

19 March 2020

To Church and Synod Treasurers

Copy to Church Secretaries, Synod Moderators and Clerks

From Treasurer, Deputy Treasurer and Chief Finance Officer

Dear Friends

The Coronavirus crisis and its financial implications

The priority for all of us at this difficult time is to look after ourselves, our families, our local church fellowships and the communities that we serve. Following on from the pastoral letter that was sent out recently by the General Secretariat, this letter deals with some of the financial implications of the current crisis.

Buildings and rental income

For those local churches that decide to close their buildings, it is important that someone continues to visit the site regularly to ensure that the buildings remain watertight and the site remains secure.

Most local churches will lose rental income from groups that are not meeting. For some congregations this will be very significant. There is little that can be done about this until the crisis has passed, but we do understand.

Maintaining income from personal giving

For each and all of us, our personal giving to our local church is an expression of our discipleship and this income is vital to the church locally and across our three nations, and to all the work that we do together in Christ's name. People need to be gently reminded that the financial needs of the church continue whether or not the congregation is meeting and that our responsibility to support it continues as well.

Some individuals and families will suffer serious financial hardship as a consequence of this crisis and we need to be sensitive to that and support those people as we are able. But there may be others who could increase their regular giving during this crisis period and they need to be encouraged to do so.

There are some practical ways in which we can try to maintain this vital income:

- people who are not already doing so should be encouraged to use standing orders or bank transfers;
- others should be encouraged to set aside their weekly offerings and arrangements should be made through your pastoral support networks to collect this money regularly and get it into the bank.

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Possible Insurance Recovery

It seems unlikely that churches will be able to claim on their insurance for some of their lost income. Those using Edwards Insurance Brokers will receive some guidance from them in the next few days. Others should consider contacting their insurers.

Contributions to the Ministry and Mission Fund

The Ministry and Mission Fund is the means by which local churches provide the finance which pays for all URC ministers – training, stipends, pensions, etc., and the other Assembly / Church House costs – Walking the Way, Stepwise, children and youth work, mission, governance, etc. Local churches contributed a staggering £18.8 million in 2019.

We recognise that, during this crisis, some local churches may not be able to meet the M&M commitments they have made for 2020. If this applies to your church, then:

- if you are paying by direct debit, please get in touch with the M&M office at Church House (yvonne.sired@urc.org.uk) and agree a reduction of your direct debit to a level that you can afford. We would much rather do it this way than you cancel your direct debit without telling us. Please note that in order to change a direct debit amount the M&M office must be notified by the 15th of the month for the change to take place that month.
- if you are paying by cheque or standing order, please adjust the amount according to your ability to pay.

Please be assured that the URC Trust does have sufficient cash to cover the payment of stipends, salaries, pensions and other bills for several months. If the health crisis does continue for longer, and if there is a substantial drop in M&M income, then we may need to talk to colleagues in the synods about providing some short-term support.

The M&M office will maintain its regular contacts with colleagues in the Synods. When the health emergency is passed, we will assess the situation and talk together about how to fill whatever gap in M&M income has transpired. We are confident that, together, we have the financial resources to deal with this but it is something to talk about later not now.

Keep in touch

This is a difficult time for everyone, and none of us know how long it is going to last. It is likely to get worse before it gets better, but it will pass.

If you need help, advice or just someone to talk to, please get in touch with your normal contacts in your synod finance team. We are sure they will be more than ready to help.

Yours in Christ

Ian Hardie
Treasurer

John Piper
Deputy Treasurer

John Samson
Chief Finance Officer