

## Opening Reflection by the Revd Dr Gillian Poucher Convenor of Training and Development Group

*'I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert'* (Isaiah 43:19). The words of the prophet Isaiah, dated to the 540s B.C., are words of hope and promise for the Jews in exile in Babylon.

Reading this verse, there are clear connections between the experience of the Jews some 2500 years ago and the Ukrainian refugees today, fleeing their ravaged country. It's impossible for us to fully understand the trauma of the victims of merciless aggression: the displaced and dispossessed, the bereaved and injured.



As cities and towns are destroyed, the wasteland left behind is a wilderness. One man escaping battered and besieged Mariupol, the city which has been his home throughout his life, said 'There is nothing left, only roads.' These roads are dangerous - fleeing civilians have been targets of shelling – but they are roads which offer a way through the wilderness.

Two years ago, the symbolism of exile spoke powerfully to us when we were unable to meet and worship together in our churches during the first Covid lockdown. There was a sense of disorientation and fear,

heartbreak and grief for those families who lost loved ones. Relief came with the vaccinations. Those small vials of liquid injected into our arms are like rivers in the desert of disease.

Pandemic and war give us fresh insight into the experience of the Jews in Babylonian exile. Our settled existence in a peaceful Europe where medical advances have eliminated many dangerous diseases is no longer something we take for granted. We have been shaken from our complacency. Belatedly, we realise how blessed we were.

It's tempting to look back with nostalgia, to long for restoration of the world we knew. No doubt there were moments of wistful contemplation for the disciples as they journeyed with Jesus towards Jerusalem. Witnessing the mounting hostility of political and religious leaders, they must have been nostalgic for the heady early days of Jesus' ministry, when he transformed water into wine, fed multitudes from meagre resources, healed the sick and taught rapt crowds. An ignominious barbaric death on a cross outside the city walls wasn't how they expected the story to end.

But that end was an earth-shattering beginning. *'I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?'* The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most startling 'new thing' in which we continue to place our faith and hope.

With God's blessings for Lent and Easter.

## United in Prayer for Ukraine

### Join in a national act of prayer this Sunday (3 April 2022)

We have all watched the unfolding conflict in Ukraine and seen the heart-breaking stories of people fleeing violence, not knowing when they'll see their loved ones again. Over two million people have fled Ukraine. Many more have been forced from their homes to seek shelter. Lives have been lost and families torn apart. No one is safe.

It shouldn't be like this. War and poverty should have no place in our world.



**Churches Together in England (CTE) and Christian Aid invite churches across the UK and Ireland to join together in an act of witness for Ukraine this Sunday, 3 April, to light candles and to pray for an end to the conflict and for all those affected by the terrible impact of war.**

This national moment of prayer will include an event at 2.00pm outside the Ukrainian embassy in London where Christians will join together to pray.

You are invited to take part in this act of prayer, in your regular Sunday worship and/or at 2.00pm in your community or by lighting a candle at home. Social media users are encouraged to post using the hashtag **#WePrayForUkraine** .

Together as Christians in these islands and with our sisters and brothers in the churches of Ukraine, we pray for an end to the conflict and for peace in our world. The following prayer has been shared for use this Sunday:



**God of all peoples and nations,  
Who created all things alive and breathing,  
United and whole,  
Show us the way of peace that is your overwhelming presence.  
We hold before you the peoples of Ukraine and Russia,  
Every child and every adult.  
We long for the time  
When weapons of war are beaten into ploughshares  
When nations no longer lift up sword against nation.  
We cry out to you for peace;  
Protect those who only desire and deserve to live in security and  
safety  
Comfort those who fear for their lives and the lives of their loved ones  
Be with those who are bereaved.  
Change the hearts of those set on violence and aggression  
And fill leaders with the wisdom that leads to peace.  
Kindle again in us a love of our neighbour,  
And a passion for justice to prevail  
and a renewed recognition that we all play a part in peace.  
Creator of all, hear our prayer  
And bring us peace. Make us whole.  
Amen.**

# Standing with Ukraine: Pray, Act, Campaign

## On the URC website

The United Reformed Church continues to update its dedicated “**Crisis in Ukraine**” web page, listing news, resources and ways to help:

<https://urc.org.uk/our-news-stories/crisis-in-ukraine/>

At this link, you can also download a “**We Pray for Ukraine**” poster, or order hard copies for delivery alongside the special Ukraine edition of Reform, free of charge.

**Commitment for Life** has made a donation to help support tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Moldova:

<https://urc.org.uk/commitment-for-life-donation-helps-aid-ukrainian-refugees/>



## Statements from CTE and CPCE

As reported in our last edition, 20 URC representatives were among the 300 delegates calling for an immediate end to the war in Ukraine at the Forum of **Churches Together in England** (CTE): <https://urc.org.uk/churches-call-for-immediate-end-to-war-in-ukraine/>



The full statement is available on the CTE website: <https://cte.org.uk/ukrainestatementforum/>

CTE also called on the UK government to support churches offering welcome and sanctuary to Ukrainian refugees: <https://cte.org.uk/ukrainian-refugees-statement/>

The CTE Forum ended with a renewed commitment that the Church is ready to serve a broken world, which may be read at: <https://cte.org.uk/a-renewed-commitment/>

The **Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe** (CPCE), of which URC General Secretary the **Revd Dr John Bradbury** is co-President, has also condemned the invasion of Ukraine and expressed support for all suffering because of the conflict. A

report, including the text of CPCE’s Prayer for Peace, is available on the URC website:

<https://urc.org.uk/european-protestant-churches-condemn-russian-attack-on-ukraine/>

The full CPCE statement is available at: <https://www.leuenberg.eu/>



Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE)  
Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)  
Communión d'Eglises Protestantes en Europe (CEPE)



## Video: How to Welcome Refugees

The **Global [Foundation Sanctuary](#)** has shared a video of its recent online forum detailing how churches can help welcome Ukrainian refugees, particularly those arriving in the UK.



To watch, visit: <https://www.sanctuaryfoundation.org.uk/>

## Around the East Midlands

### Collecting for Ukraine at Holymoorside URC



**Holymoorside URC** is among the churches playing their part in the relief effort to aid refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine. Volunteers from the church mobilised to pack dozens of shoeboxes with essential items and small toys, destined to bring a little light to some of the children caught up in the exodus.

Member **Barbara Turner** adds:

This was in conjunction with the Cubs and Beavers who meet in our church. The **60 boxes** we filled went to an orphanage in Poland to which Ukrainian children had been evacuated. We also had a retiring collection at church and I took **£400** to the bank for the [Disasters Emergency Committee Fund](#) which the government was set to match pound for pound.

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Is your church taking action for Ukraine? Marking Easter in an innovative way? Celebrating the URC's Jubilee? Please share your good news stories in this e-letter and help to inspire other readers. Email text and pictures to [training@urc5.org.uk](mailto:training@urc5.org.uk) and [trainingpa@urc5.org.uk](mailto:trainingpa@urc5.org.uk) .

# 100<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the East Midlands Synod

The **100<sup>th</sup> meeting of the East Midlands Synod** took place at **Christchurch**, Grantham on Saturday 19 March 2022, with others following online via a live stream.



In keeping with the theme of Jubilee celebration, the meeting was designed to mark the many vital ministries that sustain our local churches – especially the ministries of lay people – as well as promoting ways that these may be supported by the Synod and national Church. The life of the Synod was celebrated in montages of photographs submitted by churches, which gave glimpses of worship and church activity around all the cities and counties of the East Midlands.

However joyful the gathering, there was also room for serious debate, while the invasion of Ukraine provided a sombre backdrop. As a sign of solidarity Christchurch's frontage was bedecked in yellow flowers and blue ribbons, the colours of Ukraine's flag, and the day's proceedings were punctuated by regular singing of a Ukrainian *Kyrie* taught by Synod Clerk the **Revd Camilla Veitch**.

The **Revd Dr Peter Stevenson** welcomed the Synod to Christchurch, noting that as a Local Ecumenical Partnership, its mission is to serve the whole community of Grantham and district with Christian help and Christian witness.

Showing lay ministry in action, the Opening Worship was led by **Val Smith** and **Jean Hudson** who described their training and ongoing development as Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers. Preaching from **1 Corinthians 12**, they noted that though there are different sorts of service we all serve the same God, and encouraged others to heed God's to serve: "the URC needs you!"

You can enjoy the worship conducted by **Val** and **Jean** on the Synod's YouTube channel at:  
<https://youtu.be/v6NPOdgVnbg>



Ministry to Children and Youth was celebrated in the presentation of the new **Children & Youth Friendly Church Award to Desborough URC**, the first church in the East Midlands Synod to earn this revamped accolade.

Synod Moderator the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke** and seconded CYDO **Richard Knott** presented the certificate and plaque to **Steph Howes** of Toller URC, who received them on behalf of Desborough.



Next came a lively dialogue between the **Revds Jenny Mills** (the URC's Secretary for Education & Learning) and **Nicola Furley-Smith** (Secretary for Ministries), specially recorded for our Synod Meeting. In jovial mood, Jenny and Nicola gave "a big thankyou" to all those whose ministries, whether sung or unsung, are critical if local churches are to thrive. They described the ever-increasing number of ways that the church can help nurture the gifts and talents that are unique to each of us (through Synods, Resource Centres for Learning and online) and outlined several forms of funding such as the Mission Fund, Building Fund and the newly revised **Discipleship Development Fund** (DDF).



Following a question and answer session with Jenny live on screen, the Synod viewed a video about the DDF, which offers URC churches and organisations awards of around £5000 through the national Large Grant scheme, and individuals grants up to £200 through the Synod, all to help us further our journey of following Jesus Christ (email [training@urc5.org.uk](mailto:training@urc5.org.uk) for details).

The entertaining and encouraging presentation by Jenny and Nicola is available to watch back at: [https://youtu.be/2\\_N6MmjGo50](https://youtu.be/2_N6MmjGo50)



Convenor of the Lay Ministries Group, the **Revd David Featonby**, introduced a new paper outlining the way the Synod proposed henceforth to administer and support the vital ministry of **Lay Presidency**, ensuring that congregations retain access to the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism. Following vivid discussion, Synod approved both the new policy and the Minutes of its previous meeting before adjourning for lunch, with refreshments cheerfully served by a large and welcoming team of Christchurch volunteers.

The **Revd Camilla Veitch** began the afternoon by detailing some of the many ways available to mark the URC's **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**, highlighting the attractions of the Resource Pack recently sent to all churches and urging members in particular to look out for details of the Synod's own celebration on **Saturday 10 September**.



Next to be held up for celebration was the essential URC ministry of Eldership, whose joys and challenges were described by **Roger Milward** of Christchurch and **Victoria Paulding** of Newport Pagnell URC. Roger, who first served as a Deacon in the Congregational Church, recalled the joy of the URC's formation in 1972, by which God drew disparate churches into a family in which resources, hope and faith may be shared. Victoria acknowledged that the duties of and challenges of Eldership sometimes obscure its pleasures; but even if its reward is not always elation, there is deep privilege and gladness of heart in loving and serving Jesus by loving and serving those who follow him. Our



Moderator Geoffrey led Synod in giving thanks for the role, ministry and people that we call "Eldership", praying that in togetherness we might feel burdens lifted and rediscover that joy.



Following ratification of the Synod Clerk's report and Synod Appointments, attendees enjoyed a video talk by the **Revd Andy Braunston**, URC Minister for Digital Worship. Andy described how the **Daily Devotions** he has pioneered via website, emails and voice recordings have snowballed into a much downloaded and cherished resource and given birth to the recent development of the **Sunday Service** as a pick-and-mix suite of audio and video recordings designed to support churches in their weekly worship, especially where it is not always easy to arrange pulpit supply.

**Group reports** ensued. Papers codifying the proceeds from sale of land and property and the Manse Fund Reserves Policy were withdrawn for further clarification before coming to a vote, but in its final Resolution of the day, Synod gratefully received all Papers, acknowledging the hard work and diverse ministries that underlay them.



Bringing the day full circle, we once again enjoyed the fruits of the ministry of our Lay Preachers in the Closing Worship. Lay Preaching Commissioner **Mark Hodgson** and our most recently qualified AALP **Maggie Kirkbride** shared readings from Jeremiah 1 and 2 Timothy 4, on the calling of preachers and their duty to persist in proclaiming the truth, before being interviewed by our Moderator **Geoffrey** about their paths into preaching and the blessings it has bestowed. Geoffrey gave thanks for all preachers and their ministry, before bringing a day of celebrations to an apt conclusion in the celebration of Holy Communion.



The Closing Worship from Mark, Maggie and Geoffrey can be enjoyed at: <https://youtu.be/Q8vPs-sJWHo>



# Celebrate the URC's Jubilee



## 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Resource Packs

**Resource Packs** full of material to help celebrate the URC's Jubilee year in 2022 have now been sent to each church, to either the minister, church secretary, or main contact on the URC database. Some people received multiple packs. Additional packs are available from the [URC Bookshop](#).

### Celebrate Together



This book for all ages is available for a £1.95 postage and packing fee – whether you order 6 or 600. The book has been designed to be given to anyone and everyone with a link to the URC, however big or small, from elders, to those using Slimming World, to parents who drop their kids off for uniformed organisations.

If you want copies for your events, [please order them](#) sooner rather than later.

### Videos

If you would like to share the videos about the jubilee at meetings or on your website, they are available from the URC's YouTube channel, [www.youtube.com/URCUK](http://www.youtube.com/URCUK). These include a reflection from the **Revd Dr John Bradbury** as well as the video about what is happening through the year.

## The Thanksgiving Service and Celebration of the URC's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

**Saturday 1 October 2.30pm**



For the **Service of Thanksgiving and Celebration** on **Saturday 1 October**, the planning group would like to recruit stewards from every Synod. This is to help serve the communion, to help people around the venue, to help with the stalls and stands before and after the service and to help clear the venue. (Entrance tickets will be checked by Methodist Central Hall security so it's vital that everyone brings their ticket on their phone or on paper.)

Anyone who can help should contact [louise.ault@urc.org.uk](mailto:louise.ault@urc.org.uk) in the first instance.

More than 60% of the free tickets have been reserved. Please encourage anyone thinking about attending to [get their ticket soon](#). The event will be livestreamed and the Order of Service will be available in September for churches holding events to take part in the service while watching it.

## Grant Applications – RMHF and CBF



All applications for grants from the **Retired Ministers Housing Fund** and the **Church Buildings Fund** should now be submitted to the Property Officer using the new forms, which are available on our website:

[Resources | East Midlands Synod \(urc5.org.uk\)](#)

You will also see guidance notes to accompany each form to assist you in your request. Any queries regarding this should be directed to the Property Officer by email: [property@urc5.org.uk](mailto:property@urc5.org.uk)

## Lay Preachers' Weekend at Northern College

Thursday 12 – Saturday 14 May



**Northern College**, Manchester (Luther King House) has unveiled details of its annual **Lay Preachers' and Worship Leaders' Conference**, which runs from Thursday 12 to Saturday 14 May. (It is possible to attend all three days, or Saturday alone.) This year's theme is **The Church in and of the Community** and the schedule includes a visit to a community project. For details of the programme and information about funding to help you attend, please email [training@urc5.org.uk](mailto:training@urc5.org.uk).

## Situations Vacant

### JPIT Internships



The **Joint Public Issues Team** (JPIT) is pleased to announce that its internships for 2022-23 are now open for applications. There are three 12 month, full time, paid internships available, working across faith, politics and public life.

Two of the internships are split between the office of an MP and working with JPIT. The other is full time with the team, with a focus on communications, engagement, and research.

Could one of these roles be for you or someone you know? Please pass news of the internship on to people in your networks. More information is available here: [JPIT Internships](#)

All of the internships are open to recent graduates aged 21-30. JPIT are really keen to encourage as diverse a range of applicants as possible. To that end, on Thursday 7 April they are hosting an online open meeting, where participants can ask questions anonymously and find out what makes a strong application. To register for the event click here: [JPIT Webinar](#)

## Find Us Online



The [East Midlands Synod website](https://www.urch5.org.uk/) is the one-stop shop for all essential information:  
<https://www.urch5.org.uk/>



Our [East Midlands Synod Facebook Page](https://www.facebook.com/URC-East-Midlands-Synod-102279281444717/) continues to host the **Evening Prayers** led by our Moderator the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke** and others during the ongoing pandemic. 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/>



# YouTube

On our dedicated [YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzXFUrjKn8XOGGeZU5SgN95g), the Synod shares special events, training videos, worship resources and more. **Evening Prayers** are also uploaded here. Please subscribe:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzXFUrjKn8XOGGeZU5SgN95g>

## Contacting East Midlands Synod

Following the relaxation of the government's Covid guidance, the **Synod Office** is now open again 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.

Arrangements remain under regular review and any update will be posted on our website:  
[www.urch5.org.uk](http://www.urch5.org.uk)

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This E-letter is produced on behalf of:  
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Wilderness: Photo by [Valentin Salja](#) on [Unsplash](#)  
Ukraine demonstration: Photo by [Ahmed Zalabany](#) on [Unsplash](#)

***Next edition: Thursday 14 April 2022***

Please send all material for this E-Letter to both:  
[trainingpa@urch5.org.uk](mailto:trainingpa@urch5.org.uk) and [training@urch5.org.uk](mailto:training@urch5.org.uk)

Copy deadline for next edition: 12 noon on **Monday 11 April 2022**