

Free Church Council of Wales

Minutes of the meeting held 23 May 2019 at the South Wales Baptist College, Richmond Road, Cardiff

Present: Rheinallt Thomas (President); Peter Dewi Richards (Former President); Gethin Rhys; Peredur Owen Gruffydd; Martin Spain (Treasurer); Vaughan Salisbury; Gareth Morgan Jones; Irfon Roberts; Aled Davies; Alun Tudur; Sally Thomas; Chris Gilham; Catrin Parry (Translator); Helen Jones (Secretary).

Apologies were received from: George Baker; Tim Daniel (BUGB); Aled Jones; Ian Morris; Judith Morris; Hugh Osgood; Dyfrig Rees; Nerys Siddall; Eirian Wyn.

1. Welcome, Condolences and Apologies: The President welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was with sadness that the apology of Rev. Ian Morris was received due to his having recently lost his mother and condolences were expressed formally at the meeting. An apology was also noted from new member Tim Daniel, representing BUGB.

The President mentioned the Community Faith Forum which was held at the Senedd on 22 May. He was appreciative that the Interfaith development was strengthening.

A goodwill message was received from Vivian Williams, Llanelli to the meeting through Rev. Gareth Morgan Jones. His past work with the Free Church Council was greatly appreciated, and particularly with the South Wales branch. We should remember him in our prayers.

Catrin Parry was welcomed to the meeting to translate instead of Steffan Wiliam.

2. Devotional: The devotion was led by the Rev Aled Davies who was celebrating 30 years as an Officer with the Sunday School Council in Wales. His message from Isaiah 54 was; "Clear lots of ground for your tents! Make your tents large. Spread out! Think big!" – This is a timely message for the 21st Century. He noted that we should all have a broader outlook on the possibilities of enlarging God's Kingdom and that there is room for everyone in the tent.

3. Minutes 23 November 2018: i. Rev Peter Dewi Richards proposed their acceptance and was seconded by Aled Davies. Everyone was in agreement and Helen was thanked for her work. ii. **Ministerial Training** – Rev Bryn Williams' report had been circulated. iii. **Accreditation Board** –The President had two conversations with the Archbishop of Wales who stated that it was a mystery to him that this no longer existed. He asked the Rev. Ainsleigh Griffiths to look into the matter. He stated that this was an excellent opportunity for a practical enterprise of cooperation between all the denominations. It was hoped that the cooperation and co-ordination would be a provision for all. Reverend Canon Dr Manon Ceridwen James, St. Padarn's Institute would be the future contact. The Coleg Cenedlaethol/National College was meeting today to discuss training but only three denominations were present. iv. **Area Ministry Document** – Nothing to report. v. **Website** –see Item 6.

4. Matters arising not on the Agenda – Health Board Chaplains. Note Gethin Rhys' Attachment. Mention was made that a difficulty arose when responding to Chaplaincy vacancies for NHS Jobs. Only English speaking vacancies are to be found on this site link. There are no Welsh speaking vacancies at all. It is not possible to apply for a Welsh Chaplaincy vacancy except by looking at Welsh advertisements. Although the interdenominational 4 Pages would be a useful tool for advertising vacancies the closing date can be tight. It was also mentioned that churches with ethnic members would also like to be a part of chaplaincies and in large towns and cities this should be a practical and essential provision. It was noted voluntary work was a good starting place for a chaplain before seeking training. There is concern with full time pastors volunteering to be chaplains as the Local Health Boards could see this as a means of avoiding remunerating

Chaplains. Powys Health Board was negative in its response to our inquiry. They do not employ a Chaplain. This shows that the Health Board has no understanding of legal obligations on their part to employ a Chaplain.

Gethin Rhys plans a meeting with Ian Stevenson from Swansea and Vale of Glamorgan Health Board who chairs the “Spirituality, Health and Well-being” group in the near future in the hope Cytun will have church representatives present in their meetings.

The discussion continued with information that Morriston Hospital had recently lost a Chaplain. Two new Chaplains had been appointed and were currently going through the training process. Unfortunately, they are not ordained clergy and neither do they speak Welsh. This is a concern as a large number of patients come from West Wales where Welsh is the first language of a high percentage of patients. It was also mentioned that there was a need for Chaplains to receive “End of life” training. “Dying Matters UK” help with this in the community. Gethin Rhys was thanked for his work and would continue with these discussions.

Action point: Gethin Rhys was asked to respond officially to Powys Health Board on behalf of FCCW stating our dismay that they are unwilling to employ a Chaplain and to make them aware of their legal obligation in this matter.

5. Covenanting Churches Commission in Wales – shared Ministry (Peredur Owen Gruffydd) Report was sent with Agenda. The paper has been updated by the five denominations who form part of the Covenanting Churches in Wales. The plan is to create a leaflet to share information which would map out chapels/churches who form the Covenanting Churches in Wales with Ministers/ Clergy so that people can see where collaboration already exists. This could be a foundation in the future for other places.

There is cooperation in Port Talbot, where a minister of one tradition has received training and understands the tenet of another tradition, resulting in them having confidence to officiate a service/ administer a church of a different tradition. This is seen as an important skill in the future and is a process which requires understanding by different denominations. It was suggested that Area ministers need to have meetings to understand and aid each other in order to cooperate. The Safeguarding of Children panel was given as an example of a structure where there was collaboration even though it took a little time.

A question was raised regarding the need for legal documents to action the collaboration as this was costly and cumbersome. It was stated that the “Sharing Church Buildings Act 1969” was a legal document which showed the ecumenical structure under which a churches could unite .The Church’s main problem is individual members within churches reluctance to join together.

6. President’s Report. (Rheinallt Thomas) Report attached with Agenda. The current week was busy for the President. He referred to three meetings. **1.** Sunday night –Welsh Sikh Council celebrations – 200 people present. 3½ hour service. **2.** Monday night –Chairing Gethin Abraham – Williams Memorial Lecture in the Senedd with Rev. Canon Aled Edwards speaking about “Faith, Devolution and Global Politics”. An inclusive lecture celebrating 20th Anniversary of Devolved Government at the Senedd. Greetings were received from Elin Jones and Jane Hutt. Peredur has recorded the lecture and placed it on Cytun’s website. **3.** Wednesday – Faith Communities Forum meeting. Chaired by Mark Drakeford, First Minister at the Pierhead Building. The theme was “Inclusiveness” and many subjects were discussed. Mark Drakeford has offered 1½ hours for these meetings in the future. **4.** The President also noted that he had failed to attend the formal 20th birthday celebration of Devolution at the Senedd as he was away on holiday. He was not allowed to send a deputy either. **ii. Website** –Attention was drawn to the President’s Report regarding content of FCCW documents currently to be found on the Website. Peredur was thanked for his work of uploading them. The documents will be a means of recording our activities and discussions in the future.

There was much joy that the information was on the Website. Another noted the problems encountered to gain access to the Website. Correct instructions have to be followed and the easiest is through the Cytun website and follow the link for FCCW group via partners. It was also suggested that it was worth deleting any old Cashe if it exists on a member's computer.

The President was congratulated for sending a message of condolence to the Welsh **Muslim** Council on behalf of FCCW after the tragic terrorist outbreak in New Zealand in March. This was a significant deed in order to show a readiness to build bridges with believers of other religions by this contact.

St David's Day walk took place on 1st March – this is multi faith walk and is important that it receives support. There will also be a November Multifaith walk.

7. Free Churches Group – No report and no one was present to report.

8. Cytun Report (Rev. Gethin Rhys) Gethin was thanked by the President for circulating the Cytun Policy Report to members. Another was due shortly. The Cytun website had currently been advising on the different viewpoints concerning the European elections which was held on the day of the Council meeting. Cytun was thanked for that.

ii. Banks/ Post Offices – update. A beneficial meeting was held on Thursday 23 May before the Council meeting at the South Wales Baptist College. Gethin Rhys, Rheinallt Thomas, Chris Gilham and Victoria Ashleigh (Church in Wales) met Stuart Taylor, Post Office External Affairs Manager for Wales and South West of England. Information will be sent out by Gethin from Cytun's office. Some facts were noted –

- i.** The number of Post Offices were increasing.
- ii.** Post Offices were benefitting due to bank closures.
- iii.** Partnerships were on the increase by opening a Post Office in shops/ garages/ even chapel vestries/ Church Halls. One business strengthens the other because customers are able to buy goods in the building.
- iv.** A recent poll showed that 40% of the population knew that it was possible to obtain banking services by using the Post Office, this meant that it was not necessary to travel to another branch of the bank for services.
- v.** The Post Office as a company encourage their sub postmasters to speak/learn Welsh and are prepared to pay for lessons. The bilingual policy of Post Offices are ahead when compared with traditional banks.
- vi.** Communities are encouraged to use the services provided or it will be lost.
- vii.** Chapels/Churches would be able to pay money into their bank accounts through the Post Office but permission would be needed from the bank where the account was held to do that.
- viii.** Post Office users would have to remember that they are Bank customers not the Post Offices'. Stuart Taylor thanked the Council for bringing complaints and problems to them and suggested that individuals /communities who had complaints to contact him, especially those with specific, local problems. 98% of the Post Office's services were for private businesses. He also noted that there was an increase in the number of people buying Postal Orders even though they have to be paid for and can only be bought at the Post Office. He mentioned that Banks were losing business and closing because they no longer liked to handle cheques and that the Post Offices were offering a service to the public. Every bank has to provide services through the Post Office and the banks have to pay for this service because they have a legal obligation to provide the service. A bank account is not a Post Office account. It is possible to open a simple account in the Post Office in order to pay in or withdraw money.

iii. SACRE Nominations. Gethin thanked members for suggestions of possible nominees.

1. Caerphilly Council - Michael Gray – Methodist was confirmed. FCCW formally agreed the nomination.
2. Carmarthenshire – 1 to be filled - Presbyterian Church nominee and the County Council had to agree to the nomination that the Presbytery had approved.
3. Powys – Nomination received but person was on holiday. No approval on day of meeting.
4. Monmouth – The County Council had accepted an individual to fill the space.
5. Newport – Space filled before the meeting.

iv. New Education Curriculum for Schools in Wales (Papers sent out before the meeting) A preliminary response had been sent. Gethin noted that there should be a response from the FCCW as a body and from individual church denominations concerning the provision of the new Education Curriculum schemes of work. There was also some controversy regarding the name of the Agreed Scheme of work in Welsh - Cytun (Cytunedig).

Other events (Peredur Owen Gruffydd): Peredur was preparing for the Urdd Eisteddfod in Cardiff. He hoped that the Church tent was fun and that computer games would be entertaining. Cytun and Christian Aid would be sharing the tent and they would have an "Escape Room" The tent would be located in the Oval Basin. The morning service would be held in the Choral auditorium between the Norwegian Church and the Senedd. "Digon" from Plasmawr School would be responsible for the service. Peredur is also busy preparing for the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show at Llanelwedd in July and the National Eisteddfod at Llanrwst in August. A small group of people have been appointed to prepare the morning service there which will be an open air event. Should it rain a there will be provision for the service at the Food area on the Maes. This will be a family service and tickets will be arranged. For the 2020 National Eisteddfod at Tregaron it is hoped that the Morning Service will be back on the Eisteddfod stage.

9. Education Report (Vaughan Salisbury) (Relevant papers were circulated before the meeting)

Education Matters Report – Vaughan Salisbury noted some points from the Report.

(3) The National Academy for School Leadership has been established. This is a programme which supports and advises on the development of leadership and commissions provisions where there are spaces but does not offer training. This programme will be operational from September 2019.

(4) Some elements in education is being devolved to the Education Department of the Wales Assembly Government including salary and work conditions from September onward.

(5) Welsh Government Consultancy Document, Mission of our nation.

Reports had been sent to the Government in March dealing with the national legislation. In the attachment which the Council received we noted Vaughan's response on behalf of Free Church Council of Wales. The President thanked Vaughan on behalf of the Council. He stated that not only was the Council's response important but also that of individual church denominations.

New Education Curriculum Consultancy Document – There was a thorough discussion on the comments which Vaughan had offered as a response to each of the questions on the paper. He was thanked for his thoroughness and for the opportunity given to the Council to make known its opinion on the positive and negative comments in the document. Questions were asked which may be raised by outside bodies who visit schools. Rev. Aled Davies was asked to collect information about the various organisations who visit schools regularly on a religious basis such as "Open the Book". It was noted that the new Curriculum stated that schools should engage with local communities which naturally meant visiting places of worship. The new Curriculum was also advantageous to local publishing businesses in Wales such as Gomer Press and Y Lolfa etc. because the new syllabus text books and work books will be required in schools especially in the Welsh language for Welsh Medium schools.

Action Point: Rev. Aled Davies to collect information from different bodies/ agencies regarding visits to schools from a religious perspective such as "Open the Book"

10. Denomination Reports. There were no Reports on this occasion.

11. Treasurer's Report. (Parch Martin Spain) Relevant papers sent before meeting

i. Balance Sheet: The Financial Report circulated with the Agenda before the meeting was approved. Aled Davies thanked the Council for the £5,000 which was transferred to the Sunday School Council from the North Wales Section and £1,000 from the South Wales Section of the Free Church Council which will be used for Gee Medal purposes. There is currently an advertisement in 4Tudalen/4pages asking for application forms to be submitted. There will be two services - at Berea Chapel, Bangor on 14 September and at Priordy Chapel, Carmarthen on 21 September. **ii. Membership fee:** There was discussion that no fee

increase would be required in 2019 although it had not risen since 2000. A rise of 10% was suggested in 2020. The denominations would have a 12 month warning about the increase. Martin will send a letter to the denomination to forewarn them. **iii.** Inter-faith Membership fee: The group is prepared to accept contributions but does not seek a membership fee. This enables the various bodies to make a contribution according to their means. £25 was suggested as a contribution. The group meets 4 times a year, pays travel expenses and invites members to join in a variety of special celebrations. This was proposed and passed by the Council and ensured a FCCW presence at the meetings. Martin was thanked for his work.

12. AOB: The President noted that this was Rev. Sally Thomas' last meeting of the Council as her current post was coming to an end. The President thanked her for her ecumenical contribution and input to discussions of Council meetings. She was wished well in the future. We also remembered the Rev. Euros Jones who died a week after our November meeting. There will be a great void in the field of ministerial training, particularly with the Union of Welsh Independents. He will be fondly remembered as a kindly gentleman. Catrin Parry was thanked for her translation work during the meeting and Helen for preparing and organising lunch. The meeting finished at 3.00 by reciting the Grace.

Date of next meeting: Thursday, 14 November 2019 at South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff.