

Report from the Conference Business Committees

The Conference Business Committees for the Presbyteral and Representative Sessions met on Friday 1 May to consider plans for the Conference in the light of the current situation.

Both Conference Business Committees heard advice from the Law and Polity Committee which confirmed that our constitutional documents require a physical meeting of the members of the Conference at a specified location and there is no power to meet electronically. However, like many other charities with no power to conduct business electronically, we also have a legal duty under our constitution to carry out certain business at an annual meeting. The Charity Commission has recognised the dilemma faced by such charities and has issued guidance to the effect that it will understand if charities decide to meet electronically, but the decision should be recorded to demonstrate good governance. It is the view of the Law and Polity Committee that since the technology for electronic meetings is available, it would be acceptable for the Conference to give priority to the need to conduct essential business over the need to hold a physical meeting and that to do so would be within the spirit of the Charity Commission's guidance. For this purpose, business may be essential either because it has to be done for constitutional reasons or because the view is taken that it cannot be delayed for another year.

On that basis (and subject to the suspension of a range of Standing Orders), the Committees agreed that both Sessions of the Conference will meet virtually on the dates originally scheduled for the Conference.

The Committees further noted the limitations of meeting electronically and, in particular, the effect on conferring.

The Business Committees are considering the Agenda carefully to identify which items that are currently expected to come to the Conference are essential in either sense. They will make recommendations to the Conference in their second reports as to the items which are to be treated as essential and those which should either be deferred or handled differently. The reports will also contain recommendations as to the timing and length of sitting and will be taken early in each Session .

Representative Session

The Conference Business Committee for the Representative Session agreed the following:

- The Session will meet during the dates already scheduled and the recommended timetable for the Session will aim to conduct the business over four mornings.
- The aim is for the platform party (as minimal as is required by the restrictions in place at the time) to meet in one place, with the rest of the Conference joining by video link.
- For those essential items that are likely to need discussion, the Business Committee will ask for indications of speakers (and points) in advance and then offer advice to the President and Vice-President so as to enable a representative and diverse range of views to be heard (SO 136(2)(iv))
- At the outset of the Session, the election of the President and Vice-President will take place in a way that is clear and meaningful, with the hope that the induction can take place in some form that is visual to the whole Conference. (The Committee expressed the hope that more time could be allowed at the beginning of the 2021 Conference to enable this year's President and Vice-President more time to reflect on their year.) The President and Vice-President will each deliver an address.
- The designation of the President and Vice-President for the 2021 Conference (as well as the elections for Conference-elected representatives and any other elections) will be conducted by an electronic means that ensures a secret ballot and adopts a single transferable vote process when required.
- The Committee agreed that the Reception into Full Connexion should take place during the Conference (either in absentia or with those being received giving their assurances via video link), with the resolution directing that they be ordained at a later date. The ordinations will take place at a later date, to be determined once the restrictions have been lifted sufficiently to enable a proper

celebration. Where necessary, Authorisations to Preside will be extended until such time as presbyteral probationers can be ordained.

- The Committee will recommend to the Conference that the power to bring notices of motion that are unrelated to the business which is being handled this year should be suspended.

Presbyteral Session

The Conference Business Committee for the Presbyteral Session agreed the following:

- The President will be invited to deliver a Pastoral Address, and to offer theological reflection with the Vice-President which will particularly focus on the current situation.
- There will be some input to stimulate discussion, possibly in smaller groups.
- The essential business, most of which is conducted in closed session, will be transacted, with the necessary security in place.
- It will not be possible for the thanksgiving and remembrance service to take place, but the roll will be called within a suitable liturgical expression. The formal service will be deferred.

*****RESOLUTION**

74/1. The Council receives the report.