

Rivington Unitarian & Free Christian Chapel
Congregational AGM 15.03.2020
Minutes

Those present: Alison Whitaker, Frank Ascroft, Peter Bearon, Dennis Crompton, Judith Crompton, Diane Fairclough, Paul Fairclough, John Green, Linda Green, Vince McCully, Geoff Newey, Iris Wharton, Rev Frank Williams

1 Welcome and Prayer: Alison Whitaker welcomed everyone to the meeting and Vince McCully said a short prayer.

2 Apologies: Chris Martin, Chris Oldham, Olive Fisher, Carol Worsley, David Worsley, Jacquie Kershaw, Tim Kershaw, Mary Horrocks, Richard Horrocks, Janet Lythgoe

3 Minutes: The Minutes of the last AGM had been available to read on the notice board in Chapel and on the website. AW summarised the main points.

4 Matters Arising: none

5 Chairman's Report:

AW reported that in 2019 there were four weddings and five naming ceremonies.

After a few comings and goings, Chapel membership now stands at 27. During the year, we had the sad news of the deaths of Michael Williamson in Portugal, Gordon Walker and Sylvia Worthington.

There was good weather again for the Rivington Spring Festival so the stalls were outside on the Green. The Bennet Ladies Choir and The New Rosemere Singers provided musical entertainment in the Chapel. About £500 of the money raised came to the Chapel. The Heritage Open Day late summer fair raised about £374.

AW attended the GA Annual Meetings last April as the Chapel's delegate, and Vince was there on behalf of MDA. Significant features were two official launches – Unitarian College and the new format of the Inquirer magazine. AW will be sorry to miss the meetings this year, but Vince will attend and will no doubt report back on the proceedings.

In the Physic Garden, one of the beds was replanted with several of the plants that had been used in the original design.

In August one of the services was organised and led by members of the Congregation. This could be something that we do again if people would like to.

The Pilgrimage in September went well, despite the much reduced number of bookings and the weather, which prevented some people from travelling. Rev Celia Cartwright, who proposed the toast to civil and religious liberties, eventually made it through the floods at the third attempt, and Rev Danny Crosby took the service.

Courtesy of Vince, there are now some bookplates for the new hymnbooks, so these will be inserted in the books with the names of those making a donation. Further donations are welcome.

In an effort to be more environmentally friendly, some bins in the kitchen were obtained for sorting our rubbish for recycling. This seems to be working most of the time, but some things do seem to be ending up in the wrong bin, particularly some plastic items getting mixed up with the paper.

AW thanked the Committee and members of the Congregation for their support over the last year. She also thanked Janet Lythgoe in particular who had been co-opted on to the Committee following last year's AGM. Janet has now decided to step down due to pressures on her time of her other many commitments.

6 Secretary's Report: VM reported that he had received various items from Essex Hall including information about events at the Nightingale Centre in Great Hucklow. These had been circulated initially at Committee Meetings and then more widely when relevant. He had also received various emails from MDA.

7 Treasurer's Report: Income - £14,994.48. Expenditure - £13,050.42. Excess - £1,944.06. Assets stand at £42,763.05.

The Chapel had received a grant of £1,500 from MDA, which helped cover the increase in the electricity bill. The electricity consumption will be monitored more closely to see if there are any ways to reduce it.

It was proposed that the accounts should be accepted. Proposed: Geoff Newey, seconded: Judith Crompton. Carried unanimously.

JC thanked the Officers on behalf of the Congregation.

8 Election of Officers: There was only one nomination for each of the posts of Chairman and Treasurer, so AW and FA remain in post.

Secretary: there were no nominations for secretary, so VM will remain as correspondence secretary and other secretarial duties will be carried out by members of the Committee as necessary.

9 Election of Committee: AW reported that Marilyn Buckley had resigned from the Committee during the autumn and was no longer attending the Chapel.

There were four nominations for the seven places on the Committee, so all those nominated were elected – Jacqueline Dagnall, Diane Fairclough, Paul Fairclough and Mary Horrocks.

At this point, VM was asked to leave the meeting.

10 Election of Lay Person in Charge: The motion was put that VM should remain as Lay Person in Charge. Proposed: Peter Bearon, seconded: Frank Ascroft. Carried unanimously.

VM returned to the meeting and was informed of the Congregation's decision.

11 Registration for the solemnisation of same sex marriages: AW reported that all Chapel members had received some background information so that they could consider the issue before the meeting. The options for consideration were:

- to register the Chapel so that in the future same sex couples would have the opportunity to hold their marriage ceremony at Rivington
- to continue with the current position which is to offer blessing ceremonies to same sex couples following a civil marriage ceremony.

VM had already indicated that he would be happy to conduct marriage ceremonies for same sex couples. If necessary, a ballot of members could be held to choose one of the two options or to abstain. AW had heard from several members who were not able to attend the meeting regarding their views on the matter.

During the open discussion that followed, the main points were:

- this was a very welcome opportunity for the congregation to meet and discuss an important issue, something which happens only rarely
- The world has moved on since biblical times, and the most important thing is that couples should be in a happy and loving relationship, whatever their gender.
- If people want to form a loving relationship, who are we to say no? We should not turn our backs on anyone.
- The strapline of the Chapel is 'Here let no man a stranger be' – everyone is equal in the eyes of God.

- It is important that for any couple approaching the Chapel with a view to booking a wedding that we are mindful of what their motivation might be.

AW informed the meeting of the views she had received previously, the majority of which were in support of the Chapel being registered. She also outlined some concerns that had been expressed, which were over same-sex couples opting to have children. The general feeling of the meeting was that this was a separate issue and should make no difference to whether we applied to register the building for same-sex marriages.

AW said that it appeared that the majority of views expressed both in advance and at the meeting were in favour of registering the Chapel, and asked if people thought we should still opt for a ballot, as there had been no response from seven of the members. It was thought that as all members had been given the same opportunity to give their views, we should proceed to a vote at the meeting.

It was therefore formally proposed that the building should be registered for the solemnisation of same-sex marriages. Proposed: Peter Bearon, seconded: Geoff Newey.

Votes: For 10 Against 0 Abstentions: 1

Following the vote, Judith Crompton thanked the members of the Congregation for their decision, as it is likely that the first request to hold a same-sex wedding at Rivington will be from her granddaughter and partner.

11 Events: AW pointed out that any plans for coming events will be subject to changes due to COVID-19.

The Rivington Village Festival is planned for Saturday 9 May. If it goes ahead, there will be stalls on the Green as last year if the weather allows, and in the Parish Hall if not. So that we can make sure that space is available for everyone, so if anyone is intending to run a stall, please let us know in advance. Also, we will need help to run stalls, as some people who would normally do this will be away that weekend. VM reported that the Parish Council are already considering whether to cancel the event.

The Anniversary Sermons will be on Sunday 17 May. We will not make any arrangements for a Congregational meal at this stage.

12 A.O.B. AW read out a statement from the MDA about COVID-19 (see attached), It was felt that for the time being, we should still be able to meet as long as we practised social distancing techniques. There was some discussion about what we could do if it was necessary to cancel services.

- If visiting preachers were not able to come, VM could lead more services
- We could produce a mini newsletter twice a month. This could be emailed to most members and sent by post to those without internet access.
- We might need to suspend the usual quarterly newsletter. AW will check the newsletter mailing list to find out how many people this would affect. Most people on that list do not attend Chapel regularly.

AW asked people to contact her if they had any other suggestions.

Judith Crompton thanked AW for the way the meeting had been conducted.

13 Date of Next AGM: Sunday 21 March 2021