

URC South Western Synod

Meeting 9th March 2024

Report from the Synod Executive Committee

The Executive has continued to provide oversight to the life of the Synod. This has included significant areas of support as we have been without a Moderator. The Executive is all too aware of the extra burdens many are carrying during this key vacancy, and we express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all of you. A number of specific areas of work since our last report are worth highlighting:

1. We have reflected upon the style and content of the Synod gathering in October 2023. The overwhelming feedback was that people greatly appreciated the chance to gather in person and to have a wide range of input which highlighted opportunities and possibilities for local churches. The Executive, along with the Discipleship and Service Committee, will continue to explore how we might build upon this experiment for future Synod gatherings. We are aware, for example, that some Synods include an overnight residential meeting in their pattern. Might this be a possibility for us?
2. A number of our ministers and churches have faced great challenges and we have attempted to offer support and help in a variety of ways. Much of this work needs to remain confidential, but we are always grateful for those who assist us in different ways. The Executive wish to record our thanks to Revd Steve Faber (Moderator of West Midlands Synod) who has offered advice and who has acted when we have needed him to as our 'Moderator-on-Call.' We are also grateful to Revd Roy Lowes who has attended the monthly Moderators' meetings to ensure our Synod remains properly connected to wider URC networks.
3. We have ensured that everything and everyone is in place as the new process unfolds to seek to appoint a new Moderator and are working closely with the General Assembly staff involved. Interviews are scheduled for 3rd April.
4. With the Synod Treasurer, we have responded to grant applications, local church concerns and also revised financial support packages for local churches.
5. We have been delighted to welcome Revd Roy Lowes as convener of the Synod Pastoral Committee and thus onto the Executive.
6. We have approved a new, limited term, IT support role to oversee the IT requirements for the Synod office so that necessary updating and revising of this technology, website, etc can be put in hand.
7. As Executive (and when meeting as the Synod Trust) we have been dealing with the consequence of church closures which took place last year and were reported to the October Synod. The sale of buildings, both churches and manses, which are no longer required for our ongoing mission, provides resources which enable the Synod to support more generous enabling grants, eco grants and facelift grants

within the Synod and also to support the wider church, notably through inter synod resource sharing and contributing to the Ministers' Pension Fund.

8. In recognition of the extra work they were holding during the vacancy for a Moderator, a small group was created to conduct a review of the Synod Pastoral Advisers (SPAs). This group comprised Revds Sarah Simpson and Neil Thorogood, with input from Gwen Jennings. All of our team of SPAs were invited to fill in a document to help us gather insight into their work and these were followed by individual discussions with all of the SPAs. Executive received a report in February which had been seen and affirmed by all of the SPAs. In the light of the report and subsequent discussions at Executive and at the Discipleship and Service Committee, Executive has agreed to some follow up actions and also offers a resolution for Synod to consider.

Following Up on the SPA Review

- We will create a new opportunity for the SPAs and key officers and conveners to meet together in person. We believe this will help us more clearly define roles and responsibilities for all who serve the Synod and as we seek to make more strategic decisions rather than purely reacting to events. We imagine such a gathering might include SPAs, Moderator, Synod Clerk, Executive, Pastoral Committee, Discipleship and Service Committee, Trust and Property officers, Safeguarding, Stepwise. We believe such a gathering is urgent enough to hold the first one ahead of any appointment of a new Moderator, and imagine it might happen annually.
- The Pastoral Committee will continue conversation with all of the SPAs as we look to review and refine their role descriptions and contracts and how best line management can be sustained.
- Given that there will be retirements within the SPA team, we will ensure suitable appointment processes and training are put in place.
- Executive has recognised that this review of the SPAs opens up wider questions around Synod support for local churches and all who minister amongst us in different ways. These matters have also been discussed in the Discipleship and Service Committee, and that committee's report to Synod offers a way forward for this Synod meeting to consider.

Resolution

This meeting of the South Western Synod of the United Reformed Church warmly thanks and affirms the Synod Pastoral Advisers for their support and guidance offered to local churches, ministers, elders and others, appreciating especially their extra work whilst the Synod awaits the appointment of a new Moderator.

Report prepared by Revd Neil Thorogood (email: ministertthurc@gmail.com)