

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



ANNUAL REPORTS



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ORDER OF BUSINESS

- Notes:**
- (i) Business commences at 10am on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. There is a business session on Tuesday evening.
 - (ii) Communion will be held on Friday at 12.15pm
 - (iii) Figures in brackets refer to page numbers in the Annual Reports.

Tuesday

OPENING OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY

GA Business Committee – Initial Report

Presbyteries

Social Witness

General Council (Section 1)

General Council (Section 2)

Mission in Ireland

Training in Ministry

Wednesday

Public Affairs

Linkage Commission

Trustees

Listening to the global church

General Council (Section 3)

INSTALLATION OF NEW MODERATOR

Thursday

Congregational Life and witness

Global Mission

General Council (Section 4)

Overtures

General Council (Section 5)

Friday

Private Session – Judicial Commission etc.

General Council (Section 6)

GA Business Committee – Final Report

Communion Service

TUESDAY, JUNE 9

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 321)
3. **REPORTS OF PRESBYTERIES**
Reports and Resolutions (pages 28–34 and 325)

(11.45am)

4. **COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS:**
Report and Resolutions (pages 184–194 and 325)

1pm

Lunch

2pm

5. **GENERAL COUNCIL:** Section 1 of Report and Resolutions 7–8 (pages 35–45 and 321)
Safeguarding Development Committee

(3pm)

Refreshment Break

(3.30pm)

6. **GENERAL COUNCIL:** Section 2 of Report and Resolutions 9–14 (pages 46–55 and 322)
General Assembly Advisory Committee; College Principal Re-appointment; Clerk Appointment Panel

5pm

REFLECTIVE WORSHIP

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

5.30pm Dinner

7pm

7. COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND:
Report and Resolutions (pages 195–225 and 325–326)
8. COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY:
Report and Resolutions (pages 226–235 and 326)

9pm Close

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

Refreshments will be available prior to business

10am

9. COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS:
Report and Resolutions (pages 236–244 and 327)

(11am)

10. LINKAGE COMMISSION:
Report and Resolutions (pages 245–263 and 327)

(12pm)

11. GENERAL ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES:
Report and Resolutions (pages 264–265 and 328)

12.30pm REFLECTIVE WORSHIP

1pm Lunch

2pm

12. LISTENING TO THE GLOBAL CHURCH

2.45pm

13. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 3 of Report and Resolutions 15–17 (pages 56–99 and 322–323)
Doctrine Committee; Statutory Investigations Advisory Task Group; Ad-hoc Panel on Ordination; General Assembly Governance, Culture and Integrity Task Group

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

4pm *SHORT INTERMISSION (Assembly seated by 4.15pm)*

4.30pm

14. INSTALLATION OF NEW MODERATOR

5.30pm ASSEMBLY DINNER
(Including Assembly Reception for invited guests)

7.30pm *Close*

THURSDAY, JUNE 11

Refreshments will be available prior to business

10am

15. COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS:
Report and Resolutions (pages 266–290 and 328)

(11am)

16. COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION:
Report and Resolutions (pages 291–312 and 328)

12.15pm *Refreshment Break*

12.30pm REFLECTIVE WORSHIP

1pm *Lunch*

2pm

17. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 4 of Report and Resolutions 18–20 (pages 100–144 and 323)
General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel;
Guysmere Development Panel; Compromise Agreements Task Group

(4.15pm) *Refreshment Break*

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

(4.45pm)

18. OVERTURES AND REGULATIONS
19. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 5 of Report and Resolutions 21–26 (pages 145–169 and 323–324) Support Services Committee; United Appeal Committee; Communications Panel; Website Task Group

6pm

Close

FRIDAY, JUNE 12

Refreshments will be available prior to business

10am

20. PRIVATE SESSION
Judicial Commission: Report and Resolutions (pages 315–318 and 329); Special Commission: Report and Resolution (pages 319 and 329); Commission on Applications: Report and Resolution (pages 320 and 329) Any other referred business to the private session
21. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 6 of Report and Resolutions 27–30 (pages 170–183 and 324–325) Nominations Committee; Guidelines Review Task Group
22. LAPSED BUSINESS (if any)
23. FINAL REPORT OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE

12pm

Intermission

12.15pm

24. 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', and have been issued electronically with the hard copy being available for collection at registration. 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.

For 2026, all reports will be presented verbally and in writing.

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
- 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 and 2024 General Assemblies 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 General Council has agreed to bring the following resolution to the Assembly of 2025: “That at the 2025 General Assembly, and all subsequent General Assemblies, substantive proposed amendments, which have not been submitted to the Business Committee for licensing one week in advance of the Assembly meeting, will only be permitted, at the discretion of the Moderator, if they genuinely arise in the course of the debate, or if they relate to additional resolutions tabled in the Supplementary Business” (General Council Resolution 3).
- All supplementary business, including any proposed amendments etc., should be submitted to the Clerk in advance for licensing by 12 noon on Tuesday 3 June, 2025 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) 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) and (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 of 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

GENERAL COUNCIL INTRODUCTION

Convener: VERY REV DR D.J. BRUCE

Secretary: THE ACTING CLERK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The General Council has met eight times since the June 2025 General Assembly, as follows: 23 October 2025; 12 November; 19 November; 11 December; 29 January 2026; 5 February; 26 March; 14 April.
2. The report this year is presented in six sections as follows:
3. **Tuesday 9 June**
 - 2pm **Section 1** Safeguarding Development Committee

 - 3.30pm **Section 2** General Assembly Advisory Committee
Church Relations Panel
College Principal Re-appointment
Clerk Appointment Panel

 - Wednesday 10 June**
 - 2.45pm **Section 3** Doctrine Committee
Statutory Investigations Advisory Task Group
Ad Hoc Panel on Ordination
Governance, Culture and Integrity Task Group

 - Thursday 11 June**
 - 2pm **Section 4** Structures and Resources Review Panel
Guysmere Development Panel
Compromise Agreements Task Group

 - 5pm **Section 5** Support Services Committee
United Appeal Committee
Communications Panel
Website Task Group

 - Friday 12 June**
 - 10.45am **Section 6** Nominations Committee
Guidelines Review Task Group

4. The wide remit of the Council was extended during the course of the year to include the Safeguarding Development Committee. The report this year outlines both the background to the safeguarding crisis, and the specifics of the work being done by the committee regarding rewritten policies, procedures and protocols for the management of safeguarding across the denomination. The church remains in a major process of reflection and reform of its practice in the entire field of safeguarding.
5. A number of Task Groups have been working on different aspects of the church's response to our failings. There is further work underway commissioned by external agencies, and the Church's careful engagement with these processes has been crucial. A Task Group has been formed to advise the Moderator on his role liaising with statutory investigations. A group has been appointed looking at PCI's governance, culture and integrity, and another group is in place considering the use of compromise agreements and NDAs. Reports from each of these are included below. Although not reporting to the General Council, the General Assembly Governance, Culture and Integrity Task Group is included with other related Task Groups under Section 3.
6. The General Assembly Advisory Committee receives reports from the Church Relations Panel, which this year, in addition to hearing from PCI's delegate to the World Communion of Reformed Churches, meeting in Thailand in October, considered a request to re-examine the principles behind PCI's engagement with ecumenical bodies.
7. A major task given to the Council this year was the appointment of a new Clerk to the General Assembly. The group appointed to progress this has completed its work, and a nomination is brought to the General Assembly for decision.
8. The far-reaching work of the Structures and Resources Review Panel already commenced, continues with a significant interim report being brought for consideration and feedback from Presbyteries and Councils.
9. The careful management of PCI's financial and other support services, mainly based in Assembly Buildings is critical to the continuing operation of the denomination. The Council expresses its deep appreciation to Ken Swarbrick, now appointed as Director of Operations, for his dedicated work in leading a team of staff committed to these important matters.
10. The work of the General Council depends upon the willingness of conveners to volunteer their time in leading the work of Committees, Panels and Task Groups – and the members of these groups which meet through the year. The Council leans heavily upon the Clerk and Deputy Clerk of the Assembly who, with the administrative team in the office of Susan Hamilton, Jenny McClure, Denise Weir and Fiona McAfee give invaluable support. Members of Assembly will be concerned that Rev Dr David Allen was required to take a period of sick leave during the year, and will pray for his continuing recovery to full health and strength. Rev Peter Gamble has willingly stepped up to fulfil many additional responsibilities during this period, and the church commends him for it.

INITIAL REPORT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE

1. With Special General Assemblies in December and February, the Business Committee has had to meet on several occasions during the year. The Business Committee has continued to review the work and arrangements of the General Assembly.
2. Following the decision of the Special Assembly in February, the June Assembly will now cover four days to give adequate time for consideration of reports, worship, prayer and informal fellowship and interaction. The opening service will take place on Tuesday, 9 June at 10:00am. The service of Installation for the Incoming Moderator will be held at 4:30pm on the Wednesday afternoon. The Assembly will then continue until its conclusion on Friday, 12 June.
3. A Draft Order of Business for June 2026 has been drawn up by the Acting Clerk on the basis agreed by the General Assembly and the Committee. It was reviewed by the General Council. This includes the following:
 - (a) All business sessions will commence each day at 10am (Tuesday to Friday). There will be one scheduled evening session. Business is planned to conclude on Friday morning and will be followed by the General Assembly Communion Service at 12.15pm. As in previous years, the General Council business is split over a number of sessions.
 - (b) There will be one ‘alternative presentation’ on Wednesday afternoon, ‘Listening to the Global Church’.
 - (c) Each Council’s report will be more focused on God and His work. This will lead to prayer being offered. (As agreed by the Special Assembly in December 2025).
 - (d) All Councils are to have the opportunity to speak to their reports. (As agreed by the Special Assembly in February 2026)
 - (e) Additional worship sessions during the Assembly have been included in the Draft Timetable. As in 2025, there will be no Evening Celebration.
 - (f) The current practice of livestreaming Assembly sessions, apart from the Private Session, continues.
4. As the system for registration of Assembly members seemed to work efficiently for the Special Assemblies in December and February, on the recommendation of the Business Committee, it was agreed by the General Council that the registration system for June 2026 be similar to that used for the December 2025 General Assembly.
5. Access to livestreaming was considered by the Business Committee and a report with a recommendation was presented to a meeting of the General Council in April 2026. It was agreed that with livestreaming of the General Assembly, there would be immediate access to the recording of the events in the House until the prepackaged versions go up.
6. The Arrangements Panel has appropriate matters in hand.

7. The running costs of the December Special Assembly were covered from the Incidental Fund in 2025. These figures were approved by the General Council (£11,316).

The running costs for the February 2026 Special Assembly were £7,300 and would need to be factored into the budget request to the June 2026 Assembly. Further, the anticipated costs of a four-day Assembly should also be considered. This means that the expected budget request of ‘up to £25,000’ for this Assembly is amended to ‘up to £35,000’. This figure was agreed for recommendation by the General Council at its April meeting. A resolution is appended.

8. Arrangements are in hand for publicity and communications in the normal formats. Also:
 - (a) It is intended to have relevant video material (as in previous years) highlighting the key issues of the General Assembly to be with Clerks of Presbyteries for their May meetings.
 - (b) A press briefing will occur in a similar manner as was done for the December and February Special Assemblies.
 - (c) Costs associated with publicity by the Communications Department should be similar to 2025 while allowing for inflationary increases and an extra Assembly day. As previously, expenditure would come from the Arrangements Panel budget.
9. Praise at the June Assembly will again be led by Mr Dave Whitcroft and musicians.
10. The distribution of General Assembly printed reports was raised by the Business Committee at the General Council. Following debate, it was decided by the General Council that electronic copies of the Annual Reports for 2026 be distributed in advance of the General Assembly. Further, the General Council instructed the General Assembly Business Committee to find an appropriate method to distribute printed copies to ministers in advance of the 2026 Assembly. At its meetings on 22 April, the Business Committee agreed to have the Report Books for 2026 delivered to ministers by a courier service.
11. The Business Committee reviewed the ‘Making the General Assembly More Accessible’ Task Group’s decisions. Appendix 1 gives the substance of its review and recommendations. The review was noted and its recommendations approved by the General Council. A resolution to the Assembly is appended.
12. Minutes of the Special Assemblies for December 2025 and February 2026 will be made available in electronic format in advance of the General Assembly and hard copies will be available at the General Assembly for those registering.
13. ‘Under 30s involvement at the General Assembly’ was considered by the Convener meeting with CLW and also Rev Nigel Craig. The purpose of the meeting was to re-consider how Under 30s Delegates and Under 30s who attend the Assembly might be further encouraged in the life and work of the General Assembly and its structures. It was agreed by the sub-group

and reported to the General Council that it would be better for a new approach to be taken rather than try to re-vitalise past structures. It was further suggested that we need to clarify whether only Under 30s Delegates are to be considered or whether this could be widened to include some aspects for Under 30s in general.

14. The subgroup agreed that for 2026, due to the pressure on the Assembly Timetable, nothing substantial could be arranged. A number of suggestions would be presented to the Business Committee for consideration in the autumn to enable a structured approach to be put into place for 2027. However, it was proposed that Under 30s be invited to meet socially for refreshments in the Minor Hall during two Refreshment Breaks in this year's Assembly Timetable. This would also be an opportunity to identify Under 30s Delegates and obtain emails etc.
15. Arrangements will be made to have a paper “feedback” facility during the second half of the June Assembly. Any feedback will be requested to be returned before the Assembly ends on the Friday afternoon.
16. Finally, Standing Orders for the Assembly were updated as the current version did not follow recent practice. A revised version with a decimal numbering system (as per the present Code) was presented to the General Council for recommendation to the June Assembly (See Appendix 2 and Resolution 2).

ROY MACKAY, Convener

APPENDIX 1

REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS OF MAKING THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MORE ACCESSIBLE TASK GROUP

(2021 General Assembly Reports pp140–146)

1. The above Task Group presented recommendations to the General Assembly in 2021.

A full review to be carried out at the 2026 General Assembly

The recommendations from the Task Group in 2021 were as below.

TEXT (Par. 14 pp145–146, 2021 General Assembly Reports)

- (a) That business be scheduled on Saturdays, along with the other changes to facilitate this, as described in para. (5c)

“To maximise the value of taking a day off as well as coming on a Saturday, this model includes two items of evening business on the Friday...This model also reduces the number of alternative presentations to two (including Listening to the Global Church). This enables the Assembly to be shortened with the opening night on Wednesday evening, the midweek celebration on Thursday evening, the Lord’s Supper on Friday morning and the close of business taking place on Saturday afternoon”
- (b) That ministers and elders carefully consider their moral obligation to participate in General Assembly and encourage attendance by example and instruction.
- (c) That the General Assembly start on the third Wednesday of June.
- (d) That each presbytery run an event each year between the publication of the Annual Reports and the start of the General Assembly to help attendees understand the content of the reports and the procedures of the Assembly, and that the Arrangements Panel of the General Assembly Business Committee work with the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to create a short video for use at this event, explaining Assembly procedures.
- (e) That each kirk session considers appointing the same person to be their representative elder at both presbytery and the General Assembly.
- (f) That the Arrangements Panel provide visual aids as described in paragraphs 11 and 12.

(Par.11) A well-prepared attendee may nevertheless find it difficult to speak at the Assembly. The Moderator promotes balanced debate with input from a range of people and a range of views. However, the Moderator may not be able to tell the difference between a young elder and an under 30s representative or a voting member and an attendee with power to deliberate. Visual aids could help. Lanyards consisting of a coloured neck strap and a name badge, similar to the ones used for staff and visitors in Assembly Buildings could indicate

who people are, e.g. blue strap for voting members, red for non-voting....”

- (g) (Par.12) There will always be a limited number of people who can speak to an issue. To facilitate broader participation, especially from those who are nervous about speaking at the front, coloured cards could be provided as a way for attendees to express their views in an indicative manner while debate is still ongoing. Some other assemblies and conferences provide cards coloured red on one side and blue on the other which attendees hold at chest level... during a discussion to indicate whether they are warming to the motion...or cool to it... This would be another way for people to participate and help the Moderator to judge whether more speeches are needed for or against a motion.
- (h) That conveners, moderators, and clerks at all levels reflect on how they encourage people to participate in the courts of the Church.
- (i) That these changes be trialled for a five-year period, beginning with the 2021 Assembly and a full review be carried out at the 2026 Assembly.

RESPONSE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE TO THE ABOVE RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. The report of the Task group in the opening of its report, highlighted four areas where ‘accessibility’ to the General Assembly could be improved:
 - (a) Enabling attendance for those who found it difficult to come during a weekday.
 - (b) Encouraging attendance amongst those who could attend.
 - (c) Enabling the participation from a greater range of people.
 - (d) Encouraging participation where people are not confident that they will be listened to.
2. The Task Group responded to these issues with practical recommendations numbered a-g. However, it was understood that these recommendations should be seen as a means to an end.
3. The Business Committee, in its review below, has considered each recommendation within the context of the Task Group’s overall report and considered the following questions in its response:
 - (a) What were the AIMS of the recommendations and have these aims been achieved?
 - (b) If a recommendation was NOT successful in its aim, what is currently being done (or could still be done) to meet that aim.

RESPONSES

TO RECOMMENDATION (a): *“that General Assembly business be scheduled on Saturdays, along with other changes to facilitate this,”*

The AIM of recommendation (a) was to maximise the value of an elder taking a day off work as well as coming to the Assembly on a Saturday. This would include two items of business on a Friday and so maximise the business that could be attended during a single day. In turn, this would enable the length of the Assembly to be shortened.

Was this aim met?

It was worthwhile trialling this change to try to facilitate elders who may have found it difficult to get off weekday work. However, it has not been possible to actually quantify attendance on Fridays and Saturdays of Assembly Week, other than by observations. Registration does not tell us who attended on what days and when.

Numbers of attendees on a Saturday morning seemed to be reasonably good but “tapered off” as the day progressed. Regarding Friday evenings, there did not seem to be an observable marked improvement in attendance.

The General Assembly decided in 2024 not to meet on future Saturdays. Ministers, in particular, expressed the view that late business on a Friday and business on a Saturday were not helpful when Sunday worship was approaching. In turn, recent changes regarding the opening service of the Assembly, the midweek Installation Service for the next Moderator and no mid-week Evening Celebration have meant that other associated changes in Recommendation (a) became no longer relevant.

At the recent Special Assembly in February 2026 it was decided to move for 2026 to a four-day Assembly rather than a shorter Assembly - as first suggested from the Task Group’s recommendation.

What could still be done?

There now seems a limit as to what further could be done to facilitate a more productive attendance amongst non-ministers. The Business Committee will consider whether continued evening business is helpful and necessary during a four-day Assembly.

TO RECOMMENDATION (b): *“that ministers and elders carefully consider their moral obligation to participate in the General Assembly and encourage attendance by example and instruction.”*

The AIM of the recommendation was to underline the responsibilities of ministers and elders to participate in the church courts.

Was this aim met?

It is not possible to quantify other than consider registration figures for ministers and elders at each year’s registration which do not indicate the frequency of involvement during an Assembly week.

Recommendation (b) is an ongoing responsibility for us all and a reminder of our duties to the wider church. Responding to the need for committee convenerships at General Assembly level, could be one area where we could lead by example.

TO RECOMMENDATION (c): *“that the General Assembly commences on the third Wednesday of June.”*

The AIM of the recommendation was connected to the Assembly meeting on a Saturday and that aspect has already been dealt with.

A further AIM was to have the Assembly meet later in June and so give more time for the reading of reports and preparation.

Was this aim met?

In one sense, a later Assembly gives more time to study the Annual Reports. However, on balance, the Assembly decided in 2024 that a third week in June was getting too late in the month. A consequence is that there is less time to read the Reports.

What could still be done?

With reports now being sent out online at the end of May, this new system should help to address the issue of needing time to consider the reading of reports and preparation. However, the issue of Reports being sent out to members rather than being received at registration still raises concerns for some members. The Business Committee has addressed this question again, in its main report.

TO RECOMMENDATION (d): *“that each Presbytery run a preparation event between the publication of the Annual Reports and the start of the General Assembly to help attendees understand the content of the reports and procedure of the Assembly.”*

The AIM of the recommendation was to help new attendees to the General Assembly to be more able to understand Assembly procedures and so be more willing to participate during the business debates at an Assembly level.

Was this aim met?

The production of two videos being made available from the website during the year covered the procedures of Assembly. A third video was produced each year where some of the key issues for the immediate Assembly were highlighted. This third video was made available to Presbyteries for the end of April.

From verbal comments, the content of the videos was reckoned to be helpful to new members. Their production should continue and the Business Committee will continue to consider with the Communications Department on how to improve the effectiveness of pre-Assembly promotional material.

Presbyteries did not find having an “event” for Assembly attendees to ask questions about procedures and issues was productive after the first two years. It was therefore left to individual Presbyteries to decide on what was most suitable in their own context.

Regarding whether the aim of encouraging new attendees at Assembly to feel more confident in participating in debates was achieved, it is again too difficult to quantify.

Even if a few new members ask questions or speak, this is a certain achievement of the aim.

To RECOMMENDATION (e): *“that each Kirk Session considers appointing the same person as Representative Elder at Presbytery and General Assembly.”*

The AIM of the recommendation was that this would lead to representative elders being better informed to participate in decision making at each church court level.

Was the aim met?

The Business Committee has no objective way to consider if the recommendation was implemented by Kirk Sessions.

What could be done?

The Business Committee will forward a questionnaire to representative elders to General Assembly. One question will ask if they have, at the same time, been the representative elder to their Presbytery and Assembly.

TO RECOMMENDATION (f): *“that visual aids could help”* (Lanyards and coloured cards)

The AIM of three coloured Lanyards would indicate to the Moderator and to the Assembly who were ministers, elders and non-voting members. This might also assist the Moderator in balancing the number of speakers coming forward.

The AIM of using coloured cards for Assembly members to express their views in an indicative manner while a debate was still ongoing, was not implemented. It was thought by the Business Committee that it would not be so helpful. Some former Moderators of Assembly were asked for their opinion when chairing meetings. It was not thought that the introduction of coloured cards during debates would be as helpful as perhaps first imagined.

Was the aim met?

With regards to the use of Lanyards, the answer was clearly a ‘yes’. There has been a positive reaction to their use, and it has assisted debate. The use of Lanyards at Assemblies should continue.

TO RECOMMENDATION (g): *“that conveners, moderators and clerks reflect on how they encourage people to participate in the courts of the Church.”*

The AIM cannot be quantified at present. However, the Business Committee will try to get some “feedback” by forwarding a questionnaire to Assembly representative elders. The questionnaire would be simply presented, and representative elders would be asked to underline points for their answers. Questions could cover the following areas:

- (a) Restrictions which you feel prevent you from fully participating in the Church courts.
- (b) What you may find difficult/off-putting in speaking or volunteering in the Church courts.
- (c) Weaknesses you perceive in the “system” which hinder your involvement.
- (d) Things that would encourage your participation.
- (e) Have you been a representative elder to presbytery and Assembly at the same time?

CONCLUSION

1. At the recent Special Assemblies, it could be seen that there was a greater participation by elders in debates, some for the first time. This is encouraging.
2. The Making the Assembly more Accessible Task Group recommendations have kept issues before us and underlines the need to continue to encourage a wider participation in General Assembly.
3. Some “feedback” which the Business Committee will ask for, following the June 2026 Assembly, may assist with keeping issues before the Church and lead to further practical suggestions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (a) That the use of Lanyards at meetings of the General Assembly continues.
- (b) That the pre-Assembly promotional videos continue to be produced and made available via the PCI website.
- (c) That representative elders to the 2026 General Assembly receive a questionnaire with the Assembly Reports Book at registration, and that a summary of responses be included in the Business Committee’s report to the 2027 General Assembly.
- (d) That the Business Committee considers the outworking of evening business sessions at the General Assembly.

APPENDIX 2

AMENDED GENERAL ASSEMBLY STANDING ORDERS

1. The date, time and place of the stated annual meeting of the General Assembly shall be in accordance with the Code, Par 318, and shall include the following:-
 - 1.1 The Moderator shall conduct public worship; after which, should a quorum be present, he or she shall constitute the Assembly.
 - 1.2 During the meeting of the Assembly, the Moderator having requested the Assembly to appoint a successor, the names of members nominated by Presbyteries for the office shall be read. Others may also be proposed in the Assembly.

Should a vote be necessary it shall be taken after the method prescribed in the Code at Par 486ff.
 - 1.3 The member who is appointed Moderator shall be installed in office by prayer and may address the Assembly.
2.
 - 2.1 The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper shall be administered at the annual meeting. Communicants of this or any Church, desiring to share the fellowship of the Sacrament, shall be invited and made welcome to join with members of the General Assembly at the Lord's Table.
 - 2.2 The Arrangements Panel of the General Assembly Business Committee shall make all the arrangements for the observance of this ordinance.
3. The General Assembly Business Committee shall submit its report, including the proposed Order of Business for the succeeding sessions, together with any additions or amendments and the Assembly shall then proceed to deal with the various matters proposed.
4. Every report submitted to the Assembly shall be presented in electronic and printed form; and, as far as possible, every such report shall be included in a 'Blue Book' circulated to members in electronic form at least one week before the annual meeting of the Assembly, and made available in printed form at the annual meeting.
5.
 - 5.1 All proposed resolutions of Assembly shall be appended to every report in the Blue Book.
 - 5.2 Each proposed resolution shall be based on information provided in the report and shall seek to express a clear and succinct mind of the Assembly upon it, without attempting to include such arguments as are more appropriate to speeches.
 - 5.2.1 Where it has not been possible to include some resolution in the Blue Book, it shall be transmitted to the Clerk of Assembly (if necessary, appended to a Supplementary Report giving the relevant information) at least one clear day before it may be considered by the Assembly.

5.2.2 At the beginning of each session the Clerk shall inform the Assembly of any additional business and, where possible, provide members with copies of it in an appropriate format.

6. An amendment to a proposed resolution or overture which would substantially affect its scope shall be transmitted to the Clerk at least one clear day before it is due to be considered by the Assembly; and it shall be announced to members and, where possible, circulated to members as additional business.

This rule shall not preclude the Assembly from altering or amending the proposed resolution, as it may judge right having regard to the whole discussion on the subject when considered.

7. Speeches or addresses in the Assembly shall be limited as follows, unless in the circumstances judged by the Moderator to be exceptional:

- 7.1 The first speaker presenting a group of reports with appended resolutions on behalf of an Assembly Commission or Council shall not occupy longer than seven minutes.

- 7.2 The speaker seconding the foregoing presentation shall not occupy longer than seven minutes.

- 7.3 All other speakers shall not occupy longer than four minutes.

- 7.4 Arrangements shall be made to give a speaker warning at one minute and again at half a minute before the time expires; and upon its expiry a buzzer shall be sounded and the speaker shall immediately resume their seat.

- 7.5 Speakers proposing or seconding a group of resolutions (including additional resolutions, and also where a Convener is speaking to those of his or her Commission, Council or Committee) shall not speak separately to them except by way of closing a debate upon them.

8. 8.1 A secret ballot shall be taken at the discretion of the Moderator or when it is asked for by not less than twenty-five members of the House so indicating.

- 8.2 When a secret ballot has been decided on a bell shall be rung for two minutes, during which time all members who propose to take part in the vote shall take their places in the House; and thereafter none shall enter or leave until the vote has been taken.

- 8.3 Each member shall record their vote by detaching from their member's card the part that indicates on which side they vote, and placing it in the ballot box. If it should be found that more than one vote bears the same number, all the votes bearing that number shall be excluded from the count.

- 8.4 No member shall record any vote but their own, or use a card belonging to a member absent for whatever cause. No vote shall be counted in the absence of a member's card. No one present on a 'sit and deliberate' basis only shall be permitted to vote.

- 8.5 When the tellers have met and counted the votes, one shall take the voting papers and statement of the vote to the Clerk of Assembly and the Moderator shall announce the result to the House.
 - 8.5.1 Any member of the House may demand a scrutiny of the voting papers, provided they do so in open court immediately after the result of the vote is announced and are supported by fifty members standing in their places.
 - 8.5.2 The Moderator shall immediately appoint as many scrutineers as he or she shall think fit, selecting a number from the supporters of each side of the question voted on. They, with the tellers, shall at once proceed to carry out the scrutiny.
- 8.6 The Clerk of Assembly shall take charge of the voting papers until the rising of the Assembly, after which he or she shall destroy them.
9. 9.1 The Arrangements Panel shall be responsible for providing a panel of tellers for each session and for stewarding arrangements.
- 9.2 In making all the arrangements that may be necessary for the accommodation and discharge of the business of the General Assembly at its meeting, the Arrangements Panel is empowered to issue cards of admission to the Assembly, both to the members and to others attending; to regulate the conditions of admission; and to make such reservations of seating and accommodation as may be required.
- 9.3 Offerings may be received from those attending at one or more sessions of the Assembly, and grants made from the Assembly's Incidental Fund, to defray the expenses incurred by the Arrangements Panel.
10. The nomination of members for all Commissions, Councils and Committees shall be made in the first instance by the Nominations Committee. When the nominations are submitted to the Assembly it is open to any member to propose alternative names for appointment.
11. No person who is not a member of the Assembly, or present on a 'sit and deliberate' basis, shall be permitted to address the House unless with the approval of the House or of the General Assembly Business Committee.
12. No Presbytery, Assembly Commission, Council or Committee shall meet during the period of the General Assembly except at its discretion or with its permission.

[See also Code Par 402 concerning the General Assembly Business Committee.]

REPORTS FROM OTHER CHURCH ASSEMBLIES

The Presbyterian Church of Wales: 7–9 July 2025 – Glodaeth Church, Llandudno

The Rev Dr Donald Watts reports:

1. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Wales took place at Gloddaeth Church, Llandudno, from 7–9 July, 2025. Visiting delegates were warmly welcomed by the General Secretary, Rev Nan Powell-Davies, and other members of staff. The minister of Gloddaeth, Rev Timothy Huw Hodgins, has family roots in Dublin, which was one reminder of the close connection between the two denominations over many years.
2. The outgoing Moderator, Rev Aneurin Owen, chaired most of the sessions in a relaxed and encouraging way. The Welsh Church has a long history of mission work in North East India and the Moderator had worked there for quite some time. I think for that reason, the Church in Mizoram was enthusiastically represented, and there was a definite desire to include visitors from other churches, even in the Moderator’s Valedictory Service. This meant that there was a strong sense of being welcomed into the Church in Wales, but being part of the global church also.
3. In the Welsh Assembly there is a helpful mix of business sessions and addresses to bring encouragement. While, like all churches in Britain and Ireland, PCW is having to rationalise its resources, it chose at the Assembly to emphasise the positive while being realistic about the challenges. It was encouraging to learn about and experience the growing involvement of young people. The “quiet revival” was an often used phrase.
4. In the past couple of years the PCW has been evolving a policy on how to utilise the buildings which are no longer in use for worship, and to develop those that are still in use. “What do these stones mean” was the title of a recent conference. This is a work in progress, but it was interesting that there was a stress on decisions being made at a local level, while the centre provided ideas and perhaps some resources.
5. The PCW is also going through a period of restructuring at a radical level. It seems intent on removing one level of administration. More surprisingly, for those from outside, the level being looked at as most likely to go is the General Assembly. It must be realised that the Welsh structure is different from our own in that there are three “Associations” – two Welsh speaking and one English speaking. The idea is that they are closer to the congregations and can make better decisions, while some kind of coordination would be provided. In many of its discussions PCW is clearly intent on making sure there is local involvement in all of its planning.
6. As always, the Welsh language dominated at the Assembly, which brings a sense of family to the occasion. Not all members attend in person every year, so there were some contributing on Zoom. The translation was also

on Zoom, but for most of the time it was efficient and the business was easy to follow. For the next two years the Moderator will be an elder, Glynis Owen. She has a background in education and has already been moderator and clerk of various courts in PCW. She spoke very clearly, and in English, about her vision.

7. There is much more that could be reported on a very enjoyable Assembly, such as the new Prayer App that is being launched or developments at the Residential Centres. This is a denomination in revival mode, and it was very encouraging to be part of it for a few days.

The Methodist Church in Ireland Annual Conference: 5–7 June 2025 – Thomas Street Methodist Church

The Very Rev Dr Noble McNeely reports:

1. The Two Hundred and Fifty Sixth Methodist Church in Ireland Conference took place from 5–7 June 2025. The Conference was held in Thomas Street Methodist Church, Portadown. The constitution of the conference and the installation of the President was conducted by the outgoing President Rev Dr John Alderdice, assisted by the General Secretary, Rev Dr Heather Morris. The Rev Alan Wardlow was installed as the new President. The theme for his year in office is ‘Compelled’.
2. The text that inspires the theme is from 1 Corinthians 9:16; “For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel.”
3. Having in mind the Methodist Church in Ireland’s vision of “living wholeheartedly as followers of Jesus for the transformation of the world,” the President encouraged the Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to continue to proclaim Christ with boldness. The prayer for the conference was that each member would feel a deep, compelling urgency to take intentional steps to share the message of Jesus so that many may come to faith or experience a renewed commitment in the year ahead.
4. The business meetings of the Methodist Connexion opened each morning at 9.00am with worship and devotions. The morning sessions finished with Bible Study led by Rev Dr Martyn Atkins, former President of Cliff College and retired Superintendent of Methodist Central Hall, Westminster.
5. The Conference included many stories of how the Holy Spirit was at work. There were reports of growth and green shoots taking place throughout the church. The Conference affirmed its commitment to growth by commissioning Rev Dr Stephen Skuce as a ‘Growing Churches Officer’. This officer will work collaboratively with Connexional Teams and Districts to explore and empower growth across the island of Ireland.
6. The Conference expressed concern regarding the ongoing killing of children, women and men in Gaza by the Israeli Defence Forces and the denial of relief aid and supplies. The Conference commended and endorsed, the Methodist Church in Ireland Statement on Gaza, which called for the unblocking of all humanitarian supplies to Gaza without interference from

the Israeli authorities. The Conference also noted the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the illegality of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian Territory, and called on the Irish and British governments to take all necessary steps to give effect to this ICJ decision and to uphold international humanitarian law.

7. The Faith and Order Committee delivered an interim report on Holy Communion. These included guidelines for those joining a Communion Service online. Participants should engage spiritually in a full and meaningful way as they share bread and wine, which has been made ready in advance.
8. Much of the agenda included ‘house keeping’ issues and setting in place new arrangements. Revised methods for calculating the Comprehensive Assessment were agreed. New processes with regard to Property were put in place. It was accepted that the Trustees of the Pension Fund should consider a new defined contribution scheme.
9. The Conference held the election for the President of the Conference for 2026–2027. The President designate is Rev Dr Janet M Unsworth. Ms Laura Griffith was designated as Lay Reader for 2026–2027. The Conference in 2026, 3–6 June, will be held in Assembly Buildings, Fisherwick Place, Belfast.
10. It was a privilege to be part of the Conference and to meet friends and colleagues from the past. The worship and devotional talks were special times and as always the singing of the conference was uplifting. I thank the Conference for the hospitality and the warmth of the welcome I received.

MEMORIAL RECORD

Memorial Record Rev Brian Kingsmore

The Rev Brian Kingsmore, DipTh, BA, DMin, Evangelism Promoter Emeritus (Released), died on 26 May 2025, in the ninety-second year of his age and the sixty-sixth year of his ministry. He was born on 18 June 1933 in east Belfast, one of six children of Norman, an Intelligence Officer in HM Forces and Marion (née Brown). The home congregation was Ravenhill and he attended Elmgrove Public Elementary School. Becoming a Christian at the age of fifteen, his main interest then was football, which he played at a reasonably high level. However, a call from God to ordained ministry meant working as a draughtsman at Harland and Wolff, and study at night through Belfast Technical College, until he achieved the grades needed for the Scottish Congregational College, which he attended from 1956-59, obtaining a DipTh from Edinburgh University. While in Edinburgh he met Rona Ritson whom he went on to marry, and together they have four children. Rona's linguistic skills complemented his and were used in the training of missionaries to teach English and learn foreign languages. Dr Kingsmore was ordained in 1959 in Park Congregational Church, Airdrie, transferring into the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, assisting in Lowe Memorial congregation, and then as Ordained Assistant in Ravenhill on 2 January 1964 under the Presbytery of East Belfast. Further study at the Presbyterian College led to his BA from Queen's University, Belfast in 1969. He was installed by the Presbytery of Coleraine in Ballywatt on 2 January 1969, where he served until becoming Chaplain to the New University of Ulster from 1 September 1978 – his DMin was awarded by Fuller Theological College USA in 1980. From 1977 he additionally served as Stated Supply in Ballysally Church Extension, and then was installed in the Home Mission and inducted to that charge on 30 September 1982. He left on 31 December 1983 to be Professor of Practical Evangelism and Mission in Columbia, South Carolina, USA. He returned once more to Ireland, being inducted by the Presbytery of Coleraine to the position of Evangelism Promoter on 3 May 1994, retiring on 30 June 1995 and becoming Evangelism Promoter Emeritus (Released) on 6 February 2024. Evangelism was Dr Kingsmore's passion. He took busloads of teenagers to Christian holiday weeks; taught in Europe with Youth With A Mission; was deeply involved with the Billy Graham Association; was trained in the USA in the then new Evangelism Explosion and implemented it in Ballysally. Added to this was his conduct of gospel missions throughout Ireland over the years and his work as Evangelism Promoter for the whole Church. In retirement he played golf (and drove buggies) as aggressively as he had played football when younger. Never one to do things by halves, and study was important for him, ultimately academic theology was less important than practical, personal salvation. For Rona, and to David, Karen, John and Stephen and their families we pray grace and peace through Jesus Christ as you remember one who obeyed the command in 2 Timothy 4.5: "...do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry."

Memorial Record Rev Joe Dallas

The Rev Joseph Stanley Dallas, BA, MA, BD, Dip Ed, Minister Emeritus (Released), Whiteabbey, died on 14 August 2025, in the ninety-sixth year of his age and the sixty-eighth year of his ministry. He was born, the youngest of five children, into a farming and cattle-trading family on 28 June 1930 in Dungiven, Co Londonderry, his parents being William and Jean (née Sherrard). His mother died when he was five, his father marrying again, so that he gained eight step-siblings. His early education was at Dungiven Public Elementary School and Limavady Technical College, and at the age of fourteen he left school for work in two local shops. More consequentially, at the same age he attended a series of gospel meetings in the church hall and became aware of the challenge and need to respond to Christ personally. This he did in the quietness of his own home one night. A new love of the Scriptures led him to enrol in a correspondence course in London Bible College. At the age of eighteen, Mr Dallas went for two years to the Faith Mission Training College in Edinburgh, gaining a basic grounding in theology and practical experience in visiting and preaching. A local minister introduced him to New Testament Greek, the study of which he continued throughout his life. Preparation for ordained ministry brought him to Belfast, where he attended Renshaw's Shaftesbury House Tutorial College prior to study at Magee University College, graduating from Trinity College, Dublin with a BA in 1956 (converted to MA in 1964). He later also obtained a BD from Trinity. Following study at New College, Edinburgh and at the Presbyterian College, Belfast, he was licenced and ordained by the Presbytery of Limavady on 29 May 1958 and served as Ordained Assistant to the Moderator of the General Assembly in 1st Newry (Sandys Street), where he started a Youth Fellowship. A hockey match with Knock Youth Fellowship led to meeting Patricia McBurnie, and subsequently, in 1961, their marriage, in which she unselfishly supported Mr Dallas through his long ministry. His ministry in Newry was followed by a short period covering the absence of the minister in Shore Street, Donaghadee, from where he was called to his first charge, Fintona, being installed by the Presbytery of Omagh on 1 June 1960. He served as Clerk of Presbytery towards the end of his time there, moving to Westbourne, where he was installed by the East Belfast Presbytery on 24 November 1964. There he took an interest in Religious Education in schools and took a Dip Ed at Queen's University, Belfast in 1970. The onset of 'The Troubles' provided the backdrop to the rest of Mr Dallas' ministry whether in east Belfast, Londonderry, or Whiteabbey. The Presbytery of Derry installed him in Waterside on 9 September 1971, where he served through a very difficult period for the city near which he had grown up. There he taught Religious Education part-time in Foyle College. He was installed by the Presbytery of North Belfast in Whiteabbey on 28 June 1979. In 1983 major improvements and extensions were made to the buildings and at an associated Festival of Faith eighteen members publicly professed their faith in Christ. As well as the congregation, he had responsibilities as part-time chaplain at the then Polytechnic at Jordanstown and at Greenisland Hospital, and as Chairman of the Governors of Whiteabbey Primary School.

He retired on 30 June 1995, becoming Minister Emeritus (Released) on 6 January 2024. Mr Dallas was active in the work of Presbytery and General Assembly, convening the Colonial and Commonwealth Mission for ten years from 1967 and, in retirement, serving as Convener of the Shankill Road Mission Commission from 1998 to 2005 and, for sixteen years, as a pastoral visitor in Knock. A dedicated minister and faithful follower of Jesus Christ, along with Patricia, Julie, Angela and Stephen, and the whole family circle, we give thanks to God for him, and for the reality of these words in his life: “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” (Psalm 119, verse 105)

Memorial Record Rev Martin Smyth

The Rev William Martin Smyth, BA, BD, DD, Minister without charge (retired), died on 22 August 2025, in the ninety-fifth year of his age and the sixty-eighth year of his ministry. He was born, a younger twin to Crawford, with an older sister Doreen, on 15 June 1931, the son of James, a plumber and Justice of the Peace, and Minnie (née Kane). His home congregation was Great Victoria Street, Belfast, where his father was an elder. He was surrounded by Christian example in his home, church and also The Boys’ Brigade in Richview. His primary education was in Tin Top School on the Donegall Road and Jones Memorial School in Enniskillen where he and Crawford had been billeted during the war. He was an able pupil receiving a City Scholarship to attend Methodist College Belfast. He then studied in Magee University College, graduating with a BA in 1953 from Trinity College, Dublin, which later also awarded him a BD. After theological training at The Presbyterian College in Belfast, he was licenced by the Presbytery of Belfast in Great Victoria Street on 2 June 1955 and served as Licensed Assistant in Finaghy – Lowe Memorial. This time shaped both his preaching ministry and his pastor’s heart. He was assigned to visit patients and conduct the weekly services in Musgrave Park Hospital and also became involved with ministry to students, preaching at many youth and adult missions. Kathleen Johnston from Toomebridge was deeply involved in leadership in student ministry: it was through this that they met and kept in contact, marrying in 1957 and enjoying over 60 years together, sharing various aspects of ministry. Just two weeks after their marriage, Mr Smyth was installed on 11 September by the Presbytery of Down in Raffrey where, among many other things, he established a company of The Girls’ Brigade. Following a call to Alexandra, he was installed by the North Belfast Presbytery on 5 September 1963. There he sought to develop the missionary life of the congregation and its witness to the community. He oversaw the redevelopment of the church halls and work to the main church building. His ministry was widely acceptable across many denominations: he had a marvellous voice and a commanding presence in the pulpit; his prayers were uplifting and eloquent and he had the great joy of leading many to personal faith in the Lord Jesus. It was while serving in Alexandra that their youngest daughter Margaret was killed in an accident in 1974, leaving a lasting impact on both their lives. Out of that loss they wrote a powerful account of their experience and

the sustaining grace of God. Mr Smyth was deeply involved in the Loyal Orders and became Grand Master of the Orange Order. This led to him being a target for terrorists, even experiencing a bomb being planted at the manse and having to move house. He served on the General Assembly's Business Committee and Social Service Committee; as Chairman of Mountcollyer School; as Governor of Belfast City Mission; and in several other positions in church and society. He lectured in Belfast Bible College and authored several religious publications. He resigned his charge on 1 May 1982, serving as Member of Parliament for Belfast South from 1982 to 2005, and as Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly for Belfast South from 1982 to 1986. He became a minister without charge and a member of Mountpottinger congregation, serving on the Kirk Session. He continued to preach at home and abroad. In later years while resident in a care home, he regularly engaged in worship and led in prayer. It was there that his wife Kathleen pre-deceased him in 2021. We pray God's blessing on their daughters Heather and Rosemary, with David and Rev Ivan, and their grandchildren. "Accepted in the Beloved." (Ephesians chapter 1, verse 6)

Memorial Record Rev John Davey

The Rev John Irvine Davey, BD, Minister Emeritus, Hillsborough, died on 28 August 2025, in the seventy-sixth year of his age and the forty-eighth year of his ministry. Born on 11 April 1950, he was the eldest of six children to Jim Davey and Margaret. His father worked in the office in the Ormeau Bakery. Life revolved around Woodvale congregation where his father was an elder and treasurer. It was there that he first responded to the Gospel of Grace. He was educated at Woodvale Primary School from 1955–61, then Methodist College, Belfast, from 1961–69. He heard the call to ordained ministry and decided to study classics, taking Greek at A-level. He excelled at sport, primarily cricket, captaining the Irish Universities' team, and playing successively for Woodvale, North and St Johnston. In later years it was golf, again excelling. Through Woodvale congregation Mr Davey got to know Ruth Megarry and they married in 1972. This was while he was following a pathway to ordained ministry which involved taking a BD through Queen's University, Belfast, followed by theological studies, all at The Presbyterian College. Following student assistantships in Kilrea and First Ballymacarrett, he was licensed by the North Belfast Presbytery on 8 July 1977, and ordained and installed as Assistant Minister by the East Belfast Presbytery in Belmont on 8 January 1978. The vacancy that occurred the next year meant that he had to step up to the mark in helping maintain the life and witness of a large and demanding city congregation. He grew into the job and his ministry developed and matured. On 18 April 1980 he was installed to his first charge, Raphoe and Ballindrait, by the Donegal Presbytery, where he and Mrs Davey learned the rhythms of rural life and ministry. He served in Donegal as Clerk of Presbytery for four years. Just before they left Donegal their family was completed, with the arrival of Gavin, a younger brother to Kathryn and Christopher.

As a father, Mr Davey was always encouraging to his children and never forced particular church expectations on them. Hillsborough, where he was installed by the Dromore Presbytery on 10 June 1986, brought the challenges of another large and demanding congregation. An engaging, incisive preacher, he exercised a ministry that was confident, open and pastoral. Once again his abilities were recognised and he served as Clerk of Presbytery from 1990 to 2020. Other service that he gave to the wider church included acting as Director of Primary Education in the Republic of Ireland 1984–86, Convener of the Students' Bursary Fund 1986–89, and Convener of the Central Ministry Fund Committee 1988–95. It was during their time in Hillsborough that Mrs Davey was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. He was patient and supportive all through the fourteen years that she was ill until her death in 2016, just over a year after his retirement, which was on 31 May 2015. Retirement gave him the freedom to travel and to be a supportive presence for his children and grandchildren. A friendship with Ann, a former Clerk of Session in Hillsborough, deepened and they were married in 2018, which brought him new relationships as a step-father and step-grandfather. The suddenness of his death shocked and saddened all who knew him, and has been particularly hard on Ann and on their children and grandchildren. To them we offer both sympathy and hope: "Where, O death is your sting?... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15.55–56)

Memorial Record Rev Jim Waring

The Rev William James Waring, BA, Minister Emeritus, Ballyrashane, died on 5 October 2025, in the eighty-ninth year of his age and the fifty-fifth year of his ministry. Born in east Belfast on 20 February 1937 to Samuel, a plater, and Frances, his home congregation was McQuiston Memorial. He was educated at Grosvenor High School from 1949–54, going on to work in the linen and insurance industries, and then serve in the Merchant Navy. A call to ordained ministry saw him return to education, firstly at Magee University College and Trinity College, Dublin, where he gained a BA in 1968. He enjoyed all that college life offered, joined societies and, during the long summer holidays, took jobs in a variety of occupations and travelled in Europe. He also worked hard in his studies of History, Spanish and Philosophy, and then in his theological training at The Presbyterian College, Belfast. He was licenced by the East Belfast Presbytery on 8 June 1970 and later that year ordained and installed as Assistant Minister in Great Victoria Street by the South Belfast Presbytery on 16 December. While plying the Caribbean in the Merchant Navy, he had warmed to the people as he saw the struggles they had to contend with. Visits to missionaries of our Church in Jamaica helped to crystallise a growing conviction that this was indeed the place of God's appointment for him. He had previously married Lorna Craig, and together, having been appointed to overseas missionary service in Jamaica by his Presbytery on 11 June 1972, they set sail. His time there included conducting evangelistic missions in outlying places, particularly the Cayman Islands. He delighted in sharing the Good

News of Jesus Christ and took every opportunity to do so, believing also that social action is similarly integral to the Church's mission. After serving there for four and a half years, during which Philip and Stephanie were born, realising that Philip would need special education which was not available in Jamaica, they returned to Ireland, and his home Presbytery installed him as Minister in Christ Church, Dundonald, on 9 November 1976. Overseas Mission continued to be a passion: he served as Convener of the Western Committee for a year, before being appointed as Convener of the Overseas Board in 1986, in which position he served until 1993. This involved a lot of overseas travel, supporting our missionaries. In the meantime, he became Minister of Ballyrashane, where the Coleraine Presbytery installed him on 9 March 1990. He retired on 29 February 2000 and continued to live in the Coleraine area. Mr Waring knew a lot of personal tragedy, with the loss of a nephew through drowning; a sister-in-law, Pamela, being murdered while serving as a missionary in Brazil with Latin Link; the sudden death of his adult son Michael (who had been born after the return from Jamaica); and above all with the prolonged debilitating illness of Lorna, and her death in 1999. Through all this he showed immense courage and fortitude, ministering to his people and to his own family. In Ballyrashane he came to love and respect in the Gospel the country folk he ministered to, and was able to serve on the organising committee of New Horizon. His own health deteriorated, and a heart-attack in 1997 meant major surgery. He was able, however, for six years after retirement to assist in ministry in High Kirk, Ballymena. During this time he had the joy, as Convener of the Committee on Learning Disabilities under the Board of Social Witness, of seeing the Church open Willow Brook, a Christian supported-housing project for adults with a learning disability and Philip become one of the first residents. Mr Waring died at peace with the world, at peace with himself, and at peace with God. He prayed that peace for three friends who visited him shortly before his passing, using the words of the Aaronic Blessing, "...the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace." (Numbers 6.24-26)

Memorial Record Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson

The Very Rev Ivan James Patterson, BA, MTh, DD, Minister Emeritus, Newcastle, died on 29 October 2025, in the seventy-seventh year of his age and the forty-fifth year of his ministry. Born in Drummuck, Broughshane, on 15 January 1949 to Robert and Agnes Patterson, his home congregation was Buckna. After Racavan Primary School, he attended Ballymena Intermediate School from 1960-65, followed by two years at Ballymena Technical College. After a break from education, he studied at the College of Business Studies in Belfast from 1971-73. Having met Maureen Wilson at a church party in Buckna, they married in Wellington Street in 1972. She became not only his life's partner, but also a partner in ministry, exercising a distinctive ministry of her own. Dr Patterson's studies for the ministry were at The Presbyterian College, Belfast. The degrees he obtained from Queen's University, Belfast, indicated a strong interest that was to continue

through his ministry: a BA (Semitic Studies) and MTh (Old Testament). He was licenced by the Ballymena Presbytery on 13 June 1980, and the same year ordained and installed by the Ards Presbytery as Assistant Minister in First Bangor on 18 December. His facility for electronics was exercised in setting up the pioneering TV Unit in Belfast to produce tapes to be used in the training of ministers for this medium. He became Minister of Bushvale when he was installed to this charge by the Route Presbytery on 24 June 1982. While there, he began to exercise leadership in the central Church, becoming, in 1984, Convener of the Youth International and Inter-Church Committee, in which position he served until 1989. His description in a report to the General Assembly of the work of the committee as ‘to provide opportunities for the young people of our Church to meet with each other, with young Christians from other traditions and to bring them into contact with the Church and young people of other lands’, indicated some of his priorities, and he would go on to apply these to adults as well. He became Convener of that committee’s parent body, the Youth Board, serving from 1989-1993. In the meantime, the Presbytery of Iveagh installed him as Minister of Newcastle on 23 May 1991. Throughout his ministry Dr Patterson poured himself into the ordinary rhythms of parish life, visiting, listening, praying and turning up. He found innumerable ways of serving the wider church, including as Clerk of the Iveagh Presbytery, as External Examiner in Old Testament Language and Biblical Theology at Union Theological College, and in strengthening our partnership with the Hungarian Reformed Church. He convened the Reception of Ministers and Licentiate Committee from 2008-14 and Union Theological College Management Committee from 2018-24, in addition to various Panels and Task Groups. He was honoured by the General Assembly which elected him as Moderator in 2011, when he was also awarded his DD degree by the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland. He retired from parish ministry in Newcastle on 15 July 2013, but as will be realised, continued in very active ministry for many years. This was not least in the area of inter-church work, to which he had been increasingly drawn. He gave himself to that, not as a project, but as an act of love, being first appointed by the General Assembly to the Executive Committee of the Irish Council of Churches, and serving as Vice-President (2018-2020) and then President (2020-2022). This latter period covered the Covid pandemic where his persistent Scriptural encouragement and anchoring faith benefited many. His conviction was ‘to love God and not forget our neighbour are the fundamentals of an authentic journey of faith’. For Maureen and their son Stephen we pray: “May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” (2 Peter 1.2)

Memorial Record Rev Dr Martin McNeely

The Rev Martin David McNeely, BA, MDiv, DipMin, DMin, Minister without Charge, died on 22 November 2025, in the fifty-sixth year of his age and the eighteenth year of his ministry. The son of Robert, a farmer and property developer and Florence, a nurse, he was born in Londonderry

on 2 June 1970. He attended Bready County Primary School, then, after a move to England, Perins School in Hampshire, followed by two years at Hampshire College of Agriculture. A further two years at Wessex Tutors was preparation for university studies in which he gained a BA from the University of Ulster in Politics – a lifelong interest. Before his theological studies and eventual ordination, he worked for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as the Press Officer and thereby gained a comprehensive understanding of the denomination at central and local level. He had a wide range of interests, not always typical of a Presbyterian minister, such as a love of eighties and nineties indie bands and of surfing. In academic study he went on to receive an MDiv from Queen's University through Union Theological College, Belfast, a DipMin from the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland, and a DMin from the Reformed Theological Seminary, Florida, USA. Dr McNeely was licenced by the East Belfast Presbytery in Bloomfield, which had become his home congregation, on 4 June 2006 and, after an assistantship at First Holywood, he was ordained as Minister of Ballykeel by the Ballymena Presbytery on 23 November 2007. An exciting opportunity opened up when he was installed by the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal to the charge of Fahan, with a remit to begin a work in Bunrana. Sadly, he was not able to devote himself to this due to a challenging health diagnosis leading to his resignation on 23 March 2025. He was a gifted communicator who loved people and had a pastoral and servant heart. He could not be pigeon-holed, having a passion for both rugby and hurling, and a love for the Irish language and for loyalist bands. Throughout his ministry he would join any club or sport where he thought he would get the chance to have fun and talk to people about Jesus. Throughout his life, and in the months following his diagnosis, he affirmed "God is good – all of the time." To his wife Julie, son Joshua and daughter Martha, along with his parents Robert and Florence and sisters Helen and Mary, as well as the congregations of Ballykeel and Fahan, we offer our sympathy in Christ, remembering one who obeyed this Scripture: "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3.17)

Memorial Record Rev Bob Hornby

The Rev Robert Hornby, BA, Minister Emeritus, Mersey Street, Belfast, died on 29 November 2025, in the eighty-ninth year of his age and the thirty-sixth year of his ministry. He was born on 20 April 1937 near Southport, Lancashire, the second son of William, a farmer and market gardener, and Nellie. He enjoyed school at Tarleton Church of England School, and then Ormskirk Secondary Modern, and wanted to be a joiner, but had to leave school at the age of fifteen to help on the farm. As a child, he went to Sunday school in the local Methodist Church where he later became a teacher and then superintendent. It was in his teens that he came to saving faith in Christ through his family and a friend encouraging him to attend Gospel meetings with them. At the age of 22 Mr Hornby felt

called to the Christian ministry and went to Edinburgh Faith Mission Bible College. This was the first time he had ever been away from home, and he was very home-sick. When he finished his time at the College (1961), he was sent to Ballymena to help in the work of the Faith Mission. It was at that time that he first met Marie Gillen. Their romance had to carry on at long-distance as he was posted back to Edinburgh. However, they were able to marry in 1964 in Harryville. By this stage, he was serving the Lord in Manchester City Mission and it was there that their daughter Allison was born. The family remained in Manchester for over 23 years but maintained links with Ballymena and Harryville. He completed his BA with the Open University and in 1987 left the City Mission and the family moved to Ballymena. He was accepted as a student for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and commenced studies at Union Theological College, serving as a summer assistant in Ballyloughan and being licensed by the Ballymena Presbytery in Harryville on 4 June 1989. By this time, Megain Memorial and Mersey Street congregations were combined and, following a student assistantship there, he was ordained and installed as Assistant Minister by the East Belfast Presbytery on 19 January 1990, and then installed a Minister of Mersey Street on 13 December the next year. He had a very fruitful ministry in Mersey Street and both he and Marie were much loved by the people. He retired on 30 June 2002 and returned to Harryville, becoming a pastoral assistant, ministering for a further thirteen years, visiting the elderly and preaching regularly, and giving support and encouragement to the incumbent ministers. In prayer, the great burden of his heart was for the Lord to pour out revival blessing. He enjoyed serving others using his skills in gardening and D.I.Y. With the huge gap left in their lives by his passing, we pray for Marie and Allison that, along with grateful memories, they will know the comfort of Christ. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...they will rest from their labour for their deeds will follow them.” (Revelation 14.13)

Memorial Record Rev Billy Hook

The Rev William John Hook, BA, MA, BD, Minister Emeritus (Released), Cuninghame Memorial, Cullybackey, died on 10 March 2026, in the ninety-fourth year of his age and the sixty-eighth year of his ministry. He was born into a farming family on 5 December 1932 in Ballykeel, Dromore, Co Down, his parents being William George and Jane Ann (née Young). The family were originally Covenanters, but moved to the Presbyterian congregation of Drumlough. His early education was at Drumlough Public Elementary School after which, at the age of fourteen, he worked on the family farm. He was converted through a mission held in Sloan Street, Lisburn at which the speaker was WP Nicholson. Some years later he was to marry Anna Bothwell in the same church. Feeling called to Christian ministry, like many of his generation he attended Renshaw's Shaftesbury House Tutorial College from 1948–50, and then studied at Magee University College, being awarded a BA by Trinity College, Dublin (converted to MA in 1962) and a BD, also from Trinity, in 1965. In the

meantime his preparation for the ministry was at the Presbyterian College, Belfast from 1956-58. During his assistantship in Ballysillan he was licensed by the Presbytery of Dromore in Drumlough on 25 May 1958. A Vespa scooter took him round his pastoral visitation. Later the same year he was ordained by the Presbytery of Monaghan to the three-point charge of Drum, Kilmount and Cootehill on 4 November. To begin with there wasn't a manse for him and Anna to move into. They lived in a flat in Cootehill above a butcher's shop which is where the pram had to be kept. Mr Hook was installed as minister of Knappagh and Lislooney by the Presbytery of Armagh on 6 July 1962, and then by the Presbytery of Ballymena on 29 January 1969 in the congregation to which he devoted most of his ministry, Cuninghame Memorial in Cullybackey. He ministered with grace and truth, endearing himself to the people, having a broad smile and being able to laugh at himself. His pastimes included fly fishing, bowling and golf – he was for many years a very competitive member of the Presbyterian Ministers' Golfing Society. In the wider church he served as Moderator of the Synod of Ballymena and Coleraine in 1977/8 and as Convener of the Memorial Record from 1983–90. Mr Hook retired on 31 December 1997, and became Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2017, living in Portrush with Anna who predeceased him in 2011. In retirement he played a valuable role in pastoral visitation in Ballywillan. His favourite Psalm was the forty-sixth, and we pray that the first verse in particular may be the experience of his sons, Donald, Ivor, Edwin, Harold, and their families: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."

JIM STOTHERS, Convener

REPORTS OF PRESBYTERIES

The **ARDS PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Mark Johnston is their Moderator; that the Very Rev Dr Charles McMullen, Minister of West Church, Bangor, retired on 31 July 2025; that the Rev David Stanfield, Associate Minister of City Church, Bangor, retired on 31 January 2026; that the Rev Neil Stewart, Minister of Trinity, Greyabbey, resigned his charge on 30 April 2025 and was retained as a Minister without Charge; that the Rev Anne Tolland, Minister of Regent Street, Newtownards, resigned her charge on 30 September 2025 and was retained as a Minister without Charge; that the Rev John Mullan, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Tyrone and was installed to the charge of Greenwell Street, Newtownards on 11 April 2025; that Mr Neil Stewart, Assistant Minister in Hamilton Road, was ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament and inducted to the work of Missionary Service on 13 April 2025 as a Global Mission Worker for service in Bilbao, Spain; that Mr Jack Neilly was licensed on 22 June 2025 and given credentials to the Presbytery of East Belfast; that the Rev Annes Nel presented credentials from the Presbytery of Down and was received as a Minister Emeritus; that the Rev Lesley-Ann Wilson was given credentials to the Presbytery of South Belfast; that Mrs Louise Davidson was given credentials to the Presbytery of South Belfast; that the Rev Neil Stewart was given credentials to the Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady; that under their care are: as ministers without charge, Revs Craig Mawhinney, Aaron Ditty, Ian Dennis and Anne Tolland; as students, Mrs Jo Calvert and Mr Stuart Balmer; that they held no Consultations as per General Assembly guidance; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **ARMAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev J.T. Graham is their Moderator; that the Rev R.L. Brown, Minister of First Portadown, retired on 31 October 2025; that the Rev W.J.I. Thompson, Minister of Knappagh and Lislooney, retired on 22 February 2026; that the Rev E.P. Gamble, Minister of The Mall, Armagh, resigned his charge on 18 May 2025; that the Rev G.R. Mullan, Minister of Benburb and Moy, demitted oversight of Benburb on 29 May 2025; that the Rev A. Marsh, Minister of Drumhillery and Second Keady, resigned his charge on 26 June 2025 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of East Belfast; that the Rev G.R. Mullan was installed to the oversight of Vinecash on 30 May 2025; that the Rev Dr S.A. Moore was inducted as Lecturer in Old Testament in Union Theological College on 5 September 2025; that Mr A. Richardson was licensed on 8 June 2025 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Dromore; that Messrs J. Burke and A. Gibson presented credentials and were received as licentiates; that under their care are: as a Minister without Charge, Rev Dr J.W.P. McConnell; as licentiates, Messrs J. Burke, A. Gibson, J. Jones, J.D. McKee; as students, Messrs C. Coert and P. Hutchinson; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **BALLYMENA PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev J.T. Blue is their Moderator; that the Rev N.A.L. Cameron, Minister of High Kirk, Ballymena, retired on 27 September 2025; that the Rev A.A.P. Baxter, Minister of First Portglenone, retired on 2 November 2025; that the Rev D.J. Kane, Minister of West Church Ballymena, retired on 31 January 2026; that the Revs Dr. R.I. Birney and K. McConnell, Ministers Emeritus, became Ministers Emeritus (Released) on 27 January 2026; that the Rev W.J.C. Brogan resigned his charge as Minister of Glenarm and Cairnabana on 17 October 2025 having received and accepted a call from The Council for Mission in Ireland (Ballina Special Ministry) and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Monaghan; that the Rev Dr A.M. Bates resigned his charge as Minister of Wellington Ballymena on 31 December 2025 and became a Minister Without Charge under the care of Presbytery; that the Rev J.A. Porter, having presented credentials from the Presbytery of Tyrone, was installed to the charge of Rasharkin and Dunloy on 19 September 2025; that Mr S.J. Kerr presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and was ordained and installed to the charge of Kells on 4 September 2025; that Mr A.J. Frazer presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and was ordained and installed to the charge of Trinity Ahoghill and Grange with Craigmore on 10 September 2025; that under their care are: as Ministers Without Charge, The Revs Dr A.M. Bates, M.D. Boyd and D.A. McMillan; as a licentiate, Mr S. McKimm; that no Consultations were held during the year; that Townhill Portglenone congregation merged into First Portglenone congregation to form Portglenone Presbyterian Church on 1 January 2026; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **NORTH BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev David S. Currie is their Moderator; that the Rev J.S. Dallas, Minister Emeritus of Whiteabbey, died 14 August 2025; that the Rev W.M. Smyth, Minister Without Charge (retired) of Alexandra, died 22 August 2025; that the Right Rev Dr T.D. Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly, retired on 30 November 2025; that the Rev T.V. Patterson, Minister Emeritus became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 3 February 2026; that the Rev C.A. Meban resigned as Chaplain of U.U.J. 20 September 2025 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, the Revs Dr L.E. Carroll, K. Patterson and W.A. Shaw; as licentiates, Mr D. Dickinson, Mr S. Cairns and Mr M. Banks; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **SOUTH BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Dr J. N. McCracken is their Moderator; that the Rev R.J. Greer, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 2 September 2025; that Mr B. Abwa, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Templepatrick and was ordained and installed to the joint charge of Dunmurry & Kilmakee on 13 February 2026; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs

J.R. Burnett, C.E. Heron, Dr C.I. Dickson and L. Wilson; as a licentiate, Mr A. Ferguson; as a student, Mr P. Jaeschke; as a transferring minister Dr G.J. Shearer; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **EAST BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev E.J.B. McKenzie is their Moderator; that the Rev R. Hornby, Minister Emeritus (Released), of Mersey Street, died on 29 November 2025; that the Rev S. P. Moore, Minister of Gilnahirk, retired on 15 September 2025; that the Rev A. Marsh presented credentials from the Presbytery of Armagh and was installed to the charge of Strand on 27 June 2025; that the Rev A. M. Boreland presented credentials from the Presbytery of Iveagh and was installed to the charge of Bloomfield on 5 December 2025; that Mr J. A. Neilly presented credentials and was received as a licentiate; that the Rev M. Gilicze was given credentials to the Presbytery of Dromore; that Mr S. J. Kerr was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ballymena; that Mr A. Frazer was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ballymena; that the Rev T. J. Stothers was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ards; 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 S. R. Woods, Mr M. A. L. Tyrell, Mrs F. P. Magill and Mr J. Neilly; as students, Mr P. Huey, Miss K.. Jardine, Mr S. McCombe, Mr B. Kirkwood, Mr P. McMillan, Mr J. McCracken and Mr S. Monteith; no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **CARRICKFERGUS PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev John Philip Stanbridge is their Moderator; that the Rev Robert Vallely, a Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 October 2025; that the Rev David James Kelly, Minister of Woodburn & Loughmorne, resigned his charge on 24 April 2025; that the Rev David James Kelly, Minister of Woodburn & Loughmorne, was installed to the charge of Woodlands on 25 April 2025; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, the Rev Thomas Neil Bingham; as a licentiate, Dr Matthew William Hugh Houston; as a licentiate without charge: Mr Martin Joseph Delaney; that no Consultations were held; 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 Rev Knox Jones is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr Brian Kingsmore, Minister Emeritus (Released), died on 26 May 2025; that the Rev James Waring, Minister Emeritus (Released) of Ballyrashane, died on 5 October 2025; that the Rev John Coulter, Minister of Ballysally, retired 31 January 2026; that Rev David Leach presented credentials from the Presbytery of Tyrone and was installed to the charge of Portrush on 2 May 2025; that the Rev Neil Stewart presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ards and

was placed under the care of the Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady; that the Rev Desmond Paul presented credentials from the Presbytery of Templepatrick and was placed under the care of the Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady; that the Rev Neil Stewart was given credentials to the Presbytery of Omagh; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge Revs Dr Robert Kane and Desmond Paul; as students, Mr Thomas Black, Mr Joshua Lowry, Mr Adam Wallace and Mr David Robb; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **DERRY AND DONEGAL PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev R.R. Tregaskis is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr Martin David McNeely having resigned the charge of Fahan on 23 March 2025 and received as Minister without Charge, died on 22 November 2025; that the Rev D.F. Leal Zamora presented credentials from the Presbytery of Down and was installed into the Home Mission and inducted to the charges of Carrigart and Dunfanaghy on 25 May 2025; that the Rev J.R. Kernohan resigned as Minister of Carlisle Road and Crossroads on 30 June 2025; that the Rev A.A. McCullough presented credentials from the Presbytery of Dromore and was installed into the Home Mission and inducted to the charges of Donegal and Stranorlar on 15 November 2025; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Rev S.J. Richmond and Rev J.L. Blair; that no Consultations were held during the year; that the Financial Reports of the Congregations are being printed.

The **DOWN PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev T.A. Conway is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr A.F. Nel, Global Mission Worker, retired on 15 December 2025 and was given credentials on transferring to the Presbytery of Ards; that the Rev A.S. Smyth, Minister of Carryduff, retired on 16 February 2026; that the Rev N.R.A. Cooper, Minister of Ballygowan, resigned his charge on 5 September 2025 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Route; that the Rev D.F. Leal, Minister of First Ballynahinch, resigned his charge on 24 May 2025 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs Dr B.C.G. Black and R.C. Patton; as a licentiate, Mr L. Da Costa; as a student Mr M.J.S. Jackson; that they held Consultations at Kilmore, Lissara, Ardglass and Downpatrick; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **DROMORE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Dr Martin Cowan is their Moderator; that the Rev John Davey, Minister Emeritus, of Hillsborough, died on 28 August 2025; that the Rev Angus McCullough, Minister of Magheragall, resigned his charge on 15 November 2025 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal; that the Rev Mariann Gilicze, presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and was installed to the charge of 1st Lisburn on 10 May 2025; that the Rev Jamie Maguire, presented credentials from the Presbytery of

Newry and was installed to the charge of Moira on 25 June 2025; that Mr Alex Richardson presented credentials and was received as a licentiate; that under their care are: as licentiates, Mr Graeme Read, Mr Ryan Higgins, Mr Jonathan Boyd, Mr Alex Richardson; as students Mr Ashley Parks, Mr Nathan Donnell, Mr David Graham, Mr Ross Murphy; that the Rev Scott Moore, Minister without Charge, ceased to have that status on 3 December 2025; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **DUBLIN AND MUNSTER PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Andrew Gill is their Moderator; that the Rev Clarke Deering, Minister of Dun Laoghaire, retired on 31 January 2026; that the Rev Gary McDowell, Minister of Greystones, retired on 28 February 2026; that the Rev James Brogan and the Rev Dr John Woodside Ministers Emeritus, became Ministers Emeritus (Released) on 3 February 2026; that Mr Josh McCance was installed and inducted in Balbriggan on 26 January 2025; that the Rev John O'Donnell presented credentials from the Monaghan Presbytery and was installed in the Lucan Congregation on 25 July 2025; that the Rev Cheryl Meban presented credentials under the Council for Mission in Ireland, member of the Presbytery of North Belfast and was installed in Christ Church Rathgar on 20 September 2025; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **IVEAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev S.D. Conkey is their Moderator; that the Very Rev Dr I.J. Patterson, Minister Emeritus of Newcastle, died on 29 October 2025; that the Rev S.A. Matthews, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 3 March 2026; that the Rev A.M. Boreland, Minister of Newcastle, resigned his charge on 5 December 2025 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of East Belfast; that the Rev G.E. Best was inducted to the work of Dean of Ministerial Studies and Development on 5 September 2025; that Mr J.R. Burke was licensed on 15 June 2025 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Armagh; that under their care are: as licentiates, Mr S.I. McMenemy and Mr D. Ballantyne; as a student Mr R. McClughan; that the Rev P.G. Cleland, Minister without Charge, ceased to have that status on 3 September 2025; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

The **MONAGHAN PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Jeff Gawn is their Moderator; that the Rev John Hanson, Minister of Ballyhobridge, Clones, Newbliss and Stonebridge, retired on 10 December 2025; that the Rev David Clarke, Minister of Sligo, resigned his charge on 11 April 2025 and was retained as a Minister without Charge; that the Rev John O'Donnell, Minister of First Bailieborough, Trinity Bailieborough, Corraneary and Ervey, resigned his charge on 24 July 2025 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster; that the Rev John Brogan, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ballymena and was installed into the

Home Mission and inducted to the work of Ballina Special Ministry on 18 October 2025; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs Damien Boyle and David Clarke; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **NEWRY PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev K.W.J. Hanna is their Moderator; that the Rev J.S. Maguire, Minister of First Drumbanagher & Jerrettspass and Kingsmills, resigned his charge on 22 June 2025 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Dromore; that Mr M.B. Banks was licensed on 20 June 2025 and given credentials to the Presbytery of North Belfast; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, the Rev B.A. Kee and the Rev B.A.H. Wilson; as students, Mr M.B. Annett, Mr A.R. Hanna, Mr A.W. Hanna and Mr G.A.N. McBride; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **OMAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev R.G. McElnea is their Moderator; that the Rev R.B. Thompson, Minister of Badoney, Corrick & Glenelly, retired on 30 June 2025; that the Rev N.D.H. Stewart presented credentials from the Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady and was installed to the Charge of Fintona & Dromore on 29 November 2025; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately.

The **ROUTE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev C.B. Mulvenny is their Moderator; that the Rev A.J. Buick, Minister of Dunluce, retired on 30 September 2025; that the Rev K.D.W. Crowe, Minister of Bushvale, retired on 30 November 2025; that the Rev S.T. Carson, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 4 November 2025; that the Rev K. Henderson, Minister of Ballyweaney, resigned his charge on 26 October 2025 and became a Minister without Charge under the care of the Route Presbytery; that the Rev N.R.A. Cooper presented credentials from the Presbytery of Down and was installed to the charge of Bushmills on 6 September 2025; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, the Rev P. Douglas and the Rev K. Henderson; as a licentiate, Mr S. McCleery; as a student, Mr W.B. Quinn; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are printed separately.

The **TEMPLEPATRICK PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Chris Wilson is their Moderator; that Mr Billy Abwa was given credentials to the Presbytery of South Belfast; that the Rev D.J. Paul, Minister without Charge, was given credentials to the Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, the Rev J.L. Tosh and the Rev Karen Campbell; as a licentiate, Mr Matthew Kirk; 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 J.E. Sloan is their Moderator; that the Rev J.A. Spence, Minister of Upper Clonaneese and Lower Clonaneese, retired on 23 November 2025; that the Rev S.J.M. Lindsay, Minister of Pomeroy and Sandholes, retired on 12 January 2026; that the Rev Dr J.I. Thompson Minister Emeritus, became Minister Emeritus (Released) on 3 February 2026; that the Rev J.B. Mullan, Minister of Castledawson and Curran, resigned his charge on 10 April 2025 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ards; that the Rev Prof D.W. Leach, Professor of Ministry and Director of the Institute for Ministry (Union College), resigned his position on 1 May 2025 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady; that the Rev J.A. Porter, Minister of Orritor and Claggan, resigned his charge on 18 September 2025 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ballymena; that the Rev Dr G.W.D. Stewart, Minister of Maghera, resigned his charge on 30 September 2025 and was retained as a Minister without Charge; that under their care are: as a Minister without Charge, Rev W.I. Ferris; as a student, Mr Colin McKay; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed.

GENERAL COUNCIL SECTION 1

SAFEGUARDING DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

1. Following its relocation with the General Council, this Committee met three times, as follows: 6 January 2026; 27 February; 6 May

Background to the safeguarding issues facing PCI

2. Following the conviction and imprisonment of a person on 12 May 2025 for child abuse offences, who had previously been involved in a youth leadership role in a PCI congregation, it became apparent that there were serious failings in the delivery of safeguarding functions centrally in the denomination dating from 2009. On 27 May 2025, the General Assembly Advisory Committee appointed an Ad-hoc Committee of four people to look into concerns regarding PCI's central safeguarding provision. Its work progressed intensively through the summer and into the autumn of 2025.
3. The findings of the Ad-hoc Committee report were shared with the General Council on 12 November 2025. Following this, a letter from Dr Trevor Gribben, was read to the Council indicating his intention to stand down as Moderator of the General Assembly. This being accepted, his predecessor Dr Richard Murray assumed the office. Dr Gribben further sought permission to retire from his employed role as Clerk and General Secretary, and this was granted.
4. The safeguarding failings identified in the Ad-hoc Committee report were widely reported in the media following a press conference on 12 November, and triggered the commencement of a wide-ranging criminal investigation by the PSNI and, subsequently, a Charities Commission for Northern Ireland inquiry into both PCI's safeguarding provision and its governance. These PSNI and CCNI processes are continuing, and the church is cooperating fully with them. The CCNI inquiry will make its report following the completion of an independent review of PCI safeguarding and governance conducted by INEQE, led and overseen by the CEO, Mr Jim Gamble and a team of specialist team members. Its focus will be on the period from July 2016 (the commencement of PCI's charitable status) to the present. It is anticipated that this review will be completed no later than June 2027. The review will follow the core principles of:
 - A victim and survivor centred approach;
 - Transparency and Accountability;
 - Evidence based evaluation.

5. The General Council has appointed a Statutory Investigations Advisory Task Group to assist the Moderator in his role of liaison with the PSNI and the CCNI, and its work will continue until these investigations and inquiries are completed.
6. A Special meeting of the General Assembly was called by the Moderator, and met on 18 December 2025 in Assembly Buildings. In a profound spirit of lament, the Special Assembly agreed a number of steps, including the following:
 - (a) The elevation of the position of safeguarding within the denomination with the establishment of a new Safeguarding Department.
 - (b) The new Department would have external oversight through a Safeguarding Supervision Panel.
 - (c) The appointment of two senior level posts – a Head of Safeguarding; and a Safeguarding Lead, at an appropriate level of seniority within PCI, with appropriate professional social work and administrative support. Both roles would require Social Work or other equivalent qualifications, and safeguarding experience. The Safeguarding Department would be funded by congregational assessment.
 - (d) The Special Assembly agreed to launch an examination of PCI Governance, Culture and Integrity, and appointed a Task Group to lead this.
 - (e) A protocol for addressing safeguarding concerns in connection with ministers, elders and leaders was considered, with the agreement that it be sent to ministers and Kirk Sessions for comment before being brought to the June 2026 General Assembly.
 - (f) Recognising that a vacancy now exists in the role of Clerk and General Secretary, the Assembly commissioned a group to examine and report on the process for addressing this matter, which would report to a second Special General Assembly to be called in February 2026.
 - (g) Finally, the Special Assembly considered the posture and tone of the General Assembly in the incoming year including the role and duties of the incoming Moderator who would be appointed in June 2026, agreeing that the church requires a pastoral, prayerful and reflective lead in this time of significant crisis.
7. The second Special General Assembly was held on 18 February 2026 in Assembly Buildings. Its primary business was to consider the report of the Task Group looking at the appointment process for a new Clerk to the General Assembly. A report on the work of this Task Group is included below.

Protocol for the immediate management of safeguarding concerns

8. The Committee examined and reviewed the protocol document received by the General Council in November 2025 and recognised a number of unresolved issues within its provisions. The document was substantially revised and brought to the General Council meeting on 26 March 2026, after which it was circulated to Ministers with the status of Guidelines, while being open for comment as instructed by the Special Assembly.
9. A small number of comments were received from Kirk Sessions by the notified closing date of 1 May 2026, and were each considered in detail by the Committee at its meeting on 6 May. The revised document is included as Appendix 1 with an appended resolution. The Committee anticipates that the Protocol will be incorporated into the Safeguarding Policies and Procedures already agreed and in place.
10. As part of the implementation of the Protocol, the matter of emergency access to a member of the Safeguarding Team over weekends and holidays by telephone was noted in comments received. This provision is being considered by the Safeguarding Department.

APPENDIX 1

PROTOCOL FOR THE IMMEDIATE MANAGEMENT OF SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS

1. Policy Statement – Protecting children and adults at risk of harm

It is the role of the PCI Safeguarding Department (SD) to provide expert professional advice to decision makers regarding appropriate measures for the immediate management of safeguarding concerns. If a concern is identified, advice should be sought from the SD and consideration should be given to establishing an Emergency Safeguarding Panel (ESP) as per Appendix 1.

Having taken advice, if the appropriate convenor of the ESP (per Appendix 1) considers that there are reasonable grounds for concern regarding any safeguarding matter involving volunteers, staff or leaders of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI), the first priority must always be to ensure that no child or adult at risk of harm is exposed to unnecessary risk.

Regardless of who the concern is about or the type of risk involved, the welfare of the vulnerable person will always take precedence, alongside complementary regard for the welfare of the person about whom the concern has been raised.

2. Scope

This protocol applies to all volunteers, staff and leaders across PCI in both Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland and the principles also apply to the Church's mission overseas.

The Protocol neither impacts nor supersedes legal obligations to report concerns to appropriate statutory authorities, as per Children First and Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People. These legal obligations should be completed first.

3. Immediate protective measures and precautionary actions

In all safeguarding matters, actions must be taken as a matter of urgency, to address immediate harm and minimise any immediate risk of additional harm.

If the risk of harm is such that a person's safety is being jeopardised, it is vital that any necessary immediate protective measures are not delayed by church governance processes.

Accordingly, this protocol will be applied immediately a concern is identified. Any action taken under the protocol will subsequently be reviewed by the appropriate Court of the Church or (in the case of contracted employees) relevant HR processes, as soon as practicable.

Measures taken under this Protocol are not disciplinary actions – they are solely for the purpose of addressing perceived immediate harm or risk of harm. They should not be interpreted as implying a finding of wrongdoing.

Further, any immediate measures taken under this protocol must be proportionate to the level of risk assessed. In some circumstances, the necessary protective measures may include requiring a minister or elder temporarily to step back from delivery of their role, however such a ‘stepping back’ should be considered a last resort and must only be applied after alternative options (such as those outlined in section 4 below) have been considered.

The categories for concern are defined as:

- if an individual is convicted of offences relating to harm caused to a child or adult at risk;
- if an individual has an allegation made against them of inappropriate or abusive behaviour towards a child or adult at risk;¹
- if information is received from statutory authorities that they have concerns about the behaviour of an individual in relation to a child or adult at risk;
- if a PCI SD assessment indicates that an individual’s involvement in safeguarding related decisions, judgements or implementation could expose a child or adult at risk to harm.

As noted above, it is the role of the SD to provide expert professional advice to decision makers in relation to appropriate immediate protective measures. If a concern is identified, their advice should be sought as soon as possible.

4. Emergency Safeguarding Panel

If a safeguarding concern is identified, an ESP should be convened (as per Appendix 1) as soon as practicable to consider any necessary immediate actions to address the concern.

Material considered by an ESP and any decisions reached are strictly confidential and are likely to meet the definition of Special Category Data under relevant data protection legislation.

In undertaking its work, the ESP has two necessary and urgent functions. Firstly, based largely on the information provided when the concern was reported, the ESP should seek to understand:

- the general nature of the concern,
- if it relates to child or adult safeguarding;
- when the incident is alleged to have occurred;

¹ In line with definitions in *Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People* DOH 2017 (as revised), *Adult Safeguarding: Prevention and Protection in Partnership* DOH 2015, *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse* HSE 2014

- what is known at this point;
- any additional readily available information.

The ESP should not carry out any additional investigation nor should it seek to identify or interview witnesses, the alleged victim or the person about whom the concern has been raised.

Having collated and considered the available information, the ESP must consider what action (if any) is necessary. The outcomes of an ESP review can include:

- deciding that no immediate precautionary action is necessary
- requiring the individual to
 - cease particular actions / roles
 - refrain from contacting specific individuals
 - refrain from attending specific locations
 - step back from their role in its entirety

The ESP should not delay its deliberations in an effort to obtain additional information. As the key issue for the ESP to address is immediate protection of children or adults at risk, the expectation is that an ESP should normally make its decisions within 48 hours of being advised of a concern.

The role of the SD is to provide advice relating to:

- safeguarding matters;
- the level and type of risk involved;
- possible actions to take to mitigate risk

The SD advises, but is not part of, the decision making of the ESP.

If, for any reason, the SD cannot be contacted, the ESP Convenor should seek initial advice from appropriate statutory authorities and should put in place such immediate temporary steps as they consider necessary to protect the individuals at risk until the ESP is able to meet formally with the SD.

The ESP will summarise the information it has considered and any decisions (with reasons) on the ESP Review and Decision Record form (Appendix 4).

When any precautionary action (including requiring an individual to step back from a role or function) is taken by the ESP to address an identified concern or risk, this is deemed to be a formal decision with the authority of the church and may only be changed following adjudication by the relevant court of the church or (in the case of a contracted employee) HR process.

Any investigation which is necessary will be undertaken utilising the appropriate processes of the relevant court of the Church or HR policy. Once the immediate risk has been addressed by the ESP, the relevant church court or HR process will commence its work. The actions and

decisions of the ESP will be reviewed and either affirmed, amended or revoked by the subsequent investigation process. This initial work should also be completed as a matter of some urgency, with a review of any ESP actions normally expected within seven days.

Once the matter has been passed from the ESP to a Church Court or HR process, the rules for procedure, appeals, etc. governing those processes will apply.

The ESP must be mindful that any new information which comes to its attention during deliberation may retrigger the mandatory or statutory reporting requirements of the relevant jurisdiction.

Any additional reports required should be managed in line with PCI procedures as a matter of urgency.

5. Consideration of ‘stepping back’

While always ensuring that the safety of individuals at risk is critical in the decision-making process, the ESP must be cognisant of the implications of any decision to require an individual to step back from any or all of their roles in the church.

Such a decision can have far reaching consequences and should only be considered as a last resort, and ideally with advice from the SD. The ESP must balance the protection of vulnerable individuals with the welfare of the person about whom the concern has been raised. As previously noted, the decision should be based on fairness and proportionality.

Immediate precautionary stepping back from a role may be appropriate if:

- a child or adult is at significant risk;
- the concern is so serious that if proven it may lead to dismissal / removal from office;
- the concern has the potential to meet the criteria for a statutory referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

6. Informing the individual

If any immediate precautionary action is required, the individual concerned should, subject to any restrictions applied by statutory authorities, be advised without delay of the following:

- the nature of the concern and in particular that it is a safeguarding matter;
- the rationale for the action being taken;
- that the action is precautionary and is to protect all parties;
- the identity of a church contact point to provide pastoral support. Any person identified to provide such pastoral support must not be part of the ESP or any future investigative processes.

It is vitally important that the individual is assured that any precautionary actions are neutral and intended solely to protect all parties.

The ESP Convenor should further ensure that pastoral support is available for the individual raising the concern and their family.

7. Handover to normal procedures

When the ESP is reasonably assured that any immediate risk has been addressed, it should ensure that the steps outlined above leading to an investigation by the appropriate court of the church have been instigated.

APPENDIX 2

EMERGENCY SAFEGUARDING PANEL – COMPOSITION

In all cases, the ESP should seek advice from the PCI Safeguarding Department.

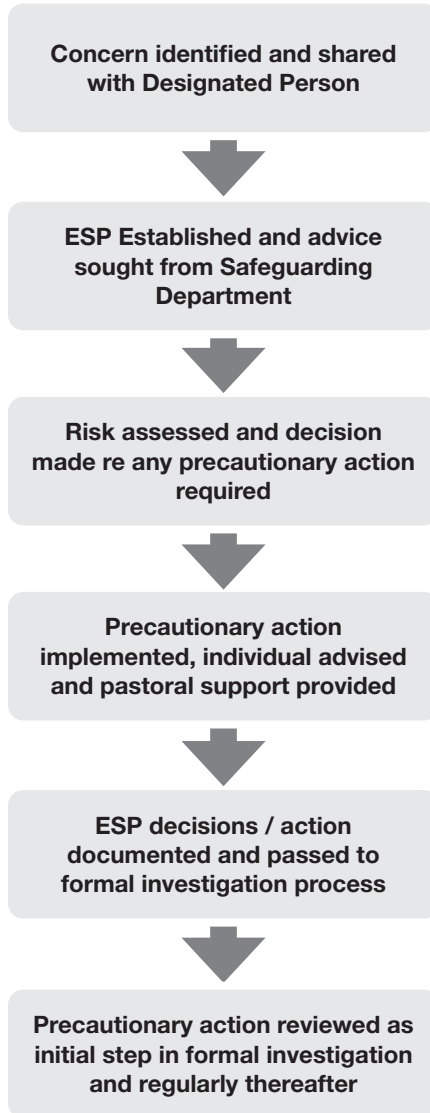
The ESP as appointed must be independent of the individual about whom concerns have been raised.

Where ESP review relates to a called office-holder, the ESP members must be members of the relevant court.

Individual about whom concerns have been raised	Responsible for establishing ESP	Composition of Panel <i>ESP should consist of at least three of the people listed below</i>
Congregational volunteer / leader	Minister	Minister, Clerk of Session, Other elder, Designated Person
Congregational staff member	Minister	Minister, Clerk of Session, Other elder, Designated Person
Minister or elder	Moderator of Presbytery	An independent panel from Presbytery with at least 1 ruling elder and at least 1 teaching elder
Presbytery Moderator	Clerk of Presbytery	An independent panel from Presbytery with at least 1 ruling elder and at least 1 teaching elder
Chaplain / Deaconess under the auspices of CMI	CMI Secretary	CMI Convener, CMI Secretary, Presbytery Moderator, Presbytery Clerk
Staff in CSW Services	Relevant Regional Manager	Regional Manager(s), Service Manager(s), Care Service Director / Deputy Director.
Other PCI Employee	Council Secretary or Head of Dept.	Council Secretary, Head of Department, Council Convener, Member of Senior Leadership Team
Council Secretary	Clerk of Assembly	Member of Senior Leadership Team, Council Convenors
Senior Leadership Team member	General Council Convener	Moderator of the GA, General Council Convener, Convener of another Council, Convener of an Assembly Commission

APPENDIX 3

EMERGENCY SAFEGUARDING PANEL – DECISION PROCESS



APPENDIX 4

EMERGENCY SAFEGUARDING PANEL – REVIEW AND DECISION RECORD FORM

Date of meeting:
Those present and their designation:
Note of declared conflicts of interest:
Note of discussion on background to the meeting:
<p>Consideration of information as it relates to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If an individual is convicted of offences relating to harm caused to a child or adult at risk. • If an individual has an allegation made against them of inappropriate or abusive behaviour towards a child or adult at risk. • If information is received from statutory authorities that they have concerns about the behaviour of an individual in relation to a child or adult at risk. • If a PCI Safeguarding Department assessment indicates that an individual's involvement in safeguarding related decisions, judgements or implementation could expose a child or adult at risk to harm.
Panel decisions/deliberations including considerations of options:
Outline of action plan and agreed next steps:
Note of named individuals responsible for tasks and related timelines:
<p>What further process to be followed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR processes • Kirk Session • Presbytery • Pastoral provision
<p>Any other regulatory actions considered necessary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notification to Charity Commission / Charity Regulator? • PSNI / Gardai • Social Services / Tusla
<p>Signed:</p> <p>Designation:</p> <p>Date:</p>

GENERAL COUNCIL SECTION 2

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1. Since the meeting of the General Assembly in June 2025, the General Assembly Advisory Committee (GAAC) met on eight occasions – 10, 11, 14, 21 November and 4 December 2025, and 28 January, 12 March and 2 April 2026 – to carry forward both its core remit and other matters referred to it by the General Council. As with other years, many 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. The work of the Committee was dominated by the issue of Safeguarding and planning for the Special Assemblies of December 2025, and February 2026. Much of the work following the Special Assemblies has been undertaken by Task Groups and Panels which are reporting separately from the GAAC.
3. At its meeting on 10 November 2025, following a request from the Council for Global Mission, the Committee agreed to release emergency funding of £20,000 to support the work of the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands (UCJCI), in response to the widespread damage caused by Hurricane Melissa.
4. On the recommendation of the GAAC, the General Council, at its meeting on 14 April 2026, gave permission to the Conference and Estates Manager and the General Assembly Solicitor to vary the terms of Clause 15 of the Temporary Hire of Rooms contract with the Anglican Consultative Council, in order to permit serving alcoholic wine at Eucharist (Holy Communion) services solely, between 27 June 2026 and 5 July 2026, inclusive.
5. Reports were received from Presbyteries in regard to Ministers without Charge and Licentiatees not currently serving in an Assistantship, as well as reports in regard to Ministers Emeritus.
 - (a) The Committee took time to consider in detail the reports received from Presbyteries regarding Ministers without Charge and Licentiatees not in Assistantships under their care. This piece of work is largely noting and confirming the decisions taken by Presbyteries. A summary report is forwarded to the General Assembly in line with previous years – see 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 now 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). The names and Presbyteries of the former Ministers Emeritus who have changed status during the past year to being Ministers Emeritus (Released) are as follows:

Very Rev Dr Russell Birney (Ballymena); Rev Kenneth McConnell (Ballymena); Rev Victor Patterson (North Belfast); Rev Roy Valley (Carrickfergus); Rev James Brogan (Dublin and Munster); Rev Dr John Woodside (Dublin and Munster); Rev Stephen Carson (Route); Rev Dr Isaac Thompson (Tyrone)

CHURCH RELATIONS PANEL

6. In a world marked by division, discord and disunity, we are to be people of good news, who follow Jesus, united in love and service. Together we reflect God's glory, with the local, global, intergenerational and intercultural family of faith, as "the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27). Our unity was prayed for by the Lord, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21) and is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

General

7. We give thanks as local PCI churches continue to pray, partner and serve with other local congregations, reaching out together with the good news of the kingdom in many varied ways, such as food banks, Alpha courses and outreach programmes, prayer times and services.

Church Leaders Group

8. The Church Leaders group "continues to meet faithfully and provides both a prophetic and pastoral voice to those who are hurting" (General Secretary's Report, ICC, February 2026).

The General Council Convenor (Very Rev Dr David Bruce) has been representing PCI on the Church Leaders Group since December 2025, until the appointment of the next Moderator at the June 2026 General Assembly.

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

9. Many rich and significant times of gathering have taken place throughout the year, providing space to share, pray and seek opportunities to listen to God's voice and witness together. On 17 January, a day conference entitled "Let Justice Flow Like Rivers", organised by ICC, IICM and the Church

Leaders group, took place in Newry. Over 200 church leaders, local congregation representatives, educators, politicians and others from across the island gathered for an event combining prayer, reflection and a strong call to action in regard to the climate and ecological crisis, with particular focus on the pollution of Lough Neagh and threats to waterways across the island.

10. Rev Dr Karen Campbell (PCI), General Secretary of ICC, has been involved in many church initiatives this past year, being a faithful servant to our Lord and His church over a busy year.

It was noted by the General Secretary, following the passing of the Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson in November 2025, that he was “tireless in support of the work of ICC and IICC. He quietly persevered in praying for church unity and being an astute encouragement to how this work might continue. We are grateful for his life and witness.” (General Secretary’s Report February 2026)

Bishop Sarah Groves (Moravian Church) has served as President of ICC since April 2024 and has done this with great compassion and servant hearted commitment to Christ and His church.

11. We pray for the Very Rev Dr Charles McMullen (PCI) as he was installed as President of ICC on 23 April 2026, and Bishop Michael Burrows (CoI) as he steps into being Vice President.
12. The launch of ‘Considering Lament: Psalms of Protest, Pain and Hope’ (26 March 2026) took place in Assembly Buildings. This project came from reflections following the book ‘Considering Grace’ and was undertaken by Rev Campbell in her previous role of Good Relations Officer in conjunction with the Peace and Reconciliation Panel (PCI).

This project includes the launch of 8 lament psalms, composed with the help of focus groups from Omagh, Armagh, Dungannon, Belfast, Bangor, Derry/Londonderry composed of victims/survivors and first responders to the troubles. Rev Campbell notes “there is currently much to lament and yet the spiritual discipline of bringing hurts to God brings relief and release knowing that justice is ultimately held by the King of Kings” (General Secretary’s Report February 2026).

13. The IICM (Irish Inter Church Meeting) conference, “Nicaea 1700: Strengthening our Witness and Unity” took place in November 2025. Speakers included Rev Dr Liam Fraser and Archbishop Angaelos and discussion times provided space to examine and reflect upon learning from the Council of Nicaea and Nicene Creed. An evening prayer time, which included art pieces by a group of invited artists, was very appreciated.

The material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2027 has recently been prepared by delegates from the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Episcopal Conference. The theme is based on the verse “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32) and will be used globally.

During the IICC and ICC meetings church representatives have time to share news from the member churches, and this is very helpful for perspective, fellowship and prayer.

Other Fellowship Links

14. Following the Affirmation by the General Assembly of Fraternal and Confessional Relations between the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (USA), links between the two denominations continue to be explored.
15. See attachment of a Report from Rev Dr Liz Hughes. Rev Dr Liz Hughes represented PCI at the WCRC General Council 2025 in Chang Mai and at the ‘Unheard voice - the persevering witness of women in war’ conference earlier in 2025, with the support of the Council for Global Mission. Both offered moments to relate to existing and historic partner churches and opportunities to input constructively into complex discussions at both gatherings.”
16. Correspondence was received from Rev Richie Cronin, raising concerns about PCI’s continued membership of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Rev Cronin raised three areas of concern, which are resumed here. Two of these stem from a document called the ‘Gender Justice Policy’ (2021 approved). This policy is binding on WCRC staff and executive officers, but not binding on PCI or any member church, instead it is commended to each member church.

The areas of concern enumerated in the correspondence related to the areas of Abortion, Same- sex marriage, and Understanding of Justification. The Policy (referred to above) states that the communion has ‘failed to respect a woman’s right to control her body and her right to choose’, and later in the document invites church members to ‘commit to a process of study and discernment over the issues of sexuality, sexual pleasure, fertility, reproductive rights, and the right to choose’. It was noted in the correspondence that this language is problematic and leading in a certain direction.

Secondly, while the WCRC at its General Council of 2017 stated it does not have a position on issues of human sexuality, it has many members that approve of same-sex marriage and in the Policy some of the language, it seems, is pushing the communion in a revisionist direction.

Thirdly the WCRC signed the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 2017, and questions were raised concerning this. It was noted the Moderator present at the WCRC 2017 was one of two representatives to dissent from the decision, and PCI’s doctrine committee recommended that PCI not sign it.

Rev Cronin noted “I do think it’s time to revisit our GA’s previous hesitance over our membership of the WCRC and reconsider it again”, and for various reasons he proposes that a membership of the World Reformed Fellowship, a more conservative body, would be a better fit for PCI. It was noted that in the 2018 General Assembly, a Task Group “was not at

present convinced that the potential benefits of membership of WRF are so clearly obvious that such membership should be actively pursued at present”, however it was recommended to the General Assembly that “the Church Relations Committee be asked to keep the issue of PCI’s possible membership of WRF on the agenda”.

17. This correspondence was discussed at a Church Relations Panel meeting, and after reflection over the blessings and challenges of being part of bigger fellowship groups, the GA resolution was drafted below.

COLLEGE PRINCIPAL RE-APPOINTMENT

18. The General Assembly appointed the Rev Prof Michael McClenahan as Principal of Union Theological College for a three-year term, commencing on 1 September 2023. His appointment is due to conclude on 31 August 2026.
19. The intervening years have seen significant changes in the Church, all of which have impacted the work of the College. Prof McClenahan has led the College faculty, staff and student community with wisdom and commitment, as he seeks to serve his Lord in his calling as Principal.
20. The College has been the subject of three strands of the work of the General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel: UTC Buildings, Staffing and Vision, and Ministerial Training. Much of this work is still to be completed, as is recorded elsewhere in these Reports.
21. As the Principal of Union Theological College is a General Assembly appointment, this would normally require a Panel to be set up and a formal process to be gone through. In order to permit the General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel to complete its work, the Council for Training in Ministry, at its meeting on Tuesday 3 February 2026, requested that the General Council seek the approval of the General Assembly to appoint Prof McClenahan for one year, from 1 September 2026 until 31 August 2027.
22. This request was agreed by the General Council at its meeting on 5 February 2026 and an appropriate resolution is brought to the General Assembly for decision.

CLERK APPOINTMENT PANEL

CLERK APPOINTMENT TASK GROUP

Background

23. The Clerk Appointment Task Group met four times during January and February, in preparation for submitting a report to the Special Assembly on 18 February 2026.

24. At the Special Assembly, the following main points were agreed:
That the General Council appoints an Interview Panel as follows:
- The Moderator of the General Assembly
 - The Acting Clerk of the General Assembly
 - The Convener of the General Council (Panel Chair)
 - Mr Hugo Wilson (Convener of the Support Services Committee)
 - Mrs Avril Heenan (General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel)
 - A Presbytery Clerk (to be appointed after shortlisting of candidates)
 - Mr Stephen Johnston (Chair of PCI Trustees)
 - Mrs Sarah Leung (Head of Human Resources)
25. The Clerk would take up their duties upon commencement, with a six-month probationary period of service, during which time they would be accompanied and mentored by the current Acting Clerk.
26. The part-time post of Assistant Clerk, previously agreed with defined responsibilities in connection with Reconfiguration of Ministry, would be retained but the date of its activation would be adjusted as required in light of the appointment process for a Clerk.

Outcomes

27. The Task Group proposed to the General Council and subsequently to the Special General Assembly in February 2026, that the presentation of the role be framed as follows:
- That the post and duties of General Secretary is effectively redundant, and that the descriptor be dropped.
 - That a Senior Leadership Team be created, of the Clerk (Team Lead), Deputy Clerk and Director of Operations.
 - That the Clerk and Deputy Clerk would have primary responsibility for supporting and servicing the work of the Courts, Commissions and Councils of the Church.
 - That the Director of Operations would have primary responsibility for supporting and servicing the work of the Charity, including regulatory compliance.
 - That the members of the Senior Leadership Team would each be line-managed by the Convener of the General Council. In this respect also, the Special Assembly agreed to seek the appointment of a co-convener for the General Council, who would be an elder if the Convener was a minister.

Deputy Clerk

28. Since there is a Deputy Clerk in post, and the adjustments to the job description were minimal, mainly relating to line management arrangements, HR advice was sought regarding the necessity for a redundancy to be

created and a competitive appointment process undertaken. On the basis of this advice it was agreed that that a formal process of consultation with the postholder would be held seeking his agreement to the changes anticipated. This consultation interview was held on 25 February 2026, and agreement was achieved. At its meeting on 26 March 2026, the General Council confirmed Rev Peter Gamble in the post of Deputy Clerk.

Director of Operations

29. It is estimated that approximately 90% of the duties anticipated for this position are currently within the job description of the Financial Secretary. HR advice was sought regarding the necessity, for the position of Financial Secretary, to be made redundant and a competitive appointment process undertaken for a Director of Operations. On the basis that the adjustments to the duties represented a small proportion of the total duties required, it was agreed that that a formal process of consultation with the Financial Secretary would be held seeking his agreement to the changes anticipated, including that his job title would change. This consultation interview was held on 25 February 2026, and agreement was achieved. At its meeting on 26 March 2026, the General Council confirmed Mr Ken Swarbrick in the position of Director Operations.
30. Following advertising of the position of Clerk of the General Assembly, and the receipt of applications the shortlisting process took place on 2 April 2026. Rev Daryl Edwards (Clerk of the Monaghan Presbytery) was appointed to the Interview Panel, following shortlisting.
31. Two candidates met the criteria, and were invited for interview. Interviews took place on 23 April 2026. In the unavoidable absence of the Acting Clerk, the Deputy Clerk took his place on the Panel.
32. Following interview, the Panel nominated Rev Jonathan Boyd M.A. (Oxon), Dip.Min. (PTFI); M.Div.(QUB), minister of Killyleagh, as the next Clerk of the General Assembly.
33. A resolution to this effect is appended.

APPENDIX 1

MINISTERS WITHOUT CHARGE AND LICENTIATES NO LONGER SERVING IN ASSISTANTSHIPS UNDER PAR 306 OF THE CODE

1. Under Par 306 of the Code, each year presbyteries are required to complete returns regarding ministers without charge and licentiates no longer serving in assistantships. The documentation related to this is brought to the General Council through the GAAC, with the former bringing recommendations to the General Assembly.
2. Code Par 306 states:
 In respect of ministers without charge, and of licentiates not serving an assistantship under Par 128, Presbytery shall:
 - 306.1 decide annually on whether to seek authorisation to retain their recognition: the names of those not retained shall be reported by the Presbytery in accordance with Par 230.3, these names being removed from the Church’s current records;
 - 306.2 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 ministers without charge or licentiates: the council shall consider such requests and ask the General Assembly to resolve on its recommendations;
 - 306.3 maintain as 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;
3. The GAAC has considered the returns from presbyteries and brought the following recommendations to the General Council, for reporting to the General Assembly.

ARDS	Rev A. Ditty to be retained as minister without charge Rev C.D. Mawhinney to be retained as minister without charge Rev N.D.H. Stewart to be retained as minister without charge Rev A.E. Tolland to be retained as minister without charge
ARMAGH	Rev J.W.P. McConnell to be retained as minister without charge

BALLYMENA	<p>Rev D.A. McMillan to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev A.M. Bates to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev Matthew D. Boyd to be retained as minister without charge</p>
NORTH BELFAST	<p>Rev Dr L.E. Carroll to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev K. Patterson to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev W.A. Shaw to be retained as minister without charge</p>
SOUTH BELFAST	<p>Rev J. Burnett to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev Dr C.I. Dickson to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev C. Herron to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev L-A. Wilson to be retained as minister without charge</p>
EAST BELFAST	<p>Rev J.M. Casement to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev W.G. Hamilton to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev W.J. Harshaw to be retained as minister without charge (retired)</p> <p>Rev Dr D.J. Montgomery to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev Dr M.J. Welsh to be retained as minister without charge</p>
CARRICKFERGUS	<p>Rev T.N. Bingham to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Mr Martin Delaney to be retained as a licentiate currently not serving in an assistantship</p>
COLERAINE AND LIMAVADY	<p>Rev Dr R.A. Kane to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev D.J. Paul to be retained as a minister without charge</p>

DERRY AND DONEGAL	Rev J.L. Blair to be retained as minister without charge Rev S.R. Richmond to be retained as minister without charge
DOWN	Rev Dr B.C.G. Black to be retained as minister without charge Rev R.C. Patton to be retained as minister without charge
DROMORE	Rev S.W. Moore to be retained as minister without charge
MONAGHAN	Rev D.J.M. Boyle to be retained as minister without charge Rev D.J. Clarke to be retained as minister without charge
NEWRY	Rev B.A.H. Wilson to be retained as minister without charge
ROUTE	Rev P. Douglas to be retained as minister without charge Rev K. Henderson to be retained as minister without charge
TEMPLEPATRICK	Rev K. Campbell to be retained as minister without charge Rev Dr J.L. Tosh to be retained as minister without charge
TYRONE	Rev W.I. Ferris to be retained as minister without charge Rev Dr G.W.D. Stewart to be retained as a minister without charge

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 3

DOCTRINE COMMITTEE

1. The Doctrine Committee met on 9 and 23 January 2026 to consider an instruction from the Special meeting of the General Assembly on the 18 December 2025. There were additional subgroup meetings. A report was communicated to the General Assembly Governance, Culture, and Integrity Task Group in early March 2026.

Principal MICHAEL McCLENAHAN, Convener

STATUTORY INVESTIGATIONS ADVISORY TASK GROUP

1. On 28 October 2025 the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) made a serious incident report to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI) regarding safeguarding concerns. Since then, two investigations have been launched by statutory bodies:
 - (a) On 19 November 2025 the PSNI met with the General Council to inform them of the launch of a criminal investigation into safeguarding concerns.
 - (b) On 10 December 2025 the CCNI informed the charity trustees of PCI that it had opened a statutory inquiry under Section 22 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and provided some remedial steps, including a requirement that PCI undertake an independent, external review, overseen by appropriately qualified members (with safeguarding and governance expertise).
2. At the request of CCNI and PSNI, the Moderator, Rt Rev Dr Richard Murray, was the main point of contact for both investigations and on 5 February 2026, the General Council used its delegated General Assembly authority, under Code Pars 326.4 and 401.1 to appoint the Statutory Investigations Advisory Task Group as a task group of the General Council with the following remit, strictly time limited to the period of the statutory investigations into the Presbyterian Church in Ireland:
 - (a) General
 - (i) To advise Dr Murray, or his successor, regarding ongoing communication with PSNI / CCNI in all matters relating to the ongoing criminal and statutory investigations and any additional associated investigations which may arise
 - (ii) To obtain independent legal advice as necessary

- (iii) To authorise any other urgent action required to co-operate with criminal and statutory investigations between meetings of the General Council
 - (b) In respect of the PSNI
 - (i) To agree and facilitate the collection of evidence (documentary, electronic, interviews, or other)
 - (c) In respect of the CCNI
 - (i) To prepare Terms of Reference for the CCNI inquiry for agreement by GC, CCNI and PSNI
 - (ii) To research, identify and nominate appropriate panel members and a chairperson for the CCNI Inquiry Panel, in consultation with General Council, CCNI and PSNI
3. The General Council has appointed the following membership of the Task Group: Dr Richard Murray, Rev Jonathan Boyd (Task Group Convener, with responsibility for taking minutes), Rev Richard Kerr (Moderator-Designate), Rev Peter Gamble (Deputy Clerk. PSNI liaison regarding evidence gathering), Mr Ken Swarbrick (Director of Operations), Mr Hugo Wilson (Support Services Committee Convener), Mrs Avril Heenan (lawyer, GASRRP, and past member of the Panel on the Financial Crisis), Mr Stephen Johnston (Chair of Trustees).
 4. The Task Group has met on four occasions: 3, 20 and 23 March; 1 April 2026.
 5. On 23 March 2026 agreement was reached with the CCNI about Terms of Reference for INEQE Safeguarding Group to carry out the independent, external review of safeguarding and governance. The PSNI were kept informed of this.
 6. On 26 March 2026 General Council committed to publishing the findings of the reviews and all learning that comes from them, except where this would compromise the integrity of the review process or contradict legal obligations regarding data protection.
 7. The task group has supported the Moderator in fulfilling the Church's stated desire to co-operate fully with the PSNI investigation.

JONATHAN BOYD, Convener

AD-HOC PANEL ON ORDINATION

1. Establishment of the Panel

The Ad-hoc Panel on Ordination was established to consider questions relating to the theology and practice of ordination within the Church, including matters raised in relation to the offices of Teaching Elder and Deacon.

The panel comprises the following members: Sam Bostock, Philip Boyd, Nigel Craig, Alastair Dunlop, Helen Johnston, Adrian Moffett, Albin Rankin, Stephen Simpson, David Thompson, Kathryn Viner, Ben Walker. In addition, the panel includes the Convenor of the General Council and the Acting Clerk of the General Assembly.

The panel has met four times to date (October, December, February, and March), alongside additional work undertaken through sub-groups.

2. Initial discussions and approach

Early meetings involved broad discussion of the panel's task, including initial expectations, concerns, and questions. The Convenor wishes to note appreciation for the spirit in which the group has undertaken its work. Members have approached the task with hopefulness and earnestness, while also recognising the significance and sensitivity of the matters under consideration. Several guiding themes have emerged in these early discussions:

- Clarity in theological understanding and ecclesial practice
- Faithfulness to Scripture and the Reformed tradition
- Unity within the Church
- Mission, ensuring the Church is equipped for faithful witness today
- A wise and careful process that honours both theological depth and pastoral sensitivity

There has been a shared desire that the panel's work be deeply rooted in Scripture and the Reformed tradition, while also proving practically helpful for the future life and ministry of the Church.

3. Key questions under consideration

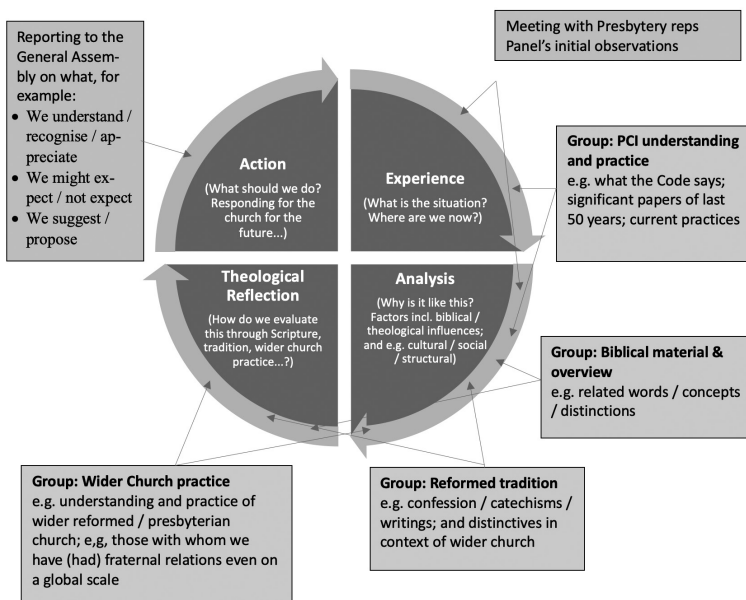
The panel has recognised that its work essentially centres on three primary questions, which together frame the discussion around ordination and church office:

- (i) *What is ordination?*
What do / should we understand about this as a Church?
- (ii) *To which offices should ordination apply?*
What should be understood regarding the relationship between ordination and the offices of the Church, with particular reference to the questions concerning Teaching Elders and Deacons?
- (iii) *What are the (potential) roles of any such office?*
What responsibilities properly belong to each office and how do these relate to other forms of recognised ministry and service within the Church?

This involves a consideration of the roles of: Minister of Word and Sacrament; Ruling elder; Deacon; and others, including but not limited to: Congregational Committee Member, Deaconess, Missionary, Chaplain, Auxiliary Minister, Accredited Preacher, APPs...)

4. Methodology

To structure its work, the panel has adopted a methodology informed by the Pastoral Cycle, which encourages careful movement between reflection on experience, theological reflection and engagement, and discernment for current and future practice.



Sub-groups have been established to undertake research in several key areas:

- Current practice within PCI
- Biblical material relating to ordination and church office
- The Reformed tradition
- Understanding and practice in the wider Church (e.g. reformed / presbyterian / those with whom we have (had) fraternal relations on a global scale)

These sub-groups provide research and analysis to inform the discussions of the full panel.

In practical terms, each sub-group is considering how its particular source or area of study speaks to:

- the understanding and practice of ordination
- the offices to which ordination should apply
- the roles and functions of those offices, and their relationship to other ministries within the Church

5. Engagement with Presbyteries

As part of its commitment to careful listening, the panel has met with Armagh Presbytery and Down Presbytery.

These meetings provided an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the concerns, expectations, and hopes expressed by these presbyteries in relation to the questions before the Church. The panel is grateful for the constructive engagement and the clarity these conversations have brought to the discussion.

6. Current focus

While the panel has begun work across the full scope of the questions outlined above, initial attention has been given particularly to the first question: the nature and understanding of ordination.

The panel considers this foundational work important in providing a clear theological framework within which the further questions regarding offices and roles may be addressed.

7. Interim material for the Assembly

The panel intends to bring interim material to the forthcoming General Assembly.

This material is intended to serve two purposes:

1. *Foundational contribution* – providing theological reflection that will inform and guide the Church’s ongoing discussion of ordination and office.
2. *Constructive resource for the present moment* – offering something that is positive, helpful, and pastorally useful for the Church in its current context.

This interim material is included as an appendix to the report.

8. Ongoing work

Alongside the preparation of interim material, the panel continues its analysis, reflection, and consultation on the more specific matters relating to:

- the offices to which ordination should apply, and
- the appropriate roles and responsibilities associated with those offices.

This work will continue in the coming months as the panel seeks to bring further clarity and carefully considered recommendations to the Church.

BEN WALKER, Convener

APPENDIX

ORDINATION IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND

Reflections for the present time

Introduction

1. Questions surrounding ordination are not new within the life of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI). At various points in the Church's recent history particular issues have prompted renewed reflection on the meaning and practice of ordination. The pattern has often been that a presenting concern leads the Church to revisit the theological principles which underlie its long-established practice.
2. One example occurred in 1979 when the Doctrine Committee produced a substantial study on the doctrine of ordination in response to questions concerning recognised ministers and ministries. Among other things, the report emphasised the principle that while ministry belongs to the whole Church, Christ acts to call particular people within the community of believers to be set apart to lead and serve it, exercising loving oversight and care.¹
3. Further reflection followed in later decades. In 2006 the Doctrine Committee again addressed the subject in connection with questions about part-time and non-stipendiary ministry, additional pastoral personnel, and the role and function of ruling elders.² That report itself noted that a considerable number of papers had been produced between 1985 and 2004 addressing related questions (and a number of reports in the years following 2006 concerned the potential outworking of its practical conclusions). This history suggests that reflection on ordination has often arisen when changing circumstances and practical developments in ministry prompt the Church to go back to its theological foundations.
4. An example was the 1994 decision that assistants should no longer be ordained while serving in assistantships, but that ordination should normally take place in connection with entry into a pastoral charge. This decision reflected both theological considerations and the practical circumstances of the time, particularly when the number of ordained ministers exceeded the number of available charges.
5. In the present context the Church again finds itself reflecting on the meaning of ordination. The immediate issue is not primarily the procedure of ordination, which continues to be exercised through the presbyteries of the Church, but rather the significance of ordination itself. In other words, the question before us is not essentially how ordination is carried out, but to what we ordain and why. What is the value and scope of ordination within the life of the Church today?

1 GAR (1979), p6–10.

2 GAR (2006), p10–14.

6. The purpose of these reflections is therefore not to reinvent established theological foundations, but to draw upon Scripture, the Reformed tradition, and the Church's own heritage in order to clarify the significance of ordination in the present moment.

Present questions prompting reflection

The value of ordained ministry

7. One area prompting reflection concerns the value and distinctiveness of ordained ministry within the wider life of the Church.
8. Within PCI there has been a significant development in the range of ministries carried out both within congregations and through denominational structures. This development reflects a welcome emphasis on the ministry of the whole people of God and the encouragement of all believers to exercise their gifts in service.
9. At the same time, the growth of multiple forms of ministry raises questions about how ordained ministry is to be understood within this broader pattern. If the Church rightly encourages every member ministry, what is the distinctive significance of ordination?
10. Put differently, what is it about ordained ministry that might attract or compel someone to consider it? Is ordination primarily a functional matter – presiding at the sacraments, moderating the Kirk Session, or receiving a stipend rather than a salary – or does it represent something deeper within the life of the Church?
11. Some have suggested that the proliferation of valuable but sometimes loosely defined ministry roles may unintentionally contribute to a perception that the traditional offices of the Church have diminished in importance. Whether or not that perception is justified, it highlights the importance of articulating clearly the value of ordination.
12. Clarifying the significance of ordained ministry may therefore help to strengthen understanding within the Church and provide encouragement to those who serve in ordained roles within an increasingly demanding ministry environment, as well as helping individuals discerning a sense of call into the ordained ministry.

The scope of ordination

13. A second area of reflection concerns the scope of ordination itself. Within PCI, ordination has long been practised in relation to certain recognised offices. At the same time, the Code continues to acknowledge the office of deacon (Code, par 15), even though no deacons have been ordained for several decades.³

3 We note, as per the Memorial of the Presbytery of Down (GAR (2025), p181), that there was provision in the Code for the ordination of deacons up until 1980; and that the last consideration of the matter by the General Assembly was in 1993, through the Ad Hoc Committee Re Ards Memorial on Deacons.

14. In practice, many responsibilities historically associated with the diaconate have been carried by Congregational Committees, membership of which does not constitute an ordained office (Code, par 15.3). This situation raises broader questions about the theological purpose of ordination and the kinds of roles to which it might appropriately relate.
15. At the same time, contemporary pressures on congregational life have prompted reflection on how ministry responsibilities are distributed within the Church. There are questions about whether some roles currently undertaken by elders or ministers might more appropriately be carried by others within the life of the congregation.
16. These matters are not explored in detail in the present paper, but they illustrate how questions about the scope of ordination continue to arise in the life of the Church.

Current pressures on ministry

17. The renewed attention to ordination does not arise in a vacuum. It reflects a number of realities currently shaping congregational life within PCI.
18. Among these are:
 - the marked reduction in the capacity of many congregations to fulfil some of the basic non-ordained functions required for week-to-week sustainability;
 - the prospect of increasing numbers of congregations having to share a Teaching Elder while functioning with smaller and often older elderships;
 - the need for those in leadership roles to devote greater energy to outward-facing mission if congregations are to remain vibrant and sustainable, or new congregations planted.
19. The fulfilment of the roles and responsibilities required of elders is not less than what is described by the Code, but in the realities of ministry in a congregation today more is often required, particularly when exercising ministry in '*partnership with the whole company of believers... in a spirit of mutual support and co-operation*' (Code, par 115.2) as is anticipated.
20. These realities do not diminish the significance of ordained ministry, but they do shape the context in which that ministry is exercised.

Ordination in our reformed tradition

21. The Presbyterian understanding of ordination stands within a rich stream of Reformed theological reflection which itself drew upon the practice of the early Church.
22. Within this tradition, ordination is rarely treated as an isolated subject. Rather, it is usually discussed as part of the wider question of how Christ governs and builds his Church. The Reformers understood themselves not as inventing a new doctrine of ordination but as returning to the pattern

of ministry and church government evident in the early centuries of the Christian Church.⁴

23. Old Testament practices, such as the ordination of priests (e.g. Exodus 29:1-9, 40:12-26; Leviticus 8; Numbers 8; cf. Hebrews 5:1-4) and other significant moments of the conferring of leadership and blessing (e.g. Genesis 48-49; Numbers 27:18-23; Deuteronomy 34:9) evidence the principle of divine calling and its proper recognition by the people of God, to whom serving leaders are also accountable; and the practice of laying on hands. This principle and practice are clearly taken up by the Church in the New Testament (e.g. Acts 6:1-7; Acts 13:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:14).
24. So, although the New Testament does not employ “ordination” as a technical term in the later ecclesiastical sense, the Reformed tradition maintains that Scripture clearly establishes the practice of ordination. We understand the broad principle of this as formally recognising God’s call to appoint individuals to particular offices within the Church for its well-being.

Recognising God’s Calling

25. A central feature of the Reformed understanding of ordination is that it publicly recognises a calling which originates not with the Church but with God (Acts 13:2). The calling to ministry is understood to be an act of God by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28; Code par 16). The Church does not create this calling but discerns and publicly acknowledges it.
26. The Reformed tradition has often described this calling as having two closely related aspects. The internal call refers to the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit drawing a person to desire and pursue the work of ministry. Scripture acknowledges this dimension when it states that “whoever aspires to the office of overseer desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1). The external call refers to the recognition and confirmation of that calling by the Church. Through processes of examination, election and ordination, the Church discerns and then publicly affirms that the individual has been called and gifted for the work of ministry.
27. In this way the calling to office is understood not to be self-appointed but to arise from the call of Christ, recognised and affirmed by the community of faith. The Code of the Church expresses this tradition clearly in stating that calling to office is ordinarily made manifest through “the inward testimony of a good conscience on the part of the person, the approval of God’s people on the part of the Church and the concurring judgment of a court of the Church.” (Code par 16).
28. Ordination therefore forms one element within a wider process of calling and recognition. It does not itself constitute the divine call, nor does it simply represent the selection of a person for office by a congregation or church court. Rather, it is the Church’s formal act of acknowledging that

4 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.3-4.

the person has been called and equipped by God for service within the Church.

29. This understanding is reflected in the description offered by the Doctrine Committee in 1979, which identified three elements involved in ordination: the call of God to the work of ministry, the testing of that call by the Church, and the formal setting apart of the person so called. In this process “ecclesiastical authority in the ordering of ministries identifies itself with the divine will by recognising and accepting the gift of Christ to his Church.”⁵
30. The biblical pattern for recognising and commissioning those called to ministry frequently includes prayer and the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6; 13:3). In the New Testament Paul refers to Timothy receiving a gift “through the laying on of hands” (1 Timothy 4:14) and cautions that this act should not be undertaken hastily (1 Timothy 5:22; cf. 2 Timothy 1:6). In the Reformed tradition, prayer for God’s blessing on the ministry has usually been seen as the essential element, with the laying on of hands functioning as a visible sign that the Church solemnly recognises the individual’s calling and sets them apart for service.⁶
31. While the Reformed tradition has not understood ordination as a sacramental act, yet it is not merely an empty ceremony.⁷ We hold that Christ is present and active by His Spirit. The Church may expect that when those truly called are ordained, God will accompany this with his blessing, equipping those called for the faithful discharge of the office.

To particular Offices

32. Ordination in the Reformed tradition is not simply a general commissioning to Christian service but a setting apart to recognised offices within the Church.
33. Scripture repeatedly refers to the appointment of individuals to particular offices of leadership and service within the Christian community. In Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas are described as appointing elders in every church with prayer and fasting. Similarly, Titus was instructed to appoint elders in every town (Titus 1:5), indicating an established pattern of recognised leadership within the churches. The Pastoral Epistles again refer to the laying on of hands in connection with ministry (1 Timothy 4:14; 1 Timothy 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6).

5 GAR (1979), p6-10, par 12.

6 James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868), 2:421-4; Alexander T. McGill, *Church Government: A Treatise* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1888), 418–32; J. L. Ainslie, *Doctrines of Ministerial Order in the Reformed Churches in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 184; John M. Barkley, ‘The Meaning of Ordination’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 9, no. 2 (1956): 135–60, 139.

7 W. D. Killen, *The Framework of the Church: A Treatise on Church Government* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1890), 320; Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, 1:470–1; Thomas Witherow, *The Form of the Christian Temple: Being a Treatise on the Constitution of the New Testament Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1889), 141–3.

34. The appointment of the seven in Acts 6 is frequently cited within the Reformed tradition as a prototypical example of ordination. After being chosen by the congregation, the seven were formally appointed by the apostles through prayer and the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6). The Form of Presbyterian Church Government produced by the Westminster Assembly understood this passage as illustrating the Church's practice of setting apart individuals to recognised offices through a public act of appointment.
35. Another example appears in Acts 13:1–3, where Barnabas and Saul were set apart for missionary service following prayer and fasting. The church at Antioch laid hands upon them and sent them out in recognition of the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them.
36. From these and similar passages Reformed churches have concluded that the Church is to continue the practice of formally recognising and appointing individuals to offices of leadership and service.
37. Ordination is the Church's public act of setting apart individuals to such offices. Bannerman described it as "the solemn setting apart of a man to the regular discharge of certain ecclesiastical functions, and his formal investiture with office by the Church in the name of Christ."⁸ Similarly, more recent theological descriptions define ordained ministries as offices conferred publicly for a continuing ministry through authorised liturgical acts such as prayer and the laying on of hands.⁹ Implicit within Reformed descriptions is the understanding that the offices to which individuals are ordained are those instituted by Christ for His Church.
38. Ordination is therefore not applied to every role or responsibility that may arise within the life of the Church, however valuable such roles may be. Rather, it is connected specifically with the recognised offices through which Christ provides ordered leadership for his people, with the qualifications for these offices being set out in Scripture. Further discussion of what we should regard these offices to be, or indeed how we should use the language of 'office' is reserved for future work by the Ad-hoc panel.
39. This understanding of the uniqueness of offices that Christ has given to the Church is recognised in the Code which speaks of the 'permanent officers in the Church' (Code par 15) – these offices are not necessarily for the life-time of the individual, but they are to remain in the Church until the end of the age.
40. At the same time, the authority associated with these offices is not understood as personal superiority or spiritual privilege. The Code of the Church expresses the consensus of the Reformed tradition when it emphasises that "the authority of any officer of the church is derived from Christ and belongs not to the officer" (Code par 16.2). Those who hold office therefore act not as lords over the faith of others but as servants of Christ and his people.

8 Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, 2:421.

9 John St-Helier Gibaut, "Ordained Ministries", *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Brendan N. Wolfe et al., 2025, www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/OrdainedMinistries.

For the well-being of the Church

41. Ordination ultimately exists for the well-being and orderly life of the Church. The offices of the Church are given by Christ for the building up of his people. As the Westminster Confession affirms, Christ has given ministry, oracles and ordinances to the Church “for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life, to the end of the world” (WCF 25:3). Ordination therefore serves the wider purpose of enabling Christ to govern and nurture his Church through those whom he has called to serve: service, as noted, being the core posture of Church leadership.
42. One important function of ordination is that it contributes to the **orderly life of the Church**. The New Testament emphasises that the life of the Christian community should be conducted “decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). By publicly recognising those who are called to particular responsibilities, ordination helps to ensure that the Church’s ministry is exercised in a structured and accountable way.
43. Ordination also provides **public recognition and confirmation of God’s calling**. Those who sense a call to ministry do not act on that conviction alone. Through examination, approval and ordination the Church confirms that the calling is genuine and that the individual has been entrusted with responsibility for the spiritual welfare of others.
44. A further benefit of ordination is that it **establishes accountability**. Those who are ordained undertake responsibilities not only before the congregation but ultimately before Christ, the head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22–23). The public act of ordination therefore serves as a reminder that ministry is not merely a role to be performed but a solemn trust to be exercised faithfully.
45. Ordination also **strengthens confidence within the Church**. When individuals are publicly set apart for particular areas of service, the congregation is able to receive their leadership with assurance that they have been examined and recognised by the wider Church as authorised servants of Christ.
46. Finally, ordination highlights the **seriousness and dignity of ecclesiastical office**. While Reformed theology rejects any notion of inherent superiority attached to ordained office, it nevertheless recognises that certain responsibilities within the Church carry particular weight. The public act of ordination signals that these responsibilities are not assumed lightly but are entrusted to individuals who have been carefully prepared and recognised for that purpose.
47. At the same time, the **authority remains associated with the office ordained rather than personal**. Christ alone is the head of the Church, and the authority exercised by officers derives from Him. Those who hold office may not exercise power through any right of their own, but serve as ministers, disciples and servants within the community of believers.
48. Ordination thus exists for the well-being of the Church, enabling Christ to govern his people through authorised servants while the whole Church continues to participate in the ministry and mission entrusted to it.

Ordination and the ministry of the whole Church

49. The Reformed understanding of ordination also exists alongside a strong affirmation of the ministry of the whole people of God.
50. Christ governs his Church through the ministry of his people as a whole, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are distributed widely among believers (1 Corinthians 12:4–7; Ephesians 4:11–13). Ordination therefore does not replace the wider ministry of the Church but functions within it.
51. Individuals are ordained to particular offices and responsibilities, but the exercise of spiritual gifts within the Church is not restricted to those who hold office. In practice, those who are ordained may undertake tasks beyond the scope of their office, while those who are not ordained may exercise gifts that contribute greatly to the life and mission of the Church. Ordination is not primarily about gifting (although gifts are part of the qualifications for office) but about authorisation to serve in the name of Christ.
52. The New Testament itself reflects this dynamic. In Acts 6 individuals appointed to oversee practical responsibilities were also seen exercising other gifts, particularly in the ministries of Stephen and Philip (Acts 6:8–10; 8:5–6). This illustrates that the presence of ordained office does not limit the activity of other members of the Church but rather provides a framework within which the gifts of the whole body may flourish.
53. Indeed, while this upholds the importance, value and necessity of ordination, it also recognises that those who are ordained, may, in the particular context of ministry, need to attend to matters that are not the focus of their ordination; and those not in ordained roles may still appropriately use their gifts, some of which we normally associate with ordained offices.
54. Along similar lines, Tim Keller writes of the dynamic balance of both the order of the Spirit (producing an organised structured community with rules and authority) and the ardour of the Spirit (producing spontaneously generated spiritual life and ministry).¹⁰
55. We note related points made by the Doctrine Committee in 2006: “[T]he Church ought to have consistency but not necessarily uniformity. What is acceptable in one part ought not to be in conflict with what happens throughout the community as a whole.... [T]here ought to be flexibility within structures. What is useful and helpful in one situation may not be so in another. Therefore there must be freedom to contextualise the universal to meet the needs of the local.... [A]ny structure must enable rather than constrict the use of the gifts given by God to his whole people for ministry. It is equally important that the structure should also provide constraints on the abuse of God’s gifts.”¹¹

10 Keller, Timothy, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 49–52.

11 GAR (2006), p10–11.

56. While Christ has given to the Church a particular form of government, that form has proved adaptable to many different cultures and contexts. Every generation needs to consider afresh both the biblical foundations of its structures and the ways in which they can fruitfully operate in different locations and ministry settings.

Conclusion

57. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland inherits a rich theological tradition concerning ordination which has its roots in Scripture, the practice of the early Church, and the reflections of the Reformed tradition.
58. Ordination has consistently been understood as the Church's public act of recognising God's call and setting apart individuals for particular offices within the life of the Church. It does not create the call of God, nor does it automatically confer spiritual power in itself, but it publicly affirms those whom Christ has called to serve his people.
59. In doing so, ordination contributes to the orderly and faithful life of the Church. It provides recognised leadership, accountability and structure while remaining firmly situated within the wider ministry of the whole people of God.
60. The questions currently being explored therefore arise not from uncertainty about the fundamental meaning of ordination, but from a desire to understand how these enduring theological principles should inform the life and witness of the Church in present circumstances.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY GOVERNANCE, CULTURE AND INTEGRITY TASK GROUP

INTERIM REPORT

Principles for the Proper Functioning of Presbyterian Polity Relevant to Matters of Governance, Culture, and Integrity

Preface

1. The special meeting of the General Assembly in December 2025 established a Task Group to inquire into issues of governance, culture and integrity within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland with the ‘aim of improving the proper functioning of our Presbyterian form of Church government according to principles regarding the same to be provided by the Doctrine Committee.’ The Doctrine Committee provided a final report to the Task Group in March 2026. This interim report includes a slightly modified version of the original Doctrine Committee report.
2. The interim report identifies and explains twelve principles for the proper functioning of the Presbyterian polity relevant to matters of governance, culture and integrity. In each case the report includes reference to Scripture, the Westminster Standards and those other supporting texts which have guided the Church in the past and still have great relevance today. Attentive readers will note the deliberate use of Irish Presbyterian writings on polity from previous generations. The Task Group notes the lack of such work in recent generations and the obvious implications of that lack.
3. The principles are not set out in order of priority and each has its own relevance and significance. However, the Task Group wishes to draw attention to the fact that current practice in PCI may not be in harmony with a number of these principles. Even so, it is the sincere hope of the Task Group that the supporting notes for each principle will help to clarify some of the implications raised by adherence to the principles. The Task Group recognizes the relevance of these principles to ongoing discussions in the denomination about governance and restructuring and a number of resolutions to test the mind of the General Assembly have been proposed.
4. The Church belongs to Christ, He is her only King and head (principle 2) and therefore she is not merely a human institution but the Kingdom of God breaking into this present age (principle 1). The Church eagerly awaits the return of Christ and the fulfilment of our blessed hope (principle 1), but even now is united to Christ by faith and sanctified by God the Holy Spirit (principle 1). The Church on earth is therefore a body made up of the Redeemed whose call is to complete their pilgrimage from this present evil age to the age yet to come (principle 1). We are not yet what we will one day be, but Christ’s plan for His Bride will be completed at His return and even now He governs us (principles 1–2).

5. Therefore, as Presbyterians we believe that Jesus is not apathetic in issues related to the governance of His Church (principle 2). Christ has instituted a particular type of government for us and He is an active King who rules by Word, Spirit and the blessing of the Officers that He Himself appoints (principle 2). The setting apart of these Officers is a serious business (principle 1) but nevertheless they are not lords to be served but servants and stewards in the household of faith (principle 3).
6. The office of Elder or Presbyter is one held with all seriousness by our Denomination. The Lord gives spiritual authority to his Elders (principle 4) and so they are to be individuals whose gifting is evident and whose desire for holiness is clear (principle 12). Those called as Elders are not unaccountable directors but individuals who work together with other Elders to shepherd the flock of God (principle 4). The work of the Elder is vital and at times these wise and holy leaders will be required to engage in church discipline which has as its goal the holiness and restoration of Christ's people (principle 11).
7. These Elders are called to be active in their own local congregations, but also Presbyteries, Synods and General Assembly (principles 5–8). These are what Presbyterians describe as the courts of the church and within these courts Christ is honoured when business is conducted with transparency, diligence and integrity (principle 9). At various times it may be necessary for these courts to appoint others to aid them in their work, however Presbyterians are clear that Christ's authority rests in His church and her courts alone (principle 10).
8. Finally, the various courts of the church support, respect and honour each other, however for Presbyterians it is the Presbytery which is the fundamental expression of our church governance and the court which seeks to advance the cause of Christ within a local area (principle 7).

The twelve principles

- i. The Church is the coming kingdom of God breaking into this age, not a merely human institution.
- ii. The sole king and head of the Church, Jesus Christ, has given his Church a specific form of government, distinct from the civil government or any other human institution.
- iii. The power exercised by Christ's servants in his Church is not 'lordly and legislative' but 'ministerial and declarative'.
- iv. Christ entrusts authority to govern the Church to elders who make decisions collectively and on an equal footing in the courts of his Church.
- v. Congregations are not isolated organisations but are joined in a hierarchy of courts with their own unique powers.
- vi. Kirk Sessions have particular responsibility to care for souls in a local congregation.

- vii. Presbyteries are responsible for ordaining office-bearers, overseeing congregations and seeking the extension of Christ's kingdom in a particular area.
- viii. Synods, such as the General Assembly, are responsible for reviewing the decisions of lower courts and making decisions on matters affecting the whole Church.
- ix. The proper functioning of the courts of the Church necessarily requires common-sense rules and office-bearers for the management of business.
- x. Where necessary the courts of the Church may appoint agents to carry out or enable their decisions, but these agents must serve rather than supplant decision-making by the courts.
- xi. Church discipline is a spiritual and pastoral ordinance, ordered toward restoration and the good of the whole body.
- xii. Well-functioning Presbyterian polity depends upon the godliness of office-bearers.

Introduction

9. Office-bearers in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are required to solemnly affirm that they believe the Presbyterian form of Church government to be 'founded on and agreeable to the Word of God'. The basic conviction underpinning this commitment to presbyterian polity has been ably expressed by one of its leading exponents, the Irish Presbyterian Thomas Witherow:

Though every statement in the Scriptures cannot be regarded as absolutely essential to salvation, yet everything there is essential to some other wise and important end, else it would not find a place in the good Word of God. ... Any truth merely human should weigh with us light as a feather in comparison with the most insignificant of the truths of God. ... With such facts before us, though we may not regard the polity of the New Testament church as essential to human salvation, we do not feel at liberty to undervalue its importance.¹

10. Presbyterian polity is far more than a set of constitutional or procedural arrangements. It is a theological vision of the rule of Jesus Christ over his Church. Rooted in Scripture and articulated through ordered offices and courts, this polity shapes not only how the Church is governed, but also the culture it embodies and the integrity it maintains. None of the principles that follow should be taken as abstract ideas because, properly understood, they give rise to a distinctive ecclesial culture under the lordship of Christ which serves to safeguard the Church's unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity.

1 Thomas Witherow, 'The Apostolic Church: Which is it? An Inquiry at the Oracles of God as to Whether Any Existing Form of Church Government is of Divine Right' [4th edition, 1869], in *I Will Build My Church: Selected Writings on Church Polity, Baptism, and the Sabbath*, ed. Jonathan Gibson (Philadelphia, 2021), 87–8.

11. Primary sources for our Presbyterian form of Church government are, alongside the Scriptures:
- The confession of faith and catechisms prepared by the Westminster Assembly (the subordinate standards of the PCI). These do not set out a form of government, but do contain several principles that are fundamental to Presbyterian polity.
 - The Code of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (2026, interpreted in light of previous versions). This document is the constitution of the Church, conferring powers on the various parts of the Church's government (Code par. 324).
12. Secondary sources include a rich tradition of writings on Presbyterian ecclesiology and polity.² In particular, works from the nineteenth century provide both strong defences of the scriptural foundations of Presbyterian polity and seasoned theological reflections on its proper functioning and the culture and virtues it both requires and promotes. The following are some of the works referred to in the production of this paper:
- *A Catechism of the Government and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church* (10th edn, Belfast, 1859)
 - Bannerman, James, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline and Government of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh, 1960 [1869])
 - Hodge, Charles, *Discussions in Church Polity, from the Contributions to the 'Princeton Review'* (New York, 1878)
 - Killen, William D., *The Framework of the Church: A Treatise on Church Government* (Edinburgh, 1890)
 - McGill, Alexander D., *Church Government: A Treatise* (Philadelphia, 1888)
 - Miller, Samuel, *Presbyterianism: The Truly Primitive and Apostolical Constitution of the Church of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia, 1836)
 - Peck, Thomas E., *Notes on Ecclesiology* (Richmond, 1892)
 - Witherow, Thomas, *The Form of the Christian Temple: Being a Treatise on the Constitution of the New Testament Church* (Edinburgh, 1889)
13. This report contains twelve principles for the proper functioning of the Presbyterian form of Church Government. With each principle relevant Scriptural material is highlighted and connections are made to corresponding sections in the subordinate standards and the Code. This is

2 One such resource is *The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government and of Ordination of Ministers; Agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster*. There is some debate about the authority of this text within the PCI, but it was approved by the 1645 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and has been recognised as 'regulative for English-speaking Presbyterianism' since its compilation. John M. Barkley, 'The Meaning of Ordination', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 9, no. 2 (1956): 135–60. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600011091>, 158. For discussion of the authority of this text in the PCI, see John M. Barkley, *The Westminster Formularies in Irish Presbyterianism* (Belfast, 1956), 67–8, where it is argued that the Form is a subordinate standard of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

because the scriptural principles outlined below all find expression in the subordinate standards and the law of the Church. In addition, the relevance of each principle to matters of governance, culture, and identity is set out.

1. **The Church is the coming kingdom of God breaking into this age, not a merely human institution**

The Church is a society that has been established by God around the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ. This society can be viewed in two ways, based either on a visible profession of Christ and external membership of the Church, or on invisible faith which truly connects members of the Church to Christ and to each other.³ In both these senses, the Church is spoken of in the Scriptures as the kingdom and household of God. It is the beginning of the new creational rule of God through Jesus Christ, and shares in the life of the age to come, even as it exists in this present age as a pilgrim community. This redemptive-historical reality should govern the Church's identity, worship, and order rather than merely earthly considerations. However, there should be no triumphalism nor over-realised expectations, because the church's resurrection life is real but not yet consummated.⁴

Scripture:

- 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.' (John 18:36)
- 'So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.' (Eph. 2:19–21)

Westminster Standards:

- The imperfection of the visible church (WCF 25:2, 4–5; WLC Q&CQ 64–65)
- The already/not yet (WLC Q&A 191)
- The seriousness of oaths and vows (WLC Q&A 112–14)

Code:

- 'The Kingdom of Christ is not of this world, its laws are founded on His authority, they are specially directed to the conscience and their sanctions are spiritual.' (Code par. 14)

3 This is the basis of the distinction between the 'invisible' and 'visible' Church.

4 Witherow, *Form of the Christian Temple*, 209: 'The kingdom of heaven, as set forth in the Scriptures, is a visible and spiritual society, existing in the world, raised up by God, organized by the apostles, receiving members into its fellowship by baptism, governed by principles and precepts of heavenly origin, containing saints and sinners bound together by the common profession of faith in Christ, gradually extending its influence among men, and going on to the conquest of the world.'

Governance

- 1.1 *The governance and structures of the Church flow from the Church's nature.* Church structures are not mere pragmatic arrangements put in place for convenience or control. They are instead to be evaluated by Scripture and consideration of whether they edify rather than whether they maximise efficiency or facilitate bureaucracy.

Culture

- 1.2 *The Church should self-consciously embody and express this present reality and future hope.* An under-realised eschatology would treat the governance of the Church as a mere matter of human organisation, rather than the present breaking-in of Christ's eschatological rule. An over-realised eschatology would lead to impatience with weakness and the gradual growth in grace. Impatience can produce a culture in which pastoral oversight is replaced by managerial control, or even coercion. Instead, a realisation that the Church lives between the inauguration and consummation of the kingdom means that we should expect weakness, disagreement and frustration. This, in turn, should foster humility and a recognition that no court or office exhausts Christ's rule and that Church structures that are not founded upon the Word of God remain provisional and reformable.
- 1.3 *It is right to expect that the Church will develop its own organisation and even its own culture, and should be careful about attempting to fit its language or structures into secular forms.* The eschatological nature of the Church reminds us that the Church of Jesus Christ should not seek to emulate any merely human institutions, even where it is subject to them for the Lord's sake (1 Pet. 2:13). Although the Church is a society that exists in the world, the PCI is more than a charity, it is part of Christ's kingdom, which is not of this world. Light from any quarter is always to be welcomed, but the Church should not expect its culture to necessarily emulate that of the 'third sector'.

Integrity

- 1.4 The Church's divine and eschatological nature underscores the seriousness of ordination vows in which officers are consciously bound by promises made before God and the Church. Leaders marked by integrity realise that they are bound by promises they cannot lightly set aside when they are judged inconvenient. 'I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is ready to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and kingdom.' (2 Tim. 4:1).

2. The sole King and Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, has given his Church a specific form of government, distinct from the civil government or any other human institution

Scripture speaks of Jesus Christ as both ‘head’ and ‘king’ of his Church. He is head particularly of the Church as it is invisible, and king particularly of the Church as it is visible. Both terms underline that all true authority in the Church flows from Christ’s authority. In the Presbyterian tradition, emphasis is placed on the uniqueness of Christ’s headship and kingship: no human being, whether a civil ruler (such as in Anglican churches) or an individual church minister (such as in the Roman Catholic Church), ought to ever usurp Christ’s ‘crown rights’ over his Church. Christ’s will for the Church can now only be found in the Scriptures, both explicitly and by necessary deductions drawn from them. As part of his commission to the Church, Christ gave the Church a definite *form* of government. Rather than just providing general principles, Christ prescribes all the parts of his government and how they are to work together in a comprehensive way for the purpose of discipling the nations.

Scripture:

- ‘And the government shall be upon his shoulder.’ (Isa. 9:6)
- ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.’ (Matt. 28:18–20)
- ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.’ (Matt. 16:19)
- ‘And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.’ (Eph. 1:22–23)
- ‘And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.’ (Eph. 4.11–12)

Westminster Standards:

- Christ is the only head of the Church (WCF 25:6)
- Christ executes the office of a King (WSC Q&A 26; WLC Q&A 45)
- Christ has established a government in his Church for spiritual purposes (WCF 25:3)

Code:

- ‘The Lord Jesus Christ is the sole King and Head of the Church, whether invisible, visible or particular; and He has appointed therein a government distinct from civil authority.’ (Code par. 14)

Governance

- 2.1 *There is a 'regulative principle of church government', parallel to that of worship (WCF 1:6): all ecclesiastical offices, courts, and structures must be warranted by Scripture, either explicitly or by good and necessary consequence. 'The Bible is a positive charter – a definite constitution – and what is not granted is, for that reason, held to be forbidden'.⁵ This is not to say that there must be Biblical warrants for everything that the Church does. Things which are required for Christ's appointed government to operate are termed 'circumstances' (WCF 1:6). These are to be ordered by the light of nature and the general principles of the Word of God.*
- 2.2 *The elements of Christ's government that are set forth in Scripture are especially the officers or ministers of Christ, including their qualifications, the ordinances or tasks given to them by Christ and their organisation or decision making by which they collectively discern the will of Christ. In the Irish presbyterian tradition, the supreme headship of Christ has been understood to mean that 'no other person or persons have any authority to decree rites and ceremonies, or institute offices in his church'.⁶*

Culture

- 2.3 *Members of the Church will cultivate zeal for Christ's supremacy in the Church. In virtue of Christ's sole kingship and headship of the Church, 'everything in the Church must be regulated in accordance with His mind and will so far as known and every power from without or within, which designedly sets at nought His authority in His own kingdom, is an usurpation'.⁷*
- 2.4 *Since church office-bearers are servants of Christ the king, the culture of the church must avoid both clerical dominance, which forgets the servant character of office, and anticlericalism, which denies Christ's appointment of officers altogether.*
- 2.5 *The Church should cultivate a clear focus on Christ's commission: the gathering and the perfecting of the saints, to the glory of God. The principle helps the church to resist mission drift by conforming its institutions and procedures to a biblical mandate rather than cultural trends or political pressures.*

Integrity

- 2.6 *All governance must be accountable to Scripture rather than personal charisma, institutional power, or cultural trends. This principle guards the integrity of conscience from either state or popular interference into the affairs of Christ's eschatological kingdom.*

5 Thomas E. Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology* (Richmond, 1892), 114.

6 *A Catechism of the Government and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church* (10th edn, Belfast, 1859), 5.

7 Thomas Witherow, *The Form of the Christian Temple* (Edinburgh, 1889), 223.

2.7 In the Church the means must match the end: in other words, to achieve the spiritual ends that Christ gave to the Church, the spiritual means that Christ provided must be used.

3. **The power exercised by Christ's servants in his Church is not 'lordly and legislative' but 'ministerial and declarative'**

All authority exercised in the Church belongs originally and finally to the risen Lord Jesus Christ. The Church does not possess sovereign or creative authority of its own but exercises a delegated authority as Christ's servant.⁸

Its power is therefore ministerial, serving Christ and his purposes, and declarative, proclaiming and applying what Christ has already revealed in his Word. The Church does not invent doctrine, create new laws, or bind consciences by human command, but announces, interprets, and applies the will of Christ as it is given in Scripture.

This understanding of church power safeguards both Christ's 'crown rights' and the liberty of conscience of his people. Church officers are not lords over the faith of others, but stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God. Their authority is real and weighty, yet always limited, exercised only in Christ's name and under his Word. Wherever the Church speaks faithfully according to Scripture, Christ himself rules his people by his Spirit; wherever it exceeds or departs from Scripture, it speaks without warrant and must be corrected.

Scripture:

- 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.' (Matt. 16:19)
- 'For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.' (2 Cor. 4:5)
- 'Shepherd the flock of God... not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.' (1 Pet. 5:2–3)
- 'Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.' (Phil. 2:3–4)

Westminster Standards:

- Liberty of conscience (WCF 20:2)
- The power of the keys (WCF 30:1–2)
- Synods may err and must be tested by Scripture (WCF 31:2–3)

8 James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1868), 1:195: 'All is derived from Him; and all emanates from Him as its source. Within the province of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Teacher, Lawgiver, and Judge. If doctrine is taught, it is taught because He has revealed it; if ordinances are administered, they are administered in His name, and because they are His; if government is established and exercised, it is through His appointment and authority; if saving grace is dispensed, it is dispensed through the virtue and power of His Spirit; if a blessing is communicated, it is because He blesses. In the language of the Confession of Faith, 'there is no other Head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ'.

- Church power is ministerial, not lordly (WCF 31:3)
- The sin of usurping authority (WLC Q&A 105)

Code:

- ‘The Word of God as set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and the supreme standard of the Church.’ (Code par. 9)
- ‘The authority of any officer in the Church is derived from Christ and belongs not to the officer; therefore, any person appointed to office may not assume any spiritual preeminence over others, but be only minister, disciple and servant. Teaching or ruling elders are not warranted on their own authority to publish any doctrine nor to prescribe any ceremony; nor is submission to them obligatory, except in so far as their doctrine and decisions are consistent with the Word of God.’ (Code par. 16.2)

Governance

- 3.1 *Church courts are not legislative bodies which create new laws for the Church, but ministerial bodies which interpret and apply the law of Christ revealed in Scripture.* Their task is to declare Christ’s will in doctrine, worship, discipline, and order, binding consciences only where Christ himself has bound them. In matters of worship, the Church orders its life according to Scripture and does not impose practices without biblical warrant. In matters of discipline, church courts apply Christ’s teaching concerning sin, repentance, and restoration, rather than enforcing arbitrary or prudential rules.
- 3.2 *Because church authority is limited to what Christ has commanded, the Church must exercise disciplined restraint.* Where Scripture speaks, the Church should raise its voice prophetically, but, where Scripture is silent, Church courts should not seek to legislate, lobby, or pronounce authoritatively where Christ has not given them jurisdiction. There is the perennial danger of significant mission creep taking place which sees the church move beyond its calling. When the Church exceeds its mandate, it can all too easily end up seeking cultural or political power, thereby obscuring its spiritual calling and weakening its witness.

Culture

- 3.3 *A ministerial and declarative understanding of authority should foster a culture marked by a combination of humility and confidence.* Church decisions are framed as acts of obedience to Christ rather than exercises of autonomous institutional power. At the same time, this principle encourages clarity and courage in confessing doctrine, ordering worship, and exercising discipline according to Christ’s will for the glory of God and the good of his people.

- 3.4 *Such a culture resists both authoritarianism and timidity.* Authority is exercised without domination, and restraint is practised without fear. Faithful polity is marked not by constant intervention, but by a willingness to speak clearly where Scripture speaks and to remain silent where it does not.

Integrity

- 3.5 This principle guards the liberty of conscience by ensuring that the Church binds only where Christ has bound. Ecclesiastical integrity is compromised when courts attempt to speak where Scripture is silent or elevate human wisdom to divine command. Properly functioning Presbyterian polity recognises that restraint can itself be an act of faithfulness.
- 3.6 Office-bearers who judge that a decision of the Church is not in accordance with Scripture should have freedom to dissent and to record their reasons. At the same time, respect for the collective authority of the Church requires that such dissent be exercised with humility, patience, and loyalty in the Lord, recognising that Christ ordinarily governs his Church through the gathered discernment of his appointed servants.

4. Christ entrusts authority to govern the Church to elders who make decisions collectively and on an equal footing in the courts of his Church

In Scripture, Christ governs his visible Church through elders whom he appoints to exercise oversight in his name. This authority is not entrusted to a single individual, nor exercised directly by the congregation as a whole, but is vested in a plurality of elders who together discern and administer the will of Christ. These elders are equal in office and authority, even where their functions differ, and they exercise government collectively rather than independently.⁹

Presbyterian polity therefore locates authority not in personal leadership but in shared deliberation. Elders are organised into representative assemblies, or courts, for the oversight of the Church. These courts are not merely administrative gatherings or advisory committees, but genuine expressions of the visible Church acting corporately under Christ's rule. Through them, Christ preserves unity, accountability, and continuity in the government of his Church.

Scripture:

- 'If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. ... Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them.' (Matt. 18:17, 20)

⁹ In view here are acts of 'jurisdiction' or 'government' proper – the administration and application of the law of Christ. Presbyterian polity recognises a distinction between these and acts of 'order', such as the preaching of the Word or the administration of the sacraments, which are carried out by publicly-recognised individuals.

- ‘And when they had appointed elders for them in every church.’ (Acts 14:23)
- The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15)
- ‘This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town.’ (Tit. 1:5)
- ‘Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety.’ (Prov. 11:14)

Westminster Standards:

- Church Officers (WCF 30:1)
- Synods and Councils (WCF 31:1)
- Exposition of the fifth and sixth commandments (WLC Q&A 123–36)

Code:

- ‘Christ is always present in His Church and governs it by God’s Word and Spirit through the ministry of His people. This government is both representative and corporate.’ (Code par. 14.1)
- ‘The Presbyterian Church in Ireland shall be governed by presbyters in representative assemblies, otherwise known as the courts of the Church.’ (Code par. 17)

Governance

- 4.1 *A defining feature of Presbyterian government is the combination of plurality and parity among elders.* Authority is exercised through Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, and the General Assembly, each acting within its proper sphere. While courts may seek advice or information from others, the responsibility for deliberation and decision-making rests with those whom Christ has called and ordained to govern his Church. ‘The indispensable qualification necessary to any one who would sit in a Church Court is that he holds the office of elder.’¹⁰
- 4.2 The representative principle in Presbyterian polity does not mean that every *demographic or interest group must be directly present in church courts*. Rather, the people are represented by their elders, in whom the Church has recognised the call of Christ. Courts should therefore be cautious about practices which blur the distinction between those entrusted with authority and those invited to contribute, lest responsibility be diffused and accountability weakened.

Culture

- 4.3 *This pattern of shared and equal leadership should foster a culture of deliberation, patience, and mutual respect.* Decisions are made through prayerful discussion rather than unilateral action, encouraging listening, persuasion, and attentiveness to minority

10 David Stewart, *The History and Principles of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (2nd edn, Belfast, 1908), 208.

voices. Both ministers and ruling elders should cultivate a deep sense of the privileges and responsibilities of office, recognising that authority is exercised together and not individually.

- 4.4 *A particular challenge for the Church is to equip and encourage elders to participate fully beyond the local congregation.* The health of Presbyterian government depends on the active, informed involvement of many, rather than reliance on a small number of experienced or confident individuals. A shared vision of collective responsibility across the courts of the Church must therefore be intentionally nurtured.

Integrity

- 4.5 *Collective and equal governance provides important safeguards against the abuse of power,* but only where elders exercise their office with courage, diligence, and openness to correction. Integrity resists both domination and abdication: neither the concentration of authority in a few hands nor the passive acceptance of decisions without genuine deliberation.
- 4.6 Elders should be willing to speak, to listen, and to take responsibility for the decisions *they make together before Christ.* Where such integrity is cultivated, the courts of the Church become instruments of Christ's wise and gentle rule, strengthening trust and promoting the peace and purity of his people.

5. Congregations are not isolated organisations but are joined in a hierarchy of courts with their own unique powers

Since the Church is one visible body under Christ, no congregation exists in isolation, but all are bound together in mutual accountability through graded assemblies that express and preserve the unity of the Church. There is a hierarchy of courts in which superior courts may genuinely bind inferior courts. This is set forth in Scripture in the lengthy account of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15–16). The Church in Antioch (a 'presbytery') had not been able to resolve a disagreement and so called for a council or 'synod' to be convened, sending several commissioners to Jerusalem as its representatives (Acts 15:2). The Council itself was comprised of the 'apostles and elders' from all the churches (Acts 15:6, 22–23). After debate, the Council reached a collective decision which was binding upon the local congregations (Acts 15:22, 28, 16:4). Presbyterian polity recognises divine warrant for elderships to oversee each particular congregation ('the Kirk Session'); the congregations of a local area ('the Presbytery'); and the presbyteries of a region, nation or the whole visible church (Regional, National or Ecumenical 'Synods'). The courts of the Church are not simply differentiated by their breadth of jurisdiction. Scripture provides us with patterns of different sorts of court with their own particular powers that operate in mutual relation.

Scripture:

- ‘There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.’ (Eph. 4:4–5)
- ‘[F]or in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal. 3:26–29)
- ‘If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.’ (1 Cor. 11:16)

Westminster Standards:

- The Communion of Saints (WCF 26:2)
- Synods (WCF 31)
- The unity of the visible church (WLC Q&A 63)

Code:

- ‘Each congregation and each member of a congregation ... in all matters of doctrine, discipline, worship and order, is under the immediate jurisdiction of the Kirk Session of the congregation; each Kirk Session, in these matters, is under the immediate jurisdiction of the Presbytery; each Presbytery is similarly under the jurisdiction of the General Assembly.’ (Code par. 17.1)

Governance

5.1 *Local congregations are accountable to broader assemblies* (i.e. sessions to presbyteries to general assembly). There should be a constitutional openness and accountability in governance which combines local responsibility with broader supervision and cooperation.

Culture

- 5.2 A church governed by lawful courts and shared oversight learns patience, humility, and trust in Christ’s appointed means. This should maintain consistency and impartiality and offer the protection of due process and a right to appeal.
- 5.3 Presbyterian polity cultivates a mindset that thinks beyond the local horizon, gladly shares resources, and submits to corporate wisdom and authority. ‘The scriptural and useful principle of association is much strengthened by the development of the presbytery into a series of presbyteries, rising above each other in the extent of their jurisdiction, and binding all the Churches under their care into a firm and compact unity. It is, on the other hand, immensely weakened

by self-will and disobedience on the part of individual rulers and Churches, and by members running off into schisms and needless separations.¹¹ Concern for the peace and unity of the Church should continue to mark Irish presbyterian culture.

Integrity

5.4 Presbyterian polity safeguards integrity by ensuring that *no single congregation, leader, or institution operates without broader accountability*. Liberty of conscience is maintained by individuals having the right of appeal.

Concern for the peace of the Church should not come at the expense of concerns for her purity. The strength of connectionalism can also be abused: ‘ambition, jealousy, and other evil passions find room to play in Synods, and that by mere force of natural ability a few unscrupulous men may succeed in establishing an ascendancy which good men may be powerless to overcome’.¹² Integrity requires those of good will to keep their ordination vows and to play their part in being vigilant against such abuses. ‘If the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?’ (Matt. 5:13)

6. Kirk Sessions have particular responsibility to care for souls in a local congregation

In Presbyterian polity, the primary responsibility for the spiritual oversight of a local congregation is entrusted by Christ to the Kirk Session. Composed of the minister and ruling elders of the congregation, the Session is called to exercise pastoral government in Christ’s name, watching over the souls of those committed to their care. This oversight is not abstract, merely administrative or detached, but personal, spiritual, and local, directed toward the nurture, protection, and growth in grace of the people of God. Scripture consistently presents elders as shepherds who are accountable to Christ for those under their charge. The Session therefore exists not principally to manage programmes or maintain institutional structures, but to apply the Word of God to the life of a particular congregation, especially through discipline, pastoral care, and example. In this way, the Kirk Session is the ordinary means by which Christ exercises his shepherding rule in a local church, preserving its peace, purity, and faithfulness.

Scripture:

- ‘And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.’ (Acts 14:23)
- ‘Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight’ (1 Pet. 5:2).

11 Witherow, *Form of the Christian Temple*, 188.

12 Witherow, *Form of the Christian Temple*, 200, cf. 188: ‘Strength becomes a curse if it fosters pride, encourages ecclesiastical assumption, stimulates persecution, or is used to promote any evil end.’

- ‘Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account’. (Heb. 13:17)

Westminster Standards:

- Church discipline as pastoral oversight (WCF 30:1–3)
- The treatment of the fifth commandment (WLC Q&A 123–30)
- The communion of saints (WCF 26:1–2)

Code:

- ‘The Kirk Session shall have the pastoral oversight of the congregation and shall watch for souls.’ (Code par. 21)
- ‘The ruling elder is appointed to watch for souls and to exercise government and discipline in conjunction with the teaching elder.’ (Code par. 15.2)
- ‘The Kirk Session shall only admit to communicant membership of the congregation those who have been baptised, who make profession of faith in the Lord Jesus, and whose character is consistent with such a profession.’ (Code par. 46)

Governance

- 6.1 *The Session exercises Christ’s authority locally* by admitting and disciplining members to Church privileges and responsibilities, encouraging faithful participation in the means of grace, and providing pastoral guidance in matters of belief and conduct. Its authority is neither remote nor impersonal, but grounded in proximity, knowledge, and pastoral responsibility.

The Session’s task is spiritual oversight, and its work cannot be reduced to compliance, policy enforcement, or organisational maintenance. Administrative responsibilities serve, rather than replace, the Session’s primary calling to discern spiritual health, address pastoral need, and apply Scripture wisely to the life of the congregation.

Culture

- 6.2 A Session that understands its calling to watch for souls will nurture a culture of pastoral attentiveness and mutual trust. Elders will know the people, pray for them, and be present among them, rather than functioning merely as committee members or organisational representatives. Authority will be exercised relationally, with patience, gentleness, and seriousness appropriate to matters of eternal significance.
- 6.3 This principle also encourages congregations to view the Session not as a distant governing body, but as a pastoral court whose purpose is their spiritual good. Where this culture is established, oversight is

less likely to be experienced as intrusive or bureaucratic, and more readily recognised as an expression of Christ's shepherding care.

Integrity

- 6.4 Watching for souls is a solemn trust for which elders must give account to Christ. Integrity in the Session therefore requires diligence, prayerfulness, and a willingness to engage with difficult pastoral situations rather than avoid them. It resists both neglect, where oversight is reduced to formality, and overreach, where authority is exercised without wisdom or compassion.
- 6.5 Faithful Sessions recognise that spiritual oversight cannot be delegated away or replaced by systems. Elders understand their office as a calling to serve Christ by caring for his people, ensuring that governance at the local level remains closely aligned with the Church's true end: the gathering and perfecting of the saints, to the glory of God.

7. Presbyteries are responsible for ordaining office-bearers, overseeing congregations and seeking the extension of Christ's kingdom in a particular area

Scripture gives several examples of a common government by elders over multiple congregations. These include the Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus and Corinth. For instance, there are repeated testimonies to the large size of the Church of Jerusalem, which met 'house to house', yet was collectively governed by elders (Acts 2:46, 11:30, 21:18), and is called 'the church' and twice 'the whole church' in Jerusalem.¹³ In Presbyterian polity the presbytery is usually considered the leading or 'radical' court. It has been called the 'pivot', upon which the Church's government turns.¹⁴ Presbyteries oversee the congregations entrusted to their care by the General Assembly. They have the power of licensing and ordination (1 Tim. 4:14), which means that they supply the pool of office-bearers in both local congregations and the General Assembly. They send memorials up to the General Assembly, and often presbyteries are required to ratify important General Assembly decisions (as per the 'Barrier Act' of the Church of Scotland).

Scripture:

- 'On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.' (Acts 21:18)
- 'Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.' (1 Tim. 4:14)

13 8620 individuals plus 'multitudes' more are mentioned in Acts 1:15, 2:41, 4:4, 5:14, 6:1, 6:7. At the end of Acts there are 'myriads' of believing Jews in Jerusalem (21:20).

14 Samuel Miller, *Presbyterianism: The Truly Primitive and Apostolical Constitution of the Church of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia, 1836), 8; *The Practice of the Free Church of Scotland*, 33. <https://freechurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ThePractice02presb-Presbytery.pdf>.

Westminster Form of Presbyterian Church Government:

- ‘The scripture doth hold out a presbytery in a church’ (Form of Presbyterian Church-Government).

Code:

- ‘The Presbytery is primarily responsible for corporate oversight of the congregations and causes assigned to it by the General Assembly, and of the ministers and elders connected with it, and the advancement of Christ’s kingdom generally within the geographical area for which it is responsible.’ (Code par. 197)

Governance

- 7.1 Whenever Presbyterians return to the Scriptures to discern the foundations of their polity, they tend to stress that *the presbytery is the ordinary way in which the Church is to be collectively governed in a particular location*. ‘There is indeed a sense in which all the New Testament Churches [the Church of Jerusalem, the Church of Antioch etc.] were independent of each other; that is, each had a distinct sphere of work within its own locality; each had its own staff of officers; each was free to manage the business that Christ assigned to it... but all these different societies constituted a greater society – a confederation of little States all combined together in the one great spiritual kingdom.’¹⁵
- 7.2 It should be asked whether recent statements that the local congregation is the ‘primary unit of mission and ministry’ have been made with sufficient theological reflection.
- 7.3 It may be appropriate at this time to reconsider long-standing arrangements in the PCI that presbyteries delegate much of the responsibility for the selection and examination of candidates for the ministry to the General Assembly, and that presbyteries do not have the power to plant churches or otherwise reconfigure ministry in their bounds.

Culture

- 7.4 The presbytery should not be seen as a merely judicial or administrative body, but rather as a significant local expression of the

15 Witherow, *Form of the Christian Temple*, 187, cf. 198: ‘Individual Churches have much power. They and their rulers may deal with any subject which concerns themselves alone, and does not touch the common faith, nor affects their relationship to other Churches. Had Antioch succeeded in calming the dissension which arose in its borders, the case would not have gone to Jerusalem.’ George Gillespie calls the area presbytery ‘the ordinary court of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, at least in all matters of higher importance, which do concern either all or any of those congregations’. See George Gillespie, ‘An Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland’, *Collected Shorter Writings* (Grand Rapids, 2021), 1:197, cf. 202, 203, 223. ‘The exercise of government by presbyteries is the common ordinary way of government held forth in Scripture’, *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici: or The Divine Right of Church Government*, ed. Chris Coldwell (Grand Rapids, 2020), 276.

Church. In contemporary terms, it could be imagined as the meeting of the leaders of a multi-site megachurch. Presbytery services, youth and training events, ministerial fellowships and other opportunities for meaningful Christian fellowship should be encouraged.

- 7.5 There are many potential cultural benefits to seeing the Presbytery in spiritual terms: 'We can easily imagine at a time when Christians were a poor and feeble minority, encircled on all sides [the advantages of such coming together]. It kindled in their meetings the enthusiasm of numbers. It welded all the followers of Christ in that locality in a solid mass, into a common brotherhood under a common authority. Discipline in these circumstances meant something... Besides, it gave every member of the local church the opportunity of profiting by the best gifts that the place could afford.'¹⁶
- 7.6 The task group should consider whether, over the course of time, the culture in the PCI has been increasingly to look for too much from the General Assembly, and for too little from presbyteries.

8. Synods, such as the General Assembly, are responsible for reviewing the decisions of lower courts and making decisions on matters affecting the whole Church

In contrast to kirk sessions and presbyteries, synods are usually understood in Presbyterian polity as courts of reference or appeal, meeting intermittently to settle matters of difficulty or in dispute. There can be as many levels of synodical assembly as required; a 'general assembly' is just a national synod. This pattern can be seen in the scriptural pattern of the Council of Jerusalem, where a disputed matter was brought to the 'whole church' for final decision. It is commonly noted that the Council of Jerusalem exercised jurisdiction in three ways: publicly declaring the mind of God according to the Scriptures (Acts 15:28), wisely ordering the external circumstances of the Church (Acts 15:29) and censuring the false teachers (Acts 15:24).¹⁷ As part of its decision it also appointed a commission and provided for its decrees to be received by the churches. Compared to many current and historic Presbyterian polities, the present day General Assembly of the PCI has relatively unrestricted powers. However, the General Assembly's powers are still limited by the constitution (Code par. 324). In cases of discipline it cannot usurp the presbytery's powers but can only act by way of reference (Code pars. 20, 330.2). Material changes to constitution, doctrines or worship of the Church agreed by the General Assembly must be agreed by two-thirds of presbyteries (Code par. 333.2.3).

Scripture:

- 'Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were *appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.*' (Acts 15:2)

16 Witherow, *Form of the Christian Temple*, 182.

17 These three powers are known as the 'dogmatic', the 'diatactic' and the 'critic', respectively.

- ‘The apostles and the elders were gathered together *to consider this matter.*’ (Acts 15:6)

Westminster Form of Presbyterian Church Government:

- ‘The scripture doth hold out another sort of assemblies for the government of the church, beside classical [the local presbytery] and congregational [the Kirk Session], all which we call *Synodical.*’ (Form of Presbyterian Church-Government)

Code:

- ‘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.’ (Code par. 309)

Governance

8.1 According to Scripture, the General Assembly is fundamentally a body that is for review and for decision about matters affecting the whole church. The default position should be that decision making and missional activity take place at the presbytery and congregational level. It is the presbytery, not the General Assembly, that has the primary responsibility for congregations and causes under its care, and for ‘the advancement of Christ’s kingdom generally’ within its bounds (Code par. 197).¹⁸ However if decisions are referred to the General Assembly for review, or affect the whole Church, the General Assembly has a vital role.

Culture

8.2 The General Assembly should be respected as the place in which the widest collection of the gifts that Christ has given to the Church are found. ‘[T]he General Assembly at once represents the Head of grace and power most completely, and the aggregate of professing believers most entirely’.¹⁹

8.3 Yet even so, General Assemblies cannot expect to attain to the full measure of the stature of Christ in this life, and so must self-consciously give space to the other parts of Christ’s government: ‘this General Assembly is by no means the vicegerent of her Head. She cannot carry all the government upon her shoulder; she cannot stoop, as our infinite Lord himself can do, to inspect and manage

18 Cf. the ‘dictum’ quoted in Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology*, 192: ‘The power of the whole is in every part, and the power of the whole is over the *power* of every part.’ (Emphasis original) The point is that ‘The general assembly has no power directly *over the part*, but only over the *power* of the part, which implies that the part has a power’, conferred on it by the constitution. While dictum is given in the context of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, the same point can be made from the Code.

19 Alexander D. McGill, *Church Government: A Treatise* (Philadelphia, 1888), 508.

little things as well as great things, all interests as well as minute and detailed affairs of administration, and therefore inferior courts are brought into existence by her wisdom for practical help to herself'.²⁰

- 8.4 Historically and today, many Presbyterian polities have cultivated a deliberately restrained view of General Assemblies, in which the Assemblies are important decision-making bodies but which are largely focused on the work of the Church in the lower courts: they spend significant amounts of time reviewing presbytery actions, judging appeals and responding to memorials sent up by presbyteries.

Integrity

- 8.5 The Church should resist the temptation to build empires. There is a natural human tendency for power to accumulate in the hands of a few, due to laziness, cowardice, pride and the way that power attracts more power. The history of political thought tells us that the more power is centralised, the more it tends to be concentrated – large deliberative bodies usually struggle to exercise effective control over day-to-day management of affairs. Yet the Scriptures reject the empires of man in favour of the sole empire of Christ (Dan. 2). Presbyters engaging in the wider work of the Church need to examine their own hearts regularly to see if what Augustine called the 'lust to dominate' is present, and they need to be careful that the Church does not repeat the error of the city builders who came together at Babel to make a name for themselves (Gen. 11:4). For like Abraham we seek a city with foundations, whose designer and builder is God (Heb. 11:10).

9. The proper functioning of the courts of the Church necessarily requires common-sense rules and office-bearers for the management of business

A familiar pattern of constitution, report, debate, resolution, decision, promulgation, and enforcement can be seen in Luke's account of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15–16). Furthermore, it seems likely that James or Peter presided over the council as something like a moderator and an unnamed person must have functioned as the secretary or clerk who recorded the decision and made it available for transmission. For collective decision making to take place effectively, the courts of the Church must have agreed regulations that members of the court agree to abide by. These will not be found in detail in the Scriptures, but reason and the general principles of Christian love, decency and order are sufficient for Christians to wisely determine these.

Scripture:

- 'Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined

20 McGill, *Church Government*, 508.

and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.’ (Eph. 4:15–16)

Westminster Standards:

- Circumstances concerning the government of the Church that are common to human societies are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general principles of the Word (WCF 1:6).

Code:

- ‘Every court shall be entitled to adopt standing orders for the regulation of its business, provided these do not conflict with the provisions of this Code.’ (Code par. 459)

Governance

- 9.1 *Proper discussion and debate are vital to the proper functioning of Presbyterian church government.* While an adversarial tone is to be rejected as not appropriate to the Church of Christ, order and edification requires rules of procedure. It is suggested that such rules should reflect the nature of the discussion and of the court, with more ‘parliamentary’ rules becoming more appropriate in larger courts or more where concrete decisions are being made. However, such rules should serve to enable informed collective debate and not to stymie it through overly complex or restrictive regulations.
- 9.2 There is a need for a moderator. ‘In every Church court a president is necessary, as otherwise business cannot be well conducted. ... But no good reason can be given why one minister should be placed permanently above his brethren, and invested with arbitrary authority.’²¹ Moderators are given significant discretionary powers when the court is sitting (Code par. 456). James’ ability to bring the debate at Jerusalem to a successful conclusion highlights the importance of spiritual leadership from the one appointed ‘first among equals’. The need for speaking and related ministerial gifts supports the PCI’s rule that the moderators of all its courts should be ministers (Code par. 453). However, the moderator is not the court itself and cannot represent it except when commissioned to do so. The moderator’s essential power when the court is not sitting is to facilitate its sitting, e.g. by calling the court or handling requests from members to convene the court.
- 9.3 There is a need for a secretary. Clerks (present but unnamed in Acts) are necessary for the smooth operation of the court, but should be seen as merely servants of the court, not its representatives or leaders. The clerical duties of a court of the Church require discretion and good judgement.

21 William D. Killen, *The Framework of the Church: A Treatise on Church Government* (Edinburgh, 1890), 248.

Culture

- 9.4 Simplicity of structures and procedures and transparency of communications are essential to enable good decision making by the whole body.
- 9.5 The importance of procedure to the Presbyterian form of church government creates a risk that managerialism trumps proper spiritual leadership. In particular, the respect that those who are procedurally adept often attract in presbyterian churches should be tempered by the recognition that the body of Christ is various, and it grows when ‘each part’ does its work.

Integrity

- 9.6 Office-bearers obediently submit to rules regarding the management of business for the *good of the whole body*. Integrity requires office bearers to familiarise themselves with processes and procedures and to come to meetings prepared to participate.

10. Where necessary the courts of the Church may appoint agents to carry out or enable their decisions, but these agents must serve rather than supplant decision-making by the courts

Courts of the church can often do little more while they are sitting than make decisions. For decisions to be implemented, the courts must often appoint agents to carry out their will. These agents can be individuals, like the General Assembly’s solicitor (also known as the ‘Law agent’) or bodies. Bodies appointed by Presbyterian churches include ‘commissions’, ‘committees’ and ‘boards’. A ‘commission’ is a subset of the members of a court who are empowered to act for the court on a particular mission. This way of proceeding can be seen as founded on and agreeable to the Word of God: In the programmatic example of the Council of Jerusalem, the Council not only published its decision in the form of a letter but also appointed Judas called Barsabbas and Silas (‘leading men among the brothers’) to go to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas and communicate the decision orally (Acts 15:25–27). This commission spent ‘some time’ with the church of Antioch and members of the commission ‘encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words’ (Acts 15:30–35). Another example of a commission can be found earlier in the chapter – the commission from the Church of Antioch to go to Jerusalem (Acts 15:2). By contrast, committees of a court are not seen in Scripture but can be justified as a necessary ‘circumstance’. The light of nature tells us that some work is required to enable the proper functioning of a court.²² An agenda must be prepared for example. Christian prudence suggests that this should be done collectively, emulating in this way the organisation that Christ has given to the church. Finally, what the Presbyterian Church in Ireland calls ‘councils’ are usually categorised as Church ‘boards’. Boards take over

22 J. H. Thornwell, *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Edinburgh, 1974 [1873]), 4:246–7.

the General Assembly's work of overseeing its committees and usually possess significant discretionary powers. These bodies are not found in Scripture but arose in the nineteenth century to facilitate the work of the church at General Assembly levels. The rise of church boards occasioned vigorous debate on the basis of Calvin's principle that 'it is unwarrantable and unlawful to introduce into the government and worship of the church anything which has not the positive sanction of Scripture.'²³

Scripture:

- 'Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.' (Acts 15:2)
- 'It has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul' (Acts 15:25).

Westminster Standards:

- '[T]here are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.' (WCF 1:6)

Code:

- 'Any court of the Church may appoint a commission or committee, the latter being sometimes called a council, for such purposes as the court may determine' (Code par. 24).
- 'Instead of dealing directly with any item of business itself, a court of the Church may, in accordance with the Code, either remit that item to a commission, having the power of the court for the matters remitted; or remit that item to a council, committee or agent appointed by the court for such purposes as the court shall determine, always provided that its actions shall be subject to review by and may be appealed against to the court appointing it.' (Code par. 466)

Governance

10.1 A 'commission' is a subset of the members of a court who are empowered to act for the court on a particular mission. They are, however, distinct from the court and remain accountable for proper execution of their commission to their commissioning body. The New Testament precedents are of small, time-limited commissions with limited powers for specific missions. A commission should not consistently supplement a court. The use in the PCI of standing commissions merits re-examination in light of the Biblical principle.

10.2 Committees of a court are not seen in Scripture but can be justified as a necessary 'circumstance' to enable the court's decision-making.

23 William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1967 [1862]), 27. See the discussion in Thornwell, *Writings*, 4:249.

In Presbyterian polity, committees do not make decisions, but enable the court to make decisions. For example, business committees have been commonly used to prepare agendas for many church courts. However, it must be remembered that such bodies are not the court itself, or any actual part of it. Faithfulness to Christ's government implies that the use of such committees for decision-making should be as minimal as possible: they should rather serve to allow the court to do its proper work well, and any decisions made should be readily reviewable by the court. For example, business committee decisions need to be clearly presented to the court, and reviewable by the court.

- 10.3 If Christ's government is not to be diluted by new additions, Church boards need to be justified as a necessary circumstance of it. Church courts have the liberty to appoint the agents it deems necessary, but it should be recognised that boards are not themselves part of the government that Christ has given to the Church and should not be a substitute for it. They are 'churchy' rather than 'the Church'. A previous generation in the PCI found that while the courts of the Church are part of the 'essential structure of Presbyterianism, our historical experience and present needs require an administrative system which we conceive to be secondary to and dependent upon the Church courts'.²⁴ Theologically speaking, this statement raises the question of whether at the present time Councils can continue to be justified as a necessary circumstance of Christ's government. Practically speaking, this statement raises the question of whether the councils do operate in dependence on the Church courts. Historically Church boards have often exercised weak oversight over their committees, and Church boards have often been subject to weak oversight by Church courts.²⁵ As boards have multiplied, presbytery powers have often been correspondingly reduced, either expressly or in practice.

Culture

- 10.4 The Church will humbly recognise that Christ's appointed way of decision-making in the Church is through informed debate taking place in large gatherings, rather than through the work of small committees being rubber-stamped.
- 10.5 At General Assembly it is important that business be ordered in such a way to facilitate this. Time is required for genuine engagement in discussion and debate. This is because the further away a decision is from the court as a whole, the further away it is from properly ordered Presbyterian polity.
- 10.6 Committees need to be careful that they do not become mere vehicles for the will of an individual, for example the person who sets the

24 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 'Committee Re Appointments to Assembly Boards etc.', *Annual Reports 1983* (Belfast, 1983), 59.

25 'We recognise the difficulty frequently expressed that Boards are mere "rubber stamps"'; General Assembly, 'Committee Re Appointments to Assembly Boards etc.', 60.

agenda for the business committee could in practice become the person who sets the agenda for the whole of a court.

- 10.7 In our culture we recognise the distinction that exists between the Church and its councils (boards) by speaking not of moderators and clerks or councils, but, instead, of their conveners, chairmen, and secretaries. This helps to make clear that these councils are under the authority of the Church while being distinct from it.
- 10.8 Confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture and of the government Christ has given encourages a culture of ‘less is more’ when it comes to creating agencies to carry out the will of the courts. While valuing the work of councils, we should have a clearer culture of valuing the local presbytery, not as a minimal ‘middle-management’ layer between the General Assembly and the local congregation, but as an expression of the Church in a particular region.

Integrity

- 10.9 Members appointed to any such agencies must conduct themselves strictly as servants of the court which established the body. Integrity requires faithfulness to the remit given to the agency and that the work be done in a manner consistent with the proper functioning of Presbyterian polity.
- 10.10 Giving the work to an agency can, on certain occasions, be a means of abdicating responsibility and not being willing to commit to the work.

11. Church discipline is a spiritual and pastoral ordinance, ordered toward restoration and the good of the whole body

Jesus Christ is committed to the holiness, peace, and restoration of his people. As part of his pastoral rule, he has entrusted the Church with discipline as a spiritual ordinance to be exercised in his name and under his Word. Building on the Church’s responsibility to watch for souls at the local level, discipline is therefore neither punitive nor coercive, but remedial and pastoral, directed toward repentance, reconciliation, and the preservation of the Church’s purity and witness. Discipline is, therefore, not a denial of grace but an application of grace.

Scripture presents discipline as an expression of Christ’s shepherding care for both individuals and the whole body. By entrusting the keys of the kingdom to the Church, Christ has given her the responsibility to address sin truthfully and patiently, seeking restoration wherever possible and guarding the Church from scandal and disorder. Properly exercised, discipline serves both mercy and holiness and reflects the character of Christ himself.

Scripture:

- ‘If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault.’ (Matt. 18:15–17)

- ‘Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?’ (1 Cor. 5:6–7)
- ‘If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.’ (Gal. 6:1)

Westminster Standards:

- The ends of discipline (WCF 30:3–4)
- Aggravations of sin (WLC Q&A 151)
- Means of grace and restoration (WLC Q&A 154–60)

Code:

- ‘Christ is always present in His Church and governs it by God’s Word and Spirit through the ministry of His people.’ (Code par. 14.1)
- ‘The ruling elder is appointed to watch for souls and to exercise government and discipline in conjunction with the teaching elder.’ (Code par. 15.2)
- ‘The Kirk Session shall have the pastoral oversight of the congregation and shall watch for souls.’ (Code par. 21)

Governance

11.1 *Church discipline is exercised by Christ through the courts of his Church for the spiritual good of the flock.* It should be conducted with prayer, due process, transparency, and impartiality, recognising the gravity of the matters involved and the vulnerability of those affected. The aim is repentance and restoration, not punishment or institutional self-protection. Because discipline is a pastoral ordinance, responsibility for its exercise rests with church courts acting corporately, rather than being informally delegated or absorbed into procedural gatekeeping. Practices which effectively displace full court oversight or reduce discipline to administrative process require careful evaluation in the light of Scripture and the Church’s constitutional commitments.

Culture

11.2 *A biblical understanding of discipline should foster a culture in which holiness and compassion are held together.* Sin is taken seriously, yet sinners are treated with dignity and hope. Repentance is encouraged, reconciliation is pursued, and the peace of the Church is guarded. This principle also challenges the assumption that avoiding formal discipline is necessarily more pastoral. While confidentiality and informality have their place, clearly ordered disciplinary processes can often serve both those accused and those harmed more faithfully than vague or unaccountable arrangements. Discipline, rightly exercised, is one of the ways in which Christ continues to shepherd his people.

Integrity

11.3 *Integrity requires the Church to act consistently with its confession.* If Christ is acknowledged as Lord, persistent disobedience cannot be ignored, nor can discipline be administered unjustly or selectively. A Church that neglects discipline, or exercises it harshly or defensively, undermines its credibility before a watching world. Faithful discipline bears witness to the truth that Christ's grace is not indifferent to sin and that his mercy is always ordered toward restoration of life in him.

12. Well-functioning Presbyterian polity depends upon the godliness of office-bearers

Because ecclesiastical authority is exercised in Christ's name and for Christ's ends, the faithful functioning of Presbyterian polity depends fundamentally upon the godliness of those who hold office. Scripture places sustained emphasis not only on the actions of elders, but on their character, judgment, and spiritual maturity. Authority in the Church is therefore entrusted not primarily to systems or procedures, but to Biblically qualified elders who have been examined, called, and recognised as Christ's servants.

Structures and safeguards are necessary, but they cannot substitute for sanctified wisdom. Where godliness is lacking, even formally correct governance can become spiritually deficient. Presbyterian polity assumes that those entrusted with authority will be shaped by Scripture, prayer, and obedience, and that their lives will commend the gospel they serve.

Scripture:

- 'An overseer must be above reproach.' (1 Tim. 3:1-7)
- 'For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach.' (Tit. 1:7-9)
- 'Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.' (1 Tim. 4:16)
- 'Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands.' (1 Tim. 5:22).

Westminster Standards:

- Integrity and faithfulness in office (WCF 24:6)
- Officers entrusted with discipline (WCF 30:2)
- Duties expounded in the law of God (WLC Q&A 128-30)

Code:

- 'Before an election of ruling elders is conducted the minister of the congregation shall... explain to the congregation the duties and qualifications of ruling elders.' (Code par. 27.3)
- 'Christ is always present in His Church and governs it by God's Word and Spirit through the ministry of His people.' (Code par. 14.1)

Governance

- 12.1 Presbyterian polity shaped by Scripture will hold office-bearers to high standards of character and competence, while also trusting them to exercise godly judgment rather than binding them with excessive procedural prescription. Many failures in governance arise not from inadequate rules, but from a lack of spiritual discernment, courage, or humility. The catechetical exposition of the Ten Commandments, particularly in the Larger Catechism, provides a moral vision that shapes both outward conduct and inward disposition. This vision reminds the Church that obedience involves wisdom, motive, and love, not mere technical compliance.
- 12.2 The localisation of pastoral ministry into particular congregations further serves this end. The close dwelling together of pastor and people enables mutual knowledge, accountability, and example, ensuring that godliness is visible and tested in ordinary life rather than assumed in abstraction.

Culture

- 12.3 The Church should cultivate a culture of prayerful dependence on the Word of God in all its courts. The identification, training, examination, appointment, and ongoing oversight of office-bearers should be valued as central to the Church's spiritual health, not treated as administrative necessities.
- 12.4 Properly appointed office-bearers should be recognised as gifts of Christ to his Church and honoured accordingly. Accusations against them should be handled with seriousness and care, requiring credible evidence, while never placing officers beyond accountability. A clear distinction should also be maintained between ordained office-bearers, whose qualifications are set forth in Scripture, and other valuable but distinct roles within the Church.

Integrity

- 12.5 Integrity may be lost not only by breaking rules, but by hiding behind them. Godly office-bearers recognise that their primary allegiance is not to public opinion, institutional expectation, or personal comfort, but to the Lord to whom they must give account.
- 12.6 Where such integrity is cultivated, Presbyterian polity functions as intended: authority remains personal, accountable, and spiritually grounded, and the structures of Church government serve their true purpose – enabling the wise, faithful, and loving oversight of Christ's people.

Conclusion

When ecclesiology is thin or confused, governance becomes distorted and coercive, culture becomes unhealthy, and integrity is compromised. It has long been recognised that even most scriptural polity cannot prevent

abuses, but this should only encourage the Church to uphold what is good. ‘No wise man will throw away a valuable garment, because of a spot or two which a little care may remove.’²⁶ Rather, the theological retrieval of these principles of ecclesiology can help transform our understanding of polity. Far from being merely a pragmatic system of management and administration, it is instead the form of spiritual government that Christ has established to enable the Church’s worship and witness. These principles should produce a culture marked by humility, patience, mutual submission, and justice, rather than by concerns simply to achieve efficiency, institutional control, or to adapt to cultural pressures.

In this present age the need for reform of the Church is always real and necessary. In this, the Church is not left alone. Christ is the presiding King of the Church and the power of the age to come is already at work in the Church as he gathers and perfects his people. The Spirit is the bond of union with the risen Christ and the firstfruits of the new creation. Therefore, the church can genuinely reform, but only as the people of God depend on the Spirit and make faithful use of the ordinary means of grace, including the spiritual government Christ has appointed for the good of His Church.

26 *Catechism of Government and Discipline*, 19.

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 4

GENERAL ASSEMBLY STRUCTURES AND RESOURCES REVIEW PANEL

This report arises from the work commissioned by the General Assembly, which tasked the General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel (GASRRP) with bringing forward proposals to enable a more sustainable and mission-focused structure for the Church in the years ahead. This remit has required the Panel to engage with questions that are both wide-ranging and deeply consequential, touching on governance, ministry, resourcing, and the relationship between central and local expressions of Church life.

From the outset, the scale and complexity of this work have been significant. The Panel has sought to listen carefully across the Church, to reflect on a diverse range of perspectives, and to hold together competing priorities with both clarity and care. This process has also unfolded in a context shaped by the ongoing safeguarding crisis, which has rightly demanded attention, resources and deep reflection. The implications of this have not only affected the pace and capacity of the work, but have also underscored the importance of integrity, accountability and trust as foundational considerations in any proposals for future structures.

In carrying out its task, the Panel has been guided by the principles agreed by the General Assembly in 2025, which have provided an essential framework for discernment and decision-making.

1. The General Assembly affirm that the primary function of its central structures is to support the overall mission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. This includes proclaiming the gospel, equipping the saints, and serving the wider community. Any services provided by the central structure should clearly align with the denomination's mission to proclaim the gospel, equip the saints, and serve the wider community.
2. The General Assembly therefore further affirm that:
 - (a) The local congregation, led by presbyters, is the primary unit of mission and ministry and subject to the courts of the church.
 - (b) Decisions should be made at the congregational level whenever possible, with the framework and oversight provided by presbyteries and the General Assembly only as necessary.
 - (c) The role of the General Assembly is to resource, support and encourage the local congregation and presbytery to fulfil their mission and enabling each to do and to be a part of that which, if they were left alone, they could not. The General Assembly determines the vision and provides oversight of the delivery of this.

- (d) The church must prioritise those roles that only the church in mission and ministry can do and should not prioritise what others do better.
 - (e) The church should model Kingdom values in its mission and ministry, pursuing its vocation to influence both society and government in line with those values especially as an advocate for the vulnerable and the marginalised.
 - (f) The church must be courageous and follow the evident prompting of the Holy Spirit particularly in challenging times.
3. These guiding principles have helped to ensure that proposals are not only structurally coherent, but also theologically grounded and pastorally attentive. Alongside this, the Panel has been mindful of the need to take account of related and ongoing processes, including matters arising from the Charity Commission review and the work of the Governance, Culture and Integrity Task Group. These parallel streams of work raise important considerations which intersect with and, in some cases, inform the recommendations contained within this report.
 4. In this context, the Church faces not only an opportunity for thoughtful reform, but also a moment in which careful attention to governance, accountability, and the clarity of structures is increasingly important for sustaining confidence and ensuring faithful stewardship of its life and witness. The proposals that follow are therefore offered both as a response to discerned missional needs and as a prudent step in preparing for a changing and, at times, uncertain external environment, including the potential implications of statutory processes beyond the Church's direct control. They are also shaped by a growing recognition that the conversation must move beyond questions of organisational delineation alone, towards a deeper consideration of how leadership, strategy, and delivery are most effectively aligned across the life of the Church as a whole.
 5. The Panel's report to the General Assembly 2025 highlighted the potential impact of structural changes on the central staff of the Church. The Panel is very mindful of this and will communicate and consult with staff as its work progresses.
 6. What follows, therefore, is not presented as a final or exhaustive solution, but as a considered contribution to the Church's ongoing discernment. It reflects both the challenges of the present moment and the opportunity to shape structures that are more responsive, transparent and better equipped to serve the mission of the Church in the years ahead.

FLEXIBLE FINANCE SUB-GROUP

7. The remit of the Flexible Finance Sub-group is ‘to examine the way central funds of PCI are organised, both to free up funds for priorities in mission and ministry and also to enable PCI to be much more flexible in funding new mission and ministry.’
8. The Sub-group has two tasks:
 - (a) Accounting and Reporting Requirements – a review of income and investment/property classification in respect of restricted and unrestricted.

To date all PCI income sources have been reviewed and classified with confirmation from the external auditors.

PCI Investment and property review and classification commenced at the end of the 2024 year and has continued through the 2025 year with further work still to be done. Discussions with the external auditors on classification are ongoing.
 - (b) Strategic Financial Management – financial and budgetary prioritisation and management review.
9. The work in this area will commence when the Structures and Resources Review Panel have agreed decisions on the PCI centralised structures going forward.
10. The work will involve the development of a rolling three-year strategic planning process for the work of the General Assembly as well as a budget setting, approval and monitoring process to support the strategic planning.

HUGO WILSON, Convener

SUPPORT SERVICES RESTRUCTURING SUB-GROUP

11. The remit of the Support Services Restructuring Sub-group is ‘To restructure the PCI centralised finance, human resources, property management (including conferencing) and IT functions as well as head office staff to meet the support services requirements of the restructured PCI centralised activities agreed by the General Assembly.’
12. The work in this area will commence when the Structures and Resources Review Panel have agreed decisions on the PCI centralised structures going forward. Any restructuring will involve full communication and consultation with staff.

HUGO WILSON, Convener

UTC AND ASSEMBLY BUILDINGS PROPERTY SUB-GROUP

13. Key Decisions up to August 2025:

Date	Decision
27/11/2024	Concept Report, Kennedy Fitzgerald Architects
31/01/2025	Re-configuration and Refurbishment of UTC Report KFA subject to GAAC and General Council approval
31/01/2025	Stephen Gowdy invited to join the group to enable the concept of a partnership with Belfast Buildings Trust to be further explored
31/01/2025	Explore the idea of approaching USA trusts regarding the development of programme and staffing at re-configured and refurbished UTC
31/01/2025	Referral of identified health and safety concerns to UTC Management Committee
24/02/2025	Stephen Gowdy to obtain further information on the influence and involvement of the Belfast Buildings Trust re: Christ Church
04/04/2025	The nature of the partnership with Belfast Buildings Trust to be considered carefully
29/04/2025	Kennedy Fitzgerald Architects instructed to commence Options Report re: UTC

14. Since the June 2025 General Assembly the UTC/AB Sub-group has met twice on 4 September and 18 November 2025.

At the September meeting it was agreed to pause work on the Options Report regarding UTC until there is clarity on accommodation requirements pending outcomes of the relevant sub-groups.

The sub-group considered a discussion paper on Assembly Buildings and it was agreed to:

- assess current running costs for both AB/FB and UTC
- invite Brian Turtle, Chartered Surveyor and Property Consultant to give his considered opinion on our central properties

15. Such preparatory work would be helpful in formulating future accommodation requirements in both buildings.

16. At our meeting on 18 November, the sub-group considered:

- A draft report from Brian Turtle which outlined the current property market trends and a SWOT analysis of our centrally held buildings
- Running costs for AB and UTC in the last 5 years from Ken Swarbrick

17. We recognise that further work will be necessary in assessing future accommodation requirements in our centrally held property and analysis of current potential income streams.
18. Additionally, we agreed to keep Belfast Buildings Trust informed of progress regarding UTC.
19. At its meeting on 19 March the GASRRP agreed to appoint a new sub-group (UTC Futures) dealing with UTC and its work.

ADRIAN McLERNON, Convener

UNION THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE VISION AND STAFFING SUB-GROUP

20. The Union Theological College Vision and Staffing Requirements sub panel has been meeting and engaging with stakeholders over the last number of months with a view to bringing recommendations as soon as possible to the General Assembly.
21. As matters stand, the General Assembly's current vision for UTC, brought about partly following the decision of Queen's University to no longer award theology degrees through a Faculty of Theology, comprises four strands:
 - Strand 1: Ministerial training
 - Strand 2: Undergraduate theological education
 - Strand 3: Postgraduate theological education
 - Strand 4: Wider training and education through an 'institute for ministry'.
22. Consultative meetings with the relevant stakeholders, being representatives from the Council for Training in Ministry, the College Management Committee, Faculty Members, and the UTC Finance team have taken place over the course of the autumn and spring terms.
23. The provision of training for ministers and the position of the College was also discussed during Presbytery consultations in November 2025.
24. It is recognised there is a desire for the denomination to continue to train its ministers, but there were differing views on how that training is offered, the cost of such training, and the location of such training. Further, there is a recognition by the sub panel of the Herculean task that the Faculty are undertaking, as far as the provision of undergraduate theological education is concerned, through the link with St Mary's University London, not least with respect to the regulatory aspects of running what is essentially a university. The success of the postgraduate programme was also noted.

25. In light of all these factors it was necessary to indicate a direction of travel to the General Council which passed the following resolutions with delegated authority on behalf of the General Assembly:
- (a) That the General Council (acting with delegated powers under Code Par 401.1) instructs Union Theological College to suspend enrolment into the BA (Hons) pathway accredited by St Mary's University, Twickenham, and enter into a teach-out arrangement to ensure appropriate educational provision for current students.
 - (b) That the General Council notes with gratitude the positive working relationship between Union Theological College and St Mary's University, Twickenham.
26. It has become apparent, following the various discussions with stakeholders, that, instead of three separate sub-groups continuing to look at training of ministers, the building and fabric of UTC and Assembly Buildings, and the vision and staffing for UTC, that the three sub-groups should merge into one group, populated with representatives of each of those panels, and college stakeholders. The new merged group is in the process of being established and will meet after the next General Council meeting, and before the General Assembly meets in June.

AVRIL HEENAN and NIALL LOCKHART, Co-Conveners

MINISTERIAL TRAINING SUB-GROUP

27. Since September 2024 the Ministry Training Review Sub-group has met regularly to review our current training for the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The process in becoming a PCI minister begins with a personal sense of call; a sense of call which is tested and confirmed over many years through several processes and involving several components, namely Presbytery, Council for Training in Ministry, three years of academic study, licentiate assistantship and call of a congregation.
28. This sub-group has examined each of the above components in light of contributions from our UTC teaching staff, from trainees at different stages of their training and from the current practices of other denominations within Ireland and the UK.
29. Having reflected upon current practices in theological training the sub-group recognises the commitment of our teaching staff in UTC and has been persuaded that the processes in testing a sense of call and in training our ministers are sound.
30. However, the sub-group is aware that its work does not stand alone and that now is the time to refer its reports and findings by way of groundwork, to the new UTC Futures sub-group.

ROB CRAIG, Convener

MISSION AND DEVELOPMENT SUB-GROUP

31. Work continues to explore PCI's understanding of mission and development, particularly in relation to how the denomination partners with Christian development agencies. While this work continues it is recognised that the Council for Global Mission is required to undertake an annual World Development Appeal (Code para. 428.2). Therefore, approval has been given for the Council to plan for a 2026 and 2027 appeal following the parameters determined by the 2025 General Assembly.

DAVID McCULLAGH, Convener

WORK OF THE COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS SUB-GROUP

32. The work of this sub-group has been carried out through several bi-lateral meetings during the past year with senior staff of the CSW, and mainly driven by specific presenting issues including:
- (a) A recognition that significant and mounting deficits on the operating accounts of the CSW have grown beyond previously approved levels, calling into question the financial viability of the work going forward.
 - (b) That the General Assembly in 2024 and 2025 has received reports indicating an agreement in principle to separate the work of CSW from the central structures of PCI, thus allowing greater managerial flexibility.
 - (c) That the nature of this separation of functions could be framed in one of the following ways:
 - i. An 'arms-length' model, where the entity becomes an Agency of PCI, retaining aspects of the historic connection, but with a degree of independent operational control, on terms to be agreed.
 - ii. An autonomous entity, freestanding and independent from PCI, incorporated in law appropriately, and with a Heads of Agreement in place defining the commitment of PCI to its early financial support in place.
 - iii. The sale of the operations and assets of CSW residential and other care facilities to a purchaser, to be run independently by them, or otherwise.
33. The Panel's consideration on these matters is included in the body of the report following, and includes these main points.
- (a) Any model which is put in place under the auspices of PCI must be financially secure and self-sustaining. The risk to the denomination of incurring significant and growing operational deficits is not acceptable.

- (b) Any model which is put in place under the auspices of PCI must be professionally sustainable, by which is meant that senior staff must have the necessary professional accreditations in place.
 - (c) Any model which is put in place under the auspices of PCI should promote and retain the reformed Christian ethos of the denomination.
 - (d) Should a model emerge which does not sit under the auspices of PCI, none of the above provisions can be assumed or guaranteed.
34. The Panel noted the following points in addition:
- (a) A decision of this importance ought to be taken by the General Assembly. It is recognised that a Special General Assembly may need to be called before the June 2027 meeting to facilitate this.
 - (b) A decision of this significance requires careful prior work with all stakeholders, especially bearing in mind the pastoral implications for staff, service users, residents and their families.
 - (c) The issues in principle would benefit from professional opinion on their viability, in addition to an assessment of the milestones on the transition pathway. The Panel agrees with the CSW intention to seek an early external review. The General Council will draft the terms of reference and then commission this review, in consultation with the CSW.
 - (d) The matters facing CSW are urgent. Steps may need to be taken sooner than the wider implementation of the PCI Structures Review.

DAVID BRUCE, Convener

STRUCTURES AND ENGAGEMENT SUB-GROUP

1 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

35. This report seeks to assist the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in a shared process of spiritual and organisational discernment concerning the shape and function of its central structures and their relationship with presbyteries and congregations. It draws together insights from consultations with Council Conveners, Secretaries, staff, and from all presbyteries.
36. The report presents the key findings and emerging themes from consultations held with all presbyteries concerning the work of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as presently guided by the General Assembly through its council structures. That stage of consultation followed earlier engagement with Council Conveners, Secretaries, and staff, and represents a further deepening of listening across the Church. The purpose of these consultations was to discern whether existing structures remain fit for purpose, how effectively central councils are perceived to serve the mission of Christ in the current context, which aspects of ministry might be better devolved to presbyteries or congregations, and which responsibilities must remain central in order to ensure coherence, accountability and care. The

feedback gained was characterised by engagement and missional concern. There was a notable openness – indeed an expectation – that the Church should review whether all current centrally guided activities continue to represent appropriate missional priorities. This was not expressed negatively, but rather as a desire for greater focus, clarity and faithfulness in changing circumstances.

37. In bringing an indication of potential directions of travel for structural change to the General Assembly, it is necessary to acknowledge candidly the wider context in which the Church now finds itself. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is presently operating under significant external scrutiny, including an ongoing police criminal investigation and an ongoing statutory inquiry by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. These developments place the Church in a position of heightened legal and regulatory vulnerability while also potentially undermining trust in the denomination. This underlines the seriousness with which governance, accountability and safeguarding arrangements must now be examined.
38. While the present proposals arise from missional reflection and extensive consultation across councils and presbyteries, it must be recognised that external processes may ultimately propose changes that are more far-reaching than those currently envisaged. The Church therefore faces not only an opportunity for thoughtful reform, but a moment of necessity in which strengthening governance, clarifying accountability and simplifying structures may prove essential to maintaining public trust and ensuring faithful stewardship of the Church's witness. Any structural reform undertaken now should thus be understood as both a proactive response to discerned missional needs and a prudent preparation for the possibility of more seismic change arising from statutory findings beyond the Church's direct control.
39. The intention is not to impose immediate structural change, nor to adjudicate between competing views, but to help the Church name what is being revealed through sustained listening. The report therefore seeks to identify emerging themes, tensions and possible trajectories that may guide future prayer, reflection and decision-making by the General Assembly.

What has been heard: Shared affirmations

40. Despite differences in emphasis, several affirmations are consistently shared across presbyteries and councils.
41. There is strong agreement that certain responsibilities must remain centrally held. These include safeguarding, human resources, finance, compliance and the governance of global mission partnerships (though there is greater ambivalence about the latter.) These functions are widely recognised as requiring consistency, expertise, legal accountability, and institutional memory that cannot easily be replicated at presbytery level.
42. There is also shared affirmation of the importance of ministerial training and formation, though with differing views on how this should be

delivered and structured. Both presbyteries and councils express a desire that ministers be formed pastorally, spiritually, and missionally, not only academically.

43. Finally, there is broad consensus that the Church's future vitality depends on renewed attention to discipleship, leadership development, children and youth, church planting and revitalisation, and the capacity of presbyteries to function as more than courts of oversight.

What has been heard: Points for improvement

44. Alongside these affirmations, several areas for potential improvement consistently surfaced.
45. Presbyteries frequently questioned whether all centrally guided activities remain missional priorities. In particular, some centrally driven initiatives were perceived as disconnected from congregational realities, insufficiently evaluated, or insufficiently responsive to articulated needs.
46. Concerns were also raised about duplication of focus between councils, especially in leadership development, elder training, and mission. Presbyteries experienced this as confusion about ownership and accountability; councils experienced it as erosion of remit and informal overlap driven by unmet needs.
47. A further concern emerged around capacity. Presbyteries expressed both a desire for greater ownership of mission and formation, and a realistic awareness of their current limitations in volunteer capacity, expertise, and scale. Councils, meanwhile, spoke of overstretched staff, rising expectations, and the absence of integrative mechanisms that once supported cross-council coordination.
48. Importantly, these tensions were rarely expressed in adversarial terms. Rather, they reflect a system under pressure, in which faithful people are compensating for structural limitations through goodwill and informal relationships.

2. PERCEIVED MISSIONAL PRIORITIES: WHAT MAY BE OUTDATED?

49. There was a broad willingness to ask difficult questions about whether all current areas of centrally guided work remain missional priorities. In particular, with regard to the work of the Council for Social Witness, there was openness to reimagining its role, especially in relation to care and nursing homes. At the same time, there was strong recognition that regulated and specialist ministries, including safeguarding, ex-offenders, addiction services, and disability services, may well require professional and central oversight. What was less widely affirmed was the long-term necessity of direct Church ownership and management of care homes, especially in light of increasing financial and regulatory pressures. This feedback suggests a desire to distinguish clearly between essential specialist ministries that require central provision and inherited institutional models that may no longer best serve the Church's missional focus.

50. The current model of delivering social care through the Council for Social Witness has been a significant and commendable expression of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's commitment to compassion and care for the vulnerable. However, the scale and complexity of modern social care provision now raise important questions about sustainability, governance, and risk.
51. Social care today operates within a highly regulated and professional environment requiring specialist expertise in compliance, clinical standards, finance, human resources, and risk management. This creates an increasing tension between ecclesiastical structures and the operational demands of delivering large-scale care services. While church councils are well suited to vision, theology, and pastoral oversight, they are not ideally configured for the technical and regulatory responsibilities now required.
52. In this context, there is a strong case for an independent entity to assume responsibility for the operational delivery of social witness services.
53. A key benefit of this approach is the reduction of professional risk. Direct operation of care services exposes the Church to risks arising from safeguarding issues, regulatory breaches, employment disputes, or failures in care standards. Even where well managed, such risks can have wider implications for the Church's public witness. An autonomous structure ensures that accountability rests with a body specifically equipped to manage these risks.
54. An independent entity could also enable governance by individuals with appropriate professional expertise, ensuring that oversight is informed, competent, and responsive to the demands of the sector. This would improve both decision-making and long-term sustainability.
55. Financial clarity would be enhanced through separation, allowing for more transparent reporting and more flexible funding arrangements. It would also reduce confusion between funds for mission and those required for service delivery.
56. Such a proposal reflects the principle that the Church should prioritise those roles that only it can fulfil, rather than retaining responsibilities that may be better delivered through specialised structures. The Church's unique contribution lies in its spiritual, pastoral, and prophetic role, particularly in advocating for the vulnerable.
57. The creation of an alternative social witness delivery model represents a prudent and forward-looking development. It reduces risk, strengthens governance, improves financial clarity, and allows the Church to focus more clearly on its core mission, while ensuring that vital care services continue to be delivered effectively in an increasingly demanding environment.

3. PERCEPTIONS OF UNNECESSARY, INEFFECTIVE OR DUPLICATED ACTIVITY

58. The strongest signal from both presbyteries and councils is the need for fewer, clearer centres of responsibility. This does not simply mean merging councils for efficiency's sake but reframing the work of mission and ministry. The common ground could be a model articulated by CCLW of co-designed delivery. In this model, the centre holds vision, theological coherence, standards, and evaluation, while presbyteries shape and deliver ministry in ways appropriate to their context. This aligns closely with presbyteries' interest in academies, shared workers, and mission hubs, while also honouring councils' concern for consistency and ethos.
59. CCLW's call for coordinated Council–Presbytery collaboration and CTM's vision of developing the initiative of presbytery academies sit naturally within this approach. What is missing at present is not goodwill, but formal structures that require collaboration rather than relying on personal relationships.

Duplication of ministry focus

60. Presbyteries articulated strong opinions regarding duplication of ministry focus at central level. In particular, overlap was noted between CCLW and the Council for Training in Ministry in the areas of leadership development and elder training, as well as between the Council for Mission in Ireland and the Council for Global Mission. Some suggested combining CMI with CCLW, though more commonly there was support for combining CMI and CGM into a single mission-focused body. The concern expressed was not simply duplication of activity, but confusion regarding ownership, priority, and accountability.

Council for Congregational Life and Witness (CCLW)

61. When reflecting on whether the central Church focuses on areas that may be less effective or necessary, the Council for Congregational Life and Witness was the body most frequently highlighted. Feedback suggested that some of its activities are perceived as somewhat removed from the day-to-day realities of congregational life. There was a recurring impression that certain initiatives may at times appear to sustain existing structures rather than respond to clearly identified needs within local contexts.
62. Questions around effectiveness were also raised, particularly regarding how impact is evaluated and communicated. Across consultations, a common question emerged: to what extent do, or can, centrally produced resources genuinely “scratch where people actually itch”?

Training and Education

I. Ministerial Training

63. Ministerial training and education were consistently identified as core priorities and there was strong appreciation for the Church's commitment in this area. However, there was also a repeated concern regarding emphasis and approach. Presbyteries expressed a strong desire for more practical and formational training, rather than (in the views of some) an over-reliance on academic education alone. The question was frequently posed as to whether the Church is training ministers for pastoral and missional leadership or primarily educating them academically. Many expressed scepticism about the necessity for PCI to continue operating what was described as a "mini-university" model and there was little emotional or missional attachment to the Union Theological College building or Assembly Buildings. Several presbyteries suggested that serious consideration be given to partnership with, for example, Belfast School of Theology or other similar bodies where services might be purchased. Training ministers well, with appropriate ongoing formation beyond ordination, was seen as essential, as was renewed emphasis on church planting and revitalisation

II. Member Training

64. Despite concerns about particular structures, there was remarkable consistency across presbyteries regarding the areas that should define PCI's future focus. Discipleship, understood as deep, intentional and lifelong, was repeatedly emphasised, alongside a strong focus on children, youth, and young adults.. Many presbyteries expressed a desire for the central Church to act more as a signpost to trusted and effective resources, rather than continuing to generate new initiatives.
65. The consultation also reveals a clear preference for training models that are relational, contextual and delivered close to where ministry is exercised. Presbytery-based and regional approaches to training are widely viewed as more effective than centrally driven programmes, as they allow learning to be shaped by local realities and foster peer support, accountability and shared ownership. In this model, the role of central structures is understood less as direct delivery and more as providing coherence, theological oversight, shared standards and access to trusted resources.
66. Particular concern was expressed regarding the training and formation of elders and leaders. There is a widespread perception that this area has lacked clarity and consistency, with some duplication of effort across councils and insufficient evaluation of effectiveness. Presbyteries are generally seen as the most appropriate locus for elder training, provided that such work is supported by clear denominational oversight and appropriately resourced frameworks.

Youth Ministry Resourcing

67. Resourcing ministry among children, youth, and young adults is not a peripheral concern but a defining missional imperative for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland at this time. Across presbyteries there is a strong and repeated conviction that the Church's future vitality is inseparably linked to the quality, depth and sustainability of its engagement with younger generations. This concern is expressed not merely in terms of numerical decline, but in theological and pastoral terms, as presbyteries reflect on the Church's calling to nurture faith, disciple believers from an early age, and form resilient Christian identity in an increasingly complex cultural environment.
68. A recurring theme is the recognition that youth ministry cannot be sustained through goodwill and volunteer effort alone. Presbyteries consistently highlighted the need for intentional resourcing, skilled leadership, and shared capacity. In particular, there was widespread support for models that enable youth workers, trainers, and ministry enablers to be shared across presbyteries or clusters of congregations. Such approaches are seen as both more realistic and more equitable, allowing smaller or rural congregations to participate in meaningful youth ministry without bearing unsustainable costs. This is viewed as an area where investment is not optional but essential, and where collaboration between central structures and presbyteries offers one of the clearest opportunities for renewed mission, shared learning and long-term sustainability.

4. DESIRED CHANGES IN DIRECTION GIVEN CURRENT CONTEXTS**General Considerations**

69. A number of structural and staffing observations were also raised. There was openness to reassessing the role of the Moderator. Interest was expressed in Presbytery Academies, or similarly conceived initiatives already emerging in some areas, as a locus for discipleship and leadership development. There was support for shared youth workers or trainers across presbyteries or clusters of congregations, and a desire for more focused and intentional post-ordination training for ministers.
70. In response to growing regulatory complexity, a suggestion was also made for the creation of a central Compliance and Risk Committee.
71. A significant insight arising from the consultations is that many presenting issues are not solely structural in nature. While there is openness to reducing the number of councils or reshaping remits, the deeper concern appears to be a lack of integration across the system.
72. Presbyteries experience the effects of fragmentation in the form of duplicated initiatives, unclear priorities, and inconsistent messaging. Councils experience the same fragmentation as siloed working, remit confusion, and competition for limited resources.

73. This suggests that the Church's discernment may need to move beyond questions of "which council does what" toward deeper reflection on how leadership, strategy, and delivery are held together across PCI as a whole.

Global Mission

74. The church has consistently affirmed the value of the ministry that has been enabled by our past and present missionaries. These individuals have served selflessly, given up much in the service of Christ and PCI should not underestimate the multifaceted nature of this work performed for the glory of God and the extension of his kingdom. However, some presbyteries questioned the current emphasis placed on PCI as a global mission sender, asking whether energy might be better redirected toward church planting and home mission, though this view was not universally held and may reflect a recognition of PCI's relatively small sending base and increased desire for partnership with external mission agencies.
75. Current realities suggest that the existing model of operating a denominational "sending" structure through the Council for Global Mission may not be sustainable in the longer term or strategically appropriate.
76. A significant factor in this assessment is the demographic profile of the current missionary body. Many serving personnel are approaching retirement, and the number of new candidates presenting for long-term overseas service has declined markedly. This creates an increasingly fragile model in which the infrastructure required to sustain a sending agency is disproportionate to the scale of activity it now supports. Over time, this risks becoming inefficient and difficult to justify in terms of stewardship.
77. At the same time, the wider mission landscape has changed considerably. A wide range of highly capable and theologically aligned mission agencies now exist, many of which already have strong relationships with PCI congregations. Indeed, a number of Presbyterian missionaries are currently serving effectively under the auspices of such organisations. These agencies often provide specialist expertise, established international partnerships, robust support structures, and the flexibility required in contemporary mission contexts.
78. In light of this, there is a case for stepping back from a denominational sending model and instead adopting a partnership-based approach. Rather than seeking to maintain a central structure for the recruitment, deployment, and support of missionaries, the Church could focus on encouraging, resourcing, and connecting congregations and individuals with trusted mission agencies. This would reflect a shift from direct provision to facilitation and collaboration.
79. Such a change could enable a more considered and strategic use of resources. It may create opportunities to review how staffing, administration, and infrastructure are best aligned to support the Church's mission, with the possibility of strengthening engagement at a local level. It would also ease the pressure on a model that currently relies on a consistent flow of candidates, allowing space to explore approaches that are more sustainable in the present context.

80. This does not represent a withdrawal from global mission. Rather, it is an adaptation in how that commitment is expressed. The Church continues to affirm the importance of international mission, to encourage individuals to explore vocation in this area, and to support those who are sent. However, the mechanisms for doing so would be more appropriately aligned with the current context, making use of existing agencies that are more appropriately equipped for this work.
81. This approach also reflects the principle that the Church should prioritise those roles that are uniquely its own. The calling to global mission remains integral, but the operational aspects of sending, supporting, and managing missionaries may now be more effectively carried out by specialist organisations. In this way, the Church can retain its missional vision while ensuring that its structures are proportionate, sustainable, and fit for purpose.

Public Affairs

82. Public Affairs was, at times, described as overly focused on press releases, with limited perceived missional impact. This work, while important, is primarily functional rather than policy-forming, focused on monitoring public issues, representing the Church in civic and governmental forums, and ensuring the Church's voice is heard in public debate. Given the relatively small staffing requirement and the project-based nature of much of its work, there is a strong case for integrating CPA either directly into the General Secretary's Department or having it report through the General Council. Such a model would streamline oversight, reduce administrative duplication, and maintain capacity to respond to legislative and social developments without the need to maintain a separate council. It would also allow the Church to retain agility in advocacy work while freeing leadership and resources for areas that require more substantive deliberation and strategic decision-making.

Union Theological College

83. Running the College within a sustainable budget presents a complex and pressing challenge. The financial burden is significantly increased by the realities of maintaining a listed ageing building, where ongoing operational costs are high even before the substantial investment that would be required for meaningful renovation is considered. Alongside this, the undergraduate programme faces particular difficulty due to consistently low student numbers, raising serious questions about its long-term viability. These issues alongside the complexities of regulatory compliance with an English collaborative partner led to the decision taken at General Council to suspend the undergraduate course. At the same time, there is a clear need to ensure that postgraduate provision is both academically robust and financially sustainable. All of this must be carefully balanced with the Church's ongoing responsibility to provide effective and accessible training for its ministers within the College, making the overall task one of considerable strategic and financial complexity. The burden this creates has been heavy upon the staff at Union.

84. A few had suggested a case for granting Union Theological College an agency-like status, whereby it operates with a greater degree of institutional autonomy, while the Church commissions and purchases the training required for its ministers.
85. One of the primary advantages of this approach would be increased flexibility. An agency model would enable the College to respond more effectively to developments in theological education, including partnerships with other institutions, diversification of programmes, and the exploration of new modes of delivery such as blended or distance learning. It would also allow the College to broaden its reach beyond a single denominational constituency, potentially strengthening its financial base and academic profile.

Denominational Magazines

86. The Church currently invests significant time, effort, and resources in producing denominational magazines. While these publications have historical and sentimental value, there is a growing concern that the level of investment required may outweigh the tangible benefit to the denomination as a whole. In an era where digital communication and targeted engagement are increasingly effective, maintaining traditional print media at current levels may no longer be the most efficient or impactful use of staff time and resources. A review of purpose, reach, and return on investment could help determine whether a scaled-back or digitally focused approach would better serve the Church's communication needs while freeing capacity for other strategic priorities.

5. WHAT MUST REMAIN CENTRAL

87. In contrast, there was strong consensus that certain responsibilities must remain centrally held, including human resources, finance, safeguarding and global mission partnerships and governance, while recognising the potential paradox that partnership with external mission agencies is widely accepted. These areas were consistently identified as requiring a level of consistency, expertise, and legal responsibility that necessitates central oversight.
88. Clear retention of these responsibilities at central level strengthens, rather than weakens, the case for selective and well-considered devolution elsewhere.

6. DEVOLUTION: WHAT COULD MOVE CLOSER TO PRESBYTERIES?

89. There was general agreement that some devolution of ministry closer to presbyteries and congregations is desirable, particularly in areas such as elder training, elements of discipleship and leadership development, and contextual mission initiatives. At the same time, presbyteries were realistic about the challenges this presents, including the potential for increased financial costs, exposure of existing capacity weaknesses and the risk of uneven provision across the Church.

90. The consultations suggest that there is meaningful scope within existing Presbyterian Church in Ireland structures to devolve certain areas of ministry practice and delivery from central oversight to presbyteries, without compromising theological coherence, legal responsibility, or safeguarding standards. The consistent message from presbyteries was not a desire for fragmentation or autonomy for its own sake, but for greater clarity about where proximity, context, and relationships add value and where consistency and specialist expertise require central provision.
91. A recurring caution voiced by presbyteries was that devolution, without resourcing, risks becoming abdication. Presbyteries were realistic about their current capacity and clear that any transfer of responsibility must be accompanied by appropriate investment, clarity of remit, and ongoing support. Where these conditions are met, presbyteries expressed a genuine desire to grow into a more strategic role as hubs of mission, formation, and mutual support, rather than functioning solely as ecclesiastical courts.
92. A helpful perspective emerging from the consultations is that devolution should focus on the delivery of ministry rather than on the setting of standards. In other words, presbyteries can be entrusted with contextual practice and implementation, while the General Assembly, through its councils, retains responsibility for policy, safeguarding, accreditation, and accountability. Where this distinction is observed, devolution is both realistic and prudent.

Elder training and leadership development

93. One area where devolution appears particularly appropriate is in the delivery of elder training and leadership development. Presbyteries are well placed to provide training that reflects local contexts, congregational realities, and relational dynamics. Many already do so informally. Central bodies would continue to define core competencies, theological expectations, and safeguarding requirements, but would increasingly act as standard-setters and curators of trusted resources rather than primary providers. This shift would reduce duplication and enable training to “scratch where people actually itch”.

Discipleship and spiritual formation

94. Similarly, there is scope for presbyteries to assume greater responsibility for discipleship and spiritual formation initiatives. Consultations repeatedly emphasised the need for deep, intentional, and lifelong discipleship that is contextually rooted. Presbyteries can facilitate and support such work more effectively than centrally designed programmes, provided that theological coherence and quality assurance remain in place. The central Church’s role would therefore become one of signposting, encouragement, and oversight rather than programme generation.

Youth and children's ministry

95. Youth and children's ministry support also emerged as an area suitable for greater presbytery involvement, particularly through shared or regional staffing models. Several presbyteries are already exploring shared youth workers or trainers across clusters of congregations. Formalising such arrangements at presbytery or regional level would strengthen sustainability and effectiveness, while central structures would continue to hold responsibility for safeguarding frameworks, employment policies, and compliance.

Post-ordination training

96. Post-ordination training and ongoing ministerial development were likewise identified as areas where presbytery-led approaches could be both effective and complementary to central provision. Peer learning groups, mentoring relationships, and contextual continuing education can be facilitated locally, fostering trust and relevance. Central oversight would remain essential in setting expectations for ongoing formation, ensuring professional standards, and providing resourcing support.

Evangelism and church planting

97. In relation to mission, there was strong support for devolving greater responsibility for contextual mission initiatives to presbyteries. Local mission experiments, urban or rural initiatives, and community engagement strategies are inherently context-specific and benefit from presbytery-level discernment and leadership. Central bodies would continue to provide strategic direction, funding frameworks, and evaluation mechanisms, ensuring that learning is shared and that mission priorities remain aligned across the denomination.
98. Presbyteries could also play a more intentional role in early-stage congregational support, particularly during times of transition or emerging difficulty. Relational, peer-based encouragement and practical guidance can often be offered more swiftly and sensitively at presbytery level, with central intervention reserved for situations requiring specialist, legal, or formal processes.
99. Taken together, the consultations suggest that the key question is not simply what can be devolved, but what the central Church should cease delivering directly while continuing to hold responsibility for standards, safety, and coherence. Framed in this way, devolution becomes an expression of faithful stewardship, enabling ministry to be exercised closer to congregations while preserving unity, accountability, and shared purpose across the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Trustee Governance Issues

100. In light of increasing regulatory complexity across both jurisdictions, there is a strong case for strengthening the importance and practice of charity trustee training at presbytery level. While constitutional standards and core compliance requirements should remain centrally defined, the day-to-day responsibilities of congregational trustees are exercised locally and are best reinforced through contextual, relational learning. Enabling presbyteries to host regular trustee training sessions – drawing on centrally prepared materials and guidance – would promote consistency while improving accessibility and engagement. Such an approach recognises that effective governance is not merely a legal necessity but a stewardship responsibility, requiring elders and committee members to understand their duties in areas such as safeguarding, financial oversight, risk management, and reporting obligations. Presbytery-level training would also allow emerging issues to be addressed promptly, encourage peer learning among neighbouring congregations, and embed a culture of accountability closer to where decisions are made. In this way, the centre retains standards and oversight, while presbyteries play a vital role in cultivating competent, confident, and compliant trustees across the Church.

Judicial Process

101. Consideration might also be given to judicial process at presbytery level, consistent with Presbyterian polity and the principle of subsidiarity. While matters of doctrine, appeals, and cases with wider denominational implications must remain within the competence of the General Assembly, many disciplinary and dispute-resolution matters arise locally and could be more effectively addressed within presbytery, provided appropriate safeguards and training are in place. Strengthening presbyteries in this regard would require clearer procedural guidance, access to legal and constitutional advice from the centre, and regular training for those called to serve on judicial commissions. Such an approach would not diminish the authority of the Assembly but would reaffirm the historic role of presbytery as a court of the Church, capable of exercising pastoral judgment and discipline in a timely and contextually informed manner. Properly resourced and supported, a modest expansion of presbytery-level judicial competence could enhance responsiveness, reduce procedural delay, and deepen ownership of ecclesial accountability.

7. PRESBYTERY CAPACITY: A REALISTIC APPRAISAL

102. Most presbyteries offered a realistic appraisal of their own capacity, with many acknowledging that they do not currently believe they are fulfilling their role as effectively as they might, nor do they feel immediately ready to assume additional responsibilities. Constraints identified included issues of size, whether too small to be effective or so large as to risk loss of fellowship, limited volunteer capacity, and the increasing complexity of challenges facing congregations.

103. Despite these challenges, presbyteries expressed a clear desire to be enabled to play a more strategic role in the mission of Christ's Kingdom. Suggestions included thoughtful resizing or clustering of presbyteries, shared youth workers and trainers, greater support for urban and home mission, clearer missional direction rather than a primary focus on oversight, and intentional investment in presbyteries as mission hubs rather than merely ecclesiastical courts.

8. Alternative Structural Suggestions

104. While presbyteries were cautious about prescribing detailed alternative structures, several ideas recurred consistently. These included exploration of structures akin to synods, or at least more formal cooperation between neighbouring presbyteries, openness to reducing the number of councils and simplifying reporting lines, and a desire for structures that enable faster decision-making, clearer accountability, and greater contextual responsiveness.
105. The General Assembly meeting in 2024 under the Reconfiguration of Ministry report indicated that change to the number of presbyteries should not be considered again until 2032; though there was space for individual presbyteries should they experience difficulties to request a discussion with the Linage Commission. However, due to the number of questions asked in this regard it is believed now is an appropriate time to return to the matter.
106. In considering any future adjustments to governance structures, it is essential to recognise the expectations placed upon the General Assembly by the relevant charity regulators in both jurisdictions. Charity law increasingly emphasises that those who serve as trustees must demonstrate active oversight, collective responsibility, and informed decision-making in relation to finance, risk, safeguarding, and regulatory compliance. The traditional presbyterian emphasis on broad representation – ensuring that ministers and elders from across the denomination participate in Assembly deliberations – must be held alongside the legal requirement that trustees act with due diligence, competence, and clarity regarding their statutory duties. Representation alone may be considered insufficient; charity governance frameworks expect defined accountability, clear delegation structures, and documented assurance mechanisms. This may require a sharper distinction between the Assembly as a representative gathering and the General Council as its charity trustee board or a reshaping of this model. Such clarity does not undermine presbyterian polity, but rather safeguards it, ensuring that decision-making remains both theologically grounded and legally robust in an increasingly regulated environment. The Charity Commission (NI) investigation will inevitably impact decisions in this regard.
107. There is openness to experimenting with new forms of Council–Presbytery partnership, particularly in leadership development, discipleship, and mission, allowing presbyteries to grow in strategic capacity while remaining connected to denominational coherence.

- 108. There is also a growing recognition that integrative leadership and systems – forums for coordination, shared planning rhythms, and clearer lines of accountability – may be as important as structural change itself.
- 109. Finally, there is an implicit invitation to consider whether some inherited institutional models continue to serve the Church’s calling, or whether alternative partnerships and configurations might better steward resources for mission.
- 110. The following three options are suggested without any attempt at giving a detailed appraisal but simply hinting at benefits or drawbacks to each. Issues like consistency and the likelihood of positive outcomes should be considered for the whole denomination especially in the presbyteries that are currently mostly populated by small and geographically dispersed congregations. For example, grouping three presbyteries like Route, Ballymena and Carrickfergus may have possibility for a variety of employed staff whereas the available resources for a group comprising Derry and Donegal, Monaghan and Omagh would have far less available resources. An ad hoc panel would be needed to carry out the spade work on such reconfiguration should the assembly decide, in principle, to adopt one of the following options.



Presbytery	Congregations	Contributing Families
Ards	31	5,082
Armagh	29	3,137
Ballymena	31	5,437
Belfast North	20	2,888
Belfast East	23	3,913
Belfast South	15	1,755
Carrickfergus	19	3,109
Coleraine and Limavady	36	4,089
Derry and Donegal	48	4,101
Down	20	3,257
Dromore	22	3,610
Dublin and Munster	26	1,117
Iveagh	28	2,871
Monaghan	34	1,051
Newry	24	2,470
Omagh	40	2,905
Route	21	2,640
Templepatrick	20	2,869
Tyrone	33	3,068

Option 1 (19 Presbyteries)

111. One possible way forward would be to retain the current configuration of nineteen presbyteries while making a deliberate and sustained investment in capacity, systems, and shared staffing. Under this approach, presbytery boundaries would remain unchanged, but greater central support would be directed toward enabling presbyteries to function more strategically in mission and formation. This could include the provision of shared youth workers, trainers, and mission enablers, alongside clearer articulation of council remits in order to reduce duplication and confusion. Stronger and more intentional models of collaboration between the centre and presbyteries would be essential. The principal strength of this option is that it is the least structurally disruptive and preserves established relational identities and local knowledge. It would also be relatively straightforward to implement in the short term. However, there is a risk that existing capacity constraints, particularly within smaller presbyteries, may persist despite increased investment, and that the underlying complexity of

current arrangements could remain without achieving greater missional clarity. The key discernment question arising from this option is whether current presbyteries can realistically be enabled to function as effective mission hubs without structural change.

Option 2 (12–14 Presbyteries)

112. A second option would involve a moderate reduction in the number of presbyteries through strategic clustering of neighbouring presbyteries, resulting in approximately twelve to fourteen presbyteries across the Church. This approach would seek to create larger units with greater critical mass, while retaining a recognisable regional identity. Such clustered presbyteries could offer improved capacity for governance, training, and mission, supported by shared staff and pooled resources. This model may also provide a more sustainable platform for initiatives such as Presbytery Academies, allowing them to operate at scale. The strengths of this option lie in its potential to enhance capacity and sustainability, deploy resources more effectively, and achieve a better balance between missional focus and governance demands. At the same time, it would involve transitional complexity and would require careful pastoral leadership to avoid the loss of local identity or relational depth. The discernment question here is whether a modest reduction in presbyteries offers the most appropriate balance between relational connection and strategic capacity.

Option 3 (6–8 Presbyteries)

113. A third option would be to move more decisively toward a regionalised model, with a smaller number of larger presbyteries, or synod-like bodies, perhaps numbering between six and eight. In this scenario, each regional presbytery would be resourced as a significant hub for mission and governance, with professionalised staffing and more delegation of authority from the centre. Presbyteries would be understood primarily as mission-shaping bodies rather than courts alone, operating within a framework of strong central coordination. The potential advantages of this approach include; significantly increased capacity and resilience, clearer lines of accountability and a strong platform for church planting, training, and strategic mission. However, it would represent a substantial cultural shift, with risks including loss of relational intimacy and increased distance from congregations. The key discernment question is whether the Church is prepared for a more regionalised and strategic model of presbyterian life.

9. FINANCIAL ASPECTS

114. Views expressed in relation to the current system of financial assessments were, on the whole, cautiously positive. There is an appreciation that the existing model has provided stability and predictability, and that it has enabled the Church to sustain ministry, governance, and mission across the denomination. At the same time, respondents recognised that the wider conversation regarding funding structures cannot remain static. Any future model will need to be shaped by three interlocking principles: long-

term sustainability, transparency in allocation and use of funds and clear alignment with the Church's missional priorities. Financial arrangements must not simply preserve inherited structures but must demonstrably serve the strategic direction of the Church.

115. If aspects of ministry and administration were to be devolved more intentionally to presbyteries, a careful financial analysis would be essential. In particular, it would be necessary to establish what proportion of centrally assessed funds might appropriately be retained at local or regional level to resource devolved responsibilities. Such an analysis would need to consider both direct and indirect costs, including staffing, administrative support, training, and compliance obligations. Without this level of clarity, decisions about devolution risk being either overly cautious or unrealistically optimistic.
116. There is some emerging confidence that presbyteries of significantly increased size – potentially three times their current scale – could realistically sustain a full-time Clerk. Indeed, even presbyteries at approximately double their current size may be viable with a full-time Clerk, particularly if the Clerk were to assume additional responsibilities, such as oversight of vacant congregations, with appropriate remuneration directed toward the Clerk's salary. This approach would recognise the growing administrative and pastoral complexity of presbytery life, while also providing greater continuity, professionalisation, and responsiveness in governance matters. One potential caveat is that this could further reduce the number of active ministers in congregations should current ministers take up these posts.
117. A realistic and transparent assessment of the financial implications of enhanced presbytery staffing will be essential. Presbyteries must be given a clear indication of the likely cost of appointing a full-time Clerk if responsibilities currently held centrally are to be devolved effectively. On present estimates, a full-time Clerk would require a salary in the region of £48,000, equating to an overall employment cost of approximately £64,000 per annum once pension contributions and National Insurance are included.
118. One potential model for affordability would involve the combining of two or more presbyteries, accompanied by a corresponding adjustment to the presbytery assessment. By way of illustration, this could result in a congregation of say 200-250 families and an assessable income of £150-200K which currently might contribute approximately £1,000 annually towards Presbytery assessments having to raise this to £2,000, with contributions adjusted proportionately for larger or smaller congregations (though noting that presbyteries make their assessments based on their own method of calculation). Alternative arrangements might include retaining a part-time Clerk supported by one or more part-time Deputy Clerks, potentially reducing overall costs by approximately half; however, such models would require careful evaluation against workload and governance expectations.
119. It should be noted that the anticipated role of the Clerk under any revised structure will involve significantly increased governance, compliance, and

regulatory responsibilities. This represents a substantial expansion beyond the traditional administrative function and must be recognised in both workload expectations and remuneration. Accordingly, structural change should not be assumed to result in reduced assessments in the short term.

120. In addition, the appointment of a local presbytery worker – whether focused on youth, mission, or congregational development – would likely entail employment costs in the region of £30,000–£40,000 per annum, inclusive of associated employment costs. These figures further underline the need for realistic financial modelling as part of any transition toward a more presbytery-led structure.
121. However, any such proposal must take seriously the likely disparity between future restructured presbyteries. Differences in geography, demographic strength, number of congregations, and financial capacity will remain significant. Presbyteries serving rural, geographically dispersed areas with fewer contributing families may face particular constraints in affording full-time staffing. Equally, the human resource capacity within presbyteries – including the availability of experienced elders and ministers willing to undertake additional responsibilities – will vary considerably. A uniform financial expectation across all presbyteries may therefore prove neither equitable nor sustainable. Provision for flexibility, transitional support, or differential assessment may be required if greater responsibility is to be devolved.
122. Broader questions concerning staffing models, remuneration structures, and shared services at presbytery level would require more detailed and rigorous examination than has yet been undertaken. While indicative scenarios can be suggested, responsible decision-making would depend upon a comprehensive financial breakdown, including current central staffing levels, property and office space requirements, pension liabilities, and projected savings or additional costs associated with any restructuring. Such work would need to be commissioned at an appropriate stage in the process to ensure that Assembly decisions are informed by accurate and transparent data.
123. In particular, the cost implications of devolving work to presbyteries must be assessed in relation to the potential impact on central staffing and facilities. If responsibilities are genuinely transferred, corresponding adjustments in central personnel and accommodation should be anticipated. Conversely, if devolution merely adds layers of responsibility without reducing central structures, overall costs may increase rather than decrease. Clarity at this point is essential. Financial modelling, including best-case and cautious-case projections, would provide the necessary confidence for the Assembly to discern the most prudent and missionally responsible path forward.

The Church as a spiritual body, ordered for mission

124. At the heart of this discernment lies a theological conviction: the Church is not first an institution that happens to have a mission, but a body called into being by God for participation in God's mission. Structures exist to serve that calling, not to define it. As such, organisational arrangements are

always provisional and instrumental, to be tested continually against the Church's faithfulness to Christ.

125. Within the Reformed tradition, good order is valued not as an end in itself, but as a means by which the Church may live out its calling decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). When structures cease to serve the life and witness of the Church, or when they obscure rather than enable participation in God's mission, the Church is obliged to review them in humility and prayer.
126. This discernment is therefore not about efficiency alone, but about faithfulness: asking how PCI's common life can best be ordered so that congregations and presbyteries are supported in proclaiming the gospel, forming disciples and bearing witness to Christ in contemporary Ireland and beyond.

Subsidiarity: Authority at the right level

127. A helpful theological lens for this discernment is the principle of subsidiarity: that responsibility should be exercised at the most local level capable of carrying it faithfully, while recognising that some responsibilities necessarily belong to the wider body.
128. Applied to PCI, this principle affirms that safeguarding, public affairs, compliance, global mission partnerships, and financial governance properly remain central, because they require consistency, expertise, and shared accountability. At the same time, it supports the devolution of certain aspects of formation, leadership development, and contextual mission to presbyteries, where proximity to context enhances discernment and effectiveness.
129. Subsidiarity resists both over-centralisation and uncoordinated devolution. It calls instead for clarity about roles, trust between levels of the Church, and intentional resourcing so that neither presbyteries nor Assembly Buildings is asked to carry responsibilities without adequate support

Ministry as gifted, ordered, and collaborative

130. The New Testament vision of ministry emphasises diversity of gifts within one body (Ephesians 4:11–13). No single council, committee, or office embodies the whole of the Church's calling. Structures that unintentionally compete, duplicate, or blur responsibility risk undermining this theological vision by obscuring the distinct gifts entrusted to different parts of the Church.
131. The concerns raised regarding duplication of ministry focus are therefore not merely managerial issues, but theological ones. When remits are unclear, or when councils operate in silos, the Church's witness becomes fragmented, and the formation of God's people is weakened.
132. A more integrated approach to ministry, whether through clearer remits, fewer councils, or improved coordination, reflects a theological commitment to unity in diversity – different ministries working together for the building up of the whole body.

Mission in a changing context: Faithfulness and adaptability

133. The Reformed tradition has long held that the Church is *reformed and always being reformed according to the Word of God*. This does not imply change for its own sake, but a posture of continual openness to God's renewing work.
134. The previously held consultations indicate that PCI is being invited into such a moment. Questions about inherited institutions, educational models, global and local mission priorities, and modes of public witness are signs of faithful engagement with changing realities.
135. Theologically, the Church is called to discern not only what it has received, but what God is calling it to release, reshape, or hold differently for the sake of the gospel. This discernment requires courage, patience and trust that the Spirit continues to guide the Church into truth.
136. The Church's structures must be shaped not primarily by inherited patterns but by present mission, governance responsibilities, and emerging realities. Structures that once served the Church well may no longer reflect current needs, regulatory expectations, or ministry opportunities, and therefore should not be assumed to be permanent. A healthy denomination recognises that organisational forms are provisional instruments in service of the gospel rather than ends in themselves.
137. For this reason, it would be wise to embed within our governance a commitment to periodic structural review – perhaps every five to seven years – enabling the Church to assess effectiveness, stewardship of resources, compliance demands and missional priorities in light of contemporary circumstances.
138. Such an approach also recognises that staffing requirements must remain responsive rather than fixed, with roles, numbers, and skill sets periodically reassessed to ensure that personnel resources align with current priorities, governance obligations, and missional needs rather than perpetuating staffing patterns shaped by earlier structural assumptions.
139. A concept of regular review would encourage adaptability, prevent institutional drift, and ensure that structures continue to support clear vision, sustainable ministry, and faithful witness in each generation rather than simply preserving arrangements shaped by past contexts.
140. Noting the areas we have already articulated as to what could possibly be devolved to Presbyteries, should there be more local staffing and resourcing as part of larger units or cross current presbytery bounds, possible structures might look like this....

OPTIONS

Option A: Retain the current structure

141. Seven Councils:

- General
- Public Affairs
- Congregational Life and Witness
- Social Witness
- Mission in Ireland
- Global Mission
- Training in Ministry

142. In addition there are four Commissions with defined powers which act on behalf of the General Assembly, but restricted to their remit.

- The Linkage Commission
- The Judicial Commission
- The Special Commission
- The Commission on Applications

Option B: Retain commissions as before but reduce Councils to three

- Judicial Commission
- Special Commission
- Commission on Applications
- Linkage Commission
- General Council (incorporates Public Affairs)
- Ministry and Discipleship Council

This council bears responsibility for equipping leaders for service and nurturing the spiritual growth of congregations, recognising that the formation of ministers and the discipleship of God's people are deeply interconnected, each strengthening and sustaining the other in the life and mission of the Church.

- Mission Council

This council takes the lead in all mission, church planting, church development with a focus on the presbytery–council dialogue articulated in CCLW response to the panel's initial consultation. This would have local presbytery leads in youth development and adult discipleship where affordable. Local church planting would ideally have resources to initiate and promote local projects. (Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group had suggested at one point aiming for £50K per 19 presbyteries with use determined locally – this was based on the anticipated Assembly Buildings repairs assessment being redistributed so a feeling of nothing more being paid out!)

Further reflection on charity governance

143. As a collective of charities, the Church operates within a framework in which designated individuals serve as Charity Trustees at multiple levels. The members of the General Council fulfil this role for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as a whole, with a total of 73 trustees. At a regional level, each of the 19 Presbyteries is itself a registered charity, and all presbytery members act as its Charity Trustees (noting Presbyteries in ROI have not as yet been called forward by the Charity Regulatory Authority to complete the registration process). Similarly, at the local level, each congregation is also a charity, with members of the Kirk Session serving as its Charity Trustees. In light of this structure, consideration is being given to whether changes may be necessary to any or all of these current arrangements.
144. It is also recognised that, following the safeguarding crisis that emerged during 2025, an external inquiry into the governance of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has been initiated, along with subsequent comment from the Charities Commission for Northern Ireland. While the outcomes of this inquiry cannot yet be fully anticipated, a number of observations and tentative draft models outlining possible alternative approaches are presented for reflection, comment, and consideration.
145. It should be noted that this work began prior to the safeguarding crisis and stands in continuity with earlier initiatives, including the General Assembly report on the Reconfiguration of Ministry and the ongoing work of the Structures and Resources Review Panel. As such, it both addresses longstanding concerns and responds to present circumstances. These concerns include the reality that the Church currently maintains more buildings and charges than may be sustainable; that there has been a medium-term shortage of candidates for ordained ministry; and that the costs associated with the central administration of the Church, particularly in Assembly Buildings, are high and require careful control.

MODEL A

146. Represents the retention of the current structure. Under this approach, the General Assembly would continue to meet annually in June, with the 19 Presbyteries reporting formally to it. The General Council, comprising 73 members who serve as Charity Trustees, would continue to report to the General Assembly and retain responsibility for ensuring regulatory compliance, including financial oversight and adherence to charitable requirements under external supervision.

MODEL B

147. Follows the same overall structure as Model A but proposes a reduction in the number of Presbyteries. Under this model, the number of Presbyteries would be reduced to a smaller figure. This change would, in turn, decrease the size of the General Council and assuming the General Council remained the body who make up the Charity Trustees of PCI, this would reduce the

total number of individuals serving as Charity Trustees as representational of the presbyteries which would in turn permit other trustees to be appointed with specific gifts and strengths.

148. It is recognised that there are several areas of potential overlap between the bodies appointed by the General Assembly whose remit touches upon aspects of charity trusteeship and the Assembly needs to ensure uniformity of outlook on this matter. There is an urgent need to move towards a renewed governance model for the Charity Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, one that reflects a broader range of gifts, skills, and experience rather than relying primarily on representational structures as has been the case to date. While representation has served the Church in ensuring wide connection and accountability, the increasing complexity of regulatory, financial, and organisational responsibilities calls for a model that intentionally draws on expertise in areas such as governance, finance, safeguarding, and strategic leadership. Such an approach would enable the Church to strengthen its stewardship, enhance decision-making, and ensure that those entrusted with oversight are equipped not only to represent, but to lead wisely and effectively in a demanding and evolving context.
149. A variation of this model could result in a much smaller Charity Trustee body, shaped around recognised competencies and gifts. This could offer the advantages of greater agility, clearer accountability, and more informed decision-making, particularly in areas requiring specialist knowledge such as finance, governance, and safeguarding. At the same time, this approach need not diminish the representative nature of the Church, as members could still be drawn from across the denomination through a structured process of regional nomination, ensuring both breadth of voice and depth of expertise in those entrusted with oversight.

MODEL C

150. Builds on the approach outlined in Model B, but introduces a revised pattern for the meeting of the General Assembly and wider consultation across the Church. Under this model, the General Assembly would meet biennially, gathering once every two years rather than annually.
151. In the intervening years, a series of regional gatherings – envisaged as four Regional Conferences made up of grouped Presbyteries – would take place. These conferences would consider matters referred to them by the General Assembly, offering feedback and reports to inform future decision-making. Importantly, these Regional Conferences would not function as decision-making bodies, nor would they hold the status of courts of the Church. Rather, they would serve as consultative forums.
152. The reflections gathered and summarised from these conferences would then be brought to the General Assembly for consideration, particularly in relation to significant issues such as Green Papers. This approach is intended to encourage broader participation across the Church, enabling a greater number of elders to engage in prayerful reflection and to contribute meaningfully to the shaping of policy ahead of formal deliberation at the General Assembly.

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 VISION

The vision of Guysmere Trust has been to develop the world-class site at Guysmere and provide a world-class residential and conference centre.

- (a) The Centre, situated in an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB), will model environmental excellence in design and management, to complement its environment.
- (b) The Centre will promote spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing and the conservation of our God-given planet home. This will be achieved through Christian programmes, tailored to meet the needs of a wide variety of local and international faith and non-faith groups.
- (c) The Centre will offer excellent facilities for people of all abilities and for carers.
- (d) The Centre will be a shared space available to the local community and will foster strong links with the Church, locally and globally.
- (e) The centre will be managed in such a way as to ensure financial sustainability.

With this vision in mind we developed a sustainable business plan for a centre designed to attract diverse interest groups, which would also be flexible in its design so that it would be able to adjust to different uses in the future . . . but all underpinned by our vision and values.

3. FUNDRAISING

The cost of this project is very difficult to estimate with any accuracy as we do not yet have plans. However, a realistic assessment is likely to be as follows:

Phase	Focus of that phase	Funding Required
One	Technical project development to carry out site investigations, develop and appraise design options, secure planning permission and procure a contractor	£600k
Two	Capital project delivery costs	£7–10 million

The Trust commenced with the process of fundraising for the phase one costs in September 2024. To date £136,320.32 has been raised. That amounts to 23% of the total required.

4. IDENTIFICATION AND APPRAISAL OF OPTIONS

The context for the identification and appraisal of options has been formed by the following:

- (a) The Trust's experience, to date, in attempting to generate the £600k required to deliver phase one of the project (i.e. technical assistance funding)
- (b) The wider business and financial uncertainty. The global geo-political situation has raised concerns across the business community and this reduces the number of high-net worth individuals who might consider a philanthropic donation or who would still be in a position to make a significant donation.
- (c) The recent disclosures in relation to historical safeguarding in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has made it significantly more difficult for the trustees (with a clear connection to PCI) to approach or to carry out communication, awareness building and generation of funds for a centre which would include activities for children and young people.

On that basis, the Trustees have decided to examine the potential strategic options available to them to consider what they should do in line with their vision for and connection to the Guysmere site.

The Trustees will be meeting to carry out this review of strategic options in April and will report on their decision to the 2026 General Assembly.

Should the Trustees opt to bring the project to a conclusion it would be helpful if the General Council had provisionally expressed their acceptance of the reasons for this decision.

JIM McCAUGHAN, Convener

COMPROMISE AGREEMENTS TASK GROUP

1. INTRODUCTION

The Special General Assembly (SGA25) in December 2025 received a short report from the General Assembly Advisory Committee noting,

“It is public knowledge that, in keeping with most other employers, PCI has used a small number of Compromise Agreements, which may include elements of non-disclosure, in employment matters. These are agreements that are entered into voluntarily by both parties, in conjunction with legal advice. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, as an employer, has only entered into agreements with the advice of its insurers and legal team.”

The SGA25, by resolution, established a ‘Compromise Agreements Task Group (CATG)’ to “consider all aspects of the use of compromise agreements, and ... [report] to the General Assembly of June 2026”

The members of the Task Group are:

- Rev Richard Murray (Moderator)
- Mr Ken Swarbrick (Director of Operations)
- Rev David Allen (Acting Clerk)
- Rev David Bruce (GC Convenor)
- Mr Colin Campbell
- Mr Jeremy Eves
- Mr Stephen Johnston (Chair of PCI Trustees)
- Mrs Sarah Leung (Head of HR)
- Mr Philip McBride
- Rev Keith McIlroy
- Rev Adrian McLernon

Process

The Task Group met to consider discussion papers and obtained feedback from a number of internal and external stakeholders.

Discussion papers were circulated in advance of each meeting and considered in depth by members. A draft ‘Employee Compromise Agreements Policy’ was agreed by the Task Group and then by General Council, for consideration by Assembly.

2. BACKGROUND

What is a Compromise Agreement?

A Compromise Agreement (CA) is a legally binding contract between an employer and an employee to end an employment relationship on mutually agreed terms. At its most basic, it is an attempt to guarantee a “clean break” at the end of an employment relationship.

The employee will generally agree to waive their right to bring any future legal claims against the employer for any workplace disputes (like unfair dismissal or discrimination).

In return for the employee dropping potential legal claims, the employer typically makes an enhanced severance payment and may provide other benefits, such as a guaranteed job reference.

A key element of these CAs is often a ‘Non-Disclosure Agreement’ (NDA), which sets rules on what the parties can and cannot say when the employee has left. It is this element of the agreements that has come under criticism recently in relation to PCI.

The purpose of these clauses is normally to keep private:

- any settlement payment amounts
- the terms of the agreement
- the circumstances leading up to the employee leaving

CAs are voluntary and at no stage can an employee or former employee be compelled to enter into a CA, though critics would argue that they are not agreements made between parties with equal bargaining power.

Use of CAs by PCI

These agreements are not routinely used by PCI. In the last 5 years (2021–2025):

- over 650 people have left PCI’s employment
- only 9 CAs have been put in place in respect of those leavers

Generally, PCI will only use CAs on the basis of legal and insurance advice, but they can be used:

- approaching the end of a disciplinary or grievance process when it appears that the employment relationship has irretrievably broken down
- if / when a relevant legal claim is lodged with the Industrial Tribunal

Prior to an employee leaving

If an employee is in dispute with PCI, and it is clear the degree of dispute means that the ‘trust’ relationship between employee and employer has broken down irretrievably, the parties can agree the employee will leave voluntarily. In this scenario, while no disciplinary determination may have been reached by PCI, the member of staff will be leaving in disputed circumstances.

In such circumstances, it is easy to understand that a disgruntled employee may wish to make derogatory comments about the organisation or other staff. PCI as an organisation has no realistic way to refute or defend such comments, but more importantly, innocent individuals who may have been involved in the ‘dispute’ also have no way to defend their reputation outside the courts. Accordingly, a CA may be sought as part of the leaving process to protect PCI and other employed individuals from potential false and / or malicious comments.

After an employee’s dismissal

If an employee has been through PCI’s disciplinary processes and has been dismissed, there are times when this can lead to tribunal claims for unfair dismissal or similar allegations. In all such situations, PCI must choose whether to defend or settle the claims, and this decision will involve legal and insurance advice.

It is quite possible that for a complex case, the legal assessment may be that we have a strong case, but the insurance recommendation is to settle. That can be because court proceedings are protracted, costly and there are always at least two sides to every story, meaning it may be more cost effective to settle than to pay the legal charges associated with defending the claim.

If a settlement is proposed, it is important to ensure that the settlement legally prevents future claims by the dismissed employee, but also protects PCI and other employed individuals from potential false and / or malicious comments.

3. CONSIDERATION OF ISSUES**Current legal position**

The current legal position is that CAs are a valid legal option that can be engaged to bring about a contractual settlement either for an employment termination or settlement of a tribunal claim. They are the only way, outside of a tribunal hearing, to bring finality to the issue for all parties.

The usefulness of a CA itself is generally not disputed. Rather it is the inclusion of non-disclosure clauses which generates difficulty for many people.

Existing legal protections

The General Assembly Solicitor has advised that there are significant legal protections already in place with regard to what the non-disclosure elements of a CA can require.

Legislation is in place to ensure that certain disclosures are always permitted. If the protected categories are included in an NDA, they are null and void. An individual who makes a disclosure under a protected category cannot be held in breach of an NDA.

As it is a requirement for each party to obtain legal advice prior to signing a CA, there is no realistic option to constrain parties beyond the extent of the law.

Existing use

Even though the numbers demonstrate PCI's very limited use of CAs, they are widely used across the employment and settlements are encouraged by the Tribunal Office to reduce the number of cases that need a hearing. They are often the most efficient and cost-effective method of closing out a case and so are also encouraged by insurers.

Settlements can of course be reached that do not include a 'non-disclosure' element.

Imbalance of power

As noted above, while CAs are officially agreements, it is strongly argued by critics that they are not agreements made from a position of equal bargaining power. However, supporters of NDAs also argue that a sufficiently damaging story can provide a departing employee with significant bargaining power.

Duty of care

Alongside the 'Imbalance of Power' argument in relation to an NDA, the duty of care owed by PCI to remaining employees, who have no power or influence whatsoever, is also of critical importance. If an individual employee has no effective alternative route to seek protection, that protection can only be provided by PCI as part of any settlement agreement.

Public perception

Regardless of the facts, there appears to be a public perception that CAs are used by employers to silence their former staff and cover up wrongdoing.

Linked to the public perception of CAs, the argued public perception of the church is that it should be open and honest.

Post Office ‘Horizon’ issue

The Post Office ‘Horizon’ case is often quoted as demonstrating that CAs are used to cover up wrongdoing. However, it is widely acknowledged that the NDAs imposed by the Post Office did not override the statutory ‘Whistleblowing’ protections for the Postmasters provided by the Public Interest Disclosure provisions. It is clear that ‘protected disclosures’ regarding miscarriages of justice cannot be legally blocked by confidentiality clauses in contracts – unfortunately Post Masters were unaware of this.

Rather than this being an NDA issue, it was the widely condemned associated tactics of the Post Office to hide their wrongdoing that caused the ‘Horizon’ problem, including:

- intimidating IT experts and investigators if any attempt was made to expose miscarriages of justice
- threatening journalists and whistleblowers with legal action to suppress negative coverage
- creating a culture of fear so that victims incorrectly felt they had no choice but to stay silent due to the threat of civil or criminal action

4. THEOLOGICAL / MORAL CONSIDERATIONS

In proposing the CA Task Group at the SGA 2025, it was noted that the use of CAs should be considered from a “theological, a moral and a practical perspective”. While these categories are not explicitly framed in the resolution that followed (see Par 1 above), they provided the Task Group with some idea of what is meant by the phrase “all aspects”, which does appear in the resolution.

Biblical perspective

It is clear that the use of confidentiality clauses in settling employment disputes is not specifically addressed in the Bible, so any references are likely to be ‘principle’ based. However, it is hugely important to understand that there is an inherent danger in selectively quoting verses of Scripture to attempt to make a specific point. With that important caution, some of the biblical arguments put forward for and against the concept of imposing or requiring confidentiality are shown in Appendix 1.

5. OPTION ANALYSIS

As noted above, it is not generally CAs that cause the concern for critics, but the inclusion of NDAs within them. The analysis therefore needs to focus primarily on the NDA element. The essential options in relation to use of NDAs are simply:

- NDAs should never be used
- There are some circumstances when an NDA could be considered appropriate
- NDAs should always be used

Each option is considered further below.

Option 1 – never use NDAs

This option is not generally considered appropriate by either side of the debate around NDAs. The ability for the departing employee to request confidentiality around the terms of their settlement and any amount potentially paid to them is important and should be protected.

Option 2 – sometimes use NDAs

This approach can be subdivided into an almost limitless set of circumstances so it is perhaps best to attempt to categorise when an NDA might be appropriate.

Some circumstances in which it might seem reasonable for PCI to consider use of an NDA in a settlement agreement include:

- if confidentiality was requested by the leaving employee;
- to prevent further harm;
- to protect other parties, including remaining employees, to whom PCI has a duty of care.

Similarly, circumstances in which it does not seem reasonable to include an NDA clause might include:

- to attempt to ‘cover up’ wrongdoing by PCI;
- to prevent any and all discussion of the circumstances surrounding the dispute with anyone;
- to attempt to silence legitimate concerns of an individual.

Option 3 – always use NDAs

While this could be considered a ‘fair’ approach as it treats everyone equally, there is little point in incurring the cost of a settlement if there is no material risk that an individual will share inappropriate information.

6. PROPOSED USE OF CAs / NDAs BY PCI

The ‘extreme’ options above (Options 1 and 3) are not practical. A balanced approach is therefore recommended adopting the following principles:

Frequency of use

It is important that CAs / NDAs do not become used ‘as a matter of course’ as that would incur unnecessary cost in relation to the hundreds of people who leave PCI’s employment on good terms. It is generally only in those cases where there is some form of employment dispute that CAs / NDAs should be considered.

Requested by the other party

PCI will consider use of a CA / NDA if requested by the other party to the employment dispute.

To prevent further harm

A CA / NDA should also be considered if the circumstances are such that finality in ending the dispute would be beneficial and would help in preventing further harm to an individual.

To protect other individuals

PCI has a duty of care to all its staff – those leaving and those remaining. If the contentious circumstances of an individual's departure are such that sharing them publicly would be unfairly injurious to remaining staff, PCI should seek to protect those remaining individuals with a CA / NDA.

Drafting

No NDAs will be drafted which seek to impose unlawful restrictions of what can be disclosed by an individual. PCI will ensure the employee has obtained legal advice to confirm they fully understand the terms of any NDA. This legal advice will be funded by PCI within agreed limits.

Approval

NDAs by their very nature need to be reviewed by a very restricted number of people to protect the confidentiality which is being sought. These are also significant, and sometimes expensive, legal documents and so should be approved at a senior level within the organisation.

To meet these criteria, all CAs should be considered and approved by PCI's Senior Leadership Team, with advice and guidance as necessary from:

- General Assembly solicitor;
- Head of HR;
- Decision maker in any relevant disciplinary process.

Governance

An annual anonymised report summarising all CAs will be presented to General Council for consideration. All instances of NDA use should be specifically highlighted and explained in the report. This governance review will allow General Council to identify and investigate any patterns or trends in the use of CAs.

Additionally if, on review of the circumstances of any specific case General Council is not satisfied with any NDA imposed, they can amend or cancel any confidentiality obligations placed on the employee, subject to legal advice and agreement from all relevant parties.

1.

APPENDIX 1

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR CONSIDERATION

Against CAs

John 8:32 – “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
Critics will argue that a CA is designed to hide or suppress the truth and, as such, must be un-biblical.

Psalm 82:3-4 – “Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

There are multiple biblical references regarding protection of the weak and oppressed. Similar to the ‘abuse of power’ concern, critics argue that using CAs to silence victims is contrary to the biblical mandate to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

Proverbs 28:13 – “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper”

Warnings against hiding sin are also used to argue that churches should not seek to hide wrongdoing behind legal walls to protect their own institutional reputation.

Supporting CAs

Proverbs 17:9 – “Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.”

A primary argument for the use of CAs is that Christians have a duty to protect the reputation of others and handle mistakes with discretion, rather than exposing every fault to public ridicule.

1 Peter 4:8 – “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

On a similar theme, supporters also argue that CAs prevent the unnecessary public shaming of individuals, mirroring how God handles our sins.

1 Corinthians 6:1-8 – “If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord’s people? ...”

This passage advises against Christians taking one another to court and is used as an argument to promote CAs as a means of settlement of an issue privately within the body of Christ rather than through public litigation or in the media.

In more general terms, supporters argue that there is a biblical duty for organisations to act as a 'trustworthy stewards', protecting the personal information entrusted to them.

Supporters also argue that on numerous occasions Jesus specifically imposed confidentiality requirements on individuals and groups, including his own disciples (see Matthew 12:16, Matthew 16:20, Mark 3:12, Mark 7:36, Mark 8:30, Mark 9:9, Luke 8:56, Luke 9:21)

APPENDIX 2

EMPLOYEE COMPROMISE AGREEMENTS POLICY

It is important to note that CAs / NDAs as discussed below are formal legal documents. Legal assistance should always be sought in addition to considering the contents of this policy.

1. Introduction

It is inevitable that employees will leave PCI over time. In the vast majority of cases people leave on good terms with the organisation and no further action is required. On occasion, however, the employment relationship will break down and some people may leave their employment in more contentious circumstances.

In these more contentious situations, it is important that steps are taken to manage the end of the employment relationship as fairly as possible for all concerned.

One tool for effectively managing the end of a contentious employment relationship is a Compromise Agreement (CA), which may also include clauses limiting what can be said publicly about the relevant circumstances. These additional clauses are generally referred to as a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA).

This policy outlines when a CA or NDA will be considered by PCI and what will be included therein.

As this policy relates to the ending of an employment relationship, it only applies to employees. It does not apply to ‘called’ posts or office holders within PCI.

2. Underlying Principle

In all dealings with prospective, current and former staff, PCI will be as open and transparent as possible. In doing so, PCI will seek to avoid the use of CAs and NDAs as far as reasonably practical.

However, where the circumstances either leading up to, or following, an employee’s departure are such that the end of the employment relationship is in some way contentious, a formal agreement to provide finality for all parties in relation to ongoing disputes should be considered. This CA will only include an NDA in the circumstances set out below.

3. Consideration of NDA

NDA's will not be used as a matter of course.

The limited circumstances in which an NDA will be considered are:

- at the request of the departing employee
PCI will consider use of an NDA if requested by the other party to the employment dispute
- to prevent or reduce further harm
An NDA can also be considered if the circumstances are such that, in PCI's opinion, finality in ending the dispute would be beneficial and would help in preventing further harm to an identifiable individual
- to protect other parties to whom PCI has a duty of care
PCI has a duty of care to all its staff. If the contentious circumstances of an individual's departure are such that sharing them publicly would be unfairly injurious to remaining staff, PCI should seek to protect those remaining staff and may engage an NDA to do so.

4. Governance and approval

PCI recognises that the use of NDAs by a charity is sensitive. As such, PCI will ensure that any CAs or NDAs are assessed, approved, implemented and monitored at an appropriately senior level. Alongside this, NDAs by their very nature need to be reviewed by a very restricted number of people to protect the confidentiality which is being sought.

To meet these criteria, all CAs should be considered and approved by PCI's Senior Leadership Team, with advice and guidance as necessary from:

- General Assembly solicitor;
- Head of HR;
- Decision maker in any relevant disciplinary process.

5. Oversight

An annual anonymised report summarising all CAs will be presented to General Council for consideration. General Council will review this report to identify and investigate any patterns or trends in the use of CAs.

In addition, any instances where an NDA has been included in the CA will be separately highlighted in the report and the circumstances requiring an NDA explained. If the Council is not content that an NDA is justified in any case, they can amend or cancel any confidentiality obligations placed on the employee, subject to legal advice and agreement from all relevant parties.

GENERAL COUNCIL SECTION 5

SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE

Introduction

The Support Services Committee (SSC) met five times through the year.

ASSEMBLY BUILDINGS DEPARTMENTS

1. Human Resources

Sarah Leung (Head of HR), returned from maternity leave in January 2026 and the SSC is grateful to Judith Johnston for so effectively covering the position whilst Sarah was on maternity leave and to the wider HR team for their support whilst operating on a reduced staffing basis.

New recruitment software was installed to streamline the recruitment processes. From September 2025 to March 2026, HR advertised 123 roles with 79 new starts and 86 leavers with the bulk of these being in the Council for Social Witness (CSW). Included in these roles are 9 head office roles with 3 being senior management.

As at 31 March 2026 there were 9 active employee relations cases with 2 at tribunal. All these cases related to CSW.

General Council approved the following policies:

- Disciplinary;
- Parental Bereavement Leave;
- Equal Opportunities;
- Harassment; and
- Probation.

The team plans to hold one event each quarter relating to employee well-being.

In line with the new safeguarding procedures, Access NI checks are to be carried out every three years on all PCI and CSW staff when required by their role. This will involve 500 checks being carried out over a rolling 3-year period. An additional part-time resource is required to process the significant number of pre-employment checks as part of the recruitment process.

2. Property and conference operations

The Retired Ministers' House Fund for 2025 showed a surplus of £28K. SSC agreed that the rents be increased by 2.7% in line with NIHE rent increases.

On Fisherwick Buildings, a tenancy overview report showed current net rents from this property at £93,000 pa from 15,000 sq ft of lettable space. SSC continues to seek to maximise rental income and to secure existing tenancies. The office space in Fisherwick Buildings is dated and if a vacancy should arise then it would be difficult to re-let without significant refurbishment work.

Conferencing in Assembly Buildings generated net income of £273K in 2025 (2024: £220K) from 251 events/meetings/conferences (2024: 205). Bookings are currently running to 2030.

The water tanks in Assembly Buildings have been replaced.

3. Information Technology (IT)

David Barr, IT Network Storage and Security Manager, was acting Head of IT for a period during 2025 to cover the Head of IT's absence, gaining valuable experience over this period.

The process of restructuring the IT Department to support succession planning, strengthen operational capacity, ensure long term departmental stability, and staff retention, continues.

A new backup platform has been successfully implemented with one server being relocated to Union Theological College to ensure data resilience in the event of a total building loss.

Preparations for BT's Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) switch-off are ongoing and PCI will be ready well in advance of the 31 January 2027 switch over to a full digital network. A rolling upgrade programme to address under performing devices continues.

Multi Factor Authentication (MFA) for access to devices continues to be rolled out.

The PSNI and Charities Commission investigations into safeguarding and governance in PCI bring significant resource pressure on the IT Department.

FINANCE MATTERS

4. Assessments

SSC considered in detail the assessment accounts for 2025 and the budgeted assessment accounts for 2026 for the various Congregational Assessment Funds. To ease the impact of Assessments on smaller congregations, the General Council agreed a change to the size of the bands, increasing the width of Band 3. No change was made to the Assessment rates of any bands. A summary of fund allocation is included in Appendix 1.

Band	2025 Assessments			2026 Proposals		
	From (£)	To (£)	Rate (%)	From (£)	To (£)	Rate (%)
1	0	15,000	0	0	15,000	0.00
2	15,001	65,000	10.0	15,001	65,000	10.0
3	65,001	130,000	11.0	65,001	180,000	11.0
4	130,001	195,000	7.50	180,001	250,000	7.50
5	195,001	260,000	3.75	250,001	280,000	3.75
6	260,001	above	3.75	280,001	above	3.75

5. Pay and Stipend increases

SSC received a report which addressed issues such as the cost-of-living pressures, recent salary and stipend increases and information on salary increases generally, both for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Following some initial discussion, the members of SSC who had a conflict of interest left the meeting resulting in the meeting not being quorate. The paper was therefore forwarded unamended to the General Council who agreed the recommendations in the report that there be a rate of increase of 3.5% for Northern Ireland based salaries and stipends and 2% for Republic of Ireland based salaries and stipends.

6. Salary Scale Review Report

This issue first arose due to difficulties in recruitment and retention of professional, technical and administrative staff in PCI. General Council decided in November 2024 that a Salary Scale review should progress and the General Assembly 2025 gave permission for General Council to agree and implement changes to pay scales, terms and conditions.

The current position was complex with:

- (a) staff split into Administrative and Executive categories with different pay scales and terms and conditions;
- (b) 13 pay bands (6 Administration and 7 Executive);
- (c) each pay band is split into a number of Scale Points with 59 Scale Points in total;
- (d) of the 59 Scale Points, 40 overlap across at least one other pay band; and
- (e) a ‘full time’ contract can be defined as any of 32.5, 35 or 37.5 hours per week.

In developing the new Salary Scale proposals, SSC applied 3 over-riding principles:

- (a) individual members of staff should not be disadvantaged by the introduction of any changes;
- (b) salary rates across PCI should be more closely aligned to general market salaries; and
- (c) full-time contracts should be standardised to a 37.5 hour week noting that this is only a change to the definition of a full-time contract and it has no impact on staff's actual working hours.

The Salary Scale review proposed 4 new pay scales:

- (a) Council Staff;
- (b) Professional and Technical Staff;
- (c) Union Theological College; and
- (d) Senior Management,

with staff being mapped across based on their current role, grade and department. SSC undertook a significant salary market review when proposing the new Salary Scales.

The proposals were agreed by General Council and allowing for staff consultation time, it is hoped that the new salary scales can be introduced by 1 July 2026.

The estimated cost impact of the Salary Scale review proposals agreed by General Council is £30K for the remaining six months of 2026 and £92K for the full 2027 year. General Council also agreed a number of associated recommendations to enhance the total staff reward package.

7. Support Services costs

For the 2025 year, Support Services (GSD, FSD, Payroll, IT, HR) costs were £80K higher than budget due to:

- (a) an additional E7 Acting Clerk post due to the Clerk being appointed as Moderator;
- (b) appointment of an E5 Acting Head of HR post as maternity cover for the Head of HR;
- (c) appointment of an Acting Head of IT due to the Head of IT's absence; and
- (d) appointment of a Deputy Head of IT in line with the agreed IT department restructuring.

The originally proposed Support Services budget for 2026 will be impacted by:

- (a) implementation of the Salary Scale Review;
- (b) the vacancy of the Clerk role;
- (c) proposed appointment of a Head of Finance; and
- (d) proposed appointment of a data and information management role.

8. Safeguarding Department Costs

On the understanding that the new Safeguarding Department will be financed by Congregational Assessments from the 2027 year onwards, General Council approved SSC's recommendation that the cost of the Safeguarding Department for the 2026 year be met from the United Appeal at the same level as previous years but that the additional cost of the Safeguarding Department for the 2026 year be met from the General Assembly Discretionary Fund. General Council also approved SSC's recommendation that the cost of INEQE's independent safeguarding and governance review of PCI also be met from the General Assembly Discretionary Fund.

9. PCI Consolidated Accounts and Financial Outturn

The production of the PCI Consolidated statutory accounts for 2025 will follow the same timetable as for the production of the 2024 Consolidated statutory accounts (final statutory accounts being brought to an October 2026 General Council meeting for approval), given the existing and projected workload of the Director of Operations department. This has been agreed with MKS, the external auditors. A summary PCI financial report for 2025 will be available for the June 2026 General Assembly.

10. Licentiate Funding

In light of the current number of Licentiates and the limited number of Calls available, General Council approved SSC's recommendation that, for 2026, the Central Ministry Fund (CMF) funding for Licentiates eligible for a Call be extended for up to six months, from its current twelve months. A request for extension will be considered based on a formal application through the Ministerial Studies and Development Committee to the Linkage Commission by the Licentiate, and with the agreement of the Kirk Session and the Training Minister of the congregation concerned.

11. Council for Social Witness Financial Situation

In October 2025 CSW had forecast a deficit of circa £70,000 for the 2025 year. However, as a result of:

- (a) Trusts not agreeing to backdate rate increases;
- (b) adjustments to the accounting treatment of certain items;
- (c) 45 vacancies resulting in heavy reliance on expensive agency staff; and
- (d) significant health and safety improvements required to buildings across the estate,

the deficit for the 2025 year is now estimated to be £530K. CSW's internal debt at the end of the 2025 year is estimated at £3.6 million which is in excess of CSW's internal debt limit of £3 million previously agreed by General Council. The ongoing interest and repayment obligations associated with this internal debt present a substantial barrier to CSW achieving financial recovery.

There are opportunities for recovery if CSW is given the necessary financial flexibility. A temporary freeze on interest payments on CSW's internal debt would provide a critical short-term strategic intervention to redirect resources toward stabilisation and transformation in the form of:

- Implementation of robust income generation strategies;
- Development of cost efficiency measures including reduction in agency staffing and better workforce planning;
- Investment in core organisational capacity, particularly HR and IT systems; and
- Establishment of essential corporate frameworks to strengthen financial and operational governance.

General Council approved SSC's recommendations that internal interest payments on the CSW accounts be cancelled for 2026 (to be reviewed early in 2027) and instructed officers of the SSC to engage with the CSW Business and Finance panel to provide support and encouragement. General Council also agreed to increase the CSW internal debt limit to £4 million, subject to ongoing review. It is hoped that these measures will facilitate CSW stabilising its financial position and implementing the necessary recovery measures.

12. PCI Risk Management

To significantly improve risk management in PCI, the Director of Operations, with SSC oversight, will be working with PCI Council Secretaries and Heads of Department on developing and monitoring:

- (a) Risk Registers;
- (b) Health and Safety;
- (c) Safeguarding;
- (d) Organisation Continuity Planning; and
- (e) Data and Information governance.

SSC will report to General Council on the risk management improvement process in PCI.

13. Prolonged Disability Fund

Wording needed to change terms as initially proposed last year

14. Pensions

The following ministerial retirements have been noted since the Committee's report to the General Assembly in June 2025.

Name	Congregation	Retirement	Early
Rev KDW Crowe	Bushvale	30/11/25	No
Rev AJ Buick	Dunluce	30/09/25	No
Rev HSW Cubitt	St James's	30/01/26	No
Rev Alistair Stewart Smyth	Carryduff	16/02/26	No
Rev RL Brown	First Portadown	31/10/25	No
Rev Albert Arthur Priestley Baxter	First Portglenone	02/11/25	No
Rev William James Ivan Thompson	Lislooney and Knappagh	31/05/25	No
Rev Mark Charles Arthur Gray	Bannside	09/05/26	No
Rev John Coulter	Ballysally	31/01/26	No
Rev Dr Annes Francois Nel	Global Mission Worker	15/12/25	No
Rev David Mark Spratt	Kilmore	30/06/25	No
Rev Trevor Gribben	Clerk of Assembly	30/11/25	Yes
Rev David Stanfield	City Church, Bangor	31/01/26	No
Rev Trevor John McCormick	First Kilrea and Boveedy	01/03/26	No
Rev Gary McDowell	Greystones	08/02/26	No
Rev Herbert Clarke Deering	Dun Laoghaire	31/01/26	No
Rev Robert Ian Abraham	First Keady and Armaghbreague	31/08/26	No
Rev Robert William Gaston	Finvoy	01/09/26	No
Rev Mervyn Burnside	Castlereagh	30/06/26	No
Rev David William Reid	Ardstraw and Douglas	31/07/26	Yes
Rev Thomas Alastair McNeely	Richill	29/07/26	Yes
Rev William Harkness (Ill-health)	Belmont	27/07/26	Yes
Rev William James Allen Sleith	Hillsborough	20/06/26	Yes
Rev Stephen Wesley Rea	Carlow/Athy	30/04/26	Yes

HUGO WILSON, Convenor

APPENDIX 1

BUDGETED ASSESSMENT INCOME 2026

	2026 Allocation %	2026 Budget £	2025 Projection £	2025 Allocation %	2025 Budget £
Central Ministry Fund	34.40%	1,250,000	1,284,000	36.45%	1,250,000
Retired Ministers' Fund	0.00%	0	0	0.00%	0
Widows of Ministers' Fund	0.00%	0	0	0.00%	0
Prolonged Disability Fund	1.38%	50,000	52,000	1.46%	50,000
Incidental Fund	28.20%	1,025,000	884,000	25.51%	875,000
Church House External Work	12.38%	450,000	455,000	13.12%	450,000
Special Assembly	0.00%	0	0	0.00%	0
Communications Department	11.00%	400,000	358,000	10.35%	355,000
Ministerial Development	0.00%	0	0	0.00%	0
Sick Supply Fund	0.28%	10,000	0	0.00%	0
Students Bursary Fund	87.64%	3,185,000	3,033,000	86.89%	2,980,000
	12.38%	450,000	454,000	13.12%	450,000
TOTAL ASSESSMENTS (Excl Pension)	<u>100.02%</u>	<u>3,635,000</u>	<u>3,487,000</u>	<u>100.01%</u>	<u>3,430,000</u>
PCI Pension Scheme (2009)	<u>17.50%</u>	<u>2,026,200</u>	<u>2,015,000</u>	<u>17.50%</u>	<u>2,026,200</u>
		<u>5,661,200</u>	<u>5,502,000</u>		<u>5,456,200</u>

APPENDIX 2**BASIC MINISTERIAL MINIMUM FOR 2026 (AND OTHER RATES)****1. Basic and appropriate Ministerial Minimum**

	Northern Ireland		Ireland	
	2026 £	2025 £	2026 €	2025 €
Annual Service Increment (1% of BMM)	329	318	474	465
Annual Increase	3.50%	3.50%	2.0%	3.50%

Basic Ministerial Minimum (BMM)	32,882	31,770	47,438	46,508
After 1 year's service	33,211	32,088	47,912	46,972
After 2 years' service	33,540	32,406	48,387	47,437
After 3 years' service	33,868	32,724	48,861	47,902
After 4 years' service	34,197	33,041	49,336	48,367
After 5 years' service	34,526	33,359	49,810	48,831
After 6 years' service	34,855	33,677	50,284	49,296
After 7 years' service	35,184	33,995	50,759	49,761
After 8 years' service	35,513	34,312	51,233	50,225
After 9 years' service	35,841	34,630	51,707	50,690
After 10 years' service	36,170	34,948	52,182	51,155
After 11 years' service	36,499	35,266	52,656	51,620
After 12 years' service	36,828	35,583	53,131	52,084
After 13 years' service	37,157	35,901	53,605	52,549
After 14 years' service	37,485	36,219	54,079	53,014
After 15 years' service	37,814	36,537	54,554	53,478
After 16 years' service	38,143	36,854	55,028	53,943
After 17 years' service	38,472	37,172	55,502	54,408
After 18 years' service	38,801	37,490	55,977	54,873
After 19 years' service	39,130	37,808	56,451	55,337
After 20 years' service	39,458	38,125	56,926	55,802

Basic Ministerial Minimum (BMM)	32,882	31,770	47,438	46,508
“Former Bonus Element”	-1,505	-1,454	-1,713	-1,679
Basic Ministerial Minimum (BMMx)	31,377	30,316	45,725	44,829

2. Retired Ministers' Fund

	Northern Ireland		Ireland	
	2026 £	2025 £	2026 €	2025 €
Pension (maximum 50% of BMMx)	15,689	15,158	stg converted	stg converted

3. Widows of Ministers' Fund

	Northern Ireland		Ireland	
	2026 £	2025 £	2026 €	2025 €
Pension (maximum 27.5% BMMx)	8,629	8,337	stg converted	stg converted

4. Prolonged Disability Fund

	Northern Ireland		Ireland	
	2026 £	2025 £	2026 €	2025 €
Grant (maximum 50% of BMMx)	15,689	15,158	stg converted	stg converted
Cost to the Fund				
Pension Contributions on BMM (17.5%)	5,754	7,784	stg converted	stg converted
Er NIC (post April 2025 increase)	1,603	1,523	stg converted	stg converted
Total Cost to Fund	23,046	24,465	stg converted	stg converted

5. CMF Payment / Regium Donum

	Northern Ireland		Ireland	
	2026 £	2025 £	2026 €	2025 €
CMF Payment (56 before 01/01/2015 i.e. born before 01/01/1959)	1,158	1,158	stg converted	stg converted
Regium Donum Annual Payment	360	360	stg converted	stg converted

6. Supply Fees

	Northern Ireland		Ireland	
	2026 £	2025 £	2026 €	2025 €
Parts of £500 in BMM	66	64	95	93
Two or more services (at £2 per part)	132	128	190	186
Single service (at 2/3rd of above)	88	85	127	124
Travel - mileage rate	18p	18p	26c	26c

7. Vacancy Conveners' Fees

	Northern Ireland		Ireland	
	2026 £	2025 £	2026 €	2025 €
Supply Fee plus				
< 100 Families + 0%	132	128	190	186
100<200 Families + 5%	139	134	200	195
200<300 families +10%	145	141	209	205
300+ Families + 15%	152	147	219	214
Travel - mileage rate	18p	18p	26c	26c

8. Expenses

	Northern Ireland		Ireland	
	2026 £	2025 £	2026 €	2025 €
Ministers' Car Allowance	4,587	4,432	6,570	6,441
Ministers' Taxable (Duties/Manse) Allowance	3,059	2,956	4,964	4,867
Associates' Car Allowance	4,587	4,432		
Associates' Taxable Duties Allowance (originally £2,000 plus increase)	2,549	2,463		
Associates' House Allowance (CMF Max contribution)	1,000	1,000		
Licentiate's Car Allowance (80%)	3,670	3,546	5,256	5,153
Licentiate's Duties Allowance (42%)	1,285	1,242	2,085	2,044
Ordained Assistants' Travel Allowance	4,587	4,432	6,570	6,441
Ordained Assistants' Duties Allowance	1,285	1,242	2,085	2,044

9. Other

	Northern Ireland		Ireland	
	2026	2025	2026	2025
	£	£	€	€
Ignored for Augmented Grant Par.316(2)(d)(i) (i.e 52 weeks supply fee)	6,864	6,656	9,880	9,672
Ignored for Augmented Grant Par.316(2)(d)(ii)	2,400	2,400		
Retired Ministers (pre-1978 service) Special Monthly Grant Par 315(5)	15	15		

(To ministers in receipt at 31 August 2006 only – no ministers retiring after that date entitled)

10. Family Grants

	Northern Ireland		Ireland	
	2026	2025	2026	2025
	£	£	€	€
Category 1. Birth to final year primary school				
– Child Allowance	471	455	693	679
– Tuition Grants	0	0	572	561
Category 2. Secondary School				
– Child Allowance	688	665	1,025	1,005
– Tuition Grants	0	0	964	945
Category 3. Further and Higher Education (to age 24)				
– Child Allowance	1,031	996	1,507	1,477
– Tuition Grants	2,500	2,415	4,817	4,723

APPENDIX 3**INCIDENTAL FUND BUDGET**

	2026 Budget	2025 Projection
Payments to / on Behalf of Councils		
General Council	106,100	90,271
Linkage Commission	20,000	16,000
Historical Society	23,000	23,000
Employment Law (Peninsula)	16,000	15,950
Youth Link	12,400	11,988
UK Borders Agency	250	239
Public Affairs (incl Educational grants)	11,900	11,500
UTC Support Services rebate	60,000	60,000
Safeguarding	75,000	-
	324,650	228,948
Other Costs		
General Secretary's Office	496,800	480,000
Support Service Charge	215,000	207,750
Postage, Admin and Other	9,300	9,000
Council and Committee member expenses	15,500	15,000
Moderator's Expenses	41,400	40,000
Printing and Stationery	14,000	13,500
Legal	100,900	25,000
Insurance	20,300	19,650
	913,200	809,900
Total	1,237,850	1,038,848

UNITED APPEAL COMMITTEE

Introduction

The United Appeal Committee has met on three occasions since the 2025 General Assembly:

- (a) 17 Feb 26 to consider the response to the 2025 Appeal
- (b) 24 Mar 26 to prepare for interviews with Councils regarding their grant requests for 2027
- (c) 27 Mar 26 to review Council budget submissions for 2027 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 2025 and projections / budgets for 2026 and 2027.

1. The 2025 Appeal

At the meeting on 17 Feb the Committee considered the response to the 2025 Appeal and the financial outturn for that year. The accounts for 2025 show that £3.166m was received directly against the 2025 Appeal target of £3.3m. In addition, a further £274K was received for prior year targets and earmarked contributions giving a total of £3.44m received from congregations. The 2025 United Appeal target has therefore been exceeded directly from congregational contributions. This figure is further enhanced with just over £90K of investment income and legacies bringing the total UA income for 2025 to £3.533m.

The Committee was very encouraged by this response to the Appeal, particularly in a time of financial pressure for many congregations and individual members.

At 31 Jan 2026 when the accounts were closed,

- 30 congregations had not contributed to United Appeal (2024 – 42, 2023 – 62)
- 194 congregations contributed above their target (2024 – 149, 2023 – 169)
- 98 congregations did not achieve their target (2024 – 151, 2023 – 131)
- 195 congregations contributed to their target exactly (2024 – 176, 2023 – 164).

There are two items to note in these figures

- ‘late’ contributions are often received from many of these congregations (bringing in over £200k additional income)
- A number of the ‘did not achieve’ will be small amounts due to exchange differences in the accounting system.

As the Committee had previously agreed to pay the 2025 United Appeal grants in full during the year, there was no need to decide if a final payment would be necessary.

The draft accounts for 2025 therefore show a small surplus of £129K for 2025 (2024 – £131K). Adding in the loss on investments during 2025, means that the UA fund has reserves of £2.457m at the end of 2025.

2. The 2026 Appeal

In response to the encouraging response to the 2024 Appeal, the June 2025 General Assembly agreed that the Appeal target for 2026 should be increased back to £3.4m and the following grants were approved for 2026.

Council	Grant £.000
Mission in Ireland	1,100
Global Mission	830
Congregational Life and Witness	689
Training in Ministry	475
Social Witness	675
TOTAL	3,769

Based on an Appeal target of £3.4m this level of grant funding is considered sustainable.

3. The 2027 Appeal

At its meeting on 13 Feb 2026 the Committee agreed a range of assumptions that Councils should use in preparing their budgets for 2027 and a ‘Commissioning Note’ for Councils was issued.

The Councils prepared and submitted their budgets during Feb / Mar 2026 and the Committee met to review the submissions on 24 Mar. These submissions included revised projections for 2026 and budgets for 2027. 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 on 27 Mar with representatives from each of the Councils to discuss the bids and seek any necessary clarification. The following are the key points identified from the requests.

Mission in Ireland

	2027 Bid	2026	2025	2024	2023
UA Grants	1,250,000	1,100,000	1,100,000	1,080,000	1,065,000

CMI explained how their UA allocation is used to stimulate new developments in mission and support ongoing ministry taking place in Presbyteries, in congregations and at denominational-level.

- (a) It was noted that approximately one third of the Council's grant is fed back to congregations through Mission Support Grants
- (b) The UA allocation has helped to support some new initiatives, including ongoing church planting as well as the deployment of some Mission Pioneers, with 4 roles deployed and 3 in training
- (c) The Council continues to support developments in various chaplaincy initiatives and is open to developing its Rural Chaplaincy model in other places

CMI representatives noted that the Council does have reserves but these are largely restricted in nature. They are budgeting for an in-year deficit and so are using some of their reserves to manage ongoing activity. They explained that use of funds is carefully considered but missional intent takes clear priority in the decision-making process.

Global Mission

	2027 Bid	2026	2025	2024	2023
UA Grants	830,000	830,000	810,000	900,000	900,000

CGM outlined the historical position of PCI sending missionaries since the 1840s in response to the Great Commission, which needs to be understood as an instruction, not an optional extra.

They went on to explain that the dynamic of Global Mission Workers (GMW) has changed in recent years so that we now send fewer, more strategic GMW and the focus has moved from Africa to Europe.

CGM is also aware of budget requirements and seeks to use existing funds where possible, but is constrained by many of their balances being restricted in some way. While they are aware that UA funds are augmentative in nature, they are also a core element of CGM's funding.

CGM makes positive use of missionaries on home assignment to support and promote the work of UA while on deputation visits.

Congregational Life and Witness

	2027 Bid	2026	2025	2024	2023
UA Grants	660,000	660,000	660,000	660,000	640,000
Presbyterian Herald	32,600	29,400	28,000	25,000	

CLLW has evolved over the last 10 years since being formed largely out of the former Youth and Children's Board in 2015.

Their current drive for delivery of their remit is to work with, in and through Presbyteries. They were keen to highlight that CCLW events sometimes happen pseudo-anonymously, in that a limited number of people in the Presbytery may know that an certain event was organised and supported by CCLW, but the attendees may have no awareness of CCLW's role in the event.

The Council agreed that UA funding augments other funding sources but also pointed to three funds they hold (amounting to £293K) which are designated for specific purposes and cannot be generally used by CCLW.

They highlighted the difficulties with the *Herald* being moved to the Council but with no recognised role in the Council. They highlighted that the transfer of the *Herald* to CCLW and the associated resources provided, were to be reviewed at the end of 2025, but this was understandably not done in the circumstances.

Training in Ministry

	2027 Bid	2026	2025	2024	2023
UA Grants	485,000	475,000	342,000	380,000	375,000

CTM acknowledges that the College (UTC) is dependent on church funds. It has some other funds available and is planning to make some use of these in year, but is still projecting to operate at a loss for the foreseeable future. A key difficulty for UTC in relation to financial planning is the inability to predict student numbers accurately.

In addition to its operating costs, UTC faces a capital repair cost which appears insurmountable within PCI's own resources.

UTC also faces significant operational challenges in relation to managing the regulatory requirements being imposed by the Office for Students in England via the link with St Mary's.

Social Witness

	2027 Bid	2026	2025	2024	2023
UA Grants	815,000	675,000	590,963	400,000	245,000

CSW is aware that they are in a period of significant uncertainty and transition as a Council. Despite positive in year projections, they incurred another significant loss in 2025.

CSW considers the services they provide to be a key mission of PCI and they have been mandated by General Assembly to deliver these services, however they are not provided with any central church funding to support the services they manage.

They strongly stated that they urgently need certainty in relation to their governance structure to allow longer term decisions to be made.

Proposed bid amendments

In considering the bids from Councils, the Committee noted two areas where immediate changes could be made to support the flexibility of future financial management.

CMI amendment

PCI was given a sum of money in excess of £900K on the final closure of Townsend Street's accounts. This is unrestricted funding and has been transferred to the Assembly Discretionary Fund. However, the Trustees of Townsend Street in making the transfer, requested that

“The asset to be used to support mission and ministry through the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, with a priority given to support such of the mission and ministry in the Shankill Road and in north and central Belfast areas and in such other areas as the General Council of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (as its charity trustees) acting reasonably conclude are areas of economic deprivation.”

In any attempt to utilise some of these funds as requested by the Townsend Street congregation, the UA Committee asked CMI what level of funding they spent in the Greater Belfast area and was advised it was approximately £226K.

The UA Committee is therefore proposing to reduce the UA bid for CMI by £226K and is requesting, via Support Services Committee (SSC), that General Council instead allocate £226K from the Townsend receipt to CMI to spend in the Greater Belfast area.

In taking this approach, CMI will receive the requested level of funding for 2027 and the wishes of the Townsend Street donors will have been respected.

CCLW amendment

CCLW noted that they have c. £293K of designated funding which they can do very little with. This funding was not restricted by donors, but was designated internally by PCI.

Again, to assist with the overall management of PCI's funds, the UA Committee is proposing to reduce the 2027 UA bid from CCLW by £293K and request General Council, again via SSC, to un-designate the funds held by CCLW so they can be used for any CCLW purpose. The relevant funds are the Church Hymn book fund, the Family Books fund and the Special Assembly Fund.

Again, CCLW will have access to the same level of funding as was initially requested and PCI overall will have made effective use of otherwise 'trapped' funding.

It should be noted that both of these proposed reductions are linked to, and conditional on, the related proposals from Support Services being agreed.

Summary

The Committee was very encouraged by the discussions with the Council representatives and is grateful for the work they put in to delivering the remit they have been assigned by General Assembly.

Having reflected on the outcomes of the 2025 Appeal, in-year projections for 2026 and requests from the Councils for 2027, the Committee has decided to recommend a United Appeal target for 2026 of £3.4m in line with the target for 2026.

Even with the proposed reductions, the total of the requests from Councils exceeds the recommended level of the Appeal. The Committee was, however, conscious of the positive response to the 2025 Appeal and the cost pressures faced by Councils in delivery of their work.

In making the proposals below, the Committee therefore commends the work being done through the Councils and seeks to encourage them in increasingly difficult circumstances. A summary of the requests received is set out below alongside the Committee's recommended grants for 2027.

	Council Requests £000	Proposed Adjustments	Proposed Grants £000	Approved Grants 2026 £000
Mission in Ireland	1,250	(226)	1,024	1,100
Global Mission	830	0	830	830
Cong. Life and Witness	693	(293)	400	689
Training in Ministry	485	0	485	475
Social Witness	815	0	815	675
TOTAL	4,073	0	3,554	3,769

DAVID BRUCE, General Council Convener
KEN SWARBRICK, Director of Operations

APPENDIX 1

UNITED APPEAL 2027	Requests	Proposed	Proposed	Budget	Actual
	Received	Adjustment	Grant		
	2027	2027	2027	2026	2025
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
THE APPEAL					
Appeal Target	3,400		3,400	3,400	3,300
INCOME & EXPENDITURE					
INCOME					
Congregations (current year)	3,200		3,200	3,250	3,172
Congregations (prior years)	250		250	200	268
Income from Trust Funds	30		30	28	35
Investment Income	1		1	1	2
Donations and Bequests	10		10	10	10
Bank Interest	20		20	20	46
TOTAL INCOME	3,511		3,511	3,509	3,533
EXPENDITURE					
Promotional Costs	10		10	10	8
Reorganisation cost					
	10		10	10	8
GRANTS					
Mission in Ireland	1,250	-226	1,024	1,100	990
Global Mission	830		830	830	810
Training in Ministry	485		485	475	342
Congregational Life and Witness	693	-293	400	689	688
Social Witness	815		815	675	561
Other (Earmarked)	5		5	15	6
TOTAL GRANTS	4,078	-519	3,559	3,784	3,397
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	4,088	-519	3,569	3,794	3,405
SURPLUS (DEFICIT)	-577	519	-58	-285	128
Grants Returned - CCLW			0		
Gain on Investments					-2
Added /(Deducted) to/(from) reserves	-577	519	-58	-285	126
RESERVES AT START OF YEAR	2,172		2,172	2,457	2,331
RESERVES AT END OF YEAR	1,595	519	2,114	2,172	2,457

COMMUNICATIONS PANEL

Introduction

1. Following the recommendation of the Communications Strategy, agreed by the 2025 General Assembly, the Communications Panel was established.
2. The Panel consists of: Moderator, Clerk, Convenor of General Council, Rev David McCullagh (Convenor), Rev David Currie, Rev Andrew Gill, Rev Joanne Smith, Mark Neale (Sec) - Head of Communications, James McCormick – Communications Dept., Dr Phil Ramsey, Matthew Wilson, Ruth Dalzell, and David Smyth. A further member of General Council is to be appointed.

Remit

3. The remit agreed by General Council for the Communications Panel is:
 - (a) To take a strategic overview of issues relating to the Communications Department of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and to make recommendations to the General Council as required. The panel should undertake its role by:
 - (i) Advising on the strategic direction of the Communications Strategy for the General Assembly and its Committees;
 - (ii) Advising on the use of social media, the tone, and policy approach;
 - (iii) Advising on new opportunities in relation to communications and approaches
 - (iv) Addressing matters referred to the panel by the General Council

Scope of work

4. Since the General Assembly of 2025, the panel has met three times. At its initial meeting the panel confirmed the recommendations of the Communications Review and proposed a detailed remit for the panel. This was accepted by the General Council at its meeting of 26 March 2026.
5. Further work has included making recommendations to the Presbyterian Herald Oversight Panel regarding promotion of the magazine, frequency of publications and alternative formats for publication.
6. The panel has also considered the role and use of social media platforms, engagement and handling of the media and other aspects of communications within and without the denomination.

Future work

7. Following the discharging of the New PCI Website Task Group, the panel will oversee and report on the use and development of the website.

8. The panel will continue to oversee and critically appraise the work of the Communications Department and the ongoing implementation and development of the Communications Strategy.

Conclusion

9. The panel commends the work of the Communications Department at this time and encourages the Church to pray for the team in their critical work.

DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Convener

MARK NEALE, Secretary

PCI WEBSITE TASK GROUP

Following the Communications Strategy Review Group report to the 2023 General Assembly, the Website Development Group was set up to progress the recommendations on developing a new PCI website. The task group consisted of: Mark Neale (Convener), Very Rev Dr David Bruce, Rev Ben Preston, Rev Niall Lockhart, Gareth Dunlop (Technical Advisor), Peter Shields, James McCormick and Ruth Dalzell.

1. Scope of work

The website task group to progress the following digital priorities:

- (a) Redevelopment of the PCI website at <https://presbyterianireland.org>
- (b) Explore methods of cost-saving by reduction in reliance on third party systems (or using more cost-effective third-party systems) in areas such as event management and online payments
- (c) Deployment of a private document area, protected behind username and password, to help with the efficient running of congregational, presbytery and Assembly Buildings business, containing documents such as meeting agendas, meeting minutes, manse regulations and other processes and protocols
- (d) Implementing a new approach to web content, to ensure the new website remains fresh and vibrant long into the future

2. Redevelopment of the PCI website

As reported to last year's General Assembly, following a competitive process, Eyekiller was selected as the preferred agency and was formally appointed to deliver the website design and development project.

Since early February 2025, Eyekiller, the Technical Advisor (Mr Gareth Dunlop) and staff from the Communications Department have worked collaboratively to bring into being the conceptual elements of the proposed website, relying on the wireframes and feedback from various stakeholders.

This work was completed in early autumn with the new website going live on 1 October 2025.

To achieve this and the success of the new site, a significant amount of work was done collaboratively by the team in the Communications Department, Eyekiller and with the help and assistance of our technical advisor.

3. Approach to content

Using the editorial map, generated by our Technical Advisor and in discussion with various stakeholders, the content of the new site reflects the key areas identified for improvement. These included:

- Seasonality and the rhythm of the church
- Content formats and audiences
- Navigation and user journeys
- Categorisation and findability of content
- Archiving
- Site search
- Search engine optimisation
- Distribution of responsibility across the organisation
- Workflow and governance

By engaging fully with the approach, the task group is confident that the new website incorporates a greater element of storytelling, enabling the site to reflect the work, focus and mission of the church, increasing our reach to a wider audience.

4. Private document area

This piece of work was scheduled to commence as part of the website redevelopment project. However, as there is significant overlap with the work of the Guidelines Review Task Group, it is suggested that this piece of work be remitted to that task group, with additional support from Gareth Dunlop and the Communications Department. As previously reported, with much of the technical infrastructure in place through PCI's Microsoft technology tenancy, including Sharepoint, the definition of material to be made available and the security around this aspect of the project needs careful consideration. This will be done in conjunction with the IT department and the relevant Council Secretaries and staff.

5. Launch and performance of new site

The new website went live on 1 October 2025, as a soft launch, with the intention that after three or four months of operation, a more formal launch would take place.

The initial launch went well, with positive audience reaction and with few technical difficulties.

Unfortunately, due to wider issues within the Church, our ability to make direct comparisons with website traffic on our old website and the new, has been somewhat confused by the significant traffic on our website regarding the issue of Safeguarding and the two Special General Assemblies in December 2025 and February 2026.

However, even accounting for this significant increase in traffic on these topics, and with several days seeing significant spikes in website traffic, the site itself absorbed these increases and few technical hitches were observed.

A user survey has been running now for several months, and the results are extremely pleasing with only one user reporting an inability to navigate to the information required. Likewise, the search engine optimisation reports have greatly improved and it is now evident that the majority of the website traffic is coming from search engines.

It is of note that over 70% of the website traffic now comes via mobile devices, and the optimisation of the website for mobiles has been highly successful and it is pleasing that, from the analytical data available, the reach of the website is cross generational.

The ongoing monitoring of user feedback will remain a regular feature of the general oversight of the website and will be reported, along with the operational aspects of the website and its performance to the Communications Panel.

6. Conclusion

The website development project is now complete and responsibility for the ongoing oversight should move to the Communications Panel.

That the creation and development of a members' document area be remitted to the Guidelines Review Task Group.

The PCI Website Task Group be thanked and discharged, with special thanks being given to Eyekiller and Mr Gareth Dunlop.

MARK NEALE, Convener

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 6

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

1. The Nominations Committee has met on four occasions since the last General Assembly.
2. During the year vacancies have arisen for the convenorship of several General Assembly Committees, and a new Co-convenorship of General Council was created by instruction of the February Special Assembly. These have been duly advertised, and a process of interview and nomination followed through in each case.
3. Once again, the Committee agreed to keep open throughout the year the online portal for applications to be considered for Membership of Councils and Committees, and this is easily accessible from the Jobs and Opportunities section of the PCI website under the heading 'Other ways to serve'. Two reminder emails were sent to ministers during the year asking that they make these opportunities known to their congregations and actively encourage suitable persons to apply.
4. In mid-March when the Committee's Vacancy Task Group began their work of seeking to fill upcoming vacancies some 15 applications had been received from 12 people, half of whom were ministers. Once again, this number is fewer than hoped for and, at the time of writing, several vacancies remain, especially within some of the Committees.
5. Nominations to the memberships of Commissions, Councils and Committees will be contained in the Nominations Booklet provided at the General Assembly. Regarding convenorships it is proposed that the following resignations be accepted and appointments made:
 - (a) The resignation of Mr Martin Hampton as Convenor of the United Appeal Committee [under General Council], that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev Alan McQuade be appointed in his place.
 - (b) The resignation of Rev Roy Mackay as Convenor of the General Assembly Business Committee [under General Council], that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev Mark Neilly be appointed in his place.
 - (c) The resignation of Rev Tom Greer as Convenor of the Nominations Committee [under General Council], that he be thanked for his services and that Rev Andrew Downey be appointed in his place.
 - (d) The resignation of Ms Heather Clements as Convenor of the Global Mission Committee [under the Council for Global Mission], that she be thanked for her services and that Rev Dr Peter Fleming be appointed in her place.

- (e) The resignation of Rev Richard Kerr as Convenor of the Global Development Committee [under the Council for Global Mission], that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev Susan Moore be appointed in his place.
 - (f) The resignation of Very Rev Dr Charles McMullen as Convenor of the Specialist Services Committee [under the Council for Social Witness], that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev Peter Bovill be appointed in his place.
6. The Committee is thankful for all those who have indicated their willingness to fill the vacancies that have arisen during the year, but they are also deeply indebted to the excellent administrative support provided by the General Secretary’s Department, and not least, by Mrs Denise Weir and by the Deputy Clerk.

TOM GREER, Convenor

GUIDELINES REVIEW TASK GROUP

Updating and publishing past decisions of the Assembly

1. The Guidelines Review Task Group has met on two occasions since the 2025 annual meeting of the General Assembly: 12 September 2025 and 20 March 2026. It has also held discussions via email.
2. Along with its report to the 2025 annual meeting of the General Assembly the Task Group published collections of reports and resolutions which were being designated as Regulations, Guidelines, etc. The collection has been updated and the changes are outlined in Appendix 1. The Assembly is asked to approve this in recommendation (a) (detailed in paragraph 5). A handful of updates are still in progress with councils and it is hoped that they will be completed soon. The text of the updated collection can be downloaded from here: <https://bit.ly/4dIEX5U>.
3. Matching resolutions for each report have been sourced and included, along with a header attached to all pre-2024 reports:

The report below, along with the accompanying resolutions, predates the General Assembly’s decision to adopt the categories of Regulations, Guidelines, and Guidance. The placement of the report and resolutions into one of these categories is intended to give the Church an indication of the broad thrust of the material, but does not in any way affect the standing of any report or the authority of any resolutions. This is determined solely by the wording that was received and agreed by the Assembly in the past.

The Assembly is asked to note this in recommendation (b) (detailed in paragraph 5).

4. Development has begun on the private document area of the PCI website, where Regulations etc. will be published in a searchable form. Completing this will take the Task Group beyond its normal three year limit, so the Assembly is asked to extend the remit of the Task Group by a year in recommendation (c) (detailed in paragraph 5).
5. The first resolution relating to the work of this Task Group covers three recommendations relating to the original remit of the Task Group:
 - (a) That the updates to the collection of Regulations, etc., including their categorisations, be accepted.
 - (b) That the General Assembly note that the authority of reports and resolutions that have been considered by the task group depends on the decisions made by past meetings of the Assembly and is not altered by the category that the Guidelines Review Task Group has placed them in.
 - (c) That the Guidelines Review Task Group, working in conjunction with the Communications Department, be authorised to publish the collection of Regulations, etc.; and the remit of the Guidelines Review Task Group be extended for one additional year to facilitate this.

Reflections and possible future work

6. The work of the Task Group has raised an issue that goes beyond the original remit of the Task Group, but is highlighted for the Assembly to reflect on and decide if it wants to do some further work that would benefit the Church.
7. One of the weaknesses in PCI's governance is that we do hard work over the course of years in various committees and come to agreement on important issues, but that work is recorded in a handful of places – reports and minutes of the General Assembly, and the fading memories of people who were at the Assembly or involved in the relevant task groups, etc. There are many decisions we forget about within a few years or forget the rationale behind them. We don't know what we've agreed or why, and without a memory or work having been done, it may not occur to anyone to look up old reports. As a result, we spend time in task groups and panels starting discussions from scratch when we have decades of previous reports that would provide a head start for discussion.
8. Various approaches for making past decisions of the Assembly more discoverable and accessible were considered by the Task Group and it is recommended that the General Council be authorised to develop a searchable electronic archive of General Assembly Reports and Minutes when there is capacity for the work. A resolution to this effect is included.

A matter referred to the Task Group and matters arising from it

9. The General Council, at its meeting on 26 March 2026, referred the following matter to the Guidelines Review Task Group:

That the Safeguarding Policies and Procedures ... be adopted from 31 March 2026 as Guidelines under the terms of Code 401.1 and that they be referred to the Guidelines Review Task Group for comment and forwarding to the Judicial Commission as required...

10. The Task Group reported to the General Council about this on 14 April 2026. In order to comment on the specific matter of how to categorise the Safeguarding Procedures, the Task Group considered the range of options available for approving the procedures for use by the Church and the advantages and disadvantages of each. The options which give the strongest standing for the procedures are also the options which take longest to come into effect and are the most cumbersome and slow to update. Consideration was given to two procedural matters relating to whether changes could be made more quickly.
11. Firstly, overtures and changes to Regulations require Judicial Commission advice. As the court appointing the Judicial Commission, can the General Assembly do this, or do commissions have exclusive jurisdiction over their business? The assumption is that a court of the church cannot do the business of a commission without discharging the commission or reclaiming the matter (neither of which are simple), but the Code does not explicitly say. The General Council agreed to refer this matter to the Judicial Commission for further consideration.
12. Secondly, Code Par 326.4 empowers the General Council to fulfil the legal obligations of the charity trustees. However it is unclear whether this allows the General Council to act more quickly than the Code normally allows the General Assembly to act, for instance would this enable the General Council to issue Regulations with immediate effect, bypassing the requirement for Judicial Commission advice, in order to fulfil the legal obligations of the charity trustees? If not, it would be helpful to amend the Code to enable this so that the charity trustees can act quickly to ensure that the Church is complying with the law and mitigating harm. A new paragraph for the Code was suggested:

326.4.1 notwithstanding Par 327.10, this shall include power to adopt or issue with immediate effect Regulations (Schedule 1) and Guidelines (Schedule 2) in the name of the Assembly.

The General Council agreed to refer this matter to the Judicial Commission for further consideration.

13. The new safeguarding procedures run to several hundred pages and the combined length of all the other Regulations etc. runs to several hundred pages. This is impractical to publish in printed form and cumbersome to maintain. The experience in General Council has been that the process of updating procedures can be confusing and slow business down drastically. The Task Group has therefore considered whether it would be useful to make a distinction between the requirement to create, maintain, and observe policies and procedures; and the content of the policies and procedures themselves. This is discussed in detail in Appendix 2. The General Council agreed to refer this matter to the Judicial Commission for further consideration.

14. Regarding the specific comment that the General Council asked for, in the short term the decision of the General Council to designate the Safeguarding procedures as Guidelines has the advantage of bringing them into immediate effect. In the long run it would be preferable that the requirement to have, maintain and observe procedures be church law but the content of the procedures themselves have a status that allows them to be updated more quickly and flexibly. It is hoped that the new process in Appendix 2 would accomplish this. The General Council agreed to refer this matter to the Judicial Commission for further consideration.
15. The process of commenting on this matter has also raised questions relating to the original remit of the Task Group. One of the types of decision that the General Assembly (and General Council) can make is to issue a statement about doctrine. This happens through the Doctrine Committee and the Task group has given designations to 10 such reports. However, the Code is unclear about the extent to which receiving a Doctrine Committee report binds the Church or any process that is necessary to produce a report which contradicts a previous report. It is unclear how a Doctrine Committee report which does not ask the Assembly to adopt anything fits within the framework of Regulations, etc. The General Council agreed to refer this matter to the Judicial Commission for further consideration.
16. In summary, the following five matters have been referred to the Judicial Commission by the General Council:
 - The question of whether commissions have exclusive jurisdiction over their work.
 - The ability of charity trustees to act quickly on their legal obligations, including a new paragraph for the Code.
 - A new process for adopting and maintaining policies and procedures, detailed in appendix 2
 - The preparation of an Overture with parameters for the safeguarding policies and procedures, in line with appendix 2.
 - The standing of Doctrine Committee reports.

JONATHAN BOYD, Convener

APPENDIX 1

CHANGES TO REPORTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Made changes to ten documents:

1. Paper on adding a Band C Salary Scale to the recommended Salary Scales for Additional Pastoral Personnel [2019] – Updated language and code references.
2. Sick supply fund rules [2014] – Updated language and code references
3. Irregular Immigration: responding to a dilemma faced by Congregations and Individuals [2009] – CMI have updated this and provided the new version for submission via this Task Group.
4. Divorced ministers (Revised) [1996] – Updated language and code references.
5. Guidelines on handling reported cases of sexual impropriety within the ordained leadership of the Presbyterian Church In Ireland (approved by the General Board of PCI and forwarded to Clerks of Presbytery) [2012] – There was no resolution for this as it was a report of a working group of the Moderator's Advisory Committee, whose work was approved by the General Board, so a paragraph was added from the report of the Moderator's Advisory Committee and noted that the report of the General Board was received.
6. Structuring Presbytery Business [1996] – This went down to presbyteries and a revised version was produced in 1997. The revised version and corresponding resolution have been put in.
7. Participation in National Lottery [1995] – Previously only had the resolution. Paragraphs now added from the Board of Social Witness report.
8. Nationhood [1994] – The report was sent down to presbyteries for comment and a report made in 1995 which engaged with those comments, but did not make any changes to the 1994 report, so it has simply been noted that the 1995 report was received.
9. Report on Freemasonry [1992] – This only had a resolution. The report has now been added.
10. Diakonia – Service or Ministry [1973] – Has a resolution in MGA stating '13. That the report on DIAKONIA be referred to Presbyteries and to the Assembly's Manpower Committee for study and comment.' The 1974 Doctrine Committee report and 1974 minutes were checked. No changes were made to the original report so it simply has been noted that the report was received in 1974.

Added nine documents and assigned designations:

1. Decision making and dissent [2024] – Regulation.
2. Structures Review Panel booklet [2014] – Regulation.
3. Categories of Inter-Church relationships used by PCI [2017] – Guidance.
4. Recommendations regarding the inter-church bodies to which PCI should belong [2017] – Guidance.
5. Manse guidelines [2025] – Guideline.
6. Guidelines for Presbytery Clerks on the Role of Presbyteries in the Employment of Additional Pastoral Personnel [2025] – Guidelines.
7. Protracted Illness Guidelines [2025] – Guideline.
8. Judicial Process Guidance for Presbyteries [2026] – Guidance.
9. Safeguarding Procedures [2026] – Guideline.

Removed 19 documents:

Many of these were removed because they are already in Schedules 1 and 2 as approved by the General Assembly in 2024.

1. Decision making and dissent [2023] – Replaced with Decision Making and Dissent [2024], which includes the 2023 report and amends it.
2. Vows for full membership and baptism task group [2021] – Already in Schedule 1.
3. Amalgamations and Charity Commission [2019] – Outdated and in the process of being updated.
4. Protracted Illness Guidelines [2018] – Superseded by Protracted illness Guidelines [2025].
5. Ministers' Prolonged Disability Fund [2017] – Already in Schedule 2.
6. Judicial process guidance for presbyteries [2017] – Much of this is specific to 161 and 224 commissions. Revised guidance is being issued by Judicial Commission.
7. Part-Time Ministry (Revised October 2015) [2016] – Already in Schedule 1.
8. Guidelines for Kirk Sessions in filling Auxiliary Ministry Posts [2015] – Already in Schedule 2.
9. Manses [2016] – Superseded by Manse guidelines [2025].
10. The implementation of a Scheme for Auxiliary Ministry [2015] – Already in Schedule 2.
11. Ministerial Expenses during the Illness of a Minister [2014] – Superseded by Protracted Illness Guidelines [2025].
12. Proposed Presbytery Guidelines for Approving Elders elect [2011] – Already in Schedule 2.
13. Course requirements for those training for the Ordained Ministry [2009] – Already in Schedule 1.

14. **Policy and Procedures for dealing with allegations of sexual abuse [2004]** – Superseded by new policies and procedures.
15. **Manses [2001]** – Superseded by Manse guidelines [2025].
16. **The appointment of Additional Pastoral Personnel [1997]** – Superseded by Guidelines for Presbytery Clerks on the Role of Presbyteries in the Employment of Additional Pastoral Personnel [2019].
17. **Personnel in Presbytery [1996]** – Was sent down to presbyteries for feedback and a revised report came the next year so it is superseded by **Suggestions for better structuring Presbytery business etc. in a context of mindset for mission [1997]** .
18. **Freemasonry [1995]** – This is simply a resolution that goes with another item, so they have been merged.
19. **Redundant Manses [1992]** – Removed on advice of Linkage Commission Convener.

Notes on five other documents:

1. **Form of a Call to a Minister and form of a Call to a Minister Part-Time Ministry Scheme [2015]** – This is in the process of being updated by Linkage.
2. **The Guidelines for Deferred Linkage [2013]** – This is in the process of being updated by Linkage.
3. **Models for Pastoral Care [2011]** – This is under active review by CCLW.
4. **Proposed Presbytery Guidelines for Approving Elders Elect [2011]** – This is under active review by CCLW.
5. **Marriage and the family [1995]** – The version the group looked at consists of some guidance but this is actually an extract from a longer 4 page report that is largely about cohabiting. This may be worth looking at again in the future.

APPENDIX 2

1. A new process for approving and maintaining policies and procedures

It is possible to make a distinction between the requirement to create, maintain, and observe policies and procedures; and the content of the policies and procedures themselves. The requirement to create, maintain, and observe procedures could be a Regulation for instance, which has the standing of Church Law and can only be changed after seeking Judicial Commission advice, but the content of the procedures could sit outside the Regulation and therefore be easier to update.

There are provisions in the Code to allow the General Council to issue and update policies, procedures, and resources. It is therefore possible that the existence of safeguarding procedures could be noted in the Code and a requirement given to follow them, while leaving the content of those procedures outside of the Code/Regulations/Guidelines, making them easier to update. There is already some provision for this in the Code Pars 226.8 (the Annual Statistical Return), 234 (resources for consultations), and 236 (resources for visitations). Par 43.26 also refers specifically to safeguarding in congregations, but the recently-approved Safeguarding policies and procedures apply to more than just congregations, so this current paragraph by itself is inadequate and it has few details about the policies.

The following process is recommended as a means for creating and maintaining policies and procedures:

- (a) Parameters for a set of policies and procedures shall be agreed.
- (b) New Code paragraphs, Regulations, or Guidelines containing these parameters shall be drafted and if necessary submitted to the Judicial Commission for advice.
 - Policies and procedures which are at the heart of church life should be referred to in the Code
 - Policies and procedures which must be stringently obeyed but are not so central to the life of the Church should be referred to in Regulations
 - All other policies and procedures can be referred to in Guidelines
- (c) A General Assembly resolution or Overture as appropriate shall be submitted to the General Assembly for approval.

2. Template for parameters of policies and procedures

- (a) The Church shall maintain a set of policies and procedures known as the _____.
- (b) The purpose of these policies and procedures is _____.
- (c) These policies and procedures apply to _____.
- (d) These policies and procedures [Code or Regulations: must be

followed in all circumstances / Guidelines: shall be observed unless there are exceptional reasons not to, and a written record of such reasons shall be kept].

- (e) These policies and procedures shall be reviewed at least every _____ years.
- (f) The _____ shall be responsible for maintaining these policies and procedures, including reviewing them and drafting updates.
- (g) Updates [may be issued by the body responsible for maintaining them, on its own authority / shall be submitted to _____ for approval].
- (h) The General Assembly shall be notified of updates at its annual meeting and shall have authority to review them.

An example of what this could look like for Safeguarding

- (a) The Church shall maintain a set of policies and procedures known as Safeguarding Policies and Procedures.
- (b) The purpose of these policies and procedures is to mitigate the risk of the Church causing harm to children or adults at risk, and to comply with all relevant legislation in the jurisdictions within which the Church operates.
- (c) These policies and procedures apply to all areas of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland with the exception of the Council for Social Witness and Union Theological college.
- (d) These policies and procedures must be followed in all circumstances.
- (e) These policies and procedures shall be reviewed at least every two years.
- (f) The Safeguarding Development Committee shall be responsible for maintaining these policies and procedures, including reviewing them and drafting updates.
- (g) Updates shall be submitted to the General Council for approval.
- (h) The General Assembly shall be notified of updates at its annual meeting and shall have authority to review them.

REPORT OF THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND

(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 2025 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 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 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); and from researchers.
3. The major areas of expenditure were the leasing and servicing of the Society's premises and the salary of the librarian/archivist. 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 topics of the programme of talks and lectures were: 'Andrew Melville', 'History of the Ordination of Women', 'Reflections on the 1625 Revival' (The Robert Allen Memorial Lecture), 'Presbyterians and the End of the Second World War', and 'Rev John Hall, 1829-98, Missionary to Connaught, Commissioner of Education and Builder of churches'. The annual Field Trip was to churches in the Six Mile Water area which was chosen as it was the 400th anniversary of the start of the Revival in that region.
6. The Annual General Meeting took place at Carryduff in March. This included the reappointment of the Revs Scott Moore and Jim Stothers as Joint Secretaries, and of Mr Stephen Johnston as Treasurer. Following the resignation of Mr Moore, the Council appointed Miss Audrey Hodge as Joint Secretary in November. The Rev Dr Tony Davidson succeeded me as Chairman at the May meeting of the Council.

7. Apart from our annual *Bulletin* the Society also published a booklet on the Rev Robert Barron, Minister of Whitehouse by the Rev Dr Joseph Thompson. Extensive work has been carried out to produce a once-in-a-generation volume work on the history of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland by the Rev Dr Bert Tosh. Preliminary work has also started on *Treasures of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland*, a lavishly illustrated book showcasing some of the more important items in the Society's possession. Other publications are progressing and are intended for publication in 2026.
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: a register of baptisms performed by PCI chaplains in Belfast City Hospital, 1887–1999; copies of letters from Dr Mary Eva Simms, missionary in China, mainly 1906; an illuminated address to the Rev James Rentoul on his ministerial Jubilee, Banbridge Road Dromore, 1915; sermons and prayers of Samuel Faris of Cork, brother of the Rev George Faris, Caledon and Coagh Presbyterian Churches, 1926–55; and a silver sugar bowl given to the Rev Samuel Edgar from his students of 1819.
10. The Society continues to share information with other organisations, agencies and blogs, which help to raise its profile and publicise its publications. This includes an ongoing relationship with Union Theological College, and a Facebook page which has over a thousand followers.
11. The Society's website (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 (115 in 2025). Web resources include:
 - Back Issues of Bulletins of the Society over five years old;
 - List of histories of Presbyterian congregations;
 - Minister Lists/Fasti/Student Lists;
 - List of Presbyterian magazines and digitised copies of some of the earliest ones;
 - First World War Roll of Honour;
 - Out-of-print books;
 - Transcripts and audio recordings of lectures;
 - Indexes to records;
 - County guides to Presbyterian congregational records.

12. The Council works hard to improve the number and range of articles on the history page, and in the updating and presentation of *A History of Presbyterian Congregations*. This year it has added an article on Dame Louise McIlroy, a Ballycastle Presbyterian and Pioneer for Women working in the Medical Profession, 1874–1968.
13. The Council has continued to work through its action plan.
14. The work of the team of volunteers who help out each week, filing, classifying library books, indexing and transcribing records, and preparing mailings is greatly appreciated.
15. 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 within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. It works mainly through ministers to alleviate poverty and financial hardship for eligible families and their children by providing regular and exceptional grants.
2. At 31 December 2025, approximately 820 children from 408 families were formally enrolled in the Society for assistance through regular quarterly grants, with an additional 32 children from 17 other families receiving interim grant payments.
3. Additionally, 111 exceptional grants, totalling over £62,000, were issued during the year. These grants enabled the Society to provide an immediate and targeted response, often overnight, to emergency situations arising from medical, family, employment, educational, marital, and bereavement issues.
4. A special summer grant of £80 per child was paid to families receiving the Society's regular quarterly grants, with an increased special winter grant of £90 per child also provided.
5. To complement congregational pastoral care, and in partnership with the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, the Society delivered another highly successful Small Grant Scheme. Small grants were awarded to forty-six local congregations to support workshops on topics such as autism, behaviour management, stress and anxiety, and digital resilience. Other congregations used grants for initiatives including parent and toddler groups, English language support training, Fun Days, church weekends, and summer lunch clubs. We are deeply grateful to Rev David Thompson and his administrative team for their continued encouragement and support of our work.

6. Recognising the importance of education in increasing opportunities and career prospects, the Society also supported an after-school education project overseen by Rev David Moore, in partnership with West Kirk Presbyterian Church and the North Belfast Urban Mission Trust. Just under £5,000 was provided in funding to support this vital work.
7. Across all grant categories, the Society paid out £671,929 in grants for the benefit of Presbyterian children and young people.
8. The families supported by the Society come from a wide range of backgrounds. The Society assists Presbyterian children whose families may be affected by unemployment or low income, separation, divorce, bereavement, single parenthood, long-term hospital care, imprisonment, or disability. In every case, the Society is committed to helping children achieve their full potential, regardless of their circumstances or financial means.
9. At its Annual General Meeting, the Society recognised the exceptional dedication of its congregational representatives, some of whom have provided faithful service for many decades.
10. Although the Society operates independently of the General Assembly, it continues to work closely with the ministers of the Church and the General Assembly. This partnership is deeply valued and greatly appreciated.
11. A range of congregational resources to inform the Church about our work is available on the Society's website: *www.presbyterianchildrenssociety.org*.
12. The Society's work is generously sustained by many Presbyterian congregations and individuals. We give thanks for all who have supported our work throughout the year and, as the Society approaches its 160th anniversary, commend it to the Church for its continued prayerful and financial support.

COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS

Convener: Rev DAVID W. BRICE

Acting Secretary: Mrs CAROLINE YEOMANS

1. The Council for Social Witness (CSW) presents this report to the General Assembly in humility and dependence upon God, recognising that all Christian service flows from His grace and is sustained by His Spirit. In all its work, the Council seeks to give faithful expression to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, bearing witness through compassionate action to the love of God for all people, and especially for those who find themselves on the margins of society.
2. The Scriptures consistently affirm this calling. The Lord declares through the prophet Micah that His people are “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself identified with those in need, teaching that “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). The Council understands its ministry as a participation in this diaconal calling of the Church - to serve Christ by serving others, upholding the dignity of every person as one made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

The core work and biblical mandate of the Council

3. At its heart, the work of the Council for Social Witness is a practical outworking of the commandment to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:31). This is not an abstract principle, but a lived reality expressed through acts of care, protection, advocacy, and support for those who are vulnerable, marginalised, or in need.
4. The Council’s ministry reflects the compassion of Christ, who consistently moved towards those whom society overlooked - the poor, the sick, the excluded, and the broken. In doing so, CSW seeks not only to meet physical and emotional needs but to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every individual as one created and loved by God.
5. This work is therefore both pastoral and missional. It is an expression of the Church’s calling to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world, demonstrating that faith is made visible through love in action (Galatians 5:6). The Council affirms that its services are not simply programmes or provisions, but ministries through which the love of Christ is made known in tangible and transformative ways.

Thanksgiving for God's blessing

6. In accordance with the guidance given to Councils, the Council for Social Witness gives thanks to God for His faithfulness over the past year. We recognise His hand at work in sustaining and strengthening our services, in the dedication and compassion of staff, and in the lives of those who have been supported through our care.
7. Particular encouragement has been seen in:
 - The continued provision of high-quality care across our residential homes, nursing home, and specialist services;
 - The resilience and commitment of staff teams working in increasingly complex environments;
 - The development and strengthening of leadership within the organisation, especially through the growth of a senior team bringing a broad range of professional specialisms.
8. This developing senior leadership structure has enhanced governance, accountability, and operational effectiveness, ensuring strong and effective management within each service. We give thanks to God for raising up individuals with the skills, experience, and Christian commitment necessary to lead in this demanding context.
9. In all these things, we echo the words of the Psalmist: "Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory" (Psalm 115:1).

Current work and ministry

10. The Council currently oversees a diverse portfolio of services, including:
 - Residential care homes for older people;
 - A nursing home;
 - Services for individuals with learning disabilities;
 - Specialist services, including Approved Premises and addiction rehabilitation.
11. Through these ministries, the Council seeks to demonstrate both professional excellence and Christian compassion. These services have, for many years, been primarily residential in nature, providing stability, care, and support to those in need.
12. The Council acknowledges with gratitude the faithful service of staff across all settings, who embody something of the servant-hearted nature of Christ, "who did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45).

Safeguarding: Transition and continuing commitment

13. Following decisions taken at the Special General Assembly in December 2025, responsibility for safeguarding across the wider Presbyterian Church in Ireland has now transitioned to a separate, dedicated denominational department.
14. The Council for Social Witness records its sincere gratitude for those who have worked faithfully in safeguarding alongside CSW over many years.

Their diligence, wisdom, and commitment have played a crucial role in protecting the vulnerable and upholding the integrity of the Church's witness. We give thanks to God for their service and for the foundations that have been laid.

15. Safeguarding is not merely a regulatory requirement but a deeply biblical mandate. Scripture calls us to protect those at risk and to act with justice and righteousness: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves... defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8–9). This responsibility remains integral to the Council's identity and practice.
16. In light of this transition, the Council will continue to develop its own safeguarding resources and frameworks specific to its services. This will ensure that safeguarding continues to be embedded within all aspects of our work, reflecting both best practice and our Christian commitment to care, protection, and accountability.

A changing context and a call to faithful adaptation

17. The Council recognises that the health and social care environment is undergoing significant change. There is an increasing emphasis on community-based provision, independence, and inclusion, reflecting a broader understanding of how individuals flourish within society.
18. This changing context presents both challenge and opportunity. If we are to remain faithful to our biblical mandate, we must be willing to go where the need is greatest. The call of Christ compels us not to remain fixed in one model of service, but to discern how best to meet people where they are, supporting them within their communities and enabling fuller participation in society.
19. In this, we are reminded of Christ's proclamation: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me... to proclaim good news to the poor... to set the oppressed free" (Luke 4:18). Such a calling requires movement, responsiveness, and courage.

The need for strategic renewal

20. Looking forward, the Council believes that this is a time for intentional reflection, prayerful discernment, and renewed vision. We acknowledge that, at times, our strategic thinking has been too narrow – particularly in relation to models of service delivery, income generation, and cost efficiency.
21. There is now a clear and pressing need to develop a fresh strategic plan that:
 - Evaluates honestly our current work and its effectiveness;
 - Listens carefully to the leading of God through Scripture, prayer, and the life of the Church;
 - Explores new and innovative models of service that reflect best practice and Gospel compassion;

- Enables us to reach those who may not currently access our services but are nevertheless in need of care and the love of Christ.
22. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, we are called to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind... to discern what is the will of God” (Romans 12:2).

Stewardship and responsibility

23. The Council also recognises its responsibility as stewards of the resources entrusted to it. Scripture teaches that “it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

In this regard, we acknowledge the need to:

- Develop a more expansive and strategic approach to income generation;
- Improve cost efficiency and financial sustainability;
- Ensure that resources are aligned with mission priorities.

Such stewardship is both a practical necessity and a spiritual discipline.

Professional development and Christ-centred service

24. The Council affirms the importance of ongoing professional development across all services. The increasing complexity of care demands a high level of expertise, and we are committed to strengthening training, leadership development, and professional standards within our teams.

At the same time, we affirm that faith in Jesus Christ must remain central to all service delivery. Our work must consistently reflect His character—marked by compassion, integrity, humility, and grace.

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord” (Colossians 3:23).

Seeking God’s guidance for the future

25. In line with the direction provided to Councils, we recognise that this is not simply a time for reporting, but for seeking God’s guidance for what lies ahead.

We therefore ask:

- Where is God directing the work of the Council in the years to come?
- How might we respond more faithfully to His call to serve those on the margins?
- What new opportunities is He placing before us?

We commit ourselves to prayerfully seeking His will, trusting in His promise: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go” (Psalm 32:8).

Conclusion and Call to Prayer

26. The Council for Social Witness stands at a significant point of transition. With gratitude for the past and clarity about present challenges, we look forward in faith.

We commend this work to the prayers of the General Assembly, asking that God would grant wisdom, courage, and discernment for the future, and that all we do would bring glory to His name and extend His Kingdom.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine... to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations” (Ephesians 3:20–21)

CAROLINE YEOMANS

Interim Director for Council for Social Witness

BUSINESS AND FINANCE PANEL

27. The past year has been marked by challenges including matters relating to safeguarding, staffing and the day-to-day business of providing care services. The early part of the year focused on addressing ongoing financial challenges, management of offenders, particularly with the associated risks and mitigations, addressing property matters across the estate and staffing matters. I am particularly grateful to those members of the panel who connect to our services and take responsibility for ensuring support and guidance to them. The relationships conveners build with staff across our services are invaluable and are a key mechanism for ensuring the ethos of our services remains anchored in the good news of Jesus Christ and the transformative, compassionate foundation the gospel provides for the care we provide.
28. In January of this year, while dealing with the response to the safeguarding crisis and responding to the gaps that resulted for the Council, the Panel was encouraged to hear of an improved financial situation. However, subsequent reviews by the Interim Director identified that the financial position differed from the information initially presented resulting in a significant change in the CSW financial outlook.
29. Since then, the Panel has been meeting fortnightly to focus on recovery. Recovery requires a critical assessment of how the financial situation arose, what improvements are required to ensure reporting is accurate, what oversight measures need to be put in place to assure the Panel, Council and General Assembly of the integrity of our work and what will give confidence to staff that they are able to provide a safe service. Above all, recovery must ensure that the services we deliver are safe.
30. The matter of safe services is significant. It is incumbent upon us to meet the standards set for care providers. These standards exist to ensure that people in our care, as in the care of other providers, are treated with dignity and respect, that they are cared for to the highest standards of planning

and protection and that where there are actions and improvements to service provision required, that we respond speedily and efficiently.

31. The current focus on recovery requires that measures are put in place to protect the safety of all. This includes oversight of safeguarding within our facilities and the resources needed to train, respond to escalated issues and deliver processes properly.
32. The Panel is mindful that our staff in the various places where we provide care have come under greater scrutiny since the safeguarding crisis. The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority has carried out more inspections than usual in a year. This is welcome in that recommendations from inspection reports assist us to focus on key areas for improvement. However, these inspections take a toll on staff who are already faced with significant pressures in their day-to-day work. As a Panel, we must ensure robust delivery of recommendations and we must also ensure services are safe, now and into the future. Our fortnightly meetings are considering the broad scope of possible responses to ensure safe services as we move forward, services that are affordable and to the standards those within our care should expect. Human Resources provision for our services also requires further consideration given the level of demand on a small team. Regional teams are stretched and staffing vacancies presents an ongoing challenge. In much of this we are not exceptional. These are the kinds of pressures other providers are experiencing. Nevertheless, they are matters of concern to us and over the next months we will be working, alongside others on behalf of the General Assembly, to define short and long term goals and actions to bring our care services to the place they need to be. These goals must ensure we have the right expertise in the right places and will likely require external assistance so we can plan and deliver for services that will be effective for the world in which we live. There has been a radical shift in understanding of how best to care for those, for example, with dementia or with substance use issues. Many of the approaches of the past are not now viable and we are considering the changes in strategy adopted for healthcare. Our services, if they are to remain viable and effective, will have to come to terms with the changed environment and consider what we, as a denomination, are capable of delivering and what it is we offer from the perspective of our Christian faith and witness. The Panel is prayerfully and intentionally engaged in considering what our services both can and should look like to bear witness in today's world. People in our care remain at the heart of our thinking and planning.
33. There is no doubt that this has been a challenging and, at times, difficult year and the Panel has no doubt that difficult decisions may lie ahead. Through it all we have been grateful for the staff in the office and those across our facilities. It is impossible to describe to the General Assembly the level of work and dedication we see and also impossible to describe the pressure on each member of staff which is often visible to us. We offer thanks to our staff, ably led, on an interim basis, by Mrs Caroline Yeomans, and invite the General Assembly to pray for them and for the work in which we are engaged to bring our services to a place that will

not only satisfy inspectorates but give confidence to all that how we are caring for people is worthy of the trust those within our care place in us. We are all grateful to God for sustaining grace and love, for the sense of community and shared enterprise and for the support of God's people.

LESLEY CARROLL, Convener

Convener's remarks

34. James 2.14-17: "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

Restructuring

35. The Council for Social Witness is fully committed to a restructuring process and our Interim Director, Caroline Yeomans, makes comment on this in her report. We anticipate the beginnings of the General Assembly discussing the restructuring of our governance and it is likely that a Supplementary report will be produced for the June Assembly.

Appreciation

36. I would wish to take this opportunity to recognise the contribution of two people. Dermot Parsons, our Director and Jayne Bellingham, our Safeguarding Lead.
37. Dermot joined us in November 2021, a highly qualified and experienced Manager in the Care Sector and dedicated himself tirelessly to bringing CSW into the 21st century. Like any long serving institution, we bordered on being entrenched and perhaps over confident in our capacity to manage Care Services matched to contemporary operational standards and regulation and with a minimalist management team. Quickly he instigated a Risk Management Strategy which identified key areas for improvement and, with determination, he pressed us to make the necessary changes so that each service was effectively and quantifiably managed. The key was to increase the level of support given to our Service Managers so that they could better manage the complexities and scope of caring for people with diverse needs in the residential sector. All that Dermot achieved was motivated by a deep personal love for God, a desire to be a servant leader and a genuine concern for all those under his care. Dermot has helped us aspire for excellence in serving God and serving people because as he constantly reminded us, "People Matter to God."
38. Jayne Bellingham, a social worker, joined CSW initially as Service Manager of Trinity House in Garvagh where she served for five years running an excellent service and strongly establishing the Christian ethos of the home which continues. Recognising Jayne's capabilities, she was asked to move to the role of Regional Manager and again she excelled with her trademark

capacity to understand what is happening on the ground, to zero in on what needed to be adjusted and help others make the improvements. Soon, as I visited the various services, I was hearing commendations of “excellent support from my regional manager.” In January 2023, Jayne was asked to change role once again and was seconded to become Safeguarding Lead. From Service Manager, to Regional Manager, to Safeguarding Lead, these are all distinctively different roles and, especially with Safeguarding, a different knowledge base. Yet, within weeks, Jayne was making significant progress and she quickly gained the trust of us all in terms of her understanding, grasp of where we were and where we needed to get to. Re-writing policies and procedures for two jurisdictions was an enormous task and processing a long overdue new set of Guidelines in such a short space of time took Herculean effort all the while addressing shortfalls in service provision as they became apparent. At CSW we owe Jayne a debt of considerable gratitude, and we thank her especially for her Christian witness to us as a dedicated servant of God. We wish her God’s richest blessing as she continues her secondment in what has become a separate Safeguarding Department.

39. It would be remiss of the Council if we did not recognise the intensely stressful environment that our CSW staff, centered at Assembly Buildings, have endured in the lead up to the public acknowledgment of historic Safeguarding irregularities and thereafter. Senior staff were diverted solely to Safeguarding and obliged to work to many deadlines in an environment of high confidentiality. The remaining staff had to deal with the day-to-day work of running a complex organisation, at times without the normal supportive engagement with senior staff. We want to thank them for the immense effort and gentle support and understanding they offered which has seen us through a very difficult time. With good grace and empathy they, as a team, held together.

Our calling to care

40. As we anticipate a new phase in the life of CSW I think it is good that we go back to first principles and ask the question why we, as a denomination, do what we do? To that end, an appendix to the report has been compiled, which covers the biblical principles that govern our calling to care and which will appear in the Supplementary Report book.

DAVID BRICE, Convener

OLDER PEOPLE’S SERVICES

41. This has been a very challenging year for Older People’s Services (OPS). What had appeared to be a stable period allowing for consolidation and development of services, for example in dementia nursing care, has been adversely affected both by emerging issues within the Council for Social Witness/Child Protection and by the associated senior staff changes. We are enormously grateful to the staff within OPS who have stepped up to

the enormous challenges faced by the Council with fortitude, faith and compassion.

42. Our financial position continues to pose significant challenges. Funding from Health and Social Care to support payment of fees for residents, has not kept pace with inflationary pressures such as increases to the minimum wage. Work continues to try to mitigate these pressures without having to make further significant “top-up” charges to new residents. Unfortunately, we are also constrained by the physical environment of many of our facilities which precludes the development of additional rooms or services on site which might otherwise be expected to contribute to an improvement in our financial position.
43. The fabric of some of our care homes continues to deteriorate with age, and the intense demands of residents and staff. A significant level of investment is required to maintain an appropriate physical environment and associated standards for our residents. Within the next year, we must urgently and honestly consider whether some of our homes remain fit for purpose.
44. At a service delivery level, we are again experiencing challenging levels of vacancies, particularly in relation to night and weekend cover. As a result, our use of agency staff, which had been on a downward trend, has once again started to increase. This has a significant adverse financial impact.
45. Our services continue to be subject to regular inspections, both announced and unannounced. Where areas for improvement are identified, these are addressed in a timely manner, and robust improvement plans are implemented. Where issues are identified by local Health and Social Care Trusts, these are also addressed quickly and thoroughly in partnership with external colleagues.
46. While there are many challenges facing OPS, it is very clear that the commitment of staff at all levels to maintaining safe and effective care for frail, vulnerable, older people remains as strong as ever. Senior staff in particular have demonstrated a commitment to the provision of faith-based care and a dedication to meeting the needs of each individual resident that can only be described as exemplary.
47. OPS recognises that there is significant work to be done as a matter of urgency in 2026, and beyond, in relation to the model of service delivery, the physical environment in which care is delivered, staff retention and our financial position.

JOYCE McKEE, Convener

SPECIALIST SERVICES COMMITTEE

48. In fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy, Jesus announced that he had come “to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18–19). These words are so

relevant in a society full of pain, brokenness, addiction, homelessness and acute mental health anxiety. Specialist services continue to draw alongside those in need, offering in the name of Jesus, hope, new beginnings, healing and restoration.

49. We want to pay tribute to staff teams working in Thompson House, Carlisle House and Gray's Court for their faithfulness and dedication, compassion and understanding. It can be a rewarding work, but it also brings many challenges, stresses and strains.
50. We pay particular tribute to David Farrow, who steps down from his role in Thompson House, after 36 years of outstanding service. David saw his work as a calling, invested totally in all who passed through the doors of the facility, and was totally dedicated to the Christian ethos of Thompson House. He never lost his vision for the work, was always passionate and enthusiastic in his approach, while at the same time being full of wisdom, understanding and realism. This has been a very high pastoral load with its share of successes as well as disappointments. It is in no small measure due to David that Thompson House is held in universally high regard by those in the prison and probationary services. We wish David well in his retirement and welcome Mr Tim Higgins who will take over as manager of the service in Thompson House.
51. Thompson House operates at full capacity, not only offering an oasis and a home to those who have served prison terms, but by providing various life tools. These include being taught how to cook as well as employment skills. Carlisle House continues to be commended for the high quality of its therapeutic interventions offered during the treatment of those recovering from addictions. Gray's Court has also a focus on developing independent living skills.
52. The distinctive Christian ethos of our services is experienced in the interactions between staff and residents, the provision of Bible studies and the development of relationships with local churches. Because of the sensitive pastoral work involved, so much happens under the radar of the wider Church, but prayer is very much appreciated.
53. Our services operate within budgetary constraints, recruitment difficulties and ongoing building maintenance. The Committee is also looking to future provision and is vision casting.

CHARLES McMULLEN, Convener

DISABILITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

54. Disability Services Committee is indebted to the staff in the CSW Office for their support over the past year. The Interim Director, Mrs Caroline Yeomans, Regional Managers and Administration Team have had an exceptionally busy year and have gone the extra mile to ensure that the work of the Committee is carried out to an exceptional standard. The Committee places on record its thanks to all members of staff.

55. The staff in the various services are also to be commended for their dedicated work and professionalism. The Committee gives thanks to God for their commitment and dedication to each resident.
56. All the services have faced a very challenging year in recruitment of staff, with vacancies and staff illness making the use of agency staff essential. This has had an impact on finances. The use of agency staff is essential for the safety of residents. Various training courses have been arranged for all staff. These courses have been well attended.
57. The residents in all the services are cared for and shown God's love by all members of staff. They all have individual needs and these needs are met professionally but also with compassion and love.
58. RQIA Investigation and Oversight Group has been established by the RQIA in response to the Church's wider safeguarding concerns. As a result, each service has been subject to an inspection. The quality of care offered within the service was found to be exemplary and not under question. Additionally, no safeguarding concerns were found.
59. An important aspect of all the homes is the Christian ethos within the facility. This is a very important part of the work. Visits from local ministers or members of congregations would be very much appreciated to lead and encourage worship with the residents.

JOYCE ANDERSON, Convener

COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND

Convener: Rev Dr BEN WALKER

Secretary: Mr RICK HILL

INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The report covers the period from July 2025 to April 2026, summarising the Council's delivery on the following aspects 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.
2. The Council has now settled into the patterns brought about through its adjusted structures with each committee benefitting from the steady leadership found in the length of period of its Convener, with appreciation noted for their faithful service.
3. The Council met twice in-person for routine business and once online to consider the issuing of a call. Most meetings of committees and panels were held in-person with a facility to join online.
4. The staff team, which supports the Council's work, has been operating at full complement, with Ms Helen Johnston, Mr Neil Harrison and Mrs Pip Florit all making significant contributions in their various Executive roles, and Mrs Joyce Craig, Ms Evie Craig and Mrs Michelle Pollock ably assisting in administrative functions within the Mission Department.
5. The Council will soon mark the retirement of Ms Helen Johnston in her role as Mission Support Officer (Member Care). Helen has served the Mission Department with distinction, wisdom and excellence for more than two decades and the Council is indebted to her for the way she has carried out her duties in service of her Lord. In particular, her care and support of Deaconesses and Irish Mission Workers, among many other things, has been greatly appreciated and her insightful input will be missed in the future, with thankfulness and prayers offered by the Council for her service. In conjunction with the Council for Global Mission, steps are being taken to recruit a successor.

6. Amidst the challenging backdrop within the wider denomination, the Council's work has progressed with continued energy and commitment in the past year, with much to be encouraged by in ongoing church planting, mission projects, chaplaincy and within the Home Mission. Significant developments are highlighted in the report that follows.
7. In addition, some reports approved at the 2025 General Assembly have been developed in a more accessible form, whether in print or via online publication, and have now been made available to the wider church for continued reference and reflection. "Chaplaincy: A Ministry of Presence", now in print-form, offers a coherent vision for chaplaincy in the coming years, while "Mission as a Minority" has been published online with additional reflection questions and relevant stories, for consideration by the church in areas where Presbyterians have long been, or have recently found themselves, culturally or religiously the minority.
8. Other significant areas of strategic thinking, highlighted in this report and its appendices, are progressing well in development-mode. These include an interim report relating to the potential shape of mission work in the south west of the island, as well as a developing framework offering helpful markers and metrics on the journey from church plant to constituted congregation. Feedback from members of the Assembly is welcomed on both areas of development, with subsequent resolutions appended to encourage discussion and enable debate.
9. The Council remains thankful for the ongoing support of the entire denomination through prayer, in involvement and by giving to the United Appeal for Mission, which continues to be the source that enables the majority of work contained in this report. In a time of much difficulty and disruption in the church, caused by a wide variety of factors, the Council understands the vital role it can play to support existing mission and stimulate new possibilities, in collaboration with Presbyteries, that help reach those beyond the Lord's Church and develop its witness across the whole island.

STRATEGY FOR MISSION COORDINATION COMMITTEE

10. The Committee continues to carry out assessment of new missional possibilities, seeking to be proactive and forward-looking, while also responding to proposals brought to the Council for consideration. In this, there is a requirement to adopt a long-term approach, understanding that many of the considerations may take several years to flourish or even unfold.
11. One big-picture item of work was completed through the development of the approved 'Mission as a Minority' report into a more enhanced tool, which involved the addition of a foreword, reflection questions and practical examples within a well-designed format. Having been shared

with relevant bodies and published online, the tool offers a summary of missional principles and practices for areas where Presbyterians represent a significant minority and the church may be required to reflect on the need to cross cultural boundaries in its mission.

12. The Committee has developed various strands of thinking in regards to its identified priority of better resourcing ministry and mission further south and west in the island, via the provision of ministry roles and mission projects. The establishment of the South West of Ireland Task Group is one such strand, while a framework offering helpful markers and metrics on the journey from church plant to constituted congregation is being developed by the Church Planting Panel.
13. The formation of a Special Ministry Project in Ballina was approved and developed, to be taken forward under the oversight of the Mission Partnership Committee.
14. Vacancy assessments were carried out in the congregations of Sligo, Fahan and Greystones, as well as the charge of Clones, Newbliss, Ballyhobridge and Stonebridge, with recommendations also offered regarding the new congregation of Central Belfast.
15. The Committee developed a proposal relating to Home Mission ministry in the congregation of Ballycastle alongside outreach work in Cushendall, in response to a request from the Ballymena Presbytery. The proposal was tested with all relevant bodies, including both Presbyteries, with a positive desire expressed from each to progress in collaboration with the Linkage Commission.
16. A request was received from Ferrybank Christian Community Church near Waterford to explore possible future partnership with this church plant led by ECM Missionaries from a Presbyterian background. Exploratory discussions were held with its leadership team, who are in theological alignment with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and express a desire for greater accountability and denominational belonging through a stated goal to explore partnership with PCI. A CMI Assessment Group recommended that a three-year exploratory partnership be developed involving Kilkenny Presbyterian Church, the Council for Mission in Ireland and the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster. This should include the establishment of a Ministry Reference Group, the offer of limited grant support (via KPC) and access to CMI staff and networks, all with a view to potential future formal integration within PCI. A Ministry Partnership Agreement was drafted in line with these recommendations and offered to each body for consideration.
17. Various Chaplaincy proposals were considered, with strategic comment given for each. Changes within University Chaplaincy arrangements in Belfast and the development of a 'Beyond' Prison Chaplaincy were approved and passed to the Chaplaincy Committee for outworking. In addition, following an increase of requests for Rural Chaplaincy roles from some Presbyteries, the Committee approved a paper outlining a way for new initiatives requesting CMI financial support to develop, which

included welcoming new proposals alongside a limit of a total of no more than two full-time equivalent Rural Chaplaincy roles being set in regards to financial contributions from the Council.

18. The Committee received a proposal from two ministers in relation to a Special Needs Chaplaincy initiative, with input invited from the Council for Congregational Life and Witness and the Council for Training in Ministry. This helped to differentiate between inclusion for people with special needs within the church (served through the remit of CCLW) and support for families who care for those with additional needs beyond congregational settings who feel isolated due to their circumstances (understood as potentially being served by chaplaincy). While the Committee was not ready to recommend the initial proposal of seeking a full-time Special Needs Chaplain, it did recommend that the Chaplaincy Committee consider establishing a two-year, part-time (6 hours per week) pilot project for a Minister to lead an initiative aimed at offering care for families with additional needs, with a view to developing a volunteer team across a broader geography and research potential funding sources for a more extensive project.
19. The Committee noted that the final piece of work identified by the Reimagining Ministry Task Group had not been developed, but agreed not to progress this with the understanding that it may fall better under the remit of other Councils or Commissions and a sense that there were enough assessment tools in circulation throughout the church during the Reconfiguration of Ministry process.
20. The Urban Mission Network held another positive summer conference in 2025 hosted by the London City Mission, in addition to one-day network events focused on 'Bible Engagement for non-readers' and 'Revitalisation in Hard Places', led by Rev Lesley Ann Wilson and Rev Marty Gray respectively. Encouraging attendance and positive feedback was noted for both events.
21. A sub-group undertook to re-work a report referred to CMI by the Guidelines Review Task Group on Irregular Immigration, with various amendments and additions approved by the Committee to be forwarded to the Task Group for their records. In addition, the sub-group continues to develop a document offering principles and practices for migrant ministry, which is now at an advanced stage and awaiting feedback from selected ministers with specific experience in this area.
22. An invitation was accepted from the Faculty of Union Theological College for the Council to facilitate a 'Missional Church' intensive module for all ministry students, trainee deaconesses and mission pioneers. This took place in the autumn term, with various Council representatives involved in delivery and the cross-council collaboration warmly welcomed.

CHURCH PLANTING PANEL

23. The Panel continues to view the planting of new churches to be one of the most effective methods of developing the missional effectiveness of the church across the whole of the island. This has been captured in the '10 + 10 in 10' vision, as approved by the General Assembly, which seeks to see the establishment of ten newly-constituted congregations in addition to ten new church planting projects in the next decade.
24. The Panel understands this to be a denomination-wide initiative and encourages congregations, in collaboration with Presbytery, to discern their capacity to be involved in sparking or supporting new church development, with accompaniment offered via the Church Planters Network and access to resources, including finances or Council staff.
25. Progress towards this tangible target is encouraging with seven ongoing church planting projects, either under the Council's care or under a congregation's oversight, alongside the constitution of one congregation, since the inception of the vision. The Panel is encouraging prayerful support of these projects, with visual aids being developed.
26. A Church Planting Conference was held in Drogheda Presbyterian on 7 February 2026 with Rev Neil MacMillan from City-to-City Europe presenting the keynote talks and a healthy attendance from a wide range of congregations and church planting projects within PCI. An overnight retreat for church planters and their spouses was held the previous day, with involvement from European church planters under the call of the Council for Global Mission.
27. The Church Planters Network has continued to gather throughout the year, with a growing sense of fellowship and unity, and helpful leadership offered from Rev Keith McCrory.
28. The Panel received an invitation from the faculty of Union Theological College to partner in a series of Church Planting Seminars, which will be held in October 2026. A timetable has been shaped to offer afternoon seminars on three consecutive Wednesdays, with input from various PCI church planters complemented by teaching from author Dan Steel (Wise Church Planting).
29. Alongside the conferencing and network, the substance of the Panel's work this year has been in developing a framework document to guide church planting projects on their journey towards constitution as congregations in line with the '10 + 10 in 10' vision. Its aim is twofold in offering guidance to church planting projects and an assessment tool prior to constitution. Following initial approval by the Council, it was referred to the Linkage Commission for comment.
30. With huge sadness, the Panel marked the passing of its esteemed Co-Convener, Rev Dr Martin McNeely, who died on 22 November 2025. Marty made a significant contribution to the Panel, helping to develop a renewed sense of vision for church planting within the wider denomination,

not least in paving the way for church development in both West Belfast and West Inishowen. He brought the same passion, warmth and energy to the Panel's work, as he did to his ministry and is greatly missed by all members who continue to remember in prayer his family.

DAVID CLAWSON, Interim Co-Convener

MISSION GRANTS PANEL

31. The Panel continues to evaluate carefully all applications with regards to missional intent alongside ensuring all approved grants are within the budget. To that end, various applications were considered, with a number of new grants awarded, and some policy amendments were made regarding sick and statutory leave for congregations in receipt of a grant.
32. With the assistance of grant funding, new Community Outreach Workers have commenced posts in Maynooth, Fermoy and Cahir, First Antrim, Cooke Centenary, New Mossley and St Andrew's, Bray in recent months.
33. A number of grant applications were approved to enable the support of Community Outreach Workers in Hazelbank, Drogheda, Kilfennan and Donabate, with two-year grant extensions offered to Movilla, West Belfast Special Ministry Project and Second Randalstown to enable the continuation of established roles.
34. Some one-off small mission grants were awarded to support Presbyteries or congregations in specific mission projects. These included grants to the Dublin and Munster Presbytery towards outreach costs at the Irish Ploughing Championship, the Presbytery of Dromore to support outreach at the Balmoral Show, the congregation of Carrigart to aid development of resources in the Bewglas Centre and the congregation of Garvaghy to support a local outreach initiative.
35. A training grant of £300 continues to be offered to Community Outreach Workers in the first three years of their role, with several requests approved by office-bearers.

KENNY HANNA, Convener

SOUTH WEST OF IRELAND TASK GROUP

36. The remit of the Task Group is to conduct research into missional needs in the South West of Ireland, defined as South of Galway and West of Cork, and bring firm proposals to the Committee for consideration.
37. The Task Group has met on a number of occasions and has included a visit to the area by some members to engage with various church and ministry leaders, as part of research and reflection.

38. A number of key principles have been identified to guide the Task Group's work, which have been approved by the Council and offered to the Dublin and Munster Presbytery for feedback.
39. These principles capture an emerging twofold desire to strengthen PCI's current witness in the area through prayerful and practical support of existing congregations, as well as support the development of at least one new missional work within the South West of Ireland where PCI is not currently present.
40. With regards to new development, the Task Group proposes that the city of Limerick should be prioritised as the initial focus and starting point. While conclusions are yet to be finalised, the Council has been asked to consider budgeting for a future Special Ministry Project in Limerick.

SAM MAWHINNEY, Convener

DARYL EDWARDS, Committee Convener

MISSION PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

Current directory of Home and Urban Mission charges (April 2026)

Minister	Charge
Home Mission	
Rev Michael Anderson	Arklow
Rev Gunther Andrich	Irvinestown, Pettigo and Tempo
Rev Rodney Beacom	Lisbellaw, Lisnaskea, Maguiresbridge and Newtownbutler
Rev John Brogan	Ballina Special Ministry
Rev Damien Burke	Drogheda
Rev Andy Carroll	Donabate
Rev Richie Cronin	Trinity Cork and Aghada
Rev David Curran	Wexford Church Development
Rev Alastair Dunlop	Howth and Malahide
Rev Daryl Edwards	Drum, Cootehill and Kilmount
Rev Helen Freeburn	Galway
Rev Andrew Gill	Blackrock and Bray
Rev William Hayes	Tullamore

Minister	Charge
Rev Dario Leal	Carrigart and Dunfanaghy (with additional missional duties)
Rev Josh McCance	Donabate Associate (Balbriggan Church Planting)
Rev Angus McCullough	Donegal and Stranorlar
Rev Dr Keith McCrory	Maynooth
Rev Jean Mackarel	Drumkeeran, Killeshandra, Cavan and Bellasis
Rev William Montgomery	Fermoy and Cahir
Rev Wallace Moore	Corboy and Mullingar
Rev Philip Poots	Moville, Greenbank, Carndonagh and Malin
Rev Jonathan Porter	Dundalk
Rev Mark Proctor	Naas (with additional chaplaincy duties)
Rev Stephen Rea	Carlow and Athy
Vacant	Ballycastle
Vacant	Clones, Stonebridge, Ballyhobridge and Newbliss (part-time)
Vacant	Fahan (with additional missional duties)
Vacant	Greystones
Vacant	Kells (County Meath)
Vacant	Sligo
Urban Mission	
Rev Rodney Cameron	St Columba's, Lisburn
Rev Mervyn Gibson	Westbourne
Rev Alan Marsh	Strand, Belfast
Rev Lachlan Webster	Craigavon
Vacant	Belvoir
Vacant	Central Belfast
Vacant (with Stated Supply)	Rathcoole

Home and Urban Mission vacancies

41. At the time of writing there were nine vacancies within the Home and Urban Mission, with several new appointments made throughout the course of the past year.
42. Rev Alan Marsh was installed in the Home (and Urban) Mission and inducted into the charge of Strand on 27 June 2025.
43. Rev John Brogan was installed in the Home Mission and inducted into the role of Ballina Special Ministry on 18 October 2025, which involves acting as Stated Supply to the congregation of Ballina in addition to developing fresh missional work in the town. As part of the proposals, a panel was established to offer oversight of the Project and supervision of the Minister, which includes representatives from both the Council and the Presbytery of Monaghan.
44. Rev Angus McCullough was installed to the Home Mission and inducted to the congregations of Donegal and Stranorlar on 15 November 2025
45. Rev John Hanson retired from active ministry on 10 December 2025 with the charge of Clones, Stonebridge, Ballyhobridge and Newbliss being declared vacant.
46. Rev Gary McDowell retired from ministry on 28 February 2026 with the congregation of Greystones being declared vacant.
47. The Council notes the upcoming retirement of Rev Stephen Rea from ministry in Carlow and Athy and will work with the vacancy convener on next steps.
48. The congregations of Sligo and Fahan have received 'Leave to Call' with all ministers being notified of these opportunities and commended for prayerful consideration.

Other Home and Urban Mission matters

49. The congregation of Kilkenny exited the Home Mission on 30 June 2025.
50. Monthly worship in Killala ceased at the end of December 2025 and the congregation will now be dissolved.
51. The new congregation of Central was established within the South Belfast Presbytery on 1 October 2025 and received into the Urban Mission, with Leave to Call granted by the Linkage Commission in January 2026 and the position advertised to all ministers and eligible licentiates. Following interviews, Mr David Dickinson was nominated for the vacancy. Mr Dickinson preached for the charge on 12 April 2026 and, in light of unanimous support from voting members of the congregation, the Council agreed to issue a call.
52. Rev Gary McDowell commenced as Stated Supply in Rathcoole from 1 April.
53. An application to join the Urban Mission was received from the congregation of Ballysally and is being progressed by the Council, in consultation with the Kirk Session.

54. The Council was invited to be represented in ongoing Presbytery Tenure Review Panels in the charges of Irvinestown, Pettigo and Tempo and Blackrock and Bray.
55. An annual overnight gathering for Home Mission Ministers was held on 21–22 April 2026 in Dundalk, with input from Rev Ben Walker and Rev Dr John Woodside. Feedback about this initiative continues to be positive.
56. A series of ‘Home Mission Support’ events took place in Kilkenny, Maynooth, Strand and Donegal, with the aim of developing greater connection with the leadership of congregations, stimulate thinking and outline mechanisms of support.
57. A number of ministers within the Home Mission continue to benefit from the support of a mentor, with ministers in new Home Mission charges assigned a mentor to offer guidance.

Mission Pioneers

Name	Location
Jonny and Naomi Campbell	Titanic Quarter Mission Project
David Gamble	Rathcoole
Lewis McKelvey	Ballycastle
Gary O’Rourke	The Village Project, South Belfast

58. Mr Lewis McKelvey (Ballycastle), Mr Gary O’Rourke (The Village Project, South Belfast) and Mr David Gamble (Rathcoole) continue in their roles as Mission Pioneers to good effect, with reviews held with each at the end of their first year of deployment.
59. On 28 September 2025, Jonny and Naomi Campbell were commissioned as Mission Pioneers and inducted to part-time roles in the Titanic Quarter Mission Project, which is overseen by the congregation of Orangefield.
60. A cohort of three prospective Mission Pioneers is progressing through a training pathway, with the aim that some may be ready for deployment later in the year.

IRISH MISSION WORKER AND DEACONESS PANEL**Directory of Irish Mission Workers and Deaconesses (April 2026)**

Name	Role	Location
Sonya Anderson	Deaconess	Shore Street, Donaghadee
Paula Burrows	Deaconess	Ballygrainey
Rachel Cubitt	Deaconess	Whiteabbey
Louise Davidson	Deaconess	South Belfast Friendship House
Eleanor Drysdale	Deaconess	Wellington, Ballymena
Joanne Dunlop	Deaconess	Chaplaincy Team – Antrim and Craigavon Hospitals
Heidi England	Deaconess	Railway Street, Lisburn
Heather Healy	Deaconess	Fisherwick
Sharon Heron	Deaconess	International Meeting Point, Belfast
Roberta Irvine	Deaconess	Elmwood, Lisburn
Heather McCracken	Deaconess	Belfast Health and Social Care Trust with additional duties in chaplaincy in Musgrave Park Hospital
Tracey Nicholl	Deaconess	St James', Ballymoney
Hazel Reid	Deaconess	First Broughshane with additional duties in chaplaincy in Causeway Hospital
Sylvia Santos Bryce	Deaconess	West Church, Ballymena
Cathy Smith	Deaconess	First Holywood
Rosemary Spiers	Deaconess	Greenwell Street, Newtownards
Tom Dowling	Irish Mission Worker	Kilkenny

61. The Irish Mission Worker and Deaconess Panel's work has continued during the year by offering support and encouragement to current Deaconesses and Irish Mission Workers and their supervisors in various areas of work and interactions. Helen Johnston continued to provide HR and Member Care direction for the panel.
62. An overnight gathering for Irish Mission Workers, Deaconesses, Mission Pioneers, Community Outreach Workers and Mission Project staff took place in June 2025, with input from John and Joan Kirkpatrick. The next gathering is scheduled for 2–3 June 2026.

63. The resumption of the three-year reviews for Deaconesses and Irish Mission Workers has been positively received, reviews held for seven deaconesses and the remaining Irish Mission Worker throughout the year. Review meetings have been scheduled to take place during 2026.
64. A morning training session was held focused on effective supervision, with the attendees all ministers or line managers who were working with and supervising a deaconess for the first time.
65. A request for Eleanor Drysdale to continue in the role of deaconess in Wellington past her age of normal retirement up to July 2027 was approved.
66. Under the supervision of the Deaconess Selection and Training Panel (CTM), a new cohort of two trainee deaconesses commenced their training pathway in September 2025. Members of the Panel have contributed to an ongoing review of the Deaconess Training programme, highlighting Pastoral Care, Outreach and Discipleship as key pillars of Deaconess roles in the variety of contexts for which Deaconesses are required.

PAUL JAMIESON, Convener

INTERNATIONAL MEETING POINT MANAGEMENT PANEL

67. The International Meeting Point seeks to love God and love the stranger in the city. (Deut.10:19), with the principle of integral mission being central to its effectiveness as it seeks to maintain a healthy balance between social action and gospel proclamation.
68. The project continues to operate as one ministry across two sites with a vast number of volunteers engaging with visitors through English classes, food provision, Bible studies, evangelistic courses and advice services, as well as a busy Op Shop in North Belfast.
69. Rev Dr Colin Dickson continues in the role of Project Leader with much diligence, wisdom and sensitivity, ably facilitated by a dedicated team of staff and volunteers. Support is also offered to the wider church in consideration of matters regarding migrant ministry and integral mission.
70. A framework document was approved by the Panel, which defines the core values for IMP's work as gospel intentionality, welcome, learning, presence, community, mercy and compassion.
71. David Johnston successfully completed his 6-month probationary period and is making a vital contribution to the ministry in North Belfast.
72. Safeguarding continues to be a standing item on the agenda of Panel meetings, with matters arising attended to, particularly through the development of policies and the delivery of training. Attention has also been given to an increase in some staff leave to ensure consistency across the team, alongside enhancing the project's online presence.

73. The project continues to benefit from partnerships with the Presbyteries of North and South Belfast and several local congregations, particularly South Kirk Presbyterian and Grace and Hope church plant. Thought continues to be given to property needs in both locations.

STEPHEN SIMPSON, Convener

SOUTH BELFAST FRIENDSHIP HOUSE MANAGEMENT PANEL

74. The Project has been experiencing the benefit of a stable team under the supervision of Project Leader, Mr Robert Dalzell, with Louise Davidson serving as a Deaconess and Abbi White as Children's Outreach Worker.
75. A refreshed programme of summer activities was held with encouraging interactions.
76. The project continues to run its weekly programme, which now includes a men's breakfast, a women's bible study and a re-launched Community Coffee Drop-In, in addition to the regular activities for children and young people. There is ongoing reflection about increasing the project's profile in the area and attendance at activities.
77. Additional outreach activities have been piloted, including a Christmas Carol Service, a Church Flute Band event and Messy Church, with aims to build on these all-age connections with the community.
78. The project has benefitted from the support of several Presbyterian congregations, not least through a generous financial donation from one congregation and the exploration of supporting a summer bible club with another. Even so, ensuring a consistency of volunteers and increased financial costs remain key challenges for the project.
79. Property is well maintained and all repairs have been carried out in a timely manner, while safeguarding policies and procedures have been recently reviewed and updated.
80. The Panel remains encouraged by all that is being accomplished and commends the project and its staff team to prayer.

ELLEN HILLEN, Convener

WEST BELFAST SPECIAL MINISTRY MANAGEMENT PANEL

81. The West Belfast Special Ministry Project has reached a significant point in its development as the initial four-year phase draws to a close. Following a review by Presbytery and approval by the Linkage Commission, the project was granted an extension for a further seven-year tenure.

82. The vision remains to establish at least one worshipping community in West Belfast and a key marker in that journey came via the establishment of weekly worship services in February 2026.
83. The project operates under the banner of '*an tionólann*', meaning 'the place of assembly' in Irish, with the ministry of Rev David Moore being supported well by Assistant Minister, Mr Cillian McNamara, and part-time Community Outreach Worker, Ms Toni Bassett, along with other members of the core team. The next phase of ministry involves developing this core team and investing in the emerging group of attendees.
84. In addition to a weekly bible study, various outreach and community connection events have been arranged, with positive involvement in a summer festival that garnered much interest and new contacts.
85. It is felt that having a consistent property base would enhance the work and options will be explored in the area in due course. Finances for the project are in a positive position.
86. Support from the wider church, not least nearby West Kirk Presbyterian, is acknowledged in the journey so far, and the Panel encourages continued prayer for this developing ministry.

JOHN KIRKPATRICK, Convener

WEXFORD CHURCH DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PANEL

87. The panel is encouraged by the progress of this project during the initial 18 months and commends Rev David Curran for his thoughtful approach. The vision remains to re-establish a Presbyterian congregation in the town of Wexford.
88. Weekly services of worship commenced in October 2025, alongside the continued weekly bible study in the manse.
89. A renovation has taken place within the existing premises, which has involved the refurbishment of kitchen and toilet facilities, in addition to fresh carpet, painting, signage and new AV facilities.
90. Some outreach initiatives have also been developed, including some door-to-door work, hosting an evangelistic course and the development of a regular coffee drop-in. Opportunities are being taken to speak via the Christian Media Trust radio and a holiday bible club is being planned for the summer, in conjunction with a visiting team.
91. A set of new strategic goals were agreed by the Panel to guide the next phase of the project and guidance was offered in aspects relating to finance, sacraments and safeguarding.
92. Support in specific initiatives has been requested from some neighbouring PCI congregations and work is ongoing to develop a stronger prayer base to support the work.

MICHAEL ANDERSON, Convener

CARRIGART MISSION PROJECT MANAGEMENT PANEL

93. This new Panel has been established to oversee the Carrigart Mission Project and guide programmes of missional aspects operating within the Bewglas Centre under the supervision of Project Leader, Rev Dario Leal.
94. The Panel seeks to play a strategic role in terms of the Centre's use, rather than take on general day-to-day operational and financial oversight of the Centre's activities, or the maintenance of the Bewglas Centre itself, which are being well provided for by the local stakeholders.
95. The Bewglas Centre remains in good condition, which is a tribute to the Carrigart congregation, offering much potential for visiting church or youth groups, retreat provision and local outreach. New AV equipment has been purchased to develop the conferencing provision.
96. An initial retreat for ministers, led by Rev Stephen Richmond, was successfully piloted in January 2026, with a programme of conferences and retreats now approved for the year ahead and to be publicised to the wider church in due course.
97. The Centre will host three mission teams this Summer, all serving within the local area, with an Alpha Course currently being run by the congregation.
98. The Panel invites ministers and other leaders to consider availing of the upcoming conferences and retreats, while also considering this venue for congregational residential activities.

DEREK McKELVEY, Convener

BALLINA SPECIAL MINISTRY MANAGEMENT PANEL

99. Following the installation of Rev John Brogan as minister of Ballina Special Ministry, a management panel was established to offer oversight of the Project and supervision of the minister, with representatives from Presbytery appointed.
100. The aim of the project is to consolidate the work of the local congregation, while reimagining a fresh missional work through word and action, more broadly, with the aim that, as people encounter Jesus Christ, they will be drawn to faith and trust in him as Saviour and Lord, and be built up in discipleship.
101. The Panel understands its role to guide the fresh missional work happening, rather than taking decisions on matters specifically relating to Ballina Presbyterian Church.
102. The Panel is working to develop a vision document, along with relevant safeguarding policies for all activities under its oversight.

103. A local core group was appointed by the Panel for an initial period of 18 months, with opportunities for seasonal outreach being explored at St Patrick's Day, Easter, Summer and Christmas.

JOHNSTON LAMBE, Committee Convener

CHAPLAINCY COMMITTEE

104. The Committee has continued to consider matters related to chaplaincy in Healthcare, Prisons, the Forces, Rural and Universities, seeking to offer support to all chaplains serving on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in these spheres and being grateful for their valuable ministry.
105. Following approval by the General Assembly, 'Chaplaincy: A Ministry of Presence' has now been published in print and online. The document highlights how the vision of chaplaincy is threefold: to care for our own people who are displaced and dispersed; to offer a pastoral presence to people of all backgrounds; and to carry a missional intent in always being prepared to give a reason for the hope we profess. It is the Committee's intention that this document will act as a framework document for future strategy and reflection.
106. A Chaplaincy Conference is planned for Thursday 10 September 2026 and everyone from PCI with involvement in chaplaincy is encouraged to attend. Keynote speaker will be Daniel Caldwell, Lead Chaplain in the Atlantic Technological University and Programme Chair for postgraduate programmes in Palliative and End of Life Care, based at the Mayo campus.

Healthcare Chaplaincy

Directory of PCI Healthcare Chaplains and the location of their service (April 2026)

Name	Location
Rev Lindsay Blair	Lead Chaplain, Western Trust
Rev Trevor Boyd	South Tyrone Hospital
Rev Richie Cronin	Cork University Hospital
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 and NI Hospice
Rev Norman Harrison	Royal Group of Hospitals (part-time) Northern Trust Lead Chaplain (part-time)

Name	Location
Rev Stephen Hibbert	Altnagelvin Hospital
Liz Lowrie	Coordinating Chaplain, Dublin Hospitals
Heather McCracken	Royal Group of Hospitals and Belfast City Hospital (Deaconess Assistant to the Chaplain) Musgrave Park Hospital – Chaplain (part-time)
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 Owen Patterson	Downe Hospital
Rev Jonathan Porter	Dundalk District Hospital
Rev Mark Proctor	Tallaght Hospital
Hazel Reid	Causeway Hospital, Coleraine
Claire Sellar	Ulster Hospital, Dundonald
Rev Marlene Taylor	Belfast Trust (Bank relief chaplain)
Rev Ivan Thompson	Bluestone Psychiatric Unit
Rev Craig Wilson	Letterkenny General Hospital
Vacant	Dalriada
Vacant	Sligo University Hospital and Mayo General Hospital
Vacant	University Hospital, Limerick

107. The Committee express its gratitude to those chaplains who have recently retired from their chaplaincy responsibilities in healthcare, welcoming new appointments.
108. Rev Craig Wilson took up a chaplaincy role in Letterkenny University Hospital, following appointment by the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal.
109. Rev David Hagan was nominated to a volunteer chaplaincy role in the NI Hospice and has commenced service.
110. The Presbytery of Tyrone notified the Committee that Rev Trevor Boyd had commenced a chaplaincy role in the South Tyrone Hospital.

111. The Committee engaged with Rev Lindsay Blair (Lead Chaplain, Western Trust) and Mrs Liz Lowrie (Dublin and Munster Presbytery), with various reflections noted and followed-up on.
112. Progress is ongoing to develop a document detailing a pathway into healthcare chaplaincy roles, which will include a list of appropriate professional experience and qualifications that would be helpful to obtain.

Prisons Chaplaincy

Directory of PCI Prisons Chaplains and the locations of their service (April 2026)

Name	Location
Rev Alan Boal	Mountjoy, Dublin (part-time)
Rev Rodney Cameron	Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison (part-time)
Rev Graham Stockdale	HMP Maghaberry (part-time) and HMP Magilligan (interim cover)
Vacant	Woodland's Juvenile Justice Centre

113. During the past year there have been opportunities for office-bearers to visit some of the prisons listed above, and to learn directly about the excellent work being done by PCI Chaplains. It is evident that PCI chaplains are held in high regard by staff members within the Northern Ireland Prison Service.
114. The Committee developed new proposals in regards to a forward-looking reconfiguration of chaplaincy provision at HMP Maghaberry designed to free capacity to pioneer support for prisoners beyond the gate as they prepare for, and move beyond, release. The vision is to deepen spiritual care inside prison in conjunction with sustaining discipleship and practical help on the outside in order to offer support and hope for lasting transformative change.
115. To that end, positive engagement with the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) led to an adjustment in role for Rev Graham Stockdale, which involves stepping back from the coordinating chaplaincy duties. Correspondence from NIPS acknowledged the dedication and professionalism of Rev Stockdale during his time in the role of Coordinating Chaplain in Maghaberry.
116. Rev Stockdale will continue with Presbyterian chaplaincy duties in Maghaberry for approximately three days per week, while continuing to provide PCI chaplaincy at HMP Magilligan for one day per week on an interim basis and seeking to develop chaplaincy work among released prisoners for one day per week initially.

117. The Committee approved a framework document for the new initiative, which will be developed under the banner of 'Beyond', with a management panel appointed to support this initiative.
118. Rev Rodney Cameron continues to faithfully serve as PCI chaplain at Hydebank Wood and Women's Prison, with support offered from Ms Heather Coard as volunteer Assistant to the Chaplain, following interview and satisfactory references.

FORCES CHAPLAINCY PANEL

Directory of Commissioned Chaplains within the Armed Forces (April 2026)

Name	Location
Rev James Burnett	Royal Navy 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 (part-time)
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
Rev Scott Woodburn	Air Training Corps

119. The Panel continues to maintain regular pastoral contact with forces chaplains through the Convener, with input from a serving chaplain invited at each meeting.
120. The Panel is mindful of how events of global significance and conflict bring a direct impact on the lives and services of our Forces Chaplains.
121. To that end, consideration is being given to ways to develop a prayer base for Forces Chaplains.
122. A video highlighting serving Forces Chaplains was distributed to ministers for use in Remembrance Sunday services.
123. Following receipt of an application from a candidate seeking endorsement to military chaplaincy, an Interview Panel met with the individual and was pleased to offer a positive commendation, which will enable continued progress in the application process.
124. The Convener represented the Panel at various conferences and meetings throughout the year.

ROB CRAIG, Convener

RURAL CHAPLAINCY PANEL

125. Work continues apace under Rev Kenny Hanna's leadership, with the Rural Chaplaincy team engaging with local marts, agri-businesses and statutory agencies, as well as having significant pastoral input with many families.
126. The Rural Chaplain has supported a number of congregations with specific rural outreach initiatives, including some creative harvest-themed gatherings.
127. The team was encouraged by various Carol Services run in partnership with local marts, which provided excellent opportunities to engage with people from a wide variety of backgrounds.
128. A new monthly gathering for young adults in collaboration with Markethill Mart has commenced, with oversight being provided by the Panel in regards to matters of speakers and safeguarding.
129. Engagement continues with a regular column in the Farming Life, with work ongoing to collate a collection of previous articles into an evangelistic booklet.
130. The Panel is encouraged by a proposed rural chaplaincy project in conjunction with congregational ministry in Raphoe and Ballindrait and looks forward to supporting this new development.

JAMIE MAGUIRE, Convener

UNIVERSITIES CHAPLAINCY PANEL

Directory of PCI Universities and Colleges Chaplains and locations of their service. (April 2026)

Name	Location
Rev Dr Gerry Clinton	Trinity College Dublin
Rev Nigel Craig	QUB, Stranmillis and Union Theological College (full-time)
Mrs Lyndsey Ballantine	Assistant Lay Chaplain (QUB and Derryvolgie Hall)
Rev Dr John Coulter	UU, Coleraine (part-time)
Rev Helen Freeburn	University College, Galway (part-time)
Rev Dr Keith McCrory	NUI, Maynooth (part-time)
Rev Graeme Orr	UU, Magee (part-time)
Vacant	UU, Belfast

131. The Panel seeks to give oversight to Presbyterian chaplaincy in various universities across Ireland and offer support to those serving as chaplains. In doing so, the strategic nature of university chaplaincy and the important role chaplains have as they engage in mission among students and staff in this context, is underlined.
132. Following 17 years of service as Presbyterian chaplain to the University of Ulster in Belfast, Rev Cheryl Meban accepted a call to Christ Church Rathgar and resigned from this role in September 2025, with the Panel recording its appreciation for her work.
133. The Panel took the opportunity to review its approach to university chaplaincy in Belfast, which led to the development of a new joined-up citywide chaplaincy team, under the direction of the current QUB Chaplain, who has become the Lead University Chaplain in Belfast. As part of these arrangements, an Assistant Chaplaincy post has been created to ensure strong presence and outreach in UU Belfast, alongside enhanced collaboration with local congregations. This approach aims to consolidate support, avoid isolation and develop a coordinated approach to chaplaincy, while maintaining clear PCI identity and gospel-centred student ministry.
134. Steps are ongoing to recruit for the Assistant Chaplain post in UU Belfast, and engagement has taken place with representatives from the Presbytery of North Belfast and the University of Ulster in regards to future arrangements.

135. The Panel has been encouraged by the commencement of Rev Dr Gerry Clinton in a part-time chaplaincy role at Trinity College Dublin, following many years with no Presbyterian involvement within the chaplaincy team. The initial period of the role involved positive engagement with other chaplains, staff and Presbyterian students, as well as the development of a study group, alongside some pastoral opportunities. Rev Clinton has also been involved in supporting the delivery of a bereavement course organised by the College Student Services team.
136. Positive engagement with students continues through the QUB Chaplaincy team, with healthy attendances at the weekly Sunday evening gatherings in Derryvolgie and ongoing small group ministry, in addition to a new 'Catechesis on Campus' initiative being run in the chaplaincy centre in Elmwood Avenue.
137. Rev John Coulter continues in a part-time chaplaincy role in University of Ulster Coleraine on an interim basis, following his retirement from congregational ministry in nearby Ballysally. The Panel also noted encouragements in Rev Graeme Orr's work in University of Ulster Magee, which included a student coming to faith in Christ, as well as ongoing connection with the CU.

HELEN McNEELY, Convener

CRAIG LYNN, Committee Convener

GENERAL PURPOSES PANEL

138. The Panel considers matters relating to the Council's finances and the monitoring and management of the Council's property portfolio. This includes review of quarterly management accounts, preparation of annual accounts, consideration of property repair and capital grant applications, alongside acquisitions, maintenance and disposals of property related to the Home and Urban Mission.
139. The work of the Panel is supported by the effective work of Mrs Lindsay Munro as Finance Manager and Mr Graham Patterson as Property Manager, ably assisted by Rev Alan McQuade (Property Agent) and Mrs Elizabeth Moffett (Finance Agent), in volunteer capacities.

Property Matters

140. Support has been offered to a number of Home and Urban Mission congregations with guidance offered regarding various property needs in relation to potential building projects, minor refurbishments, general building repairs and property valuations.
141. Refurbishment works were completed to the halls of Trinity Cork, through the support of a repair grant, which should enhance the missional activities of the congregation.

142. A repair grant was approved for the congregation of Fermoy as part of a phased refurbishment plan for the meeting house, which has also benefitted from local grant funding.
143. The congregation of Rathcoole received a repair grant to improve facilities and provide new seating to host emerging ministries.
144. A capital grant application was approved from the congregation of Naas to support the purchase of an adjoining vacant retail property next door to the meeting house in order to develop their facilities and enhance their local mission. Sadly, the congregation was unsuccessful in purchasing the property and the capital grant was not required.
145. The Congregational Committee of United Church Galway is considering development options prepared by a Conservation architect, with guidance offered by the Panel.
146. A decision was taken to sell the former meeting house in Carrickmacross, which has involved engagement with the Monaghan Presbytery and communication with the current tenants.
147. Under the terms of merger, the meeting house and church halls of the former Second Newtownards congregation will come under the ownership and stewardship of CMI in due course.
148. The Council commenced a rental agreement with Ballina Presbyterian in regards to its manse for the duration of the Ballina Special Ministry, with some structural alterations proposed to improve the internal layout.
149. Panel members met with representatives of Stranorlar's Congregational Committee to review potential building projects and agree on next steps, with encouragement given to explore refurbishing and extending the church halls in conjunction with local funding.
150. A property questionnaire was issued to Home Mission congregations in the Presbyteries of Derry and Donegal and Monaghan, with no 'red flag' issues raised in the returned questionnaires to date.

Derryvolgie and Elmwood Avenue Management Sub-Panel

151. Derryvolgie Halls are fully occupied and generate a surplus each year which will be held for future property upgrades.
152. The Elmwood Avenue accounts are now operating at a small annual surplus, after several years of deficit. This has come through proactivity from office-bearers to ensure a full occupancy of tenants and an increase in service charges to better reflect operating costs.
153. Work is ongoing in developing the existing safeguarding policy for Derryvolgie and a sub-group will begin to consider options for future development of the Derryvolgie site.

ALAN MCQUADE, Sub-Panel Convener

Financial Matters

154. The Council's accounts showed a deficit of £405K for 2025, however, the Panel noted that £227K of this related to an unrealised loss from a price decrease of shares held in the PCI General Investment Fund, which is beyond the Council's control. The Council also received a reduced grant by 10% from United Appeal in 2025 than had been requested and property repair grants came in over budget due to an increase in cost estimates. Taking these factors into consideration, the Panel noted that the actual operating deficit was less than budgeted.
155. The Capital Projects Budget retains capacity to support anticipated capital projects, albeit with the potential need for significant capital grants in the coming years. Therefore, potential asset disposals are being explored to help support such needs and will be managed with sufficient flexibility to support strategic acquisitions when opportunities arise.
156. A number of grants were approved for property repairs and mission projects, which are detailed elsewhere in the Council's report. The Panel notes the increase in requests for Mission Support Grants and will seek to budget accordingly to meet demand and realise opportunities.
157. Increases to salaries for Deaconesses, Irish Mission Workers, Mission Pioneers and Mission Project staff were approved in line with General Council recommendations.
158. A threshold of £200,000 was agreed for any property grant applications to be referred to the Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee for approval in light of missional priorities.
159. The Panel wishes to highlight that approximately one third of the Council's United Appeal allocation is being directly fed back to congregations via Mission Grants, something it believes is both vital to maintain in the context of ministry reconfiguration and important to develop awareness across the church of how United Appeal funds are supporting congregational mission.
160. Gratitude is expressed for the ongoing support of the United Appeal for Mission in enabling so much of the Council's work and which our mission as a church across this island would be poorer without. Thanks are also noted to PW for its financial support.

HUGO WILSON, Panel Convener

APPENDIX 1

CONSIDERING CONGREGATIONAL STATUS

Key factors in the journey from church plant to constitution as a congregation

Introduction

The Church Planting Panel has been giving consideration to the processes and key markers in the journey towards potential constitution for a church plant. This includes assessing the vital factors that would enable a congregation to have a long-term future in that location, as well as developing guidance on navigating particular questions on the journey, such as development of membership, appointment of elders, provision of ministry and development of resources such as Manse, finance and augmentation. Above all of these factors, the Panel considers it critical for the growth of each church plant to adopt a strongly Christ-centred, gospel-focused and missionally shaped approach in order to flourish.

Considering a framework for sustainable church development

Constitution is recognition that a church planting work has a long-term future as a congregation in that location and within the denomination. In making that journey, a number of factors are considered important in seeking to develop a sustainable congregation that is spiritually vibrant, missionally engaged, financially stable and led by a group of equipped leaders who carry vision and responsibility. This framework is offered as both an internal guide for church plants already on the journey and an external assessment of congregational viability, which can be conducted through a Presbytery-led process, with the input of CMI.

1. AREA

A defined place or network

2. BELONGING

A committed community

3. CORE TEAM

Effective, shared leadership

4. DIRECTION

Clear vision and purpose

5. ESTABLISHED MINISTRY AND MISSION

Developed missional activities

6. FINANCE

Growing sustainability

7. GOVERNANCE

Accountability and compliance

1. Area: A clearly defined place or network to reach

Clarity on the place and people you are seeking to reach.

- An agreed geographical area to serve and reach out to, with limits helpful.
- A strong or growing population within the church's reach to offer missional viability. This should normally exceed 10,000 people in a town or area.
- While an owned or purpose-built building is not essential, there should be a regular space to meet and gather in, that offers continuity and rootedness.
- Well-articulated understanding and connectedness in terms of local needs.
- Whilst reaching specific networks (e.g., migrants or students) is important, this should be balanced alongside reaching people across the full breadth of local demographics.

2. Belonging: Developing a committed community

Evidence of a growing, committed and spiritually engaged congregation.

- A healthy number of people living locally who are connecting regularly to weekly worship and other spiritually-focused activities.
- A growing sense of belonging and fellowship.
- Clear ways for people to use their gifts to serve God in the body of Christ.
- Stories of people coming to faith in Christ and signs of spiritual growth in others, evidenced through engagement in the ordinary means of grace.

3. Core Team: Enabling effective and involved leaders

Identified people who can spiritually and practically share in leadership.

- An identified group of trusted leaders who carry vision and responsibility to avoid dependency on individuals.
- Clear opportunities for identifying leaders through regular involvement and service in aspects of worship, children's ministry, welcome or setup.
- Evidence of potential elders with suitable character and capacity, who evidence ownership that goes beyond attendance.

4. Direction: Clear Vision and Purpose

A contextualised vision that guides all ministry efforts.

- Development of a contextualised vision that is biblically-based and engaged with local community, evidenced through a clear mission plan.
- Guiding principles that shape ministry priorities and decision-making.
- Measurable goals (e.g. aims, ministry developments, outreach efforts).

5. Established ministry and mission

A developed programme of worship, discipleship and outreach.

- Weekly gatherings of public worship, with a consistent number attending.
- Activities that support the spiritual growth and maturing of believers, particularly the development of weekly discipleship groups or bible study.
- A mechanism for pastoral care that offers effective nurture and care.
- Intentional outreach initiatives that connect with the local community and evidence of committed attendees seeking to witness in their everyday lives.
- Evidence of an Acts 1:8 approach to mission seen through engaging with local needs and wider partnerships, both practically and pastorally.

6. Finance: Growing sustainability

A stable financial foundation that does not create long-term dependency.

- A clear commitment to financial giving within the congregation, with a significant proportion of attendees giving regularly and evidence of growth in financial giving in recent years.
- An indication that the congregation could be able to contribute 50% of stipend cost, with flexibility offered to church plants in locations as defined by paragraph 108 of 'The Code' under the Home or Urban Mission.
- An identifiable treasurer and the implementation of proper accounting, budgeting and report systems.
- Biblical teaching on themes of stewardship and generosity.
- A financial strategy that seeks to transition from external support to self-sufficiency through regular giving and local partnerships.

7. Governance: Accountability and Compliance

Establishing healthy methods and models that ensure strong governance.

- Appropriate implementation of safeguarding procedures through an agreed safeguarding policy and an appointed, trained designated person.
- A strong understanding of Presbyterian polity evidenced by healthy submission to, and involvement in, the courts of the church.
- The development of healthy processes for decision-making and accountability, including fulfilment of any statutory obligations.

Other considerations

The following aspects are also helpful to consider in a journey to constitution:

Local Eldership

The first step in constitution is for the Presbytery to appoint an Interim Kirk Session, which will require elders to be placed in oversight of a new congregation from beyond the local context. However, as noted in Section 3, there should be clear evidence of those with eldership potential within the local context, before the point of constitution. Some recent precedents have put ministry provision before local eldership, whilst in other church planting works the sending congregation has acted as an Interim Kirk Session at the point of constitution, offering consistent oversight until local eldership is in place.

Sacraments

Administering the sacraments is a vital mark of a healthy church and a key consideration. Any congregation being constituted will include the appointment by Presbytery of an Interim Moderator and Interim Kirk Session, who will have responsibility for such. In the journey towards constitution, the provision of sacraments should be encouraged in line with Presbyterian polity, albeit without the formalities of communicant membership.

Manse Provision

Providing a Manse enables a minister to be rooted in the local context and shows a commitment to the community. In some situations, a Manse is necessary in the initial planting phase, particularly in pioneer projects in isolated areas. In other situations, it may be preferable to focus on ministry development and consider the provision of a Manse as a longer-term aim.

While Manse provision is a requirement of the Linkage Commission when seeking Leave to Call, and given that the stated manse requirements may be beyond most church plants, there has been some flexibility offered in missional settings. That said, there should be a commitment to provide a manse in the near future.

Financial assistance for a Manse may be available from the Council for Mission in Ireland in situations where the pioneering work is considered a strategic priority, and the Council's financial resources allow. Where a manse is not provided, a modest housing allowance to the minister may be permitted.

Financial Metrics

There are particular benefits to being Presbyterian in the process of developing financial sustainability for new congregations, in that support from the wider denomination can be given to church planting projects or congregations within the Home Mission. This mechanism enables flexibility to be offered to congregations in particular social or geographical contexts, who have a clear missional focus, via designation within the Home or Urban Mission.

In such settings, augmentation from the Central Ministry Fund or initial contribution from CMI towards wider mission, may be possible, particularly to enable Leave to Call. This should be part of a defined financial strategy that offers a pathway to transition from external support to self-sufficiency through regular giving and local partnerships. This may include seeking external donations from Christian Trust Funds or individual donations to supplement finances.

APPENDIX 2

THE SOUTH WEST OF IRELAND TASK GROUP

Progress to date

The South West Task Group has met on four occasions (30 September 2025, 27 November 2025, 20 January 2026 and 16 April 2026), with representatives of the Task Group also visiting the area on 26 January 2026 to meet with local leaders. The work of the Task Group has been aided by the healthy representation of PCI ministers from the defined area, which is supplemented by the involvement of others from the Dublin and Munster Presbytery and Council for Mission in Ireland.

The Task Group has been seeking to reflect on current PCI witness within the defined area, consult with a number of other church and ministry leaders from beyond the denomination as to effective missional approaches and conduct research with regards to demographics, data and trends.

Overarching aims

In addition to the above, the Task Group has been seeking to determine a number of key principles to underpin its work moving forward. This has resulted in the identification of two overarching aims:

- A desire to strengthen PCI's current witness in the area through prayerful and practical support of the existing congregations.
- A goal of developing at least one new missional work within the South West of Ireland where PCI is not currently present.

The principles that follow, seek to support these key aims.

1. Strengthening Current Witness

With regards to strengthening our current witness as a denomination, the following principles should be applied:

- (a) That, alongside any new development elsewhere, the ministry and mission of current PCI congregations in the South-West of Ireland should remain a strategic priority, with their existing witness supported through prayerful commitment and practical resourcing from the wider church.
- (b) That, with regards to extending their missional presence elsewhere in the South-West of Ireland, the initiative and ownership for such lies first with the local congregation as capacity allows, with the support of the Council for Mission sought where necessary.
- (c) That the congregations of United Church Galway, Trinity Cork, Aghada, Fermoy and Cahir be encouraged to explore new development in nearby towns through the model of outreach hubs, under God's leading and with the awareness and support of the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster.

- (d) That consideration be given to how the history of Presbyterianism in that part of the island, with regards to historic presence, connection to the Irish language, subjection to penal laws and rootedness of faith, may be an aide in developing our connection with the wider area.
- (e) That the Council for Mission in Ireland consider a prioritisation of funds to congregations in the area through Mission Support Grants.
- (f) That the development of a 'South West Network' be considered for key leaders engaged in Presbyterian congregations to develop a forum for prayer, fellowship, learning and connection.
- (g) That congregations in the wider denomination are encouraged to consider fostering supportive partnerships with other congregations in this area.

2. Seeking new development

With regards to developing new missional work in the area, the following principles should be applied:

- (a) That the city of Limerick be prioritised as a location for renewed missional development by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, with the aim of re-establishing a presence there.
- (b) That, due to the lack of proximity of nearby PCI congregations, this work should be understood as requiring the oversight of the Council for Mission in Ireland, in partnership with the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster.
- (c) That this new development be defined as 'Limerick Special Ministry' and that while the long-term vision will be to develop a worshipping community in time, this may not be the initial starting point of ministry.
- (d) That the ethos of this special ministry be clearly Christ-centred, strongly Bible-based and of a Reformed nature, while also being overtly missional in seeking to engage all people, culturally-sensitive and kingdom-minded.
- (e) That the Special Ministry be understood as a team-based approach that will include both ordained ministry and lay mission work, with chaplaincy ministry opportunities being considered as a helpful way of developing presence, relationship and trust.
- (f) That, given the sizeable student population in the city, a particular emphasis be placed on ministry to students and younger generations.
- (g) That a proportion of funds from the Southern Association of Widows Fund (within CMI funds) be requested for use towards Limerick Special Ministry.
- (h) That, in seeking a minister to oversee this Special Ministry, a Manse be identified and provided to enable local engagement and offer a commitment to the area.

COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY

Convener: Rev ANDREW FAULKNER

Secretary: Rev PETER GAMBLE

Convener's introduction

1. So much has changed in our denomination since the last Report of the Council for Training in Ministry. The significance of safeguarding now has the high priority it deserves. This is reflected in all aspects of the work of the Council.
2. Changes to personnel noted in last year's report saw the appointment of Rev Gordon Best as Dean of Ministerial Studies and Development. He was inducted by the Presbytery of Iveagh and has quickly and efficiently taken up his responsibilities. The Council gives thanks to God, and prays that Gordon will continue to be used to shape ministry students for service to Christ and His Church.
3. Other changes during the year include the appointment of Dr Martyn Cowan as Director of Postgraduate Research, emphasising the importance of the College as a centre of excellence in reformed education at postgraduate level. Dr Cowan continues to serve as Vice Principal of the College.
4. Rev Dr Stephen Moore, Lecturer in Old Testament, was inducted by the Presbytery of Armagh following his being declared eligible for Call by the Reception of Ministers and Licentiates Committee.
5. Dr Matthew Houston, a licentiate under the care of the Presbytery of Carrickfergus, was appointed as Lecturer in Church History and will be ordained and inducted (DV) before the General Assembly meets.
6. One further change will be Rev Dr Graham Shearer, a transferring minister, who will be inducted as Lecturer in Theology at the same service as Dr Houston, this time by South Belfast Presbytery.
7. The changes to faculty will not end there, as Dr Robbie Booth, who has been an outstanding Lecturer in New Testament, has tendered his resignation after almost five years of service in the College, having been appointed to a post in Canada. We wish Robbie well in this move. This will necessitate a further appointment, which it is anticipated will be concluded in the near future.
8. The Council places on record its thanks to the College Principal, Professor Michael McClenahan, and all the staff, for their work.
9. The work of the Council also extends beyond the College, and thanks is given to God who, in his grace, enables this work to go on.
10. Thanks is expressed for the work of the various Committees and Panels as Conveners and members carry out their work with wisdom, enthusiasm and commitment.

MINISTERIAL STUDIES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

11. In the autumn of 2025, eleven students commenced training for Ordained Ministry. There are currently twenty-five Ministry Students at Union Theological College and a further two at Westminster Theological Seminary.
12. Ten applicants for Ordained Ministry attended UTC for final interviews on Monday 30 and Tuesday 31 March 2026. They were interviewed by the following panels:
13. Adrian Moffett (Chairperson), Adrian McLernon (Chairperson), Colin Dickson (Chairperson), Lorna Curry, Peter Fleming, James Hyndman, Stephen Lockington, Philip Boyd, Paula Burrows, Stephen Johnston, Gabrielle Farquhar, Jim King, Alistair McCracken and James Rogers.
14. As a result, nine applicants are being nominated to the General Assembly to commence training for Ordained Ministry.
15. One request for a flexible pathway was received. The request was denied.
16. One applicant is not being recommended to the General Assembly. He did not avail himself of the opportunity for a pastoral conversation nor did his Presbytery ask for a review.
17. The monthly Licentiate Training Programme has been ongoing and has included sessions led by Mark Neale, Dr Bex Stevenson, Rebecca McConnell, Dr Andrew Collins (BCUK), David Smyth (EA), Revs Andrew Faulkner, John Graham, Peter Burke, Paul Jamieson, Nigel McCullough, Angus Stewart, Colin Dickson and Christoph Ebbinghaus. Thanks to Rev Bobby Liddle for his help in facilitating the Licentiate Training Programme.
18. On 1 September 2026, eleven Licentiates are due to become eligible for call. We are grateful to the Lord of the Harvest for raising up workers for his harvest field.
19. The Post-Ordination Training Conference took place at Assembly Buildings on 19-21 May 2026. Paul Mallard was the main speaker. The Revs Dr Sam Mawhinney, Niall Lockhart, Mark Johnston, Mark Goudy and the Dean of Ministerial Studies and Development also contributed. The focus was on Spiritual Formation.
20. The Pre-Retirement Conference took place at the Slieve Donard Hotel on 11–13 November 2025. The next conference is planned for 10–12 November 2026. Gratitude is expressed to Rev Robert and Mrs Christine Bell and Rev Robert and Mrs Christine McMullan for facilitating.

EDDIE CHESTNUTT, Convener

RECEPTION OF MINISTERS AND LICENTIATES COMMITTEE

21. The Committee met five times since the 2025 General Assembly.

Enquiries

22. Fifteen people contacted the RMLC during the year seeking information about transferring to the ministry of PCI. The Committee has been speaking with seven enquirers who have who have followed up with a clear intention of desiring to pursue the matter.

Transferring Ministers

23. Rev Elyse McCroskery completed her assistantship in Windsor Presbyterian Church and received a call from Loughbrickland and Scarva Presbyterian Churches in February 2026.
24. Dr Stephen Moore completed his assistantship in Hill St Presbyterian Church and received a call from Union Theological College in August 2025.
25. Rev Dr Graeme Shearer completed his assistantship in Lowe Presbyterian Church and received a call from Union Theological College in March 2026
26. Mr Lucas da Costa (Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales), serving as Assistant Minister in First Saintfield Presbyterian Church is due to complete his assistantship on the 31 of August 2027.
27. Mr. Matthew Kirk (International Presbyterian Church), serving as Assistant Minister in Muckamore Presbyterian Church is due to complete his assistantship on the 31 of August 2028.
28. Mr. Andrew Gibson (Orthodox Presbyterian Church, USA) was received as a transferring licentiate in May 2025. He began a 36-month assistantship in Ahorey & Clare Presbyterian Churches in December 2025 and is due to complete his assistantship on the 30th November 2028.
29. Rev Tafadzwa Kasere (Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, Presbytery of Zimbabwe) was interviewed in September 2025 and not accepted as a transferring minister into the PCI.
30. Rev Tyler Rawson, an Elim minister serving as pastor of Immanuel Church, Millisle, was interviewed in April 2026 and received as a Transferring Minister. He will begin a 36-month assistantship when a suitable placement is found.
31. Rev Philip Gallagher, a minister of the Methodist Church in Ireland serving in Moira, was interviewed in April 2026 and received as a Transferring Minister. He will begin a 24-month assistantship when a suitable placement is found.

32. Mr Riaan Boer, a licentiate and Theological Education Coordinator of the Presbyterian and Reformed Church of South Africa (PARCSA), was interviewed in April 2026 and received as a Transferring Licentiate. He will begin a 24month assistantship when a suitable placement is found.

Requests for Permission to Preach in Vacancies

33. None.

Review of Procedures for Transferring Ministers

34. Updated regulations for the Reception of Ministers and Licentiatees were agreed by the Council for Training in Ministry in March 2026 and forwarded to Judicial Commission.

LACHLAN WEBSTER, Convener

UNION THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

35. Conscious that we serve for the glory of God and through his grace, thanks and praise are his for all that has been achieved in another academic year in UTC. Each day we are witnesses to his kindness and his help in the lives of staff and students. He is our confidence and hope in this vital and thrilling task of teaching truth and helping to shape the minds and hearts of students for life and ministers for the future. We, in the college consider it a privilege to serve the needs of the Church.
36. I want to place on record thanks to all the staff who faithfully serve in Union College. There are many pressures in delivering a wide range of courses while caring for the individual needs of each student. Within the college there is a diverse community but the one aim is to pursue excellence loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and each as neighbour to the other.
37. Ongoing management matters cover a wide range of issues, seeing to ensure the smooth and efficient running of the college. I would be failing in my duty if I did not make the wider church aware of the many pressures the staff must face. Staffing levels are being addressed but the process requires time. Faculty members have been under considerable pressure to deliver the many courses.
38. We are attempting to ensure that staff are able to both work and access sabbaticals, have time to research and write. I want to assure the Church that we are served by an excellent team led by Principal McClenahan with wisdom and attention to detail in a sacrificial manner. We have been actively seeking new staff to build up our faculty to a healthy place once again.

39. Since the matter of the location of the college has been under some discussion, I can report that we have been able to complete renovation of lecture Room three and provide essential structural work to the library. We are in the planning process to provide security at the entrance on account of antisocial behaviour. This will provide a safer environment for staff and students.
40. As custodians of one of the finest theological libraries, we are once again grateful to the Ulster Scots Agency for help in some of our special projects. I take the opportunity to thank the staff and volunteers who help in various ways to maintain and expand the range of resources we have. Can I also highlight the excellent resource the Gamble library is for the whole church and others and encourage you to consider becoming a member.
41. You will be able to see from the accounts that our deficit is not reducing and this exercises us much. However, we realise that the college is not a business, but a servant to the church. The existing model used to fund the college is evidently not working and it is our hope that a better one can be developed. The strategic nature of the work of the college in the life and health of the church is without question. As such it is urgent that together we find a way to fund this as an investment in our future mission and service in the Kingdom of God.
42. The management committee is keeping in mind the wider difficulties in relation to safeguarding and what it means for the future, maintaining a high responsibility for everyone under its care and following appropriate policies.
43. We are grateful for the various panels engaged in the life of the college deriving from the review process. Much listening and reflecting has been helpful in giving time to focus on the priorities and resources to meet those. I believe that a good outcome will result and the college is ready to respond to the Church through the guidance of the General Assembly in due course.
44. We are indebted to the Deputy Clerk and his office and also the services of the HR department for their assistance in new appointments. The management committee want to place on record our thanks to the whole church for the prayerful support they give on behalf the college and the encouragement they are in seeking to identify suitable folk to pursue the possibility of ministry.
45. Our vision is of a church that is growing deeper and if God pleases, larger, such that we will require ever greater numbers of students to train and serve here and across the world. The need has not lessened and neither is our passion to seek to be part of God's purposes in reaching it. We ask the assembly to grant us all that is needed to make this vision reality in a spirit of joy and faith.

DR JOHN KIRKPATRICK, Convener

STUDENTS' BURSARY FUND

46. The Students' Bursary Fund exists to make financial provision for the Church's students for the ordained ministry during their time of study. In the academic year beginning September 2025, 27 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 £577,000.
47. 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. The literature is available from Assembly Buildings. Experience suggests that when the 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. It also may be a help to indicate in announcements – and perhaps on invitations – that, at the service, an offering will be collected for the Students' Bursary Fund.

ADRIAN MOFFETT, Convener

APS/AMS PANEL

Accredited Preacher Scheme (APS)

48. A fresh cohort of accredited preachers received accreditation in September 2025 at an uplifting service in First Antrim. An encouraging number of applications have been received for the 2026 course, which will take place (DV) in Union College in early July, with supervised placements and assessments to follow.
49. The Panel has placed a renewed focus on refreshing training for accredited preachers, with an excellent Saturday morning conference led by Dr Stephen Moore in the autumn of 2025. Plans are underway for a similar conference in the autumn of 2026.
50. As always, the precise content of the course is under review to ensure the maximum benefit for participants. We are liaising with the safeguarding team to ensure that Accredited Preachers will have suitable safeguarding training for this particular role.

Sharing God's Word

51. Production of 'Sharing God's Word' was completed in 2025 and the course is now available. Ministers who are considering running the course in their congregation or Presbytery are encouraged to contact Union College to access the videos and written material.

ANDREW CONWAY, Convener

CTM DEACONESS SELECTION AND TRAINING PANEL

52. A student cohort of two deaconesses, Mrs Sonya Boal (Whiteabbey) and Miss Olivia Smyth (Drumbo) is in its first-year training at Union Theological College.
53. Mrs Sonya Boal is on placement at Elmwood Presbyterian Church, Lisburn; Miss Olivia Smyth is on placement at Wellington Presbyterian Church, Ballymena.
54. Thanks are due to the ministers and Kirk Sessions of these congregations, and particularly to the supervising deaconesses, Eleanor Drysdale (Wellington) and Roberta Irvine (Elmwood) for the invaluable role they are fulfilling in the training and development of these student deaconesses.
55. The panel has started a review of the overall training and development process.

ANGUS STEWART, Convener

CONCILIATION PANEL

56. The Committee reports that the work of conciliation continues to be of real importance in the life of the Church. As the Church of Jesus Christ, we are called not only to proclaim the ministry of reconciliation committed to us in the gospel, but also to pursue peace, truth, and holiness within the fellowship of Christ's body. In a fallen world, and within a Church still marked by human weakness and sin, misunderstandings, tensions, and conflicts will at times arise. It is therefore necessary that the Church be ready to address such matters prayerfully, biblically, and wisely, so that the peace and purity of the Church may be maintained, and its witness not hindered.
57. During the year, cases required the involvement of conciliators. These cases varied in character and circumstance, but all served to underline the continuing need for careful and timely intervention. The Panel is persuaded that early intervention is of particular importance. Where tensions are recognised and addressed at an early stage, there is a far greater prospect of preventing misunderstanding from deepening into division, of checking the spread of conflict within a congregation, and of assisting those involved towards a more measured, honest, and constructive engagement with one another. Where matters are neglected or allowed to fester, positions may harden, trust may erode, and harm may be done both to personal relationships and to the peace and testimony of the congregation.
58. For that reason, the Panel wishes to stress that conciliation must not be regarded merely as a response to difficulties once they have become acute. Rather, it should also be seen as part of the Church's wider duty to cultivate spiritual wisdom, pastoral sensitivity, and biblical peace-making at every level of its life. The work of prevention is therefore of great significance.

59. In that regard, the training offered to Elders, Kirk Sessions, and congregations has continued to be an important aspect of this work. Such training seeks to equip office-bearers and congregational leaders to recognise the early signs of conflict, to understand more clearly the dynamics that may be at work, and to respond in ways that are disciplined, gracious, and consistent with the teaching of Scripture. The aim is not simply to contain unrest, but, where possible, to prevent conflict from spreading, to de-escalate situations before they become more serious, and to encourage a pattern of leadership marked by humility, patience, and truthfulness. In this way, congregations may be better helped to deal with difficulties in a manner worthy of their calling in Christ.
60. The Panel also draws attention to the training offered to Licentiates. As our students prepare for the work of the ministry, they must understand that pastoral leadership will often require not only the preaching of the Word and the administration of the ordinances, but also the wise and faithful handling of conflict. Those entering ministry must be equipped to discern the roots of discord, to understand the effect which unresolved tensions may have upon a congregation, and to respond with biblical conviction, spiritual maturity, and pastoral care. The training provided has therefore sought to assist Licentiates in reflecting upon the nature of conflict, the responsibilities of leadership in such circumstances, and the need to deal with difficult situations in a way that is both scriptural and peaceable. Such preparation is necessary if future ministers are to be better equipped for the realities of congregational life and better able to serve the Church with steadiness and wisdom.
61. The Panel further notes the importance of the continued training and development of conciliators themselves. If this work is to be carried out with wisdom, fairness, spiritual discernment, and pastoral sensitivity, those entrusted with it must be continually supported and equipped. Ongoing training is therefore necessary, both to deepen understanding of conflict and to strengthen the practical and biblical skills required for this demanding area of service. Such continued preparation helps ensure that conciliators are better able to serve the Church faithfully and effectively in the varied and often complex situations which arise.
62. The Panel gladly records its sincere appreciation for the service of the current conciliators. Their work is often demanding, delicate, and largely unseen by the wider Church, yet it is a work of very real value. The patience, discernment, discretion, and Christian charity required in such service should not be underestimated. The Panel wishes to express its deep appreciation to all who volunteer for this ministry, and to acknowledge with gratitude their commitment, dedication, and willingness to serve the peace and wellbeing of Christ's Church in this way.
63. The Panel also wishes to record its particular gratitude to Peter Gamble who, in his new role, has already given wise and steady leadership. His judgment, guidance, and careful oversight have been deeply appreciated, and the Panel acknowledges with thankfulness the significant contribution he has made during the year under review.

64. The need for this work remains evident. The Panel is persuaded that the Church must continue to give serious attention to the importance of early intervention, wise conciliation, and preventative training. In so doing, the Church not only seeks to address conflict when it arises, but also to encourage a more mature, peaceable, and biblically faithful culture within its congregations and courts. Such work is vital for the strengthening of fellowship, the honouring of Christ, and the preservation of the Church's witness in the world.

PAUL JAMIESON, Convener

RECOGNISED MINISTRIES

Rev Dr Ruth Patterson, Restoration Ministries, writes:

65. As we stand in a liminal space between a world that has been to which we can never return and a deeply uncertain future, many people are questioning how to live in such a space with integrity, compassion and faith. In Restoration Ministries, through listening, building relationships, being attentive to our own inner journey and, above all, through prayer, we continue to provide some reassurance and guidance.
66. This is a year of anniversary celebrations - my 50 years of ordination and 30 years of Faith and Friendship, a branch of Restoration Ministries. We give thanks to God.

PASTORAL CARE OF MINISTERS AND THEIR FAMILIES PANEL

67. 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.
68. A Panel meeting was held in Assembly Buildings on 3 September 2025. Following this, representatives from each presbytery were contacted to find out about their present pastoral care arrangements.
69. A Teams call with delegates from 13 different presbyteries was held on 14 January 2026 to share examples of how pastoral care is managed. While this provision varies from presbytery to presbytery, many recognise that regular opportunities to build relationships more informally are beneficial for encouraging and supporting one another in meaningful ways.
70. In order to provide further relevant information regarding support for ministers and their families, it is intended that the current pastoral care leaflet will be updated and distributed to all congregations and presbytery pastoral care teams.

SONIA KANE, Convener

APPENDIX 1**SCHEDULE OF STUDENTS**

ARDS	Stuart Balmer	WTS	
ARMAGH	Calum Coert	Union	
	Peter Hutchinson	WTS	
	Philip Jaeschke	Union	
SOUTH BELFAST	Peter Huey	Union	
EAST BELFAST	Karen Jardine	Union	
	Ben Kirkwood	Union	
	Peter Macmillan	Union	
	Stephen McCombe	Union	
	Josh McCracken	Union	
	Scott Monteith	Union	
	COLERAINE AND LIMAVADY	Thomas Black	Union
		Joshua Lowry	Union
	DOWN	Matthew Jackson	Union
	DROMORE	Nathan Donnell	Union
David Graham		Union	
Ross Murphy		Union	
Ashley Parks		Union	
Cillian McNamara		Union	
DUBLIN AND MUNSTER	Bob McClughan	Union	
IVEAGH	Mark Annett	Union	
NEWRY	Adam Hanna	Union	
	Alan Hanna	Union	
	Glen McBride	Union	
	Wesley Quinn	Union	
ROUTE	Christine Craig	Union	
TEMPLEPATRICK	Colin McKay	Union	
TYRONE			

COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Convenor: Rev DANIEL KANE

Council Secretary: Rev Dr DAVID ALLEN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council for Public Affairs seeks to demonstrate the power, truth and beauty of the Gospel across a wide range of highly contentious moral and ethical areas of public life. Influencing public policy decisions by advocating for Gospel-inspired values, and ethical considerations in legislative and governance processes is at the heart of much of what the Council does.
2. The Council believes passionately that Jesus is good news for everyone and Christians across Ireland should continue to be deeply involved in every sphere of society. Our calling from Christ remains living creative and courageous Christian lives as agents of love, peace, joy and reconciliation. This is liberating, transformative and life-giving to all of society.
3. The Council 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, making representations to them on behalf of the Church, and responding to various public consultations. As a council, it is also committed to pursuing appropriate and mutually beneficial partnerships with other PCI Councils and external bodies, as well as developing a public theology which empowers it to have robust, biblically informed and compassionate, outward facing engagement.
4. The Council for Public Affairs has met in-person on two 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's committee and panels over the period August 2025–April 2026.
5. The Council is massively thankful to Dr Rebecca Stevenson, the Officer for Public Affairs, for doing such a great job as she successfully navigated the work through the challenges of this difficult year. Bex combines godly wisdom, compassionate listening and a deep desire to promote Christian values across all areas of public life. Under great pressure, Bex and the Council maintained our Gospel voice in key public policy areas and decision-making processes such as education (both in the Republic of Ireland and NI), advocacy for better palliative care provision, efforts at mitigating the destructive effects of the cost-of-living crisis and lobbying decision makers on behalf of the poor and vulnerable.

6. Bex's passion for graciously confident Gospel engagement and her tenacity has been indispensable in a year when our place at the table of public policy conversations and debates became more contentious than ever before and questioned by many. Conversations about the place of the Scriptures in schools north and south of the border, sexuality, gender, abortion, legacy, free speech, ban on conversion therapy, assisted suicide, artificial intelligence and welcoming the stranger aren't distractions from the Gospel – they are the front lines of mission as we believe the authority of Christ extends everywhere. Influencing public policy decisions by advocating for Gospel-inspired values, and ethical considerations in legislative and governance processes is at the heart of much of what we do as a council and Bex is at the forefront of this strategic missional aspect of our work as a denomination.
7. As an integral part of the General Secretary's Department, the Council deeply appreciates the skilled secretarial backup provided by the General Secretary's Department, especially Denise Weir and Jenny McClure.
8. The Council has responded to a range of public consultations and calls for evidence over this period. These are available to view on the PCI website.

STATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

9. The Committee expresses its thanks to all those involved in education, this includes acknowledging the work that is undertaken by school governors, school leaders, teachers, classroom assistants, education support staff and others, paid and unpaid.

Religious education and collective worship in NI schools

10. In November last year, the Supreme Court overturned the Court of Appeal's decision in *Judicial Review 87* and ruled that the Christian-focused religious education in NI schools is unlawful. The Court concluded that religious education is not conveyed in an objective, critical or pluralist manner and that within its current context that 'amounts to pursuing the aim of indoctrination.' Additionally, the Court ruled that exercising the right to withdraw a child from RE lessons and Collective Worship may place an undue burden on the objecting parent.
11. The Department of Education's response to the Court's decision has been to commission a review of RE, with the Terms of Reference noting that the revised core syllabus should retain Christianity as the central focus while being pluralistic and inclusive, specifically ensuring pupils explore a range of religious and non-religious world views.
12. The RE review process involves several stages including - the appointment of a RE Core Syllabus Drafting Group (made up of current teachers of religious education in primary and post-primary schools and chaired by Professor Noel Purdy OBE), an open call for evidence/submissions,

- a public survey, engagement with key stakeholders (including children, young people and parents), focus group discussions and a full public consultation on the draft syllabus.
13. The Department has also sought nominations from the four main churches for a Churches' Consultative Group to engage with and provide advice, support and feedback to the Drafting Group.
 14. The Churches' Consultative Group is made up of three representatives nominated by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and three representatives nominated by the Transferor Representatives' Council. Dr Andrew Brown, former Convener and current member of PCI's State Education Committee, is one of the TRC members. The Terms of Reference state: *'The Department recognises the vital role that representatives of the four main churches play in the delivery of education in Northern Ireland, including the support provided in drafting previous curricula.'* It is further stated that the Churches' Consultative Group *'will be engaged throughout the process, meeting directly with the Chair, Deputy Chair and wider drafting group, providing input and reviewing the final draft before it proceeds to public consultation.'*
 15. The State Education Committee submitted a response to the Call for Evidence in March 2026, and, through Presbyteries, encouraged members of the church, either individually or collectively, to respond to the online questionnaire. The Committee will continue to monitor the RE review process and, when necessary, bring opportunities for input and any matters of concern to the attention of the Church.

Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC)

16. The State Education Committee continues to work with our educational partners in the Church of Ireland and Methodist Church through the Transferor Representatives' Council. During the year, Bishop Andrew Forster (Church of Ireland), was appointed the Chair of the TRC and Dr Anita Gracie (Methodist Church), was appointed Deputy Chair. PCI is represented by Dr Andy Brown, Rev Robert Herron and Dr Rebecca Stevenson (Public Affairs Officer).
17. Earlier this year, the TRC launched a Charter for Churches and Christian Organisations involved in RE, Collective Worship and other activities in schools. Over a six-month period, the TRC engaged with a wide range of Christian organisations to gather support for the Charter. The Charter outlines a shared commitment to working respectfully and constructively within school communities. It states: *'Our role is to present and explain our faith, not to exert undue influence over the beliefs of pupils, nor to expect agreement. We offer our perspective as a contribution to the broader educational experience.'* The Charter can be seen on the TRC website's home page: <https://trc-churcheducation.org>

Nomination to the Education Authority (EA)

18. At the 2025 General Assembly it was reported that Mr John Wilkinson OBE and Mrs Catherine Chambers were nominated to serve on the EA Board for the next four years. At that time John had already completed a one-year period. At its October meeting, the State Education Committee were informed of the sudden death of Mr John Wilkinson OBE, in July 2025, and recorded his valuable contribution to education as a former school principal, school governor, and representative of PCI on the TRC and EA Board.
19. The State Education Committee would like to put on the record our formal thanks to the late Mr John Wilkinson for his invaluable contribution to education.
20. The Rev Dr Colin McClure was nominated to fill the vacancy and was appointed to the EA Board by the Minister of Education in January 2026. Colin has served as a member of the Board of Governors across a wide range of schools and represented PCI on the Transferor Representatives' Council and various educational bodies, including the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment and the former Southern Education and Library Board.

Minister's proposal to form a managing authority for controlled schools

21. Following the report of the Independent Review of Education panel describing the support arrangements for controlled schools as “sub-optimal”, the Minister of Education set up a Taskforce to develop a proposed model of support for controlled schools. During 2025, a Controlled Schools Unit was established within the Education Authority to facilitate the delivery of tangible improvements for controlled schools.
22. The Minister proposes to take this a step further and set up a Managing Authority for Controlled Schools (MACS) that will provide focused governance and strategic leadership for controlled schools. This model will require legislation to transfer identified duties and functions. At the time of writing, it is unclear if the Minister will be able to legislate for a MACS in the current mandate.
23. While the Church supports the Minister's initiative in the context of ensuring there is equitable and consistent service provision across all sectors and that ‘Every child and young person is happy, learning and succeeding’ (DE Vision Statement), the State Education Committee has concerns regarding the unintended consequences of changes to legislation regarding education provision.

Special educational needs reform

24. The State Education Committee reported on the Department of Education's Special Education Needs Reform Agenda to last year's Assembly and the Assembly passed a resolution welcoming the proposals.

25. Over the last five years an additional 6,000 special education places have been created, including almost 1,400 last year. However, the challenges to find suitable school places for pupils with SEN continue. In February 2026, the Minister of Education sent a letter to schools 'requiring all mainstream schools which the Education Authority considers suitable to facilitate specialist provision to engage constructively with them to put it in place.'
26. The State Education Committee continues to raise concern about the absence of legislation to ensure statutory SEN provision for young adults in NI.

ROBERT HERRON OBE, Convenor

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PANEL

27. The Peace and Reconciliation Panel has been continuing the work of 'Considering Grace Presbyterian and the Troubles', through its follow up project 'Considering Lament: Psalms of Protest, Pain and Hope'.
28. The suite of psalms followed on from the book and emerged from a desire to continue processing the pain in ways that bring it to God, rather than pass it on to the next generation. Across eight Bible study groups, held in different locations in Northern Ireland, many of those who had contributed to 'Considering Grace' took part. The project was also expanded to reflect the experience of the nationalist community and young people growing up in the shadow of the Troubles during the peace process.
29. The project has been facilitated by Rev Dr Karen Campbell, each group studied a different, but relevant Psalm of Lament to their local experience. This, in turn, led to a suite of eight psalms and accompanying liturgies that represented the work of each group.
30. The project was launched in Assembly Buildings on 26 March 2026. At this event focus group participants were invited to share their lived experience of the Troubles, then a band led those in the singing of the eight psalms.
31. The Panel has also produced six podcasts, of approximately 15 minutes in length. During each episode the relevant psalm is read, a focus group member shares a reflection and the newly composed psalm is played. As part of the project a booklet was produced, which contains the music and lyrics for the psalms and the accompanying liturgies. Each of the psalms have been recorded by a band. All of this material and the podcasts are available on the PCI website.
32. The Panel has also kept a watching brief on developments with the Legacy Act while continuing to establish good working relationships with civic leaders. This has included meeting with the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, Joe McVey OBE.

TONY DAVIDSON, Convenor

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND PANEL

33. 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 education and the Mica scandal.
34. Education has continued to be a significant focus of discussion. This has included discussions regarding the 2026 Convention of Education and the possible implications this may have for schools under PCI's patronage. This Convention on Education is a landmark initiative to shape the future of Education. In March 2026, PCI wrote to the Minister for Education in the Republic of Ireland, Hildegard Naughton TD, and requested to discuss the Convention of Education. At the time of writing we are awaiting a date to meet.

WILLIAM HAYES, Convenor

HUMAN DIGNITY PANEL

35. As part of our Graciously Confident approach to the Public Square, the Human Dignity Panel believes that Artificial Intelligence is an area where we can present a constructive biblical message to a current issue within our society.
36. The Panel had discussed collaborating to host a conference with Union Theological College. However, they did not have the capacity to partner with us on this issue.
37. Therefore, with a view to 'upstreaming' by engaging with students as future public leaders, the Panel approached two PCI University Chaplains. As both Queen's University and the University of Ulster have significant computing departments, Nigel Craig (Queen's Chaplains) and Graeme Orr (Magee Chaplain) were approached.
38. Both were positive about partnering for an event. Rev Craig indicated that he would like to host an evening through his Sunday night student meeting at Derryvolgie and Rev Orr would like to host a lunchtime event in the main student area.
39. The Panel have approached Dr David Glass, Senior Lecturer in Computer Science and Informatics Research at the University of Ulster and an Associate of the Centre for Christianity in Society who has spoken on this topic on a number of occasions. He is keen to be involved. The Panel will aim to organise and host these events in the next academic term.

JOHN MULLAN, Convenor

ASSISTED SUICIDE AND EUTHANASIA TASK GROUP

40. The task group has continued to monitor the progress of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill in Westminster. The proposed legislation has had 1,200, (a record-high) number of amendments tabled during its scrutiny in the House of Lords, with many opponents to the Bill arguing that it lacks sufficient safeguards.
41. In March the BBC reported that supporters of the Bill believe that it is, 'effectively impossible' for the bill to pass before the end of the current parliamentary session. If this Bill fails to progress, it will need to be reintroduced in the next parliamentary session.
42. On the 17 March 2026, the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill fell at Stage 3 of the parliamentary process, failing in a 69 to 57 vote against.
43. In July 2025, members of the task group worked closely with the Public Affairs Officer and Will Leitch to develop the first four episodes of the Graciously Confident Podcast. These are available on the PCI website.

DANIEL KANE, Convenor

WELFARE AND WELLBEING PANEL

44. The Panel has primarily focused on the issue of poverty and is keen to positively engage in another policy area. However, the Panel felt that it was important that the wider Church should influence the areas with which the Panel engages.
45. In February the Public Affairs Officer wrote to Presbytery Clerks asking them to have their presbyteries rank several different issues suggested by the Panel. Five presbyteries responded, with three indicating that 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' should be a priority for the Panel, and two indicating that 'Mental Health' should be a priority.

STEVE KENNEDY, Convenor

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TASK GROUP

46. The Panel has continued to focus on the increasing tensions and unrest amongst the migrant communities across the island. In order to engage with this issue and to consider how the Church can effectively raise awareness on this issue, we have decided, after collaborating with other Councils, to host focus groups. These focus groups will be the first step in gathering data to allow the task group to have a better understanding of the challenges and obstacles facing these communities and those supporting them. The

participants will be invited from a variety of organisations including faith-based and secular, working with members of the migrant communities.

47. These focus groups will be hosted initially in two locations, Belfast and Ballymena, but it is planned to gather data from additional geographic locations. The information gathered will then be used to inform the work and strategic direction of the task group.
48. At the time of writing, some participants have been identified to be invited to the Belfast focus group and the questions for discussion have been written.

JOHN KIRKPATRICK, Convenor

Graciously Confident podcast

49. This year the Council launched its 'Graciously Confident' Podcast. This is offered to the Church as a missional resource aimed primarily at engaging a younger audience. Podcasts are currently dominating the media landscape and have a diverse, global, growing community of loyal followers. In a world of subscription streaming platforms, podcasts have become a space void of payment. They can be listened to free on any smartphone, on a wide range of platforms at any time of the day or night.
50. The 'Graciously Confident' podcast series seeks to provide biblically informed insight into a wide range of issues with which the Council engages in an easily accessible, mobile format. It also aims to help equip listeners engage in graciously confident conversations about key public policy issues.
51. Each podcast episode is approximately 40 minutes long, hosted by veteran BBC journalist and podcaster Will Leitch, with two guest contributors, recorded at Commission Broadcast Centre. The Council is indebted to Will for his guidance and expertise in making this project a reality. The podcasts are available to download from the PCI website or by scanning the QR code.
52. At the time of writing the podcast has released six episodes which address issues such as Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia, Judicial Review 87 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.

Scan the QR Code to listen to the *Graciously Confident* podcast



Partnership working

53. The Council for Public Affairs continues to collaborate with other PCI Councils as required, working with the Council for Social Witness in responding to relevant consultations and working with the Council for Global Mission and contacting MPs to support the invitation of global guests.
54. Opportunities for inter-church engagement through the structures of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) continued on a range of issues. The Council has also worked with Church Leaders to raise awareness of public policy issues.

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 2025–March 2026. Matters dealt with include, the terms of leaves to call granted to 20 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 is too many to sustain, given the decreasing number of people attending our services and the scarcity of ministers available to be called. 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, as they examine their finances and the decline in contributing families, they realise that change is needed. Kirk Sessions are familiar with Reconfiguration of Ministry and have taken part in submitting a data gathering exercise, which paints a picture of the viability of the congregation. Where a congregation seeks to enter into a new linkage, or merge with a neighbouring congregation, the help of Presbytery and the Commission is at hand. The experience of those who have come together is that they enjoy being part of a larger congregation, and they often wonder why they did not do this sooner.

As we look at a map of Ireland, we see vast parts of the island that have no reformed witness, and we realise our calling to make Christ known. How shall they hear without a preacher, and how can they preach unless they are sent? Thus the Commission has to be convinced of the Missional intent of a congregation before leave to call is granted. 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 recognises that while the work of reconfiguration has been hampered because of the pressure of recent issues, we ask Presbyteries to continue to assess the viability of every congregation within its bounds so that vibrant sustainable charges can be created into the future.

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

incoming vacancy conveners but can also reduce concerns and timescales in filling the vacancy. This practice is to be encouraged. It is of note that, as a result of this increased preparedness, the time between a vacancy occurring and the granting of Leave to Call has significantly reduced.

However, the Commission is also aware that the Church has entered a period when, for a few years, there will be a reduction in the number of available licensed assistants. This will inevitably increase the length of some vacancies.

United Appeal

3. One of the strengths of Presbyterianism is that the stronger has always sought to help the weaker. This is not only seen in larger congregations coming alongside smaller ones, but also in our support for church planting and mission, both at home and overseas. One of the ways that we support such ministries is through our giving to United Appeal. When a congregation becomes vacant, the Linkage Commission not only looks at all its statistics and finances, but it also takes into consideration its Missional intent. One of the factors of Missional intent is what we contribute to PCI mission through United Appeal. The target of honour for the last five years is recorded beside the amount paid to the United Appeal on the Congregational Return form submitted to the Commission. The Commission would strongly encourage all congregations to meet their target, if not exceed it, so that the mission of our denomination can continue.

Safeguarding

4. The events of recent months have challenged us all about our safeguarding practices. As the Linkage Commission thought through such issues, it was realised that congregations are not asked about safeguarding. To remedy this, there is now a section in the Presbytery Comment Form under “Leadership” which asks some questions about safeguarding practice. The Commission would also remind congregations involved in a merger of the need to ensure that all in leadership in the newly merged congregation have completed safeguarding forms and training.

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. Often when congregations have decided to merge or dissolve, they do not desire it to be a long drawn-out process. It is recognised that it can take some time to sort out all the legalities and the Commission is thankful to Mr Stephen Gowdy, the General Assembly Solicitor, who moves things along as quickly as possible. To help this be done more efficiently, the General Assembly has given authority to the General Council for a period of 24 months, to merge or dissolve congregations. This has already enabled congregations to move forward more quickly.

Leave to Call a Minister

6. 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
Trinity, Ahoghill	£26,400 (2025)	£4,432.80 (2025)
Grange with Craigmore	£17,600(2025)	£2,955.20 (2025)
Rasharkan	2/3 £AMM (2025)	£4,925.34 (2025)
Dunloy	1/3 £AMM (2025)	£2,462.66 (2025)
Banbridge Road, Dromore	£44,000 (2025)	£7,388 (2025)
Loughbrickland	60% £AMM (2025)	£4,432.80 (2025)
Scarva	40% £AMM (2025)	£2,955.20 (2025)
Kilmakee	50% £AMM (2025)	£3,694 (2025)
Dunmurry	50% £AMM (2025)	£3,694 (2025)
Fintona	60% £AMM (2025)	£4,432.80 (2025)
Dromore	40% £AMM (2025)	£2,955.20 (2025)
Second Castlederg	£25,666.67 (2025)	£4,925.34 (2025)
Drumquin	£12,833.33 (2025)	£2,462.66 (2025)
Ballykeel	60% £AMM (2025)	£4,432.80 (2025)
Ballee	40% £AMM (2025)	£2,955.20 (2025)
First Dromara	£28,000 (2025)	£4,925.34 (2025)
Second Dromara	£14,000 (2025)	£2,462.66 (2025)
Sligo	€26,000 (2025)	€11,308(2025)
Dungannon	£44,000 (2025)	£7,388 (2025)

Congregation	Stipend	Allowances
High Kirk, Ballymena	£48,000 (2025)	£7,388(2025)
Raphoe & Ballindrait	80% €AMM (2025)	€9,046.40 (2025)
Faughanvale	80% £AMM (2025)	£5,910.40 (2025)
Gortnessy	20% £AMM (2025)	£1,477.60 (2025)
Ballydown Associate	£AMM (2025)	£6,895 (2025)
Newmills	£45,000 (2026)	£7,646 (2026)
Ray	2/3 €AMM (2026)	€7,689.33 (2026)
Newtowncunningham	1/3 €AMM (2026)	€3,844.67 (2026)
Fahan	50% €AMM (2026)	€5,654 (2026)
Central Belfast	£AMM (2026)	£7,646 (2026)
Castledawson	70% £AMM (2026) plus £3,500	£5,352.20 (2026)
Curran	30% £AMM (2026) plus £1,500	£2,293.80 (2026)
Trinity, Boardmills	£AMM (2026)	£7,646 (2026)
Trinity Greyabbey	£42,000 (2026)	£7,646 (2026)
Gilnahirk	£40,000 (2026)	£7,646 (2026)
Wellington, Ballymena	£48,000 (2026)	£7,646 (2026)
West Church, Ballymena	£45,000 (2026)	£7,646 (2026)
West Church, Bangor	£50,000 (2026)	£7,646 (2026)

Reviewable Tenure Ministries

7. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Dervock has been extended while the minister is Stated Supply in Garryduff.
8. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Glenarm and Cairnalbana was renewed for a further five years from 1 June 2025.
9. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Sandys' Street Newry was terminated.
10. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in the West Belfast Special Project was renewed for a further seven years.

Stated Supplies

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 Eskylane, First Lurgan, Ballina, Kingsmills and Jerrettspass & First Drumbanagher and Benburb were effected.

Dissolution of Congregations

12. The 2023 General Assembly resolved as follows: “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 the rules.”
13. The 2025 General Assembly resolved as follows: “That the congregation of Killala be dissolved on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on terms set by the Linkage Commission. That the assets realised be distributed according to the rules.”

Terms of Dissolution of Congregations**Ballymote:**

- (a) That the Presbytery of Monaghan oversees the transfer of members of Ballymote to another congregation.
- (b) That all existing or future assets, including legacies and bequests subsequent to the dissolution, including property or lands not disposed of, become the property of the Council for Mission in Ireland.
- (c) That the Council for Mission in Ireland will remain responsible for any liabilities of the former congregation.
- (d) That Minute books and Registers be transferred to Ballina Presbyterian Church for safekeeping.
- (e) That seven years financial accounts and all safeguarding documentation that requires retention be transferred to the Presbytery of Monaghan.
- (f) That upon completion of Dissolution of the charity that is Ballymote Presbyterian Church, the Charity Trustees, that is, the Interim Kirk Session, be dissolved.

Killala:

- (a) That the Presbytery of Monaghan oversees the transfer of members of Killala to another congregation.
- (b) That all existing or future assets, including legacies and bequests subsequent to the dissolution, including property or lands not disposed of, become the property of Ballina congregation.
- (c) That Ballina congregation will remain responsible for any liabilities of the former congregation of Killala.

- (d) That until the Ballina Kirk Session decide otherwise, and Presbytery approve, at least one but not more than five services per year continue to be held in Killala, apart from weddings and funerals.
- (e) That the Minute books and Registers be transferred to Ballina Presbyterian Church for safekeeping.
- (f) That seven years' financial accounts and all safeguarding documentation that requires retention be transferred to the Presbytery of Monaghan.
- (g) That further advice will be given regarding the Killala graveyard.
- (h) That upon completion of Dissolution of the charity that is Killala Presbyterian Church, the Charity Trustees, that is, the Interim Kirk Session be dissolved.

Dissolution of Linkages

14. Three linkages were dissolved:

The Linkage between Dromore and Drumquin was dissolved on 24 June 2025.

The Linkage between Second Castleberg and Urney was dissolved on 24 June 2025.

The Linkage between Fintona and Ballynahatty & Creevan was dissolved on 24 June 2025.

Congregations Linked

15. Five new Linkages were agreed.

Second Castleberg and Drumquin

Terms of Linkage:

- (a) That the congregations of Second Castleberg and Drumquin be linked on 24 June 2025.
- (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) Second Castleberg 10.00 am
 - (ii) Drumquin 11.30 am; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.

- (f) That the Stipends be:
 - (i) Second Castlederg 66.66% of £38,500
 - (ii) Drumquin 33.33% of £38,500 and that Ministerial Allowances be shared on the same ratio 66.66%/33.33%
- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of Second Castlederg Manse be borne in the proportions:
 - (i) Second Castlederg 66.66%
 - (ii) Drumquin 33.33%
- (h) That the Minister shall reside in Second Castlederg Manse.

Fintona and Dromore

Terms of Linkage:

- (a) That the congregations of Fintona and Dromore be linked on 24 June 2025.
- (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) Fintona 10.30am
 - (ii) Dromore 12.00 noon; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
- (f) That the Stipends be:
 - (i) Fintona 60% of £AMM
 - (ii) Dromore 40% of £AMM and that Ministerial Allowances be shared on the same ratio 60%/40%
- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of Fintona Manse be borne in the proportions:
 - (i) Fintona 60%
 - (ii) Dromore 40%
- (h) That the Minister shall reside in Fintona Manse.

Ballykeel and Ballee

Terms of Linkage:

- (a) That the congregations of Ballykeel and Ballee be linked on 23 September 2025.
- (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) Ballykeel 10.00am
 - (ii) Ballee 11.30am; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
- (f) That the Stipends be:
 - (i) Ballykeel 60% of £AMM
 - (ii) Ballee 40% of £AMM and that Ministerial Allowances be shared on the same ratio 60%/40%
- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of Ballykeel Manse be borne in the proportions:
 - (i) Ballykeel 60%
 - (ii) Ballee 40%
- (h) That the Minister shall reside in Ballykeel Manse.

First and Second Dromara

Terms of Linkage:

- (a) That the congregations of First Dromara and Second Dromara be linked on 28 October 2025.
- (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 Dromara 11.45am
 - (ii) Second Dromara 10.30am; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
- (f) That the Stipends be:
 - (i) First Dromara 66.66% of £42,000
 - (ii) Second Dromara 33.33% of £42,000 and that Ministerial Allowances be shared on the same ratio 66.66%/ 33.33%

- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of First Dromara Manse be borne in the proportions:
 - (i) First Dromara 66.66%
 - (ii) Second Dromara 33.33%
- (h) That the Minister shall reside in First Dromara Manse.

Faughanvale and Gortnessy

Terms of Linkage:

- (a) That the congregations of Faughanvale and Gortnessy be linked on 25 November 2025.
- (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) Faughanvale 11.45 am;
 - (ii) Gortnessy 10.15 am; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
- (f) That the Stipends be:
 - (i) Faughanvale 80% of £AMM
 - (ii) Gortnessy 20% of £AMM and Ministerial Allowances be shared on the same ratio: Faughanvale 80%, Gortnessy 20%.
- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of Faughanvale Manse be borne in the proportions:
 - (i) Faughanvale: 80%
 - (ii) Gortnessy 20%.
- (h) That the minister shall reside in Faughanvale Manse.

Congregations Merged

- 16. The congregation of Ballynahatty and Creevan be merged into Fintona on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date on terms set by the Linkage Commission.
- 17. The congregation of Boveedy be merged into the congregation of First Kilrea on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date on terms set by the Linkage Commission.
- 18. The congregation of Second Kilrea be merged into the congregation of First Kilrea on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date on terms set by the Linkage Commission.

Terms of Merged Congregations

19. The 2024 General Assembly resolved as follows: That the congregation of Second Newtownards be merged into the congregation of First Newtownards on 31 December 2024, or other suitable date, on such terms as set by the Linkage Commission.

Terms of Merger for the congregation of Second Newtownards into First Newtownards.

- (a) That the congregation of Second Newtownards be merged into the congregation of First Newtownards on 31 December 2024, or other suitable date under the name “First Newtownards”.
 - (b) That the property known as Second Newtownards Manse become and remain the property of the merged congregation of First Newtownards.
 - (c) That the number one bank account of Second Newtownards be split as follows: £10,000 to First Newtownards and the remainder to the Council of Mission in Ireland.
 - (d) That all other assets of the charity that is Second Newtownards, including property or lands not disposed of, shall become the property of First Newtownards and transfer with immediate effect to the Council for Mission in Ireland to be used in mission in the Presbytery of Ards or its successor.
 - (e) That the merged congregation will remain responsible for any future Second Newtownards liabilities and receive any legacies and bequests subsequent to merger.
 - (f) That First Newtownards draw up a list of the fixtures and fittings of Second Newtownards and dispose of them taking into account the identity and legacy of Second Newtownards.
 - (g) That the Stipend of the merged congregation be £43,500 (2025)
 - (h) That the minister lives in First Newtownards Manse.
20. The 2024 General Assembly resolved as follows: That the congregation of Woodvale be merged with the Presbytery of North Belfast on 31 December 2024, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission.

Terms of Merger for the congregation of Woodvale into the Presbytery of North Belfast

- (a) That the congregation of Woodvale be merged into the Presbytery of North Belfast on 31 December 2024, or other suitable date.
- (b) 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 Presbytery of North Belfast.

- (c) That the Presbytery of North Belfast will remain responsible for any of Woodvale's liabilities.
 - (d) That upon merger the elders become elder emeritus.
21. The 2025 General Assembly resolved as follows: That the congregation of Ballynahatty & Creevan be merged into the congregation of Fintona on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission.

Terms of Merger for the congregations of Ballynahatty & Creevan into Fintona

- (a) That the congregation of Ballynahatty & Creevan be merged into the congregation of Fintona on 31 December 2025 or other suitable date. The name of the merged congregation will be known as Fintona.
 - (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 minister lives in Fintona Manse.
22. The 2025 General Assembly resolved as follows: That the congregation of Croaghmore be merged into the congregation of Toberkeigh on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission.

Terms of Merger for the congregation of Croaghmore into Toberkeigh

- (a) That the congregation of Croaghmore be merged into the congregation of Toberkeigh on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date under the name "Toberkeigh".
- (b) That Croaghmore meeting house be sold and the monies realised be lodged into a Croaghmore Fund to be used for mission within the Route Presbytery or its successor.
- (c) That all other assets of the charity that is Croaghmore, including property or lands not disposed of, shall become the property of Toberkeigh. That they make up the amount in the Croaghmore Fund to £300,000 should the sale of the meeting house be less than £300,000.

- (d) That the merged congregation will remain responsible for any future Croaghmore liabilities and receive any legacies and bequests subsequent to merger.
 - (e) That Toberkeigh draw up a list of the fixtures and fittings of Croaghmore, and dispose of them taking into account the identity and legacy of Croaghmore.
 - (f) That upon merger the elders of Croaghmore will become elder emeritus.
23. The 2025 General Assembly resolved as follows: That the congregation of Townhill Portglenone be merged into the congregation of First Portglenone on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission.

Terms of Merger for the congregation of Townhill Portglenone into First Portglenone

- (a) That the congregation of Townhill, Portglenone be merged into the congregation of First Portglenone on 31 December 2025 or other suitable date. The name of the merged congregation will be Portglenone.
 - (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 minister lives in First Portglenone Manse.
 - (f) That the stipend be set when Leave to Call is given.
24. The General Council at their meeting on 19 November 2025 resolved as follows: That permission be given to approve the merger of First Kilrea, Second Kilrea and Boveedy in the Terms set by the Linkage Commission.

Terms of Merger for the congregations of Boveedy and First Kilrea

- (a) That the congregation of Boveedy be merged into the congregation of First Kilrea on 31 December 2025 or other suitable date. The name of the merged congregation will be known as Kilrea.
- (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 minister lives in First Kilrea Manse.

Terms of Merger for the congregations of Second Kilrea and First Kilrea

- (a) That the congregation of Second Kilrea be merged into the congregation of First Kilrea on 31 December 2025 or other suitable date. The name of the merged congregation will be known as Kilrea.
- (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 minister lives in First Kilrea Manse.

Leave to Call withdrawn

25. No congregation had their Leave to Call withdrawn.

RECONFIGURATION COMMITTEE

26. The Reconfiguration Committee has met a number of times over the past year. Owing to the pressures placed upon Rev David Allen as Acting Clerk, the Deputy Clerk, Rev Peter Gamble was asked to take on the Convenorship of this Committee. There is still much work to be done throughout our denomination regarding Reconfiguration, and the Committee would strongly encourage Presbyteries to continue to look strategically at all congregations within their bounds. Some Presbyteries are further along the way than others. Those who have worked hard with reconfiguration in their Presbyteries are ready to help others who may be struggling with a way forward. The Committee is also ready to help and assist Presbyteries as required with this work.

REVIEWS, FEES AND ALLOWANCES PANEL

Reviews

27. 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:

Presbytery	Congregation	Stipend
ARDS	Ballygilbert	No change
	Millisle & Ballycopeland & First Donaghadee	No change
ARMAGH	Caledon & Minterburn	No change
BELFAST NORTH	Abbot's Cross	No Change
BELFAST SOUTH	Saintfield	£1000 increase
	South Kirk	No change
COLERAINE AND LIMAVADY	Aghadowey & Crossgar	No change
	Balteagh & Bovevagh	No change
DERRY AND DONEGAL	Glendermott	No change
DROMORE	Sloan Street	No change
	Magheragall	No change
DUBLIN AND MUNSTER	Abbey Dublin	No change
	Blackrock & Bray	No change
	Tullamore	No change
MONAGHAN	Dundalk	No change
NEWRY	Markethill & Cladymore	No change
OMAGH	Aughnacloy & Ballymagrane	No change
	Ballygawley & Ballyreagh	No change
	First Omagh	No change

Presbytery	Congregation	Stipend
	Seskinore & Edenderry	No change
ROUTE	Finvoy	No change
	First Ballymoney	No change
	Mosside & Toberdoney	No change
TEMPLEPATRICK	Templepatrick	No change
TYRONE	Culnady & Swatragh	No change

Supply Fee

28. The level of Supply Fee is determined by the Code, Par. 238, and for 2025 this is £132 (€190) or £88 (€127) where only a single service is supplied in one congregation.
29. Expenses should be paid in accordance with the rate set for attendance at Assembly Councils, currently:
 - (f) NI - 18p per mile
 - (g) ROI - 26 cents per mile/16 cents per kilometre

STEPHEN WILLIAMSON, Convener

CHURCH ARCHITECTURE AND MANSES PANEL

30. The work of the Church Architecture and Manses Panel gives its members an insight into the development work being undertaken by many PCI congregations throughout the island of Ireland, both North and South. We gain an understanding of the challenges that are encountered and ultimately overcome, all of which help bring projects to a successful conclusion, whether these involve small adaptations, extensions, or major new-build projects.
31. We have been privileged to be consulted at the concept stage of some imaginative schemes which, if brought to fruition, will undoubtedly enhance the ministry of the congregations they serve. The vision and commitment of those who see their property as an asset in extending Christ's kingdom can be an encouragement to us all.
32. The Panel has taken the opportunity to visit some recently completed projects and to see how the hopes and aspirations of their congregations have become a reality, enabling the work and witness within the communities they serve to be demonstrated even more meaningfully. Thanks are due to the congregations of First Broughshane and Buckna for the kindness extended to the Panel during visits to both churches.

33. A major concern continues to be how best we can address the maintenance of our building stock. The importance of ensuring our premises are well maintained is an area on which the Panel intends to focus attention. Understanding that undertaking simple cyclical maintenance can save substantial future repair costs must be emphasised. To this end, it is the intention of the Panel to circulate guidance documentation relating to maintenance.

WILLIAM WATT, Chair

ADDITIONAL PASTORAL PERSONNEL AND AUXILIARY MINISTRY PANEL

34. In the past year the Linkage Commission approved the creation of 20 new Additional Pastoral Personnel (APP) posts, the extension or amendment of nine existing posts and the creation of one Missional Auxiliary Ministry/ Mission Pioneer post.
35. ‘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.
36. The approval of the HR support provider, presbytery and the Linkage Commission is required to extend or amend an existing APP post. Kirk Sessions should note carefully when an existing fixed-term contract concludes so that requests for an extension are made in sufficient time.
37. 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)
38. APP Salary Scales for 2026 were agreed by the Linkage Commission at its meeting in November 2025. 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.

39. 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.
40. 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.
41. 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

Business from the 2024 General Assembly

42. In 2024 the General Assembly agreed that Second Ards be merged into First Ards. [MGA 2024 page 51, resolution 1] The Presbytery of Ards continues to give consideration to parish bounds for the entire Newtownards area.
43. In 2024 the General Assembly agreed that Woodvale be merged into the Presbytery of North Belfast. A decision on the parish bounds continues to be deferred until a new Presbytery Mission Plan has been written.

Business from the 2025 General Assembly

44. Eight decisions of the 2025 General Assembly had implications for parish bounds. These decisions and associated comment are set out in the following paragraphs, ordered by Presbytery.

Ballymena

That the congregation of Townhill, Portglenone be merged into the congregation of First Portglenone on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission. [MGA 2025 p44 res. 3] Following consultation with the Presbytery of Ballymena, the Panel recommends that the parish bounds of First Portglenone and Townhill, Portglenone, be merged into one.

North Belfast

That the congregation of Newington be merged into the Presbytery of North Belfast on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission. [MGA 2025 res. 6] Following consultation with the Presbytery of North Belfast, the Panel has noted that a decision on the parish bounds has been deferred until a new Presbytery Mission Plan has been written.

South Belfast

- (a) That the Memorial (sc. of the Kirk Session of Carnmoney) be received and its prayer granted. [MGA 2025 p41 res. 1] The prayer was to grant the Presbytery of South Belfast Presbytery authority to establish 'Central Belfast' as a Congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (within the Urban Mission) and place it in the Synod of Ulster, on a convenient date after 30 June 2025. [GAR 2025 p176]
 - (b) That the congregation of Taughmonagh be merged into the Presbytery of South Belfast on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission. [Resolution MGA 2025 p44 res. 7]
 - (c) That the congregation of Townsend Street be merged with the General Assembly on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms agreed by the Linkage Commission. [MGA 2025 p54 res. 2(b)]
45. Following consultation with the Presbytery of South Belfast, the Panel has noted that in all three instances, a decision on parish bounds has been deferred until a new Presbytery Mission Plan has been written.

Monaghan

That the congregation of Killala be dissolved on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission. That the assets realised be distributed according to the rules. [Resolution 8.] The Panel has noted that as the parish bounds of Ballina and Killala are already expressed as a single unit, the Presbytery of Monaghan is content that no action is needed, except that the Panel recommends that the designation of the description of the bounds is changed from 'Ballina and Killala' to 'Ballina'.

Omagh

That the congregation of Ballynahatty & Creevan be merged into the congregation of Fintona on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission. [MGA 2025 p 44 res. 5] Following consultation with the Presbytery of Omagh, the Panel recommends that the parish bounds of Fintona and Ballynahatty & Creevan, be merged into one.

Route

That the congregation of Croaghmore be merged into the congregation of Toberkeigh on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission. [MGA 2025 p44 res. 4] Following consultation with the Presbytery of Route, the Panel recommends that the parish bounds of Toberkeigh and Croaghmore be merged into one.

46. The Convener of the Panel gave advice and information to a number of ministers.

JIM STOTHERS, Convener

THE TRUSTEES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND

Chairman: Rev Dr D. WATTS

Secretary: Mr K. SWARBRICK

1. **Trustee Appointments and Resignations**

At the 2026 General Assembly Revs John Faris and Liz Hughes and Mr Robin Tweed will have completed their first term of office as Trustees, having been appointed in 2021. They have all expressed a willingness to continue for a further term and resolutions proposing their reappointment were agreed at the Trustees' AGM. The Trustees wish to record their thanks to Robin, Liz and John for their previous service and for their willingness to continue for a further term of office.

2. **Crescent Loan Fund**

The Crescent Loan Fund was established to provide low interest or interest free loans to congregations having short term financial problems. The interest charged on most new loans is half of 'the 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 term is three years, however loans of up to five 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.

The loan balance outstanding at 31 December 2025 was £131K and Trustees provided only one new loan for €50K during 2025. At the year end, the fund had £292K available to meet new loan requests.

3. **Trust Funds**

A summary of the various Trust Funds the Trustees manage will be included in the 2025 Accounts Book.

Trustees provide recommendations for distributions from the funds to the General Council, as the formal charity trustees for PCI Assembly Trustees. Where possible, monies are distributed to United Appeal for use rather than directly to various agencies.

4. **The Presbyterian Church Investment Fund (known as The General Investment Fund)**

The General Investment Fund (GIF) was 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 fund, the investment performance and investment holdings, are contained in a booklet available from the Financial Secretary's Department.

The PCI Trustees are also the trustees of the GIF and are responsible for the accounts of the fund. These will be prepared by the Financial Secretary's Department, audited by the General Assembly's auditors and included in the published PCI Accounts book when available. The accounts will provide additional information regarding the Fund, in particular its performance, investment allocation, level of income and distributions during the year.

Declaration of Dividend	Mar 2025	Sept 2025
No shares qualifying	6,045,744	6,055,137
Dividend per share	15.0p	19.0p

During 2025, £69,258 was transferred from the Dividend Equalisation Reserve, which is in accordance with the Scheme Rules, and the balance on the Reserve at 31 December, 2025 is £429,994. The combined annual dividend of 33p per share for 2024 is 3% higher than 2024.

The shares in the Fund are valued on a monthly basis. The share value at 31 December 2025 was £13.357 per share (2024: £13.957).

5. Bequests

The Trustees received a report of all bequests notified to the Church during 2025 and wish to record their deep gratitude for those who have decided to support the Church in this way.

COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS

Convener: Rev ALBIN RANKIN

Secretary: Rev DAVID THOMPSON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council for Congregational Life and Witness seeks to support the ongoing life, mission and witness of congregations in their work with all age groups, through casting vision, assisting in development, offering training; providing and signposting models of good practice and resourcing.
2. The report details:
 - (a) Seeking the Lord and following him in offering support for congregational life and witness in this season.
 - (b) Particular pieces of work directly commissioned by or reporting to the Council:
 - (i) Accompaniment of the development of life and witness of congregations in which ministry is being reconfigured
 - (ii) The *Present* initiative
 - (iii) Developing work in partnership with presbyteries.
 - (c) The work of the following committees and panels:
 - (i) The Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee
 - (ii) The Congregational Life Committee
 - (iii) The Congregational Witness Committee
 - (vi) The Children's, Youth and Family Panel
 - v) The Presbyterian Women Panel.
 - (d) Encouragements, thanksgiving, learning, promptings of the Spirit and the need for the Lord's guidance.

Seeking the Lord and following him in offering support for congregational life and witness in this season

3. This year, Councils have been asked to prepare and present reports which are more intentionally focused on God and how he is at work through the ministry they offer. In particular, attention is to be given to what is encouraging and suggests itself for thanksgiving to God; lessons that are being learned; what the Council believes God is prompting the church to be and do in future in its area of the Assembly's work; specific things for which the Council is seeking the Lord's guidance.

4. The suggestions of the Council on these matters will be presented in a specific section at the end of the report. In many ways they arise from what is observable throughout the body of the report which outlines some of the main activities undertaken by the Council and strategic directions set in seeking to encourage, support and give confidence to congregations and their members in developing their life and witness. Council also discussed and agreed the content of this element of the report at their spring 2026 meeting.
5. The array of activity covered by the Council in outworking the remit given to it by the General Assembly continues to be varied and extensive. God is at work. Lessons are being learned. Yet, one recurring observation is that, for a number of reasons, the denomination is not maximising the potential of the ministry offered by the Council. To do so will require change and response to some evident pointers towards adopting a different approach and the need for God's guidance to undertake a journey with others towards doing so wisely and well. It is hoped that the forthcoming review of denominational governance, culture and integrity will begin to open up an inclusive and fruitful conversation on these matters.
6. The Council's sense is that there is much about which we need to be seeking the Lord in prayer, especially given the unsettled denominational circumstances caused by continuing crisis, ongoing investigations, reconfiguration of ministry and an air of uncertainty that hangs heavily over us all.
7. The Council's work, like many other elements of the life of the denomination, has been overshadowed and impaired by the crisis in the areas of denominational safeguarding and governance which became public in November 2025.
8. The Council for Congregational Life and Witness has no direct or indirect responsibility for the provision of denominational safeguarding. Nevertheless, there have been a number of significant consequences of the unfolding crisis which have required Council response and readjustment, or are negatively impacting on its ministry of supporting the life and witness of congregations.
9. Ongoing ambiguity about a future reconfiguration of the central structures and councils of the General Assembly proves an impediment to medium term planning, and the reduced capacity available for necessary support for the Council's basic functioning from departments such as Communications and Safeguarding is a constant impediment.
10. While all of these effects of the current season of ministry are frustrating and debilitating, the Council, its committees and panels and staff team continue to plot a steady course, focusing on what can be done, rather than what has been impeded, and finding, where possible, workarounds for obstacles that emerge.
11. Aware of the significant challenges facing the denomination at present, the Council has chosen not to progress what it views as a number of important matters by way of resolution to the General Assembly this year.

Instead, it will seek to engage in a range of important conversations with other Councils and bodies during 2026/27 with a view to collaboratively crafting resolutions for next year's Assembly.

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

Accompaniment of the development of life and witness of congregations in which ministry is being reconfigured

12. Following consideration by the Reconfiguration Panel of the Linkage Commission in June 2025, a proposal for a new aspect of work in which the Council would provide accompaniment for congregations in which ministry was being reconfigured was agreed.

The aim of the initiative was to maximise the gains of reconfiguration by:

- (a) offering accompaniment to congregations in which ministry is being reconfigured;
 - (b) resourcing the facilitation of a process which enables reconfigured congregations to move towards a sharing of aspects of ministry, rather than seeing their change in circumstances terminate solely in the sharing of a minister.
13. This represents one outworking of the specific element of the remit given to the Council 'to seek to support the ongoing life, mission and witness of congregations in their work will all age-groups, and in particular... assist[ing] the congregations of the Church in setting vision and in their development... offering training [and]... advice on good practice...' Code para. 420.
14. On the ground, delivery of accompaniment was intended to be by congregational companions appointed on the basis of a mix of gifting, experience and availability suitable to offering their services as project workers paid an hourly rate from existing funding reassigned from within the Council's budget. Companions were to be deployed regionally with the agreement of presbyteries within whose bounds they will work, with training and resources designed by Council staff.
15. Due to the interruption of the safeguarding crisis this work has stalled as the progress of the reconfiguration process has slowed. Only one referral has been made to the council and it has been picked up by Council staff. It is hoped that this important work can be revived in the next church year.
16. This work having been frustrated by circumstances beyond its control, the Council pivoted to seek to provide another means of accompanying congregations finding themselves a part of the reconfiguration process. Having noted the increasing number of vacancies, many of which are extending for a significant period, some requiring that new ministry arrangements be found, a leaflet entitled Going without was received by the Council at its meeting on 11 March 2026.

17. The resource suggests simple ways congregations finding themselves in an extended period of vacancy can maintain a lively ongoing life and witness in the period in which they find themselves without a minister and are preparing themselves for changes ahead. After reviewing the material with a group of those who have navigated these circumstances in congregations and vacancy conveners, a final draft will be prepared for consideration by the Linkage Commission as a resource that could be made available to kirk sessions of vacant congregations.
18. These aspects of work represent the commitment of the Council to engage with the real situation of congregational life and witness as it exists on the ground in this current season of the denomination's life. However, its observation is that doing so is hindered by a pervasive clunkiness caused by a culture of siloisation and lack of communication between bodies that could be working in a more coordinated manner, including Linkage Commission, presbyteries and the Council for Congregational Life and Witness. It is hoped that the forthcoming reviews of denominational culture and governance, along with the review of structures, will untangle and begin to address these impediments to smooth and effective development of the renewal of congregational presence for ministry and mission. In the meantime, the Council will pursue conversations with all of these partners with a view to improving communication and coordination.

The 'Present' initiative

19. The Present initiative, intended to encourage congregations in this season of their life and witness, will reach the end of its second year in September 2026.
20. From the outset, the initiative was modest in its aims and avoids overclaiming what might be achieved. It seeks to:
 - encourage congregations to celebrate that God is at work in the ordinary;
 - seek to enable creativity in approaching the spiritual rhythms of our life together in fresh ways;
 - facilitate something of a renewal of the expression of a denominational connectedness among congregations across Ireland;
 - be simple enough for every congregation to engage with, but significant enough to really make a difference.
21. The first year simply aimed to increase awareness of the main theme and subthemes:
 - Be *present* in this season of life and witness;
 - Be *present* to God as his people;
 - Be *present* for one another in God's family of the church;
 - Be *present* where God has placed us to be his witnesses.

22. Council activity focused on sharing the basic concept and emphases of the initiative by use of all available channels of communication. These include social media, *Herald* articles, *Tides* devotions, podcasts and video clips. Metrics gathered by the Communications Department suggest that quantitatively this means that the initiative has been set before at least 20,000 members out of the denomination's total membership of 182,000. Anecdotally, congregations report that they have shared and used video material, signposted podcasts, and that members have appreciated *Tides* devotions on the theme.
23. In the second year the focus has been on providing some simple ways in which congregations can harness the *Present* theme for use in a variety of forms, as they deem most useful to them. Simple resources to use have been both provided and signposted on the PCI website. There has been an intentional attempt to earth the concept by sharing stories of how members and congregations are finding ways to express being present to God, one another and where God has placed them to be his witnesses. This has included *Herald* stories, a podcast series entitled '*Really present...*' and video material circulated on social media.
24. It is important to remember that this initiative is offered to congregations. It is not mandatory, nor does it advocate for or impose any particular model of church life. Rather, it encourages congregations under God to prayerfully discern and shape their expression of being present, determined by gifting, resources, circumstances, opportunities and setting for mission.
25. When the initiative was proposed, the particular focus of the third year was left to be decided on the basis of what had happened in the preceding two years and where the church found itself in that moment. At its meeting on 11 March 2026, Council decided that the focus of the *Present* initiative in 2026/27 should centre on the sub-theme '*Present where God has placed us to be his witnesses*'. This theme could helpfully overarch and tie together some planned initiatives by both the Congregational Life and Congregational Witness committees. It will also help maintain a focus on the outward mission of the church in a season in which prevailing circumstances could see it becoming ever more preoccupied by an inward agenda.
26. It should also be noted that the *Present* theme has already been helpful in framing conversations in a variety of areas of church life and has been recognised as an important unifying thread in the messaging of the denomination. As such it remains a valuable backdrop to retain going forward. Further future reflection may see the concept capable of making a number of significant contributions shaping the landscape of congregational life and witness as the denomination emerges from the first stage of the reconfiguration of ministry process.
27. A full range of *Present* content and resources can be accessed at www.presbyterianireland.org/present

Developing work in partnership with presbyteries

28. The Council continues to be encouraged by the development of a facilitative model of working with presbyteries. By co-commissioning, co-designing and co-delivering ministry in partnership with presbyteries, a number of important outcomes are achieved.
29. Firstly, presbytery determines the priorities for supporting the development of the life and witness of congregations under its oversight.
30. Secondly, the experience and capacity of Council staff is maximised as they facilitate discussion to identify presbytery priorities, offer help with programme development and take lead responsibility for arrangements such as publicity, taking bookings, communicating with venues, and delivery of events and programmes.
31. Thirdly, presbytery, its congregations, leaders and members take ownership of what has been locally organised, ensuring higher levels of participation.
32. This way of working both honours and harnesses the best features of our Presbyterian polity, bringing the particular contributions of congregations, presbyteries and the Councils of the General Assembly together to achieve collectively what none could deliver as effectively on their own. It also offers a pragmatic approach to overcoming the chronic constraints on available time and capacity for the proactive developmental work so desperately needed if congregations are to transition towards contemporary expressions of what it means to be present to God, one another and as witnesses where God has placed them.
33. As this means of delivery continues to be developed, wrinkles can continue to be ironed out, necessary flexibilities to accommodate local differences can be built in, and more can be achieved.
34. In the past church year, examples of work facilitated by Council staff in partnership with presbyteries, or significant groups of neighbouring congregations working collaboratively within a presbytery included:
 - Evenings for elders – Dromore, South Belfast, Templepatrick, Armagh presbyteries.
 - Leading change event – Monaghan Presbytery.
 - Facilitation of process towards shared mission project among congregations in Londonderry city – Derry and Donegal Presbytery.
 - *Leading Edge* programme – Ards Presbytery.
 - *Explore* youth event – Jointly between Omagh and Monaghan presbyteries.
 - *Explore* youth event – Jointly between Templepatrick, North Belfast and Carrickfergus presbyteries.
 - Facilitation of progress towards joint approach to youth work – Neighbouring congregations in Route and Iveagh presbyteries.
 - Training for children's ministry – Neighbouring congregations in Derry and Donegal Presbytery.

- Elders training – Neighbouring congregations in Derry and Donegal Presbytery.
 - Facilitation of young people’s summer outreach teams – Derry and Donegal Presbytery.
 - Facilitation of Forge East Easter young people’s mission team – East Belfast Presbytery.
 - Reaching fringe members event – Omagh Presbytery.
 - Exploring fresh missional opportunities input to Moderator’s tour event – Ards Presbytery.
 - Embryonic exploration of joint youth work – Neighbouring congregations in Carrickfergus and Coleraine and Limavady presbyteries.
35. Formal offers to a number of presbyteries to explore partnering for a variety of ventures in the next church year have been issued.
36. An avenue for future exploration is how greater intentionality could be built into the Council’s partnership work with presbyteries. One possibility discussed would be for the General Assembly to agree that each presbytery draw up and maintain its own Congregational Development Plan as the ongoing outworking of the current reconfiguration process. The implementation of such development plans would then be enabled and facilitated by the Council for Congregational Life and Witness. This could include an annual or bi-annual envisioning and equipping event for congregations on a particular theme or area of ministry determined by presbytery. Additionally, presbyteries could designate up to two congregations for more focused work facilitated by Council staff, perhaps as a result of reconfiguration or a consultation.
37. The Council is sensitive to the moment in which the wider church, and presbyteries in particular, find themselves, which suggest that this is not the time to formally progress this idea. Instead, consideration will continue to be given to how and when it is best to test the model with the denomination as a whole.

PROGRAMME, FINANCE AND COORDINATION COMMITTEE

38. 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. It also oversees a number of specialist projects.

Assessing the impact of the Council's work

39. In total, at time of writing, 159 congregations had participated in at least one Council event or programme in the seven months between September 2025 and March 2026. Once again this represents encouraging levels of participation, boosted by strong working partnerships with presbyteries and the adoption of a targeted regional approach where appropriate. Engagement and feedback reflect the effectiveness of the Council in responding to the needs of leaders and members in ways which they find helpful and accessible.
40. From late August 2025 to March 2026, five Council staff members undertook 70 assignments working with individual, or groups of neighbouring congregations, or presbyteries. This work is steadily expanding. Development staff involved all completed an online certificate course in enabling skills which represented a significant commitment on top of their ongoing responsibilities. The denomination now has at its disposal a staff team better trained and equipped to facilitate and accompany congregations in developing their work than at any time in its history.
41. Resources, carefully commissioned and produced by the Council to fill identifiable gaps in what is available to congregations from other providers, continue to be used in both downloadable and print format. Produced by Irish Presbyterians for use in the context in which we minister, user feedback confirms that they achieve a high degree of relevance and resonance.
42. Along with receiving reports and updates which offer an overview of Council activity, the Committee has undertaken much work in recent years designed to shape, scale and scope the overall remit and output of the Council in light of a changing congregational context, reducing staff capacity and a diminishing budget.
43. This year, greater concentration has been given to finding ways of continuing to measure impact, sift, and discern the movement, direction and leading of the Holy Spirit. The aim is to prioritise the work of the Council in light of the current and emerging needs of the church and opportunities for the development of its work.
44. As with any aspect of ministry this is not straightforward. However, assessing impact is an important consideration to ensure that increasingly stretched resources are maximised for the sake of supporting the development of congregational life and witness, to avoid stagnation and to ensure new opportunities are being grasped.
45. The following observations emerged from the process.
 - The Council's approach was affirmed

46. The Council's posture is that of serving the church on the ground, by listening carefully and responding to its needs. Borne out of a continuing and intentional commitment to the principles of accountability, communication and engagement central to the denominational restructuring of 2015, this remains positively received and appreciated.
 - The distinctive role the Council fulfils in PCI was affirmed
47. The value of the Council's nuanced understanding of the ethos, theology, leadership structures and starting point of the range of PCI congregations, while grappling with significant differences between them – including culture, context and spiritual maturity - continues to prove its worth.
 - Enhancing the opportunities for enabling ministry was identified as a priority
48. There was significant energy around the discussion of how Council staff and trained volunteers could accompany congregations in a variety of situations. These include, approaching a vacancy, during a vacancy and as part of the tenure review process. At present, this facility is offered to the church by the Council, but is hindered by persistently poor channels of denominational communication. The potential for the church to harness the enabling ministry that the Council staff are now formally trained to certificate level to deliver, will only be realised by this ministry being built into the system operated and delivered by the Linkage Commission and presbyteries in their various roles of oversight.
49. It is also recognised that to overinvest in deploying staff capacity in work with the weakest congregations will only result in a strategic misallocation of scarce resource which might be better balanced across a range of more vibrant congregations, where even a small investment of time can produce a disproportionate outcome.
50. A culture of accompaniment and appreciation of the role of softer skills is also identified as generally lacking in the denomination.
51. Going forward, the Council may choose to either formally approach the Linkage Commission to begin to address the possibility of greater collaboration on this matter, or work in pilot mode with one or more presbyteries in specific situations. Both possibilities will remain matters for further consideration.
 - Working in partnership with presbyteries was affirmed
52. The gains of investing in working in this way are already considerable. Further development is encouraged, however it is recognised that presbytery capacity to engage with Council offers of collaboration is severely limited in this current season of denominational life. Nevertheless, it is important to view presbytery as more than the business meeting attended by a limited number of representatives from each congregation. It is ultimately made up of every congregation and member within its bounds.
 - Denominational envisioning and encouragement remain important

53. The *Present* initiative is a good example of the importance of the Council's role in seeking to set mood music attuned to current realities for the denomination as a whole.
 - Annual denomination-wide events have become less effective and might be expected to continue to be so
54. There has been a definite move away from annual denomination-wide events in recent years. Regional and presbytery-based approaches represent a better way forward in that they are more likely to gain local ownership. While being careful to seek to understand why an annual event might have failed to gain desired levels of participation, the Council should feel free to discontinue events which seem to be losing traction.
 - Addressing cultural issues from a Christian perspective
55. This is an important focus of the Council's work delivered at a level attuned to equipping the member in the pew to recognise cultural divergence from Christian values and distinctives in society, while also reinforcing the encouragement to both live and bear witness to the countercultural message of the gospel. The Council also seeks to address, and challenge where necessary, the micro-cultural expressions of who we are as a people. For example, this may involve challenging what might be described as an UlsterScots reticence to wear our heart on our sleeve or to enter into the deeper conversations that nurture genuine pastoral care, discipleship and effective witness.
 - The loss of a developmental emphasis in the priorities of the denomination
56. In the last number of years, a lot of energy has been expended in necessary work such as the updating of the Code and reconfiguration of ministry. Safeguarding will now move centre stage. However unintentionally, prioritising these concerns has often been at the expense of addressing the development of the life and witness of congregations. There is a sense that this neglect has significantly weakened the church in what will always be its primary unit of ministry and mission – the local church. There is a need to recapture denominational priority in this area.
 - The difficult atmosphere of denominational life in this season
57. This is recognised as a significant reality and impediment. The church is currently smaller than it used to be, vulnerable, fragile and lacking in confidence. The Council continues to work hard to both name these realities in the ministry it offers and also promote confidence in a never-changing God.
 - The constraints of budget and capacity
58. Careful management, the significant adaptability of staff, and their willingness to go the extra mile, have helped the Council avoid running a budget deficit and sustain high levels of quality work. However, a point is approaching at which it will soon no longer be possible to sustain current output on the basis of levels of United Appeal allocated in recent years.
59. This helpful review will continue to guide the Council in its decision making and prioritisation.

Projects

60. The Committee oversees a number of specialist projects delivered under the auspices of the Council.

Fresh Light

61. *Fresh Light* counselling continues to offer clients a valuable ministry reflective of the ethos and theology of PCI. It provides both in-person and online counselling.
62. This church year has seen two new counsellors join the team, while others have stepped back for a variety of reasons.
63. More accessible ways for potential clients to access counselling have been developed, as well as more effective systems to oversee and manage the service.
64. This ministry offers congregations a way of supplementing their own provision of pastoral care, especially where issues raised are complex or more dedicated time commitment and expertise might make a significant difference. Feedback from users is unqualified in its praise.

Herald Oversight Panel

65. The *Herald* Oversight Panel facilitates the ongoing development of content of the *Herald* magazine so as to maximise its effectiveness as a medium of communication which informs and inspires the membership of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
66. At time of writing, the Panel is awaiting a major strategic decision from the Communications Panel which sits under the General Council about retaining 10 issues per year, or reducing that number to create greater capacity for creativity and change. It will discuss the pros and cons of any reduction from the perspective of the overall denominational strategy for communications and advise accordingly in time for the Panel's meeting in April 2026.
67. The Panel recognises that 10 issues per year, with the current staffing level, is a major achievement and is only accomplished by the commitment and dedication of the editor and production team.
68. The implementation of guiding principles for the next season of the *Herald's* ministry, drawn from feedback from a survey of readers, has been evolutionary rather than revolutionary, and quicker in some areas than others. It has been judged prudent to postpone some larger steps about possible changes until a decision is made about the number of future issues per annum. The format of the magazine also continues to evolve and the need for a refresh and rebranding is acknowledged.

The Alongside funding scheme

69. Working in partnership with the Presbyterian Children's Society, Council has been encouraged by the response to the first year of a new funding scheme inviting congregations to apply for grants to support work with

children, young people and families, especially those who are marginalised or disadvantaged.

70. The *Alongside* scheme aims to encourage and envision congregations with opportunities for working in partnership with a range of specialist ministry agencies to develop projects that could make a positive difference to the lives of children, young people and families in their community. The Presbyterian Children's Society will also fund bespoke congregational projects centred around children and young people which local churches identify as arising out of their own immediate context. Forty-six congregations benefited from applications to the scheme in its first year. The generous funding made available by The Presbyterian Children's Society is warmly acknowledged. Applications for funding for 2026/27 are now open to congregations and more information can be found on the Presbyterian Children's Society website.

THE PCI MARRIAGE PANEL

71. The Marriage Panel's role is to offer support to ministers in the areas of pastorally addressing requests for remarriage and inter-church marriage. Its services can be accessed by contacting the Council office.

Budget and staffing

72. Once again in 2026, it is anticipated that the Council will continue to have operated within its budget received from United Appeal. Against the backdrop of rising costs and a budget reducing in real terms this is a significant achievement.
73. The Council has also honoured the United Appeal Committee's encouragement that requests for 2027 should be maintained at 2025 levels. However, this has only been possible due to monies unspent and carried over from previous years, a reduction in the staff team and increasing efficiencies. Budget deficits forecast indicate that this state of affairs is unlikely to continue beyond 2027.

COLIN NEILL, Convener

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE COMMITTEE

74. The Congregational Life Committee oversees the Council's work of encouraging and 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.

Encouraging and supporting the development of leadership

75. Over the last two years, a suite of activities designed to develop leadership for a changing world of congregational life, under the branding Leading Edge, has been developed and gradually expanded. A five-morning programme, one off morning event, and a new day retreat offer different levels of engagement.
76. This year, the five-part programme, delivered one morning per month over a five-month period, has been intentionally relocated in the Ards Presbytery. Partnering with presbytery to deliver the programme has significantly increased numbers participating and supplements the presbytery's ongoing work of reconfiguration, oversight of congregational life and encouragement of leaders.
- The themes for five sessions are:
- 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.
77. A mix of carefully identified material from both Christian and secular leadership sources that relate directly to real issues faced in leading in a PCI congregational setting, are used to open up facilitated conversation among participants.
78. Another presbytery will be approached with an invitation to host *Leading Edge* in 2026/27.
79. A one-off morning event, entitled *Leading for a change – how change comes to your church*, was held on Tuesday 11 November 2025 in Assembly Buildings, Belfast. It opened up insights into greasing the wheels of the journey of change in a church and moving from being stuck where we are to getting things going in a new way, including:
- Understanding why things get stuck;
 - Exploring ways to generate conversation about change;
 - Learning basic skills for facilitating a group to wrestle with an issue;
 - Seeing how to map what is involved on the journey of change;
 - Grasping what is involved in getting to a new place together.
80. Following a request from the Monaghan Presbytery, this content was repeated in Cootehill Presbyterian Church on Saturday morning 22 November 2025 with good participation from leaders from a range of congregations.
81. A leadership day retreat entitled *The Next Stretch* is scheduled for Monday 11 May 2026 in Groomsport Presbyterian Church. Many leaders are thinking about, or anxious concerning, what lies ahead for them. This can be due to the forthcoming reconfiguration of congregations, or be caused by a gnawing sense of needing to expand their existing giftset for

ministry beyond their current competencies. Across the church there is an identifiable sense of transition from a model of church life with which we are familiar, to being nudged into a new set of circumstances we have not sought, or did not see coming. Adapting to these changes will require finding the inner resources to respond in God's strength. The retreat will seek to address these felt realities by providing participants with seven short devotions on the theme to read in the run up to the day so that they come with hearts and minds already attuned. The programme on the day will include a mix of short Bible reflections, prayer time, space for personal contemplation, and reflective worship.

82. Emerge is the primary Council activity aimed at encouraging and supporting younger leaders in their 20s and 30s. This year, the event will move from its previous slot in June to March, testing whether a change of date may improve participation. It will also move from a Greater Belfast location to Ballymena, where there is a sense of a number of churches who are already engaging with their younger leaders and who may provide increased potential to form a core audience.
83. The Youth Development Officer is piloting short, small scale, locally delivered training in leadership for under-18s. The Children's, Youth and Family Panel will assess and advise in this area, exploring further scope for development.
84. The Council hosted a meeting with representatives from other councils, aspects of whose future ministry and remit depends upon a continuing pipeline of emerging leaders, most notably the Council for Mission in Ireland and Council for Training in Ministry. This discussion scoped current challenges and future opportunities in this area. There was an acknowledgement that the church faces a common problem of a dearth of emerging leaders in congregations, missional personnel and ordained ministry. However, no common denominational pathway of addressing this issue was identified.
85. A number of evenings for elders were co-designed and co-delivered in conjunction with a variety of presbyteries this church year. These included:
 - Confident to care: An evening for elders in the Dromore Presbytery - Thursday 23 October 2025, Maze Presbyterian Church.
 - Revisiting the pastoral life of your congregation in changing times: An evening for elders in the South Belfast Presbytery - Tuesday 11 November 2025, Lowe Memorial Presbyterian Church.
 - Quickening our spiritual heartbeat: An evening for elders in the Templepatrick Presbytery - Tuesday 24 March 2026, Dunsilly Hotel, Antrim.
 - Eager to serve: An evening of encouragement for elders in the Armagh Presbytery - Tuesday 21 April 2026, Druminnis Presbyterian Church.

86. At its meeting on Wednesday 24 February 2026, a previously agreed plan and timetable towards addressing a number of issues converging around the election and training of new elders was paused. Significant groundwork to scope and shape the content of this work has already been undertaken, but it is obvious to the committee that recent denominational events have enhanced the importance of addressing areas such as the responsibilities of charity trusteeship and safeguarding that rest with kirk sessions. The specialism required to address and integrate these areas into a more comprehensive package of elders' training lies in other councils and departments, which in the present season do not have the capacity to provide necessary content.
87. In addition, the Committee is aware that some presbyteries are now assuming greater responsibility for the training of new elders. There may be significant advantages in the whole church following such a model. This is something that would be timely to test by resolution at the General Assembly. However, it does not seem the right moment to progress a decision that would need to be followed quickly by delivery if the opportunity is to be maximised.
88. The Committee will retain this work on developing eldership as a priority on its wider leadership agenda and will seek to discern when it is most appropriate to return to it.
89. The Committee explored the possibility of compiling a handbook to help congregational treasurers with their responsibilities, however the Financial Secretary's Department, from which most of the content would need to come, does not have capacity to undertake this work at present.

Encouraging and supporting the development of discipleship

90. Work continues on a suite of resources entitled '*You have heard it said...*' which is drawn from the language used by Jesus in Matthew chapter 5 in his contrasting of gospel values with accepted cultural norms of his day.
91. A number of prevailing contemporary cultural worldviews, which represent challenges to discipleship and barriers to sharing faith, e.g., individualism, relativism, consumerism, will form the content of material produced in flexible form and pitched at a level accessible to church members who do not naturally inhabit the worlds of academia or deep cultural analysis.
92. The aim is to highlight the values that often, and sometimes unwittingly, shape our lives, and to draw on Scripture to equip followers of Jesus to live his different way and demonstrate a distinctive gospel witness.
93. This is a large undertaking which is a response to feedback received by the Council at a previous event, and with content shaped and tested in a number of workshops held in various locations, among a variety of age groups during 2024/2025. It is hoped this resource will be available for use in congregations from January 2027.

94. The Committee looks forward to the launch of a resource entitled *Flourishing Faith in Later Life*. Working in conjunction with *Faith in Later Life*, a ministry dedicated to serving those of retirement age, the Council has developed this material delivered over six sessions which enables reflection on some of the particular discipleship challenges and opportunities which arise in this age and stage in life. The resource will be available in May 2026 for free download from the PCI website, or for purchase in booklet form.
95. The *Tides* devotional, offering a framework for the daily discipline of reading, reflecting upon, and responding to Scripture, continues to be appreciated by many, attracting significant numbers of new subscribers.

Encouraging and supporting the development of pastoral life

96. The Committee decided that material from a previous three-evening Confident to Care course should be reshaped into a range of shorter formats so as to enable delivery in an evening or extended morning session in individual or neighbouring congregations or presbyteries.
97. Now rebranded *Called to Care*, this work has been undertaken in partnership with *Biblical Counselling UK* who will also use the material in their nationwide network. It has already been delivered in a range of settings by Council facilitators and it is hoped to expand its reach in 2026/27. Expressions of interest from congregations who would like to explore having the Council facilitate this material for elders, pastoral teams and others are sought and can be communicated by emailing clw@presbyterianireland.org Two presbyteries have been approached with an invitation to host evenings for congregations within their bounds.
98. Council input to help congregations rethink and refresh their models of delivery of the ministry of pastoral care continues to be in demand. In some cases, this has been the focus of presbytery evenings for elders. The Council will continue to share emerging models and encourage congregations to arrive at the particular mix of provision which best suits their circumstances, gifting and resources. It is also mindful of the task of capturing these new models in a form that facilitates wider denominational dissemination when the time is right, not least because this is a piece of work agreed with the Guidelines Review Task Group.
99. A day conference with Dr Ed Welch of Christian Counselling Educational Foundation is planned for Tuesday 10 November 2026, in Assembly Buildings, Belfast. A growing number of members and congregations in PCI have found his books on one-to-one ministry helpful in stimulating, shaping and growing their pastoral and discipleship ministries, to supplement their regular, structured preaching and teaching ministries. This approach might be helpfully captured by the phrase ‘conversational ministry’, which will be the theme of the conference.

100. The Council had scheduled Dr Welch to come and speak at events in 2020. These had to be cancelled due to the interruption of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committee is grateful for the opportunity to pick up this possibility again as a result of the close working relationship forged with Biblical Counselling UK (BCUK) who are bringing him to Ireland to speak at a number of events.

Encouraging and supporting the development of worshipping life

101. The Digital Worship hub on the PCI website continues to be the main vehicle for encouraging and supporting the development of the worshipping life of congregations. It offers a range of resources and ideas for those who construct and lead services of worship. Content is highlighted via PCI 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, Christmas and Easter. Work on sharing a selection of praise related to each Psalm continues. The hub can be accessed at www.presbyterianireland.org/worship
102. The *Encounter* Bible study material, which helps users appreciate the elements of worship and more meaningfully participate, has been re-released as a free downloadable resource with the option of purchasing a small print run of hard copy booklets also available to congregations.

JAMES ROGERS, Convener

CONGREGATIONAL WITNESS COMMITTEE

103. 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.

Encouraging and supporting the development of congregational outreach and evangelism

104. September 2025 saw the launch of the *Seasons* resource specially commissioned for use in evangelism in rural congregations. It comprises four video stories that reflect on seasons of life that correspond to aspects of the seasons of the year, along with a simple card which offers a framework for follow up discussion. Full details of the resource can be found at www.presbyterianireland.org/seasons
105. This church year has seen a number of significant pieces of work completed and launched or signposted to encourage congregations and their members in outreach and evangelism.

106. The online Outreach and Evangelism hub on the PCI website continues to expand content which is also signposted via existing PCI social media channels. It is hoped to add a subscription email and Instagram in the near future. In particular a series of Sharing Jesus Today stories have played an important role in encouraging the church by the accounts of the journeys of those who are coming to faith in PCI congregations. They also offer important pointers about the small, but significant, things about personal witness or the environment of church life that God uses as turning points in the road to faith.
107. The development of this work has not progressed as smoothly as anticipated due to technical teething problems and the transition to a new website, however it is already proving of value in building the confidence and capacity of the church in grappling with today's evangelistic task. The hub can be viewed at www.presbyterianireland.org/outreach
108. The Committee continues to commend the use of the Stir material in outreach to those who have little or no knowledge of the things of God, or background in church. A number of congregations have found the approach adopted useful, particularly, but not exclusively, among young people.
109. Looking forward, the Committee is pursuing two particular ventures.
110. Firstly, a working relationship with Solas, a Christian ministry based in Scotland but working across the whole of the UK with a vision to share the good news of Jesus persuasively and equip Christians for evangelism practically. In particular, this will enable the harnessing of their provision of high-quality specialist material in the area of apologetics for use on the Outreach and Evangelism hub, along with training and podcast opportunities.
111. Secondly, the opening up of a denominational conversation on what may be the most persistent and pervasive cultural barrier to outreach and evangelism for PCI, that of social class. Natalie Williams, who with Paul Brown, co-authored the book *Invisible Divides: Class, culture and barriers to belonging in the church*, which addresses this issue, is engaging with the Committee with a view to helping shape and facilitate PCI to engage with the often invisible barrier between a largely middle class church and the working class. It is planned that this will include a day conference on the theme in spring 2027.
112. Stimulating congregations and their members to take fresh confidence to share the gospel is a significant task in the present climate of secularism. It will only be achieved over time through the sharing of stories and ideas which both fire the imagination and help us move beyond fear and timidity to a wise, persuasive and prayerful boldness.

Encouraging and supporting the development and delivery of summer outreach programmes

113. Two presbyteries are piloting different forms of youth outreach teams:
- Derry and Donegal Presbytery has approved an extended pilot of two teams in summer 2026, having had a successful team in Sion Mills and Strabane congregations in 2025;
 - East Belfast Presbytery has approved a pilot three-day non-residential youth team at Easter 2026.
114. Both of these projects are supported by Council staff in terms of encouragement, planning and the provision of logistical and administrative back up. Early signs indicate that other presbyteries may also consider similar projects.
115. These initiatives represent an important shift from denominational outreach teams run by the Council. As previously reported, these came to an end due to an inability to recruit both members and leaders. This new model harnesses the best of both local ownership and recruitment and the expertise of Council staff in taking care of many of the labour and time intensive logistical aspects of arrangements. There is room to build on this new approach and the Council welcomes any request to explore how they can support and accompany congregations or presbyteries in doing so.

Encouraging and supporting the development of congregational involvement in global mission

116. In terms of playing its part in stimulating congregational global mission involvement, the Committee receives a report each year from the Council for Global Mission about their priorities in seeking to encourage congregations in their involvement in global witness.
117. The Council for Global Mission, through its mission and development committees, is pursuing the following pieces of work to stimulate global mission involvement in congregations this year.
- A PCI Stewardship of Creation webpage;
 - The refreshment of Creation Sunday resources;
 - The production of a short film clip featuring stories of global mission involvement from one to two congregations.
118. Where helpful, the Council will offer its experience, advice and collaboration to assist in making resources as accessible as possible for use by congregations.
119. The Overseas Mission Travel Grant offers funding for young people going on overseas mission. It continues to see a pleasing upturn in applications.
120. Resources as part of the Blaze initiative continue to be released. They offer a great way to stimulate awareness of and participation in global mission among children and their families in the context of the whole congregation. Stories of how some congregations have done so are available on the PCI website. This work is kept under review.

JONNY McKANE, Convener

CHILDREN'S, YOUTH AND FAMILY PANEL

121. 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.

Testing and refining Panel strategy

122. The Panel met in workshop mode in autumn 2025, with an extended invitation to others from across all 19 presbyteries, for a day facilitated by Rachel Turner and Sarah Holmes from The Institute for Children, Youth and Mission. The purpose was to tease out and explore how churches might be helped express the principles of the strategy to support the development of ministry among children, young people and their families developed by the panel over the last few years.
123. In particular, the areas addressed were:
- Faith for the whole family – engaging parents and the wider family circle in the discipleship of children and young people;
 - Reimagining the role of the whole congregation in faith development – in both discipleship among those from families of faith and evangelism among non-church children and young people;
 - Developing faith as partnership – locating faith development in the wider context of a collaborative approach between parents, extended family, church family;
 - The church for all ages – developing a more integrated and intergenerational vision of inclusion and involvement of children and young people as integral to the all-age family of the church.
124. From the input from the two guest speakers and facilitators, along with feedback from those involved, the Panel is encouraged that the focus of their strategy is centred on the real needs of churches, children, young people and their families.
125. The spring 2026 meeting received updates from the Children's and Youth Development Officers on progress and outcomes of working out the strategic priorities identified by the Panel. This too offered much by way of progress and encouragement. However, against the backdrop of a constantly changing and challenging set of circumstances in terms of engaging children, young people and families, this aspect of the Council's work remains challenging and demands a degree of both experimentation and agility.
126. The attention of Assembly members is drawn to three children's, youth, and family ministry hubs on the PCI website. These offer a whole range of ideas and resources to leaders and parents which will continue to be updated and enhanced. The hubs can be viewed at www.presbyterianireland.org/children-youth-and-family.

Encouraging and supporting the development of ministry among children

127. Two new Children's Ministry Basics training clips on all-age services and children's addresses are now available on the children's ministry hub.

Encouraging and supporting the development of ministry among young people

128. Following agreed Council strategy, the Youth Development Officer has apportioned more of his capacity to working directly with presbyteries and groups of neighbouring congregations. The aim is to identify, design and deliver a range of events, short programmes and other ways of encouraging the provision of local, age-specific youth ministry against the background of reducing numbers, leadership limitations and the need for greater collaboration among congregations. This approach is beginning to bear fruit in a variety of ways, tailored to local need and capacity.
129. *Explore* evening events for 11–16 year olds, delivered in partnership with presbyteries, took place in in Clogherney Presbyterian Church in February 2026 and Muckamore Presbyterian Church in March 2026. Both were well supported and appreciated by those who attended.
130. A resource highlighting simple ways congregations can engage young people in the wider all-age life of the church is also in preparation for release for the start of the new church year.
131. The Council continues to signpost the ministry of Growing Young Disciples as a supplement to its own provision.

Encouraging and supporting the development of ministry among parents and families

132. A Starting Strong evening with Ed Drew of Faith in Kids ministry aimed at encouraging parents, was held in November 2025 at High Street Presbyterian Church, Holywood.

Encouraging and supporting leaders in children's, youth and family ministry

133. Foundations leaders' training evenings were held in October 2025 at Ballydown Presbyterian Church and Drumreagh Presbyterian Church.
134. Gatherings throughout the year and an annual retreat for children's, youth and family workers employed by PCI congregations have been well supported and appreciated. Many of those who attended are recently in post and have appreciated the opportunity to learn with and from one another. Consideration is being given to developing a ministry basics programme that would offer those in employed roles the opportunity to develop competencies that would increase effectiveness in the congregations in which they serve.

An area of ongoing challenge for the Church

135. Ministry among children, young people and families remains an area of significant, ongoing challenge for the church. Without doubt, times have changed and the ground has shifted in engaging the upcoming generation. Many factors are at work, including biblical illiteracy, a pervasive secularisation and competing agendas for time and commitment. The Panel urges the church to prayer, and encourages congregations towards the adaptation of existing practices and adoption of new possibilities where necessary, to enable the faithful and effective passing on of faith in this generation.

DAVID CROMIE, Convener

PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN PANEL

136. 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 another encouraging year in terms of engagement of congregations and members with a variety of events and resources.

Together in faith: Building women's ministry across congregations

137. An important piece of work being progressed is the compilation of a framework for women's ministry. In 2024 the General Assembly approved a new constitution for Presbyterian Women which had been drafted with the endorsement of both the Presbyterian Women Panel and the Council for Congregational Life and Witness. The purpose of the constitution is to give a broad overview of the aim of the organisation and its activities in support of ministry among women in congregations. It also provides some guiding principles about organising at congregational and presbytery levels, as well as setting out the role, responsibilities and composition of the Presbyterian Women Panel.

138. A second phase of work now progressing involves drawing up another document intended for use by congregations and women's ministry groups as a framework to enable them to shape a form of ministry among women which best suits local circumstances. It also sets out the benefits of accessing the variety of resources, events and opportunities delivered by Presbyterian Women to learn about, pray for, and financially support mission at home and overseas. The document will be called *Together in faith: Building women's ministry across congregations*.

God... ever present: The 2025/26 theme

139. The annual theme for 2025/26 *God...ever present* which was launched at the annual conference in May 2025, has been embedded and explored in a variety of ways throughout the church year.

140. In September 2025, a forum event in Clogherney Presbyterian Church attracted a large turnout to explore the subject *Present in prayer*.
141. In February 2026, the theme '*Present... at all times*' was unfolded at the Belfast forum event in Assembly Buildings which was fully booked, with participants encouraged with the message of God's presence in times of loss, suffering and transition.

Generation to Generation: The 2026/27 theme

142. Looking ahead, the annual theme for church year 2026/27 is *Generation to Generation* and the speaker at the annual conference on Saturday 9 May will be Jo Frost from Evangelical Alliance. Once again, an Inspirations resource will provide all involved in ministry among women with a variety of ways to share this theme in congregations.
143. Forum events will take place on Saturday 12 September 2026 in First Portadown Presbyterian Church and Saturday 6 February 2027 in Assembly Buildings, Belfast.

Mission support

144. Partner ministries have been identified for Home and Overseas Projects for 2026/27. The Home Project will be with Transforming Lives for Good, enabling PCI churches to engage in community projects. The Overseas Project will support the Bible Society's work in Malawi, providing family Scripture engagement packs.
145. 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.

Inspire magazine

146. The Inspire magazine continues to provide a wide variety of content intended to inform and encourage ministry among women.
147. Further detail on all aspects of the ministry of Presbyterian Women can be found at www.presbyterianireland.org/pw

ELLEN HILLEN, Convener

Encouragements, thanksgiving, learning, promptings of the Spirit and the need for the Lord's guidance

148. Drawing together the central threads running through the report, the following particular encouragements, reasons for thankfulness to God, lessons continuing to be learned and promptings for the future of supporting the development of congregational life and witness suggest themselves as matters for further prayerful reflection and response.

Particular encouragements

149. The ongoing commitment of congregations, members and leaders to serve, and their engagement with the variety of ways the Council seeks to support their ministry on the ground in what is a particularly difficult season of denominational life (see paras 39–40).
150. Growing momentum in working in partnership with presbyteries to co-design and co-deliver support that meets local needs and priorities (see paras 28–35).

For particular thanksgiving to God

151. For an increasing number of stories to share of congregations and members who are finding small but significant ways to express presence to God, for one another and as witnesses to his love where he has placed them to live for him (see para 23).
152. For blessing and signs of early growth in initiatives that have required the courage and commitment to change and start afresh, including new ways of facilitating outreach programmes for young people (see paras 113–115), enhancing the Council's online presence (see paras 106; 126) and the creation of a new funding partnership with the Presbyterian Children's Society (see paras 69–70).

Lessons continuing to be learned

153. That the Council's work will inevitably continue to fall short of reaching its full potential so long as it remains constrained by a longstanding, pervasive and structurally embedded denominational culture of poor communication and lack of commitment to collaboration (see para 5).
154. That continuing to find ways of giving attention to what God is doing and listening to congregations on the ground so as to reassess Council priorities and find ways to express them that are accessible to the church and its members remains central to its work (see paras 46–47).

Promptings for the future of supporting the development of congregational life and witness

155. Council believes God is prompting the church towards the urgent recovery of a more intentional focus among congregational leadership on the development of effective, contemporary and sustainable activities in ministry among members and mission to others that are tailored to their current capacities and opportunities. It notes that space to address this priority, crucial to the present and future of congregational life and witness, continues to be squeezed out by other necessary aspects of church life also vying for attention (see para 56).
156. Council believes God is prompting the church to recognise and build upon the significant gains and ongoing potential of partnership between presbyteries and the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, more intentionally structured to maximise both local knowledge and central

- resources in co-designing and co-delivering initiatives tailored to the needs of congregations (see paras 28–37).
157. Council believes God is prompting the church to be attentive and responsive to the impulse, opportunities and growing appetite for a more intentional denomination-wide focus on development of leadership attuned to current needs and realities (see paras 75–85).
 158. Council believes God is prompting the church to the need for the reconfiguration of ministry process to adopt a sharper and more integrated cross-council approach to ensure that the opportunity of genuinely seeding the ground for new congregational presence for ministry and mission is not missed (see paras 12–18).
 159. Council believes God is prompting the church to explore and maximise ways of enabling collaborative models of the provision of age-specific youth ministry through neighbouring congregations working together and/or at presbytery level, as best serves local needs and opportunities (see para 128).
 160. Council believes God is prompting the church towards the focus of the Present initiative in 2026/27 centring on the sub-theme ‘Present where God has placed us to be his witnesses’, so seeking to ensure that the crucial importance of the outward mission of the local church and the lives of its members is kept before the denomination (see para 25).

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 reflected in the strapline, '*global disciples sharing God's heart for the world, declaring good news and demonstrating God's love*'. As such, it points to 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 427–429), 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 (Code Par 168.2.1; 169–174), 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.
2. This report sets out the work of the Council for Global Mission from June 2025. The Council for Global Mission was able to meet on 23 October 2025 and 18 March 2026 and reports as follows:
 - (a) Global Mission Committee (Pars 3 to 19).
 - (b) Global Development Committee (Pars 20 to 40)
 - (c) Business and Finance Panel (Pars 41 to 51)

GLOBAL MISSION COMMITTEE

3. Over 20 years ago the Board of Mission Overseas conducted a theological review of mission. The Council continues to hold to the review's findings, not least that in the Scriptures we see mission as *people-focused*. God, more often than not, reaches people through people and, ultimately, direct personal missional encounter is crucial. John Stott in his book, 'Christian Mission in the Modern World' wrote, "The risen Lord's first word of commission was not to preach but to go and going into the world means presence". The Global Mission Committee affirms that PCI must remain obedient to the Great Commission when Jesus commanded his disciples, "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 will be with you always, to the very end of the Age". Matthew 28: 19, 20.

4. Given the example of Christ himself and his commissioning of the disciples, it is the conviction of the Committee that as part of PCI's global engagement in witnessing to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ this must include a commitment to send out global mission workers in response to the Call of God. From a biblical point of view, PCI's global engagement, therefore, is not simply an option to be considered but a command to be obeyed.
5. Over the past year the Committee met three times. The Council had tasked the Committee with reviewing the denominational strategy for sending Global Mission Workers for 2026–2028. At each meeting the Committee prayerfully considered this strategy and its report (Appendix A), which was agreed by the Council, concludes that:
 - Denominational global mission 'sending' should continue to be led by the General Assembly through the Council for Global Mission.
 - The 'sending' of Global Mission Workers is very much bound up with 'partnering' with like-minded churches around the world.
 - There should be full and proper resourcing of the Council's 'sending' in terms of appropriate staffing and funding, albeit with new models of funding being examined.
 - That any future review of structures should re-examine how best to facilitate effective global mission education and communication.

Global Mission Workers

6. The Council thanks God for the 15 global mission workers of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who, as his witnesses, are serving in six countries around the world in 2026. Details of roles, locations and global mission partners for those currently serving with the Council are found in Appendix B.
7. Calls to global mission service in Asia were issued by the Council to Volker and JinHyeog Glissmann. They are due to transfer from Malawi to Asia in the autumn where Volker will serve with the Increase Association which is involved in theological education at grassroots level throughout Asia and beyond.
8. Memorial minutes were recorded in respect of the following: Wilhelmina (Willi) Barton, missionary to India (1966–1984 and 1988–2006), James Barton, missionary to India (1966–1984 and 1988–2006), Jim Waring, missionary to Jamaica (1972–1974), Colin Rodgers, missionary to Malawi (1990–94) and Hazel Dorman, missionary to Malawi (1974–78). Diane Cusick, who served as a missionary to Malawi from 1995 and to Zambia from 2026, passed away while still in service on 5 April 2026.
9. A minute of appreciation was recorded in respect of Annes and Olga Nel, Global Mission Workers to Eastern Europe (2019–2026).
10. Deputation: Global Mission Workers on home assignment have had the opportunity of speaking in a range of congregations highlighting their work and thanking congregations for their prayerful and financial support.

The release of “Digital Dispatches” from Global Mission Workers every six months has provided updates on their work and highlighted points for prayer. From time-to-time, Digital Dispatches videos 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 news bulletins continue to be made available on a monthly basis, especially to encourage prayer, along with regular updates in the Mission Connect section of the *Herald*.

Global Mission Relationships

11. The Committee is deeply aware of the significant impact of war and civil unrest on many of PCI’s partners around the world and endeavours to highlight these for the prayerful concern of the wider church through the *Herald* and Let’s Pray. The number of partnerships the Council seeks to maintain remains under review, mindful of the Council’s and Mission Department’s staffing capacity to sustain and develop relationships. A list of current partners, companions and networks along with exploratory partnerships, can be found in Appendix C.
12. The following overseas visits took place during the year to meet with partners, attend conferences, visit projects and share in the pastoral support and encouragement of Global Mission Workers:
 - Malawi – The Moderator, Trevor Gribben accompanied by David McCullagh attended the CCAP Livingstonia Synod Anniversary Celebrations, 13–23 August 2025.
 - The Netherlands – Uel Marrs to the EUKUMINDO General Assembly in Rotterdam, 3–6 September 2025.
 - England – Uel Marrs to visit PCEA UK Outreach Congregation, 28-29 September 2025.
 - Jordan – Colin Dickson to the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS), 23–25 October 2025.
 - Egypt – Colin Dickson and Richard Kerr to facilitate a leadership training conference at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo (ETSC), 25–31 October 2025.
 - France – Gordon Campbell to lecture at Faculté Jean Calvin (FJC) in Aix-en-Provence, 31 October – 6 November 2025.
 - Indonesia – James Haire to meet with leadership of the Evangelical Christian Church in Halmahera (GMIH) and to lecture at GMIH’s university, 1–11 November 2025.
 - Spain – Uel Marrs to Madrid for an exploratory partnership visit with the leadership of the Reformed Church in Spain, 21–24 November 2025.
 - Malawi – Fiona Simpson, PW Overseas Vice-President, and Heather Clements, Global Mission Committee Convener, to the Bible Society of Malawi and Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Blantyre Synod, 26 February – 8 March 2026.

- Kenya – Uel Marrs to the 100th anniversary celebration of the ordination of the first East African ministers held by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), 10 to 16 March 2026.
13. The following visit is due to take place later this year:
- Hungary and Ukraine – Uel Marrs to participate in an international partners’ visit to the Transcarpathia Reformed Church, Ukraine, 6 - 10 July 2026
14. The following visits were received from partner church representatives in the course of the year:
- Myanmar – Rev Pek Muan Cuang, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) to Belfast, 17–19 November 2025.
 - Greece – Representatives of the Greek Evangelical Church (GEC) to Belfast, 7–11 May 2026.

Global Mission Partnership Grants

15. The Council approved a schedule of grants for 2026 totalling £114,300 for the support of 28 partner projects covering 17 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 £98,868 during 2025 from Miseen Cara, an international and faith based missionary movement working with marginalised and vulnerable communities. This funding is supporting the work of the International Assistance Mission (IAM) in Afghanistan, United Mission to Nepal (UMN) and the Presbyterian Church of East Africa’s Samburu Action and Awareness Programme (PCEA SAAP) in Kenya.

Global Leaders in Training Scholarships

17. In 2025 the Council approved a schedule of scholarships for 2026 totalling £59,741 in support of 30 leaders in training from 12 partners churches in 8 countries.

Priorities in partnership 2026–2027

18. While leaving space to be able to take up new opportunities to partner as God would lead, the Committee recognised the need to provide a focus for partner relationships over the next two years. Such a focus has implications for intentional engagement, visits and visitors, events and communications with the wider church. In this regard, it was agreed to build on previous work reported to the General Assembly, namely the ‘Church Planting and Evangelism Report’ received by the General Assembly Standing Commission in February 2021, and to embrace themes arising from this, namely church planting, theological training, and literature production in Europe, focusing on existing partnerships in Spain, Portugal, Poland, Hungary, and Russia. This journey will be shared with the wider church through PCI publications and social media, with the possibility of a

conference on church planting in Europe in the Spring of 2027, involving PCI's global mission workers and representatives of European partners, seeking to tell something of the story of PCI's denominational involvement in God's mission in the European context.

19. The work of the Global Mission Committee is possible only because of the faithful support of the administration staff and executive team and thanks is due, not only to them, but to all who sit on the Committee, its panels and task groups, giving of their time to serve the Lord as “senders”.

HEATHER CLEMENTS, Convener

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Introduction

20. The context for the work of the Global Development Committee is the overarching mission and purpose of God in reconciling all things to Himself through Christ (Colossians 1:15-20). This is summarised in Ephesians 1:10 where it says that the goal is “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”
21. This is the work of God, and Presbyterians are called to partner in His mission. Therefore, the Global Development Committee seeks to play its part under the Council for Global Mission in this vision as outlined by the Code paragraph:
- 428.2 to promote world development issues, including providing for an annual appeal;
 - 428.3 to lead thinking on issues of global concern such as the environment, race relations, international relations.

These areas of focus contribute to and complement the wider work of the Council for Global Mission. A brief description of what has been achieved over these past few months follows.

World Development Appeal

22. The Committee is deeply grateful for the generosity of members of PCI to the World Development Appeal. The 2024 Appeal entitled “Hunger Pains, Scarcity to Abundance” had an underlying theme of food security focusing on a lead project with a Tearfund partner in Rwanda. The final total for this appeal was £490,159. This has all been transferred to Christian Aid Ireland (47.5%); Tearfund (47.5%); and Partner Church projects (5%) amounting to £24,800 allocated as follows:
- Al Bashir, India – £4,800 for Vocational Skill Training for women and Primary Healthcare for mothers and children.
 - Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Livingstonia Synod Health Department, Malawi – £5,000 for sustainable and holistic health services.

- The Cross Reformed Centre, Nepal – £5,000 for ‘Equipped churches: Flourished individuals and communities’.
 - International Assistance Mission (IAM), Afghanistan – £5,000 for Hope and Empowerment in Recovery through Access to Treatment.
 - The Hungarian Reformed Church in Transcarpathia, Ukraine – £5,000 for medical assistance for those restricted due to war.
 - Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Zambia Synod – £1,451 for flood relief.
23. The 2025 Appeal has a focus on sustainable livelihoods with a Christian Aid Ireland lead project in Honduras and is entitled “Hives of Hope; working together for a better tomorrow.” This was launched following the Council for Global Mission meeting on 23 October 2025 and as of 26 March 2026 has realised £393,038. Following a resolution of the 2025 General Assembly congregations were given the option of allocating their contribution to either Christian Aid or Tearfund. As of 26 March 2026, of the 279 congregations who have already contributed, 262 gave no indication of any allocation. One congregation asked that their contribution of £983 or 0.3% of the total be allocated to Christian Aid only, and 15 congregations requested that their funds, totalling £14,364 or 3.7% of the total, be allocated to Tearfund only.
24. The 2025 Appeal is the first that includes Tearfund Ireland. 25% of the Tearfund allocation of funds will go to Tearfund Ireland, and 75% to Tearfund UK (via their Northern Ireland office).
25. The filming visit to Ethiopia with Tearfund (Ireland) and Tearfund (UK/NI) for the 2026 Appeal took place from 11–19 March 2026. Those who travelled were Liam Rutherford (World Development Appeal Agent), Chris Nelson (Videographer), Sean Copeland (Tearfund Ireland) and Lisa Skinner (Tearfund UK/NI). The working theme is “long-term generational change”, highlighting the importance of long-term sustainable impact and potentially focusing on vermiculture (worm farming).

Stewardship of Creation

26. The Stewardship of Creation Implementation Task Group delivered a one-day conference entitled “God’s World, Our Responsibility?” on Saturday 27 September 2025. Attended by over 200 people from 72 different Presbyterian congregations across the Island as well as a number from other denominations, the conference was an excellent opportunity to reflect on the big picture of God’s creation and our responsibility towards it.
27. The main speaker was Dr Chris Wright who pointed out the goodness, glory, gift and goal of creation in the overarching narrative of the Bible. Breakout rooms highlighted issues including “living within the earth’s limits”, “lament and eco-anxiety”, “what is truth?”, “down to earth disciples”, “food, farming and the land”, and “stories from congregations”.

28. Resources from the conference are available on the PCI website and include both of Dr Wright's talks. The Committee would strongly encourage congregations to access these and make use of them.
29. Feedback from the conference was generally very positive. However, a small minority felt that the conference did not provide a balanced debate on human-induced climate change. While the conference did not set out to address this issue, choosing instead to focus on areas of agreement on creation care and providing tools to explore further, the Committee is listening to this feedback and is giving it serious consideration. The Committee commends the Stewardship of Creation Implementation Task Group for their excellent work in designing and delivering the conference.
30. The Task Group continues to work on a number of issues outstanding from the 2024 General Assembly Report on Stewardship of Creation. These include the integration of creation care through PCI's communication channels, ensuring that the resources from the conference are available on a stewardship of creation webpage on the PCI website and regularly refreshed, and engaging with other councils to consider the development of resources for congregations, advocacy in the public square and exploring the possibility of including creation care in theological training for ministers.
31. Further, and also following on from the 2024 General Assembly Report, the Task Group is exploring the possibility of creating a dedicated role for someone to promote and coordinate matters related to creation care in PCI.
32. In addition, Michael Jemphrey, in his capacity as Stewardship of Creation Agent, has produced a draft Stewardship of Creation strategy document for consideration. This provides an indication of the direction of travel and will be further refined in the coming months.

International Relations

33. The overarching context of International Relations is the conflict in the Middle East. In recent months a Middle East Task Group undertook a listening exercise, listening to local Jewish and pro-Palestinian voices in an attempt to get a greater understanding of the complexities of the situation regarding Israel and Palestine.
34. Colin Dickson and Richard Kerr visited Egypt from 25–31 October 2025 on behalf of the Partnership Panel and the Global Development Committee. One purpose of the visit was to learn more about the Egyptian Church, building on relationships initiated at the time of Dr Anne Zaki's visit in 2024 when she invited PCI representatives to visit Egypt and "see for ourselves". Further, the Middle East Task Group Report of the Council for Global Mission received by the 2024 General Assembly, in its recommendations for future engagement, expressed a desire to build relationships with the Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church of Egypt (EPCE), and specifically regarding the training and supporting of leaders throughout the Middle East. The EPCE Seminary, the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Cairo (ETSC), is a strategic institution in this regard.

35. The visit to Egypt was very worthwhile, including an opportunity to meet key people within the EPCE and the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Cairo. The commitment of the church to growth, including church planting and mission, in Egypt and the region, is inspiring. While the church is constrained within the dominant Islamic culture, there are opportunities which are being seized and it was encouraging to hear and see what God is doing in Egypt today. There is undoubtedly potential to build on this visit, and consider what form a deeper relationship might take.

Intercultural Relations

36. In the absence of an Intercultural Relations Agent, conversations have been had with Nathaniel Jennings, OMF UK and Ireland Inter-Cultural Ministries Director. These conversations were particularly pertinent given the anxiety many people from ethnic minorities feel in the aftermath of racially motivated unrest in towns across Northern Ireland in the summer of 2025.
37. Issues around the welcome, support for and integration of refugees and other ethnic minorities, together with challenging racism and negative stereotyping, is a cross-cutting issue across various councils of PCI. The particular niche for the Global Development Committee, especially given its historic context in the Race Relation Panel, has been in addressing racism and providing resources to support the integration of people from ethnic minorities.

Persecuted Minorities

38. A Persecuted Minorities Agent remit and job description have been developed and the Committee are seeking to identify a suitable person to take on this role. Key in this will be building relationships with organisations in the sector, and partner churches for whom this is a major issue. In this regard, Uel Marrs has had conversations with representatives of Open Doors, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, and the Barnabas Fund. The Committee is also seeking to further develop relationships with Church in Chains and Release International.

Other Issues

39. The Committee looks forward to engaging with the General Assembly's Structures and Resources Review Panel as it goes about its work, especially in the exploration of how best the Committee might continue to provide a World Development Appeal; lead thinking on global concerns; and not least contribute to the resourcing of congregations as they seek to grapple more effectively with global issues, especially those with a local impact.
40. The Committee is grateful to all the office-based staff who provide invaluable support as it seeks to carry out its work.

RICHARD KERR, Convener

BUSINESS AND FINANCE PANEL

Finance

41. 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 2025 indicate an overall deficit of £185,037 although this includes an unrealised loss on investments of £238,614 which is beyond the Council's control. From 1 January 2026, Global Mission Worker – Ireland allowances were increased by 3.5%. A United Appeal grant of £830,000 was approved for 2026, with the Council requesting the same amount of £830,000 for 2027. In the course of the year restricted donations of £754,817 were received, including Irish Aid funding through Misesan Cara of £98,868 for partner projects. A Funding Strategy Task Group's work is ongoing in terms of analysing the Council's General Investment Fund (GIF) reserves.

Property

42. The Council continues to own three properties as follows: Two three-bedroomed apartments at 5 Osborne Mews, 81 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. During 2025 the bathroom was refurbished at 5 Osborne Mews. The semi-detached house at 214 Grasmere Avenue, Wembley, is being rented out at the going market rate and the Council agreed that its sale be delayed until 2027. The Council very much appreciates the wide range of property-related work undertaken by Graham Patterson and Helen Johnston.

Communication and Promotion Strategy

43. A communication and promotion strategy for the Council for Global Mission was drawn up during 2025 and has begun to be implemented. It seeks to tell the story of global mission in creative ways and aspires to be provide effective communication, ensuring that meaningful stories are generated and shared.

Council Conveners and Members

44. The Panel noted that around one quarter of the Council membership would be concluding their period of service at the General Assembly in June 2026, including two Assembly Committee Conveners. Appreciation for all who have served the Council so faithfully was recorded at the March 2026 meeting of the Council.

45. Heather Clements served for the past six years as convener of the Global Mission Committee. Due to the COVID pandemic, this included an additional year on top of the normal five-year term of service. The Council are deeply grateful to Heather for her dedication to this role, her commitment to travel from a distance to participate in meetings and, as and when required, to travel widely with a view to furthering partner relations and visit global mission workers. Heather has brought a wonderful ability to grasp issues with clarity and speak into situations insightfully, to get alongside global mission workers supportively, and to undergird everything with prayer, the importance of which she has upheld throughout her convenorship.
46. The Council express their deepest appreciation to Richard Kerr who has served as convener of the Global Development Committee since October 2021. Richard has brought vision and passion to this role; grappling with key global issues not least those with local impact here on the Island of Ireland. Throughout his convenorship, he has sought to get alongside those most deeply affected, making sure issues were recognised and addressed by the wider church and community. At times this involved him travelling to meet with PCI's partners around the world, eager to ensure that their voice is heard and that PCI learns from such encounters in terms of Christian discipleship and bringing glory to God.

Staffing

47. The Mission Department staff team, serving both the Council for Global Mission and the Council for Mission in Ireland, continue to serve with great dedication and a willingness to go the 'extra mile' to ensure work is completed in a timely way. They often find themselves operating right at the margins of their capacity and the additional administrative cover that has been provided as and when needed by Joyce Anderson and Trish Sheridan has proved invaluable.
48. Helen Johnston, will be retiring from her role as Mission Support Officer – Member Care on 30 June 2026 after more than 22 years of dedicated service. Helen came to her role, initially Executive Officer with responsibilities for mission personnel, straight from eight years of service in personnel-related roles with the United Mission to Nepal. Following PCI's structures review in 2015, the role became Mission Support Officer – Member Care, expanding to cover duties in relation to 'Called' personnel for both the Council for Global Mission and the Council for Mission in Ireland. The Council for Global Mission are so very grateful to Helen for her long-standing commitment to these roles, and for the expertise and invaluable experience she has brought to her work; in particular for the way she has been there for PCI's global mission workers, getting alongside them with understanding, grappling with courage whatever issues might arise, no matter how challenging. Helen has wept with those who were weeping, rejoiced with those who were rejoicing. She will be greatly missed and it is the Council's prayer that she would know God's richest blessings in retirement.

Safeguarding

49. The Council's executive staff have committed substantial time to interpreting how PCI's policy and procedures on safeguarding relate to and, indeed, may need to be further amended to take into consideration PCI's global mission workers and others, such as partner church representatives, who visit the UK and Ireland. A meeting with a representative of the Safeguarding Development Committee has taken place and guidance received as the Council seeks to ensure that it keeps in step with ongoing developments in denominational safeguarding. Foundational issues that arose as a result of these discussions, particularly in relation to vetting and criminal record checks for global mission workers, are being dealt with. A task group, including a link person with the Safeguarding Development Committee, is being set up and will report to the next meeting of the Council as it works towards a bespoke safeguarding policy for the Council, one that dovetails with denominational policy and procedures. Safeguarding is now a standing item on the agenda of the Council, its Assembly Committees and Business and Finance Panel.

Carbon-offsetting

50. Over the past year, in seeking to model creation responsibility and foster positive debate on creation care denominationally, an audit of the Council for Global Mission's carbon footprint has been undertaken. At the heart of this is a focus on air travel. All the relevant data has now been transmitted to a Christian organisation, 'Climate Stewards', that seeks to help businesses, churches and individuals to measure, reduce and offset their carbon emissions and it is anticipated that Climate Steward's report will be received very soon. In conjunction with this, the Global Mission Committee is undertaking a review of criteria and expenditure in relation to overseas travel for global mission workers, as well as those who travel globally on PCI's behalf. While the aim is to minimize the Council's carbon footprint, the value of face-to-face conversations with overseas partners is recognized. It is anticipated that a decision on whether or not to proceed with offsetting the Council's carbon footprint, and mechanisms for doing so, will be considered at the next meeting of the Council in October 2026.

Mission Archive – Gamble Library

51. Over the past year a question arose as to where the Council's records ought to be stored, in particular the personnel files of resigned, retired and deceased missionaries/global mission workers, ensuring proper compliance with GDPR regulations. Should such records be retained in the Mission Department, be relocated to the Historical Society, and/or in the global mission archive under the care of the Gamble Library? Subsequently, the Council approved that the ongoing review of all file contents be completed, ensuring compliance with GDPR regulations; that all files of former missionaries/global mission workers who have died be stored with the Historical Society and that these be made accessible.

STEPHEN McCRACKEN, Convener

APPENDIX A

GLOBAL MISSION WORKER SENDING STRATEGY 2026–2028

Introduction

1. The Global Mission Committee (GMC), in seeking God's leading by His Spirit on the way forward as regards PCI's 'Global Mission Worker (GMW) Sending Strategy', met for discussion on 21 May 2025, 20 October 2025 and 19 February 2026 and addressed the following key questions:

Whether to send?

2. The Committee is convinced that God reaches people mostly through people and that direct, personal, missional encounter is crucial. To this end, as a result of the theological review of mission undertaken in 2005, the Council for Global Mission articulated and continue to hold to the biblical principle of being people-focused in missionary endeavour, that God chooses to work through people, and so the Council have been prioritising resources for the sending of missionaries.
3. John Stott, in his book, 'Christian Mission in the Modern World', wrote, "The risen Lord's first word of commission was not to preach but to go and going into the world means presence".

He also wrote, "It comes more natural to us to shout the gospel at people from a distance than to involve ourselves deeply in their lives, to think ourselves into their culture and problems and to feel with them in their pain".

So, the Committee must remain obedient to the Great Commission when Jesus commanded his disciples,

"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 will be with you always, to the very end of the Age". Matthew 28: 19, 20.

4. Given the example of Christ himself and His commissioning of the disciples, it is the conviction of the Committee that PCI be engaged in witnessing to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and that this includes a commitment to send out global mission workers in response to the Call of God. From a biblical point of view, PCI's global engagement, therefore, is not simply an option to be considered but a command to be obeyed.
5. Nonetheless, when it comes to reviewing and developing a sending strategy for global mission, as required of the Council for Global Mission in the Code, the Committee is not unmindful of PCI's current context, both here on the island of Ireland and around the world. Globally, there has been a significant shift in the distribution of Christians over the past 30 years. In 1990 some 18% of Christians lived in the global south and 82% in the global north. Today, around 66% live in the global south and only 34% in the global north. Given this context, sending overseas may not appear as a priority.

6. Locally, PCI has been experiencing numerical decline and the Committee also recognises that the sending of missionaries ‘to all nations’ is increasingly costly in financial terms. The demographics increasingly point to the importance of engaging in mission cross-culturally here at home, given the growing numbers of migrants coming to live on this island and the great opportunity this provides, especially when they come from countries that are presently closed to the gospel.
7. The Committee contends, however, that when it comes to the question of mission local and beyond our shores, it is not a question of ‘either/or’ but ‘both/and’. In Acts 1 v 8, Jesus assured the apostles, “...*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*”. PCI must continue to be faithful to this Biblical mandate to send out witnesses, both near and far. In doing so, it is anticipated that a growing interface between local and global mission will be discovered, both requiring effectiveness in cross-cultural witness.

How to send?

8. How should PCI go about sending global mission workers beyond the shores of Ireland? Prior to 1840, Presbyterian congregations took the lead, expressing their commitment to sending out missionaries, particularly the larger, well-resourced, congregations for whom this had been more manageable, although only through independent mission agencies and societies.
9. Right from its first General Assembly in 1840, however, PCI has been committed to sending out denominational missionaries, when Alexander Kerr and James Glasgow were sent to India, supported by PCI’s Foreign Mission. Over the years, hundreds of missionaries, or global mission workers as we call them now, have been sent out ‘to the ends of the earth’. They have been a source of kingdom blessing, both around the world and to the church here at home as PCI congregations have been encouraged to lift their gaze to what God is doing beyond the shores of Ireland.
10. While some congregations and their members have continued to support independent mission agencies and societies, down through the years a denominational or ‘centralised’ sending model has been sustained. Indeed, it has come to be seen not only as a core activity of the General Assembly, undertaken through PCI’s central structures, but it could be argued that it has helped to define who PCI is down the years, becoming an element of PCI’s DNA, and perhaps even helping to forge the unity of the denomination.
11. More often than not, PCI’s mission endeavour has emerged from partnering with like-minded churches, united missions and agencies. PCI has sought to walk humbly alongside brothers and sisters in Christ around the world and this does, in time, lead to shared initiatives and a partnering together in God’s mission. The building and sustaining of such relationships are foundational to mission.

12. This commitment is written into the Code and forms the heart of the remit for the Council for Global Mission. Code paragraphs:
 427. The Council for Global Mission shall supervise the Global Mission of the Church and shall proclaim the Gospel in word and action in such countries and in such ways as the General Assembly or the Council for Global Mission may from time to time determine, wherever possible in partnership with churches, united missions and agencies in that country or area.
 - 428.1. The Council for Global Mission shall develop a strategy on Global Mission, including partnership with churches and agencies outside Ireland, and sending Global Mission workers.
 429. The Council for Global Mission may select and call Global Mission workers and allocate them to their spheres of service.
13. Going forward, the view of the Committee is that when it comes to sending out global mission workers and building denominational partnerships beyond the shores of Ireland, the lead should continue to be taken primarily by the General Assembly operating through its central structures, specifically the Council for Global Mission. This, however, sits alongside the role of the local congregation which more recently has been referred to in reports as the 'primary unit' of mission, although with specific reference to mission on the island of Ireland.
14. There is no doubt that sending, selecting and caring for global mission workers is a complex undertaking requiring significant resources. There are processes of recruitment, selection, pastoral care, visas, tax complexities, health issues and much else, all needing expertise that has been gained by those employed centrally and that may not be readily available in any one congregation. This work of 'sending' has consistently required the lion's share, some 60%, of CGM's annual budgeted expenditure.
15. The Global Mission Committee strongly supports the view, therefore, that the Council for Global Mission, should continue to provide a lead in undertaking this 'sending' function, ensuring and modelling best practice. The Global Mission Committee sees this as a core element of PCI's denominational level engagement and not something that can easily be decentralised to the point that congregations be seen as the primary unit in mission beyond the shores of Ireland, in the same way as they are on the island of Ireland.
16. Additionally, it was also noted that, strategically and from a point of view of their capacity and good co-ordination, the leadership of PCI's overseas partners have a preference to relate to PCI centrally, at a denominational level, i.e. through the Council for Global Mission rather than solely at congregational level.
17. While this strategy is recommending that the Council for Global Mission, operating on behalf of the General Assembly, should continue to take a lead in 'sending' overseas, it is important to recognise that other councils, presbyteries and congregations have a vital role to play on a number of levels. Indeed, this is something that PCI, at every level, ought to be

engaged in together. With this in mind, it is recommended that the Council for Global Mission should relate more closely with the Council for Congregational Life and Witness to review communication with and training of presbyteries and congregations in their global engagement, mindful of the volume of people needed for engagement in the care and support of global mission workers and in the building of partner relationships.

18. Neal Pirolo, in his book, 'Serving as senders' (Emmaus Road, International) states that, "in secular war there is an acknowledged ratio of support personnel to frontline soldiers. In World War II the ratio was generally 15 to one. In more recent conflicts, that ratio was expanded to 50 support workers per frontline soldier."
19. Related to this, as global mission workers report back to the home support base through deputation, they can have a key role in advancing the promotion of global mission throughout the church, keeping interest and engagement stimulated, so that PCI becomes more healthy, generous and outgoing in every aspect of church life.
20. When it comes to telling the story of global mission, the Committee would also like to see further development in the Mission Department's ability to communicate directly with congregations and, in turn, to see congregational and presbytery engagement strengthened.

Who to send?

21. Who should PCI be sending out to make disciples, especially when it comes to qualities of character?
"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us". 2 Corinthians 4:7.
22. Historically, PCI have been committed to sending overseas the most gifted and experienced people as an expression of God's generosity, and of PCI's trust in God's faithfulness in making provision for the ongoing challenges in mission closer to home. At times God achieves most when His people walk humbly with Him, seeing God work through their human fragility and vulnerability, knowing themselves to be the least; yet boldly, with prophetic honesty; and with self-sacrificial commitment.
23. So, while some may be older, others younger, normally PCI expects those sent to be mature Christians, who have been well-discipled, challenged and encouraged by good mentoring role-models, having already 'cut their teeth' through dedicated service in their local congregation and community; having discovered and nurtured their spiritual gifting; having begun to hone their skills in a particular field of service or expertise; and ideally, having already had some prior exposure to cross-cultural service, whether at home or overseas.
24. There should be a careful assessment of what training in cross-cultural discipleship is needed and how it can be provided, in conjunction with the overseas partner, with a view to setting goals, establishing levels of accountability and reporting.

When to send?

25. The primary, and normally the only, church that God calls to mission in any given place is the local church in that location. Today a significant number of PCI's existing partner churches are ones with whom PCI has been in relationship for many decades. Currently, these relationships account for about half of PCI's global mission workers. They are fast growing denominations, increasingly focused on the discipling and sending out of their own missionaries in their locality, where workers are well familiar with local language and culture, but increasingly beyond their own national borders.
26. One outcome of this is that invitations to PCI from these longstanding partners to send global mission workers are less frequent and this is not helped by the growing difficulty, in some contexts, to obtain visas. The Council has a growing appreciation of the need to take up opportunities to support these partners in their local initiatives prayerfully and financially, not least in the training of people for strategic positions of leadership and service. Add to this, for reasons that deserve to be explored in more depth, there are fewer members of the Western churches offering themselves for missionary service.
27. All in all, therefore, while PCI must remain committed to being 'senders', obedient to the Great Commission which remains unchanged, this sending needs, for the most part, to be in response to invitations that emerge from stable and meaningful partnerships, ones in which there is potential for bi-directional engagement, for both 'sending' and 'receiving', as PCI serves partners in their mission endeavour. These partners, in turn, help PCI, holding each other to account for what God is asking of us.
28. Furthermore, when it comes to the timing of sending, if and when PCI is invited to partner with a church in any particular location, it is good to be mindful, in an era when mission is from everywhere to everywhere, that there may well be other like-minded, international partner churches and/or agencies who are better able to meet the needs of that partner than PCI can, or at very least, multi-lateral collaboration should be considered.

Where do we send?

29. While it is important to be mindful of these developments of recent decades, there are still many contexts around the world where Christians are few, the church is a tiny minority, at times hard-pressed for resources, perhaps persecuted, and where the need and opportunity for the proclamation of the gospel is great.
30. With this in mind, looking to the next chapter of PCI's global mission engagement, the Committee is of the view that the continent of Europe ought to be front and centre, at the heart of strategy moving forward. Take for example, the 'gateway' cities of Europe where so many migrants have converged from countries often closed to the gospel. Some of these are from what we term 'creative access' countries where there are a small number of persecuted Christians. One approach to reach the unreached in such countries, is to work with migrant communities in Europe, supporting the

training and mobilising of believers and leaders, some of whom may one day become engaged in mission back in their homelands. With regard to such contexts, the Scriptures remind us that God is still asking the question, as He did in Isaiah 6:8, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

31. Again, with a European focus, it is a priority going forward to support partners in their church planting initiatives, especially where local, indigenous leadership is not readily available. There may be contexts where a global mission worker can take on a local and regional role, providing the ‘scaffolding’ of support for partners in more than one location. There is, however, a particular need for collaboration more broadly within PCI to identify, equip and support short-term engagement, especially of younger people in the European context and beyond.
32. Going forward, the focus should be on discerning where the needs of like-minded partner churches are greatest, as well as to pioneer and church plant in those places where worship of Jesus Christ is not evident. This will also require a plan for the advertising of new opportunities that reflect these priorities but also the kind of roles that PCI congregations will more readily grasp as being missional and, therefore, will be encouraged to support.

What is needed to send?

33. Presently, in mid-February 2026, there are 17 global mission workers serving in 7 countries. These are long-term missionaries and have an average length of service between them of over 20 years. The Committee is of a mind that there should be a concerted effort going forward to at least maintain numbers of global mission workers over the next two years, aiming for 18 in 2028, and in time to build on this over a range of roles and countries, reflecting the Council’s name, the Council for ‘Global’ Mission.
34. Denominational sending at this level needs to be well-resourced in every way, and to this end PCI is approaching a crossroads with important decisions needing to be carefully considered, given the significant implications for financing, staffing and communicating about overseas mission. The Committee recognise that corners cannot be cut in the appointment of well-qualified and experienced staff. It needs to be noted that as far as staffing for global mission is concerned, the Mission Department is now in a time of transition which needs to be carefully managed, ensuring that adequate staffing is provided. PCI must not underestimate all that is needed in terms of investment in processes of selection, training, supporting and caring for all global mission workers who go out in the name of the Lord and of PCI. This raises questions around the importance of having sufficient capacity to be a sending denomination.
35. Sending is just one element of the Council for Global Mission’s strategy, normally the best resourced element. Presently, 60% of the overseas budget goes on sending and supporting PCI’s global mission workers with only 16% going on partnership grants. Sending strengthens relationships, builds bridges in partnership and is core to everything the Council for Global Mission does overseas. Therefore, when it comes to resourcing, it is

recommended that the lion's share of funds would continue to be dedicated to sending and to sending well. Mindful, however, of PCI's current financial position, it is recommended that the Council, in collaboration with the United Appeal Committee, actively explore new models of funding that strengthen presbytery and congregational ownership and involvement.

36. Tied to the resourcing of PCI's denominational mission overseas, is the importance of ensuring that the story of PCI's global mission engagement be told effectively throughout the church. Congregations and individuals want to focus support on PCI's own global mission workers, first and foremost. Any encouragement for the wider church to build relationships cross-culturally, largely arises from having supported PCI's own global mission workers, who are very often a bridge into other contexts and cultures.

Conclusion

37. The Global Mission Committee recommends that the 'sending' of global mission workers ought to continue to be taken forward by the General Assembly working through central structures, that is the Council for Global Mission. It further recognises that in such engagement, the 'sending' of global mission workers is very much bound up with 'partnering' with like-minded churches around the world. The Committee emphasises that 'corners should not be cut' in terms of resourcing the work and at this current juncture in PCI's history, there should be a renewed commitment to the effective resourcing of the work. Whether speaking of funding, with new models of doing so being examined, or recruiting well qualified, experienced staff for the Mission Department, it is vital that the Council's 'sending' strategy be adequately resourced.

APPENDIX B

GLOBAL MISSION WORKERS

Global mission workers: the names, spheres and category of service at the time of writing 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 JinHyeog Glissmann	2010	Consultant to Theological Education by Extension in TEEC – South Africa Music Teacher in Phoenix International Primary School in Blantyre – Malawi
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Great Britain

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

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

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

Spain

Derek and Jane French	2000	Student outreach with Grupos Biblicos Unidos (GBU), and Bilbao International Church (BIC)
Neil and Jenny Stewart	2025	Outreach, discipleship and church planting with the Basque Country Project Team, Bilbao International Church (BIC)

APPENDIX C

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, and Zomba Theological College)
- The Christian Church of Sumba, Indonesia
- The Evangelical Christian Church in 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 (5)

- The Greek Evangelical Church
- The National Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Guatemala
- The Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church in Egypt and the Evangelical Theological Seminary Cairo
- The Reformed Church in Spain
- Central Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Colombia
- The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (Harare Synod)

Companions (18)

- 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 Student Christian Organisation of Malawi
- Université Chrétienne Bilingue du Congo
- The Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary, Jordan

- The Near East School of Theology, Lebanon
- THIMAR, Lebanon
- The Presbyterian Church of Pakistan
- The United Bible Training Centre, Pakistan
- PakMission, Pakistan
- The Association for Theological Education, Nepal
- Minority Focus, Nepal
- The Cross Reformed Centre, Nepal
- Al Bashir, India
- International Assistance Mission, Afghanistan
- The Increase Association, Asia

Network (1)

- Northern Spain Church Planting Network (including GBU, Andamio and Bilbao International Church)

OVERTURES

NEW OVERTURES

GENERAL COUNCIL

Purpose – seven overtures to update the Code in regard to changes to the role of Financial Secretary to Director of Operations. These have been deemed Category A overtures.

Anent Par 111 of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 111 of the Code be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

Following the completion of a sale or other disposal of congregational property held in connection with the Home Mission, the net proceeds of such sale or disposal, together with any income accrued thereon shall be applied in accordance with any trusts affecting it; if there are no such trusts, such proceeds shall be applied for the credit of the Council for Mission in Ireland.

Anent Par 346.1 of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 346.1 of the Code be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

The General Assembly's Director of Operations may act in an advisory capacity to all commissions, councils, committees and other bodies appointed by them.

Anent Par 402.7.2 of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 402.7.2 of the Code be deleted.

Anent Par 402.8.3.3 of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 402.8.3.3 of the Code be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

Congregations shall endeavour to transmit all United Appeal contributions received by it as soon as practicable to the Church's Finance Department and the total amount, in any case, before the 31 December following.

Anent Par 433 of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 433 of the Code be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

The Director of Operations shall act as the Treasurer of CMF.

Anent Par 438 of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 438 of the Code be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

Each congregational treasurer and minister shall jointly make a full return to the General Assembly's Finance Department, not later than such date as may be fixed from time to time by the General Council each year, of the following, with a continuing obligation to notify the Finance Department within one week of any change in them:

Anent Par 447 of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 447 of the Code be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

447. The Director of Operations shall immediately refer the matter to the relevant Presbytery if:

Purpose – two overtures to remove an ambiguity regarding the status of an elder emeritus. These have been deemed Category A overtures.

Anent Par 34 of the Code

It is hereby overtured that Par 34 of the Code be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

A ruling elder may request to retire from the eldership on attaining the age of 65, or due to special circumstance. In such event Presbytery may, in consultation with the Kirk Session of the congregation, grant the request, whereupon the elder shall be deemed to have retired from the duties of the eldership; but if the elder so wishes, the Presbytery may grant the honorary title of 'elder emeritus' of the congregation.

Anent Par 34.2 of the Code

It is hereby overtured that a new sub-paragraph Par 34.2.1 be added on the following terms:

An elder emeritus of a congregation that merges into another congregation shall be elder emeritus of the receiving congregation or, if the congregation is merged into the Presbytery or General Assembly, shall be elder emeritus of the former congregation with suffix (old).

JUDICIAL COMMISSION

Convenor: Rev N.A.L. CAMERON

Secretary: CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. The Judicial Commission met six times since the last meeting of the General Assembly in June 2025.
2. On 7 **August 2025** the Commission considered a Notice of Appeal lodged by Rev M. Anderson and three elders of Arklow Presbyterian Church against the Finding of a Par 161 Commission of the Dublin and Munster Presbytery. The Judicial Commission decided to hear the appeal on the basis of the papers submitted to it. The outcome of the Judicial Commission's deliberations can be found in Section 1A of the Confidential Supplementary Report Booklet.
3. The Judicial Commission received a Notice of Appeal from Mr Geoff McBride on 19 **June 2025** against a decision of the Par 161 Commission of the Presbytery of Carrickfergus. A 161 Commission had been established by the Carrickfergus Presbytery in October 2024 in response to a request by the Judicial Commission arising out of a previous matter *"to look into the relational breakdown within the leadership of Raloo Congregation, with particular regard to the responsibility of ruling elders for the upbuilding of God's people in fruitfulness and holy concord, and the implicit requirements to demonstrate such in their own lives and relationships."* The Raloo 161 Commission concluded on 17 June 2025 by drawing up a Summary and Recommendations document of special measures that would be put in place which would be read to the Congregation on 22 June 2025. Mr McBride lodged his appeal against the Finding of the Par 161 Commission and the making available of the Summary Report to the congregation and this action was stayed until the Appeal had been heard. The Judicial Commission met on 7 **August 2025** to give consideration to the matter. The Judicial Commission unanimously resolved as follows: The Judicial Commission, having given preliminary consideration to the Notice of Appeal, resolved that the stated grounds of appeal did not meet the requirement of being adequate and appropriate to be heard (Par 165 (1) of the Code). The appeal was therefore dismissed. The detail of the Judicial Commission's Finding is to be found in Section 1B of the Confidential Supplementary Report Booklet.
4. The Judicial Commission received a Notice of Appeal, dated 15 **October 2025** from Mr Kenneth Mawhinney against a decision of the First Portadown Par 161 Commission of the Armagh Presbytery of 2 October 2025 which Commission had been set up *"with full Presbytery powers to address issues regarding leadership and governance in First Portadown and other related matters, taking any steps necessary to it under the Code."*

As part of its investigations the Commission had considered an email of complaint by Mr Kenneth Mawhinney (a member of the congregation of First Portadown). The complaint was dismissed by the Par 161 Commission and Mr Mawhinney appealed that decision. The Judicial Commission, at a preliminary meeting on 21 November 2025, had agreed that the stated grounds of the appeal were adequate and appropriate to be heard. The Judicial Commission met on 8 January 2026 to consider the matter and to hear from the parties. The Commission considered the papers before it and, after further discussion at a subsequent meeting of the Judicial Commission on 26 February 2026, issued its Finding which can be read in Section 1C of the Confidential Supplementary Report Booklet.

5. The Judicial Commission met on 30 January 2026 to consider a Reference under Code Para 21 (1) received by the Clerk on 20 December 2025 from a Par 224 Commission of the Armagh Presbytery re: Richhill Presbyterian Church. The Commission considered whether the Reference should be accepted and noted Code Par 500 which states the options available to the Commission:

500 Without prejudice to any other power exercisable by it, a superior court to which a reference is made may:

- 500.1 decline to advise, or to investigate and adjudicate upon the matter; or
- 500.2 remit the matter to the court which has made the reference; or
- 500.3 give advice on the matter; or
- 500.4 adjudicate on the matter in the place of the court which made the reference; or
- 500.5 appoint an assessor or assessors to act with the inferior court as full members; or
- 500.6 appoint a commission of its own members to investigate and adjudicate the matter with the powers of the superior court.

Following discussion, it was agreed that, in the best interests of all concerned, the matter be remitted to the Commission of the Armagh Presbytery re Richhill (under Code Par 500.2), the court that made the reference, to complete the work expeditiously.

6. The Judicial Commission met on 26 February 2026 to consider the grounds of appeal lodged by Mr Geoff McBride on 27 December 2025, an elder in the congregation of Raloo. Mr McBride was appealing a decision of the Business Committee of the Carrickfergus Presbytery which had dismissed his appeal regarding the election of a Clerk to the Raloo Kirk Session. Mr McBride had alleged that due process had not been followed in the election of the new Clerk of Session. The Judicial Commission considered all the papers before it and determined that the appeal was not adequate and appropriate to be heard. The detail of the Finding is found in Section 1D of the Confidential Supplementary Report Booklet.

7. The Judicial Commission received a Notice of Appeal, dated **26 March 2026** from Richhill Kirk Session, and a Notice of Appeal dated **30 March 2026** from the Minister Rev Alastair McNeely, against the Finding of the Par 224 Commission of the Armagh Presbytery (Richhill Commission) dated 23 March 2026. The Judicial Commission met on 23 April 2026 to give preliminary consideration of the papers and the grounds of appeal. It was agreed that the grounds of appeal in both Appeals were adequate and appropriate to be heard and a date was to be set by the Office bearers to consider the Appeals.

Judicial Guidelines and changes to a Regulation

8. A small Task Group had been appointed in 2025 to update the Commission's Judicial Guidelines Booklet for Presbyteries in line with the numbering of the new Code coming into effect on 1 January 2026. At its meeting of 26 February 2026, an updated draft was considered by the Commission, and it was agreed that the Judicial Process Guidelines for Presbyteries be immediately published with the noted necessary amendments, but that the section on Stage 2 Commissions be further worked on by the Task Group and not published at the present time.
9. It was noted that, under Code Par 344.1.1 any proposed changes to Regulations need to be considered and ratified by the Judicial Commission. The Special General Assembly had agreed at its meeting on 18 February 2026 that applicants for the posts of Clerk and Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly may be ministers *and elders of PCI* rather than just ministers as per the current Regulations (*Regulations for the appointment of the Clerk of the General Assembly and other General Assembly Appointments*). The Judicial Commission had already been given notice of the proposed change prior to the Special Assembly. It was proposed and unanimously agreed to change the Regulations to accord with the decision of the General Assembly so that the relevant section in the Regulations now reads:
 5. The task group shall invite applications as follows:
 - 5.1 for the offices of Clerk of the Assembly and Deputy Clerk of the Assembly from anyone who is a minister or elder of the Church and who is qualified to be appointed to such office;
 and it was also agreed that the Deputy Clerk be given authority to publish the revised wording on the PCI website along with the other Regulations.
10. At a meeting of the Judicial Commission on **23 April 2026** the Commission noted that at the General Council dated 14 April 2026 the Guidelines Review Task Group in their Report referred a number of matters to be considered by the Judicial Commission. There are five recommendations in that Report (e-i) about matters that could be referred to the Judicial Commission. Namely:
 - (e) That the question of whether commissions have exclusive jurisdiction over their work, be referred to the Judicial Commission.

- (f) That Appendix 2, regarding a new process for adopting and maintaining policies and procedures, be referred to the Judicial Commission.
 - (g) That, if the new process in Appendix 2 is approved by the Judicial Commission, an Overture with parameters for the safeguarding policies and procedures be prepared by the Judicial Commission.
 - (h) That the issues in Appendix 3 concerning the ability of charity trustees to act quickly on their legal obligations be referred to the Judicial Commission.
 - (i) That the questions raised about the standing of Doctrine Committee reports be referred to the Judicial Commission.
11. The Judicial Commission considered these and referred them to the Task Group currently finalising the Presbytery Judicial Guidelines to add this work to their remit and report back to the 2027 General Assembly.

Overtures

12. At its meeting on 23 April 2026 a number of Overtures were presented to the Judicial Commission and passed for onward transmission to the General Assembly. The Judicial Commission under Par 333.2.1 of the Code designated these Overtures as Category A (a change that does not significantly alter the existing provisions of the Code).

SPECIAL JUDICIAL COMMISSION

Convener: Rev NORMAN A.L. CAMERON

Secretary: CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. The Special Commission met once, on 16 April 2026, and a verbal report will be given at the Private Session of the 2026 General Assembly.

COMMISSION ON APPLICATIONS

Convener: CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. It was not necessary for the Commission on Applications to meet.

RESOLUTIONS

GENERAL COUNCIL – INTRODUCTION

GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE (INITIAL REPORT)

Tuesday Morning

1. That the Draft Order of Business for the 2026 General Assembly be approved.
2. That the revised version of Standing Orders with the decimal numbering system (as per the present Code) be agreed for adoption with immediate effect under Code Par 330.
3. That the “Guide to Assembly Procedure” (yellow pages) in the Assembly Book of Reports be approved with the appropriate General Assembly Standing Orders suspended where necessary to facilitate alternative presentations etc.
4. That a grant of up to £35,000 be made from the Incidental Fund to the Arrangements Panel of the General Assembly Business Committee.
5. That the review of Making the General Assembly More Accessible Task Group decisions by the Business Committee be noted and the Business Committee’s recommendations on the matter be approved.
6. That the report of the General Assembly Business Committee be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 1

2pm Tuesday Afternoon

Safeguarding Development Committee

7. That the Protocol for the Immediate Management of Safeguarding Concerns be incorporated within the Safeguarding Policies and Procedures as Guidelines.

General

8. That the Report of the General Council, Section 1, be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 2

3.30pm Tuesday afternoon

General Assembly Advisory Committee

9. That the recommendations contained in Appendix 1 concerning those whose retention as licentiates and ministers without charge has been sought by presbyteries be adopted.

Church Relations Panel

10. That the General Assembly instructs the General Council to appoint a Task Group to examine the principles that should underlie PCI's engagement with ecumenical bodies. This Task Group would include three representatives from the Doctrine Committee.

College Principal Re-Appointment

11. That the Rev Prof Michael McClenahan be re-appointed as Principal of Union Theological College for a further one-year term, commencing on 1 September 2026.

Clerk Appointment Panel

12. That the General Assembly appoint the Rev Jonathan Boyd M.A. (Oxon), Dip. Min. (PTFI), M.Div. (QUB), as Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, taking up post on 1 July 2026 (or other suitable date).
13. That the General Assembly express their appreciation of the Rev Dr David Allen for his work as Deputy Clerk and, more recently, as Acting Clerk of the General Assembly, and that he be appointed as Assistant Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, taking up post on 1 July 2026 (or other suitable date).

General

14. That the Report of the General Council, Section 2, be received

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 3

2.45pm Wednesday afternoon

General Assembly Governance, Culture and Integrity Task Group

15. That the principles outlined in the Interim Report be forwarded to the General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel to assist in proposals for denominational restructuring.

16.

16a. That the General Assembly Governance, Culture and Integrity Task Group pause work for one year;

OR

16b. That the General Assembly Governance, Culture and Integrity Task Group continue with its work

General

17. That the Report of the General Council, Section 3, be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 4

2pm Thursday Afternoon

Structures and Resources Review Panel

18. That this report be sent to Presbyteries and Councils for response by 30 November 2026 using the proforma which will be supplied by the panel.

Compromise Agreements Task Group

19. That the Employee Compromise Agreement Policy in Appendix 2 be approved.

General

20. That the Report of the General Council, Section 4, be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 5

Thursday Afternoon

Support Services Committee

21. That for 2026, the Assessment Rates, along with the estimated allocation of funds, be as set out in Appendix 1 to the Report of the Support Services Committee.

22. That the 2026 budgeted expenditure for the Incidental Fund be as set out in Appendix 3 to the report of the Support Services Committee.

23. That under Par 157 of the Code, leave to retire pre-66 be granted for:
- Rev William James Allen Sleith (Hillsborough), on or after 20 June 2026;
 - Rev William Harkness (Belmont), on or after 27 July 2026;
 - Rev Thomas Alastair McNeely (Richhill), on or after 29 July 2026;
 - Rev David William Reid (Ardstraw and Douglas), on or after 31 July 2026.
 - Rev Stephen Wesley Rea (Carlow & Athy), on or after 30 April 2026

United Appeal Committee

24. That the Appeal and Grants for 2027 be as set out in this report.

Website Task Group

25. That the Website Task Group be thanked and discharged

General

26. That the Report of the General Council, Section 5, be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 6

Friday morning

Nominations Committee

27. That the following resignations be accepted, and appointments made:
- (a) The resignation of Mr Martin Hampton as Convenor of the United Appeal Committee [under the General Council], that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev Alan McQuade be appointed in his place.
 - (b) The Resignation of Rev Roy Mackay as Convenor of the General Assembly Business Committee [under the General Council], that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev Mark Neilly be appointed in his place.
 - (c) The resignation of Rev Tom Greer as Convenor of the Nominations Committee [under the General Council], that he be thanked for his services and that Rev Andrew Downey be appointed in his place.
 - (d) The resignation of Dr Heather Clements as Convenor of the Global Mission Committee [under the Council for Global Mission], that she be thanked for her services and that Rev Peter Fleming be appointed in her place.

- (e) The resignation of Rev Richard Kerr as Convenor of the Global Development Committee [under the Council for Global Mission], that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev Susan Moore be appointed in his place
- (f) The resignation of Very Rev Dr Charles McMullen as Convenor of the Specialist Services Committee [under the Council for Social Witness], that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev Peter Bovill be appointed in his place.
- (g) That the nominations to Commissions, Councils and Committees as set out in the Nominations Handbook be approved.

Guidelines Review Task Group

- 28. That recommendations (a)–(c), relating to the original remit of the Task Group, be approved.
- 29. That the General Council be authorised to develop a searchable electronic archive of General Assembly Reports and Minutes when there is capacity for the work.

General

- 30. That the Report of the General Council, Section 6, be received.

PRESBYTERY REPORTS

Tuesday Morning

- 1. That the Reports of the Presbyteries be received.

COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS

11.45 am Tuesday Morning

- 1. That the Report of the Council for Social Witness be received.

COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND

7pm – Tuesday Evening

- 1. That the General Assembly welcome the progress in the '10 + 10 in 10' vision for new church planting and affirms the development of a document offering a framework for church plants seeking to journey towards constitution (as outlined in Appendix 1).
- 2. That the progress of the South West of Ireland Task Group be noted, with the overarching aims and supporting principles (as outlined in Appendix 2) affirmed as a basis for the Task Group's ongoing work.

3. That the online publication of the 'Mission as a Minority' tool be noted and commended for reflection by the church in areas where Presbyterians are culturally or religiously the minority.
4. That the General Assembly expresses its gratitude for the vital ministry which Healthcare, Prisons, Forces, University and Rural Chaplains carry out on behalf of the church, commending each to continued prayer.
5. That the publication of the 'Chaplaincy: A Ministry of Presence' report be welcomed and used as an ongoing reference point that communicates the importance of chaplaincy ministry and defines a distinct ethos for Presbyterian chaplains.
6. That the updates regarding Mission Projects under the Council's oversight be noted, with thanks expressed to all staff members and volunteers, and glory given to God for the encouraging developments.
7. That the Report of the Council for Mission in Ireland be received.

COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY

Tuesday Evening

1. That the Report of the Council for Training in Ministry be received.

Friday Morning (private session)

2. That the following candidates, 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
Daniel Black	North Belfast
Thomas Brennan	East Belfast
Ben Day	Templepatrick
James Diffin	Ballymena
Richard Ferguson	North Belfast
Sarah McCullough	East Belfast
Ben McMechan	North Belfast
Matthew Reid	Dromore
David Robb	Coleraine & Limavady

3. That permission be given to Ben Day to defer the commencement of his studies.
4. That permission be given to David Robb to defer the commencement of his studies.

COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

10am – Wednesday Morning

1. That the General Assembly:
 - (a) commend the ongoing commitment and dedication of those who serve on Boards of Governors (NI) and on Boards of Management (RoI) and encourage all Presbyterians with an interest in the education of children and young people to prayerfully consider being actively involved in these roles.
 - (b) welcome the establishment of the Churches Consultative Group to ensure that the Christian faith remains at the centre of the new religious education curriculum.
 - (c) acknowledge the ongoing commitment by parents, education and health staff, and politicians to ensure that SEN students receive the vital support that they need.
2. That the General Assembly encourage congregations to use the Considering Lament: Psalms of Protest, Pain and Hope resource where appropriate during worship as a mechanism of collective lament.
3. That the General Assembly encourage the use of the Graciously Confident Podcast as a resource to keep the denomination informed about current public policy issues and a means of equipping people to engage with these issues in everyday life.
4. That the Report of the Council for Public Affairs be received.

LINKAGE COMMISSION

11am Wednesday morning

1. That parish bounds for the merged congregation of Portglenone comprise the previous parish bounds of 1st Portglenone and Townhill, Portglenone.
2. That parish bounds previously designated ‘Ballina and Killala’ be designated ‘Ballina’.
3. That parish bounds for the merged congregation of Fintona comprise the previous parish bounds of Fintona and Ballynahatty & Creevan.
4. That parish bounds for the merged congregation of Toberkeigh comprise the previous parish bounds of Toberkeigh and Croaghmore.
5. That the Report of the Linkage Commission be received.

TRUSTEES

12pm – Wednesday afternoon

1. That the Report of the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland be received.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS

10am – Thursday Morning

1. That the Report of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness be received.

COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION

11am – Thursday Morning

1. That the General Assembly give thanks to God for the faithful, sacrificial service of PCI's global mission workers and commend the Global Mission Worker Sending Strategy 2026–2028 (Appendix A), encouraging prayerful and active support by the wider church for this work.
2. That the General Assembly give thanks to God for PCI's partnerships with churches, institutions and agencies around the world, whether longstanding or exploratory, and for the strong missional focus to these relationships.
3. That the General Assembly, deeply concerned by war, conflict and loss of life around the world, commit to pray and advocate for peace and justice for those impacted including PCI's partners in mission in the Middle East, Ukraine, South Sudan/Sudan, and Myanmar.
4. That the General Assembly give thanks for the good progress in implementing recommendations set out in the Stewardship of Creation Report to the General Assembly 2024, especially for the 'God's World, Our Responsibility' Conference in September 2025 and the growing range of related resources now available on the PCI website for wider use.
5. That the General Assembly give thanks to God for the generosity of congregations and members of PCI in support of the World Development Appeal 2025 'Hives of Hope; working together for a better tomorrow' and commend the 2026 World Development Appeal to the whole church.
6. That the Report of the Council for Global Mission be received.

RESOLUTIONS RELATING TO OVERTURES

4.45pm – Thursday Afternoon

General Council

1. That the Overtures anent Pars 111, 346.1, 402.7.2, 402.8.3.3, 433, 438 and 447 of the Code be received and that, under Par 337 of the Code, they be made the rule of the Church.
2. That the Overtures anent Pars 34 and 34.2 of the Code be received and that, under Par 337 of the Code, they be made the rule of the Church.

JUDICIAL COMMISSION (IN PRIVATE)

10am – Friday Morning

1. That the Report of the Judicial Commission be received.

SPECIAL JUDICIAL COMMISSION (IN PRIVATE)

1. That the Report of the Special Judicial Commission be received.

COMMISSION ON APPLICATIONS (IN PRIVATE)

1. That the Report of the Commission on Applications be received.

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