

## **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Christians on the Internet (COIN),**

held on Saturday 23rd April 2016 at the church of St. Michael and all Angels, Headingley, Leeds.

**Opening worship** was led by Peter Lear.

**Present:** Andrew Foulsham (in the Chair), Gwyneth Carter (observer), Stephen Carter, Dave Florence, John Hartley, Liz Jennings, Peter Lear, Sandra Lear, Ron Newsham, Tony Whatmough, Chris Wright, Jill Wright and Sheila Wright.

**Apologies for Absence** had been received from Sallie Bassham, Mike Beasley, Peter Bowes, Ian Clark, Brian Elliott, Kathy Fergusson, Alison Fisher, Bruce Fletcher, Meg Gilley, Nick Gomersall, John Green, David Hall, Tim Hatwell, William Howard, Alan Jesson, Martin Joss, Simon Kershaw, Jeremy King, Clem Lewis, Jeff Lowndes, Lynne Lowndes, Peter Muir, Ryk Parkinson, Roger Stokes, Mike Todd and John Winterbotham.

**The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting** in 2015 had previously been circulated. John Hartley asked about the accuracy of the last paragraph, but the Chairman said that he was satisfied with the wording and would refer to it in his Report (see Chairman's report at Appendix A). After a minor alteration at Item 8, it was proposed by Ron Newsham, seconded by Chris Wright and agreed that the Minutes be signed as a correct record of that meeting.

**Matters arising:** There were none that were not dealt with in the Agenda.

**Chairman's Report:** The text of this is found at Appendix A. There were no questions or comments.

**Report from the Electoral Roll Officer:** This report had previously been circulated and can be found at Appendix B. In the absence of the ER Officer, Andrew thanked Alan Jesson for his Report. He said that Alan had provided sterling service over the lifetime of COIN by maintaining its records. The Meeting and Announce lists are basically composed of the same names. However, Announce is a record list only; the Meeting List has all the traffic; it picks up the bounced messages from Announce and throws them off the Meeting List. This makes Alan's job almost impossible and the Membership list is almost undoubtedly inaccurate. The Constitution specifies that a member must furnish an "active email address" but if a member is unreachable then valid membership is doubtful. Such members will not know they are unreachable and could therefore be put on to a separate list. It would be possible (though time-consuming!) to collate all the lists with Announce. There is a problem only when we want to consult the membership over a big decision.

**Technical Report:** Chris Wright had previously circulated his report, which can be found at Appendix C. He commented that mostly, matters technical had gone well, apart from the big hack in the summer! The other regular problem is that of spam. Most people don't get very much, but there is a lot which the filters deal with. Some is enough to get us onto a blacklist, which is, at the very least, a nuisance. Chris said that as part of his preparation for retirement, he was gradually passing on his websites to two companies, and then introduced (very new) member Dave Florence, who may be able to provide some Technical expertise. He reiterated that some sort of change must now happen, which may make it easier for us to make it happen. "We start here." Chris was thanked by Andrew Foulsham for the clarity of his report and subsequent comments. A formal vote of thanks to Chris for his work over many years was proposed by Peter Lear, seconded by Sheila Wright and agreed nem con.

**Financial Report:** this had previously been circulated and may be found at Appendix D. A copy of the bank statement showing all transactions for the year was tabled. In the absence through illness of the Treasurer, the Chairman asked for comments and/or questions. There were none

and it was proposed by Peter Lear, seconded by Liz Jennings and agreed that the Report be accepted, with thanks to Peter Muir for his work.

## **The Way Forward**

The Chairman introduced this discussion by pointing out that for several reasons, we now need to look at the future shape of COIN. We had fulfilled our remit of twenty years ago, but 2016 is a very different world technically. We need now to produce suggestions and possibilities for discussion by the membership in order to develop a structure which will serve today's demands. To this end, the Chairman proposed that the Meeting List be used as the vehicle for discussion; it would therefore be kept open for a longer period (to be defined by the Exec).

There followed a lengthy period of robust discussion, during which the following were the main points raised.

Peter Lear expressed frustration with the Constitution which ties our hands and limits what we can do. The Lists are loved! If we can go along with Andrew Leach's suggestion to get another host to keep the lists going, then PL is willing to help moderate.

John Hartley pointed out that the point of any Constitution is to make sure that an organisation is run in a fair way. Part of the reason that things don't happen is because we don't work with the Constitution. However, he agrees that the Lists are a major plus point. He also said that in his opinion, the Exec is not representative of the membership and is ineffective, citing as an example the late opening of the Meeting List.

Andrew Foulsham wondered if perhaps the Constitution is the tail that wags the dog? There are institutional and constitutional changes which could be looked at but we are not in a position to make changes at this meeting.

Tony Whatmough suggested that it is difficult to have an ongoing discussion on social media (eg Facebook) and email is better for this purpose. In addition, the silent majority makes it difficult to take development forward.

John Hartley and Peter Lear wondered whether silence indicated apathy.

Tony Whatmough added that even during this last week, there has been very little discussion of the future.

John Hartley said that we should use the Constitution to elicit responses within a given period.

Ron Newsham said that there had been very little traffic on COIN lists and he himself had contributed very little. 20 years ago, a constitution had been very necessary, when the internet was very new. Now it is less so and the whole landscape has changed. We need to distil the essence of COIN and the effect of the Constitution and then decide what we actually want. It is a group which cares about community and inclusivity. Facebook is much more commercially orientated and uncaring of people's security.

Chris Wright commented that volume of traffic on CofE-2020, Technical and General had seen roughly a 20%, 20% and 38% decrease in traffic respectively over the last year. In response to a comment, he said that attachments were possible, though not necessarily desirable!

*At this point (12.15) the meeting broke for lunch. We resumed at 1.40, after the by now traditional photo, taken this year by Ron Newsham.*

**Elections** With the consent of the meeting, the Chairman varied the order of the Agenda. After an anomaly on the Agenda paper (noted by John Hartley) had been dealt with, the following elections took place.

**Election of the Treasurer:** Peter Muir had signified his willingness to stand for re-election as Treasurer. He was proposed by Peter Lear and seconded by Sheila Wright. There were no other nominations and he was therefore elected unopposed for a term of three years.

**Election of three members of the Executive:** Peter Lear had served a year in place of Jeff Lowndes. He was willing to stand for re-election and was proposed by Andrew Foulsham and seconded by Ron Newsham. Brian Elliott and Meg Gilley had similarly agreed to stand for re-election: they were proposed by Jill Wright and seconded by Liz Jennings. There were no other nominations and Peter, Brian and Meg were elected unopposed to serve for three years. The meeting agreed that the Exec should co-opt Alan Jesson as Electoral Roll Officer, but should not co-opt Rob Pickering as the representative from SOAJ since Simon Kershaw is able to fulfil that role.

**Independent Examiner:** Ron Newsham agreed to take on this role.

**The Exec** now is comprised of:

Jill Wright (Secretary), Roger Stokes and Simon Kershaw (till 2017)  
Andrew Foulsham (Chair), Tim Hatwell, Andrew Leach and Chris Wright (till 2018)  
Peter Muir (Treasurer), Brian Elliott, Meg Gilley and Peter Lear (till 2019)

***Discussion of the Way Forward then resumed.***

Peter Lear said that it appears clear that there is a desire for mailing list traffic by some means or other.

John Hartley proposed that for the avoidance of doubt, *we continue with the same sort of service we enjoy now, with mailing lists*. This proposal was seconded by Peter Lear.

Chris Wright endorsed the continuation as proposed, but suggested we need to look at how this might be done. He referred to Andrew Leach's suggestion of a blog system which would work online and use push email. An (unofficial) commercial quotation of £1000 to facilitate this idea had been received: this was deemed to be more than what we want

Chris said that Dave Florence has good experience of WordPress and Mailman (despite its "spam" faults). Dave said that he would be willing to explore a number of different options (eg WordPress, Electric Embers) once he has a better working knowledge of our requirements.

John Hartley and Andrew Foulsham both have both had good experience of Yahoo groups. A Yahoo Account is not needed to participate and there is moderation in just the same way as other groups are moderated.

John Hartley concluded by saying that we don't need exactly the service we have now, but the principle is important. His proposal was carried nem con.

Ron Newsham asked what would about people with poor network coverage who don't have great bandwidth? Email doesn't need great bandwidth. An email push to a social media site may be insufficient and we need the ability to reply to emails immediately without having to log on to a website. He questioned how much the COIN archives are used (not much).

There is much filtering done by Facebook which affects the News Feed, allowing Facebook's administration to choose what users see.

Stephen Carter mentioned Facebook Purity, a device which allows more choice in what users see and don't see.

Peter Lear queried the definition of a “blog” and asked whether COIN members might use this kind of facility. Dave Florence and Ron Newsham explained the idea and Dave demonstrated a blog with which he works.

John Hartley proposed that *“we explore the operation of a social media platform, with the facility for email notifications and replies by emails, as an additional facility for COIN to offer.”*

Andrew Foulsham agreed that this would be a good option to explore and seconded the proposal.

Tony Whatmough commented that this might exclude those with poor internet access, but John said that that was why he had added the word “additional” into the proposal.

After this clarification, the proposal was passed nem con.

Peter Lear said that we needed to publicise the existence of the (closed) Facebook group. We need to send a reminder to the Lists that the group exists, that it is there to be used and also how to access it.

Jill Wright suggested that the Minutes be published as normal on the Meeting List, but should also go to all the other Lists, since it is such a major step in the future direction which COIN takes. People will be asked to respond to the Meeting List, so that everyone who posts can see what others are saying. The suggestion was agreed.

John Hartley enquired whether there is enough clarity about what is to be done? Dave Florence said that he understood the need for community and inclusiveness as a baseline for what is needed. He agreed to be a part of the discussions as to future development (and he paid his fiver, to be forwarded to the Treasurer quam primum!)

We agreed that the Meeting List would stay open until the next (virtual) meeting of the Exec.

## **AOB**

**John Hartley** repeated that he thought the Exec should be elected by the whole membership, rather than just by the members present at the AGM. Tony Whatmough suggested that we need to define more clearly (possibly by means of an annual subscription) the “membership”. John suggested that one criterion might be that a “member” should have posted within the last year. Stephen Carter suggested that the Exec be asked to look again at the matter of annual subscriptions. John said that we don’t need the money and that such a proposition would involve a lot of administration. Dave Florence clarified that membership presently means those who have paid £5, rather than those who take part in the mailing lists. There are methods of online payment which would be easier to administer. It was agreed that if we needed to levy a subscription, then further thought would be given to how this might be done.

**Ron Newsham** referred to the earlier conversation about the Constitution and proposed that the Exec be asked to review the present Constitution and consider whether it needs amending to fit the present and future needs of the organisation. There are procedural issues involved which mean that any work to be done must be done (either by the Exec or by others) in the near future.

Andrew thanked everyone for their attendance and their participation; in particular he thanked John Hartley for the way in which he had explored issues and pointed areas which needed more thought, particularly for summarising matters into a form that could be voted on.

**Tony Whatmough** closed the meeting with prayer at 3.15pm.

## Appendix A

### Christians on the Internet

Report from the Chair, for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015

Before we move into the details of my report, can I start by expressing my thanks to Tony for making us so welcome for our visit to the North in this rather lovely and leafy part of Leeds. It always feels – for me at least – as a kind of homecoming when I travel to anywhere in Yorkshire. To use the oft-repeated adage, you can take a man out of Yorkshire, but you can't take Yorkshire out of the man!

Even though we have heard the apologies for absence that have been sent to our Secretary, can I also mention one or two that we are missing particularly – especially Peter, our Treasurer, who is laid low with a heavy cough, and Jeff & Lynne Lowndes who are each fighting their own health battles at the moment. They have each been welcome figures at many AGMs, and I know that their presence will be sorely missed by us all.

But now to the serious business of my report. It would be so tempting to run through some highlights of our year, mentioning the wide range of topics discussed and the readiness of members to share one another's burdens and to offer help and advice so willingly. But, whilst that is all very true, that would be a disservice to COIN and to the members here today.

Firstly, it would be a disservice because it would not do justice to the efforts undertaken by Chris to keep us online, the emails flowing and the website up to date. From my own observations I can say that there is a lot of activity going on under the surface to keep everything running smoothly – the easiest comparison that I can make is to the stately progress of a magnificent swan swimming along a river – and it's only when you look underneath the water that you see the powerful and determined paddling that is going on unseen! Chris was one of the earliest members of COIN and managed our technical needs from the very earliest days, and within the last few years has taken over the complete management of the webserver and mailing list server, delivering a modern and easily maintained website and mailing lists that manage to keep the real emails flowing but hold back the flood of spam (or at least that which might come via the COIN servers) from our inboxes. However, Chris is in the process of hanging up his keyboard and putting his servers out to grass, and will not be able to provide a service to COIN for much longer. And nor should we either expect him to, or place him under any pressure to continue.

Secondly, we must acknowledge that COIN is changing. The numbers of messages are falling year on year, as Chris's technical report will no doubt mention. Not many years ago I was only able to cope with the traffic on the “General” list by subscribing to the digest and so receiving one or two summary messages a day – but now some days pass when we see no traffic on General, which was always our busiest list. The membership is undoubtedly ageing – we do not see many new members each year. I think of myself as one of the younger members, and I turn 50 this summer! We are no longer at the cutting edge of technology – I was recently chatting to two clergy friends who had not heard of COIN (although both are very internet-savvy), and although they were pleased to hear of what COIN has done, could not conceive of life without the internet. In some ways for them it would be like considering clergy life without a car – possible, but hindered in many ways, and certainly would now be seen as a bit quirky. I was struck by the comments of one of our longstanding members at last year's AGM that she enjoyed and valued COIN, but if it was founded today then she wouldn't join. So in many ways we have fulfilled our aim: “To promote the use of the Internet and other electronic communication media by Churches, Christian Organisations and individuals.” as most if not all churches and Christian Organisations now have a website and use email and many have branched out into more varied forms of electronic communication.

However, as we have approached this year's AGM the news that we will have to change was met with some howls of protest from certain quarters. It is clear that for some members COIN is still a

very precious part of their Christian life and experience – perhaps a safe place where they can know others and be known. For some, this may be because they are physically remote, living in a rural area with few contacts with people “on the same wavelength”, or because they lead busy lives and have many demands on their time due to the demands of ministry and few outlets where they can ask for advice and support from others who may have trod the same road before them. For each of these groups and more, I acknowledge that COIN provides something very necessary “above and beyond” its original calling. For this reason, any changes that we make must be considered carefully and the consequences for all sections of the COIN community examined.

I had hoped that the “working group” that was mooted at the last AGM would have formulated its survey of the membership and reported back by now. It might have pursued its charge to examine all options and leave nothing off the table – but for various reasons, that hasn't happened. We shouldn't engage in recriminations about it, but instead look at where we are now and what we can do next. As several members have noted, we cannot take decisions to amend the constitution now or close down COIN without further ado at this meeting. But we can set the course, and when that course is set, it will be incumbent on the Executive to move in the direction that has been indicated by the AGM.

So, you may ask, what are the options? I can point out some – but there are wiser heads than mine at this meeting, and I'm sure others have ideas that are just as worthy of consideration. So do speak up – express your ideas and your hopes and fears. You will find us all willing to listen.

1. It may be that we really want a continuation of the same sort of service we enjoy now, with a website and mailing lists. That is possible, as our mailing lists use a package called “mailman” which a number of hosting companies offer, and the website could be transferred to a new web hosting package with little disruption. It would be a commercial undertaking, but the key would be to make sure that we have confidence in the supplier and that they were willing to work with us and provide some of the level of personal hand-holding and support that we have enjoyed from Woodchip Computers.
2. Or possibly we might want to move the entire operation onto “social media” with a platform such as Facebook, or Google+ or any of a number of other platforms. For some people this is already where they do the “social” part of their internet usage, and they might welcome finding COIN in the same place. But we might find that only a proportion of our members want to use these, or feel comfortable with them.
3. Others might feel that we should host everything on a “bulletin board” type of forum, either hosted by ourselves or a specialised provider.
4. And finally, we may find that there are those who feel that COIN really has had its day and should be wound up. That may not be what some would want to hear, but we would be negligent if we were to ignore them.

I cannot tell what the membership will decide – all that I know is that to carry on as we are and hope for the best is not an option. Nor can the decision be just that of one or two keen and technically-able members. The last thing we want to do is to pursue a solution – however elegant and technically pleasing – that effectively excludes some of our members.

Can I add my own personal thanks to the Exec who have walked with me through this year and given me much wise advice. I couldn't have faced the year without you! In particular, I owe a great debt of thanks to Chris & Jill Wright – for family reasons I have been out of action for much of the early months of 2016, and they have been a great source of comfort, encouragement and practical help – often providing a bed for the night for me and at times for my whole family as we came up to Yorkshire regularly during the last weeks of my mother's life and to deal with her funeral and clearing her house. Thank you both so, so much.

## CHRISTIANS ON THE INTERNET

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

23rd April 2016

### ELECTORAL ROLL OFFICER'S REPORT

1. As noted in last year's Report one member resigned after the closure of the Electoral Roll 2015, and so our numbers fell to 450. This situation occurred again this year so when the Roll reopens after the AGM there will be 449 members and 82 on the former members list.
2. As usual, in accordance with our Constitution the Electoral Roll was closed for revision with effect from noon on Sunday 7th April 2016.
- 3 It should be noted that the ANNOUNCE list, which is our official on-line Roll, has only 304 active names on it. The discrepancy between this and the Electoral Roll in my possession is that the missing names represent those whose email addresses have failed in the past and I have been unable to reconcile with new ones. Nevertheless until I am advised otherwise they must remain on the Electoral Roll as still being members despite not having effective email addresses.
4. Members may feel that this has some relevance to discussions about our membership and the future of COIN, given the other circumstances which have arisen, or are about to arise.

Alan F. Jesson

14th April 2016

## Appendix C

### COIN Technical Report 2015-6

This is by way of a rather short report, but with some fairly significant consequences.

First of all – the running of the server... This has, on the whole, been relatively pain-free with a few rather dramatic exceptions.

The first happened (as it always does) while we were away on holiday in a caravan in the middle of a field. Fortunately, a field with WiFi! It became clear that someone had found a weakness in the security of the CMS system and had trolled through all of the “PCC” systems, replacing all of the front pages with a message that the site had been hacked. Fortunately, the hacker chose to brag about how clever he had been – which made it easy to plug the hole. But there were a lot of front pages to restore! COIN’s was one of the sites affected, but, I think, few people noticed.

The second problem is both more “regular” and more disturbing. The COIN lists receive a huge amount of spam. Some of these are directed straight to the list addresses and are of little problem: they just get deleted by the system. Many others (sometimes 200+ a day) are sent to

[listname]-owner@lists.coin.org.uk These, again, are little problem to me as they are all trapped in my spam systems. However not everything is trapped and there is an appreciable lot of “back scatter” – emails being returned to the supposed “sender” and the global systems pick up on this and add the server to the blacklists. This is generally classified as being relatively low level but it does impact on all of the other users of that server. I’ve always kept all of my list domains on a separate server for this reason – but that is not going to be possible in the longer term.

Having said all of that – we’ve had several months recently with no blacklisting. So that’s a cue for a new listing today or tomorrow!

Tempus is fugitting. That is true for all COIN members, but next year, I shall (if spared) achieve my threescore years and ten. It seems to me that the hosting of a raft of websites (as I do) which all depend on an increasingly dodderly septuagenarian makes for a bad business model. Now that my pension can replace the rather modest income provided by all of that work, it seems wise to make a steady and ordered withdrawal from my commercial hosting activities. I am therefore, moving the control of all the Sudanese sites to Salisbury Diocese (which has interesting overtones as ECSSS has blackballed Salisbury over its stance on gay relationships) and I am passing other sites on; some to Tim Vaughan and some to a more local firm that can give more physical support. Clearly, this means I shall be closing down some of my virtual servers – and equally clearly, I need to protect the one server that I shall retain from all untoward activity. You’ll see that I am reluctant to run mailing list traffic on that server!

I shall continue to run some sites – and I shall continue, for example, to host the COIN website for the foreseeable future. The danger is that one day Anno Domini will take over and all will collapse about our ears.

We have talked at two or three recent COIN AGMs about “The Future of COIN” and, in true COIN style, little has actually been done. There have been limited experiments with Facebook, other social media and other mailing list platforms. The fact of the matter is that, now, we **have** to do something. *This AGM and the bits of discussion that have led up to today’s meeting mark the beginning of what must be a definite move towards some change. Decisions have not been made; no one’s input or concerns has been ignored; no constitution has been overridden. We start here.*

## Appendix D

### Christians on the Internet (COIN)

Annual Accounts for the period 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015

#### Income and Expenditure Account

Income	<u>2015</u>	<u>2014</u>	Expenditure	<u>2015</u>	<u>2014</u>
Subscriptions @ £5	£5.00	£5.00	Web hosting	£79.00	£69.00
			AGM Hall Hire	£48.00	£50.00
Total income	<u>£5.00</u>	<u>£5.00</u>		<u>£127.00</u>	<u>£119.00</u>
Excess of expenditure/income				-£122.00	-£114.00

#### Assets

Bank balance brought forward			£945.04	£1,059.04
Movement in funds in the year			-£122.00	-£114.00
Bank balance carried forward			<u>£823.04</u>	<u>£945.04</u>

*Notes to the accounts:*

*Web hosting costs for 2015 comprise*

*(i) domain hosting for the period 01-Mar-15 to 28-Feb-16 @ £45.00 p.a*

*(ii) mail list hosting for the period 01-Mar-15 to 28-Feb-16 @ £24.00 p.a.*

*Projected costs for 2016 are as follows*

*Hall hire for 2016 AGM based on £10/hr; allow five hours say £50*

*Web hosting costs for 2016 comprise*

*(i) domain hosting for the period 01-Mar-16 to 28-Feb-17 @ £55.00 p.a*

*(ii) mail list hosting for the period 01-Mar-16 to 28-Feb-17 @ £24.00 p.a.*

Reverend Peter Muir  
Honorary Treasurer

Date: \_\_\_\_\_