

## **Progressive Christianity Network – Britain**

### **Residential Management Committee at Guy Chester House, London**

**20th-21st November 2010**

#### **Minutes**

**Present:** Adrian Alker, Sonya Brown, John Churcher (chair), Terence Cooper (treasurer), Sandra Griffiths, Ian McAllister, Mary McMahon, (vice chair), Angela Smith, Richard Tetlow

**In attendance:** Andy Vivian, (admin assistant)

#### **1. Apologies and welcome to new members**

Anne Padget, Philip Goodwin & Paul Onslow sent their apologies. JC welcomed Ian McAllister, a newly co-opted member of the committee and also Richard Tetlow, who was voted in at the last AGM. IM is to serve as Honorary Secretary

#### **2. Notification of AOB**

Under item 5, RT will report on preparation for the West Midland interfaith conference. Under item 7, MM will report on developments in Aberdeen

#### **3. Minutes of Sept 25<sup>th</sup> MC at St James Piccadilly.**

These were accepted and signed.

#### **4. Matters Arising**

##### **4.1. Spong Tour 2011**

A letter from Christine Spong was discussed. It was felt that PCN had kept its commitment to the Spongs. TC would write to her. **[Action TC]**

##### **4.2. Borg CDs**

AV reported that 87 copies of the Borg CDs had been sold and that Chris Avis had been paid a £50 royalty. It was agreed that 50 more CD sets should be ordered. **[Action AV]**

##### **4.3. Ian Lawton tour 2011**

JC reported that the Ian Lawton tour in 2011 was not yet certain. There was a need to circulate notice of his availability more widely. **[Action JC]**

##### **4.4. Public liability insurance for PCN group events through PCN's insurance policy**

TC is still awaiting a quote for the cost of extending cover to events organised by affiliated PCN groups. In view of this the Starting and Running a Group document would remain unchanged until further notice. **[Referred for a future meeting]**

#### **4.5. PCN Event Underwriting Policy 2010**

The revised underwriting policy, as amended after the meeting in Sept, was formally adopted.

#### **4.6. Progressive Places directory project 2011**

Action on updating the "Progressive Places" directory was delegated to the admin assistant. **[Action AV]**

#### **4.7. New "Welcome to a Progressive Church" poster**

MC members received a copy of the new Welcome to a Progressive Church poster with changes agreed at last meeting. MM suggested colour hues should be reversed to increase contrast of black print against blue background. **[Action AV]**.

AS raised the possibility of revising the wording of the 8 points. It was agreed this was a long term project and should involve the whole membership. JC promised to ask TCPC for material relating to the revision of the 8 points in the US. **[Action JC]**. JC suggested there should be a future agenda item to organise a review. **[Referred for a future meeting]**. JC informed the meeting that Jim Adams of TCPC had been diagnosed with a brain tumour. It was agreed that JC would write to Jim Adams on behalf of the committee. **[Action JC]**

#### **4.8. Newsletter printing and distribution**

TC outlined options and costs offered by Hillingdon Greenprint for printing the newsletter. It was agreed that an A4 newsletter in a C4 envelope should continue to be the format. At some point in the future the option of an A5 magazine may be investigated. It was agreed that Hillingdon Greenprint's offer to stuff, print and frank envelopes was good value as it would save both money and labour. It was decided to offer the editor this option while at the same time finding other quotes to ensure that Greenprint's was indeed the cheapest available. **[Action JC, AV]**.

#### **4.9. Publishing Project – study guide series**

AA reported that "Walk the Jesus Walk" is now at the proof stage. Members were shown the back and front covers. "Jesus Then and Now" is following close behind. CRC is to hand over to PCN the profit from Together in Hope which will be retained by PCN specifically to pay the bills for the new series. Publicity will be done "in house" by the four organisations taking part. (These are PCN Britain, Modern Church, Free to Believe and CRC). "Christmas", "Myth and Meaning" and "Interfaith" study guides are to follow in 2011. The subtitle for all the books in the series is to be "Together in Hope – Resources for Christian Faith Today"

SB asked whether the aim of having grass roots contributions was still current. AA said that there would be a paragraph in each study guide inviting further contributors. AV said that the website could be used to post follow up contributions relating to each topic, after the books are published.

#### **4.10. Progress on website Review.**

AV presented his written summary. The subcommittee of PO and AV will continue to work on a specification, seeking expert advice where possible. AA suggested that the Modern Church website was worth looking at. **[Action PO, AV]**

## **5. Conferences and Speakers**

### **5.1/3. 2011 Crossan weekend and possible clash with CRC's Borg weekend.**

AA reported that agreement had been reached with CRC for PCN to hold its Crossan conference in Oct 2011, just one month ahead of the CRC conference. However, AA said that there might be another window for Crossan and he would investigate that. **[Action AA]**

AA reported that Crossan would need to be paid \$6,250 (£3,900), which included flights and fee. There would also be the cost of 5 night's accommodation. There was discussion of possible venues and it was decided to approach York University. A question was raised about the viability of a Crossan conference in 2011 and whether he should be saved for 2012. The committee voted by 5 to 1 with two abstentions, to continue with the 2011 Crossan weekend.

It was agreed that progress on venue and dates for Crossan would be referred back to officers who would make the final decisions. To avoid organisational work falling on the same people, it was suggested that local PCN groups in Harrogate and Leeds should look after local arrangements and ticketing. **[Action PO, PG, SG, AA and officers]**

IM noted that PCN should have a policy covering "risk" to ensure the committee is aware of the risks involved in its decisions.

### **5.2. St Deiniol's residential**

JC reported that the only available weekend in 2011 for the PCN residential is 18-20<sup>th</sup> Nov. He had provisionally booked 23 rooms and the lecture theatre subject to the committee's approval. This was given. SG commented that it would be good to build in some discussion group time so that the weekend did not rely solely on the speaker. **[Action JC]**

### **5.3. Crossan weekend. This item was taken with 5.1, see above for minute.**

### **5.4. Salisbury Regional Conference**

JC said there was a growing feeling that PCN needed a conference in the south. Lavender Buckland, convenor of the Salisbury group, had requested a conference in Salisbury with Ian Bradley and JC felt the committee should support her. He said Sarum College was keen to host the event. AS noted that Ian Bradley had links with Sarum. JC felt that Lavender should be invited to go ahead and organise a day conference, with our support. He added that Sarum might make a suitable venue for a second residential study weekend in 2012. AS said that Sarum was not especially comfortable for residential. JC would contact Lavender Buckland. **[Action JC]**.

### **5.5. 2012 Progressive "Alliance" conference**

JC reported that path-finder discussions with CRC had led to an approach to Karen Armstrong. Free to Believe and SCM had received invitations to come on board. MM said it was good not to rely on solely male gurus.

## **5.6. 2011 AGM**

The committee agreed that the Quaker's Bloomsbury suite in Euston (over £600) was too expensive. JC mentioned the Indian YMCA. MM suggested Bloomsbury Baptist church and it was agreed that she would follow this up. **[Action MM]**

Suggestions for the AGM speaker included Neil McGregor of the British Museum, Loretta Minghella of Christian Aid, Clare Short, John Bell, Peter Owen-Jones of TV fame and Simon Barrow of Eklesia. JC invited the committee to email him with their thoughts. He would discuss ideas with officers and bring back a recommendation to committee. AS suggested that a performance – drama or music – might replace a speaker for the event. **[Action committee, officers and JC]**

## **5.7. Greenbelt 2011 – G-Source tent**

SB reported that SCM and Modern Church (MC) had declined our offer to invest in a joint space. SCM felt they should ally with student organisations and MC felt there might be confusion over which organisation to join. SB hoped to develop a presentation for the performance stage in the G-Source tent. Other organisations suggested as partners for a G-source joint space were CRC (which has younger members in their 20s), Free to Believe, Spirited Exchanges and Inclusive Church. **[Action SB]**

## **5.8. Potential speakers for future conferences**

Names mentioned:

JC - Robin Meyers author of "Saving Jesus from the Church".

MM - Joan Chittister author of "Called to Question" and a successful speaker in the US. MM had emailed her without response and agreed to follow it up with a letter by post. **[Action MM]**.

AA - Walter Bruggeman.

## **5.9. Speaking engagements by committee at PCN groups**

AA had led a conference at Skipton in November – Studies Impressions of Jesus – 23 attended. AA also spoke to the Leeds group in June. SG had spoken to Skipton and Harrogate. MM had helped Glasgow and Aberdeen to launch their new groups. MM noted there was an appetite in Aberdeen for a support group for liberal clergy.

JC had addressed a workshop in Telford from which the possibility of two new groups had arisen – Wolverhampton and Shifnal near Telford. JC had also addressed PCN groups in Giffnock, Glasgow where 30 had attended and Kendal where 50 had attended. He was due to attend the Ruislip Group in February and a potential Swindon group.

IM asked about PCN's communications policy in the event of press enquiries. JC reminded committee members that speaking "externally" on behalf of PCN Britain was the chair's role and other members should refer enquiries to him.

## **5.10. West Midland Interfaith Conference**

RT reported that 32 had already signed up and he was hoping for a total of 60 by January 22nd. He noted that Salma Yacoob, one of the speakers, had asked for a follow-up session for Muslim women. IM reminded members that PCN's constitution referred to promoting the Christian religion. RT felt that PCN was not straying outside this because the aim of the conference was

to learn about our own faith in openness to others. He stressed the value of being friends together at any level. JC also felt that there was value in “sharing the journey” with other faiths since we are all pilgrims together.

## **6. Financial Update**

### **6.1. Management accounts**

Referring to his submitted accounts, TC explained that, to date, PCN is nearly £3000 in deficit on this year’s activity and likely to end the year in greater deficit. TC explained that admin costs had increased due to more hours for the admin assistant and the extra cost of more frequent committees with attendant travel and increased overnight expenses. There had also been a number of one-off expenses such as the Convenors’ gatherings, the DVD library and the new computer. After covering the deficit, reserves were just under £15,000 and a further £7,000 is deposited in the CCLA.

It was agreed that an appeal would be made in the December newsletter for members to renew their membership on time and if possible to jump to the next level of membership. **[Action JC]**. AS felt that non-members attending PCN groups might be asked for a one-off donation. AA agreed.

It was agreed that financial strategy would be a major item at the January (or since January was cancelled, March?) meeting. **[Referred by JC to May Meeting]**

### **6.2. CCLA deposit account**

Referring to his submitted report, TC mentioned that the account had three signatories, JC, IM and TC. One person could transfer funds from the CCLA deposit account into the current account. Two people were required to put money into the CCLA deposit account.

### **6.3. Restricted fund for Joint Publishing Project**

TC said that a restricted fund is to be set up by PCN which will ring fence income from and expenditure on all publications of the Joint Project such as the new study guides. Through this fund PCN would administer the payment of bills associated with the project. Any profits from Together in Hope still held by the participating organisations should be paid to PCN for the use of this fund. Similarly, income from the new study guides will be paid to PCN.

PCNB will not be able to use the funds for any other purpose. There must be no cross-subsidy between the project and any other PCN activity. It would be TC’s responsibility to ensure there was enough in the kitty to pay project’s bills. TC reported that currently PCN has been subsidizing the project. AA said that CRC had covered some of the expenditure.

It was agreed that TC would write to the organisations participating in the Joint Publishing Project to inform them of the fund and to ascertain what their initial contribution would be. **[Action TC]**.

## 7. Group activity

### 7.1. Report on Group Convenor Gatherings

MM presented her written report. She said sessions had started with “group stories” followed in the afternoon by a discussion of where PCN and the groups are heading. Summarising the message from each meeting she said

- Windermere has stressed the implanting of new paradigm values in society,
- Nottingham had stressed the need to keep talking, since the journey was ongoing, while lending support to individuals in their chosen projects
- Bloomsbury had stressed the importance of spreading information about PCN and the need for dialogue on what progressive Christianity was for – a “transformational faith” in Borg’s words.

MM considered the activities of PCN and the groups are “church” and represent its future. She hoped that the regions might organise more joint events. AA suggested the gatherings might be repeated for those who couldn’t come in 2010. MM thought future gatherings might be open to a wider group, not just convenors.

AA suggested that PCN offer the regions a real “resources” day, with displays of books, DVDs, and websites. **[Action AA??]**

AS said there was genuine interest in what other groups do – reflecting the family nature of PCN groups.

TC raised a question about groups being required to keep formal records. In practice he felt that groups were less formal than the Starting and Running a Local Group document might suggest. IM said that groups had no obligation to keep minutes but if they were collecting money there should always be an audit trail. He felt groups needed to be made aware of this “good practice”. TC added that groups seeking event underwriting were required to produce accounts for the event. IM agreed to look at the Starting and Running a Group document to see what should go in and what should come out. He would report back in the first place to officers. **[Action IM].** JC promised to write to PG to inform him that the document was going to be updated. **[Action JC].**

AV drew attention to his report: “Specific Suggestions from the Group Convenor Meetings”, containing a summary of books, DVDs and websites found useful by PCN groups. He promised to circulate this to group convenors. **[Action AV]**

JC thanked those involved in arranging the Convenor Gatherings

## **7.2. Report on the Group Census and group news**

AV took the committee through summary charts and written feedback gained so far from the group census. One significant finding was the value placed by most groups in being part of a family of progressive groups within the PCN.

AV drew the meeting's attention to his written summary of group news including group launches in Aberdeen, Highland, Berwick and Borders, and new "evening" groups in Keswick, Harrogate and Chesterfield. Glasgow is organising a "West of Scotland" website and Herne Hill is not meeting for a period for individuals to reassess their need.

JC said he wanted groups to be more aware of the availability of progressive resources. AA promised to put together a resources table with books for inspection. AS offered to help compile the list. **[Action AA and AS].**

MM hoped that groups might have slot for PCN news and feedback at the start of their meetings. JC said he expected to hear soon about the possibility of a new group in Wolverhampton.

MM reported that Aberdeen had moved its meetings away from the Church of Scotland premises where it started due to an objection to PCN Britain lodged by a member of the church.

## **7.3. Virtual group and foreign links**

JC reported that Lavender Buckland in Salisbury was trialling the use of Skype to bring together people who could not meet in the flesh.

JC reported that a new progressive group in the US, the Progressive Christian Alliance, was trying to form links with PCN Britain.

JC read an email from a progressive Christian clergyman in Basle, Switzerland, who is setting up a "European" PCN group there. The group may offer retreats in the Alps to PCN members. The committee affirmed his plan.

JC reported that in Ireland Hillary Wakeman had resigned as the Chair of Open Christianity.

## **7.4. DVD library loans**

The committee learned that of the six DVDs, all were out or booked apart from Eclipsing Empire. They were pleased to hear of the progress made and expressed appreciation of the work of the new voluntary librarian, Jess Lee.

## **8. Governance**

IM handed out documentation to aid his presentation on the need for PCN to examine its governance practice. He laid out six principles of good governance, highlighting

- the role trustees,
- the need to deliver organisational purpose and develop strategy,
- the value of a finance sub-committee and the setting of budgets,
- the need for effectiveness as a team,
- the need to be open and accountable
- the need to behave with integrity and high ethical standards.

From these flowed the need for a number of policies covering **diversity/equal opportunities, conflict of interest, risk assessment, employment, complaints, the environment, communication, consultation, health and safety, confidentiality and IT.**

IM said PCN Britain needs to have further documents, namely

- **A development plan.** (The current three year strategy runs out at the end of this year.)
- **A set of employment procedures**
- **A trustee induction and training pack/programme,** possibly including a visit to Newnham
- **Management Committee and sub-committee terms of reference, role descriptions and standing orders.**

On the subject of committee standing orders IM suggested he introduce a deadline for the production of agenda documents one week before the next meeting. This was agreed. **[Action all the committee]**. In regard to **trustees' expenses** IM agreed to write a policy setting out what is reasonable. It was stated that the maximum claim for rail travel is the "advance fare".

It was recognised that the flow of emails between committee members needs to be regulated, with a limit on the amount of copying in.

AA suggested that committee minutes should be published on-line. It was agreed this should happen once the minutes had been approved by the committee at its next meeting. **[Action AV]** IM assured members that confidentiality could be protected through an agreed policy.

On the question of budgets, JC agreed to bring the subject up at the January meeting, **[subsequently deferred to May meeting]**. It was reaffirmed that JC would bring to the attention of PCN members the expected annual deficit.

After IM's presentation, the committee

- agreed to adopt the six principles of good governance
- agreed to IM's list of desirable policies and procedural documents (in bold above)
- agreed that the Hon Sec should compile a master file of policy documents
- agreed that policies should be reviewed once a year
- agreed that policies and documents should follow a particular style

AA pointed out that the colour of the newsletter paper was an issue of equal opportunities. IM agreed that yellow paper would be easier to see for the visually impaired, like him.

IM agreed to draft policies and documents, as above in bold, to be brought back to committee for agreement. **[Action IM]**

The question of whether prospective trustees should provide references on their application form was raised. MM thought this was "over the top". IM pointed out that prospective trustees need to declare they are not bankrupt.

In conclusion JC said IM's proposals were essential to facilitate the further growth of PCN Britain. If PCN does not focus now on how it carries out its activities, then may peak too early.

## **9. Reviewing Progress of Subcommittees**

### **9.1. Group Convenors Gathering subcommittee (MM, SG, AP, AV)**

This subcommittee is now disbanded, having finished its task.

### **9.2. A Guide to Running a Regional Event subcommittee (SG and PG)**

SG indicated that this subcommittee will report to next meeting. **[Action SG, PG]**

### **9.3. Engaging with Young People subcommittee (SB, JC, Peter Parr and Ben Curran)**

SB referred to the work being done on the Greenbelt preparations, (see 5.7). Other potential tasks for the subcommittee include a PCN Facebook page. JC suggested that Peter Parr, Ben Curran and another, (unnamed) might work with SB. AA agreed to give SB some contacts for CRC. **[Action SB, AA]**

### **9.4. Resources and website links subcommittee [John Hetherington et al]**

JH had resigned and no progress was reported. The sub-committee was dissolved. Part of its work now comes under the Liturgy subcommittee and part may come under the Website Development subcommittee.

### **9.5. Website Development subcommittee [PO, AV]**

PO and AV had been in contact by phone and email. The first draft of a wish list of potential site improvements had been presented to the meeting. AV and PO had contacted 5 web developers. One was interested in working with our present site, two were interested in giving us a new site, one had said "no thanks", and the last had not yet replied. IM volunteered to join the subcommittee. The next question to settle was whether to stick with the current CMS – ExpressionEngine – or switch to a new "off the peg" system. AV was concerned that switching would involve a lot of work to transfer the information currently available through the ExpressionEngine. **[Action PO, IM, AV plus Steve Ireland]**

### **9.6. Liturgy subcommittee (AS and JC)**

AS reported that Monty Lynds had sent in a Eucharist liturgy. She felt the next step was to research what a progressive liturgy is. A report would appear in the December newsletter. AS suggested that the website should also carry an appeal for fresh material. **[Action AS, JC, AV]**

## **10. Arrangements for Admin Assistant's annual appraisal**

IM agreed to carry out the appraisal and report back to the next meeting. **[Action IM]**

## **11. Progressive Christian Alliance and other emerging groups**

JC reported on his personal contacts with the Atlanta based Progressive Christian Alliance. The organisation ordains its own clergy. JC held discussions with their director and discovered that they work both within and beyond a church context. JC had encouraged them to work with the existing

progressive Christian organisations in the UK – PCN, MC, SCM etc. The PCA is expected to hold an ordination service before Christmas 2010 and will be offering same sex ‘weddings’. AA supported the idea that progressive Christians should avoid splitting their efforts. IM pointed out that the Charity Commission recommends that charities always search for the bigger picture, looking into the possibility of merger and collaboration. AA was concerned lest PCN Britain should appear to “hitch its wagon” beyond the church. JC said the issue was one of how to serve those who had already left church. IM and RT felt that the subject deserved proper space for discussion in another meeting. **[Referred to a future meeting]**

### **12. Chair’s availability in the New Year.**

JC reported that he was due to have an operation early in January. This would preclude him attending the January meeting. After some discussion it was decided to cancel the January meeting. The policy papers which IM was to prepare would thus be brought before the March meeting, which would also have to approve the annual report. It was agreed to extend the March meeting to start at 10.30 and finish at 4.30

### **13. Any other business**

Notified items for AOB were dealt with earlier in the meeting

### **14. Future meetings**

March 5th: London St James's Piccadilly W1J 9LL

May 7th: AGM and committee. Bloomsbury Baptist Church, London WC2H 8EP

July 9th: St Philip’s Church, Leicester LE2 1HN

Sept 17th: St Columba's York YO1 6EX

Nov Residential: Date and Venue to be fixed. This will focus on PCN's next “3 year strategy”, following a consultation with members via the September newsletter