

Chair approved

Church Support Committee Minutes

Time: 10.30am – 2.30pm

Date: Saturday 29th March 2025

Location: Hybrid - Nottingham Office/Zoom

Attendees:

Ruth Green
Steve Richards
Ivy Barclay (Zoom)
Margaret McGuinness (zoom)
Kevin Dudman (zoom)
Keith Bradley
Alan Kennedy
Peter Young
Joy Howell
Jan Hocking (Zoom)
Ian Jones (Zoom)
Anna Lachowski (Zoom)
Harry Booton (Zoom)
Stephen Haward

Representing:

Chair
CF in Wales
CF in Scotland (representative)
CF in Scotland (rotational)
South West Area
North East Area
North West Area/ICB Chair
South East Area
South West Midlands Area
North West Midlands Area
Eastern Area
East Midlands Area
Youth Ambassador
Chair APCCG

Staff:

Yvonne Campbell
Catherine Booton (Zoom)
Maddy Varley
Neil Chappell
Linda Cooke

General Secretary
L & D Manager
L & D Administrator / Minutes
Website and Social Media Officer
Property and Church Support Worker

Apologies

Nick Gleich
Eric Fenwick
Luzia Watt
Lisa Vickers
Caroline Stott (President Elect)
Elisabeth Sweeney Smith (President)
Colin Brown CF in Wales

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
GS General Secretary

1. Opening devotions

The Chair opened the meeting with a reading and prayer. She gave a special welcome to Stephen Haward and Linda Cooke as this was their first attendance at a CSC meeting.

2. Apologies

As noted above.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting (28/09/2024) (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 (Paper C)

PY stated that he had submitted his CV to the Robinsons' Trust, but had not received a response.

Action: Follow up with Robinson's Trust.

By who- GS

By when asap

5. Notice of Any Other Business (not elsewhere on the agenda)

Yearbook Amendments

President report

Chair approved

6. Church Support Team Reports (Paper C-C5)

Church Support Worker (Paper C1)

The CSW was not present at the meeting, however she has been busy visiting churches and Areas with members of the Brazilian mission trip team, giving talks on the work they carried out there. These have been very well received and members of the committee agreed they had been insightful, inspiring and interesting.

LW will continue to produce the Inform newsletter and LC will produce In Touch.

Area Reps were asked to continue encouraging churches to apply for Mini and Starter grants.

Committee thanked LW for all the work she is doing.

Website and Social Media Officer (Paper C2)

NC apologies for the lack of a report.

A Secluded Place project is going well and has received very positive feedback.

NC has also been assisting other departments with various technical developments. He is currently working on proposals for refreshing the CF website, and also the introduction of an app for CF with the focus being on the All For Jesus, Jesus For All discipleship programme

Committee thanked NC for all the work he is doing

Safeguarding Officer (Paper C3)

LV was not present at the meeting however the GS was able to expand on the report provided.

Council had requested a list of churches who currently have expired safeguarding certificates. This list was included in the report however it should be noted that this is an evolving picture as some have now received certificates or arranged checker visits.

Those churches who are not currently meeting are still required to have some appropriate safeguarding measures in place.

Area reps were asked to follow up on any churches in their Areas that may need to be prompted in taking their next steps.

The next round of safeguarding training has been booked, and offers an enhanced range of options: Adults, Children and Young People, Safer Recruitment, Safeguarding Leads, Online Safety and bespoke Ministers training. Area Reps were asked to remind people to book places on the appropriate course so that they don't miss out on this essential training.

Action – Areas to be updated on these two issues Safeguarding training and churches with expired safeguarding certificates

By who – Area representatives

By when - asap at next Area meeting

The Committee was reminded that those on the Roll of Ministries need to keep their training up to date and safeguarding training is required every five years in line with DBS/PVG renewal.

Chair approved

Organization of the Checker's training day as discussed at the previous meeting is in hand.

The committee thanked LV for all the work she is doing

Learning and Development (Paper C4)

Praise was given by the Committee for the number of projects the L&D team had produced, and they were thanked for their work.

CB drew attention to the Being Congregational course: The online version had been well received and well attended; however, the Committee were reminded that the course is designed to be self-delivered in churches. Contact the L&D team for physical resources to be sent; advice and support can be given if required.

The GIFT course has been fully revised to make it more accessible and bring it up to date. The course now has four modules and a variety of assignment types. It can be studied by individuals, small groups, churches, or even as an Area. Copies of physical handbooks will be sent to those who sign up. The course will be finalized in time to launch at the National Assembly.

GS thanked CB & MV for all the work they are doing

Property and Church Support (Paper C5)

LC is enjoying her new role, working on property and church support although it is very different to her previous role. Due to the staff changes LC is still supporting the Finance Team when appropriate.

The Knitted Bible exhibition is due to be hosted by CF in November. This consists of over 30 knitted biblical scenes, displayed for the public to view. All the displays are hand knitted, and it is a positive way to engage in conversations and outreach. All churches have been invited to help us host, as well as visit the exhibition. This is also a good opportunity to see if other churches might like to host the exhibition in their area. Available dates can be found on the website <https://www.stgeorgesurc.co.uk/the-knitted-bible/> - dates do get booked up a long time in advance. It is free to host, but hosts do need to collect the exhibition from the previous host, so careful planning is required.

There are a number of resources being prepared to promote at the National Assembly which LC is helping to edit and publish:

- Being Congregational (as per L&D report)
- GIFT (as per L&D report)
- Two Bible study resources based on the mission trips to Brazil and Grenada
- A ten-session Worship Outdoors resource.
- All for Jesus, Jesus for all discipleship resource*

All of these resources are available with no cost to churches or participants.

* The All for Jesus, Jesus for all resource might not be quite ready to launch at the Assembly

LC is also working Serving the Community Award process and will actively work with the editor of Refresh for CF stories.

Chair approved

The committee encourage LC and thanked her for the work she is doing

Accreditation and Pastoral Care Coordinators Group (Paper D)

SH has recently taken over the role of APCCG Chair, following Barbara Bridges resignation. He thanked her for the contributions she had made, and for her years of service.

The group is currently tasked with revising the Pastoral Period and Life Learning processes, as there is a clear overlap between the two, but neither are working well at present. The group is looking to achieve a programme that is focused, positive, and supportive for those ending their CIPT Foundation Degree, and those new in ministry. SH explained the newly introduced long-service pathway for accreditation, available to those over 12 years ministry experience, of which at least six must be in a Congregational church. This has led to an extra stream of applications and interviews, which has been positive.

Proposal:

The APCCG propose the following people for accreditation as Minister, via the traditional route:

Malcolm Simpkin
Josephine Oke
Tim Bateman
Yonas Beyene

Agreed: Unanimous

Proposal:

The APCCG propose the following people for accreditation as Minister, via the long service pathway:

Peter Damon
Ruairidh MacRae
Jim Lyon
John Clements

Agreed: Unanimous

Action – Names to be taken to Council for approval

By who – CSC Chair

By when – Council April meeting

Action – Letters to be sent to all affirming their names have been agreed

By who – Chair of APCCG

By when - asap

Accreditation for Jan Hocking and Colin Halstead has been deferred for one year.

The APCCG are working with Sara Iles to consider a gathering and/or retreat to bring new ministers together. It may not be this year if appropriate arrangements cannot be made in good time, but options are being considered. Any gathering needs to have a clear focus to attract people to attend, as in recent years participation in the annual APCCG gathering at the National Memorial Arboretum has dwindled.

Chair approved

It may be beneficial to attach the gathering to the CSC meeting to assist with travel arrangements.

SH was thanked for his report

7. Budget Papers – (Paper E)

The budget papers had been made available to the Committee in advance. The GS thanked Gary Baker for preparing the papers for the Committee.

The Finance team have been greatly affected by staffing changes, and while things are settling, they are not yet 'business as usual'. Patience with things like expense claim forms is requested as they may take longer to process at this time.

There are some spending increases for example in safeguarding training and marketing, but nothing particularly unusual.

It was noted that spending on ministers' pensions had risen significantly. This does not fall under Church Support, but the GS will enquire as to the reason for the increase.

Action: Make enquiries with GB regarding increased spend on ministers' pensions.

By who- GS

By when – asap

The GS also confirmed there was increased spend as one of the properties for retired ministers required extensive repair work. This type of expense is unpredictable and can result in significant increases in costs that we are obliged to cover.

Some expenditure, such as accreditation costs will naturally fluctuate with the numbers of applicants. The Committee were also reminded that general costs across the board for things like subscriptions, travel, and refreshments are increasing.

There are forecast increases in expenditure for Youth and Children's work, as there will be investment in events and promotion. There is also an increase forecast for investment in the website, but it was noted that funding for the new app had been sourced externally.

8. Grants – (Paper F)

Impact Grants

There is £2,5615 left available for Impact grants.

The Committee were reminded that this is made up of 10% of closed church funds and gifts to the Ministry and Mission fund. Funds have always been well used, and Council have agreed that should the amount available disadvantage one church against another that have applied for grants, then they would endeavor to source the required funding from the protected programme funds to enable both churches to benefit.

Stories of how churches had benefitted from grants were shared in the report.

There was one impact grant application from Hope, Bristol, brought to the Committee for approval:

Chair approved

Proposal:

Hope Bristol have applied for £18,000 over three years towards the salary of a part time Children's worker. The application was strong. The church have already appointed for the role, and she has already begun to have an impact on the church.

Agreed: Unanimous

Action – recommend grant to council meeting

By who – CSC chair

By when – Council April meeting

The committee was reminded that that the full grant awarded is deducted from the funds in the first year, rather than annually, and therefore the funds are now quite depleted.

Starter Grants

A number of starter grants have been awarded and these are listed in the report.

Question: why have both Knowle Green and Inglewhite churches listed twice in the report.

Action – check to be made with Finance team

By who CSW

By when - asap

9. CIPT Management Board (Paper G)

The L&D Manager had prepared the report based on the minutes of the last CIPT Management Board meeting.

As the Chair of the Board has now stepped down, and Council have asked for a CIPT report as a standing agenda item, it is a good time to review whether the Management Board is still required. CIPT is also reviewed by YSJU annually, along with an in-depth revalidation every 3-5 years. The Management Board was initially instigated at the request of Council as an extra layer of communication, therefore clarification regarding the expectations of CIPT reporting is needed before a decision on the future of the Management Board can be made.

10. Inter-Church Board (Paper H – H2)

The ICB report was submitted prior to the meeting.

AK stated that Northern College, where he sits on the board of governors, Luther King Centre and the Northern Baptist College have plans to join and are going through the legal process to unite these institutions. This may open the opportunity for continuing an CF ecumenical rep under the new body. AK confirmed he would be happy to continue in this role.

Decision – AK to continue representing the CF as a trustee at Northern College

Agreed - unanimous

Retaining membership of ecumenical bodies can be expensive, so it is important that we engage and participate where we can.

Action: Arrange for GS to be added the Northern College/LKH mailing lists.

By who – AK

By when- asap

Chair approved

Action -Distribute information they receive regarding external events, more widely

By who – L&D Team

By when - ongoing.

The Committee were reminded that the Free Churches Group offers a good support network and resources for Chaplains, particularly focused on healthcare, prisons and education.

AK attended the CTE forum with the GS. There were presentations on how we use, and question the use of, AI. These presentations are available online. It was felt there are both positives and negatives with AI use, but we should not be frightened by it or try to ignore it. It can be used for example, to record and summarize minutes of online meetings. There are however some concerns about the environmental impact of AI, as huge amounts of energy are used even when generating simple AI results.

CB confirmed that she is due to attend a webinar in the use of AI, and that CIPT already have an AI policy.

Jenny Haggar is the CF rep for World Day of Prayer. She was thanked for her work in this area and Jenny's name will appear in the booklet next year.

AK was thanked for all his report..

11. Christian Aid (Paper I)

The GS confirmed that the CF had raised over £3000 for the Malawi Christian Aid appeal at the end of the year. This appeal will run until September, when it will change to a new project.

Paper I is a poster that can be shared with churches, encouraging people to join a prayer evening specifically for this project. The GS and KD have been holding regular online meetings to pray into the work of this project alongside the fund raising. All donations made at the National Assembly will go towards the Malawi project.

Details of the new Christian Aid appeal for the earthquake in Myanmar and Bangkok were shared during the meeting. A prayer for the victims was given.

12. CWM Update (Paper J)

There has been a lot happening with CWM since the previous meeting, which are included in the report.

The All for Jesus, Jesus for All project, funded through the MSP4 programme, is coming together with Clemy Gilmore as project lead.

The project consists of 8 sessions, which have already been sent out to pilot churches to complete. The full project may not be completed in time to launch at the National Assembly, however it is worth holding off to ensure the standard reflects the investment that has gone in to it.

The MCI grant can, in theory, be applied for every year, however the application process is very time consuming and complicated. This grant part-funded the mission trips to Grenada and Brazil.

Chair approved

Nigel Lindsay is our Partner in Mission, and he is settling into his new post in Nauru. He has experienced some struggles, and a prayer support group is now set up, that meet with him regularly.

The European Members Forum was attended by Catherine and Harry Booton, and Clemy Gilmore. They found the event interesting, informative and challenging.

The annual members meeting has previously been attended by Mark Tucker. Following his retirement, this year's meeting will be attended by Jim Lyon. The GS will consider who is best placed to attend for future years.

Committee members were reminded that Ministry and Mission funds are no longer automatically divided between home and CWM donations. Churches who wish their donation to go to CWM should make this clear in writing.

13. Area Reports

A joy and challenges from the Areas.

CF in Scotland

Reverend Ruairidh MacRae, was recently inducted as the new Minister, Market Harbour Congregational Church.

Alister Weighton has been formally appointed as the Chair-Person for CF Scotland. He hopes to attend the September CSC meeting.

The Area thanked the President, Elisabeth Sweeney Smith, for her visits, and her upcoming visit to Shetland, which will be the first CF visit in many years.

Hawick Congregational Community Church will close in April, however the building has been bought by Hawick Baptist Church, so it will remain as a church albeit not congregational.

Larkhall Congregational Church has celebrated its 150th anniversary.

All Trustees must now have their PVG certificate, but there is an extended grace period of three months.

Eastern Area

Having previously reported that the Area had not met for five years, they have now held two Area assemblies. The Area wished to thank the GS and President for their encouragement and support.

Ten churches attended the presentation by the Brazil Mission group, who found their testimonies excellent and very inspiring.

Area finances have improved and all positions on the admin group have now been filled.

There are four students on the foundation degree, and two others have graduated and been accredited. Another minister has been accredited via the long service route.

Chair approved

16 out of 20 churches have gained their safeguarding certificates and the others are in hand.

East Midlands Area

Unfortunately there was a disappointing response from churches when updates were requested for this report.

Some churches continue to experience challenges with small and elderly congregations.

Rachel Aucott has been appointed as the new Area Chair and is doing a great job. Unfortunately Rob Hunter has stepped down as Area Secretary.

The Area was pleased to have inducted Ruariridh MacRae at Market Harborough.

The East Midlands are hosting the National Assembly in May.

North West Midlands Area

There are lots of joys and challenges across the Area, with some churches struggling with elderly congregations that do not meet often, and others who are seeing a growth in membership.

Bilston have an increasing membership and have conducted some baptisms. However, due to a resignation they are no longer able to continue their youth outreach.

Newcastle Under Lyme are almost ready to start looking for a new minister. Currently services are led by deacons and visiting CIPT students.

Pontesbury have had some new members, and also recently had a visit from Youth for Christ.

North East Area

There are only 11 churches in the Area. Two rarely engage, however they did send in a summary for this report, and one of them has performed seven baptisms this month!

The Area Exec have arranged a summer gathering in Whitby. The Brazil mission group have been invited to speak at the gathering.

Three churches in the Area have received grants, two from CF. Tapton have received a government grant for new windows, which have made a vast difference to those using the building and should reduce heating costs.

There has been improved engagement within the communities with good outreach, including with schools.

Sadly there have been a number of bereavements in the Area – Peter Thomas was remembered by the committee after discussions from September meeting about his resources

The Area will host the National assembly next year in Sheffield

Chair approved

North West Area

There have also been challenges in finding people to lead services, and a lack of organists.

There is a new minister working together with Springhead, Greenacres and Oldham who will start in May.

Inglewhite have appointed a new minister

Heaton Mersey celebrate their 200 year Anniversary

The Area is also pleased to have appointed Louise Clark and the new part time Children and Youth Worker.

CF in Wales

There has been some difficulty in contacting churches for this report.

There are challenges for churches across the Area, but many have decided to remain open despite the difficulties.

There are positives - there are a couple of new ministers, with Beverly Lucas hoping to join CIPT in September.

One church had left the CF as they had no safeguarding certificate, however they have since asked to rejoin and thanks to the GS and her team, they have now returned to the CF and are very enthusiastic.

One church has a Ukelele club, who are very talented, and this provides good outreach, but also works well for worship.

The Area Assembly was being held on the same day as the CSC meeting.

South West Midlands Area

The Area Assembly had the lowest ever turnout. This was in some degree due to there being many elderly members who are no longer able to drive. However, despite this, the meeting was very positive.

It was felt that often the joys and challenges go hand in hand. There are a couple of churches who will potentially be seeking new ministers. Some churches have new members and others are small but content as they are.

The Area Chair, Jason Boyd is recovering from some serious health issues, and therefore there is a shortage of Area officers at the moment.

South East Area

There are some big anniversaries coming up in the Area; Harting are celebrating 250 years, and Bunyan have already started planning for celebrating 400 years since the birth of John Bunyan, in three years' time.

The Reps from the Brazilian mission trip have visited, and their presentation was greatly enjoyed. Nigel Lindsay still attends Area meetings via Zoom when he is able.

Chair approved

The Area have now adopted a new constitution, so there is no longer a need to have six officers, and this is reduced to four, which is more manageable.

Where churches have a shortage of organists, some churches are using recording from You Tube, particularly from Chris Lawton, who is a member at Eccles Congregational Church. He records his music in various churches and then uploads the recordings. He has recently recorded from Brixton CC.

South West Area

The Area meeting was held a few weeks ago, and was the best attended for some time. The feeling was generally positive.

There are challenges with small numbers of people willing to commit to roles, and with aging congregations.

There are also some church buildings which are in need of significant repair. Dulverton have not been meeting since the first Covid Lockdown, however the congregation relaunched at a Carol Service in December 2024 and are now meeting monthly. At a membership service in March the existing members reaffirmed their membership and some previous adherents came in to membership.

Stalbridge CC thanked the Committee and CF for their Impact Grant, and they are enjoying the exciting youth ministry that it has enabled.

Crediton have had a 10% increase in attendance at services and are the largest church in the Area.

Stoke St Mary are only meeting once per month but are celebrating their 200th anniversary.

General Secretary's Summary Report

The GS thanked all the Area reps for their work in contacting churches

The reports will be shared with the Church Support Team, and this will form the focus of their work going forward.

The overwhelming theme from the reports was the need for more prayer for churches

There is the general theme of congregations getting older and smaller, and there are issues with maintaining buildings. However, there are lots of positives with new ministers and new members.

There have been very positive responses to the President's visits. Elisabeth has been very proactive and has built-up positive relationships. The Committee were reminded that each President has their own way of working depending on their skills and other commitments. There were three nominations for President Elect, and two of the nominees have accepted.

There are lots of 200-year anniversary celebrations coming up because of a change in religious law at that time which is exciting.

There are some churches still seeking ministers, but some of those with longer term vacancies have now appointed new ministers.

Chair approved

Committee members were offered children's Easter books and resources from Open Doors and Hope Together, to take back to their churches and Areas. They were reminded that churches could apply for Starter Grants for these resources if required.

There are two new members of staff in the office, Kate Bass (Trust and Property Manager) and Blessing Afolabi-Jombo (Assistant Financial Controller). Both have settled and work very effectively. Thanks were given to churches and staff teams for their support and grace throughout the changes.

There have been 12 applications for the Serving the Community Awards. Visits have now taken place, and Congregational Insurance will make the final decisions for the awards to be presented at assembly.

The Chair led a time of open prayer for churches and staff teams.

Youth Ambassador Report

Bespoke bookmarks and notebooks have been produced to help promote youth activities and events.

HB represented CF youth at last year's URC Youth Assembly, which sparked the introduction of the Youth Ambassador role. We are able to send ten young people aged 13-25 next year. The URC Youth Assembly is 27th February – 1st March 2026. More information will be provided in time for those interested to find out more.

The CF Youth Assembly at the National Assembly is being hosted by the visiting minister from Brazil, who is the youngest Congregational minister in Brazil.

It was confirmed that for CWM programmes, youth is defined as aged 18-30. However CF Youth work is from 13-25.

The Youth Ambassador can be contacted by email on youth@congregational.org.uk.

Assembly

The National Assembly takes place 9th – 11th May 2025.

The visiting minister from Brazil will lead sessions on Friday afternoon at the CF centre. Friday evening sees a walking tour with local historian Ezekiel Bones. Refreshments will be served in the CF centre.

The main assembly takes place on Saturday at Nottingham Trent University in their lecture theatre, where there is also plenty of room for the lunch to be served, and stands, including a book stall. The Assembly will be live-streamed and professional photographer will document the event.

On Saturday evening a Ceilidh band and dance will be hosted at St Nic's church on Maid Marion Way.

On the Sunday, various churches across the East Midlands are looking forward to welcoming visitors to their services.

Area Reps were asked to remind people to return their booking forms. Travel grants are available for any CF accredited ministers who attend.

A music group is still sought – any volunteers should contact YC.

Chair approved

There is no onsite parking at the venue, however there are public carparks nearby, and good public transport links.

Action: Prepare and send out more detailed information about carparks and public transport options.

By who – LC

By when – after Easter

Any Other Business

- Apologies were offered to Thandar Tun for a spelling error in her name in the Yearbook.
- Apologies were also offered to Beer CC, who were missed out of the Yearbook in error, despite achieving their safeguarding certificate.
- It was confirmed that the 'inactive' mark next to the 'Tutor' mark in the Yearbook, refers only to being inactive as a Tutor, eg M, T(I) indicates a serving minister who is no longer an active Tutor.
- Elisabeth Sweeney Smith had provided a short report about her time as President. She has enjoyed visiting many churches – an overview of these will be available in her upcoming Refresh article and CF podcast episode. She also raised the issue that she had been very proactive in approaching churches to arrange visits, as many churches did not realise they could request her to visit. Perhaps this is something we need to be mindful of and promote more in the future.
- New leaflets detailing all the courses on offer across CIPT and the CF are now available.
- A discussion will be held at the National Assembly, regarding amendments to the constitution. Area Reps were asked to encourage churches to respond when information and voting forms are sent out over the summer. It is a requirement that there are responses from 90% of churches, so it is important that they engage in the process and respond.

Dates of next meetings:

27th September 2025

21st March 2026

26th September 2026