

Church Support Committee Minutes

Time: 10.30am – 2.30pm

Date: Saturday 25th March 2023

Location: Hybrid meeting in person and Zoom

Attendees:

Barbara Bridges
Colin Brown
Steve Richards
Margaret McGuiness (Zoom)
Anna Lachowski (Zoom)
Keith Bradley
Alan Kennedy
Peter Young
Joy Howell
Ruth Green

Representing:

(Acting Chair) Chair APCC Group
CF in Wales
CF in Wales
CF in Scotland
East Midlands Area
North East Area
North West Area/ICB Chair
South East Area
South West Midlands Area
South West Area

Staff:

Yvonne Campbell General Secretary
Maddy Varley L & D Administrator/Minutes
Luzia Watt Church Support Worker
Neil Chappell Website and Social Media Officer

Apologies

Nick Gleich Chair of CIPT Management Board
Lisa Vickers Safeguarding Officer
Ian Jones Eastern Area

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

1. Opening devotions

The Chair welcomed committee members to the meeting. She confirmed that she was continuing to act as Chair and that the role of Chair was still currently vacant.

The Chair opened the meeting with a reading and prayer.

2. Apologies

As noted above.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting (24th September 2022) Paper B

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

- It was confirmed that the Robinsons Trust and Christian Aid are both still seeking representatives from the CF. All the details are available on the CF website. The Robinsons Trust meet in London twice per year and offer a birthday meal voucher, but do not cover expenses. With this in mind, it may be a position best suited to someone local to London, although CF may be able to offer expenses. Anyone interested should email the General Secretary.

Action – Share opportunity sheet with Area as appropriate

By who – Area representatives

By when – next Assembly meeting or communication

5. Notice of Any Other Business

The report from the Communications Group has been added to item 13 of the agenda.

6. Accreditation and Pastoral Care Group – Paper C

BB has come to the end of two terms as Chair of the APCCG, but happy to remain in post until a new Chair is found. The Committee recommended BB remains as Acting Chair until a replacement is found.

Proposed: PY

Decision: Unanimous

Clarification was given regarding the requirement to complete CF approved safeguarding training to remain on the accredited roll, that the completion of safeguarding training is also a requirement to be added to the roll initially. This recommendation has been added by the APCCG as a matter of clarity.

Proposed: BB

Seconded: AK

Decision: Unanimous

Further safeguarding sessions will be rolled out in the spring.

In response to feedback, the Safeguarding Officer will support churches who need to apply for a safeguarding certificate, but find the process daunting, by not sending the entire pack in one go. She will send the documents that require personalization first and then distribute the rest in small sections, offering support at each stage. Area reps were also asked to support these churches through the process if they can.

The APCCG have been looking into the issue of bullying in churches, as referred by CSC previous meetings. The issue is so broad that producing a booklet is not practical. It is hoped that issues can be addressed through training rather than leaflets. The first of these was a webinar on building positive relationships, which was attended by approximately 12 people and can be repeated if necessary either in Areas or nationally online. There are challenges in encouraging those that would really benefit to attend such sessions and it was felt that leaflets, perhaps including basics in employment law around bullying, could be handed to individuals by ministers and might also be beneficial. The issue of bullying is also covered in the Safeguarding policy.

Action: YC to look into further training options

By when: By next meeting

Action: APCCG to reconsider producing anti-bullying leaflet

By when: By next meeting

The Board were reminded that if specific training is needed in Areas, reps should contact the Church Support Team who will be able to assist with providing appropriate training at a local or national level.

It was acknowledged that there is still some confusion about the accreditation process. The APCCG did send out a Doodlepoll for a working group to discuss

this, but there was not enough response to proceed. Some of the difficulty is due to there being applications this year within Areas that have not had applicants for many years, which along with changes in officers, has made Area interviews challenging. This part of the process will also be revisited.

It was confirmed that suggested questions are sent to Areas prior to the interviews taking place. These will be reviewed by the APCCG to also include questions *not* to ask. It was felt that the questions should not be too prescriptive as interviewers need to be able to respond to what is being said.

There have been two disciplinary issues, one of which has ended with the recommendation that Rev Michael Wallace is removed from the roll of ministries as he is unable to acquire a satisfactory DBS.

Seconded: KB

Decision: Unanimous

Action – Council to agree removal of Michael Wallace

By who – Acting chair of CSC

By when – April Council

The Board were reminded of the seriousness of being aware of appropriate use of the internet and mobile phones. Consideration will be given to providing further training on this issue.

The APCCG have interviewed all of those at the end of their Pastoral Period. They are happy to confirm that the following have completed their Pastoral Period and will have PP removed from their name in the Yearbook.

- Michael Rolton
- Anna Lachowski
- Justin Lunnis
- Gerry Simonis
- Caroline Stott

The APCCG recommended to the Committee that those who complete the CIPT Foundation Degree and the Newbiggin Hub Pioneer training will be listed in the yearbook and have their names read out at Assembly in recognition of their achievements and to encourage others.

Recommendation: BB

Seconded: RG

Decision: Unanimous

Action – names to be included at Assembly and Yearbook

By who – General Secretary

By when – Assembly and Yearbook deadline

There are 9 applicants for accreditation this year. They will not all be ready for the next stage next year, but many will.

The Committee was reminded that applications need to include the minute of the church meeting when they were called into ministry. It has often proved difficult for applicants to provide this as it is not always recorded. Area reps were asked to ensure that they remind churches to ensure these decisions are clearly recorded in meeting minutes.

There was some discussion around the difficulties in attaining accreditation for Pioneer Ministry and the lack of opportunities available in pioneer settings. There is a Pioneer Working Group who are looking at and working through these issues and the issue is also on the Council agenda. There is a lot of pioneering work going on in churches, but the definition of Pioneer Minister for accreditation purposes requires clarifying and updating. The Pioneer working group will be tasked with looking into this, in consultation with APCCG and CIPT.

Action: Pioneer Working Group to review and possibly redefine the role of Pioneer Minister

By when: Next CSC meeting. September 2023

The APCCG recommended the following for accreditation as Minister following their successful completion of the Foundation Degree and interview process:

Helen Keighley – Harden Congregational Church

Kathy Shaw – Padfield Congregational Church

Both were agreed unanimously by the Committee

Action – Names to be recommended to Council.

By who – acting chair of CSC

By when - asap

There was some discussion about the lack of knowledge and understanding about Congregationalism within the APCCG and within churches in general. There are both core and optional modules on Congregationalism available through the integrated course. ~~It was suggested that~~ There was discussion about whether both modules should be mandatory for those seeking accreditation. Discussions between APCCG and the L&D Manager will take place to see how best these issues can be addressed. The Committee was reminded that CMD grants are available for those who wish to take this module.

Action – Discussion for clarification

By who - Chair of APCCG and L&D Manger

By when – next CSC meeting

7. **Budget Papers** – Paper D

Thanks were given to Gary Baker for preparing the budget papers.

Some budget lines for 2022 were under the forecast amount as some events did not take place and some meetings continue to be held online, saving on travel and hospitality expenses. Some budget lines, such as Safeguarding, have exceeded the forecast amount due to additional focus and training in these areas.

On page 2 the heading should read January – December, rather than June.

Action – Change to be highlighted to Finance

By who – General Secretary

By when - asap

The Finance team are reviewing the expenses claim policy. Any members wishing to feed comments into the review should email Sue Austin chair of FSSC

8. **Impact Grants** – Paper E

It was confirmed that fewer donations to the Ministry and Mission fund, which helps to fund impact grants, had been made.

The committee was reminded that the remaining grant fund is made up from 10% of the interest from the protected fund when a church closes.

In the past 40% of Ministry and Mission donations went to support CWM, but now churches need to make these donations separately. Only £500 has been donated to CWM in the past year, compared with £6000 in 2019, however the CF also donates time and resources. Area reps should remind churches that their donations are no longer automatically divided between Ministry and Mission and CWM – if they wish to donate to CWM this needs to be done as a separate donation.

Impact Grant application #1 (E2)

Witney Congregational Church have applied for an impact grant to support the employment of a part-time minister on a 24 hour contract. The minister has already been appointed and the church are very happy with their selection, and the appointment also has Area support. Prior to this the church was without a minister for three years. The aim is to make this a full-time post within 3 years.

There was much discussion about the recommended increase in minister's stipend and how this has been difficult for some churches to achieve. Although the grant requested was £15,000 it was felt that the award should be increased to account for the increase in the recommended stipend.

Proposal: To offer Witney CC an Impact Grant towards the stipend of a part-time minister of £6000 per year for three years.

Proposed: KB

Seconded: PY

Agreed: Unanimous

There is currently £174,000 in the grants fund. The Committee was asked to consider if the maximum grant award should be returned to £24,000 from the current £15,000. After much discussion it was felt that increasing grants to £24,000 would limit the number of churches that could be supported. It was felt that £18,000 would offer a valuable increase but leave opportunities for more churches.

Proposal: To increase the maximum Impact Grant award to £18,000 for all churches

Proposed: RG

Seconded: PY

Abstention: 1

Agreed: 8

There was a wider discussion as to whether funds should be made more widely available to churches struggling to meet the additional cost of the increased minister's stipend alongside other rising costs. It was widely felt that since CF had recommended the increase there should be some support available to a maximum of £2000 per church. Consideration was given to where funds would be taken from, for example Ministry and Mission, or general funds.

A proposal was made to ringfence £18,000 from the Ministry and Mission fund for one year only. This would support 50% of the recommended increase. This would need a specific application form.

Proposal: To ringfence £18,000 from the Ministry and Mission fund for one year only to support 50% of the recommended stipend increase.

Proposed: RG
Seconded: PY
Agreed: Unanimous

Action: General Secretary to raise this issue with Council and work with Financial Controller regarding application process

By when – asap

Impact Grant Application #2

Cowper Memorial Congregational Church have submitted an impact grant application for £15000 to repair the ceiling that collapsed without warning. This application does not fulfil the usual criteria for a grant, however the nature of the emergency meant repair had to be carried out immediately. The church has approached some other sources of funding which have been declined as the work has already begun. They have received some funding through their insurance and have also approached the local council and CF Area. They have made adjustments and cancelled other church plans to save money.

Although the Committee do not wish to set a precedence it was strongly felt that the mission of the committee is to help keep churches open and therefore the application should be considered under the 'equipment, facilities and resources' eligibility criteria.

Proposal: To grant Cowper Memorial Congregational Church £15,000 paid in one lump sum to assist with emergency repairs/

Proposed: SR

Seconded: RG

Decision: Unanimous

The Committee were reminded of the other grants available to churches; starter grants and mini grants are available for a wide range of things, which in the past have included youth and children's projects, arts and craft resources, warm spaces, a pop-up charity shop etc. The CSW has requested reports from those churches that have received awards, which can be used to inspire and encourage others to apply. She has received a letter of thanks from a young person expressing gratitude for the resources and equipment provided for their youth club, which has helped to increase participation.

9. CIPT Management Board – Paper F

The Chair of the CIPT Management Board was not present at the meeting but his report had been submitted in advance. There were no questions about this report.

10. Interchurch Board – Paper G

Churches Together in England

The ICB Chair reported that he had attended the CTE enabling group meeting the previous day and would submit a full report in due course.

CTE had received several applications for new member churches and after scrutiny two were accepted into membership.

The theme for this forum was 'Beyond the Crisis', looking at how CTE can take action and offer support through the cost of living crisis. Guest speakers gave presentations and offered reflections and ideas along with panel discussions. The group also received a number of charities and networks in association, which included Trussell Trust, Tear Fund and the National Estate Church Network. The next meeting will be held in the autumn. Committee members were invited to ask any questions by email, due to the length of the report.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

CTBI had promoted the week of prayer for Christian unity along with various webinars. They have produced a booklet of prayers for the King in the lead up to the Coronation. The booklet was approved by the CTE Presidents. The cost is approximately £60 for 60 booklets.

Free Churches Group

Helen Cameron, Free Churches Moderator, will be leading the service at Horningsham CC on 8th July at 2pm and all are encouraged to attend. Helen planted a tree at Horningsham for the Queen's jubilee as it is the oldest free Church in England.

United Board

Martin Spain had provided a report to the ICB, as CF are one of the founding members of the UB. This report confirmed that free church members are now welcome to apply for Chaplaincy roles within the armed forces, and there is now a clear pathway for those interested in armed forces chaplaincy.

World Council of Churches

The question of membership in the World Council for Churches had been raised in a previous meeting. It was confirmed that along with theological reasons for non-membership the CF is not eligible to join as churches need a membership of at least 50,000.

11. CWM – Paper H

The General Secretary, Website and Social Media Officer and Joy Howell will be attending the next CWM meeting, which takes place in the Netherlands.

The Committee were asked to pray into the MSP4 plans. A change in the proposed job description will be made, which is hoped will attract new applicants. This is hoped to be advertised before the Assembly in May.

Plans are in progress for a potential trip to visit and support Nigel in Grenada. A trip to carry out a risk assessment and look into accommodation and transport etc is planned to take place towards the end of this year. It is hoped that such a trip will offer a spiritual experience, mission opportunities and support to Nigel. The area is still recovering from hurricane Ivan 10 years ago, so there are plenty of opportunities to support Nigel's work.

12. Area Reports, a joy and a challenge – Paper I

The General Secretary thanked the Area Reps for all the effort put in to compiling the reports, which were submitted in advance.

Common themes of issues from the reports including

- building repair and maintenance,
- continued growth,
- encouragement
- vacancies.
- Participation
- Supporting smaller congregations
- Safeguarding

Area Reps were invited to share a joy and a challenge with the Committee.

East Midlands Area

A joy has been that lots of churches are trying new things and being more creative. This is attracting new people into churches, including someone that has been a neighbour of a church for 40 years, and has now become integrated in the church community for the first time.

Challenges have been where there are churches with very small membership.

South East Area

A joy is that Highbury Quadrant church although closed, the area is being redeveloped, but the new development includes a church along with housing.

The main challenge is with churches that do not engage with the Area. However, the Area has now managed to fill all the Area officer posts.

South West Midlands Area

The Area has held its first in-person meeting since the pandemic. There were approximately 20 attendees, who enjoyed being together. Attendees included those from churches who are not normally represented at meetings.

The challenges have been in getting people to participate within the Area and to volunteer for Area roles. There are currently a number of vacancies.

North West Area

A challenge has been that the Youth and Children's Worker has moved away. The vacancy has not yet been filled, despite advertising.

A joy has been in recruiting Foday Kamara as the Area Church Support Worker.

South West Area

A joy has been in seeing signs of growth and new ideas being tried. The Area is also pleased to be hosting the national Assembly this year.

A continuing challenge is that churches who do not engage well with the Area are not seeing growth but are the most difficult to support.

CF in Wales

A joy has been the success of Warm Spaces events. These have been financially supported by the local council and have been well attended, including by people who do not usually go to church. It is hoped that these events might continue beyond April. A coffee morning in the Area regularly sees up to 50 people attend.

A challenge has been a church that has not reopened since the pandemic as it has been damaged by vandals and boarded up. The congregation continues to meet elsewhere, however the building trustees which to sell the building and are seeking approval for this. Prayers are that the church can continue, even if a new permanent location needs to be found.

North East Area

The Area held their first face-to-face meeting in the last year. Following the success of the Area gathering Scarborough last year, it will be repeated this year.

The main challenge has been that there is still no Area Chair. The Exec have been making decisions and communicating with churches in the absence of a Chair. The Vice-Chair is representing the Area at meetings.

CF In Scotland

A joy was the induction of Janice Andrews at Ardrossan. The challenge of five churches with vacancies continues. A national online service is delivered on Facebook each Sunday evening.

13. Church Support Team (Paper J)

The Church Support Team shared the completed action plan from the work they have done in response to the needs that were highlighted at the last meeting. The sermon vaults and the booklets and secretaries and treasurers will be launched at Assembly.

The Committee were invited to ask questions of the Church Support Team

Church Support Worker (Paper J1)

The CSW confirmed that her visits to churches are usually made in response to an invitation from the church, but visits sometimes depend on events going on at the church.

Unfortunately, the children's weekend away had to be cancelled; although churches were supportive and encouraging of the event, it appeared that the location of the event was difficult for many families and churches. The positive outcome of this is that the CSW was able to build new relationships and re-engage with churches. It has also led to new ideas and inspiration for new events.

These new relationships have provided leaders for the Youth and Children's Assembly in Taunton, where is hoped a group of young people will attend as well as children.

Website and social media (Paper J2)

The Website and Social Media Officer was thanked for his work on the Advent Reflections, which have been very positively received. The committee was reminded that a printed copy of the anniversary reflections is available.

An online resource of sermons is being created, which can be used by churches without a regular minister. The bank of resources is building up, but more contributions are required to make it a useful and encouraging resource for churches to use. These are available on You Tube and through links on the CF website.

The second part of this project is to help churches with the setup of technology to make use of online services. Starter grants are available to assist with purchasing technology, wifi etc.

There was some discussion around whether these sermons could also be available on CD for churches that only have access to audio equipment. It was concluded that scripts could be made available rather than CD's. Churches can be provided with support in upgrading their technology if required.

The URC have links on their website to full services including readings and prayers, which can be printed and used by churches with no technology.

A preaching workshop Likewise day will be held in Newark on April 29th aimed at building confidence in preaching. It is possible that this might be made available online.

Safeguarding (paper J3)

The Safeguarding Officer was not present at the meeting, but Committee members were invited to email her with any questions about her report.

It was confirmed that it is a legal requirement for churches to adhere to safeguarding procedures and therefore it is a priority for us to encourage churches to achieve their safeguarding certificate by the end of 2023.

It was noted that there were some churches on the safeguarding list that had now closed, due to delays in processing changes. Committee members were asked to check details of their Area and email the Safeguarding Officer of any required changes.

Thanks were given to the Safeguarding Officer for the documents she had produced. These had proved very useful and were clear and simple for those churches that needed more guidance.

It was requested that the customizable poster from Oakham church was shared as a Word document rather than a PDF to make it easier to alter.

Action: Area Reps to check list of churches without safeguarding certificates and contact Safeguarding Officer if updates are required.

When: As soon as Possible

Action: Safeguarding Officer to circulate poster in Word document format.

When: As soon as possible

Learning and Development (Paper J4)

The Learning and Development report was circulated in advance and there were no questions about this.

The Committee thanked the L&D Administrator and new L&D Manager for holding the fort over the past 9 months.

Action Plan (Paper J5)

The themes from the Area reports that for the basis for the Church Support Team action plan were shared.

14. Chair of Church Support Committee – Paper K

One name had been submitted to stand as Chair of Church Support Committee. The Committee was given time to discuss the nomination.

Ruth Green then also nominated herself for the role. She was asked to leave the room while the Committee discussed the situation.

After some discussion it was agreed that RG would need to submit a written statement about herself and why she is suitable for the role, in the same process that the other nominee had completed. These statements will then be emailed to Committee members and an email vote will take place before 21st April.

BB confirmed that she would represent the Committee at the next Council meeting.

Post Meeting Note: The initial nominee has withdrawn from the process prior to the vote taking place so the vote was for RG to be the new chair

Results from online votes

9 – yes and 3 abstain

Action – RG to be recommended to Council as the new CSC chair

Communications Report (not included in the agenda)

The Christmas welcome packs proved successful and is an idea we would like to repeat for next Christmas. Any feedback on these is welcomed. It was felt that the idea could be expanded to more generic events throughout the year, such as coffee mornings etc, to provide a uniform, professional image. The calendars and Biblical Reflections books were also well received.

The Treasurer and Secretary books will be available by Assembly.

We have run out of Being Congregational booklets. More have been ordered and the publishers have kindly reprinted these without cost to us.

There is a survey in the Yearbook to gauge preferences of A4 or A5 size. The 2023 edition is now available, and copies have been sent to Church Secretaries.

15. Mission 2024

In the past we have always partnered on active projects with Christian Aid and discussion was opened on what type of mission project we wish to support for 2024. During our anniversary year we pledged to raise £11,000 for Christian Aid, but only managed to raise £5000. Although disappointing, this is still a significant amount and is more than is usually raised.

We are pausing formal mission projects for 2023 to allow a time of reflection and consider the support we want to offer next year. This could be partnering with Christian Aid, or other charities. It was felt that churches need to be clear that funds raised for Christian Aid week are separate to donations raised for CF Christian Aid projects.

Suggestions from the committee included local food banks and Trussell Trust but it was considered that many churches are already involved in this type of mission.

Our international links are strong, and it was thought that there are churches that have existing links with projects in India for example. Other suggestions included Tear Fund and Christian Rebuild.

The collection at Assembly will be split equally between Christian Rebuild and Nigel Lindsay's mission work in Grenada to assist with projects there. Gift Aid envelopes will be available at the Assembly for donations made there. Donations made by churches need to be gift-aided before they are sent to the CF.

It was confirmed that some Area constitutions state that they should be contributing to mission work abroad, so it is important to have an international project to support.

The committee was asked to consider supporting the Trussell Trust for 2023, although many churches support local foodbanks anyway.

Action: General Secretary to contact Christian Aid, CWM and Tear Fund for statements on their mission projects for the committee to consider.

When: by next meeting.

16. AOB

None

17. Date of next meeting

30th September 2023 10.30am – 2.30pm

18. Closing Prayer

The Chair closed the meeting in prayer.