

**THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND**  
**GENERAL COMMITTEE**  
**Minutes of Online Meeting held on**  
**Thursday 8th October at 10.30am**

1. **Opening Devotions** were conducted by the President.
2. **Hours of Sitting:** 10.30 am - 12.30 pm.; 1.30 pm - Close of business
3. **Welcome** All were welcomed to the meeting.
4. **Introduction** The Secretary of Conference guided members through some preliminary instructions for the meeting being held online, and reminded them that the Conference had voted to delegate its power to this Committee for the remainder of this Connexional year, in accordance with Section VI para 10 of the Constitution. Accountability is to be ensured through the Minutes of the meetings being appended to the Journal which is the legal record of the work of Conference, and also put online so that anyone can read them (except for any business deemed confidential).
5. **Apologies** had been received from Mr John MacQuarrie, Mr Alan Morris and Ms Claire Stewart. Any other apologies to be emailed [secretary@irishmethodist.org](mailto:secretary@irishmethodist.org).
6. **Permission to attend:** Simon Kinghan, Gillian Laney, Tom Millar, Tony O'Connor, Gillian Skillen, Bill Parkinson, Britt Gilmore, Wayne Mulholland, Tim Dunwoody, Peter Mercer and Nicky Blair were all given permission to attend the meeting.
7. **Sympathy and Greeting**  
Expressions of sympathy to be sent to the families of Rev William I Hamilton and Mrs Rhoda Nixon who have passed away since our last meeting.
8. **Correspondence:** An email had been received from Joshua Doig expressing his regret that he cannot attend meetings this year. It was proposed that Aaron Sweeney take his place. This was agreed.
9. **Minutes** of Meeting held on 27th May 2020. These were agreed and signed.
10. **Matters Arising**
  - 10.1 **Working Party on Governance**  
Rev Dr Laurence Graham reported that work is continuing, most recently by online consultations with Society Stewards and Treasurers, and members of Conference. A report will be brought to the December meeting of the committee.
  - 10.2 **Review of the Role of the President**  
The Secretary of Conference reported that a Working Party will be formed, to be chaired by the Ex-President, and a report brought to the December meeting.
  - 10.3 **MCI Response to Coronavirus**  
In presenting the report, the Secretary of Conference expressed the gratitude of the church to all those in ordained or local lay leadership, to the staff of the various departments of the Church and to the District Superintendents for the imaginative and gracious way that they had responded to the crisis over the past months. Nevertheless, the church needs to be mindful that there is a long road ahead, with many challenges to be faced by local churches and their communities. She gave thanks for the many instances of difficult journeys in the Bible which demonstrate the loving God who walks alongside.
  - 10.4 **The Scheme for the amalgamation of the Edgehill Theological College Charity with the Methodist Church in Ireland.** Conference in 2018 passed the following resolution "That Conference sanctions the General Committee to oversee the joint Board of Governors/Trustee and Secretaries working group as they seek the amalgamation of the Edgehill Theological College Charity into the Methodist Church in Ireland, to include

the creation of a new body within the Church for theological education comprising necessary functions of the Board of Ministry and the Edgehill Governors, subject to legal advice and professional advice and subject to the approval of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and to the provisions of the Methodist College Act 1928”

Much detailed work has been done involving a long legal and consultative process. Three documents had been circulated to members (Papers 10.4 / 1-3, attached) which are for discussion at the December meeting:

- The Draft Letter to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland
- The Draft Scheme
- The Draft Minute

Recommendation: that the General Committee, with delegated Conference powers, make a decision on the Scheme at the meeting on 2nd December 2020.

## 11. Request for Discontinuation of Sunday services:

Manual of Laws 5A.04(d) “To secure through the Connexional Team prior permission of the General Committee before discontinuing Sunday services in any church or preaching place located on the Circuit”. Rev Andrew Dougherty, District Superintendent of the Southern District brought the request for Sunday services to cease in the Ballyhupahaun church on the Portlaoise Circuit. This was agreed.

## 12. Business Delegated from Conference

### 12.1 Administrative Matters:

#### i. Thanks to the Ex-President and Ex lay Leader (Conference Agenda pp 109-110)

The Secretary of Conference paid warm tribute to Mr McGuffin and Mrs Neilands for their leadership through the exceptional time of the Coronavirus pandemic. She said they had led the church with wisdom, grace and kindness and the whole connexion was grateful to them.

#### ii. Designation of the Secretary of Conference (Conference Agenda p 111)

Rev Dr Heather M E Morris was designated Secretary of Conference for the year 2021-2022.

#### Appointment of Conference Secretariat (Conference Agenda pp 3-4)

Senior Assistant Secretary	Rev Alan G Wardlow
Editorial Secretary	Mrs Elaine Barnett
Journal Secretary	Rev Ruth E Patterson
Attesters (Daily Record & Journal)	Rev R F Toner, Rev B Gilmore, Mrs M Copeland, Mr D Twyble
Letter Writers	Rev K Connor, Miss M Henderson
Director of Music	Rev Ross Harte

#### iii. Election of representatives to the 2021 Conference of the Methodist Church in Britain

Mrs Hazel Loney and Ms Ruth Mathews were elected.

#### iv. Approval of en-bloc Reports (Conference Agenda pp 303ff)

With the addition of the Childcare Report, these were agreed.

#### v. Approval of the Committees to be elected by the Conference: (Conference Agenda pp 4-5):

The Committee of Scrutineers, the Memorials Committee, the President’s Advisory Committee, those who have responsibility to prepare the Conference allocation and the Nominations Committee.

The membership of these committees was agreed.

#### vi. Business of Departments, Boards and Committees

That business which has not been passed en bloc is scheduled for meetings of the General Committee throughout the year, allowing for discussion, feedback and accountability. Those agenda items which cannot wait, including the appointment of some officers and committees, were identified in Paper 12.1.vi, (previously circulated to members and attached)

These were agreed.

#### vii. Approval of the Connexional Calendar (Paper 12.1.vii, attached)

Agreed

## 12.2 Connexional Finance

- i. **Connexional Finance Committee Report** (Conference Agenda pp 30ff)
- ii **Audit Committee Report** (Conference Agenda pp 36ff)

The Connexional Finance Officer, Mrs Gillian Laney introduced the business, presenting figures for the year ending December 2019, including Income, Expenditure, Statement of Financial Activities and Balance Sheet. She then brought updated figures to the end of June 2020, noting that most Societies and Circuits had recorded a marked drop in income because of the closing of church services during the period of coronavirus lockdown. The Connexional Finance Committee have been giving consideration to various potential scenarios as the pandemic continues to affect communities. The overall position is that there are sufficient funds to meet 2021 budget but, importantly, that is not true for every Society.

Mr Harold Baird, Chair of the Connexional Finance Committee, expressed appreciation of the work done by Mrs Laney. Moving to the business of the Comprehensive Assessment Budget (Conference Agenda p31), Mr Baird said he was grateful to the Departments and Funds who receive funding from the Assessment who had all accepted a reduction for 2021. The total amount of Comprehensive Assessment proposed for 2021 is £1,108,937, a reduction of 15%. The amounts to be contributed by Circuits are set out on pp 32ff of the Conference Agenda. The Comprehensive Assessment Process (Conference Agenda, pp 35-36) identifies items which are assessable and those which are allowable expenditure. It is hoped the new system will be less prone to distortion since it now excludes bequests.

### **Finance Committee resolutions** (Conference Agenda p31)

1. The Conference receives the report  
Agreed
2. The Conference directs that the amount of Comprehensive Assessment for 2021 be £1,108,937.  
Agreed
3. The Conference directs that the amounts to be contributed by the Circuits in the year 2021 shall be as detailed on pp 32-34 of the Conference Agenda.  
Agreed

### **Additional Resolution**

4. The Conference appoints the committee  
The President, the Lay Leader, the Secretary of Conference,  
Mr J Harold Baird, Chair of the Committee,  
Mr William Parkinson, Secretary of the Committee  
Treasurer of the Retirement Funds: Rev Jeremy Nicoll  
Treasurer of the Ministers' Children's Fund: Mr Stephen Knox  
Treasurer of the Ministerial Training Fund: Dr Ian R Taylor  
Treasurer of the Church Development Fund: Mr Paul Cummings  
Treasurer of the General Purposes Fund: Mr Doug Edmondson  
Treasurer of Irish Methodist Youth and Children's Department: \_\_\_\_\_  
Treasurer of the Home Mission Department: Rev Mark S Forsyth  
Treasurer of the Trustees: Mr Rory O'Ferrall  
Together with Rev T H Samuel McGuffin, Rev Dr W David Rock, Rev Thomas C Stevenson,  
Mr John Cartwright, Mr Peter M C Little, Mr Kenneth Twyble.  
Agreed

### **Audit Committee resolutions** (Conference Agenda p37)

1. Conference receives the report.  
Agreed
2. Conference accepts the audited accounts of the Methodist Church in Ireland for 2019.  
Agreed
3. Conference agrees that the President and Secretary of Conference sign the audited consolidated accounts for the Methodist Church in Ireland for the year ended 31 December 2019, as requested by the Connexional Finance Committee.  
Agreed
4. Conference appoints Ernst and Young as Auditors for MCI until Conference 2021.  
Agreed
5. Conference directs that the Comprehensive Assessment Process be implemented as in the report.  
Agreed

### iii **Stipends & Allowances Board** (Conference Agenda pp 38ff)

Mr John Buchanan, Chair of the Stipends and Allowances Board introduced the report.

#### **Resolutions**

1. Conference adopts the report and directs that commencing 1st January 2021 the scale of minimum stipends and vocational lay salaries be applied.  
Agreed
2. Conference directs that the scale of allowances as set out in the report be paid with effect from 1st January 2021.  
Agreed

He then introduced the supplementary paper which had been circulated to members (Paper 12.2.iii.) He highlighted the impact of Covid-19 on the economy and the financial resources of many people, and invited discussion on the suggestions made:

- the previous recommendation to phase out the NI Taxable Fixed Car Allowance of £1,000 be now implemented from 1 January 2021 rather than over 4 years.
- the ROI (which currently stands at an advantage of 20% to the NI stipend) be reduced by 2.34% from 1 January

After considerable debate the online vote showed 65% in favour and 35% against, so the amended resolution was put:

1. Conference adopts the report and the recommendations contained therein, plus the two additional points as outlined in the supplementary paper and directs that commencing 1st January 2021 the scale of minimum stipends and vocational lay salaries be applied.  
Agreed

During the discussion concern had been expressed regarding the impact of the decision on ministers' wellbeing, and it was agreed that:

- a. the Secretary of Conference would communicate the new rates as soon as possible to help manse families plan and budget
- b. ministers should be reminded of the availability of the District Superintendents to talk through any concerns.

#### Resolutions 3-5 (Conference Agenda p43)

The remaining resolutions appointing the Treasurers and the membership of the Board were all agreed.

### iv **Retirement Funds** (Conference Agenda pp 43ff)

Ministerial Treasurer and Secretary, Rev Jeremy Nicoll introduced the report, noting that the actuaries named in the report, Kerr Henderson Ltd, are being acquired by the Deloitte Group from October 2020.

#### **Resolutions** (Conference Agenda p 54)

1. Conference receives the report of the Irish Methodist Ministers' Retirement Fund and approves the scale of Allowances.  
Agreed
2. Conference receives the report of the Retirement Benefits Scheme.  
Agreed

Resolution 3 regarding the Methodist Ministers' Disability Fund to be discussed under the General Committee Conference Resolutions (12.3.iii).

The remaining Resolutions, 4-6, were moved en bloc and all were agreed.

### v. **Minister's Medical Fund** (Conference Agenda p55)

Ministerial Treasurer and Secretary, Harold Agnew presented the report.

Resolutions 1-4 were all agreed.

**vi. Methodist Minister's Children's Fund** (Conference Agenda pp 56-58)

Ministerial Treasurer and Secretary, Rev Britt Gilmore, presented the report.

Resolutions 1-4 were all agreed.

Mr Gilmore highlighted that the 15% reduction being sought from all funds had been achieved by reducing the maintenance grants.

Resolution 5 regarding the Maintenance Allowances was agreed.

The remaining Resolutions, 6 & 7, regarding Education Allowances and Extended Benefits were both agreed.

**vii. World Development and Relief Update**

Mr Tim Dunwoody, WDR Officer, brought an additional report to the committee, regarding the shortfall the Fund is experiencing. He explained that approximately half of the money contributed comes from congregations. As a result of Covid-19, these donations are much reduced, as is money normally raised by sponsored events. He highlighted that currently only £155,000 is available but that MCI has pledged to give £220,000 April 2021 to our long-term development partners – partner organisations whose need is very great.

The committee were reminded that if only every Methodist member would actually contribute 1% of post-tax income to the fund, the pledged money could be paid easily. He commended the WDR service material which is being prepared and which highlights the particular needs this year.

**12.3 Board of Ministry, Learning and Development** (Conference Agenda pp 59ff)

Mr David Best and Rev Dr Janet Unsworth introduced the report, with Dr Unsworth highlighting aspects of Learning and Development:

- a well-attended webinar on All-Age Worship had been organised and more are planned
- the closure of St John's College, Nottingham has necessitated the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with Queen's Foundation, Birmingham
- there is ongoing collaboration with the Methodist Church in Great Britain, in particular links with Cliff College may result in the release of a member of staff on a consultancy basis (equivalent to half a day).

**Resolutions** (Conference Agenda pp 77ff)

Resolutions 1-3 were all agreed.

Policies and Procedures

Rev John Alderdice reported on the proposal to amend the existing Manual of Laws Chapter 4, and all the other necessary changes outlined in the subsequent resolutions 5-9 so that the Church may efficiently run the Policies and Procedures being put in place.

Resolution 4

Conference receives as a Notion of Motion the proposal to replace the existing Chapter 4 of the Manual of Laws with that outlined in the report (Conference Agenda pp 66ff) and to delete section 5B, chapter 25 (Edgehill Theological College) and chapter 26 (Ministerial Training Fund) of the Manual of Laws, and directs that the proposed Chapter 4 be printed in the Minutes of Conference.

Agreed

Resolutions 5-9 (Conference Agenda p 78) were moved en bloc and all were agreed.

Mr Alderdice then introduced the plans to simplify the Manual of Laws - removing sections relating to authorised ministries from legislation and, instead, adopting them as agreed Policies and Procedures for the Church. This will also make any future review of best practice more easy to incorporate.

Resolutions 10 & 11 (Conference Agenda pp 78-79) covering the deletion of relevant sections from the Manual of Laws, and the adoption of Policies and Procedures set out in Appendix 1 of the report (Conference Agenda pp 81-96) were both agreed.

### Local Preachers

Mr Tom Wilson introduced the section of the report covering the work of Local Preachers, updating the committee on Local Preachers in Training.

Resolution 12 (Conference Agenda p 79) was agreed.

### Additional Resolutions

13. The Conference directs that Local Preachers' Sunday be observed each year on the third Sunday in September.
14. The Conference reminds ministers and local preachers that the review process is now carried out within each circuit according to the guidelines outlined in the Local Preachers report from the Minutes of Conference 2019.
15. The Conference approves the publication in the Minutes of Conference of the names of those Fully Accredited Local Preachers on active service who have given permission for their names to be so published.
16. The Rowlett Morris Prize  
This annual prize, for newly-accredited Local Preachers, will be awarded to the best 800-1000 word essay entitled 'Preaching in a Changing World'. One prize will be awarded each Connexional year (1st July – 30th June). Each candidate has three years from the date of their accreditation to submit an entry, and only one entry per candidate will be permitted within that three-year period. In practice, this could allow for an entry to be submitted in one of four Connexional years. Entries should be forwarded to the Connexional Local Preachers Secretaries, by 30th April at the latest, and the winner of the prize will be announced at Conference.

These additional resolutions were moved en bloc and all were agreed.

### Resolution 17 (No 13 in the Conference Agenda p 79)

Having received a Notice of Motion in 2019, the Conference amends Manual of Laws 6B.02 as follows:

6B.02 A Committee shall be appointed annually by the Conference and shall report to the Board of Ministry, Learning and Development. It shall ensure that proper processes and procedures are followed in relation to training, accreditation and development of Local Preachers. ~~promote the efficiency and work of Local Preachers.~~ It shall be constituted as follows:

~~The President of the Conference,~~

The Lay Leader of the Conference,

~~The Secretary of the Conference,~~

~~The Ex-President of the Conference,~~

The Ministerial and Lay Secretaries of the Committee,

A member of ~~the full-time ministerial~~ staff of the Board of Ministry, Learning and Development

The District Secretaries for Local Preachers,

~~The Secretary or Assistant Secretary of the Ordained Ministry Committee,~~

~~Up to two ordained ministers and four lay members elected by the Conference.~~

The ministerial and lay secretaries shall be appointed annually by the Conference.

Agreed

### Resolutions 18-20

18. (Number 15 in the Conference Agenda p 80) – the appointment of the Local Preachers' Secretaries

19. The Conference appoints the Committee as follows:

The Lay Leader: Mrs Hazel Loney

The Ministerial and Lay Secretaries of the Committee: Rev Mervyn G Ewing and Mr Thomas G Wilson

A member of staff of the Board of Ministry learning and development: Rev Dr Janet Unsworth

District Secretaries: Mrs Heather Brown, Ms Anne Scott, Mr David Rogers.

20. (Number 16 in the Conference Agenda p 80) – the appointment of the Board of Ministry, Learning and Development for the Connexional Year 2020-21

These were moved en bloc and all were agreed.

The Secretary of Conference expressed gratitude to all standing down from the various committees as the structural changes come into effect, and moved the expression of thanks in Resolutions 21 & 22 (Numbers 17 & 18 in the Conference Agenda p80)

These were both agreed.

### 13. Conference Business from General Committee

#### i. Report from the Working Party on the role of the Director of Ministry

(Section D, Conference Agenda pp 112-120)

The Chair of the Working Party, Mr David Best, presented the report, highlighting that much of the responsibilities of the role are now being taken up by the District Secretaries. He also noted that additional admin support will be provided for the Chair of the Ministerial Selection Panel.

**Resolution** (Conference Agenda p 120)

The Conference receives the report and adopts the proposals contained therein regarding the discontinuance of the position of Director of Ministry from July 2021.

This was agreed

#### ii. Safeguarding

Mr Nicky Blair, Connexional Safeguarding Officer, presented the report (Conference Agenda pp 233-236), expressing appreciation for the Connexional Safeguarding Board and the breadth of expertise which the members bring to the work.

Resolutions E4.1 and E4.2 (Conference Agenda p236), covering the adoption of the report and the appointment of the Connexional Safeguarding Board (with the addition of Mrs Gillian Gilmore, Team Leader, IMYC) were both agreed.

Mr Blair reported on the importance for compulsory re-vetting across both jurisdictions. In the Republic of Ireland it is illegal to work with children or vulnerable adults without a check in place by the National Vetting Bureau; in Northern Ireland it is a crime for an organisation to employ someone (paid or voluntary position) if they are on the barred list - and the only way for this to be known is for a check to be in place.

Resolution E4.3 (Conference Agenda p237)

Conference directs that every volunteer or paid employee who works with children, young people or vulnerable adults undergoes training every three years and must be re-vetted at least every three years.  
Agreed

Rev Dr Stephen Skuce gave an update on the proposals for a Past Case Review. It is hoped that an external Chairperson will be soon be appointed. Any reported cases will be organised under one of four categories and, beginning in January, a random sample from each decade will be reviewed. The review will be communicated to all ministers in the coming weeks to facilitate the inclusion of any instances where, with the benefit of hindsight, a matter should have been disclosed or reported.

It is planned for an interim report to be presented to Conference 2022, and a final report to the Conference of 2023.

New Resolution E4.4

Conference directs the Connexional Safeguarding Officer with the Connexional Safeguarding Board to instigate a Past Case Review.

#### iii. Disability Fund Review (Conference Agenda pp 237-242)

The Secretary of Conference moved the first two resolutions regarding the reception of the report of the Minister's Disability Fund (Conference Agenda p52), and the information about the fund and benefits. These were both agreed.

Mrs Gillian Skillen, Operations Manager, presented the review, highlighting that current procedures do not provide any limit on the time the fund may be called upon to support a minister; neither does it provide for the number of cycles of cover which can be repeated, nor a time period between each cycle. This, by far, surpasses even the most generous contractual sickness arrangements in either the public or private sector.

The Working Party had considered various possibilities, as highlighted in the report, and Mrs Skillen presented the option being recommended in the Resolutions. In summary, the scheme would provide 6 months full stipend and full allowances and 6 months half stipend and half allowances in any 4-year period. Provisions in the event of a critical or terminal illness are unchanged – application can still be made for Ill Health Retirements Benefit.

**Resolutions 1-9** (Conference Agenda pp 245-246) amending the Ministers' Disability Fund, were moved en bloc and were all agreed.

**14. Any Other Business**

Concern was expressed regarding an issue affecting members of a Church Council and congregation in a joint charge. The Secretary of Conference agreed to contact her counterpart in the other denomination expressing the concerns raised, and to report back to the General Committee

**15. Dates of Next Meetings:**

2nd December 2020 at 10.30am online  
3rd February 2021 at 10.30 (venue tbc)  
24th March 2021 (venue tbc)

**18. Benediction**

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