

Southern Synod Ministries Committee Report to Synod Council February 2022

The Ministries Committee last met on 19th January and once again we recognise the breadth and depth of ministry that is taking place across the Synod in so many ways. We offer thanks to God for the myriad ways in which people serve, and celebrate the many ministries across Southern Synod.

We delighted in the decision of the last Synod Council decision to extend the training/book grant to Synod recognised Lay preachers, in recognition of the immense contribution they make to the life of the Synod. We also thank Andy Twilley for the training courses offered, and for those who have continued to train or serve as Lay Preachers despite the challenges of Covid times and pray they will be blessed by their ministry. Seven new names were brought to the Committee having completed their training and at least fourteen were reported to have signed up for training in this coming year. The next lay preaching training day is 16th July planned to be in person at Horsham.

We note that potential candidates are offering themselves, with another name to go forward to the Assessment Conference at Westminster College at the end of March (potentially for Ministry of Word and Sacrament (NSM Model 4)). There are a further nine candidates for Ministry of Word and Sacrament, Church Related Community Work, or Local Church leadership. Really encouraging! Adam Earle is nearing the end of his training, currently on placement at Tunbridge Wells, and has been called to serve a group of Churches in the Ipswich Area. Maurice Omorojie is enjoying his first year of training at Northern College and his placement at St John's Sevenoaks and Tonbridge URC.

Safeguarding remains an important focus within Southern Synod and we thank Belinda, sometimes supported by Roger, for her diligence and sensitivity. Training courses are currently by Zoom and have been well received. More courses are organised for March, May and June.

Tom Hackett, CYDO, also reported on the various courses and conferences organised both for our younger folk and those who support them. The Youth Mental Health Aid courses have also been well received and address a huge challenge amongst many of our younger folk (and older folk too), exacerbated in many cases by the Covid restrictions.

The Small Churches Network, set up by Martin Hayward as Mission Development Officer, is planned to meet again late spring or early summer. In the meantime, resources will be added to the Synod Website to support smaller churches. We want to encourage these during especially challenging times. Not only small churches lack energy at this time, and we were reminded of the Synod Strategic Mission Fund and the protocol for applying. The appointment of Wendy Swan as Director of Mission Projects was warmly welcomed. The end of first term review of the Southern Synod Chaplain and Advocate for the Elderly post was discussed with some suggestions of how the Synod Wide responsibilities could be highlighted, and has since been reviewed by National Ministries, and Synod Council has agreed the post will continue.

Paul Dean continues to work very effectively on Ecumenical discussions and reminds us of the nuanced impacts of decisions on our ecumenical relationships. Paul's contributions to the life of the Synod is always helpful.

The Spring School Planning Group were delighted by the participation of Local Church Leaders (LCL) in the Ministers School held in the Autumn, and so asked that they may approach a LCL to join the planning group. This was warmly endorsed.

Each Synod and United Area presented a report of their activities too. The challenges we face are multifarious, but overarching all is the sense we are “in this together” even if, at particularly stressful times, we might forget this. Aging buildings, complicated leases with lets, folks retiring from active ministry, Churches closing, specific challenges of deployment especially in some geographical areas is challenging; yet we hear about green shoots, collaborative working, folks stepping up to offer transitional ministry or act as Interim Moderators. Creative thinking abounds.

In addition to our main meeting an extraordinary meeting was also held on 14th December to consider the application of Revd Peter Flint to extend his ministry in New Malden and East Croydon by a further three years. Recognising the particular circumstances of the two Churches, both either recently embarked upon, or about to embark on, new projects, this was warmly commended to National Ministries Accreditation Sub-Committee who met in January, very soon after we were due to meet.

Saving the best for last Deployment has, obviously, been a major topic of discussion for the committee. Since the last Synod Together the deployment sub-committee has met, and consulted, and revised the proposed deployment paper. There is a separate report on this crucial issue for Synod Together.

Report from Southern S.M.C. to Synod Together – March 2022 – Rev Helen Warmington (Convener)