

# Paper P6

## Emphasising Evangelism in the life of the United Reformed Church

### Mersey Synod

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Revd Geoff Felton, Moderator of Mersey Synod <a href="mailto:moderator@urcmerseysynod.org.uk">moderator@urcmerseysynod.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	For decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 61</b> <b>General Assembly:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Affirms that evangelism is integral to the life and mission of the United Reformed Church, arising from confidence in the living God revealed in Jesus Christ and present through the Holy Spirit.</li><li>b. Encourages GA and its committees, Synods, local churches, ministers, elders and lay leaders to prioritise evangelism understood as both invitation to encounter God within worshipping communities and to discover God in everyday life.</li><li>c. Recognises the central role of worship in evangelism and calls the Church to sustained attention to the quality, depth, and expectancy of worship.</li><li>d. Commends the outcomes of the Church Life Review (CLR) as providing structural and resource support that enables evangelistic renewal, while acknowledging that renewal itself depends upon spiritual attentiveness and faithfulness.</li></ul>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. This paper invites the General Assembly to affirm a renewed emphasis on evangelism within the life of the United Reformed Church.</li><li>2. Mersey Synod Meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> March 2026 passed the resolution for this paper on Evangelism to be submitted to General Assembly.</li><li>3. Evangelism is understood not primarily as programme or strategy, but as faithful witness arising from confidence in the reality of the living God, encountered within the worshipping life of the Church and made known through the Holy Spirit.</li><li>4. The paper connects evangelism with renewed confidence in worship, ecclesial identity, and the</li></ol>
---------------------------	---

	Church's confession of itself as one, holy, catholic and apostolic.
<b>Main points</b>	<p>Context<sup>1</sup></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The United Reformed Church emerged in a period of significant cultural and theological change. In responding to shifting worldviews, many theological approaches sought to reinterpret Christian faith in ways that reduced or removed claims about God's active presence within creation.</li> <li>2. These approaches were often undertaken with integrity and a desire to make faith intelligible in the modern world, creating space for questioning and critical engagement.</li> <li>3. Experience has shown, however, that such approaches are insufficient to sustain Christian faith and witness in a world marked by starvation, conflict, injustice, environmental crisis, and widespread mental ill-health.</li> <li>4. In this context, a God who is distant, abstract, or removed from human suffering lacks credibility. The God revealed in Jesus Christ — crucified and risen — and present through the Holy Spirit is the God who is encountered in the midst of the world and proclaimed by the Church.</li> </ol>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Theos Report, John Bradbury Address to GA 2025, Church Life Review
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Lindsey Brown, John Bradbury, Mersey Synod Meeting March 2026

## Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	There are no direct financial implications arising from this paper.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	The proposal is consistent with the United Reformed Church's ecumenical commitments and understanding of the Church's incompleteness.

### 1. Evangelism and confidence in God

- 1.1 Evangelism arises from confidence that God is alive, active, and present among God's people.
- 1.2 It is not primarily a response to institutional decline, but an expression of faithfulness to the gospel and participation in God's mission, indeed evangelism is a matter of discipleship not desperation.
- 1.3 Evidence from across a wide range of Christian traditions indicates renewed engagement with faith, particularly among younger people, often rooted in experiences of encountering the living God within worship and community.

---

<sup>1</sup> Some of this section comes from Revd Dr John Bradbury General Assembly Address 2025

- 1.4 Evangelism is therefore best understood as invitation to encounter, offered with integrity where there is confidence that the Church is a place where God is known and experienced.

## **2. The Church as the Body of Christ<sup>2</sup>**

- 2.1 In confessing belief in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, the Church affirms that it is the Body of Christ and the People of God.
- 2.2 Through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments, prayer, worship, and shared life, Christ is made present in and through the Church.
- 2.3 Within the United Reformed Church there can at times be a hesitancy to speak confidently about the Church in these terms, shaped by ecumenical commitment and a strong emphasis on personal faith.
- 2.4 While these commitments are valued, such hesitancy can unintentionally weaken evangelistic confidence if the Church itself is not understood as a place of genuine encounter with the living God.

## **3. Worship and Evangelism**

- 4.1 Worship lies at the heart of evangelism. The purpose of evangelism is to encourage all people to worship with their whole lives. Worship also fuels evangelism.
- 4.2 Testimony from across the Church highlights the importance of worship that is engaging, inclusive, challenging, and spiritually nourishing, and in which there is an expectation that God will meet God's people.
- 4.3 Where worship lacks depth, vitality, or expectancy, evangelism is diminished. Where worship is confident, prayerful, and attentive to the Spirit, evangelism becomes a shared and natural expression of church life.
- 4.4 A renewed emphasis on evangelism therefore requires sustained attention to the quality and theological confidence of worship across all contexts of the United Reformed Church.

## **5. The Outcomes of the Church Life Review (CLR)**

- 5.1 The outcomes of the CLR cannot in themselves bring about spiritual renewal or evangelistic confidence. No programme or set of resolutions can achieve this.
- 5.2 They do seek, however, to create conditions in which renewal may be pursued more fully, by addressing structural pressures, resourcing local churches, and enabling new forms of ministry and communities of worship and discipleship.
- 5.3 The review should be understood as providing practical support for renewal, rather than as a substitute for it.

## **6. Mersey Synod Action**

- 6.1 Mersey Synod initiated and implemented Talking Faith in order to build confidence among church members to enter into conversation about something they might keep private to themselves. Talking Faith was not just an evangelistic program it was an idea to encourage the church to think in faith terms about all areas of life and to articulate those thoughts beyond the individual, thereby building confidence in speaking naturally of life's issues through the lens of faith.

---

<sup>2</sup> Some of this comes from Revd Dr John Bradbury General Assembly address 2025

## 7. Conclusion

- 7.1 There are emerging signs of hope within the life of the Church, including new people exploring faith, modest growth in some contexts, and a shifting mood from resignation towards attentiveness.
- 7.2 These developments invite the Church to renewed confidence, expectation, and readiness to join in with God's work.
- 7.3 A renewed emphasis on evangelism calls the United Reformed Church to deepen its confidence in the living God, to invest in worship as a place of encounter, and to understand itself as the Body of Christ in its communities.
- 7.4 As a result of the resolution, we would encourage synods, local churches and the Faith in Action Committee to review and commit to plan for and engage with culturally and contextually appropriate evangelism strategies.

## 8. Implications

### **Financial implications:**

- 8.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this paper. Any resourcing implications are addressed through the outcomes of the CLR.

### **Equality, diversity and inclusion implications:**

- 8.2 The emphasis on evangelism as invitation to encounter affirms the inclusion of all people within the life and worship of the Church.

### **Environmental implications:**

- 8.3 None directly arising from this paper.

### **Ecumenical implications:**

- 8.4 The proposal is consistent with the United Reformed Church's ecumenical commitments and understanding of the Church's incompleteness.