

Celebrate Together – the URC at 50

5. Food is important in our churches.

URCs regularly celebrate the meal we call communion. Bread and wine will be placed on a table and shared with each other as we remember Jesus dying for us and celebrate his being with us today.

Some churches use one common cup that is passed to all those taking part. In others, Elders serve the congregation by handing out bread and individual cups to people where they sit. In the URC only ministers of word and sacrament and others specially authorised to do so can offer communion. We take communion as part of the universal church, and welcome all who wish to share in the meal.

Some services, like Messy Church include food, as well as events, picnics, BBQs and harvest suppers.

Food is also a large part of the URC's mission and outreach. Many of our churches have cafés that serve their communities, or offer meals for seniors, the homeless or dementia groups. Others are involved in food banks and free meals for school age children.

6. Celebrating is an important part of the life of the church. We celebrate Christian Festivals, such as Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, as well as playing an important role in the celebration of people's lives, for example at weddings, baptisms and funerals.

When we do things well, it's good to celebrate it. Local churches may apply to be an Eco-Church or Congregation, or to be recognised as Intercultural churches, Dementia Friendly churches and Children and Youth Friendly churches.

Each year, we are invited to celebrate special Sundays such as Racial Justice Sunday, Environment Sunday and Education Sunday. The monthly Lundie Medal celebrates children and young people who have made a difference by playing their part in the mission of God.

Music plays an important part in URC worship and in 1991 we produced our own hymn book Rejoice and Sing. It reflects a special focus on social justice and faith in action in our denomination, as well as praise and worship. A number of well-known hymn writers have come from our tradition, including Isaac Watts, Fred Kaan, Brian Wren and Alan Gaunt.

The URC also publishes an annual Prayer Handbook, and offers Daily Devotions online.

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7. Sharing and exploring the word of God together is an important part of our faith.

A URC service might start with the Bible being carried in, then follow the pattern of preparing to hear the word, hearing the word, and responding to the word.

We share and explore the Bible together, perhaps through a sermon, Godly Play storytelling, café-style discussions, small group Bible studies, and Messy Church.

Discipleship is lifelong learning together.

The URC has three Regional Centres for Learning that provide formal training and education (Scottish College, Westminster College, and Northern College). In 2019, the URC replaced its Training Learning and Serving programme with Stepwise, which is accessible for ALL ages and stages in the URC as part of ongoing discipleship.

From Pilots, serving children and young people since 1936, and Congregationalists developing junior church after the second world war, to Forest Church today, many churches continue to find new and exciting ways to engage with all ages - not least by creative responses to the Covid pandemic restrictions.

8. We gather together regularly in our local churches as well as at Synod meeting, Big days out, Youth Assembly and General Assembly. These are opportunities to share our news, make decisions and direct the future life of the church, as well as enjoy fun and fellowship.

Different networks support particular emphases within the life of the church, such as the Group for Evangelism and Renewal (GEAR), Free to Believe, Together Ethnic and Minority URC, URC Spirituality, Cascades of Grace, URC Holiday Forum, Racial Justice Advocates, URC History Society, and URC Guide and Scout Fellowship.

Reform magazine was founded in 1972 as a forum for news, comment, inspiration and debate, and a digital version was launched in 2015. News, resources and information are shared through the URC website, social media channels, newsletters and, increasingly, via YouTube.

Our archive collection, launched in 2012, tells the story of the whole URC from its foundation in 1972 to the present day. It documents every area of our life and is housed in the Congregation thrt

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9. In 2022, the URC celebrates its 50th Anniversary, its Golden Jubilee Year.

We are committed to God and each other, to walking the way – living the life of Jesus today, together.

The URC has a strong tradition of social justice and missional engagement. We work with other denominations through the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) to research and campaign on issues such as debt, climate change, refugees, food poverty, and homelessness. We partner with Christian Aid and Global Justice Now through Commitment for Life to engage with, and support, people across the world to tackle poverty, education and climate justice.

Through the Council for World Mission we are in partnership with 31 other churches around the world. Together, we are reflecting on how to respond to historic transatlantic slavery and the legacies of ongoing racism and injustice. We are also becoming alert to the reality of modern-day slavery and our responsibilities to prevent it and not benefit from it.

In local projects, and supported by Church Related Community Workers, we pursue a vision of everyone living in a supportive community, unburdened by debt, and with fair access to all they need.

10. When we meet together as the family of God, we are offered gifts and opportunities to take away as we leave. No one should leave empty handed.

As disciples of Jesus, we take with us the good news of Jesus to share with others. We take with us faith, hope and love to flood our communities. We believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for everyone.

At the end of a service, we usually offer each other a blessing to take with us as we go out from worship. One blessing from the URC Service for the Word says:

Let us go out into the world,
as bringers of love
as makers of peace,
as messengers of hope,
knowing that the blessing of God, the source of life,
of Jesus Christ, the way to life,
and of the Holy Spirit, the sustainer of life,
is with us today, tomorrow, and forever.
Amen.

