



UrbanExpression
creative mission on the margins

Information Pack



Mission statement

Urban Expression is an urban mission agency that recruits, equips, deploys and networks self-financing mission partners, pioneering creative and relevant expressions of the Christian church in under-churched areas of the inner city, outer estates and marginalised communities.

Values

Urban Expression is inspired and guided by shared values and convictions. It is these that make Urban Expression distinctive as a mission agency (though other agencies would share some or many of these values). It is these values that mission partners commit to when they join Urban Expression; and mission partners, coordinators and trustees are guided by these values in the way they operate.

Relationship

We believe that, in Jesus, **God is revealed locally**, and that we should be committed to our

local community or relational network and active members of it.

We believe that the gospel works through relationships and that serving God consists largely in **building life-giving relationships** with others.

We recognise that **Christian faith is a journey** and we are committed to helping people move forward, wherever they are at present.

We focus on **under-churched areas and neglected people**, trying to find ways of communicating Jesus appropriately to those most frequently marginalised, condemned and abused by society.

We challenge the trend of some Christians moving out of the cities and encourage Christians to **relocate** to inner-city neighbourhoods, outer housing estates and other marginal communities.

We believe in **doing things with and not just for** communities, sharing our lives with others and learning from others who share their lives with us.

We see teamwork, networking and **mutual accountability as vital**, recognising that individuals and churches need each other.

Creativity

We recognise the importance of **taking risks** and the demands of urban mission, and we believe that it is **acceptable to fail**.

We value courage, creativity and diversity as we try to **discover relevant ways of being church** in different contexts.

We believe that questions and **theological reflection** are important as we learn together and so discern the way forward.

We aim to be **catalysts**, encouraging and releasing creativity in both the church and the local neighbourhood as we seek and share God in urban areas.

We believe in discouraging dependency and developing **indigenous leadership** within maturing churches that will have the capacity to sustain and reproduce themselves.

We are excited that **God can be discovered in the urban context** and commit ourselves to explore various forms of prayer and worship that are appropriate here.

We realise that **God's Spirit blows freely** and so we will not assume our work should continue indefinitely.

Humility

We acknowledge our **dependence on God** and affirm our continual need of prayer and God's empowering Spirit.

We believe that all **people are loved by God**, regardless of age, gender, education, ethnicity, class or sexuality, and that God works through all believers – and others besides.

We respect others working alongside us in the inner city and are **grateful for the foundations** laid by the many who have gone before us.

We want to **learn from others**, seeking to shape what we do in light of the experiences, discoveries, successes and mistakes of fellow-workers.

We are **careful not to drain** other local churches of their often limited resources, but hope to be an encouragement and support to them.

We realise the importance of living **uncluttered lives**, holding possessions lightly and recognising that all we have is to be at God's disposal.

We know we are not indispensable and what we attempt to do is **part of a much bigger picture**, so will try to keep ourselves in perspective.

Commitments

We are committed to following God on the **margins** and in the **gaps**, expecting to discover God at work among powerless people and in places of weakness.

We are committed to being **Jesus-centred** in our view of the Bible, our understanding of mission and all aspects of discipleship.

We are committed to seeking **God's kingdom** in the urban context, both by pioneering creative and relevant expressions of the Christian church and by working in partnership with others in mission.

We are committed to a vision of justice, **peace and human flourishing** for the city and all its inhabitants.

We are committed to **uncluttered church**, focused on mission, rooted in local culture and equipping all to develop and use their God-given gifts.

We are committed to **unconditional service**, holistic ministry, bold proclamation, prioritising the poor and being a voice for the voiceless.

We are committed to respecting and **building relationship with other faith communities** and averse to all forms of manipulation or erosion of liberty.

Who we are

Urban Expression is a mission agency and a mutually supportive network of mission partners – individuals, families and teams, who choose to live in some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised communities in the UK, motivated by our belief in the all-encompassing love of God and our desire to follow the words and ways of Jesus.

- Our context is post-Christendom and we embrace its challenges and opportunities.

- Our vocation is to marginalised places and communities as a gospel priority.
- Our commitment is to patient and long-term mission and ministry.
- Our priorities are sowing seeds and keeping the rumour of God alive.
- Our ethos is relaxed, relational and values-based.
- Our missiology is incarnational, contextual and holistic.
- Our approach is asset-based and collaborative.
- Our network is theologically diverse and missionally creative.

What we do

- We move into a neighbourhood, make our homes and put down roots.
- We build relationships and make friends with local people.
- We join in with good things already happening in the community.
- We listen and reflect before offering our own ideas.
- We work alongside others irrespective of faith, class, sexuality, physical or mental ability.
- We learn to find grace in unexpected places and surprising ways.
- We value small successes, accept disappointment and live with uncertainty.
- We express faith in ways that are appropriate to the community.
- We act for peace and healing and encourage hope.

In more detail

Urban Expression is a *pioneering mission agency*. Our purpose is to call Christians into mission in areas that are recognised as frontiers of mission work today, and to operate in an innovative way.

Urban Expression *works in the inner city, on outer estates and in marginalised communities*. There are mission opportunities in other places, but this is our vocation. These communities represent some of the most diverse and challenging environments for mission today.

Urban Expression *is concerned with under-churched areas*. We do not wish to compete with others or to work in areas that already have strong churches. We are interested in the gaps, where churches are weak or non-existent.

Urban Expression *aims to form new Christian communities* if this is appropriate locally. We engage in various forms of mission, including establishing new communities of faith that will proclaim and demonstrate the gospel.

Urban Expression *operates through self-funding mission partners – some of whom operate in teams*. Some of these are recruited by us; others are already in place and ask to join us.

Urban Expression *encourages creativity and experimentation*. In many marginalised communities, established forms of church are not working. Mission partners are encouraged to think in fresh ways, to dare and dream, to explore new ways of being a Christian community.

Urban Expression *provides support and training*. We recognise that working in marginalised communities is demanding and that this mission approach is high-risk and long-term. We provide strategic and pastoral support, and opportunities for ongoing training.

Brief history

Urban Expression was launched in April 1997 through a partnership between Spurgeon's College and Oasis Trust. These organisations already worked together to run a Church Planting and Evangelism training course. The director of this programme, Stuart Murray Williams, who had planted a church in the inner city in the late 1970s, developed Urban Expression in order to explore new ways of planting churches in inner-city communities.

Juliet Kilpin, a graduate of the Church Planting and Evangelism course, worked with Stuart to establish this new mission agency. She and her husband, Jim, recruited and led the first team in September 1997.

Several more teams have been deployed in London since 1997, some of which have moved on as the churches they have planted or initiatives they have taken have matured and no longer require the same level of input from Urban Expression.

As well as the teams in the London area, we now have teams in Manchester, Birmingham, Stoke-on-Trent, Ellesmere Port, Looe, Bristol, Nottingham, Brighton, Derby, Sheffield, Bath, Broadstairs, Wolverhampton, Hull, Northern Ireland and South Wales. Other teams have completed their work and moved on: Urban Expression deployed and supported 42 teams between 1997 and 2020.

In October 2005, we launched (in partnership with others) the **Crucible** course, which ran for many years in Birmingham, more recently in other cities, and in October 2020 went online. The course provides theological and practical training for those engaged in pioneering and missional initiatives.

In 2008, Urban Expression Netherlands was formed as a sister organization, working in various locations across the country.

Urban Expression mission partners are supported by a small team of part-time coordinators and by a board of trustees.

Crucible

The Crucible course (www.cruciblecourse.org.uk) consists of six modules:

After Christendom investigates the many opportunities, as well as the challenges, that the end of imperial Christianity presents.

On the Edge examines the dynamics of mission and ministry in marginal urban and rural communities and offers biblical and practical insights.

Church Unplugged presents the challenge of pioneering creative and contextual forms of Christian community and explores the processes involved.

Restoring Hope explores how, in light of God's mission to bring shalom (peace) to all creation, we can live towards that hope and create communities of peace.

Becoming Human probes the dynamics of discipleship and asks how we can become more fully human as followers of the Son of Man.

Jesus Unplugged imagines how we might re tell the story of Jesus today in ways that connect with contemporary cultures.

Theology

Urban Expression does not have a statement of faith. As a non-denominational mission agency that recruits mission partners from many different contexts and does not require commitment to a statement of faith, we recognise that there will be some theological diversity among us – and we welcome this.

Some ~~team members~~, mission partners, coordinators or trustees would identify with the evangelical tradition. Several would acknowledge the influence of the Anabaptist tradition. Some would draw more on other traditions.

But all of us embrace the Urban Expression values and commitments. We acknowledge that these values and commitments have theological implications, although (as with statements of faith) these can be interpreted in different ways.

We recognise that our mission partners may have different denominational and theological allegiances. As a mission agency that is not attempting to start or oversee a new denomination, we are relaxed about this. Indeed, we encourage mission partners to forge links with existing denominations or networks. If particular teams wish to adopt a statement of faith, they are free to do this.

As and when theological, ethical or other issues arise within Urban Expression, we look for guidance – both about the issues themselves and about how to engage in conversation around these issues – to Scripture, the experience of Christians elsewhere, and to our own values and commitments.

We consult with one another and, with the help of the trustees, seek consensus (not necessarily unanimity but agreement to continue to work together on the basis of mutual respect, even if we do not fully agree with the decision reached).

Mission and evangelism

Our understanding of mission is rooted in our conviction that we are participants in the great mission of God to bring shalom to the whole of creation. Our practice of mission embraces many activities – community organizing, environmental action, social enterprises, church planting, pastoral care, evangelism, etc.

We are sometimes asked what evangelism means within Urban Expression, so we have composed and endorsed a summary statement:

'Urban Expression is committed to incarnational and holistic mission in marginalised communities across the UK. This involves living in these communities; making friends; discerning local assets, priorities and needs; partnering with and learning from others; sharing our faith as followers of Jesus; inviting others to accompany us on this journey; and, sometimes, forming new and contextually appropriate expressions of Christian community.'

Benefits of joining Urban Expression

1. Solidarity

Pioneering can be an isolated endeavour, as can ministry in urban and marginal contexts. To know that you are not alone but part of a wider missional movement can be reassuring and encouraging. Meeting with others who understand what you are doing, and why, can be a relief – no need to defend yourself or explain everything.

2. Core Values

Our core values have emerged from the Urban Expression community, are internalised through the daily liturgy, have been refined and revised through consultation, and are distinctive. Being a member of Urban Expression represents a commitment to be guided by these values, to be accountable to them and to shape ministry accordingly. This can help to focus activities and set priorities.

3. Connections

Beyond solidarity is the opportunity to forge connections, build relationships and become friends with others involved in similar contexts or forms of ministry. Urban Expression provides various ways of doing this through regular gatherings at regional and national level, newsletters, email updates, Zoom calls, exchange visits, etc. For new mission partners, learning from others with a little more experience can be helpful.

4. Story-telling

Institutions often want pioneers to fill in forms, tick boxes and report on numbers. Pioneers, however, tend to be more interested in narrative reporting, sharing stories and hearing from others in this way. Urban Expression provides regular opportunities for this at gatherings and through email updates and newsletters.

5. Sharing resources

Belonging to Urban Expression provides access to ideas and resources that others within and beyond Urban Expression have discovered or developed. The website, email updates and newsletters are ways of sharing these resources, as are the regular gatherings. Sharing

ideas and resources helps to stimulate creativity and contextual reflection. Some people in Urban Expression have written books on aspects of pioneering and urban ministry. Others have developed resources for worship or nurturing disciples.

6. Subsidised Training

Urban Expression has managed to obtain bursary funds to subsidise participation in the *Crucible* course. While subsidies are available to others too, members of Urban Expression are prioritised. Some financial support may also be available towards other forms of training.

7. Pastoral Support

Urban Expression has a core team of coordinators who, among other things, provide pastoral support to the mission partners. This is delivered through personal conversations and regional gatherings. Alongside pastoral support the coordinators offer a sounding board for ideas, a resource for theological reflection and connections with the wider movement.

8. Events

Mission partners are invited to two annual day events, one of which takes the form of a retreat. These events are not open to others. The annual Community Weekend is open to all. Some of these events include children and we value the support of CURBS (Children in Urban Situations) in working with the children; some also include the young people associated with Urban Expression, giving opportunities for friendship and mutual support across the teams.

9. Baptist Accreditation

For those seeking to be or remain accredited as Baptist ministers, Urban Expression has been recognised as a 'commending body' that can recommend mission partners to become Baptist ministers and a 'calling body' that offers a context within which Baptist ministers (including newly-accredited ministers) can exercise accredited ministry.

Expectations on joining Urban Expression

Urban Expression is primarily concerned to provide support to those who are pioneering and working in marginalized communities. We do not want to place demands on those who may already be under considerable pressure. There is no expectation of any financial contribution – Urban Expression is funded by grants and the gifts of some individual supporters.

But there are some expectations on those who join Urban Expression so that this belonging is meaningful and mutually beneficial:

- Participating in an induction process in conversation with one of the coordinators.
- Participating in an annual review with one of the coordinators.
- Prioritising participation in the two day events and one community weekend each year.
- Contributing stories, reflections, news etc. to the Urban Expression internal updates and external newsletters.

- Exploring ways to build relationships across the Urban Expression network through exchange visits, Zoom calls, regional meet-ups, social media, etc.
- Engaging with the four designated Urban Expression prayer days each year (these do not involve meeting together).

Partners

Urban Expression works in partnership with a number of other agencies and networks. In most of these members of Urban Expression are actively involved.

1. **The Incarnate Network** (www.incarnate-network.eu): 'a grassroots network of Jesus followers, who live and work at the margins, where we seek to embody the good news in innovative and creative ways. The Incarnate Network seeks to provide an inclusive space for those who often find themselves on the edge of existing structures and regularly under the radar.'

2. **Urban Life** (<http://urbanlife.org>): 'cultivating mission in marginal places. Urban Life provides practical, local and accessible training to Christian groups, intentional communities and churches in urban areas and marginalised neighbourhoods.'

3. **Rural Ministries** (www.ruralministries.org.uk): 'a charity established in 1962. Our vision is to see the countryside served by people of mission who are grace filled, God empowered and contextually relevant.'

4. **Curbs** (<https://curbsproject.org.uk/>): 'a Christian charity that resources, trains and supports children's and families' workers who are working with those in urban and marginalised communities. We hope to enable all those who work with children and families to meet together to share best practice, to support one another, to raise any training needs and to be a part of producing new resources.'

5. **The Anabaptist Mennonite Network** (<https://amnetwork.uk>): 'Our vocation is to function as yeast within communities and initiatives to which we believe the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition can offer helpful insights and contributions, and to promote the understanding and practice of Anabaptist and Mennonite approaches to discipleship, church and mission.'

Contacting Urban Expression

For further information or to arrange a conversation, you can contact us in various ways:

- Write to us at PO Box 16991, Birmingham, B32 9HX
- Email admin@urbanexpression.org.uk
- Send us a message via our website: www.urbanexpression.org.uk

Find us on social media: www.facebook.com/Urban3xpression; Twitter: @urbanshalom