



The
United
Reformed
Church

EGLWYS DDIWYGIEDIG UNEDIG
SYNOD CENEDLAETHOL CYMRU
THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
NATIONAL SYNOD OF WALES

SYNOD MEETING

SPRING 2024

Saturday 16 March 2024, 9.30 am – 12.30 pm

Held on Zoom

Attendance: 45 people were on zoom

Apologies for absence were received from:

Revd Julia Bartholomew (Rhos-on-sea URC), Revd Stephen Best (Chaplain to the Synod Office), Revd Colin Foreman, Louise Gough, Judy Harris (CYDO), Revd Martha McInnes, Revd Kathryn Price, Nick Sissons, Ann Starr

Ecumenical apologies were noted from:

Revd Dr Noel Davies (Undeb yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg), Dawn & Brendan Mason (Congregational Federation in Wales), Revd Dr Ian Morris (Methodist Church, Synod Cymru), Captain Kathryn Stowers (Salvation Army)

1. **Opening Worship and Commemorations**

Opening Worship was led by Revd Lee Battle.

2. **Introductions**

The Induction of the new Moderator will be held at Beulah URC at 2pm on 6th April 2024. Responses were requested for attendance for catering purposes.

The Synod meeting dates for 2025 had been decided and are listed at the end of the minutes.

The Synod newsletter was now being produced regularly and all were encouraged to send in contributions to ensure it is lively and an interesting read.

The following ecumenical guests were welcomed:

Revd Siôn Brynach

Anna Jane Evans

Ainsley Griffiths

Andrew Kleissner

Tim Moody

Cytûn

Presbyterian Church of Wales (Zoom)

Church in Wales

South Wales Baptist Association

Baptist Union of Wales

Parch Jeff Williams

Undeb yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg (President)

3. Minutes of the Autumn 2023 Synod Meeting in person and on zoom

The minutes of the meeting held in person and on zoom, on Saturday 16 October 2023 were approved with one amendment (Synod meeting date was incorrect in Item 6) proposed by Revd Branwen Rees and seconded by Revd Julie Kirby, and signed as a true record.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

None

5. Notices

Ministers and Elders who have died since last Synod Meeting:

Marjorie Dunn	Tyddyn Street, Mold
Patricia Edwards	Elfed Avenue
Revd Grenville Fisher	retired
Alwyn Jones form Parkminster)	Roath Park (before it joined with Minster Road to
Jean Needham	St John's Flint with Bagillt
Vera Redman	Cwmbran
John Rhys	Beulah (and former Synod Clerk)
Dorothy Thomas	Rivertown
Iris Williams	St John's Flint with Bagillt

Ministerial anniversaries:

Colin Edward Claridge Richards	65 years
Irfon James	55 years
Shirley Mountcastle	35 years
Jaeyeon Yoo (known as Daniel)	30 years
Marueen Frances Roberts	30 years
Christopher Coe	25 years
Adella Joy Pritchard	25 years
David Yoe Poulton	20 years
Peter Graham Blackband	20 years
Branwen Sarah Rees	10 years
Julie Dawn Kirby	5 years

Ministers moving within the Synod before next Synod meeting:

Revd Julia Bartholomew has retired from Rhos on Sea
Revd Stephen Best is retiring this summer

Elders Ordained since last Synod Meeting:

Heather Frankish Rhos on Sea

Nominations:

Revd Dr Susan Durber Commission of Covenanted Churches Faith and Order
Group (reporting to the Synod Pastoral Committee)

6. **Lay Preaching Advocate update**

It has been a busy time preaching and training over the last 6 months. I have visited lots of new churches, to me, and made some new friends.

A Stepwise Faith filled worship course started in October and is progressing well. I am helping to facilitate this course and I am pleased to report that at least 2, if not all 3, of the participants are willing to progress further on the course to achieve their Locally Recognised Worship Leader accreditation at the end. This is a welcome result from their studies and will see the south of Wales now have their own LRWLs. The 5 LRWLs in North Wales received their certificates and were commissioned in December. The Worship Hub in North Wales has continued to thrive.

The Lay Ministry weekend was held in mid-November at The Hotel Metropole in Llandrindod Wells. This was well attended by 30, including a very welcome dog. There were presentations given by Diana Tayler, SSO and Judy Harris, CYDO which were both well received. The remainder of the weekend was presented by myself and Stephen Best on a theme of "Responding to the challenge: worship in new contexts". We explored worship from preparation to presentation looking closely at worship leading in context; looked at prayers and images, sharing good practice and tips along the way. I would hope that more will join us this year when we meet again in Llandrindod Wells on Friday 1st November, an earlier date this year. Our theme will be "We are pilgrims". We welcome anyone who is, or would like to consider, taking part, in any way, in services in our churches. There is always something to be learned, or as our eldest attendee this year told me, to be challenged by, whatever our age.

Over the months we continued our Lay ministry zoom meetings on the 3rd Thursday evening of the month. These have included some varied topics and good conversations. Some of these have led to options being looked at and taken up in some churches, which is all to the good. If you wish to join us, then let me know and I can send out the zoom link.

I was asked to take part in a Task Group late last year that was looking at minimum requirements for ministers and lay participants in accessing training at our three Resource Centres for Learning. This was a difficult, and in the end impossible, task but on the way, I was able to find out, and publicise the fact, that there is actually little, if any, lay training given by these centres for lay people. Two of them do hold one weekend conference a year, but this is a charitable event, not funded by the URC. Most of the lay training is done by Synods and is not co-ordinated in any way. It would seem that my input into this Task Group was noticed!

I was nominated in November to join the Ministries Committee as Leadership in Worship Advocate UK, and after due consideration, I felt this would work well with this role. I would have a very close liaison with all the other LPAs in the URC, and it would give a better voice for Wales as well as the opportunity to share good practice and ideas. It will be a good place to lobby for better training for Lay people throughout the URC as well as in Wales.

7. **Training and Stepwise**

Jason Askew (TDO) reported that a Stepwise Faith-filled Life course had been run last

year and the participants had received it well and got a lot out of it. There will be a new online course this year and churches can also opt to do it in person if they prefer. There is a Discipleship Development Fund of £200 to help with any resources, which can be applied for through Jason.

Megan Price made the meeting aware of a URC Spirituality group, details to be obtained from Megan.

8. General Elections

Megan Price and Gethin Rhys encouraged churches to engage with our political representatives. There are resources available including from the Joint Public Issues Team website. Gethin stated that as a united Christian voice, churches could work together. After Easter "Politics at the service of the common good" is to be issued. Gethin asked churches to send in case studies of how churches were doing things for the common good. This could be items that have already been published in local papers, websites or newsletters. The CTBI (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland) have a "Get prepared for the UK General Election" page on their website. Gethin stated that there are 8 million people not registered to vote who should be, so voter champions were needed and churches could sign up for this.

Gethin made an important point that this will be the first General Election where voter identification will be required, as in local elections. There are many who do not have the required photo identification i.e. a driving licence or passport, so it is essential that anyone who doesn't have this applies online for their identity document. There is a poster available for this to be advertised.

General Assembly last year passed three resolutions of note:

Resolution 31: Let's end poverty

Resolution 53: Asylum policies

Resolution 73: reference to the then Illegal Migration Bill which has now become law.

At this point in the meeting all attendees were put into breakout rooms to discuss two questions:

- 1. How could you and your church engage with your local candidates in the runup to the 2024 election?*
- 2. Have you done anything in the past that has worked well?*

A flavour of the discussions follows:

Get as much information as you can, including going to other groups that meet in your church such as WI, Friendship Clubs etc.

An opportunity to show that there are people who care about others and wish to connect.

It could be a community based duty to hold a meeting.

It can be difficult to get all the candidates to turn up, and also difficult to get an opinion heard, so write letters to newspapers etc.

Ensure that the subjects discussed are political issues and not party political issues and look for an ongoing engagement beyond the election.

A meeting needs to have a good strong chairperson. All candidates must be invited but not all may turn up.

Some churches don't want to be involved but it is good to create relationships well before elections.

Working together ecumenically can be better, also ensuring that a proper debate is overseen and is not just a shouting match.

Martin Spain reminded Synod that there are changes of boundaries this year, so these need to be investigated.

There was no time for the second discussion on the Hearing the Voices of Children discussion. The presentation and questions will be sent round to churches for them to hold discussions.

9. Eco Synod update

Eileen Newington was pleased to report that Hall Street, Albany and Van Road had achieved the Bronze Award. There is a new scheme coming in which is a step up from the current one. To remain on the old scheme a Bronze Award must have been awarded. Eileen asked for any news items to be sent to her for publication, as it is good to share news, and stated that there will be a newsletter for new events. As an example of what can be done, City URC had worked on the small piece of ground outside their church and created a beautiful garden with seating. City are looked forward to spring and summer to show off the garden.

Adella Pritchard had been helpful in encouraging Eco church in Hall Street, for which Eileen was grateful. Churches are encouraged to speak to all candidates in the General Election with regard to climate justice and diversity.

Some people joined the Lent vigil for climate justice at Westminster. Great Big Green Week is on 8-16 June 2024 and perhaps churches could hold an event and ask their MP to come along. Ideas for conversations are the Action for Poverty Lent course which is a wider effort to bring Eco higher on the agenda and has several suggestions.

Eco roadshows will be coming which will bring good news for God's earth to each region in Wales. These will help with registering churches and give time for reflection and prayer.

10. Rural news

Martin Spain introduced Revd Julie Kirby as the Synod's Rural Advocate.

Julie Kirby introduced Synod to the issues that a rural community can encounter. 40% of the people in Wales live in communities of 10,000 and less, but there are different demographics everywhere. Historically Wales was an Industrial Revolution powerhouse with slate, wool, fishing and shipbuilding industries providing work, but those industries have largely gone. There is rising poverty and a lack of opportunity but a perceived affluence. There is poor access to diverse employment opportunities and the costs of housing, fuel and public transport are driving young people away from their native homes. As well there are cuts to services which leave an ageing population needing high social care which is difficult to access. How do we respond to Christ's call to "love our neighbour"?

In a rural area it is important to be aware of what needs to be done, ask instead of deciding, and get in touch with people. Listen to conversations – could a “lift to the doctors” be of more help and build a relationship. Perhaps church buildings could be utilised in such a way that it helps the community, such as becoming the village post office or bank. At the General Election ask what is important and then hold the candidates to account, follow how they progress. It is not possible to do everything but just doing one thing helps.

Adella Pritchard commented that it was important for the urban community to hear the rural words.

11. Ecumenical Ministry

A resolution was passed at General Assembly last year initiating an Ecumenical Ministry that is outside of our normal deployment. Martin and Jason have been involved in creating an application for a post of this ministry in Mid Wales, where there is a lack of ministry, and have now put in that application.

12. Ecumenical celebrations

Megan Price advised Synod of an ecumenical celebration of the centenary of the Welsh Women’s Peace Appeal. This was an appeal to the women of America after World War 1 to call for world peace. They advocated for America to join the League of Nations. 22 Welsh representatives signed the petition, which was the first Interfaith cooperation since World War 1. Cytûn are keen to hear of suggestions of how to celebrate.

Other celebrations;

2025 is the 50th anniversary of the signing of covenanted churches in Wales. Could this be marked in some way?

2025 is 1700 years since the first recording of Ecumenicalism around the world. CTBI would like to know how this could be marked. The Nicene Creed is one of things that came out of this.

13. Synod Support Team Report

Maggie Kirkbride and Adella Pritchard have been added to the list of General Assembly delegates but there is still one vacancy and two vacancies for under 25’s. The deadline is 28th March for advising Megan Price of names.

14. Closing devotions

Before David Salsbury closed the session he added his thanks to several groups and people. He thanked Martin Spain for chairing the Synod meeting and Lee Battle for her opening worship, the Synod team for all the preparation and work involved in the meeting, and then to everyone who had been a part of the team who had covered the Moderator’s vacancy since Simon Walking stepped down, especially Jason Askew who took on Moderator Meetings.

The meeting closed with prayer, music and the Grace.

Synod meeting dates:

Saturday 19th October 2024 – Abergavenny in person and on zoom

Saturday 15th March 2025 – on zoom

Saturday 18th October 2025 - hybrid