

Synod Big Day Out 2024 – bookings now open!

[Buy your tickets here](#)

Following the success of the last Synod Big Day out at **Hollycombe Steam in the country**, we have booked the site again for our exclusive use on **Saturday 4 May 2024, 10am – 5pm.**

There will be more steam rides open this year and additional programme activities provided by Wessex Synod.

We invite all churches, church user groups and community groups with links to URCs and LEPs in Wessex Synod to come and enjoy a day of fellowship, fun and worship.

Ticket prices are the same as in 2022:

£8 per adult, £5 per child - for up to 10 rides on the attractions

New this year are **tickets for unlimited rides on the attractions:**

Adult £10.50 Child £7.50

A free ticket can be booked for an accompanying carer.

Hollycombe’s fabulous new café will be open this time and there will be other food and refreshment outlets. You are welcome to bring your own picnic.

We have listened to feedback and so this time the layout for the Synod activities will be more central and accessible for all. Synod activities include a large marquee with worship, stories and entertainment, as well as a marketplace with crafts, Synod Youth Executive, and church connections, forest church and a nature walk.

We look forward to seeing you there.

Jubilee Ministers

We have a large number of Ministers in Wessex who will be celebrating a significant Anniversary of their Ordination in 2024.

50th Anniversary:

Cliff Bembridge
Bernie Collins
Richard Davis
Margaret Evans

60th Anniversary:

Stephen Thornton
Derek Wensley

70th Anniversary:

Tony Tucker

60 YEARS ON! By Revd Stephen Thornton

Called to be a Minister of Word and Sacraments at 8 years old; leaving College and University at 25; ordained on 18th July, 1964; serving churches in Indiana, Yorkshire, Cheshire, Cumbria, California, Newcastle and the Wessex Synod of the United Reformed Church for 60 years. I am very grateful to all the members and friends who have sought to live the life of discipleship with me, through good times and bad. Thanks also to my family who have supported me through all the years. It's a different world, a different nation and a different Church now from when I began, so that there has been much learning and change along the pilgrim way, but certain things have been important to me through the years and remain so to this day as we face a challenging future. I share these with you now.

First, and in no particular order, the Reformed Tradition, especially the 'priesthood of all believers'. All Christians are called to Ministry according to their gifts and their situation, and we have no separate clergy.

Second, the place of children in the church, not as the church of tomorrow, but the church of today with so much to share with the adults. After all, I was called aged 8!

Third, the need for all our people to be well versed in scripture, so that we can all share the Bible's glories with young and old.

And fourthly, the church to offer deep pastoral care to its people and all around. This is not only caring for them when they are in trouble, but primarily helping all to find out what God wants them to do with their life, because doing it is life indeed. Without God, we can do little to heal broken people and a broken world, but with God we are enabled to do things beyond our wildest dreams.

The world awaits, so on we go and to God be the glory for ever.

A favourite Bible passage: 1 Peter 2. Vv. 1-10.

A favourite hymn: 497 & 433 in Rejoice & Sing.

A favourite quote: 'All it needs for evil to prosper is for good people to do nothing.'
Stephen M. Thornton.

'Living stones for a living church: buildings for the ministry of Mission' webinar

The URC Buildings Forum Webinar: 'Living stones for a living church: buildings for the ministry of Mission'

Part 1 21 May 7.30pm

Part 2 04 June 7.30pm

This is an open invitation to attend the URC Church Buildings Forum webinar on Zoom on 21 May 2024 7.30-9pm. Following the launch of these webinars just over three years ago, The Revd Dr John P. Bradbury will return as the keynote speaker to address how we may best use our building and assets for mission and ministry, particularly within the context of the Church Life Review and its outworking. As always with the webinars, you will have the opportunity for conversation in

breakout rooms and, importantly, it will also be a listening exercise to hear the questions that you have, the challenges that churches face, and positive ideas, examples and news to be shared.

A complementary and more pragmatically focussed Part Two will take place on 4 June 2024 7.30-9pm. There will be a presentation of North Western Synod's strategy '*A Church with People at the Margins: A Strategy for Mission and Ministry*' and examples of a number of local churches already on that journey, in order to stimulate debate and encourage other synods and local churches.

Coming along to one of the webinars will be more useful than not coming to either, but we do hope that you will be able to attend both.

To register for either or both seminars please email mission@urc.org.uk.

Volunteer with the URC at The Greenbelt Festival 2024!

22 – 25 August 2024 at Boughton House, near Kettering

The theme for this year's festival is: **Dream On**. If you would like to know more about this theme and why it has been chosen, you can read a blog by Paul Northup's, Greenbelt's Creative Director, [here](#).

yoURCafe venue team

As well as being an exciting opportunity to be part of the URC team in the yoURCafe venue, now in its third year, offering food saved from landfill, crafts, talks, music and more, you will also get to enjoy the myriad activities the festival has to offer.

You will receive a complimentary weekend pass, food vouchers and a car or caravan pass as a thank you.

For more information on how to become a volunteer, what is involved, and how to apply, visit <https://urc.org.uk/greenbelt/>

Closing date for applications: **20 April 2024**.

Youth Engagement team

Are you aged 18+?

Do you enjoy supporting 12–17 year-olds?

Have experience, gifts, skills to share?

Then volunteer on the URC Youth Engagement team.

The opportunity comes with festival benefits, training and support.

Email children.youth@urc.org.uk for more information.

United Reformed Church Waldensian Fellowship Gathering

Celebrating 850 years of the Waldensian Movement

Gathering at Hinsley Hall, Leeds - Thursday 18 to Saturday 20 April 2024

This year, the Waldensian Church celebrates the 850th anniversary of the movement started by Pietro Valdo, who sought to preach and live the simple Gospel message.

We shall explore something of the history of the Waldensian movement during our time together.

This will also be an opportunity for us to share our experiences of meeting the Waldensian people, both in Italy and here in Britain – so bring photographs and other memorabilia!

Information about the Gathering, costs and timings, and a booking form, are available from:

George Morton, 4 St Annes Road, Manchester M21 8TD

email: g.morton50@ntlworld.com; telephone: 0161 881 8195

Through the Roof: 'Understanding autistic meltdowns and shutdowns' video

Triona Brading, an autistic Christian who is a Roofbreaker disability champion with Through the Roof, has teamed up with the charity again for a second video: 'Understanding autistic meltdowns and shutdowns at <https://youtu.be/aDD8-exFb-S>.

Triona shares “helpful starting points for discussions with the autistic people in your church” to create awareness and begin dialogue, so autistic people can feel at home.

The new video explains the difference between two different responses an autistic person may have to feeling overwhelmed: an outward response (a meltdown) and an inward response (a shutdown).

It gives useful tips on how to prepare in advance for meltdowns and shutdowns, talking to autistic individuals before anything happens about what support or help they may want. It also covers what you could do if a meltdown or shutdown emotional response is already happening.

Through the Roof: The journey of disability inclusion – as easy as ABC

Disability charity Through the Roof is calling on all UK churches to join the ABC journey of disability inclusion, from Access to Belonging to Commission. They are sharing a new framework – the ABC model – as a simple tool for churches to show that disability inclusion is about more than just access.

Disabled people are hugely under-represented in the Church. 24% of the UK are disabled people: so nearly ¼ of the total UK population. That is more than the percentage of under 18s – yet our churches do not always reflect that percentage, and there is rarely any support or ministry in churches specifically for disabled people.

There are many barriers faced by disabled people to their spiritual life. Access to church buildings is just the first step – people can still feel excluded once they are in a church, if they do not feel like they belong, or that their gifts are valued.

Find out more about the ABC at <https://throughtheroof.org/about/abc-journey/>

Upcoming Synod events

Bookings for all events and training courses to

Ruth Heine at the Synod Office

Email: bookings@urcwessex.org.uk

Tel: 023 8067 4513

Safeguarding

Safeguarding Training – *Flowchart*

The flowchart gives an overview of the various safeguarding training courses on offer and has a table which shows the mandatory level of safeguarding training for various roles within the URC. The [flowchart](#) is on the Synod website.

Safeguarding Quarterly Newsletter – January 2024

Read the latest [newsletter](#) from the Safeguarding Team at Church House.

Safeguarding Training – *Refresher course*

A new Refresher safeguarding training course is now available for people who completed the Foundation and Intermediate level training 3 to 4 years ago. The Refresher course works best as in-the-room training. If your church would like to host a Refresher course, please contact your CYDO to discuss dates.

Safeguarding Training – *dates in 2024*

- **Refresher safeguarding training in the room.**

- Saturday 16 March 2024 at Broadstone URC. 10am – 1pm.
- Saturday 27 April 2024 at Gosport URC. 10am – 1pm.

- **Refresher safeguarding training on zoom.**

6.30pm – 8pm on Thursday 12 September and 19 September 2024.

If your church would like to host safeguarding training, please contact your CYDO to talk about dates.

Safeguarding – *Good Practice 6*

GP6 is now available. Church House has sent out hard copies to Church Safeguarding Coordinators. **GP6 is available online** [here](#).

National Safeguarding Training courses – *various topics*

Specialist Safeguarding training in 2024 organised by Church House. Please see the [poster](#) for the full list of dates and topics.

To book, please email: Emma.Pearce@urc.org.uk

Training Webinars. [Elders as Trustees](#). This is available online for you to access in your own time.

Food Hygiene training - Guildford

There are places available on a Food Hygiene course run by Guildford Baptist Church. The full course is 2 sessions, for a Refresher just attend the second date.

Mondays 15th and 22nd April 2024, 7pm – 10pm. Guildford Baptist Church.

For further information and to book your place go to

<https://guildfordbaptist.churchsuite.com/events/zd3yxdbg>

If you require parking, please add this to the notes section and we will do our best. Cost will be £20 - cash/cheque/bank transfer can be arranged - for new and refresher.

Mental Health First Aid training – with Peter Larkum

Become a certified Mental Health First Aider. Two-day courses in-person or online equivalent which includes four live zoom sessions with the trainer.

Become a certified Youth Mental Health First Aider. This two-day in-person course or online equivalent qualifies you as a MHFA with a specific focus on how that relates to younger people.

Training dates and further information for all courses with trainer Peter Larkum can be found [here](#).

Wessex Synod will cover the cost of the MHFAider training courses.

Please register via Wessex Synod, not direct, and preferably no later than 10 days before the start of the training course.

Email: bookings@urcwessex.org.uk to receive the link to register on the course.

Development and Support

Bookings for all events and training courses to

Ruth Heine at the Synod Office

Email: bookings@urcwessex.org.uk

Tel: 023 8067 4513

From your DSOs

Development and Support Officers Mary and Ray continue to support churches, elderships and ministers, individually and through their work with the pastoral committees.

If you or your church feels that the DSOs can be of assistance, please do be in touch with them.

Ray Stanyon – dso-n@urcwessex.org.uk

Mary Thomas – dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk

Dates in 2024

Listening Skills day – North, Sat 27 April, Collinwood Rd URC, 10.30 - 3.30pm

Church Treasurers' networking zoom, Sat 11 May, 10am – 11.30am

Listening Skills day – South, Sat 18 May, Avenue St Andrew's URC, 10.30–3.30

Elders' Conference, Saturday 22 June 2024 at Sarum College.

Funerals and Weddings training – Saturday 27 July 2024 at Fleet URC.

Children's and Youth Events and Training

Bi-monthly Newsletter – January 2024

[Bi-monthly Newsletter – January 2024](#) from the Children's and Youth Team at Church House.

Talking About ... Supporting LGBTQIA+ young people

Thursday 21 March 2024. 7pm – 8pm.

Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created. (Revelation 4.11)

All too often, churches seem happy to 'other' people who aren't like them. This is as true of people of other faiths or colours – but also true of people who might look exactly the same as us, created in the image of God, but whose sexuality is different.

Young people in particular can feel confused and condemned by a church community that says God loves everyone – but then don't show God's love to them.

In this month's Talking About... session we will be joined by guest speaker Katie Harwood. Katie is a youth worker with the Oasis MediaCity school and community hub and works with a group of LGBTQIA+ young people.

She will share her insights and thoughts as well as offering practical advice about how we can be genuinely inclusive to all young people.

Book your free ticket – www.bit.ly/URCTalkingAbout and encourage others from your church to book as well!

Children's Camp – *bookings now open*

28 – 31 May 2024 at Oakwood Activity Centre. For children in school years 4 – 7, (ages 7 – 12). Early bird bookings before 28 April 2024 – cost £70 per child.

[Further information](#) on the Synod Website.

Youth Camp – *bookings now open*

12 – 14 July 2024 at Gordon Brown Outdoor Centre. For young people in school years 7 – 13 (ages 11 – 17). [Joint Brochure](#) with further information.

Children and youth Work webinar

For those working with children and young people.

Understanding behaviour and additional needs webinar. Available on YouTube [here](#).

Family Film Night – new resource – Wreck It Ralph

Wreck It Ralph – Be You, in your game!

These exciting resources are designed for families to have fun and explore big questions together, all based around a family friendly film. Each film night has a main theme and follows the same pattern. Watch the film together, have fun doing the activities and then explore using the wondering questions. For families who want to link to the Bible, there are 'going deeper' wondering questions to use. This resource can also be used in Sunday Schools, messy church, bible study groups and school assemblies. **Why not consider hosting a family film night and inviting your community to come along?**

Free to download from the [Synod website](#).

Job Opportunities

Sabeel-Kairos UK are looking to appoint someone as an **Events and Campaigns officer** (18 hours a week). All the details here on our website: [We are recruiting! | Sabeel-Kairos](#)

The role has a focus on major events including their presence at Greenbelt and their annual conference, as well as being responsible for a new project with their partner Sabeel Jerusalem which will be sending 50 influential people from the UK to East Jerusalem in the next 3 years. In addition, they hope this post will continue to recruit and mobilise the under 35s to campaign and advocate with them.

If you know anyone who may be interested, please do forward them the job details.

Pioneer Evangelist Vacancy

The Southampton District of the Methodist Church is looking for a **Pioneer Evangelist** to head up a new project in Portsmouth, called Compass.

We are developing a new Christian community based around "families with children" on Portsea Island.

The post will help bring the District's vision to life "Our vision is that we will be an inclusive community providing direction in life by introducing people to Jesus, equipping them to live out their faith effectively as they discover God's plan for their lives and, therefore, impacting Portsmouth positively."

Compass will be a deliberately relational, intergenerational, inclusive, family focused, and disciple making community.

Full-time role (37 hours a week) at £31,500 a year. For more information and an application pack contact: Intergenerational Mission Enabler Mark Tizzard: mark.tizzard@sdmc.org.uk / 07391 017548.

Closing date for applications: Noon on 31 March 2024. Interview date TBC.

Postholder will be a practising Christian (this is an occupational requirement according to the Equality Act 2010, Schedule 9, Part 1), and an enhanced DBS will be required

Other News

URC News Update

[View February's News Update here](#)

News Update is seeking anything of interest for the denomination as a whole from across the country – and the nations.

Any news/photos/event information for the next edition should be sent to:

ann-marie.nye@urc.org.uk

You can subscribe to News Update via the link on the URC website.

Education and Learning bi-monthly newsletter

View Issue 7: February 2024 of [Education and Learning bi-monthly newsletter](#)

Joint Public Issues Team

View JPIT newsletter [Edition 161 \(February\) here](#)

Churches Together in England Newsletter

Latest newsletter available here: <https://cte.org.uk/enews/>

Christians on Ageing Lent Newsletter

Latest newsletter available here: <https://mailchi.mp/cc4ab4227f64/light-after-lent?e=21751e24c6>

News from our Churches

Good News Story – Woking's Solar Panels

Sun's energy powers up Sunday services at Woking United Reformed Church
Woking URC has achieved its dream of powering their entire building using electricity generated by the sun following the installation of 134 solar roof panels and eight large storage batteries. The cutting-edge technology will allow the church to produce and store five months' worth of its annual electricity needs, saving several tons of CO2 emissions every year.

[Read the full story here](#)

News from St Andrew's Walton & Weybridge

St Andrew's Walton & Weybridge has close links with Zimbabwe, and each Sunday they are joined by over 100 people from the local community, either listening to the service a few minutes behind or in the days following the service. The sermon is also used in at least 2 local schools for their weekly assembly. The Zimbabwean community contribute via prayer, prayer-requests, and greetings. They also take part in the services sometimes by doing Bible readings etc. Sometimes they will send messages of support and condolence to the members of St Andrew's who have lost a loved one, and St Andrew's pray for the Zimbabwe community's members when they are ill or have lost someone.

St Andrew's really are one church, meeting in different places on different continents.

[Artpeace Zimbabwe article](#)

Does your church have a good news story?

If your church has something it would like to share with people via the Synod Website page "[Stories from our Churches](#)", please send the article to the [Synod Office](#) and we will publish it on that page.

NB If using photographs please ensure you have signed permission from those people featured for it to be published on the Synod Website (not just for your own personal church's use) and supply this at the same time as submitting the article.

New Stories are added as when they are received, so do keep an eye on the page regularly.

Reminders

Le Weekend franco-britannique: 3-5 May 2024

Celebrating Together

We will celebrate being together again after 5 years. We will take part in Wessex Synod's Big Day Out and have fun with people from across the synod. How is God calling us to come together?

We will meet at Fleet URC in Hampshire. Accommodation will be in nearby hotels and we will eat together as a group. Arrivals from Friday late afternoon. On Saturday we will join people from all over the Synod in the Big Day Out at Hollycombe Steam Fair. We will join in worship at Fleet URC to celebrate. Everything will be in French and English.

3 May	4 May	5 May
Afternoon arrivals 18:30 evening meal 20:30 Depart for hotels	08:00 Breakfast at the church 09:00 depart for Big Day Out at Hollycombe evening meal together	08:30 breakfast 10:00 Sunday Worship 12:30 lunch and depart

Flier and booking form available on the [Synod Website](#).

Moderator's photo/drawing request

Our incoming Moderator, Michael Hopkins, would like to have a small range of notelets/greetings cards printed with images reflecting Wessex.

Everyone in the Synod is invited to send in photos or artwork that they think is suitable, and as many as possible will be used. Michael is not particularly looking for photos or drawings of church buildings, but anything that conveys an idea of Wessex.

Some parameters:

- You can interpret Wessex however that speaks to you.

- Everything submitted must be original, and by submitting you grant permission to the Wessex Synod of the United Reformed Church to use any material submitted for stationery and/or publicity in perpetuity.
- No photos of identifiable people please, to avoid safeguarding or data privacy difficulties. Unidentifiable people in the background are fine.
- Everything must be electronic, so if you draw, paint, etc. please scan it and send in an electronic file.
- Please use wetransfer.com or equivalent for large file sizes.

Send to: office@urcwessex.org.uk

Deadline: Monday 13 May

Line Management Training dates for 2024

The URC have now released the Line Management training dates for 2024.

The sessions will be online on Zoom from 10am to 11:15am.

You can find the training dates and topics here: <https://urc.org.uk/your-church/guidance-support-for-churches-synods/employment-guidance/training-events-and-courses/>

Prayer Calendar

April

7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christchurch Thame • The Beacon Church, Canford Heath
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normandy • Blackbird Leys, Church of the Holy Family
21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swanage • Havant and Emsworth United Reformed Church
28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hindhead, Beacon Hill • Twyford (Berks)

May

5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Martin's West Moors • Petersfield and Liss
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tilehurst, Reading • Southbourne, Immanuel • Braishfield, Romsey
19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woking • Bitterne, Southampton

26	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Godalming United Church• Cumnor, Oxford• Skinner Street, Poole
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**Items for the next edition to office@urcwessex.org.uk
by 12noon on Monday 15th April 2024
Please submit news items in the form of:
a heading; date and venue details; a brief descriptive sentence and a website link.**