

The United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales

Minutes of the eighty-second meeting of the National Synod of Wales
of the United Reformed Church
held on Saturday 28th February at Elfed Avenue United Church, Penarth

Attendance:

Attendance cards returned indicated 43 people present. Of these, 30 were voting members (11 church representatives, 4 active ministers, 0 CRCW, 1 Interim Moderator, 9 Synod post holders and 5 ecumenical guests) and 13 were non-voting attendees (1 retired minister, 11 visitors and 1 member of Synod Office staff).

The meeting was chaired by the Revd Simon Walkling, Synod Moderator.

1) Opening Worship

The Opening Worship was led by the Moderator 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 (known as Dilly), 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
Judy Harris (CRCW) 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**

Ecumenical guests were welcomed:

Revd Elfed Jones – Roman Catholic

Revd Prof Teddy Kalongo – Methodist

Mrs Ann Niblett – Baptist

Revd David Smith – Presbyterian Church of Wales

Ministers who are retiring before the next Synod meeting:

Paul Floe

Gordon Sollis (Methodist)

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 & Margaret Worrall, St David's, Aberystwyth

Apologies had been received from:

Adrian Bulley

Sharon Rees

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**

A presentation was given by Castle Square URC on "Chewsdays". This is an intergenerational community cohesion project which provides a meal to members of the local community, with an average of 30-35 customers every week.

6) **Ministerial Deployment**

Conversations continued around deployment, focusing on three questions:

- a) How should we support churches without a minister?
- b) How should we help people link in with the URC?

c) What do people want from a minister?

The feedback from these discussions was as follows:

- Churches with a minister could offer an agreed number of Sundays per year to churches without a minister.
- We should develop local church leadership, including elders leading worship.
- Are people aware of what the URC is doing and the direction it is taking?
- What is the level of awareness and interest of those belonging to the URC? Are they committed to the local community but not to the wider body of the denomination?
- General Assembly determines what happens at grass-roots level without any consultation.
- There is a need to review ways of working in the URC.
- We should improve communications by establishing greater links between the regions.
- Where there is no minister, leadership from within the church is forced to the fore.
- We should deploy ministers according to their skills and give them a broader remit.
- The number of people attending on a Sunday is not the only measure of the viability of a church. Think about activity-based measures.
- This is about a relationship with God, not a denomination.
- The closure of a church should not be viewed as a failure but rather as "mission accomplished", in terms of resurrection rather than death.

The Moderator was encouraged by the level and depth of the conversations. Contributions of all of the Synod meetings this spring will be reflected back afterwards.

7) A Local Church Story

Peter Cruchley-Jones, the minister of Beulah URC in Cardiff, gave a presentation on the church's "Eco-Congregation" project. This includes 'guerrilla gardening' and improving environmental sustainability.

8) 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 which has been used by Llanfair, Penrhys.

Judy Harris (Children and Youth Development Officer) advised that one young person will be participating in CWM's Exploration Programme in the Netherlands.

9) National Synods Task Group

Gethin Rhys summarised the recent work of the National Synods Task Group, which was set up by Mission Council to address the following questions:

- a) What does it mean to be a **National Synod**?
- b) In what circumstances and to what extent can the National Synods (Scotland and Wales) speak and act on behalf of the General Assembly?

The main results of these discussions were as follows:

- Is there something distinctive about the URC in Wales? There are subtle differences which are difficult to pin down. Welsh language, culture and heritage permeate all churches in Wales.
- The Synod Task Group was set up to consider the issue of how we operate as one church but across different legal structures, e.g. discussions about same-sex marriage have proved difficult as marriage laws in Scotland are different to those in England & Wales.
- Should we be able to act as the National Synod of Wales in the context of Wales-only legislation that is produced by the National Assembly, or should we bow to General Assembly decisions and not be allowed to speak on specifically Welsh issues, bearing in mind that this will apply more extensively as additional powers are devolved?
- Scotland can speak on behalf of the URC on matters pertaining to Scotland.
- Usually, on Welsh issues, the wider church will look to the Wales Synod for a steer.
- Do we all have to speak with one voice on issues where ethics and morality are involved?
- Is there a way of remaining one church but, when necessary, speaking as a local church?

The resolution considered by the meeting was:

Mission Council resolves to amend the Structure of the URC so that the functions of Synod include:

... in Scotland and Wales to speak and act on behalf of the whole United Reformed Church in public affairs or the conduct of ecumenical relationships specific to the nation concerned, in the General Assembly's name but without prejudice to the Assembly's right to speak and act in the same field on behalf of the church either in England or throughout Great Britain.

A question was raised regarding the use of the word "whole" in the proposed amendment – it could be said that if the matter relates only to Scotland or Wales, then the General Assembly would not need to have a separate view. It was felt that the wording of the resolution is such that it captures the potential for differences between England

and a national (Scotland or Wales) view. It reserves the right for the General Assembly to say that England has a different view.

The vote resulted in three votes against, for the following reasons:

- If we do not speak with a united voice, then we are not a united church.
- We need to have one authoritative voice.
- There is potential for people to go from one body to another to get the result they want.

It was agreed that the response of the meeting would be one of "overwhelming support, but with some concerns about the divisions it could create".

The responses of all four regional Synod meetings will be submitted to Mission Council in May. Mission Council will consider the matter, and, if passed, the resolution will then be referred back to each Synod for agreement/disagreement. It should be noted that Mission Council could amend the wording of the resolution.

10) Marriage of Same-Sex Couples

The meeting was asked the same questions that have been asked of every local church. Discussion took place around question E: "Should local URC congregations who want to offer and host same-sex marriage services be allowed by the Church to do so?"

- A question was raised over whether or not local ecumenical partnerships were being asked to comment. It was acknowledged that other denominational partners may not be in favour, but that this is irrelevant at this stage. If however the URC agrees that local churches can host marriages of same-sex couples, all the partner denominations in an LEP will have to be in agreement.
- Are we happy for there to be no barriers between what different churches want to do?
- In England and Wales, the building is registered, so all congregations who have a formal agreement to use the building for worship would need to agree on the use (but other users of the building do not necessarily have to agree).
- Should we allow churches to decide themselves?
- Why would we want the power to decide to be taken back to a top-down approach?

It was agreed unanimously that churches should be allowed to decide for themselves.

The deadline for local churches to respond is 31st March 2015.

11) A Local Church Story

A presentation was given about the 'Film and Chat' evenings at St David's Uniting Church, Pontypridd. It was pointed out that this might be a resource for a regional meeting.

12) Pilots

Judy Harris confirmed that the Pilots Big Day Out will be taking place at the West Midlands Safari Park on 16th May and that if enough people are interested a coach will be organised from South Wales. The event is aimed at families and church groups. The cost is adults and children over 10 - £10; children aged 3 to 9 - £9; children under 3 - free.

13) Synod Day

The Moderator advised that a budget has been set aside to hold another Synod Day in 2016. Representatives were asked to speak to or email Simon or Shelagh if they have any ideas for the format of the day, or if they are willing to be part of a planning group.

14) Written reports

There were no questions on the written reports.

15) Closing worship

The Moderator led the Closing Worship.