



**THE NORTHERN SYNOD OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH** met at Northgate United Reformed Church, Darlington, on Saturday 13 October 2018, with the Moderator, the Revd Dave Herbert, in the chair, along with 25 ministers, 26 representatives and 20 visitors [listed in Appendix 1].

#### 18/47 **OPENING AND WELCOME**

The Moderator opened the meeting, which had a theme of 'Encounters'. Consent was sought to the use of photographs from the day. Opening worship, based on Psalm 104 and Mark 8: 27-30, was led by members of Northgate United Reformed Church. Notice was given of an additional resolution.

18/48 **MINUTES** of the meeting of 17 March 2018 and further minutes were approved and signed.

#### 18/49 **MATTERS ARISING**

No items were raised.

#### 18/50 **NEWS OF PEOPLE AND PLACES**

New members, visitors and ecumenical guests were welcomed.

Since the previous meeting, *[two ministers]* had been inducted, *[one minister]* had retired, and the churches at Horncliffe and North Sunderland had ceased to meet.

Synod noted with sadness the deaths of Margaret White, Brenda Ormesher and Stuart Armstrong.

Certificates were presented to *[a student]* for completion of TLS Developing Community Experiences, and to Revd Dr Matthew Prevett for completion of EM2.

Ministers celebrating anniversaries this year were remembered, and news was shared of St Andrew's Mission, Thornaby, which was celebrating its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary this weekend.

The Moderator led the Synod in prayer.

#### 18/51 **BRIEF ENCOUNTERS**

The Moderator reflected on stories of encounters with people at different stages in his faith journey.

#### 18/52 **TREASURE**

The Moderator invited Synod to reflect on our riches in people's God-given qualities as an act of affirmation. Thoughts were written down, collected in and blessed.

**18/53 THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH (NORTHERN PROVINCE) TRUST LIMITED**

The Trust Secretary, Dr Andrew Hamnett, expressed appreciation for the willingness of existing Directors to serve for a further term. He also invited others with relevant experience to get in touch if they might be able to help. The Synod Treasurer had given a year's notice of his intention to stand down, and the process had begun to identify a successor.

A legacy of £100,000, received from the estate of Clement James Fox, was acknowledged. Andrew noted that the position of legal advisor had been reviewed at the usual 10-year point, and Sintons LLP had been appointed. Some changes were being made to staffing, with a new arrangement into three teams. Results were shared from the 2017 accounts, noting that investments were the Trust's main source of income. The budget for 2019 projected a deficit of £88,238, which would be met from reserves. The Trust felt that it was nonetheless important to increase the level of support for churches through *A Way Forward* and by increasing staffing.

In the course of discussion, it was explained that the accounts disclosed movements on all funds, whilst the budget related only to operating costs in the General Fund. It was asked whether increased staffing would have longer term implications, and it was accepted that there may be deficit budgets for a few years. Gift Aid was claimed on donations where possible, although most giving was from churches rather than individuals. Investment income was increasing with the new managers, CCLA.

*A Way Forward* provided a means by which groups of churches could employ lay workers in a range of functions, which could include administrative support (amongst other things). Although deployment quotas were reducing year on year, Northern Synod was currently under-deployed, and was actively recruiting new ministers.

Andrew then moved resolutions 1-3, which were carried, the last with one abstention.

**18/54 Synod reappoints Ian Buchanan, [two directors] and Jane Tomlin as Directors of the United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited, to serve from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2021.**

**18/55 Synod confirms the appointment of Revd Dr Tony Haws as Synod Treasurer to serve from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019.**

**18/56 Synod affirms the budget for the year ending 31 December 2019, and agrees to the levy, which is the equivalent of £32.17 per member.**

**18/57 ETHICAL INVESTMENTS**

Andrew continued, with a presentation, showing that it was possible to invest ethically without sacrificing returns. The Trust's investment manager, CCLA, actively engaged with companies on environmental, social and governance issues, resulting in improved social responsibility and improved shareholder value. This had been effective on a range of issues, including carbon reduction, water use, labour standards, combatting modern slavery, and baby milk substitutes. Ethical investors were able to work together to maximise influence and achieve change. They could also invest positively in new companies that make a difference, such as in microfinance, forestry and solar power.

**18/58 ST CUTHBERT'S CENTRE, HOLY ISLAND**

The mission project's Consultant, Revd John Durell, gave a presentation of this fresh expression of church building, explaining Northumberland District Council's vision in the 1990s to adapt the church as a centre for education and training. He outlined the project's current vision to share sacred space, to create opportunities to meet with the Divine, and to enable reflection and spiritual journeying. St Cuthbert's Centre provided a quiet place for contemplation when the island was crowded with summer visitors. With no resident congregation, the Centre relied on the support of the wider Church, through the provision of a special category minister, an annual mission grant to subsidise operating costs, and help with care of the property. As part of a future strategy to further the vision, there were plans to provide fully accessible toilets, a draft-proof porch, and to revitalise the garden as an extension of the Centre's work. The Centre touched lives beyond the Church, and reached over a thousand users on social media. He asked for Synod to reaffirm its commitment and renew its enthusiasm for the project. The Warden, *[the Warden]*, declared an interest in the resolution to come, and explained that the Centre was very much in the business of encounters, having welcomed pilgrims from America and Finland and schoolchildren dressed as Vikings just this week. She saw the post as a missional one, flying the flag for the United Reformed Church.

In the course of discussion, it was noted that the proposed improvements were not yet costed, although detailed tenders had been sought for the initial woodworm expiation, which would cost around £100,000, and could be carried out in early 2019. There would be a 20-year guarantee on the treatment. The lease of the Centre committed the Trust to maintaining the property, and there was no provision for early termination. As the rent was only a nominal sum, the landlord was unlikely to be interested in maintaining the building. It may be possible to secure third party funding for some of the improvements, but unlikely for the woodworm expiation. It was noted that the special category ministry post may prove more difficult to renew for a third term, but initial soundings had been made, and other options may be possible. The Trust had confirmed that the woodworm treatment was affordable, and that it would try to follow the Synod's lead in supporting the project, although money could only be spent once. An amendment to the resolution was proposed to fund the repairs, then refer back to Synod on the question of future

improvements; but this was not supported, instead relying on the Synod Executive's oversight of the whole project.

After prayer, resolution 4 was carried, with two abstentions.

**Synod recognises St Cuthbert's Centre, Holy Island, as a significant location for missional encounter within both the Synod and the denomination, and to that end resolves to offer ongoing support for the life and ministry of the centre in the coming years and:**

- a) requests the Trust to finance all repairs and improvements noted in the report on pages 5 and 8 of the separate booklet (together with others where possible) and to continue to offer advice and practical support on property matters;
- b) instructs Pastoral Committee to prepare for continuing ministry to support the ongoing mission of the centre, discerning opportunities for developing ministry in all its forms to meet both the needs of the Synod and the centre (including preparation of an SCM application in 2019);
- c) instructs Synod Executive to maintain oversight of the development of the St Cuthbert's Centre, ensuring arrangements for all aspects of the Centre's life are appropriate and effective;
- d) instructs the Warden and consultancy team to continue to raise the profile of the Centre through routine communication of its activities, through the provision of prayer and worship resources, and through active encouragement of churches to make use of the Centre in developing their own discipleship journeys; and
- e) encourages churches and friends across the Synod to explore the facilities and ministry opportunities available to them from St Cuthbert's Centre.

The Moderator then led Synod in a prayer of blessing for the project.

## 18/59 CHILDREN'S & YOUTH WORK

### Youth Placements

In the Convenor's absence, Revd Ed Butlin reported that five part-time paid youth placements had been set up in local churches. There would be an opportunity for more in a second round. He spoke appreciatively of the *Staying Alive* summer youth event, which was possible through ecumenical collaboration. Some twenty young people from the United Reformed Church had attended in recent years, meeting with other young Christians and doing small community projects in local churches. Resolution 5 was then carried.

**Synod affirms the intention to continue involvement with *Staying Alive* in 2019-22.**

## 18/60 Youth Assembly

Ali Greaves introduced herself as youth representative, and a member of URC Youth Executive. She recommended URC Youth Assembly as a good opportunity for young people to meet others of their own age and develop their faith. She also hoped to enable young people across the Synod to meet one another, and urged churches to contact her at [email address] or on URC – Northern Youth and Kids’ Facebook page.

## 18/61 **TRAVELLING ENCOUNTERS**

The Moderator asked members to reflect on the things that they treasured about the Synod and their local churches. Members were invited to write down three things they would bring with them if they had to “re-pitch the tent.” These were posted on flipchart sheets. Popular answers were the Bible, love and friendship.

The Moderator then said grace, and Synod broke for lunch, during which there was an opportunity to see a display illustrating what could be achieved with a mission grant, and a video on church-related community work.

## 18/62 **JOINT PUBLIC ISSUES TEAM**

The United Reformed Church’s Secretary for Church & Society, Simeon Mitchell, gave a presentation on the work of the URC, with Methodist, Baptist and Church of Scotland colleagues in JPIT on peace and justice issues. He began by asking whom churches had contact with, and who was excluded. Encounters with others can challenge us and change our attitudes to poverty and other current issues. Through JPIT, the churches had challenged convenient excuses in their report *The Lies we Tell Ourselves*. The roll-out of Universal Credit was causing significant hardship, and a petition had been launched to reform the benefit. Copies were available at the meeting or could be downloaded from <http://endhungeruk.org/>.

Simeon also outlined two other areas of work, campaigning to end the Government’s hostile environment for immigrants, and encouraging churches to engage with politicians in an initiative called “Meet your MP.” Churches could sign up for a monthly newsletter at [www.jointpublicissues.org.uk](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk).

In discussion, Synod was reminded that public issues do not just affect other people, but church members too. Although churches were predominantly middle class, it was important to work *with* people rather than just do things *for* them. There was information on the JPIT website to help churches and communities deal with Universal Credit, which was soon to be rolled out in Northumberland.

**18/63 NORTHERN VIEWS AND MISSION COUNCIL**

Representative [*Mission Council representative*] asked how two-way communication could be improved between Synod and Mission Council. Updates were available in *Reform* magazine, on the URC website and on social media, as well as in reports to Synod.

Representative Revd Joan Grindrod-Helmn reported that key topics at next month's meeting were expected to be the review of children's and youth work, learning from the past case review, safeguarding safer recruitment, discipleship development strategy, the 2019 budget, a new approach to non-stipendiary ministry, strategic direction, review of Greenbelt, and the URC's jubilee in 2022.

Representative Revd Dr Tony Haws explained that an additional promise was proposed to elders' ordination, taking account of the wider role now being taken on by elders: "Do you promise as an elder of the United Reformed Church to seek its well-being, unity and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches and to endeavour always so far as you are able to build up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church?" This would be the subject of consultation with churches and synods over the next couple of years, and any questions should be directed to the Clerk to General Assembly.

In small groups, Synod reflected on how to improve communications with Mission Council, how to mark the URC's jubilee, and reactions to the proposed new elders' promise. [Responses are reproduced in Appendix 2.]

**18/64 GLOBAL ENCOUNTERS**

The Moderator reflected that making friends throughout the world gives a bigger glimpse of God. A planned visit to the Presbyterian Church of Mozambique next week had fallen through, and interest was now being sought for a trip next June. [*UCC Link Correspondent*] was now acting as link correspondent with the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ. The United Reformed Church was running an educational visit to Israel and Palestine in September 2019, and one person from each synod could join.

**18/65 Seeds of Hope**

[*A minister and two visitors*] spoke of their latest visit to Kiboga, Uganda, running a holiday Bible club for children at the orphanage. They recommended it as a humbling and life-changing experience, which gave a new perspective on faith. [*A visitor*] appealed for more second-hand clothes and shoes to fill a container to go to Uganda.

Discussion was then invited on the printed reports.

**MINISTRIES & DEVELOPMENT**18/66 Lay Preaching Commissioner

Additional resolution 10 was proposed by [*a minister*] and seconded by Revd Dr Matthew Prevett, and carried unanimously. Gratitude was expressed for [*the outgoing commissioner's*] three years in post.

**Synod appoints [*a lay preacher*] as Lay Preaching Commissioner from 13 October 2018 until the autumn Synod meeting in 2022.**

The Moderator said a prayer of blessing.

18/67 **PASTORAL**

The Convenor, [*the Convenor*], expressed thanks to [*two committee members*], who were now standing down from the committee. He also expressed appreciation for the work of pastoral friends, pastoral links and interim moderators. Resolution 6 was carried, with an amendment of the name to that requested by the churches.

18/68 Durham & Gateshead Group

**Synod concurs with:**

- a) **the decisions of the church meetings of Cromer Avenue, Gateshead; Denewell Avenue, Gateshead; Bethel, Chester-le-Street; Christ Church, Stanley; St Andrew's, Blackhill; and Waddington Street, Durham, to form a group to be known as the Durham and Gateshead Group;**
- b) **these churches ceasing to be members of the Gateshead and County Durham Mission Partnerships, the former of which is hereby dissolved; and**
- c) **scoping of the Durham and Gateshead Group for two full-time ministers, one to be 50% in the group and 50% Synod Training and Development Officer.**

18/69 **LOCAL MISSION & MINISTRY REVIEW**

The LMMR Administrator, Revd Joan Grindrod-Helmn, emphasised that the work of teams of visitors to churches was a learning encounter rather than an inspection. Fiona Middlemist (Widdrington) spoke about new initiatives at her local church, including the visit of the Knitted Bible from St George's, Hartlepool, coffee mornings and craft days.

18/70 **MISSION**

The Convenor, Revd Meg Robb reported that St John the Evangelist LEP, Kingston Park, would celebrate its ruby anniversary next weekend. She urged members to visit the world church if they got the opportunity. [*A minister*] had joined the committee, as the Synod's new Green Apostle, whilst [*two members*] were standing down. Meg herself would remain on the committee after the convenorship passed to [*the new Convenor*].

**18/71 SYNOD EXECUTIVE**

The Clerk moved resolutions 7-9, which were carried.

**18/72 Section O Panel**

**The Synod of the Northern Province, meeting in plenary session on the thirteenth day of October 2018, resolves as follows:**

- a) to join with North Western, Mersey, Yorkshire and Scotland in constituting a shared synod panel in accordance with paragraph B.2.2 of the Ministerial Disciplinary Process, which said panel shall come into being when all the sharing synods have passed an enabling resolution in the form contained in the Appendix to Section O and at a date to be agreed by the sharing synods (“the formation date”), at which date the shared synod panel shall come into existence;
- b) in conjunction with the other sharing synods and no later than the formation date, to appoint persons onto the shared synod panel in compliance with paragraph B.2.2.1, and one person (who may be a panel member) to act as coordinator in compliance with paragraph B.2.2.3; and
- c) to continue to maintain its separate synod panel until the formation date, following which it shall cease to exist.

**18/73 Convenor of Mission Committee**

**Synod appoints [*a minister*] as Convenor of Mission Committee from 13 October 2018 until the autumn Synod meeting in 2021.**

**18/74 Next Meeting**

**Synod resolves to next meet at the Church of St John the Evangelist, Kingston Park, on Saturday 16 March 2019, or at such other place and time as may be convenient.**

**18/75 GROW YOUR OWN**

The Moderator encouraged Synod to grow its own ministers, worship leaders, local church leaders and elders, to affirm one another’s gifts and challenge people to explore their vocations. Synod was asked to consider a botanical analogy in small groups.

**18/76 INVITATION TO KINGSTON PARK**

On behalf of Hannah Middleton, [*a minister*] invited Synod to come to the Church of St John the Evangelist, Kingston Park, on 16 March 2019.

18/77 **CLOSE**

Dementia-friendly Worship

The Revd Dr Matthew Prevett spoke about his 18-month research on dementia. It was a difficult subject, provoking fear, and the illness could take different forms and progress at different rates. Some churches were already working with carers and those suffering dementia, such as at St Mark's, Amble, and Jesmond. Packs were available for each church and minister with resources for dementia-friendly churches. The Alzheimer's Society's dementia friends programme was recommended.

Matthew then led dementia-friendly worship, with members from Jesmond and St Mark's, Amble. A retiring collection was held for All We Can's Indonesia emergency appeal.

..... Moderator

..... Synod Clerk

..... Date