

ENDURANCE INSPIRED BY HOPE



CTBI Strategic Plan 2023-2027



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CONTENTS

Introduction7

 Vision and Values.....8

 Context9

Strategic Priorities 11

1. Strengthening ecumenical engagement in Britain and Ireland 17

 1.1 Promoting and resourcing ecumenical engagement.....18

 1.2 Developing our Networks19

 1.3 British-Irish engagement with global ecumenical bodies 20

2. Working together for mission and the common good.....23

 2.1 Mission.....24

 2.2 Racial Justice25

 2.3 Inter faith Dialogue26

 2.4 Social inclusion and a healthy society27

3. Healing society's fractures: identities, borders and nationalities	29
3.1 Theological reflection	30
3.2 British-Irish Relations	31
3.3 Reimagining borders	32
3.4 State engagement with faith communities	33
4. Working for Global Peace and Justice	35
4.1 Climate Justice	36
4.2 International ecumenical peace networks	37
4.3 Religion, violence and human rights	38
4.4 Freedom of Religion and Belief	39
5. Promoting Ethical and Inclusive Leadership	41
5.1 Ethical leadership	42
5.2 Support for the next generation of leaders	43
5.3 Gender justice and women's leadership	44
5.4 Developing and resourcing our collective advocacy	45

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) exists as an expression of our member churches' commitment to ecumenism and inter-church cooperation across Britain and Ireland. We provide spaces for member churches to engage in dialogue and relationship-building and support collaborative action on issues of shared concern through a range of approaches, including research, publication of resources, theological reflection, communications and advocacy.



INTRODUCTION

This strategy document outlines priorities that have been identified, in consultation with member churches, for the period 2023 to 2027. It centres on five priority areas of focus:

- 1. Strengthening ecumenical engagement in Britain and Ireland**
- 2. Working together for mission and the common good**
- 3. Healing society's fractures: identities, borders and nationalities**
- 4. Working for Global Peace and Justice**
- 5. Promoting Ethical and Inclusive Leadership**

The wide-ranging nature of the strategic plan reflects the diversity of our membership and the extent and depth of the churches' ecumenical commitment to the promotion of the common good and to the building of a just and compassionate society for all.

We are conscious that this strategy is taking effect at a challenging time for the Church, from the local through to the global level. It is offered as an invitation to dialogue and engagement in the hope that it will help churches feel supported in their vital work, and enhance the visibility of that work in the wider society.

Dr Nicola Brady
General Secretary, CTBI

Vision and Values

The mission of CTBI is to support the churches of Britain and Ireland on our shared journey towards full visible unity in Christ. The vision for this work is inspired by Christ's prayer 'that they may all be one' [John 17:21.]

CTBI undertakes work that:

- Meets unmet needs
- Adds value (amplifying or increasing the impact of work done by member churches)
- Is only possible if done ecumenically
- Adds a British-Irish focus
- Draws on or enables partnership
- Promotes equity and inclusion

The values that underpin this work are:

Faith

We seek to support our member churches, through the work of Christian unity, to follow Christ and offer the Good News of the Gospel in a multi faith, pluralist society. We offer a space for theological reflection on the challenges facing our member churches.

Hope

We find hope in our oneness in Christ and work together to bring this message of hope to a wounded and fractured Church and society.

Love

An approach founded on loving relationships underpins our working together and the concern for others reflected in that work. We demonstrate through our working together that we value our difference and diversity, which enrich and strengthen our work.

Respect

We recognise the importance of attentive and respectful listening as a foundation for the transformation of relationships, acknowledging complexity and diversity of opinions as we do so. We value every church's contribution and promote respectful relationships at all levels across our member organisations.



Justice

The commitment to Christian unity calls us to solidarity, especially with those who are marginalised and vulnerable, and to work that strengthens the Christian witness for social justice in the world, working in partnership with others.

Humility

We are accountable to our members and reflective in our working practice to ensure we are thinking beyond our own immediate experience.

Partnership

As an agency of the churches through the four nations we aim to work in partnership with the four National Ecumenical Instruments and facilitate effective collaborative working. We work with the widest possible range of partners to resource the work of the churches, agencies, networks and bodies in association with CTBI.

Context

This strategic plan is offered to our membership at a time of uncertainty and upheaval. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an abrupt and frightening interruption to the rhythm of everyday life. People have experienced great loss and we are still counting the cost of COVID in so many ways. Both the UK and Irish Governments have committed to public enquiries to examine the pandemic response.

For churches, the experience of COVID-19 has prompted profound questions about the future. It was clear that, for many people, being part of a worshipping Christian community and receiving pastoral care at times of loss and struggle were vital, but that need was not always well understood by policy makers and in the wider society. As churches were forced to be more creative in how we reach people, there was a realisation that more effort could have been made to reach those who were isolated and marginalised before COVID made these changes a necessity.

It could be argued that the investment in ecumenical structures proved its worth during this time, as members found strength and support in coming together. This was particularly evident in the case of those with senior leadership responsibilities. Nevertheless there are significant challenges to be navigated for the future as we face the reality of increasing pressure on church resources, both financial and human. It is difficult for many local congregations to see accelerated trends of decline despite the effort and investment made during the pandemic.

At a time when we need to be promoting opportunities for connection and coming together to help heal the suffering and isolation of the pandemic we see instead that the socio-economic divide is widening.

The cost of living crisis means a daily reality of struggle and impossible choices for low-income families, those who also experienced some of the greatest challenges in getting through the pandemic.

Other identity-based cleavages continue to fracture our society, pushing individuals, families and communities to the margins because of race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and other factors. We see concerning examples of manipulation of people's insecurity and fear for the future through 'fake news' and the use of dehumanising language to scapegoat those who are most vulnerable, rather than holding to account those who have the power to ensure a fairer distribution of resources.

Increasingly we see the targeting of refugees, those who have least resources and weak or non-existent support networks. Government policies that seek to create a 'hostile environment' for refugees or segregate them at the margins of society to avoid a 'pull factor' have a defining impact on a climate in which already vulnerable people are made to feel unsafe once again. The UK Government's policy of forced deportation of refugees to Rwanda has instilled terror and been condemned by churches, alongside other community leaders.

In the wake of Brexit, the unravelling of the three strands of relationships (within Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland, and between the UK and Ireland), held in a delicate balance by the Good Friday Agreement, is a cause of serious concern. The Agreement has rightly been regarded as a beacon of hope for societies in conflict around the world. That achievement belongs to all the people of Britain and Ireland, as does the responsibility for protecting and continuing the peace process. Brexit has also had a destabilising impact on relationships within the UK, bringing renewed focus to the significance of borders.



View across the border from Slieve Gullion, County Armagh to County Louth in the Republic of Ireland.

The work of Christian unity that finds expression in CTBI and the other ecumenical bodies on these islands calls us to bring a prophetic voice to these divides that wound our society, drawing on the learning from our journey of reconciliation. In our work we model a respectful dialogue that values diversity and seeks to provide sanctuary for all. We do so with humility, conscious that divisions between Christians have been and remain a cause of suffering and undermine the Good News we seek to share. We are conscious too that a contributing factor to the societal fragmentation we witness today is the declining trust in institutions, including churches, as these were exposed as not living up to the values they espoused and the standards to which they held others. There is a need to rebuild trust, beginning with respectful listening to those who have experienced the greatest hurt as a result of our failings.

Nevertheless, even in the context of the rapidly secularising society on these islands, Christian churches continue to have the convening authority to bring together leaders from across political and civic life to collaborate on issues of shared concern. This is particularly true when such work is done ecumenically and even more so when done with due regard to the presence of other faith communities. While census results published in 2022-2023 across the UK and Ireland point to a fall in the percentage of people who identify as Christian on these islands, we see evidence from our work together that there are also reasons to be hopeful about the continued importance of faith in the lives of many people. The Christian voice continues to carry weight in a diverse and multi-cultural public square, from the local to the national to the virtual.

At the international level the work of promoting justice and peace is more important than ever. The major challenges facing the whole of humanity, such as the climate emergency, can only be addressed through a form of multilateral cooperation that has the protection of the most vulnerable at its heart. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has challenged our complacency about the drift in global relationships on the North/South and East/West axes and the trend towards reliance on militarisation, rather than diplomacy and relationship-building, for conflict prevention and resolution.

The response to the invasion of Ukraine, and to the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in particular, was a dominant issue at the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) on the theme 'Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity' which took place from 31st August to 8 September 2022.



Ukrainian refugees at the Romanian border town of Siret

Militarisation had been identified as a priority concern for the Assembly before the war, alongside the Covid-19 pandemic; the climate emergency; racism and xenophobia; digitalisation; and authoritarian politics. While the Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity was an active participant, and there are obvious synergies between the WCC theme and the hopes outlined by Pope Francis for the current Synod of the Catholic Church (2021-2024) with its theme 'For a Synodal Church: Communion — Participation — Mission'. The area of ecumenical relations is a crucial element of this synodal process.

These significant encounters at the level of the global church will help shape the agenda and focus for ecumenical relations in Britain and Ireland for the coming years.

As people of faith, we have a message of hope to offer in uncertain times. That message is enhanced and amplified when we come together, finding strength in our diversity, making a conscious choice to invest in collaborative rather than independent action and living out the Gospel imperative 'that they may all be one' (John 17:21).

Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

Progress against strategic priorities will be reviewed quarterly by trustees. This will form the basis of an annual report to be presented to members at the AGM. An interim review will take place in 2025.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



1: Strengthening Ecumenical Engagement in Britain and Ireland

The work of Christian unity in the British-Irish context has deep roots and there is valuable learning to share from the experience of navigating the complex history of conflict and interdependence on these islands. We recognise the continuing need to strengthen and deepen these relationships for the challenges ahead, ensuring we make best possible use of the structures and resources available to engage more people across all levels of church and across the diversity of Christian denominations on these islands. The work of CTBI takes account of the significant contribution of theological dialogues on unity between churches at the local, national and international levels, seeking to support and promote these while integrating the learning into our wider Faith and Order agenda.



1:1 Promoting and resourcing ecumenical engagement

- We will continue to coordinate engagement with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Britain and Ireland, liaising with the WCC, the national ecumenical instruments (NEIs) and our member churches.
- We will promote the Week of Prayer as an important moment for critical self-reflection on the progress we are making on our ecumenical journey, and a significant opportunity to communicate our understanding of Christian unity to the wider society.
- We will promote a range of resources for ecumenical reflection and action during Lent.
- We will support and resource ecumenical engagement on Racial Justice Sunday, Sanctuary Sunday and other significant dates connected to our work.
- We will work with NEIs to assess needs and resources for the support and promotion of local ecumenism.



1:2 Developing our Networks

- We will organise two in-person members' forums during the period covered by this strategy.
- We will develop our network of contacts across our membership, including development of a network of church communications officers.
- We will work in partnership with CTE to facilitate meetings of National Ecumenical Officers and Bodies in Association.
- We will organise meetings for NEI General Secretaries (at least one online and one in-person per annum) and at least one networking meeting for all NEI staff for the period covered by this strategy.
- We will organise at least two online church leaders' forums during this period.



1:3 British-Irish engagement with global ecumenical bodies

- We will facilitate (where appropriate) collective engagement by our member churches in the ongoing work of the WCC, including follow-up to the 2022 Assembly and the meetings of the Central Committee.
- As a follow-up to the WCC Assembly in 2022, we will organise a Faith and Order conference for our membership with the theme 'Ecumenism in a fragmenting world'.
- We will participate in the annual meetings of the CEC General Secretaries' network.
- We will facilitate (where appropriate) collective engagement by our member churches in the ongoing work of CEC, including preparation for the General Assembly.





2: Working Together for Mission and the Common Good

We need to face with courage and honesty the way in which our fractured fellowship continues to undermine the Missio Dei and the work of building a just and compassionate society. Building on the CTBI-led project ‘2020 Vision of a Good Society’, there is a need to bring a mission lens to the question of what a ‘good society’ looks like in the context of the challenges of today.



2:1 Mission

- We will work in partnership with the NEIs to establish priority shared needs of member churches in relation to ecumenical cooperation in mission.
- We will develop a theological framework to support four nations ecumenical cooperation in mission, with a particular focus on the impact of secularisation and the churches' engagement with secular society.
- We will promote the work of the Mission Theology & Apologetics Group (MTAG) as a resource for member churches.
- We will promote the work of the Inter-faith Theology Advisory Group (IFTAG) as a resource for engagement with the multi-faith context for this work.



2:2 Racial Justice

- We will promote Racial Justice Sunday as an important moment in the church calendar for self-critical reflection on our contribution as churches to the work of racial justice.
- We will work in partnership with the Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation to mark the 30th anniversary of his murder in 2023 with reflection and action on racial justice.
- We will contribute to the organisation of the Windrush 75 Anniversary in June 2023 to celebrate the contribution of the Windrush Generation to Britain and Ireland in general, and to the presence of Black Majority Churches here in particular.
- We will work through the Churches Refugee Network, and in partnership with other organisations, to raise awareness of the impact of racism on refugees and migrant communities.
- We will work in partnership with the NEIs to support member churches in their engagement with themes of racial justice and solidarity with BAME communities.



2:3 Interfaith Dialogue

- We will promote the work of the Inter-faith Theology Advisory Group (IFTAG) as resource for our member churches.
- We will facilitate networking and information-sharing for member churches in the area of inter-faith relations through the Churches' Forum for Inter-Religious Relations (CIFFR).
- We will develop research on Islamophobia as a partnership between IFTAG and the Christian-Muslim Forum.
- We will participate in external inter-faith bodies (including those established/funded by government) and support preparatory collective engagement by member churches where appropriate.



2:4 Social inclusion and a healthy society

- We will work in partnership with NEIs and others to facilitate information-sharing and collaboration across our membership on the response to the cost of living crisis.
- Across our work plan we will consistently highlight the way in which social exclusion exacerbates experiences of isolation and alienation and is a barrier to belonging, including in a church context.
- We will support our member churches in assessing the learning from the COVID-19 pandemic and facilitating collective engagement with public enquiries as appropriate.
- We will work in partnership with relevant organisations to connect member churches to resources on issues of mental health, trauma and bereavement.
- We will consult our member churches on the theme of ‘an ageing society’ as an area of emerging need.



3: Healing society's fractures: identities, borders and nationalities

The Christian understanding of the Kingdom of God brings a hope-filled perspective to questions of identity and belonging, calling us to create spaces in which the dignity and worth of every person, in all the complexity of our multilayered identities, is respected and valued. It calls us to ask the difficult questions about who is not present in our church communities, and why, and what our responsibilities might be in that regard. We need to develop the capacity and the confidence of the churches to engage in, and facilitate, respectful, evidence-based dialogue about issues of identity and belonging.



3:1 Theological reflection

- We will coordinate theological reflection on the identity-based challenges facing churches in the British-Irish context today, and develop a paper articulating the shared values that shape and inform our approach to these issues as churches.
- We will facilitate sharing and collaboration between members and partner organisations of the work that is being done in a church context to understand the legacy of empire and colonialism, and to address its harmful consequences through education and reparation, using networks such as the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum.
- We will work with partners to develop a network for Theology and Justice as a resource for ecumenical cooperation in the field of social justice.
- We will work in partnership with Luther King House to promote the annual David Goodbourne lecture as a contribution to theological reflection and dialogue on the work of building a more just and compassionate society.



3:2 British-Irish Relations

- We will develop communications tools to support our members in telling the story of our journey so far in the development of ecumenical relations on these islands.
- We will engage with wider civil society initiatives to promote good British-Irish relations and protect the Good Friday Agreement in light of the challenges arising from Brexit.
- We will support our members in the engagement with political leaders in the promotion of peace and reconciliation in the British-Irish context.
- We will work in partnership with the NEIs to provide spaces for respectful, evidence-based dialogue on issues of national identity as a support and resource for our member churches.
- We will consult our membership on priorities for European engagement in the wake of Brexit (given that CTBI's membership includes both EU and non-EU members).



3:3 Reimagining borders

- We will promote the work of the Churches Refugee Network as a resource for member churches in understanding the asylum system, its impact on those affected, and to support advocacy for change.
- We will work in partnership with the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe to connect to the wider European context.
- We will work in partnership with CTE on the Ukrainian Refugee Roundtable.
- We will promote Sanctuary Sunday as an important annual event in the Church calendar.
- We will create a database of Churches of Sanctuary and connect this network to our wider CTBI activities.
- We will participate, and support the participation of our members, in global ecumenical initiatives in solidarity with refugees.



3:4 State engagement with faith communities

- We will organise a webinar to examine the engagement of churches, and the wider faith sector, with the state in the different jurisdictions on these islands, as a foundation for increased collective advocacy on issues of identity and belonging.
- We will consult our member churches about the supports and resources currently available for their work and advocacy on issues of identity and belonging, and the extent to which enhanced ecumenical cooperation could develop their capacity in this area.



4: Working for Global Peace and Justice

The theme for the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches ‘Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity’ prompts us to reflect on the contribution religious leaders can make to global peace and security. Faith communities bring to the table networks that span from local community to international level, with pastoral insights that are often informed by work in acute situations of human suffering, and experience of navigating cultural diversity and multilayered identities. They also need to be challenged about the extent to which they are living out their values, notably in the treatment of minorities. Developing a better mutual understanding and mutual literacy between secular and religious human rights advocates will help create a climate more conducive to multilateral responses to the major challenges facing the whole of humanity.



4:1 Climate Justice

- We will assess the environmental impact of all aspects of our work plan as part of our decision-making and evaluation processes.
- We will promote the work of the Environmental Issues Network as a resource for member churches.
- We will promote Creation Time as an important moment for reflection and action in the church calendar.
- We will work with Christian Aid and other faith-based development agencies to connect our members with those most impacted by the climate emergency.
- We will support the work of the Churches Refugee Network in advocacy for those who become refugees as a result of climate breakdown.



4:2 International ecumenical peace networks

- We will continue our engagement with international ecumenical peace networks, developing the connection between our member churches and this work.
- We will conclude the Sri Lanka project with a focus on dialogue and encounter between the British and Irish churches and National Council of Churches of Sri Lanka.



4:3 Religion, violence and human rights

- We will facilitate and contribute to inter-faith dialogue on religion, violence and human rights in the global context.
- We will support, where appropriate, collective engagement by our member churches on the issues arising from the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- We will engage with the UN Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes, other multinational organisations and other civic partners to promote and resource engagement by our membership on these themes.
- We will work with Christian Aid and other faith-based development agencies to promote ecumenical responses to issues that threaten global peace and security.
- We will support our member churches in their response to critical world events.



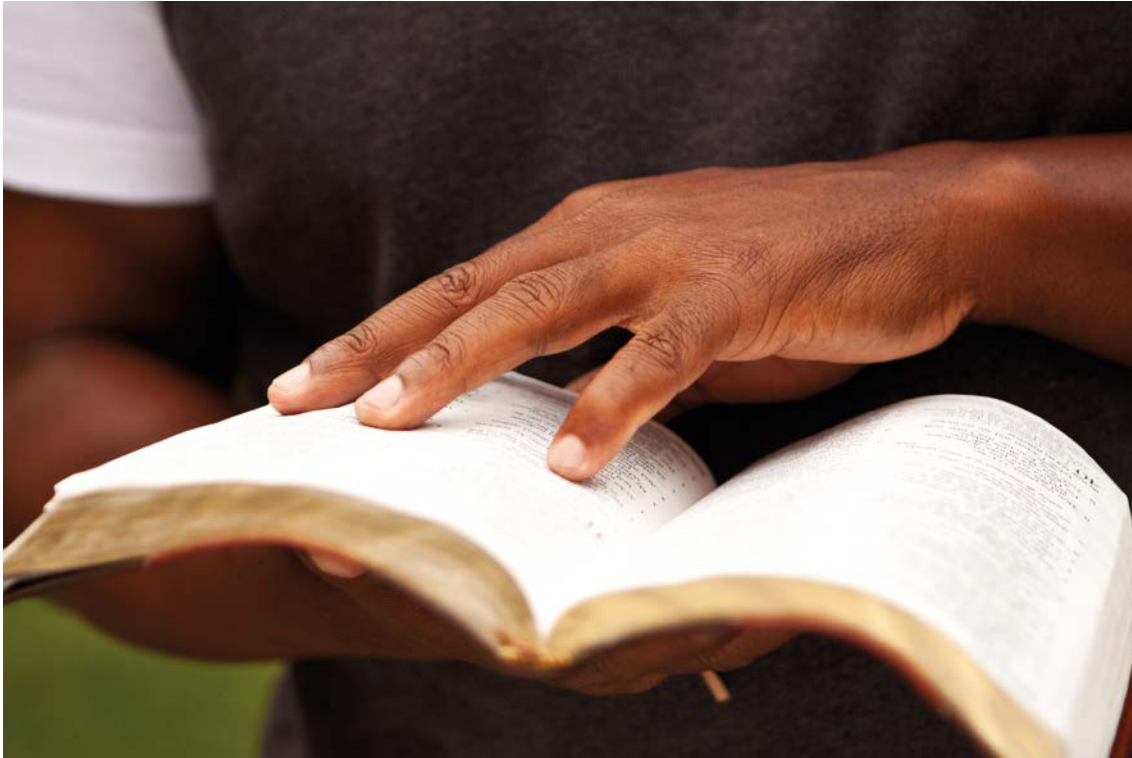
4:4 Freedom of Religion and Belief

- We will participate in, and facilitate collective engagement of our members with, structures established to consider issues of Freedom of Religion and Belief.
- We will work in partnership with the NEIs to support our members in the development of a common understanding of Freedom of Religion and Belief and priorities for shared action arising from that understanding.
- We will support, where appropriate, collective advocacy on issues of Freedom of Religion and Belief that are shared concerns of our members.



5: Promoting Ethical and Inclusive Leadership

Churches no longer hold the privileged position in society they once did. That changing reality presents many challenges but also provides valuable insights and opportunities. Churches continue to be regarded in communities as honest brokers, and to have the convening authority to bring people together, when they are seen to act with humility, generosity and the self-critical awareness that churches need to examine the extent to which they are living up to the values they profess. There is a responsibility to use our voice to bring Christian social ethics to the debate on societal challenges, as one voice among many, and to articulate how our values call us to act in defence of the most vulnerable.



5:1 Ethical leadership

- We will highlight and challenge abuses of power within and beyond the church context.
- We will build on the work previously done in *Courage to Tell* and *Time for Action* to support member churches in continuing to develop best practice in the area of safeguarding and contribute to the healing of victims and survivors of abuse in the church.
- We will support our member churches in working to provide safe spaces and welcome for all in the church, identifying and addressing issues that cause people to feel rejected or marginalised.
- We will speak out on threats to democracy, on standards in public office, and the need to build and restore trust in democratic political processes.



5:2 Support for the next generation of leaders

- We will promote the Children's Youth Ministry Network as a resource for our member churches.
- We will promote the Synergy Network as a resource to members in assessing and developing their contribution to efforts to address the problem of serious youth violence.
- We will convene a four nations roundtable of youth workers and youth leaders in the church sector to assess challenges and opportunities and produce a report for member churches.
- We will develop an internship programme for the formation of younger leaders.
- We will seek to recruit young leaders to our trustee body to help shape our work.



5:3 Gender justice and women's leadership

- We will continue to ensure that we support and highlight women's leadership across all areas of our work plan.
- We will develop a network of young women leaders supported by the Pauline Webb Fund.
- We will promote the work of IFTAG on gender justice and women's leadership in an inter-faith context as a resource for member churches.



5:4 Developing and resourcing our collective advocacy

- We will retain flexibility in our work plan to be responsive to emerging need in areas such collective advocacy and awareness-raising, and prayer initiatives.
- Through our communications strategy we will bring together examples of the leadership initiatives undertaken by NEIs and member churches to raise the profile of this work across different jurisdictions.
- We will work to expand our network of partners to maximise our outreach.

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