

DRAFT MINUTES

WATCH AGM 2018

Saturday 17th November 2018
St John's, Waterloo, London SE1 8TY

APOLOGIES: Apologies were received from around twenty members and from the following national committee members, Esther Elliott (Vice-Chair), Stephen France (Vice-Chair), Yvonne Clarke, Jody Stowell, and Michael Smith.

PRESENT: Forty-five members were present, including national committee members: Emma Percy (Chair), Mark Bennet (Treasurer), Claire Creese (Secretary), Felicity Cooke, Jenny Humphreys, Michèle Kitto, Rosalind Rutherford, Anne Stevens, Lizzie Taylor, Cath Williamson.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10.35 am

WELCOME: The Chair, Emma Percy, welcomed everyone. She apologised on behalf of the committee for the challenges experienced by members in transferring their membership subscriptions to CAF, Charities Aid Foundation [Bank]. She said that there will be an opportunity for members with individual subscription questions to raise these during the lunch break with Claire (Secretary) and Rosalind Rutherford. Member queries will be relayed to Membership Administrator, Eve West.

MINUTES for the AGM of 19th November 2017 had been circulated. There being no corrections offered, the minutes were approved as a true record.

ACCOUNTS: Mark Bennet (Treasurer) reported that the accounts had been circulated in a new format this year, noting that more was intentionally spent on the website and on other resources. WATCH is moving into a new phase with newly identified goals because that of women bishops had been achieved.

Proposed by Mark, and seconded: To adopt the CIO Accounts to Year Ending 30 June 2018. The resolution was adopted by an overwhelming show of hands in favour.

Proposed by Mark, and seconded: To appoint Simon Witcomb FCA, independent auditor and accountant for 2018-2019. The resolution was adopted by an overwhelming show of hands.

Emma thanked Mark for his considerable efforts over the years as Treasurer, noting that Mark is stepping down. She invited members to be in touch with her as soon as possible if interested in serving as Treasurer.

CHARITY STATUS, MEMBERSHIP & GIFT AID: The Chair, Emma, summarised the reason for WATCH's transition to the CAF online system noting an anticipated simpler administration and financial benefit from Gift Aid. She further explained that the implementation of the new system had been hampered by the changed life situations of committee members who had volunteered to oversee the process. Mark Bennet (Treasurer) noted that the committee had looked at another charity (One Body One Faith) that uses CAF. An advantage is that CAF automatically reclaims Gift Aid.

He also said that, in practice, volunteers can become busy or otherwise unavailable at unpredictable times due to illness or changes in job circumstances.

Emma said that during the transition both administrative systems and both bank accounts were running; members are transferred to the new system as they renew their subscriptions. The intent in transferring to CAF was to simplify the administration by having one subscription category only with one rate [eliminating Joint and Group memberships, discounts etc.] Recent feedback from membership indicates, however, that some members wish to maintain their 'paper' membership and questions had arisen about the significant number of members with previously discounted dues. The committee had reviewed these issues at its meeting in September and decided to reinstate paper memberships.

Emma offered further background. WATCH's activities in the past had been based on a campaign mode driven by the General Synod timelines (as related to legislation for women bishops.) This was the momentum shaping how lists of supporters and members (with subscriptions) had been generated. The frustration now is that WATCH is often perceived only as a group advocating for women bishops. But in fact, WATCH is only just getting started in terms of advocating for women to flourish in the Church. This concern was addressed at the recent residential [June 2018] when the committee appraised the strategic priorities WATCH can realistically set itself. The residential clarified that WATCH exists to challenge the Church; it does not exist to do what the Church should be doing. Emma invited Felicity Cooke to report on WATCH's Strategic Plan.

Strategic Plan (SP): Felicity Cooke said she had joined the committee a year ago. She referred to the creative embodied exercise engaged in at the residential and how the strategic plan was developed to meet current needs. The SP evolved in light of WATCH's charity objectives and its Mission Statement. The adopted aims are disciplined and set realistic goals.

There was a comment from the floor advocating for the Church to adopt a Code of Behaviour, and that a Code would help gather evidence of behaviours undermining women's flourishing in ministry. Felicity agreed.

There was a suggestion from the floor that the SP's 'Short Term Goals' needed further explanation and that the SP be posted on the website; the member also noted the need to explain the SP to the membership and beyond.

Felicity observed that the application of the 5GPs is not consistent and that WATCH is very concerned about inconsistent interpretations and applications of the 5GPs. She noted that the original intent of the 5GPs differs from its current use, and hence also to possible future uses.

Emma Percy explained that the 5GPs were a WATCH priority because they are also an important Church priority; incumbents must acquiesce to the principles. She agreed that the implementation of some of the principles is not as intended, while the implementation of other principles is slipping; the principles are in use at theological colleges and among ordinands. She clarified that WATCH's aim at this time is to offer a constructive critique of the 5GPs.

There was a suggestion from the floor that a column be added to the strategic Action Plan (AR) about desired outcomes. [Separate from SP. Draft copy of AP was available to attendees only.]

Emma said that WATCH wants to ensure the 5GPs are used constructively. She also noted the need to define what 'constructive outcomes' would be.

Mark Bennet reminded attendees that the Charity Commission insisted that WATCH cease its prior campaigning role and language, cautioning members about how they speak about WATCH goals.

Lizzie Taylor, committee member, asked whether WATCH can shed light publicly on evidence of how the 5GPs are implemented.

Eve Bell (Bury St Edmunds & Ipswich) asked in connection to strategy #5 [of Action Plan] that actions focus on liturgy. She also requested that Biblical language and expressions be added to strategy #4.

Emma responded that the committee had to consider what it can realistically achieve given the volunteer resources available; WATCH's role is to point to those already dealing with Biblical theology and related language issues, and in helping to make such material better known; the work of challenging theology and related use of language *is* occurring in the academy. Meanwhile she noted that WATCH has funds earmarked for theological research, but that such projects are not appropriate as short term goals.

Michèle Kitto, committee member, asked if the [academic] resources can be made more accessible. Mark Bennet suggested that Outlook magazine was a good place to list these resources.

Lindsay Southern (Leeds) affirmed the importance of doing a few things well; she commended the strategic Action Plan and looked forward to a working document that would help deaneries unpack the 5GPs. Felicity echoed the importance of being focused.

Emma thanked Felicity, acknowledging her expertise in shaping a manageable SP from the long lists of hopes compiled at the residential. She noted that where some organisations have paid executives to develop their strategic plans, what is good about WATCH is that all volunteer committee members are involved in this work.

General Synod: Anne Stevens said that WATCH remains very much involved in GS, noting a large and enthusiastic support that can easily be marshalled when needed; GS offers the opportunity to raise questions of Church staff and policy questions; WATCH's formal contribution to the national Church occurs through its representation on the Transformations and TRIG group.

There was a question from the floor about what WATCH is currently exercised about. Anne responded, that it was the 5GPs and that a sub-group is meeting in a few weeks to consider generating materials. Emma added the topics of sex and sexuality and the Church's use of binary gender language; she noted that the Episcopal Church [USA] is well ahead of the CofE in this regard. Anne said that WATCH will look into this.

There was a suggestion from the floor that WATCH work on the 2020 elections to GS, and to the Business and Appointment committees because nominees are not declaring their theological positions. Anne responded that WATCH works with Inclusive Church on this project.

There was a question about the pay of senior lay women, and that the annual meeting of lay [diocesan synod] chairs would be a good place to talk to women about their experiences.

A member from the floor said she serves on the GS appointments committee and that it works very hard to ensure the problem of hidden bias does not happen; but that the committee also cannot fully control election processes; many hold strong views that hustings be held for elections to the Church Nominating Committee. Felicity commented that it is also important to be aware of the imbalance in terms of resources, *manpower* and money.

Transformations & TRIG: Emma explained that the group is made up of two representatives each from WATCH, NADAWM, DARC, AWESOME, Black & Minority Ethnic & CMEAC; the group is tenacious and determined to see change, 'Were like a barnacle at the bottom of a boat – they can't get rid of us'; the arrival of the ABC's new chaplain has been very positive; a sub-group met with the ABC and discussed issues explicitly, including maternity policy - unresolved over twenty-five years, the issue of large churches [in university towns] and harassment; they asked the ABC to address harassment as seriously as Safeguarding is being addressed e.g., with trained individuals and educational materials. Emma further noted that while #METOO is a very important issue, WATCH is not resourced to take this on.

Emma then spoke about Lambeth 2020 and the anticipated change of dynamic given bishops may be accompanied by their [heterosexual] spouses; this means there will be a change of feel from when women were present in their own right as bishops; Transformations is looking into hosting an event for women bishops only. Emma concluded that she is happy with the group's overall progress.

Emma announced that Esther Elliott is stepping down from the Transformations group and that Cath Williamson will be replacing her to represent WATCH, along with herself.

A member from the floor said she is going to raise a question about why Richard Harris was the only CofE bishop present in the House of Lords for the recent debate which resulted in overturning a prior decision to suspend Lord Lester of Herne Hill for alleged sexual harassment.

Statistics: Rosalind Rutherford, committee member, said that she welcomes help because she is not a statistician; Church House answer WATCH's questions; a problem is that stats are collected by dioceses and are not centrally collected; she noted a positive upward trend with more than half of all dioceses having 25% or more women in office; she observed that it takes a long time for big dioceses to show a shift their percentages; there are significantly more women SSMS, but not all dioceses collect these statistics; this could be a question to put to GS; there is a concern when women are working in areas that are less obvious; there is also a question about which dioceses do, or do not, involve women in major decisions.

Becky Stevens (Birmingham) commented that the stats are very helpful; she asked what can be done nationally given that after twenty-five years no diocese has yet reached a 50% presence of women, 'We are nowhere done'; leading women such as June Osborne and Jane Shaw have supported high quality mentoring for women, and a large percentage of women bishops had come through that programme, but it was not clear now what was happening; there had been helpful funding for this from outside the Church.

Anne Foreman (Exeter) agreed that the stats have been very helpful; she noted from the Exeter Bishop's Diocesan Council minutes of May 2018 that it a) will consider how to redress the low numbers of women's recruitment, b) agreed to Unconscious Bias training for all involved in panels, c) will look at gender balance of diocesan structures at all levels (interview panels, working parties, membership of Archidiaconal Mission & Pastoral Committees), d) will consider revising the role of the Dean of Women's ministry, e) will publicise the diocesan commitment to improving statistics and the practical steps being taken. She also noted that nothing had been done since May to implement these decisions and that the situation remained very difficult.

Rosalind noted that it was difficult to find out about the age of ordinands.

Mark Bennet commented that it was important that women Bishops not be put into 'the women's corner.'

There was a question from the floor about holding days for young women about ordination; how many days like this have there been and are they effective? Emma responded that Transformations is looking into this and that there have been a number of days. Transformations can advocate for action where there is clear evidence noting there was a spike in women's ordination with the arrival of women bishops, but that the correlation is not [the same as an] explicit [connection.]

There was a question about how many women incumbents are resigning prematurely; in the speaker's deanery there had been a drop from 12 to 4 with comments that the ministry is 'impossible'.

Sue Hammersley (Sheffield) said this is a real problem in the North and that it is important that individual stories be shared more effectively. Emma affirmed this was high on the agenda and invited anyone with stories like this to be in touch because Transformations can raise the issue or a question can be put to GS.

Greenbelt: Michèle Kitto, committee member, described WATCH's stand, shared this year with Inclusive Church and Modern Church, located on a walkway with good footfall; there were wide range of young people engaging in conversations and positive interactions with other stand holders; stickers and copies of Outlook were available; visitors were encouraged to write messages on cards that were displayed bunting-like. She thanked Michael Smith, Rosalind Rutherford and other volunteers coordinating and hosting the stand.

Communications: Emma spoke briefly because Michael Smith was not able to attend the AGM, noting that communications were a work in progress and that there is an awareness of the need for much more to be done in this area; she thanked Cath Williamson in particular for her seamless editing of the 2028 edition of Outlook magazine.

Laity: Lizzie Taylor offered further background information on her report.

April Alexander (Southwark) commented that laity concerns are closely linked to obfuscation across the spectrum; in 2014 there had been an attempt to require PCCs to consult with congregations about resolutions; the amendment failed, but the hope is this will be accepted as good practice in future.

Lizzie referred to the lack of transparency once letters of request had been adopted.

Jenny [Webb?] observed that there is no requirement for those serving on bishop's panels to hold the view that women should be ordained.

Lucy Thirtle (Oxford) relayed the account of an incoming incumbent whose conservative evangelical views [on women in ministry] had not surfaced in the selection process; there was now no constructive relationship between him and the resident female LLM and her public ministry had ceased; Church Wardens had left; she noted that the incumbent's application had been promoted by the Bishop.

Michèle Kitto (Bath and Wells), committee member, shared that she had served on a panel when a member had refused HC from a woman priest; the Church should be encouraged to require that parishes state their theological position.

There was a comment from the floor that it is very important to engage with Lay Chairs at Deanery level. Sally Barnes agreed saying that Inclusive Church is using its ambassador churches to challenge churches that say they are inclusive but are not, in practice. Yvonne Cameron (Guilford) observed that having policies is good, but that their practical implementation can break down, the argument

being, 'We can't find good enough people.' Mark Bennet suggested that resigning from office may be a form of collusion with bullying. Anne Stevens asked whether bishops can ask for lists [of parishes that do not support women's ministry.] Felicity Cooke noted the lack of understanding among Diocesan Synod representatives about unconscious bias; educational programmes are needed to raise awareness. Emma Percy referred to St Barnabas Church's (Oxford) recent advertising for a male-only vicar; local journalists could not understand why women clergy were not angry about this; to the wider world this is perceived as discrimination; her experience working with 18-25-year-olds at college level is that they are horrified by discrimination.

Chair's reflections

On Tuesday last, I was at an event in Portcullis House Westminster hosted by Dame Caroline Spelman DBE MP, Second Church Estates Commissioner, and the Bishop of London, the Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally DBE. They were part of a panel talking about church women in public office. Alongside them were the First Church Estates Commissioner Loretta Minghella OBE, the Bishop of Gloucester Rachel Treweek and the Bishop of Bristol Viv Faull. It was a celebratory event. The bishops present make up three of four women Lords Spiritual and two of three senior women Church Estates Commissioners. We have come along way and there are good things to celebrate.

Yet we need to be mindful that such visible examples of women's acceptance in the corridors of the Church's hierarchy are seeds of hope, not a sign that all is now well. Culture change takes time and at many levels the Church struggles with a full recognition of women's worth. In many of my encounters with church committees I have to constantly remind myself that this organisation is not covered by the 2010 Equality Act, and thus does not perceive a duty to proactively avoid discrimination.

It was not until December last year [2017] that the House of Bishops considered the Mawer Report on the appointment and resignation of Philip North as Bishop of Sheffield. Mawer's recommendations have been adopted and various committees have followed up on these. Vacancy in See committees are now expected to consider whether their diocesan bishop will ordain women and to be explicit if that is what they want. The central Church Communications department is more proactively involved when appointments have been made. The Faith and Order Commission have published a booklet on the Five Guiding Principles which you can download for free. An Implementation and Dialogue working group for the 5GPs has been set up, and I am a member.

This group is supposed to be the 'balanced' group to reflect on how the 5GPs are being disseminated in the Church and put into practice. It is not balanced in terms of laity, there are only two lay members - both women opposed to the ordination of women. We have received information from theological colleges about how they do, or do not, teach the principles and the 2014 settlement. We are doing some in depth work on a number of dioceses and we discuss some of the sticking points. It is hard work. I am one of the few members not on GS, and one of the only members who works for an organisation where Equality and Diversity are proactively encouraged.

The Bishops of Fulham and of Maidstone sit on the working group. It is clear that there is a need for the flying bishops and the Bishop of Maidstone to actively recruit in order to justify their existence. It is also a truth that their existence allows many dioceses to care for the minority without needing to appoint a suffragan who might hold their views. This is a source of tension for that constituency.

We have as a Church committed to the concept of Mutual Flourishing but there is still little agreement about what that means. At our residential this year, with the help of Hilary Ison, we did an exercise mapping WATCH's role in the dynamics of the Church. What became clear was that

WATCH still has a voice that is consulted and listened to, to some extent. WATCH has a freedom because we are not trying to secure legislation - so we do not need to compromise our stance. However, the sad thing is the exercise provided insight into the Church's clerical focus on these issues. The person representing the laity situated themselves in the doorway, then 'the world' wandered off to the garden.

Trying to work out how to engage with the wider Church, especially lay women, is not easy. Culture change in the church is immense and we need to be clear about what part we can play in challenging the church to change. It is becoming easier through Transformations and TRIG to look at issues for women clergy such as an agreed church maternity leave that will cover all possibilities for women, from being accepted to train through to being in stipendiary ministry. It is harder to know how we speak to the issues faced by women in the pews and even harder to think about how we speak to those who cannot get beyond their sense that the church is a sexist institution.

Two experiences beyond the C of E have given me food for thought this year. I spent Holy Week as the preacher at St James Church, Sydney. I could not function as a priest as the Sydney diocese does not ordain women as priests, though ordain deacons, but they are licensed only to preach to women and children. People were moved to have a woman preaching and talking in ways that they just did not hear. This Sydney version of Anglicanism with its strong complementarian anthropology is influential beyond that diocese. It appears to be a failing project with declining church attendance in the younger generation, but that is not a narrative accepted by them. Yet, at a seminar I led in Melbourne full of women clergy and hosted by a woman bishop there was a growing sense of how the Sydney version of the faith increasingly encroached on their more inclusive diocese.

There is a fear that what has been given can be taken away. I attended a conference to celebrate 50 years of ordained women in the Church of Scotland. It was a positive event, a church where discriminating against women is wrong. Yet, they were aware of churches that had returned to excluding women, the Australian Presbyterian church and the Latvian Lutherans. One of the papers referred to a study looking at what percentage of women leads to the 'feminisation' of a profession. This refers to the sense that it loses some of its status and becomes less attractive to men, the sociologists say 30%. Yet, in the church ministry, men cannot withdraw and do something else leaving it to the women, so the 30% mark can begin to prompt the rise of theologies that exclude women. We need to be vigilant about this.

Another visit I made was to Macau, where I stood in the Morrison Chapel where Florence Li served first as a deacon and then a priest. She had to refrain from priestly ministry post-war until the church eventually caught up with the pragmatic vision Bishop Hall had when he ordained her. It is important that the newer women do not forget our past and do not concede too quickly to an accommodation with those who oppose them. We do need to be gracious and constructive with those who do not think women should be ordained, but we also should not accept a relativist position that all theologies are equally valid.

WATCH is a volunteer run organisation and all of us juggle what we do alongside other demands. This has been a hard year for us and I feel we have been struggling against 'powers and principalities.' Stephen France (Vice-Chair) has been an incredible member of the national committee and I have relied heavily on him for so much of the backroom running of WATCH. Sadly, he became unwell in the Spring and has not been able to engage with WATCH at his normal reliable efficient level. This has left holes in our working and I apologise for the way they have impacted on our delivery of the new membership system. Stephen is stepping down as Vice-Chair. We thank him for so much that he has given to us and we hope and pray for a full recovery.

Esther Elliott has had to take on extra personal responsibilities at a time when her work situation was not easy. She has now stopped working for the Church of England, and is moving to Edinburgh. I am delighted that she will however stay on our committee. I have had my own problems to deal with as many of you know things have been, and still are, extremely difficult at Christ Church. Supporting my husband and living in the midst of a toxic community has taken its toll. My thanks to Anne Stevens for stepping up to help. We also thank Tracey Byrne who has served as a co-opted member of the committee for a number of years bringing much wisdom and who had recently stepped down. One of the great joys of this year is having Claire Creese as WATCH Secretary. Her ability to both calm and organise me is fantastic.

There are times when it all feels hard work and we wonder what we are doing but I am convinced that our continuing existence allows a challenging voice to be heard in the Church saying women are made in the image of God. Women are called and used by God in as many and as varied ways as men, women's experiences of life are a rich theological resource for mission and ministry. The church needs to learn to listen.

Elections:

Anne Stevens (Election Officer) apologised for an error in the election papers which had omitted noting Michèle Kitto (2017) and Yvonne Clarke (2017) from the list of Trustees automatically continuing in 2019-2020. Regarding the vacancy for Treasurer, she noted that it is not required for the Treasurer to be a Trustee. Anne thanked Mark for his outstanding service. She thanked Emma for all her efforts as Chair through good and bad times.

Nominations for Treasurer from the floor were invited. There were no nominations.

With advance notification as part of the required Trustee annual rotation, the following members were re-elected Trustees by a unanimous show of hands:

- Rosalind Rutherford (2016). *Nominated by Anne Stevens. Second, Jenny Humphreys.*
- Michael Smith (2016). *Nominated by Jody Stowell. Second, Jenny Humphreys.*
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With advance notification, the following were elected Trustees by a unanimous show of hands:

- Felicity Cooke (2017), Vice-Chair. *Nominated by Anne Stevens. Second, Jody Stowell.*
- Miranda Threlfall-Holmes. *Nominated by Rosalind Rutherford. Second, Anne Stevens.*

UPDATES

London WATCH - Sally Barnes offered apologies for Mary Johnson who could not attend because she was unwell. Sally said she nearly fainted when she heard the Bishop of London was to be a woman. London WATCH participated in the public consultation for the 133rd Bishop of London; the group had considered what mutual flourishing means in London; concerns raised in a later meeting with Bishop Sarah Mullally were: the undertone of rudeness, lack of civility and respect, the likelihood that the Church will soon have to address its own #METOO issues given mounting evidence, the statistics on the very low ratio of female to male clergy in London, training for senior positions and having six male bishops in London. Sally reported that these concerns had been 'fully taken on board' and that the discussion had been direct and very good.

Li Tim-Oi Foundation (www.ltof.org.uk) - Lucy Thirtle (Foundation Trustee) commented that it was good that WATCH could now attend to issues other than women bishops. But this was also moment to remember those for whom the main hurdle to exercising ministry is financial. She reported that Canon Christopher Hall, is now Honorary President, having stepped down as Trustee. The charity gives grants to our sisters in the majority Two Thirds World for training in ministry in their local context in the widest sense, lay and ordained. LTOF is in a time of transition and has changed its policies to focus on awarding grants in conflict-affected areas and also to consider grants not only for initial training, but also for further training especially where this enabled women to have greater influence. The Foundation is updating its website and communications strategy. Lucy thanked all who have been loyal supporters of LTOF and invited anyone interested to speak to her.

Closing remarks: Emma thanked everyone for their contributions, promising to take feedback to the national committee. Finally, she conveyed the Bishop of Crediton Jackie Searle's apologies.

The meeting adjourned at 12.50