
Synod Council Report

1. Introduction

Synod Council, continues to deal with strategic issues on your behalf and comprises of Synod Officers, Synod/United Area Leaders, Committee and Synod Trust Convenors; we have met twice since last reporting to Synod Together. Some matters before Council remain confidential and we are grateful to those who give their time and expertise to handling some sensitive matters.

2. Kent and East Sussex Synod Area

Following the decision of the 2023 Autumn Synod Together to merge EKSA and WKESSA a service of thanksgiving and celebration was held at Maidstone URC on Saturday, 3 February 2024. The day was enhanced by the General Secretary of the United Reformed Church, Rev'd Dr John Bradbury, who addressed the gathering about "The shape of future mission" focusing on the fundamental Christian hope based on God's creative power through Christ. He highlighted the importance of mission in our administrative structure, as we begin a new journey with KESSA. In the afternoon the Convenor of Synod Council, the Rev'd Russell Furley-Smith gave an "encouraging" sermon (according to the 1st Edition of KESSA news bulletin!) on the wedding at Cana and the implications for the new area arrangements.

During the time of initial transition, the new Synod Area will have joint leaders: Rev'd Bernard Fidler and Mr John Ellis.

3. Synod Strategy

It had been hoped that Council would be able to bring an updated Synod Strategy, with priorities for our work in the next 5 years, to this meeting. Regrettably, this update has been delayed and will be brought to the Autumn 2024 Synod Together meeting.

4. New Strategic Mission Post: Pioneer Minister and Chaplain to Brighthelm Church and Community Centre

Following a process of advertisement, shortlisting and interviews, the Rev'd Martin Knight has accepted the call to this new post, and concurrence has been given. Martin will be inducted on Friday, 24 May 2024.

5. Staffing Review

5.1 Administrative Support: Following consultation two posts, for Kent and East Sussex SA and Surrey and Sussex UA are being finalised and should be advertised after Easter.

5.2 Mission and Discipleship Officer: The field staff review, following the appointment of the former Synod Mission Officer to the role of Synod Clerk, recommended the creation of a new role: Mission and Discipleship Officer. The new job title would enable a

broader understanding of mission to include our role as disciples in furthering the mission of the church. The job descriptions of other field staff would remain unchanged. The new post should be advertised after Easter.

6. Safeguarding

At our February 2024 meeting Synod Council had a very helpful presentation and discussion with the Synod's Safeguarding Officer, Mrs Belinda Herbert. She reminded Council of the need for there to be robust safeguarding procedures in place. Council therefore reminds Elders Meetings that they should ensure the congregation's safeguarding policy is reviewed annually, that the policy is adhered to and that a designated Safeguarding Co-ordinator is duly appointed.

Synod Council approved an updated Safeguarding Policy on behalf of Synod.

Council commends Good Practice 6 to all local churches for guidance on this vital matter.

7. Finances

Southern Synod has considerable financial resources but with this comes huge responsibility. The Synod Council and the Finance Committee continue to explore the best way to use these funds for God's Kingdom in the Synod and the wider Church, conscious that all we do at a Synod Level is funded partly by investments but mainly through the sale of Church buildings. As our prayer is to see church growth this position, in the long term, is not sustainable.

Nevertheless, at our December 2023 meeting Council agreed, in principle, to support the 2023 General Assembly Resolution 24a which asked Synods to support the Mission and Ministry fund from their own resources in addition to contributions from local congregations.

Rev'd Russell Furley-Smith
Convenor, Synod Council
March 2024