



Northern Synod

13 March, 2021

THE NORTHERN SYNOD OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH met online on Saturday 13 March, 2021, with the Moderator, the Revd Dave Herbert, in the chair, along with 25 ministers, 32 representatives and 19 visitors.

21/2 **OPENING AND WELCOME**

The Moderator opened the meeting, which had a theme of listening and waiting together. Instructions were given on how to take part online. A screen shot would be taken on the day. *[A minister]* led the Synod in opening worship, based on Psalm 40: 1-3 and Mark 7: 31-37.

21/3 **MINUTES** of the meeting of 17-31 October, 2020 and further minutes were approved, to be signed at a later date.

21/4 **MATTERS ARISING**

No items were raised.

21/5 **NEWS OF PEOPLE AND PLACES**

Ecumenical guests were welcomed. The Revd Joan Grindrod-Helmn (Pastoral Committee Convenor) shared news of ministerial moves, retirements and anniversaries. Since Synod last met, Berwick and Crookham churches had closed, and ministers' widows, Freda Pagan and Mary Filby had died.

[The Synod Operations Coordinator] led the Synod in prayer.

21/6 **THE CHURCH IN LOCKDOWN: LISTENING AND WAITING**

The Moderator introduced discussion in breakout rooms. *[The Youth Work Advisor]* prefaced the discussion by outlining his own experience of life in lockdown. He reflected that waiting can be a time of pain and uncertainty, but also a time of hearing what God is saying.

The groups met to discuss two questions: In what ways is your church listening and waiting? What might you be listening and waiting for?

Responses fed back included:

- Reflecting on different ways of being church, saving resources by doing things online, and the need for digital inclusion.

- Online gatherings had engaged new people and enabled people to participate who could not have attended in person, but there were capacity limitations for hybrid worship.
- We needed to go forwards not back, retaining the good we have found, but wary that technology is no replacement for face-to-face engagement.
- People valued their church family (more than the building) and were looking forward to worshipping together again.
- We should reflect on how to build on the stronger more intentional pastoral care in future.
- People are looking inwards spiritually, but are not quite sure what they are looking for.
- They are learning to live in the present, as well as planning for a new future.
- There was hope, but not yet lived reality, which was stressful now.
- Some of us have been very busy, constantly innovating, others have had a fallow period and time to reflect.
- There has been a shock of disconnection and curtailment of freedom.
- There was new empathy with those who are housebound.
- There was a need to reconnect with young people, and to listen to community concerns.
- It was hard to reach the most vulnerable, who have also been the most impacted by the pandemic, so how do we focus on them?

21/7 **WE HEAR YOU: UPDATE FROM THE THINKING DAY 2020**

The Moderator referred back to the Thinking Day in March 2020 and the earlier consultation with churches. Synod Executive Committee had carefully considered these, and discerned a need for discipleship and affirming each other's gifts; and for reaching out and nurture the young into faith.

[The Children's & Youth Work Committee Convenor] reflected on the Old Testament story of Eli and Samuel, handing on the light to the new generation. The Church needed to find new ways of doing this. A five-year development plan would be brought to Synod in October, with a programme to help churches engage with children and young people in a variety of ways. Synod would need to help with resources, such as through a team of pioneer

workers, meeting the needs of local churches. The committee would consult with churches and ecumenical partners and young people over the coming months. Everyone was invited to send in thoughts to him, to Children's Work Advisor Hannah Middleton or to *[the Youth Work Advisor]*.

[The Ministries & Development Committee Convenor] reflected on Ephesians 4: 11-13, and asked is it just the work of the teachers to equip the saints for ministry, or is it everyone's work? Many are building up the body of Christ within and outside Church, and we need someone to guide discipleship and help churches on this path. There was a great need for a Learning & Development Officer, and as it had not been possible to make an appointment of a part-time ministerial post, it was now proposed to make a full-time lay appointment, and this had been budgeted for.

The Moderator added that churches may be looking at other ways of being church. The idea of an umbrella church for the Synod was being explored, and more would be heard of this in October.

[A minister] voiced support for the resolution, as there was a desperate need for concrete support and action in engaging with communities and young people.

Resolutions 5-6, were moved and carried.

Emerging Priorities

21/8 **Synod affirms the intention to a) enable URC members to develop their gifts and abilities so that they can be missional disciples in a changed and changing world, and to b) pioneer work with children, young people and families, so that we can develop churches for today's and tomorrow's world. Synod requests Synod Executive to report on progress with these developments at the October Synod meeting.**

21/9 **In support of the intention to enable URC members to develop their gifts and abilities to be missional disciples in a changed and changing world, Synod affirms the appointment of a full-time, lay appointment of a Learning and Development Officer.**

21/10 **THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH (NORTHERN PROVINCE) TRUST LIMITED**

The Convenor, the Revd David Grosch-Miller, expressed thanks to *[The Trust and Finance Officers]* for preparing the report, and to Gordon Wanless and the Directors for ensuring the work of the Trust continues. Investment income had held up reasonably well over the last year. In recognition that churches needed help in identifying and carrying out essential repairs, a property officer

was being recruited. The Trust could help congregations struggling because of loss of income, if paying Ministry & Mission dues was a problem.

Conversations were in process about Synod priorities going forward. The Trust had resources, which should be used wisely and well, as they could be spent only once. Increasing the numbers of staff would commit us to certain expenditure, limiting other options.

Ministers' Pension Fund

- 21/11 David explained that negotiations were in process between 14 separate trust bodies to ensure the Ministers' Pension Fund would continue to be sustainable in the long term. We may be asked to contribute about £3m over nine years, either from income or capital.

He then moved resolution 1, which was carried.

- 21/12 **Synod supports the Trust in its readiness to commit a proportion of present and future assets to meeting the long-term funding required for the Ministers' Pension Fund, as part of a whole Church solution.**

- 21/13 **LISTENING TO WHERE THE ENERGIES ARE: REDCAR MISSIONAL COMMUNITY**

The Revd Joan Grindrod-Helmn chaired this item, and the Revd Dave Herbert presented a proposal for a house with three or four volunteers praying, studying, serving and eating together as a community. This was a radically new approach to presence in a community, empowering and enabling. It could be an affirmation of local mission and a seed tray for vocations and theological formation. There would be an annual consultative group for the project, overseeing the vision, resources, sustainability, HR and wider context; and there would be a monthly management group dealing with pastoral, advocacy, and local connections. There would also be a pastoral visitor as an experienced mentor, and complaints and safeguarding procedures would follow those for other Synod staff. Intermediate level safeguarding training would be provided to all community members. It was felt this would be a worthwhile investment of resources in mission in a community.

In response to a question, he confirmed that the management group would report regularly to Synod Executive, and it was suggested there should be six-monthly or annual reviews.

Several members spoke of their excitement and encouragement at the proposals, taking steps forward and trying new things, which might be replicated elsewhere or lead to other projects. The work would be hard, so the support group would certainly be needed.

The indicative budget of £5,000 for transport was a guesstimate, recognising there may be a need to travel to meetings or share the Redcar experience more widely.

[A minister] noted there was a nearby lay Catholic community at Madonna House, Robin Hood's Bay.

[Another minister] pleaded for support for St Mark's, Amble, as well as for Redcar. They wanted to replace their church with a purpose-built building for their existing and hoped-for community work and for the worshipping community. However, members were weary and needed support from people to help with fundraising and project management. She wished that the Charity Commission would allow churches to sell buildings to those making most impact. Some support was voiced for the work being done at Amble, and for trying to help there too if possible. It was recognised that there was profound need in both communities, although the proposal for Redcar was unique and a new way of being church, quite different from the challenges faced in Amble. The Revd David Grosch-Miller (Trust Convenor) noted that significant sums were needed to tackle severe problems with the Amble building, and there was a limit to what we could spend. The Revd Joan Grindrod-Helmn (Pastoral Committee Convenor) noted the heart-wrenching feeling over situation at Amble, and these issues had been under discussion for many months, and conversation would continue to seek a solution. The Revd Dave Herbert added that we shouldn't be paralysed by need in different places stopping us doing new things.

Resolution 7, was moved and carried, with 39 in favour, and eight abstentions.

21/14 Synod affirms the proposal to establish a residential missional community in Redcar.

21/15 WAITING TOGETHER

The Moderator returned to the chair. A video was shared from the Synod's daily prayer community, encouraging more people to log on and join in at 9am each weekday morning. A link would be sent out by email and on Facebook. *[A visitor]* recommended a 9.30am meeting too, from Wooler.

21/16 URC CHILDREN AND YOUTH NEWS

Children's Work Advisor Hannah Middleton and *[the Youth Worker Advisor]* spoke about their work at three levels – denominationally, producing Advent and Lent packs, within the five northerly synods with Messy Church gatherings, and also supporting local churches in Northern Synod. They highlighted new initiatives in United Reformed Church children's and youth work, including the 'Heroes and Villains' pack; the infant feeding policy; the

fortnightly 'Youth Trialogue;' booklets explaining the roles of children's work volunteer, children's and youth work elder, and youth work volunteer; the 'URC Youth (dis)Assembled' and monthly 'Youth re-Assembled' online events; Holy Week mini podcasts; the Children and Youth Friendly Church scheme; and forthcoming communications workshops. It was hoped to run some training for children's and youth work volunteers in the autumn.

21/17 **LISTENING TO EACH OTHER: COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Synod reconvened after a break for lunch.

21/18 **MISSION**

[The Convenor] explained that the committee had reflected on the nature of mission and on its large agenda over the last year. He welcomed Pat Poinen's appointment as Racial Justice Advocate. He moved resolution 3, which was carried.

21/19 **Synod gives thanks for the long service of *[a retired minister]*, and affirms the appointment of Pat Poinen as Racial Justice Advocate for an initial term of five years from 13 March, 2021.**

21/20 The Moderator welcomed Pat to the meeting. She acknowledged that this was a big task, and would need help.

21/21 **CHILDREN'S & YOUTH WORK**

[The Convenor] put forward a two-year pilot programme for pioneer youth workers, who would work with a small group of local churches, for 20 hours a week, paid from the Synod's Mission Fund. He moved resolution 2, which was carried.

21/22 **Synod endorses the creation of up to four part-time pioneer youth workers, for an initial period of two years.**

21/23 **SYNOD EXECUTIVE**

The Moderator explained that much of the committee's work had been around emerging priorities from the Thinking Day. The pandemic had lent these issues a great urgency. It had recently been announced that General Assembly would now be held online this year, on 9-12 July.

Resolutions 4, 8-11 were moved and carried *en bloc*, with 42 in favour and two abstentions.

Property Officer

21/24 **Synod affirms the Trust's decision to appoint a property officer to assist churches to manage and develop their buildings.**

Safeguarding

- 21/25 **Synod approves the Synod's Safeguarding Policy with effect from 13 March, 2021.**
- 21/26 **Synod welcomes the possibility of a joint Safeguarding Committee with Yorkshire Synod, and endorses discussions to that effect, with details of progress to be reported at the October 2021 Synod meeting.**

Nominations

- 21/27 **Synod appoints [*a minister and four Elders*] and those others commended by Synod Executive in the coming weeks, as representative to General Assembly 2021.**

Next Meeting

- 21/28 **Synod resolves to meet on 16 October, 2021, with either a physical meeting or virtual setting, and instructs Synod Executive to put appropriate arrangements in place, advising churches as early as possible of the plans.**

21/29 **PASTORAL**

The Convenor, the Revd Joan Grindrod-Helmn, thanked [*the Moderator's PA*] for her support. She explained that all the people on the list in Appendix 3 to the book of reports had been authorised to preside at sacraments until March 2022. Names of new lay presidents would be sought before October, to allow time for training (hopefully in person) before next March. Work was also being done on patterns of ministry, and deployment up to 2025.

Resolution 16 was moved and carried, with 44 in favour and one abstention.

Elsdon Avenue LEP, Seaton Delaval

- 21/30 **Synod concurs with the decision of the SENE Area Meeting, accepting the oversight ministry of [*a Methodist Presbyter*] at Elsdon Avenue LEP, Seaton Delaval, while the pastorate is in vacancy.**

Resolutions 17-18 were moved and carried.

Trinity LEP, Gosforth

- 21/31 **Synod concurs with the decision of the Church Meeting of Trinity LEP, Gosforth, to call [*a minister*] as minister, effective August 2021.**

Nominations

- 21/32 **Synod appoints [*two Elders*] to serve on the Pastoral Committee.**

Resolutions 12-15 were moved and carried *en bloc*, with 44 in favour and one abstention.

Ministerial Moves and Retirements

- 21/33 **Synod gives thanks for the long service with the NHS of [a minister], and wishes him well in a well earned retirement.**
- 21/34 **Synod gives thanks for the service of [another minister] and wishes her well in a well earned retirement.**
- 21/35 **Synod gives thanks for the service of [a third minister] and wishes him well in a well earned retirement.**
- 21/36 **Synod gives thanks for the ministry of Revd Sue Fender and concurs with the call from Eastern Synod to ministry at the Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Link. We wish her well.**

The Moderator expressed appreciation for the service of these ministers.

North West and Central Newcastle

- 21/37 Additional resolution 19 was then moved. It was confirmed that members of the churches involved may vote, and that Robert Stewart Memorial was not part of this group.

[One of the Interim Moderators] thanked *[two technicians]* for their technical support last weekend. It was explained that this was a call to a minister currently serving in Maryland, who had been trained at Westminster College, Cambridge. He had a certificate of eligibility to become a United Reformed Church minister.

Resolution 19 was carried, with 44 in favour and one abstention.

- 21/38 **Synod concurs with the decision of the Newcastle North West and Central Group (St James's, St Andrew's, Jesmond, West End) church meetings to call [a minister] as minister to the Group, effective summer 2021.**

- 21/39 **A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CHURCH-RELATED COMMUNITY WORK MINISTER**

[A Church-Related Community Work Minister] introduced herself, having been commissioned in 2006 and inducted to Sunderland & Boldon Partnership in 2020, following appointments at Poole and Bolton. She had learned that God calls the right person at the right time in each situation. The first year would usually be spent listening to voices and dreams and learning about the wider context, which had been much harder to do in the pandemic.

[She] described a typical day.

She also had a Synod element to her work, which would develop, and could include the Stepwise Faith-filled Community stream.

[She] closed with a Lenten prayer.

[A colleague] expressed his appreciation for her work.

21/40 INVITATION TO OCTOBER SYNOD MEETING

The Moderator explained that plans were fluid, but that it was hoped to be able to meet in person at St John’s LEP, Kingston Park, on 16 October. This would be confirmed nearer the time.

21/41 CLOSE

The Moderator led the meeting in closing worship, with a reading from 1 Peter 2: 1-5, and a reflection on living stones, listening and waiting.

..... Moderator

..... Synod Clerk

..... Date