

### Opening Reflection by the Revd Geoffrey Clarke

Moderator of the East Midlands Synod

#### *Is it worth bothering ....?*

My late paternal grandmother excelled at both baking and cooking. She baked her own bread and it was a real treat to eat it as if it were cake, still warm and with a taste that was sublime. Granny's cooking and baking guaranteed that any meal with her was delicious.

As a farmer my grandfather knew that his tiring and physical work, out in all weathers, was rewarded with hearty meals. He died when I was in my late teens and it took a few visits to my grandmother to realise that she was no longer cooking or baking; bread bought from the shop replaced her beautiful homemade bread. One day I asked her, "Are you not making bread any longer?" She replied, "It's not worth bothering now there's only me to eat it".

Looking back I recall feeling sad – for her and, if I'm honest, for me (in that I was no longer likely to be treated to her wonderful bread). Over the years her response has been evident in my encounters with those who have lost loved ones through bereavement or as a result of leaving home to live elsewhere. In the absence of those with whom they have shared a home and table they have concluded "it's not worth bothering now there's only me/us".



Baking and cooking and sharing a table with those closest to us are a significant element of daily life and especially on special occasions. For many it is particularly so at Christmas. One of the most common of conversational questions at this time of the year tends to be, "What are you doing for Christmas?", articulated in the accompanying questions, "Who are you having for Christmas? Are they coming to you or are you going to theirs?" In short, "With whom will you be eating your Christmas meal?" I am always careful, in any such conversations, to ensure that hurt and harm are not inflicted on those who will be alone; those for whom the coming-together for Christmas rubs their noses in the fact they will be with no one.

In the approach to Christmas 2020 there has been considerable speculation about whether or not the pandemic restrictions would prohibit people gathering around the tables of their homes. Good reasons suggested that it might be unwise to allow it; good reasons underlined the impact on the mental health of many if it were prohibited. The reality is that whilst it is possible to do so within very narrow confines it has forced many to agonise over whom to meet up with and, inevitably, who not to see. Many have concluded, "It's not worth bothering".

And that “not bothering” has extended to other elements of Christmas. If no one is coming to stay, is worth bothering having a tree or putting up Christmas decorations? In company with my late grandmother, is it worth bothering with festive fare if it’s just me/us?

The timeless message at the heart of this season – all too easily obscured by the accompanying customary expectations that have almost smothered it – is that *God bothered with this world of ours*. Regardless of what our homes and tables, our hearts and heads are like *God bothers with us*. God bothered to the extent that, as St John put it, ... *the Word became flesh and lived among us* (John 1: 14a) and ... *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son* (John 3: 16a). In that Word made Flesh we glimpse the God who *bothers* with the unloved and the lost, the broken and desperate, the hurting and harmed. In Jesus we see God’s “yes” to the question, “Is it worth bothering?”

In his poem, *Performance for an Audience of One*, Gerard Kelly speaks of God performing a drama whose Act 2 features *the cry of a child in a vastly empty universe*, building up to *an unimagined finale: a cosmos, purged of guilt, restored, dressed for dancing*. The closing stanza affirms for us, the audience:

***If you had been the only one,  
your grimy pounds the total take,  
he still would have staged the whole show  
and wept for joy at the warmth of your applause.***

May the God made manifest in the One born in Bethlehem inspire not only our applause but our commitment to *bother* – making bread and breaking bread even when we’re tempted to give up or give in.

With my prayers for the churches and communities of East Midlands Synod,



## A word of thanks

This E-Letter is the final edition before **Helen Lidgett** concludes her service as our Synod Clerk and as such it is appropriate that it features the acknowledgement of the significant contribution to the life of the Synod that she has made in the role. After standing down as Clerk on 31 December, Helen will be working alongside **Camilla Veitch** as she takes up the post in January. Most significantly Helen will be attending the March Synod Meeting. This, therefore, will be our opportunity to say a proper farewell. Ahead of that Synod Meeting, those who have worked alongside Helen as Synod Staff and Officers join me in placing on record our gratitude and appreciation of her tireless diligence and commitment. **Thank you, Helen!**

### Geoffrey Clarke

Moderator  
East Midlands Synod

*This thank-you formed part of the slide show shared with Helen at this week’s online meeting of Synod Staff.*



## Advent 2020 on our YouTube channel



Our Moderator the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke** is one of four **Milton Keynes Presidents** to contribute a video meditation to the worship of the Living Stone community on the successive Sundays of Advent.

All four will be shared on our Synod [YouTube channel](#). To view Geoffrey's Advent reflection, based like the others on the opening chapter of John's gospel, visit:

[https://youtu.be/KJa\\_yOJU2nM](https://youtu.be/KJa_yOJU2nM)

Meanwhile, every day during Advent we add another instalment of [A is for Adventure, Z is for Zoo: An Alphabet for Advent](#), a series of 26 reflections by the **Revd Thom M. Shuman** and shared by his kind permission. Each video has been recorded by a different reader from around our Synod, while Thom himself will give the final reading on Christmas Eve.



View all the films to date on our **YouTube channel** at:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2p7yigm5IRc2e3kOgDx0VaXHAr\\_NAZRg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2p7yigm5IRc2e3kOgDx0VaXHAr_NAZRg)

or keep an eye on our [Facebook Page](#) for a fresh video daily.





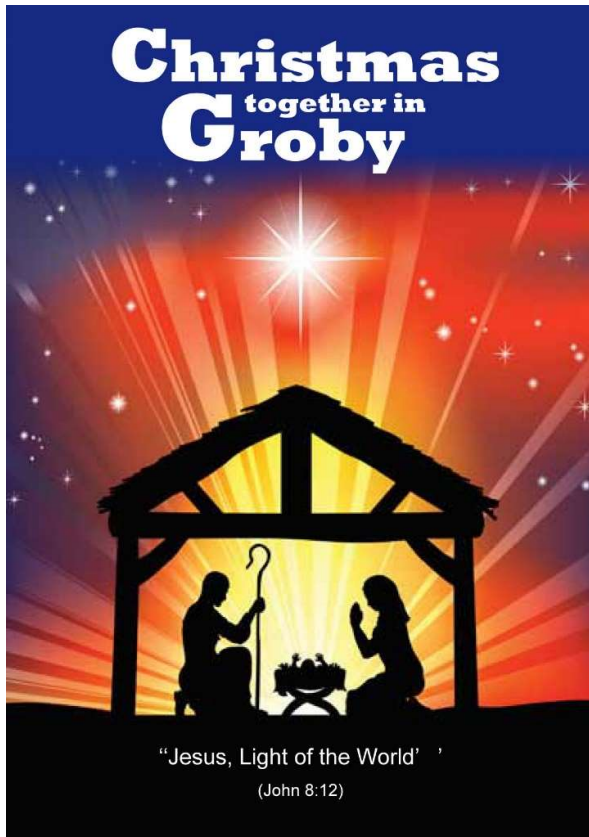
## Christmas around the East Midlands

Following our request in the last edition, here are just a few examples of the many creative ways churches around the Synod are celebrating this very unusual Advent and Christmas.

**Wigston URC** has devised an ingenious online Advent calendar, with inspiring prayers and quotations for every day as we look forward to Christmas Day. Take a look at:



[https://calendar.myadvent.net/?id=0769fc128cd4ac7f0ab7fc1c4e9a00e9&fbclid=IwAR0\\_gjmeclHxMjAAzRi0A-lqoHMWZ9tEJcVQtSnit3DgcXln7l9YaXGyu2M](https://calendar.myadvent.net/?id=0769fc128cd4ac7f0ab7fc1c4e9a00e9&fbclid=IwAR0_gjmeclHxMjAAzRi0A-lqoHMWZ9tEJcVQtSnit3DgcXln7l9YaXGyu2M)



**Groby URC** offers a full programme of services online at <https://www.facebook.com/grobyURC/>. In addition to 10am each Sunday, all are invited to **Sing the Christmas Story** on Saturday 19 December at 4.00pm alongside worship for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. There's a fresh Song for Advent on Facebook daily and, as part of **Churches Together in Groby**, it also offers a **Christmas Carol Jukebox** and **Carols Together at the Stamford Arms**, subject to regulations. For details see: <https://www.facebook.com/grobyurc/photos/a.899865066703140/3609017949121158/>



Service of Nine Lessons & Carols  
Sunday 20th December 2020  
at 11 am.

St Andrew's with Castle Gate  
United Reformed Church  
Nottingham

YouTube link at  
[standrewswithcastlegate.org.uk/worship/recordings/](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzIVuJnykyPfZPuNWzrUYIA/)

**St Andrew's with Castle Gate URC** in Nottingham also invites all to join in its online worship, published on its [YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzIVuJnykyPfZPuNWzrUYIA/) at 11am each Sunday. Its Choir has rehearsed on Zoom during lockdown and members have recorded audio and video at home to be assembled into the annual **Service of Nine Lessons and Carols on Sunday 20 December**. To view services visit: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzIVuJnykyPfZPuNWzrUYIA/> or <https://www.standrewswithcastlegate.org.uk/worship/recordings/>

## Stepwise – Facilitator Taster next month

[Stepwise](#) is the URC's innovative **discipleship development** programme, offering opportunities for people of all ages, shapes and sizes to explore and develop their Christian faith together. Some of those who have already taken part reflect on their journey so far in a new video. [Click here](#) to view:



Two groups in the East Midlands Synod have already turned to Zoom to complete **Faith-Filled Life**, the introductory Stepwise stream. Now, to meet the appetite for further groups around the Synod, we need more people who are ready to **facilitate** a Stepwise group.

Facilitators are not tutors in the traditional sense, but are willing to share their experience and skills in enabling and encouraging the group. They effectively 'host' the group meetings, creating an environment where participants can explore the themes of sessions together.

If you'd like to know more about being a Facilitator, before making any firm commitment, please join our:

### Facilitator Taster Afternoon

**Thursday 14 January**

**1.30 – 4.00pm on Zoom**

Designed to inform, equip and enthuse potential facilitators, the afternoon will include:

- Worship
- An introduction to Stepwise
- Some group work exploring and experiencing facilitation
- A Stepwise facilitated group taster session
- An opportunity to ask questions and offer feedback to the Stepwise team.

Please consider whether this is a role you might fulfil for a Stepwise group in your area – or online. To register for a place, please email **Derek Graham**, Training & Development Officer in the first instance on: [training@urc5.org.uk](mailto:training@urc5.org.uk).

## Practical information for churches: charitable status

### Registration with the Charity Commission

Synod Property Officer **Geoff Milnes** has glad tidings to share:

Some of you may be aware that it was the Government's intention to require all non-registered or exempt charities to register with the Charity Commission by the end of **March 2021**. That would have included most of our churches – those with an income of over £5,000 but less than £100,000 – and would have required churches to send annual accounts to the Charity Commission for inspection. Those with incomes of over £100,000 are already registered.

The GOOD NEWS is that the Government, driven partly by the effects of the Covid virus on working patterns and also by reductions in staff, have decided to extend the period of exemption from registration by **10 years** subject to the necessary approval by Parliament, which should be a fairly straightforward matter. It is likely that registration will be carried out in phases over the next 10 years. More details will come from the Government over time.

Treasurers – you can relax!

## Church Secretaries – please note

All Church Secretaries are asked to note that a mailing will be despatched on Tuesday 29 December. This mailing includes the **Annual Church Return** which needs to be returned to the Synod office by 31 January 2021 at the latest.

If you have any queries about completing this, please contact **Chris Willis**, Synod Administrator, at [admin@urc5.org.uk](mailto:admin@urc5.org.uk) or by telephone on 0115 960 9241.

## Lay Preachers' & Worship Leaders' meeting

**Wednesday 13 January 2021, 7.30-9.00pm**

**All worship leaders and lay preachers** in the East Midlands Synod are invited to this Zoom meeting, led by our Lay Preaching Commissioner **Mark Hodgson**. We hope it will enable us to get to know one another better and explore ways of supporting one another. Projected topics include: coping with Covid, national initiatives, lay presidency, recognition/accreditation, specific training needs; and whether it would be fruitful to hold further networking meetings.

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

## The Lundie Memorial Award: a reminder

As notified by email, the deadline is upon us to make fresh nominations for the **Lundie Memorial Award**. This month the East Midlands Synod is one of those invited to nominate a young person for this award. Our Children & Youth Convenor the **Revd Sarah Gower** writes:

We have the opportunity to recognise some of the amazing things that the children and the young people in our churches do - in the church itself, in the community, in the Synod or even nationally. They play an amazing part in the mission of God, and sometimes, let's face it, this can go a little unnoticed. But now here is a chance to change that. The **Lundie Memorial Award** is designed to spotlight and celebrate individuals using their God-given skills, time and talents.

It could be a young carer; a young person who has been doing something online or for people during lockdown and through this last year; a young person fund raising for someone or something. There are so many different ways that we can nominate a child or young person. Do take this opportunity to do so.

The nomination form can be downloaded from this page on the URC website:

<https://urc.org.uk/our-work/children-and-youth.html>

This is the last call: nominations were due to reach the Synod by **today, Thursday 10 December** and must be submitted to the Children and Youth office by Tuesday 15 December for the January nominations. If you know that you would like to nominate someone (and perhaps need an extra day to complete your nomination) please let us know. Please email: <mailto:modpa@urc5.org.uk>



## Sundays with CWM 2021: a free devotional resource



The Council for World Mission (CWM) has published a free weekly devotional series for the year ahead, intended to inspire faith and deepen our relationship with God as we face the challenges and opportunities of these uncertain times.

Sundays with CWM 2021 can be downloaded free of charge at: <https://www.cwmission.org/sundays-with-cwm-2021/>



## Personal news

It is with sadness that we record the deaths of the following four ministers.

The **South Western Synod** informs us that serving minister the **Revd Amanda Harper** died peacefully on Thursday 26 November, following an aggressive cancer. Amanda was inducted as minister of Southernhay URC, Exeter in September 2016. Amanda was in the Baptist ministry 1990-1993; Hazel Grove 1993-1997; Chaplaincy, Southampton University 1997-2004; West Sussex Area Ministry 2006-2009; Christ Church, Dulwich & Herne Hill United 2009-2014; Southern Synod 2014-2015; St. Mark's, Greenwich United Church 2015-2016; Exeter University Chaplain 2016-2017 and Exeter, Southernhay 2016-2020. Our prayers are with her family and friends as well as with the people of Southernhay.

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The **West Midlands Synod** informs us of the death on Saturday 28 November of one of its retired ministers, the **Revd Rosemary Humphrey**. Rosemary served at North Tawton & Okehampton 1978-1982; Axminster 1982-1985; Charmouth & Seaton 1985-1987; and Lynton 1990-1994. Latterly, she was living in a retirement home in Coventry. We hold in prayer all those who loved Rosemary.

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The **North Western Synod** informs us that its retired minister the **Revd Noel Stancliff** died on the evening of Thursday 3 December at Furness Hospital. Noel served at Melbourne & Repton 1985–1987; and Church Stretton 1988 – 1999. We remember his widow, Kathy, and their family.

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Finally, the **South Western Synod** also informs us that one of its retired ministers, the **Revd John Salsbury**, died peacefully on Saturday 5 December following a short illness. John served at Alfreton & Selston 1964-68; Rake Lane, Wallasey 1968-76; Lecturer, Congregational College, Manchester 1972-76; Clitheroe with Newton-in-Bowland & Barrow 1976-88; Thropton & Rothbury 1988-96; & Birdhopecraig with Otterburn 1992-96; and Henleaze, Bristol 1996-2001.

John's son the Revd David Salsbury notes his father's strong associations with the East Midlands. John was brought up in Long Eaton and worked at Boots the Chemist as a pharmacist before training for ministry and serving his first pastorate in Alfreton and Selston.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions a funeral service for family and close friends, by invitation, will be held on Thursday 31 December 2020. A further online service of thanksgiving and celebration for John's life will be held early in the New Year. Please hold John's wife Marjory and their family in your prayers.



## A free concert from Northern Synod



\*\*\*VIRTUAL\*\*\*  
**CHRISTMAS ACOUSTIC  
TOUR 2020** with  
GARETH DAVIES-JONES

URC Northern Synod  
invites you to an  
**EVENING CONCERT  
& MESSAGE of HOPE**

FRIDAY DECEMBER 11th, 7.30pm  
Register and book tickets here

Our friends in the Northern Synod warmly invite everyone to a free live concert featuring singer/songwriter **Gareth Davies-Jones** which takes place tomorrow evening, **Friday 11 December** at 7.30pm. For details, and to book tickets free of charge, simply visit:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/christmas-concert-and-a-message-of-hope-registration-129470905965>

## Faith and Science: a workshop from the Faraday Institute

### Faith & Science in the Local Church

#### A Workshop for Christian Leaders

Friday 8<sup>th</sup> - Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Online Zoom meeting with breakout rooms

Join us for this interactive two-day workshop designed for lay and ordained Christian leaders. The workshop will cover contemporary topics in the dialogue between Science and the Christian Faith, including Artificial Intelligence, Bioethics, Creation Care, and Response to Disasters.

Participants will be equipped to engage with scientific issues in the day-to-day life of their ministry context. Open to all church leaders – no scientific background required.

Cost: £50 (£30 for those in ministry training)

Details and registration: [faraday.institute/churchleadersworkshop](https://www.faraday.cam.ac.uk/event/faith-and-science-in-the-local-church/)



To register, visit: <https://www.faraday.cam.ac.uk/event/faith-and-science-in-the-local-church/>

## Christmas greetings



*The Synod team pictured at their staff meeting earlier this week.*

**On behalf of the entire East Midlands Synod team, we extend our warmest wishes to you for a peaceful and blessed Christmas.**

*The Synod Office closes for Christmas at 3.00pm on Monday 21 December and reopens at 9.00am on Monday 5 January.*

## Find us online



The [East Midlands Synod website](https://www.unc5.org.uk/) remains the one-stop shop for all essential information:  
<https://www.unc5.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 as the health crisis continues. 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/UCzXFUjKn8XOGeZU5SgN95g), the Synod shares special events, training videos, worship resources and more. Evening Prayers are also uploaded here. Please subscribe:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzXFUjKn8XOGeZU5SgN95g>

## Contacting East Midlands Synod

Owing to the continuing government recommendation to avoid office spaces where possible, the building of the **East Midlands Synod Office** remains closed. All members of staff continue to work from home: please email them in the usual way. The office number **0115 960 9241** is answered from Monday to Thursday, 9.00am-3.00pm and calls will be forwarded as necessary. Please monitor our website for updates: [www.unc5.org.uk](http://www.unc5.org.uk)

***Please note: the Office officially closes for Christmas at 3pm on Monday 21 December and reopens at 9am on Monday 5 January.***

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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

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Free-to-use photography: bread by Alexandra Kikot on Unsplash

***Next edition: Thursday 7 January 2021***

Please send all material for this E-Letter to both: [modpa@unc5.org.uk](mailto:modpa@unc5.org.uk) and [training@unc5.org.uk](mailto:training@unc5.org.uk)

Copy date for next edition: 12 noon on Tuesday 5 January 2021