

Meeting of The United Reformed Church Wessex Synod



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Thursday 27th February 2025

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AGENDA

18:30	Registration for Voting Members - V	
18:45	Registration for Non-Voting Attendees - X	
19:00	Welcome & Synod constituted by the Moderator	Moderator
18:05	Opening devotions	Moderator
19:15	Welcome to ecumenical visitors and new members of Synod	Moderator
	Apologies	Clerk
	Minutes of previous Synod	Clerk
	Matters Arising	Clerk
	Pastoral News	Moderator
19:30	Ministries & Learning	
19:40	Mission & Outreach	Ray Stanyon
Break from 7.50 to 8.00, please be back by 8pm		
20:00	Le Weekend	Helen Everard
20:10	Children's & Youth Work Committee	Josh Thomas
20:20	Synod Youth Executive	
20:30	Good News Stories	CYDO's
20:40	Nominations for General Assembly Representatives	Clerk
20:50	Thank yous	Moderator
20:55	Closing Devotions	Robert Barthram

Next meeting of Synod: Online on Tuesday 29th April 2025

UPDATE ON ORDINANDS, MINISTERIAL AND CHURCH CHANGES

Ordinands and CRCWs training for Ministry

Name	College	Ministry Category	Finish Date
Simon Peters	Northern	Stipendiary Ministry	June 2026
Abigail Perrow	Westminster	Stipendiary Ministry	June 2026
Sue Nichols	Northern	Non-Stipendiary Ministry – Model 4	June 2026

Ministerial/CRCW Changes

1st February Kirsty Ann Mabbott as CRCW at Holy Family Blackbird Leys in Oxford

Jubilee Ministers

60th David Helyar
70th John Sturney
70th Raymond Moody

Deaths

25th November Iain Stewart (obituary to follow)
30th November Brian Coward (obituary to follow)

Church Closures

13th December Waterside, Emsworth
31st December Fordingbridge URC

Changes before next Synod

28th February Robert Barthram retires from the Reading Group and moves to Mersey Synod.

MINUTES

MINUTES of the meeting of WESSEX SYNOD on Saturday 12th October 2024 at United Church Winchester.

The Moderator welcomed all to the meeting including those watching on the YouTube link which had been circulated prior to the meeting. The Moderator reported that there were delays on public transport leading to some late arrivals to Synod. The Moderator constituted Synod.

Tim Searle gave announcements on behalf of the United Church.

The Moderator led Opening Worship: Psalm 150 was read as was Philippians 4:4-9. The Moderator introduced the Synod Prayer written by Cara Heafey and illustrated by Ann Bulley. The Moderator asked members of Synod to take copies of the bookmark and postcard for each member of their churches.

The Moderator referred to those Ministers celebrating Jubilee:

- i. Celebrating 70 years: Tony Tucker, ordained in 1954.
- ii. Celebrating 60 years: Stephen Thornton and Derek Wensley, ordained in 1964.
- iii. Celebrating 50 years: Cliff Bembridge, Margaret Evans, Richard Davis, Bernie Collins, ordained in 1974.
- iv. Gwen Collins began missionary service with CWM in 1974 and was ordained in 1994, so was marking 20 years' service as a missionary, and 30 years' service as a minister.

The Moderator reported that certificates have been presented to some of the above in their local churches but Bernie Collins, Gwen Collins and Stephen Thornton were presented with their certificates by the Moderator at the meeting.

Communion was shared and the Moderator thanked Helen McTiffin for the work involved preparing the Communion table.

The Moderator welcomed. Roo Stewart, Head of Public Issues and member of JPIT, and an ecumenical visitor from St. Francis' Church, Chandler's Ford. Several were attending Synod for the first time and the Moderator welcomed them.

The Moderator explained the use of the coloured cards during discussion and decision. An informal show of cards indicated very strong support for Holy Communion at the start of the meeting.

Attendance

22	URC Ministers and CRCWs
31	Church representatives
1	Ministers of other denominations
3	Retired Ministers/CRCWs
0	Ordinands
19	Others holding Synod appointments
13	Visitors
89	Total

24S29 Pastoral News: The Moderator commented that in the Synod Directory which had recently been circulated the Moderator's address is given as the Synod office. This is correct for correspondence relating to his Moderatorial duties but the Moderator reminded Synod that the manse address is freely available from the Synod Office.

The Moderator directed members of Synod to the Update on Ordinands, Ministerial and Church Changes included in the Synod Papers. The Moderator commented that:

- i. Nigel Appleton has held many roles in the Synod and has stepped down from all these roles because of ill health.
- ii. Sue Nichols will finish her training in June 2026 not June 2028 as indicated in the Update.
- iii. Lordwell Siame has been elected to serve a second term as Bishop in the Lusaka Presbytery of the United Church in Zambia. The Moderator has sent a message of congratulation.

The Moderator directed Synod to the Obituary printed in the papers to Barbara Meachin and invited Synod to stand in silent remembrance and led in prayer for all those individuals and churches mentioned in the Update.

24S30 Apologies: Apologies had been received as listed below.

9	URC Ministers
26	Church Representatives
3	Ministers of other denominations
1	Ordinands
15	Retired Ministers
5	Others
59	Total

24S31 Minutes of the last meeting, 24th April 2024: 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.

24S32 Matters Arising: None.

24S33 Order of business and Announcements: The Clerk reported that there may be flexibility in the order of business. Only one Stepwise video would be screened. Members were asked to ensure they had signed up for the afternoon workshops. The Clerk reminded Synod members that the meeting was being livestreamed.

24S34 Wessex Trust Report: Romilly Micklem brought the report which had been circulated separately to the Synod papers. In the Grants, loans and permissions:

- i. Former Summertown URC: Romilly Micklem explained that although the church has closed the buildings are still in use. The Synod is receiving income from the use of the premises in excess of the costs incurred.
- ii. The grant to Southampton Avenue St. Andrew's of £5,360: This is towards the cost of a one-year extension to the employment of the Community Development Worker.

Romilly Micklem thanked all those churches which have sent in copies of their accounts but advised that more than half have not yet submitted their most recent accounts.

Romilly Micklem brought Resolution T1:

RESOLUTION T1

The Wessex Synod approves an offer of £135,000 to the Inter-Synod Resource Sharing pool for 2025.

This was agreed unanimously.

Romilly Micklem brought Resolution T2:

RESOLUTION T2

The Wessex Synod approves the request to make donations to the central Ministry and Mission Fund of up to £75,000 from Synod funds for each of the years 2024, 2025 and 2026, to maintain the overall payment from Synod funds at the 2023 level.

David North thanked all churches that have sent in their offers of M&M payments for 2025 and urged those churches which had not yet done so to please send him their offers.

Resolution T2 was agreed unanimously.

Romilly Micklem referred Synod to Annex A of the report, Finance and Grants Paper for Synod – October 2024.

The Moderator invited matters for clarification.

- iii. Regarding LEPs, could a distinction be made about whether a different process will be followed for listed and non-listed church building applications, clarification was sought over the word “Major” in “Major Building Projects”, also that the Mission Development Group allocation is not included in the Paper. Romilly Micklem gave clarification, stating that it is difficult to explicitly include LEPs in such a policy; a major part of the assessment of any application for a building project is the mission of the church and this applies to listed as well as non-listed buildings; major building projects might be taken to be those £100,000 and over and Romilly Micklem suggested such projects would be a long time in the planning but that DSOs should be contacted by churches planning such projects in the early stages of such planning; the Mission Development Group allocation has been fully expended. If the Group have further financial requests these should come to the Trust through the Synod Executive.
- iv. Further clarification was sought over the expressions Buy in and Buy out in the section of the report United Reformed Church Ministers’ Pension Fund (URCMPF) deficit. Romilly Micklem offered clarification.

Romilly Micklem brought Resolution T3:

RESOLUTION T3

The Wessex Synod adopts the grants policy set out on pages 7 to 11 of the paper “Wessex Trust Finance and Grants Paper for Synod—October 2024”, attached at Annex A to the Trust Report to the October 2024.

The Moderator invited further questions of clarification and then of discussion in the report as a whole:

- v. Could the Trust offer further guidance on the completion of grant applications if application to the Trust was reduced to once a year? Synod was reminded that the Synod Development Support Officers for personnel applications, the Synod Property Officers for capital applications, the Synod Children and Youth Development Officers for applications relating to children’s and youth work are those to guide churches through the application process and churches are encouraged to contact the officers at the earliest possible opportunity when considering possible projects.
- vi. Could the application(s) form be simplified? Romilly Micklem advised that all that is asked on the form is essential, but that the Trust is always seeking to simplify the application form(s).

Resolution T3 was agreed unanimously.

Romilly Micklem introduced Resolution T4 and the Moderator invited questions for clarification:

- vii. Will it be possible for the feasibility study proposed at the Gosport: St Columba’s site to be a learning resource for other churches considering their eco-church status and future? Romilly Micklem commented that should a new-build eco-church result on the Gosport: St. Columba’s site this may well be a first for the URC. The Moderator said the possibility was noted.

- viii. It was questioned whether there is anything in particular hindering the sale of the site at Bury Road? Romilly Micklem explained that several applications for planning permission have been made over the years that would have enabled the sale of that site but that these applications had not been approved.

Romilly Micklem brought Resolution T4:

RESOLUTION T4

The Wessex Synod wishes to explore the possibility of a new-build eco-church on the Gosport: St Columba's (9C05) site and authorizes a budget of £10,000 to develop a feasibility study, plans and more detailed costings. The Wessex Synod notes that this is an 'in principle' decision at this stage and does not constitute a commitment to building the new church.

In discussion it was suggested that the proposed budget of £10,000 to develop the feasibility study, plans and more detailed costings was insufficient. An amendment was proposed that the stated figure for the budget authorized be amended from £10,000 to £20,000, proposed by Tim Searle, seconded by Gordon Woods. The amendment was agreed unanimously.

Romilly Micklem brought the amended Resolution T4:

RESOLUTION T4

The Wessex Synod wishes to explore the possibility of a new-build eco-church on the Gosport: St Columba (9C05) site and authorizes a budget of £20,000 to develop a feasibility study, plans and more detailed costings. The Wessex Synod notes that this is an 'in principle' decision at this stage and does not constitute a commitment to building the new church.

This was agreed unanimously.

Janet Bousfield representing Gosport United Reformed Church, St Columba expressed grateful thanks for the support of Synod to the Resolution.

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

The Moderator led Synod in prayer.

24S35 Synod Executive: The Clerk presented the report.

- i. A video was screened of the Synod Big Day Out 2024, Seeds of Faith. The Clerk expressed thanks to all who assisted at the event, all who attended and to members of the organising Task Group. There will be another Synod Big Day Out and the Clerk invited anyone wanting to volunteer to serve on the planning Task Group for the next Big Day Out to speak to one of those who had served on the Task Group. The Moderator advised that there are conversations with the Southampton Methodist District towards their possible participation in the event. The Video and photographs of the banners from churches are on the Synod Website.

[Big Day Out 2024 | URC Wessex Synod](#)

The Clerk asked representatives to take the church banners ~~posters~~ produced for the Big Day Out 2024 back to their churches.

- ii. The Clerk reported that the M&M task group is currently putting together a new role description for the M&M secretary.
- iii. The Clerk highlighted the paragraphs relating to Nominations in the report, especially the need for trustees and someone to take on the role of the Zambia link lead.

The Clerk brought Resolution 1:

RESOLUTION 1

Wessex Synod approves the Appointment of the Revd Mike Thomason as Deputy Convener of Synod Meetings.

- iv. It was noted that the spelling of Convener needed clarification. The email addresses for committee conveners is spelt “convener”.
- v. It was asked if this is an open-ended appointment? The Clerk explained it is hoped another volunteer, possibly a lay person, might come forward.

Resolution 1 was agreed unanimously.

Six representatives to General Assembly 2024 were present and identified themselves to the meeting. The Clerk advised that in 2025 General Assembly will meet in July and be recalled in November to consider the Church Life Review. A message will be sent out in December 2024 seeking volunteers to represent Synod at Assembly 2025.

The Moderator reported that no objections had been raised to Resolutions 26 and 28 referred from General Assembly to Synods.

24S36 Good News Story IBEX – Churches working with the Economy: Esther Ridsdale addressed Synod on the work of IBEX, working with the economy, Influencing, Briefing, Enabling, Extending. IBEX seeks to look both ways, taking the Christian message to the Economy and making the Economy part of the Faith agenda. One of the afternoon workshops for Synod is led by Esther Ridsdale on Wellbeing Created Church.

24S37 Good News Story Army Chaplaincy: Stuart Turner is a URC minister serving as an army chaplain and addressed Synod.

The Moderator led Synod in prayer for those in chaplaincy, the armed forces, schools, hospitals, hospices, the economy and the workplace.

Synod broke for lunch, during which a Safeguarding Surgery with Sharon Barr was available as was a Buildings Surgery with Graham Barber and Nicola Werro.

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Synod reconvened at 2.10pm.

24S38 Commitment for Life - Faith Wills: Synod watched a video, Faith Will, inspiring those in congregations to make a gift in their will to their local church and to Christian Aid. Copies of a leaflet “Faith Will... Unlock the power of gifts in Wills” was made available to representatives.

24S39 Ministries & Learning Report: Wayne Hawkins brought the report.

Wayne Hawkins reported that this is the first time that the current numbers of ministers to be deployed in the Synod have been presented. There has been an increase in the number to be deployed within Wessex Synod presently to 29 ministers and section 1.1 in the report gives the target number for each Synod Pastoral Committee area. Wayne Hawkins advised that M&L are expecting to be developing profiles to enable ministers to move into the Synod.

The Moderator invited questions about the sections:

- i. 1.3, Elders in Local Leadership: In answer to a question Wayne Hawkins explained that sections 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 referring to deployment of ministers, active retired ministers and elders in local leadership represent a package that might help us understand leadership in local churches going forward.

- ii. The Church Life Review may well offer a perspective on how lay workers employed in local churches might be regarded as part of the ministry team.
- iii. Can M&L give consideration to the training that is needed for elders particularly in churches that are in ministerial transition? Mary Thomas speaking in her role as DSO and as Convener of Ministries declared there is material on Elders' development online as is the training Hub for elders to engage with but that elders' training is very much a watching brief. Mary Thomas advised that Ministries Department is always wanting to hear from churches on the training needs they perceive.
- iv. 5. Stepwise – it was clarified that the two attendees on Stepwise that have been accepted for Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher training came from both courses that have been run.

The Moderator thanked the committee for all their work.

24S40 Mission and Outreach, Le Weekend: Speaking as the European Partner Link Person, Helen Everard gave the date for Le Weekend in 2025 as being 2nd-4th May 2025 at Luneray in Normandy.

24S41 Workshops: Three workshops were offered, Creating Wellbeing in Church and Community, led by Esther Ridsdale from IBEX - Churches working with the Economy; Stepwise Faith Filled Life, led by Mary Thomas & Ruth White; Taking Action on Poverty, led by Roo Stewart.

Synod broke for the workshops at 14.29 and the Moderator asked Synod to reassemble at 15.40.

24S42 Stepwise 2025: Synod watched a video from the central Stepwise team, which included information on being a mentor and the new Faith Filled Environment which would be available in 2025.

24S43 Thank You: The Moderator thanked everyone for offering such encouragement to him in his taking up the role of Synod Moderator.

The Moderator thanked the Clerk for all her hard work and Deborah Walker who has played a vital role in enabling Synod to take place. The Moderator thanked the team at Winchester United Church especially Janet Messer and Steve Barber who had served on the tech team and for those who had served refreshments in the kitchen. The Moderator gave special thanks to David Wong for playing the organ and the piano at very short notice during worship.

The Moderator thanked Roo Stewart, Esther Ridsdale, Mary Thomas and Ruth White for leading the afternoon workshops and thanked Michael Ruskin for travelling so far to attend as the representative from the Channel Islands.

The Moderator thanked everyone who had made the meeting of Synod possible:

Tim Searle led Synod in an act of Closing Worship.

There will be two meetings of Synod in the Spring of 2025.

The business was finished, and Synod was adjourned at 4.02pm to meet again online on 27th February 2025, or at such other time and place as may be necessary.

OBITUARIES

The following obituaries will appear in "Celebrated Lives"
which is a collection of life stories within the URC Year Book 2025.

(John) Charles Brock

27th April 1935 – 1st November 2023 (Aged 88)

John Charles Brock was born on April 27 1935 in Erie, Pennsylvania to Arloween and Ralph Brock. At High School he became president of the student council and an accomplished clarinettist, with a lifelong love of both jazz and classical music. His first degree was at Carnegie Mellon and, after duty with the National Guard and a spell working in the family business in the metal industry, he studied at Harvard Divinity School. During this time he met his wife-to-be, Carolyn Dexter, from Deming, New Mexico, who had graduated from Oberlin College and the New England Conservatory of Music and was organist at the First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant, to which the Brocks belonged and where they were married in 1959.

In 1962, Charles and Carolyn came to Oxford for further study. The following year they moved to Wheatley, where he was ordained and began a ministry which they assumed would be brief but which turned out to last thirty-six years. At the same time Charles was appointed Chaplain of Mansfield College, Oxford and to Congregationalist, then URC students at the University, before also becoming Director of Ordination Training at the College. When they began their ministry at Wheatley it was a brave move on both sides. How would a young American couple adapt to life in an English village? And how would a congregation which consisted mainly of members of families with deep roots in the community, cope with a minister from such a different background? It was greatly to the credit of both sides that it worked so brilliantly. Charles and Carolyn enjoyed the steep learning curve and delighted in the characters they met, while the villagers took them to their hearts and instructed them in important matters such as making a proper cup of tea and growing their own vegetables, which they did with conspicuous success in the Manse garden. Wheatley was growing as opportunities expanded for work in healthcare and education, and the church flourished. Charles held together the old and the new, valuing those who had always lived in the village and welcoming the new life that incomers were bringing to the congregation. He also made lasting connections with members of the wider village community who belonged to other churches or none.

Charles and Carolyn had no children of their own, but Charles's work in the Chaplaincy and in ordination training, alongside Carolyn's gifts as a musician and as the perfect foil to her husband, touched the lives of hundreds of young people. He always insisted on connecting religion to what was going on in the world, in such a way that theology seemed less an abstruse discipline and more a powerhouse of ideas. His was a faith which engaged with the big issues of the day and could be argued about intelligently. At the same time he was profoundly human, with a highly developed sense of humour and a delight in the good things of life. Few of us who were privileged to study and work alongside him will forget the laughter and the parties in Mansfield and in the Manse.

In 1999 Charles retired from his duties at Mansfield and Wheatley to spend more time with his mother, who lived to be 102. His return to Erie enabled him to resume contact with old friends. He became pastor at the First Universalist Church in Girard, where he regularly led worship. He also taught courses on comparative religion and politics at Behrend (Penn State) university where he founded and directed the Institute of the American Dream and sponsored the first chair in Humanities. He was a founding member of the Jefferson Educational Society, devoted to civic enlightenment. At Oxford he endowed the John Milton Fellowship at Mansfield College, where he delivered the annual lecture in 2022, on Milton and Jefferson. After their return to Erie Charles

and Carolyn continued to visit Oxford for three months each year until Carolyn's deteriorating health prevented this. She died in 2017, and the following year Charles married Mary Lincoln, who, with her late husband, were longstanding friends. They had five years of happy marriage during which they travelled extensively, despite Charles's reduced mobility. Charles remained in contact with his Wheatley and Oxford friends, through occasional visits and numerous communications on politics, religion and education. He remained active until shortly before his death, which followed a diagnosis of advanced pancreatic cancer only twelve days earlier. He died peacefully at home on All Saints' Day 2023, a conjunction which would surely have amused him. Those of us who knew Charles and Carolyn give thanks to God for all that they shared with us and commend them to God's eternal keeping.

Written by Colin Thompson

Arnold Christopher Mellor known as Chris.

28th August 1931 – 14th January 2024 (aged 92).

Chris was a proud Yorkshireman who, having trained as a solicitor, decided he did not want to spend his life making rich people richer. This grew into a sense of calling and he trained for the Congregational ministry at New College, London.

He would never have said that his calling was to conventional pastoral ministry. Five years at Highbury Quadrant (1963-68) were followed by twenty one at Canford Heath, Poole (1968-89) where he was instrumental in building a new church. Throughout his life, Chris had a vision for bringing together all ages under one ministry and this was made clear at Canford Heath in his determination to create an additional multi-purpose building adjacent to the new church, known as The Beacon Centre. Here, work with families and provision for children and young people took place, serving the new estate which was still being built around the church. The local council were so impressed by the significance of Chris' endeavours that they agreed to fund a full time youth worker once the centre was established. This was a pioneering ministry, much involved with the local community, bringing people from all kinds of Christian backgrounds together with those who had no faith at all. Chris saw himself above all as an encourager of faith.

In 1989 he moved to Blackburn, to a more conventional church, where he remained until retirement in 1996. The church at Revidge Fold was in an ecumenical covenant with Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist congregations. Each of the churches served the local community, in particular with lunch clubs, and there were three trips to Poland as part of a relief effort. Chris took part in these. Various faith building courses, held towards the end of his ministry there, led to significant growth.

In retirement in Broadmayne, Dorset, Chris chose to exercise his ministry in the community rather than in a local United Reformed church. He drove for the local hospice, supported events for Christian Aid and Amnesty International as well as becoming part of a team of Street Pastors in Weymouth aged 75.

He had a great sense of humour, enjoyed holidays with the family, walking and all kinds of sport.

He is survived by his wife Janet, his children Sally, Judy and Paul, seven grandchildren and one great grandchild.

Collated by Revd Brenda Stephenson

SYNOD EXECUTIVE NOMINATIONS

The list of representatives for General Assembly 2025 will be sent out separately by Monday 24th February.

Resolution 1

Wessex Synod approves the list of representatives to General Assembly 2025 and allows Synod Officers to appoint replacements should it prove necessary.

MINISTRIES AND LEARNING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Ministries and Learning report covers the period since October 2024 to the current meeting. During the period there have been two zoom meetings of Ministries and Learning.

1.1 Deployment of Ministers and Word and Sacraments

With the allocated numbers fixed the Synod Pastoral Committees have been consulting on proposals for deployment and during the year will be looking to prepare pastoral profiles, identify interim moderators and declare vacancies.

Ministries and Learning continue to hold the oversight of the Synod Pastoral Committees deployment plans, ensuring that Synod has one overall plan but recognising that Synod Pastoral Committees have a better knowledge of the context and needs.

Specific work is being undertaken to support Synod Pastoral Committees in developing pastoral profiles for group pastorates and the mechanisms for calling and supporting ministers in these particular contexts.

1.2 Elders in Local Leadership

The last Ministries and Learning report to Synod identified that we would be looking to take advantage of the General Assembly provision of “Elders in Local Leadership.” A small group has been meeting to look at how we deploy this provision in Wessex and will present to Ministries and Learning in June, with a view to bringing any proposals to the October Synod. The General Assembly paper makes provision for Elders in Local Leadership; we simply need to contextualise it to our Synod and its needs. It is clear that “Elders in Local Leadership” will be an important part of the deployment provision in the future.

2. Synod Pastoral Committees

Synod Pastoral Committees have continued to meet throughout the period (North East, North West, South East and South West), with designated “link people” on the committees maintaining links to congregations. Not all churches respond to invitations to report to Synod Pastoral Committees so we seek to encourage more response, as this is a helpful way of maintaining contact and offering support to each other.

Some highlights from the Synod Pastoral Committees include:

2.1 South East Synod Pastoral Committee

- Revd Josh Thomas is taking on a regular preaching commitment to one of the Channel Islands.
- A final service of thanksgiving for the Waterside site of Havant & Emsworth URC took place on 13 December 2024.
- The newly developed Solent cluster is considering a ministerial candidate.
- The Southern Fellowship cluster is operational with shared ministry across the cluster.

2.2 South West Synod Pastoral Committee

- The two-stage deployment consultation was well received and resulted in identifying four new clusters. Interim Moderators are due to be appointed and will support the process of developing pastoral profiles and calling ministers.
- Ongoing nature of pastoral support for churches when they face difficulties.

2.3 North East Synod Pastoral Committee

- The newly formed joint pastorate of Maidenhead, Marlow, Bracknell and Windsor is considering a ministerial candidate.
- Womersley URC may look towards closure in the coming year.
- Revd Adam Payne (Godalming URC) will offer oversight ministry to Elstead.
- Revd Wayne Hawkins continues to offer 25% ministry to The Spire, Farnham.
- The Revd Michael Hodgeson (St Andrews Walton & Weybridge) will retire at the end of this year.

2.4 North West Synod Pastoral Committee

- Kirsty-Ann Mabbott has accepted a call to serve as CRCW at Blackbird Leys.
- Synod's application for a "Special Ecumenical Ministry" has been accepted for the Oxfordshire area to support the URC's ecumenical presence and participation.
- Deployment plans are moving forward with groups being suggested and Interim Moderators being identified.
- Revd Robert Barthram retires at the end of February from the Reading Group and Lynda Spokes will also be retiring from the Bernwode Forest Local Mission Partnership.

3. Ministry and Mission Fund

The Ministry and Mission Fund working group have continued to meet and will be meeting again to consider a job description for a Ministry and Mission Fund Secretary. The new Ministry and Mission Fund has been rolled out to the churches with good levels of engagement.

4. Candidating Secretary

John Sinclair from Woking URC was recommended to attend the forthcoming Assessment Conference.

Revd Josh Thomas will be taking on the role of Candidating Secretary after Revd Mary Thomas retires and is shadowing her in preparation for taking on the role.

Ministries and Learning Committee agreed that the roles of Candidating Secretary and Ordinand Secretary would be combined to ensure an ongoing relationship with ordinands throughout the candidature and training.

5. Development and Support Officers (DSO)

The DSO's continue to support local congregations in discerning mission priorities across the Synod.

The Leading Your Church into Growth initiative has been very well received and it is hoped to be able to re-run the initiative over the coming period. There were more churches wanting to take up the opportunity and a re-run would be helpful to those churches.

Ministers Spring School takes place in June with the theme "All are welcome" and the Ministers Gathering is in September.

Faith Filled Worship, the next stream in the Stepwise programme will be offered in late spring.

Lay Preachers training will take place in March and Elders training will take place in June.

The DSO's are mindful and active in supporting Interim Moderators as they work with churches in developing pastoral profiles and declaring vacancies.

6. Lay Preaching

Scott Wheeler as Lay Preacher Advocate prepared a paper identifying opportunities and challenges in the supporting of lay preachers across the Synod. Ministries and Learning will consider this at their June meeting and will likely bring proposals to a subsequent Synod meeting.

Finally, thank you to all those involved in the work of Ministries and Learning and supporting the local churches in their life and witness.

Revd Wayne Hawkins

Convener

minister@guildfordurc.org.uk

February 2025

MISSION AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE REPORT

As the Synod committee last met in November, and the Assembly committee meets the week after Synod meeting, this may seem like a “holding” report.

However, there are issues that we are dealing with and others that we plan to come back to very soon that we wish to keep before the churches of the Synod.

IBEX project

The Committee received background information on this project from, and gave feedback to, Esther Ridsdale’s workshop and presentation at October Synod. Reports suggest that the workshop had been helpful for those attending, and the committee will continue to consider how our links with IBEX can be of benefit and blessing to the wider Synod.

Small Grants for Mission

This scheme has been in operation for many years, and yet we only receive occasional applications. Grants of up to £1000 can now be applied for to help you with a small mission initiative, event, or for buying much needed equipment for your work. Details of how to apply can be found on the Synod website or from your DSO’s or Ruth Heine in the office. What could you do in your church and community with the help of such a grant?

Events

We have budgeted the finance and are bringing together a team to organise a Mission Resourcing Day during the latter part of 2025. The aim of this day is to be able to develop local churches in whatever mission activity they are engaged with in a relaxed and supportive environment, as well as seeing ideas for initiatives that could be possible for others. As soon as dates and other details are available, we will circulate to all churches. Please let me know if there are areas of mission that you wish us to include input on and keep an eye out for the “keep the date”.

Church Regeneration Project

During the past year funding for a fourth and fifth year of this Synod project has been secured. Good work is being done in the community around the church and in developing the mission mind of the congregation. The committee will be working with the church and the worker to ensure that the remaining time on the project will build on lessons learned so far.

Let’s End Poverty <https://letsendpoverty.co.uk/>

Your M&O committee often discusses how the Synod can be part of initiatives that we learn of at our Assembly Mission Committee. One such issue relates to the Let’s End Poverty movement. Committee discussed a possible response to the resolution approved at General assembly by NW Synod

“...that assembly committees and task groups consider the implications of our strategy, particularly in respect of the priority that’s given to the allocation of resources for ministry and mission to churches working with in the most economically deprived neighbourhoods and with low-income communities.”

We will prepare a presentation for a future Synod in order to ask Wessex Synod to approve becoming part of this movement.

ECO Synod

In accordance with General Assembly’s request for all churches and Synods to consider how green they can be, we continue to consider how we can move towards being an Eco Synod, initially at Bronze level. The application form asks for various details of local churches and Synod office/Trust

policies and so it is a little more complex than just about how green are our Synod events. But we will get there. If you have an interest in being part of the team pursuing this application, please do let me know.

Links with Lusaka Province in Zambia

On behalf of the wider United Reformed Church, Wessex oversees and administers the wider Church's link with Lusaka Province. It is certainly not a small undertaking, and we are immensely grateful to Nigel Appleton for his considerable work on this over the years and we note a huge debt of thanks to him here. Now that he has retired from this particular role, we are working hard to identify and appoint a successor to pick up the baton.

Rosemary Fletcher from the Southampton Methodist District has represented Wessex Synod at the 60th Anniversary Service of the United Church of Zambia in January and we continue to work ecumenically when and where we can.

If you have an interest in world mission and a particular passion for the work we are partnering with in Zambia please do get in touch with us now!

Le Weekend

Helen Everard attended the regional synod of the Nord Normandie region of the United Protestant Church of France as part of our Synod's ongoing link with this church.

This year's Le Weekend event will be held in Luneray, France in May 2025. Publicity has been prepared and plans are ongoing. Several expressions of interest from Wessex have already been received but please do consider this if you wish to be part of a link with the wider church, and other friends from Wessex, in this way. For those who cannot afford the full cost of attending, there is a bursary fund which you should discuss with Revd Helen Everard in confidence.

Leading your church into growth (LYCiG)

Whilst this Mission Initiative has been planned and organised by the DSO's with the LYCiG team, the M&O committee have a supportive watching brief over it.

Following an introductory talk at the Synod Elders' Gathering in 2023, over 50 people from 13 churches will have completed LYCiG course over three Saturdays by the time Synod meets. We are grateful to LYCiG for re-structuring their residential course to fit with the needs of the Wessex churches. But finishing the LYCiG course is only the start as these churches will need support as they continue to bring principles to life in their local settings.

Several churches were unable to attend this time as we had reached maximum numbers – but please do keep your eyes open for the follow up / second coming of the LYCiG course in Wessex. Decline is not the only option for any of our churches and LYCiG is one effective initiative that helps churches of every flavour to consider their own mission prayerfully and practically with the unique set of resources they have.

Main emphasis of the committee

The committee continues to take seriously the need for us to be resourcing local churches in mission as well as organising things at Synod Level. We cover the work of the three historic groups in Wessex : Church and Society, covering eco and justice issues; World Church, covering our partner/links but also other world church issues; Mission Development Group, focusing on how we can speak our faith confidently, even using words.

If you have any ideas for work that the committee could be undertaking, or if you need any help with where to find the resources and information you are looking for, please do contact us or your DSO

Thank you for your ongoing prayers and your part in God's mission in and around Wessex.

Ray Stanyon
Convener
dso-n@urcwessex.org.uk

Le Weekend – 2-4 May 2025

A weekend away in Luneray, France with friends

For more details email helen.everard158@gmail.com

No French speaking needed!

CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH WORK COMMITTEE REPORT

Children's and Youth Work Committee last met in October and were able to get updates from a number of different events including the youth camp, Synod Youth Exec weekends and some feedback was received from two young people who had been supported with grants enabling them to travel abroad with two different charities (see below for highlights from their reports).

We continue to explore as a group how we can encourage more churches to use the valuable resources offered by our CYDO team, we thought about how communicating what kinds of things they are able to offer could help - this thinking is ongoing.

The SYE ran a successful retreat weekend recently and have been discussing their future as a group and how things might evolve and adapt going forwards. As a committee, we will support them in whatever ways we can.

We continue to support both members of the CYDO team, and I always think it's important to use this report to highlight some of the churches, projects and individuals they are supporting. They are a valuable resource to all of the churches in the Synod and maybe some of the good news examples shared in this report from the CYDO team itself and also from the young people we have supported financially and Ruth and Phil have supported at a relational level will inspire you to think about how your churches can benefit from their expertise in the years ahead. We look forward to all that 2025 has in store.

Josh Thomas
Convener
minister@petersfieldurc.com

Some good news from our CYDO's

Mission at home and across the miles

It has been a pleasure to support Bitterne URC in exploring employing a community outreach worker and journeying with them as they explore what their vision is for their area and how a worker might support this. We often visit churches as a South team (CYDO, DSO and PO) which greater support for local churches as well as a joined up thinking approach to supporting mission. Working closely with churches provides opportunity to get to know individuals one of whom is Anthony Boys, a young man who is the Captain of Bitterne Boys Brigade. As well as working with the boys in his company he has recently established Mercy Collective which is an initiative raising money for communities in South-Eastern Uganda. It began when he befriended 5 leaders in Uganda and soon realising that they lived only an hour from each other. Anthony travelled to Uganda and introduced them to each other so that they can work together. Anthony is passionate about the people in SE Uganda and is focussed on raising funds to support the villages and improve living standards. He is sharing this passion with Bitterne Boys brigade and hoping to facilitate them working together as well as exploring established a boys brigade section in SE Uganda.

Check out the initiative here <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61563509894601>

Some highlights from reports received from two members of the SYE we recently supported with grants...

Jamie Laird - I went out to Sri Lanka to volunteer with the charity Travelteer. They offer a variety of volunteer programmes but I was signed on to the marine and wildlife programme. The bulk of my volunteering was supporting the turtle sanctuary that the organisation is partnered with. I also participated in multiple beach cleans. The final activity associated with my programme was tree planting. What never ceases to amaze me is how everything is connected and how God cares for and thought about every tiny detail. God has given me so many gifts; He's given me passion for volunteering and helping others, He's given me a heart of compassion, but most of all He's given me (and continues to give me) strength to do things that scare me, or I didn't believe possible. I want to go out and explore the beautiful world that God created, giving back however I can. I'm reframing the ideas I have of the job and life I want for myself. I don't know what that will look like, but I know God will guide me.

James Jenkins - Jenga in Uganda. My two weeks in Uganda have profoundly influenced my understanding and practice as a disciple of Jesus Christ. They have offered me fresh perspectives on privilege, contentment, and the role of faith in action. The experience was both eye-opening and transformative, challenging my preconceived ideas and deepening my commitment to living out the principles of Christ's teachings. It was humbling to witness individuals who, despite having so little, expressed a level of satisfaction and gratitude that often seems elusive in more affluent societies. This contentment was a powerful reminder that true wealth is not found in material possessions but in the richness of relationships, community, and faith.

My time in Uganda was a journey of spiritual growth and reflection. It deepened my understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, highlighting the importance of gratitude, humility, and service. The experience challenged me to live out my faith more fully, using my privileges and talents to make a positive impact on the lives of others. As I return to my life in the UK, I carry with me the lessons learned and a renewed commitment to following Christ's example in all that I do.

SYNOD YOUTH EXECUTIVE REPORT

The Wessex Synod Youth Executive have enjoyed a growth in engagement over recent years and sadly latter part of 2024 we have had to say goodbye to a number of members who are looking ahead to new adventures in their lives, further education and careers. This has caused the remaining five members to reflect on the SYE past and present, taking the opportunity to review and identify what future approach might look like.

Past and present members have been asked to share what has been helpful or unhelpful about the SYE. The findings included:

Helpful	Unhelpful
<p>Connect with other young people, developing long lasting relationships, close knit group</p> <p>Increase involvement with church life</p> <p>Providing a safe place to explore topics and faith, discipling each other, developing fellowship during residentials and over meals</p> <p>Offering grants for different young people undertaking a variety of mission projects</p> <p>Fun activities for larger numbers of young people to gather and meet from local churches</p>	<p>Event planning can be stressful at times</p> <p>High level of pressure on a small group of people at times when their focus is also on key exams and education milestones</p> <p>Much of the work was falling to a few within the group rather than being carried by all</p> <p>Perceived pressure of attending more committees/meetings within the Synod in addition to their own meetings</p>

In January around twenty young people from across the Synod met for a Winter Youth Retreat, at Waverley Abbey. This was the first 'retreat' we have arranged for young people, with an open programme offering time for reflection, rest and space for fellowship. We journey through the theme of seasons using it as a focus of metaphor for life and how things change.

During the weekend the young people heard about the SYE, the review which has been undertaken, and were invited to voice what youth provision should include in the Synod moving forward. Those who have been to past events were able to share what they think has been important and beneficial. Below are the key points which will help to develop the future approach for the SYE:

Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synod wide rather than small local ones • Provide opportunities for connecting young people, through fun, exploring and challenging so young people grow and develop through their experiences.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available to all, equally • Improve communication channels to key audiences, better use of social media • Better use of hard mailings – receiving something in the post causes a stronger response, with action, than something electronically. Much more likely to book.

Age Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognise that within the URC Youth age range of 11-25 there is a need to be more targeted with events for three different age ranges – school years 7 - 9, (ages 11-15), school years 10 – 13 (ages 15-18) those young adults aged 18-25 who are either in further education or starting work. • Some events can offer overlap for the two under 18's age ranges or the middle and upper age ranges but should rarely attempt to meet the full age range all together.
SYE 'work'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to possibly be incorporated within the events, rather than at separate times. This would hopefully open up the conversation with a wider group of young people and extend the opportunities further. • Move away from an 'elected' group of young people making up the SYE and undertaking the work, and lean more into working with the regular attendees, recognising strengths, areas of interest and openness to serve in creative and more flexible ways.

Those attending the retreat provided a range of suggestions for future events and activities. All involved with the process are keen to ensure that all the beneficial aspects that our young people reflected are maintained in the future approach of our synod youth work.

These reflections and thoughts will be explored further by the Children's and Youth Work Committee. We ask that you keep this process in your prayers, giving thanks for all the service so many great young people have given the Synod over many years. We trust in God that the future will be led by many more.

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