

Progressive Christianity Network Britain

Management Committee at St Philips church, Leicester

9th July 2011

Minutes

Present: Adrian Alker (AA), Sonya Brown (SB), John Churcher (JC, chair), Terence Cooper (TC, treasurer), Helen Fisher (HF), Philip Goodwin (PG), Sandra Griffiths (SG), Mary McMahon, (MM, vice chair), Paul Onslow (PO), Angela Smith (AS), Richard Tetlow (RT)

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

1. Apologies and welcome

The recent resignation of Kevin Albone was acknowledged by the committee. Helen Fisher, who is the new link with the Centre for Radical Christianity, was welcomed to her first meeting. There were no apologies

2. Minutes of residential committee at St James's Piccadilly on March 5th 2011

These were accepted with no amendments.

3. Matters Arising

3i St Deiniol's progress

JC said bookings were going well. He expected an attendance of between 22 and 28.

3ii Resources table for Spong events in Glasgow June 2-5th.

It was agreed that it was not sustainable to rely on AA's work connections to provide books and DVD's for a Resources Table. PCN should take steps to develop its own collection of resources. AA said he was happy to help out if he was attending an event personally.

[Action unresolved, officers to consult on how to proceed]

3iii Joint Publishing Project

AA said that the two volumes published already were selling well. Walk the Jesus Walk had been re-ordered. A third, "Christmas - Ancient meanings, Modern Faith" was due out shortly. Ideas for future publications include a compilation of Jack Spong's bible study notes. AA hoped that the series would produce a substantial number of titles. AV to put "Christmas" on the PCN website when available **[Action AV]**

3iv Insurance

TC advised the committee that PCN's quotation from MasterPolicy had expired and so another quote would be needed, closer to renewal date in September, before the policy could be switched away from Aviva. Noted. **[Action TC]**

3v PCN West of Scotland Website

JC reported that his letter to the Glasgow groups, mentioned in the last minutes, had been received warmly by colleagues there. PCN Britain would be providing an increased web presence for all groups once the redevelopment was complete, in October.

4. Conferences and related matters

4i Review of Spong visit to Glasgow 2-5th June

JC reminded Trustees that at one time PCN had expected to lose its £1,000 underwriting on this event. Even had this been the case, he believed the visit was important and worthwhile.

TC, presenting the final accounts for the Spong visit said there was a surplus of £4.51, thanks to a late donation of £200 from an anonymous donor. TC also presented amended budgets for each venue in Glasgow, which showed that the breakeven point for Orchardhill had been set unnecessarily high in the first place, at 250. Although the Orchardhill conference ticket sales were still well below breakeven, this had been compensated by a higher than expected attendance at Cairns, on the Thursday.

TC then presented a review of PCN's underwriting policy. After some discussion it was agreed that PCN should not back away from encouraging groups to organise public events. However, it was agreed that when PCN underwrites an event organised by a local group

- There needs to be a face to face meeting (possibly by Skype) with a named, responsible organiser at the very start in order to assess the project's viability.
- For PCN the contact would normally be the treasurer with other committee members joining in a small subcommittee if necessary.
- The budget presented by the organiser should show fixed and variable costs in order better understand the liabilities.
- If the liabilities exceeded the amount underwritten by PCN Britain, we should be told who the other stakeholders are.
- The named organiser would be responsible for keeping the Treasurer up to date with progress.

It was also decided that in future the maximum amount underwritten should be restricted to £500. Banking for the Glasgow events was through the PCN Britain account. This had worked satisfactorily and could be repeated for other events, by arrangement.

TC explained that if a local group asked PCN Britain to provide public liability insurance, then any extra charges from our Insurer would be treated as a cost to the event.

After further discussion it was agreed that "adopting" an event, ie taking the organisation away from the local group, should also be an option, if PCN Britain felt this would make it more viable and if the local group agreed. A third option was to offer some seed funding instead of underwriting. This could be given on the understanding that if the event made a profit then the seed funding would be repaid. TC agreed to consider these alternative options and to write them into a revised policy on supporting events organised by local groups. **[Action TC]**

The question of whether to call an event a PCN event was touched upon. Further discussion on this will be part of the deliberations of a new subcommittee – see item 7i.

PO reported on his production of Spong CD sets for sale, which were now available through the PCN website. Prices ranged from £4.99 to £13 depending on how many of the lectures were bought. Examples of the finished CDs in their cases were displayed. The event was also filmed but PO reported that the quality wasn't good enough to produce a DVD for sale. PO agreed to add a picture to the next batch of CDs and to label the cardboard cases as recyclable. It was felt that some consistent PCN branding for CDs and DVDs would be desirable. AV reported that a clip of the Spong lecture was now available free on the PCN website as an MP3 download and had been offered to the Cairns and Orchardhill websites. Other clips would follow. **[Action PO, AV]**

The committee considered a draft revision of the Planning a Conference guide, taking account of the Glasgow experience. In the light of decisions above, further revisions were earmarked. AV would make the changes. **[Action AV]**

PG asked TC if he might produce a "model" Conference Budget which could be useful to organisers. JC asked him to discuss/pursue the idea with TC after the meeting. **[Action PG, TC]**

4ii Crossan conference progress

PO reported 109 bookings on Friday 16th Sept and 126 on Saturday 17th. Of these, 60 were non-members, 59 from PCN and 11 from CRC. The budget was £5,600 and of this £3,201 had so far been raised. AA warned that given the high overheads, PCN should not be complacent. JC agreed to mention the conference in his next e-update. HF said that there was a half page ad in the next CRC newsletter and offered to include a flyer in the mail-out too. AS suggested that group convenors be circulated with the flyer too – by email. AV offered to put an audio clip of Crossan on the website with a link to the conference details. **[Action JC, HF, AV]**
HF said the CRC newsletter would welcome a review of the Crossan lectures. **[Action ??]**

4iii Joint PCN/CRC/Others conference in 2012

JC reported some difficulty in getting a response from Karen Armstrong. HF suggested an approach via Dominic Crossan. The aim was a conference venue, rather than a church, possibly in Sheffield. PO felt the venue should take an audience of 7-800 and mentioned one in Harrogate. JC would try further approaches. **[Action JC]**

4iv Conference Proposal from Alan Race (AR)

AR, vicar of St Philips Leicester, and a member of the World Congress of Faiths, proposed that PCN should be one of the hosts to welcome Jim Kenney to a tour of Britain in 2012. Jim Kenney is founder of Common Ground, a Chicago based organisation involved with educating in the field of religion and society. In his book "Thriving in the Cross-Current" Jim Kenny presents a thesis of world cultural evolution which holds a positive view of where the world is. The shift in values taking place is moving us from a male dominated, warlike world to a multicultural, shared prospectus. There is a need to develop a religious, intellectual model to put this into

perspective. AR proposed an all day conference on these themes. Jim Kenney, he said, was an excellent speaker and educator. Other organisations being invited to host the trip include Modern Church and the World Council of Faiths. AR suggested a June date and that PCN underwrite the fixed costs of Kenney's travel to the tune of £300, with similar amounts put forward by other hosts. A speaking fee of about £300 should also be set aside. AA commented that June was likely to clash with other events run by MC and CRC. AR said dates were negotiable, though October was out. November was convenient and JC thought this preferable. St Philips, Leicester was suggested as a venue but SB thought St Philips might be a host in its own right. Another suggestion was Edinburgh. SB and TC were delegated to discuss the possibilities with AR and to come back to the committee in October with suggestions on the venue and whether it should be a PCN Britain committee event or a local group organised event. **[Action TC, SB]**

5 Subcommittees

5i Strategy Consultation

JC reported that a report and questionnaire for inclusion in the Sept newsletter had been drafted but had not been approved by the whole sub-committee. He would circulate the draft asap and invite comments from the whole committee, after which the officers be responsible for what finally appeared. **[Action JC and then officers]**

5ii Web Redevelopment

PO presented the three bids which had been obtained from Purple Dogfish, DesignKarma and IvyPark Media. In recommending the lowest estimate, £2,418 from IvyPark Media, he suggested that the committee allocate an extra sum to cover unforeseen items which might arise in the course of the project. Asked about the benefits of the redevelopment, AV explained they were threefold – to add interest to the website by improving appearance and navigability, to deepen the offering by adding new pages, and to provide a more complete platform for local groups to have a web presence if they wished. Visually, there would be more images and a revised design. New interactive features would include a search box and sign-up button to receive updates. In addition a number of glitches would be rectified and the shop functionality improved. SB said the current site needed improving as it would not interest a younger audience. RT and JC stressed the importance of a web strategy. PO said this should include alerts sent out via Twitter and Facebook. TC agreed that for most of the public their only access to PCN is through the website. He felt that the cost of the IvyPark media bid plus a sum for incidentals was affordable. PG asked whether it was possible to see designs for the Home Page. AV promised to circulate the committee with options when they were available. The committee accepted the proposals from the subcommittee. **[Action PO, AV, TC]**

5iii Young People - Greenbelt

SB reported that PCN's Greenbelt presence would be through a double stall with Inclusive Church. They had made a Wordle which would be the logo for the stall. Volunteers would wear T shirts with the logo printed on it and a T shirt would be offered as a prize in a competition. There would be a laptop based slide show of PCN and Inclusive Church activities. A 25 minute slot on the G-Source Stage had been booked. SB planned a 12.5 minute dramatic presentation

about her faith with a friend. She was also planning a stage interview with Alan Race about working with other faith communities. SB would be inviting visitors to sign up for the PCN Britain Facebook page and planned to give out leaflets advertising the Facebook link.

Other ideas included a “How progressive are you?” questionnaire with badges for prizes, and paper carrier bags with a message printed on the side. She hoped to advertise the student rate for PCN Britain membership. AV agreed to produce a special membership form so that Greenbelt visitors could sign up to PCN Britain for 16 months for the price of 12. **[Action AV]**

AA and JC praised SB for her ideas and organisation. AA advised her to seed the audience with loyal friends. AA suggested a pull up map of group locations around the country. AA and AV agreed to liaise about commissioning the graphics and printing. **[Action AA and AV]**

SB said that the stall would be staffed by volunteers who had already bought their own tickets. PCN had needed to purchase only two tickets, for herself and Alan Race. The total budget would be around £700. The committee noted the budget. **[Actions SB]**

5iv Liturgy

AS directed members to her two copyright declarations which liturgists will be asked to sign before new liturgy can be posted on the PCN website. AA suggested a simplification of the wording of the first, to: “I give PCN Britain the right...”. The declarations and their introductory paragraphs were then agreed. AV would post them on the PCN Britain website. **[Action AV]**

The committee discussed the need for collaboration with others in the search for good progressive liturgy. JC asked AS to liaise with CRC. AS referred to her contacts in US and Australia. Members discussed the need for a range of liturgy to cover occasions associated with deep emotion and spirituality, including healing, the birth of a child, loss and dying. In reply to a question, AS suggested that the project aim to collate the best of existing liturgy as well as posting the new. AA suggested the best liturgical material should be published through the Joint Publishing Project.

Referring to her progress report, AS said a guide for authors was needed, setting out questions to ask when starting out. After lengthy discussion it was agreed that there was bound to be a tension between the truly progressive liturgy and the liturgy that could be used in a mixed church. So while the eventual target was reflect a 21st century understanding of Christianity, it is necessary for the Liturgy Project to offer small steps in that direction **as well as** larger leaps from tradition. JC suggested the twin track approach might need to be reflected in the presentation of liturgy on the website. It was agreed that AS would recruit a small editorial panel to advise on submissions and that she had the editorial authority to judge whether writing showed quality and originality. There was no obligation to publish and material could be rejected or referred back. **[Action AS]**

6 Financial Update

In presenting his management accounts for the year to date, TC explained that income was over £10,000 and expenditure almost £5,000. Although there were expenses to come and income would slow down to a trickle, he felt that PCN Britain was financially sound.

7 Operational matters

7i The relationship between PCN Britain and local groups

Introducing the discussion paper, JC reminded members that the PCN constitution made no mention of groups and that in the last year this had made it more difficult to judge the best course of action in relation to issues raised by one particular group. He thought that now was the time to prepare a policy on groups and that a subcommittee should try to clarify the relationship and prepare a report on how the constitution should be redrafted. TC cautioned against detailed alteration to the constitution, as outlined in the discussion paper. He recommended a new “authorisation clause” in the constitution which gave the Trustees the power to draw up policies/rules as needed. This would clear the way for the development of a Groups Policy which, since it was **not** part of the constitution, could be more easily launched and amended by the management committee. AS recommended that the subcommittee produce a policy document first, at the end of which the MC could decide if changes to the constitution were needed. It was agreed that Terence would draft a simple “authorisation clause” for the constitution and that MM, TC, AS assisted by AV, should work on the new policy. MM would convene the subcommittee. **[Action MM,TC, AS and AV]**

MM raised the issue of groups acquiring a denominational bias. In her experience, it could sometimes be more difficult to maintain a truly ecumenical welcome if groups met on a particular denomination’s premises and are convened by a member of that church. AS described a similar situation in which members from other denominations had stopped attending after the venue was switched to the convenor’s church. JC hoped that all groups would be sensitive to the possibility of denominational bias. It was important to safeguard the Open Welcome central to PCN Britain. He felt that where there was evidence of a denominational bias within a group or a regional hub, one answer was for PCN Britain to encourage other groups in the area so that the impression of a monopoly was broken. SG said she had come across groups which started as exclusively Anglican but that in the course of time became more ecumenical.

7ii Review of PCN Britain’s relationship with Progressive Churches listed on our website

As the sponsor of this item, AA, had left the meeting early it was decided that this should be postponed to the next meeting and be placed higher up the agenda. **[Action PO]**

8 Other business

8i Programming the preparation of the new PCN leaflet.

As the meeting was short of time, JC suggested he should undertake to work on this. **[Action JC]**

8ii Book Sales

AV reported that an approach to Cornerstones Bookshop to form a partnership by linking PCN’s website to their postal sales had not been taken up by Cornerstones. The store felt that they didn’t wish to expand into online sales as it didn’t fit with their retail policy. AV offered to carry a small stock of books which could be featured for sale on the PCN website. (PCN has *sale or return* facilities with two book distributors.) Alternatively, if PCN wishes to facilitate book sales to members and guests, it may be necessary for the committee to consider reverting to the idea of

becoming an agency for one of the existing on-line sellers such as Pick a Book or the Book Depository.

JC mentioned that a member of PCN had offered to donate some of her late husband's books by Paul Tillich to PCN. He raised the question of whether PCN should start a postal lending library. Trustees felt that in principle it was a good idea, though there would need to be volunteers to run it. HF mentioned that the CRC had a vast library and felt it would be good for PCN Britain's members to have access to it. JC suggested talks about whether the two organisations combine their efforts in this area. TC suggested that the offered Tillich books might go to the CRC library. **[Action HF, JC]**

8iii Registering PCN Britain with Charter for Compassion

The committee approved in principle that PCN Britain should apply to become a registered supporter of the Charter for Compassion. AS pointed out that this required a submission of PCN's mission statement and a declaration of why PCN Britain is relevant to the Charter. AS agreed to bring the matter up at the next meeting along with any further information she could find. **[Action AS]**

8iv 4thought on Channel 4

SB had been approached by the producer of this TV slot and remained committed to taking part, as a representative of PCN Britain. She explained that the strand addressed specific moral issues such as suicide and stem cell research and so the right occasion was necessary.

8v Membership report

AV introduced his report. Non-renewals were at their lowest since he'd kept records, due, he thought, to sending a written reminder with SAE. In the first week there were 24 replies out of a mail-shot of 53 people and more were still coming in. 21 had renewed and 3 had confirmed their wish to resign. This meant that PCN now had 488 paid up members and 11 honorary members.

8vi The need for a central London group

AV reported that a number of London members were looking for a group to attend. It was suggested he should write to Revd Lucy Winkett at St James' Church, Piccadilly. **[Action AV]**

8vii Suggestions for conference speakers

Discussion of this subject was curtailed due to a shortage of time. JC referred to attempts to recruit Karen Armstrong and the prospect of hosting Jim Kenney, (see 4iv.)

8viii Committee speaking engagements

JC outlined his PCN programme over the past two months: Free to Believe Reading Week at High Leigh [9th-12th May]; Newbury and Hampshire PCNs [23rd May]; Exeter PCN [26th May].

8ix Confirming committee locations into 2012

PO and SG reported they had experienced difficulty finding a location for the October residential meeting in the Harrogate area. Members discussed other options. JC asked all those with suggestions to share them with Terence, who would act as the contact. **[Action TC + all]**

8x Offer of progressive hymnody from George Stuart.

Some trustees had received examples of the work of George Stuart. He has agreed that PCN can publish his material free of cost, requiring only that he is acknowledged as author. JC said they were superb hymns and could be seen on Rex Hunt's Australian website. **[Action JC]**

9. Governance: Election of Officers

All current officers agreed to serve again. There were no other candidates, and so the four offices holders were confirmed in post. John Churcher, chair; Mary McMahon, vice chair; Terence Cooper, treasurer; Paul Onslow, hon. sec.

Future committee meetings

16th Sept 1pm – 5.30pm St Andrews URC, Roundhay, Leeds, LS8 1DS

8th Oct 12.00 noon - 9th 14.00 Residential venue TBA

14th January 11am – 4pm York, probably St Columba's URC. **[Action SG]**

3rd March 11am – 4pm, Birmingham,

19th May AGM and Committee in York **[Action SG]**