

Good News!

from across our Synod



Eco Church



Garstang URC have recently been awarded **Silver Eco Church status** and The Dandelion Community - Wythenshawe have achieved the **Bronze Eco Church Status**.

Gordon, from Garstang writes, I am delighted to let you know that the certificate for our Silver ECO Church Award has now arrived (by email). We can be proud of this recognition which reflects the efforts of a number of people over a long time and all for a great cause: protection of the environment and God's creation.

We are now being encouraged by ARocha to work for a Gold Award, but the Management Committee will firstly consolidate our achievements in the Silver category before building on them and aiming higher.

Kate also shared the great news that The Dandelion Community was awarded with Bronze Eco Church status and are hoping to work towards Silver when our buildings can reopen.

Daleen had four churches in Lancashire (Elswick, Clitheroe, Penwortham, and Leyland) booked in for the Eco Audit before the lock down. Although it was a huge disappointment at first in recognising that meeting up in person would not be possible, this set back did not put a halt on our goal to work towards Eco Church Status. This was made possible through: telephone conversations, filling in the eco audit online and other forms of technology.

For your congregation to become an Eco church, please contact your Missional Discipleship Mentor or the Synod's **Green Apostle Team:**

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Good News!

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Lancashire Area

Fulwood United Reformed Church - Preston

Margery writes: For longer than I can remember, my Church (St Margaret's Presbyterian which joined with Garstang Rd Congregational several years before they became Fulwood URC) had a special afternoon service on Mothering Sunday led by the Sunday School children after which refreshments were served including simnel cake. As the numbers of children reduced the afternoon service was discontinued but the ladies were still given a 'buttonhole' of flowers and wrapped pieces of simnel cake were given to the congregation as they went out of church. Obviously this couldn't happen this year but Val Atkinson, who should have been leading our worship on Mothering Sunday, passed on a simnel cake she had been given to bring with her. Slices of this cake were sent to most of our members. The Elders are keeping in touch with the congregation by phone and we are also sending all our members a hand-stitched Easter card which will include a palm cross and a reminder about the URC Daily Devotions and the Sunday services with samples of each.



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Garstang United Reformed Church

Gordon Bell writes: The suspension of Sunday worship prevents members and friends from making their weekly offerings for the church's ongoing work, but a lot of the church's regular expenditure is unaffected by the current restrictions. This imbalance could easily lead to a cash flow problem.

So I have written to everyone who usually uses envelopes or gives cash, inviting them to send a cheque, make a bank transfer, or set up a standing order.

The response has been encouraging, with quite a few cheques received and some new standing orders.

Where a former cash donor has moved to another method of giving, I have suggested that they give a Gift Aid declaration if they can – their cash would have been included in the annual Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme claim, but donations during the suspension don't meet the GASDS requirements, and the church would otherwise lose the benefit of the tax refund.

This has all gone some way towards keeping the church's income flowing while we are not permitted to meet – and it can all be done by email, post, telephone and online, even if we are self-isolating!

Thank you!
Gordon



Central United Reformed Church - Darwen

Here at Central URC Darwen we have shown that care, compassion and sheer determination can rise against all adversaries. DARE is our **Darwen Asylum Refugee Enterprise** which because of the virus issues has had to close its doors at the church. Did that stop us – NO – Food parcels are being delivered under the guidelines from Government to minimise risk.

Jean, an Elder who is over 80 – thought carefully about DARE and the many asylum seekers and refugees who might feel lonely, forgotten and uncared for – SO she DARED to make some cakes – three large ones. Leaving them on the wall – they were collected and delivered with a knock on the door and a wave through the window – and a few tears of thankfulness – Christian mission isn't complicated – it's easy! Just an idea, and the kind of love that is small but in fact is huge in God's eyes.

*And now I give you a new commandment: love one another.
As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* John Chap 13 v 34

Liz, the church secretary here at Central looks after quite a few DARE clients but is frustrated that she currently can't do more to support people because her health issues mean she currently has to stay at home. So now, one of the families she cares for are now bringing her shopping, showing their appreciation of Liz's support for her family.

Finally, David, one of the DARE volunteers has been supporting a young man from Iraq in developing his painting skills.

This his Halkawt's latest work ,completed in just twenty minutes!



Item provided by John East, DARE Coordinator, lay preacher and Member of Central URC. Darwen

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Rochdale, Bury, and North Manchester Missional Partnership

Rev'd Richard Bradley writes: we send out a Missional Partnership wide, weekly newsletter whilst we're isolating. We hope after Easter this might include a Bible Study. I am sending this out in the middle of the week via email and post.



I've also started a weekly worship, offering both text and video versions. Services will be recorded for Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and also Easter Sunday with communion. And finally, we are doing "Palm Crosses for all"; placing Palm Crosses on the wall outside church with an invitation for anyone to take one and more than one if they want to share it with anybody else. A prayer suggestion comes with the cross, where people can hold different parts of the cross and pray for different things.



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Central Area

Westhoughton (Bethel) United Reformed Church

Lisa writes: Westhoughton have set up **Bethel Buddies!** All the congregation have been invited to be a part of this network. We have shared everyone's contact details within the network and have a **WhatsApp chat group** where people are keeping each other entertained with musical pieces they are recording, and sending good wishes to each other. Also keeping each other abreast of any issues we are facing. We are also circulating a newsletter with a weekly sermon, prayers, corona virus information, and good news stories. It's our virtual link while we cannot be physically linked!

New Chapel United Reformed Church - Horwich

Linda writes: 'At New Chapel I am in constant touch with the majority of our congregation by email and phone the others to make sure they are ok. I also ring other people too, to check they are ok - as do so many others in our fellowship.

As part of the emailing I am sending a copy of the full Sunday Services which I have prepared, which has had a great response. I will be doing the same for our Maundy Thursday and Good Friday Services and hope that many join in with the M T Service as we combine it with a supper, **so we could do it at the same time on the Thursday teatime and feel that we are one together.**

As we are such a close fellowship I believe we are constantly in each others thoughts and prayers, and that we pray for the whole world!



Good News!

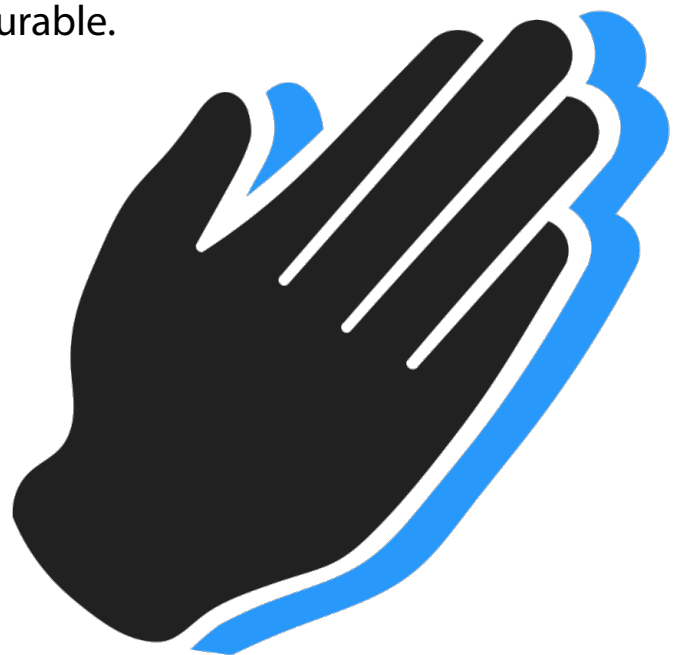
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Egerton United Reformed Church.

Roma writes: Due to Egerton having a mainly older congregation the elders agreed to set up an email Church Blog, having acquired many addresses we commenced sending out emails prior to Mothering Sunday, the responses were overwhelming, sending each other loving wishes and happy photo's which has continued over the following days, and a paper copy of these wishes has also been posted to those without email. We have made sure that each person who lives alone has contact with at least one person who will carry out any task they cannot do themselves.

Information about church services and URC Daily Devotions has been circulated, and prayers asked for those who need them especially at this time. The Pastoral Visiting team has quietly carried on the important work of support and friendship by phone. Holy week reflections will be emailed during the week.

[The love and care we have for each other](#), the families of health workers within our fellowship, the community and the wide world has in the present situation brought us together in a way that is immeasurable.



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South Area

East Cheshire and Derbyshire Borders Missional Partnership



Rev'd Alison Termie writes: We gave away more than 100 bunches of daffodils to passers-by over Mothering Sunday weekend. They were left in pots attached to railings with the message: "Because we were unable to meet for Mothering Sunday we hope that you would take some flowers and know that we were remembering you and our community in our prayers."

One of our gardeners delivered to me a box of seed potatoes ready for planting and under a poster saying: "a gift from me to you", and people were encouraged to take a few and plant them for fresh veg in July. The whole boxful has been slowly taken throughout this week. We hope that lots of young gardeners are getting their first experience of 'grow your own'.

Many church members are volunteering with **Marple Mutual Aid**, delivering food and medicines to isolated individuals. All our members are keeping in touch with friends and neighbours to give and receive help in this way.

Each church has set up a WhatsApp group to try and link up as many people as possible with chatter and pictures. (I'm a member of ALL the groups so my poor phone is nearly expiring). We gathered spare smart phones that have been lying in the back of cupboards, and using the GiffGaff friends scheme we acquired new sim cards, preloaded with £5 credit and [gave the phones to those who are not on line](#). Furthermore we have held elders meetings and prayer meetings by Zoom and worked out new ways to deliver our magazine, containing morning readings and prayers, to many of our non-technical members.

St Peters

Angela writes: we have had three Sunday services now via Zoom at the usual time of 11:00am. We use the Methodist service sheet for people to use if they are unable to attend church, and have the words of the hymns appear on the screen. The number of people taking part has increased from 25 people the first week to 35 on Palm Sunday. Our usual pianist, who is an RNCM student plays for us which is great. She also plays before and after the service.

I have asked ministers due to lead worship if they would produce a short reflection which we can use rather than the one on the service sheet and all have been willing. One of our members who is a Methodist local preacher has been leading the service and on Easter Day it will be Rev'd Ian Rutherford from Methodist Central Hall who does usually lead worship on the 2nd Sunday. We have also invited people to join us who used to be members and have now moved away and some students who have travelled home temporarily. **Last Sunday, we had people joining us from Egypt, South Korea, China as well as places in the UK.** Relatives of members who don't have their own services have also joined us. All this has made us come together as a community. If anyone would like to join us, they would be welcome.

After the service we have used Zoom for our Lent Bible study group where we 're studying Ruth Valerio's Lent book, Say Yes to Life. We've also had our Book Group via Zoom which worked well and **Zoom is set up from 6 to 6:30 pm three evenings a week, simply so that the church community can meet and talk together.**

I've set up a WhatsApp group of church members where people can post messages, share information and news, or even jokes! There are a few members without Wi-Fi so the service sheet is posted to them each Thursday with a note and two members phone them each week. I keep in touch by phone with a blind student from Uganda isolated in one of the halls of residence and two younger members are doing shopping for him. We are intending to join with Chorlton Central for its Tenebrae service on Good Friday and a few of us have joined Dave Fraser's Holy Week prayers.

Children's and Youth Work



Leo (CYDO) writes: Youth work is all about relationships – but how can you maintain those relationships when you can't meet with your young people? It's important that they have the opportunity to talk about how they feel, what they're experiencing and how they're coping and that can be done with phone calls, texts and internet messaging (ensuring you comply with Good Practice guidelines, of course!

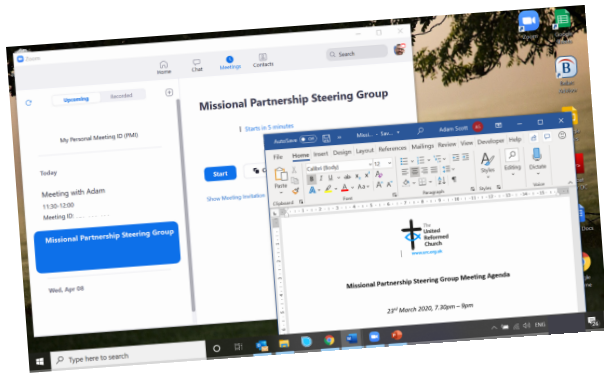
But it's also important that they feel connected to each other and the Church, and that they have some fun. That was the point of starting **Gathered Youth Groups**, where small groups of young people come together regularly to meet with each other in a Mission partnership.

And the lockdown isn't going to stop us – what can be more gathered than a virtual youth group? Next Tuesday (April 7th) at 7pm young people from all over the synod can take part in a treasure hunt using Zoom – a digital conferencing application.

The CYDO will be setting the task to find some common, and less common, household objects. First one back to the camera with the object gets a point. If you have young people in your church (or family) who might want to take part, email Leo at cydo@nwsynod.org.uk and he'll send you the link so that you can share it with your young people.

Leo will be running a **Virtual Gathered Youth Group** each week during the lockdown – so share the details when you get them but, remember, a phone call is better than an email or a text for connecting with your young people individually – don't let them feel isolated, and keep those relationships going.

Zoom Steering Group Meeting



Adam writes: I convene a missional partnership steering group. I decided that instead of cancelling our meeting we would experiment with doing it online. I was encouraged by the steering group's willingness to go with this

experiment. ZOOM was chosen as a means of having the meeting. The reason for choosing ZOOM is it is fairly straight forward to use and has some excellent features that allows us to do things like using a PowerPoint presentation, getting into smaller groups for discussion, and writing messages for collecting ideas (a bit like virtual 'Post it' notes).

An email was sent out explaining how to get into the ZOOM meeting along with the agenda. I facilitated a 'dry-run' with some people before the actual meeting to test the technology. There were those who didn't feel very technologically minded, so they appreciated this.

The meeting itself involved a lot of fun and laughter (as usual) and once we had got more familiar to being in an online meeting, we began our discussions. Whilst there were a couple of teething issues, the feedback from those who attended was resoundingly positive. I know some went on to have ZOOM elders' meetings, and even felt they could use the technology to keep in touch with friends and family.

The virtual world is not something I engage with a lot, as I prefer face-to-face conversations. But **I was pleasantly surprised how good it was to have our meeting online.** Many of my concerns and worries about online meetings were allayed, and I really enjoyed the interaction. I think it is invaluable for the time we find ourselves in, and I would like to continue to use it for some meetings when the pandemic is over.

Thank God for creative people who develop these technologies!

Northern College Worship on Zoom



Nicola writes: during term-time, Tuesdays at Northern College are the time students and tutors come together as a community to worship, study, eat and be with one another. We travel to Manchester from across England, Wales, and Scotland. In this current time of lockdown, we are

unable to do so. Instead, we are staying in our homes and coming together through Zoom.

Last week, *I found myself smiling widely, as more and more friendly, familiar faces popped up on the screen.* At the beginning, we took the time to ask one another: “How are you?” We really wanted to know about each other’s well-being, how each of us are getting on, how we are spending our time, how we are feeling and experiencing lockdown. Because each one of us, together, are affected by lockdown.

In spite of our many different locations, this togetherness was deeply present in our worship service when we:

Lit a candle. *Together.*

Listened to the Bible readings. *Together.*

Prayed the responses to the prayers of intercession. *Together.*

Laughed at the technical glitches! *Together.*

During this current time, we may not be able to come together physically as the Body of Christ. But the Body of Christ has always included a wider and deeper community: those who go to the church building; those who are housebound or in care homes; those who are at work, play or rest; those who are parts of our local, national and global communities. Indeed, in the Body of Christ, each and every one of us has a different and unique part to play, and yet we are unified through God. A God who is with all of us and within all of us every moment of every day.