

Seeds

April 2022

encourage - inspire - challenge

Augustine
United Church

Resurrection Hope

Revd Fiona
Bennett



We are about to move from the Season of Lent into the Season of Easter.

Easter is the time we celebrate that from death, new life is born; that from suffering, goodness can emerge; that hope cannot be ended.

It may seem, though, that at times reality has not caught up with the calendar. Just as in Narnia there was a time of winter but never Christmas, so the suffering and injustice in our lives and world may seem like Lent and never Easter.

In those times, this song from Natalie Sleeth holds hope for us, reminding us that every moment and situation in life

contains potential for new life. It may not follow the shape or timing we think is a good idea, but it is there in God's mind, unshakably real, shaped in love and for love.

“the potential for new life is in God's mind, unshakably real”

Throughout Jesus' life many things did not turn out to be smooth, comfortable or pain free, but through it all he showed us what it is, in the midst of challenges and suffering, to trust in God and to have faith in God's justice and love.

This Easter, whether it brings experiences of new life or experiences which seem stuck in Lent, may we too find strength and courage in the hope of resurrection.

*In the bulb there is a flower;
in the seed, an apple tree;
in cocoons, a hidden promise:
butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter
there's a spring that waits to be,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.*

*There's a song in every silence,
seeking word and melody;
there's a dawn in every darkness
bringing hope to you and me.*

*From the past will come the future;
what it holds, a mystery,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.*

*In our end is our beginning;
in our time, infinity;
in our doubt there is believing;
in our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection;
at the last, a victory,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.*

(Hymn by Natalie Sleeth, an American composer and hymn writer, Church Hymnary 4 #727)

This Month

FACING UP TO POVERTY

The key factors in the worrying growth of UK poverty



A MISSED OPPORTUNITY?

Carol Shephard discusses International Women's Day



EASTER WITH TLC

A range of local services and reflections for Holy Week





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Local and Global

News from the United Reformed Church

UKRAINE

The ecumenical Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) has brought together some of the key ways you can respond to the situation in Ukraine in a blog: www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/how-can-we-help-ukraine/.



Noah Eleazar on Unsplash

Find prayers, avenues for donation, and learn more about what is happening to refugees from Ukraine. For an excellent introduction to the history behind Russia and Ukraine's intertwined history, also see the April edition of the URC's *Reform* magazine.

HISTORIC URC YOUTH APPOINTMENT

Philippa Osei of the URC's Thames North synod has become the first BAME Moderator-Elect of Youth Assembly.

Philippa has described her appointment as 'essential', saying she hopes to make 'some positive changes'. She added it that it was 'a necessary and highly anticipated step forward for our Church if we are to truly take action in our commitment to foster an anti-racist Church, and to continue to elevate the voices of young people. Especially those from marginalised backgrounds.'

Philippa will serve as Moderator-

Elect 2022-2023 before stepping up to the role of Moderator of the Youth Assembly 2023-2024.

BLACK, GAY, BRITISH, CHRISTIAN, QUEER

Fr. Jarel Robinson-Brown, author of *Black, Gay, British, Christian, Queer: The Church and the Famine of Grace*, is giving a public lecture at New College on 1 April at 4pm.

The event, organised by New College Pride, is an in-person event only. If you'd like to attend, please sign up via Eventbrite to give the organisers an idea of numbers beforehand.

Fr Jarel is the Assistant Curate at St Botolph-without-Aldgate in London and is Vice-Chair of the LGBT Christian Charity OneBodyOneFaith.



INVESTING IN CHANGE

Do you bank with Barclays, HSBC or NatWest? Do you have your pension with Royal London, Nest or People's Pension?

UK banks and pension funds have invested £32 billion in companies producing nuclear weapons. Despite the UN Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons entering into force in 2021, many banks and pension

funds have yet to change their policy on investment in nuclear weapons.



Ilja Nedilko on Unsplash

The ecumenical Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), together with other faith groups, plans to challenge companies on their nuclear investment at upcoming AGMs.

They are looking for people to help by tweeting, or maybe even submitting a question to an AGM. Let JPIT know you are interested (or want more information) by emailing daviesb@methodistchurch.org.uk.

BIRTHDAY CARD COMPETITION

To help mark the official launch of URC Children in July, the URC's Children's and Youth Work team is inviting designs from anyone in the age group 12 and under for a birthday card which churches and synods can use to send to their children to mark their special day.

Designs should be on A4 and should include a space for the URC Children logo. They can be on paper or digital and should be sent to children.youth@urc.org.uk. Include name and age, connection with the URC, an email address where you can be contacted, and include a signature from a parent or carer.

Easter with TLC

The three congregations of The Local Church located around George IV Bridge are offering a range of services and times for reflection in the week leading up to Easter.



THURSDAY 14TH

Maundy Thursday service at Greyfriars Kirk 7.30am–10.30pm

FRIDAY 15TH

Joint TLC Good Friday service at Greyfriars Kirk 12 noon.

Tenebrae service 9-10pm (the word 'Tenebrae' means 'darkness', or 'obscurity' – traditionally it has been a sung service for Holy Week, during which candles are extinguished after each psalm')

SUNDAY 17TH

Blended Easter Day worship at AUC 11am – followed by post-service Zoom social.

In addition, St Columba's is offering a weekly Quiet Time during Lent: 20 minutes of calm, poetry and silence, each Monday at 4pm. The last two offerings are on Mondays 4th and 11th.

Legacies of Slavery – you can still comment

The URC's Legacies of Slavery initiative was discussed at AUC's Church Meeting on 8 March.

Contributions were taken for consideration by AUC's Peace and Justice CLMT as they compile our church response to the Task Group's proposals.

However, if you wish to add your comments/expand on your comments if you were present; or if you were unable to join the meeting, you still can.

Responses received by 31 March were guaranteed to be considered for the written proposals going to the URC's General Assembly in July. However, later responses will still be helpful – send to: global.intercultural@urc.org.uk.

Loss and Damage petition

This year, Christian Aid is campaigning on the issue of Loss and Damage. This is the harm caused by climate change-related events to low-income countries (usually least responsible for climate change), both by sudden-onset events such as cyclones, and long-term events such as rising sea levels.

The campaign organisers say: 'The Scottish Government took a very welcome first step towards supporting a Loss and Damage fund at COP26. Now we are calling on Prime Minister

Boris Johnson to back the creation of an international loss and damage fund as a matter of urgency.'

Noting that 'those who should contribute the most to this fund are those most responsible for the climate crisis: rich countries and the fossil fuel companies', the organisers have invited us to add our voices to the petition: www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/loss-and-damage-petition.

Christian Aid Week 2022 takes place in the week 15-21 May.

International Women's Day: a missed opportunity

Carol Shepherd reports on Our Tribe's International Women's Day discussions.

The Our Tribe meeting of 3 March enjoyed a rich debate on the topic of International Women's Day (IWD), a commemoration of women's achievements held annually on 8 March.

Using the official IWD website as the focus of our discussion, we questioned the lack of transparency over how IWD defined 'women' and whether any organisation that has as its bespoke aim the fight against injustice against women can afford to alienate male-identified supporters by appearing to eschew potentially influential male input into the debate.

It felt like an opportunity missed to forge alliances between all sexualities and gender identities.

It was noted that the experiences and discrimination faced by lesbian, bisexual and trans women were not acknowledged anywhere on the official website, and that no sponsors of the event had affiliations to LGBT+ organisations – this despite lesbian, bisexual, non-binary and transgender women facing disproportionate levels of violence at the hands of both strangers and intimate partners.

We also discussed the topic of horizontal oppression – that is, when a minority group believes, acts on, or enforces dominant systems of oppression against other members of the minority group. A number of us had, as LGBT+ women, experienced hostility from heterosexual women,

and I myself, as a bisexual woman, have faced prejudice from lesbian members of the LGBT+ community.

It was felt that any organisation that purports to speak for all women must seek to embrace the diversity of sisterhood that exists and seek to eradicate oppression between women, alongside fighting injustice towards us from outside.

A further point of discussion surrounded the commercialisation of IWD, with fears that the political fight against injustice would be diluted by commercial exploitation of the event, with comparisons made to the Pride

'bandwagon effect'.

My email inbox was bombarded with promotional codes for March 8, purportedly to celebrate International Women's Day! I wonder if the proceeds from the sales of said items

will be donated to the fight against the oppression of women? I am dubious.

To see IWD reduced to a benign celebration of women, rather than a push to give women parity of income and human rights, seems grossly reductionist, and actually plays into the very patriarchal systems that view women as decorative trophies rather than equal participants in the family, workplace and beyond.

As yet, I am still awaiting a reply from the IWD on how they define a woman. Hopefully I will find out by next International Women's Day.



Facing up to poverty

In the first of two articles on behalf of the Peace and Justice Church Life Ministry Team, Kathleen Ziffo and Pat Tweedie outline some of the key factors resulting in the rapid growth in the UK's poverty levels.

When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint; but when I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist' said Christian Aid's Theological Adviser, the Revd Susan Durber recently, quoting the Brazilian Catholic archbishop Helder Camara.

Desmond Tutu said something similar: 'We need to stop just pulling people out of the river; we need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.'

BEING 'SAINTLY' AND 'PULLING PEOPLE OUT OF THE RIVER'

In the UK, 'Food Poverty' (when more than 10% of disposable income goes to buy food) has been worsening for

several years. Universal Credit (UC) is a UK government payment to help with living costs, replacing six of the most common benefits previously in use, which is one of the ways that help can be given to those with no, or low, incomes.

The advent of Food Banks (giving out donated food) and actions like the campaign leading to an uplift in UC for children's meals during school holidays for those on benefits in England and Wales, have helped alleviate food poverty distress to a small degree. (In Scotland, £10/week payments for under sixes will double to £20/week in April, and extend to under-16s by the end of the year.)

However, high levels of 'food poverty' already existed for many reasons,

particularly affecting people on low incomes and those not in work – whether single parents, especially women, many from ethnic minorities and those unable to work due to health or disability concerns.

“Does the population and government realise this level of poverty exists, and do we accept that this should be the case?”

Does the population and government realise this level of poverty exists, and do we accept that this should be the case? The attitude that 'if you are not in work, you should be' also



Providence Doucet on Unsplash



Engin Akyurt on Unsplash

prevails! Exacerbating the situation are rising prices due to poorer harvests last summer (too hot in Canada and elsewhere for decent grain harvests), an upturn in demand from China for food, fewer EU workers in fields and factories in the UK plus increased tariffs since Brexit, higher transportation costs, and increased consumer demand world-wide since Covid eased. . . Etc.

Household poverty is exacerbated further by 'Fuel Poverty' (when over 10% of disposable income has to be spent on fuel). The wholesale price of gas has risen sharply while electricity costs have also risen (particularly electricity produced from gas). Thus, the cost of domestic heating and cooking has risen. Oil has similarly become more expensive globally, and resultant petrol and diesel costs force food prices to rise further for everyone, and for those needing a car to get to work.

Currently there are huge energy price rises, with more increases of around 54% due by the end of the year. Universal Credit payments have decreased in real value since the scheme's institution in 2013, despite

some temporary uplifts. In April, benefits will only rise by 3.1% even though inflation is already heading to 7% (and will certainly rise to around 10% due to effects of war in Ukraine). So, this means another 'de facto' decrease! The Joseph Rowntree Foundation says nine million families on benefits due to low incomes will be £500 worse off from April. About 400,000 people could be pulled into 'poverty'.

“from April... about 400,000 people could be pulled into ‘poverty’”

Meanwhile, rents in the UK are now averaging more than £1,000 each month, depending where you live. That equates to between 25% and 50% of household income. [Source: www.thisismoney.co.uk]

In an article by former prime minister Gordon Brown (in *The Guardian*, 1 March 2022), he writes about how workers at a 'Bedding Bank' in Fife, who found three children sleeping on a floor, sharing only one blanket.

He instanced other stories of children who attend school, ill clothed as well as hungry; some folk run heating for only two hours a day and use torches at night; some children obsessively check pre-payment meters when they wake in the morning, already cold. Nearly four million people are behind with bills. The UK government actions surrounding poverty smack of 18th century attitudes, he said, despite there being 21st century answers. He concluded that suffering for many is already happening and is unjustifiable.

The Trussell Trust reports that many parents skip meals, or go without most food, to allow some food for their children. For that reason, their current advert says: 'I fill up on tea, so my kids can eat. This isn't just difficult; it is impossible.'

Next time, Kathleen and Pat look at the impact of the war in Ukraine on world poverty, and ask where solutions can be found to soaring poverty levels in the UK.

What's On?

Most of our gatherings and resources are currently online. You can find out details on our website www.augustine.org.uk.

STAYING IN TOUCH

If you wish to receive weekly updates of AUC events please register to receive the Friday email by contacting our Centre Manager (centre.manager@augustine.org.uk).

Find us on 

Check our daily posts on the AUC Facebook page.

April 2022

| | | |
|--------------|-------------|---|
| Sunday 3 | 11am | Blended Sunday worship & after-service Zoom social |
| | 1-3pm | Exploring membership (URC & AUC) online |
| Monday 4 | 7.00-9pm | Rublev's Icon of the Trinity discussion – David Townsend online |
| | 4-4.20pm | Lent Quiet Time at St Columba's |
| | 7.30-8.30pm | Contextual Bible Study online |
| Tuesday 5 | 10.30am-1pm | NHS Mental Health drop-in |
| | 12-1pm | Contextual Bible Study online |
| | 7.30pm | AUC Church Council |
| Thursday 7 | 12-1pm | Contextual Bible Study online |
| | 7.30-9pm | Our Tribe (LGBTQI+ ministry) |
| Sunday 10 | 11am | Blended Sunday worship & after-service Zoom social |
| Monday 11 | 12-1pm | Contextual Bible Study online |
| | 4-4.20pm | Lent Quiet Time at St Columba's |
| Tuesday 12 | 12-1pm | Contextual Bible Study online |
| | 7.30-9pm | AUC Church Meeting (social time from 7.15pm) |
| Wednesday 13 | 1-2pm | Wednesday social time online |
| Thursday 14 | 12-1pm | Contextual Bible Study online |
| | 7.30am ff. | All-day Maundy Thursday service at Greyfriars |
| Friday 15 | 12-3pm | TLC Good Friday Service at Greyfriars |
| | 9-10pm | Service of Tenebrae at Greyfriars |
| Sunday 17 | 11am | Blended Sunday worship & after-service Zoom social |
| Monday 18 | 7.30-8.30pm | Contextual Bible Study online |
| Tuesday 19 | 12-1pm | Contextual Bible Study online |
| Thursday 21 | 12-1pm | Contextual Bible Study online |
| Friday 22 | | World Earth Day |
| Sunday 24 | 11am | Blended Sunday worship & after-service Zoom social |
| | 1.30pm | Come OUT with Our Tribe (Coffee Angels) |
| Monday 25 | 7.30-8.30pm | Contextual Bible Study online |
| Tuesday 26 | 12-1pm | Contextual Bible Study online |
| Thursday 28 | 12-1pm | Contextual Bible Study online |

Looking ahead – volunteer training

There will be an opportunity for all AUC volunteers (or those who are interested to find out more) to get together and have some training on Sunday 15 May at 1.00 - 2.30pm (in-person at AUC).

To book your place contact Lewis Reay on lewis.reay@augustine.org.uk

Seeds deadline

Seeds is published on the Sunday prior to the beginning of each month. The copy deadline for the May edition is **Wednesday 20 April**.