

Church Support Committee Minutes**Time:** 10.30am – 2.30pm**Date:** Saturday 26th March 2022**Location:** Hybrid meeting in person and Zoom (meeting recorded for the purpose of minutes)**Attendees:**

John Bentham
 Barbara Bridges
 Eric Fenwick (Zoom)
 Colin Brown (Zoom)
 Steve Richards
 Gerry Simonis
 Anna Lachowski (Zoom)
 Ian Jones (Zoom)
 Keith Bradley
 Alan Kennedy
 Tim Bateman
 Peter Young
 Joy Howell
 Steve Gill (Zoom)

Representing:

Chair
 Chair APCC Group
 Chair of Communications Group
 CF in Wales
 CF in Wales
 CF in Scotland
 East Midlands Area
 Eastern
 North East Area
 North West Area/ICB Chair
 North West Midlands
 South East Area
 South West Midlands Area
 South West Area

Staff:

Yvonne Campbell General Secretary
 Walter Riggins L & D Manager
 Maddy Varley L & D Administrator / Minutes (Zoom)
 Neil Chappell Website & Social Media Officer
 Luzia Watt Church Support Worker
 Lisa Vickers Safeguarding Officer (Zoom)

Participant Observer

Suzanne Nockels President (Zoom)

Apologies:

Nick Gleich Chair of CIPT Management Board

Abbreviations:

APCCG	Accreditation and Pastoral Care Coordinator Group
CC	Congregational Church
CF	Congregational Federation
CIPT MB	Congregational Institute of Practical Theology Management Board
CSC	Church Support Committee
CSW	Church Support Worker
FX	Fresh Expressions

Opening devotions

The Chair welcomed committee members to the first hybrid meeting. Thanks to all who made the Hybrid possible with the new technology. He clarified etiquette to be observed during this new style of meeting and expressed appreciation for being able to meet in-person again. New members Tim Bateman (North West Midlands Area), Steve Gill (South West) and Joy Howell (representing South West Midlands Area) were welcomed to the Committee.

The Chair led the Committee in prayer.

Apologies

As noted above.

Minutes of Last Meeting (25th Sept 2021) Paper B

The following amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting were required:

- Page 4 – The second paragraph under South West Area should be deleted.
- Pages 5 & 7 – Granada should read Grenada
- Page 6 – In the second paragraph under Inter Church Board the word ‘service’ should be replaced by ‘session’.

Post Meeting Note: These amendments have been made and an updated version of the minutes has been uploaded to the committee area of the CF website.

Matters arising not elsewhere on the Agenda

It was confirmed that the error on the budget paper should have read 2021 rather than 2020.

Notice of Any Other Business

There were no notices of any other business not on the agenda.

Accreditation and Pastoral Care Group Paper C

The pandemic has highlighted the importance and value of this role. There is a lack of PCC's in some Areas, and some have no active PCC's at all. Area reps were asked to actively promote and recruit for the role in their Areas. A job description for the role is currently being produced. Anyone interested in the role and joining the team should contact the APCCG Chair or the General Secretary.

The Robinsons Trust is seeking a representative from the CF. Area Reps are again asked to take this back to their Areas to ask for a volunteer. Anyone interested should contact the General Secretary.

Action – Area reps to encourage churches to nominate a representative for Christian Aid and Robinsons Trust

The APCC Group have discussed what action they should take when those on the Accredited Roll of Ministries do not take up the required safeguarding training when it is offered. It was proposed that anyone on the Accredited Roll that does not take up safeguarding training will remain on the roll, but their details will not be made public, and they will not be included in the Yearbook.

The Safeguarding Officer and General Secretary will make follow-up phone calls if no response is received to the offer of safeguarding training. Feedback for the training has been very positive, and it was felt that it could perhaps be more widely promoted, which may increase take-up.

Proposal: Those on the Accredited Roll that do not take up the offer of safeguarding training may stay on the roll, but their details will not be made public and will not appear in the Yearbook.

Seconded: Keith Bradley

Abstained: 1

Proposal agreed.

Online safety is an area where concern has grown during the pandemic and the APCCG and Safeguarding Officer are in the process of sourcing some appropriate training packages. They are also producing a booklet on best practice for anti-bullying in a church setting.

Due to the rise in covid cases the APCCG Chair will not be attending the upcoming residential training weekend in order to reduce numbers but will be available remotely to assist students.

Kathy Shaw and Helen Keighley have both started the Accreditation process and are expected to complete the process next year.

There are two recommendations to Council for accreditation:

Suzanne Nockels – Chaplain

Simone Ramacci – Minister

Recommendation to Council: Suzanne Nockels and Simone Ramacci to be accredited as Chaplain and Minister respectively.

Seconded: Alan Kennedy

Agreed: Unanimous

There was an unsuccessful application for accreditation for Pioneer Minister, which has prompted discussion as to what support a pioneer minister would need, and what the role would entail. The Committee discussed at length how churches also need support and encouragement to create pioneering opportunities alongside supporting those that have a calling to pioneer ministry. The Pioneer Working Group have been working through these issues and hope to be able to support any applications for pioneer ministry early in the process.

The APCCG are hoping to repeat their visit to the National Arboretum. Those that attended the visit found it helpful to spend time together, but also to have time spent in reflection.

CIPT Management Board – Paper D

The Chair of the CIPT Management Board was not present at the meeting. A report had been submitted in advance and there were no questions from the committee but thanks given to CIPT Management Committee for their work.

Inter church Board – Paper E

In addition to the events mentioned in the report, the National Ecumenical Officers Group held an additional meeting which included a reception with the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Inter Church Board Rep felt it was an honour to represent the CF at this event.

The General Secretary attended the Churches Together Forum event with the Inter Church Board Rep. Many churches were represented, and the GS wanted to encourage more Congregationalists to get involved at Churches Together locally so they can attend Forum in the future. With the closure of the County Ecumenical Officers group due to lack of funding, Area Reps are being asked to encourage more proactive local ecumenical work in their Areas. The funding had been largely provided by Church of England and other denominations are unable to provide such funds.

Everyone is invited to attend the Induction service of Rev Helen Cameron as Moderator of the Free Churches Group on Sunday 3rd April, 6.30pm at Wesley Chapel, London.

Christian Aid – Donations for the Christian Aid appeal are being received. Area reps asked to encourage area churches to donate £50 for the 50th Anniversary funds. We still do not have a CF Rep for Christian Aid and Area Reps are encouraged to ask for a volunteer in their churches and Area.

Angela Robinson has volunteered for the role of Word Day of Prayer Rep for England and Wales.

Proposed: Yvonne Campbell

Seconded: Barbara Bridges

Agreed: Unanimous

CTBI have produced a significant document on praying together at national and international crisis points, including ecumenical prayer which makes a public statement. This will be an agenda item for a future meeting to discuss how we take this issue forward.

Action: A Doodle Poll to be sent round to identify a suitable date for a meeting to discuss this issue.

Report was received from Martin Spain about the work of the United Board – Martin was thanked for his work and subsequent report.

CWM

Nigel Lindsay - Nigel sends a monthly report on his work in Grenada, which are posted on the CF website. The Committee were asked to continue to remember Nigel in their prayers and remind churches that he is happy to remotely attend any events taking place in your churches.

A potential trip to Grenada is being considered for the future.

Gift of Grace - There is still some CWM Gift of Grace funding remaining. Churches who will be struggling to pay their affiliation fees can apply for them to be waived if the church has a CF Safeguarding certificate.

MSP4 -The project has been paused for a while, but ideas on how we move forward will be announced in due course. Remaining monies from MSP3 has been agreed by CWM to be moved into MSP4 for a youth element.

If Only – We have run four different webinars on four different subjects (Pioneering Ministry, Spiritual Enabling Ministry, Project Management, Website and Social Media). These are available to view on the CF website, and printed packs are available to order.

Legacies of Slavery – Janet Wootton has been working on this project. Anyone interested in getting involved should contact Janet or the General Secretary. We are considering what actions we want to take forward from the work that CWM has carried out.

CWM – CWM is holding their main meeting in London this year. The Assembly for Europe is being held at Missenden Abbey in June. The General Secretary will contact churches in due course to see if anyone wishes to attend.

Budget Papers – Paper G

The budget papers were submitted late to the Committee. To allow members the opportunity to give the papers appropriate attention they were not discussed during the meeting. Committee members were invited to submit any questions directly to the budget holders after the meeting.

Post meeting note

The following notes were sent with the Accounts to committee members from the Budget holders

- 2019 actuals have been included to give a comparison of a pre pandemic year as we move back into “normal”
- Overall budgets are down and forecast to be down in 2023
- Line 7310 is historic and is a student loan which CF agreed to pay. Payments have been sporadic during 2021 and does not help with keeping up to date – we are looking at how we manage this line better or if we can not have responsibility for it going forward
- Ecumenical expenses (line 7811) have been increased because of more meetings being face to face and more meetings being paid from this line
- Youth and Children’s lines have been increased as Luzia continues to develop the provision
- There is a slight increase in websites as this work is also developed and updates installed
- Line 7825 under safeguarding has been increased given our commitment to training
- Line 7828 has been used for Ministerial counselling and please do encourage Ministers to use this service if they need to
- Line 7120/7125 starter and mini grants are very much reduced over the pandemic
- MSP3 this money will not be merged into the MSP4 monies and this project will progress into 2022/2023

Impact Grants – Paper H

Several churches had been in contact regarding Impact Grants, however only one application has been received. This application was from Upper Killay requesting support for funding a family support worker, and also for the refurbishment of the vestry room, enabling them to open a coffee shop. A summary of the application had been submitted to the committee.

The Grants Group were happy to recommend the proposal and it was confirmed that there is £111,000 available in the grants fund.

Proposal: Approve grant funding of £15,000 over three years to Upper Killay as per application.

Seconded: Steve Richards

Approved: Unanimous

A change in the eligibility criteria for Impact Grants was proposed (Paper H1). This change would require churches to agree to a minimum of five years affiliation to CF following the final grant payment, otherwise repayment of the grant would be required in full.

There was much discussion around the legalities, working and practicalities of this proposal. The suggestion was agreed in principle, but it was felt that the wording needed more careful consideration along with the legality of enforcing such a change. It was confirmed that the five-year period before another application can be made is calculated from the date a grant is approved at a CSC meeting.

Proposal: To implement a change (after further consultation regarding legalities) in criteria for Impact Grants, with a change in the wording of the first two proposed paragraphs such as 'Churches applying for an Impact Grant *must* be committed to affiliation with the Congregational Federation for a further five years after the final payment is given.'

Seconded: Tim Bateman

Agreement: 1 Abstained, otherwise unanimous.

The CSW has been actively encouraging churches to apply for Impact Grants.

It was confirmed that churches are expected to submit a report at the end of the grant period outlining how the grant was used and how it has helped the church to grow or increase outreach.

Area Reports – Paper I

The General Secretary thanked the Area Reps for their reports. There were 4 different themes and support needs identified across the reports:

- Encouragement generally
- Prayer, both specific and general
- Vacancies – some churches require support while they are in vacancy and others are finding difficulties with pulpit supply.
- Buildings – some churches are discovering problems when reopening the church after such a long period of closure.

The General Secretary shared the Church Support Team action plan and talked through the completed actions. The new themes outlined above will be added for the team to work through.

Area Reps were asked to suggest a joy and a challenge from their Areas:

CF in Wales

A joy is that many churches are now re-opening their Sunday Schools fully and there is a lot of good work taking place. Some have held coffee mornings and a recent afternoon tea in aid of Alzheimer's charities raised over £400.

There are still churches that have not reopened which is a challenge. Some churches are still offering hybrid services which is both a joy and a challenge, as it offers a service for those that are unable to attend in person, but also means that some who *could* attend in person choose not to.

South West Area

A joy has been children's clubs re-opening again. This has sometimes been intermittent due to Covid outbreaks but has been working well.

The challenge of having churches with grade 2 listed status being in need of repair. Some are also in conservation areas. This makes major building works such as roof and window repairs or replacement more expensive than usual. The Area will be looking into other grant possibilities to assist with these costs.

East Midlands Area

Lots of churches are trying new things and working more closely with others in the community, which is a joy.

Challenges have been in getting people to volunteer for particular roles within the Area, and some churches have struggled to return to a regular pattern of worship.

Eastern Area

Some churches are feeling isolated and the number of ministers in the Area has declined for a number of reasons. There have been some difficulties in recruiting new ministers which has been challenging.

Some churches have seen an increase in volunteers and grants received from the Congregational Federation have proved very useful.

There are also two potential pioneering projects in the area which are exciting and committee asked to pray for these.

One church has been delivering services via Facebook and a Christian radio station has asked for permission to broadcast the services.

CF in Scotland

The structure of CF Scotland has been changed due to difficulties in filling positions. There is now only a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. This team have visited churches to see what support they are able to offer.

Some churches are still seeking ministers or pastors, but those with ministers have seen good attendance at services.

The URC in Scotland have been approaching independent churches with regards to their education and training packages, which use the word 'congregational' in the title, so the Area will keep an on how this develops.

South West Midlands

Ruscombe is in the process of applying to become a recognized CF church. Their membership has risen from three to five.

Churches that have reopened are doing well, and attendance at Messy Church has been good.

There have been challenges particularly with bereavements and difficulties in attracting volunteers within the Area.

South East Area

There are joys in the development of churches, and several have submitted planning applications and one new building has been completed successfully. There have been some churches with storm damage, and various reports are needed to assess the damage.

All churches are now back open. Some people have been reluctant to attend in person, but Zoom is still being used to offer services to these.

North East Area

All churches are back open, however there are two churches that refuse to engage with the Area. The Area are considering whether they should continue to contact these churches and whether there are other ways they can encourage engagement.

There was good attendance from churches at the recent Area assembly. There has been discussion as to whether the Exec need to meet as often as they do as many of the same issues are discussed repeatedly. It is being considered whether to reduce the number of meetings to one face-to-face meeting per year, and one via Zoom.

There are plans to hold a 50th anniversary gathering in Scarborough in the summer.

North West Area

There have been issues with some churches having very small congregations. Some ministers have been reluctant to travel to other churches due to Covid. There are a couple of churches with new ministers and an evangelist.

The Area are considering the possibility of a role for Area Ministry or an Area Support Worker, which is both a joy and a challenge.

North West Midlands

There have been challenges with a few individual churches; one who has no contact with the Area unless they physically visit the church, and one that is experiencing dissent within its leadership team. There is no active pastoral support in the Area.

It is a joy that one church in particular has grown during the pandemic due to their online presence. They now have huge online service with people even joining from overseas. They have appointed an online pastor in response to this, although this comes with other challenges in how to fund and sustain this growth.

All churches have now re-opened, and many are working well together.

There are many new people joining the church, particularly people from Hong Kong and Iran. Again, this is a joy, but a challenge in how to stay connected with them because of the language barrier.

There have been an increased number of children in church which has been positive, but challenging as numbers can be inconsistent due to holidays etc.

Churches have been able to claim insurance for a second year for loss of income, although caution is advised as there are costs to be deducted.

There was some discussion around the increase in energy bills and whether the government could be lobbied to introduce a price cap for charities and churches.

Action: The General Secretary to contact the Free Churches Group to discuss this issue in more detail.

There was discussion on welcoming refugees from Ukraine into our churches and preparing for this. Suggestions included producing welcome posters in Ukrainian, offering to share church spaces for them to hold their own services and hosting a local lunch to welcome people to the area.

Church Support Team

Reports had been submitted prior to the meeting, and the committee were invited to ask any questions.

Church Support Worker

The CSW has developed the role since joining the team two years ago during the lockdown period. She is excited to now be able to visit churches in person. She has already visited churches in Market Harborough and Essex. She was pleased to see how these churches were engaging with the local communities and happy to offer support and share ideas.

A weekend away for youth and children is being considered. This would include physical activities and crafts for different age groups, with a focus on the Bible. Two venues are being considered and it is possible that two regional trips could be planned. The committee were very enthusiastic and encouraging in these plans. A package of proposals is to be prepared for Council so that budgets and the potential to fund grants for children can be considered.

Action: CSW to prepare proposal of a youth and children's residential trip for Council.

A children's assembly is planned to run alongside the main May Assembly. This will include a visit from Steve the Juggler who uses circus skills to talk about the Bible. Lots of crafts, stories and dance is also planned. Ten children have registered to attend so far. More volunteers are required to help with the sessions, and anyone interested should contact the CSW.

The Safeguarding Children training was very successful, and feedback was very positive. It was disappointing that a couple of churches signed up but did not attend. This had cost implications and as there was a waiting list, meant that others missed out on the opportunity.

Work is ongoing to improve the website with a specific youth and children's area which would include resources for churches wanting to increase their work with youth and children, newsletters, inspiration and encouragement.

Resources are planned for Queen's jubilee celebrations, and these will all be made available on the Resource Hub.

Website and social media

A page will be created for the Ministry and Mission fund. This will include information about the Fund, including the fund balance sheet and reports from churches that have benefitted from it.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding Checkers have now resumed visits to churches after lockdown periods. More Checkers are needed in the North West and North West Midlands Areas. Anyone interested in taking up this role should contact the Safeguarding Officer.

Barbara Bridges was thanked for her work as a Safeguarding Checker in the South West Midlands Area as she is moving on. Joy Howell and Sara Iles were welcomed as they start work as Checkers in this Area.

The Safeguarding training for those on the accredited roll has proved to be very good value at £8.71 per person. A follow up phone call will be made to those on the roll who have not attended any safeguarding training. The training needs to be renewed every five years. 44 people also attended the Safeguarding Adults at risk of Harm training, which cost £10.90 per person. The feedback for these training courses has been very positive and others are encouraged to sign up. Nigel Lindsay even participated from Grenada!

It was confirmed that some churches still don't have an up-to-date safeguarding certificate and they are encouraged to contact the Safeguarding Officer.

A safeguarding policy and code of conduct for operational use, which includes volunteers, has been produced. It has been approved by Council and is now in use.

Certificates for years of service are being produced and will be presented at assembly as part of the 50th year anniversary celebrations.

There are approximately 70 people on the accredited roll who are listed as inactive. Management of the list will be considered as there may be pastoral care needs for those who are inactive.

Learning and Development

Our training course has been revalidated by York St John University. They are very happy with our offer, and the External Examiner also endorses our course very highly. Thanks are given to the tutors for all their hard work.

Fliers for upcoming Likewise days were on the table for the Committee to take. One has already taken place successfully face to face and two others have been organized, The Spring School was very successful. A report and statement produced from the event is now on the website and a copy of the statement has been sent to CTE for them to use. We are hoping that a similar event will take place every two years.

The pioneer Working Group have produced a report for Council. Two members of the group, the President and President Elect, were invited to attend a formal URC meeting which they were very encouraged by. The group are in conversation with URC with regards to producing a joint non-conformist pioneering hub with each party making contributions. Please contact the L&D Manager with any questions or comments about this.

Various recent publications were made available for the Committee to take, including Being Congregational, Christian Hospitality and The Seven Accredited Ministries of the CF. More copies can be ordered through the Nottingham office. A new publication is planned on the various administration roles within churches, starting with the roles of Church Secretary and Treasurer. This follows two very successful and well attended online meetings, one with Church Secretaries and one with Treasurers.

Clarification was sought re page 19 of the Being Congregational booklet; is it church meetings or trustees who are ultimately responsible for the church?

Action: This point will be clarified, and an amendment issued if required.

We are hoping to be able to offer some very short courses in the future, on a range of subjects as outlined in the report. These could be delivered face to face, hybrid or remotely. Certificates of attendance would be issued, and it may be that gaining a number of certificates would equal an internal Diploma or similar. Members were invited to contact L&D Manager with any suggestions of useful subjects.

Supporting people who have experienced trauma was suggested as needed to help churches support refugees from Ukraine.

It was confirmed that Council is considering possible funding for CMD events for those on the accredited roll. Events such as Spring School would be included.

Communications Group

The latest edition of Refresh has been very well received. The committee was asked to encourage wider readership and also contributions to the content. The next edition includes a feature on Clarendon Park.

It was confirmed that despite the glossy paper, the Refresh magazines are fully recyclable.

The Year Book has a special edition 50th anniversary front cover. The Year Book will now continue in its current A4 format.

Chair of CSC

This was the last meeting for the current Chair. John Bentham was thanked for his support and faithfulness in the role.

There have been no volunteers to take on the role from Committee members and therefore the search will be broadened. Please contact the General Secretary with any suggestions for the role. The General Secretary will represent the CSC at the next Council meeting.

Assembly

The National Assembly takes place on 14th May. It was agreed that the General Secretary would represent the APCCG Chair on stage as she is unavailable.

AOB

None

Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting is Saturday 24th September. This will be a Hybrid meeting.

The meeting was closed in prayer.