

Letter to WSAM churches

4th June 2020

Dear Friends

I hope you are all well and managing to find ways to keep in touch with family and friends. I was fortunate to be able to visit my parents this week, for the first time since mid-March. This involved them sitting in a summerhouse in their garden, while I sat on a deckchair several metres away outside. We had a picnic and chatted. I know several of you have managed to do similar visits, while others are still waiting for an opportunity to be reunited. I hope the wait isn't too much longer now.

This has sadly also been a week of outrage, violence and unrest.

The following statement and prayer comes from Karen Campbell, the United Reformed Church's Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, and the Moderators of the URC General Assembly, the Revd Nigel Uden and Derek Estill:

"I have come that you might have life in all its fullness." Jesus Christ said this more than 2,000 years ago. But when will that fullness of life be afforded to all people – irrespective of the colour of their skin?

The United Reformed Church has no hesitation in adding its voice to the outrage and dismay expressed following the brutal killing of George Floyd. Together with our sister Churches in the USA, the United Reformed Church declares that racism – in any form – is a sin against humanity, and a sin against God, who created all people in God's own image and likeness. For too long, black communities have borne the brunt of systemic injustices, impacting their health, their finances, their education, their prospects, their lives. As Christians, we heed Christ's call that we should be one, we reaffirm our unity with all people through the love of our one parent-God, and we declare that it is meaningless to claim that "all lives matter" until Black Lives Matter."

They offered a prayer, of which this is a part:

Eternal God,
deeply troubled by what is happening following George Floyd's death,
and by too much other inhumanity that doesn't reach the headlines,
we cry to you as the one
whose love was the victor at Easter and
who pours it into our hearts at Pentecost.
As we observe the pain of a fractured world,
use your love to drive us from sadness to compassion...
Until none of us are disregarded for who we are
nor any diminished by what we fail to be,
we keep on praying in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen

Looking to the future

The Synod has written to all churches, expressing their intention to support us as we enter this new phase and asking our Elders to evaluate our resources, both human and financial, and assess our ability to continue our life and worship, albeit in different ways. The thinking is that some congregations will need extra support and others may sadly even need to close. Please hold the Elders in prayer as they try to see the way ahead...

For the next few months, while it is unsafe to meet together in person as we would like, we are looking at ways to do more online, and make the things we do online - social activities, worship services, meetings of all sorts - more varied, more open and more accessible to as many people as possible. We are very aware that this is difficult or impossible for some (although we are hopeful that anyone with a phone will be able to take part to some extent, if they wish), so we will continue to write and send out the newsletters and Sunday Bulletins, and try to arrange any online worship away from the usual Sunday morning slot, so that there is no conflict.

We are three quite diverse communities, and our members have different needs. I think it is vital that all those needs are considered. Equally, I think it is unlikely we will go back to exactly how we were before - some of the new ideas are good ones!

News

URC national news: The General Assembly will be replaced this year by a much briefer online meeting; and following the retirement of our previous General Secretary, Revd John Proctor, the new appointee to the post, Revd Dr John Bradbury, began work this week. We hold him in our prayers.

Rosemary has heard from Revd Peter who was previously a member at Pulborough and regularly preached in all three WSAM churches. Peter has some health issues now but is very cheerful and wishes to send his love and greetings to anyone in WSAM who remembers him.

Have a peaceful weekend, and stay in touch.

Anne Lewitt

These letters and Bulletins, with some details removed for confidentiality, are now being added to our church websites so that they are more easily and widely accessible.