Fairtrade refresher

Revd Fiona Bennett



he United Reformed Church's National Synod of Scotland held an overnight meeting at Tulliallan in March.

The gathering offered some very rich and thought-provoking opportunities, one of which was a refresher in the potential of fair trade.

The Scottish Fairtrade Forum shared with us its vision of growing a model of trade which is, and will contribute towards, shaping a more just, equitable and sustainable world. In over 70 countries across the world, there are currently over two million farmers and workers employed in Fairtrade certified producer organisations. These enable community businesses, which sustain schools, fund health care, and transform local societies.

When we look at the poverty and challenges in and for our world, with everincreasing divisions, at times a way forward can feel overwhelming and impossible. But the very real transformation and possibilities of buying fairly traded goods and supporting the Fairtrade movement are definitely not impossible or outwith everyday reach.

Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus showed us that the way of transforming our lives and world to realise God's dream for us is not through a magic potion, single ideology or conquering hero, but through grace, persuasion and faith.

The Fairtrade model of working is not a quick fix to transform every challenge our world faces but is a solid and effective way of building sustainable, just and healthy community for all the life which makes up the earth. It shows a path to make some of God's dream for the world possible, and is a light of Hope in darkness which we can all share in.

I was grateful for the opportunity at Synod meeting to be refreshed once again in the hope and possibility which Fairtrade enables us to be part of.

FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT

The next Fairtrade Fortnight will run from Monday 9 September to Sunday 22 September 2024.

This year will mark
Fairtrade's 30th
birthday, so the
organisation hopes
to use the occasion to
highlight how 30 years
of working together has
made the FAIRTRADE Mark a
leader of life-changing impact
for farmers and workers across
the world.

This Month

STORIES THAT CAN INSPIRE

Reporting from the URC Youth Assembly 2024



REDEFINING EXTREMISM

Reflecting on a controversial new interpretation



AN END IN SIGHT?

Discussing proposals for conversion practices



WORDS OF WISDOM

Three short writings to stick in the mind







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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



GAZA APPEAL

Commitment for Life (CfL), the United Reformed Church's global justice programme, has launched a campaign to support the work of its partners in Gaza. The appeal was made in the week that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, urged people not to become numb to the injustice in an 'intolerable' situation, and the UN security council passed a resolution calling for a ceasefire in the region.

Describing the scale of destruction and loss of life as 'unprecedented in recent conflicts', CfL has also produced a prayer for Gaza's children (see p.11). The organisation works alongside Christian Aid to support partners delivering vital support and aid in the region, including the Culture and Free Thought Association and the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee. Christian Aid's head of Middle East Policy and Advocacy, William Bell, says that in Gaza, 'nobody is safe, but still our partners are doing extraordinary work in the most extreme conditions'. Donate at bit.ly/3PDbeu5.

HOW GOOD IS OUR FOOD?

There is still time to get involved in Scotland's Good Food Nation Consultation, says Eco-Congregation Scotland. The consultation is looking at the Scottish Government's draft Good Food Nation Plan, which sets out six outcomes. The first outcome is that 'everyone in Scotland eats well. They can easily get safe, healthy, affordable, environmentally friendly food that suits their age and culture.'

Eco-Congregation Scotland is part of the Scottish Food Coalition, which works for food justice. The consultation is open until 22 April, to hear your views and feedback on these outcomes. More at bit.ly/3/xziSD.



'A MASTERCLASS IN IGNORING POVERTY'

Social justice campaigners with Church Action on Poverty (CAP) described the UK government's Budget on 6 March as 'outrageous' and counterproductive.

CAP said a two-parent family on £60,000 a year will be about £3,100 better off a year as a result of the Budget and Autumn statement, 'whereas the childcare assistant or teaching assistant looking after their children on a starting salary of £14,500 will be just £80 better off'.

Paul Morrison, economics advisor for the ecumenical Joint Public Issues Team, said the Budget was 'a masterclass in ignoring poverty', while CAP called for a more just tax system, action to fix the UK's broken housing system, and 'investment in a long-term future for everyone rather than short-term tweaks'.

HISTORIC DEBT RELIEF IN SOMALIA

Somalia has had 99% of its debt cancelled – a breakthrough for the country as it tries to recover from an ongoing three-decade conflict. Rich creditor nations, including the US, UK and Russia, cancelled more than £1.6bn of Somalia's debt. This will allow the Somali government the breathing space to develop basic public services.

The cancellation of unjust and unpayable global debt was the top priority of the Jubilee 2000 coalition, inspired by the years of debt jubilee embedded in Jewish scripture.

Kristalina Georgieva, from the International Monetary Fund, said the breakthrough was a 'major stride towards economic development and poverty reduction' for Somalia.



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Header globe icon by Vectors Market via Noun Project

Life on the Bridge

News from Augustine United Church

TRANSGENDER DAY OF VISIBILITY

Our Tribe is hosting a Transgender Day of Visibility Event at AUC on Sunday 31 March from 2pm until 4pm (doors open at 1.45pm).



Join us for a celebration of transgender joy: voices, music, poetry, craft activities, social time.

We will be celebrating the first birthday of Resisting Transphobia in Edinburgh (RTiE), and we will be joined by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence and Scottish Trans.

Refreshments will be provided and changing space is available.

The building is wheelchair accessible.

'SOUPER' CHURCH MEETINGS PLANNED FOR 2024

Each month at AUC we hold a Church Meeting. This is a regular opportunity for our church community to gather and discern together what we believe God is calling us to do and be as a church. Within the URC tradition, Church Meeting is the core council of the local church and participating in Church Meeting is one of the key responsibilities of full church membership. Church Meetings are open to everyone to share in the discussion, but only full members are

entitled to vote. (If you are interested in taking up full membership please speak with a minister or elder.)

In 2024 we are planning to hold more of our Church Meetings in the building on Sundays after the service. We would like to try holding these on the same days as some of the Soup and Bread Lunches so that people can be fuelled by conversation and a mug of soup to join in Church Meeting. The crêche area for children will remain out during the meetings, and it will also be possible to join these meetings online.

Some of the Church Meetings will remain online on Tuesday evenings. Our dates during the first half of the year are:

April 14 / Sunday 12.20-2pm inbuilding with soup + online

May 12 / Sunday 12.20-2pm inbuilding with soup + online (Annual General Meeting)

June 9 / Sunday 12.20-2pm in-building with soup + online

July 9 / Tuesday 7.30-9pm online.

August / NO MEETING

FASCINATING FORUMS AT ST COLUMBA'S

St Columba's by the Castle holds an after-church forum on the second Sunday of each month. The forums start at 11.45am and cover a wide variety of topics. Recent sessions asked, 'What did the Romans ever do for us?' and examined 'Impact Investment – making the most of our money'. On 14 April, Sarah and Graham Whitley will be speaking on 'A Christian Aid supporter's visit to Sierra Leone'.

Forums are recorded and posted on the St Columba's by the Castle Youtube channel: bit.ly/43OlkOJ. Find out more on the St Columba's website at /learn/sunday-forums/.

St Columba's by the Castle is one of AUC's ecumenical partners in The Local Church (TLC).

SPRING FORWARD THIS SUNDAY!



'Christ Has Risen' (Pysanka) – a pysanka is a Ukrainian Easter Egg

The clocks go forward by an hour this Sunday, 31 March. Egg rolls, coffee and an egg hunt will be offered from 10.15am, before our Easter Day service at 11am.

We are taking up a collection for a local Food Bank. To check on the store cupboard goods on the most wanted list, go to edinburghfoodproject.org/donate-food/

Seven days to make a difference

n seven days, God created the world. What can we do in seven days?

Christian Aid Week is 12–18 May. The charity is inviting us to take on its '70k in May' challenge by fundraising in whatever way we can. Holding a cake sale... Delivering the iconic Christian Aid Week envelopes... 'With your help, we can work towards a world where families can escape the trap

of poverty and fulfil their ambitions. Seven days, so many ways to fund lasting change.'

And remember, as a UK General Election approaches, wannabe MPs will be 'in listening mode', keen to hear what makes the voters in their community tick. If poverty at home and abroad is our concern, let's make it our MPs' too. www.christianaid.org.uk

Get to grips with the carbon

A Carbon Literacy Course is being run at AUC over three weeks in April/ May. Katrina Tweedie explains.

he Carbon Literacy Course is for people who want to understand the climate emergency and to learn what they can do to tackle it.

Everyone will be impacted by climate change, and everyone is welcome. The course will take place after church on three consecutive Sundays (21 April, 28 April and 5 May) from 12.45 until 3.15pm and will cover:

- the science of climate change and issues of climate justice
- how the wider community and local area will be impacted: the significant changes we will all need to adapt to as Scotland moves to a low carbon future
- practical actions you can take to reduce emissions
- how to communicate about climate change

The course is offered by the Scottish Communities Climate Action Network (SCCAN) using content created by Manchester Metropolitan University, Keep Scotland Beautiful, Climate Action Fife and The Salisbury Centre.

The course is accredited by the Carbon Literacy Project (carbonliteracy.com), which means that participants can gain an official Carbon Literate Certificate on completion of the course.

For more information and to register you interest please email Katrina at katrina.tweedie@augustine.org.uk.

Looking for laptops

o you have an unused laptop that could support a school in Zimbabwe?

Commitment for Life (CfL, the URC's global justice programme) is working with Wheatley URC in Oxfordshire to stock the computer lab at Falcon Junior School in Harare. The Programme Officer for CfL, Kevin Snyman, says, 'Currently, their lab has... precisely no laptops.' Wheatley URC is fundraising to purchase some higher-end laptops but wants to supplement these with 'preloved' laptops for younger children.

CfL is looking for laptops that have, ideally, 'a half decent, working battery (about 2-3 hours) and are not reliant on a constant power source given that they will need to charged either by the solar battery system on the roof of the headmaster's home or in rotation during the day'.

If you have a laptop that may be suitable, speak to Laurence (<u>laurence</u>. <u>wareing@augustine.org.uk</u>), who will arrange to get it down to URC Church House. There, the IT will clear the computer of all data and refurbish it with new open source software.

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URC Youth tell good stories

There was a significant TLC* presence at this year's URC Youth Assembly, held near Lichfield. The Revd Lindsey Sanderson, recently inducted as Moderator of the National Synod of Scotland, was also there and reports back.

his January, five of us from the Synod headed to URC Youth Assembly 2024.

We had two young people from TLC Youth in Edinburgh, Matt Baines, the Synod Youth Ministry Development Worker, Alex Peden, supporting one of the young people, and myself, representing the URC Synod Moderators.

The weekend was a mix of keynote presentations, workshops, worship and business sessions built around the theme of 'Story, story, story'. The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby helped us to think about being made in the image and likeness of God. She said all our key identity markers of gender, ethnicity etc. can be found in God. She suggested that being made in the image of God is about the role we play in relation to each other and that when we do this in God's image we act out of loving kindness in these relationships.

The second keynote was offered by the current URC Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, who encouraged everyone to think about the importance of our own story, which is unique to us but is also part of God's story. She reminded us that our stories can inspire others but that we are also called to listen to, not just hear, others. Collectively our stories have power and are transformative.

"our stories can inspire others but we are also called to listen to, not just hear, others"

Different working groups reported to the Assembly and three resolutions were passed. The young people encouraged support for the Honest Church campaign (honestchurch.org. uk), which promotes 'greater honesty about the true welcome that women and LGBTQ+ people in receive in church'. A second resolution asked the URC's Mission Committee to promote churches and organisations which are working towards a just peace in Occupied Palestine and Israel; and finally, the Youth Executive was asked to look at the roles and responsibilities

of the URC Youth Moderator and consider whether this should be a paid post.

One of the aspects of the weekend I enjoyed most was talking with two young Ukrainian women who came to the UK at the outbreak of the war. They have both found a welcome in URC congregations and it was good to hear something of their stories, their hopes and concerns for Ukraine, and to hear how they were adjusting to living and studying in the UK. One workshop I had been at focussed on changing the narrative about refugees and asylum seekers and it was good to hear these positive experiences in what is so often a very negative debate

The weekend was enjoyed by everyone. Michael Smith was reelected as the Synod's representative on the Youth Executive. We wish him and the whole Youth Executive well as they take forward the work of URC Youth.

*TLC – The Local Church, an ecumenical group that includes St Columba's by the Castle and Greyfriars Kirk.



Planet vs Plastic

id you manage to record all the plastic you recycled in a week? (The Big Plastic Count,

11-17 March).

Some of us fell at the first hurdle (Ed!). Others succeeded - 'but it was fiddly' (applause for Ann MacKenzie!). Whether this turned out to be your thing or not, Earth Day 2024 offers another opportunity to focus on plastic and to try to do something about it.

World Earth Day is on 22 April. Since 1970, the Earth Day mission has been 'to diversify, educate and activate the environmental movement

worldwide'. This year, the focus is on '60% Reduction of Plastic Production by 2040'.

A Mother's Love Holds the World by Mary Jane Miller (Vanderbilt's Art in the Christian Tradition project)

There's loads of information at www.earthday.org - fact sheets, action suggestions, information about global initiatives, find an event near

> you (including, of course, AUC's own Carbon Literacy Course - see p.5).

One place to start is the #PlasticDetox challenge. Take small steps to avoid singleuse plastics like bags, straws, bottles, and packaging. Share your eco-friendly swaps and inspire others to join the movement on social media using #PlasticDetox.

Help 'create a ripple effect and

encourage a wider shift towards a plastic-free lifestyle'.

Nappies that grow on trees

anana-based nappies, a pioneering water filter that uses fungi, and a web application that predicts flooding are among the recentlyannounced Earth Prize finalists for 2024.

The Earth Prize is in its third year, and is a competition that encourages young people (aged 13-19) to innovate to save the planet. Run by the Earth Foundation, this year the competition attracted entries from 10,000 teens from more than 2,000 schools globally. The prize of \$100,000 (£78,000) will help the winning team or individual scale up their ideas into a more viable initiative.

You can read more about this incredibly positive story at theearthprize.org/finalists.

Lent protest at parliament

UC member the Revd David Coleman was one of hundreds of Christians who took part in a ten-day climate change protest that began outside Parliament on Ash Wednesday.

The protest highlighted the need for 'bold climate action' by the government, including moving away from the use of oil and gas, reparation payments for damage caused by

climate change in the Global South, and investment in green policies. David, who is Eco-Congregation Scotland Environmental Chaplain, marked the foreheads of participants with ash crosses. He said the religious element of the protest was important: 'Our scriptures and traditions are a spiritual response to threat, oppression and crisis. I think we're building a sort of spiritual resilience.'

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Extremism – a redefinition?

The UK government's recent decision to redefine 'extremism' was raised at Church Meeting on 12 March. Here, AUC member the Revd Leslie Morrison reflects what that decision could mean.

he Westminster government has redefined the word 'extremism'. This is not a statutory change. In other words, the law will not change.

However, the government will now use the new definition in its dealings with organisations, particularly in financial matters and on issues with which they fundamentally disagree. The new definition reads:

'Extremism is "the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, that aims (1) to negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; or (2) undermine, overturn or replace the UK's system of liberal democracy and democratic rights; or intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve the results in (1) or (2)".

Generally, Christians would not have a problem with the first part of the definition; the second part is, however, a different matter. It is sufficiently vague that when used by government it could inadvertently bring others within its scope.

On 22 February, the Trustees of The Interfaith Network announced that it was winding up the organisation following the withdrawal of funding from the Westminster government. One reason given for the closure was that the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was a member organisation. The government will not have dialogue with the MCB, hence the principle reason for ending funding. This is very sad for many people of faith, not least those who work hard for a greater understanding of different faiths.

On 12 March, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York issued a statement asking the government to rethink its statement. They suggest that the redefinition will disproportionately affect Muslims in addition to threatening our freedom of speech, our rights to worship and freedoms to protest peacefully.

"This is very sad for many people of faith, not least those who work hard for a greater understanding"

There are many organisations to which Christians adhere, or are members. Amnesty International and Greenpeace are two with fairly large Christian memberships that come to mind. What do we do? Continue to support. Continue to protest. But above all, continue to pray that in whatever way, we will be led by God to a deeper understanding of what God wills for humankind in this fragile world in which we live.

For further discussion of the government's definition and its implications, read the report of a briefing by faith leaders to the Religion Media Centre. Faith leaders agreed that the way to tackle religious hatred in society is through continuing dialogue and building relationships between people of different faiths. See bit.ly/4a5kH5x.



'All reflecting God the Creator'

Members of AUC, including the Revd Fiona Bennett, were among faith leaders and representatives who took part in a day to discuss the Scottish Government's new draft Bill and Proposals to end conversion practices in Scotland.

he Equality Network, a leading national LGBTI equality and campaign organisation in Scotland, brought together the participants, who also included LGBTQA+ survivors of conversion practices.

The purpose of the event was to facilitate a sensitive, productive and informed discussion about the legislation being proposed by the Scottish Government to end conversion practices. Together, the group considered the proposals and shared support for the community and for finally seeing an end to these practices in Scotland.

One participant in the day was a friend of AUC, the Revd Dr Alex Clare-Young, who is moderator of the Iona Community's LGBTQ+ Common Concern Network. They said:

'As a trans, queer survivor of conversion practices in Scotland and as an ordained minister it gives me hope for the futures of faith communities and of LGBTQ+ people to be a part of respectful, open and rigorous conversations that enable transformation and justice.'

Also present was the Revd Elder Cecilia Eggleston, Moderator of Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). During worship at AUC the day before, Cecilia had spoken warmly of the Scottish government's approach, and expressed regret that the UK government in Westminster has put the issue 'on the back burner'. Following the consultation, she said:

'The proactive stance taken by the Scottish Government on conversion practices is supported by Metropolitan Community Churches. As a denomination, we have campaigned against such practices around the world and welcome Scotland's commitment to making sure every LGBTQIA+ person is able to live as themselves, fully and without fear

'Conversion practices do terrible harm to individuals on two levels. Firstly, they can cause profound trauma and distress to the person on the receiving end of the attempts to change who they are. Secondly, they often drive these individuals from faith communities that they love, where they have friends and family. The faith community also suffers, as they lose those who would otherwise stay and be active participants.

'It is encouraging to see increasing numbers of faith communities recognising the breadth of human sexuality and gender identity – all reflecting God the Creator.'

Cecilia's words have since been echoed in a statement from the Church of Scotland, which has responded favourably to the proposed legislation and said its understanding has been 'deepened by hearing the experiences of survivors of conversion practices'.

Dr Rebecca Crowther, the recently appointed CEO of Equality Network, chaired the event, which looked at key points relating to the legislation. These include a transinclusive ban on conversion practices, and the inclusion of 'suppression' in the definition of conversion practices. The group also discussed the need to ensure that 'consent' is not a defence, and that there is clear protection of freedom of religion and belief and freedom of expression. They affirmed the need for a Bill that will protect all in the community from the harm that conversion practices cause.



Words of wisdom

Poems and short writings can stick in the mind. We tuck them into purses or the back of a book, pulling them out occasionally, smiling with recognition. Here are three such writings. Two have come from Molly Glen. First, a New Year message she received from a friend made through her niece's marriage; second, a 17th century nun's prayer, which Molly read at the Burns Lunch, and sometimes referred to as a prayer about growing old gracefully. Finally, Tony Chan has been reflecting on acts of kindness and the way they can be 'good for the mind'.

WAFA'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE (FROM MOLLY)

May you always have
enough happiness to keep you smiling
enough trials to keep you strong
enough success to keep you confident
enough faith to keep you going
and enough belief to know that
each day is a gift
moving forward into 2023

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY NUN'S PRAYER

Lord, thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older and will some day be old. Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs. Make me thoughtful but not moody; helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details; give me wings to get to the point. Seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing and love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of other's pains, but help me to endure them with patience. I dare not ask for

improved memory, but for a growing humility and a lessening cocksureness when my memory seems to clash with the memories of others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a saint-some of them are so hard to live with-but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the Devil. Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places and talents in unexpected people. And, give me, O Lord, the grace to tell them so.

KINDNESS, BY TONY CHAN

It's nice and lovely to be kind, indeed it is a good trait and a rare find.

Kindness soothes, is calm and gentle and good for the mind.

It gives you a break from the monotony and from the grind.

You can relax and rewind, indeed you will feel fine, as you tow the line.

Because you did the right thing, of which generosity you did bring.

To goodness grace and mercy you cling, as from your heart and same hymn book you sing.

An angel has your protection and has you under their wing.



Prayer For

Gaza's Children

God who clothes us in warm garments of grace; weave this cry for Gaza into the fabric of your peace...

We are ashamed at the depth to which humanity can sink; how eagerly we march to the drumbeat of war; how easily we are seduced by violencejustifying narratives.

Mend our broken ways; challenge our complacency; protect the children of Gaza; grant their families freedom from oppression, and bring Shalom to all who call The Holy Land home.



- Make a donation to the URC Gaza Appeal
- https://donate.giveasyoulive. com/fundraising/commitment -for-life-gaza-appeal



Commitment



Most of our gatherings and resources are currently online. You can find out details on our website 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).





Check our posts on the AUC Facebook page.



Giving made easier with AUC's QR code

April / May 2024

Every Sunday at 11am Blended Sunday worship and after-service Zoom social.

Contextual Bible Study is currently on an Easter break but will be running online each Wednesday at 7.30pm and Thursday at 12 noon from Wednesday 10 April.

NHS Mental Health Drop-in cancelled until further notice.

March		
Sun 31		Easter Sunday and Transgender Day of Visibility
	6am	Easter Climb up Arthur's Seat with our Ecumenical partners
	10.15am	Easter Egg Roll & Hunt
	11am	Revd Lindsey Sanderson, guest preacher
	2-4pm	Trans Visibility Celebration, AUC sanctuary
April		
Tues 2		United Nations World Autism Awareness Day
Thu 4	7:30pm	Our Tribe LGBTQI+ Gathering
Sun 7	12:30pm	AUC Church Council (in-building)
Sun 14	12pm	AUC Soup and bread lunch
	12:30pm	AUC Church Meeting, with introduction to URC Eldership
Mon 15	7:30pm	AUC Book Group (The Church Cracked Open)
Wed 17	7pm	Taizé prayer for unity and peace, Greyfriars
Sun 21	12:45pm	Carbon Literacy Course pt1
Mon 22		World Earth Day
Sat 27	2pm	AUC Tea Party
Sun 28	12:45pm	Carbon Literacy Course pt2
	1:30pm	Coffee Social: Come OUT with Our Tribe (LGBTQI+), Coffee Saints
May		
Thu 2	7:30pm	Our Tribe LGBTQI+ Gathering
Sun 5	12:45pm	Carbon Literacy Course pt3
Mon 6	7:30pm	AUC Book Group (The Church Cracked Open) (online)
Tue 7	7:30pm	AUC Church Council (online)
12-18		Christian Aid Week
Sun 12	12pm	Soup and bread lunch
	12:15pm	AUC Church Meeting and AGM
Sun 19	10:30am	Pentecost worship shared with ecumenical partners at Greyfriars Kirk
	12:30pm	AUC Rota Training (TBC)
Mon 20		AUC Book Group (The Church Cracked Open) (online)
Sun 26	1:30pm	Coffee Social: Come OUT with Our Tribe (LGBTQI+), Coffee Saints

Seeds deadline

The next issue of *Seeds* will be a double issue for June and July. It will be published a little later than usual, on Friday 7 June. The copy deadline for the June/July edition of Seeds is **Wednesday 29 May**.