

Dear Friends,

In September the URC is celebrating women in the church, with special events planned to mark the centenary of Constance Coltman's ordination. Constance Mary Coltman (nee Todd) 1889-1969, was the first woman ordained by the Congregational Union of England and Wales. She was ordained alongside her fiancé, Claud Coltman, on 17th September 1917; they got married the next day. Their ordination took place at King's Weigh House congregation in Mayfair, London, and they entered into a shared ministry. Constance, a university graduate, was a wife, a mother, a pacifist and suffragist. She encountered a lot of challenges in ministry at a time when the idea of women in ministry was counter-culture. She did much to promote women's ordination across the churches - helping found the fellowship of women ministers and the society for the ministry of women.

Today the URC continues to make progress in bringing women into the leadership of the church, including ethnic minorities, of whom I am one. It is a journey of discovery with highs and lows, and at every turn in the journey there is a need for mutuality in the challenge of re-examining preconceived notions and perceptions - especially those in the inner most depth of the mind. Each local congregation must be the source of fostering not just tolerance, but acceptance and respect for all God's people. As an African lady minister with a good level of education, a wife and a mother, I applaud Constance Coltman's pioneering role. I am also grateful to God, and celebrate his inclusive love that embraces diversity, which is being encouraged by the URC. The URC Vision 2020, Statement 5, encapsulates it all: *Our story is one of a people from rich and diverse journeys. Differences, not similarities, are the source of our vitality and strength in our common faith in Jesus Christ. This includes our Church heritages, theologies, cultures, national heritages and life experiences. As a multicultural Church, we are building a biblical understanding of God's mission to which the gospel calls us to living God's word, embodying God's love and promoting God's justice as we aim to include, affirm and welcome all. We will continue to live our calling of prophetic witness to holiness, hope and reconciliation, as we seek greater participation of all to reflect our rich and diverse journeys in all our life together.*

This September, as we all celebrate URC women in ministry, enjoy and be richly blessed!

Irene John