

MINUTES

MINUTES of the meeting of **WESSEX SYNOD** on Wednesday, 24th April 2024 held on Zoom at 6.30pm.

The Moderator constituted the meeting and welcomed all to the meeting. The Moderator invited Philip Woods joining from the USA to introduce himself. Philip is a URC Minister serving with the Presbyterian Church USA in Louisville, Kentucky.

The Moderator led Opening Devotions, reading verses from 1 Corinthians 15 referring to three gardens; Adam in the Garden of Eden, Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the Garden of Joseph of Arimathea's and the rock tomb. As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

The Moderator reminded Synod of the guidance for the conduct of the meeting on Zoom, following which a test poll was launched. Co-hosts were unable to participate in the poll and a resolution of this will be sought prior to the next meeting of Synod on Zoom.

Attendance

24	URC Ministers and CRCWs
39	Church representatives
1	Ministers of other denominations
1	Retired Ministers/CRCWs
2	Ordinands
17	Others holding Synod appointments
2	Visitors
86	Total

24S16 Apologies: Apologies had been received as listed below. The Clerk reported that 180 should be present in total and that 84 were present in the meeting at that point. The Moderator suggested the low attendance at the meeting should be a matter for consideration.

5	URC Ministers
11	Church Representatives
2	Ministers of other denominations
0	Ordinands
16	Retired Ministers
2	Others
36	Total

24S17 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 unanimously.

24S18 Matters Arising: None.

The Clerk reported a change of name for a presentation appearing on the agenda and Mary Thomas not Ruth White would present the Mission House proposal.

24S19 Pastoral News: The Moderator thanked everyone involved in the Induction Service and reported that the retiring collection had raised at least £573 for relief work in Zambia. The Moderator referred to the update on ordinands, ministerial and church changes:

- i. David Masters will be inducted to Peachcroft Christian Centre, Abingdon on Saturday, 27th April 2024.
- ii. Alison Toplas retires from her ministry at Beacon Hill and remains in the Synod.
- iii. Kay Blackwell moves to Holy Island in Northern Synod on 31st July.
- iv. Subsequent to the papers being prepared David Downing has been appointed to be Moderator of South Western Synod. The Moderator asked Synod to remember the churches at Bracknell, Windsor, Maidenhead, and Marlow in prayer.
- v. The Moderator mentioned others who would welcome prayer and referred to those ministers named in the papers celebrating Jubilee. These shall be invited to the October Synod to receive certificates. Alternatively, certificates will be presented in their local church, or in person at their homes as appropriate.

24S20 Synod Executive: The Clerk presented the report:

- i. The Clerk thanked all those involved in the Moderator's Induction Service.
- ii. The Clerk reminded Synod of the Big Day Out, stating that Hollycombe Steam in the Country is now fully open. The programme and map will be emailed to those who have booked tickets by the middle of the week following Synod. Any who know they are attending are asked to volunteer for an hour of their time, to please email the Clerk.

24S21 Nominations: Resolution 1: The Moderator invited the Clerk to speak to Resolution 1.

The Clerk thanked all who have served in the past year in the various roles and offices and also thanked all continuing in those duties.

Synod Executive will be meeting with the committee conveners and Synod Youth Executive at the all day meeting on 18th May to consider how the committees function and relate to each other and understand their meeting and work as committees within the Synod Strategy.

Noting the vacancies identified in the Nominations paper the Clerk invited anyone wishing to volunteer or with any nominations to make contact.

The Clerk brought resolution 1:

RESOLUTION 1

Wessex Synod approves the list of Appointments submitted by Nominations Group.

This was agreed unanimously.

The Moderator thanked the Synod Executive for all their hard work.

24S22 Safeguarding: The Clerk presented the report, thanking Phil Ray and Ruth White for assisting Sharon Barr in its preparation. The Clerk thanked all involved in Safeguarding and in particular those putting on the safeguarding training.

24S23 Trust Report: Romilly Micklem brought the report.

- i. Romilly Micklem thanked John Sinclair for his service on the Trust, which is drawing to a close and he was thanked for his wisdom and service as a trustee.
- ii. The Energy Crisis Fund has received a request on the day of Synod which will be considered but the Fund will now close. Churches facing difficulty coming off previous energy contracts are encouraged to speak to Romilly Micklem or Ray Dunnett. The Trust will seek to put emphasis on the Synod's goal of moving to net zero when considering applications from churches related to heating matters.
- iii. Churches are reminded not to use the Wessex Trust charity number and of the link in the reports to a letter written by the Charity Commission that can be sent to those

organisations requesting a charity number. An alternative for churches not registered is to seek to use their HMRC Gift Aid registration number.

- iv. Churches are reminded that it is a requirement to produce annual accounts and have them independently inspected and sent to Romilly Micklem or David North to be filed with Synod Office.

The Moderator thanked Romilly Micklem, the trustees and the staff of the Trust for all their hard work.

24S24 Mission House Proposal: Resolution 2:

Mary Thomas referred to the material in the Synod papers. Other Synods are also developing Mission Houses separately.

The Moderator invited matters for clarification:

- i. Romilly Micklem referred to the effort taken to indicate the most accurate financial information as possible in the report but wished to encourage Synod to regard the figures as budgetary figures. The cost over the three years should be expected to be closer to the final figure indicated than that for the start-up costs.
- ii. Other sources of funding will be sought but in agreeing the proposal Synod will be agreeing to underwrite the proposal.
- iii. The proposal is targeted towards those in the 18-30 age group but application from others will be considered.
- iv. It is envisaged there will be two or three people on the team.
- v. The supervision and pastoral support and management supervision of the projects and the placement within the church will be through a 50/50 split between Synod officers and elders within the church. The pastoral care of team members will come primarily from within the church but also from the CYDO if the team member is a young adult and from the DSO otherwise.
- vi. The financial numbers in the report are predicated on three team members. If two people were in post this would increase the cost to the Synod but not greatly.
- vii. There has not been a consideration of anyone outside the UK being appointed at this stage. The primary thought is that successful candidates would come from within the Synod but then also from the wider networks across the URC and amongst ecumenical partners in the UK.
- viii. A concern was raised that early career people may need more intensive support to be able to fulfil their potential. This has been worked on and is taken seriously.
- ix. A fixed term with a minimum of two years is envisaged although anyone studying while they are working would be supported. The two year minimum appointment will allow team members to be full members of the community in which they serve.
- x. As part of the interview process there will be an exploration of why the candidates wish to embark on such an exploration ministry. Some who had been part of the conversations previously had indicated that formal training would not be appropriate for them. A catalogue of opportunities for education will be compiled. There is a list of mandatory training that successful candidates would be required to complete as part of their induction.
- xi. The apprenticeship model had not been considered. Such a model can be borne in mind. The Moderator suggested that Gordon Woods who had raised the question could contact Mary Thomas with further information should he wish.

Mary Thomas brought resolution 2:

RESOLUTION 2:

Wessex Synod approve the commencement of a Mission House Pilot Project in Poole from September 2025.

Including:

- Asking Wessex Trust to underwrite the set-up costs of establishing the mission house in the Broadstone Manse.

Approving the annual expenditure of the project.

This was agreed unanimously.

Synod took a break at 7.26pm.

Synod reconvened at 7.45pm.

24S25 Stepwise Presentation: Mary Thomas gave the presentation reminding Synod that Stepwise is progressing. At the beginning of Stepwise the graphics produced were of seemingly ordered stepping stones but discipleship and the journey together can be much more disordered with little chance to reflect on where we are going. Opportunity to do so is offered by Stepwise:

- i. One question in Stepwise is regularly asked: Where have you seen God this week? The discipline of looking out for the answer to this question in an intentional way opens up more aspects of our faith and how we see it in our ordinary lives.
- ii. Stepwise is making a difference. People have been engaging in Faith-filled life then seeing where this leads. This has often led people to see how they are serving God in their area and to see this service differently. Some have been led to consider their calling and to serve on the Advocacy Group or as a Facilitator.
- iii. More Stepwise streams are planned for this year in the Synod, namely Faith filled life in person on the Isle of Wight and faith filled worship online to be run across several Synods. Forward planning is taking place towards offering Faith filled community, faith fuelled leadership or faith filled confidence.
- iv. There is an avenue to become a locally recognised Worship leader through Stepwise. But God may be calling you to work with children and young families or with the elderly, or carers. The agenda of the Stepwise Advocacy Group is simply to open doors.

Please let the Advocacy Group know if you would like a Stepwise group to meet in your area. Mary Thomas asked the question: If other streams were planned after Faith filled life, which would be your priority?

24S26 M&M Fund Report and Resolution 3: David North presented the report, beginning by reading Mark 12:41-44, the widow's offering:

- i. The Task Group had received responses from churches and listened to the suggestions presented at the February Synod. If those emailing hadn't yet received response this would be forthcoming and the draft proposal has been adjusted for decision at this meeting of Synod.
- ii. Accounts had not been received from all the churches and so the levy on church reserves had not been included in the proposal before Synod at this stage.

- iii. The proposal includes that the changes in M&M for local churches will be phased in over the next three years, with a base figure and an ideal figure given to each church.
- iv. David North reminded Synod that requests for M&M to churches are requests not demands representing a gift from the churches to the denomination to cover the costs of mission and ministry and churches should consider their giving prayerfully before the Lord.
- v. The total requested from Synod towards M&M will remain irrespective of the policy for M&M requests from churches adopted by Synod.

The Moderator invited questions of clarification after stating that the intention in discussing resolution 3 was for Synod to seek to agree the principle about the Synod formula for M&M rather than to discuss specific situations:

- vi. What will be the stance taken toward churches with a deficit budget and to what extent are churches being asked to run down their reserves to meet M&M? David North asked churches to contact him as Synod treasurer when worried about deficit situations.
- vii. In the existing M&M formula there is recognition of scoping or ministry that is being provided to the local church which is excluded in the proposed policy. If a reduced M&M were permitted thus might enable churches to consider employing a lay pastoral worker. David North replied that the denomination relies upon local congregations contributing towards M&M regardless of ministry received. All four Synod Pastoral Committees are looking at deployment models beyond scoping. Churches with a forward-looking plan would more likely receive sympathetic hearings from Synod and other grant funders when making applications for assistance.
- viii. LEPs are not included in the proposal at this stage but an inflationary increase on the existing M&M will be applied. The letter to churches will include a comment to LEPs inviting LEPs to prayerfully consider offering more than indicated by an inflationary increase alone and also to contact him should such an increase be problematical.
- ix. There has been an historical difference between LEPs on the contributions made to each of the partner denominations. In general, where there has been alternating ministry the “minister element” has tended to go to whichever denomination is providing the minister in post, the membership element being split between the denominations.

Discussion followed:

- x. That there is a flat rate across each band rather than graduation was questioned, as churches that increase in membership could face large increases. David North explained that the flat rate makes the M&M requests simpler to identify but that there is room for discretion for those churches at such a boundary. The letter to be sent to church treasurers regarding the M&M requests going forward will reinforce the intention that those churches with concern should communicate these.

David North brought Resolution 3:

RESOLUTION 3

Synod Meeting agrees to adopt the formula outlined in the Report from the Ministry and Mission Task Group, with phasing in of the changes over three years and tasks the Ministry and Mission task group to review after the first year’s numbers have been agreed.

Agreed overwhelmingly, with none against.

The Moderator took the opportunity to reassure Synod that conversation and communication will be vital and that the implementation of the new process would be gradual and with consultation. The Moderator thanked the Task Group for their work and particularly David North for leading through the presentation of the resolution.

24S27 Any Remaindered Business: The Moderator apologised for failing to include in Pastoral News the sad news of the deaths of Colin Ferguson and David Meacher, two Lay Preachers who had also served the Synod in a variety of roles. He asked Synod to remember them and pray for their families.

24S28 Thank You: The Moderator thanked everyone who had made the meeting of Synod possible: The Clerk, Deborah Walker, the Tech team, the staff and Trust staff and the committee and Task Group convenors, and Alison Toplas for leading the closing worship.

The business was finished and the Moderator adjourned Synod at 20.34 to meet again at 10.30am on Saturday 12th October 2024 at United Church Winchester or at such other time and place as may be necessary.

24S29 Closing Worship: Alison Toplas led closing worship and led Synod in the saying of the Grace.