

EMURCE No: 319 – 7th May 2020
WEEKLY EDITION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
EDITED THIS WEEK BY: REVD JENNY MILLS

It is with joy I write this e-letter as we welcome the Revd Geoffrey Clarke into his new role as Moderator of the East Midlands Synod on this his first week following his online Induction last Friday. I have worked alongside Geoffrey for a number of years and have benefitted from his wisdom, support and encouragement over the time we have known each other (as well as his exasperation at my sense of humour being too vocal and occasionally inappropriate!). As I thought about what to write for this editorial I reflected that Geoffrey is the 4th Synod Moderator that I have had dealings with in this Synod.

The Revd Malcolm Hanson interviewed me when I took my first, hesitant steps in exploring a possible call to ministry; the Revd Terry Oakley ordained and inducted me into my role as Minister at Newport Pagnell URC and the MK Mission Partnership; then the Revd Peter Meek has been my Moderator in more recent years and when I became the Minister at West End United Church Wolverton, too.

So many years....so many Moderators!?! Which is why it is probably time for me to move on! So it is that later this year (September or October, lockdown depending) I will take up my new role having been called to serve as Secretary for Education and Learning for the URC. I will be based at Church House, London but will still live in the East Midlands Synod as I will commute from Milton Keynes. It is a role that I anticipate with enthusiasm as it will be very different from my current role and yet uses my previous experience as a teacher as well as my ministerial experience. I look forward to working with the Education and Learning team, the Resource Centres for Learning and the Training Officers (or equivalent) in the Synods. It is a role that will bring challenges plus an added recent challenge as we respond to the step-change that has occurred due to the coronavirus and consider where that will lead us as 'learning people of God'.

The hardest part of a new challenge is what has to be left behind. I responded to a nomination for this role and encouragement from others and so explored my calling. It is with obvious sadness that I will leave behind the mission potential of the churches I serve and the people alongside whom I have walked and worshipped. I have had an amazing 12 years serving in local pastorate and have learned and grown and changed because of it (and left my mark I am sure!). I have been blessed to serve in local, Synod and wider URC roles and have met amazing people and made lasting friendships. As the cliché goes, it will not be not goodbye, it will be 'Au revoir'!

But for now back to the here and now, we are blessed with a new Moderator who will build on all that has gone on before and we welcome him with a hearty 'Bonjour, mon ami'!

Blessings, Jenny

CONTACT DETAILS FOR OUR MODERATOR, REVD GEOFFREY CLARKE

Please note the new email address and mobile phone number for Revd Geoffrey Clarke.

Email: mod@urc5.org.uk

Mobile: 07544 959976

Synod Office: 0115 9609241

THE REVD BERNARD THOROGOOD 1927 – 2020

It is with deep sadness that the United Reformed Church (URC) announces the death of the Revd Bernard Thorogood, who died on 30th April peacefully in a Sydney hospital aged 92.

Bernard was General Secretary of the URC from 1980 to 1992, and, prior to that, served as General Secretary of Council World Mission (CWM) from 1970 to 1980 (bringing CWM into being in its current form as a worldwide partnership of churches), and through most of the 1950s and 1960s was a missionary in the Pacific islands.

Bernard served as General Secretary of the URC at a time of immense change in Church life worldwide.

He was responsible for the 1981 union with the Re-formed Association of the Churches of Christ for drawing them into the general life of the enlarged Church and much of his work was to do with ecumenical affairs. He gave encouragement and support to the rapidly increasing number of Local Ecumenical Projects (now called Partnerships). He also served with the British Council of Churches (now Churches Together in Britain and Ireland) and the World Council of Churches.

After retiring in 1992 he went to live in Australia. While living in Sydney, Bernard became a minister within the Uniting Church, and was awarded an OBE and made a Doctor of Divinity in 1992.

The Revd John Proctor, General Secretary of the URC, said: “Bernard Thorogood made an enormous contribution as a Christian leader, in the URC, in ecumenical life in the UK, and in the wide networks of the world church.

“He helped create the round table ethos that has shaped the life of the Council for World Mission since 1977. His directions for the URC Mission Council, drafted at the start of the 1990s, still guide the way we do business there. His gifts were legion.

“He wrote with wisdom and depth – theology, poetry, fiction. He was an able visual artist. Yet through it all he had a heart for people, meeting individuals with care and interest, supporting many, sharing deeply in church life at every level.

“We thank God for all that he gave among us, and for his example of gracious character, committed service, trusted leadership and warm friendship.”

FIND US ON FACEBOOK

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/>

Our Moderator, Revd Geoffrey Clarke, has been leading Evening Prayers 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. Please join us!

There is a Synod youth and children's Facebook page, which shares news and ideas related to children and youth.

There is also a link on there to the Synod youth and children's leaders group.

<https://www.facebook.com/URCEastmidlandsYouth/>

We would love you to follow this page too.

Synod has received the following reminder that all utility contracts continue to operate during the Covid-19 crisis and churches should ensure that contracts are kept up to date and renewed as necessary.

Please note that the UK Government expects all businesses to renew their current energy renewals, this includes every Church in the UK..

Is your Church energy agreement due?

If energy contracts are left unattended, charges may be applied which would mean a significant amount of additional costs.

RESOURCES

As the Coronavirus crisis stretches on, churches throughout the United Reformed Church continue to forge innovative new ways of maintaining worship, mission and community. The latest postings on the URC website include the example of Christ Church in Petts Wood (Southern Synod): <https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3441-busy-church-beats-lockdown-blues>

In our own Synod, too, many of us have been prompted by the lockdown to discover inspiring new ways to be church. To give just one case study, the following news from **Newport Pagnell URC** comes from its Minister, the Revd Jenny Mills.

If you would like to tell others the latest from your own church, please email training@urc5.co.uk and we will be delighted to share your stories.

A REPORT FROM NEWPORT PAGNELL URC

We have been unable to physically meet as a congregation since mid-March. We have been recording worship and sending it out, posting written copies and posting it on our YouTube channel (URC Newport Pagnell) each week and one of our Elders has set up a post-service Zoom coffee time. We are fortunate that a young man with great technical expertise has returned home and is able to edit our offerings so worship includes a variety of folk and talents.

We have also set up online Coffee and Chat (one in an afternoon and one in an evening), a Children's Zoom and a Bible Study. We have also set up systems to ensure everyone in our congregation gets a call or some contact regularly. Each Sunday we deliver the transcript of worship to the seven people unable to access anything online and this week we are including biscuits in that offering and will have a different member of the pastoral team call them up for coffee and chat on Sunday.

We are part of the NP Covid-19 Response Group supporting people in the town and ensuring help is at hand. The team was brought together by an initial meeting in our church just before total lockdown. It involves representatives from the five women who originally came up with the idea of a group for the town, the Town Council, the medical centres, the churches, and local volunteer groups. Each street in Newport Pagnell has a volunteer who will shop, deal with concerns about prescriptions, and they have become a contact for those struggling.

As churches (with Churches Together in Newport Pagnell) we have helped to fund craft packs for children via local schools and myself and the Baptist minister distributed 200 of them so they can be given out to those who most need them; whilst there we 'blessed' the teachers with cake and fruit!

We are aware that churches are well placed to support those doing the caring and we have offered a reflective poster to encourage the staff to good self-care and offered a listening ear too. We are in contact with the local hospital chaplain (of "Ross Kemp at MKUH" fame) and she shared this document with us, which we personalised to Newport Pagnell.

As a group the Covid-19 team have also set up a scheme where people can support local takeaways by buying a gift of a meal for a friend or someone who has helped them and passing it forward by using a unique code. It is also possible to gift a meal to a vulnerable person via the group itself and they will pass it on. We are part of the weekly foodbank collection: the church is in the centre of town and so we are well placed and each week we take an average of two carloads (as well as creating emergency food packs for people during weekends when the foodbank is closed).

The most innovative thing we have as a church community for our members is: The Great Newport Pagnell Zoom Bake Off. The idea came from our Church Treasurer (she had done a family Bake Off) and the theme was 'Things we like to do but cannot at the moment'. The teams met on Zoom and were given their instructions and then went away and baked and created and met up at the end for judging! Winners were Afternoon Tea, Sub Aqua Diving and Karate Club. Other entries were Travelling, Morris Dancing, Rock Choir, Visiting Family, Singing and Caravanning. The only downside was we could not taste each other's creations, but we hear that many neighbours and friends were gifted cake that day!

Disturb us, Lord

We were delighted that so many people, far and wide, were able to express their support for our new Moderator the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke** by watching the Lifesize stream of the Act of Induction, whether live last Friday (1 May) or by catching up later. The video of this joyful occasion remains available to view at <https://www.facebook.com/102279281444717/videos/263802191675933>

Following his Induction Geoffrey shared his prayers for the life and work of the East Midlands Synod and concluded by sharing the words of a favourite prayer, one attributed to Sir Francis Drake. We include it in this e-letter by request.

**Disturb us, Lord, when
We are too well pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we have dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.
Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity**

**And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new Heaven to dim.
Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas
Where storms will show your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.
We ask You to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push into the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love.**

**For this we ask in the name of our captain, who is
Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

REVD JENNY MILLS

So Jenny is leaving us to take up a new appointment in September as United Reformed Church Secretary for Education and Learning. We are delighted for you, Jenny, and know you will bring all the gifts and enthusiasm to the role that we have enjoyed in East Midlands Synod these last 12 years.

Jenny trained for the Ministry of Word & Sacraments through Mansfield College, Oxford, and reminds us that she was the last woman to be trained for the ministry there where Revd Constance Coltman was the first. Many of you will remember she appeared on Songs of Praises in an episode celebrating women's ministry. She has served as Convenor of the Synod Children and Youth Group, as the CYDO line manager, on the Synod Enabling Group and the Synod Strategy and Priorities Review Group. To everything she brought her unique blend of creative thinking, humour and outspoken wisdom. She has served as Convenor of the Assembly Children and Youth Committee since 2016 and last year as Chaplain to Youth Assembly. As part of her sabbatical she went on the recent URC visit to Israel and the Occupied Territories and you can find her report on the Synod website.

She did all this while providing ministry for Newport Pagnell United Reformed Church and latterly West End United Church Wolverton. At Newport Pagnell she led the church through the planning of a major redevelopment project, which has now begun, to replace the old hall with a modern, purpose built community centre called the Mead Centre, equipped to serve the people of the town.

Jenny, Synod will miss your laughter, your startling hair styles, your warmth, your intelligence, your support for others and your deep faith. But it is with real joy we commend you to the whole church in your new role and know that you will bring to it the same gifts that have delighted and strengthened us in East Midlands Synod.

Helen Lidgett

LUNDIE MEMORIAL AWARD - NOMINATE A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

Do you know a child or young person who is playing their part in the Mission of God?

A trust fund, established in 1895 in memory of the Revd Robert Henry Lundie, has recently been re-purposed to enable us to spotlight some of the amazing work done by children and young people across the synods. This award is designed to spotlight and celebrate individuals using their God-given skills, time and talents to good effect within their church, their community, their synod or even nationally. Each month for 100 months we will make an award to one such person—they will be presented with a certificate, a very special medal, and £100 to be spent on something of their choice that benefits children and young people in their church or synod.

Suggested nominations: a young carer, young person running a holiday club, child volunteering at a dementia café, young person fund raising for a messy church outing, a young person providing live music for services, a child raising money for an overseas development project, a young person training older people in the use of technology, etc.

The awards will be made by region. The next nominations will need to be submitted by the 8th July. For East Midlands Synod please send nominations to our CYDO, Jane Henderson: cydo@urc5.org.uk

EAST MIDLANDS SYNOD ARE DELIGHTED TO ANNOUNCE THAT ONE OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE WAS THE RECIPIENT OF THE AWARD THIS MONTH!

Our youngest recipient so far for the Lundie Memorial Medal and Award is Henry Stapleton of East Midlands Synod who was nominated by church elder Joy Rice. This is what she told us about Henry:

"I wish to nominate Henry Stapleton as he has been the answer to prayer and an inspiration to me.

Imagine you are the village head man in York Village, Freetown, Sierra Leone. 2019 is the 200th anniversary of your village's founding. Back in 1819, freed slaves moved back and started living there so now is the time to celebrate. You are asked what you want for their village to celebrate and you say 'street lights'. It goes dark at around 7pm and there is no electricity in York Village, Freetown.

Meanwhile in Nottingham there is a seven year old boy with a fascination for streetlights. This started with him compiling a booklet to give to interested people (me and a few others) and then his mother creating a Facebook page - Henry's Lamppost Appreciation Society - as interest had grown.

On 19 February Peter Bates from St Nic's church Nottingham put a posting on Henry's page explaining about two friends, Ian and Heather from Nottingham, who live and work in Freetown. Ian had found a solar streetlight that he could supply and fit for £120. Julique was contributing £60 and they were asking for contributors for the remaining £60.

Henry took this on board and along with his brother Toby, held a cake and lamppost-shaped biscuit sale at our church. He raised £150! I remarked that he was the answer to the prayers of Julique. Imagine someone in Sierra Leone praying for lampposts and then finding out that a seven year old boy on the other side of the world was raising the money! Answer to prayer indeed, and Henry agreed!"

We are delighted to hear of Henry's use of his special interest to raise money for such a worthwhile cause and we know that his act of kindness has inspired others to donate and raise funds within his church and at the Christian Women's Fellowship convention too. We are very excited to hear how Henry decides his award should be spent, although he may have to wait a while for his certificate and medal until it can be properly presented to him.

Bravo, Henry!

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

Copy Date for Next E-Letter: 12.05.2020

If you would like to stop receiving this E letter at any time please contact the Privacy Officer at the above address or telephone number.

Before sending this E letter on electronically, please ensure that you have the consent of the recipient(s) to do so.