

**THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND**  
**GENERAL COMMITTEE**  
**Minutes of Online Meeting held on**  
**Wednesday 2nd December at 10.30am**

1. **Opening Devotions** were conducted by the Lay Leader.
2. **Hours of Sitting:** 10.30 am - 12.30 pm.; 1.30 pm - Close of business
3. **Welcome** All were welcomed to the meeting, especially Dr John Higgs, Secretary of the Joseph Rank Trust. A welcome was also extended to those joining via the Facebook livestream, attending as observers in a similar way to the 'gallery' at Conference.
4. **Apologies** had been received from Rev Sam McGuffin, Rev Fiona McCrea and Ms Claire Stewart. Any other apologies to be sent by message to the meeting host.
5. **Permission to attend:** Nicky Blair, Hollyanne Boyce, Roy Cooper, Paul Cummings, John Higgs, Gillie Hinds, David Holmes, Bevin Jennings, Simon Kinghan, Gillian Laney, Ruth Mathews, Peter Mercer, Tom Millar, Wayne Mulholland, Tony O'Connor, Rory O'Ferrall, Ruth Patterson, Tara Redmond and Gillian Skillen were given permission to attend, and to speak to their particular business
6. **Introductory comments** The Secretary of Conference guided members through some preliminary instructions for the meeting online.
7. **Sympathy and Greeting**

Expressions of sympathy have been sent to Rev Sam McGuffin on the death of his father, to Rev Philip and Rev Harold Agnew on the death of their mother, to Rev June Parke on the death of her mother, Rev Lorna Dreading on the death of her father, and to Mr Albert Sherrard on the death of his wife, Maryl.

Letters of greeting to been sent to those recognised in the Queen's Birthday honours list: Adrienne Stewart, Elizabeth Sillery, Jim McIlorum, Peter Little and Rodney McCullough.
8. **Correspondence:**
  - 8.1 A letter has been received from the Superintendent of North West Methodist Mission circuit. The Circuit is seeking to incorporate the Clarendon Women's Shelter into the Mission and need the consent of the Conference for this, so a report will be brought to the February meeting of the committee.
  - 8.2 In April 2020 the Joseph Rank Trust gave a £145,000 commitment to the Connexion. In early Autumn Dr John Higgs, invited the Church to make a Connexional application of £100 000. This money will be used as follows: (a) £50,000 to help the Church improve its online presence and outreach; (b) £10,000 to enable the Church offer 'Adventure Days' for young people who are struggling, and as a support to their youth workers; and (c) £40,000 to help the Church support local congregations as a significant upgrade of the accounting system is implemented.

Appreciation was expressed to the Joseph Rank Trust and to Dr Higgs both for the money, and also for the ongoing partnership and relationship.
9. **Minutes** of Meeting held on 8th October 2020. These were agreed.
10. **Matters Arising**
  - 10.1 **Date of Ordination Service**

The Ordination Service had been planned for 6th December but, with Covid restrictions this needs to be changed.

**Resolution:** Conference notes that Ordination Service scheduled to take place on 6<sup>th</sup> December has had to be postponed and gives permission to the Conference Contingency Planning Group to reschedule that service

**Agreed**
  - 10.2 **Review of the Role of the President**

The Secretary of Conference reported that a Working Party is still to be formed.

## 11. Report from the Working Party on Governance

Conference Agenda E1 (pages 120-190)

The Chair of the Working Party, Rev Dr Laurence Graham presented the resolution that Conference receives as a Notice of Motion to Conference 2021 the following amendments to the 2019 Manual of Laws (Conference Agenda pp 190- 210), allowing for necessary minor amendments. Prior to any discussion, the Memorial received from the Dublin South-City Circuit (previously circulated to members of the committee) was tabled.

### 11.2 Memorial from the Dublin South-City Circuit

Mr Rory O’Ferrall presented the Memorial which proposed delaying the process by one year to allow more time for further discussion at District / local level.

In response, Dr Graham set out the extent of consultation already undertaken, and said that more is already planned for the spring of 2021. Tony O’Connor, Convener of the Working Party, emphasised the need for proper governance structures to be put in place, and reminded the committee that our application to the Charity Commission cannot be delayed, which would result in local societies needing to be registered separately.

Following discussion, Mr Holmes from the Dublin South-City Circuit commented that the sessions held online for Treasurers were, understandably, focussed on financial aspects, but therefore did not cover wider aspects. He felt the proposals were not widely known by members of congregations, and Mr O’Ferrall made a plea for Circuits to be well-informed.

**Vote:** In favour of the Memorial, 2; Against, 42

The Memorial having failed, the substantive resolution was discussed, with some minor alterations to wording being suggested. These were noted by Dr Graham and Mr O’Connor for consideration by the Working Party.

### 11.1 Resolution

The Conference receives as a Notice of Motion to Conference 2021 the following amendments to the 2019 Manual of Laws (Conference Agenda pp 190- 210), allowing for necessary minor amendments

**Vote:** 41 In favour; 0 Against

### 11.3 Resolution:

The Conference appoints a Governance Board Nominations Committee as in the Conference Agenda (pages 179-180) with Rev Laurence Graham and Mr Tony O’Connor as co-opted members

**Vote:** 40 In favour; 0 Against; 1 Abstention

### 11.4 Resolution

The Conference directs the Governance Board Nominations Committee to bring to Conference in 2021 a panel of nominees for election to the Governing Board and a nominee for Chair of the Governing Board.

**Vote:** 41 In favour; 0 Against

### 11.5 Resolution

The Conference asks the Chief Financial Officer to pilot (as appropriate) and prepare for the new financial pathways outlined in the proposals

**Vote:** 41 In favour; 0 Against

## 12. Charity Registration:

Tony O’Connor proposed that consultation continues with the charity commissioners in both jurisdictions, setting out the changes to be brought to Conference 2021.

**Resolution:** Conference gives permission for consultation with the Charity Commission Northern Ireland and the Charities Regulator in the Republic of Ireland with regard to charity registration on the basis of the proposals from the Governance Working Party.

**Vote:** 40 In favour; 0 Against

### 13. Conversation on the Work of God: Southern District

The District Superintendent, Rev Andrew Dougherty, welcomed the opportunity for the committee to hear how the work of God has continued, even through times of uncertainty brought about by Covid. He then invited the two Youth Ambassadors and the two District Lay Leaders to speak.

Tara Redmond, a Youth and Community Worker in Urban Junction, spoke of an after-schools programme which has re-started. Meeting once a week, the teenagers chose the name LIT (Leaders in Training).

Bevin Jennings, Southern District Youth Ambassador, reported on the annual Soul Mates House Party, which this year was held on Zoom over 2 nights. Obviously, meeting in person would have been preferable, but she said it was encouraging to see the kids really engaging in the sessions, especially in the small groups.

Ruth Mathews, District Lay Leader, showed some of the resources which had been produced and distributed to families and children in the District. Most recently, a Christmas resource was produced in collaboration with Missional Generation, and 360 of them had been sent out free of charge across the connexion. Thanks were expressed to IMYC and the Home Mission Department for funding the cost of postage and craft items.

Gillie Hinds, District Lay Leader, read a summary of activities from various churches across the District, many of which are actively involved in community interaction and foodbanks. Where usual fundraising events have been prevented due to Covid restrictions, opportunities to make use of online fundraising have been explored. In addition, Zoom, YouTube and Whatsapp are being used for various prayer activities and to help maintain fellowship amongst congregation members.

The Lay Leader thanked those who contributed and commented how encouraging it is to see such creativity and imagination being used, especially in such challenging times. She then led the meeting in prayer.

### 14. The Scheme for the amalgamation of the Edgehill College Charity with the Methodist Church in Ireland

The General Committee considered the following documents:

- Draft Scheme prepared by Edwards & Co and Counsel;
- Draft letter to Charity Commission prepared by Edwards & Co and Counsel.

The General Committee noted that the Methodist Church in Ireland had since 14 December 2018 occupied part of the Edgehill College premises as Connexional Offices, and that the Methodist Church in Ireland had incurred an associated cost of £650,000 in renovating the Edgehill College premises. The General Committee considered that having regard to the costs already incurred, the overall finances and obligations of the Methodist Church in Ireland, and the advantages of amalgamating Edgehill College into the Methodist Church in Ireland, it would not be in the interests of the Methodist Church in Ireland as a whole to pay the "valuation" for part of the Edgehill College premises to the Theological Endowment Fund, as the funds could better be used for the general purposes of the Methodist Church in Ireland, without restriction. The General Committee further considered the falling numbers of Methodist members and ministers, the annual subvention required to continue to operate, the cost of maintaining the Edgehill College premises, and the desirability of reducing the administrative burden on charity trustees within the Methodist Church in Ireland.

Having regard to the advantages of amalgamating Edgehill College into the Methodist Church in Ireland, the General Committee considered that it would be in the interests of the Methodist Church in Ireland to take over the liabilities, including employees, of the Edgehill Governors.

The General Committee (acting with the delegated power of the Conference of the Methodist Church in Ireland, in accordance with Section VI, paragraph 10 of the Constitution of the Methodist Church in Ireland) therefore approved the terms of the Scheme sought by the Edgehill Governors from the Charity Commission as per the draft prepared by Edwards & Co and Counsel, a copy of which is annexed to these Minutes.

**Vote:** (41 members present and voting) 41 In favour; 0 Against

The Secretary of Conference expressed thanks to the members of the Working Party for their diligence in progressing a huge piece of work.

### 15. Report from the Connexional Team:

- (a) The Secretary of Conference updated the committee on the work of the Connexional Team which had met twice since the October General Committee. Its role is key in co-ordinating vision across the various parts of the church and supporting that work. Currently the Secretary of Conference convenes the Connexional Team, but under the Governance proposals, the Secretary of Conference will convene / facilitate the work of the new Governing Board and so, therefore, cannot also convene the Connexional

Team. After consultation, she was proposing that Rev John Alderdice take on the role of Officer / Facilitator of the Connexional Team, from Conference 2021. This 'direction of travel' was agreed.

(b) Stationing sub-group

Rev John Alderdice reported that, although ordained ministers may experience struggles or difficulties in various circumstances, there isn't really a mechanism to intentionally work through the issues with them.

**Resolution:**

The General Committee acting with delegated Conference powers directs the Stationing sub-group to work on this and bring a paper with proposals to a meeting early in 2021.

**Agreed**

[Item 15.1, listed on the original Agenda, deferred to the meeting in February]

**16. Conference 2021**

Dates for Conference 2021: 9th-13th June

If it is possible to gather in person, Conference will be held in the Greater Belfast area. However, in case this is not possible, contingency plans need to start being made for an online version.

**17. IMYC**

Prefacing her remarks with appreciation for leaders throughout the connexion who had persevered in encouraging children and young people during a very difficult year, Mrs Gillian Gilmore reported on staff changes in the Department:

Leanne Hill continues as Training and Development Officer, now with additional responsibility for Children's and Family Ministry. Link person for North Eastern District

Lisa Best continues as Youth Ministry Co-ordinator, now with additional responsibility for Young Adults and also Events. Link person for the Southern District.

Gemma Barclay continues to Co-ordinate the Team on Mission Programme, now with additional responsibility for resourcing and supporting youth ministry. Link person for North Western District.

**18. Safeguarding**

(a) Rev Stephen Skuce updated the committee on the Past Cases Review Process: Deborah Webster, a former Safeguarding Officer for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, has been appointed as Chair.

Mr Skuce, together with the Secretary of Conference and the Safeguarding Officer, Nicky Blair, had met Judith Gillespie, Chair of the Northern Ireland Office Historic Clerical Abuse Team, who expressed appreciation of the process the church is undertaking.

(b) Safeguarding Officer, Nicky Blair gave an update on the re-vetting process. This must take place every 3 years, but now one single police check can cover several roles. This is possible because the process is facilitated by the Methodist Church in Ireland, but must be backed by a robust system of information, including a complete and up-to-date list of ALL locations where the volunteer or worker is working with children or vulnerable adults.

With regard to training, each church will get a list of those working with children, giving an indication of the timing for their checks and training.

**19. Christ Church Sandymount**

The Secretary of Conference reported that, as requested by the committee, she had spoken to the Clerk of the General Assembly raising pastoral concerns for the members of the Church Council who may be affected by the disciplinary issue between the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and someone who was a Presbyterian elder. It is an ongoing situation and the President's Advisory Committee will monitor the situation with the Secretary of Conference.

The committee was reminded that we are a Connexion, seeking to love and serve God together. We may differ in our opinions, but we seek to hold each other up and show grace. The President led in prayer.

**20. Financial Report**

The Chief Financial Officer, Gillian Laney, presented figures to the end of September, and reported that the updated pro-forma template is due to be sent out this week. End of year returns are needed as soon as possible in the New Year, but absolutely before the end of February to facilitate the audit process and budgetary planning.

She then reported that the Audit Committee, together with the Trustees Standing Committee, are in the process of reviewing an updated Constitution for Dublin Central Mission Designated Activity Company (DAC) This will include merging two Activity Companies held within the group, and establishing long-term leases in respect of the 3 facilities run by DCM (DAC).

Chair of the Connexional Finance Committee, Mr Harold Baird, reported that the tender process for the new accounting system is well under way, and it is hoped it will be in place January-April 2021, with a roll-out to Circuits and Societies beginning in April 2021.

**21. Any Other Business**

None

**22. Date of Next Meeting:**

3rd February 2021 at 10.30 (probably an online meeting)

**18. Benediction**

There being no other business, the President closed the meeting with prayer.