

# Seeds

June 2022

encourage - inspire - challenge

Augustine  
United Church

## 2022: a patchwork legacy

**Rev'd Fiona Bennett**



**T**he 2's seem quite significant in AUC's history.

2022 marks 220 years since the congregation of what was then called the North College Street Chapel was founded in 1802.

2022 marks 30 years since this congregation became part of the URC, through its union with Dalkeith Road URC. The name Augustine United Church was born in 1992 through this union – so we have been 'AUC' for 30 years.

2022 also marks 50 years of the wider United Reformed Church, which was formed in 1972 when the Congregational Churches in Wales and England united with the Presbyterian Church in England.

Both the URC and AUC are patchwork quilts composed of the legacies of several denominations and local churches.

For AUC, apart from Dalkeith Rd URC, there were joinings with Bristo Place church in 1941; Hope Park and Buccleuch Congregational church in 1979; Dalry Congregational in 2005; and the Metropolitan Community Church of Edinburgh in 2009. Of course, each of these local churches also has their own patchwork legacy of congregations who have been

birthed from, or who have joined with, them.

It is sometimes cleaner to think about our patchwork heritage through the structure of organisation, but that's like looking at a photo of a quilt rather than feeling it around you or hearing what other people felt when they had that quilt around them.

People: the Church is about a community of people supporting and challenging each other to live Jesus' good news and to share it with the world. AUC itself is full of people who are wrestling with how to build bridges and community throughout our society and world. I wonder, as you think back over your time in AUC, or as part of other churches, who are the people and the stories that have stuck with you and shaped you? Who has supported and challenged you to live out and share the message of acceptance, abundance and hope which Jesus came to bring?

**“AUC is still full of people wrestling with how to build bridges and community”**

These people are the many threads that make up the patches in the quilt of our history.

As we celebrate many 2's in 2022, I would encourage us to remember and share these thread stories of people and the legacy they have left us.

### This Month

#### UKRAINE AND BEYOND

Looking ahead to this year's Refugee Week



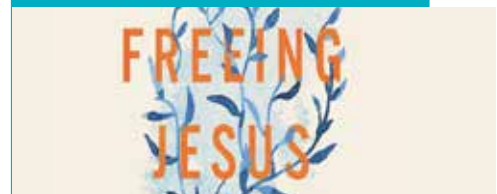
#### DECLARING FRIENDSHIP

The Saint Margaret Declaration brings Churches together



#### FREEING JESUS

Inspired by the faith journey of Diana Butler Bass





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## Getting Involved

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We are always looking for volunteers to undertake various tasks each week to keep church happening. Perhaps you could consider learning how to make coffee or welcome people. To find out more, contact:

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# Local and Global

News from the United Reformed Church

## NICOLA MAKES A MOVE

Many congratulations to AUC member Nicola Robinson who says she is 'delighted' to have accepted a call to be a minister in the Leeds URC Partnership. The role will begin in August, when she will be ordained into the URC and inducted into her new ministry. Just recently she got to take a peek at her new manse (pictured).



For the past two years, Nicola has been on a ministry placement with the Sheffield Team (ten URC churches and three Local Ecumenical Parishes), as part of her four-year training programme.

## KIRK SAYS YES TO MARRYING SAME-SEX COUPLES

At the Church of Scotland General Assembly last month, commissioners voted to allow ministers and deacons to marry same-sex couples. Commissioners voted 274 votes to 136 to allow the right to apply to become an authorised celebrant to conduct same-sex ceremonies.

The Right Revd Dr Iain Greenshields, Moderator of the General Assembly, said: 'There has been a lengthy,

prayerful and in-depth discussion and debate about this topic for many years at all levels of the Church to find a solution that respects diversity and values the beliefs of all.'

The Church of Scotland joins the United Reformed Church, Unitarians, the Scottish Episcopal Church, Methodists and Quakers in celebrating equal marriage, alongside the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), who celebrated the first same-sex marriage in the UK.

## ECO SYNODS RECOGNITION

All 11 synods of the United Reformed Church in England, and the National Synod of Wales, have now signed up to become an 'Eco Synod'. The achievement has been celebrated by A Rocha UK who operate the England/Wales Eco Church scheme. This is part of the wider commitment made by the URC in 2019 to act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life.

So far, the National Synod of Scotland (which relates to Eco-Congregation Scotland) has not made a similar commitment, in part because Eco-Congregation Scotland doesn't offer an eco status at synod level.

However, the Revd David Coleman says 'the Scotland synod is beginning to look (perhaps belatedly) at a synod environmental policy, which it hasn't developed to date.

## MEET INTERFAITH BUDDIES (ON ZOOM)

Interfaith Scotland will be hosting an Interfaith Buddies event on Zoom, 8 June, 7-8.30pm.

The event provides an opportunity to meet someone from a different faith or belief for a one-to-one conversation on Zoom.



To book your place sign up by Monday 6th June at: [tinyurl.com/IB-June2022](https://tinyurl.com/IB-June2022)

## LABYRINTH RE-OPENED

Polwarth Church's Labyrinth re-opened for walking on Saturday 14 May 2022.

A number of AUC members have experienced the Polwarth labyrinth and something of its capacity to nurture inner peace and calm.

If labyrinth walking helps you to pause, reflect, and find stillness in our unsettled world, consider getting in touch to find out future availability. Email [labyrinth@polwarth.org.uk](mailto:labyrinth@polwarth.org.uk).



# Refugees – Ukraine and beyond

Refugee Week is 20-26 June

**T**he lead image for this year's Refugee Week has been inspired by the theme of 'Healing'.

Pictured below, the image was commissioned from Nima Javan, a painter specialising in traditional Persian art and contemporary abstract art. Originally from Quchan in North East Iran, Nima sought refuge in the UK in 2019.

## URC SPEAKS OUT

In response to government plans to send some asylum seekers arriving in the UK to Rwanda, and its refusal to implement changes to the Nationality and Borders Bill, the Revd Clare Downing, Moderator of the United Reformed Church General Assembly, issued a statement, saying: 'to fail to speak out would be a denial of our gospel calling'.

Ms Downing said: 'Church leaders have been criticised for joining the debate about asylum and immigration

plans. But in the face of unfair and cruel proposals, to fail to speak out would be a denial of our gospel calling. The Biblical mandate is that righteous nations "welcome the stranger".

'... We are clear that every individual, whatever their status, should be treated by the state with humanity, dignity, respect and fairness... To export some of those seeking asylum to Rwanda is a denial of the UK's responsibilities and of the rights and dignity of refugees. Questions have rightly been raised about Rwanda's record on human rights and the treatment of LGBT people in particular.

'There are many more suitable options open to the government that would save lives in the Channel and tackle people-smuggling, including the establishment of new safe and legal routes for people to come to the UK, allowing refugees to reunite with their families, and providing increased international development assistance to countries that neighbour conflict and crisis.'

## BEYOND UKRAINE

'Ukraine is undoubtedly diverting attention from others who need help – geographically distant, but in equally dire straits.'

**"to fail to speak out would be a denial of our gospel calling. The Biblical mandate is that righteous nations 'welcome the stranger'"**

In a recent *Guardian* editorial, Global development editor Tracy McVeigh noted 'a feeling that people and politicians show support for only the "right" type of refugee. A European with pets that could be our pets and children who wear similar clothes to ours. More neighbour than stranger. More white than black.'





A recent study by Christian Aid revealed that 91% of Britons knew about Vladimir Putin's war, but only 23% knew of drought and impending famine in east Africa. Christian Aid said the finding is 'deeply concerning'. In another recent press release, Oxfam and Save the Children have estimated that someone died of hunger in East Africa every 48 seconds. Tracy McVeigh calls this 'an overwhelming statistic. But people can't put a face to that one person.' Compare that to Ukraine news coverage in which reporters have given voice to refugees themselves, making the resultant stories particularly resonant.

Distance disconnects us, she writes, and there is a 'reluctance to feel the weight of our impotence in the face of disaster. But there is also the issue of understanding. . . 'No one need feel angry that Britain is "too focused" on Ukrainians – we just need to recognise ourselves in east Africans too.'

## DOWN THE ROAD RUN REFUGEES

*Down the road run refugees,  
a child and father and mother;  
scared by what they've left behind  
and what they fear to discover.*

John Bell and Graham Maule wrote this 'carol is in the form of a protest-song' in 1992. Thirty years on, the anger and shame they expressed are

as precisely relevant today. Their words sit in the tradition of songs that not only protest but make us ask ourselves questions. We don't let ourselves off the hook when we sing these words:

*Who will help the refugees  
to cease their endless walking,  
while the ones who claim to care  
continue endless talking?*

(From the Wild Goose publication *Innkeepers & Light Sleepers*)

**“no one need feel angry that Britain is 'too focused' on Ukrainians – we just need to recognise ourselves in East Africans too.”**

## EVERY REFUGEE, A DIFFERENT STORY

There are dangers in drawing too close parallels between what we read in the Bible about refugees and those we read about in our newspapers. Each person's story is different. Nevertheless, the lessons that people of Biblical times learnt from their ancestors' experiences are an

important thread through the teaching of their community leaders, prophets, and of Jesus himself. The histories of Abraham, Jacob and Moses hold powerful memories and the people of Israel are often reminded that, with God, 'you are but aliens and tenants'. From their own experience, in other words, they should know how to treat strangers.

It wasn't always that simple – but the theme continues in the New Testament where, as one writer puts it, we continue to 'find God amidst those who are uprooted'. As a small child, this was Jesus' own experience, as we are reminded every Christmas, and we have to wonder whether the formative escape into Egypt, away from the despotic King Herod, helped inform his message of good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed.

Journalist and Baptist minister Mark Woods writes: 'Christians have no special insight into the details of security, immigration and asylum policies.' He says 'We have a duty to call those responsible for these policies to account: to tell them when not just their actions, but the fundamental attitudes that guide those attitudes are wrong.'

More about Refugee Week at [www.refugeeweek.org.uk](http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk)

# Friendship in plain sight

**T**he United Reformed Church was formed 50 years ago with a passion for ecumenical conversation and church union.

Some hoped that the fledgling denomination would itself only have a shelf life long enough to see the union of multiple Churches across the UK. That vision hasn't yet come to pass, but during the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May commissioners welcomed the second historic agreement with a sister denomination in six months.

The Saint Margaret Declaration is a declaration of friendship between the Kirk and the Catholic Church in Scotland, offering 'a decisive and irrevocable statement of our friendship with one another, based on our shared faith in Christ'.

It has been described as 'the culmination of more than 100 years of dialogue, [emphasising] the shared faith and common ground that unites the Churches'.

Named after the 11th century Scottish Queen, the Saint Margaret Declaration follows on from a similar statement of understanding signed last November between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church: the Saint Andrew Declaration. The Revd Alexander Horsburgh, Convener of the Kirk's Ecumenical

Relations Committee, said that 'we are declaring a friendship which already exists, which has existed for a long time, and we want everyone to know about it and understand it'.

He described this as a friendship 'in which individuality is respected and there is room for disagreement, but a relationship in which we stand alongside one another, support one another, rejoice together and weep together, pray for and with each other, and do things together.

'By saying out loud that the Church of Scotland and the Catholic Church in Scotland are friends, we contribute to changing not only the narrative of our churches but the narrative of our country too.'

In these days of multiple pressures on all our mainstream Christian denominations, ecumenical friendships have pragmatic value. However, they also reflect gospel values.

'Do I expect our two old institutions to be perfectly aligned and united any time soon?', Mr Horsburgh asked. 'I suspect that may be a task for another generation. Nevertheless, I believe that by acknowledging all the good that we hold in common, we can walk and pray together as friends, deepen our affective unity, and be a more authentic Christian witness in the land. The rest will come in God's good time.'



# Refreshing ministers

**R**epresentatives of the Synod of Scotland joined ministerial colleagues from across the whole of the URC for a gathering in Staffordshire in May.

Speakers included the Revd Najla Kassab, a Presbyterian minister in Lebanon who is currently the President

of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and Pádraig Ó Tuama, Poet Theologian and former leader of the Corrymeela Community. Over three days, the focus was on the theme of Jubilee, inspired by this year's 50th anniversary of the URC. A time for refreshment, conversation, and fresh vision to bring back to congregations here in Scotland.

## DANDELIONS (POEM)

Anne MacKenzie has discovered this reflection by Paul Heppleston – doubly apt for the AUC congregation, which has borrowed the dandelion as a symbol of its ministry and mission.

*Bright yellow in the morning light.  
Dandelions.  
A field chock full of them.  
Beautiful!  
What a year for dandelions!  
A flower that opens wholly,  
holds nothing back.  
Exposed and vulnerable,  
it offers all it's got;  
a sign of life fully lived,  
a pathway to the kingdom.  
Dandelions.  
Beautiful in the sunlight.  
Smiling back at their Creator.*

(from *Bare Feet and Buttercups*, a Wild Goose publication)

## FREEING JESUS

**David Townsend has been inspired by the faith journey of Diana Butler Bass.**

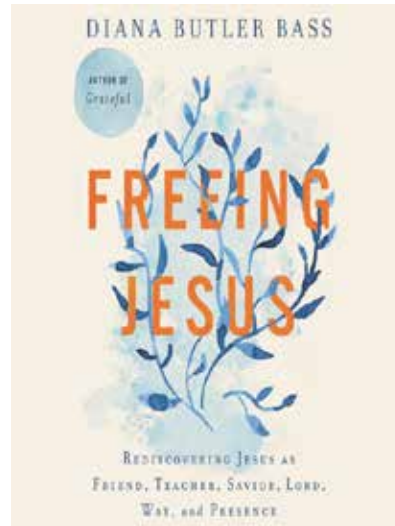
Do you ever read a book that resonates with your own experience? *Freeing Jesus* by Diana Butler Bass is, for me, just such a book.

**“the book is a rediscovery of Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Saviour, Lord, Way, and Presence”**

*Freeing Jesus* is strongly autobiographical whilst, at the same time, presenting a clear articulation of a renewed faith and theology that has moved away from fundamentalist evangelical notions of ‘salvation’.

Like me, Diana Butler Bass discovered fundamentalist evangelicalism in

her teens but, after giving it her all, found herself in mid-life questioning the journey she’d undertaken thus far. As the subtitle suggests, the book is a rediscovery of Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Saviour, Lord, Way, and Presence.



I know that I am not alone in having moved beyond the fundamentalism of my earlier years and, if that is your journey too, I think you will also find that this book resonates. On the other hand, if you never experienced aspects of evangelical fundamentalism, this book will help you to understand the faith journey of those of us who have.

And I suspect that it may help all of us to better articulate aspects of our own faith journey and understanding. As writer Anne Lamott says in her commendation: ‘Diana Butler Bass is one of only a few modern Christian writers who can absolutely blow me away with both spiritual insight and beautiful writing.’

## JUBILEE

To mark the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee, the recent Synod of Scotland enews offered the following prayer-reflection, with this comment from the editor: ‘Whatever your thoughts [about the celebrations], there is something quite emotional, disturbing,

embracing, celebratory, shuddering even, when one looks back over such a long space of time.’

*The Platinum Jubilee celebrates 70 years of Faith and Service of Queen Elizabeth II.*

*For 70 long years, through trial, turmoil, celebration, sorrow, she has endeavoured to keep herself focused upon her Christian faith, through reading the bible daily, and interpreting Christ’s teaching. Gracious God, we give thanks for the 70 years of Faith and Service of Queen Elizabeth II. As she reflects upon her commitment to duty may she draw comfort from the blessings you have bestowed upon her. We thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, for his life on earth and his teachings from which Queen Elizabeth has drawn sustenance and strength. We pray for her, for ourselves and our nations that wherever we are and whoever we are, we too will strive to follow her Christian example.*



# What's On?

Most of our gatherings and resources are currently online. You can find out details on our website [www.augustine.org.uk](http://www.augustine.org.uk).

## STAYING IN TOUCH

If you wish to receive weekly updates of AUC events please register to receive the Friday email by contacting our Centre Manager ([centre.manager@augustine.org.uk](mailto:centre.manager@augustine.org.uk)).

Find us on 

Check our posts on the AUC Facebook page.

# June 2022

Thursday 2	12-1pm	Contextual Bible Study online
	7.30-9pm	Our Tribe (LGBTQI+ ministry)
<b>Sunday 5</b>	11am	<b>Pentecost:</b> Blended Sunday worship & after-service Zoom social
	12.45pm	Black History walking tour of Edinburgh led by Lisa Williams
Monday 6	7.00pm	Divine Dance book group – David Townsend online
	7.30-8.30pm	Contextual Bible Study online
Tuesday 7	10.30am-1pm	NHS Mental Health drop-in
	12-1pm	Contextual Bible Study online
	7.30pm	AUC Church Council “3D”
Thursday 9	12-1pm	Contextual Bible Study online
<b>Sunday 12</b>	11am	Blended Sunday worship & after-service Zoom social
Monday 13	7.30-8.30pm	Contextual Bible Study online
Tuesday 14	12-1pm	Contextual Bible Study online
	7.30-9pm	AUC Church Meeting (social time from 7.15pm)
Thursday 16	12-1pm	Contextual Bible Study online
<b>Sunday 19</b>	11am	Blended Sunday worship & after-service Zoom social
	5pm	AUC Sunday online social TBC
Monday 20		<b>Refugee Week (20-26th)</b> <a href="http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk">www.refugeeweek.org.uk</a>
	7.30-8.30pm	Contextual Bible Study online
	7.00pm	Divine Dance book group – David Townsend online
	7.30-8.30pm	Contextual Bible Study online
Tuesday 21	12-1pm	Contextual Bible Study online
Thursday 23	12-1pm	Contextual Bible Study online
<b>Sunday 26</b>	11am	Blended Sunday worship & after-service Zoom social
	1.30pm	Come OUT with Our Tribe (Coffee Angels)
Monday 27	7.30-8.30pm	Contextual Bible Study online

## Seeds deadline

The next issue of *Seeds* will be a double issue for July and August. *Seeds* is published on the Sunday prior to the beginning of each month. The copy deadline for the March edition is **Wednesday 22 June**.