

Opening Reflection by Derek Graham

Training & Development Officer

Getting there...

It's the sound of summer. The thwack of willow on leather; the background drone of bumblebees and lawnmowers – and the chorus of “**Are we there yet?**” from the back seats of a million family car trips.

(My daughter holds the record: once, on a drive to Scotland from our Stapleford home, we stopped to refuel. “Is this Scotland?” she piped up. We had yet to leave Stapleford.)

But in this summer of 2021, “Are we there yet?” takes on a new level of anguish. By now, surely, we all thought we'd have come out the other end of the Covid-19 tunnel and found ourselves on the sunny uplands of the “new normal”.

Earlier this week, the Government lifted almost all legal restraints relating to the pandemic. The Press billed it as “**Freedom Day**”. So, are we there yet? Plenty have seized the day as if we were: casting aside face masks, bumping elbows at the bar, thronging back to nightclubs. “If not now, when?” is the new refrain.

True, the light at the end of the tunnel does begin to fill more of the windshield. At the same time, infections are rising, immunisation is far from complete and the WHO and others watch England's experiment with mounting concern. The vulnerable are feeling anything but free. Not to mention the new “pingdemic” of people instructed to self-isolate, leading to understaffed hospitals, cancelled trains, empty classrooms and unemptied bins. Those of us who have planned holiday trips (Yorkshire for me) may or may not get there at all.

What does this mean in our churches? We have been stepping gingerly back into our buildings – but there are still many gaps in the pews and our singing is muted. Like the leaders of other denominations, the URC's Synod Moderators [urge us to keep our masks on](#) in loving witness to our fellow worshippers.

Lately, it has felt we still have a long, long way to go in many other aspects of our public life. The inclusive, caring, multicultural nation that the England men's team seemed to model for a few shining weeks of Euro 2020? We're not there yet, not when their defeat (in the final, no less) unleashed a torrent of racial abuse.

The compassionate new global Britain our politicians promised? We're not there yet, not when our parliament has voted to claw back a drop in the ocean of national debt by slashing the aid support it had guaranteed for healthcare, family planning and girls' education in places of dire need.



A bright, green beacon of sustainability, ready to lead the world at the COP26 conference this November? Not when we're still contemplating new coal mines. We've made fine pledges and set targets, but have yet to act on anything like the scale required to meet them. So, are we there yet? I don't think so.

This season of pandemic has been described as our time in the wilderness: our certainties upturned, our plans dashed, our way ahead unclear. Better commentators than I have compared it to the travails of the Children of Israel, wandering the desert a full forty years after their flight from Egypt, the Promised Land postponed by their constant backsliding and back-biting. It is the biggest "Are we there yet?" in the Book.

Moses never does get there, although God permits him a mountaintop glimpse of Canaan before he dies. The Children of Israel attain the Promised Land at last – or their children do – but their arrival is no Happy Ever After: their continued lapses of faith lead to an endless cycle of exile, conquest and return.

If our vision of a Promised Land is no more than a return to life as it was before Covid, the comparison to the Israelites might not be terribly encouraging. But we are their heirs, and I wonder whether as followers of Jesus we can ever expect to be "there yet" in this life. Our call is to grow ever closer in resemblance to Christ, but show me the disciple who believes they've got there and I'll probably show you my heels.

Will we ever get there? Would we even recognise "there" if we did? Whether our focus is on the pandemic, or the whole journey of our lives, I'm convinced that our task is to walk through present darkness with our eyes fixed on the light, trusting that God will illuminate our path in time. A favourite hymn of mine puts it like this:

*So every day we're on our way,
for we're a travelling, wandering race;
we're the people of God.*

(Rejoice & Sing 547)

"Getting there": maybe that should be our hope. Ever walking the way of Jesus today. Ever reforming.

Earlier this month I had the honour of representing the East Midlands Synod at my first **General Assembly** (on Zoom, of course). It was a fascinating exercise in waiting upon the movement of the Spirit, discerning together where God wants the URC to go next – the very premise being that we're not there yet.

So the very weekend that a penalty shootout exposed residual racism in our land, General Assembly was attempting to cast the beam out of our own eye: contemplating how to overcome the historic lack of diversity in our leadership and become an actively anti-racist church. Elsewhere, we considered how to extend our ministry in the digital realm; how to respond to [Modern Day Slavery](#); and how best to [stand against](#) the exploitation of the occupied Palestinian territories. Meanwhile, a new group has embarked on a [Review of Church Life](#), to look afresh at what the calling of the URC may be in the decades ahead and whether that means reforming our structures and resources. With our 50th jubilee next year, it's a good time to ask where God wishes to lead us.

In the wider world, too, there is cause to walk hopefully this summer. Don't just look at those who have cast coronavirus caution to the winds, but the many others who continue to watch and care for the people around them. Look at the way people have spoken out in support of those inspiring young footballers, or in outrage at the Government's foreign aid reversal. Look at the way [young Christians are leading the way](#) on climate change, literally walking from the G7 in Cornwall to COP26 in Glasgow.

We can join in. We can be the ones to speak up for equality, campaign for compassion, march for better stewardship of God's good Earth. And yes, barring medical exemptions, we can keep our masks on a little longer and show our love for our neighbours.

Are we there yet? No. But let's pray that we're **getting there** – this moment, and always.

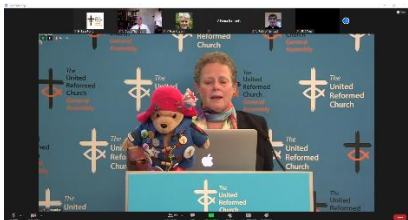
General Assembly 2021

Our Synod Clerk the **Revd Camilla Veitch** reports back on the recent meeting of General Assembly:

This took place online over four days, 9-12 July – a tiring but rewarding experience! Here are some of the issues that were discussed/agreed:



- A **Review Group** has been assembled to review the life, structures, resources and work of the URC to equip us better for the future
- A new post for a **Minister for Digital Worship** was created, one of the responsibilities being to continue to develop the URC's [Daily Devotions](#)
- [Several resolutions](#) were passed concerning **Israel and Palestine**, including calls to action for local church members to write to their MPs and to refrain from purchasing products produced in Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. Members are also asked to support Palestinian products available in the UK.
- It was agreed in principle that the **URC Pension Schemes** for Ministers and lay staff would move from Defined Benefit Schemes to alternative, most likely Defined Contribution Schemes
- A paper was adopted on how to gain recognition as a **Locally Recognised Worship Leader**
- A **Disciplinary Process** for [lay] office holders was adopted
- Plans for the **50th Anniversary** of the URC were shared, including a competition for hymn/songwriters, poets and rappers to submit entries for the Jubilee celebrations
- Assembly agreed to the creation of '**URC Children**' – an umbrella term to cover all work with children in the URC



...and so much more!! Whilst it was tiring being on Zoom for so long it was encouraging to see so many committed Christians from all around the URC family joining together for worship and to debate what it means to live out our faith in today's world. Please visit <https://urc.org.uk/general-assembly-2021.html> to read more about what took place at General Assembly and how those decisions affect and equip local churches for worship and service.

Revd Camilla Veitch
Synod Clerk

JPIC Forum: Climate Change, Divestment and COP26

An open **Forum** was hosted online on Thursday 15 July by the Synod's **Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation** group (JPIC), with a focus on the climate crisis.



Guest speaker **Adrian Shaw**, the Church of Scotland's Climate Officer until last year, led discussion of climate change and divestment from fossil fuels in conversation with **Tom Veitch**. Adrian also highlighted some ways for churches and individuals to bring pressure to bear ahead of the **COP26** conference in Glasgow in November, while general discussion included ways of supporting the Youth Christian Climate Network's pilgrimage from the site of the G7 meeting in Cornwall to COP26 in Scotland.



By kind permission of its attenders, the meeting was recorded and is available on the East Midlands Synod's [YouTube channel](https://youtu.be/MgL_rjS0TS0): to view it, please visit https://youtu.be/MgL_rjS0TS0.

If you would like to see Adrian Shaw's short briefing paper about COP26 and ways of getting involved, please email **Derek Graham** at training@urc5.org.uk.

Climate Sunday

Has your church held a **Climate Sunday Service** yet?

All churches are particularly encouraged to hold a Climate Sunday service this year, in the approach to **COP26**: for details, click on: [Climate Sunday | Service Resources | Worship | Commit | Speak Up](#).



This website is packed with helpful worship resources, including a [model service from the United Reformed Church](#) alongside many others. Here you can also register your service ahead of the national climate service in Glasgow on **5 September**, to have your church counted among the hundreds represented in that event.

Rise to the moment: Support the YCCN Relay

The **Young Christian Climate Network** (YCCN) has embarked on an ambitious relay across the UK to raise the message of climate justice ahead of COP26, carrying with them the sail of the unique boat they have constructed, with its message of “Rise to the Moment”.

Supported by **Christian Aid** and many others, the relay kicked off in Cornwall after the G7 Summit in June and is gradually making its way through Great Britain with the aim of reaching Glasgow, the host city of **COP26**, in November. YCCN invite people of **all ages** to get involved – young, old or in between – to help them campaign for systemic change on a local and global scale.

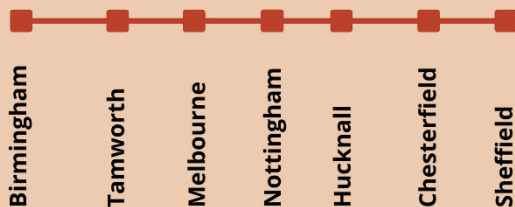


There are numerous ways to [support the relay](#). For example, you could:

- Register to **walk** one or more of the daily stages
- Arrange a “**meet and greet**” and offer refreshments
- Offer to **accommodate** one of the walkers overnight
- Help to get **local leaders and media** involved
- Plan a “**tributary**” walk to meet up with the main route
- Provide “**on call**” support for the walkers
- Show your support by making paper **prayer boats** (*see next article*)

CHURCHES' RELAY TO COP26: MIDLANDS

Birmingham to Sheffield
27th August to 5th September



Join our pilgrimage. Stand for climate justice.
Info, sign up, and Q+A sessions at yccn.uk.



JOIN US ON THE ROUTE

- ✓ Lead Walkers
- ✓ On Call Support
- ✓ Meet + Greet
- ✓ Overnight Host
- ✓ Boat Transport

HELP WITH EVENTS

Get involved in events in Birmingham, Nottingham Sheffield, and more!

No event in your area yet? Help us set one up!

TIME TO GIVE?

Help with admin, comms, and more!

AS A CHURCH

HOST
Host walkers overnight, hold a service, prayer vigil, or other event!

WALK
Join as a group if you're on the route.

CAMPAIGN
Use our Local Celebration Guide to hold events or campaign politically.



SIGN UP

We need as many people involved as possible to join us

and our boat of hope on its journey to COP26! Sign up and find out more information at yccn.uk. Not sure how you can help sign up for a Q&A session at yccn.uk. Now is the time to





The relay is scheduled to pass through the **East Midlands Synod** area during the week commencing Monday 30 August:

Monday 30 August: Netherseal to **Melbourne**

Tuesday 31 August: Melbourne to **Aston-on-Trent**

Wednesday 1 September: Aston-on-Trent to **Nottingham**

Thursday 2 September: Nottingham to **Hucknall**

Friday 3 September: Hucknall to **Huthwaite**

Saturday 4 September: Huthwaite to **Chesterfield**

Sunday 5 September: Chesterfield to Sheffield

Already, Synod Moderator the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke** plans to join the walk on Friday 3 September, while **St Andrew's URC** has arranged to offer hospitality to the pilgrims when they reach Chesterfield. The East Midlands Synod's **JPIC** group is keen to encourage others to show their support and help campaign for climate justice: visit the YCCN website at <https://www.yccn.uk/> for more information or email **Derek Graham** on training@urc5.org.uk to join in the Synod's response.

Send your Prayer Boats to COP26

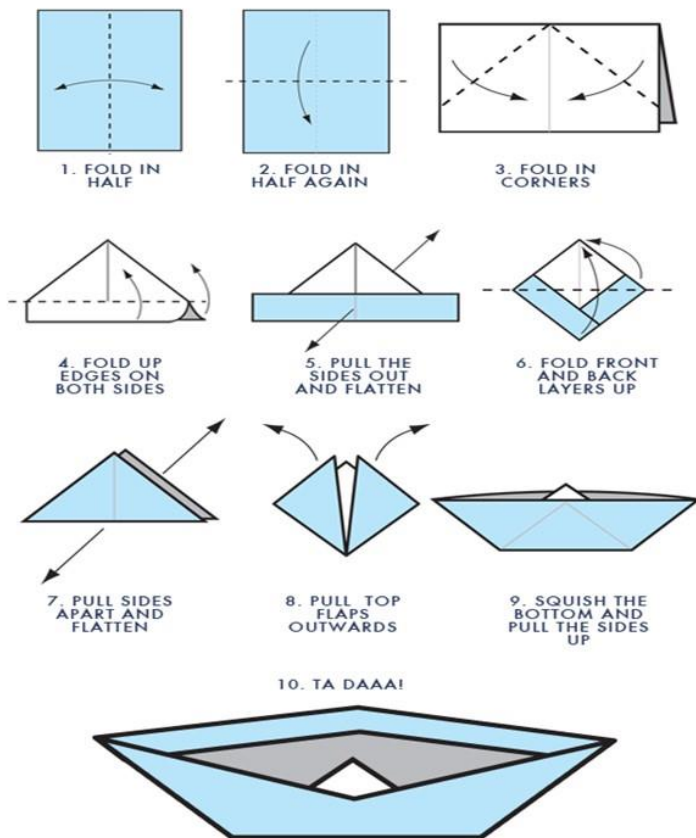
Christian Aid is campaigning ahead of COP26 – and supporting the YCCN relay – with the suggestion that churches get involved in crafting paper prayer boats.

Christian Aid says:

The climate crisis is a storm that is affecting us all, yet we're not all in the same boat! Many of the countries around the world who are most affected by the climate emergency are also the ones least equipped to deal with it. Join with others around the country to pray for the climate crisis and to send a message to politicians that they must prioritise those who are most affected.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED:

1. Make your prayer boats using the instructions below or on [YouTube](#). Why not invite your local MP to join you?
2. Share images of your boats on Facebook or Twitter with the hashtag **#prayforCOP26** to join an 'online fleet'. Tag your MP if they're on social media.
3. Display the boats in your church or school as a focus for prayer.
4. If you are supporting the **YCCN** relay, take your boats along
5. Finally, send them on to **Christian Aid** - we'll be taking all the boats to **COP26**
[Post to: **Christian Aid**, 35-41 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7RL]



Latest Covid-19 Guidance from the URC

Responding to changing guidance from the UK Government, the URC's Synod Moderators have updated their Coronavirus advice in a new document named [New Freedoms, Same Responsibilities](#):

https://urc.org.uk/images/Coronavirus_resources/New_Freedoms_Same_Responsibilities.pdf



Subsequently, the Government updated its specific guidelines for [Places of Worship in England](#). On behalf of fellow Moderators, the **Revd Steve Faber** (Moderator of the West Midlands Synod) has summarised its main points, together with a helpful response about the wearing of face masks. This can be found at: <https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3873-urc-s-summary-of-government-s-guidance-for-places-of-worship-for-england> .

URC Holiday Forum

Your Derbyshire summer staycation awaits you...

After nearly 18 months away, the URC's [Holiday Forum](#) returns to the beautiful English countryside at [The Hayes](#) Conference Centre, Swanwick from **Saturday 21 to Friday 27 August**.



Theme leader **Anthony G Reddie** will address the topic of Living With and Loving Difference, with worship led by the **Revd Jane Rowell**. Places for the week are being snapped up quickly so you are advised **book now** to avoid disappointment at: <http://www.urcholidayforum.org.uk/wpsite/>

The organisers are determined to make attenders feel comfortable and safe and to follow all the [guidelines](#) set out by The Hayes. They will encourage:

- mask wearing
- bringing your [free lateral flow tests](#) (and testing before you travel)
- traffic light system for awareness
- social distancing as much as possible
- creating space for distance in rooms



For those who can't attend in person, the worship and theme talks, along with some evenings of the conference timetable, will be **live streamed** making this a Forum first - a hybrid conference!

To secure a virtual place, simply sign up at: <http://www.urcholidayforum.org.uk/wpsite/booking-form/>

*Online access will be based on a **Pay What You Can** system with a suggested donation of **£25 for the week or £5 per day** (via BACS/transfer)*

Whether you choose to take part online or in person, the **Holiday Forum** team can't wait to welcome you back for a week of **faith, fun and fellowship**.

URC Leaders Condemn International Aid Cut

The **United Reformed Church** along with the **Baptist Union of Great Britain** and the **Methodist Church** have called the UK Government's decision to renege on the UK's international development commitment unfair, unwise and immoral.



The Moderators of General Assembly, the **Revd Clare Downing** and **Mr Peter Pay**, joined their Baptist and Methodist counterparts in condemning the vote as heartless and self-defeating. They note how other major economies have shown leadership during the pandemic by stepping up their international development programmes, and remark that the UK's decision stands in contrast to its recent announcement of the largest spending on defence since the end of the Cold War.

Their full text can be found at:

<https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3871-church-leaders-condemn-the-decision-to-renege-on-the-uk-s-international-development-commitment>

From URC Children and Youth

Talking about... Opening Up?

Thursday 29 July 7.00pm

A brand new series of online gatherings is being launched by the team of Children's and Youth Work specialists from around the Synods, entitled "Talking about...". These monthly gatherings will provide all those engaging with children, families and young people, whether as volunteers or employed workers, an opportunity to meet together, to build networks, and to talk through some of the issues common to many.

The first session, on **Thursday 29 July**, will be focused on opening up some of our children's and youth groups post-lockdown – a topic which will be relevant to many as we ease out of restrictions and consider our next steps. Join in on Zoom to find out what you need to know about:

- **Rules and regulations**
- **Activities**
- **Risk assessment**



Book your ticket at: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/opening-up-tickets-161875254243>

Summer Day Out with URC Youth

JOINT MIDLANDS SYNOD
URC YOUTH
SUMMER DAY OUT

**AUGUST
14TH
2021**

**WE'RE
GOING TO
THE ZOO!
YOU CAN
COME TOO**

Twycross Zoo
Burton Road
Atherstone
CV9 3PX

Register your interest
<https://bit.ly/3wFwXW0>
Entry Ticket Donation of £5.00

or contact
cydo@urcwestmidlands.org.uk
07577867024

The United Reformed Church Youth

As an extension of the **Final Fridays Joint Midlands URC Youth Events**, we are delighted to offer an invitation to join together with other young people in person on a day trip to **Twycross Zoo** on **Saturday 14 August**. This is open to anyone aged 11-25 years and connected with a URC Church or group within the East or West Midlands Synods.

The cost of the admission ticket is being subsidised: while a donation of **£5** per person is being requested, this should not be a barrier to attendance and everyone is welcome to attend. As this is an arranged group booking final numbers need to be with the venue by **30 July**. Please encourage everyone who might be

interested to register their interest on the Eventbrite page at <https://bit.ly/3wFwXW0> before that date. It is hoped that individuals or local church groups can coordinate transport, but if you need assistance or have any other questions, please contact **Richard Knott**, Children and Youth Development Officer at: cydo@urcwestmidlands.org.uk.

Assembly 2022 - JUBILEE

Friday 28 – Saturday 30 January 2022

Whitemoor Lakes, Alrewas, Staffordshire

Book ahead now for a weekend of fun, friendship and fellowship including:

Youth Decides – discussions/Workshops and keynote talks/Worship/Silent disco

Cost: Early Bird price on or before 11 November 2021 is **£115**, from 12 November 2021 onwards is **£145**.

Age: Year 10 students and up to 26 years inclusive (the age limit has been extended for 2022 only due to the cancellation of Youth Assembly 2021). Creche available.

JUBILEE!

**28-30
January '22**

**Whitemoor Lakes,
Alrewas, Staffs**

COMMEMORATE THE PAST
CELEBRATE THE NOW
CREATE THE FUTURE

**Youth
Assembly
2022**

The United Reformed Church Youth

Find out more about Youth Assembly at: www.urc.org.uk/urc-youth-urc.html

Situations Vacant



Finance and Governance Officer East Midlands Synod

Full time – 37.5 hours per week

Annual Salary £35,000 - £40,000

The East Midlands Synod and Trust are seeking a qualified and experienced person for this important role.

Experience in financial management, banking and investments along with the governance needs of the charity are essential.

An application pack can be accessed by emailing **Mrs Chris Willis** on admin@urc5.org.uk or via the Synod website:

<https://urc5.org.uk/content/advert-synodtrust-finance-and-governance-officer>

Closing date for applications: midday on Monday 26 July 2021

Interviews: Wednesday 1 September 2021

Find Us Online



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

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

As of Monday 19 July 2021, following the Government's relaxation of Covid-19 regulations, the **Synod Office** has reopened from Monday to Thursday each week. As a continued precaution, members of staff are attending the premises in two alternating "bubbles". In the first instance please contact the staff by email in the usual way, as this will receive a direct response from the staff member you wish to correspond with. The office phone (**0115 960 9241**) will be 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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Free-to-use photography on [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com): boy in car by Tim Mossholder; couple wearing face masks by Julian Wan; child in mask by Taylor Brandon; "Open" sign by Jennifer Bonauer

***This e-letter now takes a break for the month of August:
we wish you a safe, healthy and blessed summer.***

Next edition: Thursday 2 September 2021

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 30 August 2021**