

The Governance Board
Meeting 007: 10th March 2022, in Edgehill
MINUTES

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

In attendance: Ms Elaine Barnett (Secretary to the Board)
For particular items of business: Rev Dr Stephen Skuce (Vice Chair, Past Cases Review) – item 5 (via zoom) Ms Gillian Laney (Chief Financial Officer) – Items 9-11 Rev John Alderdice (Facilitator, Connexional Team) – item 12

1. Opening Prayers

Mr Tony O'Connor 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 with one minor alteration.

The small group to consider the extension of Rev Nigel Mackey's appointment as Chaplain of Wesley College has been appointed, but have not reported back to date.

4. Conflicts of Interest

Sahr Yambasu, Heather Morris and Gillian Kingston all serve on the Faith and Order Committee (item 13); David Best is a member of the Working Party on the role of the President and Lay Leader (item 8); Gillian Kingston is a member of the Past Cases Review panel (item 5).

5. Safeguarding: Interim Report on Past Cases Review (007_22.03_05 PCR Interim Report)

Rev Dr Stephen Skuce presented the Interim Report which had been previously circulated. He noted that there are very few past cases needing to be dealt with by the review panel, since some of those reported are instances where advice had been sought, but no formal allegation was made. Any instances of historic abuse not previously reported were referred to the Safeguarding Officer.

Even though the number of cases is small, there are instances where the Church did not act with appropriate care and attention: some were dealt with in a private conversation and not presented formally, and there was a lack of focus on the victim. Another area which had caused concern was the inadequacy of the record-keeping and the Church has already acted on Dr Webster's requirement that changes be introduced as to how cases are recorded.

The current Policy and Procedures of the Methodist Church in Ireland requires that all reports or accusations go first to the Safeguarding Officer. In addition:

- the General Secretary gave an assurance that in future no cases will be directed to the President's Advisory Committee
- the Policy and Procedures to be made explicit in the Manual of Laws

It is planned that the Final Report will be presented to Conference 2023, with a draft going to the Governance Board in March 2023.

Action: Tony O'Connor to clarify with Dr Skuce the situation regarding any report to Conference 2022.

6. General Secretary's Report

Dr Morris reported on a wide range of issues:

1) **Covid measures:** in accordance with Government guidance in the Republic of Ireland, the requirement for masks has been lifted, but the maintenance of basic mitigations, ventilation, hand hygiene etc is encouraged. In N. Ireland the requirement for wearing masks while singing will be reviewed at the end of the month. The focus now needs to shift to Circuits and Societies assessing risks in various contexts and settings and making wise decisions. Appreciation was expressed for all the communication and advice from the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Adviser. It was agreed that a letter of thanks be sent.

2) **Finance:** the Finance Team remains under considerable pressure. An appointment has been made in a temporary accounting post, but the work involved in implementing the new finance system with accompanying training and support for Circuits, along with the annual audit, has led to overload.

Considerable disappointment was expressed that one impact of this means that the Consolidated Accounts will not be available in June as originally planned. They will now be audited in July/ August, presented to the Governance Board in September, and so be available for the CCNI and CRA deadlines at the end of October.

Concern was also expressed that members of staff are having to work excessive hours, and that the situation needs to be closely monitored.

Proposal: the Finance Sub-committee (drawing in other expertise as needed) to meet with Heather and members of the Finance staff team over the next couple of weeks to give support and to help develop a suitable 'road map' for the next few months. If it is identified that additional staff resources are needed, these should be provided with the aim of staff members returning to working normal office hours.

Agreed

3) The **Connexional Budget Working Group** has not yet met. Work has progressed on developing budgets for Connexional committees etc, but budgets for Circuits are not in place which also has implications for Comprehensive Assessment. It was agreed that a basic Budget be drawn up to help move things forward

Action: Finance Sub-committee

4) Sandymount

As reported previously, because of the requirements of Charity Law, the three congregations in the Alternating Ministry Scheme (AMS) needed to become either Presbyterian or Methodist congregations. They were supported through the process and on 30th April the AMS will cease. In a resolution to the next meeting of the Governance Board and to the parallel committee in PCI, Limerick and Sandymount, Dublin will become Methodist congregations. A separate issue involving the current Presbyterian minister and one of the elders in Sandymount remains a matter of Presbyterian discipline.

5) **Charity registration:** CCNI have confirmed that MCI is now registered as a single charity in N.Ireland.

There will be ongoing work to apply for religious designation, and also in communicating with Circuits the implications of the single registration. Details with the CRA in the Republic of Ireland have been updated and are now correct, and a meeting is being sought.

6) A new **Head of Finance** has been appointed: Ms Nicola Robinson, a senior manager with BDO, will take up her post on 2nd June.

- 7) **Living Wholeheartedly**: details of resources to help Church Councils explore the MCI theme were emailed last week, and a further email will highlight 50 Days of Wholehearted Prayer from Easter to Pentecost.
- 8) **Conference 2022** will be held in Assembly Buildings 9th-12th June with the theme 'Wholehearted'. Governance Board business will be dealt with in one session. The possibility of a 'banquet' on Friday night is being explored – an opportunity to celebrate being able to gather again. The Ordination Service will take place on Sunday afternoon when the Lay Leader will be the preacher.
- Action:** Draft programme to be circulated to members of the Board
- 9) **Ukraine**: WDR and WMP have been co-ordinating the MCI's response. £12,500 has already been sent (£10,000 of which went to the Polish Church). The appeal is only in its early stages but already £41,638 has been received. It was noted that the strategic initiative to link each District with a partner church had meant that relationships had already been established making it easier to find out how we could best support the Church in Poland.

7. Administrative Items

a. Dublin Central Mission DAC

Two Directors, Mr Ken Galloway and Mr Alex Thackaberry, are stepping down and the names of four proposed new Directors had been received:

Mr Stuart Ferguson, Mr Ian Johnston, Mr John Kingston, and Ms Anne-Marie O'Grady.

Agreed

Work will continue on the consolidation of a few Boards into DCM DAC meaning 2 further names will be brought to a future meeting. The General Secretary was asked to feed back the hope that the diversity of the DCM Church Council will become reflected in the membership of DCM DAC.

b. Conference 2022

It was proposed that any unfilled places for lay people to attend Conference be allocated in the following order:

- i) any lay members of the Governance Board who are not already members of Conference
- ii) Circuits nominate a substitute if the named representative cannot attend
- iii) if the Circuit substitute cannot attend, someone will be appointed from the District list of substitutes

Agreed

c. Representatives to World Church events

World Council of Churches: Michael Briggs

European Conference for Lay People: John and Doreen McConnell, and Grace McGurk

8. WP on the role of the President and Lay Leader

David Best, a member of the Working Party, gave an update. As reported at a previous meeting, the current suggestion is for the President to serve a 3-year part-time appointment. Consideration had been given to the appointment process which could involve speaking with 6 nominees with a view to bringing 3 names to Conference with Reasoned Statements. The timetable under consideration is -

2022: introduction of legislation

2023: substantive motion

2024: nomination

2025: installation

The role of the Lay Leader is a later addition to the remit, and the desire of the WP is to see the role on an equal footing with the President with greater involvement in special services and a suggested name change to Lay President. Consideration is being given to going back to a 3-year term of office.

Action: David Best and Heather Morris to offer feedback to the WP around the following points:

- concern that a 3-year term meant some ministers would be lost from key Circuit appointments

- although the proposed term of office is 3 years, it involves a significant time commitment: a 5-year span with the President Designate and Ex-President years, albeit they carry a lesser workload
- recognition that a 1-year term is too short, so suggestion of a 2-year term in line with the current term of office for Lay Leader, with Installations on an alternating basis offering continuity and 'flow' between the incumbents
- a desire for more clarity around the role, with perhaps more opportunity for the Lay Leader/President to have more contact with Circuits
- concern that there might be fewer District visits by the President

In addition, it was felt that it might be better to defer presentation to Conference by one year to allow time for further reflection.

9. Finance (*Paper 007_22.03_09*)

Ms Gillian Laney (CFO) presented the report which had been previously circulated, highlighting the following:

- The Advisors have recently completed the triennial valuation of the Retirements Benefits Scheme which is a Defined Benefit Pension Scheme, and papers outlining the valuation and the Pension Trustee proposals had been previously circulated. The Governance Board confirmed their commitment to supporting the Retirement Benefit Scheme. The Board is currently undertaking a general review of pension provision across the Methodist Church in Ireland as part of normal good governance, however this does not lessen their commitment to the scheme.

The Finance Committee have reviewed the request noted in the report and propose that the Governance Board should confirm its commitment to maintaining an employer contribution rate of 26.1%.

Agreed

- Work continues on the new accounting system, with training sessions for Circuits recommencing this month.
- Finance reports will be provided in due course with work continuing on reconciling December figures.
- The person appointed on a temporary contract is assisting with year end accounts.
- The Governance Board approved the opening of accounts for Circuits, Societies and Connexional departments in the Republic of Ireland under the umbrella of the MCI accounts group already held with AIB. This will facilitate those whose accounts are currently held with Ulster Bank which is closing its operations in ROI over the course of 2022.
- The Governance Board also confirmed the updating of bank mandates to reflect the changes in personnel including the addition of the new Head of Finance at the appropriate time, and the removal of the CFO as a signatory once she has left the organisation.

10. Comprehensive Assessment 2023 (*Paper 007_22.03_10 previously circulated*)

Mr Paul Cummings reported that the Finance Sub-committee had considered various options for setting the Comprehensive Assessment (CA) for 2023, seeking to balance affordability issues for Circuits with rises in inflation and a fluctuating economic climate. It was noted that the benefits from CA for Circuits needs to be better communicated.

Proposal from the sub-committee:

that Comprehensive Assessment for 2023 should be increased by 2% to £1,343,664

Agreed

11. Reserves Policy (*007_22.03_11 Reserves Policy previously circulated*)

In presenting the report, Paul Cummings quoted the CCNI guidance, "Reserves are that part of a charity's unrestricted income that is set aside to meet future, unexpected needs or pursue an opportunity". Reserves "can play an important part in building resilience to cope with unexpected events in a charity's life, including a sudden loss of funding or the unforeseen closure of the charity". It was also noted that good governance demanded that excess levels of reserves should be avoided. The current reserve policy

of MCI is to maintain reserves to cover approximately 6 months of consolidated expenditure. Examining the end of year figures for 2020 reveals reserves well in excess of this, and also indicates a higher level than most in the charity sector.

Proposal: that the reserves policy is amended to 9 months, and that investments be part of the calculation of available reserves.

Adopted

Action: Paul Cummings to write this into a policy document

There was broad agreement that any excess reserves released should be used for clear missional purposes and that a group should be established by the General Secretary to review the implications of this policy and develop an implementation plan. This work to include a recommendation as to where reserves should be held.

Action: General Secretary to consult with the Connexional Team and report back.

12. Interim Report on Strategy formulation (Paper 007_22.03_12 CT Strategy and Work Plan)

Rev John Alderdice (Facilitator and Secretary, CT) updated the Board on work being undertaken by the Connexional Team (CT): a prayerful process of consultation, reflection, and discussion on the question of connexional mission strategy. This has involved the District Superintendents and the Team Leaders of the Connexional Departments on how best to support the development of vision and mission in the local setting. Three preliminary strategic themes, Mission, Discipleship, and Leadership, have been identified and work will continue to further develop these. The Board suggested that the areas of prayer and resource allocation could be developed further in the final document.

13. Faith & Order report: Human Sexuality (Paper 007_22.03_13 Faith & Order Report on Human Sexuality)

In presenting the report, which had been previously circulated, Ms Gillian Kingston (Interim Convener, Faith & Order Committee) paid tribute to the dedicated work undertaken by Rev David Turtle, Dr Katie Heffelfinger and, more recently, Rev Dr Andrew Stobart. In discussion, members of the Board expressed appreciation for the work that had gone into such a substantial report, and made some suggestions for taking the report forward, although the board recognised that this was a matter for the Faith and Order committee as they reported directly to Conference.

- the inclusion of an executive summary
- consideration to be given to the presentation of the report to Conference this year, with a deferral of the final vote on the report by a year to give the wider Connexion the opportunity to engage with the recommendations through a series of local / District meetings

It was agreed that Heather and Gillian would feed the suggestions in to the group within Faith & Order who are looking at the Conference presentation.

14. Any Other Business

None

15. Next Meeting:

7th April in Edgehill. It was noted that the additional meeting which had been planned for 1st June was now no longer required.

16. Closing prayer

Mr O'Connor thanked everyone for their participation and, there being no other business, closed the meeting in prayer.

Tony O'Connor
7th April 2022