

### Opening Reflection by Pippa Hodgson

Convenor of the Training and Development group

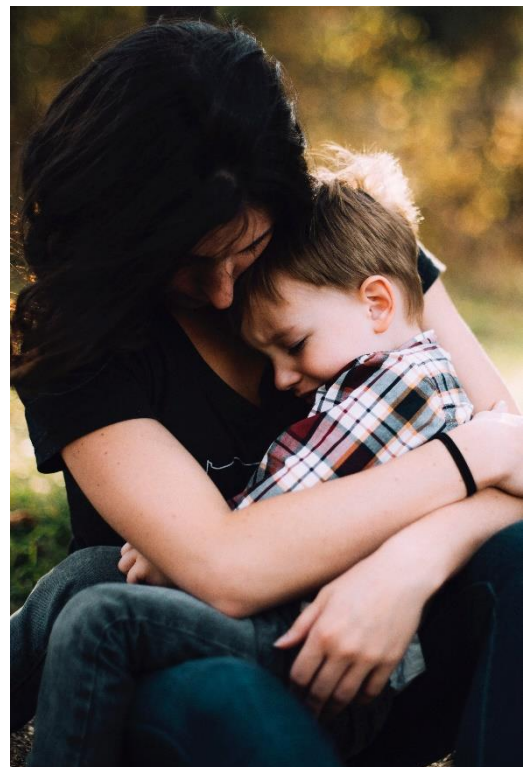
I am writing this on the **Day of Reflection** marking the anniversary of our first Covid 19 lockdown. Lots of questions come to mind: 'who would have thought?'; 'what went wrong?'; 'what went right?' No doubt there will be inquiries and recommendations and we each will reflect on our own personal lessons from the last twelve months.

But today I think particularly of Leicester. In late June, a few days after the Prime Minister announced the lifting of lockdown restrictions for England with the opening of hairdressers and meeting folk outside from 4 July, Leicester went back into restrictions and have remained there ever since. To have your liberty and choice so limited for so long is like a biblical wilderness. It has been an intense experience for all of us but for our friends in Leicester the time spent has been so much longer.

But in the wilderness God is faithful to us. He loves us unconditionally. He walks beside us whether we want him to or not. He shares our pain and isolation. He is waiting for us to come out of our wilderness and share the wonder of the Good News.

As we approach Easter and the promised lifting of Covid restrictions, let us all embrace the small things, the things we have missed for so long. Let us not take for granted the love of family and friends and the love of God. As we can again see other people, and look forward to haircuts and meals out, let us always remember the company of God in the dark times and share the joy of the risen Christ.

For me, a hug from my 4-year-old grandson who lives in Leicester is my wish. Who would have thought that the significance of such a simple thing, not experienced since the summer, could be so longed-for. For all of us, I pray that as we journey through Holy Week and the wilderness of the Passion of Christ, it will make the joy of the 'hug' of Easter all the more special.



*"A hug", said Pooh, "is always the right size." A.A. Milne*

# Report of the East Midlands Synod Meeting

Saturday 27 March 2021



The 98<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the East Midlands Synod was, for a second time, conducted online – this time hosted from the Synod Office in Nottingham. Synod Moderator the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke**, Synod Clerk the **Revd Camilla Veitch** and Synod Administrator **Chris Willis** maintained suitable social distance from one another and from the IT team of **Adam Lester** ([Integrity Team UK](#)), **Katie Lester** and **AJ Mills** ([The Soundest Guy](#)). Welcoming us to screen, Geoffrey prayed that inspiration, encouragement and challenge would be enabled by our coming together on Zoom.



## Opening Worship

Lay Preaching Commissioner **Mark Hodgson** led opening devotions, drawing from Ephesians 1:15-23 to open the theme of “rewilding the church”. Our lockdown wilderness has been like a very long Lent, he said, but we should see this moment as a God-given opportunity to consider whether rushing back to all our old ways is really what we are being called to do. Although an architect, Mark reminded us that buildings and places are secondary: instead, we ourselves are the living stones who together form the Church, to ensure God’s kingdom breaks out wherever we are. He challenged us to find the courage to reform ourselves and confirm our hope in Christ Jesus.



*The Opening Worship can be viewed on our YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/pWpBU47uOs>*

## Personalia

The Moderator brought before Synod some of its most significant departures and arrivals since last we met. Together we gave sincere thanks for the life and service of the **Revd Ralph Eveleigh**, **Mr John Shaw**, **Mrs Sheila Watson**, **Mrs Gwen Balding** and **Mr Alan Lloyd**.

This was to be the final Synod meeting for the **Revd Elizabeth Kemp**, who will move to the South Western Synod on her retirement from Crick, Long Buckby, Kilsby and Creaton URCS; meanwhile it was the first for the **Revd Matt Rigden**, who was Ordained and Inducted as Pioneer Minister to the Heath Christian Partnership, Lincoln. Both received warm wishes.

## Rewilding the Church

Our Mission Development Officer the **Revd Robert Bushby** addressed the major theme of the meeting. “Rewilding” is the practice of returning land to its natural state, prompting a resurgence of variety and vibrant life across the landscape. Published last year, Steve Aisthorpe’s book “Rewilding the Church” suggests that God (as in Isaiah 41:17-20) is doing something very similar with his Church in this age. We have all heard of Fresh Expressions; that may be one way he has already been at work. We are being led by the Holy Spirit toward a new future, which we will only see if we watch, listen, pray and follow his lead.

Robert introduced three examples within our Synod where we are already engaged in “rewilding”, all in major new housing developments.



The **Revd Ruth Maxey** is Pioneer Minister at **Church Without Walls** in Milton Keynes. From the outset this has represented a different way of being Church, she said, but the pandemic had shaken everyone out of their comfort zones. Church was revealed first and foremost as a community of people trying to follow the Way of Jesus. Church Without Walls, which works in close partnership with a range of community organisations, holds to a principle of “belonging before believing” and the challenge of the past year had been how to remain in relationship when many of its usual activities were suspended. They had been forced to think differently again, meeting outdoors or under a gazebo when that was possible and taking things one step at a time – rediscovering afresh the heart of being Church. “Being different” was not an end in itself but part of the journey of faith people embark upon together.

**Ruth’s presentation can be viewed at:** <https://youtu.be/LWf0dBM3Dsc>

The **Revd Sue Steer** is Pioneer Community Worker at the huge **New Lubbethorpe** housing scheme, to the west of Leicester. In an enlightened initiative of the landowner and developer, she has been on site from the outset to welcome new homeowners and develop a sense of place, dispelling the notion that new housing developments must be soulless. Working with those of all faiths and none, Sue is involved in the setting up of a community company to serve everyone, but alongside that has developed an ecumenical Christian community, “Heart and Soul”. She shared a video produced recently by the developers, in which they state, “Every urban development should have a Sue Steer”. Sue herself lays the credit at the feet of God, who she said has been involved in New Lubbethorpe from Day 1: her task is to see where God is at work and join in.

**Sue’s presentation can be viewed at:** <https://youtu.be/6dHr8NcFnxI>

The **Revd Matt Rigden** was Ordained and Inducted less than two months ago to the new South Lincolnshire Pioneer Ministry – now to be known as the **Heath Christian Partnership**. By definition, he said, this is outward-looking and tremendously exciting – he has been sent ahead to lay the way for Jesus to do something incredible in this emerging community – although beginning with a blank page could also be daunting. Matt had found his two great resources are prayer, looking to God to open doors, and relationships: every day he encountered new people (with his young daughter proving a remarkable ministry asset) and had also shared contact information and established a social media presence. Christ has promised he will build his church; our task is to trust in his word.

*Matt's presentation can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/kOtabr0lafA>*

During a short panel discussion, Ruth, Sue and Matt took questions about: how to make Fresh Expressions of Church sustainable in the longer term; whether there was a distinction between social action and saving souls for Christ; the demographic diversity of community-based church projects; and how churches who do have walls can ensure their buildings are not drains but assets, without entering the “village hall” business.

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## Meetings of Mission Council and Synod



The **Revd Richard Eastman** presented a short report on some of the major topics discussed at the recent Mission Council meeting: the creation of a URC review group, to be initiated at General Assembly; work in progress on a revised national website; the likely continuation of the audio Sunday Services post-Covid; the study of two different models for future Pensions provision; the adoption of new Marks of

Ministry and training pathways for Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers; and the availability of grants from the Discipleship Development Fund.

Minutes of the 97<sup>th</sup> Synod meeting (10 October 2020) were approved. The **Revd David Featonby**, Convenor of the Lay Ministry group, answered a question that had been raised at that time: whether Lay Preachers were expected to retire at the age of 70. No such rule exists for anyone in any lay ministry.

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## Communicating Your Message:

### An Address by Andy Jackson, URC Head of Communications

After an adjournment for lunch, **Andy Jackson** joined the meeting to share a pre-recorded presentation in which he urged us all to consider ourselves digital evangelists. If we don't refer the people we meet to our websites or advertise our digital channels on our noticeboards, he argued, we are not taking seriously in our own age Christ's command to go into the whole world and tell the good news. Social media are now considered by a majority of Christians to be an appropriate platform for churches to use and many are already doing so intentionally, prayerfully, hopefully and even evangelistically. Even in worship, we might turn to our phones (to follow readings, for example) rather than turn them off.

Historically, the Church has always seized upon new technology, sharing the same Word through differing



media. In some respects we are ahead of cultural trends, such as the appetite for short talks on philosophical subjects (eg TED talks): we know these as sermons. Now a “Digital Reformation” is under way and the expressions of faith which have for hundreds of years been invisible and private are being made visible and public.

The statistics for social media uptake are staggering: in fact, social media use is now the third greatest use of time after television and sleep. Andy wondered whether, if churches do not use this powerful tool, they can effectively be said to exist at all. If we are not digitally engaged, most people have no way to find us or come to us. To walk the way of Jesus today, we all need to learn to be better at digital evangelism.

*You can watch Andy’s presentation at: <https://youtu.be/ZoOF6cP18hY>*

## Changing of the Guard



The **Revd Camilla Veitch** presented her debut report as Synod Clerk, noting that this year’s General Assembly is also now to be virtual.

Members affirmed the significant new responsibilities now adopted by the **Revd Jane Wade** as Deputy Moderator of the East Midlands Synod, and of the **Revd George Mwaura** as Convenor of the

Ordained Ministry and Churches Group. Bringing them to screen, our Moderator Geoffrey prayed for God’s blessing upon Jane and George in their new roles, that we might be open to their wisdom and take delight in their company.



Geoffrey also seized this opportunity to pay tribute to the dedication, wisdom and professionalism of Camilla’s predecessor as Synod Clerk, **Helen Lidgett**. She had been a boon in his early months as Moderator and was widely appreciated across Synod for her smooth running of processes but with an emphasis on people’s wellbeing at heart. In reply, Helen thanked members for their friendship and support during 6½ years as Synod Clerk, which had taught her all manner of things and opened countless new avenues.



Members voted to express a heartfelt thank-you to all those who have given great time and energy to Synod responsibilities.

## Group Reports

Following the **Synod District Council report**, Convenors of the **Training & Development, Lay Ministry, Children and Youth, Ordained Ministry and Churches, Mission Focus, Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), Ecumenical, Finance, Property and Belonging to the World Church** groups appeared in turn to present their reports and respond to any matters arising. For the Children and Youth group, this was an opportunity to welcome **Richard Knott**, who has been seconded for the moment from West Midlands Synod one day a week to advise us on the welcome and inclusion of young people and the rollout of the new Children & Youth Friendly Church award.



Two poignant Resolutions emerged from the Ordained Ministry and Churches report. The Church Meeting of **Lutterworth URC** had given notice of their decision to close at the end of March 2021. This was ratified by members and our Moderator Geoffrey called on us to give thanks for the faithful life and witness of this church since its foundation in 1689.

Similarly, following the death of its long-time Local Church Leader John Shaw, **Westcotes URC** was unable to continue and, although its surviving members were unable to hold a Church Meeting, they had been carefully consulted (with grateful thanks to the Revd Les Gill) and confirmed their intent to close the church. This was passed by resolution and again, thanks were offered for the life and witness of the church, since its foundation in 1906.



The Moderator praised the pastoral heart of all the OMCG's work and paid especial tribute to the **Revd Geoff Townsend**, who is standing down as its Convenor after over 10 years' service, in which his immensely faithful approach has been

complemented by his great wit and deep knowledge of the Synod, its churches and ministers.

Presenting the Finance paper, Synod Treasurer **David Greatorex** urged churches to maintain M&M payments wherever possible. Convenor **Vaughan Griffiths** stated that the Synod has identified how to make funds available to pay its fair share toward the deficit in the URC Pension Fund, but this will impact what we can do in future out of our existing budgets. Thanks were warmly expressed to **Vaughan**, who will stand down in June as Convenor of the Finance Group and as a Finance Networker in order to become Deputy Treasurer for the URC at national level.

Members voted again to thank all who have served the Synod and to wish them well – an expression of gratitude which, the Moderator said, encompassed all those church members and office bearers at every level without whose dedication, prayer and time the Synod simply could not flourish.



## Closing Worship and Address by the Revd Geoffrey Clarke, Moderator:

### Being Church in the Garden of Gethsemane

Our final act of worship included the Sacrament of Holy Communion and drew upon “A Liturgy of the Passion for a time of pandemic” by the **Revd Thom M Shuman**. Our Moderator Geoffrey was overjoyed to be united on screen with readers the **Revd Elizabeth Kemp** and, live from Botswana, our partners in the United Church of Southern Africa, the **Revd Moiseraele Prince Dibeela** and **Cheryl**, his wife.



Hymns were by our retired minister the **Revd Michael Forster** and the **Revd Basil Bridge**, while the **Revd Daphne Preece** read the account of Jesus at Gethsemane from Mark 14. In his address, Geoffrey explored how this reading reminds us that being Church is about taking our place as Jesus prays. Recalling Steve Aisthorpe’s plea in “Rewilding the Church” to hold Christ at the centre of everything, he urged us to put aside the “invasive species” of busy-ness – which is not to be mistaken for effectiveness – and to concentrate less on doing than being.

Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane also reminds us of the distress and anguish often experienced in human life and of those who are brought low by the challenges they face. Alongside “being there”, taking hurt and harm seriously are at the heart of being Church. The present pandemic is a cup we have all prayed to be taken from us – and yet, like Jesus, to meet the needs of the world we must subordinate our own wants and wishes to being and doing what God wants.



Worship incorporated the Inductions of the **Revd Camilla Veitch** as Synod Clerk and the **Revd Sue Powell** as Pastoral Consultant, and Geoffrey stated that the busy-ness of their roles must not eclipse their primary calling, to be and to pray. The **Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church** was read by Deputy Moderator the **Revd Jane Wade** and Synod Treasurer **David Greatorex**.



In addition, the Moderator conducted the Commissioning of **Donna Gordon** as Synod Safeguarding Officer and urged members to pray, with Donna before us, that the Church may be a place of safety and care. Synod Administrator **Chris Willis** welcomed her on our behalf and we recalled that Camilla, Sue and Donna do not stand alone but as servants of the Synod and members of a strong team.

The 98<sup>th</sup> East Midlands Synod Meeting concluded with the prayer attributed to Sir Francis Drake, “Disturb us, Lord” and the blessing.



With thanks to **AJ Mills**, highlights of the Synod meeting are collected in a [playlist](#) on our **YouTube** channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2p7yjgm5IRdxEAQQVDIsVKW6sPo0VH0n>



The Synod **YouTube** channel also hosts videos of our **Evening Prayers**, led nightly by our Moderator Geoffrey and others for over a year now, and much more. Find it at:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzXFUjKn8XOGeZU5SgN95g>

## An appreciation: Helen Lidgett

*Synod Clerk the Revd Camilla Veitch writes:*

At the (virtual) Synod meeting on 27 March 2021 we said ‘thank you’ to **Helen Lidgett** for her service as **Clerk to the Synod**. Helen first took up this role in October 2014 and has served the Synod with commitment and passion since then. Anyone who has seen Helen at work will know that she is thorough and conscientious – which is why she has made such an excellent Clerk. Whilst the role has been



demanding, I know that Helen has enjoyed her time as Clerk and the opportunities of engaging with the wider United Reformed Church it has brought her. We are grateful to you, Helen, for the time, commitment and care you have given to the Synod as Clerk. On a personal note I am grateful for the guidance you have given me as incoming Clerk, helping me to settle into the role. We wish you all the best as you are now able to give more time to your family and your church family at St Andrew's URC, Chesterfield.

A gift of donations from local churches has been sent to Helen, along with flowers which Helen showed on the screen at the Synod meeting.

## Camilla Veitch

Clerk

### A thank-you from Helen



Dear Friends in East Midlands Synod

Thank you so much for your generous gift and the flowers sent to me to mark my retirement as Synod Clerk. It is seven years since you appointed me as Clerk-elect in March 2014 to take over the role from **Duncan Smith** in October that year. I deeply appreciate the support and friendship I have received from churches, ministers, two Moderators, Synod staff and other Synod Clerks over the years. I have learnt a lot during my time as Clerk and appreciate the mental challenge it has always presented. I have sought to do my best for you, from responding to both straightforward and tricky queries to helping to restructure the Synod and organising the appointment of a new Moderator.

The final year of course turned into a marathon, beginning with covering the Moderatorial vacancy following **Peter Meek's** retirement and preparing for **Geoffrey Clarke's** induction, and then lurching into the pandemic. As the weeks went by and anxieties deepened, the work increased, ever tougher decisions were needed, and all of us had to learn totally new skills. If I was ever tempted to think 'this is not what I signed up for', I had the reassurance of staff colleagues who were facing the same challenges with determination and good humour, some of them coping with home schooling their children as well. I firmly believe that God, who displayed the uttermost vulnerability in Jesus, walked with us through those times of anguish, grief and despair and walks with us still.

I hand over the role of Synod Clerk to the **Revd Camilla Veitch** and commend her to you. I know she will serve you faithfully and skilfully. I am not disappearing entirely, as I will continue to serve on the **Synod Mission Fund Panel** and from July as Convenor of **Assembly Nominations**.

As I look back, the words of a hymn by **Geoffrey Holland** come to mind (533 in *Rejoice and Sing*):

Glory to God, who now to us has given  
Best of his gifts the call to share his strife!  
Glory to God who bids us fight for heaven  
Here in the dust and joy of human life!

*Helen*

## An appreciation: Geoff Townsend

*Synod Moderator the Revd Geoffrey Clarke writes:*

Our thanks were conveyed at our Synod Meeting to **Geoff Townsend** after he presented his last Report as Convenor of the **Ordained Ministry and Churches Group** (OMCG). Geoff has served as Convenor of OMCG – and its predecessor, Pastoral Group – and as a result served on Synod Council (and Synod Enabling Group before this) for more than ten years. Throughout that time he has combined an encyclopaedic awareness of the churches and people of the Synod with a care to attention and natural interest in their wellbeing. He has been a familiar face and go-to person for many across the Synod. His distinctive sense of humour and reserve of anecdotes have featured in the meetings he has chaired or attended. At the last meeting of OMCG he spoke of looking forward to “donning the slippers and putting my feet up”. We wish him relaxation and refreshment for the coming years and thank him for his service.

**Geoffrey Clarke**  
Moderator

## Rewilding the Church – reading group and discount offer

### Now with a personal appearance by author Steve Aisthorpe

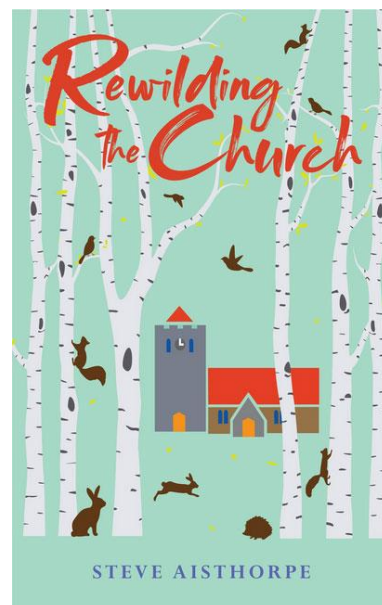
After exploring the theme at the Synod meeting, we are offering an opportunity this spring to engage further with **Rewilding the Church** and what it may mean for us. If we wish to see the Church reinvigorated, author **Steve Aisthorpe** urges, we should take heart from the ecological concept of reverting landscapes to their natural state. In his compelling and enjoyable book, “rewilding” is a metaphor for our pressing need to simplify and get back to basics, with Jesus Christ at the heart of everything. God is renewing the Church: how can we join in?

Our Synod “book group” begins on **Wednesday 28 April** at 7.30pm. The **Revd Robert Bushby** (Mission Development Officer) will lead us in discussing the ideas raised in **Rewilding the Church** over five weekly sessions, two chapters at a time, to consider what this might mean in our own churches and settings. You can take part in as many or as few of the meetings as you are able.

We are delighted to announce that **Steve Aisthorpe** has kindly agreed to join our reading group at the third meeting, on **Wednesday 12 May**, to share in our discussion and take our questions.

The publisher St Andrew's Press has arranged a special discount for anyone in East Midlands Synod. Purchase the book at <https://bit.ly/Rewilding21> and you will **save £2** on the cover price. To receive this discount, simply enter **URCREWILD21** in the box, "Do you have a voucher code?" (at the Shopping Basket stage) before proceeding to the online checkout. The discount offer ends on 30 April 2021 - but now is the time to order if you wish to read the first two chapters ready for our first session!

Coming at a moment when Covid-19 has interrupted all our time-honoured practices, but we still wonder what the "new normal" may look like, **Rewilding the Church** makes for a prescient call to action. All church leaders and members looking to take stock and make fresh connections are strongly encouraged to join our online book group and explore "rewilding" together.



## Read more

**Simon Cross** of **Grimsby URC** has reviewed **Rewilding the Church** – and quizzed **Steve Aisthorpe** in person – for the illuminating blog of book and film reviews on his website [simonjcross.com](http://simonjcross.com) .

To read his verdict and interview, scroll down to the entry for August 2020 at:  
<https://simonjcross.com/blog/>

## Meeting for Lay Preachers and Worship Leaders

**Monday 19 April 2021, 7.30-9.00pm**

Following the success of our first gathering in January, all **worship leaders and lay preachers** in the East Midlands Synod are invited to a second networking meeting on the evening of **Monday 19 April**, led by our Lay Preaching Commissioner **Mark Hodgson**.

This will be an opportunity to share experiences and mutual support as we consider with hope what worship may look like post-lockdown. It will also include a briefing on the latest national developments, training opportunities, mentoring and worship resources for forthcoming times in the church year.

To register, please email **Derek Graham**, Training & Development Officer, on [training@urc5.org.uk](mailto:training@urc5.org.uk).

## JPIC Forum: Food Poverty

Tuesday 20 April 7.30pm



The next open forum event hosted by the Synod's **Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation** group (JPIC) will focus particularly on the pressing topic of **food poverty**. The hour-long meeting takes place via Zoom on Tuesday 20 April at 7.30pm.

The current pandemic has forced ever more households into hardship and in response, many churches have stepped up their support – for example by running, staffing or helping to supply a food bank in their locality. Here is an opportunity to hear from church members who have responded creatively to the food poverty around them, to compare notes between the situations of different churches – and to consider together whether needs may change as the panic eases and restrictions on work and movement are gradually lifted. What might God be calling us to do in this next phase?

You are warmly invited to join the JPIC team and guest speakers for a lively discussion of food poverty and the wider issues that surround it.

Please email **Tom Veitch** on [tomveitch20@gmail.com](mailto:tomveitch20@gmail.com) to find out more and to receive the Zoom joining details.

## From the Property Officer

*Synod Property Officer **Geoff Milnes** writes:*

I want to re-iterate my comments at Synod on Saturday regarding the re-opening of Churches.

As most of you will be aware, the Moderators' Meeting has given advice to all churches that they should stay closed until **Pentecost Sunday**, in the interests of good practice and ensuring that the health and well-being of our congregations and members takes high priority in the life of our churches.

That said, the responsibility for the day-to-day management of each church lies with the Elders and they are responsible ultimately for the decision about opening the church. This must include confirmation that your **Risk Assessment** is up to date and in force, that the congregation must keep to its bubbles and be socially distanced, masks must be worn and there is to be no singing, unless outside, and no socialising is to take place e.g. no coffee after the service!

There is always the danger, even if all attendees have been vaccinated, of contracting the virus unknowingly and passing it on to others, possibly with dire consequences. I am sure no-one wants to feel that they have been party to someone else's ill health – or worse! No Elder wants a letter from a solicitor accusing them of negligence or bad practice to land on their doorstep.

The decision to open or not lies firmly with the Elders, but please heed the advice from the Moderators.

### **Geoff Milnes**

Synod Property Officer

The URC's Human Resources department is looking for any churches with a **live-in caretaker** or equivalent, as the tax regime governing live-in staff is due to change this year. We do not know of any examples in the East Midlands Synod, but if you do have such a staff member please contact **David Grotorex** for advice on [treasurer@urc5.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@urc5.org.uk).

## **Final Fridays – a Joint Midlands Synod Youth Event**

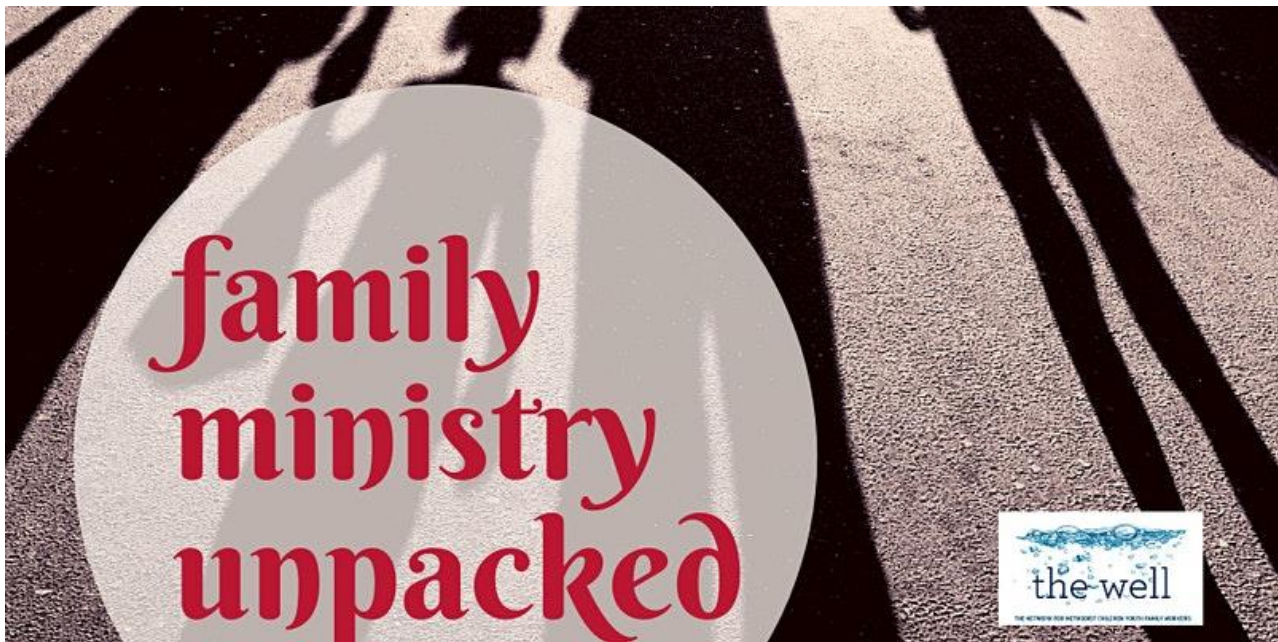
**Friday 30 April 7.30-9.00pm**

**Friday 30 April** sees the next in our new series of opportunities for young people to connect and have fun together, taking place on the last Friday of each month. It is open to all young people included in the URC Youth age range (11-25 years), although a consent/permission form will be needed for those under the age of 18 if their local congregation does not already hold one. Young people can also come as a youth group "trip" with a leader.

Young people can join and participate as individuals or household groups. The event is co-hosted by Young Adults from within **URC Youth** in the Synods.

For more information and to arrange to join, please contact **Richard Knott** via [cydo@urcwestmidlands.org.uk](mailto:cydo@urcwestmidlands.org.uk) . You can also register at: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/final-fridays-joint-midlands-synod-urc-youth-event-tickets-146537863695>

## Family Ministry Unpacked



West Midlands CYDO **Richard Knott** (currently seconded to our Synod part-time) is excited to bring you news of this course, open to all with an interest in **family and intergenerational ministry**. There are four sessions on Zoom plus an additional option to attend the **Intergenerate Conference** or access some further materials. The sessions will take place fortnightly on Tuesday evenings from 7.00-9.00pm:

- Tuesday 13 April            **Biblical, Historical & Contemporary Contexts of Family Ministry**
- Tuesday 27 April           **Seasons of Family Life**
- Tuesday 11 May            **Family Relationships and Wellbeing**
- Tuesday 25 May            **Intergenerational Ministry - participation in the Intergenerate Conference or guided self-learning**
- Tuesday 8 June             **Faith at Home**

There will also be an opportunity to follow on from this course in a community of practice, focusing on the book **The Essential Guide to Family Ministry** by Gail Adcock. You will be most welcome: have a look and sign up [here](#):

[https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/family-ministry-unpacked-tickets-145975076383?fbclid=IwAR0qcOuhFFIbl\\_PL6qgm2wFbJNGINUecSxGnq2MsOQI5I5YFM0zML3ekkqU](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/family-ministry-unpacked-tickets-145975076383?fbclid=IwAR0qcOuhFFIbl_PL6qgm2wFbJNGINUecSxGnq2MsOQI5I5YFM0zML3ekkqU)

## Update from the Mead Centre

The **Mead Centre Vision Team** send us the latest on this exciting new development:

The Mead Centre will be a **unique space** at the centre of Newport Pagnell, managed by Newport Pagnell United Reformed Church, community representatives and users of the space.



The vision for the Mead Centre is to be a **place of community** in which to meet, celebrate, learn, grow, share and make a difference, making it possible to **transform lives and enrich society**. Our desire is for the Mead Centre to be accessible to everyone in the community, raising awareness, understanding and active participation. It will be vibrant, joyful, adaptable and spontaneous.

The Mead Centre is named after **Gordon and Glenys Mead**, Newport Pagnell URC members who left a legacy which started the fund for a new building. They were a local couple who believed in community and cared deeply about bringing people together.

Building work began in March 2020 and we now have a watertight shell. Phase 2 is to fit it out and to finish it, we need to raise **another £200,000** to add to the **£1.2m already raised**.

In the past week we have launched what we are calling **THE FINAL PUSH**. We urgently need more support if the work is to be completed. We are **86% of the way there**: so near...and yet so far!

For the Easter holidays, we have created "Look Up and Look Out", our third **Town Trail**, which has photos of buildings on the High Street which people have to spot. Each participant is asked for a donation of **£2** to the Mead Centre and a local general store is partnering with us as host of the trails.



On Saturday 27 March we held our spring-themed **Bake off!** It was £10 per household to enter and was a great success and good fun for all the bakers, who checked in on Zoom to talk about what was going to be made, again halfway through and once more at the end to vote for the winner. Everyone who took part

made a difference and helped the building of the Mead Centre come one step closer. The winner was the 'Spring' cake with sheep and flower pots; the runner up was 'Rabbit'. But it was really about baking, having fun and then eating delicious cakes.



You can follow our progress on our Facebook, Instagram or Twitter pages, or go to our website [www.themeadcentre.co.uk](http://www.themeadcentre.co.uk) for more information.

**Maybe you feel able to support us in this project financially?** We need all the help we can get; we have been hit by the pandemic as many of our 'normal' fundraising activities have been halted. However we have been creative and tried different things. We really need this **Final Push** to enable the church to continue its community-building in the community building! (We already have people wanting to use the space.)

Please contact [victoria.paulding@urcnewportpagnell.org](mailto:victoria.paulding@urcnewportpagnell.org) for more information or help. We would also value your prayers - for the Final Push, for the finishing of the project and for the possibilities this will offer the community and town. Thank you.

**The Mead Centre Vision Team**

## Together Apart - from the Arthur Rank Centre



The **Arthur Rank Centre**, which works to equip confident rural Christians, has been producing a [regular email](#) ever since the UK first went into lockdown last spring, containing reflections, resources and practical suggestions. They recently produced their anniversary edition, tying in with the National Day of Reflection: <https://arthurrankcentre.org.uk/week-40-forget-me-not/>



The Easter newsletter is now available too at: <https://arthurrankcentre.cmail20.com/t/i-e-mhtnlt-fouyykly-g/>

Amongst its contents is the following prayer:

**Gracious God,  
You call us to follow you on the way of the cross.  
Help us to trust all things to you  
and give us, we pray, the wisdom to know  
what we must leave behind.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

## Christian Aid Vaccine Appeal

Generous donors have helped the URC beat its initial fundraising target of £5,000 to raise a whopping **£15,669.00** (at time of going to press) for **Christian Aid**. First launched in February, the aim of the campaign is to provide people with the opportunity to show gratitude for their Covid-19 vaccines and help protect our global neighbours for whom the vaccine remains out of reach.



In the UK, more than 30 million people have now received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, while poor nations are yet to receive a single dose. **Christian Aid** is already on the ground, helping keep people safe from coronavirus with practical support, but with donations, the charity can do more.

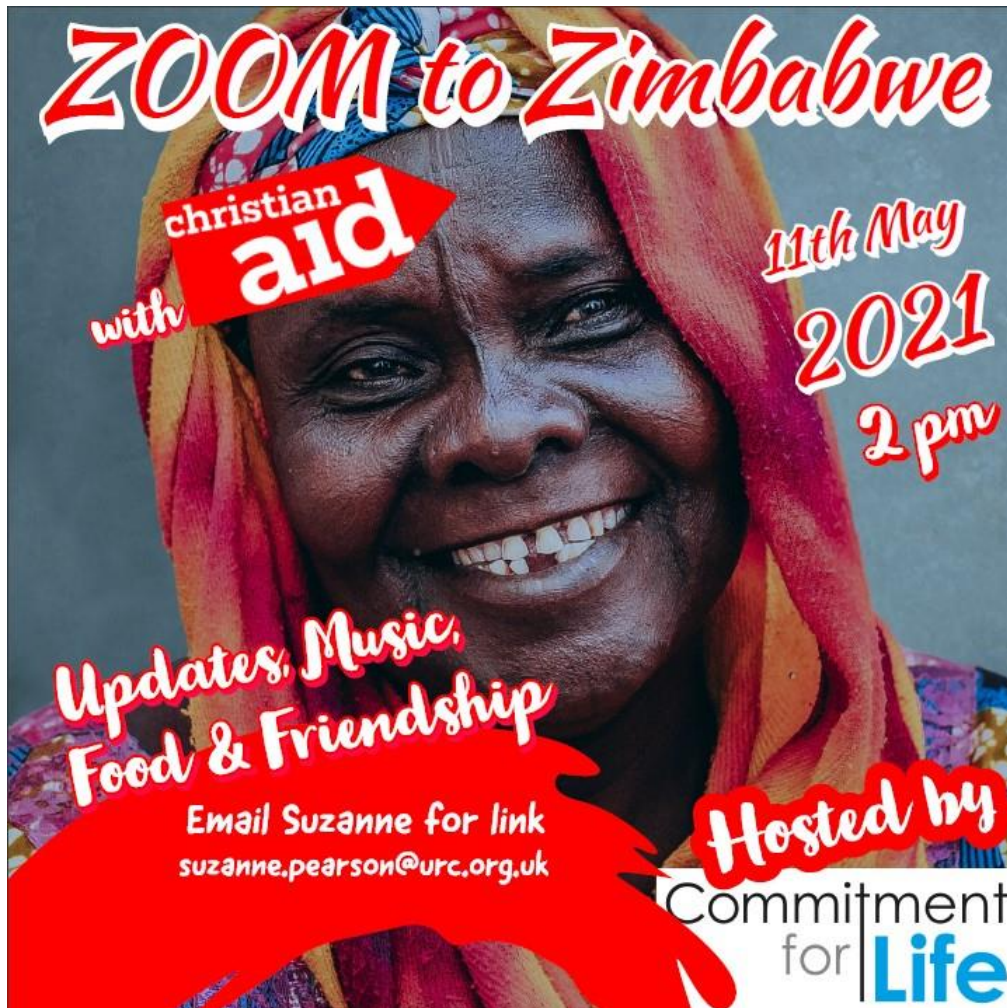
The **Revd Dr Kevin Snyman**, URC **Commitment for Life** Programme Officer, said: "I actually don't even quite know how to articulate how appreciative I feel. It is just such a phenomenal affirmation of the growing legend that is the generosity of URC members. Amazing! But more than that, it shows how deeply the URC cares about justice. We want everyone in the world to be vaccinated; you can see that desire expressed in many of the comments."

The campaign remains open. If you haven't and would like to, please make a donation [here](https://giving.tapsimple.org/page/christian-aid/united-reformed-church-supporting-a-just-vaccine-rollout):  
<https://giving.tapsimple.org/page/christian-aid/united-reformed-church-supporting-a-just-vaccine-rollout>

## Zoom to Zimbabwe for Christian Aid Week

Tuesday 11 May 2.00pm

To mark Christian Aid Week, **Commitment for Life** invites us to a “Zoom to Zimbabwe” to be held on Tuesday 11 May at 2.00pm. Organised in partnership with Christian Aid, this offers an afternoon of updates, music, fellowship and more. To obtain the Zoom link, please email Suzanne Pearson: [suzanne.pearson@urc.org.uk](mailto:suzanne.pearson@urc.org.uk).



## Personal News

It is with great sadness that we report the death of the following retired URC ministers. We remember their families and friends in our prayers.

The **Revd David Wilkinson** (West Midlands Synod) died on Friday 19 March. David served at: Milton & Whitworth, Hallford (1976-78); Milton with Trinity, Rochdale & Whitworth, Hallford (1978-82); the South Cheadle Group (1982-89); Warminster & Westbury (1989-93); and the Wrexham Group (1993-2000).

The **Revd Anne Hunt** (North Western Synod) died on Friday 26 March. Anne served the South East Manchester District (1981-88).

## Reminders of forthcoming events

### Communications skills: a series of free workshops and grants

URC Children's & Youth Work and Education & Learning have teamed up to offer a series of **free, online workshops** to improve communication skills. There are eight in total, with two per topic:



**Creating and editing videos for beginners: Thursday 1 April 7.30pm**  
**Creating and editing videos - next steps: Thursday 15 April 7.30pm**  
Both led by **AJ Mills**

**Social media for beginners: Thursday 29 April 7.30pm**  
**Improve your social media: Thursday 13 May 7.30pm**  
Both led by **Oli Deeks**

**Inclusive worship using signs and symbols - session 1: Thursday 20 May 7.30pm**  
**Inclusive worship using signs and symbols - follow up session: Thursday 17 June 7.30pm**  
Both led by **Lorraine Webb**

**Sharing stories more effectively - session 1: Thursday 27 May 7.30pm**  
**Sharing stories more effectively - follow up session: Thursday 1 July 7.30pm**  
Both led by **Ann-Marie Nye**

Find out more and book to attend a single workshop, each pair, or the full series at:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/series-of-workshops-building-skills-confidence-and-capacity-in-comms-registration-144181152709>

The sessions will be recorded, and attenders connected with URC churches will have the opportunity to apply for small grants (up to £200) to enable the training to be put into practice by purchasing equipment, software or further training.

The current series of **free hour-long Zoom webinars** about each of **Stepwise** streams continues with:

**Faith-fuelled Leadership**      **Tuesday 13 April 7.00pm**

**Faith-filled Confidence**      **Tuesday 27 April 7.00pm**



To register, and find out how these streams might help you develop your own discipleship, please email [stepwise@urc.org.uk](mailto:stepwise@urc.org.uk).

### 'Building for the Future'

A Zoom conference, for all interested parties, to consider strategies for churches and church buildings

**19th April 3pm-4.30pm**



The **Revd Dr John Bradbury**, URC General Secretary, is the keynote speaker at this conference from the [URC Buildings Forum](#), to be held via Zoom on **Monday 19 April** from 3.00-4.30pm. Please email [mission@urc.org.uk](mailto:mission@urc.org.uk) by 16 April to register, stating which church you represent.

## 2040: free film screening for Earth Day

Thursday 22 April 7.00pm

Approach the future of our planet and children with hope, in [this feature documentary](#) showing how we have all the solutions we need already in our grasp to mitigate the effects of climate change. **Global Sleaford** kindly invites anyone in the East Midlands Synod to join their online screening of 2040 on Thursday 22 April, to mark this year's Earth Day.



To accept this invitation and book your tickets, free of charge, visit:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/global-sleaford-2040-screening-event-tickets-144035741781>

## Table Talk for Change – Stepping into the New Normal

The **Ugly Duckling Company** has launched Table Talk for Change, a tool to help you talk about the past present and future.



**Table Talk for Change** is a 'Mini' game consisting of a set of 18 question cards. Rather than rush into the 'new normal' and firmly shut the door on what has gone before, it is designed to help you take time to reflect on what we've all been through, acknowledge how you're feeling and look to what's ahead.

Costing £4, the game is currently available for pre-order, with orders expected to be fulfilled by mid-April. Immediately on placing an order, purchasers receive a confirmation email giving exclusive access to an online version of the game. For further information please see: <https://uglyducklingresources.org/products/table-talk-for-change>

## Situations Vacant



### URC Youth Intern - Communications

Home based  
12 month fixed-term contract, 8-30 hours per month  
Living Wage Foundation rate (London) £10.85 per hour

#### Are you passionate about communicating with young people and young adults?

URC Youth is an organisation for all young people aged 11- 25 with a connection to the United Reformed Church. URC Youth elect a Youth Executive each year to run an annual Youth Assembly, to be the voice of young people, enact resolutions, and promote young people's engagement in the life of the church. There is a strong emphasis on inclusion, diversity, mental health, social justice, and environmental issues.

During this Internship you will support the work of URC Youth to increase connection and engagement with young people across England, Scotland and Wales in conjunction with the URC Children's and Youth Work team.

You will work as part of a team; to create and post promotional material, manage a schedule for communication and assist in production of press releases, written resources, and web content.

You will be aged 17-25, educated to at least National Fives & Highers / GCSE level standard, with experience in communication through social media and wider channels. You will have good design and communication skills. You will be able to manage a fluctuating workload and attend meetings as required online and in person.

We will offer appropriate training and development opportunities to increase your skills and knowledge in communication.

If you are interested in this new opportunity and can meet the above requirements, please provide a CV and covering letter to:  
Human Resources, the United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT  
020 7691 9874 [recruitment@urc.org.uk](mailto:recruitment@urc.org.uk) [www.urch.org.uk/jobs](http://www.urch.org.uk/jobs)

Closing date for applications: 12 noon, Wednesday 14 April 2021 Interview date: Tuesday 27 April 2021

*This post requires an enhanced certificate from the Disclosure and Barring Service.*

## Find us online



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

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/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

Owing to the continued restrictions mandated by the UK government, the **East Midlands Synod Office** building is presently closed. However, all members of staff continue to work from home: please email them in the usual way. You may continue to use the Office address for any postal business and mail is collected at least once a week. The office number **0115 960 9241** is answered from Monday to Thursday, 9.00am-3.00pm and calls will be forwarded as necessary.

Any update to these arrangements 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:

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

CCL1067405

Free-to-use photography on [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com/): embrace by Jordan Whitt, food bank by Joel Muniz

***Next edition: Thursday 15 April 2021***

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

Copy deadline for next edition: 12 noon on **Tuesday 13 April 2021**