

MINUTES OF THE THIRTY-FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

OF THE FRIENDS OF THE CHURCH IN INDIA

HELD HYBRID

ON SATURDAY 30TH SEPTEMBER 2023

The Thirty-First Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Church in India was held in a hybrid manner (in person and by Zoom) on Saturday 30th September 2023. Those FCI Members and Visitors physically present at the AGM were 26 (plus 5 children), and in addition those who joined the link by Zoom were 11.

1. Welcome – The Chair welcomed those who were present, including the members who joined by Zoom.

2. Apologies for Absence

The Secretary informed members that apologies had been received from Revd Timon Singh, Philip Wade and Sheila Norris.

3. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2022

The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held by Zoom on Saturday 10th December 2022, were accepted and approved. Proposed by Matthew Bicket and seconded by Sumanth Bommarthi and agreed by all members and signed by the Chair.

4. The Report of the Secretary

Margaret Marshall presented her Report for 2022/2023. During the year, the Management Committee had met on Friday 27th January 2023, and by Zoom on Friday 26th May 2023. A further meeting is planned for Saturday 4th November 2023.

A Prayer Zoom Meeting had been held on 24th April 2023, when thirty people joined FCI members led prayers in response to presentations on key contextual issues given by Ms Archana Adhikary (CNI), Prof. Dr Jasmine Alley (CSI) and Revd Suchitra Behera (Church of Bangladesh). The next Prayer Zoom Meeting will be held in 2024.

The St Thomas Unity Lectures were held during June 2023 organised by Revd Anand Asir, our Education Secretary. They took place in Aberdeen, Derby, Ely, Leicester and London. Dr Isaac Devados of Bishop's college, Kolkata, gave the lecture on the topic 'Hindu Nationalism and the Political Oppression of Religious Minorities in India: an Ecumenical Response'.

Work is continuing on the writing of a short history of the FCI.

Discussions have taken place for a small Leaders Consultation and it is hoped to hold a meeting in November 2023. This will also explore the possibility of a mission story-telling Conference in 2024.

FCI members have received regular issues of 'Pilgrim' during the year. We give thanks for the Editor and Editorial Group for preparing these and to the people who have made contributions to these editions.

Since the last FCI Day unfortunately, we have lost members who have died. There is currently a membership of 67 Individual Members; 72 Joint Members making a total of 139. In addition, there are 27 (unfortunately, some of whom we have not heard from for some time.)

The Secretary expressed her thanks to the Chair – Revd Adrian Watkins; the Treasurer – Revd Jessie Anand; the other members of the Management Committee: Revd William Allberry in his various roles and the Webmaster. Alaister Cutting proposed and

Alastair Cutting proposed and Chellaian Lawrence seconded that **The Report be accepted**, this was **agreed** by all members.

5. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer, Jessie Anand informed members that the Closing Balance as at 31st December 2022, was £13,970. The Income for the year had been £2,282 with the Expenditure being £6,212.

The major expenditure was for the publication of copies of 'Pilgrim', especially with the cost of the postage.

The cost of the FCI Day this year will be relatively high as due to the rail strikes fewer members were able to attend in person.

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

Chellaian Lawrence proposed and Matthew Bicket seconded that the Financial Statements be approved and this was agreed by all members.

6. Management Committee Elections

The Revd Matthew Bicket and Revd Timon Singh have served as members of the Management Committee for three years. They are happy to continue for a further period and have been nominated by the management committee. There being no other nominations both were elected to serve a further term.

Members were reminded that up to three Co-opted members can be appointed to serve on the Management Committee. Names will be discussed at the Management Committee's meeting in November. It was also noted that there is now also a CSI Representative vacancy.

7. Chairman's Remarks

Below is the abbreviated content of the remarks by Revd Adrian Watkins:

Adrian extended his appreciation for all who contributed to the success of the St Thomas Unity Lectures, especially the Revd Anand Asir who organised them, all the work undertaken by the local hosts and Dr Isaac Devados for his excellent lecture.

The Zoom Prayer meeting which was once again a valuable initiative that we hope to repeat in 2024.

He expressed his appreciation for the excellent standard of the issues of 'Pilgrim' magazine that we have received this past year – many thanks to Sumanth and the team.

Adrian then highlighted just some of the broad challenges for FCI at this time.

- There is the need to strengthen our core task of witnessing to the ecumenical unity of the united churches in India and South Asia to the churches here in the United Kingdom and Europe, at a time when there is less interest in movement towards organisational unity of the churches, The response to this challenge includes finding innovative ways of sharing the history of these churches.
- There is the need to share the present realities of the life, worship and mission of the united churches specifically and the church generally in India and South Asia to the churches in our own context. There are inspiring and encouraging stories to tell – so much that is happening at the grassroots level that churches in the West can learn from.
- The above highlight the continuing relevance of FCI today – but they in turn point to a third major sphere of challenge. This is how we can communicate more effectively not just to our members, but to a

wider audience and so broaden our core constituency. And then how we can effectively engage them and connect with the churches in India and the South Asia region.

How can we better unleash the potential of FCI and encourage a new generation of young leaders.

- We live in a rapidly challenging and unstable context at every level – local, national, and international – which also means changing and unstable ecclesial contexts. We need to be alert, informed about and responsive to these changes.
- These challenges all call for prayer – how can FCI become a more united and committed community of prayer, praying for specific needs. Prayer itself opens our hearts to the love of God and so will always lead to building a stronger and more loving friendship with those Christians and churches for whom we pray.

The Chair expressed thanks to all the members of the Management committee for their work and support, including the Office Bearers – Margaret, Jessie, Sumanth, Anand, and to Selvan Enoch our webmaster. Special thanks to William Allberry for his faithful, diligent work as the Membership Secretary.

8. Date and Venue for FCI Day 2024

It was **Agreed that the FCI Day and Annual General Meeting be held on SATURDAY 28TH SEPTEMBER 2024.**

It was noted that the Indian YMCA now charge £435 for the requirements that are normally used on the FCI Day.

The meeting closed in prayer.

FRIENDS OF THE CHURCH IN INDIA DAY

SATURDAY 30TH SEPTEMBER 2023

Morning Session

The Chair, the Revd Adrian Watkins welcomed all who were present and also members and visitors who had joined by Zoom. He informed members and visitors that the Offertory in the Afternoon Service will be given to Environmental Awareness Programme – Women Workers' Training Centre, Nagalapuram Thoothukudi, Nazareth Diocese, Church of South India.

Mr James Wesly from Bishop's College, Kolkata was welcomed to the event.

The theme of Mr Wesly's address was 'Opportunities and challenges for the South Asian Diaspora'.

He commenced by saying that he had spent two years in the United Kingdom. He was aware of many missionaries travelling from the West to India. These people been motivated and committing their lives. James indicated various points during his address:

- We are witnessing the decline of the Church.
- We are at a moment to reflect - we need to have soul searching where God is leading us.
- Unfortunately, many churches are functioning more like a Club however, we require to find a new way.
- The book 'In the search of hope' is about the Church in the 1960's.
- The Church is for the Kingdom of God and Renewing the Word.
- Searching new ways to follow God.
- None of us have the right to call 'Church'.
- We belong to different denominations to follow Christ.
- The Christian Church requires redirection to a more grounded theology for the modern world.
- The risen Christ gathers people for the future – to have the world transformed.
- The Church should function in society – the Church is more of a Social Club and looking inwards.
- We have the challenge to actively engage in the modern society – God is pushing us out of Church buildings.
- We require to be more inclusive – to include diversity of people.
- A man named John Hall was blind. He was a very established academic however, because he was blind he was excluded.
- People who are not white are often excluded.
- We have a challenge – there are many people in diverse backgrounds.
- How are we to welcome the people? Jesus said 'Come to me all you who are weary' – Jesus welcomes everyone.
- We need to know each other's world – we require to make space to be able to talk to one another.
- God is in the present crisis and he is pushing us out to the people, especially in diverse situations.
- Is there a future for the Church and Christian Faith?
- We need to model the Triune God.
- We need to engage with one another more and more.
- People can enrich people – one country to another.

Thanks were expressed to James by the Revd Alistair Cutting.