



CONFERENCE COUNCIL MEETING

held on Tuesday 21st October 2025 Via Zoom Video Conference Call

Trustees Present:	Mrs M Cowie	Chairperson
	Revd B Jarvis	Vice-Chairperson
	Mrs S Chesworth	
	Mr B Friend	
	Mr P Brooks	Co opted
	Mr J Ford	Co opted
	Miss J Walton	Co opted
Also in attendance:	Ms N Welch	Company Secretary
	Mr P Mehew	Company Accountant
	Revd J Dunion	Spiritual Leader
	Revd B Jarratt	Deputy Spiritual Leader
	Mr C Chambers	President, New Church College
	Miss A Presland	Invited Guest

Start time: 10.00am
End Time: 17.00pm

6	Opening Revd Jack Dunion opened the meeting with readings from Matthew 20:25-28 and Heaven & Hell 564, followed by a prayer	
7	Apologies –Trevor Millar sent in his apologies	
8	Welcome- Margaret Cowie welcomed Alison Presland, who attended as a guest having expressed interest in possibly joining Conference Council.	
9	<i>Confirmation of the Minutes of the Conference Council Meeting held on 22nd July 2025.</i> The minutes were approved by all present with John Ford proposing and Revd Bruce Jarvis seconding. <i>Confirmation of the Minutes of the Conference Council Meeting held on 20th August 2025.</i> The minutes were approved by all present with Revd Bruce Jarvis proposing and John Ford seconding.	
10	Spiritual Leaders Update Revd. Jack Dunion provided an update on several recent events, noting their value to the organisation. He specifically drew attention to the Communication Training led by Gayle-Anne Drury (Baobab Centre) at Wellspring House. Jack expressed confidence that, over time, the implementation of the course material by key personnel would result in measurable improvements to organisational efficiency and internal communication.	

11	Safeguarding The Safeguarding Officer, Sue Chesworth, reported that a few incidences have been informally reported since the last meeting in July 2025. She confirmed that she is managing these cases individually and confidentially, following the official organisational safeguarding policy.	
12	Property Update <i>Auckland</i> Natalie Welch, Company Secretary, explained that she was initially contacted by the Revd John Sutton in Auckland, New Zealand at the beginning of the year regarding persistent issues with the property's roofing materials. Three quotations for replacement were sought by Revd. Sutton who resides at the property. At the July 2025 Conference Council meeting, approval was granted for the replacement of the roof up to a maximum sum of NZ\$21,000.00 (approximately £9,907.00). Following the July meeting, John Sutton believed the issue might be resolved without full replacement and therefore did not proceed with the work. The problem has since reappeared, and John subsequently contacted the Company Secretary requesting approval to proceed with the full replacement as initially approved. Additionally, John Sutton reported that the external walls of the property had been painted, a maintenance item overdue by over ten years. He enquired whether the Conference Council, as a part-owner, would contribute to the cost. Following a discussion conducted via email, Conference Council agreed to the following expenditures: • Roofing Replacement - Conference Council approved proceeding with the new roofing as initially agreed, up to the maximum sum of NZ\$21,000.00 (approximately £9,907.00) • Exterior Painting - Conference Council approved contributing their proportion of 86.7647% toward the exterior painting of the property which cost in total: NZ\$14,950.00 (approximately £6,565.00) <i>Chester - Church and Manse at Chester</i> – John Ford reported on the properties at Chester. He noted that the solicitors are awaiting a reply from the Charities Commission regarding the application for a Cy-Près Scheme for both the Church and Manse. The solicitors advised that the Commission currently has a backlog of up to 20 weeks for a response. <i>Kearsley - Manse</i> – John Ford explained that he is still preparing this property for the market.	
13	Policies <i>Working alone Policy for volunteers</i> – Wilf Woodhouse, Health & Safety Manager for General Conference, had prepared a standalone policy/guideline for working alone for volunteers within the organisation. After a discussion it was felt that the document needed some minor amendments. <i>Action:</i> Natalie would organise a meeting for Barry Friend, Natalie and Wilf Woodhouse so they could revise the document before taking it back to Conference Council for approval. <i>Financial Policy</i> - The financial policy was due for review and the Company Accountant, Paul Mehew had made suggested amendments and presented the revised policy to Conference Council to be approved.	NW/BF PM

	Following discussion, the Council agreed that the policy requires final amendments before approval. These specific amendments include, inserting an index to the policy document and including the current budget holders' names and their respective authorised spending limits. <i>Access to all General Conference Policies-</i> It was discussed at the beginning of the year that all policies should be made available in the members only section on the General Conference website which the IT Manager was working on alongside the Company Secretary. Company Secretary, Natalie Welch, explained that she would get the IT Manager, Paul Crone, to continue working on this project and aim for completion in January 2026 <i>Action:</i> Paul Crone, IT Manager, to complete the development and circulate login instructions to members, aiming for a January 2026 launch.	NW
14	Continuing Professional Development (CPD) The Council considered a report from the Task and Finish Group, consisting of Chris Chambers, (SOLCe President), Sue Chesworth, and Revd Becky Jarratt, regarding the need for and implementation of a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) system. The report highlighted the urgent need to establish a formal CPD policy for all employees and volunteers to ensure lifelong learning, deepen ministerial understanding, and maintain administrative awareness of industry standards and regulations. Following discussion, Conference Council approved the adoption of the proposed CPD scheme as a major benefit to the organisation. All present expressed thanks to the Task and Finish Group for their extensive work. The group would continue to work together on this scheme in the hope to implement it sometime in 2026	
15	Psychometric Testing for potential Ordination Students The Company Secretary, Natalie Welch, reported that as this is the first time she has had to make arrangements for this requirement, it had taken some time to find an appropriate provider for psychometric testing for ordination students. Natalie confirmed she has successfully secured a company that is able to carry out the required testing, ensuring that the process for future applicants will be quicker.	
16	Committee of Ministers <i>Trustees attending Committee of Ministers Meetings</i> Revd. Becky Jarratt explained that it has been extremely helpful having Trustees attend the Committee of Ministers meetings, and their contribution are valued. Committee of Ministers would like to invite Trustees to future meetings <i>Action:</i> Revd Becky Jarratt will send the dates of future meetings to Company Secretary, Natalie Welch so that Natalie can organise which Trustees can attend on behalf of Conference Council. <i>Spiritual Tuesdays</i> The Committee of Ministers presented a report on "Spiritual Tuesdays," a new initiative being trialled by the Ministry. The purpose is to address the encroachment of administrative work, particularly emails, on Ministers' spiritual and creative time. Ministers have agreed not to send each other emails on Tuesdays. They request that others "schedule send" any emails intended for Ministers on a Tuesday, so they are not delivered until the next working day. The Ministry have introduced a communal time of prayer via a half-hour Zoom meeting at 9:00 AM on the third Tuesday of the month. This is initially open to employed and retired Ministers and those who attend Conference Council meetings. The time will be spent in prayer focusing on	RJ/ NW

	the future of the church and its mission. A review will be held after the first three months to consider potentially widening attendance. Conference Council expressed that they felt this was a great idea and unanimously supported the Spiritual Tuesday initiative. <i>Emails</i> It was noted that the Online Worship Coordinator is having to send emails from his personal Gmail email address to be able to communicate with some people attending Zoom services. The Task and Finish Group consisting of Natalie Welch, Margaret Cowie, Paul Crone and Jack Dunion will meet to try to resolve the issues that were discussed in the May and July meetings. <i>Brave Space Meeting Proposal</i> The Committee of Ministers proposed introducing a "Brave Space Meeting", composed of two representatives each from the Committee of Ministers, Conference Council, and SOLCe. The initiative is designed to create a safe environment where participants can be vulnerable, express their concerns, and share thoughts freely. The Conference Council welcomed the idea but felt that further understanding and clarity is required regarding the structure and operational details. <i>Action:</i> Revd Becky Jarratt would go back to the Committee of Ministers with a request for a more detailed proposal and understanding of the initiative which will be discussed further at the Conference Council meeting in November 2025 <i>Retired Ministers Fees</i> The Committee of Ministers produced a new template for retired ministers' fees. The contract for retired ministers was discussed, and it was agreed travelling expenses could continue to be claimed. The Chair of Conference Council will continue to sign off these expense claims, and items of work do not need to be agreed in advance. Retired ministers no longer need to have a contract for this work. <i>Staff Diary</i> Revd Becky Jarratt requested that all line managers be reminded to ensure their employees are promptly informing the Ministers' Secretary of any annual leave or out-of-office dates when this information is requested. This request is necessary as only a few employees are currently responding.	NW RJ
17	Human Resources <i>Purley Chase Centre Manager</i> –Conference Council appointed a new manager for the Purley Chase Centre, with employment commencing Monday 29th September 2025. However, it became obvious within the first week that the individual was not a good fit for the role. Consequently, the Council had to terminate the employment contract on Friday 17th October 2025. The Council expressed the urgency of filling this role but stressed the importance of not rushing the decision. Recruitment agents have been instructed to continue the search, and the role will also continue to be advertised internally. <i>Marketing and Media Coordinator</i> The requirement for the role was confirmed. Recruitment for the Marketing and Media Coordinator position will be put on short-term hold while the organisation prioritises the recruitment of the Purley Chase Manager and the Programme Director. As previously agreed by the Council, ad hoc media and marketing support will be commissioned and funded by the Conference for any affected society or group in the interim. <i>Outreach Coordinator Report</i> Bradford	

	<i>Subsidised events</i>- Clarity was needed by the Company Accountant, Paul Mehew, if the family weekend events at Purley Chase Centre should be standardised. The subsidised fees for May and November family weekend is 35% and the Youth & Family Team have agreed to subsidise the family weekends by 33% and General Conference subsidise the summer camp by 33% It was agreed that all the subsidised fees for all family weekends is 33% All prices will increase along with the Retail Price Index (RPI) + 2% subject to a maximum of 5% which for this year will be 5% as RPI is 3.2%. <i>Paul Mehew left the meeting</i> <i>Chris Chambers re-joined the meeting</i>	
19	Constitutional Revision Group (CRG) Conference Council reviewed the report from the CRG, dated 15th September 2025, regarding the outcome of its July Conference proposals and outstanding matters requiring Conference Council's approval. The Annual Meeting of Conference rejected the CRG's proposed amendment to Article 28 <i>ie</i> to insert the words "up to" immediately before "six members". This was the advice provided by our solicitor. If the Conference is unwilling to support the words "up to", then the Conference has a duty to appoint the full number of six. The Council needs to discuss the legal implications of all this with the solicitor. This has been referred to the CRG. <i>Council Standing Orders</i> - The CRG sought Council approval for the following amendments to Standing Orders, which the Council has the authority to change without Conference approval. <i>A. Standing Order No. 2 (Voting Eligibility)</i> - Amendments were made to Article numbers and the title 'Chief Executive'. Clarification was added that the four members must be Members of Conference, along with the addition of the phrase 'or Group'. <i>B. Standing Orders Nos. 3, 5, and 6 (Removal of Members)</i> - The CRG propose that the Conference Council amalgamate these three Standing Orders into a single, consolidated Standing Order No. 3, omitting repetitious wording. <i>Youth Membership Pledge of Commitment (Rule A1(b))</i>- Amend Rule A1(b) to include the full text of the Pledge of Commitment directly within the Rule, replacing the phrase "a signed Pledge of Commitment." CRG propose the new wording inserted: "a signed copy of the following Pledge of Commitment: 'As a Youth Member I will endeavour to support and serve the General Conference, to develop my knowledge of the heavenly teachings of the New Church, and to honour the Lord Jesus Christ in all my thoughts, words, and actions.'" <i>Rule B9 Wording Consistency</i> - Alter the word "will" to "shall" in the first sentence of Rule B9 for consistency with the wording in the first sentence of Rule B8. Apart from A Standing Order no. 2 which has been referred to the CRG for simplification and sentence reconstruction, the Conference Council approve the proposed amendments. <i>Proxy Voting/Secret Ballots</i> - Concern was raised after the latest Conference, that, when voting by Proxy in a ballot as in the election of Council members, their vote would not be secret, because the voting instruction form, which was to be returned to the Company Secretary, asked how he/she	

	would vote. The C.R.G. therefore proposes that this matter should be solely in the hands of the Voting Member and his/her Proxy. This was approved by all present. <i>Conference Roll</i>- The CRG asked whether the person appointed as a proxy should be registered in the Conference Roll next to the name of the Voting Member All present approved that the person appointed as a proxy will be included in the Conference Roll. Conference Council expressed their sincere thanks and gratitude to the Constitutional Revision Group, particularly Gordon Kuphal and Revd Robert Gill, for their significant time and effort invested in updating the Rules and Articles to ensure the General Conference constitution remains up to date.	
20	Future of Conference Council The Council held a discussion concerning the importance of encouraging members to come forward and serve on the Conference Council. The members emphasised that this is a critical strategic priority, noting that, without a Conference Council, the General Conference could not continue in existence. The need for active planning and member engagement was stressed.	
21	Annual Conference <i>Conference 2027</i> - has been provisionally booked for Monday 26th July – Friday 30th July 2027 at the Hayes Christian Conference Centre, Derby. <i>Future of Annual Conference</i> – Barry Friend is exploring options to better understand what members want from the Annual Conference, particularly how to effectively include the AGM business day. It was suggested to convene a 'Brave Space' meeting to discuss the future of the Annual Conference with the Conference Programme Planning Team. <i>Conference Organiser Appointment</i> - John Ford stepped down as Conference Organiser after many years of service following Conference 2025. The Council is delighted that Barry Friend has offered to step into the role of Conference Organiser. Company Secretary, Natalie Welch will support Barry where possible and continue to manage the bookings. Conference Council once again expressed their deep thanks to John Ford for his dedicated service in organising the Conference for many years and hopes he can now attend and relax. <i>Conference Programme Planning Team</i> – The Conference Programme planning team would consist of Revd Jack Dunion, Margaret Cowie as Chair of Conference Council, Barry Friend as would also attend as the new Conference Organiser after John Ford stood down after Conference 2025. Revd. Becky Jarratt has stood down from the Conference Planning Team due to her workload and her need to prioritise other areas. There is a need to appoint someone else to help in the programme planning team, and the Ministry will be asked to find a replacement. Margaret will also work on this. <i>Displaying Suggested Changes to Rules at the AGM</i>- The Council discussed methods to improve clarity when presenting constitutional proposals at the AGM. It was agreed that at future Annual General Meetings, any suggested changes to the Articles and	RJ/MC

	Rules will, where possible, be displayed on the screen next to the original text. This will ensure members can clearly see the proposed amendments on the day.	
22	Youth & Family Team Update <i>Forest School Activities at Conference 2025</i> - Sue Chesworth explained that the Youth & Family Team arranged for an external activity provider to organise forest school type activities for Wednesday and Thursday of Annual Conference at the Hayes Christian Conference Centre in July 2025. The young people enjoyed the activities, and positive feedback was received from families. <i>Summer Camp at Purley Chase</i> - This year's Summer Camp at the Purley Chase Centre was an International Summer Camp with visitors from the USA. This proved to be successful and the young people enjoyed themselves. <i>Summer Camp for 9-13 year olds at Wellspring House</i> - Unfortunately, this event had to be cancelled because of health issues of the two main leaders. This raised the issue that there was no back up support available to ensure the young people did not miss out on the camp. New Forest Bunkhouse took place in September 2025. <i>Youth & Family Team Away Day</i> – Sue Chesworth explained that on 4th October 2025, the Youth & Family Team attended a planned away day. This was attended by Jenny Jones and Robert Clark in their roles as leaders, Revd Becky Jarratt and Revd Jack Dunion in their role as Ministers, Shannon Fitzgerald in her role as Outreach Co-ordinator and Sue Chesworth representing Conference Council. The day was facilitated by Emma Daniels from Tempus Fugit. The primary focus was developing the Youth & Family Team's strategy for the next three years, yielding many interesting and creative ideas for future consideration. Sue Chesworth highlighted that while the Youth & Family Team works hard to provide a wide range of activities, limited resources require a huge and unsustainable commitment from both paid staff and volunteers to maintain the existing schedule. These further strain the ability to develop new activities. <i>Safeguarding at Residentials</i> - Clarity was sought regarding the attendance of persons under and over 18 years old at residential events. It was agreed that no person under 18 years old could attend an 18+ residential event under any circumstances, owing to absolute compliance requirements regarding Safeguarding, and that residentials that cross the child/adult age range should not be run. Therefore, the 16+ Activity Weekend planned by the Young People's Committee will not be able to go ahead as this is not one of the age ranges resolved upon by the Youth and Family Team in September 2024.	
23	Conference Council Meeting Dates 2025 November 25th, 10am – 15.00pm - Zoom 2026 January 13th, 10am – 15.00pm – Zoom March 24th, 10am – 15.00pm – Zoom May 7th – 8th, 1.30pm at Purley Chase Centre July 28th, 10am - Writing Room at the Hayes Conference Centre	
24	The meeting closed with a short prayer	