



Thames North Synod

20 March 2021

10.00am to 2.40pm

A Virtual Synod Meeting

Recorded Synod Attendance: Voting 87, Non-Voting and Observers 37

1. **Welcome** *Moderator*
The Moderator welcomed us all and introduced our next Moderator Revd George Watt.
2. **Instruction about virtual meeting** A J Mills
A J explained that Zoom had been able to develop their program so that voting members would be able to respond to a request to vote without using a different program.
3. **Opening Worship and Reflection** *Moderator*
The Moderator led our opening worship using verses from Genesis and then his own Pauline farewell Epistle to the faithful in Thames North Synod which was distributed after the Synod.
4. **Introduction and Constitution of Synod** *Moderator*
The Moderator formally opened the Synod
5. **Apologies** *Synod Clerk*
Apologies for absence received from 8 voting and 5 non-voting members.
6. **Minutes of Synod Meeting of 17 October 2020** *Synod Clerk*
85 members voted for the adoption and 2 abstained.
7. **Matters arising not considered elsewhere** — none. *Synod Clerk*
8. **Personnel (Paper A)** *Convener of Pastoral Committee Revd James Fields*

Ministers

New Moderator Nomination/Appointment

Synod Clerk

The Revd George Watt who is at present a minister in Southern Synod would start working in Thames North from 1 June 2021 and his induction on 5 June at 2.30pm will be online.

Revd Alison Davis has been inducted to Romford Heaton Way and Romford Western Road (50%) on 14 February 2021 and Revd Dominic Grant has been inducted to Barnet Chesterfield Road and Barnet Wood Street (75%) on 13 December 2020.

Moves out of Synod

The Revd Nick Brindley who retired from Brookmans Park on 31 May 2020 on the grounds of ill health has now moved to Edinburgh. The Revd Dr John Parry retired from St Andrews West Kilburn and the London Interfaith Centre in 2020 and the Revd Gemma Dunning (Baptist) left Leytonstone UFC at the end of 2020.

The Synod notes the demission of office by Hugh Graham.

50 Years' Service

The Synod notes the 50th anniversary of ordination for the Revd Terry Oakley who was ordained in 1971 and served in a number of pastorates before retiring as Moderator of East Midlands Synod. He now lives in the Thames North Synod.

Personnel Changes

The Moderator

The Revd Ros Lyle retired as Candidating Secretary on 28 February 2021 and the Revd John Mackerness was appointed to the role on 1 March 2021. Brian Hosier completes his term of office as Synod Assistant Treasurer at this Synod. Paul Ashitey has completed his third term as Lay Preachers Co-ordinator.

Hard Hit by Covid 19

The meeting noted that the Revd Dr Rodney Woods, minister of The City Temple who had been hospitalised for a number of months was now recovering from his illness.

Deaths

Revd James Fields

The Revd Eglan Graham died on 23 November 2020 after a long illness. He saw service at Christ Church Enfield and Acton Hill before retiring in 2004. The Revd Hazel Day died on 24 November 2020. She had served at Buckhurst Hill and Debden before retiring in 2004 to live in Enfield.

Revd James Fields led the meeting in prayer in remembrance of their service to the Synod and the wider church.

9. Appointments Advisory Committee – Paper B.

Synod Clerk

Synod Executive Committee – Marion McNeill appointed as Convenor. The Revd Ann Woodhurst is re-appointed for an exceptional third term to provide continuity over the period of Moderatorial transition. Tony Alderman has completed his second three-year term and retired.

Discipleship Steering Group – Mark Meatcher appointed to be Convenor.

Resources Committee – Mike Gould re-appointed for a second term

Pastoral Committee – Re-Appointments – Jim Holliday (Enfield & East Herts LAG), Margaret Ingram (South Herts LAG) and Cathy Simpson (Metropolitan North LAG) all to serve until 2024.

Appointments Advisory Group – New appointment – Jean Wyber (to serve to 2024) and two re-appointments Bridget Akinyombo and Marion McNeill (to serve to 2024).

Listed Building Advisory Group – no new or re-appointments

Mission Council – no new or re-appointments

URC Thames North Trust – re-appointment of Brian Moere, Mike Gould and Jean Wyber (to serve to 2025).

Nominations for General Assembly – Moderator (ordained): Revd Ruth Whitehead who is Moderator of South West Synod (and a former Thames North minister)

Representatives to General Assembly – Minister: Revd Sally Thomas

Paper B (+ errata) (Jean Wyber joined the Appointments Advisory Committee, 28 January 2021.)

for the above appointments and re-appointments was approved:
84 members voting for, with 2 against and 1 abstention.

Thames North representatives to General Assembly 2021 (9th-12th July, online)

There were still 12 vacancies, therefore, the Synod Clerk proposed and Cathy Simpson seconded the following:

Recognising the need to continue the selection process for Thames North representatives at General Assembly 2021, Synod authorises the Synod Clerk to continue the selection process and the Appointments Advisory Committee to finalise the selection.

Carried with 75 members voting for, with 5 against and 7 abstentions.

Farewells

The Moderator thanked Ros Lyle, Paul Ashitey and Brian Hosier for their hard work and service to the Synod over many years. Brian will continue to work with the Synod specifically in relation to the use of the former Lumen URC. Ros, Paul and Brian expressed their feelings of being privileged to serve the synod.

Tokens/vouchers were sent to Ros, Paul, and Brian as an expression of Synod's appreciation of their service.

A word from the Outgoing Moderator

The Moderator shared his personal experience of serving the synod for almost 13 years. He appreciated the church leaders, staff and the synod officers for their excellent support throughout his tenure and asked for the same for George.

James Fields, Muna Levan-Harris (Staff) and John Macaulay responded on behalf of the Synod, thanking him for his leadership, wisdom and pastoral approach. They wished him well as he retires at the end of May 2021.

10. Finance

Treasurer

Paper C1

Anthony Obi-Ezekpazu presented the management accounts for 2020 which show a surplus of £367,000 (£367K) against a forecast of £348K for regular Income and Expenditure. No entries were included for income or expenses of the former Lumen URC which the Synod office is directly managing. These will appear in the final account, but it is expected their inclusion will have little effect on the overall results. The surplus on Discretionary Fund Income and Expenditure was £4,639K against a forecast loss of £1,608K). This was due to the inclusion of £4,482K gains from the valuation of closed churches and £1,243K unrealised gains on investments against inability of churches to make applications to the Resources Fund while they were in Lock Down during the pandemic. No payment had been made to the Reserve for Ministers Pensions because while the value of the closed churches had been agreed, they had not yet been sold. The Treasurer expects that the final outcome for both regular and discretionary Income and Expenditure will be in the region of £7.5m. once the valuation of Lumen and its income and expenditure are fully incorporated.

Paper C2 Pension Update

The Pensions Task Group (PTG) of the URC had been tasked by the Pensions Regulator (tPR) to set a Long-Term Objective (LTO) for the Ministers Pension Fund (MPF) to have sufficient funds to pay future pensions. At present there is an estimated shortfall of £45m of which £30m should be contributed to the MPF by 2026 and £15m by 2031. Consultations as to how these funds should be contributed have been in progress for the last year. Synods are asked to agree in principle to their commitment to their share of the funding by July 2021. In initial consultations the PTG has calculated a schedule of contributions to enable them to discharge the LT). In the latest consultation PTG have suggested that Synods should contribute 15% of the value of their investments as at December 2019 and that they should contribute 50% of the sale proceeds of redundant properties from 2022 onwards. The 15% of the value of investments should realise £20m for the URC and the sale proceeds £15m.

The PTG will be consulting with Thames North on 24 March to make sure they understand each other and then there will be further consultation with all other Synods by the end of May with a final consensus reached by the end of June.

Papers C1 and C2 are for information only.

11. Whole Life Discipleship – Paper D

Revd Eddie Boon

Our Synod Discipleship Enabler, Eddie Boon, shared something of his work since starting last November. Eddie spoke briefly about whole life discipleship, starting not with the church but with the places and people with we find ourselves. Eddie asked us in our breakout rooms to discuss some questions about discipleship and 'place'. How do we see God at work so that we might take intentional steps in continuing 'faithful presence'? Eddie's videos, written pieces, other content, and social media connections may be accessed at his website www.discipleseveryday.com

12. Lunch Break

13. Welcome back and worship

14. Stepwise and Training – Paper E

Revds Alison Davis & John Campbell

The Revd John Campbell is acting Synod Training Officer and the Revd Alison Davis ministers at Romford Heaton Way and Western Road (50% scoped) and Pastoral Tutor for Northern College. They showed a video produced by **Stepwise** (stepwise@urc.org.uk) which is the URC Training programme to succeed TLS for Discipleship development for our members and adherents. John and Alison are keen to encourage local facilitators who can nurture such groups.

John explained that he convenes a ministers monthly Zoom meeting where concerns can be shared and another for Lay Preachers (with paper copies sent out to those who cannot Zoom). He will be running a Presidency at Communion course on 24 April. Ministers Spring School - course in May. He is facilitating a Black History monthly Zoom covering the URCs legacies of slavery. He will produce a monthly Training Newsletter which will include suggestions for sources of grants. He hopes to get back to Safer Sacred Space training sessions. John promised Revd John Macaulay that he would continue running TLS Lite courses until Stepwise had produced a workable alternative.

15. Green Apostle – Paper F

Revd Terry Hinks

The Revd Terry Hinks introduced the proposal explaining that environmental advocates (generally called 'Green Apostles') had been appointed in Synods across the URC following the 2016 General Assembly URC Environmental Policy. He himself had attended the denomination's Green Apostles' Meeting in 2017 as part of his sabbatical and had continued to do so since then, representing Thames North Synod on an informal basis. From time to time other members of Synod have also attended these meetings, which take place twice a year.

He explained that it was time to formalise this involvement, in order to promote our commitment to the care of the environment at Synod and local church level and prepare for the COP26 (26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties) which is to take place in Glasgow in November 2021. He, with the support of Synod Executive, proposed that:

As part of its strategy to implement the 2016 URC Environmental Policy and to respond to the growing climate and ecological crisis, Thames North Synod meeting on 20 March 2021, agrees to create a Synod Appointee position, namely a Thames North Synod Green Apostle.

The meeting voted with 80 members for, 3 against and 1 abstention.

Terry gave notice of a Synod workshop/online discussion to be held on 8 May (10.30 am – 12 noon), open to all with a concern on these issues. There will be a further presentation at the October Synod.

16. Israel/Palestine Proposal

Hilary Tyrell – St Albans Trinity

St Albans, Trinity brought the following motion, to be brought to General Assembly:

Informed by the direct experience of participants in the denomination's educational visit to Israel and Palestine in 2019, widely shared since within the church, General Assembly embraces the Cry for Hope issued in July 2020 by Kairos Palestine, <https://cryforhope.org/>

- **General Assembly recognises the grave injustices and suffering which so many Palestinians, including our Christian brothers and sisters, endure every day resulting from the increasing and on-going occupation of Palestinian land**
- **General Assembly calls on churches:**
 - ✦ **to take steps to ensure that they are well informed about the enormity of the situation for Palestinian Christians;**
 - ✦ **to reflect on how a Biblical understanding of 'justice and peace' challenges us to listen to the voice of the oppressed**

The URC resolves to live in Christian solidarity with Palestinian Christians. We will continue to pray for peace and respect for the human rights of all of the people of the Holy Land as we seek ways to engage with and respond to the Cry for Hope.

Debate took place before the motion was put to the vote which was carried. 70 members voted for, 5 against and 7 abstentions.

17. District Councils

Hounslow

The Revd Andrew McLuskey presented the following motion, from Hounslow URC, to be brought to General Assembly for consideration.

In the light of the top heavy (Synod-based) style of governance currently obtaining in the URC, Thames North Synod urges General Assembly to restore the former District Councils as the main day-to-day form of church government.

Debate took place, during which it was reported that the subject of reviewing the governance structures of the URC had been at the recent Mission Council meeting and therefore this motion was unnecessary. The meeting was therefore asked to vote on the motion **That the proposal on District Councils be 'not put'**. Proposed by the Revd Melanie Smith and seconded by the Revd Sal Bateman. 55 members for, 15 against and 10 abstentions. Under Standing Orders, a simple majority was required and the District Councils motion was therefore 'not put'.

No other business had been notified to the Synod Clerk and therefore the meeting closed with worship led by the Moderator and assisted by the Revd Ros Lyle and the singing of "Lord for the Years" at 2.20pm, and will reconvene on Saturday 16 October 2021.