

# Past Cases Review: Final Report

JUNE 2023

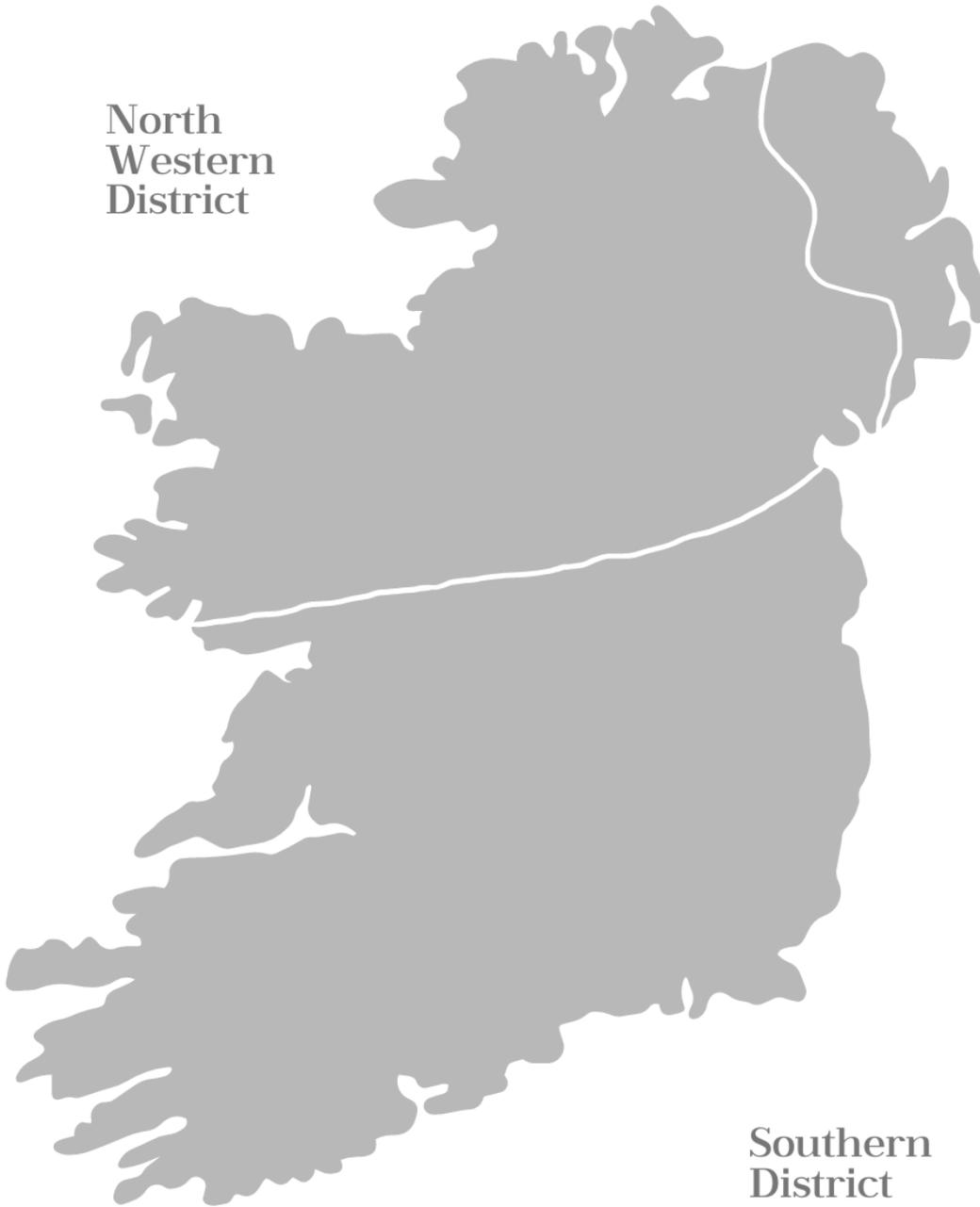


THE METHODIST CHURCH  
IN IRELAND

IRISHMETHODIST.ORG

North  
Western  
District

North  
Eastern  
District



Southern  
District



THE METHODIST CHURCH  
IN IRELAND

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## **Dedication**

**This report is dedicated to all survivors/victims of abuse that has occurred within the life of the Methodist Church in Ireland with the hope, prayer and intention that this work, findings and our response will contribute to making the Church a safer place for all.**

## 1.0 Introduction

As a Christian Church, the Methodist people in Ireland are called to be a community of love, care, support and safety. We are to be the friends of all and the enemies of none. We recognise that while this has always been our intention, it has not been the experience and reality for all. We must be better. Consequently, the Methodist Church in Ireland chose to investigate its past actions. This was not caused by any specific issue or awareness of problems. Rather it was in response to the widespread awareness that various institutions, organisations, Christian denominations and others had failed to keep all as safe as possible in days gone by. This is a situation of great distress. Society has failed to adequately support those who are vulnerable. The Methodist Church chose to recognise this and to relook at its past experiences, actions and failings. Our intention has been to learn from the past in order to make the present and future as safe as possible for all who are in any way in the life of our Church.

This review was agreed by the Methodist Conference in 2020. The remit was to:

- a) identify and consider sample past cases since 1950 that have safeguarding concerns, review the response at the time, implement any remedial action and consider any lessons to be learnt to develop stronger practices, processes and culture;
- b) seek to establish whether there are any currently unreported cases, and where any are highlighted to investigate, implement any necessary action and consider any lessons to be learnt to develop stronger practices, processes and culture.

The only significant change made was to decide to review 100% of cases rather than a sample of cases. This was to ensure as full an understanding as possible, and in response to the recognition that there were fewer past cases than had been anticipated.

It is our hope that any publicity around this report may encourage and enable one or more people to come forward and report to us their experience where this has not already happened. It is our intention that this report does not signal the end of something, but rather clearly articulates our desire to continue to learn from our past, no matter how painful this may be for us as a Church. Whatever pain we feel is merely a fraction of that experienced by those for whom their experience of our Church has been of abuse, neglect, cruelty, violence and harm. Even to write this is distressing, knowing the harm caused to others.

This report is presented with the full awareness that it speaks of our failures as a Church and our failures as individual followers of Jesus. We have failed to keep all in the life of our Church as safe as possible, and we have failed in our calling to be disciples of Jesus Christ. We are sorry and resolve to do whatever it takes to make the Church a place of complete safety for all from today onwards. We also note that we uncovered a number of examples where the Church was considered a safe place for a young person or adult to reveal abuse that had occurred to them unconnected to the Church. Such cases were also part of our investigation. We may have been found to be a safe space and acted well, but there is still much for us to learn so that this becomes the experience of everyone.

## **1:1 We Apologise**

We apologise. The Methodist Church in Ireland apologises without reserve to all those who have been victims of abuse in the life of our Church. We have failed you, failed society and failed our Saviour. Our processes that were designed to protect all have not done that. We have caused pain that goes beyond measure. We apologise that we have not been the beacon of light that we are called to be. It has taken us too long to recognise our failings and face up to the truth. We have failed to listen carefully to what we were being told in the past. We apologise.

## **1:2 Our Way Ahead**

Now that we know what we know, there is no longer any possible defence for failure in the present or future. We do not offer a defence for the past but we resolve that the present and future will be different because of what we have learnt. We accept again, as a Church and as individuals, the Covenant prayer we renew each year. We renew this in light of our failings and sin, and seek in God's strength to be different.

'Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us again accept our place within this covenant which God has made with us and with all who are called to be Christ's disciples. This means that, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we accept God's purpose for us, and the call to love and serve God in all our life and work.

Christ has many services to be done: some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, others bring reproach; some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests, others are contrary to both; in some we may please Christ and please ourselves; in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us. Therefore let us make this covenant of God our own. Let us give ourselves to him, trusting in his promises and relying on his grace.

Eternal God, in your faithful and enduring love you call us to share in your gracious covenant in Jesus Christ. In obedience we hear and accept your commands; in love we seek to do your perfect will; with joy we offer ourselves anew to you.

We are no longer our own but yours. I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me, in all that I do and in all that I may endure; when there is work for me and when there is none; when I am troubled and when I am at peace.

Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded; when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking; when I have all things, and when I have nothing.

I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you, as and where you choose.

Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. May it be so for ever. Let this covenant now made on earth be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.'

## **2.0 The Methodist Church in Ireland [www.irishmethodist.org](http://www.irishmethodist.org)**

The Methodist Church is a worldwide communion of over 70 million people which originated from the time of the Wesley brothers, John and Charles, in the mid-eighteenth century. John and his hymn writer brother Charles were members of a group of young men who met daily to pray and study the Bible whilst at Oxford University. Nicknamed 'the Holy Club', they were so methodical in their lifestyle that they were called Methodists, a name which eventually became that of the religious movement and denomination which followed.

### **2.1 Early History**

John Wesley made the first of his twenty-one visits to Ireland in 1747, finding 280 Methodists who had been gathered together in Dublin by pioneer lay preachers. The first chapel was opened at Dublin in 1752 and the first conference was held at Limerick in the same year. Emigrants from Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were of immense importance in spreading Methodism to other parts of the world. They included Barbara Heck, Philip Embury, Robert Strawbridge, and Robert Williams, pioneers in the United States of America, and Laurence Coughlan, the founder of Methodism in Newfoundland.

### **2.2 Basis of Belief**

The Constitution of the Methodist Church in Ireland sets out the basis of belief as follows:

'The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church, which is the Body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the Apostolic faith, and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation. It ever remembers that, in the Providence of God, Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith, and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its divinely appointed mission.'

'The doctrines of the evangelical faith, which Methodism has held from the beginning, and still holds, are based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice. These evangelical doctrines to which the preachers of the Methodist Church, ministerial and lay, are pledged are contained in Wesley's Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his sermons.'

'The Notes on the New Testament and the forty-four Sermons are not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on Methodist preachers, but to set up standards of preaching and belief which should secure loyalty to the fundamental truths of the Gospel of Redemption and ensure the continued witness of the Church to the realities of the Christian experience of salvation.'

A more detailed understanding of Irish Methodist belief is found at on the Connexional website, see [MethodistBeliefs\\_web.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

### **2.3 The Ethos of Methodism**

The Methodist Church seeks to be a Christian community which is open and welcoming to all. At its heart is the conviction that everyone can know and experience the love of God for herself or himself. God's love changes us to be more Christ-like. It is also to be shared with the whole community, in particular with the most vulnerable. Thus, City Missions are an important part of Methodism. Methodists stress that God's love affects the whole person, body and mind as well as spirit. Consequently education and wholeness are high values for the church.

### **2.4 Membership**

The Methodist Church in Ireland has about 200 churches or 'societies' with a total community membership of around 50,000. There are more Methodist Churches and people in Northern Ireland than in the Republic of Ireland, but in each jurisdiction the Methodist people seek to play a full part in national and community life.

### **2.5 Governance and Organisation**

The Methodist Church in Ireland extends throughout the island, and refers to itself as 'the Connexion', to remind individual members and local churches of their interconnected and interdependent nature. Methodism's structures are shaped by its origins. A local congregation, also known as a society, is administered by a Church Council. A large society or a group of societies form a circuit, which may have one or more ministers, is in the care of a Superintendent minister and administered by a Circuit Executive. A group of circuits forms a District, overseen by a District Superintendent and currently there are three Districts: North Eastern, North Western and Southern.

The supreme court of the church is the Conference, which is the final authority in the Church in all matters of doctrine, worship, discipline and order. Each year the Church elects a President, who serves for that year. The Church also elects a Lay Leader, who has a two year term of office. The Secretary of Conference acts as General Secretary of the Church. Lay and ordained people, both men and women are involved in decision making at all levels. The Methodist Church in Ireland has ordained women since 1978, and women may serve in all positions in the Church. A system of committees deals with a variety of issues within the Church.

Methodism has made an important contribution to Irish education, including the establishment of Wesley College in Dublin, Methodist College in Belfast, and Gurteen College in Co Tipperary-this last a college of agriculture. It has developed a wide-ranging social work service, largely through its five city missions in Dublin, Belfast, Newtownabbey and Londonderry, which control several homes for the elderly, hostel accommodation for needy men and woman, and day care centres for the elderly. An increasing number of churches in other towns provide a range of services on their premises, including luncheon clubs, community advice centres, pre-school play groups, practical help and work with the elderly.

### **3.0 Safeguarding in the Methodist Church in Ireland**

The Methodist Church in Ireland is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all who are part of the life of our Church in any way. We are particularly conscious of our responsibilities towards children and adults at risk of harm.

#### **3.1 Recent past**

MCI received its first Child Protection report, 'Keep them safe' in 1995, which was also the year that training commenced. The Child Care Act (RoI) 1991 and the Children Order (NI) 1995 were the legislative frameworks which underpinned this.

Since 2004, MCI's Child Protection Policy has been called 'Taking Care', written in conjunction with our colleagues from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. This has been updated twice now to ensure that the Church has the most current policies and procedures in place. Through 'Taking Care', MCI obligated all churches to appoint a Designated Person to work closely with the minister and be responsible for overseeing Child Protection at society and circuit level.

In 2005 it became a requirement in MCI that all leaders (paid and voluntary) should attend MCI safeguarding training at least once every three years. In 2006, MCI made vetting checks compulsory across Ireland within MCI. This reflected legislative changes in Northern Ireland (Protection of Children (NI) Order, 2005) and Republic of Ireland (Criminal Justice Act 2006). In 2016, it became a requirement that all leaders should attend training regardless of other/ external training. In 2020, MCI introduced compulsory re-vetting for all leaders (lay and clergy) through MCI every three years.

#### **3.2 Today**

In 2019 the church moved from having a part-time to a full-time Connexional Safeguarding Officer who is responsible for the provision of a comprehensive Child Protection training programme for leaders, volunteers and ministers across the island of Ireland. The MCI processes vetting forms through the National Vetting Bureau and AccessNI. Vetting checks must be completed through MCI at least once every three years for all working with under 18s, whether paid or voluntary. All who work with children, young people or adults at risk of harm under the auspices of MCI must attend training provided by MCI at least once every three years.

2020	394 completed training
2021	617 completed training
2022	751 completed training

This work is overseen by the Connexional Safeguarding Board which meets at least 4 times per year, and which reports annually to the Governance Board of the Methodist Conference.

As a recognition of the importance of Safeguarding and an example of increasing commitment, the MCI has increased its expenditure as follows:

2016	£11, 496
2021	£43,041
2022	£53,513
2023	£60,000 budgeted

Full details of MCI Safeguarding, including current policies, are found at [Safeguarding — The Methodist Church in Ireland \(irishmethodist.org\)](https://www.irishmethodist.org/safeguarding).

## **4.0 Background to this Report**

The Past Cases Review process of the Methodist Church in Ireland was established by Conference 2020. An Interim Report was presented to the Governance Board in March 2022 with this Final Report presented to Conference 2023 as agreed in the original timeline. The purpose of this review has been to ascertain if there are any Safeguarding issues that have previously occurred within the life of the Methodist Church in Ireland which, were they subject to today's standards, would be considered unacceptable, inappropriate, unethical or in some cases illegal. The two specific tasks have been to:

- A) identify and consider sample past cases since 1950 that have safeguarding concerns, review the response at the time, implement any remedial action and consider any lessons to be learnt to develop stronger practices, processes and culture;
- B) seek to establish whether there are any currently unreported cases, and where any are highlighted to investigate, implement any necessary action and consider any lessons to be learnt to develop stronger practices, processes and culture.

### **4.1 Membership**

Chair: Dr Deborah Webster

Vice Chair: Rev Dr Stephen Skuce

Members: Cathy Bell, Rev Ruth Craig, Gillian Kingston, Rev Paul Maxwell, Kathryn Minnis, Sinead Whiting

All the PCR team are members of the MCI with the exception of Dr Deborah Webster who is a member of the Presbyterian Church. Dr Webster's appointment was in light of her expertise in the area and to give a further level of external objectivity to the process and help assure all that this review has been rigorous throughout.

The process has been supported by many colleagues within the MCI including the Secretary of Conference, the Safeguarding Officer and administrative team members.

### **4.2 Contact**

The main way used to contact the PCR was by [pastcasesreview@irishmethodist.org](mailto:pastcasesreview@irishmethodist.org) and details of the process have been publicly accessible at [Safeguarding — The Methodist Church in Ireland \(irishmethodist.org\)](https://www.irishmethodist.org/safeguarding). We continue to invite anyone with safeguarding concerns to contact the Methodist Church via [safeguarding@irishmethodist.org](mailto:safeguarding@irishmethodist.org). The MCI's safeguarding policies and further details are found at [Safeguarding — The Methodist Church in Ireland \(irishmethodist.org\)](https://www.irishmethodist.org/safeguarding).

### **4.3 Scope**

The life and work of the MCI has been considered. This included but was not limited to our ministers, lay employees and local church members; the various departments and teams of the Church and the range of activities including our work with children and young people, residential events, overseas trips and ministers in training at Edgehill College. It includes some semi-independent events eg Castlewellan Holiday Week and its predecessors, and On Fire for France. Such activities may not formally be or have been under the control of MCI but are MCI through and through and so it is appropriate that they have been considered.

This Review has not considered the work of our three existing Methodist schools, nor the work of Gurteen College. While these are clearly Methodist, they have a level of independence that means ongoing review is better carried out through their governing bodies. Each was contacted and in responses they each assured the process of their good wishes and interest in learning anything that might emerge from the review. We have not considered the work of our mission partners when in training in Britain or in their overseas appointments. During such periods of time, up to and including the present, our mission partners serve under the structures of the MCB and come under their support and accountability.

We have considered issues from 1950 onwards. That said, any disclosure prior to 1950 would be considered actively and if already known to some extent by the Church it would be included in the review. If it was a very historic but new disclosure it would be dealt with like any other new disclosure and referred to the MCI Safeguarding Officer who would consult with the relevant authorities irrespective of the age of a potential perpetrator or indeed whether they were already deceased. Consequently events prior to 1950 are not excluded from the scope of this review, but 1950 is taken as a realistic starting point. For the purposes of the review, a 'safeguarding concern' is defined as any concern that a child or adult may have been at risk, been suffering or had suffered abuse, or that someone represented a risk of abuse to others.

### **4.4 Timeline**

Nov 2020	process begins and all ministers asked for a response
Jan 2021	all current lay employees asked for a response
Feb 2021	all circuits asked for a response, and process publicly launched
Feb 2021	past cases selected through anonymous process for consideration
June 2022	interim report to Conference
June 2023	final report to Conference and findings publicly available

## **5.0 Number of Cases**

The initial number of recorded cases under consideration within the period being considered was 61. The overwhelming majority of recorded cases date from 1998 onwards. When this was clarified the review quickly decided to consider 100% of cases rather than a sample. However the relatively poor recording means that 61 is an inflated number. Within that number there is one duplication, there are two unsigned 'Agreement between Offender and Church/Circuit' forms reducing the number to 58 but in one record there are two distinct cases bringing the number back to 59. Twenty nine recorded cases are not cases at all but rather records of advice given, or updates 'Agreement between Offender and Church/Circuit' covenants. In all cases a record was needed, but they were not cases in themselves. In particular this highlighted the lack of a systematic approach to recording and then monitoring 'Agreement between Offender and Church/Circuit' processes.

### **5.1 Final Number**

The accurate number of past cases is 30. While this is a relatively small number and not on the scale recorded in a number of other denominations or institutions even allowing for the size of Methodism, there is no comfort taken in this small number of cases. Like all other denominations we assume that there are unrecorded cases, and part of the purpose of this review is to seek to uncover anything that is currently unknown. A number of these cases resulted in no action being taken due to no inappropriate actions having occurred. But even with this small number of cases, there is still more than enough issues to consider. We sadly have plenty of cases to learn from.

This demonstrates a recurring issue of relatively poor administrative structures that need to be addressed. In recent years cases have been held by the Secretary of Conference, Director of Ministry and Safeguarding Officer, due to their various responsibilities. Some issues that were brought to the President's Advisory Committee are relevant to the PCR process. All the cases held by the Safeguarding Officer have been considered. The Secretary of Conference and former Director of Ministry have considered the potentially relevant cases they hold and drawn a number to the attention of the PCR. The Chair and Vice Chair have had access to 100% of these cases and have randomly sampled cases not drawn to their attention to ensure their confidence that the appropriate cases have been highlighted. An example of a case that is held by the Secretary of Conference but not relevant to this review is where the marriage of a minister has broken down and there are no safeguarding issues involved.

### **5.2 Type of Case**

Within the 30 recorded cases there are a range type which includes the following:

- 1 inappropriate physical violence that did not result in any police action

- 2 peer to peer physical, sexual or emotional abuse that did not result in any police action
- 3 inappropriate relationships between young adult leaders and teenage participants
- 4 inappropriate use of social media
- 5 no issue to address, after investigation
- 6 abuse that resulted in police action

The cases normally involved an accusation against a lay volunteer leader. There were 6 cases that involved ordained ministers and 3 that involved lay employees.

A number of recorded cases were when a young person or adult in the life of the Church made their first disclosure of abuse that happened to them but unconnected to the Church or to a leader. These are recorded as cases but are examples of where the Church was considered to be a safe place to disclose this abuse and where the Church was able to assist in supporting the young person or adult and engaging with the appropriate statutory authorities.

## 6.0 Work Undertaken

The PCR process began in July 2020 and in Oct 2020 the Chair, Dr Deborah Webster, was confirmed. The Chair and Vice Chair have met approximately every two months. Considerable work was necessary to confirm the range of potential cases held. The case files were standardised, assigned a case number, held online in a secure site and individual cases made accessible to specific members of the PCR when allocated.

### 6.1 Methodology

All Methodist ministers were contacted in November 2020 to request a response to the process and there has been a 100% response by stationed ministers and a significant response by retired colleagues. All current and many previous lay employees were contacted in January 2021 to request a response to the process and there has been a good uptake. An actual response rate cannot be determined given the range of lay employees contacted, the very part-time nature of many of the roles and that contact details are not necessarily available for other than current employees. All circuits were contacted in February 2021 to request a response to the process and there has been an adequate uptake.

The requests for responses to ministers and lay workers, circuits and anyone was to help achieve our 2<sup>nd</sup> requirement which was to discover any unreported cases. It is hoped that the submission of this final report will be a further point when some may feel now is the right time to disclose something previously not disclosed. Any publicity around the report may further assist individuals to contact the MCI with new information, and again this is welcomed. That should be done via [safeguarding@irishmethodist.org](mailto:safeguarding@irishmethodist.org) or to the President, Secretary of Conference or a District Superintendent. All contact details are readily available on the connexional website [www.irishmethodist.org](http://www.irishmethodist.org). The Methodist Church will always want to hear from anyone with concerns to raise, assures all that we are a safe space for such disclosures, that we will follow our published guidelines and processes and will never seek to silence any voice contacting us. We need to hear.

The PCR invited submissions from anyone who considers that they had something relevant to share. Where information has been received about a circumstance that was to that point unknown to the Church, this has been treated as a new disclosure and immediately passed to the Safeguarding Officer to follow up and is not considered to be a part of the PCR. Wider publicity on the review was created by a public launch on 1 February 2021 with information circulated and material available online. Ecumenical partners have been advised of this MCI process and advice has been received from the Methodist Church in Britain who conducted their own past cases review process with a final report published in May 2015.

Later than originally anticipated, past cases began to be reviewed by the group in October 2021. The process for doing this has been that the Chair randomly chose case numbers and then initially also randomly assigned which team members would consider which case. Each

case was accessed through a secure site online by the two or in some cases three team members reading that particular case. It was read separately and then the sub team met online to agree their findings using a proforma which was then passed to the Vice Chair. The proforma itself was confirmed by the Chair and Vice Chair who considered several draft proformas and used it in a pilot case to finally confirm the document to use. The Chair, and Vice Chair, have had access to 100% of material while the team members have had access to those cases assigned to them.

In November 2021 the Secretary of Conference drew one case to the attention of the PCR requesting it be considered and this has been done. This was because the ongoing work of the review process has raised awareness regarding safeguarding issues and the Secretary of Conference was aware that in at least one specific historic case the MCI may not have acted as comprehensively as it would do so today. This case is reflected upon in this final report.

The Vice Chair reported regularly to the MCI Safeguarding Board, to the General Committee and since July 2021 its successor the Governance Board.

The PCR process has been noted by the Independent Chair of the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries and Historical Clerical Child Abuse. In November 2020 Judith Gillespie met with the Secretary of Conference and the Vice Chair of the PCR to discuss some general questions, consider the ongoing work of the PCR process and concluded that no further questions needed to be asked of the MCI at that time. As part of this the PCR process invited the Inter-Departmental Working Group to consider appointing someone to our PCR group. This offer was made to further demonstrate and ensure full objectivity and rigour in this MCI process. The Inter-Departmental Working Group thanked us for the invitation but were content that we continue as we are.

## 7.0 Reports

The PCR has read various relevant reports from recent years and those that have been published during the ongoing work of our PCR. The British Methodist Church 2015 report *Courage, Cost and Hope* is particularly relevant, and a number of Irish focused reports are also of significant importance to us.

In 2020 and 2021 reports covering both jurisdictions in Ireland considered the historic Mother and Baby homes. As Methodists we note the following:

- 1 the MCI never had Mother and Baby Homes or anything equivalent to Mother and Baby Homes
- 2 we were happy to be associated with such homes at the time such as individual Methodists serving on the Bethany Home Dublin committee and in an official way through our annually appointed President being vice president of Hopedene, Belfast
- 3 there were Methodists as mothers with babies in one or more homes
- 4 there were very likely Methodists employed in such homes
- 5 our ministers pastorally visited such homes
- 6 our ministers almost certainly were involved in arranging admittance to such homes
- 7 our ministers may have been involved in arranging adoptions
- 8 we do not appear to have been critical of such institutions in their day
- 9 we do not have much evidence to think that our MCI orphanages were much more than very well meaning institutions that reflected all the attitudes and approaches of their day.

While Methodism has not been criticised in any way in these reports, we do not consider that we are without blame. We were part of the culture in that era that enabled the violence, abuse and mistreatment in such homes to happen. A biblical analogy may well be found in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). At the time the MCI may well have considered that we were part of helping the needs of the vulnerable, and indeed we did that to a high level. We were the Samaritan assisting the person who had been attacked. However, like the Priest and the Levite we also passed by on the other side of the road to where abuse and harm was happening, either not noticing, or choosing not to notice. Like almost all others, we have no record of taking actions at the time to challenge the abuse in such institutions, or to challenge the wider culture that allowed such actions to continue. Like the rest of society at the time, we were part of the problem.

## **8.0 Past Cases Review Findings**

Through the systematic investigation into the past cases related to safeguarding held by the Methodist Church in Ireland, a number of issues and themes emerged. These point to practices and procedures which may have been normal in a particular era but are considered below the level required today. These are detailed below and are followed with a number of recommendations. What also became clear is that such a past cases review may be a one off process, but the need to constantly review policies and processes will remain. The Methodist Church needs to be constantly self-critical, to very quickly change as we continue to learn, and to maintain safeguarding as a highest priority.

### **8.1 Findings**

- 1 The historic record keeping of the Methodist Church in Ireland has been weak with missing documentation and imprecise records. In case files there is reference to letters or emails received but in a number of cases these have not been retained. In a small number of cases links to other Irish Methodist records that may have some bearing on a case or its outcome have not been made. This is to such an extent that in certain situations we do not have clear evidence that the correct processes were followed. It became clear during this review that current practices have also been weak. These have been addressed but point to the need for the Church to be constantly self-critical.
- 2 In our records, there are examples where it is not clear when an actual allegation has been made, who has made it, how is it addressed and resolved and what is the precise outcome.
- 3 Historically we have not considered the needs of victims and survivors as well as we should have.
- 4 Historically we have treated one or more ministers who have confessed to wrongdoing with a degree of financial generosity.
- 5 Historic activities that were associated with the MCI and have now ceased have not retained records. In such cases no incidents have been recorded or emerged in this process, but the absence of records makes it hard to be certain that good practice at the time was consistently followed. That said, data protection legislation requires the deletion of files that are of no current relevance and there is no question of wrongdoing being raised. But, the absence of any centrally held records is still an issue, albeit a minor one.
- 6 MCI has had several office holders responsible for safeguarding related cases. Currently the Safeguarding Officer, Secretary of Conference and up to June 2021 the Director of Ministry, have all been responsible for cases. Historically it is not clear who was aware of a situation.
- 7 Historically there were too many committees looking at related areas. This may be largely resolved with the reduction in the number of Connexional committees and the appointment of District Superintendents, who are full time regional leaders and involved across the full life of the MCI.
- 8 There have been occasions when an individual has met with representatives of MCI who are seeking to understand and resolve a situation. At times such a meeting has been held with MCI ministers when it would be helpful to have an MCI lay person as well as a minister present and involved.

- 9 Historically individuals have been able to take up chaplaincy roles with little or no training or preparation.

These findings result in the need to address a numbers of areas in the life of the Methodist Church. Whilst ensuring a piecemeal approach was avoided, there were still two areas that were considered so weak that an immediate remedy was necessary and these are detailed below. This indicates both the urgency of the work of this review, and the desire that the Church should be as safe a place as possible for all, as quickly as is possible. There are no circumstances where delaying important developments is acceptable.

## **8.2 Developments**

In Dec 2021 the MCI process for recording safeguarding cases was strengthened. It was considered that this should not wait until an interim or final report, but on the advice of the Chair was acted upon with immediate effect and now MCI has a much more robust system in place to record and retain safeguarding relevant information.

In Dec 2021 the Secretary of Conference initiated wider consideration on the implications of a particular historic case and reported this to the PCR.

The Secretary of Conference, in consultation with the connexional HR Manager is in the process of putting into place a system for the holding of personnel files on all ministers and lay employees. This is not directly as a consequence of this this review but it emerged as a likely recommendation and so it is noted that this is being addressed.

## **9.0 Recommendations**

In order to protect all within the life of the MCI, to be as safe a space as possible, and better reflect our calling as Christian disciples and witnesses to the love of Jesus Christ, the following are recommended to be accepted by the MCI at Conference 2023 and then to be implemented with immediate effect.

### **Record Keeping**

- 1 Significant further revision to administrative processes including but not limited to record keeping to ensure that full documentation from any cases is retained, to ensure that where necessary and remaining confidential that such case notes are made available to others within the life of the Church as required and that senior Church leadership is aware of any concerns or circumstances when making decisions. This will include our stationing of ministers to appointments.
- 2 Where the Safeguarding Officer gives advice to be followed, or where another senior leader in the life of the Church gives advice to be followed, that this is given via email in addition of any other communication. This is to ensure advice is clear, that a record can be maintained and that follow up is easier to maintain.

### **Training**

- 3 The MCI needs to develop and deliver further training to assist ministers, lay employees, leaders and others in the life of the MCI to understand how to better help survivors in the life of local congregations.
- 4 MCI further reviews its training and safeguarding processes for events that are directly run by the Church or indirectly run by the Church, and that have a residential aspect.
- 5 The MCI Safeguarding training programme and processes are reviewed annually and this is reported to our annual Conference.
- 6 Greater attention is given to safeguarding in the area of social media, use of smart phones and other technological advances. The MCI needs to be at the forefront of societal developments to ensure there is no lag in the training offered and processes followed.

### **Offender contracts**

- 7 An immediate review of all 'offender contracts' in the life of the MCI. This includes developing a centrally held comprehensive list, revisiting each contact, ascertaining whether it is still active, how successful it has been and developing a process to provide regular, systematic review of such contracts.

### **Church Organisation**

- 8 The Connexional Safeguarding Board is required to ensure the full implementation of these recommendations within the year that lies ahead and report to Conference 2024 as regards this. This Board is responsible for ongoing learning from our past. This will include a formal audit of Safeguarding practice in 2028, reported to the Governance Board.

### **Theology**

- 9 The Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church in Ireland is requested to develop a Theology of Safeguarding, to further underpin Safeguarding in the life, witness and ministry of the church. This to be reported to Conference in 2025.

### **Personnel**

- 10 The important role of Safeguarding Officer for MCI is reviewed annually in terms of appropriate support being offered such as ongoing training and development of practices via an enhanced annual review process.

### **Pastoral Care**

- 11 The Ministries Policies and Procedures Committee is to review the Methodist Church Disciplinary Process in light of this report and with particular regard to ensuring pastoral care and support for all involved in such circumstances.

### **Disciplinary Process**

- 12 If there is a disciplinary process involving a minister, and they offer their resignation during this process, that their resignation is not accepted until the completion of the disciplinary process. For lay employees the appropriate processes will be completed.

### **Methodist institutions and Organisations**

- 13 The MCI invites the four educational institutions of which we are the patron body and where there are Boards of Governors acting on behalf of the Church, to undertake their own Reviews in a timely manner and report to their governing bodies. These are Wesley College Dublin, Methodist College Belfast, Gurteen College Tipperary and Rathgar National School Dublin. No issues have emerged during this review process that raise any concerns and each institution has in place appropriate and robust safeguarding process. However, as part of our focus on ensuring that all aspects of the life of the MCI, including our educational institutions, are as safe as

can be, and to ensure we learn as much as is possible from the past, we recommend this review process in these institutions.

- 14 The MCI invites related organisations including the five Methodist City Missions to undertake their own reviews of safeguarding issues in the life of their institution both in the past and in the present. Again, no issues have emerged during this review process that raise any concerns and each organisation has in place appropriate and robust safeguarding process. However, as part of our focus on ensuring that all aspects of the life of the MCI are as safe as can be, and to ensure we learn as much as is possible from the past, we recommend this review process for these organisations.

## 10.0 Conclusion

It is the intention of this report to shine such a light on our past that we can clearly see what has happened, learn from this and be a better and safer place because of this. We seek to continue to do this by implementation of the recommendations and to commit ourselves to continuing to learn.

To the best of our abilities we have:

- A) Identified and considered all past cases since 1950 that have safeguarding concerns, reviewed the response at the time, implemented any remedial action and considered any lessons to be learnt to develop stronger practices, processes and culture;
- B) Given opportunities to hear and so learn from any previously unreported cases, and investigated any such cases, implemented any necessary action and considered any lessons to be learnt to develop stronger practices, processes and culture.

We will continue to do so. We offer this report to the Methodist people in Ireland, and to wider society. As a result of this work and the implementation of the recommendations that will follow, current safeguarding policies and practices will improve. Consequently, this will ensure that everyone involved in or in any way associated with the life and ministry of the Methodist Church will be better protected both today and in the future.

Dr Deborah Webster  
Rev Dr Stephen Skuce

## Appendix 1

### Press Release 1st February 2021: Past Cases Review

In November 2020 the Methodist Church in Ireland began a Safeguarding Past Cases Review. This encompasses cases and situations where there has been any safeguarding concerns or issues. A final report is anticipated in June 2023. It began with requests for any comments and insights from all Methodist ministers and then lay employees. Phase two is the more public stage with a request for all Methodist Circuits to respond and an invitation for anyone to contact us to raise any concerns. This review is not prompted by any problems within Irish Methodism or any wider community issues. It is in line with the actions of some other denominations and charitable organisations, such as the Methodist Church in Britain who produced *Courage, Cost and Hope - Past Cases Review* ([methodist.org.uk](http://methodist.org.uk)) in 2015. Our purpose is to learn further from the past in order to enable the Methodist Church in Ireland to be as safe a space as it is possible to be. The Past Cases Review includes all ministers and lay employees, all circuits and individual congregations, and the Church is now seeking to make this Review widely known so that anyone to whom this is relevant may hear and be able to make their view known. The Methodist President, Rev Dr Tom McKnight, remarked "An important part of our current safeguarding responsibilities as a Church is to learn from any issues that may have arisen in the past. Commitment to such a task is part of our witness in today's world." The process is chaired by Deborah Webster, a former Presbyterian Church in Ireland Safeguarding Officer, who brings a wealth of personal skill and understanding to this process, in addition to a detachment from Irish Methodism which will help ensure the transparency and objectivity of this process. Deborah commented that 'It is extremely commendable that the Methodist Church in Ireland has taken this step to learn lessons from the past. I am confident that the process will improve current safeguarding policies and practices and ultimately will ensure that children and young people involved in the life and ministry of the congregations will be better protected today and in the future as a result.'

Details are available at Safeguarding documents | The Methodist Church in Ireland ([irishmethodist.org](http://irishmethodist.org))

Rev Dr Tom McKnight, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland  
Rev Dr Heather Morris, General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Ireland

For further information Rev Roy Cooper, Press Secretary of the Methodist Church in Ireland  
[roy.cooper@irishmethodist.org](mailto:roy.cooper@irishmethodist.org), 07710 945104

## Appendix 2

Feb 2021

### Past Cases Review: Methodist Circuits

The Methodist Conference has agreed that the Methodist Church in Ireland will undertake a Past Cases Review of cases and situations where there have been safeguarding concerns and issues. This has now begun, and will bring an interim report to Conference in June 2022 with a final report anticipated in June 2023. A small committee has been formed to oversee this work with Deborah Webster as Chair and Rev Dr Stephen Skuce as the vice chair.

We would like to give our people – the Methodist Church in Ireland- the opportunity to talk about any Safeguarding related issues that they may have encountered at some stage in the past, so that we can learn and make amends if needs be. Some things will rightly be left in the past as, rightly or wrongly, certain actions, reactions and attitudes were deemed acceptable at the time. However, where there were indiscretions, crimes, damage or inaction, as a denomination, we must hold ourselves, and be held, accountable.

The purpose of this review is to ascertain if there are any Safeguarding issues that have previously occurred within the life of the Methodist Church in Ireland which, were they subject to today's standards, would be considered unacceptable, inappropriate, unethical, or in some instances illegal. So far Methodist ministers and lay employees have been contacted. We now wish to draw this to the attention of our circuits and congregations to invite any response. If there is a response that involves new information this will be followed up by our Safeguarding Officer who will act in accordance to our safeguarding policy and procedures.

We are grateful if you can draw this to the attention of your church councils and Methodist people, and through your circuit executive bring a response that confirms this has been discussed. There is a separate form attached that an individual congregation can use, if it is desired.

#### **Circuit Name:**

#### **Question 1**

Please confirm the date that this issue has been considered by the circuit executive.

Response:

#### **Question 2**

Please share anything that the circuit wishes as regards this process and issues.

Response:

Please return this to [pastcasesreview@irishmethodist.org](mailto:pastcasesreview@irishmethodist.org) by 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021. Information received will be held securely, confidentially and according to current data protection requirements.

## **Appendix 3**

### **February 2021 Past Cases Review: Methodist Societies and Congregations**

The Methodist Conference has agreed that the Methodist Church in Ireland will undertake a Past Cases Review of cases and situations where there have been safeguarding concerns and issues. This has now begun, and will bring an interim report to Conference in June 2022 with a final report anticipated in June 2023. A small committee has been formed to oversee this work with Deborah Webster as Chair and Rev Dr Stephen Skuce as the vice chair.

We would like to give our people – the Methodist Church in Ireland- the opportunity to talk about any Safeguarding related issues that they may have encountered at some stage in the past, so that we can learn and make amends if needs be. Some things will rightly be left in the past as, rightly or wrongly, certain actions, reactions and attitudes were deemed acceptable at the time. However, where there were indiscretions, crimes, damage or inaction, as a denomination, we must hold ourselves, and be held, accountable.

The purpose of this review is to ascertain if there are any Safeguarding issues that have previously occurred within the life of the Methodist Church in Ireland which, were they subject to today's standards, would be considered unacceptable, inappropriate, unethical, or in some instances illegal. So far Methodist ministers and lay employees have been contacted. We now wish to draw this to the attention of our circuits and congregations to invite any response. If there is a response that involves new information this will be followed up by our Safeguarding Officer who will act in accordance to our safeguarding policy and procedures.

This has been drawn to the attention of your circuit executive which has been asked to make a response. An individual Methodist congregation can also make a response and please do so using this form.

**Society/Congregation Name:**

**Circuit:**

#### **Question 1**

Please confirm the date that this issue has been considered by the church council.

Response:

#### **Question 2**

Please share anything that the church council wishes as regards this process and issues.

Response:

Please return this to [pastcasesreview@irishmethodist.org](mailto:pastcasesreview@irishmethodist.org) by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021. Information received will be held securely, confidentially and according to current data protection requirements.

## **Appendix 4**

Letter to ministers/Lay employees November 2020

### **Past Cases Review**

The Methodist Conference has agreed that the Methodist Church in Ireland will undertake a Past Cases Review of cases and situations where there have been safeguarding concerns and issues. This has now begun, and will bring an interim report to Conference in June 2022 with a final report anticipated in June 2023. A small committee has been formed to oversee this work with Rev Dr Stephen Skuce as the vice chair and an external chair to be appointed.

We would like to give our people – the Methodist Church in Ireland- the opportunity to talk about any Safeguarding related issues that they may have encountered at some stage in the past, so that we can learn and make amends if needs be. Some things will rightly be left in the past as, rightly or wrongly, certain actions, reactions and attitudes were deemed acceptable at the time. However, where there were indiscretions, crimes, damage or inaction, as a denomination, we must hold ourselves, and be held, accountable. As part of this, we are seeking to learn from our ministers.

The purpose of this review is to ascertain if there are any Safeguarding issues that have previously occurred within the life of the Methodist Church in Ireland which, were they subject to today's standards, would be considered unacceptable, inappropriate, unethical, or in some instances illegal.

#### **Ministers**

Name:

Current appointment:

#### **Question 1**

Going back through your notes and your memories, are there any situations that you faced within the life of the Methodist Church, or perhaps were even a part of, which if today's standards were applied, you would have serious concerns about? If so, please give details.

**Response:**

#### **Question 2**

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you were uncomfortable about the conduct of others within the life of the Methodist Church? This could have been conduct that you observed, or that you heard about. If so, please give details.

**Response:**

### **Question 3**

In your current or any previous appointments, have you worked with any lay staff involved in pastoral ministry? If they are no longer an employee or an active member of a Methodist Church, please provide names and any contact details for this/ these individual(s).

### **Response:**

Please return this to [pastcasesreview@irishmethodist.org](mailto:pastcasesreview@irishmethodist.org) by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020. Information received will be held securely, confidentially and according to current data protection requirements.

## Appendix 5

### Oct 2020      **Past Cases Review: letter to ecumenical partners**

The Methodist Conference has agreed that the Methodist Church in Ireland will undertake a Past Cases Review of cases and situations where there have been safeguarding concerns and issues. This has now begun, with a final report anticipated in June 2023. The process is chaired by Deborah Webster, a former Presbyterian Church in Ireland safeguarding officer, who brings a wealth of personal skill and understanding to this process, in addition to a detachment from Irish Methodism and will help ensure the transparency and objectivity of this process. Rev Dr Stephen Skuce is the vice chair.

The review is being more publicly launched on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021. This review is not prompted by any issues within Irish Methodism or any concerns. It is in line with the actions of some other denominations and charitable organisations, such as the Methodist Church in Britain who produced [Courage, Cost and Hope - Past Cases Review \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/courage-cost-and-hope-past-cases-review) in 2015. Our purpose is to learn further from the past in order to enable the Methodist Church in Ireland to be as safe a space as it is possible to be. This is being done through a process that involves all ministers and lay employees, all circuits and individual congregations, and seeking to make this widely known so that anyone to whom this is relevant may hear and be able to make their view known.

If any further information is helpful, please contact the vice chair Rev Dr Stephen Skuce, who is managing the process [stephen.skuce@irishmethodist.org](mailto:stephen.skuce@irishmethodist.org).