

# MINUTES

**MINUTES** of the meeting of **WESSEX SYNOD** on Tuesday, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2023, held on Zoom.

The Revd Nigel Appleton, in the role of alternate chair of Synod, constituted the meeting of Synod, and welcomed members to the meeting.

Nigel invited the Clerk to advise Synod on the protocols of meeting on Zoom, and the Clerk also advised that the meeting was to be recorded on Zoom to facilitate the taking of the Minutes by the Minutes Secretary. Assurance was given that the recording would be deleted once the Minutes had been produced.

**23S15 The Alternate Chair of Synod brought a resolution:** "Synod Meeting agrees for the Revd Dr Michael Hopkins to be the Chair of Synod Meetings until a new Moderator of Wessex Synod is appointed." This was agreed unanimously.

The Chair led opening devotions. The Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo read Mark 13:5-13, and the Chair spoke about the exit of the young man in Mark 14 in the Garden of Gethsemane, who fled. If this was Mark, something transformed him to allow him to become a companion of St. Paul and the writer of the Gospel. We can learn from Mark that our relationship with Christ can be something very personal, that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine, that in an incredibly short time the world can change, and that everyone on the margins that thinks themselves excluded is welcomed by Jesus. The Chair led in prayer.

## Attendance

28	URC Ministers and CRCWs
33	Church representatives
0	Ministers of other denominations
4	Retired Ministers/CRCWs
2	Ordinands
22	Others holding Synod appointments
7	Visitors
<b>96</b>	<b>Total</b>

**23S16 Welcome to Ecumenical visitors and new members of Synod:** No Ecumenical visitors had joined the meeting. The Chair welcomed Mr Doug Carlyle and anyone else at their first meeting of Synod.

**23S17 Apologies:** The Clerk reported that Apologies were received from

4	URC Ministers
5	Church Representatives
1	Ministers of other denominations
0	Ordinand
10	Retired Ministers
3	Others
<b>23</b>	<b>Total</b>

**23S18 Minutes of the last meeting:** The Clerk advised that there were no amendments to be made to the Minutes of the last meeting published in the Synod Papers held on Zoom on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, but asked Synod to note that there had needed to be corrections to the Minutes first made available on the Synod website, regarding the attendance numbers, some missing names and naming inconsistencies. Noting this, the Minutes of the meeting published in the Synod Papers were agreed with unanimity.

No matters arising from the Minutes were identified as not included in the agenda for this meeting.

**23S19 Pastoral News:** The Chair directed members of Synod to the Update on Ordinands, Ministerial and Church Changes included in the Synod Papers, and drew attention of Synod in particular to:

- i. The now former Moderator the Revd Clare Downing moving from Wessex Synod to take up her appointment as Moderator of North Western Synod, the retirement of the Revd Richard Becher who had retired from Lymington URC and moved to West Midlands Synod. The Chair also thanked the Revds John Downing, Duncan Goldie, and Trish Davies for their ministries, who will each also be retiring shortly.
- ii. The Chair also commented on the closure of Longham URC and on the sad news just prior to the last meeting of the death of the Revd Margaret Tilley. The Chair led Synod in prayer.

**23S20 Synod Executive:** The Clerk presented the report.

- i. Much of the Executive's time in 2023 has been providing support to the Synod in the light of the Moderator's departure. The Clerk directed members to the list of names of those covering various aspects of the Moderator's role, and asked that anyone unsure who to approach should contact Mrs Deborah Walker in the Synod Office either through the office email address or the Moderator email address.
- ii. The Executive have appointed a small task group to compile the Synod Profile for the appointment to be advertised in June 2023. The Clerk asked members to pass on to churches a thank you for all those who had responded to the request for information and profiles to be included as an Appendix to the Synod Profile. In the end 61 churches had responded.
- iii. The Clerk also commented that the website is still a work in progress and updates from Synod Committees and feedback from the Wessex Synod Communication Strategy task group will further contribute and assist with this. Anyone wishing to be a part of this task group or support this group in anyway should contact the convenor, the Revd Graham Hoslett, at [graham.hoslett1@outlook.com](mailto:graham.hoslett1@outlook.com).
- iv. The Clerk added that the Synod has now moved fully to using the central Church House database. As such, it is imperative that the contact details for those in local churches serving in roles are updated, and members were asked to check with Church Secretaries that the Annual Return had been submitted. If not, Church Secretaries should contact Deborah Walker so that she may submit the information. At least ten churches had not submitted their Annual Return.
- v. The report included the names of those who have been nominated to stand in Committees and Groups since the last meeting of Synod. The Clerk also advised of two further names to be added to the list of nominations appearing in the Synod Papers, namely Mr George Faris as Secretary to the Nominations Group, and the Revd Harry Lanham to be added to the list of co-opted members to the Nominations Committee.

The Clerk invited questions and comments on the report:

- vi. A member raised a concern that the Synod is lacking a Lay-Employment Advisor at the moment. The Clerk had sign-posted the church to ACAS, as a result of which the church had sought advice from Croner, which offers HR, Employment Law and Health & Safety Services. Croner had advised the church that the lay employment contracts used by the church were out of date. Would Synod Executive be open to explore a contract with Croner to advise local churches on lay employment issues? The Clerk replied that Executive are considering the use of such a specialist agency for advice rather than appointing an employee, but that Executive might wish to use

a different agency which was already be offering support to local churches in another Synod. Churches needing support with HR in the meantime should go to the ACAS website in the first instance.

The Clerk brought Resolution 1 to the Synod, with the addition of the two names mentioned above:

### **RESOLUTION 1**

Wessex Synod approves the list of Appointments submitted by Nominations Group. Resolution 1, with the addition of the two names notified in the meeting. This was agreed unanimously.

**23S21 Safeguarding:** The Clerk presented the report. There were no questions. The Chair thanked the Synod Executive on behalf of the Synod, particularly the Clerk, and thanked Ms Sharon Barr, Mrs Ruth White, and Mr Phil Ray for their work on Safeguarding.

**23S22 Stepwise:** Phil Ray and the Revd Mary Thomas presented the Synod Stepwise Steering Group Report.

- i. Phil stated how encouraging it is to see how many people have engaged with Stepwise, and the number and breadth of churches represented.
- ii. Mary commented that those that have been on Stepwise and experienced Stepwise have taken back to their churches the benefits of the process, and asked members of Synod to do likewise. Mary said: “Christians grow in discipleship in a number of ways, through action, through being mentored by others, through their homegroups, through their own learning in different ways. Stepwise is on offer to those who wish to take time and space to reflect on their Christian journey.”
- iii. An in-person group is planned in Guildford and the surrounding area, and those wishing to join it should contact Ruth Heine in the Synod Office.
- iv. Mary said that Stepwise is not going away. The Steering Group meets regularly.
- v. In addition to the in-person Faith Filled Life planned at Guildford URC from May 2023, Faith Filled Life will also be available online. It is hoped that Faith Filled Worship and Faith Fuelled Leadership will take place beginning in January 2024.
- vi. As indicated in the report, members from other Synods have also joined some of the Stepwise groups, which has been of benefit.
- vii. Phil reminded Synod that the Advocacy Group is made up of himself and Ruth White, Mary Thomas, and the Revds Ray Stanyon and David Downing, Mr Bob Robertson, and Mrs Karen Smith. Anyone else interested in being part of the Advocacy Group are invited to be in touch with the Group.
- viii. A question was asked about Faith Filled Worship and Assembly accreditation for Lay Preaching, and Mary invited the questioner to be in touch with her.

**23S23 Church Life Review:** The Chair introduced the video “Church Life Review Group Update March 2023”, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCYVoOmchHE> which was screen-shared. The Church Life Review Group is reporting to General Assembly 2023.

Synod took a comfort break at 7.28pm.

---

Synod reconvened at 7.45pm.

**23S24 Wessex Synod Youth Executive:** Miss Jemimah White presented the report, and invited questions and comments.

- i. The Clerk asked what the best thing was about 2022 for the WSYE, and whether other young people had talked about joining? In reply, Jemimah said that the year had been amazing in terms of people joining, especially the Back to the Future event held in October, with three or four new people joining the WSYE.
- ii. The Chair asked about the Action Point in the report: “We would like you to go back to your churches and ask the following question: Who is our named Mental Health First Aider and what more can we be doing to support those in our communities with mental ill health?” Why does the WSYE feel important, and what does the WSYE want churches to do about it?
- iii. In Youth Assembly last year a resolution had been passed asking every church to receive training and to identify a mental health first aider. WSYE wished to remind churches of the importance of mental health first aid.
- iv. A member asked if it would be helpful the WSYE being advised which churches have a Mental Health First Aider, and Jemimah said the WSYE would welcome this. Another member of Synod reminded Synod of the Synod offered Mental Health First Aider training.
- v. It was also asked if there is any chance that Paddington might return on his travels? Jemimah replied that whilst Paddington is unlikely to return soon, WSYE is considering what his next steps might be.

Mr Tom Hackett, CYDO in Southern Synod, was invited to speak. Tom had been invited to attend Synod to present Jemimah with the Lundie Memorial Award. Tom read from the commendation offered by Mrs Lorraine Webb, the Children's & Youth Work Programme Officer for the URC, and Synod offered its congratulations to Jemimah on receiving the award.

**23S25 Ministries & Learning:** The Revd Wayne Hawkins presented the report, and comments and questions were invited. None were forthcoming.

**23S26 URC (Wessex) Trust Ltd:** Mr Ray Dunnett presented the report.

- i. Ray advised that the Trust is looking in more detail at how the Trust can best support churches in seeking to address Climate concerns, bearing in mind that such support needed to be targeted to achieve best ecological value for money.
- ii. As stated in the report, Mr Ian Bartlett, the Trust's Finance and Operations Manager, left the Company at the end of December 2022 and, following discussions with Mrs Jim Butcher, the Trust's Financial Accountant, it had been decided not to recruit a direct replacement. Ray thanked Jim and all those offering encouragement and support to her as she continues to handle the finance operations, and asked churches to continue to show consideration at this time.

No questions or comments were forthcoming.

**23S27 Ministry & Mission Fund:** The Clerk presented the report on behalf of Mr Peter Stevenson, and asked that the thanks of Synod to Peter for taking over the role of M&M Secretary at such short notice and for all his work be included in the Minutes. No further questions or comments were forthcoming.

**23S28 URC Church & Society Eco:** The Chair reminded Synod that at General Assembly 2022 Assembly had adopted an Environmental Policy for the United Reformed Church to take effect from January 2023. Assembly had established an Environmental Task Group, and the Chair introduced a video produced by the Task Group (available at [linktr.ee/ecovideo](https://linktr.ee/ecovideo)) and the video was screen-shared.

Members were then assigned to Zoom Break Out rooms, with questions suggested to enable conversation:

- Are there any worries that you have that others might be able to advise you on?
- What has your church been doing that may help other churches?
- Are there any worries you have about the targets for 2030?

The Chair welcomed members back to the meeting, and invited comment from members following the Breakout discussions:

- i. Ruth White was given permission to speak. Ruth reminded Synod that grants are available towards environmental improvements, eg. the Start Up Grant from the Children & Youth Work Committee, and also that young people are very enthusiastic when it comes to Eco concerns. It might also be good if there was a section on the Synod website that might be able to collect good ideas from local churches, with live links where appropriate.
- ii. It would be helpful for an advisor who might be able to offer help in dealing with Victorian and Listed Buildings.
- iii. The Revd Mike Shrubsole directed members seeking information, resources and ideas to the Eco Church website (<https://ecochurch.arocho.org.uk/>), and commented that one of the Eco Church Gold Award holders is a Christopher Wren church building in the City of London. It is not always possible to answer every possible Eco concern, but it is doing the very best historic churches can within the constraints of their situation. Revd Shrubsole placed the following link in the Chat function: <https://urc.org.uk/your-church/church-local-and-global/become-an-eco-church-or-congregation/>
- iv. The Clerk commented that the Synod Mission & Outreach Group have Eco church and Eco Synod high on their agenda. Also, that it is hoped there will be a link to the Eco church website on the Synod website, and this will be taken back to the Communications Strategy Task Group and the Synod Exec.
- v. In terms of local churches gauging their carbon footprint, Mike advised that many Carbon Calculator and Carbon Reduction websites are available online. Two he wished to commend are Climate Stewards and Carbon 360.
- vi. One member from a church in a conservation area commented that planning permission can be a real difficulty for certain environmental and carbon reduction improvements. The Chair suggested the church should contact their Synod Property Officer.

**23S29 Thank You:** The Chair thanked the Tech team, Deborah Walker, the Clerk for serving with remarkable diligence, and Nigel Appleton for acting as alternate Chair at the beginning of the meeting. The Chair also thanked the Stephen Ansa-Addo for bringing the reading in opening devotions, and thanked the Graham Hoslett for taking the Minutes. The Chair thanked all the Committee Convenors and Officers for their reports, and thanked all the members of Synod for their attendance, attention, and support, which is appreciated.

The Clerk led the closing worship assisted by Jemimah White. The Clerk referred to the booklet Love Is, which follows the 2023 Children's and Youth Work theme for the denomination (see <https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/children-young-people/children-youth-work/love-is-2023-childrens-and-youth-work-theme/>). The Clerk used the Walking the Way challenge in the material: Love God (and God's world), Love others, and Love self.

**The business was finished, and Synod was adjourned at 20.47 to meet again on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2023 at Richmond Hill St Andrew's URC, Bournemouth, or at such other time and place as may be necessary.**