

Paper I1

Report to General Assembly 2023

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor, Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This report provides an update on the work of the Mission Committee and Mission Team. It includes the response to previous General Assembly resolutions.
Main points	The report covers the areas for which Mission Committee is responsible, namely: Church and Society, Ecumenical Relations, Interfaith Relations, Greenbelt, Commitment for Life, Global and Intercultural Ministries, Fresh Expressions, Mission and Evangelism, Rural Mission, URC Buildings Forum and Net Zero Task Group.
Previous relevant documents	Paper I2 and Resolutions 26-35, Israel Palestine Report, General Assembly 2021 Paper I2 and Resolution 17, Environmental Policy, General Assembly 2022.
Consultation has taken place with...	Widely within the context of the ongoing work of Mission Team and Mission Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	All the work described below is within current budgets.
External (eg ecumenical)	The report outlines considerable areas of outreach including UK, European and Global ecumenical relationships.

Introduction

The task of the Mission Committee is to seek to encourage growth in discipleship, evangelism and witness by:

- reflecting on the Church's mission practice and theology
- formulating policy, strategies and programme (action) priorities
- reading the signs of the times and speaking prophetically
- working with partners
- continuously evaluating the place of mission and evangelism within the work of General Assembly.

This report offered by Mission Committee provides an overview of each area for which the committee is responsible, enabled by the staff members indicated at the beginning of each section of the report. Members of the Committee, representing each of the URC's 13 Synods are listed in the Nominations Committee report.

2. Church and Society

Secretary for Church and Society, and Team Leader of the Joint Public Issues Team:

Simeon Mitchell

Programme Support Officer:

Roo Stewart

The church and society programme helps the Church to speak prophetically about justice and peace issues in the public square. It supports local churches by providing resources and campaigns that help individuals make the links between faith, politics and social action. Most of this work is carried out through

membership of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), a partnership between the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church, and the Baptist Union of Great Britain, with the Church of Scotland as associate partners. Over the period since we last reported to General Assembly in



2021, JPIT has focused on helping the Church to work, witness and pray for Six Hopes for society.

2.1 **A society where the poorest and most marginalised are at the centre**

Rising living costs have had huge impacts across our society over the last 18 months, but the sharpest effects have been felt by the least well-off. In August 2022, JPIT coordinated the launch of a research report highlighting the huge financial shortfall people would be experiencing and some of the personal impact of that. It called for urgent government action. This was endorsed by multiple faith and charity leaders, alongside former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, generating significant media and political interest.

Advocacy on these issues has continued. The URC added its support to the 'Guarantee Our Essentials' campaign for benefit rates to be calculated to at least cover the cost of essentials like food, household bills and travel costs. JPIT is currently coordinating the development of a broader campaign which aims to generate the political will to end structural poverty in the UK.

We have supported local churches in responding to the increasing challenges faced by communities, in particular through being part of the 'Warm Welcome' initiative to offer safe, warm, free and heated community spaces in the winter of 2022-23, while pointing people towards the policy changes and justice work that would ensure such provision is not required in the future.

As part the wider movement to address poverty, JPIT has been a partner in Challenge Poverty Week and a conference hosted with Church Action on Poverty and the APLE Collective on 'Dignity for All' in June 2023.

2.2 A society that welcomes the stranger

The asylum system has been a hot political topic over this period, and the Church has been a significant voice in advocating for fairer and more compassionate policies. JPIT played a leading role in coordinating the response of faith groups to the government's 'New Plan for Immigration' and subsequent Nationality and Borders Bill, which sought to reduce the rights of asylum seekers arriving by 'irregular' routes. Over 1000 faith leaders signed a letter released in February 2022 urging a rethink of the plans, and it was quoted extensively in parliament.



More than 1,000 leaders representing the six major faith groups in the UK expressed their concern about the government's asylum plans.

The Church was also vocal in opposing the plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, and the 2023 Illegal Migration Bill, which effectively seeks to close Britain's borders to almost anyone seeking sanctuary here. A statement from JPIT church leaders questioning the morality of the Bill attracted the signatures of more than 1,500 other church leaders. It was presented to 10 Downing Street in April 2023.

2.3 A world which actively works for peace

In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, we offered prayer material alongside practical guidance for local churches and members around supporting refugees. The URC also joined a statement calling for an immediate end to the war as part of Churches Together in England. Further reflection materials were released around the anniversary of the invasion, urging ongoing generosity in offering hospitality and humanitarian support.

A JPIT project has continued to look at the financing of nuclear weapons, as well as wider issues about militarisation and the ethics of arms technology.

2.4 A planet where the environment is renewed

The UK's hosting of the COP26 climate talks in November 2021 offered a focal point for action on the climate crisis, although the summit itself secured limited progress. More than 2,200 churches held a Climate Sunday service, thousands engaged with the Young Christian Climate Network's relay around the UK and other campaigns, and many new commitments were made to environmental action. The COP27 summit a year later was significant in acknowledging the need for compensation for climate loss and damage, a justice issue on which faith communities have been actively campaigning for many years.

Recognising the need for local as well as global responses to the climate emergency, in 2022 JPIT launched the 'Net Zero in my Neighbourhood' initiative to encourage and support churches to engage with local authorities on their environmental plans.

2.5 **A just economy that enables the flourishing of all life**

Linking concerns about poverty and the environment are questions about our economic system. In 2023 JPIT released *Just Economics*, www.jpit.uk/justeconomics, a six-session Bible study course for small groups designed to open up conversations about how the economy might be re-shaped to enable the wellbeing of all people and the planet.

2.6 **A politics characterised by listening, kindness and truthfulness**

JPIT has sought to resource churches and members in their political engagement, encouraging the development of good relationships through the 'Meet your MP' scheme, and informed dialogue through election briefings. A campaign has also raised awareness of new requirements for people to have a form of photo ID to vote.

An event organised in parliament in November 2022 brought together leaders from five denominations with parliamentarians for discussion and debate.

The Church has expressed its concerns about the erosion of democratic space through restrictions on protest and proposals to reform the Human Rights Act.



Secretary for Church and Society, Simeon Mitchell, welcomes MPs and church leaders to an event in parliament in November 2022

A variety of events and resources have been offered to enable church members to engage with, reflect on and respond to current issues in society. In June 2022, more than 150 participants took part in the JPIT Conference, on the theme 'From the Ground Up: unearthing hope and seeking justice'. Webinars and speaking engagements have been provided on a range of topics. Worship resources were produced for Advent and the Season of Creation, along with daily prompts to 'Stay and Pray'. 'Politics in the Pulpit?', JPIT's weekly lectionary-based video podcast, has continued to be appreciated, with seasons hosted by URC ministers the Revd Jenny Mills and the Revd Lee Liddell. Informed commentary on current events is provided by JPIT through regular blogs, briefings, news stories, social media posts, a monthly email newsletter, and a relaunched podcast offering '10 minutes on...' a range of topical issues. All can be accessed from the JPIT website: www.jpit.uk

3. **Ecumenical relations**

Mission Support Officer with responsibility for ecumenical relations:
Lindsey Brown

Administrator to ecumenical relations:
Carole Sired

Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer, Synod of Scotland:

John Bremner

Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer, Synod of Wales:

Martin Spain

3.1 UK ecumenical instruments

The URC continues its active engagement with Churches Together in England (CTE), Cytûn in Wales and with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI).

3.1.1 Wales

On 1 April 2023, Cytûn's new Chief Executive, Siôn Brynach took up his post. He was formerly the Head of Communication and Public Affairs for Arts Council of Wales and is ordained as a priest in the Church in Wales. The URC Synod of Wales continues to play its part in Cytûn. Martin Spain will be the URC appointed Director on the board of Cytûn. The current Moderator, Revd Simon Walkling, serves as the President of the Free Church of Council of Wales. Ecumenically, the Covenanted Churches meet together twice a year with the Ecumenical and Interfaith Officers' Network (EION). This is a Church in Wales led initiative and has achieved much since its formation. In recent meetings, initiatives brought forward by the URC have gathered momentum, including the following recommendations for radical co-working:

- Wales to become an ecumenical nation, drawing inspiration from Cumbria as an ecumenical county
- The Commission of the Covenanted Churches' statement on shared ministry to be put into practice
- Initiatives to train and deploy pioneer ministers ecumenically
- Increase ecumenical and interfaith aspects of ministerial training
- A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission (Churches Together in England toolkit) to be adapted and developed for the Welsh context.

In addition to EION, there are several dialogue groups with church partners, including one with the Presbyterian Church in Wales.

3.1.2 Scotland

Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) consists now solely of funds, administered by a board of Trustees, and, other than dealing with administrative matters, is effectively inactive. To fill this vacuum, the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum, in which the URC Synod of Scotland plays an active part, has widened ecumenical involvement. It was originally shaped as a response to the pandemic, but subsequently has developed into an effective forum for engagement between participating churches, senior church leaders and with Scottish Government agencies.

3.1.3 England

Lindsey Brown represents the URC at CTE's Enabling Group, which has been engaging with issues including responses to the conflict in Ukraine and the cost of living crisis. She has made two presentations to the Group, focusing on the URC's ecumenical hopes in its Jubilee year, and sharing the film 'An Ecumenical Love Story': www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMBF1gmEUJM&t=1s. This short film about a newly formed URC/Methodist Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP)

demonstrates how the sharing of ecumenical resources in Salford has brought much needed help to this impoverished community.

Lindsey Brown contributed to CTE's training course for new Ecumenical Officers and will be part of the group revising this well-established course. She was also part of a panel presenting on Climate Justice as Missional Action at a CTE conference with the theme of 'Learning to be Missionary Disciples'.

Philip Brooks is a member of CTE's diversity group which was set up to respond to the issue of the 'empty chair' of the fourth presidency, where Quaker Hannah Brock-Womack was requested not to take her appointed role as president because of her same-sex marriage.

Victoria Turner from URC Youth continues as a CTE Trustee.

The URC welcomed the opportunity to host CTE's National Ecumenical Officers' Away Day at Lumen in January for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.



L-R, Ecumenical representatives from the Church of England, Roman Catholic Church, Congregational Federation, Baptist Union, Salvation Army, the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch, Methodist Church and the Lutheran Church attended the event in-person and were joined online from the Society of Friends (Quakers), Church of Scotland and the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

3.2 Bilateral ecumenical relations

3.2.1 Methodist

The Methodist/URC Liaison Group is co-convened for the URC by East Midlands Moderator, Geoffrey Clarke and for the Methodist Church by the Chair of the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire District, David Chapman. It meets twice per year and deals with many of the practical details of the relationship between our two denominations.

The Strategic Oversight Group which brings together the URC General Secretariat and their Methodist equivalent takes a more strategic overview of our activities. Philip Brooks is the ecumenical observer to Methodist Council and the Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission. Geoffrey Clarke currently represents the URC at Methodist Conference.

As the Methodists relocate their Church House operations from Marylebone Road to Tavistock Place, just a few doors down from URC Church House, partnerships between the two denominations move closer geographically as well as relationally.

3.2.2 Roman Catholic

The Roman Catholic/URC Dialogue Group continues to meet and is planning the document that will mark the end of its third phase. This is intended to be an accessible paper designed to highlight practical ways that URC and Catholic local churches can work together. The co-convenors are Philip Brooks and Bishop Paul Hendricks. Visits to local contexts have included Milton Keynes, Carlisle and Cardiff, with a residential set in Edinburgh in November 2023. A fourth phase is anticipated at the end of this period of dialogue in 2024.

In June 2023, the Centre for Catholic Studies in Durham hosted a symposium entitled, 'Learning on the Way: Receptive Ecumenism and the Catholic Synodal Pathway'. Contingents from six denominations, including the URC, took part.

3.2.3 The Church of England

Our bilateral Contact Group is still awaiting the appointment of a Bishop and therefore, sadly has not met during this phase of dialogue. Philip Brooks is the ecumenical observer on the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity, which resumed meeting after a 13-months pause in April 2023. Tim Meadows represents the URC at the Church of England Synod.

3.3 Golden Jubilee Celebrations

At the postponed service for the URC's 50th anniversary, we were joined by more than 50 British, European and global ecumenical guests, including the Moderator of the Free Churches Group, the Revd Helen Cameron; the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Bishop Mark Strange and the General Secretary of the Council for World Mission, the Revd Jooseop Keum, who delivered one of the sermons.

3.4 European ecumenical relations

- 3.4.1 In November 2022, Philip Brooks spoke at the **Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz** Synod in Speyer, Germany, in recognition of the URC's 50th anniversary. A party of 12, including the region's first female Church President, Dorothee Wüst, then attended the rearranged celebrations on the weekend of 15-16 April 2023. The Pfalz churches gifted the communion wine used in the Jubilee service. After the service at Methodist Central Hall Westminster, the visiting group presented a framed painting from the Pfalz to the URC (see below).



L-R: Tessa Henry-Robinson, URC GA Moderator-Elect, Dorothee Wüst, Pfalz Church President, John Bradbury, URC General Secretary, Marcus Jäckle, Pfalz Ecumenical Secretary and Fiona Bennett, URC GA Moderator

- 3.4.2 The URC Waldensian Fellowship** visited the Waldensian Valleys and the Ligurian coast of Italy in May 2023.
- 3.4.3** Helen Everard represents the URC at the National Synod of the **Église Protestante Unie de France**.
- 3.4.4** A delegation from the **Uniting Church in Sweden** met with members of the Mission Team and the General Secretariat at Church House in April 2023. The initiative for the visit came from the Swedish Church's interest in the URC's environmental policy from the 2022 URC General Assembly.
- 3.4.4 The World Council of Churches (WCC)** held its General Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany in September 2022. Karen Campbell and Sarah Moore attended as delegates and Philip Brooks as an ecumenical advisor. They travelled by train as a group of ecumenical partners from the UK. We are delighted to note that Sarah Moore was elected to a second term on WCC Central Council, and the Revd Dr Susan Durber was elected as WCC President (Europe).

Lindsey Brown attended the World Council of Churches online Ecumenical Officers gathering in March 2023, which focused on its new post-Assembly strategic and programmatic direction.

3.4.5 Communion of Protestant Churches Europe (CPCE)

John Bradbury continues his term as President of CPCE. In July 2023, Philip will attend the 50th Celebration of Leuenberg for CPCE Church Leaders, and at the end of September Tessa Henry-Robinson will join a gathering of CPCE Synod members in Bad Herrenalb, near Karlsruhe in Germany.

In October 2022, the Revd Martin Spain was the United Reformed Church delegate/presenter at a CPCE conference in Romania, on the subject of multilingualism and inter-culturality. He spoke about the real experience of bilingual worship in Wales. In February 2023, Alex Clare-Young attended a CPCE Sexuality and Gender conference in Berlin.

- 3.4.6** In June this year, the Revd John Bradbury attended the **Council of European Churches (CEC)** General Assembly in Tallinn, Estonia. The theme of the Assembly was 'Under God's Blessing, Shaping the Future'.
- 3.4.7** Karen Campbell, Lorraine Downer and Philip Brooks represented the URC at the **Council for World Mission (CWM)** European Members' Mission Forum in Amsterdam in April 2023. Lindsey Brown attended in her capacity as CWM trustee. Four of the member churches have a strong presence in Wales, which enabled useful conversations about future ecumenical cooperation in Wales. One of the key themes of the Forum was the response to Legacies of Slavery, CWM's 'Onesimus Project'.



L-R: Ebin Thankachan, PA, CWM London Office, Philip Brooks, URC DGS (Mission), Karen Campbell, URC Secretary for GIM, Graham McGeoch, CWM Mission Secretary (London), Lindsey Brown, URC Project Support Officer & CWM Trustee, Lorraine Downer, URC Thames North CYDO, Amelia Koh-Butler, CWM Mission Secretary (Singapore), Sudipta Singh, CWM DGS, visiting the Lutheran Museum, Amsterdam.

4. **Interfaith relations** **Programme Officer:** Kevin Snyman

Administrator to interfaith relations:
Carole Sired

4.1 **The Interfaith Enabling Group (IEG)**

The IEG is overseen by Mission Committee. It meets three times per year, and two of these meetings combine with the Baptist Interfaith Working Group (BIWG). Facilitated by members of the IEG, there has been URC representation at various interfaith events. These include the one-year anniversary of the Ukraine war; an Iftar event organised with Carrs Lane in Birmingham; a Churches Forum for Interreligious Relations residential meeting at the Woodbrooke Centre; representation at the Faith Communities Forum, organised by the Inter Faith Network (IFN); an IFN regional gathering in Yorkshire and many other excellent programmes that facilitate a meaningful encounter between faiths in the UK.

There has been continued support of the Church/Mosque twinning initiative and CTBI is developing a resource for churches to help combat Islamophobia. At the time of writing this report, an urgent review of IFN activities is taking place in the light of government funding being withdrawn from IFN. We continue to highlight a recent resource drawn up by members of the IEG and BIWG which gives guidance to local churches about the use of church buildings by people of other faith communities: 'The use of church buildings by people of other faith communities – United Reformed Church'.

4.2 **Interfaith Fund**

This facilitates local URC congregations looking for a small grant to support an event. Full details can be found on the URC's funding page:
www.urb.org.uk/grants-funding-opportunities/.

4.3 **Israel Palestine**

In 2021, the United Reformed Church's General Assembly passed ten resolutions relating to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IOPT). Mission Committee has worked to address each of those resolutions in a variety of creative and

substantive ways. This is itemised in relation to each of the ten resolutions passed at the 2021 General Assembly, as follows:

- 4.3.1 Resolution 26** instructed Mission Committee to raise awareness about Holy Land pilgrimage to underline the importance of engaging with Palestinian communities. Mission Committee has developed an ecumenically shaped pamphlet that helps organisers of pilgrimages to build into their trip at least some exposure to the reality of Palestinian life under occupation. A copy of the pamphlet can be obtained by contacting urcinterfaith@urc.org.uk.
- 4.3.2 Resolution 27** recognised and affirmed Israel as a country within the international community of States with rights and responsibilities. Mission Team continues to affirm and support of The Council for Christians and Jews and continues to strengthen relations with the Board of Deputies of British Jews in response to this resolution.
- 4.3.3 Resolution 28** affirmed the United Nations commitment to a State for Palestine. Mission Team met with ecumenical representatives in a meeting called by William Bell, Christian Aid's Head of the Middle East Region, to determine whether there was support for a call to Rishi Sunak not to attend the 75th anniversary celebrations of the founding of Israel given the increasingly desperate actions of the Israeli State in suppressing all hope of a viable Palestinian State. It was agreed that a call would be made for the Prime Minister to give equal weight in his visit to representatives of Palestine, who would be marking the 75th anniversary of their Nakba, translated as the Day of Catastrophe for Palestinians.
- 4.3.4 Resolution 29** condemned all acts of violence in the region. Understanding the root causes of that violence is critical. To that end, Mission Team has sponsored a Council for Christian and Jews (CCJ) visit to IOPT that included Bishops, ministers, Rabbis, Holocaust Memorial workers, and Muslims. Mission Team has also arranged for the Assembly Moderator to attend a CCJ trip to Poland. Commitment for Life sponsored two young URC members on a Christian Aid trip to IOPT in April 2023. Mission Team is intrinsic to the planning and leading of an ecumenical trip to IOPT in November 2023.
- 4.3.5 Resolution 30** expressed deep concern over the worsening situation for Palestinian people since 2016, particularly with regard to forced house demolitions and the acquisition of land by coercion that are breaches of international law. Our GA call for Israel to reverse its de facto annexation of the occupied territory has gone unheeded, and even accelerated. The authorisation from this resolution has enabled the URC to join with ecumenical partners in lobbying the UK government.
- 4.3.6 Resolution 31** requested local churches and members to write to their MPs expressing concern over these expansions. Mission Committee has worked in partnership with The Balfour Trust to encourage this action.
www.balfourproject.org/balfour-project-writing-to-your-mp/
- 4.3.7 Resolutions 32 and 33** addressed the problem of church trusts, often unknowingly, maintaining investments in companies that benefit from the occupation. Mission Committee continues to negotiate with CCLA on an investment portfolio that screens for such companies, as reported to the November Assembly Executive.

4.3.8 Resolution 34 and 35 addressed the question of support for the Palestinian economy rather than that of Israeli settlements. We commend the work of Christian Aid, EAPPI (Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel), the Sabeel-Kairos URC Action Group, the online congregation YoURChurch, Commitment for Life congregations who support IOPT, and many individuals associated with the URC for their tireless work in support of our partners in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

**5. Greenbelt
Programme Officer**
Roo Stewart

5.1 Introduction

The URC has had an active presence at the Greenbelt annual Christian arts and music festival since 2016 (except 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic).

5.2 The URC's visible presence at the festival has provided:

- A meeting point where festivalgoers who attend a local URC can feel connected with the rest of the URC.
- A showcase for the URC for those unfamiliar with the denomination.
- An opportunity for URC members around Great Britain to participate remotely.
- An inspiring, welcoming oasis amid the hubbub of the event, providing a space for conversation and making friends, with activities available for all ages.
- A space where URC people can represent the denomination through volunteering.
- A place for asking questions and growing in faith. The organising team responsible for the URC's presence at Greenbelt is keen that a growing number of URC people have an opportunity to experience it.

5.3 The URC's active presence at Greenbelt is overseen by the Mission Committee. The detailed organisation, in terms of delivering this presence over the August Bank Holiday weekend each year, is undertaken by a team of volunteers and staff members from the Mission, Discipleship and Communications teams, many of whom offer their services above and beyond their daily tasks at Church House. Without their dedication and enthusiasm, it would not be possible to mount such a major witness to the life, work and ethos of the URC.



5.4 Innovations

In 2022, the URC developed its presence at Greenbelt considerably.

- We expanded our team to 65 volunteers and ran a café in a large marquee at a prime position at the festival.
- We teamed up with REfUSE, Durham and Grace Kitchen, Bradford to provide low-cost, quality food made on site from ingredients saved from going to landfill.
- Income from the café offset the additional costs involved.
- A programme team developed the theme of 'Revolting Christians', encouraging tent visitors to stand up against injustice.
- The team secured funding that enabled a group of Black people to attend the festival, to act as ambassadors after the event.
- A special service on site, also available on Zoom in partnership with the URC's online worshipping community yoURChurch, celebrated the URC's 50th year.
- A CYDO+ team, supported by the Church House Children and Youth team, took over the running of Greenbelt's youth provision, with creative ways to encourage a diverse range of young people exploring their own faith. This was funded directly by Greenbelt.



5.5 Future plans

- The URC will have a similar presence at the 2023 Greenbelt festival as in 2022.
- The theme of 'Revolting Christians' is retained.
- There will be a Sunday afternoon service in the café tent, designed for strong Zoom video conferencing participation, once again in partnership with yoURChurch.



- Funding has been secured to facilitate a further group of Black and Asian URC young people coming to the event.
- Lessons learned from our experience in 2022 have brought enhancements.
- The café will be serving hot food throughout the day, to cope with the high demand we experienced last year.
- The craft area will be open all day and more visible.

- A large timetable of events will be visible to passers-by.

- 5.6** The CYDO+ and Children and Youth teams will again run the youth provision at the festival. This will be sustained for the next three years, funded by Greenbelt directly.
- 5.7** The 2022 refreshed and expanded format for the URC at Greenbelt made a real impact as can be seen by the **Appendix** below. From the comments, it is possible to see how this is a vehicle to celebrate all that the URC offers, engaging with a wide audience of festival goers, several of whom are actively seeking connections to church. We look forward to building on this work of outreach in 2023 and beyond.

Appendix

Some social media feedback

Kudos to the URC team running the YoURCafe (sic) for a job well done providing affordable food, reducing food waste and providing entertainment all at the same time!

 **Rhiannon Wilmott**
It was fantastic!
12w Like Reply 3

 **Alan Window**
By the Saturday, the only place I would eat.
12w Like Reply 4

A fab venue, thank you URC ❤️
Lovely people, lovely food.
And the cakes were terrific

 **Diane Barnard**
I stopped off to pick up a drink and stayed on for a chat because of the lovely background music.
12w Like Reply 2

 **India Farrow**
Super duper place, really well done to the team!
12w Like Reply 2

 **Pippa Marie**
And decaf tea and coffee ❤️❤️

Great craft activities for kids and a lovely friendly team
I loved the Revolting Christians theme: the posters were fabulous and brought about conversations

 **Lis Telcs**
A wonderful place!
12w Like Reply 2

 **Diana Boyles**
The paella was superb 😊
12w Like Reply 4

 **Abigail Beaney**
Absolutely! A big thumbs up from us!
12w Like Reply 2

Our fave snacking venu[e] which showed the way – just got to love non-conformists!

Some volunteer feedback

- I loved Greenbelt! I had the most incredible experience, both in terms of fun and spiritually. It was beautiful and I loved what we did with the waste food.

 **Unofficial Greenbelt Festival**
LesnChristine Parker · 30 Aug · 📍

Kudos to the URC team running the YoURCafe for a job well done providing affordable food, reducing food waste and providing entertainment all at the same time! 😊

151 23 comments

It was fantastic!
By the Saturday, the only place I would eat.

 **Steve Kings**
A fab venue, thank you URC ❤️
12w Like Reply 3

 **Wendy Tucker**
Lovely people, lovely food.
12w Like Reply 1

 **Vivienne Thomas**
And the cakes were terrific.

I stopped off to pick up a drink and stayed on for a chat because of the lovely background music.
Super duper place, really well done to the team!
And decaf tea and coffee ❤️❤️

 **Steve Thackray**
Great craft activities for kids and a lovely friendly team .
12w Like Reply 5

 **Gail McMillan**
I loved the revolting Christians theme: the posters were fabulous and brought about conversations.
12w Like Reply 6

A wonderful place!
The paella was superb 😊
Absolutely! A big thumbs up from us!

 **Frances Stanfield**
Our fave snacking venu which showed the way - just got to love non-conformists!
12w Like Reply 3

- It was great to see an explicit effort made to increase racial diversity by inviting a group of people from minority ethnic backgrounds to attend without the burdens of cost or camping. It was also good to see diversity in the Greenbelt programme and artistry side of things.
- Probably the best thing I've done all this year. If not volunteering I'd gladly pay to return – but volunteering was rewarding in itself.
- I felt really positive on the whole about my experience as a URC volunteer, but also enjoying the festival atmosphere and activities of Greenbelt. I appreciated the opportunity to both serve and welcome as well as be part of the festival in a more in-depth way.

Some feedback from UK marginalised groups

- This is what the URC does so well: create safe space and sanctuary for vulnerable and marginalised communities. Stepping into the URC Café felt like a home coming.
- The atmosphere was great. A delightful pleasure to be at Greenbelt. Both the people and the atmosphere get a 10/10. ... it was great to be part of an environmentally friendly festival, working to support the climate and minimise excess waste [that is] harmful to the environment. I am truly inspired!
- All in all, I think Greenbelt has a long way to go in terms of ethnic diversity. I was very impressed by the accommodation towards people of different gender identities and sexualities ...] I was also taken aback by the concessions made for the differently abled.
- The evening Taizé worship was a very calming way to connect with God. I have never experienced that style of worship before but enjoyed being outside in the dim light with a sea of people connected in worship.

6. Commitment for Life

Programme Officer, URC Global Justice and Partnerships:

Kevin Snyman

Administrative Assistant Commitment for Life:

Suzanne Pearson

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 One immediately identifiable characteristic of the United Reformed Church is our unwavering support for and commitment to global justice. This can be seen in the fact that while the effects of Covid, lockdown, and the cost of living crisis have impacted on aspects of church life, including the closure of some Commitment for Life (CFL) congregations, there remains a robust support for the advocacy and generosity to CFL. There is a lively interest in and support for our Christian Aid partners in Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, and Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

6.1.2 The strapline for CFL is *Life-giving faith; Defiant Hope; and Generous Love*. The Mission team is keen for this strapline to be used more widely in its work, and conversations around how this might be rolled out are in progress.

6.2 People

We say thank you and a fond farewell to Christine Eddowes (Northern Synod) and John Collings (National Synod of Scotland) who step down as CFL

Advocates. Jonathan Clark has provided maternity cover for our Christian Aid contact, Charlotte Scott. Ruby Pickering from Global Justice Now has shared news to the CFL Reference Group of their ongoing campaigns, particularly around climate justice and trade injustice. We continue our support for the work of the Fairtrade Foundation.

6.3 Activity

CFL has sponsored three young people on Christian Aid-organised trips, including one to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. We are also sponsoring a facts-and-story-gathering trip to Zimbabwe planned for July 2023 to generate content for our bi-monthly *Moving Stories* publication and the *Go-with-Greta* resource for children.

There are ongoing discussions and long-term planning internally and with Christian Aid to map out the route towards reducing the carbon impact of our work.

6.4 Thank you

The team is particularly grateful for all supporters and congregations who have supported *Commitment for Life* through prayer, advocacy, and generosity, and practical means by which to demonstrate faith, hope and love.

If you would like to access a video resource for use in your local congregation that focuses on the work of CFL, you can find Richard Lewney's excellent presentation here: <https://youtu.be/WBowpCGoAL4>

7. Global and Intercultural Ministries

Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries:

Karen Campbell

Administrator:

Veronica Daniel

Programme Officer, URC Global Justice and Partnerships:

Kevin Snyman

7.1 Introduction

Much has happened in Global and Intercultural Ministries (GIM) since our 2021 report. The racial justice aspects of our intercultural remit have progressed significantly, with considerable attention both from within and beyond the URC. Although less visible, the global work has also demanded focussed attention. This report provides just a snapshot of recent and ongoing work.

7.2 Racial Justice – the URC journey

7.2.1 Racial justice continues to be a priority as GIM works to encourage and equip the URC to live out its commitment to journey from 'not racist' to 'actively anti-racist' (November 2020). Collaboration has taken place with the Equalities Committee to form the Affirmative Action Task Group (General Assembly 2021), now renamed the Positive Action Task Group, seeking to address the underrepresentation of Black and Ethnic Minority colleagues in Assembly-appointed positions of leadership and influence in the URC. Convened by the GIM Secretary, the task group has sought to highlight the barriers faced by Black and Ethnic Minority colleagues, and to propose strategies to overcome these barriers.

- 7.2.2 Senior Leadership' conversations are ongoing between the task group, the Mission Team, and the Secretaries for Ministries and Education and Learning. This collaboration has given rise to the 'Making Spaces' gathering planned for July 2023, bringing together individuals in Assembly-appointed leadership roles, and Black and Ethnic Minority URC members, to explore together how to effect change.
- 7.2.3 With thanks to film-maker, Kevin Snyman, GIM produced the well-received 2022 docufilm, 'Telling it like it is', sharing the testimonies of Black URC members concerning racism within and beyond the denomination:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MrzfxX5gGs
- 7.2.4 The poem 'Do They Know?', shared during the URC History Society's 50th Anniversary Conference and at General Assembly 2022, was directly inspired by conversations with Black and Ethnic Minority URC ministers. GIM offers the docufilm and poem as resources for reflection and conversation.

Do They Know?

Do they know, Karen,
Does the URC know
All that we face, day out and day in –
What we see, what we hear,
What we take in our stride;
What it means,
How it feels
To walk in our skin?

Can they imagine the sting,
Standing fresh in the church,
Offering gifts of talents and time,
And much more,
To be told, "You're not needed
For this, nor for that;
We've called a white colleague
We knew from before!"?

Do they know how it burns
When the message is shared,
"She says she's not coming on any such day
That you lead, that you preach,
Because she insists,
She can't understand a word that you say"?

Do they have any idea
Just how much it smarts
When a colleague, in collar,
Seeks to keep me in check -
Says, "I welcome 'your folks' in the pews, but cannot
Accept a white collar
Around a Black neck"?

When we look around
And see so many ways

We uphold this Church – our Church –
‘Cross this land
Then look beyond local,
See our spaces dissolve
And hear the view that, perhaps,
This is all as God planned?

Do they know, Karen,
Does the URC know
Just what we encounter
While they say we ‘belong’;
What it means to be Black in this Church –
Our Church?
Please, hear what we see -
See that something is wrong.

Karen Campbell, June 2022

7.2.5 GIM is delighted to report that some progress is being made. We rejoice that when inducted in July 2023, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson will become the first Black woman to serve as Moderator of the General Assembly, and that two black ministers will serve as her Chaplains. It was also pleasing to see the whole diversity of the URC reflected in the URC’s 50th Anniversary celebration service.

7.3 Legacies of (Transatlantic) Slavery

The Legacies of Slavery (LoS) Task Group welcomed its new Convenor, Prof David Reynolds in 2021 – just in time to steer the group through the URC-wide consultation process. While some responses were unnecessarily hurtful to engage with, it was gratifying that General Assembly 2022 adopted the statement of Confession and Apology drafted by the task group, committing to concrete actions of ‘repairing justice’. The year since then has seen close collaboration between the LoS and Positive Action task groups to bring proposals to General Assembly 2023, starting with mandatory anti-racism training for the occupants of specific roles within the Church, as detailed in the Mission Committee Paper ‘Legacies of Slavery – Proposals for Repairing Justice’.

7.4 Racial Justice – the Ecumenical Journey

7.4.1 The URC is represented in various ecumenical conversations. We are among the founding members of the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF) and sponsored its formal launch in February 2023. The RJAF works both proactively and reactively to promote racial justice in civic society, engaging with victims of injustice, the police and with politicians in seeking to bring about change.

7.4.2 There is great ecumenical interest in the URC’s racial justice journey, with the GIM Secretary being invited to contribute to the Baptist Union General Assembly on the topic of LoS (May 2022), and to serve on the Reparations Group for the Methodist Church (current). She has contributed to ecumenical resources collated by CTBI for Racial Justice Sunday 2022, marking the 30th anniversary of the murder of Stephen Lawrence (<https://ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday-2023-stephen-lawrence/>), and was invited to participate in ‘Stephen Lawrence Legacy Conversations’ alongside colleagues from a variety of Christian backgrounds:

- <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9RYHi01mHNfWnh-s0VyiV9ABURGxIKnw>
- <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9RYHi01mHNegnzOYRQeC-PAeYLEwJh0B>

Through the Secretary, we are currently part of the planning for a service to commemorate the Windrush 75th Anniversary, to be held at Southwark Cathedral on 22 June 2023.

7.5 **Global and Intercultural – the Council for World Mission**

Sometimes, there is no clear distinction between global and intercultural. There has been mutual encouragement between the Council for World Mission (CWM) and the URC regarding engagement with the Legacies of Slavery. In August 2022, the GIM Secretary was invited to co-host the launch of CWM's Onesimus project in South Africa, including an apology for its predecessors' involvement in transatlantic slavery: www.cwmission.org/council-for-world-mission-launches-the-onesimus-project. She has also worked with the CWM joint Caribbean and Europe regions' Gender Justice Working Group, including moderating two live-streamed global conversations in March and October 2022. Nearer to home, the Secretary is participating in Europe Region Roundtable Conversations addressing LoS/Reparations – opportunities for mutual sharing and support between the member Churches.

7.6 **Partners in Mission – the Council for World Mission**

GIM oversees the relationship between the URC and CWM, including the URC's sending and receiving of Partners in Mission. We are blessed to have two Partners currently serving with us – the Revd Yufen Chen, from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (Thames North), and Ms So Young Jung, from the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Southern Synod). Both Partners completed their first terms of service during the past year, with GIM organising reviews and recommending that each serves a second three-year term. GIM oversaw the retirement of Alison Gibbs, CWM's longest serving Partner in Mission, who returned from service in Zambia in December 2021. April 2022 saw the departure of URC ministers the Revd Melanie Smith and the Revd Mark Meatcher to serve with the Pacific Theological College in Fiji. All of these were intensive processes, and thanks are due to the International Exchange Reference Group, and to Veronica Daniel (GIM Administrator), who contributed greatly to ensure that all ran smoothly.

7.7 **Global Partners**

GIM continues to have a presence in the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum (TEF) and in the Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reunification and Development on the Korean Peninsula (EFK). Thanks are expressed to former Moderator of URC General Assembly, the Revd David Grosch-Miller, who has continued to represent the URC in both networks and to share his wisdom with the GIM Secretary and the Mission Committee. General Assembly 2022 adopted a resolution in support of the Korea Peace Appeal, calling for a formal end to the Korean War, and in September 2022, the GIM Secretary attended an EFK gathering in Karlsruhe, Germany. More recently, conversations have resumed with the London Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. In April 2023, GIM was pleased to support the visit to the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) by the Secretary for Ministries, Nicola Furley-Smith. She spoke at the Yeongdeungpo Synod meeting with 300+ ministers and elders present. After the URC Secretary for Ministries had spoken, a debate ensued at the Synod as to why no women

delegates had been elected, given partner churches had women in leadership roles. This resulted in the passing of an emergency resolution to suspend their rules and to commit the PCK to sending at least one female minister and one female lay person each year to their General Assembly.

- 7.8 The coming year will see a review of our ongoing and potential global relationships.

8. Fresh Expressions

Fresh Expressions Coordinator:

Linda Rayner

Fresh Expressions are new forms of church that emerge within contemporary culture and engage primarily with those who don't 'go to church.'

(www.freshexpressions.org.uk)

- 8.1 Since our last report in 2021, the remit of the Fresh Expressions Enabling Group has expanded to include the enabling of *Pioneering* in the denomination. Therefore, the group is now known as **Fresh Expressions and Pioneering Enabling Group** (FXPEG) and includes representatives from the Mission and Discipleship departments, as well as the URC Pioneer network and Synod Moderators. The group meets four times each year to consider how to cultivate a deep understanding and acceptance of fresh expressions of church and pioneering within the URC. This will be achieved by ongoing development of the 'embedding strategy' and ensuring the necessary action takes place between the meetings. Much emphasis is laid on collaboration between the Mission and the Discipleship departments and recognition and acceptance of the wide variety of accepted ministries within the URC (Word and Sacraments, CRCW Ministers, Special Category Ministers, Chaplaincy etc).

Introducing new ways of being church, and changing mindsets is a slow process, however, there have been considerable strides forward since the last report.

8.2 Pioneer Training

2022 saw the launch of a major new initiative called the Newbigin Pioneering Hub. In collaboration with the Congregational Federation and Church Mission Society (CMS), URC lay pioneers can now train for the CMS Certificate in Pioneering Mission. The part-time course consists of six modules delivered via a mix of teaching styles, including two residential weekends and a series of hybrid (online and in-person) sessions. The first cohort consisted of 21 people and will end in July 2023. The second is due to commence in September 2023. The development of the Newbigin Pioneering Hub is intended to offer ongoing support for students. Full details of the Hub can be found at:

www.urch.org.uk/your-faith/more-about-ministry/newbigin-pioneering-hub/

Creating New Christian Communities is a short (three day) course at Westminster College, which is optional for ordinands for credit, or can be audited by lay or ordained church leaders.

- 8.3 The Fresh Expressions Partners' Learning Community, which is for the partner denominations of the Fresh Expressions movement, was attended by representatives from the FXPEG in January 2023. This year, the focus was on studies of liminal spaces, the creativity that can arise from being in a position of

uncertainty, and how this applies to post-Covid church and fresh expressions of church.

- 8.4 The FXPEG worked in collaboration with Faith and Order Committee to develop a paper: 'Ecclesiological considerations for the United Reformed Church in conversation with Fresh Expressions', which establishes how the URC can recognise new forms of church and welcome them into the denomination. The paper represents a number of years of work and concludes that the URC is able to accept new forms of church, saying: "The Faith and Order Committee confirms that there are means, through dialogue and mutual respect, of agreeing that a Fresh Expression of church constitutes a congregation which could be recognised as a church within the United Reformed Church."

9. Mission and Evangelism

- 9.1 The Mission Committee has devoted time in recent meetings to look at the relationship between mission and evangelism. At its September 2022 residential, a presentation was given by the Mersey Synod representative, which was followed by a full discussion. In February 2023, the theme was picked up again with a session led by Northern College Tutor, Graham Adams on the subject of evangelism and social action. This was followed by Niall Cooper from Church Action on Poverty, looking at the relationship between social action, church growth, and discipleship. He shared how hospitality and generosity are significant for church growth and how participation in social action can also offer a practical route into faith for people who have previously not been part of the church community and therefore might not have considered exploring faith before. Church Action on Poverty is calling for the traditional churches to invest in low-income areas and halt its disproportionate withdrawal from the poorest communities.

9.2 Mission Enablers Network

From the Mission Team, Lindsey Brown and Linda Rayner support the work of the Mission Enablers Network, comprising all those Synod appointees who enable mission in various ways. These include regular meetings for networking, sharing and support. As well as meeting for an annual residential and an annual day meeting, there will be regional meetings to support the work more locally.

The Network is made up of a range of roles, including evangelists and special category ministers, as well as representatives from the team of Missional Discipleship Mentors in North-West Synod. As it has emerged from the challenging pandemic period, the Network is becoming increasingly energised by success stories and new initiatives.

9.3 Leading Your Church Into Growth (LYCIG)

Mission Team will be represented at the LYCIG residential in November 2023 in Preston, led by Mersey Synod Mission Enabler, Stuart Radcliffe and Yorkshire Synod Evangelist Ashley Evans. Mission Team is actively looking at how LYCIG can be offered more widely in the denomination, as a way of helping local URCs to focus on church growth.

10. Rural Mission

- 10.1 The Arthur Rank Centre hosts a regular online gathering of Rural Regional Network officers and anyone with an interest in Rural Mission is welcome to join. The conversations tend to focus on activity in the regions and are particularly

useful for mutual support and generating ideas. The one-hour meetings cover a diverse range of topics, including recently 'Campaigning and Engaging your local MP', and 'Cost of Living Crisis in Rural Areas'. Contact linda.rayner@urc.org.uk for information about joining the hub.

- 10.2 It is becoming increasingly clear that rural communities, in particular, are suffering in the financial crisis:
- 10.3 Trussell Trust reports a 75% increase in need for food parcels in rural areas in the six months to January, and there is recognition that rural areas incur additional living costs of at least 10%, in terms of such items as heating, fuel, and housing. The nature and threshold of rural poverty is markedly different from that in urban contexts.
- 10.4 Isolation and loneliness also continue to be key issues facing rural churches, and the Arthur Rank Centre offers a toolkit for churches which can be found at: www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/mission/rural-isolation-and-loneliness-toolkit/
- 10.5 The Arthur Rank Centre offers a course for lay and ordained leaders who may be new to a rural context, entering a rural appointment for the first time, or in need of a 'rural refresher'. This is a space to explore mission, evangelism and leadership through an ecumenical rural lens.
www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/ruralministrycourse/
17–18 Octobrt at King's Park, Northampton.

11. URC Buildings Forum

Administrator:

Carole Sired

Mission Support Officer:

Lindsey Brown

- 11.1 The URC's Buildings Forum was established to provide a single voice for the URC when consulting with other denominations and other bodies to further develop an understanding of the ways in which buildings both enhance and hinder the life of the Church.
- 11.2 The forum now largely comprises URC Synod Property Officers and some additional members and meets twice a year to exchange information and ideas and receive updates from the Listed Buildings Advisory Group and others, loosely organised by a small team with a range of property experience.
- 11.3 Online conferences were started during the pandemic in 2021, covering a range of topics including inspirational examples of missional focused buildings. In 2023 there will be two conferences, one on using church buildings for community presence, and the second in the autumn on ways to adapt our buildings to be more environmentally friendly.
- 11.4 We are grateful to David Skipp for chairing the planning group until spring 2023, and to the rest of the group for their enthusiasm and drive in founding and steering this very popular initiative. Mission Team actively supports the work of the URC's Building Forum, recognising the important role that church buildings can play for mission.

12. Net Zero Task Group

Convenor:

Chris Baillie

Administrator:

Carole Sired

- 12.1 Within the URC, a new Environmental Policy was agreed by General Assembly in 2022, establishing a target and plans for the Church to reach net zero emissions by 2030. The 2022 resolution outlined the membership for the Net Zero Task Group. Once the required members were recruited, it held its first meeting in March 2023 and has committed to meet monthly thereafter.
- 12.2 There is a growing network of 'Green Apostles', who advocate in their respective Synods. 30% of local URCs have registered as eco churches. 121 churches have received their bronze awards, with 52 having achieved silver.
- 12.3 With just over six years to achieve the task set by last year's General Assembly of reaching net zero 'across the whole of church life', the task ahead is very steep. As the Net Zero Task Group gets to grips with its work, it is also likely to be costly, with major changes to the way we operate as a church.