



The **United Reformed Church**
National Synod of Wales

Yr **Eglwys Ddiwygiedig Unedig**
Synod Cenedlaethol Cymru

Ecumenical and Inter-faith Strategy

Approved at Synod Meeting 14th October 2023

John 17: 20-23 (NIV UK)

Jesus prays for all believers.

²⁰ My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ *that all of them may be one*, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – ²³ I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

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Preface

Ecumenism and inter-faith relations have always been part of the life of the National Synod of Wales. The Synod reflects what occurs with the United Reformed Church UK and plays a prominent part in progressing these matters within Wales. We do many things very well but there is still room for improvement.

This Strategy is presented at a time of great change for the churches in Wales, not only churches that are part of the United Reformed Church. The way we ‘do’ ecumenism and the way we relate to other faiths in our context needs to be affirmed. Building on what is already good and offering direction on how to develop in other ways, the Strategy is a prayerful, pragmatic approach that ensures Ecumenism and Inter-faith Relations are prominent within the life of the Synod and Churches.

The Strategy is in two parts. PART 1 deals with Ecumenism and PART 2 deals with Inter-faith Relations. Both parts have strategic aims and objectives – what we will do, some suggestions of working together using established methods and an encouragement to progress with new initiatives – how we will do things, and implementation methods that show the responsibility of churches, councils and individuals – who will do it.

This document is large! But it contains the source information and material that can be referenced in the future. You only need to consider the part(s) that help you in your role within the Synod. It may be useful for you to look at the section that relates to Implementation and Responsibilities, as each part of the Synod contributes to the strategy. For example, there is a section on the role of the local church and another section relating to Ministers and Elders.

It is our hope that all involved will respond positively and embrace the approaches the Synod has laid out for Ecumenical and Inter-faith Relations, and that we remember the prayer of Jesus, when he prayed that “all of us may be one”.

PART 1 - Ecumenism

Strategic Aim

The principle aim of this Strategy is for the United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales to intentionally embed into all our activities the missional ethos of ecumenism, so we are an ecumenical movement in Wales. Mission is the priority and ecumenical initiatives are some of the ways to achieve that Mission. The Synod's aspiration is that Wales will become an Ecumenical Nation, and the United Reformed Church will promote this ambition with its partners.

Strategic Objectives

The Strategic Objectives are defined as, but not restricted to:

1 Advancing ecumenical activity within the National Synod of Wales.

In the main, this is achieved through local ecumenical action, using the methods outlined in the Churches Together in England publication - *A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission*. The toolkit suggests three ways in which local mission can be achieved, through a Working Agreement, a Partnership Agreement or a Constitutional Agreement. The agreements are briefly explained below.

Working Agreement	Partnership Agreement	Constitutional Agreement
When a simple record is all that is needed for a cross-church activity. Provides a simple outline of the agreed local informal arrangements.	When the activity requires coordination of resources , ministry, and pastoral provision.	When a new body is being created. It <u>may</u> involve registration with the Charity Commission, has trustees, and sets up the governance structures of the new body.
Denominational approval not required.	Requires denominational approval according to the organisation of the churches involved.	Requires denominational approval according to the organisation of the churches involved.

(The full version is available from [the Churches Together in England website](#) or the Synod office)

The framework means local churches and the Synod can exploit opportunities to engage with other churches and organisations informally and through formal arrangements, for example, Local Ecumenical Partnerships or Shared Ministry. This should be the responsibility of the local Church, Regional Pastoral Committees and Councils of the Synod. *(Note: There may be some local ecumenical actions that don't need an agreement of any kind, for example: joint services, Week of Prayer events; Good Friday walks of witness; shared support for Food Banks or Street Pastors. This is to encourage Churches to engage in local ecumenism.)*

The Ecumenical Officer will offer specialist subject matter advice when required.

2 Developing the Synod's relationship with partners in Wales.

This is achieved through intentional engagement by the Synod with Cytûn, Commission of Covenanted Churches, Free Church Council of Wales, Christian Aid, local Councils of Churches, Ecumenical and Inter-faith Officers' Network, Inter-faith forum, Inter-faith council of Wales, as well as the Synod level cross denominational meetings with the denominations in Wales. In the main, this is the responsibility of the Councils of the Synod and any Synod Office Team member that represents the Synod on any committee, group or forum where ecumenism is on the agenda. The Ecumenical Officer will offer specialist subject matter advice when required.

3 Participating in the United Reformed Church's (UK) ecumenical activity.

The National Synod of Wales is but one of the Synods that make up the United Reformed Church of the United Kingdom. Some ecumenical initiatives are developed in collaboration with other UK churches and Christian organisations (for example the Methodist Church of Great Britain), and some come from the larger denominations and organisations in England (for example the Church of England and Christian Aid). The National Synod of Wales contributes to this form of ecumenism by participating fully in the UK Councils of the Church, including the General Assembly. In the main, this is achieved through elected or nominated representatives and through the Ecumenical Reference Group, which is a group of the National Ecumenical Officers from England, Scotland and Wales. The responsibility for promoting UK national ecumenical initiatives lies with the committee or board that has stewardship of the subject. Specialist advice will come from the UK national officers and/or convenors that manage national ecumenical projects.

Introduction to Ecumenism

The terms ecumenism and ecumenical come from the Greek οἰκουμένη (oikoumene) and is the concept and principle that Christians who belong to different Christian denominations should work together to develop closer relationships among their churches and promote Christian unity. Christians believe that Jesus was the ultimate example of reconciliation because his crucifixion and resurrection healed the broken relationship between God and humanity. We try to follow Jesus' example by working for reconciliation in the world. Ecumenism is a form of reconciliation that aims to bring the different denominations of Christianity together.

Ecumenism is a vision, a movement, a theology, and a mode of action. It represents the universality of the people of God and affects the way Christians think about their faith, the church, and the world. Ecumenism is a long process that draws Christians together, uniting their life and mission and bringing the Body of Christ and the human community closer to the fulfilment of God's purposes.

To be ecumenical is to work toward worldwide Christian unity or cooperation. The ecumenical movement seeks *unity in diversity*, that we may be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus prayed for in John 17: "*I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one ... so the world may believe.*"

The United Reformed Church is an ecumenical movement. It supports and encourages unity amongst the Christian traditions in the United Kingdom and has ecumenism rooted at the

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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 its mission.

The United Reformed Church's ecumenical mission requires that it plays a full part in

- Ecumenical Partnerships
- Ecumenical Organisations in the UK
- Interdenominational Dialogue
- European and Worldwide Councils of the Church

The United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales reflects this approach to ecumenism and at Synod level, we are key stakeholders and participate with our Christian partners in

- Local Ecumenical Partnerships
- Cytûn
- the Free Church Council of Wales
- the Commission of Covenanted Churches
- Interdenominational Dialogue with National Denominations
- Christian Aid Committees
- Local Councils of Churches
- Wales national youth and children councils/forums

All Ecumenical activity relates to our Mission.

The Mission of the Church

The United Reformed Church defines Mission as “sharing God’s vision of justice and love for all people in the world around us, including our local neighbourhood.”

Churches Together in England (CTE) declares that “Mission (missio dei) is the total redeeming work of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – in saving, healing, restoring and renewing the World. The Church is invited to join in this adventure. Simply put: mission begins and ends in God.”

This strategic aim is all about the Mission of the Churches and Synod of the United Reformed Church in Wales, through the theology of ecumenism. Ecumenical theology is focussing on God’s will for unity among Christians. This is an important concept. All ecumenical activity must serve to further Mission.

The toolkit (explained at [objective 1](#) above) helps to achieve local mission and the Synod’s approach to Ecumenism will be Missional, Relational and Structural. This technique feeds into *A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission* and is an additional part of the toolkit that can be deployed to achieve the strategic aim. To be Missional, Relational and Structural follows the triune nature of the church. The church is a living organism, a particular kind of a very real body, where all members function together in a network where people learn, share experiences and serve communities and life. The church’s mission is God’s mission. God’s mission is attained both through our relationship to each other, and the way we develop our structural relationships as the church’s commitment to Missio Dei.

1. Missional

The missional church is a community of God's people that defines itself, and organizes its life around, its real purpose of being an agent of God's mission to the world. In other words, the church's true and authentic organizing principle is 'mission'. Mission is about sharing God's vision of justice and love for all people in the world around us, including our local community. What do we need to do to further our mission in our context? This is the first question to ask when considering the most appropriate way of engaging ecumenically.

2. Relational

From the time that Jesus called his first disciples, people have been in a relationship with God, through Christ and his Holy Spirit. In the same way, we are relational in the Church today. And having a relational connection to others means that the mission of the church is relational. One supports the other. The missional church will be relational. What do we need to do to ensure a firm commitment to relational approaches that underpin the mission? This is the second question to ask when considering the most appropriate ways of engaging ecumenically.

3. Structural

In this respect, structural does not mean the bricks and mortar that make up our church buildings. It means developing and maintaining a structure that equips and empowers every believer to be missional. Within Wales, churches have different structural ways of managing mission. Even those that are part of the same denomination have varying and, in some cases, contrasting structural methods and this is true of local United Reformed Churches. It is important that partners in an ecumenical arrangement are aware of the differing structural approaches and governance arrangements of each other. Any sharing agreement will be cognisant of how best to manage structural arrangements to further the mission of the partnership. What cohesive structural ways do we employ to ensure we have a common vision and understanding that makes mission achievable? This is the third question to ask when considering the most appropriate way of engaging ecumenically.

Ongoing Ecumenical Projects

The United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales has in place a number of ecumenical initiatives that are already being used to further Mission.

Local Ecumenical Partnerships

Most structural ecumenical initiatives are managed through Local Ecumenical Partnerships. The United Reformed Church was established as an ecumenical church and has been, and still is, a prominent lead in setting up Local Ecumenical Partnerships. The term Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEP) describes the situation where more than one Christian denomination is working together under a formal agreement. As this is the main ecumenical focus of the United Reformed Church, this is a brief explanation of LEPs.

Across Great Britain, the URC is involved in around 400 LEPs; our most common partnerships are with the Methodist Church, the Baptists and the Church of England. The Methodist Church is our closest ecumenical partner with whom we share in approximately 300 LEPs, 100 of which also comprise one or more additional ecumenical partners.

There are 12 LEPs which include the Roman Catholic Church and a total of four united congregations, with the Moravian Church. We have eight LEPs with the Church of Scotland.

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In Wales, LEPs exist with the Church in Wales, the Methodists, the Baptists, the Presbyterian Church of Wales and the Union of Welsh Independents. Of the 79 Churches in the National Synod of Wales 29 are involved with a LEP (37%). In terms of church polity, the United Reformed Church is very close to the Presbyterian Church of Wales and share the same understanding of ministry and the ministry of elders. We have 16 churches that are in a LEP with the Presbyterian Church of Wales.

LEP arrangements are necessarily individual to each setting and are established by means of formal documentation. This takes the form of a constitution or model governing document, and usually a sharing agreement, as well as deeds of trust that take note of the original financial assets contributed by each denomination. In the URC National Synod of Wales, support will be given to each LEP in this detailed work and the Synod will generally task the Ecumenical Officer to help guide the process and to co-ordinate the work required of other committees and boards. LEPs will need a Partnership Agreement or a Constitutional Agreement and there are model templates already in place that will be adapted to suit the local situation.

Ecumenical areas

In several parts of Great Britain there are defined Methodist-United Reformed Church ecumenical areas. This is an ecumenical model that encourages regions and circuits to formally come together.

In Wales, we have one such ecumenical area which is the Bridgend United Area, with churches in Bridgend, Porthcawl, Ogmere Vale, Brynna, Gilfach Goch, Cefn Cribwr and Tondu.

In January 2019, the two denominations issued a model constitution for ecumenical areas, which can be adapted to meet local needs. A copy is available from the Synod Office.

The Covenanted Churches and Shared Ministry

The National Synod of Wales of the United Reformed Church is part of the Covenanted Churches in Wales. In 1975, a group of churches agreed to work and pray that they may be brought into one visible Church to serve together in mission to the glory of God the Father. There are five churches/traditions that covenanted, namely:

- The Committee of the Covenanted Baptist Churches in Wales
- The Church in Wales
- The Methodist Church
- The Presbyterian Church of Wales
- The United Reformed Church

The Covenant declares:

Confessing our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and renewing our will to serve his mission in the world, our several churches have been brought into a new relationship with one another.

Together we give thanks for all we have in common.

Together we repent the sin of perpetuating our division.

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Together we make known our understanding of the obedience to which we are called.

The Covenanted Churches work together through the Commission and over the years, there have been attempts at progress towards a fuller uniting church in Wales. It is fair to say that the attempts have not been as fruitful as hoped and prayed for, but there are a number of matters agreed upon that can be used in an ecumenical setting, for example, an agreed form of liturgy to celebrate Holy Communion and Baptism. This can be found on the [Cytûn website](#) or is available from the Synod Office.

The Commission has re-stated its ecumenical vision of Shared Ministry and the latest update, published in 2020, explains, “The Commission of the Covenanted Churches invites Churches within the Covenant in Wales to renew their commitment to sharing ministry”.

The policy is clear and states that, “those ordained ministers of Word and Sacraments who are fully recognized by their churches may share ministry across the other Covenanted Churches in a local ecumenical setting in accordance with current regulations.”

The Shared Ministry publication can be found on the [Cytûn website](#) or is available from the Synod Office. Shared Ministry can be achieved through a Working Agreement if it is a one off event such as a united Communion Service. Other forms of Shared Ministry are likely to need a Partnership Agreement or a Constitutional Agreement and the Councils of the Synod will be involved in supporting the local Church or Regional Pastoral Committee as necessary.

Local Ecumenism

Many ecumenical activities happen at local level. The following are examples:

- Special united services
- Walks of Witness
- Gymanfa Ganu
- Open the Book
- Community engagement
- Food banks
- Street pastors
- Back to Church Sunday
- Bible studies
- Alpha course
- Bible society courses
- Volunteer community chaplains
- Sunday school projects
- Church holiday groups
- Holiday clubs
- Retreat days
- Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- Christian Aid local appeals
- Remembrance Services
- Pulpit swop
- Eco Church
- Messy Church
- Youth Club
- Children and Youth
- Toddler Groups
- United Sunday School
- Mission Partnerships
- Pilots
- Community Café
- Stepwise
- Memory choirs
- Clothing banks

Some of the ecumenical activities are managed and organised by the local church, for example United Services or Walks of Witness and others are organised by national

associations and made available for local adaptation, for example Week of Prayer for Christian Unity or the Chaplaincy Service at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society Showground. The next section defines some of the common approaches that can be taken to accomplish this strategy.

Implementation and Responsibilities

The established approaches provide clear examples and methods that demonstrate churches can work ecumenically to further a common mission and witness. Local Churches, Regional Pastoral Committees and the Boards and Councils of the United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales must consider all available processes to further our Strategic Ecumenical aim. Each constituent part of the United Reformed Church in Wales has an important role to play, and the next section looks at what can be done to stimulate and encourage ecumenism in Wales and to give some sense of who does what and how we achieve the Strategic Aim.

Local Church

Having regard to the description of [ecumenism](#) above, the local church is well placed to encourage greater cooperation and union among neighbouring churches. The Structures of the United Reformed Church explain that two of the functions of the local Church are:

- (i) to further the Church's mission in the locality;
- (ii) to develop local ecumenical relationships;

In the United Reformed Church, the Church Meeting is the deciding authority for matters affecting local mission and ecumenism. Ideas and initiatives may come from individuals or other local church councils, but it is the Church Meeting that agrees and authorises ecumenical activity. It is also a function of the Elders Meeting to foster in the congregation concern for ecumenical action. Structure 2(2)(i). Therefore it is proper that plans are shared and discussed with the Church Meeting and any decision is recorded in the minutes.

The Toolkit has a number of suggested approaches that can be adapted locally. These include having a lead church model, a formal ecumenical 'welcome' process and simple agreements to share buildings. In addition, there is a scale that helps the local church decide whether it needs a working, partnership or constitutional agreement. The Church Meeting should decide where the ecumenical project appears on the scale.

- a. If it is a cross church activity that makes few demands of the churches involved or has a specified timescale, or is simply joining together for worship, the church meeting should maintain a simple record of the arrangements as a [working agreement](#).
- b. If the activity requires a more co-ordinated approach involving numerous resources or the provision of ministry and makes several significant demands, impacting the life of the churches, or will be ongoing for a considerable period, with the option of long-term commitment, this would require a [partnership agreement](#) and is likely to need

support, guidance and possibly approval from one of the Councils of the Synod. The Church Meeting should involve Synod accordingly.

- c. If the activity goes beyond a partnership agreement and a whole new body is being created involving all the life and resources of the participating churches, this would be a [constitutional agreement](#) and the Church Meeting must involve Synod in its plans.

Whichever form of agreement is used, any project plan should follow the basic outline of [Missional, Relational and Structural](#). This will ensure that agreements are not reliant on the good will of individuals alone, but there is a common approach that ensures the ecumenical initiative would continue if the people involved in the matter change.

In all agreements, Safeguarding policies and procedures must be renewed and a decision made as to the risk assessment and training needed in accordance with Safeguarding Policy.

The Regional Pastoral Committee should be kept informed and be ready to offer advice and assistance and support the Church Meeting in coming to the right agreement. Further advice can be given by the appropriate Council of the Synod and the Officer for Ecumenical and Inter-faith Relations. It is essential that the Local Church seeks advice when any ecumenical activity goes beyond a simple working agreement.

Ministers and Elders

Both Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Elders in the United Reformed Church exercise a ministry that includes ecumenism in their role. The expected characteristics of ministers include:

- representing the Church in ecumenical, community and other settings
- meeting with other ecumenical/secular community leaders to discuss joint working or local issues

Elders also have expected characteristics and are called to share responsibility, with the Minister of the Word and Sacraments:

- for the spiritual oversight of the congregation.
- and are committed to play their part in the wider councils of the Church and in ecumenical relationships.

It is further expected that Ministers and Elders within the National Synod of Wales actively seek out ecumenical opportunities and engage with local ecumenical initiatives wherever possible. Such opportunities should be reported via the Regional / Synod Pastoral Committees as necessary.

Councils of the Synod

In addition to the local Church Meeting and Ministers and Elders, several Councils and Boards contribute to the mission and life of the Synod. These are:

- Regional Pastoral Committees

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- Synod Pastoral Committee
- Finance and Property Board
- URC (Wales) Trust Company Limited
- Mission and Discipleship Board
- Synod Support Team
- Children and Youth Working Group
- Synod Leadership Group
- Safeguarding Reference Group
- Synod Panel for Interviewing Ministerial Candidates
- Wales District Council

All Councils and Boards of the United Reformed Church in Wales have a degree of responsibility in supporting ecumenism. It is accepted that some Councils and Boards will have more involvement with ecumenical projects than others, and these are listed below, but all Councils and Boards must be concerned about ecumenism and consider if an ecumenical response would be an appropriate way to manage any issues that come before them. It shall be a requirement that all Councils and Boards include ecumenism on any agenda. This is particularly important to those Councils and Boards that do not have the Ecumenical Officer as a member.

Whenever an ecumenical initiative is referred, or a request for assistance is made to a Council or Board, that Council or Board is responsible for ensuring the initiative contributes to the Strategic Aims and Objectives of the Synod and the appropriate agreement is in place, be it a [Working, Partnership or Constitutional Agreement](#). Further, Councils and Boards must cascade information to partner Councils and Boards as necessary to ensure the right support is given.

The following section explains the specific responsibilities of the Council or Board that is more likely to be involved with ecumenical matters.

Regional Pastoral Committee

- The main point of contact and support for local Churches
- Encourage local ecumenical initiatives
- Support the Missional ethos of the United Reformed Church
- Advise on the agreement(s) needed
- Include ecumenism on the meeting agenda

Synod Pastoral Committee

- Support the Regional Pastoral Committee
- Ensure the appropriate agreement is in place
- Give concurrence to cross denominational ecumenical initiatives
- Provide project management support as necessary
- Ensure engagement of other Councils or Boards as necessary
- Include ecumenism in any local ministry and mission review

- Include ecumenism on the meeting agenda

Finance and Property Board

- Include ecumenism on the meeting agenda
- Providing concurrence for projects and initiatives
- Allocating grants from Synod funding sources
- Reviewing and agreeing Synod and Trust policies
- Agreeing Constitutions

URC (Wales) Trust Company Limited

- Draft and agree Partnership Agreements
- Assist FPB in drawing up Constitutions
- Prepare Sharing Agreements (with supporting finance schedules)
- Formulate Deeds of Trust.

Mission and Discipleship Board

- Seek out ecumenical mission opportunities
- Explore cross denominational discipleship programmes
- Encourage ecumenical initiatives with children, young people and families work
- Explore ecumenical approaches to environmental matters
- Include ecumenism in any local ministry and mission review
- Include ecumenism on the meeting agenda

The approach that all Councils and Boards must take is to ensure that consideration is given to ecumenism and ecumenical initiatives in their area of business and responsibility. Any scheme of work that helps to achieve the aims and objectives of this strategy will need to be effectively managed and follow established project planning methods. In particular, project plans should follow the SMART model, and ensure that project objectives contribute to the strategic aim and objectives in this strategy. Linking separate project aims to the Ecumenical Strategy is key for ensuring a successful project.

The SMART model is included at [Appendix A](#).

Synod Support Team

In addition to the Councils and Boards of the Synod, the Synod Support Team must also engage in ecumenism to achieve the aims and objectives of this strategy. All officers are members of at least one Council or Board, but this section is making sure that all members of the Synod Support Team have regard for the ecumenical ethos of the Synod in their everyday work.

Officer for Ecumenical and Inter-faith Relations

The strategic lead for Ecumenism is the Officer for Ecumenical and Inter-faith Relations. The role is a General Assembly appointment, and the Officer has responsibilities within the Synod of Wales and plays a key part in the work of the Ecumenical Officers' Reference Group, that promotes ecumenism and approaches across Wales, Scotland and England.

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The role profile for the Officer for Ecumenical and Inter-faith Relations can be obtained from the Synod Office but the main activities are:

- Advancing ecumenical activity within the National Synod of Wales
- Developing the Synod's relationship with partners
- Work at Synod and Assembly level on behalf of the National Synod of Wales
- Undertake specific projects as directed by the Synod Pastoral Committee
- Practice episcopate in bringing the national to the local

Synod Moderator

The Synod Moderator's role description includes encouraging ecumenical commitment and endeavour across the Synod and being proactive in encouraging fruitful ecumenical activities and to ensure the United Reformed Church is represented at church leaders' meetings and ecumenical events. The Synod Moderator is also a key person in the formation of pastorates and the deployment and movement of ministers.

The Moderator will refer to ecumenical initiatives when leading worship and attending meetings and when future possibilities for ministry are being discussed.

The Moderator will welcome ecumenical guests at Synod Meetings.

Where ecumenical developments involve changes in pastorates, the EIRO and Moderator will consult with each other and work on implications for deployment strategy with the relevant Regional Pastoral Committee and the Synod Pastoral Committee.

Where the role and duties of a URC minister change with formal ecumenical agreements, the EIRO and Moderator will consult with each other and work with those involved.

Where a minister of another denomination may serve United Reformed Church congregations on a Certificate of Limited Service, the Moderator will work on the Synod and URC processes.

Where the Synod is to be represented at ecumenical meetings or events, the EIRO and Moderator will consult about the appropriate person. Where there are discussions about deploying ministers, the Moderator will usually be involved, and work on building relationships to promote ecumenism. The Moderator will normally attend church leaders' meetings and preside at inductions in LEPs or agree an appropriate deputy, which may be a Synod Support Team member or a member of the relevant RPC.

Synod Clerk

The Synod Clerk's role is to ensure the smooth and efficient running of the Synod facilitating a spirit of communication and cooperation across the work of the Synod. As convenor and/or member of many of the Councils of the Synod, the Synod Clerk will:

- Ensure that Ecumenism appears on the agenda for Synod Meeting, Synod Pastoral Committee, Synod Support Team Meeting, Synod Leadership Group

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- Contribute to discussions on Ecumenism and ensure it is considered in any policy discussions
- Actively look for opportunities to promote and foster ecumenical work in the Synod

The Synod Clerk currently represents the Synod on CYTŪN's Racial Justice Network.

Trust Company Secretary/Synod Treasurer

The Company Secretary for the United Reformed Church (Wales) Trust Company Limited and Synod Treasurer for the United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales are posts held by one individual. The two roles cover a range of practical and compliance issues from finance to governance.

Regarding ecumenism, the Trust Company Secretary/Synod Treasurer:

- Provides specific and specialist advice on all ecumenical matters that involve property and assets;
- Provides line management to the Property Officer
- Advises on the financial implications of ecumenical projects and considers sources of grants monies that may be needed;

Property Officer

The Property Officer supports congregations in managing property, including church buildings, land, graveyards and manses, held in trust on behalf of the Synod by the URC (Wales) Trust Co Ltd. The Property Officer liaises with congregations and the Finance and Property Board to request concurrence and implement decisions.

Regarding ecumenism, the Property Officer:

- supports Local Ecumenical Partnerships based in URC-held property in the management of buildings and land;
- provides guidance for the property aspects of sharing agreements and deeds of trust;
- liaises with Local Ecumenical Partnerships in seeking concurrence and/or Synod grant funding for property-related projects.

Training and Development Officer

The Training and Development Officer works with local churches, members, elders, and ministers to identify and develop training needs, and implements the Synod's strategy for training and development, including worship, ecology, discipleship, ministry, mission, continuing ministerial development, and other areas of church life.

Regarding ecumenism, the Training and Development Officer

- Works with the ecumenical instruments in Wales and through personal relationships with officers in other Churches, to develop ecumenical initiatives for the provision of training and development.

Children and Youth Development Officer

The Children and Youth Development Officer's role is to ensure that churches, their staff and those who act as leaders are encouraged, enabled and effective in their work with children and young people and to ensure this takes place in a safe environment.

Regarding ecumenism, the CYDO:

- Encourages and empowers young people to take an active part in youth based ecumenical activities;
- Seeks opportunities that allow young people that are part of any LEP to participate fully in local ecumenical projects;
- Ensures that any URC children or youth group has involvement in Synod ecumenical projects or initiatives;
- Acts as the conduit for information and communication from any Synod committee to the Children and Youth group;

Safeguarding Officer

The Safeguarding Officer works with congregations to make churches 'safer places', providing support, advice and training, and responding appropriately when safeguarding issues arise. Each church is encouraged to appoint a Safeguarding Coordinator. Where a congregation is URC and worships in a URC owned building, it is recommended that the church follows URC safeguarding policy (Good Practice 5). Where a church is a Local Ecumenical Partnership and worships in a building owned by a different denomination such as Presbyterian Church in Wales, Methodist or Baptist, it is recommended that the church follows the safeguarding policy associated with the relevant denomination.

Regarding ecumenism, the Synod Safeguarding Officer

- Works closely with colleagues in other denominations doing an equivalent role, especially Presbyterian Church in Wales, Methodists and Baptists. (These are the three denominations most often found in Local Ecumenical Partnerships).
- Attends the Wales Christian Safeguarding Forum, representing the URC.
- Shares information as appropriate with colleagues in other denominations.

Synod Office Staff

Office staff have direct and regular communication with churches and individuals across the Synod. As such, they are well placed to promote ecumenism and the ecumenical strategy. All staff will be mindful of the importance of ecumenical work when dealing with churches and ensure that processes in place with other denominations, (eg payments to the PCW for an ecumenical chaplaincy grant; payments to Cytun for ecumenical work; and payments to the UWI for the church marquee at the Pembrokeshire County Show) are observed in a timely manner.

Summary

The United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales continues its ecumenical journey. There have been many successes over the years, evidenced by the number of Local Ecumenical Partnerships that are in the Synod, some of which were formed in the early 1980s forty years ago. There is much that goes on in our communities, where the local church is a leading light in sharing its mission. Ecumenism is one of the major theological and practical ways that help us towards visible unity in one faith. The more we advance this unity, the closer we get to what Jesus prayed for, namely that we “may be one...so the world may believe”.

Whilst acknowledging our sin of division within the Church of Jesus Christ, we continue on our ecumenical journey in hope. Hope that we show a visible unity to the world, hope that what we are doing is God’s plan – His mission, hope that our continuing efforts will bring peace and justice to the whole world. God’s plan is universal, we are part of something great. And all of us have something to offer.

PART 2 – Inter-faith Relations

Introduction to Inter-faith Relations

The word "inter-faith" describes an interaction between people of different religions or faith traditions. But it is more than that. It is about understanding our significant differences, but also recognizing our similarities, and working together for peace, justice and healing in our world.

Inter-faith cooperation is not about renouncing religions or combining all religions into one. In fact, many people find that their friendships with people in other traditions strengthen their understanding and respect for their own tradition.

Inter-faith friendships reach out across the stereotypes and misunderstandings that lead to religiously motivated violence. They reinforce the idea that, regardless of religion or belief tradition, every human deserves respect.

Inter-faith interactions live out the core values that are shared by all religions - values like compassion, respect, love, hope and peace, which are necessary for sustaining life in all communities.

In the UK today, we live in the conscious presence of religious diversity. Many congregations and members are located just a stone throw away from mosques, gurdwaras, Hindu temples, synagogues and viharas. In their local communities, some members of our churches will be in daily contact with colleagues and neighbours of different faiths, and many have friendships across faith traditions. This strategy is about developing those friendships and connections and empowering the local church to take the initiative in local matters of inter-faith.

Strategic Aim

The main aim of the inter-faith strategy for the United Reformed Church in Wales is to build positive relationships with people from all the faith groups in Wales. This is an important part of the mission of the United Reformed Church.

Strategic Objectives

The Strategic Objectives are defined as, but not restricted to:

1. Advancing inter-faith activity across the National Synod of Wales.

The local church is best placed to develop local initiatives that promote inter-faith activity. Such activities would include a faith response to local or national events that have an impact on the community, vigils, call to public prayer and inter-faith community projects such as food banks. Churches of the United Reformed Church are encouraged to engage with faith groups in their community. Advice can be sought from the Synod and the Officer for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations should be approached if the local church has any questions or queries.

2. Developing the Synod's relationship with inter-faith partners in Wales.

The inter-faith council of Wales is the body through which the Synod engages with faith partners. The inter-faith council is charged with building Trust and respect between people of all faiths throughout Wales. Members of the inter-faith council include: Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity (Church in Wales, Churches Together in Wales – Cytûn, Evangelical Alliance Wales, Free Church Council, Roman Catholic Church in Wales), Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism.

Further, the Faith Communities Forum (which is an organ of the Senedd) facilitates meetings at ministerial level with all the above faith groups. The United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales is represented on these groups through the President/Moderator of the Free Church Council of Wales.

3. Participating in the United Reformed Church's (UK) inter-faith activity.

The Officer for Ecumenical and Inter-faith relations is a member of the inter-faith enabling group of the United Reformed Church (UK). Through this forum, the Synod has access to:

- a) **The inter-faith fund** – The promotion of contact, understanding and respect among Christians, Jews and members of other faith communities, in ways consonant with the beliefs and practices of the United Reformed Church.
- b) **Israel and Palestine** - the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)
- c) **Initiatives and events** – Holocaust Memorial Day, Inter-faith Week and policies that allow use of church buildings by other faith groups.

Further details of the above can be obtained from the Officer for Ecumenical and Inter-faith Relations or via the United Reformed Church website.

Summary

While inter-faith matters in the UK have made significant strides, challenges still exist. These include combating religious discrimination, countering religious extremism, and addressing interfaith tensions that occasionally arise. However, the Synod's commitment to interfaith dialogue and cooperation provides opportunities for overcoming these challenges and promoting a more inclusive society.

Overall, inter-faith matters in Wales reflect a commitment to fostering understanding, respect, and cooperation between diverse religious communities. Through dialogue, collaboration, and educational initiatives, Wales seeks to create a society that values and appreciates religious diversity, while addressing common challenges and working towards the common good. The United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales is committed to the work of the interfaith council.

The SMART approach to achieving the Ecumenical and Inter-faith Strategy

The SMART model was developed in the early 1980s (see Doran, G. T. (1981). "There's a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management's goals and objectives". *Management Review*. 70 (11): 35–36.) and has been developed and adjusted to suit the needs of the organisation using the model, to achieve its overall strategic aim.

The principle aim of the Ecumenical Strategy is for the United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales to intentionally embed into all our activities the missional ethos of ecumenism, so we are an ecumenical movement in Wales.

This is underpinned by three objectives:

- 1 Advancing ecumenical activity within the National Synod of Wales.
- 2 Developing the Synod's relationship with partners in Wales.
- 3 Participating in the United Reformed Church's (UK) ecumenical activity.

Any ecumenical project or initiative that makes a demand on Synod resources should contribute towards the strategic aim and objectives. Using the SMART model for all ecumenical projects and initiatives will help to achieve this.

S	SPECIFIC	Objective clearly states, so anyone reading it can understand, what will be done and who will do it.
M	MEASURABLE	Objective includes how the action will be measured. Measuring your objectives helps you determine if you are making progress. It keeps you on track and on schedule.
A	ACHIEVABLE	Objective is realistic given the realities faced in the Synod. Setting reasonable objectives helps set the project up for success.
R	RELEVANT	A relevant objective makes sense, that is, it fits the purpose of ecumenism, it fits the culture and structure of the Synod, and it addresses the aims and objectives of the Strategy.
T	TIME-BOUND	Every objective has a specific timeline for completion.