

General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Notes of the Annual Meeting of the General Assembly held from 4 – 6 April 2023 at Staverton Park Hotel, Daventry

The ninety-fourth Annual Meeting of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches was held from 4-6 April 2023 at Staverton Park Hotel. Rev Sue Woolley, President of the General Assembly, was in the chair for the business sessions, assisted by Elizabeth Slade, Chief Officer of the General Assembly.

Tuesday 04 April

The first plenary session commenced with an opening welcome from Rev Sue Woolley, President, and the lighting of the Chalice.

The Standing Orders for the Conduct of Business, as set out in document AGM 5/23 were adopted. The Steering Committee members – Daniel Costley, Angela Maher and Lynne Readett – were confirmed.

Gavin Howell, our Youth Coordinator and Safeguarding Officer, discussed our expectations for being together over the Meetings, set the scene and gave information about how to deal with any safeguarding concerns.

The Chief Officer gave a report on the current status and context of the General Assembly, including the recent census results for England and Wales that reported a rise in the number of people identifying as non-religious. She also drew attention to research showing the rise in 'climate anxiety' particularly in young people, and how we can support them in our congregations.

The Nightingale Centre report was presented by Michael Tracey. It had been another successful year. Thanks were given to retiring Treasurer Colin Partington, and tributes were presented to former Treasurers Martin West and Michael Tomlin, both of whom had passed away in recent months.

David Warhurst reported on the 2023 Executive Committee (EC) election, on behalf of the Electoral Panel. John Bates and Wyn Thomas had been elected unopposed. It was hoped that the next election would be contested, and people were encouraged to stand for the EC at the next election.

GA Staff Members Simon Bland (Ministry & Congregational Support Officer) and Rory Castle Jones (Communications Officer), reported on their work during the year and future plans. This included the Congregational Toolkit, new activity on Lindsey Press books and youth activities.

For the Keynote Address, Jon Alexander, co-founder of the New Citizenship Project, was interviewed by Elizabeth Slade on the work in his book "*Citizens: Why the Key to Fixing Everything is All of Us*", with further questions from the attenders.

Wednesday 05 April

The second plenary session commenced with opening reflections led by Rev John Carter.

The Annual Report and Annual Accounts 2021/2022 were introduced by Elizabeth Slade, who presented and recapped the Annual Report, and key priorities for the year.

The Honorary Treasurer, Rev Dr Rob Whiteman gave an update on the GA's finances and reported that he was unable to present the final Annual Accounts 2021/22 because of delays in the audit process outside of the GA's control.

Motion 1 to allow electronic participation in meetings was passed.

Motion 2 to receive and adopt the Annual Report and Accounts was passed.

Motion 3 to appoint Shaw Gibbs as auditors was passed.

Motion 4 to appoint Rev Dr Rob Whiteman as Honorary Treasurer 2023-2024 was passed.

Motion 5 to thank Rev Dr Rob Whiteman and district and local officers was passed.

GA Staff Member Ann Howell reported on Social Action.

The Inquirer Board gave a presentation on the future of The Inquirer.

The third plenary session commenced with opening reflections led by Rev Mark Hutchinson.

An emergency motion from 12 full members was received on the Illegal Migration Bill, and was passed.

GA Staff Member Lizzie Kingston Harrison (Congregational Connections Lead), presented on Congregational Connections. A demonstration of the new Worship Words website was given, and videos on the LGBT+ Project from Rev Dr Ann Peart, Derek McAuley and Rev Jeff Gould were shown.

A Handover Ceremony was held for the EC. New members John Bates and Wyn Thomas were welcomed. Elizabeth Slade gave words of thanks for Marion Baker, at the end of her term on the EC and as Convenor, and the other retiring members, Hilda Dumbleton and Robert Ince, were thanked in their absence.

The Anniversary Service, led by Revs Kate Dean and Stephanie Bisby, with Rev Winnie Gordon as Preacher, took place in the evening. Julio Torres was formally accepted onto the GA Roll of Ministers.

Thursday 6 April

The fourth plenary session commenced with opening reflections led by Rev Jim Corrigan.

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

A video advertising the 'FUSE' weekend based in the South-East was shown.

The fifth and closing plenary session commenced.

Motions 6 (giving greetings overseas) and 7 (thanking the Volunteers and GA Staff) were passed. Rev Sue Woolley delivered the Presidential Address. Motion 8 to appoint Vince McCully as President of the General Assembly for the year 2023-2024, was proposed by the President, seconded by Rev Laura Dobson, and passed. The installation of the new President took place, and the new President addressed the Meetings. Motion 9 to appoint Prof Geoff Levermore as Vice President of the General Assembly for the year 2023-2024, was passed. Motion 10 to thank the outgoing President was passed.

A closing act of worship took place, led by Vince McCully and Rev Laura Dobson, and the President declared the Meetings closed.

Resolutions

Once passed, Motions become Resolutions. The text of all of the Resolutions passed was circulated after the Meetings, published in the following Annual Report, and made available on the GA website.