

South Western Synod meeting Saturday 11th March 2023

REPORT from the Discipleship and Service Committee

Revd Neil Thorogood (Convener) – email: ministertthurc@gmail.com

1. As mentioned in our report to the October Synod, a developing key strand in our agenda is the Making Christ Visible initiative launched by our Moderator in 2022. We think this might be better named Making Christ Known given the emphasis upon encouraging our mission and outreach. In the light of the very helpful group feedback from discussions at last Synod, and with the blessing of the Synod Executive, we plan to give this major time at our October 2023 Synod. The ideas we are exploring include:
 - We make the primary focus of this gathering the opportunity for churches to share what they have tried and to discover resources. Normal Synod business will be kept to the bare and essential minimum and it will come at the end of the gathering as far as possible rather than at the beginning. Ongoing Synod business flows out of the energy around MAKING CHRIST VISIBLE, rather than leading into it.
 - Ahead of the gathering, we will prepare a simple pro forma to go to all churches, ministers, local church leaders, etc. inviting you to tell us about anything you have done over the past year or so that has helped grow discipleship (broadly defined – help with prayer, worship, outreach, mission, revitalising buildings for mission, evangelism, work with specific generations, etc.). We find out who has good stories and is willing to tell them.
 - At the gathering, the bulk of the morning will be devoted to a menu of small groups in which these stories are told, resources are highlighted and questions can be asked and answered. In the papers ahead of the meeting all of this will be clearly explained and the small groups will be identified so people can come knowing what they want to attend. We strongly invite churches to send more than their usual reps – everyone welcome!
 - This plan suggests we might want to switch to a different venue for this special Synod. We feel that Bridgwater is the best option, given its size relative to Taunton and its familiarity as a Synod venue.
 - Follow up will be vital to keep momentum going. We suggest that a lot of the likely resources are already gathered online in the URC's Toolbox (<https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/developing-your-faith/mission-and-discipleship-toolbox/>). But, as we have found with the pastoral supervision material for ministers, there may be value in creating a Synod-friendly version that acts as a guide to this very large range of resources. Something in the ENews will be an obvious route. Another thought is something like a pack of playing cards, colour-coded for different aspects of discipleship and each giving a resource, information on what it is and where to find it, and sharing the experience of someone who has used it with its pros and cons. Such packs could go to every church. We feel there is still a very real place for physical material in our churches alongside the digital and online to help ideas flow!

2. Stepwise continues to be appreciated and explored in groups around the Synod. We continue to be very grateful to Roy Lowes for the input and advocacy he offers. Stepwise will certainly be one of the major resources to be shared in October.
3. We keep Elders' training on our agenda and wonder if there might be value in a regular event, either in person or online after Easter each year given that many churches may well have welcomed new elders at the start of the year. All suggestions welcome!
4. We are ensuring that the Synod's Pastoral Advisors have the relevant contact details for those authorised for lay presidency of the sacraments to ensure that any training/refresher training can be offered.
5. Plans are well in hand for the next Ministers' Spring School, taking place at Saunton Sands in Devon, 17-20 April, 2023. We have agreed that any of our students in training always be invited to attend such gatherings and look forward to welcoming our Synod Clerk to share with us.
6. We have a couple of important vacancies to fill and are grateful for the Pastoral Committee's work in seeking potential candidates. Jo Morling has stepped down as our Lay Preaching Commissioner and Hazel Starritt will cease to be our Candidating Secretary this summer. The committee, on behalf of the Synod, wish to record our grateful thanks to both Jo and Hazel for their wisdom and work in these important aspects of our life and witness.