

United Reformed Church South Western Synod
Minutes of the 101st Meeting of the Synod held on Saturday 11th March 2023

ATTENDANCE: 63 people attended: 21 church representatives, 19 serving ministers, 1 CRCW, 7 retired ministers, 15 synod officers/staff and visitors. There were 34 apologies: 19 church representatives, 2 serving ministers, 13 retired ministers.

The Moderator constituted the 101st meeting of Synod. Apologies for absence received via the Synod Office. There would be an audio recording for the Minutes.

MOVEMENT OF MINISTERS - Report attached.

WELCOME to those attending for the first time. Advance welcome also to Revd Jessica Ashcroft-Townsley from the UCC Church of Christ as a Minister of Limited Service at Kingsteignton and Dawlish, with additional Synod directed work, starting in June 2023.

OPENING WORSHIP was led by Revd Ruth Whitehead and was on the theme of Fresh Shoots of Growth.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - Report attached.

In addition to the report it is to be noted that the Synod Safeguarding Officer, Jan Murphy, finished her service on 28th February 2023. The contact person for Safeguarding matters, until there is a new appointment, is Carrie Kaunda at Church House. She can offer support on a part-time basis and her details are to be passed on to Ministers, Church Secretaries and Safeguarding Coordinators. The new appointment to the Synod will be a half-time role.

Revd Peter Henderson (Rtd) expressed gratitude for Jan Murphy's dedicated work for the Synod, which spans over 13 years. The notice that was sent out to churches regarding the end of Jan's role is attached.

Resolution 1 Annual Data

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.

1. Mileage rate on Synod business is 30 pence per mile or the costs of public transport.
2. 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).
3. 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 Nominations List

1. Synod Nominations – papers on website. Paperwork in the Sanctuary - any changes to be noted and the resolution to be dealt with after lunch. Thanks were given for updates. Executive Committee agreed to pass the resolution at the Executive Committee meeting on 11th May 2023.
2. General Assembly

AGREED

Resolution 3 – Lay Presidency Names

Sheets at the back of the Church to be checked by Synod members and any amendments made at the end of lunchtime. Additional names can be considered at the next Pastoral Committee Meeting (next week). Thanks were given for updates, which Pastoral Committee received and the Executive Committee agreed at the meeting on 11th May 2023.

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Resolution 4 – Korean Church

Dougie Burnett spoke of the background to the Korean Church's decision to become a local URC. Synod to seek approval at General Assembly that the Bristol Korean Church becomes a local URC. The Moderator presented the Korean Representative with a model of the URC logo for use once General Assembly has accepted them as a local URC.

AGREED

FINANCE - Report attached.

- **M&M** – The Synod Treasurer thanked all churches for their M&M contributions. The Treasurer stated that the shortfall is around £100K or about 10%. The M&M Pledge for 2023 is £1,100,000.
- **Youth Work** – funds are available to support Youth Assembly and any further youth work.
- **Balance Sheet** – current assets amount to £16m, of which £6m is in property. The recent rise in interest rates is beginning to show in the value of savings and investments. 2021 was a better year for investments than 2022.

General discussion ensued regarding support available from the Synod in instances such as the freezing of church bank accounts. It was explained that although the 2022 figure following church closures was lower than 2021, this does not necessarily mean fewer churches were closed. Church closures are always the decision of the local church (not the Synod). The local Church makes the decision and the Synod Trust then acts on its behalf. Although many ministers are endeavouring to promote the church amongst young people, effective communication is difficult. Enabling grants are available to assist with various projects. Although many banks are closing their local branches, it is possible for churches to deposit money via Post Office accounts. Churches experiencing cash flow problems may approach the Synod for assistance.

CHURCH LIFE REVIEW (CLR) – a video from the CLR Group in Church House was shown. A resolution will go to General Assembly this year. Every church will be able to access the General Assembly papers online and comments can be passed to GA Reps (names available from the Synod Clerk). A Theos think tank questionnaire relating to the CLR was sent to all Churches in November 2022. A full report from this will go out with the General Assembly papers.

DISCIPLESHIP & SERVICE including Making Christ Visible update (Report Attached)

A Making Christ Visible day is planned for the October Synod Meeting at Bridgwater URC. This follows on from the initiative launched by the Moderator in 2022. A proforma will be sent to Churches asking them to update the Synod on their progress. All are welcome to attend the October day and the Synod will cover any extra costs involved.

Time will be factored in to the Synod agenda to consider CLR. The Moderator and Janet Gray, SPA for Devon and North Cornwall, recently held a Making Christ Visible day for the Elders of the Plymouth Churches, which was very well received. Churches to contact Janet Gray or Neil Thorogood if they would like to run such a day in their area.

ECO SYNOD UPDATE (Report Attached)

Chris Baillie has agreed to continue as a Green Apostle alongside Rob Weston. 41% of Churches have signed up to the Eco Church Award Scheme. 22% of Churches have been awarded Bronze, Silver or Gold awards. Eco grants are available to help Churches with all aspects of energy loss.

The net zero carbon goal is 2030, set by General Assembly. There are some questionable carbon off-setting schemes, so care is needed. Climate Stewards is a reliable company. Grants are available for boiler upgrades. Everybody can make a difference with electricity by using green providers.

PASTORAL COMMITTEE (Report Attached)

Time has been spent praying and thinking about the best way to help Churches. A Prayer Board for Post-it Notes will be put out during lunch hour. The Report covers discussion on deployment in Somerset and gives details of Church Changes and Movements of Ministers.

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STEPWISE

Roy Lowes gave an interim update on current progress within the Synod on Stepwise. A further report will be provide at October Synod.

NOTICES

Concluding Comment

The formal procedure for marking the end of the Moderator's tenure took place and farewell wishes were extended to Ruth. A panel has been formed to coordinate the appointment of a new Moderator. Churches will be contacted advising them on how they can participate in the process. An advert for the post of Moderator of the SW Synod will appear in the April edition of "Reform". It is hoped that a new Moderator will be in post to be welcomed at October Synod. Photographs were taken by Tracey Lewis to record Ruth's last Synod and will be used in the profile for the post.

Closing Prayer including in memoriam:

Mr David Sessions - died 6th November 2022. Husband of Revd Patrice Sessions.

Mrs Betty Taylor - died 18th December 2022. Widow of Revd John Taylor.

Revd Jessie Clare - died 7th January 2023.

Revd Paul Holdsworth - died 25th January 2023. Husband of Revd Patsy Holdsworth (Mor).

Mr Andrew Sims - died 23rd February 2023.

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Attachment – Notice re Synod Safeguarding Officer

27th February 2023

To: URC SW Synod Church Secretaries, Serving Ministers, Local Church Leaders and Church Safeguarding Co-Ordinators

Please see message below from the Moderator.

Kind regards
Hilary

Hilary Bradshaw
PA to the Moderator

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to let you all know that, following discussions within the Synod about how best we can support Churches with their safeguarding responsibilities, we are taking steps to bring safeguarding in line with other Synods. As many of you know, Jan (Murphy) has served us in this Synod for over 13 years. Jan has decided to use this opportunity to reflect on possible future ministry which may include moving in a different direction and she will therefore be leaving her post to enable her to do this.

Many of you will also know that Jan has been awaiting knee revision surgery. We have agreed that, in order to facilitate this, she will not need to work her notice period. She will thus be leaving us on Tuesday 28th February 2023. We have arranged cover from 1st March from the wider URC Safeguarding network, details of which will be sent out very soon.

We shall be arranging a collection and card that will be sent to Jan. If you'd like to contribute to a leaving gift, please make a donation either by sending a cheque to the Synod Office (made payable to "URC South Western Synod") or via bank transfer – please ensure you include the name of your church and "Jan Murphy" as the transaction reference. Bank details are as follows:-

Account Name: URC SYNOD INC
Account number: 00015448
Sort Code: 40-52-40

Please send your message to be included in the card for Jan to synodoffice@urcsouthwest.org.uk by 31st March.

With best wishes,

Ruth

Revd Ruth Whitehead
Moderator
South Western Synod