support in the form of a supportive congregation with wider Presbytery buy-in
- The establishment of a Project Base that includes premises funded or supported locally
- Staff should be appointed centrally while property should be managed locally
- Ensuring local finance is in place to help seed-fund or sustain the work
- A local support group to help share the burden of the work
- The recruitment of a worker to begin the work locally
- The identification of some local volunteers to help run activities
- New site leaders may initially benefit from mentoring and practical

guidance offered by current staff members, as directed by the IMP Management Panel in conjunction with CMI Secretary.

### **Recommendations**

The Task Group recommends the following for strategic consideration and actioning:

- (a) **Framework:** A Framework Document be drafted to help clarify in writing the Core Values, Mission Statement and Key Ethos of IMP.
- (b) **Structure:** That the structure outlined on page 235 is adopted and implemented as a revised operating framework for IMP.
- (c) **Budget:** As IMP currently operates at high-costs, maintenance of the current level of staffing provision is of utmost importance. Development in new areas will be necessitated by both the provision of facilities and the identification of some local funding, which could be combined through a CMI Mission Grant to help seed.
- (d) **Timeframe:** Recruitment for the role of a new Project Leader for IMP should be in sufficient time for a period of overlap to take place with the current Project Leader.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Rural Chaplaincy Review Panel**

#### **Process**

A Review Panel was established under the Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee with representatives from the Rural Chaplaincy Panel included. The Review Panel was made up of Rev Robert Bell (Chaplaincy Committee Convener), Mr Rick Hill (CMI Secretary), Rev Gareth McFadden (Rural Chaplaincy Panel Member) and Rev Nigel Reid (Rural Chaplaincy Panel Convener). Rev Roland Watt was also appointed to the Panel, but unable to be part of the Review meetings due to dates clashing with a planned Sabbatical.

The Review was conducted in three parts. Firstly, the Panel invited feedback from various individuals and bodies who have experienced the work of Rural Chaplaincy directly, such as the four Presbyteries within the Pilot Project and key service users such as the Ulster Farmers' Union, the Rural Support Agency and Local Livestock Markets. Secondly, the Panel met with volunteers from within the Rural Chaplaincy Team before meeting with the Rural Chaplain himself. Finally, all of these comments

and feedback were reflected on by the Panel and drawn together into final recommendations.

### **Summary of feedback**

It was obvious throughout the review that the Rural Chaplaincy Pilot Project has been very positively received across the Rural Community, including in local congregations, the Agri-business sector, various Livestock Markets and a wide variety of other personal contacts. There was also widespread endorsement of the Rural Chaplain himself, including his winsome personal nature, his proactivity in the role, his sensitivity in pastoral interactions and his deep-seated passion for witnessing for Christ.

It should be stated that the panel did not receive a single negative comment regarding the Rural Chaplain and his work, and it was clear that everyone we engaged with would want to see this continue. In addition to this,

reflections were offered to the Panel relating to the scope of the current work, the strategic areas for focus going forward and developing this work in other Presbyteries. Feedback from the four participating presbyteries was positive, with the following points particularly noted by the Panel:

- (a) The Rural Chaplain has worked hard to be present across congregations.
- (b) A strong emphasis on the suitability of the Rural Chaplain for the role including his farming background, warm personal gifts, passion and energy.
- (c) An acknowledgement that this Project has helped open doors that most ministers and congregations struggle to, particularly when it comes to intentional presence in Livestock Markets and Agricultural Shows.
- (d) This is recognised as a ‘ministry of presence’ requiring a holistic approach, one that is understood as being a ‘slow-burn’ project strengthened over time.
- (e) Some suggestion that the work of Rural Chaplaincy is more directly relevant in some of the Presbyteries than in others, with particular concentration to the work in the Presbyteries of Newry and Iveagh. It was felt that some parts of the Presbyteries of Armagh and Down view themselves as more urban in nature and so, while looking on warmly towards Rural Chaplaincy, its impact might be less in the larger towns.
- (f) While recognising the enormous importance of the Rural Chaplain, it is important not to build the whole project on him.

The comments from farming organisations, agencies and service users were also extremely positive, with the following evident:

- Strong connections have developed with government departments, environmental agencies, agri-food industry – HSE, Rural Support, Fane Valley;
- The extremely highly regard that the Rural Chaplain is held in, with strong affirmation of his winsomeness, sensitivity and energy;
- The Rural Chaplaincy Project is having a much wider impact than merely the Presbyterian ‘rural community’;
- Clear appreciation for this project within the wider agri-farming community and their desire to see the project continued;
- Comments from volunteers and team members included:
- The opportunity to extend the work beyond one individual and grow the reach;
- The need for sensitivity and wisdom in developing conversations in Marts;
- The high regard they hold for the Rural Chaplain and his work;
- Volunteers do not see it as essential that the Rural Pastor is an ordained minister;

- The potential to develop this kind of work in other locations.

In talking with the Rural Chaplain, his energy, enthusiasm and enjoyment of the work cannot be missed, together with the fact that his initial expectations have been exceeded. Some particular highlights include:

- Gaining acceptance in marts and among the wider farming community. Engagement in the marts in Hilltown, Rathfriland and Markethill have been the most encouraging. Contacts in Downpatrick have been slower but are still significant, and it is hoped that new possibilities could open up in South Armagh.
- Working closely with local congregations and relating to participating presbyteries has been a source of encouragement, particularly in helping to deliver imaginative outreach events, as well as presence at the major agricultural shows within each of the participating presbyteries.
- Building pastoral contacts and significant relationships across the spectrum, including the development of Bible studies in Hilltown and Kilcoo.
- Enjoying fruitful and encouraging partnerships with agri-businesses, e.g., Health and Safety Exec, Fane Valley, Farm Family Health-check schemes. There is the potential for developing the work more within the agri-business sector, potentially with additional volunteers, and in schools with large rural intakes.
- The development of the volunteer teams has been encouraging, both through the regular volunteers and occasional teams at agricultural shows. However, it is vital that care is taken in identifying people who are suitable to be part of the work on a regular basis, particularly for those with a good understanding of cultural sensitivities and the nature of the work.
- It seems very clear that there are several other areas that would both welcome and benefit from rural chaplaincy, whether that be in Northern Ireland, among the border counties or in the midlands area of the Republic of Ireland.

### **Observations**

From the various conversations and written submissions, the following observations are offered by the Review Panel in the categories of Continuation and New Development:

#### **Continuation:**

- (a) It is important to affirm the success and value of the Rural Chaplaincy Pilot Scheme, and seek to move it from 'pilot' status to 'permanent' status, even though regular reviews will be important.

- (b) There was an acknowledgement from local ministers within the participating Presbyteries that this project helps to open doors that local congregations might find more difficult. To that end, Rural Chaplaincy should be understood as ‘adding value’ to Presbyterian mission in the Rural Community through its pastoral presence and intentional focus beyond the walls of the church.
- (c) It is clear that respect has been developed well beyond the Presbyterian community, including among many from a Catholic background. Projects in Hilltown and Kilcoo are testimony to the sensitive approach of the Chaplain. He is very clear that his role and work is seen firstly as Christian, and only secondly as Presbyterian – and that if this was not the case, it would be much more difficult, if not impossible, for other farming organisations and businesses to support him so positively. No secret is made of his Presbyterian identity, but that is the foundation rather than the flag of this work. In other words, the Rural Chaplain’s Presbyterian identity is never hidden, but rarely trumpeted.
- (d) While it is acknowledged that there may be some benefits to the current Rural Chaplain being an Ordained Minister, it doesn’t seem that it is necessary for someone serving as a Rural Chaplain to be ordained. The nature of the role does require a level of theological understanding, pastoral sensitivity and experience in ministering to a wide variety of people, but it is possible that this kind of skillset may be found in other suitably qualified individuals. Naturally, it will be important that great care is taken in any future appointments, and the basic criteria for the role should include membership of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, agreement with its theological positions and willingness to come under the accountability of the Council for Mission in Ireland.
- (e) The Rural Chaplain has worked hard to be present in as many congregations as possible across the four pilot presbyteries, with a busy diary of Sunday services, speaking engagements and involvement in various events. It is felt that this has been important in the establishment of the project, however may not be among the highest of priorities in terms of strategic objectives going forward. The Rural Chaplain should be freed to give the majority of his focus to engagement beyond the walls of the church however, it will still be helpful to maintain some presence on a more occasional basis in local congregations.
- (f) Linked to this, it also seems that working across four Presbytery areas is stretching to the limit the potential depth and effectiveness of the project. While it is currently manageable for the Rural Chaplain, the Review Panel did consider whether the target area should become more focused to help increase its effectiveness. While it is not being suggested that the current Project footprint should be reduced, it

would be worthwhile testing with each participating Presbytery if they wish to remain within the Scheme going forward.

**Development:**

- (a) There is certainly scope for Rural Chaplaincy to be extended to other Presbyteries in the future. It would be important for the initiative for this to come at Presbytery-level rather than Council-level to ensure effective ownership of the project.
- (b) The current Rural Chaplain could act as a ‘Lead Rural Chaplain’ in which the current work would continue, but he would also become available on a more formal basis than before to advise other Presbyteries and areas interested in developing similar work. The Review Panel feel it vital however, that the Rural Chaplain does not take on the running or managing of any such projects, which would be the ongoing responsibility of the Rural Chaplaincy Panel, but rather act in a consultancy and support role. Reducing the emphasis on visiting congregations in the four Presbyteries might help enable this. The Lead Chaplain would also have a mentoring role, with it recommended that any potential rural chaplains spend a period of time shadowing before commencing any new work.
- (c) In order to aid new development, it will be essential to develop mechanisms of appropriate financial support. It is recognised that the Council is already operating at capacity in terms of its financial commitments, therefore it is unlikely to fund new rural chaplaincy projects in the same way as with the Pilot Project. However, that should not prevent Presbyteries, or even a group of local congregations, considering means of funding a post, either in part or entirely. While the post of ‘Lead Rural Chaplain’ will continue to be funded by the Council on an ongoing basis through its United Appeal grant, any new projects would be reliant on the provision of some form of local funding. In this case, some CMI assistance could be sought in the form of a Mission Grant to help seed-fund new work.
- (d) The effectiveness of Rural Chaplaincy in the Pilot Project has been helped by the dedicated focus of a full-time role, and it is felt this is essential for ongoing work in the current areas. However, it may be appropriate for Rural Chaplaincy to begin in new areas in other forms, particularly in its genesis. Such options might include part-time roles, lay chaplains and partnerships with local congregations.

**Recommendations**

1. That the Council for Mission in Ireland continues the Rural Chaplaincy Pilot Project in the form of an ongoing scheme, with the current post of Rural Chaplain made permanent.

2. That the Council for Mission in Ireland invites each of the four Presbyteries in the Pilot Project to consider whether they wish to continue being part of the Scheme going forward.
3. That the Rural Chaplaincy Panel be re-populated, with each participating Presbytery invited to nominate one representative.
4. That Presbyteries who desire a Rural Chaplaincy Project to develop within their bounds contact the Council for Mission in Ireland to explore the possibility.
5. That the Rural Chaplain continues to be proactive in the development of a volunteer team to help support and develop the ongoing work.



# THE TRUSTEES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND

Chairman: Rev DR D. WATTS

Secretary: Mr K. SWARBRICK

## Trust Funds

1. A summary account of the various Trust Funds the Trustees manage is included in the Book of Accounts 2023. The following Trust Funds are distributed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Trustees.
2. As in 2023, the Trustees have agreed to recommend to the 2024 General Assembly that, where the terms of Trust permit, these should be distributed via the United Appeal rather than directly to various agencies.

**Mrs A.M. Davidson Trust:** The total income for 2023 available for distribution is £6,627. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

United Appeal	£6,627
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**Sir Wm. V. McCleery Estate:** The total income for 2023 available for distribution is £34,602. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

Central Ministry Fund	80%	£27,682
Retired Ministers' Fund	10%	£3,460
Widows of Ministers' Fund	10%	£3,460

**Estate of Miss Irene Scott:** The total income for 2023 available for distribution is £7,169. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

United Appeal	£7,169
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**Estate of Miss Ida Mary McGeown:** The total income for 2023 available for distribution is £4,601. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

United Appeal	£4,601
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**Estate of Mr Victor Morrow:** The total income for 2023 available for

distribution is £1,500. The following recommendation is made to the General Assembly:

United Appeal	£1,500
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## **THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH INVESTMENT FUND** (commonly known as The General Investment Fund)

- The General Investment Fund was originally established under the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 1964. It is a Common Investment Fund in which any charity connected with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland can invest.
- Investments in the Fund tend to arise from trust funds, bequests or donations which often have particular terms or restrictions attached regarding the application of the capital and income.
- Further details about the General Investment Fund, the investment performance and investment holdings, are contained in a booklet available from the Financial Secretary's Department.
- The Trustees have prepared the accounts of the General Investment Fund for the year ended 31 December 2023 in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice: Financial Statement of Authorised Funds (May 2014) as amended in June 2017. The accounts are included in the Book of Accounts presented to the General Assembly and provide detailed information regarding the Fund and in particular its performance, investment allocation, level of income and distributions during the year.
- |  |           |            |
|--|-----------|------------|
| <b>Declaration of Dividend</b>   | 31.03.23  | 30.09.23   |
| Number of shares qualifying  | 6,135,658 | 6,161,850  |
| Income from investment for distribution and Tax recoverable less Administrative Charge and Investment Advisers' Fees | £750,266  | £1,511,818 |
| Dividend per share   | 12.0p     | 14.0p      |
- During 2023, £83,135 was transferred from the Dividend Equalisation Reserve, which is in accordance with the Scheme Rules, and the balance on the Reserve at 31 December, 2023 is £648,125.
- The combined annual Dividend of 26.00p per share for 2023 is comparable to previous years (27.00p for 2022, 26.00p for 2021).

	31 Dec 2023	31 Dec 2022
Valuation of Investments	80,510,722	74,895,161
Cash Balance	-591,453	-682,285
Dividend Equalisation Reserve	648,125	731,260
	80,567,394	74,934,136
No of Shares Issued	6,045,488	6,131,644
Share Value	13.3269	12.2209

The shares in the Fund have from 28 February 2017 been valued on a monthly basis and the monthly share prices are included in the audited accounts. The share value at the end of the financial year, 31 Dec 2023 was £13.3269 per share (2022, £12.2209).

### Registration with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland

9. As reported last year to the General Assembly 2023, the Trustees were invited by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland to apply to have the Presbyterian Church Investment Fund (also known as the General Investment Fund) registered as a charity in Northern Ireland. The application was submitted on 28 March 2022 and approved by the Charity Commission on 18 August 2023.

### Trustees' Discretionary Fund

10. On occasions the Trustees are notified of bequests where the terms may state they are for the "benefit of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland" or the "Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland".

In accordance with advice received from the General Assembly Solicitor, and as previously reported to the General Assembly, the Trustees "take instructions from the General Council (or the General Council Standing Committee), or from the General Assembly (or its duly authorised Commissions), regarding allocations from the Trustees' Discretionary Fund".

No bequests were received in 2023. During 2023 the following grants were paid:

- £30,000 to Union Theological College as part of agreed transitional funding arrangements
- £20,000 to Union Theological College to support the development of a recording studio
- £30,000 to Council for Social Witness as approved by General Assembly 2023
- £51,160 to assist with the installation of a door access system in Assembly Buildings.

### Crescent Church Loan Fund

11. The Crescent Loan Fund was established following the sale of the Crescent Church premises in 1975 and provides low interest loans to congregations having short term financial problems.

The interest charged on new loans is at half the total of bank base rate plus 2% and this is charged on the average balance outstanding over the term of the loan.

The maximum loan normally provided by the Fund is £50,000 and the normal maximum term is 3 years, however loans of up to 5 years can be provided at the discretion of the Trustees. Further information about loans from the Fund is available from the Financial Secretary's Department.

During 2023 the Trustees provided loans to 4 congregations totalling £137,395 and the loan balance outstanding at 31 December 2023 was £169,798. At that time the fund had £226,926 available to meet loan request.

### **Bequests**

12. The Trustees received a report of all bequests notified to the Church during 2023 and wish to record their deep gratitude for those who have decided to support the Church in this way.

### **Investment Manager to the General Investment Fund**

13. As reported to General Assembly 2023, the Trustees appointed "bfnace", a London based consultancy firm to assist with a tendering process to review the appointment of an investment manager to manage the General Investment Fund. That process concluded with the formal appointment of CCLA Investment Management Limited in February 2023 and with the fund transfer taking place at the beginning of April 2023.
14. As part of CCLA's appointment, the Trustees have confirmed their investment policy and associated investment restrictions. In summary CCLA will not directly invest in companies:
- deriving more than 10% of their revenue from the extraction of oil and gas (this is defined as revenue derived from oil and gas extraction and production and oil and gas refining); derives more than 5% of their revenue from the extraction of energy coal or tar sands; companies whose principal business is the generation of electricity, that have not demonstrated the ability to align their business with the Paris Climate Change Agreement; extractives or utilities sector companies where productive engagement is not believed to be possible.
  - Producing landmines, cluster bombs, chemical biological weapons, and /or nuclear weapons.
  - Having significant involvement (>10% of revenue) in alcohol, gambling, pornography, tobacco, high interest lending, non-military weapons, or strategic military sales.

The Trustees consider that this not only reflects resolutions previously approved by the General Assembly but is also consistent with a socially responsible investment policy.

### **The Rev John Forsythe Endowment**

15. As part of the winding up of the Presbyterian Widows' Fund Association the John Forsythe Endowment has been transferred to the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland under a scheme approved by the Department for Communities. Under the Scheme the assets of the Fund transfer to the Trustees with the income to be used for the benefit of the "wives and children of ministers and deceased ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who are physically disabled or in chronic ill health".

The transfer of this fund was actioned during 2023 and Trustees are developing criteria for the distribution of the income from the Fund.

### **Trustees**

16. At the 2024 General Assembly Mr Allen McAdam and Mr John Mason will have completed their first term of office, having been appointed in 2019. Both have expressed a willingness to continue for a further term. The Trustees wish to record their thanks to John and Allen both for their previous service and for their willingness to continue for a further term of office.

In addition, Rev Dr Donald Watts and Mrs Avril Hennan will have completed their second terms as Trustees having been appointed in 2014. The Trustees wish to record their deep appreciation to both for their committed service and valuable contribution to the work of the Trustees.

The General Council previously decided that all nominees for appointment by the General Assembly, should come to the Assembly through its Nominations Committee. With regard to the Trustees, the Nominations Committee are to take this forward by:

*"nominating Trustees to the General Assembly for appointment, following advice from the Clerk of Assembly and the Secretary of the Trustees."*

# COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS

Convener: Rev DAVID W. BRICE

Secretary: Mr DERMOT PARSONS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council report reflects the work of the Council for Social Witness, showing how wider issues affecting social care, and society generally, have impacted on our services that support vulnerable people and, through the Taking Care programme, on the life of our church. The themes of developing safeguarding approaches, embedding our improved policies and procedures that direct care for vulnerable people, improving financial stability and developing our staff teams have run through our work this year and were taken into account when Council discussed and agreed the 2024–2025 Business Plan.
2. The Specialist Services Committee oversees the work in our Criminal Justice and Addictions services. The services have continued to respond effectively to changing societal needs.
3. The former Taking Care Committee has been replaced by a Safeguarding Panel to oversee our safeguarding work in congregations, with development of improved safeguarding approaches now underway. Adult safeguarding work in congregations is underway, and the necessary review of safeguarding policy and procedures can commence.
4. The Older People's Services Committee has responsibility for the work in our Care Homes in Northern Ireland and Tritonville supported living service in Ireland. While services continue to experience staffing-related challenges, a major emphasis is now on financial performance.
5. Disability Services Committee oversees the work of the services provided to people with a disability, and the Kinghan Mission for the Deaf Community. Changing demand and needs, financial stability and essential improvements to facilities have dominated this year's work. In Lawnfield House, the higher number of permanent residents fully reflects demand and the work to align Peacehaven with other disability services has progressed well.

### Council Convener's Report

6. The past 12 months have been challenging especially in the area of finances and we anticipate the next 6 months to be eventful and fast moving. Simultaneously we have been consolidating professional levels of administering care that are transparent, implementing efficient rota systems, and introducing budget management in each home.

7. We recognise this is unsettling for staff but at so many levels it is evidently necessary. We have appreciated the increased demands this has placed on our Regional Managers in introducing new methods and rectifying areas of concern. In all of this we have had the indispensable support of our Finance and Human Relations departments who we are keeping extremely busy. Ably led by our Council Secretary, he and our Regional Managers are having detailed and strenuous negotiations with multiple statutory funding bodies.
8. Our committee and panel meetings are lengthy and detailed. All the above indicates an intensity of workload that invites us to uphold all our faithful and wonderfully compassionate staff in regular and consistent prayer through 2024.
9. Complex times necessitate meeting a simple and straightforward challenge, “Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” 1Cor 4.2. In the middle of arduous times a strong leadership team at central and local level is being forged.

### **Secretary's Report**

10. This has been a year of great challenge, change and yet solid achievement for the Council for Social Witness. Probably most people expected that normality would return to social care, once the Covid 19 pandemic receded and post Brexit arrangements bedded down. Instead, a new state of constant turbulence has emerged: staff recruitment and retention challenges, inadequate public sector funding and rocketing costs for providers dominate the care environment – and this is our reality.
11. In our own senior team, it has been a time of challenge. We have worked internally to develop a servant leadership model for ourselves as a group of leaders and there cannot be many periods of time where the humility, openness to learning and willingness to be mutually supportive have been more apposite. Last year I cited Richard Sibbes and this year again his words have resonance for us:
12. “After conversion we need bruising so that reeds may know themselves to be reeds, and not oaks. Even reeds need bruising, because of the remainder of pride in our nature, and to let us see that we live by mercy.”
13. By the end of 2023, we had assembled a professional senior team and the events of the year have truly shown us that we will not succeed through professional strength alone, but through recognising our individual and corporate weakness and seeking God's wisdom.
14. Following decisions in 2023, the Council established a Safeguarding Panel to support the Head of Safeguarding in work to develop PCI's approach to both child and adult safeguarding across the denomination. Although this significant work has had some setbacks and is even now at an early stage of development, it is crucial to supporting congregations in ensuring safe arrangements for all who engage with the church. Some important achievements can be noted. Our volunteer Taking Care trainers have continued to raise awareness across the whole island of Ireland and their

training materials have undergone review and refinement. The Safeguarding Panel has started its strategic oversight work; the Safeguarding Office has started to issue procedures to ministers to support them in handling challenging safeguarding situations, and the first sessions to raise awareness of support available to those who may have experienced harm in the past have taken place in Ards, Derry & Donegal and Monaghan Presbyteries.

15. CSW's care services have continued their journey of improvement over the past year. Regular robust senior manager oversight and service visits have supported service managers in their challenging task of delivering care that reflects the importance that every resident and service user has to God. The service manager group has become more stable, with our monthly Managers' Meetings solidly established as a forum for learning and sharing. We have developed well over a hundred new policies and the senior team have worked with service managers to embed these policies in practice. This has had the effect of making care safer, and better. After significant expenditure, strong approaches to fire and water safety, so critical in care services, are in place. Recruitment and retention continue to be a challenge, and the impact of a new Recruitment Executive, Janet Moffett, has been a real boost in this area.
16. A major challenge in 2023 has been managing services within available finances. There is some history of reliance on disposals of unwanted properties and transferring surpluses from some services to offset deficits elsewhere. This approach cannot continue because it has led to underinvestment in existing properties, and has relied upon slack in the system that simply no longer exists. 2023 has seen the start of realistic budget building and upskilling of our management team to plan their staffing and expenditure, a process which should start to bear fruit in 2024. We are also grateful to Colin Muldoon for the accurate and informative evaluation he has completed of our existing estate. Equally, the unstinting work of Harry Orr in maintaining our varied buildings in good condition has been a joy to experience throughout the year. At the same time, the senior team has started stretching engagement with statutory funders as there are a number of situations where CSW is simply not receiving funding that covers the cost of service provided.
17. During the year Rick Hill, Secretary of the Council for Mission in Ireland, identified an insightful question in "Is our inability to prune impacting our ability to plant?". This question is critical for us too, not only in the context of financial planning. Continually we should ask ourselves whether we are meeting today's societal challenges, and whether a fresh expression of our mission is best achieved through our current service provision – essentially, whether our established ways can accommodate a new work of God. We are aware of the dangers of new wine in old wineskins (Luke 5:37-39) and can be confident this reflection will be critical in 2024.
18. It was a joy to us to meet members of Kinghan Church at General Assembly 2023, benefitting from the BSL interpreting that accompanied CSW's

contribution last year. During 2023, the relationship between Kinghan Church staff and the CSW senior team has deepened and we look forward to supporting Kinghan increasingly effectively in the incoming year.

19. CSW agreed a stretching set of Business Objectives for 2023 and it is pleasing to see the degree of realistic achievement there has been against these. At Council in March 2024, further objectives centered around sustainability were agreed for the incoming year (Appendix 1).
20. In the later part of this year, once more there were changes in our senior team which have reinforced the need for humility and prayer as we seek God's will for our future work. In these days the wise counsel of our Convener, Rev David Brice, has been a strong resource to us. In many practical ways the work of Sarah Leung and the HR team, Elaine Glass and the CSW Admin team, and the wisdom of our Finance Manager, David Hooks, have sustained us also.
21. We continue to serve in times of challenge and, in closing, there is further affirmation of the reality for our senior team in the words of Richard Sibbes:
22. "Are you bruised? Be of good comfort, he calls you. Do not conceal your wounds, open everything before him and do not take Satan's counsel. Go to Christ, although trembling, as the poor woman who said, "If I may only touch his garment" (Matthew 9:21). We shall be healed and have a gracious answer."

## **SPECIALIST SERVICES COMMITTEE (SSC)**

23. The Committee, with grateful thanks to God, wish to acknowledge the dedication of all staff across the three Special Services sites, and also commend our Convener, David Brice; Director, Dermot Parsons; Regional Manager, Caroline Yeomans and the Council for Social Witness Office Manager, Elaine Glass and staff, Gail Gamble for their work.
24. The adoption of a Risk Management Approach (RMA) continues to highlight issues and bear fruit.
25. In support of current objectives, SSC resolve to strengthen ties with North Belfast Presbytery by seeking input from a Presbytery representative on the Committee.

### **Thompson House (TH)**

26. The SSC wish firstly to acknowledge the dedication of Mr David Farrow and the staff team at TH.
27. The spiritual ethos of this service remains strong, with weekly Bible classes taking place with both residents and staff participating. It is heart-warming to acknowledge that Glengormley Presbyterian Church maintain their strong links with TH.

28. There are currently no staffing vacancies. A review of the current staffing model is in the pipeline and the additional funding secured will enable this review to take place. One student Social Worker is currently on placement.
29. TH shows a current financial deficit but is now in surplus due to the increase in housing benefit. The Mount Charles catering contract is due for renegotiation in 2025. Work with staff around governance, training and workplace learning continues with good staff engagement.
30. One incident has occurred since the last report, with a resident being viewed as a significant high risk. This only goes to highlight the kind of work that our staff are willing to engage in, in order to provide a safe environment for all our services users at TH.
31. Finally, TH will celebrate their 40th Anniversary on 28th April 2024 and a couple of celebration events are planned to mark this significant milestone.
32. The funding stream associated with Thompson House has been resolved for the meantime, after we passed a resolution last year: “that we engage robustly with external funding sources to service sustainability.”

### **Carlisle House (CH)**

33. The SSC wish firstly to acknowledge the dedication of Mr David Cuthbert and the staff team at CH.
34. Current treatment programme and staffing model dictates that there should be a maximum cohort of 10 at any one time (full occupancy is 16 beds).
35. Since April 23, 41 treatment episodes have been met. A recent RQIA inspection highlighted four areas for improvement.
36. Flexible working arrangements have been agreed and implemented for two staff members.
37. There has been an issue with the Housing Association not paying for essential work that was required.
38. Finances remain a concern, with other funding options currently being explored and will be reviewed regularly. However, SSC is of one mind that we need to continue to engage robustly with our current partners, simply to maintain equitable levels of funding which other similar service providers have already received.

### **Gray's Court (GC)**

39. The SSC wish firstly to acknowledge the dedication of the manager Mrs Frances Craig and her staff team at GC.
  - GC remains at full occupancy, with staffing levels remaining stable as a result of sterling work by the Manager.
  - GC services continue to run at a significant deficit due to Housing Benefit however, the Regional Manager is confident that this can be addressed by engaging with our current partners.

JOHN STANBRIDGE, Convener

## **DISABILITY SERVICES COMMITTEE (DSC)**

40. Our report begins with staff as we are always in awe of the commitment, zeal and motivation of our staff, especially (but by no means exclusively) our senior management staff: Dermot, Caroline, Jayne and now our new Regional Care Manager, Eddy Kerr. Welcome to the team Eddy! Eddy will join with Jayne and Caroline and will temporarily take over Jayne's Disability Services remit.

Not enough can be said about how much our staff do; nor could enough be said about how much they are vitalising other staff members within our homes to achieve more – with heart.

41. Staffing, however, is an area where much consternation exists as we still have a high number of staff in our homes who are suspended on full pay during an investigation. This also incurs costs for replacement staff and agency staff to cover shifts.

### **Kinghan Church (KC)**

42. KC continues to enjoy worship and fellowship as a community for deaf people in the heart of Belfast's Botanic Avenue. KC have decided together, that the future life and witness of Kinghan no longer lies in a relationship with Windsor and the KC Committee have taken on the task of ownership. KC are particularly indebted to Rev Will Murphy for all the pastoral support he gives.

43. The Committee owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to our two staff members in KC, Judith Currie and Claire Nicholson, who have gone way beyond the bounds of contract and expectation to serve the people of KC and the surrounding community.

More recently the KC community were delighted to be the attention of BBC Newsline, when journalist Conor Neeson visited and filmed some interviews with members. Our thanks to Mark Smith for liaising with the BBC.

44. Our care homes each continue to be a place of care and kindness for individuals and their families, in Christ's Name. Each resident is an individual who is treated as a precious image bearer of God. As we know, many of these individuals have very specific care needs, and care needs that often change with time. Our care homes have always met these needs with compassion and professionalism.

### **Willow Brook**

45. Our utmost thanks and appreciation must be expressed to Francis Mooney who is temporarily managing Willow Brook. He has brought experience and expertise and is going the extra mile (literally) to be there. Willow Brook staff are settling well under his support. Residents are actively involved with staff in a number of activities on site, and off, which even extended to a trip to Paris.

**Aaron House**

46. Occupancy remains high in Aaron House with 14 permanent beds and 2 respite beds. With a new staffing rota introduced, many staff issues have been resolved, however night shift posts remain difficult to fill.
47. Residents have been supported to go on a number of outings throughout the year, including Belfast Zoo and the cinema. The residents also highly enjoyed the petting zoo visiting during the summer.
48. Plans to develop a model for day care for people with disabilities that meets community needs, and is financially viable, are underway.

**Lawnfield House**

49. Occupancy remains high in Lawnfield House and our new manager there is doing a wonderful job. A new staffing model and budget management is good for finances however, due to significant environmental and structural works, along with various financial pressures, this means a financial deficit is predicted. However, local demand for Lawnfield House is high so there is certainly much potential for the future.

**Peacehaven**

50. Peacehaven Trust have been the grateful recipients of a number of substantial gifts from wills providing a basis for enhancing the service. Occupancy continues to run at a high level with all 17 beds often occupied. Staffing remains an issue with recruitment issues in ROI, meaning agency staff (and their incurred financial consequence) are in use.
51. The Committee celebrates the recent permission from the Irish Charity Commission for Peacehaven CLG to adopt a new constitution that enables them to be fully under the auspices of PCI.
52. The Committee continue to take note of the particular issues regarding the general recruitment of staff within the health and social care sector, to which Disability Services have not been immune. We appreciate the work and effort of Sarah Leung (HR) in investigating this and strategies being rolled out to counter this.  

Many recruitment drives have been held in various locations which have produced some results. The Committee also takes note of the increase in costs right across the Council for heat, light, staffing, and food costs.
53. The work and ministry of everyone involved in the Council for Social Witness, Disability Services, not to mention the surrounding work by HR, Admin staff and David Hooks in Finance, is an invaluable witness to the world that all people matter to God. It is a privilege to serve the most vulnerable in society and be able to treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve as precious image bearers of God.

STEPHEN LOWRY, Convener

## **OLDER PEOPLE'S SERVICES COMMITTEE**

54. Since the last meeting of the General Assembly, there have been a number of changes that have had a significant impact on the delivery of care within our homes.
55. Throughout 2023, the Senior Team continued to drive improvements in our care homes, both in practical ways such as the introduction of new financial and staffing models, and in promoting a strong Christian ethos in all aspects of care and service provision. These improvements are evident in the feedback from regular announced and unannounced inspections from the Regulator. The increased interest in the life of our care homes and their residents from local presbyteries and clergy is a great answer to prayer and a source of blessing to residents and staff alike.
56. Occupancy has improved since the last meeting of the General Assembly but continues to be an area of concern. Locally, Home Managers continue to liaise with HSC Trust personnel to encourage applications and to ensure that waiting lists are live and actionable moving forward.
57. The Senior Team continues to work with all Managers to implement new staff ratios and new shift patterns. This has had the immediate effect of reducing the number of agency staff employed per shift, but more work remains to be done to reduce the cost of agency staff further, particularly in providing night-time and nursing cover. The new staffing models are also designed to ensure that the needs of residents are fully met within each home.
58. The Senior Team are working hard to reduce the number of staff who are on precautionary suspension following a complaint or allegation. This has a human cost in terms of stress and distress to staff, but also a financial penalty for the service as a whole. While the backlog of investigations has reduced, there is still a significant number of staff unavailable for work.
59. The financial position continues to be a cause of concern, although the position has improved since the last report to the General Assembly.
60. Fee income has increased by 7.4% in our residential care homes and by 6.2% in our nursing home. However, at the same time, the national minimum wage has increased by 9.7%, driving up overall staff costs as well as the cost of any necessary agency staff used to ensure all shifts are covered. We have engaged the services of an agency broker where we can book properly trained staff whilst appropriately managing finances.
61. The Senior Management Team continues to consider further financial controls and to drive down costs wherever possible. Monthly meetings are held between the Senior Managers and Finance Manager to review financial performance.

62. Change is frequently slow to materialise and is always challenging. It is difficult to overestimate how demanding this change programme has been and continues to be for our care homes. We are blessed to have a committed, caring and capable Senior Team, so ably led by Dermot, to take forward the necessary developments.

JOYCE McKEE, Convener

## **SAFEGUARDING PANEL**

63. The year since the last General Assembly in 2023, when the Taking Care Panel was appointed and I became convener, has brought many significant and unexpected challenges alongside those that were more predictable. Yet, in the providence of God, our ministry has progressed a great deal, and we can record new and ongoing work on a number of very important issues such as (but not limited to) the establishment and development of the role of the Taking Care panel; plans to update the Taking Care guidance; working on an adult safeguarding policy for congregations; upgrading our record keeping system and working on an enhanced training programme. In general terms we are very aware that much needs to be done to bring our safeguarding policies and procedures to the highest standard. This is important not only for those most directly involved and affected, but also for the honour of Christ in an increasingly troubled society.
64. We are also of course committed to providing ongoing assistance and guidance on the numerous queries that come to our staff in the office.
65. This report would not be complete without my recording very specific and grateful thanks to each and all of our staff, panel and Council members who contribute so much time and energy to our work, and bring so much wisdom and expertise to this crucially important part of our church's ministry.

NORMAN HAMILTON, Convener

**APPENDIX A BUSINESS PLAN 2024-25**

Objective number	Proposed 2024 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner
2024/1	Develop and implement a coherent system that delivers the staff team we need on each site, this should include a focus on retention.		Jan 2025	Sarah Leung
2023/5	Review and develop the PCI ethos across all services and develop the embedding of the ethos across all.	This work is partially complete, but consistent implementation of ethos will take several years	Jan 2025	Dermot Parsons; Regional Managers
2023/6	Refresh and clarify the roles of the local support committees. Write clear terms of reference.	This has not been achievable this year.	Jan 2025	David Brice / Dermot Parsons
2024/2	Implement a new training development role, with responsibility for all levels of training across CSW staff		Jan 2025	Dermot Parsons
2023/11	Update Taking Care Guidance	Work has been undertaken but this area requires further attention.	Aug 2023	Head of Safeguarding
2023/12	Establish a programme for training and development for safeguarding and have this implemented	A Training and Development Officer was appointed. There is further work to be done.	Aug 2024	Head of Safeguarding

Objective number	Proposed 2024 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner
2023/13	Develop and implement an adult safeguarding policy for churches	This is written but not finalised or implemented	Sept 2024	Head of Safeguarding
2023/15	Identify the full range of policies, procedures and guidance required across the denomination to ensure satisfactory safeguarding arrangements	This work is at an early stage, but is projected to progress in early 2024.	Sept 2024	Head of Safeguarding
2023/16	Prepare paper outlining Taking Care resource needs for 2024-6	This paper is largely complete but needs to be accompanied by a robust work plan including developing standards for safeguarding with measurable evidence indicators	Sept 2024	Head of Safeguarding
2023/17	Work to establish new Taking Care Panel and initiate policy development work	This work has commenced as intended. Resource constraints delayed progress in January 2024.	Sept 2024	Head of Safeguarding
2024/3	Record keeping system is urgently required.		Sept 2024	Head of Safeguarding

Objective number	Proposed 2024 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner
2024/4	Complete and maintain updated needs/dependency information for all service users in each service to inform funding negotiations and staffing arrangements		January 2025	Regional Managers
2024/5	Produce monthly financial performance information for each service that can be used to inform operational management		March 2024	David Hooks
2024/6	Produce quarterly financial performance information for the council for social witness		March 2024	David Hooks
2024/7	Produce financial forecasts for 2025 that inform strategic decisions		December 2024	David Hooks
2024/8	Achieve implementation of an electronic care system (Epi Care)		Pilot site live in September 2024 and all services by March 2025	Dermot Parsons
2023/25	Develop a costed asset renewal and replacement program for CSW Services	This work is deferred into 2024 owing to complexity	Jan 2025	Dermot Parsons

Objective number	Proposed 2024 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner
2023/26	Develop and implement a comprehensive routine maintenance program across CSW services.	This area is largely complete, though final work elements have been impacted by the resignation of a senior manager.	April 2024	Dermot Parsons
2023/18	Thompson House Develop a business proposal to formalise the currently informal outreach and aftercare arrangements.		September 2024	Caroline Yeomans & David Farrow
2024/9	Carlisle House Achieve funding levels that recognize the services currently provided		June 2024	Caroline Yeomans & David Hooks
2024/10	Willow Brook Develop options for the future of Willow Brook and make proposals to CSW		June 2024	Eddy Kerr
2024/11	Harold McCauley House Refine and implement the recovery plan and make recommendations to CSW		June 2024	Eddy Kerr

Objective number	Proposed 2024 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner
2024/12	Lawnfield House Develop options for the future of Lawnfield and make proposals to CSW		June 2024	Eddy Kerr
2024/13	Aaron House Day Care Develop a model for day care for people with disabilities that meets community needs and is financially viable		June 2024	Margaret Millar

# COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY

Convener: Rev A. FAULKNER

Secretary: Rev D. ALLEN

## Convener's Introduction

The Council's work has continued through its committees and panels.

Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson has completed his term convening the Union College Management Committee and the Nominations Committee is bringing a proposal that Very Rev Dr John Kirkpatrick become convener after this Assembly.

## MINISTERIAL STUDIES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

1. In the autumn of 2023, 10 students commenced training for Ordained Ministry. There are currently 28 Ministry Students at Union Theological College.
2. The Ministry Taster Day was held at UTC on Saturday 16 March 2024. There was a record attendance due, in part, to extensive advertising which included a two-page article in the February 2024 edition of the *Presbyterian Herald*, emails to all ministers and clerks of presbyteries, multiple social media posts and a slot on BBC Radio Ulster's *Sunday Sequence* programme which featured Professor Leach and two Ministry Students. The format of the Ministry Taster Day allowed enquirers to enjoy brief input from a wide range of people: current Ministry Students, Licentiates, those in the early years of Ministry, UTC staff and members of the Council.
3. Ten applicants for Ordained Ministry attended UTC for final interviews on Monday 25 March and Tuesday 26 March 2024. They were interviewed by the following panels:
 

Angus Stewart (Chairperson), Stephen Lowry (Chairperson), Gary Glasgow (Chairperson), Robin Aicken, Elizabeth Stewart, Lorna Curry, Mark Johnston, Sam Finlay, Stephen McNie, Joe Campbell, Deborah Webster, Trevor Long, Amanda Best and Alan Dickey.
4. As a result, eight applicants are being nominated to the General Assembly to commence training for Ordained Ministry.
5. Of the eight applicants, two requested flexible pathways (see Resolutions 4(a) and 4(b)). It is proposed by the council that a further two applicants undergo a flexible pathway (see Resolutions 4(c) and 4(d)).
6. Two applicants are not being recommended to the General Assembly. One availed of a pastoral conversation. One Presbytery requested a review, the

outcome of which is not known at the time of writing.

7. The monthly Licentiate Training Programme has been ongoing and has included sessions led by the Council for Mission in Ireland and the Conciliation Panel with a particular emphasis on leadership. Rev Bobby Liddle has agreed to assist Professor Leach with this, which has been a great encouragement.
8. In September 2024, 13 Licentiates will become eligible for call. We are grateful to God for raising up workers for his harvest field.
9. One Licentiate, Mr Billy Abwa, has been reassigned, to Duneane and First Randalstown. His pathway has been extended for 18 months. He will be eligible for call in June 2025.
10. The Post-Ordination Training Conference was held on 21, 22 and 23 May 2024. Dr Zack Eswine was the main speaker, and the focus was on pastoral care.
11. The Pre-Retirement Conference gives time and space for Ministers and spouses to consider how to ‘finish well’ in their particular areas of service and plays an important part in the Ministerial Development Programme. Two Pre-Retirement Conferences were held in autumn 2023 with a further three conferences being planned for 2024–2025. Gratitude is expressed to Rev Alistair and Mrs Angela Bill; and Rev Robert and Mrs Christine Bell for facilitating these. The conferences continue to be appreciated by those who attend.
12. Following a series of meetings during the summer of 2023, the Ministry Formation Panel brought a report to the Council for Training in Ministry. It concerned third year Ministry Student, Mr Tom Finnegan. After careful consideration, and with much regret, the Council for Training in Ministry resolved to suspend Mr Finnegan’s pathway immediately and bring a recommendation to the General Assembly that it be terminated (see Resolution 5). Mr Finnegan asked for a Review of this decision. The Review took place and upheld the decision of the Council. Mr Finnegan did not take up the offer of a pastoral conversation.
13. In March 2024, Mr Richard Hill, Licentiate Assistant under the care of Iveagh Presbytery, resigned from the Ministry training pathway due to personal reasons.
14. The current deadline for Ordained Ministry applications of 15 September, means Presbyteries have a very tight timeframe within which to arrange interviews. The Council for Training in Ministry believes a new closing date for applications of 31 August would be preferable. The Council is bringing a resolution to this effect.

EDDIE CHESTNUTT, Convener

### **Students’ Bursary Fund**

*Rev Adrian Moffett, Students’ Bursary Fund agent writes:*

15. The Students’ Bursary Fund exists to make financial provision for students

for the ordained ministry during their time of study.

In the academic year beginning September 2023, 28 students are in receipt of grants. The cost to the fund of the grants, fees and other expenses for this academic year is in the region of £561,500.

The Students' Bursary Fund receives its income from offerings at services of licensing of probationers, of ordination and installation of ministers and other special services, and through personal and congregational donations, as well as congregational assessment. The support of the Church in these ways is gratefully acknowledged. Those who have responsibility for planning a service of licensing, ordination and installation, etc. are asked to ensure full use is made of the Students' Bursary Fund literature, especially the Gift Aid envelope. (Experience suggests that where literature is made available at an earlier time, such as on the Sunday before the special service, those attending are more likely to make use of the Gift Aid Scheme.) The literature is available from Assembly Buildings.

## DEACONESS SELECTION AND TRAINING PANEL

### Current Students

16. The panel notes the good progress of the existing cohort of student deaconesses, about to graduate.

It expresses appreciation for the pastoral care offered to the students by Mrs Phyllis Linton on its behalf.

It also commends Dr Olwyn Mark for her leadership of the deaconesses' training programme.

### Recruitment and Selection of a new cohort of students

17. The panel received in July 2023 a letter from the Council for Mission in Ireland, asking for a new cohort of student deaconesses.

The faculty of Union Theological College agreed to deliver the training.

The panel conducted a recruitment and selection exercise for two student deaconesses, to commence training in September 2024.

Two applications were received under the initial recruitment and selection process. This process was paused, in order to re-advertise from May 2024 and so widen the pool of applicants.

The start date for training a new cohort of deaconesses has therefore been deferred until September 2025.

ANGUS STEWART, Convener

## UNION THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

## MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

18. The Management Committee wishes to put on record its thanks to all who have contributed to the life and work of Union Theological College in this past year. It has been another busy year and we are especially indebted to the faculty and professional staff for their willingness to ensure that all is done decently and in order. The atmosphere throughout the College reflects good working relationships, which in turn makes for a pleasant place to work, study and visit.

### Teaching

19. Recruitment for the BA in Theology, validated by St Mary's University, Twickenham, in the 2023/24 academic year was below forecast, with seven students enrolling. However, a new recruitment strategy is resulting in the number of offers made for the 2024/25 year far exceeding expectations. It is hoped that this will result in recruitment being above the projected recruitment target.  
Agreement has been reached with the Langham Partnership to fund PhD students. This has potential to advance the mission of both partners in many ways.
20. The inspection report of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education following its Review of the College in May 2023 was particularly encouraging. Thanks are due to faculty, staff and students for their hard work in preparation for the Review. The findings are available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/union-theological-college-belfast-her\(ap\)-2023.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/union-theological-college-belfast-her(ap)-2023.pdf)

### Staffing

21. Prof Gordon Campbell, Professor of New Testament, has given notice of his intention to retire in August 2024. College and the denomination are grateful to Prof Campbell for his service, taking up post in 2007, and serving as Principal from 2021-2023. Council wishes him the Lord's blessing as he prepares for retirement.  
The General Council has been informed of Prof Campbell's retirement.
22. During this past year Dr Graham Shearer has been appointed as Lecturer in Theology; Dr Olwyn Mark (Lecturer in Practical Theology) and Dr Stephen Moore (Lecturer in Old Testament) have moved to permanent contracts; and the contract of Dr Robbie Booth (Lecturer in New Testament) has been extended.
23. In keeping with many employers, the College has struggled to recruit administrative staff. We are grateful for employees who have been recruited on a temporary basis, their gifts and commitment to the work has been a benefit to the College.

### Property

24. The report of the Building Condition Survey has been received. In

summary, it states that renovations are needed which in total amount to approximately £3 million.

The magnitude of this sum has resulted in the Council referring the matter to the General Council.

The report states that work amounting to £25,000 is required urgently. This work is being undertaken.

### **Finance**

25. The committee is extremely appreciative of the extension of the transitional financial arrangements that have been in place to support Union.

26. The College continues to experience financial challenges.

Expenditure has increased more than was forecast, mainly due to higher increases in salaries, support services charges and general inflation, than anticipated. These are beyond the control of the Committee.

In addition, income has been lower than anticipated, primarily due to lower numbers of ministry students and BA students than anticipated.

### **Guysmere Project**

27. An approach has been made to the College by representatives of the Project, inviting Union to become involved. Specifically, this would involve the appointment of an associate member of Faculty, based at Guysmere, working on C.S. Lewis. The Senior Research Fellow would not be employed by Union, but the agreement would give Union priority access to Guysmere. A Memorandum of Understanding is being drafted for consideration by the Committee.

IVAN PATTERSON, Convener

## **RECEPTION OF MINISTERS AND LICENTIATES COMMITTEE**

28. The Committee met four times since the 2023 General Assembly.

### **Enquiries**

29. Twenty-three people contacted the RMLC during the year seeking information about transferring to the ministry of PCI. The Committee has been speaking with eight enquirers who have followed up with a clear intention of desiring to pursue the matter.

### **Transferring Ministers**

30. Rev Mark Haugh, originally from Northern Ireland and theologically trained in the Presbyterian Church in America, having been granted

eligibility for a Call in February 2023, was ordained and installed as Minister of Waringstown Presbyterian Church in September 2023.

31. Rev Mariann Gilicze, an ordained minister in the Hungarian Reformed Church, serving as Assistant Minister in Gilnahirk Presbyterian Church since December 2020, was granted eligibility for a Call in February 2023.
32. Rev Elyse McCroskery, an ordained minister in the Protestant Evangelical Church of Timor, serving as Assistant Minister in Windsor Presbyterian Church since June 2022, was granted eligibility for a Call from June 2024.
33. Dr Stephen Moore, originally from Northern Ireland, theologically trained at Oak Hill College, London and currently serving as a Lecturer in Union College, was received as a Transferring Licentiate and began an 18-month assistantship in Hill St Presbyterian Church in July 2023.
34. Rev Graeme Shearer, an ordained English Baptist (FIEC) minister, currently serving as a Lecturer in Union College, was received as a Transferring Minister and began an 18-month assistantship in Lowe Presbyterian Church in May 2024.
35. Mr Lucas Da Costa, originally from Brazil, theologically trained at Union School of Theology (Open University) and licensed by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales was received as a Transferring Licentiate in April 2024. He will begin a 24-month assistantship when a suitable placement is found.

### **Requests for Permission to Preach in Vacancies**

36. At the request of Dublin and Munster Presbytery, Rev Niek Wit (retired from Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa) was interviewed on 7 September 2023 and has been granted permission to preach in vacancies throughout their Presbytery.

### **Request for Restoration of Status under Code Par 219(5)**

37. Rev Kenneth G Patterson: Mr Patterson, a former minister without charge under the presbytery of Derry & Donegal, submitted a request to the Committee for restoration of his status. After consultation with, and approval from the presbytery, the Committee, acting with Assembly powers under Par 291(5)(b)(i) of the Code, restored status on 23 February 2024.
38. Rev Karen Campbell: The Committee referred Rev Campbell, under Par 219(5)(c) of the Code, to Templepatrick Presbytery. Presbytery received Rev Campbell as a minister without charge under its care.

### **Review of Procedures for Transferring Ministers**

39. A comprehensive review of all procedures for prospective Transferring Ministers from the point of initial enquiry through to installation in a PCI congregation has begun and it is hoped this will be completed later this year.

### **Recognised Ministries**

40. *Rev Dr Ruth Patterson, Restoration Ministries, writes:*

Restoration Ministries continues to provide a safe and confidential space for people to come for prayer and sharing. We also offer Spiritual Direction and are finding an increasing number of people wanting to avail of this. The work of retreat giving and speaking at various events in different parts of the island is ongoing and very encouraging, including a quiet day for Belfast South Presbytery in September 2023. The current six Faith and Friendship Groups are thriving and our annual gathering takes place in the month of May each year. We are grateful for the prayers and support of all those who share the vision for reconciliation, healing and peace.

## **PASTORAL CARE OF MINISTERS AND THEIR FAMILIES PANEL**

41. Over the past year the panel has continued its work of seeking to encourage and resource Presbyteries in their provision of pastoral care for ministers and their families.
42. During the year a short video was produced featuring a range of approaches being taken by presbyteries to the care of ministers and their families. This video was circulated around presbyteries offering stimulus to them in this area of their work.
43. The ongoing work of the panel was also highlighted to the wider church, through an article in the Presbyterian Herald.
44. Following on from a similar event last year the panel collaborated with the Moderator, hosting an event for Presbytery representatives in April 2024. Rt Rev Dr Sam Mawhinney was the keynote speaker at this event.

NIALL LOCKHART, Convener

## **ACCREDITED PREACHER AND AUXILIARY MINISTRY PANEL**

### **Accredited Preacher Scheme (APS)**

45. At the time of writing 30 individuals are in the process of being interviewed as applicants to the scheme. Those who are accepted onto the scheme will

have an intensive week of teaching and training at Union College in July, followed by placements in the autumn or early in the new year. Some modifications to the training have been made with a view to making the practicality of the teaching more apparent.

### **Auxiliary Ministers Scheme (AMS)**

46. There have been no significant developments on this matter since the last Assembly, largely due to the lack of AMS posts being created.

### **Handling the Word**

47. The panel is investing a significant amount of its time in producing what effectively amounts to a new course/resource in place of the original 'Handling the Word'. The working title is 'Sharing God's Word', and we hope to be in a position to begin sharing this with the wider church soon. There are six sessions in the proposed course, covering the following matters:

- What is God's word?
- What does God's word say?
- Understanding a text
- Considering your hearers
- Crafting a message
- Preparing to be a messenger

Our hope is that this course might be helpful to a wide variety of people who share God's word in lots of different settings, not just those who might be moving towards the APS or the ordained ministry.

48. We do not envisage completion of the course yielding a qualification, nor will completing it be a formal requirement for applicants to the APS. Having said that, we do expect that completing this course (or one similar to it) prior to applying to the APS will be viewed as best practice. Once the course is readily available, the application form for the APS will be altered to reflect this understanding (i.e. there will be a question on the form that invites applicants to describe how this course, or one similar, to it has helped shape their understanding of preaching).

ANDREW CONWAY, Convener

## **CONCILIATION PANEL**

49. The Conciliation Service continues to support congregations dealing with conflict and has worked on a number of different cases throughout the year since June 2023. Alongside this, the Service has provided training to licentiates, and at presbytery and local congregational levels.
50. The Conciliation Panel is committed to ensuring a high-quality service to

PCI and that conciliators take part in update and development training twice a year, usually in April and October. For each case, the conciliators involved are supported by a supervisor, with whom they meet regularly.

51. The Service is indebted to conciliators and supervisors who give of their time freely in the service of the Church and its Lord.

PAUL JAMIESON, Convener

## APPENDIX 1

### SCHEDULE OF STUDENTS

ARDS

Francine Magill

Union

Jack Neilly

Union

ARMAGH	Daniel Ballantyne	Union
	Jordan Jones	Union
	Alex Richardson	Union
NORTH BELFAST	Dave Dickinson	Union
	Samuel Scott	Union
EAST BELFAST	Andrew Ferguson	Union
	Peter Huey	Union
	Karen Jardine	Union
	Stephen McCombe	Union
CARRICKFERGUS	Stephen McCleery	Union
	Myles Tyrell	Union
COLERAINE & LIMAVADY	Jonathan Boyd	Union
DOWN	Ellis Hanna	Union
DROMORE	Nathan Donnell	Union
	Tom Finnegan	Union
	Ashley Parks	Union
	Steven Woods	Union
DUBLIN & MUNSTER	Josh McCance	Union
	Cillian McNamara	Union
IVEAGH	James Burke	Union
	Stuart McKimm	Union
NEWRY	Matthew Banks	Union
	Ryan Higgins	Union
	Glen McBride	Union
	John McKee	Union
TEMPLEPATRICK	Christine Craig	Union
TYRONE	Colin McKay	Union

# JUDICIAL COMMISSION

Convener: Rev N.A.L. CAMERON

Secretary: CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**NOTE:** The main Report of the Judicial Commission will be taken in Private Session at 10am on Saturday 22 June 2024. When Ministers and Elders register in person at the Assembly they will receive a *Judicial Commission, Special Judicial Commission and Commission on Applications Confidential Report Booklet*.

1. In what has been a busy year, the Judicial Commission has had to meet on a number of occasions, and in a number of different permutations and formats, since the last meeting of the General Assembly in June 2023. There were a number of shorter, yet significant preliminary meetings held as well as some more substantive meetings, reports of these being outlined below.
2. The Judicial Commission met on **4 October 2023** to consider the Notice of Appeal lodged against a decision of a Commission of the Presbytery of Down. It agreed, following the recommendation of the Office Bearers, that the appeal should be heard on the basis of the stated reasons of appeal submitted by the Appellant. The outcome of the Judicial Commission's deliberations can be found in Appendix 1 of the *Judicial Commission and Special Commission Confidential Report Booklet*.
3. The Judicial Commission met on **15 January 2024** and had before it a Reference under Par 21(1) of the Code from the Dublin & Munster Presbytery. In that Reference the Presbytery sought to refer three separate, but closely related, complaints against an individual to the Judicial Commission for determination, having through its officers firstly consulted informally with each of the individuals involved. Following detailed consideration, the Judicial Commission, acting under Par 174(d) of the Code resolved to accept the Reference and, taking the place of the court referring and at its request, adjudicate on the complaints. In doing so, the Commission accepted, in the round, the case made by the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster as to its reasons for making the Reference under Par 21(1) of the Code. The Judicial Commission further resolved that, while recognising there were three separate complaints, because of the fact that the complaints were closely related, that the Complainants would be heard together and at the same time and a date was set to hear the case. The case is still ongoing, having had to be postponed twice because of illness. It is hope that this will be completed prior to the meeting of the General Assembly and therefore a report included in the *Judicial Commission and Special Commission Confidential Report Booklet*.

4. The Judicial Commission met on **8 March 2024** to consider the Notice of Appeal lodged against a decision of a Commission of the Presbytery of Down. The papers lodged were read and consideration was given to the necessary requirements for an appeal to be heard, namely:
  - (a) the appeal has been lodged within 10 days (Code Par 164(1))
  - (b) the person lodging the Notice of Appeal must have “the right to appeal” (Par 163(2))
  - (c) the stated grounds of appeal are “adequate and appropriate to be heard” (Par 165(1))

Following discussion, the Commission agreed that the requirements for the appeal to be heard had been met and agreed to hear the parties on 10 May 2024. This case is ongoing. It is hoped that this will be completed prior to the meeting of the General Assembly and therefore a report included in the *Judicial Commission and Special Commission Confidential Report Booklet*.

5. At the time of writing this Report there are a number of ongoing cases for the Commission to hear. If they are completed prior to the meeting of this year's General Assembly, a Report will be given on the outcome of these cases, either as a verbal report or included in the *Judicial Commission and Special Commission Confidential Report Booklet*. It should be noted that when a matter is being considered by ‘civil authorities’ and it has also been referred to a Presbytery, or indeed has been appealed to the Judicial Commission, the church body only deals with the matter when any relevant civil proceedings have been completed. This, on occasions, can mean some matters can be greatly delayed.

### **Code Republishing**

6. The Judicial Commission met on **12 April 2024** to approve formally the final draft of the Republished Code to be presented to this year's General Assembly and to give guidance on some queries raised by the Panel.
7. The Judicial Commission is grateful to a small number of people who have worked tirelessly over recent years to bring the Code Republishing project to this stage. It expresses the thanks of the Church to each member of the Panel and in particular to its Convener, Rev Dr Donald Watts, the joint Secretaries, the Rev Jim Stothers and the Rev David Allen, the General Assembly Solicitor, Mr Stephen Gowdy and to the Clerk. It is also grateful for the work of Mr Ed Connolly in editing the final proofs for publication and distribution.

## CODE REPUBLISHING PANEL

**NOTE:** The Report of the Code Republishing Panel will be in public at 2.45pm on Friday 21 June 2024

*The Rev Dr Donald Watts (Convener) reports:*

1. The Code Republishing Panel continued to meet since the last Assembly to receive further comments from Presbyteries. Fifteen submissions were received, two simply commending the panel for its work. The others were all carefully considered by the panel and, where it seemed appropriate, amendments made to the draft of the rewritten Code. As before, some of the Presbytery requests for change were beyond the remit of the panel and on some issues on which Presbyteries differ. The panel was grateful where Presbyteries drew attention to omissions or inconsistencies, which have now been corrected.
2. Coming out of this process of review and the panel's general discussions, there are **four areas that the panel drew attention to the Commission**. Any 'proposed changes of policy' have to be referred to the General Council for authorisation to remain in the final draft of the Republished Code. These four proposed changes in policy were, therefore, brought firstly to the Judicial Commission, for the Commission's consideration and approval, prior to referral to the General Council.

- (a) This concerns the Election of ruling elders (RC Par 29.3)

The draft states that the poll of the qualified voters present shall be by secret ballot. This is consistent with RC Par 488.4: "*where an individual is being voted on, it shall normally be by secret ballot.*" The panel believes this is an important provision, when the vote involves an individual, so that people may feel free to express their view, but it is not so specified in the present Code.

[Note: This wording was agreed by the General Council, at its meeting on 16 April 2024, and therefore is included in the final draft of the Republished Code.]

- (b) This concerns the Quorum for a meeting of the Congregational Committee (RC 69)

The Present Code (PC) Par 188 states:

*188. The quorum for a meeting of the Congregational Committee shall be fixed by the Kirk Session at not less than one quarter of its membership.*

This poses problems when a congregation has a large number of members of Kirk Session, who though ex-officio and therefore in committee's "membership" but may not ever attend.

The Revised Code (RC) Par 69 therefore states:

*69. The quorum for a meeting of the Congregational Committee shall be a quarter of elected members, or other higher figure as the kirk session may determine.*

[Note: This wording was agreed by the General Council, at its meeting on 16 April 2024, and therefore is included in the final draft of the Republished Code.]

- (c) This concerns the holding of Annual General Meetings of the Congregation (RC Par 75)

In the Present Code an Annual Meeting of the Congregation is mentioned (Par 45.3), but without specific direction. The draft Revised Code in RC Par 75 makes clear that: “*An Annual Meeting of the congregation shall be held each year to transact any or all of the following business:* ” The panel is of the view that that is the intention of the Present Code.

[Note: The General Council, at its meeting on 16 April 2024, agreed an amendment to this wording and therefore the final draft of RC Par 75 in the Republished Code now read as follows:

“At the discretion of the kirk session, or if requested by 10% of contributors to freewill offering, an Annual General Meeting of the congregation may be held each year to transact any or all of the following business:” ]

- (d) This concerns the publication of a list of contributors alongside their contributions (RC 71.11 and 98)

PC Par 240(3)(a) and (b) state:

- (3) *A list of all contributors to the stipend or weekly freewill offering and to the Central Ministry Fund, with the respective accounts paid by each, shall be similarly prepared; provided that –*

*(a) the list of contributors is shown by number except where a contributor wishes their name to be recorded; but*

*(b) in order to preserve the status of contributors shown by number, their names and numbers shall be held in the joint custody of the Clerk of Kirk Session and the F.W.O. Secretary of the congregation.*

RC Par 71.11 and Par 98 now state:

*71.11 preparing a list of all contributions, identified by number only, to freewill offering, stipend and Central Ministry Fund (See also Par 98);*

*98. The Statement of Accounts together with a list of all contributors to freewill offering and stipend shall be circulated to the congregation in such form as the Presbytery shall decide and individual contributors shall be notified of their contributions either by publication in the report or individually. Where the amount of each individual contribution is to be published, it shall be by number only.*

[Note: This wording was agreed by the General Council, at its meeting on 16 April 2024, and therefore is included in the final draft of the Republished Code.]

# SPECIAL JUDICIAL COMMISSION

Convener: Rev NORMAN A.L. CAMERON

Secretary: CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. The Special Judicial Commission met during the year to deal with one appeal from a decision of a Presbytery. Some details will be included in the *Judicial Commission, Special Judicial Commission and Commission on Applications Confidential Report Booklet* (received by full members when they register in person at the Assembly) and other details will be reported verbally in the Private Session.

# COMMISSION ON APPLICATIONS

Convener: CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. The Commission on Applications met during the year to deal with two appeals from decisions of Presbyteries. Some details will be included in the *Judicial Commission, Special Judicial Commission and Commission on Applications Confidential Report Booklet* (received by full members when they register in person at the Assembly) and other details will be reported verbally in the Private Session.
2. It is recommended to the General Assembly that the Commission on Applications deals, on behalf of the Assembly, with appeals from Presbytery decisions not to seek the retention under its care of licentiates not in an assistantship, or deaconesses not in a post or ministers without charge. As an interim measure, until this can subsequently be included in the Republished Code, a resolution is appended.

# OVERTURES

## CURRENTLY ON THE BOOKS

1. The two overtures below, having being made interim acts at the 2023 General Assembly and having been ‘on the books’ for one further, are now presented to the 2024 General Assembly, with appropriate resolutions (see Resolutions 1 and 2 on page 294)

### OVERTURE RELATING TO PAR 72(i) OF THE CODE

**Purpose** – to update Par 72(i) of the Code to reflect the decision of the 2021 General Assembly requiring an ‘opt-in’ system rather than an ‘opt-out’ system in relation to the retention of Ministers Emeritus.

#### Anent Par 72(i) of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 72(i) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

- (a) annually review the position of each Minister Emeritus and following each review may release a retired minister from the responsibilities of full membership of Presbytery (and thereby also of the General Assembly), whom it shall then designate as Minister Emeritus (Released). A decision to so release is appropriate when:
  - i. a Minister Emeritus requests to be released;
  - ii. a Minister Emeritus fails to request to be retained;
  - iii. there is a lack of capacity to fulfil the responsibilities of membership of Presbytery; or
  - iv. there is a failure to attend Presbytery for a period of twelve months without appropriate reason.

### OVERTURE RELATING TO PAR 118(3) OF THE CODE

**Purpose** – to update one further paragraph of the Code in line with the PTFI Supplemental Charter granted in 2021.

#### Anent Par 118(3) of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 118(3) be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

“The Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland, established by Royal Charter, dated 25th October, 1881, and supplemented by its Supplemental Charter of 2021, shall consist of the Principal and other professors appointed by the Assembly, together with such other persons as may be appointed by the Assembly on the proposal of the Faculty, and is empowered by the said Charter to grant degrees.

# RESOLUTIONS

## GENERAL COUNCIL

### GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE (INITIAL REPORT)

10am Thursday morning.

1. That the Draft Order of Business for the 2024 General Assembly be approved.
2. That the “Guide to Assembly Procedure” (yellow pages) be approved with the appropriate General Assembly Standing Orders suspended when necessary to facilitate alternative presentations etc.
3. That at the 2024 General Assembly, substantive proposed amendments, which have not been submitted to the Business Committee for licensing in advance of the Assembly meeting, will only be permitted, at the discretion of the Moderator, if they genuinely arise in the course of debate, or if they relate to additional resolutions tabled in Supplementary Business.
4. That at the 2024 General Assembly, all resolutions of the Council for Training in Ministry relating to named individuals (i.e. CTM Resolutions 3 – 5) be taken in the Private Session on Saturday morning.
5. That a grant of up to £25,000 be made from the Incidental Fund to the Arrangements Panel of the General Assembly’s Business Committee.
6. That the initial report of the General Assembly’s Business Committee be received.

## GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 1

Thursday afternoon

### Decision Making and Dissent

7. That the General Assembly adopt the following revised underlined wording of the 2023 affirmation 4(iv), which was referred back to the General Council for further consideration by the 2023 General Assembly:  
“Similarly, in private discussion or as part of debate in wider groups outside the courts of the church, ministers and elders should approach such matters in a spirit of grace and humility, acknowledging their ordination vow to “yield submission in the Lord to the courts of this Church” and to “preserve the peace and unity of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as part of the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ”

(Code Par 212(5) for ministers and Par 205(4) for elders). It would therefore not be appropriate for an ordained minister or elder to fail to implement a decision taken by the courts of the Church, or publicly to promote a view which undermines the Church or opposes the stated policy of the Church on any matter apart from when the General Assembly has by resolution recognised liberty in the exercise of conscience on a specific matter, which exercise should be characterised by grace and humility.”

### **Monaghan Memorial Task Group**

8. That in the material provided to Presbyteries relating to the nomination of the Moderator of the General Assembly, information on each nominated minister contained in the Church’s Directory shall be clearly set out, with abbreviations removed and current charge/ charges, presbytery, and any additional current roles within the Church clearly stated.

### **General**

9. That from the 2025 General Assembly onwards, business sessions shall normally no longer be held on Saturdays, unless because of exceptional circumstances and on the recommendation of the General Council.
10. That all annual meetings of the General Assembly, from 2025 onwards, be held in the week containing the second Monday in June.
11. That Section 1 of the report of the General Council, with the exception of the Initial Report of the General Assembly Business Committee, be received.

## **GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 2**

Friday morning

### **Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group**

12. That the report of the Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group be received and its Recommendations 1- 9 be adopted.

### **General**

13. That Section 3 of the report of the General Council be received.

## **GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 3**

Friday morning

14. That the following is recommended with regard to to the implementation of the recommendations of the Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group (if adopted by the 2024 General Assembly):

- (a) That the recommended review of denominational-level structures, resources and buildings, including those at Assembly Buildings and Union College, be carried forward by the following ‘General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel’, reporting to the General Council and through it to the General Assembly:

Moderator and Clerk of Assembly; Convener of the General Council; Financial Secretary, Convener of the Support Services Committee and its Finance Convener; Very Rev Dr William Henry, the Rev Daryl Edwards, Rev David McCullagh, Mr Martin Hampton; Mrs Avril Heenan, Rev Adrian McLernon, Mr Edgar Jardine, Rev David Irvine, Mr Joe Campbell, Rev Naill Lockhart, Rev Stephen McNie.

- (b) That the recommended review of the training of ministers of Word and Sacrament be carried forward by the following ‘Ministerial Training Review Sub-Panel’, reporting to the ‘General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel’ and through it to the General Council and the General Assembly:

Moderator and Clerk of Assembly; Convener of the General Council, Convener and Secretary of the Council for Training in Ministry; the Principal of UTC and the Professor of Ministry and Director of the Institute for Ministry; Very Rev Dr Rob Craig, Prof Paul Hanna, Rev Joanne Smith, Dr Lena Morrow, Rev Dr David Cupples, Rev Darren McCorrison, Very Rev Dr Frank Sellar, Mr Rick Hill, Rev Dr Graham Connor, Rev Angus Stewart, Rev Dr Keith McCrory.

- (c) That the recommended ‘Transitional Implementation Steering Group’ of the General Council (to ensure that there is an effective transition from the vision to reality of the agreed recommendations of the Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group) be as follows:

Moderator, Clerk and Deputy Clerk of Assembly; Convener of the General Council; Convener and Chairman of the Linkage Commission; Very Rev Dr William Henry, Rev Sam Finlay, Mr Rick Hill and the Rev David Thompson.

15. That the following is recommended to deal with various presenting issues:

- (a) That, in light of the anticipated necessary property expenditure in the region of £3 million, the future requirements and provision of buildings for PCI’s theological education be part of the remit of the proposed General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel and its Ministerial Training Review Sub-Panel.
- (b) That consideration of longer-term staffing at Union Theological College be part of the remit of the proposed Ministerial Training Review Sub-Panel of the General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel.

- (c) That the proposed General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel be instructed, as part of its remit, to take forward a detailed overview of the structure, remits and responsibilities of the General Assembly's Councils and Commissions.
  - (d) That the report regarding the Financial position of the Council for Social Witness (CSW) be noted; that the officers of the Support Services Committee continue to monitor the situation in the short to medium term; and that the wider issues relating to CSW be included in the remit of the proposed General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel.
16. That an appropriate report and resolution be brought to the 2025 General Assembly to formalise a relationship (Fraternal – Confessional) and that a representative of EPC(USA) be invited to be present at the 2025 General Assembly when the relationship is being formalised.

### **General**

17. That Section 3 of the report of the General Council be received.

## **GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 4**

Friday evening

### **Nominations Committee**

18. That the following resignations be accepted, and appointments made:
- (a) the resignation of Very Rev Dr FP Sellar as Convener of the Council for Mission in Ireland, that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev Dr BJ Walker be appointed in his place.
  - (b) the resignation of Very Rev Dr IJ Patterson as Convener of the Union Theological College Management Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that Very Rev Dr JA Kirkpatrick, be appointed in his place.
  - (c) the resignation of Ms Karen Jardine as Acting Convener of the State Education Committee, that she be thanked for her services, and that the Rev Robert Herron be appointed in her place.
  - (d) the resignation of Rev JP Stanbridge as Convener of the Specialist Services Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that the Very Rev Dr CJC McMullen be appointed in his place.
19. That the Rev Robert Herron be, and is hereby nominated and appointed by the General Assembly as a Trustee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in room of Rev Dr Donald Watts, retired, and the appointment of the Rev Robert Herron as a said Trustee due attestation is made by the signature of the Moderator of the General Assembly and the Clerk of the General Assembly in accordance with the provisions of the Irish Presbyterian Church Act, 1871.

20. That Mrs Joan Hunter (Elder, Ballyholme) be, and is hereby nominated and appointed by the General Assembly as a Trustee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in room of Mrs Avril Heenan, retired, and the appointment of Mrs Joan Hunter as a said Trustee due attestation is made by the signature of the Moderator of the General Assembly and the Clerk of the General Assembly in accordance with the provisions of the Irish Presbyterian Church Act, 1871.
21. That the nominations to the General Assembly Commissions, Councils and Committees (as tabled in the separate Nomination Booklet) be approved.

### **General**

22. That Section 4 of the report of the General Council be received.

## **GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 5**

Saturday morning

### **United Appeal**

23. That the Appeal and Grants for 2025 be as set out in the report of the United Appeal Committee, pages 72–78

### **Support Services**

24. That for 2024, the Assessments Rates, along with the related allocation of funds, be as set out in Appendix 1 to the Report of the Support Services Committee (pages 82–83) and that the rate of assessment for the Pension Fund be set at 24% of stipend paid in the year.
25. That the 2024 budgeted expenditure for the Incidental Fund as set out in Appendix 3 to the Report of the Support Services Committee (pages 87–88) be approved.
26. That under Par 223(3) of the Code, leave to retire pre-66 be granted for:
  - Rev DH Gilpin (Moir), on or after 30 September 2024
  - Rev TP McCullough (Townhill, Portgleone), on or after 31 October 2024
  - Rev JG Trueman (Banbridge Road, Dromore) on or after 31 January 2025
  - Very Rev Dr CJ McMullen (Bangor West), on or after 22 March 2025
  - Rev D Kane (West, Ballymena), on or after 31 July 2025
  - Rev NAL Cameron (High Kirk), on or after 31 Aug 2025

### **General**

27. That Section 5 of the report of the General Council be received.

## **PRESBYTERY REPORTS**

Thursday morning

1. That the reports of Presbyteries be received.

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

Thursday morning

1. That the General Assembly welcome the Council for Congregational Life and Witness Present initiative and strongly encourage congregations to harness the potential it offers to envision and enable the development of their life and witness.
2. That the Regulations comprising the redrafted Constitution of Presbyterian Women set out in Appendix 1 of the report be adopted from 1 July 2024, in place of the provisions of paragraph 308 in the current Code and that they be incorporated, as appropriate, into the Republished Code in due course.
3. That the Guidance contained in the Membership and Intellectual Disability resource set out in Appendix 2 of the report be approved and that the vows suggested for illustrative purposes be adopted and inserted as an appendix to the Book of Common Worship.
4. That the report of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness be received.

## **COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

Thursday afternoon

1. That the General Assembly:
  - (a) encourage the Council of Public Affairs to continue to pursue graciously confident gospel engagement in the public square through its interactions with the Northern Ireland Executive and the Governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom;
  - (b) commend the invaluable work in both jurisdictions of many congregations and faith-based organisations in seeking to address the implications of the cost-of-living crisis;
  - (c) welcome the restoration of the Stormont Assembly and urge politicians to continue to work together for to ensure a sustainable future for Northern Ireland;

- (d) call on the Northern Ireland Executive Departments to work collaboratively towards the development and implementation of a comprehensive Programme for Government, for the common good and with a focus on the most vulnerable in society.
2. That the General Assembly:
    - (a) commend the ongoing dedication and commitment of those who serve on school's Boards of Governors (NI) and on Boards of Management (RoI) and encourage those Presbyterians with an interest in the education of children and young people to prayerfully consider serving and being actively involved in these roles;
    - (b) recognise and commend the vital work carried out in Special Schools across the island of Ireland and encourage congregations to make real and meaningful links with such schools;
    - (c) affirm the non-denominational Christian ethos of controlled schools in Northern Ireland as a sound framework for developing the educational, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing of children and young people;
    - (d) express thanks to the Transferors Representative Council for its intervention in the Judicial Review JR87 (relating to collective worship and religious education in schools in NI) which has led to a more encouraging outcome;
    - (e) welcome the NI Department of Education's common-sense approach to implementing legislation on the delivery of Relationships and Sexual Education in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland.
  3. That the General Assembly express concern about the distress caused by the ongoing issues with Mica concrete in the Republic of Ireland and encourages the Council for Public Affairs to engage with government and raise awareness of the issue and the struggle of those affected;
  4. That the General Assembly:
    - (a) express deep concern about the recommendation from the Oireachtas Joint Committee to legislate for Assisted Suicide/Euthanasia, which is will create precedent in undermining human dignity and the sanctity of life;
    - (b) encourage the Council for Public Affairs to engage proactively on this issue, promoting a compassionate and biblical response for the good of all in society across both jurisdictions.

## COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION

Thursday afternoon

1. That the General Assembly give thanks to God for the resilient and faithful witness of Christian communities in the Middle East, often in the face of significant adversity, and commend the Middle East Task Group Report together with its recommendations (Appendix C).
2. That the General Assembly receive with appreciation the Stewardship of Creation Task Group Report (Appendix D), note carefully its conclusions and encourage the Council to implement its recommendations.
3. That the General Assembly give thanks to God for the enriching fellowship shared with partner churches, institutions and agencies around the world, and for opportunities to listen to, learn from, and serve together with them in the mission of Christ, not least those being most adversely impacted by conflict, persecution and extreme climatic conditions.
4. That the General Assembly give thanks for the dedication and creative endeavour of PCI's global mission workers, as they seek to humbly collaborate in mission with PCI's overseas partners, and for the faithful, generous resourcing of the Council's work through the United Appeal.
5. That the General Assembly be encouraged by and thankful for the undiminished generosity of congregations and members of PCI in support of the World Development Appeal 2023 despite significant economic uncertainty, and commend the 2024 World Development Appeal to the whole church.
6. That the General Assembly commend the work of PCI's relief and development partners, Christian Aid and Tearfund (UK), as they seek to address global poverty and, mindful that PCI is an all-Ireland church, instruct the Council to also progress a partnership with Tearfund Ireland.
7. That the report of the Council for Global Mission be received.

## MEMORIALS TRANSMITTED

Thursday afternoon

### **Memorial of First and Second Markethill Kirk Session**

1. That the Memorial be received and its prayer granted.

Proposer: Norman Smyth

Seconder: David McCullagh

**Memorial of the Revs John Hanson and Alan McQuade**

1. That the Memorial be received and its prayer granted.

Proposer: John Hanson

Seconder: Alan McQuade

**JUDICIAL COMMISSION (IN PUBLIC)****Code Republishing Task Group**

Friday afternoon

1. That the Final Draft of the Republished Code, as presented to the 2024 General Assembly with agreed amendments (if any) be send down to Presbyteries under the Barrier Act (existing Code Par 112).
2. That the report of the Code Republishing Panel be received.

**LINKAGE COMMISSION**

Friday evening

1. That the congregation of Second Ards be merged into the congregation of First Ards on 31 December 2024, or other suitable date, on such terms as set by the Linkage Commission.
2. That the Congregation of Windsor, into which Great Victoria Street has been merged, be known henceforth as “South Kirk”.
3. That the revised parish bounds for the Monaghan, Dublin and Munster and South Belfast Presbyteries, as set out in Appendices 1–2, be approved.
4. That the report of the Linkage Commission be received.

**COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND**

Friday evening

1. That the General Assembly affirm the Council in its desire to respond to the rapid expansion of the major cities and towns of Ireland through its priorities and resourcing, in particular through new church development, the calling of ministers and the development of suitable mission projects and roles, in collaboration with the relevant Presbyteries.

2. That the General Assembly express profound gratitude for the work of our Healthcare, Prisons, Forces and Rural Chaplains, recognising the opportunities for ministry and mission in these challenging contexts.
3. That the report on the Strategic Future of the International Meeting Point be received and its recommendations adopted, affirming that the call on the church “to love those who are foreigners” (Deut 10:19) among us is strongly held as both a missional principle and a prophetic sign to wider Irish society; and that as a tangible outworking of such, the Council be encouraged to collaborate with Presbyteries where need might be greatest in proactively seeking to develop new IMP centres elsewhere in Ireland.
4. That the General Assembly note the Council’s review of the Rural Chaplaincy Pilot Project and the Council’s affirmation of its continuation in the form of an ongoing scheme (along with associated recommendations); and that the General Assembly refer this to the Priorities Reference Panel for consideration with a report and recommendations being brought to the General Council for decision on behalf of the Assembly.
5. That the report of the Council for Mission in Ireland be received.

## **TRUSTEES**

Friday evening

1. That the recommendations be adopted in relation to:
  - (a) the Mrs AM Davidson Trust;
  - (b) the Sir Wm V McCleery Trust;
  - (c) the Miss Irene Scott Trust;
  - (d) the Miss Ida Mary McGeown Trust;
  - (e) the Victor Morrow Trust.
2. That the Report of the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland be received

## **COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS**

Friday evening

1. That the General Assembly commend the Council for Social Witness managers and staff for their commitment to delivery excellent care to service users and relatives throughout 2023.
2. That the General Assembly welcome the Council’s continuing work to place its finances on a long-term sound footing.

3. That the General Assembly welcome the start of work to update and streamline safeguarding arrangements for the denomination.
4. That the General Assembly welcome the Business Objectives set by the Council for 2024
5. That the report of the Council for Social Witness be received.

## **COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY**

Friday evening

1. That that the closing date for applications to Ordained Ministry be changed from 15 September to 31 August.
2. Consolidated Resolution
  - (a) That the assessment for the Ministerial Development Programme be set to raise £25,000.
  - (b) That the assessment for the Students' Bursary Fund be set to raise £400,000.

(Note: The General Assembly Business Committee will be proposing that Resolutions 3–6 be taken in private at the Saturday morning Private Session.)

3. That the following applicants, their nominations having been sustained by the Council for Training in Ministry, be accepted as Students for the Ordained Ministry, and placed under the care of their Presbyteries:

Applicant	Presbytery
Mark Annett	Newry
Thomas Black	Coleraine and Limavady
Joanne Calvert	Ards
Alan Hanna	Newry
Ben Kirkwood	East Belfast
Josh Lowry	Coleraine and Limavady
Peter Macmillan	East Belfast
Robert McClughan	Iveagh

4. That the following pathways be approved:
- (a) Alan Hanna
- i. Make application for an MTh in Reformed Theology.
  - ii. Complete the remaining CTM modules in order to satisfy General Assembly requirements:  
(audit = class attendance and participation with assessment covered in the MTh)
    - Johannine Intensive
    - Reformation History seminars (audit)
    - Irish Church History
    - The Great Tradition (audit)
    - Theology for Ministry (audit)
    - Ethics and Apologetics
    - Homiletics 1 and 2
    - Leading Worship
    - Pastoral Care and Reflective Practice 1 and 2
    - Missional Church
    - Missiology
    - Christian Education and Disciplemaking
    - Church and Ministry Leadership
    - Presentation Skills
    - Relational Skills
  - iii. Complete the regular summer placements and a 26-month full-time assistantship in order to expand understanding of the work and witness within PCI.
- (b) Robert McClughan
- i. Complete full-time three-year study pathway and associated summer and full-time placements.
  - ii. Exposure to a range of ministry settings in order to experience a breadth of ministry within PCI during his training.
- (c) Mark Annett:
- i. Commence Union Theological College in September 2024 to complete a 3-year training pathway fulfilling all CTM requirements.
  - ii. Complete a two-year, full-time assistantship leading to eligibility for call on 1 September 2029.

- (d) Josh Lowry:
- i. Commence Union Theological College in September 2024 to complete a 4-year training pathway, to include a foundation year, followed by 3 years fulfilling all CTM requirements.
  - ii. Complete a two-year, full-time assistantship leading to eligibility for call on 1 September 2030.
5. That the pathway of Mr Tom Finnegan be terminated.
  6. That the Report of the Council for Training in Ministry be received.

## **JUDICIAL COMMISSION (IN PRIVATE)**

Saturday morning

1. That the Report of the Judicial Commission be received.

## **SPECIAL JUDICIAL COMMISSION (IN PRIVATE)**

Saturday morning

1. That the Report of the Special Judicial Commission be received.

## **COMMISSION ON APPLICATIONS (IN PRIVATE)**

Saturday morning

1. That the Commission on Applications be authorised to deal, on behalf of the Assembly, with appeals from Presbytery decisions not to seek the retention under its care of licentiates not in an assistantship, or deaconesses not in a post or ministers without charge.
2. That the Report of the Commission on Applications be received.

## **RESOLUTIONS IN RELATION TO OVERTURES ON THE BOOKS**

Saturday morning

1. That the Overture anent Par 72(i) of the Code, having lain on the books for one year, be enacted as the law of the Church.
2. That the Overture anent Par 118(3) of the Code, having lain on the books for one year, be enacted as the law of the Church.

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