



Member
Profile:
United
Reformed
Church

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Celebration
Time: Irish
Council of
Churches

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75th
Anniversary:
Walking for
Windrush

14



Week of
Prayer for
Christian
Unity

30

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Cover image: Traditional stilt fishing in Galle, Sri Lanka. See article on page 26.

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Welcome

This edition of our CTBI Magazine is particularly rich in diversity in its themes, experiences and global reach. We have travelled to Sri Lanka and Estonia, welcomed church leaders from the Caribbean to Britain for the Windrush 75 anniversary and we prepare to join in prayer with the churches of Burkina Faso for next year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

As part of the symposium 'Being Churches Together in 21st Century Ireland', organised by the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, I was invited to respond to the question: 'How can churches best bring their values to the public square when challenged with a lack of human and financial resources?'. Reflecting on this question, which is a particularly live and relevant one across the different national contexts brought together in Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), it occurred to me that there are some significant threads running through the different areas of work featured here, centred on listening and learning, and this of course goes to the heart of how the work of Christian unity is carried out. We come together to listen to the experiences of others, open to what we may have to learn from them, and willing to share any learning we may have to offer.

Our primary focus is on building relationships, and we can sometimes fail to notice how this sharing strengthens and enhances the work of mission, and not only that which is done ecumenically, but also the evangelising outreach of participating denominations and congregations.

In this edition of the magazine we listen to experiences of the United Reformed Church as it contemplates a significant crossroads in its future; of the Irish churches as they reflect on significant anniversaries; of the National Christian Council in Sri Lanka as they respond to the cries of a country in crisis; of the Windrush generation as they challenge barriers of belonging; to Christians in Burkina Faso as they share their vision for the work of peace and reconciliation with the global Church, and the list goes on. In each case there is an opportunity to think about how we might apply this knowledge and experience to our own contexts and the particular challenges that are foremost in our own minds.

We remember all those suffering, and working for peace, in the many forgotten conflicts around the world, especially those we seek to support through CTBI in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka

As we prepare for the next Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we are reminded of the contribution we can make by supporting all of this work in prayer. Here too we can see significant common threads running through the different areas of work across the globe: the need for peace, reconciliation and the healing of relationships, and the hope that the Church might realise its full potential to be a force for good in this area. The churches of Burkina Faso remind us that Christ's commandment to 'love our neighbour' not only still applies in a context of security threat but takes on a particular relevance and significance.

This year, Christian churches from across Europe gathered in Tallinn for the General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches with the theme 'Under God's Blessing — Shaping the Future'. Incoming President H. E. Nikitas, Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain, challenged us to think about what it means for Christians to be bridge-builders in a world that all too often wants to put up walls. We can continue the work initiated in that coming together of Christians on a continental level by praying for renewed peace in Europe, with deeper attention to relationships and belonging. We pray especially for an end to the terrible suffering in Ukraine, and for all those in Ukraine and Russia who are being harmed by this invasion. We pray for greater global solidarity for the Armenian people losing their lives and their hopes for the future. We remember all those suffering, and working for peace, in the many forgotten conflicts around the world, especially those we seek to support through CTBI in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka, working in contexts considered to be post-conflict but where the threat of violence remains and there is still a long road ahead to mend and build bridges and heal relationships. In the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity we join with our fellow Christians around the world in praying that the learning from our ecumenical journey will help us to bring a message of hope and healing wherever people are divided on issues of identity and belonging.

Dr Nicola Brady
General Secretary,
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland



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

Member church profile

The United Reformed Church is a denomination with ecumenism in its DNA



It was a great privilege to be invited as Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) General Secretary to lead the Bible study for this year's General Assembly of the United Reformed Church (URC) with the theme 'Spaces of Grace'. The URC marked the 50th anniversary of its establishment last year and has been undergoing a

significant period of reflection and dialogue on how best to support the mission of the church in a rapidly changing context. Founded in 1972 when the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Church in England and Wales formally joined together, with other churches in England and Scotland joining in later years, the URC has

had a commitment and vision for ecumenism at its heart since its earliest days. That commitment remains strong today with local URC churches participating in many different forms of local ecumenism and ecumenical guests receiving a warm welcome as full voting members of the General Assembly.

Leading the Bible study, I was challenged to reflect on spaces of grace and spaces of reconciliation. This gave me the opportunity to explore some of the points of connection between the work of synodality in my own church, the Catholic Church, and the approach to dialogue and discernment demonstrated in the URC General Assembly. I was particularly encouraged to learn that some URC members have been following the process in the Catholic Church quite closely and are also keen to explore opportunities for mutual learning. Other ecumenical guests expressed appreciation for the opportunity offered to us by the URC. Speaking on behalf of the ecumenical delegates, Dr Anna Krauss, General Secretary of the Council of Lutheran Churches in Great Britain, and the new President of Churches Together in England (CTE), representing the Fourth Presidency Group, commended the depth of listening and discussion and the meaningful inclusion of ecumenical guests, noting that the URC is a church with ecumenism in its DNA. The Church of Scotland Moderator, Rt Revd Sally Foster-Fulton, gave the homily at the Sunday morning worship on the theme “a space of grace is a space of connectedness to each other and the earth”. She invited those present to give thanks not only for the beauty evident in the URC, but in its connection to something bigger, and to recommit to the work of reaching out and embracing others with open hearts and minds.

Over the four days of this General Assembly members reflected and deliberated on some significant challenges and potential new opportunities in the changed and changing context in which the local church is seeking to share the Good News of the Gospel and make disciples. The issues discussed will be arising for many of the member churches of CTBI in different forms and it can be helpful to learn from the experiences and approach of the URC. The Assembly received reports and recommendations from the Church Life Review Group, which has been conducting research into the current realities of the URC and listening to members’ different perspectives on hopes and challenges for the future. As part of this work research was carried out in partnership with Theos to examine the life, identity and flourishing of the URC through

engagement with a cross-section of local congregations. The importance and value of gathering this kind of evidence to inform decision-making was underlined, alongside the commitment to ongoing dialogue and listening as the Assembly commended the report, entitled *The United Reformed Church: A Paradoxical Church at a Crossroads to local churches and synods for prayer, study and reflection* [2].

The report has been published online and is a useful resource both for the insights it offers into the life of the URC and as a model that might be helpful for other churches undergoing similar dialogue processes about the future.

We give thanks for the continued leadership of the URC in our ecumenical work on these islands, and for the opportunity to learn from reflections at this important crossroads.

One interesting challenge that arose from the research relates to the understanding of mission and the varying degrees of emphasis placed on evangelisation and discipleship as part of the URC’s vibrant tradition of community outreach. This is of particular interest from a CTBI perspective since our member churches identified as one of the priorities for our organisational strategy ‘working together for mission and the common good’. In the July meeting of Bodies in Association (in partnership with CTE) faith-based charities and networks linked to CTBI discussed the tensions that can sometimes lead to a separation between the spiritual and the social in the churches’ community outreach. We reflected on the need for the two dimensions to go hand in hand since churches cannot be expected to leave their faith back in the church when engaging with the wider community, and because people will be helped to know Christ by seeing how Christians love their neighbour. It has been suggested that some focussed reflection on what we mean when we use words like “mission” and “discipleship” would be helpful, particularly in an ecumenical context where there is an opportunity to learn from others and learn from the wider global church.

An effective illustration of this kind of learning exchange was a new addition to this year’s URC General Assembly in the form of a recurring item entitled ‘Treasures of the URC’ in which the Assembly received lively and creative presentations of projects and bodies, responding to different areas of concern for the URC in areas such as social justice and children’s ministry, highlighting the resources available to local congregations. In the midst of an Assembly agenda that reflected the URC’s commitment to engaging with social justice issues such as reparations, concerns for refugees, for those living in poverty, for the transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people, these presentations ensured that the Good News stories and the practical examples of ways to connect and act together were not overlooked. In a sign of the changing times, the Assembly also welcomed its first entirely online congregation, called *yourchurch*, integrating some of the learning from the pandemic experience to adapt more effectively to people’s changing needs.

Outgoing URC Moderator Revd Fiona Bennett, reflecting on her term in office, said she had discovered in a new way a great community of disciples. She had also encountered a wide range of mixed feelings, from acceptance and belonging within the URC to tiredness and a sense of deflation; compounded by the uncertainty facing our planet and institutions. But she felt that she could trust the people she met right across the denomination – not because they were perfect “but because we are whole”. That this commitment to unity in Christ extends beyond the membership of the URC was underlined when the Assembly passed a motion to help reinvigorate its ecumenical vision. It was particularly encouraging that this motion originated in the URC’s youth assembly.

We give thanks for the continued leadership of the URC in our ecumenical work on these islands, and for the opportunity to learn from reflections at this important crossroads.

Dr Nicola Brady
General Secretary, CTBI



www.urc.org.uk/general-assembly

Read the Theos Report:

‘The United Reformed Church: A Paradoxical Church at a Crossroads’

Celebration time

Centenary of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and the fiftieth anniversary of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM)

This year marks the centenary of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and the fiftieth anniversary of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM), the forum for dialogue and cooperation between the ICC and the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. We spoke to Rt Revd Sarah Groves, Bishop of the Moravian Church, based in Gracehill Moravian Church in Ballymena, about her reflections on these significant anniversaries. Bishop Sarah is Vice President of ICC and will take over the Presidency from Rt Revd Andrew Forster of the Church of Ireland in April next year.

What has impacted you most about these anniversaries?

Thinking about that question prompts me to go back and reflect on my own journey and the beginning of my experience of ministry in Northern Ireland. I came here after nine years of ministry in inner city Bradford and I now realise that I arrived with a set of assumptions that were shaped by the English context. I found myself on a steep learning curve as I grappled with the complexities of Irish history on both sides of the border. I quickly came to understand that what I knew about Ireland from learning in school and from watching the news and documentaries was only a very small part of the story. Over the years I have developed a deeper appreciation for the way in which culture shapes communities and the need to understand that culture in order to engage effectively with those

communities. Just as plants will reflect the particular habitats in which they are grown, we need to be learning all the time in our ministry, seeking to understand what lies beneath the surface of what we are seeing in communities, and how that influences what will and will not work in terms of outreach and engagement. If you travel through England, which has a very varied geology, and you see the different styles of houses – from limestone in Yorkshire to brick in Lancashire to flint in Norfolk and Suffolk – you see that what's underneath reflects what's on top. What's underneath the surface here – Irish history and Irish experience – shapes identity, including in ways that are not immediately obvious. What's underground is so important. That has been the starting point for my reflection.

As someone who has come to Northern Ireland from England, what do you think might be important for colleagues in the national ecumenical bodies in Britain to understand about the significance of these anniversaries of ICC and IICM?

The church context on the island of Ireland is unique in many respects. The history is so different and that is reflected in the unique model of national ecumenical instruments – plural – in Ireland. I came here thinking that the Churches Together model was the natural model and I couldn't understand why it was different here, but it goes back to the point about needing to understand what lies beneath. For example, I think a lot of people in Britain would be

quite shocked to learn that the word 'ecumenism' is very often avoided in the Irish context. Because of the way in which sectarianism divided churches as well as communities, the word 'ecumenism' is considered negative and even toxic for some, and so we talk about inter-church relations and cooperation to avoid alienating people. The ICC and IICM have taken as their mission statement 'Churches in Ireland – Connecting in Christ' which allows them to work together on issues of shared concern on the basis of shared Christian faith and values, and some would regard this as distinct from "traditional ecumenism". It was initially a shock to me to discover that the terms "ecumenical" and "ecumenism" were considered unacceptable, but I have since come to appreciate the experiences and concerns that moved the churches here to seek other language. Nevertheless, I do feel there is a challenging conversation to be had about our purpose. Working together is very positive but are we losing something important about relationships – and specifically building relationships across the historic Catholic-Protestant divide – by dropping the word "ecumenism" from our vocabulary? I initially suggested to colleagues that a rediscovery or renewed examination of the language of "covenant" might offer a viable alternative here, but again we come up



Main photo: Cross at Bray Head in Ireland, near Dublin; this page: The Moravian Church at Gracehill, Ballymeena; Ireland's first Moravian settlement created by Reverend John Cennick in 1746; (inset) Bishop Sarah

against the weight of history. I have since come to the view that a focus on friendship could help us achieve the same effect, conveying that reaching across the barriers and boundaries of culture exemplified by Jesus in Scripture. Consider for example the encounter with the Syrophenician woman and the way in which the woman challenges Christ because of her need to seek healing for her daughter. The churches are being challenged here by communities in need of healing, and we are called to respond by crossing boundaries.

How have you been marking these anniversaries as ICC/IICM?

It was important that we began the year by marking the anniversaries through worship, giving thanks to God for what has been achieved so far and taking prayer as our starting point. From there the next priority was to examine and document the history. Later this year we will be launching a significant publication from Revd Dr Ian Ellis, *Called to be One*, that traces key developments in the history of inter-church relations in Ireland.

Alongside that we planned a series of articles for member church publications explaining key milestones in that history and helping to raise awareness of what has been happening. We will have a symposium to help us focus on practical challenges for the present – what do we need to do together now and how can we do it most effectively? Finally towards the end of the year, in the IICM we will look back on what we have done over the year and what we have learned for our future working together.

What challenges have stood out for you personally as you reflect on these anniversaries?

I think these anniversaries offer an important opportunity to reflect on how we relate to each other, accepting our diversity. We need to communicate clearly that what we are about is not imposing uniformity but developing relationships that respect and reflect

our common humanity with all our differences. In a church context there will always be people who will read the same passage of Scripture and interpret it in different, perhaps conflicting ways. This can lead to some profound differences on issues such as support for the ordination of women or same sex marriage to name two examples. We see too that history is not always a steady march forwards along a straight line. Questions that appeared settled in some denominations, such as the commitment to ecumenism or support for women's ordination, are now being reopened, often in quite polarising ways. There is a challenge to all of us to work graciously with others, even where we disagree profoundly with their theology. These differences should not prevent us from respecting each other as human beings, and recognising where we are trying to serve the Lord and serve our communities. Another important difference in relation to these specific anniversaries is the extent to which different member churches of ICC and IICM have been impacted and shaped by the events of Irish history. For some churches that are relatively new to Ireland, notably among the Orthodox and Black Majority Churches, these events have not been part of their history. There is a risk that they could

“What’s underneath the surface here – Irish history and Irish experience – shapes identity, including in ways that are not immediately obvious. What’s underground is so important. That has been the starting point for my reflection....”

feel that there is no place for them in this conversation when, in reality, we really need their perspective and to learn how their faith tradition and culture shape how they approach the issues raised by these anniversaries.

Arising from this reflection, what do you think will be some of the priorities for your Presidency of ICC?

I’m very proud that my church, the Moravian Church, was one of the founder members of ICC a century ago. We have to admire the vision and the courage that motivated and sustained that work and perhaps even more so fifty years later in the encounter with the Catholic Church through the IICM at the height of the conflict. I feel it is really important that we honour that work by continuing to deepen our relationships through listening to each other. I am keen to go out and meet the different member churches, learning from their experience and listening to their concerns. Whether we call it “ecumenism” or “working together” ultimately, it’s how we treat each other that matters.



For information on the Moravian Church in Ireland, visit:
www.irishchurches.org/members/moravian-church-irish-district



CTBI

The Award has been made more or less annually since then, on the basis of courage, creativity and consistency. Recently, it has been made to the Revd Dr Inderjit Bhoghal of the Methodist Church in Britain for his work with Churches of Sanctuary and to the Revd Ebenezer Joseph of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka for his cross-community work through a very troubled period in that country. The Award is not made only to Methodists or, indeed, Christians – anyone may receive it on the basis of her/his work for peace. I am hugely enthusiastic about this and can talk for ages on the Award and on those who have received it! It is great to see synergy between this Award and the work that CTBI have carried out with the Church of Sanctuary, working with Inderjit and the partnership with the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka (NCCSL) to deliver a project entitled: ‘The Reconciled Land? A Theology of Land at the Nexus of God, People and the Environment’.

How have you seen the ecumenical landscape on these islands changing during your time with CTBI?

As I see it, two factors have contributed significantly to changes in the ecumenical landscape on these islands over the last few decades. The first was the entry of the Roman Catholic Church into ecumenical structures in the late 1980s. This coincided with the then British Council of Churches (BCC) becoming, more properly and more accurately, the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (CCBI). This involvement has worked in different ways within the four nations, but it has been enriching beyond measure.

The other factor is the involvement of churches from other traditions and nations in the ecumenical relationships of these islands. This has been particularly evident in Ireland where, from having been a bi-polar Roman Catholic/Protestant scene, things are now multi-lateral with the inclusion of Orthodox churches, African-originating churches and ‘new’ churches.

However, there has also been a proliferation of para-church and fellowship groups who operate independently and who seem not to be interested in working with other Christians. This is a matter for concern and reflection, I think.

Trustee Profile:

Gillian Kingston

Gillian Kingston is a life-long member of the Methodist Church in Ireland, and currently the Vice President of the World Methodist Council.

Having served as the first Lay Leader of the Conference of the Methodist Church in Ireland, twice as Convenor of its Faith and Order Committee and a chaplain at University College, Dublin, for 10 years, Gillian is committed to ecumenical matters at whatever level. Gillian is married with four adult children, has eight grandchildren and lives in a rural area in the midlands of Ireland.

Gillian, could you tell us how you came to represent your denomination and your national ecumenical instrument on the CTBI Board?

Following some gatherings to explore the way forward for ecumenical bodies in Britain and Ireland, I was asked if I would be one of the Presidents of the new Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (CCBI). There were six of us and we co-chaired gatherings of the Church Representatives’ Meeting (CRM). However, when the time came for a review, it was decided the CRM should appoint a Moderator for its deliberations. I was appointed and served in that role for seven years. During the same review,

CCBI evolved into Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). When diminishing financial resources called for a further re-structuring, the CRM was discontinued and the CTBI Board re-configured. It was then that I was asked to be the ICC representative on the Board.

How do you see the work of CTBI aligning with the priority concerns and interests of the Methodist Church, in Ireland and globally?

H’m, an interesting question! I guess the priority questions for the Methodist Church in Ireland and, indeed, for all churches in these islands and further afield are much the same – migration, refugees and displaced persons, cost of living issues, climate change, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, *inter alia*. As Christians of whatever tradition, we make most impact locally, regionally and globally when we work and speak together.

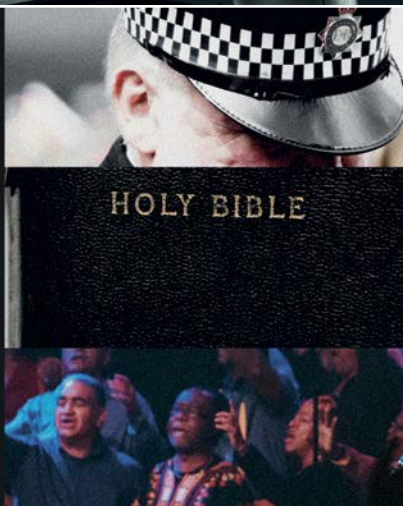
The World Methodist Peace Award was the brainchild of the late Revd Dr Eric Gallagher, a minister of the Methodist Church in Ireland. The World Methodist Council, meeting in Dublin in 1976, ran with the idea and the first Award was made to Ms Saidie Patterson of Belfast for her incredible work across the peace line in that city.

NEW
SCOTLAND
YARD

HOPE FOR JUSTICE

A CHRISTIAN CALL FOR CHANGE
WITHIN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

SATURDAY 4TH
NOVEMBER 2023
BLOOMSBURY
BAPTIST CHURCH



Britain, specifically from the perspective of racial justice. The RJAF believes that churches and their leaders can be positive conduits between police and local communities by creating spaces for engagement. Many church leaders are de facto community leaders, and they are regarded as 'honest brokers' by the police and the local community alike.

The conference will also be an opportunity for attendees to share their views on policing in Britain, and the day will see representatives from the Christian Police Association, the National Black Police Association, the College of Policing, and politicians, outlining their vision for the future.

The RJAF is also working with the National Church Leaders Forum and Premier Radio to deliver the conference. Prior to the event, the RJAF and Premier will be sending out a questionnaire to Christians which will solicit their views on the police, and what can be done to improve relations between certain communities. The survey's findings will inform the conference. Likewise, the RJAF will use both the survey, and conference outcomes as the basis for its subsequent engagement with the police and British Home Office.



For more information about the 'Hope for Justice' conference, see the CTBI website.

Hope for Justice

Racial Justice Advocacy Forum conference

The terms 'trust' and 'confidence' (or the lack of them) are often mentioned in most conversations concerning police engagement with Black communities in British cities. What has compounded this already-difficult situation has been a spate of recent scenarios in which Black people were on the wrong end of what many would consider 'heavy-handed' policing. The need to improve relations between the police and certain communities is vital, not only for good community relations, but it would arguably play a key role in curtailing

aspects of serious youth violence, which has ruined so many lives over the last few decades.

With that being the case, the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF), of which Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) is a founding member, is hosting the 'Hope for Justice' conference on Saturday 4 November 2023 at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church in London, from 11am to 4pm. The conference aims to encourage church leaders to engage with the crucial issue of police and criminal justice reform/transformation within



We will repay

Reparations: an idea whose time has come

On 6 April 2023, the British monarch, King Charles III, indicated that he was in support of research into the Royal Family's connection to African chattel enslavement. The British monarchy has now joined a long list of British and European institutions examining their links to this nefarious activity; chief among them are the churches on these shores.

Any exploration of African chattel enslavement invariably leads to conversations about the thorny matter of reparations. With this in mind, Churches

Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) is working with the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF) to produce the Bible study *'We will repay'*, which is designed to help Bible study groups explore the idea and mechanics of reparations/ reparative justice from a biblical perspective. This ecumenical resource comprises of several sessions covering different reparations-related topics, and will provide an exegetical commentary, reference to various theological perspectives and study questions that prompt a conversation about reparations

for today's context. The resource will also equip Christians with the information and knowledge on the topic, with the hope that each church can reach an informed consensus on the issue once the study is completed. 'We will repay' will be available in both a hard-copy format, and as a downloadable PDF, this autumn.

The Bible study itself will be officially launched at a conference also called 'We will repay' on Saturday 14 October 2023, at the CTBI offices in Waterloo, London. This half-day conference, which starts at 1pm and ends at 6pm, will feature some of the keenest Christian minds on these shores, and explore reparations from a theological, economic, educational, restitution and psychological perspective. Once again, the aim is to equip Christians to engage in the conversations linked to this topical, contested issue.

CTBI's Richard Reddie says: 'Reparations are an idea whose time has come. It is fitting for Christians to engage with this subject, especially as we know how the churches were inextricably linked to African chattel enslavement. If the British monarchy is willing to engage in this matter, surely the churches, given their commitment to truth-telling, healing and reconciliation, must do likewise.'



ctbi.org.uk/conference-the-churches-and-reparations/

NEW CTBI PUBLICATION

A COLLECTION OF VOICES ON RACIAL JUSTICE ISSUES FROM ACROSS THE CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS.

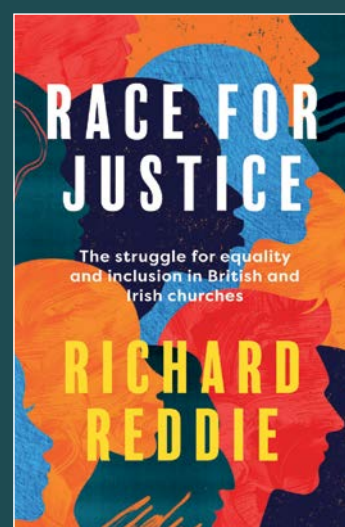
AVAILABLE FROM:

LION HUDSON:

www.lionhudson.com/product/race-for-justice

AMAZON: <https://amzn.to/3RKGoOV>

PRICE: £9.99



Standing Together Sunday

Full steam ahead for the Synergy Network



The Synergy Network held its second, annual ‘Standing Together Sunday’ event on 16 July 2023, which encouraged churches to open their doors this summer to provide safe spaces for young people during the school holidays. Launched in 2022, ‘Standing Together Sunday’ recognises that the summer break is often a fraught one for some young people, as incidences of serious youth violence invariably spike. Akin to last year, the Network produced a range of **resources** that were available on its website, which enabled the churches to not only pray into this matter, but also take action: the materials provided practical ways for

Christians to engage with young people over the school break.

Bishop Lenford Rowe, the Synergy Network Chair, who was interviewed by BBC Local Radio and Premier Radio in the run up to the event, said ‘the churches can do a great deal more to help our young people during a time of the year that should be one of fun and relaxation. I’m urging them to use all of their assets to make sure our young people remain safe, and can have places to enjoy themselves.’

This autumn, the Synergy Network will be appointing a new coordinator to take forward the work of Laura Besley and Jack Edwards, who had previously

carried out aspects of this role. The new position will be more strategic in nature; not only will the coordinator work more closely with the Network on its strategy to tackle serious youth violence, but they will also liaise directly with those bodies responsible for addressing the matter locally, regionally and nationally.

In late November 2023, the Network will be holding its annual Thanksgiving Service, at which it will encourage more churches to join the group in focusing on serious youth violence.



wearesynergy.org.uk

Stephen Lawrence@30

The racial justice legacy continues

In April of this year, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) and Christian Aid brought together over a dozen leading Christian thinkers and theologians to discuss the legacy of Stephen Lawrence’s racist killing in April 1993, and the current state of race-relations in church and society in Britain and Ireland. The results of these discussions were ‘*The Stephen Lawrence Conversations*’ – a stunning series of videos that can be found on the CTBI website, which saw an ethnically mixed, age-diverse, panel of Christians from a range of church denominations and groupings, discuss everything from Stephen’s death to racial justice and the Bible.

The killing of the London-born teenager 30 years ago remains a watershed moment for race equality in Britain, and it can be argued, helped to set the tone for what was to follow over the following decades. The tragedy was also a catalyst for the churches’ work on racial justice, and it saw the establishment of Racial Justice Sunday in 1995. Christian Aid’s Dr Lisa Adjei said: ‘It was important to get a range

of perspectives on this very important issue. Several of our participants were very young at the time of Stephen’s death, yet were aware of the significance of that event, and how it has informed many prevailing attitudes and behaviours. What was great about our filmed sessions was that we had people who were around at that time who spoke about their experiences, alongside those who could talk about what it is like to be a younger Christian who is

committed to ending the work they started all those years ago.’

The aforementioned videos capture those powerful conversations, which feature Pat White, Karen Campbell, Revd Arlington Trotman, Ben Lindsay, Linbert Spencer, Dr Garrick Wilson, Revd Dr David Wise, Jacqueline Gray, Richard Zipfel, Joshua Hudson-Roberts, Dr Elizabeth Henry, Yogi Sutton, Anne-Marie Agyeman and Revd Kumar Rajagopalan. CTBI’s Richard Reddie added: ‘This is very much a stellar line up who are discussing some really vital, topical issues. There is little doubt in my mind that the churches on these shores will be inspired and challenged in equal measure by what they see and hear in these videos.’



<https://ctbi.org.uk/stephen-lawrence-legacy-conversations/>



The Old Oak

Don't call me a racist! Refugees and their resettlement in the film

When do so-called 'legitimate concerns' over the location and accommodation of asylum seekers and refugees, spill over into what can be described as racist attitudes or behaviours? That is one of the themes in the new Ken Loach film, *The Old Oak*, which is set in 2016, and explores how a fictional, former mining village in northern England responds to the arrival of Syrian refugees.

With the exception of a handful of residents, all the inhabitants in this virtually all-white village appear hostile toward the Syrians. Their grouse is a combination of not being pre-warned about these newcomers, and the council not appearing to care about the effects of this sudden influx on the poverty-stricken village; in short, there has been

no (community) impact assessment. At first sight, such concerns appear bona fide. However, what is impossible to justify is the way the local residents articulate their worries, and then put

It is noteworthy that they do not take to task anyone from the 'body' that made the decision in the first place; all their fire is turned on the hapless new arrivals; people who no doubt faced real trauma while fleeing their homeland.

them into play. It is noteworthy that they do not take to task anyone from the 'body' that made the decision in the first place; all their fire is turned on the hapless new arrivals; people who no doubt faced real trauma while

fleeing their homeland. (Such a scenario reminds me of the Bible verse from Amos 5:19 – 'It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear...'.) Equally, the locals all too easily lapse into language and use tropes that are crude stereotypes at best, and downright racist at worst. The Syrians are invariably described in racist terms and declared to be potential dangers to the public (would-be terrorists). The irony is that the locals do not believe that their language or behaviour is racist or offensive. Indeed, they even say they are 'not racists' and are concerned that 'outside racist agitators' may come into their village to stir up real trouble!

The film's heroes, and the village's moral compass are two locals: TJ Bannatyne, landlord of the eponymous pub, *The Old Oak*, and Laura, another local resident who helps the Syrians to resettle in the village. They are helped by Yari, a young Syrian woman with a penchant for photography, who now lives with her mother and younger, school-age siblings in one of the tiny houses in the village. Together, they seek to break down barriers, dispel misconceptions and challenge stereotypes through encounters. They



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Main picture: Yari, a young Syrian woman, in the film 'The Old Oak'; Left: Scenes from the film 'The Old Oak'.



have failed them over decades. As TJ, the pub landlord points out in the film: 'The villagers were poor long before the Syrians arrived.'

In summing up, I would argue that while the subject matter is bleak, this film is very much about hope, and the importance of not losing hope despite the despair that is all around. The Syrians are fleeing a desperate situation in the hope of starting a new life in a new country. They arrive in a gloomy village filled with desperate people who have little hope, and they subsequently struggle to hold onto their hope in their new surroundings. However, one sees that hope prevails in the efforts of Yari, TJ and Laura, who are also faced with their own challenges, but encourage others to see the best in each other and rise above petty ignorance, small-mindedness and prejudice.

There is little doubt that this film makes uncomfortable viewing for a number of reasons. One could argue that any film focusing on refugees or those seeking asylum should do this, as there is invariably tragedy, loss, suffering and pain involved in any effort to flee conflict, persecution and danger. Yet, the film also has its moments of epiphany, leaving the viewer with a sense that change can occur in some people, if they are prepared to be more reflective, and are willing to move beyond comfort zones that are enclosed by walls of prejudice.

The Old Oak was out in cinemas end of September 2023.



<https://ctbi.org.uk/category/witnessing-together/asylum-and-refugees/crn/>

agree that food is the best medium to bring communities together, and they fix up the rundown room at the back of the pub, and invite Syrian families and hard-pressed local ones to have meals together. While there is some resistance at first, most warm to the idea, and help with the repairs to the building, and assist with donations of food and cooking equipment. On one particular occasion, they all enjoy an afternoon meal together, and then a photographic slide show which mixes old photographs from the village's mining heyday with contemporary photos taken by Yari of Syrian families and locals. Two Syrian men then show the villagers an amazing modern coat of arms they have made for the village, which fuses the old with the new, and contains certain English and Arabic phrases.

As this is a Ken Loach film, one should not be surprised to know that there is no Walt Disney-like ending to proceedings. However, one of the things that the film tells us is that it is 'best practice' to create opportunities for communities to encounter and engage with one another. It is only through 'meetings' that we can start to build relationships.

What the film also illustrates is that there is a lot of ignorance regarding asylum and refugee matters. In one scene from the film, locals moan that 'they don't house refugees in rich areas'. The truth is that they do; Westminster in London is arguably the richest area in the United Kingdom, yet it still has its share of refugees; it's just that they are housed in poor accommodation – think of Grenfell Tower!

...hope prevails in the efforts of Yari, TJ and Laura, who are also faced with their own challenges, but encourage others to see the best in each other and rise above petty ignorance, small-mindedness and prejudice.

In the film we see that the village is poor, and that most of the residents are jobless – as a result of the coal mine closing. This would be a community that would be prime for 'levelling up'. Yet the local residents appear to turn their ire on those who are equally poor and powerless, rather than the politicians of various political hues who



Walking for Windrush

Marking the 75th Anniversary

22 June 2023 marked the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush ship to Britain, a date that many link to the rise of multiethnicity on these shores. That date was also an important one for the Christian faith, as many of the passengers on the Windrush, and those who would arrive later, brought with them a faith that has helped to transform the spiritual climate on these shores. As such, the Black Majority Churches that are to be found in sizeable numbers in both Britain and Ireland have their roots in this initial movement of people.

To mark this significant anniversary, Churches Together in Britain and

Ireland (CTBI) joined with the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF) to organise events to showcase the religious dimension of Windrush, such as the 'Walk of Witness', and the National Windrush Church Service at Southwark Cathedral, in south London.

The Walk of Witness, which took place on the same day as the church service, saw around 75 walkers (representing the 75 years), supported by 30 volunteers, walk from Waterloo Station in London to Southwark Cathedral - around 1.5 miles in distance. Waterloo Station, which has the iconic Windrush Monument on its concourse, was deemed the ideal place for the walk to begin. At 11am, a gathering which

included the CTBI General Secretary, Dr Nicola Brady and CTBI Trustee Pat White, as well as representatives from the British and Irish churches, community groups, the NHS, the police, the Ambulance Service and Transport for London, assembled on the Lower Concourse of the station. These numbers were swelled by a group of Jamaican clergy who had flown in from the Caribbean for the event, alongside a Jamaican Government Minister and the British High Commissioner to Jamaica.

The event began with several speeches that highlighted the significance of Windrush to the various groups gathered, followed by a prayer which sent all the walkers on



their way. CTBI had commissioned a special 'Windrush floral anchor' for the occasion, and at various stages of the walk, different pairs of the representative groups, carried the anchor. After taking various photographs at the Monument, the walkers set out from the station, accompanied by members of the media from the BBC, ITN, Sky, the Press Association and the Daily Mirror. Londoners stopped and stared as the walkers, largely marching in pairs, snaked their way through the capital, on one of the hottest days of the year. On arrival at the Cathedral, they were greeted by students from a local Church of England secondary school, who collected the floral anchor from the walkers; in turn, the walkers were presented with a handmade Windrush flag.

After a short break, the walkers entered the Cathedral, where the service, which included members of the Royal Family, the Mayor of London, politicians and a cross section of church

figures from CTBI-supporting churches, took place. The service had the triple themes of 'Remembering the struggle', 'Celebrating the success' and 'flourishing for the future', and sought to emphasise the intergenerational nature of the Windrush celebrations. The third and final segment of the service was led by many of the younger voices in the Church who emphasised the importance of telling the Windrush story for their generation. Akin to all services of this nature, it included a Gospel choir, who took their place alongside soloists, poets and rappers. Senior figures within the church participated in the reflections, prayers and scripture readings. Moreover, rather than having one sermon, there were three 'sermonettes', all of which reflected the overarching theme of remembering, celebrating and flourishing.

Given that demand for places was high, and the Cathedral's limited seating capacity, CTBI arranged for the service to be live-streamed, which meant that those in Britain and Ireland, and

Participants of the Windrush Thanksgiving Service at Southwark Cathedral and Walk of Witness from Waterloo Station, London.

elsewhere in the world, could watch the service live via CTBI's YouTube channel. Additionally, BBC Radio 4, and Premier Radio recorded the service, and broadcasted edited versions of it on Sunday, 25 June 2023.

CTBI's Director of Justice and Inclusion, Richard Reddie, said: "The day was a fitting tribute to the Windrush generation. In thanking those pioneers for their outstanding contributions to the Church, we are really praising God for his generosity and providential care".



Rewatch the 75th Anniversary Thanksgiving Service at Southwark Cathedral:
ctbi.org.uk/windrush-service-at-southwark-cathedral/



Churches' Refugee Network

A refuge for all?

The Churches' Refugee Network (CRN) liaised with the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) in stating its opposition to the British Government's then 'Illegal Migration Bill'. On 4 April 2023 a group of Christians, including the CRN coordinator, Richard Reddie, visited 10 Downing Street in London to hand in a letter signed by over a thousand church leaders and religious figures, highlighting their opposition to what they considered a piece of draconian and unjust government legislation. The CRN's Chair, the Bishop of Liverpool, the Rt Revd Dr John Perumbalath, played a key role in voicing his concerns over the proposed legislation, and alongside other church figures, participated in media interviews and featured in press statements outlining his opposition to

the British Government's approach to asylum matters.

The next issue of the CRN's e-bulletin, which will be published in late September, will pick-up on the church-related activities following this Act of Parliament, and highlight what the churches are also doing to end the ongoing hostility and negativity around those seeking refuge on these shores.

The CRN will also be holding its annual meeting on 25 October 2023, which features contributions from the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe's (CCME) Dr Torsten Moritz, and staff from the Boaz Trust, who will juxtapose immigration and asylum matters in Europe with those in Britain respectively.

The CRN is also liaising with the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum

Representatives from The Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church in Britain, the United Reformed Church, Churches Together in England (CTE) and CTBI handed in a statement opposing the Immigration Bill to 10 Downing Street.

(RJAF) and Church of Sanctuary, for Racial Justice Sunday 2024, which is 11 February. Next year's theme is 'Exodus – Justice for God's people on the move!' and will explore the powerful intersectionality between racial justice and those fleeing peril around the world. The resource will include contributions from churches and parachurch groups in Britain and Ireland, and feature liturgies, commentaries, reflections and sermons from some of the leading thinkers connected to asylum and refugee and racial justice matters. 'Exodus – Justice for God's people on the move!' will be available on the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) website as a downloadable resource (in both English and Welsh) in late November 2023.



ctbi.org.uk/category/witnessing-together/asylum-and-refugees/crn/

Church of Sanctuary:

Congregations creating cultures of welcome, hospitality and safety

Over the last five years, the Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal has been working with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) and City of Sanctuary to develop and coordinate the Church of Sanctuary initiative, which works to encourage congregations to create cultures of welcome, hospitality and safety in Britain and Ireland. Both CTBI and City of Sanctuary have also jointly pioneered the Church of Sanctuary Award that has seen several churches, and a Cathedral become recipients of this in 2023.

Recently, Inderjit attended a specially convened meeting in Lichfield, England, to announce that five churches of different denominations in that Cathedral city had been given the Church of Sanctuary Award. Earlier in the year, he was the preacher at a service in Brighton and Hove, England, at which five Methodist Churches of the Circuit received the Church and Circuit of Sanctuary Award, affirming their ongoing work alongside refugees and people seeking sanctuary. Moreover, Nailsea Methodist Church in North Somerset, has also been recognised as a Church of Sanctuary, while Chester Cathedral has been declared a Cathedral of Sanctuary.

In all these different contexts, church members work together to learn and be well-informed about refugees and people seeking sanctuary; they are intentionally building and embedding welcome, hospitality and safety; and are engaging in this work as part of their Christian discipleship and prayer with pride.

Deeptima Massey is the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer for the Brighton and Hove Methodist Circuit, and has worked with others to help the Circuit navigate the Church of Sanctuary process. Deeptima says: “The value of this recognition and award lies in the fact that we have made a commitment to live out God’s purpose to offer hospitality, kindness, love and sanctuary to all through our witness and service. It also offers us an opportunity to work for and with refugees, identifying and responding to their needs, embracing everybody just as they are.”

Pastor Gerard Goshawk ministers with the Six Ways Erdington Baptist Church, Birmingham, a recognised Church of Sanctuary, and says, “We are a Church of Sanctuary. This is who we are, an embedded, blessed and enriched congregation, and we take pride in that. Being inclusive is natural and a joy, it offers us more opportunities to serve and advocate.”

The Church of Sanctuary Award is not the end of the process, but an important stage on an ongoing pilgrimage. It is not about getting a certificate to display, it is more about learning together and building communities of sanctuary. In the process a congregation can also help to build and strengthen refugee voices and leadership.

What value is added by becoming a recognised Church of Sanctuary?

Becoming a Church of Sanctuary further strengthens and embeds the ethos and culture of welcome, hospitality and safety; it provides a connection to the Church of Sanctuary network of CTBI, the wider City of Sanctuary network, and the even wider community engagement with refugees and people seeking sanctuary.

Moreover, Church of Sanctuary is not a campaigning, political movement. Equally, it is not about opening up buildings for people to live in, but about building communities of hospitality and sanctuary. It is a biblically-inspired initiative; it is about being prophetic, and challenging hostility with hospitality. It can mean we become political in standing up to injustice. This is in keeping with the biblical prophets – speaking truth to power with passion and compassion, and seeking justice. It adds local congregation-based witness to the initiatives taken by faith leaders, such as the “hospitality not hostility” video message during Refugee Week.

Sanctuary is the abode of God, enshrined in every house of prayer, embodying the holiness and hospitality of God. Church of Sanctuary is a practical outworking and witness of this, affirming sanctuary as a safe space, free of hostility and harm.

Inderjit Bhogal



Hospitality and Sanctuary for All
resource: ctbi.org.uk/hospitality-and-sanctuary-for-all/

Church of Sanctuary:
churchofsanctuary.org/

City of Sanctuary: cityofsanctuary.org/





Kenneth Cracknell: A man for all seasons

Earlier this year, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) hosted a one-day theological symposium, 'Justice, Courtesy and Love: Looking back with gratitude and looking forward in hope' in memory of Kenneth Cracknell (1935-2022). The inter faith work Kenneth pioneered continues through the work of many different organisations, churches, and other faith groups.

S. Wesley Ariarajah remembers the inter faith pioneer

Over the many decades of my continuous involvement in the Inter faith Movement, I have developed some sense of what makes someone an ideal “dialogue person” – both at the personal level and in the ministry of inter faith dialogue. Kenneth Cracknell is the first name that come up when I think about it now. I want to begin by saying that it is a privilege to have this opportunity to reflect on someone who had been a close friend and co-pilgrim in my dialogue journey; he leaves behind a blessed memory. Among others, I would highlight three reasons that made Kenneth a special person within the dialogue movement.

First, I am yet to meet a person that had the width of knowledge and the depth of scholarship in a number of fields that are closely related to inter faith dialogue. Kenneth was, at the same time, a biblical scholar, a theologian, a missiologist, a Wesleyan scholar and a person who knew the scholarship on inter

faith dialogue inside out. One only has to read the volumes he has written in each of these fields to appreciate the levels of research he had done, and the inalienable connections he saw between these fields.

The second dimension that impressed me was his down-to-earth approach to inter faith relations. He held his local, national, and international commitments to inter faith relations together, and was sure that all the national and international efforts and advances in inter faith relations are of little value unless they find expressions at the local level. Therefore, his dialogue ministry was deeply rooted in attempts to promote relationships at the local level. He met leaders of other religious communities in person, helped to build a community of mutual trust and friendship, and worked towards building local and national networks of persons committed to dialogue. It is from this lived experience that he drew up the *'Four Principles of Inter faith Dialogue'* as the staff person responsible for the

inter faith ministry of the British Council of Churches:

- **Dialogue begins when people meet each other;**
- **Dialogue depends on mutual trust and mutual understanding;**
- **Dialogue makes it possible to share in the service of the community;**
- **Dialogue becomes the medium of authentic mutual witness.**

The four-fold principles appear to be simple, but are based on concrete experience of actual meeting with persons of other religious communities. As the Secretary for Inter faith Relations of the British Council of Churches (BCC), Kenneth travelled all over the country to promote inter faith relations. When the World Council of Churches (WCC) produced the *Guidelines on Dialogue*, Kenneth brought out of it a version of Guidelines that would be relevant to the churches in Britain.

Kenneth was also deeply involved in the international dimension of inter faith ministry. He worked closely with the Dialogue Sub-Unit of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and contributed much to the discussions on Theology of Religions pioneered by the Council. He was one of the persons that worked tirelessly, along with Professor Diana Eck of Harvard, in producing a study booklet, *My Neighbour's Faith and Mine: Theological Discoveries in Inter faith Dialogue*, which was translated into 18 languages to facilitate a world-wide study process on the significance of inter faith dialogue to Christian theology and practice. The results of this study were fed into the significant international consultation on Theology of Religions in Baar, near Zurich, that produced the celebrated “Baar Statement”. This consultation brought together leading theologians on Theology of Religions from within the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Churches, and had to deal with rethinking some of the central Christian teachings on God, the significance of Christ and the role of the Holy Spirit in the world. Leader of the drafting group had to know all the pitfalls and the risks involved in this exercise, and it is little wonder that Kenneth was asked to be the leader of the drafting group.

This leads me to reflect more specifically on Kenneth as a person, and specially as a “dialogue person”. It is said that there are three things required of one to be a ‘dialogue person’: “Humility, more humility, and much more humility!” This, Kenneth had in abundance. As a person who lived and ministered in Nigeria, he was well tuned to relate to people of other religious traditions, who were for the most part also from other cultures. It is not what one said, but who one is as a person, that made all the difference in inter faith relations. Kenneth was humble, simple, open, and totally trustworthy in the way

He met leaders of other religious communities in person, helped to build a community of mutual trust and friendship, and worked towards building local and national networks of persons committed to dialogue.

he related to others; people felt it, were at home with him, and were open to in-depth conversations.

He was such a good listener, that I always attempted to make him the leader of the drafting committee in the main consultations I had organised. He listened with great discernment, accommodated the concerns expressed by the participants, and was totally non-defensive when others expressed opinions on his draft. He would go back and re-draft the report in such a way that everyone felt that their concerns had been genuinely heard.

He was an avid reader, thoughtful writer, and a person who spoke only when he had something important to say. Above all, he never took himself too seriously and had the wonderful gift of being able to laugh at himself. His was an endearing personality, and he has left behind a legacy and a ministry that we deeply cherish.

S. Wesley Ariarajah, Methodist Minister from Sri Lanka, is Professor Emeritus of Ecumenical Theology at the Drew University School of Theology, Madison, NJ, USA and now lives in retirement in Geneva, Switzerland. Before teaching at Drew for 17 years, he served at the World Council of Churches, Geneva, for 16 years as the Director of the Inter faith Dialogue Program and as the Deputy General Secretary of the Council.



Passing over to come back Churches' Forum for Interreligious Relations

The Churches' Forum for Interreligious Relations (CFIRR) is where the churches come together to reflect upon, and be informed about, relationships between the different religions across Britain and Ireland. It is the only place where these conversations can happen at this level and is an invaluable opportunity to keep informed around some of the sensitive issues, good practice in inter faith relations and how some of the challenges are being addressed.

Although most of its meetings take place online, it comes together for a residential once a year which enables a deep dive into particular areas of interest. Earlier this year CFIRR came together for the first time since the pandemic, gathering in Birmingham for two days. Not having met in person for four years it was a great joy to be together again, to renew friendships and meet newer members of the group. After such a long break, its importance was recognised to be, not just a place where structured conversations happen, but the opportunity to network informally.

But we also had a full agenda, and we came to Birmingham because it is one of the most diverse cities in

Europe where large communities of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs come into relationship with the Christian churches. Canon Dr Andrew Smith, the Director of Inter Faith Relations in the Diocese of Birmingham, expertly guided us through the many aspects of the churches' engagement within this context of religious diversity. We also heard presentations from two specialists – Dr Elizabeth Harris and the Revd Dr John Parry – on dialogue with Buddhists and Sikhs. This work is not developed in the short-term, but through a lifetime's commitment to this work. Here we learned of how deepened relationships with people of other faiths, whilst often challenging, is an immense opportunity and privilege to deepen Christian faith and witness. This has sometimes been described as “passing over to come back” – moving beyond one's tradition to be immersed in another only to return with fresh eyes, which helps one to interrogate aspects of one's own religion and thereby deepen faith.

In 2024 CFIRR plans to visit Glasgow for its residential.



www.ctbi.org.uk/category/theology/interfaith/

CEC Assembly

The Conference of European Churches General Assembly

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) held its General Assembly in Tallinn, Estonia, in June of this year with the theme 'Under God's Blessing — Shaping the Future'. Participants from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) member churches shared their thoughts on the significance of this gathering for the Church in Europe.



Gemma King from the Church of Scotland was attending for the first time

"I'm impressed by the size of the gathering and the diversity of Church representation. It has been a wonderful opportunity to meet people from different denominations, including some that I never had the opportunity to learn about before. Despite our differences there is clearly a lot of shared concern about the uncertainty of our European context at present. At the same time, there are evidently significant challenges for CEC because members have different priorities for action and different expectations in terms of what they want from

CEC. A major theme for me has been the role of youth in the ecumenical instruments. It has been wonderful here to meet with other youth delegates and share experiences. I've found other churches have been dealing with very similar things to what we've been dealing with in the Church of Scotland, but from quite different places. When I return home I'm keen to explore what more we could be doing to bring together young people who are passionate about ecumenism to better support them to engage nationally and internationally."



For Siôn Brynach the CEC General Assembly was his first international engagement as Chief Executive of Cytûn

gathering from the moment of arrival, with so many delegates from different churches and countries and the choice of the Kultuurikatel (a former power station dating from 1913 now converted into a cultural centre) as the venue. The quality of the keynote speakers has been exceptional. Obviously, I was very interested to hear what Archbishop Rowan Williams was going to say, as he also comes from Wales. One of the many things that struck me from his profound theological reflection was the way in which it complemented the sociological analysis offered by the previous keynote speaker Prof Harmut Rosa, and really brought out what all this means to us as Christians. I know that I will be reflecting on this for some time to come. Clearly, and inevitably, the situation in Ukraine is exercising churches across Europe in a quite profound way. Of course there have been other conflicts in Europe in

the decades since World War II, but this full scale return to conventional warfare has taken people by surprise. This is something that the General Assembly has been coming back to time and time again but there is a question for me about how effectively we are engaging as churches. What has undoubtedly been beneficial has been the experience of being here together as Christians from across Europe, sharing with other delegates about how Europe has changed from our different perspectives in the last fifty to sixty years. Profound conversations happen in the informal spaces.

The worship has given us both a sense of connectedness to place, with the contributions from Estonian churches, and a glimpse of Pentecost with so many different traditions included. It's important that we don't lose sight of that Pentecost moment in our everyday lives."

"I really commend the CEC staff and the Assembly planning team for all the organisation that has gone into this event. There was so much to prepare, from the logistics to all the documentation, now thankfully circulated electronically rather than in print! It has been an impressive



Revd Dr Susan Durber
attended the Assembly as
WCC President for Europe

“I have really appreciated the quality of the keynote addresses. The speakers have helped us to wrestle with what is happening with Christian voices in Europe, not in a way that tries to defend the space for Christianity in an increasingly secular world, but seeking rather to find a way – perhaps a renewed way – in which the churches can begin to speak from a minority perspective. This minority perspective brings a greater understanding of what it means to be marginalised and this

can help us to speak up for a Europe that is welcoming to the stranger, and open to an increasing plurality of voices, while also being confident about the distinctive message that the Gospel brings. There’s clearly a strong commitment here to the renewal of creation and recognition of the role that European countries have played in exploiting the planet, leading to a desire to renew the way in which we live in creation and respond to what is happening among us.”



His Grace Bishop Hovakim Manukyan (pictured with **Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary, CTBI**) in addition to representing the Armenian Church, was a member of the outgoing Governing Body

“I have been coming to CEC meetings for twenty years now, attending all the General Assemblies during that time and contributing to different areas of work, beginning with the Church and Society Commission and, most recently, the Governing Body. It is important to me to represent the Armenian Church here. We are a small church, but one with a very long history. As the only one of

the Oriental Orthodox churches in membership of CEC it is important for us to bring a witness of Oriental Orthodox spirituality through our participation and we will have an Armenian prayer service as part of the worship programme. CEC has been an important space for us, like the World Council of Churches (WCC) on the global level, to voice our concerns about the violence that is being inflicted on Armenia, and the suffering of the people. Listening to Archbishop Rowan Williams today, I was thinking that perhaps we have to hear and search for God differently in the world of today than in the time of Moses and Aaron. God is acting through our friends. Each of us has grace and gifts from God, as individuals, as communities, as churches. So when we come together, we are becoming the voice of God and we are working for justice, peace, a better world. We are working to protect humanity. And I see that there are a lot of challenges that we cannot face alone even though our world is becoming smaller through technological advances. As human

beings we have our limitations and need God’s help, and how can this be materialised if not through Christian cooperation?

As a small nation we need this bigger family to hold each other’s hands and support each other, as we seek to raise awareness of the humanitarian disaster in Artsakh where people are starving and desperate because Azerbaijan has cut them off. As Armenia tries to build democracy, external threats are causing that democracy to fail. We need our brothers and sisters in Europe to speak out about this to draw media attention, as we have seen with Ukraine and other places like Belarus. Armenia is one of the forgotten conflicts where a powerless people are being shot on borders. It is a volatile situation that at any moment can escalate further as young people see no other choice than to take up arms. The Church has more followers than the Governments. The churches can have a strong voice when we stand together. If we stand together for the people of Armenia, we can bring the hope of the resurrection to those who are now experiencing the suffering of the cross.”

One of the main tasks of the General Assembly was to appoint the Governing Body for the next five years. The member churches of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) have strong representation in the appointment of H.E. Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as President and Rt Revd Dagmar Winter of the Church of England as one of the

Vice Presidents. On their election, Archbishop Nikitas spoke of the role of the Church in building bridges, while Bishop Dagmar expressed the hope that CEC could help carve pathways to peace in Europe. We look forward to supporting them in this work and strengthening CEC as a voice for justice and peace in Europe over the coming years.

The CEC Assembly delegation



John 14.6

‘I am the way, the truth and the life:
no one comes to the Father but by me.’

Dr Clare Amos is an Anglican lay theologian with a background in biblical studies. Between 2001-2011 she was Coordinator of the Anglican Communion Network for Interfaith Concerns (NIFCON) and between 2011 and 2018 she worked at the World Council of Churches, Geneva, as head of its interreligious office. She also wrote the 2020 CTBI Lent course ‘Opening the scriptures: setting our hearts on fire.’

I have long been fascinated by the ‘I am’ sayings of the Gospel of John: indeed one of the privileges of my working life was being part of the international team which wrote the Bible studies for the 2008 Lambeth Conference, which focused on these ‘I am’ sayings.

As we realised then, it is a mistake to suggest, as is often done, that there are only seven ‘I am’ sayings in the Gospel. The list often quoted is:

*I am the bread of life
I am the light of the world
I am the resurrection and the life
I am the good shepherd
I am the gate (door) for the sheep
I am the way, the truth and the life
I am the true Vine*

In fact the words ‘I am’ (used by Jesus in referring to himself) appear in the Gospel considerably more often, which was fortunate for those of us working on the Lambeth Conference Bible studies, as we had 16 days worth of Bible studies to prepare. Many of these other ‘I am’ saying are not so obvious to a casual reader, and can sometimes be half hidden by the English translation, but if you count up the number of times in John’s Gospel that the emphatic Greek first person pronoun *ego* appears directly in front of the first person singular of the verb ‘to be’, *eimi*, you will find over 20 examples (though some simply repeat or reinforce what has been already said a couple of verses earlier).

I am sure, as are virtually all the interpreters of John’s Gospel, that in these repeated uses of *ego eimi*, we are intended to see Jesus as alluding to the self-description of God in the Old Testament, and making a claim to

divinity. This then gives the sayings a particular authority, and, for example, in the case of John 14.6, the saying under special consideration, means that its apparent exclusivism might become more challenging for those of us who are committed to honouring interreligious relationships.

But... to pick up the full significance of this apparent claim to identity with God, perhaps we need first to go back to the pages of the Old Testament, and look at the point where ‘I am’ in relation to the name of God first appears. It is of course in Exodus 3.14, during Moses’ meeting with God at Mount Sinai. When God commands Moses to return to Egypt in order to liberate his people, Moses’ request is to know the name of the deity that is ordering him to undertake this challenging task. The exchange goes like this:

But Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your ancestors has sent me to you”, and they ask me, “What is his name?” What shall I say to them?’¹⁴ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I AM has sent me to you.”’¹⁵ God also said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you”: This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations.’¹⁶ Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, “The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt.’ (NRSV)

The name itself is disclosed in verse 15 – the English translation, ‘The LORD’ conceals four Hebrew letters standing for YHWH, which is probably understood as a third person form of the Hebrew verb HYH, which means ‘to be’. This linkage is made more likely by the ‘explanation’, also linked to the verb ‘to be’ which is given to the name in verse 14, ‘I am who I am’.

But in the cultural and theological world of the ancient Middle East the revealing of names was seen as dangerous. It gave others power over the one whose name was revealed. This was especially true for a deity – ‘to call on the name of God’ gave humanity control over the object of their attention. The revealing of the name is a gesture on God’s part of his compassion, or else his people would for ever have remained slaves in Egypt. But the name YHWH, elusive in its sounds, and interpreted as ‘I am who I am’ is probably intended to remind us of God’s sovereign freedom and refusal to become humanity’s puppet. It is interesting that when the name of God is re-revealed in Exodus 33-34, there are echoes of the earlier phrasing:

And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, “The LORD” and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. (Exodus 33.19)

That phrasing ‘I am who I am’/ ‘I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy’ seems designed to reinforce the idea that in the Old Testament God’s name is intended to reinforce divine sovereignty and absolute freedom, rather than to allow God to be controlled by humanity – however much this might be seen as being for God’s own good.

The German scholar Walther Zimmerli has argued that this mysterious and elusive ‘name’ of God, as the one who both reveals himself but refuses to become the puppet of humanity, constitutes the central theological core of the Old Testament, throughout which the motif of God’s unpinnable-down-ness is expressed in a variety of ways which may escape human logic and comprehension.

Back to the New Testament, and to the Gospel of John. Is it not possible that the ‘I am’ sayings of this Gospel, rather than being intended simply as an

unambiguous proclamation of Jesus' divinity, are also similarly intended to remind us of God's sovereign freedom to act in ways that defy human comprehension? What might this mean then for our interpretation of John 14.6 which is so often taken as categorically ruling out real interreligious dialogue on the part of Christians? If we can only approach the Father through Jesus, may it not be that the Father that we have the privilege of approaching is characterised precisely by a refusal to be placed in that safe and secure 'box' to which Jesus alone has a key in which many Christians have wanted to confine him in?

Realistically this is a hint we are offered, rather than a conclusive argument. But there are I think a few pointers which might suggest that to see a link between this self-description 'I am' and a Jesus whose graciousness defies the human logic of exclusion.

The first is to realise that John 14.6 needs to be read in a context which certainly includes the second verse of the chapter: 'In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places.' *prima facie* this suggests, as it has often been understood to be so, that God's hospitality extends to many and different kinds of people. It is not, I think too fanciful to wonder how far this variety might include interreligious diversity. The 'I am' of John 14.6 needs to encompass both the generosity of verse 2 as well as the apparent exclusion of verse 6.

The second is to reflect on the word 'truth' (in Greek *aletheia*) which forms part of the predicate of the 'I am' saying in John 14.6. If we are exploring the passage in the context of interreligious dialogue it is this word that is perhaps most challenging to deal with. We do however need to reflect on what the passage, and John's Gospel as a whole, means by 'truth' which is not, I think, necessarily the same as the intellectual and academic way that 'truth' is often understood in the western academic world – influenced as it has been by Greek philosophy.

It is important to remember that in semitic languages the word for 'truth' comes from the same verbal root as the words for 'faith', 'believe' and 'trust'. Indeed that linkage is preserved in English precisely by the resonance between 'truth' and 'trust'. The semitic root is *'amn* – from which we adopt the liturgical word *Amen*. So I would suggest that the primary meaning of

the Greek *aletheia* within the Gospel of John is as something like 'trust-worthy', 'reliable', 'faithful'. It may be significant that the first the noun *aletheia* appears in the Gospel is in 1.14 where it is paired with *charis*, 'grace'. 'We have seen his glory, full of grace and truth'.

Interpreters often point to Exodus 33-34 as the Old Testament background for these final few verses of the Prologue, and I think they are correct. In Exodus 33.22 God promises that his 'glory' will pass by Moses while Moses is held safe in the cleft of the rock.

Then in the following chapter God reveals his name as YHWH and proclaims himself as a God, 'abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness' (Exodus 34.6), a pairing which seems to be deliberately echoed in John 1.14's 'grace and truth'. I find it significant that this pairing is so closely linked to the revelation of the divine name. I would also want to suggest that this initial occurrence of *aletheia* in John 1.14 may legitimately be used to define how it can be translated or interpreted in the rest of the Gospel. Some of the later instances may refer to a primary intellectual sense of truth e.g. 'I tell the truth' (John 8.45). However other instances need to be seen primarily in relational terms – referring to Jesus as the one on whom the disciples can rely because he is faithful. To understand John 14.6 in this light is to suggest that the passage is reassuring the disciples, soon to be deprived of their master's presence, of Jesus' reliability and faithfulness in spite of his apparent absence.

My third point is to draw attention to the first time that the phrase *ego eimi* appears in the Gospel of John. It is rarely noticed because it is half hidden by most English translations. It comes in the context of Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman when, in response to their mutual discussion about the 'correct' holy place, Jerusalem or Gerizim, in which to worship God, Jesus states, *ego eimi, o lalon soi*, literally, 'I am, the one talking to you'.

I find it fascinating that the first time Jesus explicitly 'claims' this divine identity that it should be while he is in conversation with a woman, an outsider, someone who represented an alien religious tradition from his own. But that is not all. I used to describe this as 'I am saying without a predicate', contrasting it with others such as 'I am the bread of life' (in which 'bread of life' constitutes a predicate). But it

was pointed out to me that actually this statement does have a predicate: 'talking to you'. Jesus is claiming this divine identity precisely in view of his conversation with this religious other. Which makes a great deal of sense given that the Gospel itself begins with a reflection on the cosmic Word which became flesh in Jesus (John 1.-5, 10-14). Might not a possible implication of this disclosure in John 4.26 be that it is in such 'interfaith' dialogue that God is revealed? And that we need to bear this in mind when in turn we reflect on the 'I am' of John 14.6?

This is I think made more plausible by the exchange that has led to Jesus and the Samaritan woman arriving at this point. They had been discussing the respective merits of Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim as 'holy places'. Walther Zimmerli, whose insights into the importance of the divine name for our interpretation of the themes of the Old Testament was referred to earlier, notes, 'The God who is invoked by the name 'Yahweh' repeatedly demonstrates his freedom by dashing to pieces all the 'images' in which humanity would confine him.' One particular and obvious expression of human attempts to confine God is to build him a 'holy place', a temple in which he could live to be available to human beings at their convenience. The story of the Old Testament, especially at the time of the exile, is of 'I am who I am' who categorically refuses to be confined in such a way. So it is more than appropriate that the first time Jesus claims the description 'I am' for himself in the Gospel of John, that it is also in the context of a discussion about the need to transcend such places and buildings. And this is the first, 'I am' of John's Gospel, which we should perhaps use as the starting point for our reflection on the other examples of the phrase – including our challenging John 14.6 which Christians have so often used to seek to confine God by the limits of human logic. Perhaps those words of the beloved hymn of FW Faber rightly have the final word,

*For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of human mind
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.*



Read the other papers in this series:
ctbi.org.uk/the-way-the-truth-and-the-life-jesus-faith-salvation-and-inter-faith-dialogue/



Churches and Net Zero: How to get there

Mark Joselin and Jenny Brown of Christian Aid reflect on the work of the Environmental Issues Network

In 2019, the UK Government announced its intention to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to Net Zero by 2050. Many UK churches, however, have committed to reaching Net Zero by 2030.

The Environmental Issues Network (EIN), established by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), is a growing group of churches and Christian organisations which collaborate on the environmental, biodiversity and climate crises. At EIN's June meeting representatives of four CTBI member churches, the Church in Wales, the Methodist Church, the Salvation Army and the Church of Scotland, shared how they

were addressing their respective denomination's Net Zero target. In our discussion, we identified areas for cooperation, saw possible solutions to problems, and above all were encouraged to keep going. What follows are some key points from our discussions that we hope are helpful and will catalyse a wider conversation.

The challenges described fall into three main areas:

Assets

Old buildings can be difficult to adapt and may have limited electrical capacity. Low-carbon options, e.g. for heating, tend to be expensive. Some denominational

structures make it difficult to calculate their current carbon footprint and therefore to measure progress. Virtually all potential modifications cost money, which is in short supply and with few available external sources of funding.

Hearts and minds

Net Zero can be seen as a technical, political and scientific issue, disconnected from faith and mission. Too often, church members and leaders are already overloaded and regard action towards Net Zero as an additional and unwelcome burden. Some, perhaps older congregations, may struggle with the idea of new, cleaner technologies and need much persuading to change.



No easy answers: High intensity agricultural practises release huge amounts of CO₂ into the atmosphere while degrading soil health. Global demand for fossil fuels continues to rise. And we must recognise that renewable technologies still have a carbon footprint. Achieving Net Zero should be inseparable from our expression of faith; we need to win hearts and minds so that lifestyle changes can be made.

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Lifestyle

Churches are encouraging people to take Net Zero home with them, making lifestyle changes in such areas as energy, diet and travel. Reluctance to make changes is common: prioritising fiscal stewardship over environmental stewardship and maintaining a mindset of scarcity rather than one of abundance, are frequent blockages.

The meeting identified some shared approaches to these challenges:

Participation

Early consultation with congregations is key, so they feel the relevance and ownership of their church's Net Zero strategy. Energising a Net Zero strategy by appointing a local church climate champion can be a good start. Correspondingly, some denominations have their own designated climate change/Net Zero roles to support and coordinate their Net Zero strategy across the denomination.

Fact-finding

Tools are available to help establish a baseline for carbon footprints, and to identify the larger sources of carbon emissions. Efforts can then be focused

on where they will have the biggest impact. Seek advice and experiences from other churches, denominations and congregations. Think about banking arrangements and investments: what 'greener' options exist? Why not move to those?

Winning hearts

Show people that achieving Net Zero is inseparable from the expression of their faith, incorporating climate justice and creation care into teaching and preaching so that they're understood as core to mission, not an inconvenient add-on. Such schemes as Eco-church and Eco-congregations are helpful ways to begin the 'faith in action' journey.

Influencing public policy

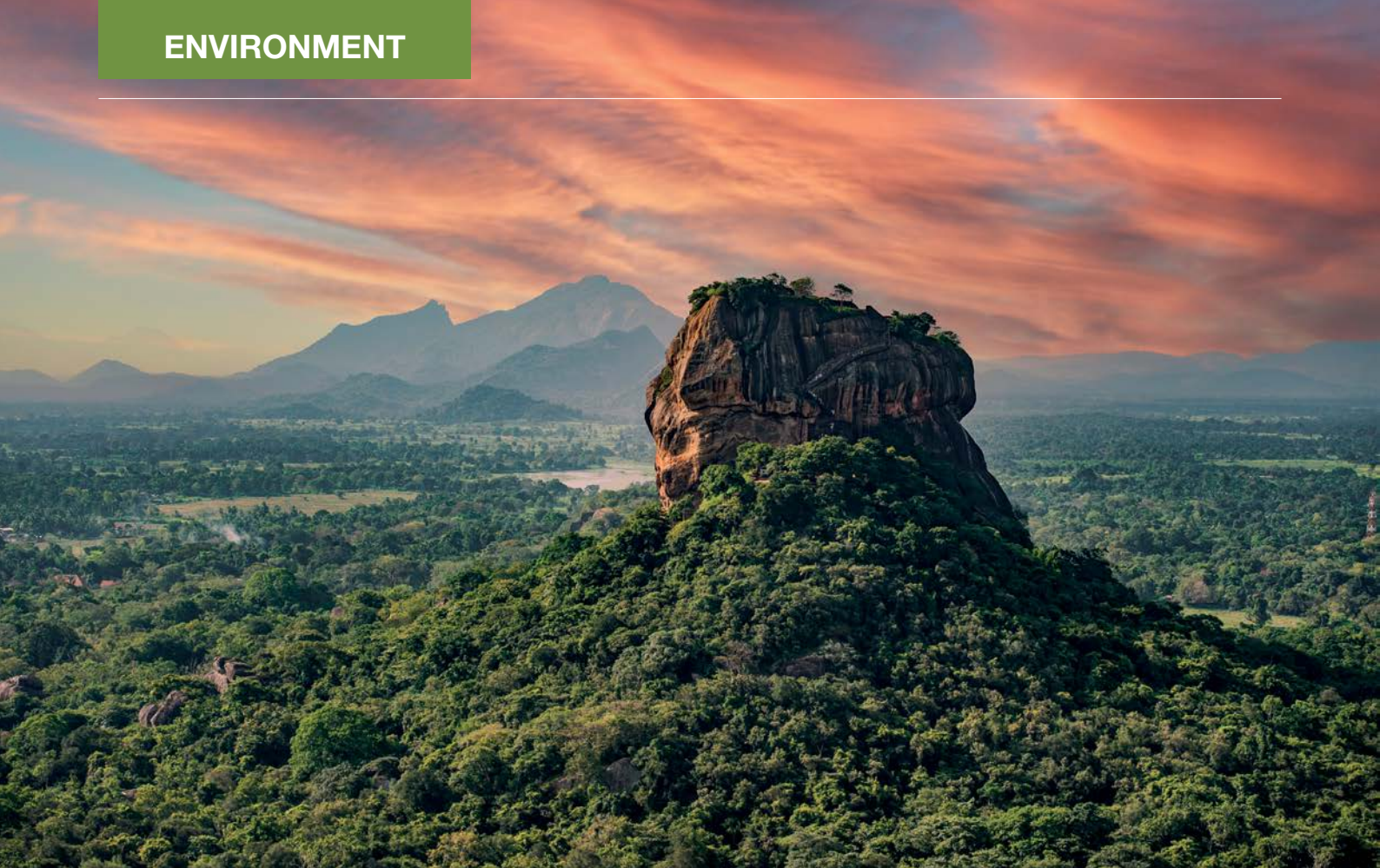
Churches at all levels have a voice that needs to be heard. Net Zero is a UK government target as well as that of the churches. As churches move towards their own targets, their credibility with policy makers increases. The UK government, and all others, need to know their citizens are concerned and engaged with the issue, and are demanding ambitious action to meet the global target. Many agencies including members of EIN have resources to

inform and support churches as they seek to influence their politicians and governments. This high-level influence is vital if global heating is to be stopped in time.

EIN and members of CTBI all have valuable experience and ideas to share. Perhaps a good 'next step' is to establish a Net Zero sub-committee in the ecumenical space to facilitate that. None of this needs to be done alone. Together we can do it!

For more information about the Net Zero strategies of the four churches, please see:

-  [The Church of Scotland: Net Zero Strategic Outline \(churchofscotland.org.uk\)](https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/net-zero-strategic-outline)
-  [The Church in Wales: Join the Net Zero Carbon journey – The Church in Wales](https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/net-zero-carbon-journey)
-  [The Methodist Church: Environment and Climate Change \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/environment-and-climate-change)
-  [The Salvation Army: Declaration of climate emergency](https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/climate-emergency)



Sri Lanka

At the Nexus of God, People and the Environment

“The business of state and the social fabric of Sri Lankan affairs in general are shrouded in a tension of unresolved violence belying the island’s peaceful exterior and its natural beauty.”

(Gordon Weiss, The Cage, 2012).

Dr Nicola Brady, CTBI General Secretary, visited Sri Lanka in March 2023:

I had the privilege of visiting Sri Lanka from 19th to 27th March this year with Dr Liz Harris, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) trustee and Chair of the CTBI Sri Lanka project working group. CTBI has been supporting a project with the National Council of Churches in Sri Lanka (NCCSL) entitled ‘The Reconciled Land: A Theology of Land at the Nexus of God, People and the Environment’. It aims to build on the historic links between churches in Sri Lanka and those in Britain and Ireland, helping both CTBI and NCCSL to widen the perspectives

that shape and inform their work. The project has a particular focus on deepening the theological reflection that shapes and inspires the churches’ work for peace and healing of relationships in both contexts, drawing on social analysis and action learning generated by the community-based dialogues facilitated by NCCSL around issues of land and belonging.

This is year four of the project. The impact of the pandemic, which was followed by a period of deep economic, social and political crisis in Sri Lanka, had a significant impact on the work of the NCCSL itself, and also on the circumstances of the local project partners. One of the aims of the visit was to assess the continued relevance

of the original project plan in this changed context.

We had an intense week of project visits in different parts of the island including Batticaloa, Anuradhapura, Vavuniya and Kilinochi, as well as meetings in the capital Colombo. We attended community meetings of civic and religious leaders on land issues. We visited a community-school founded by a group of Christian and Hindu mothers. There were opportunities to learn from the experience of women’s networks and of groups responding to the needs of ex-combatants. We met with some of the victims of the conflict, including mothers of the disappeared and internally displaced people now living in the former no-go areas. The



Opposite: UNESCO World Heritage Site Sigiriya (Lion Rock); top: fishermen, tea pickers and other workers face decreasing returns for their labour; above: Colombo's commercial centre – in 2021, the government declared an economic crisis; school children are affected by rising costs of supplies; CTBI General Secretary Dr Nicola Brady; right: Rev Sujithar Sivanayagam, Dr Brady and Elizabeth Harris; Hindu temple in Batticaloa.



role and contribution of the churches was explored through visits to the NCCSL offices and the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

It was humbling to see how much the CTBI support for this project is valued. Project participants gave up a considerable amount of time to meet with us, with some undertaking difficult and sometimes risky journeys. Not only did they want to tell us about the importance of external support to struggling communities in Sri Lanka, but they also wished to appeal to CTBI for help in raising awareness about the challenges to peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka today.

We were deeply moved by the resilience of the people in a context

where the price of basic food items and other essentials has increased four-fold since the pandemic. It was heartbreaking to see people receive so little return for

It was heartbreaking to see people receive so little return for their labour, whether in agriculture or industry, and yet remain so committed to working together for the good of the whole community.

their labour, whether in agriculture or industry, and yet remain so committed to working together for the good of the whole community. The overwhelming priority across the different groups we

met was children's education, with the rising cost of school supplies also causing real concern. I asked the mothers who had founded the community school we visited what kind of future they hoped their children might have. The responses were not about careers, but about community: "I want my child to learn to be a morally good person". "I want my child to be someone that contributes to the community". "I want my child to work hard and to be able to give work opportunities to others".

The work of the NCCSL in this context is one of dialogue and accompaniment. On the questions of identity and belonging that are central to the issues around land addressed by the project, the presence of the



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Competing demands for access to land: wild elephants cross a road to get from a river to an Elephant Orphanage

that are very isolated and suspicious of outsiders and is therefore doing work that few, if any, other groups could do, bringing a clear commitment to justice and peace, seeking to highlight the devastating impact of all forms of violence, amplifying the voices of victims and survivors.

On our travels we experienced the beauty of the landscape in Sri Lanka, jungle and coastline. Close encounters with elephants on busy roads brought home the fact that competing demands for access to land and natural resources are not limited to different groups of people, but also includes the wildlife. It was disturbing to see how corrupt practices in construction and industry are harming the whole ecosystem on which all forms of life depend. For this reason environment is one of the main pillars of this project and a priority focus for NCCSL in its advocacy to Government and its engagement with other faith communities.

Sri Lanka offers a fascinating case study for learning about inter faith dialogue. The island has long been a place of encounter between different nationalities, faiths and cultures and, sadly, all too often those encounters have not been peaceful or respectful. The legacy of these conflicts continues to impact the way in which different faith communities relate and treat each other in different locations, influenced by the local history. NCCSL is working both locally and nationally to promote honest and meaningful engagement between the different faiths to identify where they can make common cause in their advocacy and awareness-raising, in areas such as climate justice, and where there are tensions and competing demands for land, and a responsibility on faith leaders to work with communities and political leaders to find just and peaceful solutions.

Please remember in prayer the struggling communities of Sri Lanka and those in NCCSL and other positions of community leadership working to support them.



For more information visit:
<https://nccsl.org>

National Council of Churches is helping to create a sense of shared identity. This is reinforced through the facilitation of networking on a national level, bringing together groups that would not otherwise have the opportunity to meet and yet have so much in common. The current NCCSL General Secretary, Revd Sujithar Sivanayagam, who is in his first year in the role, places particular emphasis on the ability of the churches to cross boundaries: geographical, cultural and linguistic. He is clear that their role is not to give leadership to communities, but to build confidence and capacity. Project beneficiaries are supported to meet and engage in dialogue to analyse the challenges they face, identify shared priorities and then pool their resources. At times the project offers practical assistance through the purchase of equipment needed for a community employment scheme, for example, but this is always in addition to the requirement that project participants invest in their own communities, even from very scarce resources. The success stories have been remarkable, and the NCCSL moves quickly to bring beneficiaries to other areas to tell their story in order to encourage and teach others.

In this project we saw a combination of support to existing groups and the establishment of new groups, depending on the circumstances of each local context. We encountered some particularly striking examples of transformation among women's groups. As in other societies emerging from conflict, women in Sri Lanka face additional vulnerabilities and challenges. The project is supporting women's groups and networks in a variety of local contexts across

Sri Lanka, as well as bringing them together on a national level for learning exchange and peer support. We heard women speak powerfully about under-representation in community leadership. We saw inspiring examples of initiatives led by women's groups that benefit multiple groups in the community through a holistic response to challenges, such as food projects that benefit not only the sellers and the producers they buy from, but also the consumers by making nutritious food more affordable. We heard about the transformation of villages that had been no-go areas after dark due to drug-related violence and crime

Close encounters with elephants on busy roads brought home the fact that competing demands for access to land and natural resources are not limited to different groups of people, but also includes the wildlife.

through investment in sports and other diversion activities for youth.

The project has clearly been a lifeline for a variety of groups. This is particularly significant in the case of the ex-combatants from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). These support groups were particularly interested in learning from CTBI about the Northern Ireland experience. Engagement with armed actors in a society emerging from conflict poses complex political, social and moral challenges. In a deeply divided society it entails significant risks for the peacemakers working with groups that are alienated from the state and its security forces. The NCCSL has built up relationships of trust with communities

Prayer for the Season of Creation

By Revd David J M Coleman: Environmental Chaplain, EcoCongregation Scotland

Sustaining God,
sharing the flesh of the Earth:

How their voices cry!
– The Earth, the wildlife, people
looking on as waters rise,
fields dry, migrations go awry!
And prophets of every
evicted, exiled species,
look us in the eye,
us, blinkered folk,
who close our eyes to pray.

‘Laws that never shall be broken’:
are daily shattered
wherever greed, profit and
entitlement
usurp the love for every Creature
commissioned when Christ rose.
As if we had no other way to live.

But you say ‘read the signs!’

Wild wind, and breath of Life, still
through you, we are good news
where discipleship lets go of
control,
and grace reassures:

What’s given to us to do:
our small response,
our quiet voice, when lifted
carries blessing.

Build in us your foundation of
hope
through the unjust turmoil
which our species has set in
motion;
the rising heat and frequent
storms:

For faith and holy writings are not
“single-use”
for those who, faithful, take some
notice.

Responsive Christ
Re-use, recycle, repurpose
the treasures old and new
that define the company of Christ’s
friends
with hope and even joy defiant.
May we shine as light with many
lights of faith
unhidden by the facts
encouraged by possibility
in love
with this World you so love.
AMEN



Resources for the Season of Creation are available online:
ctbi.org.uk/season-of-creation-2023/

Go and Do Likewise

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
18-25 January 2024

Of all the stories in the Bible, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37), is probably one of the most familiar, its appeal and its message reaching far beyond the church. It points to an important human reality that acts of goodness and compassion cross the boundaries of faith and ethnicity and such actions can be found in the most unexpected of places. It is therefore a good basis on which to reflect upon the importance of Christian unity. Unity is God's gift to the church and in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU), we pray that our hearts may be turned, through repentance, to live as Christ lived and in so doing, manifest the unity of the church which itself is a witness to God's love for the world.

Children play in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; The Nave at the Catholic Cathedral of Ouagadougou; proud Aunt and a new life welcomed.

In next year's WPCU, we are invited into the experience of the churches of Burkina Faso in West Africa, who speak out of a complex inter-communal conflict and extreme violence in one of the most destabilized regions of the world. Yet they offer to us a message of hope that insists that amidst terror and violence, love and compassion must always be central to the Christian life.

"...we are invited into the experience of the churches of Burkina Faso in West Africa, who speak out of a complex inter-communal conflict and extreme violence in one of the most destabilized regions of the world."

The Good Samaritan draws on his innate human instincts to act in mercy; it is not shared identities that should prompt us to come to the aid of the other but love of our 'neighbour'. But it may be the case that this story is so familiar to us that its real power has become occluded. It is therefore an immense gift to us that Christians in Burkina Faso have read this parable in the light of their own lived experience in a place of fear and violence.

We sometimes hear voices that suggest that because Christians suffer violence and persecution, we should somehow restrict our love and compassion to those who are different. But the churches in this part of Africa disagree – it is only through love and compassion that we can be truly Christian and true disciples of Jesus Christ.

But the parable also contains a warning to religious people who may find cause to limit their own compassion. Our own disunity as Christians can be seen to arise out of a desire to limit the obligations of love and compassion and instead to pursue self-interest. The actions of the priest and Levites surely serve as a warning in this regard.



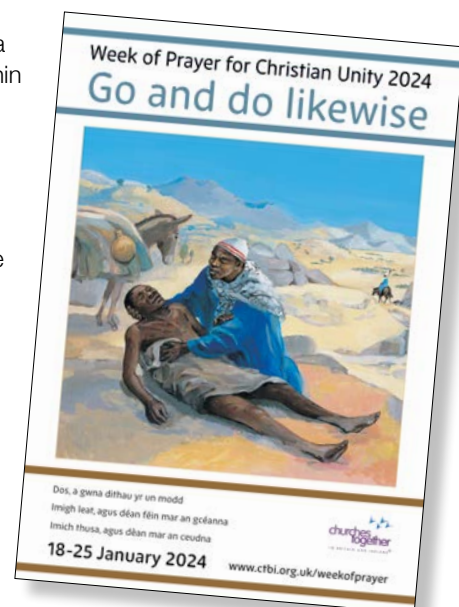
And so, in 2024's WPCU and beyond, we are being invited to join with the churches of Burkina Faso to reflect upon Christian unity through Jesus' call to show love and compassion to all. The Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) Writers Group met earlier this year in Dublin to prepare these resources for use in the churches across Britain and Ireland and to also offer some additional prayers, meditations and reflections.

All photos: istock

WPCU 2024 Resources will be available in a variety of formats that reflect the diversity within these islands; hard copy booklets containing the worship service and reflections for each of the eight days for the WPCU (these will be available in a bilingual Welsh/English version as well as an English only booklet) and will be available to order via the CTBI website. These booklets are also available as free downloads from the website including formats that enable easy editing for local use. There are also versions of the worship service available in Irish/Gaelic and Scots/Gaelic, available as free downloads. In addition, there will be all age resources prepared by ROOTS for Churches.



For more information visit:
ctbi.org.uk/wpcu24



Lent:

Politics at the service of the common good

Each year Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) offers a Lent course for inter-church groups to engage together in study and prayer around a theme that is relevant to the Church on these islands, and often in a wider international context. It can also be used by individual congregations wishing to join with groups from other denominations in prayer during Lent around issues that are of shared concern, and by individuals seeking inspiration for their own prayer and reflection.

For Lent 2024, we are inviting participants to reflect on the Christian contribution to the political landscape. In different areas of work where CTBI has been facilitating dialogue and collaboration between our member churches, we have been hearing concerns about the tone and content of political debate and how it is impacting the rights and wellbeing of those who are most vulnerable in particular. These concerns arise, for example, in discussions about the cost-of-living crisis, the care of people seeking asylum, issues of climate justice and racial justice, discussions on national identity and constitutional questions, and issues relating to the wellbeing of young people.

The work of CTBI spans five different political jurisdictions which will all have unique features and characteristics. There are, however, shared concerns about the increased prevalence of political discourse which is divisive and polarising, which fails to respect the equal worth and dignity of all people, and which reduces complex socio-political realities to binary choices, making enemies of political opponents

The space for respectful, reasoned and well-informed debate and discussion appears to be shrinking.

and minimising any sense of common ground or collective responsibility. The space for respectful, reasoned and well-informed debate and discussion appears to be shrinking.

A related concern is that the content of political debate often fails to engage with the challenges that people face in their everyday lives, offering little hope to individuals who are struggling with issues like housing insecurity or



inadequate income, or to communities concerned about issues like access to employment and public services. This can give rise to feelings of disconnect and alienation which cause people to lose faith in political processes as a means of effecting positive change.

The Lenten resource invites us reflect on how Christians are called to respond in this context, bringing their values to the political debate as part of a pluralist and multi-faith public square, working with politicians as civic and community leaders to promote and protect the common good, holding them to account when necessary, and promoting a sense of collective responsibility, encouraging all to active participation in political processes, including and beyond elections.

We will reflect together on the values we wish to bring to the wider public square as Christians, offering a vision of politics as a vocation to serve communities and work for the common good. We will consider what the vision and promise of the Kingdom of God offers in the context of contemporary political debates, and discuss the opportunities and challenges for churches and individual Christians in communicating a Christian social ethic.

A particular focus of this study programme will be the relevance of the learning from our ecumenical journey in this context. What might we be able to share from the skills and experience we have developed in facilitating respectful and inclusive encounters, conversations and dialogue that promote greater understanding and celebrate unity in diversity? How might the story of that ecumenical journey help to inject some language into the political discourse, with themes such as friendship, solidarity and collective responsibility?

What might we want to say about relationships: relationships between politicians from different parties, relationships between political and civic

leaders, between elected representatives and the communities they serve? In our ecumenical bodies at all levels — local, national, international — particular emphasis is placed on the value of regular encounter and gathering for dialogue to build deep and lasting relationships. How might some of this learning transfer to the political sphere, creating more spaces for dialogue

We will reflect together on the values we wish to bring to the wider public square as Christians, offering a vision of politics as a vocation to serve communities and work for the common good.

for understanding and relationship-building, facilitating effective two-way communication between political leaders and communities, rather than limiting such encounters to those occasions when one side needs something from the other. This reflection will be informed by learning from the experience of the different ecumenical bodies on these islands.

Most importantly we will pray together for positive change in these very uncertain times when communities desperately need a message of hope.



For more information visit:
ctbi.org.uk



The late Pauline Webb made an immeasurable contribution to the promotion of women's leadership in ecumenism, both through her personal example in the series of significant high-profile leadership roles she took on and in her decision to provide funding, through Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), as a legacy to continue that encouragement and support for the women who would come after her.

Unfortunately, women can still face additional barriers to opportunities for leadership and professional development in our church context today. A 2022 study by Dr Anne Francis on women in ministry in Ireland, entitled *Called* (Wipf and Stock Publishers), interviewed women in a range of different leadership roles in different denominations and identified significant challenges in both structures and attitudes that continue to limit opportunities for women in the Church. Ecumenical cooperation and solidarity was identified as a valuable support that could and should be further developed: "Participants expressed a desire for greater ecumenical co-operation and for their sisters across the traditions to flourish. [...] Many expressed a desire for solidarity among women across the denominations and opportunities to work, reflect and pray together" (p. 143).

Pauline Webb Fund

Promoting women's leadership in ecumenism

Since it was established in 2017 the Pauline Webb fund has been encouraging women to identify and develop the opportunities for networking, national and international, that will develop the kind of cooperation and solidarity advocated by the women interviewed in *Called*. The fund has helped grant recipients to learn from

reflections, questions and challenges back to the work of CTBI around the visibility of, and investment in, women's leadership in the ecumenical space, and the engagement of the churches with social justice issues that have a particular impact on women's rights, leadership and participation.

We encourage women leaders to explore how this fund might assist them in building support networks, gaining new experiences to bring back to their work or in developing that work through further research. Contributions to study costs in the field of ecumenism will also be considered where applicants can demonstrate clearly how the study undertaken will benefit the wider community. We also encourage our member churches to consider how this fund might help them to support and promote the work of women leaders, particularly those working with vulnerable and marginalised communities. Although the fund has a specific focus on women, underlying this is the recognition that the under-representation of women is damaging for everyone, and empowering women will make an important contribution to wider issues of diversity and inclusion.

The fund has helped grant recipients to learn from women leaders who are working with marginalised and vulnerable groups in other parts of the world.

women leaders who are working with marginalised and vulnerable groups in other parts of the world. Among the benefits reported by participants are inspiration and ideas for future work, the development of support networks, enhanced understanding of the context in which ecumenical work takes place and/or of the specific issues of justice and peace they seek to engage with in that work. Through their reports they have been bringing important

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

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

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



collaborating with





THE PAULINE WEBB FUND

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

ECUMENICAL UNITY

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

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

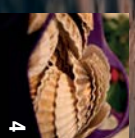
For more information, or to request an application pack and confirmation of the deadline for the next funding round:

visit ctbi.org.uk/pauline-webb-ecumenical-fund
email: info@ctbi.org.uk

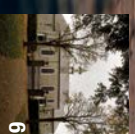
CTBI STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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.



4
Member
Profile:
United
Reformed
Church



6
Celebration
Time: Irish
Council of
Churches



14
75th
Anniversary:
Walking for
Windrush



30
Week of
Prayer for
Christian
Unity