**Free Church Council of Wales**

**Minutes of the meeting of 22 November 2022 held at Tŷ John Penri and Zoom**

**Present:** Rev. Simon Walkling (President); Rheinallt Thomas (Former President); Helen Cameron Moderator FCG; Judith Morris; Dyfrig Rees; Ian Morris; Stephen Wigley; Aled Davies; Chris Gillham; Brendan Mason; Dawn Mason; Nan Powell-Davies; Anna Jane Evans; Peter Dewi Richards; Vaughan Salisbury; Paul Rochester; Aled Jones; Roger Batt; Gordon Atter; Helen Jones (Secretary)

**Apologies were received**: Martin Spain (Treasurer); Gethin Rhys; Steffan Wiliam (translator); Aled Edwards

**1. Welcome**: The President welcomed everyone to the meeting either in person or via Zoom. He extended a special welcome to new members of the council attending for the first time - Dawn and Brendan Mason who will be joint successors of Chris Gilham of the Congregational Federation; Nan Powell-Davies, Meirion Morris’ successor as General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Wales and both Roger Batt and Gordon Atter from the Salvation Army, Stephen Wigley joined the meeting as joint Chair of Synod Cymru Wales. The Reverend Anna Jane Evans PCW was welcomed as a representative in place of the Reverend Brian Matthews. He welcomed our special guest, Rev. Dr. Helen Cameron, Moderator of the Free Churches Group to the meeting. Apologies were received.

**2. Devotion:** Dyfrig Rees, General Secretary of Undeb Annibynwyr Cymru welcomed those who attended in person to Tŷ John Penri stating it was good to see people face to face again. The devotion was led by Dyfrig Rees, He read part of Luc 23 and reminded us of walking to God’s paradise as was promised to the thief on the cross. “Today” was emphasised and we were asked if we could make small steps to inspire others to follow God in Christ. This was followed by a prayer of blessing on the meeting.

**3. Free Church Council Reports**

**i)** **Free Church Council of Wales**

Each denomination explained their structures and functions. Every denomination shared their concerns regarding older membership, church closures and the effect of the Covid pandemic.

**ii) Free Churches Group**

The Moderator found that she was excited and interested in the work of the Free Churches Group having only been Moderator since April.

The membership continues to grow and there have been recent applications to join. The Elim Church being the most recent and others were showing interest. The new churches are dynamic, younger in age range and the churches are learning to enjoy being energised by this new group. Churches in general have become more anxious and churches worldwide have benefitted from the use of Zoom. This has helped to engage with the wider audience.

It was significant that Helen was asked to read a prayer in Queen Elizabeth’s funeral in September. Helen was aware that she represented 25 denominational churches in the service.

The work of chaplaincy is gaining importance:

1. There are now Military chaplains and this reflects the diversity of faith of those who are willing to serve.
2. Hospital chaplaincies - this has received more attention since Covid and has brought issues such as wellbeing of both patients and staff to the forefront.
3. Prison chaplaincies - The work done is amazing and the “Welcome Directory” supports prisoners who have come to faith in prison and find difficulty being accepted in churches on leaving. The Welcome Directory helps to settle former prisoners who have paid their dues to society and wish to settle and be accepted by society again.
4. Education chaplaincies – These are to be found in Secondary and Higher Education establishments. There is a need for churches to support religious education in schools. There is a place for the free church to have a voice and school leaders need to trust the volunteers who come into schools. Faith needs to be an action which frees people not enslave and it is imperative that ecumenism aids this.

Paul Rochester, Chief executive of the FCC group stated that it was completing a 5-year strategy between 2023 and 2025. He was anxious to pursue a Welsh context within the group. This would build a more direct link to deal with future developments. Paul was thanked for his input.

**11.30** Nan Powell-Davies joined the meeting via Zoom. Simon Walkling welcomed Nan officially to her first meeting as General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Wales. Nan stated that she was very excited to be a member of the Council and looked forward to attending future meetings.

Judith asked how the dynamic of the newer churches like the Elim church changed the dynamic of the Free Churches Group and that it was good to learn of their vibrancy. Helen explained that gifts, grace and experience was essential. The growth of small churches stems from mutual respect and cooperation and a need to work together. There is no suppression of views but a tolerance between one another.

Peter said that there was a “small denominations group**”- Rural Churches group** based in England. A way forward could be learnt and encouraged for meetings like this in Wales.

Rheinallt was concerned that the Education committee of the Free Churches group did not appear to function at a UK level. Education is a devolved power in Wales but there is a lack of contact at FC Group level. It was hoped that there would be more cooperation and understanding so that England and Wales could look forward to being more positively active in the future rather than have a negative approach. H C stated that FCG will identify Welsh priorities in the future. Simon stated that reorganising reduces the connectivity with other people who then feel isolated. It was suggested that committees could be involved together to have a Welsh context. The small churches group of old would also be a useful support for rural churches. Paul was happy to look at this.

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| **ACTION POINT:** Paul and Simon to liaise and will bring suggestions to the next meeting in May. |

**4. Reports**

**a. Education**

Vaughan expressed his disappointment that there was no translator. He drew attention to the two reports that he had forwarded to be circulated before the meeting.

 **1.** **Circulated reports**

1. **Guidance to school visits** – liaising with schools. He wished to thank Aled Davies for producing a PDF format of this.
2. ii) **Linking Churches and Schools** –Vaughan had recently revised a 2003 report from Gillian Wood of the FCG Education department. Vaughan emphasised that this needed circulating to a wider audience. Aled promised to outsource the updated format and send to Vaughan when completed.

**2. Anti-Racist Wales initiative**. This is with the government at the moment and to be functional by 2030. Our contact with Sarah Cawte (FCG Education Officer) has been useful to ensure progress with materials created. Zoe Keens (RE Today) and her team are now adapting the FCG KS2 Anti-Racist RE resources for the Curriculum for Wales. However, the material will need to be translated into Welsh if the English version is accepted by HWB. This is the government website for teachers in Wales to find lesson materials. The name of the subject is no longer Religious Education but Religion, Values ​​and Ethics.

The Council was grateful for the time, effort and patience required and the cooperation with Zoe Keens at RE Today over the racist material initiative. Judith was grateful that these new resources would be helpful for denominations to link with schools. As education is a devolved matter for Wales the papers have significance in discussion.

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| **ACTION POINT:** 1. Both documents to be circulated to Members in PDF format.2.The Documents to be circulated to the Cytûn Website and to all denomination offices who will then forward it to churches. 3. The Documents to be sent to 22 SACS Clerks to distribute to schools in their area. 4. Aled Davies will outsource the work for “Linking Churches and Schools” to PDF format. |

**B.** **Treasurer’s Report**

1. Martin was thanked for his financial report.

2. The Council was warned that there would be a cost for the Welsh translation of the Anti-Racist report. The Treasurer was asked not to transfer money to the deposit account as FCCW would need to fund this. It would cost £5,000 for the translation of the Key Stage 2 material and there would be a design fee also.

3. The Key Stage 3 material is not ready and currently there is no budget to pay for this. Aled Davies stated that he would speak to Zoe Keens regarding this.

**5. Minutes of meeting 23 June 2021:** The Minutes were accepted with Rheinallt proposing them as a true record and seconded by Peter Dewi Richards and the other members of the Council present. The Secretary was thanked for recording them.

 **5i. Matters Arising** – None

 **5ii**. **Area Ministry Document -**There was nothing to add. The conversation is ongoing.

1. **The President’s Report.**

This was circulated to members before the meeting.

1. **Cytûn Report** This was circulated to members before the meeting. There will be a Board meeting on Wednesday 23 November. Gethin was wished a speedy recovery.
2. **Training Report**

There was nothing new to add but Nan Powell-Davies promised a report in the next meeting.

1. **AOB** - 6.30 – 8.00 - 5th December –Webinar on Chaplaincy. FCG thought useful to promote this.

The President thanked Chris Gilham for his participation as a valued member of the Council who was always concerned for the work of the church. He wished him well on his forthcoming retirement.

1. **Date of Next meeting**: **23 May** **2023** – location to be decided.