



THE NORTHERN SYNOD OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH met at the Church of St John the Evangelist, Kingston Park, on Saturday 16 March 2019, with the Moderator, the Revd Dave Herbert, in the chair, along with 30 ministers, 44 representatives and 26 visitors [listed in Appendix 1].

19/5 OPENING AND WELCOME

The Moderator opened the meeting, which had a theme of 'God's Wonderful World'. Notice was given of the use of photographs from the day. Opening worship, based on Psalm 148, was led by members of St John's Church. Notice was given of an amendment to resolution 9, which would be removed from *en bloc*.

19/6 MINUTES of the meeting of 13 October 2018 and further minutes were approved and signed.

19/7 MATTERS ARISING

No items were raised.

19/8 NEWS OF PEOPLE AND PLACES

New members, visitors and ecumenical guests were welcomed.

The imminent closure of the churches at Belford and Blackhill was noted with sadness, and all churches experiencing difficulties were remembered.

News of ministerial moves, retirements and anniversaries was shared. It was noted with a cheer that the Synod Clerk had transferred her membership to the United Reformed Church.

The Moderator led the Synod in prayer.

19/9 THE ENVIRONMENT – IT'S NOT AN OPTIONAL EXTRA

The Moderator reflected that the environment was integral to the web of life, and that something needed to change as four earths were needed to sustain current standards of living. He shared his efforts to give up plastic for Lent.

19/10 STAYING ALIVE

Revd Edward Butlin introduced a video on *Staying Alive*, a joint youth camp at Seahouses each August. It was hoped to increase attendance, and postcards were available to give to young people in local churches, promoting this year's event.

Hannah Middleton (Children's Work Advisor & St John's, Kingston Park) spoke of her church's take up of toilet twinning with communities in the Third World, enabling others to benefit from safe sanitation. Leaflets were available. She also recommended the *One Body* resource booklet recently sent out to churches by Church House.

19/11 CHURCH THROUGH A DIFFERENT LENS

[*The Children's & Youth Work Committee Convenor*] gave an update on the Youth Opportunities Programme. Four youth interns were in place in local churches, and a fifth was in process. There was funding available for more posts.

19/12 Roker

David Dick was invited to speak on Roker's experience of the programme. At first, there had been concerns about whether there would be enough work, how the mentoring would work, and how they would attract an intern. Then as they progressed, excitement had grown, and after some frustrations with the recruitment process, the concerns had been resolved. They had recruited a photography student from Sunderland University, who was bringing new ideas and enthusiasm to the team, linking church and community and working with socially isolated people. David recommended the programme.

Amelia Turner was then invited to speak about what she had achieved as a youth intern at Roker. She had helped with monthly themed afternoon teas, craft classes, autumn children's parties, collecting for the food bank, cookery classes for refugees, and had been involved with a connectedness event and an international café event. She exhibited a banner made of superimposed long and short exposure photographs showing movements in a dance class. This would be displayed at the church.

Appreciation was expressed of the amazing amount of work done, and [*the Convenor*] encouraged other churches to consider participating in this programme.

19/13 YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE

Ali Greaves (Youth Representative) gave a short video clip. She explained her role to represent under-26-year-olds associated with the churches of Northern Synod, and was happy to hear from churches wishing to make contact with her. This included attending Synod Children's & Youth Work Committee, and URC Youth Executive meetings. Youth Executive planned Youth Assembly and also supported Greenbelt and Crossfire events.

19/14 COMMITTEE CONVERSATIONS

[The HR Consultant] was introduced as the Synod's new Human Resources Consultant. As an experiment, committee convenors and Synod officers visited tables to talk about their work and their reports and answer questions. Views on the conversations were mixed, although Synod generally warmed to it.

19/15 YOUTH ASSEMBLY

Ali Greaves gave a second short video clip, explaining that Youth Assembly was a big gathering of 14-25-year-olds for worship, learning and eating together. There had been a good attendance this year, when the theme was "One Body – We're All in This Together." A short video was shown of this January's event.

19/16 RESOLUTIONS

Church Closures

Two churches were coming to the end of their lives, although hope was expressed that new ways of being church might emerge, as this was an age of transition. Concerns were expressed by many members about church closures. Synod needed to take a lead in showing what might be possible; organisational structures and levies may need to be changed; could registered fellowships take the place of local churches? Some felt churches were insufficiently supported by Synod when they were in distress. Learning from past closures showed that it helped if elders could continue to give pastoral support during the time of transition. It was suggested that someone be employed to give interim or transitional ministry, which was welcomed by some, although it would not solve churches' financial problems. *[A Synod member]* shared experiences from Blyth and Ashington where churches had worked together or amalgamated rather than closing.

19/17 Erskine & St Cuthbert's, Belford

[The Interim Moderator] pointed out that the church hall had been the only community space in this small market town. It was noted, positively, that two people from Belford were training for ministry. Resolution 6 was carried, with two abstentions.

Synod, giving thanks for faithful life and service through the years, concurs with the decision of the Church Meeting of Erskine and St Cuthbert's, Belford, having ceased public worship, to close on 31 March 2019.

19/18 St Andrew's, Blackhill

Resolution 7 was carried, with one abstention.

Synod, giving thanks for faithful life and service through the years, concurs with the decision of the Church Meeting of St Andrew's, Blackhill, to close in July 2019.

The Moderator then led the Synod in prayer.

19/19 East Cleveland Group

Resolution 8 was carried, with one abstention.

Synod concurs with scoping the East Cleveland Group for one full-time Minister of Word and Sacraments, and their addition to the Moderators' list of vacancies.

19/20 Lay Presidency

[The Pastoral Committee Convenor] added that *[a name]* should have been included in the list of those already authorised to preside by South East Northumberland Ecumenical Area. *[A Synod member]* called for Ann Honey to be removed from the list for Newcastle North/Central, given her impending move, and Jane Tomlin (St Andrew's, Nunthorpe & Marton) asked for *[another name]* to be removed from the list for Teesside South East. Resolution 9 was amended to include *[a further name]*, and was then carried.

In cases of pastoral necessity, Synod authorises those previously authorised (in normal print in the list on pages 9-10 of the book of Synod reports) to preside at the sacraments in their mission partnerships and groups for a further year; and also authorises for one year and within the mission partnership or group, subject to their first completing the required training, *[one name]* (Newcastle North/Central), *[a second name]* (Newcastle East), *[a third name]* (Coast) and *[a fourth name]* (Tees and Swale).

19/21 Synod Executive Committee

Resolution 13 was carried, to enable the committee to function more easily with a reduced membership.

Synod resolves to amend the Synod Executive Terms of Reference to enable a quorum of 50% of the existing membership.

19/22 In response to a question, the Moderator indicated that Synod Executive and its task group on intentional missional communities would be responsible for carrying out the work envisaged in the next resolution. Resolution 14 was then carried, with one abstention.

Synod affirms the continued exploration of how we may foster the church of tomorrow, understanding that church life may settle into different shaped communities and patterns of worship, and asks to receive news of progress made, as it becomes available.

19/23 Killingworth Christian Council

Resolution 16 was carried, with two abstentions.

Synod affirms the Trust's resolution that no request shall be made for a refund of the initial capital of £8,500, or if the cash assets of the Killingworth Christian Council are more than £38,500, a greater proportion thereof, on condition that:

- The Newcastle Central & East Circuit Meeting and the Diocese of Newcastle pass similar motions;
- any remaining funds of the Killingworth Christian Council continue to be used in accordance with the charitable aims of the charity, number 1126757;
- the Killingworth Christian Council make report to the Trust Officer and the Synod Clerk, at least annually, as to the use of the funds, with details of the grants made, until such time as the money has been exhausted.

19/24 Safeguarding Policy

Resolution 17 was carried, reflecting the updated denominational policy.

Synod adopts the revised safeguarding policy, dated October 2018.

19/25 Changes to the Membership of General Assembly and to the Elders' Promise

Resolution 18 was carried.

Synod raises no objection to resolutions 17/50 of Mission Council November 2017 and 5, 7, 10 and 14 of General Assembly 2018.

19/26 En Bloc

At Revd Max Shepherd's request, resolution 2 was removed from *en bloc*. Resolutions 1, 3-5, 10-12 and 15 were then carried.

19/27 **Synod concurs with the retirement of [a minister] from 31 December 2018. We give thanks for his service and wish him well in retirement.**

19/28 **Synod acknowledges with sadness the resignation of Revd Dr Matthew Prevett from St Andrew's, Monkseaton, and supports his remaining on the Roll of Ministers. Synod thanks him for his service and commends him in prayer as he seeks to discern the way forward.**

19/29 **Synod acknowledges the conclusion of the term as CRCWM at Robert Stewart Memorial of Ann Honey and rejoices in her call and commissioning to the new CRCWM post at St Columba's, Billingham. We hold Ann and the church in our prayers as they begin this new phase of ministry together.**

19/30 **Synod concurs with the retirement of Revd Meg Robb from the end of May 2019. We give thanks for her service and wish her well in retirement.**

19/31 **Synod affirms Ali Greaves' appointment as Northern Synod representative upon URC Youth Executive until March 2022.**

19/32 **Synod appoints Melanie Campbell as Mission Council representative with effect from 16 March 2019 until March 2022.**

19/33 Synod instructs Synod Executive to appoint alternate representatives for Mission Council May 2019, if required.

19/34 Synod resolves to next meet at Wooler United Reformed Church on Saturday 5 October 2019 or at such other place and time as may be convenient.

19/35 THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH (NORTHERN PROVINCE) TRUST LIMITED

The Convenor, Revd David Grosch-Miller, explained that the Trust was looking for new trustees, a Treasurer, and a convenor for the Ministry & Mission Subcommittee. It was planned to review the way in which M&M was raised next year.

David reflected that structures can obscure our common purpose of making evident the love of God. "Synod" is a collective noun, made up of representatives of local churches. The Trust was the body recognised in civil law to serve all the churches. However, there was a tension between the collective and individual interests. Speaking personally, David reflected that it was clear that churches were struggling to raise funds and maintain properties. Yet buildings were not in themselves a core purpose, but were there to serve the church. Their usefulness should be reviewed with this in mind, as many were not comfortable, well-equipped or well suited to current needs. There was a danger of putting money into buildings that were not fit for purpose, and were not being used for mission, but simply to generate income. If it was left too late, a congregation might run out of energy and close, and then the Trust's options were limited by law. Should buildings be maintained by the Trust and rented back to churches at affordable rates, he wondered.

The Moderator then led Synod in prayer, which was followed by lunch.

19/36 SYNOD AND CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS... HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE URC?

Communications Group Convenor Ian Buchanan gave a presentation, showing work in progress picking up on 92 responses from the previous meeting on what members valued. Key themes had been nurturing, fully alive, light and love, inclusive, belonging, acceptance, friendship and togetherness, authentic and playful, sense of purpose in life, and faith in action. Members were asked to indicate how they would describe the URC as a faith community to a stranger, and what the role of communication was in an organisation like ours. A focus group had sought to define an identity for the Synod, with the strapline, "Faith in action, bringing love and meaning to life," supported by evidence, "Standing with others... belonging... love." Two creative agencies had produced a number of concept designs, on which feedback was invited. Ian planned to have further discussions with church and non-church people, with the aim of bringing a proposal to Synod Executive Committee in June. Packs were available to pick up and respond.

19/37 SAFEGUARDING

[The Synod Safeguarding Advisor] spoke to her printed report, highlighting that arising from the Past Case Review, the United Reformed Church was revising its *Good Practice* guidelines and developing its own training materials during 2019. Her level of casework had increased, and she had helped churches with risk assessments. Training was being publicised on the Synod website. Safeguarding returns provided a valuable opportunity to reflect on risks and processes, as well as providing assurance to the denomination as a whole. Our faith tells us to protect the vulnerable, and this helps us to do so.

In response to questions, it was pointed out that the United Reformed Church needed its own policies, even if this seemed like reinventing the wheel, as they reflected different denominational structure and reporting mechanisms to those of the Methodist Church. Supervision and support of clergy had been discussed at denominational level, but this had not come as a strong recommendation for the URC from the Past Case Review, unlike in the Church of England.

As this was to be *[her]* final Synod meeting before retiring, the Moderator gave thanks for her diligence, reassurance and support. He also thanked the trainers and those who keep churches safe.

19/38 KELD RESOURCE CENTRE

Company Secretary Clive Davies was invited to speak to the Keld Project 2018/2019 report booklet. He saw Keld as a good news story of a small church, a unique place of transcendence. He explained the origins of the project in the 1970s, and the new structure put in place in 2009 with initial support from three synods and ecumenical partners. Over the last ten years, the manse and institute had been renovated, and a heritage centre, well-being garden and community orchard created. A programme of events was running. It was now hoped to refurbish the school as a project hub.

Clive was congratulated on an excellent booklet, showing new ways of being church.

19/39 RURAL POVERTY, RURAL CHURCH

The Methodist and United Reformed Church National Rural Officer, Revd Elizabeth Clark, was invited to speak. She began by challenging ideas of what rural was. It could be industrial or agricultural, sparsely or densely populated, remote or accessible communities of fewer than 10,000 people. In England, 17% of the population was rural, and this could include pockets of hidden deprivation. Rural people were generally older than their urban counterparts. Increases in second homes, holiday lets and moving to the countryside were pushing up house prices and rents, and putting pressure on infrastructure. Young people were being forced out. Some 900,000 households were in rural poverty, which could include finances, fuel, access, and networking. There was a lack of public transport and local services. Loneliness had a significant impact on health.

However, Elizabeth added, rural churches could help with this, and there was a toolkit on www.germinate.net. She gave examples of running coffee bars, post offices and village shops from churches. Tea and toast were offered to parents who wanted to chat after dropping off children at school. Family film nights were offered. Craft groups, breakfast clubs and dispersed food banks were also possibilities. Churches could make a huge impact.

Revd Edward Butlin recommended Germinate's rural leadership course.

19/40 **WHY DOES NORTHERN SYNOD HAVE A GREEN APOSTLE?**

The Moderator formally welcomed Revd Trevor Jamison into his ministry as Green Apostle with a handshake and a prayer. Trevor explained that his role, for 25% of his scoping over the next three years, was to provide information, support and encouragement on creation care issues to Synod and to local churches. Creation was celebrated in scripture, inviting a response of awe, thanksgiving, humility and love. Climate change presented challenges, as it was beyond our power to make all the changes needed. Burning fossil fuels had become central to the society we had constructed, but that needed to change. Some synods were again considering divestment from energy companies.

As Green Apostle, Trevor would encourage churches to register with Eco Church (a tool to explore our life as churches and sharpen our thinking) and aim to win awards. He would also encourage Synod to register as an Eco Synod, and he would set up a group or network to encourage this area of church life.

In response to questions, Trevor suggested one thing churches could do was to ask how often they celebrated creation in imaginative ways. He was available to preach or talk on this subject. Plastic packaging could damage the environment through pollution, and its manufacture released carbon. There is not always a right answer to ecological questions, but the church could offer hope.

19/41 **MAN ON A MISSION – THE WORK OF THE FISHERMEN'S MISSION IN THE NORTH EAST**

Superintendent Peter Dade was invited to speak on his work as Area Officer covering the North East coast from Amble to Hartlepool. Fishing was the most dangerous peacetime occupation in the UK, with five accidents a week, and a 1 in 14 chance of death. The Fishermen's Mission was founded in 1881, and now had centres around the UK. Their work included combating loneliness, preventing poverty, and emotional and financial support in bereavement. They depended on donations and volunteers (some of whom were former fishermen) to operate. North Shields was the biggest prawn port in England, and the mission there was celebrating its 120th anniversary in 2019.

19/42 **MISSION COUNCIL**

Melanie Campbell announced that topics coming up at the May meeting would include divestment from fossil fuel companies, and discipleship development strategy.

19/43 **MAX SHEPHERD**

Revd Max Shepherd corrected the Pastoral Committee report, explaining that he had worked for the Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust, which had been judged outstanding on its mental health work. Resolution 2 was amended to give the correct date, and carried.

Synod, noting and affirming the retirement of Revd Max Shepherd from 28 February 2019, wishes him well in retirement.

19/44 **INVITATION TO WOOLER**

[The representative for Wooler] and [a visitor from Wooler] invited Synod to come to Wooler on 5 October 2019.

19/45 **CLOSE**

The Moderator led the meeting in closing worship.

A retiring collection was held for Action Foundation.

..... Moderator

..... Synod Clerk

..... Date