

## Becoming a member

People often ask whether they need to 'join' their church and 'become a member'. This is not essential but, for those who decide to take this step, it can deepen the sense of belonging. The URC encourages regular attendees to consider church membership when they start to think of a particular church as 'their church'. Church members commit to supporting the church through giving, through action, and by taking part in the Church Meeting, as well as through regular attendance at public worship. If you would like to know more about becoming a member, please do speak to the minister or worship leader – they will be delighted to answer any questions.

For URC books and resources: [www.urcshop.co.uk](http://www.urcshop.co.uk)

For more information: [www.urc.org.uk](http://www.urc.org.uk)

*'Being "Reformed" means that we delight in exploring the Bible, we do not fear change, and we try to run our churches in ways that take everyone's insight and contribution seriously.'*

# What is The United Reformed Church?



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## Introduction

We are very glad to welcome you to our church. This leaflet tells you a bit more about the wider family to which we belong – the United Reformed Church (URC).

The URC is a group of Christian churches across England, Scotland and Wales and is part of the worldwide family of Reformed Churches, which has a total membership of more than 70 million. The URC itself has around 53,000 members in 1,426 congregations, with more than 600 active ministers.

## Historical background

The name United Reformed reflects our roots in the Reformation. This began in 1517 after Martin Luther published his '95 Theses' attacking papal abuses. The 'Reformed' part of our name also reflects our continual aim of reforming ourselves to be a Church for the present day.

The United Reformed Church Act of 1972 formally merged the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Church in England and Wales. One MP described this merger as: 'one of the most historic measures in the history of the Christian churches in this country'. The denomination expanded when the Churches of Christ joined us in 1981, followed by the Scottish Congregationalists in 2000.

The URC is a nonconformist Church. Put most simply, this means that we are not an 'established' Church, with a formal link to civil authority as the Church of England and Church of Scotland have. We are committed to working closely with Churches of all traditions, in prayer and social action, and many of our local churches are now united with local churches from other traditions.

## What we believe

We believe that in the Bible we can hear the Word of God, still speaking to us today, and that each of us can find fulfilment through loving and serving Jesus Christ.

Lack of hierarchy and a respect for individual conscience mean that the URC is not dogmatic and embraces a wide variety of opinions. At the same time, in the words of our *A Statement of Nature, Faith and Order*, together we are committed to 'God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the living God, the only God, ever to be praised.'

We are proud to be an intercultural Church, where people with varied ethnic and cultural roots enrich one another's Christian living. All posts in the URC, whether voluntary or paid, are open to both men and women. We were pioneers in ordaining women – our first female minister was ordained in 1917.

More information on our core beliefs can be found at <http://bit.ly/urcbelief>.

*'Lack of hierarchy and a respect for individual conscience'*

## Our organisational structure

The URC has a democratic three-tier structure:

**Local church congregations** – hold meetings to govern their affairs. Each church has local leadership from elected elders, but the Church Meeting of members is the main decision-making body at local level.

**Synods** – there are 13 synods: the national synods of Scotland and Wales plus 11 regional synods across England. Each provides oversight of regional matters and is led by a synod moderator.

**General Assembly** – is the URC's ultimate decision-making body. It meets biennially to celebrate, discuss and make decisions on the life and work of the denomination. Mission Council is the executive body of the General Assembly and meets twice a year.

## Getting involved in church life

Local churches offer a varying range of community activities in addition to Sunday worship, which is at the centre of church life. For details of activities at our church, ask a member of the congregation or check out our church website.

