Minutes of the Free Church Council of Wales meeting

held at the Baptist College, Richmond Road, Cardiff on Thursday 23 May 2024

Present: Simon Walkling (President); Rheinallt Thomas (Past President); Peter Dewi Richards; Martin Spain (Treasurer); Dyfrig Rees; Jill-Hailey Harries; Gethin Rhys; David Salsbury; Eirian Wyn; Vaughan Salisbury; Helen Jones (Secretary); Steffan Wiliam (Translator)

Present via Zoom: Brendan Mason; Dawn Mason; Paul Rochester; Nan Powell-Davies; Anna Jane Evans

Apologies: Aled Davies; Irfon Roberts; Judith Morris; Jonathan Roberts; Kathryn Stowers; Gordon Atter

1. Welcome: The meeting began with everyone introducing themselves, those in the room and those who joined via Zoom. The Reverend Jill-Hailey Harries, President-Elect and the Reverend David Salsbury, the new Moderator of the United Reformed Church were welcomed to their first meeting.

2. Devotion: There was a prayer for Pentecost - for the Holy Spirit to manifest himself in the meeting. The Scripture was read from 2 Corinthians 5: 16 – 21. In his reflection the President reminded us that we are ambassadors representing our different traditions, accountable to God and His church and to reconcile and promote God's work through Christ in the world.

3. Minutes from the last meeting 14 November 2023:

The minutes were accepted. Proposed by Peter Dewi Richards and seconded by Vaughan Salisbury.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising except for the points on the agenda.

i. **Area Ministry Document**: It was suggested sharing the document would be appreciated and that the content would be very useful to promote and share ministry in both Welsh and English. There was a lively and thorough discussion on the way forward and a few concerns were raised. The 3 General Secretaries will meet in July where it will be the main discussion on the agenda. The Reverend Ainsley Griffiths, Ecumenism Officer of the Church in Wales will also join.

It was pointed out that the Cytûn logo was on the document and it was said that the Cytûn trustees had not discussed or seen the document and that this was the document of the Free Churches. It was felt necessary to consider how viable the Area Ministry Document is and the document would have to be as simple as possible to move forward. The 3 General Secretaries were asked to come to the November meeting and report on their discussions. The Council was not keen to accept this as a temporary / interim document because this would delay the final form. It was noted that it was necessary to change the name of the Regional Reformed Church to the Pastoral Synod Committee. It was agreed to remove the Cytûn logo from the document and replace it with the one from the Free Church Council of Wales. Discussions with local congregations could continue without the document. Should local inquiries require guidance there is a document already available. It would be good to present the document to the Cytûn Board of Trustees so that it may be officially accepted.

The Free Churches Group has a flexible framework that complies with charities in England and Wales. The United Reformed Church uses this with partnerships in Wales and it works effectively.

Action Points: **1. Approval of the document content was accepted for discussion by the 3 General Secretaries. 2. The 3 general secretaries need to report back with an action plan by the 21 November meeting. 3. Review the document every 2 years. 4. Cytûn must be part of the future negotiations and keep ownership of it alive. 5. Rheinallt Thomas to organize the translation of the document into English.**

ii. Safeguarding of documents: The documents from the South Wales Free Church Council have been received but the documents of the North Wales Free Church Council have not been received although there have been many messages between Rheinallt Thomas, Aled Davies and the Secretary to try to assist in order that they may be collated before being sent to the National Library of Wales.

Action point: The Secretary to contact again to request the documents of the Council of Free Churches of North Wales. They are asked to be sent to Cardiff by the end of June. The documents will be transferred to the National Library of Wales afterwards.

iii. The Constitution: Paper circulated before the meeting.
The changes to the Constitution were accepted. The new reviews will be translated into Welsh by the next meeting in November and the document will be bilingual. The Free Churches Group is a denominational movement and new members who wish to join can be considered.

Action point: Rheinallt Thomas to arrange that the reviews will be translated into Welsh by the next meeting in November.

iv. Officers: The May meeting is an Annual Meeting. The following were confirmed:

President: Reverend Jill-Hailey Harries.
The nomination was confirmed by the Welsh Independent Union and proposed in the meeting by Peter Dewi Richards and seconded by Martin Spain.
Past President: Reverend Simon Walkling
Treasurer: Reverend Martin Spain
Secretary: Mrs. Helen Jones

The current President thanked the former President Rheinallt Thomas for his commendable work. It was appreciated that he had raised the profile of the Council, his continued interest in education matters and his recent work coordinating the archive of the Free Church Council of Wales.

Vaughan Salisbury was also thanked, for having completed ten years as Education Officer. Vaughan was thorough in his dedication, creating work and acting as a bridge between the local Authorities and the Senedd especially with a recent change in the Education Curriculum from Religious Education to Religion, Values and Ethics. The Council will continue to use the PCW Education Officer as its Education Officer.

5. The President's report: circulated before the meeting **Simon Walkling**

Simon was thanked for his work representing the Council. The Protocol Officers of the Senedd are now inviting him along with other church leaders who represent the different views of the Christian tradition.

6. Cytûn Report: circulated before the meeting **Gethin Rhys**

A Gethin Rhys raised 3 points in his report regarding the Cytûn Policy report:

i. General Election: The date has been announced. Cytûn will provide information about policies that have not been devolved on their website. Churches could also add appropriate material.
ii. Peace appeal: A request has come to support the fund and some churches have arranged to raise money for the Appeal. The United Reformed Church meets in the Autumn and the Welsh Baptist Union Historical Society has organized a meeting in May 2025. The denominations organize their own activities. On 4 June, there is a meeting online by Cytûn to celebrate and more information can be found on the website. According to history, this was the first joint denominational activity

between the Free Churches, the Church in Wales and the Quakers. The Catholic Church is examining its history but no documents have come to light. They have given a financial contribution to the Appeal.
iii. Chaplaincies: A review of the work of chaplaincies is being updated by the Health Boards and includes guidelines on Spirituality. FCCW does not accredit chaplains and the Health Boards guidelines decide how chaplaincies will be organized in the future. Chaplains are available to all staff and patients within the Health Boards.
B. SAC's: The circulated paper was appreciated. Sadly, no one tried to fill the vacancies in Neath / Port Talbot or in Cardiff recently. It was recommended that FCCW end trying to nominate and allow the individual denominations to endeavour to fill them. It is now the statutory responsibility of the local Councils to fill gaps on the SAC's and they could ask for advice from Cytûn or FCCW. Rheinallt and Vaughan agreed. Paul Rochester of the Free Church Group suggested that it might be beneficial for Gethin to speak to Sarah Lane Caute in England for further suggestions. It was noted that there is a difference between the composition of SAC representatives in England and Wales. In general, local Council officers do not understand the difference between one religion and another let alone understand denominationalism. It is a shame that churches are do not nominate members to the local SAC and the worry is that Christian influence on the Curriculum will diminish as a result.

Action point: The Council accepted Gethin Rhys's recommendation.

Nan Powell-Davies was thanked for her contribution to the morning's discussions.

7. Training: There was no report.

8. Reports:

a) Education: a report was circulated before the meeting **Vaughan Salisbury**
The points in the Report were noted but great concern was shown about the problem of recruiting good, qualified teachers to teach Religion, Values and Ethics in our schools. They are facing a problem recruiting and the worry is that inexperienced teachers, without having received the appropriate training, teach the subject and do not understand the Curriculum. It is more of a problem in our Welsh schools. It was reported that students who go to England to train to be Religious Education teachers, are not taught how the subject is presented and taught in Wales. We were advised that only 13 Religion, Values and Ethics students were receiving training in Wales this year and only one was receiving education to train in Welsh. 30 students are needed each year to keep numbers up and many leave the profession. There are good courses in Swansea, Carmarthen and Swansea.
Vaughan thanked for the opportunities he had received over the last ten years with FCCW and also being part of the Free Church Education Committee in England. The President thanked Vaughan for his valuable contribution.

b) Treasurer: a Report was circulated before the meeting **Martin Spain**

1. The financial Report was received and he was thanked for his work over the year. The Treasurer stated that Barclays Bank in Haverfordwest had closed. This had held up the Secretary's name as a cheque signatory if needed. He said we should consider Sustainable Banking in the future.
2. Peace appeal 2025 – A sum of £500 was offered.
3. It was decided not to raise the denominations' contributions but to put them on the May 2025 Agenda.
4. An invoice of £538 was received for Cytûn's work and he especially thanked Gethin Rhys for his contribution to the Council.
5. Honorarium: It was decided to ask for advice. Dyfrig Rees's proposal to enquire with accountants Cross & Bowen was accepted.

6. Payment of Travel Expenses: The recommendation to raise the amount to 45p per mile was accepted.

c) Denominations

Baptist Union of Wales **Eirian Wyn**

Annual Conferences: **The Welsh section: Eglwys Croesgoch, 25-26 June:** Reverend Geraint Morse will be inaugurated as President. The Conference theme is 'I will build my Church'

The English Section: A joint conference with the South Wales Baptist Association, Wales Baptist College and the BMS will be held at the Halliwell Centre on **Saturday, 8 June**. The theme of the day will be: **'Dynamic words in a dynamic world'**. A one-day meeting for the UBC non-Welsh Department at Eglwys Sarn, Newtown on **Friday, 5 July** when Reverend Maggie will be inaugurated as President of the English section.

Christian Aid Appeal: Talents of Hope: The Appeal was launched for Christian Aid at the 2023 conferences. The focus of the Appeal is Zimbabwe and in particular the agricultural communities suffering as a result of Climate Change, epidemics, economic and political instability. In order to try and generate interest in the Appeal a Walking Challenge was recently launched to try to walk the length of Zimbabwe and Wales. The Appeal will continue until the end of this year.

Future Requirements: As a Union we have been doing a lot of work recently considering what our position will be in twenty years' time. As a result, we intend to establish regional CIOs in order to assist the Churches, the Assemblies and the Union to respond to the missionary challenges we face. In addition, we have also strengthened the team that deals with property matters.

Union of Welsh Independents **Dyfrig Rees**

The Annual Conference will be held at the University of South Wales, Treforest in July.
The UWA Christian Aid Appeal called "Living Wells" continues and raises money that will help Colombia.
Two grant schemes were launched:
1. Innovation and Investment - in order to reach out to our communities.
2. Ministry.
Representation will go out to Durban, South Africa under CWM (Council for World Mission).
Rhodri Darcy is looking after the website where there are sermons / devotionals / interviews etc.

United Reformed Church **David Salsbury, Moderator**

David said that he was new in his role. He thanked for the work and contribution of the former Moderator, Simon Walkling.
There will be a one-day Annual Conference in July.
There is a review of "Church Life" at the moment. There may be two conferences in 2025 to consider the review.
Response to Slavery – A report was received and was sent to representatives in Jamaica and an apology was made on behalf of the church to the High Commission there and it was accepted.

Congregational Federation **Brendan Mason**

A new church has started in Penclawdd
The Summer Rally in Carmarthen on 28 June will discuss a peace petition. It will not be a business meeting.

Presbyterian Church of Wales **Rheinallt Thomas**

Annual meetings will be on the 9th of July and a meeting the night before on the 8th.
Reverend Aneurin Owen will be the new President.
A diverse Ministry continues.

d) Sunday School Council: a report was circulated. **Aled Davies**
Thanks were given for the report and the work being carried out through the Sunday School Council. It was expressed that Aled creates enthusiasm in the places he visits.

9. Free Churches Group **Paul Rochester**

1. Expansion: The members of the Free Churches Group have expanded in England and 5/6 have joined since 2016. Vineyard and Ichthus have recently applied to join.
2. Chaplaincy: This is an area that has expanded recently and it brings people together. Having a constitution means that people seeking membership are considered. There is a Chaplaincy podcast on the website which helps people get a taste of the joys and challenges that arise from being a chaplain.
3. A new president. Reverend Tessa Henry-Robinson, Moderator, United Reformed Church will follow Reverend Helen Cameron from next April for 3 years. She is currently shadowing Helen Cameron in order to understand the role. Her name will not be revealed until June.
4. General Election: There is information on Education policies on the website. You can ask politicians a question. The Quakers have already done this.
Paul was thanked for his contribution

10. Installation of new President of the Council of Free Churches of Wales.
There was a short service to invest and install the Reverend Jill-Hailey Harries as President of FCCW for the next three years. In response to her investiture and installation she quoted words from Psalm 133, that God calls people together and this creates unity. It is a privilege to be like the oil and the dew, like a liquid flowing to others, so that they can know God's grace and love and be part of the family. People's conflicts and sufferings are an example of those that need to be reached out to. After the installation prayer, Jill added her thanks for Simon's work in his role as President. She thanked the members for putting their trust in her to follow him as President.

11. AOB

Steffan was thanked for his translation work during the day.
The Baptist College were thanked for assisting with Zoom facilities to enable a hybrid meeting and Helen was thanked for her work including preparing the catering.

Grace: The meeting ended with the President announcing the grace at 2.50.

Next meeting on Thursday, 21 November 2024 and hybrid facilities will be offered at that meeting.