

# Paper I1

## Report to General Assembly 2025

### Mission Committee

#### Basic information

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<b>Action required</b>	For information.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	This report provides an update on the work of the Mission Committee and the Mission Team.
<b>Main points</b>	The report covers the areas for which Mission Committee is responsible, namely: Evangelism, Ecumenism, Public Issues and Community Engagement, Interfaith Relations, Greenbelt, Commitment for Life, Global and Intercultural Ministries, and Net Zero Task Group.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Mission Committee Report to General Assembly 2023 Mission Report to Assembly Executive 2025.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The Mission Committee works in regular consultation with other Assembly Committees and related staff.

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	All within current budgets.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	This report provides an update on many areas of ecumenical cooperation.

#### Introduction

Mission Committee's stated brief is to seek to encourage growth in evangelism, discipleship and witness by:

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

This report provides an overview of each area for which the Mission Committee is responsible.

## **Evangelism**

### **FaithTalk Webinars**

Inspired by Mersey Synod, this is a denominational series with a growing momentum. At the spring FaithTalk webinar, Trey Hall, director for evangelism and growth at the Methodist Church, led a session looking at the role of prayer in evangelism. The second webinar of 2025 will take place on 23 September at 7pm and will also feature a special guest. The webinars are intended to be a relaxed forum to encourage people to share stories around their faith. The planning group represents a broad spectrum of the Church. Please do share dates in your Synods and among your networks.

### **Evangelism Webpage**

This is a new development on the URC website and is updated regularly: ([www.urc.org.uk/your-faith/evangelism-in-the-urc](http://www.urc.org.uk/your-faith/evangelism-in-the-urc)). It includes various Synod initiatives and strategies and a wide range of other resources to use locally. The recommendation is to tailor what you do to your local situation and the people you have available: there is no 'one size fits all' for evangelism! The starting point (other than prayer) will almost always be about welcome and growing relationships.

### **Partnership with Ugly Duckling Charity/Table Talk**

The Mission and Discipleship teams are working with the Ugly Duckling Charity to produce branded coasters for use as conversation starters at church and Synod events. The coasters have thought-provoking questions on them to encourage deepening relationships (and a link to new daily questions) and could be used as a pre-evangelisation tool. Every URC church will be sent a small sample. Churches who wish to order more will only need to pay for the cost of postage and packing. This is an exciting initiative, funded by the Discipleship Development Fund. Churches are encouraged to use the coasters creatively.

### **Mission Enablers Network**

The network meets regularly both online and in-person. Members of the network draw support, encouragement and inspiration from one another, despite their roles varying considerably, according to context. There are currently several Synods which are under-represented. Synods are encouraged to take an active part in the network, which provides mutual support and the sharing of creative ideas.

### **Conversations at the Crossroads: Towards new Christian communities**

*A gathering of URC mission and discipleship animators*

In January 2025, 100 URC 'animators' were gathered by the Church House Mission and Discipleship Teams. The first wave of invitations went to the Synod networks of Mission Enablers, Training Officers, Children and Youth Officers, CRCWs, Special Category Ministers and principals and staff of the Resource Centres for Learning. In addition, invitations went to Moderators, ordained and lay people in pioneering roles, and ecumenical guests.

To have this rich mix all together provided a unique opportunity for sharing and learning from one another, making new connections, and understanding the Church from different perspectives. There was also a more focused purpose – to explore current practice and to learn from ongoing challenges and success stories, in order to establish new Christian communities. The conversations were guided for us by an independent facilitator in mission and pioneering, Dr Nigel Pimlott.

There was much discussion of our use of language. New Christian communities could be anything from a full church plant, a mission project, or a fresh expression. It could be a light-touch model, with little formal structure, to a full-blown constituted unincorporated association or Local Ecumenical Partnership. Those gathered sought to hear others' experiences of establishing and nurturing a range of Christian communities with the opportunity to discuss what works, and what can get in the way.

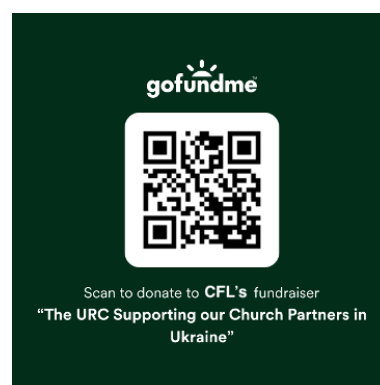
There were a number of ecumenical guests present, who immersed themselves in the table groups and downtime, so that they could contribute to the conversations and reflect back some of what they heard. Three of them joined a panel discussion, during which emerged some very straightforward takeaways, including the overriding need for prayer, and for partnership. One very successful example began with a small prayer group nearly 20 years ago, and the faithful, prayerful commitment of that first group has since borne extraordinary fruit. The conversation concluded by encouraging the Church in 'midwifing' new communities but also highlighting the need for palliative care for some, and for nurturing and/or reinvigorating others.

The conversations were recorded in many ways, through a graphic artist, through Slido polls, feedback sessions, gathered notes on flipcharts and post-its. Our facilitator also captured his sense of the main principles and themes that had emerged, which included the need to be intentional; to develop and deepen relationships; to increase evangelism; to animate local change with central support; to embed 'both/and' thinking; to lessen organisational burdens and to take more risks. He identified some themes which he heard, around death and resurrection; each of us taking responsibility for where we are; the great value in the wide diversity of views (we are a Church which also operates like a network or movement); the centrality of evangelism and that together, in our different ways, we are all seeking the kingdom.

A new Church Life Review working group is working on the next steps.

## Commitment for Life

Commitment for Life (CFL) income has shown an overall increase thanks to the generosity of URC members who have ensured that the CFL appeals continue to be well supported. Alongside the much valued regular local church contributions to CFL, there have been several focussed appeals. The Gaza appeal has so far raised £28,547.00. The Joint Methodist/URC Justice Appeal for Gaza and Lebanon has raised over £25,000. The Ukraine appeal is ongoing, and we ask General Assembly representatives to share this appeal to encourage congregations in their support for our partners in Transcarpathia and in response to the resolution passed at the 2023 General Assembly, brought by East Midlands Synod. We are grateful to Children's and Youth Work for collaborating on our Greta Global Resource that focuses on supporting refugees and internally displaced persons in Transcarpathia, western Ukraine. You can find out more here: [www.urc.org.uk/your-church/church-local-and-global/commitment-for-life/ukraine-appeal](http://www.urc.org.uk/your-church/church-local-and-global/commitment-for-life/ukraine-appeal).



## Presbyterian Church in Myanmar Appeal

The United Reformed Church has a long and close relationship with the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar (PCM) ([www.urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/global-and-](http://www.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 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, a URC appeal for the PCM was launched to our local churches. An email was sent to Church Secretaries, since publicity through social media and the website could have posed potential dangers of persecution to the Church in Myanmar. There was a magnificent response from local URCs with over 50 churches contributing more than £18,000. This impressive figure has been matched by the historic Yangon fund.

Responding to the successful appeal, the General Secretary of the PCM, Revd Pek Muan Cuang, wrote:

*We are overjoyed! Thanks to God, and to URC and all the members of local churches who shared the concern for us. We felt reassurance that we are not suffering alone in this turmoil but have people around the world praying for us.*

*We will be praying and committed to that your generous collections will work at its full potential for suffering people from Myanmar, especially our crisis affected families in Christ. We will also be making sure to share the information of the works of your kindness and prayers. So that the joy for the fruits of your kindness is echoing back to you and we can praise and thank our Lord together.*

The Council for World Mission finance team assisted the URC in transferring the funds to the PCM. Since this appeal you will have heard of the devastating earthquake which hit Myanmar. Despite not being significantly directly affected by it, the PCM immediately began relief efforts to support their neighbours in other regions. URC churches have been supporting through the Disasters Relief Committee and Seedbeds [www.seedbeds.org/burma-earthquake-emergency-appeal](http://www.seedbeds.org/burma-earthquake-emergency-appeal).

## **Jamaica**

The Commitment for Life Reference Group is outlining a way to play its part in supporting the United Reformed Church's commitment to reparations for the role played by our antecedent congregations in the transatlantic slave trade. A discussion took place as to what a partnership might entail, including which projects we might usefully support. A consultation with CFL churches is underway, asking whether they would support taking on Jamaica as a fourth region, alongside Bangladesh, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IOPT) and Zimbabwe. The premise is that Jamaica, as a possible fourth CFL region would receive 18.75% of CFL donations (around £35,000 per year). The money would be given to our church partner, the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, through the Churches' Reparations Action Forum, for a term of five years with a review to be conducted in year four. Ideally, we would look to be linked to a specific project, such as the new Free Villages. Once the results of the consultation have been received, a final decision will be taken.

## **Global Justice Now**

An organisation supported by CFL, Global Justice Now is working on a campaign focussing on the US/UK Trade Deal. This deal covers food services and the quality of food. Global Justice Now advocates for limits to be placed on the power of corporate

monopolies as well as the trade in military technology. Illegal wars are frequently used as testing grounds for such technology. See [www.globaljustice.org.uk](http://www.globaljustice.org.uk) for more information.

## Christian Aid

Our primary partner, Christian Aid (CA), has announced that it is moving to a new organisational model which it hopes will make it a better steward of the resources entrusted to it by us and other supporters. The aim is to become more responsive and accountable to communities living in poverty. This new structure will entail setting up five hubs located in Bogota, Abuja, Nairobi, Amman, and Dhaka. Each hub will be responsible for a multi-country cluster of national and cross-border programmes. The changes, it is hoped, will reinforce CA's identity as the agency that enables British and Irish churches to work out their solidarity and compassion for the world's poorest and most marginalised people. CA will continue both to alleviate suffering in humanitarian emergencies, and to tackle the root causes of poverty through their four programme themes: peacebuilding; gender justice; governance and rights; climate adaptation and resilience. It is worth noting that, under the current American administration, countless global development programmes have had to be put on hold due to funding cuts. This is aggravated by UK aid budget cuts. In this context, the support of the United Reformed Church, through Commitment for Life contributions to CA partner projects, becomes even more vital.

## Lay Preacher Training

A second successful Commitment for Life Lay Preachers' training event was held at Luther King House. The aim of these sessions is to train Lay Preachers who can lead creative and engaging global justice services of worship in local churches. Every available place on the course was taken and the training was enthusiastically received. Lay preachers are already beginning to take CFL services.

## Global and Intercultural Ministries

### URC global relationships

Global and Intercultural Ministries is a main point of contact for many of the URC's global relationships. Many (but not all) of these relationships arise through our membership of the Council for World Mission (CWM).

#### *a) Partners in Mission*

The Partners in Mission (PIM) programme was established by CWM to upturn the colonial model of missionaries being sent 'from the west to the rest', replacing this with a model of mutual sharing in which personnel, skills and resources are sent from everywhere, to everywhere, according to gifts and need. The past year has been both challenging and rewarding. GIM has overseen two ongoing PIM relationships with colleagues sent by partner Churches to work with us, and the return of two PIMs sent by us to serve in a partner context:

- **Ms So Young Jung** – a Lay Missionary, sent by the Presbyterian Church of Korea and working with Kingston and New Malden URCs in Southern Synod, has recently been accepted to train for stipendiary ministry in the URC. We celebrate this exciting development.
- **The Revd Yufen Chen** – sent by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, continues to serve in Thames North Synod, working with the Taiwanese Fellowship in London, and developing ministries primarily amongst Taiwanese and Mandarin speaking communities. Yufen completes her second term at the end of December 2025, with the potential to serve a third (and final) term to 2028.



- **The Revds Melanie Smith and Mark Meatcher** returned from their placements with the Pacific Theological College in Fiji in July 2024. We give thanks for all they contributed during their placements, and that both are now settled in new ministries in the URC.

## *b) Global Partnerships (Church House)*

The URC's global relationships extend well beyond the PIM programme. Some of these relationships are managed via Church House, with active partnerships currently including:

- **The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM)** – offering much-needed support as the PCM responds to the needs of its communities in light of the ongoing military coup, compounded by a series of environmental disasters. Many thanks to all individuals and congregations who responded so generously to the recent funding appeal, both through financial contributions and continued prayer.
- **The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT)** – offering solidarity as the PCT negotiates a landscape in which Taiwan is denied the right to autonomy and is excluded from particular global bodies, even while being subject to constant intimidation from China.
- **The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea** – with whom we signed a Memorandum of Understanding in June 2024, formally agreeing a framework for working together for the mutual benefit of our respective denominations.

## *c) Global Partnerships (Synod and Local Church)*

In addition to the relationships managed by Church House, the URC has long encouraged its Synods to establish and maintain their own global relationships. In the past, GIM has suggested global partners with whom Synods might be matched. During the past year, a review has been taking place to ascertain which partnerships are live and meaningful, which are dormant and may have served their time, and to discover relationships about which Church House has previously been unaware. The aim is to celebrate and resource the relationships which work, encourage new partnerships to develop organically, perhaps, through a minister or church member with links to a community in another part of the world, and to release Synods from commitments which are no longer viable, giving thanks for what has been, and freeing them to explore new areas of focus if desired. As relationships evolve and develop, we encourage the partners to think broadly and creatively, exploring a variety of ways through which to interact beyond environmentally costly exchange visits so that the relationships are truly mutual to the benefit of all. GIM can be contacted for practical support and advice.

## **Legacies of Slavery (LoS)**

The URC's three-strand commitment to acts of 'repairing justice' addressing the legacies of transatlantic slavery, adopted by General Assembly 2023, is progressing. The LoS Task Group continues to meet as a whole body to guide the work, and has also subdivided to enable greater focus:

### *a) Local: Anti-racism training*

- Anthony Reddie has continued to work with us to complete the delivery of centrally organised sessions.
- Feedback from session participants has been overwhelmingly positive.
- The 'local' subgroup has drafted a number of proposals for cascading the anti-racism training. The aim is to equip the Synods to take over responsibility for delivering the sessions while maintaining consistency in approach and quality.

The anti-racism training is ambitious, seeking to elicit a culture-change in the URC. While it is still early days, we believe we can see green shoots of change starting to emerge.

b) *Regional: Mentoring projects focussed on young black men*

- The subgroup has been working to tighten the proposals – including consideration of the relationship between the URC and the emerging projects, and how the projects will be managed and overseen.
- It is proposed that the projects operate under the umbrella of the new amalgamated Mission and Discipleship Committee, giving periodic updates to General Assembly so that the work continues to be held by the whole Church.
- The Revd Les Isaac (founder of Street Pastors) has been approached to journey with us as a consultant, helping to identify possible mentors, advising us in establishing the projects, and keeping us true to the initial vision.

c) *Global*

- Close relationships are being maintained with the Churches' Reparations Action Forum in Jamaica (CRAF). The GIM Secretary met with the Revds Gordon Cowans and Collin Cowan (CRAF Principals) in Jamaica in November 2024 to further develop the proposals, which include support for the creation of New Free Villages to address the issue of landlessness which sees 30% of Jamaicans classed as squatters, and a joint project to promote positive self-identity and belonging amongst African and African diaspora participants.
- We are exploring the production of a number of very short films to provide quick and accessible insights into the actions being proposed, why they are needed, and the anticipated outcomes.
- Conversations have been taking place within GIM about the possible broadening of the Commitment for Life (CfL) remit to include support for CRAF's work.

In addition to the three repairing justice strands, further developments include:

d) *Legacies of Slavery Fund*

- Following agreement by General Assembly 2024, a LoS Fund has been established to resource our repairing justice commitments, starting with a £250k input from central funds, with Synods invited to contribute with an aim of reaching a minimum target of £1m.
- At the time of writing, definite pledges combined with ongoing conversations indicate that we are likely to exceed the £1m target.

It is apparent that some Synods are hesitant about making pledges, wanting to hear more specifically how the funds will be spent. While this is understandable, it misses a key point of reparation/repairing justice – which is about letting go of that which, at least in part, belongs elsewhere and freeing the wronged party to address the harms suffered as they determine. That said, the LoS task group has never suggested a 'carefree' approach – but has linked with trustworthy partners, outlining the proposed areas of work even while explaining that specifically what we can achieve will be determined by the extent of the funds we raise. This is a definite 'chicken and egg' situation, with members of the task group ready to offer clarity as they are able.

e) *The LoS webpage*

- The LoS Webpage has recently been updated and now effectively tells the story of the URC's LoS journey.

- The page includes reference to the April 2024 Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Jamaica and features two docufilms produced during the pilgrimage, one of which captures the URC's Statement of Confession and Apology being delivered, in-person, by the then GA Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson.
- The webpage also features a reflection by the Revd Geoff Felton, who joined the pilgrimage as part of his sabbatical and is championing the issue of Modern Day Slavery alongside his focus on LoS. Geoff subsequently represented the URC at a CWM Global Consultation addressing this issue.

### f) *Ecumenical links*

It is worth noting that the URC's work regarding the legacies of transatlantic slavery is highly regarded and frequently drawn upon by ecumenical partners both in the UK and globally. The GIM Secretary currently serves on the Methodist Church's Reparations Advisory Group.

## **Racial Justice in the URC**

### a) *Racial Justice advocates and Cascades of Grace*

The first strand of the LoS repairing justice proposals – anti-racism training – specifically engages with our 2020 commitment to journey from a position of 'not racist' to becoming actively 'anti-racist'. It is GIM's hope and intention that the URC's two racial justice networks, the Racial Justice Advocates (RJAs) and Cascades of Grace (COGs), will play a significant role in this journey, even while recognising that they need to be resourced to do so. Strengthening the networks will be a priority in the next period.

Recent network activities include:

- A joint residential in Liverpool in October 2024, including a visit to the International Slavery Museum, with a further 24-hour COGs core-group gathering taking place in February 2025.
- Welcoming three recent additions to the RJA network. Our hope is for every Synod to have a named RJA, and for each of those individuals to be resourced by their Synod to gather a small team to advocate for racial justice and to develop appropriate work. It is, perhaps, worth noting that Racial Justice Advocates DO NOT need to be Black. Indeed, we need colleagues from all ethnicities, working together, if we are to effectively tackle the issue of racial injustice.



## b) A fond farewell



The Revd Zaidie Orr retired in March 2025, having served as Convenor of both the RJAs and COGs for the past five years, and made a significant contribution as a member of the LoS Task Group (and to many other areas of the URC's life). Zaidie will be missed – but we are sure she is not going to disappear.

*The photo shows Zaidie presented with a gift basket by members of the COGs core group.*

## A happy update

It is heartwarming to see former GA Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, continuing to make an impact within and beyond the URC. On 13 April 2025, Tessa was inducted as the new Moderator of the and, in so doing, became a President of Churches Together in England. This follows Tessa's ecumenically acclaimed keynote input at the CTE Forum in March 2025, brilliantly addressing LoS, reparations, and other justice-related issues. The keynote speech can be accessed at the URC website.



## Ecumenical

### URC Ecumenical Officers (EOs) and Posts

EOs met together online this spring. We heard about newly formed Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) in the Synod of Wales and Eastern Synod and were heartened by Yorkshire Synod's new ecumenical strategy. We continue to encourage Synods to ensure that EO vacancies are given priority, and that paid roles are considered where possible. EOs can be hugely more effective when they are given the time to fulfil their roles. URC EOs will meet again in person at Churches Together in England's (CTE) All Ecumenical Representatives conference. In January this year, Mission and Ministries met to consider the remaining applications for ecumenical posts. We were delighted to approve the following posts:

- St Andrews URC, Douglas and Ramsey Methodist and Trinity URC LEP, Ramsey, Isle of Man (Mersey Synod)
- Cambridgeshire Ecumenical Minister (Eastern Synod)
- Oxfordshire Ecumenical Minister (Wessex Synod)
- Grahamston United Church, Falkirk (ecumenical minister to central Scotland).

## **Roman Catholic/URC Dialogue Group**

The group drew its third quinquennial to a close by taking a pilgrimage to Rome together. The theme of this latest phase of dialogue has been *Journeying Together*, and instead of a conventional report, the group put together a practical resource pack for local RC and URC churches. It is aimed at encouraging local churches to meet using the resource as a study guide and to encourage further activity together. The pack has been updated since the ecumenical pilgrimage and now includes a report of the pilot, undertaken by The Bridge URC, Otley, Yorkshire. In Rome the resource was received by the RC Dicastery for the Promotion of Christian Unity and by officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The Pack is now available online here: [www.urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2025-1-3-RC-URC-Resources-FINAL.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2025-1-3-RC-URC-Resources-FINAL.pdf). We encourage members of General Assembly to share the resource with Synods and local churches.



## **Methodist/URC Liaison Group**

The group has recently started regular meetings again following a short break. The group continues to discuss how it can support ministers and regional leaders in better understanding one another's traditions and structures. This is to enable closer working together, as we consider, for example, the differences between Elders and stewards and denominational procedures around 'call' and 'stationing', in terms of ministerial deployment. URC/Methodist and wider ecumenical regional leaders' training sessions are planned for later in the year.

## **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. Tim Meadows, Moderator to GA, has faithfully attended the Church of England's General Synod meetings, representing the URC.

## **Methodist/Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM)**

We are fully participating observers on this panel, and the most recent meeting grappled with language around pioneering, hearing from some on-the-ground practitioners undertaking rich and valuable work in their communities.

## **Churches Together in England (CTE)**

Our engagement with CTE takes place in several different areas. The URC was represented on the planning group for the annual Learning to be Missionary Disciples conference, the Living with Diversity working group (working on better ways for CTE members to work together with difference, specifically around sexuality), and the Enabling Group (which brings together over 50 member churches). We are part of the team for the New Ecumenical Officers training in January and continue to be active in the Group for Evangelisation. In the last year this group has been hosted by the Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Methodist Church. It is always challenging and invigorating to hear the perspectives and approaches of other churches. At CTE's Forum in March, the URC was active in its contributions from the platform and in delivering workshops as well as offering



worship. The Revd Dr Susan Durber and the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson delivered keynote presentations. As Free Churches Group Moderator, following her induction in April, Tessa is now one of the CTE presidents. There was a large URC delegation at Forum (see photo) and there are films of the sessions available on the CTE YouTube channel ([www.youtube.com/@ChurchesEngland](https://www.youtube.com/@ChurchesEngland)). Many of these would work well as a resource for local churches or Synod events.

National Ecumenical Officers (NEOs) involved in LEPs continue to meet regularly to discuss individual and broader issues that have been brought to them, identifying patterns and offering support. NEOs continue to encourage the use of CTE's Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission Toolkit to inspire and guide practical and missional partnerships.

## European Ecumenism

Although the URC withdrew from the Council of European Churches (CEC) last year, as have some other close ecumenical partners in Britain, we remain committed to our relationships with the Church in Europe through the Council of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and World Council of Reformed Churches (Europe). We have long-standing and close links with the Evangelical Church of the Palatinate (Pfalz) and are developing closer connections with the United Protestant Church of France, including establishing a three-way Friendship Group. A Friends of the Pfalz webinar in April, including friends of other European churches, was well attended and we look forward to developing this work further. Please email [mission@urc.org.uk](mailto:mission@urc.org.uk) if you are interested in connecting with this group or want to know more about our work with European churches. The Moderator of GA, the Revd Tim Meadows, attended the 400th Synod of the Waldensian Church in Italy in August 2024. There continues to be an active Waldensian Group in the URC, which meets regularly online as well as organising visits to Italy. Relationships with other members of the Council for World Mission's European churches were reinvigorated by the recent Members' Mission Forum, and there are particularly encouraging possibilities with the Protestant Church of the Netherlands (PKN).

## Inter Faith

In late February 2025 the United Reformed Church joined with the Church of Scotland, Methodist World Council, Methodist Church in Great Britain, and the (US) United Methodist Church on an ecumenical solidarity visit of justice to East Jerusalem and the West Bank. This visit took place in the context of a conflict that, according to multiple human rights organisations and the International Court of Justice, meets all the criteria of genocide in Gaza. We witnessed the aftermath of attacks and house demolitions that were carried out by Israelis living in illegal settlements, protected by the Israeli occupational forces, in the South Hebron Hills. Our solidarity visit was met with enormous appreciation. There are almost a dozen video resources that you can use in this playlist. Scan the QR code to access them. Palestinian Christians asked us to reflect on whether our churches were doing enough to pressure our governments to reconsider their military, economic, and political support for a country that almost daily carries out egregious acts of violence against Palestinians in the name of security.





The Inter Faith Network has been formally dissolved. A third party has re-registered the name, which may be a malicious action. Members should be cautious of communications from this source. A closing event was held on 29 April in central London with 32 churches in attendance. The United Reformed Church regrets the decision by the former government to cease funding for the Inter Faith Network at a time when inter religious tensions are spiking. The rise in tension is in part fuelled by the worrying rise in global conflict and the increasingly polarised nature of politics and discourse.

An Inter Faith Week Consultation in England was organised by the Faith and Belief Forum with funding from the government. Regional and national consultations are ongoing. The Council for Christians and Jews (CCJ) is to host its annual Rabbi-Clergy event on 14 May 2025 and Andy Lie from Northern Synod will attend with the aim of reporting back to the next Interfaith Enabling Group meeting.

The Interfaith Enabling Group (IEG) continues to meet regularly. These meetings are ecumenical by design, offering a connecting point for partner denominations. The IEG has been working with Northern College and others to wrestle with the changing nature of inter faith engagement and work, given the cuts to funding by government and denominations for inter faith work. Some of the key items on our agendas are: the rise of Islamophobia and antisemitism; the move to decolonise our thinking; conversations, and practice in shaping the inter faith agenda in the UK. Applications to the Interfaith Fund have been received from the CCJ, and the LUMODO Association (History and Literature of Syriac Christianity) and these are being considered by the IEG.

'Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IOPT) in focus': Following the 2024 General Assembly resolution on Gaza, the IEG, in partnership with Commitment for Life and YoURChurch, has offered a series of educational webinars called 'IOPT IN FOCUS'. A recording of the 'Christian Zionism' session led by the Revd Philip Woods can be found at [youtu.be/cliEN0yWiwc](https://youtu.be/cliEN0yWiwc) and the 'Nakba and Occupation' session with Charlotte Marshall, Sabeel-Kairos UK, is here: [youtu.be/2Riv7BKkDfA](https://youtu.be/2Riv7BKkDfA).

## Public Issues

### The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT)

In April 2025, Alex Clare-Young joined the team as JPIT's Campaigns and Church Engagement Officer, based at Methodist Church House. Among many projects, Alex is co-ordinating JPIT's next justice conference, 'For Goodness Sake!', on 8 November 2025 in Derby. See more at [jpit.uk/conference](https://jpit.uk/conference).

JPIT continues to have six key areas of focus, providing assistance to the Church and to local congregations to pray, speak out and take action for justice and peace:

- 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 characterised by listening, kindness and truthfulness.

A new Constituency Action Network has been formed to support congregations that are seeking to develop a meaningful relationship with their MP. JPIT is supporting this



through monthly webinars and occasional one-to-one meetings. One URC LEP congregation (Cirencester Ashcroft Church) has become a full member of the Constituency Action Network, with several other URC congregations also building better connections with their MP through engagement with the network. See [jpit.uk/can](http://jpit.uk/can).



## Future of Arms

JPIT has produced a major report on the rise of autonomous weapons, with an accompanying video presented by Christine Ntim, Youth Representative for Thames North Synod. See [jpit.uk/foa](http://jpit.uk/foa).

As Artificial Intelligence embeds itself further into our daily lives, it has already been integrated into several military applications, some of which have already been tested in live combat situations. Echoing blockbuster films over the

decades, the new reality of warfare has increasingly blurred lines around who is ultimately in control. As people who favour peaceful resolutions to conflict and to avoid killing, how should the Church speak into this discussion of automated weaponry?

Individuals and local churches are encouraged to explore the issue and sign the petition calling on government leaders around the world to develop international laws that prohibit the use of machines that target people, reducing us to objects, stereotypes and data points.

## Public responses

The URC, as part of the Joint Public Issues Team, has released or signed statements or written open letters, including:

- Child poverty: [www.urc.org.uk/faith-leaders-call-for-bold-action-on-child-poverty](http://www.urc.org.uk/faith-leaders-call-for-bold-action-on-child-poverty)
- International aid budget cuts: [www.urc.org.uk/church-leaders-lament-cuts-to-international-aid-budget](http://www.urc.org.uk/church-leaders-lament-cuts-to-international-aid-budget)
- Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty: [www.fossilfuel treaty.org/faith-letter#faith-letter](http://www.fossilfuel treaty.org/faith-letter#faith-letter)
- Quaker Meeting House police raid: [www.jpit.uk/concern-over-police-raid](http://www.jpit.uk/concern-over-police-raid).

We also, independently of JPIT, crafted public responses to the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Supreme Court ruling on the legal definition of a woman and on the Assisted Dying Bill.

These are not straightforward issues in our society. We could not and do not try to respond to every public issue, but tread carefully by addressing those areas where the General Assembly of the URC has come to agreement and where it seems relevant and important that the URC should be speaking into the public square, sometimes where other Churches are reluctant to do so.

## Faith in Affordable Housing

This initiative has continued to progress, involving Mike Hart from North Western Synod, Chris Atherton from the Synod of Wales and Becki Winter from the Church of England (and formerly Housing Justice). Guidance for Synods towards repurposing URC church land for affordable housing has been drafted.



## **The Church Buildings for Mission**

Webinars have proved popular with local church members, Elders and Synods. The first webinar in this period included presentations and conversations about Eco Church and making church buildings fit for climate objectives, majoring on initiatives in the Synod of Wales, while the second webinar explored creative use of church spaces, illustrated by two fine examples from North Western Synod. The next webinar is on 20 November 2025, 11.30am-1pm.

## **‘A Church with people at the margins’**

This report was presented at the 2024 General Assembly giving rise to Resolution 53 which requested Synods, Assembly committees and task groups to consider the implications of the North Western Synod report, and how this particularly relates to the Church Life Review. This is now being developed by the Church Life Fund steering group. The Synod of Scotland has adopted its own resolution similar to the NW strategy and it is good to see the momentum of this initiative gathering pace. The event ‘Dreams and Realities: In the Thick of It 2’ in May at the Luther King Centre, Manchester facilitated conversations between people with lived experience and those engaged in different marginal contexts and has provided learning and ideas for resourcing churches in low-income communities going forward.

## **The ChurchWorks Commission**

The ChurchWorks Commission is made up of 23 senior church leaders drawn from 16 major UK church denominations, umbrella organisations and Christian charities to collaborate with government and to equip local congregations to transform the lives of the most vulnerable people in local neighbourhoods and communities. The URC began partnering with and investing in ChurchWorks in September by contributing staff time and experience, linking with local churches and networks, and a small financial contribution.

ChurchWorks has three key mission areas in communities across the UK: tackling poverty, mental health and wellbeing, and vulnerable children and families. This includes:

- supporting those vulnerable to poverty and the cost-of-living crisis through the Warm Welcome Campaign;
- promoting positive mental health and wellbeing in churches and communities;
- supporting vulnerable children and families.

ChurchWorks has actively promoted the ‘Who Cares’ Campaign by the Home for Good/Safe Families merger charity to support children and families within or at risk of entering the care system.

The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson has accepted the invitation to be a URC representative as a ChurchWorks Commissioner.

## **Church and community engagement newsletter**

The newsletter is a new resource which is published twice a year. It provides 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. Over 200 subscribers from local churches and Synods now directly receive this useful resource.

## Migration, refugees and asylum seekers

John East, a non-serving Elder and lay preacher in the East Lancashire Mission Partnership, attended the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe conference in December 2024. John is one of the founders of Darwen Asylum and Refugee Enterprise (DARE) and shared the impact that DARE has had on his region, as well as how URC congregations are supporting refugees and asylum seekers to adjust to life in the UK.



## Prayers for Ukraine

For the third anniversary of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, URC congregations were encouraged to reflect on prayers written by leaders of the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia in Ukraine: [www.urc.org.uk/prayers-to-mark-the-third-anniversary-of-russias-war-on-ukraine/](http://www.urc.org.uk/prayers-to-mark-the-third-anniversary-of-russias-war-on-ukraine/)

## Greenbelt

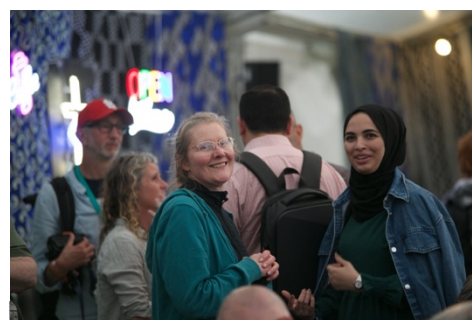
The United Reformed Church's presence at Greenbelt Festival, 21-24 August 2025, will be in an enlarged tent shared with the Trussell Trust. Echoing the festival-wide theme of 'Hope in the Making', the URC at Greenbelt will engage with and equip festivalgoers through crafting, facilitated conversations, music and displays.

Once again, there will be a family-friendly café on site, thanks to the generous efforts of 65 volunteers, including a combined kitchen team made up of staff from REFUSE community café in Durham and Lodge Road URC in Birmingham.

Greenbelt's youth programme will be overseen by the URC this summer for the final time after several years of providing this vital, faith-building and creative space for young people.

The whole of the URC is invited to participate in Greenbelt: by attending for a day or longer where possible, by sending craft items to be displayed in our large tent and distributed after, or by joining in our Sunday service, broadcast live from the event in partnership with YoURChurch.

More information on these opportunities can be found at: [www.urc.org.uk/greenbelt](http://www.urc.org.uk/greenbelt).



## Caring for Creation

The URC's Green Apostle Network has been working hard to encourage and support congregations and Synod offices in caring for creation. There are now seven Synods who have achieved a bronze award from Eco Church: North-Western, Mersey, West Midlands, Eastern, Thames North, Southern and the National Synod of Wales. The National Synod of Scotland is part of Eco-Congregation Scotland, a similar scheme but with no Eco Synod equivalent.

Over 30% of URC congregations are registered with Eco Church (in England and Wales) or Eco-Congregation Scotland. Of those congregations, almost two fifths have a Bronze award, over one-fifth have a Silver award, and eight congregations have achieved the top Gold award for their achievements in making their churches more eco-friendly, from buildings and energy use to services and personal lifestyles.

The National Synod of Scotland, Northern Synod and West Midlands Synod have recently updated their Synod environmental policies, implementing and extending the URC Environmental Policy which was received by General Assembly in 2022.

## Net Zero Task Group (NZTG)

Despite a worsening global picture, our general conclusions, and our assessment of the challenges and opportunities remain much as we reported last year. We now have significantly more information provided by the Synods in their annual reports to the Mission Committee, and there is some progress towards our goal. Different parts of the URC vary in response, and in capacity to respond, to the call to achieve a net zero church.

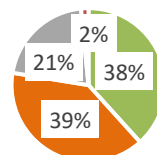
## Progress in the Synods

Synods have responded well to our first detailed enquiry which has set the baseline for assessing our progress annually. Some have got much further along their net zero journey than others, and our non-critical approach is focused on encouragement. There are some common themes among the ten Synods that have sent us their responses to date:

- Capacity: those who enable Synods to function are stretched and many respondents clearly wished they could respond more completely to our enquiry. We will refine the document without losing the continuity necessary for year-to-year monitoring. However, we note with concern that capacity is the universal primary issue for all Synods.
- Missing knowledge and skills were the second main concern. Work is progressing with URC Communications to ensure that practical information and signposting is more accessible.
- The need to improve communication within Synods was the third main concern flagged.
- The Green Apostles are strategically key. They also have limited capacity, and an increased engagement from all of us is necessary for maintaining focus and increasing momentum.

### AWARD STATUS OF REGISTERED CONGREGATIONS

■ No award      ■ Bronze Award  
■ Silver Award   ■ Gold Award



- There are signs of encouragement and effective action. We hope to see some of these shared across the URC. Those who have yet to share their good news stories are encouraged to do so. Most Synods have a regularly featured eco e-news.
- Synods are offering support to local churches for adapting buildings to reduce emissions. Whilst the grants available are no match for the need, they play a part in getting this shared enterprise moving.

Busy Synod Officers and others made time to assess and report on actions. Synods now have a baseline from which to assess and report all further progress. Synods are encouraged to share their findings with their churches and committees to help develop a focus on action. Variations among the Synods include:

- The designated lead on net zero might be a Green Apostle, the Moderator, the Synod Clerk or another. We recommend appointing someone who is not responsible for managing too much other work but appreciate that this may mean a shift in prioritisation.
- The financial strength of a Synod does not predict the amount of progress made towards net zero. Capacity to focus and energise seems to matter more.
- How carbon emissions are assessed or measured varies. Climate Stewards 360° Carbon Calculator is the most-used measure. There is variety in what activity is identified for measurement. Although more standardisation would help assess overall progress, we think more will happen if Synods use the tools they prefer.

To illustrate, here are a few of the actions we have heard from the Synods:

- Northern has increased grants to local churches for emissions reduction works.
- North Western has increased car sharing, hybrid vehicles and hybrid meetings.
- Mersey has achieved Bronze Eco Synod Award and adapted the Synod Office.
- Yorkshire has continued the use of Zoom meetings and is exploring a car charging point.
- East Midlands have established a fund to support local churches in reducing emissions.
- Eastern produced sustainable buildings guidance, now adapted for the URC website.
- South Western has reduced manse stock and offers 50% grants to lower emissions.
- Southern Synod has adapted its office and been given its first Eco-Church award.
- Wales has established a fund to help churches assess heating replacement options.
- Scotland has started a grants scheme to support church energy-saving measures.

We are inviting those in Synods who will respond to future annual enquiries to participate in a webinar in October. This will help us refine our method and provide a forum for shared experience and wisdom.

## **Assembly Committees**

All Assembly committees are actively seeking to lower emissions resulting from their work. Learning from our first use of an annual enquiry for Synods, we aim to have an equivalent document available for committees to assess and report progress. This should be available later this year.

## **Associated Bodies**

The NZTG has not assessed progress in the various bodies that serve the URC but are not constituted as parts of it. We hope to engage with these in the year ahead.



## Developing Resources

For congregations in England and Wales, participation in A Rocha's newly revised Eco-Church scheme is encouraged. Not specifically a net zero programme, it is straightforward to get started and progress, setting in motion actions towards net zero. In Scotland, Eco-Congregation Scotland offers a similar scheme. Improving a building for reduced emissions can seem daunting. A straightforward guide, most of which is already familiar to many in Eastern and Thames North Synods, is being made available on the URC website at: **[www.urc.org.uk/your-church/church-local-and-global/greenerchurch/](http://www.urc.org.uk/your-church/church-local-and-global/greenerchurch/)**. A short companion guide on reducing emissions created by the activities within buildings towards net zero is nearing completion. UN Sustainable Development Goals are being featured in Reform, and we recommend A Rocha's template for a local church environmental policy as a helpful tool to help churches to plan.

The URC website is being adapted to make it easier for all parts of the URC to access guidance on making steps towards net zero. The Resources Committee is utilising the Church Building Fund to support Synods in pilot projects to demonstrate what can be achieved.

The new Stepwise course, Faith-Filled Environment, will be an excellent way of growing engagement through discipleship, with the potential to increase the number of people willing to offer time, energy and new knowledge and skills to projects in local churches: **[www.urc.org.uk/stepwise](http://www.urc.org.uk/stepwise)**.

## Increasing momentum

The context is changing, and becoming more challenging. Across the world, swings in politics both change and reflect attitudes. The necessary international cooperation seems to be stalling. Technology offers no magic solutions, but we can expect some helpful developments.

As for ourselves, modest adjustments can be the right starting place, but they will not get us across the line. We have begun to move, but our progress must gather pace, and we need to lighten the load. Some of our buildings cannot realistically be adapted, others require intimidating levels of investment, and our current patterns of use may exacerbate these issues. Painful as it must sometimes be, we need to rationalise our buildings – adapting some and (responsibly) relinquishing others. We believe we will have to go on making this point, which also has a prophetic edge. If the church is not the building, it may be time to act on our faith. In doing so, we may rediscover some aspects of being an authentic church. There is liberation in letting go what is too much to carry.