

Seeds

Feb / Mar 2025

encourage - inspire - challenge

Augustine
United Church

Seeing the stars

Rev'd Fiona
Bennett



Earlier in January, I was up very early one morning, out in my garden. Everything around was encrusted in white frost.

I was cold, very tired and resigned to a tired day, when I happened to look up. A deep indigo sky was studded with sparkling stars. It was stunningly beautiful. Lines came to my mind from a re-working of Psalm 23: 'You lift my head; my vision clears. The blessing cup overflows.'

I would not have seen that glorious sight but for the clear cold sky and my early start.

It was a reminder to me that in the midst of 'all that troubles, threatens and diminishes' it is important to allow God to lift our heads, clear our vision, and to be reminded that God is always with us, abundance is always around us and that God's bigger story

of love and hope is always going on in the world.

God's story is far broader and richer than that which is consuming my thinking or feelings on a cold, grumpy morning!

It was due to the cold and the early hour I felt put out by that I could see the stars.

It is often in the tougher situations in life that we remember what is truly important and learn to savour the beauty and wonder always around us in any given moment.

The blessing cup overflows (even when we are tired!).

*'In the midst of all that troubles,
That threatens and diminishes,
You set abundance before me.
You lift my head; my vision clears.
The blessing cup overflows'*

Part of Psalm 23
(*Psalms Redux: Poems and prayers* by Carla Grosch-Miller)

This is a slimmer edition than usual. Sometimes 'life' interrupts even the *Seeds* schedule! We look forward to being back with you in all our fullness next month, with more life on, around, and important to the 'church on the bridge'.

This Month

HOPE FOR THE WORLD

Global Justice Now looks back on 2024's significant moments



PATIENCE & DEDICATION

A beautiful new communion tablecloth is dedicated



JUSTICE FOR MARIELLE

Positive news about an Amnesty International case in Brazil





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

FACEBOOK

Eilidh Carmichael
eilidh.carmichael@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

Hanna Albrecht
hanna.albrecht@augustine.org.uk

PASTORAL & MENTAL HEALTH

Contact one of the ministers

WORSHIP

Revd Fiona Bennett
minister@augustine.org.uk

YOUNG PEOPLE

Matt Baines
youth@augustine.org.uk

SAFEGUARDING COORDINATOR

Alex Peden
safeguarding@augustine.org.uk
07747 300897

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 many different roles available and full training will be given, mainly by shadowing current volunteers. The rota is planned quarterly, so it is always a great time to get in touch.

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



SYNOD YOUTH WORK CHANGING

Matt Baines' post as the Synod Youth Development Worker for the URC Synod of Scotland came to an end in January, and the synod's Children's Ministry Development Worker role will be adapting and expanding. However, it will not include all the youth work that Matt has previously undertaken, which greatly benefited TLC Youth. At a recent Church Meeting, the minister expressed gratitude for Matt's work with young people.



willingness of synods to underwrite M&M contributions, and a reduction in ministry costs, mainly because more ministers have been lost than gained.

Mr Yates added that the financial strategy would need to be reviewed again nearer 2027, and restated his belief that the M&M system 'is broken'.

He said he was confident that central committees and staff 'don't throw money around' – they 'spend with a purpose'.

So, there will come a point 'when they have to stop doing things'.

The Gathering is open to all interested in finding out more about Christian Aid's current work and priorities. This will be an opportunity to hear directly from Christian Aid partners in Latin America.

Sign up and find out more at www.christianaid.org.uk/events/gathering-2025, or email edinburgh@christian-aid.org.

EDINBURGH WOMEN CELEBRATED

An outdoor theatre show presenting the lives of unsung women will come to the city in May, The Scotsman newspaper has reported.

Members of the feminist F-Bomb Theatre group will interpret the stories of five women for a site-specific theatre show called 'Monumental', which will take the form of a theatrical walking tour.

The show will include the stories of Scotland's youngest suffragette, Bessie Watson (pictured), and Edinburgh University's first female professor, Elizabeth Wiskemann, who is featured in AUC's own herstory pilgrimage.



It is hoped 'Monumental' will inspire the creation of similar open-air theatre shows in towns and cities around the world where there are few public monuments to women.

UNDERSTANDING URC MONEY

'Church culture has caught up with reality,' the United Reformed Church's Treasurer told the budget meeting of its Assembly Executive in November.

Alan Yates said there has been 'a distinct improvement' in the way the Church views the budget, which was one factor contributing to a reduced deficit in the Church's Ministry and Mission (M&M) Fund in 2024.

The M&M Fund pays for ministers' stipends, training, Assembly costs, and all the central support functions for ministry in the URC across England, Wales and Scotland. In 2023, Assembly Executive voted to tackle the fund's budget deficit over a period of five to seven years.

Other reasons contributing to the reduced deficit in 2024 have been the

PRAYERS NEEDED

Many friends of AUC write prayers for worship and other occasions. Here is an opportunity to share prayers more widely. The editors of the 2026 *URC Prayer Handbook* – *Touching God* are looking for prayers that express gratitude for, or a yearning to experience, the touch of God in our lives – moments when the sacred mystery of God breaks into the everyday, filling it with awe and wonder.

The deadline is approaching fast: 21 February. You can email your prayers to phb@urc.org.uk.

CHRISTIAN AID CATCH-UP

Christian Aid in Scotland is holding its annual online event for supporters on Tuesday 25 February, 10.30am-12pm.

Life on the Bridge

News from Augustine United Church

PAUSING ON THE THRESHOLD

A Retreat Day with the theme 'A Pause on the Threshold' was held at AUC on 11 January. It was, says Linda Harrison, 'definitely an opportunity to pause on the threshold of a new year.

'Susan Mansfield gently and graciously guided us through moments of reflection, poetry, discussion, stillness and meditation. Tables were sensitively set out for reflection, for varying levels of activity, for stillness, for reading, and Susan invited us to visit each in our own time, to use the spaces she had so carefully crafted as we felt drawn to them across the developing day.

However, one table drew Team AUC a little more than others, particularly as the day drew to a close, supporting each other to reach the goal of completing the puzzle (pictured). The day was for individual space, and all experienced the many opportunities, but it was delightful to be a part of

AUC's strengthening community in that special space too.'

JUSTICE FOR MARIELLE'S FAMILY

Eilidh Carmichael shares some positive news about an Amnesty International case that AUC members have campaigned on in the past.

Church members and friends have written Write for Rights letters on behalf of Marielle Franco's family, and Eilidh Macpherson, Campaigns Manager (Individuals and Communities at Risk) for Amnesty International UK, has written to say:

'In 2018 we campaigned, as part of Write for Rights, for Marielle Franco's family. Marielle was a Brazilian activist who was fatally shot in a hit and run in 2018. For six years, the police investigation into Marielle's death was shrouded in secrecy. It was reported that the bullets that killed Marielle were from a batch bought by

the federal police and, what's more, President Bolsonaro himself had been pictured with one of the murder suspects. You and thousands of others took action, and finally there has been a breakthrough in her case. In October 2024, six years after her death, Marielle's killers were sentenced to 59 and 78 years in prison.

'Thank you for taking action, and showing that when we come together, we can get justice.'

LENT WORSHIP

Ash Wednesday is on 5 March this year. As we approach the Lent journey towards Easter, look out for details of worship and other events. The best place to receive information is from the 'Friday email'. If you wish to receive these comprehensive weekly updates of AUC activities, please register to receive the email by contacting our Centre Manager at centre.manager@augustine.org.uk.





RICH IMAGES FOR COMMUNION

Pictured is the beautiful communion tablecloth dedicated in worship on 5 January. The cloth is the result of the skill, patience and dedication of Fiona Somerville, who says she 'crazy quilted' the cotton scraps donated by others in the congregation.

The cloth celebrates so many stories in the donated fabric that makes up the patchwork surrounding the central dandelion images.

As Fiona Bennett reflected at the dedication, AUC's dandelion logo says much about our discipleship: its roots can be used to make medicine, and keep us strong and healthy; we support one another as the stalk supports the yellow flowerhead, in glorious radiance as we bring our worship; the leaves can bring nourishment; and the dandelion clock is a mass of seeds that carry on the wind just as we are seeds of hope and love in our discipleship of transformation.

We are rooted in God's love; we support each other; we offer nourishment; we worship God; and we seek to be a part of God's transformation in the world.

Our thanks to Fiona Somerville and all who have contributed to this special gift.

GIFT AID – A WIN FOR EVERYONE?

On behalf of the Finance & Property Team, Fiona Somerville highlights the plus-points of Gift Aid.

In these economically difficult times, we understand that people may find it challenging to increase their charitable giving as much as they would like, but could you help Augustine boost its income using Gift Aid?

When you Gift Aid a charity donation, the government adds another 25p for every pound you give. We calculate that, for 2024, Augustine will be able to reclaim over £11,500 from the government in Gift Aid.

This is very welcome, although to meet the financial challenges we also face, we would love to increase this figure. Anyone can Gift Aid donations provided you pay enough income tax during the year to cover the amount the charity (or charities) you donate to reclaim from the government in Gift Aid. This means that for every £100 pounds you pay annually in income tax you can make Gift Aided donations of up to £400 to charity, and the charity (or charities) will receive an additional £100 from the government.

If you haven't already done so, feel you meet the above criterion, and would like to help Augustine boost its income in this simple way, please consider completing a Gift Aid declaration form, which can be downloaded from the website. Or you can talk to our treasurer (Ewen Harley) or Gift Aid coordinator (Fiona Somerville).

Link to Gift Aid declaration form: www.augustine.org.uk/gift-aid-declaration.

Hope for the world

Together with Christian Aid, Global Justice Now is a key partner of the URC’s global justice programme, Commitment for Life. Here, Director of Global Justice Now Nick Dearden looks back on some significant moments in 2024. We can make a change, he says.

Last year, 2024, the fragility of our world was laid bare. The genocide in Gaza, spreading conflict in the Middle East, and the war in Ukraine devastated tens of thousands of lives.

At the same time, the fast-accelerating climate crisis – driven by the power of the fossil fuel industry – continues to wreak havoc. Extreme weather events are destroying food systems, depleting water supplies, and devastating the world’s most climate-vulnerable communities.

The concentration of wealth and power has been decades in the making; a direct result of the rules which govern our global economy. The inequality and injustice that have flowed is now so great that it is tearing at the social fabric in dozens of countries. International law, applied unfairly at the best of times, now has been rendered completely

meaningless. So, the inequality, the conflicts and the climate breakdown we are witnessing aren’t inevitable. They aren’t accidental.

And that means that we can reverse the tide. For example...

THE UK’S EXIT FROM THE CLIMATE-WRECKING ENERGY CHARTER TREATY

This time last year, the UK announced its exit from the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT), joining a wave of European nations abandoning this harmful agreement. This victory against corporate power puts the ECT – often used by fossil fuel companies to block climate action – on the brink of collapse.

This victory capped off three years of dedicated campaigning. Since 2021, we’ve been raising awareness about the ECT’s dangerous Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism,

which allows corporations to sue governments over climate policies. While the fight against ISDS continues, the defeat of the ECT marks a crucial step in dismantling corporate control and protecting both people and the planet.

“a crucial step in dismantling corporate control and protecting both people and the planet”

MOBILISING SUPPORT FOR A FOSSIL FUEL TREATY

The climate crisis is driven by fossil fuels, yet they remain the elephant in the room at international climate summits – a sign of how powerful fossil fuel interests are.





Last year, 17 local councils across the UK, including Manchester, Glasgow, Reading, and Stroud, passed motions backing the call for a Fossil Fuel Treaty. Stirling University's student union became the first in the UK to endorse the treaty, and we've secured growing cross-party support in Westminster, Holyrood, and the Welsh Senedd.

“a global movement to phase out coal, oil, and gas production ... we've built real momentum”

We've also got growing support from the trade union movement, with Unison passing a resolution in support at the union's annual conference.

These victories are part of a global movement to phase out coal, oil, and gas production and ensure a just transition to renewable energy.

Through grassroots activism, local campaigning, and strategic alliances, we've built real momentum.

In 2025, we'll build this campaign, pushing for more councils and more political support, including working with the union movement to ensure a just transition – the only way to undermine the power of fossil fuel corporations.

CHALLENGING THE UK'S ROLE IN THE GAZA GENOCIDE

Historically, Global Justice Now has not campaigned on Palestine. No organisation can take on every injustice, and we have trusted others to dedicate the attention this issue requires.

But last year, we could not remain silent. The horrifying violence unleashed on civilians in Gaza demands action. So, in 2024, we took action to confront the UK government's complicity in the crisis in Gaza. Israel's actions in Gaza, and its decades-long

occupation, is made possible through political, military and economic support from countries like the UK. We've increased the heat on arms sales, making some progress with a partial ban. But this isn't enough.

During 2025, we will work for a total arms embargo as well as challenging the UK's trade ties with Israel, mobilising to block a new trade agreement and pushing for the suspension of the existing deal. We also plan to shine a spotlight on corporate complicity, particularly in the tech industry, exposing how major companies profit from violence, and building momentum for divestment campaigns.

It's hard to look at the state of the world today without feeling a mix of fear, anger, and, at times, despair. But through it all, we must find hope in the incredible work being done by activists worldwide – and remind ourselves that change is possible.

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

February / March 2025

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.

February - LGBTQ+ History Month

Sun 2	12:45pm – 3:15pm	Belonging: Exploring Church membership
Mon 3	7:30pm	AUC Church Council
Thu 6		International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM
	7:30pm	Our Tribe LGBTQI+ Gathering
Sun 9		1st Sunday in Lent
	12:30pm	AUC Church Meeting
Sun 16	12:45pm – 3pm	Become a better listener Part 2
Sun 23	10am	Joint Sunday Worship Service with Ecumenical Partners at St Columba's-by-the-Castle
	1:30pm	Come OUT with Our Tribe (LGBTQI+) (Coffee Saints, Little King St)

March

Sun 2	1pm – 2pm	Space to Remember (tbc)
Mon 3	7:30pm	AUC Church Council with Trustees Training
Wed 5		Ash Wednesday
Thu 6	7:30pm	Our Tribe LGBTQI+ Gathering
Fri 7		(Women's) World Day of Prayer
Sun 9	12:30pm	AUC Church Meeting
Sun 16	12:45pm – 3pm	Carbon Literacy Course (1 of 4)
Sun 23	12:45pm – 3pm	Carbon Literacy Course (2 of 4)
Sun 30	12:45pm – 3pm	Carbon Literacy Course (3 of 4)
	1:30pm	Come OUT with Our Tribe (LGBTQI+) (Coffee Saints, Little King St)

Seeds deadline

The next issue of *Seeds* will be a double issue for April and May 2025. The copy deadline for the April/May edition is **Wednesday 19 March**.

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.

