

**The United Reformed Church
National Synod of Wales**

Minutes of the eighty fifth meeting of the National Synod of Wales
of the United Reformed Church
held on Saturday 21st March 2015 at The United Church in Rhyl

Attendance:

Attendance cards returned indicated 48 people present. Of these, 22 were voting members (11 church representatives, 3 active ministers, 0 CRCW, 1 Interim Moderator, 5 Synod post holders and 2 ecumenical guests) and 26 were non-voting attendees (3 retired ministers and 23 visitors).

1) Opening Worship

Everyone moved to the sanctuary for Opening Worship led by the Moderator, Revd Simon Walkling, on the theme of sharing.

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

Les Bowring, Canton Uniting Church, formerly Grand Avenue
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

The meeting moved through to the hall.

Ecumenical guests were welcomed:

Revd Brian Huw Jones – Presbyterian Church of Wales

Revd Neil Kirkham – Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Wales
and Minister of Gloddaeth United Church

Mr Mervyn Phillips – Presbyterian Church of Wales

Fr Charles Ramsay – Roman Catholic

Ecumenical apologies had been received from:

Revd Andy Grimwood – Church in Wales

Ministers who are retiring before the next Synod meeting:

Paul Floe

Gordon Sollis

Brian Matthews, who will be taking on new service after retirement.

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

Jennifer Jones and Lorna Tull will become Elders in the URC upon the transfer of their membership from Llandudno Junction PCW to Gloddaeth United Church.

The meeting was reminded of the dates when churches were being asked to respond to certain issues:

'One Plus One' by 31st March 2015

Registration for TLS by 31st May 2015

'What is the Spirit saying to the churches?' by 31st July 2015

3) Minutes of Last Meeting

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

4) Synod Council

The Synod Clerk pointed out that in item 3.10 the words 'Rural Officer' should be amended to 'Rural Chaplain'.

As there were no questions about the content of the report from Synod Council, the meeting moved to Resolution 3.13 '**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**'. This resolution was agreed unanimously.

5) A Local Church Story

A member of the organising group at Gloddaeth United Church, Llandudno gave a presentation on their initiative "Hope Restored" which had won a Congregational Community Award at last year's General Assembly. A short video was also shown. The scheme had been operating for four years, providing hot meals for the homeless but also much more. The clients were given support with finding housing; help completing any application forms; provided with clothes and toiletries; given food parcels, as they may not have eaten for a number of days; and assistance with paying for B&Bs. The organisation has applied for registered charity status and will know on 15th April if this has been successful. The Moderator offered prayer and thanks for those who are in need and those who provide the necessary support.

6) A Season of Invitation

Revd Julia Bartholomew, the minister at the Bay of Colwyn Pastorate, introduced this initiative. In previous years it had been called "Back to Church Sunday" but was now being seen as a process rather than a 'one-off' occasion. She spoke of reasons why church members at times seem reluctant to ask friends and neighbours to join them at worship. It might therefore be easier to ask them to join you at a church organised social event first. A Season of Invitation was planned to commence in an Autumn with perhaps invitations being given to people during September or October to attend a special service and/or a Harvest Supper; a special service or event for Remembrance Day in November; a service or event for Advent such as a Christingle; and a fourth event such as a Christmas Nativity with carols.

Julia said that training would be available for the North Wales Region and it was hoped that we could trial the process for the Synod and produce a 'best practice' guide while supporting the other regions to help them take this initiative on board. Julia also informed the meeting that Traidcraft had packs of fifty special invitations which could be used for these events at a cost of £35.00. She wondered if churches would be willing to start this Autumn or in 2016. It was felt by the meeting that some churches may already be prepared to take up this initiative. Churches were asked to share their experience with Julia.

7) Marriage of Same-Sex Couples

The Moderator reminded the meeting why we were having this discussion and why each of our local churches were also doing the same with responses to be returned by 31st March 2015. The consultation process had been called for by General Assembly to aid them in their thinking and decision-making on this sensitive issue. The questions to which the Synod Clerk will have to respond as a result of this Synod Meeting were printed on page 14 of the Synod Papers.

The Moderator opened the meeting for comments and questions and reminded everyone that we were not looking for a decision but to consult with one another.

There was great thoughtfulness and care in comments made which represented two differing opinions. On the one hand the biblical view of marriage as being between a man and a woman was quoted, while on the other hand comments were made about marriage as being love and commitment between two people. People read the Bible in different ways and there are a variety of interpretations.

It was noted that views can change over time, as in the past it was not possible for divorced people to re-marry in church but now this was accepted in the majority of denominations.

It was stated that this discussion process could be divisive within the denomination as a whole and within individual churches and would therefore need very careful handling. It was necessary to accept differing opinions. The meeting was reminded that there are differing views on infant and believer baptisms within the denomination and this seems to operate without problems.

The meeting was reminded that where a church was a member of an ecumenical partnership the views of the other denomination(s) would need to be borne in mind. For example, in the Presbyterian Church of Wales the decision would be made nationally rather than decided by each local church, whereas in the United Reformed Church it seemed likely that each local church would decide if the necessary approval was given by General Assembly.

Using the consensus cards the majority view of the meeting was 'warm' to the idea that if an individual URC congregation wished to offer and host same-sex marriage services it should be allowed to do so by General Assembly. However some were 'cold' to this idea.

The final comment was a quotation from the booklet "One plus One", that we should "agree to disagree, agreeably."

The Moderator led the meeting in prayer before lunch.

When the meeting resumed a notice was given of an event organised by Gloddaeth United Church, Llandudno concerning a 'Keswick' Bible Week from 5th to 8th May with Peter Lewis on the subject "Peter. Making of a disciple." More details are available from the church on the exact timings for each day.

8) A Local Church Story – Tabernacle's Ecumenical Story

Revd David Salsbury, the minister of Horeb URC, Dyserth and Tabernacle URC, Holywell explained that for over ten years Horeb had been sharing

their building with Bethel, the Welsh Presbyterian Chapel in the village and it worked well for both congregations.

David went on to inform the meeting that since last year Tabernacle had, on a trial basis, begun sharing the building of St Peter's Church in Wales, Holywell. Some background information about the issues they had with their building was shared. By December 2012 frost had detached some of the stonework of the front façade and it was in a dangerous condition. As the church was a Grade II Listed Building the cost of the repairs was in the region of £60,000. Netting was erected and work was carried out to make the area safe. Then at a Church Meeting in March 2014 it was agreed that a decision needed to be taken on the future of the congregation and building. There were three options: (1) Stay in the church and carry out the necessary repairs; (2) Remain together as a church but seek new premises in which to meet; (3) Close the church and disband. An almost unanimous decision was made to seek alternative accommodation and as the church already had a link with St Peter's Church in Wales, this was the obvious choice. Following conversations between the two congregations, Tabernacle began to worship at St Peter's on a trial basis on 7th September 2014 and have done so ever since, except for Harvest and Christmas. Recently the trial period has been extended to September 2015. It had been a very positive experience and the congregation had been warmly welcomed. The congregation needs to decide their long-term future and in the meantime the Synod is investigating the possibility of 'de-listing' the building.

9) Synod Day

The last Synod Day had been held in June 2013 at the Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells and it had been suggested that this event be organised every three years. This means that a Synod Day would be arranged in 2016 if people wanted such an event. The meeting thought that this was a good idea. The Synod Day would incorporate worship, speakers, workshops, etc., and would include activities for children and young people. If anyone is willing and able to offer support through ideas and/or time, they were asked to contact the Synod Clerk.

10) National Synods Task Group

The Synod Clerk, Revd Shelagh Pollard, referred the meeting to pages 12 and 13 in the Synod Papers. Further background information was given on this item which concerned whether or not the National Synods of Wales and Scotland, separately, could make statements and represent the United Reformed Church on particular issues. These issues may initially only impact on their own Synod but later could be found to have a national aspect. A copy of a report of the National Synods Task Group was available if anyone wanted more in-depth information on the subject. A copy of the Resolution drafted for Mission Council was displayed on the screen and there was a full discussion. Questions were asked to obtain clarity and answers were provided, following which the meeting gave its approval to the Resolution.

11) A Local Church Story – Rhyl’s Building Project

First a notice from the United Church in Rhyl was given inviting people to a Photo Exhibition which was being organised during Holy Week. Copies of a flyer had been distributed to people on arrival. All were welcome to come and share in prayers at 9.30am or to view the exhibition from 10.00am to 1.00pm.

Revd Paul Robinson, the minister of the United Church in Rhyl, gave a presentation on a large project which was being undertaken by the church in conjunction with the local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) which currently uses part of their building. The CAB were looking to develop their services alongside the church and were providing a small large amount of capital for this to happen. However it is hoped that most of the funding will result from other funding applications, to which the Synod’s Finance & Property Board gave their approval. The new facility was to be named the ASK Centre (Ask, Seek, Knock) and would incorporate the CAB services; a Foodbank, giving a quick response to need; and a Digital Gateway with computers being made available for clients to use when accessing government departments, e.g. DWP, as the majority of these services were now via the internet. The project would use more of the space which was available in the building and there would be spiritual engagement. It was a very large and important project for Rhyl as a whole and for the life of the church.

, the second sentence suggests that the CAB Would be providing a large amount of capital - they’re not providing very much capital at all - it’s primarily a church project and the capital is coming from the grant applications mentioned later in the paragraph. I really hope that is what I said in the meeting...

This was followed by prayer, led by the Moderator, for the project, for funding and for all those involved with this initiative.

12) Ministerial Deployment

Synod Meeting was informed that discussions on this matter were continuing as not many formal responses had been received. There were choices to be considered regarding different locations; numbers of members/churches; developing new ways of working; and perhaps different functions for ministers, e.g. a training and oversight role. This subject would continue to be discussed.

13) Council for World Mission

The meeting was informed that grants are available from the Livingstone Trust Fund for exchange visits between the Wales Synod of the United

Reformed Church and churches outside Europe, giving priority to churches which are members of the Council for World Mission.

The Moderator drew the meeting's attention to helpful resources available on the CWM website, including a mission toolkit.

One young person from the Synod will be participating in CWM's Exploration Programme in the Netherlands.

Revd Linda Elliott had been invited to attend a special celebration in Taiwan over the Easter period to mark the 150th anniversary of the first English Presbyterian missionary's arrival in the country. Ministers who had worked in the area over the years had been invited to participate. Linda was asked to take greetings from the Synod.

14) Any Other Business

The Pilots' Big Day Out would take place at the West Midlands Safari Park on 16th May. Leaflets with information on booking were available.

The meeting was asked if there were any questions relating to the matters which had been discussed during the day. There was a query concerning the completion of application forms for DBS checks. Help and support was available for this if it was required, either from the Children and Youth Development Officer or the Training and Development Officer.

15) Thanks and Closing Worship

There were no further items of business and the Moderator offered thanks to the folk at Rhyl for hosting the day and providing refreshments and to everyone who had come along to be part of the meeting.

Those present moved through to the church for the Closing Worship led by the Moderator.