

SOUTHERN SYNOD
Minutes of the Twenty first Synod Together Meeting
held in the Brighthelm Centre, North Road, Brighton
on Saturday 11th March 2023

Theme: Synod – Together

1. **Health and Safety Notices:** At 10.25am Mr John Lane, Co-Leader Central Sussex United Area, welcomed everyone to Brighton and gave health and safety notices.
2. **Welcome and Constitution of Synod Together:** The Synod Clerk proposed the following resolution
Synod Together agrees that the Convenor of Synod Council, Revd Kim Plumptre, will chair certain items of the agenda, if the Moderator so desires. The resolution was carried unanimously.

The Synod Moderator welcomed all who were in attendance. She duly constituted the Synod meeting.
3. **Opening Worship** was led by Revds Sally and Andrew Willett and members of the West Thamesmead Christian Community. Sally and Andrew were thanked warmly
4. **Synod Roll and apologies for absence:** The roll of Synod Together was tabled by the Synod Clerk including the names of 69 ministers, 112 lay members and 27 co-opted members. Apologies had been received from 31 members of Synod Together (19 ordained and 12 lay) and 9 retired Ministers.
5. **Minutes of the meeting held on 8th October 2022:**
The following resolution was passed unanimously:
Synod Together agrees that the minutes of the meeting held on 8th October 2022 are an accurate record of that meeting
The minutes were duly signed by the Moderator.
6. **Matters arising not dealt with on the agenda:** There were none.
7. **Pastoralia:** The Moderator advised that some ministers were retiring before the next Synod - Revds Jennifer Millington, Andrew Sellwood and Paul Dean
Revd Kim Plumptre would be leaving the Synod to take up her appointment as Moderator of Northern Synod
Revd Andrew Prasad had moved into the Synod following his retirement as Moderator of Thames North Synod.
The Revd Gordon Palmer (retired) had died.
Kay Mackintosh, Peter Mackintosh's widow, had died - also Ken Meekison, widower of the former Synod Clerk, Christine Meekison.
8. **Appointment of tellers:** The following were elected as tellers - Martin Hayward (chief teller), Nadene Snyman and Pamela Tolhurst.
9. **Synod Council Report [Paper A]**
Synod Council Convenor, Revd Kim Plumptre, presented the report which was received. She apologised that the report had mentioned Revd Roger Jones as conducting the Synod Staffing Review: It should have been Sandy McLeish.
Kim was thanked sincerely for all that she had contributed to the Synod Council as its convenor.
10. **Synod Ministries Report [Papers B1-5]:** Revd Helen Warmington, Convenor of the Committee, presented the report [Paper B1] which was received. The date of Revd Reggie Mudenda's sabbatical was amended The other papers for noting were as follows:

Terms of Reference for Synod Area Pastoral Committees [Paper B2] These had been reviewed and would be kept under review from time to time to take account of everchanging requirements and policies. Thanks was expressed to Hilary Miles and others who had worked on this paper.

Synod Deployment Guide for Local Churches [Paper B3] Paper B3 had been prepared over a period of time as the implications of the deployment policy adopted in March 2022 had been worked out. In addition a vision day for ministers and local church leaders was planned and Revd Bernard Fidler was planning a series of prayer days (see Notices Item 15).

Synod Deployment Guide for Local Churches Flow chart [Paper B4] provided a flow chart to accompany B3.

Update on Deployment Targets [Paper B5] gave current deployment statistics. These were produced by John Ellis and Lauren King, and now gave an accurate picture of the deployment within the Synod. John and Lauren were thanked for their work on this.

Graham Campling was thanked for all that he had contributed to the life of the Synod serving as Ministries Committee secretary. Thanks were also given to Sue Eardley for her willingness to take over from Graham.

11. Presentation: West Thamesmead Pioneer Ministry: Revds Sally and Andrew Willett described the church plant started in 2016 in West Thamesmead as part of the ecumenical Thamesmead Christian Community. They had been given the remit of starting a church in an area where there was no church and which had not been provided with a church building or suitable community spaces by the developer. They had started their ministry by familiarising themselves with the area, pamphleting, knocking on doors and an invitation to drop in for a chat sessions. They had handed out leaflets outside the polling station at the local school. They had declared their intention to hold an act of worship on Sunday afternoons but initially they organised social events to raise awareness of their existence. Messy Church had proved a big draw along with special Christian festival services. In January 2017 they held their first afternoon Sunday service in the local school hall. Bible study and youth group meetings followed. Photographs taken at each church anniversary illustrated the growth in numbers – in 2022 nearly 100 people present. Maurice and Juliana Omorojie gave an account of their experience of moving into the West Thamesmead area and becoming involved in the church family. Maurice has since become a student for ministry. Some slides were shown of an outside nativity and an Easter Fun Day.

12. Energy Surveys Update [Paper C]: Mr David Walters, Synod Property Committee Convener presented the report. The energy audits had been stopped as the pilot reports were based very much on buildings rather on the work of churches and were likely to produce similar reports for most churches. What was now proposed was more of a “do it yourself” approach. Each church was to be encouraged to do what it could to minimise its carbon footprint. There were many resources available to assist in this. It was felt that the 2030 target adopted by the URC was a more appropriate target whilst 2025 should be regarded as a milestone.

Synod Together voted on the following resolution

Synod Together adopts Paper C

The resolution was passed with 2 abstentions

New Manses were now being updated to improve their insulation etc.

13. Finance Report Mr John Denison, Synod Treasurer, opened by thanking all who had paid their M&M contributions in 2022, appreciating that for some it had not been easy.

Southern Synod had made a second contribution (£1.5million) to its commitment to make good the deficit in the Ministers’ Pension Fund.

Submission of Annual Returns and accounts was needed as soon as possible. Any church experiencing difficulties in doing so were asked to contact the Synod Area Treasurer or Catherine Kingdom.

The governance roadshows were about to re-start. John implored Synod Areas to encourage attendance by all churches but particularly by the very churches most in need of guidance on church governance.

The Grant Panels were still willing to receive applications for both buildings and mission projects.

Emergency energy grants had been paid by Synod to assist certain churches struggling with energy bills. This was to be extended to December 2023. It was not intended, however, to make this a permanent arrangement. Invoices were necessary and accounts indicating a church's reserves. Payment would be on the basis of the difference between old and new contracts.

The URC had established an emergency energy crisis fund in September 2022 to assist those synods which do not have the resources of their own to assist churches with emergency funding of future energy projects. There was an expectation that better off synods such as Southern would be asked to contribute to this fund.

- 14. Synod Children's and Youth Work Committee Report [Paper D]:** The report included a report on the Youth Assembly held in January. Graham Purdye spoke to the report, noting that a secretary was still required. Tom Hackett, Children's and Youth Development Officer, described some new initiatives and resources.

URC Children had just launched a new resource for ages 0 – 11,. **Faith Adventures for Children Together** - a weekly Bible-based resource for children's groups from the URC -See URC website

The Children and Youth Friendly Church Synod Scheme was about to be taken forward and anyone interested in helping in the planning was invited to get in touch. Caterham URC had just been awarded Children and Youth Friendly status and representatives from Caterham received a letter confirming that they were now a Children and Youth Friendly Church.

The 2023 all-age resource book **Love is....** had been sent to all URC churches in February 2023. It was also available online https://bit.ly/URC_CYW_resources or as hard copy from children.youth@urc.org.uk

Commitment for Life – annual resources had been produced for some of the countries associated with this scheme.

There was to be a **Tri-nations event for 15-18 year olds** held in Lee Valley Youth Hostel 12 – 19th August 2023 involving young people from Germany, France and the UK. Anyone interested should contact children.youth@urc.org.uk

Greenbelt Festival 24th – 27th August- volunteer helpers aged over 18 were needed.

Talking about.... There was a monthly online gathering for all who work with children and young people, hosted by the CYDO+ team held at 7pm on the fourth Thursday of each month.

www.bit.ly/URCTalkingAbout Topics for the next few sessions were

23 March 2023 - Holiday Clubs

27 April 2023 - Eco Church

25 May 2023 - Recruiting and Retaining Team Members

22 June 2023 - Resources – where to find them & what to look out for

Heather Moore was congratulated on her election as Youth Moderator Elect. She described the Youth Assembly held in January. Details were available in the Big Round-up publication, also available online. Several resolutions had been considered and passed (or deferred pending more information being available) and Synod members were invited to discuss how their local church might respond to some of the issues raised at Youth Assembly.

Tom concluded by reminding everyone of the 4 session **Youth Mental Health First Aid** training available online – daytime and evening sessions were available. See the Synod's monthly training newsletter.

15. Notices:

- i. **Annual Returns:** These were to be completed by the following Monday.
- ii. **General Assembly:** The Synod Clerk was about to complete the list of attendees although there might still be an opportunity for people to express an interest in attending.
- iii. **Prayer Days** Revd Bernard Fidler spoke of the need in these changing times to spend time listening to God. For this reason he was organising a prayer day for each Synod/United Area. Area leaders were asked to suggest dates and venues in June or July. Bernard would welcome offers of help in planning these days.
- iv. **WKESSA:** The retiring Area Treasurer, Ian Harrison, was greeted and thanked for his service by the Moderator.

16. The morning session concluded with a video prepared by the Church Life Review Group.

The Group was looking at governance, resources, needs, finances, structures, deployment and had consulted widely. Its work and recommendations were nearly complete and would go to General Assembly in July.

The meeting broke for lunch and recommenced at 1.45pm.

17. Introduction of new ministers, EM3 ministers, personnel changes, Lay Preachers and Synod Recognised Worship Leaders:

- i. The Moderator greeted Rev Ruth Armstrong (minister of Hardres Street United Church, The Vale URC, and Synod Directed Thanet Ecumenical post)
- ii. Revd Andrew Prasad was welcomed to the Synod. Andrew had previously served in the Synod and more recently served as Moderator of Thames North Synod. He was already serving as interim moderator at Trinity Wimbledon.
- iii. The Moderator thanked Revd Kim Plumpton for everything she had contributed to the life of the Synod and looked forward to her joining the Moderators' Meeting. She was wished well in her future ministry.
- iv. Revds Jennifer Millington, Andrew Sellwood and Paul Dean would retire before the next Synod meeting.
- v. Sue Knight, Synod Lay Preaching Advocate, advised that a total of 22 people had successfully completed the Synod Lay Preaching Course and an assessed service. Those present were greeted by the Moderator and presented with their certificates. Sue encouraged local churches to use this growing resource. An additional online evening training course was to be provided for those unable to attend in person. She also drew attention to the next training event which was to be held on 20th May at Horsham URC and was open to anyone engaged in leading worship. Attendance was free apart from a contribution towards catering.

Note: Following item 17, at the request of the Moderator, Revd Kim Plumpton assumed the chair. The Moderator subsequently left the meeting during item 19.

18. Presentation: Special Category Ministry in South East London: Revd Jacob Bali described his mission and purpose as the Pioneer SE1 Evangelist in South London. He saw his ministry as one of "presence", going out to meet the community and demonstrating faith, hope and love. He concluded his presentation with a video. His message was that the church is still relevant in communities. Faith in action, hope in the community and love on display were all part of evangelism. Comment was made that Jacob's story illustrated that we must no longer think only of church in terms of building. When asked, Jacob described his greatest delight was seeing "growth" in people and his greatest challenge was dealing with the baggage of the label of evangelist.

- 19. Presentation: Legacies of Slavery video** Since the 2022 General Assembly, the URC's Legacies of Slavery (LoS) Task Group had been drawing up a shortlist of proposals and possible projects, based on feedback from synods and churches during the consultation in 2022.

A film "Telling It Like It Is" was shown. Those watching were invited to think about

1. How do you respond to the film? Does anything surprise you?
2. To what extent do the issues highlighted resonate with your own local context, or situations you have encountered in other parts of the URC?
3. What practical actions could be taken by the local/wider church to address the issues as part of our commitment to becoming an actively anti-racist Church? What support might be needed to enable the journey?

The film was available for local churches. The link was to be sent out. A general discussion followed.

Comments made: The issue of racism was not just a black/white issue – it is complicated. The point was made that there was a need to identify some positive ways of moving forward. A training course for *everyone* was needed. A change of perception was needed. The issue of educational qualifications (gained in other countries) as a measure of suitability for training for ministry needed to be looked at. There is no pecking order, prayer was needed alongside other strategies, let's have more diverse images of Christ.

As one of the Synod's Racial Justice Co-ordinators, Jacob encouraged people in local churches to become racial justice advocates. An emphasis of his work this year was to be Korea. The Synod Clerk drew this item to a close in prayer.

- 20. Thank yous and date of next meeting:** The Synod Clerk advised that the autumn meeting was now to be held on the **3rd Saturday** of October. Expenses claim forms for this meeting were to be sent out electronically. He thanked John Lane for co-ordinating the meeting, the trustees and staff at the Brighthelm Centre, the technical team, committee conveners, the Moderator, Kim, Jacob Bali, Sally and Andrew Willett and the members of West Thamesmead, Lauren and the office staff and all who had contributed to the meeting.
- 21.** Rev Kim Plumpton led the meeting in closing worship. She led a responsive prayer. The closing hymn was "How great thou art".
- 22.** At 3.45pm Kim closed the Synod Together meeting noting that the next meeting would take place on **Saturday 21st October 2023** (NB change of date), almost certainly at St Mary Cray URC, or at such other time as may be deemed necessary.

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