



Northern Synod

11 March 2017

**THE NORTHERN SYNOD OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH** met at West End United Reformed Church, Newcastle, on Saturday 11 March 2017, with the Moderator, the Revd Dave Herbert, in the chair.

**Present:** Revds J A Breslin, S J Brock, E K Brown, G R Brown, E J S Butlin, H J Collinson, S Collinson, A L Coulthard, R A Crofton, H M Drummond, A S Dunstone, W Ellerby, R J Forster, K P Gray, J E Grindrod-Helmn, Dr C A Grosch-Miller, K Harris, M Harris, Dr A P Haws (Treasurer), M Lloyd, A E Mills, J Mooney, P C Moth, J C Paul, R M Poolman, D A Pratt, P S Rand, M M Robb, J Ross, J Rowell, M Shepherd, M E Taylor, Dr G F Wilson **(33 Ministers)**

Ms M Bellshaw, Ms A C Honey **(2 CRCW Ministers)**

Mr G J Aitken, Mrs J Armstrong, Mrs D J Barker, Mrs S N Bell, Mrs J O Calcraft, Mrs M A Campbell (Clerk), Dr P H Clarke, Mrs G Cox, Mrs M Davidson, Mrs R Dawson, Miss J M Degenhardt, Prof J W Derry, Mrs M Dobie, Mr J H Drew, Mr D L Fox, Miss C Gabriel, Mrs D Gollan, Mrs L Gowland, Mrs A Grey, Dr A Hamnett, Mrs C Hogg, Mrs M Humberston, Mr S Johnson, Mr R M Jones, Mr A S J Lie, Mrs P Maccoy, Mr D Mackay, Mr P B Matthew, Mrs S McNabola, Miss E A Meikle, Mrs H J Middleton, Dr D Moore, Mr W Offler, Mr A T Ogilvie, Mrs S Rand, Ms L Robson, Mrs C L Roddam, Mr J Scott, Mrs C T Smith, Mrs A Stears, Mrs J Stewart, Mrs H Sutton, Mr G L Thersby, Mrs J R Tomlin, Miss L M Wilson, Mr A Woodhall **(46 Representatives)**

**Also in attendance:** Mr A Atkinson, Mrs T Benkhabebe-House, Mr P Bowes, Mrs M Brock, Mrs J Brown, M S Bommel, Mrs D B Clarke, Mrs E M Conran, Mrs H Cooper, Mr H J Gowland, Mr J Green, Mr M Hall, Mrs J Haws, Mrs H E Hogg, Mrs A Main, Mr D Morrell, Mrs G Sands, Mr P Sheard, Dr A I Shiel, Dr E A Sinclair, Mr A Solomon, Mr W Sutherland, Mrs W Watson **(23 Visitors)**

**Apologies for absence:** Revd M K Alberg, Revd R Anglesea, Mrs S M Bush, Revd G L Connacher, Revd Dr P G Dempster, Mrs C Dowson, Revd J C Durell, Mrs C Eddowes, Revd I T Farnsworth, Mr J C G Forrest, Mrs M W Gibson, Revd D Grosch-Miller, Revd S M Hamnett, Mrs C A Holmes, Revd A F Jackson, Revd N Johnson, Revd J Magee, Revd E H Marley, Revd J S Martin, Revd H S May, Revd D M McFarlane, Revd R C Mills, Miss H Peacock, Revd Dr D R Peel, Revd Dr M Prett, Mrs E Robertson, Miss M Russell, Revd J M Smith, Mrs H Stephenson, Mr J C Storer, Revd G Thompson, Revd Dr D E G Whiting, Mrs L Whiting

**17/1 OPENING AND WELCOME**

The Moderator opened the meeting, which had a theme of reaching out to others. Consent was sought to the use of photographs from the day, and it was confirmed that there had been no requests to remove resolutions from *en bloc*. Opening worship was led by local church members.

**17/2 MINUTES** of the meeting of 8 October 2016 and further minutes were approved and signed.

**17/3 MATTERS ARISING**

No items were raised.

**17/4 NEWS OF PEOPLE AND PLACES**

New members and visitors to Synod were also welcomed.

The Clerk reported that Oxclose LEP, Washington, was moving towards becoming a single denomination parish church.

News was shared of Mrs Helen Stephenson and Mrs Ki Anglesea. Synod noted with regret the deaths of Revds Arnold Dawson and Alan Spivey.

Revds Gordon & Elaine Brown, John Paul, Ron Forster and Joan Ross were due to retire over the next few months.

Revd Ken Harris had recently celebrated a significant birthday, and Revds John Durell, Cyril Hobson, Vivian Buddle, Jean McCallum, Tom Ellison, Gordon Connacher, Meg Robb and Ray Anglesea were celebrating ordination anniversaries. Mrs Hannah Middleton was presented with her certificate on completion of the TLS Gateways into Worship course, and would be commissioned as a lay preacher a week on Sunday. A bouquet was presented to Mrs Daphne Clarke on sixty years as a lay preacher.

The Moderator led Synod in prayer, and encouraged churches to share their stories around the Synod via Mrs Wendy Watson.

**17/5 SOUL TO SOLE REFRESHMENT**

The Moderator introduced a discussion of things that would be good to start, on the basis that as one door closes, another opens. The following suggestions were made:

- Giving the call to worship from the front door of the church
- Slowing down
- Talking to people about our ideas
- Worshipping in different ways, such as through *Godly Play*

- Providing helicopters for rural ministers
- “Doing church” on other days than Sunday
- Having “Coffee Church” to get to know people and talk gently about faith matters
- Using a local theme such as Amble’s puffins

#### 17/6 **MISSION COUNCIL UPDATE**

The Clerk gave a brief report on the meeting last October, which included Greenbelt, a review of children’s and youth work, redevelopment of Church House, deployment and the nature of call, *Walking the Way*, and the future of the Windermere Centre.

#### 17/7 **THE CHURCHES’ MUTUAL CREDIT UNION AND CREDIT UNIONS IN OUR AREA**

The Treasurer praised the work of credit unions, which helped 217 million members around the world with savings and low interest loans. They were mutual organisations, based on a common bond, and all deposits were protected by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme. The Synod wished to promote their work, as it was a matter of justice, and could transform lives by helping those who were struggling.

The United Reformed Church was part of the Churches’ Mutual Credit Union, and membership was open to elders, church officers, ministers and lay preachers. Synod wished to encourage local churches to invest in their local credit unions, and the Trust would make matching investments up to £5,000, thereby supporting those local communities.

#### 17/8 **A SIMPLER WAY TO APPLY FOR GRANTS**

Mr Andrew Atkinson (Trust Officer) explained that the Trust and Synod Executive had revised the current grant schemes for supporting mission and maintenance of church and manse properties, to make them simpler, quicker and more generous, taking account of affordability, and encouraging the sharing of good ideas and experiences with the wider Synod. This was welcomed, and thanks were paid to Ian Buchanan for his work on this. Resolution 1 was carried.

**Synod affirms the new scheme for property, manse and mission grants, as set out in the March 2017 book of reports, with effect from 11 March 2017.**

#### 17/9 **PROPERTY SALES AND LETTINGS POLICY**

Andrew Atkinson then explained that the Trust and Synod Executive had also reviewed the standard terms on which Synod permission is given for the sale or leasing of churches, halls and manses. It was proposed to simplify, update, and to achieve a fairer balance between local and wider church interests. Rental monies should be aside for property maintenance until £5,000 was reached, after which they could be spent on general purposes. In

response to a question, Andrew confirmed that when a church closed, any remaining debts could be met from sale proceeds, but that churches should seek to remain solvent. Jane Tomlin (St Andrew's, Nunthorpe & Marton and Trust Director) welcomed these proposals, which should clear a logjam and enable churches to spend money on buildings and mission. The Treasurer added that the Ministers' Pension Fund could need more money, but that there were already some funds already in place which could be used.

Discussion was then invited on the committees' printed reports.

#### 17/10 **TRUST**

The Chair of the Board, Revd James Breslin, noted that the Trust had met the goals it had set itself. He gave thanks to Revd Peter Moth for convening the Property Subgroup since 2010, and to Mr Ian Buchanan for taking on that convenorship. He noted that the Synod was fortunate in that the investment portfolio had now reached £8 million, and generated income to meet two thirds of the Synod's general expenditure. The Middlesbrough Christmas Traidcraft shop had had another successful year, with support from the Trust. Attention was drawn to advice on building security and lift inspections. Resolutions 2-4 were then moved and carried unanimously.

17/11 **Synod appoints Carol Hogg as a Director of the United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited, to serve from 11 March 2017 to 31 December 2019.**

17/12 **Synod adopts the property sales and lettings policy as set out in the March 2017 book of reports.**

17/13 **Synod instructs Synod Executive Committee to review existing sale and letting resolutions with a view to harmonising them with the new policy.**

#### 17/14 **SYNOD EXECUTIVE**

The Clerk reported that the committee had also set itself goals for the coming year. The forthcoming consultations on *A Way Forward* were advertised, and as many people as possible were encouraged to attend.

Resolutions 5-10 were then moved and carried.

17/15 **Synod agrees the revised nominations process, to take effect from 11 March 2017.**

17/16 **Synod agrees an annual Partner in Mission Grant of £1,000 jointly to Ponteland United Reformed Church and St John's United Reformed Church, Wideopen, each year from 2017 to 2019.**

17/17 **Synod agrees an annual Partner in Mission Grant of £3,000 to Northumbrian Industrial Mission, each year from 2017 to 2019.**

17/18 **Synod agrees an annual Partner in Mission Grant of £5,223 to North East Churches Acting Together, each year from 2018 to 2020.**

17/19 **Synod accepts the updated safeguarding policy and procedures, dated February 2017, with effect from 11 March 2017.**

17/20 **Synod resolves to next meet at St Aidan's United Reformed Church, Hexham, on Saturday 7 October 2017, or at such other place and time as may be convenient.**

17/21 **MISSION**

There was enthusiasm for a Big Day Out in the Synod to mark the centenary of the ordination of Constance Coltman and the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. Stories were shared of use of prayer in churches, and Mission and Ministries & Development Committees could collaborate in producing materials. It was explained that Oxclose LEP, Washington, had taken the difficult decision to become a single denomination Anglican Church, for financial and practical reasons. Mrs Dinah Gollan (Oxclose LEP, Washington) expressed gratitude for the United Reformed Church's continuing support and friendship, and asked for prayer.

17/22 **CHILDREN'S & YOUTH WORK**

The Convenor, Mr Sandy Ogilvie, drew attention to the £50 bonus available to churches gaining or renewing their Child-Friendly Church Award, to spend on resources for youth and children's work. Reflecting the lack of candidates for ministry and church-related community work, the committee had begun to consider the idea of year-long student internships. Interns could work alongside ministers and elders, or with a Synod officer. It was pointed out that the Methodist Church and Church of England were already doing this, as was the Council for World Mission. Synod expressed its enthusiasm for this idea, and its hope that the practicalities could be sorted out to enable it to happen.

17/23 **PASTORAL**

The Convenor, Revd Dr Grant Wilson, began by asking what was the most important thing the committee did. Responses included settling ministers in congregations and giving ongoing care. He explained that people tended only to tell the good stories, but that a fuller picture was needed. He then moved resolution 11, which was carried with applause, acknowledging Synod's gratitude for faithful service.

**Synod concurs with the retirements of Revds Elaine Brown and Gordon Brown on 30 April 2017, the retirements of Revds Ron Forster and John Paul on 31 August 2017, and the retirement of Revd Joan Ross on 30 September 2017, giving thanks for their ministry and wishing them well in retirement.**

17/24 Grant then introduced resolution 12, with the addition of four further names. Revd Ed Butlin asked why lay presidency was voted on annually, whilst General Assembly

recommended a 3-year cycle of authorisation. Grant took the point, but added that it could be useful to have annual check on who was presiding. Resolution 12 was then carried unanimously.

**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: Clare Oswell (Mid Northumberland), Ian Gillies and Bryan Spurr (Tyne Valley), Liz Barnes and Ian Patterson (Newcastle North/Central), Alison Williams (Gateshead), Joyce Brown, Elisabeth Meikle, Ian Smith and Dorothy Muckles (Sunderland/South Tyneside), Christine Holmes, Hazel Holliday, Roberta Ritson, Judith Rodgers (Tyne Valley).**

17/25 Grant then introduced resolution 13, and explained that owing to a decision of General Assembly in 2006, Synod had to resolve whether a minister not in post could remain on the roll of ministers. An amendment was moved by Revd James Breslin and formally seconded by Mr John Scott (St James's, Newcastle) to grant full membership of Synod to Revd Dr Carla Grosch-Miller, following her move into the Synod last year. This was agreed, and the amended resolution was then carried.

**Synod, affirming the valuable work being done by the Revd Dr Carla Grosch-Miller with the Lindisfarne Regional Training Partnership and in her other varied ministries, approves her retention on the Roll of Ministers and, subject to annual review with the Synod Moderator, grants her full membership of the Synod.**

17/26 Oxclose LEP, Washington

A further resolution, 14, was then also moved and carried.

**Synod, noting the request of the Oxclose LEP Church Council to become a single denomination church, remits the matter to the Provincial Trust to determine what legal and financial steps now need to be taken, and authorises it together with the officers of the Synod to negotiate with our ecumenical partners to achieve this end.**

17/27 **MINISTRIES & DEVELOPMENT**

The Convenor, Revd Hilary Collinson, gave an update on recent developments since her report had been written. Revd Mary Taylor would start a sabbatical in May. The committee wished to place on record its thanks to Revd Elaine Brown, who had acted as its Minutes Secretary for many years. Thanks were also expressed for the sterling work of Mrs Chris Eddowes, who was stepping down from the committee and as Regional Coordinator for Training, Learning & Serving, now that the course was changing. Hilary urged people to give her ideas of things they would like help with, and of people who have skills to help, as the committee aimed to react to need and had funds to "buy in" expertise.

**17/28 PRISONS WEEK: THE WELCOME DIRECTORY**

Mr Jon Green (Development Officer for the Welcome Directory) then gave a presentation, which included a video for Prisons Week, this year to be held on 8-14 October. The Welcome Directory had been set up by the Free Churches' Group to help connect former prisoners with places of worship. Training was given to participating churches. The system did not include sex offenders, for whom there was a different arrangement. Revd Hilary Collinson concluded with a story of a former prisoner who had been helped in this way.

**17/29 SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS**

Mrs Geraldine Sands (Safeguarding Advisor) explained her role in helping churches to protect vulnerable people in their midst. General Assembly in 1997 had asked synods to monitor the implementation of *Good Practice*. Arrangements should include having a safeguarding policy, with a link person in place for reporting any concerns, safe recruitment, and providing a safe environment for children and vulnerable adults. She could also advise on arrangements for supervising sex offenders, if necessary. Training was being provided at both foundation and leadership levels. The next six-monthly network meeting for link persons would be held on Saturday 27 May at Jesmond United Reformed Church.

**17/30 IF ONLY THEY KNEW...**

Mr Dan Morrell (Youth Assembly Moderator) then gave a presentation urging that young voices be heard and taken seriously as part of the church. The church should seek different ways of being intentionally and appropriately inclusive, providing a welcoming and safe space for children to grow. Young people were passionate about the world and the church. Attendance at URC Youth Assembly had been increasing for the last five years, and Northern Synod was urged to send young people.

Christian arts festival Greenbelt was being co-sponsored by the United Reformed Church in 2016 and 2017. Last year's theme of *Scrap the Church?* had provoked both critical and appreciative thinking. People were encouraged to attend in Kettering this summer, even if they did not camp.

The URC's Big Day Out at Warwick Castle on Saturday 20 May would feature music, workshops and guest speakers. Young and old should be encouraged to attend.

Dan was thanked for his presentation. The Moderator led Synod in prayer, after which lunch was shared.

**17/31 LOCAL MISSION & MINISTRY REVIEW**

LMMR Coordinator, Revd Joan Grindrod-Helmn, thanked volunteers who carry out visits to churches. She stressed that it was not an inspection, but a privilege to spend time learning from each other. The booklet had been updated and was on the Synod website.

17/32 Good News Story: Safe Water Trust

She then introduced Mr Gordon Aitken (Boldon), who spoke of the Safe Water Trust, set up by Boldon URC and Rotary to provide membrane filters for manual water pumps in countries where there was no access to safe drinking water.

17/33 **A FOCUS UPON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Children's Work Advisor, Mrs Hannah Middleton, adverted to the publication of the latest edition of *Building Blocks*, and spoke of the importance of serving people and reaching out.

17/34 Child-Friendly Church Award

She advocated the Child-Friendly Church Award, which recognised churches that encouraged children to participate within a safe environment. She praised St George's, Hartlepool, for its strong history of well-resourced work with children and young people, and the Moderator presented the award to the church's representative, Mr Alan Woodhall.

17/35 Community Links

Hannah asked churches to think about their community links and write them on the jigsaw pieces provided, which should be sent to Synod Office for display at the next Synod meeting.

M Stephane Bommel (Head teacher at Hazlewood Community Primary School) spoke of the importance of community links for schools. His school had benefited from the link with St John's, Wideopen, in enabling the children to meet people and learn about life outside school, including remembrance. He encouraged churches to make links with local schools, to visit them and invite them to visit church.

17/36 **A SYNOD WAY FORWARD**

The Moderator introduced this item by urging Synod not passively to accept the future, but actively to shape it. The Clerk reported that the churches in the North Northumberland and County Durham mission partnerships had been invited to form a group each. Consultations were taking place on other groupings on 29 March, 7 and 8 April. The aim was to help churches to explore the gifts within them and how to share them, and Synod could provide resources to help with this. Revd Jane Rowell (Mission Enabler) invited members to discuss what kind of help the Synod could offer to enable churches to flourish. Feedback included making course accessible to those who worked during the day and who lived at a distance, and training for worship teams.



**17/37 FEASTS & FESTIVALS**Stained Glass Ceilings

Revd Dr Carla Grosch-Miller gave an account of the first female minister in the denominational heritage, Revd Constance Coltman, ordained on 17 September 1917. Carla saw the inclusion of women into the full life of the church, as part of its growing in light, truth and grace. A service would be held in London at 3.00 pm on the centenary day, and would be live streamed.

**17/38 The Lutheran Reformation**

Revd James Breslin gave an account of Martin Luther's publication of an intention to run a disputation for his students on the effectiveness and purposes of indulgences, on 31 October 1517. James outlined the main elements of what became the Lutheran Reformation, and explained some differences from the Reformed churches in ecclesiology, vestments and liturgy. The Lutheran World Federation was organising the planting of 500 trees in a garden in Wittenberg to mark the anniversary.

**17/39 ST CUTHBERT'S CENTRE, HOLY ISLAND**

Revd Ruth Crofton explained that a sensory garden was planned for the centre, reflecting St Cuthbert's life and our own, and that the mission project would be fundraising for this.

**17/40 KELD RESOURCE CENTRE**

Revd Stephen Collinson reported that local people had been creating a community garden in Swaledale, and planting fruit trees. Leaflets were available on the KRC festival weekend on 28 April to 1 May and prayerful imagining days at Keld on 28 June, 26 July and 23 August.

It was suggested that the Synod might sponsor a tree in the Luther garden and one in this Synod.

**17/41 SYNOD PILGRIMAGE**

The Moderator publicised this year's walk, along St Hilda's Way on 19-23 June.

**17/42 WINDERMERE CENTRE**

Mrs Daphne Clarke (Visitor) urged people to sign her online petition to save the Windermere Centre, as lay training was becoming more and more important.

**17/43 MODERATOR'S REFLECTIONS**

The Moderator reflected on a positive and constructive meeting, with energy, consensus and good stewardship of resources. Synod had been inspired by mission and outreach

possibilities and energised by its Reformed roots. He concluded that we could be confident in God's call for the future.

17/44 **CLOSE**

Mrs Linda Gowland (St Aidan's, Hexham) formally invited Synod to come to St Aidan's for its next meeting on 7 October. The Moderator led Synod in closing worship. A retiring collection was held for the West End Refugee Service.

..... Moderator

..... Synod Clerk

..... Date