

Opening Reflection by the Revd Geoffrey Clarke Moderator of the East Midlands Synod

Small in stature, large of heart and loud in laughter

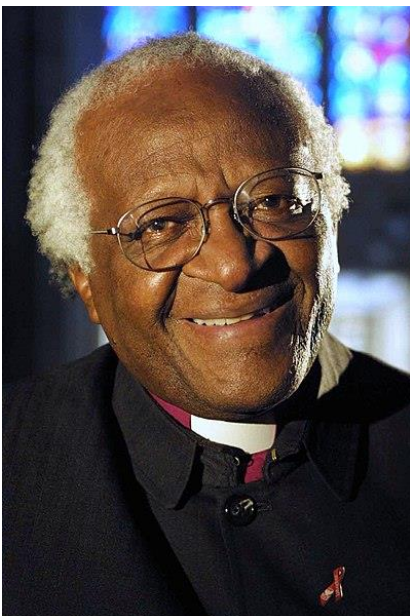
Archbishop Desmond Tutu may have been physically small but he was large of heart and loud in laughter. I suspect I am not alone in counting him among my spiritual heroes.

Of the many tributes to him one of the finest is his contribution as chair of the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** in South Africa, set up in 1995 to help heal the country and bring about a reconciliation of its people by uncovering the truth about human rights violations that had occurred during the period of apartheid. It has been moving to watch again some of the film coverage of Tutu hearing people's testimonies and to see him reduced to tears by their hurt and pain. No one can pretend that forgiveness is simple or automatic but the Lord's Prayer, if we truly mean the words, requires us to forgive others as God forgives us. The process could only lead to reconciliation and healing if and when people were allowed firstly to remember and then to forgive.

Tutu famously said that,

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

(cited by Martyn Percy in *The Humble Church*)



Tutu practised what he preached. In his book *Naked Spirituality* **Brian McLaren** shares a story illustrating Tutu's commitment to forgiveness: *A white South African once told me ... During the apartheid years, he believed what he was told by white authority figures, namely, that those working against apartheid were evil: trouble-makers, rabble-rousers, communists, heretics. Chief among the trouble-makers was an activist Anglican priest named Desmond Tutu. Once, walking through an airport, this large white man saw Tutu coming towards him. Overcome with rage, he moved toward Tutu and roughly, intentionally bumped him as he walked by. Tutu, much smaller in stature, fell back on the ground, landing on his backside with a thud. When Tutu opened his eyes, angry blue eyes glared down at him with a sneer of obvious disdain, only to see Tutu's shocked and dazed face gradually focus and form into a smile. 'God bless you, my child,' Tutu said, his brown eyes gleaming with an impossible mix of compassion and mischief.*

The man stomped away, infuriated all the more that Tutu found a way to transcend his act of hatred. Over the hours and days that followed, the words of blessing echoed in his memory, and gradually, that big, proud, white man was brought to repentance by a simple, spontaneous blessing. Tutu's non-violence, that moment showed, wasn't simply a political strategy: it was a spiritual practice ... The only way we will learn to respond to violent actions with non-violent actions is by learning to respond first with non-violent words – words of blessing not cursing, words of prayer not revenge, words of compassion not retaliation.

(pp. 166-167, **Naked Spirituality: A life with God in twelve simple words**, Brian McLaren.
Copyright © Brian D. McLaren, 2010. ISBN 978 0 340 99545 7

So next time someone treats us unfairly, may we try responding with compassion and grace. There is no promise we will not get knocked over ... but the power of forgiveness may just enable us to get on our feet again and bring our opponent to their knees. And may our churches be known as places where forgiveness is preached and practised.



Induction of the Revd Jo Clare-Young

Saturday 22 January 3.00pm

This weekend sees the Induction of the **Revd Jo Clare-Young** as Minister of **Newport Pagnell URC** and the Mead Centre and of **West End United Church**, Wolverton. We are delighted to welcome Jo into the East Midlands Synod.

The Induction Service will take place on **Saturday 22 January** at 3.00pm at Newport Pagnell URC. In accordance with current Covid guidelines, all those attending in person are asked to take a lateral flow test beforehand, to wear a face covering and to observe social distancing.

The Induction will also be live streamed on **Facebook**: search "URC Newport Pagnell". If anyone not on Facebook would like to watch live, please email victoria.paulding@urcnewportpagnell.org to receive a link by email half an hour before the Service begins, allowing you to view the Facebook stream without having to sign up or log in. The service will also be available to view on **YouTube** later in the weekend.

Lay Preachers' Forum

Monday 24 January 7.30pm

The first of this year's events for **Lay Preachers and Worship Leaders** will be held via Zoom this coming **Monday, 24 January** at 7.30pm, with the "meeting room" open from 7.15pm.

Chaired by Lay Preaching Commissioner **Mark Hodgson**, this Forum will offer an opportunity to compare experiences as we continue on the slow and uncertain path out of the pandemic, to hear about the latest developments around lay worship in the URC and East Midlands Synod, and discuss what further support is available in the year ahead.

To register to attend and receive the Zoom code, please email **Hannah Holmes** at trainingpa@urc5.org.uk.

What is God Asking of You?

Ministry Enquirers' Event

Saturday 12 February 10.00am-3.00pm

The URC is holding an online **Enquirers' Event** to help you think about God's call to Worship Leading, Lay Preaching, Ministry with children and young people, the Ministry of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Work. To register for this online event and receive Zoom details, please email ministries@urc.org.uk.



New year, new challenges; is God calling you to new ventures?

- ❖ Perhaps you feel passionate about making a difference in your local area?
- ❖ Perhaps you feel unsettled in a job or role you've been doing for a while and feel ready for a new challenge?
- ❖ Perhaps you've been the main parent or carer at home, but your children are older and less dependent now, or your carers' responsibilities are reduced, and you have more available time and energy for a new vocation?



Maybe you've been a family worker or a youth worker employed by a local agency or your church, and feel called to develop your skills further? Or perhaps it's a short-term contract and you hope for a role that's longer-term? Perhaps you've felt a 'niggle' to get involved with community ministry for quite a while now but have never quite got round to chatting with someone or praying about what the Holy Spirit might be prompting you to explore further.

Perhaps some of these stories about community involvement excite you? <https://urc.org.uk/tag/church-related-community-work/>

If any of these examples above apply to you, or if you have any questions about how you might be able to get more involved with making a positive difference in your neighbourhood, community or church, then please do not hesitate to contact steve.summers@urc.org.uk in the Church Related Community Work (CRCW) team for more information. All enquiries will be held confidentially.



Perhaps it's time to step out, have a go, take a risk -and be surprised where God may lead you, and how God will support you in the venture along the way.....

Additionally, the **Enquirers Event** on February 12th will provide the opportunity to discover about different ministries and to explore your discipleship and vocation further. For example, the URC has a recognised ministry of locally-called, locally deployed, non-stipendiary CRCW.

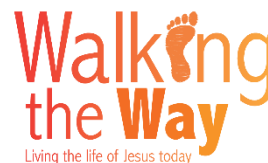
Please email: ministries@urc.org.uk for more information about the event.



Creating Change in Communities & the Church

Discipleship Development Fund – New Opportunities

The United Reformed Church has revised its [Discipleship Development Fund](#) to encourage all individuals, groups and churches to engage with a journey of **deepening personal discipleship**.



There are now two levels: the **Small Grant** scheme awards grants of **up to £200** per person, while the **Large Grant** scheme welcomes applications from churches, groups and Synods for grants of around **£5000**.

You can apply for resources, courses and conferences or help to develop programmes of your own – be creative! At both levels, the Discipleship Development Fund is designed to:

- create opportunities for everyone to **encounter the living God**, whether they already identify themselves as followers of Christ or not
- encourage everyone in their **prayer life and relationship with God** to enable them to live as disciples of Jesus.
- encourage everyone to make the most of **educational opportunities** that are relevant and appropriate for them in their discipleship journey.

Small Grant Scheme

- Who can apply?** All individuals and congregations in the URC may apply, for up to £200 a year.
- What's it for?** An individual could receive support for discipleship courses, activities or retreats. A congregation might seek help to bring in an outside speaker or buy resources to facilitate an in-house project or event: there are all sorts of possibilities.
- Who awards grants?** Each Synod awards the Small Grants, from a pot of **£2000** each year – please apply early to avoid disappointment!

To apply for a Small Grant up to £200, please obtain an application form from **Derek Graham**, Training and Development Officer, by emailing training@urc5.org.uk.

Large Grant Scheme

- Who can apply?** Any recognised group within the URC is invited to apply, including local churches, Synods and Assembly Committees.
- What's it for?** Grants can be put towards any purpose that will contribute to the discipleship development of lay people in or connected with the URC including personnel costs, facilities, travel, courses etc. Multi-year projects can be supported for up to 3 years.
- Who awards grants?** The Large Grant Awarding Group will meet four times a year. Applications are invited by the end of March, June, September and December and the Group will normally respond with its decision by the end of the following month.

For further details and to download an application form for a Large Grant up to a sum of around £5000, visit <https://urc.org.uk/education-learning/discipleship-development/discipleship-development-fund/>. Application forms may also be obtained from **Derek Graham** on training@urc5.org.uk.

The URC at 50!

Worship Resources Competition

To celebrate the **URC's 50th anniversary**, choirs, bands, individuals, songwriters, composers, and poets are invited to submit an entry into the URC at 50: Worship Resources Competition.

There are four categories in which you can enter:

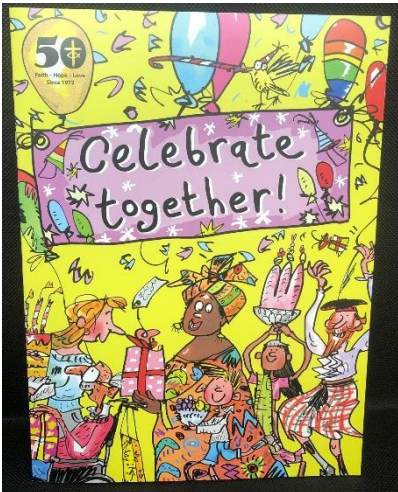
- traditional hymn/song
- poem
- contemporary hymn/song
- rap

Judges will select a winner from each category. Winning entries will be included in a digital version of the URC at 50 resource pack for local churches for them to use in jubilee celebrations and/or Sunday services.

The closing date for entries is **8 April 2022**. Winners will be publicly announced at **General Assembly** in July 2022, at which the songs, or recordings, will be performed/played/sung. The winning entries will be recorded and/or filmed in July 2022 for sharing online.

Entries to be sent to: mission@urc.org.uk

For more information visit: [URC at 50: Worship Resources Competition - United Reformed Church](#)



Celebrate Together

Copies of [Celebrate Together](#), the brilliant new, joyously colourful anniversary booklet by Sam Richards and Ruth White, illustrated by Mark Beech and put together by Sara Foyle, are available to order from the [URC Bookshop](#).

The book is **free** and is designed to be informative and enjoyable for all ages. Churches are encouraged to order as many as they can use and distribute these freely to **all members**

to help start the anniversary year in celebratory fashion.



Local Church Packs

All churches will receive a pack in the next month containing worship resources, a drama, a quiz, posters and other resources to help with anniversary plans. The resources will also be available to download.

Personal News

Our apologies go to **Matt and Sasha Rigden** for misreporting the name of their newborn daughter in our last edition.

Evangeline Lois was born on Monday 27 December 2021, a sister for **Cara**. We send our congratulations again.

Matt is Pioneer Minister for The Heath Christian Partnership (Lincoln).



We continue to hold in prayer the friends and family of our retired minister the **Revd Margaret Taylor**, including all those at Loughborough URC. Margaret, who died on 24 December 2021, was the first woman to be accepted for training and ordination by the Presbyterian Church of England at Westminster College. Her life is marked by an article on the national URC website: <https://urc.org.uk/urc-minister-dies-after-road-accident/>

Margaret's funeral date is not yet known: please contact trainingpa@urc5.org.uk to receive details when available.



GEAR – Refreshing Your Ministry

Thursday 10 February 2.00-3.30pm



**Group for
Evangelism
And
Renewal**
*within the United
Reformed Church*

GEAR is running another 'Refreshing Your Ministry' session on Zoom with worship, Biblical input and prayer.

The first one for 2022 is on Thursday 10 February from 2.00-3.30pm, and will be led by **John Proctor**, former General Secretary on the theme of "**Holy Week in Luke's Gospel - Jesus in grief, Jesus as guide, Jesus as giver**".

All are welcome to join, and the event is free. To register, please contact **Richard Bradley** for the Zoom details by emailing richardbradley@cantab.net.

Hybrid Working

Wednesday 23 February 7.30pm via Zoom

The URC's **Education & Learning** and **Children & Youth** teams continue to offer support for churches navigating their way through the digital environment.

Their latest collaboration is an online meeting to share experiences of hybrid work, worship and outreach – with the promise of more to follow in the months ahead. For details please email the **Revd Jenny Mills**, Secretary for Education & Learning at: jenny.mills@urc.org.uk.



Wednesday 23rd February 7.30pm

Following our successful training sessions, Education & Learning and Children & Youth invite you to meet together. We hope this will become a regular gathering.



Email: jenny.mills@urc.org.uk for more information.

Christian Aid – Changemakers Supporter Conference



Real People, Real Change

Following the success of last year's inaugural online **Changemakers Supporter Conference**, Christian Aid supporters across the country will be joining together for an online conference on **20-25 February 2022** on the theme of **Real People, Real Change**.

This is an exciting opportunity to be inspired by stories from **Christian Aid** partners in Zimbabwe who are facing the daily reality of the climate crisis and share ideas around fundraising for **Christian Aid Week**, campaigning for climate justice and prayer.



Whether you join the conference for one session or for the whole week, you'll feel equipped to be a changemaker in 2022 and join a movement for change this Christian Aid Week.

Are you wondering what Climate Justice campaigning over the last year has achieved and what you can do now? Then join the **Climate Campaigning beyond Cop26** session. Or be inspired by Christian Aid's Ambassadors and frontline activists in **Whose Prophetic Voice?**

Other sessions cover a wide range of stimulating topics including online Bible study with **CREAS** (Christian Aid partner in Argentina) and exciting new ways of fundraising and promoting your Christian Aid Week events. You can also meet other supporters from your area to share ideas and experiences.

If you support **Christian Aid** or volunteer to encourage others to give, act and pray during Christian Aid Week, then this event is for you. For more information and to sign up, visit caid.org.uk/conference2022

Holocaust Memorial Day

Thursday 27 January



Next Thursday, 27 January, is **Holocaust Memorial Day 2022**.

As it does each year, the Council of Christians and Jews has produced a resource for Christian churches and communities to help mark Holocaust Memorial Day. This can be viewed and downloaded on the CCJ website at: <https://ccj.org.uk/resources/holocaust-education>.

The resource contains a wealth of material which can be used in a liturgy of remembrance, written by contributors from across the UK and from a variety of Christian denominations. This includes poems, an exposition on the Scripture readings for the preceding Sunday (23 January), prayers, a litany written by members of CCJ's Yad Vashem Alumni Group, and finally a reflection on one day in the life of **Jane Haining**, a Scottish Righteous Among the Nations.

More information about Holocaust Memorial Day and this year's theme of **"One Day"** can be found at: <https://www.hmd.org.uk/what-is-holocaust-memorial-day/this-years-theme/>.

Christians in the Holy Land

Thursday 3 February 6.00pm

The **St Philip's Centre**, Leicester, which is dedicated to promote understanding between faiths, is holding a special online event on Thursday 3 February to ask how we can support Christians in the Holy Land in this time of hardship and uncertainty. To register, please email onlinetraining@stphilipscentre.co.uk.



Christians in the Holy Land 6pm, Thursday 3rd February

What is the current situation of Christian communities across the Holy Land? What are the particular impacts of covid-19 and the lockdown on families who derive their income primarily from caring for pilgrims and tourists? How can we support the Christians of the Holy Land through our prayers and actions as this testing time? Dcn. Dr. Georgios Tsourous of the International Community of the Holy Sepulchre and Professor Francis Davis of the University of Roehampton will discuss all this and more at this unique session.

To book a place, email onlinetraining@stphilipscentre.co.uk



Arthur Rank Centre – Rural Ministry Course Returns

Tuesday 14 – Thursday 16 June



The **Arthur Rank Centre** is glad to announce that its highly-regarded **Rural Ministry Course** will return this summer, taking place from **Tuesday 14 – Thursday 16 June** at King's Park Conference Centre, Northampton.

The Rural Ministry Course is designed for **lay and ordained church leaders** across the denominations entering a rural appointment for the first time, and those already in rural ministry who feel the need for a 'refresher'.

The three-day programme employs a variety of approaches including practical sessions, group work and workshops led by practitioners, and includes sessions on understanding rural contexts, mission and growth, leadership, farming and work with children and young people in the countryside.

Fees are £300 per delegate for the residential course, which includes a one-year subscription to Country Way magazine. For more information and to book visit: [Rural Ministry Course - The Arthur Rank Centre](#)

Find Us Online



The [East Midlands Synod website](#) is the one-stop shop for all essential information:
<https://www.unc5.org.uk/>



Our [East Midlands Synod Facebook Page](#) continues to host the **Evening Prayers** led by our Moderator the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke** and others during the ongoing 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/>

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



On our dedicated [YouTube channel](#), 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

Following the government guidance issued in December to work from home where possible, the **Synod Office** is currently closed. This will be reviewed in line with changing guidance. Staff members continue to be available as usual: in the first instance please contact them by email, as this will receive a direct response from the staff member with whom you wish to correspond. Mail will be checked periodically and the Synod telephone line (**0115 960 9241**) is answered Monday-Thursday, 9.00am-3.00pm.

Any further 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

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Next edition: Thursday 3 February 2022

Please send all material for this E-Letter to both: trainingpa@unc5.org.uk and training@unc5.org.uk
Copy deadline for next edition: 12 noon on **Monday 31 January 2022**