

**Report for GURC on Synod Together
"Virtual Meeting" 10th October 2020
via Zoom**

There was no theme this meeting.

The meeting scheduled for March 2020 was cancelled following the outbreak of the Covid-19 corona virus so this was the first meeting of Synod Together for 12 months. As the Covid-19 pandemic continues it was decided to hold the meeting as a virtual meeting using Zoom. I joined the meeting as a viewer, because I had neither web-cam nor microphone. However, I found that I was able to follow the meeting and vote when necessary.

The meeting opened with the introduction of Southern Synod's new moderator, the Reverend Bridget Banks, who was confirmed in post at the July virtual meeting of Mission Council. The Synod Together Meeting also welcomed our new Synod clerk, the Reverend Russell Furley-Smith, who had agreed to serve for an initial period of 5 years from 1 October 2020.

The Reverend Bridget Banks led the opening worship, followed by the Synod Clerk dealing with Pastoralia, the names of Members of Synod who had died since the last meeting in October 2019. We were asked to pray for them.

The minutes of the meeting in October 2019 were approved nem con.

The meeting then moved on to consider the Synod Council report, the main themes of this were climate change and racial justice. A report from URC Youth stated that Christians should be stewards of the planet following the principles of A Rocha. A Rocha is a charity which sees its mission as responding to the biblical mandate to care for the earth, and demonstrating the Christian hope for God's world.

The search for a Racial Justice Advocate continues. Sharon Henriques has been representing Southern Synod on the national racial justice network across the URC.

The Synod Council report also dealt with the Korean Ministries. Ms So Young's post as Mission Partner has been reviewed and it was agreed to renew her post until 2023. The Reverend Suk Lee's post is currently under review pending a decision at the next Synod Council Meeting.

The Reverend Andy Twilley's post as Training Development Officer has been renewed until 2026.

After considering the Synod Council report The Reverend Helen Warmington reported on Ministerial Supervision. After a 3 year lead in time this will be compulsory for individuals, but not groups. Further details will no doubt, follow.

The Reverend Helen Warmington was followed by Belinda Nielsen, the safeguarding officer for Southern Synod and North Thames, who introduced and explained a short video clip reminding us of the importance of safeguarding children and adults at risk. She emphasised the need for Good Practice, Policy and Procedures. None of this was designed to trip anyone up. It is important to recognise, respond, refer and report bad practices. "Good Practice 5" is available to download from the main URC web-site. Training is mandatory for a wide range of officers. There will be a question on safeguarding in church annual returns due at the end of December.

After a short break John Denison, Synod Treasurer, took us briefly through the budget for 2021 and estimates for 2022 to 2025. As in previous years Synod is unlikely to break even without the income from the sale of redundant church buildings. The budget for 2021 envisages a deficit of £443,091. Stripping out the provision for the sale of property there is planned expenditure of about £944,091 against estimated income of about £321,000. Unlike local churches Synod does not receive hall letting income, so has to rely on the proceeds from the sale of redundant churches. The schemes for loans and grants to churches have been reopened and the Emergency Fund is also open. There is also a deficit on the Ministers' Final Salary Scheme, which will be discussed with the scheme's actuary early in 2021. Synod Together endorsed the recommended Synod budget for 2021.

Next the Children and Youth Development Officer showed us a short clip of the work done by the CYDO. There is an information pack available to local churches.

The meeting then broke up into groups to discuss the future for churches after Covid. Some churches had tried social meetings on Zoom. The prospect of holding carol services outdoors was discussed. The Forest Church in the New Forest pointed out that the only way to have a gathering of 30 people outside was to take gun and shoot a deer during the service. There were various suggestions for holding Communion services, members to bring their own elements, have 2 trays, one for glasses of wine and the other for glasses containing bread. One church had found pre-packed sets of bread and wine which the congregation could collect on the way into church. It was pointed out that a risk assessment would be needed to run social events and that back to back events should be avoided. Each group appointed a rapporteur to report back to the Synod Secretary.

The final item on the agenda was the expression of thanks to Jubilee ministers, those who had served for more than 25 years. There were 13 in total including the Reverend John Kay who had completed 60 years of service.

The meeting closed at 12.30 pm.