

WATCH AGM 2017

Saturday 18th November 2017
St John's, Waterloo, London SE1 8TY

DRAFT MINUTES

PRESENT: Fifty members were estimated present. The following members of the national committee were present: Emma Percy (Chair), Stephen France (Vice Chair), Anne Stevens (Vice Chair), Mark Bennet (Treasurer), April Alexander, Tracey Byrne, Hannah Elias, Esther Elliott, Gill Gould, Jenny Humphreys, Michael Smith, Rosalind Rutherford and Jody Stowell.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10.35am

WELCOME: Emma noted that last week was the 25th anniversary of the vote in 1992, and that 2017 marks WATCH's 21st anniversary since being established in 1996.

APOLOGIES: Apologies were received from Sally Barnes, John Polhill and Michele Kitto.

MINUTES for the AGM of 19th November 2016 had been circulated. The following corrections were noted: Lucy Thirtle is a trustee of Li Tim Oi Foundation; Christopher Hall didn't work in Guildford; 'Humphries' should be 'Humphreys.' The corrected minutes were approved as a true record.

ACCOUNTS: Mark Bennett reported that the accounts have been steady over the year. There has been no major fundraising because WATCH was waiting to acquire charity status which has involved a great deal of work. There have been enough funds to cover this transition period. In February WATCH became a charity and will be able to open a new bank account with CAF (Charities Aid Foundation) allowing WATCH to receive and administer Gift Aid

Proposed by Mark, seconded by Jodie and Emma. The assembly accepted the accounts for the year and reappointed Simon Witcomb FCA.

The Chair announced that a new Treasurer is sought because Mark needs to let go of the extra work.

CHARITY STATUS, MEMBERSHIP & GIFT AID UPDATE

Stephen France said that the application for charity status was long and hard fought for. Our application was queried despite the Welsh Mae Cymru being approved as a charity. In the end we accepted changing the word *campaigning* to *challenging*, and thus got approval. In January we were notified by email about our charity number - 1127267. Charity status allows WATCH to reclaim Gift Aid. He noted the problems with our current data base. Our website designer who currently manage this had estimated £6K to solve the problem. The committee had decided not to pursue this path. Instead the national committee decided to use a simplified system to collect Gift Aid by opening a [specialised CAF] bank account. Membership subscriptions would become automated with yearly payments made by direct debit [instead of by standing order]. This should be simpler administratively. He noted that the new system should be running in Spring 2018. A period of transition was anticipated when old and new systems will run concurrently until members have moved over to the new system. Apologies were offered to members who have felt detached from WATCH during this time of administrative changes.

In response to a question from the floor, it was noted that members would need be proactive with regard Gift Aid; the new membership rate will be £25 per year, and there will be an option to donate more.

There was a question from the floor about whether WATCH is on top of the incoming GDPR issues. It was noted that the Government has not yet given enough guidance on this and as a result there is a mood of panic among organisations. WATCH is introducing the new membership system to coincide with the new regulations. When the new system is running, WATCH will be asking members to renew within 6 months.

Jenny Humphreys said she was very pleased to learn about the new system compared with the old [current] renewal system.

Christopher asked if one can Gift Aid subscriptions. In a partnership, if you want WATCH to receive Gift Aid, then put it in the name of the person who has the higher income.

Emma thanked all those involved in the immense amount of work needed to establish charitable status. Tracey Byrne had given a lot of support and information. She had made the initial suggestion that an automated system would simplify the administration.

GENERAL SYNOD & PARLIAMENTARY TASK FORCE REPORTS: Jenny Humphreys spoke about the Bishops' decision to produce a teaching document on sexuality and marriage which will take three years. Questions of gender will inevitably be part of this.

She also spoke about the Crown Nomination Committee and the recent elections of the permanent members. The voting balance on womens' issues of 3 in favour and 3 against, has now shifted to 4 in favour and 2 against. We hope this may lead to more women appointed as diocesan bishops.

There is a clear difference in how the two synods operate, February in London, July in York. In London there is only room for very small displays. York has changed its lunching arrangements and this was detrimental to the fringe stands. It was felt, as a result, that having a stand in York was not worthwhile.

The next General Synod elections are for 2020. We need to be proactive now to encourage candidates.

Lucy Thirtle noted that the Saturday morning session of Synod was more interesting than Thursday/Friday evenings programme, and that it was difficult for lay people to get time off to come to weekday Synod meetings. Esther Elliott said that the Saturday session was intended to make synod more available to the laity in general.

Christopher raised concerns about House for duty posts which did not seem to qualify as pensionable service. Could this issue be raised?

Parliament. Stephen France is watching the parliamentary brief. He had not felt the need to be as involved this year.

The Chair noted that the WATCH committee is low on numbers of General Synod members. Anne Stevens would be representing WATCH at General Synod even though she will be stepping down as Vice Chair. WATCH needs to learn from other organisations that are really good at succession planning.

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE: Michael Smith has said that posting via Facebook has been particularly good, but there has not been a calendar to regularly schedule posting material. Email newsletters have been especially problematic because the same news was being sent out week after week which was frustrating for receivers. It was therefore decided to stop sending out weekly the newsletters in order to shift to monthly email communication with a new content calendar. Michael apologised for the lack of email communication, but he felt that it was better to stop until the problem is fixed. Orange & Blue are addressing this issue.

Members were invited to send information about what is going on around the country to Michael so he can share. Word docs should be sent to Eve West, the WATCH Administrator at admin@womenandthechurch.org. The Chair reminded members that the website was initially set up on an amateur basis without costs. It has since transitioned to a professional management with costs. We are now hoping to have a tidier, more efficient, way to manage membership online.

LAITY TASK FORCE REPORT: Sarah Bennet said there had not yet been another Laity Day this year. It was hoped to hold one in the North. It has been difficult to book a full Saturday, the option of hosting a coffee morning or snack lunch had been suggested. The TF hopes to continue to meet 3 times a year. It was noted that there is very little information on statistics for lay women. Some women sitting in the pews are wondering why they are there.

A question was raised about whether there has been any cross fertilisation with the Mother's Union. The Chair said that is difficult to pursue wider partnerships because WATCH is dependent on volunteers.

Sarah said that there is a 'how to' pack on organising lay events with information on finding a venue and speakers etc.

It was asked whether the objectives for these days were being achieved. Sarah said it can be difficult to get people to come. But that it is often an amazing and very powerful event for the women who do come and who find the support of other women. It is important to keep asking the question, 'What do you want as a lay woman?'

The Chair mentioned the work of Dr Abby Day – *The Religious Lives of older Women*. Her 'Generation A' (Anglican laywomen born in the 1920s and 1930s now in their 70s, 80s and 90s) speaks of the lay women who keep churches open and functioning. Her conclusion is that they are getting old and dying with no new people to carry on the task. The church hasn't yet woken up to this fact. In the Philip Mawer (Independent Reviewer) report, there is a question about whether female clergy feel they can flourish or not. The question is wider than clergy. We want a church where all women flourish. But if the church doesn't

address this, then they will find that there will be no more lay women left. The church needs to help encourage lay women much more.

GREENBELT: Rosalind Rutherford remarked that she saw several present at the AGM who had attended Greenbelt, a 4-day annual Christian arts festival. She talked about how the event opened up the eyes of an eighty-year old lady who found it so wonderful to have discovered this event.

Lucy Thirtle said she thought it was an excellent event. She had had a non-threatening, gentle first-time festival experience. About 500 persons of all ages had visited the stand and engaged with the volunteers. It was a safe place to talk about issues. Camping is not required. There are B&B options nearby.

Rosie Elsdon was grateful to have discovered Broken Rites at the festival, an organisation for divorced and separating clergy.

Lucy asked if Greenbelt was a good place for WATCH to be. Rosalind felt it was a good place because there are young unchurched people as well as older people present who wish to discuss topics.

Emma asked what other partnerships could WATCH could work with?

GENDER JUSTICE: Emma said that the Church of England is not fully signed up to talking about gender justice in the context of poverty and injustice in general. WATCH is trying to get gender justice onto the agenda. She noted certain [legal] exemptions operating in the Church of England regarding equality whereby some positions may exclude women. Anne and Emma met with Bishop Rachel to talk about working through Synod encouraging partnerships with others to advance this concern.

TRANSFORMATIONS: Esther Elliott said that she is the only lay women on the committee. There is work being done on young women's vocations, on women leading larger churches and on maternity leave.

CHAIR'S REPORT & SHEFFIELD/MAWER REPORT UPDATE

Emma Percy, read the following report:

It is a year since the AGM elected me as Chair of WATCH. It was a difficult time in my own life as I was caring for my brother who had terminal cancer. I am grateful for the Vice Chairs Anne Stevens and Stephen France who carried everything until January 2017. We had all hoped that WATCH could move into a phase where we set the agenda instead of being a largely reactive organisation. Then I received a phone call from Sheffield asking me if I had seen the announcement that +Philip North had been appointed as the new Bishop of Sheffield. We were back into reaction mode.

WATCH listened, especially to women in Sheffield. We made formal complaints about aspects of the process to the Independent Reviewer, the Archbishops and the Prime Minister. We wrote what we hope were sensitive pieces when the debate became more public. We did not organise a campaign, we did not need to. Clergy and Laity in Sheffield found a voice to question the process and question +Philip. I think we were all surprised when he withdrew.

This appointment and the subsequent debates highlighted the very real lack of understanding about women and the church. Too often we were told that because there are women who felt that +Philip should have been Bishop of Sheffield (notably these were not women clergy in Sheffield) then the rest of us clearly were being unreasonable. As a national committee we put serious thought into our collective response to Sir Philip Mawer's review. We have tried to be reasonable whilst highlighting the very genuine problems. Stephen France and myself met with Sir Philip.

The eventual report was as expected. It was an establishment piece rather than an 'independent' review. The many failings in the process of assessing the needs of the diocese, in the appointment process and in the reaction to that appointment are described but those responsible are not named. Much was made of Prof. Percy's article as if without that then all would have been containable.

We submitted a careful response to the review but the Archbishops have not yet acknowledged it. In fact, no comment has been made on the review or its recommendations. The positives from this sorry episode are;

1. It is now clear that the question of whether a diocesan bishop will ordain women must be discussed as part of the discernment process in any future appointment.
2. The assumption that people will accept the appointment of a non-ordaining bishop as 'mutual Flourishing' cannot be presumed on.
3. Problems in the CNC can be spoken about because they are in the report.
4. People are now more aware of the Forward in Faith position and its notion that women priests are real office holders but not in real orders.
5. WATCH needs to keep stressing that this is not about women clergy. Women and men both ordained and lay need to be considered. Lay people tend to live and work in a world which has embraced the Equality Act.

All of this has taken much time and is ongoing. In a more positive way we have tried to look forward to how we can begin to change the culture of the Church. We have already heard about gender justice, the Laity project and are ongoing work with Transformations.

WATCH's excellent report on ministry statistics from women's point of view has enabled us to speak with authority about where women flourish. My thanks particularly to Rosalind and Stephen for all the work on that. We will continue to find ways to use the statistics provided to flag up issues about women and ministry.

My thanks to Catherine for taking on the editorship of Outlook and producing an informative and encouraging magazine. We continue to have a place at Greenbelt and thanks to those who have organised and supported that. We are an entirely voluntary group and cannot do as much as we would like.

Anne Stevens has been a dedicated Vice Chair for x years and I have been grateful for her support and advice. She is stepping down [as Vice Chair] but staying on the committee and now that she is back on Synod will continue to be a WATCH voice. This is an amazing and inspiring committee and I thank each one for the part they play.

My hope is for a year that is without dramas where we can plan how and where we place our energy. Much needs to be done. We need to keep raising the issue of the Diocesan appointments system. We need more women diocesan bishops. We need to continue to pursue the gender justice policy because it matters far beyond our church structures. We need to help the central church understand that there is far more that needs to be done to include women and to think creatively about gender. We need to keep challenging ideas of masculine normativity and the subtle sense that the male is more like the divine than the female.

25 years on from the vote, I can be pleased that women clergy are normal. I can be pleased that we now have women bishops. I give thanks to my predecessors in this role and all the hard work they have committed to the cause. I think particularly of Hilary, recovering from breast cancer with a good prognosis but a traumatic experience. I give thanks for you and hope that in the year ahead we can begin to draw others in to our commitment to transform the church so that the humanity of women may be taken seriously. Women made in God's image, reflecting the divine in the reality of our world.

ELECTIONS: Vice Chair and Committee

Hannah Alias has stood down.

There is a Secretary vacancy.

Esther Elliott was elected Vice Chair after a clear show of hands in favour.

Lizzie Taylor and Felicity Cooke were nominated for election as trustees by Stephen France, seconded by Jenny Humphreys.

Yvonne Clarke, Michele Kitto and Anne Stevens were nominated for re-election by Stephen France, seconded by Jenny Humphreys.

There was a clear show of hands in favour for the slate.

#METOO – SEXUAL ASSAULT & HARASSMENT: Emma wondered what WATCH should be doing in support. WATCH could challenge dioceses to ensure that they have up to date harassment policies and routine training as they now do around safeguarding. Should WATCH set itself up as a place to lodge complaints? But WATCH is under resourced to handle this.

Effectively addressing bad behaviour in the work place can involve breaking down the 'old boys' network.

One member said it can be difficult supporting someone who is making a complaint of sexual harassment. She spoke of one case where a bishop talked about forgiveness with a victim rather than taking things forward. There is a cultural problem in how the issue is dealt with. There is also, a fear that if the complaint is against a clergyman it may leave his family homeless.

It was said that there is pressure for women clergy to fall into line. Some victims are suffering in silence.

There can be a particular issue for clergy wives who find themselves in marital breakdown situations, because the bishop's visitor is no longer responsible. Christopher Hall observed that apparently the bishop's visitor can't support parties until the marriage has formally broken down

It was felt that Bishops should to be encouraged to learn from the dioceses that have good policies.

AOB: Christopher Hall talked about the Li Tim Oi Foundation
Emma reminded attendees to look at the memories of 1992 on display.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 12.45pm.