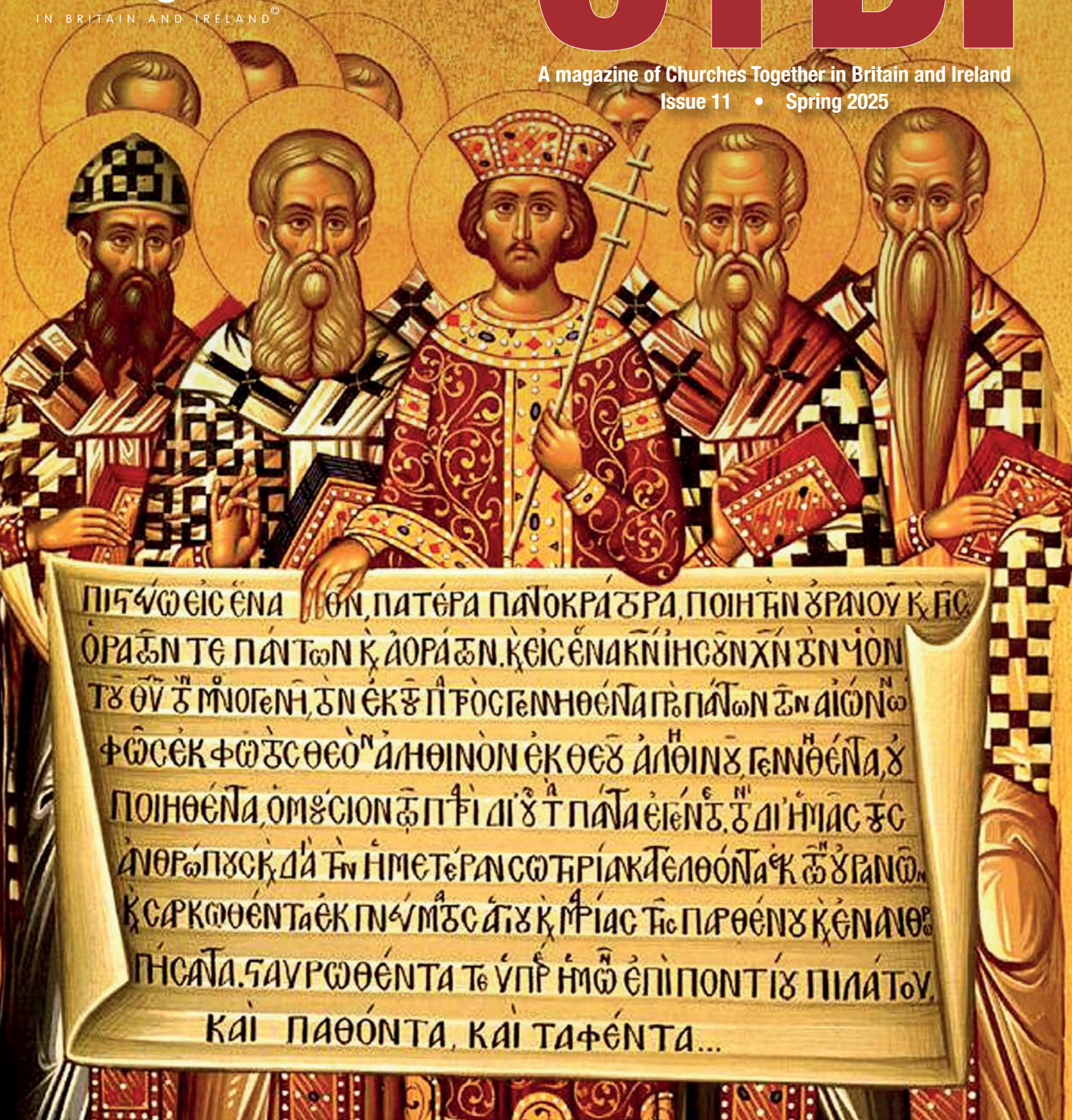




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Lent 2025

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NEWSLETTER

Subscribe to the monthly CTBI Newsletter to be the first to find out the latest news, events, new resources and webinars from CTBI and its member networks. Sign up at bit.ly/3QQaDnn



Background image:
Christ Pantocrator mosaic
from Hagia Sophia



Welcome

The journey of Christian unity is often joyful and celebratory. As we take steps closer together, and go deeper in our relationships, we are lifted up by the fellowship and the sharing of the Good News. There are also significant tensions to be navigated as we seek to be authentically open to diversity and yet also true to what we believe, cherishing what is precious to us in our respective traditions and valuing what matters to others, while together working to share our Christian faith in a pluralist public square in a way that is understandable and meaningful to the wider society. We can experience discomfort at areas of profound disagreement, and pain at those moments that highlight our continued separation from one another.

This Easter the calendars of Christians of East and West will coincide. Pope Francis has described this shared date as ‘an important sign’ (Address to the Group Pasqua Together 2025, 19 September 2024) and expressed the hope that the opportunity this significant moment in a year of other major ecumenical anniversaries and milestones would not be lost.

The joy of this moment of unity and connection strikes a poignant contrast with much of the fragmentation, fragility and conflict in human relations we see all around us, from the local community level to international relations. As people of faith we trust

in Christ’s promise of a peace that surpasses our human understanding, and we are called to act on that faith to bring about the transformation of society in accordance with our Kingdom values.

In marking the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea we reflect on our response to the question: ‘Do you believe this?’ (John 11: 26). What does it mean to share our faith in today’s world? In this edition of the magazine, we share some of the responses and reflections emerging from different areas of our work. Working closely with the churches in Ireland, we continue to explore what is meant by reconciliation, both in the context of the unfinished work of the Northern Ireland peace process, and in the learning that can be shared from that experience to other areas of societal conflict and division. Foremost in our minds are the divisions related to race, ethnicity and religion with the trauma of the riots of August 2024 continuing to pose unsettling questions that require clear responses from the Church. As we mark the 30th anniversary of Racial Justice Sunday, we remind ourselves of the vision that inspired this initiative and renew our commitment to the actions required to achieve it, shining the light of our Gospel values on those areas where there is still resistance to naming the reality of racism and counting the cost

of its lasting legacy. We have been encouraged by the participation of our members in our inter faith dialogues, conscious of the need to stand in solidarity with our neighbours of other faiths who are feeling victimised, misunderstood and attacked. Our experiences of sharing learning to help make the most of available opportunities to show solidarity, to build on examples of good practice and explore together challenging questions has affirmed the value of our ecumenical collaboration in this area.

In our member church profile, we have an opportunity to learn from the work of Revd Tim Norwood, National Ecumenical Officer for the Church of England. Revd Norwood offers a hopeful perspective for ecumenism, suggesting we are now more “instinctively ecumenical”. This is despite, and perhaps also in some ways because of, the many challenges facing churches at present. In sharing an example from the work of our Environmental Issues Network on Banking and Climate Justice we explore how effective partnership working can strengthen our collective ability to articulate and act on our values on those issues that matter to us for the sake of the common good.

You can keep informed of the progress of all these initiatives and more via the new Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) website which has been launched this year as a resource for the delivery of our strategic plan. There is an opportunity for member churches and bodies in association to promote ecumenical news, resources and events that align with CTBI’s strategic priorities, and we encourage you to avail of these opportunities where that might be helpful and support us by sharing the website as widely as possible to encourage engagement with the resources it offers.

Dr Nicola Brady
General Secretary
Churches Together in
Britain and Ireland



Trustee profile

Gemma King, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) Trustee

Gemma, who is currently working as an Intern at the World Communion of Reformed Churches' offices in Germany, shares her aspirations for ecumenical working.

How did you come to represent your Church as a CTBI trustee?

My journey in ecumenical organisations really began when I joined the Student Christian Movement back during my undergrad studies at New College, a journey which ultimately led to me serving as a trustee of SCM Britain. After attending an inspiring Ecumenical Youth Council of Europe conference

in Strasbourg, I was invited initially to give a report to the Church of Scotland Ecumenical Relations committee. However, when I attended the meeting to give my report I was asked if I would like to join the committee as a seat had become available. A few years later my Church sent me as a delegate to the Conference of European Churches General Assembly in Tallinn, Estonia in June 2023 where I met Nicola Brady and learnt more about the work of CTBI. When I got back from that meeting, I heard that the Church of Scotland was looking to nominate a new trustee for CTBI and I volunteered since the work of CTBI sounded interesting.

What motivated you to get involved in this work?

I think what motivated me to get involved in ecumenical work was a curiosity about other denominations and a desire to understand other churches better. I have always been fascinated by the denominational maps which show the divisions and reunifications of the Church and particularly inspired by the stories of unions and ecumenical initiatives. Then the more I got involved in ecumenical work the more I came to appreciate how much my faith was strengthened through working together with people from other denominations. It has enabled me to have my preconceptions challenged about other churches and what is normal for a church to believe or do. I was also motivated by my experiences in ecumenical communities including Taizé, Sannox Christian Centre and the Northumbria Community. In these spaces I could see the energy that ecumenical encounters can bring.

How could churches work together to better support youth leadership?

I think one of the best ways churches could work together to better support youth leadership is by sharing best practice stories about ways in which they have grown young leaders in their churches. They could also more actively support and publicise ecumenical organisations that provide opportunities for youth leadership such as Youth Link and Student Christian Movement.

What are your priorities for the work in the coming year?

In terms of my work as a Trustee of CTBI my priority is continuing to think through ways to involve more young people in ecumenism in Britain and Ireland. In my wider ecumenical work, my day job is working as an Intern with the World Communion of Reformed Churches in their office in Hannover, Germany. There my three main projects are: supporting the Gender justice work of the WCRC, serving on the editorial board for the WCRC's Nicaea book project and preparing for the General Council Meeting in Chiang Mai in Thailand in October.



Member Church profile

Tim Norwood is the National Ecumenical Officer for the Church of England, a member church of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

A Season for Ecumenism

I'm a "National Ecumenical Officer" in the Church of England. It's a broad role, but my focus is on partnerships, mission and local church life. I've been in this post for just over two years, although my ecumenical experience runs deep.

I'm a cradle Anglican who spent my teenage years in Pentecostal churches. I studied divinity in Aberdeen, where I preached my first sermon for a Church of Scotland congregation. I've served most of my ministry in Local Ecumenical Projects (LEPs), including a long stint as Area Dean of Milton Keynes, where I helped launch a new ecumenical body.

I attended the very first Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) Assembly at Swanwick in 1992 as a

student which was an amazing and formative experience. I was one of the youngest people there. It's amazing how much has changed since then, but also how much has stayed the same. John Bell, for example was leading worship, while the accommodation needed a lot of upgrades...

The ecumenical scene in Britain and Ireland has also changed dramatically since 1992. My priorities as an Anglican ecumenical officer need to reflect that. I'd like to take this opportunity to share some of my thinking...

Winter or Spring?

Some people have said we are in an "ecumenical winter". I really don't like that phrase, and I don't think it's true. In many ways Christians in Britain and Ireland have become more instinctively ecumenical over the past few decades.

At a local level, people are generally less suspicious and more welcoming.

I have also noted that charities, agencies, and initiatives choose to work ecumenically so they can have more impact. This is true at a local, national, and international level. Those who are focussed on specific needs or issues recognise that they can achieve more if they work with a broad range of churches and partners.

At the same time, many church institutions have been facing huge challenges in terms of money, ministers, or mission. I am conscious that my own church has been struggling with big issues, including attendance, money, safeguarding, gender, racial justice, and sexuality. These issues are important, but we've tended to turn inwards rather than look outwards. We've been focussing on our own internal problems rather



than finding support in our ecumenical friends. As a result, we have tended to see ecumenism as an optional extra rather than an opportunity or strength.

The Church of England Council for Christian Unity (CCU) has made “Encouraging Ecumenism” one of its top priorities. We need to rethink our ecumenical narrative for this new era. How can we as Anglicans reignite our vision for unity and rediscover its benefits? How can we become better partners in mission to these islands and the wider world?

Jesus used the image of the one vine to describe the unity we have in him (John 14). We remain in the vine because it links us to one another and to God. It’s the source of our life and growth. A big part of my job is to remind my fellow Anglicans that they are only one branch of this great vine, and we need to remain part of the whole. We need our partners if we are to fulfil our own calling.

Broader and Deeper

The most significant change in the ecumenical landscape since that first Assembly in 1992 has been the incredible growth of diversity both in

racial and ecclesiological terms. It is particularly exciting to see the rising number of Pentecostal and Orthodox churches that are now involved.

When my home city of Milton Keynes was founded in 1967, the Christian churches who were there at the time came together to form the Milton

A big part of my job is to remind my fellow Anglicans that they are only one branch of this great vine, and we need to remain part of the whole.

Keynes Christian Council. In the early days of the city, ecumenical discussions focused on the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodists, the Baptists, the Salvation Army, the United Reformed Church, and the Quakers.

Since then, we have witnessed an explosion of Christian Community in our new city. There are now several large charismatic churches, a growing number of Pentecostal churches and three Orthodox congregations – Greek, Romanian and Ukrainian. The approach

to Christian unity that was developed in the 1970s and 1980s is no longer suitable for this rapidly changing context.

Our new ecumenical body (Churches Together in Milton Keynes) was designed with diversity in mind. There is a need to be more flexible, more relational, and more missional. We also need to have meetings and events that work for newer partners.

This is a racial justice issue. Our existing structures and patterns of meeting were designed to meet the needs of the more established churches. This prevented newer congregations and church leaders from playing an active role and gave a very negative message. In Milton Keynes, we are trying to turn things around.

Similar patterns are true across Britain and Ireland. God is enriching us through diversity and challenging us to change. I believe this is a move of the Spirit that we should welcome and celebrate.

People and Networks

Christian Unity is not an optional extra in Church life. It is a response to the call of Christ to reconciliation and wholeness.

Church of Christ the Cornerstone in Milton Keynes

We need people who remind us of this call and keep us focused on the path ahead. We need to set resources aside for this purpose. As Jesus said, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).

In the Church of England, we are trying to rebuild our network of denominational ecumenical officers (DEOs) across the country. I have really enjoyed meeting existing ecumenical officers and welcoming new ones. It has been a joy to work together more closely as a team of mutually supportive colleagues!

I also want to pay tribute to our ecumenical instruments and the staff of these organisations who do so much to bring us together. I am endlessly impressed with their talents, passion, and commitment – and the patience they need when herding us ecumenical cats.

Working Together for Christ

One big strand of my previous ministry was “community organising” – the practice of bringing communities together to achieve shared goals.

I worked closely with Neil Jameson and others at Citizens UK for a number of years at both a local and national level. I was involved with the Living Wage campaign, Refugees Welcome, and other projects.

This experience has given me an appreciation of what churches and other civil society groups can achieve if they work together. I have also come to value relationships as the bedrock on which action is built.

I do believe in Christian Unity for its own sake. It is a response to the command of Christ – but there is also an intimate relationship between unity and mission. We come together in order to serve God in the World.

My gut feeling is that there is more that we can achieve together than we can achieve by ourselves, but this needs to emerge from the quality of our relationships. I’m not sure what this means for the next few years, but I believe God is calling us to something new.

Form and Content

I was recently asked if the emphasis of Christian Unity should be on relationships or structures. It was a great question, and the answer is somewhere in between. If we only focus on

relationships then things fall apart when people change, and nothing gets done. If we only focus on structures, then the energy drains from our ecumenism and our best efforts come to nothing.

It may not seem the most exciting issue for contemporary ecumenism, but we need to look again at our ecumenical structures, including LEPs and unity groups. We may also need new structures for new contexts – but this needs to emerge from, and coexist with, an ever more relational approach to Christian Unity.

Following God

I started this article with the question of an “ecumenical winter”. As I said, there is some truth in this statement when we turn inwards on ourselves, but God is calling us to come together and this leads through spring to a harvest of righteousness. This is not a time for triumphalism and overconfidence, but we do need to follow Christ faithfully in humility and love – seeking a better way for the sake of both the Church and the World.



For more information, visit:
www.churchofengland.org/

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

CTBI serves the churches of Britain and Ireland on the shared journey towards full visible unity in Christ. It provides information and guidance to bridge understanding of issues in today's society, and creates an ecumenical space for Christians to listen and work together for peace and reconciliation.

It develops publications and resources with other organisations and members to offer reflection, prayer and study materials to celebrate Christian events, as well as opportunities to learn and address key issues. It seeks to value the contribution of each church, respectful of relationships at all levels and recognising the diversity and difference within churches and nations.



collaborating with



national ecumenical instruments
(across England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales)



Finding the Face of God in One Another:

Learning from the 2024 Irish Inter-Church Meeting



A priority objective from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's (CTBI) strategic plan is 'healing society's fractures'.

In this strand of our work, we look at issues relating to identities, borders and nationalities through the lens of reconciliation. Central to our work in this area is the learning from the peace process that gave us the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, made possible by the commitment of people across these islands to find peaceful ways to deal with our differences and to acknowledge and work to heal the wounds of the past. We have been working in close partnership with the Irish Council of Churches (ICC), helping to support the creation of a Good Relations Officer role with ICC and learning from the work that Rev Karen Campbell has been undertaking since being appointed to that post in December 2023. In this article we explore some of the learning from the 2024 Irish Inter-Church Meeting, which took the theme "finding the face of God in one another", mindful of the need both for continued investment in the work of reconciliation and healing for those impacted by the Northern Ireland conflict, and the potential to draw inspiration from the successes of that process for our work with other situations of societal conflict.

The challenge of keeping reconciliation as a clear priority

The strategy that guides the response of the ICC to the challenge of reconciliation is entitled "The Unfinished Work of Peace", emphasising the participating churches' awareness of the need for continued investment in this area. The significant anniversaries that took place during 2023 — the centenary of the ICC, the fiftieth anniversary of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting and the 25th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement brought mixed emotions. There was much to be celebrated in the significant reduction in the levels and threat of violence, and the commitment to human rights protections and conflict resolution practices that made this possible. At the same time, there was disappointment that the work of reconciliation has not gone far enough, and the hopes that accompanied the signing of the Good Friday Agreement have not been fully recognised. Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, Most Rev



Opposite page: "Hands across the divide" – public sculpture in Derry, Northern Ireland; above: Co-Chairs, Bishop Sarah Groves and Bishop Brendan Leahy with keynote speaker Prof Martin Leiner, Director of the Jena Centre for Reconciliation.

Eamon Martin, remarked that: "We have not yet substantially reflected openly and honestly as churches on how our relationships have been scarred as a result of recent conflict, or on the deeper generational wrongs and traumas that lie underneath, unaddressed, and continuing to drive in a sinister way much of the sectarianism that we see today."¹

"...just as water can revive a garden that has dried out, so the grace of reconciliation can transform our reality."

So the 2024 Irish Inter-Church Meeting, the annual gathering of representatives from across the membership of Ireland's national ecumenical instruments, took the theme of reconciliation, which is ever-present in the work of those ecumenical bodies, and placed it at the heart of the discussion, creating a space in which the difficult questions around what we mean by reconciliation and how we believe it can be achieved could be examined from different perspectives.

The keynote speaker, Prof Martin Leiner, Director of the Jena Centre for Reconciliation, underlined the need to keep reconciliation as a clear

and consistent priority with reference to the wider global context which is scarred by increasing numbers of armed conflict, exacerbated by economic and cyber warfare. Reflections on the current state of international relations have the potential to be depressing and overwhelming, but Prof Leiner reminded participants of the hope that results from the promise of reconciliation – just as water can revive a garden that has dried out, so the grace of reconciliation can transform our reality. As our experience on these islands reminds us, peace requires constant attention and religious leaders have the opportunity to use their public profile to raise the public consciousness and support political leadership in this direction.

Understanding the context

The ICC *Unfinished Work of Peace* strategy states that "the journey towards healing takes place in a concrete local context where the complex intersection between the personal and communal dimensions of healing can be difficult to navigate". The 2024 Irish Inter-Church Meeting sought to unpack and explore critical dimensions of that context, mindful too of the wider international context that impacts the conditions for the work. Key themes identified included politicisation and the politics of fear, the climate crisis and the impact of racism and xenophobia. Participants were both challenged and supported to consider what it means to be truly open to, and appreciative of, diversity in this work of reconciliation. We may speak

¹ Archbishop Eamon Martin, 'Truth recovery and reconciliation in Ireland: a faith perspective', 1 April 2023 <https://www.catholicbishops.ie/2023/04/01/truth-recovery-and-reconciliation-in-northern-ireland-a-faith-perspective/>



often of the need for reconciliation, but are we articulating fully how we understand the terms and how we believe reconciliation can be achieved? In the Northern Ireland context there are obvious differences of language that reflect different visions and aspirations around the reconciliation process. Could we go further in exploring these differences in language and narratives? What gets in the way of our sharing?

An important challenge to the churches is the need to look honestly at the divides that result from and/or are exacerbated by socio-economic inequality and the isolation that can result from stark differences in quality of life, life chances and aspirations. What more might be done to support the building of meaningful connections, allowing churches to journey alongside communities, rather than being viewed as distant and disconnected?

Exploring different methodologies and approaches

The Inter-Church Meeting considered diversity not only in relation to the issues we need to be discussing, but also in the ways in which we might work together to create spaces conducive to sharing and relationship-building. Participants experienced the “peaced together” method which uses a collaborative process to create

art that allows for the exploration of our own brokenness and need for healing, with a focus on hope, gratitude and forgiveness. It can sometimes be mistakenly assumed that leadership in the process of reconciliation and community healing require us to take our own individual needs out of the equation and focus on what communities need from us, but this work is so deeply personal that we need to be aware of the experiences we are bringing to the process and how they have shaped us. Engaging with our own vulnerability, frailty and brokenness helps us respond to the challenge of finding the face of God in others who are struggling, as individuals and as communities.

Another methodology explored was the “Conversations in the Spirit” discernment practice used in the synodal process of the Catholic Church. Roundtable discussions, grounded in Scriptural reflection, were centred on the question: “What is the Spirit presenting to us at this Kairos moment and how are we being called to respond as ambassadors of reconciliation?”. In this method of discernment, individual contributions are followed by periods of silent reflection. Participants are encouraged to listen not only to one another, but also to listen for the Spirit. In this way we are encouraged to move

The Peace Bridge, Derry

beyond the individualism and self-interest that can sometimes be barriers to reconciliation, with the reflection on Scripture reminding us of our connection in Christ and the ties that bind us to one another.

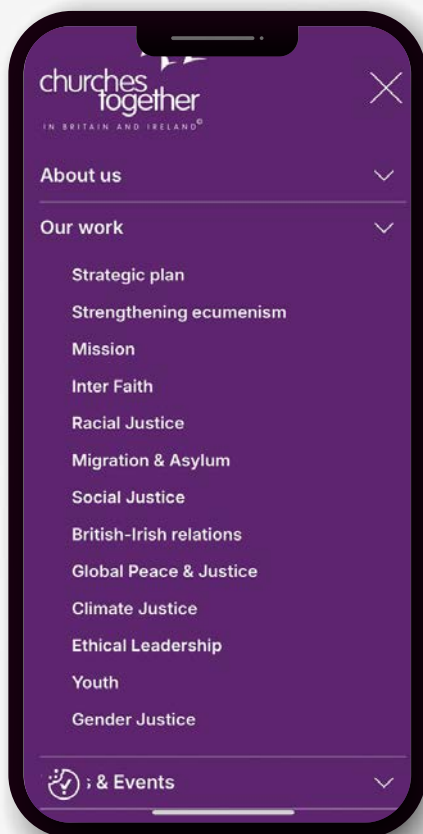
Applying the learning to future work

The experience of this Irish Inter-Church Meeting has motivated participants to think strategically about those opportunities that exist within denominational and ecumenical structures to keep the theme of reconciliation as a clear and consistent priority; to think creatively about how to engage those with whom the churches do not have strong connections — with humility, honesty and respect; and to share the stories about this journey with its achievements and disappointments, hopes and fears and the faith that shapes and guides the process.

It is hoped that this learning might be useful for others working to overcome divisions in communities and to encourage churches to invest in the work of reconciliation.



For more information on the work of the Irish Council for Churches, visit: www.irishchurches.org



NEW CTBI WEBSITE

Access the latest news, event details and resources to help strengthen ecumenical engagement and Christian unity.

WWW.CTBI.ORG.UK



Church of Sanctuary

“The time has come to shift the debate”

The Church of Sanctuary conferences held in partnership with the national ecumenical instruments Cytûn (Churches Together in Wales), Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS), Churches Together in England (CTE) and the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) over the last four years have been instrumental in the development and promotion of the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) Church of Sanctuary initiative. There is a growing number of congregations of different denominations taking up the Church of Sanctuary process. Recent recipients of the Church of Sanctuary certificate include Norwich Cathedral and Wesley Methodist Church, Chester. Churches working with the process include Leeds Minster and East Belfast Mission. My

preaching engagements on the theme have included Bolton Abbey, and the First Presbyterian Church, Belfast.

My coming commitments are centred on visiting congregations to present Church of Sanctuary certificates. 9th February 2025 marks an important date when I presented the Victoria Hall Methodist Church in Sheffield with their Church of Sanctuary certificate. This is particularly heart-warming for me because the congregation meets in the building in which I first dreamed up the idea of City of Sanctuary. I had a small office here. In return for the office space, I worked as an Associate Minister (2004-2011) with the specific remit to provide a strategy for ministry. I explored ways of working with people of all faiths and engaging with vulnerable people.

At a meeting held in Sheffield twenty years ago, in October 2005, City of Sanctuary was launched. It was a meeting of organisations and individuals committed to working with refugees and people seeking sanctuary in the city. All in attendance, people of different faiths and political backgrounds, and people who professed no religious faith, agreed to work together “recognising the contribution of asylum seekers and refugees to the City of Sheffield...and to welcoming and including them in our activities”. We pledged to work together to support Sheffield being a recognised City of Sanctuary.

Twenty years on the idea of City of Sanctuary, rooted in the biblical concept of cities of refuge (Numbers 35, Joshua 20), has grown into a network and



Opposite page: Asylum seekers arrive in Britain; this page: above left: awarding a Council of Sanctuary Certificate to Cheshire West and Chester Council; above right: the Church of Sanctuary conference; opposite: Victoria Hall Methodist Church of Sanctuary

movement across Britain and Ireland, and beyond. There are around 150 Cities, Towns and Boroughs of Sanctuary working with the City of Sanctuary vision. There are hundreds of Schools of Sanctuary. Two thirds of our universities are Universities of Sanctuary. There are 80 Local Authorities working together with the City of Sanctuary vision committed to creating cultures of welcome, inclusion and empowerment for people seeking sanctuary. Sanctuary is an idea enshrined in all humanity, religious and non-religious.

On 12 February 2025, Cheshire West and Chester Council received their Council of Sanctuary certificate. It was presented in an event held in the Chapter House of Chester Cathedral which received its Cathedral of Sanctuary certificate last year. Part of the outcome for this gathering was to give thanks for and celebrate the crucial work of faith communities, and to increase the number of places of worship and faith partners working with refugees and vulnerable people.

From faith perspectives, sanctuary and holiness are inseparable. The Church of Sanctuary is a constructive way for congregations to engage with people seeking sanctuary, learning and being informed by engagement with people with lived experience, working together to embed welcome, protective hospitality and inclusion, and doing this loud and proud as part of Christian discipleship. As a Church of Sanctuary, a congregation connects with a deep

biblical tradition, a long history and an incredible network of religious and non-religious organisations like Together with Refugees and the Refugee Council tuned in to and working together with shared values.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) there are currently 122 million people who are displaced or have been forced to flee their homes, the majority of them are fleeing war and violence. The majority are “internally displaced”, trapped in their own countries. Of this number, 43.7 million are “refugees”, people who have left their countries, fleeing for protection and safety.

There are 80 Local Authorities working together with the City of Sanctuary vision committed to creating cultures of welcome, inclusion and empowerment for people seeking sanctuary.

In the midst of all the political words around refugees, and migration in general, we uphold human beings seeking sanctuary, safe routes for travel, and protective hospitality. Human beings with names and families and stories, with gifts and contributions to share. It is essential to listen and pay attention to their incredible stories and dignity, courage and resilience. We belong together. Opinions and strategies are better built on facts, not fiction.



The time has come to shift the debate from hostility and preventing migration to planning migration, and managing migration with justice, mercy and humility. Churches build sanctuary and have positive contributions to make. That's the way ahead.

Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal OBE is a leading theologian and Methodist Minister. He is founder and President of City of Sanctuary, a former President of the Methodist Conference, and the former Leader/CEO of the Corrymeela Community. Inderjit also heads up the Church of Sanctuary, in partnership with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI).



For more information visit:
churchofsanctuary.org

Synergy Network



Joanna Brown

Left: Production still from Jamaican-British film maker Paul Bucknor's adaptation 'Romeo n Juliet 4eva'; above: Joanna Brown



This year promises to be a busy one for the Synergy Network (SN); we are hosting a number of events, and undertaking key pieces of work, a few of which are listed below.

One Pledge: One Change

One Pledge: One Change is SN's strapline for the Standing Together Weekend, and it wants as many leaders as possible to come on board and support the weekend. It will be asking them to undertake a task from a list of pledges to help to bring about one change that will positively contribute to the reduction of Violence Affecting Young People (VAYP). SN has compiled a list of pledges from which participants can choose (or they can make their own pledge).

SN will be asking key faith (and non-faith) leaders to help promote this event by recording a 30-second video confirming their support, and using our strapline, 'One pledge; One change', which will be shared on the organisation's website and other promotional materials.

Standing Together Weekend

SN currently hosts the Standing Together Sunday event each year in July: The purpose of this special Sunday is for all churches in Britain and Ireland to set aside a Sunday to pray for our young people, and focus on VAYP. SN provides material for churches to follow, if requested.

For 2025, SN wants the special Sunday to become a weekend that includes not only churches and Christian organisations, but also those of all faiths and none to come together in unity, to bring an end to VAYP. This year the events will take place on the weekend of the **19/20th July 2025**, which are the immediate days after which many schools on these shores break up for their main summer holidays.

British Government roundtable on knife crime

SN efforts to lobby the British Government to act more decisively on knife crime by making it a public health issue, has resulted in SN's Chair, Bishop Lenford Rowe, and Coordinator, Joanna Brown, being invited onto the British Government's roundtable meetings on VAYP. Bishop Rowe and Joanna Brown have attended the last three

meetings at Downing Street and the Home Office respectively, where they had opportunities to share information about SN's activities, and feed into the conversations around the banning of zombie knives, and the ways in which young people could be deterred from joining gangs and engaging in violent activity. In addition to being part of the roundtable, a senior British Government civil servant regularly attends SN strategy meetings on VAYP.

Film project

SN is also collaborating with the noted film producer, Paul Bucknor, regarding his Jamaican cinematic adaptation of Romeo and Juliet. The network will screen the 97-minute movie in early 2025, and following the screening, will convene a panel discussion featuring a cross section of practitioners to debate some of the issues raised in the film, such as VAYP and postcode/gang rivalry.

Joanna Brown, Coordinator, Synergy Network



For more information, visit:
<https://wearesynergy.org.uk/>



On 21 November 2024, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), and the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF) hosted an all-day meeting at the CTBI headquarters, which brought together those church-based groups engaged with reparatory justice or reparations linked to Transatlantic African chattel enslavement. The all-day, London-based gathering aimed to find out more about the work that is being carried out on these shores in relation to reparations, and the ways in which it could be better supported.

The in-person gathering was co-Chaired by Christian Aid's Dr Lisa Adjei, and Dr David Muir of the National Church Leaders Forum, and featured ten presentations from denominations, parachurch organisations and mission agencies throughout the day.

Reparations for Transatlantic African chattel enslavement

A meeting in London explored the excellent work of a range of organisations

Time was also set aside for comments and clarifications in relation to the presentations, as well as for opportunities to discuss the learning gained from this work, and best practice. The packed programme also reserved time for networking, which ensured that attendees discussed the possibilities of collaborative work, and shared statements on reparations.

Over the last two decades, reparations have gained real traction in the Caribbean and North America, with churches in those regions playing a key role in this conversation. In recent years, churches on these shores have taken up this matter with earnest, and the roundtable was the latest in a series of RJAF activities that aim to inform and equip British and Irish churches with the knowledge and tools to properly participate in this significant discussion.

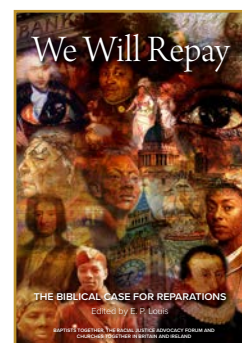
CTBI's Richard Reddie said, 'The roundtable was a great opportunity to hear more about the excellent work taking place in the various churches on this important issue. Reparations are not a subject that will go away

anytime soon, and it is vital that the Church is at the forefront of the conversation around this justice-related matter. It is my hope that the other denominations and mission agencies that were also connected to this historical activity, also participate in this reparatory journey.'

The roundtable was a precursor to a proposed international conference next year that will explore reparatory justice from a global, Christian perspective.

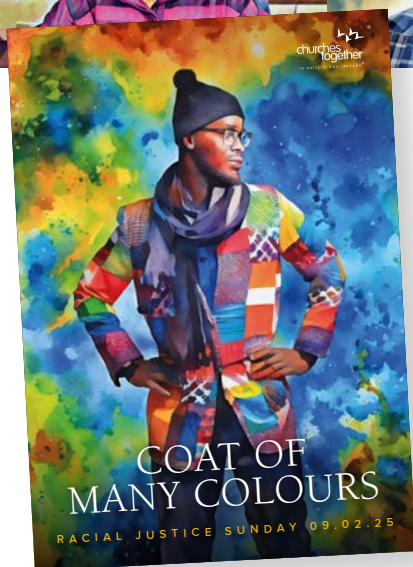


For more information, visit:
ctbi.org.uk/our-work/racial-justice/



Download a copy of CTBI's 'We Will Repay' Bible Study: ctbi.org.uk/resources/we-will-repay-bible-study/

Racial Justice Sunday



This year's Racial Justice Sunday (RJS) event took place on 9 February 2025, and celebrated the 30th anniversary of RJS in British and Irish churches.

RJS was established by the Methodist Church in 1995 following the tragic racist murder of Black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, in southeast London in April 1993.

A few years later, the Churches' Commission for Racial Justice, a Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) programme, agreed to mainstream this special Sunday, and began to produce resources to ensure that all churches could engage with it.

The CTBI resources for 2025 have the theme, 'Coat of Many Colours', which reflect the increasing diversity that exists in the churches in Britain and Ireland. CTBI's Richard Reddie, who edited the resource said, 'There is little doubt that churches, especially in our larger cities, are a microcosm of the world in a congregation, which is indeed a blessing that must be celebrated. Equally, the fact that these believers have breathed some much-needed spiritual life into our churches reveals that this is a movement of God for which He must be praised.'

Yet, despite this amazing reality, inequality still exists in the Church, and blights the experiences of too many Christians from Global Majority Heritage backgrounds. This can leave believers with the sense that they do not belong in the house of the Lord, or are not being given the opportunities to use their God-given talents to further the Lord's Kingdom. Richard Reddie adds: 'Given the unwelcome decline in church attendance over the last several decades, British and Irish churches must wake up to the reality that God is doing a 'new thing' (Isaiah 43:19) among those Christians who now call these shores home.'



... despite this amazing reality, inequality still exists in the Church, and blights the experiences of too many Christians from Global Majority Heritage backgrounds.

Although the second Sunday in February is Racial Justice Sunday, CTBI are keen for churches to note that every Sunday should be Racial Justice Sunday. Richard ends by saying, 'Our God is a God of justice who takes an interest in justice permanently and perennially. If that's the way God sees it, so should we!'



To download the Racial Justice Sunday resource for 2025, visit ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday/

Churches' Refugee Network



The recent upheavals in Syria have once again shone a light on the fact that international events invariably impact and inform domestic matters on these shores. Almost a decade ago, the turmoil in Syria saw a massive spike in those forced to flee that war-torn country, resulting in a refugee crisis in western Europe. On these shores, this led in part to the development of schemes such as 'Community Sponsorship', and other initiatives established to respond to the sizeable numbers fleeing danger.

This year marks a decade since the Churches' Refugee Network (CRN) organised its first 'exposure visit' to

Greece, which saw over a dozen key church leaders from Britain and Ireland observe the work the churches were carrying out with Syrian refugees ensconced in temporary camps. That visit, which was followed by two others to Italy and Greece, aimed to encourage these church leaders and representatives to become advocates for refugee-related matters in the places where they lived and worked.

The current Syrian crisis is one of many around the world that has seen men, women and children forced to leave their homes, and lose their livelihoods, in search of sanctuary. It can be argued that except for those fleeing from the Ukraine, people seeking sanctuary on these shores invariably experience greater hostility today than they did a decade ago. Issues around immigration and asylum have now become a key public policy issue, which has seen certain politicians and (social)



media commentators weaponising these matters to satisfy their own agendas.

In 2025, the CRN will continue to work with its partners to encourage a more compassionate and justice-driven response to what is a global crisis. It will use its quarterly meetings (the first of which took place in January 2025), e-bulletins and regular communiques, to encourage churches and Christians to redouble their efforts to engage in activities that can transform the lives of those looking to start new ones on these shores.



For more information visit:
ctbi.org.uk/crn

Race, Religion, Rhetoric and far-right extremism: a response

On Saturday, 8 February 2025, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), alongside the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF), and the University of East London (UEL), hosted the 'Race, Religion, Rhetoric and far-right extremism – a response' conference at Church House (Church of England headquarters), Westminster, London.

The one-day conference, which was chaired by Revd Guy Hewitt from the Church of England and Dr Nadia Habashi from UEL, explored how elements of the 'far-right' have weaponised 'race' and religion to fuel hatred. The conference was primarily a response to the disturbing riots that took place on these shores in the summer of 2024. In the aftermath of those worrying events, Black and Asian Christians approached the RJAF to encourage it to create a space that

enabled Christians in particular to make sense of what took place. Of paramount concern was the way certain groups had coopted Christian symbols, and were using them to foment division.

The conference itself featured a number of experts and practitioners such as Revd Dr Helen Paynter, Dr Maria Power, Bishop Rosemarie Mallett, CTBI's General Secretary, Dr Nicola Brady and Lord Boateng and Lord Woolley. Interspersed between the plenary sessions were several workshops that explored everything from the role and influence of the media, especially social media, in promulgating misinformation, to issues of free speech and the role of the authorities in policing behaviours that could incite violence.

There is little doubt that the riots tested to the full the church's community engagement, and the conference discussed new approaches

Lily Reddie



to build more cohesive and resilient communities, which are established on confidence, trust, honesty and mutual engagement.

The conference was part of the **RJAF's** overall efforts to promote justice and inclusion in church and society, and to encourage greater cohesion and resilience in our increasingly diverse society. Such a viewpoint chimes with the CTBI priorities of 'Working together for mission and the common good', and 'Healing societies' fractures; identities, borders and nationalities'.



For more information visit:
ctbi.org.uk/our-work/racial-justice/



Lily Reddie

see the language of freedom of speech being distorted to justify abuses like disinformation and hate speech.

Reflecting on the different dimensions of the challenge of the Far Right (i.e. socio-economic, political, spiritual, community relations), participants affirmed the importance of the role of the Church across all of these. The spiritual and pastoral dimensions of this crisis are profound. Beneath much of the anger and threat, we can detect a cry for help and a search for belonging and it is a challenge to find ways to engage with this without compromising on our commitment to the rights and dignity of all, and the need to challenge attitudes and behaviours that damage our communities.

The Church has the potential to both support and challenge those in our communities to engage in a dialogue of difference, drawing on the Church's deep-rooted practice of hospitality with intentional outreach to those who may be feeling alienated, left out and unheard, to help establish relationships that will give a foundation for dialogue. Deeper processes of critical self-reflection by the Church are necessary to support credible leadership in this area. We can too often slip into a posture that suggests that the Church is speaking from outside of, or above, societal divisions. We can also be blind to the way in which practices and structures within the Church can inhibit the engagement of Christians with these issues (e.g. hierarchical structures as barriers to collective responsibility and collective leadership).

This work cannot be kept within the walls of the church. We discussed creative ways in which churches are working together and with other faith communities to bring messages of peace, unity and belonging out on to the streets, such as initiatives like street pastors and community choirs. Gaps in youth services and the role that faith communities can play in supporting young people were highlighted as particular priorities.

There are many examples of good practice we can draw on and do more of to develop intentional collective responses that connect the community-building work of faith communities, that will effectively reduce the threat of Far Right violence to help develop our preparedness and hopefully lower the risks.

Religion and far-right extremism

A four-nations church response

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) facilitated a series of workshops at the 'Race, Religion, Rhetoric and far-right extremism – a response' conference looking at the role of the Church.

Participants discussed the problem of Far-Right extremism threatening communities, identifying causes, consequences and recommendations for the Church. We shared examples of good practice and learning from other areas of work that touch on similar themes, such as the work of churches in support of the Northern Ireland peace process.

Among the causal factors identified by the group, white supremacy was a priority concern. While white supremacy is obvious and frightening in its manifestations, it was recognised that there are other, sometimes more subtle, forms of identity conflict that are having a harmful influence on communities. Participants shared examples from their different contexts of battles for territory in communities, struggles for control of the public space and the forms of tribalism that we can identify underneath these clashes. We talked about the importance of speaking out against xenophobia and the weaponisation of nationalism against different groups in society, with

an awareness that there is a need to go deeper in our analysis to examine and engage with the factors that leave people vulnerable to getting involved in these movements that direct them towards hatred and violence.

The atomisation of community life in many places, with the loss of many of the opportunities for people to come together, and this social contact being replaced with time spent in so-called "social" media spaces, which are all too frequently echo-chambers, help reinforce feelings of isolation, being left behind and betrayal. Connected to this are the narratives of masculinity that are dominant in these spaces. Far Right groups are adept at exploiting the very real suffering and vulnerability that results from socio-economic inequality and the lack of hope for the future in many parts of society. Particular concern was expressed that this behaviour and language is increasingly being replicated in political discourse with political leaders increasingly resorting to divisive and isolating narratives, and the politics of fear and distraction, all while attacking those who speak out on issues of social justice for being "woke". In this context it is increasingly difficult for people to identify "fake news" and misinformation, and we



“Dancing with Diversity”

Revisiting the Scandal of Particularity in the context of inter-religious dialogue

A Day Conference arranged by the Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group

The Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group within Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) aims to stimulate a conversation amongst Christians about the theological implications of living out the Christian faith in a religiously plural world. This is something we cannot avoid, or at least we should not avoid if we take seriously Christian mission in the world. Over the years IFTAG has arranged various conferences looking at different aspects of this and this has included a conference on the use of Bible in inter faith dialogue, theologies of land in the context of the conflict in the Middle East, and challenges posed when Christian acts of worship have other faiths in attendance and who may participate in some way. In 2024, we turned to the question of Christian

particularity in a world of many faiths, and how that distinctiveness can potentially enrich inter faith dialogue.

The day conference was held at the new Coptic Church centre at Saint Andrew's by the Wardrobe, close to Saint Paul's Cathedral in London and featured three Christian theologians all exploring different aspects of this question with a particular emphasis on the doctrine of the Resurrection as the very essence of Christian distinctiveness. Dr Clare Amos opened the conference with her contribution entitled **“Beyond the binary: The scandal of particularity and the grace of divine plenitude”** and sought a different kind of engagement other than those framed by polar opposites and confrontation. This was followed by the Revd Dr Graham

Adams with his paper **“Do not hold on to me: Resurrection as a basis for an unsteady dance”**, building on the themes in his recent book *“Holy Anarchy: Dismantling Domination, Embodying Community, Loving Strangeness”*. And finally, the Revd Dr Peter Colwell offered a reflection entitled **“A Haunted Dance: Christianity Particularity and the Perplexity of Religious Pluralism”**, which pondered how our instinctive reaction of perplexity to otherness might be something creative in the area of interfaith dialogue.



For more information visit:
ctbi.org.uk/dancing-with-diversity

True to Self and Open to Others

Report on the CTBI-CWM Workshop on Inter Faith Relations in the UK Context

The Council for World Mission is one of the oldest Christian missionary organisations, formerly known as the London Missionary Society. In its former incarnation it was responsible for sending missionaries to places that were, for the most part, ruled over by the British Empire.

From 8-10 October 2024 in London and Luton, CWM invited Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) to facilitate a residential workshop for its member churches on the subject of inter faith relations. We took a conscious decision to construct a programme that not only addressed the historical roots of inter faith relations in the UK context but also offered sufficient breath that recognised that inter faith issues in the UK are in the context of Britain as a post-colonial power living with settled inter religious diversity and for this reason racial justice was a critical part of the contemporary context. It was therefore important to include within the programme presentations on Racial Justice from Richard Reddie, CTBI's Director of Justice and Inclusion and the Churches of Sanctuary movement

from Revd Inderjit Bhogal. Alongside these social justice issues, Bonnie Evans-Hills led a session on gender justice. The theological dimension was picked up by Raj Bharat Pata, looking particularly at public theology from a Dalit perspective that is exercised in an interreligious context, and also a focus on one Christian tradition's approach to inter faith relations, namely the Anglican tradition and this was led by Clare Amos. The particularities of the Jewish Christian encounter were addressed by James Roberts of CCJ. Peter Colwell, CTBI's Deputy General Secretary, was able to offer the historical perspective of how the British Council of Churches engaged in this area and outlining some of the contemporary challenges faced by inter faith relations including the challenge of religiously inspired nationalisms and geopolitical conflicts.

How all this is expressed in a local context was addressed through a visit to Luton, one of the most religiously diverse towns in England and also the place with a strong tradition of inter faith engagement. It is also the place where CWM sent one of its partners, David

Jonathon, originally from the Church of North India, more than 20 years ago, and he has remained there continuing the vital work of Grassroots. In that visit we heard from civic leaders and the Luton Council of Faiths and visited a Gurdwara and a Mosque. It was noteworthy that during last summer's riots, the good relationships between faiths and strong communication between them helped to keep a sense of calm.

Those attending the workshop came from a diverse range of contexts including Pacific Islands (including Samoa, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea), Africa (including Malawi in South Africa), Asia (Hong Kong, India, South Korea and Taiwan), Jamaica and New Zealand.

The Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group within CTBI worked on this programme and most of the input provided was from its members. It was a good example of how CTBI can resource inter faith engagement through its long history of work in this area. But we also learnt much from our friends from the global south who came to participate in this programme. Through questions and shared stories from their contexts, we were challenged to think in new ways about Christian witness in a multi-faith world. In particular, the need to be faithful to our Christian calling whilst being open to others with whom we share our humanity.



For more information:
ctbi.org.uk/our-work/inter-faith

Living Well Together: Confronting Anti-Muslim Prejudice

The past 18 months have been incredibly challenging for us all in the face of riots on our streets, heart-breaking war and violence in many parts of the world, not least in the Middle East, and rising levels of hate crime, fed by misinformation on social media.

As we witness to the unity that we have in Christ, we are also compelled to challenge injustice wherever we see it and look deep into our own hearts and open ourselves to be challenged where our actions and words fall short

of a witness to the self-giving love we see in Christ.

A few years ago, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), in partnership with the Council of Christians and Jews, produced a resource that help local churches and leaders better understand Antisemitism. Together with the Christian-Muslim Forum we are aiming to produce a similar resource that explores anti-Muslim prejudice. The past few years, and especially recent months, have been very challenging for

Muslims, and many Christians have sought to reach out to their Muslim neighbours in love and friendship. This forthcoming publication is aimed at resourcing this important work in our local communities.

This will also provide tools for deepening understanding and mutual solidarity in troubled times. Key areas for this resource will be Qur'an and Bible, Jesus and Mary, Evangelism, Colonialism, Post-colonialism and racism and the effects of Islamophobia.

This resource is currently being compiled and should be available later in 2025.



For more information:
ctbi.org.uk/our-work/inter-faith



ZOOM WEBINAR

DAVID GOODBOURN LECTURE 2025

**Just knowing:
How do we create
knowledge that does
justice to
marginalised voices?**



20 MAY 2025

7.30PM - 9.00PM

'Nothing about us without us' is a frequent cry for justice from marginalised groups. Yet this cry also recognises people who are 'not us' who we hope will change to include us as fully human and able to flourish.

This lecture will explore [Project Violet](#), a three-year project to explore women's experience of ministry in the Baptist tradition. Using Theological Action Research, the project has involved Baptist women to understand more fully the theological, missional, and structural obstacles they face resulting in 57 requests for change.

**REGISTER YOUR
ATTENDANCE**

GUEST SPEAKERS



**Dr Helen
Cameron**

Regent's Park
College, Oxford



**Revd Jane
Day**

Regent's Park
College, Oxford


**churches
together**
IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND®

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:





‘A Reconciled Land’:

New hope after presidential and parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka

The reality that it was the Emperor Constantine who convened the first ecumenical council of the Church at Nicaea 1700 years ago brings to mind for many the harm that was done to the Christian witness of the Church in the centuries that followed through privileged relationships with empires and dictatorships, at the expense of its responsibility to defend the rights and dignity of all.

The Church that gathered in Nicaea was a persecuted Church, with many participants bearing the physical scars of that persecution. The protection of the emperor was undoubtedly viewed as a great relief and embraced as an opportunity to spread the Gospel message. Over the centuries that followed the experience of the Church across the world in its relationship to political power would vary widely from those examples where the alliance with empires or dictatorships made

the Church not only complicit, but sometimes also an active participant, in the great wrongs that were done to people through wars, colonialism, slavery, dehumanisation of peoples and human rights abuses. There are also inspiring examples of the Church

...the alliance with empires or dictatorships made the Church not only complicit, but sometimes also an active participant, in the great wrongs that were done to people through wars, colonialism, slavery, dehumanisation of peoples and human rights abuses.

standing with the abused, marginalised and oppressed, with Church leaders risking, and sometimes losing, their lives for their opposition to human rights abuses by political powers.

It is only in recent years that, in the wider Church context, we are beginning to open up in-depth conversations about the legacy of the relationships between churches and empires, and other examples where close relationships between Church and State gave cover for human rights abuses, including abuses perpetrated within the Church.

The Church on these islands today is one that has largely, though not entirely, lost its privileged position in relation to political decision-making. There is an opportunity to redefine the relationship between the Church and political leaders in a way that supports healthy, participative democracy, encouraging Christians to get involved and bring their values to the political debate, alongside other perspectives in our pluralist societies.

The past year has been marked by significant elections on these islands with a UK General Election in July 2024 and an Irish General Election in November



AI photos: istock

Opposite: Tea pickers in the hills of Sri Lanka; left: Polling station during the 2024 elections; below left: life in the capital Colombo



2024. That same month the eyes of the world were on the US Presidential Election, conscious of the implications for global peace and security.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) has been working with other partners to support and promote constructive engagement with politics by the Church, particularly at local church level, recognising the centrality of relationships between political and community leaders to a healthy democracy. Our Lenten resource took the theme of politics at the service of the common good, reminding us that, at a time when we were disappointed at much of the tone, content and policy decisions reflected in public discourse, we are not powerless to influence and shape the direction of political debate. We have opportunities to inject language that reflects our Christian values, reaching out to those who share those values. We sought to encourage local inter-church groups to build on their existing relationships to develop the confidence to get involved and engage more people in this work.

When we re-launched the Churches General Election website we were encouraged to see the number of local inter-church groups advertising hustings events, with some partnering

with other faith communities in these important initiatives. In a time of widening and deepening polarisation it can be risky to take the lead in creating a space for public debate on political issues and making the case for why that dialogue is necessary. In the preparatory workshop we offered participants reported a range of challenges including: unwillingness of politicians to join multi-party debates, preferring to have their own platform without dialogue; unwillingness of venues to host such an event, including some owned by local authorities; and concerns about how to handle the threat of intimidation, hate speech or violence.

NCCSL has been working with some of the most marginalised groups in that society to make their voices heard through community dialogue including women leaders, youth leaders, victims and survivors of the conflict and plantation workers.

We know that the most effective way to combat hate speech and the threat of violence is through building connection – listening to one another and sharing our stories, including how we communicate around political engagement, building and rebuilding people's confidence that participation in political processes can lead to meaningful change for them. The work of these local groups in taking a lead has been a vital service to the wider community.

During 2024 there were also important elections in Sri Lanka where CTBI has been supporting the National

Christian Council of Sri Lanka (NCCSL) in a project entitled 'A Reconciled Land': a presidential election in September and parliamentary elections in November. Through the Reconciled Land project NCCSL has been working with some of the most marginalised groups in that society to make their voices heard through community dialogue including women leaders, youth leaders, victims and survivors of the conflict and plantation workers. Learning from their experience, Church Leaders in Sri Lanka issued statements through the NCCSL providing public information to educate people about their voting rights and reminding people what is at stake in light of their responsibilities as Christians.

Ahead of the parliamentary elections they said: *The NCCSL considers voting as a spiritual-political act, which is an opportunity for voters to exercise their rights to choose their leaders, express solidarity with marginalised and vulnerable groups and contribute towards a better country for all. All voters should consider the commitment of political parties, independent groups and individual candidates to these ideals including bringing realistic laws, policies and practices that will bring "good news to the poor and oppressed" and ensure "life in its fullness for all."*

Our next priority as CTBI is to encourage relationship-building beyond and between elections on these islands, and continued dialogue with our church partners around the world about issues of democracy and human rights. The outbreak of riots and other forms of violence on the streets of communities across Britain and Ireland in the past year reminds us both of the need for constant attention to issues of peace and community relations and for the importance of ongoing regular dialogue between political and community leaders to make that a reality.



For more information, visit:
ctbi.org.uk/sri-lanka



Building on Momentum

Action on Banking and Climate Justice for the Season of Creation

During last year's Season of Creation, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), with the support of our Environmental Issues Network (EIN), contributed to the development of a collective advocacy initiative which saw over seventy churches and Christian institutions sign a Statement of Concern addressed to five leading UK high street banks (Barclays, HSBC, Santander, NatWest and Lloyds) about their continued investment in fossil fuels.

The initiative was based on a wide-ranging partnership, which included one of CTBI's Bodies in Association — Just Money Movement — as well as Christian Climate Action, the World Council of Churches and the Laudato Si Movement. The partnership extended beyond the faith sector with the participation of Make My Money Matter

and Bank Better. It built on earlier conversations with CTBI member church representatives which noted an increasing awareness among churches of the need for attention to banking and finance as a key element of the response to issues of climate justice and a desire for support to help churches discern how best to engage and take action.

The focus of the Statement of Concern reflects the diversity of ways in which churches and faith-based organisations are responding to these issues: some have intentionally and publicly switched banks as part of their advocacy and awareness-raising; some have been using their position as shareholders to lobby for positive change and engage in dialogue with the banks. Others are exploring their options before deciding which approach might work best in their particular circumstances.

The Statement was launched shortly after the end of Season of Creation on 19th November and received prominent coverage in *The Times* and in church press. Critically, it has proved to be a helpful tool for dialogue, opening up conversations with banks addressed in the Statement.

Effective partnership

CTBI has been reflecting on the learning from this experience. There is a strong consensus from our members that climate justice is a clear priority. From a policy perspective, the implications are wide-ranging and sometimes complex. In the EIN, CTBI brings together member church representatives, faith-based organisations and ecumenical partnerships working in this area for shared learning and collaboration. Participants are supported to keep informed about relevant events and

*Opposite: North Sea rig construction;
Right: City of London; the Just Money
Movement logo*

initiatives, share learning and raise questions about challenges they face.

Building on the learning from the Climate Sunday evaluation we have been exploring how to work most effectively in partnership on these issues. The Statement of Concern experience offers useful learning, particularly because this was a partnership that extended beyond the faith sector, drawing in relevant expertise from the wider community and voluntary sector.

There was a strong foundation for the churches' engagement in this advocacy. Taken together, churches and Christian organisations are significant stakeholders from the banks' perspective. They are also highly visible, having a presence at the heart of every local community, and with networks of relationships that extend internationally. This latter point was emphasised by the support from the World Council of Churches and the global Catholic Laudato Si Movement.

Churches continue to hold an important moral leadership role in the public square and are considered to have legitimacy when speaking out on ethical issues.

Churches continue to hold an important moral leadership role in the public square and are considered to have legitimacy when speaking out on ethical issues. This is, of course, not without challenge and the tone and content of the statement was the subject of careful reflection and dialogue to ensure that it conveyed humility — because in the work of climate justice we could all be doing better — and outreach rather than judgement. The Statement also had an impact beyond the addressees in awareness-raising across the wider church membership, and beyond the churches in encouraging other institutions to consider similar initiatives.

In planning this action, we were conscious of the many pressures facing those in different positions of church leadership. The various partners involved in the initiative were sensitive

to this and anxious to be supportive and so the timeline was fixed with consideration for the church calendar, allowing for the promotion of the initiative and the gathering of signatures to take place during Season of Creation, when many churches were planning events and worship themed around climate justice. This timing also helped to reinforce the connection between our Christian faith and our action on issues of climate justice.

The initiative had dialogue at its heart, beginning with a collaboration between faith-based and secular organisations, engaging a wide range of churches and Christian organisations, communicating with the banks and also with the media. It was an opportunity to model the kind of inclusive approach that we advocate in the work of climate justice, recognising the need for many different areas of expertise and experience to be present in the conversation, including the perspective of churches.

Next steps

Participating organisations are continuing to build on the momentum generated by the Statement of Concern in a range of ways. Conversations are ongoing with the banks addressed in the Statement to encourage them to move away from investment in fossil fuels. The engagement with churches has produced encouraging stories about effective action that can be shared as an encouragement to others and possible models to follow. These stories bring a hopeful perspective to a very challenging and concerning area of work. As the work is ongoing the Statement of Concern remains live and churches and Christian organisations can continue to sign up and lend their voices and support to this important appeal.



The initiative has generated renewed interest in the work of the EIN more broadly and we are encouraging member churches to ensure they are represented and availing of this opportunity to collaborate, share learning and explore questions and challenges with support from organisations experienced in different aspects of the work of climate justice. CTBI is grateful for the opportunity to partner with our Body in Association, Just Money Movement, in this initiative and for the support of the other partners: Make My Money Matter, Bank Better, Christian Climate Action, the World Council of Churches and the Laudato Si Movement.

 **The statement is still available to be signed and/or used in your own advocacy and awareness-raising work: ctbi.org.uk/fossil-fuel-financing**

 **A Greener, Fairer Banking Guide for churches from Just Money: ctbi.org.uk/climate-money-resources**



For more information on CTBI's Environmental Issues Network and the work on banking and climate justice visit: ctbi.org.uk/our-work/climate-justice/

World Day of Prayer: Together we can make a difference

The vastness of the night sky or the immensity of the ocean reminds us of the infinite possibilities when we work together with faith and purpose.

The World Day of Prayer (WDP) is a testament to this transformative power – a movement that connects people across nations and denominations in a wave of prayer and hope.

Each year, the World Day of Prayer focuses on the lives and stories of women from a different region. On 7 March 2025, the theme is drawn from Psalm 139:1-14, “You are fearfully and wonderfully made.” This year’s service, written by women from the Cook Islands, invites us to lift our spirits and embrace hope amidst a world grappling with uncertainty. It’s a poignant reminder that God’s love is present even in the face of challenges like war, poverty, climate change, and lingering pandemic effects.

The World Day of Prayer is more than a single day of worship – it is a movement that inspires informed prayer and prayerful action. It reminds us that together, we can face challenges, celebrate our shared humanity, and make a meaningful difference.

As the oceans rise

O, we pray for courage
as the oceans rise
and people suffer.
Let us care for one another,
and protect our precious home.

O Lord, we pray for strength
as the glaciers thaw
and our Earth is in pain.
Give us the spirit to do more.
We must all act together,
and protect our fragile home.

O Lord, we pray for hope
as the temperatures soar.
To the tears of your Creation
we will not close our eyes.
We will all work together
to preserve our common home.

We ask this through Christ Our Lord,
Amen.

*Prayer by Catherine Wignall/CAFOD.
This prayer has been kindly offered
by World Day of Prayer, a Body in
Association of CTBI. To learn more,
visit wwdp.org.uk.*


[About us](#)
[Our work](#)
[News & Events](#)
[Support & Resources](#)
[Get involved](#)

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland – working for unity, peace, and social justice

We bring churches together across Britain and Ireland, supporting ecumenical efforts, and promoting collaboration, mission, and justice.

[Learn more about us](#)

Refreshed new website

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) launched its new website at the beginning of 2025. As the Revd Canon Graham Sparkes, CTBI's Moderator, points out, the new design of the website places strong emphasis on the strategic plan, which was developed through consultation with trustees, staff, representatives of CTBI's member churches and the volunteers who support its work in different ways.

News, events and resources across the different priority areas of the strategic plan are highlighted. There is an opportunity for member churches and bodies in association to promote ecumenical news, resources and events that align with CTBI's strategic priorities, and everyone is encouraged to avail of these opportunities where that might be helpful.

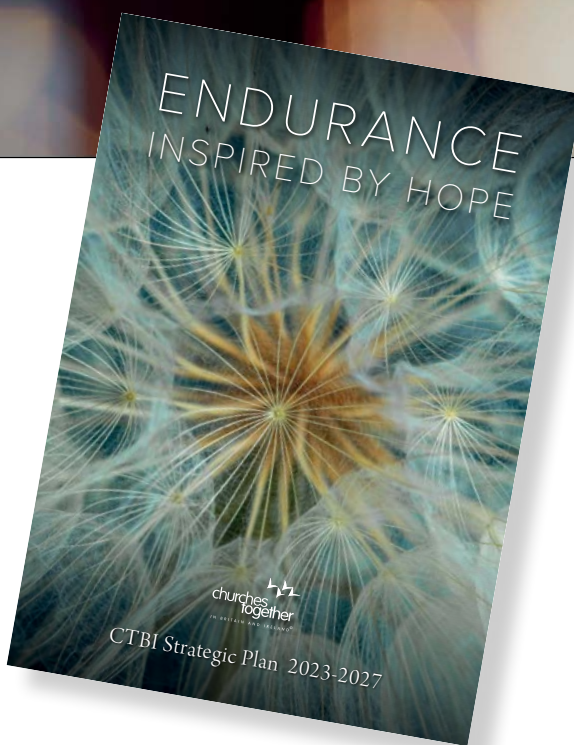
In this year of significant ecumenical anniversaries, we have been reflecting together in our CTBI meetings about where we are on our ecumenical journey, how we are sharing the story of that journey towards unity, and where there might be opportunities to go deeper in building connections and overcoming divides. The process of developing this new website has been helpful to us in thinking about how we tell the story of what Christian unity means for us on these islands in the

context of today and we hope it will be useful for you as well.

All our members are encouraged to explore how the website and the resources it provides can help strengthen our ecumenical engagement and our collective efforts to transform society in a way that reflects our shared Christian values.



For more information, visit:
ctbi.org.uk/



Lent 2025

Christian Unity in a Fragmenting World



In a world where it can often feel that things are falling apart, our work of Christian unity serves as a powerful reminder of what holds us together and requires us to care for one another as Christians and, as a Christian community, to care for the whole of humanity.

The enthusiastic engagement with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity this year has been a great encouragement. This is always a special moment of heightened awareness and appreciation of what it means to belong to a global Christian community, but this was experienced in a particularly powerful way this year as we reflected on the shared significance and enduring relevance of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. In Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) we often reflect on the great privilege we experience in doing work that is about unity, connection and solidarity, in contrast to the division and polarisation that concern us in so many spheres of life at present. The activity we have witnessed during this year's Week of Prayer suggests that this feeling is shared by many local church communities and ecumenical groups.

This coming together also opens up profound questions about the future and the next steps on our journey. Our Lent resource for this year seeks to build on the reflection and dialogue that has been taking place across different

areas of our CTBI work, offering an opportunity for local congregations and inter church groups to engage with the major themes that have been emerging in that work and explore what might be relevant in their context.

We invite groups to reflect on what we mean by unity in the circumstances of today, how we are modelling our shared understanding of unity and where there may be missed opportunities. Thinking about the issues that might be getting in the way of our collective witness, or undermining the messages we seek to

Together we reflect on what the experience of our ecumenical journey has taught us about reaching out across borders and boundaries, demonstrated so powerfully for us in the example of Christ.

share, we consider what the Church might have to offer as a wounded healer – a community placing itself with humility at the service of society, acknowledging the need for healing internally as well as externally, and recognising that these two processes of healing can be mutually supportive and enriching when communicated with honesty and integrity.

The need for such an approach is particularly evident in the area of racial justice. There can be a temptation

to treat this as an external societal problem and resistance to calls to examine the role and leadership of the Church, especially when it comes to the historic role of Christian churches in contributing to the racial divides in our world that continue to impact relations between nations and communities. We reflect on the ways in which the reluctance to open up these conversations may be weakening our response to challenges such as that posed by anti-immigrant, xenophobic and racist riots and attacks.

Another major target of this kind of violence is communities of faiths other than Christian. While the engagement with other faith communities is clearly an externally facing outreach there is an important internal Christian ecumenical dimension. Our sharing of our Christian faith in a pluralist public square is clearly strengthened when we speak together with common messages. The experience during the riots of August 2024 last year of seeing our Christian faith misappropriated, misrepresented and cynically exploited by people seeking to provoke hatred and division prompts us to think proactively and strategically about how we can best collaborate to counteract the potential damaging impact of this kind of abuse on our relations with other faith communities.

The Council of Nicaea gathered the global Church across borders and boundaries of race, culture, language and identity. Together we reflect on what the experience of our ecumenical journey has taught us about reaching out across borders and boundaries, demonstrated so powerfully for us in the example of Christ. What might we offer from this learning to a society struggling with identity-based conflict, polarisation, alienation and division?

The message of hope we seek to offer is not one based on an oppressive optimism that ignores or sidesteps the profound challenges facing our local communities at present, but one that, guided by the light of faith, believes in our ability to overcome divisions and transform relationships in justice and mercy, renewing our commitment to peace and to the valuing of the dignity of each and every human person, made in the image and likeness of God.



For more information, visit:
ctbi.org.uk/lent2025

Roots for Churches

Supporting Intergenerational Leadership in Church

Our partners, Roots for Churches, have been responding to research from The Institute for Children, Youth & Mission (CYM) and Liverpool Hope University which found that young people who already attend church have a clear desire to be more involved in Sunday services, but those in leadership can lack confidence when it comes to finding meaningful ways to include and engage them*.

While it is understandable that leaders may be concerned about the time commitment involved in changing the format of their worship, and doing so collaboratively with young leaders, not to mention the concerns about alienating older members of the congregation, there are a range of ecumenical resources available to help and support leaders in moving towards intergenerational ministry. Melanie Cave, Managing Director of Roots for Churches, describes intergenerational ministry as “intentionally gathering people of different generations to learn, worship, serve and share life together. It’s not all-age by a different name, and it’s not just for children. It’s for everyone – a place to be known, contribute, share and explore.”

Unsurprisingly, when churches put greater emphasis on inclusion of children and young people, this has positive outcomes in inclusion, participation and sense of belonging for people of other age groups also. Melanie explains that “because, in intergenerational ministry the different component parts of the service are shorter and less wordy, and it’s also multi-sensory, it’s a more engaging way to do church. That makes it helpful for those with dementia, ADHD, dyslexia, neurodiversity, English as a second

language, different learning styles – all of us, really.”

It has been a recurring theme in our Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) dialogues in recent years, across different areas of work, that our expressed appreciation for diversity and our desire for the church to be a place of welcome and belonging for all, can too often be undermined by the way in which we gather in church, particularly for worship. We can often be very good at welcoming people but fail to make the changes that would help them feel like they really belong. This is especially true in the case of young people. The absence of younger generations is frequently lamented in major gatherings of the life of the church and yet those young people who do commit their time and energy to church can still experience and express great frustration at the lack of opportunities for them to lead and participate in decision-making.

The new Worship Together lectionary-based resource launched by Roots for January-February 2025 shares the learning from the practice of intergenerational ministry, recognising that this is not only about children or young people, but also bridging generation gaps between adults of different ages. Editor Tracey Messenger reminds us that “someone who is forty is obviously of a different generation to someone who’s seventy: they’ll have different life experiences, different cultural references, different ways in which they like to worship.



ROOTS for Churches Ltd.

Intergenerational worship makes the most of the gifts of everybody.”

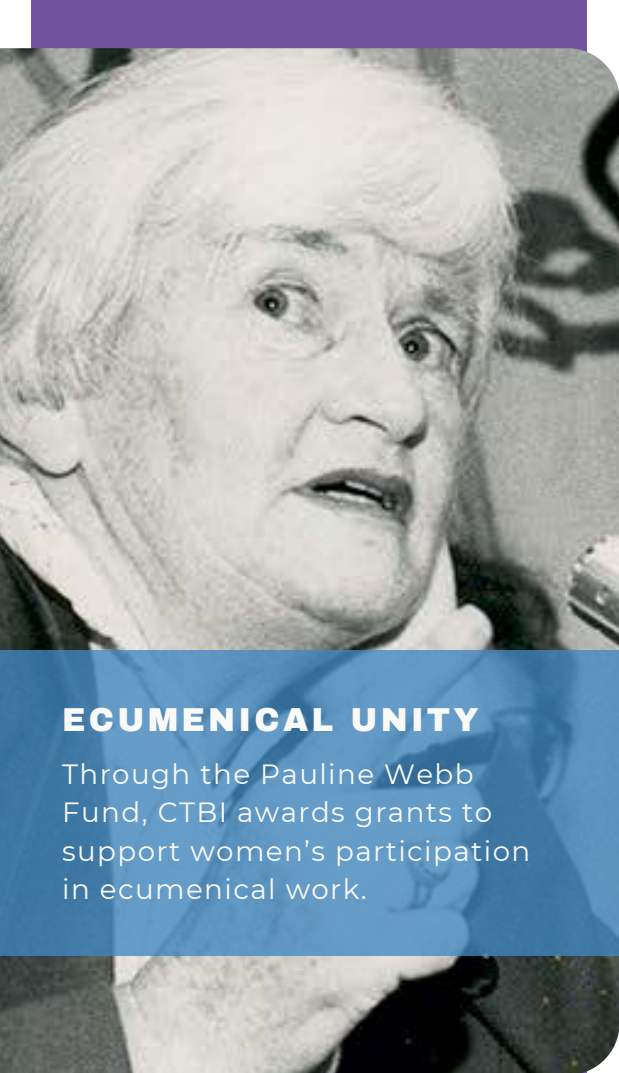
The worship resources are supported by a series of articles examining the theology and theory, as well as the practicalities of intergenerational ministry. There is also a podcast series discussing different aspects with experienced leaders, as well as experts in relevant themes to help leaders anticipate and overcome some of the challenges they might encounter, as well as making the most of the opportunities that present with the creation of intergenerational spaces.

“We hope to equip church leaders to explore and live out the values of intergenerational worship: young, old and everyone in between, with our diverse needs and gifts, worshipping, learning, leading and serving together,” says Melanie. “That’s a vision and experience of church we can all enjoy and get excited about. One I think God is committed to as well!”

**Report, Taking the Pulse of Ministry Amongst Children, Youth and Families.*



More information can be found on the Roots for Churches website: www.rootsontheweb.com



THE PAULINE WEBB FUND

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

ECUMENICAL UNITY

Through the Pauline Webb Fund, CTBI awards grants to support women's participation in ecumenical work.

WHO CAN APPLY?

The fund is open to people who meet the following criteria:

- Women, normally resident in Britain or Ireland, and
- Members of a church that is in membership of CTBI, or one of the national ecumenical instruments. (Evidence of support from a sponsoring church or ecumenical body is required as part of the application process.)
- In accordance with the focus of this fund on enabling early career leaders to have an experience of ecumenical engagement, preference is given to women under forty years old.
- We particularly encourage applications from women from minority ethnic communities in Britain and Ireland, and those working in areas where access to funding and other resources limits opportunities for engagement.

BACKGROUND

This programme was established with the support of the late Dr Pauline Webb of the Methodist Church in honour of her leadership in ecumenism, internationally and closer to home. Throughout her career Dr Webb held a series of significant leadership roles in the World Council of Churches and the Methodist Conference of Great Britain. She played a key role in significant ecumenical dialogues and campaigns and in the world of religious affairs broadcasting. She was a powerful advocate for women's rights and leadership through her speeches and publications, but above all through her example.

Pauline was keen to support and encourage the participation of women in the ecumenical movement, especially through support for younger leaders to gain ecumenical experience early in their careers. The Fund was established before her death in 2017 and since then has continued in her memory. CTBI wishes to acknowledge with deep appreciation the personal contribution of Dr Webb to this fund through a legacy donation.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

- The fund awards grants of up to £1000 as a contribution towards travel or other costs to enable women to:
 - Attend an intentionally ecumenical event
 - Undertake a course or study visit in the area of ecumenism
 - Conduct research in the area of ecumenism
- As part of the application process participants are asked to provide details of how they will use the experience gained to contribute to the promotion of ecumenism.
- Please note that grants are only awarded where other financial support for this activity is unavailable.
- Grants do not normally cover more than 75% of the total cost.

HOW TO APPLY

For more information, or to request an application pack and confirmation of the deadline for the next funding round:

visit ctbi.org.uk/pauline-webb-ecumenical-fund

email: info@ctbi.org.uk

DEADLINE

The deadline for the current round of applications is the 31 May 2025.

CTBI STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland believes that Ecumenism is an urgent evangelical imperative. It is time we cease projecting the image of a dismembered Body of Christ, which is a counter-witness to the Good News we proclaim.

The ecumenism we seek is dynamic and responsive not a monolith resulting from one powerful church swallowing the others, but a mega community composed of churches (local, national and international) that complement one another, each with its own historical identity, its unique tradition, its own doctrinal emphasis, and its particular worship form; in short, a pentecostal communion of communities that understand and speak one another's language.

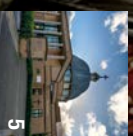
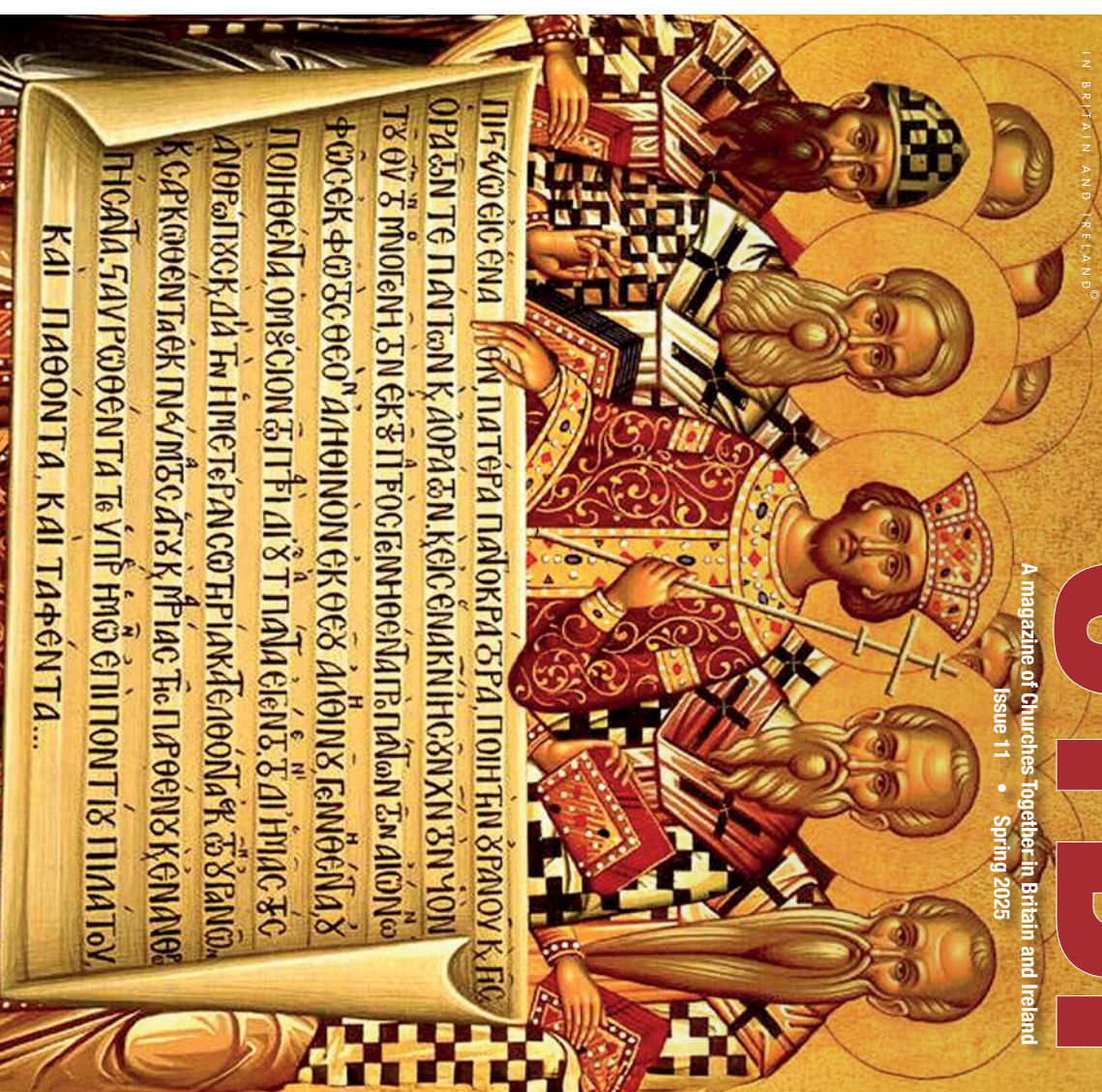


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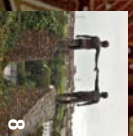
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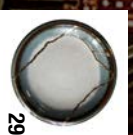
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