

## Minutes of Church Members Meeting: 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020

### Welcome by Roy Bawden

**Apologies:** Chrissie Dore, Kim Hatton and Kat Pead. There were 96 members present (67 connections).

#### 1. Prayer and Worship

Roy Bawden opened in prayer and Roy Treadaway led in worship and read from Philippians 4:4-8.

#### 2. Approval of minutes of last meetings – Annual and Ordinary Meetings (15<sup>th</sup> July 2020)

The minutes were approved without any queries raised.

#### 3. Deacons Elections

Roy shared photos and ballot paper provided with RBC update 13<sup>th</sup> November. Dave Pead and Hilary Ross-Smith are not seeking re-election. They were thanked for their faithful service over many years service. Emily Chong, baptised in 1993 and a member since May 2016, was elected as a deacon and Duncan Tuft was re-elected as a deacon. Roy and Anne Bawden acted as scrutineers and counted the votes. The membership prayed for the outgoing and incoming deacons.

#### 4. Report from Church Treasurer including the proposed budget for 2021

Craig Rowland presented a financial report for the first 10 months of 2020 and the 2021 budget. Our offerings peaked in February pre Covid. Cash in envelopes is down £30,000 with standing orders up as some switch. £3,000 a month net is being lost in offerings overall which are down £24,000. Total income is £22,000 down on last year. We have saved around £20,000 expenditure due to furlough payments and as church activity on the premises is down. A deficit of £16,000 is expected at year end.

The budget proposes break-even. It is very difficult to forecast - flat revenue is forecast for prudence but not without risk; we are averaging around £25,500 a month at present and this budget would require an increase of £1,000 per month. Budgeted tax refund is down £7,000 due to drop in this year's income. Income overall will be down £6,000. The principal change in expenditure relates to internal mission. It is a blessing that we have paid off the building loan and that will enable a break-even position next year. Otherwise, we would have a deficit of £30,000. A full report is available on the church website. A question was posed regarding Building Fund income by John Stark and answered by Craig. The budget was approved unanimously.

Fellowship Fund. A number of people have enquired whether there was there a fund within the church that they could contribute to as during Covid, some folk were experiencing hardship. We do have a Social Concern budget to assist people who have an urgent need but the Diaconate has agreed to set up a Fellowship Fund with a transfer from general reserves. Further details will be sent out in the Friday update. It will be treated as if it is a restricted fund. If there are people that have an urgent need, they can contact the church office. Also, if folk know of people with an urgent need, contact the office or someone on the diaconate. If anyone wishes to contribute, contact Chris Follett whose details will be on the Friday update.

#### 5. COVID-19 Report

Helen Yarrow brought the report. The Covid team has been meeting each week and making use of their gifts. Helen invited members to give thanks to the team for their huge commitment and dedication. Helen summarised actions taken since last meeting. Since we were last together, the church re-opened and we were able to worship in church. It was necessary to book and numbers were restricted. It was a blessing to be able to be part of Barry's ordination and that showed the highest number of people coming into church and watching on line. Huge congratulations to Barry. Initially, we pre-recorded all services but now they are live streamed. This presents technical challenges and a huge thank you for all those who make this possible. In between lockdowns, we had one meeting of the children's groups 5-11 year olds, an altogether communion service for all ages and one Roots and Refine live meeting. It has been wonderful to see members of Tuesday Fellowship meeting together. Thanks to Roy Bawden for organising that. Children's work has continued throughout with resources sent out and linked to Sunday services. There has been a Toddler Trail, Holiday Club and the Great Summer Activity Adventure pack for children aged 3-11. Great Extreme Sunday Zoom. Schools work has continued with pre-recorded services on Harvest, Peace and Christmas have been sent out.

DVD's of the services are sent to those unable to access services on-line and many people have been making phone calls and sending cards and offering support to those who are lonely and shielding, for which we are very grateful. A correction to the report from the last meeting: the Care Home ministry, Barbara Avery and her team send a programme for a service, including prayers, bible readings, with an explanation and hymns that can be played on YouTube. Please continue to pray for those in care homes who have not seen family for over 9 months. Café Connect guests receive monthly mailings, with quizzes. They have been named 'Café Connectors' as a number of them met at church and are now contacting and supporting each other, alongside receiving regular phone calls from church members.

A survey was sent out and responses are still being collated. In response, the time of Zoom prayer meetings are alternated. A lot has been happening within the church. Harefield Hospital has been using the church hall for health checks. The church has been open for Safe Space and a rota of people are in church from 10-12 on a Monday and 1-3 on a Friday. As the church is open, if anyone has donations for Hillingdon Food Bank, they can be dropped off at these times. Thanks were expressed to Mark & Marie Dendy for being there last Saturday to receive donations and to Tony Strutt for keeping the outside space tidy. An appeal for anyone handy with a paint brush and available to do minor repairs was made, please contact the church office.

The Covid team met to discuss plans for re-opening church activities. Sunday services will continue to be live streamed and there will be regular prayer meetings. The church will be open from Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December for folk to attend, via a booking system. On Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December, we will be holding a Family service, with priority given to families and children. Later that afternoon we will be holding our Lighting the Darkness service that will also be live streamed. We are planning to hold one or more Carols by Candlelight services.

A poll was taken on whether folk would be happy to attend and on which date. **Would you be happy to attend and invite family and friends to Carols by Candlelight, on one or more of the following dates:**

17<sup>th</sup> Dec 32%, 18<sup>th</sup> Dec 44%, 19<sup>th</sup> Dec 56%, 20<sup>th</sup> December 64%, No do not feel able 34%. Other activities planned include an interactive Advent calendar accessible for children, via our website; 20<sup>th</sup> December, a Christmas Trail and craft activity; and a Christmas poster will be sent via email or the post to be put up in the window and perhaps shared with local shops and businesses. Thanks to everyone for their input for Advent Devotions and thanks to Gillian Rose and Marie Dendy for getting this organised.

Christmas services will be sent to care homes. Cards, Christmas quizzes and a gift sent to Café Connectors. Discussions are in hand about how we can celebrate our Senior Citizens Christmas party. The blog advised in the email sent on 23<sup>rd</sup> November is now live and ready to receive contributions about how we can reach out to our community and fellowship to share the Good News of Jesus' birth and we are challenged to consider ways in which we can reach out or help out.

## 6. Membership matters

Report brought by Alison Dennis. The deaths of Eileen Thompson and Barrie Purdy were announced and the resignation of Pat Holley. Membership now stands at 298.

## 7. Uniformed Organisations

Nikki Latham on behalf Lesley Ferguson, Kat Pead and herself, advised that they have jointly and in consultation with the Deacons, made the decision to close our Girl Guiding unit. RBC has sponsored a Girl Guiding Unit for 83 years, since 1937 and the decision was not taken lightly. Nikki re-started the Ruislip Windmill Unit in 2011 and took over the guiding unit a bit later. Nikki attended church parades as a teenager and that brought her to faith in Jesus and saw it as a good outreach to the local community. In 2013 the Promise changed and a discussion took place then about whether to continue. The Unit leaders saw it as a good outreach to the community and children of all faiths and no faith were welcomed. The leaders saw it as a good way to show God's love in the way they ran their units with traditional Christian songs to begin and close meetings, invited speakers in and celebrated Christmas and Easter with the girls and chose Christian charities to discuss with them. However, the Girl Guiding inclusion policy further defines that we are now not to focus on one faith and are encouraged not to mention God in prayers or songs. As such, all 3 leaders have decided that they are not prepared to do this as an RBC outreach as it does not align as an outreach for our youth.

Q1 whether this would affect the younger units. As the policy affects all guiding units: Rainbows, Brownies and Guides, they will all close.

Q2 whether we could move to something like the Girls Brigade. The team is considering how they can work with children to provide a different group that will not be a uniformed organisation and are keen to include

boys and girls. The leaders are not stepping down and are looking at giving time to another group but not necessarily a uniformed organisation.

Thanks was given for the work Nikki, Lesley and Kat and all previous leaders of the uniformed groups, since 1937.

## **8. Youth Strategy**

Roy Bawden introduced the item. On 9<sup>th</sup> October, members were notified by email that, following a review of our staffing model and strategy for youth work going forward, the leadership team decided to cease the full-time Youth Worker role. The process and rationale were summarised at a meeting of the Youth volunteers on 22<sup>nd</sup> October. A search and recruitment team has now been established for a new part time Youth Worker post of 25 hours, that will include a strong emphasis on empowering volunteers. This team will also be charged with searching for and recruiting a Children's Worker, following the resignation of Lucy Newton, reported to members on the 20<sup>th</sup> October. Lucy's notice expires in January. The team that will report to the trustees is comprised of Karen Gardner, Marianne Jeanes, Derek Page, David Rose, Helen Smith and Helen Yarrow. They will be consulting with some of the membership as part of their search process.

As a fellowship, we will be marking John and Lucy's invaluable contribution and service and details will be shared in due course.

The decision was a very difficult one given the consequences for John Reynolds and the wider family. It was only taken after careful and prayerful consideration.

Hilary Ross-Smith advised that some had asked why the matter was not brought to the members prior to the decision being taken. This had been considered very carefully. The Constitution states that when it comes to staffing, only the termination or appointment of ministers is specifically reserved to the authority of the church meeting. Other matters regarding members of staff are dealt with by the Deacons. This does not prevent the Deacons from bringing the matter to the members if they felt it was right to do so. There were compelling reasons not to in this case, which relate to the possible consequences of a church-wide discussion. John, is an employee and we are guided by the requirements of employment law. The decision had to be based on certain specific criteria, relevant to the role and not to the person occupying the role. One of the most important legal requirements is that the process must be fair and the potential effect on John and his family if the discussion was submitted to a church meeting was a very important consideration. There were understandable concerns about the effect on John, his family and his livelihood could lead to the discussion becoming personal and make an objective decision about the role very difficult. Quite apart from the legal aspect, there were pastoral concerns. RBC has been John's church family for the past 5 years and if the church members decided to make the role redundant, a difficult decision to bear could become even harder. Consequently, the deacons took the view that it would be wrong, unfair and potentially divisive to use the church meeting in the decision-making process. BU and specialist external Christian legal counsel provided unequivocal advice not to bring the decision to the church meeting. It was felt right to take the greatest care of John through a difficult time and that support and care is on-going.

John Bawden provided a summary of what is being provided for our youth now and the strategy and vision moving forward. The Youth Strategy Group that includes John Bawden, Karen Ingram, Pippa Durn and Andy Bell, met together with Helen and Derek, with a view to re-starting our existing provisions for our young people. They were conscious that they had had little opportunity to meet together since the summer and not in person since lockdown in March. Before we could achieve this, it was important to hold a meeting for existing volunteers who had been involved in youth work, together with other individuals that had expressed an interest in supporting our youth ministry. We wanted to share the process and rationale that the church leadership had undertaken to reach the decision, as well as the immediate plans to get young people back into church. A single meeting to include existing and potential new volunteers was held given the tight timeframe on 22<sup>nd</sup> October. Refine and Roots, our Tuesday and Thursday evening provisions, was consequently re-launched just after October half term and we had over 20 young people in church. The second lockdown then occurred and subsequent meetings have had to be virtual. The intention is for both Refine and Roots to return to the church building as soon as possible, depending on Government Guidance. Following feedback from the young people, leaders and parents, sessions have focussed on playing games and providing an opportunity to chat together and rebuild relationships.

Longer term, a search and recruitment team has been established with respect to fleshing out a draft job description to help achieve our vision and strategy for youth, which is to develop a thriving youth work that is at the centre of RBC where young people feel secure and welcomed, have fun and feel supported and are mentored as they explore faith and grow in their relationship with Jesus. The purpose of the role therefore, will be to bring vision and leadership to RBC, that facilitates our youth finding a deep rooted personal faith in

Jesus Christ, the engagement of the whole church in that vision, the integration of our youth into the heart of the church and to be responsible for RBC activities i.e. the provisions that we have in place at the moment, groups and events for those in school years 7 – 13 and that has clearly been impacted as well by Lucy's resignation and there are effectively two roles to consider.

The aim of the role is not simply to maintain the provisions we currently provide or to add to these but an emphasis on empowering volunteers to become spiritual guides and mentors for our young people, in recognition that it is the strength of these relationships, that is essential to the development of faith in our young people. Clearly this is something that we would expect any Youth Worker to be gifted in. John Reynolds, was certainly very gifted in that area but one person is only capable of doing so much and therefore, we believe that through intentionally establishing and building up a group of youth volunteers, we will be better able to achieve the foregoing. There is some way to go to achieve this and the search and recruitment team will be working to develop that role description with input from the expanded Youth Strategy group, before seeking to advertise and fill the role, as soon as is practical. Before opening the floor to questions, John shared that he had received an email regarding the decision to cease the fulltime Youth Worker role, that has prompted him to ask Craig Rowland for more detail on the background to reaching the decision. Questions were then invited.

**Q** Jane Golden asked has there been any consideration about having any young people in the groups?

**A** With respect to the search and recruitment team, there is an emphasis on including a number of different people in the church and it is expected that young people will be a part of that. With respect to the Youth Strategy group, that is not something that has been considered to date and the point will be considered by the strategy group.

**Q** Jim Green asked is there a link between the resignation of John Reynolds and Lucy Newton at the same time and is this due to financial constraints?.

**A** It is not related to financial constraints. As announced, Lucy's resignation relates to how she sees God's leading for her future and as this includes personal reasons, it is best that any questions be asked directly of Lucy.

**Q** – Gaynor Desai expressed concern about the content that volunteers would have to teach the youth. John used to deal with difficult questions such as homosexuality, transgender and sex before marriage. Having been a volunteer a long time, she would find it very difficult to be informed enough to do it properly and that it was a skilled job. She expressed concern that the church would think that volunteers, that have busy lives anyway, can replace a trained youth worker in an area where we have one evangelical church. There was a lot of youth in the area that we were not reaching. Are volunteers supposed to go into schools and do assemblies?

**A** John Bawden answered that we would not be relying on purely volunteers indefinitely. There is a paid position of around 25 hours that we are looking to recruit for; it won't just be relying on volunteers. It will be a team effort moving forward, in much the same way as it is now, except, instead of having a full-time youth worker it will be a part-time youth worker.

**Q** Gaynor Desai asked who would be discipling the youth as it would take a lot more hours than the Tuesday night, Thursday night or Sunday morning. The discipleship is endless – you cannot put a time on that. Gaynor expressed concern that there would not be enough volunteers to cover what John has managed to do up until now and he has had to disciple a lot of children and there could be a lot more that he couldn't reach because there was a limit to the number of hours he had available.

**A** John Bawden recognised that John Reynolds has done a fantastic job discipling as part of his role and we will be looking to some volunteers alongside the new Youth Worker to meet this important area of ministry alongside other things. We are not just going to be relying on one individual to do that because we recognise there is only so much that one individual can achieve, whether that is a full or part time employee. Gaynor pointed out that in her experience, volunteers would often arrive late due to work commitments. As much as they wanted to be there; their faith was not always where it needed to be to be a youth leader and we were very thin on the ground for many years. She is not sure that there will be sufficient volunteers and expressed her disappointment and concern about the future of the youth.

Craig Rowland followed up on Hilary's explanation and advised that many hours had been spent discussing this, prior to the decision being taken. When the decision was announced, it became clear that it was a 'bolt out of the blue' to members who had no idea of how long the position had been under discussion. The review was carried out in response to concerns about whether the current Youth Worker role is the most effective model for RBC in the current environment. The current youth worker role was set up 13 years ago as a 40 hour per week contract plus a manse. Prior to this, youth work was run for 4 years by unpaid volunteers. We have used a number of different models including Assistant Minister with responsibility for

youth and we have had full and part time youth workers. The main driver for making such a significant investment in a full-time youth worker 13 years ago, was that volunteers were struggling to cope with the large number of youth attending. There were 100+ teenagers registered at that time and the average attendance for Blaze on Tuesday was over 40. The investment made then was not only to alleviate the pressure on volunteers but also, with such large numbers, it was seen as a great outreach opportunity to build on this platform and go into schools and youth clubs etc.

The picture today is very different. In the last term before Covid, we had 9 regular attendees in Refine (formerly Blaze) and although there is one less year group in Refine than there was in Blaze, the significant drop from 40 to 9 demanded discussion and review. It's recognised that guiding teenagers on their walk with Jesus is not just a numbers game and that year groups can fluctuate in size. However, when the trend continues to decline and there are serious issues retaining our 14-18 year olds, the leadership team had to review the situation. To make it clear, although there were only 9 in Refine at the beginning of this year, those young people have been truly blessed with wonderful discipleship and that is not in question. This was not a sudden decision to review the Youth Worker role. The leadership team has been talking to John about some of the concerns, in earnest, for the last 2 years and to some degree, longer. As a result, the Youth Worker's contract has never been extended for more than 12 months and for John, he has almost had to justify his job every 12 months, which is not good and is unsettling. 2 years ago, in 2018, after some research and discussions with previous youth leaders, plans were put forward to make changes to the Youth Worker's role but following discussions with John, no significant changes were made. Changes were made to the hours but not the pay and things were tweaked. In June, it was decided to try and end the annual review of the role and do a more in-depth look at youth work and decide a strategy for how to deliver youth work at RBC with the benefit of the earlier consultations and other information like ChurchSuite. Following the review, 5 key issues were identified and in the strategy document produced, they were called 'drivers for change'. They were:

1. Numbers attending have diminished in the 14-18 age group.
2. A duty of good stewardship. We have a responsibility to ensure we are making best use of church funds: we are accountable for tithed funds. The current Youth Worker role costs around £900 per week and the rest of the youth budget is around £100 per week, so the total budget is £1,000 per week. We had to ask ourselves whether £1,000 a week is supportable; is that the right amount; whether the split of £900 per week on a youth worker and £100 on the youth was a good use of funds. To demonstrate that we are showing good financial stewardship, should we be spending less on the youth worker and more on the youth themselves, such as Christian youth events?
3. The leadership team perceived growing separation of youth from the central church. In recent years, instead of becoming more deeply rooted in our church community, they appeared to become more separated and less visible. In recent memory, two full rows would be taken up by our youth, whereas today, there are very few of our youth in attendance on Sunday evenings.
4. It is believed that there is a greater number of volunteers than are currently being empowered. In employing a full-time Youth Worker, a number of previous volunteers have stepped back from front line responsibilities. It's not known how many volunteers will step up and this is identified as a risk to the strategy. RBC though has an excellent record of people stepping up when felt called to do so and it is believed there are large numbers of members in this church who are interested in our youth. Whilst youth workers may come and go, our volunteers tend to stay within their church community and therefore, the youth knowledge is within the church and relationships continue long after a young person leaves Refine. There will, of course, still be a paid Youth Worker to lead the youth work at RBC but an emphasis on volunteers with more engagement is desired.
5. Since the investment to employ a full-time Youth Worker was made 13 years ago, the external environment hasn't facilitated the communities expected like school assemblies and youth clubs and the role has become more about building relationships with existing church children and their friends, which is not a bad thing but it is not what was envisaged 13 years ago when the large investment was made.

These 5 issues have driven the discussion and the decision has been a long and difficult journey. The leadership team concluded that a change the Youth Worker model was needed. The broad parameters for the role have been set out and the detailed work is now underway. It's been an incredibly challenging decision to make and the repercussions on John, Jade and the family are not underestimated and they will continue to be supported going forward. If anyone wishes to talk in more detail, then please contact Craig, or other members of the leadership team.

Roy invited further questions.

**Q.** Alison Dennis expressed concern that a manse will not be made available to an incoming new youth worker and that someone taking on the role will be working 25 hours per week which is not a big salary to be paying London rent.

**A.** Craig – It could suit someone to work 25 hours per week who seeks such flexibility; they could be from the area or within the church. It is one of the challenges.

**Q.** Neesha Soba – Does the church have a contingency plan for after Covid, when things go back to normal and we can return to church? During this period, a lot of people have come to Christ and want to know about Jesus. Once we are able to open again, what will happen if we have a flood of youth coming to RBC? Will volunteers be available to deal with the numbers?

**A.** John Bawden – if that did happen, it would be amazing and a challenge to face. It is not something that has been planned for and maybe more faith should be held. There is confidence that amongst our fellowship, we would be able to generate sufficient support and volunteers to meet that need, should it arise.

Marion Sharp – expressed a concern that once John has left, it may be difficult for young people to develop confidence in a person to speak and confide to if there are several volunteers who are temporary in nature.

Anna Goddard – wanted it minuted (herewith) that thanks be given to John Reynolds for all his time and effort invested in our youth and the personal and pastoral care he showed towards them because it was second to none. He really invested so much time and energy into them. From the parent of a child who has been part of the youth group with John and has had the benefit of such a fantastic youth leader. Anna thanked Craig for his explanation about what has happened and what led to this decision but questioned whether the youth be given an explanation, as this has come as a huge shock to them, totally out of the blue, with very little explanation about why, when to all intent and purposes, everything was going well, as far as they were concerned. Anna felt it was important that their views (the youth) be taken into account as to the way forward. Primarily, a huge thanks to John.

Roy thanked Anna for her words and reiterated that we should all endorse them.

John Bawden agreed with Anna and that it has been a real privilege working with John at RBC. In terms of feeding back to the young people, a session was held at the last meeting and provided more context and certainly, an opportunity for them to ask questions and to feedback and young people will continue to be encouraged to approach with any questions and concerns they have and especially when thinking about the future and new roles. The views of the young people will absolutely be sought regarding the new role.

## **9. Report from Church Secretary**

Roy Bawden presented the report.

a). It is formally minuted that Barry Dore is now a newly accredited Minister, effective 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020. Barry now serves a 3 year probation, whereupon he will become fully accredited.

b). Roy advised that as the Secretary on behalf of the fellowship, he had attended the Baptist Assembly, which was on line using CrowdCast on 16<sup>th</sup> September. It can be found on YouTube.

c). One year later than due, Derek will be taking a 3-month sabbatical next year between May and July. Derek is allowed to take a sabbatical every 7 years, although he has not always done so.

d). The Baptist Union Legal has informed churches that decisions taken at Members' meetings on Zoom are not legally binding under most churches' constitutions, although Trustee decisions are. This is to do with the principle of a gathered meeting in person, rather than virtually, being the intended method in which God's will is discerned. The suggested fix, since nearly all churches are in the same position, is that when we can gather again physically, all past decisions are ratified. As always advised, all decisions taken on our Zoom meetings have been unanimous, or by very substantial majorities, with a comment made that if close, decisions would be reserved.

## **10. AOB**

Derek Page advised that Andy Willis is very seriously ill. The hospital is unable to provide further treatment. Derek has been in regular contact with Mary and their children. The family have asked if Andy can return home for the final period of his life. The hospital are indicating that the level of care will drop and his condition will worsen rapidly. He is due to return home on Thursday (26<sup>th</sup> November). The major concern is whether he is able to travel in the ambulance home. The family would value our prayers that Andy be strong enough to travel and to be in his home, with his family. These are very difficult days for the Willis family. They have been hugely restricted in being able to spend time with Andy. Please remember the Willis family this evening, tomorrow and through the coming days.

**11. Derek** closed the meeting in prayer, specifically praying for our church, for John and Jade Reynolds and their family, Lucy Newton and Andy and their family. Thank you for Hilary and Phil Ross-Smith and for the 25 years Hilary has faithfully served as a deacon at RBC. Also for Andy Willis, Mary and the family, that Andy will be able to spend his final days with his dear wife and loving children.