



Walking the Way....where you are

Starting in May 2019, there have been gatherings in some Areas of our Synod - and more are planned for the remaining Areas - with the title "Walking the Way....together". They were intended to give us a taste of pilgrimage - an experience of journeying with God alongside other people. But not everyone is able to travel a distance to take part in an event like this, and it was suggested that some resources people could use in their own locality might prove helpful. So....welcome to "Walking the Way....where you are".

Events have, to a certain extent, overtaken us in this project. The lockdown restrictions have meant that for some time we have all been limited to taking a walk in our own local area, and I am sure that many of you will have used that time to pray for the people and situations round about you. This booklet is not intended to replace that, but to add to it by suggesting some topics for your continued prayer and reflection. Please use it in whatever way you find most useful. My hope for you is that as you walk and pray, you will encounter God walking alongside you.

Marion Thomas
August 2020

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All journeys begin at home, and some of us have been limited to the home for our own safety, so we begin our journey of prayer by looking at the view from a window. What do you see?



I am fortunate enough to look out on a green space.

Your view may be more built-up.



Jeremiah 29:7

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Is there a particular community project in your locality that you could support with your prayers, and perhaps also through getting involved in some way? Take a look at your local newspaper or listen to the news on your local radio station for more information about what is happening near you.

Wherever you are, spend a few minutes in silence praying for the homes and families round about you. Hold before God any particular needs that you are aware of and any issues that affect your local area.

Lord, you have placed me in this spot and with these people, with all the needs and issues that make this place unique. I hold them before you now. Bless my local area with peace and wellbeing, and show me how I can best be a light for my neighbours to illuminate for them your loving presence amongst them. Amen

Is there a green space near you? Perhaps you are fortunate enough to live in the countryside and to have green all around you. Most of us live within a short distance of a park or other open space. Take a walk to somewhere where you can enjoy the peace and beauty of nature .



Isaiah 55:12

For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Psalms 8

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

The hymn “For the beauty of the earth” was written in 1864 by a young man called Folliott S Pierpoint. He was mesmerised by the beauty of the countryside that surrounded him. As you take time to stop and reflect in the lovely surroundings where you are, read the words slowly and thoughtfully.

For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies,
 for the love which from our birth over and around us lies:
Gracious God, to thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise.
 For the beauty of each hour of the day and of the night,
 hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun and moon and stars of light:
Gracious God, to thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise.
 For each perfect gift of thine to our race so freely given,
 graces human and divine, flowers of earth and buds of heaven:
Gracious God, to thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise.

Spend a few minutes in silence giving thanks in your own words for the wonder and beauty of God's creation.

Glory be to you Creator God
 For the wonder and majesty,
 the immensity and exquisite delicacy,
 For the sheer audacity of your heart-singing creation.
 For the cathedral balm of the beech wood
 and the dancing butterfly across a sunlit glade;
 For pale primrose and towering nimbus
 and bobbing coot chicks on a windy pool;
 For the blackbird soloist in the dawn chorus
 and waves stirring pebbles on a summer beach;
 For a gibbous moon caught in winter branches
 and heather moors drowsy under western skies;
 For the smell of puppies and lilac and babies;
 and the petrichor of raindrops on dry-cracked ground;
 High mewing of buzzards circling the big wind;
 The wriggling tadpole in the garden pond
 For frosted shimmer of a winter cobweb
 And sweet, purple-stained blackberries for autumn fare.

Glory be to you Creator God - how can I not sing your praises! Amen

Contributed by Diana Cullum-Hall



There will almost certainly be a children's playground, a youth centre, or some other facility for children and young people near you. Without lingering in a way that might appear inappropriate, find somewhere to stop and give thanks for and pray for the children and young people of your community.



Psalm 127:3-5 (MSG)

Don't you see that children are God's best gift? The fruit of the womb his generous legacy? Like a warrior's fistful of arrows are the children of a vigorous youth. Oh, how blessed are you parents, with your quivers full of children! Your enemies don't stand a chance against you; you'll sweep them right off your doorstep.

Matthew 18:2-5

He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

BBC Children in Need is just one example of the many charities that work to

improve the lives of children and young people. Their vision is that every child in the UK has a childhood which is:

- ✦ safe
- ✦ happy and secure
- ✦ allows them the chance to reach their full potential



They provide grants to projects in the UK which focus on children and young people who are disadvantaged, supporting small and large organisations which empower children and extend their life choices. The projects they fund help children facing a range of disadvantages; for example poverty and deprivation, children who have been the victims of abuse or neglect, or disabled young people.

Spend a few minutes in silence praying for the children and young people in your own circle of family and friends, your church and your community.

Loving God our heavenly Father, we pray for all the children and young people of this community. Be with them in all the places where they gather and keep them from danger or harm. May they know the love of parents and carers in their homes, and the nurturing support of teachers, youth workers and others. Children and young people are precious to you, loving God, and we pray that they may come to know how special and valuable they are both to you and to the adults in their lives. We remember before you the increased challenges with mental health faced by young people today and we ask that they may be able to find the help they need when times are tough. We pray for our local schools, for the pupils and the staff teams, including teachers, admin staff and those who care for the facilities. May our schools be safe environments, free from abuse, free from bullying and places of growth and wellbeing for all. And we pray for our local church communities in the contacts they have with children and young people, whether that is through organised activities or through the extended families represented in our congregations. May the love we offer lead them to a greater knowledge of your love. Amen

Contributed by our Synod Children's and Youth Development Officer, Richard Knott

Why not consider praying regularly for your local school(s)?

See <https://www.prayforschools.org/>



Is there a source of water in your local area? Perhaps a stream, or a pool? Such places can be a tranquil spot to stop and reflect. As you enjoy the peace, remember those in desperate need of a safe, clean water supply.



John 4:7-14

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink". (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are

you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

Revelation 21:5-6

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life."



Until very recently, growing up in Tombohuaun, Sierra Leone was a daily struggle because of the lack of water. Daily chores involved carrying a heavy bucket full of water back from the waterhole, being careful not to slip on the way and spill it, or worse still, dropping and breaking it. Nafisatu is nine years old, and used to wend her way down to the waterhole several times a day. A bucket is a difficult object to balance on your head, and water is heavy, especially if you're small. It's not just hard work for small bodies, the water itself made children in Tombohuaun sick. Nancy's younger sister died from drinking dirty water. She became ill very suddenly with vomiting and a fever, and didn't recover. Their family will always grieve the loss of their little girl, but now have hope for a healthy future for Nancy.

Working with WaterAid, the village are putting in place a water pump, digging toilets and together, young and old, learning about good hygiene. Now children in Tombohuaun have the chance to grow up healthy and strong, living life to its full potential. Childhood as it should be.

Spend a few minutes in silence praying for those places in the world that do not have a safe, clean water supply.

Father God, help us to remember...

As we turn on a tap,

those who walk miles for a bucketful of water

As we enjoy a refreshing glass of water,

those whose drinking water makes them ill

As we enjoy a warm shower,

those who have barely a cupful for washing

As we water our garden,

those who have insufficient water to grow food to eat,

and whose seedlings are washed away on flooded ground when the rains come

As we enjoy a swim,

those who do not have the luxury of relaxation or play

...and to thank you for your care and compassion for all. Amen

Contributed by our Synod Spirituality Consultant, Jan Scott

This may look like just another country view, but it is a place with a history. Whitefield's Tump, close to Rodborough Tabernacle, is a site with significance for churches of the Reformed tradition - the place where evangelist George Whitefield preached his message of the love of God.



Isaiah 6:8

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Mention the word evangelism to the average churchgoer and there is a reaction of blind panic! This is probably because we imagine having to stand out in the open like Whitefield or Wesley and preach to a noisy and possibly hostile audience. - but his is not the only way to proclaim the good news of the love of God as seen in Jesus. Take a look at the "Good News Stories with Nick" page on the Synod website at <https://www.urcwestmidlands.org.uk/synod-video-stories.html> or on YouTube for a host of ways in which churches in this Synod are reaching out in love to those around them.

Here are just 2 examples from around the Synod. Dursley Tabernacle have taken the risk of opening their worship area every Wednesday for a family café where people can come and have a cuppa and a cake, and children can run and play, and they will find a warm welcome and a sympathetic ear. And when people ask “why do you do this?” it provides the opportunity to say quite naturally “because we want to show Christ-like love and hospitality, and you are welcome!”.

URC Longton wanted to find a way to demonstrate their support for their local community during the lockdown. At a time when they were unable to open their doors to welcome people, they put this message of God’s love on the outside of their building where it faces the main road, to offer a sign of hope to those around them.



Spend a few minutes in silence reflecting on the question “what could my church do to offer the love of God in our situation?”

Lord, we are not all Wesleys or Whitefields,
 And their way of doing things might not be the way for us,
 But still you call us to be your witnesses in the world, saying
 ‘As the Father sent me, so I send you.’

Open our ears to hear your call more loudly than the voices
 of hesitation and fear;

Open our minds and stir our imaginations

to see new ways in which we can reach out to others;

Open our mouths that we may speak of you freely and naturally;

Open our hands that we may be generous as you are;

Open our lives, that your love and truth may be seen in us daily;

And open our hearts, that when you ask, ‘Who will go for me?’

we are more than ready to respond, ‘Here I am, send me!’ Amen

Contributed by our Synod Evangelist, Nick Stanyon

There is almost certainly a war memorial somewhere near you. As you pass it, stop and reflect on the cost and the effect of conflict whether between nations, ideologies or individuals.

Micah 4:2b-4

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
 and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
 He shall judge between many peoples,
 and shall arbitrate between strong
 nations far away; they shall beat their
 swords into ploughshares, and their
 spears into pruning hooks; nation shall
 not lift up sword against nation, neither
 shall they learn war any more; but they
 shall all sit under their own vines and
 under their own fig trees, and no one
 shall make them afraid; for the mouth
 of the Lord of hosts has spoken.



Matthew 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

The West Midlands Synod follows the border between Wales and England for much of its length, and our churches in border villages and towns include people of both nationalities. Although historically this was not always the case, today English and Welsh people co-exist, on the whole, fairly happily. But we are reminded that in other parts of the world borders are places of tension and conflict. We probably all remember seeing President Trump step over the border between North and South Korea. And we have seen for a number of years the border conflict between Iraq and Syria. There are other less high-profile borders that are hotly disputed. The borders between China and India, between Venezuela and Colombia and between Eritrea and Djibouti are prime

examples. Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) is an international organization working to promote peace through non-violent direct action. It has its roots in the historic peace churches such as the Mennonites and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). A witness to peace and enemy-loving as an integral part of the gospel is a strong perspective of these traditions, and more information on how that is being lived out in today's world can be found on the Anabaptist Mennonite Network website www.amnetwork.uk/

Spend a few minutes in silence praying for peace in the troubled places of the world, and in any troubled relationships of those you know and love.

Skip with the Peacemakers

May we play hopscotch at checkpoints, chanting ancient skipping rhymes.
Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn around.

May we patch daisies onto khaki pockets, cultivating landing strips
with seed-bombs.
Say a prayer, say a prayer, touch the ground.

May we dance freestyle at the border sharing welcome howls of laughter.
Teddy bear, teddy bear, jump up high.

May we throw petals at broken fences widening pathways for hand-crafters.
Say a prayer, say a prayer, bless our cry.

May we stroll through deserted camps picking over well worn
pointless phrases.
Teddy bear, teddy bear, bend down low.

May we spray arrows of hope and awe, spinning rainbow yarns of tenderness.
Say a prayer, say a prayer, peace may grow.

Contributed by Craig Muir

Finally, look for somewhere that represents to you the life of our nation - perhaps a Town Hall or other significant focal point in the life of your town or village. At a time when all our lives have so recently been turned upside down by the effects of the pandemic, whatever your opinion of our local and national leaders they carry heavy responsibilities and need our prayers.

2 Chronicles 1:7-10

That night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, "Ask what I should give you." Solomon said to God, "You have shown great and steadfast love to my father David, and have made me succeed him as king. O Lord God, let your promise to my father David now be fulfilled, for you have made me king over a people as numerous as the dust of the earth. Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can rule this great people of yours?"



1 Timothy 2:1-2

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.

The Joint Public Issues Team is a venture of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland. The Team aims to enable our four Churches to work together in living out the gospel of Christ in the Church and in wider society. They aim to promote equality and justice by influencing those in power and by energising and supporting local congregations. You can sign up to their monthly

e-newsletter, Praxis, or subscribe to their blog to keep up to date with their work. For more details visit www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/



Spend a few minutes in silence praying for the nation - for the government and all with responsibility for the life of the nation, both at national and local levels.

Loving God, Ruler of all,

We pray for those who have been elected to rule over us.

As they face the great many challenges before us,
dealing with the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic,
with its huge personal and economic impact,
we pray that you will bless them
with an abundance of wisdom and compassion,
that they may lead our nation well in the coming months.

We pray also for decisions being made over Brexit that will affect us all.
Give negotiators for the UK and the EU calm heads and clear sight,
that a settlement can be found.

We pray for those who are regularly subject to racial hatred
and discrimination of any form,
that they may be treated equally,
and that deep hurts may be healed in our society.

We pray for provision for those living in poverty, and those who are homeless,
that you will provide their Daily Bread—for their whole needs.

We thank you for the work of your Church
in responding to the many situations that face our nation.

Give us eyes to see need and strength to address that need.

We ask these things in and through Jesus, our Lord, and hope for the world.

Amen

Contributed by our Synod Moderator, Steve Faber

As your time of reflection draws to a close, give thanks for all that you have received.

Lord, I give you thanks for this neighbourhood in which you have placed me.
For its people and places, for the hidden beauty which I so often pass by without noticing, for your presence in the midst of it all and with me now. Go with me, I pray, into the rest of my day, that I may be a channel of your love to all I meet.
Amen

Opening and closing prayers contributed by Marion Thomas

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