

Synod Ministries Report

Synod Ministries received comprehensive reports from Synod Areas which illustrated the range of joys and challenges in ministry. There were also very full reports on training, mission, safeguarding, lay-preaching, candidates and training, and youth and children's work amongst others. There is so much good news despite the challenging times of the last year and a half. So much dedication in the midst of so much uncertainty and stress.

We were therefore especially happy to receive the report of a letter from the Synod Moderator to encourage some relaxation during August, when we could all perhaps enjoy the blessings of God's creation with fun and sun.

A major focus of Ministries Committee has been on deployment. There is so much good ministry from the "priesthood of all believers"; not only Ministers of Word and Sacrament, but CRCWs, Local Church Leaders, Elders, and members and adherents. This is all to be encouraged and celebrated. So when we talk about the Crisis in Ministry, or Deployment generally, let us be frank and say what is under discussion is the role of Ministers of Word and Sacrament.

Everything we discuss in Southern Synod is against the backdrop of the national picture, and Synod Together will be very well aware of the Church Life Review which the General Secretary, Revd Dr John Bradbury, is leading. Obviously when Synod Ministries met on 28th July the implications of what had been said at General Assembly needed to be shared.

Against this backdrop the Moderator wanted everyone in the Synod to understand the realities of the challenges of the deployment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament, hence a second letter was sent to all churches, whether in vacancy or not. This is an issue for us all. The pause on declaring vacancies within Southern Synod was both surprising, and yet not surprising given the National Context. Most of us would prefer to rumble on as we have been. Currently we cannot do so. This calls for radical re-thinking, not only by us in Southern but throughout the URC.

Ministries had hoped to bring a Southern Synod Deployment Strategy for discussion at Synod Together, but this has been deferred by Synod Council until next Spring to allow time to have looked at more of the implications of the pause on declaring vacancies.

We thank everyone who submitted a comment or question arising from the Moderator's Letter. Some of these have received detailed answers, others have raised issues which Ministries will be continuing to consider. All were very helpful, and most expressed understanding of the challenges ahead, though some illustrated that we need to do more to explain the background to the current situation. In essence this is simply not enough ministers of Word and Sacrament to go round, and those we have are already stretched as thinly as sanity will allow. We thank God for those candidates and students who have responded to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to accept the challenge of exploring a call to full time ministry, and the work of so many in Southern Synod who support our lay preachers and local church leaders. Perhaps you might be able to identify others and encourage them to be listening out for the call to lay preaching, to Local Church Leadership, and to full time Ministry in the future.

Other news- the new Convenor of the Spring School Planning Group is the Rev Wendy Swan. We are delighted Wendy has accepted this nomination, which has been ratified by Synod Council.

The next "Spring School" will actually be in the autumn of 2022 as there is a national gathering in the Spring. We were also delighted with the success of this autumn's "Spring School", deferred because of Covid, and the inclusion for the first time of Local Church Leaders in the invitation. A good step forward.

Revd Helen Warmington
October 2021