

RMHS Newsletter

Retired Ministers' Housing Society (RMHS)

Spring 2025

As the days lengthen and parks and gardens come back to life after a long winter, a sense of renewal is in the air. Here at RMHS we are also living that sense of renewal. As you'll have seen in our letter last month, we are making many changes which we hope will improve your experience of RMHS.

In this newsletter, we explain the changes to our emergency and out of hours repairs, which we believe will provide a much better standard of service. We will also be rolling out a number of changes over the coming year: telephone check-ins, welfare benefits advice and health and wellbeing assistance (eg timely, in-person occupational therapy assessments for residents who require aids and adaptations to continue living at home).

Later in the year, we will also be making major changes to our website and communications to make it easier to report repairs online, pay rent by direct debit, and more easily get in touch with the right person at RMHS. We have also updated our Complaints Policy to make it easier to tell us when something has gone wrong and give us the opportunity to put things right more quickly. This is now a two stage, rather than three stage process and I will personally respond to all stage 2 complaints if the team has not been able to correct matters at stage 1. We also love to hear when things have gone well, so please do let us know if you are particularly happy with the way your queries and repairs have been dealt with!

Behind the scenes, we are making ongoing improvements to our processes and systems and will be rolling out further changes as this work is embedded, such as a Resident Handbook with advice and guidance on all matters housing. May the promise of Easter fill your heart with peace and joy!



Irmani Smallwood, Interim Chief Executive Officer

Reflection



Dear friends,

My name is Geoff Felton, I am the Moderators' Representative on the Board of RMHS and I have been asked to

write a short reflection for this edition of the RMHS Newsletter. So here goes!

When I speak to ministers who are due to retire, one of the things they tell me they are most looking forward to is the opportunity to do things they can choose to do. One minister told me about their love for crochet, another Lego and someone else their love of playing in a brass band.

If I had more time, my activity of choice would be photography. I was infected with the photo bug at an early age by a father who had a darkroom in the loft and a camera repair workshop in the garage. Over the years, I have honed my craft and have gained a Certificate of The Photographic Alliance of Great Britain (CPAGB) and entered many competitions and exhibitions to share my love of photography with others.

Photography helps me to slow down. It enables me to appreciate the details of God's creation and it enables me to see things from a different perspective. In my opinion, these are all good things that bring a richness to life and a breadth to my story. Photography lifts my mood and brings me joy.



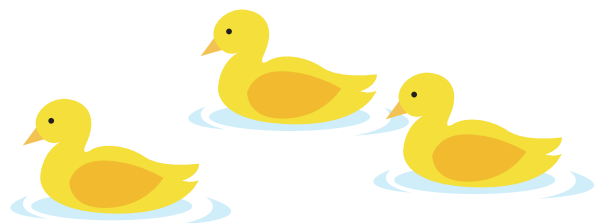
Ultimately, photography is all about the light. Light brings life, it enables us to see the way and it illuminates what is before us.

In the gospel of John, Jesus declares himself the Light of the World, but far from being a hobby, following Jesus is a total commitment to the one who gives life and illuminates the world for us. Just like photography, being a Christian is all about the Light!

So I wonder what brings you joy?
I wonder what you enjoy doing when you have the choice and I wonder what part God plays in the 'non churchy' aspects of your life?

May God bless you.

*Geoff Felton,
Moderator of URC Mersey Synod*



Update on RMHS sustainability project

Over the winter, we reviewed the energy performance of another 30 homes and updated their Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs). We now have better quality information to help us plan future energy improvement projects.

Within the next three years, the RMHS aims to cut carbon output from our buildings and lower tenants energy bills by installing energy efficiency measures to 120 homes. The homes being targeted are those that currently have EPC ratings in bands D, E, F and G. Our aim is to improve these homes to achieve an EPC rating in band C so they comply with forthcoming changes to the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES).

The type and number of energy efficiency measures required will vary from one home to another but will typically be one or a combination

of measures such as wall insulation, roof insulation, solar panels and energy efficient heating appliances.

Prior to instructing work a Retrofit Assessment and Improvement Options Evaluation will be undertaken to establish which measures are potentially suitable. A primary objective of the project is to deliver improvements that tenants want, that can also be installed with a minimum amount of disturbance.

We are currently in discussions with a number of fully accredited contractors that operate nationally and we hope to appoint contractors within the next few months. Once a delivery plan has been agreed with contractors, we shall contact tenants to arrange to undertake Retrofit Assessments.

Before instructing work, we will discuss the benefits of potential improvement measures with tenants and explain the installation process for each one.

The work to improve homes to an EPC rating band C will be funded entirely by RMHS and from grants where it is available.

You can check your EPC rating online:
England and Wales:
www.gov.uk/find-energy-certificate
Scotland:
www.scottishepcregister.org.uk

Or you can contact Michael O'Brien,
Sustainability Project Lead on
07889 224 457 or
michael.obrien@urc.org.uk.





Springtime jobs

As the season of spring arrives, there is a renewed enthusiasm for looking forward, sorting out clearing, cleaning and preparing for the summer and autumn seasons ahead. In the garden, there are jobs to do; sorting and cleaning plant pots, checking seeds and tools, as well as listing the items which need to be purchased. Often, items sorted carefully in the autumn are no longer serviceable or needed, and this starts the process of disposing of these or gifting them to someone who will enjoy using them. The benefits of a tidy, well organised shed where items are easily found is a great reward!

The same process applies in the home, where sorting and cleaning is often a springtime activity. Reviewing personal possessions, including books, ornaments and household items can present challenges, as the emotional attachments to these are often strong. Knowing that belongings are going to benefit someone else or raise funds for an organisation we support can ease this process. For some, the thought of parting with any possessions are deeply uncomfortable and therefore the process of sorting and giving away items is avoided. This can

lead to an increased amount of personal belongings which, in turn, make daily living more difficult. If you identify with this for yourself, or a loved one living in RMHS housing, there is sensitive support available. In the first instance, please contact the Tenancy Manager directly for a confidential conversation and signposting to support: 020 7520 2714 or judith.williams@urc.org.uk

Prayer for spring

Let us be glad:
The days lengthen,
bringing the hope of warmer times.
The dark earth of garden and wood
Is filling with beauty as the flowers of spring
clothe the ground with colour.

New life is emerging from trees and shrubs
and the promise of resurrection calls us
to rejoice in the Easter message.
Let us rejoice that Christ is alive.

Loving God, as we journey into these days,
emerging from winter and travelling
towards spring,
we give thanks for a Faith which offers
us hope,
and promises us strength, support,
and peace.

Our prayers are for our colleagues,
all facing the challenges of these days.
May we know the strong arms of a
loving God,
and the support of family, friends and
the People of God.

Be with us, Lord.
Sustain us with resurrection faith and life.
Fill us with your peace, a parting gift for all.
May we live to your praise and glory.

The Revd Peter Scotland



Easter simnel cake (V)

The simnel cake is a rich, sweet treat traditionally baked and enjoyed at Easter. This classic fruit cake can be topped with eleven balls of marzipan to represent the eleven disciples and decorated with a ribbon. Freezable, serves 12. (Recipe by Cassie Best, Director BBC Good Food). Preparation time: 30 minutes
Cooking time: two hours.

Ingredients:

- mixed dried fruit, 250g
- one orange, zested and juiced
- marzipan, 500g pack
- softened butter, 250g
- light brown soft sugar, 200g
- four eggs, (plus one beaten, to glaze)
- plain flour, 175g
- ground almonds, 100g
- baking powder, one tsp
- one lemon, zested
- mixed spice, two tsp
- vanilla extract, one tsp
- halved glace cherries, 100g
- apricot jam, three tbsp.

Method:

1. Put the mixed dried fruit in a bowl with the orange juice and zest and two tablespoons of water. Heat gently in a pan, stirring now and then until the liquid has been absorbed and leave to cool. (Alternatively, cover and microwave for two minutes, then leave to cool completely).
2. Heat the oven to 150C/130C fan/ or Gas mark 2. Roll out a third of the marzipan and use the base of a deep 20cm cake tin as a template to cut out a circle. Wrap any offcuts and the remaining two-thirds of marzipan and set aside for later.
3. Butter and line the cake tin with a double layer of parchment. Beat the butter and sugar together until creamy. Add the eggs, flour, almonds, baking powder, lemon zest, mixed spice and vanilla (all in one go) and mix until well combined. Mix in the cooled soaked dried fruit and fold in the cherries.
4. Scrape half the cake mixture into the tin. Top with the disc of marzipan, then the remaining cake mixture, and level the top with a spatula. Bake for two hours. Check it's cooked by inserting a skewer to the centre of the cake, if any wet mixture clings to the skewer, return to the oven for another ten minutes, then check again. Cool in the tin for 15 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack and leave to cool completely.
5. Brush the top of the cake with apricot jam. Roll out half of the remaining marzipan and use the base of the cake as a template to cut out another disc. Place it on top of the cake and crimp the edges, if you like. Roll the remaining marzipan into 11 equal-sized balls for decoration. Brush the marzipan with beaten egg and arrange the marzipan balls in a circle on top around the outside and brush them with a little egg too. Put under a hot grill for a minute or two until just starting to caramelize – be very careful as the marzipan will burn easily. Leave to cool, then decorate with a ribbon if you wish.

Reflection

**'You trace my journeying
and my resting-places and
are familiar with all the paths
I take.'**

Psalm 139.3, REB

Pilgrimage has become a common way of exploring faith these days. I enjoyed the BBC series of that name based in Scotland, and have just started watching the Portugal one on iPlayer (the North Wales one is next on my list.) In these series, celebrities of various faiths share a pilgrimage journey with all the self-searching, challenges and joys that provokes.

During my last ministry before retirement, one highlight was an interfaith pilgrimage to Iona. The format was a little different from the BBC programmes as we travelled by train, ferry and coach.

The essence of our sharing was the time spent together on Iona, a very special place for Christians but, on this occasion, happily shared across the major faiths – Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan and Sikh.

We stayed in the Abbey and were told we would need to share a room. My initial thought was that I am past doing that, but I so wanted to go on this trip that I thought the compromise might be worth it – and the Jewish Texan professor, now living in Edinburgh, and the Hindu Indian doctor, now a surgeon in the Scottish

borders, proved to be great friends and room-mates.

There is perhaps a gentle irony in that a walk across the island by six of us, five Hindus and myself, nearly ended when we were chased by a small herd of cows!

In spring, we walk through Lent. We walk through Holy Week. We walk from Easter to Pentecost. The 'walking' pilgrimage may not be literal. Pilgrimage can happen in so many ways but may be described as 'a journey to a holy place for a spiritual purpose'.

Perhaps the final words of Psalm 139 offer us a suitable pilgrimage prayer, whatever your form of pilgrimage – 'Examine me, God, and know my mind; test me, and understand my anxious thoughts. Watch lest I follow any path that grieves you; lead me in the everlasting way.'

The Revd Paul Whittle



Out of hours calls

All emergency/out of hours calls are now handled by Service Solutions Direct (SSD).

Please make a note of their contact number: 01772 289 499.

When calling SSD to report an emergency repair, they will ask you to provide your full name and address (including the postcode). If you're calling on behalf of a resident, please ensure that you have this information ready.

An experienced member of SSD's staff will discuss and evaluate the repair. If the repair is deemed an emergency, SSD will allocate an engineer and provide an estimated arrival time. They will provide regular updates on progress until the repair has been rectified.

If you are unsure whether your repair is an emergency, still call SSD on 01772 289 499, and they will decide whether the repair is an emergency, urgent or routine.

If the repair is deemed not to be an emergency, then the RMHS Repairs and Maintenance Co-ordinator will contact you the following working day regarding the repair.

Examples of emergency repairs covered by SSD include:

- pest control
- security
- gas supply* (after NGES have attended)
- complete loss of heating/hot water
- boilers**(with the exception of Worcester Boilers).

*IF YOU SMELL GAS you should ring 0800 111 999 and inform the National Gas Emergency Service (NGES).

**For WORCESTER BOILER BREAKDOWNS please call 0330 123 9339 and Worcester Bosch will confirm if your boiler is covered under their warranty scheme.

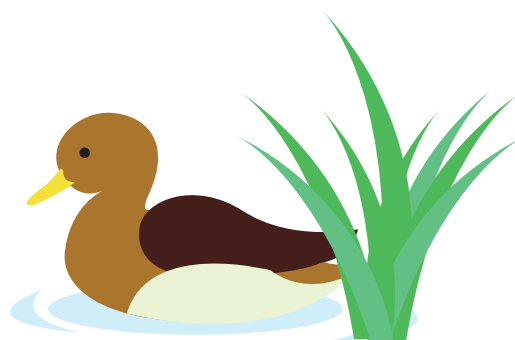
Signpost to Age UK



We recently received some excellent feedback from one of our residents who applied for Attendance Allowance.

Thank you to the Revd and Mrs A for taking the time to share it with us!

'We were very grateful to Age UK who do a brilliant job of assisting anyone to fill the forms, question by question in an up to two hour phone call. I would definitely suggest that you recommend them to anyone who needs it. Age UK are also ready to assist in a tribunal, should one's claim not be upheld. We would recommend them wholeheartedly.'



The RMHS staff team

Irmani Smallwood	Interim Chief Executive	020 7916 8636	rmh@urc.org.uk
Judith Williams	Tenancy Manager	020 7520 2714	rmh@urc.org.uk
Ted Ford	Maintenance Surveyor (North)	07739 360 034	rmh@urc.org.uk
Francesca Pitts	Maintenance Surveyor (South)	020 7691 9868	rmh@urc.org.uk
Michael O'Brien	Sustainability Project Lead	07889 224 457	rmh@urc.org.uk
Roger Corbett	Tenancy Transactions Co-ordinator	020 7916 8643	rmh@urc.org.uk
Maria Cardazzone	Repairs and Maintenance Co-ordinator	020 7520 2716	rmh@urc.org.uk
Khadija Idris	Finance Administrator	020 7691 9875	rmh@urc.org.uk
Kathleen Benjamin	Housing Officer	020 7871 7871	rmh@urc.org.uk
Helen Corbett	Housing Officer (part time)	020 7916 8682	rmh@urc.org.uk
Katia Crowley	PA to Chief Executive	020 7916 8636	rmh@urc.org.uk

