



THE NORTHERN SYNOD OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH met at Jesmond United Reformed Church, Newcastle upon Tyne, on Saturday 19 March 2016, with the Moderator, the Revd Lis Mullen, in the chair.

Present: Revds M K Alberg, J A Breslin, E K Brown, G R Brown, S Collinson, R A Crofton, H M Drummond, A S Dunstone, J C Durell, I T Farnsworth, R J Forster, J E Grindrod-Helmn, K Harris, M Harris, Dr A P Haws, D A Herbert, J Magee, A E Mills, Dr F J Nelson, J C Paul, D A Pratt, M Prevett, M M Robb, M Shepherd, J M Smith, Dr D E G Whiting, Dr G F Wilson (**Ministers**)

Ms M Bellshaw, Ms A C Honey, Mrs H Stephenson (**CRCWs**)

Ms B Allen, Mrs J Armstrong, Mrs D J Barker, Mrs J O Calcraft, Mrs M A Campbell, Dr P H Clarke, Mrs L Cooke, Mrs G Cox, Mrs M Davidson, Mrs R Dawson, Dr P G Dempster, Prof J W Derry, Mrs C Eddowes, Mr D L Fox, Mrs D Gollan, Mrs L Gowland, Mrs A Grey, Mrs S Hamilton, Dr A Hamnett, Mrs C A Holmes, Mrs M Humberston, Mr R M Jones, Mrs P Maccoy, Mr D Mackay, Mr P B Matthew, Miss F E Middlemist, Mrs H J Middleton, Dr D Moore, Mr W Offler, Mr A T Ogilvie, Miss H Peacock, Mrs V J Pears, Ms L Robson, Mrs C L Roddam, Miss M Russell, Mrs C T Smith, Mrs A Stears, Mr G L Thersby, Mrs J R Tomlin, Miss L Wilson, Mr A Woodhall (**Representatives**)

Also in attendance: Mr A Atkinson, Mr A Braunston, Mrs D B Clarke, Mr R Golightly, Mr H Gowland, Mrs Y Hall, Mrs H E Hogg, Miss P Hunter, Mrs D M Perry, Dr A I Shiel, Revd Dr K Snyman, Mr W Sutherland, Mr R F Todd, Mrs D Whaley, Mr I Whaley, Mrs W Watson, Mr D J Wise

Apologies for absence: Dr G J Aitken, Revd R Anglesea, Mrs M Barlow, Mrs J Boyd, Mrs S M Bush, Revd J Claydon, Revd H J Collinson, Revd G L Connacher, Mrs E M Conran, Revd A L Coulthard, Revd A J Dawson, Miss J M Degenhardt, Mrs M Dobie, Revd W Ellerby, Mr J C G Forrest, Mrs M W Gibson, Revd S M Hamnett, Revd N Johnson, Mr A S J Lie, Revd E H Marley, Revd J S Martin, Revd J M McCallum, Revd D M McFarlane, Mrs S McNabola, Miss E A Meikle, Revd R C Mills, Revd C E Morrison, Revd P C Moth, Mrs D Muckles, Revd S J Orange, Revd Dr D R Peel, Mrs N Pigeon, Revd P S Rand, Mrs S Rand, Mrs E Robertson, Revd A Shepherdson, Mr D Stembridge, Mr J C Storer, Mrs H Sutton, Mrs S J Swanston, Revd M E Taylor, Revd G Thompson, Mrs L Whiting

16/4 **OPENING AND WELCOME**

The Moderator opened the meeting and no objections were given to use of photographs from the day. Opening worship was led by members of Jesmond United Reformed Church,

with readings from Matthew 6: 24 and I Timothy 6: 6-10, and music which reflected the day's theme of the theology of money.

16/5 **MINUTES** of the meeting of 17 October 2015 and further minutes were approved and signed.

16/6 **MATTERS ARISING**

No items were raised.

16/7 **NEWS OF PEOPLE AND PLACES**

The Clerk reported that Revd Liz Blair was leaving St Columba's, North Shields, at the end of the month, to work as a chaplain at Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, replacing Revd Max Shepherd who was moving to Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust, with an emphasis on mental health. Helen Cooper from Durham and Ann Sinclair from Monkseaton, having completed their TLS Gateways into Worship course, would be commissioned as lay preachers on 2 April at Jesmond. Dr Paul Dempster would be ordained and inducted on 4 June to a chaplaincy post with Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and as an associate minister at St George's, High Heaton. Methodist Minister Revd Peter Holwell had been appointed as the minister at Trinity, Gosforth, in September.

News was shared of Revds Greg Thompson and Jane Rowell, and Henry Gowland and Bill Hopper.

Retired Methodist Minister Revd Peter Wright, who previously gave oversight to our North Tyne churches, died in September, and Retired Minister Revd David Welbrock died on 16 January at the age of 89.

Felton URC closed on 10 January, after 193 years.

Revd Alasdair Pratt and Revd Alan Dunstone were congratulated on their 50th and 60th anniversaries of ordination by the Moderator.

Ecumenical Officer Andy Lie had returned from his three month EAPPI placement in Palestine/Israel.

The Clerk reminded Synod that Revd Lis Mullen would be retiring as Moderator in July. No nomination had been made after the first round of interviews for her replacement. A second round would be held in May.

The Moderator led Synod in prayer.

16/8 BIBLE STUDY

The Moderator welcomed Revd Dr Kevin Snyman, Mission Enabler to West Midlands Synod. He led the Synod in a Bible study on the theology of money and debt, based on Luke 19: 12-27 and Mark 12: 13-17.

Dr Snyman pointed out that there was more money in the world than ever before, and yet the world's problems were getting bigger. He questioned the church's role in this, and quoted one commentator¹, the desire for what money can buy has functionally replaced faith in God. All decisions are filtered through this lens, so what is needed is a new way of seeing the world, focussing on empire, *ekklesia*, and the nature of money.

As CWM had noted², God's mission has always taken place in the context of empire. Empire had been defined as "a coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power", serving the interests of the powerful and colonising the collective consciousness.³ Read in this light, the parable of the talents in Luke 19 could be seen as a potentially subversive critique of political and fiscal realities.

The Church had been described as those who come out of the empire.⁴ The Bible reflected a tension between two competing ways of being God's people: a religion of empire or a religion of creation.

Dr Snyman concluded by calling on the Church to acknowledge its complicity in the system, to study scripture with new eyes, and to practise sharing and generosity.

16/9 THE DENOMINATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The Moderator related the denominational Treasurer's six helpings of good news, shared at Mission Council in November 2015.

- The pension fund for ministers does not require additional funding
- The recalled General Assembly cost less than expected
- The Windermere Centre was on a firmer financial footing
- The overall M&M giving was better than expected

¹ Ernst Conradie, 'Globalisation, consumerism and the call for a *status confessionis*' in *Globalisation Volume II: Global crisis, global challenge, global faith: An ongoing response to the Accra Confession* © 2010 Stellenbosch University, Beyers Naudé Centre

² *Mission in the Context of Empire: CWM Theology statement* 2010 www.cwmission.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/mission-and-empire.pdf

³ *The Globalisation Project* – Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa and Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany, quoted in *ibid*

⁴ *Come out, My People! God's call out of empire in the Bible and beyond* © 2010 Wes Howard-Brook

- The 2015 out-turn will be better than budget and the expected 2016 budget deficit was easily covered
- And, as far as could be told, there were no 'budget horrors' awaiting us in 2017 or 2018.

She explained that the denomination had assets but would not in future have many ministers, as the baby boomers came to retirement. She pointed out that it was 6 years since Northern Synod last sent a candidate for ministerial training.

16/10 **THE SYNOD, ITS MONEY AND MISSION**

Revd Dr Tony Haws spoke to his report. The Trust had been prudent in building up reserves for a rainy day. The key question was whether the rainy day had now arrived. The Synod needed to balance prudent maintenance of sufficient reserves, using resources wisely, and seizing mission opportunities.

In the course of a question and answer session, the following points were made. A medium-term plan may help to some extent, although the main thing was to work towards a common purpose. In the context of the crisis in ministry, the church needed to dream new dreams. It could be prudent and visionary to spend reserves, as had been done with the Development Team in the 1990s, although it needed everyone to be engaged to keep it on track.

Committee convenors then came forward, and discussion was invited on their printed reports.

16/11 **MISSION**

The Convenor, Revd Meg Robb, added that the committee was now looking at research into homelessness in the region.

16/12 **CHILDREN'S & YOUTH WORK**

The Convenor, Sandy Ogilvie, appealed for one or two people from the south of the Synod to join the committee. Resolution 1 was then moved and carried.

Synod approves the revised remit of the Children's & Youth Work Committee, dated January 2016.

16/13 **PASTORAL**

The Convenor, Revd Gordon Brown, confirmed that all candidates for lay presidency had satisfactorily completed their training. Resolutions 2 and 3 were then moved and carried.

Synod agrees to the closure of Felton United Reformed Church, with effect from 10 January 2016, giving thanks for its life and witness, and commending its members to the care of Almighty God.

16/14 **Synod grants authorisation to the following individuals, subject to satisfactory training (except for those who have already completed it), to preside at the sacraments within their own mission partnerships in cases of pastoral necessity in the coming year: Ann Tunnard and Lisa Wilson (North Northumberland), John Robson (Coast), and Cathy Leggett (County Durham).**

16/15 **TRUST**

The Chair of the Board, Revd James Breslin, appealed for one or two people from the north of the Synod to join the Board. Resolutions 10 and 11 were then moved and carried.

Synod confirms the appointment of Tony Haws as Synod Treasurer to serve from 19 March 2016 to 31 December 2018.

16/16 **Synod appoints Heather Finlayson and Jane Tomlin as Directors of the United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited, to serve from 19 March 2016 to 31 December 2018.**

16/17 Ethical Investment Policy

Mr Breslin presented his printed report on ethical investment policy, which came with the support of the Board. He explained that the Trust's aim was to maximise income and growth, with a view to generating sufficient income to support the work of the Synod on an ongoing basis. The Trust's investments were managed in accordance with its policy, which would be reviewed following the review of investment manager next year. Concerns were voiced by several Synod members about continuing to invest in alcohol, given the negative social effects throughout the region.

Jane Tomlin (St Andrew's, Nunthorpe & Marton) proposed and Mary Bellshaw (Community Worker) seconded the following resolution, which was carried, with 5 votes against.

Synod requests the Trust to divest itself of its shares in Diageo plc as soon as possible.

16/18 Mr Breslin undertook to seek agreement from the Investment Subcommittee next week, with a view to instructing the Trust's investment manager accordingly. Resolution 12 was then also moved and carried.

Synod notes the report on ethical investment, and resolves to revisit this issue in October 2017.

16/19 Synod reconvened after a lunch break, and Jane Tomlin gave appreciation for the clear financial information provided by Helen Hogg in the book of reports, and encouraged members to take an intelligent interest in this.

16/20 There was nothing to add in relation to the reports on Ministries & Development, Commitment for Life, Local Mission & Ministry Review, Listed Buildings Advisory Committee and Northumbrian Industrial Mission.

16/21 NOMINATIONS FOR MODERATORS OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2018-2020

The Synod Clerk announced that Revd Lesley Charlton had received the support of the Synod ballot (Revd Rachel Poolman having indicated a wish to withdraw). Accordingly, she would inform the General Secretary of this result.

16/22 CHILDREN'S WORK ADVISOR

Hannah Middleton spoke of the good work being done, with creativity, energy and enthusiasm in local churches, and encouraged more churches to invite her to visit them. She advertised three forthcoming events: a *Messy Church* swap shop at St Columba's, North Shields on 21 May, a Children's Workers' Day also at North Shields on 2 July, and the Staying Alive youth camp at Seahouses on 28-31 July.

16/23 KELD RESOURCE CENTRE

Revd Stephen Collinson thanked the Synod for its support of this project, and outlined the refurbishment of the Institute which was currently underway. He encouraged groups from all over the Synod to use this resource.

16/24 GRINDON MISSION PROJECT

Revd Dr David Whiting paid tribute to Dorothy Muckles, who had helped to maintain the project over several years, and was now retiring from this role.

16/25 ST CUTHBERT'S CENTRE, HOLY ISLAND

There was nothing to report.

16/26 ST ANTONY'S PRIORY: THE DIFFERENCE YOUR MONEY CAN MAKE

The Moderator welcomed Yvonne Hall, who thanked Synod for its generous grant, and spoke of the priory's outreach project. She gave an inspirational talk on this work, which was making a huge difference for recovering drug addicts and their carers, and showed the grace of God at work.

16/27 THE WAY FORWARD

The Moderator then introduced her printed report on Synod strategy. She explained that, although the Synod was viable, it was facing the same problems as the rest of the denomination – declining membership, smaller congregations, and fewer ministers. In 2016, there would be five churches in the Synod without ministry; within 12-18 months it could be 16 churches, and by 2020 it could be 21, as more ministers came to retirement. Spreading ministry thinner, freezing vacancies, forcing churches to unite or work together more closely were undesirable options.

Accordingly, Synod Executive had been looking at more radical solutions, in consultation with ministers, and following last year's Thinking Day. New patterns of ministry,

strengthening and supporting our congregations in their discipleship, and using our financial resources to develop our mission have emerged as common themes in the discussions and consultations which have occurred. She was now asking Synod to endorse this direction of travel by way of an enabling resolution.

Discussion in groups and plenary followed. The Moderator undertook to send her presentation to churches to be printed in their magazines so that all church members could be informed of the proposed Way Forward. Support was voiced for using ministers for pioneering work and training churches to do things differently. With Synod's support, churches may be able to make greater use of technology, although personal relational ministry was also valued. Concern was also expressed for the diminution of the concept of call. The Moderator encouraged members to continue thinking on this and giving her their ideas. Resolution 4 was then moved and carried.

a) Synod agrees in principle to, and affirms the value of:

developing new patterns of ministry and

building up our laity,

recognising that to do so may involve use of our resources to serve our churches and others.

b) Having heard the Synod Treasurer outline the choices we have before us, Synod directs Synod Executive and requests the Trust to use the financial assets in such a way as to mutually encourage the development of mission and service.

16/28 **TRAINING FOR LEARNING AND SERVING**

Chris Eddowes promoted TLS as a means of training lay people in churches. The Foundation Course was being re-written, but other courses continued to run. She asked to be told if people were doing TLS LITE, as she could organise groups over a wider area if needed. Synod funding was available for the main TLS courses, and it was suggested should also be available for TLS LITE. TLS was also a route to accreditation as a lay preacher. Ann Sinclair and Helen Cooper had completed the Gateways into Worship course, and the Moderator presented a certificate to Dr Sinclair, who was present at Synod.

16/29 **CHARITY FUNDRAISING**

Daphne Clarke spoke of her appearance on BBC's *One Show* following a letter to her local paper, which had led to her being invited to join the Commission on the Donor Experience.

16/30 **SHARED INTEREST**

Diane Whaley spoke of the work of local charity Shared Interest, which was the largest fair trade lender in the world, and encouraged members to use it as a means of investing ethically. She was available to speak on this subject at churches.

16/31 MODERATOR'S UPDATE

The Moderator referred to the printed reports on the work of the northerly synods and Synod Executive. She also spoke of the Northern Church Leaders' day of prayer at St Antony's Priory, and recent visit to Redcar and Middlesbrough, to see a foodbank and community shop run from a church. Nominations were needed for the northerly synods' listening and reconciliation service for local churches, as well as listeners for the denomination's past cases review.

Mozambique

The Moderator would hold an open house serving strawberries on 2 July, to raise £5,000 to help the Presbyterian Church of Mozambique replace the 4x4 vehicle bought with funds raised by Synod in 2007.

16/32 SYNOD EXECUTIVE

Resolutions 5-9 and 13 were taken *en bloc* and carried.

Synod accepts the amendments to the Synod safeguarding policy, and encourages each church to ensure it is compliant with statutory safeguarding requirements.

16/33 Synod recognises the need to increase safeguarding capacity, and authorises Synod Executive to put suitable arrangements in place. This may take the form of a fixed-term part-time post shared with Yorkshire Synod or such other arrangement as is deemed appropriate to meet Synod requirements.

16/34 Synod appoints Rachel Poolman, Joan Grindrod-Helmn, Matthew Prevett, Dorothy Blenkinsopp, Margaret Brock, Margaret Humberston, Paul Humberston, Bob Jones, Linda Robson and Abigail Morrison as its representatives to the 2016 General Assembly, and authorises Synod Executive to appoint alternates should the need arise and one other under-26 representative.

16/35 Synod appoints Tony Haws as its fourth representative to Mission Council, to serve from 19 March 2016 to 31 December 2018.

16/36 Synod resolves to next meet at St George's United Reformed Church, Hartlepool, on Saturday 8 October 2016, or at such other place and time as may be convenient.

16/37 Synod accepts the recommendations from the northerly synods consultations and agrees to the following work being done:

- a) continuing to support the northerly synods 'being church' developments, and offering £500 to assist with arrangements for the joint northerly synods conference in 2017;
- b) (in recognition that Church House is not in a position to provide synods and all churches with operational HR support) enabling the Trust and Synod Executive to

work with northerly synods colleagues to put appropriate HR arrangements in place for synods and churches, providing they consider them to be good value;

- c) continuing to support the northerly synods Safeguarding task group to collectively develop our safeguarding practice in ways that reduce duplication of time and resources;**
- d) enabling Synod Executive and the Trust to put in place feasible and appropriate arrangements to fulfil our safeguarding statutory requirements;**
- e) supporting the Listening and Reconciliation task group, and offering £500 for the training arrangements as we find ways to walk alongside churches in difficult situations.**

The Synod Clerk then moved resolution 14, which was carried.

16/38 For the avoidance of doubt, Synod confirms Hannah Middleton as a member of Northern Synod for as long as she remains employed as Synod Children’s Work Advisor.

16/39 MISSION COUNCIL

The Clerk briefly reported on the recent meeting. The United Reformed Church was sponsoring the Greenbelt Christian festival. Study resources were being prepared on refugees. The future of General Assembly had been discussed. Church House was to be upgraded to make it more cost-effective and disability and environmentally friendly.

16/40 CONCLUDING REMARKS

As this would be her last meeting in Northern Synod, the Moderator gave thanks for the support given to her. A farewell service would be held on 16 July at St Margaret’s, South Shields. Peter Clarke (Low Row) responded by thanking her for what she had achieved, remarking that she had been “a gale of fresh air.” Synod showed its appreciation with applause.

16/41 CLOSE

Alan Woodhall (St George’s, Hartlepool) formally invited Synod to come to Hartlepool for its next meeting on 8 October. The Moderator thanked the members of Jesmond for their hospitality. She then led Synod in closing worship and Communion. A retiring collection was held for Christian Aid’s campaign for mosquito nets.

..... Moderator

..... Synod Clerk

..... Date