

Seeds

April / May 2026

encourage - inspire - challenge

Augustine
United Church



All in this together

Jo Clifford



This issue's guest reflection comes from Jo Clifford. Jo is an Elder at Augustine, and recently led worship here for the first time. Jo is a playwright, performer, father, grandmother, and saint.

One Sunday in March, while I was leading worship, my friend Joelle was preparing her testimony to the House Judiciary Committee of the Ohio State Legislature.

Joelle is the Revd Dr Joelle Henneman (she/her), and she is the pastor of the United Methodist Church for All People in Columbus, Ohio. The Bill she was speaking to was House Bill 249, 'The Indecent Exposure Modernisation Act', which restricts cabaret to adult locations only.

She needs to speak to it because the Bill defines cabaret performers as anyone speaking in public who 'expresses a gender identity differing from their biological sex'. So when she leads worship in her church, as I led worship in ours, we would lay ourselves open to prosecution for 'indecent exposure'. And if children were present, as we all know they are, we would be committing a criminal offence and could be jailed for it.

And for Joelle, that would mean incarceration in a prison for men.

And we may think such cruelty and injustice to be very distant from us here in Scotland...

...But it's worth remembering that it was a Scottish women's group, For Women Scotland, that won the legal action that led to the Supreme Court Ruling last year that ruled that 'the terms "woman" and "sex" refer to biological sex at birth, not gender identity'. And all the confusion and suffering and distress that has resulted from that judgement.

And we also need to remember that an Edinburgh MSP, Ash Regan, is one of those constantly pressuring the Scottish Government to make it mandatory for trans women prisoners to be housed in men's jails.

When I led worship the other week, I was so moved by the way your support and acceptance has helped me overcome my demons of internalised transphobia, shame and self hatred. But in the global context, our church's absolute acceptance of trans people in every aspect of church life means much more.

Joelle reminded the Committee that 'a central truth of the Christian faith is that every person is created in the presence of God. Every person has sacred value and divine worth and deserves the freedom to live honestly and safely in the world.'

I would add the words of Jesus Queen of Heaven as she reminds us that we are all connected with each other:

'We are all in this together, All of us here to love and to be loved.'

So when at worship you affirmed that for me, I affirmed it for myself, we affirmed it for each other and for Joelle too in her place of danger. And we will continue to do so. Now and for ever.

This Month

VOTE YOUR VALUES

Making our voices heard ahead of May's elections



ISLAND OF CONNECTION

Hanna Albrecht on her year with the Iona Community



WHY EARTH DAY?

How a 1969 oil spill sparked a global movement



LESSONS UNLEARNED?

Alan Robson on foot and mouth, 25 years later





Augustine United Church,
George IV Bridge,
Edinburgh, EH1 1EL
0131 220 1677
www.augustine.org.uk
facebook.com/AugustineUnited
Scottish Charity no. SC000385

CHURCH SECRETARY

Linda Harrison
 secretary@augustine.org.uk
 or via the church office

MINISTER

Revd Fiona Bennett
 minister@augustine.org.uk
 07552 162 717

ASSOCIATED MINISTER

Revd Maxwell Reay
 associateminister@augustine.org.uk

CHURCH CENTRE MANAGER

Rachel Fitzgerald
 centre.manager@augustine.org.uk
 0131 220 1677

WEBSITE

Thomas McPolin
 web.editor@augustine.org.uk

SOCIAL MEDIA

Antonia Cahill
 social.media@augustine.org.uk

SEEDS EDITORIAL TEAM

Laurence Wareing and Denis Mallon
 newsletter@augustine.org.uk

Getting Involved

Within AUC there are Ministry Teams which are responsible for different areas of Church Life (CLMTs).

If you would like to know more or get involved with one of these, please email the contact person.

CENTRE, PROPERTY & FINANCE

Ewen Harley
 treasurer@augustine.org.uk

CHILDREN

Kate Owens
 juniorchurch@augustine.org.uk

COMMUNICATION

Denis Mallon
 denis.mallon@augustine.org.uk

OUR TRIBE (LGBT MINISTRY)

Revd Maxwell Reay
 associateminister@augustine.org.uk

PEACE & JUSTICE

Jim Kerr
 jimleainekerr@gmail.com

PASTORAL & MENTAL HEALTH

Moira Holmes
 moira.holmes@augustine.org.uk

WORSHIP

Revd Fiona Bennett
 minister@augustine.org.uk

YOUNG PEOPLE

Matt Baines
 youth@augustine.org.uk

SAFEGUARDING COORDINATOR

Alex Peden
 safeguarding@augustine.org.uk
 07594 093357

VISITOR MINISTRY

Thomas McPolin
 thomas.mcpolin@augustine.org.uk

LOCAL COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING

Kathleen Ziffo
 kathleen.ziffo@augustine.org.uk

WANT TO GET MORE INVOLVED IN AUC?

Do you feel called to get more involved in the life and ministry of AUC? Then joining the volunteer rota might be for you! We are always looking for new people to join the rota to provide our inclusive ministry of hospitality for all.

There are a variety of roles available and full training will be given, mainly by shadowing current volunteers.

Please pick up a 'Sharing' card at church or email **Lewis Reay** directly on rota@augustine.org.uk.

Local and Global

News from the United Reformed Church



ONGOING SYNOD VACANCIES

The National Synod of Scotland is still lacking a Clerk and Treasurer. These key roles have been re-advertised with revised role descriptions. Details are available at www.urch.org.uk/jobs, along with details of salary, hours and how to apply. Or speak directly with the Convener of the Synod Executive, the Revd Susan Henderson (synodexec@urchscotland.org.uk), or the Moderator, the Revd Lindsey Sanderson (moderator@urchscotland.org.uk).



CARE VAN

Members of Duke Street URC in Leith have spoken of their pleasure in being able to continue playing their part on a monthly basis with the Bethany Care Van. The van provides soup, rolls and basic supplies to men and women who are homeless or otherwise in need. Duke Street's participation in the initiative has been made possible by members of Saughtonhall URC, who help with the driving and preparing the soup and the rolls. The care van goes out every day of the year but has been especially appreciated in the winter months.

DRUG CONSUMPTION ROOM PROPOSED

A three-month public consultation on a drug consumption room in Edinburgh will begin on 1 April. A similar facility is already open in

Glasgow, enabling drug-users to consume their own drugs without being prosecuted, but supervised by trained staff who can intervene if necessary. The proposal is to site an Edinburgh facility in the Old Town, in either Spittal Street or the Cowgate.

A CHURCH WITH PEOPLE AT THE MARGINS

The URC's Faith in Action Team is hosting four 90-minute webinars through 2026, exploring what it means for the URC to be 'A Church with People at the Margins'.

The series is designed to help congregations become places where people at the margins are loved, nurtured and empowered; and to share what is already working locally. The next webinar will take place Monday 11 May, 7-8.30pm. Visit urch.org.uk/margins for details and to pre-register.



KEEP REFUGEE FAMILIES TOGETHER

The ecumenical Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) is campaigning to reverse the Home Office's decision in September 2025 to pause the refugee family reunion scheme. JPIT says the scheme is 'a long-standing component of the UK refugee system that allows those who are granted

refugee status in the UK to apply for their immediate family members (spouses, partners and children) to join them. The scheme stands as one of the few "safe routes" into the UK.'

The UK government now proposes a much more restrictive approach. JPIT is calling on local faith leaders to sign a letter to speak out against the proposals. This can be found at jpit.uk/refugee-reunion, together with materials describing the impact of the Home Office decision.



FUEL CONFERENCE IS 'A FIRST'

In April, Colombia and the Netherlands will host the First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels. They have confirmed that a key point of discussion will be addressing 'Investor-State Dispute Settlement' and the threat this poses to phasing out fossil fuels. Government representatives, who will gather in Columbia, will hear about how big polluters use corporate courts to deter or penalise it via costly claims.

HOPEFUL ACTS

The URC is joining with other charities and faith groups to celebrate A Million Acts of Hope, 13-20 May. The initiative will counter the next Tommy Robinson-led Unite the Kingdom rally, and communicate the power of working together in mutual support. See millionactsofhope.org.

Header globe icon by Vectors Market via Noun Project.

Life on the Bridge

News from Augustine United Church

DISABILITY AND THE BIBLE: ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

Join Mike Holroyd and Siân Joyner as they lead a series of online discussions. In each session, we'll read a short Bible passage together and share a discussion on disability in the Bible.

When: Mondays 4, 11, 18 and 25 May, 7:30pm – 8:30pm (BST)

Everyone is welcome.

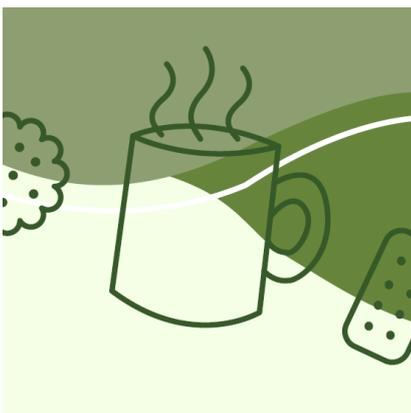
The Zoom link will be in the AUC Friday Notices.

Find out more, or let us know you're coming: mike.holroyd@augustine.org.uk

GET TO KNOW ROOTS

Andrew Owens, an AUC member and Team Leader at Roots: Globalscope Edinburgh, writes:

'This is your invite to the Roots Open House coming up on Sunday the 17 May. Roots is a grace-driven community for all university students where they can make friends, have fun, and explore life and faith together.'



We'll be opening Roots' doors for you to come by and enjoy some tea/ coffee and biscuits, while we chat about all that's been going on over the past few months at Roots. Feel free to invite anyone who might be interested in Roots – all are welcome to come along.

We're looking forward to seeing you there and, as always, thank you so much for your continued support and prayer. If you have any questions please speak to AUC members Andrew Owens, Kate Owens, or Emma John.'



RECYCLE BLISTER PACKS AT AUC

'Blister packs' is the name for the plastic sheets, often with a foil backing, in which many of our tablets are packaged in individual doses. Traditionally, they have been hard to recycle, but Boots the Chemist is now making collections of empty vitamin and medicinal blister packs.

You can bring your used blister packs to AUC for passing on to Boots. Edinburgh City Council does not recycle blister packs, which go instead to landfill.

Various other plastic containers can be recycled via Boots, but care has to be taken that no residual shampoo, makeup etc remains in the discarded plastic containers.

CHURCH MEETINGS

Our Church Meetings continue to alternate between online weekday meetings and in-building gatherings on Sundays after the service. The Sunday meetings are on the same

days as our Soup and Bread Lunches. The crèche area remains out during meetings for children and it is also possible to join the meetings online.

Church meetings coming up:

Tuesday, 14 April, 7.30–9pm Online

Sunday, 10 May (AGM), 12.30–2pm In-building (hybrid)

Tuesday, 7 June, 7.30–9pm Online

Sunday, 12 July, 12.30–2pm In-building (hybrid)

JUSTICE WEEKLY

Can you spare two or three minutes each week to pray for peace and justice? In this new reel and text-based resource from the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), Alex Clare-Young, a friend of AUC, takes us through key public issues in the UK and around the world each week, touches on what's happening in parliament next week, and offers up a prayer for peace and justice.

If you would like to watch and listen, catch up with the reel each Thursday morning on JPIT's Facebook or Instagram sites.

If you would prefer to read a text-based version, go to jpit.uk/justice-weekly.

A THING WITH FEATHERS

As the URC's Scotland Synod invites us to consider Words of Hope in 2026 (see p.6), here is the beginning of one of Emily Dickinson's poems.

'Hope' is the thing with feathers –

That perches in the soul –

And sings the tune without the words –

And never stops – at all –



Katrina Tweedie's SAMH challenge - To raise funds for SAMH (Scottish Action for Mental Health), Katrina Tweedie has set herself a challenge. As she recovers from an accident, she is going to do her physio three times a day, six days a week, for 50 days. She began her challenge on Saturday 14 March. We can sponsor Katrina for SAMH at justgiving.com – search for "Katrina Tweedie".

SAMH provides a huge range of services to support mental health in Scotland and is presently setting up a network of walk-in mental health support hubs. Do give generously to support a great cause and to help encourage Katrina to get back to full strength and fitness.

Photo by Metin Ozer on Unsplash.

Holy Week on the Bridge

It's that time of year again - let's take a look at how Augustine and our TLC partners will be marking the run up to Easter with a range of events. Everyone is welcome.

THURSDAY 2 – MAUNDY THURSDAY

8am:- Morning prayer and breakfast (St. Columba's by the Castle)

7pm:- Foot washing. Last Supper followed by Stripping the Altar and Watch until 9pm (St. Columba's by the Castle)

FRIDAY 3 – GOOD FRIDAY

8am:- Pre-sanctified Eucharist and Veneration of the Cross (St. Columba's by the Castle)

12 midday:- Meditations until 3pm (Greyfriars Kirk)

9pm:- Tenebrae by candlelight (Greyfriars Kirk)

SATURDAY 4 – HOLY SATURDAY

8pm:- Easter Vigil, Fire, and Renewal of Baptism Vows (St. Columba's by the Castle)

SUNDAY 5 – EASTER DAY

10:30–11am:- Pre-service egg rolls and hunt (AUC)

11am–12pm:- Easter Sunday Worship Service (AUC and online)

Words of Hope

With the spring Scotland Synod meeting came hope.

The National Synod of Scotland's spring synod was held on 14 March at Grahamston United Church, Falkirk.

Lindsey Sanderson, the Moderator, introduced the Synod's new theme: 'Synod's Four words of Hope'. The theme ties in with a wider project aiming to increase trust in public life in Scotland. It has been inspired by the four words inscribed on the Scottish Mace – the ceremonial staff that symbolises authority and without which no business can be conducted in the Scottish Parliament.

The words are: **integrity, compassion, justice and wisdom.**

What could these words mean for us in practice in the run up to, and following, the Scottish parliamentary elections in May?

One of the project's founders, Frank Strang (deputy director at the Scottish Government), hopes that promoting the four words will help 'underpin the quality of debate and decisions,

thereby doing its bit to give hope and help restore trust in public life in Scotland'.

Lindsey says, 'The values of integrity, compassion, justice and wisdom are firmly grounded in our Christian faith. As we seek to be disciples today and live the marks of mission, which include transforming the unjust structures of society, we continue to have a role to play in public life in our nation and local communities.'

In 2026, there will be three mini-Synod days focusing on the theme. The days will be held at:

Rutherglen URC (Saturday 23 May);
Dunfermline URC (Saturday 30 May);
and Nairn URC (Saturday 8 August).
Details to follow.

In other items of business at Grahamston, the Synod's Transitional Minister, the Revd Sarah Moore, invited Synod to consider establishing a 'Wider Fold' congregation in the Synod. Wider Fold congregations hold the membership of people who, for a variety of reasons, may not be able to worship regularly with a URC congregation but would like to retain membership with the URC.

Words of Wisdom

The URC's Youth Assembly took the theme 'Wise Words – Wise Actions' as its starting point when it gathered in Northampton at the end of February.

One key decision was to ask Youth Executive to focus its attention in 2026-27 on three priorities: social injustices for young people; international partnerships and collaboration with Christian youth; and environmental issues.

From tackling a housing crisis that prevents young people from moving out from home to recognising that those below the poverty line are impacted more by the effects of climate change, Assembly delegates made clear the issues they are passionate about – and feel their churches and communities should care deeply about too.

Youth Assembly was asked to encourage synods and local churches

to become more young carer aware. The resolution will come to the recently formed Faith in Action committee for further discussion and action.

There was a notable emphasis on the need to collaborate ecumenically. Ecumenical delegates were present from across the UK and Germany, as well as interns from the Joint Public Issues Team. The new Youth Moderator, Kacie Hodgson, has made 'expanding our horizons through our ecumenical relations' one of the platforms of her year in office, and Moderator-Elect Alex Clements added that 'where URC churches exist at a geographical distance, we need to support young people to feel more confident in getting to know young people of other Church denominations'.

Michael Smith, who attends St Columba's by the Castle Scottish Episcopal Church, is the Scotland representative on URC Youth Executive.

Elections – what’s YOUR manifesto?

Countless organisations have published their ‘manifestos’ ahead of May’s parliamentary and council elections. What is yours?

From Amnesty to LGBT Youth Scotland, charities, campaigners, faith groups and business organisations all hope their priorities and dreams will cut through the soundbites and raucous on-air debates to the will and intentions of our would-be political leaders.

They want their voices to be heard by those who may effect change. In most cases, their voices speak on behalf of the needs of others.

We can make our voices heard too. As Fiona Bennett said: ‘Particularly given the increase in poverty and hatred across the world, and the rise of the Reform party in the UK, the Scottish election in May is going to be very significant and important to engage with as people of faith.’

In the last issue of *Seeds*, we outlined some of the nuts and bolts of getting ourselves ready for the elections. With apologies to our ‘international readers’ (how amazing is that!), here is a recap, plus further information drawn together for us by our Justice and Peace coordinator, Jim Kerr.

Did you know?

- There are 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs)
- Everyone in Scotland is represented by eight MSPs. One is a constituency MSP and the other seven are regional MSPs
- When you vote, you will receive two ballot papers. One is for you to choose your preference for constituency MSP
- The other is for you to choose one political party (or Independent candidate) for your region

You can find out about the candidates and political parties standing in your area at whocanivotefor.co.uk

To vote

You must be registered to vote by 5.00 pm on Monday, 20 April. You can:

- Apply online or through the Local Registration Office
- Still register to vote without a National Insurance Number
- Still register to vote without a fixed or permanent address
- Register to vote anonymously if safety is a concern

You will not need photo ID for Scottish Parliament elections or local council elections (see Scottish Assessors’ Association – www.saa.gov.uk)

Speak to the candidates

Look out for hustings in your area and hear what your candidates have to say on the issues that are important to you. If they haven’t addressed your concern, ask them about it. Jim says, ‘Hustings offer an opportunity to discuss and express opinions on issues that matter to you; discover the positions of various political parties on these matters; hear and even participate in debates about important issues; and obtain a commitment from candidates about what they would do if elected.’

Hustings we know about:

- Amnesty International UK and the Human Rights Consortium Scotland – an opportunity to press candidates on human rights issues.

Wednesday 1 April, at 7pm online (more information at hrcscotland.org)

- The Salvation Army Scottish Election Hustings – ‘Question Time’ format.

Wednesday 8 April, at 7pm, in East Adam Street, Edinburgh. Aimed at representatives of churches and faith groups in Scotland. AUC has one or two delegates.

- National Food Debate, in-person and on-line

Wednesday 8 April, 6:30pm, Augustine United Church, George IV Bridge. Tickets from tickettailor.com/events/scottishfoodcoalition/2040667

- Grassmarket Residents’ Association (GRASS) hustings for Central Edinburgh candidates.

Thursday 9 April, 6.30 pm, St Columba’s by the Castle Scottish Episcopal Church, Edinburgh



Iona – an island of connections

Hanna Albrecht describes the radical hospitality and rich surroundings that made her year working on Iona so memorable.

It seems strange to me that it's been almost a year since I packed my bags, left Edinburgh, and moved to the Isle of Iona for an adventure the scope of which I could not fathom at the time.

Instead of on Holyrood campus, my work would centre around the cloisters of a medieval abbey.

Instead of bright city lights and the persistent cries of seagulls (impossible to escape in Leith) there would only be a small ferry service and the sweet cries of oystercatchers, gannets plunging like arrows into the sea, and the persistent and unmistakable sound of the corncrakes throughout all of spring and early summer.

Instead of cosy mealtimes at home or nights out at stylish restaurants, I would share my meals with fifty other people, sitting on wooden benches in a centuries-old refectory.

I had – surprising myself in the process – applied for the position of programme coordinator for the Iona Community and gotten the job. I arrived on Iona on an evening in early February, the ferry lights the only brightness in a vast sea of darkness.

“a whirlwind year of new guests, planning, delivering, comfort and challenge, inspiring folk to connect”

What followed was a whirlwind year of welcoming new guests every week, planning and delivering programme sessions, making space for comfort as well as challenge, inspiring folk to connect with the wild and wonderful complexity of creation, and being inspired in turn by the vulnerability,

courage and kindness shown to me by staff, volunteers and guests.

The Iona Community, an ecumenical Christian community working towards creating justice and building peace, runs an island centre at Iona Abbey. From March to November, it offers weekly programmes for people from across the world. Built into a daily rhythm of prayer in the beautiful Abbey Church, delicious shared meals, working in task teams and making time for rest, we dive into the programme for the week.

Programme weeks focused on the climate crisis, eco-theology and the beauty of creation are followed by weeks centred around creative exploration of music, art and writing, followed by programmes that explore concepts of power and protest. No week is the same, but all weeks are connected to one another. They all highlight suffering and injustice in the world, and make room for grief and





pain, but also celebrate the kindness and beauty of this world. They offer an invitation to recalibrate our lives, to renew our commitment to build a better future for all; to come together as a community rather than facing things alone.

Through shared conversations, on our weekly pilgrimage across the island, during programme sessions in the ancient Chapter House, I was reminded again and again of my favourite part of the daily morning liturgy: ‘God’s goodness, at the heart of humanity, is planted more deeply than all that is wrong.’

I met pastors from the US who bravely keep resisting narratives of fearmongering, who create safe havens of kindness and inclusion for all.

I met people from across the UK who are determined to protest and take action against a climate that is hostile towards refugees and asylum seekers; who are committed to welcoming the stranger.

I met people of all ages who came to Iona on a journey of questioning, wondering about their sexuality, their gender identity, and how it could fit in with their faith. I could see their faces relax, their shoulders drop, the deep sighs of relief when they realised that the Pride Flag displayed

in the refectory was not just for show – a mirror of my own relief and reassurance when I first arrived on the island.

I witnessed folk come with their fears, their doubts, their grief, and find connection and solace. I witnessed folk who were completely secure and comfortable in an unmoveable kind of faith slowly open up to bigger questions, to deeply buried doubts, to a more expansive God.

**“God’s goodness,
at the heart of
humanity, is planted
more deeply than all
that is wrong”**

My year on Iona was a year of radical hospitality, of moving beyond my comfort zone, of finding a balance between work and rest, of being more connected with creation than I ever have. The liturgy and music of our morning and evening services held me, challenged me, invited me to move more deeply within my faith, and so did the island itself. The crystal-clear waters and sandy beaches, cold swims and long rambles, the winter storms, the ferry rides across to Mull and back to get the best fish and chips

you can imagine, a perpetual mix of salt and sand in my hair, in my clothes, in every corner of our house, became part of my life.

The ever-present sand especially reminded me of Augustine’s symbol, the dandelion. Its fluffy seeds are blown all over this world and keep finding roots in new places, a reminder that grace and hope and love are not only still present in this world but impossible to get rid of.

I noticed so many connections between AUC and the Iona Community over the last year, not least in the overlap of members. The thoughtful and inclusive liturgy, the focus on care for creation and all its people, and the commitment to laughter, celebration and community.

These made me feel at home and at ease. The Iona Community has become inextricably linked with who I am, and I’m honoured that I get to share a glimpse of its wonder and wisdom with you all.

(Lewis and Maxwell Reay will lead a programme week on Queer Joy in 2027. Details to follow – you heard it here first.)

World Earth Day

Every year on April 22, we mark Earth Day, but why? What inspired it? What impact does it have?

In January 1969, Senator Gaylord Nelson, a junior senator from Wisconsin, witnessed the devastation of a massive oil spill in Santa Barbara, California.

Union Oil had persuaded the US Government to grant a waiver allowing the company to bypass environmental safeguards. Less than two weeks into drilling, a pressure buildup caused a blowout that released almost three million gallons of oil – enough to fill four and a half Olympic swimming pools. Images of oil soaked birds, ruined beaches and blackened surfboards dominated the news in the United States and abroad, exposing the destructive consequences of fossil fuel disasters.

Inspired by the energy of the student anti-war movement, Nelson sought to channel that activism into a growing public awareness of air and water pollution. He founded a non profit organisation called Earth Day to coordinate nationwide protests and teach-ins focused on environmental protection. It was a campaign that, crucially, crossed political boundaries.

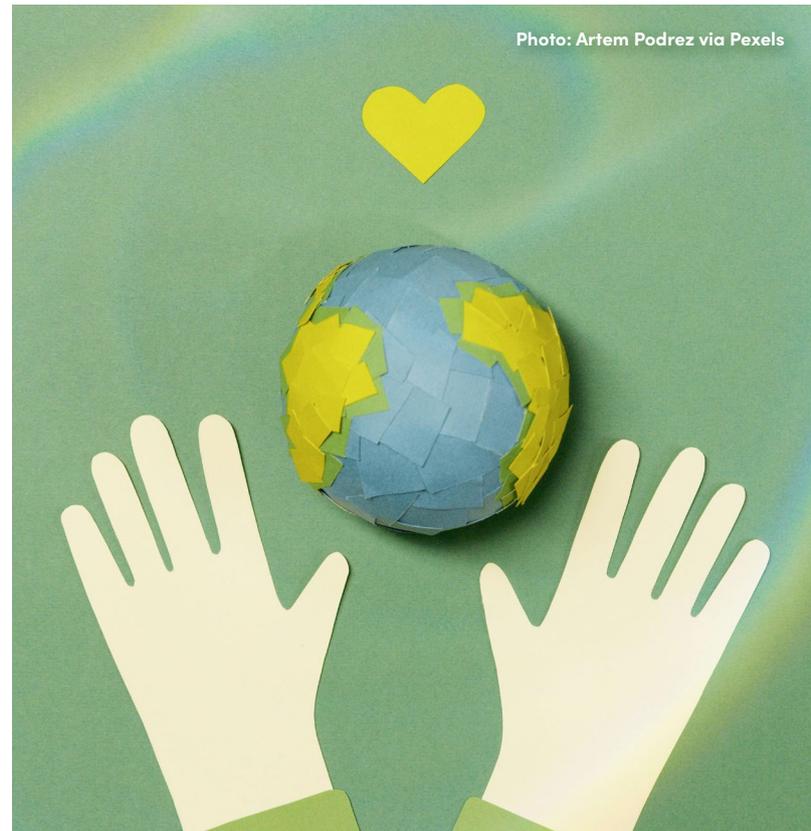
The effort centred on education and grassroots mobilisation. A 25-year-old Stanford graduate, Denis Hayes, sent organisers to college campuses, civic groups, newspapers, faith communities, and neighbourhood organisations to build momentum. The name 'Earth Day' captured media attention. On the very first Earth Day in 1970, 20 million Americans – around ten per cent of the US population at the time – took to the streets to protest against pollution, demanding protection for human health.

That same year, because leaders across the political spectrum were uniting behind the cause, the movement achieved major results. President Richard Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency, designed to respond to contamination crises and regulate threats to public health.

“Nelson sought to channel that activism into a growing public awareness of air and water pollution”

Before this moment, the impacts of pollution were not widely understood. Globally, few people recognised that leaded petrol, industrial smoke and sludge, or raw sewage and chemicals in public waterways were harming ecosystems and human health. Even the idea that airborne pollutants could trigger asthma attacks was not part of mainstream debate.

Today, that knowledge is far more widespread, but its impact remains fragile. In the UK, it took until 2020 for air pollution to be formally recognised as a contributing factor in an individual's death, following a landmark coroner's ruling on the case of nine year old Ella Adoo Kissi Debrah. In the US, President Trump has acted against many of the rules protecting air, water, and ecosystems established by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). He also repealed the EPA's 2009 Greenhouse Gas Endangerment Finding, effectively removing the EPA's obligation to regulate greenhouse gases.



If Earth Day helped spark the modern environmental movement, its organisers hope it can still galvanise action. Earthday.Org's global initiatives include the Canopy Project, which combats deforestation, and the Climate Education campaign, which promotes environmental literacy through school curricula, advocacy materials, and community toolkits. But as Steve Jewett, Global Program Administrator at Earthday.org, notes, 'The most important impact isn't just cleaner communities, it's stronger relationships. People come together to care for their parks, beaches, and neighbourhoods. They reconnect with nature and with each other. It's a simple act – picking up litter – but it becomes a powerful way for communities to show up and support the places they call home.'

Read more about Earth Day at www.earthday.org/earth-day-2026

Foot and mouth: did we learn?

Twenty-five years ago this year, the first major outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the UK for 20 years began, with the first case detected in Essex on 19 February 2001. Alan Robson, Agricultural Chaplain for Lincolnshire, is worried that we haven't learnt the lessons.

The 2001 foot and mouth outbreak spread rapidly across the country, eventually leading to around 2,000 confirmed cases on farms. It caused a nationwide agricultural crisis, mass culling of livestock, and widespread rural restrictions. In Cumbria alone, there were 893 cases.



Alan Robson has been an agricultural chaplain for 26 years, but he says his education began when he married a pig farmer's daughter. 'I spent my Saturdays working on a pig farm, and learned first-hand the physical demands of farming and the constant pressure of forces beyond human control. Weather, markets, disease, policy decisions made far away – all of these shape daily life on a farm, and all of them generate deep anxiety.'

'There is a phrase used in business circles that feels painfully apt for farming: BANI – "brittle, anxious, non-linear and incomprehensible".

'Farming has lived in that reality for decades. The food system depends on weather, yet we are not climate resilient. It depends on policy, yet the UK lacks a coherent, integrated food and farming strategy. Instead, people operate in silos, flying blind. Politicians fly blind. Farmers are expected to build viable businesses while navigating chaos.'

"The result was devastation, emotional, economic and spiritual, and a bill running into billions"

Alan says foot and mouth disease did not create this instability; it exposed it. 'What shocked many of us was learning that only around 0.2% of the animals slaughtered during the outbreak actually had foot and mouth. We were simply not prepared. The result was devastation, emotional, economic and spiritual, and a bill running into billions.'

'I am not convinced we have learnt the lessons. We remain unprepared for crisis. Avian flu, bovine TB, insecure borders for food and climate change: these threats are not hypothetical. Government reports have been blunt: the UK is not ready. We invest heavily in military defense, yet food and water security are equally vital to the nation's wellbeing. Disease, not people, is what truly worries me.'

'Farming communities live close to life and death. Livestock farmers encounter it weekly. I rarely meet farmers who are wholly atheistic. They may not articulate belief in church language, but they hold a holistic understanding of life, land and loss. They understand cycles, fragility and dependence in ways many urban communities have lost.'

'Many in our congregations have lived through war, austerity and upheaval. We know something about resilience. Yet we must ask hard questions: are we places of sanctuary? Are we ready to hold fear and anxiety without judgement? Can we help communities prepare spiritually and practically for the shocks that may come?'

'Foot and mouth must be remembered honestly. If it returns, and it may, I fear our response will again be reactive rather than prepared. Faith calls us to do better: to listen deeply, to advocate courageously, and to build resilient, compassionate communities rooted in hope.'

A longer version of this article first appeared on the Methodist Church in Britain website.

What's On?

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).

Find us on 

Check our posts on the AUC Facebook page.



Giving made easier with AUC's QR code

April / May 2026

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

Contextual Bible Study takes place online twice-weekly, on Wednesday at 7.30pm and on Thursday at 12 noon.

NHS Mental Health Drop-in is cancelled until further notice.

For Holy Week events, see p.5.

April		
Thurs 2	7.30pm	Our Tribe LGBTQI+ gathering
Sun 5	10.30pm	Pre-service egg rolls and hunt (AUC)
	11am	Easter Sunday Worship Service (AUC and online)
Thurs 9	7.30pm	Church Council
Tues 14	7.30pm	Church Meeting (online)
Wed 22		World Earth Day (see p.10)
Sun 26	1.30pm	Coffee Social: Come OUT with Our Tribe (LGBTQI+), Coffee Saints, Little King Street
Thurs 30	7.30pm	Church Council
May		
Sat 2	2-3.30pm	Strawberry Tea
Mon 4	7.30pm	Disability and the Bible: online discussion
Thurs 7		Scottish Parliamentary Elections
	7.30pm	Our Tribe LGBTQI+ gathering
Sun 10	12pm	After church, a soup and bread lunch, followed by Church Meeting (AGM), In-building (hybrid)
Mon 11	7.30pm	Disability and the Bible: online discussion
	7pm	A Church with People at the Margins webinar (see p.3)
Sun 17		Roots Open Day (see p.4)
Mon 18	7.30pm	Disability and the Bible: online discussion
Sun 24	12.45pm	Belonging: Exploring Membership
Mon 25	7.30pm	Disability and the Bible: online discussion
Thurs 28	7.30pm	Church Council
Sun 31	1.30pm	Coffee Social: Come OUT with Our Tribe (LGBTQI+), Coffee Saints, Little King Street

Seeds deadline

The next issue of *Seeds* will be a double issue for June-July 2026. The copy deadline for the June/July edition is **Wednesday 20 May**.

Want to write for *Seeds*?

If you're thinking of writing a longer piece for *Seeds*, we hope this information will be helpful. Roughly speaking, we find that a good length for a one-page article is c.570 words, allowing for an image as well. A two-page article will be no more than 900-950 words.

Augustine United Church has been in ecumenical partnership with Greyfriars Kirk and St Columba's by the Castle since 2002, and we enjoy joint services and events through the year. You can discover more about our partners at greyfriarskirk.com and stcolumbasbythecastle.org.uk.

