

**Eglwys Ddiwygiedig Unedig
Synod Cenedlaethol Cymru
The United Reformed Church
National Synod of Wales**

**Minutes of the eighty-ninth meeting of the National Synod of Wales of the
United Reformed Church held on Saturday 4th March 2017
at Libanus United Reformed Church**

Attendance:

Attendance cards returned indicated: 32 people present.

Of these, 29 were voting members (12 church representatives, 4 active ministers, 0 CRCWs, 9 Synod Post Holders, 2 Interim Moderators and 2 ecumenical guests) and 3 were non-voting attendees (1 retired ministers and 2 visitors).

Apologies for absence were received from:

Margery Davies (Sardis, Llangynidr), Wendy Roberts (Sardis, Ynysddu) and Brad Turner (Church of the Resurrection, St. Mellons).

Apologies were noted from the following ecumenical guests:

Janice Jones	Presbyterian Church of Wales)
Neil Hook	Church in Wales

The Moderator welcomed people to Synod Meeting.

- 1. Opening Worship** was led by the Revd Michael Hodgson, drawing together the themes of St. David's Day, Ash Wednesday and the First Sunday in Lent.

During the course of worship the following Ministers and Elders who had died since the last Synod Meeting were remembered:

Revd Paul Floe	Retired Minister
Revd John LI Humphreys	Former Synod Moderator
Revd Chris Tolley	Retired Minister
Harry Edwards	Hanover, Llanover
Anne Escott	Beulah, Rhiwbina
Ann George	Tabernacle, Llanvaches
David Gwynne	Plough, Brecon
Russell Howells	St. David's Uniting, Pontypridd
Thomas Owen John	Bethel, Wolfsdale
Eunice Jones	Trinity, Llanidloes
Sue Jones	Beulah, Rhiwbina

Joan Roberts	Rivertown, Shotton
Dennis Smith	Tabernacle, Mumbles
Enid Trollope	Hill, Swansea

2. Introductions and Notices

The following ecumenical guests were welcomed:

Cathy Gale	Methodist Church
Patrick Fitzgerald-Lombard	Roman Catholic

The following Ministers were recognised for having achieved significant anniversaries since their Ordinations:

15 years	Paula Parish-Foley
20 years	Kathryn Price
25 years	Peter Cruchley Barbara Flood-Page Stephen Gilbert Simon Walkling
30 years	Russell Gordon Michael Hodgson Colin Foreman
35 years	Kim Fabricius Neil Riches
40 years	Michael Gudgeon Clive Lloyd-Jones
50 years	John Heywood-Thomas
55 years	Malcolm Shapland
65 years	Tom Owen

The following Ministers who had moved into the Synod since the last Synod Meeting were recognised:

SPI Lewis	from South Western Synod to Valleys Pastorate
Kathryn Price	from South Western Synod to Alun Vale Pastorate

One minister is expected to retire before the next meeting of Synod:

Stephen Gilbert	Christchurch/Caebach, Llandrindod Wells (retiring Easter Sunday)
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The following minister will be moving out of the Synod before the next Synod Meeting:

Michael Hodgson	from Brecon Beacons Pastorate to Walton-on-Thames and Weybridge URCs (Wessex Synod)
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The following Elders have been Ordained since the last meeting of Synod:

Margaret Morris	St. David's Uniting, Pontypridd
Bethan Walkling	St. David's Uniting, Pontypridd

The Synod Clerk drew attention to:

- a) The CWM 'Face to Face' Programme for young adults which is being held in the UK this summer with the theme 'Freedom from the clutches of empire - face to face with migration and human trafficking'.
Wales are to host two participants for their placements:
9th-23rd June based in Pontypridd
26th June – 10th July based in Cardiff
- b) The Future of General Assembly Task Group has produced an online survey in which churches and individuals are invited to participate. The link to the survey is <http://bit.ly/gasurvey2017>, or hard copies are available from Adrian Bulley.
- c) Big Day Out at Warwick Castle on 20th May. Bookings close 31st March so please book if you haven't already. A short promotional video by the organising group was shown.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on Saturday 15th October 2016 were approved without amendment and signed as a true record.

4. Matters Arising

None.

5. Welcoming Refugees

Beverley Humphreys of St. David's Uniting Church Pontypridd spoke about their work with Refugees and Asylum Seekers. After the Synod declaration that we should welcome refugees and make their voices heard, St. David's contacted, then liaised with, their local authority to be a place of welcome, especially for Syrian families. Meeting people, learning their stories and making their new homes as welcoming as possible has been a

learning curve bringing together people of all faiths and none. Highlights have been celebrating harvest and Christmas with cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

6. Draft Welsh Language Policy

The Welsh Assembly has encouraged cross border organisations to consider a Welsh Language Policy. Following comments and clarifications, the following resolution was passed unanimously:

Synod Meeting adopts the Welsh Language Policy as printed in the Synod Reports.

7. District Council

The circumstance that gave rise to the convening of the District Council in January this year was the decision last year of Caersalem United Church to declare itself solely a Baptist Church. There being no remaining United Reformed Church members at the church, it falls to the District Council – in the absence of a functioning Church Meeting – to take the decision necessary to formally close Caersalem United Church from the URC perspective. Following questions and clarifications, the following resolution was passed unanimously:

Synod Meeting ratifies the decision of the District Council regarding Caersalem United Church.

8. Calling Ministers: Honouring Past and Future

The Moderator explained that our URC culture is that we vote yes or no. Is how it currently works still appropriate?

It came from an understanding of a minister giving pastoral and spiritual support in a given geographical area.

Now churches share ministers, are more diverse and may be theologically very different. Such issues make the current process of calling a minister problematic.

As a whole church we're recognising that the current system is under stress.

How could we introduce changes that would give permission for some churches to work in a way suitable for them?

Synod was invited to discuss three questions in small groups:

- i) Who is calling whom to what when a minister is called to serve in a pastorate?

Suppose it were the wider church that issued the call and the pastorate

gave concurrence,

- ii) What would any new arrangement look like and what steps should it include?
- iii) Should these arrangements be used to fill all pastorate vacancies?

Responses included:

- . Some will be uncomfortable if the decision is not made at church meeting level - letting go of current model
- . Onus is on us to work with those who want to work with us - i.e. those we get
- . One rejected any change to status quo
- . Noted problems of expectations and pastorate profile, e.g. of Cardiff situation and potential for this system working if the churches will allow it
- . Power of Church Meeting is invested in how to do it rather than in the final position. A proposition could be put to the churches for them to accept
- . Expectations need to be challenged - e.g. that of preaching and pastoral care still being the role of the minister. Unless this is done effectively, there will always be disappointment with any changes
- . Need to ensure Synod can't be blamed should things go 'pear-shaped'
- . Steps of challenging expectations and involving people
- . Difference of processes for LEPs already a factor and local churches need to be involved in agreeing what process is right for them
- . A step could be a missive from General Assembly saying this is what should be included in local churches working out what is right for them
- . One pattern will not fit all
- . Broadly in favour of a new system and helping congregations regarding expectations of ministry - and ministers are not chaplains
- . Brecon Beacons has overtaken what was the Usk/ Wye region and now have a clear idea of what is wanted and how. Because of history they are self-reliant and have a structure that allows them to cope without a minister. Strength is the ethos
- . We also need to challenge expectations of ministers spending time reflecting on how their role has and will change.
- . Nothing will work unless and until laity are included - congregations need to be equipped
- . Can't discount the high age profile

9. Rural Chaplaincy

Mindful that the Rural Chaplain, Chris Coe, has had to take early retirement on medical grounds and that we are needing to reduce the

numbers of stipendiary posts across the Synod over the coming years, tables were asked to discuss:

- i) How should the Synod engage with rural issues?
- ii) What experience do you have of the work of the Rural Chaplain with local churches, ecumenical partners, the farming community, rural areas and the Synod itself?
- iii) How do you respond to the position of the Learning, Leadership and Mission Board regarding the future of this post?

Responses included:

- . There is a strong need for rural advocacy
- . Generally, rural communities are cohesive but there are needs, e.g. loneliness
- . Need more information to be able to make a decision
- . Needs to be done ecumenically and possibly lay led
- . Issues such as rural deprivation, suicide rates, isolation are significant
- . How does this relate to poor attendance at rural churches; should we engage in appropriate outreach? Could local chapels be equipped to engage in this work?
- . Local churches should be supported to serve the needs of their communities
- . Some of our members are farmers and part of this network
- . We could engage more effectively politically to advocate for fair treatment for farmers
- . We have a significant number of people already engaged with rural issues. Synod should focus on supporting these
- . Could not having a Rural Chaplain/Officer enable us to make use in Wales of the National Rural Officer for the Methodist Church and the URC?
- . Encourage all churches to buy locally produced products

10. Walking the Way

Phil Wall, a member of the General Assembly Steering Group for 'Walking the Way - living the life of Jesus today', gave a brief presentation to Synod outlining some of the ideas behind – and plans for – this initiative.

11. Positive Parenting

Judy Harris introduced this matter for discussion.

Questions for consideration:

- i) How, as churches, can we support families who struggle with behaviour issues of their children?

Responses included:

- . Make time to listen
- . Few churches have contact with any children
- . Strategies for support mean knowing children and having prolonged contact with them and their parents
- . Most of current courses available involve referral services so maybe churches should consider providing something
- . Increasingly parents may see little of their children - grandparents and others may be more involved.
- . Could engage with other organisations to give support, e.g. volunteering with Sure Start.
- . Walk with families not criticise.
- . Support the parent - don't judge
- . Are adults also vulnerable and needing support / counselling?

ii) How can we provide that support?

Responses included:

- . Learn how to listen
- . Support those already providing support
- . Be aware of our responsibility towards everyone - know of some that have left church because of critical comments.

iii) Do we actively provide groups for parents and families where issues can be discussed and resources shared?

Responses included:

- . Not aware of any of our churches providing the support
- . Sometimes a third party offers parenting classes, e.g. through schools, Communities First, etc.

12. Past Case Review

The Moderator briefly outlined the current stage of the Past Case Review.

13. More Able Church

The Moderator explained how this initiative will be taken forward in the Synod.

14. Reports to Synod

An update on the present situation with regards Transitional Ministry was given.

There were no further matters arising from the printed reports.

15. Next Meeting

Synod will meet at the Grand Pavilion, Llandrindod Wells on Saturday 14th October 2017.

Closing worship was led by the Moderator on the theme of wilderness experiences in terms of identity building.
The meeting closed at 3.45pm.

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