



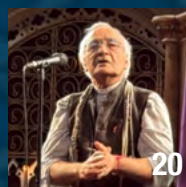
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Week of
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NEWSLETTER

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





Welcome

“Founded on Christ, the living stone, we experience the powerful and mysterious action of the Holy Spirit, and we believe that every authentic human effort to cooperate with him for the good will be blessed by our heavenly Father, in whom we place our hope. For this reason, we can diligently contribute to every initiative that builds a more just world, and we can call others to collaborate in promoting the integral development of every human being. We wish to engage in dialogue with all men and women of our time, with whom we share in the events, questions and aspirations of humanity (Cf *Gaudium et Spes*). Together with them, we seek to identify new paths for the common good and for promoting a dignified life for all. Indeed, openness to dialogue is an integral part of the Church’s vocation because, constituted in Christ as “a sacrament... of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race,” (Cf *Lumen Gentium*) she recognizes history as the place where the Gospel challenges and directs human experience.

(Pope Leo, *Magnifica Humanitas*, 2)

Pope Leo’s groundbreaking Encyclical on the safeguarding of the human person in the time of artificial intelligence has found powerful

resonance across different Christian traditions and beyond with its clear articulation of the primacy of the dignity of the human person and its heartfelt appeal to dialogue and collaboration in a time of fragmentation and conflict. In this edition of the magazine, we share the ways in which Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), our members and partners have been working to help equip Christians for dialogue and outreach with biblically based resources on themes of identity, racial justice, and interreligious dialogue. The material for the 2027 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity from the Irish churches with its theme of ‘Do not be afraid’ calls us to resist the temptation to retreat into isolation and instead view our unity as a refuge from which we draw strength to engage in efforts to heal divisions and share the vision of the Kingdom of God in which all are valued and find belonging.

Churches Together in England’s *Kingdom over Nation* resource reminds us that the Church is not immune to the forces polarising our communities. Being honest about our own divisions can be a powerful witness to a wounded society. Although these divisions are an important part of our story, they are only part of the story. The continued growth of the Church

of Sanctuary movement, at a time when the wider Sanctuary movement has been subject to demonisation, misinformation and threat, conveys the depth of the commitment of local church communities to solidarity with those most at risk in our society. This year’s theme of ‘courage’ for Refugee Week really brought this home and messages of support from Church leaders were more important than ever at a time when some have sought to weaponise Christian heritage, language and symbols against people of different faiths and ethnicities, in direct contradiction of our values.

The riots and hate-filled demonstrations that have taken place across the UK and Ireland in recent months have been a cause of grave concern and pain to those leading in our local churches. CTBI has been listening to those who have been on the ground working to hold communities together. Too often this work, which builds on long-term commitment and long-established presence, only receives attention at times of emergency. With increasing pressures on resources, it is more important than ever to amplify these voices and raise awareness of this work. We have also been reaching out to partners of other faiths, sharing

“Being honest about our own divisions can be a powerful witness to a wounded society”

our concern about attacks on places of worship and faith communities. Together we affirm that an attack on one faith community is an attack on all, and there is no substitute for encounter between people to overcome the fear and hatred that results from prejudice and ignorance. Churches are well placed to give leadership, taking the initiative in outreach as hosts, having the humility to accept hospitality as guests, being honest about the challenges of this work while also being proactive in sharing the joys that it brings and the hope that inspires it.

Dr Nicola Brady

General Secretary

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland



Mark Lilley

Where do you see ecumenical instruments like CTBI making a positive contribution at present?

CTBI produces work of exceptional quality in the field of dialogue, such as the Reaching Out in Love – Interreligious Dialogue toolkit. The material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has a real presence in the life of local Churches Together groups, and that reach and depth is something we should really value. The work is happening. We may not always see the details nationally, but relationships exist locally and are nourished by CTBI materials.

In recent times, the ecumenical instruments have proven to be nimble and proactive, as issues have arisen that have been set adrift in a dense and polarised media atmosphere that encourages division. Responding to these issues is central to the life and mission of the churches, and the churches' voice and message of love and hope speaks more fully to the interconnected and complex problems in society – conflict, poverty, exclusion – that are fuelling issues of violence, racism and xenophobia. Our ecumenical witness to the values of the Gospel is transformative and shows a hopeful and truthful vision for society and individuals.

What do you consider to be some of the most important challenges we should be thinking about together for the future?

We are facing challenges created by technology and its relationship to individuals and society, articulated recently in Pope Leo XIV's encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*. We need to remain vigilant about peace. War and conflict are changing in form. A Christian understanding of war needs to continue to relate Jesus' message of peace to a fractured world, when actors are not only nations, war is not only 'defensive', and weapons are autonomous.

I remain positive: through unity we can relate Jesus' vision to a polarised world, disarming our language, maintaining the integrity of Christianity in the public sphere, and modelling peaceable dialogue that reflects God's love for us all in a broken world.

Trustee Profile

Mark Lilley, Quakers in Britain

Mark Lilley is a trustee of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), representing Quakers in Britain. A former history lecturer, he currently serves as a university chaplain. Originally from Scotland, educated in Ireland, and now living in Lincolnshire, he values the differences and similarities across these islands.

What has motivated you to become a trustee of CTBI, representing Quakers in Britain?

I was a member of the Quaker committee that represents Quakers (also known as Friends) to other churches and faiths for six years. That role is dual-facing, reflecting back to Quakers the work and life of the ecumenical instruments, and I felt drawn to deepen my involvement through CTBI. I greatly value being part of Lincoln's Churches Together, where the work of unity is locally relevant and built on long-standing personal friendships that are able to face challenges in a loving way. I'm blessed to be able to live ecumenically, nationally and locally. Local and national ecumenical life are gifts I am a steward of, nurturing what Quakers have contributed to the national ecumenical instruments, and open to how we can continue to work towards Christian unity.

What have been the most significant aspects of this work for you so far?

Working through CTBI's Strategic Plan, *'Endurance Inspired by Hope'*, has been meaningful for me. It captures the crucial components of ecumenical work – strengthening ecumenical engagement, mission, healing fractures, peace and justice – and offers us, as an organisation, clear markers for our work. The CTBI staff are undertaking so

In the midst of all this work, I really value the joy and vibrancy that stems from spending time in the company of other traditions, and of having time to learn the nuances of others' Christian experience and traditions.

much work on behalf of the churches, and it is important that we reflect this back to member churches who will see how much is being done together. As a Quaker, I value that the Strategic Plan has a positive vision of peace as a reality and not as an idealistic option.

In the midst of all this work, I really value the joy and vibrancy that stems from spending time in the company of other traditions, and of having time to learn the nuances of others' Christian experience and traditions.



For more information visit:
www.quaker.org.uk



Member Church Profile

The Methodist Church in Ireland

The Methodist Church in Ireland describes itself as “a community of people drawn together by God’s love who seek to live wholeheartedly as followers of Jesus for the transformation of the world”. It comprises approximately 200 churches across the island of Ireland, in both political jurisdictions. It is conscious of its place as “a small part of an even larger global Christian Church”, sharing values with Christians around the world while also recognising “the distinctives that shape what it means to be a Methodist in Ireland today”.

The work of peace and reconciliation, a strong priority for the Church, demonstrates both aspects of the shared global Christian values and the distinctive aspects of the Irish context. This profile explores the learning from reflections on the Church’s leadership and engagement in the work of peace and reconciliation and considers what

might be learned by others at a time of widening and deepening identity-based fractures across Britain and Ireland, as well as the wider international context.

We spoke to Dr David Gallagher, former Lay Secretary to the Methodist Council on Social Responsibility (Northern Executive), and Gillian Kingston, Convenor of the Inter-Church Relations Committee for the Methodist Church in Ireland and former Vice-President of the World Methodist Council.

David has recently published research into the peacebuilding efforts of the Methodist Church in Ireland from 1985 to 2025, with particular focus on the critical years either side of the signing of the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. In addition to the research undertaken into Government papers in official archives, he writes partly from his own experience as a participant in many of the meetings and initiatives examined. In this way he follows on from his father Revd Eric Gallagher CBE, a former President of the Methodist Conference

who wrote about his peacebuilding experience in the book *‘Christians in Ulster 1968-1980’* (Oxford University Press, 1982) with Stanley Worrall.

David’s work explores how the Methodist Church responded to violent conflict, to contentious displays of identity, to political agreements and

David has recently published research into the peacebuilding efforts of the Methodist Church in Ireland from 1985 to 2025, with particular focus on the critical years either side of the signing of the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

efforts to promote good community relations and reconciliation – themes that are sadly all too relevant across Britain and Ireland today. While emphasising the need for caution in applying lessons from one peacebuilding situation to another, because context is critical, David shared some important



themes that emerged during his research that could have wider application.

The first major theme is trust, and how this is established over time. For the Methodist Church in Ireland, a combination of the presence at the heart of local communities through decades of conflict, providing pastoral support in times of fear and loss, and also outreach beyond the Methodist community – including to those engaged in acts of violence – provided foundations the Church could build on in seeking to establish itself as a credible dialogue partner. The dialogue in which the Church was engaged was clearly a two-way process. At times, Methodist representatives would initiate outreach and convene conversations seeking to encourage, challenge and explore what might be possible in the work of peace. At other times they would be approached by politicians and others as leaders who could be trusted to listen, to advocate and give wise counsel at moments of decision-making or pressures on relationships. David emphasises the importance of the long-term commitment to the work of building trust. Much of this work was unseen – quiet diplomacy going on in the background which positioned Church

representatives to provide that work of bridge-building when communications broke down and groups risked isolation. A strength of the Church as a dialogue partner in the work of building peace is the way in which it brings together in its membership people of different backgrounds and experience, many of whom may be leading in different areas of life, including politics.

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The ability to facilitate dialogue flows from this work of trust. Regular meetings with all major political parties were a feature of the Methodist Church's engagement with the peace process, signalling and modelling a commitment to dialogue. It was recognised by Government that churches had a particular reach into communities and could support the work of the Northern Ireland Office and others in consultation

and engagement, whether that was in locations like the Skainos centre of East Belfast Mission, or informally around the kitchen table of Revd Harold Good OBE. David experienced personally how the Church's instinctive, biblically based hospitality could have a transformative impact on relationships.

Unsurprisingly, this work could also be controversial. Regular reporting to the Methodist Conference helped provide reassurance through a commitment to transparency and accountability as the Church sought to navigate difficult issues such as how best to respond to the needs of victims and survivors, how to engage with those involved in paramilitary organisations – including requests for funerals. Public statements issued by the Church also required approval from Conference or other bodies with delegated authority. The discussions around these issues as approval was sought provided opportunities to clarify the values that informed the Church's approach to these issues, emphasising that engagement with those who have committed acts of violence does not in any way imply that those acts are condoned or accepted, and the responsibility to encourage engagement with political processes.



Methodist Church in Ireland

Previous page: Stained glass window detail from Knock Methodist Church, Belfast; opposite page: Revd Dr Janet Unsworth, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland 2026-7; this page above: Methodist Centenary Church, Dublin; left: Gillian Kingston; above right: Dr David Gallagher

Having served the Methodist Church in congregations across the island of Ireland, as well as involvement internationally, Gillian affirms the value of capturing these stories of dialogue and encounter that had such a crucial impact at the time and would otherwise risk being forgotten. This was recognised by the World Methodist Council of which Gillian was Vice-President (2014-2024). At the World Methodist Council, meeting in Dublin in 1976, it was proposed that a World Methodist Peace Award be inaugurated, with the first recipient being from Ireland. The Award was made to Sadie Patterson MBE, a trade unionist who was widely recognised for her commitment to women's rights and peacebuilding. Over the years the contribution of members of the Methodist Church in Ireland to the work of peace such as Gordon Wilson and Revd Harold Good would be recognised alongside other global leaders. The role the Church can play in articulating a global vision for peace, based on the recognition of our common humanity and shared human experience of the suffering caused by conflict has thus been affirmed for some sixty years.

Reflecting on the more recent work of the Methodist Church in the post-

Belfast/Good Friday Agreement era, one moment stands out for Gillian as a powerful illustration of this connection. In 2021, the Church Leaders Group (Ireland) worked with representatives from political life and civil society from across Britain and Ireland to mark the centenary of partition with a Service of Reconciliation and Hope.

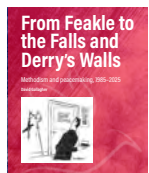
Over the years the contribution of members of the Methodist Church in Ireland to the work of peace such as Gordon Wilson and Revd Harold Good would be recognised alongside other global leaders.

A preparatory dialogue process leading up to the Service explored the challenges arising from the fact that this would be a moment of lament for many, and a celebration for others, and discussed the tension between the need to work to heal the wounds of the past and also to protect the space for people to look forward in hope for a better future. President Revd Dr Sahr Yambasu, the then President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, was asked to preach at the Service. Coming to

Ireland from Sierra Leone, Dr Yambasu spoke from the experience of people who experienced partition, conflict and injustice: "Brothers and sisters in Christ, building an equal and just future is costly. It is a moral imperative needing moral courage to fulfil. Failing that, hope for a just and peaceful co-existence of different peoples and traditions on this island, as anywhere else, will remain just that – hope. A moral imperative, courage, and hope are intertwined. Perhaps a most concrete way to embrace them is to seek to make space in our lives for even those we believe have wronged us."

Reflecting on what might be most important to share from the experience of the Methodist Church in Ireland in the work of peace and reconciliation, David emphasises how that experience of pastoring to the broken-hearted motivated church members to stretch themselves and seek to encourage others to do likewise, helping to heal the wounds of victims and survivors and protect future generations from similar suffering.

'From Feakle to the Falls and Derry's Walls: Methodism and Peacemaking', by Dr David Gallagher is available [here](#) or by contacting the author directly: davidgallagher904@gmail.com



For more information visit:
www.irishmethodist.org



Kingdom over Nation

A timely new resource from Churches Together in England

Concerns about the rise of Christian nationalism, a term used to describe the way nationalist political ideology can appropriate Christian faith and language for its own ends by attempting to separate Christian language and symbols from Christian values, have been a recurring theme in our meetings in recent months.

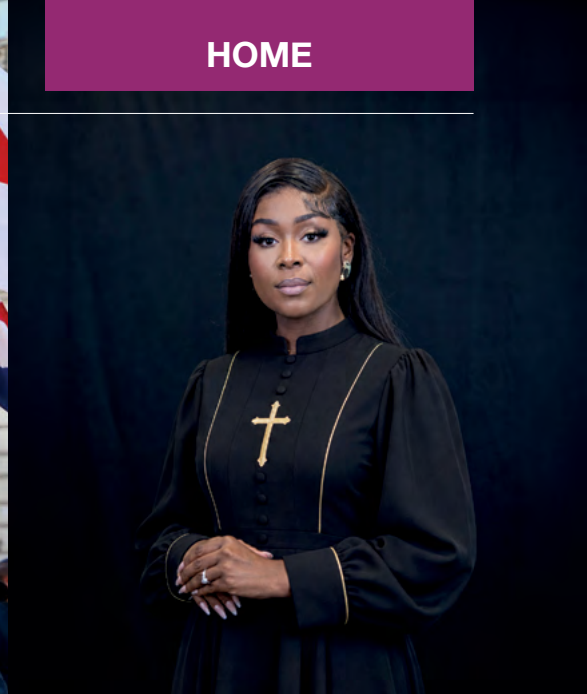
We have been reflecting together on how best to respond to the needs of divided communities, conscious that the Church itself is impacted by these divisions. Local church leaders have faced complex pastoral questions in seeking to support people who may be both wounded and angry, articulating both fear and hatred. As rhetoric that was previously considered extreme becomes more mainstream, with some of the leading proponents of those messages consciously seeking to engage Christian voters on the basis of shared values, and as the space for reasoned and respectful debate seems to be narrowing, churches have an opportunity and a responsibility to convene conversations with the common good at their heart.

Resources that provide Gospel-centred foundations for these conversations are helpful for many leaders in seeking to navigate these challenges, ensuring the Church can continue to be present for communities and re-establish connections with those who may have become alienated.

In our conversations on these questions, we have been grateful for the opportunity to learn from the work that has been done by our Churches Together in England (CTE) colleagues on their resource Kingdom over Nation. Before the launch, Minister Shermara Hoyte spoke to our four nations gathering of national ecumenical officers about the inspiration for this work and the approach that informs it. Min Hoyte is Principal Officer for Pentecostal, Charismatic and Multicultural Relations at CTE. The resource was inspired by her experience engaging with local churches and seeing firsthand how their surrounding environment was being transformed by the proliferation of flags and other symbols. This seismic social change clearly required a response from the Church, one grounded in the

ministry of listening. Drawing on the experience of her CTE work, Shermara saw the added value that an ecumenical Bible study resource could make by bringing together reflections and perspectives from different Christian traditions, modelling the unity in diversity that flows from our shared belonging in Christ.

Min Hoyte explained that the approach adopted in Kingdom over Nation is one of seeking to equip Christians for discernment, grounding our reflections in the Gospel's call to love our neighbour and prompting us to think about how we approach themes of belonging and nationhood and how we respond to divisive rhetoric. As Executive Editor, Shermara worked with her co-editors, CTE colleagues Revd Dr Ben Aldous and Sarah Ball, to put together a series of guided reflections to enable participants to identify and explore the questions arising in their different contexts, from understanding Christian nationalism to exploring questions about patriotism, power, reconciliation, faith in the public square and leadership. A contribution from



Opposite page: artwork from the Kingdom over Nation resource; above left: the rise of Christian Nationalism has become a troubling recurring theme; above right: Minister Shermara Hoyte

CTE's Principal Officer for Ecumenical Development and Relations, Doral Hayes, helps to equip churches to facilitate difficult conversations and explore challenging themes in a spirit of relationship and in a way that helps participants consider other perspectives. Shermara emphasises the resources we have to draw on for this work from our ecumenical experience in learning to disagree well and appreciating what we can learn from each other.

CTE General Secretary, Bishop Mike Royal, provided the Foreword

for this resource. He shared with us that, since the launch, the CTE team have been greatly encouraged by the response, with evidence of widespread engagement across different denominations, different parts of England – and beyond. The feedback received suggests that this resource has been very timely, with church leaders concerned about the risks of a vacuum that could be filled by negative voices.

Beyond England, there has been significant interest from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's (CTBI)

membership in this resource. The title 'Kingdom over Nation' encapsulates the challenge churches face and the message of hope they must bring to these conversations.

Churches Together in England (CTE) is the national ecumenical instrument supporting and encouraging churches from a wide range of traditions to work together in unity in England, working alongside Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI).



For more information, visit:
www.cte.org.uk/working-together/kingdom-over-nation

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.

we are

member churches

collaborating with


4

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

linked to


8

**charitable
agencies**


38
**ecumenical
organisations***

(*bodies in association)



istock

Smith from the Joint Public Issues team highlighted the impact of the culture wars and the way in which this can obscure the Church's vision of love and the outreach that flows from that. There is a challenge to balance the need to listen to young people and hear their fears, concerns and frustrations, which can lead to anger, without rushing to judgement, seeking instead to truly understand where they are coming from and what they are looking for. This relational approach, grounded in mutual respect, can help young people identify what they can bring to the Church as well as what the Church, as a community grounded in Gospel values, can offer them.

Other speakers reflected on the complexity of the cultural context that young people are seeking to navigate, with all its distractions and many powerful competing influences. It is not an easy choice to follow Jesus in this context, but this is a choice that many young people are making. The Church has both an opportunity and a responsibility to support them in that search but can struggle to reach them because of differences of language, culture and experience.

Youth Ministry Roundtable

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) was glad to support an event from our Youth Ministry Roundtable in April, hosted by the United Reformed Church (URC), to discuss the implications of the Quiet Revival research carried out by the Bible Society.

Although the report, published in 2025, has since been withdrawn due to questions about the reliability of the data provided by YouGov, the findings have resonated with the experience of many churches and faith-based organisations that have seen increased interest in faith from younger generations.

Those leading in this area recognised a shared need to prepare to support young people who may be seeking opportunities to engage with churches, and to learn from the experience of youth and young adults in shaping those responses. This roundtable explored what may be drawing Gen Z (those aged fourteen to twenty-nine) to faith and to Church.

In the keynote address, Benjamin Hoyte, Church Engagement Manager at the Bible Society, shared some of the learning from the Quiet Revival

research and the churches' engagement with the findings. The publication has sparked discussions about how churches can best be equipped to welcome, engage and disciple young adults who come to Church with no previous connection. In an increasingly connected and online world the younger generation is engaging in a very varied spiritual marketplace. This is leaving them with questions to explore and unpack. Churches can be well-placed to offer authenticity, community and connection.

Many conversations have had a particular focus on young men, concerned about identity challenges faced by this group, including a sense of purposelessness and loneliness which is often exacerbated by influences they encounter on social media. Participants considered what the Church can have to offer these young men and how best to reach them with our messages.

A key challenge identified by speakers was the need for the Church to engage with expectations that may have been shaped by social media and may include only partial or superficial engagement with Church teaching, or even a distortion of it. Erica Lees-

This relational approach, grounded in mutual respect, can help young people identify what they can bring to the Church as well as what the Church, as a community grounded in Gospel values, can offer them.

Participants shared their experiences in examining how they reach young people through their communications, and how they assess how their culture welcomes, includes and supports them. The benefits of working ecumenically were emphasised. This kind of exchange provides opportunities for sharing learning and good practice, helping to support those leading in this work and build their confidence. This coming together helps model for young people a Church that contributes to building bridges, building relationships and building community.

Find out more at www.ctbi.org.uk/ecumenical-gathering

Across all areas of the life and mission of the Church, we are becoming increasingly aware of the need to strengthen our confidence in addressing issues of identity and belonging, and to expand the knowledge and experience we draw on in seeking to create the conditions for inclusive dialogue on these themes.

This is true also of the area of children's ministry and arguably takes on particular importance in this context, in which the Church is accompanying children and their families at a formative, and sometimes, very vulnerable time in their lives.

The March online conference of the Children's Ministry Network brought together those leading in this area from across our member churches to consider how the Church can best support children in engaging with questions of individual and community identity, connecting their church experience to their home, school and social lives, informed by learning on intercultural and intergenerational aspects of ministry.

Revd Dr Israel Olofinjana, the former Director of the One People Commission of the Evangelical Alliance, spoke about the importance of listening to young people, intentionally mentoring and giving them opportunities, investing in the future sustainability of this work and consciously integrating this with other ministries of the Church.

Dr Phoebe Owen from Intercultural Churches encouraged reflection on how a shared identity in Christ can unite people across different cultural identities. Intercultural Church is about building relationships across community boundaries and promoting unity in the Spirit. Many of the challenges we encounter in a church context in this work of reconciling identities are shared with the rest of society, not least the impact of racism. Ultimately, it is to be hoped that talk of intercultural Church will become obsolete as more inclusive practices become universal. Practical areas to focus on as we work to achieve this include looking at how we use resources like music as a tool for connecting cultures; thinking critically about who is leading and speaking – do all children see themselves represented? While being sensitive to what is happening in the world around us, and not avoiding



Being inclusive

The Children's Ministry Network Conference

the difficult issues, Church should also be a place where we consciously celebrate the joy of being together.

Nathaniel Jennings, OMF (UK) Intercultural Ministries Director, introduced the theme of intercultural discipleship. He emphasised the importance of having an awareness of where people are coming from, asking good questions while being sensitive and curious. That interest can be crucial in helping people feel connected. Conversely, when we shy away from these conversations, people can feel like they are being asked to leave part of their identity outside of discussions. This is especially true of children and young people, who can be living through many transitions in their lives, grieving lost relationships and finding it difficult to trust.

In the discussion that followed,

participants shared experiences about creating a positive nurturing environment for children and young people. This is not just about what the Church does for children, but also how it learns from them. Many children are now living very multicultural lives in school and in their social and cultural activities, they have experience of building bridges and developing relationships across cultures, and can be disappointed with more monocultural churches where these skills are not valued.

Churches can often think about discipleship in terms of membership, but this can result in an approach that feels too narrow and alienating for younger people. There is a need to integrate not only different cultures, but also different visions of leadership and what it means to belong.

Find out more

The Children's Ministry Network (CMN) is an official network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) and was constituted in 1972. It exists to bring together all those with national responsibility for work with children in denominations and Christian agencies who are in sympathy with the aims and objectives of CTBI. www.childrensministrynetwork.org



Our partner organisation, **Roots for Churches**, has recorded a **podcast** sharing insights and reflections from the conference on intercultural church and children's ministry. For more information go to: www.rootsontheweb.com

Roots



Church and Social Capital

The National Churches Survey 2025

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) was glad to promote the UK-wide National Churches Survey to our members as a valuable opportunity to gain data and insights into the contribution of churches to social capital in diverse communities.

With 3,628 churches taking part, the results provide a valuable resource for the reflections that are taking place in denominations and ecumenical groups about how best to use the assets that churches have at their disposal to respond to the needs of communities, and how best to respond to the challenges they face and the pressures on resources.

The experiences captured in the report help to illustrate the contribution churches make to local communities, describing this as a “hidden welfare

network” and citing examples of services offered by respondents, such as **food distribution (provided by 56% of respondents), support for those experiencing isolation and mental health issues (34%) and youth groups (49%)**. In addition, the report emphasises the contribution of churches to the conservation of local history and cultural heritage. At the same time, the centrality of the worshipping community to the life of the Church is affirmed, with **80% holding services at least weekly**.

One of the headlines of the survey is that **85% of respondents want to do even more to expand their outreach and welcome and support more people**. The challenges and barriers faced by congregations are identified within the context of this hope-filled framing. Since the previous survey in

2010, concerns about the condition of church property have risen, while significant proportions have identified **the need for more volunteers (70%), more financial support (62%) and improved facilities (39%)**.

CTBI has promoted engagement with research into the experience of churches during, and in the aftermath, of the COVID-19 pandemic, which conveys similar messages about the value and resilience of our local church communities. The National Churches Survey further underlines the shared nature of both the challenges and opportunities, and we would encourage ecumenical dialogue on the findings and the questions they pose for the future.



For more information visit:
www.nationalchurchestrust.org/our-research/survey

A Heart for Peace

Peace Sunday 2026

Did your church or network join hundreds of others in marking Peace Sunday on 20 September 2026? If not, consider how your church can participate in this wave of reflection and prayer that deepens our heart for peace and inspires action.

Peace Sunday is an annual moment in the church calendar that helps reset and renew the church's commitment to year-round discipleship focused on peace and justice. It is aligned with the United Nations International Day of Peace (21 September) and uses material produced by the Fellowship of Reconciliation. This year we used the lectionary reading, the parable of the workers in the vineyard, to recognise that our calling to be peacemakers and peacebuilders can happen at any time. Some may feel like they have toiled for years, and others may have that 'a-ha' moment now. The reward is in contributing to God's vision of right and just relations for the world, not in having worked at it the longest. We encouraged the creativity of churches by inviting them to host prayer stations for either what breaks God's heart for peace or what peace work we want to give thanks for. We also suggested churches invite their MP to come along and present certificates to celebrate local peace work – the people in their community with a heart for peace. The joy of the moment is that the material is so often a starting point to many beautiful moments. Over the years we have had moving stories of where and how it has been used; in recent times this has included a small ecumenical group in North Wales wanting to do something different and a chaplain to a prison wishing to explore something meaningful with the prisoners.

This combination of theological reflection and practical action has been at the heart of Fellowship work ever since it was founded in 1914. As the guns of war were warming up and all felt it was inevitable, an English Quaker and German Lutheran (among others) felt they were called to go a different

way. Committing themselves to be 'one in Christ and never at war', they each set about building up groups of people who shared their conviction. This has led to a global network of branches across four continents, with eight Nobel Peace Prize laureates in history. Some members – like Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr are famous; others, like our sister branches in Sudan and South Sudan, are just quietly getting on with education and action to build peace in increasingly fragile situations. Whatever the situation, it has at its heart people who see a world descending into war and conflict and hear a faith-shaped challenge to sit up and do something different.



“Jesus calls us to lament – and weep with him – over this; then he challenges us to action.”

In the coming months, our work is increasingly challenging us to build bridges and challenge separation. We hosted a visitor from Bethlehem in early September who has spent over 30 years running peace and reconciliation courses. We're working on an online education programme that will help unlock the biblical vision of peace and nonviolence for a new generation, and we will be launching a new programme for churches who want to go deeper into a way of peace. Meanwhile, we will support members to pray for peace and to explore more deeply how to reflect peace and justice when preaching at Remembrance Sunday, especially at a moment when it feels some churches



From left to right: some of the Trustees of The Fellowship of Reconciliation: Naomi Rose Steinberg; Revd Mark Wakelin (Chair); Denis Beaumont; Revd Chris Collins (Vice Chair); John Cooper (Director) and Richard Bickle

(institutional) are more comfortable with welcoming military uniforms than bending swords into ploughshares.

Over the last few years our world has become increasingly focused on war and conflict. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the situation in Gaza are leaving many thousands killed or injured and community relations in many nations lying shattered at the wayside. Jesus calls us to lament – and weep with him – over this; then he challenges us to action. To recognise that our work and witness isn't complete until we show the way to peace – even when time seems dark.

Our branch of the Fellowship has members across England and Scotland and has been growing in membership for the last three years. It's clear there is an appetite for peace among church members, and the joy of this is that every new member takes and shapes the Fellowship and who knows where our work for Peace will take us next. Will you join us?

The Fellowship of Reconciliation is a Body in Association of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)



For more information, visit:
www.for.org.uk/peacesunday



‘To walk through the desert without fear’

A tribute to Fr. Aloysius Pieris by Dr Elizabeth Harris

One of the case studies from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland’s (CTBI) *Reaching out in Love* interreligious dialogue toolkit resource is taken from the work of Fr Aloysius Pieris in Sri Lanka where CTBI has engaged in interreligious peace-building dialogue initiatives in recent years. Fr Aloysius sadly passed away before the resource was published. Dr Elizabeth Harris, former Chair of CTBI’s Inter Faith Theology Advisory Group, shares her experience of his inspiring leadership.

Aloysius Pieris, or Fr. Aloy, as many knew him, died at 6.00 a.m. Sri Lankan time on 22 March 2026, after a long period of increasing weakness and illness. He died, as he would have wished, at Tulana, the centre he founded in 1974 to facilitate discerning action (the meaning of the world ‘tulana’), research and interreligious encounter, particularly with Buddhism. He would have been 92 on 9 of April. During his life, face-to-face and through his writings, he touched the lives of thousands, as mentor, pastor, teacher, friend, academic adviser, Indologist, liberation theologian and humanitarian.

Fr. Aloy was a mentor to me for forty years. In 1986, I arrived in Sri Lanka, as a Christian, to study Buddhism at the Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies (PIPBS), funded by the World Council of Churches. I sought not only to have dialogue with Buddhism but to enter it so that I could see the world through Buddhist eyes. I went to Fr. Aloy for advice, and he helped me to have confidence in what I was doing. I later learned that he had done something similar, when, as a young Jesuit who was fluent in Latin and Pali, he had completed a doctorate in Buddhist Studies in Sri



The Art of Tulana: Opposite page: 'The Wall' – Art installation by Chandraguptha Thenuwara; this page top left: Mary Seat of Wisdom by P. D. Ranjith; below left: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well by Kingsley Gunatileke; top: unknown work; left: Pieta Lanka by Kingsley Gunatileke; above: CTBI General Secretary Dr Nicola Brady and Dr Liz Harris with Fr Pieris.

Lanka, learning at the feet of Buddhist teachers – the first Sri Lankan Roman Catholic priest to have done such a thing. He had also stayed incognito at a Buddhist *vihāra* (monastery/temple) and had been mistaken for a former Buddhist monk, because he spoke Pali with such ease. So, when, for instance, I shared with him that something was being broken within me, as I sought to let go of God-centred meditation in order to practice Buddhist methods, he responded, 'To walk through the desert without fear is to be truly a Christian'.

At one point, I asked Fr. Aloy what kept him within Christianity. 'A God who identifies with the poor' was his answer. The victims of the greed and violence of others were, for him, the body of Christ, and they were mainly non-Christians. And those who were closest to God, whether they were Christian or not, were those who did what God was interested in, namely the empowering of the poor and the victimised. The corollary of this was that the Christian Churches, if they were to be free from greed and patterns of domination, needed to be evangelised

by the poor, not vice versa. These convictions meant that, towards the end of his life, when Sri Lanka was facing economic crisis and people in the vicinity of Tulana were suffering, he refused to have needed repairs done to the fabric of Tulana or to undergo expensive medical tests himself; any spare money had to be given to those who were in need of food.

Fr. Aloy had a capacity for friendship across religions that was second to none. He could move into the language and idioms of Buddhism as though they were his own, whilst remaining firmly rooted in his Christian faith. Faith in a God who sided with both the poor and those who embraced voluntary poverty sustained him and the Tulana community through the darkest times of Sri Lanka's history.

Three memories come to me as I finish this appreciation of a remarkable man. The first is worship at Tulana during the ethnic war, when Psalm 23 was said every day as the prayer of the community because of the threats it faced, followed, almost paradoxically, by lightness, laughter and a glass of wine if it was available.

The second is Fr. Aloy's delight in teaching the young, particularly Jesuits in formation, some of whom would come each week to Tulana for instruction. His very being would come alive in this context, as he weaved a theology that would equip the young to be truly Christian in a Buddhist environment.

The third is my last conversation with him in February 2026. He was weak, chafing against the catheter he was wearing, but he was completely lucid. He spoke of truly moving into retirement, of saying 'No' to future requests for interviews, writing and new research. Sadly, this retirement was not given to him; he lived only a few more weeks. I wish he could have had longer.

Thank you, Fr. Aloy, for all you gave in your life. Thousands around the world are in your debt.



Reaching out in Love

From Christian Unity to Interreligious Dialogue

Last April, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) launched *Reaching out in Love* – a toolkit and training course which aims to support Christian leaders to work together ecumenically to develop interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

Ecumenical dialogue on interreligious engagement has been emerging as a priority need for CTBI members in recent years. As communities across Britain and Ireland have experienced violence targeting

people of different religious identities, and attacks on places of worship, we have seen the positive contribution that strong local networks of inter faith relationships can make in helping people feel safe and challenging the forces seeking to divide communities.

Interreligious dialogue has been a priority area of work for CTBI since its establishment and this resource draws on the learning from that experience and the networks that have been developed, especially through the work of the Inter Faith Theology

CTBI Advisory Group which, for over a decade, has been providing resources for theological reflection in response to questions coming from member churches about the challenges and opportunities of interreligious dialogue in Britain and Ireland today. This resource was supported by KAICIID – The King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue – as part of a fellowship awarded to the CTBI General Secretary in 2025. This fellowship programme focussed on interreligious peace-building dialogue and included in-person training in Amman, Jakarta and Lisbon as well as extensive online learning in areas such as dialogue skills, intercultural communication, creating affirming spaces, addressing hate speech, and freedom of religion or belief.

With the support of the Churches' Forum on Interreligious Relations, facilitated by CTBI, the resource has now been disseminated to member churches, and we are midway through a pilot online training programme with monthly sessions being offered on each of the six modules of the course:

- 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 our words in interreligious dialogue
- Growing peace, not importing conflict
- Dialogue deepens and enriches faith

The experience of the training has deepened our understanding of the needs of local Christian communities in this area and affirmed the value of ecumenical engagement on these issues. The Church has an established presence at the heart of local communities, creating both opportunities and a responsibility to show leadership. Some of the challenges for which members are seeking support include invitations to inter faith prayer, requests around sharing buildings, responding to acts of violence – especially in situations where people are being targeted because of their religion, and inter faith responses

to spiritual needs in a community (such as those encountered in various chaplaincy settings).

In areas where there are already foundations of friendships between different faith communities to build upon, participants have spoken of their hopes that this course will help them to move interreligious dialogue from the safe space of celebrating what we have in common to the riskier exploration of the important ways in which we differ and the consequences of that, which is critical for the development of authentic relationships and meaningful collaboration on those issues of concern to the whole society.

There is also a challenge in engaging the wider church membership in this work, particularly where local churches may have a sense of being “in survival mode”. We have also been asked to develop dialogue and learning

opportunities with a specific focus on the context of rural communities, which may be less diverse in religious identity and/or not have a visible presence of other faiths in the form of places of worship, but where education and opportunities to experience interreligious dialogue are no less vital.

Through this course, CTBI is not seeking to teach, but rather to facilitate learning by connecting participants with the experience that already exists in the form of successful grassroots inter faith initiatives and cooperation in areas such as chaplaincy. We are finding that this learning is not only valuable in the development of our interreligious engagement but is also providing new insights for our ecumenical journey.



For more information:
[www.ctbi.org.uk/
reaching-out-in-love](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/reaching-out-in-love)



Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group Away Day 2026

The work of the Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group (IFTAG) includes time set aside for deeper reflection on some of the issues that are being faced at the present time. Inevitably, this has recently been taken up with the alarming rise in hate crime and prejudice.

IFTAG takes these issues and discussions to a deeper place where some of the complexity is explored. Many of the resources that have been produced by this group over the years have arisen from these kinds of discussions and this has included work on church growth and inter faith relations, questions about whether people of different faiths can pray together, and the resource ‘Torn in Two?’ on the challenge of Israel-Palestine. All these resources and many others are available on the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) website.

In June 2026, the group met for an away day in Manchester at a time when these issues were most acute and much of the reflection was focused on increasing hostility towards minority communities. However, one of the questions that we wrestled with was whether dialogue and religious literacy alone are enough to respond to current challenges.

What therefore are the links between dialogue, solidarity, public witness, and the need to speak out more clearly against prejudice? How then might we frame a theology (or theologies) of inter faith solidarity in the face of growing division and moral complexity?

Addressing these sorts of questions is central to the work of IFTAG and builds on the resource “*Reaching Out in Love – Interreligious Dialogue toolkit*”. As well as this discussion, we were pleased to welcome new members Victoria Turner and Elliot Vanstone.



For more information:
www.ctbi.org.uk/iftag

Prayers from the Inter Faith Toolkit Training

Loving God, creator of all,

Sustainer of the whole universe,
Redeemer of humankind:

In the multicultural rainbow of your creation

We celebrate your love for us

A love that reaches into the very depths and heights of our lives.

We know that nothing is hidden from you

No person is outside your love

And that you call us into friendship and fellowship with all women and men.

Give us tenderness in our loving

Persistence in our forgiving

And courage in our justice seeking

So that we may be active partners with you

In the building of your kingdom of justice and love.

Amen.

O God of challenge and new horizons

We are glad of the shelter of your everlasting arms

And we praise you for the grace that you shower upon us.

Yet your love knows no bounds

And your care is for all.

Remind us O God

That we receive your mercy for which we have not laboured

That we bask in your redeeming grace,
even though we have not won it by merit.

Renew us therefore by your spirit

That our vision of your love

May be broad and deep

Recognising that all people

And all living things are held

In your unfailing and matchless beauty.

Amen. (Jonah 4.9-13)

كَلِمَةً شَوَاعًا

Qur'an, Surah Āl 'Imrān (3:64):
"Come to a common word between us and you..."

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"A Common Word"

Twenty years on: Revd Dr Peter Colwell on
a timely reminder of this important initiative

In 2027, we are marking the 20th anniversary of the "Common Word" initiative. This was a letter addressed to Christian leaders around the world from a number of Muslim scholars and leaders that called for a coming together around the theme of "love of God and love of neighbour".

To mark this, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), in partnership with the Christian-Muslim Forum, are holding a series of webinars on a range of different themes relevant to Christian-Muslim relations at the present time.

The letter "A Common Word Between Us and You" was a glimmer of light in what were very difficult times, emerging as it was in the aftermath of 9/11, the 7/7 bombings in London and the so-called War on Terror raging in the Middle East, costing the lives of

thousands of innocent men women and children.

The Amman Inter Faith Message, which acted as a precursor to the Common Word initiative, made a bold claim that merits restating in our time: "not merely to defuse the tensions between Muslims, Christians and Jews... nor simply to promote tolerance between them, but rather to establish full acceptance and goodwill between them".

Revisiting this after nearly two decades have passed, it is easy to think that the challenges of our own time are the worst and most desperate in recent history. Yet we can easily forget that in the aftermath of 9/11 there were dominant narratives of division and hate that sought to characterise Muslims in the most negative terms possible. And we feared that the hatred and violence would only get worse. What is more, there were those in

our communities who argued against dialogue, arguing we were naïve for doing so.

So the question that we might reflect upon as we approach this 20th anniversary is whether the idea of coming together around the love of God and love of neighbour is still a relevant call and if it is – and I am sure that is the case – then how does this speak into the challenges of our own time when our society feels very divided, where faith communities can often be polarised, and when there is a less receptive political context for the ideas of tolerance, coexistence and dialogue?



For more information:
www.ctbi.org.uk/interfaith



The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is, first and foremost, about people's lives.

Palestine-Israel: A Catholic Perspective

Reflections on the
David Goodbourn Lecture 2026

Fr David Neuhaus SJ is one of the foremost Catholic voices from within Israel and Palestine.

We were therefore hugely privileged that he accepted our invitation to give the 2026 David Goodbourn lecture on the theme “*Palestine-Israel: A Catholic Perspective*”; we were also grateful that the Bishop of Gloucester, Rt Revd Rachel Treweek, agreed to chair the occasion.

Fr David has a unique story to tell of his own journey from his upbringing in South Africa, of his Jewish heritage, his journey towards Christian faith and his deep engagement with the people of this land who are so deeply traumatised by conflict and violence.

The lecture itself is deeply autobiographical and a reminder that for many people across Britain and Ireland, Israel and Palestine is something that we read about in our

newspapers, or we hear different sides of an argument of what can so often seem like a deeply political and ideological matter. It is unusual to meet somebody who says they have no view of this conflict! That alone makes this a unique matter in the lives of our churches and in our dialogue with other faiths.

But away from the headlines, the opinions and the resolutions before our

different church governance structures, we are first and foremost talking about people's lives and how they live day-to-day, and for Christians how they seek to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This was one of the important themes of this year's lecture. It is impossible to summarise the content of the lecture in such a short space but here are a number of standouts:

Palestinian and Israeli people belong to two worlds that converge but seldom meet

Christians should not be seen as a neutral buffer nor a third party, nor a separate body but as an integral part of Palestinian and Israeli society. They are therefore the salt, light and leaven in the societies in which they rightly belong.

The Christian vocation is not to isolate themselves nor to flee, but to live out their Christian calling within their society.

The story of Judaism in the Middle East is one of being an integral part of Arab society and this surely suggests that a future is possible where Jews, Muslims and Christians, Arabs and Israelis can not only live in peace with one another but can flourish together.

Importance of equality, justice and peace, with equality being fundamental to justice and peace for without equality there can be no lasting peace or justice.

Christians therefore have a critical role to bring about change in a society. A different model, not of empire and domination but being the leaven that brings about gradual change often unseen.

For more information

The lecture can be viewed again on the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) [YouTube channel](#), or via the link on the [CTBI website](#) ([David Goodbourn Lecture 2026 – CTBI](#)).

Father David also mentioned his forthcoming book “*Conquest or Leaven: Reflections of a Catholic priest in Palestine-Israel*”, details of which can be found at www.conquestorleaven.org, which also includes regular blog posts offering Fr David's continuing reflections.



Derrick Hudson/stock



Church of Sanctuary

Growing engagement with a prophetic vision

There is a growing engagement with the prophetic vision of Church of Sanctuary, a Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) priority, working with the wider City of Sanctuary network, challenging hostility with hospitality.

Recent recipients of the Church of Sanctuary certificate include St James's Piccadilly and Union Chapel in London, St Andrews United Reformed Church in Sheffield and Wakefield Baptist Church.

In the context of an alarming rise in intimidation and animosity towards people seeking sanctuary, and "migrants" in general, many church congregations are standing up with courage, kindness and compassion alongside those told "you are not welcome here", to speak up with their values of justice, mercy and, yes, humility. Churches are engaging theologically and practically, demonstrating what it means to be a church in a hostile environment.

St James's Piccadilly works with local

ecumenical and inter faith partners, and takes pride in being a Church of Sanctuary, a safe and vibrant space of welcome and inclusion, an international congregation with strong work alongside people seeking sanctuary and people living through times of hostility. Members of the congregation accompany people seeking sanctuary through the complexities of the UK asylum processes and write letters of support for asylum applications. The church is constructively exploring the biblical basis and meaning of hospitality and sanctuary and takes a creative lead to mark Refugee Week and Sanctuary Sunday.

Union Chapel is a remarkable church in Islington. It is also an award-winning music venue and charity and was named Time Out's Number 1 London Music Venue in 2026. The building is an architectural masterpiece with phenomenal acoustics. It has not only hosted legendary artists such as Omid Djalili, U2 and Adele, but also the

talented Iranian music group Shahnai Band. Three members of the Shahnai Band were, at the time of performance, part way through their asylum claims as people seeking sanctuary. The congregation based here has a strong commitment to building justice, welcome and community in their worship and activities including cricket, football and cooking. Their Margins Project works alongside disadvantaged people and supports people facing homelessness, and they work with the UK-wide Bikes Project supplying bikes to people seeking sanctuary.

A Church of Sanctuary certificate is more than a validation of this work, it roots what we do in scripture and heritage and connects congregations with a wider network of others engaging with people seeking sanctuary, building hospitality and sanctuary for all. The congregation learns from people seeking sanctuary and works together to build and embed values of welcome, hospitality and safety, taking pride



Opposite page: Cast bronze park bench sculpture by artist Tim Schmal, depicting Christ hidden beneath blankets, in the grounds of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin; above: Revd Inderjit Bhogal presents a Church of Sanctuary Certificate to Union Chapel, Islington.

in this work and vision. It is about giving leadership and being part of a movement endorsed by a diverse range of people.

Sanctuary, protective welcome and hospitality, is the most repeated ethical requirement and longstanding prophetic theme in scripture. The



Inderjit Bhogal

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 CTBI.

foundation is in the call to love your neighbour as yourself, and to love the "stranger/outsider" as yourself (Leviticus 19:18,34; Luke 10:25-37).

In the context of rising fascism in the 1930s, the German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer pleaded with the church to be the church and to live out the values of the Gospel.

We heed this call in our times. It means to live out the Gospel, to embody the ministry of Christ, be the body of Christ, a community of sanctuary into which we welcome, and enfold and safeguard people with all our differences and diversity. The Church is a house of prayer for people of all nations.

Any congregation can explore becoming a Church of Sanctuary.

How to order

To order a copy of the Hospitality and Sanctuary for All, visit here: ctbi.org.uk/publications/hospitality-and-sanctuary-for-all/



For more information visit: www.churchofsanctuary.org

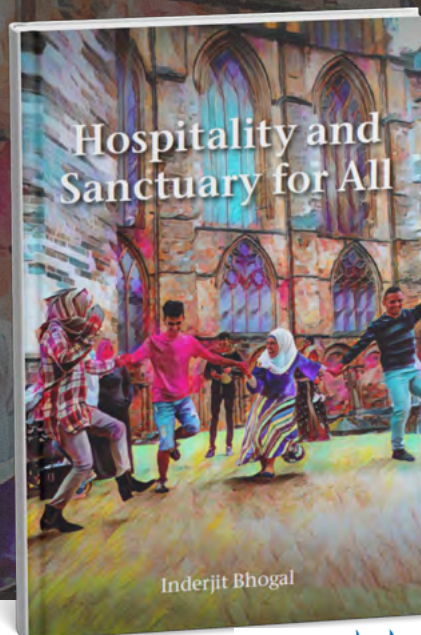
CHALLENGING HOSTILITY WITH HOSPITALITY

HOSPITALITY AND SANCTUARY FOR ALL

by Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal

A resource for churches offering prompts for conversation and reflection on the themes of hospitality and sanctuary

FIND OUT MORE



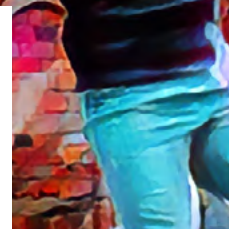
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churches together
IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND®





CHALLENGING HOSTILITY WITH HOSPITALITY



In a Church of Sanctuary all members of the congregation are encouraged to work together to:

How the work of Sanctuary benefits churches:

Resources available:

*"Everyone knows Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan – upholding the capacity of all people to show mercy, to live with hospitality and to refuse hatred. Love your neighbour, without exception. Church of Sanctuary is a meaningful way to live out this message." **Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal***

- **Learn** about the real-life experiences of people forced to flee danger and people seeking sanctuary, and engage others to work from facts, not fiction.
- **Embed** the values of welcome, hospitality and safety within your congregation and community, supporting and including people seeking sanctuary in your activities.
- **Share** your vision, commitment and achievements with pride, highlighting the positive contributions of refugees and the benefits of welcoming others.
- **Deepening** relationships through collaborative action rooted in a shared vision and purpose.
- **Building** stronger relationships across the wider community.
- **Developing** new forms of outreach through a better understanding of community needs.
- **Experiencing** growth and renewal through new relationships, volunteers and shared experiences.
- **Hospitality and Sanctuary for All**: offers materials for Bible studies and discussions.
- **Church of Sanctuary** website: shares news and stories from across the network.

HOW TO APPLY

UK (including Northern Ireland)

Apply to become a Church of Sanctuary: [Church of Sanctuary Application Form](#).

From 2027 City of Sanctuary UK will only accept applications once a year, applications are due by the end of March.

Ireland

You can begin the process by contacting the [Places of Sanctuary Ireland](#) Steering Committee:

Kevin Mascarenhas kmascarenhas2000@yahoo.com or Abigail Sines dean.meath@icloud.com

Applications for Church of Sanctuary are supported by [Places of Sanctuary Ireland](#) and [City of Sanctuary UK](#) (or a local affiliated group).

Church of Sanctuary is a
programme of Churches Together
in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)



Working in partnership with:



Churches' Refugee Network



Refugee Week 2026

Exploring the theme of 'courage'

The Churches' Refugee Network (CRN) produced resources that enabled churches in Britain and Ireland to engage with Refugee Week from 15 – 21 June 2026.

This year's Refugee Week had the theme 'Courage', highlighting the fact that all refugees display a copious amount of courage when they take the decision to leave their homes and homelands to live in new, strange countries.

The CRN resources picked up on the theme of 'courage', exploring what the Bible has to say about this matter. The sermon, reflections, hymns and worship songs, Bible readings, poetry and prayers, as well as practical activities all enabled churches and Christians to host events and activities to celebrate this annual event.

Equally, the CRN commissioned a number of church leaders from across the four nations to record messages

of support for Refugee Week. Again, these videos saw the leaders pick up the theme of 'courage', as they encouraged those in their denominations, congregations and networks to celebrate this annual event.

Messages of support for Refugee Week are available to watch on the CTBI YouTube channel: www.ctbi.org.uk/rw2026

CRN Annual Meeting

The Churches' Refugee Network (CRN) Annual Meeting will take place on 15 October 2026 from 11am to 1pm via Zoom.

Among other matters, the Annual Meeting is an opportunity for those within the CRN network to hear more about its work over the last 12 months, as well as the CRN Chair's vision and work priorities for the CRN in the forthcoming year.

The CRN is also working with the Church of Sanctuary to host

a conference in Belfast, Northern Ireland in early April 2027 that will explore asylum, refugees, sanctuary and hospitality within a church context.

The CRN/Church of Sanctuary conferences take place every two years and showcase local engagement with immigration-related matters.

*You can register for the Churches' Refugee Network (CRN) Annual Meeting via **Zoom**.*

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



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the protests were taking place. These Christians felt isolated and vulnerable, and stated that they were not receiving any support from the denominations that had stationed them in those areas.

At the RJAF meetings in June and July 2026 respectively, attendees discussed how best to support these men and women in rural settings. Given the nature of what they were experiencing, the RJAF agreed that these individuals were in need of therapeutic responses and counselling. Equally, it noted the importance of these Christians reporting all race-related incidents to make the authorities aware of the dangers they faced. Additionally, it considered the allegations of two-tier policing and pointed out that the evidence and data disavowed the notion of an anti-White bias in policing.

The RJAF also used those meetings to explore the challenges to racial justice work in Church and society, and the best ways to support racial justice practitioners. As a result, it will be working with the National Church Leaders Forum to host a symposium to address all the above mentioned matters, and to produce resources to supplement racial justice work.



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

Racial Justice Advocacy Forum

The Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF) hosted two meetings in the summer in response to the violent ‘race’/ religiously related protests in Southampton, and other English cities, and various towns and cities in Northern Ireland, in the late spring.

These protests were accompanied by allegations and contestations from

far-right activists that ‘indigenous’ White communities were experiencing ‘marginalisation’ in ‘their own country’. This included accusations of two-tier policing that saw White individuals experiencing biased law enforcement.

During those frightening events, a number of Black and Brown clergy and laity in rural English towns contacted the RJAF to register their concerns about living and working in areas where

Racial Justice Sunday 2027

“Seeking justice and peace in the place where you live”

Next year’s Racial Justice Sunday resource (2027) will explore the theme of ‘Justice and Peace’, and has the working title: ‘Seeking justice and peace in the place where you live’

The Racial Justice Sunday Writers’ Group, who are responsible for the commissioning and writing of the resource, met several times in the early spring to discuss a theme and overall approach for the resource. It was agreed that the resource will explore the premise that if Christians are called to be justice seekers and peace makers, how can they do this in

the places and spaces where they live?

Interestingly, next year’s Racial Justice Sunday falls on Valentine’s Day, and Richard Reddie, who pulls together the resource, is urging churches to use these two dates to explore the connections between love, peace and justice. He states: ‘it’s notable that when Racial Justice Sunday falls on Valentine’s Day, church leaders feel as if they are in a quandary – should they preach about racial justice or should they speak about love? I believe that racial justice and love are akin to two sides of the same coin; they are inextricably linked. What is more,

with the addition of ‘peace’ you have this wonderful, interconnected trifold of love, justice and peace. The Bible has so much to say about these subjects, and so should we, especially on Racial Justice Sunday/ Valentine’s Day’.

The Racial Justice Sunday resources for 2027 will be available for churches to download at the end of November 2026 on the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) website.



For more information: www.ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday

The Church and Reparations

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Afrikan Reparations (APPG)

On 6 July 2026, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's (CTBI) Director of Justice and Inclusion participated in the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Afrikan Reparations (APPG) conversation: 'African Union's Vision on The Next Steps for Engagement with Citizens, Diaspora, People of African Descent and Reparatory Justice In Conversation with Ambassador Amr Aljowaily on Global Africa' at the British House of Commons in London.

The parliamentary meeting was chaired by the Hon. Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP, and featured keynote speaker, Ambassador Amr Aljowaily, Director of the African Union's Citizens and Diaspora Organizations Directorate (AU-CIDO), who spoke about the African Union's evolving vision for reparatory justice, Global Africa and the role of the African diaspora as Africa's 'Sixth Region'.

The audience included those from Parliament, faith organisations, civil society, and the African diaspora. CTBI's Dr Richard Reddie spoke about the contributions of the churches across these islands on reparations and reminded the audience that reparatory justice is not simply a matter of policy, but also of remembrance, healing,

institutional reform and building new relationships for the future.

The RJAF will continue to work with the organisers – APPG, AFFORD, and The Pan-African Studies Centre, SOAS University of London – to ensure that the topic of reparations stays on the Church's agenda.

RJAF meeting with young people to obtain a reparations statement

The Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF) held its fourth and final roundtable on 15 July 2026 to glean church-related views on Transatlantic African chattel enslavement (TACE), and colonialism within an African and Caribbean context. The online gathering involved a group of young Christians (those between 18-35 years) whose comments and opinions will help the RJAF in its continuing work with the churches to craft a statement on reparations.

The RJAF held three previous such roundtables – all in-person gatherings between autumn of 2024 and the summer of 2025 – and the July 2026 meeting saw those who gathered online listen to the RJAF theologian provide a scriptural underpinning for reparatory justice, especially what the Bible has to say about justice. The session also saw the young people reflect on the Church's involvement in TACE, and the reality and legacy of colonialism.

CTBI



Dr Richard Reddie speaks alongside co-delegates at the APPG in July

Richard Reddie said: 'It was both inspiring and sobering to hear the young people's views on TACE and colonialism. It is clear that these topics mean as much to them as they do to the other age groups in the Church.'

The next steps of this process involve the collation and evaluation of the data from the roundtables, which will then be shared with church leaders, alongside a questionnaire. This will be followed by a meeting with key church leaders, which will result in the formation of a representative subgroup who will be responsible for drafting the statement.



For more information, visit:
www.ctbi.org.uk/appg-ar

BIM Black History Month 'Honouring our Communities'

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) will be producing a range of resources that will enable British and Irish churches to celebrate Black History Month, which marks its 39th anniversary this year. The annual October event invites those on these shores to recognise the individuals whose everyday contributions shape, support and sustain life across Britain and Ireland.

This year's theme is: 'Honouring Our Communities', and it is an opportunity to celebrate the contributions of those pioneers who have helped to transform Britain over so many years. The CTBI resources will be picking up this theme by focusing on the role of the Christian faith in shaping Black British and Irish history.



For more information, visit:
www.ctbi.org.uk/black-history-month

Further information

The Racial Justice Advocacy Forum is an ecumenical Christian entity that seeks to speak prophetically on behalf of Black and Brown Christians to the government on racial injustice challenges and reparations. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) is part of this Forum.



www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/365504/Racial_Justice_Advocacy.aspx



Why Synergy Network Matters

The American writer and essayist, Mark Twain, popularised the phrase: 'There are lies, damned lies, and statistics' to explain how the latter can be used (and abused) to tell a particular story. When it comes to issues connected to violence affecting young people, it is obvious that the statistics in the public domain do not tell the whole story. For instance, in England and Wales, in the 12 months to March 2025, 52 young people under 25 were killed with a knife or sharp instrument. Moreover, according to the Scottish Police Authority, in 2025 there were 17 attempted murders where a child had been accused. The figures for Ireland also paint a gloomy picture showing a significant spike in knife violence in certain towns and cities.

What these figures do not reveal are the numbers of young people in hospital for knife assaults, or those who are referred to mental health services due to related trauma. Equally, they do not cover the damage done to the families and friends of those impacted by the violence. This is the appalling 'ripples in the pond' impact of this scourge on society.

It is within this context that the Synergy Network's outgoing Chair, Bishop Lenford Brown, is calling for churches to get involved with the work to tackle violence affecting young people. He says: *'We cannot stand idly by while this is happening to our young people. As Christians we are commanded to love all those who God loves. Jesus had so much to say about the 'little children'; what is he saying to us regarding those who are impacted by violence? I'm sure he is telling us to get involved – to show his love in a tangible way, which is what we do at the Synergy Network'.*

Synergy Network Board

It will be a case of all change on the Synergy Network's management board. After six years, both its chair, Bishop Lenford Brown, and Deputy Chair, Bola Ojo, will be stepping down from their duties. They will be replaced by Revd Les Isaac from the Ascension Trust, who was instrumental in the establishment of the Synergy Network, and who will become the interim chair. Equally, Dr Richard Reddie, the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's (CTBI) Director of Justice and Inclusion, will become the Vice Chair with a view of taking over as Chair in the New Year.

Standing together

Update from the Synergy Network

The Synergy Network hosted its annual 'Standing Together' event on Saturday 19 April 2026 in Kennington, London. Unlike previous years, the event took place in spring as opposed to around the time most schools on these islands break up for the summer holidays, to maximise participation, especially of young people.

The all-day event was led by the inspirational Dez Brown from Spark2Life, a community-inspired initiative that empowers and advocates for people by giving them the tools to successfully navigate key aspects of life to reduce and prevent the risk of offending.

However, what made the event significant was the young people who were in attendance. It is often the situation that church, community and local authority events and activities focusing on violence affecting young people do not have young people in attendance. What is more, when they do, they are often not the young people who require interventions or assistance. However, the Standing Together event included many of the young people who are habitually off the churches' radar, and realising that they had an opportunity to do something different, large sections of the agenda were abandoned so that the young people could be heard. Such a move proved inspired as the young people spoke passionately about their hopes, dreams, fears, anxieties and challenges.

They also spoke about family life, friends, school, the police, recreational time, and what life was like as a young person seeking to navigate their way toward adulthood. It became apparent that the education system for many of them was an obstacle rather than a bridge to thrive and succeed. They also noted that they were often 'never heard' or 'listened to' by teachers, and that schools were too susceptible to exclude students who were struggling emotionally with 'life issues'. They stated that they would welcome more therapeutic interventions in school and pointed out the importance of having mentors and counsellors to help them.

As a result of the success of the Standing Together event, the Synergy Network is committed to avoiding 'about us, without us' scenarios, and will be establishing a Youth Board under the Synergy Network Board to ensure a consistent and structured youth voice in decision-making.

It will also be hosting a webinar later in the year that will bring together more young people from around the country to hear about their experiences, and the ways in which churches can work with them to improve their life chances.



For more information, visit:
www.wearesynergy.org.uk



When the Saints Come Marching In...

Lent Course 2027

“Unite the Kingdom! Make Britain Great Again! Reclaim Christianity! England for the World Cup! It’s coming HOME!”

Many voices on our streets and across the social media platforms offer slogans, thoughts, advice, jubilation, and sadly also hatred towards others about what these slogans might mean and who might be gathered up under their banners. As well as expressions of solidarity and community around sport and national life, we hear language of ‘invaders’, ‘occupiers’ and ‘freeloaders’ suggesting that somehow our ideas of nation, identity and belonging are being deliberately undermined and twisted by evildoers and saboteurs. We hear cries of ‘Go HOME!’

But what does it really mean to claim a ‘national’ identity? This question has become ever more fraught in our current polarised society, with many different people claiming to know what

the language of nations and nationality means, who and what it includes or excludes, and what flags, crosses and other symbols get thrown into the mix. And then what happens when Christian faith is claimed as part of all that? There’s been a lot of discussion about how these questions should be framed and examined.

In 2027, we will look at these questions through different eyes – the eyes of the patron saints of the four nations: David, Patrick, George and Andrew. We will set off on a journey with them, exploring what it means to bear the burden of being a national saint, finding out how these saints’ devotion to Christ gives us new perspectives on identity and nationality in the context of faith. As we walk with them, as our companions on the way through Lent to Easter, we will explore themes of holiness, mystery, discipleship, and mission and see how

these speak to ideas of identity and give us ways of enriching and deepening our communal national life.

We will gather other companions from the communion of saints and from the Church worldwide and will explore what it might mean to join them all finally, with Jesus, in a place without borders, called ‘HOME’.

The 2027 Lent resources are produced by The Mission Theology and Apologetics Group (MTAG), a partnership between CTBI and the Church of England that supports churches through theological reflection, research and resources on mission and contemporary issues, helping them respond to the challenges facing society today.



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



Life is our light

Thoughts on a shared calendar for “Creation in Christ”: Revd David Coleman, Environmental Chaplain for Eco-Congregation Scotland

The ‘polycrisis’ of nature and climate is a brutal and still increasing existential threat – without precedent – to the ‘integrity’ of all Creation, thus a most urgent occasion for prayer. Human societies, security, and recent progress in attending to poverty are all objectively endangered. It’s not just future. Damage is already done.

The world Church has hitherto lacked the key spiritual resource, for such a time, of a defining, mainstream, ecumenical observance of specifically Christian prayer, celebration, and conversation.

A listening, loving partnership with “the rest of Creation” needs to be recognised as ‘cake, not icing’ of Christian mission, discipleship, witness, and evangelism, however denominationally expressed.

I’ve seen how this can be hamstrung by outdated anxiety that love, awe and wonder, which is rightly due more than human neighbours, as creatures of God,

might detract from devotion proper to God alone. The respected influence of indigenous Christians as well as rediscovery of historic trinitarian and Christological approaches to Creation, should authoritatively calm such nerves.

Two extraordinarily ecumenical conferences, (which I attended) in Assisi in 2024 and 2025, and the continuing ‘Assisi Process’, have helped converge many streams of a momentum begun in 1989 by the Orthodox ‘Ecumenical Patriarch’ Demetrios 1, and developed by the World Council of Churches into the Season of Creation/Creationtide/Creation Time.

The encouragement of Pope Francis’ encyclical ‘Laudato Si’, launched with the UN Paris Conference in 2015, and the movements that grew from it are now joined by the Revised Common Lectionary for a ‘Feast of Creation in Christ’.

Following much conscientious study and conversation, we now enjoy a mainstream encouragement to rediscover how the most ‘obvious’

texts, (starting with the three ‘Great Beginnings’ of Genesis 1, Genesis 2 and John 1), shed light on our spiritual needs in the crisis. Complementary readings, like Paul’s creation apologetic in Acts 17 complete the offering. John 1 as an option for all three lectionary years valuably anchors this as “Creation in Christ”. Provision is also developing to support and encourage ‘free churches’ who might not usually follow a lectionary.

Eco-Congregation Scotland is part of the Environmental Issues Network (EIN), a network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). www.ecocongregationscotland.org

**Season of Creation/Creation Time
1 September – 4 October 2026**



**For more information,
visit: [www.ctbi.org.uk/
seasonofcreation26](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/seasonofcreation26)**

Creation: The Weavers' Collective

("the life was the light of humanity" – John 1:4b)

Sustaining God: Guild of Creation:
Caregiver, Beloved, and Windpower Untamed!
You call for light:
-look: there is life!
and...

Life is our light!
for that's how you made us:

You made us the Light,
whom we also care for.

You made us the Earth,
whom we also share for
a home, who's made fruitful
by justice and beauty.

And Christ, the Beloved,
makes wonder-abundance:
God's wisdom-diversity:
all Earth's incumbents,
sharing the life-stuff of cells and of water
with God's creatures, our teachers;
their signs and their warnings.

You delegate majesty:
sun, moon, awaking;
by sea, and by soil:
co-creating of life.
so that...

Life is our light!
for that's how you made us:

In times and in seasons;
you give us permission
to love and to savour;

For 'very-good' reasons
Christ gives us commission
to be and to bring
your good news to all life.
for...

Life is our light!
for that's how you made us:

And yet still:
that 'particular darkness' re-tangles,
muddying vision with absence of light.

Dear God,
Shine forth and help us be clear:
that neither night, nor your winter,
nor shadow's dark dapple
nor shade of our skin,
where the sun shines strong...

Not repose of the grave,
Not today's coming sunset;
Not decay that feeds flowers;
Not the depths of the sea
are God's opposition...

But rather greed's choice:
proudly othering, exploiting,
releasing the carbon of ages long past;

And entitled unbalancing,
transgressing Earth's laws,
in love's absence
at cost of much life,
though...

Life is our light!
that's how you made us:

So with restless hearts
Like seeds who reach,
like moths who fly,
like flowers who follow,
as partners,
refracting the Rainbow Communion:
delightful 'twixt all life and God
Thank God that:

Life is our light!
for that's how you made us:
AMEN

*This prayer has been kindly offered
by Eco-Congregation Scotland:
www.ecocongregationscotland.org*

“Do not be afraid...”

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2027

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU) offers us the opportunity to pray in solidarity with a different nation or context from around the world and to be reminded that our prayers for unity are for the worldwide church. For 2027, the theme comes to us from within our own context of Britain and Ireland. The island of Ireland has a very particular and distinctive story about Christian heritage and the challenges of acting and praying together in unity.

The central text for 2027 will be Luke 12.22-24, which is concerned with the words of Christ who reassures his disciples not to worry about the future. The overall theme is one of letting go of fear and embracing the Kingdom. From this text, it is the words on verse 22 that will be key “do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom”.

We are very familiar with the image of God’s people as a flock of sheep and Christ as its shepherd, but there is also a call to unity in diversity that leads us to engage with the world and not merely to seek a unity that is safe behind the walls of the church.

These resources draw strength from the history of Christianity on the island of Ireland, which stretches its story back many hundreds of years to the preaching of Saint Patrick, but which contains within its stories challenge and pain as well as the testimony of joy and celebration.

The example of Saint Patrick connects with the Gospel reading for this year, as we read in this testimony from the writings of Saint Patrick:

“When I had arrived in Ireland and was looking after the flocks the whole time, I prayed frequently each day. And more and more, the love of God and the fear of him grew in me, and my faith was increased and my spirit enlivened. So much so that I prayed up to a hundred times in the day, and almost as often at night. I even remained in the wood and on the mountain to pray. And – come hail, rain or snow – I was up before

dawn to pray, and I sensed no evil nor spiritual laziness within. I now understand this: at that time ‘the Spirit was fervent’ in me.”

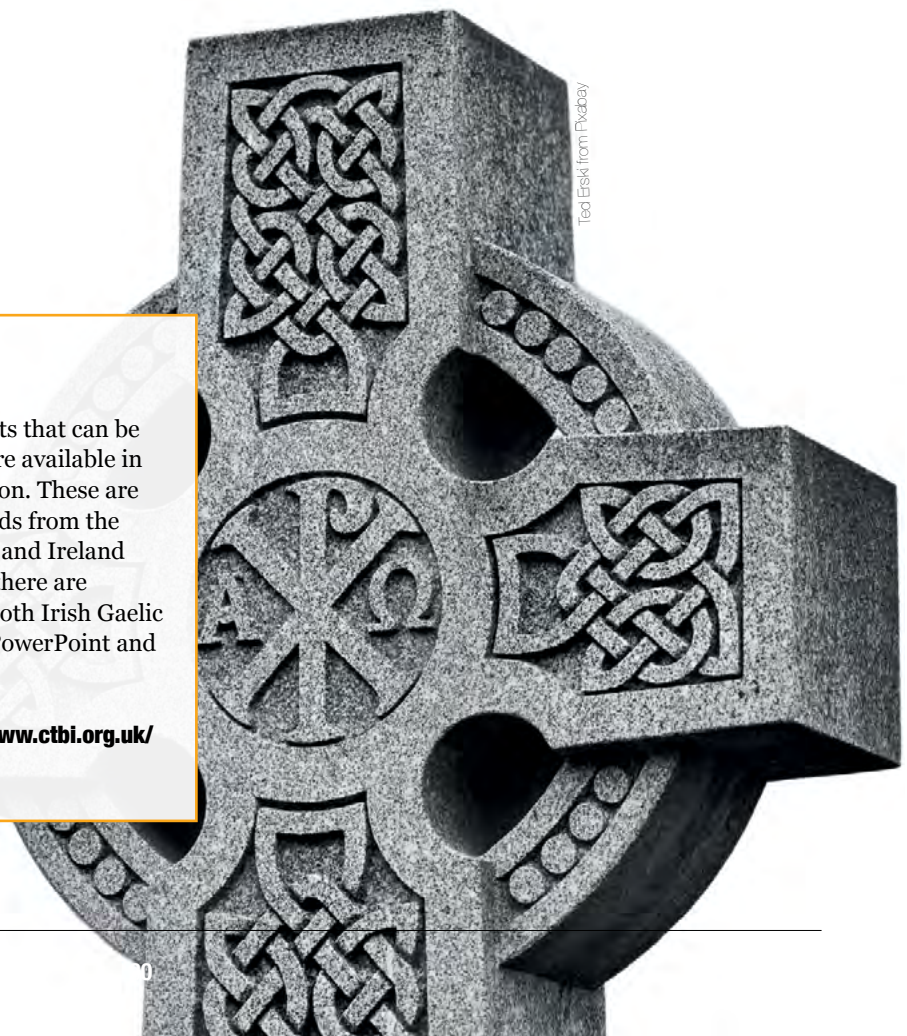
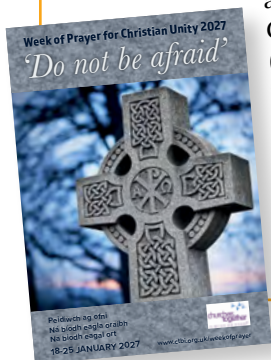
And so as new challenges are faced by the churches seeking a unity together, they can seek strength from a faith that is both ancient and new, especially in the growing challenges of social change and growing diversity both within society and within the church.

The main worship service is offered for those occasions which typically bring together different churches and traditions in a local community to pray for Christian unity. There are also resources for the 8 days of what is known as the octave for the Week, which offers materials for study, reflection and discussion in groups, but these can also be used in personal devotion.

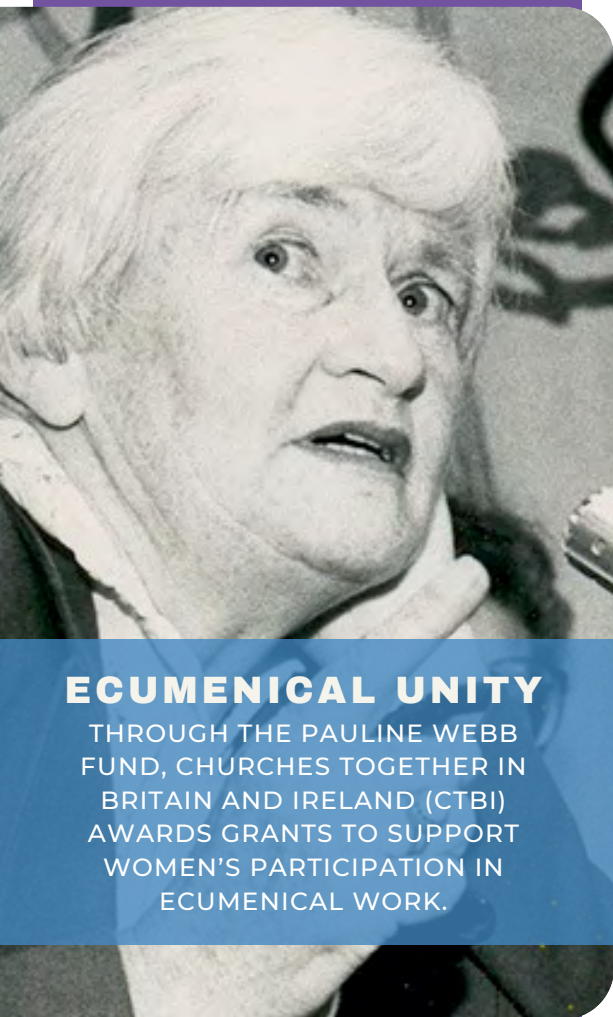
How to order

As in previous years, there are hard copy booklets that can be purchased for use in congregations, and these are available in English and in an English/Welsh bilingual version. These are also available as free downloads from the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) website. In addition, there are versions available online in both Irish Gaelic and Scots Gaelic, as well as PowerPoint and all age resources.

For more information, visit: www.ctbi.org.uk/wpcu2027



Teo Ersk from Pixabay



THE PAULINE WEBB FUND

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

ECUMENICAL UNITY

THROUGH THE PAULINE WEBB FUND, CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND (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

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churches
together
IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND®

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.

