

**Minutes of the 92nd meeting of the South Western Synod
Held on 10th March 2018 at Westfield URC, West Street, Bridgwater, TA6 7EU**

Attendance: 112 people attended: 42 church representatives, 28 serving ministers, 3 local church leaders, 6 retired ministers, 13 synod officers/staff and 19 visitors. There were 44 apologies: 17 church representatives, 10 serving ministers, 12 retired ministers, 1 Local Church Leader 4 visitors.

Opening worship was led by Revd Tim Richards

1. The Moderator, the Revd Ruth Whitehead, constituted the Synod. The theme of the meeting being: "Walking the Way – inviting others"

2. The minutes of the last meeting:

The minutes of the last meeting held on 21st October 2017 were agreed as correct and signed.

3. The Moderator greeted or mentioned the following:

Welcome:

Ms Michelle Howard - commenced as Church Development Worker in January 2018.

Retirement:

Revd Paul Snell - retired as Chaplain at Derriford Hospital, Plymouth at the end of December 2017.

Changes within the synod:

Revd Paul Snell - commenced as County Ecumenical Officer for Churches Together in Devon from January 2018.

Revd Amanda Harper - ended SCM role as Chaplain at Exeter University and inter-faith work in Exeter and Devon at the end of December 2017.

Revd Colin Phipps - commenced additional responsibility for Cornerstone, Torpoint from end of October 2017.

Moving out of the Synod:

Revd Ian Kirby & Mrs Julie Kirby - moved to Brecon Beacons Pastorate, Wales Synod in December 2017.

CHURCH CHANGES

- Bickington URC closed on the 31st January 2018.
- Exeter Heavitree and Exeter Pinhoe amalgamated on 1st January 2018. Now known as Heavitree & Pinhoe URC and continuing to worship at both sites.

Revd John Proctor, General Secretary of the URC led a thought provoking Bible study on the Saints of the Church. He reminded us that holiness is received not achieved; is borrowed, like moonlight; is from God and of God; is about people more than places; is generated by God in Trinity; is created by cross and resurrection; is plural; is bigger, in communion, than we can see; and is practical, making a difference to the world around. There was discussion around tables of the names we use for each other and the benefits and dangers of treating one another as 'holy people'.

Business of Synod

- Annual data. No changes to the information and so the resolution was unchanged from last year:

Resolution 1: Synod notes the following to be applicable until further notice:

1. The synod agreed minimum ministerial housing allowance is either £4,000 per year grossed up to take account of income tax and national insurance or by annual application of the formula set down in the plan for partnership.
2. Mileage rate on synod business is 25 pence per mile or the costs of public transport.
3. Where the ownership of a manse is shared between the Synod Trust and the local church (i.e. there is an Equity Share) the local church is responsible for all expenses and repairs unless agreed otherwise. When the manse is occupied by a minister, this is in accordance with the Plan for Partnership (which is available on the URC website).
4. The Default Minimum Apportionment of the proceeds from the sale of buildings where there is a continuing local church is 60:40 between the Synod and the local church. **AGREED**

- Nominations for Synod Representatives & Committee Members with effect from March 2018.

The amended list was on the website prior to the meeting and there were no questions or further amendments.

Resolution 2: Synod accepts the nominations listed, with thanks to all those who have agreed to serve and extends the service of those due to finish in 2018 or earlier until the position is reviewed. **AGREED**

New members of Executive Committee

Resolution 3:

Synod accepts the nominations of Don Macalister who has agreed to serve on the Synod Executive, with thanks. **AGREED**

- General Assembly representatives:

Each Synod was asked to identify their Assembly representatives for 2018. Churches and Ministers were contacted by Synod office at the beginning of November with a request for nominations. A list of the nominees was shown [which also included the Moderator and Treasurer who are automatically members of General Assembly and not counted in the list of nominations]. As there were still vacancies on the list the Synod Clerk appealed to those present to forward names of people who would be willing to represent the Synod.

The list comprised:

1 Revd Chris Baillie, 2 Mr George Faris, 3 Mrs Gwen Jennings, 4 Revd Robert Jennings, 5 Ms Truida Mutaire, 6 Mrs Jacquy Newton, 7 Mr Roger Newton, 8 Revd Phil Nevard, 9 Revd Henriette Wentink
10 Ms Amy Weston.

Resolution 4:

Synod accepts the nominations listed, with thanks to all those who have agreed to represent the Synod at General Assembly 2018. There are still places available so a request for additional names to Synod Clerk after the meeting. **AGREED**

Post meeting the Synod clerk received further names and these have been added to the list which will appear on the website.

- Committee reports:

Executive: [the report was available on the website prior to the meeting.] Gwen Jennings

- Since the last Synod meeting Michelle Howard has been appointed to the new post of Church Development Worker. Sales of closed churches and manses are ongoing, and a number have been sold during the year.
- A number of Synod grant applications have been agreed by the Property Committee, and consent has been granted for several building projects.
- The 2018 Property Roadshow will take place during March and April to update churches on legislation and procedures, including the Hiring of Church buildings.

- The Executive have agreed in principle to relocate the Synod Office to Taunton URC and planning applications have been submitted for reordering works. If these are successful then the existing premises will be sold to meet the cost of the relocation and raise capital for the Synod Trust.
- New member of the committee, Revd Don Macalister was given approval from Synod meeting. A question was raised about availability of video conferencing at the new Synod offices. Ruth advised the meeting that the Synod have taken up the offer of a licence for this from Church House.

Ministries: Lythan Nevard

- Since the last Synod meeting the committee have been considering changing the name because of the changing emphasis of its work, but decided that Ministries covers every different kind of ministry from minister of word and sacrament to being disciples who are walking the way together.
- This year they have worked on looking at all the different kinds of ministry available to local churches, writing South Western Synod specific notes for Interim Moderators and a paper on Local Church Leaders coming from within the URC.
- Also starting to look at ways to encourage churches to apply for mission grants to support their mission in different ways.
- Communion training has been organised but unfortunately the pilot had to be postponed due to severe weather conditions.
- Worship and Preaching Advocates [WAPAs] have been consulted about being connected to Ministries committee instead of meeting on their own. Once all responses are in a decision will be made.

Pastoral: Ruth Whitehead

- The following pastorates are currently on the vacancy list: Trowbridge, Furrough Cross & Derriford. By the end of 2020, the number of ministers in synod will be 22 (somehow shared between about 110 churches). Some pastorates are looking for leadership in other ways – e.g. house for duty, a minister of another denomination, or other church leadership. A flowchart has been designed to help churches look at the options for leadership, this is available from Synod Pastoral Advisors.
- After a number of years without a Church Related Community Worker in the Synod, the committee have supported applications for CRCWs at Westfield, Bridgwater & Cannington and Dawlish. We wait to hear from the CRCW Programme Sub-Committee.
- By our next Synod, Revd Janet Conway (Heavitree & Pinhoe) and Revd Robert Jennings (Exmouth, Glenorchy with oversight of Sidmouth, Primley) will have retired, and we wish them well.

Celebrating with faithful servants of Jesus and the Church - Jubilee Ministers

Ruth reported on the 50th Anniversary of ordination of: Peter Brain, Michael Diffey, and John Robinson and presented a certificate to Margaret Howard who was able to join the meeting. The 60th Anniversary of Ordination for Janet Webber was also reported.

Discipleship: Revd Phil Nevard: talked about the language we use to help think through what it is to live a holy life in the world. The meeting saw a video with the members of Muddiford URC telling us how they see their faith in action - ordinary people doing everyday things. Phil offered to run the LICC course “Fruitfulness on the Frontline” at any church within an hour’s journey from Cranbrook. Churches further away were reminded to contact their SPA if they would like support.

Walking the Way [WtW] update – Stephen Newell asked how we can work out what WtW is – he said it starts with us, it’s not new, and not a new course: churches are already doing this as God is already at work in us. It’s a journey with a known destination and we are working it out

together: There are resources appearing on the URC website and SPAs have copies of Holy Habits for loan to churches. He will be bringing more ideas to share at next Synod meeting.

Notices – Gwen Jennings reminded the meeting of the wealth of resources available on the table at the rear of the room and to use the e-newsletter which is published monthly [except for December and January which is a combined edition] to advertise events and good news stories about our churches. Ruth gave an update on Stepwise which included a flyer showing the timeline for things to start in September 2018. Over the lunch break a film on Stepwise was shown.

Youth Genesis: Walking the Way with youth - Jon Oliverio brought young people and volunteer youth workers to show the meeting what is happening with Youth Genesis in South Devon and how it started in 2007 at Brixham. Since then the URC have invested £26,732.84 in Youth Genesis and we were shown what was needed to reduce anti-social behaviour and live life in all its fullness. We were asked to consider what will church look like in 2049 and how we can play our part in the future.

Safeguarding update - Jan Murphy gave details of a Charity Commission regulatory alert that had been issued following the much publicised difficulties with Oxfam and Save the Children. It states that Safeguarding should be a key governance priority for all charities, not just those working with groups traditionally considered to be at risk. Jan remind everyone that churches were charities, some registered and some excepted charities and Elders and Ministers were trustees of their churches. Jan detailed the Charity Commissions guidance to trustees about the necessity to provide a safe and trusted environment, and a culture that supported reporting incidents. She also detailed that the charity commission had reminded that churches should have adequate safeguarding policies procedures and measures to protect people, and that policies should be implemented. She emphasised that trustees duties included ensuring that staff volunteers and trustees should be appointed by rigorous and robust process and that safer recruitment procedures are essential. She reminded everyone of a letter that our Moderator had written approximately 3 years ago about back checking of volunteers on the advice of our Insurers. Jan went on to say that the Charity Commission were clear about trustees responsibilities and that they are accountable if things go wrong and they expect them to put things right. The charity commission have suggested that all charities review their safeguarding procedures if a review has not been undertaken within the last year. Jan went on to advise about the necessity of reporting what the Charity Commission would deem to be a serious incident and suggested discussing any such reporting with her first as it has serious implications for a charity and she can assist with the wording.

Jan highlighted the documents that were available on the charity commission website
The essential trustee <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3>
Finding New Trustees <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/finding-new-trustees-cc30>
Whistleblowing <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/whistleblowing-guidance-for-charity-employees>

Jan pointed to other resources already available on the Synod website detailing Elders responsibilities for safeguarding issues and those relating to Property and Trust and a wider resource by Ruth Whitehead and Peter Ball which touches on legal issues but covers a variety of things, including the spiritual aspect of an elders calling. Jan said that she was available to support churches in any matters relating to safeguarding children and adults at risk and that there was a whole Synod team of Raoul and Kathryn, Gwen, Hilary and Dinah, Dick, the SPAs and of course our Moderator who were all keen to support churches in whatever way they could. She said that she would be sending out the information in a briefing note.

Financial report: Dick Gray:

Accounts currently with the auditors. Dick reported that our income was lower in 2017 due to less funds arising from the closure of churches. Expenditure was up a little compared to 2016. Church support increased in 2017. Special Ministry grants decreased as we changed our Youth and Children's Officer to a Safeguarding role in the middle of 2017. This caused a decrease in Special Ministry costs and an increase in staffing costs.

Dick thanked churches who have given more and mentioned the work of David Hayden and the M&M team.

By comparison with most other Synods we are in a healthy situation but we do depend on the sale of churches to balance the books. We are looking at how we can use funds generated by the sale of buildings to more effectively provide help with new forms of ministry for those churches where it is needed.

Net assets 2016 - 11,916m up to 14,922m 2017

Synod does not take a single penny from the M&M contributions of churches – Synod is here to serve the churches. There was no resolution – merely reporting situation. A challenge to Pastoral Committee and Ministries to use the money in areas we need to concentrate on and remind everyone that there are forms on the website to apply for mission grants.

John Proctor thanked Dick for all his voluntary work to support the wider church as his term of office of Chair of the Trust will end at General Assembly.

Closing Worship & Communion, including In Memoriam was led by the Moderator.

In Memoriam – March 2018

- Dr Geraldine Kew Died 28th October 2017. Widow of a URC minister. Geraldine's background was the Salvation Army and after retirement Geraldine did an OU degree followed by a PhD on the role of women in leadership in the early days of the Salvation Army.
- Miss Peggy Cooke Died 25th November 2017. A lay preacher who was well known throughout the area. She served as president of the East Devon District and was also a voluntary chaplain for the RD&E Hospital.
- Mrs Sue Cornish Died 9th December 2017. Wife of Revd Roger Cornish (retired minister living in Tavistock, Devon).
- Mr Gerald King Died 28th December 2017 (aged 91). Former Synod Trust Treasurer and Treasurer at Kingsteignton.
- Miss Joyce Saunders Died 1st February 2018. Former midwife with LMS in Bangladesh and member at Taunton URC.
- Mrs Margaret Brymer Died 5th February 2018. Widow of a URC minister. Margaret had latterly been living in residential care.
- Mrs Esme Macarthur Died 15th February 2018 (aged 93). Widow of Revd Arthur Macarthur.
- Revd Michael O'Hara Died 22nd February 2018. Michael served at Buckingham & Tingewick 1967–83, Potterspury & Paulerspury 1974–83; East Grinstead 1983–99; Balcombe 1988–99; Chapel Street, Sidmouth 1999-2002.

The meeting ended at 4pm.

Gwen Jennings Synod Clerk 10/03/18