

## **United Reformed Church South Western Synod**

### **Minutes of the 99th meeting of the Synod held via Zoom on Saturday 12th March 2022**

**Attendance:** 68 people attended: 34 church representatives, 19 serving ministers, 1 CRCW, 8 retired ministers, 6 synod officers/staff and visitors. There were 21 apologies: 10 church representatives, 5 serving ministers, 2 Local Church Leaders, 4 retired ministers.

**OPENING WORSHIP** was led by Revd Roy Lowes (Stepwise Advocate for the SW Synod) and was on the theme of Walking the Pilgrim Way.

The Moderator constituted the 99<sup>th</sup> meeting of Synod. Apologies for absence received via the Synod Office.

Minutes of the last Synod held in October 2021 on Zoom were AGREED. Matters arising covered the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the URC. A service will be held in London at Westminster Central Hall on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022, and an event will be held at Church House. Information and tickets are available on the URC website. The service will be available online. For the South Western Synod there will be a celebration at the Synod Meeting on October 15<sup>th</sup>.

#### MOVING INTO THE SYNOD

Revd Philip (Nick) Nicholas - retired minister moved to Minehead from West Midlands Synod in November 2021

Marie Trubic - commenced as CRCW for Bridgwater Westfield and Cannington in December.

#### MOVING OUT OF THE SYNOD

Revd Duncan Tuck - retires to West Midlands Synod at the end of April 2022.

#### NEW METHODIST MINISTERS

Revd Andrew Day - commenced at Looe Riverside United Church.

#### CHANGES WITHIN THE SYNOD

Mrs Gwen Jennings - retired as Synod Clerk December 2021.

Revd Paul Stokes - ended role as Minister for Plymstock United Church. Now working full time as Director of the Dunamis Fellowship of Britain & Ireland and Academic Dean for the Dunamis Institute.

Revd Sian Collins - retires to Weston super mare after the end of March 2022.

Revd Aiyana Gardner-Houghton - ends role at Exeter Heavitree & Pinhoe at the end of April 2022; commences as Transition Minister for Devon & Cornwall.

Revd Chris Baillie - retires from Bridgwater Westfield and Cannington at the end of May 2022.

#### CHURCH CHANGES

Uffculme - closed February 2022.

**Notices** – Annual Church Returns due in by end of March. 35% received. Online or hard copy. Queries to Dinah Firmin.

#### **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Synod Clerk** – post still vacant following retirement of Gwen Jennings. Post could be adapted to suit the correct applicant – either more part time or combine with other role for full time. Churches to be encouraged to advertise widely. Sarah Simpson and Rob Weston to join Executive Committee at May meeting. A lay member is still needed. Safeguarding Committee to be formed – members are being sought. Agreed at last Synod meeting and now activated for £3m to be set aside from Trust funds to reinforce the URC Ministers' Pension Fund.

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Nominations for Moderator of General Assembly would be welcome to be brought forward for consideration at March Synod 2023.

**Resolution 1 Annual Data**

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 30 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 (ie 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**

**Resolution 2 Safeguarding Changes to the Structure of the URC**

The SW Synod, meeting in March 2022, approves the changes to the URC structure proposed by Resolution 44 of General Assembly 2021. (Explanatory Paper on website.) **AGREED**

**FINANCE**

**M&M Summary** – M&M contributes to the cost of stipends, training of ministers (including NSMs) and CRCWs; also Synod Moderators, including stipends and housing. 91% of the fund comes from local churches. 69% is spent on ministers' stipends but this will reduce to 61% this year largely due to fewer ministers. This synod has promised to meet the cost of its own ministry. The annual cost of stipendiary ministry, excluding housing is £40K. However, the figure for 2022 has risen to £43K, mainly due to cost of pensions. Last year M&M fell short of pledged figure of £1.23m. The actual figure was £1.18m. This was due to churches closing and loss of lettings income. There will be the same commitment for 2022 in order to meet the cost of the expected ministry. Thanks to churches which have contributed more than asked. Slight change to come in 2023 to be advised at a later date.

**Finances in Synod Trust for 2021**

Significant church closures occurred with resulting income from sales of property and also the acquisition of manses. Pension fund commitment is £3m.

There was slight increase in training and conference costs, together with an increase in Safeguarding costs which was due to some difficult cases and Section O costs.

There was little change to staffing costs except the appointment of a new Property Officer to cover a handover period prior to the retirement of Raoul Hewitt at the end of March 2022. No major changes to support costs, although a new way of handling investments incurred some additional administration costs.

There was a total spend of £3.6m in 2021, with a £1.9 m loss. Value of property and investments have increased which has reduced the deficit to £160K. Net assets are approximately £17m. Situation in Ukraine has disrupted trade throughout the world and affects investments. We do not invest in fossil fuels. The auditors have yet to approve the accounts.

Applications for the role of Assistant Treasurer would be welcomed.

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**VIDEO from Andy Braunston – newly appointed Digital minister – was shown**

**DISCIPLESHIP & SERVICE**

**Legacies of Slavery:** Henriette Wentink delivered information on the Legacies of Slavery and referenced papers mailed out by the Task Group and Synods. Reminder to churches to have these conversations about LoS. This is potentially a difficult issue which may involve hard conversations and strong responses. Karen Campbell (Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries) and Henriette Wentink are available to assist if necessary. Reminder to send responses to Global and Intercultural Ministries if possible by end of March in time for GA papers.

**Stepwise:** Roy Lowes delivered an update on Stepwise via PowerPoint. Stepwise is a discipleship development programme for everyone and all ages. It is a helpful tool for Walking the Way. Roy explained the structure and nature of Stepwise. Resources are available on the URC website for each session of the streams. The fee for each stream is between £5 and £30 but financial assistance is available via Synod grants. Roy talked about the Stepwise group he facilitated. Groups can be run in person or online – the material has been recently amended to make it more online friendly. Rachel Leach described her experiences of facilitating groups to explore their faith within a supportive environment. She would very much encourage others to get involved as Stepwise opens to the door to reflection. The session ended with a video from the Stepwise team including contributions from people who had participated in Stepwise. The video is also available on the URC website.

**BREAK OUT ROOMS - discussion took place on the following two questions:**

1. How have the people in your church encouraged you in your discipleship?
2. How could your church encourage each other in the future?

**PASTORAL COMMITTEE**

The report is on the Synod website and gives detail on numbers of ministers, transition ministers, the appointment of a new minister for Cranbrook (this will not be a URC scoped post). There were no questions.

**CONCLUDING COMMENT**

Ruth thanked everyone who had participated in the meeting. Formal thanks were expressed to Raoul Hewitt, Property & Trust Officer, who is retiring at the end of March. Churches were reminded that there is still time to send messages for Raoul to the Synod Office. A farewell presentation, attended by Synod Staff, will be held shortly before Raoul leaves at the end of March.

**CLOSING PRAYER** including in memoriam:

Mrs Sheila Woodcock - died 17<sup>th</sup> October 2021. Wife of Revd Brian Woodcock.

Mr Paul Venn Dunn - died October 2021.

Mr Roger Thorne - died November 2021.

Revd John McMinn - died 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

Mr John Waines - died 22<sup>nd</sup> December.

Mrs Valerie McMinn - died 14<sup>th</sup> February 2022. Widow of Revd John McMinn.

Mrs Olive Marshall - died 28<sup>th</sup> Feb 2022.