

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

**Approved Minutes of Executive Committee meeting on  
Friday 17th & Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2014  
Essex Hall, London**

**Present:** Rev Martin Whitell (Convenor), Joan Cook, Louise Rogers, James Barry (from Session 2 item 6), Rev John Clifford, Alison Thursfield, Robert Ince, Jacky Woodman

**In Attendance:** Derek McAuley (Chief Officer), Mary-Jean Hennis (Minute-taker)

**Friday**

**Session 1**

*Opening Devotions: Jacky Woodman read from the book entitled "After Mandela the battle for the soul of South Africa" by Alec Russell, directly quoting Nelson Mandela – "There is no short cut to the country of our dreams".*

1. **Apologies:** James Barry until Session 2 item 6
2. **Minutes of the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> November 2013 (Doc 02/14)**

After an amendment on pg5 swapping items 7 & 8 to read item 7 - Appointment of President & Vice-President (Doc EC96/13) and item 8 to read Appointment of Vice-President – (Doc 95/13), the Minutes were signed as a true record of the meeting held on the 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> November 2013.

3. **Matters arising for noting or to include in Agenda for later Discussion:**

**Appeal for the Philippines:**

Robert reported that the amount raised from the EC appeal was likely to be £20,000, it could have been more but by the time the EC appeal went out a number of congregations had already donated to various charities. However the Unitarian Appeal site is now set up and in the event of another emergency an email will suffice to generate donations. Robert was thanked for instigating the appeal. Essex Hall staff were also thanked for donating their 2013 Christmas Card money to the appeal.

**Pg 5 item 6 – Service Plan: (Doc EC94/13)**

The final version is almost complete. It was **agreed** to change the name of the document to the Strategic Plan and it be published and circulated to Districts.. Looking ahead to the 2014/15 process it was **agreed** a facilitated away day with the Strategy Groups and others would be held to ensure greater involvement. It was **agreed** that the Strategic Plan Day would be held at Cross Street Chapel (tbc) on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2014 from 10.00am – 4.00pm.

**Pg 8 item 2 – Evershed Arts/Billingshurst Chapel – (Doc EC103/13)**

It was noted that the Chapel has been awarded £10,000 from the National Churches Trust illustrating that funding may available to congregations from other sources in addition to GA funds.

**4. Appointment of Vice President nomination (Doc 03/14)**

A lengthy discussion was held and it was **agreed** that the Executive Committee were not in a position to propose a nomination to the Annual Meetings. This was a unanimous decision held by a secret ballot of the seven EC members present.

It was acknowledged that this may result in the no appointment of a Vice President and support for the incoming President would have to be considered. It was **agreed** that the way forward in future would be to reinforce the criteria for the nomination of a Vice-President in the letter seeking proposals.

**The Convenor to communicate the decision of the EC. The Chief Officer to convey the EC decision to the nominating Congregations and to inform the Steering Group when they met on 20 January 2014.**

**5. Reports of Strategy Groups:**

**a) Ministry Strategy Group - (Doc EC01/14)** noted with the following: Rev Stephen Lingwood has not yet communicated with Jacky with regard to the Competency document. It was agreed that Robert should email Rev Lingwood and copy Jacky in on the email as a form of introduction.

Two requests from the Interview panel were received for approval by the EC:

That Kath Forder be accepted on the GA Roll with full status as a Lay Pastor.  
**Agreed.**

That Rob Whiteman be recommended as a Ministry student at LKH provided that the criteria as set out by the Interview Panel are met. (Joan and John declared an interest in this item). **Agreed. The Chief Officer to notify the individuals and Rev Linda Phillips.**

It was noted that the meeting of the EC/MSG and UCM group on ministry training would take place on 14 February 2014.

Louise commented upon the inclusion of listening skills in the proposed mentor training.

**b) Local Leadership Strategy Group:**

Louise reported that at the moment some of the current LLSG members no longer wished to participate in its work. There remained the need for high-level strategic work and there were certainly others interested. It was proposed to hold a workshop day for interested parties, Christine Thompson and Margaret Robinson were willing to attend. **The Chief Officer and Louise will move on this before the Annual Meetings.**

It was noted that there would be a Rites of Passage course in June run by Dawn Buckle and on Saturday 18 January there is a Pastoral Care Course.

**c) Visibility Strategy Group: noted with the following:**

It was noted that Philip Colfox has not been approved as a member of the VSG and that a formal proposal for him to be a member must be made by the VSG to the EC. **James to action.**

Lindsey Press – there are Terms of Reference, but the question is “what is the reporting mechanism?”

It was **agreed** that David Dawson be approved as a member of the VSG, but not as a representative of the Lindsey Press Panel.

It was **agreed** that Lyanne Mitchell be approved as a member of the VSG.

It was **agreed** that James would continue to help facilitate the group until the May 2014 EC meeting. James was thanked for his work in this area.

The need for very clear terms of reference was emphasised and the Executive Committee’s ultimate responsibility for appointments was stressed. The former Triennial appointment process needed to be revisited.

## Session 2

**6. 2020 report to EC (Doc – EC05/14) Noted**

Jacky declared an interest in this item.

The Convenor reported that the web-site has now finally been amended so that “2020 Board” now reads the “2020 Group”.

It was noted that the deadline of February 28 2014 for further formal applications will be after the February EC meeting and therefore too late for approval to enable a public announcement at the General Assembly.

James joined the meeting at this point and the Convenor congratulated him and Lorna on their recent engagement. He was updated on the previous decisions.

**7. Youth Strategy Group Update – a letter from Sue Talbot was distributed at the meeting:**

Five names have been put forward to start up the YSG, three have already agreed to stand and two have yet to be approached. The EC therefore approves Jen Hazel, Katie Millard and Vanessa Rothwell as members of the YSG. **The Chief Officer to respond to Sue and approach others**

Clarity about terms of reference was required.

It was noted that BUYAN have expressed an interest in being included under the YSG umbrella and contributing to the review in some form.

**8. Nightingale Centre**

**a) Minutes of last meeting (Doc EC06/14) – noted**

Robert reported on the management committee meeting.

**b) Terms of Reference (Doc EC07/14)**

Louise, Christine Hayhurst & Michael Tracey have been appointed as the Review Group. **Louise to take forward.**

The Terms of Reference, excluding future arrangements if not change was recommended, were **approved**. Louise was thanked for her work.

**c) Annual Report & Accounts (Doc EC08/14)**

The changes in how its activities were recorded were noted. It was noted that the list of Trustees on page 1 of the Report should be updated to reflect changes in April 2013.

The Draft Accounts were formally **APPROVED** pending the corrections as above.

It was noted that the assets of the Nightingale Centre should be re-valued – **Robert to action**

**9. EC Communications –**

**Report of District/EC meeting Nov 2012, and extract from EC minutes (Doc EC09/14) and Andrew Hill's article in the Inquirer were noted**

It was **agreed** that a full response would be sent to Andrew with regard to his article in the Inquirer focusing on their responsibility to give leadership and what the EC has achieved. It was **agreed** to extend an invitation to the GA Presidents to attend any or all of the EC meetings **with observer status only**, and on the understanding that due to other commitments attendance would be occasional and they will have to excuse themselves from the meeting during confidential items. Individual members are to be encouraged to vote in future elections. Key messages will be distributed within ten days. An annual event with district representatives involved would be arranged (see above). The EC expressed its appreciation to Rev Hill for taking the time to express his helpful views.

**The Convenor to respond.**

It was noted that the EC had not in the past always responded to articles written in the Inquirer and this should be encouraged.

It was felt by the EC that once the Strategic Plan has been documented and circulated the Movement will have a better understanding of what is happening.

**Session 3****10. General Assembly Annual Report 2012/13 (Draft) (Doc 10/14)**

It was noted that this was the first draft of the Annual Report and the first time they had been presented in this way and the focus was on the text.

Photographs and formatting changes would be added later.

Louise would like to see a more standard approach to the Annual Reports of the three bodies presented. It was requested that more information be included on the role of staff and on the changes to the policies of the Sustentation Fund.

Subject to revision the Annual Report was **approved**.

**11. General Assembly Accounts 2012/2013 – (Doc 11/14)**

The gains from investments and control of expenditure were highlighted. The EC was asked to be mindful of changes in the SORP requirements relating to reporting of pensions liabilities for next year. Thanks were given to Martin Sarbicki, the Chief Officer and the Acting Treasurer.

The Annual Accounts were approved.

**12. Final Accounts year ending 30 Sept 2013 – (Doc EC12/14) - noted**

Comparative figures to explain the changes since the September management accounts were presented.

**13. Management Accounts to 30 November 2013 – (Doc 13/14) – noted – with the following:**

It was noted that Newton's, the Investment Advisers, would from June 2014 no longer be offering discretionary advice to the General Assembly because of new legislative requirements.. As the responsibility of making investments decisions will lie with the EC it needs to be clarified where professional advice would be obtained. The Unitarian Investment Panel was meeting on 19 February 2014.

**14. Millennium Fund Bid – Simple Gifts – (Doc EC14/14)**

It was noted that the focus of one of the projects was on the LDPA. Louise emphasised the need for measurable outcomes to be included in the response and that any materials should be made available to the General Assembly. It was **agreed** that EC would award the amount of £4,750 to the Simple Gift bid. **Chief Officer to action**

It was reiterated that the policy on Millennium Fund grants was that they would not be awarded retrospectively.

**Session 4****15. Sustentation Fund Annual Report/Accounts – (Doc EC15/14) – noted**

The Annual Report and Accounts were **received**.

**16. Report on Congregational Survey – (Doc EC16/14) – noted with the following:**

To date approximately 80 congregations had responded and EC Links were to review the response from their respective Districts and find out which congregations have not done so. Louise suggested that a research group be formed to take forward such work more generally.

It was clear that the Quota is not an accurate way to establish the true “life” of the movement and that attendance figures showed more people were involved regularly in our activities. The results will form the basis for a discussion on national membership at a Annual Meeting workshop and would be useful for the new Youth Strategy Group and the annual strategy development process. The results are more encouraging than was expected and needed to be considered alongside other information, such as applications to be Sustentation Fund and individual congregational and district annual reports and “softer” intelligence.

It was agreed that congregations who had not completed the survey be offered the opportunity during March 2014.

**17. Resolutions of the General Assembly Report - (Doc EC17/14) –noted with the following:**

Louise welcomed the exercise undertaken by the Chief Officer and congregations who had responded were thanked. The document would be used as feedback for the Annual Meeting EC Report presentation. James highlighted the opportunities presented by the Coronation Street storyline and it was explained that assisted dying would be attracting attention over the next six months in the run-up to the presentation of Lord Falconer’s Bill in the House of Lords.

**18. Annual Meeting Report – (Doc EC18/14) – noted with the following:**

Indicators and targets have been set drawing upon performance from the past three years. More marketing had been done to promote the GA this year as it was a different type of venue. A provisional booking is in place for the 2015 GA. The use of “Retired” on badges was questioned.

**19. IT update- ( Doc EC19/14) - noted**

Considerable progress had been made. The website remained an area for work on content rather than technical aspects and there were budget implications which would be raised at a future meeting.

**20. Chief Officer Report - (Doc EC20/14) – noted with the following:**

The Convenor conveyed his disappointment that there has been limited response to the Directory with Handbook elements not published for ten years, that has been circulated.

Louise enquired about what is being done to encourage small congregations in to becoming full congregations. **The Chief Officer would follow up.**

The responsibilities of the General Assembly for “excepted” congregations was mentioned as an area for further work.

**21. President’s Report – (Doc EC21/14) - noted**

**22. Key Messages – key items agreed and to be circulated separately.**

**23. A.O.B.**

A letter has been received from Richard Merritt on behalf of the Merseyside District Missionary Association with regard to the language used after a Motion has been agreed at the GA i.e. if the Motion is agreed by a 60/40 majority, that is how it should be reported and not as a unanimous or landslide vote. The statement of confidence in those speaking nationally for the Movement was noted. The difficulties were acknowledged and how the media interpreted the decisions was outside of our control. **The Chief Officer to respond.**

**24. Date and time of next meetings:**

**May - Fri 16<sup>th</sup> 9.00 am – 5.30pm & Sat 17<sup>th</sup> 9.00am – 12 noon – Essex Hall, London**

**July - Mon 14<sup>th</sup> July 9.00am – 6.00pm – Essex Hall, London**

**Sept - Fri 5<sup>th</sup> 9.00am – 6.00pm – LKH, Manchester**

**Sat 6<sup>th</sup> – Strategic Plan Day – Cross Street Chapel, Manchester (tbc).**

**Nov – Fri 14<sup>th</sup> 9.00am – 5.30pm & Sat 15<sup>th</sup> 9.00am – 12 noon – Essex Hall, London**

**Jan 2015 -**

**Fri 23<sup>rd</sup> 9.00am – 5.30pm & Sat 24<sup>th</sup> 9.00am – 12 noon – Essex Hall, London**

**25. Non-responsive check-out**

*Closing Devotions: Martin read from “The Letters of Abelard & Heloise” with regard to holding people who are hurting close and also from the book Falling into the Sky a meditation – “Go boldly”*

**Session 5**

*Opening devotions: Louise read a piece by Rudolph Gelsey “ Rejoicing Together”*

**26. Confidential Items - The Chief Officer and Mary-Jean were not present for this item**

**27. Non-responsive check out**

*Closing Devotions: Joan read from Anam Cara by John O'Donohue “ The King and the Beggars Gift”.*