

For those not attending in person the meeting was recorded and could be viewed on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/oyVhvrCoc6Y>

1. **Health and Safety Notices:** At 10.30am Mrs Sue Knight, Local Leader at Reigate Park Church welcomed everyone and gave health and safety notices.
2. **Welcome and Constitution of Synod Together:** The Synod Moderator, Revd Bridget Banks, welcomed all who were attending. Attendees were seated at tables. The Moderator duly constituted the Synod meeting and led the opening worship.
The reading was Deuteronomy 7: v 7-12. Opening hymn was Before the throne of God I stand. The Moderator's favourite word was "bonkers!" There were so many mad things going on in the world. She reflected on the difficulties all were currently experiencing but called on all to think about the positives. She posed three questions. How can the local church be authentic in these bonkers time? How can we be the body of Christ to those who are struggling? How can Synod enable churches to do what they want to do? Synod's mission was to bring love, hope and peace. Concluding hymn was In Christ Alone.
3. **Good News Stories:** Stories/Reports were received as follows, each offering things to feel positive about.
 - i. **Mission:** Revd Martin Hayward, Synod Mission Development Officer, introduced his presentation with a Mission Impossible theme. Challenges facing some churches could be seen as missions impossible but Jubilee moments could mean a turnaround. What was important was to fail fast and move on. The Synod had already invested heavily in local church projects. The meeting was invited to discuss at their tables "What are your mission needs – can the Strategic Mission Fund help?"
 - ii. **Training:** To the amusement of the meeting, Revd Andy Twilley, Synod Training Development Officer, asked tables to name all twelve disciples. These were people who had been so important in the Christian story and yet it was not easy to name all of them – Andy noted that few of them are mentioned in the epistles. Ministry in the early church must, therefore, have been delegated and carried out by many others and the baton had been passed on to us. We were called to ministry, every member ministry. There were many within the Synod who had offered themselves for particular ministries and at this point Revd Memona Shahbaz was presented with her EM3 certificate. Andy posed two further questions for discussion - "How can we ensure that we build the mindset of EVERY MEMBER MINISTRY in our church?" and "How can we help people to discover their ministry and thereby their God given purpose?"
 - iii. **Children and Youth:** Tom Hackett, Synod Children and Youth Development Officer spoke of recognising and celebrating the good news stories of children and young people within URC Children and URC Youth, and those who help support children and young people in our local churches.

He showed a video of pen portraits submitted by members of URC Children highlighting 2 stars and a wish for their church.

Lundie Memorial Award –Cleo Ward from Gillingham URC who was the recipient of the award in June 2022 was featured and congratulated. A video introducing other recent winners from across the Synods was shared.

Scouts – Tom advised that Rev David Marshall-Jones had stepped down from the role of URCGSF (URC Guide & Scout Fellowship) chaplain after 21 years and was thanked for his service in this role. Rev Keith Morrison had now taken over this role.

Boys Brigade & Girls Brigade - Rev Stuart Cuttler had been appointed as Chaplain to Boys Brigade. The Boys Brigade and Girls Brigade Groups at The Temple URC St Mary Cray were celebrating their 75th Anniversary in November and December 2022.

Pilots – A video was shown from Tolworth URC Pilot's Company exploring Nicaragua using URC Commitment for Life Resources.

Attendees were encouraged to think about how they support children and young people and families they come into contact with both in, through and beyond their church.

Questions for small group discussion

I wonder...

Where/when you may have seen children and young people playing their part in the mission of God?

How might we better enable and support children and young people to play their part in the mission of God?

- iv. **Eco Church:** Revd Nadene Snyman, one of the Synod's Green Apostles, described the Eco-church Scheme. This was an ecumenical scheme which helped churches to assess several different aspects by which they might improve their eco friendliness. There were many helpful resources to support churches in the process. She encouraged more churches to engage with the scheme. She was willing to assist any church wishing to make a start. Nadene72@gmail.com
- Revd David Pickering, the other Green Apostle, and David Walters, Central Sussex Property Advisor, introduced the Green Energy Audits scheme. The Green Apostles and the Synod Property Team had met and recognised the need to obtain independent professional energy assessments. This had resulted in a trial study at Hayes Free Church. On the strength of this it was proposed to obtain a further 10-12 pilot reports in 2023. Following these reports consideration would be given to the value of each report and review what actions were required. He encouraged churches to consider joining the pilot - this would require approval of the Church Meeting and Synod Area meetings. Priority would be given to churches already committed to environmental improvement and churches planning refurbishment/redevelopment.
- David Walters gave assurances that the reports would be produced in a format which was both meaningful and useful to each church. Costs would be covered by the Synod although a contribution from the churches would be asked for.
- With regard to manse, some more work was to be done. Small scale changes such as loft insulation and draught excluders were to be encouraged to improve energy use. There were more significant measures which might be undertaken when the manse was vacant.

4. **Synod Roll and apologies for absence:** Revd Russell Furley-Smith, Synod Clerk, advised that the Synod Roll contained the names of 208 voting members, including 69 Ministers and CRCWs, 115 Synod representatives and 24 co-opted members. It also included 80 retired Ministers and 7 observers.

Apologies had been received from 17 active Ministers and Local Church Leaders, 25 lay members, 6 co-opted members and 3 retired ministers.

5. **Minutes of the meeting held on 12th March 2022** The following resolution was put and passed.

Resolution 1: Minutes of the last meeting

Synod Together agrees the minutes of the meeting held on 12th March 2022.

There were no matters arising other than agenda items.

6. Pastoralia:

The Moderator advised that there had been a number of deaths since the last meeting – Revd Alistair Hutcheson, Revd Donald Finnan, Revd John Waller, Revd Mark Westerman and Revd Brian Treharne. The Moderator prayed for those who were unwell and the bereaved.

7. Appointment of Tellers: It was considered unnecessary to appoint tellers.

8. Synod Ministries Report [Paper A]

Revd Helen Warmington, Convener, presented the report which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Some comments had been submitted one of which was a query about vacant churches. The pastorate of Bexley, Geddes Place and Emmanuel Sidcup had been added in October and Wimbledon was to go on the list in November. That would make three Southern Synod pastorates by the end of the year. A protocol for vacant pastorates had been agreed by Synod Council and was to be taken to Ministries Committee in a couple of weeks. A further Deployment meeting was to take place at Crawley URC on 9th November. The role of the interim moderator had now taken on a more crucial importance in preparing churches for future ministry

9. Synod Council Report: [Papers B]

The papers had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Revd Kim Plumpton, Convener, presented the report. No comments had been received on the report. Kim reflected on the contributions of so many individuals who gave of their time, wisdom and skills to the work of the Synod. She gave thanks for these people. In the spirit of previous speakers she concluded with a phrase from Star Trek saying “Let us boldly go where no-one has gone before.”

10. Synod Finance Committee Report [Papers C1-2]:

John Denison, Synod Treasurer presented the reports which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

Manse/Church Maintenance Grants: John was pleased that use had been made of the various grants schemes including the annual maintenance grants for churches and manses and encouraged churches who had not applied so far to do so. Details were on the Synod website.

2021 Accounts [Paper C1]: John reminded the meeting that the Synod Office is not self-financing but dependent on the sale of church buildings to finance any deficit. A larger than normal cash balance had been maintained in 2021 because of the uncertainties of the market. All Synod funds are invested in non-fossil fuel funds. The value of investments had recovered in 2021 following a drop in 2020. The Synod had agreed to increase its contribution to the Inter-Synod Resource sharing scheme. A summary description of the annual accounts had been provided.

Resolution 2: Adoption of the accounts

Synod Together adopts the accounts for the year 2021.

This resolution was passed unanimously.

2023 Budget [Paper C2] A budget had been prepared using the normal projections of income and costs for 2023. This also contained provision for the Green Audit Pilot surveys already mentioned and budgets for the grants panels. Budgets could be adjusted if the need arose.

Resolution 3: Synod Together is asked to endorse the recommended Synod 2023 budget for the General Purposes Fund.

This resolution was passed unanimously.

2022 Financial Position: In the light of the Synod’s healthy finances, the Synod had made early payments to the Ministers’ Pension Fund and planned to do so again making its contribution for 2023 in October/November 2022.

Maintenance of Ministry: The Treasurer thanked all churches for their contributions to the MoM Fund. He was aware that several churches were having to think carefully about their contributions in 2023 and recommended that any church experiencing difficulty should discuss this with their Area Treasurer.

Several churches had asked why, with the decreasing number of ministers, the MoM contributions were not going down. He reminded that these monies were used for far more than the stipends of ministers.

Energy costs: Although energy prices had been capped for churches, emergency assistance might be provided by Synod if churches were struggling. Any church beginning to experience difficulties should contact their Area Treasurer and Synod Office.

Thank yous: John thanked Catherine Kingdom, Opuene Charles and all the Synod Area Treasurers for their support, advice and hard work. John gave special thanks to Ian Harrison who was shortly to retire as WKESSA Treasurer.

11. Synod Children's and Youth Work Committee [Paper D]

There had been no comments on the report. Heather Moore, Synod Youth Representative, described the Youth Zone at Greenbelt the running of which had now been taken over by the URC. She had attended General Assembly and assisted other young people to understand the issues. She noted that Youth Assembly could now make a nomination for Moderator of General Assembly.

Online youth groups had been re-launched.

Several upcoming events were highlighted including Let's Celebrate Together (for 5 – 12 years) on 27 October, Youth Get Together (Year 10 to age 25) in London on 29th October and Youth Assembly 27 to 29th January 2023. Synod was willing to pay the costs of attendance. There were also various training opportunities organised and further sessions of the Mental Health First Aid Training. Tom Hackett and she were willing to provide information on any of these arrangements.

The Synod Clerk noted that nominations were already being sought for General Assembly Moderator.

He led the meeting in prayer prior to the meeting breaking for lunch .

The meeting broke for lunch from 1.00pm to 2.00pm

12. Introduction of new ministers, EM3 ministers, Personnel Changes and Synod Recognised Lay Preachers

South London Revd Lesley Charlton, Area Leader, introduced Simon Loveitt, CRCW at St Andrew's Brockley and New Cross.

Mention was also made of

- Revd Rachael Wilson who had joined the team ministry which serves the URC/Methodist church at Herne Hill
- Duncan Wilson, Lay Preaching Co-ordinator for S E London, who had resigned.

Central Sussex United Area: Revd Andrew Mills had retired. Revd Vicky Welsh as a Methodist Deacon had joined the pastorate of United at Crowborough and Cornerstone at Uckfield churches.

East Kent: Revd Lisa-Maria Browning was to retire in December 2022 and Revd Ruth Armstrong had been inducted to the Vale URC, Hadres Street United Church and a Synod directed post in July 2022.

East Sussex: Revd Krystyn Ofstad had retired and Revd Sue Chapman was about to retire in December 2022. Revd Naison Hove had left the Synod for Thames North at the beginning of October 2022.

13. Jubilee Ministers

The following ministers were congratulated on their Jubilee years

65 years

Revd Brian Pavitt

55years

Revd Derek Wales

50 years

Revd Alan Spence
Revd Jean Wall
Revd Pat Hall
Revd Peter Welsh

35 years

Revd Graeme Allan
Revd David Allonby
Revd Nicola Furley-Smith
Revd Raymond Singh

30 years

Revd Kristyn Ofstad
Revd Pauline Sparks

25 years

Revd Gerald Munro
Revd Simon Franklin
Revd Michael Meachin
Revd John Anthony du Bois
Revd Richard Goldring

20 years

Revd Andrew Coyne

15 years

Revd Helen Higgin-Botham
Revd Philip Brooks

5 years

Revd Angela Rigby

14. Time of Thanksgiving and Good News Stories:

The meeting broke into groups to discuss the three questions which had previously been posed to churches and to share good news stories. These were then shared in a plenary session. In the meantime the Moderator cut a magnificent cake which had been baked and decorated to honour the occasion by Sue Knight. The Synod Clerk shared the answers to a quiz which had been on the tables since the beginning of the meeting.

- 15. Thank you:** The Synod Clerk recorded his personal thanks to the Revd Roger Jones who had taken over the planning of the meeting during Russell's sabbatical. He also thanked the Synod Planning Team and the team at Reigate Park who had laid on such a successful meeting.

He thanked the IT team who had again performed brilliantly

He thanked Lauren in the Synod Office for all she had done to prepare for the meeting and all who had prepared and presented papers and the committees they represented. Field staff were thanked for their good news presentations.

The Moderator was thanked for her vision in planning the meeting and all that she was doing for the Synod.

He thanked all attendees for coming and for their contributions to the meeting which would be noted.

This session ended with a toast to the URC accompanied by a slice of the celebratory cake.

- 16. Closing Worship:** Closing worship was led by the Moderator. The reading was Ephesians 4: v 1-16. She had recently been struck by the words of a worship song “Do you know my Jesus?” The mission imperative was to go out and be like Christ. The hymn was From heaven you came. Prayers were led by URC youngsters via a video. The Moderator gave a blessing.
- 17. Closing of Synod Together**
- At 3.50pm the Moderator declared the Synod Together meeting closed until it meets again on Saturday 11th March 2023 (time and venue to be advised) or at such other time and place as it may be called together by those charged with the direction of its affairs.