

Progressive Christianity Network – Britain

Management Committee St Columba's URC, York

14th January 2012

Minutes

Present: Adrian Alker (AA), Sonya Brown, Andrew Burrell, (AB, treasurer), John Churcher (JC, chair), Helen Fisher (HF, CRC representative), Philip Goodwin (PG), Sandra Griffiths (SG), Mary McMahon (MM, vice chair), Angela Smith (AS), Richard Tetlow (RT)

In attendance: Andy Vivian, (AV, administrator)

1 Apologies

Paul Onslow (PO, Hon Sec) sent his apologies.

2 Minutes of October Residential 2011

These were approved by the committee and signed by the chair.

3 Matters Arising

JC advised that the appointment of a deputy treasurer had been deferred until AB was in a position to advise about this role. Michael Wright had agreed in principle to be the new media officer for PCN Britain.

AV advised the committee of progress on a number of Strategic Plan targets: Hon Sec familiarity with PCN office, age and ethnicity survey, membership search service. A DVD copier had been bought by PO.

PG advised that his Specimen Budget for conferences was ready – this was referred to next committee for approval.

JC and HF gave updates on Raymond Short's books and the proposal for access by PCN members to the library at the Centre for Radical Christianity (CRC). HF agreed to write articles for the next PCN Newsletter and the PCN website to advertise how to access the CRC online book-loan service worked. **[Action HF]**

JC and AV reported the purchase of three additions to the DVD library. AA recommended the acquisition of Don Cupit's Sea of Faith series through Chris Avis. **[Action AV]**

JC read out the PCN legal adviser's message regarding copyright liability on liturgy contributions. The committee was reassured and felt that current policy was in line with his recommendation.

AV noted that so far 23 members had requested their newsletter by email.

4 Strategic Plan Progress

Progress had already been noted in item 3.

5 Strategic Plan: Churches Leaflet

AA introduced his text only version which had been circulated to trustees ahead of the meeting. Some uncertainty emerged as to whether the leaflet was aimed at church leaders or the whole congregation. JC and MM were for including all parishioners. There was a brief discussion of

whether the leaflet should advertise local PCN groups. AA thought this could be added as a paper insert, if necessary.

The meeting discussed the wording of page 1: HF felt that the leaflet would generate more interest if it included the word "questioning". SB wanted reference to abstract questions in relation to God, she felt the current wording concentrated solely on practical questions that society faces. AA suggested adding "the big questions about God". HF queried the words "fresh vision" which she felt readers might confuse with "Fresh Expressions". RT felt the leaflet should make PCN more exciting and refer to a "new paradigm in the face of current anomalies". AA reminded trustees that the agreed focus of the leaflet was the typical church just beginning to move out of its medieval view of faith. This was an evolutionary process and we should not frighten them. AV referred members to decisions at the October residential, (*6.2 the leaflet "would aim to help churches think through the big questions of faith outlining what PCN had to offer by way of resources...in the spirit of helping churches to thrive rather than trying to undermine them"*). He suggested that PCN's primary interest here was in helping churches onward in their faith journey and not in recruiting new members for PCN. MM said it might none-the-less attract people to PCN. She recommended inclusion of the words "evolutionary" and/or "a new way of understanding". AA wondered if the 8 points were not challenging enough. AB liked the word "evolutionary". He also felt the leaflet might benefit from fewer words. HF said the leaflet shouldn't be timid about being challenging as there was enthusiasm for that. RT agreed. AB questioned whether that was true inside the churches. AA reminded trustees that the leaflet needs to be able to go through the filter of the clergy.

Page 2: AV suggested there might be reference to DVD Loans and possibly PCN speakers.

Back Page: AV suggested there should be an invitation to "find out how PCN can help your church" with a named PCN contact given.

JC drew the discussion to a close, suggesting that any further ideas could be sent to AA. The leaflet would be brought back to the March Committee. **[Action AA and trustees]**. MM suggested that PCN members should be given the new leaflet to distribute. AV asked if the committee might at some point return to the question of how it conducts ongoing relations with churches which are interested in PCN.

Treasurer's Progress Report

AB said he had made himself a list of tasks and was working down it. It had proved difficult to re-establish the full facilities of the PCN Co-op bank account following Terence Cooper's death. He was taking steps to make the next Gift Aid claims. He intended to create an on-line accounting system for PCN so that officers had direct access to information and so that banking information could be easily inputted through a download. He suggested that in future AV should have on-line access to PCN accounts as this would aid administration and continuity. He explained progress on tax and pay for AV. He advised that a significant sum had been transferred from PCN's PayPal account with the help of PO.

There was a short discussion about creating a trustee's expenses form. AB agreed to adapt the existing travel form to suit all claims. **[Action AB]**

JC expressed the trustees gratitude to AB

Newsletter Revamp

In considering the move to white glossy paper, AA told the committee there were several degrees and weights of glossiness. He provided examples for trustees to examine. He expressed a wish for some colour, at least on the cover.

Trustees agreed that the current blue paper was not suitable for the visually impaired. SB suggested a move to A5 but MM was concerned this might mean a reduction in type size. AA also made a request for a limit on the length of articles in the Newsletter and an attempt to have fewer articles which go over the page. He recommended that the group pages in the Newsletter should be rationed so that groups had a slot in every other or every third edition. AS wondered if the group news should be an insert. AS received support for her suggestion that the glossiness should not be too "posh".

It was agreed that the March newsletter should be on white paper, nominally glossy but with a sheen rather than a shine. Hillingdon Greenprint should be asked to provide a sample based on the December newsletter. They should also be asked to provide prices for colour options - for photos and graphics on the covers only or throughout the newsletter. **[Action AV]**

The committee would discuss the colour options in March. The March committee would also consider whether to create a name for the Newsletter and the issue of group reports. MM was concerned that groups should not lose out. JC recommended that ideas should be sought from groups. AA suggested a word limit.

8 Administrator's Annual Appraisal feedback

The committee welcomed the report from PO and approved the targets given to the administrator.

9 PCN attendance at the London Partnership Day in London.

It was agreed that SG and AV would attend. AA felt they should mention the Together in Hope publishing project and Greenbelt collaboration. HF suggested that copies of the TiH study guides should be taken. SB thought there should be mention of recent PCN conferences involving international speakers. JC wanted it stressed that PCN was ecumenical, growing and not just London based. SG thought it appropriate to mention the PCN groups and group numbers. *The officers subsequently agreed that a joint conference for 2013 on "50 Years of Honesty" could also be raised.*

10 Website Re-Launch. (Subcommittee PO, AV and designer, Steve Ireland)

10 i Latest Home Page Demos

In the absence of the sub-committee trustee PO, AV distributed printouts of brown, green and turquoise colour options for the website banner. He said that the original choice was brown since this reflected the colour of the painting of Jesus used, (the Mandylion of Edessa). However, during email consultation with Trustees on the Home Page design last November, two members had queried the shading; AA because the colour seemed reminiscent of Victorian churches and SG because she felt the shade was too dark. Several trustees thought turquoise suitable. AA questioned the use of the Jesus face. He didn't like the image or the old fashioned script used in the graphic. SB and MM wondered whether it was obvious enough that it was Jesus. AA contrasted the banner with the St Mark's, Broomhill, website which carries a moving set of photographs. He felt that PCN should have a moving set of PCN photos from conferences. MM felt this would reflect a more modern ethos. AV said that the sub-committee had initially looked at the option of using photos but was concerned that the images available were of poor quality and projected the image of an elderly and church based organisation. SB mentioned Greenbelt as a source of "younger" photos. AV agreed but suitable photos were not available. AA suggested that

the banner might represent the 8 points pictorially or graphically. Symbolic representation of the 8 points was briefly considered. AA then suggested a rolling text of the 8 points where the background colour changed behind each “point”. AV queried how this could be made to work in the banner. AA suggested it could go instead in the space currently occupied by the map of Britain, under the banner and social media buttons. AB suggested that the banner should keep some kind of watermark graphic and if the Jesus face was unacceptable suggested the PCN star. SG concurred with the need for a graphic and suggested another alternative, a map of Britain.

AA questioned the wording of the new “Welcome to PCN Britain” section in the banner. He liked the idea of the welcome but felt it should reflect a positive exploratory journey and that “dogma” was not a PCN word; he was concerned it would portray PCN as an “against” organisation. SB thought it should not refer to a “new” biblical understanding since it was really an old understanding being “rediscovered”. She also asked for the word “reformation” to be removed from the graphic. AV said that the wording given to Steve Ireland, the designer, was not intended to be definitive, but was to give him something to work on.

JC asked Trustees to give consideration to the wording of the Welcome and to submit their own versions in the next few days. He asked for another Trustee to help on the subcommittee and AS agreed. He asked the subcommittee to try out the suggestions discussed, namely a turquoise banner, with a map graphic instead of the Jesus face and with the old fashioned script removed and with an 8 points display under the banner.

The question was raised whether the map should include Northern Ireland. After some discussion it was decided to leave it out. It was also agreed that until PCN Twitter feed was being published, the Twitter button should be removed. **[Action Steve Ireland, the subcommittee and all trustees]**

10 ii Training Local Groups to Use the Re-launched website

AV took Trustees through a paper on the planned programme for notifying and training groups on how to post material on their five new webpages. He said that the re-launch date was targeted for the end of February and that the first of two notification emails would be sent to group convenors at the end of January. Five training videos would be available on line from mid February. AV would deliver the script while Steve Ireland would record the screen movements to correspond. Follow-up help would be available if these proved insufficient. This would include CD versions of the videos, phone-calls and, if necessary, a visit. AV mentioned that Steve’s work in helping to produce these videos would need to be paid for as it was outside the specification. **[Action Steve Ireland and AV]**

(The launch timetable has subsequently been revised by JC in order to allow time to produce alternative designs. April might now seem more reasonable)

10 iii A Series of 4 short videos for the re-launched website.

JC drew Trustees attention to the quote from Jennifer Page for making films featuring four PCN members on “What progressive Christianity means to me”. SB said that the price seemed reasonable. The proposal was accepted. **[Action Officers and AV]**

11 i Group Insurance

JC referred to a letter received from PCN's insurance broker regarding extending PCN's insurance cover to include group meetings. This followed an enquiry from the Newcastle group about cover for regular meetings. JC revealed that the cost of extending PCN's insurance cover to group meetings would be approaching £100 per group assuming 50 groups were included. To achieve this, PCN would have to adopt each group as an integral part of the PCN organisation, overseen by the Trustees. It was pointed out that many groups do not hire their venue but meet in homes or churches and would be unlikely to want insurance. Therefore, the average cost per group could go higher. On both financial and constitutional grounds this was therefore ruled out.

The broker's letter also spelled out the extent of cover for conferences. At present PCN is covered for three a year (two day conferences and one weekend residential). These have to be directly organised by PCN Britain. AV pointed out that this was not compatible with PCN guidance for regional conferences which holds open the possibility of groups applying for PCN insurance cover when holding a regional conference. He suggested that the matter of extending insurance cover to include more conferences be raised with the insurance broker. He reminded the committee that Terence Cooper had reported in March 2011 that PCN's former insurer, Aviva, had offered cover for 5 conferences at a cost of £100 and 10 conferences for £130. If the current Ansvar policy is too restrictive, the committee may wish to reconsider its Regional Conference guidelines or else its chosen insurer. It was agreed that JC would seek advice from PCN's legal adviser **[Action JC]** It was also suggested that the broker be asked to clarify the situation if PCN wished to cover more than the existing 3 conferences. **[Action AB or PO]**

11 ii Groups Policy Subcommittee.

MM introduced a previously circulated paper produced by the Groups Policy subcommittee (MM, AS and AV) on the relationship between PCN and groups affiliated to the network. This outlined the constitutional and practical arrangements that govern how groups interface with PCN Britain. It also lists the benefits available to groups which choose to affiliate.

The following changes to the draft policy were agreed:

2nd guideline: replace *regardless of their church background or lack of it* with *whether or not they have a church background*

12th guideline: replace *we may ask* with *there may be occasions when we may ask*

1st benefit: replace *mostly from* with *including*

2nd benefit: replace *can supply* with *will endeavour to supply*

3rd benefit: replace *based on* with *available on*

4th benefit: replace *newsletter* with *publication*

8th benefit: replace *We will train and support you* with *Training and support is available*

It was agreed that the new Guidelines and benefits would be added to the next group convenors' email

12 Conference Arrangements

12 i May residential weekend: JC noted the switch to Swanwick from St Deiniol's. Swanwick offered better accommodation, was cheaper, and was more centrally placed.

12 ii May conference and AGM in York: There was currently no speaker fixed for this event. SB proposed Alan Race on Interfaith. AV pointed out that the theme had already been agreed and

published in the Strategic plan, namely: *How progressive Christian communities can be people of The Way, including a contribution from the emerging church movement*. AA suggested Chris Howson, a mission priest in Bradford, author of *A Just Church*. HF agreed that Howson would be an effective speaker. She pointed out that the AGM would clash with a CRC conference. JC asked AA to contact Howson to check his availability and to give him a brief to give two talks, possibly one before and one after lunch. He should be offered a donation plus expenses. If he was not available it was suggested that Barbara Glasson, a Methodist with whom Howson has worked, might be an alternative. AA agreed to make the approach. SG agreed to arrange the event at St Columba's York. **[Action AA, SG]**. AGM notices along with Trustee nomination forms need to be issued by April 14th. **[Action PO, AV]**. The officers were delegated to discuss ticket prices in the light of the potential ticket price for the Sept conference which is on the same theme. **[Action officers]**

12 iii September conference in London: Several speaker suggestions were made: Iain McDonald of Southernhay URC, Exeter; Ian Wallace of St Marks, Sheffield; Barbara Glasson of the Touchstone Community in Bradford; Neil Riches (?) of Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham. SB made a plea for PCN to grapple with multiculturalism. AA mentioned Ray Gaston who wrote a book on engaging with Islam called *A heart Broken Open*. JC suggested that multiculturalism should be a PCN theme next year. In the meantime, PCN would support the autumn interfaith event being organised by Alan Race in Leicester and/or London.

AA saw the theme for this year's conference as being how the new paradigm works out for Christianity in the community.

JC asked AA to approach speakers and if they were available to report back on their available dates to the officers who would make the final decision about the date for the conference. **[Action AA and officers]**

12 iv Joint conference 2013

JC reported that he had had no further contact with CRC on the proposed joint conference which was first suggested in 2010. Two names were mentioned, Gretta Vosper and Giles Fraser. JC confirmed that Gretta had agreed to speak at the Glasgow PCN groups in mid 2013. He felt it would make sense to invite her to speak elsewhere in PCN or at partnership meetings. HF reported that CRC was interested in Giles Fraser for their own conference in 2012. AA reminded trustees that 2013 was the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Honest to God* and suggested this would make a good theme for a major conference. **[Action JC]**

13 Together in Hope

AA said there were two more study guides in the pipeline and that income from the current titles was needed in order to proceed with their publication. AB would inform the Joint Publications Steering Group of the current financial situation as soon as possible. **[Action AB]**

14 2012 Membership renewals and interim census results

AV reported that there had been more than 150 renewals by cheque. About six were coming in each day. Around 200 members now paid by standing order. Newcastle and North Merseyside were the two latest group names to appear on the website. North Merseyside was already meeting and Newcastle was to launch in February. AV suggested trustees build links with groups in the network and suggested that if each trustee visited three groups a year, then all the groups would be covered every three years. **[Action all trustees]**. AV reported that he had been unable to get a

reply to emails sent to the Swindon group and so he had been unable to post any details of their activity on the website. It was suggested that a personal visit might be advisable. **[Action ?]** JC mentioned that a new St Albans group would soon be up and running.

AV reported that the membership census had so far revealed that the majority of PCN members were over 60. So far, the youngest members to have given age in the census are in the 30-39 age-group.

15 AGM preparation

15 i Amendment of the 10% quorum rule:

Following PO's enquiry to the Charities Commission on the legality of reducing the AGM quorum it was noted that the Commission left PCN to choose whatever arrangement was practical for the smooth running of the organisation. It was agreed to submit to the AGM a proposal to bring the quorum down from 10% to 5% of the membership.

15 ii Charter for Compassion affiliation:

It was agreed to refer this item to the March meeting

16 Dates and Times of future meetings

The follow was confirmed

Saturday 3rd March Committee: 11am – 4pm, Highgate Baptist, Birmingham B12 0YL

Saturday 19th May AGM and Conference: St Columba's URC, York, times to be confirmed

Wednesday 4th July Committee: 11am - 4pm, St Columba's URC, York

Saturday 8th September, committee: 11am – 4pm St Columba's URC, York.

Friday 9th – Sat 10th November at The Windermere Centre in Cumbria.

17 Any other business

There was no other business

Meeting ended at 16.00