

Synod Moderators' Report (Extra) Ordinary Hope

Moderator's Meeting

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Lythan Nevard moderator@urceastern.org.uk Geoff Felton moderator@urcmerseysynod.org.uk
Action required	Discussion
Draft resolution(s)	None

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The report is offered to General Assembly and to local churches to encourage us to reflect on our hope in Jesus and where we can bring God's hope into the world today.
Main points	Despite living through difficult times, we see the radical hope we share in Christ at work in the world today. We share examples of places where hope can be seen – both ordinary and extraordinary. We invite people to reflect on where we can offer the transformational hope of Jesus to our communities.
Previous relevant documents	Previous Synod Moderators' reports.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	Ecumenical partners are welcome to engage with the report.

The Moderators would like to encourage the local churches of The United Reformed Church (URC), to reflect on hope.

It can be hard to contemplate hope at the moment. How can we be hopeful when we are being encouraged to be divisive rather than united as a nation? How can we be hopeful when the people and the natural resources of the world are being exploited by those who already have more wealth than they need? How can we be hopeful when war and inflicting pain on others is still seen as the best way to deal with problems? How can we be hopeful when we can feel inadequate in the face of such dark times?

And yet. And yet we do see these as hope-filled times.

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To be hopeful is to be radical.

Hope is a foundational Christian character. It is rooted not in the achievements of individuals or human institutions but on the character and promises of God as fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We see this hope at work in the Church today.

The Catholic Church has just celebrated a year of being Pilgrims of Hope.

We note the “Quiet Revival” report from the Bible Society and have shared stories together of the small but tangible signs of growth within a good number of United Reformed Churches. We hear conversations with younger generations who are disillusioned with the promises of hope from the past – they are asking big questions and longing to find a new focus for hope in their lives.

There was a genuine sense of hope arising from the Extraordinary General Assembly in November. A belief that God is not done with us yet and that together we have created possibilities for churches to focus on discipleship and mission as administrative burdens are lifted.

As Christians, as beloved children of God, we have hope to offer. As it says in 1 Peter “But have reverence for Christ in your hearts and honour him as Lord. Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect.” We are called to hold on to hope, to hold up our hope and to live as people who know that hope in Christ and are ready to share it.

There is something radically missional about living with Christian hope. Hope is not about escaping the reality of present circumstances but living with the hope of Christ despite circumstances with the understanding that in the future all will be well. This living hopefully in the now brings the future to bear on the present. It witnesses to a hurting and despairing world of the love and grace of God.

Hope doesn't have to be big, it can be ordinary. But the Spirit can make it extraordinary. Even if our faith is only as big as a mustard seed, God can do amazing things.

Timothy Keller says: “If you're falling off a cliff, strong faith in a weak branch is fatally inferior to weak faith in a strong branch. Salvation is not finally based on the strength of your faith, but on the object of your faith.” We could easily replace the word faith in the above quote for hope.

Here are some signs of hope that the Moderators have seen:

- In West Midlands Synod, a worker in a church decided to create a new Sunday afternoon congregation. After a few months the whole church has been revitalised.
- In Wessex Synod, an idea 10 years in the brewing has turned into a Mission House where three people will live and support mission projects in the area.
- Webinars across the National Synod of Wales thinking about how we can be a More Able church, open and inclusive to everybody – have captured the imagination. The webinars have offered hope, particularly to people of all ages who have a disability.
- Yorkshire Synod framed their October meeting around what young adults wanted to talk about. This engaged and enabled conversation on difficult topics – such as rise

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of the far right; Gen Z experience of gender and identity; the place of young adults in the church.

Sometimes what makes a difference is sharing our hope despite the dark times. People don't just want to hear how faith has made everything shiny and new. But that faith gives us the ability to endure and keep going when life is tough.

To echo Paul's words: *And so we boast of the hope we have of sharing God's glory! "We also boast of our troubles, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance brings God's approval, and his approval creates hope. This hope does not disappoint us, for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us."*

Romans 5:2-5

Sometimes holding on to hope means being brave enough to let things go so that something new can emerge. Hope in what we do not yet see as well as what we do.

"For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

Romans 8:24-25

- In East Midlands Synod a congregation had closed but community engagement was still happening within the building. A plea was made by the community not to walk away without exploring the possibility of a new community partnership and the birthing of a new congregation. A Synod Mission Project has been created looking to explore possibilities of a new-build and planting of a new congregation.
- In North Western Synod, the Moderator was reminded that at a closing service they had commented that the commitment and resilience of the members would form the fertile soil by which others would nurture the Word and the Church into the future. They were told: "Although you politely stopped short of calling them the fertilizer of the future, your meaning was clear. And so it has indeed come to pass - you were absolutely right." The resources and members of that church are feeding other churches and new places of mission.

Hope can shine bright or be the smallest of flames. Hope in Christ will always bring light to the darkness. Hope may look extraordinary or it may look like quite ordinary. Hope in Christ will always be transformational.

Personalia

This year we have said goodbye to Bridget Banks from Southern Synod and Clare Downing from North Western, both of whom have retired. We give thanks to God for their faithful service over the years and ask God to guide and uphold them as they begin ventures anew.

We have welcomed Mike Thomason to North Western Synod and eagerly await a new Moderator for Southern Synod. We have appreciated all that Russell Furley-Smith has brought to the meeting as the representative for Southern Synod whilst in vacancy.

Questions for discussion

- **If we say we put our hope in Jesus, how should this shape how we live?**
- **How can we demonstrate that we are hopeful people?**
- **What does hope look like in your context?**
- **What does it mean to let go of what is known with hope?**