

Synod Council Matters

I have just returned from another MAD day in the life of Southern Synod. From the numbers gathered to Make A Difference I was heartened by the ‘success’ of the day. Success is a strange word to use when talking about the church because I am not sure whether God is calling us to succeed. Rather, God is calling us to listen to his call and to respond, faithfully. And then to trust that his calling on our lives will indeed bear fruit.

Synod Council continues to look for opportunities of making a difference as it considers issues of looking for new opportunities for being the church in the geographical area of the Synod and is supporting and resourcing the local churches to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ

- 1. New Ways of being church.** As numbers of traditional Ministers of Word and Sacraments decrease, Synod Council continues its work on look for new ways of being church. At present we are working on plans and job descriptions for seeding a Korean Speaking URC in South London with the Presbyterian Church of Korea, a Pioneer post for a Synod Evangelist based in London, as well as working ecumenically to fund a CRCW post again in London with two LEPs. We already have been granted a 4th Special Category ministry in Chaplain and Advocate for the Elderly based in Bognor. Additionally, we have more people than ever coming forward responding to the call to be Local Church Leaders. There is a sense of excitement that God is not finished with the URC yet!

An additional note: I often hear churches say there are not enough Ministers of Word and Sacraments to go around. That is not entirely true. In 2012 the URC General Assembly agreed to only have the number of Stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments that it could afford to pay for rather than to have as many as we need and then hope we can afford them. As churches decrease their M&M giving, the effect is that there is less money to pay for stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments. Hence, the number decreases each year and the need to find other ways of being true to our heritage that allows us to look for new and exciting ways of being church.

- 2. Past Case Review part 2.** This is now complete.
- 3. Alternating Ministry with the SE Methodist District.** Many of the current constitutions in Methodist/URC LEPs required alternating ministry but because of the shortage of ministers in both denominations, this was not always easy or indeed possible. Following consultation with the Revd John Hellyer, SE District Chair, the Moderator and he had agreed that this pattern might be changed to reciprocal arrangements for shared ministry in that shared ordained ministry should be explored in preference to alternating ministry at the point of establishment of a Single Congregation LEP or at the change of minister.
- 4. Walking the Way – living the life of Jesus today** remains the focus for 2017 and beyond in the life of our Synod. All that we do to enable and facilitate discussions about our faith in local churches and in our Synod meetings will be held under this umbrella. Many of you will have already had the leaflet and bookmarks. There are free prayer chains for you to take away also as well as free bookmarks. Much of the initiative has come from Church House but they are asking, as we know you better than they do, to use the gifts we have in our Synod. We have already begun to Walk the Way with our MAD days and under a separate heading on our agenda we shall hear about other resources to help us on our Way.

5. **Changes on Synod Council.** There have been further ‘comings and goings’ on the Council as we have said thank you and goodbye to Revds. John Gordon and Andrew Royal both of whom take up other callings in Southern Synod. Both have brought insight and energy onto the Council and their contributions will be greatly missed. We welcome Mr John Ellis as the Synod Area Leader of the West Kent and East Sussex Synod Area and look forward to working with him to further the kingdom. We await the name of a replacement for the Central Sussex United Area.
6. **Changes in the Synod Office.** We also welcome Mr. Colin McCracken to the Synod Office as our new Property Administrator as we recognise that the needs of local churches for advice and support is growing. Mr Simon Harding is now working part-time as our Finance Administrator.
7. **Retirement.** This is also the final Synod meeting for Mr Guy Morfett, our Property Officer, as he retires on 9th December. Being a Property Officer is not always as easy or popular role as often difficult decisions have to be made but Guy has been dedicated in his task and we will thank him more formally at our March meeting. We are currently in a second round of advertising for a new Property Officer post.
8. **Deployment and Call.** And lastly, we come full circle. We are conscious that deployment and call are a ‘live’ issue in our denomination at present. What are Ministers of Word and Sacraments for, and how are their ministries being used to further the work of God's Kingdom? 44 ministers and local church leaders gathered in Crawley on 27th September for the Moderators’ Ministers Day led by Revd. Paul Whittle, Convener of URC Ministries Committee, to catch a renewed vision for Southern Synod on matters concerning call and deployment. We look forward to exploring new and creative ways of being the church.

The Moderator
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