

Minutes of the meeting of the Yorkshire Synod of the United Reformed Church held on Saturday 13th March 2021 on the Zoom Digital Conferencing platform

1. Synod convened

Synod was convened by Rev Jamie Kissack.

Mr Dan Morrell of the Synod IT group reminded representatives of the conventions Synod would be using in relation to the use of Zoom as a forum.

2. Welcome and Worship

Rev Jamie Kissack welcomed those who has been able to join the meeting via Zoom. He outlined the plan for the day and started with a short act of worship and a period of prayer with interactive images of salt, seed and a candle representing the meaning of Jesus' words "if you have ears to hear, then hear".

3. Greetings

The Clerk, Mr Tim Crossley, welcomed everyone including new representatives and those at Synod for the first time, as well as those visiting and observing.

4. Present

The Clerk indicated that those present would be counted throughout the day.

The figures were as follows: There were 90 Lay people, 29 Ministers, 6 Retired Ministers, 1 CRCW and 1 Lay Pastor representing 62 churches, Yorkshire Synod Youth, Leeds Universities Chaplaincy and Sheffield Teaching Hospitals Trust,

5. Apologies

Apologies were received from 6 Lay people, 2 Ministers, 4 Retired Ministers and 1 CRCW. It has been requested that the minutes record apologies were received from the representative from Selby Portholme LEP.

6. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th October 2020 on the Zoom Digital Platform had been circulated. The minutes were duly agreed to without amendment and will be signed at a suitable time by the Moderator, Rev Jamie Kissack.

The Clerk indicated that Synod has met on two occasions since the October 2020 Meeting. Firstly, on the Zoom Digital Platform on Saturday 7th November for the induction of Rev Annette Haigh into the Aire Valley Pastorate of Trinity Keighley, Bingley URC and Idle URC. Secondly, on the Zoom Digital Platform on the 14th November 2020 for the induction of Rev Alison Micklem into the pastorate at West Park, Harrogate.

7. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the said minutes.

8. Agenda

The Clerk updated the meeting with the news that nothing had been received to alter the day's proceedings or the agenda as published.

9. Synod Notices

The Clerk asked that Synod representatives to take note of the information which had been sent out in the Synod mailing, in particular the instructions regarding identification on Zoom by Place of Church & name. In particular those who are voting members please indicate that they are by placing a capital V in front of their name.

The Clerk thanked those who had already submitted names for the In Memoriam element of the day's worship and requested that further names may be submitted via the Chat facility within Zoom or e-mailed directly to clerk@urcyorkshire.org.uk.

The Clerk asked that representatives let Synod Office know of attendance as soon as you can in order that the records can be as accurate as possible. Finally, the Clerk asked for feedback to be sent to the Synod Office; the office e-mail being office@urcyorkshire.org.uk

10. Date and Place of the next Synod meeting

The Clerk reported that the next scheduled meeting of Synod will be on Saturday 9th October. However, where it meets and the format it takes is yet to be decided. Synod will make every endeavour though to continue with the usual pattern of meeting on the second Saturday in October and the second Saturday in March.

The Clerk indicated that the three churches who have recently offered, but missed the opportunity, to host Synod (Longcauseway Dewsbury, St Andrew's Skipton and King's Way, Ossett) are still happy to host, but other volunteers are more than welcome to offer. Once a decision is made then churches will be informed.

Similarly, a decision on the means by which representatives receive their papers will be conveyed over the summer. This Synod the office staff have experimented with the Ministers within Synod in that they have not received physical papers but have been sent a link to download them. In future, as you will see in the presentation on the new Yorkshire Synod website, it is hoped that all papers will be available to download. This we hope will cut costs and save on resources and paper use. The Clerk though indicated that paper copies will always be available to those who require them.

11. Appointment of Tellers

When we meet in person, we normally ask four people to count the number of raised voting cards if there is need for a resolution to be passed. However, this time we are using the Zoom polling facility and at the appropriate time those eligible to vote should follow the instructions that will appear on screen.

12. Setting the Scene

The Moderator, Rev Jamie Kissack opened the main proceedings outlining the themes for the day based on the report he had submitted. He accepted that whilst much of Synod's strategy in 2021 is set against the background of the pandemic, Synod and its parts must not lose sight of its mission; we are being challenged at a time of transformation in society and this meeting offers both.

Session One

13. Racial Justice, Diversity and Inclusion – Rev Zaidie Orr

Rev Zaidie Orr led a presentation on Racial Justice, Diversity and Inclusion that challenged Synod in many ways. Here follows a brief summary of the presentation as well as outlines of the moves within the URC as a whole to tackle racial injustice.

Introduction – Journey

Micah 6:8 - And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

The calling to take on the many injustices around us is both challenging and can be tiring. Whatever, the injustice, there is no hierarchy in the oppression which one experiences as woven into the fabric and they come in many forms of inequality and exclusions, such as class gender, racism, sexuality,

violence against vulnerable people, religious bigotry, migrant bashing, etc. What is needed more than ever is wisdom, openness and courage to wrestle with some of the issues, such as power and privilege. However, there are some common grounds such as powerlessness, feeling voiceless, being made to feel invisible, excluded, economically disadvantaged, and much more which is common to all who face injustice.

Sharing our stories and starting the conversation will assist us on this journey. It is important to note that some of the things which I will share this morning you will find challenging, there may be feelings of guilt, and confusion. Here Rev Orr offered the opportunity for members of Synod to ask questions or to stop me if clarity was required.

It is important to note that when we talk about racism – we are talking about people’s life and we are all aiming for healing, restoration and dignity. As God’s children we all desire wholeness and to work in God’s love to deliver through actions not words – the move to become an anti-racist church.

We have sought to recognise and address this disparity over many years and point to our long history of promoting learning and positive action aimed at bringing about racial justice in our Church and world.

The resolution which commits the United Reformed Church to a journey towards being an anti-racist Church reads “Building on our past and current work, Mission Council commits the whole United Reformed Church to embark on a journey beyond good intentions, beyond being 'not racist', towards active anti-racist living”.

This commitment is neither an initiative nor a project, but a pledge for our future existence as one body with many parts - valuing the presence and gifts of all, equally, and affirming each individual as being equally made in the image of God”. There are three areas of work to be considered:-

(i) Identifying barriers within all parts of its life - including local, Synod and Assembly structures and processes, and initiating strategies to combat racism within its own body and in the wider community/society.

(ii) To instruct the Mission Committee to explore and develop initiatives to address the barriers within our structures, and to develop resources to equip and empower the United Reformed Church to begin the process of education and change in all parts of its life.

(iii) To instruct the Mission Committee to report on progress to, Mission Council and General Assembly, including any specific objectives identified.

There is work to be done and we need to be committed even when the going gets tough. This is a lifelong journey and today this session represents a place to begin. Keep asking yourself questions, for e.g. *Why do I believe this? Why do I think this way?*

God’s ear is attuned to the suffering and the cries of the most marginalised because God is committed to justice.

Racial Justice Sunday

The United Reformed Church celebrated Racial Justice Sunday on Valentine's Day - 14th Feb. For some congregations this was a significant milestone as it was the 25th Anniversary of Racial Justice Sunday. Racial Justice Sunday is an opportunity for Christians to:

- remember the importance of Racial Justice, people, places and names
- reflect and give thanks for diversity
- respond in many ways including praying for the end to racial injustice

Social transformation is not a spectator sport. We need to start the conversation – the learning is not about me re-telling all my stories, but learning from each other.

The URC is committed to the challenges identified from the work on the Legacies of Slavery. The report asks 4 questions of the URC:

1. **Apology:** Should the URC apologise for any role its predecessors had in transatlantic slavery? If so, what for, by whom and how?

2. **White privilege:** Does White privilege exist in the URC, and if it does what impact does it have? *White privilege describes the unearned advantages that are granted because of one's whiteness. Peggy McIntosh wrote a couple of essays. She made a list of fifty examples. We need to start talking and working as we cannot dismantle what we cannot see and we cannot challenge what we do not understand.*
Should we set up a small 'task and finish group' to investigate White privilege in the URC? We need to talk about race
3. **Diversity:** Leadership within the URC does not reflect the diversity of our membership. Is it time to take some radical steps to address this imbalance?
4. **Racism:** Are we, as a denomination, doing enough to combat racism in the UK?

Actions: Are there any symbolic and substantial actions we should be investigating?

The URC's commitment to multicultural ministry which is integral to justice for all (including racial justice) is premised in a number of core convictions that are biblically and theologically grounded. The goal of the Privilege Walk (as distributed prior to Synod for members to complete) was to acknowledge that not everyone is starting their adult life from the same place. The exercise was designed to help individuals to recognise and unpack different sorts of privilege within society. It worth pointing out that we sometimes do not notice our own privilege because it is so ingrained within our culture. This activity is to enable us to start a conversation about privilege, community and values, and how we could take responsibility either as an individual or as a community for dismantling privilege.

What small steps can we take to begin to address this work?

1. What work is needed to assist us on our journey? – We cannot stay silent – let's start within our churches. Some people will say that they are introvert – you can be an introvert and still have some powerful conversations. Just reflect about the times you have stayed silent – we have all been silent. The challenge is now, "How do we Speak Up and Speak Out".
2. How could you help to bring about greater diversity in your church?

14. Social Action; Environmental Issues, JPIT and our response to COP24 – Alex Jowitt

Mrs Alex Jowitt, the Synod's Green Apostle led Synod on a journey through the current environmental issues currently facing society. At the heart of the presentation are the questions of being able to future-proof and how churches can help in this process. One way individual churches can do this is through the Eco Church initiative via Arocha UK. From a Synod perspective there is a need to develop a Synod policy, which will be brought to the October Synod for discussion and perhaps adoption. The message is a simple one; there is a Climate emergency, we are all responsible in varying degrees and we must listen to those in the future who will be reaping what we sow. This message was emphasised by the recorded presentation from Dan Morrell. In it he challenged churches with the question "Are you doing enough to protect the environment for the future?" For the young people engaged in this work the answer is a resounding "No", and that there is a strong feeling that churches are either unaware of the seriousness of the situation. It is important for churches to take action as for them to put the question of climate change at the centre of their spiritual life. As there is an increase in greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere, leading to more extreme weather conditions and overall mean temperatures, as well as related rising in mean sea levels churches need to respond. They can do this through looking at more efficient heating and lighting systems, by looking to renewable sources of energy, including solar panels on their own premises and by changing energy supplier. Churches can also look at better waste management through intelligent purchasing and recycling and by revising their investments they can divest from net polluters and invest in greener companies. By setting this example at church level then we can look to doing it on an individual level and conversely if we are already doing it at a personal level we can take it back to church level.

Session Two

15. Open House and Break-out Rooms

This session was dedicated to a series of open discussions, facilitated through break-out rooms in which Synod attendees focused on what we have learnt in Lockdown and heard in Synod. The groups were asked to look at the common themes that have been running through our shared experience and how we may be able to take the steps to allow us to seize those aspects which have been identified as being of use to us as Church.

Key areas that were identified included the use of improved technology to spread the word and allied to this was a realisation that there is value in having flexible worship times throughout the week. Another theme was that the “re-set” button needs to be pressed. Complete worship needs to be rebuilt on the foundations that the past twelve months have created for us. By using the new creativity that has flourished we can maintain the activities Church is good at in different ways.

As is always the case new questions arise, especially that of how do we do Mission in an age of Covid. How we identify what is important, how we plan and support the structural work within churches in a post-Covid age and how we engage with under 25’s (or even under 50’s) using newly learnt digital skills. There is no right or wrong answer, only that we need to make sure that we, as Church, are fit for purpose.

The feedback will be collated and duly published through the Synod Office.

16. Grace – The King’s Way Church, Ossett.

Grace prior to the Lunch break was offered by members of the King’s Way Church in Ossett.

Session Three

17. Yorkshire Synod Website – Mr Lawrence Moore & Mr Dan Morrell.

The new look website, sat at <http://bit.ly/urcyorkshiresynod> was introduced by Mr Dan Morrell and Mr Lawrence Moore They explained that the site was being restructured for ease of use, both for visitors to the site and for those maintaining it. Through Zoom they took Synod on a tour of the site and its features emphasising that it is a means of communication, mission, celebration and resource. Various questions were asked and answered to the satisfaction of the enquirers and Synod agreed to its roll-out over the Easter period.

Session Four

18. Business Session

The Moderator opened this session and reminded Synod of the ways and means by which the business of Synod is to be conducted and in particular drew attention to the *Guide to Zoom Etiquette* paper that is available for download from the new-look website.

The Clerk indicated that it is at this meeting whereby Synod would normally nominate an individual or individuals for the role of General Assembly Moderator(s). As no names have been forwarded the Clerk asked permission of Synod to allow him to inform the General Secretary of the URC that Yorkshire Synod has not made any nomination. Synod agreed.

i. Resolution 1

Synod receives the report of its Council.

This was agreed unanimously.

ii. Resolution 2

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

- i. Ministries Committee*
- ii. Pastoral Committee*
- iii. Children and Young People's Committee*
- iv. Safeguarding Committee*
- v. Financial Resources Committee*
- vi. Property*
- vii. Listed Buildings Advisory Committee*
- viii. Keld Management Group*
- ix. URC Missions Committee representatives*

Synod was asked whether there were any questions relating to the submitted reports that would not arise elsewhere in the agenda. There were not and the reports were received unanimously.

The Treasurer then reported on the preliminary meeting held on Thursday 11th March on the pensions issues and to introduce resolutions 3 and 4.

The Treasurer brought Synod's attention to his submitted report and expanded on it. There are two key points regarding the year 2020: firstly, that Synod was able to survive the financial downturn as a result of property sales and secondly that there was a reduction in general expenditure. Furthermore the issues surrounding the Ministers' Pension Scheme, which formed the basis of the meeting of 9th March, means that Synod will need to address the issue of supporting the scheme by offering financial resources (with the other Synods) to underwrite the pension scheme.

A major theme though with the use of property sales as a means of survival is that a large proportion of sales goes into the Synod Mission Fund, which at present is under-used by churches as a resource. The Treasurer indicated his belief that there is a need to reallocate and regulate these funds to allow for greater financial flexibility. Therefor the Treasurer proposed.

iii. Resolution 3

Synod approves the temporary amendment, with immediate effect, of all policies in respect of proceeds from sale of properties allocated to the Synod Mission Fund such that any sums that would have been allocated to the Synod Mission Fund will be held by Synod pending a further decision by the Synod. This amendment is to be reviewed at the October 2021 meeting of Synod.

The resolution was carried with 99% of those voting in favour and 1% not in favour.

The Treasurer then moved to the question of financial resources in general. At the October 2020 Synod it was agreed to remove the suspension of the Synod Levy and incorporate it into the budget for 2021. However, this budget was drawn up on the premise that the Covid-19 pandemic would have abated and that normality would have returned. This is not the case as we are now experiencing two strange and unpredictable years, not only at Synod, but also within our churches. Churches are still struggling financially and it will take time for them to recover. To aid this recovery several options have been explored, some of which are in the published papers. It was pointed out that the Levy is not only a means by which Synod's cash flow is improved, but, more importantly, it emphasises the reciprocation that is at the heart of individual church's relationship with Synod. The Treasurer agreed to withdraw options a and c agreed to the amended version b, which read as the following:

iv. Resolution 4

Synod agrees that the Synod Levy, set for the 2021 Budget (and approved at the October 2020 meeting), be suspended for the current year; Congregations are invited to contribute up to an equivalent amount voluntarily if they feel able.

The resolution was carried unanimously.

The Clerk introduced Resolution 5. It is for Synod meeting to determine who should be its representatives to General Assembly in the summer. The Clerk has been in touch with the sixteen people who agreed to represent Synod at the 2020 General Assembly, and of those only 2 are unavailable. However since the call were being made it has been decided that GA 2021 is to be remote on Zoom.

This resolution was kept out of en-bloc as it may have needed amendment to the published wording and since the papers have been published this has happened with the removal of Mrs Rosie Buxton (as she is unable to attend) and the name of Dan Morrell added as one of the Lay representatives. As two places were still available, either lay or ordained the Clerk asked for names to be forwarded to him.

Therefore, the Clerk moved Resolution 5.

v. Resolution 5

Synod appoints the following to represent the Yorkshire Synod of the United Reformed Church at the URC General Assembly to be held between 9th July 2021 and 12th July 2021:

Rev Jamie Kissack, Rev Fran Kissack, Mrs Rosie Buxton, Rev Alex Clare-Young, Rev Jo Clare-Young, Rev Clare Davison,

Mr Tim Crossley, Mrs Terri Raddings, Miss Lydia Raddings, Mr Alex Walker, Mr Jacob Lowe, Mr Mordecai Weynberg, Miss Megan Westgarth, Mr Aaron Wood, Mr Dan Morrell.

The resolution was carried unanimously.

The Clerk introduced Resolution 6.

The annual review of the Synod's Safeguarding policy has been completed by the Safeguarding Advisor. It was submitted and accepted by the Safeguarding Committee and in accordance with the policy itself it is brought here to be ratified by Synod. The copy was a bit too long to send with the physical papers, so as a temporary measure the Clerk felt it necessary for it to be uploaded to the website for Synod representatives to access and print out if required. The changes that have been made are those which bring the old version up to date by referencing Good Practice 5 rather than any previous version. If Synod formally adopts it then it will remain on the website.

Therefore, the Clerk moved Resolution 6

vi. Resolution No 6

Synod approves the Synod Safeguarding Policy as reviewed and adopted by the Synod Safeguarding Committee on 16th November 2020 and published on the Synod website.

The resolution was carried unanimously.

En-bloc Resolutions

The Clerk introduced the various en-bloc resolutions and informed Synod that no request had been made to remove them from en-bloc.

Therefore

vii. Resolution No 7

Synod resolves to accept Resolutions No 8 to No 15 inclusive.

The resolution was carried unanimously.

viii. Resolution No 8

Mr David Figures has stood down as Chairman of the Synod's Listed Building Advisory Committee. Synod wishes to place on record its thanks to Mr David Figures for his many years of service to Synod in this role and wish him all the best for the future.

ix. Resolution No 9

Prof Clyde Binfield has stood down as Secretary of the Synod's Listed Building Advisory Committee. Synod wishes to place on record its thanks to Prof Clyde Binfield for his many years of service to Synod in this role and wish him all the best for the future.

x. Resolution No 10

Mr Peter Saxton has stood down as a member of the Synod Property Committee. Synod wishes to place on record its thanks to Mr Peter Saxton for his services to the Synod Property Committee.

xi. Resolution No 11

Mr Simon Loveitt has stood down as a member of the Synod Ministries Committee after completing his second three-year term. Synod wishes to place on record its thanks to Mr Simon Loveitt for his services to the Synod Ministries Committee.

xii. Resolution No 12

Mrs Pauline Mewis has stood down as Synod Pastoral Elder for the Aire Valley area and as a member of the Synod Pastoral Committee. Synod wishes to place on record its thanks to Mrs Pauline Mewis for her services as Synod Pastoral Elder and to Synod Pastoral Committee.

xiii. Resolution No 13

Rev Pauline Calderwood has stood down as the Link for Retired Ministers in the Harrogate Mission and Care Group. Synod wishes to place on record its thanks to Rev Pauline Calderwood for her services as Retired Ministers Link and to the Harrogate Mission and Care group.

xiv. Resolution No 14

Synod appoints Rev Helga Cornell to serve as Link for Retired Ministers in the Harrogate Mission and Care Group for a period of three years.

xv. Resolution No 15

Synod records with sadness the closure of Greasbrough United Church on 4th February 2021. Synod also offers thanksgiving for the life and witness of its members over the years since its foundation in 1815 and most recently its work as a united church within a Methodist/URC Local Ecumenical Partnership.

SESSION FOUR

19. Thanks

Thanks were offered by Synod to

- Rev Jamie Kissack for leading us today
- Those who have participated, Revd Zadie Orr, Mrs Alex Jowitt and Mr Dan Morrell for the morning's soul-searching presentations. To Revd Jamie Kissack for facilitating the Break Out discussions before lunch. To Mr Dan Morrell and Mr Lawrence Moore, not only for their technical expertise today but for their work on the Synod's new website and to the LYCiG team for the forthcoming act of worship.

- The Office Staff, Sally, Anne Rachel and Hayley for coping with the strange way Synod has been put together this Spring and for the way in which they have been able to cope admirably with the way in which they have had to work in these lockdown times.
- All who have joined us and have coped with new systems or have continued to cope with the new systems. Please 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. As I mentioned earlier, please do not be shy about sending us feedback. We need to know what we did well, what needs improving and how we do this kind of meeting in the future.

22. Closing Worship

Led by the LYCiG Team including In Memoriam, the list of which will be appended to these minutes.

23. Dismissal

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