



Northern Synod

7 October 2017

THE NORTHERN SYNOD OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH met at St Aidan's United Reformed Church, Hexham, on Saturday 7 October 2017, with the Revd Ron Forster, in the chair.

Present: Revds M K Alberg, J A Breslin, S J Brock, E J S Butlin, S Collinson, H M Drummond, J C Durell, W Ellerby, K P Gray, Dr C A Grosch-Miller, D Grosch-Miller, D C Haslam, Dr A P Haws (Treasurer), G Hume, J S Martin, R M Poolman, Dr M Prevett, M M Robb, J Rowell, M Shepherd, H Stuteley, M E Taylor, Dr D E G Whiting, Dr G F Wilson **(25 Ministers)**

Ms M Bellshaw, Ms A C Honey, Mrs H Stephenson **(3 CRCW Ministers)**

Mrs S A Ames, Mrs J Armstrong, Mrs D J Barker, Mrs J Boyd, 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, Mrs C Eddowes, Mr D L Fox, Mrs M W Gibson, Mrs L Gowland, Dr A Hamnett, Mrs J Haws, Mrs C A Holmes, Mrs M Humberston, Mr S Johnson, Mr A S J Lie, Mrs P Maccoy, Mr D Mackay, Mrs S McNabola, Miss E A Meikle, Miss F E Middlemist, Mrs H J Middleton, Dr D Moore, Mr W Offler, Mr A T Ogilvie, Ms L Robson, Mrs C L Roddam, Miss M F Russell, Dr E A Sinclair, Mrs C T Smith, Mrs H Sutton, Mr G L Thersby, Mrs J R Tomlin, Mrs A Tunnard, Miss F Tunnard, Mr A Woodhall **(44 Representatives)**

Also in attendance: Mr A Atkinson, Mr S Blake, Mrs M Brock, Mr B T Carter, Mrs H Cooper, Mrs L Cross MBE, Mr D Diston, Mrs A Drew, Mr A Forsyth, Mrs D Gollan, Mr R Golightly, Mr H J Gowland, Mrs J Haigh, Revd T Haigh, Mrs D Hogg, Mrs H E Hogg, Miss H Peacock, Revd N Riley, Mr N Rowark, Mrs M Shepherd, Ms J Simmonds, Mr I Smith, Mr A Solomon, Miss I Solomon, Dr E Styan, Mr W Sutherland, Revd J Thorns, Mrs F Usher, Mrs W Watson **(29 Visitors)**

Apologies for absence: Revd R Anglesea, Revd M Attwood, Mrs S N Bell, Revd H J Collinson, Revd A L Coulthard, Revd R A Crofton, Mrs C Dowson, Revd A S Dunstone, Revd I T Farnsworth, Mrs A Grey, Revd J E Grindrod-Helmn, Revd S M Hamnett, Revd K Harris, Revd M Harris, Revd D A Herbert, Revd A F Jackson, Mr R M Jones, Mr P B Matthew, Revd D M McFarlane, Revd A E Mills, Revd R C Mills, Revd P C Moth, Revd J C Paul, Revd D A Pratt, Revd P S Rand, Mrs S Rand, Revd J Ross, Revd J M Smith, Mrs A Stears, Mrs J Stewart, Mrs L Whiting, Miss L M Wilson

17/82 OPENING AND WELCOME

Revd Ron Forster opened the meeting, and the Clerk explained that the Moderator had been unwell since August, and hoped to begin a phased return to work later in October. In the meantime, he had nominated Mr Forster to chair the meeting, which had a theme of

prayer and understanding our gifts. Consent was sought to the use of photographs from the day. Opening worship, based on psalm 8, was led by local church members.

17/83 **MINUTES** of the meeting of 11 March 2017 and further minutes were approved and signed.

17/84 **MATTERS ARISING**

No items were raised.

17/85 **A TIME OF PRAYER**

Revd Meg Robb led the Synod in prayer and reflection.

17/86 **NEWS OF PEOPLE AND PLACES**

The Clerk welcomed ecumenical guests Revds Joanne Thorns (NECAT), Nigel Riley (Northern Baptist Association) and Trevor Haigh (Darlington Methodist District). She also welcomed representatives of churches that had received grants from the Synod in recent years, who had brought small displays showing how the money was spent.

Revd Dave Herbert had written thanking churches for their support, prayers and cards.

Synod noted with sadness the deaths of Revd Norma Leveridge, Mrs Carole Parker and Mr John Storer.

Since the previous meeting of Synod, Revds Elaine and Gordon Brown, Ron Forster, John Paul and Joan Ross had retired. CRCW Minister Mrs Helen Stephenson would be moving on in the New Year.

Mrs Linda Gowland was presented with an award for completing her Living Theology North East course with the Lindisfarne Regional Training Partnership. Revd John Durell noted that Revd Dr Carla Grosch-Miller and Revd Rachel Poolman had contributed to the coming year's IBRA Bible reading notes.

Revds Ray Anglesea, Meg Robb, Tom Ellison, Katherine Stocks, Jean McCallum, and Cyril Hobson were celebrating ordination anniversaries this year. A presentation was made to Revd James Breslin, whose 40th jubilee was this weekend, with thanks for his work in the wider Church, especially his 18 years in leadership roles on the Trust.

Members were encouraged to share their stories around the Synod.

17/87 **MISSION COUNCIL UPDATE**

The Clerk gave a brief report on the meeting in May, which included discussion of *Walking the Way*, and the future shape of General Assembly. A great deal of time was spent in prayerful discussion of the future of the Windermere Centre, hearing many different

perspectives, before deciding that it should close. The former Synod Moderator, Revd Lis Mullen, had led the closing service at Windermere.

17/88 **TRUST**

The outgoing Convenor of the Board, Revd James Breslin, noted the wide range of activities carried out by the Trust. He noted the work done by the Trust Officer, Mr Andrew Atkinson, on untangling complex early ecumenical agreements. He then moved resolutions 1-5, which were carried.

17/89 **Synod appoints David Grosch-Miller as a Director of the United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited, to serve from 7 October 2017 to 31 December 2019.**

Mr Breslin explained that Revd David Grosch-Miller would replace him as Convenor.

17/90 **Synod reappoints Tony Haws and Mike Louis as Directors of the United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited, to serve from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2020.**

17/91 **Synod affirms the budget for the year ending 31 December 2018, and agrees to the levy, which is the equivalent of £31.45 per member.**

Mr Breslin explained that the Synod levy was kept low because of the good performance of the Trust's investments. He added that, following a five-year review, it had been decided to appoint CCLA as investment manager, as they promised even better performance, and equally importantly, they engaged proactively with companies on ethical issues.

17/92 Former Holy Family LEP, Killingworth

Synod resolves to approach its ecumenical partners with a view to winding up the Killingworth Christian Council, and sharing the balance of its funds between them, and requests the Trust to facilitate this.

The initiative for this move had come from the Newcastle Methodist District, and it was believed that the remaining funds were of the order of £35,000-£50,000.

17/93 Oxclose LEP, Washington

Synod recognises Oxclose as having ongoing ministry as a single-denomination church. As their former partner, we support that ongoing ministry, following a pattern established in the dissolution of an earlier Anglican-Methodist LEP. This is to take *“our share as a mortgage in perpetuity with no repayments and no interest... establishing our share of the building when/if it has to be sold at any time in the future.”* Synod requests the Trust to facilitate this.

It was noted that the Local Ecumenical Partnership had come to an end, and that this resolution provided for the winding up of the sharing agreement for the church centre. The mortgage was in effect a legal charge, deferring repayment of capital contributions to

the ecumenical partners, and the wording was retained as the United Reformed Church was following the Methodist lead here.

The Acting Moderator thanked the Finance Officer, Mrs Helen Hogg, for her work which underpinned much of the Trust's work.

Discussion was then invited on committees' printed reports.

17/94 **SYNOD EXECUTIVE**

The Clerk thanked all those who had attended consultation events on *A Way Forward*. She also reported that £3,938 had been raised for refugees and had been given out to organisations working in all parts of the Synod. Churches were encouraged to share widely the letter from the Safeguarding Advisor, Mrs Geraldine Sands, and to file returns to her if they had not already done so.

Resolutions 6-9 were then moved and carried, with two amendments. The final phrase was added to resolution 6 to provide for a review of the Mission Enabler's post in three years' time, and one nominee had withdrawn from resolution 8. The Clerk explained that although the Mission Enabler had originally been shared with North Western Synod, both synods now found they needed greater capacity in this role.

17/95 Synod affirms the 100% scoping of Revd Jane Rowell within the Northern Synod, and her appointment as full-time Mission Enabler within Northern Synod with effect from 7 October 2017, to be reviewed in 2020.

17/96 Synod confirms the appointment of Maureen Shepherd as a Synod representative to Mission Council with effect from May 2017 to November 2020.

17/97 Synod agrees the nominations of Jean Degenhardt and Wade Sherman to attend General Assembly in 2018 together with Mission Council representatives Tony Haws, Joan Grindrod-Helmn and Maureen Shepherd, subject to any further amendment notified to the Synod Clerk, and notes that any amendments will be brought to the March 2018 Synod meeting.

17/98 Synod resolves to next meet at St John's United Reformed Church, Wideopen, on Saturday 17 March 2018, or at such other place and time as may be convenient.

17/99 **MISSION**

There was debate on the question whether ministers might be disciplined for protesting on social justice issues. The General Secretary, Revd John Proctor, had written a letter seeking to clarify this matter, advising that that participation in peaceful protest even if a minister were arrested would not of itself initiate the disciplinary process. The criminal law and Church discipline were two separate systems with different criteria.

17/100 CHILDREN'S & YOUTH WORK

The Convenor, Mr Sandy Ogilvie, remarked that exciting progress had been made following the suggestion of setting up short-term youth placements in connection with local churches. Advice had been received from the Methodist Church and the Council for World Mission, in drawing up a scheme for 5 or 15 hours per week. Twelve churches had already expressed interest, and others were invited to do so. Guidance notes and application forms would be on the Synod website (<http://urc-northernsynod.org/grants/>). Applications should be submitted before the end of the year, with the aim of starting the placements in June 2018.

17/101 MINISTRIES & DEVELOPMENT

The Candidating Secretary, Revd Dr David Whiting, asked for two people to represent the Synod for assessment training at High Leigh on 30 October-2 November.

Revd Jane Rowell (Mission Enabler) advertised five remaining places on the *Trajectories for a Transforming Church* course at Keld on 20-24 November.

17/102 PASTORAL

The Convenor, Revd Dr Grant Wilson, expressed appreciation for all that the Moderator did. He reported that Revd David Grosch-Miller would take on the Moderator's role with regard to the ministerial disciplinary procedure. He explained that Synod would support, encourage, facilitate and providing funding to help with *A Way Forward*. Whilst meetings and resolutions were proceeding, working together could just happen naturally without formality. Resolution 10 was then moved and carried.

17/103 Synod resolves that churches whose membership votes to become part of a local church group, will cease to be a part of their present mission partnership from the date of the formation of such a group.

17/104 ST CUTHBERT'S CENTRE, HOLY ISLAND

The Warden, Revd Rachel Poolman, displayed a community weaving from the Centre's summer programme. She reflected on the need to periodically review how things are done in churches and mission projects, recognising the retirement of Assistant Administrator Ms Janet Dypevaag. She expressed gratitude for the support of others, with the project's business plan, and contacts and funding for the Centre's garden. God's grace may be imparted in the fleeting contacts that the Church has with individuals.

17/105 GRINDON MISSION PROJECT

Chair of the Management Committee, Revd Dr David Whiting, commented that the project was fortunate to benefit from a huge amount of voluntary work, and noted that there was to be a *Messy Harvest* tomorrow.

17/106 JIGSAW PIECES

Mrs Hannah Middleton (Children's Work Advisor) thanked churches for returning their jigsaw pieces describing their community links. These would be displayed at the next Synod meeting. She invited any churches that had not yet responded to send them in to Synod Office, and was asked for an indication of which churches were awaited.

17/107 MESSY VINTAGE

Mrs Middleton advocated use of this new version of *Messy Church*, which could help churches to reach out to older people experiencing social isolation. *Messy Vintage* (<https://www.messychurch.org.uk/messyvintage>) could be run in a church or taken out to a care home. It would usually involve a themed craft activity, followed by worship with percussion instruments and then afternoon tea.

17/108 PRAYER GIFT BAGS

Revd Meg Robb (Convenor of Mission Committee) introduced the prayer gift bags that were available for each church to collect. The bags contained tissues, a holding cross, a candle, a sheet of instructions and a leaflet for reproducing in church magazines. These prayer ideas were designed to help churches in an era of reduced availability of ordained ministers.

17/109 CAROUSEL

The Acting Moderator led Synod in doxology, after which lunch was shared, and there was an opportunity to talk to grant recipients and explore their displays. These included: Grindon Mission Project; North East Churches Acting Together; Jesmond; St Antony's Priory, Durham; St George's, Hartlepool; and Zion, Northallerton.

17/110 LUTHER 500/COLTMAN 100

Revd Helen Drummond led Synod in a quiz on the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation and the 100th anniversary of the ordination of Constance Coltman. The latter anniversary was to be marked with commemoration services at Cromer Avenue, Gateshead, on 14 October and at Trinity, Bedlington, on 19 November.

17/111 THE ROLE OF CHAPLAINCY

Mrs Fiona Usher, Chaplaincy Team Leader at Northumbrian Industrial Mission, gave a presentation on chaplaincy, which included a short film. She described this as a specific genre of ministry which runs alongside but is distinct from local church ministry, and which seeks to reach people where they are in their daily lives in a vast range of diverse contexts. She expressed her thanks for the Synod's support for NIM, and encouraged members to pray for chaplains and to consider whether they or people they knew may be called to this ministry of presence.

Mr Nick Rowark, chaplain to four schools in Northumberland under the auspices of the Three Rivers Learning Trust, then spoke on his practical experiences of schools chaplaincy, and asked for prayer for his work and for the children and staff with whom he works.

17/112 **A SYNOD WAY FORWARD**

The Clerk announced that answers to frequently asked questions were available on the Synod website (<http://urc-northern-synod.org/a-way-forward-faqs/>). She noted that churches were having conversations about groups. Mrs Jane Tomlin (St Andrew's, Nunthorpe & Marton) queried the need to produce a vacancy profile before talking to other churches about forming a viable group. The Clerk responded, recognising that there could be different processes in individual cases, that churches were free to talk about grouping, and once they were agreed on a group, they should inform her and Pastoral Committee, so that Synod could confirm the new group and ministerial scoping. Churches could work on preparing their profile during that period.

17/113 **WALKING THE WAY**

Revd Meg Robb (Convenor of Mission Committee) introduced this denominational discipleship initiative for living the life of Jesus today, which fitted well with the Synod's *A Way Forward*. She showed the short video of voices to hear (<http://urc.org.uk/wtw/films.html>) and Synod discussed in buzz groups the two questions: 'What would you expect to see in the life of someone who says they are a Christian?' and 'What do you think churches are for?'

Revd Jane Rowell (Mission Enabler) explained that resources would be coming online over the coming year. In the meantime, everyone at Synod had received a copy of the book *Holy Habits*, for discussion around churches. The Synod could get bulk discounts if any churches wanted further copies. Thirty-one people were taking part in four *Growing Leaders* courses across the Synod.

17/114 **FACILITATION: LISTENING AND RECONCILIATION SERVICE**

Mr Alastair Forsyth, Coordinator on behalf of the five northerly synods, introduced the service. This was being funded for three years by the synods with the support of a grant from the URC Legacy Fund. Volunteers had been trained to help churches discussing difficult questions or considering group formation. The aim was to provide two neutral facilitators to each meeting to enable all views to be heard and resolution or reconciliation sought as necessary. The service was being run by a steering group representing the five synods, and more volunteer facilitators would be welcome.

17/115 **CHRISTIAN AID**

Ms Jan Simmonds, former North of England Manager for Christian Aid, gave her thanks for churches' fundraising through Christian Aid Week and *Commitment for Life*. She asked for prayers for the charity's work, and drew attention to the current emergency appeals for

the Rohingya crisis and South Asia floods. The Christmas appeal this year would focus on the food crisis in South Sudan and Burkina Faso. She finished with a verse from Isaiah 58: 10, "Feed the hungry! Help those in trouble! Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you shall be as bright as day."

17/116 WEST END REFUGEE SERVICE

Mrs Lindsay Cross, Project Director, thanked churches for their support during a challenging year, in which they had helped 560 people from 58 countries. The *strength through support* programme helped to rebuild confidence and self-esteem, then the *strength through society* programme moved them on to training and self-development to rebuild their lives. Over the last eighteen years, WERS had had to continue to innovate to meet needs and to seek changing patterns of funding. Christians needed to challenge negativity, recognising the individual stories behind refugees.

17/117 LESSONS FROM UGANDA

Revd Dr Grant Wilson, Mr Alphonsi Solomon and Miss Inez Solomon from St George's, High Heaton, spoke of their recent visit to four orphanages in Uganda, and showed a short video. They thanked churches for their support for the Seeds of Hope appeal. Donations or volunteers to join them next summer would be welcomed.

17/118 CLOSE

The Acting Moderator shared some closing reflections and led Synod in closing worship. A retiring collection was held for the West End Refugee Service.

..... Moderator

..... Synod Clerk

..... Date