

Synod Council Report

Synod Council continues to actively look for opportunities to Walk the Way and live the life of Jesus today. Having identified and adopted our Synod Strategy over the next five years at our last meeting of Synod Together, the Committees' activities are building upon its criteria of helping local churches to become healthy churches by:

- a) being transformed by the Gospel
- b) making new disciples
- c) serving the people of the geographical area known as Southern Synod.

Once again, I thank all those who serve on Synod Council in their varied capacities for their encouragement and support in walking this way together.

1. Partnership between the URC and the Presbyterian Church of Korea.

I am delighted to be able to introduce to the meeting Ms. So Young Jung who joins us from the Presbyterian Church of Korea as a lay missionary. In our final act of worship, we will commission her to work with Southern Synod with the Bridge Ministry bridging the gap between North and South Koreans in New Malden and Kingston.

2. Church Growth and Development for Southern Synod [Part 1].

Following a discussion of a paper on Church Growth and Development for Southern Synod written by our Mission Development Officer, Mr. Martin Hayward, Synod Council is working on producing a discussion paper for Elders and Church Meetings along with Bible Study material.

3. Church Growth and Development for Southern Synod [Part 2].

We know there is no single recipe for growth and there are no simple solutions to decline. What works in one place may not work in another. Context is important. However, evidence tells us that growth is a product of good leadership, whether lay or ordained, working with willing others in kingdom building. Like other Moderators, I have a concern that the number of stipendiary ministers of Word and Sacraments is decreasing at an alarming rate. By 2022 our full-time stipendiary equivalents is expected to reduce from 43 to 37 for 140 churches and three mission projects. Of course, we are fortunate in Southern Synod with a growing number of Local Church Leaders and that is a blessing. Yet our Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers remain a rich resource.

Synod Council discussed the lack of people offering themselves for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments (and those who have offered themselves for MWS but who are leaving after only a few years) and wondered whether it is time to start telling another narrative, namely that we can afford more ministers if

- a) people were challenged to offer themselves for ministry;
- b) there were more certificates issued to ministers of other denominations;
- c) there was more flexibility over retirement age;
- d) etc.

The immediate challenge before Southern Synod is to make sure we keep as close as we can to the target figure. That means some questions need to be answered, for example:

- a) do we need to consider looking at new ways in which our ministers are deployed (not for all but for some) and
- b) is the challenge to the local church one of deciding whether you are a maintenance church or a missional church? In other words, are we driven by keeping things going or by missional thinking?

At present we have 43.75 full-time stipendiary equivalents. If we fill all our vacancies we shall have 49.75. This is not to be alarmist but to say that Synod Council will need to begin to look again at our future deployment strategy.

I have, therefore, withdrawn the resolution on the previous version of this paper as the work on a deployment strategy needs to be considered first before a resolution, if any, is taken to Mission Council.

4. Safeguarding Lead.

Following the Past Case Review and increased legislation, Synod Council has agreed to work with Thames North Synod to recruit a Safeguarding Lead for both Synods. We are grateful to Revd Roger Jones for doing this role on a temporary basis for the last 3 years.

Good Practice 5 will be ready later this year.

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