

Free Church Council of Wales

Minutes of a meeting of 23 June 2021 held over Zoom and at "The Sanctuary" (Park Presbyterian Church, Pontypridd).

In attendance at Pontypridd: Rheinallt Thomas (President); Rev. Simon Walkling (President-designate); Helen Jones (Secretary)

Virtually: Peter Dewi Richards (Former President); Martin Spain (Treasurer) Judith Morris; Aled Davies; Aled Jones; Alun Tudur; Eirian Wyn; Ian Morris; Chris Gillham; Evan Morgan; Nerys Pritchard; Vaughan Salisbury; Paul Rochester; Gareth Morgan Jones; Steffan Wiliam (translation)

Apologies were received: Brian Matthews; Meirion Morris; Dyfrig Rees; Aled Edwards; Gethin Rhys; Irfon Roberts

1. Welcome: The President welcomed the Council members to the Zoom meeting and explained that he was in Pontypridd with Rev Simon Walkling and Helen Jones in order to secure a dignified location to install the new President. The remainder of the Council joined on line. Rheinallt made reference that the Presbyterian Church of Wales was represented by their President-elect, Rev. Evan Morgan. The period between the November 2019 meeting and the current one had been challenging and difficult and many members had experienced bereavement. The President also congratulated Martin Spain on his promotion to being the Synod of Wales Inter Faith Relationship Officer. He mentioned that Martin's experience with the FCCW had been an advantage and he hoped that co-operation would continue into the future.

2. Devotion

The President referred to the prayers of the dark period in the book of "Cwlwm Celtaidd" - Huw John Huws and it reminds us that life was a combination of joy and sadness, light and darkness. He read two prayers to open the meeting. One by William Barclay and the second was from a volume by the late Revd. Elfed ap Nefydd Roberts asking for the presence of the Lord to confirm our faith, to strengthen us in his work to bear witness and to not be afraid to celebrate the new life in Christ.

3. Minutes of the Meeting of 14 November 2019.

It was proposed that the minutes be accepted by Aled Davies and seconded by Judith Morris.

Matters arising:

4iv. Area Ministry Document: The attached document has been received as a Draft and will need to be revised. The document will be discussed at a future meeting of the Council. The President stated that this document was a project that the FCCW, Cytûn and the denominations could be involved in. The proposal was received and Judith was thanked for responding on behalf of the committee.

Action Point: FCCW to arrange with the relevant members to ensure an agreed bilingual document.

9. Information to Aled Davies regarding voluntary work in schools - No response received.

5. John Luxton: Child Punishment Act - Jon Luxton attended our last meeting. He has made an inquiry as to whether the Council would like him to return to another meeting. The President stated that all documents received from him had been forwarded to members. It was decided to see what future developments would take place before inviting him to a meeting.

4. President's Report: (Attached with meeting papers)

Rheinallt mentioned that he had enjoyed his presidency term and the extra year. He had pledged to raise the profile of the FCCW and sent regular reports to the “4tudalen” and “Y Gwyllydydd” on the work of the Council. The range of events showed how much the Council's profile had risen as it had the opportunity to be present with 2 Archbishops of Wales (Anglican and Roman Church) at many events, meetings and services. He emphasized the need for people to know about the existence and activities of the Council. He was part of the Government Faith Forum sharing a platform with the Church in Wales, the Roman Church and other religions. He emphasized that because of these events were held in central Cardiff he was fortunate to have retired to the city. He said that the Secretary had been happy enough to deputise for him and represent the FCCW when necessary.

The connection between Cytûn and the Council had been of benefit and he wished to thank Peredur for setting up the website and to congratulate him on his election as a Member of the Senedd. Thanks were also given for Sasha's help. Gethin was thanked for his outstanding contribution especially with his reports explaining the Welsh Government's guidelines for the Pandemic period. Hedd (PCW) was thanked for being responsible for the morning arrangements at "The Sanctuary" and for helping to host the virtual Zoom meeting.

Rheinallt thanked former President Peter Dewi Richards for his advice and Treasurer Martin Spain for looking after the finances. He also thanked Vaughan Salisbury for being thorough with his analysis of Education Matters and the new education curriculum. He thanked Noel Davies for his willingness to attend Brexit meetings on behalf of the Council and for his report where he was prepared to deputize for Gethin and himself (report circulated prior to meeting). The Report is in English but Cytûn will deal with future issues. There was a CBTI meeting and an Easter Statement was made 2021. He referred to those who had attended and signed the document. (See document papers prior to meeting)

In his last sentence in the Easter article to “Cenn@d” he stated that there was potential for the churches to work together and he hoped that this would come to fruition in the future. He sincerely thanked for the opportunity of being President. Judith expressed that Rheinallt had been an energetic, dignified President and his work had been appreciated by Council members.

5. Cytûn Report

A Report was attached with other papers prior to the meeting updating the position on consultations on aspects of the new Curriculum. Members were thanked that there was a new member on Powys SACRE but that a vacancy had to be filled by another member of the Free Churches. It was noted that the Welsh Government was consulting on a bereavement care policy. During Gethin's Sabbatical he will study how the churches in Northern Ireland relate to the Assembly there and compare it with Cytûn in Wales. It was noted that Cytûn was going through a period of change through Peredur's departure to the Senedd and the retirement of Aled Edwards at the end of the year. Rheinallt thanked Aled for his co-operation with the Council and wished him well on his retirement. Vaughan expressed his gratitude that the Cytûn Policy Bulletin is shared because it is a valuable document to know about what is happening in our churches in Wales.

6. Ministerial Training - No report

7. Reports:

a) Education - Vaughan Salisbury

A report was circulated prior to the meeting with other papers. Vaughan said it has been an innovative and challenging period in education with the different circumstances prevailing. He drew attention to **point 3 -**

A Curriculum Guidance for Wales Consultation Document – Religion, Values and Ethics. The consultation deadline is 16 July and expressed the importance of churches, denominations and individuals giving their views along with the Council. He emphasized that denominational membership on SACRE and representation of the Free Churches was important. **Point 4.** A change to the Erasmus scheme will begin in 2022. He was pleased that the Welsh Government had set up their own version after Brexit. This will improve standards and provide an opportunity for Welsh students to study in Europe and vice versa for European students to study in Wales. Supervising the Curriculum in Wales will be a huge task. He expressed his gratitude that the FCCW and the Free Churches Group in London share information. He mentioned that "Worldviews" was on the English Curriculum and stated that an accurate and precise definition of the term was necessary. Vaughan stated that the "Church and Social Cohesion" booklet was valuable and had good examples of connecting churches and community.

Vaughan also revealed his intention to retire from his role as the Education Officer for FCCW when the new Curriculum starts in Welsh schools in early September 2022 or whenever there is a start date.

Vaughan was thanked for his comprehensive Report. Rheinallt said Vaughan's response had been very valuable to the Council. He emphasized that SACRE members had an important role in attending and influencing meetings and as such Christianity was retained as the main religion although some in the Councils wished to delete it from the Education document.

b) Treasurer - Martin Spain. The report and details of the accounts were circulated before the meeting. Martin was thanked for his report and work. The accounts were received for 2020. Martin thanked Rheinallt for his term as President of the FCCW.

c) Denominations

3 written reports were received in advance and circulated prior to the meeting.

1. The Methodist Assembly - Ian Morris. Synod meetings in October and discussions will continue regarding joining the English and Welsh Synod to Synod Cymru. The Wales circuit inspector will finish in July and return to New Zealand where his wife has received an education post. Many ministers are retiring. Ian was thanked for his report.

2. The Presbyterian Church of Wales - Evan Morgan. Over the lock-up period there has been an element of change and collective service meeting. Despite the difficulties the church is looking forward to the future. The denomination thanks Rheinallt for his commendable work over the term of his Presidency. Rheinallt wished Evan Morgan well on his appointment as President of PCW.

3. Congregational Federation - Chris Gillham. Chris thanked Rheinallt for his leadership of the Council during his Presidency. He expressed the concern of the denomination that there was no longer a minister in the Rhondda, that chapels were closing and therefore the Valley was becoming a Spiritual Christian wilderness.

4. Baptist Union Wales - Judith Morris. The AGM was held earlier in the week. The denomination had worked together to facilitate the meetings over Zoom with some aspects of the meetings going live. Miss Aldyth Williams is the new President. The denomination has launched an attractive new website and Carwyn Graves is starting as a new mission officer. The denomination has withdrawn its investments in fossil fuels. Covid's worries mean that chapels are closing and members are getting older. A Mission initiative is underway.

5. Union of Welsh Independents - Gareth Morgan Jones. The Union's Annual meetings will take place virtually next week. Jill Hailey Harries will hand over her presidency to Beti Wyn James. Next year the denomination will celebrate a century and a half in Carmarthen. An investment program is underway

where funds are released for specific mission projects (instead of buildings). During the period church services have been broadcast, however the impact of the Pandemic on church attendances will be of concern for the future.

Several ministers have passed away. The death of Rev Derwyn Morris Jones who served as President of Cytûn and Secretary of the volume of Songs of Faith (Caneuon Ffydd) was recorded.

8. Greetings Free Churches Group London - Paul Rochester. It was noted that Reverend Helen Cameron replaces Hugh Osgood as Moderator of the Free Church Group in April 2022. He noted the "Church and Social Cohesion" booklet which deals with improving and fostering social cohesion in communities. The second booklet deals with how Government and Statutory bodies work effectively with churches.

Meetings will be held on 30 September in the Liverpool area to promote work in the North and North West of England. The pressure of the pandemic has been heavy on churches and the Group is looking into the future. It is hoped that churches will share their best practices going forward. Paul finished his report by wishing Rheinallt well and God's blessing in the future. Rheinallt thanked Paul for the report and appreciated Paul as a link to the Council in London.

Date of next meeting - to be arranged between the President and the Secretary around November but will have to consider the type of guidelines that must be followed at the time.

Induction service of the President of the Free Church Council of Wales

The service began with a word of prayer by the outgoing President. A portion of scripture was read from Romans 12: 3 - 13 by the Secretary and a prayer was offered by the immediate Past President Reverend Peter Dewi Richards.

The Outgoing President explained the purpose of the service was to induct the Revd. Simon Walkling as President of the Council for the next three years. The President asked the Secretary to attest to the regularity of the appointment. She replied that the appointment had been confirmed at the Council meeting on 14 November 2019. The Elected President was asked questions and having confirmed its implementation he was invested with his Office gown and medal. The Presidency was transferred to the duly Elected President. He outgoing President finished the induction service with a prayer.

After the prayer, the new President added his thanks to those expressed by other members for everything that Rheinallt had brought to the role of President. He said Rheinallt had brought his experience in education and chapel life with charm, conviction and a smile to the role. He particularly thanked him for serving an extra year through the pandemic restrictions, when ecumenical meetings had been reduced but engagement with the Welsh Government had increased.

Simon noted that the reading by Romans 12 uses the image of the Body of Christ, and said that the image of Jesus as the vine and ourselves as the branches also expresses our essential unity in Christ and brings fruit to others. He mentioned the important work of the Council in expressing a distinctive nonconformist voice, particularly in the areas of chaplaincy, education and spiritual development.

He thanked members for putting their trust in him to be an effective representative and sought their support in working out how the Council fits in with other ecumenical groups and how local chapels relate to the work of the Council. He hoped that Council meetings would develop ecumenical relationships as well as monitor the work done between meetings. He suggested that we could learn from each other about worship and the discipline of 'Zoom', and explore the possibilities of ecumenical working online.

The grace was said by all to conclude the meeting

The meeting ended at 12.30.