

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

Present: Peter Dewi Richards(Chair); Eirian Wyn; Sally Thomas; Christopher Gillham; Gethin Rhys; Vaughan Salisbury; Martin Spain; Rheinallt Thomas; Meirion Morris; Judith Morris; Irfon Roberts; Noel Davies; Catrin Parry; Helen Jones (Secretary)

Apologies: Aled Edwards; J.P.Ramos; Gareth Morgan Jones; Aled Jones; Alun Tudur

1. Welcome: The Chairman Rev. Peter Dewi Richards welcomed everyone present especially the translator Catrin Parry, Steffan Wiliam's colleague to her first meeting.

2. Devotion. Rev. Sally Thomas, URC. Verses were read from Isaiah 2:1-5 and Luke1:76-79. We were reminded of the confused age in which we live - politically in Britain and Europe. People need to have refuge and be welcomed. We are called to proclaim Christ's gospel and Sally's hope is that when we celebrate Christmas - God will bless us and consciously remind us of the world and its problems. We need to extend the hand of friendship to people in their various circumstances. Peter thanked Sally for her contribution.

3. Minutes 26 May 2016.

A. Matters Arising: The minutes were accepted as being correct with the exception of: A) Baptist Reports - Rev. Mark Thomas will be the new President of the English Assembly in 2017. B) Presbyterian Church in Wales. The confederation will be organising an event to remember 300 years of Wm Williams Pantycelyn's birth. Vaughan Roderick has written a biography about Wm. Williams which will be published in 2017.

B. Training: Enquiries were made as to Rev Aled Jones' contact with the non-conformist denominations since the last meeting. Aled was asked at that meeting to meet the Development and Training officers to explain their Training programme. It was agreed that there was a post training requirement for Ministers in Wales. There was concern that no University in Wales offered training in the Welsh language. A denomination committee still exists. There had been discussions with T Padarn - Church in Wales. The principal was to contact the Free Church to discuss co-operation in the future.

<p>ACTION: The secretary to contact Rev. Aled Jones to remind him of the need to contact the training officers within the non conformists as suggested in May 2016.</p>
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4. Cytun Report: Rev Gethin Rhys.

1. Rev Aled Edwards is helping communities to welcome refugees and his expertise is much appreciated.

2. Rev. Aled Edwards is the Chair of the Humanities Appeal for the Urdd.

3. Cytun - Local groups - Some groups continue to be active. Other groups have disappeared in areas as local churches/chapels have closed or have joined to become one entity. Some groups do not wish to be a part of Cytun even though there is lively co-operation within communities. Reasons given were theological and that the Roman Catholic Church was a part of the group. There was a lack of commitment in some areas since the number of churches were diminishing. There was no structure for further cooperation e.g. no Chair/ Secretary/ Treasurer. This lack of commitment weakens Gethin Rhys' ability to speak on behalf of the Churches in the Welsh Assembly.

Rev. Sally Thomas stated that she was currently in contact with local groups seeking details including the names of Clergy. She offered support if necessary. There are 74 Cytun groups in Wales currently and 3 had recently closed.

Cytun's strategy was questioned. The Cytun office should enquire as to the reasons why branches closed. Did the various denomination meetings afford space in their Agenda for Cytun in their annual Meetings? From 2017 there will be representatives of the various denominations on the Cytun board. It was indicated that several communities were having difficulty to find personnel who were prepared to volunteer locally, e.g. Christian Aid. Other groups have grown who are not necessarily religious e.g. "Citizens UK" and

“Wales for all” in Aberystwyth. These movements are open for everyone to voice their opinion on all kinds of political situations.

Cytun will still be a presence in all the Welsh events during the year – Urdd Eisteddfod, Royal Welsh Show and the National Eisteddfod. Ynyr Roberts, the Witness and Communication Officer is having talks with the personnel within the localities.

ACTION Point: Rev.Sally Thomas to follow up discussions about the work of Cytun locally.

B. Work of the Policy Officer

Gethin informed those present the various fields of work he was involved with at the moment. He stated that the work changed from month to month. Gethin was thanked for actively informing the public via the internet about his work on behalf of Cytun and the Free Church Council.

5. Constitution This needs to be placed bilingually on the Cytun website.

ACTION point: The Chair and Secretary to ensure this.

Letter: A letter was received by Rheinallt Th. on 3.11.16 from the Gee Medal Committee in North Wales stating that they were concerned about awarding the Gee Medals without permission from the North Wales Free Church Council. It was explained that such a committee did not exist. In 2016 the Chair and Secretary of the Gee Medals changed. There was a meeting in September to award the medals. It was noted that the Gee Medal Committee did not know about the existence of the Free Church Council and that they did not have a constitution. According to Rheinallt the last formal minutes for such a meeting dated 2008 and another was suggested in 2012 to consider forming a North Wales Free Church Council. The letter wished to rectify the situation which the committee had found itself in and award Gee Medals in the future.

Irfon Roberts stated that the Free Church Council as a group was currently in a sorry state. It could not justify its existence because so many of its concerns were included in Cytun's remit. It could lead on two subjects - Sabbath observance and Temperance. The other was awarding Gee Medals for service to the Sunday school. Receiving the Gee Medal is considered to be a huge honour. Only one received the Gee medal in South Wales. A special service is normally held in the recipient's chapel and the congregation is most welcoming.

Questions were asked about the future role of the Free Church Council? It was agreed that working on the Constitution had been a valuable experience and that this had given a new insight to the purpose of the Council. It was acknowledged that its purpose was to be a voice for Nonconformists in Wales and to make declarations on their behalf. The Church in Wales has a very strong network of public relations and is more likely to have publicity in the press.

It was decided to respond to the letter:

ACTION point: 1. Helen Wyn Jones, Sec, should form a committee of previous chairpersons, representatives of the denominations (2/3), representatives of any F.Ch.C groups who still meet (2/3) – especially those who have sent contributions to the treasurer. 2. A request should be forthcoming to Rev. Meirion Morris (EBC); Judith Morris (UBC) Geraint Tudur (UAC) a Jenny Hurd (EF) for denominational representatives beforehand. 3. The Chairperson should be nominated by the denominations on a rota basis. 4. It would be beneficial for the group to see a copy of the Constitution of the Free Church Council of South Wales. 5. Rheinallt Th. should invite a representative of the North Wales committee to the Annual Meeting in Cardiff November 2017 and to meetings thereafter. 6. No current member of the committee should in the future choose from within their group a recipient of the Gee Medal.

6. Rev Noel Davies – The obligations of Brexit on Christian principles

Reverend Noel Davies gave a detailed report on the discussions with the relevant authorities post Brexit vote. His account was appreciated and a question and observation session followed.

1. It was noted that there wouldn't be a change in the structure of church bodies in Europe after Brexit. Despite Brexit, the relationship with the European Council will strengthen.

2. There have been difficulties since Brexit with some churches unable to avoid divisions. The church has to be sensitive to the different opinions within. Love and tolerance need to be emphasised.

3. The Human Rights Committee have met at Westminster. It was decided that the Free Church Council should begin immediately on inter denominational work. The mechanics of the State Church has much more to offer and their publicity machinery is noticed by the press.

Rev Noel Davies was thanked and appreciation was given about the work of the Welsh Affairs Committee and the Human Rights Committee in Westminster.

ACTION point: The Council decided that a letter should be sent through Gethin Rhys to the Secretary of State for Wales, the First Minister of Wales and the press voicing our concern about the current situation in our communities and the tone of arguments for and against the results.

This letter will be distributed via Cytun's email source.

REPORTS:

A. Denominations

1. Presbyterian Churches - Rev. Meirion Morris

a) Attended meetings and discussed the Ministry with the Baptist, Independent and the United Reformed Churches 3 times. There is local co-operation but help is required to ensure success.

b) There is a working policy locally within churches, church areas and Trustees do exist.

c) Fair rents – local people are not prepared to shoulder the responsibility to ensure this.

d) Financial difficulties facing Presbyterians. This has created an overview of finances and legal implications.

e) Mr. Rheinallt Thomas was named as the new President of the Free Church Council of Wales. He will be installed in the May 2017 meeting.

2. Free Church Council of South Wales - Rev. Irfon Roberts

a) The previous president send representatives from various denominations to meetings.

b) A letter was received last August from a Mr Parkes requesting information about a Gee Medal awarded to a Mr E. Edwards. No information was forthcoming and it was assumed that the recipient was from North Wales.

3. Congregational Federation – Rev Chris Gillham

a) The Great Britain meeting will be held in the Brangwyn Hall 10 June 2017.

b) There will be an invitation for a representative of the Council to attend.

4. Baptist Union of Wales - Rev Judith Morris

a) 150 celebration in June 2017, at Llwyfan, Carmarthen. A family day with seminars and interesting activities. The Welsh and English Associations will join in a day of celebration.

b) Mission work - 3 young men have started work experience with the Baptists in Llanelli under a new pilot scheme.

5. U.R.C. - Rev Sally Thomas

1. Major problem is the shortage of ordained ministers. 15 will be needed by 2020.

2. The ministers and teams of lay people are very active during this period to be of assistance during this time of change. Training lay people locally is in hand and many of these are to be found in Cardiff.

3. Ecumenism - Ministers and their partners will be meeting shortly.
4. About 100 women have been ordained as Ministers.

6. Independent churches

1. The secretary will send a written report.
2. Martin Luther 500 year since birth will be celebrated. A trip to Germany will be arranged. The Lutheran church in Cardiff will celebrate on 31 October 2017.

B. Education - Mr Vaughan Salisbury Report was sent beforehand. Vaughan noted.

1. Professor Sir Ian Diamond's report (September 2016) on the future of HE funding in Wales. There will be a new format for financing undergraduates and research students. The Education department was supportive of a research Agenda. Rev Meirion Morris and Noel Lloyd were to join the board of the National College of Wales.

2. Consultation for the accreditation of ITE programmes in Wales Early years education in Wales Vaughan has responded to this and sent a copy to Gethin Rhys. It is a difficult and complex operation to place students in schools. In future there will be a routine with more organisation and finance.

3. Recommendations of the Donaldson Report the Digital Competence Framework 4 areas – Digital Agenda. This is an extra to the normal ICT classes in schools. It could create a difficulty to R.E. lessons within school structures. There will be a meeting of SACRE in Carmarthen on 18/11/16 and the representatives will need to be a strong voice. It is not possible legally to remove any co-opted body in Wales without passing a law to allow this.

4. Welsh Government Dysg eNewsletters and Estyn reports sent regularly to Rev. Hywel Richards.

5. Free Church Education Committee (England and Wales). Meetings were held in London on 19 October. Two informative presentations were given by Patricia Hannam, Hampshire County Inspector/ Adviser and Deborah Weston from the NATRE Research Office focusing on Free Church Engagement with schools in England. Vaughan was given the opportunity of informing members of current developments in Wales, specifically the recommendations of Sir Ian Diamond's report.
Vaughan was thanked for his work.

C) Treasurer's report - Rev. Martin Spain

1. Payment - No payment was received from Salvation Army. The Cong. Fed was late paying.
2. Financial year – It was accepted that the financial year would run from January to December and not from September to August. This will be activated from January 2017.
3. *** The Treasurer 48 hours later asked permission to donate £500 to Cytun as an appreciation of Sasha Perrian's contribution to the Council.

8) AOB.

1. The Chair informed members that there was a grant called "The Retired Minister's and Widow's Fund". If anyone knew of a retired Minister or a Minister's widow facing hardship/financial difficulty to contact the Chair to make a claim for assistance.
2. Catrin Williams the translator was thanked for her work.
3. Helen was thanked for arranging the meeting and organising lunch.

9. Blessing

The meeting finished with a prayer from the Vice President Mr. Rheinallt Thomas.

The meeting finished at 2.50.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY, 16 MAY 2017, SOUTH WALES BAPTIST COLLEGE, CARDIFF.