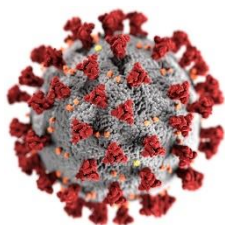


Ask a question at a URC gathering, such as Synod or General Assembly and there will be a ripple of laughter when the answer is prefixed with 'normally'. It is often noted that there is no normal in the URC, every church is different, every Synod is different and even General Assembly whilst having a routine is always influenced by the Moderators and what they bring to the proceedings. So, when I received a copy of the booklet 'A new normal' I was interested in what it might say.

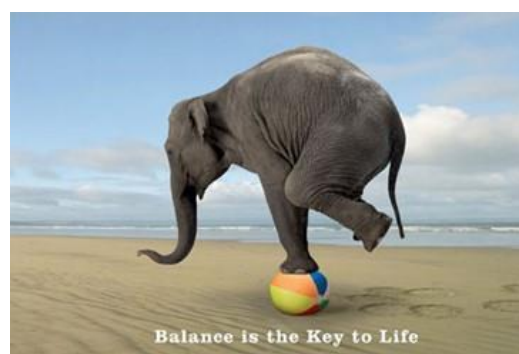


This is a booklet produced by the thirteen Synod Moderators to try and plan a route map out of Lockdown. Thankfully it is not as long as the government's route map and I suspect will not be the subject of so much scrutiny, indeed it was only by chance that I received a copy so quickly as minister's have not been circulated with the news of its publication! Our route map is of course at the mercy of the government's time frame, which is in turn dependant on the effect of any changes to Lockdown and we have no idea yet when church buildings may re-open but I suspect normal will not be a word in popular use for some time to come, and I do have to ask how we can have a new normal when we have never actually managed a normal?



Covid 19 has changed the world, it has changed our perception of risk, and it has changed everyday life. Viruses are tricky things, we talk about having a cold but actually there are hundreds of different viruses that cause respiratory symptoms which as shorthand we call having a cold, and there are others which cause symptoms we refer to as flu. These microbes are constantly evolving, responding to nature's way of defeating them and whilst some are confined to certain species we are seeing more occasions when they evolve to cross lines infecting other species, in the way that a particular strain of coronavirus has recently done with quite spectacular consequences. Is this an example of the new normal? There are many theories about Covid 19's origins and I suspect the general public will never know how this pandemic was caused, what is important is that we realise we do have a part to play in such events happening and any new normal needs to include more awareness of the consequences of our actions.

There is a re-balancing of nature as a result of Lockdown, the air is clearer, wildlife is flourishing, there is a calm as we walk, instead of running everywhere with our eyes firmly fixed on the end point rather than the journey. People are worried, about relatives, jobs, their own health, but there is also a change as a new work life balance is experienced and the realisation that they have been missing out on certain aspects of life. So, maybe the new normal will be about a better balance to life, both our own and that of the planet. For years we have recognised that things needed to change but we could not see the change that was needed happening, it was too big a change, Covid 19 forced that big change and it has given us the opportunity to re-evaluate what is important and perhaps to re-evaluate our relationship with the planet. The way forward will not be easy, and it will definitely not be normal but it can be exciting as we begin to build a sustainable future together.



Lockdown has forced churches to explore new ways of being, and for many it has re-focused our life together even though we are apart. It has encouraged the use of technology and evidence shows that there are many people accessing online worship who would not normally attend a church service. Until there is a vaccine our life together will be fractured, even if some can meet there will be those for whom the risk is too great. However, we are part of creation, we are creative and we will find a path that enables and encourages exploration of God and our journey to know God. It will not be normal, but then as I shared at the beginning there has never been a normal in the URC, so this is simply a new phase where each church finds the path that is best for them in the challenge to be disciples of the way of Jesus, the way of love, compassion and creativity. After all the Jesus way was a new normal once.