

**Part 3**

**Building bridges – values in action**

### **Progressive theology**

AUC theology follows a thread from the ‘radical’ Scottish Reformation through to the present day inclusive affirmation of the LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex) community. It is a theology rooted in the ‘Word of God’ as expressed through the Bible, but with a commitment to always making the experience of God accessible to all. It derives from the broad theological diversity within Congregational tradition – which can make for long-drawn-out, respectful debates.

Historically, the theological hope of the United Reformed Church was organic unity between all reformed churches in the UK within 40 years of its formation in 1972. Since that has not come to pass, the URC has been wrestling with its identity and purpose. It continues to combine its commitment to the Reformed tradition with a passionate belief that all God’s people should be one. The twin ideas of (a) being reformed and always reforming, and (b) Christian unity are two key elements within the identity of the URC – still the only UK denomination that has originated from a union of denominations rather than a schism.

The United Reformed Church maintains a ‘conciliar’ way of working. Authority rests not with bishops or some other hierarchy but, locally, with the Church Meeting, which comprises the members, elders and minister of each local church. Nationally, for issues that affect the United Reformed Church in Scotland, authority rests with decisions taken from representatives from each church, who attend Synod; and decisions on a UK basis at General Assembly. As such, the URC defines itself as a Church in three nations, not a UK Church.

The theology of Congregationalism and Churches of Christ, and then the URC, has always been underpinned by the Word of God in the Bible, which provides the foundation of the faith. As such, an aspiration to emulate the idea of the New Testament church, or a ‘back to basics’ approach, combined with a high value placed on freedom of conscience, is regarded as preferable to doctrine and creeds.

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In particular, this theology is non-credal and not based on a set of rules but evolving and linked to the importance of individual conscience and church meeting and synod decisions to discern God's calling as guided by the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the URC can be described as a 'broad church' where there is room for a breadth of theological opinions to be held together.

When Gudrun Reid moved to Scotland from Sweden in 1968, for example, she was drawn to worship at Hope Park Terrace Congregational Church where she recalls that the Revd Dr. Joyce Collie "did not avoid awkward problems". Gudrun was struck in particular by Joyce's experience of candidating for the Congregational ministry. When interviewed about her core Christian belief, Joyce had made clear that she didn't believe in the Immaculate Conception ('virgin birth') of Jesus. Somewhat to Joyce's surprise she was nevertheless accepted for ordained ministry.

Equally telling is Gudrun's memories of her husband, the philosopher Alec Reid, who described himself as not "a believer" but as being a "fellow traveller" with members of the Augustine congregation. He was responding to the commitment to respectful enquiry that was, and remains, a core principle of congregationalism. Where Alec delivered talks on Socrates, Kierkegaard, democracy and poetry, nowadays congregation members engage regularly, for example, in contextual Bible studies and the AUC Spirituality Book Group.

### **Progressive Christianity**

At AUC we believe that Jesus' example calls us to be an inclusive community that welcomes and values all, regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation or ability. As such, AUC understands itself as a Progressive Christian Community.

Progressive Christianity does not hold to a fixed statement but sees itself as a group of Christians who:

- have found an approach to God through the life and teachings of Jesus
- recognise the faithfulness of other people who have other names for the gateway to

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God's realm, and acknowledge that their ways are true for them, as our ways are true for us

- understand the sharing of bread and wine in Jesus' name to be a representation of an ancient vision of God's feast for all peoples
- invite all people to participate in our community and worship life without insisting that they become like us in order to be acceptable
- know that the way we behave toward one another and toward other people is the fullest expression of what we believe
- find more grace in the search for understanding than we do in dogmatic certainty, more value in questioning than in absolutes
- form ourselves into communities dedicated to equipping one another for the work we feel called to do: striving for peace and justice among all people; protecting and restoring the integrity of all God's creation; and bringing hope to those Jesus called the least of his sisters and brothers
- recognise that being followers of Jesus is costly, and entails selfless love, conscientious resistance to evil, and renunciation of privilege

Worship services at AUC are characterised by inclusivity and progressiveness and provide a space where the community comes together to hear how the Christian story resonates in our lives today, to encounter the Living God and share in times of challenge and celebration. Services can include elements of silence, prayer, singing, sharing bread and wine, pictures, preaching, Bible readings, music, interviews and discussion.

Communion is celebrated on the first and third Sunday of the month and children are welcome to share fully in communion, as is anyone else who would like to. The baptism of adults and children can be celebrated as part of Sunday services. The celebration of weddings is available for all couples regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

Moreover, the inclusivity we witness in Augustine's is also a clear theme in the URC Synod of Scotland's 2009 aspirations, which seek to:

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- celebrate in our worship and in our living God's **unconditional love** as revealed in Christ
- respond to God's love through **inclusive** worship
- show that the love of God is **radical**; continue our **journey** towards church unity understand; and work with, people of **other faiths and none**; work for **peace and justice**
- act on our concern for all God's **creation**
- be committed to **developing** our faith both personally and corporately

## **Women**

From the outset of the nineteenth century the Congregational Union was responsible for the setting up of separate fundraising and educational committees for women, which had the benefit of allowing women to organise themselves, handle money, run meetings, speak in public and hear women missionaries speak.

Though less visible than men in the histories of AUC, it is clear that women of considerable ability were members of the congregation from its earliest days; women like Elizabeth Fraser, whose commitment to improving the lives of those less fortunate than herself contributed to a pioneering rehabilitation initiative for young women.

### **Elizabeth Fraser and the Dean Bank Institution**

Elizabeth Fraser, known as Betsy, was a member of the church from its early days. She played an active role in the Dean Bank Institution, a charitable initiative that allowed girls and young women to escape the poverty trap and the possibility of reoffending by training them for domestic service.

Elizabeth joined the Institution's Committee in 1834, holding the position of Treasurer and latterly President until her death in 1876. The social reformer Eliza Wigham, a well-known suffragist and abolitionist, and a member of the committee for 36 years, wrote:

When I first joined the committee of Dean Bank Miss Betsy Fraser was the mainspring, and very faithful to her trust she was. Nothing was too troublesome for her, if she thought it was for the good of the poor girls.

The Institution had been established in 1832 by a small group of women in the Stockbridge area of Edinburgh. Inspired by the work in England of Elizabeth Fry, they had visited female inmates of Edinburgh Prison and identified that many of them often returned to prison because securing employment following imprisonment was too difficult. Their solution was to establish the Dean Bank Institution. It was funded by the patronage of wealthy contributors who paid an annual subscription, as well as some money received as a grant from the Council.

In her will, Betsy left £1,000 to the London Missionary Society and an amount from stock to the Ministers' Fund of the Congregational Union of Scotland.

In 1869, Augustine engaged its first Bible Woman, who was responsible for visiting the

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homes in the areas surrounding the church, particularly the deprived and underprivileged areas. She was aided in this task by a group of volunteers. AUC historian Mary Parnaby notes that this group, comprising mostly women:

worked in close co-operation with the Public Health Department, caring for the sick, distributing clothing, and making regular fortnightly returns to the City Chambers on the needs of the area.

Women taking on other types of leadership roles at Augustine can be traced back to 1892 when the minutes highlight how women (who were present and voted at the meeting) had been deemed competent to take part in business meetings and hold office bearer positions. One member, Mr James Stewart, asked the minister, the Revd James Gregory, if it was competent for a woman to take part in the business meetings and hold any offices in a congregational church. Gregory replied that it “was quite competent for a woman to do so, although as far as he was aware the privilege was not taken advantage of.”

A change was in the air, however. The following year, Mr Gregory’s wife addressed the Congregational Union Assembly in Aberdeen on the subject of ‘Women’s ministry in the Church’. She pleaded for greater cohesion and communion between women workers both within and between individual congregations. Five years later, in 1898, the Women’s Christian Union (later, simply the Women’s Union of the Congregational Church) was established. Early pioneers are named – Mrs Somerville of Dalkeith, Mrs Simpson of Portobello, and Mrs Milne of Aberdeen who, in 1907, became the first female delegate to the Assembly of the Congregational Union.

During this period, women were increasingly being admitted into university and professions including medicine and law. In 1892, the movement to extend the franchise to women was augmented by the establishment of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies. In 1912, when a Pastoral Committee of 12 was set up at Augustine, four women were appointed.

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AUC contains in its heritage the first two denominations in the UK to ordain women as ministers: the Congregational Church of England (in 1917) and the Congregational Union in Scotland. In April 1929, the Congregational Union of Scotland amended its constitution to allow the designation 'minister' to apply equally to women as well as men. However, in the previous year Vera Kenmure (1904-1973) had been called to Partick Congregational Church and became its minister. She is known as the first woman ordained to the ministry in the Congregational Union of Scotland as well as Scotland's first woman minister. Subsequently, Vera went on to be minister of other churches in Glasgow, including the Pollokshields Congregational from which she retired 1968. She was also president of the Congregational Union of Scotland from 1951-1952.

Augustine's own first female minister, the Revd Fiona Bennett, was inducted in 2009. Among other women who played a role beyond AUC's own life was Christina (Ina) Durrant, who died in 2004 aged 90. A lifelong Augustine member, a deacon, elder and former secretary of AUC, Ina played a leading role in the Congregational Union of Scotland (CUS), serving as its president and as president of its Women's Union. She was involved in a wide range of ecumenical and overseas mission organisations and was the CUS representative at the 1975 Council for World Mission Singapore consultations that pioneered the formation of the new internationally based council

### **LGBTQI ministry and *Our Tribe***

In 2003 the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) of Edinburgh became tenants at Augustine, where many of its members began worshipping as an independent congregation. In the summer of 2009, representatives of AUC joined in an MCC 'church growth weekend' in Newcastle, where it became clear that the two congregations shared similar values and decision making structures.

#### **Metropolitan Community Church (MCC)**

Founded by the Revd Elder Troy Perry Jr., MCC emerged in 1968, a year before New York's Stonewall riots, as a small home church in Southern California to provide a Christian sanctuary for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender) people. Since then, it has grown into an international denomination committed to radical inclusivity in all areas. It is a movement that celebrates the diversity of the whole human family and recognises the need to address issues of human rights and justice.

MCC describes itself as being on a '**bold mission**' to transform *hearts, lives, and history*. 'Just as Jesus did, we are called to "**Do justice**, show kindness, and live humbly with God. (Micah 6:8) As people of faith, we have a responsibility to act on behalf of those who cannot effect change on their own."

MCC has brought to the life of AUC its tradition of lay leadership, its commitment to inclusive and affirming language in worship and, above all, the diverse experiences of LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer and intersex) folk who, in turn, have found within AUC a safe space to be themselves and to offer their many gifts and talents.

The merging of the two congregations has offered not just welcome but positive affirmation to LGBTQI folk. Church members march on Pride Weekend, advertise in *Scots Gay*, and regularly run courses on the Bible and 'queer bashing'. We celebrate LGBTQI achievements in worship and mark significant dates. At the present time, AUC is believed to be the only congregation in Scotland that annually holds a Transgender Remembrance Service, in which we recall transgender folk across the world who have been abused or killed in the preceding year.

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In partnership with the MCC, *Our Tribe* is the LGBTQI welcoming and affirming ministry that meets on the last Saturday evening of each month. The programme of activities is diverse and it always contains an element of worship, including communion, within it. On Saturday 26 September 2015, *Our Tribe* hosted Scotland's first ever LGBTQI Friendly Church Fair at Augustine.



## **Education and Young People**

There has always been a tradition of scholarship and education at Augustine, which from its earliest days has attracted members with an involvement in academic life (a reflection, also, of the church's location within the University of Edinburgh's heartland) and evidencing an independent cast of mind. However, the tradition reaches much deeper into the Congregational/United Reformed ethos and history.

This tradition may be traced through the careers of specific individuals such as the Revd Greville Ewing, the first secretary of the Edinburgh Missionary Society, an associate of the Haldane brothers and a tutor at Glasgow Theological Academy; his friend Ralph Wardlaw, the founder of Glasgow's first academy for Congregationalist theology students, whose campaigns against slavery greatly influenced David Livingstone; and Augustine's own early ministers, John Aikman and, most especially, Lindsay Alexander. However, within the records of Augustine, frequent mention is also made of members joining or moving away as a result of work in academic settings, and to the formidable intellect of some of its leading lights. Is it surprising, then, that the congregation established a lending library relatively early in its life?

### **Library at AUC**

The Augustine library was established on 18 May 1840, while the congregation was still worshipping at Argyle Square, and by March 1841 £41 had been contributed to buy books.

The library would remain a part of the church's life for almost a hundred years. It was open on one evening a week for members to borrow books, with a varied catalogue ranging from theology and sermons to novels and biographies. At the outset the membership subscription was four shillings a year, which was reduced to one shilling in 1862 before membership finally became free to all church members. It was managed by a specially appointed library committee and in 1883 women were admitted to the committee for the first time. During the 1905-10 period, the *Monthly Record* highlights that there was also a flourishing Literary Association in the church, which facilitated debates, lectures and a book

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group. It is interesting to note from the minutes of this association that, while most of the speakers were men, it was, in fact, attended by more women than men.

However, by 1939 books were becoming too expensive and public libraries were providing the same service, so the decision was taken to close the library and auction the books in aid of the Special Appeal Fund.

Today, the room until recently known as the Library (now 'Iona') lives out its literary and educational heritage by being used for Contextual Bible Study, book groups and meetings that develop both our spirituality and understanding of the world. It is also where children of the congregation meet every Sunday – reflecting the strong emphasis that there has always been on providing education, discussion opportunities and social opportunities for the congregation's children and young people.

### **The Haldanes and the Sunday School movement**

Setting up Sunday Schools was a primary aim of the Haldane brothers, Aikman and friends on their preaching tours of Scotland and in the subsequent establishment of the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home (SPGH). William Porteous, a member of the Church of Scotland and the founder of Glasgow's Sunday schools, provided the Lord Advocate with accounts of the Haldanes' "subversive" work in the Glasgow area. Distinguishing the early Church of Scotland schools from the new schools Porteous wrote in 1798:

About ten years ago, the people here, and in many other places, created Sunday schools for keeping educated boys in the practice of reading and repeating the catechism after, public worship. Mr J. Haldane, in the beginning of last year, made a tour to visit the Sunday schools, the effects of which were soon visible. By his influence, he prevailed on some well meaning persons to open Sunday schools on a new plan. Old and young, men and women, boys and girls, were invited to attend, they did attend in their multitudes.

By 1810, many of these new Sunday Schools were becoming connected to congregations of

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the Congregational Churches. Although much of the effort of the SPGH had been mainly within the rural areas of Scotland, the greatest growth of the movement took place in the towns and industrial areas of central Scotland. This medium of education continued to be important in the churches that were subsequently established.

Within AUC's own story, the central part of the mission work based at Simon Square was educational in nature. In 1890, Augustine's Sunday Schools housed at the Gilmour Street or 'Simon Square' mission educated over 250 members and employed 50 teachers. Twenty years later, the ratio remained similar and "undertaking work today carried out by public education and social services".

### **Youth work over the years**

A member of the congregation during its early days on George IV Bridge, Abijah Murray Jr. is recorded as having been active in work with young people:

Notwithstanding his busy official life he found time for much beneficent work, done quietly and unostentatiously. As well as taking an active part in the management of Augustine Congregational Church, and long before Boys' Brigades were heard of, as a teacher at the Simon's Square Mission School, he had organised the boys into classes for physical drill, swimming and out-of-door exercises.

The provision for young people was expanded under the ministries of a succession of Augustine ministers: Joseph Pickhall (1922-26), who replaced the midweek Wednesday service with a Bible School and supported the creation of the Girl Guides, Brownies and Boys Brigade; Gordon Hawes (1935-40), who revived the Young People's Fellowship; and C. T. Rae (1941-50), who encouraged the congregation to pay a contribution to the former Mission in the Pleasance area where 300 youngsters enrolled under the supervision of a full-time youth worker to engage in a wide range of activities. This was a formative experience for many young people, including those from the recently united congregations of Augustine and Bristo who were getting to know each other. Armed with mops and brushes, they

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refurbished the building – older boys fitting window ropes, the minister up the ladder fixing lights, and some of the younger girls below skipping with the ropes! Together they formed the 'ABC' youth club.

By 1945, children and youth activities continued to flourish, concentrating especially on activities that "gave [them] purpose and direction" – carpentry, colouring black and white photos, and First Aid were among the activities, as well as talks, debates and trips (Isa Morey recalls one memorable outing down into the still-working Lady Victoria Colliery at Newton Grange). Mr Rae's policy, Isa recalls, was that "he would look after us (the older ones) and we would look after the younger ones and the older members of the church". Robert Waters (minister 1968-71) was also known to relate exceptionally well to young people and children and his 'Time with the Children' slot in the Sunday services is still remembered.

Different groups were formed across the years to suit the make-up of the younger members of the congregation at any given time. In the 1970s one ecumenical project thrived – a united youth group, named 'Saints and Sinners', involving young people from Augustine Bristo, Highland Tollbooth, St Columba's by the Castle and St Giles. A letter dated June 1976 records the general conclusions of a meeting of representatives from eight churches earlier in the year and asks for sanction for continued collaboration between the churches. The conclusions had spoken of going ahead "on an informal basis, reaching out one church to another wherever it is seen that there is a common interest or common work that can be done better unitedly".

For the young people themselves, however, it was individual group experiences that stayed in the memory. The Somerville family recalls a gathering in 1999 at St Columba's at which author J.K. Rowling read from her unpublished third Harry Potter novel, telling the children that they were the first group to hear the book read and that they "had to keep it secret!" Catherine Somerville, a member of AUC's junior church at that time, was proud to receive a book inscription from the author : "To Catherine, who looks just like Ginny Weasley".

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Today, young people begin church each Sunday in the service before spending time with their leaders in Junior Church. As part of the service, there is always a box of instruments for young people to accompany the hymns. There is space for children to receive and serve communion, and four times a year there is an all-age worship service. At Junior Church, all ages, abilities and learning styles are catered for through an inclusive and progressive programme called *Cornerstone*. The programme covers themes that are broken down into ten units each. Each unit is explored from different angles, including storytelling, arts and crafts, food and videos.

## **Engagement with Community**

Engagement with those around us, within whatever community our churches are located, has long been a core value of Congregationalism. As the President of the Women's Union put it succinctly in 1912: there "should be no antagonism between our religious profession and our social and political activities". This commitment to looking outward, which is both evangelical and compassionate, is seen in the life of AUC's congregation from its very earliest days.

### **Pew rents**

In evidence to the Royal Commission on 'the Religious Instruction and Pastoral Superintendence afforded to the people in Scotland, particularly those of 'the poor and working classes', the Revd Thomas Chalmers, who was passionate about extending the parish system as a way of tackling poverty, explained the 'monstrous anomaly' that only 737 out of the Old Town population of 27,000 had seats in their parish churches. Traditionally, seats in parish churches were paid for in the form of pew rents, collected by the town council and put towards paying the stipends of clergy and other related expenses. Chalmers' point was that not only were many city centre congregations made up largely of 'gathered congregations', coming to church from outwith the parish bounds, but that parishioners themselves had been priced out by pew rents that were too expensive for them. Where there were cheaper or free seats, they were "ill-situated and uncomfortable, and immediately marked out their occupants as of the lowest class".

While still in their North Street College home, the 'Augustine' congregation had bucked the trend in this respect: maybe because this Independent chapel was not a parish church; maybe because of the force of John Aikman's convictions. In his Trust Deed of 1812, he stipulated: "I appointed that at least one third of the seats shall remain free and unrented for the use of strangers and of the poor". In contrast, a parish church might only put a handful of pews to this use. Aikman himself offered his services for no stipend, though this would not have been possible for many of his successors.

### **The Mission (Simon Square)**

The tradition of active service to the community started in 1845 when work at the Gilmour Street Mission (often referred to as ‘Simon Square’) began. On the occasion of the congregation’s Jubilee, it was stated that “from the very beginning it has been a missionary Church. Always a warm and generous supporter of the London Missionary Society... it has not been neglectful of the heathen at its own door. As far back as 1845, when Home Mission work was almost unknown, the warm-hearted members started a Religious Instruction Society in the slums of Simon Square.”

The congregation’s founder, John Aikman, had been known for visiting prisoners as far afield as Penicuik during the Napoleonic Wars for the purposes of preaching. His successor, Mr Cleghorn, encouraged work close to home and, through the Religious Instruction Society, members of the church began visiting in the lanes and closes around Simon Square. Tract distribution and prayer meetings comprised the core of the initial work: education and mission were always seen as indivisible. Later a missionary was appointed and, in 1869, the first of a line of highly committed ‘Bible women’.

In 1890, the Simon Square mission work established a permanent base in premises that had previously been rented and were now purchased in Gilmour Street. This became a home to week-night services, Sunday Schools (250 children; 50 teachers), a packed girls’ sewing class, a men’s club and billiard room, temperance meetings, and a penny bank.

That this work continued here once the congregation had re-established itself on George IV Bridge may say something about the way in which social work in the immediate Cowgate and Royal Mile areas was the province of more established church denominations. At the same time, the clearances from the Old Town had made circumstances in the Simon Square vicinity more than ever in need of support. A drawback of the 1867 Chambers’ Improvement Act was its failure to replace demolished housing with equivalent provision elsewhere. The council demolished 2,741 houses but built only 340, so shifting the problem of overcrowding to other areas. Simon Square was one such area.

The emphasis on education at the Mission becomes clearer down the years (in 1923, Miss

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Lottie Hardy is “congratulated on the success of a cantata given by her Bible Class”) and with particular emphasis on work with young people – but as the Second World War approached, the increasing burden of demand on dwindling time and resources meant that, in October 1940, the mission was finally closed with a view to selling the premises. In fact, with the arrival of the Revd C.T. Rae the following year, the Gilmour Street building was rejuvenated as the home for Rae’s inspiring commitment to work with young people.

The need for social work amongst AUC’s immediate neighbours decreased as slum-dwelling dwindled and the resident population moved (or *were* moved) away. However, homelessness and destitution remained and continue to be a city problem. In C.T. Rae’s day, parcels were made up for distribution to callers – setting a precedent for the congregation’s present-day support for Fresh Start and Scottish Churches Homeless Action, both addressing the broad needs of homelessness in the city.

In more recent times, church members have also been engaged with the Ark hostel on New Street; and the determinedly non-denominational Grassmarket Project now based at the foot of Greyfriars Kirkyard.

### **Temperance**

Engagement with the temperance movement has been a long-standing and significant theme within the life of the Congregational and United Reformed Churches. The temperance movement, which strengthened in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, was a response to the effects of excessive drinking and its complex relationship with endemic poverty, not least in Edinburgh’s Old Town and other inner city slums. Thomas Guthrie was a noted advocate of abstinence from alcohol; and Augustine member Adam Smail was a familiar temperance campaigner whose poems on the subject were published in the press.

Among the shifts in tradition and organisational structure that came from the union with Bristo Place to form Augustine-Bristo Congregational Church in 1941 was a reinforcement of this temperance ethic. Bristo’s roots were in the Evangelical Union tradition and the strength of feelings around the issue had been embodied in the person of the

congregation's first minister, a former blacksmith, the redoubtable John Kirk. On the news that a member of his congregation had inherited a hotel in a nearby town, Kirk is reported to have said that he would "rather take off his coat and break stones upon the public highway at half a crown a day than remain minister with a drink-seller as one of his members".

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the issue remained a priority for the Congregational Union at large. Numerous resolutions were submitted to the Women's Union on issues such as local no licence campaigns, encouraging temperance propaganda among service women, and licensing hours on V.E. Day. AUC members themselves sent a unanimous resolution to the MP for Central Edinburgh requesting him to resist two licensing bills before the House Commons in 1934 that would allow increased drinking hours.

Related to these concerns, the question of using non-alcoholic wine during the celebration of communion in worship was an important one for Congregationalists. The idea of using unfermented wine during communion was raised at a church meeting at Augustine in 1892, though the item was remitted to the next meeting, due to the "great diversity of opinion among the members". It was not until January 1894 that agreement was reached by a large majority that in at least one communion service per month 'non-intoxicating wine' should be used. However, the Bristo members brought with them a commitment to the use of non-alcoholic wine at *all* times during the celebration of communion in worship – a tradition that continues to this day. This is more than a symbolic gesture; it was, and remains, a practical declaration that no-one need be deterred from sharing in this sacramental meal, whatever their relationship with alcohol is or has been.

### **Mental wellbeing**

The challenges of those struggling with their mental wellbeing can never have been far from the minds of the church congregation, in either its Argyle Square or George IV homes. A stone's throw away, in what is now Forrest Hill, with its back to the remains of Flodden Wall, had once stood the Edinburgh City Workhouse; and alongside it an asylum for the mentally ill, the Edinburgh Bedlam Mental Asylum. (The Edinburgh poet Robert Fergusson died there

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in 1774 aged 24.) The institution is now commemorated in the name of the Edinburgh University student theatre, Bedlam.

In 1844, residents of the Bedlam were transferred to the asylum in Morningside, now the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. Here, in 1982, a new opportunity opened up for AUC members.

The congregation was invited to join a rota of church volunteers to operate a canteen at the hospital: the Verandah Tea-Room. A group of volunteers continues to serve in the canteen on a monthly basis, providing home-baked cakes and refreshments for patients and visitors.

A more formal connection exists also through the provision of the Edinburgh Community Mental Health Chaplaincy. Run by the chaplains of The Royal Edinburgh Hospital, and with the support of some volunteers, this weekly drop-in offers an opportunity for an informal chat with a chaplain and with other mental health service users, over a cup of tea or coffee. The service was established in 1994, driven by the vision of the then assistant chaplain at the Royal Edinburgh, Alison Wagstaff.

Alison realised that most people addressing mental health issues were not in hospital and that they would value a neutral setting – away from home or hospital – in which to share with a chaplain, or others in a similar situation, their needs and concerns. And this, she realised, applied to family members as well. Building on a community model already established in Newcastle, an independent management committee was established and AUC offered the ideal central meeting space required, including an office in the tower room. The church was a place into which people could walk from the off the street, responding to advertising in the front window, and participate in the weekly coffee and chat. The drop-in always concluded, and still does, with a short worship service – though no-one is required to stay and participate. Nowadays, the community mental health chaplain is based back in the Royal Edinburgh Hospital but the drop-in space, previously funded by the hospital, is provided free of charge by the church.

In addition, for the past several years AUC has participated in the Scottish Mental Health Arts & Film Festival (SMHAFF) with creative groups that have facilitated workshops on

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painting and storytelling. AUC is also a supporter of the national See Me Campaign in promoting good mental health and eliminating stigma.

**A space for the community: from dance classes and joinery workshops to the Fringe**

Augustine has provided a medium or long-term home to a wide variety of groups and businesses over the years, each one reflecting changing tastes and requirements within the community. There was Miss Brandon's dancing school and The Recorder Society of Edinburgh; a joinery shop and storage for the audio equipment shop 'Richer Sounds' on Chambers Street – the latter businesses having access via the Merchant Street basement entrance.

Community, music, political and religious groups hold meetings and events in the church's sanctuary and other rooms throughout the week, and in 1998 Paradise Green established a Fringe Venue – "for a year, to see how it went".

There was already a well-established tradition of hosting Fringe performances reaching back to the days of Bill Martin and Erik Routley (ministers from 1951 – 58 and 1959 – 67 respectively). Bill Martin himself hosted extremely popular and well-received lectures on poetry in the downstairs hall; while the first Fringe event in the sanctuary was a performance by Donald Swann and Michael Flanders of *At the Drop of a Hat* fame. At the time, their mix of secular and satirical songs was deemed a little controversial by some church members. They returned, however, as did Donald Swann with his own choir, the actor and singer-songwriter Nadia Cattouse (both in 1968), and folk musician and author of "Lord of the dance", Sydney Carter, with both of whom Swann collaborated.

Paradise Green, following their one-year experiment, have built on that tradition and continue to return annually, making significant contributions to the year-round facilities within the building. In 2007, they celebrated their 10th anniversary at Augustine by creating a new theatre space out of a storage area in the basement: The Vault – the "smallest purpose built theatre" in Edinburgh, available for hire all year round.

## **Engagement with the World**

As well as developing 'Home Mission' AUC shares a commitment to overseas mission work that is part and parcel of the Congregational and URC tradition. Long-standing church member Charles Somerville observed in the church newsletter in 2000 that the union of evangelism with foreign mission constitutes one of the major themes that have dominated Congregational and United Reformed life – a theme brought into sharp focus by the work of the London Missionary Society (LMS).

### **Missionary organisations**

The LMS was a non-denominational missionary society formed in England in 1795 by evangelical Anglicans and nonconformists, largely Congregationalist in outlook. In 1966, it merged with the Church Missionary Society to form what was known as the Congregational Council for World Mission (CWM). The new organisation began the shift of emphasis towards greater partnership with Congregational Unions across the world – recognising, in the words of the Ceylonese evangelist D.T. Niles, that “the ‘home base’ of mission is everywhere”. This move towards greater partnership and away from a London-centric development of mission was further cemented by the 1975 international consultation in Singapore, attended by AUC's Ina Durrant, which gave birth to the restructured Council for World Mission. The consultation asserted that:

... every church had the right and privilege to give to mission, as well as to receive, both in people and money, wherever it is, and... every church should be represented on the board of CWM.

During this period of evolution, the Revd Brian Bailey, who would become AUC's minister in 1984, was working as CWM's Communications Secretary, before which he had served with the LMS for twelve years in Bechuanaland (now Botswana). His arrival at AUC would further strengthen the congregation's engagement with the organisation's work.

Charles Somerville notes that, from its beginnings, “a high proportion of LMS missionaries

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came from Scotland” – though not all of them Congregationalists of course. The story of David Livingstone is well known; Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China, lived the life of a hermit for seven years in Canton, completing the first translation of the New Testament into Chinese in the face of government and popular opposition to his presence; John Philip, a Scottish Congregationalist minister originally from Kirkcaldy, became a supporter of the rights of black South Africans and is remembered in the town of Philippolis, founded by the LMS in 1823 for the local Khoi people; and the Olympic athlete Eric Liddell died in 1945 in a Chinese camp while serving as missionary.

Augustine itself was built just above the Cowgate Medical Mission Dispensary, opened in an old whisky shop and shortly after transformed into a training station for the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society. It was founded in 1841 to train Christian doctors for work overseas and the aim of the society (with which David Livingstone was also associated) was to work “towards the inclusion of medicine as a method of opening up new territories and peoples to the Gospels and the Love of the Saviour”. Augustine was the church of choice for staff and students of the EMMS.

At the congregation’s Jubilee Celebrations in 1901 it was recognised that:

the members of Augustine Church have always been distinguished by strong intellectuality and by evangelistic zeal. From its very beginnings it has been a missionary Church. Always a warm and generous supporter of the London Missionary Society, it has a noble roll of workers in the foreign field.

For women, in particular, this was an area of Christian work that offered considerable possibility at a time when ordained ministry in Church was not yet available to them. Even after such limitations were removed, a number of women from AUC travelled overseas to engage with mission work. Jean Campbell, for example, was commissioned in 1976 to become Administrative Assistant to the United Congregational Church in Zimbabwe; and Elspeth Harley, originally an AUC member, was commissioned with her husband Ewen to serve at the hospital in Ramotswa, Botswana – later re-training as a minister.

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Closer to home, it is indicative of AUC's priorities and key partnerships that in May 2007, for example, at the end of that year's Christian Aid week, the congregation hosted former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda (himself the son of an ordained Church of Scotland missionary and teacher) at a public meeting presented by Jubilee Scotland. Jubilee Scotland, with Christian Aid, remains one of AUC's long-standing tenants.

### **War and Peace**

The stories of two AUC ministers, together with the responses of their congregations, shed a little light on changing attitudes towards the use of military responses in resolving conflict.

#### World War 1

Mary Parnaby writes that the history of the church 1914-18 was "inevitably influenced and overshadowed by the First World War, the impact of which was to alter drastically many hitherto uncritically accepted beliefs, attitudes and habits".

The minister at the time had been appointed two years earlier: the Revd A.D. Martin. Mary writes:

One thing which emerges clearly, both from Mr. Martin's sermons and from many other articles, is the absolute conviction that was held that we were engaged in a holy war against the forces of evil represented by the Kaiser and Germany. As in most churches there were increasing gaps in the pews as the finest of the young men, imbued with a spirit of patriotism and idealism, entered the forces, and the War Memorial, still in the church, records the names of 17 of those who lost their lives. One of the first to be killed was Frederick Martin (Derrick), the minister's elder son, who fell in 1915. His younger son, Bernard, was severely wounded in September 1917.

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The congregation supported the war effort in a variety of ways, from handing the halls over to the Territorial Army as a social and recreational club, to organising ladies' working parties "making comforts for the troops" and preparing sphagnum ('bog') moss for use in wound dressings. In 1918 intercessory prayer meetings 'for the nation' were introduced.

In July 1918 Mr. Martin tendered his resignation as minister in order to enlist in the Royal Army Medical Corps but he was persuaded by members of the congregation that "his best and most important work could still be done as pastor of the church", and eventually he withdrew his resignation. Four months later, the armistice was signed, a service of thanksgiving was held on 13 November, and the church, "in common with all others, had to adjust to the new situation of the post-war period".

#### World War 2

Seventeen years later, the Revd Gordon Hawes was inducted at AUC, on Easter Sunday 1935. With glamorous, Leslie Howard looks, Gordon had been a tutor at the Lancashire Independent (Congregational) College as well as a minister in Manchester, and was seen as a rising star of the denomination. During his time in Edinburgh, he was engaged regularly by the BBC as presenter of radio services and 'thoughts'.

Gordon was well regarded as a 'pastoral' minister. However, he was a committed pacifist whose preaching and actions appear to have created tension with some church leaders and may have led to his ministry in Edinburgh drawing to a premature end. In a sermon preached in October 1939, he said:

This war is not between angels and devils, but between sinners and sinners, for we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.' (Cf. A.D. Martin's 'holy war against the forces of evil' above.)

In September [year?], he was one of the keynote speakers at a 'Stop the War' rally organised by the Edinburgh Peace Council in Oddfellows Hall nearby on Forrest Road. In

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what makes an interesting connection with Augustine’s beginnings, Gordon shared the platform with the geneticist Professor J.B.S. Haldane, a leading voice of the left who was associated with the Communist Party. J.B.S. Haldane was also the great grandson of James Haldane, mentor and associate of the congregation’s founder, John Aikman.

Professor Haldane had visited Spain three times during the civil war and brought back his experience of the devastation caused by air raids on defenceless civilians. Gordon drew on experience of another kind. In the pre-war years, he had made several visits to Germany where he’d seen at first hand the rise of Nazism and its impact on ordinary people. He brought home with him copies of *Die Sturmer*, the Nazi’s anti-Semitic newspaper that as early as 1933 was calling for the extermination of the Jews.

Gordon became involved in helping Jews to escape from Germany. One unsubstantiated suggestion is that he sheltered Jews in the basement of his manse on Mayfield Terrace. Was this the real source of tension with some of his office bearers? Is it significant that in that same sermon of October 1939, he asked that “our church may be a place not of controversy but of sanctuary”? In March the following year, Gordon accepted a call to Highfield Congregational Church in Huddersfield.

The church is home to four war memorials, originating in four of the congregations that have moved to George IV Bridge. Following the refurbishments of 2005, it was felt that there was no suitable space for the war memorials downstairs – but Molly Glen recalls being told in no uncertain terms by staff at Edinburgh Castle that it would be unthinkable to dispose of the memorials. Instead, they were gathered together and placed in the south gallery.



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War memorials from (left to right): Dalry United Reformed; Augustine Congregational; Dalkeith Road Church of Christ; Bristo Place Congregational

A commitment to peace, combined with respectful memory, is a constant AUC. At the front of the church, there is a 'Peace Table'. It reflects a long-standing commitment of many at Augustine to work on peace and justice issues. Back in 1984, for example, a number of members (notably Carolyn Smyth and Charles Somerville) were leading organisers of a city-wide Gathering for Peace, which drew together around 2000 participants in twelve city churches and culminated in an all-night Easter vigil in St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral.

In 2005, at the same time as discussions were being held about the placement of the war memorials, two members, Molly Glen and Eleanor Bailey, proposed establishing a 'Peace Table', making use of a communion table received from the recently closed Church of Christ in Musselburgh. This can be found at the front of the church.

The candle that burns on the table each Sunday is a 'Peace Candle' – a descendent of the candle brought to AUC by the congregation of Dalkeith Road. The first peace candle was lit at a church in York, Pennsylvania, after an old woman in Russia thrust three roubles into the hand of a visiting American Christian, asking that a candle be burnt in his church as a sign of peace.

In the face of continuing violent conflicts around the world and complex questions about how we address them, our candle burns as a sign of peace and justice.

### **A home to charities**

Returning to street level, as Mary Brockington points out, for many years AUC has been known more as the home of Christian Aid than of a worshipping Sunday congregation. But there has been strength in this. Christian Aid is one of many charities that have rented space in the building and the congregation has drawn on their presence for affirmation of its

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values and its continuing existence as a city centre church.

The Scottish head office of Christian Aid took up residence in AUC in 1968, together with the Scottish Churches Council – a move that required the construction of office accommodation under the church side galleries. The initial agreement was for ten years and Christian Aid's presence gave a new impetus and focus to the congregation's commitment to overseas work – in that year, for example, support for children suffering as a result of the Biafran War.

At different times, Christian Aid (still retaining an Edinburgh office following the move of the head offices to Glasgow) has been joined by SCAWD (Scottish Churches Action for World Development; later renamed 'Commonweal'), set up in response to the world debt crisis and who literally built a home for themselves in the church tower; Feed the Minds; a local community race relations group; and Jubilee Scotland.

It is no coincidence that members of AUC were fully involved in the Make Poverty History campaign of 2000; and that on Wednesday 12 February 1997 the National Launch of the first Fairtrade Fortnight was held in the church.