

Opening Reflection by the Revd Robert Bushby

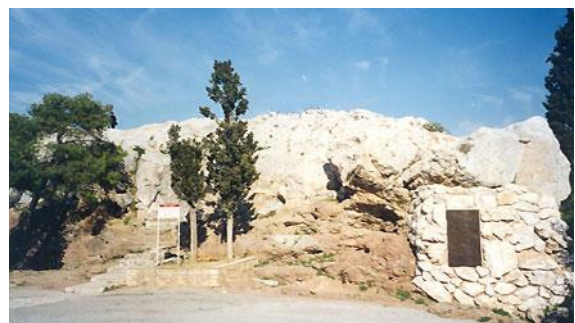
Mission Development Officer

We read in the book of Acts that the apostles began speaking about their faith in Jesus Christ in the synagogues or at places of prayer. That was certainly true of Paul as he spread the word during his missionary journeys, but as he travelled further away from Palestine, he had to change the way he addressed his audience. When he reached Athens in Acts 17, Paul went to the synagogue, but also loitered about in the marketplace where he got into conversation with the Greek philosophers who invited him to speak at the **Areopagus**, a place where new ideas were discussed.



The Areopagus (left) and Acropolis hills, Athens

When Paul got up to speak, he couldn't start from where he usually did with Old Testament prophecy and the teachings and miracles of Jesus; he had to begin somewhere else, namely, by what he had observed as he walked around the city. He had noticed all the numerous temples and statues of gods and he had noticed an altar with the inscription 'To an Unknown God'. The Athenians had so many gods that they thought they needed to cover all their bases. They were worried that they might offend a god they didn't know about, so they created this altar. Paul used this observation to talk about the One True God they didn't know and preached a sermon quoting their own philosophers as well as talking about the resurrection.



*A plaque at the Areopagus,
inscribed with Paul's sermon (Acts 17:22-31)*

Today, our culture has changed and many people do not have the Christian background that previous generations have had. We cannot assume that people know the words of the Bible or know very much about Jesus; so, if we are speaking about our faith, then we have to begin from where people are. The good news of Jesus Christ and God's mercy and grace do not change, but the way we portray that message does not have to be the same. Many of the Fresh Expressions of church and mission today have this in mind as they seek to express our faith in new ways.

So can we follow Paul's example when we share our faith, or do we slip into the language of jargon. When we talk about our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, our testimony is effective when we take two things into account: a willingness to speak honestly about what God means to us, and a sensitivity towards those we are speaking to, so that God may speak to them in turn.

At our Synod on Saturday 27 March, we will be exploring some of this as we consider our mission in the 21st Century with the title '**Rewilding the Church**'. This is the title of a book by **Steve Aisthorpe** where he asks what might happen if the ecological concept of rewilding, which allows nature to break free from managed control and restores wonder to our lives, was applied to the Church? The back cover of the book says:

'Rewilding the Church explores afresh Jesus' compelling invitation to leave behind all that hinders and entangles and to follow him adventurously. It calls us not only to be part of an exciting rewilding of the Church, but to be rewilded ourselves.'

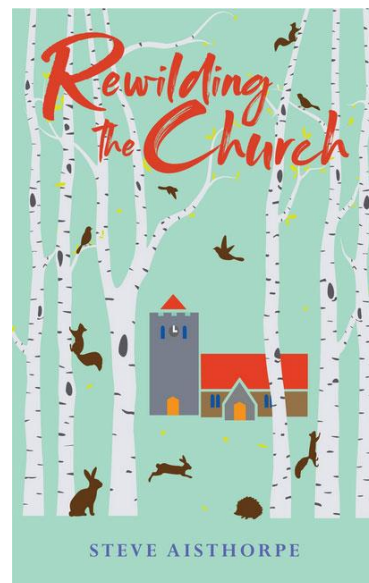
Let's join in the adventure.

Rewilding the Church – book group and discount

Rewilding the Church – the theme for our Synod on 27 March – is taken from the title of **Steve Aisthorpe's** book. If we wish to see the Church reinvigorated, Aisthorpe urges, we might take heart from the ecological concept of reverting landscapes to their natural state. In his compelling and readable book, "rewilding" is a constant metaphor for our pressing need to simplify and get back to basics, with Jesus Christ at the heart of everything. Many hanker for faith, but struggle to express it in churches which persist in doing things because that's the way they have always been done. God is renewing the Church: how can we join in?

To explore the theme in greater depth, we are launching a Synod "book group", beginning 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.

To encourage participation, the publisher St Andrew's Press has kindly agreed to a discount for anyone in East Midlands Synod. Purchase the book at <https://bit.ly/Rewilding21> and you will **save £2** on the RRP. To receive this discount, enter **URCREWILD21** at the online checkout. This offer is now live and will end on 30 April 2021.



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.

Amongst the business discussed by Mission Council was:

- The proposal to appoint a small group to **review** the URC's structures, resources and work
- The development of a new **URC website** and how it will help engage people in our story
- The future of the popular **Daily Devotions** and Daily Devotions **Sunday Service**
- Possible approaches to ensuring the future of the **URC pension schemes**
- New marks of ministry and training provision for **Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers**
- An update on **Safeguarding** provision and governance in the URC
- The decision that **General Assembly 2021** will now be held virtually
- The use of the **Discipleship Development Fund** to empower people throughout the Church
- A [response by church leaders](#) to the UK Government's announcement on its nuclear stockpile
- A review of feedback about **Walking the Way** and emerging proposals for its development



The Revd Geoffrey Clarke, Synod Moderator, addressing Mission Council to express thanks for the work of the Communications Team

Consultation on Education & Learning Integration

The URC's **Education & Learning Committee** has been conducting a consultation on developing a more integrated education and learning system, building on steps already taken to make the **Resource Centres for Learning** (including Westminster College) a resource for all. This was discussed at the recent meeting of the East Midlands Synod's **Training and Development Core Group**, which responded with broad support for greater working together and networking, with the proviso that Synods must retain the capacity where appropriate to determine where to opt into national programmes and to respond to local training needs. This week's **Mission Council** meeting heard that an appetite for further integration was felt across the URC.

Reopening Church Buildings – Moderators' Advice

In updated advice to churches, issued shortly after the last edition of this e-letter, the URC **Synod Moderators** urged continued caution and suggested that, while any decision must remain subject to the developing public safety situation, **Pentecost** (Sunday 23 May) may prove a possible target date to reopen buildings for public worship.

The Moderators' advice is available in full on the East Midlands Synod website:

<https://www.urch5.org.uk/content/synod-moderators-issue-new-guidance-reopening-churches-5-march-2021>

From the Joint Public Issues Team



The latest newsletter from JPIT (the Joint Public Issues Team) includes:

TAKE A MOMENT

to Pray & Act for #ResetTheDebt

Friday 26th March



- Details of the **Reset the Debt [day of prayer and action](#)** next **Friday, 26 March**
- The continuing lectionary resource **[Politics in the Pulpit?](#)**, issued every Tuesday morning
- A coffee break event on **Tuesday 30 March**, advising about **[Investing in Change](#)**
- An interview with Labour MP **Rachael Maskell** in the latest **[Faith in Politics](#)** podcast
- An online service marking the **[5th anniversary of Eco Church](#)** on Friday 26 March at 11.00am
- Encouragement to all churches to host and register a **[Climate Sunday service](#)** before Sunday 5 September, including a short video which can be used in services:



Watch and download at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BAODZvoXtA>

Earth Day 2021: Free Film Screening

Thursday 22 April 7.00pm

More than ever, we need positive voices in the environmental crisis. **Global Sleaford**, with support from **Sleaford Climate Action Network** and the **Faith & the Environment Lincolnshire Group**, extend an invitation to celebrate **Earth Day 2021** on Thursday 22 April by joining an online screening of the film **2040**.



In this “exercise in fact-based dreaming”, director Damon Gameau envisions a positive future for our children and planet, showing how we can mobilise solutions we already have within our grasp to mitigate the huge global challenges we face.

It’s a story of hope, and a powerful tool to encourage people to act now. You can view the trailer at:

<https://togetherfilms.org/2040-screenings>

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>

Church Leadership Programme

The Church Leadership Programme (CLP) is a comprehensive programme to refresh experienced lay and ordained leaders in authentic leadership, helping church leaders to develop external skills from their core sense of being. A mix of physical and virtual learning, the course threads from September to June every academic year.



View a video introducing the CLP at: <https://youtu.be/BL07h4jNScg>

The programme will be beginning again this autumn, with the first residential taking place at Hinsley Hall, Leeds from **17-19 September**. If you would like to know more, including the possibility of grants to support your participation, please email **Derek Graham**, Training & Development Officer at training@urc5.org.uk.

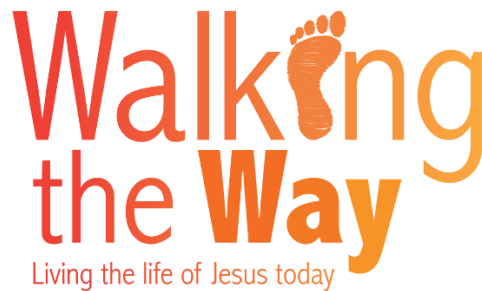
From Walking the Way

Online Discipleship session

Monday 29 March 2.00-3.30pm

What does **living the life of Jesus today** look like online? It's great that worship, fellowship and other important elements of the Christian faith can happen virtually, but how do we use technology to take us deeper our relationships so we can help each other walk the way of Jesus on a daily basis? The Walking the Way Steering Group proposes to set up a network of people from across the URC to explore this further. To start off, you are invited to attend a Zoom session to think about what we mean by 'discipleship', what's already happening with faith development online and how we might take things forward into more intentional community building.

This will take place on **Monday 29 March** from 2.00-3.30pm: to sign up, please email wtw@urc.org.uk.



Church on the Edge sessions

Thursday 1 April 2.00-3.00pm

Knackered? Jaded? Scunnered? What word would you use to describe how you're feeling right now? The times we live in are very strange. The pandemic poses lots of difficult emotional, physical, social and economic challenges, which affect absolutely everyone – not least those involved in community and neighbourhood ministry. There are major, unanswerable questions about the long-term impact this will have, and where we go from here.

If you need a space to meet with others, to be open and honest about this difficult situation, and to seek support from each other in living through these challenging times, then join in the first of three monthly Zoom sessions brought to you by the URC's '[New Reality Same Mission](#)', on **Thursday 1 April** at 2pm. In this opening session, guest speakers **Al Barrett** and **Ruth Harley**, co-authors of '[Being Interrupted: Reimagining the Church's Mission from the Outside, In](#)', will help ask what God might want of us in the midst of everything that has interrupted normal life. To sign up, please e-mail wtw@urc.org.uk.

Communication Skills: 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 workshops 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**

You can read details and book to attend a single workshop, each pair or the whole 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).

Prayers on the Anniversary of Lockdown



during the pandemic, often in areas of community outreach that were new to them.

Churches Together in England is encouraging churches to mark the anniversary this coming **Sunday, 21 March** and also shares details of an anniversary #PrayersOfHope programme on **Premier Christian Radio** on Sunday at 7.00pm. Read more at:

https://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/605437/Home/Coronavirus/Prayers_of.aspx

On Sunday 22 March last year, candles were lit in thousands of homes across Britain to launch the **#PrayersOfHope** initiative, as the UK entered the first national lockdown. During the last year churches throughout the land, and from every tradition, have continued to pray and act in compassion and witness.

Research shows that more than 70% of churches have delivered new services



The anniversary of lockdown itself, on **Tuesday 23 March 2021**, has been designated a **National Day of Reflection**, with a minute's silence at noon following by the ringing of church bells and later a doorstep vigil at 8.00pm. A one-minute video outlines the day: https://youtu.be/ZsUOWcvL_TM



CTE encourages Christians everywhere to pray as the nation pauses to remember those who are lost and those who are grieving. Details of this **call to prayer** can be found at: https://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/605509/Home/Coronavirus/National_Day.aspx

The Bible Society: Navigating Trauma

Thursday 25 March 10.30-11.30am

As a society, we're more conscious than ever before about mental health and the complexities of how traumatic situations and events can affect both individuals and groups. Many of us have experienced some form of trauma and we know that many in our churches and communities are survivors too.



A new scripture-based from the **Bible Society**, [Navigating Trauma](#) asks what the Church's role and witness may be to those who are suffering in this way. As we heal the wounds inside, we change the world outside. How can we equip Christians to come alongside those on a journey from pain to peace? That is the purpose of a special webinar on Thursday 25 March at 10.30am, [Navigating Trauma – How the Church can help](#). The session is **free** and open to all church leaders, Christian group leaders, chaplains and others who want to discover how their church or group could offer this Bible-based programme to those who have experienced trauma in your community.

To book, please visit:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/navigating-trauma-how-the-church-can-help-tickets-138951717327>

Conference Calls from Christians on Ageing



Christians on Ageing has announced a new **summer series** of its Conference Calls, using Zoom, following the sell-out success of the sessions to date. You can view the subjects already covered and reports of the discussions at:

<https://christiansonageing.org.uk/conference-call->

Free to book, and open to anyone interested in the topic, each session is introduced by someone with specialist knowledge of the subject. Numbers for each session are limited to around a dozen in order to allow meaningful discussion, so early booking is advised. The new sessions are:

Tuesday 18 May 2021

Hospitals - their importance to us and the experiences of admission, care and aftercare

led by **Marion Shoard**, Writer and Broadcaster

Tuesday 15 June 2021

Listening for carers

led by **Maureen O'Neill**, Director, Faith in Older People (FiOP)

Tuesday 20 July 2021

Faith amongst BAME older Christians

led by **Charles Kwaku-Odoi**, Chief Officer, Caribbean & African Health Network, Gr Manchester

Tuesday 17 August 2021

Older people and spiritual strength in the world of nature

led by **Barbara Stephens**, Chief Executive, Dementia Pathfinders

To register your interest in any of these sessions, or for more information, please email

discussion@ccoa.org.uk .

Reminders of forthcoming events



You can register up to Friday evening for the free “**Holiday Forum in a Day**” this **Saturday, 20 March**, a concisely targeted dose of fun, faith and fellowship alongside a searching central talk. For details, see: <http://www.urcholidayforum.org.uk/wpsite/>

Join the uprising of Jesus at an international **Easter online festival**, supported by the URC’s **Commitment for Life** and **Walking the Way** teams. Running this weekend from **Sunday 21 - Monday 22 March**, the free event features prominent speakers from both sides of the Atlantic exploring how to recognise and resist empire in the Bible, the Church and beyond.



URC Youth offers 11 to 14-year-olds eight daily podcasts to engage with throughout **Holy Week 2021**. For details see: <http://bit.ly/holy-week-2021>

“YOURS IN THE UPRISING OF JESUS”

CHINE McDONALD
WES HOWARD-BROOK
WILLIAM YOUNG

SUN 21 6-8PM
MON 22 10AM-12: 6-8PM

EASTER ONLINE FESTIVAL
RECOGNISING & RESISTING EMPIRE IN THE BIBLE, THE CHURCH & BEYOND
SUN 21 - MON 22 MARCH 2021

PROGRAMME

Sunday 21 March, 6.30-8pm
Recognising & resisting Empire in the Bible and the Early Church
Wes Howard-Brook

Monday 22 March, 10-11am
Recognising & resisting White privilege
Chine McDonald

11am-12pm
Resistance Music in Washington, Brazil and Palestine
William Young

6.30-8pm
Recognising & resisting Empire in the church today
Wes Howard-Brook

To add the daily meeting to your calendar:
<http://bit.ly/UprisingCalendar>

To join the Zoom Meeting
<http://bit.ly/UprisingLaunch>

Meeting ID: 952 8324 4787 Passcode: 784428

Helping Christians to engage constructively with MPs & Councils



<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/building-back-better4-helping-christians-engage-constructively-with-mps-etc-tickets-141898519291>

The next in the Building Back Better series of Zoom sessions from [Faith and the Environment Lincolnshire](#) is **free** for anyone in our region to attend, provided you do make use of a place once booked. On **Friday 16 April** from 1.00-2.15pm, **Rachel Mander** of [Hope for the Future](#) will outline ways to communicate the urgency of climate change to MPs and local politicians. To book, visit: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/building-back-better4-helping-christians-engage-constructively-with-mps-etc-tickets-141898519291>

A series of free Zoom webinars to help you find out more about each of **Stepwise** streams and how they might help you develop your discipleship continues with:

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



All webinars in the series begin at 7.00pm and last no longer than one hour. To register, please email 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 and open to all. Please email mission@urc.org.uk by 16 April to register, stating which church you belong to or are representing.

Find us online



The [East Midlands Synod website](https://www.urc5.org.uk/) remains the one-stop shop for all essential information:



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:

The [Synod Youth and Children's Facebook Page](https://www.facebook.com/URCEastmidlandsYouth/) shares news and ideas related to our work with young people:



On our dedicated [YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzXFUrjKn8XOGeZU5SgN95g), the Synod shares special events, training videos, worship resources and more. Evening Prayers are also uploaded here. Please subscribe:

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

This E-letter is produced on behalf of:

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Telephone: 0115 960 9241

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Areopagus & Acropolis by Anna Kurmaeva on [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com/photos/areopagus)
Image of plaque at the Areopagus: Immanuel Giel on [Wikimedia commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Immanuel_Giel_plaque.jpg)

Next edition: Thursday 1 April 2021

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

Copy deadline for next edition: 12 noon on **Tuesday 30 March 2021**