



THE NORTHERN SYNOD OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH met at Denewell Avenue United Reformed Church, Low Fell, Gateshead, on Saturday 17 October 2015, with the Moderator, the Revd Lis Mullen, in the chair.

Present: Revds M K Alberg, J A Breslin, E K Brown, G R Brown, E J S Butlin, H J Collinson, S Collinson, R A Crofton, H M Drummond, A S Dunstone, J C Durell, W Ellerby, I T Farnsworth, R J Forster, J E Grindrod-Helmn, K Harris, Dr A P Haws, D A Herbert, G Hume, M Lloyd, H S May, A E Mills, P C Moth, S J Orange, J C Paul, R M Poolman, D A Pratt, M Prevett, M M Robb, J Ross, J Rowell, M E Taylor, Dr D E G Whiting (**Ministers**)

Mrs H Stephenson (**CRCW**)

Mrs J Armstrong, Mrs S M Bush, Mrs J O Calcraft, Mrs M A Campbell, Mrs D B Clarke, Mrs E M Conran, Mrs R Dawson, Mrs M Dobie, Mr J H Drew, Mrs C Eddowes, Mrs S Flett, Mr D L Fox, Mrs D Gollan, Mrs A Grey, Dr A Hamnett, Mrs C A Holmes, Mr R M Jones, Mr A S J Lie, Mr D Mackay, Mr P B Matthew, Dr D Moore, Mr W Offler, Mr A T Ogilvie, Mrs C M Oswell, Mrs E Robertson, Ms L Robson, Mrs C L Roddam, Mr J Scott, Mrs C Smith, Mrs A Stears, Mrs J R Tomlin, Miss L Wilson (**Representatives**)

Others: Mr A Atkinson, Dr A Bradstock, Mr A B Dobie, Mr R Golightly, Mrs H E Hogg, Mrs H J Middleton, Dr S Moon, Mrs D M Perry, Mrs E Styan, Mr W Sutherland, Mr R Todd, Mrs W Watson

Apologies for absence: Ms B Allen, Revd R Anglesea, Mrs D J Barker, Mrs M Barlow, Mrs S N Bell, Ms M Bellshaw, Revd E Blair, Revd S J Brock, Dr P H Clarke, Revd G L Connacher, Revd A L Coulthard, Mrs G Cox, Miss J M Degenhardt, Mrs R Dunn, Mr J C G Forrest, Revd S M Hamnett, Revd M Harris, Revd P Holwell, Ms A C Honey, Mrs M Humberston, Revd J Magee, Revd J S Martin, Revd J M McCallum, Mrs S McNabola, Miss E A Meikle, Miss F E Middlemist, Revd R C Mills, Revd C E Morrison, Mrs D Muckles, Revd Dr F J Nelson, Mrs V J Pears, Revd Dr D R Peel, Mrs N Pigeon, Revd P S Rand, Miss M Russell, Revd M Shepherd, Revd A Shepherdson, Revd J M Smith, Mr D Stembridge, Mr J C Storer, Mrs H Sutton, Mrs S J Swanston, Revd G Thompson, Mrs L Whiting, Revd Dr G F Wilson, Mr A Woodhall, Revd J C Young

15/61 **OPENING AND WELCOME**

The Moderator opened the meeting and no objections were given to use of photographs from the day. Revd Gordon Brown welcomed Synod to Denewell Avenue. Opening worship was led by church members, with a reading from Matthew 6: 25-34 and a dialogue.

15/62 **MINUTES** of the meeting of 21 March 2015 and further minutes were approved and signed.

15/63 **MATTERS ARISING**

No items were raised.

15/64 **NEWS OF PEOPLE AND PLACES**

The Clerk reported that retired minister Cyril Hobson had celebrated his 90th birthday on 23 June with a party at St Paul and St John's, South Shields.

Janet Appleby had left the Church of the Good Shepherd LEP, Battle Hill. Andrew Clarke had moved from Trinity LEP, Gosforth, and the new Methodist superintendent Peter Holwell was welcomed as the minister there last month. Matthew Prevett was ordained and inducted on 26 September at St Andrew's, Monkseaton, to a ministry which would also include 25% working for the Synod. Jane Rowell, formerly Secretary for International Church Relations, had been welcomed back to the Synod as joint Mission Enabler with North Western Synod. Hannah Middleton had been welcomed back to the Synod as Children's Work Advisor. Stephen Lindridge had been welcomed as the new chair of Newcastle Methodist District. Linda Gowland was appointed local church leader at St Aidan's, Hexham, on Easter Sunday. In addition to his Seaton Delaval pastorate, Greg Thompson was ordained as minister of Trinity LEP, Bedlington, on 26 August following the departure of Methodist Minister, Heegon Moon. Retired minister, Vivian Buddle, had moved into the Synod and is now living with his wife near Yarm. Ted Walton retired in the summer after 70 years of preaching.

Olga Hawkins a longstanding member of Roker URC, and widow of a former minister, died in April.

Widdrington was celebrating its 250th anniversary this year, and Oxclose LEP, Washington, its 40th. Winlaton LEP and Lingdale had closed on 26 July and 5 April respectively.

Since the previous meeting of Synod, Helen Hogg had raised £300 for the Mozambique project with a sponsored ride on the biggest zipwire in Britain, and Rachel Poolman had done a sponsored parachute jump.

Andrew Atkinson was presented with a certificate on 20 years working for the Synod.

Henry Gowland, the May family, Catey Morrison and Lis Mullen were remembered in prayer, together with everyone mentioned above.

Allison Grey was welcomed to her first meeting, representing Elsdon Avenue LEP, Seaton Delaval.

15/65 BIBLE STUDY

The Moderator welcomed Andrew Bradstock, outgoing denominational Secretary for Church & Society, who was moving to become visiting professor in theology, religion and philosophy at the University of Winchester. He led the Synod in a Bible study based on Deuteronomy 15: 1-5, Luke 4: 16-21 and John 10: 7-10. He reflected on the scriptural basis for the Church's concern with worldly public, environmental and social matters, as expressed through the ecumenical Joint Public Issues Team. Jesus' mission was to enable all to enjoy life to the full, which encompassed both a new meaning for our lives as individuals, and a new model of community based on love, peace, compassion, justice and sharing. God affirms life in the here and now, and society is meant to operate on a just basis, giving the hope of restoration for those who have fallen on hard times. Although there are instances of violent bloodshed and even genocide in the Old Testament, on the whole the Bible is about human flourishing. Jesus' ministry was public and engaged in changing the world – far more than a private spirituality. Therefore it was illogical for churches to be at the heart of their communities responding to human need, but not speaking up about injustices. The Church, like Jesus, is criticised by those in power for being politically disruptive. However, the Church has a Biblical mandate to engage with society, and to bring another dimension to the debate, without claiming superior knowledge. This world is more than an airport waiting lounge for the next world. Andrew closed by quoting Jim Wallis, "Hope is believing despite the evidence, and then watching the evidence change."

15/66 CHRISTIAN AID'S CAMPAIGN FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

The Moderator then welcomed Sarah Moon, Regional Coordinator for Christian Aid. She quoted the World Council of Churches' Guillermo Kerber: "The God of the Bible is a God of justice, who takes care and loves 'the orphan, the widow, the stranger', the vulnerable ones. Today victims of climate change are another face of the vulnerable ones." For 70 years, Christian Aid had stood alongside the vulnerable and poor, and challenged systems that kept them poor. For the last 9 years, they had been campaigning on climate change, as this was now the biggest threat facing humanity. Government needed to hear members of the public calling for action, to enable them to act more decisively on the issue.

A short film (www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzTUL_9pnOk&noredirect=1) introduced Christian Aid's *Big Shift* campaign to move from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. Dirty energy needed to become a thing of the past. A mind shift was needed. Taxes, pensions and investments should be steered away from supporting fossil fuels. Cleaner alternatives would also bring more employment, in both research and production.

Another short film (www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQ--Aw9SSwA) showed the economic benefits of solar energy in Mali, which enabled work and study in the evenings.

Sarah concluded with some action points for churches.

- Sign her petition by 1 November
- Visit www.christianaid.org.uk/ActNow/climate-justice/resources.aspx for further resources
- See Riding Lights Theatre Company's *Baked Alaska* production at St Luke's, Newcastle, on 7 November
- Attend the global people's climate march and rally at Princess Square, Newcastle, at 1.30 pm on 29 November
- Pray and be a prophetic voice in our communities
- Lobby MPs and MEPs

She ended with a prayer.

15/67 **ECUMENICAL ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAMME IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL**

Ecumenical Officer Andy Lie thanked the Synod for giving him leave of absence to enable him to spend 3 months volunteering with EAPPI, a programme set up by the World Council of Churches in 2002 in response to a request from Palestinian churches. EAPPI monitors human rights abuses, reports, engages and provides a protective presence, working for peaceful change. He asked for prayers for what could be a difficult time, starting on 1 December.

15/68 **MODERATOR'S UPDATE**

Mozambique

The Moderator spoke of the visit to the Presbyterian Church of Mozambique in April, and the generous welcome and joyful exuberant worship there. It was hoped to have a return visit from Mozambique next year, visas permitting.

Synod Strategy

Synod Executive had been working on churches' feedback from the Thinking Day and subsequent letter, seeking to discern a way forward for the Synod. Whilst planning for the future ahead, the committee also recognised the importance of responding well to situations as they arose. Clearly, it would be important to build up the Eldership as deployed ministry continued to reduce, and the second Elders' Conference would take place next week. There was a growing mismatch of churches' and ministers' expectations of each other as the nature of ministry evolved. Spiritual growth was even more important than numbers. New models may include ministry teams and lay workers. Churches were urged to make full use of the Synod's new resource staff, Children's Work Advisor Hannah Middleton and Mission Enabler Jane Rowell.

Northerly Synods

The five synods were continuing to discuss human resources, finance, discipline, administration, mediation and safeguarding, and all five found it worthwhile.

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

15/69 MISSION

Jane Tomlin (St Andrew's, Nunthorpe & Marton) added that the charity Justice First worked with failed asylum seekers on Teesside.

15/70 CHILDREN'S & YOUTH WORK

The Convenor, Sandy Ogilvie, urged churches to invite Hannah Middleton to come and help them re-engage with children and young people.

15/71 PASTORAL

There was nothing to add to the printed report.

15/72 MINISTRIES & DEVELOPMENT

The retiring Convenor, David Whiting, explained that the appointment of the joint Discipleship Enabler was not progressing just now, as the synods were reviewing the arrangements.

15/73 Convenor

Resolution 1 was carried.

Synod appoints Revd Hilary Collinson as Convenor of the Ministries & Development Committee, to serve until October 2018.

15/74 SYNOD EXECUTIVE

The Synod Clerk, Melanie Campbell, explained that views would be sought at lunch time to moving to a different format, with a shorter meeting and a working lunch. She also encouraged churches to consider using volunteer role descriptions, which can be helpful in clarifying expectations for major roles. Resolutions 2-5 were carried, with a minor amendment to resolution 3.

Partners in Mission

Melanie explained that resolution 2 would stabilise funding for 3 years for a joint project in which Ed Butlin was very involved. Resolution 3 would enable good work to be done that churches would like to do, but in practice could not.

15/75 **Synod awards a Partner in Mission Grant of £6,000 to the Diocese of Newcastle towards the Staying Alive joint youth summer project, to provide £2,000 each year from 2016 to 2018.**

15/76 **Synod awards a Partner in Mission Grant of £21,000 to St Antony's Priory, Durham, towards the outreach project supporting adults in recovery from addiction and their carers, to provide £7,000 each year from 2016 to 2018.**

15/77 Safeguarding

Synod agrees that the annual review of the Northern Synod Safeguarding Policy and Procedure will be undertaken in preparation for the March meeting of Synod.

15/78 Next Meeting

Synod resolves to next meet at Jesmond United Reformed Church, Newcastle, on Saturday 19 March 2016, or at such other place and time as may be convenient.

REFUGEE CRISIS

15/79 An emergency resolution was proposed by Meg Robb and seconded by Ron Forster, based on a text from East Midlands Synod. This was a matter of desperate need. The Synod was also collecting a fund to help refugees when they arrive in the North East. Rachel Poolman, James Breslin and David Herbert proposed adding a further resolution 17 to take this forward. Resolutions 15 and 17 were carried, with slight grammatical amendment to the former.

Northern Synod of the United Reformed Church calls upon Her Majesty's Government to:

- **Recognise its responsibility to help protect refugees arriving in Europe**
- **With European partners, provide safe and legal routes into Europe to tackle people smuggling**
- **Promote the establishment of proper, EU-run, processing centres at key borders**
- **Accept its fair share of refugees who have arrived in Europe, in cooperation with other member states of the European Union**
- **Make necessary arrangements to provide immediate shelter and support for refugees, and longer term to arrange for full resettlement for those wishing to remain**
- **Provide local authorities which are taking refugees with additional financial resources to help meet the costs.**

15/80 **Synod instructs its Clerk to forward resolution 15/79 to the Secretary of State and calls upon its churches and members to write appropriately to their MPs and MEPs.**

15/81 **TRUST**

The Chair of the Board, Revd James Breslin, explained that the role of Synod Treasurer had been reviewed and greatly reduced, and the Finance Officer's job had been increased. He appealed for volunteers or nominations. He thanked Helen Hogg for producing the figures and charts for the book of reports, and Synod recorded its gratitude for the extra work she had done whilst the Synod was without a Treasurer.

15/82 Ethical Investment Policy

James explained that the Trust generally sought to maximise income, but may omit investments that could put off supporters. The Trust was carrying out a review of its ethical investment policy and invited comments from Synod, particularly with regard to alcohol and fossil fuels. Doug Fox (West End, Newcastle) spoke against investment in alcohol because of the social problems that it caused. A majority of Synod members warmed to the idea of excluding alcohol from the Trust's investments. Stan May pointed out that it was highly unlikely that renewable energy sources could meet the UK's needs entirely, so fossil fuels were likely to continue to be used. However, the church should encourage research and use of the cleanest fuels possible. It was reflected that it can be hard to know which companies have connections to fossil fuels, so the Trust relied on its investment manager to advise on those with a significant involvement (>5% of turnover). Suggestions included proactively investing in renewables and disinvesting from coal and tar sands, which were the most polluting fuels. Ron Forster noted that the URC nationally could make a difference by actively engaging with investee companies. Joan Ross asked the Trust to provide evidence of how the Trust's continued investment in fossil fuels had brought about demonstrable change in the actions of fuel companies. Clearly more thought was needed, and James undertook to bring a paper and a resolution to the next meeting of Synod.

Resolutions 6-10 were carried *en bloc*.

15/83 Nominations

Synod reappoints James Breslin and Jo Kennedy as Directors of the United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited, to serve from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2018.

15/84 **Synod appoints Ian Buchanan as a Director of the United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited, to serve from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2018.**15/85 St Mark's LEP, Coulby Newham

Synod thanks Jane Tomlin, Roger Wheeler and Evelyn Robertson for their service as trustees of the former Coulby Newham Manse, and notes that this trust has now been wound up.

15/86 St Cuthbert's Centre, Holy Island

Synod, recognising the unique mission of the St Cuthbert's Centre and its associated properties on Holy Island, recommends that the Property and Manse Subgroups, acting on behalf of the Trust, work with the Centre's team to ensure that the properties are surveyed on an annual basis, an annual capital expenditure budget prepared and advice provided in carrying out whatever maintenance and repair work is deemed necessary.

15/87 Budget

Synod affirms the budget for the year ending 31 December 2016, and agrees to the levy, which is the equivalent of £29.80 per member.

15/88 **LISTED BUILDINGS ADVISORY**

There was nothing to add to the printed report.

15/89 **JUBILEE MINISTERS**

Synod reconvened after a lunch break, and celebrated ministerial jubilees: David Welbrock 60 years; Tony Ritchie 50 years; Stuart Brock and Graham Carling 40 years; Alan Smith, Rachel Poolman, Ron Forster and Helen Drummond 30 years; Ruth Crofton, Julie Martin and Joan Ross 25 years; Barry Hutchinson and Steven Orange 20 years. Those present were given certificates.

Alison Mills was congratulated on completing her EM2 post-ordination training, and Hannah Middleton had completed the Training for Learning and Serving Foundation Course.

15/90 **WELCOME**

The Moderator then formally welcomed Jane Rowell as Mission Enabler (inducted the previous weekend by North Western Synod) and Hannah Middleton as Children's Work Advisor.

15/91 **APPOINTMENT OF THE NEXT SYNOD MODERATOR**

The Clerk announced that a leaving service for Lis Mullen would be held on 16 July at St Margaret's, South Shields.

A trailer advertisement for the role of Moderator had appeared in the October edition of *Reform* magazine, with the full advertisement coming in November. Short-listing and interviewing would take place in January. Thanks were given to Stephen Collinson for coordinating the production of the Synod profile, which would go online on Monday.

15/92 ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

The Moderator then invited Andrew Bradstock to speak to the United Reformed Church's draft environmental policy. He explained that the paper in the book of reports represented the latest stage in a process of consultation, prior to being put to General Assembly in 2016. It was premised on the need to be good stewards of God's creation and combat climate change, and would update the 2004 policy. It was intended to be a statement of intent rather than a directive. Section 5 suggested specific actions for measuring and reducing the Church's carbon footprint. It aimed to be practical, usable and flexible, given the diversity of opinion and local situations, without being too vague. A Rocha's Eco-Church programme would be launched next year, with online resources for congregations.

Andrew asked what difference this policy would make to us, whether the balance of precision and flexibility was right, and whether anything was wrong or missing. The theology may need 'beefing up.' Several speakers felt churches lacked expertise in this area and would need support and practical guidance to implement suggested actions. Section 6 gave links to online resources, and churches needed to take responsibility to follow them up. Rachel Poolman pointed out that those arranging meetings had a responsibility to consider accessibility by public transport. James Breslin remarked that Synod should have an environmental audit if it is serious about this, which could sit alongside the condition survey and LMMR. Andrew Bradstock agreed that this needed to be taken seriously, and that the Church needed to be part of the change.

15/93 THOUGHTS FROM AN ECO-CONGREGATION

Liz Styan, Green Apostle at Zion, Northallerton, was invited to speak. She explained that the church had set up a Green Group in 2001 in response to the Five Marks of Mission. The group had credibility because it had come out of the church's decision-making process. Zion used the then new ecumenical Eco-Congregation resource, which enabled them to prioritise, examine and improve every area of the church's life. It could also be challenging on a personal level. The group meets regularly and addresses matters step by step, covering spiritual, practical, local and global issues. Eco-Church would replace this award. Liz spoke enthusiastically of all that the church had done through Eco-Congregation and thoroughly recommended this.

15/94 MISSION COUNCIL AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Clerk referred to the printed report on Mission Council from Andy Braunston.

General Assembly had discussed the marriage of same-sex couples.

Technical resolutions 11-13 were carried *en bloc*.

15/95 Synod raises no objection to resolutions 19B(2) and 19E of General Assembly 2014.**15/96 Synod raises no objection to resolution 15/4(3) of Mission Council May 2015.**

15/97 Synod raises no objection to resolution 15/13(3) of Mission Council May 2015.**15/98 MARRIAGE OF SAME-SEX COUPLES**

The Moderator explained that following the overwhelming support for the enabling resolution at Synod in March, General Assembly had considered the matter further, and had produced a more detail resolution, which was being sent to synods for consultation as it may amount to constitutional change. The effect of this would be that the decision on the marriage of same-sex couples would be taken at local church level, rather than permitted by General Assembly.

Steven Orange spoke against the resolution, pointing out in discussing religious marriage the Church need not follow Parliament's lead in civil law. The Church as the body of Christ is indivisible, and therefore all should follow Biblical standards rather than prevailing social attitudes. It was not necessarily right to fulfil all natural desires. Grace is not permission to do as we wish.

Jane Tomlin (St Andrew's, Nunthorpe & Marton) queried whether it would be acceptable to the Home Office not to take a view at denominational level. James Breslin clarified that the Government would accept the Church's view of its own governance, that it would be for each local church to decide. The question was a theological one and a matter of scriptural interpretation on which different views may be held, and in the United Reformed Church these may be resolved at Church Meeting.

Resolution 14 was carried with 2 against.

Synod raises no objection to resolution 4A of General Assembly 2015.

The Moderator led the Synod in prayer.

15/99 LOCAL MISSION & MINISTRY REVIEW

The Administrator, Joan Grindrod-Helmn, explained that LMMR was not intended to be an Ofsted for churches, but an opportunity. Visitors would hear churches' stories and help, encourage and celebrate their work and help them to prioritise what they need to do next. Nine churches had been visited in the first year. She appealed for more people to volunteer as visitors so that more churches could be visited next year. It was a great experience, and a privilege to share in the life of a church. Names could be given to her, to Jan Adamson or Synod Office.

15/100 KELD RESOURCE CENTRE

Stephen Collinson brought leaflets, and asked for prayers and support for the third phase of the refurbishment programme, which was now nearly fully funded.

15/101 GRINDON CHURCH COMMUNITY PROJECT

David Whiting mentioned that the mission project was looking at installing solar panels, which should save money as well as being good theologically.

15/102 ST CUTHBERT'S CENTRE, HOLY ISLAND

Rachel Poolman spoke of the work of the mission project, meeting people, engaging deeply, then never seeing them again. The centre received 25 prayer requests this week. As with local churches, outcomes may not be measurable, but unseen fruit can be sown. The centre would love to welcome more groups and individuals to the island.

The Convenor of the Management Team, John Durell, then spoke on the developing work of the centre, which now necessitated new ways of working. The team had worked with Synod officers to put in place proposals for a new model. The team would be disbanded, with a view to engaging with consultants with the gifts needed at particular times, which would give greater flexibility to develop this ministry. This would be balanced with accountability to the Synod. New arrangements were planned for property matters, in conjunction with the Trust.

Resolution 16 was carried, with the addition of "determining" in the final bullet point.

Synod reaffirms the Holy Island Mission Project (The St Cuthbert's Centre) as a significant part of its life. Synod approves new patterns of management and financing as outlined in the Synod report, and therefore:

- **thanks the members of the disbanded management team for their active support of the project over recent years;**
- **appoints the Revd John Durell as Project Consultant, approves the continuing appointment of Mrs Sheila Flett as Pastoral Advisor to the Warden, and encourages the appointment of consultants, to be approved by Synod executive, to work with the warden in developing the Project's programme and activities;**
- **notes that day by day financial management of the project will be undertaken within the Centre office, while overseen at a distance by a project treasurer;**
- **encourages the involvement of appropriate Synod personnel in drawing up an annual budget for the project which should provide a basis for determining the level of any Synod mission grants.**

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

15/103 David Herbert brought a flyer for a lecture at Crookham on 23 October, and a night with the stars at Kielder Observatory on 13 February.

15/104 James Breslin drew attention to the opening of the North of England Garden of Remembrance at Saltwell Park, Gateshead, on 31 October.

15/105 **CLOSE**

The Moderator thanked the members of Denewell Avenue for looking after Synod, and the staff for their help behind the scenes, and then led Synod in closing worship.

..... Moderator

..... Synod Clerk

..... Date