

Frequently asked
Questions...

...about the United Reformed Church's
campaign of radical welcome

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1. What is radical welcome?

The definition that we have used is the one given by Stephanie Spellers on page 11 of her book *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other, and the Spirit of Transformation*:

"Radical welcome is a fundamental spiritual practice, one that combines the universal Christian ministry of welcome and hospitality with a clear awareness of power and patterns of inclusion and exclusion."

Of course, churches have different personalities and will express radical welcome in different ways – and that's fine. You might find a very warm, outgoing welcome in one and a very gentle loving welcome in another – but the aim is for each campaign church to have very similar and solid foundations of acceptance and hospitality – and a willingness to be changed as they welcome "the other", whoever that is for them.

For a more complete answer we recommend you read *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other, and the Spirit of Transformation* by Stephanie Spellers and/or *Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* by Miroslav Volf.

View a short film of Stephanie Spellers talking about radical welcome here:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NA53Z-JKfjc>

2. How does this campaign of radical welcome fit in with *Vision2020*?

The basis of *Vision2020* is the ten statements of our mission and purpose – and the ways in which we are achieving them. The statements describe our ten mission priorities for the years ahead and include: spirituality and prayer; identity; Christian ecumenical partnership; community partnership; hospitality and diversity; evangelism; church growth; global partnership; justice and peace and the integrity of creation.

If churches decide to start on a journey of radical welcome they will also be directly contributing to the fulfillment of six *Vision2020* objectives: identity; Christian ecumenical partnerships; community partnerships; diversity; evangelism and church growth.

3. What mandate exists for the campaign?

In December 2008 Mission Council backed the concept of radical welcome and approved the "God is Still Speaking" campaign, which was the first part of the URC's journey along the road of radical welcome. The steering group is responsible to mission committee, and ultimately to General Assembly. The steering group also reports to Mission Council at its twice-yearly meetings. And of course, the United Reformed Church adheres to an equal opportunities policy – much of what radical welcome is about is equality – treating everyone the same – whoever they are, whatever they've done.

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4. Who is paying for the campaign?

It is almost completely funded by the Council for World Mission (CWM), who gave us a grant (to be released over three years) for just under £316K. Like most projects, it is anticipated that the recipient will make some contribution to the project so there is a small Church contribution. The CWM funding will end in 2012 so the continuation, and indeed further development of the campaign, will depend on us raising money through donations and the sale of campaign merchandise. We have already been promised funding by local congregations who are enthusiastic about the campaign.

5. Who created the ads - who decided on the final six?

We have been very fortunate to work with one of the most well-respected ad agencies in the UK - This is Real Art (TiRA). It is their creative team that developed the ads - and the steering group whittled down the selection they showed us to the six that you may already have seen, if you were at your local synod meeting in spring 2011.

6. Who are the ads aimed at - who is the campaign for?

We have three particular groups in mind.

First - marginalised people of every kind who've got the message that they're unwelcome in church. They may have had a bad personal experience of the Church, they may have been scared off by negative media stories about the Church, or they may just think that church is not for "people like them". Whatever the reason, these marginalised groups have the impression that they're not welcome. Yet we know that Jesus was particularly loving towards men and women on the edge of society. This campaign aims to show them that.

Second - the 3 million UK adults, (identified by Tearfund* research), who are totally disconnected from the Church, but who would come if only someone invited them. This campaign issues that invitation.

Third - people with a taste for social justice who have stopped believing that actively loving, Jesus-shaped churches exist. Only one ad of the campaign is currently targeted at them; but the tone of voice of each ad will speak to them anyway.

**Church Going in the UK - A research report from Tearfund on Church Attendance in the UK.*

7. Can the ads be changed?

The headline of one ad – the “Unforgivable” one – is being changed, but the other headlines will remain as they are. Body copy is being shortened and re-worked to ensure that it is both legible and appropriate to our target audiences; and to address ecumenical concerns.

It is important to remember that you are looking at the ads as someone from within the Church. These ads are not aimed at you; they are for people with little or no experience of the Church – or for people who have had bad experiences which we need to acknowledge.

We have an excellent agency – This is Real Art – made up of professional men and women whose expertise and insight we trust; they have accepted our brief and given us exceptional ads. The steering group acknowledged from the start that too much designing (or re-designing) by committee was not a good idea.

8. Why isn't the URC logo used on the ads?

Two significant reasons – firstly, there is the issue of integrity: we can only advertise and point people to churches that have opted into the campaign of radical welcome and have been through the process that will allow them to deliver what the campaign promises. We hope that many URC churches will opt-in, but the reality is that not every congregation will make that choice.

The second reason is one of ecumenical consideration. The campaign is not seeking to promote the URC at the expense of other churches. Far from it. We will soon be offering churches an opportunity to opt into the campaign regardless of denominational affiliation – ultimately we want to make it as easy as possible to convert the campaign into a fully ecumenical movement.

And, of course, this will help make the decision easier for Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs). We know that, before this decision was taken, some LEPs could not sign up to the campaign because of the URC logo – now they can, and we're delighted that LEPs are starting to explore the campaign.

However, all campaign ads will clearly state that the campaign is an initiative of the United Reformed Church.

9. Does the campaign put our ecumenical relationships with other denominations at risk?

No! In the same way that it challenges us in the URC, radical welcome may seem very challenging to our ecumenical colleagues. But that's no reason not to engage with it – or to ask them to engage further themselves.

The Revd Roberta Rominger, general secretary of the URC, and the Revd David Tatem, the URC's secretary for ecumenical relations, are making individual presentations to other denominations over the summer and the strategy for full ecumenical buy-in will be developed following these meetings. There is, of course, a logic that says that the Council for World Mission has given

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us this resource for a largely URC initiative and that URC churches might expect to be first in the queue – and we are only working with URCs at the moment. However, we do want to make it as easy as possible to convert the campaign into a fully ecumenical movement.

Churches that have opted-in to this radical welcome process may well want to discuss with their companion when and in what manner they will let their local ecumenical colleagues know about the campaign. Every church will have different relationships with their Christian neighbours, but no-one will wish to prevent authentic and profound welcome being offered, especially if they are already doing so themselves.

10. How does a church become a campaign church? Explain the process to me.

There are three clear steps on the journey towards becoming a campaign church. These are:

- a. **Exploration:** This is the stage when interested churches can find out more detail about the preparation process, the theology of the campaign, the advertising messages that will be unveiled to the public at next year's launch, and other issues which surround radical welcome. To do this fully churches will need to contact Denese Chikwendu on 0207 691 9864 or denese.chikwendu@urc.org.uk and ask for an introductory pack.
- b. **Opt-in:** This is when your congregation has worked through the exploratory material provided in the introductory pack and feels ready to start the next stage of the journey towards becoming a ZI church. You do this by registering with Denese Chikwendu and asking for a companion. Once your companion arrives you can begin the deeper preparatory conversations, discussions and workshops which are needed to familiarise your church with the challenges you will encounter and strategies you will need to be consistent and confident in the radical welcome offered by your church.
- c. **Covenant:** This is when your congregation and your companion feel the time is right for you to become registered as a campaign church – and to be named as such on the campaign website. You will need to let Denese Chikwendu know of your covenant and you may wish to hold a church service celebrating this – and pledging your commitment to radical welcome to God.

We estimate that this process from exploring to covenanting will take at least four months.

11. Who are "companions" and how are they recruited?

Companions are the people who will accompany an individual church, other than their own place of worship, through the process of exploring radical welcome, and ultimately helping it to decide whether or not it wants to register as a campaign church.

Anyone with a heart for radical welcome can apply to be a companion. A number of potential companions emerged from the initial presentations of the campaign to synods, and more have come forward through follow-up meetings, conversations with members of the steering group etc. People across the United Reformed Church have been inspired by radical welcome and volunteered themselves. The word is being spread widely within the synods, and as training begins to cascade through synods more people will come forward with the necessary character, skills and motivation. What about you? Are you considering it?

Companions will be appointed after completion of an initial training course. The URC's Windermere Centre in the Lake District has already hosted three training courses, and is hosting one more on 8-10 August. Additional dates will be offered in other areas depending on local demand. To find out more about becoming a companion, or to book your training place, please contact Denese Chikwendu on 0207 691 9864 or at: denese.chikwendu@urc.org.uk

12. Who is my synod contact person?

Most synods have appointed a campaign contact person and these are listed below. The remaining synods are in the process of appointment.

Synod:	Synod Contact:	Email:
Northern	Rhona Dunn	rhona.dunn@urc-northernsynod.org
North western	Pat Oliver	stcolumbawarden@hotmail.com
Mersey	Gwynfor Evans	revev@dsl.pipex.com
Yorkshire	Anne Parker	annebarry526@btinternet.com
East Midlands	Helen Carr	helly75@hotmail.co.uk
West Midlands	John Burgess Stuart Scott	ministerialtraining@urcwestmidlands.org.uk laytraining@urcwestmidlands.org.uk
Eastern	Linda Harrison <i>Interim contact</i>	HARRL@colchsfc.ac.uk
South western	Heather Whyte	Communications@urcsouthwest.org.uk
Wessex	Andrew Gibb Elizabeth Kemp	andrew@andrewgibb.com minister@chezkemp.net
Thames North	Anne Sardeson	training@urcthamesnorth.org.uk
Southern	Martyn Coe	MartynCoe@GreenwichUnitedChurch.org.uk
Wales	Kevin Snyman <i>Interim contact</i> Shelagh Pollard <i>Interim contact</i>	tdosouth@urcwailes.org.uk synodclerk@urcwailes.org.uk
Scotland	Stewart Cutler	scutler@urcscotland.org.uk

Please contact the local synod office for phone numbers for your synod contact person.

13. How many United Reformed churches are signed up to the campaign?

As at the week beginning 26 September 2011, 374 United Reformed congregations were exploring becoming a campaign church.

14. What other kinds of advertising/promotional activity will there be, after launch?

When the campaign launches publicly, it will do so using as many different media as possible. We will obtain the widest possible coverage of our target audiences, both urban and rural. Flyers, posters, viral online film, radio, newspaper and magazine articles, the URC and other websites, and all the publicity that will come from launching anything so different.

15. Can campaign churches express reservations and impose conditions about the people who turn up?

Of course they can – as long as the reservations are about truly destructive, dangerous or illegal behaviours – and not about your attitudes to who or what the person is.

One of the roles of the companion is to help a congregation recognise ways it already sets the healthy boundaries that enable it to create a safe church – and to distinguish these from behavioural and attitudinal barriers which may be alienating.

A radically welcoming church can expect to encounter some fairly uncomfortable moments – both during their preparation and after they join the campaign fully – because, by its nature, it is resolving to go beyond what it currently finds comfortable in order to reach out to “the other” – (whoever that “other” may be for that particular congregation). Opted-in congregations will be encouraged to participate in a great workshop on boundaries which explores this whole area thoughtfully and in-depth.

**16. I've heard that there is new
"body copy" for the six adverts.
What does it say?**

As part of the review process, which took place over Summer 2011, new "body copy" - that's all the text on the advert that is not part of the headline - was re-written, and is reproduced in full below.

1) ZERO INTOLERANCE

The world is intolerant. It can be hard, bloody and cold if you live differently from the people in charge. You can be excluded from everything: family - work - community. Even church. You need to belong, but you're not welcome. So sad. And so wrong.

Jesus never turned anyone away. Neither will Zero Intolerance churches.

**2) RACISM, SEXISM, HOMOPHOBIA.
UGLY IN THE WORKPLACE.
FORGIVABLE IN THE CHURCH?**

We humans punish people we don't understand. If you're black, female, gay, foreign or in any way different, you probably already know that. It's illegal - but it still goes on. Even in churches. How can we forgive ourselves if we don't welcome everyone?

Jesus never turned anyone away. Neither will Zero Intolerance churches.

Please note that the headline for this advert has been changed from a statement to a question.

3) LOVE*

***No Conditions apply**

Are there rules about love? Are you only lovable if you've got money? Or a home? Or if you're married? Or white? Or able-bodied? Or straight?

Jesus never turned anyone away. Neither will Zero Intolerance churches.

4) JESUS IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES SAVIOUR.

Jesus was for everybody.

Unmarried mums, divorced people, black and white, gay and straight, balanced or bigoted, very young, very old, fit or dying, coping or collapsing, believers and doubters... He'd have loved you.

Jesus never turned anyone away. Neither will Zero Intolerance churches.

**5) 2000 YEARS AGO THE CHURCH WAS A PLACE FOR
THE POOR, THE DISABLED, THE PROSTITUTE AND
THE DESTITUTE.
WHAT WENT WRONG?**

Jesus mixed with all sorts. He chose thieves, drinkers, street-women, poor people, and misfits to be his friends. Room for everybody.

Jesus never turned anyone away. Neither will Zero Intolerance churches.

**6) RATE JESUS?
HATE CHURCH?**

Jesus: what a tough act to follow. But we try hard. We try not to say one thing and do another. We try not to huddle in groups of "Us and Them". We're not afraid to change when we get things wrong.

Jesus never turned anyone away. Neither will Zero Intolerance churches.