

Southern Synod Ministries Committee Report to Spring Synod Together March 2024

It is always exciting to share news with Synod Together of the huge range of topics we have considered together in Southern Synod Ministries Committee (SMC). As most folk will know we meet four times a year to receive reports from the Synod/United Pastoral Committees and hear of the huge range of blessings and challenges they are facing. We also receive reports from the Mission and Development Officer, the Safeguarding Officer, the Training and Development Officer, the Ecumenical Development officer, the Children and Youth Development Officer, Students and Candidates Committee, and the Deployment Sub-Group, as well as updates from the Moderator and Synod Clerk. Such a huge range of work that goes on, that this report can barely touch the surface of thrilling work God is doing in our midst; OK there are some things we do not always so joyfully embrace but everyone does their best to hear God speaking in our midst and to act accordingly. As well as reporting to Synod Together twice a year we also report to Synod Council quarterly.

Our last meeting was in person at St Paul's URC, South Croydon, on 24th January 2024. At this meeting we welcomed two new members, Rev Cristina Cipriani (Ecumenical Development Officer) and Deidre Harrison (Lay Preaching Advocate). There is currently a vacancy for Mission Development Officer and some background to this was given, with a possible name change and job description. Rev Keith Morrison was announced by the Synod Clerk as the new line manager to the TDO; thanks are due to Stuart Dew for his previous line management of the TDO. Keith also line manages the CYDO.

The agenda for the meeting was varied from previous meetings to allow Committee Reports to be heard first. So often they are squeezed at the end of a meeting. We will keep with this current agenda for a few meetings then vary again so the work of everyone is given priority from time to time. All reports are appreciated (they really are!)

The TDO reported The Gathering will take place this May, with SMC agreeing to a gathering in 2026, and a shorter gathering in the autumn of 2027 (possibly a national gathering in the summer that year). Synod bookings all at High Leigh. A variety of training courses are taking place across the Synod. 15 people attended the Explore Your Call Zoom meeting in Nov, and currently 13 folk are embarking on the Synod Recognised Local Worship Leaders course (previously known as Lay Preachers Course, but now renamed in accordance with General Assembly decisions). We give thanks for those from the 2023 cohort who have successfully passed their assessed services. Synod Together are asked to pray for a few folk who have undertaken this course in the past who are now feeling the call to other ministries too. Some of our current students in training for Ministry of Word and Sacrament started their journeys via this course.

After SMC met a new Lay Preachers and Worship Leaders handbook has been published by the national Ministry and Learning Committees which SMC will consider more fully in our April meeting; this handbook gives clear guidance to Synods to make sure we have all caught up with General Assembly decisions in recent years, including encouragement for those who want to undertake the national accredited courses to become Lay Preachers, and clarification of the link between presiding at the sacraments and enjoying a good relationship with the local fellowship.

The CYDO reported a further Mental Health Awareness course will take place online in March, and an update on resources for Children and Youth was given. Of especial note Heather Moore, from Emmanuel URC West Wickham, was to be inducted as URC Youth Assembly Moderator and prayers and greetings were sent to her.

Candidates and Students Committee membership has changed with Dr Brenda Vance joining, and Derek Fickling having to step down; Derek was thanked for his service. A further vacancy still exists, and steps are being taken to fill this. At present we have five students in training. Two at Northern College and three at Westminster. We currently have one candidate attending Assessment Conference in March and another in November.

Safeguarding, ever an important issue, was highlighted by the Safeguarding Officer's report with a whole range of mandatory and optional training courses being offered, most online though some in person, with a mix of Synod organised and Nationally organised. The need for us all to understand the implications of Good Practice 6, and safer recruitment, was highlighted.

As ever the Synod Area reports highlighted a wide range of good work going on locally, with some challenges along the way. Amongst issues raised were the resumption of LMMR alongside the Visionary Companion role training; care of retired ministers; whether Local Church Leaders should have Pastoral Supervision (we are following national guidance); deployment; and specific pastoral issues. Whilst SMC cannot solve all these challenges it hopefully allowed some space for topics to be shared, and the informal chats over lunchtime were, as ever, an important opportunity to encourage one another in our shared mission, joys and challenges.

The merger of WKESSA and EKSA into KESSA, agreed by Synod Council last autumn, was noted and we rejoiced the first meetings have been held. After SMC a Day of Celebration was held at Maidstone URC and enjoyed by all who attended.

Paid Administrative Support for Synod Areas is to be trialled soon, in two Synod Areas. This came out of a previous Deployment Day (DD); the next DD is in May and invitations to attend have been issued. Please make sure your Synod/United Area is being represented at this meeting.

The Deployment Sub-Group reported they recognise the need to clarify the role of LMMR, a nationally mandated URC process, and that of VCs (Visionary Companions) which is a Southern Synod initiative. The number of VCs recruited and trained is increasing and that many of these VCs are finding their task to be a stimulating one. The deployment sub-group highlight VCs are certainly making a valued contribution to the overall life and witness of the URC in Southern Synod (and to the roll-out of the Synod Deployment Policy in particular).

The sub-group requested a tweak to their **Terms of Reference**, which SMC agreed, and took to Synod Council for noting, and are below:

Terms of Reference

The Deployment Sub Committee is a meeting of the Southern Synod Ministries Committee and therefore accountable to the same committee.

ROLE:

- To offer a strategic overview of deployment in the Synod, across all synod Areas.
- To support and advise Pastoral Committees.
- To maintain the Deployment Strategy.
- To support national targets and policy mindful of the Church Life Review.

RESPONSIBLE FOR:

Maintenance of Deployment Figures:

Mr John Ellis will work with Lauren King to ensure that our figures on the Mods list are correct.

The group will be the ones to do any deployment mapping on figures and vacancies.

Maintenance and Review of the Deployment Policy

This is a living document and was passed at Synod Together March 2022

Mapping

To look at each Synod Area and its neighbours to see where it is possible to work together.

Meeting

Meet at least twice a year, once with all Area Leaders and Pastoral Committee Convenors, and once with Pastoral Committee Convenors so that everyone has a knowledge of the Synod deployment picture and momentum is maintained.

Support

To work with the Pastoral Committee Convenors on creative ways of deployment.

Membership

Rev Bridget Banks, Rev Wendy Swan, Rev Andy Twilley, John Ellis, Sue Eardley, Nigel MacDonald (rep to SMC)

Deployment Figures – thanks go to Lauren and John Ellis for the latest, revised, deployment figures, which are attached.

Deployment Good News Stories – will be shared at Synod Together so do come along and hear these.

Our Next Meeting is 17th April, and we do value prayer for this.

Rev Helen Warmington, Convenor of SMC, 25th Feb 2024