

MINUTES OF THE TWENTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

OF THE FRIENDS IN INDIA

HELD ON SATURDAY 21ST November 2020 HELD VIRTUAL

The twenty-eighth Annual General Meeting of the Friends in India was held at approximately 11.15am on Saturday 21st November 2020. Due to the COVID19 Pandemic, the meeting was held virtually over Zoom, with 23 members of FCI attending and eligible to vote.

1. Welcome – The Chair welcomed those present.

2. Apologies for Absence

The Secretary informed members that apologies had been received from: Margaret Addicott, Daleep Mukarji, Jeremy Ashton, Sarah Miller and Daniel Jeyaraj.

3. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2019

Gordon Shaw proposed and Eleanor Jackson seconded that these Minutes be accepted and all members **Agreed**. These will be signed by the Chair.

4. The Report of the Secretary

Margaret Marshall presented her Report for 2019/2020 which included an update from the Membership. The amendments to the Constitution had been undertaken. Many events that had been planned obviously, had not been able to take place due to the Pandemic. We are waiting for a further two copies of 'Pilgrim' to be circulated. The Chair thanked the Secretary for her Report.

The Report was accepted.

Gordon Shaw enquired how the YMCA was coping with the present situation. It was noted that due to the cancellation of many bookings, with people not being able to attend events, the YMCA is struggling. The London and Birmingham YMCA are working together and they are awaiting their new General Secretary to commence.

5. Treasurer's Report

Copies of the Treasurer's Report, the Audited Accounts and Independent Examiner's Report for 2019 had been previously circulated to the members.

The Treasurer, Rev Jessie Anand informed members that the Closing Balance as at 31st December 2019, was £17,571. The cost of the production of two further copies of 'Pilgrim' will affect the Balance in Hand.

The FCI Thanksgiving Service 2019's offertory amounted to £654.

The Treasurer expressed her thanks to the Chair and the Membership Secretary for their assistance and guidance.

John Webber proposed and Israel Selvanayagam seconded and members **Agreed** that the Financial Statement and Report be accepted.

6. Subscriptions

Members were informed that at the present time there is no proposal to increase the amount of the subscriptions.

7. Elections to the Management Committee

The Chair reported that there are two vacancies for members on the FCI Management Committee – one of which is pending from last year. Israel Selvanayagam does not wish to serve an additional term.

Revd S A Anand Asir proposed, and Margaret Marshall and Sarah Miller had seconded that Revd Matthew Bicket be appointed as a member of the Management Committee. **This was Agreed by Members.**

Revd Jessie Anand proposed and Revd Chellaian Lawrence had seconded that Revd Timon Singh be appointed as a member of the Management Committee. **This was agreed by Members.**

Israel Selvanayagam was thanked for all his contributions and wisdom that he had given at meetings of the Management Committee.

8. Chairman's Remarks

Revd Adrian Watkins commenced by saying that he was aware that many members had experienced difficulties during this challenging and difficult time. As the Secretary previously mentioned events had been planned but unfortunately, due to the Pandemic could not be held, but looking ahead to the future he highlighted the following as likely areas to focus upon:

1. Effective education on issues especially in relation to the church and mission in India and what we can learn from, engage with and support in this regard. This may take the form of St Thomas Unity lectures and Education Seminars. Anand Asir the Education Secretary, said he is hoping that there can be a speaker from India for the next Unite lectures and they could be look at for August/September 2021.
2. Bringing the rich experience of worship, culture, liturgy and theology in India and south Asia to the churches in UK and giving thanks for these gifts. We hope it may be possible to hold again future thanksgiving services in this respect, as had been successfully held in 2019 organised by Israel Selvanayagam.
3. All of these events (points 1 and 1) could be held in different parts of the UK, so being more easily accessible to members and other friends with an India interest.
4. We need to increasingly be *diversified in our membership* if FCI is to have a future including strengthening participation by the Indian/South Asian diaspora, those with connection to the Indian churches through local ecumenical or church partnerships, and connections with younger generations.
5. Also, in relation to this point explore broadening our friendship with those with connections to other south Asian countries and churches. In this respect the bishops in the Church of Bangladesh have repeatedly requested FCI to embrace their church and nation in our fellowship. It was noted that some FCI members, including present in this meeting, have strong Bangladesh connections. Martin Heath's earlier paper about broadening our relationships can be revisited in this regard. And bearing in mind that CSI and CNI are not just united, but also uniting churches with an ecumenical vision, we can also extend our friendship across denominational boundaries. *Ecumenism remains at the heart of FCI identity and mission.*
6. Strengthen our commitment to prayer – for India, South Asia for the churches, for our witness here in UK and for one another.
7. The need to treasure our history. Not only the broader history of the story of the united churches, but also histories that are local, particular, and individuals. Our members are a repository of a wealth of experience, knowledge, memory and above all testimony and we need to hear their stories and for them to send these to us.

8. And of course, FCI Day and Pilgrim will remain core flagship activities.

Adrian expressed thanks to the Management Committee for their fellowship and support and for the work they have undertaken including the office-bearers, those who have held various roles, and to William Allberry for his work as Membership, Gift-Aid and Database Secretary and to Oswin Peter, the Webmaster.

9. Any other business and matters discussed

i) John Webber stated it was wonderful to see people on Zoom and it was good to recall Revd John Hastings (father of Karen Drayton) and the ministry he undertook in India.

ii) Eleanor Jackson is working on the biography of Revd Lesslie Newbiggin. If anyone would like to contribute any information please contact her on Email: Eleanor_jackson@bathes.gov.uk

iii) Andrew Wingate expressed we should not lose the knowledge and understanding that Israel Selvanayagam has brought to the management committee now that he has stepped down and it was agreed that the committee consider how best to continue to avail of his expertise.

iv) Israel Selvanayagam suggested that it would be good to form friendships not only with Bangladesh, but also Pakistan, Nepal and Sri-Lanka. We may be able to learn from members of the St Thomas Fellowship.

v) Julie Lipp-Nathaniel also encouraged developing relationship with Sri-Lanka, as churches there have also been part of the ecumenical journey towards unity, although a united church has not been formed. She also encouraged to continue to find ways to relate to friends in Europe.

vi) Following on from Julie's remarks Andrew Wingate enquired about a representative from the Diocese of Europe. Leslie Nathaniel indicated that there are various connections to explore and that he would be happy and willing to support such a task.

viii) Alastair Cutting suggested that it would be good to take advantage of opportunities when people are in this country to develop relationships, for example connecting with Bishops when they come to the postponed Lambeth Conference in 2022. Adrian did state that he mentioned the idea of another Fringe event at Lambeth at the South Asia Forum in February, but that the feedback from those present who are closely involved with Lambeth said such Fringe events were not being encouraged this time. Leslie noted that it might depend on who you approach to take an initiative.

ix) Andrew Wingate encouraged members to listen to Radio 4 on Sunday at 8.30pm to the programme 'The Last Word'. This programme will include informing listeners of the death of Dr Ataulloh Siddiqui who had died on 8th November 2020. He was a Muslim scholar who did a lot to promote Interfaith relations. Also we remember Jonathan Sacks who had died on 7th November 2020.

10. FCI Day 2021

It had been agreed at the 2019 Annual General Meeting that future FCI Days to be held on the last Saturday in September. However, in 2021 the St Thomas Fellowship is planning to hold their final meeting on that date, postponed from this year. **It was therefore agreed** that the Management Committee review the date of 2021's FCI Day.

As there was no further business, the Chair led a closing prayer and all shared The Grace.

ADDITIONAL NOTES OF the FCI Zoom Gathering from before the start of the AGM

1. The Chair, Revd Adrian Watkins, welcomed everyone, especially those attending for the first time – Matthew Bicket, John Webber, Karen Drayton and Timon Singh. Jessie then read a Poem by FCI member Mary Paterson regarding the 'Lockdown'.
2. Members had received information of a book compiled by Israel Selvanayagam 'With Spirit and Understanding', this consists of 1369 Meaningful Prayers and a book written by John Ray entitled '25 years in Kashmir'.
3. Adrian led the members in prayer especially remembering Bishop Pradeep Samantaroy, his wife Lily and Sarah Miller for their recovery from COVID19.
4. Jessie led the Thanksgiving Service and Adrian gave a message on "The Unique Talent You Have Today" based on Matthew 25.14-39 (the Parable of the Talents).
4. Prior to the Thanksgiving Service Revd Adrian Watkins informed members that as no Offertory would be taken during the day, donations can still be given this year to the Mangalya Programme of the CSI South Kerala Diocese. This is an initiative to help with the marriages of young women from poor families who cannot afford to cover the costs of the marriage of their daughters and especially in the current context of severe economic hardship resulting from the Coronavirus Pandemic. The Diocese has decided to help with fifteen weddings this season. The aim is to cover all expenses of the wedding as well as some start-up costs to help the couple with their home as they begin their married life. The Mangalya programme is led by the Women's Fellowship of the Diocese. Since the FCI thanksgiving service is being conducted this year by Zoom, contributions will need to be sent directly to the Treasurer by cheque, or by bank transfer to the FCI bank account.