

Past Cases Review - members were reminded that Judith Gillespie, Independent Chair of the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Mother & Baby Homes and Clerical Abuse, at a meeting in November 2020 had expressed appreciation of the Past Cases Review (PCR) being undertaken by the Church.

Agreed: an update from the PCR Vice Chair, Rev Dr Stephen Skuce, to be brought to the December meeting.

c. Working Party on the Role of the President

Following on from the direction that this Working Party include consideration of the Role of the Lay Leader, permission was sought:

- to extend the time to complete the work, with a final report coming in 2023 instead of 2022
- for two people, who could speak with authority to the role of Lay Leader, to be added to the group - with the Chair of the Working Party and the General Secretary delegated to make approaches

Agreed

d. Legal issue

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. A submission has been made requesting a preliminary hearing.

e. Service

Information was given on the plans for the Service of Reflection and Hope on the Centenary of the Partition of Ireland and the formation of Northern Ireland – due to take place in St Patricks Cathedral in Armagh on 21st October. There will be many young people taking part in the service, and the President will be the preacher.

The service is due to be broadcast across the BBC and on RTE, and copies of a Centenary Prayer are being distributed to all churches across the island of Ireland.

f. Wesley College

The Board of Governors have identified that the current Constitution of Wesley College is not fit for purpose and is in need of major revision, or even to be re-written. Assurances have been made that the relationship between the school and MCI will not be undermined – it is foundational to the ethos of the school; the teaching of Religious Education will not be compromised; and the Governance Board will be kept informed of progress.

Agreed: Work can proceed on the revision of the Constitution, and to be re-written if that is deemed necessary.

6. Administrative Items

a. Re-naming of Lisburn & Dromore Circuit

The General Secretary reported that members of the Lisburn & Dromore Circuit (including Ballynahinch and Donard) have continued their co-operative working for the benefit of the gospel and wished the Circuit to be re-named Lagan Valley and South Down Circuit.

Agreed, and this change to take effect immediately.

b. Update on Board Membership

Rev Dr Tom McKnight will take leave of absence from the Board due to health reasons, and therefore his name will not be submitted as a Charity Trustee until he is able to attend meetings and fulfil the role.

Mr Tony O'Connor will bring an updated policy document on the operations of the Governance Board to the January meeting.

c. Appointment of Chairpersons for Ministries Team and Safeguarding Board

It was reported that the Chair of the Learning & Development Committee of the Ministries Team is Mike Anderson. Nobody has yet been appointed as Chair for the Safeguarding Board. It is recognised that this is a very important role, and for the right person to be found.

7. Finance

Mr Paul Cummings reported that the Chairs of the 3 sub-committees had had an initial contact with the Chief Financial Officer, Ms Gillian Laney, and have set up a meeting with her for 24th November. A report to be brought to the Governance Board following that meeting.

In discussion concern was expressed about the current workload on the Finance Team, because of the ongoing introduction of the accounting system, and on the General Secretary's office. It was reported that an application had been made for a grant from the Joseph Rank Trust which would enable the extension of the contract of Ms Sharon Brown as Accountant. In addition, an application has been submitted to the Rank Trust for initial funding for two years towards the new post of Executive Assistant to support the work of the General Secretary and Ms Gillian Skillen, Operations Manager. The grant from the Rank Trust would make such an appointment possible two years sooner than otherwise.

8. The Role of the President's Advisory Committee (PAC) [Paper 002_21.10_8]

A Paper, prepared by the General Secretary and previously circulated, clarified the remit and responsibilities of both the PAC and the Governance Board.

The significance of the work done by the PAC was recognised, and its role in specific areas was identified:

- where there is prolonged conflict which has not been successfully resolved at District level
- in matters of ministerial discipline, and hearing Candidating appeals

Proposal:

With clear structures in place the Governance Board can be informed of any matters which could affect the Church and is assured that they are being handled well. Oversight is ensured by the inclusion of a standard item on the Governance Board Agenda 'Is there any Report from the PAC'.

Agreed

Action: The appropriate changes to the Manual of Laws to be processed and brought to the Board for approval.

9. Charity Regulator Compliance

a Matters relating to the Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA)

As MCI is registered with the Charities Regulatory Authority in the Republic of Ireland, there is a requirement to be compliant with the Charities Governance Code, and to file a return confirming such compliance by the end of October.

Board members (the Charity Trustees) were asked to confirm the following:

1. They have read the Charity Regulator's guidance on 'What is a Charity' found online at charitiesregulator.ie

Confirmed

2. They have read (and have available for reference at Board meetings) MCI's Governing Document (Manual of Laws, including the Acts), found online at irishmethodist.org

Confirmed

3. They confirm that the charity's main purpose(object) continues to be the advancement of religion:

"The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church, which is the Body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation. It ever remembers that, in the Providence of God, Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith, and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its divinely appointed mission." from *The Constitution of the Methodist Church in Ireland. This is summarised and more clearly expressed for a contemporary world in our purpose statement (as publicised on our website "The Methodist Church in Ireland is a community of people drawn together by God's love who seek to live wholeheartedly as followers of Jesus for the transformation of the world."* (irishmethodist.org - Story so far — The Methodist Church in Ireland

Confirmed

b Matters pertaining to both the CRA and Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI)

1. Are there any risks of possible harm arising from our purpose or how we carry out our purpose?

A range of potential risks were considered and discussed, and the Board delegated authority to the Audit, Risk & Budget Committee through the Chief Financial Officer to make the final submission.

2. The Governance Board have considered the public benefit requirement and developed and agreed the following **public benefit statement**:

“The Methodist Church in Ireland meets the public benefit requirement by providing to its members and the general public by making known the Christian Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ through the advancement of religion.

The direct benefits which flow from the purposes of the Church include the gaining of an understanding of the doctrines of the evangelical faith based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures, which is our supreme rule of faith and practice. Historically, this is rooted in John Wesley’s Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his sermons, together with “The Rules of the Society of the People called Methodists” drawn up by John and Charles Wesley in 1743, which the Church has, over time developed, leading to spiritual and moral development and opportunities in response to Bible teaching. In turn, these lead to practical expressions of Christian beliefs and standards in the local community, such as through the care of those in need (including people who are sick, living with disability and bereaved).

Generally, the above benefits are delivered locally by local churches (known in Irish Methodism as “Societies”) and members, or are facilitated through circuits or districts, or are organised and delivered centrally. Local delivery is normally facilitated by central resources and subject to central approval. Public access is made known through the use of noticeboards, printed material, press advertisements, websites, social media, or in other ways.

The benefits are demonstrated through regular evaluation of the services and informal and ad hoc feedback from members, their families, and members of the public.

The purpose does not lead to harm. The only private benefit flowing from our purpose is related to Ordained Ministers, Mission Partners, and Lay Workers, who receive benefits as a result of their holding office or employment. However, this is incidental and necessary in order to further our charitable purpose. There are no other private benefits. The beneficiaries of this purpose are members, their families, other individuals with whom the Methodist Church in Ireland is in direct or indirect contact, the community in which pastoral services are provided and other communities throughout Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the world, which benefit from our engagement with and support of both Christian and secular organisations, charities and individual members of the public.”

Confirmed

The Board delegated to the Chair of the Board and the General Secretary to finalise the statement for submission.

3. The Governance Board have considered any Private Benefit and have concluded that it is necessary, reasonable and ancillary to the public benefit:

Private Benefit – Who gains

The only private benefit flowing from our purpose is related to Ordained Ministers, Mission Partners, and Lay Workers. Roles are evaluated based on relevant NJC scales (NI) and are reasonable for the roles. (Note that further work is ongoing in relation to scales for ROI, but it is unlikely that scales are higher than the benchmark). All expenses may only be claimed in line with the expenses policy approved by the Conference which are in line with Revenue/HMRC approved rates in each jurisdiction.

Private Benefit – How

Ordained Ministers, Mission Partners, and Lay Workers receive benefits as a result of their holding office or employment. However, this is incidental and necessary in order to further our charitable purpose. There are no other private benefits.

Private Benefit – Conflict of Interest

Where there is a potential conflict of interest, trustees should declare their conflict and have this recorded. Charity Trustees who have declared a conflict of interest should not participate in any vote on such matters. A record of conflicts of interests will be maintained based on the annual returns submitted by Board members.

Confirmed

c Matters pertaining to the CCNI

1. The Governance Board members have read and understood the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on working with children and young people which can be found in 'Working with children and vulnerable adults' | The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (charitycommissionni.org.uk).

Final statement

We jointly and severally declare that we have made the necessary checks required to safeguard our beneficiaries (re children, young people and vulnerable people)

Confirmed

10. Connexional Team Report

The Governance Review had clarified the role of the Connexional Team (CT) in resourcing the Conference and Connexion, in discerning vision, and developing strategy. Consequently, subgroups have been established and charged with:

- Scheduling - drawing up a programme and guidance for teams and departments which report to the CT to ensure appropriate accountability
- Strategic Development of Mission
- Supporting the Conference in the development of vision and mission

11. Domestic Violence Policy

Ms Grace McGurk presented a paper '[MCI Response to Domestic Abuse 2021](#)' which follows on from Council on Social Responsibility statements on Domestic Violence in 2015 and 2016, and is intended to provide churches with practical guidance in responding to situations. The work is now being continued under the umbrella of Adult Safeguarding.

The document includes:

- theological background, noting some harmful teaching and highlighting helpful teaching
- good practice – Prevention, Protection & Support
- reporting procedures

The policy document offers another strand of collaboration within MCI – between the Safeguarding Board, the Ministries Team which runs Safe Place Training and MWI Resources' No Excuse for Abuse'.

12. Governance Board Programme

Mr O'Connor presented the paper which had been previously circulated, a means of scheduling governance reports from committees and reviewing various policy documents. It was noted that the program would include performance reviews of both the Board and individual members.

13. Any Other Business: None

14. Next Meeting:

9th November at 10.00am in Edgehill House, including Training for Charity Trustees from 3.00-5.00pm

15. Closing prayer

There being no other business, Mr O'Connor invited the Lay Leader to close the meeting in prayer.

Tony O'Connor
9th November 2021