

EMURCE No: 317 – 23rd April 2020
WEEKLY EDITION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
EDITED THIS WEEK BY: REVD GEORGE MWAURA

Sisters and Brothers; greetings in the name of the Risen Lord!

We have all spent most of the Lenten season and just celebrated Easter in lockdown: exiled away from our familiar church buildings and isolated from our fellowship communities. In some cases, some have been completely cut off from their families, loved ones and dear friends. Some have been ill, and some have sadly lost loved ones. My sincere thoughts and prayers are with you. Truly, these are incredibly challenging times. But despite all those challenges, nothing can hinder the joyful movement of the Spirit of God among His people towards the light that has broken through the darkness of the awful events of Friday noon and given voice to the unstoppable shouts of: Hallelujah; Christ is risen! The resurrection of our Lord was indeed very Good News and it brought a renewed hope and purpose to his disciples that life was possible even after the disaster of Good Friday. We read in Romans 12: 12-13: Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Clearly, the gift of hope is given to us in those moment and times when we are going through very personal or communal testing times. COVID-19 is such a time and it will test our resources and tenacity. It will force us to re examine ourselves and the things we hold and value most. It will challenge our commitment to church, both parochial and universal. It will even force us to redefine who our neighbour is. It will expose our ingratitude to the daily ordinary blessings which we have taken for granted for yonks. But it will come to pass, and the church of Christ will flourish once again just as it has in the past 2000 years doing what it was mandated to do:-minister to Gods children at their point of need.

It was a very sad moment in the history of our churches when we had to close the physical building where we worship. In anxious times like now, a community is held together by the physical and spiritual connection that it shares; sadly, this is not possible. For this reason, we are thankful to God for the gift of technology that has allowed us to continue meeting virtually, keeping in touch with one another and being a church in this new dispensation. Its not the same, but it will do for now as we all play our role and stay indoors for the sake of all. As a synod, we are grateful and indebted to the ministry of the many wonderful leaders, both lay and ordained who are shepherding our churches in these anxious times. We give thanks for them and the synod staff for their effort to keep the synod going and giving direction in these testing times as we wait for our moderator elect Geoffrey Clarke to be inducted next month. This is very good news for us!

This pandemic has generated a fear among us which if not carefully monitored, might do more damage to the communities and relationships than the virus itself. Do not give into fear or be swayed by the deluge of fake news all around us. Remember the words of 1 John 4:18: There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. Because we are a people of faith, let our words and actions show forth Gods love to all people in the communities where we live. Our physical separation does not affect our spiritual and faith unity as the Body of Christ- both here and abroad. Together, we are a force to reckon with that even COVID -19 cannot defeat! Finally, PLEASE! Take every precaution to Protect and Keep yourself, those you love, strangers and the NHS safe! And may the overcoming Christ journey with us through testing times.

Peace to you all!

Rev George Mwaura

PEOPLE

- We regretfully inform you of the death of **Revd Eilleen Ritchie**, from Eastern Synod, on Tuesday 14th April in the Quebec Nursing Home in Dereham. She had been increasingly frail and died of pneumonia.
Eilleen served at Harleston 1985-92. There are no funeral details at present.

FIND US ON FACEBOOK

To help stay in contact during the health crisis and beyond, we are pleased to introduce a new Synod Facebook Page. We hope this will develop into a place of sharing and of celebration. If you are a Facebook user, please feel free to Like and Share both the Page and its Posts.

You will find it by searching “**URC East Midlands Synod**” or following this link:

<https://www.facebook.com/URC-East-Midlands-Synod-102279281444717/>

From Thursday 9 April, this Page will host the **Evening Prayers** which our Moderator-Elect, the Revd Geoffrey Clarke, has been leading daily at 9.30pm since the beginning of the lockdown. Geoffrey draws on a variety of resources from several denominations to offer a time of peaceful prayer and meditation toward the end of the day.

RESOURCES

As you will know, the government has now officially extended the current lockdown at least until the 7th May. In response the United Reformed Church continues to offer fresh resources for extraordinary times. These are a few of the latest.

The URC's Programme Officer for Global Justice and Partnerships, the Revd Kevin Snyman, leads an excellent **Commitment for Life** service: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8ULWWDzPXc> This is offered for churches to share for their own worship and includes footage from last autumn's visit by 22 URC members to Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories.

A new guide for churches thinking of using **Instagram** to enhance their communications has now been added to the existing guides to the use of other social media and technology:

https://urc.org.uk/images/Communications/docs/Setting_up_an_Instagram_account.pdf

“Listening to God” is the theme of the second weekly **Families on Faith Adventures** activity pack from the Children's and Youth Work team: <https://urc.org.uk/images/Families-on-Faith-Adventures-Week2-Listening-To-God.pdf>

A full list of resources and advice is updated frequently on the URC website: <https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3365-urc-issues-coronavirus-advice-to-its-churches>

We are still keen to share examples of what our **East Midlands Synod** churches are doing to support congregations and communities during the ongoing crisis. These might be uplifting “good news stories”; they might equally be ways of supporting those for whom Covid-19 has proven very bad news indeed. Or simply ways in which the worship of God continues beyond our church buildings.

Many churches and worship leaders have generated their own reflections and devotional materials prompted by the public health emergency: if you are willing to make these available for others to draw upon, we'd be glad to publish them. If you are looking for a challenge this week, why not share with us a seven-line prayer for our times?

Please email training@urc5.org.uk to share your stories and prayers.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR FAIRTRADE REGISTERED CHURCHES

All Fairtrade registered Churches should by now have received an email from the Fairtrade Foundation containing the information below, asking them to recommit on a two yearly basis. If your Church has not received this information then please get in touch with the Fairtrade Foundation to let them know.

Contact details can be found here: <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/>

"As a part of our 25th Anniversary celebrations last year, we relaunched our Fairtrade Places of Worship Award scheme. Fairtrade Places of Worship were integral to the success that the FAIRTRADE Mark has seen so far. Twenty-five years on, we know that the need for Fairtrade, and the fair deal this small but powerful Mark represents, is as acute as ever.

WE ARE ASKING ALL FAIRTRADE PLACES OF WORSHIP THAT FIRST COMMITTED OVER TWO YEARS TO RECOMMIT AND THEN DO SO EVERY TWO YEARS ONWARDS. This new online commitment process has been created to make sure that we can capture the incredible scale of activity from Fairtrade faith groups across the country. This form is quicker and more straightforward than our original application form, which should allow your group to focus more on spreading the word rather than paperwork, and celebrate the impact you are having locally, which drives change globally."

CHRISTIAN AID - NEWS RELEASE - CHRISTIAN AID WEEK 2020 GOES DIGITAL

Think of Christian Aid Week and you might picture red envelopes through doors, plant sales, Big Brekkies, banners in front of churches, special services and much more.

Since 1957 the week has brought communities together in action and prayer and while the coronavirus pandemic means that Christian Aid Week 2020 (May10-16) will be different, churches across the diocese are being invited to stand in solidarity with the world's most vulnerable people in new and innovative ways.

With daily quizzes and live-streamed worship, supporters can be involved from their own homes and could also take part in the 300,000 steps in May challenge which will be run through Facebook or send an electronic donation envelope - an 'e-envelope' - to friends and family. caweek.org/virtualresources

Some groups are arranging online plant sales, while others are doing sponsored runs, cycles or walks in their daily outdoor exercise or in their own homes and gardens.

Christian Aid Week manager Sophie Brightwell said: "Coronavirus is teaching us what it feels like to feel vulnerable, to fear, to be separated and experience scarcity." It is at times like these - testing and painful times - that we recognise we are all in this together. Coronavirus impacts everyone, but love unites us all. Christian Aid Week has always been a joyful celebration of what we can achieve together for the world's poorest people and in this time of global crisis Christian Aid's work is needed as much as ever before. The most vulnerable and marginalised people are at the greatest risk from coronavirus. In Sierra Leone there are no ICU beds and in Malawi there is one ICU bed for every one million people. In refugee camps, people are not able to keep socially distant from one other and 40% of the world's population do not have access to soap and water."

Christian Aid's Church Engagement and Fundraising Officer for the East Midlands, Tom Wyke said: "In recent weeks, we have been overwhelmed by the messages from our fundraising community, looking for guidance on how they can support us. Communities and churches across the East Midlands have shown their resilience and adaptability since social distancing began and Christian Aid groups have inspired me with their inventiveness and resolve. For example, great-grandfather John Hindson (77), from Stapleford in Nottinghamshire is not letting lockdown limit his horizons as he sets his sights on walking 350 miles 'towards Nairobi' for Christian Aid during April and May. John is aiming to raise £500. It will be a different Christian Aid Week but with all the great hallmarks that we recognise of compassion, love and vision for a more just, equitable and healthy world. Please join us if you can."

To explore ideas about how to celebrate Christian Aid Week digitally call our churches support team on [01925 573769](tel:01925573769) or visit caweek.org/virtualresources

THE URC WEBSITE - ADVICE TO CHURCHES ABOUT CORONAVIRUS

<https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3365-urc-issues-coronavirus-advice-to-its-churches>

The URC website is updated daily with advice and resources from a variety of sources. Many of the questions and concerns of local churches are addressed, along with some uplifting and encouraging articles and prayers. Please do keep checking for updates.

REQUEST FROM JOINT PUBLIC ISSUES TEAM

It is uplifting to hear how congregations and individuals are supporting their communities at this time, such as picking up groceries for a neighbour, donating sacrificially or volunteering time to assist food banks while on furlough.

The Joint Public Issues team would love to share this good news more broadly. Modesty can leave folks reluctant to share, but inspiring others to 'do likewise' can be a great thing and could have a profound impact.

Have members of your congregations been making a difference in their local community during lockdown?

No matter how small, the Joint Public Issues Team would like to hear about it.

Please get in touch with Roo at roo.stewart@urc.org.uk or call 020 7916 8632.

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

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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