

E-LETTER 322 – 11 June 2020

Opening Reflection by Vaughan Griffiths

Convenor, Synod Finance Group

Dear Friends in Christ

I have for some weeks been drawn to ponder the first chapter of the book of Haggai (Bible index useful to find it!).

The prophet brings God's message to the people: "You say this isn't the right time to build a temple for me. But is it right for you to live in expensive houses while my temple is a pile of ruins? Just look at what's happening. You harvest less than you plant, you never have enough to eat or drink, your clothes don't keep you warm, and your wages are stored in bags full of holes." (vv.2-6, CEV).

In context it is around the time of Nehemiah, the people have returned to Jerusalem and are trying to re-establish themselves. They are centred on their own welfare and security and God's temple is barely thought about.

Today, it seems to me this passage speaks to our condition but is most definitely not to do with buildings. God points up our uncertainties and challenges us about our priorities. Will we retreat back into the most secure place we know, hunker down and aim to tough it out? Or will we re-affirm our trust in God and offer Him our time, energy, money and talents to work for the Kingdom of God and the mission of the church?

Of course, everyone is having to do church differently; my church has been live-streaming Sunday services (as have many churches) and doing Thursday Bible studies via WhatsApp, but also trying to minister to those who are not online by sending out printed orders of service and Bible study notes.

However, we are also finding new opportunities for mission; for example, we are getting to know a lot more people in our road as my wife and a neighbour have been organising fortnightly collections of food and other supplies for a local homeless charity. Now many are in a WhatsApp group and we know who in our road is older or frail and who we can therefore offer to support.

So, is it all about us, or is it about a better focused relationship with God? Our resources, or God's resources released through us? Our (perhaps declining) energy or renewal through the Holy Spirit?

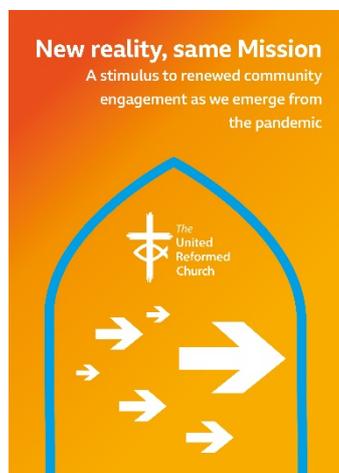
As Haggai points out, if God is not our priority we live in spiritual poverty. If God is our priority then we should know (as Paul writes in Ephesians 3 v.19) "...Christ's love, although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives will be filled with all that God is. I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will for ever bring praise to God. His power at work in us can do far more than we dare to ask or imagine."

Amen, indeed!

New Reality, Same Mission

A stimulus to renewed community engagement as we emerge from the Pandemic

The United Reformed Church has this week published a new [resource booklet](#) to help churches explore how they might respond to the current needs, opportunities and injustices in their local neighbourhoods.



[New reality, same mission](#) complements last month's publication by the URC Synod Moderators **Ready for the new 'normal'** and takes some of the questions posed in that booklet as its starting point to explore the themes of community presence and engagement and social justice in these challenging times. Mission and ministry are bound to take new forms in the new reality that will follow Covid-19: where is God already at work? And how should we join in?

Written by members of the CRCW and Church and Society teams, the booklet asks what kind of society and economy we want to rebuild after the pandemic and points to resources and organisations that can provide advice and support.

The booklet can be downloaded via this link:

<https://urc.org.uk/images/Communications/docs/New-reality-same-Mission.pdf> and is also available via: <https://urc.org.uk/information-guides.html>

Ready for the new 'normal', meanwhile, can still be downloaded via: <https://urc.org.uk/images/Communications/New-Normal-2020.pdf>

Churches Celebrating Creation

'Wild Christians' celebrate and protect God's creation at home!

From Charles Jolly, Green Apostle:

With church members worshipping from home in these strange times, you may be looking for ways to continue celebrating and protecting God's creation (although quite a lot of Creation seems to be enjoying the respite from human 'business as usual'!)

Please check out A Rocha UK's [Wild Christian](#) scheme, a community of families and individuals exploring the connections between our Christian faith, the natural environment, and how we live.

You can sign up on the link below to receive the free Wild Christian monthly email, which includes a biblical reflection and ideas on how to enjoy, nurture and defend nature: arocha.org.uk/wildchristian/



Personal News

Our love and prayers are extended to the **Revd Jane Wade** on the death of her husband, Mark, on 11th June. Please hold Jane, the family, and our congregations at Abington Avenue and Paulerspury in prayer at this sad time.

We are very sad to inform you of the death of the **Revd Arthur William Spurling**, known as William, who served at Christ Church, Leicester from 1988-1997. Our prayers and thoughts are with his family and friends.

Following news of the death of the **Revd Jim Garrow** in the previous e-letter, we have now heard that a private family service will be held at Redditch Crematorium on Tuesday 16 June at 3.30pm. We would ask you to remember the family at this time. It is hoped that a memorial service will be held towards the end of the year.

Revd Garrow is survived by his daughter and her family. Derek Graham (TDO) apologises for any distress caused by his mistaken reference to Revd Garrow's widow in the last edition.

A Pledge to Combat the Evil of Racism

On Monday 8 June, URC members across a wide area participated in an ecumenical response to the continued racism, prejudice and injustice which mar our world.



Coming together in a moment of prayer, reflection, solidarity and unity instigated by **Nottingham City Prayer**, they lit a candle in their front windows at 9.25pm (UK time) - exactly a fortnight after the killing of **George Floyd** in Minneapolis, which sparked the recent **Black Lives Matter** protests around the world.

The words of the **#nottschurchespledge** remain powerfully resonant, declaring that we light our candles as a symbol of:

- grief as we think first of the family and friends of George Floyd and as we reflect on continuing injustice in our world; and

- hope for a future – a future where the evil of racism is banished from our society and our streets.

And as a pledge to:

- examine our own hearts and reflect on our own attitudes and indifference;

- listen to and to love our neighbours of all races and all cultures; and

- speak out against injustice where we see it and choose to be the community that we long for.



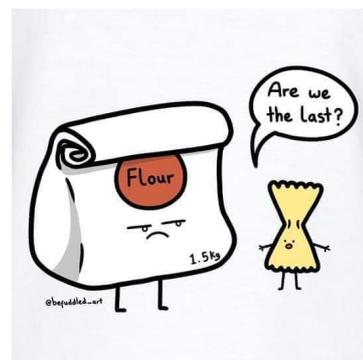
Around the East Midlands

Fundraising for the Mead Centre project

Newport Pagnell URC raised nearly £750 from the Fit-A-Thon in which their minister, the **Revd Jenny Mills** took part in three hours of exercise on Zoom – for two of which she was joined by the Moderator and his wife!

The next fundraising effort to raise both money and awareness of the **Mead Centre project** is a joint effort with a local designer and t-shirt printing company, both based in Newport Pagnell.

[CharGrilled T Shirts](#) have printed three great t-shirt designs by [@befuddled_art](#) and are donating 15% of each sale to the Mead Centre – rising to 20% if over 100 t-shirts are sold! All three will make an excellent memento of lockdown and the time when we could not buy certain items:



[Toilet Roll Endangered Species](#)

[Toilet Roll Face Mask](#)

[Flour and Pasta](#)

All purchases will help raise money to continue onto phase 2 of the building work. For more information about the Mead Centre, visit www.themeadcentre.co.uk . Further advice on how to help is available by emailing: treasurer@urcnewportpagnell.org

Online Reflective Group for People in Ministry

Spiritual directors **Mark Argent** and **Lynsey Heslegrave** are offering a series of online reflective groups for people in ministry, running every Monday at 10.30am-12.45pm until 13 July.

These are an opportunity to pause and talk together. They draw on the leaders' backgrounds in accompanying people as they explore their experience of God and how they are working, and offer a space for people to reflect with others in ministry on their changing role in the world of Covid-19, and on where God is in this.

Full details can be found at: <https://www.markargent.com/events.htm>

Practical Guidance for Churches

Opening for Private Prayer

Some churches may be wondering how to respond to the government's statement on Sunday 7 June that places of worship in England will be permitted to reopen for private prayer from Monday 15 June.

In response, URC General Secretary the **Revd John Proctor** has prepared guidance on this subject which may be downloaded at: <https://urc.org.uk/images/private-prayer-080620.pdf>

This can also be found on the East Midlands Synod website: <https://www.urc5.org.uk/content/opening-private-prayer-statement-revd-john-proctor>

The guidance directs any churches who do plan to reopen their buildings for this purpose to advise the Trustees. In the East Midlands Synod, please contact **Mr Geoff Milnes**, Property Officer: <mailto:property@urc5.org.uk>

M&M Offers for 2021

All of the emails about East Midlands Churches' offers for 2021 have been issued and treasurers are reminded to send returns back as soon as possible. It is recognised that formal meetings to agree the information may not be possible at this time so indicative offers are welcomed.

If you should have any concerns, please contact your local Finance Networker.

David J Greatorex, Treasurer

Employment law update

The URC has published a new edition of its twice-yearly [HR Focus](#), which summarises recent changes to legislation regarding paid employees.

This may be found at:

[https://urc.org.uk/images/Human-Resources/Documents/HR_Focus/EL_Newsletter - HR_Focus.pdf](https://urc.org.uk/images/Human-Resources/Documents/HR_Focus/EL_Newsletter_-_HR_Focus.pdf)

Support British Farming and Food Standards



The **Revd Elizabeth A Clark** is National Rural Officer for the Methodist and United Reformed Churches, based at the [Arthur Rank Centre](#). She asks us to share the following:

As the UK begins to negotiate trade deals with countries around the world, it is crucial that we get an amendment to ensure that imported food must meet the same standards of quality and welfare as that produced by British farmers.

Failure to do this could seriously damage UK agriculture. Please sign the food standards petition here: <https://www.nfuonline.com/back-british-farming/campaign-news/food-standards-petition/>

This petition has been launched by a broad coalition of groups, headed by the NFU but also supported by organisations including the National Trust and individuals such as Jamie Oliver, whose message can be seen here: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CA2Q1tmg821/>

Candidates for Assessment

Equipping God's People for Service (Ephesians 4:11-13) .

The URC's Ministries Committee is responsible for interviewing candidates for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Worker at the residential Assessment Conferences held 2 times a year. However, the process begins at a local church, then, Synod and finally the National Assessment Board.

Who forms the Interviews Panels at synod and national levels? Ministers (active or retired) , Elders and church members can be nominated to sit on an interviewing panel. To help people to gain insight in assessment interviews, the Ministries Committee runs a Assembly Assessment Training Consultation 2 times a year. The next training will be at High Leigh Conference Centre from 19-22 October 2020.

Perhaps this an area you might want to explore. If you are interested, please contact Derek Graham at training@urc5.org.uk or Samuel Silungwe at s.silungwe@yahoo.com

Samuel Silungwe - Synod Candidating Secretary.

East Midlands Synod Contacts

Please remember these recent updates to contact details at East Midlands Synod:

CONTACT DETAILS FOR THE NEW SYNOD PERSONNEL OFFICER

Robert White has now assumed this role: please email robertbwhite80@gmail.com

CONTACT DETAILS FOR OUR MODERATOR

The new email address and mobile phone number for the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke** are:

Email: mod@urc5.org.uk

Mobile: 07544 959976

Synod Office: 0115 960 9241

CONTACT DETAILS FOR TRAINING

Hannah Holmes, PA to the TDO and CYDO, is now on maternity leave.

Therefore, for all training enquiries and bookings please contact **Derek Graham**, TDO in the first instance on:

Email: training@urc5.org.uk

Find us on Facebook

Our [East Midlands Synod Facebook Page](#) is a place of sharing and celebration, which hosts the Evening Prayers led by our Moderator the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke** during this period of lockdown. If you are a Facebook user, please do **Like** and **Share** both the Page and its posts.

We also invite you to follow the [Synod Youth and Children's Facebook Page](#), which shares news and ideas related to our work with young people.

Office Closure: Please Note

The **Synod Office** remains closed until further notice as we follow Government guidelines relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. All members of staff are working from home: please e-mail them in the usual way. Contact details can be found at: <https://www.urc5.org.uk/synodstaff>. Telephone calls are forwarded, so to speak to a member of staff you may call the usual office number of **0115 960 9241** between Monday-Thursday, 9am-3pm.

We regret we are unable to send out group emails or to mail newsletters during the office closure: please keep checking our website for the most recent information.

This E-letter is produced on behalf of:

The URC East Midlands Synod, 1 Edwards Lane, Sherwood, Nottingham, NG5 3AA.
Telephone: 0115 960 9241

Next edition: Thursday 25 June 2020

Please send all material for this E-Letter to both: modpa@urc5.org.uk and training@urc5.org.uk

Copy Date for next edition: 12 noon on Tuesday 23 June 2020