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**MINUTES OF THE 34th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Saturday 21 November, 2020 by Zoom**

At 14.00, Colin South, Chair of Living Stones, welcomed all present (25 participants).

**Apologies** were received from Rev. John Hudson

The minutes of the previous AGM held on 16th November, 2019, were accepted as a true record with the following amendments:-

Under the section entitled **British Palestine Friendship and Twinning Network** the sentence stating that “*This year’s first conference in Nablus/Sebastiaya had been very successful*” should state “*This year the second conference in Palestime was held in Nablus/Sebastiaya and was very successful.*”

Catharine Langrish pointed out that she was also nominated as a Trustee. It was agreed that Catherine was left out in error and should be added to the list of nominated Trustees at the AGM on 16th November 2019.

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous AGM held on 16th November, 2019, as a true record with the above agreed amendments. Proposed by Rene ?? and seconded by Duncan Macpherson.

**Matters Arising and Pilgrimages** there were two items in matters aring about two pilgrimages. One organised by Jo Simister which took place in Jan/Feb to Derby with 7 attendees. It was a difficult programme as it got mixed up with international events but was a time of positive spiritual reflection nevertheless. The second pilgrimage was organised by Andrew and was supposed to be to Lebanon in May but was then postponed to September but in the end all plans and bookings were cancelled due to Covid19 and lockdown. Any plans for Living Stones Pilgrimages are on hold.

**Chair’s Report.** Colin South highlighted that the Report covers the period April 1st 2019 – March 31st 2020 with the previous AGM taking place in the middle of the year so half the work in the report was undertaken by the previous Executive Committee and the second half by the new Committee. The new Committee only inherited three members from the previous Executive and one of those had to leave to deal with family matters so with only two experienced members in the new Committee there was a sharp learning curve for many. The new Committee had to re-examine the Strategy and Objects and decide where to best concentrate its energies and decide its priorities. There was also no adminstrative support. A SWAT analysis was undertaken and much thought was given to how best to go forward. A Strategy document was produced called “?????????”. The thrust of the work focussed on leadership support and producing the Yearbook.

**The Yearbook** – Len and Anthony reported that the Yearbook will have over 400 pages when it is published. There has been a delay due to Covid and a paper from Aziz has been delayed in submission. The Yearbook should be printed before Chrsitmas and distributed before the end of 2020. It will be posted out by mail and put on the website along with previous Yearbooks so there will be a wealth of riches. There are already 4 papers for the 2021 Yearbook. New scholars are and should be encouraged to disseminate their research and knowledge and Living Stones needs to think about repositioning scholarships to a wider range of people and churches in the Middle East and outside. The Theology Group also feeds into the Yearbook. It is a good way to test out any research in this area with committed people. It is a unique venture and the only academic platform to consider theology in the Middle East.

The second part of the Strategy related to Leadership support which resulted in the creation of a set of teams to focus on and support particular areas of work. For example – Membership, Publicity and Promotion team, pilgrimage and Partnerships Team, Theology and Scholarship team etc. In the area of scholarships we discovered how much we needed the expertise of Heythrop College and in this regard Anthony O’Mahony has contributed very richly. We have decided to fund Anthony for 2 years to support our work and his.

Unfortunately Michael Doherty felt he was not sufficiently qualified to continue undertaking the role of Honorary Treasurer so he stepped down from this role. There have been no other volunteers so the Chair has been acting in this role with the support of Betty Sanders, Finance Officer who has been appointed by Living Stones.

Colin South thanked all Executive members from the previous and new Committees who have worked very hard to produce the programme of activities and the new Strategy. Last year Living Stones paid out £10,000 in Scholarships. This year £5156.60 has been distributed on 4 scholarships. It is unlikely that this will expand in the next 2 years but fund raising will help. The focus of the scholarships is on contextual theology.

**Finance:** Betty Sanders worked on reconciling the year end accounts which have been examined. She pointed out that on Page 8 of the Annual Report the income was £6,200 this year compared to £7,300 in 2019 but there are opportunities to get funding from Gift Aid. The expenditure this year is £16,657 compared to £18,881 last year. Total funds carried forward are £91,007 compared to £103,755 last year. The reduction in the overall balances is largely due to the investment funds reducing at end of March 2020, a critical time when Covid changes were on the march. However since this time investments have recovered and increased substantially. The balance sheet also shows that the balance of invesments has reduced form £103,000 to £91,000 and this is due to selling £12,000 for ????.

The overall value of funds is £91,000 with most of this (over £86,000) in the Michael Prior restricted funds for scholarships.

Betty explained that she was very comfortable with the Examiners who were very co-operative and agreed to reduce their fees.

It was proposed to accept the accounts and the Independent Examiners Chanter, Browne and Curry.

Proposed: Len Harrow. Seconded: Michael Doherty. A clear majority accepted these proposals.

The following questions and points were raised in discussion.

**Q** – How is membership doing and what is being done to increase smaller subscriptions to larger ones?

**A** – Michael explained that much time has been spent consolidating the existing membership and obtaining up to date communications such as email addresses and telephone numbers where this information did not exist. The Committee has agreed to reduce the various categories of membership (up to 5) to two categories and through this to standardise and increase subscription rates. A letter and email have been developed to this effect and asking existing members to consider increasing revenue through gift aid.

**A** - Catharine expalined that a fund rasing plan is in place. It will start this afternoon with a launch by Grace Al Zhougbi. There will also be a Christmas Appeal before Chrsitmas and in January. A Lenten Easter Appeal will be made for scholarships. The website will be used to promote membership. The website has been improved to increase participation and partnership. This will continue to be a key priority going forward.

**Retirement and re-election of the present Executive committee** Colin South explained that the nominations for the new Committee were as set out in the proposals paper sent out to everyone before the meeting and currently on display on everyone’s screen. He asked everyone to note that Len Harrow would no longer be able to approve the printers for the Yearbook as he has a conflict of interest in being a member of their Board. He also pointed out that he was very pleased to have Grace Al Zoughbi nominated as a Trustee. However she will be exempt from scholarship decisions given that she has benefited from a Living Stones scholarship.

All Trustee nominations proposed by Colin South. Seconder – Duncan Macpherson. Agreed by clear majority.

Appointment of Officers: Chair - Colin South, Vice-Chairmen - Rev. Dr. Duncan Macpherson, Membership Secretary - Michael Doherty, Hon. Treasurer - Len Harrow (supported by Finance Officer, Elizabeth Sanders)

Proposer - ????? Seconder - ??????

Clear majority accepted.

Dominic Robson from Farm Street nominated as an honorary member but cannot take Trustee decisions. Proposer - Deacon Dr Duncan Macpherson. Seconder – Philip Francis

It was agreed that Dominic Robson must become a member in order to be appointed as an Honorary Member.

**AOB**

Professor Mary Grey is still President of Living Stones. She responds to communications from Living Stones but it is unclear how her health is fairing.

Andrew Ashdown reported that his book is being published next week by Routledge and he is able to obtain a 30% discount if anyone should wish to order it through him. It was agreed by all that the recent SOAS presentation was excellent.

Alison Driscoll commented that a newsletter would be welcome for those who find the Yearbook too high brow. The Publicty and Promotion Team are considering this and developing engagement through a newsletter.

John Angle pointed out that a webiste search for Living Stones generated lots of options not related to Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust. It was expalined that that Google searches are ranked on popularity or sponsorship which is expensive so we are not able to control what comes up on a search engine. Suggestions were made to visit the site frequently and bookmark as a favourite.

Anthony emphasised the importance of research and theological papers in spreading the news and making a big impact on churches and the role individual people play in their churches - Andrew’s example of sharing his paper with the Theology Group at SOAS and then having it included in the Yearbook demonstrates this as well as next year the paper from Father Nicodemis in the Yearbook was publshed by Routledge the year before and he is now an interreligious adviser to the Arch Bishop of Canterbury. Hence wider scholarship is making a big imapct on people and their churches.