

The Governance Board
Meeting 008: 7th April 2022, in Edgehill
MINUTES

Present:		Apologies
Mr Tony O'Connor (Chair)	Rev David Campton	Rev Nigel Mackey
General Secretary: Rev Dr Heather Morris (Convener)	Mr John Clarke	
President: Rev Dr Sahr Yambasu	Mr Paul Cummings	
Chair of the Standing Committee of the Statutory	Ms Laura Griffith	
Trustees: Mr Tom Millar	Ms Gillian Kingston	
Rev Harold Agnew	Ms Hazel Loney	
Mr David Best	Rev David Nixon	

In attendance: Ms Elaine Barnett (Secretary to the Board)
For particular items of business: Ms Gillian Laney (Chief Financial Officer) – Item 7 (via Zoom) Rev Sam McGuffin (Chair, Working Party) – item 10 Mr Doug Edmondson (Chair, Working Party) – item 11 (via Zoom) Ms Joan Strong (President, MWI) – item 12

- 1. Opening Prayers**
Mr John Clarke read 2 Corinthians 5 v 16-21 and led the meeting in prayer.
- 2. Welcome and Apologies**
All were welcomed to the meeting and apologies noted.
- 3. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising**
The Minutes were agreed, and there were no matters arising not covered by the agenda.
- 4. Conflicts of Interest**
Sahr Yambasu, Heather Morris and Gillian Kingston all serve on the Faith and Order Committee (item 8); Tom Millar, Heather Morris and John Clarke are Statutory Trustees (item 9). David Best and Hazel Loney are members of the Working Party on the role of the President and Lay Leader (item 10)
- 5. General Secretary's Report**
Dr Morris reported on a wide range of issues:
 - 1) **Finance:** Nicola Robinson, the new Finance Team Leader, is due to take up her appointment in June and has been working this week to facilitate changeover with the outgoing Chief Finance Officer. The next few months are going to continue to be challenging. The Board identified the need for a clear plan to be set out, and repeated its concern with reference to workload of existing staff.
 - 2) **Data loss:** The software provided by Nitech failed to identify that scheduled back-ups were not taking place, resulting in some data being lost – although there was no data breach and no malware was involved. Nitech are dealing with the issue, another level of monitoring has been added, and the Church will be compensated for the time / work lost.

- 3) **Covid:** In line with the Presbyterian Church and the Church of Ireland, MCI has eased Covid mitigations. This has been communicated to churches who can make decisions according to local contexts, with MCI continuing to monitor risk.
- 4) **Ukraine**
World Development and Relief have been able to send in excess of £150,000 to support the work being offered to refugees. A video has been produced showing how the money is being used, and a number of people have offered accommodation.
- 5) **50 days of Wholehearted prayer:** A resource for the 50 days of prayer between Easter and Pentecost has been circulated.
- 6) **Soul Mates** took place very successfully with 240 (including leaders) attending in Lurgan plus 3 hubs: in Dublin, Longford and Finaghy.
- 7) **Council on Social Responsibility:** significant work is being done on poverty through the links with Trussell Trust and Christians Against Poverty.

6. Administrative Items

a. Conference Agenda

Heather reported on the proposed timetable for Conference. The current plan is for the Ordination Service to take place on Sunday morning, and this will be the close of Conference.

b. Conference membership

Responses from the circuits is progressing well, with only 5 remaining to submit the name of their representative.

c. Alternating Ministry Scheme

Paper 008_22.04_06c had been previously circulated. This report and resolution from the Mission Partnership Forum is being jointly presented to the equivalent Board in PCI.

Recommendation

- a. **That the congregation of Christ Church, Limerick** will become a congregation of the Methodist Church in Ireland, under the care and oversight of the Southern District, from 1st May 2022, with all current members being deemed to be Members of the Methodist Church in Ireland unless they desire otherwise.
 - That the current Presbyterian Manse in Limerick will transfer to the ownership of the Methodist Church in Ireland as soon as practically possible after 1st May 2022, with a 'leasing arrangement' (at a minimum nominal rent) put in place in the interim. The Church and Halls complex are already in the ownership of the Methodist Church in Ireland.
- b. **That the congregation of the United Church, Galway** will become a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, under the care and oversight of the Presbytery of Dublin & Munster, from 1st May 2022, with all current members being deemed to be Members of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland unless they desire otherwise.
 - That the current Church and Halls complex in Galway will transfer to the ownership of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as soon as practically possible after 1st May 2022, with a 'leasing arrangement' (at a minimum nominal rent) put in place in the interim. The Manse is already in the ownership of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
- c. **That the congregation of Christ Church, Sandymount** will become a congregation of the Methodist Church in Ireland, under the care and oversight of the Southern District, on 1st May 2022, with all current members being deemed to be members of the Methodist Church in Ireland unless they desire otherwise.
 - Both the current Manse and Church and Halls complex are already in the ownership of the Methodist Church in Ireland.
- d. That the change of ownership outlined in points 5 (a) be deemed to equate to the change of ownership in point 5 (b), with no additional payments required. The legal documentation of both

transfers should however include a clause indicating that if either property is sold within a ten-year period from 1st May 2022, then any amount obtained over and above €450,000 shall be divided equally between the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland.

- e. That in respect of Limerick Manse, and in recognition of pending necessary renovations/repairs for this domestic premises, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland will make a one-off payment of €25,000 to the Methodist Church in Ireland towards those anticipated costs.
- f. That the General Secretaries of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland be authorised to take any other decisions necessary to implement these recommendations.

Resolution

That the report of the Mission Partnership Forum be received and its recommendations adopted.

Agreed

7. Finance

Ms Gillian Laney (CFO) presented the report highlighting the following:

- a. Comprehensive Assessment: as agreed at the last meeting, the amount to be contributed by Societies in 2023 should be increased by 2% to £1,343,664
- b. Figures for Connexional Funds were presented, as well as Cash & Investments for 2021. It was recognised that detailed work needs to be done to identify which funds are restricted, and the nature of the restriction.

This being Gillian's last report to the Governance Board before she leaves to take up her new post, Tony expressed the thanks and good wishes of the Board.

8. Faith & Order report: Human Sexuality

Ms Gillian Kingston (Interim Convener, Faith & Order Committee) reported that a sub-committee had reviewed the comments made at the last Board meeting and had decided to allow a further year for consultation. The substantive report of the Working Party will therefore now go to Conference 2023. Instead, a synopsis of the findings will form part of the Faith & Order report this year, and will include an outline of some of those findings for further discussion at Circuit and Society level as to how to continue in the spirit and practice of Christian love, while differing on how we hear and interpret Scripture.

9. Policy Review – Investment Policy (Paper 008_22.04_09)

Mr Tom Millar presented the updated policy document which had been previously circulated and which reflected suggestions made at a previous Board meeting.

Agreed

10. WP on the role of the President and Lay Leader (Paper 008_22.04_10)

Rev Sam McGuffin, Chair of the Working Party, presented the updated report which had been previously circulated. He outlined that the vision behind the report is for the Lay Leader to be given equal status as the President in the life of the Church, and the key recommendations are:

- the President to serve a 3-year part-time term
- the Lay President (re-named role from Lay Leader) to serve a 3-year term, at the same time

In a wide-ranging discussion, it was recognised that the other substantial changes made in the Church: the introduction of 3 District Superintendents, the Connexional Team, the Governance Board, the role of the General Secretary, all contribute to a very different context, and therefore changing role, for the President and Lay Leader.

11. Working Party on Property (Paper 008_22.04_11)

In presenting the report, which had been previously circulated, Mr Doug Edmondson commented that communication and accountability both need to be improved. The report was welcomed and consideration given to recommendations 4-14 contained within the report:

4. MCI urgently needs both a comprehensive Mission Strategy and a comprehensive Property Strategy. Both are needed due to issues highlighted in the Background section. They would inform and guide the careful management of the MCI property assets. The Property Strategy should be consistent with the Mission Strategy.

Agreed

5. Further, if it has not already been done, the Governance Board [GB] should designate a board member to carry responsibility for Property matters on its behalf and that and succeeding members should become the next and subsequent resident chair of the Property Board. [PB]

Not Agreed

6. All investment and divestment decisions related to Investment-led properties should be the sole responsibility of the GB working in and through the PB and the Estates Department [ED].

Agreed

7. Major decisions (other than maintenance) affecting Mission-led properties should be approved in principle by the District Superintendent [DS] and the Connexional Team [CT], as being consistent with the approved Mission and Property Strategies, before engaging the PB, who should then liaise with the Circuit on the detail and development. The following sentence to be added to

Agreed with the following addition: all major property transactions, i.e. in excess of £500,000, to be brought to the attention of the Governance Board for approval.

8. Home Mission should forthwith be relieved of all property management roles, namely manse and investment properties. These responsibilities should transfer to the ED and the PB reporting upwards to GB.

Agreed

Within the new Mission and Property strategies, the granting of Church Development Status, if it needs to continue, should transfer from the Church Development Board [CDB] to the responsibility of CT. Therefore the question arises, with the existence of a CT, is there a continuing need for the CDB?

Resolution to be brought to Conference:

- a. expressing thanks for the work of the Church Development Board over the years
- b. directing that the CDB ceases from this Conference
- c. a Notice of Motion to the Conference of 2023 bringing the required legislative changes, and
- d. directing that, pending those legislative changes, any work not already covered by the Connexional Team be transferred to them

Agreed

9. Membership of the PB should include only those with a relevant skill base and be restricted to, say, ten persons. Responsibility for current PB Funds should be transferred to GB. PB should report into GB, and the concept of a larger PB should cease.

Agreed

10. Local Trustees holding Property on behalf of MCI should be encouraged to transfer title to the Statutory Trustees in an orderly and timely fashion, say within three to five years.

Agreed

11. It is imperative that the Database audit of all property holdings is completed as soon as possible. The GB should fully resource and empower the PB and ED to achieve this. This database should be integrated into the new financial system.

Agreed

12. Across the Connexion, management of all property issues requires a more rigorous approach, from simple reporting routines, through maintenance to major development matters. The GB should fully resource and empower the PB and ED to achieve this.

Agreed

13. Unlike manses, there are no stated standards or criteria for other Mission-led buildings. Such criteria need to be developed as soon as possible for all significant refurbishments and new builds.

Agreed

Implementation

It was recognised that there are resource implications and that further work is needed.

It was therefore agreed that the General Secretary, together with Simon Kinghan (Estates Manager) draw together a small group to develop an implementation plan. Membership of the group to be reported to the Board at its meeting in May, and to a subsequent meeting with a plan for implementation including costs and timing.

Action: Heather Morris

12. Methodist Women in Ireland

Ms Joan Strong, MWI President, presented the draft report which had been previously circulated, and which is due to be considered by the MWI Central Forum on Saturday 9th April. She commented that MWI had adapted to the 3 District system, and were emerging well from the pandemic and associated lockdowns.

In discussion, members of the Board commended the work being done by MWI, in collaboration with the Safeguarding Officer and the Ministries Team, in raising awareness about domestic violence “No excuse for abuse”, and also the introduction of online gatherings which had had some success in attracting younger women.

In future years the MWI will report through the Connexional Team.

13. Governance Board Report to Conference

Tony O’Connor had drafted an outline of the Board’s report to Conference (previously circulated) and invited comments. The following suggestions for inclusion were made:

- registration with Charity Commission as a single charity – and the implications
- the benefits of central administration picking up much of that workload
- the new financial system
- recognition that some areas are under-resourced
- new vision and challenges for next year
- The benefits of Connexion

14/ Committee Reports

- 15** Working in two groups, Board members examined and discussed reports which had been received from Committees [*Paper 008_2022.04 14/15(i) previously circulated*].

They also examined the Committee Details Returns Forms [*Paper 008_2022.04 14/15(ii)*] which outline committee membership, length of service, number of meetings etc.

16. Committee Reports: Summary and Adoption

Working in plenary session, all the reports and all committee details were discussed, giving consideration to the purpose of the committee, committee membership, salient points from the report, and any items which need to be reported to, or highlighted at, Conference.

All the resolutions from the reports were approved, are listed in the Appendix to these Minutes, and will be reported at Conference.

In discussion, it was noted that -

- reports had not been received from 2 committees, and the secretaries will be contacted again
- some committee reports reflected a poor response rate from the Connexion which needs to be further examined
- a couple of committees have members in excessively long tenures and, whilst the outstanding service of the individuals is much appreciated, it does not reflect good governance. Those committees to be contacted to discuss the context and offer support in finding fresh impetus.

- some reports received are from associated bodies who do not need to report directly to Conference, and the Church has limited responsibility for them, and it would be more helpful to list these in a separate section.

Specific points were made as follows:

- the Governance Board identified that additional information on legislative and governance changes to the Belfast Student Chaplaincy should be included in the Connexional Team report
- the Governance Board suggested that a member of the Ministries Team outline to the Conference any significant changes in the policies included in their report
- the Governance Board recommended the Statutory Trustees change their Reserves Policy from 6 months to 9 months, in line with the MCI Reserves Policy
- A new reporting schedule to be drawn up, and notified to all committee chairpersons, to enable end of year reports to the GB to be staggered between December and March from now on.

17. Any Other Business

None

18. Next Meetings:

Thursday 5th May in Edgehill.

Thursday 15th September
Tuesday 11th October
Thursday 10th November
Thursday 8th December

} Venue to be decided

19. Closing prayer

Mr O'Connor thanked everyone for their participation and, there being no other business, invited John Clarke to close the meeting in prayer.

Tony O'Connor
5th May 2022