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# New reality, same mission: A stimulus to renewed community engagement

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# Starting where we are: a model for responding to the new reality

*"Mission is finding out what God is doing, and joining in." (Rowan Williams)*









## What's happening in our neighbourhoods and local communities?

*"We recognise that injustice doesn't affect everyone equally and whilst we're all at risk of Covid-19, there are some people who are more vulnerable and need greater support from the community." ([covidmutualaid.org](https://covidmutualaid.org))*

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

Take some time to think about the neighbourhood where you live and/or your church is part of.

- Who lives in it? Who works in it? Who plays in it? Who learns in it?
- How have different groups been affected by the pandemic restrictions, or responded to it?
- How are local people – of different ages and backgrounds – feeling at the moment?
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- Libraries and coffee shops being closed has meant that people with no accommodation have lost a place of shelter during the day and, quite often, access to Wi-Fi for emails, research, benefit claims, advice services and job



the provisions in place for many refugees and asylum seekers, not least the possibility raised by government that such vulnerable people may be offered [repatriation](#) once this is over.

**Action:** Identify 6-10 people in your local neighbourhood to talk to who can help you understand the impact of the crisis from their perspective. This could include local professionals (teachers, health visitors etc), but should also include people directly affected (eg people who have lost family or friends, work or income, or who have had to apply for benefits – maybe for the first time).

#### Questions for reflection and discussion:

- What do we now know about the challenges and aspirations in our local neighbourhoods and communities?
- What injustices have been raised by your listening and research?

*“We are not living through an era of change, but a change of era. We are entering a new chapter in the history of the world, and of the church. The scale of the challenge before us demands a careful response.” (Pope Francis)*





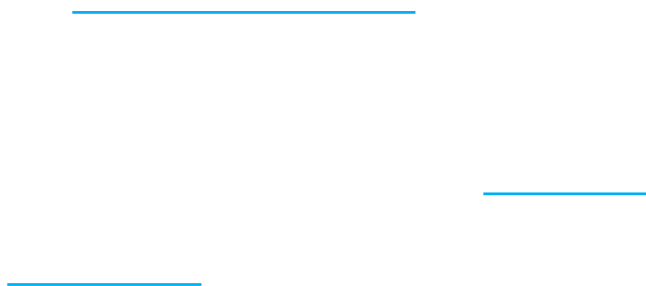
**Action:** Identify a shortlist of 3-4 local groups, organisations or networks that you might work in partnership with in developing your response. Have a conversation with each of them to see if they are interested in working in partnership, and what you could each bring to the partnership.

## Supporting one another

One encouraging feature of the response to the pandemic was the way that many 'mutual aid' groups sprung up. These have a much more effective approach than traditional models of community service with their unhelpful, sharp distinction between 'helpers' and those being helped.

*"One of the key points made throughout is that it is mutual aid – the person giving the help today could be in need of their neighbour's help tomorrow and vice versa. I've also noticed that younger people who have not been in the neighbourhood*

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**Action:** Investigate what mutual aid groups already exist in your neighbourhood and encourage church members to join them.

## Reflection

Considering which part of God's mission we might be being called to join in with, and what we have to offer

### What does God ask of us?

As with all important q

The well-known question and answer call to action in Micah 6:8, 'And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God', highlights to us what God truly asks of us.

In the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), Jesus reminds us of God's strong feelings about the most vulnerable in society. This is further reinforced in Matthew 25:40 and 45, when Jesus tells his followers that 'whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me', and 'whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me'.

However, mission is not simply a task to be done *by* the so-called 'privileged' *to* the so-called 'vulnerable'. All are equal in the sight of God, all are called, and everyone has a contribution to offer.

The disciples asked Jesus about when the kingdom he had promised would come. 'He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere.' (Acts 1:7-8). In this, we see a God who is, quite literally, with us, not a distant leader, ordering us from above, but a friend, walking with us on the way, already engaged in mission and inviting us to join in with it.

When this incarnated God urges us 'to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (Matthew 28: 20), it is seen that God is calling us to enter into the life of the world, and to be part of the mission of the church.



Having listened to the aspirations and concerns of people in your area, explored what others are doing, and reflected on your mission calling as an individual and as

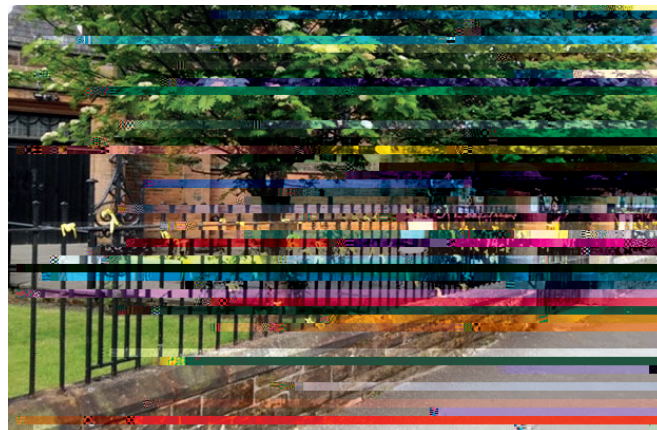




- **Financial support:** The economic impact of the lockdown will have impacted



- [Chester URC members prepare hot meals for the vulnerable](#)
- [Busy church beats lockdown blues](#)
- [Tie a yellow ribbon on your church railings?](#)



The [Church-Related Community Work](#), [Walking the Way](#) and [URC](#) news pages regularly feature inspiring stories of local churches engaging in God's mission, particularly during the current crisis.

One idea that would bring together lots of the themes of this booklet would be to help organise a '[Big Lunch](#)' celebration meal for everyone in the neighbourhood, once physical distancing measures allow. After the lockdown, no doubt there will be much enthusiasm to reconnect and party! By working with local residents' associations, Covid-19 response teams and others, and inviting representatives from across the neighbourhood (local residents, business owners, homeless people, social workers, refugees, etc), it would provide an opportunity to hear people's thoughts about developing flourishing communities, and the role of local faith groups. It would also be useful in order to shape the work and ministry of your church moving forward. Perhaps an all-inclusive community party or festival won't be able to happen until next year, but is there a scaled-down 'Small Lunch' or virtual lunch that could happen sooner?

*"This year, due to lockdown and the need for physical distancing, we are planning to hold a 'pop up Big Lunch' in place of our normal open-to-all event. Instead of inviting everyone to an event, we are planning to have a table by the pavement from which we will be giving out 'goody bags' to our neighbours who pass by. As well as this, we will also be taking out these gifts to those we know who are in particular need at this time. Part of our mission is to love our neighbours, and this has to still happen, however much we are now restricted as to what we can do in our building."*

*(URC church in West Midlands Synod)*

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

- Taking into account all that we have experienced, explored and reflected upon, what are our priorities?
- Who will we work with on this?

**Action:** Turn your priorities into a plan of action and take that forward with your identified partner(s).

*"Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." (William Carey)*

## What comes next?

Working in partnership to support those most hard-pressed and at risk in our local neighbourhood and communities is a vital short-term priority. However, as we begin to emerge from lockdown, we also have important long-term choices to make about the kind of society and economy that we rebuild. We've seen how deeply we all need each other, and how our current set-up fails to meet the needs of too many of us.

*"As the lockdown has continued, we've been reflecting on the things in life that matter most. It has highlighted the crucial importance of human interaction and friendship, of having hope and purpose, and our mental well-being."  
(Maurice Wren, Chief Executive of the Refugee Council)*

1. Moving away from individualism to greater togetherness;
2. Valuing life more than productivity, and;
3. An appetite and greater imagination for real change.

We need to learn from these experiences, and take the opportunity to ‘build back better’ by addressing big issues such as the climate crisis, global poverty, and economic injustice. If we are to see God’s mission of fullness of life for all people achieved, our work in dealing with the effects of injustice locally should go hand-in-hand with campaigning around the causes of injustice nationally and globally.

*“The reboot of the economy could fast-track action on the climate emergency, protect the most vulnerable and reduce inequality. This might just be possible, if we take action together.” (Tearfund)*

Groups such as the [Joint Public Issues Team](#), [Church Action on Poverty](#), [Global Justice Now](#), [Christian Aid](#) and [Tearfund](#) offer tools, campaigns and resources which help individuals and churches to advocate for changes to unjust structures and systems in order to create a fairer future for all God’s people.

#### Questions for reflection, prayer and discussion:

- What part could you

## Useful resources and support agencies

- [URC Coronavirus pages](#) – advice from the URC on coronavirus, including efforts to deal with its effects on communities.
  - [Churches Together in England Coronavirus Hub](#) – ecumenical advice on coronavirus.
  - [Muslim Council of Britain](#) – Information and advice from our Muslim friends on dealing with the effects of coronavirus.
  - [Citizens UK](#) – advice for communities on coronavirus.
  - [yourneighbour.org](#) – tools to equip church leaders in supporting the most vulnerable around us.
  - [HeartEdge](#) – Inspiration and ideas for taking opportunities brought forward by the crisis.
  - [Together for the Common Good](#) – resources to reimagine a culture that puts people, communities and relationships first.
  - [Cinnamon Network](#) – Weekly webinars with people from various networks dealing with the effects of the crisis.
  - [Life on the Breadline](#) – Researching how churches are responding to austerity.
  - [‘New Wine, New Wineskins’](#) – Resources from Church Action on Poverty to help churches move forward from this crisis.
  - **Church on the Margins** – Resources from Churches Action on Poverty to help widen understanding of the effects of poverty through [videos](#) and [gatherings](#).
  - [In the Thick of It](#) – Stories, experiences and reflections on God’s kingdom in the margins, from a 2019 URC partnership event
  - [Livability](#) – Advice and support for people and communities dealing with disabilities during the current crisis.
  - [Church Urban Fund](#) – Organisation of offering support, volunteering and funding pu
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## Where can I find more information?

The groups who put this booklet together are available to help all congregations of the URC (and anyone else) in delving further into these questions. Visit our webpages to find out more:

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