



## DRAFT MINUTES

### WATCH AGM 2021

Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2021  
Held Online via Zoom

**APOLOGIES:** Apologies were received from thirty-two members, among whom were committee members Liz Shercliff and Michael Smith.

**Quorum.** Forty-four members were present (43 online, and 1 by proxy). A quorum (20) was established. The following national committee members attended: Emma Percy (Chair), Felicity Cooke (Vice Chair), Esther Elliott (Vice Chair), John Briggs (Treasurer), Claire Creese (Secretary)\*, Yvonne Clarke, Jenny Humphreys, Mary Kells, Rosalind Rutherford, Lizzie Taylor, Cath Williamson, and Sally Wright. \*Not a trustee

**The Chair called the meeting to order at 9.30 am**

**Chair's WELCOME:** Emma Percy welcomed everyone and offered a prayer. She referred to a recent photograph on the front page of the Church Times of Christina Rees, former Chair of WATCH, celebrating her ordination. Emma then introduced committee members.

**Approve MINUTES - 2020 AGM 17<sup>th</sup> October.** The minutes had been circulated.

*Motion.* Proposed by Claire Creese, seconded: That the 2021 AGM draft minutes as submitted be approved as a true record. *The motion was adopted by unanimous consent.*

**CIO ACCOUNTS to 30 June 2021.** John Briggs (Treasurer) noted that there were changes made in the originally published Receipts and Payments: the original sub-headings 'Website costs' had been corrected to 'Communications', and 'Publication of Outlook' corrected to 'Print and Distribution', headings that better reflect expenditure categories. [These changes to the Accounts were made on 24.09.2021 to the Accounts posted online.] He commented that WATCH was in a very healthy financial position.

The accounts had not been not independently verified this year because turn-over was less than 25K and so was not legally required. The committee had been consulted about this and had agreed to the cost saving. He thanked Philippa Blackwell for assistance with the bookkeeping.

In responding to a question from Sarah Bennet about the Rachel Hodel-Jones Fund, Emma said that the committee had this year approved guidelines for applying to the fund for grants.

*Motion.* Proposed by John Briggs, seconded: To receive the CIO Accounts to Year Ending 30 June 2021. *The motion was adopted by unanimous consent.*

### **2021 Annual Report**

The report was submitted in advance. There were comments and discussion on the following items. *[The report headings below are not comprehensive and appear only relative to comments made etc.]*

**Membership Administrator report.** In response to a question by Christine Broad, Emma explained that WATCH can no longer keep lists of members by their diocese. This is because of WATCH's shift to subscription (in 2018) to online CAF. She added that there has not been a membership drive because there had been no singly straightforward issue on which to base a drive.

**Secretary.** Emma thanked Claire for her steady calm and for the AGM materials.

**General Synod.** Jenny Humphreys noted the significance of the July GS 2021 representatives response to the Take Note debate on the IDG report and the importance of supporting IC in upcoming elections to GS. She will be stepping down as trustee once the newly elected GS is installed. During her time as WATCH representative she said that she had tried to keep putting questions to GS, even though there were often no clear answers coming back.

In response to a question by Lucy Thirtle about what questions had been answered, Jenny and others responded that these were factual or figure related. But that answers were often perceived as 'fudges', 'unbelievably vague' with issues being 'batted away'.

Charles Read pointed out the danger of the opinion that 'the women's issue is a done deal', when in fact there remained a real need to keep an active eye on issues.

Rosalind Rutherford said that extracting figures about ordinands had been very useful as it was the only way to get proof of discrepancies and of disproportionate percentages [between ordained women and men].

Emma invited members to let the committee know of questions to submit to GS, indicating that questions have to be very specific in order to 'flush out waffle'.

There followed a number of comments about members' worries about the hidden agendas and lack of transparency [regarding the theological positions on women's ministry] by some standing for the 2021 election to GS.

Emma thanked Jenny for her faithful service on GS over many years.

**Transformations & TRIG - Transformations Research & Implementation Group.** Cath reported that the committee met three times with a fourth meeting dedicated to memory-sharing because committee members were stepping down. Topics covered were the impact of Covid on women's ministry; how the Covid furlough disproportionately affected women curates; implementation of the new family friendly maternity/paternity leave. She noted that for Transformations meeting in person was better than online.

In answer to a question by Miranda Threlfall-Holmes, Cath noted the patchy implementation of the maternity policy. Emma said that it was intended as a minimum requirement and that, as national policy, implementation should not be dependent on dioceses. While it needs strengthening, she observed that developing the policy was 'a remarkable example of collaborative work.' She paid tribute to Liz Goddard whose 'forceful and constructive approach had improved the situation for

women in the church'. Emma concluded that WATCH can achieve things through Transformations that we cannot do on our own.

**Strategic Plan (SP).** Felicity Cooke said the committee found it very helpful to work within the framework of the Plan. But it had not been possible to review the plan in June due to priority being given to WATCH's response to the IDG Report (July GS).

❖ **Strategy 1: Transparency & Accountability**

*To work for transparency and accountability in all areas of church life*

**Statistics.** Rosalind Rutherford said that most dioceses are slowly rising in their percentage of women clergy; stats for Sheffield Diocese, however, were 'shocking' [low]; Ministry Division are not taking the stats seriously. WATCH cannot itself do the research into ministry statistics, it can only ask questions.

Emma paid tribute to Rosalind's work noting that annual focus on statistics is an example of a very straightforward task that WATCH does well. She added that WATCH wrote to the Bishop of Sheffield asking about the diocese's statistics, and that he had replied. Emma also noted that Rosalind had analyzed the results by gender and house of the GS Vote on the 'take note' debate on the IDG Report.

Rosie Harper said that no one had observed the percentage of men to women being called on to speak at GS; that there were only three women clergy standing for election to GS in the Diocese of Oxford, for example. 'I think we are going backwards. There are things happening that we need to watch very carefully.'

Emma asked how can we encourage more gender auditing in dioceses? There followed a discussion about the composition of the Crown Nominations Commission and a related concern about the composition of BAPs (Bishop's Advisory Panel.)

Esther Elliott concluded that WATCH needed to consider the different strategies to address particular situations. But that it was harder to think about how to effect cultural change within the church, especially with regards lay women who should be taken much more seriously. She observed that if there are no young women in the church, there will be no senior women in the church.

**Call for Clarity/Honesty re 2014 Settlement.** Lizzie summarized points made in the Annual Report. Anne Stevens expressed the need to chip away at the issue of the lack of transparency, but not too harshly, and that it was important to highlight the effect bad practices have on the church as a whole, and not just for women. Peggy Jackson found the situation in England shocking having recently moved here from Wales. She suggested WATCH tap into younger women's anger. The contrasting opinions about approaches was noted.

❖ **Strategy 2: Critique Five Guiding Principles**

*To critique the 5GPs to understand how they do and don't work*

**Implementation & Dialogue Group.** Esther Elliott spoke about the anger that had arisen during the WATCH GS online fringe meeting [held in preparation for the July GS]. She also referred to the 5GPs groups that she and Liz Shercliffe had run in the Diocese of Chester using the materials WATCH published in 2020. She saw a need for women-only groups and encouraged everyone to use

WATCH's resources. The key issue around the IDG Report was education and the need to work with TEI's and dioceses ensuring that accurate information about the 5GPs is communicated.

❖ **Strategy 4: Develop Liturgy, Theology, Language**

*To promote and encourage liturgy, theology and general language of the church which recognizes and affirms that women are made in the image of God.*

Mary Kells commented on the positive outcomes of the online Liturgy Writing Day held on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2020, with attendees from North American and Europe. A number of members commented that the use of inclusive liturgical language has an important in 'normalising' effect. Sally Wright warned that in using the phrase 'women priest' we 'make ourselves deviant.' There was a brief discussion about the 'current inefficient' Liturgical Commission.

❖ **Strategy 5: Communications – Michael Smith (Rosalind Rutherford & Lizzie Taylor)**

*To devise and implement a communications strategy that includes all media*

Felicity noted that 'we want to do better with comms.'

***Discussion on the Annual Report was suspended at 10.55am for Elections to take place***

**ELECTIONS** There were no contested vacancies.

A. Standing for re-election through trustee rotation\*:

- Rosalind Rutherford for Vice Chair. *Nominated by Sally Barnes. Second, April Alexander*
- Felicity Cooke. *Nominated by Romie Ridley. Second, Maggie Luff*
- Cath Williamson. *Nominated by Tracey Byrne. Second, Sue Hammersley*
- Michèle Kitto. *Nominated by Sarah Bennet. Second, Sally Barnes*

*[\*Secretary note: the Charity Commission-approved Constitution 2017 did not provide for initial staggered terms, resulting in some trustees being periodically asked to rotate sooner than the end of their term of office.]*

B. Also standing for election:

- Roger Neill. [Co-opted January 2021.] *Nominated by Sally Wright. Second, Lizzie Taylor*
- Sally Wright. [Co-opted April 2021.] *Nominated by Roger Neill. Second, Claire Creese*
- Tracey Byrne. *Nominated by Esther Elliott. Second, Cath Williamson*

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| <p><b>Election results.</b> With advance notification of nominations, all nominees were elected to a three-year term by unanimous consent.</p> |
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***The meeting was adjourned at 11 am for a Talk and Q&A:***

***Revd Dr Miranda Threlfall-Holmes: How can Feminists be nourished by the Bible?***

***followed by lunch and then worship, led by Revd Sally Wright***

***The Annual General Meeting resumed at 1.22pm***

**Vice Chairs comments** - Esther Elliott commented on her recent move to Scotland. 'The grass isn't greener, it's a bit of a different shade. The shepherds are different here, more gentle rhythm of the hill farmer, less high energy, and less competitive. Reflecting on the C of E feels exhausting, if you are marginalized, gay and working class. Leaders really do create culture in parishes, Bible study groups, model compassion, kindness, and welcome. The mental and spiritual load is huge in the C of E.' Esther concluded by thanking colleagues and friends.

Felicity Cooke reflected that it had been a joy to work with Esther and that she had learnt a lot. Claire (secretary) had been a tower of strength in support of all on the committee. In thinking about WATCH as the only organization in the C of E with responsibility for all women, with the caveat of a small number of volunteers, men and women, meant that difficult decisions about prioritizing efforts had to be made. Also, WATCH has to respond to events; and inevitably the focus is on ordained women. There continue to be shocking hurdles and obstacles in women's path, a lack of transparency and the need for the church to make more room for lay women. She concluded by expressing her gratitude for the experience of the past year.

**Chair's reflections.** Emma said that it was appropriate that she step aside from the Chair position (November 2020- June 2021) with Esther and Felicity together taking on the role during that time. This allowed WATCH to thrive and was supportive for her personally. She invited members to think about succession and to encourage those not involved to get involved because next year she will be stepping down as Chair having completed two terms (6 years). Having a good committee has made it possible for her to be Chair: good vice chairs, secretary, treasurer, and Eve (membership administrator). 'Please think about and pray for the next leader. Talk to me, or to Esther or Felicity.'

**The Annual Report was received by unanimous consent.**

***The Chair closed the business meeting at 1.35pm.***

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