

## The Governance Board Meeting 020: 16<sup>th</sup> October on Zoom

### MINUTES

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

#### **In attendance:**

Ms Clíodhna Smyth (Secretary to the Board)

#### **In attendance via Zoom to present particular items of business:**

Ms Nicola Robinson (Head of Finance) – Item 9

#### **1. Welcome and Apologies**

All were welcomed to the meeting and apologies were noted.

#### **2. Opening Prayers**

Rev Harold Agnew opened the meeting in prayer.

#### **3. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising**

The Minutes were agreed subject to 2 small clarifications and there were no matters arising not covered by the agenda.

#### **4. Conflicts of Interest**

None declared.

#### **5. Past Decisions – Implementation**

Mission-related property decisions: It was observed that developing criteria for mission-related property decisions should be led by the Connexional Team (CT) rather than the Property Board (PB), as Missional thinking is required. It is difficult to identify a comprehensive list of all the criteria that are required for each Mission as circumstances vary so much, but the CT do consider all property-related decisions on that basis.

The Superintendent of a circuit observed that it is a challenge for most CT members to get into the detail of complex property schemes and that the PB is essential in helping these conversations, however the process can slow down when the people on the circuit are not directly involved. It is a complex process with many complex issues, and it was agreed that it needs to continue to be addressed.

Policy on how MCI uses reserves: A query was raised regarding the finalisation of the policy on how MCI uses reserves - it will come once the review of central services/finances is completed by the Chair.

#### **6. PAC**

The PAC has not met or corresponded since the last meeting and there is a meeting scheduled for 23<sup>rd</sup> October.

#### **7. General Secretary's Report**

Dr Morris reported:

Circuit realignments - when circuits decide to realign there is a growing awareness that MCI is only at the beginning of the effective implementation of this in terms of Mission. Members of the GB involved were commended for their part in this difficult process. In response to a query regarding circuit alignment in

the NW and SD the General Secretary responded that circuit realignment is not appropriate in every context nor the correct way to structure for Mission everywhere. There are ongoing discussions with the DSs to see what is appropriate for each district, and missional questions are continuing across the Connexion.

Autumn Soul a significant event for young people and prayers are requested for it taking place 28/29 Oct in Bangor.

Connexional Processes — The centre is doing as much as possible to not weigh circuits down with form-filling and as MCI is a single charity much of the associated administration has been reduced by the centre taking on the load. While circuits feel that policy implementation, feedback required and information-gathering is onerous, it is incumbent on MCI to make processes rigorous in the light of being in a new Governance/legislative era.

Presidential resources are available monthly on spiritual disciplines and people are encouraged to use them.

DS retreats – Post Covid these have been reinstated twice a year.

Church leaders Rome visit – The British and Irish Ambassadors to the Holy See invited church leaders to Rome to take part in a seminar on the Good Friday agreement, and a Service was held.

Each leader spoke of the effect of the ongoing challenges of the GF agreement at the seminar, attended by many Ambassadors, which reflected the fact that the NI journey is one that others are looking at from the rest of the world. The service was at the Rhodesian church attended by a group of Christians from the different traditions in Rome. The President noted that there is a significant role for the church leaders to play in the ongoing journey of the Peace Process and a desire to see what can be done by them to help move the process forward.

Update on Human Sexuality – there is less anxiety now as all correspondence received has been answered and a letter went to all users on the process MCI is following on this topic into Conference 2024.

Re:Call conference retreat for Ministers – A proposal was put to the GB to gather Ministers for prayer and spiritual renewal in January 2024, and a budget line is to be allocated for this going forward. **Agreed**

Property Processes – The Estates manager is still off work, due back soon but property processes are continuing to be revised by the chair of the PB and Chair of the Statutory Trustees so that these can go to Conference 2024 for ratification.

It was agreed that a 2<sup>nd</sup> person is required in the Estates department however recruitment is on hold as the Estates manager needs to be involved in the recruitment process. New property processes need to be in place in order to determine the skill set required of this 2<sup>nd</sup> person. There is no cover and hence a big impact with the Estates manager being off work, however others in MCI are covering urgent issues.

Local trustees 14% of total land and property in North and South is held by local trustees. 35% of deeds are still not held centrally. A list of circuits identifying local trusteeship is due from the Estates manager when he returns.

**Centenary** trustees – They understand that properties are to be transferred into statutory trusteeship, however negotiations are ongoing to ensure this happens, as the local trustees still have authority over various accounts. **Proposal:** The Chair of the Statutory Trustees, General Secretary and Chair of the GB request to be delegated authority to give permission to proceed should a decision be required before the next GB meeting. **Agreed.**

Living Wage review HMRC reviewed the Living Wage in MCI in June. Outcome was 2 small cases were found and a fine of £205 applied. It was emphasised that had these people been centrally employed, no infringement would have happened.

A question was posed regarding how many people are still employed locally - the HR manager said she has never been informed of any, despite many requests. Due to her knowledge of MCI she thinks that organists/cleaners are most likely to still be locally employed. The HR manager is constantly reminding people that they must be centrally employed now.

The Governance Board formally thanks the HR manager for her contribution, rigour, overseeing and expertise in this area.

DS appointment process This is to be shortened from 2 to 1 year's notice and the MPPC is working on this, with formal proposals to come in November to the GB.

WMC Gothenburg meeting August 2024 **Proposal:** to send 10 people to this World Methodist conference: WMC MCI 3 members plus the 2 current EMC members, the President and Lay Leader and 3 young leaders. Significant cost of approximately €10k. **Agreed**

Nigerian Church – The Nigerian church have agreed that they will no longer appoint a Bishop of Ireland & London – just London. It has been verbally agreed and MCI await official confirmation of same.

## 8. Administrative Items

Health & Safety policy – The risk assessment part of this is a significant part of this policy but it doesn't give equivocal guidance because all insurers have different interpretations. There is no other practical way of proceeding other than to say the spirit of the policy is already embedded in the circuits.

Dan Randall – UMC Due to come to North Connacht circuit in September but the visa was turned down, it's now in appeal, they hope to come in January. Wife Courtney is coming as a UMC missionary and is being paid by UMC. A contingency plan is being put in place should the visa be refused again. **Proposal:** to pay the stipend for September as previously agreed. This one-off payment has no ongoing implications.

**Agreed**

St Kevins's Park – This manse is being sold. The house was left to circuit to be used as a manse and the local trustees want to sell the house and release the funds to the circuit. They have requested and for indemnity in case anyone from the family contests, but it is a long time ago, and family are very unlikely to take MCI to court over it. It was agreed that this happening is a low risk and the indemnity should be given.

**Proposal:** The Chair of the Statutory Trustees, General Secretary and Chair of the GB request being delegated authority to give indemnity and hence permission to sell. **Agreed.**

Safeguarding

- The data breach as noted previously is a very low risk and the Safeguarding officer continues to follow up.
- CCNI - MCI had to submit a serious incident report. All processes are being followed. The local circuit acted, the MCI solicitor was informed and reported it.
- In regard to what the GB requires going forward in terms of reporting process- the role of the GB is to ensure that the safeguarding officer and board are following the processes which are in place, therefore personal details of each occurrence are not required.

ROI education scoping enquiry into sexual abuse in religious run schools

The Wesley College principal was concerned that Wesley College had not been included in the scoping enquiry currently being held in the ROI, implying that MCI was not considered a religious order. The General Secretary contacted the enquiry proactively as its patron. There is a meeting planned on 18<sup>th</sup> October and the decision as to whether MCI will be further involved will be theirs.

## 10. Audit committee – 2022 year end accounts

There was a presentation from EY auditors and when the loss on investments is taken out the key points are:

- A loss of £4m, explained by an increase in salaries especially in Missions.
- Giving in societies is virtually the same in 2022 as in 2021.
- Accounts are ready 2 months earlier than last year.
- EY were very complimentary of the working papers received and due to this the EY audit fee for next year has been agreed due to the quality of those working papers.

The ARB recommended that the accounts are signed.

The accounts can be signed off subject to small changes to the Conference Report section. **Agreed.**

## 11. Stipends and Allowances

**Stipends proposal** – NI stipend to increase by 4% with an extra 2% on the TMEA. ROI to increase by 3%.

**Agreed**

**Salaries Lay workers proposal** – a proposal of an increase of 5% in NI and 3% in ROI. **Agreed**

It was expressed that these were difficult decisions as any change in stipends triggers a change in pension costs and comprehensive assessment. Previous increases were well below inflation.

A question was posed as to why there was a difference in stipends between ROI and NI and it was answered that there is a working party appointed 18 months ago to look at salaries, stipends and pensions. This is a very complex area as they are all bound together and in addition they also affect the comprehensive assessment. Two different tax jurisdictions also complicates matters.

**Proposal:** It was requested that a paper be seen in future on the recommendation of the salaries and stipends rather than verbally proposed, but it was also noted that the verbal proposal was only as a consequence of PC being on holidays. **Agreed.**

## 13. Governance Board Performance Review

This was carried out via a survey of the GB members over the summer. All points were either agreed or strongly agreed, and overall it was very positive.

Key points to note on the survey responses:

- a) Policies and procedures – 2 members expressed a neutral point of view – the Chair asked if this was an issue. Comment was made that great progress has been made, but how does the GB ensure that these are being implemented/communicated on the ground, and it was answered that it is partly the job of the Gen Sec and partly the committees and it was acknowledged that this is a culture change which will take time to bed down. A comment was made that once people in societies understand they are not carrying the risk any more this really helps compliance with policy implementation and paperwork.
- b) There is a list of policies and they are reviewed on a regular basis. Policies should be accessible for anyone in the Connexion and thus it was decided to compile a central register of policies to include last reviewed, when the next review is due and who is responsible for them. This will help decide which policies should be published on the website, as it is not appropriate for all to be there. **Action: HM/CS to do this November.**
- c) Collective responsibility for decision making – one person disagreed. The place to raise disagreements is in the board room at the time. It is important that each GB member feels able to be completely open and express their honest opinions – if anyone does not feel that freedom then they are requested to approach the Chair in confidence to discuss this, or any aspect of board meetings.
- d) Communication from GB to the wider MCI church – this has been discussed before and the Chair invited comments and suggestions from the GB on this important topic - how the GB can increase engagement with the wider MCI. It was suggested
  - to have an open Zoom meeting during which the GB take and answer questions.
  - Disseminate key issues through Ministerial colleagues.
  - Have GB actions as a standing item on each CE and church council agenda **Action: HM**

### e) Chair of the MCI Governance Board

The Chair excused himself whilst this was discussed.

The board expressed its confidence in the Chair.

The induction that was given to the new Board members was commended as being an excellent experience of induction.

The term of Chair is 3 years – thus the current term is finishing at Conference 2024. The Chairman planned to step aside in 2024, however 2 major pieces of work are ongoing.

**Proposal:** To complete these requires one more year – so the Chairman will step down in June 2025.

**Unanimously agreed by the GB.**

There would need to be succession planning so ideally a name to be Chair should be decided a year in advance. This will form part of the process going forward.

**14. Any Other Business**

Auditors tendering process Some firms showed interest but didn't submit a bid, this was primarily due to the UK exiting from the EU meant a lack of foreign workers available and they are very busy at a time when the audit is required for MCI. Overall, the AAC said that EY were considering withdrawing from the audit as there were too many problems but thanks to the quality of papers for the 2022 accounts they have now agreed to go forward as our auditors for another few years.

**15. Next Meeting:** 23rd November, Belfast - investigate the January meeting being in Dublin, a central location is needed as DCM is closed. **Action: HM**

**16. Closing prayer**

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

Tony O'Connor 16th October 2023