Minutes of the Free Church Council of Wales

A meeting of the above was held at Cardiff Baptist College on Thursday 21 November 2024

Present: Jill-Hailey Harries, (President); Simon Walkling, (Past President); Martin Spain, (Treasurer); Rheinallt Thomas; Eirian Wyn; Ian Morris; Paul Rochester; Aled Davies, Peter Dewi Richards; Kathryn Stowers; Helen Jones (Secretary); Steffan Wiliam (Translator).

Zoom participants: Anna Jane Evans; Gareth Morgan Jones; Hedd Wyn Morgan; Irfon Roberts

Apologies: Cynan Llwyd; Gethin Rhys; David Salsbury; Jonathan Roberts; Judith Morris; Dyfrig Rees; Bryn Williams; Anthony Batterton

1. Welcome: The President welcomed everyone to the meeting including Kathryn Stowers from the Salvation Army to her first meeting. Kathryn is the Salvation Army's Ecumenical officer.

2. Devotion: The President undertook the Devotion by reading a few verses from Genesis. A prayer was then offered asking for God's guidance on the meeting.

3. Minutes: The minutes of the meeting of 21 May were received with the exception of one point which was to clarify the difference between the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education which is administered by the local authority and not to be confused with the Sunday School Council (**C**yngor **Y**sgolion **S**ul). The possible confusion was noted. Aled Davies proposed to accept the Minutes and they were seconded by Peter Dewi Richards.

4. Matters arising:

i. Area Ministry Document

After reading Judith's message, disappointment and frustration was expressed that the committee seemed always to be dragging its feet with excuses for not taking action. It was said that some people did not want an active document involving Cytûn and FCCW with the Cytûn logo which was hindering publication. It was emphasized that this was originally a document between four denominations with the hope of collaboration. It was suggested that it would be worth having the document translated for English for non-conformist churches as they would also find it useful. Proposed by Aled Davies and Rheinallt Thomas seconded. This proposal was carried unanimously.

Action point: The committee asked for the document "Local Ecumenical Partnerships" to be an agenda item at the May meeting.

ii. Archive Document Collection Update

Two boxes containing seven large files and computer material were handed over to the National Library of Wales by the Secretary on 16 June 2024. The 2005 – 2008 materials are missing but are now believed to be part of Cytûn material. Rheinallt Thomas and the Secretary were thanked for their work. It was appreciated that the documents were now safe and available for any future research.

iii. The Constitution

Simon Walkling and Rheinallt Thomas were thanked for their work in reviewing the constitution of the Council. The revisions were approved at the meeting by the Council. Simon will send a copy to the charities Commission. Cytûn will also receive the document.

5. The President's report

i. The President expressed thanks to Simon for his advice on the role.
ii. She thanked the Secretary for representing her at the National Remembrance Service on 10 November in Cardiff.
iii. Many invitations were turned down due to other events.
iv. She was supportive of the "Help to die" letter and Cytûn's report circulated before the meeting.
v. The President will make statements on behalf of FCCW.
vi. It was suggested that if the President was unable to accept invitation someone should represent the Council.

6. Cytûn Report - Circulated before the meeting. Rev. Gethin Rhys
i. Apologies that no one was represented at the meeting because they had another meeting.
ii. Burial and Crematorium Consultation.

It was asked if FCCW had a collective voice or if each denomination was responsible for giving their opinion. It was expressed that it would be wise for each chapel or denomination to discuss it. The Cytûn Bulletin was distributed to the denominations. It was noted that there are different rules in England and Wales. It was noted that Gethin was inviting people to contact him. PCW representatives said they would be happy to consult and respond. Information is needed as churches are closing and the implications of the consultation for the future must be considered.

Action point: The Secretary to encourage all denominations to contact Cytûn through their denominations.

iii. Assisted Dying Bill
A draft law comes before the parliament in London, Friday 29 November. The Free Church Group in England has no voice. A Declaration was made by Archbishops in England - Anglican and Catholic.
It was noted that the current Moderator of the FCG, Reverend Dr Helen Cameron had also signed the declaration.

Action point: The Secretary to circulate to Council members.

7. Training:
Over the years, training was delivered to prospective students among the individual denominations. There is now training in Welsh across the denominations from Cardiff Baptist College and there is also collaboration with the Padarn Sant Centre. The Congregational Federation still provides direct training through its denomination.

8. Reports

1. Sunday School Council. Aled Davies
i. Gee Medals – The presentation of the Medals has been part of the Council's function since 2017. 4 will be presented in the Tabernacle, Cardiff on Sunday 24 November and 1 in Prestatyn on 1 December. 15 were awarded this year.
The Gee Family is still active and helps to pay for the supply of medals as needed. Funds were handed over to the Sunday School Council when the prizes were put into their care. The Council is reinvesting the money even though the original Fund has closed. Instead of two meetings a year - one in the North and the other in the South as in the past, the Council presents the awards locally and this is a celebration that is relevant to the community. The deadline for nominations each year is 30 June.

i. Current Work Plan
Over the last 5 years the strategy has developed so as to offer 5 websites as listed below:

a. **Sunday School Council website**
b. **Gair.cymru** – Christian resources have been downloaded and hundreds of devotional lessons and Bible studies can to be found.
c. **beibl.net** - translation by Arfon Jones
d. **hope.cymru** – authorizing Welsh hymns/songs including e.g. Hillsong
e. **Cristnogaeth.cymru** - information about organizations and denominations - to find out more about Christianity about churches, chapels and contemporary church organizations and information about dementia, agriculture, humanitarian organizations etc.
Information on FCCW was requested. The resources represent everything to do with Christianity in Wales today. It was asked if it would be possible to have such resources in English and if Cytûn would be willing to finance this. It was said that no specific Fund was available from any body to fund this.

iii. Future work – next 2 years.
a. The work will continue and the main development will be to help churches connect with local schools. Aled explained that it is regrettable that children in our communities are missing out on this provision as they are not part of a faith community. The link would help connect people / churches with schools.
b. The Christian Education Movement closed during the Summer. A sum of money was presented to the Sunday School Council in order to introduce Christianity in schools. A document on Connecting Church and School by Vaughan Salisbury already exists and is valuable.
Aled was thanked for his energy in working for the Sunday School Council since 1989 and has never accepted or asked for a sabbatical period. Aled will take a well-deserved Sabbatical from September until November 2025.

The Honorary President, Elizabeth James, recently passed away and the new Honorary President is Rheinallt Thomas. He was wished well.
Peter proposed and Eirian Wyn seconded that we send information about FCCW to Aled. Everyone agreed. It will be discussed at the next meeting in May.

Action point: Discuss the content of an article about FCCW to send to SSC at the May meeting. Aled left the meeting to go to the Cytûn meeting.

2. Education
There was no report. It was understood that there was no nomination from PCW at the moment to fill the role vacated by Vaughan Salisbury.

3. Treasurer's Report Martin Spain circulated a report before the meeting
1. In his presentation the Treasurer mentioned that if someone wanted information from him to contact him. There is a link on "One Drive" and details of costs and travel could be sent direct to him.
2. As the Treasurer is the only one who can sign checks at the moment, he stated that he would be happier to have a second signatory and he is waiting for the Bank to add the Secretary's name. He said that the former President could also sign if necessary.
3. It will be necessary to pay the cost of being a member of the Interfaith Council of Wales this year over the last 3 years - £150, this is due to a technical problem with the Bank. The President is the representative of the committee on this organization.
4. The Treasurer's report was received.

4. Denominations

Baptist Union of Wales Eirian Wyn on behalf of Judith Morris

1. Annual Conferences - The Welsh section of the Baptist Union was held in Croesgoch, Pembrokeshire in June when the Reverend Geraint Morse was inaugurated as the President. There was a lovely balance between the formal meetings and the opportunities to socialise.
2. Momentum: In addition, the joint Momentum meeting with the South Wales Baptist Association, Baptist College of Wales and the BMS held at the Halliwell Centre in June attracted around 200 people. Reverend Maggie Rich was inaugurated as President of the non-Welsh Section in Sarn in July.
3. 2025 Conferences: Preparations are underway for the 2025 Annual Conferences. Meetings of the Welsh Section will be held in London, Momentum in Carmarthen and the business meeting of the non-Welsh Section in Sandy Hill, Pembrokeshire.
4. Christian Aid Appeal - The Appeal continues and a Walking Challenge was held which was to walk the length of Wales and Zimbabwe, a distance of 750 miles. Several Churches took part and we succeeded in reaching the goal and now we hope that the Churches will contribute generously to this important appeal.
5. Future Requirements - The work of responding to the needs of the future continues and we are proceeding with the work in partnership with the Assemblies to establish Regional CIO's in order to assist the Churches, the Assemblies and the Union to respond to the missionary challenges we face. A number of positive consultative meetings were held during the year.
6. Cardiff Baptist College - We are very proud of the opportunity to collaborate in partnership with the Union of Welsh Independents, the Presbyterian Church of Wales and Cardiff Baptist College to ensure Welsh language provision for our ministerial students. This has been a wonderful example of collaboration and we look forward to seeing the Welsh language provision at the College increase and go from strength to strength.
7. Cennad - Another example of collaboration is the partnership that exists between the Baptist Union of Wales and the Presbyterian Church of Wales in relation to the publication which appears weekly on the web.
8. Esgyn - A weekend for children and young people was held earlier this year at the Rock Centre, Treharris and another is planned for next weekend. This has been a good venture to offer opportunities to Churches where perhaps only one or two children/young people meet and for them to be part of something bigger and to meet children/young people of the same age who are in a similar situation. This work has been extremely encouraging not only because of the positive response and support from the Church and Assemblies but because the activities are bilingual.

Assisted dying- At a meeting of the BUW United Council held last week, it was agreed to share the following statement in relation to the 'Help to Die' debate:
The United Council of the Baptist Union of Wales calls on all UBC churches to pray for the discussions that are currently being held in Westminster in relation to the 'Help to Die' debate. We recognize that this issue is a difficult and sensitive one and elicits very different responses from Christians across the country. We therefore beg our Churches to pray deeply for our political representatives who will ultimately have to decide

whether the right to provide aid to die should be granted or not. We pray that the Members of Parliament will listen carefully to each voice and that God will bless the debate with his wisdom and guidance.

Union of Welsh Independents. Gareth Morgan Jones

1. Annual Meetings: This was held at the University College of South Wales, Treforest in July with the Reverend Jeff Williams starting the second year of his Presidency and he gave a powerful, contemporary address from the Chair. The 2025 meeting will be in Nant Gwrtheyrn and the Reverend Owain Llŷr Evans will ascend to the Presidency.
2. Survey: It has taken place recently on the current history of the churches and 3 points were reported about the churches: 1. Tired 2. Lack of theology 3. Too ready to look back to the past.
3. Living Wells Appeal: This raises money for Colombia and runs until the end of the year.
4. Y Tyst: The members are pleased to receive it but there is no decision yet to place it on the web.
5. Carwyn Siddall: Reverend Carwyn Siddall is now organizing the training of church leaders. These are people who perhaps lead their churches and/or are assistant preachers.
6. Candidate: Sian Meinir from Penarth has presented herself for the ministry.

NOTE: The Union of Welsh Independents are delighted to announce that the Reverend Jill-Hailey Harries has been appointed as the Union Charity and Property Officer.

Methodists Ian Morris
1. There has been a reduction in membership. The church is very proud of its progress in working towards being an Eco Church. The intention is to be an Eco denomination by 2032 similar to the United Reformed church. The Synod has passed this.
2. The denomination believes it is important to support ordained ministers and lay ministers.
3. There is a plan to share ministry in mid Wales where small churches of all denominations are scattered.
4. The Vulnerable Care Policy is being revised.
5. There is no expenditure on buildings but a new mission could be started as a way forward to attract new people. There is already one in North Wales where people who learn Welsh come together to practice the language in a Welsh Christian atmosphere. A simpler version now exists to celebrate Communion which helps learners to follow.
6. In Bridgend, Rachel Weaver contacts people who are members of churches and offers to hold services in the Welsh language in order to draw them back to worship again. It was mentioned that if there was no Welsh language provision in the area, services could be held to use the language. It is hoped to follow John Miller's format - "Church Without Walls" - an idea that uses cafes, social communities but not church buildings.

Presbyterian Church in Wales Hedd Wyn Morgan
1. It was reported that as a denomination they are in a period of transition. Several meetings were postponed due to the older membership wanting to be released from their duties and the need for younger blood to replace.
2. Coleg Bala – is funded and does good work with youth. An age-old question for the denomination like all others is how youth can be connected with chapels. The chapels need to change their way of operating. There are examples of new chapels starting but it is difficult to bridge between the old and the new.
3. The denomination is having difficulty filling vacancies - 6 Welsh speaking vacancies need to be filled at the moment. The care of buildings is a problem and the church cannot get the local Councils to assist.
4. Training has moved to the Baptist College, Cardiff and the denomination is very grateful for the new Welsh courses offered. Bringing in a new ministry requires flexibility. Despite the challenges it is an exciting time when looking to the future.

United Reformed Church Simon Walkling

1. A Review continues into church life The denomination shares resources between the churches that are in wealthy areas and those that are in poor, disadvantaged areas.
2. The pressure of conformity within the denomination is being relaxed so that others can share their mission.
3. The Council of World Mission is trying to find a way to respond to the problem of slavery in the past.

Congregational Federation Martin Spain

1. The Federation is looking for an Ecumenical Minister for a period of 7 years to look after projects. **2.** The denomination is keen to have a Minister present in mid Wales and this may mean consulting with the PCW and the Baptists in the area. There is a good example of collaboration in Brecon with the "Plough" chapel

and the Baptists, where 7/8 churches are scattered. There are other arrangements in the Cwm Camlas area which is part of the pastorate of the Brecon Beacons and there, a husband and wife share Ministry.
3. There is a change of representatives to the Council of Free Churches in Wales. Anthony Batterton who is originally from the United States and is a minister at Tabernacle, Haverfordwest, has taken over from Dawn and Brendan Mason.
4. Within projects there are successes and struggles. The Congregational Federation trains their own Ministers by following a "Congregational Institute of Practical Theology" course. The Federation would like to have a discussion about the way forward with the Baptist College, Cardiff for the ministry in Wales. The Institute is run as a Trust.

The Salvation Army Kathryn Stowers

1. Celebrations of 150 years of their work in Wales have been taking place. There are 2 new officers in Cardiff and St Asaph. The Army is looking for new places to show their presence but the areas of the country tend to be isolated. The Army was at the Royal Welsh Show in Llanelwedd in the Summer and at the National Eisteddfod in August.
2. There has been a change in leadership in Wales - Jonathan Roberts is the Chief Ecumenical executive. He has worked in a similar position in England. His experience is valuable to the requirements in Wales.
3. Assisted Dying - the Army went through a process in the Isle of Man and is looking at what happens in Scotland. They are looking at the need in England and Wales. They are aware that everyone has a voice.
4. The Salvation Army is trying to recruit a new officer in west Wales The current membership is older and they are looking at the process of their presence in Ammanford as they are aware of the need of Youth in the town especially after the sad incident at the Comprehensive School in the Spring.
5. Officers are in Tenby and are now looking to see what is happening on the West side of Pembroke. The Army is trying to recruit for the "Starfish" programme and for mentoring in the schools. They hope to employ an officer in Gwent before long. There is pressure on the centres and where there have been 24 officers 7 who have come to assist them and 5 are new this year.
6. The Salvation Army offers a different ministry.

The President thanked all the denominations for their reports. The opportunity to share what is happening with everyone was appreciated.

Free Churches Group Paul Rochester

1. Paul encouraged the churches to do more together and tackle issues instead of being separate and independent. He expressed that more could be achieved together rather than separately.
2. Education - In England, there is a review of the religious education Curriculum. The Free Churches Group supports the review but shows concern about the right to withdraw a child from lessons. The Curriculum has changed in Wales and Religious Education has been integrated into Religion, Values and Ethics and therefore the withdrawal of lessons cannot happen.
3. Prison - Lord Timpson is the Government's Prison, Parole and Rehabilitation Minister. He supports prisons that offer educational courses so that a prisoner could offer work after spending time in prison. The Welcome Directory supports this. The churches are also considering following and supporting reform.
4. New denominations - "Vineyard" and the "Redeemed Church of God" are now members of the group. There are currently 28 denominations belonging to FCG. The Vineyard does not have the problems of decline in their churches like the traditional denominations and it is hoped that insight will be gained which will be beneficial and ideas shared in the future.
5. Assisted Dying. The Secretary will send out a letter prepared and in the name of FCG signed by Archbishops and included Dr Helen Cameron, current President FCG. It deals with vulnerable people and the sanctity of life.

10. AOB
Rev Peter Dewi Richards was thanked for his service to the Council after he informed the meeting that this was his last meeting. He was Secretary of the BUW, Secretary and President of FCCW. The President thanked him for his work throughout the years.

Date of next meeting Tuesday, 13 May 2025.

The grace was shared to end the meeting.
The meeting finished at 1.00pm and there was time to socialize over lunch. (HMJ)