

The Governance Board
Meeting 005: 13th January 2022, via Zoom
MINUTES

Present:	Apologies
Mr Tony O'Connor (Chair) General Secretary: Rev Dr Heather Morris (Convener) President: Rev Dr Sahr Yambasu Lay Leader: Ms Hazel Loney President Designate: Rev David Nixon Chair of the Standing Committee of the Statutory Trustees: Mr Tom Millar	Rev Harold Agnew Mr David Best Rev David Campton Mr John Clarke Mr Paul Cummings Ms Laura Griffith Ms Gillian Kingston Rev Nigel Mackey
	<i>None</i>

In attendance: Ms Elaine Barnett (Secretary to the Board)
To present particular items of business: Ms Gillian Laney (Chief Financial Officer) – Item 7

- 1. Opening Prayers**
Rev Harold Agnew read Lamentations 3:21-23 and led the meeting in prayer.
- 2. Welcome and Apologies**
Mr Tony O'Connor welcomed all to the meeting.
- 3. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising**
The Minutes were agreed, and there were no matters arising which would not be covered by the agenda.
- 4. Conflicts of Interest**
Rev David Campton and Mr John Clarke with regard to item 6a.
- 5. General Secretary's Report**
Dr Morris reported on a wide range of issues:
 - 1) Significant work is being done to progress and develop how the Church lives out the MCI summary statement 'Living Wholeheartedly as Followers of Jesus for the transformation of the world'. Resources are being developed and Heather reminded the Board that all its work is carried out in light of this statement
 - 2) Despite requests for comment on the situation regarding the ongoing disciplinary process involving the minister and an elder in Christ Church in Sandymount (part of the Alternating Ministry Scheme), no public statement will be made because it is a matter of PCI discipline.
 - 3) Covid-permitting, it is planned to use The Spires (PCI) for Conference 2022 and the Conference Arrangements Committee are due meet next week.
 - 4) Unfortunately, Edgehill House will be closed for the month of January. It was only a short time that staff had returned after the previous lockdown, but it became inevitable following government guidelines to work from home where possible. The District Superintendents continue to keep in contact with Circuits and ministers through the challenges of the pandemic.
 - 5) Heather reported that Ms Gillian Laney has tendered her resignation in order to take up a new position, so careful thought is being given to the process of finding a replacement, and some temporary accounting cover in the meantime. The Board was unanimous in expressing regret that Gillian will be leaving, and tribute was paid to her significant contribution to the life of the church. It was agreed that the Risk Register would need to be updated.

6) Laura Griffith (Lay Secretary, Connexional Local Preachers' Committee) was invited to update the Board regarding plans for a service celebrating the work of Local Preachers to be held on Circuits on the 3rd Sunday in September. As both Laura and Heather commented, this is the start of a strategic process aimed at involving Local Preachers more fully in the life of the church.

6. Administrative Items

a. Methodist College Endowments

Paper 005_2022.01 6a, which had been previously circulated, set out the proposed scheme 'Methodist College Act 1928 – Alteration of restricted funds and ancillary matters' whereby a number of historic endowments would be amalgamated into a single fund, the 'Methodist College Foundation Fund'. Care has been taken to match as closely as possible the original purposes of the endowments, taking into account changed circumstances, and it is proposed that income from the fund will be used:

- to support pastoral provision within the school
- to support the ongoing provision of the Chapel of Unity
- to support children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds
- and to support the children of children of any eligible Methodist ministers

There was broad agreement for the proposed scheme, but a response will not be given until after the February meeting of the Board, pending legal advice which has been sought.

b. Conference Allocation

Dr Morris proposed that the Conference 2022 consist of 115 ministers and 115 laypersons – a similar number to recent years.

Agreed

7. Finance

Tony O'Connor welcomed Ms Gillian Laney (CFO) to the meeting and, on behalf of the Board, expressed good wishes to her on her new appointment, but also sorrow at her departure from her role in MCI. He said that there had been universal expressions of thanks and appreciation for her work with the Church.

Gillian thanked him and presented the 2022 Connexional Budgets from Comprehensive Assessment (CA). Paper 005_2022.01 7, which had been previously circulated, set out a summary of key movements on the various accounts, the bulk of which will be funded from the CA. The 2022 CA figure of £1,317k had been determined by the Connexional finance Committee in 2021. Planning for the 2023 CA and the amounts to be contributed by Circuits will take place over the coming months.

Paul Cummings reported that the Finance Sub Committee (FC) had met on 5th January. In addition to reviewing the figures in the budgetary summary just presented, the group had examined:

- examples of Charity Reserves policies whereby charities are required by law to hold sufficient funds to cover all liabilities. This will be given further consideration at future meetings
- a self-assessment tool, Financial Health Check for Charities and Churches, which could prove useful in the future for both the Governance Board and Circuits.

8. Working Party on Human Sexuality

Ms Gillian Kingston outlined the background of work already carried out by a Working Party set up in 2014 comprising the members of the Faith & Order Committee plus a representative from IMYC and one from the Church of Ireland. The Conference of 2016 had directed that the booklet "Sexuality: Developing good conversations on difficult questions" be discussed on every Circuit, but this had only happened on a very small minority of Circuits. In addition, District Bible Studies had been held.

The Faith & Order Committee have convened a special meeting to consider the report being prepared for consideration at this year's Conference. In general, it was agreed that small group discussion at Conference offered the best opportunity for conversation, and that the facilitators of those groups need to be well-chosen. Further thought to be given to this at the next Board meeting, by which time the report will have been received from the Working Party.

9. Policy Review

Paper 005_2201.01 9a, a draft policy document outlining a process for declarations of Conflict of Interest in Committee or Circuit meetings, had been previously circulated. It's an aspect of good governance as a charity which needs to be observed, and the document was approved in principle, but the introduction to be deferred to a later date, perhaps as part of a booklet.

10. Committee Reporting Programme

Consideration was given to a process for the various committees to report to the Governance Board. One key area for the Board to monitor is the governance of each of the committees, so a Report Sheet was tabled which looks for the membership of the Board/Committee; the number of meetings held; and a brief summary of current areas of work. In this first year of some committee reports going to Conference via the Governance Board, it was thought it would be helpful for a written report to still be included in the Blue Book. Each committee to be informed to submit a written report by the end of March so that they can be presented at the April meeting of the Board.

11. Stipends, Allowances and Salaries Working Party (005_22.01_11 previously circulated)

The Terms of Reference were adopted and the membership of the Working Party was agreed:

Chair: Mr Paul Cummings

The General Secretary

The Chief Financial Officer

The Human Resources Manager

One member of the old Stipends and Allowances Committee: Rev Harold Agnew

An accountant with knowledge of the laws and regulations of Northern Ireland: *one to appointed*

An Accountant with knowledge of the laws and regulations of The Irish Republic: Mr John Kingston

An Experienced Circuit Treasurer: Ms Joan Doherty

The WP may co-opt or consult with other individuals if a particular skill set, or knowledge base is identified that is not covered adequately by the above membership.

12. Governance Board Nominations Committee

No nominations needed this year since all Board members are in their first year of service.

13. Any Other Business

None

14. Next Meeting:

10th February in Belfast

15. Closing prayer

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

Tony O'Connor
10th February 2022