**REPORT TO GENERAL COMMITTEE**

**Re**

**THE CONSULTATION PROCESS PRIOR TO CONFERENCE 2020**

**On**

**GOVERNANCE PROPOSALS and RELATED CHARITY REGISTRATION ISSUES**

**Prepared by**

**Governance Working Party**

**October 2020**

**Introduction**

Because of the importance of the proposals on the future Governance structures of the church and the related but separate issues of charity registration, the Working Party on Governance was concerned to ensure that as wide a discussion as possible took place prior to the issue coming to Conference 2020. The various reports of the Working Party had been discussed in detail by General Committee at both their January and May meetings and had met wide widespread approval. However, it was thought that the general membership of the MCI, and particularly the delegates to Conference 2020, should also have an opportunity to discuss the proposals in detail before Conference. The following steps were therefore taken.

* A series of five Zoom meetings were held in July/August with circuit and society treasurers, run by the Finance department, to discuss issues around the implementation of the new accounting system. The opportunity was taken at these meetings to outline the related budget and charity elements of the governance proposals and discuss their implications for circuits and societies.
* A series of three Zoom meetings were held in late September/early October to specifically deal with the governance and charity proposals. These meetings were widely publicised on social media and individual invitation emails were sent to all Ministers, Circuit Stewards and Circuit Treasurers in early September. The invitation was extended to all lay conference delegates and any other interested parties.
* Copies of the full Governance Report and the paper on the implications of Charity Registration, which had already been presented to General Committee, were posted on the MCI website and the above invitation included links to these documents.
* A number of written and face-to-face (via zoom) interactions were held with individuals who expressed concerns.
* The full report and related changes to the Manual of Laws was included in the Conference Blue Book and circulated to all delegates.

**Feedback from Zoom Meetings**

All of the above meetings were very well attended. The three meetings dedicated to the Governance and Charity reports attracted over one hundred attendees. In total over twenty people raised issues directly with the panel which consisted of the chair of the Working Party, Laurence Graham, and the convenor, Tony O’Connor, and a full discussion took place on each issue raised. The issued raised ranged from the future role of Conference, to the make-up of the Governing Board, the role of the Secretary of Conference, the role of the Connexional Team, the governance planning process, etc.

Clarification was sought on future control over local finances and the meetings were assured that the report specifically stated that this would remain in local hands.

Concerns were also raised over the diagram of the proposed structure outlined in Appendix F of the report, to the effect that there was no two-way arrow leading from Conference and that it did not represent the relative importance of various areas.

Another concern raised was the use of the term Chief Executive in relation to the Secretary of Conference: the objection being that it was too business like and did not reflect the nature of a church.

It is important to note that the report on governance report specifically calls for the presentation to conference of an annual report from an independent body on the adequacy and functionality of the governance procedures of the church (Sec. 5.1.3.6). In addition, an on-going review of the workings of the entire governance procedures of the church would form part of the duties of the governing board.

 As a result of these discussions the Working party has suggested some amendments to our proposals and these are outlined below.

Attendees appeared to accept the explanations given on the various issues raised. Attendees were repeatedly invited to follow up with Laurence Graham or Tony O’Connor if they wished to discuss further or ongoing concerns but only two or three individuals did so. An open invitation to any individual, circuit executive or church council who wished to have individual meetings was also repeatedly issued but, to date, none have taken up this option. This invitation remains in place.

As a result of the above the working party believes that it can say with confidence that we see no evidence of widespread rejection of the proposals on governance or on Charity registration and we have therefore concluded that there is a broad level of acceptance of our proposals among the membership of the MCI.

**Proposed amendments arising from feedback**

* The new title given to the Secretary of Conference i.e. “Secretary of Conference and Chief Executive of the MCI” should be amended to “General Secretary of MCI”. The current title “Secretary of Conference” could be retained for matters relating to the actual running of Conference, thus maintaining the link with our traditions.
* The amended organisation chart mentioned above be adopted to reflect the organisation and reporting structures of the church but a “softer” diagram be developed to reflect the mission focus of the MCI.

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