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URC expresses shock at reactions to BBC Friday prayers broadcasts

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The Moderators of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church (URC) have expressed shock and sadness at the Islamophobic and xenophobic comments made after the BBC started to broadcast Friday prayers for followers of Islam on local radio stations.

The early morning broadcasts started on BBC local radio stations on 3 April for Muslims unable to visit their mosques during the coronavirus crisis.

Chris Burns, Head of BBC Local Radio, said: "Many Muslims will feel a void in their lives where prayers used to be – a feeling that will be magnified as we approach Ramadan.

"Local radio is all about connecting communities and we hope these weekly reflections will go some way to helping Muslims feel a sense of community while they are isolating."

After the announcement was made, hundreds of Islamophobic and xenophobic comments were made on social media along with severe criticism of the BBC for broadcasting the prayers.

Comments included disapproval towards the BBC for starting the broadcasts so close to the Christian festival of Easter; that the BBC should lose its funding; that some would now refuse to pay their TV licence fee, along with many anti-Islamic and xenophobic comments.

A lot of social media users showed their support of the broadcasts, including support from the URC which has an interfaith secretary and a dedicated committee aimed at improving interfaith relations (the Interfaith Enabling Group). The URC is also an active member of the Inter Faith Network UK, the body which oversees Inter Faith Week.

Critics were reminded several times that all BBC local radio stations broadcast a Christian service every Sunday at 8am.

URC Moderator Derek Estill, an Elder in the URC, said: "As we approach Holy Week with our minds focussed on the incredible selfless sacrifice that Jesus made for the whole world, it is with deep sadness that we find Islamophobic and xenophobic comments after the action from the BBC.

"As we know, the new commandment that Jesus gave the world to 'Love God and each other as I have loved you' applies to everyone without exception.

"It is clear, now more than perhaps we have realised before, how important this is as we fight the coronavirus pandemic together, irrespective of faith or culture.

"We all need to show support and sensitivity to our Muslim sisters and brothers as they approach Ramadan, a very special time of prayer, fasting, sacrifice and charitable giving for Muslims across the world.

"We remember how important it is that we live out Jesus' new commandment, so simple and powerful, and just what our world needs now more than ever. So, let us all do our best to live the life of Jesus today reaching out in love to everyone."

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- Visit the Global and Intercultural Ministries area of the URC website: <https://urc.org.uk/our-work/global-and-intercultural.html>

Picture: A Muslim man praying by Rachid Oucharia/Unsplash

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It is with deep sadness that the #URC announces the death of the Revd Robert Waters. Mr Waters, widely known as Bob, died peacefully in his sleep at home on 3 July, just four days shy of his 90th birthday. His funeral takes place on 16 July. Details here: bit.ly/URCrevdwaters



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