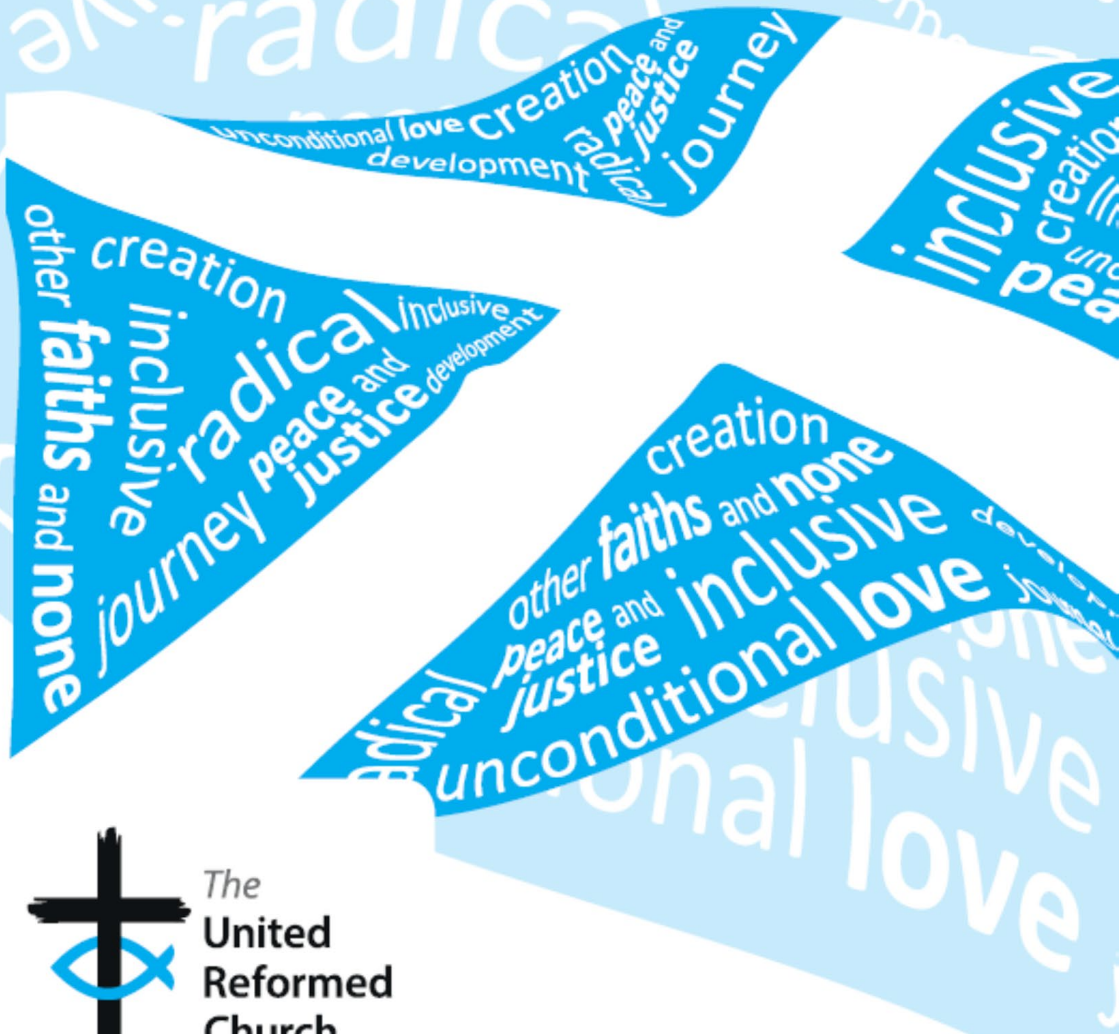


United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland  
**2023 National Synod Profile**



# Our aspirations

## **Unconditional Love**

We are an active Christian community that responds to the UNCONDITIONAL LOVE of God through celebrating the Christian story in ways that bring meaning and hope to life. We seek to support each other in faith and doubt as a caring community.

## **Inclusive**

Our INCLUSIVE worship reflects a broad variety of sources and styles. Local churches offer weekly worship, regular celebration of Holy Communion, and mark the stages of life in baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

## **Radical**

We believe that God's RADICAL love is for everyone, regardless of age, gender, sexuality, physical and mental ability, social status, or ethnicity. Young people are represented with full voting rights in our councils.

## **Journey**

From its formation in 1972, the United Reformed Church has been committed to JOURNEY to ecumenism and is a member of the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies. The National Synod of Scotland works closely with ecumenical partners through the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum, the Ecumenical Officers' Meeting, and the Scottish Churches Committee. We maintain links with the world church by engaging with global partners, mainly other member denominations of the Council for World Mission.

## **Other Faiths and None**

The national synod is a participant in Interfaith Scotland. Many local churches seek to build relationships with people of OTHER FAITHS AND NONE to nurture their local communities.

## **Peace and Justice**

Our commitment to PEACE AND JUSTICE is strong and, through the Commitment for Life programme, is particularly expressed with (?) Christian Aid, Jubilee Scotland, and Global Justice Now. We are a Fair Trade Church and support the work of the Scottish Churches' Parliamentary Office.

## **Creation**

We believe we are called to live in balance with the whole of CREATION. Many local churches participate in the Eco-Congregation Scotland scheme.

## **Development**

The Scottish College (Congregational & United Reformed) offers a dynamic programme for spiritual and faith DEVELOPMENT for anyone wishing to explore Christianity or particular callings in the life of the church. URC YOUTH and URC CHILDREN are growing youth and children's organisations within the United Reformed Church, offering opportunities for learning and friendship among youth and children.

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# Our story

## Our vision

Jesus was once asked about the greatest commandment. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,” he replied, before adding: “Love your neighbour as you love yourself.”

Loving God and loving our neighbour takes many forms in Scotland during the 21st century. As the United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland – a group of 39 congregations spread throughout Scotland and supported by our staff based in our office in Glasgow – we want loving God and loving our neighbour to both be demonstrated through growth.

That growth can be expressed in many ways: a growing love for God as our faith deepens; a growing love for our neighbour as we feed the hungry, heal the sick, and free the prisoners; and growing in number as our congregations spread the gospel in our communities.

Our story about growth is expressed through both our national synod’s aspirations (page two) and through our vision:

- to support our congregations – through staff time, educational opportunities, and sharing stories of growth from the wider church;
- to strengthen our ecumenical links – both at a local level and at a national level;
- to pursue a collective approach to two challenging areas – finance and a reduced number of stipendiary ministers of word and sacraments;
- to continue to develop teams and clusters – in part in response to ministerial deployment;
- to continue to review and amend, as appropriate, our national synod’s governance and structures;
- to continue to develop our national synod team and new ways of working.

## Our journey

The coronavirus pandemic continues to change the outlook for all our congregations. For some, the lockdowns presented opportunities to create or extend online and telephone ministries, providing the chance to spread the gospel to people who may never have chosen to enter a church building. For others, the lockdowns led congregations to take the difficult decision to close.

For many of our congregations, the pandemic has accelerated the decline that set-in during the 20th century. With fewer people able to attend Sunday worship or midweek groups, many of our smaller congregations are wrestling to discern God’s calling within our communities. Fewer worshipers also means less income, adding to the headache surrounding the deployment of ministers and increasing the pressure on elders and other lay leaders.

Yet there is still hope – God isn’t finished with us yet. Our national synod brings together a wide variety of people with an even wider variety of gifts. Some of our congregations are large, gathering around 100 people for worship, while others are wee, gathering a dozen or fewer people. Some meet in large stone-built Victorian buildings; others worship in modern buildings with housing association flats above, while some meet in community centres, school halls, and other secular spaces.

Our bairns and young people lead from the front. Our youth executive was created in 2016 after our young people brought a resolution to our synod meeting. Now, our young people are exploring options for how to further develop our youth executive.

What unites us is more than our history – it’s our outlook. When visiting congregations throughout our national synod, the recurring theme is a sense of independence, both of thought and of vision, during worship and during the coffee and bletcher that follows. As a national synod and as a wider denomination, that independence creates opportunities for our congregations to serve our local communities in new and exciting ways, following the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel.

## Our national synod

Being a national synod brings with it special privileges and special responsibilities. As a national synod, we speak and act on behalf of the whole United Reformed Church through our interactions with our ecumenical partners and with wider civic secular society.

Our ecumenical links are made at both a local and a national level. Nine of our congregations have formal links, either as united churches or through local ecumenical partnerships (LEPs). As well as working with our ecumenical partners locally, we also work with our ecumenical partners on a national level, interacting with many denominations that have no presence in other parts of the UK.

Since 2010, our national synod has also been part of the Episcopal, Methodist & United Reformed (EMU) partnership, which draws us closer to the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Scotland & Shetland District of the Methodist Church.

As well as the month-by-month and year-by-year activities of attending each other's committee meetings and gatherings, working with our ecumenical partners also involves interacting through several national bodies. In the past, Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) was the primary body for many of those interactions; now, the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum (SCLF) is coming to the fore.

Along with our ecumenical partners, our national synod also plays a role in civic life, including through the Scottish Churches' Parliamentary Office (SCPO) and its interactions with the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government, and with the UK Parliament and UK Government. Our national synod is also an active member of bodies including Eco-Congregation Scotland, Interfaith Scotland, and Jubilee Scotland.

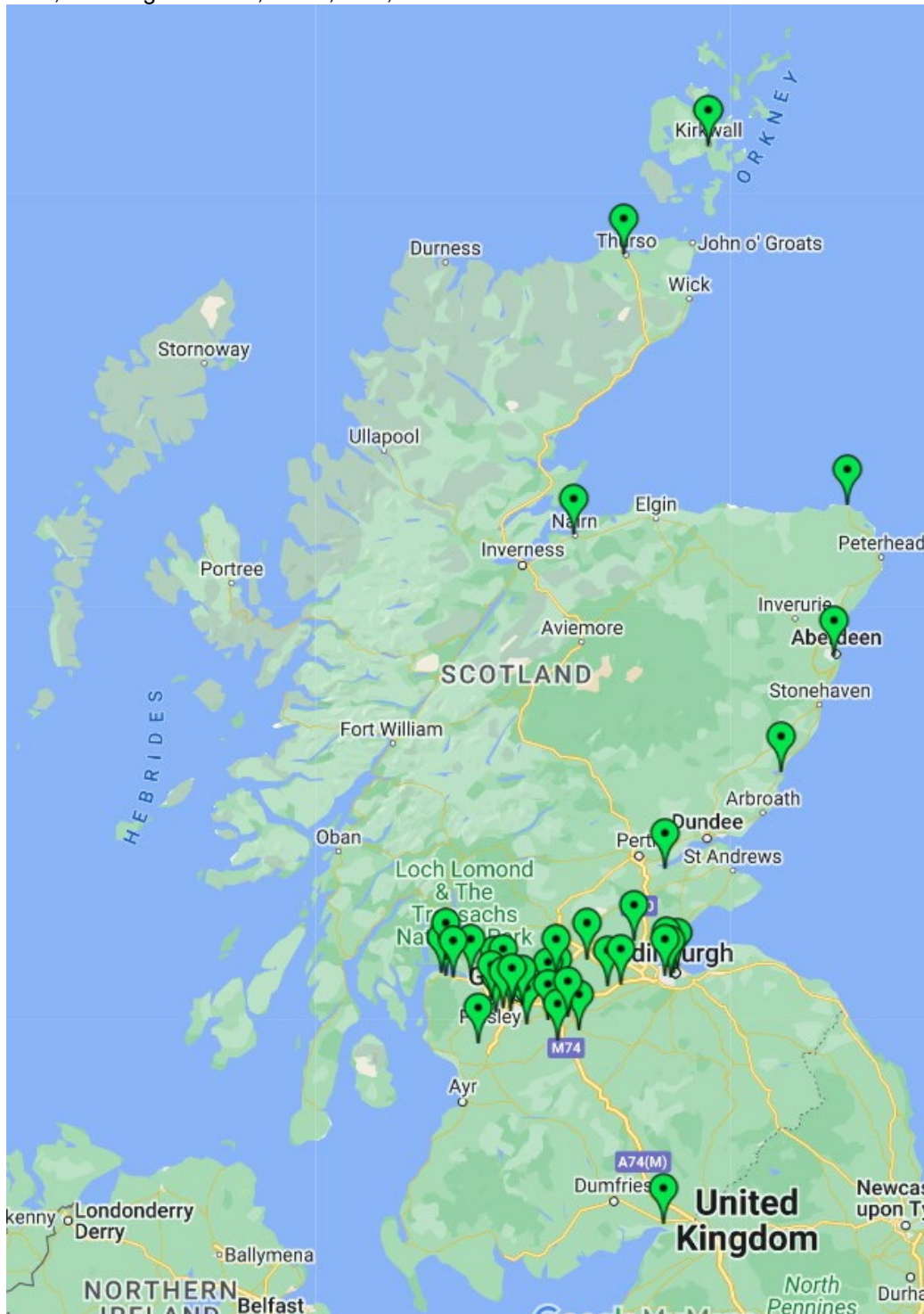
While members of the public are most likely to interact with the United Reformed Church through our congregations, the work of our national synod provides a different yet complementary avenue for the public to come into contact with the United Reformed Church, whether through statements on important issues – from climate change and debt relief through to equal marriage and social justice – or through its participation in major events.

Our links with our partners also go as deep as our day-to-day operations. For example, our safeguarding measures to protect vulnerable people are delivered through the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service, which provides advice, support, and training, along with risk assessments for activities and people with previous convictions on their protection of vulnerable groups (PVG) disclosures. In this way, our safeguarding arrangements reflect the differences between our Scots Law and the Law of England & Wales when it comes to protecting vulnerable people.

# Our people

## Our congregations

Our congregations are spread throughout Scotland, from the Peedie Kirk in Kirkwall on the Orkney Isles in the north to Annan in Dumfries & Galloway near the border in the south. Most of our congregations are clustered in the Central Belt, and around Glasgow in particular, reflecting the concentration of Scotland's population more generally. Our 39 congregations are grouped into four links, covering the north, south, east, and west.



Our congregations serve our communities in a wide variety of ways, from providing worship and pastoral care through to supporting food banks and other charities. Each congregation was asked to share three snippets about what makes them special – those that replied said...

**Augustine United Church** in Edinburgh is...

...a gathered city centre church, passionate about justice, inclusion, and joy for all.  
...an ever-changing body made up of people with diverse abilities, ages, sexualities, neurodiversities, genders, and experiences.  
...formed by disciples of Jesus who seek to worship God, support each other, and reach out with love, that we and the whole world be transformed into God's realm.

**Barrhead United Reformed Church**...

...is enthusiastically looking forward to the future.  
...may be small in number but embraces its worship, community outreach, and new ecumenical relationship with Barrhead Methodist Church.  
...believes 2023 will be an exciting year.

**Duke Street United Reformed Church** in Leith has...

...youth organisations with more than 70 members and 13 leaders, spread across Rainbows, Brownies, Guides, and Boys' Brigade.  
...a strong sense of belonging.  
...a rich history in Leith, formed by three other congregations joining in the 1970s, 1980s, and 2010s.

**Hamilton United Reformed Church**...

...gives witness through its Sunday morning worship and making its buildings available for community and commercial groups that provide activities for adults and children.  
...supports local joint ecumenical worship and mission activities.  
...supports activities including the Drama Kirk passion play and Christmas gifts for Women's Aid.

**Inverclyde Cluster**...

...Greenock East United Reformed Church recently opened a warm space for the community.  
...Greenock West United Reformed Church opens its building during the summer for passengers from visiting cruise ships to learn about the congregation's history and enjoy tea, coffee, and shortbread.  
...Port Glasgow United Reformed Church has opened a café at its food bank, runs a walking football group with Port Glasgow New Parish Church, and is a part of Port Glasgow Churches Together.

**Morningside United Church** in Edinburgh has...

...a single-congregation local ecumenical partnership formed with a Church of Scotland parish church.  
...a high standard of quality music in worship and at other regular events.  
...plans to further develop its chaplaincy with Edinburgh Napier University.

**Oakshaw Trinity Church** in Paisley has...

...run The Wynd Counselling & Conference Centre in the heart of the town for nearly 40 years.  
...gained its silver Eco-Congregation Scotland award.  
...an exceptionally talented organist, David Murray, who is one of the most distinguished organists in the west of Scotland.

**Peedie Kirk United Reformed Church** in Kirkwall is...

...located on Orkney and is the most northerly congregation in the United Reformed Church.  
...already carbon neutral, with all its electricity generated by wind and tidal power, and now plans to erect its own solar panels on the roof of its building.  
...probably the only congregation in the United Reformed Church that can't open on Christmas Day - unless it falls on a Sunday - because the streets are closed for "the ba", a mass game of football.

**Righead United Reformed Church** in East Kilbride has...

...been part of the Murray Church Partnership with The Salvation Army in East Kilbride, South Parish Church of Scotland, and St Mark's Scottish Episcopal Church since 2016.

...decided to knock down its building and replace it with a church and community centre, plus amenity flats for older people, in partnership with East Kilbride Housing Association and Rosewood Homes.

...welcomed back former members during the pandemic, and now offers recorded services on the telephone for housebound people.

**Rutherglen United Reformed Church** has...

...begun sharing its act of remembrance outside its church building on Remembrance Sunday to increase community involvement.

...decorated its church railings to celebrate pride, harvest, and other events.

...turned its old vestry into a breakout room for children to use during worship.

**Saughtonhall United Reformed Church** in Edinburgh has...

... recently replanted in the centre of its residential community.

...embraced the opportunities of broadcasting worship.

...an energy of commitment, with growth, potential, and adaptability.

**Shawlands United Reformed Church** in Glasgow has...

...come from the Church of Christ tradition, and so has weekly communion and a baptistry, with one person training for the new style of non-stipendiary ministry, and one assembly-accredited lay preacher authorised to lead communion.

...steam cleaned its church building, both to clean and preserve its stonework and to have a better profile in the community, with which it has good relations.

...has adapted and partially redecorated its premises to meet the needs of users more easily.

## **Our staff and officers**

Our national synod is blessed with both staff and officers, with some ordained ministers serving in synod roles, while other positions are filled by people who bring with them professional skills from the secular world, some in paid roles and some as volunteers. Some of our staff work from home, while others are based in the centre of Glasgow in our office, which we own jointly with the Scottish College (Congregational & United Reformed).

### **Moderator: Rev Paul Whittle (full time)**

The moderator provides leadership for our national synod and pastoral support for ordained ministers serving in our pastorates. Paul joined us in 2021 for a three-year appointment.

### **Clerk: Rev Jan Adamson (part time)**

The clerk supports the moderator in providing leadership for the national synod and is responsible for the administration of the committees and office. The clerk is also the line manager for the national synod staff. Jan became our clerk in 2021, having served from 2006 as our field officer for local mission and development.

### **Personal Assistant: Gemma Walker (full time)**

The personal assistant provides support to the moderator and clerk, and is involved in the administration of our national synod and its office. Patsi Dickie retired as personal assistant in 2022 after 46 years of service to the Congregational Union of Scotland and the United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland.

### **Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations Officer: Rev John Bremner (full time)**

The ecumenical and interfaith relations officer represents the national synod and works with our ecumenical and interfaith partners. John became our officer in 2018.

### **Treasurer: Duncan Walker (part time)**

The treasurer manages our national synod's finances. Duncan was appointed as our treasurer in 2021, and also serves as our accountant.

**Finance Officer: Jackie Kyle (full time)**

The finance officer helps the treasurer to manage our national synod's finances. Jackie joined the Congregational Union of Scotland's central office in 1980 and continued working with our national synod following the union in 2000.

**Children's Ministry Development Worker: Jess Poole (part time)**

The children's ministry development worker supports, encourages, and enables children's ministry by our congregations. Jess became the children's ministry development worker in 2018.

**Youth Ministry Development Worker: Matt Baines (part time)**

The youth ministry development worker supports, encourages, and enables youth ministry by our congregations, and by being part of our youth executive. Matt became the youth ministry development worker in 2019.

**Training & Development Officer: Rev John McNeil Scott (full time)**

The training officer encourages, promotes, and organises education for our national synod, and serves as principal of the Scottish College (Congregational & United Reformed), one of the three resource centres for learning within the United Reformed Church. John became the training officer and college principal in 2017.

**Transition Champion: Rev Sarah Moore (full time)**

The transition champion helps our congregations to explore options for their future. Sarah became the transition champion in 2020.

## Our structures and committees

Our 39 congregations come together to form the United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland. Our national synod helps our congregations to serve our communities through a series of committees. Both lay people and ordained ministers serve on our committees, sharing their faith and their experience to help spread the gospel, both in Scotland and further afield.

**Executive**

The executive is a new body that replaced the previous Policy, Planning & Strategy Committee. The executive enables the work of the national synod and its committees and organises national synod meetings.

**Ecumenical & Interfaith Reference Group**

Our task group advises and guides our ecumenical and interfaith relations officer, and promotes ecumenism within our national synod.

**Church Life Committee**

The committee encourages congregations to explore mission, worship, theology and sense of community.

**Church & Society Committee**

The committee advises the national synod and congregations in all matters concerning the church's relations to society and, in particular, to the national institutions in Scotland.

**Finance & Property Committee**

The finance and property committee works with the treasurer to manage our national synod's finances. The committee also buys and sells manses on behalf of our congregations.

**Pastoral Committee**

The committee has pastoral oversight of ordained ministers, lay preachers, and congregations. Our pastoral committee works with our congregations to "scope" requirements for ordained ministry.

### **Youth Executive & Children's Ministry Committee**

Our youth executive was formed in 2016, when our young people brought a resolution to our national synod meeting. Since then, the youth executive has organised lots of events, including outdoor activity weekends, day trips to major cities, youth programmes during our national synod meetings, and a five-day pilgrimage to the island of Tiree. Our youth executive also challenged our congregations to raise money for a homelessness charity and brought a resolution to our national synod meeting asking every congregation to look at becoming more environmentally friendly, and for our congregations and our national synod to offset church-related mileage. Our youth executive is very small in number and is looking at options for its future function. It is supported by our youth and children's ministries development workers.

### **Trustees (Council of Nominees)**

Under the 2005 Charity & Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act, trustees are defined as people with "control and management of the administration of a charity". The trustees' council is a separate body to the executive.

### **Area Council**

The United Reformed Church's area councils were dissolved in 2006; however, the 2000 United Reformed Church Act sets out statutory functions for area councils, and so the national synod is required occasionally to sit as an area council.

## **Our finances**

The 2021 accounts for the United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland (SC011907) are available from the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR): <https://www.oscr.org.uk/about-charities/search-the-register/charity-details?number=SC011907>

## **Our part in the wider United Reformed Church**

While our national synod has a proud and distinct identity – both within the United Reformed Church and within national life in Scotland – we also play a number of roles within the life of our denomination. Both ordained ministers and lay people from within our national synod serve the United Reformed Church on its internal committees and as representatives to external bodies.

Our national synod is part of the five northerly synods, along with Mersey, Northern, North-Western, and Yorkshire. The group offers mutual support in ministry and mission.

Our national synod is also active in the wider work of the United Reformed Church. Many of our congregations support the work of international development charities Christian Aid Scotland and Christian Aid, both directly and through the United Reformed Church's specific Commitment for Life partnership, which also includes Global Justice Now.

Echoing our public policy work at a national level through the SCPO, our national synod also supports the work of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) at a UK level with The Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Methodist Church. On the international stage, our national synod is also an active participant of the Council for World Mission (CWM), and in the past had formal partnerships with the Presbyterian Reformed Churches in Cuba and the Reformed Church in Hungary.

# Our context

## Our nation

Scotland was formed from an exciting mix of many cultures. From the Picts and the Gaels to the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons, Scotland's history is rich with diversity. That diversity has continued to develop over more recent decades and centuries, with people moving to Scotland from throughout the world, including from Ireland and from England and Wales, from the Indian subcontinent and from Eastern Europe.

That diversity brings with it a broad range of national identities felt by our people in Scotland, whether we are Scottish by birth or by welcome. Identity is not at odds with diversity. Modern Scotland is a diverse nation with many cultures, perhaps captured most eloquently in the old Scots' saying, "We're a' Jock Tamson's bairns" – expressed elsewhere as "We're all God's children".

During 2021, an estimated 5.5 million people lived in Scotland. Deaths have outnumbered births for the past seven years, with the population continuing to grow slowly thanks to migration. The average age of Scotland's population is forecast to increase in the coming years and decades, with the headcount in our cities and other urban areas projected to continue growing, while the number of people living on our west coast and some of our islands is expected to continue falling.

Scotland is served by 32 unitary local councils, with local councillors elected to multi-member wards using single transferable votes. The 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) at Holyrood in Edinburgh are elected using a mixture of 73 first-past-the-post constituencies and eight regions each with seven MSPs selected through the additional member system. First-past-the-post votes are used to elect the 56 Members of Parliament (MPs) representing Scottish constituencies in the UK Parliament at Westminster in London..

## Our geography

Scotland's beautiful landscape is both a blessing that delights residents and visitors alike and a challenge that can only truly be appreciated when trying to navigate from one part of our nation to another. Scotland covers around a third of the UK landmass and includes nearly 800 islands, with its mountains and islands leading to the development of distinct cultures and dialects spread throughout its Highlands and Lowlands.

Although our population is concentrated in the Central Belt – with around 20% of Scots living in Greater Glasgow – our people are spread sparsely across a vast area, especially along the west coast in the Highlands and Argyll. A member of staff or office bearer based in our national synod office in Glasgow could spend a day – or longer – travelling to visit any of our five congregations spread throughout the North Link; a long journey, no matter whether the day is bright or dreich.

Such a bonnie yet challenging landscape presents opportunities and obstacles when it comes to spreading the gospel in the 21st century. More and more of our congregations have explored using video calls and other forms of digital technology during the pandemic, with both our synod office and the Scottish College using video conferencing software to run meetings and training sessions. If shrinking membership continues to drive lower ministerial deployment then online options will need to be explored in further detail.

Our geography highlights the importance of our congregations meeting together, whether through in-person national synod meetings or through online gatherings. Swapping stories with each other about spreading the gospel is an important part of the life of our national synod and helps us all to generate ideas and to discern the Holy Spirit's calling for us as individuals and for us as congregations as we share God's love and communicate the good news.

## Our history

The earliest days of our congregations lie in a very wide variety of sources – while many trace their roots to the preaching of the Haldane brothers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and from similar charismatic revivals, others have their origins in the Evangelical Union of Scotland, which grew from the United Secession Church in the 1840s and which united with the Congregational Union of Scotland in 1896. Some of our congregations identify at least part of their origins within previous church splits, secessions, and disruptions.

When the Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ joined with the United Reformed Church in 1981, six Churches of Christ congregations in Scotland became part of the Northern Synod of the expanded United Reformed Church in the UK. Those six congregations then formed our current National Synod of Scotland in 2000 along with the remaining churches from the Congregational Union of Scotland, which joined with the United Reformed Church in the UK to form the current incarnation of the United Reformed Church.

Those complex and varied origins add to the richness and experience of our congregations, reflecting the diverse ways in which we have served and continue to serve our communities.

## Our setting

Whisper it, but the United Reformed Church often defines itself in relation to the Church of England. Yet comparisons with an Anglican church are meaningless in Scotland, where our largest denomination – and former established church – is Presbyterian. Our congregations within our national synod often follow the same trope, describing ourselves as being “a wee bit different” to the Church of Scotland, with reference to our church meetings and other forms of congregational governance.

While describing ourselves with reference to other denominations is unlikely to help spread the gospel, exploring the ecclesiastical and ecumenical landscape in Scotland does help to explain the wide variety of church buildings that still line the streets of many villages, towns, and cities.

The Church of Scotland remains the largest denomination in our land and – as with several other denominations, including the Free Church of Scotland and the United Free Church – is Presbyterian in governance. Along with the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church traces its roots to the Reformation in 1560, which explains why – even though it is part of the Anglican Communion – it is a sister church to the Church of England and not a daughter church, spawning other Episcopal churches in North America.

The Roman Catholic Church in Scotland also has a structure separate to that of other Roman Catholic churches within the UK, including its Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland. Other denominations in Scotland have their own distinctive origins and identities too, including the Baptist Union of Scotland, with many of its congregations sharing the same origins as Congregational churches founded in the wake of the Haldane brothers' preaching.

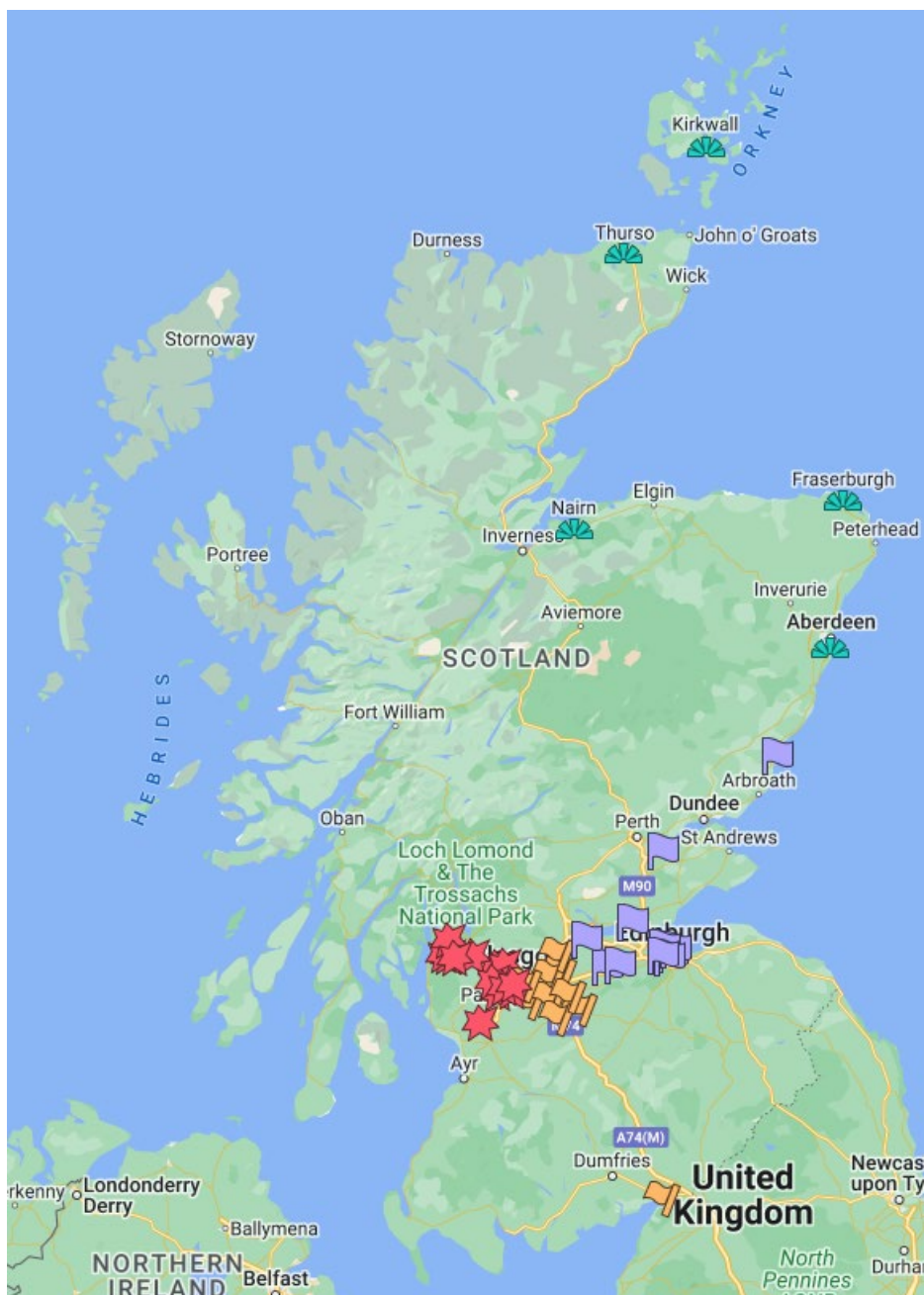
# Appendix 1: Our locations

**North Link:** Aberdeen; Fraserburgh; Nairn; Peedie Kirk (Kirkwall); Thurso.

**East Link:** Augustine United (Edinburgh); Bathgate; Duke Street (Leith); Dunfermline; Grahamston United (Falkirk); Granton United (Edinburgh); Livingston Ecumenical Parish; Montrose; Morningside United (Edinburgh); Newburgh; Saughtonhall (Edinburgh).

**South Link:** Annan; Carluke; Coatbridge; Cumbernauld; Hamilton; Park (Airdrie); Righead (East Kilbride); Rutherglen; St Ninian's (Stonehouse); Wishaw.

**West Link:** Barrhead; Morison Memorial (Clydebank); Dumbarton; Essenside (Drumchapel); Giffnock; Greenock East; Greenock West; Helensburgh; Oakshaw Trinity (Paisley); Port Glasgow; Priesthill; Shawlands (Glasgow); Stewarton.

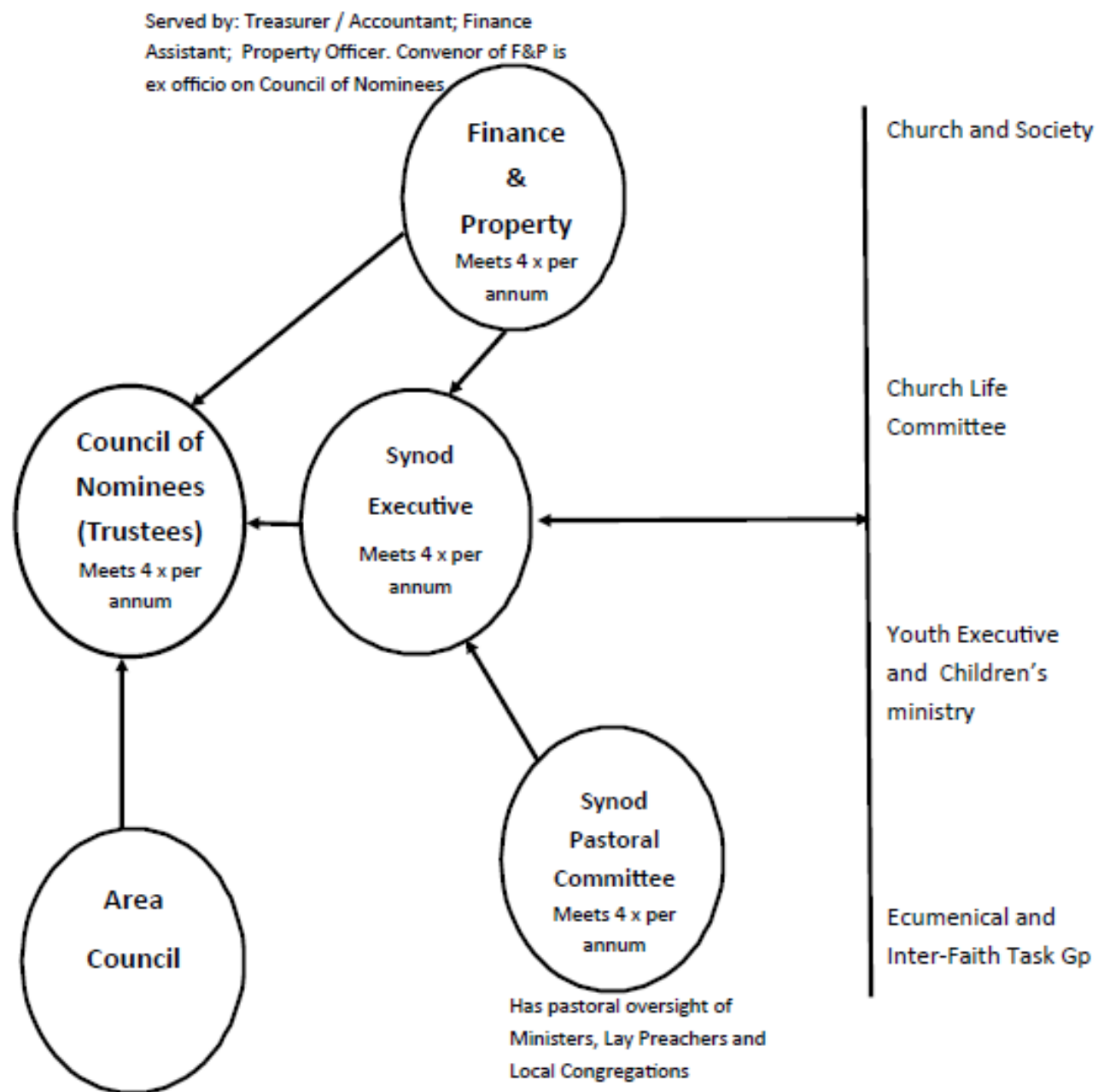


# Appendix 2:

## Synod Organisational Chart (non-hierarchical)

Synod Moderator: Ex Officio on all committees incl: Council of Nominees

Synod Clerk: Ex officio on Finance and Property and Pastoral Committees. Acts as Clerk to Council of Nominees, Area Council and Synod Executive



This Council only meets on a rare basis.

