

Heaton Moor United Church



The United Reformed Church and The Methodist Church

working together in partnership



Zoom Services and Meetings

Sunday 21st June Super Sunday 10.00am

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82303911927?pwd=MnZlRmpFZk04MmtLa1BuTVZkd2x1UT09>

Meeting ID: 823 0391 1927 Password: 2Tajv1

Sunday 21st June Circuit Service 3.00pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87212246881?pwd=VXpyMzRYV21UZ1ZoYlkc2R4dmV1QT09>

Meeting ID: 872 1224 6881 Password: 974333

Wednesday 24th June Coffee and Prayer 11.00am

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/95327541668?pwd=ekU2QWgzZjVKWTBFTjZsb0tERVQrdz09>

Meeting ID: 953 2754 1668 Password: 794265

Wednesday 24th June Missional Partnership Remembrance Service 6.00pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89746291941?pwd=S0dIZ1dYcGdlcnB2OXhPR3lPa1NNQT09>

Meeting ID: 897 4629 1941 Password: 247168

Joining by telephone

Step 1)

Dial any of the following numbers. If one doesn't work try another and another until you are able to connect:

0330 088 5830

0131 460 1196

0203 481 5237

0203 481 5240

0208 080 6591

0208 080 6592

Step 2)

Follow the prompts you hear on the phone.

You may be prompted to enter 3 different things:

1 -- Meeting ID followed by hash #

2 -- Password followed by hash #

3 -- Participants ID -- You will not have one of these, don't worry, all you need to do is enter "Hash" #

You should then be entered into the service.

Dear Heaton Moor United Church family,

Grace and peace to you all in the name of Jesus, our friend and our brother.

As the lockdown is easing out, we have been discussing the various possibilities of opening our church buildings, with our leadership team and the property group. They are working on the needed risk assessments to be done for our building and will keep you all informed the update and progress on it. Thank you all for your understanding and co-operation. If you have any insights about our moving forward as a church, don't hesitate to get in touch either with me or Sharon or Linda or any person on the leadership and property team please. Most of the people to whom I have spoken have expressed their longing for a fellowship at our church, and I hope and pray that it will not be too long before we can all meet for fellowship at our church.

Thank you to people who have joined for the reimagining church discussions offered by the circuit during the week, for we have had some good discussions that will help us in our journey forward as churches. The circuit has reassured that the online worship services will continue and will be offered for a longer period of time. One of the questions that has been coming time and again during this period of lock down has been, how can we as a church show the love of Jesus Christ in our community today? For our being to be relevant as a church, we are called to collectively grapple this question. In one of the daily devotions during the week, I was challenged by the words of Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher who said, "Jesus today needs followers – not admirers." What does being a follower of Jesus Christ mean today should be a guiding question in our way forward. URC has produced a very important resource called "New Reality, Same Mission", which is very helpful for our collective thinking as churches in this context. (There is a copy included in this newsletter)

Herewith I am sending you the reflection for this Sunday for your personal meditation and also am enclosing some worship resources for your kind perusal. Thanks to Graham and Sheryl for organising Super Sunday on zoom, which have been very interesting for the families that are participating.

Kindly uphold in your prayers the churches in our circuit, asking God for more strength in our moving forward. May be take time this week to ring a friend or someone whom you know in another church and offer prayers with them. As faith communities we need to pray for one another and collaborate together for the deepening of God's reign here on earth.

May you all have a blessed week and may the Spirit of God be with you all and grant you peace and grace.

Thanking you,

With warm regards,
Raj

19th June 2020

Remembrance Service



A short service of remembering, for those who are grieving the loss of a relative, friend, neighbour, church member and weren't able to attend a funeral service.

Wednesday 24th June 6.00pm, led by the Rev Marion Tuckwood



The United Reformed Church



is pleased to invite you and members of your church/es to
an on-line Service of Worship in which

Rev'd Brian Jolly

will be Inducted as

**Moderator of the North Western Synod
of the United Reformed Church**

Tuesday 30th June 2020, 11am

RSVP

if you are able to attend
**please reply by
25th June**
to receive
joining details



Please reply to
Ms Kerry Later, Communications & Business Support Officer
office@nwsynod.org.uk

Joining In

once you have replied
**a link
will be sent**
to your
email address

It that time again, Magazine time ! Please send in any pictures of your gardens to office@heatonmoorunitedchurch.org or 07471 065729 (don't forget to put you name on it)



This Sunday is Super Sunday at 10.00am

Log in details are:

Topic: Super Sunday

Time: June 21st , 2020 10:00 AM London

Join Zoom Meeting are on the front cover

Circuit Prayer

21st Jun 2020 11:00(30 mins)

Every Sunday morning at 11am — when we would all normally be in worship in church — we are encouraged to pray the following prayer. This way we stay connected in a very really and tangible way.

God of Love and Life,

We pray to you this morning for the life the United Stockport Methodist Circuit, for our sisters and brothers who belong to:

(pausing briefly to reflect after each name)

Christ Church Methodist /URC Davenport Methodist Church Dialstone Lane Methodist Church

Edgeley Community Church Hazel Grove Methodist Church Heaton Mersey Methodist Church

Heaton Moor United Church St. Johns Methodist Church Tiviot Dale Methodist Church Trinity Methodist Church Windlehurst Methodist Church

In this time of isolation and separation may we feel the unity of your spirit in the bonds of peace and love which connect us to one another. We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. We ask that this time of crisis might pass and that those who suffer might find comfort and strength within the knowledge of your grace, revealed through the kindness and compassion of the people of God. Eternal God, though the self-offering of your Son you have filled our lives with your presence. Help us in our sufferings and trials. Fill us with hope and strengthen us in our weakness. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Things that can be seen only by the eyes that have cried: Lament as a subversive prayer

Reflecting on Genesis 21:8-21

Did you know that there are 5.1 million people in UK living in households with children who have experienced food insecurity since the lockdown began? Did you know that Bolton has high levels of child poverty, which is 27, 291 children living in poverty? Did u know that 1.5 million children would have gone hungry during the summer holidays without a food voucher? Thanks to Marcus Rashford, who has written an open letter to the MP's asking to continue to provide food for children in summer during these strange times, to which the government heeded to. When child hunger and child poverty are so real in our contexts, what is the role and function of church today? What does living faithfully as disciples of Jesus Christ mean for us today?

In the text, Genesis 21: 8-21, Hagar, an Egyptian who served as a slave and her child Ishmael were sent out into the wilderness by Abraham with some water to drink. As they walked, wandered in that wilderness under a scorching sun, Ishmael reached the edge of death due to thirst. Hagar leaves her child under a bush, for she did not dare to see her son dying out of thirst but does not go far away, sitting opposite her son with a hope against hope. Hagar out of her desperation lifts her voice, weeps and prays, "Do not let me look on the death of the child" (16v). At this point it is also important to recollect Hagar ran away from her mistress' harsh treatment and encounters the messenger of God at the spring, a well in the desert in Genesis 16:13, and it is here that Hagar names God, perhaps the only person to name God in the scriptures. Hagar, a slave from Egypt, a person of different colour to Abraham and Sarai, names God as "El-Roi" which means 'God who sees,' for she in her conversation with the messenger of God, understood who this divine is and therefore names the divine. So, Hagar already had an encounter with the divine previously and therefore now when her son is on the edge of death due to thirst, she in her weeping, she in lifting her voice was invoking this 'God who sees' to intervene and save the child. In that wilderness, which was a kind of lockdown, Hagar laments for her child, knowing that 'God who sees' is a God who listens and offers hope to her child and thereby to herself. From Hagar's weeping I hear a lament, where she raises her voice and demands of God to save her child. This week during a theological conference online, I have heard churches becoming spaces where people can lament openly and aggressively, and the book of Lamentations has become an important theme at the Pandemic theological discussions. Hagar's prayer was a lament because she was expressing her cry to 'God who sees' not to allow her to see the death of her child. Her cry was a lament, for she received a promise from 'God who sees' in Genesis 16 that God is going to make a multitude of generation through Ishmael, and why is God allowing the death of her child at this point. What do I mean by lament? Lament in the setting of faith for me is a public outcry in the presence of God looking for hope, in protest against a system and structure within a community. Lament is a subversive way of praying, ranting at God in favour of life, and towards dismantling notions of status quo which includes religious exceptionalism. Lament provides an understanding of God, who chooses to be on the side of the oppressed.

Archbishop Christophe Munzihirwa, the Archbishop of Bukavu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, also known as 'Romero of Congo,' (named after Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was assassinated in El Salvador for speaking out against the military government in 1980) worked tirelessly and courageously for the cause of peace and justice in the context of Rwandan genocide and eventually was shot dead in 1996. One of his famous sayings come to my aid in understanding the power of lament that I hear in the prayer of Hagar. He said, "There are things which can be seen only by eyes that have cried." In the lament of Hagar, in her tears, in her weeping, she has seen abandonment, she has seen loneliness, she has seen thirst, she has seen nearing the death experience of her son, she has encountered 'God who sees' and 'God who hears', and she has seen hope offered by God. *There are things which can be seen only in the eyes that have cried.*

Hagar when she lamented, she was crying out loud against a system that has left her and her child in the wilderness, and when Ishmael is on the brim of death, she laments in that wilderness looking for hope from God, whom she had an encounter previously with. "Do not let me look on the death of the child" (16v), these are the only words recorded in the text as a lament of Hagar, and in the rest of the story we witness her silence or her being silenced when she was sent away into the wilderness. To understand the depth of her lament, I (ad)ventured to 'hear to speech' this text from the perspective of Hagar. If Hagar were to narrate her own story at that place in the wilderness, this is one of the many ways that I think she would have narrated her story. I confess that as I narrate this story from Hagar's perspective, all along my male privilege is exposed, drawing me towards repentance.

If Hagar narrates her story:

Early in the morning, long before the sunrise, when it was still dark, Abraham, through whom I bore his first descendant, deserted us and sent us away into the desert. All that he gave was some left-over food and a skin of water and left us into the dark.

Here I am with my son Ishmael, deserted now to be a single parent, did not know where to go, and started to walk and wander through the wilderness. Coming from a Black Ethnic Minority community, an outcasted community, I was treated as a property of my master at their house and was inhumanly pushed out from their house. After a brief walk in the woods, my child and the love of my life Ishmael felt hungry and I fed him with food and water. Towards the end of the day in that scorching sun in the desert, we were thirsty and couldn't continue our walk. We woke up the next day thirsty and searched for an oasis in that desert and could not find any water. All I hear is my love weeping for water. I couldn't see my son dying of thirst, and I left him alone near a bush and was weeping at the other end, crying out loud in desperation and in helplessness, thinking what kind of God is this? Where is this 'God who sees?' Can God come and save us from this thirst? I lamented to God in that wilderness "Do not let me look on the death of the child." I did not want to see the death of my child in front of my eyes. There are things which can be seen only in the eyes that have cried. I wept, wept, and only wept.

I might be the only woman, perhaps the only slave woman who had a conversation with God in the Scriptures, calling God as 'El -Ro'i' (God who sees). Yet, Abraham, who couldn't overcome his patriarchal dominance, deserted me and my son. And now we are dying of thirst here.

At that moment, 'God who sees' saw our plight and heard our cries. God subverted the system that Abraham used to claim to be of God, by coming in rescue of a slave woman and to her child. God manifested that God is a God who consciously takes sides with the oppressed and is not limited to those who claim God to be their own. In fact, the patriarchal writers of the text in Genesis, did not record my plight and cries, they only mentioned that God heard the cries of my child. Yes, God did hear the plight of my son, for God gave life by quenching our thirst with a well of water. The angel of God called on me and I have heard the voice: "What troubles you Hagar? Do not be afraid, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is and your weeping from where you are. Come lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." As I heard the voice, my eyes were opened, my heart was opened and my whole being was filled with hope for a new life.

God sent a water angel and checked the matter from my end and strengthened me by providing water to us from a well which was very near to us. Immediately I drew water from that well, filled the skin with water and quenched the thirst of Ishmael. Water gave us a new life to me and my son, for through water my child was ordained to become a great nation.

I realised without water; life is nearly death. For I have seen it with my own eyes, for my son was nearing death from thirst, and was longing for fresh water. By drinking water from the well, Ishmael my son came back to life. When my son and me were dying of thirst, God sent an angel with water from a well. God's responded to my lament in a practical, timely and relevant manner. God did not do a magic to save the life of Ishmael, but helped us to draw water from a well nearby, which we did not realise that it was there. Even though Abraham deserted me and my son, God did not leave us nor forsake us. God gave us waters of life so that we become a stream of life for many generations. God watched over me and Ishmael, for Ishmael grew up, made a living in the wilderness of Paran and became an expert with the bow, for he was well known for hitting a bullseye with his bow. By the way we have recognised and experienced the presence of God in the wilderness, for I am a testimony to a 'God who sees,' and Ishmael lives up to the meaning of his name in his testimony to a 'God who hears.'

As I narrate this story, I recount several people across the world today in 21st century who are dying thirsty, due to lack of water, in fact lack of fresh water. There are many who are 'quintessentially outsiders', marginalised on gender, social class, caste and ethnicity, and have been yearning for fresh waters to save their lives.

The God of Hagar is a God who sees and is a God who hears, for the God of justice, sees and hears the cries and tears of communities who have been living under stigma, discrimination and exclusion. The God of Hagar comes to the thirsty communities with wells of fresh waters, quenching their thirst and granting life.

When Hagar speaks, she exposes the powers of patriarchy of the faithful people. When Hagar speaks, she invokes a God who sees and hears the plights of the thirsty communities, thirsty for water and thirsty for justice and peace. When Hagar speaks, she is firm in addressing the thirst of her children. When Hagar speaks, she overcomes stigma and discrimination inflicted by race, caste and such other prejudices. Let those that have ears listen to Hagar and strive for a just world, where water will be accessed by all people freely and justly.

In the context of growing child hunger in the UK in particular and in the world in general, these words of Hagar, "Do not let me look on the death of the child," reverberates as our lament, and as our prayer today. There are many around the world today crying out "I can't breathe" may be that would have been what Ishmael was crying out loud in that wilderness. God in our context is inviting us to be and become wells of fresh water where we can quench the thirst of several people dying out of hunger and thirst and also offer hope to people who are unable to breathe due the pressure of prejudice and discrimination.

Alluding to Emmanuel Katongole, a Ugandan Catholic theologian who explains three constitutive elements that belong to the theological practice of lament, allow me to draw three lessons for our faith communities from the lament of Hagar. Firstly, lament as a protest, Kantongole calls it 'critique,' where the society has forgotten the experience of weeping. Because of the growing individualism, and with the culture of growing personal well-being, we have lost the sense of fraternity in our societies. Though this lock down has enhanced the neighbourliness by talking to one another on the streets, it has not gone beyond the confines of our own streets, leave alone going as far as to the wilderness. Hagar lamented offering a critique of her patriarchal society, and today we as churches are called to lament of our insensitivity and indifference that we show towards people who are different to us. When child poverty is on the rise in our communities, when Black lives not mattering with ongoing sagas of discriminations and oppressions, when fear of the strangers has been increasing, perhaps as we return

to our churches and places of worship, we are called to lament of our complacency, of our insensitivity and indifference towards others.

Secondly, the grace to weep – the church as a community of lament. This phrase ‘grace to weep’ was from Pope Francis’ homily at Lampedusa, his first visit outside of Rome, at a Refugee camp, where he was inviting the faith communities to join in the heart of divine pathos, for a call to the church is to reimagine her location which is at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ. Hagar’s lament is an invitation for us today to be a community of lament speaking openly in the public space for the plights and pathos of children who are pushed to poverty and for the plights of the refugees. Liberation is an invitation to join with Jesus into situations of weeping and offering a way of light by being and becoming wells of fresh water to the thirsty community around us.

Thirdly, lament as “suffering -with” – the power of compassion. This grace to weep is an invitation to be in solidarity with people who are suffering and joining with them in their suffering, in their weeping. Hagar wept as Ishmael wept, and demanded ‘God who sees’ to act and demonstrate compassion for her dying son. As faith communities our calling is to offer lament as our willingness to join and suffer with those who are suffering. When the claps have finally stopped on our streets it is time to keep continuing the acts of compassion which should extend beyond our confines to the margins of our societies.

On a final note, as part of my imagination I think Hagar and Ishmael, having tasted the hope from God after their laments, would have dug several wells in that wilderness and beyond, ensuring that people’s thirst is quenched. By such acts of digging wells, they would have demonstrated the presence of God and strived in turning that wilderness into a liveable place, offering hope through community building around wells. As a church should we not become a well of fresh water to our community around us quenching the thirst of many Hagar and Ishmaels?

May God of Hagar and may the God of Ishmael grant us as communities to see things that can be seen only through the eyes that have cried for water, food, peace, love and justice.

Rev. Dr. Raj Bharat Patta
18th June 2020

Sunday 21st June 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

God of all, we come to you just as we are – happy, sad, busy, bored, lonely, or fed up with people. We thank you that you welcome us just as we are and are always with us, even when we don't realise. We come to worship you and praise you, faithful God.

Hymn: 467 I need thee every hour

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6B9HbPs kX5c>

I need thee every hour,
most gracious Lord;
no tender voice like thine
can peace afford:
I need thee, O I need thee,
every hour I need thee;
O bless me now, my Saviour;
I come to thee.

I need thee every hour;
stay thou near by;
temptations lose their power
when thou art nigh:

I need thee every hour,
in joy or pain;
come quickly and abide,
or life is vain:

I need thee every hour;
teach me thy will,
and thy rich promises
in me fulfil:

We pray together

Beautiful God, we praise and worship you – your loving kindness and mercy is without end. Your faithfulness to us is unending. We praise you for your eternal love.

We recognise before you, and thank you, for where your image is clear in us – where we radiate you in the way that we live. We recognise too where we mar that image – with selfishness, unkindness, a lack of love. We say sorry in a moment of quiet and ask your forgiveness.

We thank you that you say to us each, 'my child your sins are forgiven, go in peace and sin no more'.

We thank you that you give us your Spirit to help us know you and be closer to you.
We thank you that when we come to you, you don't wait for us to be clever enough, good enough, or perfect enough – but you accept us as we are in complete Love.
We thank you for people who have shown us what your love is like, remembering with thanks those who have died who have shown us what your love is like.
We bring our prayers in Jesus name. Amen.

Today's Reading from the Old Testament:
Psalm 86

Today's Gospel Reading: Luke 22: 39 - 46

Time to Reflect

Recently a friend told me that he was grateful for the 'gift of desperation' because it was what made him reach out for help.

This echoes for me in the Psalms, where there is nothing the Psalmist won't bring to God – fear, panic, anger, despair, jealousy, injustices, pain. From the lowest depths, the Psalmist cries out to God – for what else are the depths for, but to give us the 'gift of desperation' which makes us reach out to God?

Jesus too gives us this example with his heart-wrenching prayer in Gethsemane. Jesus brings it all – the pain, the anguish, the loneliness – to God, just as it is.

However this time is for us, the examples of the Psalmist and of Jesus, encourage us to bring it all to God – just as we are. If there is fear, panic and anguish, bring it to God, let it push you to reach out to God and to good people for help.

If there is desperation, loneliness, despair, let those be the things that have us pouring our hearts out to God, reaching out to the One who is our Creator, Sustainer, Upholder.

If there is joy, gratitude, praise – bring that too! The Psalmist brings it all, Jesus brings it all – so can we – confident, without fear, knowing we are beloved.

Things to consider:

- 1) When are you likely to pray the most?
- 2) Do you find it hard to bring difficult emotions to God? How might today's bible passages inspire you?
- 3) Consider writing your own Psalm to God – sharing how you are – the wonderful things, the joys, the difficulties and the struggles.

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer – please make your own prayers for specific people, places and situations in the spaces.

Eternal God, we come to pray as your co-workers and co-carers in your world. We know you already care and are already there in the places and with the people for whom we pray.

In a moment of silence we pray for people suffering, in pain, depression or anxiety. We pray for all those who work to alleviate suffering.

We pray for communities struggling in poverty, overcrowding and hunger, for people feeling disconnected and for those who are working together to bring comfort, food and help.

We pray for governments and those in power around the world, for wisdom and the desire to put the wellbeing of their people first and to work together with other countries in peace.

We bring all our prayers, in trust and confidence, in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer
Our Father

Hymn: Listen to 41 Blessed be your name

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnWKehsOXu8>

Blessed be your name
in the land that is plentiful,
where your streams of abundance flow,
blessed be your name.
And blessed be your name
when I'm found in the desert place,
though I walk through the wilderness,
blessed be your name.

Every blessing you pour out
I'll turn back to praise.
And when the darkness closes in, Lord,
still I will say:

*Blessed be the name of the Lord,
blessed be your name.
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
blessed be your glorious name.*

Blessed be your name
when the sun's shining down on me,
when the world's 'all as it should be,'
blessed be your name.

And blessed be your name
on the road marked with suffering,
though there's pain in the offering,
blessed be your name.

Every blessing you pour out
I'll turn back to praise.
And when the darkness closes in, Lord,
still I will say:

Blessed be the name of the Lord ...

You give and take away,
you give and take away.
My heart will choose to say,
'Lord, blessed be your name.'

Blessed be the name of the Lord ...
Matt Redman (b. 1974) and Beth Redman

A prayer of blessing

May Immanuel God be with us, bless us with
the deep heart-knowledge that God is with us,
and as we share the reality of ourselves with
God, may we know ourselves held and
beloved. Amen

Original Materials by Ruth Yorke

All Hymns reproduced under CCLI 1144191.

Local Churches please insert CCCLi No here

The Lectionary Psalm for today

Psalm 86 A Prayer of David.

- ¹ Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.
² Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.
You are my God; ³ be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to you do I cry all day long.
⁴ Gladden the soul of your servant,
for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
⁵ For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call
on you.
⁶ Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
listen to my cry of supplication.

⁷ In the day of my trouble I call on you,
for you will answer me.

⁸ There is none like you among the gods, O
Lord,

nor are there any works like yours.

⁹ All the nations you have made shall come
and bow down before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.

¹⁰ For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.

Gospel passage for today:

Luke 22:39-46

³⁹ Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of
Olives, and his disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ On
reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that
you will not fall into temptation." ⁴¹ He
withdrew about a stone's throw beyond
them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² "Father, if
you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not
my will, but yours be done." ⁴³ An angel from
heaven appeared to him and strengthened
him. ⁴⁴ And being in anguish, he prayed more
earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of
blood falling to the ground.^[c]

⁴⁵ When he rose from prayer and went back to
the disciples, he found them asleep,
exhausted from sorrow. ⁴⁶ "Why are you
sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray
so that you will not fall into temptation."

Lectionary gospel passage for this Sunday

Matthew 10: 24 – 31.

A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave
above the master; ²⁵ it is enough for the
disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave
like the master. If they have called the master
of the house Beelzebul, how much more will
they malign those of his household!

²⁶ "So have no fear of them; for nothing is
covered up that will not be uncovered, and
nothing secret that will not become
known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in
the light; and what you hear whispered,
proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear

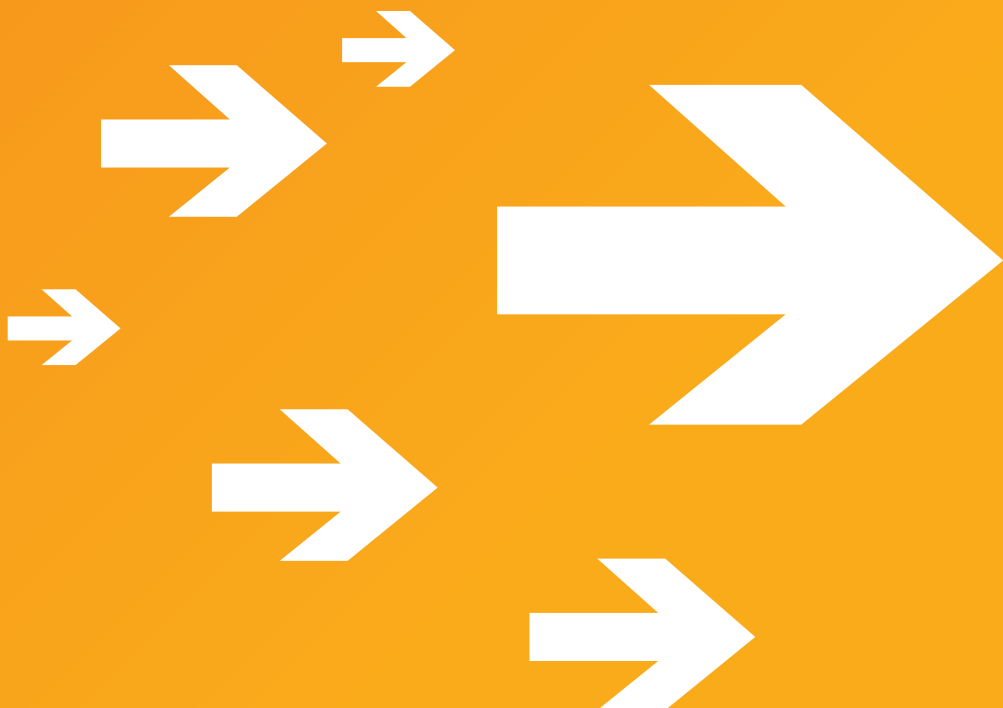
those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.^{[a] 29} Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted.³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

New reality, same Mission

A stimulus to renewed community
engagement as we emerge from
the pandemic



The
United
Reformed
Church



In writing this booklet, we have endeavoured to strike a sensitive balance between acknowledging and respecting the challenges and restrictions that we are presently experiencing, while encouraging you to imagine what might be possible in the future.

Pictures in this booklet were taken before physical distancing was introduced. We acknowledge that photographs of group gatherings may be disheartening to see at present, but we hope they illustrate hope for the future.

We know that many church members and churches are already involved in various invaluable initiatives and activities to support hard-pressed and vulnerable people of all ages in our neighbourhoods and communities. We hope that your vital contributions are recognised, greatly appreciated, and not at all underestimated!

“We think God is calling the churches into the local, to rediscover their role as civic institutions, to act alongside friends and neighbours to defend the space where human beings flourish. It may require some rewiring and a revitalising of the Christian imagination. It needs to begin with a sense of a humble church and the recognition of shared vulnerability.”

(Jenny Sinclair, Together for the Common Good)

To hear what other people are saying about the ‘new reality’, and to continue the conversations that have been started from reading this booklet, please see www.urc.org.uk/same-mission.

New reality, same mission:

A stimulus to renewed community engagement as we emerge from the pandemic

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The coronavirus pandemic has changed our reality. As lockdown begins to ease in different ways across the UK, the synod moderators of the United Reformed Church (URC) have produced a very helpful booklet, [Ready for the new 'normal' – a discussion paper for a pandemic recovery and resumption plan](#), to help local churches prepare for the coming days, weeks and months.

The booklet asks key questions, theological and pragmatic, and has as its main focus immediate practical issues about organising worship and use of buildings. It also begins to open up questions about community presence and engagement, asking, ultimately:

**‘What can you do differently to express more fully
God’s love in word and action?’**

To complement the discussion booklet produced by the moderators, this booklet is offered by members of the URC’s Church Related Community Work, Mission and Discipleship teams, along with Church Action on Poverty, to enable individuals and local churches to explore, in more detail, questions of community presence and engagement and social justice in the new reality which we all face.

We believe that Christians and churches are called to demonstrate God’s love to our neighbours, and to collaborate towards building flourishing communities, so that people may live ‘life in all abundance’ (John 10:10). This is particularly important in this moment of crisis, reflection and rebuilding.

There are, of course, many wonderful examples of this kind of mission and ministry happening through local churches and community groups already, some of which are included here to offer inspiration. You are probably already actively involved with a local community initiative, voluntary group or network. If you have a story, example or information to share, please [let us know](#).

Church, as we have known it, is already different, and will continue to be different from now onwards. How will you reflect upon the challenges of this pandemic and discern what might have to be organised and delivered differently, with renewed priorities for mission and ministry going forward?

“As we move forward into whatever the new normal will be, we need to amplify our prophetic voice and challenge the powers and principalities which would pick off the weakest and most vulnerable, and leave an already accelerating inequality spiralling downwards.” (Dave Herbert, Moderator of Northern Synod)

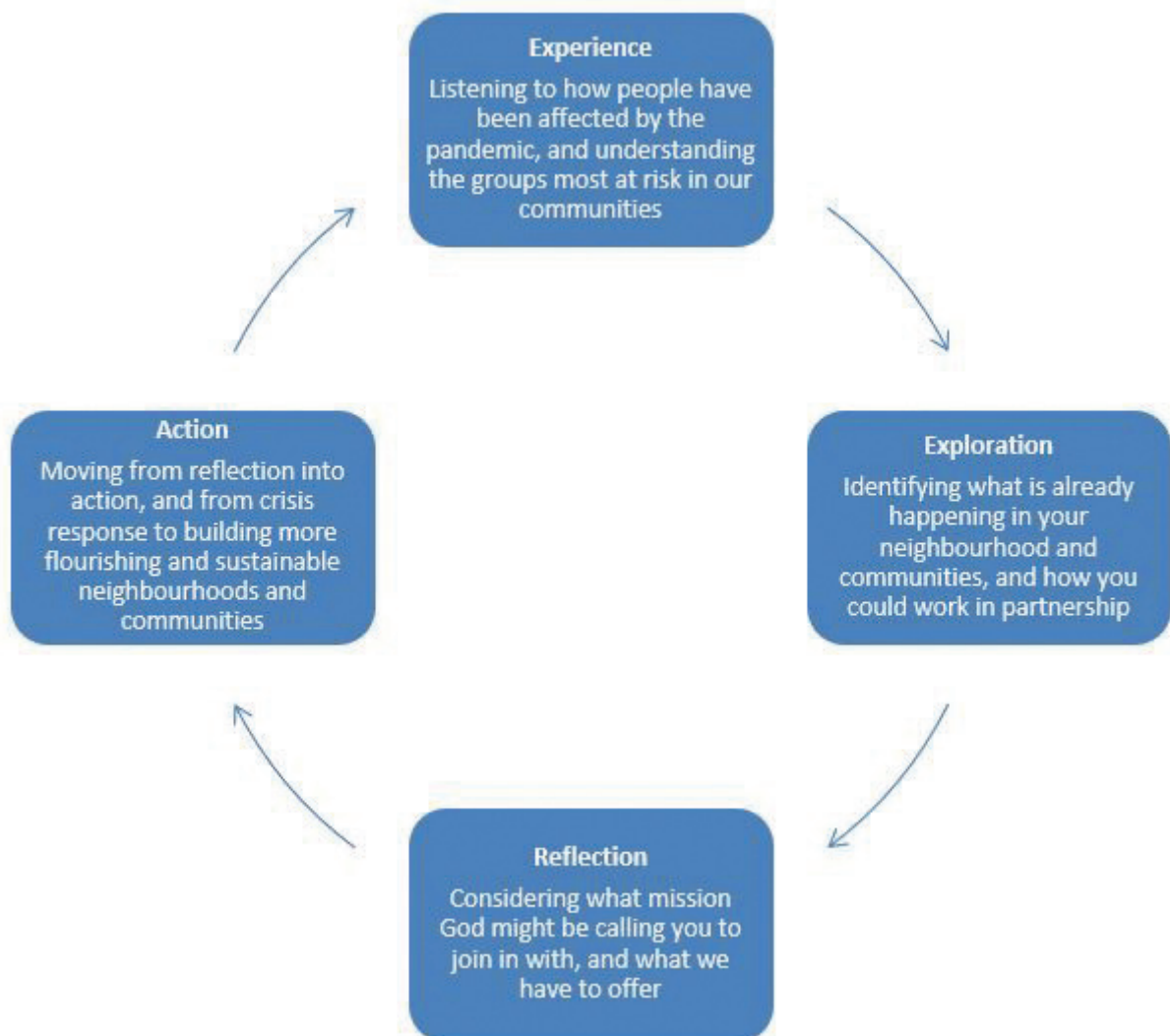
Starting where we are: a model for responding to the new reality

“Mission is finding out what God is doing, and joining in.” (Rowan Williams)

The pandemic has highlighted existing injustices in society, and brought many new challenges. It has also prompted communities to pull together, and shown the value of bold, collective action for our wellbeing. As the lockdown begins to ease, churches and communities will find themselves in a range of different situations. Many challenges and possibilities will present themselves.

While the impulse to get stuck into ‘doing something’ may be hard to resist, it is important to begin by trying to understand the new reality, and reflect on its implications. How have people been affected? What is going on in our communities already? Where is God at work? What have we to offer? And how, therefore, should we join in?

One established model for such a process is the pastoral cycle. This booklet is structured around a version of this:



This model offers a series of stages to work upon, in an ongoing cycle. In practice, it is more like a continual spiral as we reflect on new experiences and situations we encounter and then move forward again.

The cycle can be approached at any stage; you might already be at the action stage, such as a volunteer at your local food pantry, before you hear about the experiences of hard-pressed families, which leads you to reflect upon how and why they are in the situation they find themselves.

Or you might be praying, reflecting and trying to discern what God wants you to get involved with in these challenging times, which will hopefully lead you to some form of action as a response.

For each stage, we offer some information, inspiration and examples from various sources, with **questions to consider** and some **suggested action points**. Please do not feel constrained by this, but use those parts which feel most pertinent to you and to your situation.



Experience

Listening to how people have been affected by the pandemic, and understanding the groups most at risk in our neighbourhoods and communities

The current crisis is affecting everyone in different ways, some of which we will already be well aware of, but certain people and groups will be affected in ways we might not think of or expect.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- How have you experienced this crisis?
- What have you found hardest?
- What have you appreciated, and where have you found new joy amidst the crisis?
- What have you learned about the world, your neighbourhood and local communities during this time?

(Source: adapted from Tearfund, The World Rebooted)

We are all sharing the experience of the storm caused by Covid-19 and the lockdown, but it is increasingly clear we are not all in the same boat. Some are being buffeted but remain fundamentally secure, yet it is clear that some groups are at risk of being financially overwhelmed.

Poverty under lockdown

Early in the pandemic, the Joint Public Issues Team and Church Action on Poverty started an ongoing programme of research with churches and local charities, *Gleanings: Listening and learning about poverty under lockdown*. Through surveys and regular focus group conversations, it has sought to understand the impacts being seen and felt on the ground, especially among financially and socially disadvantaged groups. Some of the initial findings have been that:

- The families who entered the crisis with very low incomes and receiving benefits have been protected from loss of income. They are, however, experiencing a rise in costs for essentials. This is a particular problem for families with children.
- An enormous rise in demand for food banks. Trussell Trust figures show an 81% increase overall, and a 122% increase in children supported. This rise is patchy throughout the country, with some areas reporting little or no effect, and others overwhelmed.
- In England, the voucher system introduced to replace Free School Meals and support low income families with children is poorly designed, and is failing many schools and families.
- Around 2.1 million families have applied for Universal Credit. The application process has been made much easier, sanctions and debt repayments have

essentially ceased, and the payment has been increased to £94 per week. Churches are, however, reporting that those with IT difficulties or needing assistance are facing waits of several weeks for assistance from the usual charities who provide help.

- Debt workers are reporting an increasing number of approaches around managing unsustainable debt.
- Huge income shocks are appearing for middle-income families, some of whom are struggling to cope. There are reports of people needing assistance who would not ever have viewed themselves as benefit claimants or users of a food bank.

The research highlights groups about whom there are particular concerns:

- Families with no recourse to public funds. These are non-UK citizens who can no longer earn money because of the crisis, but who do not qualify for most benefits.
- Low-paid self-employed or gig workers, who face an income shock with limited state support.
- Families who need help with Universal Credit, most commonly as a result of IT or language difficulties.
- For all of these groups, struggling families with children face additional costs and risks.

Official data on the well-being of the UK paints a troubling picture of a generally more insecure and anxious population. More than 14 million people have experienced a loss of income so far as a result of the crisis, including people who previously thought that they had secure jobs, or secure incomes from self-employment or small businesses.

Alongside this, there is deepening concern about the unavoidable household debts building up, often in the form of unpaid rent or utility bills.

Read the latest research results at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/gleanings



What's happening in our neighbourhoods and local communities?

"We recognise that injustice doesn't affect everyone equally and whilst we're all at risk of Covid-19, there are some people who are more vulnerable and need greater support from the community." (covidmutualaid.org)

Questions for reflection and discussion:

Take some time to think about the neighbourhood where you live and/or your church is part of.

- Who lives in it? Who works in it? Who plays in it? Who learns in it?
- How have different groups been affected by the pandemic restrictions, or responded to it?
- How are local people – of different ages and backgrounds – feeling at the moment?
- Who might have been pushed 'to the margins' by the crisis? Which people, groups or voices are not being heard?

These sorts of questions can offer a good insight into thinking about the aspirations and needs of different individuals and communities in the area and, subsequently, how local churches might respond, in partnership with other agencies, for the mutual benefit of everyone.

The examples below represent just a handful of the situations that have been adversely affected by the pandemic.

- The partial closure of schools has left many parents and carers needing to juggle work commitments while educating their children, often without the support of relatives or friends because of physical distancing or isolation/sheltering. Children will have been particularly affected by lockdown – physically, socially and emotionally – and parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities will be looking for extra support, help with transport, and respite.
- The closure of charity shops has resulted in a considerable drop in charitable income, and has also meant that affordable clothes, books and children's toys are unavailable for people and families on low incomes. Many charity shops are staffed by older people who may feel too vulnerable to return to voluntary work when the shops re-open.
- Numerous voluntary organisations and local charities are facing a considerable reduction in income, potentially jeopardising the services they will be able to offer in the future, with a devastating impact on those experiencing poverty, isolation and vulnerability.

- Libraries and coffee shops being closed has meant that people with no accommodation have lost a place of shelter during the day and, quite often, access to Wi-Fi for emails, research, benefit claims, advice services and job applications, many of which can only be accessed online.
- The closure of the housing market has provided respite for some, but it has also been very difficult for those looking for affordable property to rent, those facing domestic abuse, those who have been made redundant, and key workers whose landlords have sought to evict them out of fear that they may transmit the virus.
- Many sports and arts events and venues have been suspended and closed during the pandemic, and many will not be happening or opening for quite a while. Local summer carnivals, community festivals and music events have been cancelled, while local sports groups, cinemas, theatres, dance and drama groups are under threat of closure altogether as they have no income from ticket receipts and booking fees. Sports, culture and the arts are necessary components of flourishing communities.



- According to the UK Government, more than 5,400 individuals who were sleeping rough at the beginning of the outbreak were offered emergency accommodation as part of an initiative to ensure all homeless people were housed during the pandemic. However, the Government announced on 15 May 2020 that it had [ceased](#) the funding that has enabled people who are homeless to be temporarily housed in hotels.
- The government has permitted food banks and night shelters to continue through lockdown, but many of these have had to operate with fewer volunteers and a reduction in resources brought about by physical distancing and supply issues.
- Refugees and asylum-seekers are still required to travel to register an asylum claim despite the lockdown, often live in cramped accommodation without space to self-isolate, and are struggling to afford basic necessities to look after themselves and their families. The Refugee Council says that some people are even being made homeless and destitute, causing serious concern about

the provisions in place for many refugees and asylum seekers, not least the possibility raised by government that such vulnerable people may be offered [repatriation](#) once this is over.

Listening to those most affected by this crisis

Action: Identify 6-10 people in your local neighbourhood to talk to who can help you understand the impact of the crisis from their perspective. This could include local professionals (teachers, health visitors etc), but should also include people directly affected (eg people who have lost family or friends, work or income, or who have had to apply for benefits – maybe for the first time).

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- What do we now know about the challenges and aspirations in our local neighbourhoods and communities?
- What injustices have been raised by your listening and research?

“We are not living through an era of change, but a change of era. We are entering a new chapter in the history of the world, and of the church. The scale of the challenge before us demands a careful response.” (Pope Francis)



Exploration

Identifying what is already happening in your neighbourhood and local communities, and how you could work in partnership with others

The challenges in our local communities and wider society, exacerbated by the effects of the pandemic, are bigger than anything we can tackle alone. We will need to work in partnership with other agencies and faith groups to make a meaningful difference.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- What have we learned about what makes for good partnership work, both in the past and during this crisis?
- Who have we worked with before, and what do we know about how they have been responding to the situation?

Working in partnership

If you haven't already done so, investigating which local initiatives are already supporting local people is vitally important in order to avoid duplication of activities or services, and to offer to collaborate and potentially partner with local agencies working for the common good. Contacting and working alongside other churches via the local Churches Together group, local leaders from different faith communities towards implementing an interfaith response, or working in partnership with other existing neighbourhood or community organisations, can be highly effective and appropriate.

Action: Contact your local councillor(s), Churches Together group, other faith leaders and community organisations to build an understanding of what is already going on locally in response to the crisis.

A common experience of CRCWs and other church members involved in community work is that they have been welcomed as key players in the various local authority Community Resilience Emergency Response teams around the UK, with some taking lead roles in such efforts. Partnership-working between agencies has increased and, hopefully, the stronger relationships that have been developed throughout this period will result in more effective local services in the future.

“Now we should build on the good practice to permanently shift to a better way of working between authorities, voluntary organisations and communities. Flexible, partnership working and an end to price-based competition should be part of the ‘new normal’...” (Catherine Goodall, senior policy officer at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO))

Action: Identify a shortlist of 3-4 local groups, organisations or networks that you might work in partnership with in developing your response. Have a conversation with each of them to see if they are interested in working in partnership, and what you could each bring to the partnership.

Supporting one another

One encouraging feature of the response to the pandemic was the way that many ‘mutual aid’ groups sprung up. These have a much more effective approach than traditional models of community service with their unhelpful, sharp distinction between ‘helpers’ and those being helped.

“One of the key points made throughout is that it is mutual aid – the person giving the help today could be in need of their neighbour’s help tomorrow and vice versa. I’ve also noticed that younger people who have not been in the neighbourhood very long took the lead on setting up the network using their ease with technology, and those of us who have been around longer have helped to connect them with existing community networks. It’s a subtly stratified neighbourhood, and perhaps Mutual Aid has the opportunity to connect across the strata, in a way that has always (from my observation) proved really difficult” (Participant in Bellingham and Whitefoot Mutual Aid network)

Many mutual aid groups are organised autonomously within streets and neighbourhoods. [Covid Mutual Aid UK](#) has been set up to support these groups, mapping out thousands of them on their website to help people identify groups close to them, or where they might potentially set one up.

Other similar groups to investigate include [‘Nextdoor’](#), a neighbourhood hub for building trusted connections and exchanging helpful information, goods, and services, and [‘Streetbank’](#), a site designed to help users share or give things away when they no longer need them, or don’t use them very often. A parent might give an unused toy to a grateful neighbour, for example, or share their drill with a friend who doesn’t have one.

*“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”
(Acts 2:44-45)*

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- What are the benefits of a ‘mutual aid’ approach?
- How can you ensure that whatever you do enables and empowers individuals and local communities to flourish together, for mutual benefit?

Action: Investigate what mutual aid groups already exist in your neighbourhood and encourage church members to join them.



Reflection

Considering which part of God's mission we might be being called to join in with, and what we have to offer

What does God ask of us?

As with all important questions, there are no quick, easy or set answers about what local churches, groups and individual Christians should do in their neighbourhood and communities in response to the current crisis. But it is abundantly clear that the mission to which God invites us is one which prioritises the needs of those who suffer most, especially in times of particular trial or challenge.

The well-known question and answer call to action in Micah 6:8, 'And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God', highlights to us what God truly asks of us.

In the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), Jesus reminds us of God's strong feelings about the most vulnerable in society. This is further reinforced in Matthew 25:40 and 45, when Jesus tells his followers that 'whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me', and 'whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me'.

However, mission is not simply a task to be done *by* the so-called 'privileged' to the so-called 'vulnerable'. All are equal in the sight of God, all are called, and everyone has a contribution to offer.

The disciples asked Jesus about when the kingdom he had promised would come. 'He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere.' (Acts 1:7-8). In this, we see a God who is, quite literally, with us, not a distant leader, ordering us from above, but a friend, walking with us on the way, already engaged in mission and inviting us to join in with it.

When this incarnated God urges us 'to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (Matthew 28: 20), it is seen that God is calling us to offer a continued presence of love, hope and justice for all people, in all times, in all places, as we seek to live the life of Jesus today.

"Churches are called to prophetic witness, to proclaim and live out the vision of Jesus Christ of fullness of life for all creation...The mission context and God's mandate of fullness of life for all creation demands a holistic understanding of mission." (Vision statement of the [Council for World Mission](#), of which the URC is a member)

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- What do we see as our mission in this moment? As individuals, and as a church or group?
- Which stories and scriptural passages seem to have particular relevance?
- How can we mutually support each other in building God's kingdom in our own, everyday situations and realities?

Action: Pray and discuss together about what your response might look like.

What do we have to offer?

Having listened to the aspirations and concerns of people in your area, explored what others are doing, and reflected on your mission calling as an individual and as a church, it is time to reflect on what you might have to offer. As individuals and as a church, you will have a range of resources, experiences and skills that you might contribute. These will be very dependent on your context, but could include:

- **Space:** If it isn't already, your church building could be an invaluable community asset. Once its reopening is permitted, and necessary safeguarding and other preparations undertaken (as set out in the [Ready for the new 'normal'](#) booklet), could it be opened at pre-arranged times, with pre-arranged groups of volunteers, to offer some of the services which other groups, bodies and charities are unable to offer at this time? Could you offer a ['Place of Welcome'](#) for those in need of a safe space? Might you consider operating an online-request toy



library, or placing a 'help yourself' book swap box outside your church building? Could the church be used for missed children's birthday celebrations and other family celebrations? While anticipating that large gatherings for sports and arts events probably won't be possible until next year, could your church have conversations with sports and arts organisations about providing space or other support for sporting and community art events, which are vital for sustainable

communities. If you have outside space, might this be a place where particular groups could meet, while respecting physical distancing guidelines?

- **Memorial services:** Many local people will have had family members or close friends die during this period. Some will have held funerals that were far from normal, or will have been prevented from attending a funeral or having a wake. Could your church offer its building as a venue to hold memorial events, once restrictions allow, or put on a collective act of remembrance? Might you offer a way for people to permanently commemorate and remember loved ones?
- **Collecting goods:** Food banks are experiencing massively increased demand, and are in need of supplies. Local charities, care homes and community groups may well be appealing for help with sourcing certain items. With local charity shops not opening until 15 June at the very earliest, could your church offer a place for exchange of items?

- **Financial support:** The economic impact of the lockdown will have impacted many charities, voluntary organisations and community groups, who have experienced increased demand for services but been unable to hold their usual fundraising activities. You might be able to make contributions from church funds, organise fundraising events, or highlight particular needs and causes to church members. While church finances might well be strained from reduced income at this time, could you offer your church premises at reduced rates, at least in the short term, which may bring in more sustainable revenue in the longer term if it decreases the chance of local groups closing altogether?
- **Pastoral support:** For many people, the lockdown will have been a time of trauma or struggle. For example, pre-school children will have been isolated from peers during this period, and their parents and carers won't have had the face-to-face mutual support that can be so helpful when struggling to care for babies and young children. Many churches offer invaluable Carer and Tots groups and family support services which will have been greatly missed; while following safeguarding guidelines, could you keep in contact with these families via phone and social media? Could you offer Zoom sessions to keep everyone connected?
- **Volunteers:** Because many of their previous volunteers are older or in vulnerable health categories and will have to continue to self-isolate or avoid social contact, many charity shops, community groups and local support services are in desperate need for volunteers. Perhaps you could contact a local school to enquire whether they would like assistance in any way?



Could you find out about local opportunities for volunteering, and publicise these to members of your congregation, and also via community networks, to those who may be able to assist? Could you welcome local residents as volunteers to help with church activities?

“It could be that the mutual aid networks disappear as quickly as they emerged – perhaps a key contribution that the churches could make is to encourage the activists who have emerged to stay in contact with one another and engage in some of the existing community bodies. Maybe, also, the Church can bring to the table its understanding of presence over the long term.” (Fiona Thomas, URC Secretary for Education and Learning)

- **A campaigning voice:** This booklet has already highlighted some of the injustices being experienced by groups and individuals, both before and during the pandemic – and your research and listening may have revealed more situations of concern. On issues such as homelessness, debt, the situation for migrants and racial injustice, churches can be powerful advocates for change, raising concerns with local and national decision-makers (see next section for more on this). You can also stand alongside individuals facing particular challenges, conducting online research, making phone calls, and sending letters and emails as an act of solidarity and support.

“People seeking asylum receive just £5.39 per day to live on. In normal times, this isn’t enough. During a pandemic, it puts lives at risk. That’s why we’re calling on the government to increase asylum support, to strengthen the safety net for everyone in our society. Please contact your MP today” (Refugee Action)

- **Prayerful support:** It will not be possible for everyone to be involved in one of these practical activities. If this is you, be assured that there is always something important you can do to make a difference, regardless of your abilities or resources. Try to keep in regular contact with friends and family who are engaging in such work, pray for them and for local initiatives, and for God to enable everyone to look at local communities and the world more closely through a ‘neighbourhood lens’.

Action: Make a list of your resources and assets (including people) and the ways in which you might be able to offer them in your neighbourhood and to local communities.

Action

Moving from reflection into action, and from crisis response to building more flourishing neighbourhoods and communities

An important stage in the pastoral cycle is action. This will be different in every context.

Ideas for responding

The links below take you to various examples of what some churches are currently doing in the area of community presence and engagement, to suggest some possibilities to you as you consider what you might (additionally) do in your area:

- [Story of the Little Free Pantry](#)
- [A virtual Church-Related Community Worker?](#)
- [You can’t stop the music!](#)
- [Virtual puddings for Earth Day go down a treat](#)

- [Chester URC members prepare hot meals for the vulnerable](#)
- [Busy church beats lockdown blues](#)
- [Tie a yellow ribbon on your church railings?](#)



The [Church-Related Community Work](#), [Walking the Way](#) and [URC](#) news pages regularly feature inspiring stories of local churches engaging in God's mission, particularly during the current crisis.

One idea that would bring together lots of the themes of this booklet would be to help organise a '[Big Lunch](#)' celebration meal for everyone in the neighbourhood, once physical distancing measures allow. After the lockdown, no doubt there will be much enthusiasm to reconnect and party! By working with local residents' associations, Covid-19 response teams and others, and inviting representatives from across the neighbourhood (local residents, business owners, homeless people, social workers, refugees, etc), it would provide an opportunity to hear people's thoughts about developing flourishing communities, and the role of local faith groups. It would also be useful in order to shape the work and ministry of your church moving forward. Perhaps an all-inclusive community party or festival won't be able to happen until next year, but is there a scaled-down 'Small Lunch' or virtual lunch that could happen sooner?

"This year, due to lockdown and the need for physical distancing, we are planning to hold a 'pop up Big Lunch' in place of our normal open-to-all event. Instead of inviting everyone to an event, we are planning to have a table by the pavement from which we will be giving out 'goody bags' to our neighbours who pass by. As well as this, we will also be taking out these gifts to those we know who are in particular need at this time. Part of our mission is to love our neighbours, and this has to still happen, however much we are now restricted as to what we can do in our building."

(URC church in West Midlands Synod)

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- Taking into account all that we have experienced, explored and reflected upon, what are our priorities?
- Who will we work with on this?

Action: Turn your priorities into a plan of action and take that forward with your identified partner(s).

"Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." (William Carey)

What comes next?

Working in partnership to support those most hard-pressed and at risk in our local neighbourhood and communities is a vital short-term priority. However, as we begin to emerge from lockdown, we also have important long-term choices to make about the kind of society and economy that we rebuild. We've seen how deeply we all need each other, and how our current set-up fails to meet the needs of too many of us.

“As the lockdown has continued, we've been reflecting on the things in life that matter most. It has highlighted the crucial importance of human interaction and friendship, of having hope and purpose, and our mental well-being.”

(Maurice Wren, Chief Executive of the Refugee Council)

A YouGov survey in April 2020 found that ‘only 9% of people in Britain want life to return to normal after the coronavirus outbreak is over’. Most people in the UK do not want to simply go back to life as it was before.

How can we work together collaboratively to create a fair and just society where every one of us can thrive? In this, it is especially important that we listen to the ideas of children and young people, who will probably be affected the most by the choices we as a society make today.

“We must build a future that puts people first and allows us to feel hope again. This is a time of anxiety and physical distancing, but also a time for solidarity and helping each other. So we'll be working with our allies and partners on a recovery plan that provides us all with access to things we really need to live a good life – such as quality housing, healthcare and [social care](#) – and that responds to the long-term crisis of climate change. At the New Economics Foundation (NEF) we have long argued that the role of the economy is to serve society, not the other way round.

Now is the time to make good on that.”

(Miatta Fahnbulleh. NEF's CEO)

Tearfund's *The World Rebooted* [video](#) and [reflective leaflet](#) offer an excellent way for churches to begin thinking and discussing together about the future we want to emerge from these challenging times. They note three major shifts which this crisis is bringing about that are central to God's mission:



1. Moving away from individualism to greater togetherness;
2. Valuing life more than productivity, and;
3. An appetite and greater imagination for real change.

We need to learn from these experiences, and take the opportunity to ‘build back better’ by addressing big issues such as the climate crisis, global poverty, and economic injustice. If we are to see God’s mission of fullness of life for all people achieved, our work in dealing with the effects of injustice locally should go hand-in-hand with campaigning around the causes of injustice nationally and globally.

“The reboot of the economy could fast-track action on the climate emergency, protect the most vulnerable and reduce inequality. This might just be possible, if we take action together.” (Tearfund)

Groups such as the [Joint Public Issues Team](#), [Church Action on Poverty](#), [Global Justice Now](#), [Christian Aid](#) and [Tearfund](#) offer tools, campaigns and resources which help individuals and churches to advocate for changes to unjust structures and systems in order to create a fairer future for all God’s people.

Questions for reflection, prayer and discussion:

- What part could you and your church play in reshaping society – locally, nationally and internationally?
- Based on what we’ve learnt and are learning, how can we ensure that the church, and society as a whole, enables everybody to flourish?
- In particular, what can be done to help those facing greatest hardships (locally and globally)?

In considering all of this, we are hopefully discerning the mission of God in the strange, new reality that we all face. How can we, both as individual disciples ‘walking the way of Jesus’ and also as institutional Church, order our time, resources and energies to demonstrate prophetic hope in uncertain and challenging times?

Action: Commit to doing at least one thing as an outcome from your discussions and prayers, and then reflect on the experience.

“In dangerous times like these... we have to produce generations of dedicated, courageous, and creative contemplative activists who will join God to bring radical healing and change to this damaged world, before it’s too late. We need this movement – not someday, maybe, but right now, definitely.” (Brian McLaren)

Useful resources and support agencies

- [URC Coronavirus pages](#) – advice from the URC on coronavirus, including efforts to deal with its effects on communities.
- [Churches Together in England Coronavirus Hub](#) – ecumenical advice on coronavirus.
- [Muslim Council of Britain](#) – Information and advice from our Muslim friends on dealing with the effects of coronavirus.
- [Citizens UK](#) – advice for communities on coronavirus.
- [yourneighbour.org](#) – tools to equip church leaders in supporting the most vulnerable around us.
- [HeartEdge](#) – Inspiration and ideas for taking opportunities brought forward by the crisis.
- [Together for the Common Good](#) – resources to reimagine a culture that puts people, communities and relationships first.
- [Cinnamon Network](#) – Weekly webinars with people from various networks dealing with the effects of the crisis.
- [Life on the Breadline](#) – Researching how churches are responding to austerity.
- [‘New Wine, New Wineskins’](#) – Resources from Church Action on Poverty to help churches move forward from this crisis.
- **Church on the Margins** – Resources from Churches Action on Poverty to help widen understanding of the effects of poverty through [videos](#) and [gatherings](#).
- [In the Thick of It](#) – Stories, experiences and reflections on God’s kingdom in the margins, from a 2019 URC partnership event
- [Livability](#) – Advice and support for people and communities dealing with disabilities during the current crisis.
- [Church Urban Fund](#) – Organisation offering support, volunteering and funding to facilitate positive change and growth in communities, especially in this time of crisis.
- [National Estate Churches Network \(NECN\)](#) – supporting people active in Christian ministry on housing estates, particularly at this time.
- [Urban Life](#) – Resources and training for mission and ministry in marginalised contexts.

Where can I find more information?

The groups who put this booklet together are available to help all congregations of the URC (and anyone else) in delving further into these questions. Visit our webpages to find out more:

- [Church-Related Community Work](#) (CRCW) is a recognised ministry of the URC concerned with bringing about positive change in local people and communities. It encourages the local church to consider ‘What does it mean to be a meaningful Christian presence in *this* place?’ Do you know someone who might be called to this distinctive ministry?
- [Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today](#) – The URC’s denomination-wide focus on whole-of-life discipleship, helping everyone to recognise and respond to God’s presence in our own, everyday reality.
- [Children’s and Youth Work](#) – Helping and supporting all areas of the URC’s life and work in recognising and responding to children, young people and families.
- [Joint Public Issues Team](#) – Ecumenical team empowering the URC, Methodist Church, Baptists Together and the Church of Scotland in engaging with social justice issues and campaigning.
- [Church Action on Poverty](#) – National ecumenical Christian social justice charity, committed to tackling poverty in the UK.



‘We worship God, ever present in the Holy Spirit;
who brings this Gospel to fruition, assures us of
forgiveness, strengthens us to do God’s will,
and makes us sisters and brothers of Jesus,
sons and daughters of God.’

The United Reformed Church Basis of Union

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