

# THE ROMAN CATHOLIC / UNITED REFORMED CHURCH DIALOGUE GROUP



*The*  
United  
Reformed  
Church





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Practical things that RC and URC local churches can do together

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# THE ROMAN CATHOLIC / UNITED REFORMED CHURCH DIALOGUE GROUP

## PREFACE

This resource pack is the work of the third phase of the Roman Catholic / United Reformed Church Dialogue Group. With it, we offer our churches a practical resource that they can use locally to foster greater understanding and collaboration, and demystify one another's beliefs and practices. Each of the thematic sections could be used as a stand-alone small-group resource, or they could be used as a series. There is also a list of prompts for further ways of praying, studying, worshipping and working together at the end of the pack. We hope you find it both enlightening and useful.

Our journey together began in December 2006. Given the Reformation, we were not the most obvious dialogue partners – though we quickly discovered that living as Christian communities outwith the Established Church was something we had in common.

Our starting point was the formal sharing of our theologies at an academic level. This was in itself a challenge. There is a big contrast in expectations between, on the one hand, the international framework of canon law within which the Roman Catholic Church operates and,

on the other, the intentional flexibility of the United Reformed Church, operating on a British level.

After 15 years of dialogue we have moved beyond theory, however inspiring, to what we always hoped to develop: materials to help local churches in their desire to make or strengthen links between our traditions at congregational level.

Through a deliberate pattern of overnight meetings biannually, we have moved as individuals and as church representatives towards friendship: appreciating each other without trying to reshape the other in our own pattern. As our first congregational resource, **Friendship**, indicates, our relationship has become 'complex, honest, gracious, practical, enduring' (Bishops Conference of England and Wales).

Given the historical prejudices of each church against the other, friendship has been necessary for the trust needed to move from theory to practice. Our second resource, **Saints**, has taken up one theological theme that our two traditions view very differently and, through the secular lens of celebrity, has tried to explain each tradition to the other.

One constant aspect of each of our meetings in person has been the celebration of Holy Communion, alternating between traditions. This has been a source of pain as well as joy, given the impossibility of sharing the consecrated bread and wine. Our third resource, **Communion**, acknowledges this

and offers some theological context to help people at the local level to understand the issues involved.

**Citizenship** challenges us to look more outwardly, as well as to pray together for the coming of God's kingdom, through our interaction with the wider society in which God has placed us.

Our conversations over 15 years – and the inspiring work we have witnessed in Wales,

Scotland and England, described in the report **Journeying together** – have given us a rich variety of ways in which we can legitimately work together, described in the final section **What can we do together?**

We hope and pray that these resources will encourage inter-church relationships to grow and develop where you are, and welcome you as you join us on the journey.

You can find more information about our ecumenical relationships here:

RC: [www.bit.ly/4fJNm1Z](http://www.bit.ly/4fJNm1Z)

URC: [www.bit.ly/4gHI3md](http://www.bit.ly/4gHI3md)

If you have any questions please contact: [mission@urc.org.uk](mailto:mission@urc.org.uk)  
and / or [urcdialogue@cbcew.org.uk](mailto:urcdialogue@cbcew.org.uk)



# THE ROMAN CATHOLIC / UNITED REFORMED CHURCH DIALOGUE GROUP

## Who's who?

### The Revd Philip Brooks

Co-Chair of the Dialogue Group.  
URC's Deputy General Secretary (Mission) based at Church House, Tavistock Place, London.

My time with the Roman Catholic/URC Dialogue Group has been a joy and a blessing, carried out in the true spirit of receptive ecumenism.



### Bishop Paul Hendricks

Co-Chair of the Dialogue Group.  
Auxiliary Bishop for Kent area of R/C Diocese of Southwark.

Member of the Department of Dialogue and Unity of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

I really enjoy gaining insights into what other Christians love about their own Church tradition and what it means to them. Our dialogue group has been an ideal opportunity for this.



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Bishop Paul Hendricks

### Father Dominic Robinson

Co-Secretary.  
Parish Priest in London, Lecturer in Systematic Theology, Chair of Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission.

This has been a wonderful five years especially through the quality of relationships formed across such a diverse group of Christians all committed to working for closer collaboration between our two Churches in different corners of Britain.



### Lindsey Brown

Co-Secretary.  
Evangelism and Ecumenical Officer of the United Reformed Church. Elder at Epping URC. I am the newest

member of the group, but there have already been many highlights. I've particularly enjoyed exploring seemingly familiar things from different perspectives. There has been a great deal of deep reflection in our conversations.



## Mary Welsh

Ecumenical Officer to the Bishops' Conference of Scotland (BCOS).

I work in partnership with ten members of the Ecumenical Officers' Forum of Scotland and am honoured to serve as a member of the RC/URC Dialogue Group.

Since serving in partnership with the RC/URC Dialogue Group I have developed greater understanding of the challenges and joys faced by members of all Christian denominations and greatly appreciate the knowledge and understanding achieved therein.



## The Revd Lindsey Sanderson

Moderator of the National Synod of Scotland.

I have been a part of the dialogue group for more than ten years. During that time, I have valued reflecting deeply on topics of faith, church life and ecumenism with people from another tradition and learned a great deal about the breadth of Roman Catholicism. Journeying together over such a long period of time has allowed for trust and friendship to grow which I believe has become a hallmark of the group's conversation.



## Patrick Coyle

A lay member of the Roman Catholic Church.

Now retired, I spent my working life in the National Health Service as a Consultant Surgeon and Medical Director.

I was chair of the board of Cytûn, Churches Together in Wales and a member of the board of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.



## The Revd Jason McCullagh

Minister of the United Reformed Church, serving two churches in West Yorkshire, The Bridge Church, Otley and Salem, Burley-in-Wharfedale.

I have enjoyed the lively companionship and deep conversations in this group which have challenged and enriched me.



## Father Philip Kerr

A parish priest of Glenrothes. I have greatly enjoyed discovering at first hand the diversity which the URC embodies.



## The Revd Dr Sarah Hall

A URC minister in Southampton. I am the only original member of this dialogue remaining. I have been appreciating the learning and friendships it has brought since 9 December 2006, when the group first met.



## Dr John Cornell

Church Secretary Christ Church LEP, Stocksbridge, Sheffield  
A member of the URC.

I had been on the RC Hallam Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes more than a dozen times as a doctor and medical director and for more than 20 years had played the organ for morning Mass, before going to 'my church'. It has been an interesting experience, all the folk on the group have been friendly and easy to get along with, and the visits we have undertaken have been illuminating.



# THE ROMAN CATHOLIC / UNITED REFORMED CHURCH DIALOGUE GROUP



## LET'S TALK ABOUT friendship

This is one of an occasional series of resource sheets offered by the Roman Catholic and United Reformed Church Dialogue Group. This group brings together lay and ordained members of the Bishops' Conferences of England, Wales and Scotland and the URC. Its aim is to explore issues of faith and practice in both our traditions, so that together we may deepen our insight into each other's traditions and our own journey of faith. This resource is designed for local RC and URC congregations to use together. It could be a one off meeting, or part of a regular pattern of meetings. The material could also be used by a wider 'churches together' style group. There are notes for facilitators at the end of the resource. The members of the Dialogue Group would be very interested in receiving feedback from the use of this material or, indeed, suggestions for future topics. You can contact the Dialogue group via its co-secretaries:  
RC: The Revd Dominic Robinson  
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URC: Lindsey Brown  
[lindsey.brown@urc.org.uk](mailto:lindsey.brown@urc.org.uk)

### Something to get started

**F**riendship is a gift that we treasure. Friendships may last for decades and be a source of joy, support and comfort at different times in our lives. Friends may be people we meet almost daily or only infrequently. Friendships may be across generations, genders, social, cultural and religious backgrounds. Within the group, share stories of friendship, either personal friendships or friendships which have been documented in the public domain, what elements of friendship emerge from these stories?

The Dialogue Group would like to offer the following elements of Friendship. These were highlighted in discussion with Molly Conrad, the Public Policy Officer of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in relation to the 2024 General Election and the intention of the Bishops' Conference to strengthen relationships with the new government. As the second phase of the RC-URC Dialogue Group comes to a conclusion, as a group we reflected that these elements of friendships were appropriate to our group as well. We offer them to our communities as a stimulus for further reflection.

### Friendship is...

**Complex**      **Enduring**  
**Honest**      **Gracious**      **Practical**

## Something to talk about

**D**o any of these statements resonate with your own thinking?

**Share your responses with one another.**

‘Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy to a friend. We never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate; we get rid of an enemy by getting rid of enmity. By its very nature, hate destroys and tears down; by its very nature, love creates and builds up.’

Martin Luther King, Jr

Friendship... ‘is the soul of a friendly world. No free and just society will come into being without the ethics and the wisdom of friendship. Friendship links personal freedom with social solidarity’.

Jurgen Moltmann, *The Living God and the fullness of life*, p.119

In friendship we are beyond law and obedience, beyond rules and commandments, beyond all constraint, in a world of freedom. But did not Jesus say, ‘Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you’? Yes, he did. We, on our side, are apt to miss the quiet humour of his paradoxes. ‘These are my commandments,’ he goes on, ‘that ye love one another’.

In other words, the friendship of Christ is realised in our friendships with one another. His command is that we rise above commandments, and therefore his obedience is perfect freedom. Make service your centre, with its laws and duties and self-sacrifice, and life is a bondage. Make friendship the centre and life is freedom.

John Macmurray, 1942  
*Quaker Faith & Practice*, 22.10

‘There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship... Friendship is the source of the greatest pleasures, and without friends even the most agreeable pursuits become tedious.’

Thomas Aquinas,  
*Summa Theologica*

‘Our relationships, if healthy and authentic, open us to others who expand and enrich us. Nowadays, our noblest social instincts can easily be thwarted by self-centred chats that give the impression of being deep relationships. On the contrary, authentic and mature love and true friendship can only take root in hearts open to growth through relationships with others. As couples or friends, we find that our hearts expand as we step out of ourselves and embrace others.’

Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* 89,  
3 October 2020



## Something to pray

**H**oly God, divine three in one, who invites us into friendship with your very self, we thank you for the gift of friendship and for those people we have the privilege of calling our friends.

As we reflect upon those personal relationships and our friendships as organisations and communities may we recognise the importance of nurturing our friendships, tending to them, so they may grow and flourish not just for our own wellbeing but for the benefit of wider society.

May our friendships never be exclusive, rather give us discernment and grace to reach out to the other with humility and compassion, reflecting in our own desire for friendship the friendship we enjoy in you.  
**Amen.**



## Some Scripture to study

**R**ead the passages below which tell a Biblical story of a friendship or offer some reflections on the nature of friendship. You are invited to use the following questions to focus your reflections.

1. What stands out for you reading this passage today?
2. In the story, or the way friendship is described, which of the qualities of

friendship are in evidence for you? Friendships are complex, honest, gracious, practical, enduring.

3. In what ways do the passages and the qualities of friendship enable you to reflect on your own individual friendship with God, and with other people?
4. In what ways do the passages and qualities of friendship enable you to reflect on friendship between pairings or groups of churches?

### David and Jonathan – 1 Samuel chapters 18-20

‘Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, ‘The Lord is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.’  
(1 Samuel 20:42)

### Ruth and Naomi – Ruth 1

‘Don’t urge me to leave you or turn back from you. Where you go, I will go and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.’  
(Ruth 1:16)

### Mary and Elizabeth – Luke 1:39-45

‘At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth.’ (Luke 1:39)

### Paul and Timothy – 2 Timothy

‘To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.’  
(2 Timothy 1:2-4)

Proverbs 17 and 18 talk a lot about friendship, including these verses

One who forgives an affront fosters friendship, but one who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend.  
(Proverbs 17:9)

A friend loves at all times, and kinsfolk are born to share adversity.  
(Proverbs 17:17)



Some friends play at friendship but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin.  
(Proverbs 18:24)

Ecclesiastes 4:12

'And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.'  
(Ecclesiastes 4:12)

John 15:12-17

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.'

Romans 5:1-11

We were God's enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son. Now that we are God's friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ's life!  
(Romans 5:10)

## Something to sing

**The hymns we sing proclaim our theology as much as the sermons we preach. What do these two hymns say to us about Friendship?**

1. This is my will, my new command,  
that love should dwell among you all.  
This is my will, that you should love  
as I have shown that I love you.
2. There is no greater love than this;  
to lay your life down for your friends  
You are my friends if you obey  
what I've commanded you to do.
3. I call you servants now no more;  
no servant knows his Lord's full mind.  
I call you friends, for I've told you  
all I have heard my Father say.
4. You did not choose me: I chose you,  
appointed you, and chose you all, each  
one to go and bear much fruit, fruit that  
will last beyond all time.
5. All that you ask the Father now  
for my name's sake you shall receive.  
This is my will, my one command  
that love should dwell in each, in all.

James Quinn (1919-2010)

Text available in *Church Hymnary 4, Laudate*.



1. What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!  
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,  
oh, what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer!
2. Have we trials and temptations?  
is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged –  
take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful,  
who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness;  
take it to the Lord in prayer.
3. Are we weak and heavy-laden,  
cumbered with a load of care?  
Jesus only is our refuge –  
take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Do your friends despise, forsake you?  
Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
In his arms he'll take and shield you,  
you will find a solace there.

Joseph Scriven (1819-1886)

Text available in *Church Hymnary 4, Rejoice and Sing, Singing the Faith*.

## Notes for facilitators

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## LET'S TALK ABOUT SAINTS

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**dominicrobinson@rcdow.org.uk**  
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### Something to get started

**W**e live in a world of celebrity culture. Are celebrities saints? Are saints celebrities? What can we discover about our faith when we think about sainthood and celebrity? What can we learn from each other?

Are there saints (those formally recognised by the church, and others not formally recognised) who inspire you in your journey of faith? Share their stories and the ways in which they inspire you in your discipleship.

Many local churches are dedicated to a particular saint. If this is the case for you, share with each other the story of the saint with whom you are associated. Do you celebrate this saint's life and witness in any particular way? What does it mean to you to have this connection with a particular saint?

There are many local saints throughout the British Isles. Find out about a saint that is associated with your local area. Are there events to celebrate their life and witness? What would you draw from their life to encourage your own discipleship?

## Something to talk about

**D**o any of these experiences resonate with your own?

**Share your responses to the statements and your own experiences with one another.**

I was brought up from birth in the Roman Catholic tradition, and an awareness of saints is something with which I grew up, but this was not in any 'partisan' way. We had books/pamphlets in the house about individual saints, but there was no one individual to whom any of my extended family had a devotion which 'dominated' their personal prayer life. Indeed if I was to be asked who is my 'favourite saint', I would have trouble giving a genuine answer, because I can perceive various values in them all, more in some than in others no doubt but not in a way that puts one or a few in the lead.

'I regularly ask particular saints for their prayers when I need help in my daily life.'

There is much I admire in the lives of many saints, those from history and contemporary women and men who have been recognised by the Church. I find inspiration and encouragement in their witness. I find the idea of praying to a saint quite alien. I appreciate other people praying for me but would never ask a saint to do this.

'By asserting the intercession of the saints, if all you mean is that they continually pray for the completion of Christ's kingdom, on which the salvation of all the faithful depends, there is none of us who calls it in question.'

John Calvin

'The communion between our Communities, even if still incomplete, is truly and solidly grounded in the full communion of the Saints – those, who at the end of a life faithful to grace, are in communion with Christ in glory. These Saints come from all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities which gave them entrance into the communion of salvation. In the radiance of the "heritage of the saints" belonging to all Communities, the "dialogue of conversion" towards full and visible unity thus appears as a source of hope.'

Pope St John Paul II *Ut Unum Sint*  
(1995)

## Something to pray

**O** God, fount of all holiness, make us each walk worthily in our vocation, through the intercession of your Saints, on whom you bestowed a great variety of graces on earth and a single glorious reward in heaven.

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As many as the leaves golden in autumn blowing along the streets are your saints.

As precious as bales gathered in the barns or stored at the field side are your saints.

As strong as the rocks graining the hillsides or forming the river bed are your saints.

As widespread as frost glazing the meadows and coating the branches are your saints.

As strange as it seems, grace makes possible that me and my neighbour are your saints.

© Terry Oakley, *Worship from the URC*

in the New Testament to Christian believers being 'saints'.

The reference to the Christian community in Corinth shows us clearly that this vocation to holiness co-exists with ongoing practical sinfulness, but this does not prevent a real fellowship in holiness with Christ and the blessed in heaven whilst we are here on earth. The Church has from early centuries made a distinction of 'three states of the Church'. As the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught,

'Until, therefore, the Lord comes in his majesty..., some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth, others who have departed this life are being purified, while others are in glory gazing "clearsighted on God himself as he is, three in one"; all of us, however, though in a different degree and manner, communicate in the same love of God and our neighbour and sing the same hymn of glory to our God. For all who are in Christ, possessing his Spirit, are joined together into one church and united with each other in him (*cf. Ephesians 4:16*).'

*Lumen Gentium 49*

Now the disciples who are 'pilgrims on earth' clearly share in this holiness which is manifest in the community of the blessed in heaven, even if we, to a greater or lesser extent, are also marked by sin. (*See 2 Corinthians 4:7*)

We might say that there is an ongoing tension between the power of grace and the effects of sin within the lives of God's people on earth but that we are all on a journey towards sainthood.

- What is it that makes someone a saint in your eyes?
- How do you think this process of journeying to sainthood is manifest in your life or the lives of others you know?

## Some Scripture to ponder

### Read

Revelation 7:9-17

### Reflect

The blessed in heaven began their journey to sainthood when in this world they come to have faith in Jesus as saviour, a faith which we express in the Sacrament of Baptism. The description of the blessed wearing white robes inspired the giving of white garments to the baptised – plunged into the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection they are redeemed and made holy. Thus we find various references

- How does it make you feel to think of yourself as a 'saint – in the process of formation?'
- Does it change your attitude towards who are already declared saints by the Church and our interaction with them?

## Something to think about

### Sainthood and Celebrity?

It is often said that the saints were the celebrities of the Middle Ages, with people traveling great distances to visit, and pray at, the relics of a saint, in the same way that people travel to Elvis Presley's home, Graceland, or visit the grave or memorial to a famous person. To what extent is this a helpful comparison today?



The cultural historian Daniel Boorstin describes a celebrity as 'a person who is known for his well-knownness'. (Daniel Boorstin, *The Image, A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, 1962, republished Vintage, 1992). Film critic and cultural historian Neal Gabler writes,

'A celebrity arrives on the scene from circumstances not very different from ours. He enters the wondrous world of show business where he encounters his own trials and temptations from drugs to sex to career setbacks, and, having survived them, he returns to us via the media to pass on what he has learned, which is, basically, that he is no different from us, that his priorities are the same as ours, that for all the fame and power and glory and sex he has, the only thing that truly matters is knowing who you are...those who live celebrity are the sanctified, the best, the most deserving. And having conspired in the creation of this new art form as fans, we get the dispensation to watch them, to share them, to consume them, to enjoy them, to bask in their magnificence and to imagine that we might have a narrative of our own some day, allowing us to join them.'

*Neal Gabler, 'Toward a New Definition of Celebrity',*  
[www.bit.ly/ngabler](http://www.bit.ly/ngabler)

Here is a basic distinction between celebrities and saints. A celebrity life tells us a story of wish-fulfilment, for if they are no different from us, we might yet find our lives change to become like theirs. Saints, by *their* lives, retell a very different story, one of self-sacrifice: service, opposition to the powers of evil, suffering, death and resurrection.

**Are there celebrities you would consider contemporary secular saints today, or others whom you would not consider candidates for sainthood?**



## Something to sing

**The hymns we sing proclaim our theology as much as the sermons we preach. What do these two hymns tell us about saints and sainthood?**

For all the saints who showed your love  
in how they lived and where they moved,  
for mindful women, caring men,  
accept our gratitude again.

For all the saints who loved your name,  
whose faith increased the Saviour's fame,  
who sang your songs and shared your word,  
accept our gratitude, good Lord.

For all the saints who named your will,  
and saw the kingdom coming still  
through selfless protest, prayer, and praise,  
accept the gratitude we raise.

Bless all whose will or name or love  
reflects the grace of heaven above.  
Though unacclaimed by earthly powers,  
your life through theirs has hallowed ours.

*John Bell & Graham Maule.*

*Tune: O Waly, Waly or LM*

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Hail Mary, our icon of trust in God's Word  
in faith you conceived, and God's life in  
you stirred.

O woman of wisdom, now show us the way  
the faithful in confidence call on your name.

Hail, mother of Jesus, of all mothers blest  
to you joyful praises and prayers are  
addressed.

The saints and the angels your glory proclaim;  
the faithful in confidence call on your name.

We pray you, O woman of all women blest  
to care for the homeless, the poor and  
oppressed.

Be with us, your people, in joy and in pain;  
be near us to cheer us til heaven we gain.

To God, your creator, glad hymns with us raise  
To Jesus, your Son and the Spirit, give praise.  
And pray for the churches, that all may be one:  
On earth as in heaven, may God's will be done.

© 1987, words by Delores Dufner,  
*The Sisters of St Benedict, St Joseph,*  
*OCP Publications.*

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### Something to get started

**F**or many Christians, the opportunity to share in Holy Communion lies at the heart of their faith. For some people, receiving Communion is so central they participate daily, or at each Sunday service. For others, it is so central it is only received a few times a year. Different experiences may have the same significance for different people.



In your group, share experiences of receiving Holy Communion. This could be in your own church, or on special occasions, for example at an ecumenical service during Holy Week. What is significant to you in this act of worship? What similarities and differences do you notice from the experiences you have shared?

## Something to pray

**H**oly God, eternal mystery of life and source of all love

we offer our thanks and praise that in the Sacrament of Holy Communion you are present with us as we remember the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ

and rejoice that he is with us today through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

In our partaking of bread and wine may we draw ever closer to you, may we abide in your presence, knowing your peace and your joy, may we be renewed and refreshed in our journeys of faith.

In our sharing and reflecting with one another

may we learn from the treasures of our traditions

and be encouraged in our discipleship committing ourselves once again to the unity which is Christ's will for the church.

We pray in the name of Christ.

**Amen.**

## Something to think about

**B**elow are two extracts from a paper given to the RC-URC Dialogue group by the Revd Dr John Bradbury, General Secretary of the United Reformed Church, at its meeting in March 2020. The full text of 'Reformed Pastors at Adoration: some Reformed reflections on Roman Catholic-Reformed dialogue and the Eucharist' is available at [www.bit.ly/4gHI3md](http://www.bit.ly/4gHI3md)

### **The Eucharist and Sacrifice**

Luther objects in the strongest possible terms to the idea that the Mass is a sacrifice. His objection is that the Eucharist may be viewed as some kind of human

'work' that effects salvation, which would be to usurp the work of Christ in effecting salvation. Luther wishes to understand the Mass as 'the promise or testimony of Christ'. Luther's objection to the understanding of the Mass as a 'sacrifice' is mirrored very clearly in the writings of Huldrych Zwingli. In his *67 Articles*, he writes:

**XVIII. That Christ, having sacrificed himself once, is to eternity a certain and valid sacrifice for the sins of all faithful, from which it follows that the mass is not a sacrifice, but is a remembrance of the sacrifice and assurance of the salvation which Christ has given us.**

**XIX. That Christ is the only mediator between God and us.**

**[www.bit.ly/3Prz9vV](http://www.bit.ly/3Prz9vV)**

For Calvin, the benefit of Christ's sacrifice upon the cross is communicated to us in the Eucharist. 'We now understand the purpose of this mystical blessing, namely, to confirm for us the fact that the Lord's body was once for all sacrificed for us that we may now feed upon it, and by feeding feel in ourselves the working of that unique sacrifice...' Christ's sacrifice, salvation, and the reception of the communion elements are decisively linked in Calvin's account of the Eucharist. He is always at pains to protect the once-for-all nature of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

In Roman Catholic theology, Christ's sacrifice on the cross, salvation and the reception of the communion elements are similarly closely related, and closely related to the aspect of the Eucharist which is about a memorial.

Understanding the memory as *anamnesis*, a 'thick' kind of memory that we might frequently illustrate through what the Jewish tradition understands is going on in the Passover, is helpful. In the Passover, those

participating, as the stories of the Exodus from Egypt are told, speak about 'we', and 'us'. 'When we crossed the Red Sea...' The quality of the memory is so intense that it is as if the past becomes present. As Jews celebrate around the Passover table, they are so caught up in the memory of those events, it is as though they are living those events in the here and now.

These are very much the terms in which the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church expresses it. The Roman Catholic tradition does, though, wish to still speak of the Mass as a sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the Eucharist are 'one single sacrifice' (Catechism, paragraph 1367), 'The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head.' (paragraph 1368).

## Christ's presence in the Eucharist

Zwingli is deeply concerned about the potential for idolatry – treating that which is not God as God. Alongside this, he is at pains to protect the full humanity of Christ, 'fully human and fully divine'. For Zwingli, for Christ to be fully human means that his body must be fully human and identical to ours. Unlike Zwingli, Calvin is keen to understand the Eucharist as going beyond something that is a mere sign, and a spiritualised presence – he wishes to understand the Eucharist as one of God's gifts to us through which God unites us ever closer with Christ. Calvin reaches the conclusion that 'Jesus' flesh is truly food, and his blood truly drink, and by these foods believers are nourished into eternal life'.

He is concerned to protect the full humanity of Christ, and to argue that Christ assumed our human nature, and therefore has a human body like ours that can only be in

one place at one time. So if the believer truly feeds on Christ's flesh and blood and yet Christ is seated in heaven, how does Calvin set about squaring this circle?



At this point, Calvin's concern with the work of the Holy Spirit becomes clear – 'The secret power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how foolish it is to wish to measure his immeasurableness by our measure. What, then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space.' (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T McNeill (ed), (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1960), p.1370).

The personal presence of Christ in the Eucharist is foundational. Christ imparts himself in body and blood, through the bread and wine. So one might conclude that in all kinds of ways, both in terms of the understanding of the Eucharist as sacrifice and the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, we can say far more together than one might at first think possible.

Image: Palm Sunday in Westminster Cathedral © Mazur/cbcew.org.uk

## Something to talk about

The United Reformed Church celebrates the gospel sacrament of the Lord's Supper. When in obedience to the Lord's command his people show forth his sacrifice on the cross by the bread broken and the wine poured for them to eat and drink, he himself, risen and ascended, is present and gives himself to them for their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. United with him and with the whole Church on earth and in heaven, his people gathered at his table present their sacrifice of thanksgiving and renew the offering of themselves, and rejoice in the promise of his coming in glory.

(Basis of Union URC, The Manual,  
found at: [www.urc.org.uk/the-manual](http://www.urc.org.uk/the-manual))

**D**o any of these statements resonate with your own thinking?

**Share your responses with one another.**

In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover, and it is made present the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present. "As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out.

(Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, Para 1364,  
[www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P41.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P41.HTM))

In the Lord's Supper, the risen Jesus Christ imparts himself in his body and blood, given up for all, through his word of promise with bread and wine. He thus gives himself unreservedly to all who receive the bread and wine; faith receives the Lord's Supper for salvation, unfaith for judgement.

We cannot separate communion with Jesus Christ in his body and blood from the act of eating and drinking. To be concerned about the manner of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper in abstraction from this act is to run the risk of obscuring the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

(Leuenberg Declaration, paras 18 & 19. Available to download in English here:  
[www.leuenberg.eu/documents](http://www.leuenberg.eu/documents))

It is in this light that we may understand something of the specific presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, which is at once sacramental and personal.

He comes to us clothed in his Gospel and saving passion, so that our partaking of him is communion in his body and blood (John 6:47-56; 1 Corinthians 10:17). This presence is sacramental in that it is the concrete form which the mystery of Christ takes in the Eucharistic communion of his body and blood. It is also personal presence because Jesus Christ in his own person is immediately present, giving himself in his reality both as true God and true Man. In the Eucharist he communicates himself to us in the whole reality of his divinity and humanity – body, mind and will, and at the same time he remains the Son who is in the Father as the Father is in him.

(1977 Reformed-Roman Catholic dialogue report  
The Presence of Christ in Church  
and World p.29)

## Something to sing

**The hymns we sing proclaim our theology as much as the sermons we preach. What do these two hymns say to us about Communion?**

1. Loving God, we praise and thank you  
as we gather round your table.  
One with you and with each other,  
as we follow in Christ's way.  
Bless the bread which we have  
brought here,  
Bless the wine which we will share.  
Bless each one here by your Spirit,  
Loving God, now hear our prayer.
2. Take this bread, it is Christ's body,  
broken so the world might live  
Take this wine, the cup of blessing  
Sign of what we in Christ receive.  
Gifts of life from God the Father.  
Gifts of love from Christ the Son,  
Gifts of faith from God the Spirit,  
Given freely for each one.

3. Through the bread and wine you  
feed us  
for our journey throughout life.  
Loving God, be present with us,  
as our friend, our guide, our light.  
Give us grace to love our neighbour.  
Give us words of hope to share.  
Let us live in peace and justice  
As Christ's folk, who love and care.

Melody: Calon Lan.

Words: Lindsey Sanderson.

Written following a discussion at the Dialogue Group about whether it would be possible for a whole community to preside at Communion and what that may look like. This hymn is a suggestion of how a community may preside. Used with permission.

One bread, one body, one Lord of all,  
One cup of blessing which we bless.  
And we, though many, throughout the earth  
we are one body in this one Lord.

Gentile or Jew, servant or free  
woman or man, no more

One bread, one body, one Lord of all,  
one cup of blessing which we bless.  
And we, though many, throughout the earth  
we are one body in this one Lord.

Many the gifts, Many the works,  
one in the Lord of all.

One bread, one body, one Lord of all  
one cup of blessing which we bless  
And we, though many, throughout the earth,  
we are one body in this one Lord.

Grain for the fields,  
Scattered and grown, gathered to one, for all.

One bread, one body, one Lord of all  
one cup of blessing which we bless  
And we, though many, throughout the earth,  
we are one body in this one Lord.

Words and music © John Foley SJ,  
Published by OCP Publications, 5536 NE  
Hassalo, Portland OR 97213 USA.  
Music can be found in the following  
hymnbooks: *Church Hymnary 4; Hymns of  
Glory, Songs of Praise; Hymns Ancient &  
Modern, Laudate.*



## Notes for facilitators

**This material uses a receptive ecumenism approach. You can find out more information about receptive ecumenism at [www.bit.ly/3BSAyZn](http://www.bit.ly/3BSAyZn)**  
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# THE ROMAN CATHOLIC / UNITED REFORMED CHURCH DIALOGUE GROUP



## LET'S TALK ABOUT CITIZENSHIP

This is one of an occasional series of resource sheets offered by the Roman Catholic and United Reformed Church Dialogue Group. This group brings together lay and ordained members of the Bishops' Conferences of England, Wales and Scotland and the URC. Its aim is to explore issues of faith and practice in both our traditions, so that together we may deepen our insight into each other's traditions and our own journey of faith. This resource is designed for local RC and URC congregations to use together. It could be a one off meeting, or part of a regular pattern of meetings. The material could also be used by a wider 'churches together' style group. There are notes for facilitators at the end of the resource. The members of the Dialogue Group would be very interested in receiving feedback from the use of this material or, indeed, suggestions for future topics. You can contact the Dialogue group via its co-secretaries:  
RC: The Revd Dominic Robinson  
[dominicrobinson@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:dominicrobinson@rcdow.org.uk)  
URC: Lindsey Brown  
[lindsey.brown@urc.org.uk](mailto:lindsey.brown@urc.org.uk)



### Something to get started

**O**ur churches have a long history of engaging with our politicians – local councillors, MSPs, AMs and MPs – and although we will have differing views on party politics, many Christians believe that participating in the political process is part of being a good citizen. What do you think makes a good citizen? In what ways is citizenship part of your Christian faith?

## Something to talk about

**D**o any of these statements resonate with your own thinking?

Share your responses with one another.

'When people say that the Bible and politics don't mix, I ask them which Bible they are reading.'

Archbishop  
Desmond Tutu

'Voting is another way in which we exercise responsibility for the good of society.'

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, speaking ahead of the English local elections, May 2024.

We believe that Christ gives his Church a government distinct from the government of the state. In things that affect obedience to God the Church is not subordinate to the state, but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ, its only Ruler and Head. Civil authorities are called to serve God's will of justice and peace for all humankind, and to respect the rights of conscience and belief. While we ourselves are servants in the world as citizens of God's eternal kingdom.

Extract from The Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church

'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's'  
(Matthew 22:21)

In this maxim of Jesus we find not only the criterion for the distinction between the political sphere and the religious sphere; clear guidelines emerge for the mission of believers of all times, even for us today. To pay taxes is a duty of citizens, as is complying with the just laws of the state. At the same time, it is necessary to affirm God's primacy in human life and in history, respecting God's right over all that belongs to him. Hence the mission of the Church and Christians: to speak of God and bear witness to him to the men and women of our time. Every one of us, by Baptism, is called to be a living presence in society, inspiring it with the Gospel and with the lifeblood of the Holy Spirit. It is a question of committing oneself with humility, and at the same time with courage, making one's own contribution to building the civilization of love, where justice and fraternity reign.

Extract from Pope Francis,  
Angelus homily 18.10.20

## Something to pray

**L**ord God, as citizens of your kingdom, we seek to better understand the issues and concerns that confront our communities and nations of the United Kingdom, and how the Gospel compels us to respond faithfully in our communities.

We ask for eyes that are free from prejudice so that we might see each other as brothers and sisters, one and equal in dignity, especially those who are victims of abuse and violence, deceit and poverty.

We ask for ears that will hear the cries of all people oppressed because of race or creed, religion or gender.

We ask for minds and hearts that are open to hearing the voice of leaders who will bring us closer to your Kingdom.

We pray for discernment so that at elections for local, regional and national leaders, we may cast our votes for those who hear your Word, live your love, and keep in the ways of your truth as they follow in the steps of Jesus and his Apostles and guide us to your Kingdom of justice and peace.

We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Adapted from Election Day Prayers (xavier.edu)*

## Something to get involved with

**B**oth the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and the United Reformed Church have a long history of involvement in public affairs and encourage their congregations to be active citizens in their local communities.

The United Reformed Church works through the Joint Public Issues Team in partnership with the Methodist Church and Baptist Union of Great Britain.

JPIT has six hopes for society: a **just economy** that enables the



flourishing of all life; a society where the **poorest and most marginalised** are at the centre; a world that **actively works for peace**, a planet where our **environment is renewed**; a society that **welcomes the stranger**, a politics which is characterised by **listening, kindness and truthfulness**. Ideas for engaging with all these issues can be found on the JPIT website ([www.jpit.uk](http://www.jpit.uk)).



The Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales offers resources via their website ([www.cbcew.org.uk](http://www.cbcew.org.uk)). The themes are **life issues, environment, migrants and refugees, marriage and family life, human trafficking, domestic abuse, prison ministry, racial justice, health and social care, international affairs, education.**



The information on these topics from both organisations can be used as a basis for discussion groups with your congregation, a focus for individual prayer and reflection or a focus in congregational prayer.

**Christians in Politics** is a parachurch organisation whose mission is 'to inspire and encourage Christians to get involved in politics and public life. We believe that

decisions are made by those who show up. We strive to put kingdom before tribe and disagree well.

Christians in Politics draws together

Christians from across the political parties and beyond, and from across the breadth of the church.'

Their website offers video resources and details of publications to encourage Christians to engage in political discourse ([www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk](http://www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk))

They also run events around the country, online and offer speakers to groups.



## Meeting elected representatives

Elected representatives at all levels of government have a responsibility to engage with and hear the views of those they represent. Church congregations bring together a diverse group of people from across the local community and taking time to meet your elected representatives and build up relationships with them can be mutually beneficial. Here are some ideas about how you might do this:

### Send a card

Adjusting to becoming an elected representative can be a daunting task for people, especially if it involves significant travel and time away from families. A card offering good wishes and letting your representative know that you are praying for them and the work they are undertaking shows that your congregation cares. There are more ideas about this at Congratulate your MP – Joint Public Issues Team ([www.jpit.uk/congratulate-your-mp](http://www.jpit.uk/congratulate-your-mp))

## Meet your elected representatives

Invite your elected representative to a service or event at your church. Make this an opportunity not just to tell them what is important to you, but also to ask what is important to them, what has motivated them to enter into political life, and how the church might be able to support and encourage them.

The Joint Public Issues Team is launching the **Constituency Action Network** ([www.jpit.uk/can/what-is-can](http://www.jpit.uk/can/what-is-can)) and Christian Aid is encouraging congregations to **Break bread with your newly elected MP** ([www.bit.ly/4fU5g2k](http://www.bit.ly/4fU5g2k)) to encourage congregations to build long term relationships with their Members of Parliament. The ideas could be replicated with other elected representatives and could involve congregations working together within a constituency or council ward.



## Something to sing

**T**he hymns we sing proclaim our theology as much as the sermons we preach. What do these two hymns say to us about Citizenship?



1. Jesus Christ is waiting, waiting in the streets;  
no one is his neighbour, all alone he eats.  
Listen, Lord Jesus, I am lonely too.  
Make me, friend or stranger, fit to wait on you.
2. Jesus Christ is raging, raging in the streets,  
where injustice spirals and real hope retreats.  
Listen, Lord Jesus, I am angry too.  
In the Kingdom's causes let me rage with you.
3. Jesus Christ is healing, healing in the streets;  
curing those who suffer, touching those he greets.  
Listen, Lord Jesus, I have pity too.  
Let my care be active, healing just like you.
4. Jesus Christ is dancing, dancing in the streets,  
where each sign of hatred he, with love, defeats.  
Listen, Lord Jesus, I should triumph too.  
Where good conquers evil let me dance with you.
5. Jesus Christ is calling, calling in the streets,  
"Who will join my journey? I will guide their feet."  
Listen, Lord Jesus, let my fears be few.  
Walk one step before me; I will follow you.

Words © John Bell and Graeme Maule. Wild Goose Resource Group, Iona Community. Melody Noel Nouvelet. This hymn can be found in *Church Hymnary 4, Hymns of Glory, Songs of Praise, Laudate, Singing the Faith, Hymns Ancient & Modern*.

1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness.  
Longing for truth, we turn to you.  
Make us your own, your holy people,  
light for the world to see.  
*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light! Shine in your  
church gathered today.*
2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.  
Longing for hope, many despair.  
Your word alone has power to save us.  
Make us your living voice.  
*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light! Shine in your  
church gathered today.*
3. Longing for food, many are hungry.  
Longing for water, many still thirst.  
Make us your bread, broken for others,  
shared until all are fed.  
*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light! Shine in your  
church gathered today.*
4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.  
Longing for warmth, many are cold.  
Make us your building, sheltering others,  
walls made of living stone.  
*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light! Shine in your  
church gathered today.*
5. Many the gifts, many the people,  
many the hearts that yearn to belong.  
Let us be servants to one another,  
making your kingdom come.  
*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light! Shine in your  
church gathered today.*

Words and music © Bernadette Farrell  
Published by OCP Publications, 5536  
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# THE ROMAN CATHOLIC / UNITED REFORMED CHURCH DIALOGUE GROUP



## LET'S TALK ABOUT JOURNEYING TOGETHER

### Local and Regional Visits, 2019-2023

#### Introduction

At the beginning of our current five-year period, we reviewed what had been learned over the previous ten years of this dialogue group. In a spirit of receptive ecumenism, there had been an increasing appreciation of each other's traditions and perspectives. It was noted that in different ways we shared the experience of being 'nonconformist' churches in an English context.

We had been 'walking together' long enough for friendship and trust to develop within the group. We felt we now wanted to extend the conversation to include a range of local communities, from our churches and from others, who have been similarly walking

together. We wanted to see what we could learn from their experience, and how the fruits of our own conversations might be able to support them. We decided to make one such overnight visit per year, with another overnight meeting of the dialogue group on its own, about six months later. This would allow time for reflection on the previous visit and for planning the next one, as well as for discussion of general ecumenical issues, relevant to our churches.

During our visits, we also had time to discuss the ongoing work of our dialogue group, but in this paper we'll focus on our interactions with the local worshipping community.

### 2019: Milton Keynes

Christ the Cornerstone church, Milton Keynes

**F**irst on our list of possibilities was Milton Keynes, where the church of 'Christ the Cornerstone' was a well-known early example of a local ecumenical partnership.

On our first day, we met George Mwaura and Fr Francis Higgins, two of the three clergy appointed to this church. George is a URC minister and, along with an Anglican priest, looks after the two ecumenical services on Sunday mornings. Francis said the RC Mass on Saturday evenings and also looked after a nearby parish.



We found the Cornerstone building itself both striking and impressive – even more so, perhaps, given the uniform architecture of the rest of Milton Keynes! There’s a large central church, octagonal with a high cupola, together with a large reception area, shop and café at the front, and a large hall to the rear. On one of the sides there is a small chapel with reservation of the (Catholic) Sacrament. On the other there is a small hall, which we were using for our meetings.

Thinking about the questions we could discuss with the people from Cornerstone, we came up with the following. What are the challenges and joys of being in this ecumenical congregation? What are the differences between this and any church you may have attended before? Are there any opportunities to learn from each other?



There were also some questions arising out of the fact that the Catholics have a Mass on Saturday evening, separate from the Sunday morning ecumenical services. Are there any opportunities for coming together for things like shared prayer, Bible study, social outreach and so on? How do you see your identity: as a member of a denomination or of Cornerstone? Do the Catholics feel ‘semi-detached’?

In our meeting with members of Cornerstone, there were about a dozen or so people who came along with George and Francis. To begin, we said something about the work of our dialogue group, and Francis and George had shared some of their experiences as pastors in this ecumenical setting. We divided into groups for half an hour or so, and the following points were noted.

Although the Catholics and the others were in some ways separate congregations, there was more overlap than you might think. Catholics were well represented on the ‘Ecumenical Council’, their equivalent of a parish pastoral council, and on the team of volunteers who manned the reception desk during the week and the Sunday evening meal for the homeless. Several Catholics also came to one of the Sunday morning services.

Outside of the church services, people weren’t particularly aware of who the Catholics were. Some landmark services are done jointly, including Ash Wednesday, the Good Friday walk of witness and the Renewal of Covenant in January. We discussed some possibilities for the future, including a proposal to create a town-centre chaplaincy, largely lay-led.

Sadly, some areas of ecumenical engagement had fallen by the wayside. There used to be some sharing of readers between the Saturday evening and Sunday morning congregations and also some ‘pulpit exchange’, which hasn’t happened for a long time. They felt that most Christians now see the Milton Keynes model of ecumenism as outdated. By contrast, our joint dialogue group experienced a context of ecumenical hope which still has relevance and purpose.

When the Cornerstone was first set up, there was more dialogue about our



respective beliefs and customs, and they felt sad that this doesn't happen any more. If it happened now, though, it would also be a matter of dialogue about different nationalities and cultures, as well as different denominations!

Looking back, the following morning, we were very pleased about having had this meeting, with a group of people who have had such practical experience of local ecumenism. This is something our dialogue group have been wanting to do for years, as far back as the previous five-year period. We noted down the main points that we wanted to feed back to the group, to encourage them.

We saw the Cornerstone Church as thriving, in itself and in its relationship with the local community. Having to have separate Eucharists for Catholics and the others, does tend to make two congregations, but they're by no means entirely distinct. Several of the Catholics also attended one of the Sunday morning services and many others were involved in the 'Ecumenical Council', the lay chaplaincy that the centre provided and the local outreach including the food-for-the-homeless provision on Sunday evening. There was a strongly shared sense of belonging and, though this took somewhat different forms for different people, this was something that's also essential for any 'normal' parish.

Looking ahead to the following year, we felt we'd also like to explore the experience of people in Cumbria, where the churches had been working together in a very committed way over the previous three or four years.

## 2020: Reflections on Worship under Covid

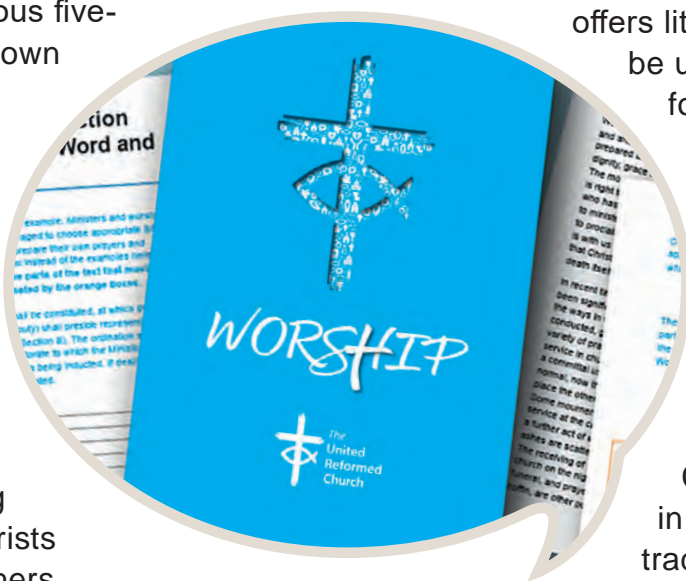
Our planned visit to Cumbria was delayed, of course, by the restrictions needed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Subsequently we were able to reflect on our experience of online worship, when church attendance wasn't possible.

How this worked in practice was influenced by certain features of our two worshipping traditions. The URC Worship Book

offers liturgies, which can be used as a resource for planning services, rather than being prescriptive, and many local URCs prefer to use other ecumenical liturgies or, in some cases, much freer forms of worship.

Collective responses in worship have traditionally been seen as almost the opposite of participation – a cacophony of voices and useless repetition. Hymns, on the other hand, by their nature, require singing together in time, creating a stronger sense of united participation. Over time, it has become normal for a number of different people to be involved in leading any given act of worship, in terms of readings, prayers and reflections.

This lent itself naturally to a variety of approaches for online worship. The central URC emailed a set of online devotions, adaptable by local ministers, along with a recorded act of worship and accompanying printable text. Many churches also invited their members to film themselves leading Bible readings, prayers, or other elements of devotion, which could be edited together.



Other churches opted to use Zoom for worship, allowing a greater sense of participation. All this fits well with a tradition that is 'permissive', in the sense that a thing is allowed if it isn't explicitly prohibited!

Different congregations took different stands on the possibility of 'virtual' Eucharistic services, in the sense that although the presiding minister consecrates (to use a Catholic term) the bread and wine remotely, this can be seen as the action of the Spirit, uniting us to Christ through the bread and the wine. An interesting question arises when the service is pre-recorded on (say) YouTube rather than shared 'live' on Zoom: the fact that there is a time-lag between the experience of the presider and that of the viewer. This raises the question which we continued to ponder: What does it mean to be a present at an act of worship, and what does the word 'congregation' mean in this context? One view was that 'the possibility of others whom I do not know being able to join in that meal through YouTube does not perturb me'.

We felt that post-lockdown experience in the URC suggests that worship will continue in multiple formats, at least in some congregations. At the 2023 General Assembly the first virtual church was accepted as a local church in the URC. Efforts during lockdown to reach out to the wider community, may continue to become a part of our self-understanding. While most of us have been released from lockdown, that is not the case for those who are housebound and so multiple formats cater for such pastoral circumstances. Nevertheless, the fellowship achieved in spite of the lockdown restrictions will feel



more precious than before, when we had previously tended to take it for granted. It isn't until something on which you depend suddenly stops, that you realise just how important it was.

If the URC approach to liturgy is fairly permissive, the Catholic tradition is much more prescriptive. The texts themselves, including the

readings, are set – though there is room for surprisingly wide variations in style of celebration, music and hymns/songs. This could range from an ultra-traditional Latin Mass with 'bells and smells' to an exuberant Latin American or African Mass (depending on the predominant local community).

The Catholic concept of sacramentality depends very much on physical presence, so that even Confession (which would appear to be purely verbal) can't be given over the phone or online. This means that participation online, even by simultaneous streaming, let alone pre-recorded video, isn't regarded as satisfying the 'Sunday obligation'. When physical presence isn't possible, not only during a lockdown but also when a person is sick or housebound, the obligation doesn't apply. Still, online participation is only the nearest available alternative, rather than the 'real thing'.

The result is a form of online worship that gives emphasis to the priest and any congregation who are able to be present. The online viewers are addressed and welcomed at the start, but it feels almost as though they're 'eavesdropping' on what is happening in church, without being able to be a part of it in quite the same way as those physically present.



On the other hand, there is a strong Catholic tradition of 'Spiritual Communion', which was highlighted during the pandemic. Also present in some other traditions, this emphasises our desire for God – either at times when external factors such as plague or persecution make church attendance impossible, or at periods of history in which scrupulosity meant that actually receiving Communion was a fairly uncommon practice. St John Vianney explained that Spiritual Communion is like 'blowing on fire and embers that are starting to go out, to make them glow again'. Just as we found in the URC experience, we return to church, appreciating more keenly that of what we have been temporarily deprived.

## 2021: Carlisle

**F**or our visit to Cumbria, we went to Carlisle, which seemed to offer the best prospects for engagement with a good-sized local community. On the first afternoon we had two sessions, meeting with people representing two groups of churches. In Cumbria they distinguish between the four churches that are in the 'covenant' and those who are 'companion' churches. The covenant is primarily aimed at uniting the churches in mission, which we could all sign up to, but in the covenanting

churches one key element to this is the formation of 'Mission Communities' which rely on the interchangeability of ministry, which Catholics can't sign up to. Instead, they do the best they can, in a supportive way, as 'companion' churches, which include the Baptists and the Quakers, as well as the Catholics. To get an idea of the particular characteristics of each group of churches, we met first with local leaders of the covenant churches and then with those from some of the companion churches.

In our first session we heard from James Newcome (Bishop of Carlisle), James Tebbutt (Methodist Chair of District) and Alistair Smeaton and Martyn Coe (URC ecumenical officers). They gave a very clear outline of the aims of the covenant, and were very affirming of the role of the companion churches, including Paul Swarbrick's contribution as the local Catholic bishop.

Carlisle Cathedral



It was noted that churches had already found themselves working ecumenically, in response to various natural disasters, local tragedies and emergencies. Housing poverty was being made worse by inflated house prices, with great demand for second homes. Churches worked together on social action projects to address poverty and need, with dementia-friendly churches,

food banks and clothes banks. The Rose Castle Foundation, an initiative based in Cumbria, was founded to promote global reconciliation and to bring Christians together.

We heard that the Covenant is based on four themes: follow daily (discipleship), speak boldly (evangelism and social action), tread gently (environmental theme) and care deeply (pastoral responsibility for each other and everybody). There are also three strategies: mission locally and county-wide, ministry (sharing ministers where possible), sharing congregations (given the challenges of having too many buildings).

Some challenges included the fact that we have different ecclesiologies (which complicates oversight) and different theological views, the large distances involved, and imbalances between the sizes of different denominations. There were also the challenges of our respective bureaucracies and the legalities that have to be observed. Having said all this, everyone agreed that working together is vital for our witness to the Gospel.



After tea we were joined by Bishop Paul and Paul Burden (Chair of Churches Together in Barrow). Andrew Dodd (Chair of Churches Together in Cumbria) also joined us on Zoom, as he had picked up a chest infection

and it was thought better for him not to travel. In this session we explored some of the limitations.

We came to realise that there is a problem specifically in Carlisle, because of its size. Places like Barrow are small enough to have just one church from each denomination, and a very clear local focus, which means that they generally also have just one Mission Community. In practice, this means it isn't too hard to coordinate the work of the Mission Community with that of the local Churches Together. In Carlisle it is a more complex picture, and this complicates practical arrangements and makes clear communication more difficult.

Our final session, after supper, was with some of the people from the local URC and Catholic churches, to give us the opportunity to get some idea of the 'view from the pew'. The Catholics were accompanied by their priest, Fr Luiz Ruscillo. The local URC minister had already been with us throughout the afternoon. We were also very pleased to welcome John Bremner, the URC Ecumenical Officer for the Synod of Scotland, and Mary Welsh, the Catholic Ecumenical Officer for Scotland. We were almost on the borders already and we'd gathered that John and Mary had already visited Cumbria and were interested in the 'Ecumenical County' experiment, so we had invited them to join us and to stay on for second day's session as well.

The Mission Community concept had made little impression on the Carlisle Catholics – perhaps for the same reason that makes Carlisle rather different to the other Cumbrian towns and villages. On the other hand, the Catholics had fond memories of ecumenical initiatives in past years and they clearly had an appetite for more, if opportunities could be created. Paul Burden, a Catholic himself, said that

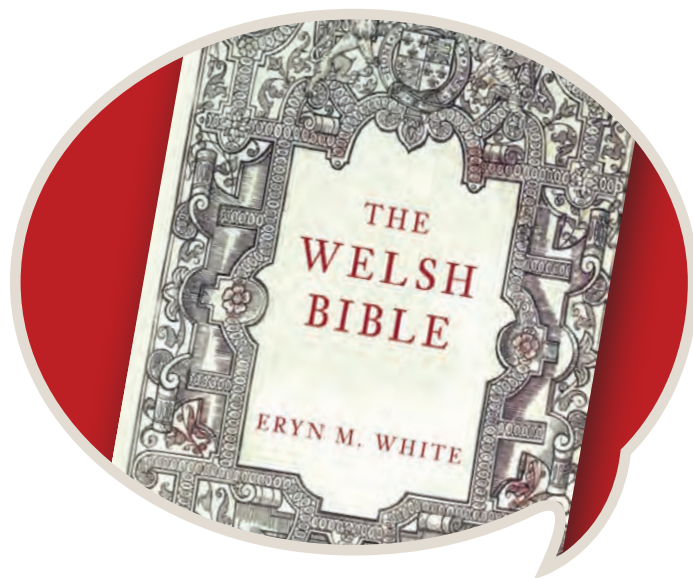
the picture was much more positive from a Catholic perspective in Barrow and elsewhere. The URC people, being part of the covenant, were of course better informed about it, but were equally keen to take local initiatives with any local companion churches as well.

On the following day, we were joined by Fr Jerome, the Catholic Ecumenical Officer who covers the northern part of the diocese of Lancaster. His experience reinforced our impression that there is a lot of variation around the county and that things are easier where there is a strong local sense of identity. He observed, sadly, that a number of Catholic clergy aren't really interested in working ecumenically. He wondered whether more might be made of their ecumenical responsibilities at the appointment stage.

## 2022: Cardiff

**O**ur meeting started out with a personal reflection on Catholicism in Wales by Carys Whelan, chair of the Ecumenical Commission for Cardiff Archdiocese. This got us off to a good start, with a vivid picture of how things have developed in Wales over the past decades, and of the particular characteristics of Welsh ecumenism, where identity and sense of place are very important. In her village there were many small chapels, whereas the Catholic church was away from the centre and its members were seen as foreign (mostly Italian) and different (lax about Sunday observance).

One point that recurred during the visit was the importance of the Welsh language. For many years, the Chapels were the only places where one could speak Welsh freely, as it was frowned upon in public life and in schools. One ecumenical asset is that there's only one Welsh version of



the Bible, used by all churches including the Catholics. It has been revised over the years, in a way parallel to the stages of development of the RSV from its origins in the King James Bible.

After a short break, we heard from Gethin Rhys, the Policy Officer for Cytûn. In his paper, he outlined various forms of engagement with the Welsh government. The Faith Communities Forum and the Third Sector Partnership Council (the latter including a range of voluntary organisations) are both important – increasingly so, during Covid. While a guaranteed meeting with each portfolio minister twice a year is a remarkable privilege, much of the value of the relationship lies in meetings arranged with officials between those formal encounters. The relationships built up through these regular meetings are of great value, especially when problems arise, as they enable swift contact to be made with the right people and there is in most cases a predisposition to seek mutually acceptable solutions.

Aled Edwards, the General Secretary of Cytûn, then spoke about working with refugees in Wales. Reference is often made to Wales being a 'Nation of Sanctuary'. Over the years it has been taken up by Welsh politicians as well as by Welsh

churches, and a meaning and an increasing importance have gradually developed. It was very moving to hear about recent work done in welcoming Afghan refugees. This was based around a large ecumenical youth centre in Cardiff, which hosted the refugees for some months until more permanent homes were found for them. The Welsh language featured here, too. The Afghans were as keen to learn Welsh as English, and emerged from their stay as keen Welsh rugby supporters!

In the discussion that followed, it was agreed that one thing that helps ecumenism and engagement with the government in Wales is the fact that it's a relatively small nation. At a certain level, everyone knows everyone else and it's easier to build up relationships, which are so important.

Mention was made of the Covenant, which was intended partly to facilitate shared ministry. When this met with difficulties, the idea fell into abeyance, but some felt that it may be opportune to have another go, so to speak. This may be part of a greater pattern, in which ecumenical agreement comes near but doesn't quite work out, leading to a 'fallow period' until hurts have healed and people are ready to try again. Sometimes, too, agreement is reached on paper, but it isn't observed in practice, while remaining 'on the books' for when people are ready to renew their efforts.

There was also agreement around the idea that we should not give up on the theological dimension of ecumenism. It can be tempting to rely just on practical mission and addressing social issues together. These are clearly essential, but part of the motivation may be discouragement with the lack of progress at the theological level. Our feeling was that we should still persevere with the theology, too!

After supper we had a short presentation by Simon Walking, then the Moderator of the URC Synod of Wales and President of the Free Churches Council. He explored four themes of the URC in Wales. First, the commitment of membership – in contrast with the Anglican and Catholic churches, which are based on parishes rather than membership. Second, the importance of place. Third, the emphasis on preaching. There is no 'imposed' liturgy, but this means that a lot depends on the individual worship leader. Fourth, its ecumenical origins. Congregationalism and Presbyterianism are so very different in terms of their organisation – the former consisting of very independent congregations and the latter having a well-developed system of governance and oversight. Given the experience that the URC has of living with these tensions, it's easy to see why they say that ecumenism is in their DNA!

The following day, in the course of a visit to the Senedd, we also had a period of reflection and discussion amongst ourselves. Here, we returned to a subject we had discussed before, particularly during the meetings in between our local and regional visits: the fact that most churches allow ecumenical partners to receive Holy Communion during their services, but the Catholic church does not. This is painful for all concerned – a sign of the importance of Holy Communion for us all. It is the result of different ecclesiologies and sacramental theologies, which our dialogue group is not in a position to change. What we can do, in our own way, is to contribute to the journey towards the point where our churches can be fully united – which however doesn't imply being merged!

We also talked about different models of ecumenical engagement, during which mention was made of a Church of Scotland initiative, known as a 'Declaration of Friendship' (later renamed the 'St Margaret

Declaration') as a way of widening the sort of Covenant they have in Cumbria and in Wales, to include the Catholics to the extent that their theology allows. This opened up the possibility of us making a visit to Scotland the following year, so that by the time we've finished our current term, we would have visited all three nations represented in this dialogue group.



Edinburgh New College

## 2023: Edinburgh

**D**uring our visit to Edinburgh, we were hosted by the Theology Faculty of Edinburgh University, in New College. In our first session, we had a presentation by John McPake, the National Ecumenical Officer of the Church of Scotland. We'd asked him to give us some background about the St Margaret's Declaration, which was agreed in 2022 by the Church of Scotland and the Catholic Church in Scotland.

The declaration was forged over lunch – much more quickly than other such agreements. There were some groups who tried unsuccessfully to prevent it – indeed, even 50 years ago, such a declaration would have been unthinkable. The essential elements are the public recognition of each other as Christians, an affirmation of the Trinity, our common Baptism, and the Ecumenical Councils.

There were already good relations between the two churches, in practical matters at local and national level. Though that might raise the question whether the agreement was really needed, it does form an important and powerful symbol, and other churches could also sign up to it. The declaration has prompted conversations about similar statements of togetherness, even from other faiths, including Judaism.

After supper, we visited a local church, called Augustine United Church, where we were also joined by members of the Sacred Heart Catholic church.

We began by explaining what we had already done in visiting sites of local ecumenical activity, including Milton Keynes, Cumbria and Cardiff. Although the number attending was somewhat limited, there was plenty of material for discussion. At first, they didn't think they were doing very much, but as we got into the subject it appeared that there was a considerable amount of joint activity. Both churches have a distinctive ministry which people tend to seek out, with good participation from young people, mainly students. Individual churches do work together, for instance on the 'Bethany Care Van' project, and classes and groups for those in financial hardship.

There was concern, though, about Edinburgh Churches Together. They felt that it tends to operate on an old 'business style' model, which doesn't attract people. Also, the size of Edinburgh is itself a challenge, as Churches Together has to work with so many congregations. Smaller groups of churches work together much more easily. This could be seen as rather similar to what was observed about Carlisle in comparison to smaller communities in Cumbria.

Finally, we had some interesting and encouraging input from Sara Parvis (Catholic) and Kirstie Murray (URC), who both teach at New College and who work together a lot. The College was originally a Free Church of Scotland training college for ministers, and since 1935 has been the home of the School of Divinity of the University of Edinburgh, attracting people of all faiths and none. It aims to encourage the students to engage more with the wider community, to see how the past can be understood through the lens of faith, and to think critically and ethically. It also promotes contacts with global Christianity, and with the many faith communities in Edinburgh itself.



The following morning, we had a presentation by John McPake and Philip Kerr. They'd already provided some documentation on work done on the subject of Baptism by the Joint Commission for Doctrine of the Church of Scotland and the RC Church in Scotland. Now they spoke on a specific document, 'A Catholic and Reformed Perspective on our Common Baptism'. They highlighted a growing area of shared understanding on Baptism, our distinctive understandings of the nature of Church, and the ecumenical implications of our common Baptism.

For Catholics, the key concepts are 'real but imperfect communion' between the churches, the implications of the idea that the Church of Christ 'subsists in' the Catholic Church, and the intrinsic link between Eucharistic and ecclesial communion. For the Church of Scotland, what stands out is its self-understanding as part of the universal, holy, catholic Church, and also as a church of the Reformation. Also key is the principle that unity doesn't require uniformity.

The document takes into account the Joint Declaration on Justification (1999), though more as regards its methods than its details, as Justification wasn't a key issue for the Scottish Reformation.

One practical result of the St Margaret Declaration has been the introduction of common Baptism certificates and a common liturgy for the renewal of Baptismal Vows.

The Declaration shows the value of even a partial synthesis of the theology of two churches, even though differences remain. It also shows the impact that such a public declaration can have, despite its limitations.

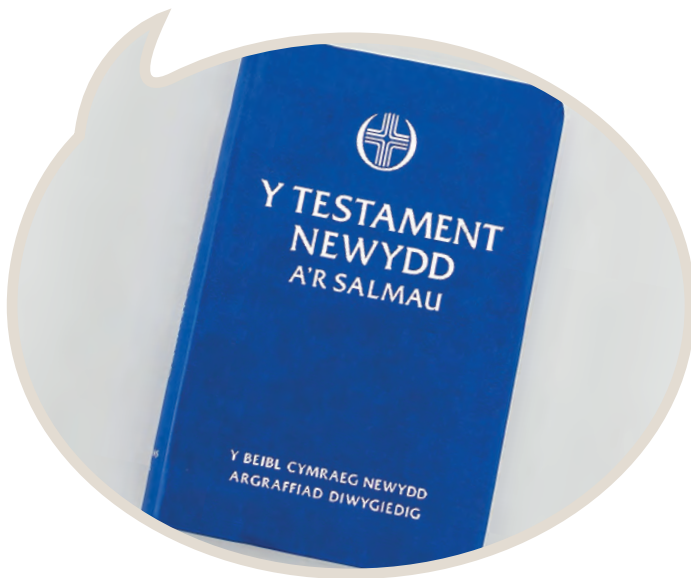
## Conclusion

**W**e started with the aim of learning from the experience of churches and congregations who have been working ecumenically, in a variety of social and religious contexts. We found that we were also able to encourage those who felt that they were 'ploughing a lonely furrow' and that many of their contemporaries didn't share their commitment to Christian unity.



Our readers may like to reflect on their own thoughts and feelings on some of the issues that 'showed up' for us, during our journey:

- The implications of our mutual recognition of each other's Baptism, which is foundational for both our churches.
- The relationship between our understanding of Church, and the possibility of sharing Holy Communion.
- The importance of a local or regional culture shared by the churches. This was highlighted particularly in Wales, by the crucial role of the Welsh language.



- The way in which high-profile symbols can be very significant (St Margaret's Declaration). We might think also of Pope Paul VI presenting his episcopal ring to Archbishop Michael Ramsey in 1966.
- The implications of our different understandings of belonging, based on parish for Catholics, and on membership for the URC.

- The different ways in which churches and ecumenical bodies relate to local and national government.
- The different forms of relationship that are possible between churches: formal and informal, close and less close. The way that these do not always sit easily together, as shown in Cumbria.
- Again from Cumbria, and also from Edinburgh, the experience that working together is easier when there is a strong local focus, which can be lacking in larger towns and cities.
- The observation that there can be phases in ecumenism – periods of enthusiasm and commitment, and periods in which nothing much seems to be happening. Sometimes there is a commitment 'on paper', which doesn't bear fruit at the time, but the agreement in principle can be returned to later, when the time is right.
- The fact that so much, in a local context, can depend on individual members of the clergy – something that could usefully be considered when appointments are being made.

**You may like, as we did, to reflect on your own experience of online worship.**

**How did you feel about your relationship to the rest of the congregation in the church and those participating online?**

**Has the experience changed your feelings about in-person worship since churches reopened?**

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# THE ROMAN CATHOLIC / UNITED REFORMED CHURCH DIALOGUE GROUP



## WHAT CAN WE DO TOGETHER, BEYOND THIS PACK?

### Further study and reflection

- CTE Receptive Ecumenism resources: [www.bit.ly/3BSAyZn](http://www.bit.ly/3BSAyZn)
- Reflections on spiritual writers from our two traditions, including poets, hymn-writers, novelists (see appendix, below)
- Exploring different sorts of prayer: lectio divina, silent prayer, mantra... Ways Into Prayer – Archdiocese of Southwark Spirituality Commission: [www.bit.ly/4gCdGwe](http://www.bit.ly/4gCdGwe)
- Retreat (could incorporate a number of the above)

### One-off activities to do together

- Pulpit swap/congregation swap
- Dispelling myths/preconceptions with a Clergy Question Time
- Pilgrimage: the Holy Land (ethical pilgrimages: [www.bit.ly/402yCFM](http://www.bit.ly/402yCFM); sites associated with saints)
- An Agape Meal, eg liturgy used at Iona Abbey: [www.bit.ly/4gU3MpA](http://www.bit.ly/4gU3MpA)

- Passion Play: Wintershall, Oberammergau, Bolton...
- Visiting specific local church projects: community outreach in different forms; local ministries
- Meet your MP together: Joint Public Issues Team: [www.jpit.uk/can](http://www.jpit.uk/can) (URC/Methodist/Baptist); CBCEW Department for Social Justice [www.bit.ly/4h3PD9u](http://www.bit.ly/4h3PD9u)

### Joint services / mid-week worship

- Joint service, eg CTBI World Day of Prayer: [www.bit.ly/40IGMKv](http://www.bit.ly/40IGMKv); Peace Service: [www.for.org.uk/resources/worship](http://www.for.org.uk/resources/worship)
- Care of creation – joint service of creation; outdoor worship; creation-care events
- Reaffirmation of baptismal vows (annual ecumenical event); see here for ecumenical baptism cards: [www.bit.ly/3BYkWDw](http://www.bit.ly/3BYkWDw)
- Pray as You Go daily meditation resource [www.pray-as-you-go.org](http://www.pray-as-you-go.org)

## Ongoing activities together

- School Chaplaincy (eg additional support needs; pastoral support for staff)
- Hospital chaplaincy/prison chaplaincy /other ecumenical chaplaincies (market /local council/rural/retail...) – coming alongside people under stress /low morale/isolated
- Representation on monthly gatherings of community groups
- One-off, occasional or regular book or film clubs (see appendix for suggestions)

## What are the potential obstacles, and what can we do about them?

- Misunderstanding purpose: meeting together is not about proselytisation or persuasion. It's about listening and appreciating and learning.
- Dependant on personalities and relationships: small steps; meet without an agenda; meet over food
- What if the (new) clergy are not interested, but the congregation are? Talk to Priest/minister about lay members continuing to meet, until the Priest/minister has got to know their parish/pastorate
- Preconceptions about what we can /can't do together: this document attempts to address some of these; we would encourage open listening and informal conversations (see Receptive Ecumenism resources, above)

- Permission from church authorities: not needed unless for formal representation; parishioners/members of both traditions are free to join any group for their own interest and faith development
- Contact your local CTE or denominational ecumenical officer (EO) or National EO

## Sharing buildings

- Some RC and URC congregations share a building. If this is something you would like to explore contact your local ecumenical officer.
- URC: contact via your Synod ecumenical officer or clerk
- RC: local Diocesan directory
- Sharing church buildings informally: [www.bit.ly/4jfy8oy](http://www.bit.ly/4jfy8oy)
- Sharing church buildings more formally: [www.bit.ly/403yfuv](http://www.bit.ly/403yfuv)

# Appendix for Reflections



## Hymns / Songs / Music

- Anne Sardeson, *50 hymns for 50 years* – a good starting point for discussion  
[www.urcshop.co.uk/50-hymns-for-50-years](http://www.urcshop.co.uk/50-hymns-for-50-years)
- Brian Wren  
[www.hymnary.org/person/Wren\\_Brian](http://www.hymnary.org/person/Wren_Brian)
- Fred Kaan  
[www.hymnary.org/person/Kaan\\_Fred](http://www.hymnary.org/person/Kaan_Fred)
- Dominic Grant  
[www.revdsgrant.wordpress.com](http://www.revdsgrant.wordpress.com)
- John Bell / Iona Community  
[www.hymnary.org/person/Bell\\_JohnL](http://www.hymnary.org/person/Bell_JohnL)
- Bernadette Farrell  
[www.hymnary.org/person/Farrell\\_B](http://www.hymnary.org/person/Farrell_B)
- James Quinn  
[www.hymnary.org/person/Quinn\\_James](http://www.hymnary.org/person/Quinn_James)
- Mozart / Beethoven / Haydn's Requiems  
Brahms' German Requiem / Bach's *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit*

## Writers from our traditions

A book group could focus on some of the themes in the resource pack, found in the work of the following authors:

- Lucy Berry (URC poet)  
John Updike (Congregationalist)  
RL Stevenson (Presbyterian)  
Marilynne Robinson (Reformed)  
Corrie Ten Boom (Reformed)  
Graham Greene (RC)  
Evelyn Waugh (RC)  
Gerard Manley Hopkins (RC)  
John Henry Newman (RC)  
GK Chesterton (Anglican – RC)  
CS Lewis (Anglican)

## Books that can help us to reflect together

Mike Berners Lee, *There is No Planet B* (non-fiction; has been used at a RC book club)

Noel Moules: *Fingerprints of Fire and Footprints of Peace* (social justice and activism; 'made me excited again')

## Films to watch together...

The Miracle Club (close friends win a ticket to Lourdes; with Maggie Smith)

Sister Act ('how to use torch songs for worship'; 'light-hearted way into a conversation')

Bruce / Evan Almighty (light-hearted; listening to God / how God works through prayer...)

## ...exploring Citizenship

The Letter ([youtu.be/I3EBHebH17Y](https://youtu.be/I3EBHebH17Y); a documentary of a discussion of Laudato Si')

Don't Look Up ([www.bit.ly/4a8YcO4](http://www.bit.ly/4a8YcO4), a secular film about the impending climate catastrophe)

## ...exploring Christian witness, tying into 'Let's talk about Saints'. Trailers for films that could be watched.

Silence (2016; Jesuit missions in Japan)

[www.bit.ly/3PoAYd1](http://www.bit.ly/3PoAYd1)

The Mission (1986)

[www.bit.ly/40ke6li](http://www.bit.ly/40ke6li)

Romero (1989)

[www.bit.ly/3W87iEP](http://www.bit.ly/3W87iEP)

Chariots of Fire (1980)

[www.bit.ly/4gyQLC1](http://www.bit.ly/4gyQLC1)

Bonhoeffer (2025 release)

[www.bit.ly/41Yzs97](http://www.bit.ly/41Yzs97)

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