



1. **Zoom Etiquette:** Members of Synod Together joined the meeting via Zoom. The Synod Clerk had previously sent out guidance notes on registration, voting procedures and general Zoom etiquette. The Synod Clerk emphasised some of the key points involved in using Zoom.
2. **Welcome and Constitution of Synod Together:** **Revd Bridget Banks**, the Synod Moderator, welcomed all who had joined the meeting. She duly constituted the Synod meeting.
3. **Opening Worship** was led by Revds David Pickering and Nadene Snyman – the Synod’s new Green Apostles. After opening prayers led by Nadene, David told a story “The Rowing Boat” illustrating the shared consequences of individual events. Currently everyone faced the consequences of rising temperatures to which we all contributed. A video made by Revd David Coleman was shown. The reading was Deuteronomy 30: 19-20 with the theme “Choose life”. Worship concluded with the Lord’s Prayer adapted to an ecological theme.
4. **Minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2021:** The Synod Clerk advised some amendments. With these amendments the following resolution was put and passed.

***Resolution 1: Minutes of the last meeting***

***Synod Together agrees the minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2021***

5. **Pastoralia:** Synod Roll contains the names of 241 voting members including 92 ministers of Word and Sacrament & Church Related Community Workers; 119 Synod Representatives and 30 co-opted members and 64 Retired Ministers and 6 observers

Apologies: 13 active ministers, 7 retired ministers, 19 lay members

The Moderator expressed concern for three ministers who were unwell.

6. **Synod changes** Since the last meeting the following changes of personnel had taken place or were about to take place within the Synod:

**South London SA**

Revd Elaine Colechin: pastorate of St Mark’s United Church Greenwich and Bromley United Reformed Church, Widmore Road – inducted 1st May.

Revd Jun Soo was inducted to Tooting URC on 31st July

Josephine Osei has been commissioned as local leader of St Marks Balham.

**WKES SA**

Revd Wendy Swan resigned as URC Minister in the Capel United Church LEP from the end of March;

Graham and Katy Hill resigned as Local Church Leaders of Emmaus Christian Centre in Chatham from the end of May;

Revd Alan Spence expects to end his Interim Ministry at Christ Church, Sevenoaks at the end of October

**Surrey & Sussex SA**

Rev’d Alex Mabbs – left SCM post at Brighthelm to minister in Northern Synod

Rev’d Graeme Allen had stepped down as Synod Area Leader

## **7. Synod Council Report [Paper A]**

Revd Kim Plumpton was welcomed as the new Convener. The paper had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

Kim highlighted the great work of Mark Rigby and the Tech Team.

Mission Projects – Revd Wendy Swan had been appointed as new Director of Mission Projects and thanks were expressed to her.

Deployment – Synod Council recognised the anxiety and stress of churches in vacancy or about to go into vacancy – the deployment situation was to be discussed later in the meeting.

Kim welcomed the appointments of

- Revd Wendy Swan as Convener of Spring School Planning Group
- Revd Martin Knight to serve on the Mission Committee – Revd Andrew Royal offered to provide cover until Martin was able to fully resume duties.
- and Revds Nadene Snyman and David Pickering as the Synod's Green Apostles

The recent return to office working by Synod staff had underlined the importance of conversations which can happen when face to face.

## **8. Synod Ministries Report [Paper B]**

The paper had been circulated prior to the meeting. Revd Helen Warmington, Convener, advised that the committee had met in July and was due to meet again in a couple of weeks.

It was noted that the Ministers' Spring School was to take place in the autumn of 2022 due to a national Ministers' Gathering taking place in the spring.

She highlighted the conversations held about deployment of stipendiary ministers of word and sacrament and the pause on vacancies being put on the Moderators' List. The letter sent by the Moderator in July to all churches had been sent with the intention of making everyone aware of the situation. The convener intended to bring a synod strategy to the March Synod Together meeting – this would stress the importance of lay contributions.

Revd Naison Hove asked whether the Synod had a plan in place – could more overseas ministers be considered? Revd Paul Dean advised that there were some applications for certificates of eligibility which were currently being considered.. It was recognised that more trained ministers were needed and all were encouraged to identify likely candidates. Andy Twilley advised that over 60 lay people had taken the lay preaching course and there were several people investigating other forms of ministry. Revd George Kalu asked whether the Synod was investing enough in training local leadership. Revd Lesley Charlton wondered whether all stipendiary ministry was used in the right direction, too much of a minister's time appeared to be spent on administration. Revd Kristin Ofstad recalled that she had previously worked on such a question and she undertook to find the paper which had been produced.

## **9. Deployment**

The Moderator had written to churches in July advising of the very real shortage of ministers and the difficulty of posting new vacancies in Southern Synod on the Moderators' List. She was grateful for the many responses received and for the assurances of support.

This was a denominational problem. Church House gave each Synod a target figure for each year. The Synod had a three-fold strategy

1. Synod Council had been unhappy at the policy of the Moderators Meeting and at its request a letter had been sent to the General Secretary voicing the Synod's concerns. A face to face meeting involving the Revd Adrian Bulley (Deputy General Secretary Discipleship), Rev'd Paul Whittle (Convener of Ministries Committee) and Revd Simon Walkling (Joint Secretary of the Moderators Meeting) and representatives from Southern Synod was now proposed to address the Synod's concerns.

2. A sub-group of the Ministries Committee was working on a strategy which would be brought to the March meeting. In the meantime, the Moderator outlined the minimal staff that ran the Synod Office but emphasised all the resources and support currently available to local churches from Synod.
3. In the longer term, the denominational 'Church Life Review Group' is looking at the life and witness of the URC. This is a huge task, but we need a denominational deployment strategy that can look at new ways of leadership for our churches. The Moderator asked that local churches continue to pay their M&M contribution to support current ministers and those who have served faithfully in the past.

Revd Bernard Fidler emphasised the crucial role of local church leaders. Revd Naison Hove asked for some statistics to be shared to make the situation more tangible. There were currently 42.5 ministers in 140 churches. Revd Sally Willett as a member of national Ministries Committee welcomed any suggestions on how the situation might be improved. John Ellis made a plea that emphasis be given to facts and analysis rather than anecdotal evidence.

There was a short break

## **10. Legacies of Slavery Presentation**

The Moderator welcomed Professor David Reynolds, convener of the Legacies of Slavery Task Group. David opened the presentation with a video demanding a change in attitudes towards racism. The video asked for: a. Apology for the racist legacies of slavery, b. Reparation to give substance to apology, and c. Engagement with the issues of white privilege. David explained that he was a historian who had been invited by the General Secretary, Revd John Bradbury to convene the group. The Group was intending to bring a resolution to General Assembly 2022 and David invited any contributions to the consultation currently taking place prior to this. Revd George Kalu felt that the URC needed to give more reassurances to those experiencing racial discrimination. Revd Andrew Willett as a minister of a predominantly black congregation, shared the reactions of some of his younger congregants on the issue of an apology. Those he asked had felt it more important to focus on anti-racism. The point was made that if the church were to apologise, the church included many black people who would be apologising to themselves. It was noted that there might be a difference between those with West African and Caribbean heritage. Revd Lesley Charlton queried whether it was sensible to apologise for something which had happened so long ago. David felt that the confession was rather for the way it had been allowed for those attitudes to continue. John Bunker welcomed this and asked for more information on how racism continues to be experienced. Revd Naison Hove spoke of his own experiences of racist attitudes in two different synods in which he had served. Tom Hackett, CYDO, advised that URC Youth had been working on the issue of racism. To conclude this item, Revd Lesley Charlton led the meeting in prayer asking for forgiveness and for guidance in addressing the problem.

## **11. Synod Treasurer's Report [Papers C - G]**

Mr John Denison, Synod Treasurer spoke to the papers.

### **11.1. Grant Panels Review [Paper C]**

The Strategic Mission Panel and the Buildings Grants Panel had been set up in 2019 for a two year period with an annual budget of £1,000,000 each and were now due for review. Both panels had operated easily within these budgets. It was felt that the operation of the panels had enabled a more focused approach to making grants available to churches within the Synod. At the same time, it gave churches a more visible sign of the grant procedures. The panels had been able to act promptly which had allowed churches to be supported

In the light of this, and with the possibility of reviewing budgets if required, the following resolutions were brought to Synod Together

### ***Resolution 2: Grant Panels Review***

#### ***Synod Together resolves that***

- i. ***Instead of a renewal the panels are established as permanent grant making bodies within Southern Synod,***

- ii. ***The Annual Church Maintenance Grants budget (£250,000) be removed from the budget of the Panel and placed in the Synod's annual budget under "Annual and Emergency Repair Grants",***
- iii. ***The annual budgets for each panel be reduced to £750,000.***

All resolutions were passed.

Sincere thanks were recorded to Colin McCracken, Mark Price Haworth and Martin Hayward for the work that they had contributed towards the success of the grants process.

## **11.2. Ministers' Pension Fund [Paper D]**

Prior to the Synod Together meeting, it had been recommended that attendees watch a video on You Tube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hp2VbQYtTyw>. This had also been played prior to the opening of the meeting. This concerned a proposed change to the way ministers' pensions were dealt with which was approved at General Assembly in July 2021.

Following the decisions taken at the March Synod together meeting, several meetings had taken place between Synod representatives and Ian Hardie, URC Treasurer, and John Piper, Deputy Treasurer. The Southern Synod representatives in discussion, following the March meeting felt that the Synod was in the position to offer a £8.6 million contribution towards the anticipated deficit. The sale of Leatherhead had enabled this to be more realisable. In the light of offers emerging from other Synods, however this had been scaled back to £8.0 million and forms part of the in-principle joint synods' offer of £50.0 million. Funds from the Synods will be kept in a separate account and fed into the pension fund as required, with any surplus in 2030 being repaid pro rata to the synods. Clarification was given as to the definition of a redundant church building. This would only be when a church closed and returned its building to the Synod. Christine Thompson asked for clarification as to the defined benefit scheme which was to be closed as opposed to the defined contribution scheme. John Ellis clarified that there was now no longer a requirement to link the Synod's contribution to property sales - it was for each Synod to decide how to fund their contributions. It was noted that Resolution 4 would address the situation of individual ministers.

The joint meeting of the Synod Trust and Synod Council held on 11th August 2021 recommended to the Synod Together Meeting the following Resolution:

### ***Resolution 3: URC Ministers Defined Benefit Pension Fund Deficit***

***With gratitude to God for the past, present and future service of stipendiary Ministers within the United Reformed Church, Southern Synod undertakes to provide £8.0 million in funding to the URC Ministers' Pension Funds anticipated deficit. The funds to be provided over the period 2022 to 2030.***

***This undertaking to provide the funding is subject to:***

- i. ***A satisfactory method is established that funds are held in a separate account under the control of the URC Trust, or such other body as agreed by all thirteen synods, and only provided to the Ministers' Pension Fund Trustees as required.***
- ii. ***When the deficit has been cleared, funds no longer required will be returned to the Synod unless otherwise agreed.***
- iii. ***Southern Synod's commitment will be reviewed in 2026 and at other times when the Ministers' Pension Fund valuation estimates change.***
- iv. ***Annual review as part of the Synod budget process; should the continued provision of this funding jeopardise the financial integrity of Southern Synod, the Synod reserves the right to cease providing funds until such time as the position is rectified.***

On this understanding the resolution was passed.

## **11.3 Ministers' Pension Fund supplementary Resolution [Paper E]**

Mr John Ellis spoke to the paper which sought to ensure that any change to pension arrangements in the future would not be to the detriment of some ministers compared to others. He felt that a safety net needed to be built in to remove any financial anxiety on the part of ministers.

Mark Camp felt that there had not been sufficient consultation at both Synod committee level and local church level. He felt that the decision taken by General Assembly shifted the risk onto ministers. He felt that further work be done on the resolution but John Ellis felt that this would be too late as a lot of work would have been done by the next Synod together meeting in March. Alternatively Mark asked that the word “ensure” be replaced with more open wording - for instance “look at ways which might be put in place” This was accepted by the proposer and the wording of the Resolution was changed accordingly.

The following resolution was passed –

***Resolution 4: Ministers’ Pension Fund – Supplementary***

***Synod Together, noting the decision in principle of the General Assembly to move away from a Defined Benefits pension scheme for ministers, requests those working on a replacement scheme to look at ways which might be put in place to underpin a minimum fair pension for all ministers at retirement.***

The meeting was suspended for a lunch break

## **11.4 Synod Accounts and Budget [Papers F & G]**

**i. Synod accounts [Paper G]** Paper G prepared by John Denison, the Synod Treasurer on behalf of the Finance Committee, outlined the various sources of income and expenditure of the General Purposes Fund and the Manse Fund during 2020. There had been a drop in the value of investments but sale of properties had realised a small surplus overall. Due to uncertainties of 2020 a larger than normal amount of cash had been retained. All members of staff had continued to work albeit from home during 2020. The principal areas of activity for the Synod were mission which includes all related grants to churches and ecumenical groupings, training, property grants and costs, resourcing the Synod Office, governance and inter-synod resource sharing. The accounts as presented in Paper G were received.

***Resolution 5: Synod Accounts***

***Synod Together receives the Accounts for 2020.***

The resolution was passed.

**ii. Budget for 2022 [Paper F]** The draft budget had been prepared in line with what was forecast when preparing the 2021 budget. It took account of the Synod’s grants and loans Scheme, the contribution to the Ministers’ Pension Fund and an increased amount for office rental to reflect the need for improvements to the current Synod Office accommodation. The draft budget for 2022 envisaged a deficit of £2,653,135 (which included a £25,000 contingency). All figures were subject to sales of property.

The following resolution was passed.

***Resolution 5. Synod Together approves the recommended Synod 2022 budget for the General Purposes Fund.***

**iii.** The Treasurer expressed his confidence that the Synod’s finances were currently in a healthy condition.

**iv. M&M:** He thanked all churches for their M&M contributions in 2021 and their commitments for 2022. He appreciated that 2022 might be even more difficult than 2021. Any church experiencing difficulty was asked to contact their Area Treasurer.

**v. Thanks:** He recorded his gratitude to Catherine Kingdom and Opuene Charles for their assistance with all matters financial and to the Area Treasurers for their support.

## **12. URC 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary:**

The Synod Clerk reminded the meeting that 2022 would be the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the institution of the United Reformed Church. A video which had been used at General Assembly was shown advertising various resources and events to mark the anniversary. [www.urc.50](http://www.urc.50)

The Synod Clerk encouraged all churches to mark the anniversary in some way. The Moderator asked for any ideas for ways in which the Synod might mark the event.

### **13. Synod Environmental Charter and Strategy [Paper H]**

The Synod Moderator welcomed the Synod's new Green Apostles – Revds David Pickering and Nadene Snyman. They introduced the following charter and strategy -

#### **Southern Synod Environmental Charter**

A: We believe that creation reveals the glory of God. That we are called to be stewards of God's creation working with all people of good will to make sure that God's earth remains a beautiful place full of wonder, worship, love, justice and peace, by respecting the environment and all creatures.

B: We challenge ourselves to live simply and in solidarity with the poor not taking unfair amounts of the world's resources or creating waste and pollution.

C: We commit ourselves to safeguarding life and living sustainably by taking our environmental impact fully into account.

#### **Southern Synod Environmental Strategy**

Our strategy is to:

1. Consider and take forward steps to deliver the current Environmental Policy of the URC, with particular attention to tasks identified for Synod.
2. Consider and take forward environmental resolutions agreed by Southern Synod Together.
3. To proactively engage with developing environmental concerns.

In adopting this Strategy, David suggested that Synod Together would be recognising that the environmental agenda cross-cuts Synod's whole life and mission, such that the question 'what are the implications of the Synod's Environmental Strategy?', form a part of the consideration and decision-making of each Synod Committee and function.

Kristin Ofstad asked for advice on how to move away from gas fired boilers to renewable energy sources – could someone come to give advice and would synod offer a grant to cover a feasibility study? The Moderator advised that it was early days but the Synod would have to look at ways of resourcing the strategy. Other measures would include changes to the Synod Manse Policy and consideration would be given as to how many meetings had to be in person. There was a network of Green Apostles in the URC with a great deal of expertise and Nadene and David would be happy to pass on any enquiries which they themselves could not answer.

The following resolution was carried.

***Resolution 7: Synod Together adopts the Environmental Charter and Strategy outlined in Paper H.***

### **14. Climate Emergency Resolution [Paper I]**

The resolution had been brought by Wimbledon URC with the endorsement of the South London Synod Area meeting. Sam Elliot, an elder at Wimbledon introduced the resolution. This resolution had been originally agreed in 2019. Some reservations were expressed as to the target date and as to whether local churches were in a position to have this resolution imposed upon them. It was suggested that the Green Apostles might be used to get the message on climate emergency across which was what the resolution was seeking to do.

#### ***Resolution 8: Climate Emergency Resolution***

***We, the Southern Synod of the United Reformed Church, declare a Climate and Ecological Emergency.***

***We pledge to work with and support our congregations and government, at local and national levels, in tackling this Emergency, and we call on others to do the same.***

***These are our intentions:***

**1. We will tell the Truth**

***Governments and public broadcasters must communicate the facts about the Climate and Ecological Emergency, reverse inconsistent policies and communicate the urgency for far-reaching systemic change.***

***We will communicate with members of our congregations and support them to discover the truth about the Emergency and the changes that are needed.***

**2. We will take Action**

***Governments must enact legally binding policy measures to reduce emissions to net zero by 2025 and to reduce consumption levels.***

***We pledge to work towards reducing our emissions to net zero by 2025.***

***We will challenge policies and actions of local and national governments and their agencies, where they do not help to reduce emissions or consumption levels.***

***We will actively work to inspire, enable, and resource our congregations to protect and renew our life-sustaining planet.***

**3. We are committed to Justice**

***Faith communities can imagine and encourage fundamental changes in the ways people relate to one another and the world, in our values and behaviours.***

***We will do what is possible to help our congregations and the communities they serve to talk about how the Emergency will affect them and the changes that are needed.***

***We believe that all truth-telling, action and democratic work must be underpinned by a commitment to justice both within our nation and towards other nations, particularly those who are poorer.***

The resolution was carried.

**15. General Assembly 2021 [Paper J] :**

A full account of the Assembly can be found on the URC website:

<https://urc.org.uk/general-assembly-2021.html>

Any of the attendees could be contacted for further information. Amongst other items the Synod Clerk drew attention to the two matters which had been referred to synods for comment, one on safeguarding governance and the other on Ministerial Disciplinary Process and Incapacity Procedure. It was felt there was no reason to object to the proposed changes. Revd Naison Hove had some concerns which he was asked to discuss with the Synod Clerk.

Revd Fiona Bennett had been elected to serve as Moderator of General Assembly 2022 to 2023.

Synods are invited to make nominations of people to serve as Moderator of the General Assembly 2023-24 no later than 31 March 2022. Although only one Moderator serves, Synods may nominate both an Elder and a Minister of the Word and Sacraments/Church Related Community Worker.

**16. Any Other business:**

- i. the Synod Clerk referred to two late papers Paper K and Paper L on Youth and Children and Safeguarding respectively which should be read.
- ii. He hoped that the March 2022 meeting would be in person with a streaming option for those unable to attend to watch. Negotiations were underway with a potential venue.

**17. Closing of Synod Together:**

Closing worship was led by Revd David Pickering and Revd Nadene Snyman. David told The Olive Tree Sapling story to illustrate the need for our legacy to be one which cares for the future. Nadene introduced a new hymn The Legacy Song written and sung by Roo Stewart.

The Moderator expressed her thanks to the technical team, Lauren her PA, the Synod Clerk and all who had contributed to the meeting. She closed the Synod Together meeting noting that the next meeting would take place on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2022 (timing and venue to be advised) or at such other time as may be deemed necessary.

She gave a blessing to bring the meeting to a close.