



Footsteps

A mission journey from church to community
Part of 'The Way Forward'

With **GOOD NEWS** stories from around the Northern Synod



**“Your word
is a lamp
to guide my
feet and a
light for my
path”**

(Psalm 119:105)

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FOREWORD BY THE MODERATOR

These are exciting times in the life of the United Reformed Church. I believe there is a fresh movement of God's Spirit encouraging us as individuals, local congregations and wider groupings to re-focus on mission and discipleship. This is not confined to the United Reformed Church, but is becoming evident simultaneously across the whole church in western Europe. Evidence for such a movement in The United Reformed Church comes through 'Walking the Way', a new national resource which sets a vision of discipleship for God's people today; and also through another more familiar trajectory, Northern Synod's "Way Forward", encouraging all who are part of the United Reformed Church across Northern Synod to reconsider the ministry of the whole people of God, along with fresh groupings of congregations.

As we embrace new ways of understanding who we are and what we can be and do, these resources help us on our way. Two new initiatives to inspire, challenge and encourage within the life of our Synod are the "Growing Leaders" course, and "Footsteps".

"Footsteps" was launched at our March 2018 Synod. I love the title: "Footsteps". Footsteps come about when our feet are planted firmly on the ground, when we are 'earthed'; very appropriate since this particular resource

helps us in our ongoing adventure of faith as congregations called to serve Christ in our respective communities. How do we earth the good news of Jesus in the neighbourhoods in which we are called to share God's love?

"Footsteps" is a good way to share ideas and practice; a resource to help all in our congregations keen to engage in mission-based outreach. In addition to the booklet you are now reading, "Footsteps" includes a dedicated website and Facebook group: providing valuable opportunities for a greater cross pollination across our congregations through stories and advice to encourage one another as we reach out in Christ's name to the communities around us. Details on accessing the website and joining the Facebook group can be found at www.footstepstoolkit.com.

Absorb the following, be affirmed in what you are already doing, be challenged by fresh approaches, and I trust and pray "Footsteps" will help you to enjoy and embrace sharing God's touch of transforming love in new and exciting ways as together we reach out in Christ's name to a world aching for justice, peace, wholeness, healing, a sense of self-worth and of belonging.

David.



WELCOME!

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” (1 Peter 2:21)

It is time to take a fresh look around us - at groups, individuals and our environment - and at ourselves, as we develop new ways of being and 'doing' church.

The biblical reference above reminds us that we must explore what it means to actively follow and learn from Christ, to transform ourselves and others. The United Reformed Church's focus on "Walking the Way" of Jesus today is reflected in this toolkit as we explore how your church fellowship can get further involved in its local community, seeing our discipleship lived out every day.

It aims to provide a step-by-step guide to identifying the gifts we have amongst us and to share these with one another, at church and in our local areas.

Ready to take another step on your mission journey? Read on to find activities, tips, support and good news stories of those who are achieving great things through community engagement.



STEP 1:



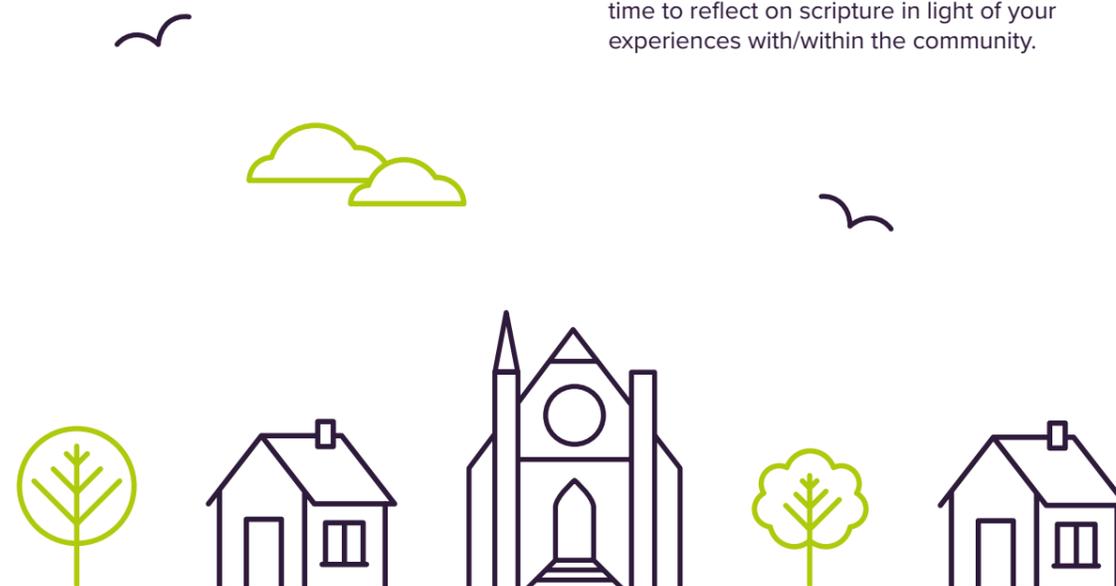
REFLECTION AND PRAYER

“ESTABLISH MY FOOTSTEPS IN YOUR WORD” (PSALM 119:133)

As people of faith it is essential that everything we do is underpinned with prayer and reflection. As a faith people, we seek to be led by the Spirit in all that we do.

- Give thanks to God for the many blessings you have received through fellowship in your local church
- Pray for each member - that God will use their gifts and talents!
- Pray for the groups that use your building - those that belong to the church and those that don't

The Greek word for 'disciple' is mathetes; the literal meaning of which is "one who learns as they follow". As a fellowship, take time to reflect on scripture in light of your experiences with/within the community.



STEP 2:



TAKING STOCK

WHAT ARE WE ALREADY DOING AS A CHURCH?

One of the first things a church fellowship can do is to consider what they are already involved in. The URC is renowned for the work we do in the community - from lunch clubs to mums and toddlers' groups, coffee mornings to foodbanks - we already do lots!



Sometimes we need to step back and reflect on what we are already doing and why. What are we doing well? What can we do better? What needs to end?

Sometimes it's not about doing something big, radical and new. It could simply be a change of direction; using what we are already doing and doing it better or differently.



CONSULT WITH THE SYNOD TEAM VIA THE MISSION ENABLER

The Synod “Way Forward” emphasises the need to find a sustainable future for our churches and adaptability and creativity are key to this. The Synod has a team of people with a wealth of gifts and experiences to help churches take steps to begin their mission journey from church to community.

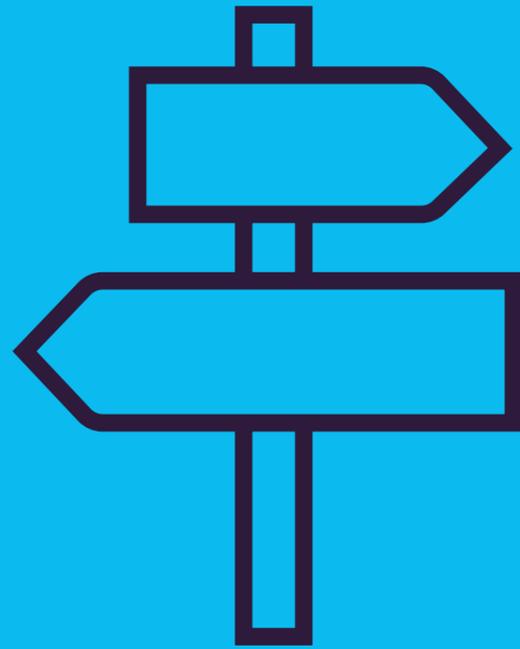
The Synod mission enabler is there to do exactly that - to enable mission! To walk alongside churches and to support them to discover their purpose, their mission and to help discover the gifts within and without the church that can help serve the Kingdom of God in that place!

They are available to run workshops, elders’ meetings, church meetings and to help build capacity for mission and are willing to walk alongside congregations as they work through this process.

Contact details are available at the end of this document.



STEP 3:



EXPLORING GOD'S PLAN

EXPLORING WHAT GOD MAY BE CALLING YOU TO AS CHURCH IN COMMUNITY

**“Make straight paths for
your feet.” (Hebrews 12:13)**

There are several approaches that a church can utilise when it comes to participating in its community and developing community outreach.

Here's a taster to see if there is a way forward that may suit your local context.



1. CONDUCT A COMMUNITY AUDIT

Why is this important? Simply because it's helpful, when you are trying to reach out to your community, to know who your community is! So a community audit is a research-based approach. There's little point in starting a playgroup or a young mothers' support group if your church is in the middle of an area where the average age is 50.

Here are three key steps to consider:

- **What do we know about our communities?**
- **What do others know about our community?**
- **What does our community think about itself?**

This will involve teamwork to achieve. The Way Forward encourages churches to look around them at the gifts they have which can help with their mission work. Where you recognise a gift in someone, tell them, it can make all the difference to them, and the church's outreach journey.



Good news story: > Roker, Sunderland

The church had voted in favour of an initiative called 'Opening the Threshold', which aimed to engage further with the local community by opening its doors as a resource and service to local residents.

Having been a part of a number of local networking groups including "Churches Together", the voluntary community sector network and 'faith in our communities' there was up to date knowledge of what was already happening in the area but they felt that it was time to find out what they could offer too.

They organised an informal 'drop-in' consultation event (including afternoon tea 2-4pm!) at the church with invitations delivered to those they knew were already active within the local area including people from the local authority, community and voluntary organisations based in the area, local schools, police, churches, those currently using the building and 300 local residents who lived in the streets surrounding the church.

People were invited to bring promotional material of their own work and services available in the area to share and the church also had the architect's plans for developments to the building. They provided craft activities for children who attended with their parents and Post-It notes were placed on every table, which, once written on, were added to boards that asked people to think of the local neighbourhood and answer, "Wouldn't it be great if..." and "what concerns me is...?"

The event also encouraged feedback on the church's ideas for possible project work. Contact details of attendees were collected, and their areas of interest were logged so that they could be kept up to date with development and dates for future events.

95 people attended the session in total, 82 Post-It notes were completed and several new relationships were sparked which eventually led to the redevelopment of the church vestry space into a computer suite with five refurbished computers, the delivery of children and young people's activities during school holidays, the sharing of the building with a newly formed community interest group working with people living with memory loss and dementia, and project work with a local artist and a local chef.

A Community Action Team was established to draw all the people now using the building to look at the best way forward for all those passionate about supporting the local community by using their skills and resources together. Three years on and the work continues. A regular newsletter is distributed to the 300 houses surrounding the church to share good news stories and promote the work being done.

The congregation felt that making themselves visible to the local community, meeting people where they were already living and working, and inviting them to hear the church's story and ideas, provided them with the initial stepping stones for partnerships to develop, evidence for funding applications and a kickstart to achieving the aims of their 'Opening the Threshold' initiative.



2. JOIN IN WITH AN ALREADY IDENTIFIED LOCAL COMMUNITY NEED

It is important here to recognise that you don't need to reinvent the wheel or "go it alone" when engaging with community needs. If you have heard of it, the likelihood is, so have other people. There may already be projects starting in your area - keep an eye out for those.

Find out whether there are residents' associations in the area around the church - go to them and listen. Ward meetings are also useful to find out what concerns people locally. These aren't the only places - it's amazing what you can find out while you're waiting for the bus.

If there is already a project working on community concerns - go along and see how you can help - it may be that offering space for meetings in your church would make a big difference or boosting the number of volunteers. Support community projects, be the person who is always there, be reliable, build relationships, be visible as a church, active and interested in the local area.

It is important to remember choosing to engage with local needs and opportunities is about responding to what you learn and hear, sharing resources, and building relationships... all Gospel stuff.



Good news story:

> Amble URC and The Puffin Lounge



The town of Amble is working towards becoming a dementia-friendly town, and to that end a drop-in session once a fortnight was launched. It's called 'The Puffin Lounge' and they welcome anyone who comes in, be it people living with dementia, their families, carers and friends.

People have a cup of tea, enjoy a game of dominoes or downfall, do some knitting etc. You are likely to hear the jollity before you come through the door! As well as providing a safe, secure and happy place for people, it has drawn the attention of those outside the church. One person not connected with church has made a colourful noticeboard to put up outside when they are 'open for business'.



3. PARTICIPATION IN AN ECUMENICAL COMMUNITY PROJECT

How is the “Churches Together” group doing in your area? Is it well attended? Do you go to the meetings? If not, why not?

If these meetings have fizzled out due to lack of enthusiasm - be the enthusiasm! Either invite other church groups to your events or try and regularly go along to other churches’ coffee mornings/cake sales etc. Find the joy in being together.

If “Churches Together” is doing well - is there a new project you can all work on together (see community audit on page 14)?

Are there ecumenical bodies working across a bigger area you are located in, for example your town/city, that you could engage in? Food banks can offer a good example. Coordination of a food bank can often be the best way to offer the most to an area in simple ways such as ensuring food banks are open on different days of the week, sharing out food from those who collect the food to those who distribute it, sharing volunteers’ skills, praying with and for each other, and collecting data and real stories from those attending the food banks so that longer term solutions can be sought and policy makers challenged.



Good news story:

> **Bethel URC, Chester-le-Street and the foodbank**



In Chester-le-Street five years ago “Churches Together” and the Durham Christian Partnership set up a food bank. The distribution centre was in the Parish Centre and a few of Bethel United Reformed Church’s members were volunteers giving out food to hungry people.

In 2016, a change of venue was requested to give more space for volunteers to talk to the people who were requesting food. In response to this, Bethel offered use of their upstairs hall, which was rarely used, and now the new distribution centre is located there, and used three times a week. Although they consider themselves to be a small, ageing congregation, they do not let this hold them back from contributing to the local community’s needs through their strong ecumenical links.



4. PARTICIPATION IN A SECULAR COMMUNITY PROJECT

The best dialogue for church is with those who do not recognise themselves as church.

Could your local church engage with a secular community project? Since the gospel and serving the community go naturally together, linking in to existing or new secular community projects is well worth exploring. There are some things to consider on your mission journey from church to community...

Identifying a suitable project

Are there things that your church already has an interest in? There will be more energy and enthusiasm for a project that resonates with a local church's core values and interests. So, the first step will be to have a discussion within the church. It will work best if the whole church gets behind the initiative and there is a sense of ownership.

Engage in a search for an suitable project:

- Ask the congregation and other people in the local community
- Check the local press
- Check with your local volunteering agencies, charities, NHS, local government agencies (social services; police; etc)
- Search the web

If a new piece of work is envisaged, with the church and a secular partner, first gain clarity within the church about your vision for the project and then look for a suitable partner. Internet searching will usually uncover some possibilities.



Good news story:

> The Waddington Street Centre, Durham



The centre opened in Waddington Street United Reformed Church's hall in 1981 to fulfil a need for additional support for people with mental health problems in Durham. It began in a very small way as a day centre run by volunteers and only open one day a week.

It developed almost immediately due to demand and its considerable success and, with the help of additional funding, the day centre's provision in the church hall was expanded and opened for five days a week. Over the years it expanded in to nearby buildings to accommodate a resource centre with facilities for education, computer training, and arts and craftwork and a

drop-in open in the evenings, and in 1997 it was eventually fully reconstructed in to one accessible site due to Big Lottery Funding to provide a more purpose-built facility to keep up with demand and the nature of the provision.

The centre is now open during the day, five days per week (Monday - Friday). There are also some evening sessions, including drop-ins and music and poetry performance nights when the centre is opened up as a community facility.



5. CONSIDER RELOCATING TO A COMMUNITY SPACE

“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” (Matthew 18:20)

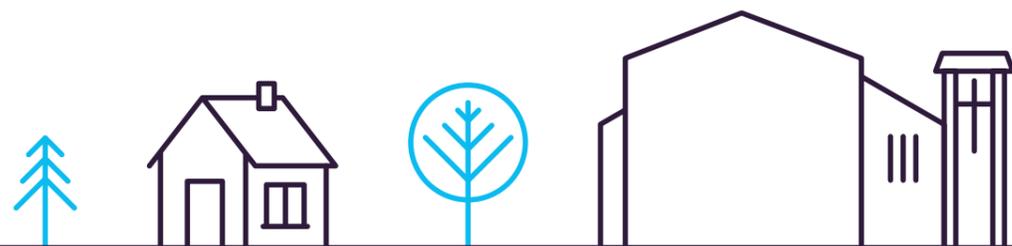
You don't need a big fancy building. It may be that your church building is no longer viable - either it is too big or too broken to carry on being useful to your smaller congregation. Have you considered instead holding your services somewhere else?

Going to a place where other people already meet may open new opportunities for mission and partnership working.

Perhaps your big and useful building could be used as a community building by others and become a resource for the local community? Time to give thanks and close the door, or open it wider and let God's people and kingdom in to enhance what you are already offering?

Buildings can be a great resource or a heavy burden. Look around your community... is there already another building that is a great resource which you can join in and use your energy to engage with people rather than fixing leaking roofs and fundraising for high energy bills?

This list is not exhaustive so be creative. Be inspired by others' stories but remember what works best is prayer and finding out what is unique to your location and church.



Good news story: > Kielder URC



Kielder URC decided to close the old church and to hold services in Kielder Castle. The services are more modern and child-centred and the after school club has helped them to contact the parents and young people. They also attract some tourists to worship. Refreshments are supplied by the Castle Café after the services so they can chat and get to know people.

This has been a fantastic success and they have gone from an average of six to eight people attending to 25-30.



6. SEEKING A VISION FOR CHURCH

**“Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.”
(Habakkuk 2:2)**

When we seek a vision, we are looking to discern God’s will for where we are going as church in the long term (10-20 years and beyond). Each church vision will therefore be different and unique. Here are three statements that demonstrate different visions for church:

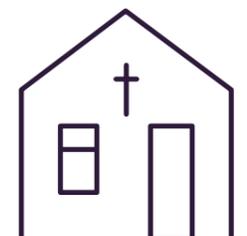
“To know Christ better and to make Christ better known.”

“A Place to Belong.”

“To be a welcoming church, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, focused on outreach and support within our local community and beyond.”

COMMON THEMES FOR A CHURCH VISION:

- A faith based process
- Spiritually led in worship and prayer
- Looking to the future
- Not time-bound
- Always striving to improve
- Developed over a well-researched process
- A solid core of the church family is committed and involved from the outset
- Worship, nurture, extending to others
- Considers the use of buildings, as both asset and liability



PROCESS TO DEVELOP A CHURCH VISION:

Each church, led by the Spirit, will design its own process for developing its vision. As a stimulus, the following example, from St James's, Alnwick, outlines the process embarked on by that church.

A daily prayer was written and distributed to everyone in the church family.

Next, a full day's elders' meeting, led by a member of the Synod team, was held to take stock of where the church was as a family and to share dreams on building the church of the future. These dreams were captured on wooden bricks to be built around "Christ, as the cornerstone".

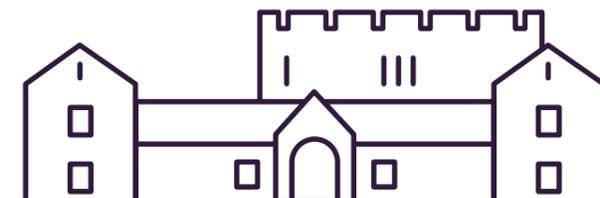
Led by the same member of the Synod team, a half day's church meeting was held, including adherents and young people, and the process from the elders' meeting was replicated. House meetings with elders' pastoral groups were subsequently held to engage more people in the process to discern their views on the church of the future.

In tandem with the house meetings a community audit was conducted, including an audit of the community engagement of other churches in the community.

Subsequently, a team was appointed to draft a vision for the church, based on all the inputs.

The draft vision was presented to elders and church meeting and accepted as...

"St James's will be a welcoming church, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, focused on outreach and support within our local community and beyond."



THE DAILY PRAYER FOR ST JAMES'S:

"Eternal God, we thank you and praise your name.

"We give thanks for the many people who have given of themselves over the years to serve you in this church and we give thanks for the fellowship we have found here. We pray for all those in our church who give of their time and talents to serve in your name.

"As we seek a new vision for St James's, may your lead and strengthen us. May we discern your will and your way to be a vital presence in our community through service, fellowship and witness. May we reach out beyond the walls of our church, caring for your children around the world, this we ask in Christ's name. Amen."



7. PURSUING YOUR AGREED VISION

**“Watch the path of your feet
And all your ways will be established.”
(Proverbs 4:26)**

Depending on its size and structures, each church will pursue its agreed vision in different ways, although some aspects may be common to all churches:

- Pray daily for your church’s vision and the mission that extends from it.
- Share the vision with all the church family and user groups.
- Decide who is most likely to be attracted to what you offer as church, while remaining open to receive all who are seeking to know more about the Christian faith.
- Identify the key local needs from your community and competitive audit.
- Discuss and agree the mission of the church in elders and church meetings, based on your community audit.
- Develop a plan to pursue your mission, including the necessary human and financial resources.
- Uphold your vision in worship; prayer and house groups.
- Discuss how you can be a more welcoming church.
- Consider whether your buildings are fit for purpose to deliver your vision and mission.
- Engage with partners who use your building, e.g. inviting them to special services.
- Seek funding from the mission and property funds, if required.



Good news story: > South East England



A church in the south east of England discerned a vision to be:

“A family church where everyone is welcomed and valued and offers support and encouragement to all.

1. **A Worshipping Family - giving glory to God as we share in worship together**
2. **A Nurturing Family - supporting each other through friendship, teaching and Christian discipleship**
3. **An Extending Family - reaching out to others and meeting their needs”**

These three pillars informed the elders’ agenda; its church meeting agenda and its newsletter content. It gave them a structure and a focus to continuously deliver the vision.

Below are some of the achievements flowing from this vision:

- Joint services were organised with two partner churches that used the buildings; one a charismatic Evangelical Church, the other a church in a more Orthodox tradition. These services enriched and diversified Worship in church.
- An annual bereavement service was held for members and non- members to remember loved ones.
- An annual service was held at Christmas with a local school who used the premises each week.
- A pastoral visitors team was set up, with each visitor supporting an elder.
- Working ecumenically the church hosted and resourced staffing for a night shelter for homeless people during the cold winter months.
- Its users were redefined as partners, each partner was assigned an elder, with regular opportunities for joint partner get together.
- The church sanctuary was remodelled as a multi-purpose space, open seven days a week.
- Significant funding for the redevelopment was obtained from Synod, based on the church’s vision and mission.
- A Giving Campaign was launched that underpinned the financial viability of the church.
- 5% of income was distributed each year to local and international charities.

Through these actions and activities, the church was transformed from a somewhat inward-looking church, constantly concerned with decaying buildings, to an outward-looking church which focused on its community.



STEP 4:



HELP AND ADVICE THE SYNOD CAN OFFER

The Synod team is here to help churches do their work! We can offer advice, support and encouragement to local congregations at any stage of their journey from funding to property, vision to engagement - we are here to help!

Funding:

The Synod has released some of its financial resources to help churches engage in mission effectively. These come in the form of church property grants and mission grants. Details of how to apply for these can be found at: <http://urc-northernSynod.org/grants/>

Mission Grants

The aim of the mission fund is to enable the churches of Northern Synod to be lively, informed and effective in being the church in their local setting, in the light of the five marks of mission.

There are two categories of grants:

Small grants, up to £10,000

Large grants, from £10,000 to £50,000

Contact details:

Synod Moderator
Revd David Herbert

Synod Clerk
Melanie Campbell

Mission Enabler
Revd Jane Rowell

Ecumenical Officer
Andy Lie

Children's Work Advisor
Hannah Middleton

Finance Officer
Helen Hogg

Synod Treasurer
Revd Dr Tony Haws

Synod Mission Committee Convenor
Revd Meg Robb

LMMR Co-ordinator
Revd Joan Grindrod-Helmn

Church Related Community Worker
Ann Honey

Contact addresses can be found in the Synod yearbook or from Wendy Watson in the Synod.

For further information and regular updates, please refer to the Footsteps website at www.footstepstoolkit.com

You may also wish to become a member of the Footsteps Club on Facebook - sign up details can be found on the Footsteps website

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The United Reformed Church

We hope this booklet has given you many things to think about and inspires you to begin your mission journey from church to Community. We wish you God's blessing in all you do!

"I simply argue that the Cross be raised again at the centre of the market place as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves, on the town garbage heap; at a crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write His title in Hebrew and Latin and Greek (or should we say in English and in Bantu and in Afrikaans!); at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where He died. And that is what He died about. And that is where church men and women should be and what Church should be about."

© MacLeod, G. Ferguson, R (1998), Chasing the Wild Goose, 2nd Edition, Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, Pg. 73-74

