

the unitarians

Annual reports 2024-5

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES
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Annual reports 2024-5

The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches
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“Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

Howard Thurman (1899-1981) American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader.

The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (often simply called “the GA”) is the national body that connects and supports Unitarian and Free Christian congregations across the UK.

Unitarians are a liberal religious movement with a long tradition of encouraging people to explore faith freely and thoughtfully. Our congregations bring together people with many different beliefs and backgrounds – some Christian, some from other religious traditions, and some who do not identify with any religion at all. What unites us is a shared commitment to open-minded inquiry, compassion, and the belief that each person’s spiritual journey matters.

The General Assembly exists to help this diverse movement flourish. We support congregations, ministers, and lay leaders across the country by providing resources, training, and opportunities for connection. We also help represent the Unitarian voice in wider public and interfaith conversations.

Through national gatherings, training programmes, communications, and collaborative projects, the GA works to strengthen local congregations while helping Unitarians share their values more widely.

At heart, the General Assembly is about connection: bringing together communities that value freedom of belief, mutual care, and a spirit of curiosity about the world and one another.



Liz Slade

LIZ SLADE
CHIEF OFFICER

A WORD FROM OUR CHIEF OFFICER

When I look at the overall picture of how our Unitarian and Free Christian community is doing, it's clear that a simple story can't do it justice.

On the one hand, we certainly see the trend of congregational decline continue from recent decades. We see congregations embark on the process of closure, and we see congregations kept afloat by a valiant small group of volunteers, often in their 70s, 80s and 90s without likely support from younger generations.

Most of our congregations don't have a minister, or other professional leadership, and it can be hard to find the breathing space to plan for the future, or to devise changes that might reach new members. We know that religious participation is low across the country, and that the Unitarian faith is not well known.

On the other hand, things look rather different. We have congregations (like **Ullet Road in Liverpool**, or **Gellionnen in the Swansea Valley**) that are flourishing with multigenerational life, care, and connection. We have congregations offering multiple gatherings throughout the week, serving varied audiences, and opening up their buildings to an even wider community.

We have flourishing online gatherings, from one-off events to long-running communities like **Heart and Soul**, or the **Unitarian and Free Christian Bible Group**.

We have congregations that are developing new ways of connecting with families, like **Chowbent** or **Birmingham New Meeting**. We have welcomed the first three people onto the new **Register of Lay Leaders** (Worship and Leadership), and there are dozens of people currently taking part in the Advanced, Intermediate and Foundation steps of **Unitarian College's Worship Studies Course**.

We have welcomed new ministers onto the GA Roll, and Newly Qualified Ministers of the last few years are making an impact in their congregations. New people are stepping into positions of leadership, becoming trustees or committee members in their congregations and districts. Our voices are being heard outside of our own community, and the Unitarian ethos is being recognised as powerful and necessary in Britain's changing religious landscape.



Bacon butties at Chowbent Chapel

Both of these narratives are very real at the same time, and it's important that we honour this whole picture. Rather than them being stories that are at odds with each other, I am learning to see them as a coherent whole. Perhaps these patterns of ebb and flow are always at play, one way or another.

I see our work at the GA as being to support these processes of change – to nourish and nurture what is already unfolding, to connect, to encourage.

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Change in a context like ours
is not linear.

”

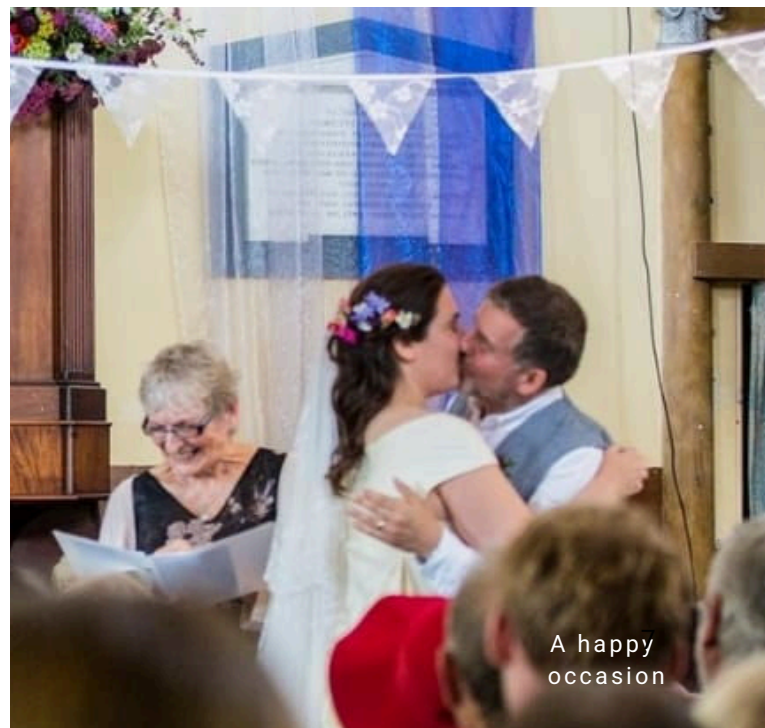
Mainstream culture can easily see endings as failures, but our work with the Decelerator – and the wisdom we draw on in our communities – reminds us that endings are natural, and can give space for new things to grow. We must support good endings and mark them well. Likewise, it's easy to celebrate new things whatever they are – but we also know the risk of relying on something before it has roots. Healthy change is often slow – moving at the speed of trust – and also transformational shifts can happen very quickly. Change in a context like ours is not linear.

One ending I'd particularly like to mark is **Rev Melda Grantham's retirement** from the GA staff team in June 2025. She served as Welsh Secretary, supporting the 21 Unitarian congregations in Wales.

She also took on a special multi-year project to support congregations across Britain to be more confident in weddings, after the Covid years gave us an unexpected hiatus. We miss Melda's no-nonsense practical support, combined with her wisdom, care, and deep understanding of people – as well as her quick and ruthless sense of humour! She has continued to work as Tutor / Assessor at Unitarian College, and remains a deeply connected minister in the Unitarian movement.

The congregations in Wales have regrouped to consider how they best work together now, as much as changed since the Welsh Secretary role was first created.

2025 also saw an event to mark the closure of the InterFaith Network, which was a moving celebration of its work since the late 1980s in bringing together faith groups at a national and local level. Its founder, Brian Pearce, was present, as was its most recent Director, Harriet Crabtree. It was clear how much inspiration the guests there took from these impressive leaders, and how many threads have been woven thanks to their work. Of course, interfaith connection will not end, but will find new forms of gathering, connection, and advocacy.



A happy
occasion



The Greenbelt crew

Kate Dean
on stage



A highlight in getting our message out into the world was being invited to be in conversation with artist **Brian Eno at Greenbelt festival**, where we also hosted a Unitarian exhibition stall, and offered Unitarian worship. Huge thanks to the team of volunteers who helped make this happen – Janine and Ewen Sim, Kate and Stew Dean, Rob Foreman, Aleks Zglinka, Zac Baker, Shana Parvin on site (doing everything from setting up the stand , hosting countless visitors in conversation, designing and leading the Sunday worship, and even joining Brian Eno in song), and Raj and Emma from Mill Hill who created beautiful materials for our booth to create a really inviting welcome for people wishing to connect with Unitarian life.

It was a powerful reminder that there is a rich public conversation about the role of faith in society that we are ready to be a fuller part of.

The **Innovation Fund** has nourished many new shoots especially via the small Development Grants. These are allowing congregations and local leaders to take risks, to try new things, to experiment so that they can learn what new moves they might make to serve their future. Ypu can read more from Nick Butler-Watts' report later in this document.

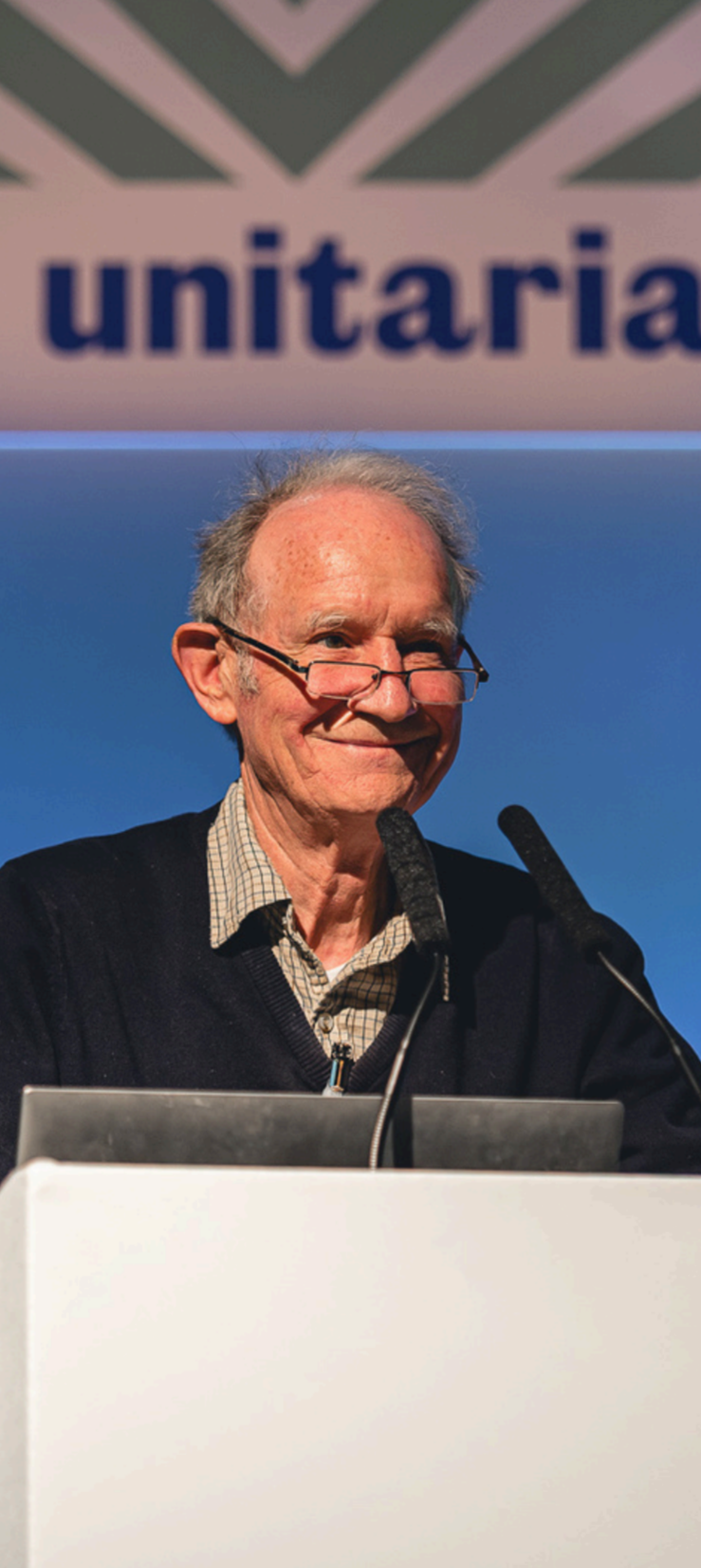
Of course, all this work in supporting change in our wider community is supported by careful behind-the-scenes work in strengthening the operations of the GA charity. This year we transitioned to a more ethical investment manager (Epworth), and moved to a new auditor (Sayer Vincent), as well as continuing the slow and careful work to move the GA towards becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Our thanks to our Honorary Treasurer John Bates for taking the lead in these important projects, and to David Joseph and Andrew Mason in particular in the staff team for their essential work in supporting these changes.

As this was an election year, we saw a change in our Executive Committee membership. My huge thanks to our outgoing EC members Jenny Jacobs, Simon Hall, Laura Dobson and especially to Jo James as Convenor, and to the newly elected EC members Sarah Benfield, Zac Baker, Stephanie Bisby and Arek Malecki, as well as Joe Calvert, Winnie Gordon, and Andrew Appleyard who have since been co-opted.

I am proud that we have a diverse, skilled, professional and committed Executive Committee, and am grateful for their wisdom, support, expertise and hard work.

An enormous thanks also to the whole GA staff team – it is a significant privilege to get to work with such a fantastic group of people, who go countless extra miles, and bring a vast range of professional experience and insight. Thank you Andrew, Ann, Audrey, David, Gav, Lizzie, Natalja, Nick, Pamela, Rory and Simon.





GEOFF LEVERMORE
PRESIDENT

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

As my successor as President stepped down at the last minute due to personal reasons I was asked to stay on for another year. After discussions with my wife I decided to do another year as I'd enjoyed the last year visiting many chapels with interesting and inspiring people.

On Good Friday I was invited to Great Hucklow Chapel to help distribute 250 hot cross buns round the village, wishing residents a happy Easter. Thanks to Ed, Judith, Mary and John.

I went to Ballyclare, Northern Ireland, where I was invited to give greetings from our GA to the General Synod of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

I recently attended the funeral in Altrincham of David Copley. I knew him from the MDA and when I occasionally took the service at Dunham Road. It was always a pleasure to meet and chat with David and Helen, but I did not realise his contribution to Unitarianism until I heard his younger brother give a fine eulogy.

I also attended the funeral of Dawn Buckle who made a great contribution to Unitarianism, helping to train ministers and becoming President of the GA. She was tireless in her work for the movement and was known by many. I did not personally know her, to my regret, but had heard her name many times.

I've taken three services recently at my "home chapel", Norcliffe in Styal, Cheshire as sadly our very good Lay Person in Charge, Len Elias, died shortly into his ministry with us.

I attended the **Rivington Pilgrimage** commemorating the **Great Ejection of 1662** when nearly 2,000 Puritan ministers, including Rev Samuel Newton at Rivington, were forced to resign their positions in the Church of England rather than conform to the newly required Book of Common Prayer. It was good to see two tables filled by younger people from **Mill Hill, Leeds**, a number of whom were new to Unitarianism. Well done Emma, who primed me to briefly explain Unitarianism in my toast after the meal.

Getting my wife to A&E and waiting with her through the night meant that I could not attend the Cross Street participation in Manchester Pride; apologies.

However, I went to the Pride Exhibition at Dean Row Chapel, Wilmslow and the Pride service. The exhibition had details of Alan Turing of Bletchley Park fame (a local resident) and details of significant LGBT+ Unitarians.



At Rivington Chapel

There was a recently signed Declaration between the Muslim and Jewish Faith leaders of the Greater Manchester communities to respect each other in these times of division. I was inspired by this to consider that my fellow Faith Leaders in the UK should sign a similar declaration but related to the Golden Rule, treat others as you would like to be treated. This is the subject of my Second Presidential service which has had a very positive response from congregants. At Shrewsbury Unitarian Chapel the local Labour MP, Julia Buckley, was there. She had some useful suggestions for promoting the Declaration. She also chatted to the many members of the congregation over coffee until the end; a diligent MP.

I think it is an appropriate time for Faith Leaders to sign the Golden Rule Declaration with the divisions emerging in the UK spreading to occasional violence. After all the Rule is in most if not all religions and most societies. In the Christian tradition this is "love thy neighbour as thyself." I suggested that this included respecting one's neighbour's right to have a different religious belief (or none), a different political view and the right to vote.

This does not mean that one has to respect all their beliefs or views themselves. We can disagree but discuss and debate in a civilised way.

Similarly, one does not have to like one's neighbour but we must respect each other as human beings. We are all one in humanity. With the new Archbishop of Canterbury now announced it would be fitting for her, along with the Head of the Church of England, the King, to lead us Faith Leaders in this declaration.

“

We can disagree but discuss and debate in a civilised way.

”

Political leaders and others might also like to follow suit as successful societies evolve by following the Golden Rule. I outlined this to the 22 Faith Leaders at the Remembrance Ceremony in Whitehall that I attended. The response was very encouraging. So I am progressing it. I also wrote an article in the Inquirer about the questionnaire survey I put round the GA Annual meeting. Thanks to Liz and Andrew for allowing this. In my article I mentioned that perhaps we do not need a President who has little influence but emphasise more the GA EC Convenor and the EC itself and its vision.



In an unofficial capacity I went to an Open Day at a Masjid near my home. It was welcoming and friendly and the people very open to discuss their beliefs. Those I spoke to expressed their horror about the terrorist attack on the Heaton Park Synagogue when it was mentioned. I had a good theological discussion with a congregant who was flood engineer by profession. There were good posters around and booklets. They emphasised that it was primarily a community centre with many activities for all ages over the week. It was estimated that the congregation was about 2,000! It had a large catchment area. One of the guides I spoke to said he was willing to come and talk at our Unitarian chapel, even though it has stained glass windows with figures.

Many thanks to Hazel and David Warhurst and Louise Reeve for inviting me to the Northern Unitarian Association (NUA) Annual Meeting and inviting me to give a talk and two services. Hazel and David kindly put me up in their house. I met the Rev Paul Walker who takes a lot of services at Newcastle and Stockton. An ex-Anglican vicar he has been Preacher of the Year and established a church from scratch in a deprived area of Sunderland that had a congregation of 80 when he left.

It was good to see Stockton's new, low energy chapel.

It was good to see Stockton's new, low energy chapel. It was good to attend the Rev Tina Gandhi's ordination. A stimulating service with contributions from Hindu scripture by Tina's Mum and children. Good hymns and a very thoughtful reading on Love and Service written by Sri Babaji read by a student colleague, Rev Janine Sim. We were also treated to some opera with an aria sung by Rev Rob Foreman. Best wishes to Tina on her future ministry. Unitarianism is in good hands with new ministers like Tina.



Unitarianism is in good hands with new ministers like Tina.



I was invited to meet the Ministers at the Ministerial Fellowship meeting at Great Hucklow on 29th Oct. It was good to have a circle discussion.

In my part-time day job I've also given three keynote talks at conferences in Turkey and France. Although I deal primarily with climate change and low carbon technology, I also include a section on ethics and mention my Unitarianism. It's produced some interesting conversations with my mostly Muslim audiences including some from Gaza, Lebanon and Syria.



Rev Tina Gandhi

Trying to get a little more publicity for Unitarianism, I've written a letter to the Times (as the establishment paper) suggesting the Golden Rule declaration and volunteered to do a Thought for Today on Radio 4, both without success.

I am pleased to make the inaugural President's Award to Dr Carolyn Jones and Dr Aled Jones. Both are members of Dunham Road Chapel, Altrincham. Carolyn, a self-described "Jewnitarian," has run the successful Altrincham Interfaith Group for many years and Aled has been the Secretary at Dunham Road and a member of the MDA for many years.



Dunham Road Chapel



SOCIAL ACTION REPORT



U4CJ protest at Westminster

BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

BY ANN HOWELL

This year has seen growing energy across the Unitarian movement around social action. Events, networks and new collaborations have helped strengthen connections between congregations and national initiatives, while the Social Justice Network continues to develop its leadership and capacity.

Events and gatherings

Workshops and meetings brought Unitarians together to explore shared priorities for social justice..

Podcast growth

The People So Bold podcast continues to expand, with new interviews and a growing audience.

Stronger network

A stronger Social Justice Network is developing with representation from multiple groups.



ANN HOWELL
SOCIAL ACTION OFFICER

Events

My third year in the post started strong, coming off the “Faith in our Future II” (U4CJ) event at **Cross Street Chapel** in **Manchester** in September, and following up in early October with “**Unite for Justice**” day.

Unite for Justice was intended to look more deeply at the issues raised by the Social Action Survey in the spring and start to plant ideas for ways to act. There were 18 selected attendees from a variety of congregations, with 1/3 under 50 years old. (ok, but room for improvement!)

Workshops focussed on ways of working within the Unitarian movement, both at the local and national level on the main issues concerning Unitarians. We announced the new leadership team, including **David Zucker as chair** and **Victor Anderson as Vice-Chair**

The outcome of the event was to develop a network of congregational representatives serve as a communications network, so that we:

- Could deliver information about social justice related news and events, and likewise have an open conduit for them to pass along information about what is happening at their chapels
- Create a database of skills and expertise about specific social justice issues.

Our “**Embracing Resilience**” (Unitarians for Climate Justice) event at **Hinckley Unitarians** was successful, and was aimed at rejuvenating activists and those concerned about social issues. It was led by **Rupert Reed** (co-founder of The Climate Majority Project) and **Leena Seeward** (psychotherapist specialising in ecological issues).



At the General Assembly

SOCIAL ACTION AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- The main social action slot was so packed with people in the room that we had to alter our original workshop outline on the spot! We had 9 full tables and there were very fruitful discussions.
- U4CJ held a hosted session on spiritual ecology
- Unitarians for Justice for Palestine worked hard on a motion for the GA to recognise the genocide in Gaza and to call for an immediate cease-fire. (This motion was amended at the last moment, and it was the amended motion that passed.)
- The positive outcome of this slightly frustrating process was for the SJN to start to look seriously at how we could either improve the motions process or work better within its confines.

People So Bold podcasts

The podcast continues to gain traction within the movement. People are starting to contact me directly with ideas of possible subjects and interviewees. To streamline production, I have also invited a few people to join the podcast team, which should increase productivity.

Interviews included:

:

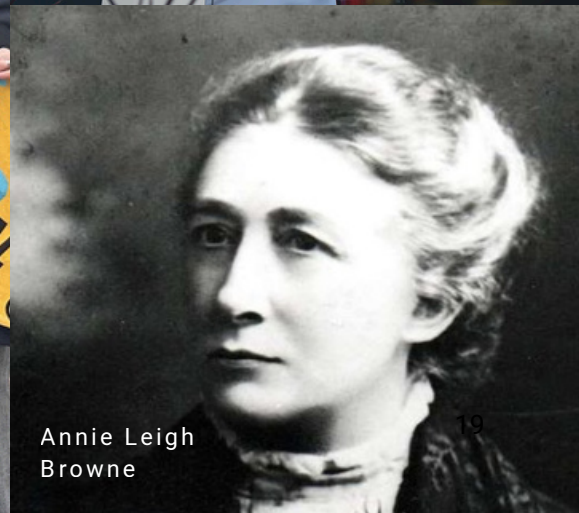
- **Rev Andi Phillips** on Artificial Intelligence from a Unitarian perspective
- **Gavin Howell and Lesley Emery** about the exciting work going on at the Dissenter of Sidmouth. Lesley has written a one-woman show about **Annie Leigh Browne**, an early suffragist and life-long Unitarian with strong ties to the chapel in Sidmouth.
- **Lizzie Kingston-Harrison** (our GA Congregational Connections lead) and **Aysha Madha**, a professional trainer (and member of Cambridge Unitarians), about self-compassion
- **Jo O'Sullivan** on her commitment to Unitarianism and social justice
- **Rev Stephen Lingwood** (Pioneer Ministry and Right to Protest) and Clive Russell (Right to Protest)



Rev Andi Phillips



Annie Leigh Browne



Social Justice Network

The SJN had a change of leadership over the summer when David Zucker stepped down as Chair for reasons of conflict of interest (given his role as judge) over the discussion over the right to protest and the support of Palestine Action. The Vice Chair Victor Anderson moved up to Chair and has been filling the role ever since. He is happy to stay in this role for now, but increasing leadership support would be useful (he has suggested James Chiriyankandath as Vice Chair, but that is yet to be confirmed).

There is now a strong “core team” that includes at least one representative from each of the sub-groups: Unitarians for Climate Justice, Unitarians for Justice for Palestine, Peace Fellowship, Unitarians of Colour (name to be finalised), and the new LGBTQIA+ group. This core team meets regularly and is building a way of working together regarding responding to topical issues.

Engaging with Liz Slade on statements: when an event of social importance occurs and it seems like the Unitarians should have their voice heard, we are working with Liz Slade on statements. This process is still a work in progress, and it very much helps when there is a motion to support the statement, but the lines of communication are open. This is an important issue for the SJN right now.

Unitarians for Climate Justice (U4CJ): Rob Oulton is taking the lead for now, with strong support from myself, Jen Deacon, Andy Frost and others. They have been developing a “Roadshow”, which will entail a pre-rolled Sunday schedule, with climate justice-themed worship and afternoon workshops, with a shared vegan/vegetarian lunch in between.

The programme will then be offered to any congregation who wishes to participate, with potentially one or two U4CJ members on hand to facilitate. We also have a strong connection with Faith for the Climate, which works hard to lobby for change in government and work with faith groups to inform regarding climate issues.

Unitarians for Justice for Palestine have been active in attending marches (mostly in London, but also elsewhere) and sharing information online.



If the current peace agreement holds, we will watch this space for how the group progresses. Meanwhile, they are supportive of initiatives such as New Unity’s recent “Vigil for Gaza” commemorating all civilian lives lost in the conflict so far.

LGBTQIA+ group: Rev Andi Phillips has taken the lead on getting this group set up, which came out of the Social Action workshop at this year’s GA. They are already working hard to become an affiliated society so that they can have a voice regarding motions.

The Peace Fellowship has an unknown future, though there are a couple of ideas for activities that may help to reignite it.



Social action service

I continue to deliver social action worship services regularly and will ramp that up even more in 2026, as part of my Intermediate Worship Studies* training course (*done independently from my paid role).

External Unitarian and social justice links

I recently attended the EUU gathering in Cologne, Germany where I delivered a social action workshop. This community is strong and enthusiastic (though spread-out) and we could make more connections there, especially since there are very few active in-person congregations. They seem hungry for any Unitarian content, so at the very least their mailing list is a place to advertise any of our online events.


UU Service Committee (UUSC): I had a great conversation with Laura Randall and Salote Soqo from the UU Service Committee in the US. There may be future collaborations there in the future, but for now we are on each other's radar.

Charter for Compassion: I reconnected with the UK branch of the Charter for Compassion, an initiative founded by religious historian Karen Armstrong and ratified by the UN in 2009. In the UK, the Unitarians were the first faith group to sign the charter (largely because of the links that Rob Gregson and I made at SimpleGifts). There is a revival of interest and some interesting new work going on that we could get involved with. Watch this space!



RADAR: Victor Anderson keeps us informed of their activities and issues raised.

In conclusion, there is a lot of momentum starting to build within the Social Justice Network and connections to congregations. With the leadership developing in all the sub-groups, it is expected that this will continue, and there will be even more tangible results next year, including events, content creation, and the sharing of expertise.

The background features a repeating pattern of blue circles and stylized leaves on a dark blue background. The circles are arranged in a grid, and the leaves are positioned between them, creating a symmetrical, mandala-like design.

CONGREGATIONAL CONNECTIONS

CONNECTING UNITARIANS

I have now been working as Congregational Connections Lead for the General Assembly for four years. It continues to be my pleasure and privilege to support our movement in this way and I am grateful to everyone I have collaborated with this year. I very rarely work alone and the relationships and connections I have built with others are the foundation for everything else I have done this year. Having recently fallen and sustained a fracture and concussion,

“
spaces to gather,
connect, share resources
and inspire each other
”

My intention in conducting my connections work is to create new spaces where Unitarians and Free Christians can gather, connect, share resources, and inspire each other. While these gatherings differ in focus and content, the space is held by my commitment to creating spiritually nourishing, free-thinking, safe and considerate spaces for sharing. I have not always been able to predict the direction and impact of the work, but I trust that if the space is working, what we need as a community will emerge.

A new and exciting group this year has been **Heart of the City**, a space for anyone connected to our city centre congregations to come and share resources, ideas and inspiration and share the many joys and concerns that are unique to urban life. It's felt great to launch this much-needed new group and working with **Emma Romy-Jones** and **Rev. Andi Philips** is a pleasure.



LIZZIE KINGSTON HARRISON
CONGREGATIONAL CONNECTIONS
OFFICER



Spirit of Land and Sea is a good example of the kind of group I have focussed on nurturing this year. This group meets now meets twice a month via Zoom, is hosted by me and Gavin Howell, and is open to anyone who lives by the sea. It draws together ministers and lay people who do the important work of spiritual leadership, community action, and pastoral care in a coastal context. We share ideas, inspiration, and resources and when we met in person at last year's Annual Meetings, we also shared in a seawater communion.

Another group, now well-established and thriving, is the online **Administrators' Network** which I run with Jenni Duffell. This offers support to our administrators as they conduct their essential work keeping our congregations and places of worship running.

It has been great to see this resource grow and become an increasingly important space for sharing useful information. This year has seen many of the documents, originally shared on the Admin. Network 'Dropbox,' posted onto the Congregational Toolkit. It was great to be able to meet many of the Administrators in person at a workshop to celebrate the network at the Annual Meetings 2025 where we were able to spread news of the network more widely.

It is three years since I started **Together in Meditation** with Richard Bober, Rev. Sheena Gabriel, and Rob Oulton. This weekly gathering offers meditation, readings, music and spiritual nourishment and we have around 30 regular attenders. Richard and I also offer **Sacred Stillness** a monthly meditation intended to support our worship leaders. Creating these spaces for meditation continues to be a pleasure and it was wonderful to offer a space at the **Annual Meetings 2025** and at **FUSE** to continue to grow our supportive network of meditators and meditation leaders.

Now entering its second year **NUBIs (New Unitarian Beginnings, In-Gathering)**, which I host with Rev. Kieren Mardle Moss, in one of my highlights of the month. This online group meets regularly to provide a safe space for all those who are new to our movement in which we share our Unitarian stories, address questions and queries, and facilitate discussion. It has been a privilege to meet people in search of a spiritual home and see them become part of our community, to answer their questions, to help them find congregations and online gatherings and to be a small but important part of their journey. I am so glad that the movement can offer this space.

Aware that we already have our Districts working hard to foster congregational connections, I have been working with **Liz Slade** to provide an ongoing space for district representatives to connect, share ideas and have open dialogue with the GA. Our District Connections gatherings have proved a valuable space for building rapport across the movement and giving us all a sense of momentum and shared goals. Meanwhile, acknowledging that East Anglian does not have a district, I have been also hosting monthly **Heart and Soul in East Anglia** using the excellent Heart and Soul resources developed and shared by Rev. Jane Blackall.



Rev Jane Blackall

It's been brilliant to work with Kay Millard to start up a group for **Western Union Connections** so that folks can drop in and stay connected, this is especially for those who may not otherwise have a local congregation to attend but is very much open to all

One of the reasons why I enjoy hosting groups online is because of the ways in which I have been taught to hold space well, with compassion and ethical standards and with an understanding of the needs of everyone in the group.

I could not have done this without learning from the gold-standard covenants used at Summer School and in Heart and Soul sessions. Therefore, it was my pleasure to work with Rev. Jane Blackall this year to launch the Facilitators' Network at the Annual Meetings 2025 and then monthly online. This group is open to anyone developing or hosting engagement groups and is designed to help nurture their work in a supportive environment.

Part of my role also includes supporting others who are doing essential connections work. For example, I lend support to the **Unitarian Christian Association** and to **Unitarians for Climate Justice** and I am open to any other groups that approach and ask for my time and assistance. It is my pleasure to sit on the **Summer School Panel**, and we are currently organising Summer School for August 2026.

I also support Liz Slade and Simon Bland in hosting the **Ministry Coffeehouse** to help keep our ministers feeling connected to the work of GA staff and provide a supportive and informal space for discussion

My work is not only focussed on new gatherings as online spaces are also important for sharing information and resources. I continue to work on Worship Words, a collaborative space for the whole movement to share worship materials. The collection hosts almost four hundred readings, from over fifty authors, includes voices from across the movement and can be easily searched by category, theme, or keyword. Look out for the Sunday Prayer, shared on Sundays across our social media channels with a link to the website - www.worshipwords.unitarian.org.uk

I also worked this year with Simon Bland to develop the **Congregational Support Toolkit** which is another valuable repository of resources and information, intended to help anyone involved in the governance, administration, and leadership of our congregations.

It has been another hard year in the wider world, but I believe that as a movement - due to our history as dissenters, our ongoing love for each other, our compassionate values and radical action - we have a chance to create spaces that address the difficult and unsteady cultural context we currently face.

It is our shared principles that allow us to do this. I see my role as helping to remind us of what we can be at our absolute best. This work has been a huge blessing to me alongside my ministry training. I very much hope that the projects I am working on have inspired others, sparked some innovative ideas, and helped strengthen our sense of Unitarian and Free Christian identity across the movement.





MINISTRY AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



REV DR RORY CASTLE-JONES
MINISTRY AND LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

MINISTRY MATTERS

For the past two years, I have spent two days a week investigating, exploring and imagining ministry and leadership in our movement. I looked at our existing structures, culture and ways of working, digging deep into the realities on the ground for our ministers and leaders in our congregations, and was tasked with offering solutions. We know that bold, visionary and innovative leadership is key in building and growing healthy spiritual communities.

“**bold, visionary and innovative leadership is key**”

In Spring 2024, I produced a report entitled ‘Challenging Leadership: Unitarian and Free Christian Ministry Today’, which concluded that support for our ministers was “lacking at a systemic level” and that whilst ministry training was strong, support after that was often poor.

The report put forward ten recommendations to change this:

- mandatory continuing professional development
- the creation of a system of supervision
- renewal of our probation system
- encouraging covenant groups
- providing trustees with training
- starting a conversation about the role of retired ministers
- guidance and support on sabbaticals
- supporting a new annual gathering for active ministers
- encouraging open and honest conversations about congregational autonomy and its strengths and weaknesses.

With the support of our Executive Committee and in collaboration with our Ministerial Fellowship, we have been working to implement these recommendations. Following conversations and consultations, we have been able to provide our ministers and congregations with a Continuing Professional Development diary and Sabbaticals Guidance. We have launched 'Advance' - a new annual gathering for ministers which, following a successful pilot in March 2025, will gather for the second time in July 2026. We have also begun conversations about how to better organise covenant groups and about the role of the retired ministers, as well as thinking creatively about how congregational autonomy can evolve to best serve our future needs.

Finally, we have convened a group of experts to begin the creation of a system of pastoral supervision for our ministers. At the time of writing, I am a month away from the end of this two-year project and busy preparing documents and notes to hand over this work to the individuals and groups who will continue it. It has been a great privilege to be entrusted with this project and to collaborate with clergy and lay leadership to explore together what changes we need to make to train, support and celebrate our leaders, so that our congregations and communities can thrive and transform lives. I would like to offer my sincere and heartfelt thanks to everyone who has worked alongside me in this work and I wish all the very best to those who will continue it in the future.



From last year's annual meetings



INNOVATION FUND

SUPPORTING CONGREGATIONAL GROWTH AND REJUVENATION

In 2024 plans for the Innovation Fund were completed and I was recruited toward the end of the year. I began in post in March 2025, to lead and manage the Innovation Fund and we held two introductory sessions in April 2025 at the Annual Meetings and online, to anyone interested in applying. We also published guidance and information about the fund; what we were looking for, how to apply and how applications would be considered.

We then opened the scheme for applications and expressions of interest in May 2025. At the same time, I was busy recruiting our fantastic assessment panel, who provide independent advice on applications we receive, and helpful feedback to applicants. Panel members include Unitarians ministers, members of congregations, people with expertise in grant making, other denominations, community work, project design and more. They met to consider the first set of funding applications in July 2025 and have been meeting quarterly since then. By the end of September 2025, we had awarded 9 grants, pledging over £45,000.

£45,000

Pledged since
September 2025

NICK BUTLER WATTS
INNOVATION FUND MANAGER



Funded projects

Chowbent

Rev Tina Gandhi has been working with the primary school neighbouring Chowbent Chapel in Greater Manchester, to co-design a project with their pupils. The result has been a new primary school and chapel newsletter, written by the pupils themselves. Young people are visiting the chapel, interviewing teachers, students and members of the congregation and writing about chapel life in their own words. This is then circulated to other pupils, families and nearby local nurseries, reaching hundreds of homes.

Unitarian Transformers

Unitarian Transformers were awarded Development Grants to support three congregations: Warwick, Shrewsbury and Chorley. They have been supporting staff, trustees and volunteers at all three to explore new activities, including new worship services for families, improving financial sustainability, supporting trustees, creative art groups for young children, lunchtime meditations and improving pastoral care.

Heart Spaces

A new collaboration between multiple ministers and spiritual leaders across London has created a series of weekly activities at Essex Hall, including 'Mystic of the Month', 'Mindful Lunch Breaks' and 'Spiritual Jukebox'. This has created a new, small, Unitarian community in central London, that is modelling alternative worship formats beyond Sunday services.

Soul Deep

Funding was awarded to provide communications and administrative support to Soul Deep, to deepen participants' spiritual engagement and improves connections within congregations. Funds enable any congregation to run a 'Soul Deep' course in their area, to promote spiritual exploration in small groups over a period of weeks, with guidance and organisational support. Two courses have run as a result, one in Edinburgh and another nationally, held online.



Lewisham LGBTQ+ consultation

A small grant was awarded to support a consultation to ask members of the local LGBTQ+ community about their needs and interests, and identify gaps in services available to them, and what Lewisham Unitarians could do to help bridge this gap. The first consultation event has taken place and has begun building new relationships members of their community, as well as giving them fresh ideas into what they could offer locally.

Lewes and Ditchling

Funding was awarded for a 6-week ministry placement, to explore new, non-traditional ways of ministry to support and grow the congregations. A visiting minister will provide guidance, programming, and vision planning to assess the needs and opportunities for a modern approach to ministry.

Cambridge

A two-day workshop organized by the Unitarian Church Cambridge was given funding to create a compassionate and connected community by addressing barriers like shame, practicing self-compassion, balancing individual and community needs, and exploring egalitarian structures. The workshop includes playful games, reflective exercises, facilitated conversations, music, movement, creative activities, and food sharing. In feedback, 100% of participants would recommended the workshop.

“I think this was a really important topic and I don’t know where else I could have gone for a practical course on this.”

“I found this very thought-provoking with plenty of practical ideas to take away.”

“Funding this was very much worthwhile”



What's been challenging

Launching the Innovation Fund has been a new adventure for all of us, both at the GA and for applicants, and in some areas we have had to build the plane whilst also flying it. Providing advice to people on applying to the fund before it was open was challenging, and no doubt we haven't always got it right. But I'm pleased with how the fund has operated in 2025 and 2026, and thankful to my colleagues' great work designing the scheme before I was in post, especially John Bates, Simon Bland and Liz Slade. Due to their careful planning, we have not had to make drastic changes since opening for applications, only small readjustments.

Managing expectations

The name 'Innovation Fund' may have suggested to some that we wanted immediate, bold, transformational projects, or that it would attempt to fix deep-seated cultural issues. Whilst we would welcome that, the reality is that helpful and meaningful innovation within small congregations can seem quite small and mundane.

We are perfectly happy to fund the Unitarian equivalent of the 'u-bend' of a toilet – an innovation which no one really thinks about but we would sorely miss if it suddenly disappeared! The most useful and effective ideas are likely to be simple, not flashy, and something that others will have already thought of. What matters is that it enables congregations to thrive.

What's next

Looking ahead, I'm excited by the projects we've awarded in the current financial year. We've already pledged funding to a Unitarian community hub in Wales, peer-support groups in Edinburgh, a Youth Programme Lead in Birmingham, community conversations in Evesham and research into how Unitarians can meet the needs and interests of today's weddings and other rites of passage. There are other projects funded too, and lots more in the pipes. It is inspiring and encouraging to see Unitarians use the Innovation Fund to invest in themselves and to take a risk on a new activity, idea or initiative, that can help them share the treasures that Unitarianism has to offer.

We are open to considering any and all ideas for applications. It could be something that:

- supports ministers in providing visionary leadership
- supports trustees and committee members of congregations to steward healthy, vibrant Unitarian communities
- provides congregations with tools, staff and systems that reduce complexity and make congregational life easier to manage and more spiritually fulfilling
- meets the needs and interests of children, teens and young adults
- supports outreach, helping Unitarian communities to be even more confident in their mission and purpose
- empowers members of congregations to develop their spiritual lives and to be agents of growth, change and renewal in their communities

Or something entirely different we haven't thought of!

If you have an idea for a project please get in touch via our website:
unitarian.org.uk/unitarian-innovation-fund

The background of the page is a repeating geometric pattern of concentric diamonds and squares in various shades of purple, creating a complex, interlocking visual effect.

WORKING IN OUR COMMUNITIES

SUPPORTING CONGREGATIONAL GROWTH AND REJUVENATION

Safeguarding is one of the most important things we do. Getting it right means that the people who come through our doors, whether they're lifelong members or first-time visitors, can trust that they are safe and looked after.

That's why we take it seriously, and why we keep investing in the structures, training and networks that help GA bodies do the same. Over the past year, we've been working with GA bodies to raise standards in safeguarding practice across the General Assembly – and I'm pleased with how far we've come.

Over 50 GA bodies are now members of **thirtyone:eight**, a charity dedicated to safeguarding best practice across the faith and voluntary sector. Safeguarding Leads have found the helpline, model policies and DBS checking service particularly useful. If your organisation isn't yet a member, we've negotiated a discount code, UNIT25, that gets you 25% off your first year's membership.

In June, around 80 trustees came together for role-specific training. The feedback was really encouraging, and it's led us to plan more for summer 2026. Our ideas have been shaped by conversations with the Safeguarding Network, so we're building on what people have actually told us they need.

The Safeguarding Network has been meeting monthly throughout the year, and it continues to be one of those valuable spaces where people can share experiences, ask questions and develop best practice together. We've covered trustee responsibilities, new safeguarding requirements, and how to host a Safeguarding Sunday well. It's open to everyone – if you'd like to join, just get in touch.



GAVIN HOWELL
SAFEGUARDING LEAD



WHAT WE'VE OFFERED FOR CONGREGATIONS SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE

Over the past year, the General Assembly has worked with GA bodies to develop various youth provisions across the General Assembly. The place where most of this work happens is the Youth Leader Meetup. It's an online space that welcomes youth leaders from across the General Assembly to meet and develop best practice together.

This network, a place of collegiality, is not only somewhere to share ideas but also a place where youth leaders can receive support and encouragement. Simply put, at the congregational level, this role can be a lonely one.

Youth leaders using the space have gone on to establish new networks of their own. Within the past year, some have teamed up to create a WhatsApp group connecting Unitarian parents and carers. It's a space created by Unitarian parents for Unitarian parents.

It has strengthened relationships and led to the formation of a new group able to advocate for its own interests. It's early days, but there are already signs of success, as some places have adapted their youth offerings in response to parental requests.

Do get in touch if you like to join the Youth Leader Meetup. All are welcome.



OUR TORBAY PROJECT: WORKING IN A MORE EMERGENT WAY

This is the final year of a five-year project exploring the potential of working in a more emergent way. There are no fixed outcomes.

The early projects born out of this inquiry continue to develop. One, the local engagement group, based in Torquay, is now increasingly being facilitated by the attendees themselves, on themes of their choosing. Some projects, in a spirit of true emergence, have developed in surprising ways. On International Women's Day, Lesley Emery performed her moving one-woman play *Annie Marches On*, inspired by the Unitarian suffragist Annie Leigh Browne, to a packed-out venue.

This grew out of the Peace Garden Mural project at Dissenter of Sidmouth. Now, with the support of a local theatre director, who knows what might come next?

And, as is the nature of this way of working, new initiatives continue to emerge and develop. Within the past 12 months, working in collaboration with the local engagement group, Death Cafés have been established in Paignton and Plymouth.

Our hope is that they will link with existing provisions, establishing a network across south and east Devon. We're optimistic and extremely excited by this prospect. Let's see what happens...



SUMMER SCHOOL



Summer School 2025

Hucklow Summer School Panel 2025

Annual Report for the financial year

October 2024 – September 2025

Panel Members

Jane Blackall (convenor), Michael Allured (to Sept 2025), Charlotte Chanteloup, Lizzie Kingston-Harrison, Angela Maher, Raj Savarapu (from Sept 2025), Rita Woditsch (to Sept 2025)

Mission Statement (abridged extract)

The core activity of Hucklow Summer School (HSS) is religious education. We aim to provide a balanced programme including small group activities and morning theme talks. We are committed to providing opportunities for daily spiritual practice including meditation sessions each morning and worship in the chapel each evening. We provide a programme for children and young people. It is essential that HSS is a safe and caring environment. To this end, we are committed to provision of a named 'Minister of the Week' for pastoral care, and to the widespread use of group covenants. It is our hope that participants will be inspired and challenged by their experience of HSS to develop and promote religious education activities back in their own congregations and communities. We aim to promote diversity at HSS, representing the breadth within our movement, in terms of our demographics, theologies and varied forms of spiritual practice.

Achievements

This year was a milestone year for Hucklow Summer School as we were marking our 30th anniversary. We celebrated this achievement at the General Assembly annual meetings with a short talk on the history of the event, which paid tribute to its founders and all those who have kept it running since 1995, and a short film made up of reminiscences from people whose lives have been touched by Hucklow Summer School over the years.

In 2025, Hucklow Summer School took place from 15th to 22nd August, and this year our community was made up of 52 in-person participants (including 5 children) and a further 20 participants joining us each day for talks and engagement groups online. We always aim to bring in plenty of newcomers and so we are delighted to report that this year 20 of the in-person participants and 10 of the online participants were first-time attenders.

Morning talks and engagement groups explored the theme 'Finding Our Religion? Being Unitarian in the 21st Century'. Our theme speakers across six mornings were Sheena Gabriel, Mel Prideaux, Jane Blackall, Winnie Gordon, Sarah Tinker, Arek Malecki, Danny Crosby, Fiona Owen, and Lizzie Kingston-Harrison. The talks are available on Hucklow Summer School's YouTube channel.

Morning talks and engagement groups explored the theme 'Finding Our Religion? Being Unitarian in the 21st Century'. Our theme speakers across six mornings were Sheena Gabriel, Mel Prideaux, Jane Blackall, Winnie Gordon, Sarah Tinker, Arek Malecki, Danny Crosby, Fiona Owen, and Lizzie Kingston-Harrison. The talks are available on Hucklow Summer School's YouTube channel.

Participants had a choice of five engagement groups for the week: 'The Words we Speak Become the House we Live In: Constructing a Contemporary Unitarian Identity' with Danny Crosby and Arek Malecki; 'The Religious Life: Integrating Our Faith and Daily Living' with Jane Blackall and Charlotte Chanteloup; 'Reclaiming Ritual and Exploring Ancient Wisdom' with Kate Dean and Michael Allured; 'The Flame and the Chalice: Discovering Our True Self in Community' (online) with Lizzie Kingston-Harrison and Rob Oulton; or 'The Great and Fiery Force: Getting to the Heart of Unitarian Spiritual Practice' (online) with Laura Dobson and Stephanie Bisby. Claire Ayers and Tim Harrison co-led our children's programme. Angela Maher served as Coordinator, Nick Morrice as musical director, and Sheena Gabriel as Minister for the Week.



The standard rate in 2025 was £640, of which only £80 was the conference fee to cover the cost of accommodating our staff team and other expenses (the balance is for accommodation and meals at the Nightingale Centre). In an attempt to keep the price to participants down we have sought additional financial support, not just from the Executive Committee, but also from Kensington Unitarians and several generous individual donors, and we are very grateful for their contributions which significantly subsidise the event. We are also grateful to the Stokes Croft Educational Foundation and several district associations and congregations which have generously supported a number of individuals to attend.

Bursaries continue to be in high demand and make it possible for more people from a more diverse range of backgrounds to experience Summer School.

This helps to build and strengthen connections across our network of Unitarian communities, and helps us fulfil our mission to be a centre of excellence for engagement group practice, nurturing aspiring facilitators to carry the Summer School ethos back to their home congregations (and beyond).

One innovation for 2025 was the offering of one of this year's engagement groups, 'The Religious Life', as a six-part online course during the autumn, to give people who weren't able to attend a second chance to get a taste of Summer School from home. We are also offering a six-part 'Finding Our Religion' study group online in early 2026 at which we are screening abridged versions of the theme talks and offering questions for small-group reflection. Over 40 people have signed up for this group which is an encouraging sign. We are always on the lookout for ways to disseminate Summer School's message more widely.

Looking Ahead to 2026

The panel met in September 2025 to begin planning for 2026. The theme will be 'Doing Our Best?' and we will explore the tension between trying to hold ourselves to the highest standards and the need to accept our human limitations. Once again we will have three in-person engagement groups and two online engagement groups. The wider economic climate is proving to be increasingly challenging, and we anticipate that our costs will increase significantly, so we will be on the lookout for further sources of financial support both to subsidise the running of the event and for the Summer School Bursary Fund.

Together in meditation





TRUSTEES' REPORT

The EC works with the GA staff team to work to our charitable object:

“

To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition.

”



The Executive Committee (EC) acts as the trustee body of the General Assembly (GA) and is responsible for determining the overall direction and development of the GA in line with the decisions and policies agreed at the Annual Meetings and the requirements of charity law and other legal requirements.

The Executive Committee provides strategic leadership, appoints the Chief Officer, and is responsible for ensuring the effective use of the assets of the General Assembly. Executive Committee members are not representatives of individual districts or areas of the country but must act in the best interests of the General Assembly as a charity.

Our current focus is in supporting the change that's needed as our movement finds a path to rejuvenation.

For those congregations that are at a point of very low capacity, or are finding themselves at a crossroads, we have been collaborating with the Decelerator, an organisation that helps charities and civic organisations approach endings well. We have also found the need to support congregations on their governance, and in addressing the challenges that arise from having low capacity.

At the other end of the scale, our work is investing in leadership and ministry development. As always, the GA works with Unitarian College and Harris Manchester College Oxford to support ministry training.

Our thanks to Simon Bland and the Interview Panel for their work in supporting ministry training in partnership with the colleges. We are glad to see such a high calibre of new ministers joining the GA Roll, as well as a growing number of people taking part in Unitarian College's lay worship leader training. We were delighted to welcome Rosie Whiting, Vince McCully and Garry Hammond onto our new Register of Lay Leaders (Worship and Leadership), having successfully completed the Advanced level training.

Rev Dr Rory Castle Jones has continued his work in identifying how ministry can be strengthened, and is collaborating with stakeholders across the movement to implement schemes for continuing professional development and supervision for ministers.



This year the Innovation Fund opened, with Nick Butler-Watts joining the GA team as Programme Manager. Initial development grants were awarded in 2025, enabling congregations to pilot and explore ideas for more extensive bids. We are grateful to our Assessment Panel, a thoughtful group of Unitarians and allies with experience in grant-making, community development work, and congregational innovation. Nick's work in facilitating 'Three Horizons' workshops with districts and congregations has been a powerful way of supporting local leaders to identify the changes they wish to make.



Three Horizons has been a powerful way of supporting local leaders



An important part of strengthening the fabric of our community and enabling change happens through the GA facilitating new connections. This year has seen the Admin Network go from strength to strength, sharing resources and fellowship between staff and volunteers who take care of the administrative day to day for congregations, and is helping shape our Congregational Support Toolkit, which makes resources available.

We have continued with our District Connections online meetings, enabling relationships to strengthen between district leaders and to increase dialogue with the GA. The 'Spirit of Land and Sea' group is going strong for those congregations finding commonality in their coastal locations, and this has inspired a new 'Heart of the City' group for leaders in city centre chapels.

Connections are also happening on the spiritual side, with the Meditation Network and Facilitators Network growing. Staff member, Gavin Howell, has continued to support congregations with safeguarding. As part of this he hosts the online gathering of the Safeguarding Network twice a month to share information and help to promote best practice. Approximately one third of GA member congregations are now members of Thirty-One Eight, the national safeguarding advice charity. We hope to see more congregations take the step to membership as part of a recognition of the importance of good safeguarding practice. This year, the GA hosted training from 31:8, the church safeguarding specialists, and subsidised access to it for trustees of congregations and district associations, and we were delighted that 80 trustees took part. We hope to build on this in future years. The Safeguarding Network's monthly online meetings go from strength to strength as a way for local Unitarians to connect and learn.



In our work to grow awareness of the Unitarian movement, a team of volunteers led by Janine Sim hosted a stand at Greenbelt festival in the summer, a Christian-based festival of 'artistry, activism and belief'. We also offered Unitarian worship, led by Janine, Kate Dean, Rob Foreman and Shana Parvin. Our Chief Officer, Liz Slade, was also on the programme, in conversation with artist and musician Brian Eno.

Following consultation with the denomination, and the resolution passed in the 2025 annual meetings, the GA have been continuing work to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, which will be completed in the 2025-6 year.

This year the EC began a new practice of hosting an open online space for dialogue a few days after each of our meetings, so that Unitarians can hear first hand what has been discussed by the EC, and have a chance to ask questions.

During the year we reviewed both our Auditors and Investment Management providers. The Audit review panel met with four firms from a long list of eight who were invited to submit proposals and recommended Sayer Vincent who were appointed by the EC in September 2025. Our thanks to David Joseph, Ray Harding and Gilian Woolman for their input to the process.

The Investment panel including The Hon Treasurer, Chief Officer, Marion Baker and Ray Harding with input from Natasha Stanley, Robert Crick; Wendy Sudbury and Joe Calvert met with three potential Investment Managers representing a range of approaches in May 2025. Epworth Investment Management Ltd was selected as providing the best mix of performance, service and ethical investments and were appointed in July.


Investments held with the previous manager were sold in August and September and held in cash at the year end prior to reinvestment with Epworth commencing October 2025.

The General Assembly's reserves policy is to hold sufficient free reserves, not restricted by their purpose or by virtue of endowment, to ensure that it is able to service its annual budgeted expenditure and to ensure that its risks in relation to its pension obligations are mitigated.

The EC agreed to continue with last year's new guidelines in implementing the reserves policy, looking at the unrestricted funds in line with the annual operational costs:

- Above 2x one year cost cover = green light – use more reserves to invest in programmes to achieve objects (including routine fundraising)
- Between 1 and 2x = amber light - maintain programmes but none new until > 2x activate fundraising campaigns
- Below 1x cost cover= red light – start to trim costs and accelerate fundraising

We are currently operating with 4.7 times the annual costs in unrestricted funds, and so are acting in line with the 'green light' above.



WHO WE ARE



Our Staff

The following were members of GA staff during the financial year:

Chief Officer	Elizabeth Slade	eslade@unitarian.org.uk
Programme staff:		
Ministry and Congregational Support Officer	Simon Bland	sbland@unitarian.org.uk
Ministry and Leadership Development Officer	Rev Dr Rory Castle Jones	rcastlejones@unitarian.org.uk
Youth Co-ordinator, Safeguarding Lead, Torbay Lead	Gavin Howell	ghowell@unitarian.org.uk
Congregational Connections Lead	Lizzie Kingston Harrison	ekingston@unitarian.org.uk
Social Action Officer	Ann Howell	ahowell@unitarian.org.uk
Support staff		
Operations Manager	Andrew Mason	AMason@unitarian.org.uk
Administrator	Audrey Longhurst	alonghurst@unitarian.org.uk
Communications Officer	Pamela Welsh	pwelsh@unitarian.org.uk
Finance staff		
Finance Manager	David Joseph	djoseph@unitarian.org.uk
Finance Assistant	Natalia Talikova	ntalikova@unitarian.org.uk
Volunteer	Rosemary Ruston	info@unitarian.org.uk

The following were members of the Essex Hall Trust during the financial year:

Lee Warren	Caretaker
Hepzi Lewis	Cleaner

Governance

For the year ended 30 September 2025

Charity number 250788
Country of registration England and Wales

Registered office and operational address: Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex Street, London, EC2R 3HY

Trustees who served during the year and up to the date of this report were as follows:

Ms J Jacobs (resigned 14 April 2025)
Rev. J James (resigned 14 April 2025)
Mr S Hall (resigned 14 April 2025)
Mr A J Bates, Hon. Treasurer
Ms S Benfield
Mr Z Baker
Rev L Dobson (resigned 14 April 2025)
Mr J Calvert (appointed 14 July 2025)
Rev W Gordon (appointed 14 July 2025)
Rev A Malecki (appointed 12 April 2025)
Rev D Bisby (appointed 12 April 2025)

Key management personnel Ms E Slade, chief officer

Bankers: HSBC
31 Holborn
Holborn Circus
London
EC1N 2HR

Investment advisors Epworth Investment Management Limited
Methodist Church House
25 Tavistock Place
LONDON
WC1H 9SF

Auditor Sayer Vincent LLP
Chartered Accountants and Statutory Auditor
110 Golden Lane
London
EC1Y 0TG

Our members

Honorary members

Marion Baker
Rev Dr Peter Godfrey
Dorothy Hewerdine
Rev J Eric Jones

Rev Celia Midgley
Rev John Midgley
Rev James McClelland
Rev Dr Ann Peart

Rev Clifford Reed
Alan Ruston
Jeffrey Teagle

In accordance with rule 4 of the Constitution of the General Assembly the following persons, having contributed not less than £40 each to the funds of the Assembly in the financial year 2023-24, are Associate Members of the General Assembly.

Aaronson, Jane
Ashworth, Joyce
Atkinson, Jennifer
Attfield, Robin
Aylmer, Vivien

Baker, Marion
Barber, Mike
Beck, Robert
Beckett, Eleanor
Benfield, Sarah
Bennett, Diane
Birtles, Elizabeth
Blair, James
Borsotti, Alessio
Boyce, Sarah
Boyle, Brendan
Bradley, Alex
Brooks, Beryl
Brown, Iain
Buckle, Dawn
(Deceased)
Buckley, David

Cann, Tony
Carter, John
Cartwright, Celia
Chilton, Bruce
(Deceased)
Chilton, Carol
Clarke, Nigel
Cockroft, Brian
Cockroft, Lena

Coldwell, AH
Cook, Joan
Cooper, Sue
Copley, Helen
Copley, David
(Deceased)
Corrigall, Jim
Costley, Daniel
Costley, Janet
Crompton, Judith

Dawson, Christine
Day, Mike
De Silva, Marco

Dawson, Christine
Day, Mike
De Silva, Marco

Edwards, Juliet
Egloff, Urs
Elder, Raymond
Elias, Len
(Deceased)

Faiers, Elizabeth
Ford, Shaun
Fordham, Ed
Foster, Katie
Foster, Megan

Gaines, Richard
Gienke, Martin
Gillman, David
Godfrey, Peter
Greenwood, Craig

Hague, Gillian
Hague, Howard
Harrison, Marjorie
(Deceased)
Hartley, Lesley
Haughton, Dorothy
Hewerdine, Claire
Hewerdine,
Dorothy
Hewerdine, John
Higgins, Martin
Hill, Andrew
Hill, Margaret
Hoskins, Gareth
Howarth, Jane
Howarth, Miles
(Deceased)
Hughes, Mary

Ince, Robert
Isaac, Adrian

Our members

Janes, Jennifer
Johnson, Ken
Jones, Aled
Jones, Anne
Jones, Eric

Kay, Hazel
King, Linda
Kirk, Margaret

Laycock, Barbara
Lingwood, Stephen
Lloyd, Gavin

Maher, Angela
Mansfield, Doak
Mardle-Moss,
Benjamin
Mardle-Moss,
Kieren
Martin, Christine
Mason, Gavin
Mason, Helen
Merritt, Helen
Merritt, Richard
Midgley, Celia
Midgley, John
Mills, Colin
Mitchell, Susan
Morrison, Sue
Murray, Sian
Myerscough,
Thomas

McAuley, Derek
McClelland, Anne
(Deceased)
McClelland, James
(Deceased)

Nettles, Emma

O'Neil, Sandie
O'Shea, Philip
Oulton, Robert

Partington, Colin
Partington, Joan
Paxton, Margaret
Payne, Beryl
(Deceased)
Peart, Ann
Pebody, Isabel
Pennington, Alan
Percy, Annette
Perry, Margaret

Dawson, Christine
Day, Mike
De Silva, Marco

Reed, Clifford
Reed, Paulette
Rees, Clare
Rees, Tony
Reynolds, Amanda
Richards, John
Roberts, Wilna
Robinson, Jim
Robinson,
Margaret
Rogers, Jocelyn
Rogers, Louise
Rowland, Jennifer
Ruston, Alan
Ruston, Jennifer
Ruston, Mark
Ruston, Rosemary

Sakurai, Shige
Sampson, Peter
Sanders, Neil
Sellman, Jennifer

Shaw, David
Shaw, Elizabeth
Silk, Joyce
Silk, Philip
Sinclair, Ann
Slaven, Sarah
Smith, Carole
Smith, Matthew
Soulsby, Peter
Sykes, Jenny

Teagle, Jeffrey
Teagle, Sue
Thompson,
Christine
Thursfield, Alison
Tinker, Sarah
Tombs, Susan
Tomlin, Jane
Tucker, Andrew

Usher, Ann
Usher, Geoffrey

Varley, Lynne
Varley, Richard
Voegeli, Iris
Voegeli, Rodney

Wagner, Erich
Walker, Frank
Warhurst, David
Warhurst, Hazel
Whitell, Martin
Whitham, Margaret
Wildman, Susan
Wilkie, Chrissie
Wilkins, Howard
Williams, David
Williams, Jane
Williams, Montana
Woodman,
Jacqueline
Woolley, Sue
Wykes, David
Wykes, Elizabeth



Finance and governance



OUR FINANCIAL POSITION

The financial position of the General Assembly remains stable and resilient. For the year ending 30 September 2025, the charity reported total income of £862,892 and total expenditure of £1,188,610. This resulted in a net movement in funds of £117,884, reflecting the ongoing work of the General Assembly to invest in the movement's programmes and activities.

The organisation continues to be supported by a combination of voluntary income, charitable activities, and investment returns. Donations and legacies remain an important source of support, alongside income generated through events and other activities.

Investment income also continues to make a valuable contribution to sustaining the work of the Assembly.

At the end of the financial year, the charity held total funds of **£8,043,117**, including **£3,521,440** in unrestricted reserves. These reserves provide an important foundation for the organisation, enabling it to plan confidently for the future while supporting the work of congregations, ministers and communities across the movement.

This year also marked an important transition, with the Nightingale Centre becoming an independent charity, and therefore no longer included within the General Assembly's accounts.

As always, the accounts reflect the generosity of those who support the Unitarian and Free Christian movement through donations, legacies, and their ongoing commitment to our shared work. Their support allows the General Assembly to continue strengthening connections across the movement and supporting congregations across the country.

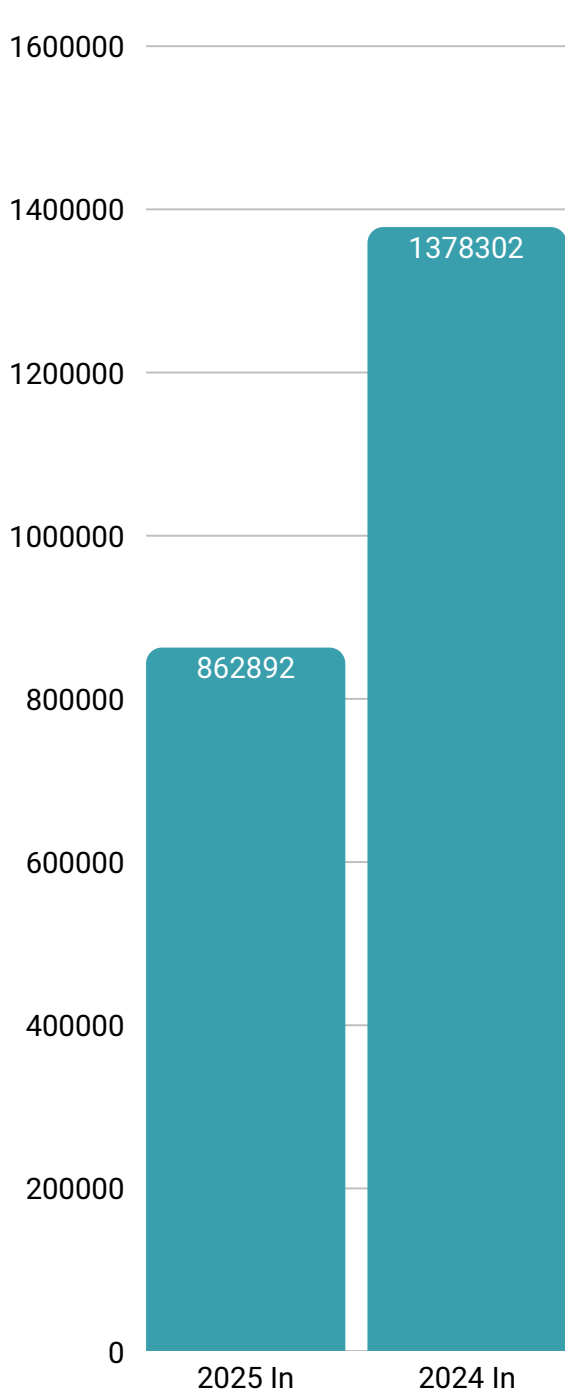
Statement of financial activities

	2025 Total	2024 Total
	£	£
Income from:		
Donations and legacies	430,238	634,654
Charitable activities	223,499	495,014
Other trading activities	41,110	45,511
Investments	168,046	198,089
Other	—	5,034
Total income	862,892	1,378,302
Expenditure on:		
Raising funds	4,144	5,129
Charitable activities	1,184,466	1,460,453
Total expenditure	1,188,610	1,474,582
Net (expenditure) / Income before net gains on investments	(325,718)	(96,280)
Net gains on investments	<u>222,504</u>	769,049
Net income for the year	(103,214)	672,769
Transfers between funds	—	—
Net income before other recognised gains and losses	(103,214)	672,769
Other losses	(14,671)	(3,066,645)
Net movement in funds	(117,884)	(2,393,876)
Reconciliation of funds:		
Total funds brought forward	8,161,001	10,554,877
Total funds carried forward	<u>8,043,117</u>	<u>8,161,001</u>

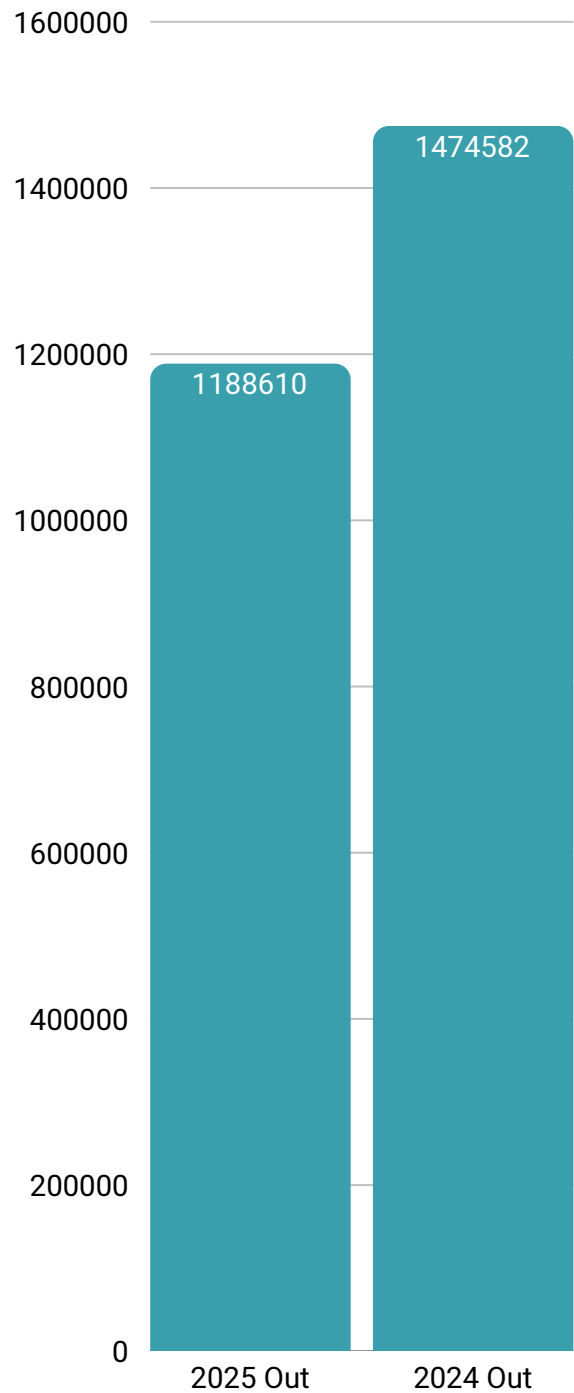
All of the above results are derived from continuing activities. There were no other recognised gains or losses other than those stated above. Movements in funds are disclosed in Note 21a to the financial statements.

Income and expenditure report

Income:



Expenditure:



Balance Sheet

	2025	2024
	£	£
Fixed Assets		
Tangible Assets	122,122	123,355
Investments	–	7,647,664
Investment Property	<u>100,000</u>	<u>150,000</u>
	222,122	2,489,013
Current Assets		
Stocks	995	1,311
Debtors	99,630	242,232
Short term deposits	1,759,910	76,229
Cash at Bank and in hand	<u>6,058,055</u>	<u>270,376</u>
	7,918,590	590,148
Liabilities		
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(97,595)	(76,811)
Net Current Assets	<u>7,820,995</u>	<u>513,337</u>
Total assets less current liabilities	<u>8,043,117</u>	<u>8,161,001</u>
Total net assets	<u>8,043,117</u>	<u>8,161,001</u>
The funds of the charity:		
Endowment funds	1,038,673	1,038,673
Restricted funds	3,483,003	3,609,147
Unrestricted funds:		
Designated funds	684,781	682,177
General funds	<u>2,836,659</u>	<u>2,831,004</u>
Total unrestricted funds	<u>3,521,440</u>	<u>3,513,181</u>
Total charity funds	<u>8,043,117</u>	<u>8,161,001</u>

Congregational Contributions

We are grateful to the quota payments made by congregations as part of their membership of the General Assembly.

Congregation	Members	Quota £
England		
Ainsworth	5	175
Altrincham	30	1050
Ashton in Makerfield	32	1120
Atherton	26	910
Bath Unitarians	4	140
Belper	16	560
Billingshurst	6	210
Birmingham Edgbaston	20	700
Birmingham Hollywood	36	1260
Blackpool	10	350
Bolton Chorley New Road	8	280
Bolton Egerton	30	1050

Congregation	Members	Quota £
England		
Boston Unitarian Meeting	5	175
Bradford	15	525
Bridgwater	5	175
Bridport	15	525
Brighton	39	1365
Bristol Brunswick Square	10	350
Bristol Frenchay	16	560
Bury	31	1085
Bury St Edmunds	10	350
Cambridge	22	770
Chatham	6	210

Congregational Contributions

Congregation	Members	Quota £
England		
Chesterfield	6	210
Chorley	8	280
Cirencester Fellowship	4	140
Coventry	4	140
Cradley	5	175
Crewkerne Unitarian Chapel	12	420
Croydon	15	525
Cullompton	5	175
Dean Row	46	1610
Denton	15	525
Derby Chapel	3	105
Ditchling	8	280
Dover Unitarian Chapel	5	175
Dukinfield Old Chapel	17	595

Congregation	Members	Quota £
England		
Eccles	39	1365
Evesham	15	525
Framlingham Unitarian Meeting House	11	385
Godalming	33	1155
Great Hucklow	13	455
Hale Barns Chapel	21	735
Hastings Unitarian Church	12	420
Hinckley	33	1155
Horsham	26	910
Hull	15	525
Hyde	2	70

Congregational Contributions

Congregation	Members	Quota £
England		
Ipswich	32	1120
Kendal	40	1400
Knutsford	42	1470
Leeds	34	1190
Leicester Great Meeting	28	980
Lincoln Unitarian Chapel	11	385
Liverpool Gateacre Chapel	8	280
Liverpool Sefton Park	20	700
Liverpool Toxteth	10	350
London Brixton	16	560
London Golders Green	21	735
London Hampstead	79	2765

Congregation	Members	Quota £
England		
London Kensington	50	1750
London Lewisham Unitarians	6	210
London New Unity	56	1960
London Stratford	5	175
Macclesfield	8	280
Maidstone	5	175
Manchester Chorlton	23	805
Manchester College Oxford Chapel Society	40	1400
Manchester Cross Street Chapel	32	1120
Manchester Gorton	3	105

Congregational Contributions

Congregation	Members	Quota £
England		
Mansfield	32	1120
New Mill	3	105
Newcastle Divine Unity	8	280
Newcastle under Lyme	13	455
Newport	3	105
Northampton	5	175
Norwich	57	1995
Nottingham	3	105
Oldham	12	420
Padiham	21	735
Plymouth	28	980
Portsmouth John Pounds Church	25	875
Rawtenstall	5	175
Richmond and Putney Unitarian Church	34	1190

Congregation	Members	Quota £
England		
Rivington	20	700
Rochdale	14	490
Scarborough	6	210
Sevenoaks	19	665
Sheffield Fulwood	43	1505
Sheffield Norfolk Street	52	1820
Sheffield Stannington	15	525
Shelf	5	175
Shrewsbury	27	945
Sidmouth Unitarians	4	140
Southampton	11	385
Southport	5	175
Stalybridge Unitarian Church	5	175
Stockton on Tees	11	385

Congregational Contributions

Congregation	Members	Quota £
England		
Stourbridge	4	140
Styal	10	350
Taunton	13	455
Tenterden	8	280
Trowbridge	5	175
Urmston Unitarian Church	14	490
Warwick	13	455
Watford	6	210
Whitby	18	630
Whitefield Stand Unitarian Chapel	23	805
Wick	4	140
Wirral	15	525
York	45	1575
	2,070	72,450

Congregational Contributions

Congregation	Members	Quota £
Scotland		
Aberdeen	10	350
Dundee	8	280
Edinburgh	28	980
Glasgow	32	1120

Congregation	Members	Quota £
Wales		
Aberdare	12	420
Bangor	12	420
Cardiff	9	315
Cefn Coed y Cwmer	10	350
Nottage	4	140
Swansea	9	315
Trebanos	27	945

Your notes

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