

The Governance Board
Meeting 023: 18th January 2024 on Zoom
MINUTES

Present:	Apologies
Mr Tony O'Connor (Chair)	Rev Nigel Mackey
General Secretary: Rev Dr Heather Morris (Convener)	Mr John Clarke
Mr Tom Millar	Mr David Best
Rev David Turtle	Mr Paul Cummings
Mr Tom Wilson	Ms Jackie Wright
Rev David Nixon	Rev John Alderdice
Ms Gillian Kingston	Rev Richard Rowe
Rev Harold Agnew	

In attendance via Zoom: Ms Clíodhna Smyth (Secretary to the Board), Ms Ruth Campbell
In attendance via Zoom to present particular items of business

1. Welcome and Apologies

All were welcomed to the meeting and no apologies were noted.

2. Opening Prayers

Rev Richard Rowe opened the meeting in prayer.

3. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

The December Minutes were adopted and there were no matters arising not covered by the agenda.

4. Conflicts of Interest

It was agreed that while there was a potential conflict of interest regarding item 7 on the Connexional Team change proposals, given that a number of the Board are part of this team, it was not practicable for them to excuse themselves, so they remained. The Chair was noted as being excused for item 8 with regards to DCM.

5. Past Decisions – Implementation

- Local trusteeships – an interim report was given by the Estates manager at the last Trustees meeting, and an update on progress is to be given to the GB in February 2024.
- Register of policies – completed and will be put on the GB Teams channel.
- Finance committee – still looking for members and the GB is asked to bring forward any recommendations.
- Castlewellan – meeting is due to take place early February and the General Secretary will report back at the next meeting.
- Design of financial reports to be standardised to help HOF with financial reports - action by end Feb. **PC and TOC to meet on this.**

6. PAC has not met or corresponded since the last meeting.

7. General Secretary's report

Dr Morris reported:

Re:Call retreats

These will take place in January for stationed Ministers and February for Lay and Pioneer mission workers which will be run by the Ministry team. Ministers/Lay workers are feeling tired and demoralised, (as are many across all denominations) and the objective of Re:Call is to restore and refresh them, as well as teaching from the President and Neil Hudson. Prayer Ministry, individual and corporate prayer and soaking prayer will be woven throughout the retreat. The Governance Board was asked for prayer for both retreats, and all Ministers

will be prayed for throughout the retreat. A question was posed as to why retired Ministers were not included and it was answered that it had been debated long and hard – it was decided to be kept to Stationed Ministers as this was the fairest, a line had to be drawn somewhere. The take-up of the retreat is over 90%.

It was commented by the Chair that across other churches – Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and the MCB that there is a general issue of low morale, so the retreat is not only welcome, but necessary. Several of the attending Ministers expressed their gratitude for the retreat and said that it was appreciated that MCI was doing this for them.

It was noted that the issue of low morale should be put on the risk register. **Action: HM/CP**

Ongoing processes – there are several ongoing currently:

- Pensions process – is ongoing. The timing of consultation with all interested parties is tight, it is hoped that any issues of clarification can be concluded 90 days before Conference so that an affordable and better pension scheme (and consequently stipend) can begin in September 2024, otherwise it will be 2025 before implementation as it needs to be ratified by Conference.
- Conversation on Human sexuality – ongoing consultation in preparation for Conference 2024.
- District Superintendent appointments – As the current DSs and the General Secretary all began at the same time, there needs to be staggered replacements so that not everyone goes at the same time, but there are limits with regards to time – 7 years with a possibility for an extension to 10 years. Therefore Philip Agnew will be returning to circuit in July 2025 and a designate name will be brought to Conference for his successor in June 2024, there will be a process happening to facilitate this. There was a discussion regarding the 10 years' stationed on circuit required to be a DS being questioned as perhaps being too restrictive (e.g. women on maternity leave) but the overall view of the Board was that the 10 years was necessary for both depth of knowledge and credibility.

Connexional Team

Working Party on Church Growth – submitted its report to the Connexional team (CT). There ensued an excellent conversation and the report is now a working paper for the CT to take and further discuss and work on its implementation. The CT is discussing at their next meeting and an implementation group will be assigned, so GB will see it March/April time.

Property issues – The new convenor Cheryl Patterson did a report for the CT which proposed a setting up of a subgroup to deal with Missional property issues this was agreed by the CT.

Administrative issues

8. Southern District

2 circuits are proposed to be realigned

- Adare/Ballingrane and Limerick. It was suggested that perhaps a new name for the District might be better. **The proposal was agreed**
- Cork South/Kerry and Waterford. **The proposal was agreed.**

A comment was made that as the area is so big how can a circuit identity be generated across such an enormous area, and that even in smaller geographical areas, this remains a challenge, as distances that a Minister has to travel across such a huge area makes it difficult to foster a sense of identity.

It was expressed that what is understood by a Circuit is changing, it is all about Mission, this strategy of realignment and releasing applies across the entire Connexion, circuit changes are all about the facilitation of Mission. In every case the DS has been working with circuits directly to make sure that what is presented is workable.

Cork/Youghal – this releases Sahr to support Youghal from Waterford.

It was noted that MCB will be closing 1400 churches out of 4,000 churches – so this is not an issue that is specific to MCI. A live list of active societies is required – this was a gap which is now being closed.

DCM

Changes are needed in the DCM Constitution so that they can get themselves re-registered as the correct legal entity and this needs to be approved by the Governance Board.

DCM's three entities (nursing home, sheltered housing and DCM church) within the new constitution should be checked by Mason Hayes Curran, however timing means a delay is not practicable.

The GB accepted it in the short-term subject to any recommended changes by MHC being agreed by John Clarke, and it is on the understanding that all issues will be addressed once the re-registration process is complete.

It was agreed that DCM should be asked for clarification on the issues raised by MHC and these along with the draft constitution are then to be sent to MHC. **Action: HM.**

MPPC Policies for approval

Ordained Ministers separated appointments policy – this relates to the District Superintendents, IMYC (when it is a Minister) and the General Secretary’s roles. A point was raised that in the MOL there is a limit of 7 years term with a possibility of an extension for 3 years, but there is no provision for it to be less than that, this will be rectified with the word “maximum” included. **Approved.**

Ordained Ministers serving as a Mission partner policy

MCI works through the Global relationships team of MCB for this – there have been significant changes agreed by the MCB, who are continuing to send ordained people as missionaries, but they are ceasing to send Lay people as Mission Partners, which WMP is also looking at. **Approved.**

Finance report

No updated figures as it is too early in the month.

Skainos Loan Update

9. Skainos is an organisation that is closely interlinked with EBM. They came to MCI in at the end of 2022 in financial difficulties and requested a temporary overdraft loan for £100k.

MCI gave Skainos £25k on the basis that it would be repaid within the year. However the projected repayments didn’t arrive and the Chair got a commitment from the outgoing Chairman that they would repay the loan before the end of 2023. Subsequently it was realised that a loan to an un-related charity should have gone through EBM.

The new chair of Skainos David Dobbins apologised for the lack of repayment and stated that they hope to start repaying the loan in 3rd quarter 2024. The Chair was dissatisfied with this and a meeting between Brian Anderson (EBM) and David Dobbins to ask for interim repayments has been set up for 1st February. An update will be given to the GB next month and it has been put on the agenda for the February meeting.

Committee Reports

10. Gurteen College

There was a discussion regarding Gurteen College where it was acknowledged that it is an excellent organisation which is at the forefront of sustainable farming. **The report was accepted.**

Methodist Historical Society (MHSI) – **The report was accepted.**

Northern Executive of the Board of Education

A question arose regarding the length of service on the board of certain members not being compatible with good Governance, and this is pointed out to the Board of Education.

However it was acknowledged that it can be difficult to find others who may have relevant experience, and in general getting replacements for boards is increasingly difficult. **The report was accepted.**

There was a general discussion regarding the Missional aspect of the church in the public square given that MCI is exposed to the reality of the difficulty of finding expertise for various committees. However it was acknowledged that the Governance Board chair is very conscious that MCI is a church, not a charity, even though it has charity regulations to fulfil.

The Chair also acknowledged that MCI as a charitable organisation is still doing a lot of catch-up and is heavily regulations-biased for now, this will settle down in the future once the new rhythm of charity

management is embedded within all processes. The Board acknowledged that the balance between charity regulation and being a Church is one that is constantly being reviewed.

DCM update The building on Abbey Street will go on the market mid-February, church is meeting at the back of the Pro-Cathedral on Sunday mornings. The premises at the top of O'Connell street was deemed too big and expensive and so has been dropped as an option.

Any Other Business

Chair of the Governance Board The Chair announced that he would be stepping down in June 2024, and is not in a position to continue until 2025 as previously agreed. He thanked the Governance Board for their support over the lifetime of his chairmanship. The General Secretary expressed her thanks to the Chair for his service which has been exemplary.

A process will be followed as per the Manual of Laws – the Nominations committee will act to find a successor.

The chair expressed his profound thanks to Clodhna for the excellent work she had done as secretary to the board and this was echoed by the full board membership. The equally excellent Ruth Campbell is replacing her as secretary.

Next Meeting: Thursday 15th February 2024, in person at Edgehill House.

Closing prayer

Mr O'Connor expressed his thanks to the members of the Board and, there being no other business, he invited Rev. Rowe to close the meeting in prayer.

Tony O'Connor 18th January
2024