

United Reformed Church South Western Synod
Minutes of the 95th meeting of the Synod held at Westfield URC, Bridgwater
on Saturday 19th October 2019

Attendance: 93 people attended: 50 church representatives, 20 serving ministers, 3 local church leader, 5 retired ministers, 10 synod officers/staff and 5 visitors. There were 38 apologies: 12 church representatives, 11 serving ministers, 9 retired ministers, 4 Local Church Leaders, 1 Synod officer/ staff.

Opening worship was led by the Moderator, Revd Ruth Whitehead who introduced the FOFA box from pilots.

1. The Moderator constituted the Synod. The theme of the meeting being: New Ways of being church.

Apologies for absence received by Synod Office and Synod Clerk.

The minutes of the last meeting on March 9th, 2019: no amendments had been received and before Ruth signed the minutes the Synod Clerk asked that the information about Ruth's term of office being confirmed until June 2025 be added to the minutes. This was **AGREED**.

Ruth welcomed the following people:

Revd. Heather Cadoux – Furrough Cross (October)

Revd. Mark Woodhouse – Plymouth, Derriford (August)

and noted the following movements into the Synod:

Revd. Sheila Dickson – retired minister moved from Wessex Synod to Swindon

Revd. Phillip Jones – retired from Wessex Synod

Revd. James Thorneycroft – retired from Southern Synod

Changes within the synod:

Revd. Rowena Francis – Oversight of Middle Lambrook

Revd. Don Macalister – Oversight of Muddiford

Revd Colin Marsh (living in Wessex Synod) – oversight of Templecombe

Revd. Robert Weston – Interim Minister at Bideford, Lavington (formerly Interim Minister at Plymouth Derriford)

Revd. Heather Wilson (Methodist) - has left Melksham, Monks Chapel, Whitley and Bradford on Avon

Revd. Jon Doble (Methodist) has left Torquay Central

Church changes:

Falmouth – closes end October 2019

Henbury, New Kingsland – closed April 2019

Synod gave thanks for the life of these churches and prayers and support as they grieve.

2. Mission Council

Several changes to the URC's arrangements for General Assembly were agreed at our Assembly in July 2018. Some of these involved changes to the constitutional structure of the URC and were therefore, referred to Synods. The Synod's responses were then considered at Mission Council where these changes were formally confirmed as decisions of the Church.

The following changes have now been formally agreed:

- i. Assembly will be annual from 2020 onwards;
- ii. Each Synod will have the same number of representatives to Assembly [currently 16];
- iii. A Synod may include its Moderator in its overall representation if it wishes to;
- iv. Among a Synod's 16, no more than two thirds [no more than 10] are to be elders or lay, and no more than 10 are to be ministers [of Word and sacrament or CRCW];
- v. A Synod must still include at least two people aged 25 or under in its representation;
- vi. Incoming Moderators of General Assembly will take office at the end of Assembly;
- vii. Mission Council will meet for one 48 hour meeting each year roughly mid-way between General Assemblies;
- viii. Each Synod may appoint 4 representatives to Mission Council. From Assembly 2020 onwards, these four people are to be chosen from among those who attended the most recent General Assembly.

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The following changes were approved at Mission Council in May 2019. They have been referred to the Synods because they would involve changes to the structure of our Church. Responses from Synods are required by December 31st, 2019.

RESOLUTION 1: There shall be one Moderator of General Assembly, serving for one year. This Moderator may be a minister [of word & sacrament or CRCW] or an elder. Each Synod may nominate one minister and one elder each year, but only one Moderator will be elected.

AGREED unanimously

RESOLUTION 2: The name of Mission Council shall be changed to Assembly Executive.

AGREED unanimously

The result of these resolutions will be communicated to the General Secretary by the end of December as required.

3. Finance: Dick Gray; Report on website

Budget: investments currently doing well. There are several properties from which we collect rental and some interest on deposit account. There are other sources of income also which means a stable income stream.

We make several grants to ecumenical projects and churches and there is Inter Synod resource sharing: e.g. a manse for the Synod of Scotland.

Summary:

2019 had a small surplus. We have a healthy stable situation.

Fossil Fuels:

Mission Council meeting in May 2019 passed a resolution asking all bodies within the URC to remove from their investment portfolios, any companies that are significantly involved in Fossil Fuel extraction. The Synod has changed its investments held with Newton to a different fund which has no fossil fuel companies within its portfolio.

CCLA has promised that by December 2019 its Ethical Investment Fund will no longer hold any companies which derive significant earnings from involvement with Fossil Fuels

Dick, in his role as Synod Treasurer was thanked for his proactive work on this issue by Rob Weston, one of the Synod's Green Apostles. Dick offered his assistance to churches when they investigate their investment portfolios and will continue to look into suitable investment funds.

The Mission Council recommendation is not binding on local churches, but **the South Western Synod urges all churches that hold investments to examine their holdings and determine whether they are consistent with Mission Council's request.**

Update of M&M 2019 Projection:

We exceeded our pledge in 2018 and we should meet our 2019 pledge but it might require a contribution from Synod. Thanks, were given to the many churches that meet and, in some cases, exceed their agreed commitment.

Ministry & Mission Fund Target 2020: we will commit £1,275,000 which should fully cover the cost of stipendiary ministry that we are allowed. There is no contribution from churches to Synod costs.

RESOLUTION 3:

The South Western Synod of the URC agrees the factors quoted as the rates to be used for the calculation of the 2020 M&M Local Church Guided Contribution and commits to a total giving of £1,275,000 to the M&M fund.

Noting that Ministerial True cost increases to £38,000

AGREED unanimously

4. Executive Committee report:

Ruth gave a summary of the report from Executive Committee and highlighted the following:

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- CDW role – we have benefitted from 2 years of Michelle Howard working as Church Development Worker. It was agreed to continue this role for another 2 years. Thanks, were given to Michelle for her contribution.
- 2020 March Synod will be at Taunton URC and delegates will be able to view the new Synod offices.
- Youth Genesis update – From the initial expressions of interest from churches, several churches have now started work with Youth Genesis and Jon Oliverio spoke about churches who are currently involved and the positive outcomes.
It has been agreed that a new Service Level Agreement is to be negotiated and more churches are invited to **express interest for 2020 by November 10th, 2019 to the Synod Pastoral Advisers.**
- Synod Environmental Policy – Rob Weston spoke about the policy and Eco Synod. 25% of churches in the Synod are now registered as an Eco Church. The Synod will consider offering grants to churches who want to have more environmentally friendly buildings [and manses]. This policy is based on the General Assembly policy of 2016.
Synod were encouraged to use the website and e-newsletter to share examples of environmental action – a new page will be added to the website specifically for Eco – news and articles.

*RESOLUTION 4: The South Western Synod agrees to adopt the Synod Environmental Policy. **AGREED***

5. Pastoral Committee report:

- Vision Day and progress: there were discussions about new ways to support churches in the light of decreasing number of ministers. The support of Interim ministers and oversight ministers was noted: Reverends Rob Weston, Phil Nevard, Ken Marsh, Don Macalister, Rowena Francis and Robert Jennings are currently providing support in various churches in different ways.
- Lay Presidency
 - o Nominations list – Ruth clarified the process for authorising people to preside at communion. Annual system now changed to every three years with training and support.
 - o Training information advertised

RESOLUTION 5:

*The South Western Synod agrees that those listed be authorised to preside at the sacraments in cases of pastoral necessity for the next three years, and those people nominated will be trained or be prepared to undergo training. **AGREED***

6. Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)

Jan Murphy, Synod Safeguarding Officer gave a presentation about the Inquiry which was set up because of serious concerns that some organisations had failed and were continuing to fail to protect children from sexual abuse. It was announced in June that the URC would be included. Current child protection policies, practices and procedures will be reviewed. The focus is upon organisational structures and child protection practices. IICSA need to know about any allegations where there is a link to the Church. The abuse does not necessarily need to have taken place within the Church in order to be linked to the Church, e.g. an allegation of a URC chaplain abusing a child in a school may still be relevant and need to be addressed in the witness evidence. The definition of Child Sexual Abuse is:

Forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities.

These activities may involve:

- *physical contact or looking at or being part of the production of sexual images,*
- *watching sexual activities or encouraging children to act in ways which are sexually inappropriate for their age and development,*
- *or grooming a child in preparation for such activities, whether in person or by way of any internet or social media channels.*

Jan asked for people to talk to her over lunchbreak or contact her via email or phone to discuss any issues by 12th of November.

Further information and links are available on the Synod website or from Jan Murphy:

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7. Israel/Palestine

Revd Tracey Lewis spoke about her recent trip to Israel/Palestine, representing the URC, to find more ways of supporting the Palestinian church. The group went *'to see and come back and tell'*. Tracey will be speaking at March 2020 Synod and would like to visit churches in the meantime to share her experiences and what we can do to help. [There are also resources available on the main URC website].

8. Notices

The synod clerk spoke of training courses available for Lay Presidency and Safeguarding which are advertised in the e-newsletter and by email from the Synod office. There is a URC bookstall at Synod where orders can be taken, and resources are available.

The South Western Synod are still without a Youth Representative and churches are urged to nominate any young person who might be interested in filling this role.

Lunch between 1 and 2 pm.

The afternoon session began with the presentation of a certificate to Bryan Elkington who has been a Lay Preacher for 50 years. Ruth spoke of the gratitude of the local churches for those who serve the church in this way.

9. Ministries Committee report

Revd Lythan Nevard reminded Synod about the resources available on the URC website particularly Walking the Way. Also, to seek advice and guidance from the Synod Pastoral Advisors regarding support available and employing Local Church Leaders.

'Resources for Elders' are going to feature in the e-newsletter four times a year to promote discussion at elder's meetings and suggestions for topics to include are welcome from elders.

10. Working together in practical ways/ Knowing me, knowing you

Ruth explained that we would be working in areas to discuss ways of working together and share what God is doing in individual churches.

First, we heard from Jon Oliverio in his role as Synod Pastoral Advisor [SPA], who told us about Network Cafes which have started up in East & South Devon on alternate Saturday mornings in different churches to share news and support each other.

Skills – buildings – community – ministers: There was an interactive session when everyone sat round tables with the other churches from their area [and their SPA] and wrote down something that their church is doing – new or old. Then everyone moved around to see what other churches are doing – maybe getting new ideas. Each SPA gave a summary of their area's activities and suggested a way forward. Communication between churches seemed to be a key factor.

Revd Stephen Newell & Revd Sue Cossey with Mrs Nesta Parsons, then spoke about Companion Elders at Mangotsfield and Castle Green: Stephen said that the thing that is distinctive about the URC is the Elders. That we should be considering partnerships with nearby churches and 'sharing elders' to support each other. By sharing experiences and expertise friendships are formed and we can walk together on the journey of faith.

Closing Worship: Walking the Way – Revd Phil Nevard & Revd Robert Jennings spoke about their retreat on a narrow boat where they were able to pray and talk together in a different environment. They spoke of 'narrow boat moments' when you may not be physically far away but a world away mentally and spiritually. Phil asked Ruth what her 'narrow boat' moments were, and she replied that she uses the Examen at the beginning of her day to reflect on what has happened and to be thankful. Ruth was presented with flowers to mark the extension of her role as Moderator and a model of a narrow boat to remind her of the importance of 'narrow boat moments'.

Our worship included:

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In Memoriam:

Revd Patricia Whittaker died 23rd March 2019.

Revd Mary Piggott died 21st April 2019.

Revd Roy Richards, died Friday, 7th June 2019.

Revd Eric Carless, died 12th August

Revd. Peter Gornall, died 14th August

Revd. Kenneth Roach, died 10th September

Mrs Dawn Souter died 18th October.

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