

# Progressive Christianity Network Britain

Management Committee at St James's Piccadilly, London

5<sup>th</sup> March 2011

## Minutes

**Present:** Adrian Alker (AA), Sonya Brown (SB), John Churcher (JC, chair), Terence Cooper (TC, treasurer), 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 to new members

Anne Padget, Philip Goodwin & Ian McAllister sent their apologies. JC announced that IM had been forced to stand down from the committee because of work related commitments. AP (representing the Centre for Radical Christianity), was also standing down, having completed her three year term. JC agreed to write to CRC about future representation. **[Action JC]**

### 2. Notification of AOB

Added at 7.7: Venues for PCN Britain committee meetings at the request of JC

### 3. Minutes of residential committee at Guy Chester House 20<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> November

These were accepted with minor corrections and signed.

### 4. Matters Arising

#### 4.1 Crossan update

PO announced that 35 people had booked and had paid £908.37. A new student ticket had been added at a cost of £20. AA felt bookings would increase once flyers had been circulated through the PCN Newsletter, Modern Believing and the Free to Believe newsletter. He appealed to the committee to help fill the conference. AV was asked to circulate a PDF copy of the conference flyer to all the committee. **[Action AV]** AA aimed to get flyers into Leeds networks. **[Action AA]**

#### 4.2 Spong update

No report on ticket sales was available. AA suggested PCN should make a presentation to Jack Spong if this was his last visit to the UK. AA agreed to find out and report back to May committee. **[Action AA]**

### **4.3 Salisbury Conference with Ian Bradley update**

JC was unsure whether this conference would materialise.

### **4.4 St Deiniol's update**

JC wondered, should the Salisbury conference not take place, whether Ian Bradley might be persuaded to lead the St Deiniol's weekend in November 2011.

### **4.5 Greenbelt update**

SB said she was liaising with Bob Callaghan of Inclusive Church and also CRC. She hoped that Inclusive Church might be willing to share a Network Space and that CRC might help provide a two performances on the G-Source stage. The cost of a Network Space is £1,850 which includes twelve weekend tickets and two performance slots on the G-Source stage. The fall back was to simply take out a table space as happened in 2010. JC asked SB to refer back to the officers with costings before making the booking. **[Action SB]**

AA suggested some useful contacts for SB. AA thought the Network Space could have a big screen showing video clips. It was agreed that Greenbelt offered a valuable opportunity to hear from young people and to explore how PCN Britain might become a voice for young progressive Christians. AA will liaise with SB about contacts worth chasing. **[Action SB, AA]**.

### **4.6 Birmingham Interfaith conference feedback**

RT reported that 48 people had attended "Reclaiming a Radical Faith for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". About 30 were new to PCN Britain and expressed enthusiasm for the organisation as well as the conference. 16 were from Birmingham. RT hoped that this might lead to a Birmingham group to sit alongside the existing West Midlands group serving the Birmingham area. RT thought the model of allowing Christians to rethink their faith in the light the radical edge of other faiths was good. He felt in retrospect that the word "radical" in the title of the conference had created some confusion since it could be interpreted in differing ways.

### **4.7 Joint Publishing Project update**

AA showed the committee copies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> book in the Together in Hope study guide series, called Jesus Then and Now. This was longer than the first and so, to keep the postage costs from rising, thinner paper had been used. MM offered to talk to the Edinburgh bookshop Cornerstone about carrying copies. **[Action MM]**. AA agreed to this and also suggested that the Quaker bookshop at Friends House might sell copies. **[Action AA]**. He hoped there would soon be a long list of titles. AV reported that over 60 copies of Walk the Jesus Walk had been sold through the PCN Britain on-line shop. AA said John Simmonds, the author, had sold a further 28. AV reported that two multiple orders – one of 24 copies and one of 12 - had been placed by groups for discussion purposes.

### **4.8 Newsletter contract update**

AV reported that having obtained three quotes, the newsletter contract had been given to Hillingdon Greenprint. Not only had they put in the cheapest quote for printing (£145 for 500 copies) but they had offered an envelope printing and franking service which would give PCN a saving of over £40 on every newsletter distribution. The mailing list, provided by AV, would be erased by the firm 7 days after distribution.

#### **4.9 DVD library feedback**

A report from the DVD librarian, Jess Lee, showed that all but two of the DVDs were fully booked. AV reported the purchase of four new DVDs from LTQ, at good discounts. He added that two new titles were available for £70 each, one by Spong and one by Crossan. It was agreed that before purchasing they should be assessed. AA offered to loan these titles from his diocesan library for a short period to a volunteer assessor so that a judgement could be made. **[Action JC to arrange assessor, AA]**

JC would purchase a title called "Beyond Theology". MM recommended this two DVD set. JC recommended another DVD title, "From Jesus to Christ – the first Christians", available on Amazon for £11.35. It was agreed that JC should purchase it. **[Action JC x2]**.

#### **4.10 Virtual groups update/Progressive Christian Alliance**

JC reported that the experiment using Skype had been unsuccessful due to technical difficulties with Skype. There was also little demand for a Skype group. JC reported that the PCA now had a European representative in Gloucester. He compared PCA to a house church movement. He recommended that committee members should visit the PCA website.

#### **4.11 Speaking engagements by committee members**

JC reported running a seminar in Swindon which might lead to a new PCN group. He was due to lead the Free to Believe reading week at Highlea in May when the subject was Karen Armstrong's Book, the Case for God. He was also speaking at a PCN event at Southernhay URC in Exeter. SB said she was going to visit the Tonbridge Wells Radical Pilgrims, a PCN group. JC said he would like all committee members to have a pack of leaflets and other resources to take around when they have engagements. **[Action AV + ?]**

#### **4.12 Ian Lawton tour 2011**

JC reported that as only one group had expressed interest in a visit from Ian Lawton, there was no basis for a tour.

### **5. Governance**

#### **5.1 Admin Assistant's annual appraisal feedback**

Andy's appraisal had been carried out in early December, by IM. The committee expressed itself well satisfied with his work.

#### **5.2 Consideration of draft policies**

In the absence of IM, this item was deferred.

### 5.3 Arrangements for 2011 AGM and Annual Report

The following timetable was agreed

Registration	10.30
AGM	11 – 11.45
1 <sup>st</sup> Seminar (Where does progressive Christianity go from here)	11.45 – 13.00
2 <sup>nd</sup> Seminar (Same title)	14.00 – 15.15
Trustees meeting	15.30 – 17.00

Invitations to the AGM would go out by the end of March, along with Trustee nomination forms and minutes of the 2010 AGM. Minutes of the 2010 AGM would be posted online. **[Action AV]**  
The deadline for submission of copy for the Annual Report would be 19<sup>th</sup> April. **[Action JC, TC, AV, PO]**

Hillingdon Greenprint had agreed to print the report. Copies would to be handed to members at the AGM. A web edition would be posted as close to the 19<sup>th</sup> April as possible. Hard copies would be distributed by mail with the September Newsletter. **[Action Hillingdon Greenprint, AV]**

MM would organise refreshments. **[Action MM]**

JC agreed to continue as chair of PCN for another year if re-elected at the AGM.

AV listed those committee members whose terms ended this year as JC, SG and AP. AP was stepping down, as previously stated. JC and SG would seek re-election. SB and PO decided they would like to stand for election, having joined the committee by co-option. At the AGM there would be room on the committee for six seats to be elected or re-elected.

It was felt the current committee was geographically skewed in its representation, with a cluster of trustees from Yorkshire and only one south of Luton . There was need for greater breadth on the committee in order to support the ambitious workload. AA and SB felt that a student representative or university chaplain would be a good addition. AA and SB agreed to contact student bodies – eg Network of University Chaplains, SCM, **[Action AA/SB]**. It was agreed that PCN did not wish have on its committee representatives with observer status. All should be full members of the committee. This would require that all should be members of PCN Britain.

MM suggested that the committee devote a session to PCN's work with young people and that young people should be invited to attend.

PO offered to serve as temporary PCN Hon Sec. This was endorsed warmly by the committee. AV agreed to provide PO with a job description. **[Action AV]**.

JC said it would be desirable for PCN to recruit a legal adviser to help with governance and the development of good practice policies. **[Action JC]**

## **6. Subcommittees: Website, Liturgy, Running a Conference, Young People**

### **6.1 Website development update (Pick-a-Book link proposal)**

AV reported that PCN had been offered a 5% commission on all book purchases made through its website by the new online book seller Pick-A-Book. The committee felt that PCN should not embark on this affiliation mainly out of sensitivity to the survival of High Street bookshops. The long held target of starting a section of the website which made book recommendation was endorsed - but without links to an online seller. JC asked AV to investigate the possibility of a tie-in with the Quaker bookshop or Metanoia Books (the Mennonite bookshop). **[Action AV and all committee for book recommendations]**

AV shared with the committee correspondence from Steve Ireland of IvyPark Media on proposals to upgrade the website. Improvements include more webpages for each group, an RSS feed, on-line self-management of members' membership records, more photos and videos and a new home page. A final spec would be presented to the next committee. **[Action PO, AV]**

### **6.2 Liturgy update**

Introducing her report, AS said a number of members had sent in progressive liturgical material for publication on the website. However, closer examination had revealed that many of these contributions contained elements of existing publications such as Common Worship and the Iona liturgies, raising copyright issues. She also questioned how to make a judgement on whether material did in fact fulfil the "progressive" brief. JC said that PCN had never sought to promote a PCN authorised version of liturgical material. He felt that anyone contributing material should make a declaration that their material was not bound by someone else's copyright. After further discussion it was agreed that JC and AS, as the liturgy subcommittee, would produce a form of words which could be given to contributors and which would safeguard PCN's duty not to breach copyright **[Action JC, AS]**. AA made the point that obtaining permission from copyright owners was not likely to be difficult. AS said what worried her was the tendency among contributors to blend their own original material into copyrighted material creating a document of dubious status.

### **6.3 Running a Regional Conference Guide - update**

SG presented the draft document that she and PG had prepared. TC suggested a paragraph should be added to cover banking arrangements and accounts for the event. RT suggested a reference about the value of taking photos of the event for use in future publicity or the Newsletter. He also stressed the need for a good relationship with the speaker. AV suggested the guide should raise options such as organising a crèche, making an audio or video recording, printing a flyer and booking form and (for weekend events) recruiting volunteer overnight hosts for less well-off attendees. **[Action SG]**

## 6.4 Young People

SB reported that the subcommittee included Paul Onslow, Peter Parr, James Quinton and Janis Knox. One proposal was to contact university chaplains and to try to arrange for PCN Britain speakers to visit universities. JC said Ben Curran was also interested in helping and that he would contact Ben. AA proposed that PCN Britain introduce a student rate of £5 a year for full time students. This was agreed **[Action AV]**

## 7 Financial matters

### 7.1 Accounts for 2010 Annual Report, official approval

TC presented his annual accounts for 2010 in two different formats. These were formally accepted. It was agreed that the annual accounts for the Charities Commission would be presented in the format favoured by the Charities Commission while the annual accounts for the PCN Britain Annual Report would continue in their present format. AA proposed a vote of thanks to the treasurer Terence Cooper, which was agreed unanimously. **[Action TC]**

### 7.2 Management Accounts 2011, to date

TC presented his accounts for the first three months of 2011. Attention was drawn to the generous response by members to news of last year's deficit. TC agreed that the heading indicating *Subscriptions* would be amended to read *Subscriptions and Donations*. There would continue to be a separate heading for donations received independent of subscriptions. **[Action TC]**

### 7.3 2011 and 2012 Budgets – clarification of agenda for May 2011

The committee agreed that the May meeting would consider a draft budget for 2012 starting January 1<sup>st</sup> 2012. Since PCN would already be nearly half way through the financial year by May, there was no point in creating a new budget for 2011. **[Action TC]**

### 7.4 Insurance

TC reported that he was trying to obtain another quote for PCN Britain's insurance. This arose because of PCN's need to be clear that public liability is covered at public events. Currently PCN has two public liability options through Aviva: to pay a supplement of £100 a year to cover five public events or £130 a year to cover ten events. A quote is expected soon from Anscar, through a broker, MasterPolicy, in Biggleswade. The quote will cover the complete insurance package. AA recommended that a quote should also be obtained from Ecclesiastical Insurance. TC said that PCN is likely to end up paying more for insurance. He hoped that under the new arrangements PCN would be able to offer PCN groups annual public liability insurance for £25. This could be useful for groups which meet in a place where the venue's insurance does not cover groups using the property. **[Action TC]**

### 7.5 Restricted Fund update

TC reported that funds had already been placed in this ring fenced budget heading following his letter to partners in the Together in Hope joint publication project. This is in accordance with the agreed policy that PCN Britain should act as banker for future publications, paying bills and banking sales income.

### **7.6 Modification of Underwriting Policy (to whom cheques are made payable)**

There appears to be a contradiction in PCN policies. The existing Event Underwriting Policy does not allow organisers at group level to ask for PCN to act as the banker for ticket sales, while the existing Starting and Running a Group Document makes it clear that ticket sales must be paid to PCN Britain. This matter was deferred to the officers to discuss. In the case of the Spong Events in Glasgow, PCN had received a request from the organisers to allow ticket sales to be paid to PCN Britain and this had been agreed. **[Action TC, JC, MM and PO]**

### **7.7 Venues for PCN Britain committee meetings**

JC said that the free use of a meeting room at St James's, Piccadilly, was unlikely to continue and the committee should consider alternatives. The cheapest he had found in London cost £400. He wondered if a venue in central England might be more suitable since it would be closer to more members of the committee. SB said that PCN would be welcome to meet at her church in Leicester. AA felt PCN should keep one committee meeting a year in London. He would research cheaper alternatives in the capital **[Action AA]**.

## **8 Membership and Groups**

### **8.1 Membership renewals update**

Introducing his report, AV drew attention to the good response by members to the chair's request to renew in January. 415 had now renewed their membership compared with approximately 310 at the same time last year. The total membership in March stood at 490, which is 21 more than the same time last year. The number of non-renewals from 2010 was 53 which is similar to the previous year.

### **8.2 PCN West of Scotland Website**

AV introduced a paper from Chris Vermeulen in Glasgow about the wish of the two PCN West of Scotland groups to start a website. Chris had invited PCN groups across Scotland to have a share of this website. While having no objection to groups running their own website, the committee had been concerned that an all-Scotland website might lead to a de facto split in PCN Britain between Scotland and England. Mindful of these concerns Chris explained in his paper that this was not his intention. Rather he sought to reflect the differing perspective on religious issues north of the border.

His aim was to offer individuals as well as groups an on-line community. He recognised that the PCN committee was making plans to upgrade the access offered to groups within its own webpages. He offered to hold back on the Scottish website initiative to see what was on offer from PCN Britain.

There followed a discussion on what unites the PCN groups network.

Summing up JC identified two issues.

The first was what constitutes the PCN brand. In his view PCN is an enabling organisation helping those following the progressive route to flourish. In this regard the 8 points had proved

an important part of the brand. The 8 points had generated considerable interest on Facebook among people who were returning to religion.

The second was the principle that “splits fail”. He was reluctant to see an independent PCN website/network in Scotland. If the West of Scotland groups decide to become an independent organisation like the Centre for Radical Christianity in Sheffield, they should adopt an independent title and drop the PCN name to make this clear. They would still be welcome to affiliate to PCN Britain.

RT emphasised the point that the ultimate aim should be the support of progressive Christianity. PCN Britain was simply a way to facilitate that.

It was agreed that JC would contact Chris Vermeulen to explain the committee’s position.

**[Action JC]**

### **8.3 Attendance of groups by people unsympathetic to progressive Christianity**

The committee heard that a couple of people from an established religious community based in the US, not generally linked to progressive Christianity, had joined a PCN group. The committee had no experience of this issue. It was decided that the matter should be left to the local group to address unless there was a specific request for help.

### **8.4 Group Census – final figures**

AV presented the final figures from the group census, in which nearly half the groups had taken part. SG emphasised the clear sense of belonging which emerged. AS said that in her experience groups conveyed a sense of immanence and transcendence in meetings.

AA said that the committee should allocate time to discuss how PCN serves the churches. He felt that PCN’s relationship to churches had not been discussed recently. JC agreed to put this on the agenda for the July 9<sup>th</sup> in Leicester. **[Referred to July 9<sup>th</sup> meeting]**

### **8.5 Best practice review of *Starting and Running a Group***

As IM was not present, this item was deferred to a future meeting.

### **8.6 Resources table**

AA offered to have a resources table ready for the Crossan event. It would have examples of books, DVDs, CDs and other resources for suitable for learning about progressive Christianity. JC asked him to try to have something available to send up to the Spong meetings in Glasgow. **[Action AA]**

## **9 PCN Britain strategy**

### **9.1 2012 progressive “alliance” conference**

JC, who has been liaising with CRC on this project, said that a Sheffield venue was still envisaged and that an invitation had been sent to Karen Armstrong.

### **9.2 Other conference possibilities for 2012**

SB wondered if Ayaan Hirsi Ali might be a suitable speaker for PCN. Ms Hersi Ali is a Somali born Dutch feminist writer and politician. She currently works for the conservative think-tank, the American Enterprise Institute. SB quoted Ms Hirsi Ali as saying that the “future lies with liberal churches”. JC suggested that SB should try to contact her. **[Action SB]**

MM said she had received no response to an email sent to Sister Joan Chittister. PO suggested she approach Chittister’s agent. (Possibly via The Liturgical Press in Collegeville MN or one of her other publishers.) **[Action MM]**

Canadian liberal theologian, Greta Vosper, author of ‘With or Without God’, was also suggested. **[Action??]**

### **9.3 Planning for the three year strategy review**

JC said that consultation for the next 3 year strategy would take place at the AGM seminars and through a membership questionnaire mailed out with the newsletter in September. Feedback would be sifted and organised into a new strategy document at the November residential 2011. It was agreed that a subcommittee be formed to organise the process. AV would provide documentation from the 2008 strategy review to help the subcommittee. The subcommittee would produce a summary of targets met in the last three years, a questionnaire for this year and discuss how best to garner opinion at the AGM. JC, PO, RT and AS were appointed to the subcommittee. **[Action JC, PO, AS, RT, AV]**

### **9.4 Programme for revision of the 8 points**

JC said that the TCPC reviewed the 8 points on a 5 year cycle. They will inform progressive networks worldwide when they next undertake a review. It was agreed to postpone any consideration of the 8 points until after this year’s strategic review.

**9.5 Who and what we are – the need for a simple sentence and a pithy paragraph.**

This need had been highlighted by TC and SG. MM said that PCN needs to discover what we are about and where we are going. JC agreed that the idea of finding a pithy description of PCN would be included at the AGM seminars and in a chair's e-update. A competition was suggested by SG **[Action JC]**

**9.6 A slot for PCN Britain on *4Thought on Channel 4***

SB offered to investigate whether it was still possible to register for this slot. **[Action JC]**

**10. Any other business**

Nothing was discussed under this heading.

**11. Future committee meetings**

May 7<sup>th</sup> 10.30am: AGM, seminars and committee. Bloomsbury Baptist Church, London WC2H 8EP

July 9<sup>th</sup> 11.00am: St Philip's Church, Leicester LE2 1HN

Sept 16<sup>th</sup> 1.00pm: St Andrew's URC, Roundhay, Leeds LS8 1DS

Nov Residential: Date and Venue to be fixed.