



Thames North Synod

Minutes

17 October 2020 10.00am –2.45pm

Recorded Synod Attendance Voting: 82 Non-Voting and Observers 32

1. **Welcome** *Moderator*
The Moderator welcomed Synod Members to the virtual Synod Meeting.
2. **Instruction about virtual meeting** A J Mills
'A J' explained the process for voting members to be able to contribute and how they could exercise their votes using the *Menti* voting 'app'.
3. **Opening Worship** *Moderator*
The Moderator led our opening worship, based on Luke chapter 6 verses 20-23, expanding on its application to the crises brought about by the Covid pandemic.
4. **Introduction and Constitution of Synod** *Moderator*
The Moderator formally opened the Synod
5. **Appendix C to Standing Orders** *Synod Clerk*
The Clerk presented Appendix C, occasioned by the need to hold Virtual Meetings.
Motion to approve Appendix C to Standing Orders: Carried Unanimously.
6. **Apologies** had been received from 14 voting and 8 non-voting members. *Synod Clerk*
7. **Minutes of Synod Meeting of April 2020** *Synod Clerk*
Due to the cancellation of the March 2020 Synod meeting, Synod Executive had met in April and acted on behalf of Synod to deal with necessary business. The minutes of the April meeting had been approved by the Executive. These were noted by Synod.
8. **Matters arising not considered elsewhere** — none. *Synod Clerk*
9. **Personnel (Paper A)** *Convener of Pastoral Committee, Revd James Fields*

Ministers

Ministerial Moves into Synod

Revd Alison Davis has been called to Romford Heaton Way and Romford Western Road (50%) and in post, Revd Dominic Grant has been called to Barnet Chesterfield Road and Barnet Wood Street (75%), Revd Donna Fowler-Marchant (Methodist) was called to The Scroll Church, Watford as from 1 September and Revd Eddie Boon will join the synod as Synod Mission Enabler (SCM) with effect from 1 November 2020. Formal inductions for these ministers have not yet been able to take place. All were attending the meeting virtually and participants were able to see them.

Moves out of Synod

Revd Viv Randles has left Hounslow URC and moved to Wales Synod.
Revd Dorothee Bührma left the Heath and Havering Group of URCs in 2019 and was removed from the URC Roll of Ministers at her request and she has now re-joined the Austrian Methodist Church.

Retirements

Revd Nick Brindley retired from Brookmans Park on 31 May 2020, Revd Liz Shaw retired from the URC of Eastcote and Northwood Hills on 13 September 2020 and Revd Ruth Eldridge (Methodist) retired from The Scroll Church, Watford on 1 September 2020.

Deaths

Revd Anthony Bosschaert who served Thames North pastorates at Hounslow and Heston died after a long illness on Easter Sunday 2020.

Revd Michael J Davies who served as Moderator of Thames North Province from 1978 to 1990 died on 5 October 2020.

Revd Alan Kirkcaldy who served as an NSM at Amersham and Wendover died on 26 June 2020.

Revd James Fields led the meeting in prayer in remembrance of their service to the Synod and the wider church.

Staff Changes

Moderator

The Synod Training Officer, the Revd Anne Sardeson (SCM), left on 31 July 2020 to take up a pastorate in Eastern Synod.

Ms Belinda Nielsen joined the Synod as Safeguarding Officer, jointly with Southern Synod, on 1 December 2019. The Moderator formally welcomed her to the Synod.

Synod Appointees

Synod Clerk

Mrs Kate Yates was appointed a Director of URC Thames North Trust by the Synod Executive on 25 July 2020 acting on behalf of Synod.

Current Moderator's term of office

Synod Clerk

The Moderator's term of office was being extended to the end of May 2021 since the process of appointing a new Moderator had been disrupted by the Covid-19 crisis. Shortlisting and interviewing are due to take place shortly.

Motion to receive Paper A, proposed by the Convenor (second: Nancy Hands):

Carried with 1 abstention.

10. Appointments Advisory Committee – Paper B.

Synod Clerk

Synod Executive Committee – no new or re-appointments

Discipleship Committee – no new or re-appointments but notice that the following had reached the end of their terms of office and did not wish to be re-appointed viz:

Revds Sally Bateman, John Hardaker and Sue McCoan.

Resources Committee – no new or re-appointments.

Pastoral Committee – New Appointments – Revd Sue McCoan (South West London LAG) and Revd Sally Thomas (Central London LAG). There were no re-appointments.

Resignations – Revd Viv Randles (South West London LAG) and Revd Hugh Graham (Central London LAG).

Appointments Advisory Committee – no new or re-appointments

Listed Building Advisory Group – no new or re-appointments

Mission Council – no new or re-appointments

URC Thames North Trust – Mrs Kate Yates appointed (qv)

Motion to adopt Paper B: Carried with 1 abstention.

11. Finance

Treasurer

Paper C1 – Budget 2021

Anthony Obi-Ezekpazu presented the revised forecast of the Synod's finances for the current year which include the windfall gain from the disposal of closed churches which allowed a budgeted deficit of £1m to become a net surplus.

The Budget for 2021 envisages a deficit of £2m which is higher than normal due to the anticipated effects of the pandemic and a wish also to encourage education and learning in 2021. However, this will be mitigated by anticipated funds coming into the Synod from the disposal of two closed churches (see Item 13). It includes income and expenses arising from the management of the former Regents Park @ Lumen and greatly increased grants made by the Resources Fund to enable churches to develop their Mission. The Reserve for a contribution to the URC Ministers Pension Fund (MPF) has not be budgeted as we don't anticipate Windfall gains, but it is expected that a payment will be made (see item 13). The Valuation of the MPF is due on 1 January 2021 and a shortfall of £45m is currently estimated towards which Thames North as one of the better endowed Synods will be asked to make a significant contribution over a period of time to maturity of the MPF in 2034.

Motion to approve the Budget for 2021, proposed by the Treasurer (second: Revd John Mackerness): Carried, with 5 against and 1 abstention.

Paper C2 – 2019 Accounts

Draft Statutory Accounts had been circulated with a net surplus of £3m mostly arising from the realised gain on the sale of the former Iver URC church building. During the year Synod disinvested from Investment holdings in the fossil fuel and extractive sectors. The audit had been delayed during the year as a result of the effects of the pandemic, which included audit staff on being furloughed and having to conduct the audit remotely. This coupled with the uncertainty about the valuation of the loan Adeyfield has meant the Auditors, *Hays Macintyre*, have not yet been able to sign their Audit Report. Therefore, **Motion to approve the 2019 accounts subject to final approval by the Auditors**, was proposed by the Treasurer (second: Revd James Fields): Carried, with 2 abstentions.

Paper C3 M&M Fund Report

Convener Resources Committee

Dr John Wise presented this paper giving an update for churches giving to the Ministry and Mission Fund of the URC for 2020 as at the end of September and provided giving continues for the rest of the year, the original target of £2.1m should be achieved. The Resources Sub Group for M&MF had held five Zoom presentations reaching 90 churches explaining the fund and asking for promises for 2021 which should be sent by 23 October 2020. John thanked Keith Berry and Martin Powell for their work on this important task.

12. Breakout Rooms — online groups of 6.

People were placed in 'chat rooms' for half an hour where they could discuss, *inter alia*, their churches' experience of the Covid pandemic.

13. News from the Churches

Synod Executive at their meeting in April had already approved the closure of three churches but this meeting gave the opportunity to formally note their closing.

Christ Church, Whetstone – July 2020

Revd Julian Templeton

Julian spoke of the history of the church which was originally founded in 1788 but the present church was built in 1901 where it flourished. Sadly, the congregation had declined as other denominational congregations had come into the area and the decision was taken to close.

St Andrews West Kilburn and the London Inter Faith Centre

Revd John Parry

John related the history of the church which originated in a Presbyterian preaching station in Queens Park in 1896. In 1998 St Andrews West Kilburn now an LEP with St Anne's CofE moved to a new building in Salusbury Road which also included the London Inter Faith Centre. Again sadly, the URC congregation had declined and with John's third and final retirement, the decision was taken to close the church and the Inter Faith Centre. St Anne's will continue to worship in the building.

Regent Square @Lumen

Dr Patricia Brewerton

Patricia spoke of the 212-year history of four successive congregations starting with the Gaelic speaking Presbyterian congregation in Hatton Place in 1808, moving to a Gothic cathedral of a building which was badly damaged by the penultimate V2 rocket dropped in 1945 and rebuilt in 1966. The church was remodelled in 2008 and provided a café and community space which flourished for a while but its worshipping community declined and no one was available to fill the Church Officer roles so the decision was taken in July 2020 to cease worship and ask the Synod to assume responsibility for the building.

The Moderator led the meeting in saying the Doxology, acknowledging the faithful service and witness of these three congregations.

14. Joint Programme Committees Report (Paper D)

Convenors of the Committees

Revd James Fields presented the paper which arose from a meeting held in February and attached to the minutes of the meeting of Synod Executive on behalf of Synod in April 2020 (qv). This paper replaces the earlier one as the Criteria for the Allocation of Synod Resources as a working policy document in the light of our Covid and post-Covid unchartered waters.

Synod was asked to receive the report which was passed with 57 members approving it, 1 against and 4 abstaining.

Annual Gathering for Church Administrators and Treasurers

Dr John Wise

The annual gathering will take place by Zoom on Saturday 13 February 2021.

Discipleship Committee Change of Name

Revd Sally Bateman

Discipleship Committee proposed a change of their name to *Discipleship Steering Group* since this far more accurately reflects their role of working alongside churches and Local Area Groups in their Mission outreach and not as a decision-making body.

Motion to approve the change of name: Carried, with 1 against.

15. Conduct of future meetings

Moderator

The Moderator took a 'straw poll' as to whether members were in favour of using the 'Zoom' facility and *Menti* app for voting, if it is necessary to meet virtually in future.

Members were in favour, with 3 against.

A J Mills thanked the co-hosts (Synod staff) for their assistance in facilitating the meeting.

Closing Worship

Moderator & Revd Ulrike Bell

The meeting closed with worship based on the Letter to James Chapter 1 verses 2-8.

Synod closed at 12.45pm and will re-convene on Saturday 20 March 2021

