

Progressive Christianity Network – Britain

Residential Management Committee at the Bar Convent, York

8th – 9th October 2011

Minutes

Present: Adrian Alker (AA), John Churcher (JC, chair), Helen Fisher (HF), Philip Goodwin (PG), Sandra Griffiths (SG), Mary McMahon (MM, vice chair), Paul Onslow (PO, hon. sec), Angela Smith (AS), Richard Tetlow (RT)

In attendance: Andy Vivian, (admin assistant)

Saturday Afternoon Session

1. Apologies

Sonya Brown

2. Notification of AOB

There was no other business notified

3. Crisis Recovery following the death of Terence Cooper, PCN treasurer

JC expressed on behalf of Trustees, the sadness of this occasion and relayed the thanks of Terence's family for the support offered by members of PCN Britain.

Since Terence died, JC had acted as stand-in treasurer, organising cheque payments and negotiating with the bank. He had bought with him paperwork for signing by officers.

He announced that three members had put their names forward for the post of treasurer. Of these the first two had declared themselves "candidates of last resort" to be appointed only if no other suitable candidate came forward. Taking into account information gained through correspondence and conversations with all three, it was agreed that the third candidate, Andrew Burrell, (AB) was most suitable. In view of the reservations expressed by the other candidates, the committee appointed JC to pursue references for AB and arrange an interview with AB in London when RT would also be present. If this was satisfactory, the officers would move swiftly to propose AB's co-option to the committee. **[Action JC & RT]**

The committee agreed that PCN needed a deputy treasurer to ensure smooth transitions in future. **[StrategyTarget 29]**. JC would invite applications in his next chair's update. JC also agreed to write to the other candidates. **[Action JC]**

4. Three Year Strategy

30 response forms had been received following the publication of the Three Year Strategy Consultation document. The responses were discussed in subject headings:

4.1. National Strategy and progressive Coalitions

It was agreed that

- i. PCN would continue to work alongside other progressive Christian organisations and aim for a presence at large Christian gatherings, including Greenbelt **[Target 1]**
- ii. PCN should improve media communications by preparing a list of PCN regional and national spokespeople, to be sent to media editors and correspondents, along with information about the organisation. **[Target 2]**
- iii. Press would be invited to use the PCN office number as a central press contact.
- iv. JC would seek a volunteer from the membership to join the committee and work on the development of the list of spokespeople and circulate it to media outlets. **[Action JC]**
- v. PCN will aim to provide articles about PCN Britain to the denominational press, once or twice a year. **[Action New Trustee to commission?]**
- vi. PCN will work with progressive coalition partners to stage a major conference in spring 2013. **[Target 4]**
- vii. The preferred keynote speaker for the event should be Greta Vosper, if partners agree **[Action JC & HF]**

4.2. Administration

It was agreed that

- i. Where possible individual Trustees would take an interest in particular aspects of the admin assistant's work. This would give Trustees the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the detail of PCN activity and to share some of the tasks. AV to facilitate this. **[Action AV + Trustees]**
- ii. The Hon Sec would become familiar with the filing system in the PCN office. **[Action PO & AV]**
- iii. The title of the Admin Assistant should be changed to Administrator **[Target 28]**
- iv. PCN should adopt an eco-friendly and sustainable approach to administration and communication. **[Target 30]**

HF announced that she may leave the committee at the 2012 AGM

4.3. Membership

It was agreed that

- i. Members would be asked to indicate their age group and ethnicity on membership renewal forms in order to improve awareness of the make up of PCN's membership. **[Target 5, action AV]**
- ii. Members wishing to make contact with other members in their area should have a way of making their names known to others. **[Target 6, Action AV to publicise via magazine article]**
- iii. PCN would provide resources for members who are churchgoers to engage their own church in a progressive faith journey. **[Target 7]** See Agenda Item 11 for more targets relating to this.

4.4. Groups and Regional conferences

It was agreed that

- i. Groups would receive a reminder of the advice available on running a group, coping with dominant group members, and holding a regional seminar or conference. A reminder would be included in a Convenors circular. **[Action JC]**
- ii. Trustees should make themselves available for group visits and groups should be reminded of the availability of PCN spokespeople to address local meetings. . **[Action All Trustees]** A reminder would be included in a Convenors circular **[Action JC]**
- iii. PCN would encourage the establishment of groups in areas not currently served. **[Target 12, Action JC, through the newsletter and/or chair's update]**
- iv. PCN would produce a fresh statement of the relationship between groups and PCN Britain. **[Target 13, Action Groups policy subcommittee of MM, AS & AV]**
- v. PCN would encourage groups to work individually or together to organise public events where progressive Christian understanding could be explored. **[Action 14]**. It was felt that groups should be empowered to take the initiative and not rely on national organisers. JC to communicate this to groups through a Convenors' circular and Trustees on group visits **[Action JC & Trustees]**
- vi. PCN would produce a list of British progressive conference speakers with information about each, their contact details and fee. **[Target 15, Action PO with help of recommendations from Trustees]**
- vii. PCN would assist locally organised conferences by providing written advice, publicity and financial underwriting within the constraints of our resources and in line with current policy. JC and AV to remind groups of what help is available and where on the website relevant documents can be found. **[Target 16, Action JC, AV]**
- viii. PCN should persist with the aim of producing a model budget for those hoping to run a conference. This would be based on the recent Crossan conference. **[Action PG for January MC]**
- ix. PCN would remind convenors of the need to keep PCN informed of public events arranged in PCN's name. This is both to protect the good name of PCN and to offer the benefit of PCN help on such matters as public liability insurance and underwriting. **[Action JC through a convenor's update.]**
- x. Group convenors should be informed of any churches in their area listed on the progressive Churches list. **[Action ?? in tandem with new leaflet publication]**

4.5. PCN National Conferences

It was agreed that:

- i. PCN would hold at least one residential conference each year. **[Target 17]**
- ii. PCN will continue to stage two non-residential day conferences each year at geographically spread locations. One of these conferences may be linked to the AGM **[Target 18]**

4.6. Resources

It was agreed that:

- i. PCN would investigate the production of an "app" so that users of mobile devices might access the website. **[Target 26, Action PO]**

- ii. PCN would complete the upgrade of the website and provide training for groups in how to use the new group webpages **[Target 19, action AV & JC]**
- iii. PCN would continue to encourage the writing of new liturgy for publication on the website or elsewhere while also pointing the way to similar resources already published. **[Target 20, Action AS with help from AA to identify existing resources]**
- iv. While liking the idea of a progressive Alpha or British LtQ, the committee felt it was too risky an investment for PCN to undertake on its own.
- v. PCN would continue to work with partners on the Together in Hope study series adding new titles each year and improve the marketing of the study guides to reach the widest possible audience. **[Target 21]** It was stressed that more of these guides should be suitable for less academic groups. **[Action AA]**
- vi. The TiH publishing partnership should introduce an e-book version of the study guides if feasible. **[Target 22, Action AA]**
- vii. PCN would make available a selection of recommended books for sale in the PCN online shop in addition to the currently available stock of CDs and study guides. **[Target 23]**
- viii. PCN would add more DVDs to the DVD library and to make the DVDs available more widely. **[Target 24]**
- ix. PCN would work with the Centre for Radical Christianity to make their lending library list available to PCN members. **[Target 25]**. It was pointed out that the CRC library is currently unavailable. It was agreed that JC should write to the widow of Raymond Short who has offered some of his library and that the books should be picked up and stored at PO's garage until the CRC is ready to catalogue them. **[Action JC and PO]**

4.7. Financial Targets

It was agreed that:

- i. PCN should aim to maintain the current membership fees while encouraging those who can afford it to switch from the reduced to the full fee option. **[Target 27]**
- ii. JC would use a chair's letter and/or update to mention the possibility of legacies in favour of PCN **[Action JC]**

5. Conferences and Speakers

5.1 Greenbelt

AA announced that for 2012 PCN had the offer of two partners at Greenbelt: Modern Church and Inclusive Church. HF said she hoped that CRC would make up a partnership of four. AA stressed the need for quick action to reserve a major space. He suggested a meeting before Christmas involving the four organisations to discuss the commissioning of a film, stall staffing and a production for the G-Source stage. He felt that with four organisations sharing the cost, the space rental for 2012 could be less than 2011. **[Action SB, AA, Christine Alker, AV]**

5.2. Leeds Conference retrospective.

AA reported that taking into account the profit from books and CDs sold at the Crossan conference, the whole weekend made a profit of £235. The turnover was £7,746. Feedback on the conference had been good.

5.3. Proposed Jim Kenney Conference, Nov 2012.

JC expressed concern that insufficient was known about the proposed conference in order to take it forward. AA and HF felt that the July management committee had given Alan Race, the conference organiser, a clear indication that PCN supported the conference. AA added that Alan Race had told Modern Church that PCN was committed. Referring to the July minutes, JC said it was clear that progress was dependent on a meeting between SB, TC and Alan Race and that this meeting did not appear to have taken place. Apart from the lack of a budget, he was concerned that too little was known of the content of Jim Kenney's talks and that these may not be within the remit of PCN and could be difficult to sell to PCN members. PO and MM agreed. RT felt we should enquire about the crux of Jim Kenney's talks. AA felt the talks would be within the 8 points but said that JC should go back to ask Alan Race how the talks would reflect progressive Christianity. After discussion a consensus emerged that PCN was free to pull out of the event and was inclining towards doing so, but the committee left open the possibility of supporting the event in some way. JC would write to Alan Race to explain that PCN was not yet committed to the conference and needed more detail of content, venue and a budget. His email would be circulated first to the officers for approval. JC felt it might be appropriate for PCN to support the conference with advertising and possibly underwriting, but not adopt it as an official PCN conference. He was concerned that PCN should not let down Modern Church. **[Action JC]**

5.4. National conferences 2012

AA suggested that late September or early October would be the best times for a conference. Following representations from two members, it was agreed that London would be a suitable venue and HF suggested the Unitarian HQ. AA suggested that the theme might be Emergent Christianity, with contributions from leaders of active progressive churches such as Lucy Winkett at St James's, Piccadilly, Dave Tomlinson at St Luke's, Holloway, Angela Tilby of St Bene't's, Cambridge and, from the US, Phyllis Tickle, the author of *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why*. Other names mentioned included Mark Vernon, Ian Wallace and Elizabeth Oakley. PO suggested that Brian McLaren from the US might be willing to make a video link appearance to give a talk on emergent church and answer questions.

It was proposed that the conference should have two keynote speakers but in addition progressive churches should be invited to lead workshops/give a presentation on how they "do church". AV suggested running two conferences with the same theme, one in London and the other in York, alongside the AGM in May. This would allow representation from northern churches such as All Hallows, Leeds. This was agreed and JC asked all Trustees to think about the format and speakers for the two conferences and to give their thoughts to him and to AA asap! **[Action ALL TRUSTEES]**

No arrangements were discussed for the St Deiniol's residential in 2012.

6. Study Guides and Relationship with Churches

6.1. Report on TiH study guides

Alison Micklem had resigned from the Commissioning group and had been replaced as Free to Believe representative by John Hetherington. 700 out of the 1100 printed had been sold to date, meaning there is money for a new title. A new writer, Neil Burgess had joined the team and was

writing a guide on *Liberation Theology*, already prepared in draft form. It is still hoped that a compendium of Jack Spong's weekly newsletters can be published; copyright had been requested. Other potential titles included *Human Sexuality and Spirituality* and *What to tell the children*. The consultation had highlighted an interest in a progressive guide on *Atonement and Resurrection*. The publication of e-book editions was discussed. PO said he'd like to see e-book versions available on the PCN website. JC asked PO and AS to put their ideas to AA. **[Action PO, AS]** AA said the TiH commissioning group hopes to improve marketing of the series, including ads in Reform, Methodist Recorder, the Church Times and through international progressive Christian contacts. Stalls would be organised for Greenbelt and for conferences run by coalition partners.

6.2 Relationship with Churches

AA proposed a new PCN leaflet targeted at churches which conveyed the message that "PCN is your friend". It would aim to help churches think through the big questions of faith outlining what PCN had to offer by way of resources such as the 8 points to the study guides. The leaflet would be in the spirit of helping churches to thrive rather than trying to undermine them. AA offered to write a draft. MM felt that PCN should not forget its aim to provide a safe place to ask questions that can't be asked in church. RT felt the leaflet would offer immense benefits, allowing many more to "own" progressive Christianity. AS felt the leaflet would be pushing at an open door. There was a thirst in many churches for allowing people to ask questions. She supported the leaflet. HF asked if CRC could be copied in to this development. It was agreed that AA would have his draft ready for the January meeting. **[Action AA]**.

7. Newsletter Editor

The committee discussed the editor's view, expressed in the September newsletter, that "only church and the people called church (whatever its and their inevitable shortcomings at any particular point in time, and regardless of their Christian 'flavour'); only church has the capacity to live out the gospel and story of Jesus and proclaim its vision for all. Those who consider themselves to have 'moved on' from church have moved on from Jesus and moved on from Christianity also".

The committee agreed that this view diverged from its own and thus PCN's position. Like most other progressive Christian networks, PCN takes seriously its service to "church alumni". It was noted that this was not the first time that the editor had expressed in the newsletter his opposition to this aspect of PCN's work. It was agreed that PO as honorary secretary should write to Hugh Dawes to convey the committee's view that the editor had a duty to uphold the values and position of PCN and that such opposition was inconsistent with his role as editor. The letter should stress that Hugh Dawes' work as editor is greatly valued by the committee, but, in future if he feels he must comment negatively on PCN policy, then he should consult the chair before going to print. PO would provide a draft of this letter for the committee to comment on before sending it. **[Action PO]**

Following up the editor's suggestion that the newsletter might be printed on white glossy paper, it was agreed that the printer should be asked to provide a quotation. **[Action AV]**

8. Pithy Statement

The committee felt unable to progress this item.

9. Kindle versions of Study Guides

This matter had already been discussed in item 4.6 and 6.1

10. Minutes of July MC, matters arising

The minutes were noted and signed without amendment. Under matters arising JC said that he would provide hymns from George Stuart to the Liturgy project organiser, AS, for posting on the website. **[Action JC, AS]**

AT THIS POINT THE COMMITTEE RECESSED FOR THE NIGHT. AV was delegated to write up the decisions regarding the Three Year Strategy for further consideration in the morning.

Sunday Morning Session

11. Three Year Strategy 2012 – 2014

The committee discussed the list of agreed targets drafted overnight by AV. Minor amendments were made and some items reduced to action points, (these changes are now part of the minutes of item 4).

In view of the discussion minuted under item 5.4 (National conferences) it was agreed to add another Strategic Target

- i. To make 2012 a year when our conference calendar focuses on how progressive Christian communities can be people of The Way, including the emerging church movement. **[Strategy Target 11]**

In view of the discussion minuted under item 6.2 (Relationship with Churches) it was agreed to add three more Strategic Targets:

- i. To produce a PCN leaflet aimed at churches explaining how PCN can help provide resources to explore current understandings of scripture and faith. **[Target 8]**
- ii. To provide copies of this leaflet to PCN members and groups to help them support the faith journey of their own churches. **[Target 9]**
- iii. To provide copies of this leaflet to all the churches on the PCN locations list and to follow this up with regular updates. **[Target 10]**

AV was asked to create a draft document of the Strategic Targets and to circulate them by email to members of the committee for further comment. In particular, the chair asked members to consider the wording of Target 11, above. **[Action AV and all Trustees]**

12. 2012 budget

It was agreed that TC's 2012 draft budget draft B would become the budget for 2012. This envisages outgoings of £19,150, 2% up on 2010, and membership income of £17,650. The difference would be made up from book and CD income and Gift Aid receipts. AV warned that it might be necessary to vire some money to pay for website training.

13. Amendments to the PCN constitution

It was agreed that TC's drafting of a set of Aims and of a permissive clause to allow the Trustees to set policy should be put to the next AGM. The proposed aims of PCN are

- (a) To be focused by a progressive understanding of Christianity;
- (b) To support and encourage members of the Charity, both those who attend a church and those outside any organised church;
- (c) To support and encourage all, whether members or non-members, to meet together in groups to explore a progressive understanding of Christianity.

The proposed permissive clause gives the Trustees:

"power to make such reasonable and proper rules or policies as they may deem necessary or expedient for the proper conduct and management of the charity, provided always that they are consistent with this constitution."

14. Amendment to the Quorum rule

At the last AGM there was a suggestion from the floor that, with membership rising, the 10% rule was becoming more difficult to achieve and should be amended. It was agreed that PO would write to the Charities Commission to seek advice on a suitable rule.

15. New Underwriting Policy

The committee noted that an updated draft of this policy had not been prepared due to the untimely death of TC. It was suggested that the new Treasurer might take up the task of drafting a new version in the light of the July minutes.

16. Advertising

Having cancelled this year's advert in the Retreat magazine, the committee considered advertising in alternative publications. A survey of how Trustees had heard of PCN revealed that three came via the web, two via conferences, two through personal contacts and one through the Retreat magazine ad. The committee did not make a decision on press advertising but asked for research into costs. **[Action AV or new "media" Trustee]**

17. Purchase and availability of DVDs

It was agreed to purchase two new DVDs: *The Challenge of Jesus* by Dominic Crossan and Joan Chittister's *The Human Spirit and the Times We Live In*. AV would check whether these could be purchased in Britain, to avoid paying customs duty **[Action AV]**.

Members were shown a report on current DVD loans and availability. In relation to Strategic Targets 8 and 24, it was agreed that DVDs should be made available to church groups as well as PCN groups. **[Action Jess Lee, DVD librarian]**

18. Emailed Newsletter Option

It was agreed that from the next renewal date, members would be asked whether they would like to opt out of a printed newsletter, receiving an emailed PDF instead. Members would be alerted to this in the December newsletter **[Action AV]**

19. Future committee dates

With the proviso that the new Treasurer will need to be consulted the following dates are provisionally set for meetings in 2012

Saturday 14th January Committee: 11am – 4pm, St Columba's URC, York

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

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

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

Thursday 5th September or Saturday 8th September, committee: 11am – 4pm St Columba's URC, York. (On 5th the room is needed from 4pm for nursery)

Saturday 3rd - Sun 4th November or Monday 5th - Tuesday 6th November: Residential Committee: venue TBA

20. Charter for Compassion

AS explained the form which the Charter expects applicants to fill in. JC suggested the question of signing up should be taken to the membership at the AGM. The Hon Sec should add this to the AGM notice and agenda. **[Action PO]**.

21. Purchase of a DVD/CD copier

It was agreed that a copier would be a good investment. It should copy both CDs and DVDs. The agreed budget was for a second hand machine at £200. If none was available or if there is a bargain on a new one, the committee would be prepared to go higher but no more than £400.

[Action PO]. JC asked PO to check whether Chris Avis would be prepared to display PCN's CDs on his website, and what commission he would charge. **[Action PO]**

22. Liturgy Project

AS raised the question of what to do about contributors who did not want to chase up copyright permissions. The committee felt that the task belonged to contributors not PCN. JC agreed to chase up with one active liturgist, as to why he was not prepared to sign a consent form. **[Action JC]**. JC agreed to check with the newly appointed legal adviser to PCN whether a "good faith" defence existed in the event of unwittingly publishing copyrighted material. **[Action JC]**

23. Membership and Group news

AV drew to Trustees' attention his reports containing total membership figures as well as regional and clerical breakdowns. The membership is currently at an all time high of 537. The most populous regions are South East (97) and South West (68). These are closely followed by Scotland (58) and the NW (54). The lowest membership is in the NE (15%). A quarter of the membership is ordained. 14% do not name a church.

Trustees were asked to consider increasing visits to groups. It was suggested that a trustee might visit the conference being held in Scarborough on Thursday Nov 3rd, organised by the Driffield group convenor. AA said he was interested.

24. Running a Regional Conference

It was agreed that the completed and amended Guide to Running a Conference could now be posted on the website and made available to group convenors. **[Action AV]**

The meeting ended at 12 noon with an act of meditation and communion led by Paul Onslow, Mary McMahon and Angela Smith.