

Opening Reflection by the Revd Sarah Gower

Convenor of the Children and Youth group



How was **Shrove Tuesday**? Did you have pancakes, and what fillings did you have? For the first time in many years, I will enjoy pancakes with my husband, who is often away on a school trip at this time of year, and if the beginning of Lent and half term do not coincide, then he is at a traditional Shrove Tuesday Dinner at the school where he teaches with alumni from the last fifty years or so. So, one thing that these strange times have allowed us to do, is to share Shrove Tuesday together.

And so begins **Lent**. A time for reflection about ourselves before God, and a time to reflect on all that God has done for us. Perhaps, like me, you are entering this season rather differently this year. Often the discussion is around what we are going to give up – whether it is something we have always wanted to give up, or feel that we should give up! In recent years, I have heard people talking more about the things they are going to take on; how we are going to use our time differently by doing or being or contemplating or helping. Of course, all of these things are good, especially if they help us to focus a little more on our amazing God.

As I thought about this year, what struck me particularly was that whatever we do should lead us to look to **the God of hope**. Last year, in the middle of Lent, we began to find ourselves in lockdown; a year later, long after we expected, we are still in lockdown albeit, for most of us, a different one. Perhaps we find ourselves struggling just a little bit more than we were, and I am aware that may be a massive under- or overstatement for us all. But how can we use this Lent to help us in these continually unprecedented times? How will we use this Lent to focus especially on our God of hope; and how we might spend Lent a little differently?

What is going to point us towards our God, who is our hope yesterday, today and tomorrow – our God who has not changed from before the beginning of time and for eternity; our God who helped the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness, our God who was alongside David, the shepherd boy, as he fought Goliath, as he escaped from Saul, and as he embarked on his journey with God, as the person who was to become the most celebrated king of God’s people, despite and because of his failures? In all things, David looked, or eventually looked towards our God of hope.

Then Jesus came, to bring the message of Good News, of God’s love, peace, joy and hope, so all the world could live in hope. Let us take time this Lent to look to, to ponder on, and to share our amazing God of hope with one another, with our communities, even if we have to do this differently, and within ourselves.

Have a great and a Godly hope-filled Lent, everybody.

Good News from the Children and Youth Group

As Convenor of the Children and Youth group, Sarah adds:

In the reflection above I spoke about hope. Good news is exciting. So, I am extremely delighted to introduce to you **Richard Knott**, who has been seconded from West Midlands Synod to work with us in the East Midlands, as we discern the role that our future Children and Youth worker will fill. Richard will join us – online of course - for a day a week over the next few months.

I am thrilled that Richard will be part of the Children and Youth Group. He will be a contact for all who are doing the **Children and Youth Friendly Church Scheme** – do be in touch with him if you are renewing or interested in considering this. He is already working with **Ella Lemon**, our Youth Representative for the Synod, on (currently online) events for the young people of the Midlands. Richard will also be a person to contact with queries and will be providing invaluable advice to the Synod in many different ways.

As a Group, we are also working on questionnaires to be sent to ministers, children and youth leaders, young people and children, about all your hopes and dreams for the Synod and what we can be doing. Richard is working alongside us to do this. And in the next few weeks, we hope that you will complete these forms.

Welcome, Richard. We are hugely looking forward to working with you. And so over to Richard.

An Introduction

I am Richard Knott and I am delighted to join with you in the East Midlands Synod. I am currently the West Midlands Synod **Children and Youth Development Officer** and began working there in January 2020. I come with a wealth of previous experience in similar roles serving church denominations and interdenominational agencies in Scotland since early 1996: initially as a schools worker with Scripture Union Scotland, then as a Divisional Children’s Officer with The Salvation Army and prior to January 2020 with the UF Church as Children’s and Youth Development Worker.

Throughout my career I have been keen to support, develop and initiate ways of connecting with children and young people, enabling them to explore the way of Christ for themselves. I am keen to support churches who already have vibrant connections with children and young people and also to come alongside those congregations who feel that they have lost that contact and to seek to help them see where those connections might be developed.

I have experience in Messy Church, Godly Play, creative prayer, ecumenical networks and a variety of methods and models of ministry and hope that this experience alongside the qualifications gained in study at Cliff College will be of benefit to churches across the Synod. I believe passionately that the church is at its best when people of all ages are included and involved in every area of



its life, worship, mission and ministry, that each of us of whatever age has something of great value to add and also to gain from being the church together.

I am looking forward to this period of secondment with you and my hope and desire is to serve the churches of the Synod to the best of my ability in this period with God's help and guidance. I would be delighted to hear from you. Please get in contact via the Synod office, or call **07577 867024** or email via cydo@urcwestmidlands.org.uk.

JPIC Needs You!

The **Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation** Group (JPIC) is seeking to build a network of **Commitment for Life Advocates** and **Green Apostles** across the Synod.

To find out more about JPIC or becoming an Advocate or Green Apostle, please email: training@urc5.org.uk

JPIC is here to promote crucial aspects of Christian Mission: to transform unjust structures of society, pursue peace and reconciliation, sustain and renew the life of the Earth. We meet regularly on Zoom and have supported, among other things, the Synod's new **Environmental Policy** and congregations wanting to become **Eco Churches**.

We work hard to bring related issues to your attention but we would very much like to hear back about what is going on in the Synod. Your church may be an Eco Church or a **Commitment for Life** Church or you may already have held a **Climate Sunday** service but of course many churches are active without 'signing up'.

If you have a passion for the Church's mission to serve and empower the world's poorest people, to challenge the unjust structures that cause so much harm to humanity and other species and to protect and care for God's wonderful Creation, then we would love to hear from you. Please feel free to contact **Graham Ghaleb** (grahamghaleb50@gmail.com), **Derek Graham** (training@urc5.org.uk), or **Charles Jolly** (charles.jolly13@btinternet.com).

What is Climate Sunday?



Climate Sunday

Of special note this year is the call for ALL churches to hold a special Climate-focused service on any Sunday before 5 September. Then a nation-wide **Climate Sunday** will be observed on **Sunday 5 September 2021**, prior to **COP26** (the international conference to be hosted by the UK government in Glasgow this year). You may well be waiting for some semblance of normality to return to arrange your service!

For details please visit: www.climatesunday.org or for resources go straight to: [Climate Sunday | Resources | Worship | Commit | Speak Up](#) . There is an excellent range of resources including inspiring sermons and ideas for services.

At your service, the congregation can be encouraged to make a commitment to greater action to address climate change in your own place of worship and your community and to use their voices to tell politicians that we want a cleaner, greener, fairer future at the heart of plans agreed during COP26. We in the JPIC Group would be really encouraged to hear about your Climate Sunday.

Charles Jolly
Green Apostle

From the Joint Public Issues Team



The [latest newsletter](#) from the **Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT)** details:

- A brand new preaching resource, [Politics in the Pulpit?](#), with a weekly 30-minute video and podcast based on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for the following Sunday
- A list of [resources for Lent 2021](#) with a focus on social and environmental renewal
- A new **group discussion** resource, exploring in six sessions [How Change Happens](#)
- An [audio interview](#) with Labour peer **Lord Alf Dubs**, who campaigns for the rights of refugees



Give Thanks for the Coronavirus Vaccine



*On behalf of the JPIC group, **Charles Jolly** makes the following appeal:*

Many of us aged over 70 have now received a Covid-19 injection and we probably feel very relieved and very thankful. Yet the harsh truth is that the rich countries have bought up the bulk of the supplies and, despite some warm words, protecting the vulnerable in poor countries is lagging far behind. Many people that I have spoken with would like to **donate the cost of their vaccine** to help poorer people, in the Christian spirit of sharing.

It is very difficult to give a monetary cost of a Covid jab. Prices paid vary wildly around the world but The Week (22 January) gives the probable cost to the UK of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine (which I received) as **£15** per person and of the Moderna jab as around **£26**. But then there is the cost to the NHS of distributing and giving the jabs and there is the considerable sum granted to pharmaceutical companies to aid the rapid development of vaccines. So, as so often, it comes down to a matter of what we can afford.

Unicef has an ambitious plan to deliver 2 billion Covid vaccines to health workers and the most vulnerable across the world. Knowing Unicef they will probably source the vaccines at a lower cost than the UK, EU, Israel and USA, so donating the cost of our jab, if and when we get it, will probably help several vulnerable people. To find out more and donate please go to: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/donate/coronavirus/>



Alternatively, of course, you might consider **Christian Aid** who are working hard to help many poor people to survive the pandemic although they do not have a vaccination programme as such.

Charles Jolly

on behalf of the **JPIC** Group

Churches Together in England Vaccine Seminars



Churches Together in England is leading two free **vaccine webinars**, with medical professionals and church leaders coming together to address the issues surrounding resistance to vaccination among Christian communities.

Ministers, Elders and other church leaders have an important role to play in dispelling concerns about taking the vaccine. Here is a moment to focus upon the common good and help protect every member of society, especially the most vulnerable to the ravages of Covid-19.

The first of these webinars takes place **tonight (Thursday 18 February)** from 7.00-9.00pm and addresses especially the concerns of Black Christian communities. The event is open to all, up to a capacity of 1000, and the Zoom link can be found at:

<https://www.cte.org.uk/Publisher/Article.aspx?ID=602554>

A second webinar on **Thursday 25 February** from 7.00-9.00pm addresses the concerns of the widest of Christian audiences and the Zoom link will again be published on www.cte.org.uk.

Panel Discussion and Q&A on the COVID-19 vaccine myths and facts



This Saturday: Westminster College Open Day



**Westminster College, Cambridge
online open day
20 February 2021
10.30am**

degree programmes
short courses
community
resources
worship
URC

bursaries available

email wmsoffice@hermes.cam.ac.uk to
express interest

One of the URC's **Resource Centres for Learning**, Westminster College is for **everyone**: Ministers, trainees, Lay Preachers, Worship Leaders, Elders and Members throughout the church. Find out what the College may have to offer **you** at <https://www.westminster.cam.ac.uk/>.

“Taste and see” Stepwise in a Free Webinar Series

Find out more about Stepwise, what it is, who it's for, and how it can help you develop your discipleship and faith journey through a **series of five webinars**.



Each webinar will focus on one of the five Stepwise streams, beginning with **Faith-filled Life**, the starting point for the other streams. You can pick the one that interests you or attend them all – the choice is yours.

The series begins on **Tuesday 23 February** with **Faith-filled Life**, followed by:

Tuesday 9 March	Faith-filled Worship
Tuesday 23 March	Faith-filled Community
Tuesday 13 April	Faith-fuelled Leadership
Tuesday 27 April	Faith-filled Confidence

All webinars in the series begin at 7.00pm and will last no longer than one hour.

The **Revd David Salsbury**, Stepwise Programme Manager, says: “Stepwise is a resource for the whole church. It is interactive and intergenerational offering something for everyone who wants to develop their faith. These webinars are an opportunity to discover how Stepwise can inspire you and deepen your discipleship.”

To register, please email stepwise@urc.org.uk and you will be sent the Zoom joining details.

For more about the streams and how the programme works, visit the dedicated [webpage](#).

If you are interested in forming or joining a Stepwise group in the East Midlands Synod, please email the **Revd Samuel Silungwe**, Stepwise Coordinator on s.silungwe@yahoo.com or **Derek Graham**, Training and Development Officer on training@urc5.org.uk.

Christian Aid Update

Virtual Conference

With this year's **Christian Aid Week** (10-16 May 2021) coming closer, Christian Aid is holding an online conference next week (Monday 22 – Friday 26 February), entitled [Changemakers: Real People, Real Change](#) and covering a variety of subjects.

Alongside this conference Christian Aid's Church Engagement Officer for the East Midlands, **Jez Gowers-Cromie**, will be running a session especially for East Midlands supporters, which will be repeated on:

- **Tuesday 23 February at 7.30pm**

Sign up at:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/east-midlands-supporter-gathering-tickets-133072536539>

- **Friday 26 February at 10.00am**

Sign up at:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/east-midlands-supporter-gathering-tickets-133103683701>

This is an excellent opportunity to meet others across the East Midlands, be inspired by Christian Aid's work, hear about Christian Aid Week 2021 and share ideas.

Jez Gowers-Cromie also recorded a short conversation with East Midlands Synod Moderator **Geoffrey Clarke** recently, discussing Christian Aid's 75th anniversary and future plans. Enjoy their chat on our [YouTube](https://youtu.be/yMrNgP0fSJE) channel: <https://youtu.be/yMrNgP0fSJE>



Christian Aid has also joined forces with the URCh at a national level to create an [appeal page](#) in response to the continuing Covid-19 vaccination programme. For the poorest and most vulnerable communities across the world, there is [little hope of a vaccine rollout](#). These people already face a lack of water, food, shelter and healthcare.

So for all those rejoicing that they or their loved ones are receiving their vaccinations, and giving thanks for the NHS staff and key workers continuing to save lives across our own country, Christian Aid asks you to consider giving a donation to support in other ways those for whom the vaccine is still out of reach:

United Reformed Church Giving Thanks for Our Vaccine
Online Giving Page
In aid of Christian Aid
£330.00 Raised of target £5,000.00



<https://events.tapsimple.org/page/christian-aid/united-reformed-church-supporting-a-just-vaccine-rollout>

Around the East Midlands

We are always glad to hear news of churches around the Synod and their activities: please email your stories and pictures to training@urc5.org.uk. In this edition, **Joy Rice** from Bulwell URC, Nottingham shares news of her own fundraising initiative for Christian Aid, while **Alison Hadley** brings us an update from Abbots Road URC, Leicester and we congratulate **Buxton URC** on an achievement of Biblical proportions.

A gift of poetry

For Lent, instead of giving up, I'm giving away. I have put together a collection of the Christian and contemplative poems that I've written since 2015. These are not in either of my books but may have appeared on my Facebook page – [Joy's Poems](#).

These are a gift! Email me at joyricepoet@gmail.com and I will email them out to you. There is no obligation but if you would like to give something in return then please feel free to make a donation which I will forward on to Christian Aid. I will let you know the total raised. If everyone gave a pound then Christian Aid could be quids in! Thank you and God bless,

Joy Rice

Bulwell URC

News from our fellowship: Abbots Road URC



As we entered 2021, we took time to reflect over the last year and gave thanks for all the blessings we had encountered. With Leicester having been in some degree of lockdown since March 2020, we quickly realised as a church that we needed to be creative in order to continue to 'be church'.

Zoom has been such a lifeline for us. Our Saturday Coffee Mornings continue to thrive and at Christmas we were able to send another donation to **Rainbows Hospice** in Leicester, our designated charity for the year. A total of **£1700** was raised from March to December by many of our congregation who gather for a raffle and chat on a Saturday morning and also a quiz night on a Wednesday. But others who don't join us on Zoom also contribute weekly and this great amount was testament to people's generosity. Our designated charity this year is **Homelessness in Leicester**.

We continued to dress the church windows over Christmas so the community could see that although the church building is closed, the church is very much alive. The nativity scene was placed, the lights of the tree shone each night and pictures of the stable, shepherds and Kings were painted by the children.

In addition to our Christmas services on zoom which included a Nativity service with a puppet nativity, Carols by Candlelight, Midnight Communion on Christmas Eve and a family Service on Christmas Day, we also held a 'Drive in' Christmas on the carpark. We welcomed around 15 cars and over 50 people who sang carols together from their cars and on the car park at a distance. This was a wonderful act of worship and witness in our community.



And so we entered into 2021 with Hope in our hearts. We continue to be in lockdown but we remain very active. Our windows are now full of Hope and after the success of the **URC Advent boxes** which we were able to give to our children and young people, we now enter this time of Lent and we have delivered the **URC 'Walking Towards Easter Together' resource pack** to each member of our congregation near and far and each family who worship at Messy Church. These have been wonderfully received and we look forward to journeying together and having a time of reflection each Thursday as we approach Easter.

For all the latest information, a message from the **Revd Martin Ferris**, photographs and updates including recorded worship links from our [YouTube channel](#), please visit our website at www.abbotsroadurc.com.

May we take this opportunity to send greetings and blessings to you all.

Alison Hadley

Abbots Road URC, Leicester



Feeding the 5,000

The **Waste Not Want Not** food bank run by **Buxton URC** has now reached **5,000 food parcels** given out – in a response to food poverty that responds to Jesus's own actions for the hungry in the Gospel.



The **Revd Dr Mark Houghton** says, "The sanctuary and vestry at Buxton has been full with food for those who need it for months now and this surely expresses more of an offering to God than a few songs there of a Sunday in days past."

A team of dedicated volunteers opens the church from 11.00am to 1.00pm six days a week, providing a selection of fresh fruit and vegetables, bread and cakes, tins and packet goods, baby supplies and more for all in need of food support. The food is collected and distributed in conjunction with the [FareShare](#) scheme, which provides a means for supermarkets and other outlets to donate surplus food to charities providing food or meals for those in need.

From URC Youth



Activism & Advocacy

Watch live
Facebook and YouTube - bit.ly/trialogueURC

Take Part
using [Slido.com](https://www.slido.com) and code [urctrialogue](https://www.slido.com)

Listen
To podcasts on all major platforms

7pm
Thursday 25 February

Join URC Youth each week for 50 minutes of lively discussion, exploring a Bible passage and current topic – with a chance to share your thoughts and questions (age guidance 16+). The next Trialogue is on **Thursday 25 February** at 7.00pm: take part using [Slido.com](https://www.slido.com) (code: [urctrialogue](https://www.slido.com)).

You can also watch along live or catch up with previous editions on **YouTube**: bit.ly/trialogueURC

The inspiration of Thomas Becket: an Online Seminar



Is Thomas Becket still an inspiration for churches today?

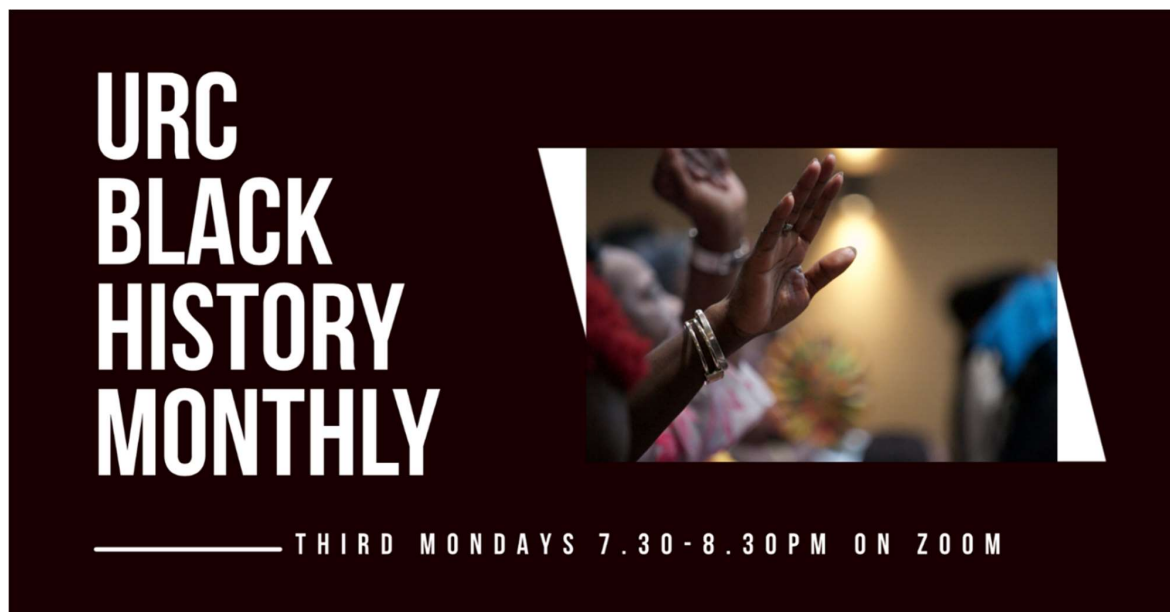
The **Society for Ecumenical Studies** asks what Becket and martyrdom mean in the 21st century, in an [online seminar](#) on Zoom on **Tuesday 23 February** from 7.30 pm to 9.00 pm. The keynote speaker is Professor Henry Mayr-Harting, Emeritus Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Oxford.

This event costs £5 and may be booked via [Eventbrite](#):

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/thomas-becket-an-inspiration-for-the-churches-today-tickets-139835701347>

New from the URC: Black History Monthly

It's too important to leave till October. So the URC's Legacies of Slavery Task Group has launched a new monthly opportunity to take a dip into Black History, every month in 2021.



Black History is so important to our shared story that it can't be confined to one month a year: we need to break out and make it something we keep learning about and exploring. Hence **URC Black History Monthly**: a one-hour conversation taking place on the third Monday of every month at 7.30pm on Zoom.

Each month identifies a particular nugget or sweeping overview of Black History which participants are encouraged to review for themselves, before coming together on Zoom to share an hour's discussion, exploring and teasing out how it affects all of us in our situations and settings today.

The next session is on **Monday 15 March** at 7.30pm, focusing on the **Kairos Document** of 1985/86, a key church document from the freedom struggle in South Africa with a rich afterlife in other freedom struggles. What is its resonance in the UK today? The document will be available to read on the URC website in advance of the session.

For more information about **Black History Monthly**, including details of how to log on, visit the Legacies of Slavery web page: https://urc.org.uk/images/LOS/200127_URC_Black_History_Monthly_launch_-_final.pdf

Covid-19: Psychological First Aid

Would you like to learn how to give practical and emotional support to individuals using the techniques of **Psychological First Aid (PFA)**? A **free online course** has been developed by **Public Health England**, based on international guidance from the World Health Organisation, United Nations and partners:

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/psychological-first-aid-covid-19>

PFA is the globally recommended training for supporting people during and after emergencies. This course, lasting three weeks with an hour's study time a week, will be invaluable for Ministers, Elders and anyone who would like to be able to help people with different needs to cope with the emotional impact of Covid-19.

Situations Vacant



Mission Enabler

N.B. closing date Friday 19 February

Churches Together in All Lincolnshire, (CTAL), is seeking to appoint a 'Mission Enabler', to work with church leaders, churches, denominations, and other appropriate groups across the region of Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, and North East Lincolnshire from April 2021. This is a paid, part-time post, (18hrs per week), with a degree of flexible working.

The post holder will:

- Encourage and develop ecumenical working in the mission and growth of God's Kingdom throughout the region
- Enable good communication between denominations, churches, local CT groups, and other partners
- Coordinate the various meetings and activities of CTAL

The successful applicant will have:

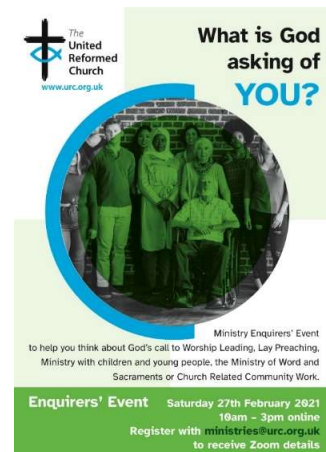
- A strong faith in Jesus Christ and good standing with a local church
- Enthusiasm and skills to facilitate Christians working together in mission
- Good communication skills, including IT and administration
- An understanding of, and prior involvement with, working ecumenically
- Self-discipline, and the ability to organise and prioritise their own workload

If this describes you, and you are interested in the post, please also see the CTAL website <http://www.ctal.org.uk> before submitting your CV and covering letter to admin@ctal.org.uk

Closing date for applications is Friday 19 February; interviews via Zoom on Thursday 25 February. Interviews will be held via zoom on Thursday 25 February

Reminders of Forthcoming Events

The **URC Enquirers' Event** takes place on Zoom on **Saturday 27 February 2021**, from 10.00am to 3.00pm. If you – or someone you know – would like to explore whether they are called to **Worship Leading, Lay Preaching, Ministry with Children and Young People, Ministry of Word and Sacraments** or **Church Related Community Work**, please email ministries@urc.org.uk and register to find out more.



If you're thinking about attending this summer's Holiday Forum, there's a foretaste of the fun, faith and fellowship it offers at a free "Holiday Forum in a Day" on **Saturday 20 March**. For details, visit: <http://www.urcholidayforum.org.uk/wpsite/>

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 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/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 continued restrictions mandated by the UK government, the building of the **East Midlands Synod Office** remains closed at present. However, all members of staff continue to work from home: please email them in the usual way. Please continue to use the Office address for any postal business: mail is collected weekly. 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.unc5.org.uk

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): Pancakes by [Hello Lightbulb](https://www.hello-lightbulb.com), Man being vaccinated by [Macau Photo Agency](https://www.macao-photo.com)

Next edition: Thursday 4 March 2021

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

Copy date for next edition: 12 noon on **Tuesday 2 March 2021**