

MINUTES

MINUTES of the meeting of **WESSEX SYNOD** on Tuesday, 20th February 2024, held on Zoom at 6.30pm.

Mike Thomason chaired the meeting and welcomed members and constituted the meeting.

The Chair, Karen Bell and Alison Johnston led opening devotions, which included Psalm 13, a contemporary version of The Lord's Prayer, and "Lead me to Calvary", a song by Jennie Evelyn Hussey, vocals by Peter Wade.

The Chair welcomed guests to the meeting and those attending Synod for the first time and thanked those on the Tech team for enabling the meeting to take place.

The Clerk referred to the Guide to How to Use Zoom which had been issued and advised of a change to the telephone number for members to advise of technical issues, and some other matters relating to the conduct of the meeting on Zoom.

Attendance

28	URC Ministers and CRCWs
38	Church representatives
1	Ministers of other denominations
0	Retired Ministers/CRCWs
1	Ordinands
18	Others holding Synod appointments
5	Visitors
91	Total

24S01 Apologies: The Clerk reported that Apologies had been received from:

3	URC Ministers
13	Church Representatives
0	Ministers of other denominations
0	Ordinands
11	Retired Ministers
3	Others
30	Total

24S02 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 as published in the Synod papers, and the Minutes of the meeting were agreed with unanimity as published.

24S03 Pastoral News: The Chair congratulated Michael Hopkins on his appointment as Moderator and reminded Synod of the Induction Service taking place on 23rd March 2024 at London Street URC, Basingstoke. Deborah Walker was also congratulated on attaining a First Class honours degree in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

The Chair led Synod in silence remembering the deaths of four ministers since the last meeting of Synod: "May they rest in peace and rise in glory."

24S04 Children's & Youth Work Committee: Josh Thomas presented the report.

- i. At the last meeting it had been reported that the Synod Youth and Children's Camps were going to take place separately and these had been very good. The 2024 Children's Camp will

take place in May, the Youth Camp in July 2024. Josh Thomas thanked the Children's Youth and Development Officers Ruth White and Phil Ray for all the good work involved. Children's Camp bookings for 2024 are going well, with 38 bookings already made.

- ii. Josh Thomas reminded Synod that the CYDOs are available to churches to support in the setting up of new initiatives relating to children and young people.

The CYDOs addressed Synod on their work to support churches:

- iii. Ruth White shared a link to the Wessex Summer Camps Children's Camp and the Youth Camp, which includes a further link to the Camp Brochure 2024 <https://www.urcwessex.org.uk/wsc24/>.
- iv. Ruth commended Broadstone URC who have been exploring the development of their ministry with families. Ruth White suggested their success in seeing and enabling change in their ministries is through their being strategic and intentional in their work. Ruth encouraged churches to be strategic and intentional in their planning remembering that the CYDOs are available to assist churches in being so.
- v. Phil Ray promoted the Children and Youth Friendly Church process which he suggested be regarded as a tool to enable churches to identify and develop their vision and to be strategic for Children and Youth Work rather than as an award. It celebrates what is being achieved in children's work as well as helping churches identify the next steps in their children's and youth development.

Josh Thomas paid tribute to all those working with children and young people throughout the Synod in churches.

24S05 Synod Youth Executive: The Chair invited Laura Everard to give an update further to the report in the Synod papers.

- i. The Synod Youth Exec currently comprises 11 young people drawn from 8 churches across the Synod. The Youth Exec met in 2023 in Gosport, being visited by Josh Thomas, the former Moderator, and Fran Kissack, convener of the General Assembly Task Group reviewing Children & Youth Work across the denomination.
- ii. A group of 15 young people from Wessex Synod representing a quarter of those attending had been taken to the URC Youth Assembly 2023.
- iii. A Beach Day in August 2023 held at West Wittering had been an amazing time of fellowship and an event exploring the theme Story, Story, Story had been held in October 2023 at Westminster College, Cambridge.
- iv. In January 2024 a group of 24 young people had been taken to Youth Assembly.
- v. Youth Camp 2024 will be held 12th-14th July 2024 at the GB Outdoor Centre.
- vi. This coming weekend Wessex Synod Youth Exec will be meeting to plan the programme for 2024, including:
- vii. Synod Youth Exec presence at the Big Church Day Out, 4th May 2024, a Beach Day to be held in August 2024 and an event yet to be confirmed for the weekend of 25th-27th October 2024.
- viii. In addition, Laura Everard reminded Synod that Youth Mission Grants are available to support young people in a mission-based project/trip. Applicants should be aged 14-25, and further information is available on the Synod website.

- ix. A question the Synod Youth Exec wished to pose is: How can your local church best make young people feel like full and active members of their church community, especially if they are the only young person in your church?

The Chair expressed his thanks to the Synod Youth Exec for the events that had been organised.

24S06 URC Children's Strategy: Ruth White referred to the launch of URC Children at General Assembly 2022, screen-sharing some visuals:

- i. URC Children is an umbrella group for those aged 0-12 years in the URC and those caring for and working with that age group, creating identity and boosting the voice of 0-12s in the church, and Ruth White serves as convener of the General Assembly Task Group aiming to:
 - Provide a URC identity for children 0-12 and those who work or care for them.
 - Raise the visibility of URC Children across the URC at all levels.
 - Resource and network those who care or work with children 0-12.
 - Encourage and enable the participation and prophetic voice of children in the URC.
- ii. Ruth asked the question whether URC Children feels connected to Synod members and churches at a local level or not, and invited feedback to be sent to her.
- iii. There will be a Children's Worker's Conference to be held 1st-3rd November 2024 at Ripon College, Oxford of retreat, information and training, bookings open from 1st May.
- iv. In local churches child participation is a chance for children to be heard and to be involved in all church matters.
- v. In some churches children are already involved in planning their groups, in wider church aspects such as Eco Church, the Call of a minister, the choice of charities the church supports, being active members of the church.
- vi. Tools are available to help churches increase child participation, such as the Eco Church questionnaire and the Children and Youth Friendly Church scheme, which contains three questions:

How do we consider the implications for children's and youth work in our decision making?
How do we enable children and young people to participate in decision making?
How do we listen to and learn from our children and young people? How do we share this?
- vii. Ruth shared a picture produced by the children of Fleet URC demonstrating the Children's Charter and reminded Synod of the Lundie Award and Medal and those young people in the Synod who have been recent recipients.

The Synod broke into Break Out Groups considering the questions:

- How are children able to participate in your local church at the moment?
- Where are the opportunities for them to be more involved?
- What might need to happen to enable this? What do you need as a church for support/ideas?

The Chair asked each Group to identify someone to send feedback on the questions to Deborah Walker by email to be sent on to Ruth White.

Synod returned from the Break Out Groups at 19.39.

24S07 Synod Executive Nominations: Resolution 1:

The Chair invited the Clerk to speak to Resolution 1.

The Clerk reported that this year there had been more volunteers to represent the Synod at General Assembly 2024 than may attend. Since the publication of the list of names in the Synod papers there had been further interest and there are now two lay reserves and two minister reserves, one in addition to each category of the names published. The Clerk explained that each Synod is entitled to send two representatives aged under 26 years, and young people volunteering to represent Synod are allowed to represent those Synods unable to send two under 26 year olds as representatives.

The Clerk brought resolution 1:

RESOLUTION 1

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

This was agreed unanimously.

24S08 Synod Executive Nominations: Resolution 2:

The Chair invited the Clerk to bring resolution 2:

RESOLUTION 2

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

The Clerk reported that Scott Wheeler has been serving in the role since July 2023.

This was agreed unanimously.

Synod broke at 19.46 and reconvened at 20.00.

24S09 Ministries & Learning Committee: Wayne Hawkins spoke to the report published in the papers and drew the attention of Synod to the event organised by the Spiritualities Group taking place at Guildford URC on Saturday 16th March exploring “Christ of the ashes: finding life in the season of lent,” with Hannah Fytche, a student at Westminster College. There is a need to know numbers of people attending, and a decision as to whether the event is viable will be taken on Monday 26th February.

The Chair thanked Wayne Hawkins and the Ministries & Learning Committee for all their hard work.

24S10 Mission & Outreach Committee: Philip Bonnier brought the report, adding that the working party on becoming an Eco Synod has met for the first time and another meeting is planned.

Le Weekend will be on 3th-5th May 2024 which coincides with the Synod Big Day Out. Anyone may join Le Weekend at Fleet URC on the Friday or the Sunday, they will all be attending Big Day Out on the Saturday.

24S11 Ministry & Mission Fund update, with questions on MAM proposals: In referring to the discussion paper David North read from Acts 4:32-35 and made the following remarks:

- i. The developments emerging from discussions around ministerial deployment in the Pastoral Committees have suggested to the working party that including scoping in the M&M formula is no longer sensible and that a levy on church reserves should be applied to assist in the process of raising M&M.

- ii. David North offered an apology that communication to churches of the anticipated M&M contributions had been sent only lately but commented on some of the responses so far received:
 - a) Several churches have expressed concern where an increase in their contribution is indicated. David North stated that the best would be done to adjust and steer and refine that requested to ensure the M&M contributions can be met.
 - b) Some churches are concerned that as their current scoped Stipendiary ministry comes to an end they had hoped for a reduced contribution to M&M allowing them to employ lay workers. The Task Group appreciate this is a difficult conversation, but the ministry and mission of the URC is a collective enterprise. It is to be hoped that the Church Life Review may indicate additional answers to this dilemma.
 - c) The levy on church reserves has received comment from churches. David North reminded Synod that it is a legal requirement for churches to send their accounts to the Synod every year. The Task Group will probably assume in the future that every church has reserves that should be levied, unless the notified accounts indicate otherwise.
- iii. David North thanked the several churches with a suggested decrease in their M&M contributions that have responded their willingness to continue to offer more.
- iv. We are all in this together, and the Task Group continue to value everyone's thoughts and prayers and further input.

The Chair invited Synod to seek any matters of clarification:

- i. What proportion of the M&M is expected to be raised through the 2% levy? David North replied this is expected to be at most 1 or 2% of the total amount, but there is not yet an accurate assessment of the figure given the numbers of churches which are yet to send Synod their accounts.
- ii. How M&M is spread and how ministry is deployed is a very difficult matter. Ministers are not a commodity to be bid for.
- iii. Churches must submit their accounts to Synod, which may be emailed to treasurer@urcwessex.org.uk or trustdeconvener@urcwessex.org.uk or trustconvener@urcwessex.org.uk.
- iv. It is good to remember that M&M also pays for the training of Ministers.

The timescale and timetable is that the Task Group hope a consensus will emerge and that the Group may be able to bring a proposal to the next meeting of Synod. Should this not be possible an inflationary adjustment will be applied to the M&M contributions agreed with churches under the existing formula.

The Chair asked that further feedback be sent to David North and thanked David North and the Task Group for their work so far.

24S12 Resolution from Synod Pastoral Committee (South West): The Chair invited Peter Clark to speak to resolution 3 following which the Chair invited matters for clarification.

Romilly Micklem reminded Synod that the United Reformed Church (Wessex) Trust has no standing in this matter, not being the trustee of the building. The Trust has made the offer to provide advice to Wimborne URC, but no advice has been sought by the church. In respect of the building itself the Trust has no role or responsibility. Romilly Micklem commented that the Elders, as charitable trustees of the church's funds, have not yet established new charitable trust arrangements, and that therefore on the passing of this resolution Wimborne URC will no longer

exist as a charity. In this circumstance, the church's charitable funds revert to the Synod General Fund.

Peter Clark moved resolution 3:

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.

This was agreed unanimously.

The Chair asked for prayer for the church and for Synod Executive at this time.

24S13 Remaindered Business: There was none.

24S14 Closing Worship: Lucy Brierley led Closing Worship, reading Psalm 89:1-2 and offered the prayer: "God to enfold me, God to surround me, God in my speaking, God in my thinking, in my sleeping, in my waking, watching, hoping, life, in my lips, in my soul, in my heart." The hymn "O God you search me and you know me" was screen shared and The Grace was shared.

24S15 Thank You: The Chair thanked all those attending Synod for joining the meeting. Synod expressed thanks to Mike Thomason and Josh Thomas for chairing the recent meetings of Synod.

The business was finished, and Synod was adjourned at 20.50 to meet again at 3.00pm on Saturday, 23rd March 2024 at London Street URC, Basingstoke for the induction of the moderator, and then online at 6.30pm on 24th April 2024, or at such other time and place as may be necessary.