



Director's Report

September 2016 to August 2017

The Urban Theology Union continues to be an exciting hub of ideas and actions and a network of incredible people ministering in places of great challenge and grace. Members and supporters are proud to belong to a charity pioneering contextual theology for nearly fifty years. God's grace, our historic assets, and our ingenuity have kept us going.

UTU was built by its students and members: you, in the end, are our reason for being. We need to rediscover this but doing so is not a straight line from A to B. To build a more democratic membership will take time and money but I hope that, like me, you think it's worth us putting up both.

In the last twelve months the staff and executive have continued to radically disorganize and reorganize. This has been hard work and we have done some things better than others but our general direction of travel is realistically optimistic. We have adjusted staffing and are currently reviewing all our costs to see where savings can be made while still finding ways to increase our income and impact.

Revd Dr Keith Hebden,
Director of the Urban Theology Union



Changes and Seasons

Previously we had an Kate Thompson as Support Services Manager on 20 hours a week and Rachel O’leary as administrator on 12 hours per week. They’ve done a great job for over a decade serving our membership.

Rachel has moved on and we made the Support Services Manager post redundant. In the past we had properties to manage, cleaning and maintenance of the teaching site to organize, needed an in-house academic registrar and managed our own pay roll. Today we pay The Foundry, Luther King House, have only one rental property to manage and outsource pay roll.



In June we appointed Helen Cottrell as our Office Manager on 12 hours per week. We will keep administrative support under review.

Offering Thursdays and Fridays back to the Foundry led to a reduction in our rent. Helen will be focusing on setting up new financial and organizational systems and on finding saving in our running costs.

In May this year our friend Grace Vincent died, surrounded by family, aged 83. Without Grace and John Vincent there would be no UTU. Grace has been a prophet, and mentor to many of our members. A wonderful service of Thanksgiving took place at Pitsmoor Methodist Church and many stories were shared then and in local and national press.





The Unit

Patsy Wheeler and Christine Gegan have worked tremendously hard all year to continue to organize the library. Many of the books are now on the online system but we can't go fully computerized unless they are all online. Patsy produced a helpful guide to the library for members and students.

We have a good relationship with the Foundry Trust and staff and they appear keen that the basement area be developed and improved. They have also faced financial challenges and are coming out of a long-term deficit.

We have put new signs in both at the Chapel Walk entrance and in the basement, to encourage people in the right direction. We now make use of the noticeboard near the unit.

We still have some physical sorting of the space to do – thinning out the second-hand books, clearing rubbish, making the space even more inclusive and accessible and clearing away filing cabinets. We will need a lot of volunteer help to make this happen but it also needs careful planning.

Post-Graduate Studies

We continue to build a good relationship with the rest of Luther King House of whom we are a “constituent college”. We are building an experienced and diverse team of supervisors. We are exploring new funding streams to widen access.

Graduate Study Seminar

We have created a new pathway into Post-Graduate learning that allows us to support potential PhD students and auditing learners and book-writers at research level. This Graduate Study Seminar costs the student £200 per year for four sessions and overlaps with the PhD seminar.

We have a closer working relationship with the Methodist Church’s Connexional Team that will support and encourage more post-graduate learning with us.

MA Students

Our six new MA students are due to start in September. They are an exciting mix of traditions: Pentecostal, Anglican, Catholic, Quaker, and contexts. We have five enquiries for next year and hope to build that to fifteen enquiries and six new students for September 2018.

PhD Students – Looking into the Future!

Congratulations to Christine Dutton and Andrea Mislner who passed their vivas “without correction” and Steve Palmer for his Mphil. We are very happy to have Christine as a supervisor formally recognized and on the Research Committee. We have seven Manchester PhD students plus two in progress and four new enquiries.

We are in conversation with Church House about sponsorship of PhDs that support the mission strategy of the Church of England. We are in conversation with a Bishop about a sponsored PhD on Cathedral contextual missiology.

Raising Our Profile

We've published articles in Church Times, Methodist Recorder, Preach, Movement, War Cry, in the past twelve months. We have brought local lay trainers and faith leaders in for an event with the Methodist VP.



Our Facebook page has gone from nothing to 550

Likes in less than a year. We now have four regional groups on Facebook that link to the page. The action button on the page links to our email newsletter subscription form.

We reach over 6,000 people on Facebook every month. Our email list has gone from 90 to 210 subscribers in the last twelve months.

Our twitter account has grown, and sees some engagement, but not on the same level as the Facebook account. The average age on our Facebook page is 45 – 60 and they are mostly based in London, Sheffield, and Birmingham.

Mailchimp is the platform we use for our monthly mail out. We also have more than half of these on regional lists although these have not yet been used.

Summer Internships

At the last AGM the members agreed for the Director to explore apprenticeships delivered by UTU. While there was enthusiasm from members and stakeholders we also met with problems.

- Confusion with the Government Apprenticeship.
- Challenge of paying apprentices for a year let alone two.
- Better resourced offers both nationally and in Sheffield with similar products.
- Cost of managing complexity is too high.

We are not yet ready for something this complex and we are reviewing how we might move towards this in the future as we build capacity.

A new proposal is a five-week Summer Internship A model like this has been proven to work in East London as delivered by the Centre for Theology and Community in partnership with Citizens UK.

A Five-week Summer Internship in June-July to inspire a generation and energise the church.

Opportunities for UTU to build reputation and relationships through meeting our charitable aims will be just as likely through five weeks as they would over a year or two.



Practical Challenges

Due to a gap in staffing over the summer and the reduction in staff we have not been able to complete the September Newsletter on time.

We do not have up to date Role Descriptions for current volunteers let alone new ones.

We need a Vice Chair and Human Resources Chair on our Board. Not having these has been a huge challenge in the last twelve months. And we are very grateful to Erica Dunmow and Andrew Crawley for being our Chair and Treasurer but for also supporting staff with HR, IT, and many other things.

We need to recruit new trustees to broaden expertise and share the vision and task.

We need to continue to recruit students and members at a steady rate. This year I have heard many people say we need an ecumenical network to support urban mission and ministry – they need to hear about us: it already exists!

The library and teaching suite needs a further work make the most of the potential space.

We need volunteers to do some discreet one-offs: editing books for John, helping sort out our archives and old records etc.

