

Paper I1

Report to Assembly Executive 2025

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 and to formally receive and commend the report from the third quinquennial of the Roman Catholic/URC Dialogue Group.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 19 Assembly Executive receives <i>Journeying Together</i>, the Roman Catholic/United Reformed Church Dialogue Group resource, give thanks to those who have produced this practical document and commends it for use by Synods, local churches and ecumenical partners.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This report provides an update on the work of the Mission Committee and Mission Team since General Assembly 2024.
Main points	The report covers the areas for which Mission Committee is responsible, namely: Evangelism, Ecumenical Relations, Interfaith Relations, Commitment for Life, Global and Intercultural Ministries, Legacies of Slavery, Racial Justice, Fresh Expressions, Community Engagement, Public Issues, Greenbelt, Net Zero Task Group.
Previous relevant documents	Papers I1, I2, I3, I4 General Assembly 2024 Book of Reports Resolutions 240-249, Record of Assembly 2024.
Consultation has taken place with...	Within the context of the ongoing work of Mission Team and Mission Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	All the work in this report is contained within current budgets.
External (eg ecumenical)	The overwhelming majority of the work outlined in this report is external, detailing significant activity in building and maintaining ecumenical relationships within the UK and globally.

1. Evangelism

1.1 Conversations at the Crossroads: towards new Christian Communities A Gathering of URC Mission and Discipleship Animators

In January 2025 a gathering of 100 URC 'animators' will be taking place, organised by the Church House Mission and Discipleship teams. The first wave of invitations went to the Synod networks of Mission Enablers, Training Officers, Children's and Youth Workers, CRCWs, Special Category Ministers and principals and staff of the Resource Centres for Learning. In addition, invitations have also gone to Moderators, ordained and lay people in pioneering roles and ecumenical guests.

'Conversations' will be a unique time of collaboration and encouragement. It will be an opportunity to respond to the challenges contained in the Theos Report, in the context of the Church Life Review. Building on the decision of the 2024 Assembly Executive to set aside 13 new pioneering posts to establish new worshipping and discipling Christian communities, as well as the 2024 General Assembly Resolution to 'develop presence and engagement with people experiencing poverty and marginalisation', this could well be a seminal moment as we work towards a truly outward looking URC.

1.2 Mission Enablers Network

The network met online in the autumn as an additional meeting ahead of the 'Conversations' gathering. Members of the network continue to draw support, encouragement and inspiration from one another, despite their roles looking quite different.

1.3 Webinars

Two 'FaithTalk', everyday evangelism in the URC, webinars were held in 2024. These were provided as a relaxed forum to encourage people to share stories around their faith. The planning group represents a broad spectrum of the Church. The webinars will continue in 2025.

1.4 Webpage

The URC has a dedicated evangelism page which is now live on the website and is updated regularly: www.urch.org.uk/your-faith/evangelism-in-the-urch/

1.5 Fresh Expressions

In August 2024 we said goodbye to Linda Rayner, the URC's long-serving Fresh Expressions Co-ordinator. We give thanks for Linda's many years of service and for the expertise which she brought to the denomination. In line with the need to reduce the central budget the Fresh Expressions post will not be replaced and Linda's duties have been shared amongst the Mission and Discipleship teams.

2. Interfaith

2.1 Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territory (IOPT)

Gaza resolutions update

The Mission Committee report on Gaza was thoroughly debated by General Assembly. Its members passed all the resolutions with a few useful, technical amendments.

A summary of all resolutions on IOPT from the 2016, 2019, 2021 and 2024 General Assemblies is available, as is a short FAQs that may be useful for those who may be

asked questions on the URC's thinking on and approach to IOPT. These can be requested by emailing interfaith@urc.org.uk.

Deepening local Interfaith relations

The 2024 Gaza Resolutions (41 and 42) focussed on deepening local interfaith relations. There is a question on how the URC can best encourage local members, congregations, and Synods to reach out in solidarity and friendship to other faith groups. Work is being carried out on a simple programme of encouragement with ideas on how to reach out, such as *#BeMyFriend*. This programme is in an early phase of design and will encourage deepened interfaith friendships.

Raising awareness of IOPT issues

The 2024 Resolution 44 encouraged learning and building deeper awareness on a range of issues including antisemitism, Balfour and Christian Zionism. A programme of online learning (IOPT IN FOCUS) is being rolled out after consultation with various stakeholders. There is a view that this programme should ideally be linked in some way to worship. The URC's online congregation, yoURChurch (www.yourchurch.uk) appears to be both well placed and interested in supporting a wider programme of education. Speakers who have thus far agreed to lead sessions include Charlotte Marshall (Sabeel-Kairos), the Revd Philip Woods (PCUSA) and Dr Atif Imtiaz (University of Bradford).

Ecumenical Roundtable on the impact on Inter Faith Relations of the Gaza-Israel War

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) organised the ecumenical Roundtable on this challenging topic which took place at the end of July 2024. Speakers Phil Rosenberg of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and Ibrahim Mogra, Imam and former Deputy General Secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) expressed anxiety about appearing in a predominantly Christian forum, but both were deeply complimentary of proceedings.

For Muslims, the war takes up enormous emotional space, leaving little for other important issues like the cost-of-living crisis and the climate emergency. Phil Rosenberg spoke about how the massive spike in antisemitism began immediately after 7 October, which for Jews in the UK speaks to the deeply rooted antisemitism here.

CTBI Deputy General Secretary (and URC minister), Peter Colwell has commented that the roundtable was one of the most nerve-wracking events he had ever organised. But he was pleased with the honesty, candour, and sensitivity of both speakers, as well as the contributions from the audience.

Nicola Brady, General Secretary of CTBI drew on her experiences in Northern Ireland about the importance of avoiding labels like 'terrorist', which tend to shut down conversation and routes to understanding different perspectives.



The Gaza-Israel catastrophe has proved challenging for UK interfaith relations. The conflict has played a significant role in stoking Islamophobia, which most observers suggest has played into the anti-refugee rioting. Arguably the worst moment was the attempt to burn down a hotel housing refugees. We had reports of church members not driving through potentially affected riot zones for safety concerns. We have heard of enormous pressure on prison chaplains, who are expected to be 'experts' in dealing with a vast array of complex socio-political issues, with prisons being a microcosm of the problems in wider society.

The Islamophobia resource being developed by CTBI (following on from the antisemitism resource) had stalled a little but is now back on track – we look forward to its publication in the near future.

Muslim commentators are grateful that CTBI is able to raise these difficult issues in an interfaith context and are hopeful for the new resource which CTBI has resumed working on. This speaks to the value that the churches have among other faiths in the UK.

The Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ)

Nathan Eddy, Co-Director of CCJ and URC minister, has spoken at several events on antisemitism and has recommended a study of the resources offered by the Communities Security Trust (CST): <https://cst.org.uk/research/cst-publications?> The Inter Faith Fund has been generous in its support of the CCJ in their work to improve awareness on antisemitism in the UK.

Nathan Eddy, has been asked to write a prayer and reflection on behalf of the URC, taking seriously the way many Israelis view 7 October as its own, unique event which, as already outlined, has affected many Jews living in the UK. Nathan Eddy has been elected to the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) Council, representing the URC. Now that John Bradbury has finished his term, CPCE will find Nathan's experience in Jewish-Christian relations particularly helpful.

Quakers accept the term 'Apartheid'

The Middle East Programme Manager for the Quakers in Britain has outlined the outcome of a three-month discernment process via 'Meetings for Sufferings' by which the Quakers have come to an agreement to name the situation in occupied Palestine (OPT) as 'apartheid'.

The process was not easy given the widely divergent views not only on the situation but also on the core role of the Quakers either as 'prophet' or 'reconciler'. They discerned that the Quakers had a moral and spiritual obligation to speak truth to power, and that by refusing to heed the call by Palestinians Christians along with the findings of the International Court of Justice, advisory opinion would be deemed a failure to accurately describe the legal situation as it pertains to the occupied territory.

The URC has thus far not taken the step of naming the situation in the OPT as 'apartheid'.

International developments

In November 2024, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants citing alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former defence minister Yoav Gallant and Hamas commander Mohammed Deif. The following month Amnesty International accused the Israeli Government of

committing genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza war. The human rights group said its conclusion was based on 'dehumanising and genocidal statements' by Israeli officials, digital images and witness testimony and must serve as 'a wake-up call' to the international community. Israel strongly denies the accusations.

In the wake of the worsening situation in the region, the lack of progress towards a peaceful settlement and the continuing unwillingness of the Israeli Government to abide by international law, the following resolutions passed at the 2024 General Assembly have taken on even more significance. They are summarised below:

Resolution 39 – **General Assembly calls for an immediate, permanent ceasefire** between Hamas and the Israeli Defence Force, and for the immediate de-escalation of hostilities regionally.

Resolution 40 – **General Assembly calls on the UK Government...to cease arms sales** to Israel and to monitor existing embargoes on arms sales to nations...supporting Hamas militarily.

Resolution 45 – In the wake of continuing and worsening breaches of international law...**General Assembly requests URC Trusts to avoid knowingly investing in Israeli registered companies** until Israel once again abides by international law.

2.2 Inter Faith Network (IFN)

The loss of the IFN is being felt keenly, especially at this fraught time for interfaith relations. The board still needs to attend to various issues, such as the final accounts and the problematic Wikipedia page.

The board has asked Angela Rayner, Deputy Prime Minister, for an idea of what the government's direction will be and has received no response yet. However, the issue of a replacement for IFN was raised at ChurchWorks, which the URC has just joined and where Steve Summers represents the URC. Encouragingly, it is on the agenda for the new government.

Harriet Crabtree (former Executive Director of IFN) has voluntarily offered to finalise details, and Interfaith Week plans are underway.

Phil Champagne from the Freedom and Belief Forum has asked that CTBI's Churches' Forum for inter-religious relations (CFIRR) be represented among a wider group that is asking what might replace the IFN. Concern has been expressed that all four nations be represented.

The plight of Christians in Nigeria is of concern, and also those in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria. There is also concern over how artificial intelligence might impact freedom of religion.

2.3 Upcoming Churches Forum for Inter-religious Relations (CFIRR)

The 2025 in-person gathering will be held in Belfast, where there are ongoing conversations between the Northern Ireland interfaith forum and the Dublin interfaith forum. There is useful cross border sharing, with joint events on topics such as training, health, education, policing, racism and religiously motivated hate-crime, but with two historically very different contexts. CFIRR will meet at

Duncairn, North Belfast, which was an area of deprivation and Presbyterian in a predominantly Nationalist area and is now an arts and crafts centre.

3. Commitment for Life

3.1 Lay Preachers' Event at Luther King House

In the 2023 Annual Church Returns Questionnaire, Commitment for Life (CFL) asked congregations to indicate whether they would be likely to host a CFL service of worship. CFL received hundreds of affirmative replies. This interest in CFL was most heartening, but did pose a significant logistical challenge. CFL has very little capacity within the team to lead services of worship, yet we know that face-to-face contact on a Sunday morning in the context of worship is critical for the ongoing sustainability of CFL. How were we to address this (most gratifying) demand?

The idea was put forward that we engage with Education and Learning, who then suggested we approach Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher students and graduates. We ran with this idea, and in partnership with Luther King House created a *CFL Lay Preachers' Training Event* for September 2024. The event was, we are happy to report, over-subscribed. Our small team's programme was underpinned by the respected theologian and Northern College Tutor, the Revd Dr Graham Adams. It focussed on creatively 'leaning into' the preaching interests and strengths of participants. The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale offered invaluable input. The event was unanimously praised by lay preachers who attended. Commitment for Life has already invited the trained lay preachers to lead CFL services. Another training event will be held for lay preachers in 2025.

3.2 Gaza Appeal

CLF has been supporting Palestinians through its Christian Aid partners, raising over £20,000 through its Gaza Appeal and adding to this amount by giving £50,000 from reserves for this vital, life-saving work. Our efforts have been strengthened by the resolutions taken by General Assembly in 2024, and we thank Mission Committee for its principled stand, rooted in international humanitarian law.

The URC is partnering with the Methodist Church to launch the Gaza and Lebanon Justice Appeal (see QR code). Our URC church partner the National Evangelical Church in Syria and Lebanon will be part beneficiaries of this appeal. The Revd Joseph Kassab sends regular updates on how the conflicts are affecting the Christian communities in the region.



At the time of writing the ceasefire in Lebanon has been broken over 60 times by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). Over 780 people have been killed on the West Bank since October 2023. All the while, the situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate. The policies of the Israeli Government lead inexorably to unbearably awful living conditions for Palestinians in Gaza. Children are being killed at a horrifying average rate of 30 per day. The former head of the IDF, Minister Moshe Ya'alon describes the situation as 'ethnic cleansing' and has been informed by commanders on the ground that Israeli troops are committing war crimes. The Church's calls to successive UK governments to demand an immediate ceasefire have not been backed up by significant government curbs on the sale of UK-manufactured weapons and weapon components, nor the

cessation of RAF reconnaissance flights out of Cyprus in support of the IDF. During Advent the URC backed a petition organised by Embrace the Middle East calling on the UK Government to suspend all arms sales to Israel.

3.3 **Wessex Big Day Out**

We are grateful to the Wessex Synod for their invitation to CFL to share in their Big Day Out. The video can be watched here: <https://youtu.be/xxneTkTEFpQ>

3.4 **Mersey Does Mercy event for Commitment for Life**

We are also grateful to Mersey Synod for hosting CFL for a special event focussed on our global justice work.

3.5 **Legacies of the Transatlantic Slave Trade**

CFL is working with Global and Intercultural Ministries to determine how best CFL might work in support of the church's reparations commitments. It seems one option may be for CFL to take on an additional partner region for a determined period. For example, CFL may partner with the Churches' Reparations Action Forum (CRAF) in Jamaica for a period of four years in which time a quarter of the funds that are normally shared through Christian Aid are used to support the work of CRAF.

Assuming total CFL donations (conservatively speaking) of £200,000 per annum (pa), a total of £150,000 would go to Christian Aid. Shared across four global partners (rather than the current three), this would mean each global partner would receive £37,500 pa for a period of four years, assuming no significant drop in donations. We would work with CRAF to direct to specific projects that fit with the ethos of CFL. The hope is that the additional focus might encourage more engagement with CFL.

These plans and figures are for discussion and illustrative purposes only and may be subject to change.

3.6 **Myanmar Appeal**

The URC has a long and close relationship with the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar (PCM): <https://urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/global-and-intercultural-ministries/global-partnerships/>. We are represented on the PCM Partners Roundtable, a gathering of global churches and CWM, offering prayer and practical support and solidarity with the Church, particularly since the military coup in February 2021. The PCM's response to the subsequent crises has been deeply moving: offering shelter for thousands of displaced people; establishing informal medical centres and primary schools in local churches; and offering pastoral care to young men fleeing conscription.

In August 2024 we launched an appeal for the PCM to our local churches, which we made by email to Secretaries. We were not able to use social media and the website due to the potential dangers this could pose to the Church in Myanmar. We have been delighted by the response of our churches: more than 50 churches have contributed a total of over £16,000. This amount will be matched by a historic fund, ringfenced for the Church in SE Asia.

3.7 Ukraine Appeal

Following a resolution from the East Midlands Synod to the 2023 General Assembly, Mission Committee was asked to investigate how the URC might offer support for Ukrainian refugees in Ukraine. Mission Committee agreed to work with our URC ecumenical partner churches in Hungary and the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine. Our partners are heavily invested in



providing aid for Ukrainian refugee projects. With strong support from John Bradbury, based on his work with the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe, it was agreed that the URC Programme Officer for Global Justice & Partnerships, Kevin Snyman, would visit Hungary and Ukraine. The purpose of the trip was to build our ecumenical relationships, specifically in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, and to bring back stories and media assets that could be used to share an appeal for URC support. The film of the visit can be found here: https://youtu.be/IK9s_v4ebPU?si=G9YYixklmHKKYnME and we ask that you share it along with the affiliated donations page.



3.8 Finance

The CFL Reference Group agreed to allowing a percentage of the URC portion of income (12%) to go towards the costs of paying the Programme Officer, which at the 2023 rate amounts to around £6,200 pa. This news was received with appreciation by those tasked with reducing Assembly expenditure given the constraints on income increasingly felt by the denomination. An application has been approved to increase the CFL Administrative Assistant's hours by half a day per week to cope with the increased demand for CFL resourcing and services.

Taken in the round the income for CFL along with its additional appeals is holding up well. We are moving to a new phase for CFL which will incorporate new ways of global justice engagement with the denomination which includes targeted appeals such as the ones for Gaza, Myanmar and Ukraine. This should raise the profile of CFL and more importantly its ability to have an impact with partner countries.

3.9 Remote working

From November 2024 the CFL Programme Officer is no longer based at Church House but working remotely. Having a Church House staff member located in Northern Synod presents opportunities for new engagement not only for CFL, but also for Interfaith and other Church House staff activities and engagement.

4. Ecumenical

4.1 The Roman Catholic/URC Dialogue Group is coming to the end of its third quinquennial. The theme of the last years has been 'Journeying Together', with the group making several visits to look at ecumenism in local contexts: in Milton Keynes, in Cumbria, in Cardiff and in Edinburgh, as well as journeying online together during the Covid-19 pandemic. Instead of a conventional report, the group has put together a practical Resource Pack for local RC and URC churches looking to working more closely together, as a small group resource and to encourage other activity. The group is planning this stage's final journey together to Rome, where the resource will be received by the RC Dicastery for the

Promotion of Christian Unity and by officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

Assembly Executive is asked to receive the Resource Pack and commend it to Synods, local churches and ecumenical partners in the resolution accompanying this Mission Committee report. The Resource Pack can be accessed here:

<https://urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/ecumenical-relationships/interdenominational-dialogue/>.

- 4.2 URC Ecumenical Officers (EOs)** met together in person at Churches Together in England's (CTE) 'All Ecumenical Representatives Conference' in September. This was a valuable time for encouragement and support. We also gather once a year online. We encourage Synods to ensure that vacancies are filled promptly, and that paid roles are considered where possible. There is a huge range in the effectiveness of our EOs according to the time they have available for the role. Mission and Ministries will be meeting in January to consider the next three applications for ecumenical posts.
- 4.3 Methodist/URC Liaison Group**
In November, this group had its first in-person meeting in several years. We were hosted by the Lutheran Church in Great Britain where we received a warm welcome. The main focus of discussion was around supporting ministers and regional leaders in better understanding of one another's traditions and structures. As part of supporting better working relationships at a local level, the Group has looked at the differences between elders and stewards, as well as considering how URC 'call' and Methodist 'stationing' operate in practice.
- 4.4 Christian Council for Unity (Church of England)**
We continue to be represented on this group, which offers valuable insight into the Church of England's ecumenical working. The bilateral URC/Church of England Contact Group is still awaiting the appointment of a Bishop and so has not met for several years now.
- 4.5 Churches Together in England (CTE)**
The URC's Evangelism and Ecumenical Officer, Lindsey Brown is on the planning group for the annual Learning to be Missionary Disciples conference in November. The 2024 event was a very broad and inspiring gathering, on the theme of 'Beyond the Familiar'. Two members of URC Youth attended. Lindsey also continues to be active on the CTE 'Living with Diversity group' (working on better ways for CTE members to work together with difference) and took part in a presentation on the group's journey so far at CTE Enabling Group. This will be repeated at CTE Forum in March 2025. She is part of the team for the New Ecumenical Officers training in January and continues to be active in CTE Group for Evangelisation.
- 4.6 National Ecumenical Officers** from the Church of England, the Methodist Church and the Baptist Union, who have a close involvement with LEPs, continue to meet regularly to discuss individual and broader issues that have been brought to them, identifying patterns and offering support.

4.7 European ecumenism

The URC has recently withdrawn from the Council of European Churches (CEC). The reason was partly budgetary but also reflects the view of the URC and other UK ecumenical partners that CEC is less relevant to our wider ecumenical work. We remain committed to our relationships with churches in Europe through the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). As already covered in this report, URC minister, Nathan Eddy was elected to CPCE Council, following the end of John Bradbury's term as a member of the CPCE Council and CPCE Executive President. We continue to engage with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) Europe, attending their annual conferences. We have strong links with the Evangelical Church of the Palatinate (Pfalz) and are developing closer connections, in conjunction with Wessex Synod, with the United Protestant Church of France, including establishing a three-way Friendship group. Deputy General Secretary (Mission), Philip Brooks attended the Pfalz Synod in November 2024. The Moderator of General Assembly, Tim Meadows, attended the 400th Synod of the Waldensian Church in Italy in August 2024. Susan Durber continues to serve as World Council of Churches (WCC) President, Europe and Sarah Moore is an active member of WCC Central Council.

5. Public issues

5.1 Assisted dying

The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill [affecting England and Wales] rightly attracted much media coverage in October and November. We endeavoured to represent the position of URC in the public square, while recognising that within the URC were people seeking to deepen their understanding through resources and conversation. We received communications from URC members, ministers and moderators about the issue, which expressed a range of views, concerns and uncertainty or sought guidance, and we tried to reflect this sensitively in our wider communication.

It was clear from the outset that this was a deeply emotive and complex issue, worthy of great care and nuance, although this in itself caused some frustration for a few members who wished us to be more forthright.

We worked with public issues colleagues from the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union, the Church of Scotland (the Scottish Parliament also has assisted dying on its agenda), the Church of England, the Church in Wales, Cytûn and the Salvation Army to explore the issue and practical details.

On the URC website, we shared information from various sources, including the URC's own work in 2007 and material prepared by the Methodist Church and Church of Scotland, with whom we often work ecumenically through the Joint Public Issues Team. We encouraged individuals and congregations to explore these documents and videos, and to consider writing to their MP about the issue.

Some denominational representatives and leaders of other faiths signed an open letter, organised by the Church of England, which was strongly against the Assisted Dying Bill. We chose not to sign this: although in principle it was broadly in line with the URC General Assembly's resolution on assisted dying (2007). This is because we were concerned that the letter lacked the nuance and spirit of that work.

We released a response, www.urc.org.uk/terminally-ill-adults-bill/, which explained some of the impact of the vote in the UK Parliament on 30 November. This restated the URC's 2007 General Assembly resolution, while urging MPs to exercise diligence and thorough scrutiny in subsequent committee stages, debates and voting. The Worship, Faith and Order Committee will begin work on the potential impact for the URC, should the Bill eventually come into law.

5.2 Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT)

The JPIT work plan for 2024-2025 includes preparing for a justice conference in June 2025. At time of writing, the venue has yet to be confirmed, but we hope to be in Leeds, to facilitate a large in-person gathering of justice seekers for a day of workshops, conversation and inspiration.

Our Campaigns and Church Engagement Officer (CCEO), Nathan Maguire, decided to return to local church ministry in early January. We hope a new CCEO will be in post very soon, to continue Nathan's excellent work in many areas, including an overhaul of the JPIT website, www.jpit.uk to promote wider engagement and making the large range of resources on the website more accessible to a growing number of users.

Another of our priorities for 2024-2025 is growing youth and young adult engagement and the provision of relevant materials. Working alongside our URC Youth Moderator and Youth Moderator Elect, plus our attendance at the "Junction '25" young adults' event in January and URC Youth Assembly in March, are essential parts of this process of listening and empowering.

The Constituency Action Network (CAN) was launched in September 2024. Several JPIT staff members are supporting local churches in Scotland, Wales and England in praying for and developing a meaningful relationship with their MP that will positively influence decisions at national level that impact on neighbourhoods, the UK and the world. We currently have about a dozen URC congregations involved and would like to double this number in the next few months. More information may be found at www.jpit.uk/can.

5.3 Churches' Commission for Migration in Europe (CCME) conference

John East from the Darwen Asylum-seeker and Refugee Enterprise travelled by train to Frankfurt in early December to join the CCME conference. As our URC representative, he joined Simeon Mitchell, who was there on behalf of the Methodist Church of Great Britain. The aim of the conference was to explore how churches can speak into the policy of 'offshoring' (offshore processing) of asylum seekers in some countries of continental Europe. The group reflected on the experience of UK churches and other organisations who had been campaigning around the Rwanda Bill and its potential impact. John also shared his experience of local churches welcoming refugees and was introduced to a large-scale welcoming programme run by the Church in Frankfurt.



6. Community engagement

Samara Andrews (Administrator, Community Engagement and Public Issues) and Steve Summers (Head of Community Engagement) moved roles from the Discipleship team to join the Mission team and Joint Public Issue Team in June 2024.

Key responsibilities and areas of work have included:

- producing two editions of the Church and Community Engagement Newsletter, packed full of information, resources and means of encouragement to enable churches and disciples to be even more present and engaged within their local neighbourhood and with communities as an expression of God's love and mission.
- being Co-Secretary to the Accreditations sub-committee, overseeing and enabling Church Related Community Work (CRCW), Special Category Ministry and pioneer visits, reviews and applications in Chester, Oxford, Northampton, Lincoln, Sunderland, Leicester, Swansea, Huddersfield, Dovercourt, Coventry and Manchester. Plus, supporting CRCWs and CRCW ministry.
- working alongside colleagues to co-organise the URC at Greenbelt programme, Church Buildings and Mission webinars, Constituency Action Network, Mapping new Christian Communities, the Conversations at the Crossroads event, Rural Ministry network, Liminal ministry and chaplaincy and the Dreams & realities: *In the Thick of It 2* event, 15-16 May 2025 to facilitate conversations between people with lived experience of different marginal contexts.
- responding to General Assembly 2024 Resolution 53 that requests that Synods, Assembly Committees and Task Groups consider the implications of the North Western Synod report, 'A Church with people at the margins' and working alongside the Church Life Steering Group to review the feasibility of establishing a Community Enabling Fund.
- becoming a panel member of the Legacy Fund, Mission Enabling Fund and Community Project Awards.
- URC representation with organisations such as ChurchWorks, the National Estates Churches Network, Faith in Affordable Housing and the Churches Together in England Urban Mission Forum.

7. Greenbelt

Preparations for 2025 are well under way. An advertisement for volunteers is now live on the *URC website*.

As in 2022, 2023, and 2024, we will be running a family café called yoURCafe as an excellent 'shop window' into aspects of the mission and discipleship of the URC. We will retain familiar elements such as a creative arts installation in our tent, assembled from a nationwide call for submissions from URC members. We are planning a special hybrid Sunday service in partnership with yoURChurch, the URC's online congregation.

There will be innovation, as we add some world cuisines on our menu, thanks to the culinary skills of volunteers from Lodge Road URC, and we will have a significant collaboration with another Greenbelt partner organisation that specialises in the alleviation of poverty. This necessitates another great change for 2025: we will yet again be enlarging our tent.

8. Caring for creation

8.1 Net zero synod reporting

Responding to the General Assembly (2024) resolution 36, which asked each Synod to give an annual report on its progress in reducing its carbon footprint, we have been working on a reporting template for each Synod to use.

The initial draft was suggested by the Net Zero Task Group, and further consultation with Synod Moderators, clerks, property officers and the Green Apostles network has led to the production of a reporting template to be updated and submitted by 31 March each year.

The report includes a request to share good news stories from the synod: good practice, events and successes that can be shared nationally to help inspire and encourage further action to reduce the URC's carbon footprint.

8.2 Climate change – youth rights and wellbeing

Staff at the World Council of Churches have drawn our attention to a growing number of 'test cases' in courts, where fossil fuel company bosses are facing litigation for the physical and/or psychological harm being caused to particular groups (including children and young people) because of climate change.

As a Church that deeply cares for creation, has made brave and pioneering decisions around divesting from fossil fuels and highly values children and young people, we are listening to and learning more about this new and hugely difficult method of seeking to influence change in large, powerful industries.

8.3 Preparing for climate disruption

While continuing to reduce our carbon footprint as part of creation care, we are also mindful that areas of the world are already severely affected by extremes in weather and a shifting climate, including flooding in the UK.

We are at an early stage of exploring how we can learn from our Global partners how they are responding to severe challenges, including how local churches have been leading the way in the provision of food sources, healthcare and education in difficult environments. A goal of this work would be to build resilience and preparedness in our communities as a missional activity alongside other ways of tackling climate change.

9. Global and Intercultural Ministries (GIM)

9.1 Legacies of Slavery (LoS)

Anti-racism training

Anthony Reddie delivered the final session of centrally organised anti-racism training at the end of July before we paused to take stock.

Members of the GIM team are working to ascertain how many more centrally organised sessions might be needed to cover the initially mandated groups/individuals. They are also exploring strategies for *who* might deliver the training, and *how*, and will work on putting together a 'crib-sheet' to support potential trainers.

The GIM Secretary, Karen Campbell has met with the Synod Moderators to discuss the need to hand the training on. The GIM Administrator is updating the database so that synods can see who has received the training, and who is still outstanding.

Finances

This was identified as a major concern as the LoS task group was continuing its mandated work, but without any clear budget being earmarked to support the emerging proposals. General Assembly approved a proposal from Finance to create a LoS Fund, to be started with a central contribution, and with all synods being encouraged to contribute as they feel able. The aim is to establish a fund of at least £1m. Communications are now ongoing between the Mission Committee, URC Finance and the Synod Moderators/Trust Officers to start the process by which Synods can decide how they wish to contribute.

Regional Repairing Justice Proposals

The sub-group has met three times since General Assembly, clarifying the proposals to develop/support mentoring of young Black men in (up to) four locations with significant links to transatlantic slavery in Northern England, Southern England, Scotland and Wales. Thought is being given about how to identify the locations, how the related mentoring posts can be managed and overseen, the potential relationship between the posts and the URC, and the role that external partners might play in the development of the projects. The new funding proposals outlined above may play a significant part in determining how this work proceeds.

Global Repairing Justice Proposals

Again, this area of work is awaiting clarity regarding the amount of funding which might ultimately be available. That said, the URC has already expressed interest in supporting the development of New Free Villages in Jamaica. In addition, Gordon Cowans (Churches' Reparations Action Forum – CRAF), Lisa Adjei (Sankofa Collective), and the GIM Secretary have had further conversations about initiating a 'positive identity and belonging' project focused on Jamaica and the UK initially, then drawing in participants from Africa (possibly Ghana) once the relevant contacts are established. As covered earlier in this report, Commitment for Life is also looking to see how it might support CRAF.

The Ecumenical Jamaica Pilgrimage

We have received two short films documenting the pilgrimage which took place in April 2024 and included the URC, Church of Scotland, Scottish Episcopal Church, and Christian Aid. One film specifically relates to the delivery of the *URC Apology* by GA Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson; the other documents the *Pilgrimage* more generally. Both films capture the impactful way in which the URC apology and commitment to mutual journeying have been received.

Ecumenical Working

The GIM Secretary continues to serve on the Methodist Church's Reparations Group and contribute to conversations both in the UK and globally.

9.2 Global Work – Partners in Mission

The Revd Melanie Smith and the Revd Mark Meatcher returned from Fiji in July 2024. We are thankful that both have taken up new positions in West Midlands Synod. Thanks are due to the Revd Paul Whittle and the Revd George Watt for their support in enabling this transition.

We continue to face challenges regarding the two remaining Partner in Mission (PiM) relationships, and these are a priority for the GIM Secretary.

We are delighted that the Revd John McNeil Scott has taken on the convenorship of the Management Group pertaining to PiM Yufen Chen (Thames North). John embodies a long history with the Taiwanese Fellowship in London with/through whom Yufen does much of her work. We anticipate that his insights will be invaluable.

9.3 Global Work – Council for World Mission (CWM)

The CWM Assembly took place from 12-19 June in South Africa, with URC delegates Karen Campbell (GIM Secretary); Lindsey Brown (Evangelism and Ecumenical Officer, formerly a trustee of CWM); the Revd Tim Meadows (then Moderator-Elect of URC General Assembly); and Zeerak Shahbaz (Youth Delegate).

The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson (then Moderator of URC General Assembly) was also present and invited to preach for the main act of public worship, broadcast globally. Heather Moore (Moderator of URC Youth Assembly) was part of the international team of young people serving as stewards.

The Assembly was immediately preceded by:

CWM Annual Members' Meeting (AMM)

Karen Campbell was the URC representative. The AMM oversees the business of CWM – a space for input and feedback from the member churches.

Women's Pre-Assembly

Karen Campbell was a thematic speaker on the theme of 'Gender Justice'.

The Onesimus Project Core Group

Following her input at the AMM and Assembly, the GIM Secretary has been invited to serve on the Onesimus Project Core Group, 2024-2028. The Onesimus Project is a broadening of the original CWM 'Legacies of Slavery Project' to cover four themes: Legacies of Slavery; Modern Day Slavery; Education for Liberation; and Transformative Ecumenism.

CWM's 'A New Face' Programme

This saw a delegation of women from around the globe gather in the UK to explore issues relating to 'Women & Leadership', hosted by the URC at various points. The URC input included a meeting with women holding varied leadership positions in the Church (including Church House personnel and the Thames North Synod Clerk); worship, lunch and conversations hosted by High Cross URC, Tottenham, drawing in women from Upper Clapton URC; and the opportunity to meet with Tessa Henry-Robinson, Immediate-Past Moderator of URC General Assembly. Many thanks to all who were involved in organising/hosting.

9.4 Global Work – Global Partnerships

The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK)

A new partnership with the PROK became official with the signing of an MOU on 26 June 2024. The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith has agreed to act as the URC's

main point of contact with both the PROK and other URC contacts and partners in Korea.

Global Partnerships Review

GIM has begun a review of all existing URC global partnerships – including those overseen by Assembly staff, and those being maintained by synods. The aim is to get a clearer picture of which relationships are ‘live’, which might warrant greater energy, and discern how to support the relationships more meaningfully.

Global Subscriptions

The URC is a member of various global ecumenical bodies, including the Council for World Mission (CWM), World Council of Churches (WCC), and World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), demonstrating our commitment both through practical engagement and financial contributions. In light of the URC’s budgetary constraints, we have reviewed our commitments, advising various bodies of a reduction in our financial contributions even while managing to create a small amount of slack to support new missional relationships, creating an overall 10 per cent saving in ecumenical subscriptions. Our commitment to global partnerships remains undiminished.

9.5. URC General Assembly 2024

GIM Secretary, Karen Campbell, served as Chaplain to the Moderator of GA alongside the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo. Karen and Stephen were keen to ensure that GA worship and Bible studies tied in with the ongoing URC priorities of Legacies of Slavery and Anti-Racism. This commitment included:

- Inviting Bible Studies led by the Revd Dr Gordon Cowans (Churches’ Reparations Action Forum [Jamaica]); the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar (former GIM Secretary; former CWM Mission Secretary [Caribbean and Europe]); and Dr Lisa Adjei (Christian Aid; founder of Sankofa Collective).
- Drawing on the musical talents of David Williams, black musician and URC member
- Commissioning artwork by young, black artist, Tariq Westcarr, who grew up in the URC.

Feedback from General Assembly has been overwhelmingly positive.