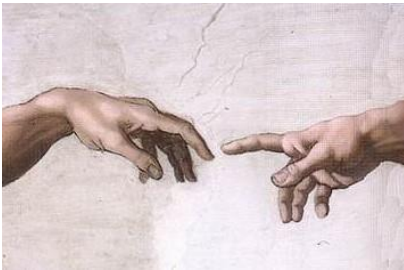


Opening Reflection by Derek Graham

Training and Development Officer

An embrace unconstrained



Iconic is an overused word but it certainly applies to the image found at the heart of the **Sistine Chapel** ceiling: with the delicate touch of a fingertip, the Almighty brings Adam to life. But this is 2020 and [an illustration circulating online](#) gives **Michelangelo's** centrepiece a topical touch. Greek cartoonist **Michael Kountouris** has given Adam a facemask, and he and his Creator reach out not to touch fingers – but to bump elbows.

This week Nottinghamshire leapfrogs parts of Leicestershire and Derbyshire to become the region of the East Midlands at the highest level of coronavirus restrictions. This, however, is not a game with any winners. Wherever we are, we have all lost out to this pandemic. The worst affected have suffered the loss of a loved one, in desperate circumstances where they could not comfort or mourn properly. Others have suffered loss of livelihood. Even the more fortunate of us legitimately lament our loss of freedom, of opportunity, of cherished plans – and if we're churchgoers, of raising voices together in worship.

Amongst these, I suspect many of us have found the loss of ordinary human touch one of the most painful. Even where it is permissible to meet in person, we often have to fight the impulse to shake hands or embrace. And for some – those who live alone, those who miss children or grandchildren – that loss has been especially acute.

There are also, of course, myriad sensitivities around touch. Appropriate boundaries are important and unwarranted, unwanted physical contact is to be avoided at all costs. Yet a massive study conducted earlier this year by the **BBC** and the **Wellcome Collection**, [The Touch Test](#), established that even pre-Covid, the clear majority of people hungered for more touch in their lives.

Even in this virtual age, it is touch more than any other sense that conveys to us the reality of something, makes it tangible. Think of St Thomas. That goes double for emotions: touch communicates what words cannot. A welcomed hug transmits affection or comfort like nothing else. To see this expressed far more touchingly than these lines can manage, just watch the [video](#) of "Hugging You" by songsmith **Tom Rosenthal**, recently shared among the ministers of our Synod:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGfK295eW9o>. A thing of beauty.

Now, I am not a born hugger. The Presbyterian circles which nurtured me as a child could not have been described as touchy-feely. It was a liberation to me as a student when I accompanied my future wife to an

Episcopal church where the liturgy was punctuated by the sharing of the Peace, a glorious melee in which every congregant scrambled to squeeze the hand of every other.

Ours may be an incarnational faith but it has sometimes been dogged by a tendency to renounce the body - as if we should aspire to be purely spiritual beings. Jesus teaches us otherwise. The Word made flesh, his gospel incorporates non-verbal communication at every turn.

This is the Lord who touches the tongues of the speechless and the eyes of the blind, who reaches out to embrace the untouchable. Who can sense amid the throng that a woman has touched his hem, in faith that she will be healed. This is the Lord who washes his disciples' feet and whose own are anointed with perfume and tears.

And this the Lord who is betrayed with a kiss. Who saves our souls by surrendering his body to the scourge and the thorns, the nails and the spear.



There are many ways to look upon the Crucifixion. One is captured to perfection in another iconic work of art – literally a landmark. Forming the shape of the cross high on the mountaintop above Rio de Janeiro, **Christ the Redeemer** throws his arms open in the ultimate embrace – an embrace wide enough to enfold the whole world.

While we wait to hug our friends and families again, we must remember that we are always and forever held fast in Jesus's embrace. In Jesus's embrace we will endure.

Derek

Safeguarding – an important notice

We draw your attention again to the following, which has been shared on the [East Midlands Synod website](#) and emailed to Safeguarding Coordinators:

During the interim period until such time as a new Synod Safeguarding Officer is appointed, due diligence and priority will be given to ensuring adequate cover for the Synod. In consultation with the central Safeguarding Office the following three areas of cover have been identified:

1. Advice on safeguarding concerns or safer recruitment

We are grateful to **Donna Gordon**, Safeguarding Officer for West Midlands Synod, for her willingness to extend limited cover by way of advice if churches need help before an appointment is made. **Ioannis**

Athnasiou, the URC Safeguarding Adviser, is offering back-up support and is second contact if necessary. (Our thanks go to Steve Faber and our West Midlands colleagues for this helpful offer.)

Donna Gordon: safeguarding@urcwestmidlands.org.uk and/or **0121 783 1177 (ext: 1009)**

Ioannis Athanasiou: safeguarding@urc.org.uk and/or **020 7520 2729**

2. Training

Although training is not being delivered in person at present owing to the ongoing health crisis, safeguarding training is available online. This is managed by **Penny McGee**, whose role is to support Synods across the URC in the delivery of safeguarding training. We would urge all those for whom training is due, including those who may recently have taken on a new role with safeguarding implications, to seek training now wherever possible rather than wait for the resumption of in-person training.

To make arrangements, your church Safeguarding Coordinator should contact **Derek Graham** (East Midlands Synod Training & Development Officer) in the first instance: training@urc5.org.uk or 07772 911449.

3. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)

The East Midlands is one of two regions in which the DBS is piloting a **Safeguarding Outreach** programme, offering to work with organisations to raise awareness of DBS as a safeguarding organisation, develop relationships and help address any issues or barriers that may arise. The regional Outreach Officer is **Beth Dale:** elizabeth.dale@db.gov.uk or 07867 153500.

Specific training is also now available within the URC for those who act as **DBS Verifiers** in churches and wish to refresh their skills: for this, please contact **Derek Graham** as above.

Practical advice for churches

When should a church consider closing in light of increasing rates of Coronavirus?

The following guidance was published by Synod Moderators on the URC website on 21 October:

At this stage, it is not possible based on infection rates or other criteria to give a definite point at which a local United Reformed Church should close as Covid-19 rates increase.

Current Government guidance in England, Scotland and Wales allows places of worship to remain open even when higher levels of alert and restriction are in place, although the “fire-break” lockdown in Wales WILL require places of worship to close to the public, which includes for acts of worship.

However, the United Reformed Church stresses that whilst Governments allow churches to remain open, this is permissive, and not an obligation. The Elders’ Meeting (and equivalent council in LEPs) are best placed to understand and assess the risk locally, bearing in mind the nature of the premises, and the activities that take place (including worship and other church-related meetings and groups) and external lettings.

Due consideration needs to be given the vulnerability of the people. Without the appropriate volunteers to manage activities and the premises, churches will not be able to maintain Covid-secure buildings, in which case activities must cease until that can be remedied.

Further, churches are reminded that Risk Assessments are not documents to be created and then ignored. It is essential to put into place the mitigations identified in order to open and operate safely.

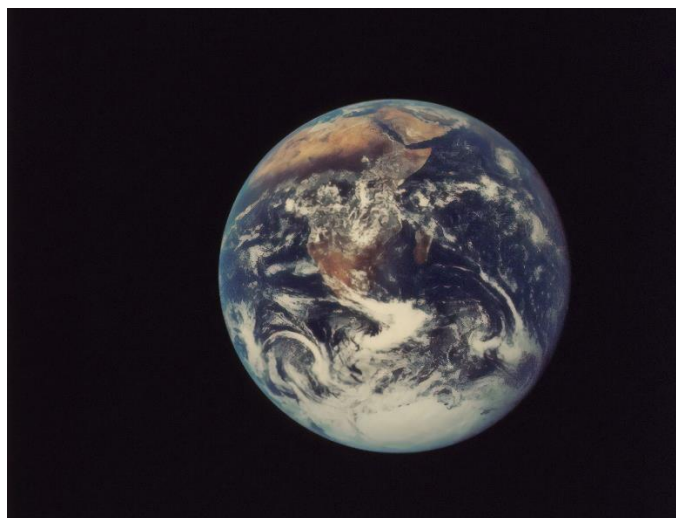
Equally, when risks alter, the “venue managers” or “person responsible” (in Government terminology) – almost always the Elders’ Meeting within the United Reformed Church – will need to consider whether the changed circumstances require changes in practice to further reduce the risks prevailing, which might include closing for a time.

When a church enters the Tier 3 (Very High) risk level in England and any equivalent state should a similar system be developed for Scotland and Wales, we strongly encourage the Elders’ Meeting to consider whether it is now appropriate to close for worship and other non-essential activities (which would leave foodbanks, support groups for vulnerable people, etc. able to continue to operate as they did during the national lockdown).

Whatever decision is taken by the Elders, they should document the reasons for their decision. This does not place an obligation on churches in the highest risk areas to close, but it is a strong encouragement that this is considered.

In all cases, if Governments tighten up their position, churches must follow that Government policy and regulation, and nothing here is intended to supersede that guidance.

An invitation from JPIC



What on Earth is JPIC?

JPIC is a group from across the Synod that supports churches in working out our faith in the areas of **Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation**. To transform unjust structures of society, pursue peace and reconciliation, sustain and renew the life of the earth – these are crucial aspects of Christian mission and that’s what **JPIC** is there to promote.

We meet regularly on Zoom and have supported, among other things, the Synod's new **Environmental Policy** and congregations wanting to become an **Eco Church**.

Join us for a special evening **Zoom meeting** where you can raise your concerns about church and the environment, and hear from churches who are exploring new and effective ways to fulfil this part of their mission.

- What is the new Environmental Policy and how can it help to refresh your approach to mission?
- How does the Eco Church programme make a difference?
- What support is available to churches along the way?
- What issues matter to you?

We'll meet on Zoom at 7:30 pm on **Tuesday 17 November** for an hour. Please email tomveitch20@gmail.com to find out more and to book a place.

Ethical banking

Connecting your faith and your finances



*Our JPIC group shares the following from **Money Makes Change**:*

Is it possible to love our neighbour and care for creation through our choice of bank account? It might not be the first thing that springs to mind, but who we bank with has an impact on the world.

What do you know about your bank's values and practices? Who does it lend to? It's possible that your money is being invested in things you view as harmful. For example, most of our big high street banks continue to finance the fossil fuel industry, despite the threat of climate change.

The good news is that there are banks out there that are helping shape a fairer, greener world, and some of the bigger banks are taking positive steps due to pressure from their customers.

5 ways to take action

- Use the [Switch It](#) tool to check whether your bank invests in fossil fuels.
- Find out if your bank is investing in [nuclear weapons](#).
- If you switch your bank, do let them know why! Ethical Consumer has a [helpful template](#).
- Support your local [Credit Union](#) – could you raise awareness of them in your church?
- Explore [ECCR's website](#) for more resources, including an [analysis of ethical bank accounts for churches](#).

Pray: *Creator God, guide us to be wise, just and generous stewards of the resources entrusted to us, so that together we may help shape a fairer world for all. Amen*

Imagine if every Christian banked with an ethical bank! What a difference that could make.

Eco Synod

Following the adoption of our Synod **Environmental Policy** at the Synod Meeting of 10 October, Synod Moderator the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke** has now signed our commitment to working towards the status of **Eco Synod**:



This begins the journey of the East Midlands Synod to fulfil item 7 of its Environmental Policy, which states:

Synod pledges to work towards achieving Eco Synod status and to commend Eco church to local congregations. Synod will implement measures to support people in living joyfully, simply and responsibly with respect to God's Creation including: promoting an environmental theology, training preachers and leaders, appointing 'Green Apostles', celebrating 'Time for Creation', undertaking practical projects, producing community artwork celebrating the Creator God and working in collaboration with other denominations, other Faiths and local environmental groups.

The full **Environmental Policy** can be found on the Synod website at:
<https://www.urc5.org.uk/content/justice-peace-integrity-creation-group>

Looking ahead to Christmas

Regrettably, under present circumstances it is not possible to hold this year's **Advent Refresher**, which was scheduled for Saturday 7 November.

Christmas too may be rather different for many of us this year. However, there will still be a great hunger for seasonal worship – and the devotional materials to support it.

With this in mind, please consider sharing:

- recommended sources of Advent and Christmas material available online or commercially
- any materials successfully generated and used within your church in recent years and which the authors are willing to share within the Synod
- anything you'd be willing to share that you have prepared for Advent and Christmas this year

If there is a good response, the Synod's Training and Development Officer **Derek Graham** will endeavour to gather links and materials together and share them digitally in time for the beginning of Advent. Please email any contributions to training@urc5.org.uk by Monday 16 November.

Personal news

It is with sadness that we announce that we announce the death of former minister, Brian Norris. Brian, who ministered in South Derbyshire, died on Wednesday 21 October 2020.

We ask for your prayers for Brian's widow, Louisa and the family.

Rural Officers' Gathering



Arthur Rank
Centre

CONFIDENT RURAL CHRISTIANS

The **Arthur Rank Centre** has arranged a **Gathering for Rural Officers** and others, to take place on **Monday 12 and Tuesday 13 November** from 10.00am to 1.00pm each day, via **Zoom**.

Speakers include: **Prof Mark Shucksmith** speaking about rural poverty; **Stuart Richards** (NFU) with a farming update; the **Prince's Countryside Fund** on the subject of encouraging vital villages; **A Rocha** on Eco Church; and the **Plunkett Foundation** on using church buildings for businesses.

The full programme for the Rural Officers' Gathering can be viewed on registration at:

<https://arthurrankcentre.org.uk/rural-officers-conference-2020/>.

Children and Youth



**JOINT MIDLANDS URC YOUTH
EVENTS COMING SOON
7.30-9PM**

**30
OCT**

**ZOOM GAMES, ACTIVITIES
& CHALLENGES**

**27
NOV**

**JOIN WITH OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE
FOR AN EVENING OF FUN.**

**18
DEC**

**JOIN WITH OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE
FOR AN EVENING OF FUN.**

**THESE EVENTS ARE OFFERED BY BOTH URC
SYNOD YOUTH REPS**

EAST & WEST MIDLANDS URC YOUTH

Contact Richard via cydo@urcwestmidlands.org.uk

Lectionary Liturgies by the Revd Thom M Shuman

Participants in the **Evening Prayers** shared each day on the East Midlands Synod Facebook Page may well recognise the **Revd Thom M Shuman**, who regularly fills in for our Moderator **Geoffrey Clarke**.

A Presbyterian pastor based in the USA, Thom is also an Associate of the Iona Community and a gifted and much-published writer of prayers and reflections that speak closely to our modern-day experience. Ministers and CRCWs recently enjoyed the opportunity to be led by him in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, live from Ohio on Zoom, and using his own Communion Liturgy in a time of pandemic.

Thom regularly posts worship resources on his Lectionary Liturgies blog and is happy for us to share the link: <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>

Fresh events from Fresh Expressions



Vision and Calling

A one-off Mission Shaped Ministry module

Monday 2 November 7.30-9.15pm

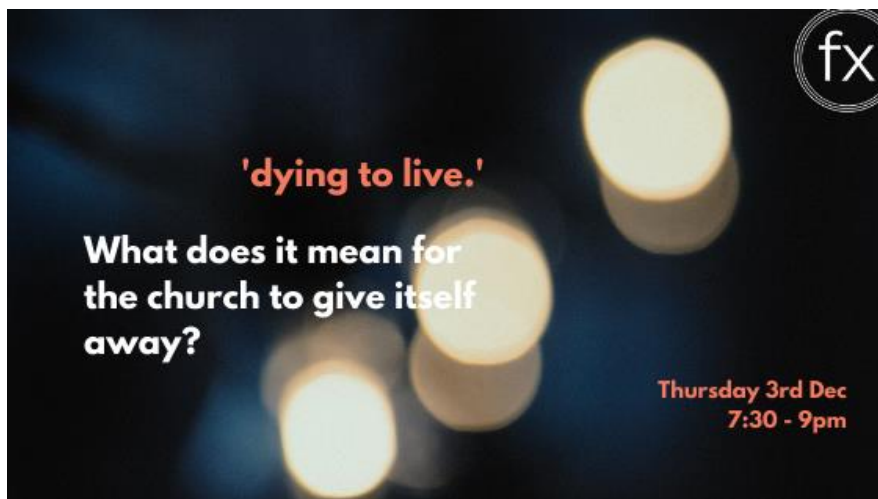


Andrew Vertigan of the Salvation Army and a member of the fx leadership community leads this evening module, perfect for anyone who undertook the *Mission Shaped Ministry* course some time ago and want to revisit it – or who would like to do a stand-alone module as a taster before embarking on the year-long MSM online journey.

Zoom access for up to five people from the same context costs £20. Places can be registered at: <https://fxresourcing.org/msm/msmonline/one-off-sessions/>

Dying to Live The fx Gathering

Thursday 3 December 7.30-9.00pm



“**Dying to Live**” is an interactive conversation, asking the question “What does it mean for the Church to give itself away?” The evening will begin with reflections on the topic from three pioneer practitioners followed by a time for discussion, conversation and storytelling as participants explore this question from their own contexts and experience.

This is billed as an opportunity for both those already involved in **Fresh Expressions** and those interested in finding out more. Admission is **free**. To book a place, visit: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/dying-to-live-evening-event-tickets-126385547575?aff=odeimcmailchimp&mc_cid=ab771155ec&mc_eid=80a9b2f8a3

Ministry with older people – a webinar

Staying in touch – staying engaged

Wednesday 25 November 1.00-2.30pm

- Are you part of your church's ministry with older people?
- Is Covid forcing you to work out new ways to respond to the practical, social and spiritual needs of older people?
- Are you concerned by the prospect of a winter of isolation?
- Would you like an opportunity to speak with others asking the same questions?

Many of the older people who previously attended activities and events run by our churches are currently unable to get out easily, as are many of the people who run such activities. With Covid tiers tightening around us, this situation is unlikely to change any time soon. **Sheffield Methodist District** has decided to set up a community of practice to meet online, share experiences and talk together about what can be done – and is delighted to spread the net more widely with ecumenically and geographical boundaries.

The inaugural webinar is for anyone – volunteers, lay workers, ministers – involved in ministry with older people. We will share stories, hear from a panel of speakers including **Chermayne Bennett** (MHA Live at Home Manager, South Yorkshire & Bassetlaw) and speak about what we can do.

To register for this event, which is open to all, visit:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMkdu6opzkvG9FxbA9gMn3qUyoObmhkyho](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/joinMeeting?meetingRef=1234567890)

Contact admin@sheffieldmethodist.org with any registration queries.

Situations Vacant

Chaplains for the Nottingham University Hospitals

Department of Spiritual and Pastoral Care

The ecumenical, multi-faith team of chaplains which covers both campuses of this Hospital Trust currently has vacancies for **Band 6 Chaplains** (£ 31,365 -£ 37,890 pro rata).

The Trust seeks to recruit 2.8 WTE permanent Chaplains to expand its large team and will accept applications from those looking for either full-time or part-time employment (0.6 WTE and above - Hours of posts from 22.5 - 37.5 to be negotiated).

Exploratory conversation and informal visits are welcomed. Please contact **Revd Andrew Keith**, Head of Service at andrew.keith@nuh.nhs.uk or 0115 9249924 ext 63836 (ext 63799 to leave voicemail).

Full details of the posts can be found on either **NHS jobs** (www.jobs.nhs.uk) or **TRAC jobs** (apps.trac.jobs), including the job description and person specification. The closing date for applications is Friday 6 November.

Synod Safeguarding Officer East Midlands Synod



17.5 hours per week (home based)
Salary: £15,150 - £15,750pa
(FT £30,300 - £31,500 pro rata)

The Synod is looking for a well-qualified and experienced Safeguarding Officer able to deliver the United Reformed Church Safeguarding Strategy in the Synod. Experience of managing safeguarding and providing training essential.

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

Closing date for applications:
Midday on Thursday 26 November 2020.

The Role Description, Person Specification and Application Form are available at:
<https://www.urc5.org.uk/content/advert-synod-safeguarding-officer-east-midlands-synod>

Find us online



The [East Midlands Synod website](http://www.urc5.org.uk) remains 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 as the health crisis continues. 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/>



These have recently been joined by a dedicated [YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzXFUjKn8XOGGeZU5SgN95g), where the Synod will share special events, training videos, worship and more. Evening Prayers are now available here subsequently. Please subscribe:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzXFUjKn8XOGGeZU5SgN95g>

Contacting East Midlands Synod

Owing to the current government recommendation to avoid office working where possible, the **East Midlands Synod Office** is presently closed. All members of staff continue to work from home: please email them in the usual way. The office number **0115 960 9241** is answered from Monday to Thursday, 9.00am-3.00pm and calls will be forwarded as necessary. Please continue to monitor our website for updates: www.urb5.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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Next edition: Thursday 12 November 2020

Please send all material for this E-Letter to both: modpa@urb5.org.uk and training@urb5.org.uk

Copy date for next edition: 12 noon on Tuesday 10 November 2020