



Minutes of the ninety-seventh meeting of the National Synod of Wales of the United Reformed Church held on Saturday 29th February 2020 at The Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells

Attendance:

Attendance cards returned indicated that 69 people were present. Of these, 52 were voting members (19 church representatives, 19 serving ministers/CRCWs, 3 co-opted members, 3 Synod post holders and 8 ecumenical guests) and 17 were non-voting attendees (3 retired ministers, 13 visitors and 1 Synod post holder).

Apologies for absence were received from:

Revd Stephen Best, Revd Linda Elliott (Retired Minister), Revd Teddy Kalongo, Pamela Marsden (Aberystwyth), Jean Needham (Hebron, Mostyn), Revd David Poulton (Retired Minister), Revd Gethin Rhys, Revd Colin Richards (Retired Minister), Helen Stenson, Verena Walder (Tabernacle, Mumbles), Revd Joan Warner, Iris Williams (St John's with Bagillt, Flint).

1. **Opening Worship** was led by representatives of the Swansea Regional Pastoral Committee.
2. **Introductions and Notices**

The following ecumenical guests were welcomed:

Noel Davies	Undeb yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg
Phil Dunning	South Wales Baptist Association
Aled Edwards	Cytûn
David Evans	Salvation Army
Peter Hussey	Religious Society of Friends
Brian Matthews	Presbyterian Church of Wales
Janet Matthews	Baptist Union of Wales
Ian Morris	Methodist Church Synod Cymru
Barry Wilson	Church in Wales

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

William Campbell	60 years
David Owen	60 years
Lionel Thomas	60 years
Kenneth Graham	55 years
Stuart Jackson	55 years
Nanette Lewis-Head	55 years
Grenville Fisher	35 years
Samantha Caton	30 years
David Dean	30 years
Alison Dummer	30 years
Martha McInnes	30 years
Gethin Rhys	30 years
Peter Gaskell	25 years
Jason Askew	20 years
David Salsbury	20 years

The Moderator led the meeting in prayer, giving thanks for lives given in service and the following elders who had died since the last Synod Meeting were remembered:

Ifor Swales	Crundale
Barbara Jones	Libanus, Ebbw Vale
Rachel Williams	Parkminster, Cardiff
Marion Williams	Parkminster, Cardiff
Joyce Challis	United Church, Rhyl
Gwen Rudge	United Church, Rhyl

The following ministers will be retiring before the next Synod Meeting and Neil Riches was greeted by the Moderator:

Neil Riches	Swansea Pastorate
Neil Kirkham	Gloddaeth, Llandudno

The following appointment within the Synod was acknowledged:

John Hayton (NSM)	South Pembrokeshire Pastorate and South West Wales Methodist Circuit
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The following Minister who will shortly be moving within the Synod was acknowledged:

Jason Askew	from Bridgend United Area to Synod Training and Development Officer
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The following elders had been Ordained since the last Synod Meeting:

Kenneth Wheeler	Christ Well, Swansea
Kathy Williamson	Gilwern

The following Minister who has moved out of the Synod since the last Synod Meeting was acknowledged:

Sally Thomas	to Kensington and Bayswater (Thames North Synod)
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The Synod Clerk drew attention to:

- a) The Fairtrade Stall, provided by Just Shopping in Conwy.
- b) The 'Equipping Elders' event on Saturday 13th June for which funding is available for coaches and minibuses arranged by Regional Pastoral Committees.
- c) 'Equipping Disciples: Westminster College in Wales' which will take place from Monday 29th June to Thursday 2nd July, located in four venues as follows:
 - **Monday 29th June:** Sketty Uniting, Swansea
 - **Tuesday 30th June:** City URC, Cardiff
 - **Wednesday 1st July:** The Priory Centre, Abergavenny
 - **Thursday 2nd July:** United Church in Rhyl

A flier was distributed, and will also be in the March eNewsletter.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on Saturday 19th October 2019 were approved without amendment and signed as a true record.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

None.

5. Safeguarding: A brief (re-)introduction for local churches

Judy emphasised that the purpose of safeguarding in churches is to create a safe space for people to live out their faith through safe buildings, safe programmes and safe people.

Judy is available to support churches in putting safeguarding policies into practice and to respond to questions and concerns. Some churches have

not agreed a safeguarding policy because they have no children in their congregations, but safeguarding also covers adults at risk.

Judy asked churches to consider what they do well, what they need help with, and what is the most important thing for them to do.

Mathias Tchatchoua (Stow Park) asked how frequently Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks need to be done. Judy responded that DBS checks in churches need to be renewed every five years, but noted that it is illegal to check people unnecessarily.

Simon Walkling commented that it was important to show a commitment to safeguarding in addition to providing robust systems, reducing risk and creating a positive safe space for people.

6. **Local Church Story: Eco Church**

Ann Star from Hope and Market Square church in Merthyr Tydfil spoke about the church's journey to achieving a Silver Eco Church Award. Their journey began at the Synod meeting in October 2017, with presentations from A Rocha and Beulah URC. The church registered for Eco Church in November 2017. The survey of 94 questions in five categories seemed daunting at first, but it was straightforward. The church discovered that they already did many things listed in the survey, such as Fairtrade, toilet twinning, offering vegetarian food options, and using recycling bins. They added environmental topics to sermons and the bi-monthly newsletter and completed a lifestyle audit as part of a church service. The church achieved the Silver Award in November 2018 and the plaque is displayed at the front of the building as a celebration and a reminder to keep improving.

Rob Moverley (Caerphilly) asked if the church gained the Bronze Award before achieving the Silver Award. Ann explained that, as the survey is completed, it shows the level of attainment for each section. By making some changes, Hope and Market Square was eligible for a Silver Award without having to get a Bronze Award first.

7. **Further Stories from the Israel/Palestine Educational Visit**

Branwen Rees offered some further reflections following last year's educational visit and reiterated her offer to visit churches to talk about her experience and share her reflections.

She described a waste water management project run by PARC (Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee). Water distribution is controlled by the occupying authority, and PARC hopes to make the occupied areas more self-sufficient by reclaiming waste water through treatment plants and reusing water efficiently with irrigation technology.

PARC is also manufacturing organic fertilizer, as imported fertilizer is often stopped at the separation wall, and educating people (especially farmers) to improve food security. When a food truck is held at a checkpoint for several days, the contents perish and food shortages can result.

The group also visited a cooperative run by women, which consists of little shops selling locally-grown food. The women involved explained how the cooperative had helped them financially and developed their confidence.

In Galilee, the group visited Sindyanna, a Fairtrade business producing olive oil and olive-based soap, where Israeli and Palestinian women work together. Since starting in 1996, Sindyanna has won international awards for their olive oil and now supplies olive oil products to Zaytoun (available from Oxfam) and Lush.

Branwen also recommended the Kairos Palestine document (<https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-kairos/kairos-palestine-document>), produced in 2009, which was inspired by the South African Kairos of 1985 in response to apartheid. It is a call to Christians to focus efforts on the liberation from occupation, which is in the interests of all people in the region.

8. **How do we see ourselves developing the place of the United Reformed Church in the life and culture of Wales?**

Simon Walkling introduced the opportunity to reflect on the place of the URC within Wales as part of a review of the Synod's purpose. He invited attendees to discuss the question above. Responses included:

- You cannot talk about one Welsh culture; there are different cultures in the valleys, mid-Wales, North Wales and West Wales
- Using our understanding of prayer and spirituality to engage with others, such as through the Llandaff to Penrhys Pilgrimage, which draws on a concern for mental health and the environment
- It could mean a resurgent Welsh ecumenical scene
- An eco-friendly, safe and inclusive church that says 'Yes, we can'
- Encouraging communities to incorporate the Welsh language more
- Offering a user-friendly counter-cultural Christian reality to a superficial disposable society
- Information flowing between Synod and local churches, engagement through sharing and listening
- Developing a strategy on campaigning, such as responding to the increased use of foodbanks, climate change, and replacing EU funding
- Be more Christ-centred and 'Do the small things you've seen me doing'; start locally and go from there
- Important to work together, especially when campaigning on issues

- Continuing to value and develop the work of Cytûn and Gethin Rhys, and initiating conversations with local partners
- Noting there are more opportunities in Wales, as Welsh culture is less hostile to Christian faith than in some parts of England

9. **Good Practice 5**

Judy Harris introduced Good Practice 5, the latest safeguarding policy and good practice guidance from the URC. Judy noted that Good Practice 5 is available online (<https://urc.org.uk/good-practice-policy-and-procedures.html>) and a copy has also been sent to every church. It covers recent changes in legislation, more categories of abuse, GDPR, recruitment good practice, and concerns children, young people, adults at risk and survivors of abuse.

Judy also highlighted the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, which are available as an app for Android and iOS.

In terms of safeguarding, Judy encouraged people not to ignore their gut instinct but ask themselves three questions: does it look right, sound right, feel right? Judy will be providing ten safeguarding training sessions across Wales every year (full details on the National Synod of Wales website - <https://www.urcwales.org.uk/safeguarding/>).

Chris Byrne (Rivertown) asked if non-URC members would be able to attend the safeguarding training, as they have an ecumenical team providing a lunch programme. Judy confirmed that non-URC members are welcome to attend the training.

10. **Local Church Story: Eco Church**

Leslie Noon and Pat Davies from Sketty Uniting Church in Swansea spoke about the church's journey to achieving a Bronze Eco Church Award.

The church was galvanised by a local Methodist circuit project called 'Creationwise'.

In the area of worship, the church held a harvest service with the theme 'There is no planet B', contrasting a harvest of plenty with destruction and pollution in natural world. The church also produced a 'Prayer in the Park' leaflet, encouraging people to encounter God in nature.

In terms of their building, they have insulation, double glazing and low energy bulbs, and use eco-friendly cleaning projects. The small church garden has been planted with flowers, with bird feeders and boxes installed by the Brownies, and the church is supporting a local Anglican church that is planning a community orchard.

Under community and global engagement, the church has implemented toilet twinning, Fairtrade products and vegetarian meals for the night shelter.

For lifestyle, the church added cosmetics, toothpaste tubes, tetra packs and crisp packets to the list of items they collect for recycling.

Leslie and Pat encouraged churches to celebrate what they already do well and to make informed decisions about what to do next.

11. **Mission and Discipleship Board**

Kathryn Price invited attendees to discuss the following question in small groups and to feedback one point from each group.

a) Eco Church

How might your church respond to the climate emergency? What support could Synod offer?

- Do an audit and assess the scale of the challenge
- Consider carbon emissions in car travel
- Include information about Eco Church in the church magazine
- Synod could send out a questionnaire
- Synod could share stories from individual churches about the changes they have made
- The Synod eNewsletters will include an article on green issues every month this year
- Some churches have declared themselves plastic-free
- Synod could have a designated 'Green Sunday', in which all members, attenders and ministers walk to a place of worship – and not necessarily their own
- An ecological aspect could be written into quinquennial inspections
- Resources are being developed ecumenically for a Climate Sunday during Creationtide (1st September to 4th October, 2020), in preparation for the November climate change conference (COP 26) in Glasgow (details in the March eNewsletter - [https://mailchi.mp/7402db5dc0f2/march-2020-synod-newsletter?e=\[UNIQID\]\)](https://mailchi.mp/7402db5dc0f2/march-2020-synod-newsletter?e=[UNIQID])))
- Youth Assembly declared a climate emergency this year

Kathryn Price also recommended initiatives from Caring for God's Acre, Hope for the Future and Keep Wales Tidy.

b) World Church Links

Kathryn Price asked churches with international links to email her with details of how the link enhances church life for both partners and how it is sustained, with a view to sharing at a future Synod.

12. **Local Church Story: Eco Bricks**

Diane Brain and Branwen Rees from Cwmbran United Reformed Church spoke about the Eco Bricks initiative.

Non-recyclable plastic is washed and dried and then stuffed into clean plastic bottles to make Eco Bricks. Eco Bricks are very durable and can be used in sustainable building projects around the world, including children's playgrounds and outdoor classrooms. More details are available at www.ecobricks.org.

13. **Reports to Synod**

There were no matters raised from the written reports for this meeting.

14. **Closing Worship** was led by the Moderator.

The meeting closed at 3.20pm.