

Appendix 1

Facing into Poverty

Section One: Introduction and Remit

Conference 2022 passed these two paragraphs as part of a wider Resolution on poverty as it called:

“Conference also commends the partnership arrangement between the Council of Social Responsibility, Christians Against Poverty and the Trussell Trust as it seeks to encourage Methodists on the island of Ireland to Pray, Learn and Act with regard to poverty.

Furthermore, Conference directs the Council of Social Responsibility to gather information and reflect prayerfully on the nature of poverty on the island of Ireland and to report to Conference next year on a series of evidenced-based recommendations to local administrations – north and south – and to the Methodist people with regard to reducing poverty as well as encouraging practical actions to support those most in need.”

The partnership between the Council of Social Responsibility, Christians Against Poverty and the Trussell Trust did seek to encourage Methodists on the island of Ireland to Pray, Learn and Act with regard to poverty by the following actions:

Articles and posts on MCI Facebook and website as well as the Methodist Newsletter:

- Larne Food Bank
- The effect of poverty on the 5 City Missions
- Mental Health and poverty
- Child Poverty
- Debt awareness
- Disability and poverty.

The effect of the present cost-of-living crisis as it has impacted on people as well as volunteers and employees of our partner charities and the 5 City Missions is reported on in Section Three below.

Play it by Ear was commissioned to produce 3 impactful monologues as follows:

- The Crisis: Homelessness

- The Crisis: Poverty which deals with the heat / eat dilemma
- The Crisis: Help? which focuses on the help offered by the likes of CAP with budgeting.

A detailed resource bank of relevant material on poverty is available on the MCI website.

Briefing material was provided to the President and Lay Leader in advance of their visit to Lisburn Food Bank and Seymour Street’s Damask project.

The partnership also resourced a Connexional Prayer meeting via Zoom.

CSR championed the Warm Space initiative and, with the willing support of the District Superintendents, an interactive data base of congregational and circuit outreach such as Warm Space, Food Bank, Uniform Bank or Baby Bank by way of illustration has been compiled as reported below in Section 5.

Finally, four podcasts on the theology of poverty and the Christian imperative to do all in the eradication of poverty has been commissioned. Section Four in this report refers to this Christian imperative.

In Section Two, the Council has gathered information and reflected prayerfully on the nature of poverty on the island of Ireland in order to report to Conference on a series of recommendations to local administrations – north and south – and to the Methodist people with regard to reducing poverty as well as encouraging practical action to support those most in need. These can be found in Section Six.

In all of this activity the three pillars of the partnership have been prevalent: to pray, to learn and to act. The two-fold purpose has to be to support with compassionate practical action those individuals and families who are most in need, and the Missions and charities working alongside them, as well as to act with passionate conviction to eliminate poverty in the first instance.

Section Two: Some basic facts

<p>Northern Ireland: Official figures in Northern Ireland rely on an income poverty measure only set at 60 per cent of median household income. (=£18,470 or £355pw)</p> <p>Source: Department for Communities and Department of the Economy</p>	<p>Republic of Ireland: Official figures in Ireland rely on both an income poverty measure - set at 60 per cent of median household income (=€15,158 or €291.50pw) and an indicator of material deprivation. Sources: Central Statistics Office and Social Justice Ireland</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 370,000 people (17%) are living below the poverty line in NI. • Nearly one in every three is a child. Along with their parents/carers, they make up nearly 60% people living below the poverty line. More than two in every three children in poverty live in households where someone is working. The vast majority of the remainder (c. 40,000) are being looked after by the 23,000 lone parents living in poverty. • Working age people without dependent children account for nearly one in every three people living below the poverty line. • Around 43,000 working age people (without dependent children) living in poverty are people with disability. • Almost one in every three pensioners in poverty (just under 10,000 of the 31,000) lives alone. Single pensioners make up about a quarter of all pensioners. • The majority (60%) of people in poverty live outside the wider Belfast metropolitan area. Derry City and Strabane has the highest poverty rate of all council areas at 27%. • 15,768 presented to NIHE as homeless of which 6700 were children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 595,000 people (11.6%) are living below the poverty line in RoI. • About 135,000 children up to the age of 18 or 13.6% are living in poverty. • This rises for a single adult with a child(ren) to 22.8% • For those over 65 years of age 11.9% are in poverty but this rises to 21.5% if a pensioner is living singly. • The highest category, albeit combined, is for those who are either with long term illness or with a disability and stands at 39.1% • Regarding location and proximity to Dublin, 8% for those living in Dublin and the Midlands are recorded as living in poverty (but there will be pockets of much higher poverty levels), whereas the northern and western counties are recorded at 18% in poverty. • 9,825 people are homeless of which 2,811 were children. • 5,143 single adults and 1,238 families are living in emergency accommodation.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3481 families were accepted by the NIHE as being homeless 	
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Some caveats to above table	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistics have been extracted separately from sources; there is no comparative information as such and next to no comparative academic research has been undertaken. • The above does not compare like with like as there are considerable differences to tax, social security payments, what areas are particularly targeted and the time it takes to get payments into bank accounts, housing costs and availability. • The housing crisis (ROI) is putting enormous pressure on many people. Many have to make severe choices about expenditure due to very high rents. While not necessarily showing up in these statistics, people's wellbeing is also greatly negatively affected by the unavailability of housing. • Whilst both jurisdictions measure poverty at 60% of median income, indices of material deprivation are measured in the ROI, the nature and extent of which can vary annually. • Whilst these are up-to-date figures (published 2022) at the time of submission, they are somewhat "skewed" due to the pandemic and they do not take account of the cost-of-living crisis / energy prices and food inflation as a result of the war in Ukraine. 	

Section Three: Lived experience of charities and Missions

We had originally considered seeking the views of those with lived experience of poverty but decided that it would be imposing too many demands on the already over-stretched staff and volunteers of the organisations we are partnering with as well as the City Missions. So we sought responses from our partners and Missions as to their experience as a charity over the last couple of years and what they thought would be their expectations and challenges over the next couple of years.

Christians Against Poverty

Times have been tough. Covid and then cost of living, really without a break, has been tough for us all. We thought we were seeing cost of living pressures during Covid, with people being at home more etc (and we were) but nothing like what came next without, really, any time for people to recover.

Our amazing frontline worked on through it all to help our clients, in so many practical ways, while times were and are tough for them also. Clients' cases are getting more complex - especially around mental health. One in five of our clients last year (2022 Client report based on 2021 client data) said poor mental health was a major reason for their debt. And debt is a big driver in mental health problems so there is a cycle that needs to be broken.

And then, unsurprisingly given the financial climate, you factor in falling incomes for charities like ours and the churches we partner with, just when we are needed the most, and this creates even more pressure on us all.

More complex cases, as has been happening. Deficit or broken budgets which is already a huge problem (about 50% of cases UK wide are now in the category) will continue to be a massive issue.

These cases are not proceeding and cannot proceed because client's budgets do not add up and they can't move on. There is no money to pay into a repayment plan and no money for court fees so they are "stuck"- placing pressure on themselves, on debt advisors/frontline, as they don't see people progress, and on the sector as a whole, because people in this situation will have to keep coming back to us or others and there isn't sufficient capacity for this.

Trussell Trust

Food banks in the Trussell Trust network provided 1.3 million emergency food parcels across between April to September this year - a record number for this six-month period. The cost-of-living emergency is impacting all of us. But for people on the lowest incomes, it's simply impossible.

From April to September this year we have given out 32,000 emergency parcels to people in Northern Ireland. 13,400 of these were provided for children. This represents a 25% increase from last year and a 194% increase compared to five years ago. Almost 10,000 people in Northern Ireland were forced to turn to a food bank in the Trussell Trust network for the first time. It's not right that people in our community are needing a charity's help to put food on the table. Everyone in Northern Ireland should be able to afford the essentials. But the rise in the cost of living is pushing more and more families

through the doors of food banks.

According to new research by the Trussell Trust, one in five people referred to a food bank in the Trussell Trust network are in households where someone is working. This comes as food banks in our network are telling us, for the first time, that need for emergency food is outstripping donations as the cost of living emergency leads to a drastic increase in the number of people forced to turn to charity for support. The current cost-of-living emergency is built on an existing crisis of destitution in our communities. The need for food banks has been steadily rising over the years as food banks and other frontline organisations plug the gaps in an insufficient social security system that is unable to protect people from the most severe forms of hardship. As our statistics show, the level of need for emergency food parcels seen in the mid-year period 2022/23 is more than we distributed in the entirety of the year five years ago.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have served to erode households' financial resilience even further and have weakened the social security system. The increase in need for emergency food parcels that we have seen across the Trussell Trust network in the last 6 months, demonstrates how the cost of living crisis is forcing more people to the doors of food banks more frequently, because they simply do not have enough money to afford the essentials.

We also sought the response from the City Missions as to the impact the cost of living crisis was having on staff and on their organisation as a business / charity. The responses are generic.

Impact on staff from the 5 City Missions

Staff are facing increased concerns from Service Users. They encounter people not eating properly, nor tending to their medical needs due to the expense of travel, and not socialising. The concern of Covid has not entirely gone away for many older people. Staff are aware that a lot of people whom they support do not have family members to help. The fear is for those people who do not have the Missions to support them will have no one to advocate for them.

The worries and concerns of Service Users impacts on staff wellbeing. It is, as has been described, a new strain of "compassion fatigue". One respondent commented "You get into this line of work to do good. To help people. It's getting harder and harder. The need of people is overwhelming, and I am not sure how much more of watching people suffer I can take". Added to this are the real fears that staff have annually or towards the end of the life-time of a funding stream in regard to their job retention.

Coupled with this, staff have their own personal concerns about affordability of travel and general living costs. Unsurprisingly, the cost of living crisis affects Mission staff just as much as anyone else.

Impact on Missions as businesses / charities

The 5 Missions vary considerably in location, outreach and resources but the mounting challenges being faced are common to all:

- Staff recruitment and retention: how can the charity sector compete with the supermarkets?
- Staff morale / wellbeing
- Increased waiting lists / demands matched by fears of reduced donations. The fear of reduced donations is considerable. More complex requests and cases are being referred to various services leading to a reduced throughput of Service Users, which in turn leads to people waiting longer for the service. This mirrors the issue of backlog in the health services.
- Energy and other costs
- Looking to expand social enterprise activities to generate additional funding streams, all in a very uncertain economic climate.

Section Four: Theological Reflection

Methodists in Ireland are encouraged to "*live wholeheartedly as followers of Jesus for the transformation of the world.*" What does that mean for the thousands living in poverty in Ireland and across the globe today? If the cost-of-living crisis is an urgent social need, what is the MCI missional response?

Christ did not only come to preach good news to the poor, but he also was a poor man. He was a Jewish man living under Roman rule under a system of exploitation.

When he said in Luke 6 "*Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God*", two women read those words. One a single mum with a toddler in rented accommodation, her electric meter show 10 units left, no benefits expected for 4 days and little food in the fridge. The other, a single employed mum, who pays her electric bill by direct debit, can afford childcare, and the cupboards are well filled. To one the words will relate to her lived experience hoping for help, to the other it could be dreams of a spiritual home.

Old Testament writers spoke on the social injustices of their day but also demanded that the people of faith took up the cause to defend those in crisis (Isaiah 1v 17 Proverbs 3: 8-9). Carrying that into the New Testament, this section addresses the response of the

early church to poverty and poses the question are there lessons to take forward? What are today's churches missional imperatives from the early church stories?

Here are four early church lessons that brought new perspectives on society and the treatment of the poor.

1] To be Christlike in adopting an attitude of poverty. To one Jesus said, "go *and sell what you have and give it to the poor*" to another "*How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*". Paul speaks of Jesus "*Though he was rich yet for our sake he became poor, so that by his poverty we became rich*". In following Jesus, a generous attitude to poverty is a faithful way to go. The imbalance of power that exists between the haves and have-nots could be addressed by the church adopting a simpler attitude to the accumulation of wealth by living a life of simplicity and service.

2] A sharing of resources so that no one need be poor. Acts 2; 44-45 gives one the earliest descriptions of the church. A community built on sharing their resources for mutual wellbeing is model for the church which has application beyond. When Jesus said, "*the poor, you will always have*", implies that the church will always be with the poor. The task of getting to know the poor and seeking to share life with all remains a challenge.

3] Finding Jesus in strange places. The parable of the Sheep and the Goats {Matt: 25 31-46} tells of faithful people being given opportunity to be Jesus to the naked, the stranger and to miss the opportunity leads to judgement. If you look hard enough you may find Jesus in the lives of the prisoner, the poor and the hungry. If there is no desire for mutual friendship, then there is no commitment to true love because mutual love only exists among equals.

4] A New Social Order. When in the temple Jesus lifted the scroll and quoted "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, Release for the captives.... Sight of the blind... oppressed go free... and proclaim the year of the Lord favour.*" (Luke 4: 18) Was Christ calling for a new world order that the church should be in the place of challenging injustice and demand social action? The fact we live in a country reliant on Food Banks shouts of a failed system that the church should be speaking out on.

As Gustavo Gutierrez writes "*but the poor person does not exist as an inescapable fact of destiny. His or her existence is not politically neutral, and it is not ethically innocent. The poor are a by-product of the system in which we live and for which we are responsible. They are marginalised by our social and cultural world.... Hence the poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order.*"

There can be no doubt of the rise of concern among Christians to address the issues of poverty with the giving of money, time, skill to help, but care is needed we don't create a "doing to" rather than "a being with" missional attitude.

Section Five: What is being done around Methodism?

Methodist people have always recognised that caring for those who find themselves in difficult circumstances is an important strand of Christian ministry. This is clearly demonstrated through the breadth and depth of work carried out by our five mission churches over many years.

In 2023 all three of our Districts participated in a survey to identify how many circuits were responding to needs they identified in their communities by developing a local ministry or supporting a ministry established by others. Of particular interest for this paper is the number of these initiatives which were commenced in response to the current economic crisis. Forty circuits across all districts responded to the on-line survey. Twenty-two circuits had commenced at least one new ministry between 2020 and 2023 giving a total of thirty-seven new ministries across the circuits. The most commonly reported ministries were warm welcome space type initiatives (14) and foodbanks (12) community meals (4), baby banks (4) and warm coats/clothing (3). Twenty of these ministries were delivered or supported in partnership with other churches in the community or with external voluntary organisations. It is important to note the commitment to long-established ministries reported from 20 circuits, (NB: some of these reported new additional initiatives since 2020) which responded to local need in earlier years but who undoubtedly will have experienced greater demand with the recent cost-of-living crisis.

Section Six: Call to Action

Pray

	Type of Action	Level / Action Lead
1.	Pray regularly individually or in a prayer network for all those who are vulnerable, affected by the present cost of	Individual, Congregation,

	living crisis and are affected adversely by poverty and deprivation.	Circuit, District, Connexion
2.	Pray regularly individually or in a prayer network for our partners in NI Christians Against Poverty and the Trussell Trust; other similar agencies and the 5 Methodist City Missions and the Child Care Society that they may affect meaningful change.	Individual, Congregation, Circuit, District, Connexion
3.	Highlight poverty at least once a year in Sunday Worship possibly using worship resources from Church Action Against Poverty perhaps on its designated Sunday or use https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/ as a Lenten Bible Study.	Congregation, Circuit, District

Learn

	Type of Action	Level / Action Lead
		Individual, Congregation, Circuit, CSR, District, Governance Board, Connexion
4.	Read more about Child Poverty Action Group, Depaul Ireland, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Save the Children (UK), St Vincent de Paul, The Children's Society or Social Justice Ireland and any other relevant charity working to eradicate child, or any other form of, poverty. Listen to podcasts from Social Justice Ireland and the like	Individual, Council on Social Responsibility
5.	Become more informed by finding out more about the needs in your local area and learn from others involved as CAP Advisors / Trussell Trust food bank volunteers or similar charities e.g. Storehouse and any other relevant charity working to eradicate child, or any other form of, poverty.	Individual, Congregation, Circuit
6.	Have a better understanding of the correlation between business practices, employment prospects and job security and poverty	Individual, Council of Social Responsibility

7.	Have a better understanding of the correlation between housing provision, homelessness and poverty.	Individual, Council of Social Responsibility
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Act

	Type of Action	Level / Action Lead
		Individual, Congregation, Circuit, CSR, District, Governance Board, Connexion
8.	Before voting at election time, consider prayerfully which party has the most effective anti-poverty policies / strategy.	Individual
9.	Support / volunteer / set up a local Baby Bank, Food Bank, School Uniform Bank, Breakfast Club, Homework Club, Summer Scheme, Warm Spaces.	Individual, Congregation, Circuit
10.	Support / volunteer / donate to the 5 Methodist Missions work with children / families / single adults or donate to the Child Care Society.	Individual, Congregation, Circuit
11.	In the Republic, join with other stakeholders to lobby government for change such as Social Justice Ireland or the Children's Rights Alliance Ireland's No Child 2020 campaign in the Republic which called on the Irish government to ensure that no child should be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hungry • homeless • be without timely, affordable healthcare • be blocked from having an education • be excluded from society. 	Connexion
12.	In the Republic of Ireland, learn more about and monitor the work of the Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit in the Taoiseach's Office.	Individual, Council of Social Responsibility

13.	In the Republic of Ireland, to increase the rate of the Jobseekers Benefit to the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment rate of €300.	Connexion
14.	In Northern Ireland, join with other stakeholders to lobby government for change removing the two-child limit would mean 11,000 fewer children in poverty and introducing a £20 Child Payment for families eligible for means-tested benefits would lift a further 27,000 children out of poverty: a combined reduction of about 25%. This would cost in the region of £56m per year.	Connexion
15.	In the spirit of the “jubilee”, to lobby government in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to remove debt deductions to allow some breathing space for families.	Connexion
16.	In Northern Ireland, join with other stakeholders to lobby government for a one-off payment of £500 to those entitled to Disability Allowances or Carers Benefit. This would cost in the region of £194m.	Connexion
17.	In Northern Ireland, join with other stakeholders to lobby government to re-instate the £20 per week uplift. According to the Department for Communities, the £20 uplift, which translated to £86.67 per month, was withdrawn from 134,000 people in Northern Ireland from October 6, 2021. Over 44,000 households with children have a Universal Credit claim in payment meaning that around 83,930 children were impacted by its removal. This would cost in the region of £143m.	Connexion
18.	In Northern Ireland, for those who receive the Winter Fuel Allowance and in the Republic of Ireland, those who receive the Fuel Allowance but don't actually need it – donate it to an appropriate charity or Methodist Mission / Child Care Society.	Individual
19.	In Northern Ireland, join with other stakeholders to lobby government, especially HM Treasury, to ensure that the promise to maintain the European Social Fund is activated with immediate effect.	Connexion

22.	Bring a paper to Conference 2024 on the arguments, consequences and potential implications for MCI, and its attendant agencies, of adopting the Real Living Wage in NI and its equivalent in the Republic of Ireland.	Governance Board
21.	Bring a paper to Conference 2024 on how the Governance Board might disperse at least 10% of MCI reserves to a criteria-based fund to which congregations, Circuits and the 5 City Missions could apply for seed money and/or match funding in order to initiate or continue a poverty-focussed project.	Governance Board
22.	Continue to bring poverty issues to the attention of MCI and to provide an update within three years on how these recommendations have been put into practice.	Council of Social Responsibility

Appendix 2

Draft Windsor Framework Press Statement

The Council of Social Responsibility of the Methodist Church in Ireland notes with appreciation the stance of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, M.P. when in announcing the Windsor Framework he wisely suggested that people and parties should have time to study and reflect before pronouncement. We believe that time should be spent wisely and prayerfully as the Council, too, desires to do before producing a more definitive response.

Before reflecting on a number of pertinent questions, we would like to acknowledge the hard work of so many UK, EU and other officials culminating in, and perhaps generated by, the clear goodwill, trust and respect between the UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, M.P. and the EU President, Ms Ursula von der Leyen.

It is also relevant for all to continue to reflect on the outcome of the Brexit referendum result, 23rd June 2016 which recorded nationally Leave 51.9% and Remain 48.1% whereas the result locally was paradoxically the Reverse with Remain 55.8% and Leave 44.2%. As the principle of consent is a cornerstone of democracy, the Methodist Church in Ireland accepted the decision of the referendum result, has sought to honour it yet also determined to get the best for all through supporting constructive engagement and negotiation.

Indeed, the Council of Social Responsibility advocated a number of generic principles for the negotiation (NI Protocol) phase which, arguably, still apply to ongoing relationships and negotiations; those being:

- commitment to prayer
- maintaining and developing deeper understanding, trust and cooperation between peoples, governments and supra-national institutions
- balancing the supra-national, national, regional and sectoral interests with generosity to others
- articulating and addressing the concerns of the marginalised
- seeking the common good.

In relation to the specifics of the Windsor Framework and in attempting to come to a definitive position in the round, a number of questions might usefully be considered as follows:

Timing of response: Whilst no external pressure should be applied to anyone individual or party just to satisfy certain calendar events, no matter their optics or historic significance, nevertheless is it not incumbent on all to be expedient in coming to a determination as so many people are crying out to the local politicians for executive decision and legislative action in order to mitigate the cost of living crisis, the horrendous NHS waiting lists and applying united pressure on the UK Treasury to honour its commitment to at least match the former EU Social Fund to so many charities be they single sector or cross-community, other projects which offer employment and hope, now presently jeopardised, as well as marginalised cross-border communities, in full and in a very timely manner? In truth, responsibility does not just lie with the Westminster Government but also with the local political parties in their abdication of forming an Executive and devolved institutions. Local civil servants have their responsibilities as well. The Council, therefore, urges the Westminster Government to double down and honour its promises and, at the same time, strongly encourage the Permanent Secretaries of the Communities, Economy, Finance, Health and Justice Departments, who have part-funded these services to date to find continued funding for them going forward, particularly in the context that they fall under the NI Assembly's statutory responsibility. As it is written in Proverbs 3:27 "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act."

Trade: It is acknowledged that even with the Windsor Framework there will be a minutiae of bureaucracy between GB and NI but is this something that can be accommodated in order to have unique access to the EU single market?

Petitions of concern: Is the “Stormont brake” sufficient to address the democratic deficit allowing minorities to raise their concern about any newly proposed EU law as it might affect trade in NI? Is it better for those with concerns to seek to use their good offices through constructive engagement in the outworkings of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement institutions in the first instance rather than seeking recourse to such mechanisms?

Final thoughts: naïve presentational matters aside, is the undoubted reduction in bureaucracy in east / west trade, the now minimal role of the EU and other considerable achievements outlined in the Windsor Framework sufficient to endorse it, albeit with certain reservations if needs be, and, consequently, to participate fully and constructively in the devolved institutions?

Appendix 3

Statement on 25th Anniversary of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement

Five years ago, to mark the 20th Anniversary of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement the Methodist Church in Ireland issued a brief statement under the title - Enduring Principles for a Shared and Hopeful Future.

In it we highlighted these 5 principles:

1. Consent. Article 3 of the Constitution of Ireland has enshrined that “a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people, democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island.” The Republic only seeks such a united Ireland when people are “in harmony and friendship” and recognising “all the diversity of their identities and traditions.” True consent has to be free and informed and will, in effect, require a large proportion of the unionist population to give such consent in order for any constitutional change to have the necessary full democratic support.
2. Respect Identities. The commitment in the Belfast Agreement “to partnership, equality and mutual respect” ought to endure. Winning hearts and minds to a shared and mutually beneficial political endeavour is more important than seeking to end land borders in the short term without full and free consent. The identities of both nationalists and unionists require to be equally recognised at all times in the governance of Northern Ireland and in the relationships on the island as a whole.
3. Social and Economic Well-being. In the wake of Brexit, the correct approach by political leaders ought to be to develop a *Good Neighbour* policy which seeks to optimum social and economic well-being of all the people of Northern Ireland

and of the Republic without any unhelpful or overt pressure to change the constitutional status of Northern Ireland in the short or medium term. Brexit will require imaginative arrangements for Northern Ireland so that the Belfast Agreement is honoured and vital economic interests are protected. Such arrangements are best designed and are best freely supported by both unionist and nationalist on the basis that they make best economic sense, will lead to the optimum economic development North and South of the border and thus serve the well-being of all the people of the island.

4. Responsibilities of the British and Irish Governments. There is an urgent need for both Governments to exercise fully and effectively their responsibilities for 'all-island and cross-border co-operation on non-devolved issues' in order to secure the social and economic well-being of the peoples of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. This is their legal responsibility either in conjunction with a Northern Ireland administration, if such an administration is re-established, or in the absence of a devolved administration.
5. Spirit of Concord Required for Devolved Government. The 'Declaration of Support', which prefaced the Belfast Agreement, speaks of a 'spirit of concord'. It outlined the 'deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering' incurred in the 'tragedies of the past' and hence, the need to '*firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.*' The reaffirmation of 'total and absolute commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means or resolving differences on political issues' and the commitment to 'endeavour to strive in every practical way towards reconciliation and rapprochement within the framework of democratic and agreed arrangements' remain essential imperatives.

Now five years on, what can we say?

Firstly, we still hold firmly to the principles that are outlined above. Indeed, looking at them again now, we lament that these principles do not seem to have informed much of the political discourse in the last five years.

Secondly, we note, again with much lament, that for most of the past five years the Executive and the Assembly have not functioned properly. In turn each of the two largest parties have found reasons to exercise their veto on the political process. Each may have had reasonable political issues that were of legitimate concern to them and their voters, but to paralyse the system for so long has caused great frustration.

It has discouraged many, particularly younger people, from believing that devolved politics can function in Northern Ireland in a way that makes a real difference to the vital, everyday issues of health, education, the economy, and so on. It is all very well to say that the Agreement has brought a significant measure of peace and that things are much better now than during the 'Troubles'. Those of us who lived through the Troubles know that, but the next generation(s) need to see prosperity and progress alongside the peace. Perpetual political logjams seem to make that a remote possibility – surely, we can do better?

Thirdly, Brexit has caused more problems than we might have imagined. Perhaps we were naïve five years ago when we said – “Brexit will require imaginative arrangements for Northern Ireland so that the Belfast Agreement is honoured and vital economic interests are protected.”

As we write this we are awaiting responses (particularly from the DUP) to the Windsor Framework. Will the present logjam break, and Stormont be up and running again in time for the 25th Anniversary (or shortly afterwards)? Who knows? Yet what is certain is that there must be some way of resolving the complex set of relationships – North/South; East/West; and now also UK/EU.

Finally, as we have always done we call our Methodist people, and all people of faith, to be patient, persistent and prayerful in working together with any and all who will work with us to build a better society, for the glory of God and the blessing of all our neighbours.

Appendix 4

Written Evidence from the Methodist Church in Ireland

for the NI Assembly All-Party Group (APG)

Phase 2 consultation on reducing harm related to gambling

Introduction

A sub-group of the Council for Social Responsibility of the Methodist Church in Ireland has recently been reading into the extent and social consequences of gambling in Ireland. The Council itself has no expertise on this subject but has Reviewed literature from sources such as government groups, campaign groups and local media. The Methodist mission churches have most exposure to problem gambling and the harm to individuals and their families.

The Methodist Church is most concerned about the extent of problem gambling in Northern Ireland, in particular:

- the harm and suffering families experience from having a loved one addicted to gambling,
- the iniquitous advertising strategies designed to lure people into gambling activity,
- the inadequacy of the law governing gambling and
- the absence of any enforcement of existing law.

However, we are also most encouraged by the approach and determination shown by the APG on reducing harm related to Gambling and applaud what you are doing. The reality of no sitting Assembly and the mounting priorities awaiting a newly functioning Executive creates foreboding that new gambling regulation is a long way off!

Public Health Approach

We strongly endorse a public health approach to reducing harm from gambling. A Public Health Strategy should be led by the Department of Health, but it needs to be a cross departmental strategy with commitment from and objectives for the Depts for Community, Justice and Education. Public Health Policy needs to address;

- education of adults and young people on the harm some individuals and families can suffer from gambling.
- advertising campaigns on gambling with money you can't afford to lose, knowing when to seek help, where to go for help etc.
- Marketing restrictions on TV, in sport and on social media.
- Treatment provision and development of specialist services.
- Data collection for monitoring and surveillance.

We are not aware of research into the factors contributing to a significantly higher rate of problem gambling in Northern Ireland compared to the other regions of the UK or the Republic of Ireland. It would be important to understand the higher prevalence so that public health interventions could be more targeted.

Although it is recognised that due to the problems with Governance in NI, new legislation will take longer than is desirable but we believe that the departments should move ahead with the development of the public health strategy under the direction of Permanent secretaries if necessary.

Gambling Related Harm

One report we read suggested that there were 42,000 problem gamblers in NI, we also know that for each problem gambler, on average a further six people are affected, approximately 250,000 people. Problem gambling leads to a whole range of problems including;

Mental health problems; anxiety, depression and tragically suicide.

Financial problems; debt, homelessness, bankruptcy, job loss, family poverty.

Crime; fraud, theft.

Social and personal; family stress, divorce, children stigmatised, social isolation, health and social inequalities, domestic abuse, bereavement and loss.

Mitigating Harm

It is alarming to read that children as young as 11 have problems with gambling and that 500,000 children in the UK have admitted to betting regularly.

We are pleased to learn that Young Gamblers Education Trust has extended their Young Peoples Harm Prevention Programme to NI. Programmes such as this should be promoted and supported through the Dept. of Education.

Advertising

Gambling advertising is so pervasive that it is impossible to avoid, it normalises an activity which is potentially harmful and children and young people are exposed to it through television, sports sponsorship and social media. There must be greater control over when advertising is permitted.

It is unlikely that NI could regulate advertising on national television channels so any change may be a matter for the Council of Devolved Governments and ROI.

According to a June 2020 study, the 'whistle-to-whistle' ban on gambling ads reduced the number of ads seen by children by 97%. Advertising should be prohibited online unless a person opts into receiving adverts.

There should be a prohibition on children being in any premises where gambling takes place and restrictions on gambling advertising on events involving children.

Clearly future gambling legislation will have to address on line (remote) gambling. The legislation should cover young people gaming within online video games using so called "skins" and "loot" boxes and the increase in gambling on e-sports. (Perhaps this should be

included in the public health strategy as it relates to gambling prevention in young people.)

Another concern is the prominent display of scratch cards in many local shops. One of our Council members while buying his morning paper counted up 20 varieties of scratch cards on prominent display at the check-out. He also noted the repeating loop advertising the National Lottery, The Lotto and then the Euro Millions.

It prompted him to ask this question. Confectionery has been removed from the check-out area. Tobacco products are now stored behind a door. Is it not time the Display Cabinet for Scratch Cards should also be placed in a less prominent place in the store?

Gambling Products and Public Health

FOBTs have been described as the crack cocaine of gambling as they have been shown to be more addictive than other forms of gambling. The fact that the large bookmakers have voluntarily lowered the maximum bet on a FOBT to £2 is to be welcomed but this is not a statutory requirement, and we cannot be assured that all bookmakers have adopted this. This highly addictive product clearly causes harm and has to be subject to greater controls and attention in the public health strategy.

While most physical FOBTs now have a £2 maximum bet, there is no limit on the amount you can bet and the speed at which you can bet online. This form of betting is available 24/7. This is complex but requires urgent attention. It is illegal to knowingly sell alcohol to a drunk person, there must be a parallel principle for the gambling addict.

Finally.

As members of the Methodist Church, we have deep theological objections to the basic principles that lie behind gambling. We encourage our members not to participate in any forms of gambling. We recognise that not everyone shares these views – including some in other Christian traditions. However, we hope that almost everyone will agree that more needs to be done to prevent gambling related harm, particularly for those who are young, vulnerable and/or addicted.

We commend the work being done by the APG on this important issue and look forward to seeing further progress and positive outcomes.