

SYNOD MODERATOR REVIEW

At the 2016 Spring Synod Together Meeting on March 12th at East Croydon URC, the meeting heard that our Synod Moderator Nicola Furley-Smith had served five and a half years of her seven-year term of office. URC practice allowed the possibility of an extension for a further five years. As part of this process a review by the Synod was required to be carried out a year prior to the end of the current term. I then proposed that a team representative of the Synod be elected to carry out this task. The Revd Paul Dean, the Revd Jennifer Millington, Mr Nigel Macdonald, Ms Pam Tolhurst, Mr Sam Brown (representing youth), and the Synod Clerk who were nominated by Synod Council were elected by Synod Together to serve on this team.

In the months following the March meeting, the Synod Review Panel (SRP) conducted a wide consultation around the Synod. The aim has been to gauge opinion on Nicola's service, and to consider whether she might be invited to serve a second term in this ministry.

The SRP compiled a carefully written reflection of all that was heard from the Synod and prayerfully recommended that Revd Nicola Furley Smith be reappointed for a period of five years from the end of her current term, and hoped that if offered an extension Nicola will concur with this calling. The SRP then met on 23rd June with a Review Group responsible to the URC General Assembly (ARG). After conversation with the SRP, the ARG met with Moderator Nicola. Both the SRP and the ARG were impressed with what we heard about Nicola's wise and thoughtful leadership, her pastoral skills and good judgment, her patient and purposeful management of change, and the trust and respect in which she is so widely held. With confidence and conviction, the ARG took a recommendation to General Assembly, through the Nominations Committee, which met at Southport in July 2016 that Nicola be invited to serve for five further years beyond the initial seven, thus extending her tenure to February 2023.

At Southport during business session two, the Assembly called for the report of the nominations committee. The convenor, Mrs Irene Wren, proposed Resolution 46:

General Assembly re-appoints the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith as Moderator of the Southern Synod from 1 March 2018 to 28 February 2023.

This was agreed unanimously.

I mention here that some respondents in the Synod recognised that the Moderator is not directly responsible for the delivery of pastoral care, however, there were many who expressed concerns about pastoral care of Ministers and Churches within our Synod and consider that this matter needs to be addressed more effectively within the Synod. It is notable that these concerns reflect those expressed in a 2014 Review initiated at Nicola's request, to which she has been seeking to respond.

It has to be pointed out that the different facets of a Moderator's job, whether pastoral, ecumenical, strategy etc., are interlinked. For example, sometimes a Moderator is required to attend an ecumenical meeting so that there is parity of perceived status in the minds of ecumenical partners. Equally, an independent chair of Synod Council may not understand the financial, property or even the pastoral implications of a strategy.

I need to also point out that Moderator Nicola has had many pastoral encounters with ministers but, just as ministers 'crisis visit', she tends to see people when they 'need something'. There is nothing wrong with this. However, Nicola believes visiting ought to have a purpose and, therefore, she would like to be able to have the opportunity to talk with ministers about what they need to effectively equip them for ministry in 2016 and beyond.

The SRP were conscious of the many demands on Nicola's time, and noted that expectations tend to far exceed what is reasonable to expect. There is a need to help Southern Synod to understand the boundaries of the Moderator's role.

The SRP noted that the generic job description for Moderators has been the subject of quite significant amendment recently with a greater emphasis on pastoral care.

The SRP recognised that a process will be needed to consider how appropriate support can be encouraged within the Synod to enable such changes to be made effectively and the SRP would be willing to assist with this if requested by the Synod Council.

In the light of comments received the SRP recommends that Southern Synod should be encouraged to explain afresh its present strategy for the pastoral care of ministers and churches, and to consider what future needs there may be for mutual support and supervision in pursuit of the goals of Christian discipleship, and how these things might best be delivered.

I must also report to Synod Together that at two meetings with Nicola, the SRP asked her what she could relinquish or how she might do things more efficiently so that she can make pastoral care of ministers a priority. The Assembly Review Group also picked that up. Consideration as to how might time to do this be achieved by Nicola was considered by Synod Council at their meeting this September and the following proposals were agreed:

- 1) For the Synod Clerk to be the Moderator's 'official' deputy at meetings if the Moderator is unable to attend and to make that known to the Synod.
- 2) For Synod Council to look at the Synod Clerk's JD to make sure there is not a duplication of administrative work that falls under the Synod Clerk's remit rather than the Moderator's remit.
- 3) Regarding Ecumenical work, to have one person responsible for the overall picture in the Synod would be extremely helpful due to the changing nature of ecumenical work.
- 4) For Synod Council to look again at the future property needs of the Synod especially at the division of manse and church issues.
- 5) For the Moderator to have a clear mandate to go to the Synod Officers meeting for decisions of a sensitive pastoral nature.

Synod Council also expressed the wish for a 50% Synod Moderator's pastoral assistant post to be created to assist with the pastoral care of ministers, widows and widowers.

In light of the above, members of Synod Together, I bring the following resolutions:

Resolution 3

Southern Synod Together resolves that:

- 1. The Synod Clerk be the Moderator's 'official' deputy at meetings if the Moderator is unable to attend.**
- 2. A 50% Synod Ecumenical Officer post be created to replace the present 25% posts.**
- 3. A 50% Synod Moderator's Pastoral Assistant post be created to assist with pastoral care of serving ministers, retired ministers, widows and widowers.**
- 4. Synod Council should look again at the future property needs of the Synod especially at the division of manse and church issues.**
- 5. The Moderator is given a clear mandate to go to the Synod Officers meeting for decisions of a sensitive pastoral nature, usually involving manse issues.**
- 6. Synod Together appoints the Revd Paul Dean, the Revd Jennifer Millington, Mr Nigel Macdonald, Miss Pam Tolhurst, Mr Sam Brown (representing youth), and the Synod Clerk as Convenor, to review the Moderator's job description in light of the Review report/findings and using the generic job description for Moderators approved by Mission Council.**

Revd Derrick Dzandu-Hedidor
Synod Clerk
September 2016