

# Synod Moderators' report

## Synod Moderators

### Basic information

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### Introduction

In our report to last year's General ( )Tj EMC /P <</MCID 15 >>06oT(')Tj 0.004 Tc -0.C.004 Tc15

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stir the spirit, stretch the mind,  
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Our structures have been changed within our history, as our union grew and as we ended the role of the District Councils (except for very specific and occasional purposes). This is undoubtedly a point where we need to review and simplify our structures. We never meant to create a bureaucratic institution, yet many of us feel that we are too often bound up in red tape and unable to respond creatively to the new direction in which the Spirit of God is trying to blow us.

What are those things that are essential for us to carry forwards and what can we safely leave behind for the next phase of our journey? What are the things that now leave us heavy laden and encumbered? A former General Secretary remarked that we are held back by two equally dangerous phrases: 'We've never done it like that before,' and 'We've always done it this way.' Can our Jubilee be one where we consign those sentiments to the past, while taking forward the positive aspects of our past that will help us for our next 50 years as this part of Christ's Body? We are not called to iconoclasm, destroying what has been important and helpful in the past simply because it is part of our inheritance, but neither can we possibly carry forward everything we have valued – we must retain what we need, but no more.

## **Courage, not comfort**

When we set up camp and settle  
to avoid love's risk and pain,  
you disturb complacent comfort,  
pull the tent pegs up again;  
keep us travelling in the knowledge  
you are always at our side;  
give us courage for the journey,

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## **Taking risks**

We are convinced that the denomination now needs to take risks. We don't have the resources, particularly the most valuable ones – people – to do all that we once did or that we would like to do. We are being forced, or at least very firmly guided, into looking at how we can and how we should do things differently, to suit a new age and new circumstances.

General Assembly has recognised this in commissioning the Church Life Review. The Synod Moderators are perhaps better placed than anyone else to see this need lived out in the life of a variety of local churches, needs that are deep and real.

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for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

Walking ever closer with Christ as Lord, we can know that doing the right thing because it is the right thing, will always be right, even if it might prove costly to us. Yet, who will harm us if we are eager to do good, and even if we do suffer, God will bless us.

As Abram was called to leave the familiar and travel into an unknown land, as Moses led the people out to slavery in the Exodus, and the first disciples gave up their familiar living in order to follow Christ, we can know that we do this at God's call.

In our Jubilee year, we remember also how our predecessors lost their living in parish churches for the sake of dissent – and in order to follow the path onto which God had called them. Our traditions have their roots in a travelling people, leaving behind the familiar in order to respond to the call to move on with God.

In the wilderness, the people grumbled and wanted to go back to how things were – even though that would mean returning to slavery.

We would rather listen to the prophet Isaiah's words, which we appropriate and adapt for the United Reformed Church:

See, God is about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. Do not fear, for God has redeemed us; God has called us by name and will be with us as we pass through the waters, where even mighty rivers will not overwhelm us. We are precious in God's sight, and honoured and loved by God. Are we ready to venture with God into the unknown and embrace this new life?  
(Based on verses from Isaiah 43.)

Now that the Covid-19 restrictions have all but ended (at the time of writing), we find ourselves with an opportunity ahead. When the Moderators offered 'Ready for the New Normal' to the United Reformed Church two years ago, we were signalling that the pandemic gave us all a chance to imagine things differently. Some have been able, despite the anxiety and uncertainty, to re-order life locally and fit themselves for a new age of being and doing. We see other churches that have yet to catch up, and sadly too many congregations that have reached the end of the road for the worship and witness, and have taken the, usually painful, decision to close. We pray for the whole United Reformed Church, that together and in our own fellowships we may discern the mind of Christ on how to move forwards.

We do not believe in a 'one-size-fits-all' solution, but according to local context, some of the answers will involve choosing to adopt locally-recognised 'lay leadership' rather than an ordained Minister, more creative collaboration between congregations, merging some churches and ceasing operation in other places. Alongside this we commend experiments to plant new causes through Fresh Expressions of church and pioneering ministry, and, true to our DNA, ecumenical co-operation wherever possible.

We do not believe one approach will suit everyone or fix every approach. But we do believe that there is hope for the United Reformed Church and for the world.

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