



Thames North Synod
12th March 2016
10.00 am to 4.00 pm

Minutes

Hosts: The Heath and Havering Group of Churches

Venue: Trinity United Reformed Church, Upminster, RM14 2SJ

Ministers: Revds Dorothee B  urma, Jim Dalgleish, Martin Wheadon & Ann Woodhurst

Synod attendance: 111 voting members and 19 non-voting members/observers

Election of Chairman

The Moderator was absent through illness. Simon Fairnington, Synod Clerk, asked if Synod would accept the Revd Ray Adams as chair of the meeting. This was agreed *nem con*

Welcome and Constitution of Synod.

Revd Ray Adams constituted and opened the meeting. He welcomed those present and asked members if they wished the Clerk to send good wishes for his recovery to the Moderator. There was enthusiastic agreement for this.

Mr Adams thanked the churches of Heath and Havering for hosting the Meeting.

Opening worship: was led by all the ministers of the Heath and Havering Group, assisted by members of the Romford URC's music group.

Revd Martin Wheadon read 2 Kings 5:1-14 and reflected how the most important person in the story was the young maid who suggested the king should consult the prophet Elisha. He reminded Synod of the importance of being faithful in saying the little things. This can lead to great things, when others pick them up and use the ideas therein.

Glimpse of the mission of the local church: Revd Dorothee B  urma introduced the five churches in the group, telling Synod in each instance of their roots and shoots, all illustrated with appropriate photos.

Apologies were received from: 25 voting members and 8 non-voting members.

Minutes of the Meeting of Synod held at the Church on Fairford Leys, Aylesbury on 21 November 2015. A number of corrections had been notified: the minutes were amended as follows: Sandra Ackroyd is coordinating the Synod Church and Society Network; Tony Obi-Ezekpazu was elected as Treasurer; there were two abstentions in the vote on the recognition of the Heartland group; CRB is now D&B, Declaration and Barring Service. Following these amendments the minutes were agreed.

There were no **Matters Arising** from the Minutes not considered elsewhere.

Movement of Ministers: Synod noted two recent moves into Thames North Synod and was advised of a future move. Revd Martin Kitchener retired from ministry in Eastern Synod at the end of 2015 and moved into Thames North Synod in the New Year (he was unable to attend the Synod meeting). Joshua Kane was inducted to the pastorate of Mill Hill East Church (Bpt/URC) on 16th January (Baptist appointment). He was welcomed by the Moderator. Revd Sue McCoan has been called to the pastorate of St Andrew's Ealing and Wembley Park United Reformed Churches and will be inducted on Saturday 23 July.

Update on the Re-Visioning process:

Mr Adams read a report by the Moderator on the progress of the Re-Visioning process. He likened the process to a journey; at the beginning it sometimes seemed we were travelling through the wilderness. But progress is evident: the Groups are beginning to work together and many are finding they are stronger together. The new committees have made an excellent start, as revealed in their reports. "We do not have answers to all questions but that is OK; we shall work on them together!"

The Conveners of the new committees each spoke to their reports, which had been circulated with the Synod papers. Then members of Synod were invited to discuss the following at their tables:

- Where have you got to in getting your LAG off the ground?
- What has been the best experience and the most frustrating experience
- What are the challenges ahead?

Representatives of three Groups spoke briefly of how they were working together and then Synod discussed three further questions:

- Have you got things that are working well or ideas for developing your LAG you would like to share?
- As your LAG emerges what is the best way you can see to ensure that local concerns are represented and communicated effectively to the committees?
- One of the long term aspirations for LAG's is that they will support each other in achieving the M&M targets. What is your best thinking about what the LAG's can do to help bring this about?

Synod passed the following three resolutions by majority votes:

Resolutions: From the Roding Area Committee

1. The Synod recognises the Forest Group of the Roding Area with its current member churches of St James, Buckhurst Hill; Chingford; Highams Park; Ray Lodge, Woodford and Woodford Green United Free Church.
2. The Synod recognises the Heath and Havering Group of the Roding Area with its current member churches: Chadwell Heath; Nelmes, Hornchurch; Heaton Way, Romford; Western Road Romford and Trinity Upminster.

Resolution: From the Lea Valley Area Committee

3. The Synod recognises the South Lea Valley Group with its current member churches of High Cross URC, Tottenham; Upper Clapton URC; Stamford Hill United Church; Manor Road URC; Rectory Road URC; Harecourt URC and Bethnal Green Meeting House.

All three resolutions were passed.

Finance Report

Synod Treasurer

Tony Obi presented the 2015 draft accounts. The 2015 "regular expenses" includes £700,000 of one off items: Inter Synod sharing (£200,000) and the Adeyfield development (£500,000).

Both the 2014 and 2015 underlying results show a deficit in line with the Synod's policy to reduce historic free reserves. In the period under review sales of property, producing windfall income, have been a rarity.

Unrealised gains have displayed a similar profile over the period due mainly to the weak investment returns achievable in recent times. For this reason, no exceptional gains were included in the budget for 2016 when it was set, although events may have overtaken us with recent announcements.

The Treasurer reminded Synod a net deficit was budgeted for 2016.

In reply to a question he indicated that about 70% of local churches pay their full M&M assessment.

Notices: the notices drew attention to information in the mailing members of Synod had collected on arrival. Synod adjourned for lunch.

The afternoon session began with a gathering song.

Report from Synod Youth Executive and Youth Assembly:

Dan Simpson, Convenor of Synod Youth Executive, introduced himself and other members of SYE. He then introduced Rachel Southwood, Thames North Synod representative to the National Youth Executive.

At Youth Assembly Thames North Synod had the largest delegation of any Synod, representing a good number of churches across the Synod and various shades of theology. URC Youth & Youth Assembly has been restructured over past 2 years, including the new name of 'URC Youth', which will replace the previous name 'FURY' in all documents.

Extract from Minutes of Mission Council November 2015:

15/50 Paper B1 - Youth Structures and Guidelines Acting on behalf of the General Assembly, Mission Council agrees that all references to FURY in the Structure, and any other constitutional documents, shall henceforth be deemed to refer to 'URC Youth', and authorises that the name be formally updated in the documents next time they are changed.

The theme of Youth Assembly was "Roots and Foundations".

Training for Learning and Service (TLS)

Revd Francis Ackroyd

TLS is being replaced by a new programme. This programme will need tutors. However, some areas have very few ministers. The organisers need to find people, not necessarily ministers, to tutor students in their placements. The new programme is still being constructed and there will be no new TLS Foundation students this year. It is envisaged that the new training programme, which has no name as yet, will begin next September. Meanwhile those who wish to commence study are recommended to join a TLS Lite group.

Closure of Queens Park URC

Revd James Fields

Revd James Fields brought this resolution on behalf of the West London Area Committee. Before he spoke he led Synod in prayer.

He told the story as a member of the Area Team that had supported the church. At a Church meeting on 10th January 2016 the congregation decided to close on 20th March 2016. All of congregation have found other churches to attend or have at least been pointed to one which would welcome them. Those members who have not yet decided on a church to attend have been given the contact details for Revds James Fields, Maggie Hindley and Carole Elphick, who are happy to offer them pastoral care as necessary.

Mr Fields asked Synod to vote on the resolution:

Thames North Synod approves the closure of Queens Park United Reformed Church on 20 March 2016 and gives thanks for 129 years of Christian witness and service at Queens Park.

This was agreed by an overwhelming majority. One abstention was recorded and there were no votes against the resolution.

Revd Jane Weedon led the meeting in prayer and Synod sang "Be still and know that I am God".

Human Resources Consultant:

Simon Fairnington, Synod Clerk, explained that a Human Resources Consultant is needed at Synod level and to assist local churches. He asked that any local churches which have a have a company or consultant they use contact him.

Appointments and Elections:

Synod Clerk

Mr Fairnington proposed the appointments and elections as detailed in Paper A2; Revd Martin Wheadon seconded. Representatives to General Assembly were all elected and the appointments confirmed.

Representatives to General Assembly:

Ministers/CRCWs

Ms Karen Campbell	CRCW Luton
Revd Hugh Graham	Minister, Trinity Camden Town; St Andrew's Frogna and Lumen
Revd Kate Hackett	Minister, Muswell Hill URC
Revd Owiny Laber	Minister, The Hyde URC, Colindale
Revd Dr Allan Smith	University Chaplain & Head of Chaplaincy, University of Hertfordshire
Revd Jane Weedon	Minister, Welwyn Garden City URC
Revd Henriette Wentink	Minister, North Enfield Churches

Lay Representatives

Ms Sally Bateman	Member Muswell Hill URC
Jack Charlesworth	Under 26
Mr Jeremy Flynn	Member, St George's, Hemel Hempstead
Ms Victoria Paulding	Member, The Church on Fairford Leys, Aylesbury
Mr Tim Reith	Member, Fulham URC
Daniel Simpson	Under 26
Mrs Kate Yates	Member, Trinity High Wycombe

Thames North Representative to the Youth Executive:

Rachel Southwood	Member, St George's, Hemel Hempstead
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Member of Resources Committee

Mrs Janet Coleman	Member, Burnham URC
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Synod authorised Executive to approve the remaining representatives to General Assembly.

Mr Fairnington expressed thanks to Adrian West who has completed two full terms (6 years) on Synod Executive.

Israel /Palestine Resolution (Paper D)

Resolution from Welwyn Garden City United Reformed Church

Mrs Joyce Nicolson (Welwyn Garden City URC) briefly introduced the resolution. A video clip produced by Jewish Voice for Peace: "Israel and Palestine: a very short introduction". Mrs Nicolson then introduced Dr Janet Hislop, a member of Trinity URC, St Albans, who has extensive experience of working in Palestine. She asked for permission for Dr Hislop, who is not a member of Synod, to present the resolution, the chairman agreed and invited Dr Hislop to speak. Dr Hislop presented the case, emphasising that this is a very complex issue. She gave background to the Church of Scotland report, the "Inheritance of Abraham" and drew attention to the "A moment of Truth" document. Then she spoke of her own experiences and concluded by urging members of Synod to educate themselves about the situation.

The chairman invited questions for clarification and then opened the matter for debate. A lengthy discussion ensued. The debate was wide-ranging, balanced and amicable.

Synod agreed to vote on the individual sections of the resolution:

General Assembly resolves to:

a) commend the Church of Scotland Report 'The Inheritance of Abraham' (revised version) for study by United Reformed churches. Lost by a clear majority.

b) endorse the conclusion of 'The Inheritance of Abraham' incorporated in the preamble to this motion rejecting claims that scripture offers any peoples a privileged claim for possession of a particular territory. Lost by a clear majority.

c) commend 'A Moment of Truth, a word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering, Kairos Palestine 2009' for study by United Reformed Churches and encourage the formation of Kairos communities, either within individual congregations or ecumenically. Agreed by a narrow majority, with a large number of abstentions.

d) urge the UK Government and the European Union to do all that is within their power to ensure that human rights are respected and international law is upheld in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Agreed.

e) urge the UK Government and the European Union to exert, through sanctions or other effective means that address the inequality of power between the parties, international pressure on Israel to end the occupation of Palestinian territory and the blockade of Gaza and allow a just peace to be achieved. Agreed by 37 votes to 26.

Therefore, the motion to General Assembly is:

General Assembly resolves to adopt the following resolution:

- commend 'A Moment of Truth, a word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering, Kairos Palestine 2009' for study by United Reformed Churches and encourage the formation of Kairos communities, either within individual congregations or ecumenically.
- urge the UK Government and the European Union to do all that is within their power to ensure that human rights are respected and international law is upheld in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- urge the UK Government and the European Union to exert, through sanctions or other effective means that address the inequality of power between the parties, international pressure on Israel to end the occupation of Palestinian territory and the blockade of Gaza and allow a just peace to be achieved.

Any other business: none had been notified to the clerk

Closing Worship: Revd Jane Weedon led worship and Revd Ray Adams closed in prayer.

Synod meets again on Saturday 17th September.