

Meeting of The United Reformed Church Wessex Synod



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Meeting ID: 428 112 2198

Passcode: 231612

Tuesday 20th February 2024

Wessex Synod

BIG day out '24



Children £5
Adults £8



SATURDAY 4TH MAY 2024
10AM - 5PM



Hollycombe
STEAM IN THE COUNTRY

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AGENDA

18:00	Voting Members Registration - V	
18:15	Non-voting Attendees Registration X	
18:30	Welcome & Synod constituted by the Chair	Mike Thomason
18:35	Opening devotions	Ray Stanyon
18:45	Welcome to ecumenical visitors and new members of Synod	Mike Thomason
	Apologies	Clerk
	Minutes of previous Synod	Clerk
	Matters Arising	Clerk
	Pastoral News	Mike Thomason
18:55	Children's & Youth Work Committee	Josh Thomas
19:05	Synod Youth Executive	Taylor Hawkins
19:15	URC Children strategy - Child participation	Ruth White
19:25	Breakout Groups - please send any feedback to Deborah Walker office@urcwessex.org.uk	
19:40	Resolution 1 - General Assembly nominations	Clerk
	Resolution 2 - Role specific nominations	Clerk
Break from 7.45 to 8.00, please be back by 8pm		
20:00	Ministries & Learning Committee	Wayne Hawkins
20:10	Mission & Outreach Committee	Ray Stanyon
20:20	Ministry & Mission update with questions on MAM proposals	David North
20:40	Resolution 3 - To Dissolve Wimborne United Reformed Church	Peter Clark
20:50	Any Remaining Business	
20:55	Closing Devotions	Mike Thomason

Next meeting of Synod: Online on Wednesday 24th April 2024

UPDATE ON ORDINANDS, MINISTERIAL AND CHURCH CHANGES

Ordinands and CRCWs training for Ministry

Name	College	Ministry Category	Finish Date
Siobhan Antoniou	Northern	Stipendiary Ministry	June 2024
Simon Peters	Northern	Stipendiary Ministry	June 2026
Abigail Perrow	Westminster	Stipendiary Ministry	June 2026

Ministerial Retirements

31st January John Lee retired from Thatcham URC and remains in the Synod

Deaths

31st October Brian Rawling (obituary to follow)

1st November Charles Brock (obituary to follow)

16th November John Johansen-Berg (obituary to follow)

14th January Chris Mellor (obituary to follow)

Church Closures

31st December Hedge End URC closed.

Changes before next Synod

29th February Michael Hopkins leaves Farnham and Elstead to take up the role of Wessex Synod Moderator from 1st March. Induction: 23rd March at London Street, Basingstoke.

MINUTES

MINUTES of the meeting of WESSEX SYNOD on Saturday, 14th October 2023, held at Richmond Hill St Andrew's URC, 8 St Stephen's Road, Bournemouth, BH2 6JJ.

The Clerk welcomed members to the meeting and constituted the meeting. At the 50th Anniversary service candles were placed by each Synod on a Map, and each Synod took away a candle from another Synod. The Clerk showed the candle from the North Western Synod which she had received and placed this on the table in front of Synod.

23S30 The Clerk brought Resolution 1:

RESOLUTION 1

Synod Meeting agrees for The Revd Josh Thomas and The Revd Mike Thomason to be the Chairs of Synod Meetings until a new Moderator of Wessex Synod is inducted.

Resolution 1 was agreed unanimously.

Peter Clark and members of the Synod's South West Pastoral Committee led opening devotions, beginning with the Iona hymn "All are welcome" and remembering the conflict in Palestine and Israel and asking for God's guidance of the Synod meeting in prayer. The Bible reading was Matthew 16:18-19.

Attendance

25	URC Ministers and CRCWs
43	Church representatives
1	Ministers of other denominations
0	Retired Ministers/CRCWs
0	Ordinands
13	Others holding Synod appointments
13	Visitors
95	Total

23S31 Welcome to Ecumenical visitors and new members of Synod: The Chair mentioned the apologies of the Right Reverends Karen Gorham, Bishop of Sherborne, and Debbie Sellin, Bishop of Southampton. The Chair welcomed Revd Simon Gray, the Regional Minister (South and East) and Operations Lead, Southern Counties Baptist Association. The Chair read the following statement received from Pasteur Charles Klagba, of the Eglise Protestante Unie de France (Nord Normandie Region):

"Warm greetings in the name of our God. Peace and grace of Jesus Christ be with you.

I would like to thank you for your invitation to attend the Synod.

My profound desire is to be part of your synod, the occasion for all participants to dream together the dream of God as we continue to be partners with Him.

Unfortunately, I will not be able to be with you.

My greetings to all the members of the synod on behalf of our Region and the President Reverend Olivier FILHOL.

I wish you a fruitful synod under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. May God bless you."

The Chair welcomed anyone for whom this was their first meeting of Synod.

23S34 Pastoral News: The Chair directed members of Synod to the Update on Ordinands, Ministerial and Church Changes included in the Synod Papers:

- i. The Chair commented on the closure of Woodley Airfield Church (UMCE) not included in the Synod papers. Synod notes the closure of Hedge End URC reported in the papers.
- ii. The Chair welcomed the recognition of Sheilagh Courtnege as a Synod Recognised Worship Leader, and Brian Harley received her certificate on her behalf in her absence.
- iii. The Chair referred Synod to the inductions of Gill Bailey ordained and inducted to Christ Church Milton, Portsmouth, on 15th August; Hee-Gon Moon (Methodist), welcomed to Christchurch Thame on 20th August; and Jeongsook Kim (Methodist), welcomed to Christ Church Woodley, on 1st September.
- iv. The Chair reminded Synod of those Ministers celebrating their 60th Jubilee: Revds J. Charles Brock and Arnold Christopher Mellor. Their names had not been included in the Synod papers but are recorded here in these Minutes. Certificates celebrating their Jubilee have been produced and will be presented.

The Chair led Synod in a moment's silence and then led in prayer remembering the deaths of the Revds Chris Copley, Emily Browne, Margaret Tilley, Peter Leonard Southcombe and Richard Johnson Wiggins. An obituary to Revd Emily Browne will appear in the papers for the next Synod meeting.

23S32 Apologies: The Clerk reported that Apologies were received from

12	URC Ministers
19	Church Representatives
4	Ministers of other denominations
2	Ordinands
26	Retired Ministers
12	Others
75	Total

23S33 Minutes of the last meeting: The Clerk advised that there had not been any notice of amendments to be made to the Minutes of the last meeting, and 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.

The Clerk reported that there were no changes to the Order of business to be advised.

23S35 Synod Executive: The Clerk presented the report. The Clerk drew the attention of Synod to:

- i. The appointment of Task Groups by Synod Exec that Synod had requested. These included the Big Day Out Task Group; the group that had put together the Synod Profile and documents for the advertisement for the Synod Moderator, the Clerk thanking those involved in the Interview Process; the Synod Communications Strategy Task Group, the Clerk asking anyone wishing to volunteer to join the group to contact Graham Hoslett or speak to Graham or Blair Crawford at the meeting; and the Ministry and Mission Task Group to contact the clerk.
- ii. The section in the report on Nominations. The Clerk stated that it is a continual struggle to fill vacancies on Synod committees, and that it is vital the Exec has representation from each of the areas of the Synod. The Clerk asked members of Synod to contact the DSOs or the Clerk for further information about the work of Synod Exec and for suggestions of nominees for the Synod Exec or any of the vacancies in the report to be sent to clerk@urcwessex.org.uk

The Clerk then explained that prior to the pandemic it had been normal to hold Area Gatherings, which had included a session offering feedback from General Assembly. The Clerk asked the following questions of Synod:

Area Gatherings & General Assembly Feedback:

- How often do you want to meet?
- Do you want to meet online?
- How often do you want to meet in person?
- How do you wish to receive information about General Assembly?

The following comments were made from the floor of Synod:

- a) The Area Gatherings were formed following the dissolution of District Councils. The Area Gatherings had been well attended to begin with as the Gatherings were to discuss the churches' concerns and worries. Interest in the gatherings had faltered when the workshops were introduced.
- b) Training events had been good, but is there value in yet another evening meeting? However, relevant training events are welcome even on an evening.
- c) Churches near each other should car-share to Synod events and meetings which affords opportunity for good conversations.
- d) Some people don't finish work until the late afternoon and a 7pm start does not allow for a meal and sufficient rest.
- e) On-line platforms such as Zoom work well for information and training but less well for fellowship. The question of online or in-person formats depends on what we want from such Gatherings.
- f) The best attendance at former District meetings and the Area Gatherings tended to be at a really good tea party, with fellowship, conversation and food, especially where the host church showed real interest in hosting the event and offering hospitality. Good hosting leads to a better atmosphere and experience. However, such hospitality can lead to leftovers! There has to be a reason for meeting.
- g) Another member found Zoom meetings can be very impersonal. Area Gatherings with a training element would perhaps be welcome.
- h) Ray Stanyon wished to remind Synod that churches and church officers do not need to wait for an Area Gathering of any kind to talk and share fellowship together.

The Clerk thanked Synod for the comments received. These will be discussed at the Synod Exec meeting in November with the intention that the discussion will inform possible Area Gatherings that may take place in 2024 and 2025.

The Clerk introduced David North, the Synod Treasurer. David North reminded Synod that the Ministry and Mission (MAM) fund reflects the principle that all churches contribute to the central payment of ministerial and denominational costs.

In relation to MAM the Clerk then asked:

- What does MAM mean to you?
- What does it cover?

Responses offered included:

- i) Stipends.
- j) The spreading of the gospel.
- k) Training, Church House – maybe MAM isn't apportioned across the churches in the Synod quite as it should be, and the new Group will sort this out.
- l) Extra costs in terms of ministerial benefits and pensions.
- m) In Local Ecumenical Projects (LEPs) MAM can be paid to and then received from the partner denomination, the congregation not always being aware of what the URC element represents.
- n) Romilly Micklem thanked those churches that have responded to the MAM letter recently sent, but advised that nearly one half of churches still needed to respond. Romilly Micklem

asked Synod to remember that MAM is a direct indicative of the relationship between local churches and the central church and that the Trust does not receive any benefit directly from MAM.

- o) It is a conundrum. Sympathy should be extended to those who will be serving on the Group.
- p) The smaller churches may not see the reason for contributing to MAM if they do not receive SM and don't understand what else other than Stipendiary ministry MAM pays for.

The Clerk asked Synod to remember that:

- q) The Ministry and Mission monies from churches in Wessex Synod are not received into Wessex Synod funds.
- r) The Synod is tasked with how the formula for these offers is calculated. MAM contributions are at present calculated as: cost of a minister multiplied by scoping, plus a contribution per member (on a scale based on membership).
- s) Ministry across the Synod's churches is changing and there have been concerns from churches about this formula considering the number and deployment of stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments and the pressure to find a 'fairer' way of funding MAM has been growing.

The Clerk stated that the MAM Task Group will be convened by the Synod Treasurer, will be supported by Ray Dunnett from the Trust, and the Clerk expressed the thanks of Synod to the Trust for their support with MAM. The Group will also include representatives from the Synod from each of the SPC areas.

The new formula will need to be brought for agreement to one of the Spring 2024 meetings of Synod.

The Group will also seek to draw up a Job Description for the Synod MAM Secretary role.

Further comments from the floor of Synod:

- t) There might be value in ensuring representation on the MAM Task Group from smaller and not just large churches.
- u) The new formula to be applied will still need to deliver the same amount of money. Churches should be encouraged to regard their contribution to MAM as a joy not a burden.
- v) The fact that the current formula includes a church membership element can act as a disincentive to the growth of the church. The level of local church Reserve, and matters of Income and Expenditure, is not currently included in the calculation of MAM.

The Clerk informed Synod of the forthcoming appointment of Reverend Doctor Michael Hopkins as Wessex Synod Moderator, and informed Synod that the Moderator will be inducted at a Service to be held at 3pm on Saturday, 23rd March 2024, at London Street URC, London Street, Basingstoke, RG21 7NU.

The Chair reminded Synod that Michael Hopkins' new book "Pastoral Care in Practice, An Introduction and Guide" is available from purchase from Michael Hopkins.

23S36 Big Day Out: David Downing addressed Synod about the Synod Big Day Out '24, an advert for which is in the Synod Papers, to be held from 10am to 5pm on 4th May 2024 at Hollycombe Steam in the Country. The day is open to all church groups, user groups, and community links. Ticket Price Adults £8, Children £5, and will comprise a range of things for people of all ages to participate in, to worship together, celebrate together, explore together, craft together and be inspired together with community at the core of the day. David Downing stressed that the pricing has been considered at length, and it was felt good to keep the pricing simple. There will be the chance to pay an extra amount of £2.50 per person to have unlimited access to the rides. The Day

in 2022 had been very good, and Synod was encouraged to attend. The Hollycombe price is much greater, and the ticket prices are subsidised by Synod.

Questions and comments were invited:

- i. Is it more than just a subsidised trip to a Theme Park? Could a few people write a sentence (from different age-groups) including short testimonials? David Downing responded that further publicity will be coming out.
- ii. Is this just for those currently in the close-knit church community, or for wider contacts? David Downing reminded Synod the Big day Out '24 is for all.
- iii. The Booking is by a QR code – is there opportunity to book in any other way? David Downing assured Synod alternative methods of booking will be available through the Synod website and an email will be sent out from the Synod Office on Monday, 16th October 2023.
- iv. Will we have exclusive use of the site? David Downing stated that should members of the public arrive the site staff will allow them entry but they will be paying the full site price. The site are not advertising the site as open on 4th May on their website.
- v. There are volunteering opportunities available, especially for folk from local churches. Anyone wanting to volunteer in any capacity for the day should email the Clerk.
- vi. David Downing added that the site catering will be different from 2022. The restaurant has now been refurbished and will be open.

23S37 General Assembly Feedback & Discussions: The Clerk reminded Synod that we send 16 representatives to Assembly, at least two under 25, and a maximum of seven being Ministers of Word and Sacraments or CRCW.

Synod broke into three groups for Feedback and Discussion, these led by Clive Snashall, Tim Clarke, David North, Jill Abrahams, Glyn Millington and Linda Jackson.

The Chair asked for members to return at 12.45pm. The Clerk asked for any comments at the group meetings that members wished recorded in the Synod Minutes to be noted and brought back to the meeting for inclusion (Appendix A).

When Synod re-convened the Chair assured Synod any noted comments would be appended to the Minutes but invited any immediate response from the groups:

- i. Has an Assembly digest been produced? The Clerk advised the link to the Digest is in the Synod papers. The think tank Theos report included in the Church Life Review Group report to Assembly can be found at www.urb.org.uk/clrg.

Synod broke for lunch, during which a Safeguarding Surgery was available in the Rainbow Room with Sharon Barr. The Chair stated that sadly the Buildings Surgery was unable to take place, but that any concerns or questions relating to church buildings or manses should be emailed to Graham Barber (at po-s@urbwessex.org.uk).

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23S38 Wessex Trust: Romilly Micklem presented the report, commenting that:

- i. Church Property Committees and Finance Committees need to remember to ask permission from the Trust for any changes to the fabric of buildings or any works other than repair, especially for those seeking grants from the Trust. The Trust does not have a

written policy for retrospective grant funding, but it is general practise for grant-funders to refuse retrospective applications.

- ii. The Accounts are now available on the Charity Commission website.
- iii. Letters inviting the MAM contributions were sent to church treasurers in July 2023, a further email to those having not yet responded being sent last week. As of 13th October 2023, 61 of the 110 churches in the Synod have responded, these offers representing approximately 66% of the total MAM offer of Wessex Synod. Romilly Micklem suggested that MAM can either be regarded as a tax or burden by churches or as a joyful giving and as part of their outreach as the people of Jesus.
- iv. Wessex Synod is privileged of having a more advantaged share of financial resource than many Synods in the URC. This year a contribution of £135,000 is the subject of the Resolution being recommended to the Synod, which is an increase on the contribution made in 2022. Romilly Micklem suggested the possibility that the Church Life Review Group appointed by General Assembly may make a recommendation in the future regarding the fairer sharing of resources which would see an end to the existing Synod Resource Sharing process.

Questions and comments were invited on the report, bearing in mind the workshop that would be following:

- a) Regarding permissions and grant applications, clarification was sought over those emergency repairs that might require immediate action but that might also properly be regarded as the subject of a grant application. Romilly Micklem reminded Synod of the word “usually” and the word “normally” and sought to give assurance that the Trust was not wanting to disqualify all and every request for assistance after the event. However, Romilly Micklem reminded Synod of the importance of advising Synod Property Officers as a matter of urgency in such an eventuality.
- b) The report in the Synod papers states: “Climate Emergency (‘Net Zero’) Grant Funding”, that “the Trust has made some grants under the ‘Net Zero’ scheme I announced in the Spring to support projects that move members’ churches of the Synod closer to the URC’s goal of ‘net zero’ carbon emissions by 2030.” Clarification was sought over how many of the grants awarded reported in total are part of this scheme and how successful is the scheme? Romilly Micklem replied that it is difficult at this point to project the benefits from the solar panel installations and improvements to buildings insulation, as it would take time for the benefits to be quantified.
- c) The report included Resolution 2, over which clarification was sought: Did the wording “up to” admit the possibility that the Synod could pass the Resolution but itself instruct that less than £135,000 be granted? Romilly Micklem responded that the wording “up to” indicated that the Trust had been asked to grant up to the figure stated as part of the Inter-Synod Resource Sharing process, rather than a recognition that Synod could agree to the grant whilst choosing to give less.

There being no further matters of clarification or discussion of the report, Romilly Micklem brought Resolution 2:

RESOLUTION 2

Wessex Synod approves a grant of up to £135,000 from the General Fund of the Wessex Trust to support the URC’s Inter-Synod Resource Sharing for 2024.

This was agreed unanimously.

23SE29 Ministries & Learning: Tony Brett brought the report. Tony Brett thanked Sarah Hall for putting the report together. Tony Brett highlighted the following:

- i. The Deployment of Ministers of Word and Sacraments in the report is the big issue at the moment, and the report indicates the position of the conversation in each of the SPC areas. The summaries of the progress on deployment made by the Synod Pastoral Committees included in the report indicate:
 - a) In the SPC(NW) a consultation letter has been sent to church secretaries, the report including thanks to those that have responded. Tony Brett requested that any that haven't replied to the letter to please do so.
 - b) In the SPC(SW), consideration that ministers in the clusters are working more and more by way of Synod appointed ministers.
- ii. The paper from the Mission Development Group regarding Mission criteria indicates that stipendiary ministerial deployment going forward will quite probably be more about mission and not just members.
- iii. SPCs have each met a couple of times since the last Synod. Each member of each SPC has several link churches and are expected to contact church secretaries and ministers.
- iv. Lay Preaching – Tony Brett drew the attention of Synod to the reference in the report to the nomination of Scott Wheeler as the Synod Lay Preaching Advocate.
- v. Tony Brett stated the huge thanks from the Ministries and Learning Committee on behalf of Synod to the Development Support Officers for all the love and care they show to churches.
- vi. The Synod Spirituality Group needs more volunteers – any volunteers are invited to speak with Alison Toplas.
- vii. Tony Brett stated the thanks of the Ministries and Learning Committee to everyone who exercises ministry in the churches in the Synod and in the Synod, whether that be ministers, CRCWs, elders, lay preachers and worship leaders.

Matters of clarification and questions on the report were invited, the following comments made:

- a) The summary of the progress made in the SPC(NE) seems at odds with that stated by the SPC(SW) in terms of support for those churches “with solid lay leadership”. Tony Brett invited Lucy Brierley to respond on behalf of the SPC(NE), Lucy Brierley explaining that each of the SPCs had been encouraged by M&L to express the situation and progress made in each of the areas separately, whose situations are presently diverse.
- b) What will the process be in the future for unfreezing the current ‘moratorium’ on movement of ministers? Response was made that once the Synod target for deployment is reached it would be possible for vacancies to be declared, but that meetings would be taking place between the SPCs under the facilitation of Ministries and Learning to discuss these. There are some movements of ministers out of pastoral charge in the Synod that can be planned, such as retirements, but others are more of a surprise. Ministries and Learning have agreed that as movements of ministers out of pastoral charge in local parishes occur each SPC will make the case for each vacancy to be declared to Ministries and Learning once the possibility of such declaration arises.
- c) The Synod is currently below the target for ministerial deployment within the Synod, which number is based on the Ministers available for deployment. The question of deployment remains a difficult, sensitive process, and it is necessary to move forward sensitively and carefully.

23E30 Resolution from Synod Representative: The Chair invited Graeme Panting to bring Resolution 3, proposed by Graeme Panting and seconded by Alistair Knox:

RESOLUTION 3

"I raise that, as an important integral part of Synod, we request leaders, or an appointed scribe, or volunteer to report back from workshop groups, with any suggestions and recommendations made for follow-up."

The proposer and seconder addressed Synod.

The Chair invited any matters for clarification:

- a) What time implication would Resolution 3 imply for the work of Synod, and what would be the impact on the general business of Synod? The Clerk responded that the timing indicated in the Synod agenda for workshops is more for the direction of the workshop leaders in their timing. It might prove difficult to state the time necessary for report of workshop matters to the Synod in the agenda and including such feedback in the Minutes might be troublesome.
- b) This might need to be more carefully thought out.
- c) One member indicated they generally make their own notes for their own use to bring back from committees and meetings. Could perhaps the leader of each workshop produce an A4 sheet by way of report and response in the workshop for the benefit of Synod? The proposer responded this might need not be an official review.
- d) Workshops are for the attendees, and any feedback from them can be superficial.

The Chair invited Synod to indicate whether it was ready to move to a vote using the consensus cards, and then called for a vote.

27 Voting Members were in favour, 36 against. The Resolution was lost.

The Clerk commented that where possible there would be attempt made in the Minutes to include feedback from feedback groups. The Clerk invited those attending the workshops to make any notes made available to the Minute Secretary for these to be appended to the Minutes.

23E31 Workshops: Three workshops were offered, Wessex Finances (Appendix B), led by Romilly Micklem and David North; Schools Work: Making a difference, led by Ruth White and Karen Tweed; Starting and Improving Social Media in your Church, led by Noah Brierley and Justin Brierley.

The Chair asked Synod to reassemble at 15.50.

Synod reassembled at 15.50.

23E32 Remaindered Business: There was none

23E33 Thank You: The Chair thanked the Workshop Leaders for their contributions, Deborah Walker in the Synod Office for her hard work in the administration for the meeting, the General Assembly 2024 representatives from Synod who had offered feedback, and thanked Richmond Hill St. Andrew's URC, Bournemouth, for their hosting of Synod, and Peter Hansford and the catering team, and for arranging the audio facility.

Andy Hall led Synod in a closing act of worship. Following all the talk and all the business, he invited members of Synod simply to meet with God, leading Synod in worship playing on the guitar and reading and offering a reflection on 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Andy Hall led Synod in praying for those who came to Synod discouraged, saddened, struggling or burdened.

The business was finished, and Synod was adjourned at 16.13 to meet again online on 20th February 2024, **or at such other time and place as may be necessary.**

Appendix A

Notes Received from Feedback on General Assembly Group Discussions:

1. Difficult for some LEPs to keep URC identity
 - “Denominational layers” where things are done differently, ie. Safeguarding Policies
 - Treasures of our own denominational history, ie. agreement to work as united.
 - Uncomfortable local context/situation.
 - Able to welcome people from other faiths and denominations, other nationalities and creeds.
 - Be comfortable explaining the URC and beliefs. More information needed to show differences between denominations.
 - Label URC doesn’t help. Need to say the whole title “United Reformed” (by who/why/what/where?).
2. Buildings, meetings, Bureaucracy, Synod, more of a community centre than Church.
3. Never accept that life long learners/always will keep learning/we do not know it all/”If we rely on God, he will supply all we need”.
4. Commit to the Kingdom of God.
 - Not just Sunday morning.
 - Outreach opportunities ie. for families.
 - Consider those who come to activities a (sic) part of the Church.
 - Meet people where they are.
 - Not about bums on seats.

Appendix B

Notes from Workshop on Wessex Finances

About 20 people participated in the workshop on Wessex Finances. A wide range of topics were covered, including:

Q: Why are we relatively well off compared to many other Synods?

A: Partly good stewardship by our trustees, partly historical (we inherited a lot of funds from our predecessor denominations owing to the way in which regional funds were passed on when the URC was formed)

Q: What is the difference between the Synod and the Trust?

A: The Trust can be thought of as a legal entity and a group of people (the Trustees) who look after the Synod's money

Q: Where does all the money go?

A: The Synod's policies cost money to implement; the biggest items being those involving employment of staff (Children and Youth Development officers, DSOs, Safeguarding, ...)

Q: What would happen if a local church / pair of churches wanted to consolidate/sell some buildings?

A: If there was a good and forward-looking plan for the future then the proceeds from that sale might well be made available to the local church. If there was only a desire to cover a deficit for a few more years, less so. The Trust has a responsibility to steward resources including church and manse buildings appropriately.

OBITUARIES

The following obituaries appear in "Celebrated Lives"
which is a collection of life stories within the URC Year Book 2024

Emily Constance Browne

5 July 1934 - 10 May 2023 (aged 88)

Served at: Romsey 1989-91; Montfort Mission, Romsey 1997-98.

Emily's father was a Methodist minister, so she was a Methodist from the minute she was born in Yorkshire. Her early life involved moving around – usually every three years in those days – to South Wales, Yorkshire, Leicestershire, Banff in Aberdeenshire and Bradford.

After leaving school at 16, Emily trained as a nurse, meeting long-standing friend Norma Gutteridge at a pre-nursing course in 1950. After training, Emily was a staff nurse for about a year before starting midwifery training, then undertook district-nurse training, in Oxford as a Queen's Nurse, working to improve the nursing care of people in their own homes.

Her first placement as a district nurse/midwife was in Nettlebed, near Henley on Thames. Emily was a very attractive person: doing her district nursing rounds, she attracted fleas and had to have a bath as soon as she reached home!

She moved to London in 1964 for health visitor training and in 1970 married Derek, moving to Bristol because of his work, then later to Romsey. By 1986, after serving as a church officer at Romsey's URC, Emily felt called to become a non-stipendiary URC minister, was accepted and trained, ordained and served two years in the Romsey church.

Poor eyesight prevented her from driving, so the URC District Council invited her to explore planting a new church in the Montfort area of Romsey.

Emily carried out a great deal of research, a strategy group was set up, and in December 1994 a Christingle service was held and 60 people attended. This became a weekly service and in June 1996 the URC recognised this as a mission project. The Church endorsed this at national level in 1997. Emily's health forced her to resign as minister the following year.

After the closure of Montfort church, Emily and Derek worshipped at Romsey Methodist Church, where Emily's sister, Lillian, was a member.

Emily always had Derek's valued support, something greatly missed when he died suddenly after a short illness.

She offered her services as a preacher in the Romsey Circuit and became a pastoral visitor, and many benefited from the time she shared with those in her care. She was a good listener, and her life was one filled with prayer which she shared with others.

As her sight deteriorated, Emily reluctantly stepped down from preaching, but continued to take part in services. Her contributions were always thought-provoking and challenging.

We thank God for Emily, for the contribution she made to the life of the Church and the service she gave to others.

Written by Revd Brian Spencer

Margaret Tilley

11 April 1933 – 31 January 2023 (aged 89)

Served at: Dorset District 1992; West Moors Group 1992-96

Margaret Tilley had an illustrious career in education and ministry. Those who met her felt privileged to have known her and grateful that she had been part of their lives.

Born in Scarborough in 1933, she was brought up in Nottingham and attended Nottingham High School, where she became Head Girl. Graduating from Kings College London with a BA in Classics, she began teaching in Dalston in the East End of London. Her understanding of young people and their family situations made her ideally suited to become a Justice of the Peace.

There was a move to Dorset in 1982 when Margaret was appointed head of Ferndown Upper School. As well as her responsibilities as head of a large secondary school and her work as a JP, Margaret found a further outlet for her energy as a lay preacher, enabling her to express her Christian faith among the churches of Dorset.

On retirement from teaching, Margaret trained for the ministry at the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme (STETS) based at Salisbury. In 1992, she was ordained and called to the West Moors Group in the Dorset District. She made an immediate impact on St. Martin's URC in West Moors and under her guidance and sensitive leadership, the church was re-ordered in a way which opened up the church both visibly and communicatively to the local community.

As a minister, it was her commitment, privilege and joy to share the Gospel with others through Scripture-led preaching and in her compassionate and sincere pastoral work.

Having trained at STETS with Anglicans, Methodists and other URC students, Margaret was very much at home with ecumenism and happy to share ministry with others. She was an encouraging and supportive tutor on the TLS course.

She also took a full part in the work of the URC at district level. She was convener of the pastoral committee, which, at the time, gave support and advice to some 40 URCs in the county. In recognition of her service and leadership, she served a term as president of the Dorset district.

Margaret was very creative. She had a gift for embroidery and produced inspirational banners for the churches at West Moors and Verwood, a lasting legacy. She loved gardening and classical music, being a keen supporter of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.

Margaret enjoyed the companionship of Janice for many years. She proved a strong supporter and confidante of all that Margaret undertook. They enjoyed travelling the world on cruises and overland holidays.

Margaret died in January 2023, having shared what living the Gospel is all about.

Written by Martin Ambler

SYNOD EXECUTIVE NOMINATIONS

Resolution 1

Wessex Synod approves the list of representatives to General Assembly 2024 and allows Synod Officers to appoint replacements should it prove necessary.

Lay	Clive Snashall	Ministers	Helen Everard
Lay	David Wong	Ministers	Michael Hopkins
Lay	George Farris	Ministers	Pat Oliver
Lay	Karen Bell	Ministers	Ray Stanyon
Lay	Magie Larkin	Ministers	Sarah Hall
Lay	Phebe Mann	Ministers	Tim Clarke
Lay	Sheilagh Courtnage	Ministers	Wendy White
Youth	TBC	Youth	TBC
Lay Reserve	Jill Abrahams	Minister Reserve	Glyn Millington

Resolution 2

Wessex Synod approves the appointment of Scott Wheeler as Lay Preaching Advocate.

Note: all other nominations will be brought to the Synod meeting on Wednesday April the 24th

Resolution from Synod Pastoral Committee (South West)

Resolution 3

Wessex Synod, fulfilling the function conferred upon it in paragraph 2(4)(iii) of the Structure of the United Reformed Church, resolves that the local church known as Wimborne United Reformed Church shall be dissolved with effect from 20 February 2024.

Synod authorises the Executive Committee to take any further action necessary to effect this decision, and instructs the Wessex District Council, the trustees of the building (if they can be identified), and the United Reformed Church (Wessex) Trust Ltd to take appropriate action on any future use or disposal of the building, which will be no longer required for the worship of the United Reformed Church from the date on which Wimborne United Reformed Church is dissolved.

MINISTRIES AND LEARNING REPORT

The Ministries and Learning report covers the period since the October 2023 Synod to this meeting of Wessex Synod. As such, there have been two meetings of Ministries and Learning (both meetings on-line in September 2023 and November 2023).

Deployment of Ministers of Word and Sacraments

A significant amount of time and discussion for Ministries and Learning and Synod Pastoral Committees has been focused on the deployment of Ministers of Word and Sacraments. Synod having previously agreed the deployment strategy and Synod Pastoral Committees being aware of the total numbers of Ministers available, each Committee has been communicating where appropriate with local congregations to begin discussions regarding future deployment(s). To this end, each Synod Pastoral Committee will have a deployment strategy that uses the Ministers available in ways that serve the local congregations with an eye to mission and growth.

Ministries and Learning appreciate that these changes are not straight forward and cannot meet all our expectations. It is also the case that there is no intention to change the role of ministers currently in post. In some settings ministers have taken the initiative in beginning wider consultations and working with a wider team have taken on additional congregations.

Synod Pastoral Committees will be continuing to consult local congregations about new and emerging patterns of deployment and how these will impact in the future. The changes will take place over some time given that new arrangements are only introduced as current ministries change and create the opportunity to deploy differently.

Previously Ministries and Learning agreed that vacancies would need to be approved by the Committee rather than the Synod Pastoral Committees. Therefore, Ministries and Learning agreed that to expedite vacancies in a timely way we would arrange additional on-line meetings for the purposes of agreeing any new pastoral profiles. In November 2023 Ministries and Learning agreed the pastoral profile for The Solent Cluster and this was added to the vacancy list in January and is currently declared as being vacant.

General Assembly agreed to make a number of stipendiary ecumenical posts across the URC, through Ministries and Learning we are actively considering applying for one such post within the Synod.

Ministry and Mission Fund

Related to changing patterns of deployment is the ongoing revision of the formula for Ministry and Mission Fund. A small group has been put together which will bring proposals to Synod in due course.

Synod Pastoral Committees

The four Synod Pastoral Committees have continued to meet and take forward the work of Ministries and Learning. As mentioned above, the Pastoral Committees have been focusing on ministerial deployment, alongside the regular business of supporting and keeping updated from local congregations and any ministerial movements or issues.

Candidating Secretary

There is one candidate for Ministry of Word and Sacraments Model 4 going on to the Assessment Conference this March. There are 3 other enquirers, so we continue to pray for God's hand on the lives of those who are currently discerning a way forward with this.

Development and Support Officers

Ray and Mary continue to take an active role in helping the Synod Pastoral Committees in conversations around deployment. They continue to offer support to local churches where there may be pastoral need. Training has included pastoral care training for pastoral visitors and elders, lay presidency training, setting up other events. They are currently working on arranging trainers and venues for Leading Your Church into Growth. Ray has been co facilitating a Stepwise Faith Filled Life in person group with Ruth White and both he and Mary serve on the Synod's Stepwise Advocacy group.

Ray and Mary have, in certain areas, been filling in for the role of moderator in this interim time.

Spiritualities Group

The Spiritualities Group are planning to hold a series of 'retreat' style days throughout the year. The first will take place on Saturday 16th March at Guildford URC when we will explore "Christ of the ashes: finding life in the season of lent," with Hannah Fychte, a student at Westminster College.

Thank You

Once again thanks to everyone involved in the work of Ministries and Learning for their ongoing work in support of the Wessex Synod and our local congregations.

Revd Wayne Hawkins

Convener - Ministries and Learning

minister@guildfordurc.org.uk

MISSION & OUTREACH COMMITTEE REPORT

For Information

Owing to illness, it was not possible to hold the full meeting of the Committee In November. In its place a meeting was held on Zoom to deal with those matters requiring decisions or other urgent attention, with all other matters being deferred to the April 2024 meeting.

Eco-Synod:

One of the key concerns of the Committee has been to work towards Wessex applying to be recognised as an *eco-synod*. A working party is to be set up, which will over the next six months consider possible ways forward with the aim of bringing a proposal to Synod Executive and the October 2024 Synod Meeting. Dates are currently being coordinated for the first meeting of this working party.

Zambia:

Following a pause during the pandemic, a new exchange programme is getting under way, which includes more opportunities for exchanges for lay people and also short-term exchanges for ministers going to Zambia, including increasing the number of congregation to congregation visits.

A key issue is recruiting more local church partners within the Synod. To this end we wish to propose that we offer at least some of the grants as “exploratory” visits to a couple of potential Zambian partners.

It has been agreed to endorse a representative of Lusaka Presbytery attending the Synod Moderator’s induction, the cost of between £2,000 and £2,500 to be met by already committed funds of the Zambia exchange programme.

France:

Le Weekend is to be held on 3-5th May, allowing French participants to join the Synod Big Day Out.

Leading the Church into Growth:

The Committee has given enthusiastic support to the work the Training and Development Officers are doing on developing the *Leading Your Church into Growth* programme, and hoped to see this rolled out across our churches in the first half of 2024.

Other Matters

Because we were unable to hold the full meeting of the Committee in November, a number of agenda items were deferred to the spring, including a discussion of mission with the elderly, the Welborne church plant and a progress report on the Synod funding of a church regeneration worker at Collinwood Road, Oxford.

Ray Stanyon
Development & Support Officer – North
dso-n@urcwessex.org.uk

CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH WORK COMMITTEE REPORT

It has been another busy year for us as a committee as we seek to support the work amongst children and young people within the synod. Since our last report there have been a number of events and opportunities starting in May of last year with our first – standalone, children's camp. This took place at Oakwood Youth Centre near Wokingham and attracted a really good number of children aged between 7-12 years old. I was pleased to attend for a day, and I even took my six-year-old daughter along with me (she'll be official this year!) upon looking back at her highlights of last year on New Year's Eve she told us all that her one day at camp had been the ultimate highlight. High praise indeed.

In July, youth camp took place at the Gordon Brown (no, not the ex – Prime Minister) outdoor education centre near Hook. Again, this was really well attended and organised and I take this opportunity to thank Ruth, Phil and their various teams for making these two big events such good fun and a real opportunity for our children and young people to come together in times of worship and fellowship – these opportunities are so valuable and relationships that last come from times such as these, special indeed.

We have been delighted to continue our support of our brilliant Synod Youth Executive and I was pleased to join them at one of their residential weekends last year. They are a really great, dynamic group of young Christians and they are always looking for potential new members, I take this opportunity to commend them to you and encourage you to get in touch should you have any young people who you think would value learning more about this team. It has been great to have the input of Taylor – their chair on our committee this year and we thank them for the part they have played.

At the heart of what we want to do as a committee is to support the work of our local churches with their engagement of children and young people. There are a number of ways we try to achieve this, and I want to take the opportunity of reminding you of some of them through this report.

- Firstly, we have funding available which can be applied for through either Ruth White or Phil Ray to support you in the setting up of new initiatives. Some examples from recent history are the setup costs for a baby group, the purchase of a new urn for a breakfast church initiative, the cost of some specific training for a young person in a church. If you have an idea, let's talk about it and see how we can help it to become more than just an idea!
- Secondly, one of our most valuable resources is our staff team. We have, between Ruth and Phil a huge breadth of experience and expertise. If you would value a conversation about how they might be able to help your church in your mission with children and youth, I know that they would be delighted to book in a visit. At last year's synod meeting, Phil spoke about how he was supporting a Time for God student, maybe this is something your church would like to explore? Ruth spoke about how she had supported a church in their recruitment and ongoing management of a new member of staff working alongside children and young people, perhaps, this is something your church want to explore. No matter what it is, big or small, please do use this valuable resource of expertise.
- Finally, as a committee, we want to provide for you as a church. In the past we have tried to put on resourcing days for all of those involved in their local church children's and youth work. If there is a particular area, you'd like for us to consider on a day like this, or a training need of any kind, please do get in touch and let's see how we can work together on this.

I want to end my report by saying a huge thank you to all of those involved in their local church mission with children and young people. Just in the two churches I serve, I see how much goes into this weekly mission and it is thanks to people like you that our children and young people are hearing about God’s love for them and experiencing what it means to belong. Keep up the good work but please don’t struggle on alone, we are here to support you in a number of ways, and I encourage you to get in touch and reach out to us if you think we can do so in any way.

Josh Thomas
 Convener - Children’s and Youth Work Committee
minister@petersfieldurc.com

Le Weekend franco-britannique

3-5 May 2024

Celebrating Together

We will celebrate being together again after 5 years. We will take part in Wessex Synod’s Big Day Out and have fun with people from across the synod. How is God calling us to come together?

We will meet at Fleet URC in Hampshire. Accommodation will be in nearby hotels and we will eat together as a group. Arrivals from Friday late afternoon. On Saturday we will join people from all over the Synod in the Big Day Out at Hollycombe Steam Fair. We will join in worship at Fleet URC to celebrate. Everything will be in French and English.

Programme

3 May	4 May	5 May
Afternoon arrivals	08:00 Breakfast at the church	08:30 breakfast
18:30 evening meal	09:00 depart for Big Day Out at Hollycombe	10:00 Sunday Worship
20:30 Depart for hotels	evening meal together	12:30 lunch and depart

Flier and booking form available on the [Synod Website](#).

SYNOD YOUTH EXECUTIVE REPORT

Report to follow.

MINISTRY AND MISSION FUND

Discussion Paper

Introduction

The Ministry and Mission (MAM) fund is the central fund of the URC out of which ministers' stipends are paid, along with the central expenses of the denomination. The URC's approach is rooted in the New Testament principle of all giving according to ability, and each receiving according to their need.

Synods do not receive money from the fund, but each Synod is given a target figure every year and asked to apportion this among its churches.

For some years, Wessex has used a formula to calculate requested contributions from each church which is based on two factors:

- Church membership numbers
- Ministerial scoping percentage

As fewer stipendiary ministers are available, and all four areas are looking at models for ministerial deployment which move beyond a basic scoping / division among churches, it has become necessary to revisit the formula. A task group was formed in the autumn of 2023, led by the Synod Treasurer, and with all four areas of the Synod represented.

In addition to the scoping consideration, the task group is also keen to ensure any new formula is as fair as possible, and that we take into account how the other Synods approach this.

Key conclusions reached

1. Around a quarter of the churches in Wessex are Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs). Because of the complexities of working with the other denominations involved, we propose to take the 2024 requested figures for the LEPs and add 4% for inflation.
2. For the non-LEP churches, we note that some have significant un-restricted reserves, and that (in keeping with the practice of several other Synods), a small levy on these would help raise the required total MAM figure and support the less well off churches. However, we are keen to ensure churches are not penalized for holding a reasonable reserve relative to their outgoings.
3. By grouping churches into bands based on their membership, we can simplify the calculation of a membership-based component of the request.

Draft formula results

Please note the following:

- **Synod is not being asked to vote for or against this proposal at the February meeting – it is for discussion only. Once the results of that discussion and any feedback from churches after the meeting have been considered, we hope to bring a proposal for vote at the April meeting.**
- The most up to date membership figures available have been used. If the 2024 figures are available in time for a final proposal, we will use those instead.
- The reserves levy is based on a 2% levy on unrestricted reserves which exceed 12 months of expenditure for each church. Expenditure has been estimated as 95% of 2022 net income. We will be relying on churches to self-declare an accurate figure here – the estimates used are based on the (incomplete) set of responses to the task group's request in December 2023.

- The model assumes we will be asked to come up with 9% more for 2025 than in 2024. We do not yet have the figures from London but expect to do so in time for them to feed into a final proposal for the April Synod meeting. If we are asked for less then we will reduce the requests accordingly. The reverse also applies.
- If the new formula is adopted, changes to church contributions will be phased in over several years (exact number to be decided). This will apply to both decreases and increases.
- Scoping for stipendiary ministry is not part of the new formula.

The totals are as follows:

	LEP	Non-LEP	Total
2024 (current formula)	287,829	1,372,907	1,660,736
2025 proposed	299,342	1,509,543	1,808,885

Read on for some detail of how these have been reached.

Section 1 – Non-LEPs

The new figures are based on 12 membership bands with band 1 being the largest membership and contribution, and band 12 the smallest.

Because the changes being proposed are substantial in some cases, we have elected to e-mail church treasurers privately in advance of the Synod meeting, giving them the proposed numbers for their church. (Note that these e-mails are unlikely to go out sooner than Saturday 3 February.)

Once feedback from the meeting and discussions in local churches has been collated, any proposal being brought to April's Synod meeting for a decision will include sharing the full list of churches and their proposed contributions.

For now, the table below shows the band for each church, whether the reserves levy is applicable, and whether the new formula produces an increased or decreased figure compared to 2024's request using the old formula.

		Members (2023 yearbook)	Band	Increase or decrease?	Reserves levy applies?
9D54	WOKING	231	Band 1	Increase	No/Unknown
9B11	HYTHE	130	Band 2	Decrease	No/Unknown
9D27	ST ANDREW'S WALTON & WEYBRIDGE	112	Band 2	Increase	Yes
9A61	BOURNEMOUTH, RICHMOND HILL	111	Band 2	Increase	No/Unknown
9E33	READING, PARK	99	Band 3	Increase	No/Unknown
9E08	HENLEY-ON-THAMES	96	Band 3	Decrease	No/Unknown
9C08	HAYLING, SOUTH HAYLING	95	Band 3	Increase	Yes
9C16	PETERSFIELD & LISS	95	Band 3	Increase	No/Unknown
9A20	BROADSTONE	90	Band 3	Increase	No/Unknown
9B13	ABBEY, ROMSEY	88	Band 3	Increase	Yes

		Members (2023 yearbook)	Band	Increase or decrease?	Reserves levy applies?
9C12	ISLE OF WIGHT, SHANKLIN	85	Band 3	Increase	No/Unknown
9C02	FAREHAM	78	Band 4	Increase	No/Unknown
9D02	BASINGSTOKE	77	Band 4	Increase	No/Unknown
9A13	BOURNEMOUTH: SOUTHBOURNE	75	Band 4	Increase	No/Unknown
9B15	SALISBURY	75	Band 4	Increase	No/Unknown
9C06	HAVANT & EMSWORTH	73	Band 4	Increase	Yes
9D15	GUILDFORD, PORTSMOUTH ROAD	66	Band 5	Decrease	Yes
9E26	OXFORD, ST COLUMBA'S	65	Band 5	Decrease	No/Unknown
9E34	READING, ST ANDREWS	62	Band 5	Increase	No/Unknown
9B98	SOUTHAMPTON, AVENUE ST ANDREW'S	62	Band 5	Increase	Yes
9A29	LYMINGTON	57	Band 6	Increase	No/Unknown
9D11	FLEET	55	Band 6	Increase	No/Unknown
9A34	POOLE, THE BEACON, CANFORD HEATH	52	Band 6	Increase	No/Unknown
9A47	SWANAGE	50	Band 6	Increase	No/Unknown
9E44	OXFORD, WHEATLEY	47	Band 7	Increase	No/Unknown
9A28	FORDINGBRIDGE	47	Band 7	Increase	No/Unknown
9E13	MAIDENHEAD	46	Band 7	Increase	Yes
9D16	GUILDFORD, WESTBOROUGH	44	Band 7	Decrease	No/Unknown
9A99	BOURNEMOUTH, TRINITY, CHARMINSTER	40	Band 7	Increase	No/Unknown
9A06	BOURNEMOUTH, IFORD	40	Band 7	Increase	No/Unknown
9A48	VERWOOD	37	Band 8	Increase	No/Unknown
9E05	BRACKNELL	36	Band 8	Decrease	No/Unknown
9E42	THATCHAM	35	Band 8	Decrease	No/Unknown
9A62	BOURNEMOUTH INTERNATIONAL	34	Band 8	Decrease	No/Unknown
9A38	WEYMOUTH, RADIPOLE	31	Band 8	Increase	No/Unknown
9E43	TILEHURST	31	Band 8	Increase	No/Unknown
9C17	PORTSMOUTH, BUCKLAND	31	Band 8	Increase	No/Unknown
9E02	ASTON TIRROLD	31	Band 8	Increase	No/Unknown
9E14	MARLOW	30	Band 8	Decrease	Yes
9B21	SOUTHAMPTON, ISAAC WATTS MEMORIAL	30	Band 8	Increase	Yes
9C05	GOSPORT, ST COLUMBA	29	Band 9	Decrease	No/Unknown
9B19	SOUTHAMPTON, BITTERNE PARK	27	Band 9	Decrease	No/Unknown
9E03	BANBURY	27	Band 9	Decrease	No/Unknown
9B22	SOUTHAMPTON, PEAR TREE GREEN	26	Band 9	Increase	No/Unknown
9B18	SOUTHAMPTON, BITTERNE	25	Band 9	Decrease	No/Unknown
9C28	WARSASH	25	Band 9	Increase	Yes

		Members (2023 yearbook)	Band	Increase or decrease?	Reserves levy applies?
9C10	ISLE OF WIGHT, RYDE	25	Band 9	Decrease	No/Unknown
9B99	CHANNEL ISLANDS, JERSEY	24	Band 9	Increase	No/Unknown
9E32	READING, GRANGE	22	Band 9	Decrease	Yes
9E47	WINDSOR	21	Band 9	Decrease	No/Unknown
9A55	WEYMOUTH, HOPE	21	Band 9	Increase	No/Unknown
9E18	TWYFORD (Bucks)	21	Band 9	Increase	No/Unknown
9D04	TADLEY	20	Band 9	Increase	Yes
9E11	OXFORD, CUMNOR	19	Band 10	Decrease	No/Unknown
9E23	OXFORD, COLLINWOOD ROAD	19	Band 10	Decrease	No/Unknown
9D24	HINDHEAD, BEACON HILL	19	Band 10	Decrease	No/Unknown
9A24	CHRISTCHURCH, BURTON GREEN	18	Band 10	Increase	No/Unknown
9A33	PARKSTONE	18	Band 10	Decrease	No/Unknown
9E19	HUNGERFORD	18	Band 10	Decrease	No/Unknown
9D17	GUILDFORD, NORMANDY	16	Band 10	Decrease	No/Unknown
9C34	PORTSMOUTH, MILTON	16	Band 10	Increase	No/Unknown
9E25	OXFORD, MARSTON	15	Band 10	Decrease	Yes
9A50	WAREHAM	15	Band 10	Decrease	No/Unknown
9A22	CHRISTCHURCH, SOMERFORD	14	Band 11	Decrease	No/Unknown
9B14	BRAISHFIELD, Romsey	14	Band 11	Increase	No/Unknown
9A52	WEST MOORS	14	Band 11	Decrease	No/Unknown
9A36	POOLE, SKINNER STREET	13	Band 11	Increase	No/Unknown
9A01	BLANDFORD	13	Band 11	Decrease	No/Unknown
9B05	CHANNEL ISLANDS, GUERNSEY	12	Band 11	Decrease	No/Unknown
9A05	BOURNEMOUTH, EAST CLIFF	12	Band 11	Decrease	No/Unknown
9D13	ELSTEAD	11	Band 11	Increase	No/Unknown
9C23	ROWLANDS CASTLE	9	Band 11	Increase	No/Unknown
9A43	MERE	9	Band 11	Decrease	No/Unknown
9B16	BROADCHALKE	6	Band 12	Increase	No/Unknown
9E45	BRILL	6	Band 12	Increase	Yes
9D19	GUILDFORD, WONERSH	4	Band 12	Decrease	Yes
9A49	THREE LEGGED CROSS	3	Band 12	Increase	No/Unknown
9E17	MARSH GIBBON	2	Band 12	Decrease	No/Unknown
9B33	SOUTHAMPTON CHAPLAINCY	1	Band 12	Decrease	No/Unknown
9E52	READING, CAVERSHAM PARK	4	Band 12	Increase	No/Unknown

Section 2 – LEPs

The 2024 figures for LEPs have been increased by 4%. For the record, the list of LEP churches is given below.

9B26	TOTTON Trinity
9A26	DORCHESTER
9B28	WINCHESTER
9D12	GODALMING
9A17	BRIDPORT
9D10	FARNHAM
9D53	ELVETHAM HEATH LEP
9E39	WOODLEY
9A46	SHERBORNE
9B31	CHANDLER'S FORD, ST FRANCIS LEP
9D05	CAMBERLEY
9E01	ABINGDON, TRINITY
9E41	THAME
9D32	BORDON, ST. MARK'S LEP
9A42	SHAFTESBURY LEP
9E49	ABINGDON, PEACHCROFT
9E38	TWYFORD (Berks)
9A41	RINGWOOD LEP
9E06	FARINGDON U/M
9D08	EGHAM
9E22	OXFORD, BLACKBIRD LEYS LEP
9E48	BANBURY, ST FRANCIS LEP Banbury
9A57	FERNDOWN
9C03	BISHOP'S WALTHAM
9C18	PORTSMOUTH, DRAYTON
9D51	BASINGSTOKE, CHINEHAM, CHRIST CHURCH
9E46	TRINITY, LOWER EARLEY

Questions and Answers

A more detailed presentation on this topic, followed by Q&A, will take place at the February Synod meeting. Questions in advance of the meeting are very welcome – e-mail them to David North via treasurer@urcwessex.org.uk - and we have tried to anticipate some obvious questions below:

Can the Synod use its funds to subsidize the amount being requested and reduce the demand on local churches?

While the Synod does have significant assets, it also has significant annual outgoings (mostly the employment of staff), and the assets we have are necessary in order to generate sufficient annual income to remain a going concern. In other words, any significant subsidy from the Synod's funds would reduce our ability to spend elsewhere. It should be noted that the Synod spends money to carry out policies set by the Synod meeting. A proposed increase in spending in one area would realistically require a matching decrease in another.

It should also be noted that the Synod has contributed significant sums from recent property sales to help close the funding gap in the URC Minister's Pension Fund, meaning that we have less money available for other purposes than previously.

Could/should substantial savings be made, for example by relocating the central management and administration of the URC out of London?

The majority of MAM fund expenditure is on ministerial stipends and other direct employment costs (e.g. pension contributions). Central administration is a small percentage of the total, and it is not clear that meaningful savings could be made in the short or medium term as any such relocation would have up-front costs.

The Church Life Review has been considering the wider question of how the URC spends its money, but any outcomes from that will not be immediate enough to avoid the decisions Wessex needs to take in 2024.

What are we getting in return for this money, given there are fewer ministers available/deployed in our Synod?

The URC accounts for 2022 (the most recent fully audited year) are available at <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Trustees-Report-and-financial-Statement-2022.pdf> and pages 13-15 are the most relevant to this question. It should be noted that one of the biggest financial headaches for the URC at the national level has been the cost of ministers' pensions, and with the closure of the final salary scheme to future accruals in early 2023, this area of expenditure should be easier to control going forward.

Isn't this idea of a levy on reserves punishing more prudent churches?

The task group has debated this at some length, and we have aimed to calculate the formula in a manner which only asks for contributes from churches with significant reserves which are not assigned to a restricted purpose.

What will happen next?

There will be a presentation and a Q&A session at the online meeting of Synod in February. The MAM Task Group will then consider all feedback received – both in that meeting and outside it – and decide whether to propose the new formula, or a modified version of it, for adoption by vote at the online Synod meeting in April.

If a new formula is not adopted by the April Synod meeting then the existing formula – with adjustments for inflation – will need to be used to make requests for 2025, as these must go out in April/May in order for responses to be received in time for the Synod to confirm its total MAM figure to London for the national budget to be finalized.

David North
Synod Treasurer
treasurer@urcwessex.org.uk