

## NORTHERN AREA COUNCIL

### Minute of meeting of Saturday 30 September 2006 held in Nairn United Reformed Church.

**Present:** **Fraserburgh URC** Rev S Brown; Miss W Sinclair; Mr A Sinclair  
**Kirk of St Nicholas** Mr T Forrest; Dr J Merrilees  
**Nairn URC** Rev T Heggie; Mr B Walker; Miss A Quinn  
**Peedie Kirk URC** Mrs H Muir  
**Thurso URC** Rev K Ofstad; Mr R Bolton; Mrs E Mathers  
(Mrs C Bolton observer)

**Synod of Scotland** Rev JL Humphreys, Synod Moderator

**Apologies:** Rev J Muir (Peedie Kirk URC); Rev S Taylor (Kirk of St Nicholas);  
Mr S Ranscombe (Nairn URC); Mr D Bain (Peedie Kirk URC);  
Mrs F Blagden (Thurso URC); Mrs I Reid (Kirk of St Nicholas)

**Welcome & Devotions** Rev S Brown led devotions with a reflection on 1 Kings 9 before leading the singing of his hymn *The scent of forever is sensed in a pebble.*

Rev Brown then explained the thinking behind the 'new look' agenda, namely, that all the business of Area Council should be conducted in the light of the churches' own stories, joys, concerns and issues. We would, therefore, be spending the first part of the meeting sharing news and concerns from each of the churches.

**Minute of Meeting held 22 April 2006:** Approved

#### **Matters Arising:**

- 1. Good Practice:** review of current situation in each of the 5 churches.
  - **Thurso:** all the deacons have Enhanced Disclosures, as do all those who work with children and young people. There are some new names who will be given disclosure forms to submit before Christmas.
  - **Nairn:** not all deacons have disclosures, but anyone within the church whose job descriptions require disclosures are processed. Two people from within the congregation are responsible to ensure that all procedures are followed professionally. The URC at Nairn have entered their own negotiations with CRBS - this means that they do not go through the Churches' Agency for Safeguarding (CAS) in London. One agreement reached by Nairn URC with the CRBS is that disclosures will last 5 years rather than being renewed annually. CRBS regularly do training to explain new procedures. CRBS can now turn an application round in two weeks. Another important agreement with CRBS is that one Disclosure will now cover several roles, rather than people needing to go through the procedure for each single role they play. This agreement is not only for the URC but for all the churches in Nairn.
  - **Aberdeen:** Progress is being made. Elders require to be disclosed. The CoS Presbytery runs training for churches.
  - **Kirkwall:** the process is ongoing and every effort is being made to meet requirements.

- **Fraserburgh:** the necessary effort has not been made to ensure that all those who need disclosures are being processed. The church is lagging behind the others in the Northern Area.

Nairn URC's procedures and the way in which they are carried out impressed the others attending the meeting. A request was made, that the procedures be summarised and circulated to the other churches. The need to renew disclosures, and when, was not specified on forms received through the central clearing office in London. This needs to be clarified, urgently. Nairn URC's negotiations with CRBS show that there is ambiguity for the rest of us in several areas.

Rev Humphreys pointed out that for those who still see no reason why there is a need to comply with disclosure requirements, the issue is that not only are they legal requirements, but the whole process is as much about protecting church people involved with vulnerable groups as to protect those with whom we work.

A letter from Stewart Cutler would shortly be sent to all churches in the Synod with important update information on Child Protection procedures.

2. **Section O representation:** finding another representative from Northern Area will no longer be necessary in view of restructuring. 12 people are required for the mandated Synod group, and 12 people have already been found.

## **Business 1 MISSION: Church Life**

### **Aberdeen**

The Kirk of St Nicholas, Uniting is living through exciting times. 600 skeletons have been uncovered – there are potentially 800 – in the careful work done to excavate the East Kirk. The burials were done from the 11<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> century. The analysis of the remains has found interesting medical conditions. The dig has uncovered a sacristy and the remains of five churches, the earliest from about 1020, before the Norman Conquest. Another interesting discovery has been that the fire of 1835 did not completely destroy the East Kirk, as had been previously thought. The dig will continue and plans to finish by Christmas. This means that building work can start, as planned, in January.

The excavated remains will receive a proper burial within the Kirk in about 2 years.

#### **Funding News:**

£2.7 million of the total project cost of £5.1 million has now been raised. The difficult decision must now be whether to borrow in order to proceed with the project, or to wait and watch costs spiral. The focus now needs to be on corporate fundraising, and whether to employ professionals to do that. 'Friends of St. Nicholas' association has been revived. A special tartan for the Kirk of St Nicholas has just been launched.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has promised £430,000 – the application was so good it passed without needing revision. BAA donated £10,000 for new kitchen facilities. And the local BAA group donated £600 for new information boards.

#### **Publicity:**

There have been five very successful Open Days for the Archaeological Dig, with extra tours of the dig having to be added to the projected number.

Also, the Doors Open days have been successful – these were days when the public could have tours round the whole church, including the gallery of the East Kirk to see some of the

excavations. As only 70 people could be allowed in the East Kirk gallery at a time, busy days meant having to stagger groups. One day eleven tours were conducted round the church!

#### The Congregation:

Rev Brown asked how all this upheaval is affecting the life of the congregation? As in all church life, there is both support and grumbling. Those who are finding it difficult were not helped by some inappropriate publicity from the excavations. With reference to the ongoing life of the church, Dr Merrilees reported that worship continues to be of a high quality and the Kirk continues to seek to ensure fully rounded and focussed ministry in all its aspects.

#### Fraserburgh

The meetings with the extended church family and all its connections to discuss the life of the church had now been held. Some evenings had been very successful both in terms of attendance and participation, other less so. The good thing is that folk were able to speak about issues which concerned them. Some were relatively minor, but others were more substantial. The contribution from Fraserburgh at Synod was appreciated; it was one of the stories in the series presented by the Intentional Church Focus Group.

The Harvest celebrations had been extended over the whole weekend. There had been Open House and a pot-luck harvest supper. Attendance at the Harvest Service had filled the church to capacity! Personal invitations and an article in the local press had helped to encourage participation in the events of the weekend.

One aspect of the church life in Fraserburgh URC was particularly mentioned; that of the wider social life of the church – folk meeting as friends and going out together socially.

#### Kirkwall

Peedie Kirk continues to claim a strong place in the community of Orkney, over and above its size. Rev Muir has unofficially become the minister for the whole community. Individual members of the URC are very active in the wider life of the community through their participation in groups and organisations outwith the life of the church.

Peedie Kirk has been able to pay for the new roof (£30,000) out of funds. The contractor owns his own scaffolding; this saved a substantial amount of money. Other work that is pending: proper disabled access and new toilets.

Peedie Kirk will celebrate its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in December. There will be a Celebration! The congregation continue to be a close and happy church family with aspirations for the future.

#### Nairn

##### Buildings:

By next August all debt connected with the extension and improvements to the building will be cleared (£350,000 had been spent). Next project: redoing the lighting and restructuring the front in the main church. The lights need redoing because the insurance company were not willing to cover potential accidents which might happen when bulbs were being changed on the present lights. The Health & Safety Officer from the insurance company had come and spent many hours doing a risk assessment – changing bulbs on the church lights had been assessed as too risky.

### Mission:

A very successful Mission Day had been held, with input from Hungary (John Humphreys), Bangladesh (Tim Huc) and Brazil. Commitment for Life and Fairtrade made an important 'frame' for the programme of the day.

75 invitations had been sent out to a cross-section of partners in the community to attend a consultation facilitated by the new Field Officer for the Synod, Rev Jan Adamson. The theme of the consultation: 'Being Church'; the task: to make a strategic plan for the future. In order to ensure that momentum is sustained, Rev Adamson will come back every 3 months to audit progress.

Rev Heggie made the comment that there needed to be a more coherent strategy for relating to Synod Officers. Nairn URC had realised that they were relating to the Youth & Children's Work Development Officer, Stewart Cutler, separately from Rev Adamson. This might not be helpful in the long run. Might it be better to have one of the Synod Officers as the 'primary' contact person?

### Thurso

There are two aspects to Thurso URC's intentional agenda.

#### Building

One is related to a major assessment of buildings. The present accommodation is not meeting present needs, let alone any future requirements, so a restructuring is necessary. The big question facing the congregation is whether to stay independent and raise funds to achieve the basic needs, or to go into partnership with appropriate local organisations and go for a more substantial shared project which will allow for joint applications for much larger funding. The next stage, about to start, will be an audit ('options appraisal') of other community venues in Thurso and collating information about local voluntary and statutory groups and their unmet need for accommodation.

#### Talking together about our faith

A series tackling issues submitted by individuals under the umbrella title *Challenges to Faith* is about to start – one evening a month. By addressing questions that people struggle with, conversations about the faith can open up to wider discussion about sharing that faith with others.

### Shared concerns

1. A general discussion on issues of Health & Safety, Fire Regulations and risk assessments was held. For the latest fire regulations, the advice was: google 'Fire Regulations Scotland 2006'. For insurance purposes, the advice was: ask the insurance company to send their health & safety officer to inspect the buildings.
2. Message from Rev Jan Adamson: she is happy to spend two weeks visiting the Northern Area and offers the following dates:  
either  
2 weeks from 19 February 2007  
or  
2 weeks from 26 February 2007.

She would then make every effort to attend the next Area Council Meeting in order to reflect with us how best she and the Synod can help each of the churches plan for the future. The process is already well underway in Nairn.

**Moderator's Response** Rev Humphreys' opening comment was to remind Council members how important it was to report back from Synod and Area Council to Elders/Deacons and Church Meetings.

1. Health & Safety: Synod may be able to advise on health & safety issues.
2. Reminder that members of the Synod Team would be visiting each of the congregations in the Northern Area Council as part of the **Towards Tomorrow Roadshow**.
  - 9/11 Fraserburgh
  - 13/11 Aberdeen
  - 16/11 Nairn
  - 28/11 Thurso
  - 29/11 Kirkwall
3. Rev Ofstad asked the Moderator whether the meeting so far had been useful as a model for future Link Meetings at Synod. Rev Humphreys responded that one main focus at Link meetings was to share as we had been doing. The other two important tasks would be
  - a) to encourage input to the Synod Meeting by reviewing the agenda from a Link perspective. A wider range of voices need to be heard at Synod.
  - b) to plan common strategy and fellowship for the next 12 months.

**SYNOD DAY** 23 June 2007, Perth Racecourse. This is an important day! Churches should be booking coaches as soon as possible and encouraging people to come. The programme will include something for everyone, including children. The issue of Synod subsidies for churches travel was raised and referred to the Finance & property Committee.

## **Business 2: MISSION: Reports**

### **General Assembly 2006 - Exeter**

Dr Merrilees said that it had been a good Assembly. However, accommodation had been spread over a wide area and many people had spent far too much time getting to and from their accommodation.

Lawrence Moore (Director of Windermere Centre) had led excellent Bible Studies.

### **Synod**

- Stewart Cutler's Bible studies were very well received.
- Lawrence Moore spoke (with great illustrations) on Emerging Church Life, challenging both complacency and despondency about our life as church.
- Rev Jan Adamson was inducted to her new post as Field Officer for Local Mission & Development.
- Peter Ranscombe announced that SynNEWS is getting a 'new look'.
- The Ecumenical Policy for the National Synod of Scotland was accepted.
- Thank you!

- To Carol Rodgers whose retirement was imminent. She was presented with a gift and thanked for her great service in providing a bookstall at every residential Synod.
- To Alan Paterson, for his groundbreaking and inspirational leadership of the Church & Society Committee.
- There were four workshops: Human Sexuality; CRCW's and the work they do; Emerging Church Life; Consensus Decision Making. Everyone had the opportunity to attend all the workshops.
- Sannox: decisions about the Sannox Centre were deferred until the March Synod. More information is needed before responsible decisions can be made.
- **CUBA: contribution to be made from Synod to our partner church in Cuba for their printing press/publishing house.** This is of particular relevance to Northern Area, as we hosted the visitors from Cuba last May.

## PPS

Dr Merrilees reported that the agenda for the PPS meeting on 21/10/2006 would be very 'administrative'. Items on the agenda included

- Preparing for the new synod structures
- Intentional Church
- Synod Day
- General Assembly resolutions
- Follow-up from Synod workshops

## Other Committees

There were no reports to Area Council from the representatives to Education, Mission & Ecumenical, Church & Society or Pastoral Committees. Recent work of all these committees were detailed in the Synod Reports.

Rev Ofstad reported that she had made every effort to see Committee convenors and secretaries whilst at Synod. It was difficult to see how issues surrounding meeting times of synod committees to meet Northern Area travel times could be resolved. The new structures, which will include an annual residential meeting of all synod committees will be of considerable help. Pastoral Committee, however, is the key committee and will be meeting regularly throughout the year. Every effort must be made to ensure Northern Link participation. Rev Ofstad will correspond with the convenor of Pastoral Committee on behalf of Northern Area Council.

## Moderator

Rev Humphreys had two things to communicate:

1. For information – Rev Hutton Steel (CoS) has been inducted to Paisley Oakshaw Trinity.
2. A reminder of the Autumn Roadshows *Towards Tomorrow*.

## **Business 3: RESTRUCTURING**

- The meeting in March/April will be the final meeting of the Northern Area Council before the new structure is initiated in Summer 2007.

- The need for some sort of valediction was brought up, and also the need to ensure our continuing relationship within the churches 'up North', were identified as key agenda items for the spring meeting.
- Mrs Mathers made a plea that we must make sure that we don't lose what we've got.
- Mrs Muir hoped that the new Link would be a 'moveable' one – i.e. that there would be events/meetings/training etc arranged in different churches.
- Mr Walker pointed out that there would be new opportunities in the new Link to get deeper and wider co-operation between the churches, for example between treasurers, church secretaries, youth workers, Sunday School teachers and deacons as well as larger inter-church events.
- Miss Quinn hoped that there would Link Weekends and Link Open Days.
- **Link representatives on the Synod Pastoral Committee, and the forming of the Link Pastoral Group is top of the priority list. Suggestions for good people should be given to the Synod Nominations Group.**

#### **Business 4: GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS**

Dr Merrilees had prepared a list of all the resolutions put to General Assembly. Of these, the following have been referred to Area/District Councils and churches.

- Resolution 9: *Amendments to the Structure in relation to the Section O Process* requires concurrence of District/Area Council. This is a technicality. Mr Walker proposed, and Mr Sinclair seconded, that Northern Area Council give concurrence to resolution 9. Passed unanimously.
- Resolution 15: *General Assembly notes the clarification of and alterations to the advice concerning Charity Trusts given to the General Assembly in 2001 and 2004 and asks synods, synod trust companies, district councils/area meetings and local churches to ensure that all are aware of their responsibilities.* This resolution does not affect our Area Council.
- Resolution 17: *General Assembly adopts the Report 'Peacemaking: A Christian Vocation' and commends it for study by Synods and local congregations, and as a helpful guide for church leaders who may be called upon for comment on the ethical considerations relating to war and peace.*
- Resolution 18: *General Assembly commends the leaflet on Church Magazines to all local congregations.*

#### **Business 5: MAINTENANCE**

##### **Finance & Property Committee**

Mr Walker introduced his report by saying that there is a need to look at how things are done. There has not been enough communication between this committee and local churches.

In preparation for regular surveys on all church buildings, three pilot surveys had been carried out by DM Hall at the committee's request. One of those surveys had been at Thurso URC. The church paid £250 and the Finance & Property Committee paid the balance. Rev Ofstad reported that the survey had been thorough and useful.

## **Northern Area Council Finance**

Mr Walker presented the accounts.

- The balance of the current account: £711.67.
- The balance of the Northern Association Account: £2000

Dr Merrilees gave some background history to the Northern Association Account. In preparation for the new synod structures, the following resolution was put:

*That the Northern Association Account be wound up with immediate effect and funds held be transferred to Northern Area Council funds.*

This resolution was passed unanimously.

Mr Walker suggested that he investigate transferring the current account to another bank with a better return. This was agreed.

## **ACOB**

Dr Merrilees raised the following:

- A successor to replace Tom Woodbridge as Synod Treasurer has yet to be found. Members of Area Council were asked to think whether there was anyone in their church who may be suitable.
- Church & Society Committee and Pastoral Committee are looking for new Convenors. Because of the complexity and significance of its work, Pastoral Committee needs to find a new convenor soon, to work alongside Rev David Pattie until he relinquishes the post. Again, members of Area Council were asked to think whether they know of anyone suitable.
- Youth representation on all Synod Committees; this point had been made strongly at Synod.

## **Date of Next Meeting**

31/03/2007 was proposed and agreed.

There was also agreement that a date should be set for the first Link event. A Link Open Day was proposed and the date 29/09/2007 was agreed. Planning ahead for the Open Day would be an important item on the agenda in March.

**Benediction:** The meeting ended with all saying the Grace together.