

The United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales

Minutes of the eighty fourth meeting of the National Synod of Wales
of the United Reformed Church
held on Saturday 14th March 2015 at The English Baptist Church, Carmarthen

Attendance:

Attendance cards returned indicated 30 people present. Of these, 20 were voting members (9 church representatives, 4 active ministers, 1 CRCW, 1 Interim Moderator, 5 Synod post holders and 0 ecumenical guests) and 10 were non-voting attendees (1 retired minister and 9 visitors).

1) Opening Worship

The Moderator, Revd Simon Walkling, led the Opening Worship on the theme of sharing.

The following Elders who had died since the last Synod Meeting were remembered:

Les Bowring, Canton Uniting Church
Carmen Davies, Beulah
Cordelia Davies, Tabernacle, Mumbles
Dennis Frost, Beulah
Spencer Harvey, Crane Street, Pontypool
Llew Hughes, St David's, Aberystwyth
Charles Lintonbon, Stow Park
Roy Morton, Mynyddislwyn
Margaret Rawle, Bethesda'r Fro
Kenneth Roberts, Tabernacle, Mumbles
Gwen Williams, Rhyl

Ministers celebrating significant anniversaries this year were recognised:

David Salisbury 15
Peter Gaskell 20
Samantha Caton 25
Alison Dummer 25
Gethin Rhys 25
Grenville Fisher 30
Kenneth Graham 50
Stuart Jackson 50
Nanette Lewis-Head 50
William Campbell 55
Keith Forecast 55
David Owen 55
John Bridson Cribb 60
Marshall Owen Edwards 60

2) Introductions and Notices

Ministers who are retiring before the next Synod meeting:

Paul Floe

Gordon Sollis

New Elders were welcomed:

Christine Hands and John Rees, Gilwern

Matthias Tchatchoua, Stow Park

Anne Wilkes and Mary Edwards, Beulah

Alan Axford, Yvonne Gulley, Mike King, Tina Taylor and Margaret Worrall, St David's, Aberystwyth

Apologies had been received from:

Chris Tolley

No ecumenical guests were present.

3) Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were available on the website and were accepted without amendment.

4) Synod Council

Item 3.10 should read 'Rural Chaplain' not 'Rural Officer'.

The resolution '**Synod Meeting expresses its gratitude to Revd David Salsbury for his ministry as Training and Development Officer (North) and appoints him to this post for a further period of five years from November 2015**' was unanimously agreed.

5) A Local Church Story

Rosie Buxton (CRCW) reported on the Swansea Night Shelter Project which is an ecumenical project involving a large number of volunteers from several churches in Swansea. A night's shelter and hospitality has, for a number of years, been offered to guests selected by Social Services. Although it was planned to operate from January to the end of March, the Shelter closed at the end of February as all guests had been offered accommodation. The Moderator offered prayers for this work.

6) Ministerial Deployment

Participants in Synod Meeting were invited to share in group discussions regarding ministerial deployment. Few responses had previously been received regarding a suggestion that ministers should be shared out according to numbers in churches. Those who had expressed a view felt that the resources would, in that case, be spread thinly, and that it would cause stress for ministers and lack of growth in the churches. It was felt that ministers should be placed in areas of potential growth.

Asked by the Moderator why churches want ministers, a variety of views was expressed: ministers provide leadership and help churches to develop and move forward; they have in-depth biblical knowledge; they are a focus of unity and mission; they provide continuity of worship; and should be involved ecumenically. Ministers should be freed to do those things that others in churches cannot do. In respect of a proposal to have regional ministers, although it was felt that some ministers have the skill to train and develop elders within a whole region, not all do. Would regional ministry give ministers job satisfaction? It would require a huge change of attitude among congregations.

7) A Local Church Story

Julie Pearce, the Secretary of Trinity Church Porthcawl, gave an interesting presentation regarding their Community Project, 'Trinity Care & Support'. It has been running for twenty years, supporting disabled people and their families. The Project is registered with Care Standards Wales and provides an individual service of friendship and activities for young people and adults. It is valued both by the disabled and the volunteers, each group deriving enormous benefit from the interaction and friendship.

8) The Livingstone Trust Fund

Paul Floe encouraged ministers to use the Livingstone Trust Fund which arranges exchange visits, particularly with churches belonging to the CWM, and from which he had greatly benefited personally.

For the afternoon session, only nineteen people remained.

9) National Synods Task Group

The Moderator sought views on whether or not the National Synod of Wales should be able to speak on and decide issues relating to Wales-only public affairs or the conduct of ecumenical relationships without prejudice to the right of General Assembly to speak and act on the same issues on behalf of the Church either in England or in the United Kingdom as a whole. (This question also applies to the National Synod of Scotland.)

The meeting warmed to the idea that the National Synod of Wales should be able to make these decisions, although there was a concern amongst a minority that this could create a potential conflict with the views of General Assembly in certain situations.

10) Marriage of Same-Sex Couples

For this discussion there were few people remaining from churches which were solely URC. This complicated the situation because the Methodist Church has yet to make any decisions on this subject.

Opinions were strongly expressed. One view was that Christian marriage can only be for heterosexual couples and that it is for the procreation of children. Another view emphasised that marriage is fundamentally a covenant of love between two people and that this can be found equally in gay and heterosexual partnerships. The discussion demonstrated the diversity of views held within the URC.

In respect of the question being placed before churches and synods, namely, whether or not local URC congregations who wish to offer and host same-sex marriage services should be allowed by the Church to do so, there was a majority view that local congregations should be able to make their own decisions about this rather than have the matter predetermined on their behalf by General Assembly.

11) Pilots

Judy Harris (Children and Youth Development Officer) spoke enthusiastically about the Pilots Big Day Out to be held at the West Midlands Safari Park on 16th May, to which all are invited and which will provide an enjoyable opportunity for outreach.

12) A Local Church Story

Rosie Buxton (CRCW Swansea) informed the meeting that due to the tragic closure of the Cyrenians organisation, which has provided a significant service to the vulnerable in Swansea over a number of years, a large number of staff have lost their jobs and a variety of services have come to an end. However, one group that offered basic skills training and a meal has been enabled to continue and double its numbers due to the willingness of Carmarthen Road URC to open its doors to them. Not only is this providing a service to sixty asylum seekers but also the members of Carmarthen Road URC have become involved and the group has been enthused by their presence. This is a good example of a church responding to a crisis.

13) Synod Day

Those present supported the suggestion that there should be a Synod Day in 2016 and the Moderator called for volunteers to help with the organisation of the event and to provide workshops.

14) Closing Worship

The meeting ended with a short act of worship led by the Moderator.