

# URC South Western Synod Meeting 19<sup>th</sup> October 2024

## Report from the Discipleship and Service Committee

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**OUR COMMITTEE'S REMIT:** to advocate and coordinate Synod work in areas of training, resourcing, support and encouragement for all members of our congregations and those who share leadership and pastoral oversight amongst us.

1. Since Synod last met, we have worked with the Synod Executive Committee to fulfil the resolutions we offered at that meeting and which you passed. As a reminder, these were:
  - A. *This meeting of the URC South Western Synod asks the Synod Executive, in discussion with all relevant parties, to create a task group to explore Synod staffing in the light of the SPA review and reflections from the Discipleship and Service Committee.*
  - B. *This task group to consult as widely as necessary in order to bring a report and, if appropriate, suitable resolutions to a future meeting of the Synod no later than March 2025.*

The task group has comprised Revd Sue Cossey (SPA), Rachel Leach (Synod Clerk and Ordinand), Marie Trubick (CRCW) and Revd Neil Thorogood. We are delighted that our new Moderator will be joining us. We have been paying close attention to the emerging directions suggested through the URC's **Church Life Review** – all we come up with needs to fit well within wider URC reformation. To learn from experience, we have written to every other synod and have received a wealth of information from over half (including detailed staffing and mission strategies, person specifications, job descriptions, salary scales, etc.). As we expected, all of our synods are deploying staff in diverse and creative ways in support of local congregations. At this October meeting of our Synod, we will launch a simple but vital questionnaire to go to all congregations and those in leadership of them. We're asking you what you would like the Synod to support you with. We want to shape staffing plans to best meet what needs we can meet. But, a gentle word of reality, we already know that the one thing we can't magically do is give every church lots of extra ministers and preachers because the URC does not have any of these spare. We can, however, create ways to free up congregations to focus on the things that matter to us in terms of worship, pastoral care and outreach by easing other burdens. And we will redouble efforts to encourage and support preaching and creativity amongst all our churches through the resources the

Synod might develop and share. The questionnaires are due back to Neil Thorogood by the end of November. Please return them!

2. We have been following up on major reports at the 2024 URC General Assembly. One related to the agonies of Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories, Gaza (and now we must include Lebanon and Iran). Another continued the URC's journey as an anti-racist church and opened up our denominational responses to the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade. Both of these vital topics will be subject to presentations at this October's Synod meeting.
3. We are looking, with the Synod Pastoral Advisors and Pastoral Committee, at various ways in which local churches can be supported and encouraged even as our larger task group planning continues (see above). These include material for training in presidency of the sacraments, Elders' training and support and reinvigorating the Local Mission and Ministry Review (LMMR) process. This last is a way for local churches to maintain a written summary of their sense of mission and their priorities for achieving this.
4. We are connecting with very significant developments in the restructuring and delivery of training and learning across the whole URC. Staffing and financial changes in central URC budgets and with people at Church House in London have set in motion a decentralizing of Education and Learning provision. The intention is that more work will be held more regionally in our three Resources Centres for Learning (Northern College, Manchester; Westminster College, Cambridge and the Scottish College) in much closer collaboration with training teams already based in our 13 synods (thus fulfilling the aspirations of the 2006 URC Training Review!). Clearly this evolution needs to be integrated into our own task group planning as things emerge. But it is a helpful development, ensuring that the creation and delivery of training, development and creativity is rooted much more in the needs and dreams of local congregations rather than created elsewhere for implementation locally. This follows the essence of the Church Life Review: maximising support for the local in all things URC because it is at congregational level that we truly are Christ's body.

Thus, the committee knows full well that we are living in exciting times! Plenty of challenges for sure. But glorious possibilities! Our thanks to all who make these things possible here in South Western, and across the URC. And, on a personal note, my sincere apologies for being absent from this October meeting of the Synod. I will, however, be happy to respond to comments and questions via email as usual.