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## Synod Council Report

### 1. Introduction

Synod Council continues to deal with strategic issues on your behalf. 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. Synod Committees, Synod Trust and Synod/United Areas and Personnel Changes

Synod Council regularly receives reports from Synod Committees (Finance, Property, Youth and Children's Work), Synod Trust and the Synod/United Areas. Council is grateful for the invaluable contribution of all these groups for the work they undertake on behalf of Synod.

Since the last report to Synod Together Mr John Lane has stepped down as Co-Leader of Central Sussex United Area, his role being taken over by Mr Stuart Dew. Rev'd Lesley Charlton has stepped down as leader of the South London Synod Area, her role being taken over by Rev'd Elaine Colechin. Council is grateful to the invaluable contributions of both John and Lesley over many years and wish them well for the future. We look forward to the contribution of both Stuart and Elaine as we now work together.

### 3. Synod Strategy (see Paper A)

After much prayerful thought and discussion, Council is pleased to bring to this meeting an updated Synod Strategy, recognising that the priorities moving forward are to Renew, Reimagine and Reorder the life of the Synod and local churches within the Synod. This will be dealt with as a separate item on the agenda.

### 4. Synod Staffing

4.1 We are delighted that two new Synod Area administrators, Mrs Denise Woodhatch (Surrey & Sussex Synod Area) and Mrs Ruth Willis (Kent and East Sussex Synod Area) have been appointed and are already making valuable contributions to their respective areas.

4.2 Mission and Discipleship Officer and Training and Development Officer: Sadly, despite two rounds of advertising, short listing and interviews, we have not been able to make appointments to either post. Both Synod Council and Synod Trust have given the Synod Officers permission to seek, at least in the short term, alternative means of ensuring that essential training and support can be offered across the Synod.

4.3 Director of Mission Projects: In 2021 Rev'd Wendy Swan was appointed as Director of Mission Projects, to oversee and work alongside situations where there was the possibility of a mission project. Wendy has made an incredible contribution to this role, bringing her expertise, sensitivity and passion for mission. Wendy is now retiring

from this role and we wish her well in the future. The role will now end, with the expectation that the new MDO will pick up this important work.

4.4 Safeguarding Officer Maternity Cover: Belinda Herbert began 12 months maternity leave in September 2024. Natalie Van Camp has been appointed to provide maternity cover and we wish her well in this role.

#### **5. Closure, amalgamation and grouping of Churches (see Paper C2)**

One of the functions of Synod, as laid out in the Structure of the United Reformed Church, is to deal with all matters concerning the closure, amalgamation and grouping of churches. In exceptional and rare circumstances, it may be necessary for Synod to act on behalf of local churches concerning their closure. Following advice from the Clerk to General Assembly, Synod Together will be asked to delegate certain tasks either to Synod Council (re closure) and Synod/United Areas (re amalgamation and grouping) of churches. This will be dealt with as a separate item on the agenda.

#### **6. Ministry and Mission Fund**

Synod Council has received a discussion paper from KESSA concerning the future of the Ministry and Mission Fund. Finance Committee has been asked to consider suggestions in the paper for changes to the way the Fund is operated within Southern Synod and to bring any proposals back to Synod Council in December.

#### **7. URCs working in Partnership with independent churches**

Council is aware that there are a few situations arising where an independent church, sometimes with no denominational affiliation, is seeking to work in partnership with a local URC, often one which is struggling to maintain its own life and mission and manage its own premises. Council is mindful of the need for good practice and the possible need for guidelines to be drawn up to assist when approaches from other churches are being made.

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