

**General Assembly of Unitarian  
& Free Christian Churches**

**Approved Minutes Executive Committee  
Friday 18th & Saturday 19th September 2015  
The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow**

**Present:** Robert Ince (Convenor), Marion Baker, James Barry, Philip Colfox, Joan Cook, Peter Hanley (Honorary Treasurer), Gwynn Pritchard, Lynne Readett, Jacky Woodman.

**In attendance:** Rev John Clifford (General Assembly President until item 15.), Derek McAuley (Chief Officer), Simon Wilson, (Vision Day facilitator Session 1) and Mary-Jean Hennis (Minute taker). Members of the Nightingale Centre Management Committee; David Copley, Dot Hewerdine, Richard Merritt, Colin Partington and Michael Tracey attended for Session 8.

The Convenor welcomed Simon Wilson to the first session of the meeting.

## **Friday**

### **Session 1**

*Opening Devotions: Marion read from the purple Hymn book – “Dear weaver of our lives design – set our spirits free today”*

**1. Apologies – none**

**2. Vision Day Follow-up**

A copy of a draft agenda for the workshop on 21 November 2015 was circulated. Simon wished to establish whether the purpose of the meeting had been properly defined and to look at the overall shape of the day. Discussions had taken place since the last meeting on online streaming of parts of the event to include as many people as possible and encourage their feedback and contributions.

A lengthy discussion took place with the following issues highlighted:

- A) The purpose of the day should be to identify possible new people who are willing to serve with the go ahead given on the day to move forward with ideas
- B) It is imperative that a coherent plan is in place to enthuse people to sign up.
- C) Links could encourage their Districts to identify new people in the congregations to serve nationally.

- D) EC need to ensure that actions arising from the Vision Document had been implemented by the Annual Meetings to avoid cynicism.
- E) To have “mini-bites” of information on the tables and around the room to encourage discussion grounded in knowledge rather than looking to the past. This was agreed.
- F) It was noted that the Local Leadership Strategy Group had a one year plan which had been based on the Vision Document (see below item 6 A))
- G) It was agreed that six themes would be identified for discussion on the day. We would seek to use the energy present to activate action with the focus on what could be done immediately, while recognizing difference and diversity of views.
- H) It should also be made clear that some of the initiatives from the past Vision Day have in fact already been implemented successfully; these should be put onto posters around the room, highlighting their success and celebrating best practice.
- I) By advertising in advance what the themes are going to be, people can arrive at the Vision Day with ideas.
- J) Any involvement of people working remotely should be earlier rather than later eg: streaming the welcome and feedback sessions. **Action: John Clifford agreed to moderate online feedback.**
- K) The final questions for the EC on the day would be – what can we do today and what are the issues that require further reflection. The risk is that there is not a plan, only ideas. We need to acknowledge that there will be differences of opinion.
- L) It was agreed that a “happy sheet” would be used at the end of the meeting eg: “What are you taking away from today?” “What could we be?”
- M) One of the objectives of the day would be to “Energise Volunteers”. We needed to be systematic about data collection on attendees.
- N) It was agreed that James would liaise with the administrators of the Unitarian Face-book page with regard to the appropriateness of an open or closed Face-book stream – there is however some concern being expressed at the use of the “open” page. **Action: James Barry**
- O) Publicity for the event remained a challenge.

Simon ended this session by saying that there is now a sense of how it would be most appropriate to break down “What is the Vision”; how to organize that conversation and bring it all back together and that he is confident that the day would be successful. For each theme we needed to identify what’s happening already, what else needs to happen and who is to it. The Convenor thanked Simon for attending the meeting.

## Session 2

3. **Minutes of the meetings held on 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> July 2015 (DOC EC76/15)** – the Minutes were signed as an accurate record of the EC meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

4. **Matters arising for noting or to include in Agenda for later discussion:** - Link Reports were added to the Agenda after item 17. And included the UCM representative

5. **EC Action List (DOC EC77/15)** noted with the following

All items on the EC Action list have been actioned, apart from:

**15/16 May 2015**

No 10 – item 14 b) – Climate Change – to be referred the Steering Group meeting in January 2016 with a request to consider a written report to the Annual Meeting.

**17/18 July 2015**

No 2 item 4 – EC bios – still awaiting photographs.

No 3 item 5 – VSG follow up letter 2020 – **James to request response from 2020 and Philip will follow-up as Link person.**

No 5 item 7 – Risk – highlighting with their Districts the implications of not following recommended policies. – ongoing.

No 6 item 8 – Volunteering – remind Districts that responses to letter on Volunteering/Nomination Committee still welcomed and request suggestions for President and V/P 2016/17 – ongoing.

**6. Reports from Strategy Groups**

- A) Local Leadership Strategy Group - (DOC EC78/15)** –noted with the following:

- A comprehensive one year plan was received for which Louise Rogers and the group are thanked. It has been noted that the LLSG are using the Vision Document for the framework for their planning. The plan needed to be shared with the other groups. It also illustrated the need for sharing of previous work, such as the music course developed by Myrna Michell.
- Marion Baker the EC Link to the LLSG had not been informed of the date of the meeting on the 15 August 2015, so had been unable to attend, however she has the dates for the next two meetings and will attend the meeting on the 6 February 2016.
- **Action: EC to ask the other Strategy Groups how their strategies fall into the Vision;**
  1. **James agreed to prepare a document for the VSG.**
  2. **Chief Officer will liaise with Rev Linda Phillips.**
  3. **Marion will ask Louise to condense the LLSG plan into a presentation form.**
  4. **Marion would liaise with Louise with regard to LLSG attendance at the Vision Day**

- B) Ministry Strategy Group - (DOC EC79/15)** – noted with the following:

- Joan informed the EC that she had reported the decision of the EC with regard to the release of funds made at the July EC meeting to the MSG.

- Work had been initiated on the recognition of new ministers during the Anniversary Service and there was a need for greater theological clarity on what the ceremony meant and how it related to College Valediction.
- As there are new members on the EC, Joan gave a summary of the progress around stage 1 and stage 2 of the training review.
- The Chief Officer noted that the timings of EC and MSG meetings remained problematic.

**C) Visibility Strategy Group - (DOC EC80/15) – noted with the following:**

- EC agreed in principle the addition of the two people identified by the VSG from Ireland onto the group on condition that they become Associate Members and that they take account of the sensitivities of the NSPCI. Joan indicated that the person in Aberdeen is still interested. **Action: Joan to forward the details to James for his attention.**
- EC agreed that VSG use funds from the 2015/2016 VSG budget for the purpose of supporting funding of PR training at the UNI-Coms conference.
- The concerns raised by the VSG with regard to the branding of the Derby Unity Project were noted and it was agreed that the General Assembly should be acknowledged as the funder in any future publicity. – Derby Unity to be notified. Marion to enquire as to the view of the EMU toward the lack of acknowledgement and branding issue at Derby Unity.  
**Action: James to liaise with the 2020 Leadership Group to obtain a response to his email and Phillip to contact Martin Whitell with regard to the above and to enquire about an invitation to the Launch open day.**

**D) Youth Strategy Group - no response obtained and to await new Strategy Plan.**

**E) 2020 Leadership Team - (DOC EC81/15) – noted with the following:**

EC agreed to the addition of Angela Maher to the 2020 Leadership Group.

Phillip to enquire about his attendance at the 2020 leadership group meeting in October and future meetings.

**7. Nightingale Centre Minutes (DOC EC82/15) - noted with the following:**

The Convenor raised two issues – incidents involving the swings and concerns regarding mine shafts on property - which are being dealt with appropriately.

### Session 3

#### 8. Nightingale Centre

The Convenor welcomed the Nightingale Centre Management Committee to the meeting and was hopeful for a positive outcome following the informal discussions the previous evening. It was acknowledged that the changes to delegation arrangement had affected relationships. Michael Tracey introduced the views of the management committee and looked forward to a constructive dialogue. The Convenor indicated that it had not been the intention of the EC to exclude the Management Committee when it had felt a need to take urgent action and offered his apologies.

A document produced by the management committee with suggested redraft of the delegation arrangements, which unfortunately had not been circulated as part of the papers as intended, was copied to EC members and discussed. It was agreed that it would be considered at the November EC meeting. It was agreed that the Delegation arrangements should show a degree of trust. The need to make sure that those seeking appointment to the EC were fully aware of their responsibilities as a trustee of the Nightingale Centre was stressed.

The EC agreed that it would meet annually at the Nightingale Centre, normally in September.

Discussion took place on succession planning for the Nightingale Centre Management Committee which it was agreed should be reviewed on a regular basis. Some form of skills assessment was suggested as had been undertaken by the EC. **Action: Chief Officer to share with Marion.**

Discussion took place of the ideas suggested the previous evening. A key message of this session should be "How the EC and NCMC can move forward and work together on the Vision looking at opportunities of working together" with the needs of young families being suggested as a joint project.

### Session 4

#### 9. Finance – Budget 2015/16 - (DOC EC83/15)

The Chief Officer announced that he had received £1515.00 from Portsmouth being reimbursement of a Millennium Fund grant as they had decided not to progress with their intended work.

The Chief Officer presented a draft Budget for 2015/16. It was **agreed** to include £3000 to cover costs of the Vision event and bursaries for

those who could not afford to attend. It was **AGREED** that Ministerial Students can claim for travel costs to the Vision Day from the Ministerial Students Fund. The plans set out by the LLSG (see above) was incorporated into the Budget.

There was discussion around whether to keep the Legacy provision in income. It was suggested that any legacies should be retained separately to prepare for the ending of Bowland Trust funding. A proposal was put forward to remove the allocation and as there was no seconder it was agreed to retain the £10,000. The Budget was approved

It was pointed out that one of the messages on the Vision day should be about the potential for fund-raising and that, as shown by the nightingale centre and SACH, success will produce funds.

It was recognised that a Budget for actions arising from the Vision would be required but no funds had yet been allocated. Following discussion it was agreed to close the Millennium Fund to new applications – recognising that a commitment has already been given to Dukinfield of £5,000 – and use the remaining funds for Vision projects.

**10. Financial Review Group Update - (DOC EC84/15) – noted with the following:**

The Financial Review group had met on 26 August 2015 and a report was received. It was recognised that the ending of the Bowland Trust funding is a major concern. It was agreed that professional advice on legacy management should be a priority within the context of overall fund-raising. .

The Chief Officer to enquire if the numbers attending the annual meetings can be increased when he attends the next Annual Meeting Panel meeting. **Action: Chief Officer**

**11. Widows' Fund - (DOC EC85/15)**

Lynne declared an interest in this item.

A request was received from the Ministerial Pension Fund that the EC, in light of the General Assembly's position as "guarantor of last resort", approve their acceptance of the Widows' Fund assets and liabilities following the decision of the Widows Fund AGM to wind-up the Fund. The proposal was approved and MPF to be informed. **Action: Chief Officer**

**12. Non-responsive check-out**

*Closing Devotions: Lynne read from "A Feast of Days" by Joyce Hifler.*

## Saturday

*Opening Devotions: Peter read three snippets – mini—themes; change and perspective.*

- a) *Tom Briggs – Sacred Art – symbolic language.*
- b) *Andrew Marr – History of the World – pg 470*
- c) *Peter Hawkins – Wise Fools Guide to Leadership – “To what end”.*

## Session 5

### 13. Annual Meetings Panel - (DOC EC86/15) – noted with the following:

Item 7 – page 3 – Venue progress – one of the possible venues for 2017 is unsuitable, however there are still two which are viable. John Clifford has declined to be the disability officer at the 2016 Annual meeting due to a heavy schedule.

### 14. President’s Report - (DOC EC87/15) – noted with the following

The President had raised with the Chief Officer the response of the General Assembly to the Syrian refugee crisis. He asked the EC to recognise the serious implications and to respond accordingly, The President had received an email from the Rev Feargus O’Connor, which was also copied to the EC with regard to the above and on another matter with regard to an appeal for animal welfare. The Convenor will respond to the email.

It was agreed that the Chief Officer and the President should liaise and issue an immediate statement from the President and the EC. The Red Cross Unitarian Churches Clara Burton fund would be used to raise funds. The Chief Officer was asked to research how the GA had responded to the refugee crisis before and after the Second World War and find out how other groups were responding to this issue. Congregations should be encouraged to work with others in their local area.

### 15. Chief Officer Report - (DOC EC88/15) - noted with the following:

- The Chief Officer reported that the Leicester Fellowship (unofficial group) closed in August 2015 and that the Worthing Congregation will be holding it’s last meeting in December 2015.
- The Chief Officer has produced a “GA Policy” document which was distributed – this is a “live” document which can be added to as and when necessary – The Chief Officer was thanked by the EC for producing this document which will be invaluable in future EC induction and in preserving organisational memory. **Action: MJ to email to Jacky, Lynne and James.**

- The Chief Officer announced the successful recruitment over the summer of a Financial Manager – Colin Farey. Colin started work at Essex Hall on the 9 September and has already made an impact on the Finance Dept and given an assurance that we will be able to use Aqilla for the Year-end Accounts. The Chief Officer and the Honorary Treasurer were congratulated on the successful recruitment exercise.

## **16. Key Messages to be distributed separately**

### **Session 6**

**11.00 – 12.00**

## **17. Arrangements for Future Meetings in 2016 – dates agreed to September 2016.**

## **18. Link Reports – verbal**

### **MDMA & MDA:**

1. Lynne to encourage districts to implement a skills audit to encourage volunteers. **Action: Chief Officer to email Skills Audit form to Lynne.**
2. Lynne expressed concern about smaller congregations who are finding it difficult to carry out work eg: accounts etc – the Convenor indicated that he is working with Rachel Skelton and Martin West on producing a standard spreadsheet.

### **Wales:**

1. Gwynn noted that Melda Grantham, the Welsh Secretary, has established good relations in Wales and has indicated that she would like to attend a future EC meeting.
2. Showed the EC the "YR YMOFYNNYDD" with a page dedicated to the Vision Document and a questionnaire inspired by the document, it has also been issued in English.
3. He hopes there will be a healthy representation by Welsh Unitarians at the Vision Day.
4. Rev Cary Johnsen, a UUA Minister has been working to encourage partnerships between American and Welsh congregations.
5. It had been raised with him why some of the documents are not available as word documents. The Chief Officer responded that those particular documents are protected specifically to ensure they are completed in full however he will see if pdfs could be produced for online completion. **Action: Chief Officer**
6. Reported that Megan Jones had indicated that the General Assembly could honour the memory of Rev Jacob Davis at national Level during 2016 to mark his centenary. It was thought that this could be appropriate during the Welsh slot at the Annual Meetings



**Scotland and Northern:**

1. Joan reported that Newcastle have made the decision to sell their building.
2. Edinburgh celebrated its first same sex marriage this month which went very well.
3. Glasgow also celebrated their first same sex marriage – this was at Glasgow University Chapel and the couple were presented with a gift to celebrate the occasion.
4. Forth Valley Fellowship continue to meet monthly however Rob Whiteman was no longer able to provide leadership.
5. Orkney (Haughland House Trust) – the Charity has to be wound up before a sale can take place, with the SUA being the sole beneficiary.

**NELUM, EMU & MUA:**

1. There has been no response to the email sent by the Convenor to NELUM with regard to the Vision Day in November. Jacky will be attending the next NELUM meeting in November
2. EMU has responded well to the Safeguarding Audit.
3. Jacky has had no contact yet with the MUA, but will soon.

**UCM:**

1. Marion indicated that there will be no Sharpe Scholar from Transylvania in the near future.
2. Ratified the appointment to take forward the College Review project and the second stage has commenced. There is concern that there has been no recent dialogue with the MSG and Joan will take this up with Rev Daniel Costley. **Action: Joan Cook**

**19. Any other Business:**

A question was received from the President on acknowledging the recent 63<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Queens' Accession and he was advised that he should use his discretion.

James raised an issue relating to an unpaid invoice [following investigation it was confirmed it had been paid on 2 June 2015]

**20. Vision Day - Themes for the Day – “Making Change Happen – from Vision to Action”**

The following themes were agreed –

1. Ministry in all its forms
2. Being relevant to the world
3. Doing things differently
4. Lifelong spiritual development
5. Leadership
6. Sustainability

**The timetable is:**

10.00 am for 10.30am start (to accommodate trains from the South West) with a 4.30pm EC debrief and maximum finish 5.00pm.

**To move forward before the day:**

- Email personal invitations.
- Articles to be placed in The Inquirer, The Unitarian and the Uni-news.
- Posters to be circulated and to be placed on the events section of the website.
- To be promoted on the Ministers Chatline.
- When invitations are sent out they should include sending new members
- The themes to be released before the day.
- Ideas for PROMPT cards to reach the EC before November EC meeting.
- Marion to check Novotel deals.
- Marion to send map to the venue to Essex Hall.
- Applications for expenses for accommodation for those unable to travel in a day to be received.

**1) Non responsive check-out**

*Closing Devotions – Joan read from the hymn “I will be a rational Unitarian” written by Eric McFadd a former member of the Edinburgh Congregation.*