

United Reformed Church South Western Synod
Minutes of the 98th meeting of the Synod held via Zoom on Saturday 16th October 2021

Attendance: 67 people attended: 33 church representatives, 18 serving ministers, 2 local church leaders, 4 retired ministers, 10 synod officers/staff and visitors. There were 22 apologies: 10 x church representatives, 6 serving ministers, 2 Local Church Leaders, 3 retired ministers, and 1 visitor

Theme: "Looking Out"

OPENING WORSHIP was led by the Moderator, Revd Ruth Whitehead and was on the theme of death and rebirth.

Our worship included In Memoriam and the following were remembered:

The family of **MP Sir David Amess** who died after being stabbed at his Essex constituency surgery in a Methodist Church.

Mr Gordon Inglis Died 7th April 2021.

Mrs Eileen Barber [widow of Revd Derrick Barber] Died 13th May 2021

Mrs Marion Butler [widow of Revd Allan Butler] Died 15th May 2021

Mr Terry Riches Died 13th June 2021

Revd Denis Newman Died 30th June 2021

Revd Alan Thomasson Died 27th July 2021.

Miss José Robins Died 18th September 2021

Mr Richard Smith Died 29th August 2021

Revd Edmund Fallows Died 8th October 2021.

The Moderator constituted the 98th meeting of the Synod. Apologies for absence were received by the Synod Office.

Minutes of the last Synod held in March 2021 have been amended and further corrections were made at the meeting. AGREED.

Welcome given to those attending for the first time and guests

MOVING INTO THE SYNOD

Revd Ken Blanton: moved to Bath from Wessex Synod. Ken is Head of Support for the Sue Ryder charity.

Revd Elizabeth Kemp: retired minister moved to Tavistock from East Midlands Synod

Revd Ruth Dillon: retired minister moved to Point in View from Wessex Synod.

Marie Trubic: commences as CRCW for Bridgwater Westfield and Cannington December 2021.

MOVING OUT OF THE SYNOD

Revd Lythan Nevard: appointed as Moderator of Eastern Synod from August. Formerly served at Cornerstone Church, Cranbrook (special ecumenical project)

Revd Phil Nevard: moved to Eastern Synod to serve at Sawston, Castle Camps and Whittlesford Pastorate from August. Formerly served at Kingsteignton and engaged on various Synod responsibilities.

NEW METHODIST MINISTERS:

Revd Paul Benney - commenced at St Andrew's Mevagissey in September. (Replaces Revd David Hart).

Revd Christopher Jackson - commenced at Okehampton Fairplace in September. (Replaces Revd Liz Singleton.)

Revd Alistair Lowe - commenced at Plymouth, Sherwell and Cornerstone, Torpoint in September.

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CHANGES WITHIN THE SYNOD

Michelle Howard: left Church Development Worker role at the end of March to take up post with a specialist care agency.

Diane Phillips: appointed as Property & Trust Officer in June. Successor to Raoul Hewitt who retires in March 2022.

Revd Colin Phipps: retired July 2021.

Revd Jim Thorneycroft: appointed as Synod Pastoral Advisor for Somerset from June (in addition to Synod Pastoral Advisor for Devon S&E)

Revd Susan Durber ended role as Minister of Taunton URC in August 2021.

Revd Pam Stranks, Methodist minister, retired August 2021. Served at Bromham, Calne and Corsham, St Aldhelm's.

Revd Stephen Newell: appointed as Transition Minister for Bristol from November 2021.

Revd Boh Yun Kim appointed as General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Korea. The Synod extend their love and prayers for this move.

Gwen Jennings: retires from the role of Synod Clerk in December 2021.

CHURCH CHANGES

North Tawton, Lakeway United: Closed March 2021

Estover, Plymouth: LEP ended March 2021

Langport: Closed August 2021

Newquay: Closed August 2021

General Assembly feedback and matters arising.

****Further information on General Assembly matters and resolutions are available on the URC website.**

- Resolution 44 [constitutional amendment] and Resolution 45 [changes to rules of procedure] for Safeguarding. This is an introduction of the resolutions which will be discussed at March 2022 Synod with any comments from local churches to General Secretary by the end March 2022. There is time to look at these resolutions [see note above **] between now and March when it will be discussed in more detail. The Synod Safeguarding Officer will be sending out information to Safeguarding coordinators in churches and there will also be articles in the E-News.
- Resolution 39 – 43: Ministerial Incapacity & Discipline [MIND]. These are Constitutional changes and further information on URC website: again, for discussion in March 2022 Synod.

Finance:

Pensions' situation update:

The Lay staff pension scheme is managed externally by TPT and the Ministers' Pension Scheme is managed by our trustees. Both are Defined Benefit [DB] schemes and 2021 General Assembly made a decision in principle to move to a Direct Contribution [DC] scheme for all future pensions and a scheme to be devised subject to 2022 final decision. DB scheme in current form is unaffordable and low interest rates mean expensive contributions. Currently contribution is equal to more than 30% of stipend.

Centrally URC has assets of around £50 million and the Synod Trusts have assets of around £200 million. It is probable that local churches have around £200 million in savings and investments and there are buildings probably worth at least £1 billion. The Pensions fund needs around £50 million.

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The URC has a problem meeting the promises already made and most agree it is a family problem. URC centrally has asked the Synod Trusts for help to meet the shortfall and all Synods have indicated a willingness to help - contributing according to their means.

The South Western Synod have, at the end of 2020, £17 million in assets. £11 million in investments whose income meets Synod costs. We have indicated our share is around £3 million spread over 9 years - to be met largely from sales of redundant buildings. We already contribute 10% of sales of redundant churches.

We are proposing to commit to giving up to £3 million to the URC Trust to meet the needs of the Pension Fund and to commit 50% of the Synod share of sales of all buildings (churches and manses) to meet this commitment with a top up the commitment from Synod Trust resources, if needed.

Q&A session:

There was a general discussion about the contributions from other synods and what further information is available: - an appendix attached to finance papers and on the website:

<https://www.urcsouthwest.org.uk/events/98th-meeting-of-the-south-western-synod/> gives full details.

The Pensions Trust has spent many hours discussing this matter and engaged widely with all the Synods.

RESOLUTION 1

The Synod supports the need for the Synod Trust to commit to making a maximum contribution of £3 million pounds over 10 years to the URC Trust to meet the funds required to support the URC Retired Ministers' Pension Fund.

AGREED

RESOLUTION 2

Synod notes and agrees that 50% of the net sale proceeds of all church buildings manses and other properties (Including but not limited to those of closed churches), where the funds are held by the Synod Trust upon trust to support the work of Synod, will be applied by the Synod Trust towards the cost of meeting this commitment.

AGREED.

Synod Trust Budget 2021-24

The budget proposal for 2022 and beyond is based upon the planned donation to the URC Minister's Pension Fund. Making significant contributions will cause us to show a deficit budget for the next several years. In our budgeting we also anticipate an increase in the closure rate of churches.

Income from assets

£ thousands	2021	2022	2023	2024
Investment Income	240	240	240	240
Rental Income	40	40	40	40
Interest on deposits	0	1	1	1

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Capital from sale of redundant properties	400	300	300	300
Totals	680	581	581	581

Income from other sources

£ thousands	2021	2022	2023	2024
Grants received	8	7.5	7.5	7.5
Training receipts	1	2	2	2
Sundry income	20	5	5	5
From trust assets	680	581	581	581
Totals	709	595	595	595

Expenditure part 1 staff

Category	2021	2022	2023	2024
Special ministry	80	82	84	86
Synod Staff	175	200	210	220
Pastoral Advisors	40	55	56	58
Total	295	337	350	364

Expenditure part 2 Grants

Category	2021	2022	2023	2024
Ecumenical Grants	5	5	5	5
Other grants	25	25	25	25
Property grants	50	50	50	50
Mission grants	100	100	100	100

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Resource sharing	25	25	25	25
Retired Ministers Pension	250	500	500	500
Total	455	705	705	705

Expenditure part 3 Activities

Category	2021	2022	2023	2024
Training	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Youth work	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Schools, retreats, conferences	0	4	4	4
Safeguarding	30	25	25	25
Church Support	5	5	5	5
Total	37.7	36.7	36.7	36.7

Expenditure part 4 other

Category	2021	2022	2023	2024
Synod & area costs	2	5	5	5
Office costs	26.5	30.5	30.5	30.5
Synod Property	20	20	20	20
Investment property	20	10	10	10
Misc. fees	12	12	12	12
Total	80.5	77.5	77.5	77.5

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Budget Summary

Category	2021	2022	2023	2024
Staff	295	337	350	364
Grants	455	705	705	705
Synod activities	37.7	36.7	36.7	36.7
Other	80.5	77.5	77.5	77.5
Total expenditure	868	1,156	1,169	1,183
Total income	709	595	595	595
Surplus/deficit	-159	-561	-574	-588

Ministry & Mission Fund update and target for 2022

We fell short with our pledge in 2020 and we anticipate falling short in 2021. It is likely to require a contribution from Synod funds.

A number of churches have suspended or reduced their contributions due to loss of income [and other reasons] Thanks to the churches that meet and, in some cases, exceed their agreed commitment.

RESOLUTION 3:

The South Western Synod of the URC agrees the factors quoted as the rates to be used for the calculation of the 2022 M&M Local Church Guided Contribution, and commits to a total giving of £1,230,000 to the M&M fund.

Ministerial True cost remains at £40,000

AGREED 1 against

Ruth noted that all votes received were majority votes in favour as there were a few technical issues with the voting system used. Also, clarification given about who is eligible to vote: it is an open meeting but only serving ministers, Synod Pastoral Advisors and a representative from each church are able to vote on Synod business.

50th anniversary celebration of the URC. <https://urc.org.uk/50th>

A video describing the 50th Anniversary celebrations was shown and the link for the video will be shown in the E-News. There was a time for discussion in breakout rooms for ideas about Synod celebrations - ideas sent to Synod clerk by email. It was noted that Enabling Grants could be made available for outward focusing celebrations.

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Moderator of General Assembly 2023 - 24

A reminder that there is one Moderator of General Assembly, serving for one year. This Moderator may be a minister of word & sacrament or CRCW or an elder. Synods may nominate one minister and one elder each year, but only one Moderator will be elected. Explanatory document on URC website and Synod Clerk has nomination forms available.

Synod Committee reports:

Executive Committee:

- Youth Genesis update: The work going forward for September 2021 to December 2022 will include a continuation of the youth development work initiated in 2020 with a focus on the churches where work has been progressing. This will include developmental work around missional opportunities in response to the covid-19 pandemic as well as the engagement of 'youth voice' for young people.
- A video was shown asking "What do young people most worry about? What do they want church to care about? What would they ask of God?" [Apologies for poor sound quality. Permission will be sought from Youth Genesis to put the video on our website.] Ruth summarised what was said and churches are asked to use the same questions to discuss with members of their own churches. It would be good to show short videos of these at March 2022 Synod. Further information to appear in the E-News.
- Eco policy update – Diane Phillips [Property and Trust Officer] and the Green Apostles are producing this policy and when finalised it will be shared at the next meeting of Executive Committee for approval and then for wider distribution.
- Safeguarding is a regular item on the agenda to update the trustees and to see the challenging work that the Synod Safeguarding Officer undertakes.
- A reminder that enabling grants are available for new and innovative ways for churches to serve the community.
- The search continues for a deputy Synod Treasurer – an important role for the Synod. Contact Dick Gray for further information.
- An advert for the role of Synod Clerk is on the website and in the E-News – closing date is the end of October. It is hoped that there can be a handover period before Gwen retires at the end of December.

LUNCHBREAK A 'News' PowerPoint with details about Yearbook/items available from URC shop/ etc was shown. All this information will be shown in the November edition of the E-News.

Pastoral Committee:

Pastoral committee continues to help support the people of the churches of the South Western Synod as we all wrestle with the changes which have been amplified and accelerated by the Covid pandemic.

We have seen great instances of churches adopting new ideas such as outdoor services, streaming and zoom, but we are aware too that this has been a time of great pain and difficulty for some.

Bristol Transition Minister post: Revd Stephen Newell has been appointed at 50% and will leave Zion, Frampton Cotterell at the end of February 2022.

Question from Andrew Hayden [Church Secretary, Redland Park]: How many FT serving ministers in the Synod: **A:** 2 less than number previously given. Full details were not to hand so this will be sent out to Andrew after the meeting. Number for Bristol = 4.5 when Stephen Newell leaves Frampton Cotterell.

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It was emphasised that each area is different and all areas are being discussed in detail and conversations continue with Synod Pastoral Advisers. Recently there have been some very positive meetings with ministers in the Bristol area.

- Boh Yun Kim has been appointed as General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Korea from 1st October 2021.
- Lay Preacher retirements – Synod Office sent letters out informing churches of these changes and the Synod Yearbook has been updated. The details are noted below with thanks in some cases for the many years of faithful service given:
 - Cornwall, Plymouth & North Devon Area
Helen Pengelly
 - South & East Devon Area
David Lee, Jean Potter, Geoff Smith
 - Somerset Area
Arlo Cuss, Pauline J Oakley, Les Phillips
 - Bristol Area
Philip Fowles, Alan Jones, Peter Redding, John Waines
 - Wilts Area
Douglas Colborne (Methodist)
- Lay Presidency Authorisations – The Synod Office keeps an updated list of those authorised and dates of training. A reminder that authorisation is given on the understanding that training will be undertaken and that it is a time to share experience and gain knowledge. Training is being planned for the 2022.

RESOLUTION 4.

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

Ministries Committee [to be known as Discipleship and Service Committee in future]

Noted that Discipleship and Service Committee seemed to be a more appropriate description of what the committee actually does. The committee has expanded to include regular space on its agenda for the work of the Synod's Interfaith Advocate and Racial Justice Advocate.

Anti-racism report – the meeting was shown a video explaining the work of the Legacies of Slavery [LoS] Project. David Reynolds, a church member of Downing Place URC and acclaimed historian, and member of the task group for the LoS, joined the meeting to answer questions and discuss the issues raised in the video.

The LoS Task Group has called on General Assembly to make a statement of apology and confession and to embark on a programme of 'repairing justice' to include financial commitment, community projects and education, both in the UK and in parts of the Atlantic world still scarred by the legacies of slavery.

David reminded the meeting about the short essay by Susan Durber: 'White Daughter of Empire', from the Ecumenical Review. Susan works in the World Council of Churches. This will be shared with the Synod with her permission.

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Ruth said that this is our opportunity to be part of the reparation and education and churches are asked to consider questions:

1. How do you/your church respond to the video and paper?
2. How happy would you feel to endorse the draft apology?

The LoS task group are very happy to receive feedback or be invited to give local church presentations/lead conversations.

Thanks were given to David and the task group for the work they are undertaking.

Israel/Palestine

Revd Tracey Lewis spoke about her visit to Israel/Palestine, representing the URC, to find more ways of supporting the Palestinian church. The group went *'to come and see and go back and tell'*. Tracey shared her experiences and told us of the work that is happening currently. The situation is complex and continues to be the source of much injustice and the Palestinians ask that it is not called a conflict because they are not fighting – it is an occupation. Israel is a tense and military state and the check points can be shut down at any time. There is an unequal dependence.

There are resources and more information about the discussions at General Assembly, and in the Book of Reports resolutions 26 - 31] which are available on the main URC website. Tracey welcomes invitations to speak to churches.

"We are called to stand with these people as members of the body of Christ".

Tracey presented Ruth with a simple olive cross from Jack's shop in Bethlehem.

Closing worship was led by Tracey Lewis: 'Samud' – steadfastness, solidarity, hopefulness.

Ruth gave Gwen Jennings an autumnal bouquet of flowers and a card, recognising that this was her last Synod before she retires at the end of December.

Gwen Jennings

Synod Clerk October 2021