**Minutes of the meeting of the Yorkshire Synod of the United Reformed Church held on Saturday 14th October 2023 at Holme United Reformed Church and via the Zoom Digital Conferencing Platform**

1. **Welcome**

The Clerk offered a welcome as did Mr John Rider, Lay Pastor at Holme URC.

1. **Synod Convened**

Synod was convened by the Moderator, Rev Jamie Kissack.

The Moderator then extended a welcome to all who were attending including those attending Synod for the first time.

Synod representatives were reminded of the conventions Synod use in relation to the use of Zoom as a forum.

1. **Present**

There were 53 Lay people, 15 Ministers, 8 Retired Ministers, 1 Lay Pastors representing 51 churches, Yorkshire Synod Youth and Sheffield Teaching Hospitals Trust.

1. **Apologies**

Apologies have been received from 4 Ministers, 3 Retired Ministers, 1 Lay Leader, 12 Lay People.

1. **Minutes**

The minutes of the March 2023 meeting were presented, were agreed as a true record and were signed by the Moderator.

Synod has not met since the March 2023 meeting.

1. **Matters Arising**

None

1. **Notices**

The Clerk gave the notices for the day including the addition of two extra resolutions – No 14 asking for the adoption of the Synod Budget and No 15 marking the addition of Trinity Methodist Church to the Local Ecumenical Partnership in Skipton. The Clerk also noted that Resolution 2 has been slightly amended from the published papers and will be reflected in the record of the day.

1. **Date and Place of March 2024 meeting**

Synod will meet again on the Saturday, 9th March at Central URC in Sheffield.

The Clerk also requested churches willing to host Synod to contact him in the usual manner.

1. **Worship**

Worship was introduced by the Moderator, who invited Mr Roo Stewart, the Programme Officer for Church and Society, and based at the denominational offices in London. He was joined in the service by members of the Synod Eco Team, who were introduced to Synod members.

The PowerPoint presentation is available from Synod for those who wish to use it in their own devotions.

Mr Stewart offered the following areas to think about in relation to our relationship with the environment:

* God made the world
* God sustains the world
* Our personal responsibility
* Our social responsibility

With these questions to ponder and the story of the Persistent Widow, Synod members entered small groups for further discussion and exploration.

Synod then enjoyed a film exploring *Community Mission* including ongoing projects at Glastonbury URC, St Paul’s South Croydon and at Crouch End in London. From this our Yorkshire Churches, especially the 72% who have yet to engage, were challenged to create Eco groups so that we all can

* Share stories
* Sign up to Eco Church
* To have a Eco Apostle or Eco Lead or Eco representative in each church
* To attend Eco workshops – from Greening to finance (and all in between
* Attend carbon literacy training
* GET YORKSHIRE SYNOD TO THE BRONZE AWARD!!

1. **An Introduction to Safer Recruitment.**

In the absence of Mrs Paula Kitson, the Synod Safeguarding Support Officer, the Clerk presented an outline of the current URC policy via a series of supplied PowerPoint slides. These slides are available for use via the Synod office.

In essence the adoption by churches of the Safer Recruitment guidelines is not as daunting as it has been made out to be. The means by which recruitment to tasks within churches will not change although the adoption of safer recruitment means that the recording of relevant conversations and invitations is recommended to allow for the process to be put into a more structured form. The Clerk mentioned that the Safeguarding Team are more than willing to answer any questions that churches feel the need to ask about this and any other Safeguarding matter.

1. **Receiving Resolutions**

The Clerk opened this session and reminded Synod of the ways and means by which the business is to be conducted & in particular the Guide to Zoom Etiquette leaflet on the website.

The Clerk moved the following resolutions as it means that the reports submitted may be received and that we can discuss them in their appropriate place.

* **Resolution No 1**

Synod receives the report of its Council.

* **Resolution No 2**

Synod receives the reports from its Committees and Groups as presented in the attached papers where appropriate.

* 1. Moderator’s Report
  2. Treasurer/Financial Resources Committee
  3. Ministries Committee
  4. Children & Young People’s Committee
  5. Safeguarding Committee
  6. Listed Buildings Advisory Committee
  7. Yorkshire Synod Manse Strategy Paper

The Clerk noted that Convenors of some of these committees are here today and if there are any questions time has been set aside later in the proceedings.

Both Resolutions 1 and 2 were passed unanimously.

1. **Budget 2024**

Rev Simon Copley, the Synod Treasurer, took to the floor to the present the Synod Budget for 2024.

He highlighted the following areas:

* Support for Churches: £75000 had been set aside in 2023 to help churches with their fuel bills. This will not be happening in 2024 although the Financial Resources Committee (FRC) will be keeping a close eye on the financial health of our constituent churches.
* Raising Money from other sources: The FRC keeps a continuous watch on grant sources and will advise churches where may be best to look for such grants and in some cases will offer advice and help in the application thereof.
* Safeguarding Provision: The changes in the way in which we deliver Safeguarding (in partnership with Northern Synod) has had quite an effect on the 2023 expenditure and has been taken into account in the 2024 budget.
* The Future: The budget has taken into account the fact that any additional income from property sales could be flexible depending on the health of our churches and the health of the market. However, it is forecast to be higher than in previous years and as such there will need to be discussions regarding what may be done with the extra income. This will link into the question of Manse provision and how we hold them as well as the question of M&M calculations as there are as many ways of doing this as there are Synods in the URC. The budget has also taken into account the fact that salaries are forming a greater proportion of the Synod’s expenditure as it looks to increase available office-based support for churches. This does have an effect of the workload of the FRC and as ever new volunteers from as wide a background as possible are required.
* Immediate action: The increase in some income streams means that in this budget it is proposed that the mileage policy is revised again, and that the Synod suspends the Church Levy for the foreseeable future.

The Treasurer then moved

* **Resolution No 14**

Yorkshire Synod, meeting on the 14th October 2022 resolves to accept the Yorkshire URC Synod Budget for 2024 as circulated and submitted.

The Resolution passed unanimously.

1. **Synod Manse Strategy**

Synod agreed that Rev Jason McCullagh take the chair to allow the Moderator to speak to the paper submitted regarding the planned conversations surrounding the Synod’s manse strategy. The Moderator emphasised the validity of existing policy and that this is what is currently being abided by. The new conversation is a response to ever changing scoping and deployment pressures as well as to local church needs. This is particularly the case when balancing what ministerial provision is available nationally with the available stock of manses within Synod. Although at present there is no plan to change the policy, it is important to keep a missional eye on Synod manse provision. There is a need, however, to ensure that we are not sat on resources for resources sake which could be used in a more missional context.

From the floor various questions were asked including ownership of manses and the suitability of manses. In response the Moderator noted that although most manses are held in trust by the Yorkshire Congregational Union (YCU), they do in for the benefit of the local church who directs the use of the manse through Church Meeting. The YCU will then act accordingly within the provisions of existing legislation. The suitability of manse stock tends to be tested at the commencement of any call process and quite often becomes part of the call process. This is why Synod would advise that any Manse stock is kept ready for any potential call. Finally, a suggestion was made to bring all policies currently involving manses together and that the YCU are sufficiently resourced to cope with any increased workload any change to the strategy would entail.

1. **Grace & Lunch**
2. **Opening Prayers for the Afternoon Session**

Prayers opened the afternoon session, in particular those offered by Rev Dr Munther Isaac of the Bethlehem Bible College and the resources available on the URC website at <https://urc.org.uk/prayers-in-a-time-of-conflict/>.

1. **Wilderness – Children and Young People Team**

Megan Tillbrook (via Zoom) introduced the “Wilderness Hub” to Synod. The Children & Young Peoples Committee are looking to work alongside churches to explore different ways of engaging with Children and Young people through the Wilderness Hub Scheme. Applications are welcomed from far and wide, and the plan is for it to be funded through church/Synod/URC partnerships. More information will be circulated as the scheme develops.

Megan also drew Synod’s attention to the Advent Resources available through the national URC website and noted that if obtained through the Synod a 50% discount is available.

1. **Commitment to Anti-Racism**

Rev Zaidie Orr followed up on her presentation at the March Synod on the Legacies of Slavery journey and to bring the conversation up to date to include the URC’s commitment to Anti-Racism. First of all was a call for volunteers to step up and to work alongside Zaidie and the URC team. She noted that October 2023 was Black History Month and there is a great amount of resource available to churches. In particular there is help available to understand the difficult term “reparations” in this matter. However, as it is being interpreted as repairing justice, the action of reparation will create a legacy of seeking justice, loving mercy and walking humbly, which is presaged in Micah 6 v8.

Moving forward; there is training on offer, starting with the input of Prof A Reddie, who is working on a package that can be utilised at Synod and Church level. These sessions will be rolled out in 2024 and the evaluation of this training will be from across the while of the denomination.

1. **Synod Forums**

Rev Jason McCullagh reported on the feedback received from the summer’s four Synod Forums and expanded on the comments withing the Moderator’s report. He emphasised how important they have been in engaging with the Synod’s churches and from a Synod point of view how missional they are.

A key element of the forum was the relaxed nature of the events. Those who were called to contribute were able to do so in a free and open environment which was conducive to listening. Although the Pastoral Committee has been the body which shaped the structure of the forums, it is open to suggestions as to how to do it again in the summer of 2024 as dates have already been set for four more. The Synod Forums in 2024 will be held on 11th May at St Andrew’s Scarborough, 1st June at Gleadless, 8th June at Salem Burley-in-Wharfedale and 6th July at Hipperholme.

Synod was then invited to join breakout groups to answer the following question: *It's 2024, it is time for the Synod Forums. What are we looking forward to and what are we talking about?*

The responses were varied, including concerns over LEP’s being unable to effectively access URC resources, the need for churches to have a wider attendance base, a deeper understanding of eldership (especially in LEPs) and how blessed the URC is in having a flexible organisation, where meetings can be a joy to attend and open to all.

1. **General Assembly 2024 Feedback**

Several of those who attended the 2024 URC General Assembly meeting held at *The Hayes* in Swanwick, Derbyshire, reported back on their experiences and on the decisions made there. The highlights of the extended weekend were the diversity of worship, the ecumenical resolutions being passed, the ability to be heard in both open sessions and in group activities and the input from URC Youth into the overall proceedings. In particular the induction of the first female black Moderator – Rev Tessa Henry-Robinson and the admission into the URC of two new churches – the Bristol Korean Church and the online URChurch.

Areas which were felt to have most impact on what we do here in Yorkshire Synod included the conversations on *Flourishing* and how we can do that here. Linked into this were the many resolutions passed (available online at <https://urc.org.uk/general-assembly-assembly-executive-assembly-committees/general-assembly/>) especially those related to supporting asylum seekers, Trans-gender issues, and Social Justice.

Overall, the General Assembly representatives’ feedback was positive as it allowed for honest and open conversations, it was never boring, and it showed that the URC is open to change across all its facets.

1. **Committee Reports**

The Clerk has received one comment regarding the Synod Council report. This is regarding the follow up to the Missional Synod questions posed of the constituent committees and the use of the Theos Report published to coincide with General Assembly. He reported that the feedback is still coming in (with some of the committees being a tad slow in their reporting). As the final analysis hasn’t been fully worked through, nothing can be offered formally, although I think today it is clear through their reports that the constituent committees are working in a more missional direction.

Similarly, the response to the Theos report has not been fully analysed from a Synod perspective, mainly as Yorkshire Synod has not pushed it out to the Yorkshire churches as some other Synods have done with their churches. The Moderator has referred to it in his report and copies have been made available for collection. It is also available to download from the Theos website at <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/URC-report-Final.pdf>

On the back of the submitted reports and in the absence of the Synod Committee Convenor the Clerk then introduced **Resolution 3**. He noted that the increased responsibility and risk burden placed upon the Trust bodies of both Northern and Yorkshire Synods has meant that that there has been an increase in safeguarding cover, as has been explained in the submitted Safeguarding paper. Over the summer it was felt best that to bolster the efficacy of the Safeguarding committee by adding a member of each of the two trusts covered by the committee, namely the URC (Yorkshire Province) Trust and the URC (Northern Province) Trust. As the membership of the joint Safeguarding Committee was established by both Synods through resolutions, any changes need to be done in the same way. He reminded Synod that at the March 2022 Synod the following resolution was passed, creating the joint Yorkshire/Northern Safeguarding Committee.

*Yorkshire Synod, meeting at St Andrew’s Methodist/United Reformed Church, Skipton on 12th March 2022, resolves the following.*

1. *Synod acknowledges with thanks its existing Safeguarding Committee and agrees to form a new united Safeguarding Committee, to fulfil its duties and remit on behalf of both the Northern and the Yorkshire Synods of the United Reformed Church.*
2. *Synod adopts the terms of reference for the joint Safeguarding Committee as set out in the Safeguarding Committee report for the March 2022 Yorkshire Synod, and requests that any subsequent amendments be agreed by both synods.*
3. *Yorkshire Synod appoints Ailsa Johnson, Anne Robson, Alex Walker, to the joint Safeguarding Committee to serve until October 2023. Northern Synod Executive to nominate three suitably experienced Northern Synod representatives in due course.*
4. *Synod appoints the Synod Moderators and Synod Clerks of both Synods as members ex officiis of the joint Safeguarding Committee. The Synod Safeguarding Officer serving the Northern and Yorkshire Synods will be in attendance.*
5. *The joint Safeguarding Committee reserves the right to co-opt additional members as necessary.*

In discussion within the Safeguarding committee and with the respective Trust bodies, it has been felt that it is prudent to add to those who sit on the committee a member of each of the respective Trust bodies. Rather than those persons being co-opted as is allowed for in clause e, the Committee felt that to formalise it in clause d would be the better option. Therefore, the Clerk proposed the following amendment to clause d is proposed:

1. **Synod appoints the Synod Moderators and the Synod Clerks of both Synods, and one representative of each of the Synods’ respective Trust bodies as members ex officiis of the joint Safeguarding Committee. The Synod Safeguarding Officer serving the Northern and Yorkshire Synods will be in attendance.**

After a period of discussion an amendment was received which removes the proposed new paragraph d and replaces it with:

* **Resolution No 3**

**Yorkshire Synod resolves to amend the Terms of Reference of the Yorkshire and Northern Synods Safeguarding Committee, to include in the 'Membership and Appointment' section, the bullet point: 'One representative of each of the Synods' respective Trust bodies will be ex officio'**

The amendment was accepted by the proposer, and out to vote where it was carried overwhelmingly.

1. **Synod Life**

The Clerk then addressed Synod and moved Resolutions 4 to 13 plus the extra Resolution 15:

* **Resolution No 4**

Synod records with sadness the closure of Castleford, Christ Church, URC on 31st August 2023. Synod offers thanksgiving for the life and witness of its members over the years since its foundation in 1863.

* **Resolution No 5**

Synod records with sadness the closure of Lidgett Green URC, Bradford (as a constituent part of Cornerstone LEP) on 31st August 2023. Synod offers thanksgiving for the life and witness of its members over the years since its foundation in 1888 as well as for the life and witness of Great Horton URC (founded in 1861) with whom it amalgamated. Synod also gives thanks for the ecumenical witness of Cornerstone LEP in partnership with Great Horton Methodist Church.

* **Resolution No 6**

Revd Alan Crump has stood down as a member of the Financial Resources Committee (and with it as a member of the United Reformed Church (Yorkshire Provincial Trust) and the Yorkshire Congregational Union). Synod wishes to place on record its thanks to Revd Alan Crump for his work in this field and wishes him well for the future.

* **Resolution No 7**

Revd Samantha Sheehan has stood down as a member of the Children and Young People’s Committee. Synod wishes to place on record its thanks to Revd Samantha Sheehan for her work in this field and wishes her well for the future.

* **Resolution No 8**

Revd Jenny Morgan has stood down as a member of the Pastoral Committee and as Pastoral Elder for the Castleford, Flanshaw and Knottingley group of churches. Synod wishes to place on record its thanks to Revd Jenny Morgan for her work in this field and wishes her well for the future.

* **Resolution No 9**

Mr John Rider has stood down as a member of the Pastoral Committee and as Pastoral Elder for the Bradford and Saltaire group of churches. Synod wishes to place on record its thanks to Mr John Rider for his work in this field and wishes him well for the future.

* **Resolution No 10**

Mrs Jane-Anne Frame has stood down as Retired Ministers’ link for the eastern part of Synod. Synod wishes to place on record its thanks to Mrs Jane-Anne Frame for her work in this field and wishes her well for the future.

* **Resolution No 11**

Mrs Valerie Jenkins has stood down as Retired Ministers’ link for the Aire Valley and Bradford part of Synod. Synod wishes to place on record its thanks to Mrs Valerie Jenkins for her work in this field and wishes her well for the future.

* **Resolution No 12**

Mr Edward Convery has agreed to act as Synod Pastoral Elder for the Aire Valley area and to be a member of the pastoral Committee. Therefore, Synod appoints Mr Edward Convery to serve as a member of Pastoral Committee and act as Synod pastoral Elder for the Aire valley for a period of three years until October 2026.

* **Resolution No 13**

Mr Andrew Murison stepped down as a member of the Synod Investments Sub-Committee in July 2023. Synod wishes to place on record its thanks to Mr Andrew Murison for his work in this field, for his long-time service to all things financial in Yorkshire Synod and wishes him well for the future.

* **Resolution No 15**

Synod records with joy the extension of the Local Ecumenical Partnership in Skipton, with Trinity Methodist Church joining with St Andrew’s Church to form Trinity St Andrew’s, and which was marked at a special service on 16th July 2023. Synod offers thanksgiving for the ecumenical witness in Skipton and looks forward to many years of mission and witness working with our fellow Christians there.

Resolutions 4 to 13 and 15 were all passed unanimously by Synod.

1. **Thanks**

The Clerk offered thanks to

* Rev Jamie Kissack for leading us today.
* Those who have participated: Mr Roo Stewart, the Eco Team, Rev Zaidie Orr and Megan Tillbrook.
* To Lawrence Heath Moore, Dan Morrell and the Holme URC team for behind-the-scenes work
* To the Office Staff, Sally, Anne, Rachel and Hayley for coping with way Synod has been put together this Spring and for their continuing work for the Synod between meetings.
* All who have joined us and have coped again with this hybrid way of doing Synod. The Clerk asked representatives to take back to your churches not just your impressions of the day but also the information you have received and share it with your congregations. He also asked for feedback as the Synod team need to know what we did well, what needs improving and how we do this kind of meeting in the future.
* To the good folk at Holme URC for allowing us to use their buildings and for their hospitality this morning, this lunchtime (in particular the most welcome food), and after we adjourn.

1. **Closing Worship including in Memoriam**

Closing worship was led by members of Holme URC and included the Synod’s In Memoriam (appended to the minutes).

1. **Synod Concluded** to meet again on 9th March 2024 at Central URC, Sheffield.

Signed..................................................................................Date...............................

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**Yorkshire Synod**

**In Memoriam**

**March 2023 to October 2023**

Ministers

Rev Alan Gaunt Minister Christchurch Keighley 1965-1969

Elders

John Kemplay Elder Flanshaw

Valerie Bridgens Elder Meersbrook Park

John Lauder Elder Headingley St Columba

Cynthia Hunter Elder West Park Leeds

Olive Kelsey Elder Flanshaw

Peter Hall Elder, Treasurer & Lay Preacher St Columba’s, York

Jean Stanley Elder Ardeen Road, Doncaster

Patricia Startin Elder Moldgreen, Huddersfield

Bill Ellis Elder & Musician Moldgreen, Huddersfield