

Free Church Council of Wales

Minutes of the meeting of 9 November 2021 held over Zoom

Present: Rev. Simon Walkling (President); Rheinallt Thomas (Former President); Martin Spain (Treasurer); Aled Davies; Chris Gillham; Gareth Morgan Jones; Judith Morris; Meirion Morris; Dyfrig Rees; Ian Morris; Peter Dewi Richards; Irfon Roberts; Vaughan Salisbury; Eirian Wyn; Steffan Wiliam (translating); Helen Jones (Secretary)

Apologies were received: Brian Matthews; Gethin Rhys;

1. Welcome: The President warmly welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Gethin Rhys who was in Glasgow for the duration of the COP26 meetings and Brian Matthews who was away at Eastern Assembly meetings.

2. Devotion: The devotion was led by the President. He read part of Mark 13: 1 - 8. He contrasted the predictions of the destruction of Jerusalem and the post-Covid period that we are currently witnessing. God's mission continues and as did a change and emphasis on the formal worship of the Temple, when Jesus extended God's forgiveness to his people during his ministry. We should question ourselves whether this is echoed in our denominational meetings as we ask where is our unity in Christ. He then offered a prayer for God's guidance in our meeting and asked the Holy Spirit to act as the Council found a way to make a difference in its purpose and vision and to develop relationships with each other.

3. Minutes of meeting 23 June 2021: The Minutes were accepted with Rheinallt proposing them as a true record and seconded by the rest of the Council present. Secretary Helen was thanked for recording them.

3i. Matters Arising - None

3ii. Area Ministry Document

Judith was thanked for leading. She said there had been no change since the June meeting. She mentioned that the document needed to be revised and translated. She stated that there would be little change until a new Officer was appointed by Cytûn. She was in discussion and arranging to meet Ainsley Griffiths, Church in Wales. The document as it stands would need to be discussed with and input required from Ainsley.

Rheinallt expressed concern about the postponement, especially bearing in mind that Cytûn had been without a n Officer for almost 2 years before Peredur Griffiths was appointed. There had been calls from local churches in areas considering the initiative for a copy. By not responding this could be a barrier. He asked when would the document be a priority for a new Cytûn Officer in the future.

The 3 General Secretaries needed to respond and revise the document and arrange an English translation. It was stated that there was no impediment to local churches who wished to share a ministry to pursue their aims if discussions had begun e.g. a new ministry of Bro Nant Conwy. It was agreed that the document needed a framework for discussion. Peredur had hoped that the document would have been responded to by the 3 General Secretaries before he left office. It was asked if there was co-operation between Anglicans and Nonconformists in an area - but no one was aware of this.

The President said that as Ministers are declining in different denominations disestablishment for collaboration can happen. Meirion said that discussions with the Church in Wales were useful and that Ainsley Griffiths saw this as possible especially in Welsh speaking areas but that there was a need to understand how such a shared ministry would be possible. The Church in Wales has a problem understanding their own ministry with the division of priests into area ministries.

Nonconformists have worked together to form a Ministry in the past. Although there are difficulties

with the patterns of worship there are benefits as well as challenges. It is necessary to be rational about buildings of worship and to consider the sensitivity of members within a local community.

Aled D. said that he is the Minister of 5 churches of 3 different denominations, as virtual services have increased over the last year, members of other chapels outside this area are joining and seeking virtual services. They have now become part of the Virtual Service congregation even though they do not belong to his pastorate. As a result, pastoral care has developed and increased. He inquired as to whether such a collaboration would be seen as a way forward in the future? With the advent of virtual meetings there is a virtual audience which means that there is co-operation between those who join. This will require constructive discussion in the future. Judith was thanked for leading the discussion.

Action points: 1. The 3 General Secretaries to continue to amend what is necessary in order to publish the document. 2. Meeting with Ainsley G to continue discussions with the Church in Wales. 3. Need to question the community impact of following Virtual services on Zoom. 4. To consider the future co-operation of Lay Ministry. 5. Document Ministry to be placed on Agenda for May meeting.

4. President's Report - (Event diary sent out in advance.)

Simon stated that he received invitations from the Welsh Government. He was trying to work out whether it was through his work as an URC Moderator or through his role as FCCW President. Gethin's input was important in differentiating his work into his denomination and Inter-faith work on behalf of FCCW.

5. Cytûn Report - (Report sent out in advance)

Gethin will report back to Cytûn's meeting on 18 November following discussions after his visit to COP26 in Glasgow.

Vaughan raised many points from Gethin's report.

1. Education - i. He noted the Bible Society had a contribution to the new Curriculum in schools. It will be difficult to know what the response to "Open the Book" will be. It is now difficult for Ministers of religion to visit schools.

He noted that a member of Wrexham SACRE who is a humanist has announced that he would like to visit schools to express his views. "Open the Book" was carefully scripted so as not to err on the side of one's opinion. The second volume of the current "The Lion Storyteller" will be published next Easter and will be a sequel to the current one. He stated that it is difficult to know what the response of "Open the Book" will be when the new Curriculum begins next September. Aled said that the local church has a place in history - local evidence is very important under the Curriculum and classes of children could be invited into places of worship to explain its place in society. Meleri Cray is coordinating on behalf of the Bible Society (Wales) in the England and Wales Project.

ii. Chris Gillham expressed concern about the Pembrokeshire SACRE group and their change of name to SAC, ending the current committee representation and seeking new nominations to the committee. In the future this will mean fewer representatives on the committee and Cytûn would need to quickly send nominations to the local Committee. He was concerned that the Nonconformists could lose representation on the committee and that the membership of SAC was dependent on the local authority following proper procedure.

2. Banks - The lack of banking services is still a concern and in particular the need to pay and transfer cheques through the banks. This can be costly especially for charities as reported by HSBC. An interesting point was raised about a Credit Union which could be of use to small organizations.

6. Training –

This is now chaired by Dr Hefin Jones, Coleg Cenedlaethol (National College). The renegotiation of formal training is about to resume under the care of Dr Eryl Wyn Davies. The individual denominations will have a prospectus and a meeting will be arranged in January 2022. It is encouraging on behalf of the Welsh side that Dr Manon Ceridwen James of the St Padarn's Institute has taken an interest in this. It is useful to have courses available on the Welsh Ministry in Wales. Meirion was thanked for his Report.

7. Reports

i. Education - Vaughan Salisbury (Report sent out in advance)

1. The new Curriculum is still under discussion by the Welsh Government. New guidance should be published at the end of the year. He stated that although time is limited it is intended to start the new Curriculum in Primary schools in September 2022. The Secondary Schools Curriculum will not start until September 2023.

2. It was mentioned that a change to the future of GCSE was being considered. Courses will be revised and new ones added. A consultation on this is being considered over the next two years. The new qualifications are due to start in September 2025.

3. Tertiary Education - Vaughan said that Education Minister Jeremy Miles wants to create a new body in this sector and then finish funding the existing budget. This change will need to be passed as an Act. See the Senedd website for a 56-page summary - "Commission for Tertiary Education and Research."

4. Rheinallt and Vaughan have sought permission to translate Religious Education's anti-racist resources in partnership with FCG for 18 months. Sarah Cawte coordinates on behalf of FCG but there has not been a response from RE today. Rheinallt proposed that it would be beneficial for the President of the FCCW to send a letter to RE today to see what is possible to support such a project. Aled Davies said that he often saw Zoe Keens, the chief executive and would talk to her.

<p>Action point: FCCW President to write a letter in the name of the Council to RE today to see how they can assist with the project in Wales.</p>

ii. Treasurer - Martin Spain

The Treasurer stated that there had been little change in the accounts since the June meeting. The only expenditure was the £ 500 for Cytûn.

iii. Denominations

i. Synod Cymru Methodist Assembly - Ian Morris (Report forwarded in advance)

The Assembly is looking forward to establishing a bilingual Methodist Synod in September 2022.

ii. The Presbyterian Church of Wales - Meirion Morris

The churches begin to reconvene after Covid. The church is seeking to discern its future mission including its local services and what kind of administration will be needed in the future.

iii. Union of Welsh Independents - Dyfrig Rees

Activities are resuming and people are returning to their places of worship although some are still continuing with Zoom services and this is much appreciated. Churches realize they are in a new place and there are lessons to be learned about the future in order to move forward.

iv. Baptist Union of Wales - Judith Morris

Activities have resumed. A Code of Conduct for Ministers has been established. The Union has welcomed mission workers to Wales. 5 new Ministers to various Associations have been or will be ordained. The Corporation is giving greater consideration to the future value of buildings.

v. Congregational Federation - Chris Gillham

Coming out of Covid it seems that the strong churches have strengthened and the weak ones have weakened. Continuation of Zoom services seems a long-term resource. The Church Support Worker has resigned and the denomination is in the process of appointing a new one. This is necessary to assist churches in the future. It would also be worth considering "Community Ministry" for English churches in order to share ministry in non-ministerial areas.

vi. United Reformed Church - Simon Walkling

The number of churches is decreasing. Training has now extended to lay people. The church is looking at its environmental policy.

8. Free Churches Group - Paul Rochester - No report

9. AOB

Vaughan expressed his intention at the June meeting to be released from his role as the Education Officer for FCCW when the new Curriculum starts in Welsh schools. He was now prepared to continue until September 2023 when the new Curriculum will begin in Welsh Secondary schools. Simon expressed his gratitude to Vaughan for this and was sure this would help to arrange a successor.

Helen was thanked for recording the minutes and Steffan for translating effectively.

10. The Blessing

The meeting concluded at 11.45 with a prayer and grace shared by the President.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 24 MAY 2022 via ZOOM