



Thames North Synod 21st November 2015

10.00 am to 4.00 pm

Minutes

Venue: The Church on Fairford Leys, Aylesbury.
Minister: Revd Anthony Howells

Synod attendance: 102 voting members and 22 non-voting members/observers

Welcome and Constitution of Synod.

Moderator constituted and opened the meeting.

Opening worship: Revd Anthony Howells used a poem by Graham Hopwood based on Psalm 148, followed by a short video called "You are a Refugee." His theme was peace and justice.

Glimpse of local church mission: Revd Anthony Howells outlined the church's mission, and how improvements to the building were enabling them to build contacts with the local community.

Apologies: 28 voting members and 9 non-voting members- Synod Clerk

Minutes of Synod Meeting 19 September 2015 — accepted & signed as correct record.

Matters Arising — None

Re-visioning process

The Revd Jean Weedon gave a short message about Re-visioning. The Re-visioning process includes looking back at the past and see where God's hands had been. God was faithful in the past, faithful in the present and faithful in the future.

The Moderator dealt with subsequent matters under this item.

Paper B1 Update on Re-visioning (circulated)

The Moderator presented the paper. He reminded the synod of the two main principles of Re-visioning. First principle is that the churches will be empowered by forming Local Area Groups. The Moderator has offered to hold conversations with any church that has difficulty in joining one group or another. The synod, for the administrative purposes, will eventually allocate each church to a Local Area Group. The ministers in a Local Area Group will be expected to work as a team. The second principle is that the synod structure is streamlined in order to release voluntary resources to serve locally.

The Moderator made a correction in the paper under the sub-heading 'Deployment of ministers' in the third line of the first paragraph by deleting the words "Mission Council recently discussed a paper by the Ministries Committee about" and replacing it by "Ministries Committee is working on". The rest of the sentence remains as is.

Paper B1 (part 2), a further update on Re-visioning, was tabled for information. It had two main points.

- 1) The new synod structures come into effect from 21 November 2015. However, as the Area Committees had not finished the task in hand, they would continue to support the churches during the transition period until the March 2016 Synod Meeting, particularly where the vacancy is already declared and to form Local Area Groups.
- 2) The paper listed 5 key principles that should be borne in mind as the Local Area Groups are formed. The Pastoral Committee will take over the responsibilities once up and running.

Appreciation of outgoing committees

Members standing down from outgoing committees and Area Committees were invited to the front of the meeting and applauded in recognition of the good work they had done. Each person was given a small gift as a token of thanks, and asked to plant a sunflower seed.

Paper B2 Slate of Appointments to New Committees and Other Synod Roles. Approval of new committee members (circulated)

The Synod Clerk presented the paper. The Paper set out the appointments to the following Committees and officers who should be in attendance when required: **Discipleship Committee, Pastoral Committee, Resources Committee, Appointments Advisory Group** as well as three synod appointees.

The Synod Clerk spoke of the short period given for assembling the new slate of appointments and thanked Sue Russell for all of her hard work. He explained the reasons driving the selection process. The terms of office of the Slate are to be seen as transitional. Some posts could be carried over; others would be short-term, some members will step down after a year and others after two years, but would be eligible for re-appointment.

The table was approved!

Dedication of new committee members

The members of the new committees/group including the synod officers, ex-officio members, programme staff and office staff were invited forward to confirm their willingness to serve the synod. They were greeted with a round of applause and the right hand of fellowship. All were also invited to plant sunflower seeds.

Paper B3 Recognition of three Local Area Groups (circulated)

Andrew Jack introduced the proposal concerning the St Albans Area LAGs

- i. The Synod recognises the North Herts. Group of the St. Albans Area with its current member churches of Ashwell, Baldock, Cardington, Hitchin, Knebworth, Letchworth, Stevenage and Walkern & Sandon
- ii. The Synod recognises Group 2 of the St. Albans Area with its current member churches of Bricket Wood, Chiswell Green, Dunstable Edward Street, Dunstable St. Katherine's, Harpenden, Luton Bury Park, Luton St. Ninian's, Luton Wigmore, St. Albans Homewood Road, St. Albans Trinity, Wheathampstead, Welwyn Garden City URC, and Welwyn Garden City Panshangar
- iii. The Synod recognises the South Herts. Group of the St. Albans Area with its current member churches of Boreham Wood, Brookmans Park, Hatfield, Hemel Adayfield, Hemel St. Georges, Potters Bar, Radlett, and Watford

Proposed: Synod Clerk; Second: Brian Hosier — Passed unanimously

The Re-visioning presentation was embedded in worship, the theme being 'planting seeds'.

Discipleship — Revd Richard Church

Richard will be leading the new Discipleship Committee at the URC General Assembly level. He spoke of the challenges of Missional Discipleship. The focus is shifting from missional church to missional spirituality. We should try to understand what we can do to support local churches, leaders and teachers. He explained some of the process- a shared journey, critical accompaniment, integration, flexibility timing, work gone before and ongoing. The emphasis should be making and releasing disciples from our congregations and becoming more public in our profession of Christ. He reminded the meeting there was plenty of literature and guidance material already in existence and listed a number of Discipleship courses.

He hopes to provide a new framework by 2016 and to have resources in place by autumn 2017. A series of questions were given to consider and discuss in the table groups.

Finance (Papers C1, C2) — Brian Hosier, Synod Treasurer.

Paper C1 Audited Accounts for year ending December 2014

The Synod is showing a surplus of £244,000 due to additional funds following the sale of two properties, one realising more than expected (£683,000) and funds from the sale of a shared lease. There was also an increase in the value of investments in stocks and shares (unrealised gains).

Motion to accept the accounts for 2014 — carried unanimously.

Paper C2 Budget 2016

There is £215,000 left as a cost on the Mission Initiatives Grants (budgeted at £350,000) due to delays in some projects due to staffing problems and applicants not meeting the criteria for funding in the financial year. The deficit will be written back in the final accounts for 2015 as it cannot be carried forward.

Rental income is set to go up on Synod properties, but property maintenance expenses are expected to be high.

Salaries and costs- a little extra is allowed for extra staffing.

Budget deficit for 2016 looks to be in the region of £842,000. This may need to be revised during the year when the new Resources Committee has been set up and commences work.

Motion to accept the budget for 2016 — carried unanimously.

Brian announced that he will be standing down as Synod Treasurer at the end of the day's business. There was a vote of thanks and appreciation from the meeting and Synod for all of his hard and dedicated work over the years. The Moderator presented him with a gift voucher and presented his wife, Fredwyn, with a bouquet in appreciation of her support of Brian in the Treasurer's role.

Church & Society Working Party — Sandra Ackroyd, Revd Leonora Jagessar-Visser 't Hooft

A Newsheet was circulated. The 'Market Stall' event, in July, was attended by about 36 people. 14 signed up to the Network. And a further meeting was held in October.

Issues they want the Network to deal with include:

Food poverty and food banks, UK poverty, including government sanctions, refugees and migration, abuse and the different kinds, mental health and young people & disability, young people in isolation.

The list is not exhaustive and may well include issues like sexuality.

The meeting will be looking for a suitable model for the network, as they want it to be part of Synod going forward. They will be using a Social Justice Pack as an aide. They will have to show how this Network could be helpful to the work of Synod. It is hoped it can interlink with the London Interface Network. Part of the unwritten agenda is to incorporate younger people. Sandra and Leonora will be co-ordinating the group for now.

The Network hopes to organise an annual event like the market stall, using a church with a project in existence as host.

Notices

Simon Rudiger – Youth matters

- **Youth Assembly 2016** for the URC young people to be held in Staffordshire.
- There will also be a meeting looking at Youth & Children and Youth Workers in churches attendees will need to book by January 2016.

Revd Anne Sardeson — Ministers' Spring School 2016, '**Household of Faith**', to deal with passing on faith to the next generation. Pastorates should pay for their ministers to attend.

New website going live Monday 23 November.

Quiet day: Wednesday 25 November "My Soul in Silence Waits".

Personnel-

Movement of Ministers (Paper A1)

Movements out of Thames North Synod

Revd Sue Chapman will be leaving the Luton and Dunstable Group early in the New Year for the Pastorate of Hove and Portslade United Reformed Churches.

Revd Tim Jackson will be leaving the Wixams South Bedford Ecumenical Project in January 2016 after completing his 5 years' term of service. The Moderator expressed appreciation on behalf of Synod for the hard work of Tim and his wife, Bev, in engaging with the new school and the community.

The project in its current form has closed down but the Christian presence will be maintained by the neighbouring churches.

Movements within Thames North Synod

Revd Hugh Graham was inducted as Interim Minister for a period of one year at Lumen URC; he continues his ministry at Trinity, Camden Town and St Andrew's, Frognal.

Revd Leonora Jagessar-Visser 't Hooft has left the Pastorate of Bricket Wood, Harpenden and Trinity (St Albans) URC and has been inducted to the pastorate of Kingsway, Trinity (Slough) and St Andrew's (Iver) URCs on 1st November 2015.

Staff Changes

Lesley Trenkel had resigned a Synod Pastoral Consultant for personal reasons. The Moderator expressed gratitude on behalf of Synod for her huge contribution to the work of the Synod Pastoral Consultants over the past years.

Appointments — Andrew Jack, Nominations Committee

New Synod Treasurer: Mr Tony Obi-Ezekpazu

Proposed: Andrew Jack; Second: Synod Clerk — carried unanimously.

Synod Executive:

Ms Bim Oniwinde Member Clapton Park URC (new appointment)

Mrs Tina Ashitey Member Palmers Green URC (re-appointment)

Proposed: Synod Clerk; Second: Derek Linfield — carried unanimously.

Presentation of TLS Certificates (Awarded September 2014) — Revd Francis Ackroyd

Theology Foundation Course Year 2: Ann Clark, Jane George, Laura Marlow, Richard Nunn

BA degree, Chester University: Lesley Hilton

The Moderator presented the certificates.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers — Revd Vaughan Jones

We were asked to examine our part or our role as individuals and to question whether we were bystanders or actors. Vaughan described the various ways the media dealt with asylum seekers; some being polemical, sensationalist and negative. Vaughan was of the view that this crisis has been with us for a long time and was in fact three converging crises: environmental, climate change and political unrest. He produced facts and figures to illustrate the enormity of the problem; for example: 43 million people registered as refugees, 4 million from Syria, 7 million are displaced in Syria, 710,000 have already entered Europe this year.

Vaughan set out statistics in regard to borders and the difficulties of putting up walls to keep people in or out. And detailed the arc of countries that surround Europe and which are in conflict or suffering instability.

The UK has already taken 14,000 people from Syria and is set to take a further 20,000 from camps in Turkey and Jordan. He presented a number of arguments often used by others to limit what we should do. There were no easy answers, but we need a universal social programme for international development. He then went on to discuss what we could be doing in our local churches and our homes.

The Moderator closed the discussion with a prayer.

Inter-faith matters — Revd Maggie Hindley

The meeting was asked to consider being extra considerate and neighbourly to our Muslim and Jewish friends. The meeting was asked to consider how church buildings were used by other faiths to host events. Brian Ball led the meeting in a case study exercise, which posed a number of questions churches may want to ask if requests were received from, for example, Muslim, Baha'i and Indian communities.

There was a request made for donations to the London Refugee Fund. They are trying to help up to 200,000 displaced people in the UK who are without resources.

Good Practice/ Safeguarding — Synod Clerk, Simon Rudiger (CYDO)

All churches should have received the '**Good Practice 4**', regarding the safeguarding of children, the elderly and vulnerable, which is downloadable from the URC website.

Elders should be D&B checked and should appoint a Safeguarding Officer.

Simon Rudiger reminded the meeting that LEPs should be clear and note down which denomination's safeguarding policy they were going to adopt.

Any Other Business

Change to Standing Orders 1(c), (Addition in italics):

A quorum shall be one quarter of the Synod voting membership as determined at the beginning of the year, using the most recent information given by churches in their annual returns. *For the purposes of ordination and/or induction the quorum shall be those members of synod there present.*

Proposed: Synod Clerk; Second: Julian Templeton — carried unanimously.

Closing Worship

The closing worship was conducted by Revd Jane Weedon and the Moderator.

**Synod reconvenes at Trinity, Upminster URC
on Saturday 12th March 2016**