

E-LETTER 347

8 July 2021

Opening Reflection by the Revd David Featonby

Convenor of the Lay Ministries group

Dear Friends

What an honour to be asked to write the opening reflection for this edition of the e-letter. I am sure that you will concur that this has proved a valuable instrument with which to keep us all informed, especially during the pandemic caused by Covid 19.

The various restrictions, under which we have had to live for over a year now, have severely limited what we have been able to do and who we have been able to meet with in person. The months since March 2020 have been for many of us ones of frustration, worry, maybe anger and for some, sadly, ones of grief and mourning. However, the pandemic has also offered us the opportunity to reflect upon what is really important in life and what we can do without if required. I rejoice in the way that so many folk have risen to the challenges that the pandemic has caused in a wide variety of creative and inspiring ways.

However, we are now being promised by our politicians a return to some kind of normality, at the time of writing, from 19 July. Some people in the media and beyond have titled this 'Freedom Day'. It is, I suppose, a catchy title and one that sits well as headline material on the front cover of a newspaper. However, it got me thinking about what the word 'freedom' really means: have we ever been truly free?



We use this adjective in combination with many nouns, such as free speech, free running, free gift, free thinking, free style, free radical, free trade and so on and so forth. But what if we stop for a minute and ask ourselves, 'for a Christian, what does being free really look like?' I believe that one of the greatest gifts our Divine Creator God has given us is 'free will'. We were never designed to be in slavery to God, but rather to be free to think for ourselves and come to our own conclusions about what life is all about and the kind of things we truly value. God never forces his love upon us; to do so would in truth be paradoxical. The term 'forced love' is indeed an oxymoron. God loves us simply because we exist. There is no need to try and analyse what this means, despite the fact that sadly all religions have a preoccupation to do so. The result is that we place restrictions upon ourselves such that our freedom in God becomes restricted by our own set of rules and regulations. As religious people it then becomes far too easy to take away the freedom from another, however inadvertently that might be.

I am of course not advocating a free for all, self-centred, hedonistic and anarchic approach to life, but a call for God's people to witness to the freeing nature of God's love, available for all to experience. A love not held back from us because of our personal circumstances, who we are: our sexuality, gender or race. This is true freedom, to know we are unconditionally loved by the one who made us and to recognise this same gift in the other. And not just to recognise it but to live out God's amazing love, as best we can, with all of Creation.

Rather than quoting here a Bible verse, I leave you with the words of 'And can it be' from the hymn writer **Charles Wesley**:

'I woke, the dungeon flamed with light, My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee.'

Enjoy your freedom and feel loved and blessed.

David Featonby

Covid-19 Guidance

On Monday 5 July, the Prime Minister announced the Government's decision in principle to relax most of the remaining Covid-19 restrictions, with effect from **Monday 19 July**.

This remains subject to confirmation by a further announcement next Monday (12 July) and by updated Government advice for places of worship. However, at time of publication it appears likely that from 19 July, the rules regarding restricted capacity, social distancing, the wearing of masks indoors and the prohibition of communal singing will all become matters for the judgement of individuals and organisations rather than Government mandate.

The planned relaxation comes against a backdrop of rising infections on the one hand and the success of the NHS vaccination programme on the other. All Government ministers and advisers have been clear that risks from Covid-19 will remain. As and when nationally imposed restrictions are lifted, local churches will assume full responsibility for the management of these risks in their own contexts.

Please continue to watch the Synod website www.urc5.org.uk and the national URC site www.urc.org.uk/coronavirus, where any official update on behalf of the United Reformed Church will be shared.

General Assembly 2021



The URC's key decision-making body, **General Assembly**, holds its annual meeting this weekend, from **Friday 9 to Monday 12 July.**

Members of General Assembly are taking part via Zoom, and the meeting will be livestreamed on the URC's <u>website</u>, <u>Facebook page</u> and <u>YouTube channel</u> for all to watch. Church members everywhere are encouraged to view part of the proceedings over the four days

and gain a flavour of what General Assembly is about. This year topics under discussion include action towards an anti-racist church, the future of Pilots, disciplinary processes for ministers and office holders, safeguarding, the URC's pension scheme, the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, and the URC's 50th jubilee.

Papers, including the Book of Reports, can be found at: https://urc.org.uk/general-assembly-archive.html

In particular, URC churches and members are warmly invited to join in with General Assembly's **Sunday worship service** on Sunday 11 July at 11.00am. Some churches have even taken up the suggestion of making it their own weekly act of worship. The preacher is the **Revd Clare Downing** and the service will be livestreamed via the URC's website and Facebook page from 11.00am: visit bit.ly/URCwelcome or bit.ly/URCfacebook.



Congratulations to our Former Moderator

We send our warmest congratulations to our former Moderator the **Revd Terry Oakley**, who celebrates the **50**th **anniversary of his Ordination** tomorrow, Friday 9 July. Terry and his wife Joan celebrate their Golden Wedding Anniversary later this month, on Tuesday 27 July – so double congratulations are in order.

Terry, who was Moderator of the **East Midlands Synod** from 2003-11, sends us the following message:

Thank you for remembering and marking this anniversary.

My ministry has from the beginning been ecumenical, from training and in the three pastorates I served as well as when I worked from Church House, in Northern Synod and as Moderator of East Midlands Synod. It has been interesting, challenging and fulfilling to be a minister thanks to the friends and colleagues I have worked with. I am particularly grateful to the minister and congregation of Keyworth, who welcomed Joan and I and supported us, and to the staff and colleagues of the Synod office.



My faith has changed considerably since Ordination fifty years ago, but I still feel a strong loyalty to the United Reformed Church because of its commitment to Unity, inclusion of all ages and ethnicities and to safeguarding. I continue to cherish all that the URC means to me. Thank you.

JPIC Forum on Climate Change, Divestment and COP26

Thursday 15 July 7.30-8.30pm

The next open **Forum**, hosted by the Synod's **Justice**, **Peace and Integrity of Creation** group (JPIC), will focus on the crucial issues of **climate change** and **divestment from fossil fuels** in the year when the UK will be hosting the **COP26** climate change conference in Glasgow in November. The hour-long meeting will be held by Zoom at 7.30pm on **Thursday 15 April**.

Many of the recent natural disasters that have hit the headlines, like the extreme temperatures and wildfires in Canada, have been attributed to the effects of climate change. With global warming and bio-diversity loss requiring global solutions and action, many of us, both as individuals and church members, may feel there is little we can do to bring about change. However, we cannot remain passive in the face of this environmental crisis – so our discussions at the Forum will be exploring the sort of



actions we can take, including campaigning, lobbying politicians and big business, and other strategic actions. These questions will be the main focus for our discussion and will be relevant to all our churches, whether or not they have already registered as **Eco Churches**.



The discussion will be led by **Adrian Shaw**, who was the Church of Scotland's Climate Officer between 2007 and 2020. He was heavily involved in the debates about divesting from fossil fuel companies and has been part of consultations with other churches, politicians, oil company boards, investors, financiers and the general public. He is a volunteer with **Eco-Congregation Scotland** and an active supporter of faithbased environmental action. He will share his experience of the journey so far and the opportunities that COP26 presents.

If you have a question for Adrian, or a concern you would like the Forum to address, please send it to **Tom Veitch** on tom-veitch20@gmail.com **by Monday 12 July** – or if you would like to attend please email Tom at the same address for further details and to receive the Zoom joining instructions.

The Journey to COP26

An "Explainer" by our Green Apostle

In just under four months' time, at the beginning of November in Glasgow (Covid permitting), the United Kingdom will host the **26**th **United Nations Climate Change Conference**. COP stands for 'Conference of the Parties' and most of 197 nations are expected to be represented. This is the decision-making body of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assesses scientific, technical and socio-economic information related to human-induced climate change and produces reports and guidelines on measures to reduce and adapt to climate change.



The great strength of the **Conference of the Parties** is that the worries of poor nations should carry as much weight as the concerns of the rich. In the formal negotiations, governmental representatives (even Prime Ministers and Presidents) and UN officials agree action. In the **'Blue Zone'**, experts and policymakers debate how to make progress in practice. In the **'Green Zone'**, Non-Governmental Organisations, campaigners, businesses and others share knowledge, insights and aspirations. Much of the essential preparatory work is now well underway.

In 2015, the pivotal **COP21** in Paris (influenced by reports of the IPCC) agreed the 'Paris Climate Accord' (which came into effect in 2020). The importance of the Accord is that it includes legally binding commitments by the major greenhouse gas-emitting countries to cut pollution and to strengthen their commitments over time. Unfortunately, it is widely considered that the commitments to date (if honoured) would at best limit global warming to about 3 degrees C. In 2018 the IPCC published a report on global warming of 1.5 degrees C, showing that the consequences of warming by that amount alone would be serious and of warming by 2.0 degrees C would be severe (for instance, the destruction of nearly all the world's coral and considerable suffering for some of the world's poorest people).

People in the front line adapting to climate change, the leaders of vulnerable nations, agencies like **Christian Aid** and **Tearfund**, environmentalists, activists, campaigners and the churches are therefore investing a great deal of hope in COP26. It is essential that the major emitting countries submit and commit to much tougher long-term goals and to actions that could keep global warming well below 2 degrees C. In addition, wealthy countries need to provide much more assistance to poor and vulnerable ones. The Conference presents a great opportunity for the United Kingdom to set an example and to take a lead and there are many ways in which we as individuals and churches can encourage and support this effort both practically and in prayer.

Charles Jolly

Green Apostle

Talking Absolute Worship

A free resource for ministers, lay preachers and all worship leaders

During lockdown, the URC's **South Western Synod** started a project called **Talking Absolute Worship**.



Each week, a panel of preachers discusses the **Lectionary** texts: how we might preach them and how the rest of worship might be shaped around them (art, music, activities...) Each edition is available both in video form and as an audio podcast, with episodes made available in advance for those worship leaders who like to think ahead.

The idea is not to do all the work for preachers, but that they listen or watch long enough to be inspired with an idea or an "angle" that they

can then run with in their

preaching and worship leading. The style is

designed to be like eavesdropping on a conversation between friends grappling together with the Lectionary texts. The first half of the discussion covers preaching, the second half covers everything else and listeners are encourage to skip through until they find something useful.





The podcast version can be found through most podcast applications (Spotify, iTunes, Google etc) by searching for "Talking Absolute Worship" or from the podcast page: https://taw.buzzsprout.com/

You can also stay in touch with the latest releases by following the Facebook Page: https://www.facebook.com/TalkingAbsoluteWorship

New edition of In GEAR out now

After a long gap, the Summer 2021 edition of In GEAR is now available online. In GEAR is published by GEAR, the Group for Evangelism and Renewal in the United Reformed Church.

This latest edition plus numerous back copies can be found at: http://www.gear.org.uk/publications/in-gear-magazine/

You can download the PDF version by clicking on the relevant front page view, or complete the form on the web page to be sent a paper copy (or multiple copies to distribute). You can also go straight to the new edition by clicking on the image here.



Personal News

It is with great sadness that we bring news of the deaths of the following retired ministers:

North Western Synod reports that the **Revd Glyn Eatock** died peacefully on Sunday 27 June 2021. Glyn served at: Guisborough & Lingdale (1963-69); Hope, Denton & Audenshaw (1969-72); Bispham (1974-90); Claremont, Blackpool (1988-90); and Leyland (1990-99). He retired to Lytham St Annes in 1999 where he became a strong voice in both the local congregation and Amnesty International. Our thoughts and prayers are with Glyn's wife Mary and his daughters Yvonne and Caroline.

South Western Synod reports that the **Revd Denis Newman**, formerly of the **East Midlands Synod**, died peacefully on Wednesday 30 June 2021. Denis served at: Wesleyan Reform Union (1956-63); Dean Congregational (1963-65); Bunyan Meeting, Bedford (1965-75); Abbots Road & Wycliffe, Leicester (1976-80); East Leicester Group (1980-1985); Grimsby (1985-94); and Minehead (1994-99). In retirement he was a member at Taunton URC. His funeral will be held there on Wednesday 21 July at 2.00pm: if you would like to take part in the funeral via Zoom, please email modpa@urc5.org.uk to receive the link. Our thoughts and prayers are with Denis's family and friends.

North Western Synod reports that the **Revd John Hetherington** died on Sunday 4 July 2021. John served at: Lancashire District (1986); and Windermere (1986-92). His funeral will be held at Carver Uniting Church on Friday 23 July following a private woodland burial. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife Mandy.

Impact of Covid-19 on Bereavement and Grief

Call for participants in research study

NatCen Social Research that works for society

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is conducting research on people's experience of bereavement during the Covid-19 pandemic. This will explore how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected bereavement, funeral practices, mental health support and responses to public health messaging.

They would like to interview 30 bereaved people from a variety of social, cultural, and religious backgrounds, with a second, follow-up interview taking place six months later.

The aim of the research is to improve people's bereavement journey by informing key stakeholders of their mental health support needs, how funeral practices can be improved, and requirements around public health messaging.

Participants will be offered a £15 voucher for each interview to thank them for their participation. To learn more about the study or to find out about taking part in this confidential research interview, please click the link below: natcen.ac.uk/bereavement

From URC Children and Youth

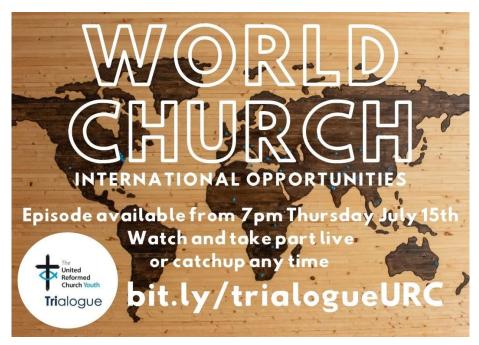


The **Final Fridays Joint Midlands URC Youth Events** are taking a short break in July - but are planning to offer a **Day Out** in August!

It has been great to gather a group of young people online in recent months for our Final Fridays - Joint Midlands URC Youth Events. We have decided to take a break in July but are hoping (*God willing*) to arrange a day out in mid-August, open to anyone in the **URC Youth** age range of 11-25 years. If you know young people who might like to be involved please get in touch: it would be brilliant to have as many young people as possible to get together and enjoy this opportunity.

Trialogue: World Church – International Opportunities

The next episode of **Trialogue** from URC Youth (Season 4, episode 3) is available from 7.00pm on Thursday 15 July, with a focus on **World Church – International Opportunities**. Visit bit.ly/trialogueURC.



PART OF THE URC YOUTH RE-ASSEMBLED MONTHLY PROGRAMME

Let's Celebrate: Children and Young People in the URC

Wednesday 21 July 7.30-8.45pm



The URC's **Children's and Youth Work Committee and URC Youth** invite you to **'Let's celebrate: children and young people in the URC'**, a General Assembly fringe meeting.

Come and share in an uplifting hour focusing on all that has been happening with 0 to 25s, thanking God and praying for the next steps. The session takes place on Wednesday 21 July from 7.30pm to 8.45pm - please book to secure your free place here.

Living Faith with 5-11s

A FREE conference over three evenings for all those engaging with 5-11s in faith settings

A free online conference on **Living Faith with 5-11s** takes please over three evenings in November. This conference is sponsored by **URC Children** and **ROOTS for Churches**. Sessions are for all those relating to, leading church for and working with 5-11s: parents and grandparents, children's workers and church leaders, volunteers of all ages. Each session will explore aspects of living faith through listening, learning and loving:



Living Faith with 5-11s at home

Speaker: Alison Hulse - Tuesday 2 November 2021 - 7.15pm to 9.00pm

Living Faith with 5-11s in all age church

Speaker: Martin Adams - Thursday 4 November 2021 - 7.15pm to 9.00pm

Living Faith with 5-11s in children's groups

Speaker: Ruth White - Tuesday 9 November 2021 - 7.15pm to 9.00pm

Participants may choose to attend one, two or all of the live sessions by registering for tickets. Please register here. Highlights of sessions will also be available to view via **YouTube** after the event.

Youth Assembly 2022 - JUBILEE

Friday 28 – Saturday 30 January 2022 Whitemoor Lakes, Alrewas, Staffordshire



A weekend of fun, friendship and fellowship including: Youth Decides – discussions/Workshops and keynotes 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 for children 0-5 years old.

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

Book your place at: www.urc.org.uk/urcya before 1 January 2021 or contact the Children's & Youth Work Office for a booking form. Post: Children's & Youth Work Office, United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT. Telephone: 020 7916 8683. Email: children.youth@urc.org.uk

Further information will be sent once your booking form has been received. If you or your group need a leader to accompany you, please get in touch with the Children's & Youth Work Office on 020 7916 8683 or children.youth@urc.org.uk

The Big Cliff Weekend

Saturday 24 & Sunday 25 July 2021



The **Big Cliff Weekend** is a one-off gathering on the **Cliff College** site to worship, learn, relax and celebrate together.

Philippa Hanna and Tom Smith (Soul Survivor) will be leading worship and performing some of their own music, and there are also appearances from Daughters of Davis, OTC from the Message Trust, comedian Tony Vino and more.

As well as excellent worship and teaching, there will be activities for all ages across the site. Cliff College invites you to come with your family and friends and spend the weekend praising God and enjoying the beautiful college site in all its summer glory. You could even bring your whole youth group along.

The **Big Cliff Weekend** accommodation options include camping, caravanning and single and double ensuite bedrooms. Those looking for a longer break may buy an extended Big Cliff Weekend ticket and stay on the site for an extra two or four nights. Cliff College is a perfect base from which to visit Chatsworth House and Bakewell and explore the Peak District.

For more information or to book tickets please visit: https://cliffcollege.ac.uk/venue/big-cliff-weekend

URC Buildings Forum Conference

Wednesday 21 July 11.30am to 1.00pm

The second **URC Buildings Forum online conference** takes place on **Wednesday 21 July 2021**, starting at 11.30am and finishing around 1.00pm. The conference will explore the vision and mission context for URC buildings and assets, including the question: do we need a building to be 'church' in the 21st Century? Addressing this topic is **Martin Haywood**, the convenor of the Mission Enablers Network and the Southern Synod



Mission Officer. The Forum also aims to host short talks from two separate places of worship – one in a rural community and the other in a multi-cultural community – about how they have used their buildings creatively.

The conference is open to all URC members. Please email mission@urc.org.uk to sign up for this event.

The third and final conference for 2021 is being planned for **Thursday 14 October** from 7.00pm to 8.30pm, the conference will focus on environmental issues for church buildings, including Eco-Church and Eco-Congregation.

Refugees at Home



The UK-based charity **Refugees at Home** has issued an appeal for hosts who may be prepared to offer a welcome to refugees and asylum seekers. They explain:

Refugees at Home has helped thousands of refugees and asylum seekers to avoid destitution and homelessness. We match guests with our generous hosts who would like to offer a safe, welcoming place to stay, for the length of time that they can manage. Many of our guests go on to receive Refugee status and eventually to find work and a place of their own. Our vision is a society where every refugee and asylum seeker facing homelessness has a safe place to stay and a chance to rebuild their life.

Refugees at Home matches hosts and guests, supports hosts throughout the placement and arranges guests' move-on. Hosts offer placements for as long as their circumstances permit. To date, the charity has:

- · Hosted guests from over 75 countries
- Placed 2,386 guests in total
- · Supported a total of 185,416 placement nights

Could you host, or do you know someone who might be interested? Can you help spread the word? You can get in touch on info@refugeesathome.org or visit www.refugeesathome.org



Become a Lay Preacher or Worship Leader



Have you ever considered training to lead worship? The United Reformed Church has devised new pathways to become an **Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher**, or to work toward the new designation of **Locally Recognised Worship Leader**.

A new course to train as an **Assembly Accredited Worship Leader** begins this September, led by one of the URC's Resource Centres for Learning. Funding support is available. If you would like to find out more, please contact Lay Preaching Commissioner **Mark Hodgson** (<u>markgoodwillhodgson@gmail.com</u>) and Training & Development Officer **Derek Graham** (<u>training@urc5.org.uk</u>).

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



Compliance Officer London

Permanent contract, 35 hours per week Salary: £40,113

Do you have the skills to support the United Reformed Church's compliance with legislation and regulation?

A new role working closely with the Deputy General Secretary for Administration and Resources to ensure the activities of Church House and its staff are compliant. This is a varied role which touches several areas of the organisation's life but with common themes of service, support and compliance. Providing advice, information and training to the wider United Reformed Church and its people is a key feature.

You will play a vital part in ensuring that the Deputy General Secretary is carefully supported in these important areas, acting as an administrative anchor, balancing a range of responsibilities confidentially and carefully.

You are educated to degree level or equivalent with exceptional attention to detail. An excellent communicator, you are organised and used to working to deadlines. You have worked in a regulated environment and have experience of data protection legislation and practice. Legal experience would be a distinct advantage.

We can offer you a flexible and friendly work environment with a comprehensive benefits package.

We are happy to talk about flexible working.

If you are interested in working for us and can meet the above requirements, please contact us/see our website for an application form (noting that we do not accept CVs):

Human Resources, the United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT 020 7691 9871 recruitment@urc.org.uk www.urc.org.uk/vacancies

Closing date for applications: 12 noon, Monday 19 July 2021

Interview date: Tuesday 3 August 2021

Find Us Online



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



Our <u>East Midlands Synod Facebook Page</u> 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 <u>Synod Youth and Children's Facebook Page</u> shares news and ideas related to our work with young people: https://www.facebook.com/URCEastmidlandsYouth/



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

Contacting East Midlands Synod

At time of publication, the **East Midlands Synod Office** building remains closed. 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.urc5.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 <u>Unsplash</u>: figure with arms outstretched by <u>Pablo Heimplatz</u> at Mount Cook, New Zealand; "Climate Justice Now" by <u>Markus Spiske</u>; "Fossil Fool" by <u>Callum Shaw</u>; open Bible by <u>Stephen Radford</u>

Next edition: Thursday 22 July 2021

Please send all material for this E-Letter to both: modpa@urc5.org.uk and training@urc5.org.uk and modpa@urc5.org.uk and training@urc5.org.uk and training@urc5.org.uk and modpa@urc5.org.uk and training@urc5.org.uk and modpa@urc5.org.uk and training@urc5.org.uk and modpa@urc5.org.uk and <a href="modpa