



The
United
Reformed
Church

SOUTHERN SYNOD
Minutes of the 27th Synod Together Meeting
held at Christ Church Petts Wood
Saturday 14th March 2026

- 1. Health and Safety Notices:** At 10.30am, Mrs Kat Copley, the Church Secretary, welcomed everyone to Christ Church Petts Wood and gave health and safety notices.
- 2. Welcome and Constitution of Synod Together:** In the absence of a Moderator, Revd Russell Furley-Smith, as Convener of Synod Council, chaired the meeting. He welcomed all who were in attendance and duly constituted the Synod Together meeting.
- 3. Pastoralia:** Concern was expressed for the many people who were known to be under strain or stress for various reasons at the moment mentioning in particular Colin McCracken, the Synod Property Officer, who was not going to be as available as usual for a while. The Synod Property Team was currently operating under great pressure, and Russell asked that patience and understanding be exercised.

Since the last meeting the following had died -

Revd Colin Bones (Lindfield and Balcombe)

Revd Robert Blows (Thames Ditton)

Revd Keith Havers (Hastings, Faversham and Deal)

Revd Derek Redfern (Dartford Group)

Revd Brian Stone (East Grinstead, Hove Central, Haywards Heath and Lindfield).

Colin Riley, a retired Lay preacher at Crowborough and

John Latham who was a Local Church Leader and Lay preacher at Hampton Hill

- 4. Opening Worship:** Opening worship was led by Revd Martin Knight on the theme 'Encountering Christian Nationalism'. After an opening prayer for peace, the hymn "As we are gathered" was sung. The readings (Micah 6: 6-8 and Matthew 18: 15-22) were interspersed by the singing of "Listen to the word that God has spoken." Christian Nationalism what is it? A conjoining of political and religious interests but this is something the URC in its statement of faith and order makes clear is not our belief. Christian faith does not sanctify political power but instructs us to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God. The church is a sign of another kingdom where everyone is welcome. Martin drew attention to a march organised by Together Alliance on 28th March and an online webinar on 23rd April at 7pm entitled. The Prophetic and the Flag organised by the Racial Justice and Advocacy Forum. Worship concluded in Prayer followed by singing "Lift high the cross".
- 5. Minutes of Synod Together 18th October 2025:** After noting that on page 3 line 6 it is Roger Johnson not Johnstone, the minutes were found to be an accurate record and were duly signed by Russell.
- 6. Matters Arising not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda:** There were none.

7. Synod Roll and apologies for absence: The roll of Synod Together was tabled by Revd Martin Hayward, the Synod Clerk, including the names of 188 members comprising 62 ministers and CRCWs, 103 Synod Reps, 23 Co-opted Members and a total of 80 non-voting members. Apologies had been received from 17 members of Synod Together.

8. The appointment of tellers: The following were elected as tellers – Mrs Deirdre Harrison, Revd Keith Morrison and Mr John Bunker.

9. West Thamesmead Community Church [Paper A]

Paper A was introduced by Revd Dr Elaine Colechin who had acted as Interim Moderator to the pastorate of West Thamesmead and Charlton URC churches. The paper described how the church had been planted in 2017 by the Revds Andrew and Sally Willetts as part of the Thamesmead Christian Community. It was assigned a church number but had never been formally constituted. With the agreement of the Anglican diocese, it was now proposed to constitute West Thamesmead Community Church as a wholly URC church operating within the Thamesmead Christian Community.

Resolution:

Southern Synod gives thanks for the ecumenical work in Thamesmead and the partnerships that enabled the planting of West Thamesmead Community Church. As West Thamesmead Community Church establishes itself formally as a local church, the Synod recognises it wholly as a local church of the United Reformed Church, while still being part of the wider Thamesmead ecumenical framework.

The resolution was passed unanimously.

10. Synod Committee Reports

1. Synod Children and Youth Work Committee [Paper B]

Mr Graham Purdye (convener) and Tom Hackett the Synod Children and Youth Development Officer, presented the report which listed several events and training opportunities. See report.

8 young people from the Synod had attended the Youth Assembly. One of the participants had written to Tom describing the very positive impact the event had had on her. See appendix published with the participant's permission.

Tom also announced that the Lundie Memorial Medal for February had been awarded to James from the Bay Church in Kent for work in both church and community and the March award had been awarded to Dexter, aged 9, from Christ Church Petts Wood in recognition of his considerable fundraising efforts to support the England men's amputee national football team, who had qualified for the World Cup in Costa Rica this year.

Tom added that he was always available to talk with local churches about work with children and youth

2. Synod Council Report [Paper C]

In his report as Synod Council Convener, Russell expressed his appreciation of the leadership provided by Committee Convenors and Synod/United Area leaders whilst we are without a Synod Moderator. He emphasised that he was not the acting Synod Moderator, but was

representing the Synod at Moderators' Meetings to assist with the movement of Ministers.

The paper described the practice of en bloc voting which was to be adopted in future when the need arose.

With regard to the so far unsuccessful process in finding a new Synod Moderator Russell advised that the post was to be re-advertised but with the intention of speeding up the process by holding interviews in late April/early May. This time round he had been led to believe that there would be some interest. It was still open to people to nominate possible candidates.

He paid tribute to the Revd Martin Hayward who was very shortly to retire as Synod Clerk and thanked him on behalf of Synod for all that he had contributed to the life of the Synod since he joined as a District Evangelism and Mission Enabler some twenty five years ago.

Interviews for a new Synod Clerk were to take place the following week and Russell asked for prayers for this process and vital appointment.

3. Synod Ministries Report [Paper D]

Mr Simon Loveitt, Convener, had sent his apologies as he was attending the National Assessment Conference.

In his report he expressed his appreciation of the support provided by the four field officers.

He advised that Guidance on presiding at the Sacraments paper would be brought to the October Synod Together meeting.

Code of Conduct: Synod Ministries Committee was working on a Code of Conduct for the Synod on how we treat and communicate with each other, and Synod staff members and how we should conduct ourselves at public meetings such as Synod Together.

4. Synod Property Committee Report

Mr David Walters, Convener, advised that the Synod Property Officer was not going to be around much for at least the next two months and asked that this be respected. Enquiries should be directed to the Property Administrator.

5. Synod Finance Committee Report

Mr John Denison, Treasurer, reported on the Synod's contribution to the Ministers Pension Fund Deficit. Southern Synod, having agreed to contribute £5.0 million over 5 years had contributed £3.5 million during the first two years. In the third year Synods were advised that no further funding was required and that there would be a surplus that would be refunded in proportion to each Synod's funding. John had recently received confirmation that Southern Synod would receive £1.2 million from the excess funds. As this had not been anticipated in the Synod's budgeting, the Finance Committee had recommended to the Southern Synod Trust that the returned funds be placed in a "Designated Account" to be used to assist in covering any deficits in the Central URC Funding over the next 3 to 4 years as it moves towards a balanced budget.

John encouraged churches to make use of the Building and Mission grant making panels when planning projects or work that fall within the parameters of either or both panels. He encouraged discussions with the relevant field officers prior to making application.

John thanked churches for their continuing support of the Ministry and Mission Fund without which the denomination would not exist. He had been asked about the Church Life Fund which was being set up but of which he currently had very little knowledge. Assurance, however, was given that there was a lot happening behind the scenes to enable a swift implementation.

COFFEE BREAK

Following the break, Revd Ruth Armstrong encouraged everyone to come along to the Synod Big Day Out on 20th June (volunteers also needed).

11. PRESENTATION: Mr Ian Moore, the Synod's Green Apostle, gave a presentation on the theme of Healthy Churches. He referred to the 5 Marks of Mission which included care for God's creation. He handed out "Hope Maker certificates" to churches within the Synod which had successfully embraced the concept of eco church. He showed a short video on efforts being made to collect plastic from the ocean floor. It was important to allow people who were committed to eco matters to enthuse and lead on a church's engagement with environmental matters. The Church of England had identified what are called "demonstrator churches" and these were there for other churches to visit to gain ideas. A video was shown on making churches warm and welcoming.

Attendees had been given some sunflower seeds to plant and Ian asked that when they flowered, a photo of them be sent to Synod Office.

Deirdre Harrison from The Temple Church spoke about The Carbon literacy study group which was currently being run as a Lent Course but which could be adapted for use within a church. Contact Ian if interested.

Ian conducted a "higher or lower" quiz on carbon footprint with some surprising statistics. Recommended reading was the book "How bad are bananas?" by Mike Berners Lee. Ian had several second-hand copies for sale at £5 each.

He concluded his presentation by encouraging churches to share their good news stories with him and by completing the energy footprint audit form.

Russell thanked Ian for his inspiring presentation and reminded the meeting that we were all in this together.

12. Welcomes and Farewells:

- i. Revd Dr Elaine Colechin, Area Leader of South London Synod Area noted that Revd Alan Brand had been inducted to The Grove Centre church the previous month and introduced Revd Dr Confidence Bansah whose induction to the pastorate of West Thamesmead and Charlton was to take place on 21st March 2026. She also introduced Mr Stephen Fellingham who was retiring as Local Church Leader at Bromley URC at Easter having served in that capacity since 2010. She noted that Revd Roger Jones was retiring as Synod Area West Pastoral Committee Convener.
- ii. There were no introductions from Kent and East Sussex Synod Area.
- iii. There were no introductions from Central Sussex United Area,
- iv. There were no introductions from Surrey and Sussex Synod Area.

- v. Mrs Deirdre Harrison, Synod Lay Preaching Advocate, introduced Jennie Macfadyen who had recently been recognised as a local worship leader.

13. Thank yous and date of next meeting: The Synod Clerk thanked Kat Copley, the elders and the team at Christ Church for their hospitality, Martin Knight for his opening devotions, Martin Leonard for his technical assistance, and all those who had contributed to the meeting in different ways. He was particularly grateful to Lauren King his PA for her assistance.

Martin reported that the next meeting was due to take place on Saturday 17th October 2026, venue to be confirmed.

Russell led the meeting in a vote of thanks to Martin Hayward as he prepared to retire in a few days' time after 25 years of service to the Synod. He presented a card and gift to Martin.

14. Closing Address from Synod Clerk: In answer to speculation as to his exact age, Martin conducted a little quiz based on childhood tv programmes. There were too many people whom he could thank by name but he particularly mentioned Lauren who had provided such valued and loyal support. He had greatly enjoyed his time in the Synod and valued the diversity he had encountered. He encouraged everyone to embrace diversity and be open to change. He concluded by quoting Theodore Rooseveltt "It is not the critic who counts....."

15. Closing Worship and conclusion of Synod Together: Russell invited the meeting to sing the hymn 'Will you come and follow me if I but call your name'.

At 1.35pm Russell closed the Synod Together meeting noting that the next meeting would take place on Saturday 17th October 2026 or at such other time as may be deemed necessary.

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

Appendix to Item 10.1 included with Caitlyn's permission

"Youth Assembly 2026 was truly an amazing and life changing experience. It was my second time going, my first time as a Youth representative/helper, and I sang in the worship band. I met new lifelong friends that I can't wait to hopefully see again next year, had lots of fun experiences, and most importantly, really felt the holy spirit and God's presence the entirety of the weekend. I felt him in the worship, the music, the talks, the activities (including the workshops), truly everywhere! I feel that this year's Youth Assembly was overall very well planned with lots of exciting activities, but possibly could have had a bit more down-time to relax and just chat with friends. For just 3 days, Youth Assembly has done it again by making me really feel close to God and I cannot wait until Youth Assembly 2027!!

Caitlyn Finch – Southern Synod Participant.