

General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Notes of the Annual Meeting of the General Assembly held on 24 April 2021 by videoconference

The ninety-second Annual Meeting of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches was held on 24 April 2021 by videoconference, due to the Covid pandemic. Rev Celia Cartwright, President of the General Assembly, was in the chair for the business sessions, assisted by Elizabeth Slade, Chief Officer of the General Assembly.

Session 1

The first session commenced at 11.00 with an opening welcome from Celia Cartwright, President, and the lighting of the Chalice.

An explanation of the online voting system, including a practice vote, was held, to allow voting delegates to adjust to the requirement for online voting this year.

The Standing Orders for the Conduct of Business, as set out in the advance document, were adopted. The Steering Committee members, Daniel Costley, Ann Sinclair & Alison Thursfield, were confirmed.

Six ordinary motions had been submitted. For the first time, a vote was taken on which four ordinary motions would be presented to the Meetings for consideration. In the order presented on the Motions sheet, the four motions accepted for consideration were: Fossil Fuel Divestment (Cardiff Unitarian); Provision for Young Unitarians (Stockton Unitarians); Code of Ethics (Findhorn); and Interfaith Memorial Red Cross Appeal (London District, Peace Fellowship and 12 Full Members). The following were not selected for consideration this year: Alcohol Misuse (Kendal) Transgender Rights (Foy Society). The selected motions were relabelled A-D and inserted into the agenda in the slots provided.

The Annual Report and Annual Accounts 2019/2020 were introduced by Liz Slade. The report and Accounts were approved.

Motion 4 to receive and adopt the Annual Report and Accounts was passed.

Motion 5 to appoint James Cowper Kreston LLP as auditors was passed.

Motion 6 to appoint Peter Hanley as Honorary Treasurer 2021-2022 was passed

Motion 7 to thank Peter Hanley and district and local officers was passed.

The Thanks to Retiring Ministers, and Welcome to New Ministers, which normally takes place during the Anniversary Service, were given at this point. The following were thanked and welcomed:

Retiring Ministers thanked for their service: Rev Brenda Catherall; Rev Nicky Jenkins; Rev Alan Kennedy; Rev Tom McCready; Rev Sarah Tinker.

Ministers welcomed to the Roll with Probationary Status: Rev Michael Allured; Rev Stephanie Bisby; Rev Melda Grantham.

Ministers welcomed to the Roll with Full Status: Rev Mark Hutchinson; Rev Maria Pap; Rev Andy Philips; Rev Duncan Voice.

These Ministers would also be thanked and welcomed at the next in-person Meetings.

Session 2

The second session started at 12:20. Opening devotions from Michael Allured, which were being given live, had to be cancelled due to local technical issues.

The President gave a short outline of the purpose of motions, for those who had not attended the Meetings before.

Motion A, the Findhorn Unitarians' motion on a Code of Ethics, Proposed by Ralph Catts and Seconded by Leslie Schipa, was passed. The meeting then broke for Lunch.

Session 3

The third session started at 13:45. Opening devotions were offered by Rev Sue Woolley.

Motion B, the Cardiff Unitarians' motion on Fossil Fuel Divestment, Proposed by Stephen Lingwood and Seconded by Sarah Boyce, was passed.

The report of the Stipend Review Committee was presented by the Honorary Treasurer, who thanked all those who had contributed feedback. The report was adopted.

Motion C, the Stockton Unitarians' motion on Provision for Young Unitarians, Proposed by Hazel Warhurst and Seconded by Margaret Robinson, was passed.

Marion Baker conducted a short handover ceremony following the Executive Committee Elections. She thanked Sir Philip Colfox, Peter Hanley, Lynne Readett and Matthew Smith, who had served on the EC; and the four new members; Rev Celia Cartwright, Simon Hall, Jenny Jacobs and Rev Jo James; as well as those who were continuing.

Session 4

The fourth session started at 15:25. Opening devotions were offered by Rev Stephanie Bisby.

Motion D, from the London District, Peace Fellowship and 12 Full Members, Proposed by Rev Feargus O'Connor and Seconded by Rev John Carter, was passed.

Motion 11 to send greetings to kindred churches and societies abroad was passed.

Motion 12 to thank Staff and Volunteers for help with organising the Meetings was passed.

Motion 13 to appoint Anne Mills as President of the GA for the year 2021-2022 was passed. Anne was formally installed as President, and addressed the Meeting. Anne then took over as Chair of the Meeting.

Motion 14 to appoint Rev Sue Woolley as Vice-President of the GA for the year 2021-2022 was passed.

Motion 15 to thank the outgoing President, Rev Celia Cartwright, for serving between 2019 and 2021 was passed.

Motion 16 to thank Anne Mills and Rev Sue Woolley for working as a Presidential Team during 2020 and 2021 was passed.

Motion 17, to express empathy to all churches and members for the loss of loved ones during the pandemic was passed.

The new President conducted a closing act of worship and declared the Meetings closed.

Resolutions

The text of the Resolutions was circulated and also published in the Annual Report.