

Opening Reflection by the Revd Sarah Gower Convenor of Children and Youth Group

Who am I? Who are you? Who are we?

In exploration of some answers, I wonder what you would reply if I were to ask you some questions.

- Do you have a car?
- Are you right-handed?
- Do you have more than 30 books in your house?
- Is English your first language?

Questions we are probably very happy to answer. Others we might not answer so readily.

- Have you ever had to skip a meal because you didn't have enough food?
- Do you feel safe walking alone at night?
- Have you ever been made redundant or been out of work?



Some of these questions, generally in this country at least, are innocuous. Some are more thought-provoking for us. We will all answer those questions differently, even if we only use 'Yes' or 'No'. If we gave further details, there would be even more differences between our answers. That is what it is to be people, to be human. If I asked the question, 'Are you loved by God?' I might still receive different answers depending on your experience and many other factors. But, actually, there is one answer. Yes, you are – each of you.

In the last few weeks, like us, some of will have been following the lectionary. Delightfully, during this season of Lent, we are in John's Gospel, and we have heard about two people. A scribe of the Pharisees – Nicodemus – and a Samaritan woman whose name we do not know. One is an upright leader of the Jews who, nevertheless, comes to see Jesus at night. His question to Jesus was, who are you? And how does that affect who he, Nicodemus, is. Importantly, and incredibly among the scribes and Pharisees, Nicodemus was asking questions not to trick Jesus but to find out what he would say. In contrast, the Samaritan woman encounters Jesus in the open. She too is asking questions, and not afraid to do so. She was surprised that Jesus was talking to her, a woman and one from Samaria. She heard what Jesus said immediately; even in these verses, we can sense her excitement and the

transformation to her and her life that a meeting with Jesus had on her. From an upright Jewish official to the traditionally despised and rejected Samaritan woman, Jesus meets with those who come with questions. The questions he loves to answer are the ones that ask ‘Who am I? Who are you? Who are we? And whether we are Nicodemus, or the Samaritan woman or you or me, he answers us just the same - in all our differences and they are blessedly many as God has fearfully and wonderfully made us each to be ourselves. He says, ‘you are my beloved child. You are part of my family, the family of God.’

Young or old, right or left-handed, from the UK or from elsewhere, the list continues, he says, ‘Come. You are my beloved child.’ Our identity, our belonging is formed in different ways; ultimately, our place, our belonging, who we are, is held within the loving heart of our amazing and incredible God.

Brothers and sisters, as we travel through Lent, and look to the celebration and joy of Easter, I praise and thank God, that we do so together in all our differences held within the love and family of God.

Meeting of the East Midlands Synod

The **102nd meeting** of the East Midlands Synod took place on Saturday 18 March at St Andrew’s with Castle Gate United Reformed Church in the centre of Nottingham, chaired by our Moderator the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke**.



In his Opening Worship, the **Revd Dr Phil Wall** related the anxieties and discomforts of taking a journey to the real fears and backward-looking of the Israelites in **Exodus 16**, following their escape from Egypt. The **Church Life Review** group, on which he serves, is engaged in “counting quails and managing manna” as it looks to bring options for the denomination’s future to General Assembly. Brave decisions are needed if the URC is to survive and thrive for the sake of the gospel. The guarantee offered by scripture is not that the journey will be easy, but that God will equip us for its challenge.

Phil also featured in a fresh video update on the **Church Life Review**, which was screened at Synod and can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCYVoOmchHE>:





Synod was formally welcomed to St Andrew's with Castle Gate by its Secretary **Noel Worley**. A gathered congregation formed of several amalgamations, it now serves as Resource Church for the South Notts Area. Post-pandemic, with attendance steadily recovering and some new members, the church is continuing to live-stream worship and is looking to the future with positivity. It has become an Eco Church, registered to host same sex marriages, and is now busy reviewing its Pastorate Profile and development plans.

As Synod moved on to consider **Personalia**, the Moderator highlighted new ministers and first-time attenders for an especially warm welcome. This was followed by a celebration of **Jubilee Ministers and Ordination Anniversaries**, an opportunity to mark the service of 20 ministers who between them account for some 630 years of ministry. Geoffrey was pleased to present certificates in person to those in attendance.



L-R: the Revds Geoffrey Clarke, Richard Eastman, Jay Phelps, Chris Parker, Craig Muir & Mrs Sylvia Heathcote, accepting the certificate on behalf of the Revd Bob Heathcote

Following our enforced experiments with virtual Meetings as a result of Covid-19, Synod debated the format of its future gatherings. Serving this meeting in her final duty as Synod Clerk, the **Revd Camilla Veitch** asked whether we should retain a place for virtual meetings, which have to an extent enabled larger attendance, or return exclusively to coming together in person? And where we do, should the locations rotate throughout the whole Synod or toward its geographic centre?

Members of Synod debated the options in groups and in plenary before a ballot. Appointed tellers for the day, **David Greatorex**, **Helen Lidgett** and **Irene Wren** returned later to announce that the largest number of votes had been cast for the proposal to alternate virtual meetings with physical ones, centrally located. This will allow Synod staff to plan confidently for the next two years before further review.

On behalf of East Midlands Synod Trust, the **Revd James Breslin** and legal advisor **Catriona Wheeler** presented revisions to its **Policy on Proceeds from the Sale of Buildings and Land**. Following discussion of the new paper, which responds to previous objections while bringing policy into compliance with the stipulations of the Charity Commission, the Resolution was passed.

Now speaking on behalf of St Andrew's with Castle Gate URC, James returned to the lectern to propose a Resolution for General Assembly on the subject of **Support for Churches in Ukraine**. Through his service to the European Region of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, James was aware of the isolation that the small Reformed Churches of Eastern Europe often feel. Based in the South-West of Ukraine and broadly comparable in size to this Synod, our Reformed counterpart the **Transcarpathian Reformed Church** is nevertheless well integrated and its members have played a significant role in the current conflict.



The Revd Chris Ford, South Notts Resource Minister, acted as organist

The proposed Resolutions seek first to formalise the URC's greetings to our brothers and sisters in the Transcarpathian Reformed Church and secondly, to determine what help we might give toward reconstruction in the wake of the Russian invasion, remembering the financial aid we ourselves received from the Reformed family following World War 2. Following amendments to bring greater clarity, these were adopted by Synod and will now go forward for consideration by General Assembly.



By way of a good news story, the **Revd Peter Stevenson** outlined a fruitful initiative at **Stamford United Reformed Church**. With internationally celebrated harpist **Eleanor Turner** a member, **Sanctuary** began as an opportunity for members of the wider community to step inside for music and spiritual contemplation, without any prayers, hymns, scripture or preaching. It has become a self-sustaining monthly event, showcasing other musicians and offering a variety of themes for exploration. "But is it worship?" asks the [article about Sanctuary](#) in the current issue of **Reform**; it is certainly outreach, welcoming people who would not otherwise cross the threshold to an experience of spirituality and reflection. Where that may lead is in God's hands.

Synod Administrator **Chris Willis** brought the morning's business to a close by reciting the significant list of churches overdue in submitting **Annual Returns**. Synod representatives were also urged to check whether their churches were amongst the even greater number who had yet to file their mandatory **Safeguarding** returns.



After lunch, at which the lemon and lentil soup proved the surprise hit of the day, Synod moved swiftly through essential business such as the approval of the Minutes of its live-streamed meeting of 10 October 2022 and appointments to Synod and to General Assembly. The **Revd Martin Ferris** gave a report on Assembly Executive, where business included the ongoing Church Life Review and the new Marks of Ministry for Elders and the Elders' Meeting. Executive had also reaffirmed its commitment to vocation and whole-of-life discipleship, and heard a challenge from the **Revd Dr Susan Durber** on the URC's relation to church unity, expressing an "ecumenism of the heart".

Next came the screening of a powerful film commissioned by the **Legacies of Slavery Task Group**. "[Telling It Like It Is](#)" takes an uncomfortable look at white privilege in the Church today and the often unacknowledged barriers faced by Black members. Taking inspiration from Jesus as a beacon of justice, it ends with a plea to listen and to act together as the URC strives to become an actively anti-racist church. One of our Synod's Racial Justice Advocates, the **Revd Andrew Mudharara** himself features in the video and responded to Synod members' comments about the surprises, local resonances and call to action that it contains.



The short video, which the Moderator urged us to share as a conversation starter with local congregations, is available at: <https://youtu.be/1MrzfzX5gGs>



Presenting the first of the **Group Reports**, the **Revd Gillian Poucher**, Convenor of **Training and Development**, amplified the request for volunteers from each Area to serve as networkers and help shape what the Synod offers, especially to lay people. The **Revd David Featonby** as Convenor of **Lay Ministries** commended newly revised guidelines about gifts and expenses for Lay Preachers, urging churches to take these seriously and to consult Synod should they struggle to meet them. For the **Children's and Youth Work** Group, meanwhile, the **Revd Canon Sarah Gower** celebrated the appointment of **Richard Knott** as Children & Youth Development Officer.

The report of the **Ordained Ministries and Churches Group** (OMCG) was an opportunity to remind churches to consult Synod if fuel costs were causing them to struggle, and to mark with sadness the decisions to close of **Castle Square URC**, **Wisbech** and **Ermine URC**. Synod joined in prayer to recognise the life and witness of these two churches.

The Moderator commended to churches the practical, specific challenges to churches contained in the report from the **Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation** group (JPIC) and drew attention to the short video recently published by the national Church & Society team, designed to be shared in local churches as part of the bid for 100% participation in Eco Church: linktr.ee/ecovideo.



Synod Treasurer **David Greatorex** thanked churches for their M&M contributions. A revised mechanism for calculating offers had been adopted as an emergency measure in 2021; at the recommendation of the Finance Group, Synod resolved to make this the basis of our permanent process, effective from 2024 offers. Updates from Property Officer **Geoff Milnes** and Global Partnership Coordinator **Judith North** concluded the Group Reports.



Closing Worship was led by the Moderator, the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke**. Scriptures from **Exodus 17** and **John 4** prompted his reflection on “Empty Buckets, Rocks and Wells”. Faith can wear thin: when our own desperation for affirmation or reassurance strains our confidence in God’s guidance, our “empty buckets” make us kindred to the Israelites thirsting in the wilderness. But just as God provides them with water from the least likely of places – a rock – we may be humbled by God turning on the taps of grace and goodness from the people or places we have been tempted to write off. It is the least likely of people Jesus asks to quench his thirst in John 4 – the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar – and it is there that he promises living water in return, such that we need never be desperate again. “Praise be to our God, thirst-quencher and source of hope and healing. Is the Lord among us, or not?” asked Geoffrey in conclusion: “Try a rock. Try a well.”



Elders of St Andrew’s with Castle Gate assisted in serving **Holy Communion** and the worship included not only an **Act of Remembrance** for those whom the Synod has lost in recent months, but the presentation of a surprise gift to the **Revd Camilla Veitch** in recognition of the many blessings she brought us during her service as Synod Clerk. The Closing Worship was live-streamed and the recording is now available to enjoy on the Synod’s YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/2knMS0YXVFg>.

Press Statement from Churches Together in England

CTE Presidents call for a period of prayer leading up to the Coronation



Presidents of Churches Together in England have today [issued a statement](#) encouraging Christians to join in daily prayers for the King and the nation.

They said:

"The forthcoming Coronation of King Charles III is a moment of great importance and joy for this nation.

As Presidents of CTE, we invite Christians from all traditions to join together in a period of daily prayer, for both the King and the nation, from Easter Day through to 6 May.

We welcome the publication by the Church of England of the book of Daily Prayers for the Coronation of King Charles III which can be used as a guide to reflection. The Coronation will be a time to celebrate community, faith and service – values that are reflected in these prayers."

The Daily Prayers

The book of prayers, produced by the Church of England combines themed daily readings and shares features of the Coronation Ceremony, exploring the Christian symbolism behind it.

The readings also reflect the value that King Charles III places on charitable work, environmentalism, volunteering and community life.

The Daily Prayers – a sample of which can be read online [here](#) – are available to order as a booklet from [Church House Publishing](#).

They will also be available free via email and audio via [the Church of England website](#) and social media.

Activism in Ministry – by Westminster College



Interactive workshop on Zoom

Saturday 25 March 2023 at 2.00pm

This interactive workshop with Alex Clare-Young discusses activism as a poorly understood facet of pioneering ministries. Tickets are £10 per person.



One of the least understood forms of pioneer ministry sits at the end of the pioneering spectrum, and is ministry as activism. This interactive workshop will begin with a brief overview of the different forms that pioneer ministries might take, followed by an in-depth conversation about how activism can be a part of the ministry of all believers, lay and ordained, pioneer and church-based, whatever our ages or identities, as we live out the mission of Christ in each of our contexts. This workshop will be facilitated by the **Revd Alex Clare-Young**, who is a minister and activist working in a pioneering role in Cambridge City Centre.

For more information and to book visit: [Activism in Ministry - an interactive workshop on Zoom Tickets, Sat 25 Mar 2023 at 14:00 | Eventbrite](#)

Quiet Days 2023



Quiet Days give you an opportunity to pause, to contemplate your faith and to be refreshed.



In a tranquil setting, a leader offers a simple scriptural starter, then gives you the gift of time to meditate, wander, listen and pray as you choose. The day finishes with a short time of sharing. A quiet Day offers a respite from pressure and a space to rest in God.

For 2023, **East Midlands Synod** is offering two Quiet Days with different locations, lengths and on different days of the week so that as many as possible may take part. If these prove valuable, we will offer others around the Synod in future years.

Who's it for? Our Quiet Days are open to all. We especially hope they will offer overstretched lay leaders time out to reconnect with their spirituality.

How to book? The Quiet Days are **free of charge**. Simply email Hannah Holmes – trainingpa@urc5.org.uk



When and Where?

Dale Abbey, Derbyshire
Saturday 27 May 10.00am – 12.30pm
Led by the **Revd Ruth Allen**

Heckington Fen, Lincolnshire
Tuesday 5 September 10.30am – 3.30pm
Led by the **Revd Jane Weedon**

Enquirers' Day

Saturday 24 June 10.00am – 12.30pm
at the **Synod Meeting Room**, Sherwood, Nottingham



Do **you** feel God is calling you to serve in some way, but you are not sure what? Or how? Then here is an opportunity to come along and hear people share stories and answer questions about a whole range of vocations in the United Reformed Church:

- Elder
- Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher
- Locally Recognised Worship Leader
- Children and Youth Worker
- Pioneer
- Minister of Word and Sacraments
- Church Recognised Community Worker
- Chaplain

Beginning and ending in prayer, this morning offers a relaxed, no-pressure space to explore what your own calling might be. For more information email training@urc5.org.uk to book email trainingpa@urc5.org.uk



Stepwise Sampler

Saturday 24 June 1.30pm – 2.30pm
at the **Synod Meeting Room**, Sherwood, Nottingham

The same day, here's a great opportunity to find out how the URC's discipleship programme **Stepwise** can help you take your next steps in faith and to enjoy a short sample of the introductory stream **Faith Filled Life**. Come to one or both: to book email: trainingpa@urc5.org.uk

Personal News

It is with great sadness that we bring news of the deaths of the following servants of the Church. We give thanks to God for all that has been achieved through their lives and ministries.

We, at **East Midlands Synod**, bring you the news of the death of **Bernard Stonehouse** on Thursday 2 March. Bernard was an Honorary member of Synod and had served many years in the churches and organisations in Lincolnshire. His funeral will be held on Tuesday 28 March at Gainsborough URC at 10.30am. Our thoughts and prayers are with all who held Bernard dear

Online Youth Mental Health First Aid

Online Youth Mental Health First Aid Training will be held online over 4 separate sessions this spring. Spaces are available at the subsidised rate of **£27.75** per person.

Online Youth Mental Health First Aid
Learn to support young people

Gain an in-depth understanding of mental health and factors that can affect wellbeing in the youth sector
Develop practical skills to spot the triggers and signs of mental health issues
Feel confident to step in, reassure and support a young person in distress
Enhance your interpersonal skills such as non-judgemental listening and how to champion self-care

For more info and to book, contact:

Northern Synod - Children's & Youth Development Officers
Mersey Synod - Steven Mitchell svl@bunionsmerseysynod.org.uk
Southern Synod - Tom Hackett cyd@urcsouthern.org.uk

www.bit.ly/march-mhfa
March 2023 - Morning Course
9:30-12:30
4 online sessions
Mon 20, Weds 22,
Mon 27, Weds 29

www.bit.ly/may-mhfa
May 2023 - Evening Course
18:30-21:30
4 online sessions
Tues 16, Thurs 18
Tues 23, Thurs 25

May Evening Course – 18:30-21:30

Session 1 – Tuesday 16th May
Session 2 – Thursday 18th May
Session 3 – Tuesday 23rd May
Session 4 – Thursday 25th May

Book online at www.bit.ly/may-mhfa

Reminder of Other Upcoming Events

Holiday Forum 2023

Saturday 19 – Friday 25 August at The Hayes, Swanwick

Holiday Forum is an annual event, described as a heady holiday mix of faith, fun and fellowship. This year's Forum takes place at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire from **Saturday 19 – Friday 25 August**, with opportunities to book to attend in person, or to share in parts of the programme virtually.

Inclusion Through Invitation is this year's theme, led by **Michael Harvey**, the founder of Back to Church Sunday, the National Week of Invitation, and schools-based organisation God & the Big Bang. Michael will help Holiday Forum in its continuing explorations of how church can become a genuinely welcoming, diverse and anti-racist community.



For full details of **Holiday Forum 2023**, visit: <http://www.urholidayforum.org.uk/wpsite/>

Free Age UK Event: Don't Fall for Scams

Wednesday 26 April 7.00pm

Hosted by The Dales URC



This free event led by **Age UK** takes place on **Wednesday 26 April 2023** from **7.00pm** at **The Dales United Reformed Church**, 63 Parkdale Road, Nottingham, NG3 7GL. There is plenty of parking available.

Situations Vacant



Clerk of General Assembly

Voluntary role

Are you a member of the United Reformed Church who has a thorough knowledge of the structures of the church and experience of its councils?

Decisions about policy and the central work of the URC are made at the annual council called General Assembly. There are about 280 representatives, including lay persons, elders, and ministers. Committees are appointed to carry out the decisions of General Assembly.

General Assembly is looking for a Clerk to provide an efficient and impartial source of constitutional advice to the General Assembly, in particular to its Moderators; also, so far as reasonably possible, to others in the URC.

You will be an excellent communicator, with strong interpersonal skills and the ability to work collaboratively. Accuracy and attention to detail is essential in addition to working confidentially.

Experience of working with legal documents would be an advantage.

A willingness to travel within the UK and be flexible in attending meetings, residential events and weekends is essential.

Nominations must be received by Sunday 26 March 2023.

For more information and details of how to apply please visit:

<https://urc.org.uk/jobs/clerk-of-general-assembly/>

Children, Youth & Family Worker

Bulwell URC (Nottingham)

Full Time position with salary £22,050 - £24,310 (dependent on qualifications and experience)

One Year Maternity Cover Contract (Part-time working will be considered) starting June 2023.

We are a vibrant, exciting, lively and growing church on the northern outskirts of the city of Nottingham.

We are seeking to appoint a gifted and committed Christian to serve as part of the ministry team to oversee and continue and develop our vision to bless and grow the church in its ministry with children, youth and families.

For an application pack and full details please email: ask@bulwellurc.org.uk
or download forms and documents from www.bulwellurc.org.uk/vacancy

We're up for it, are you?

Closing date for applications: 24th March 2023

Missional House

'No. 84', Redcar, Cleveland

Is New Monasticism catching your attention? Does being part of a small innovative residential missional community appeal? Does taking time out to think and pray through new possibilities, or taking a gap year feel timely?

Are you excited by new ways of being and doing Church?

From Spring 2023 onwards for those aged 18 and over, Redcar has a rare opportunity in the Northern Synod of the United Reformed Church to become part of a household of three living within a simple Rule of praying, eating, studying and serving together while accompanying Redcar United Reformed Church & Redcar Baptist Church in missional presence in Redcar.

If needed, a modest maintenance allowance is available. You are invited to register your interest by 31 March 2023.

Information Packs available from:

Lisa McAvoy, Northern Synod of the United Reformed Church, 4 College Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8JJ. Tel 0191 232 1168 lisa.mcavoy@urc-northersynod.org

Find Us Online



The [East Midlands Synod website](https://www.urb5.org.uk/) is the one-stop shop for all essential information:
<https://www.urb5.org.uk/>



Our [East Midlands Synod Facebook Page](https://www.facebook.com/URC-East-Midlands-Synod-102279281444717/) hosts **Evening Prayers** every day at 9.30pm, led by our Moderator the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke** and our prayer team, along with other posts. If you are a Facebook user, please consider **Liking** and **Sharing** this Page and its posts:
<https://www.facebook.com/URC-East-Midlands-Synod-102279281444717/>

Similarly the [Synod Youth and Children's Facebook Page](https://www.facebook.com/URCEastmidlandsYouth/) shares news and ideas related to our work with young people: <https://www.facebook.com/URCEastmidlandsYouth/>



On our dedicated [YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzXFUrk8XOGeZU5SgN95g), the Synod shares special events, training videos, worship resources and more. **Evening Prayers** are also uploaded here. Please subscribe:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzXFUrk8XOGeZU5SgN95g>

Contacting East Midlands Synod

The **Synod Office** is open from **Monday to Thursday** each week. Please contact staff members by email in the first instance, as this will receive a direct response from the person with whom you wish to correspond. The Synod telephone line (**0115 960 9241**) is answered Monday-Thursday, 9.00am-3.00pm.

This E-letter is produced on behalf of:
The URC East Midlands Synod, 1 Edwards Lane, Sherwood, Nottingham, NG5 3AA.
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Next edition: Thursday 6 April 2023

Please send all material for this E-Letter to both:
trainingpa@urb5.org.uk and training@urb5.org.uk
Copy deadline for next edition: 12 noon on **Monday 3 April 2023**