

# The United Reformed Church Press Pack



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## URC Bookshop

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## Useful links

For news about the United Reformed Church [www.urc.org.uk/news](http://www.urc.org.uk/news)

For news about the United Reformed Church General Assembly

[www.urc.org.uk/general-assembly](http://www.urc.org.uk/general-assembly)

All [www.urc.org.uk/assembly-executive](http://www.urc.org.uk/assembly-executive)

### Find the URC on social media

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LinkedIn [bit.ly/URCLinkedIn](https://bit.ly/URCLinkedIn)



Keep up-to-date with news from the URC by signing up to our monthly e-newsletter News Update:

[bit.ly/URCNUsignup](https://bit.ly/URCNUsignup)

### Reform magazine

Keep up to date with news, comment, inspiration and debate

[www.reform-magazine.co.uk](http://www.reform-magazine.co.uk)

# About the URC

The URC is a family of Christians who meet in local churches across England, Scotland and Wales, part of the worldwide family of Reformed Churches, a group of more than 70 million Christians.

The URC has around 37,000 members in about 1,250 congregations with more than 600 ministers. More than 50,000 people worship in our churches each week, and many more take part in the weekday activities of the churches.

We believe that each and every one of us can find contentment through loving and serving Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

A lack of hierarchy, and a respect for individual principles, means that the URC is not rigid in the expression of its beliefs, and embraces a wide variety of opinions.

At the same time, in the words of the URC's Statement of Nature, Faith and Order, together we are committed to 'God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the living God, the only God, ever to be praised.'



[www.urch.org.uk](http://www.urch.org.uk)



## Our roots

Being reformed sets us in a stream of tradition that goes back 500 years to the Protestant Reformation that began in 1517 when Martin Luther launched a movement of challenge in the Church.

## History of the URC

The creation of the United Reformed Church in 1972 formally merged the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Church in England and Wales. One Member of Parliament at the time described this merger as: "one of the most historic measures in the history of the Christian churches in this country."

The denomination expanded when Churches of Christ joined it in 1981, followed by Scottish Congregationalists in 2000.

The URC is a nonconformist Church. Put most simply, this means that we are not an 'established' Church, with a formal link to civil authority like, for example, the Church of England has.

However, the URC is committed to working closely with Churches of all traditions, in prayer and social action, and many of our local churches are now united with local churches from other traditions (Baptist, Church of England, or Methodist to name a few).

# Church Structure

The URC has a three-tier structure, which is open for everyone to participate in.

Local churches have an Elders' Meeting, in which the Ministers and Elders share pastoral and spiritual oversight and leadership, and a Church Meeting, where all members gather to seek God's will and to discuss the life and work of the church.

At a wider level, the URC has 13 Synods: the national Synods of Scotland and Wales plus eleven regional Synods across England. Each provides oversight of about 100 local churches and is led by a Synod Moderator.

The General Assembly of the URC is its ultimate decision-making body. It meets every year to celebrate, discuss and make decisions about the life and work of the church.

## **General Assembly Moderators**

Every year, General Assembly appoints a new General Assembly Moderator and a General Assembly Moderator-Elect to serve the following year.

The General Assembly Moderator travels around the denomination and abroad, representing the denomination and speaks out on a range of social justice issues.



## Global relationships

The URC has ecumenism rooted at the heart of its very existence. At local, national and international level, the contact and understanding between the wide variety of Christian traditions, representing the diversity of the body of Christ, lies at the heart of our mission.

As such the URC is a member of: Council for World Mission; Council for World Mission UK, World Communion of Reformed Churches; World Council of Churches, Conference of European Churches, Churches Commission for Migrants Europe, Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Churches Together in England, The Free Churches Group, Action of Churches Together in Scotland, Churches Together in Wales, The Commission of Covenanted Churches in Wales, Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council;

The URC has international links with churches in Africa, Asia, North America and the Pacific. Our partners are: Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, Presbyterian Church in Korea, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Uniting Congregational

Church of Southern Africa, Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar, United Church of Zambia, Church of North India, Church of South India, United Church of Christ in the USA, United Church of Canada, Presbyterian Church in the USA, United Church of Australia, and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands



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# Key people



**The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson**

General Assembly Moderator 2023-2024

As a URC minister,

Tessa has responsibility for four congregations in the East London Group, a multi-culturally diverse constituency. Tessa, a womanist practical theologian and published author, made history at General Assembly 2023 by becoming the URC's first woman BAME Moderator. Tessa serves on groups such as the Church Life Review, Cascades of Grace, as well as the Faith and Order Committee and is not afraid to be a voice crying out for justice and dignity for all excluded and marginalised communities and has particularly interested in the upliftment of Black/Ethnically-Minoritised women.



**The Revd Dr John Bradbury**

General Secretary of the United Reformed Church

In 2020 at the age of 43, John became one of the youngest

people to be leading a mainstream Christian denomination. He has been heavily involved in ecumenism and has served on various groups for the Community of Protestant Churches in

Europe (CPCE). In 2019, John was elected as one of three presidents of the CPCE. Prior to these roles, he served as a minister of churches in Liverpool and Cambridgeshire and was appointed to teach Systematic Theology and Church History at Westminster College, where he ultimately served as Vice-Principal and Acting Principal. Along with his current duties, John is leading a review into the life of the United Reformed Church to help the denomination be more healthy and fruitful. John is available to speak on the Reformed tradition, European Protestantism, Theologies of Marriage and questions around sexuality and same-sex marriage, church reform and renewal, church-state relations from an English non-conformist perspective.



**The Revd Timothy Meadows**

General Assembly Moderator-Elect

Tim comes from an Appalachian-

mountain family in the USA and served with the United Church of Christ, and after accepting a call to the URC, served with Liverpool City Centre, at Stoneycroft, Allerton and St Stephen's Wavertree, and with

a Mersey Synod-directed ministry. Nationally, he has been a member of the Faith and Order Committee and is presently a URC ecumenical representative to the Church of England. His topics of interests include His topics of interest include: motivating and encouraging faith communities, Christian history and theology, human rights and diversity, the relationship between inherited models of faith and practice and emerging models of faith and practice, ecumenism, sociology of religion, rewording and re-imagining paradigms for covenant, hymnody and sacred music, worship and the arts.



**Heather Moore**  
Youth Assembly  
Moderator  
2024-2025

Heather is from Southern Synod

and is currently studying Physics at Durham University. She previously served for a year as the Southern Synod Rep and has a passion for social justice, particularly how the church welcomes and ministers to its LGBTQ+ members, and for elevating the youth voice, and enabling young people to speak out about what they are passionate about. She is excited about her year as moderator and the opportunities and challenges it will bring. Outside of the URC, Heather enjoys playing D&D and going hiking.



**Maya Withall**  
URC Youth  
Assembly  
Moderator-Elect

Maya is currently at college studying English,

Product Design and Geography. She plans to study law at university with the aspiration to becoming an environmental lawyer. She became a Christian through her local Pilots Company, and has been part of the URC since she was 7. Maya has been Wessex Synod Rep on the Youth Executive for the last three years and the Green Apostle, engaging with the URC Net Zero task group and other environmental projects. Maya has a particular passion for children and youth work as this is how she came to be a part of the URC and found religion. When not at school or college Maya enjoys to read, watch TV and always has at least three crochet projects on the go. She can't wait to begin her work as Mod-Elect with the new Youth Executive.



# Other specialist people



## **The Revd Dr Susan Durber**

President of the European Region of the World Council of Churches

Susan is a minister

of the United Reformed Church, now retired after serving in pastorates, as Principal of Westminster College and as Theology Advisor at Christian Aid. Since 1993 she has been involved with the work of the World Council of Churches, and particularly with Faith and Order. In 2022 she was elected as one of Presidents of the WCC and can be called on to provide comment about the global ecumenical movement and about ecumenism more generally. She is committed to the WCC as a place of dialogue and conversation, and to continuing conversations even when there is profound disagreement.



## **The Revd Andy Braunston**

Minister for Digital Worship

As Minister for Digital Worship, Andy curates

resources which local churches can download to enhance their Sunday services and edits the Daily Devotions – reflections which are sent out every morning via email. Andy has over

25 years' experience ministering in primarily LGBT congregations and with a particular emphasis on LGBT asylum seekers. He served as a Justice of the Peace for over 10 years and now lives in Orkney.



## **Sarah Moore**

Clerk to the General Assembly

Sarah was ordained in 2005 and has served as Transition

Minister in the

National Synod of Scotland since 2020 following local church ministry in East Lancashire and then in Cumbria as URC Area President developing an ecumenical covenant with partners in the county developing close links in mission, ministry and use of buildings. She also represents the URC at the World Council of Churches Central Committee. Sarah has interests in developing creative and flexible ways of being Church and living out the Christian life as well as supporting congregations, synods, the URC as a whole and those who have leadership roles in all these places with the legal and procedural tools they need for their work and vocation.



## **The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins**

Moderator of the Wessex Synod, former Clerk to the General Assembly and Secretary to the History Society

Michael is a long serving minister of the URC with more than 20 years' experience in pastoral charge of local churches. He's an Oxford graduate with particular interests in Church History, Ecumenism, and governance and constitutional matters.



## **The Revd David Thompson DD**

The Revd Professor David Thompson is a retired non-stipendiary minister in Cambridge and

Emeritus Professor of Modern Church History in the University of Cambridge. He was Moderator of the General Assembly in 1996-97. A former member of Churches of Christ, he was an Observer of the Congregational-Presbyterian Joint Committee of 1963-72 and Secretary of the URC-Churches of Christ Joint Committee of 1972-80. He has extensive ecumenical experience internationally, nationally, regionally and locally, and was Ecumenical Officer for the Eastern Synod, 1999-2015, as

well as being a member of the International Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and Disciples of Christ, 1979-2019. His specialism is modern Church History, especially Church & State, Church & Society, and Christian Missions, particularly current affairs.



## **The Revd Clare Downing**

Moderator of North Western Synod and a former Moderator of General Assembly

Clare has been a minister for 25 years,

with experience in local churches, inter-faith issues, as a Synod Moderator, and as Moderator of General Assembly from 2020 to 2022. She has previous experience in social work, and worked for the Diocese of Manchester on a project around disability and church. She has a breadth of experience about the life of the URC and is passionate about making the church a place where the widest variety of voices can be heard. Other emphases of her work are to encourage Christians to explore vocation in its widest sense, and to make the good news of Jesus known through individuals and local churches, in words and in action.



**The Revd Dr Alex Clare-Young**  
Pioneer Minister and Theologian

Alex is an ordained minister in a pioneering role in

the URC in Cambridge City Centre and identifies as they/them. Alex has a PhD in queer theology, having researched the experiences, identities and faith understandings of trans and non-binary Christians. Alex is a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) expert and is at the forefront of creating new expressions of church in partnership with young adults and millennials, and particularly with people who have experienced religious trauma. Alex is also co-chair of the Open Table Network – a network of communities which create safer faith spaces for LGBTQ+ Christians. Alex's first book, *Transgender. Christian. Human.*, was published in 2019 by Wild Goose. For their academic publications, see: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1596-9899>



**The Revd Dr Elizabeth Welch**  
Former General Assembly Moderator

Elizabeth is a URC minister within the URC Thames

North Synod. Her father served as a Congregational minister in South Africa where she grew up, in a family

that campaigned against apartheid. She was ordained in the UK in 1976, served for 20 years in local ecumenical partnerships, and then moved on to serve as West Midlands Synod Moderator from 1996-2008. During this time, Elizabeth also served as Moderator of the URC General Assembly. In 2008, she moved to Hackney to serve the church part-time while writing a PhD on the Holy Spirit and worship with the other half of her time. Elizabeth has chaired national and international ecumenical and theological groups and is interested in digging deeper into ecumenism, the Holy Spirit and the nature of worship when looking at the role of the church in the world today.



**Dr Sam Richards**  
Head of Children's and Youth Work

Sam, whose doctoral studies were on lay vocation, was

previously Director of Oxford Youth Works, an innovative mission project among young people in Oxford, for more than 20 years and one of the founders of CYM (Institute for Children, Youth and Mission) which developed ground-breaking training including degrees, and masters programmes for Christian youth and children's workers. Sam champions children's and young people's participation in

church life and mission, intergenerational practices, and new ways of being church and can be called on to speak on these issues.



### **The Revd Anne Sardeson**

Anne Sardeson is a minister in the URC and has ministered in multi-cultural London before

moving to rural Essex. She trained for ministry many years ago in Manchester and then studied for an MA in Pastoral Theology at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge. She is fascinated by all things worship, and in particular hymns and prayers: the process of writing them and their place in worship. She's also committed to LGBTQI+ issues from the inside out and has an interest in faith and mental health. Before returning to pastoral work she was a trainer for the URC and appears to have no fear of large groups of people.



### **The Revd David Coleman**

**Environmental  
speaker**

Ordained 1995,  
and a member

of the Iona Community, the Revd David Coleman is EcoChaplain for EcoCongregation Scotland, the movement of Scottish churches committed to partnership with Creation. The chaplaincy is a special category ministry, working ecumenically, visiting grassroots congregations from the Borders to Shetland, and in conversation with training institutions. David curates the annual "Season of Creation" resource. The remit includes availability to the wider URC too. Having attended COP26, David has been confronted by the rapid and alarming changes which affect life on Earth, and works to help churches repurpose language, prayer and action, accordingly, building spiritual resilience. Qualified in digital graphics; since lockdown, his reflective video resources have enriched contact with congregations and other groups.



# Structure and organisation diagram

Level 1

## Local Churches

**Elders' Meeting**  
(Ministers and Elders)

**Church Meeting**  
(all members)

Level 2

## 13 Synods

The National Synod of Wales, the National Synod of Scotland and 11 regional Synods in England

Level 3

## General Assembly

The national decision-making body

## Assembly Executive

(executive body which meets once a year to review and continue of work of the General Assembly)

## URC Youth Assembly

(Children and Youth)

Ecumenical links

# URC Synod Map

