

The Governance Board

Meeting 011: 11th October 2022 in Dublin Central Mission

MINUTES

Present:		Apologies
Mr Tony O'Connor (Chair)	Rev Harold Agnew	Rev David Campton
General Secretary: Rev Dr Heather Morris (Convener)	Mr David Best	Mr Paul Cummings
Rev David Nixon	Mr John Clarke	Ms Laura Griffith
Rev Dr Sahr Yambasu	Rev Nigel Mackey	Ms Gillian Kingston
Rev David Turtle	Mr Tom Wilson	Mr Tom Millar

In attendance: Ms Elaine Barnett (Secretary to the Board)
In attendance via Zoom to present particular items of business: Ms Nicola Robinson (Head of Finance) – Items 9 & 10 Mr Nicky Blair (Safeguarding Officer) – item 17

1. **Opening Prayers**

The President, Rev David Nixon, read from 2 Corinthians and led the meeting in prayer.

2. **Welcome and Apologies**

All were welcomed to the meeting and apologies were noted.

3. **Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising**

The Minutes were agreed, and there were no matters arising not covered by the agenda.

4. **Conflicts of Interest**

J Clarke, H Morris, D Turtle and Tom Wilson are members of the President's Advisory Committee (item 6); H Agnew and D Best, Lurgan Circuit (item 22, Any Other Business, Circuit loan from Property Board)

5. **Past Decisions – Implementation**

Tony O'Connor presented the paper (*011_22.10_05 GB Decisions Review, previously circulated*) updating Board members on progress.

6. **President's Advisory Board**

Dr Morris updated the meeting on the progress of the legal issue being dealt with by the President's Advisory Committee and previously reported to the Governance Board. The matter had been settled during the mediation process. Appreciation was expressed to those who had dealt with the case most closely – the General Secretary, the Operations Manager and the solicitor.

7. **General Secretary's Report**

Dr Morris reported:

- the latest Census figures show a drop in numbers for all denominations with MCI figures down by 17% which raises concerns. The Connexional Team have already started work on the theme of Growth.
- the European Methodist Council had met the previous week and are exploring the possibility of a Methodist European Federation which may offer more potential for mutual support.
- a solicitor's letter regarding an allegation of abuse from the 1970s had been received. The Safeguarding Officer is dealing with this.
- it is encouraging to note that conversations between the Church Leaders Group and politicians in both jurisdictions are taking place. In the Republic of Ireland these are focussing on reconciliation. In Northern Ireland poverty and the functioning of the NI Executive are the main areas.

8. Administrative Items

- 1) The Institute for Multi-Cultural Ministry, run by the European Methodist Council, offers training and support for this ministry and several MCI ministers have already benefitted.

Proposal: that MCI become a partner at a cost of €1,000 per year for 5 years.

Agreed

- 2) Oversight of Investments - the Charity Regulator in the Republic of Ireland have indicated that the annual report to Conference by the Statutory Trustees is too infrequent.

Proposal: the Statutory Trustees report on Investments to the Governance Board every quarter

Agreed

9. Finance

Tony O'Connor welcomed Nicola Robinson to the meeting and expressed the appreciation of the Board for all the work that she and the Finance team were doing. Ms Robinson gave an update on the report (*011_22.10_09 Finance Report, previously circulated*), highlighting the following:

a. Consolidated Accounts

the Draft of Consolidated Accounts is ready unless there is any change in the DCM lease. Once that final detail is clarified, the accounts will go to the Auditors, then to the Audit & Assurance Committee who will make a recommendation to the Board meeting in November.

Proposal: that the Compliance documents be submitted to the Charity Regulator before the end of October with an indication that audited accounts are to follow.

Agreed

b. New Finance System

70% of Circuits are now submitting monthly returns and training for the remaining Circuits will start in November/December.

c. Budget Process

From early 2023 quarterly reports for Connexional Funds & Departments should be available for the Governance Board, and the 2022 Consolidated Accounts are scheduled for Audit in April.

10. Risk Register Review

Two documents (*papers 011_22.10_10a Trustees Risk Register Oct 21 (xlsx) and 011_22.10_10b Risk Register Review*) had been previously circulated and Nicola Robinson reported that work will now begin on updating the register and amalgamating any other Department risk registers.

The plan is for all Risk Registers to conform to a standardised format and David Best said that members of the Audit & Assurance Committee (AAC) and General Assurance Committee (GAC) could contribute towards this work.

11. Audit Committee (AAC) report (*paper 011_22.10_11 AAC Minutes 2022.04.12, previously circulated*)

David Best, Chair of AAC, asked for clarification regarding confidential issues not known to those members of sub-committees who are not members of the Board.

Proposal: Sub-committee members to be briefed in confidence as needed.

Agreed

12. Governance Board Schedule 2022/2023

The schedule for the year ahead (*paper 011_22.10_12 GB Schedule*) had been previously circulated and was approved.

13. Associated Bodies Review

John Clarke reported that some preliminary work had begun and it is clear that for those such as the City Missions advice should be sought from a lawyer with expertise in charity law. However, the members of GAC could begin looking at some of the smaller Associated Bodies with a view to establishing the extent of Governance Board responsibilities.

In a separate but associated matter, clarification is being sought regarding the Governance Board acting as the Governors of Edgehill College.

Action: the General Secretary to report back.

Timescale: November meeting.

14. Policy Review - Fraud Policy (*paper 011_22.10_14 Fraud Policy Oct 19, previously circulated*)

It was recognised that the policy, written in 2019, needs to be updated incorporating name changes etc. In discussion, various suggestions were made:

- the Chairs of the Finance Sub-committee and Audit & Assurance Sub-committee should be notified of any incidence of fraud, and be provided with updates until the matter is resolved
- (point 15) reporting to CCNI 'if appropriate' ie if there are reasonable grounds to suspect fraud
- the Scope of the Policy (point 5) – a qualifying statement is needed with regard to Associated Bodies
- an introduction framing the policy in a Biblical context would be helpful
- regular training for Ministers and possibly circuit officials should be considered

Action: Heather to bring updated document to the Board.

Timescale: November meeting.

Wider discussion regarding MCI Policies identified that:

- there should be a standard format, making use of a single template
- a complete index is needed
- they should be more easily accessible

15. Southern Board of Education (SBE)

Nigel Mackey reported that:

- changes in the governance structures of the Secondary Education Committee (SEC) in the Republic of Ireland mean that the current Secretary of the SBE is no longer eligible. The SEC is responsible for awarding the Block Grant to schools in the Protestant-controlled sector and it's important MCI has representation on it.
- the SBE awards grants to Methodists seeking assistance to send their children to a protestant ethos school. The grants are controlled by the Ministerial Treasurer and financed by accounts held in Belfast. For various reasons have not been paid last year or this.
- the Church of Ireland Board of Education, amongst other matters, deals with patronages, singular or shared, for Rathgar National School in Dublin, St Andrew's NS in Bray, and Carbury NS in Sligo. Ms Daphne Wood, Principal of Bray National School, is the MCI representative on this board. Additional representation would be an advantage and this might be explored with the Church of Ireland.

Recommendations of the Board:

1) Two new appointees to the SEC

Action: Nigel, Heather, Southern District DS

2) Discussion with C of I regarding additional MCI representation including voting rights rather than observer status.

Action: Nigel initially, or Heather through the Covenant Council.

3) Payment of MCI grants

Action: Nigel; Lay Treasurer, Ken Twyble; Head of Finance.

4) The grants are paid out of the interest of an amount held in Trust – these monies need to be identified

Action: Heather to seek clarification from Head of Finance.

5) Explore the possibility of a single MCI Board of Education with no separate Southern Board

Action: Nigel in consultation with Dr Anita Gracie, General Secretary/Convener, Northern Board.

Timescale: Nigel to report back on all of the above to the December meeting of the Board.

16. Insurance Review (*papers 011_22.10_16a MCI Insurance Review 2022 & 011_22.10_16b MCI Insurance Update Sept 2022, previously circulated*)

Heather agreed to write on behalf of the Board expressing appreciation for the huge amount of work undertaken on our behalf by Graham Hohn who did not seek payment, just a donation to Fields of Life.

Action: Heather to follow up with WDR/WMP regarding Travel Insurance.

Timescale: as soon as practicable.

17. Policy Review - Safeguarding Policies (*papers 011_22.10_17a Taking Care 2022 & 011_22.10_17b Taking Care of All, previously circulated*)

In discussion with Nicky Blair, Safeguarding Officer, the following points were noted:

- the procedure for ensuring compliance could be included in the policy document

- Circuit Compliance with Safeguarding forms are due to be sent out this month
- an Executive Summary / FAQs would provide a useful, more user-friendly, reference point
- the policies are reviewed annually, and in the future will include reference to Spiritual Abuse.

Recommendations:

- 1) Safeguarding Board to report annually to the Governance Board the results of Circuit compliance reporting
- 2) Wording on Spiritual Abuse for incorporation into reviewed policy documents to be sent to Governance Board for consideration

Subject to these recommendations, the policy documents were approved

18. Reserves Policy – Implementation

Heather indicated that she will be talking with the Head of Finance and also colleagues in British Methodism to consider the various implications of the Reserves Policy. It was thought that an article in the Methodist Newsletter might be a useful way of communicating the importance of this in the context of Mission. The Biblical context is a vital element, and time could be allocated to it at Conference.

19. Statutory Trustees: Memorial re Investment Policy

The response from Epworth Investment Management (*011_22.10_19 Epworth reply to MCI re Memorial*) had been previously circulated and was approved.

20. BCM – Memorandum of Understanding re Eileen Gardens Manse

The paper (*011_22.10_20 BCM - MOU re Eileen Gardens Manse, previously circulated*) was approved.

21. GB Communications with Connexion

In discussion, Board members sought to balance the importance of transparency for work being undertaken by the Board and gauging the level of interest amongst church members. It was suggested an article in the Methodist Newsletter every quarter may be a good way of indicating the main areas of work.

Action: Tony to write the article

Timescale: November

22. Any Other Business

The Property Board had requested approval for a loan of £278,000 to Lurgan High Street to cover the costs of repairs needed following the discovery of Dry Rot and Wet Rot in the 200-year-old building.

Approved, subject to a policy decision on interest rates to be applied being made at a later date.

23. Next Meeting: 10th November, Belfast

24. Closing prayer

Mr O'Connor expressed his thanks to the members of the Board and, there being no other business, he invited the President to close the meeting with prayer.

Tony O'Connor
10th November 2022