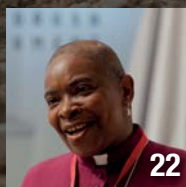




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Cover image: Shepherd Abu Okab tends to his sheep in the Jordan Valley on the West Bank. Ecumenical Accompaniers from the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme accompany shepherds, a presence known to have a mitigating effect on confrontations between Israeli settlers and Palestinians. EAs' presence also helps Palestinians access lands they otherwise might not have dared to continue to cultivate. In the West Bank's Area C, any land that isn't cultivated for a period of three years becomes property of the state, the shepherds explain, so accessing their lands regularly is vital for the communities and their herds. © Albin Hillert/WCC

Background image: nicaea1700.net

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





Welcome

As this autumn edition of the CTBI Magazine goes to press, the promise of peace feels very remote for many of our brothers and sisters around the world.

Images of starving and wounded children from Gaza and from Sudan are a harrowing reminder of our collective failure to create a safe and peaceful world. In Europe, our Ukrainian neighbours face continued loss and uncertainty for the future.

As we reflect together in this anniversary year on the first Ecumenical Council at Nicaea 1700 years ago, we find both comfort and challenge in the reminder of the endurance of our faith and its significance in the world. In our reflections on the anniversary, we have experienced an invitation to recommitment and reconnection, as we look back to the proclamation of faith at Nicaea, asking what that means for the challenges facing the Church in the fractured world of today. Similarly, in celebrating the 80th anniversary of Christian Aid, we have been inspired by how Christian churches together have responded to the devastation of war. The needs of the victims of violence today are no less urgent and, in this magazine, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) has been responding through our various networks, working groups and projects.

There are good news stories that help illustrate how churches are working to bring light into the darkness and provide places of safety and welcome to those most in need. Our member, the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, is celebrating the centenary of its founding, alongside the sixtieth anniversary of its presence in the

If we are to make the most of our diversity in drawing on the range of experiences and gifts across the breadth of our membership in helping people to encounter the healing love of Christ, then we need to take steps to ensure, proactively, that our leadership reflects that diversity.

UK. We give thanks for the leadership and contribution of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church and to all those who give so generously of their time to support our work. In this edition, you will have the opportunity to get to know our trustee from Cytûn, Churches Together in Wales, Revd Dr Jennie Hurd and the new Chair of the Churches' Refugee Network, The Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Bishop of Dover.

The context in which this work takes place is challenging. This autumn, we discuss a new guide from the Office for

Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR) of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which seeks to raise awareness about anti-Christian hate crimes, as well as our continued concern about the raid of the Quaker Westminster Meeting House by the Metropolitan police last March and the implications for freedom of assembly and the freedom to protest, as well as respect for places of worship as places of welcome and sanctuary for all. At the same time, we were encouraged to learn from our Body in Association, the Bible Society, about the findings of their 'Quiet Revival' research. People are coming to faith and committing to Christ in their search for meaning in today's world. Across the different areas of work highlighted in this magazine, including youth and children, mission, inter faith, care of refugees, racial justice and climate justice, we see faith in action and are spurred on by the positive responses that affirm the importance and value of the churches' engagement in these areas of social life, especially when done ecumenically, because of the power of that witness to unity.

We have a long way still to go, as the learning from recent events supported by the Pauline Webb fund, and the work of the Children's Ministry Network, remind us. If we are to make the most of our diversity in drawing on the range of experiences and gifts across the breadth of our membership in helping people to encounter the healing love of Christ, then we need to take steps to ensure, proactively, that our leadership reflects that diversity.

As we approach the midpoint of our current strategic plan, we at CTBI, are taking time to reflect on how we are responding to the priorities set by our members and look forward to engaging with them to focus our efforts and maximise our impact.

Dr Nicola Brady
General Secretary
Churches Together in Britain & Ireland



Endurance inspired by Hope

Midpoint reflections on CTBI's Strategic Plan

In 2025 we find ourselves at the midpoint of our Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. Here we share some reflections about the changing context and what we are learning in each of our five strategic priority areas.

This strategy was prepared at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic was prompting searching questions about the future, including for churches. Just over two years later, threats to global peace and security are multiplying. The message of hope that churches have to share is much needed and a great source of encouragement for many. At the same time, with increasing competition for people's attention in a fast-paced communications environment, it can

be a challenge to reach people, making ecumenical cooperation more important than ever.

Strengthening ecumenical engagement in Britain and Ireland

The foundational nature of this first priority was evident as we were writing the strategy. In our initial analysis, a recurring theme was the concern that there was perhaps insufficient investment in formation in relation to ecumenism, meaning that those in leadership had to be proactive in obtaining the knowledge and experience for themselves, resulting in missed opportunities. Our ecumenical reflections on the significance of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea have shown that not only is this

kind of space for reflection and shared learning necessary, but it is also greatly valued when it is offered. What we've heard from participants in our meetings is that this kind of sharing helps us tell a better story about who we are as Christians in an increasingly diverse society where we may have to adjust our message to engage with those who don't have the kind of religious literacy that aligns with our experience.

Our working together makes sense in a context of increasing pressure on resources but, more importantly, it conveys a critical message about the value we place on these relationships. The work we have been able to do in partnership with the national ecumenical instruments, including the use of the ecumenical fund to allow for

innovation and to support investment in strategic development, has been greatly valued by our members. We have a shared interest in expanding our networks to encourage more people with diverse backgrounds and skillsets to engage in this work.

One of the areas CTBI is best known for is the resourcing of ecumenical engagement around key moments in the Church calendar including the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and Racial Justice Sunday. In recent years, we have been privileged to work with a range of partners to expand our offerings in this area and to use our Lenten resource as an opportunity to connect local groups with the work of CTBI. Internationally we are also finding it beneficial to create space for dialogue and collaboration about our contribution to the European and wider international context. We are encouraged by the affirmation from our members of the significance they place on investment in relationships and will continue to build on this by being intentional in prioritising the time and space for reflection on why and how our ecumenical engagement matters.

Working together for mission and the common good

A common thread running through diverse strands of our work – from racial justice to interreligious dialogue – is the essentially missional nature of our ecumenical relations, with a central focus on what it means to share Christ in our communities today. In 2015, CTBI promoted the 2020 ‘Vision for a Good Society’ initiative which consulted with local churches and others to shape a hopeful vision for a society where the economy would be at the service of the common good. Sadly, that vision was not achieved by 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis that followed have exacerbated deeply rooted inequalities. More worryingly as society becomes more polarized, we are seeing vulnerable groups within society being scapegoated and attacked for societal problems in areas like housing and access to services that are not of their making. Our coming together to engage in collective reflection about the learnings from the pandemic experience, notably in the context of the UK Government COVID-19 Inquiry, has highlighted the ways in which churches can be of service to their communities at times of crisis. In seeking to extend

this learning to the challenges facing communities today, we are placing particular emphasis on solidarity, respectful listening and the promotion of dialogue.

Healing society’s fractures: identities, borders and nationalities

A related theme is that of healing society’s fractures. Under this strategic priority we place particular emphasis on the need for continued engagement with the peace process that gave us the Good Friday Agreement and the extension of the learning from that experience into other areas of identity-based conflict. Through the ecumenical fund, we have been able to make a contribution to the creation of a Good Relations Officer position with the Irish Council of Churches/Irish Inter-Church Meeting and have been partnering with the national ecumenical instruments in Ireland to support grassroots peace-building efforts, as well as facilitating an international learning exchange.

Our 2024 AGM had a particular focus on the churches’ role and responsibility for peacebuilding with speaker Dr Maria Power. In February 2025, Dr Power was also one of the contributors to a conference on ‘Race, Religion, Rhetoric and Far-Right extremism’ in which CTBI was a co-organiser. This event examined the challenges posed to communities by this broad movement that is labelled ‘the Far Right’, with perspectives from different sectors – including Church, academia, politics, policing and media – on how we can respond.

One important area of focus for CTBI is the promotion of the Church of Sanctuary movement. This has been an encouraging area of growth in recent years offering a response to these challenges that is community-based, deeply rooted in Christian theology and, from that foundation, offering welcome and hospitality to all.

Working for global peace and justice

We support our members in working to promote a vision for global peace and security that has climate justice, human rights and relationship-building at its heart. Having commissioned an independent review of the Climate Sunday initiative, we are now working with the leadership of our Environmental Issues Network to support ecumenical engagement. In

2024, we were part of a successful joint initiative to raise awareness about banking and the financing of fossil fuel exploitation, which offers a helpful model for future engagement.

We concluded a five-year project with the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka on the theme ‘A reconciled land’ with much valuable learning and relationships that will continue as part of a wider international focus. We will be consulting our members about the future direction of this international work, with particular emphasis on the area of Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Promoting ethical and inclusive leadership

Ahead of the last General Elections for both the UK and Irish Governments, CTBI joined with partners to support advocacy and engagement by local ecumenical groups. It was concerning to note the feedback about increasing concerns around issues like security of candidates and hate speech, as well as reluctance of some candidates to engage in debate, or of local authorities to provide a neutral venue. Under this strategic priority, we place particular emphasis on the responsibility of the Church to model the kind of leadership we wish to see in the wider society, looking at our own failings in areas such as safeguarding women’s leadership, and diversity and inclusion more broadly. We are being encouraged and challenged by the Children’s Ministry Network and our developing Youth Network to think about how the perspectives of children and young people are represented and valued in our work.

Looking to the future

As we reflect on the extent of our progress and the challenges we have encountered at this point in our strategic plan, we are encouraged by the continued relevance of the areas we have chosen to focus on together. The inter-connected nature of the different strands help us to cover a broad area with a small staff team guided by highly experienced and committed volunteers on the various networks, forums and advisory groups. We look forward to a constructive dialogue with our members about how we can build on this work and engage more people.

For more information on the CTBI Strategic Plan, visit: ctbi.org.uk/our-work/strategic-plan



Nicaea 1700

Renewing commitments as we reflect on Nicaea

We were very grateful for the opportunity to share some of the learning and questions arising from our reflections on the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea as a contribution to the discussion on this theme at the May gathering of the Enabling Group of Churches Together in England (CTE). Here we outline some of the key themes from a Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) perspective, as well as those emphasised by other contributors.

In our approach to the anniversary, we've been keen to strike a balance between looking back and looking forward. There were two major themes in our conversations last year in preparation. The first was overcoming polarisation, both within and beyond the Church. We recognised that this anniversary had the potential to be divisive because of the ways in which the paths of different denominations have diverged since the first Ecumenical Council, meaning that not everyone

would see this anniversary as equally relevant and some would identify more closely than others with the Church that gathered at Nicaea. It was felt that this anniversary could be a helpful test of our ability to listen well, and to engage with difference from a place of respectful curiosity as we seek to journey together. It was hoped that in being intentional about avoiding the trap of polarisation in our internal conversation, we could also strengthen our response to the challenge of polarisation in the wider society.

This connects closely to the second theme which was 'a new agenda for peace'. It's often commented as part of our reflections on this anniversary that Emperor Constantine in convening the Council, hoped that unity in the Church would help pacify his Empire. As we are living through a time that Pope Francis famously described as not an epoch of change but a change of epoch, with so much uncertainty and upheaval, we were prompted to reflect on how the Church gathering today is called to engage with the problems facing

the whole of humanity. This led to the conclusion that there is a need to change the conversation if we are to make meaningful progress in addressing the rapidly escalating global conflicts, and that Christians, alongside other people of faith, have a critical role to play.

Finally, we felt that the World Council of Churches' theme for the anniversary of 'Faith, mission and unity' was a helpful approach to thinking about where we have come from, what brings us together, what we want to do together, and where we hope we might be going. Our working group identified the following hopes for what we might achieve in our marking of this anniversary:

- **Renewed commitment to our ecumenical journey, strengthening relationships:**

It was hoped that, in exploring together the significance of this anniversary, we would go beyond noticing our differences and really take the time to explore them to help deepen our mutual understanding.



Opposite page: Byzantine fresco depicting The First Council of Nicaea in the Basilica of St. Nicholas, Demre, Turkey; left: attendees at the CTE Enabling Group Meeting in May.



- **Deeper understanding of the journey so far:** Many people realised they knew very little about the Council of Nicaea and this period of the Church's history and it prompted them to want to know more for themselves, but also to feel equipped to share with others what this meant in the life of the Church and how we got from there to here.
- **Celebration of our faith and the joy of the Gospel:** Participants were finding real encouragement reflecting on this anniversary. It was a powerful reminder of the endurance of our faith, and it was felt that we shouldn't just keep this to ourselves and our internal conversations because it was a prompt to share our faith and to think about how we are doing that in today's world.
- **Courage to share the painful stories and hard lessons of disunity and fractures in relationships:** The joyful and celebratory is very appealing and it can be tempting to spend all our time in that space, and yet we know it's not the whole story. The story of Nicaea is not only one of Christians uniting around a creed but also one of condemnation, exclusion and conflict. As we reflect on the journey the Church has been on since, then there is an opportunity to learn from the painful experiences and look at the issues we still need to address.

- **Renewed vision of unity to help overcome polarisation:**

It was noted that in our work of Christian Unity, we are developing skills and experience in creating and sustaining the conditions for a respectful dialogue of difference that resists the temptation to polarisation, and it was hoped that there might be something more we could do to share that experience, in humility, with the wider society.

- **Supporting local church engagement, exploring theologically what this anniversary might mean in their context and sharing that message more widely:**

The local church context was felt to be really critical, because no matter how clearly and effectively we communicate about our ecumenical experience, there is no substitute for people experiencing it for themselves, and so it needs to be happening at the level of the local church.

The other speakers at the CTE Enabling Group offered reflections from a range of different denominational perspectives. Fr Michael Lambros from the Coptic Orthodox Church highlighted the courageous witness of the Christians gathered at Nicaea, many of whom had experienced intense persecution, and their longing for the Kingdom of God. As we remember Nicaea today, we are reminded that the Creed is a proclamation of faith that we are called to share, especially with young people. Fr Michael challenged us to think about how a modern-day version of Nicaea might help us to overcome the challenge of the fragmentation of Christianity into tens of thousands of different churches and denominations by focusing our attention on our unity in Christ.

In the panel discussion, Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Morris from the Church of England, placed particular emphasis on worship, reminding us that "the Nicene Creed is not only a statement of faith which roots us in the past, but also a proleptic statement, a goal or

programme or horizon for the future which reminds us of our shortcomings as divided churches and calls us to something greater and deeper in our unity in Christ." Rowena Lowerance explained what it means for Quakers to be a non-credal Church. Quakers are opposed to fettering the Spirit, believing that the coming of the Spirit "is not a once-and-for-all thing that happened at Pentecost" and are concerned that creeds can be used to fence the faith, defining people out, which does not sit comfortably with the Quaker understanding of the universality of the Christian message. Quakers advocate for every person to speak about the truth of God out of their own experience

As we remember Nicaea today, we are reminded that the Creed is a proclamation of faith that we are called to share, especially with young people.

and consequently can participate in ecumenical dialogue and cooperation with others who hold very different views. Bishop Mike Royal, CTE General Secretary and a leader in the Apostolic Pastoral Congress, posed the question: "As a Black Pentecostal, what relevance does the Council of Nicaea and the Nicene Creed have for us today?" Bishop Mike highlighted the huge contribution that people of African descent made to the shaping of early Christianity. He explained that while the Nicene Creed may not be recited in many Pentecostal churches, the truths it contains are sung and preached from the pulpit, reflecting this shared heritage. Elliot Vanstone from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales shared that: "As Catholics we recite this Creed every Sunday at the Holy Mass. It is not a relic of a bygone council, but a living act of faith, uttered in the communion of saints. It is the breath of the Church's belief – uniting bishop and layperson, East and West, age to age. It connects us across time and place – from the fourth century to today, from small village chapels to the grandeur of St Peter's Basilica. It reminds us that faith is not just personal but shared".

As we approach the end of this anniversary year, we will be working with our members to take up these challenges and renew our commitments.

Remember Nicaea

The Nicaea 1700 anniversary inspired Claire Šego to reach out to fellow Christians across Britain and Ireland with an appeal for a prayerful marking of the Nicaea anniversary, and reflection on the Nicene Creed, on Sunday 5th October 2025. Here she explains what prompted her to initiate this outreach and shares one of the prayers offered to support this remembrance:

“I have been challenged by the Lord Jesus’ prayer in the Upper Room (John 17) and how at such a critical point in the redemption story He is praying for the unity of all Christians... including us in 2025. The question for us is: how to respond?

The Nicene Creed is one answer. It covers all the core beliefs of our faith, and this truly ecumenical creed is something that almost all Christians agree on, despite splits on other matters. Participating in remembering it can be wholehearted, without

compromise, and involves the ‘regular folk’ in the pew. As we reflect on how the First Council of Nicaea met to address a threat to the Church’s unity, it is good for us to look beyond our own congregation at how we join with so many others in believing these truths.

When we think of the ‘life of the world to come’ our denominational distinctiveness will not divide us from being God’s one people, united with Him and each other in the Kingdom with no end.”

Almighty God,

We praise you that you are good, your love endures forever. You are our God and we are your people. We praise you that your kingdom covers the earth, that you are not restricted by time nor space. Thank you that your people are from every tribe and language and people and nation. Thank you for your faithfulness to all your people in every generation.

We thank you for your creation of all things in Heaven and on earth.

We thank you for your only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who humbled himself to come to earth and be born of a virgin.

We thank you that He was obedient to death on the cross for us, and that he died and was buried, for our salvation.

We thank you that he rose again on the third day as had been prophesied and that He ascended into Heaven. Thank you that our Lord Jesus is at this moment sitting at the right hand of the Father. Thank you that he will return again in glory as judge.

We thank you for the Holy Spirit which is sent to give life, help and peace to your people.

Thank you for your church and for the Christians who came before us: those who have taught us and given us an example to follow, saints and scholars, missionaries and martyrs.

Thank you for the faithful people who gathered at Nicaea to address a controversy about Jesus and how your Spirit led them into truth. Thank you for the statement of faith created that summarises the most important parts of what we believe.

We remember how in the Upper Room before he went to the Garden of Gethsemane, our Lord Jesus prayed for all his people that they may be one. We recognise that he was praying for us.

We pray for peace and unity among your people that we may show and experience God’s great love.

We pray for all Christians around the world, particularly those facing persecution or trials of any kind because of their faith.

May your Holy Spirit encourage and strengthen them, relieve their distress and and give them confidence in their faithful God.

We ask for your grace that we too may be faithful followers of Jesus Christ, continuing to run the race towards the Heavenly prize to which God calls us, and the eternal life promised to your people.

In Jesus’ name
Amen

You can learn more about this initiative and register your participation at: www.nicaea1700.net
Scan the QR code to quickly access the website



Revd Dr Jennie Hurd is a Methodist presbyter currently serving as one of two District Chairs for the Methodist Church in Wales. Originally from East Yorkshire, she has served in circuits in the English Midlands as well as in Wales and was privileged to have the opportunity to start to learn Welsh in the late 1990s for her second circuit appointment. Jennie is a trustee board member of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI).

Jennie, as Chair of Cytûn you represent the national ecumenical instrument for Wales on the CTBI Board – what motivated you to volunteer for these leadership roles?

Working ecumenically has always been an important part of my faith, right from childhood, when I didn't know that was what I was doing or why it was important. Significant ecumenical influences in my teens and twenties included the Taizé Community, the Student Christian Movement and the Iona Community, and I trained ecumenically for ministry in the Methodist Church at Queen's in Birmingham. In every appointment since, in England and Wales, I've sought to take an ecumenical approach, and when vacancies arose for the role of Chair of Cytûn and for a Cytûn representative on the CTBI board, it felt like the right and natural step to offer to serve. In a divided world full of disputes and tensions, our ecumenical witness seems more important than ever.

In your experience, how does the work of CTBI relate to the national ecumenical instruments?

From a very prosaic but vital perspective, the help and support that's available from CTBI to the national ecumenical instruments, in a practical sense, is invaluable. For example, to be able to refer to the expertise and experience of a wider network as Cytûn seeks to restructure, is extremely helpful. Also, given a context in our four nations where division seems to be increasing, CTBI is an instrument not only for church unity but also for unity within Britain and Ireland, presenting a shared witness to the Gospel and its values in public life in these islands. It reminds us all that we live on a bigger map and enables us to do just that.

Methodist Church in Wales



Trustee Profile

Revd Dr Jennie Hurd (Chair of Cytûn)

Alongside this, however, to be able to participate distinctively in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Welsh, as well as English, through the resources that are made available by CTBI, is very precious to us. We are aware that we are part of a wave of prayer not only in Britain and Ireland but across the world, and we value being able to share in that in our unique way.

What are your hopes for the future development of that work?

CTBI achieves an enormous amount with a relatively small staff, and it would be wonderful to see that acknowledged and appreciated even more by the member denominations. The development of any work generally needs more resources in order to be able to do it, and while times are challenging for all the churches, an increase in funding for CTBI would allow for expansion. If that were possible, I would hope to see the development of ecumenical work with and for young people, not only looking to the future of ecumenism in these islands, but for now as well. I would also hope for resources to be put to develop ecumenical work regionally and locally within the nations. The temptation when under pressure, as many local churches are now, is

to withdraw to a certain extent from working ecumenically at precisely a time when more ecumenical co-operation is needed. CTBI's unique overview of Britain and Ireland enables that, but more resources would mean it could be done even more widely.

What excites you about the future of ecumenical work in Wales?

It's fair to say that, as for everywhere, ecumenical life in Wales felt the impact of the Covid pandemic and the periods of lockdown. It has taken a while for us to regain our balance, but it's heartening to see ecumenical activity taking off again, and in new ways. We have been delighted to welcome several new churches and bodies in association into the Cytûn family, all of whom bring fresh perspectives and enrich our life together. While our structures and formal organisations are vitally important, it excites me to see more active, practical, hands-on ecumenism taking place across Wales, as Christians come together to serve their communities. Looking to the future, I sincerely hope for more such active ecumenism to happen in Wales, across the language communities, as well as across the denominations.



Member Church Profile

Cherubim and Seraphim Church UK

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.” Isaiah 35:5.

Our member church the Cherubim and Seraphim Church UK marks 100 years with centenary celebrations this autumn.

One of Nigeria’s oldest Christian movements, the Cherubim and Seraphim Church was founded in 1925 by St. Moses Orimolade Tunolase. It has grown from a small revivalist movement focused on bible study into a global Christian community spanning Africa, Europe, North America, and beyond, and one that is very active in ecumenism from local to international levels. In the UK there will be dual celebrations as the centenary coincides with the 60th anniversary of the arrival of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in the UK.

The Chair of the UK Centenary Committee is Pastor Richard Fasunloye,

who is also a trustee of Churches Together of Britain and Ireland (CTBI). Announcing the celebrations, Dr Fasunloye noted that: “The Cherubim and Seraphim Church has been a

“This milestone is not only a celebration of our past, but a moment to renew our mission for faith, unity, and social contribution in a multicultural Britain.”

spiritual home for generations of African Christians in the UK.” He added: “This milestone is not only a celebration of our past, but a moment to renew our mission for faith, unity, and social contribution in a multicultural Britain.”

The Cherubim and Seraphim Church in the UK describes its vision as “unveiling the Gospel, bringing Jesus Christ into focus and touching lives.” Its mission is to “strengthen and lead people both in the immediate and wider communities into a growing and close relationship with our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ”.

The Church was first established in the UK on 5th June 1965, with its first members mainly coming from the Nigerian student community. Since then, it has grown steadily. The UK Church has taken a leading role in the European context and significant global leaders have emerged from its membership.

In the UK context, the commitment to mission is evident in the work of the Church, which describes its primary aims and objectives as follows:

Opposite page: Worship at a Cherubim and Seraphim Church

- To spread the Word of God throughout the world by supporting individuals in establishing and developing a relationship with Christ.
- To engage in soulwinning and fostering spiritual growth among brethren with the principles and attributes of the Kingdom of God.
- To employ prayer and fasting with evangelism and charitable works as the four pinnacle cornerstones in spreading the biblical teachings of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.
- To provide an enriching and loving platform for children and young adults to understand the basic teachings of the Bible in a simplified way so they can experience the love of God and live impactful lives becoming a blessing to the community and the world at large.

- To effectively capture the movement of God in our times through spreading the full Gospel to the wider community by caring for the sick and all those in need of fellowship and support.
- To provide welcome facilities for the elderly and an informative mentoring platform for the youth so as to impact experiences in all areas of life for the advancement of their careers and development.

This Christ-centred approach also prompts the Cherubim and Seraphim Church to collaborate and share fellowship with Christians of other denominations through membership of CTBI and national ecumenical instruments across Britain and Ireland. Ecumenical hospitality in worship and major celebrations has been evident in the contribution of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church to Christianity in Britain and Ireland, and the same is true of these centenary celebrations, with a warm invitation extended to all to



join in the activities and share in prayer, reflection and dialogue to mark this significant milestone in the life of the UK Church.

We wish our valued member the Cherubim and Seraphim Church UK every blessing for both the global centenary celebrations and the UK anniversary celebrations. We are grateful for their contribution to, and support for, our work in CTBI, with particular thanks to Pastor Richard Fasunloye for his contribution as a trustee.



For more information, visit: Cherubim and Seraphim Church: www.candsukhq.org; Cherubim and Seraphim Church Centenary Celebrations: ctbi.org.uk/cherubim-and-seraphim-church/

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.

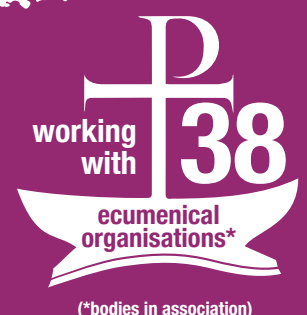
It develops publications and resources with other organisations and members to offer reflection, prayer and study materials to celebrate Christian events, as well as opportunities to learn and address key issues. It seeks to value the contribution of each church, respectful of relationships at all levels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



collaborating with



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





‘Who is my neighbour?’

Celebrating Christian Aid’s 80th Anniversary

by Pete Moorey, Head of Church & Community and Charlotte Scott, British Church Relations Manager, Christian Aid

On Sunday 9th May 1945 the British and Irish churches held services of thanksgiving for VE day. As they marked the end of the war their thoughts were already turning to the work of reconciliation and rebuilding that would be required for the future.

They established the Committee for Reconstruction in Europe, with every denomination adopting plans to raise part of the £1 million target. As the end of the war approached, the secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland’s (CTBI) predecessor, the British Council of Churches, came up with the idea to use the National Day of Thanksgiving on 9th May 1945 as the occasion for churches to demonstrate our solidarity with Europe.

The General Secretary of the Committee for Reconstruction in Europe, Eleanora Iredale, wrote a year later that this act “proved one of more than ordinary significance”. She wrote that “the fact that on that particular VE Day we put the needs of Europe before all else had a profound psychological effect in Europe. It gave rise to the hope of our genuine understanding and concern for them, and of our desire to join with them in an effort to make Christ King amidst a world in ruins.”

This was demonstrated in the incredible generosity of that first VE Sunday, as churches raised more than £80,000 – around £3m in today’s money. This support helped churches across Europe to provide emergency support right across the continent – so vital when nations such as Hungary

were in the midst of a famine.

Within a few years, what became known as “Christian Reconstruction in Europe” was absorbed into the British Council of Churches and in 1949 became known as Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service. Its work expanded from Europe to supporting refugees in Palestine, Korea and Hong Kong / China. It then started supporting the processes of nation-building in Africa – in nations such as Kenya – responding to the injustice of colonialism and the need for independence.

This year, we have been marking the 80th anniversary of that historic act of solidarity, together with our church partners. Anniversary services took place in Westminster Abbey, London, St Giles’ Cathedral, Edinburgh and St Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast (with a further



Opposite page: Christian Aid Anniversary Service; this page top: Christian Aid continues to support local communities around the world; bottom from left: Storm Cecile performs a poem; Churches Consultation Breakfast for Christian Aid's 80th Anniversary; the Westminster Abbey Choir

service at the Tabernacle in Cardiff in September) as an opportunity to give thanks for the work and to renew our commitment to that global solidarity at a time of unprecedented need.

The London service was preceded by a vibrant breakfast reception and consultation, where we were joined by representatives from our sponsoring churches and key allies. It was deeply moving to hear from our partners Wilson Bezwada (India) and Diana Gichego (Kenya) and from William Bell (Christian Aid's Head of Middle East Policy & Advocacy). Their testimonies powerfully illustrated the impact of Christian Aid's work and the vital support of our sponsoring churches. In a world increasingly marked by division and conflict, the prophetic voice of the Church is more important than ever.

During our shared conversation, several key themes emerged:

- **Be Bold and Clear in Public Witness:** Churches are calling on Christian Aid to take a courageous and visible stand on complex and challenging issues – such as racism and the situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territory. There's a strong desire to bridge the gap between local and global justice and to speak out with clarity and conviction.
- **Highlight Advocacy in Church Communications:** Many churches support Christian Aid because of our commitment to campaigning and advocacy. Our communications – especially during key moments like Christian Aid Week – should reflect this, showing how our faith identity drives our justice work and how we empower local communities. Hearing directly from our partners, as we did at the event, was especially powerful.

● **Strengthen Global and Ecumenical Connections:**

There's a shared enthusiasm for deeper collaboration and stronger global and ecumenical networks. Churches are eager to connect international relationships for greater collective impact.

Christian Aid is a member agency of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

FIND OUT MORE

- Christian Aid website www.christianaid.org.uk
- Read the full day report, including Storm Cecile's poem and Jerry Pillay's sermon: bit.ly/3JJdAax
- Re-watch service highlights via Christian Aid's YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/@thisischristianaid



The Quiet Revival



istock

in 2024) is backed up by plenty of anecdotal evidence.

Young people stood out among the respondents. Several years ago, few of them turned up on a Sunday. Now four times as many under-35s attend church, compared to 2018. And the percentage of young men in church has gone up from 4% to 21%.

The 18–24-year-olds are more likely to read the Bible during the week than older churchgoers. That said, many of them struggle to make good sense of it. Will churches use the opportunity to help young seekers and believers to develop their Bible literacy?

Even non-churchgoers are more open. One in three told YouGov that they would go to church if a Christian friend invited them. One in four would be interested in learning more about the Bible. And the majority would appreciate it if a believer were to pray for them.

The question is whether Bible Society's *Quiet Revival* research is a blip or an indicator of lasting change.

Economic stagnation, military conflicts involving nuclear superpowers, and headlines about collapsing ecosystems are testing younger generations' faith in a liveable future.

Is there some relation between YouGov's political snapshot last June and the revived interest in spirituality, especially among younger people? Not only is the golden age of the baby boomers beyond their reach. In her TED talk, climate and data scientist Hannah Ritchie referenced an international survey that found one in two young adults believes that the world is doomed, and one in three are hesitant to have children. Economic stagnation, military conflicts involving nuclear superpowers, and headlines

The Quiet Revival

A recent survey shows an increase in the number of young churchgoers. Is this a blip... or real change?

Back in June, a YouGov survey revealed that voters were switching their party allegiance, especially the socially conservative among them. The research findings suggested that if people continued to feel that their lives weren't improving, our political landscape could look very different after the next General Election.

A poly-crisis has gripped humanity. Ranging from climate change to forced migration, from military conflicts to the collateral damage of globalization, it has left many people anxious, disillusioned, and angry. Across the West, droves of voters in liberal democracies are turning their backs on liberalism.

Last year, YouGov carried out another survey. They found that change was not restricted to politics. People are returning to faith. Might there be a link between the new spiritual openness and the old certainties crumbling?

The research, entitled *The Quiet Revival* and commissioned by Bible Society, suggests a renewed interest in Christianity. According to the YouGov figures, church attendance over the past six years has gone up by over two million in England and Wales alone.

While, as yet, not every church or denomination may be feeling the shift, it is well documented. The large research sample size (19,000 in 2018 and 13,000

about collapsing ecosystems are testing younger generations' faith in a liveable future. So, how might we reach out to them when they show up in church, looking for answers?

And what about us, seasoned Christians, unsure perhaps how to connect a volatile present and a precarious future with Christ's vision that God's will be done on earth? How do we progress from receiving God's good news for an ailing world afresh, to wanting to be part of the cure?

At Bible Society we're convinced that

the answer lies in what we're calling 'Bible confidence', where we trust the Bible as God's word to us and for us. We believe a renewed encounter with Scripture needs to involve our head, heart and hands: we understand the Bible's big story and how to explain it, we experience the Bible as God's word to us, and we let it shape how we live our lives.

With a better understanding of history as His Story, a passion for God's good rule to heal the earth, and the will to act as citizens of his kingdom here

and now – who knows, we might even end up moving the dial from quiet to large-scale revival.

*Michael Pfundner,
Bible Society Editorial
Team. Bible Society is
a Bodies in Association
of Churches Together in
Britain and Ireland (CTBI)*



For more information, visit:
[www.biblesociety.org.uk/
research/quiet-revival](http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/research/quiet-revival)

Children's Ministry Network

– supporting churches in the care and development of children and young people

The Children's Ministry Network (CMN) is an official Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) network advocating for the needs of children and seeking to learn about issues affecting children in order to equip those working closely with them within Church and Christian settings and support the development of their discipleship.

The Network exists to bring together all those with national responsibility for work with children in denominations and Christian agencies. It provides support for Christians involved in this vital area of work and offers opportunities for networking while also exploring issues and themes in ministry amongst children.

External resources are evaluated and promoted by the network with a collaborative and ecumenical approach to this important ministry. Due to the breadth of experience of working with children within member churches, the network can offer the development of support material for children's ministry. This means the CMN is well placed to provide training for children's work leaders; something it does on an ongoing basis.

Among the key current priorities for the network are the flexible training programmes offered for those engaged in mission and ministry with children and families: Children's Ministry Essentials (10 modules) and Family

and Intergen Ministry Essentials (10 modules). These have been developed in dialogue with academic experts and practitioners from different traditions and denominations, working in a range of settings.

Both programmes are designed to be delivered in a variety of ways including online and face-to-face. Once registered, every participant is given access to all the online material so that they can engage at their own pace. This includes

The Network exists to bring together all those with national responsibility for work with children in denominations and Christian agencies.

short videos explaining ideas and concepts, and interactive exercises that help learners to think about how what they have learnt applies to their own context. Many of the denominations involved are also offering extra support for learners in the form of discounts and gathered sessions either online or face to face.

The ten modules can be taken together as a full programme, or as standalone courses. Each module explores one key area of ministry and should take about two learning hours to complete. The learning is self-paced, which means learners can engage with the content at a time that suits them and work through it at their own speed.

Modules are made up of three sections: insights, which explore theories and research on the theme; practice and skills, which examine how this applies to mission and ministry; and personal development, which looks at how this impacts participants as a practitioner and as a disciple. There are some preparatory resources to work through at the beginning of each course, with opportunities to consolidate the learning through written reflections and creative activities. Each module also includes opening and closing devotions as we dedicate all that we do to God. There is no assessment or grading for this learning, but everyone who completes the full programme will receive a certificate of completion.

Network members have been really encouraged by the response to the training offered. Many denominations had identified children's work as a priority for investment but are struggling with the pressures of so many competing demands on human and financial resources. The support offered by CMN brings added value in terms of being more affordable as a shared resource, providing access to a network of peers that can be a great resource and encouragement for ministry leaders, as well as contributing to furthering the work of Christian unity. If you have a heart for children's ministry and would like to be involved in an ecumenical approach to sharing resources and best practice, please get in touch.



Children's Ministry Network
A network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland



For more information, visit:
childrensministrynetwork.org



Revd Karen Campbell, CO General Secretary

‘Called to Preach’

Supporting women’s leadership through the Pauline Webb Fund

The support and encouragement of women’s leadership in ecumenism is a critical element of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland’s (CTBI) strategic focus on ethical leadership. The Pauline Webb fund, which aims to promote and develop women’s leadership in ecumenism, is central to that commitment. Two initiatives in recent months have raised important questions that will help shape and inform the future direction of this work.

The 2025 David Goodbourne lecture in May took the theme ‘Just knowing: How do we create knowledge that does justice to marginalised voices?’. Presented by Dr Helen Cameron and Revd Jane Day of Regent’s Park College Oxford, the lecture was based on findings from the Project Violet participatory research project organised by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, who recognised that, one hundred years after the admission of women to training for ministry, women leaders continued to face challenges. Working

with women in ministry, the project aimed to explore the barriers they encountered in their work, whether theological, missional or structural. The work began in 2021 and, now that the three-year research phase has concluded, the Baptist Union is exploring how the research can be used as a driver for positive change with a focus on accountability.

The collective dimension of Project Violet helped overcome the tendency of women leaders to self-edit before raising a concern by reducing isolation and increasing the visibility of the shared challenges.

The presentation of the findings in 2024 prompted the Baptist Union to initiate a season of lament to conclude at the 2025 Assembly, with that Assembly giving space for feedback and further reflection. Clearly there is a lot of work still to do. The research resulted in the adoption of fifty-seven requests for change. The process included an

ecumenical roundtable in November 2023, supported by the Pauline Webb Fund, which underlines the relevance of this work and the ongoing conversations on these issues beyond the Baptist Union. Project Violet recognised the need for safe spaces in which women could share the stories of their joys and sorrows in ministry, recognising that many women had negative previous experiences of sharing the challenges they faced and finding that the concerns they raised were ignored, or sometimes even used against them. The collective dimension of Project Violet helped overcome the tendency of women leaders to self-edit before raising a concern by reducing isolation and increasing the visibility of the shared challenges.

At the heart of this work is the sense that there can be an epistemic injustice relating to women’s leadership in a church context, where their knowledge or experience is not valued to the same extent, impoverishing the mission of the Church. When this intersects with other forms of marginalisation it can have a profound impact.

The changes requested through Project Violet covered:

- Language and behaviour in church life.
- Accepted ways of doing things.
- Theology.

We look forward to further opportunities for sharing the learnings from this project as the Baptist Union works to implement the recommendations. Similar issues and concerns were discussed at an event organised by the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) on Saturday 7th June 2025, sponsored by the Pauline Webb Fund, helping to demonstrate the wider relevance and shared nature of these concerns.

In such contexts the absence of role models can be isolating, and ecumenical peer support, guided by the Spirit, can help sustain people.

Entitled 'Called to Preach', the ICC event brought together a group of female ordained and lay theologians for sharing and reflection about the joys and challenges of ministry. Introductory reflections were provided by Revd Dr Jaclyn Williams, Assistant Professor of Preaching at Fuller Seminary, Dr Anne Zaki, Professor of Preaching and Practical Theology at the Evangelical Presbyterian Seminary in Cairo, Egypt and Dr Grace Al-Zoughbi Arteen, who teaches online at Arab Baptist Theological Seminary.

The speakers began by reflecting on the call to ministry, noting how God is shaping us all even before we are aware. We can hear God's voice calling us when we are in the midst of other plans, but not everyone experiences the same support in the surrounding environment when they hear that call. They noted the great diversity of experiences that exist and the sometimes stark differences in how women's ministry and leadership is encouraged and affirmed in some contexts and ignored or marginalised in others. The group was invited to consider how we can support those women who receive the call to ministry but find themselves in an environment that it is not supportive. In such contexts the absence of role models can be isolating, and ecumenical peer support, guided by the Spirit, can help

sustain people. There is also a deeper question about how we work for change in the culture of the Church. With echoes of Project Violet, the sharing of stories was considered to be critical to this work of cultural transformation. There were so many good news stories from the panel and the wider group of lives transformed through women's ministry, yet these go unheard in many parts of the life of the Church.

This event had a particular focus on preaching. The panel shared their experiences of preparing themselves to connect people to the Word of God through their preaching, seeking to facilitate a dialogue between the deep meaning of Scripture and the experiences of the community. We were invited to reflect on how we feel God might be speaking to the people around us, especially those who most need to encounter the hope of Christ's love in the midst of suffering. Scripture offers us examples of women who have wrestled in their hearts with the message of God's love and the sacrifices asked of them in faith. There are also many other examples where women's experiences are not given voice, and we are invited to reflect on that silence as part of the story. We were reminded that preaching is a deeply relational spiritual practice, beginning with our personal relationship with God, and extending to the surrounding community. The importance of women leaders having a community that it is supportive and honest was emphasised. This helps us to grow and also offers protection in times of challenge. Anne encouraged participants to listen to good sermons, as good preaching is more easily caught than taught. Jaclyn reassured the women leaders present that they are already the preachers that God has called them to be, fearfully and wonderfully made, even when they may feel that their reality is far from where they aspire to be. Grace challenged each of us to embrace our individuality, speaking from our own contexts and experiences, rather than seeking to conform to others' expectations because the Church doesn't need perfect sermons, but rather honest and embodied sermons grounded in the contexts in which leaders are living and working, reflecting God's word that has become flesh in their lives.

Speaking after the event, ICC General Secretary Revd Karen Campbell said: "I am grateful for the vision of the Pauline Webb fund in seeking to lift the voices

of women who hear God's call but who are often overlooked. This event enabled us to create a space to hear God's word afresh and be reminded it is an organic process through the tutoring of the Holy Spirit. Many of the women present had experienced hurt in their ministry and it was encouraging to be reminded that, by turning to Jesus, many of these hurts can be healed. The joyful presence of young and old providing mutual support and encouragement was truly a balm to the soul".

CTBI is grateful for the work that has been shared during these two important events. Some of the important questions for the future arising from this engagement include:

- How can ecumenical engagement help transform barriers to women's leadership in the culture of the Church?
- How might we draw on the spiritual practice of lament to support the work of healing and reconciliation in this area?
- What more can be done to support women who do not experience support for their calling or affirmation in their ministry?
- How can male leaders best show their support and get involved in this work of transformation?
- How can we connect this work to efforts by the Church to eradicate violence against women and girls?

We encourage women leaders to apply to the Pauline Webb Fund for support for initiatives that contribute to the development of these or other aspects of women's leadership in ecumenism.

For more information, visit:

- Pauline Webb Fund: ctbi.org.uk/resources/pauline-webb-ecumenical-fund
- David Goodbourne lecture 2025: ctbi.org.uk/event/david-goodbourn-lecture-2025
- Called to Preach recording: ctbi.org.uk/event/called-to-preach/



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



Patterns of intolerance

Addressing and preventing hate crimes against Christians

As part of our strategic plan, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), has committed to the support and encouragement of ecumenical efforts to promote Freedom of Religion or Belief for all, recognising the importance of these protections to global peace and security.

We have also undertaken to collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders in the contexts where we work and at an international level to help raise awareness, share best practice and advocate for positive change. As part of this work, our General Secretary, Dr Nicola Brady, was invited to contribute to a consultation on *Understanding Anti-Christian Hate Crimes and Addressing the Security Needs of Christian Communities: A Practical Guide*. This has now been published by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR) of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The publication of this Guide is a welcome and timely initiative from ODIHR, which follows previous publications that addressed hate crimes against Jewish and Muslim communities. It aims to improve understanding about the extent, nature and impact of hate crimes against Christians, including the ways in which religiously motivated crimes can intersect with other aspects of identity-based hatred and violence including attacks linked to gender, ethnicity, immigration status, sexual orientation and gender identity.

The Guide includes extensive recommendations for a wide range of stakeholders, aimed at strengthening the response to anti-Christian hate crimes – especially the care of victims, reinforcing the cooperation between state authorities and Christian communities, as well as engaging the wider civil society. Case studies help to contextualise and deepen understanding of the issues raised, as well as providing insights into the wider international contexts with examples

taken from OSCE member states across Europe, Central Asia and North America, including examples from the UK and Ireland.

Crucially, the guide emphasises that religiously motivated attacks against Christians are a problem for the whole of society. ODIHR states: “When someone is attacked for their beliefs, it’s never about one person. It’s a signal that something deeper is cracking in the foundation of our societies. Hate crimes against religious or belief communities are not isolated acts – they’re part of a broader pattern of intolerance. When that pattern is ignored, it doesn’t just threaten the targeted group, it threatens everyone. When one group’s dignity is unsafe, no one’s security is guaranteed.”

The Guide explains that: “The starting point for addressing anti-Christian hate crimes is to acknowledge that it poses a serious threat not only to the security of individuals and communities but also to broader societal cohesion. This requires a prompt, coordinated and comprehensive response. Effectively



Shutterstock

A perennial problem – Previous page: a burned out church in Orissa, India, in 2008; left: an Orthodox priest reads by candlelight in Ethiopia, where violence has increased in recent years.

countering anti-Christian hate crimes and its associated security challenges requires sustained political will and commitment. Governments must send a clear and unequivocal message that all forms of hatred, including anti-Christian sentiment, are unacceptable” (p. 66).

Readers are encouraged to consider this latest guide alongside the guides developed for Jewish and Muslim communities. Each shares the same key priorities:

- Help keep people safe, no matter what they believe.
- Spot the warning signs.
- Build trust and share the security load — so no one carries it alone.
- Inter religious dialogue is strongly encouraged as a central pillar of the response: “one of the most urgent challenges today is to foster knowledge and understanding of different religions, beliefs and cultures” (Guide p. 68). The guide helpfully includes a checklist for governments to encourage best practice in the promotion of interreligious dialogue.

We would be interested to hear from our members about their responses to the issues raised in this Guide. ODIHR acknowledges the challenges faced by churches, like other faith communities, in striking a balance between the need to ensure adequate safety to protect members, and the importance of communicating openness and welcome as part of the work of mission and outreach.

The Guide makes the case that failure by governments and the wider civil society to ensure Freedom of Religion or Belief for all, can lead to self-censorship by Christians and restrictions on how they can live out their values in the wider society.

CTBI hopes to work with our members to help ensure that our experiences can shape and inform the response to these issues in Britain and Ireland, as well as the wider European context.



For more information, visit:
www.osce.org/odihr/594847

Freedom of assembly

Continued concern about March raid on Quaker Meeting House

We remain concerned about the circumstances surrounding the raid on Westminster Quaker Meeting House in March this year and the response from leaders in politics and policing to the issues raised by church representatives and the wider faith sector in the weeks that followed.

On 27 March 2025, six people were arrested for attending a peaceful introductory gathering for the nonviolent action group Youth Demand in an operation in which police forced entry into this place of worship. Paul Parker, recording clerk for Quakers in Britain, stated: “This aggressive violation of our place of worship and

the forceful removal of young people holding a protest group meeting clearly shows what happens when a society criminalises protest”. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) worked in partnership with our colleagues in Churches Together in England (CTE) to support both ecumenical and inter faith advocacy to police and government in solidarity with Quakers.

CTE sent an open letter to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, which was copied to the Home Secretary, Rt Hon Yvette Cooper and Mayor of London, Sir Sadiq Khan. Calling for a review of these events, the letter emphasised the right to peaceful protest and the need for respect for

places of worship. In a written response to CTE, the Metropolitan Police justified the action on the grounds that they have “a responsibility to intervene to prevent activity that crosses from protest into serious disruption and other criminality”. Although emphasis was placed on the fact that there was no act of worship taking place in the building at the time, the letter states that the concerns raised by CTE will be taken into consideration in the planning of future operations. The Home Office responded that its Ministers cannot intervene in complaints relating to the police, but emphasised that the right to protest “does not extend to behaviour that is violent or causes harassment, alarm or distress to others”. The original CTE letter, together with these responses, have been published on the CTE website: cte.org.uk/responses-to-cte-letter-about-raid-on-quaker-meeting-house.

Concerns about this raid extended beyond the Christian community and CTBI was asked to facilitate an inter

Protest against the Police actions of March 2025

faith response. We were glad to show our support. As one of our priority areas of focus, CTBI promotes the Church of Sanctuary movement. Although this initiative has a particular focus on migrants and people seeking asylum, it is inspired by the belief that churches should be places of welcome and safety for all, drawing on that ancient principle of sanctuary associated with sacred places. The events of 27th March undermined that principle and faith leaders from diverse backgrounds share the concern that, if left unchallenged, it could set a worrying precedent.

In an open letter to the Prime Minister, copied to the Home Secretary and the Minister for Faiths, Lord Wajid Khan, the letter states that:

‘Quaker Meeting Houses are places where Quakers gather for worship; they are also places that Quakers offer for use by many groups, including those who are working to uphold the Quaker testimonies of peace, equality, truth and sustainability. As such, and as with all places of worship, they are intended to be places of sanctuary and welcome for all who gather there. The heavy-handed and disproportionate policing of a peaceful, public meeting has seriously damaged this sense of sanctuary.

We have gathered together as representatives from many different and diverse faith traditions to write this letter. We share the experience of being guided by our faith in how we act in the world. For many of us, this faith guidance leads us to political engagement, discussion of our views with others, and peaceful protest. The right to gather peacefully is a key cornerstone of our democracy, as well as being central to our religious freedoms. That the laws intended to limit and criminalise protest have now been the basis of a police raid on a place of worship is not an unforeseeable side effect; the peaceful expressions of moral conviction that these laws aim to limit are, for many of us, an inextricable part of our faith.

Although entirely in line with existing restrictions on protest, this police raid sets a deeply concerning new precedent. It reflects a growing trend of excessive policing under new laws brought in by the previous government, which are now being enforced and strengthened

through the Crime and Policing Bill by the current administration. It illustrates that police powers are being used not just to preserve public order, but to intimidate and suppress nonviolent protest movements, undermining fundamental rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

The work of the police in keeping communities safe needs to be respected and supported, while also ensuring that the space for civil society to raise concerns and awareness about issues, is protected.

As gathered representatives of faith communities, we want to live in a country where the rule of law underpins an open democratic society rather than silencing dissent and discussion. In light of such a clear illustration of how these laws can be used to limit peaceful discussion, we ask this government to:

- affirm its commitment to protecting the right to freedom of expression and assembly.
- launch an independent investigation into the raid, including its legal basis and proportionality and publish the findings.
- review the laws that made this police raid on a peaceful meeting in a place of worship possible.’

At time of writing, we have received a response from the Home Office reiterating the points made to CTE



and we have left the letter open on our website for further signatures from official representatives of faith communities because we believe this is a conversation that needs to continue.

The work of the police in keeping communities safe needs to be respected and supported, while also ensuring that the space for civil society to raise concerns and awareness about issues, is protected. The failure to protect that space can lead to a heightening of tensions, alienation of groups from government and authorities like the police and increased societal fragmentation.

Dialogue is key to navigating these tensions. Faith communities, because of their trusted presence at the heart of communities and the diverse networks of relationships they develop in their mission and outreach, can often make a significant contribution as convenors of dialogue, being trusted by many to act as honest brokers in matters of community relations. Indeed, in some areas of our work in recent years, we have seen examples of faith communities working with the police to help build bridges and begin to build trust in contexts where there may be fear or mistrust of policing. As faith communities, it is important that we remain vigilant around the application of the law in relation to protest and assembly, as well as restating our desire for dialogue on these questions, using our spaces and our influence to support and promote dialogue where we can.



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



Following in the footsteps of Jesus

Interview with the Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Bishop of Dover

Richard Reddie speaks to the new Chair of the Churches' Refugee Network (CRN)

Could you tell me something about yourself, especially your role as the Bishop of Dover?

I'd like to start by saying that I was blessed to have been born and brought up in Montego Bay, Jamaica. I say that because growing up there, I saw images of myself in all walks of life. And therefore, it meant that I grew up with the knowledge that I could succeed in life, become whatever I wanted to be. However, although I was baptised at three months old (as an Anglican), and later felt that God was calling me into ministry as a teenager, it wasn't possible for women to participate in ordained ministry within the Church of England at that juncture. The situation only changed in 1994 when women were first allowed to become priests, and I

was subsequently ordained and worked in parish ministry. I later became Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons and was also appointed as one of the chaplains to Her late Majesty the Queen. And it was during my time in Parliament that I was invited to explore the possibility of becoming the Bishop of Dover.

Interestingly, I was enjoying my work as a chaplain. What is more, I have always had a real sense of calling to be a priest and wanted to fulfil that calling. So, when I had previously been approached to explore becoming a Bishop there was always some initial hesitation. However, at that time a number of people quite randomly brought up the topic of me becoming a bishop, so I also believed that God

was telling me to look deeper into this position. In the end it became clear that this was God's calling and so I said yes. The role of the Bishop of Dover is interesting and exciting; this November will be my sixth anniversary in the role.

Earlier this year you took part in an ecumenical event in Dover during Refugee Week (in June 2025). How important is it for you to participate in such events?

Just to say, I always try to make myself available during Refugee Week in June. I think of Jesus and his ministry towards those who were the most vulnerable, and I think it is the mark of any nation in terms of how it treats those who are most vulnerable. I believe that when it comes to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

there is a real undercurrent of hostility, which certain politicians foment for vote catching. They must know or realise the types of 'games' they are playing with real people's lives. During last year's riots we had the almost unimaginable situation of people pushing a burning bin into a building that housed asylum seekers. I believe that this happens because a section of society think that the lives of refugees and asylum seekers do not matter as much as theirs. And that's the message that politicians are implicitly reinforcing with the rhetoric that they offer.

However, we are one human race, and we need to care for our fellow human beings. Are you familiar with the song: 'No man is an island'? That is so true. We all need each other, and we all need to support one another. So, we need to break that cycle.

Going back to Refugee Week; I attended a number of events in our Diocese – as many as possible to tell the truth. One of the most moving of these events that took place in Canterbury saw the names of those who have lost their lives (seeking sanctuary) being read out. It brought home the fact that those who died so tragically were somebody's daughter, somebody's son, somebody's grandchild. They were not just statistics; their lives were of value – and should have value to us.

How should the Church respond to the current hostile narrative on these shores about asylum seekers and refugees?

It is important to me that the Church speaks prophetically with one voice on this matter. And when I say the Church, I mean that we collaborate ecumenically on this issue. But more than that, I think we need to reach out to those of other faiths to engage with them on matters of common concern. I spend time with our local Rabbi, Muslim leaders, and those from civil society groups as a way of ensuring that our communities remain united and prosperous.

I also think that it is important that as a church we challenge the voices in our congregations who support those parties that foster hatred and fearmongering and say: 'Refugees are not welcome here.' We need to challenge this, and ask: 'What is God saying to us about how we live with our brothers and sisters who come to us seeking sanctuary?'

And while I hear people saying, 'Oh, but they're not real refugees or real asylum seekers, they're economic migrants?' I want to ask: 'Do you know what it is like to be hungry, to not be able to feed your family?' I want us to work together, ecumenically and on an inter faith basis, to change the message regarding refugees and asylum seekers.

I also think that there is an educational dimension to this matter. When I carry out Confirmations, especially with young people, one of the things I say to them is, going forward, I want you to be courageous advocates. This can mean that if they hear one of their relatives or friends making derogatory remarks about people who are refugees, asylum seekers or migrants, they must be respectful, but also have the courage to challenge them, and ask: 'What would Jesus have to say about this?'

When it comes to asylum seekers the most pertinent question is not about wanting to stop the boats. I do want to stop the boats because people are risking their lives on these crossings. The right question to ask however, is why are they leaving their places of origin? What is going on in the countries from which they come? The reality is that they come from countries where there is war, climate change, poverty and persecution. What is more, western countries are often the cause of these issues due to their foreign policies, and environmental decisions. As a result, people are going to move. So, internationally, we ought to be teaching about reconciliation and about how we ought to care for one another. We don't invest in peace and reconciliation. There's a song that I used to sing when I was in Sunday school, that had the words: 'Let there be peace on Earth and let it begin with me'.

As the new Chair of CRN, what issues would you like it to focus on?

I would like the CRN to be a conduit, a channel between those who are most vulnerable, and so-called political leaders who are making decisions that are impacting on them. I think we need to be attuned to what we're hearing, what we're seeing, and then to challenge it by speaking with one voice. We need to give a voice to those who are not heard in those corridors of power, so that they can see the human face and hear the human stories.

Again, I would like to use the term 'courageous advocate'; we need to be courageous advocates on behalf of those who are most vulnerable. For me it's also about equipping the next generation, many of whom appear more comfortable with diversity, to speak truth to power on issues around justice, truth and integrity when it comes to asylum and refugee matters.

Finally, who or what inspires you to carry out this work?

My inspiration comes from our Lord Jesus Christ when it comes to this kind of work. Every time I participate in the Church of England Eucharist, the final prayer in that service says: 'Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory'. For me, these cannot just be words; they must mean something more substantive or tangible. We must live out these words. When our Lord was talking about the last judgement in Matthew 25: 31-40, he wasn't talking about religiosity, he was talking about our relationships with some of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in society:

The right question to ask however, is why are they leaving their places of origin? What is going on in the countries from which they come?

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink". When we are tucking into our fish and chips or whatever meal that is appealing to our palate, do we consider those who are forced to go without?

I think that we need to be at the cutting edge of following in the footsteps of Jesus, reaching out to those who are most vulnerable, giving them a voice, and being courageous advocates to a world that would often prefer to look away. So, I'm inspired by the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus, who calls us to follow in his footsteps to be his 'voice', 'arms' and 'hands', in our world.



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



CTBI

A Church of Sanctuary Certificate is handed over to the East Belfast Mission

is as urgent and important as ever to up-scale the counter-dial of stories where people of different backgrounds work together modelling ways to challenge hostility with hospitality.

There is no need for the hostility that fuels practice and procedure in immigration matters. It is possible to engage in informed, respectful conversation, across all opinions and political views, to consider compassionate and constructive policies and ways ahead. Hostility is costly and hurts us all.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ninety percent of all people seeking sanctuary are people who are fleeing the danger and destruction of war and violence. They have lost the protection of their own countries, and are dependent on others for their safety and protection. In place of deterrence, detention and demonisation, it is essential to prioritise sanctuary, protective hospitality. Long term, the solution to the “refugee crisis” is not to stop the boats, but to stop the wars. Invest more in development and security, and in instruments of healing not harming. No one wants to be a refugee. People want to live safely in their own homes, where they can “sit under their own vines and their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid” (Micah 4:4).

More immediately Church of Sanctuary aims to support congregations to give a lead by working with partners like City of Sanctuary to build communities of welcome and protective hospitality. Every congregation can commit to be a community of sanctuary as part of our prophetic witness to serve the present age.

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

Church of Sanctuary

Inderjit Bhogal on the importance of hospitality

East Belfast Mission (EBM) became the first congregation in Northern Ireland to receive the Church of Sanctuary certificate. Also known as Skainos, the church merits the recognition for their commitment to building protective hospitality.

The name is based on the Greek term translated “dwell” in John 1:14, and holds the image of pitching a tent, building sanctuary. The EBM congregation has undertaken Bible study and theological reflection using materials provided by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), such as the study guide *Hospitality and Sanctuary for All*; where possible congregation members work to co-design programmes including worship, housing, employment, celebrating festivals, opportunities to develop language skills and learn about different religions, with people seeking sanctuary; and there is advocacy for justice with all levels of government.

St Andrews United Reform Church in Sheffield has followed a similar journey and is the latest recipient of the Church of Sanctuary certificate. This congregation also has an extensive engagement with people seeking sanctuary, and accommodates the refugee run Open Kitchen which serves Sheffield City of Sanctuary.

In a recent engagement with congregations in the Isle of Man I found great commitment to engage with Church of Sanctuary, in a context where the numbers of people seeking sanctuary are small. The ecumenical Island Spirituality Network arranged a conference on Sanctuary themes. The Promenade Methodist Church has grown a truly international congregation, with an inspirational Café Lingo initiative bringing together local people and newly arrived people seeking sanctuary, learning together. They are undertaking the Church of Sanctuary journey.

People want to live safely in their own homes, where they can “sit under their own vines and their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid” (Micah 4:4).

The annual Methodist Conference devoted a whole session on refugees and justice featuring the theme of Church of Sanctuary. The session included showing a film on Church of Sanctuary highlighting the CTBI website on Church of Sanctuary. The ecumenical Joint Public Issues team supported the session.

In a world in which there is increasing demonisation of people who are of a different nationality and ethnicity, especially people seeking sanctuary, it

On Sunday 25 May 2025, Christians from across Britain attended a service at St John's Church, Waterloo, London to mark the fifth anniversary of the killing of African American, George Floyd, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.

The service, which took place five years to the day of that police killing, featured prayers, talks, reflections, hymns, worship songs and poetry.

The service had the theme: 'From Lament to Action', which enabled attendees to reflect on the events of five years ago, and how Christians and churches have responded to the challenges of addressing inequality and discrimination in the church, and society. The service included the participation of Dr Cynan Llwyd, General Secretary of Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales, Rt Revd Dr Nick Bundock, Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway, Rt Revd Dr Rosemarie Mallet, Bishop of Southwark, Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Bishop of Dover, The Rt Revd Paul McAleenan, Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster, and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) Moderator, Revd Graham Sparkes, among others. It also featured the celebrated organist Wayne Marshall, OBE, and the talented Christ's Hospital School Gospel Choir.

Moreover, the sermon and reflections highlighted the current 'pushback'



'From Lament to Action'

Service in memory of George Floyd

against racial justice and equality on both sides of the Atlantic, and the importance of challenging this prevailing tendency, especially if we are to make good on the promises made after George Floyd's passing.

CTBI's Richard Reddie said: 'The tragic murder of George Floyd proved to be a *Kairos* moment for racial justice in both church and society. His haunting, dying words: "I can't

breathe," not only came to symbolise his fight for life, but also that of those who struggle to experience justice today. If we are to be true justice seekers, we need to be courageous, visionaries committed to effecting change in church and society.'



Rewatch the service: ctbi.org.uk/event/from-lament-to-action

Loving One's Neighbour

Racial Justice Sunday 2026

Racial Justice Sunday takes place on Sunday 8 February 2026 (the second Sunday of that month), and the church-related resources for next year have the theme 'Loving One's Neighbour'.

The Racial Justice Sunday Writers' Group agreed that the materials should focus on 'Loving One's Neighbour' within the context of belonging, identity and community cohesion.

It is hoped that the resource will provide a scriptural counternarrative to the toxic, blame-filled conversations

linked to 'race' and immigration, which are far too prevalent on these shores. The resources want to present a hope-filled, positive narrative around ethnicity and diversity.

The resources will be available in late November 2025; see the CTBI website www.ctbi.org.uk for more information.



Past Racial Justice resources can be found online at: ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday





Synergy Network



CHURCHES & COMMUNITIES TAKING A STAND

Synergy Network Update

Standing Together Weekend 2025

On the 19 and 20 July 2025, the Synergy Network (SN) encouraged churches and communities to hold events on Standing Together Saturday and Sunday to draw attention to Violence Affecting Young People (VAYP) – what was previously known as ‘serious youth violence’. Although that July weekend invariably heralds the start of the school summer break in many nations, it also sadly sees a spike in knife-related violence among young people. As such, the SN encouraged churches in particular to open their doors during the holidays to ensure our young people remain safe.

On Saturday 19 July, youth workers, practitioners, church leaders and an array of interested parties gathered at St Mark's Church Kennington to find out more about what is taking place to address VAYP, and how they could

better engage in this work. The day began with three members of staff from 'Leap Confronting Conflict', an organisation established by several Quakers almost 40 years ago, which now delivers transformational development programmes in schools to support young people through a time of transition, discussing the best way to engage with young people struggling with the challenges associated with navigating the journey from adolescence to adulthood.

This session was followed by a similar training exercise led by Pastor Des Brown, the CEO and founder of 'Spark2Life', an award-winning charity that supports children, young adults and those who face adversity to make positive, productive life choices. Among other matters, Pastor Des encouraged attendees to think 'outside of the box' when it comes to churches supporting the increasing numbers of Christian organisations tackling VAYP.

Finally, Poetess Jess (Jessica Anastasia) an award-winning, young Christian spoken-word artiste, delivered a series of poems exploring some of the challenges faced by young people growing up on these shores. Many of these poems encouraged audience participation, allowing attendees to enter into the spoken-word drama. The meeting ended with prayers and a reflection led by Bishop Lenford Rowe, the SN Chair, and Pastor Bola Ojo, the network's Deputy Chair.

The following day, churches in Britain and Ireland were able to use the SN resources that enabled churches to both pray and take action. This year, the SN created a bespoke 'service outline' that could be used specifically for church services on 20 July 2025. SN Chair, Bishop Lenford Rowe said: 'Although we want churches to engage with our *Standing Together Weekend* on the 19 and 20 July 2025, they need to be cognizant that this work must continue throughout the year if we are to see any transformation in this tragic situation. We cannot sit on our hands and hope for the best. If we truly care about our young people, we need to get involved and be the change that we want to see!'



For more information, visit:
wearesynergy.org.uk



Addressing legacies

Roundtable seeks to obtain a statement on reparatory justice for Transatlantic African chattel enslavement

In November 2024, the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF) organised a gathering at the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) offices involving the churches, parachurch organisations and mission agencies engaged in the work to address the legacies of Transatlantic African chattel enslavement (TACE).

A key facet of that activity involved exploring 'reparations' or reparatory justice, and what this means for the church. At that meeting attendees agreed that the churches should host an international conference focusing on TACE, and craft a possible theological 'statement' that outlines the 'position' of the churches in Britain and Ireland regarding 'reparations' or reparatory justice for TACE.

The RJAF subsequently organised two respective roundtables this year, which brought together a cross section of churches, parachurch organisations

and mission agencies to help in the effort to craft a reparations' statement. Both the May and July gatherings utilised a discernment process that enabled attendees to explore all aspects of TACE, colonialism and reparations in what was an open, safe space. As with most processes, this endeavour or undertaking is regarded as a 'journey' on which there will be opportunities for reflection, critical examination and learning, as we 'progress in the direction of justice and true reconciliation' linked to reparations. It was also recognised that the Bible must be the lodestar or guiding principle regarding all conversations, especially in the formulation of the proposed statement.

After the success of the two meetings, there will be a third gathering involving young people. This will be followed by a larger, in-person event in 2026, at which key church leaders will be able to build on the conversations of the three previous meetings. The RJAF expects the whole process to last over a year,



Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745 – 1797), known for most of his life as Gustavus Vassa, was a writer and abolitionist. As a freedman, Equiano became a leading figure of the British abolitionist movement in the 1780s.

and it is hoped that the 'statement' could be unveiled at the proposed international conference later that year.

CTBI's Richard Reddie said: 'I believe that this statement will enable the churches to properly engage in the growing conversation linked to reparations. It seems as if "reparations are an idea whose time has come", and it is important that Christians can liaise with community groups, civil society organisations and governments on what they consider to be the most apt way to address the impact of TACE.'



For more information, visit:
www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/365504/Racial_Justice_Advocacy.aspx



Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Shutterstock

Battered and bruised... but not defeated

Supporting Christians in the Holy Land

At the time of writing, the situation in Israel Palestine grows ever graver, especially in Gaza where we have all witnessed the shocking images of malnutrition and the relentless bombardment of civilians.

For many decades, the churches in the Holy Land have appealed to churches in the West to be in solidarity with them and to bear pressure to bring about peace and justice in the region. In recent weeks and months, these calls have been increasingly desperate as there seems no end to the violence. Meanwhile, Israeli hostages are still being held in Gaza, and this situation has yet to be resolved.

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem held a joint press conference,

highlighting the historic pastoral visit to Gaza of His Beatitude Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, and His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, The Patriarch of Jerusalem. Together, they carried a message of consolation and hope to a grieving people, and a cry of conscience to a silent world. The Most Revd Hosam Naoum, Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem and Primate of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East, addressed the General Synod of the Church of England on July 15th, and stated “we are battered and bruised but not defeated”.

The attacks by Settlers on the Christian village of Taybeh on the West Bank, has drawn particular concern and alarm from churches around the world. The future of Christianity in the

Holy Land has for many years been highlighted as a significant challenge for the ecumenical movement and the present conflict has made this all the more acute.

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine Israel – a programme of the World Council of Churches and taken forward on behalf of the British and Irish churches by British Quakers – has also come under enormous strain because of the present situation.

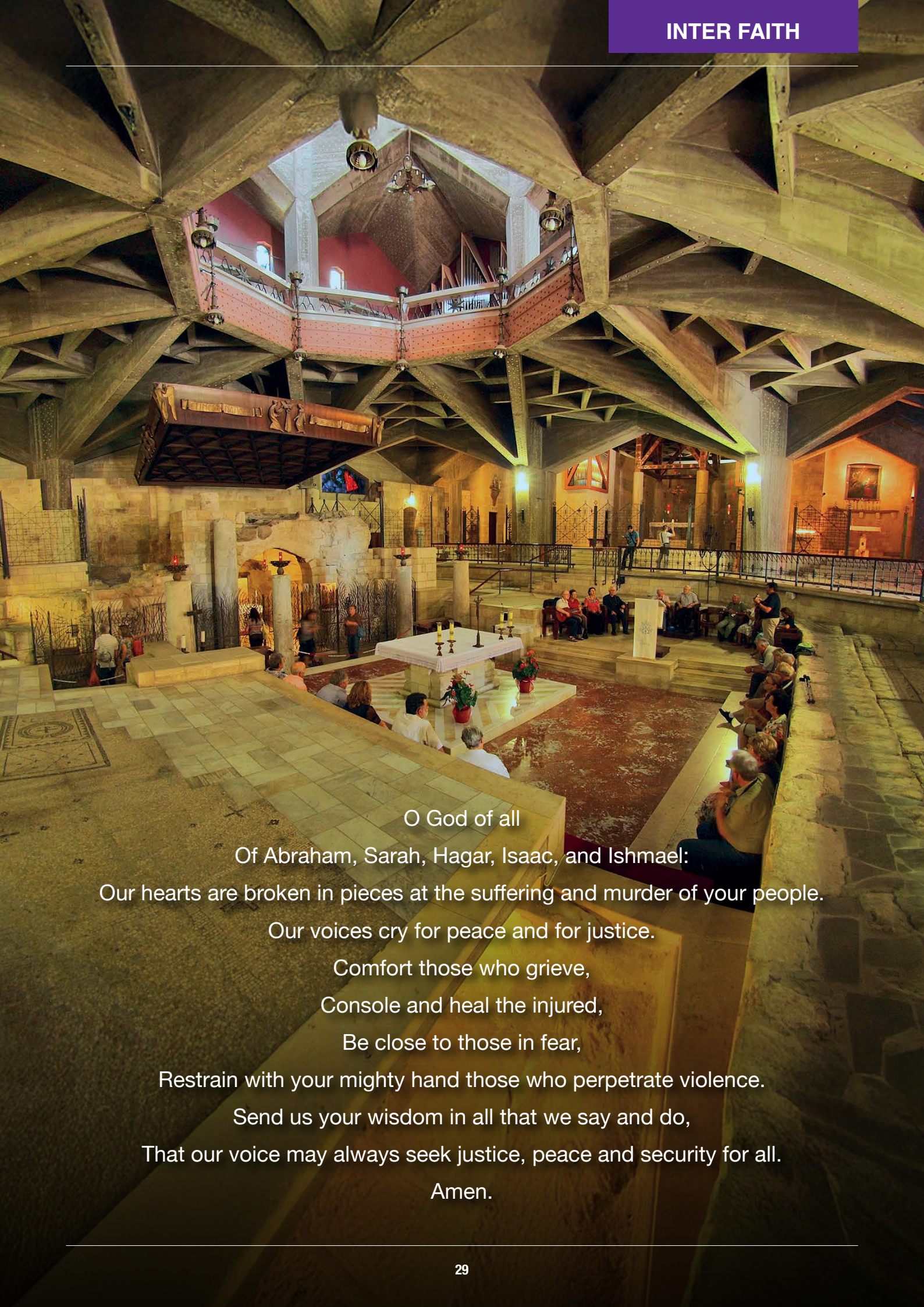
Different Christian groups will be advocating for many different kinds of actions including lobbying of politicians for the recognition of Palestine, lifting the blockade on food and the prevention of attacks on civilians by all sides.

Meanwhile, this conflict has been a serious challenge in community relations across Britain and Ireland with alarming rises in hate crimes against Jews and Muslims. We continue to stand in solidarity with all victims of violence and hatred and pray for peace and justice.

Main image above: His Beatitude Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa and His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III visit Gaza in 2025; opposite page: Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, Israel



Read statements here: ctbi.org.uk/prayers-and-statements-on-violence-in-the-middle-east

The background image shows the interior of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The architecture is a blend of ancient and modern styles, featuring a large, vaulted wooden ceiling with exposed beams. A balcony with a red railing and a harp is visible in the upper part of the church. The floor is made of stone tiles, and there are several altars and religious artifacts throughout the space. People are seated on the floor, facing the altar area, suggesting a religious service or prayer session.

O God of all
Of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, and Ishmael:
Our hearts are broken in pieces at the suffering and murder of your people.
Our voices cry for peace and for justice.
Comfort those who grieve,
Console and heal the injured,
Be close to those in fear,
Restrain with your mighty hand those who perpetrate violence.
Send us your wisdom in all that we say and do,
That our voice may always seek justice, peace and security for all.
Amen.

Active listening

The Churches' Forum for Inter Religious Relations at an historic meeting in Belfast

The Churches' Forum for Inter Religious Relations (CFIRR) brings together representatives of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) member churches to discuss and network around matters relating to the churches' relationship with people of other faiths.

Although it holds most of its meetings online, there is always one residential a year, meeting in a different town or city around the Four Nations. This year CFIRR met for the first time in its history in Belfast, where we heard from the Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum and the Dublin City Inter Faith Forum and how inter faith matters are taken forward on the island of Ireland.

We were able to hear of some of the work being taken forward in Northern Ireland, including monthly inter faith lunches, climate justice work, and refugee support. There is also work with marginalised religious groups and important work in peacebuilding led by the Corrymeela Community.

From Dublin, we learnt of work on social cohesion, especially

collaborations with the City Council, police and education/health sectors and about the development of the 'Safe Haven' programme to address hate speech and extremism. There is also engagement in major commemorations, especially the Holocaust Memorial, and Inter Faith Harmony Week.

The importance of inter faith groups from different cities and areas working together was a major theme and this is done between the Northern Ireland Faiths Forum and the Dublin City Inter Faith Forum, but also more widely with bodies in other places such as Birmingham and Glasgow. Meanwhile, in the Republic there continues to be strong links with mainland Europe.

Hate crime is a particular concern, faced by Sikhs and others as well as Muslims: Islamophobia being underacknowledged in inter faith spaces, especially by Christian leaders. Discrimination in schools was also highlighted. Religious Education (RE) plays a positive role in community harmony, but Ireland lacks a standardised, inclusive RE curriculum.

This summary of some of the issues discussed, reveals the extent to which inter faith relations permeates many aspects of life and goes far beyond the merely religious sphere. Through these residential meetings, CFIRR seeks to be a partner of active listening with the communities who honour us with their welcome in their community.

Through this active listening we ourselves are enriched by new insights and we learn from the wisdom gained by local engagement. But there is also an important aspect of ecumenical solidarity, where we show our support for our sisters and brothers in the Christian churches who are engaged in inter faith work and also those of other faiths who are partnering with leaders from our churches. Inter faith work is as much about solidarity with one another than formal conversations and initiatives, important as these are. Inter faith work is a slow process of building good relations with our neighbours which involves a good deal of building of trust where otherwise wariness or suspicions may persist.

We were greatly enriched by our time in Belfast and are grateful to our friends from that city and from Dublin who gave their time to share their experience and insight.



For more information on the work of CFIRR, visit: ctbi.org.uk/cfirr



Embracing Dialogue:

A new inter faith resource

Inter faith dialogue has long been recognised as an important activity in building good community relations. This is especially important at a time of great uncertainty, with divisions within society and alarming rises in hate crime. In some communities, inter faith work is well established, but in other places there may be some hesitancy about reaching out to one's neighbour.

We engage in dialogue with other faiths, not as a means of seeking compromise, nor is it about diluting our faith in order not to cause offence, but rather seek to deepen our understanding

of our neighbour that we may serve each other on order to show love for our fellow women and men and to grow justice and peace. This is the case whether we are concerned with local contexts, what is happening nationally and of course internationally. And what is happening in our world today is having an enormous impact in our local communities. Many of the conflicts overseas result in strong feelings and there are often differences of conviction with different communities feeling empathy towards a particular side in a conflict.

The Catholic theologian, Hans Küng famously wrote: *"No peace among the nations without peace among the*

religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundation of the religions."

We take as our starting point the life of Jesus who reached out beyond the confines of his own religious identity, to reveal himself to the world. The story in the Gospel of John of the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is one amongst many examples of this, where they discuss the nature of holy places and how God interacts with humanity. It is in the midst of this dialogue that Jesus reveals who he is: the word made flesh.

During 2025, the Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group (IFTAG), has been working on a resource that helps to support and encourage local Christian leadership and inter faith work cooperation and dialogue.

This toolkit will have six modules:

- The Christian call to unity empowers and helps equip us for dialogue
- Planning for effective dialogue
- Can we pray with people of other faiths?
- Mind your language: negotiating language in inter religious dialogue
- Growing peace, not importing conflict
- Dialogue deepens and enriches faith

Each module will include case studies and stories from around the Four Nations, some biblical reflection and questions for discussion and reflection. There will also be resources for prayer.

It is hoped that this resource will build confidence amongst Christians to reach out to their neighbour in friendship and solidarity, so that we can contribute to building safe and more harmonious communities.

This Toolkit has been prepared with the support of the KAICIID International Dialogue Centre and publication is expected later in 2025.



For more information on the work of IFTAG, visit: ctbi.org.uk/iftag

The Inter Faith Network (IFN) for the UK was founded in 1987 and since then has served as an important forum for building good relations with people across the faiths. Sadly, it was forced to close its doors in 2024 following the withdrawal of UK Government funding, however, its legacy is a significant one and on the 29th April 2025 there was a gathering in Central London that celebrated the contribution that IFN has made.

I was privileged to represent Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) at this event and was part of the planning group that put it together. What was most apparent was the strength of friendships that have been built up over a long time and across different faiths and I was so pleased to meet many old friends once again. But it wasn't just the gathering of old friends, some of the young people who had most recently served as interns also shared their stories and testimony about the importance of inter faith work which meant that the inter faith torch is being passed on to a new generation. IFN came into being with its founding resolution: *"We meet today as children of many traditions, inheritors of shared wisdom and tragic misunderstandings. We recognise our shared humanity and respect each other's integrity in our differences with the agreed purpose and hope of promoting greater understanding between the members of the different faith communities to which we belong and of encouraging the growth of our relationships of respect and trust and mutual enrichment in our life together, we hear by jointly resolve that the Inter*

A significant legacy

Revd Dr Peter Colwell on the closure of the Inter Faith Network

Faith Network for the United Kingdom should now be established"

Over its nearly 40 year history, IFN has worked hard in ensuring that it remained a place where different faiths and inter faith organisations can network together. Events such as the Faith Communities Forum and the National Meeting, have done enormous work in breaking down barriers and creating trust even by merely being in the same room together. Despite the pressure to speak out on international matters, it prioritised relationships in the UK and only issued statements when relationships were undermined or when there was a need to speak about the importance of looking after each other in times of difficulty.

Traumatic events such as 9/11 and 7/7 threatened to set different faith groups against one another, so having a national inter faith organisation that helped to resource the building of relationships was so crucially important.

Sadly, over the past year with conflict in the Middle East and riots on our streets, IFN was not there to create the space for careful and considered responses, and many of us felt this huge gap, meaning that we have to find other ways to reach out to our sisters and brothers from other faiths to express solidarity with each other in these times.

And so new ways will need to be found to strengthen inter faith relations and it is therefore really important that inter faith week continues to be supported by a consortium of different inter faith organisations.

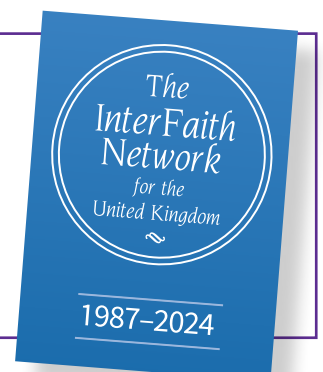
On a personal note, I would like to thank IFN for its immense contribution to inter faith relations, especially the personal commitment of its founder Brian Pearce and its most recent director Dr Harriet Crabtree.



For more information on CTBI's Inter Faith work, visit: ctbi.org.uk/our-work/inter-faith

For more information, visit:

- Report on the final event: www.interfaith.org.uk/uploads/Report_on_event_celebrating_work_of_IFN.pdf
- Video from the event: <https://bit.ly/3Jvr5nv>





Major Heather Poxon, The Salvation Army

*Mass lobby – Act Now Change Forever,
9 July 2025*

Reflecting on this call to action, at the July meeting, EIN members noted the many encouraging developments in the volume and variety of different initiatives that are taking place at present. Many members were preparing to participate in the mass lobby at the UK Parliament which took place on 9th July and called on MPs to:

- 🌍 Deliver vital funding to communities hit hardest by climate change here and around the world;
- 🌍 Cut bills, back UK jobs, and secure a greener fairer future for all;
- 🌍 Restore nature to create a safer, healthier future.

Looking ahead to Creation Time, which this year takes the theme 'Peace with Creation', Network members emphasised the importance of storytelling in the work of climate justice. Where might there be opportunities for the Church to sing a new song, one that emphasises God's promise, draws inspiration from figures like St Francis of Assisi and encourages people to engage with nature, from a place of appreciation and love to better hear the cry of the earth?



For more information on the work of EIN, visit: ctbi.org.uk/ein

Decade for Climate Justice

CTBI's Environmental Issues Network reflect on a new initiative by the World Council of Churches

In our Environmental Issues Network (EIN) we have been reflecting on the challenges and opportunities in engaging the Church in the work of climate justice, particularly in light of the fact that the World Council of Churches (WCC) has recently launched an Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action.

In the April meeting, Network members had the opportunity to receive a preparatory briefing from the WCC in which it was explained that the purpose of this decade is to amplify the urgency of the climate

crisis and enable collective action. It aims to encourage the WCC and other ecumenical bodies to act as a space for repentance, resistance and a place where churches can collectively hold themselves accountable. The Decade will also offer a strong encouragement for dialogue, bringing faith and science together and intentionally amplifying the perspectives of indigenous and marginalised communities. It will be a platform for common prophetic witness, standing in solidarity with and promoting leadership of those on the frontline of climate injustice.



Unity is the gift of God to the church, the Body of Christ, and we are called to pray constantly that we might more fully embrace that gift to us.

Marking the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU), whether it be during Pentecost or the 18-25 January, we not only pray for unity in our own community or context, but we are joined with our sisters and brothers in the world church and led each year by churches from a particular context.

For the WPCU in 2026 we will be led in our reflections by the churches of Armenia. As the introduction to next year's resources states:

"The Armenian Apostolic Church, recognized as one of the world's oldest Christian communities, has played a pivotal role in shaping the spiritual and historical identity of the Armenian people for nearly two millennia. Established in the early 4th century, with roots tracing back to the Apostolic era, this venerable institution transcends religious organisation; it embodies national resilience, cultural heritage, and spiritual fortitude."

And so, we will be connecting with one of the oldest churches in the world, which dates back to Apostolic times, and with one of the most continuous Christian nations in the world, which

One Body, One Spirit

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2026

finds itself in challenging political times.

The Biblical text is taken from the Letter to the Ephesians: "I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4)

The agreed international material takes the form of a service in the orthodox tradition, and we are inviting everyone to participate in this tradition of worship. However, acknowledging that this may be challenging for some, we have provided an alternative version

which follows the same theme and contains some of the same prayers. Whichever version we follow, it is our hope and prayer that we can better understand Christians of Armenia and the challenges that they are facing at the present time.

All the resources will be available in the usual formats:

- English & Welsh-English versions (downloads and hard copy)
- Irish Gaelic & Scots Gaelic (downloads only)
- PowerPoint (downloads only)
- All Age materials



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



In the second webinar we looked at the burgeoning of AI and its possible development within future death care. There were all kinds of interesting (and some terrifying) possibilities, including AI grief companions culled from a dead person's data, and a raft of questions about the influence of AI on grieving people. Yet another perspective asked about the possibilities of cybercrime in relation to grief tech, as well as who controls and charges for the technology.

In the third webinar, we looked at the many things which can be done with a person's ashes, and asked whether exterior concerns, whether that be a beautiful, bespoke urn, or an exciting adventure to take ashes to different places, was becoming more significant than the human remains in themselves and what it might mean to complete a person's earthly journey.

So, where does the Christian voice help people navigate these choices and ideas? What does it take to make our mortal remains speak of the hope of eternal life?

Webinar Recordings

Recordings of the MTAG webinars are available to rewatch:

- **Direct Cremation: the new funerary movements**
- **Grief Tech: what might AI offer the bereaved in the future?**
- **Ashes to Ashes: how does the Church talk about ashes as cremated remains?**
- You can also watch the recording on the MTAG playlist on the CTBI YouTube Channel: **Mission Theology & Apologetics Group (MTAG)**

MTAG webinars

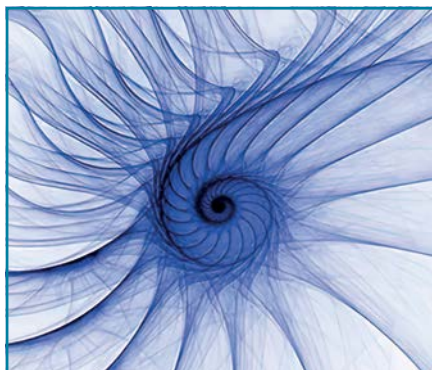
Mortal Remains – exploring the dead body within Christian understanding

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) recently hosted three webinars showcasing work done by the Mission Theology & Apologetics Group on 'Mortal Remains'. These webinars looked at the subjects of 'direct cremation', 'grief tech' and 'ashes'.

The central issue of each of the three webinars was the status and meaning of the dead body in Christian understanding and in secular culture. Are a person's mortal remains just another waste product, or does it matter that the dead are treated with respect, dignity and care? Is the body critical, not only to a theology of resurrection to

eternal life, but to the wellbeing of the bereaved and their life without the loved person?

The first webinar looked at the challenge of direct cremation services in which the dead are taken directly to the crematorium, unaccompanied and without funeral ceremony. Such services are marketed as simpler, cheaper options, saving mourning relatives hassle, fuss and distress. We looked at how important feeling in control and having choice was to people, as well as the impact on families and friends for whom the lack of a ceremony or rite of saying goodbye led to feelings of unfinished business and missed opportunities.



Mission Theology & Apologetics Group

The Mission Theology & Apologetics Group (MTAG) produces resources across five themes: Spirituality, Theology, Reconciliation, Evangelism and Mission. MTAG is a partnership between the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Division and CTBI which creates links with other groups and agencies involved in this field.

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

David Goodbourn Lecture 2026

Palestine-Israel: A Catholic Perspective

In the midst of violence and suffering in the Holy Land, we hear from Fr David Neuhaus, South African born Israeli Jesuit, and a prominent voice for justice and peace.

ZOOM WEBINAR

Date	Time
14 May	7.00pm -
2026	9.00pm

BOOK NOW



Fr David Neuhaus SJ
Pontifical Biblical Institute
in Jerusalem
Speaker



Rt. Revd Rachel Treweek
Bishop of Gloucester
Chair

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.

