

The
**United
Reformed
Church**
Yr
**Eglwys
Ddiwygiedig
Unedig**

THE NATIONAL SYNOD OF WALES

Synod Profile 2023



Contents

Croeso! Welcome to the National Synod of Wales	2
Where We Are	3
Who We Are	4
A National Synod	4
Our Churches	4
Church Locations Map	8
Church Buildings	9
Our Ministers	9
The Synod Support Team and Synod Office	10
Our Structure	11
Our Finances	12
What We Do	13
Mission and Discipleship	13
Children and Young People	13
Training	13
Lay Worship Ministry	14
Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations	15
Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion	15
Safeguarding	15
Where we are going	17
Challenges and Opportunities	17
Our Next Moderator	18

Croeso! Welcome to the National Synod of Wales

We continue the traditions of God's people by:

- Acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God (Micah 6:8)
- Desiring to see God's kingdom come and God's will be done (Matthew 6:10)
- Loving God, loving ourselves and making disciples (Matthew 22:36-40, 28:19)

We proclaim the good news through synod events and communications, and through our engagement with ecumenical partners and wider society.

We nurture and teach all new believers through Stepwise and encourage all believers to consider their role as part of the Whole People of God. We are passionate about developing discipleship across the synod and encouraging members to reconsider what they think of as ministry.

We respond to human need in loving service by supporting the missional work of our local churches, led by them as they work in their own local contexts. We are a 'bottom up' organisation, responding with empathy, creativity and practical support to the needs of communities across Wales. We consider Safeguarding to be a priority both legally and pastorally.

We transform unjust structures of society by engaging with wider society on issues of social justice. We are exploring and developing ways to enable local churches to engage with these issues.

We safeguard creation and sustain and renew the earth by considering the environmental impact of everything we do and seeking to minimise our carbon footprint. We hope to be the first synod to gain an Eco Synod Silver Award.

In everything we do, we seek to practise an **Appreciative Inquiry** (AI) approach. AI is a strengths-based model for organisational development that aims to identify and build upon what is working well. The fundamental premise of AI is that every challenge presents an opportunity to develop positive potential.



Libanus with Barham, Ebbw Vale

Where We Are

For a small country, Wales is rich in history, landscapes and culture. Where else would you find over six hundred castles, five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, four UNESCO World Heritage Sites, three National Parks, two languages and one red dragon on the national flag?



The population of 3.1 million is concentrated in southeast Wales, with almost 1.5 million people living within 25 miles of Cardiff. In the west and the north, communities are gathered around ports, university towns and coastal resorts, while the urban areas of the northeast are focussed on centres of industry. Inland from the coast and throughout mid-Wales, the countryside features rural farming communities and small market towns.

The country's transport infrastructure was developed to move goods and people from west to east, rather than to link north and south. As a result, there is no quick way to travel from Cardiff to Caernarfon. The main road through Wales, the A470, is beautifully scenic in places, but it is no motorway and 160 of its 186 miles are single carriageway. There is no north-south railway line within Wales – mainline services weave through the English and Welsh borders – and direct flights between Cardiff and Anglesey were discontinued in 2020.

The National Assembly for Wales was formed following a referendum in 1997. In 2020, it was renamed Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) in recognition of its extended legislative powers. The Senedd, as it is commonly known, is situated in Cardiff and oversees the work of the Welsh Government (Llywodraeth Cymru) in devolved matters, such as health, education, housing, transport and the environment. Notable priorities include the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act](#), which requires public bodies to consider the long-term implications of their decisions.

The Welsh language is one of the nation's treasures. In 1993, the Welsh Language Act established the Welsh Language Board and required certain public bodies to offer services in Welsh as well as English. The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 gave Welsh equal legal status with English, introduced the office of the Welsh Language Commissioner and created formal Welsh Language Standards. In 2017, Senedd Cymru launched Cymraeg 2050, a strategy to achieve the target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. According to the 2021 census, 17.8% of the population speak Welsh and there are many opportunities for learning the language, from classroom-based courses to online services (including Duolingo, where Welsh was the fastest growing language in the UK in 2020).

Nonconformity has a distinct history in Wales. The first congregational or independent congregation was founded in 1639 at Llanvaches and is now part of the United Reformed Church. The Welsh-speaking Undeb yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg (Union of Welsh Independents) was formed in 1872 to complement the English-speaking Congregational Church in England and Wales (established in 1831). Baptist ministers began preaching in Wales in the mid-seventeenth century and the resulting Baptist congregations affiliated to the Baptist Union of Great Britain (formed in 1813) or the Baptist Union of Wales (established in 1866). Calvinistic Methodism developed in Wales from the 1730s and seceded from the Church of England in 1811, becoming the Presbyterian Church of Wales (Eglwys Bresbyteraidd Cymru) in 1823. Throughout the nineteenth century, Welsh Nonconformists campaigned for the disestablishment of the Church in Wales, which was enacted by the Welsh Church Act in 1914. In 1975, three years after the formation of the URC, a covenant committing to greater ecumenical cooperation in Wales was signed by the Committee of the Covenanted Baptist Churches in Wales, the Church in Wales, the Methodist Church of Great Britain, the Presbyterian Church of Wales and the URC.

Who We Are

A National Synod

As the National Synod of Wales, we represent the whole United Reformed Church through our interactions with our ecumenical partners and with wider civic secular society.

In matters relating to Welsh ecclesiastical and public affairs the national synod speaks and acts in the name of the URC. We play a full and active part in relation to organizations, institutions and activities which are indigenous and / or devolved to Wales. This can help simplify ecumenical relations at a synod level as we share the same regional boundaries as our partners.

We are actively involved in Cytûn (Churches Together in Wales), whose current Policy Officer is a URC minister, and in the Free Church Council of Wales (FCCW). Our departing Moderator, Revd Simon Walkling, is the current President of the FCCW, in which role he attended the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II and the coronation of King Charles III. As a result, Simon was the only URC minister to be present at these events in a professional capacity.

We engage with Welsh Government on policy and legislation issues, both denominationally and through Cytûn, and ensure that relevant changes are recognised with the URC centrally.

Our Churches

We currently have 79 active churches in the synod. Twenty-nine of our churches are Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs), partnering with up to six other denominations, including one united ecumenical area in Bridgend. We have a total URC membership of 1287 and an average total congregation of 1629, including 112 under the age of 18.

We asked our churches what they would want their new Moderator to know about them and received the following responses:

Uniting Church Sketty (Swansea Region)

URC/Methodist LEP, established 2015. Average congregation 57. New Methodist Minister taking up post September 2023.

We provide a clothing bank for many refugees in Swansea working with the Region's Church Related Community Worker (CRCW). We are working towards an Eco Church gold award and to become a church of Sanctuary. We voted in favour of same sex marriage. The church is active and in good heart.



Bailey Street Uniting Church, Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale (East Wales Region)

URC/PCW LEP, established 1884. Average congregation 17.

We are a small church serving a deprived area, strongly committed to our local ecumenical group. We are proud of our outreach and community work - weekly coffee morning, monthly lunch club and CAMEO (Come And Meet Each Other club). Regular supporters of local and international charities and causes including local foodbank

/ kitchen pantry. Without a minister at present but led by enthusiastic Elders.



Revd Simon Walkling (centre) at the Coronation of King Charles III with (R-L) the Most Revd Andy John, Archbishop of Wales, and the Most Revd Mark O'Toole, Catholic Archbishop of Cardiff.

Ebenezer URC, Pontnewynydd (East Wales Region)

Average congregation 12.

Founded in 1740 with large graveyard and hall, we are a friendly, welcoming fellowship caring for each other and the community. Pastoral care is very important to us. The hall is used for community events, regular users, and charity events.



Elfed Avenue United, Penarth (Cardiff and Penarth Region)

URC/PCW LEP, established 1985. Part of the Cardiff and Penarth Pastorate. Average congregation 17.

We are situated in the seaside town of Penarth. Apart from regular Sunday worship our church and hall are frequently used by various groups. Our commitment is to facilitate and support community outreach. Following return from the effects of Covid we are pleased to re-introduce our monthly Community Lunch which is very well supported. Our recent Valentines' Tea was well attended and raised urgent appeal funds for Christian Aid.



Hanover URC, Llanover (East Wales Region)

Founded 1664. Average congregation 9.

Through Robert Jermain Thomas there is a particular link between Wales and Korean Christians, for Hanover Church was the place where he came from. He was the first Protestant missionary and martyr to Korea. His sacrifice with the Bible became a source of inspiration for the early Korean churches and Pyongyang revivals in 1907. Korean pilgrims visit Hanover church to receive inspiration from the Holy Spirit for their own mission.

Trinity Church Llanidloes (Mid Wales Region)

URC/PCW LEP, founded 1821. Average congregation 24.

Trinity is part of the Llandinam Pastorate, made up of seven PCW chapels and Trinity, whose minister, Revd Monica O'Dea (PCW), gives one Sunday a month to Trinity. Llanidloes has a very active Cytûn and over the year there are prayer groups, bible study, social events, joint pastorate services, Open the Book presentations and other joint activities. On the closure of the local Methodist Church several members joined our congregation.

Maesyronnen Chapel, Glasbury-on-Wye (Brecon Region)

Founded 1697. Part of the Brecon Beacons pastorate. Average congregation 15.

This 'thin' place is Wales' oldest non-conformist chapel, and as well as doing our best to look after this nationally significant building, just as importantly our small congregation hold weekly services in a mix of styles with a variety of speakers. We also organise community events through the year for our scattered population.



Rivertown URC, Shotton (North Wales Region)

Founded 1897. Average congregation 25. New URC minister starting June 2023.

We are a small, town-centre church full of God's love – for each other and for the community we serve. We are excited to be welcoming a new Minister this summer and moving forward together with our plans to radically improve our building, enabling God's work here to grow and expand.

Parkfields Community Centre, Mold (North Wales Region)

Part of the Alun Vale Pastorate.

Parkfields is a partnership between local churches and members of the community to offer help, advice, training, support and premises to the people of Mold as a practical expression of Christian faith, particularly serving the Bryn Gwalia neighbourhood.



Hope and Market Square United Church, Merthyr Tydfil (Valleys and Vale Region)

URC/PCW LEP, established 1838. Average congregation 23.

We are a welcoming group of worshippers who also celebrate and explore faith through Prayer Circle and Bible Study meetings. Community outreach is an important part of our mission. We support Fairtrade, Health Help International and our local Foodbank and our hall is used by Visually Impaired Merthyr, Tenovus Merthyr Choir and Cantorion Cyfarthfa.

Tabernacle Mumbles (Swansea Region)

Founded 1831. Average congregation 13.

Tabernacle Church in Mumbles, although small in number, are welcoming, relaxed, and friendly and love, care and pray for one another. We seek to be faithful and committed to love and follow Jesus and the Bible, and share warm fellowship together, seeking to be His light here in Mumbles.



St. David's Uniting Church, Pontypridd (Valley and Vale Region)

URC/PCW/Baptist LEP, established 1985. Average congregation 49.

We are a progressive, outward-looking Christian community, committed to working for justice and peace. We are a mixture of ages, status, sexualities, and worldviews, united in our belief that all people should be listened to and loved. We support a number of charities and are a Fair Trade and aspiring Eco Church. We are involved in ecumenical and inter-faith work and are keen to learn from people of all faiths and none.



St John's URC, Buckley (North Wales Region)

Founded 1792. Part of the Alun Vale Pastorate. Average congregation 23.

We pride ourselves on being a welcoming church to everyone regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and background. We are proud to hold URC Children and Youth Friendly Church Award status and our family club has an active role in our church life. We also welcome people of mixed abilities and focus on God's love for all and Jesus' teaching, especially on faith, hope and love.

Tyddyn Street, Mold (North Wales Region)

URC/PCW LEP, established 1857. Part of the Alun Vale Pastorate. Average congregation 8.

We are here as a faithful community of God's people, expressing our faith through worship, loving service to one another, to our local community and God's creation; and working with others to seek the unity of God's people.

Sardis Community Chapel, Ynysddu (East Wales Region)

URC/PCW LEP, established 1906. Average congregation 16.

Situated in the beautiful Sirhowy Valley, Sardis was beautifully renovated in 2007 with the Hall re-built in 2013. We are a warm, welcoming, happy, caring congregation, liberal in outlook with a close connection to the nearby churches. We support charities and contribute to the local Foodbank. We host a weekly puppet class, ladies' coffee morning, guitar and art classes and our hall is hired out for crochet, yoga and self-defence.





Beulah URC, Cardiff (Cardiff and Penarth Region)

Founded 1850. Part of the Cardiff and Penarth Pastorate. Average congregation 106.

We are a suburban church at the centre of a village that loves its local and global neighbours. This love of neighbour is embodied in supporting charities, being a passionate eco-church, creating interactive art

projects, and using our buildings to support the community. In addition, we proclaim the love of God each week through worship, Junior church and additional programmes for adults.

Dan-y-Graig, Risca (East Wales Region)

URC/PCW/Methodist LEP, established 1841. Average congregation 27.

Dan-y-Graig is a family Church in the heart of Risca. Our faithful LEP congregation meet to worship, for coffee mornings and for regular fellowship events. We're a friendly, multigenerational Church proud of how the three denominations have come together successfully. "Church is fun, makes us happy and feels like home" (co-written with our young people).



Albany United Reformed & Methodist Church, Haverfordwest (Pembrokeshire Region)

URC/Methodist LEP, established 1638. Average congregation 40.

We're blessed with a technically-gifted minister so were able to continue worshipping together via Zoom throughout the pandemic. This has kept our fellowship alive and resulted in a growing congregation. Meeting in our hall rather than heating the church during winter has meant a more vibrant and informal feel to worship. We've been able to reduce fees for some struggling hall users and thus support mental health in our community.

Bethel United Reformed Church, Llanishen (Cardiff and Penarth Region)

Founded 1975. Average congregation 8.

We are a very small congregation but feel our presence is required in the area. We are part of Churches Together in Llanishen and join various ecumenical services and events during the year. The main mission focus of the Church is a regular fortnightly Lunch Club, which is well attended by people from the local area and outside. We also hold afternoon teas twice a year and are accredited as Dementia Friendly.



Horeb URC, Dyserth (North Wales Region)

Founded 1843. Average congregation 15.

Our membership of 20 averages 15 for Sunday worship with 3 attending on Zoom. Our Elders have pastoral lists to care for and as our congregation is generally older there is no longer a Sunday School. Post Covid we have established a weekly coffee morning and resumed monthly community lunches. We support various charities and hold a special event for Christian Aid. Other regular events include a garden party and autumn fair.

Cwmbran URC (East Wales Region)

Founded 1760. Average congregation 14.

Cwmbran URC, set in the village of Old Cwmbran is a small but welcoming congregation. We pride ourselves on hospitality. As well as regular coffee mornings and fellowship lunches we have an annual hog roast and harvest lunch and mark important events like the Coronation.

Stow Park Church, Newport (East Wales Region)

URC/PCW LEP, established 2010. Average congregation 30.

Our church mission is centred in our Community Centre which has been helping those in need since 2010 with a food bank, warm space, community meals, prayer meetings and Bible studies. Our registered charity Health Help International supports the destitute and disabled in Zambia and India. On Sunday mornings we hold a semi-traditional service followed by refreshments, fellowship and chat. Sunday evenings are a buoyant and celebratory informal café-style service called 'Sunday Tea'.



The United Church In Rhyl (North Wales Region)

URC/PCW LEP established 1856. Average congregation 46.

Worship is at the heart of church life and informs all we do. Christ Church in Rhyl town centre is on the edge of one of the most deprived wards in Wales and attached is the ASK Centre, offering space for the local Citizens Advice Bureau and a variety of community-based groups. Tynewydd Road is set within mixed housing close to a large primary school. Throughout the week we offer opportunities to meet for informal prayer, worship and fellowship, with a programme of events for church family and friends on Saturdays.

Landsker Pastorate (Pembrokeshire Region)

Founded various dates 1787-1858 Average congregation 6 – 20

We are five churches who are used to working together and sharing ministry. Many families have deep roots into the communities we serve and we aim to welcome others into our fellowship. The Christian faith is an important part of the history of Pembrokeshire and through worship, prayer and example we want to help those around us of all ages to become part of the present and future faith, too.

Church Locations Map



Church Buildings

Through the URC (Wales) Trust Co Ltd, the synod holds sixty church buildings in trust (other congregations generally worship in a building owned by a different denomination). From the United Church in Rhyl on the north coast to Bethesda'r Fro in the south, from Nolton Haven in the west to Llanvaches in the east, our churches range from remote rural chapels to busy inner city church centres. We have 25 listed buildings, with five at Grade II* and 19 at Grade II. Our only Grade I-listed chapel, and the oldest in the synod, is Maesyronnen near Glasbury-on-Wye, which was founded in 1697.



*Ebenezer United Reformed Church,
Pontnewynydd*

Our Ministers

We see ministry as continuing the ministry of Jesus in and through the whole people of God called and committed to his service and equipped by him for it. We are addressing the reducing number of stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments available to the synod through 'The Whole People of God', which is both a process and a series of documents to help members, Elders and Ministers reflect on their roles, commitment and contribution to ministry. Stipendiary Ministers are also exploring collaborative working.

Since 2009, our deployment policy has aspired to place stipendiary Ministers where there is potential for mission and asks them to give a nominal day a week to their community or the wider church. This strategy is reviewed regularly and informs 'The Whole People of God' programme. We encourage churches to consider how they might best use available stipendiary ministry available with suggestions from a 'Ministry Menu', which gives an indication of what has worked elsewhere. This may be facilitated by a Synod Support Team member, a trained temporary part-time transitional minister or the stipendiary Ministers in the region. We expect each area or region to develop its own model.

As a result, there are a range of ministerial models across different parts of Wales, including:

- a team of ministers over a number of churches (Brecon and Cardiff)
- a group of united churches within broader Presbyterian Church of Wales (PCW) pastorates served by PCW ministers (Mid Wales)
- ministers settled in one church and using their skills across the rest of the region in a 'settled plus' model (North Wales)
- regional ministers called to particular churches with oversight of others in the region who are served by local leaders or other forms of ministry (East Wales and Swansea)
- ministers in multi-church pastorates (Pembrokeshire)
- a Church Related Community Worker based in the Swansea region
- a united ecumenical area in the Bridgend region

We aim to ensure that stipendiary Ministers are not isolated from other colleagues and recognise that vacancies and diminishing numbers may mean that additional support from the Synod Support Team is welcomed.



*Keyston URC, Haverfordwest and their entry in the
Keyston Coronation Scarecrow Trail*

The Synod Support Team and Synod Office

The Synod Support Team (SST) does what it says on the tin – we are a team of people who are here to support the synod. We are focussed on working as a team to support and encourage local churches in their mission as led by their priorities. We value fostering good relationships with our local churches and seek out opportunities to visit in person. We also attend Regional Pastoral Committees meetings. We have been described as “hard working oddballs” and we embrace the fact that we are a well-knit group with diverse gifts and skills, supporting each other and our local churches with empathy, flexibility and creativity.

In 2021, the team doubled in size as vacancies were filled and new roles established. We invest time in developing and growing together in our quarterly SST meetings and our annual Away Day, as well as through regular catch-ups in person or on Zoom. We aspire to work through the principles of Appreciative Inquiry and we value collaboration and mutual accountability. Although we have a formal Line Management structure, day to day we work non-hierarchically and see our Moderator as an intrinsic part of our team with specific responsibilities, rather than our leader.

The current Synod Support Team are:

- Revd Dr Jason Askew, Training and Development Officer (full time, remote working)
- Chris Atherton, Treasurer and Trust Company Secretary (part time, hybrid working)
- Revd Stephen Best, Synod Office Chaplain and Candidating Secretary (part time Non-Stipendiary Minister, hybrid working)
- Claire Boot, Property Officer and Assistant Trust Company Secretary (part time, hybrid working)
- Judy Harris, Children and Youthwork Development Officer and Deputy Safeguarding Officer (full time, remote working)
- Maggie Kirkbride, Administration Officer (part time, office based)
- Gaynor Morgan, Finance Assistant (part time, office based)
- Megan Price, Synod Clerk (part time, hybrid working)
- Joel Sainsbury, Office Manager, Cashier and Moderator’s PA (full time, hybrid working)
- Revd Martin Spain, Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations Officer (full time Certificate of Limited Service, remote working)
- Diana Taylor, Safeguarding Officer (part time, remote working)
- Revd Simon Walkling, Moderator (full time, hybrid working)



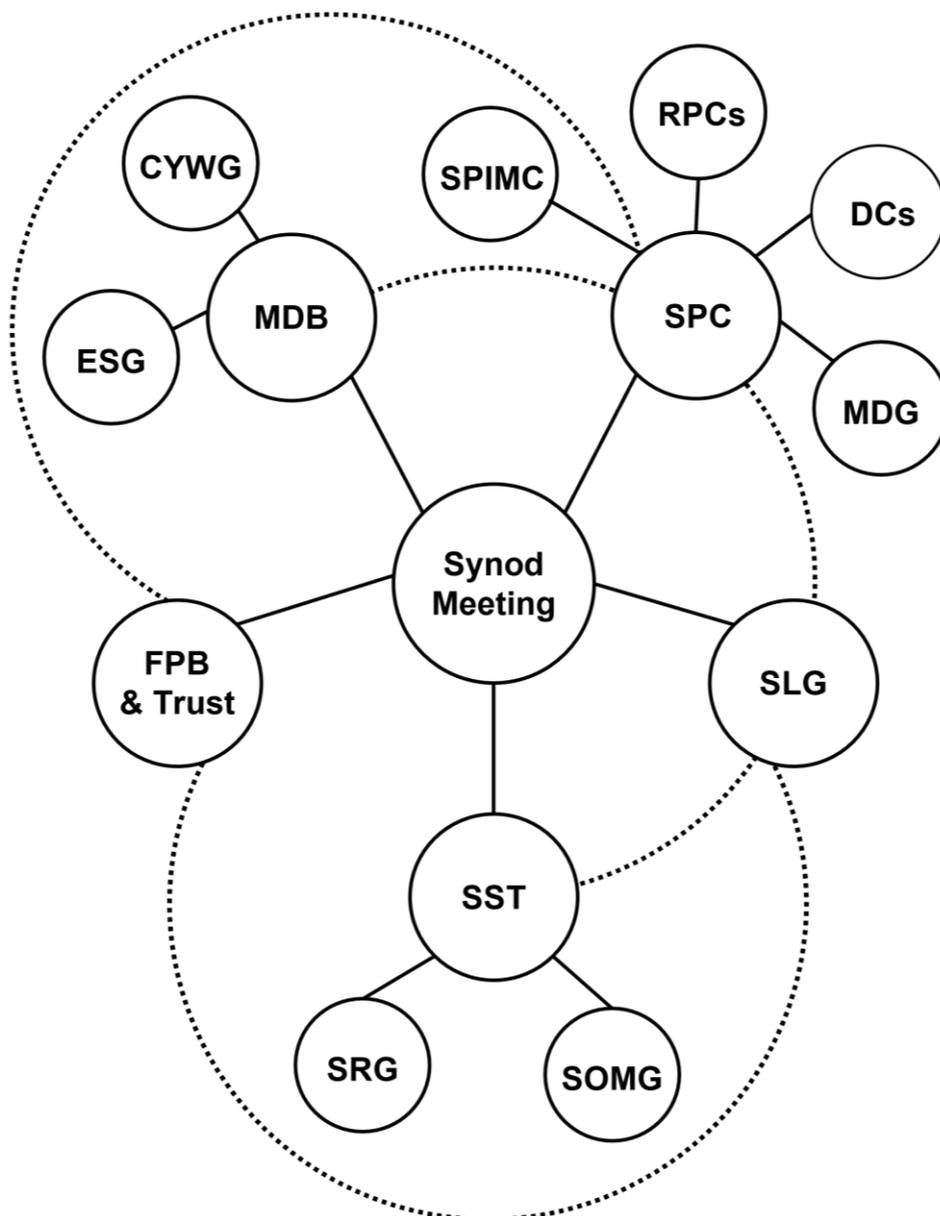
Members of the Synod Support Team take part in a circus workshop at a recent Away Day

We are in the process of recruiting a part time Communications Officer.



The Synod Office is staffed on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, 9.30am to 5pm. It is located in the Roath area of Cardiff, to the east of the city centre, and attached to Parkminster URC. Most of the team work in an open plan space on the first floor, with side rooms for the Clerk and Property Officer. Downstairs there is a separate office for the Moderator, a small kitchen and a meeting room, which is set up to enable hybrid meetings. There is a car park on site and several bus stops within a short distance. The nearest train station (Cardiff Queen Street) is a 25 to 30 minute walk away.

Our Structure



CYWG	Children and Youth Work Working Group (reports to MDB)
DC	District Council(s) (convened on an ad hoc basis, reports to SPC)
ESG	Environmental Steering Group (reports to MDB)
FPB & Trust	Joint meeting of the Finance and Property Board (FPB) and the directors of the URC (Wales) Trust Co Ltd
MDB	Mission and Discipleship Board
MDG	Ministerial Disciplinary Group (convened on an ad hoc basis, reports to SPC)
RPC	Regional Pastoral Committee(s) (report to SPC)
SLG	Synod Leadership Group (Moderator, Synod Clerk, Synod Treasurer and Trust Company Secretary)
SM	Synod Meeting
SOMG	Synod Office Management Group (reports to SST)
SPC	Synod Pastoral Committee
SPIMC	Synod Panel for Interviewing Ministerial Candidates (reports to SPC)
SRG	Safeguarding Reference Group (reports to SST)
SST	Synod Support Team (synod staff and officers)

The solid line indicates how boards and groups relate formally, while the dotted line indicates how boards and groups are connected through personnel.

Our Finances

The United Reformed Church (Wales) Trust Company Limited acts as employer for the National Synod of Wales and holds all the assets on behalf of the synod under an agreed relationship document. In essence, the synod decides its working priorities and sets the budget to deliver them that the Trust Company accepts. The Trust Company keeps accounts and deals with the regulatory bodies such as the Charity Commission and Companies House in order to deliver statutory requirements on behalf of the synod.

Currently, the Trust acts on behalf of 86 churches out of the 89 churches within the National of Wales with regards to their property assets and actively manages 31 church funds on their behalf under the umbrella of COIF (Common Investment Funds) funds provided by CCLA Investment Management Limited. The Trust further manages 13 National Funds across 23 investment accounts with CCLA, Eden Tree Investments and Purple Shoots (a micro-finance charity).

For the last full year (2021), incoming unrestricted funds totalled £979,154. The net incoming unrestricted surplus for the year 31 December 2021 amounted to £650,923 (2020: £199,491), which includes a gain on investments of £523,794 (2020: £164,385). This surplus increased the cumulative unrestricted funds to £9,020,836. Included within unrestricted funds are designated funds of £6,019,405. This includes proceeds of sales from redundant church buildings and transfers from closed bank accounts.

The synod is a net recipient from the voluntary Inter Synod Resource Sharing (ISRS) process for about 50% of its recurrent annual expenditure, without which synod operations would not function.



Beulah URC, Cardiff... the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow?

What We Do

Mission and Discipleship

“The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning.” (Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World*, 1931)

We see mission as being part of God’s work in the world. We seek to promote, support and participate in intergenerational mission initiatives by offering guidance and practical support to enable churches to respond to their local context.

Our Mission and Discipleship Board (MDB) meets quarterly, with a wide-ranging remit of work. Its official responsibilities are implementation of synod priorities and mission strategy, development of missional discipleship and the Local Ministry and Mission Review programme, mission enabling and encouraging local churches to be missional communities, and rural matters. It is responsible for oversight of church and society issues, global links and partnerships, children, young people and families work, and the Mission Development Fund (MDF).

With an emphasis on environmental matters, MDB also oversees the Synod Environmental policy, encourages churches to register and work towards becoming Eco Churches through the A Rocha scheme and is working towards becoming an Eco Synod.

Through the board, a Synod Stepwise Faith Filled Life course has been run over Zoom and we are currently on our third cohort. We are planning to run a Faith Filled Worship course later in the year.

The synod’s mission priorities are set out in the document [The National Synod of Wales and Our Part in God’s Mission](#).

Children and Young People

The Synod has a vibrant group of children and young people, supported by our Children and Youth Development Officer (CYDO), Judy Harris. Judy works proactively with local churches, offering support, training and resources and encouraging churches to work with all the young people they are connected to. She also contributes significantly to the URC’s children and youth work nationally, through the CYDO+ network, and runs the children and youth venues at Greenbelt, on behalf of the URC.

St John’s, Buckley, has gained a Children and Youth Friendly Award and several other churches in the synod are in the process of applying. We are also beginning the process of being recognised as a Children and Youth Friendly Synod. Three of our young people have received a Lundie Memorial Award, celebrating the good work they are doing for their church and community.

This year we took a group of eight young people to Youth Assembly and we will be taking four Youth Representatives to General Assembly in the summer. We have recently established a Children and Youth Working Group, convened by the immediate past Moderator of URC Youth, Jo Harris, to support Judy in her work and organise events in the synod.

Training

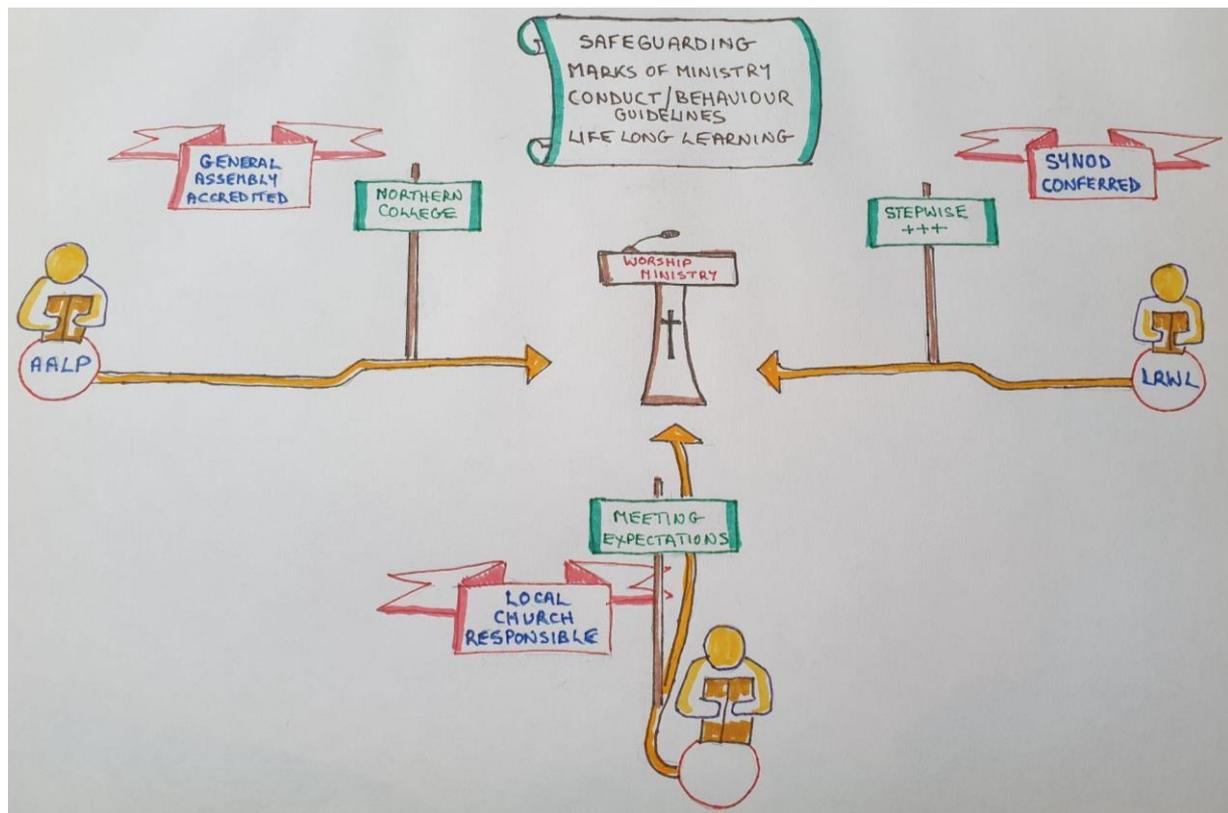
Our approach to training and development is collaborative wherever possible and appreciative always. We endeavour to generate a positive environment in our debates, discussion, and delivery of training events. We are committed as a synod to a number of training, learning and



development strands, namely Stepwise as the primary way forward in enabling and encouraging discipleship; Eco Church training events and information; More Able Church initiatives and events; Lay Preacher training and development.

Since 2021, we have developed an ethos of every member ministry through 'The Whole People of God' documents and worksheets. The foundations and motivations for this are the United Reformed Church Basis of Union No.19 Ministry, where it states, "The Lord Jesus Christ continues his ministry in and through the Church, the whole people of God called and committed to God's service and equipped by God for it." In addition, we recognise that deployment of Ministers of Word and Sacraments needs careful development so that they can best serve the church, alongside all the other ministries that are active. This has been, and will be, an on-going piece of work which we expect to evolve as further discussions take place and the situation changes.

Lay Worship Ministry



It is testimony to the importance and value attached to lay worship ministry that two members of the Synod Support Team have an additional ministry to our preachers and worship leaders. Maggie Kirkbride is an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher and has recently come into role as Lay Preaching Advocate for the synod. Stephen Best continues his work supporting and mentoring. A well-established zoom group (open to all) meets monthly and there is a weekend residential conference every November. Maggie and Stephen liaise with Jason and others over training needs and opportunities.

The vast majority of preachers and worship leaders are home grown in their local church or pastorate. A handful are Assembly Accredited and a small group are now almost ready to be recognised under the new Synod Recognition (Locally Recognised Worship Leaders or LRWL) procedures. Some also serve as lay leaders of local churches and many are authorised to preside at communion.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

The synod is committed to active participation in ecumenism and interfaith matters in Wales. Ecumenism is a founding principle of the URC and it is integral to the synod's mission criteria of 'Proclaiming the Gospel' and 'Serving Communities'. Similarly, through interfaith interactions, the synod seeks to fulfil the criteria of 'Transforming Injustice' and 'Working with Partners for the Common Good'.

Over a third of our churches are Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs). Our denominational partners are the Presbyterian Church of Wales (16 LEPs), the Methodist Church (14), Baptist churches (6), the Church in Wales (3), the Union of Welsh Independents (2) and the Congregational Federation (1). Most LEPs are a combination of two denominations, although Llanfair Uniting Church in Penrhys includes eight.

Revd Martin Spain is the synod's Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer. Martin serves on the URC Ecumenical Reference Group alongside the national Ecumenical Officers for England and Scotland. Within Wales, Martin engages with Cytûn (Churches Together in Wales), the Commission of the Covenanted Churches, the Free Church Council of Wales, Christian Aid, the Ecumenical and Interfaith Officers' Network, the Interfaith Forum and the Interfaith Council of Wales.

Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion

As a synod, we are committed to being open and accessible to all. We have been active in the Council for World Mission's More Able Church programme and have committed to providing guidance documents in an accessible format using Widgit. Our last two Synod Meetings have passed resolutions, brought by our young people, asking local churches to consider Mental Health First Aid training and providing a Quiet Space during services for those that need it.

We are firm supporters of racial justice and are actively involved in Cytûn's Racial Justice Network. Following General Assembly's statement on the Legacies of Slavery we are exploring how we can encourage difficult conversations about race, beginning with an online bible study entitled "Let's Talk About... Race", which we intend to be the first in an ongoing series.

While there is a diversity of voices in the synod, LGBTQIA+ people are welcomed. Several of our churches are registered for same sex marriages, with more currently applying. Local churches are also involved in other ways. St David's Uniting and City URC are registered Inclusive Churches and City URC also host The Gathering, an inclusive church for the LGBTQIA+ community and their allies.

Safeguarding

The synod aspires to be a loving community and offer a welcoming environment in which everybody can flourish. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and involves keeping both children and adults at risk safe from harm.

Whatever the demographic of a church community, safeguarding is vital. In Wales, every church has charitable status, and therefore falls under regulatory direction of the [Charity Commission](#). The serving Elders and Minister in each church have 'primary responsibility' for safeguarding in



their church. This includes a duty to ensure compliance with legislation, policy and procedures. Signposting for safeguarding resources and training is regularly updated on the [Safeguarding](#) page of the synod website.

Diana Taylor is the Safeguarding Officer for the synod and Judy Harris is the Deputy Safeguarding Officer. Each church is expected to nominate one of their members to be a Church Safeguarding Coordinator. Sometimes pastorates nominate a Church Safeguarding Coordinator to oversee safeguarding in more than one church.

In order to equip people with necessary safeguarding knowledge, training is regularly available for all those working with children, young people and adults at risk, and is also important for ministers and elders. Our goal is that safeguarding training should:

- Equip leaders and elders to create a church culture that is safer for all
- Inform leaders and elders about safeguarding issues relevant to their context
- Alert leaders and elders to statutory safeguarding requirements
- Enable leaders and elders to respond appropriately.

In addition to safeguarding training, Diana and Judy aim to be responsive to any safeguarding issues that arise in churches or in community or outreach groups run by churches.



Where we are going

Challenges and Opportunities

The Synod Support Team seeks to practise an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach to issues facing the synod. AI is a strengths-based model for organisational development that aims to identify and build upon what is working well. The fundamental premise of AI is that every challenge presents an opportunity to develop positive potential.

In common with the URC as a whole and with other denominations, church membership in the synod is declining. In 2019, there were 88 churches with 1,778 members and an average congregation of 2,316. Now, there are 79 churches with 1,287 members and an average congregation of 1,629. This signifies a shrinking pool of volunteers for church officer positions, as well as for synod boards and groups, and coincides with the challenge of ministerial deployment.

In response, the Mission and Discipleship Board (MDB) is helping churches to reframe their perspective on ministry and personal discipleship through Lay Preacher training and the Whole People of God and Stepwise initiatives. The Synod Support Team is actively connecting with churches through visits, phone calls and emails to ensure that congregations know what support is available to them and how to access it. The Synod Pastoral Committee (SPC) is examining how to re-organise regional structures in order to foster collaboration between churches and encourage more effective use of ministry resources.

The synod operates within the statutory requirements of regional, devolved and centralised authorities. The key areas for compliance concerning churches are safeguarding, health and safety, property and finance, and changes in these areas can be complex and frequent. The Synod Support Team monitors developments in legislation and best practice, resulting in specific advice and support for congregations. In 2021, the synod created a dedicated Safeguarding Officer post, which has enabled a proactive approach to safeguarding and the development of regular training for churches.

The synod is also engaging with challenges facing wider society. The pressing need to respond effectively to climate change saw the synod adopting an Environmental Policy in 2021 and appointing a Green Advocate. Our churches are strongly encouraged to participate in the Eco Church programme, facilitated by the Christian conservation charity A Rocha, and we are keen to build on the success of the nine churches that have gained awards so far by applying for an Eco Synod award this year, understanding that we must play our part in the URC's pledge to reach Net Zero by 2030.

The synod recognises the ongoing impact of racism and inequality on both national and global levels. The Synod Clerk attends the Racial Justice Network, formed by Cytûn, and we are exploring the possibility of appointing an Equalities Advocate. We promote the work of the URC Legacies of Slavery Task Group by sharing its resources with congregations, while acknowledging that more work is needed to embed reflection and action on racial justice into the life of the synod.



Christ Well, Swansea

Our Next Moderator

We expect our next Moderator to be someone who:

- understands the specific context of a National Synod and is willing to engage with the culture and language of Wales and its distinct regulatory and compliance frameworks
- can think strategically and implement locally, working with churches to understand and respond to their specific contexts
- is a team player who trusts their colleagues and values their passions
- is comfortable representing the United Reformed Church at high profile events in Wales
- will work with an Appreciative Inquiry mindset, valuing collaboration, mutual support and mutual accountability
- is empathetic, caring and likes to have fun!



Revd Paul Robinson leads a scratch choir rehearsal at Wales' Big Day Out 2019