

# Around the Synod

May / June 2012

News highlights from the Northern Synod



## From the Moderator.....

### Dying to Live – Vision 2020 in Northern Synod



Dear Friends,

Have you ever calculated the number of days between Ash Wednesday and Easter Day? Most people will be surprised that it is not 40 days but 46, because even in the depths of Lenten repentance the church cannot fail but celebrate the resurrection, life rising

out of death, every Sunday. So I have been taken aback when several folk have said that 'Dying to Live' is a depressing title for the mission framework for the URC Northern Synod.

I have wondered why this response! Is it because so many churches are living in anticipation of death as numbers of committed folk decline? Or is it a result of a fear of our own personal death that this culture pretends can be put off indefinitely and that is unspoken of today? Or is it resistance to surrendering our lives to God? Or is it that the URC is 40 years old this year and there is disappointment that we are still here when the URC's identity has been that we were born to die into a greater uniting church? Therefore 'dying to live' triggers an identity crisis for the URC.

Yet still each Sunday we celebrate the risen life of Christ. Each spring we celebrate creation awaking from sleep into abundant fruitfulness. Each baptismal service we rejoice in the person dying and being raised to new life with Christ.

The key biblical text of 'Dying to Live: Vision 2020 in Northern Synod' agreed by the Synod meeting in March 2012 is John 12.24: *Jesus said, 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains a single grain but if it dies it bears much fruit.'* As Jesus died and brought forth through resurrection the fruit of reconciliation, new life for all creation in God, so we are to be prepared to die to self and rise in Christ as part of the body of the church today.

Alternatively think of the familiar parable of the sower who scatters seed that brings forth the harvest. Our identity and calling is to plant seeds of God's kingdom

that God may give growth. We are to plant seeds of nurturing people's spirituality and prayer life through different styles and times for worship and praying for our communities. We are to plant seeds of evangelism and growth – speaking of our faith to others, engaging with Back to Church Sunday and welcoming folk. We are to plant seeds that relate to the ten statements of Vision 2020, that is the mission of God in the world.

As a symbol of this call to plant seeds of the love of God each church has a gift of sunflower seeds. As the flowers grow the hope is that they will prompt reflection on what other more metaphorical seeds the churches of the synod can and are planting, often in partnership, so that God's harvest will be abundant in our generation. We are to plant and water seeds, that God may give growth (1 Corinthians 3.5-9).

Yours in Christ

Rowena Francis  
Synod Moderator



**You are invited** to one or both of two creative 'retreat' days planned for this summer.

Bring paper and pencil, computer, camera, paints, sketch pads, needle and thread, knitting or anything that enables your creative juices to flow and have some space to be creative around the theme of

### Dying to Live – Vision 2020 in Northern Synod

**Friday 8th June** Shepherds Dene, Riding Mill, nr Hexham, Northumberland, NE44 6AF 9.30 am - 4.00 pm  
Facilitated by Revd Rowena Francis

**Saturday 8th September** St Cuthbert's Centre, Holy Island 10.30 am - 4.00 pm  
Facilitated by Revd Canon Rachel Poolman

Drinks and lunch provided. Pop in for an hour or so or the whole day. Please book with the Synod Office for number for catering:

0191 2321168 [wendy.watson@urc-northernsynod.org](mailto:wendy.watson@urc-northernsynod.org)

## NEWS OF PEOPLE

Welcome to **Joan Ross**, inducted into the joint pastorate of Ponteland and St John's Wideopen on April 21<sup>st</sup>. Born and brought up in the North East, Joan has ministered in New Zealand for over 20 years. And welcome to the Synod to retired minister **Henry Dickenson**, formerly serving in the Bristol District.

We say goodbye to **Pamela Ward**, retiring after 40 years of ministry and soon to move from Rothbury; and to **Tjarda Murray**, retiring from Darlington and moving to Southampton; and also to **Philip Gray** as he moves from Wideopen and Ponteland to be inducted at St Andrew's Cheam in June.

Our congratulations to **Sandy Ogilvie**, an elder at Waddington Street Durham, on receiving the Queen's Award for Enterprise Promotion following his recent retirement as CEO of the PNE Group.

Former **Young Congregationalists** recently held a FYC reunion and meal at St Columba's, North Shields. Forty years on, and still going strong, they were reported as all hoarse by the end of the evening.

**General Assembly** meets at Scarborough July 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>. Our synod representatives will be Revds Ray Anglesea, Bill Ellerby, Alison Mills & Rachel Poolman, Ms Ann Honey, Mr Matthew Appleyard, Dr Peter Clarke, Mrs Lucy Cooke, Mr Henry Gowland, Ms Jan Harper, Mrs Margaret Humberston, Mr Bob Jones and Mr Danny Pigeon.

## EVENTS



Pictured left is Crookham URC minister Dave Herbert and the **Gardeners Question Time** team at the recording at the church in March.

**Brighton Road Studios** have opened in our former Brighton Road church halls in Gateshead, refurbished by Mushroom Works community interest company. The original contact with Mushroom Works was made through *One Church:100 Uses* working with Synod.

**A Walk through the New Testament** is being held at Bethel URC, Chester-le-Street on Saturday May 26<sup>th</sup>. Gordon and Elaine Brown promise "a relaxed and fun way to discover when and where events in the New Testament took place, and plenty of laughs together as we learn more about Jesus and get to grips with the places mentioned in the Gospels." Suitable for 11s upwards - no upper age limit! (Details were sent to each church in the April mailing.)

**A Jubilee Party**, organised by Synod's Youth & Children's Work Group, will be held at Roker URC on Saturday May 26<sup>th</sup> from 2.00 to 4.00. It's for the 5 to 10 year olds - but mums, dads and Junior Church leaders are welcome too. Book with Meg Robb on 01642 326343 - or [margaret.robb1@ntlworld.com](mailto:margaret.robb1@ntlworld.com).

**The Olympic Torch** will soon be passing through our area, beginning at Berwick on 14<sup>th</sup> June and leaving

## VISION2020 COMPETITION

*Celebrating 40 years of the United Reformed Church and 20 years of Commitment for Life*

Projects should be creative, inspirational, effective and community minded

and meet some of the Vision2020 statements listed in the Synod *Dying to Live* booklet

Submissions should be in Synod Office by July 16<sup>th</sup>

*Full details in the leaflet sent to all churches - or see the synod website*

Barnard Castle on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Our synod Olympics contact, Ann Honey, is urging churches to make something of the opportunity offered. *Going for Gold* is organising a prayer cascade to follow the torch's progress: "Could you use the huge publicity and bring a flame of hope to your community?" asks Ann.

**The Synod Pilgrimage** in Coquetdale, August 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>, should find the historic Preaching Trees all in place again. With money raised after our March synod meeting, John Cox of Rothbury URC purchased and



planted an ash sapling, well protected behind a rabbit-proof fence, to replace the tree lost 100 years or so ago. Pilgrimage details are on the synod website, or contact Linda Gowland on 01434 605837.

## Human Sexuality

General Assembly in 2007 made a Commitment on Human Sexuality in which members of our Church agreed to stay together and to work together, despite diverse and contrary views over human sexuality. Our Synod meeting in March noted the work undertaken since by the Assembly Task Group, and asked for opportunity for this to be explored in greater detail.

Two meetings have been set up, facilitated by Mrs Val Morrison, current Moderator of General Assembly, and a member of the Task Group. Churches are encouraged to send at least one person, though everyone interested will be very welcome:-

**Friday 8<sup>th</sup> June** 6.00 - 9.00 pm (access from 5.00 for folk to bring a packed tea and eat together) at Queen's Park, Stockton on Tees TS18 4HD

**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> June** 10.00 am - 1.00 pm with drinks from 9.30 am at St John's Wideopen, Newcastle NE13 6JQ

## Keep the news coming in! -

Contact Wendy Watson at Synod Office  
Tel 0191 2321168

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