

Synod Ministries Committee Report to Synod Together

Introduction

It is a pleasure to share the work of Synod Ministries Committee with Synod Together. Synod Ministries Committee meets quarterly and has met three times since our last Synod Together, on 17th April, 17th July and most recently on 16th October. Rev Helen Warmington convened her last meeting at our April meeting. Helen has brought her considerable gifts to this role with 3 years of service and we are thankful for her work. We wish her well in the next chapter of her service to the Kingdom.

I took on the role of Convenor of Synod Ministries Committee in October and I'm looking forward to working with this hard working and committed group. Our remit is varied and covers an ever-expanding range of topics as ministry in the Synod changes and develops. We work with a standing agenda but also react to changes in the wider URC. We have begun planning for 2025, assessing what our local churches need, how we disseminate information and how we might implement changes to policy from General Assembly whilst staying relevant to our local church contexts. All this is held with prayerful consideration knowing it is the work of the Kingdom and that we are discerning the will of God.

Membership

Our committee members are me and our secretary Sue Eardley, the Moderator, Synod Clerk and Convenor of Synod Council, Synod/Area Pastoral Committee Convenors, Ecumenical Officer, Mission Officer, Training and Development Officer, Safeguarding Officer Children and Youth Development Officer, Candidates and Students Convenor, Lay Preaching Convenor, and a representative from the Deployment Sub Group. We report to Synod Council quarterly, but a lot of work goes on in-between meetings. We are blessed with the people who dedicate time to this and bring many years of invaluable experience to our meetings and at other times.

Recent Discussions

Our meeting covers a wide range of topics, but a flavour of our recent discussions include:

- Long service awards for local church leaders, lay preachers, worship leaders.
- Feedback on the spring gathering.
- Deployment matters including Elders training.
- LMMR and national changes including Minister's reviews.
- Lay preachers plans to gather and other matters.
- Our Safeguarding Officer Belinda Herbert is on maternity leave and we welcome Natalie Van Camp as cover.
- Mental health training for local churches – increasingly complex issues and an increase in incidents.
- Pastoral convenors reporting local issues. They remain hard working and extremely valuable especially finding solutions to our deployment challenges.
- Review and dissemination of papers from General Assembly and update where appropriate of Synod related policies.

We gladly receive and discuss reports from Synod officers hoping to helpfully reflect on their work and current priorities.

Officer Changes and Recruitment

Andy Twilley our Training and Development Officer left in May after seven years of service. Andy will be missed for his enthusiasm, dedication and energy. The Synod has been unable to employ a new Training and Development Officer, but our search continues. Synod has also been unable to employ a new Mission and Discipleship Officer – Synod will continue with another round of recruitment. Ministries Committee is aware of the gaps that these two vacancies create. The Synod is looking at creative ways of filling those gaps whilst seeking out the best people for the job. Please pray for this process as it is complex and time consuming for those involved.

General Assembly

General Assembly included a range of papers from Ministries which we will absorb and disseminate to local churches in time, including:

Paper H3 – Process for reconfiguring pastorates and scoping

Paper H4 – Amendments to the plan for partnership remuneration.

Paper H5 – Local Ministry and Mission review

Paper H7 – Guidelines on Elders in Local Leadership

Paper H11 – Guidelines on safer recruitment of those who lead worship

Synod Moderator's report – offers some helpful questions for local churches to consider and can be found here: <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Synod-Moderators-Report.pdf>

Other relevant discussions at General Assembly included changes to the plan for partnership and papers on the conflict in the middle east. More information can be found on the URC website here: <https://urc.org.uk/general-assembly-assembly-executive-assembly-committees/general-assembly/>

Future work

We will meet (by Synod Together we will have met) on 16th October and are planning ahead for 2025. We will ask committee members what the burning issues in our pastorates are, what is key, what mission looks like for our local churches. I am keen to ask churches, pulpit supply secretaries and people at the grass roots what matters most to our worshipping congregations and our local communities. We have had a difficult time reconsidering our deployment with the help of our dedicated committee, perhaps it is time to move forward and consider what makes us flourish for the work of the Kingdom. What does God ask of us, what is our ministry in our context? How creative can we be? We hope to ask these questions during 2025.

We are also aware that communication and dissemination to local churches is sometimes ineffective, so we hope to find new and appropriate ways of informing churches of news and information, so watch this space.

All that we do is for the glory of God, please pray for us as we continue this work.

Jo Patterson – Convenor Synod Ministries Committee, 27th September 2024