

The meeting was held at the South Wales Baptist College, Richmond Road, Cardiff.

**Present:** Reverend Peter Dewi Richards (President), Rheinallt Thomas (Vice President), Reverends Gethin Rhys, Martin Spain (Treasurer), Judith Morris, Gareth Morgan Jones, Aled Jones, Irfon Roberts, Ian Morris, Sally Thomas, Paul Rochester, Mr. Paul Gutteridge, Steffan Alun (Translator) and Helen Jones (Secretary).

Apologies: Canon Aled Edwards, Reverends: Meirion Morris, Chris Gillham and Eirian Wyn; Vaughan Salisbury.

**1. Welcome:** The Rev. Peter Dewi Richards, President, welcomed everyone to the meeting especially the translator Mr Steffan Alun and also the two guests from London Rev. Paul Rochester and Mr Paul Gutteridge.

**2. Devotion:** Peter chose Ephesians 4 as text. Having read Rev Dr Trystan Hughes' book "finding hope and meaning in suffering" and it being Christian Aid week he stated that the aid agency had opened our eyes to the suffering in the world. We are one family and we have a responsibility to be Jesus' voice, hands and feet. Any suffering should be a concern for all of us.

**3. Minutes 17 Nov 2016:** These were accepted as being a true reflection of the meeting apart from: URC - report on Ecumenism the English version should read... "Ministers and their co-partners will be meeting shortly."

Matters Arising: i. The Treasurer explained the reason behind the \* point of his report.

ii. Rheinallt Thomas reported on his meeting at the end of March with the Free Church Council - North Wales Area. 12 came to the meeting - 11 of these were former Chairpersons. Rheinallt explained that the North Wales branch's intention was to transfer the awarding of the Gee Medals to the "Sunday School Council". A decision was made to award the medals this year and that an advert would be placed in the "4 Tudalen" of the weekly church denomination newspapers to seek applicants. A North Wales panel would meet with Rheinallt present to discuss the applications. This year's recipients would be invited to a service at Emmaus Chapel, Bangor at 3.00 pm. on 28 September to receive their medal. At 1.30 the same day, a meeting would be arranged of the North Wales area ministers to discuss the future of the North Wales branch. Peter thanked Rheinallt for his contribution and wished the discussion well and hoped it would lead to the re-emergence of the branch.

iii. South Wales Area: Irfon Roberts explained that Mr Vivian Williams had passed all accounts that were in his possession to him. Only one recipient would receive the Gee Medal in South Wales this year. He stated that there were some lively cells in the area but generally interest was waning. This caused the Council much heartbreak. Without a clear vision for the future Irfon suggested the Council should finish. It was worrying that the Non-Conformists would not have an independent voice thereafter.

**POINT of ACTION:** Rev Irfon Roberts to contact lively cells and ask for their opinion by November's meeting. The new President, Rheinallt Thomas and Denomination representatives should also be present if this meeting was to be organised.

#### 4. Cytun - Rev Gethin Rhys

General Election: This had produced a heavier work load. The Cytun website publicised meetings/hustings with prospective parliamentary candidates. He stated that local meetings could have publicity through this means too. Gethin offered to set up meetings if given the relevant information.

Europe: Gethin had written a letter to the First Minister for Wales, Carwyn Jones on behalf of the Free Church Council explaining our concerns post Brexit and the tone of the arguments generally. This was much appreciated. Currently he was preparing for a meeting of the European Council of Churches which would be held in St Michael's College, Llandaff in 3 weeks. The First Minister, the European Commissioner would be among those invited to the meetings. He wished to emphasis that our connection with the European churches would deepen and strengthen in the future. There will be further follow up meetings in the autumn and a report will be presented in the Nov. Meeting. Gethin was thanked for his report.

## 5. Training - Rev Aled Jones:

Aled reported that co-operation between the denominations were mixed and that nothing much had happened during the last 12 months. There was an Ecumenical Authentication Board in existence but with Rev Gwynn ap Gwilym's failing health and subsequent death as well as the retirement of the Bishop of St David's, Rev Wyn Evans there was no meeting. As the Church in Wales are between vacancies the Bishop's have not redistributed new duties and this has been frustrating.

The college in Bangor is trying to put in place an interdenominational training programme. The main problem seems to be the structure between the denominations. No theological courses are offered in Wales for students wishing to follow an academic course. Students currently have to study in Birmingham, Oxford, Nottingham or London. This shows a weakness in the current education situation. Aled said that there were 5 candidates currently following such courses. 2 in their 20's of which one has gone to London and the other to Oxford. The stumbling block is that so few students apply to follow these courses especially through the medium of Welsh. Peter thanked Aled.

**POINT of ACTION:** Aled and Gethin to jointly write to the Education sec in Assembly - Kirsty Williams stating concern that courses offered in Welsh colleges do not meet the nation's needs or offer courses through the medium of Welsh.

## 6a. Denominations

**Baptist** - Rev Judith Morris. Celebration of 150 years. The Annual Conference will take place at Trinity St David University, Carmarthen where both Welsh and English sections are holding joint formal business meetings on Friday 16 June. The transfer of Presidency will take place in the evening, the new Welsh President is Rev. John Talfryn Jones and the English president is Rev. Haydn Davies. On Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> there will be a Day of Celebration.

**The Union of Independent Churches**— Rev. Gareth Morgan Jones. Apologies from Rev. Geraint Tudur. The mission plans continue. The 3<sup>rd</sup> video "Y Ffordd" is being filmed and completed. Rhodri Darcy has been appointed as Promotion and Communications Officer and works from Tŷ John Penri. In 2018 there will be a commemoration to recognise that 200 years have passed since sending missionaries to Madagascar. Hopefully Christian Aid will support this. The Annual General Meetings will be held at Gellimanwydd, Ammanford on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> June. Rev Glyn Williams is the President and Rev Jill Hailey Harries, Vice president. Rev Derwyn Morris Jones was wished a speedy recovery. Gareth suggested that the Free Church Council of Wales should formally write to him.

**POINT of ACTION:** The Secretary to write to the Rev. Derwyn Morris Jones to wish him a speedy recovery on behalf of the Council.

**The Methodist Churches** – Rev Ian Morris. The restructuring of the Synod continues. There will be 4 strategies in place by September. 1. Mission 2. Celebration and use of Welsh. 3. Ecumenism - between churches and inter faith groups. 4. Training – aiding local people to be local church leaders. The 4 strategies wish to adopt "best practice" by using all manner of ideas in order to find a way forward. It is hoped that the North and South Wales areas would adopt this in order to learn and develop for the future and thereby it becoming a Synod Wales format.

**U.R.C.** – Rev Sally Thomas. Celebration of 100 years of Women in the Ministry. Rev Kirsty Thorpe will be speaking in URC, Windsor Place, Cardiff on 18<sup>th</sup> May to celebrate this. Events are being organised to celebrate 500 years since the Protestant Reformation. "eNews" is useful for updates on General Election and encourages people to use their vote. Approved and Transitional ministry is working with both rural and urban areas. Training is being developed for lay people. The Ecumenical group in Llandrindod works well. The rural chaplain has recently retired but there is no known replacement currently.

**The Presbyterian Church in Wales** -Mr Rheinalt Thomas. The South Wales convention took place a week ago. Rev Meirion Morris will retire as General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Wales in the summer. After a period of illness, Meirion is currently having a phased return to work and meetings are organised around this. Meirion had hoped to develop mission and ministry within the denomination but buildings have and continue to be time consuming. The membership has sadly declined. Releasing central fund money is difficult because it is the

investment of individual local churches. 2 ministers were ordained in the November convention and one has been placed in North Wales with the other in the South - in the Swansea area. The appointment of Director is being sought to work with Delyth Oswy-Shaw and to co-ordinate training. The Annual Conference will be held in Cardiff in July and the current President is Prof. John Gwynfor Jones who has recently written 4<sup>th</sup> volume of the history of the Denomination. The new website for the Denomination is almost ready.

**PONT of ACTION:** Secretary to write officially to Rev. Meirion Morris to wish him well on his retirement and a speedy recovery.

### **The Congregational Federation:** Rev Martin Spain

The Annual Conference will be held in Swansea on 10<sup>th</sup> June. New President will be Rev. Martin Spain. One event is a memorial lecture for Rev. Gruffudd John and his contribution to mission in China 100 years ago. The lecture will be held in the City of Swansea Museum.

Restructuring continues including closure of the Youth office in Manchester. An individual will be appointed to look after youth.

Rev Chris Gillham continues to be in dialogue with Syrian Christians. We should remember their plight and remember them in our prayers.

Training - A local course to Accreditation standard is available at Lampeter. Full time ministry training is only available in Winchester or St John's, York - old colleges who have experience in ministry training, worship leaders, chaplaincy and retreat officers. Students attending these courses would not necessarily be ordained ministers but would be Accredited Counsellors.

Dr. Janet Wooton is due to retire and her successor has been appointed.

The Ministry is struggling but is able to cope with using lay readers in Churches and the church denomination is growing. Local churches are anxious to co-operate with other Non-Conformist churches to share ministry and buildings.

Peter thanked the various denominations for their contribution.

### **6b. Education**

Apologies were accepted from Vaughan Salisbury and a report had been sent beforehand. Gethin Rhys reported on Vaughan's behalf. Gethin disclosed that he was a committee member looking into restructuring education in Wales. A Humanities meeting will be held shortly and this would disclose the changes to RE in Wales. A new curriculum will be published and Gethin is in consultation with the Welsh Government about this. There will be an update in our November meeting. Schools will be able to "experience" the new curriculum and report their opinion to the Welsh Government. When asked about changing Primary Legislation as regards RE, Gethin stated that Huw Lewis, the previous Education Secretary in the Assembly had stated that there would be no change in the law.

### **6c. Treasurer's report**

The Annual Accounts for this year began in September 2015 and completed on 31 December 2016. In November 2016 the meeting of the FCCW agreed to change the dates of the Annual Accounts to run with the year. Martin has written to the various denominations to explain this. £1,500 is received by the FCCW annually. Mr. Vivian Williams still has an interest in the work of the Council. Martin was thanked for his report.

### **7. Greetings from the Free Church Council**

Both Rev. Paul Rochester and Mr Paul Gutteridge gave an outline of their work within the group. Rev. Paul Rochester is the General Secretary and Paul Gutteridge is the Media Communicator. Paul Rochester outlined the 4 strands to their work. 1. Prison, 2. Health, 3. Faith Education, 4. Public Voice.

Prison – The main concentration is on the work of prison chaplaincy - part of Wellcome Directory. Every faith community needs to include the prison community and guarantee Safeguarding. The Wellcome Directory runs 3

courses to train people. There is a need to take the church to the prison community. Prisoners need to feel that they would be welcomed in a place of worship after leaving prison.

Health – This is important as so much emphasis is on “Care in the Community.” Chaplains are required to assist with this and lead with this work in the community. There are 6 Pilot schemes currently developing this scheme. NHS England funds this.

Education - 2 sectors are involved – 1. Further Education - 3 million are part of this sector and the Church’s involvement is important. There are policy talks about this in Parliament. Higher Education – There are no longer chaplaincies in this area. The FCC hopes for better support in the future.

Public Voice – Social media is in the forefront of life today and the church needs to develop how this can be a valuable tool for its message in current society. The church must be seen. FCC believes that there is a need for a hub of Ministers/leaders in the background to influence government policy and this could be done effectively with the Media and government channels.

Both representatives stated that they would like to work closely with FCCW and look to help with non devolved situations. The minor churches needs a voice and representation on the Council.

On behalf of the Council, Peter thanked and appreciated that both had come to the meeting in Cardiff. He hoped that there would be continued dialogue in the future.

#### **A.O.B.**

Rev. Sally Thomas has been invited to a religious affairs programme on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May.

The President thanked the translator for his work. He also thanked Helen for arranging the meeting and preparing the lunch.

#### **Inauguration of new President**

The opening prayer was offered by Rev. Judith Morris.

Before installing the new President, Peter said it had been a privilege to be the President during the last 3 years. During that time he had an opportunity to meet people and make new friends. He had enjoyed working with other denominations. He looked forward to coming to future meetings.

Introducing the new President, Peter said that he couldn’t think of a better successor than Mr Rheinallt Thomas. His work in the field of Religious Education and indeed education in general was greatly appreciated. During his career Mr Thomas has been a school teacher and a lecturer at Bangor Normal College for over 11 years. He was then appointed to be the first Director of the National Centre for Religious Education – a post he held for over 20 years. Rheinallt’s contribution to the Sunday School Council of Wales has been immeasurable. He has been Chairman, Trustee and most recently Financial Secretary. Rheinallt Thomas’ contribution to that Council has been immense and his leadership has been wise and strong.

The Free Church Council of Wales has also benefitted from his specialism in the field of education. He has represented the council on many committees and ensured that the Non-Conformist voice was heard in discussion with Religious Education in Wales (1997 – 2013)

Rheinallt Thomas was a member and an elder in the Welsh Presbyterian Church at Llanfair P.G. and was the church’s secretary for 40 years. He and his wife have recently become members of Salem Presbyterian Church, Canton, Cardiff. The Church will surely benefit from his wisdom and leadership. Personally, it has been a privilege to work with Rheinallt on many committees.

The installation prayer was offered by the Rev. Gareth Morgan Jones.

Having been installed as the new President, Rheinallt Thomas thanked the Presbyterian Church in Wales for nominating his election and promised to do his best for the Council. He thanked Peter for bringing his London experience to a new situation. He said that it was a great privilege being a lay person to become President. He noted that he was the first lay person to become President of the North Wales branch of the Free Church Council, since

then there have been many ladies - but he remained the only man! He had travelled to London since 1997 representing the Education group on the FCC. He hoped to represent faithfully during the coming years.

In his address, the new President stated that he was disappointed that the Media and Press paid little attention to the Free Church Council, even though it represented all the Non-Conformist denominations in Wales, who worshipped in both the English and Welsh languages. The press tend to ask the opinion of the Archbishop of Wales – as if they did not realise that there hasn't been a state church in Wales since the disestablishment in 1921. The situation in England is different.

He stated that the main aim of the Free Church Council is to promote good communication between church leaders who are members of the Council. The Council's work is to promote the active voice of Non-Conformists in matters of national importance, ensuring that the denominations are represented at both religious and secular events.

He said that the FCC had a long tradition of freedom of conscience and belief and that people over the centuries had suffered disadvantages because of this compared with minorities in Wales today. Even though people have different theological ideals one should adjust as communities change. The Council's focus should be one of mission. There is a need to share God's story within wider communities – by faith, prayer, love and worship. We must share hope and justice for all people.

He finished by stating that the Free Church council voice should be heard through Cytun's website, to share information in the Interdenominational magazines and report our work to the Press.

The new President concluded the meeting by reciting the Grace.

The meeting finished at 2.50.

**The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 14 November at South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff**

The meeting should finish around 3.00 pm.