



## Welcome to the Footsteps Newsletter

By Dave Herbert

I often reflect that part of being human entails a hunger to belong, and a sense of purpose in life, rooted in feeling hopeful and confident. Our lives are quickly diminished without these core feelings.

Church, at its best, offers people all of these, to all comers in an inclusive way. Our age, gender etc is immaterial: belonging, sense of purpose, hope and confidence are key to spiritual, mental, and physical wellbeing.



One of my wider family is in her mid-80's, and sustains an active engagement in the programmes of her local church throughout the week, which is great for those sisters and brothers in her congregation whose days are filled with demanding careers, looking after younger and older family members, etc. etc. - their capacity (time and energy) to engage with church is often severely limited to attendance at Sunday worship.

So although I appreciate that asking too much of our older members is akin to 'elder abuse', the opposite risk is not inviting people to do as much as they feel able. Looking at it from the other end of the age range, we appreciate how not allowing youngsters in our congregations to do things can alienate and eventually drive them out when we over-resist asking them to do anything among a bunch of older folk! At any age, within a group, we need our pegs to hang our presence on; we need to find a platform, a foothold, from which we can establish ourselves and become truly part of the collective. Without such a peg we struggle to nurture that sense of belonging, a sense of purpose and a confidence that all of us have something unique, a God-given calling to fulfil a task within our capacity when moved by God's spirit as well as affirmed by our wider congregation as we seek to serve.

As it is with younger people in the life of our churches, so it is with older people too. Whether we are like the children blessed by Jesus (Matthew 19: 13-15; Mark 10: 13-16; Luke 18: 15-17), or

at the other end of life like Simeon and Anna in the Temple (Luke 2: 22-38) who see who the infant Jesus is, as St Paul writes, "All of you are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it". (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Read of the people and places in this edition with the above thoughts in mind as to how we include the whole age range in the life of our churches – the developing garden at Roker URC is a good example.

In Christ

David.

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## The Borders Abbeys Way

22 July – 27 July 2018

Join fellow pilgrims, from across Northern Synod, for 5 days of spiritual and physical exercise. A time for worship, walking and dining together, as we explore the theme of New Monasticism. Contact Linda Gowland for further information 01434 605 837 [linda.gowland@btopenworld.com](mailto:linda.gowland@btopenworld.com)



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## From the Editor

Here we are in April / May, with our second new-style newsletter! We would really welcome your feedback and comments on the Footsteps programme, including the newsletter.

**We would also welcome receiving Good News stories from your Church to share with our readers.**

Under the news section of the Footsteps website, you will find a leading article during May on the work of the Synod Trust. Your Church Secretary will shortly receive a navigation guide for the Footsteps website, indicating the content that can be found under the different section headings.

Good News! Over 70 people have already signed up to join the Footsteps Facebook group. If you have not yet registered why not do so today and share in the discussions with your fellow members. An instruction guide to assist you with registration will soon be available.

## A Way Forward: an extract from the leading website article in March / April

By **Dave Herbert**

'A Way Forward' sounds such a clear and definite process, yet we all know, Kingdom-living can be a more organic and messy affair, and rarely runs according to our clearly delineated plans and strategies. The twists and turns, surprises and messiness may, we feel, point to a certain sense of humour on God's part, and at other times feel simply frustrating, especially if things are simply not moving quickly enough for us.

How far have we come? Standing back, we can see we have made significant steps with A Way Forward albeit at different speeds and in different phases in different areas and in different ways across Northern Synod. For example, newly formed groupings are getting closer to being able to look for their next stipendiary minister, fresh initiatives such as Growing Leaders are bringing a new confidence to more of our companions in every part of the synod and conversations are taking place between and within churches, and we are excited to explore new resources being brought out by the URC nationally, which dovetail so well with this synod's vision of A Way Forward.



All point to a context of flux, of changing expectations and awareness of where ministry and gifts in the life of the church are to be found. I would love to see us pioneering new models of being and doing church as a synod and being prepared to take risks as we experiment and test fresh initiatives, providing experiences and insight we can then share with the wider church.

I feel quite strongly that if we lay down a piece of work or mission, we should immediately be wanting to see what new thing we can begin as we seek to be fluid and allow God's Church to evolve.

Maybe it's best to do fewer things, and do them well; and in our groupings I would encourage us all to look to each other for help and support, perhaps one congregation can specialise in ministry or outreach, another in youth work, music, vintage church or providing much needed safeguarding or administrative support, so that between us, we feel we are collectively offering up a rich palette of gifts and ideas as we use our God-given opportunities and creativity right where we are.

All the while, our most important work continues through the life of our local congregations responding to God's call to engage in God's mission in the communities in which they are set. The faithfulness, openness and flexibility of our congregations is both humbling and encouraging. Not every moment or initiative will be pioneering, yet every act of faithful service remains vital to the nurture of God's kingdom in the world.

As we move forward steadily, we can be reassured that God's priority is not slick presentation, but that we form communities of heartfelt hospitality, where people are nurtured in the faith, God's love is expressed both inwardly and outwardly, and all can feel truly welcome.

I would be delighted if anything I have shared above stirs up further reflection or comment, agreeing or (constructively) disagreeing. Please feel free to ensure the above does not remain a Moderator's monologue!

As ever, and in Christ,

Dave Herbert

The full version of the leading article can be read at [www.footstepstoolkit.com](http://www.footstepstoolkit.com)

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## The Good News Story for April / May

### Roker Children's Garden

From **David Dick, Roker URC**



The large garden at Roker URC is one of the very few green spaces in St Peter's ward other than Roker Park which is council owned. As such it is heavily used during the summer hosting children's holiday activities and is also used by the children associated with the church.

We (Helen Stephenson our CRCW and I) were approached last year by CEED (a Sunderland based environmental charity [www.ceedcharity.com](http://www.ceedcharity.com)) to agree to support an application for grant funding they were about to submit to Sunderland Council to re-arrange part of our garden into a community facility with raised beds. The idea for this had initially come from one of our active partners the Social Chef, David Robinson who runs a social enterprise encouraging healthy eating through cookery and baking classes. CEED loved the idea of linking vegetable plots in the raised beds with healthy eating linked also to our holiday hunger work with children. They had a grant of £2,000 approved which will cover 25 sessions, all delivered by young people under supervision starting in May and finishing in September to create the raised beds and improve the surrounding area of the garden.

We hope to get young refugees and asylum seekers engaged in the project through our strong links with FODI, Friends of the Drop in, whom we have worked with for the last year. So, we expect that the garden will be tamed in one difficult to manage area leaving a still large space to enjoy, creating a unique community resource, engaging young people who will in the main have had no links to the church, and supporting mental and physical wellbeing in our community.

**A win win all round!**

## Where is God calling the URC ...a growing conversation?

From March Mission Council An extract from the URC website



Healthy churches regularly examine their work to reduce ministry clutter. And the healthiest ones start reducing clutter, not *after* they find a great new idea, but *before*. It seems to us that three things have come together to help us feel something should be done across the denomination.

1. *Walking the Way* and its focus on discipleship.
2. The reality of the situation of local churches, and indeed the synods that we belong to, who have experienced a decline in numbers and capacity – and can identify with the need to declutter.
3. The mark of a healthy church ‘that we should do a few things and do them well’.

### Food for thought?

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## Global and Intercultural Ministry

An extract from the URC website

The URC commits itself to an intercultural journey of embodying God’s love, living out God’s word, promoting God’s justice, and practising expansive hospitality, the Jesus way – locally and internationally.



### Together WE:

- affirm one human family of many diverse ethnicities and cultures
- rejoice in and treasure the variety of gifts of all
- welcome ALL people into the community of faith
- commit to work with our partners across the world
- promote God’s justice for all
- commit to enriching every aspect of our life together
- challenge / reject all forms of marginalisation

## Reflections on my first Synod

By Ian Buchanan, Editorial Assistant

I attended my first Synod on 17<sup>th</sup> March, after 43 years in membership of the URC. Was it worth the wait?

Two external speakers – one from Action Foundation [www.actionfoundation.org.uk](http://www.actionfoundation.org.uk) the other from Hope for Justice [www.hopeforjustice.org](http://www.hopeforjustice.org) – each talked about their work helping refugees and victims of modern slavery respectively. Each presentation contained case histories in graphic detail of the horror that the victims had suffered before the charities came to their rescue. It was heart-rending stuff!

After lunch, we had presentations on two initiatives from the URC – *Walking the Way* [www.urch.org.uk/our-work/walking-the-way.html](http://www.urch.org.uk/our-work/walking-the-way.html) which is already being rolled out and *Stepwise* [www.urch.org.uk/stepwise/](http://www.urch.org.uk/stepwise/) which will be with us in the Autumn of 2018. There was an update on LMMR from a very dedicated and enthusiastic team member. Finally, there was the launch of the *Footsteps* programme that you should all have heard about from the March / April newsletter, your Church Secretary or your magazine editor.

Individually, each of these programmes challenge our discipleship. Collectively they demonstrate that God has still got work for us to do!

So, to answer my own question ..... was it worth the wait? You will have guessed the answer!

It proved to be an enjoyable, thought provoking, battery recharging day and I would recommend a visit to a Synod meeting to any member who has not attended one before.





# **‘Finding Our Voice’:**

## ***A Day with John Bell of the Iona Community***

*at*

***Jesmond United Reformed Church,  
Burdon Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 3AE***

*on*

***Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2018***

***10am – 4pm***

***(registration and refreshments from 9.30am)***

### **Session titles:**

- ***Leadership by the Laity***
- ***Limited or Limitless Resources?***
- ***Colourful Congregational Song***
- ***Songs for the Season***

***£8 per person, payable on the day.***

***Bring a packed lunch, drinks provided.***

***If possible, please register by contacting Alison Shiel on***

***0191 281 3417 or [alison.shiel@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:alison.shiel@hotmail.co.uk)***

***[www.jesmond-urc.org.uk](http://www.jesmond-urc.org.uk)***

Readers' comments and social media posts

We are looking forward to receiving your comments and feedback for the May / June edition of the newsletter.

The copy deadline for the May / June edition of the Footsteps newsletter will be 26<sup>th</sup> April 2018.



Readers can contact The Editor with comments and views

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