

GURC Church Meeting 28 07 2022

Present 25 members

Apologies 4

Chairman Revd. Andrew Sellwood

Devotions led by Rosemary Terry

Elders Election.

Matthew Smith and Bett Swierk were agreed as Tellers by the meeting.

Andrew led the meeting in prayers for guidance.

Valerie Gill was unanimously re-elected to the Eldership. Thanks were given in her absence.

The meeting agreed to the destroying of the ballot slips.

Minutes of previous meeting. After one amendment these were agreed and signed by the minister.

Matters Arising

1.Safeguarding. Rosemary Terry

Kestro are virtually at the end of the signing process and are hoping to resume on 2nd September. How long they can continue will depend on the number of helpers available.

2. Looking forward. Revd Andrew Sellwood,

Andrew gave an update on Where we are and Where we're going. He has noted the comments around the way we "Do church" since coming out of Lockdown. Andrew has received both written and verbal comments. It has been requested we vote on the issues raised.

Here are highlights from Andrew's introduction to the item 2 in Matters Arising. A full transcript is to be found in the minute folder.

"The next few years will be difficult for the Church and we pray God will present us with opportunities and resources.

The situation for the wider URC is appearing be quite challenging but here at Goring URC we are blessed with a committed Eldership.

Our finances are better than many churches and we have a fantastic potential for Mission.

The LICC initiative, which was approved by the church meeting, is moving forward.

Andrew expressed his sadness that the Elders are currently under a lot of criticism and pressure from individuals within the church.

The Elders have a heart for the future of the Church and the meeting was reminded that the church members agreed to pray for and support the Elders when they were ordained and inducted."

Three of the serving Elders present at the meeting, representing the Eldership, each spoke in turn regarding the following matters.

Church seating plan, Communion and other elements of worship.

Some members prefer a central aisle and some prefer the chairs to remain as they are since lockdown. The meeting was asked if they thought the current seating arrangements affect their worship of our Lord. Can the Cross the Lectern, the pulpit or the screens still be seen?

Does the new arrangement provide a more relaxed, friendly and inviting atmosphere to people visiting our church?

Going back to "Normal".

What is normal? The rituals we have always had are now out of date and have no place in our quest towards Mission. The beginning of the service should be indicated by the arrival of the minister or visiting preacher, not the ritualist bringing in of the Bible and the parade of Elders into the Church. Given Andrew will be retiring in 2023 we need to keep things simple for those leading our services who are inexperienced or unused to visiting different churches.

Doing things the same way is the easy option. Change challenges us so maybe now is the time to be challenged.

Communion rituals can be very confusing and off putting for people new to Church.

Having this laid out on tables means people can chose to partake or not without feeling pressured or confused about what to do. The decisions made by the Elders have not been to throw their weight around, but to gently nudge us into the future. Given our dwindling congregation, this is something the Elders feel is important and there are exciting prospects for tomorrow.

If we had not moved forward and embraced new ways our members would not have been able to view services online during lock down, we would not have the visual and sound systems we have.

There was then a discussion time for the meeting to express their concerns and ask questions.

A selection of questions and comments from various church members follows ...

"Why are we spending time on this, surely there are more important things to talk about?"

"Andrew spoke recently about Outreach, what about In-reach to members?"

"Using the Arundel Silver is part of our tradition, some people like tradition. "

"It is the way of the URC to vote on matters such as this so please can we vote."

"We voted for the Elders, why are we questioning their decisions?"

"I applaud what the Elders are doing."

"The position of the chairs is a personal point of view to individuals, but it does not affect worship."

An example was given of another church in Brighton, who recently took a difficult and challenging new decision which has paid off and led to growth.

"If we keep looking back, how can we look forward".

It was suggested that taking such a vote could prove to be constraining to both the Elders and the Church as the outcome would be decisive and could be divisive. The Eldership should review the effectiveness of decisions and review if necessary.

Andrew reported that he has spoken with the Moderator about the ongoing issues. The serving Eldership do have autonomy to make certain decisions, such as finances and spending a sum of money previously agreed by the meeting, without having to bring the Spend to the meeting beforehand.

After much discussion the meeting voted on whether they wanted to vote on this matter. The vote was unanimously in favour of this.

The Proposal for the vote was-

Keep things as they are currently or revert back to how things were pre lockdown in respect of :

Chair layout

Communion

At the beginning of worship – the ceremonial carrying in of the Church Bible and Elders joint entry from the vestry.

The proposal to keep things as they are now, following lock down had a majority vote of 18 in favour.

Andrew added a caveat that the Elders will maintain a review process of our worship but for now things will remain as they are. Let us move on.

A representative of the Eldership requested that backbiting and unhelpful comments to the Elders now ceases as this has made them all feel very uncomfortable.

Some members expressed their concerns that people were not at the meeting who also share the view that things should go back to how they were. The meeting was advised this could equally apply to those not present who wanted to keep the post lockdown changes. Every member has the opportunity to attend Church meetings and that those present at the meeting today were a representation of the Church.

It was noted that a minority of members were not happy with the outcome. The meeting was reminded we are guided by the Holy Spirit on this and all decisions.

Revd Andrew Sellwood spoke of his concerns for the Eldership over recent times, pointing out they have had a very difficult time and that a lot of hurtful comments have been directed towards them by various people in the Church. Andrew asked if this could now be put behind us grace, love and encouragement is the way forward.

AGENDA ITEMS

Church family news. Hilary Redman

The meeting shared news of the fellowship and upheld in prayer all those with special needs at this time.

A request was made for the Prayer book to be reinstated as it is a useful tool. This has been well used online also.

Group Reports: Matthew Smith

Finances and hall lettings

The budget has been presented to the Finance committee. Shortfall of £603 forecasted for end of year but final outcome could change either way. The committee are content with the mid -year situation.

Much depends on Hall letting which remain short of pre Covid levels.

A number of factors necessitate revisiting hall hire agreements. The aim is to issue new agreements (Licences to Occupy) over the next few weeks. Prime drivers are Safeguarding policies and insurance cover to be evidenced. This exercise needs to be conducted yearly.

Wilma and Matthew Smith with Rosemary Terry will be working on the details over the next week or two.

There will be no increase in hall hire rates for now due to the protection afforded from our gas and electricity contracts. Decisions will be made around increases from Sept 2023-2024.

These will be addressed at the March meeting each year

An increased rate for Sanctuary hire is being considered but Matthew is looking to the Elders to steer on this.

Progress is also needed to formulate letting agreement with Little Fishes. Church Meeting will be updated.

Signatures for bank mandate. The meeting was asked to agree on the following signatories: Mrs Valerie Gill, Mr Wilfred Rhodes, Mr Matthew Smith, Mrs Rosemary Terry, Mr Alan Westcott, and Mr Roger Wilde.

This proposal was carried unanimously by the meeting.

Property. Bett Swierk

There was some criminal damage to the church a few weeks ago. The perpetrators were captured on Little Fishes CCTV camera, and this is now in the hands of the police. Choir vestry roof repair is delayed due to the Roofer being unwell.

PAT testing is completed.

The new notice board is arriving soon. Barbara Hillman is to “go to” person for the notice board.

The meeting was requested to be mindful of security and locking up the church securely.

Outreach. Coffee and Cakes is going well with 17 people attending last week, not all church folk. This is an informal setting where games can be played, or people can just sit and chat.

Notices and Correspondence

An email has been received from Synod asking the church to respond to 3 questions.

Where will we be in 5 years' time?

What could be better within the URC?

What would one area of change be in your local church.

AOB. None notified.

Date of next meeting

Saturday 24th September at 10:30

Andrew closed the meeting with a Prayer