

**Southern Synod**  
**Minutes of the Twenty Second Synod Together Meeting**  
**held in Temple URC Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2023**

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1. **Health and Safety Notices:** At 10.25am Mrs Deirdre Harrison welcomed everyone to The Temple and gave health and safety notices.
2. **Welcome and Constitution of Synod Together:** Due to the absence of the Synod Moderator, Revd Russell Furley-Smith, Convener of Synod Council, chaired the meeting. He explained that in the course of the meeting he would be acting in several different capacities.  
  
Russell welcomed all who were in attendance and duly constituted the Synod Together meeting.
3. **Opening Worship** was led by Mrs Jo Patterson, Church Related Community Worker, Revd Edward Collier and members of the Copleston Centre Church and Community Centre.
4. **Induction of the new Synod Clerk:** On behalf of the Synod, Revd Russell Furley-Smith inducted Revd Martin Hayward to the post of Synod Clerk to the Southern Synod.
5. **Minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2023:**  
The following resolution was passed unanimously:  
***Synod Together agrees that the minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2023 are an accurate record of that meeting.***  
The minutes were duly signed by Revd Russell Furley-Smith.
6. **Matters arising not dealt with on the agenda:** There were none.
7. **Synod Roll and apologies for absence:** The roll of Synod Together was tabled by the Synod Clerk including the names of 292 members comprising 70 ministers, 119 Synod Reps, 17 Co-opted Members and a total of 86 non-voting members. Apologies had been received from 46 members of Synod Together.
8. **Introduction of new ministers, EM3 ministers, Personnel changes**  
Revd Russell Furley-Smith greeted the following -  
**South London Synod Area:** In the absence of the Revd Lesley Charlton, Alistair Wilson introduced Revd Rodolphe Blanchard-Kowal (Geddes Place, Bexley and Emmanuel Sidcup), Revd Lance Stone (1 of 2 non-stipendiary ministers at Crossway, the other being Revd John Campbell), Revd Hendry Ponniah (Methodist minister at Trinity, Sutton) and Revd Jacob Bali inducted to Trinity, Wimbledon.  
**Surrey and Sussex:** Revd Helen Higgin-Bottom introduced Revd Dan Balsden, Methodist minister in Cobham, Leatherhead and Effingham and Assistant District Chair of the South East Methodist Circuit.  
**WKESSA:** John Ellis introduced Peter and Marie Jackson (Local church leaders at Seddlescombe Chapel) who were about to leave the Area after a very successful ministry including their contribution to the wider church.  
**East Kent:** Revd Bernard Fidler advised of 2 retirements - Revds Paul Dean and Martin Belgrove.  
**Central Sussex United Area:** Keith Morrison introduced Revd Dave Cumbers, ordained and inducted to the Mid Sussex Pastorate.  
**EM2 to EM3:** Revd Andrew Twilley advised that Revd Prince Brown-Engmann and Revd Jacob Bali had successfully completed EM2. Jacob was greeted and Prince was greeted following the lunch break.

**Jubilee Ministers:** The Convener gave thanks for the service of the following Jubilee ministers:- Revd Howard John 70 years, Revd Keith Havers 65 years, Revds Bob Scribbins,

Peter Scotland and Brian Bowyer 60 years, Revds Bruce Stuart, John Oldershaw and Geoffrey Collins 50 years. He led the meeting in prayer giving thanks for the service of these and so many other faithful servants.

- 9. Pastoralia:** Revd Russell Furley-Smith advised that the Moderator had experienced post operative complications which would mean a further time of sickness leave prior to a phased return to work. Concern was expressed for Revd David Marshall-Jones and other ministers. The deaths of 3 ministers since the last Synod meeting were recorded - Revds Jenny Yule, Janet Loveitt and Peter Southcombe. Prayers were offered.
- 10. Appointment of tellers:** The following were elected as tellers – Keith Morrison, Revd Wendy Swan and John Bunker.
- 11. Synod Council Report [Paper A]**  
As Synod Council Convener, Revd Russell Furley-Smith, presented the report which was received. He apologised that Paper A was an early draft which now needed to be brought up to date.
- i. He was to induct Revd Cristina Cipriani to Crawley and the role of Synod Ecumenical Officer. He apologised that he had originally mis-spelt her name.
  - ii. The Synod staffing review had been partially completed which had resulted in the appointment of a full-time Synod Clerk.
  - iii. Due to David Marshall-Jones' indisposition, he had withdrawn from the review and a replacement for him was sought but unfortunately that had not been possible. The review will continue with enhanced support from the Convenor of Synod Council.
  - iv. Synod Priorities within the Synod strategic plan: He hoped to bring updated recommendations to the next meeting in March 2024.
  - v. He thanked those who dealt with confidential matters that often took up much time and energy
- 12. Synod Ministries Report [Paper B]:** As the committee convener, the Revd Helen Warmington, was on sabbatical, Revd Russell Furley-Smith presented the report which she had written prior to going on sabbatical. The Committee had since met. Simon Loveitt raised the issue of training in respect of assessment of candidates for ministry. Since 2019, Southern Synod had not sent anyone for such training and he asked why this was the case. Mrs Deirdre Harrison assured the meeting that all members of the Candidates and Students Committee had undergone the training and a new recruit to the Committee was about to do so.
- 13. Presentation: Church Related Community Worker Ministry (CRCW):** Mrs Jo Patterson. CRCW at the Copleston Centre church and Mr Simon Loveitt, CRCW at St. Andrew's Brockley and St Michael's New Cross described the ministry of Church Related Community Work. Simon gave a short history of the work of a CRCW, a ministry which was unique to the URC. It was a lay ministry working alongside a Minister of Word and Sacrament. The first CRCW started in 1981 in Bradford. The main focus was to facilitate change, working "with" rather than ministering "to", tackling social justice issues through lobbying, working with outside organisations and local councils and being relevant to the community in which they served.
- Within the URC there were currently 13 serving CRCWs with 2 in training. In his current post Simon's focus was largely in supporting people through financial crises. Jo was about to start her second term at Copleston which was both a church and community centre.
- Jo and Simon described the circumstances in which some of the other CRCWs were operating. This revealed a very varied range of work, addressing needs both urban and rural.
- The meeting was asked to break into groups to discuss the following
- What relationships do you have outside your church?*
- If you have some – what does that currently look like?*
- Further questions
- Does your community know that you are there?*

*How?*

*Would they care if you were not there?*

*How can you improve your relationships with others?*

*Who in your community would you like to work with and why?*

*What could you do “not on Sunday”?*

The final activity involved matching bible passages to specific actions.

*Scripture passage*

*Actions*

*Mark: 14 – 29*

*You do/I help (“I” being Jesus)*

*Matthew 28: 16-20*

*I do/you watch*

*Mark 1: 16 – 20*

*You do/I watch*

*Luke 9: 1-6*

*I do/you help*

Both Jo and Simon were willing to visit churches to enable further discussion on the subjects raised.

Jo described how she saw success – enabling people to carry on the work they had started once the CRCW leaves post.

Russell gave a heartfelt thanks both for the presentation and the continuing ministry of both Jo and Simon.

- 14. Synod Children’s and Youth Work Committee Report including report on Youth Assembly [Paper C]:** Tom Hackett, Synod Children and Youth Development Officer, presented the report on behalf of Graham Purdy. He introduced Zeerak Shahbaz as Southern Synod’s new Youth Representative. Zeerak replaced Heather Moore who was currently Youth Moderator Elect. Zeerak had recently successfully completed the worship leaders course and assessed service. He shared some photos of recent youth events he had been involved in - Synod Residential, General Assembly and Tri-Nation Exchange event.

Tom commented on the very successful URC involvement at Greenbelt and the youth contribution to this.

Lundie Awards had been made to Jemimah White (Dartford) and Jessica Warren (Cornerstone Church Uckfield) and more were in the pipeline. Anyone thinking of nominating someone should contact Tom.

Nominations for attendance at the 2024 Youth Assembly were sought.

A further course on Mental Health First Aid Training was about to start. A Youthscape Essentials course for any volunteer youth leader was also scheduled. Further details from Tom.

- 15. Additional item: RAAC:** David Walters, Convener of Synod Property Committee, drew attention to the Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) issue which had arisen in September. 65 churches in the Synod had had work done on their premises during the time period involved. These churches were advised to commission surveys if there was any suspicion that this type of concrete might have been used. The cost of such surveys would be met by Synod through the normal annual buildings grants.

### **Lunch Break**

- 15. Synod Prayer days [Paper G]:** Revd Bernard Fidler reported on the Synod Prayer days which he had organised over the summer. Attendance at some had been sparse. He reflected on the centrality of prayer and hoped that both individuals and churches would spend more time in prayer.
- 16. Step Wise:** Revd Andy Twilley, Synod Training and Development Officer, advocated participation in the Step Wise programme. He gave as an example Mrs Sue Knight whose faith life journey had led to service in several different capacities (and he expressed his appreciation to her for her most recent service as Synod Lay Preaching Advocate.) Faith Filled Life was the first stage of the Step Wise course. He challenged Synod representatives

to consider whether they themselves might engage with Step Wise or whether anyone from their church might do so. Another possibility was to do the course as a church rather than an individual. He was to start a Faith Filled course in the new year. Anyone interested was asked to contact Andy in the first instance.

**Lay preaching:** Andy noted that anyone completing the course which he ran in the Synod would be recognised as a locally recognised worship leader. He believed that there were many others who would benefit from such training.

**Explore Your Call** evening of November 22<sup>nd</sup> on Zoom. Andy recommended this session in which more information would be shared on discerning the call to worship leading, lay, preaching, local church leadership, ministry as a CRCW and Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

- 17. Creation of Kent and East Sussex Synod Area [Paper D]:** The Area Leaders of East Kent Synod Area (Revd Bernard Fidler) and West Kent and East Sussex Synod Area (Mr John Ellis) presented Paper D. They believed the sacrifices necessary in changing, were far outweighed by the advantages.

**Synod Together approved the following resolution (63 in Favour, 1 Against, 1 abstention) -**

***Synod Together agrees to the requests of the East Kent and West Kent & East Sussex Synod Areas to remove the border between them and create a single Kent & East Sussex Synod Area from January 2024, to support all the churches currently within EKSA and WKESSA.***

For the time being at least, John and Bernard were to continue as joint leaders. A meeting on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> February at Maidstone was planned to mark the launch of the combined Area.

- 18. General Assembly Report [Paper E]:** Revd Russell Furley-Smith presented the report which highlighted the resolutions from General Assembly which specifically had implications for local churches, as indicated by the Record of GA. He recommended that Paper E be taken back to Church and Elders meetings. The Church Life Review had produced some interesting reading which he highly recommended.

The Synod Clerk would shortly be seeking nominations for General Assembly attendees in 2024.

Russell noted that there were resources available which addressed the current crisis in Israel/Gaza.

- 19. Synod Finance and Synod accounts [Paper F1 and F2]:** Paper F1 summarised the annual 2022 accounts and F2 the budget for 2024

**Grants available to churches:** Mr John Denison, Synod Treasurer, opened by reminding the meeting of the grants available from Synod – administered by the Strategic Mission and Church Building Panels. Funds were still available and details of criteria and process for applying could be found on the Synod website. He reminded churches of the Church and Manse Annual Grants schemes. It is very easy to make applications under these schemes and the grant could be carried forward for a year. The Energy Emergency Fund started in 2022 was due to end on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023 although claims could be made after that date for the period leading up to it.

**2022 Accounts:** Investment income was never sufficient to meet all the Synod expenses and though the sale of church buildings currently made up the deficit, if that were not sufficient transfers from reserves would be required to balance the figures.

During 2022 we showed a surplus of income over expenditure with the proceeds of the sale of redundant church buildings (£9.2 million).

The value of our investments fell in 2022 due to the Stock Market reaction to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

As in 2021 in the light of global uncertainties, larger than normal cash balances had been retained. Extra funds had also been held on account due to Southern Synod's agreement to provide financial assistance in clearing the Ministers Pension Fund deficit.

The following resolution was passed:-

***Synod Together accepts the accounts for the financial year ended on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022.***

**Budget for 2024:** Normal projections for income and costs had been used in assembling the budget for 2024. The amounts devoted to grants to churches had increased over the last couple of years.

**Financial position 2023:** Whilst monitoring expenditure closely, a great many of the costs of Synod were pre-set and difficult to reduce. A greater contribution to the inter-Synod resource sharing had been made and increased amounts made available by the grant making panels and the Ministers' Pension Fund.

Due to the reduced number of sales of church buildings in 2023 the contribution to the Ministers' Pension Fund would not be made early as in previous years but in 2024. John expressed his confidence, however, that this commitment would not have a significant detrimental effect on the Synod's financial position which was kept under constant review.

**M&M:** John expressed appreciation of the effort made by churches to meet M&M requests. The 2024 requests of a 10% increase was to bring the Synod's contribution level close to 2020 levels. Any church experiencing difficulties should approach their Area Treasurer in the first instance.

John thanked Catherine Kingdom for all the work she was doing and had done in the Synod Office on the churches' behalf and the invaluable assistance she provided to him personally. He concluded by expressing his appreciation and thanks to the Area Treasurers for their work on the Synod Finance Committee and in the various Synod Areas.

The following resolution was passed:-

***Synod Together accepts the budget for the financial year ended on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024.***

- 20. Thank yous and date of next meeting:** The Synod Clerk advised that the next meeting was to be held on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2024. Offers to host would be welcome.

He thanked Russell for chairing the meeting, the team at the Temple for their hospitality, especially the car park stewards (it had rained heavily), the technical team, all who had submitted reports and made presentations. He noted the extra work Lauren King in particular had taken on during the Moderator's absence and thanked the office staff and all who had contributed in so many ways to the meeting.

- 21.** Russell gave thanks for the work shouldered by Martin Hayward since assuming office as Synod Clerk. He then led the meeting in closing worship. He reflected on how small acts of kindness can change the world. He led the meeting in repeating the words of renewal of commitment used earlier in the meeting during Martin's induction.

- 22.** At 3.20pm Russell closed the Synod Together meeting noting that the next meeting would take place on **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2024 at a venue to be confirmed**, or at such other time as may be deemed necessary.

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