

 <p>The United Reformed Church</p>	<p>Thames North Synod 16th March 2019 Annual Committee Reports</p>	<p>Paper C</p>
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1 Executive Committee

The Synod Executive met five times during the year. The usual pattern is four all day Saturday meetings – in February, April, June and September – and an afternoon meeting in November. Along with dealing with various Trustee matters such as finance, governance, employment and administration, the committee considered progress made in the implementation of the Synod's Re-visioning process.

The Committee considered and agreed to the Synod posts of: Pastoral Consultant & Interim Ministry, Special Category Ministry (SCM) of Discipleship Enabler and a joint paid post of Safeguarding Officer together with Southern Synod. The committee is making progress on the post of Children & Youth Development Officer (CYDO).

Staff Matters

I am delighted to inform you that the process of recruitment for an Administrator (office staff) is now complete with the appointment of Nneoma Chima. Colleen Fraser (PA to the Moderator and Synod Clerk) and Muna Levan-Harris (Legal & Trust Officer) have settled well in their roles. The role of PA has been revised to include certain tasks of office management. The feedback has been positive. Patrick Daykin is now employed as Synod Accountant. He served until recently as an agency worker. He is being supported in completing his educational qualifications. James Fields is settling well in the post of Pastoral Consultant & Interim Minister.

We are thankful to Sue Russell and Jean Wyber for their longstanding and excellent services to the Synod.

The Executive Committee continues to work with the Discipleship Committee and Church House regarding the CYDO and SCM posts and with Southern Synod regarding the Safeguarding post.

Finance

The Executive agreed the accounts for the past year (2017) and the budget for the coming year (2019).

Personnel

There have been changes in the membership of the Executive Committee during the past year. Tina Ashitey and Vic Russell's terms of service came to an end, and we thank them for their service. We welcomed Bim Oniwinde and Bridget Akinyombo to the committee.

In conclusion

We look forward optimistically to the new way of working in the Synod with its streamlined structure and Local Area Groups providing hubs of mutual support and resource sharing for local churches, working jointly with the Synod for mission, discipleship, growth and new opportunities. Instead of formally closing Totteridge Union URC, a mission project to replant a congregation there has been started with much support from Totteridge and Trinity Church Harrow, the North London and Metropolitan Local Area Groups, and the Synod. The URC has clearly laid-down procedures to close churches but hardly any to replant churches.

The Executive Committee is immensely grateful to the churches, those involved in the lay and ordained ministry and the Synod staff for their passion to serve Christ and spread the good news of God's love.

Revd Dr Andrew Prasad, Convenor

2 Discipleship Committee

Your Synod Discipleship Committee continues to be inspired and excited by the work that we believe God has given us to do on your behalf. This work, which we have variously called 'Re-imagine Church', 'Whole Life Discipleship' and 'Walking the Way – Living the Life of Jesus Today', has the single objective of **encouraging our churches, as individuals and congregations, to be intentional about discipleship.**

We believe that this objective entails two things: 1) intentionally growing in our relationship with God through Jesus, and 2) intentionally growing in relationship to all those we meet in our daily lives with the intention of, in some small way, being the love of Jesus to them. Neither of these things is easy or quick, which is why we need to be intentional and disciplined as disciples. We need to slowly change the culture of our churches as gathered bodies and of ourselves as individuals.

This is why we have emphasised that the Discipleship Committee is not producing a programme that churches can adopt, and the national church 'Walking the Way' initiative is not a programme that churches can adopt. Together we are providing resources which churches may engage with to help them to slowly grow a church culture where whole life discipleship is the core of all that we are and do.

These are some of the areas we have been working in during the past year:

Holy Habits – This series of 10 booklets, based on Andrew Roberts' book of the same name, provides a wealth of resources to help churches grow in their relationship with God and with others. The 'habits' are designed to produce a culture of intentional discipleship in 10 different areas of life. The Discipleship Committee actively promoted these and enabled churches to buy the complete set at a 50% discount.

If churches would like support in the use of the Holy Habits resources, then they should ask Discipleship Committee.

Learning Hubs – Working with the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICCC), we have run a pilot series of 8 Learning Hubs that was attended by leaders from 10 churches. The aim of the learning Hubs is to help anyone in any sort of leadership position to learn how their church culture can slowly be changed, 'by one-degree shifts', so that it becomes more focussed on whole life discipleship. Some of the areas of church life covered included: culture change; spiritual vitality; worship; preaching; relationships; your frontline; sharing faith.

In the coming year it is planned to train people, hopefully from each Local Area Group (LAG), so that they can deliver the Learning Hub material to churches locally. Some churches have already had a taste of this material at Elders' days or during Sunday worship. The Discipleship Committee is happy to continue to explore this option with any interested churches.

Children and Young People – During the year our Synod CYDO, Simon Rudiger, moved on to a post outside the URC and we have lost his very valuable input on discipleship work for children and young people. He had set up a working relationship with the charity Act 4. We are working to explore how this work can be developed to enable whole life discipleship resources for children and young people.

Working with the Regional Pilots Officer, the Committee has a responsibility to support the work of 'disciplining' our children and young people through the Pilots organisation. The Pilot's strapline 'Pilots – Friends on a Faith Adventure' indicates the nature of this community of disciples and we understand that there are exciting new developments to be revealed in 2019.

The Discipleship Committee is responsible for supporting the work of our young people and their involvement in the wider life of the URC. We were delighted to hear that 14 young people from 8 churches in TN Synod attended URC Youth Assembly and that three of our young people are now members of URC Youth Executive. They are setting a worthy example of being whole life disciples.

The Committee is actively involved in a process of reviewing the role of the Synod CYDO. We aim to advertise the post in April and hope to have filled it by September.

Stepwise - This is the national URC's replacement for TLS. It is part of the Walking the Way initiative and has a strong focus on whole life learning with an emphasis on whole life discipleship. We have met with Stepwise representatives to look at the material and consider how it may complement the Synod's whole life discipleship initiative.

We are now in the process of working out how best to enable and support Stepwise in the life of churches in TN Synod.

Synod Discipleship Enabler – With so many ongoing initiatives and a desire for this work to be effective in as many churches as possible, we felt it necessary for someone to be working full-time in order to make reasonably timely progress. An application was therefore made for a Special category Minister to fill this role. After much work and discussion with the Ministries Committee this post has now been approved and the vacancy declared.

The Committee will be involved in selecting the candidate and then managing the person appointed.

Other Committees - We continue to work with both Pastoral and Resources when there is a Discipleship element to applications or issues that arise and to appraise the end of year reports for churches with Mission Initiative Grants.

We have been asked by Resources Committee to consider how we might be involved earlier in the process with churches who are looking to apply for grants where there is a mission or discipleship element. If we are able to support churches before they begin the task of completing the grant application form, then there may be fewer questions or concerns when the application is formally submitted.

We have also been asked to consider devising criteria whereby grant applications for ecumenical situations, such as chaplaincies, may be more objectively assessed.

The Synod Discipleship Committee is served by very dedicated disciples. I give thanks to God for each one of them and ask that you pray for their work. I also ask that you pray as to how your church might be enriched by the work that God is doing through us. Then, please do get in touch with the Committee and ask that we work with you to help you to enable your church to grow in intentional whole life discipleship.

Revd Jim Dalgleish, (stand-in for Revd Jane Weedon, Convenor)

3 Pastoral Committee

I closed the report last year with a reference to the dust that gathers on our feet with a prayer that we might not rush to wipe it away too soon. It is important sometimes to linger long enough that we might better understand a given situation, feeling the ground beneath us. Needless to say, in the intervening year it feels at times we are so preoccupied and rushed that the chances of any dust gathering are remote.

The work of the Pastoral Committee has as its focus the well-being of our Synod family and I feel as confident now as I have ever done. We have a well-established sense of that family in all its diversity, opportunity, challenge, frustrations and hopes.

Consonant with the evolving aims of Synod a lot of our discussion has focused on striking a balance between supporting churches that are struggling and vulnerable while providing equally focused support to those churches where there is evidence of growth and a keen, often exploratory, sense of what discipleship can mean in our fractured society. We have reflected upon the very real pressures and stresses that arise for those in leadership roles at a time when some question what the church has to offer or how it offers it. All our deliberations dovetail with the work of Discipleship and Resources. As Convenors, with the Moderator, we have given thought to how we ensure our respective remits are synchronized, enabling not hindering. The issue of effective project management across the committees is high on our shared agenda.

If the Christian Church has become a remnant community then let us not forget there may be a seamstress with a sense of how those remnant pieces might be stitched together to provide comfort, assurance and warmth to those increasingly left out in the cold in our city. Support of our churches and Local Area Groups involves helping people locally to express their particular and distinctive vision; this local vision will inform the process of declaring vacancy and in due course the deployment of new ministry, ministry shaped to the needs of our society.

The Committee is clear that deployment of ministry is also about supporting and developing ministry which already exists. A question we increasingly ask is how new ministry can be deployed to the greatest possible benefit of as many as possible, complementing and recognising existing local skills and experience. What is the team that a new minister is being invited to join? In our deliberations the view has been expressed that ministers should not be appointed to prop up failing structures, but rather to help churches discover new structures, better reflecting our Christian values and indeed our faith and optimism; our sense that God is making all things new ... even us! Do our Church Profiles reflect such intention?

The new reporting mechanism for the Local Area Groups has worked well, ensuring the Pastoral Committee is effectively briefed. But this is complemented by visits by the Convenor to the Local Area Groups. The task of getting around all the groups is time consuming and for that reason the committee commends the Moderator's initiative of asking the Synod's Pastoral Consultants to visit the groups. The aim of these visits is simply to further cement the relationship between Synod and the Local Area Groups, and of course they are by invitation.

The Committee receives reports regularly from the Synod Training Officer. Anne has been leading our thinking on matters ranging from support of those who preside at the sacraments to the role of named ministers and Interim Moderators. Consideration has been given to how we support and affirm the range of ministries, ordained and lay, stipendiary and non-stipendiary which are crucial to the well-being of our Synod and its churches. Thought is being given as to how such training is delivered, acknowledging the demands of a geographically large synod, but one also where the particular demands of cross-London travel are significant. Surely it makes sense for training to be delivered at Local Area Group level, with local churches coming together to explore a shared vision?

On a different note; the committee has discussed the conduct of meetings, the quality of written e-mail communications and the treatment of personnel. No institution can claim to be perfect in these matters, but surely the church should be setting a benchmark that reflects our ethos? Frustration and stress, hurt or fear, can lead to the odd outburst, but a repeated, systematic undermining and humiliating of any one or group constitutes bullying. The Pastoral Committee implores Synod's members to challenge or, if necessary, report such behaviour. It tears at the very fabric of our church. Bullying has no place. It is always unacceptable, whatever its guise. Our duty of care to vulnerable persons extends to us all. Safeguarding is a shared calling and it is not optional.

This year, notwithstanding the inevitable problems and challenges that fall sometimes onto our agenda, the overwhelming feeling has been one of moving forward with a much greater determination and resolve. It is quite clear that when we risk conversations and prayers that bridge the chasms we used to regard as unbridgeable, good things happen and new kingdom possibilities unfold. Much of our work reflects a concern to support the local churches, but to see all such support as part of a wider vision for the Synod. This in turn is about affirming the distinctive witness of our United Reformed Church, whose voice for those on the margins in our country has never been more needed.

I close by thanking all who serve on the Pastoral Committee, bringing to our meetings a wealth of experience, insight and considerable kindness. My thanks also to the staff at Bayswater for their hospitality and excellent support facilities.

I am glad to say another year ends with as much dust on our feet as ever. It speaks of a journey.

Revd James Fields, Convenor

4 Resources Committee

The purposes of the Synod Resources Committee are summarised succinctly in our Terms of Reference:

"To ensure that Synod's financial and property resources are properly safeguarded and used to best advance Synod's mission and growth objectives and support the ministry of Local Area Groups fairly and appropriately across the Synod area".

Delivering these objectives over the past year has required the Committee to continue its principal functions to:

- Maintain the principle of deficit budgets, in year budget monitoring and maintaining our commitment to inter-synod sharing
- Take decisions on applications for grants and loans from Synod funds
- Support our churches in their endeavours to maintain and derive benefit from their property resources and finance new mission initiatives and projects
- Oversee Ministry and Mission payments from our churches and the Synod's contribution to the national M & M Fund
- Support our officers, and oversee their work
- Make recommendations to Synod Executive and Reporting to Synod

Throughout the year there has been regular and fruitful dialogue with the conveners of the other committee. This has allowed us to support the work and objectives of the Discipleship and Pastoral Committees better and collaborate where necessary to facilitate applications to the Resources Committee. In particular this has enabled us to identify and budget for planned expenditures by the other committees and streamline the application process for training grants.

At the same time we have sought to improve our practice by;

- Improving our communication with the other committees, working together on common issues which arise from applications to the Resources Committee and developing partnership working to support the objectives of the pastoral and discipleship committees.
- Agreeing proposals for planned expenditure by the other committees to inform budget preparation and monitoring and determining how the funds identified in the budget for committee expenditures will be allocated.

Over the past year it has been encouraging to see an increase in the number of grant applications for initiatives and projects that are not related directly to property. We hope that this is a trend which will continue. However we are aware that this development has not been without its problems.

Over the past few months churches have raised a number of concerns with us about the process of applying for Synod grants, particularly applications that do not relate to property.

In particular they have referred to:

- Lack of support for churches completing applications
- Perceived delays in the process leading to decisions by Committees
- Complexity of the application form

The Conveners of all three Synod committee have discussed these concerns and are working towards what we hope will be effective solutions.

As a starting point we recognise that the process for dealing with property maintenance grant applications has something to teach us. In those cases we have an officer, David Skipp, who is dedicated to providing support at an early stage. He works alongside churches, assisting them in completing their applications, helping them to answer important questions and ensuring that essential information is provided before an application gets to committee. When this works well an application comes to Resources Committee in a form which will allow the Committee to make a decision without referring back to the church. However the whole process does rely on a congregation making contact with the Synod at the earliest possible stage. Ideally when they first begin to consider a possible project.

What we need to do now is to extend these principles to other applications, particularly those which seek grants for mission or training. So can I firstly urge churches to make contact with the Synod at the earliest possible stage when they begin consideration of **any** grant application.

Mission grant applications have to be considered by the Discipleship Committee before coming to Resources Committee for finance approval. Our recent experience has been that applications are often coming to Discipleship Committee without all the necessary questions being considered and in a form that raises questions, about for instance Human Resources or employment issues, and consequently delay follows while questions go back to the church.

We hope to reduce delay in these cases by providing officer support for these applications. Over the next few months I hope we will be able to identify officers linked to the Discipleship Committee to undertake this support for churches, but in the meantime the Conveners will endeavour to arrange support for the application process.

To further speed up the process we are seeking to arrange our meetings in an appropriate sequence so that business can flow more efficiently from Discipleship to Resources.

We will also be reverting to a previous practice of only accepting new grant applications to Resources Committee at fixed points during the year, rather than at every meeting. We hope

that with a longer lead time before Committee this will encourage and enable churches to take the time necessary to complete an effective application.

Finally, we have heard concerns about the complexity of the application form. We have responded by breaking down what was one application form for all applications into four separate forms for different categories of grant applications; Children and Young People; Building Developments; Church and Local Area Group projects; and Human Resources Projects. Each of these forms and associated guidance notes can be accessed through the Synod web site. We will continue to review the application form. We appreciate that a lot of information is requested, but we believe that it is necessary if the Synod is to exercise proper stewardship over its resources and grants.

At this stage all the changes I have referred to are work in progress. We will endeavour to keep churches informed as they evolve, but in the meantime can I reinforce the request that churches contact the Synod at the earliest possible stage of thinking about possible grant applications.

Finally, during this year the Resources Committee has continued its oversight of the Thames North Ministry and Mission Fund Formula Review, the outcomes from which are reported elsewhere on the Synod agenda.

As always I would like to end by recording my thanks to the Committee's members, and particularly to our Secretary Patrick Daykin and our officers for their commitment and hard work in support of the Committee.

John Wise, Convenor

5 Listed Buildings Advisory Committee

The Committee met formally on one occasion during 2018 and considered a number of projects requiring either advice or full approval through the ecclesiastical exemption process:

- Woodford Green United Free Church – Pre-planning details of reordering the main worship space and associated rooms
- Kensington United Reformed Church – Consideration of neighbouring redevelopment
- City Temple – Reordering project

Officers of the Committee and of the attended the main URC Assembly Listed Buildings Advisory Group meetings. These meetings bring together representatives from most of the URC Synods to monitor recent changes to legislation in respect of the URC's Ecclesiastical Exemption.

We continue to be on the lookout for people with the knowledge, training, qualifications and experience willing to serve on this committee.

Revd David Skipp, Secretary

6 Appointments Advisory Group

The Appointments Advisory Group (AAG) met 5 times in 2018 to consider its business. The role of the AAG is to find suitable volunteers: to serve on the synod committees; to represent the synod in wider Church circles; and to fill the posts known as Synod Appointments (such as Synod Lay Preaching Coordinator). The AAG also keeps a record of these individuals' terms of service.

In consultation with the Synod committees the AAG identifies their needs, circulates vacancies, checks details of applicants and prepares applicants' names for presentation to the next Synod Meeting for the purpose of being appointed. Certain ad hoc vacancies may if necessary be filled with the approval of the Executive Committee. However, membership of the Executive Committee must always be approved by the Synod Meeting.

The group has spent quality time in understanding and responding to the needs of the Synod's new structure. It has devised methods for communicating vacancies, providing summaries of the roles of committees, application forms for interested parties to apply for vacancies and ways to maintain diversity. Conversation with synod committee convenors about each committee's needs and ways of matching skills is important. As the committees work more like teams or task groups, the AAG tries to work out which specific skills are lacking, or which will strengthen the committee. In addition to general advertisement, one to one conversations and a search for people with specific skills that are essential to a particular role are important in filling a committee vacancy. The Pastoral Committee is populated by representatives of the Local Area Groups; however, these names are processed through the AAG for good order.

Attracting volunteers to serve on committees and maintaining diversity of geography, ethnicity, gender and age are some of the challenges faced as the pool of volunteers in our denomination grows smaller.

Andrew Prasad (Revd Dr), Convenor