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 **SOUTHERN SYNOD**

**Minutes of the Twenty Third Synod Together Meeting**

**held at Saint Andrew’s Cheam URC Saturday 9th March 2024**

* 1. **Health and Safety Notices**: At 10.25am Nigel Dickinson, Church Secretary, welcomed everyone to St Andrew’s and gave health and safety notices.

**2. Welcome and Constitution of Synod Together:** Revd Bridget Banks, the Synod Moderator, chaired the meeting. She welcomed all who were in attendance and duly constituted the Synod Together meeting. She thanked everyone for all the greetings and good wishes she had received during her recent indisposition.

**3. Opening Worship** was led by Revd Nadene Snyman, minister at Christ Church Petts Wood and Camberwell URC and one of the Synod’s Green Apostles. She reflected on how God’s redeeming love is to be found in unexpected places. We needed to find and be open to a different way.

**4. Synod Roll and apologies for absence:** The roll of Synod Together was tabled by Revd Martin Hayward, the Synod Clerk, including the names of 202 members comprising 68 ministers and CRCWs, 112 Synod Reps, 21 Co-opted Members and a total of 90 non-voting members. Apologies had been received from 35 members of Synod Together (29 voting, 6 non-voting).

**5**. **The appointment of tellers**: The following were elected as tellers – Revd Wendy Swan Revd Russell Furley Smith, Revd Angela Rigby.

**6. Minutes of the meeting held on 21st October 2023:**

The minutes were found to be an accurate record and were duly signed by the Moderator.

**7. Matters arising not dealt with on the agenda:** None had been notified.

**8. Presentation: Leading your church into growth.** The Moderator welcomed Revd Ashley Evans, Yorkshire Synod Evangelist. He observed that since its inception, the URC denomination overall had shrunk, although some churches had grown. Referring to the Five Marks of Mission he suggested that it was necessary to concentrate on all five, rather than just some. He led the meeting in a Growth Prayer, copies of which had been distributed. Evangelism meant transmitting life, joy and hope. Was this evident in our worship? How do we make the message relevant to those to whom we reach out? He introduced a programme of seven steps towards growth. Mission involved numerical growth, servanthood and spiritual depth and above all a willingness to try a different way. Ashley was willing to provide further training.

The Moderator thanked Ashley for his stimulating presentation. She referred to flip chart sheets at the back of the church and invited attendees to put their own ideas of what they felt Synod could provide by way of support, training and content of Synod Together meetings.

There was a break for lunch.

**9. Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting which are not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda**. There were none.

**10. Pastoralia:** The deaths of Revds John Braund, Geoffrey Finch, David Marshall-Jones and Brian Pavitt were recorded. Prayers were offered by the Moderator.

**11. Introduction of new ministers, EM3 ministers, Personnel changes**

The Moderator greeted the following -

**South London Synod Area:** Revd Lesley Charlton introducedRevd Dr Michael Jagessar

and Revd Leonora Jagessar-Visser’t Hooft who had recently moved into the Area.

**Surrey and Sussex:** RevdHelen Higgin-Bottom introducedRevd Cristina Cipriani, minister at Crawley and Southern Synod’s Ecumenical Officer.

**Kent and East Sussex Synod Area:** John Ellis and Revd Bernard Fidder were greeted as Co-leaders of the newly combined Synod Area. Revd Bob Street was greeted as the Pastoral Convener of the Area.

**Central Sussex United Area:** no introductions

**EM2 to EM3:** There were none.

**Synod Clerk Introductions:**

Mrs Sue Knight was greeted and thanked following her service as Synod Lay Preaching Advocate.

Revd Helen Warmington was greeted and thanked prior to her stepping down as Convener of Ministries Committee.

Mrs Deirdre Harrison was greeted as the new Synod Lay Preaching Advocate.

**Lay Preachers:** Deirdre introduced Foozie Sellick, Zeerak Shahbaz, Elspeth Bunker, Joan Pike, Sue Shaw and Brian Pusser who had recently received recognition as Synod Recognised Lay Preachers.

**12. Moderator of General Assembly Nomination [Paper A]:** John Ellis presented Paper A suggesting the Synod nominate Revd Neil Thorogood as General Assembly Moderator 2025 – 26.

Synod unanimously approved the nomination.

**13. Synod Council Report [Paper B]**

As Synod Council Convener, Revd Russell Furley-Smith, presented the report which was received. He opened by expressing his pleasure that the Moderator was now returned.

It had been hoped to bring a revised Synod Strategy to this meeting but this had not proved possible and would be brought to the October meeting. He intended that the strategy be a positive one. He welcomed the appointment of Revd Martin Knight to the strategic ministry post in Brighton and the forthcoming advertisements to recruit two Area administrative assistants and the Mission and Discipleship Officer. He drew attention to the slightly altered job title of the latter post. The Synod Clerk explained that there was a distinction between the training work done by the Training Development Officer usually involving a course or syllabus or process, and that of visioning and enabling done by the Mission and Discipleship Officer. The importance of Safeguarding had been highlighted at the most recent Council meeting.

**14. Synod Ministries Report [Paper C1 - 3]:** Revd Helen Warmington presented the reports which were received. Paper C1 outlined the many issues which come before the committee. Papers C2 & 3 gave updates on the deployment targets for the respective Synod Areas and how they were calculated. These were noted.

Helen spoke of the privilege she had experienced as Convener of Ministries Committee. She reminded all present of the commitment and time devoted by so many people to the work of the Synod.

Helen invited Revd Wendy Swan as a member of the Deployment Sub-Group to introduce some good news stories. She introduced John Bunker and Andrew Hume. John described the situation at Horsham URC which had just embarked on a three year Transitional Ministry.

Andrew described The Bookham Youth Project an ecumenical project in which the local URC church was a contributor.

**15. Synod Finance Report:**

John Denison, Synod Treasurer, explained that he had recently attended several web meetings on the funding of the URC.

**General situation**: Whilst the Synod finances were healthy with cash balances sufficient to meet current requirementsthis was only due to the sale of church buildings.

**Ministers Pension Fund**: In accordance with decision of Synod Together the Synod was already committed to making an initial contribution of £5.0 million towards clearing the deficit in the Ministers Pension Fund. The final payment of £1.5 million was to be made in 2024. The actuaries were currently carrying out their three year review of the fund. Should they feel that additional contributions were necessary the Synod had already agreed that we would provide up to an additional £3.0 million spread over six years commencing in 2025.

**The Building Grants Panel and the Strategic Mission Panels** were operating well and John confirmed his commitment to providing grants which conformed to mission criteria. John noted that grants are increasingly assisting in the funding of outreach programmes for periods of 2 to 5 years.

**Church Building and Manse Grants**: He gave a reminder of these grants which were available to every church annually.

**Annual Church accounts**: It was important that all churches send a copy of their accounts to the Synod Finance Officer in timely fashion. No accounts, no grants.

**Emergency Energy Grant system.** The Synod had paid out over £30,000 in grants in response to 12 claims. The period of claims period ended on 31st December 2023. Churches have, however, until 31st March 2024 to submit claims for grants. Please direct any questions on claiming to the Finance Officer, Catherine Kingdom, at the Synod Office**.**

**M&M Fund:** John thanked all those churches which were continuing to support the M&M Fund particularly in the light of the recent 10% increase in what was being asked. Whilst he appreciated that for a few churches this was beyond their means, he appealed to all churches that have not responded in a positive manner but have the financial resources to do so to rethink their response**.**

The churches in Southern Synod had provided £2.3 million to this fund for the work of the denomination. The M&M Fund was the lifeline of the URC.

**Wider Finances of the URC**: Alan Yates, the new URC Treasurer, recently advised URC Synod Treasurers that the 2023 M&M fund had received funds totalling £16.2 million of which £14.3M came from local churches and £1.9 million from some Synods. Despite this there is a projected deficit of £1.3 million for 2023.

The URC has not had a balanced budget for several years. In view of this Alan was tasked, by the Assembly Executive in November 2023, with producing a balanced budget within 7 years.

To achieve his task he is proposing:

- annual savings of between 5% and 3% in the denomination’s budgets, and

- setting three funding streams to the M&M Fund from the churches and the Synods:

a) Church giving, he anticipates will decrease from the £14.3 million in 2023.

b) Assumption that the £1.9 million synods funding of 2023 is maintained throughout.

c) To meet anticipated deficits, the synods would provide additional funding starting with approx. £359,000 in 2024.

Synod Council at its 14th December 2023 agreed to support the 2023 General Assembly Resolution 24a asking synods to give additional support to the M&M Fund. By the next Synod Together meeting John hoped to have a much clearer understanding of how much will be needed. He intended to propose a resolution recommending the amount Southern Synod should provide in the third funding stream to the 2024 M&M Fund. Additional annual funding will depend on each new budget.

Revd Roger Jones asked whether the 10% increase had been agreed by Synod Together but John explained that the decision to ask for the increase had been made by the Finance committee.

Mark Camp, Treasurer of KESSA had knowledge of churches with the necessary resources which were nevertheless unwilling to increase their contribution by 10%.

Paul Woods, Treasurer at Burgess Hill, one of the churches which had not agreed to the increase, suggested a gradual increase of 1% a year.

**16. Synod Children’s and Youth Work Committee Report [Paper D]:**

Zeerak Shahbaz, southern Synod Youth Representative, presented the report in Graham Purdye’s absence. The Youth Assembly had taken place 26 to 28th January. 13 had attended from Southern Synod, seven of whom for the first time. Another Tri-Nation event was to be held in 2024, anyone interested to contact Church House. Shahbaz had attended CWM European Pre-regional Assembly in February.

Tom Hackett, Children’s and Youth Development Officer, reported that Lundie Awards had been made to Jess Warren at Cornerstone in Uckfield, Malumbo and Tawonga Mtika at Gillingham. Tom hoped to visit Christ Church Tonbridge shortly to present the award to Phoebe, Zoey, Elong and Gideon Leung.

Helen Moore, from Emmanuel, West Wickham, had been inducted as the new URC Youth Assembly Moderator. A letter of support and encouragement was to be sent to her by the Moderator on behalf of Synod Together.

Tom highlighted several resources available:

Stories, stories, stories

Holiday club resources

Faith adventures: children together weekly resources

Prayer prompt cards

Online Training courses

Tom paid tribute to the Revd David Marshall-Jones who had been a great supporter of youth work and guides and scouting.

**17.** **Presentation - Strategic Mission Fund**: Revd Keith Morrison as convener of the grant awarding Panel outlined some of the projects being undertaken by local churches. The Fund was a successor to the Turn the Tide Fund and New Growth Fund. It now worked on a budget of £750,000. Grants for less than £30,000 can be dealt with by email within a month. Some grants will be spread over the duration of a particular project.

Revd Roger Jones, minister at Tolworth described a situation where employment of a youth worker would have been beyond its resources. As an alternative Tolworth had employed a teenager on a session basis to work with the children and young people. She would otherwise have been looking for a part-time job. This had proved a very successful venture both for the person concerned and the church. (see attachment to the minutes)

Keith described other projects involving the provision of IT. Ten churches had benefitted from this. Some of these projects permitted interconnecting services.

Smaller projects had involved new playgroup equipment, warm spaces funding, Ukrainian refugees, LICC learning hub, participation in an arts festival, community singing.

Thanks to the Fund a group of young people at West Thamesmead had been enabled to attend a Limitless Festival.

For projects based around Children, Youth and Family work churches should talk in the first instance to the CYDO.

For other projects, in the absence of a Mission and Discipleship Officer, contact Revd Wendy Swan.

Application forms on the Synod website under grants and loans.

**18. Thank yous and date of next meeting:** The Synod Clerk advised that the next meeting was to be held on 19th October 2024 at St Andrew’s Canterbury.

He thanked the Moderator for chairing the meeting, the team at Saint Andrew’s Cheam for their hospitality, the technical team, minute taker and all those who worked behind the scenes at Synod Office. He thanked all for their attendance.

**19.** The Moderator led the meeting in closing worship.

**20 .** At 3 pm the Moderator closed the Synod Together meeting noting that the next meeting would take place on Saturday 19th October 2024 at St Andrew’s Canterbury, or at such other time as may be deemed necessary.

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