

Opening Reflection by Derek Graham Training & Development Officer

A Point for Inflammation

We are but a fortnight away from **General Assembly** – the first in four years to be held in person, hosted in the East Midlands at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick.

This week I have had the honour of convening a meeting of the 16 members of General Assembly to be sent by this Synod. Together we took a first glance at the hot topics slated for four days of lively discussion: amongst them, the launch of **URC Children**, the development of **Lay Pioneering** and urgent action to reach **net zero** carbon emissions.

Our lucky 2022 representatives will enjoy anew the voices joined in praise, the shared meals with counterparts from further afield, the chance to strike up new friendships and partnerships. However, last year's Assembly, held thanks to Covid as a sort of giant Zoom meeting, afforded one incidental pleasure that they may miss.

To ensure that everyone could follow the virtual discussion, automatic captioning turned the speakers' words into text along the bottom of our computer screens. This software is a technological marvel but, as you will know if you've ever watched live subtitles on TV, it does have an enchanting tendency now and again to mishear. So for example, with comic inevitability, "pastor" became "pasta".

Now, I wouldn't like you to think that as I sat in my improvised living-room office, I was paying Assembly business anything less than my full attention. But as I listened, I did scribble down a few of my favourite mis-transcriptions.



Many were delightfully random. "I'm going to suggest a..." came out on screen as "I'm kind of Chester..." and "a useful way forward" as "a useful wakeboard", while "Thank you, Moderator" turned into a coffee order: "Thank you, mocha right here". I wish I could recall what gave rise to "help us to bond with a crossbow and Shanghai".

But some were strangely apt. “The waters sing and everything that has breath praise God” became remarkably specific: “the Baltic Sea and everything that has breath praise God”. New heights of ecumenism were scaled when “the scope of this post” became “the scope of this pope”. “To craft worship” became “to cough worship”: yes, we’ve all been there, but maybe best avoided during a pandemic?

God can speak to us in surprising ways, but it is probably fanciful to reckon captioning mishaps among them. Still, I did begin to wonder if we were receiving some sort of commentary here.

“A point for information” became “a point for inflammation” – a dangerous moment in any debate. More alarmingly still, when we heard what “God says to our species”, the caption instead displayed what “God says to ash basis”. An echo of the time-honoured burial service: “ashes to ashes, dust to dust”?



The unfamiliar word “synod”, meanwhile, led the captioning software to some striking judgements. What had poor Eastern Synod done to be labelled simply “Eastern sin”? Conversely, the National Synod of Scotland was elevated to the “Senate of Scotland” while the National Synod of Wales must have been flattered (or else unsurprised) to emerge as “the National Centre of the World”. At one stage, “synod” came out as “tsunami”, which might strike a chord with Church Secretaries inundated with paperwork; at another as “send out”, which at least carries an encouraging sense of mission.

What of us, then? I was mystified when “East Midlands Synod” turned into “in Zico he’s mittens.” I was altogether more perturbed when the caption reported us as “Emergency mode”.

Emergency Mode, in some sense, is where every congregation has spent the last two years and more: scrambling to share in worship, pastoral care and social action when our church doors were closed, then fretting over who or what might be left as they reopened. And as the URC assembles in Swanwick, some might judge the whole denomination to be in Emergency Mode. It is 50 years this very week since Parliament enshrined the URC in law. The anniversary finds us contemplating a long, slow decline in place of 1972’s great vision: that as a spearhead of church reunification, the URC would be snuffed gloriously out of existence in a few short years.

But just as Christ assures us our species is more than just “ash basis”, so I believe the United Reformed Church has more life to come. Far from moribund, we play a vital role in countless local communities and in the wider family of Christ’s Church. We are confronting change, but change is in our DNA: ever renewing and reforming as we seek to join in the new things God is working amongst us.

Will our Jubilee be the year of the Lord’s favour, when we emerge definitively from Emergency Mode and at 50, embrace a fresh vision? Let us all pray that at The Hayes, our members of General Assembly will hear new prophecies and dream new dreams.

Synod Jubilee Celebration



50

Jubilee Celebration



Illustration by Mark Beech

**Commemorate -
Celebrate - Create!**

Saturday 10 September 2022

10.00am - 3.30pm at the **De Vere Jubilee Conference Centre**, Nottingham



Praise, **workshops** and **fun** for all ages

£5 per person including refreshments voucher

Under-18s free (must be accompanied)

Book now: email jubilee@urc5.org.uk

Around the East Midlands

We have been delighted to receive further news of the celebrations held by churches to commemorate Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and more.

St Andrew's United Reformed Church, Chesterfield

Members of **St Andrew's URC, Chesterfield** gathered after Pentecost Sunday worship to plant a rowan tree in the church garden in celebration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Every child had a chance to add some soil - some with a little help from Mum!

This rowan, also known as mountain ash, has yellow berries and joins the rowan with traditional orange.



After the tree planting the congregation gathered in the church hall for a buffet lunch prepared by members and to take part in a quiz about the Queen's life and reign.

Members were also encouraged to sponsor an olive tree through the project run by [Embrace the Middle East](#) to donate olive trees to Palestinian farmers to help preserve their right to their land and provide a source of income and sustenance.

Planting trees in the garden, encouraging wildlife and supporting the planting of olive trees in Palestine are all part of St Andrew's [Eco Church](#) commitment. The church achieved a **Silver Eco Church Award** in 2020.



Christ Church United Reformed Church, Leicester



Christ Church URC in Leicester marked the Queen's 70 years on the throne with a **Jubilee Picnic and Street Party**. With the weather proving less than clement, most people celebrated inside the church – although there were gazebos standing outside in the middle of Barbara Road.

The church was packed with people enjoying picnics, and the children were provided with games and a bouncy castle. The church was superbly decorated with flags, balloons and bunting and attenders enjoyed a rather special cake, too. All in all, the event was judged a great success.



Enderby United Reformed Church

In 1822 a group of dissenters gathered to build an Independent Chapel. This year **Enderby URC** celebrates 200 years since that happened. Commemorations began on Thursday 2 June, alongside celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee by holding a 'street party' inside the building.



The church's next event will be a **Flower Festival** over the weekend of **Saturday 25 to Sunday 26 June**. The event will be in the main church with refreshments to be served all day in the schoolroom. The festival will be open from 10.00am-5.00pm on the Saturday and 2.00-5.00pm on the Sunday. A special service at 10:30am, to which everyone is welcome, will be led by former minister the **Revd Mary Burgess**.

Another date for your diary is the weekend of Saturday 23 to Sunday 24 July, with the same opening hours as above, when the church will be hosting an **Art Exhibition** by local artists. Refreshments will be again served throughout the days. The Sunday service will be led by the **Revd Malcolm Fife**, also a former minister. All are welcome.

Induction of the Revd Chris Parker

Saturday 16 July 2.00pm
Wellingborough United Reformed Church

The Service of Induction for the **Revd Chris Parker** will be held at **Wellingborough URC** on **Saturday 16 July** at 2.00pm. Chris will be Inducted as minister of the newly-formed **Wellingborough and East Resource Area**, which comprises Wellingborough, Great Doddington, Dean, Yardley Hastings, Olney and Harrold LEP.

East Area Group
of
United Reformed Churches

Cordially invites you to the

Induction Service
of
Reverend Chris Parker

Saturday 16th July 2022 at 2.00pm

Followed by refreshments

High Street, Wellingborough NN8 4HW

RSVP 01933 278137
wellingboroughurc@hotmail.com
Friday 1st July 2022



If you would like to attend the Induction, please email wellingboroughurc@hotmail.com by **Friday 1 July**, indicating whether you will stay for refreshments and whether you have any dietary requirements.

The Service will also be live-streamed: joining instructions will be available on request from wellingboroughurc@hotmail.com from **Monday 4 July**.

Joint Venture Launches New Pioneering Hub



A new venture between the URC, the Congregational Federation, Church Mission Society, and the Seedbeds organisation has led to the creation of the **Newbigin Pioneering Hub**. The hub is named in honour of the inspirational URC minister and mission theologian, **Bishop Leslie Newbigin** and aims to offer a space for Pioneers to connect and learn.

A celebration of the new hub will also be held alongside the Newbigin Public Lecture at 1.00pm on **Saturday 2 July**, at the Lodge Road Community Church, Winson Green, Birmingham. Further information is available [on the URC website](#).

URC Children – Pray like Hannah

[URC Children](#) is the new umbrella for children aged 0 to 12-years-old connected with the United Reformed Church. To mark its launch next month, all local congregations are invited to '[Pray like Hannah](#)' throughout July for children.

Children have always been important to the life of the URC. **Dr Sam Richards**, Head of Children's and Youth Work, said:

"We want to help the whole Church to hear the voice and receive the blessing of children. **URC Children** will give a clear focus and identity for our youngest disciples."



In 1 Samuel, Hannah prays with such intensity for a child to secure the future of the family and the nation that Eli thinks she is drunk. So, **Pray Like Hannah** is a simple invitation to all churches is to pray passionately for children to know they are part of God's family.

Dr Richards explains:

"We recognise that not every local church has children present on a regular basis, and that many long for this to change. We want to honour the prayer ministry of all ages by equipping people for a focussed month of prayer for children across our churches – and we wait expectantly to see what God will do."



Churches are invited to use the following prayer each week during July:

**Listening God,
you hear us when we pour out our souls before you;
hear our prayer for all your children.
Give us faith like Hannah,
to pray to you for the life of our church
that we may be a place and a people
where your children are present, welcomed and valued.
Prepare us to hear you through them
and to be led by children closer to you.
Meet us in our prayers, in Jesus' name. Amen**

For full information about **Pray like Hannah**, including daily prayer suggestions, visit:
<https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/prayer-and-worship/pray-like-hannah/>

Introduction to Safeguarding for Elders

Thursday 21 July 2022 2.00pm

An information webinar is now available for Elders and those who would like to know more about the important safeguarding role that Elders have as trustees of local churches.



The webinar will enable Elders to:

- Gain an understanding of URC policies and how they underpin their role in relation to safeguarding.
- Understand their role as a trustee for the church and how this links to safeguarding.
- Understand the 5 safeguarding actions outlined by the government for churches as charities.

For more information or to book please contact **Carrie Kaunda**: carrie.kaunda@urc.org.uk

Digital Worship from the URC



The following digital resources are now available for churches to aid in worship planning, especially when struggling to 'fill the pulpit'.

These resources have been compiled by the URC's **Minister for Digital Worship**, the **Revd Andy Braunston**.

Daily Devotions - A daily **email** with a simple reading, reflection and prayer to help with discipleship. The **Daily Devotions** are also published as **podcasts** and are available in advance in the form of **booklets** to print off locally to give to those without internet access.

Sunday Worship - A weekly audio service, sent by email to Daily Devotions subscribers with the full text of the service included. Also available in advance, in text and MP3 format for local distribution to those unable to attend church.

Pulpit Supply - The weekly service in both audio and video format loaded into PowerPoint (and available in an alternative format for those without PowerPoint), giving everything needed for worship. All a local church needs is its own copyright licences, a laptop connected to the sound system and a data projector. The services are available around a month beforehand and can be adapted to suit local requirements.

Worship Notes - A resource to allow Elderships, lay preachers (and ministers) to produce a high-quality service. Prayers, comments on the readings which can help with building a sermon, and hymn suggestions are all given for each week of the year, alongside some Communion Prayers and Affirmations of Faith which might be used seasonally.

Coming soon - Small group resources based on series from the Daily Devotions daily reflections. Available from [Daily Devotions Archive United Reformed Church](#)

Hybrid Church Meet-up

Wednesday 6 July 7.30-9.00pm



Hybrid Church Meet-up

Wednesday 6th July 2022
7:30-9pm

Come along to
YOUR space to
share and learn..

- Share ideas and good practice 
- Hear valuable, experienced input 
- Gain inspiration on Children's and Youth Work, Community Outreach, Technology and Worship 



For more info, email:
jenny.mills@urc.org.uk
dan@media4ministry.co.uk



Meeting ID: 892 8553 7599
Passcode: 655777

Coronavirus: Synod Moderators' Updated Guidance

The Moderators of the 13 Synods of the United Reformed Church have updated their Coronavirus guidance as follows:



Covid-19 infections continue to spread, although the lower 'R-value' shows that the infection rate is slowing. Restrictions imposed by our various Governments have been lifted.

However, many people who form, and are served by, our churches are still vulnerable. Many now see the risks from Covid-19 as being lower because of vaccines and seasonal factors. Some people will continue to feel nervous about the risk to their health, and others will rightly want to be cautious about the possibility of passing infection to others.

We remind churches that the **Elders' Meeting** or equivalent council in a **Local Ecumenical Partnership** has the responsibility for mitigating all health and safety risks around their premises and operations. Government regulations no longer require the wearing of face coverings, although some will choose to do so and their decision must be respected by the local church.

We commend the practice of maintaining good hand hygiene, which has been shown to reduce the incidence of a number of other illnesses as well as Covid-19, so the ongoing provision of sanitiser is a sensible precaution where it is not practical to wash hands thoroughly with soap and water.

We should all be aware that it is likely we will see seasonal increases in Coronavirus, just as we do for 'flu and other respiratory infections. Even though the main Covid-19 variants currently in the UK tend to produce milder disease, the potential for more serious effects remains. Churches should therefore be ready to reintroduce appropriate precautions according to local circumstances at any time, whether or not they are mandated by legislation.

We believe that the experience gained in the last two years will help churches to respond appropriately. The Synod Moderators are only likely to offer further guidance if the UK Governments change their approach.

This guidance can also be downloaded at:
<https://urc.org.uk/coronavirus-synod-moderators-updated-guidance/>

Talking Climate Justice Tour from Christian Aid

Launching on Monday 4 July 7.00pm



Christian Aid invite you to join them as they launch the **Talking Climate Justice Tour** and find out how you can be part of change-making climate conversations. They write:

The next decade will be critical for action on the climate crisis as it drives and exacerbates poverty. The church must call for climate justice now and into the future.

Every successful social movement started with a conversation. And we're not just talking chit chat. From debt cancellation to the ending of apartheid, conversations that stoked anger at injustice and a passion for change moved people into action!

This year, we want to see thousands of powerful conversations that stir up action for climate justice in the church. Join us on the **Talking Climate Justice Tour**.

Join the launch on **Monday 4 July** to find out:

- Why the next decade is critical for poverty and climate
- How you and your church can make a difference
- How our conversations can build the power for transformative change
- How you can get involved in the Talking Climate Justice Tour
- Where you can find all the resources you need to talk climate justice with your church

To find out more about the Talking Climate Justice Tour visit:

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/campaigns/talking-climate-justice-tour>

Positively Rural: How Green Spaces Promotes Wellbeing

Thursday 14 July 1.00-2.30pm



Following previous sessions considering mental health, wellbeing and rural life, **Positively Rural** will be hearing from **Dr Jenny Mercer** and **Dr Debbie Clayton** from Cardiff Met University. Jenny and Debbie have a wealth of experience on the rural environment and its effects on health. They are currently part of a team evaluating an EcoTherapy project for Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust.

They will be joined by Lyndsay, a research student who has just completed her doctorate looking at bees as an intervention for those in recovery.

It is hoped that this session will prompt people to think about the resources we have available, whether it be a small hanging basket, a church garden, a graveyard, or an allotment, that could be used to promote Wellbeing in our communities.

You can register here: <https://220714positivelyrural.eventbrite.co.uk>

Ride and Stride to Support Historic Churches

Saturday 10 September 10.00am-6.00pm



Nottinghamshire Historic Churches Trust invites people to take part in its annual **Ride and Stride** event. Up to 80 churches around the County will be open to receive visitors, who are encouraged to walk or cycle between churches.

The Trust would also be delighted if URC churches in Nottinghamshire would like to take part and open their doors to visitors. This is the charity's biggest annual fundraiser, last year raising £14,000 in

Nottinghamshire, which is split 50/50 between the Trust and participating churches. Details of the event can be found at: <https://nottshistoricchurchestrust.org.uk/ridestride/>



Nottinghamshire Historic Churches Trust is a charity which exists to help with the maintenance of churches in the County, including Church of England, Baptist, Methodist and URC buildings. It offers grants of 25% or up to £5,000 for repair of pre-1960s fabric. There are also opportunities to become Friends of the Trust and go on organised visits with talks – and cake. For full information about the Trust and its work, visit <https://nottshistoricchurchestrust.org.uk/>.

Find Us Online



The [East Midlands Synod website](https://www.urb5.org.uk/) is the one-stop shop for all essential information: <https://www.urb5.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 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](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

The **Synod Office** is now open from **Monday to Thursday** each week. Please contact staff members by email in the first instance, as this will receive a direct response from the person with whom you wish to correspond. The Synod telephone line (**0115 960 9241**) is answered Monday-Thursday, 9.00am-3.00pm.

Arrangements remain under regular review and any update will be posted at: www.urb5.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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Laptop: photo by [Chris Montgomery](#) on [Unsplash](#)
“Caption”: photo by [Monica Flores](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Next edition: Thursday 7 July 2022

Please send all material for this E-Letter to both:
trainingpa@urc5.org.uk and training@urc5.org.uk

Copy deadline for next edition: 12 noon on **Monday 4 July 2022**