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RECOGNITION, COOPERATION AND POWER: THE ISSUES THAT HAMPER MISSIONAL MOMENTUM IN URBAN CONTEXTS

Erica Dunmow

URBAN TRACTS



William Temple
Foundation

**Recognition, Cooperation
and Power:
The Issues that Hamper Missional
Momentum
in Urban Contexts**

by Erica Dunmow

Urban Tracts, Book 7

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Erica Dunmow served as Advisor to the UK Urban Mission¹ Development Project (a joint enterprise between the Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission and the Methodist Church, part-funded by The Jerusalem Trust) from 2004 – 2010,² culminating in her leading the input from the UK urban perspective to the Edinburgh 2010 World Mission Conference.³

Her main task at UMDP was to raise the profile of urban mission across the UK and to build networks and a stronger grouping of agencies to promote and sustain urban mission and provide or campaign for the resources and training that local churches and projects needed.

A particular focus was connecting the Black majority churches into any new network(s) that developed.

She is currently Chair of the Urban Theology Union, Sheffield and a member of the Urban Mission Network hosted by Churches Together in England, convened by the CofE Estates Evangelism Task Group and Project Director of *Reclaiming Local Lay Ministry for Mission*. She has lived, worshipped and led worship in very diverse UPA areas, most of her adult life, first in London's East End, and now East Sheffield. In all her paid roles in the third sector, work on equalities and diversity was a key thread. She has reflected and refined her understanding of her urban mission experience through an MA in Theological and Practical Reflection from Durham University.

With thanks to Rev David Moore who set me off on the journey, and the Jerusalem Trust who funded and continue to fund national collaboration in this area.

¹ See Section 1 footnote for the way in which the Project defined both urban and mission!

² The full UMDP paper Archive was deposited with the Methodist Church, and has presumably been transferred to its current premises, Methodist Church House, 25 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9SF. An archived web page of resources assembled by the Project is not currently available. Key documents can be found at <https://www.urbanmissionuk.net/umdp-methodist-archive>

³ Edinburgh2010 information used to be found at <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/>, available at the time of writing but apparently not at the time of publishing. The key texts are now at [Edinburgh 2010 publications](#)

The two main texts in which the UK Urban Mission scene was reported upon are:

Theme 7 Christian Communities in Contemporary Contexts, chapter 7 in Balia, D and Kim, K (eds) Edinburgh 2010 Vol II Witnessing to Christ Today Oxford: Regnum 2010, pp175 – 198.

Parallel Sessions: Theme 7 Christian Communities in Contemporary Contexts, in Anderson, A and Kim, K (eds) in Edinburgh 2010 Mission Today and Tomorrow, Oxford: Regnum 2011, pp 166 – 173.

Editors' Introduction

Urban Tracts is a series of papers on urban mission and ministry commissioned in the lead up to the 40th anniversary of the Faith in the City report.

The Brixton disturbances of April 1981 prompted, among other things, Archbishop Robert Runcie to set up the Archbishop's Commission on Urban Priority Areas. This led to the publication of the Faith in the City report in December 1985 with its recommendations for church and nation, which proved a great stimulus for urban ministry across the whole UK church.

In 2023 the issues of social inequality, racial justice, and the failure of the Church to flourish and grow in urban settings have not gone away — although the enthusiasm for urban ministry of the late 1980s seems to have waned, especially within the Church of England.

To mark the anniversary, the William Temple Foundation is commissioning and publishing (electronically) a new Temple Tract series on urban mission and ministry. Our aim is to produce three or four tracts each year in the lead up to the 40-year anniversary of Faith in The City in December 2025.

These tracts are aimed at practitioners and church leaders, offering reflection and experience from authors who have been involved in urban mission and ministry. We aim to highlight resources and lessons that are relevant for Christians in urban areas today and renew the challenge to the churches.

In seeking an appropriate style for the urban church there will be plenty of photos and links to writings, websites, and videos to explore if you wish to delve deeper or check out sources.

In this tract (number 7) Erica Dunmow reflects on her experience and learning as a national urban mission networker, in particular on overcoming the barriers to constructive mission relationships between mainstream denominations and Black-led and Black majority churches.

Greg Smith, Series Editor

Chris Baker, Associate Editor

Ryan Haeker, Production Editor

Thanks are also due to editorial advisers Paul Keeble and Marijke Hoek who commented on earlier drafts of the tract.

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Figure 1. London Youth Conference (copyright unknown)

1. Introduction

In line with being a passionate practitioner of urban mission, this Tract is, in technical terms, a partial and particular account of my participant observation as a white British lay woman, with academic training. I have incorporated some theological reflection to stimulate thought, and referenced some external sources.

Mission in urban contexts has been my passion since the privilege of being in a congregation in the East End of London (Bow Methodist Mission), where the ordained minister⁴ was a Cliff College trained Bible-based radical evangelical who set up a pioneering project to combat racism in the locality ([The Zebra Project](#)). He had the imagination to use a letter of greetings and encouragement from a congregation member who'd retired back to Jamaica in place of the Epistle one Sunday. He invited us to burst party-poppers over a newly baptised adult as part of the service. A young lad with Down's Syndrome often gave the peace in communion services. His way of leading worship was so engaging that local children would come to church unaccompanied on a regular basis.

How could that relevant, vibrant, attractive, sort of worship and integral mission be encouraged on a wider scale? And how could its approach be brought to the attention of the wider church?

⁴ Rev David Moore, now retired and making theologically provocative wood carvings with his colleague Richard Smith.



Figure 2. Zebra Project flyer from the 1980s

Twenty years later, from 2004-10, I was given the daunting and exciting task of trying to create a national focus for urban mission, and also to increase the networking between local practitioners. I was employed as Urban Mission Development Advisor to the Urban Mission Development Project (UMDP) - a pioneering partnership between the Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission (ECUM) and the Methodist Church⁵, where I was the sole employee attached to the Project with the UK as my patch! Over six years, and goodness knows how many railway miles, I worked to try to raise the profile of urban mission and to create a wider body or resource to support the local practitioners who often feel at the bottom of their denominational priority list, and to help them network together. UMDP (which gained a

⁵ The leading light in pushing for this Project was Michael Eastman OBE, a Baptist writer and activist in the field, Secretary of ECUM, and in the 1980s a *Faith in the Cities* Report Commissioner. The other key members of the Committee that oversaw the Project were Rev Peter Sulston, Methodist Co-ordinating Secretary for Unity in Mission, and his successor Rev Jonathan Kerry, Coordinating secretary for Worship and Learning; Rt Rev Roger Sainsbury, retired Bishop of Barking and lecturer in Urban Mission at Trinity College, Bristol; Rev Vernon Marsh, Chair of Methodist Sheffield District. ECUM (the Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission) itself had worked on building collaboration within its constituency since 1981. See [Urban Tract #1, p 11 available here.](#)

second staff member, Katy Armstrong, after three years) did achieve some of those aims, and we did make input into the World Mission Conference Edinburgh 2010⁶, but they were very hard won, and some not very long-standing.

In this Tract, I first delineate in Section B the three issues which seem to block real momentum in urban mission - recognition, cooperation and power. In Section C I tell part of the story of UMDP in order to illustrate some of the working methods designed to enhance cooperation and inclusion, and where they were successful. Section D revisits the three issues to explore what has happened since the Project ended, and in Section E , I suggest some possible ways forward.

⁶ Edinburgh2010 information can be found at [Edinburgh 2010 Collection \(globethics.net\)](http://Edinburgh2010Collection.globethics.net). The two main texts in which the UK Urban Mission scene was reported upon are:

Theme 7 Christian Communities in Contemporary Contexts, chapter 7 in Balia, D and Kim, K (eds) Edinburgh 2010 Vol II Witnessing to Christ Today Oxford: Regnum 2010, pp175 – 198.

Parallel Sessions: Theme 7 Christian Communities in Contemporary Contexts, in Anderson, and Kim, K (eds) in Edinburgh 2020 Mission Today and Tomorrow, Oxford: Regnum 2011, pp 166 – 173.

2. What's the Problem with Getting Urban Missioners Mobilised?

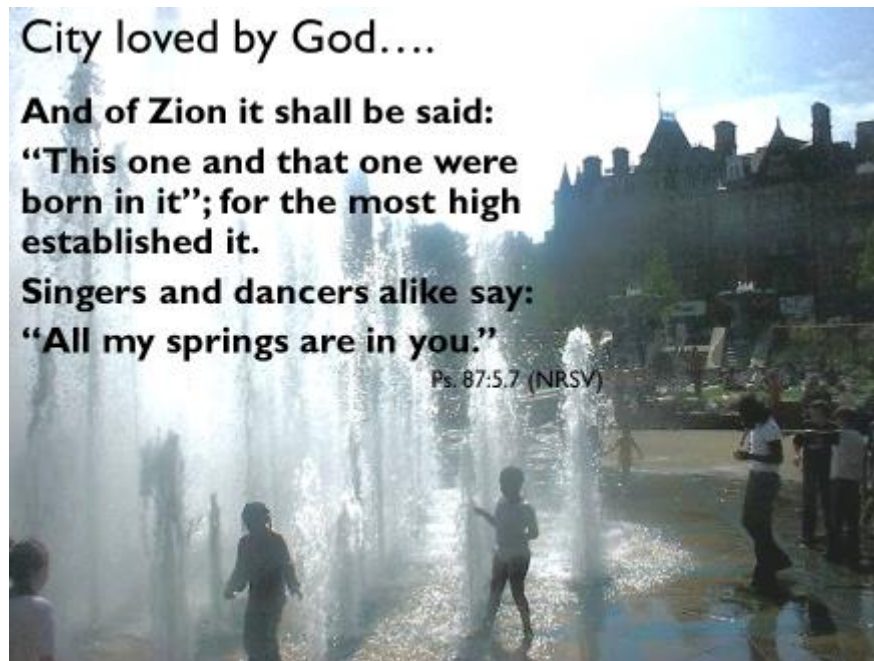


Figure 3. Sheffield City Centre

There are three incidents which illustrate the three factors which I've been painfully aware of in urban contexts which prevent a real momentum in urban mission both locally and nationally.

2.1. Recognition

Michael is an Afro-Caribbean man who attends a local church I know. During Lockdown 1 in 2020, I was talking to a lay leader about whether various Black people⁷ in the congregation were faring OK, given the fact that Covid-19 was causing a higher rate of illness and fatality for Black people. The leader was struggling to recall several of the people – they didn't attend every week, but had all been coming for at least 2 years. She recalled the two women (who weren't on the church

⁷Clarity of terminology on this issue is very difficult as there is no firm consensus on any term. I first worked on equalities issues in the 1980s, and will be using Black (with the capital letter) to include all those people whose skin colour is dark enough to experience racism, and BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) to mean the wider grouping (including Black people) of those who may have lighter skin tones but also experience prejudice on ethnic grounds from the White Majority, including as Roma and Jewish people. This series has no editorially agreed definition, so any hopefully enlightening discussions on the unhelpfulness or otherwise, of those usages, needs to come to me as author.

WhatsApp Group that had developed - action was taken to invite them). When I asked about Michael, I got a mystified: 'Who's Michael?' He had attended regularly once a month for over three years, as his shift pattern allowed. I'm not sure he'd ever been visited by a minister. He was, as far as that church leadership was concerned, invisible.

In the same way the Black-led denominations had no place in the forums around Urban Mission when I started work, and drawing them into the networks was a key aim of the UMDP.

Unconscious bias is operating at all levels, which means that there is a lack of recognition for BAME people of non-White British heritage and people from working class backgrounds, as having anything of value to contribute to the wider church. Until we get that right, the body of Christ that is gathered around the urban mission table is damaged and incomplete.

2.2. Cooperation

In 2021 when, thanks to the work of the National Estate Churches Network and the Anglican Estates Evangelism Task Group steadily convening biennial residentials to bring their contacts together, there began to emerge the idea of reviving an Urban Mission grouping (a legacy of the UMDP, that had finally stuttered to an end in 2019) at Churches Together in England (CTE). A new younger group of practitioners and activists came together to begin to frame things. Meanwhile, two different bodies were working separately to set up the web-based resource on the topic...

Many of the people who have a strong sense of call to ministry or develop projects in urban contexts are somewhat maverick; often charismatic (in a character sense); are driven by the vision for their piece of work; and have to work very hard to ensure it has enough resources to keep on the road. Due to this combination of things, they are very protective of and focussed on their mission and ministry. They gather around them people enthused by their approach who are also reluctant to see that others might have something valid they could learn from. This all means that, for understandable reasons, they often have very little time, and sometimes no inclination, to work with others in the field. Unless at least the majority of agencies and people put ego and organisation aside, there will never be a continued pressure on the mainstream church to resource and take seriously urban contexts which are often the crucible in which important insights and advances in missional practice are developed.

This separateness can sometimes exist locally and may be based on theological and historic divides. However, the sharp divisions between those who espoused the social action gospel and the evangelical gospel in the mid to late 1900s, were beginning to heal by the time UMDP began in 2004. Nonetheless, churches do not do as much joint mission as would make sense to the people on the ground.

The tendency towards separation rather than co-operation even extends into the preciousness of whether other people consider themselves in or out of the urban mission field – does

‘urban’⁸ include city centres (especially after regeneration and gentrification)? or peripheral housing estates ? Is ‘mission at the margins’ a better term? What about seaside towns which increasingly exhibit (especially now their hotels host asylum seekers⁹) similar population mixes and deprivation indices to inner city communities? There are indeed particularities that matter - many would argue with a strong case that the mission task differs from neighbourhood to corner along the same main road - but somehow we have to both acknowledge that granular particularity and find enough common ground to build momentum.

2.3. Power

At the Edinburgh 2010 World Mission Conference, each of the Commissions met with delegates in a Parallel Session, hearing short presentations and papers, discussing, and praying. Commission VII ‘Christian Communities in a 21st Century World’ had taken as its focus contextual theology issues of power and imbalance in terms of the dynamics of the church between the global south and the old world, between imposed and indigenous leaders, and within the communities that were suffering economic oppression. It had been a moving and heartfelt time together. Each Parallel Session had a rapporteur – a listener from another context, who reported back on what they had heard to the final Conference Plenary. When the small team who had led the year-long pre-Conference Study Group process and shaped our Conference content, heard the bland account of our Commission’s Parallel sessions, we were disappointed with the watering down of what had happened. We had to push to get our final statement for the Conference Report accepted. We were being too radical. We were speaking too loudly about disadvantage. Those with power did not like our voices.¹⁰

There is absolutely nothing new about an analysis of the church which says that it is not good in its embodiment of power. Jesus was still, slightly despairingly in my view, trying to get the

⁸ Smith, with Keeble and Purnell in their very helpful introduction to this series of Urban Tracts - *Urban mission 40 Years On: Towards an Ongoing Presence* 2020 (p4) very helpfully define urban mission as covering ‘contexts which have at least one of the following characteristics:

1. a concentrated settlement with a large population, maybe 50,000+
2. a diverse population in terms of social class, ethnicity and religion
3. concentrated, high levels of poverty and deprivation’

However, the trouble is that many practitioners do not agree with that breadth!

⁹ UK government’s somewhat chaotic management of Channel crossing asylum seekers is currently (as of early 2023) block booking hotels to house the excess people for whom there is no room in the reception centre in Kent.

¹⁰ Compare the content and tone of the final statements put together before the end of the Conference by the four main Study Group Representatives (listed in [Appendix 6](#) p 407) in the report of [Parallel Session Theme 7](#) (especially pp 171-173) with the Listening Group’s Report in the [Session Reports, Listening Group Report](#) pp315, 316, all in Kim, K and Anderson, A (eds) *Edinburgh 2010 Mission Today and Tomorrow* Oxford: Regnum 2011.

disciples to grasp his servant-leadership model at the Last Supper,¹¹ and it has been the role of prophets and the awkward squad to challenge the misuse of power ever since.

Many of the people who live in urban contexts have seldom known political power other than being on the receiving end of oppressive power. When they do attain positions with authority, some can become petty tyrants.¹² One of the challenges for those in mission in urban contexts is both healing the damage of oppressive power,¹³ and trying to find a voice and cease to be considered either as dangerous subversives, or ill-informed and opinionated people, not intellectually able to ‘cut it’ in more prosperous churches.

If we can model the power-with, or even better the apophatic¹⁴ approach (that Jesus took by ascending to leave the disciples to get on with things on their own¹⁵) at the local level, we will at least have done something to begin to break the cycle.

Another aspect of this is the language we use. The persistent use of a ‘definite article plus adjective’ to describe people – e.g., ‘the rich’, ‘the poor’ - ‘others’ them, sets people aside or apart, reduces their humanity as it defines them by one characteristic. People with disabilities were one of the first protected characteristic groups¹⁶ to campaign against this in the 1980s, and in the secular world this is becoming less common, but the church is woeful at it. It is one example where exact translation of Luke 4: 18 (which is so very often quoted in urban settings) – ‘good news to *the poor*’¹⁷ is not helpful in advancing an understanding of our shared humanity first and foremost over other things. This ‘othering’ plays a part in the unwillingness to see people from within urban contexts as suitable leadership material.

¹¹ John 13: 2b-17.

¹² Bob Holman (1936-2016) a Christian academic social science, who lived for a while in Easterhouse Estate in Glasgow, writes tellingly of the dilemma of growing local leaders who then misuse their power. He puts it down to them having experienced only power-over and being unable to model anything else. See [Faith in the Poor, Holman, Bob Lion Books, 1998](#) and various columns in *The Guardian* newspaper.

¹³ ‘I come to bring news to gladden the hearts of poor people... to let people who are oppressed gain freedom’ (Luke 4: 18 - a translation suggested by Prof Patton Taylor, Professor Emeritus in Old Testament Studies of Union Theological College Belfast, in preparation for the *Jesus in the City* Urban Mission Congress, 2010.)

¹⁴ This word derives from the Greek *apophasis* meaning negation or denial. In ministerial terms it means that the personality and ego of the priest should not be to the fore, but kept in the background, in order to reveal God, and is stronger in some Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions.

¹⁵ Acts 1: 1 – 12.

¹⁶ A term used in the UK Equalities Act 2010 to define the categories of people protected by that Act, and often used in Equalities training. Some organisations add that they will treat social class or economic status, and having served a prison sentence, as if they were protected characteristics.

¹⁷ This seems to be a very ancient form of prejudice ! Both the Greek in Luke 4 v 16 and the Hebrew in Isaiah 61: 1 that Jesus was reading in the Nazareth Synagogue, also use the adjective poor (or meek) as a noun.

3. The Urban Mission Development Project 2004-10



Figure 4. Beechen Grove Baptist Church – one of the more diverse congregations (copyright unknown)

Threaded through this account of the Project, are some of the outworkings of those three problems, as well as a more general overview of the work.

3.1. Definitions

The diversity of understandings of both urban and mission, meant that I needed to establish terms, sometimes before a meeting could even be set up! Because of that diversity, the Project developed its own definitions, then checked whether those I spoke with, identified with them.

3.1.1. Mission

Some denominations use mission to mean service only (traditional Methodism), some to mean evangelism only (many Baptists). In 2001 the Micah Declaration from the Lausanne Conference had identified mission as a holistic endeavour consisting of integrated activity that may well serve but which was also intentional in seeing itself as communicating good news and therefore evangelistic.¹⁸

¹⁸ Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel [...] It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life

3.1.2. Urban

Equally vexed was what was meant by the term urban. Those serving in housing estates/housing schemes (the Scottish equivalent) and those in city centre mission being sometimes reluctant to engage in discussions with a wider urban grouping, and some in inner city urban settings wanting to retain the exclusivity of their label. The Project took the view that whilst these specialities have their own characteristics and validity, they should also be included. This is a geographically wider definition from that set out by Greg Smith et al who host the Urban Mission website.¹⁹ UMDP used it partly to gain a wider potential constituency, and partly because there was really no term or network that those working in deprived seaside or run-down post-industrial areas could gather around and if not included by us, they were even more isolated.



Figure 5. Slide from Author's presentation Edinburgh 2010

[...]

And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ [...]

If we ignore the world, we betray the word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world.

¹⁹ See [UK Urban Mission](#) for their tighter geographical definition.

After some consultation, the Project adopted a detailed definition, which I felt I had to highlight to people at the start of almost every conversation, when I met someone for the first (and sometimes second and third times). This became summarised in one breath as:

“The project uses the term *mission* holistically (as in Micah Declaration on Integral Mission and *Missio Dei*²⁰), and uses *urban* to include any place larger than a village and in a relatively built-up area, which exhibits socio-economic deprivation.”²¹

This was especially important when meeting with White charismatic and Black-led Churches who initially often didn’t identify urban mission as anything to do with them, or confused it with youth culture.

3.1.3. Practitioner

This was a term which I used to mean someone generally paid to do mission in a church or project - who might be lay or ordained. This felt helpful because whether a person was lay or not seemed less important in urban mission than in other settings – youth workers might have a more important role in the missional impact of a congregation than an ordained leader. Also it prevented getting tangled in the complexity of vocabulary around different types of leader, debates about women’s ordained leadership, and whether they saw themselves as ordained in the same way as a Catholic or Anglican priest does.

3.2. Short explanation of the main working methods and principles

3.2.1. Going to other people’s ‘parties’ rather than inviting them to yours

This is a deeply Jesus characteristic – typified in the story of Zaccheus.²² I didn’t expect to be visiting sinners and tax-collectors (although some more radical Christians felt I was working too closely with some senior church leaders and nominal missiologists) but I knew that if I was to draw in streams who had felt themselves ignored and demeaned by the mainstream churches, then I needed to show I was serious and engage with them in their place, and recognise their learning. So, I set up a series of meetings with the national leadership of the three largest Afro-Caribbean denominations at the time – Church of Jesus Christ Apostolic (CJCA), Church of God of Prophecy (CoGoP), New Testament Church of God (NTCG), and also the London Baptist Network where many independent Baptist churches (largely Black-led) were based. Later in the Project, I worked closely with the Education and Training Department of the NTCG, attending their annual Roswith Gerloff Lecture, to network with staff and pastors and talk to them about mission in urban contexts.

I also always travelled to meet with people in their own setting, whether a local practitioner or a denominational officer – getting a sense of the community they served by travelling by

²⁰ A coin termed by Karl Hartenstein in the 1930s but propounded around 10 years before the UMDP began in [David J. Bosch](#), *Transforming Mission*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991, 389–390

²¹ See Appendix 1 below.

²² Luke 19: 1 - 10

bus rather than taxi from the railway station. Meeting people in their place was sometimes time consuming but helped to build up the very important relational links needed.

3.2.2. Regional networks

The Project had a UK-wide brief and initially investigated the support needs of 130 practitioners²³ of urban mission across Scotland, Wales and England.²⁴ Many of them confirmed that they would like a network where they could meet with other people wrestling with the challenges they faced. We looked at where networks were weakest, strongest and most likely to engage with Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME)-led denominations. The result of this analysis was that we concentrated on convening regional groups in Wales and Yorkshire & The Humber, and the West Midlands, respectively.

3.2.3. National networking

In order to build momentum and profile for urban mission, it was felt important to build links with many people nationally and so one-to-one meetings with the national bishops of the three major Black Majority denominations; with the staff with (urban) mission briefs in the White Majority denominations and network churches such as New Wine; liaison with other inter-denominational bodies, the Evangelical Alliance, Churches Together in England, Action by Churches Together in Scotland, CYTÛN in Wales, the African-Caribbean Evangelical Alliance; and the chief officers of agencies and networks in the field of mission in urban contexts. The 20-year anniversary process of the 1985 *Faith in the Cities* Report²⁵, happened during the Project's life and we worked quite closely with the Anglican sponsored *Commission for Urban Life and Faith*,²⁶ especially on the issue of the education and training for clergy in the mainstream denominations.

The main event that brought urban mission practitioners together every three years was the triennial *Jesus in the City* Urban Mission Congress, which had begun in Leeds in 1998. This was seen as an integral part of the development of national networking and sharing of good practice and so the Project acted as Secretariat for the Congress in 2007 (Bristol) and 2010 (Belfast).

²³ See definition in Section 3c.

²⁴ See <https://www.urbanmissionuk.net/umdp-methodist-archive> for the UMDP archive which contains the Report of this research - [Next Steps 05 - Google Drive](#).

²⁵ [Faith in the City A Call for Action by Church and Nation by Commission for Urban Priority Areas - Paperback - 9780715143261 \(chpublishing.co.uk\)](#).

²⁶ The Commission began in 2004. It was chaired by Baroness Kathleen Richardson a senior lay Methodist, the rest of the Commissioners were Anglican. The community theologian, Ann Morisy was employed as their officer. The Commission's main report was [Faithful Cities: A call for celebration, vision and justice The Commission on Urban Life and Faith, \(CHP: London and MPH: Norwich, 2006\)](#). As the economic situation in the UK at that point was less marked and divisive than in 1984/5, the Report's tone was more visionary and less polemic than its precursor, *Faith in the City*. It had much less national impact in both the secular and church environment.



Figure 6. Delegates at Jesus in the City 2007 (Photo UK Urban Mission Congress Trust)

3.2.4. International contact

The Project undertook no international networking during the first three years of work. In 2007, however, we became aware that there was likely to be some sort of anniversary event of the 1910 World Mission Conference – which had tried to remedy the competitiveness and piecemeal work of global north/western denominations and agencies who were undertaking mission in the global south²⁷. So for the second phase of the Project we worked to gain a presence and influence at what became Edinburgh 2010 World Mission Conference in June of that year. The main input was to Study Group VII – Christian Communities in a 21st Century World. I worked very closely with Dr Afe Adogame of Edinburgh University the Study Group Convenor, as convenor of urban evidence gathering in the UK.

²⁷ The cultural colonialism inherent in much Western overseas mission, was already being challenged at the 1910 event, when one of the few non-White attendees V.S Azariah ended his challenge on the patronising attitudes of White missionaries with the ringing statement ‘ You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We ask for *love*. Give us FRIENDS!’ see Revisiting the 1910 World Missionary Conference McKenzie, Timothy S found on Core.ac.uk at [228944725.pdf \(core.ac.uk\)](https://core.ac.uk/doi/pdf/10.22894/4725).

3.3. Outline of highlights achieved

3.3.1. National network

UMDP's biggest block to gaining a real head of steam to push for denominations to take urban mission across the board seriously, and properly equip their ordained ministers, was the fact that many agencies, often for very good reasons, were concentrating on their own specific tasks, and lead officers didn't have time or energy, even if they had inclination, to add their weight to the idea of a hub or network for urban mission as a kind of equivalent to the [Arthur Rank Centre for Rural Mission](#). As many development projects find, identifying the people with capacity alongside their main work responsibilities, or funding to pay for work time, to continue a legacy, was very difficult.

For a while it looked as if the Eccleston Group, an informal meeting of CEOs of social action agencies might become the kernel of a new centre for urban mission. But the agencies mostly weren't quite focussed enough on purely urban mission, and so things didn't get off the ground. A smaller grouping did agree to continue to work together. We were very grateful that Churches Together in England (CTE) were happy to take over hosting and providing a focus for what became the Christian Coalition for Urban Mission (CCfUM). This suffered as many CTE Bodies in Association do, with a decreasing level of involvement from denominations, most of whom didn't have a dedicated urban mission officer, and often had a mission officer tasked mostly with church growth in all contexts. (See section D.2.a for recent developments at CTE). The Coalition continued to meet until 2017.

3.3.2. Lay training and equipping

The West Midlands regional networking seemed to show an appetite for working together on the issue of training for lay people, and a very pleasing range of agencies and bodies, including Black AME -led ones – two denominations and one agency - engaged. They all contributed financially and in time to *Equipping Urban Christians*, a guide to resources for Christians living and serving in the Midlands.²⁸

²⁸ Many people won't recognise or be able to access this resource. The dissemination and distribution were much reduced by the fact that the Project finished 3-months early because of the legal requirement to pay redundancy even on a fixed term contract (this hadn't been budgeted for as the Project started when this was not law), and because several boxes of the publication were lost in transit from a conference. I hope my apologies did get through to all concerned, but if not, please accept them for a frustrating and disheartening end to a very good piece of work.

3.3.3. Black-Led Church engagement



Figure 7. 2006 Baptist Regional Minister Jane Day welcomes Zonal Pastor Musa Bako (RCCG) as a new member of the South Yorkshire Area Church Leaders' Group (photo Kenneth Peet)

The challenge given to the Urban Mission Development Project when the idea was discussed with the African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance, was to ‘start with the Black-led denominations, not add them in afterwards’.²⁹

Although Black-led churches are often situated in multi-ethnic areas, the level of BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) staff networking nationally on urban mission was very low during most of the Project’s life. The Black-led denominations didn’t recognise urban mission as something that was on their radar, even though their churches were generally situated in areas of high deprivation where building rents were lower, and where some had originally settled, only to move out to ‘better’ areas as their own lives prospered. With the exception of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), which was just beginning to have a significant profile in the South East and beyond, the Black-led Churches were largely, like many Catholic parishes, concerned with sustaining their congregations by internal renewal. They were also coping with 2nd /3rd generation drift from church attendance. However, this began to change during the life of the Project, and the work on reaching out to the Black Christian churches bore fruit at both the *Jesus in the City* Urban Mission Congress

²⁹ Presentation to 2009 Urban Mission Network, [available in UMDP archive](#).

2007 in Bristol, where we had a keynote speaker from the Wesleyan Holiness Tradition., In the 2010 Congress in Belfast more people from a Black background were present than the previous five triennial events. The longer footprint emerging from this work was that the Church of England engaged in more formal ecumenical dialogue with Black-led and Pentecostal churches.

One of the most interesting pieces of work I did to connect the Black-led traditions into more general networking was in Glasgow in January 2007. In the course of attending the Community Mission conference 2008, convened by Action by Churches Together Scotland (ACTS), I met a Kenyan Anglican, Rev. Joseph Nwenga. He was bringing together a very recent influx of African Diaspora Pastors to Glasgow, to encourage them to work with the traditional denominations from the outset. He wanted a facilitator to meet with them and help them create a network together, discern their aims and purposes, and decide how they wanted to relate to ACTS. I had helped with such processes in previous jobs, so was brought in. I was the only White person. I was the only non-Pentecostal person present in a room of about 15 pastors and their wives. Before we got down to work, there was 20 minutes of fervent, simultaneous, extempore prayer. I led an interactive process which I hoped would travel cross-culturally, which engaged the pastors and their wives equally. The exercise went well. At the end they had their aims and in priority order, beginning with revival in Glasgow, followed by a public evangelistic event in central Glasgow. I thought as I saw these two (and later shared this with Joseph Nwenga) that they were good aspirations, but they weren't going to happen. Seven months later I received an invitation from Joseph to attend a day celebration in George Square, central Glasgow which was going to mark the bicentennial of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. On a large stage there were performances by Christian music groups, ranging from some White hillbilly Pentecostals, to a Korean Choir singing the Hallelujah Chorus, to a steel band. These were interspersed with short addresses from the leaders of all the major denominations (including the Catholic and Anglican Bishops, the Salvation Army Regional Major, and a visiting Kenyan, Bishop Francis Waihenya)³⁰ about how they saw the abolition of slavery and similar justice issues as part of their Christian faith. Signatures were collected to petition the Scottish Government to make the provision of school meals for asylum seekers. It was the most impressive holistic mission gathering I've ever been to. It was the first overtly Christian event to happen in that space since the 1960s. It was organised by the Black pastors, and it was Bishop Waihenya who gave the most theologically, small 'p' politically, and evangelistically confident address. The Black Christian presence in Glasgow was clearly going to make waves. How could the churches in England be encouraged to take their BAME colleagues more seriously?

3.3.4. Pentecostal and charismatic engagement in ecumenical forums

Likewise, White-led Pentecostal and charismatic streams initially didn't generally engage in the service/prophetic side of urban mission (with the exception of the Assemblies of God and some small house-church networks), although many spawned stand-alone projects, especially

³⁰ He established his own denomination church planting initially into the slum areas of Nairobi House of Faith Ministries, www.hofam.org.

youth ones, and Street Pastors and similar ministries. Again, partly through UMDP and partly through international efforts to include them in Edinburgh 2012 as full participants, this has changed markedly in the decade following the Project, and CTE now has not only a staff member but also a President from this stream of the Christian family.

3.3.5. Adfywio'n Trefi - Urban Refreshment 2009, Newport, Wales

This was the most successful piece of networking undertaken by UMDP. Wales was the most un-interconnected part of the UK, due to the fractious and divisive history of Christianity there.³¹ Four years of slow and steady networking were spent with local ministers and building up good links with:

- Catholic Cardiff Diocesan Commission for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) (and some contact through them with people in the Dioceses of Menevia and Wrexham, where they had no Commission);
- the Gweini network - which was an offshoot of EA Wales that was similar in purpose to the Church Action Networks or local Faithworks groups in England;
- and CYTÛN (Churches Together in Wales) with their network of local groups.

UDMP then brought their officers together round a table for over a year of meetings which led to the holding of a day-event called *Adfywio 'n Trefi - Urban Refreshment* in Newport. The invitations were circulated through all three streams, but none would have their logos on the flyers, because they feared some of their memberships would complain and certainly not come. So it was branded a UMDP event. Around 40 people came from across Wales from the three streams, many of whom, because I had met with them, trusted me.

We were lucky enough to have the minister and religious broadcaster Roy Jenkins as chair. He was well known and respected by all parties. Over the lunch break he said: 'I have never seen such a varied gathering of Christians together in one room before in Wales.' The event featured a remarkable range of people giving witness to their circumstances and what the churches were doing to reach out. One was a homeless young man, supported by *Ty Bronna*, a Church Army Wales residential project; another an undocumented asylum seeker. He was a Catholic priest from Cameroon, telling of his dangerous and difficult journey to escape political persecution in that nation, and how the most testing time for his faith had been his time in the UK Reception Centre. His dreamt-of place of safety had treated him like a criminal. Sadly, both stories could be repeated almost verbatim today.

Gweini, CYTÛN and JPIC representatives led three times of prayer/worship in amongst the presentations and workshops and we ended by singing *Guide me, O thou great Jehovah* in English and Welsh - and lifting the roof!

³¹ A sad example of the failure of mission is one, not very large, mid-late-20th Century new-build area north of Pontypridd, which had 12 different churches developed on it as it grew. By the time the Project visited in around 2006 there were just two, and one was about to close. This was in marked contrast with the English period of local ecumenism when new-build areas were often served by two/three/four denomination partnerships.

3.3.6. Contextual theology³² as a mainstream discipline

In 2006 in the initial fact-finding exercise, 143 urban mission practitioners across the UK were asked to assess how well their ministerial training had equipped them for mission in an urban context, and suggest what support and training would help them now. So many said that some form of contextual theology (they may not have used this exact term) should have been part of their ministry training, that I (with the then *Commission for Urban Life and Faith*) convened a day conference of practitioners and the Principals of many denominational theology training colleges, to persuade the latter to include this in their courses. There was general agreement that contextual theological skills would benefit ministers in all settings, and for quite a few years this was offered in a number of theological colleges.

3.3.7. Edinburgh 2010

The UMDP formed part of the Edinburgh 2010 Commission VII Study Group ‘Christian Communities in present day contexts’ which had a focus on justice and equality in mission, and was therefore closest to having an urban mission ethos.³³ I took part in the international conference, not as denominational input, but to represent urban mission in the UK context. This was because the Conference Director recognised our work in contextual and cross-cultural mission, and what we could contribute about the reverse mission presence of BAME-led churches – the African Diasporan mission to the UK mirroring the 1910 ‘colonial’ mission model.

³² The Project used this term to be a methodological approach to theology that is about learning to apply the Gospel in a way that is relevant to the context (whether that be rural, cathedral city or whatever) rather than a body of knowledge. Because its practice was first adopted in the UK by practitioners in urban contexts it has since become associated more with a body of liberationist, urban theologies, leading some to discredit its pedagogical usefulness, although it is an approach that helps in moving away from White, middle-class theology being seen as the only theology.

³³ See [Edinburgh 2010 Collection \(globethics.net\)](http://Edinburgh2010Collection.globethics.net).



Figure 8. Slide from Author's presentation at Edinburgh 2010 (author and Katy Armstrong)

‘Bubbles of enthusiasm’ was the slightly strange term UMDP used to cover a very wide range of evidence gathering events about the current issues that faced people in urban mission contexts. This activity began in 2009 into the first half of 2010, starting with *Adfywio’n Trefi* - *Urban Refreshment* in Newport, Wales (see section C3e), and finishing with *Jesus in the City* 2010 in Belfast, N Ireland. These two events were convened and organised by UMDP. The other events³⁴ were convened by other organisations where they were happy for a UMDP rapporteur to attend and write up their reports.³⁵ The UMDP then collated the findings and the attendees at *Jesus in the City* were able to help formulate the final report about the ‘messy’ (i.e. complex and multidimensional) nature of mission in urban contexts, which UMDP presented to the Parallel Session, Christian Communities in the 21st Century Context, Edinburgh 2010.

³⁴ The full list of ‘bubbles’ was: *Adfywio’n Trefi* - *Urban Refreshment*, Wales; Urban Mission Forum; *Jesus in the City* Urban Mission Congress, 2010 Belfast (– all three convened by UMDP); Urban Expression Associates Day, Message/William Temple/Urban Presence day event, Methodist City Centre Network day conference, Urban Theology Collective Summer School, National Estates Churches Network day conference, London Urban Theology Project, Scripture Union Scotland *Beauty for Ashes* day conference for youth work agencies, in Scotland focussing on the care and support of vulnerable teenagers, Churches Community Work Alliance day conference, Belfast – attended by UMDP.

³⁵ See [Bubbles Reports - Google Drive](#).



Figure 9. Flyer for Jesus in the City UK Urban Mission Congress 2010 (© UK Urban Mission Congress)

3.3.8. Indigenous leaders and cross-cultural mission

By the time I was engaged with the Edinburgh 2010 Study Group process there were two interlinked matters about leadership in urban settings which I had become aware of. The first was cross-cultural mission - the subject of an Urban Mission Forum. The second was the lack of leaders in tough urban contexts who had grown up in similar areas.

Cross-cultural mission became an issue for me from out of the CULF Conference on Contextual Theology, where one of the Black attendees had brought up the fact that in many UK urban contexts the ordained ministers serving them did not come from the same cultural background – either in terms of race, education or class. They therefore needed cross-cultural preparation as much as White missionaries going overseas who were briefed by the Selly Oak or other similar colleges. Oddly enough the theological trait evident amongst some Baptists (i.e., a fear of losing faith through living in urban contexts, which led to many in those contexts engaging only through two-week missions) is the one that is most acutely aware that socio-economically deprived communities are very different from suburban middle-class ones.³⁶

³⁶ The most blatant and sad case of a lack of awareness or preparedness I came across was reported in an MA study into Fresh Expressions in urban contexts, where a small group of planters, who had faithfully said to the people in the area that they would stay put in their new urban context, left within 3 months saying that the people they were living amongst were little better than animals.

The converse of this attitude is that people from within these communities, especially long-term indigenous people (often White working class) are seldom seen as worthy of becoming leaders in their own setting. This was a key strand in the work that I did in Commission VII in the Edinburgh 2010 Study Group process.³⁷ Over my six years, I met very few people in urban mission in the mainstream denominations who had grown up and come to faith within the same or a similar setting to where they served. When they did, their ability to engage with local people – especially local men if they were men - was powerful and their ministry often more effective than people from outside such an area.³⁸ The church badly needs to grow leaders with greater empathy or who have the life experiences of those they want to serve.

³⁷ See Balia, D & Kim, K eds Edinburgh 2010 Vol II Witnessing to Christ Today Oxford: Regnum 2010, p180.

³⁸ Good examples would be Rev. Steve Willett priest of Hackenthorpe, Sheffield Anglican Diocese in the 1980s to 2010s, who grew up as a young child in a missionary family in Nigeria and then in urban Liverpool. He therefore understood cultural difference and knew urban culture. Another is retired Archdeacon Ven Pamela Ingham, OBE, previously priest of St Mary's, Fawdon, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in the early 2000s.

4. Progress on the Four Main Blocks to Concerted Urban Mission Growth

In this section I bring the story more up to date and then offer some working practices that if we all adhered to, might overcome the blocks to concerted mission.

Not all of these practices, nor the solutions, are unique to mission in urban contexts, but given that mission in these settings is often a prophetic and pioneering space, why not improve our practice and continue to give the lead to the rest of the church?

4.1. Recognition - Racial Prejudice

4.1.1. Brief update

The problems outlined in Section B.1 on this issue, are of course not confined to urban mission, but in an area of mission which is long seen as marginal, the concerted efforts of all practitioners engaged in urban areas from whatever stream is important. Contexts have gradually moved forward since the end of the Project, partly due to national legislation³⁹ and changes in societal attitudes. Here the vexed issues around sexuality and gender have, in religious contexts, often given equality issues a bad name. Some Christians make the excuse of not wanting to adhere to ‘wokeness’ or ‘political correctness’ to avoid addressing other areas of discrimination. However, improvement is happening.

The new Urban Mission Network convened by the Anglican Estates Evangelism Task Group and hosted by Churches Together in England, had as guest speaker in November 2022 Pastor Dr Akpo Onduku, a RCCG leader, to lead us in deep listening.

The writings of a growing number of Black writers such as Robert Beckford, Chine McDonald, Israel Olofinjana and Anthony Reddie and Delroy Hall are helping to counter the stereotype of the theology of Black-led churches in the UK as essentially narrow and conservative, which used to lead some White practitioners to dismiss their Black colleagues. The number of BAME pastors accessing academic learning is also growing. Many are studying at Queens College, Birmingham. This indicates that BAME pastors can no longer be assumed to be less well theologically educated than their White counterparts. And Black Theology is increasingly appearing on college syllabuses.

From within the White-led churches there are moves to encourage more diverse leadership. John Root within the Anglican context has been pressing for a greater number of Black clergy.⁴⁰ The Methodist Church in Britain is addressing the continued lack of BAME people from within White-led congregations being encouraged to become leaders or seek ministry

³⁹ Equalities Act 2010

⁴⁰ See <https://johnroot.substack.com/p/the-need-for-minority-ethnic-clergy>.

vocations, as part of its *Justice, Dignity and Solidarity* (JDS) Strategy. In 2022 Methodist Conference agreed that JDS training, including Unconscious Bias, should be mandatory. Potential reaction against this initiative can be countered by seeing JDS and Equalities Diversity and Inclusion learning in general, not as a tick-box extra thing to do. Rather it is the fundamental way in which we all need to be better at following the second Great Commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves.⁴¹

White-led Pentecostal, Baptist, Catholic, and charismatic streams and leaders are often better at integrating across ethnic groups. The RCCG has a target to have 25% of its congregations of White ethnicity by 2025 (although that is also hard to achieve for the same White racist reasons). Prayer gatherings and more evangelistic events better reflect the ethnic balance of the Christian presence in England.⁴²

Until this prejudice is ironed out, the richness of mission engagement in urban areas - where the general population is increasingly likely to be BAME-majority - will not happen effectively.

4.1.2. Possible solutions

4.1.2.1. Being deliberately inclusive

Assume that everyone who is working in your locality will want to be included. Some older BAME streams will continue to stand apart officially because of past hurt or theological differences but ways of connecting can be found.⁴³



Figure 10. Darnall Community Gospel Choir (Photo Hazel Barrett)

⁴¹ Matthew 22: 34 – 40.

⁴² Chinese and Korean streams take part in Sheffield emPower prayer gatherings, but have not engaged with Churches Together Groups in their areas. The ethnic diversity of people attending a Franklin Graham evangelistic rally in Sheffield in early 2022 was also marked.

⁴³ A wide group of Christians sings in my local definitely evangelistic Community Gospel Choir started by a BAME stream whose leaders had never joined the very active and long-established Church Leaders Group. This is gradually healing the divisions.

4.1.2.2. Call out prejudice

Those of us who are White need to continue to challenge ourselves and others about our attitudes – sometimes literally calling it out.⁴⁴ Do we ask advice and value the experience of our BAME colleagues? Do we look to see if their way of doing things might help our praxis?

4.1.2.3. Confessional modelling

Being honest about past exclusivity and overlooking can be a helpful starting place. We know we have behaved in a racist way, and we want to do better. This can look glib from the outside, but if people then experience you working with them in a respectful and engaged way, things will shift.

4.2. Co-operation

4.2.1. Brief Update

The lack of a strong concerted voice has continued to hamper putting pressure on denominations to resource mission in urban contexts seriously. Noble exceptions making waves within their own streams include the Estates Evangelism Task Group (EETG) which has managed to persuade the Church of England to recommit to there being ‘a Christian presence in every community’⁴⁵ after a period when the dissolution of the parish system looked a possibility. New Wine established [a special urban forum](#) during the life of UMDP which continues to serve their constituency.

[The Cinnamon Network model](#) has provided a way of particular mission projects, such as Street Pastors, the Trussell Trust and Baby Basics, to be replicated around the country. In the best cases these are supported by a very wide range of the churches in their localities. From about 2010 to the present, [Church Urban Fund’s Together Network](#) has been developing projects and partnerships in a number of dioceses. Gweini, an off-shoot of EA Wales,

⁴⁴ I had to do this at Edinburgh 2010. Dr Daryl Balia a BAME minister from S Africa was the Project Director who worked very hard to establish that the attendance and range of speakers reflected the breadth of global Christian presence, and denominations and streams well beyond the membership of the sponsor, the World Council of Churches. Something happened about six weeks before the Conference. He was removed as Director and didn’t attend. At the closing plenary the planning group Chair, was giving the vote of thanks. All manner of people were being rightly included, but not Dr Balia. The encomiums continued and still no mention of Dr Balia. I could hear the mutterings from the back of the hall (where most of the Global South delegates were sitting ‘What about Daryl Balia?’) The thanker happened to be sitting near me. As he left the podium, I called out to the session Chair – ‘Can we please thank Dr Balia?’ Dr Anderson heard this, did a sharp about-turn as if he’d just forgotten something, and said astutely ‘And of course we mustn’t forget Dr Daryl Balia !’ There was a great roar of approval and a standing ovation for some long minutes. A White colleague from S Africa said that it was good that a White person had called out for justice. Whatever he had or hadn’t done, I just knew Dr. Balia’s work to create a truly inclusive and representative event needed to be acknowledged.

⁴⁵ The strapline on the Church of England website as at Nov’22.

gathering Christians in localities to serve their local people and relate to their local authorities, continued until the late 2010s.⁴⁶

There is the beginning of a new national Urban Mission body that has grown out of the Churches Together in England's Mission and Evangelism Gatherings, and the biennial [Estates Evangelism Task Group](#) Gatherings. Four denominations are actively engaged with relevant staff who have a passion for this work, including the Wesleyan Holiness Church and [Redeemed Christian Church of God \(RCCG\)](#), as well as a range of agencies (although as yet, not all the major players) so there is hope that things will motor again. Sadly, some of the poverty issues present in the 1980s which gave such a sharp focus for the *Faith in The City* Report, are gaining ground again, which ironically may help things.

Through some local Churches Together groups in England, denominations have become more jointly missionally-minded at that level. A survey I undertook of such groups in South Yorkshire in 2017/8 showed that over the previous five years, there had been a considerable increase in outward-facing activities, i.e. actions and projects beyond the 'pulpit-swap', that aimed to impact on their localities. Around 75% were now doing community engagement and witness collectively.

There are also signs through the [Gather Movement](#) and similar informal missional bodies at a town/city wide level, that practitioners – both agency and church-based practitioners – are working better together, often based around prayer.

4.2.2. Possible Solutions

4.2.2.1. Different Structures

The looser relational groups can work better on the ground than formal Churches Together groups to get joined-up mission going, although they are both becoming more alike in feel⁴⁷.

4.2.2.2. 'To go far, go together'⁴⁸

There is a time to accept the need for common ground. Working together tends to last longer and leave a deeper footprint. Maybe we can gather around a common term. Perhaps 'mission in income deprived areas' is one that people can gather around to build a strong and powerful voice.

⁴⁶ The most recent event found after a Google search on 10.11.2022 was on their Facebook page as October 2018.

⁴⁷ It will be interesting how having a Black AME, Pentecostal General Secretary at Churches Together in England (Bishop Mike Royal appointed in late 2021) will shift the culture of ecumenism.

⁴⁸ The full saying is 'If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together' It has been attributed variously to Rt Rev Desmond Tutu and Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela but is an African (probably Luo) proverb.

4.2.2.3. Centring on Prayer



Figure 11. City Pentecost (copyright unknown)

Greater emphasis on prayer, with planning and action following from that, has proven over the years to be what often sustains and fuels local Christian groups which keep going simply through member commitment. It enables them to last after the initial, widely respected, figure-head/convenor has moved on.⁴⁹ I learnt the habit of real praying together (rather than a notional initial short led prayer) as a key part of meetings which enables better decision-making from two incidents. Firstly, from the Black Pastors' Group in Glasgow (see Section 5c) and secondly from a hugely overrunning reflection session at the start of an Urban Mission Forum where all remarked at the end of the event, that it had felt an unusually blessed and purposeful space. Prayer is also vital for streams where relational (rather than structural) bodies are preferred – if the relational focus is on each other through, and as, Christ, rather than on a human person, then it can sustain in the long term⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ I began to notice around 2008 that leaders (often from house and independent charismatic churches, but with a background in a traditional denomination) were calling people together for prayer and action. Roger Sutton, then working for EA in the NW Region, was noticing this too, and out of this came the [Gather Movement](#).

⁵⁰ In the late '90s the very successful Church Leaders prayer group in Westminster had become a busy group - planning joint initiatives - and attendance, especially of newer leaders, began to tail off. The then Dean of Westminster Abbey wisely suggested they return to simply praying together around the tomb of Edward the Confessor, and attendance rose again and stabilised at the higher level.

4.3. Power

4.3.1. Brief update

I'm not as close to things as I used to be, so I'm less aware as to how far some of the blocks caused by gatekeepers who were protective of their own role still are. I know that there has been some recent pressure on large agencies moving into poorer urban settings to come and learn from those who have already have so much experience. There is also a sense from younger Anglican clergy that the exuding of a sense of 'effortless superiority' exhibited by some of their older colleagues (itself often an outworking of class prejudice), is being repented of and a more collegial way of working is the new norm.

The [*Together for the Common Good*](#) project which began around 2012, has also got some powerful material about the importance of covenantal relationships, 'mission with' etc and see also the book *Mission With* by Paul Keeble⁵¹ of Urban Presence. and his [2021 Temple Urban Tract No 2.](#)

4.3.2. Possible solutions

4.3.2.1. Sharing principles

One of the things I tried to establish when working with the Eccleston Group was that of pooling some resources for the greater good of all – 'You may not get a new pair of trousers this year, but you don't have to lose a leg to make this work'. There are an increasing number of urban mission projects on the ground where local churches are supporting initiatives with volunteers or funding irrespective of whether they come from within their own stream, with little sense of expecting a definite 'return'.

4.3.2.2. Giving people their full personhood

The othering and 'the-plus-adjective' that I critiqued in Section B.3., is overcome by using language which places our common humanity before the characteristics that set us apart. Learning to use the slightly more clunky 'people in poverty' or 'poor people' or even 'those suffering poverty' is a way of moving into greater shared humanity. This is especially important at a time when many people using foodbanks and other provisions are experiencing poverty but do not define themselves as part of 'the poor'. A simple shift in language in prepared intercessory prayers (especially for Poverty and Justice Sunday etc.) would go a long way.

⁵¹ Keeble, P *Mission With: Something out of the ordinary* Watford: Instant Apostle 2017.

4.3.2.3. Live alongside

The Catholic Religious orders, Urban Expression, Urban Presence and the National Estate Churches Network have done great work in helping people understand the need to share the actual living circumstances of the people you work with.

Travel by the local buses, cycle or walk and use the local shops, if you want to get a sense of how the local community functions.

5. Final thoughts

It could be that urban mission will never gain a high profile. Perhaps we simply have to be faithful to our calling - engage prophetically with the very essence of the communities we work with, share their marginalisation and fragmentation, and accept we will be overlooked.

However, the sense that the Holy Spirit is what will guide us forward together is growing in denominations that would not identify as charismatic or Pentecostal, and I believe it is what will heal some of these issues, and strengthen our mission in tough, complex, multi-ethnic and socio-economically deprived communities.

I also believe that the round table - holding Christ at the centre, and gathering with all people in humility around him - is the strongest way forward. And I continue to have hope that God will have been right to trust us to build the kingdom in urban places.



Figure 12. Rainbow over Wallsend, StormCam still (copyright Les Crossan)

6. Questions for Reflection



Figure 2. Sculpture outside Sheffield Station, Photo Greg Smith

1. The author assumes that there is a case for a national focus for urban mission, with a similar profile to that of [The Arthur Rank Centre](#) for rural mission. Do you agree ?
2. What do you think is the best solution to the debate about whether to have an inclusive or focussed understanding of ‘urban’? Or do you think a term around ‘margins’ or ‘edges’ works better than urban?
3. Are Black and BAME Christians marginalised or not seen as leaders in your context, and what might you do about that ?
4. The Tract talks very little about how our theology impacts on mission, but our images of God are often very much about power. If you identify and model God mainly as either Almighty Creator/Father, or Suffering Servant or transformative Holy Spirit, how might this affect the way you engage with your local community and its people?
5. Does the notion of a covenant relationship between the church and the local community give a helpful way of approaching mission in urban, income-deprived contexts?
6. Are there any specialist agencies with charismatic founders in your area? How might their valuable work be sustained beyond the service of that person, and is closer cooperation with local churches and other agencies part of that solution?

Appendix

Acronyms and Definitions

ACTS	Action by Churches Together in Scotland
BAME	Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic
CCfUM	Christian Coalition for Urban Mission
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CTE	Churches Together in England
CULF	Commission for Urban Life and Faith, 2004 - 6
CYTŪN	CytŪn: Eglwysi Ynghyd yng Nghymru/Churches Together in Wales
ECUM	Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission
JITC	Jesus in the City Congress (held triennially in different UK cities from 1997 - 2014)
JPIC	Commission for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, a Diocesan level body in the Catholic Church in England and Wales
RCCG	Redeemed Christian Church of God
UMDP	Urban Mission Development Project

The full definition used by the UMDP Project at its outset was:

Urban Mission is:

a) - practical service and thoughtful engagement - may be done in partnership with secular bodies and organisations from other faith communities, and should involve communication between all Christians in any locality:

e.g., community regeneration; action and campaigning on peace, justice and environmental issues; service activities such as parent and toddler groups

b) - theological discussion – partly through dialogue with other faiths

i.e., putting God into the conversation

c) - evangelism and evangelistic activity – proclaiming Christian faith to others

Any activity may be any combination of these elements: but there is growing recognition that they are parts of the same process. (NB statutory funding cannot be used for the last of these three types of activities)

‘Urban’ mission particularly, concentrates on 'edgy' and fringe ministry serving:

- the inner city (often mixed housing and multi-racial)
- outer estates (often large areas of mainly low-rise housing and white majority areas)
- town/city centre (including retail chaplaincy, street sleepers, sex workers, night clubs and 'loft living' new city dwellers)
- post-industrial areas (brown-field sites, high unemployment)
- seaside towns where socio-economic deprivation is high

but recognises that the solutions to some of the issues in these areas can only be solved by city-wide action through: prayer, involvement in civil structures and with decision-makers, and commitment by the suburban churches to a generous engagement and enabling of these processes.



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