

EMURCE No: 313 – 26th March 2020 EXTRA EDITION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

THE CHALLENGE OF CORONAVIRUS

The coronavirus pandemic has hit all our churches hard. Church services have ceased, premises have been closed and community activities cancelled. Synod office staff have worked long hours to share information and advice as they receive it and respond to questions from the churches. Our staff now all work from home and we have held our first virtual staff meeting by video link. But we are heartened to hear the various ways churches are dealing with the situation, from live-streamed services to the collection of shopping for the elderly and vulnerable.

We have decided to issue the Synod E-letter weekly during the course of the pandemic. We will use it to share vital information and refer you to the Synod and URC websites, but we also want to include your stories. Make it your forum. Tell us how your church is responding to the needs around you and witnessing to the love of Christ who is with us in the darkest times.

In your prayers please remember Revd Geoffrey Clarke as he prepares to become our Moderator in unprecedented circumstances. His induction service has been cancelled but arrangements are being made to induct him so he can take up his ministry on 1st May with the blessing of the whole church.

A prayer from the Moderators of General Assembly, Revd Nigel Uden and Derek Estill:

**Living, loving God,
we praise you,
and through times of peril we lean into you,
for in Jesus Christ
you have trodden paths as difficult as ours,
revealing there a love that nothing defeats,
a love that bears us through.
Amen**

LETTER FROM MODERATORS OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY

A message from Derek Estill and Nigel Uden, Moderators of General Assembly to all who are the United Reformed Church, can be found here:

<https://urc5.org.uk/content/letter-moderators-assembly>

EAST MIDLANDS SYNOD OFFICE CLOSURE

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the Synod Office closed on 24th March and will remain closed until further notice as we follow Government guidelines. Whilst we are closed all members of staff will be working from home. If you wish to contact them please e-mail in the usual way. For the list of emails click on the link below:

<https://www.urc5.org.uk/synodstaff>

Telephone calls will now be forwarded to mobiles so please call the office in the usual way on 0115 9609241 between the hours of 9am - 3pm, Monday - Thursday, if you wish to speak to a member of staff.

Due to the office closure, at this time we have no access to the database for sending out group emails. Therefore all information will be put on to our website. Please keep checking for updates. All other information will be sent out using our E-Letter provider so if you have not already signed up, please click on this link:

<https://urc5.us18.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=7b9491ce2216f1835e4829f87&...>

Our E-Letter will be sent out weekly for the time being, to help keep you updated and keep in touch, so if you have any information, news, good news stories, etc please send to training@urc5.org.uk

SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

Churches across the East Midlands are responding to extraordinary times with an extraordinary burst of creativity, as we forge new ways to uphold worship, community and pastoral care as long as we are unable to gather together in person. As our Synod Clerk Helen Lidgett has written in her introduction to this e-letter, it is truly heartening to see how churches and individuals continue to reach out in witness to the love of Christ.

At the same time, our forced separation and adaptation to "church online" is challenging in numerous ways. We might all welcome a helping hand from time to time - and news of a good idea elsewhere may well inspire us in our own situations.

One way in which the Synod hopes to support you during this very testing period is simply to help share what is going on around the East Midlands as we all adapt to the COVID-19 crisis in our different ways. I and my colleagues aim to collate as many cases as we can of good practice and good news to publicise in future e-letters and on the Synod website. We are also especially keen to hear about any online resources (whether from within our own denomination or beyond) that are proving helpful in feeding your mind and soul during your isolation and which others might find equally fruitful.

Please share anything you think may be of interest by emailing training@urc5.org.uk <mailto:training@urc5.org.uk> . This will reach both myself and Hannah Holmes, who collates this e-letter.

Let us hope that the age of social distancing is a short one - but as long as it endures, let us use every form of communication available to share, sustain and support one another.

Derek Graham, Training & Development Officer

INFORMATION REGARDING CHURCH BUILDINGS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Congregational and General Insurance Co – who insure most of the URC churches and Manses - recently issued a condition of their cover that churches closed purely due to the Covid-19 virus must be inspected at least weekly to ensure they are secure and undamaged, either by anti-social behaviour or burglary, etc.

Since the Prime Minister's statement on the 23rd March instructed everyone to stay at home unless absolutely necessary, the insurers have issued the following statement:

We therefore confirm that if it is not possible for you to safely make the required inspections, then these parts of our statement are waived until such time as it is safe to reintroduce. We accept that it is of the utmost importance that we all follow the guidance of the Government and Public Health England.

We would in the meantime request that reasonable efforts are made to protect the church during this difficult period wherever possible and safe to do so.

Therefore, whilst it would be ideal to carry out the weekly inspections, Synod does not expect anyone to undertake them unless you can be absolutely sure that neither you, nor anyone else, are put at risk. If you do inspect it would be helpful to keep a record of the inspections so that, in the event of a claim, there is evidence of efforts to follow the insurer's requirements.

Geoff Milnes, Synod Property Officer

INFORMATION FOR ALL CHURCH TREASURERS - GIFT AID

Questions have been asked about the effect of the current legal framework for claiming under the GASDS (Gift Aid) system.

I can tell you that this is being handled by one Synod's legal adviser and when information is received it will be posted on the Synod Website for your information and any actions necessary.

David J Greatorex. Treasurer

ROBERT WHITE - THANK YOU AND FAREWELL



In 2004 Robert White, a recently retired Nottingham solicitor, saw an advert for a Trust and Property Officer at the United Reformed Church East Midlands Synod and thought it might be a nice little job to keep him occupied in his retirement for a few years. He was offered the post and 16 years later following his 80th birthday he decided to retire on 31st March 2020.

He believed that his role was above all to help the churches. He quickly won the hearts of church elders and property managers throughout the Synod by his expertise, helpfulness and courtesy. Every one of his Property Reports to Synod demonstrated his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Synod's churches and the range of issues he dealt with week after week. His presentations to Synod were a model of clarity and gentle humour. His professional expertise ranged over property transactions, quinquennial reports, charity and trust law, and the application of the URC Acts which govern how the church acquires, holds and can dispose of property. He advised local churches of the resolutions Church Meetings need to pass to sell a manse or close a church. He dealt with complaining neighbours with characteristic politeness and advised on ways to end disputes. He bought and sold manses, he sold redundant churches, he commissioned quinquennial inspections, he set up the Church Buildings Repair Fund, he managed the Synod's fund for retired ministers' housing. He drew up Sharing Agreements for Local Ecumenical Partnerships. He was Secretary to the Synod Trust. In one day he might arrange a £300,000 manse purchase, agree a grant of £2500 to repair a leaking church roof, refer another church for listed building consent to replace the windows, and prepare a committee agenda. Over and above the day job, he oversaw the recent conversion of the Synod offices to provide a fully accessible meeting room.

He was a valued member of the Synod staff team, and his friendship, kindness and support was deeply appreciated by colleagues. His desk was a marvel of tidiness and order and although computers at times defeated him he graciously accepted the help of colleagues.

It is sad that the coronavirus outbreak meant that we could not give a proper farewell to Robert at his last Synod meeting nor among friends and colleagues in the office. But all of us throughout Synod thank him sincerely for his invaluable contribution and wish him well in his retirement.

Helen Lidgett, Synod Clerk

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FROM THE ARTHUR RANK CENTRE

In partnership with our national church colleagues and fellow rural mission and ministry organisations, we at the Arthur Rank Centre, have decided to respond to the challenges faced by rural churches - in common with churches, communities and individuals across the world - with a suite of reflections and resources that we hope you will find helpful.

Each email will contain a Bible passage, a short reflection and a prayer, plus practical suggestions of ways you might like to respond locally, We'll also highlight information and resources available on our website and signpost to our partners.

We'd also love to be able to share resources that you are producing and using in your own churches and communities, as well as stories of creative and surprising local responses to coronavirus; please send anything you'd like to contribute to [louise.davis@arthurrankcentre.org.uk].

URC PEACE FELLOWSHIP BECOMES PART OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION

The URC Peace Fellowship has announced that its work is to continue as part of the ecumenical charity, the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

The Peace Fellowship was set up in 1999 to raise the profile of issues of peace and justice in the United Reformed Church, and support members in peace making initiatives at local, national and international levels. It has worked closely with the Church & Society team at Church House, and the Joint Public Issues Team.

After a period of reflection and consultation, the Fellowship's committee decided last year that the best way for members to continue to be engaged with issues of peace making and peace building would be as part of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FoR), with which it has worked closely over many years. It has invited all members to join FoR, and will wind up its activities as an independent organisation this month.

The Fellowship of Reconciliation supports its members by providing opportunities to meet with other peacemakers from around the country and to take action locally. This includes an annual educational conference, producing resources for use individually or in collective worship, a regular newsletter, and providing opportunities to campaign for change and connect with peacemakers around the globe.

To find out more about the Fellowship of Reconciliation, visit www.for.org.uk

To learn about the Joint Public Issues Team's work on issues of peace and justice, visit www.jointpublicissues.org.uk

ACAT 2020 CONFERENCE AND GENERAL MEETING

WHAT: ACAT 2020 Conference and Annual General Meeting

WHERE: Central Hall, Westminster, London

WHEN: Saturday, October 17, 2020

Please do put this date in your diary. Over the next month, ACAT plans to agree the themes for this year's event as well as some of the speakers. The ACAT Conference is always an excellent opportunity to discover more about the vitally important role of church treasurer, while also sharing best practice with colleagues from across the country. As soon as some details about this year's topics and speakers is made available more information will be circulated. Please note: this date is different from the one advertised at last year's conference.

SAFEGUARDING AND SAFER SACRED SPACE TRAINING CANCELLED

Please note that all Synod Safeguarding training scheduled for April and May has now been postponed until further notice.

The Safer Sacred Space Training which was scheduled to take place on Saturday 25th April is also postponed.

AND FINALLY: - This E letter is sent on behalf of The URC East Midlands Synod, 1 Edwards Lane, Sherwood, Nottingham, NG5 3AA. Telephone: 0115 9609241

Email address for E-Letter Editor: trainingpa@urc5.org.uk

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