



John August Swanson, 'A Celebration'

Being With Jesmond 2025

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ,
there is a new creation.
The old has passed away;
behold, the new has come.
2 Corinthians 5:17*

A year to transition

Our annual budget with a vision



Jesmond
UNITED REFORMED
CHURCH



Introduction

This is a year to make bold moves and lean into what God is calling us to be and do.

We have significant financial and building assets. We know that we are called to be a church in this time and this place. Yet whilst we have more than enough to do what God is calling us to do, we do not have more than enough to keep doing things the same way. This budget proposes that we invest in ministry that will help us understand what God's call is for us to *become*, and re-align ourselves with that calling.

Our optimism is shared in British Christianity at the moment: **UK churches are growing**. A report, [*The Quiet Revival*](#), published this year by the Bible Society and based on surveys conducted by the venerable YouGov agency, found that **church attendance has grown by 50 percent in the past six years**. People in 'Gen Z' (young adults) are leading the change, especially young men. By figuring out how best to position our ministry in the current context, as this budget is proposing we fund, **we are transitioning into what could be a fruitful context for ministry**.

Much of this budget is carried over from 2024, particularly our collaborative ministries. We believe that there is almost nothing we should be doing in Jesmond that is not alongside other community partners, whether secular, ecumenical, and/or interfaith. In a time when people are reporting record levels of loneliness and isolation, our Christ-given call is to expand belonging to everyone in our midst, as Jesus did. We do this through Reformed Christian ministry, but also through supporting community initiatives that are explicitly welcome to people of all faiths and none.

In 2022 we understood that the future we imagine participating in includes:

- The church becoming more of a communal hub and community centre
- Technology becoming more important in how we connect with one another
- That an authentic church will be synonymous with care for creation
- People will want healthy face-to-face relationships to counterbalance technology overload
- Varied forms of music, with joyful congregational singing, is a thing of the *future*, and we will invest in new forms of music that include a varied congregation in age, race, and socioeconomic class
- Worship will display a blend of various cultures coming together
- Being able to share in each other's stories will help us understand how God's story is at work amongst us, and will drive our discipleship together

How we participate in being with Jesmond is guided by five values prayerfully identified in our 2022 'Futures Literacy Lab':

- **Community:** a deep sense of our connection to one another, and a sense that community is at the heart of the Christian life.
- **Contemplation:** equipping people to develop the inner capacity to quiet our 'monkey minds' and sit in silence, creating space for deep reflection necessary for personal growth.
- **Creativity:** Thomas Aquinas said the nearest thing to contemplation is play. We are developing the creative capacity of our church to be a place where people can creatively explore their gifts in life-giving and life-affirming purposes.
- **Care:** we are growing into a place where those seeking to follow Jesus can live out our interdependence and sharing the joy and pain caused by injustices, whether ecological, economic, social, racial, gender, or generational.
- **Celebration:** recognising that pain and anxiety that infect so many lives, we find ways to celebrate Jesus, Justice, and Joy in all our acts of service, fellowship, and discipleship.

Our vision leads us to find ways to connect with those who live in the immediate area of Brandling Park, particularly:

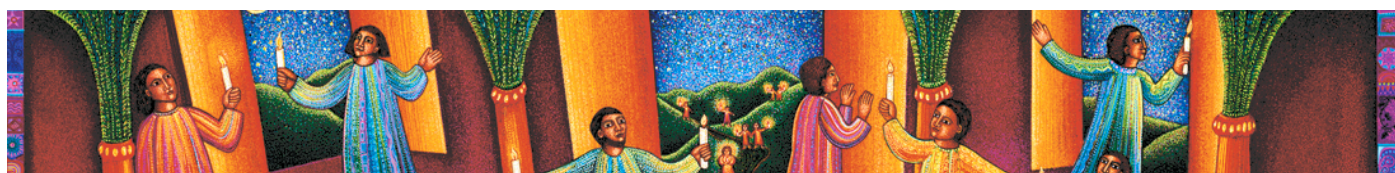
- People living in South Jesmond, our immediate neighbourhood, and especially young professionals and families moving into the area
- Students, of whom represent over 60% of Jesmond's population
- People living in nearby sheltered accommodation
- Anyone seeking to engage with a 'just and generous' Christianity in Newcastle upon Tyne

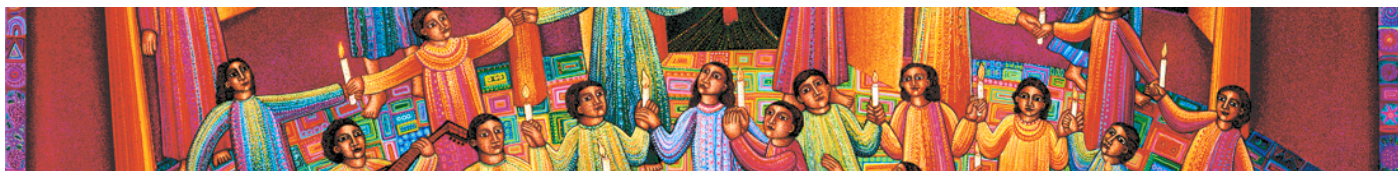
Whilst we are continuing to maintain and invest in our traditional relationships with members, we recognise that even people we have known for years may be unknown to us. Through practicing ways of being with people, we can improve our discipleship in providing care, prayer, and presence as we continue to be the church for one another.

The entirety of the [Futures Literacy Lab can be read here.](#)

The Future [*read the 2025 proposed budget*](#)

The previous two years have left us with substantial budget surpluses, in part because previous cost estimates for building work were greatly overstated. We approach the present moment with healthy reserves, sound facilities, and a good plan for continuing income. We have allocated our building assets in ways that both support our church's vision and provides strong income for ministry going forward. The sanctuary is a celebrated music venue. The hall is sought-after for community events. The former manse, Haldane House, provides essential income to funding our ministries whilst sheltering childcare and student housing.





How we are using our resources to live into the vision we have been given

What's new:

- **Church in Community Development Worker (CICDW).** This is a working title for a part-time post we are developing *and funding* that will work with church and community leaders, institutions, and individuals to identify where God's agency is already at work in the community and assist church leadership in aligning the church's gifts with that agency. This will enable the church to 'get behind' what God is already doing in the church and community, follow the Spirit into the community, and draw on the abundance of gifts of people present. **At the moment, we are asking the Church Meeting to support this post in theory as a group works to finalise the Job Description, which will be brought to a future Church Meeting. We hope to appoint in November 2025.**
 - A first task of a CICDW may be the creation of an '**energy map**' that looks at our area and provides answers to the questions of where there is already movement, where there are already differences being made, where there are already initiatives being built up, and where there are already people being excited by their purposes. In short, it is 'asking where God's agency is already at work in ways that the energy showed up,' per Gil Rendle, a church vitality consultant, in *Quietly Courageous*.
 - This replaces the Pioneer Children, Youth, and Families post we have been unsuccessful in filling for nearly three years. A key difference is that, rather than developing children and family programming at the church, this post will seek to find ways to partner with people and institutions so that the church can come alongside what is already happening, or help foster something that is trying to happen, in our community.
 - This post is intended to complement, not supplant, the work of a Church-Related Community Worker, whose salary is funded entirely by the denomination. We still have an active call open for that post, in partnership with St James's URC.
 - Whilst we intend to seek Synod funding to defray some of the costs of this post (and have received encouragement to do so), we are including in our present budget the fullness of funding for this post, drawing on our healthy reserves and strong expected future income, for two years.
 - **Budget impact:** £7,000 in 2025, £28,000 in 2026, and £23,500 in 2027.
- **Choral Scholars.** Music is one of the greatest joys at Jesmond URC. The 'Choral Scholars' programme, also a working title, is something we hope to launch in the autumn. This would invite four students to be stipendiary choral scholars, whose goal would be to work with the church and community to enhance participation in congregational and community singing. Working with our music director, Dr Alison Shiel, and the wealth of musical

wisdom resident within the congregation, this could be a rich and promising exchange between our church, students, and our vital music ministry.

- **Budget impact:** £3,000 in 2025, then £6,000 for 2026.

What's staying (mostly) the same:

- **A Church-Related Community Worker** as a shared ministry with St James's United Reformed Church, to address loneliness and isolation in city centre communities of students, service-sector employees, elderly people, and young professionals moving into the city centre communities. *This position was approved by the United Reformed Church in 2024. This is an open call; we await a qualified candidate to respond. Please continue to hold this in prayer.*
 - We have set aside £6,560 each year for the next five years (but not in 2025, as by this point even if a materialises, the expense will now arise in the 2026 budget) for expenses and project costs associated with this ministry, for a total investment of £32,800 over five years.
 - The manse for the CRCW will be provided by Northern Synod under the new Synod Manse Strategy.
- **Community ministries.**
 - **Repair Café.** This ministry boasts participation from dozens of people outside the church as we not only repair stuff, but communal fabric through relationships forged during the café. Start-up costs were covered by a Synod grant, and the donations received at each session have meant that the Repair Café is now self-financing.
 - **Budget impact:** £500pa contingency
- **Justice ministries,**
 - by being an active part of Tyne & Wear Citizens, including the **Organising for Growth campaign, launched at the end of 2024.** This campaign works with small urban churches to develop and grow congregations around by deepening relationships with local people and organisations. A pilot programme in London and surroundings saw record growth in formerly struggling congregations, and is now actively brought to Newcastle via Tyne & Wear Citizens.
 - **Budget impact:** £779pa in annual dues
 - Continuing participation in the formation of an ecumenical Inclusive Church network with St James's URC, Jesmond Methodist Church, St George's Church, Jesmond, Newcastle Unitarian Church, and Newcastle Cathedral, which seeks to welcome people from a variety of backgrounds and identities, including LGBTQ+ people, and people from different socio-economic, ability, and cultural backgrounds.
 - **Budget impact:** £20pa, but additional hospitality could come from the Ministry Programmes budget
- **Becoming an eco-church.**
 - An authentic church of the 21st century must take our obligation to creation seriously.
 - **Budget impact:** We have allocated £5,000pa for the next three years to support this effort (for a total of £15,000), which could include formally

becoming an A Rocha Eco Church. Synod has allocated £4mm for this effort, which could help us reach a more fulsome Eco Church impact.

- **The ‘1888 Project’**, in concert with St George’s, Jesmond, to:
 - Promote the industrial heritage of Jesmond, linked by both churches being built in 1888;
 - Repair and restore the historic organs of both churches;
 - Provide a heritage trail linking the churches and other areas of industrial importance to Newcastle
 - **Budget impact:** In addition to seeking Heritage Lottery Funding and gifts from the congregation and community, we are directly investing £3,800 this year. This is a significant decrease from the originally expected total of £25,000 toward the £250,000 total we are seeking for Jesmond URC as part of this joint effort.
- **Providing a space for contemplation** by supporting and participating in pastorate-level retreats to Holy Island and Iona, and finding ways to support Quiet Days in the pastorate. The Community Garden at Haldane House is a continuing ministry of this church as a quiet space in an urban centre.
- **Investing in our buildings:**
 - In 2023 a five-year property condition review (called a ‘Quinquennial Report’) of Haldane House found areas in need of significant investment to keep it structurally sound, safe, and able to continue to function in ways that support our ministry. The initial estimates of expenses were very high. Having engaged the excellent property management skills of Graham Hatt to help us navigate this work, we have discovered that the actual outlay required will be significantly lower. In 2024, we spent £26,670 toward urgent repairs to Haldane House (instead of the original estimate of £50,000), and are allocating £40,000 for repairs in 2025. This brings us to an expected total under £70,000, as opposed to the original estimate of £100,000 over three years.
 - These works are necessary to ensure that Haldane House continues to provide income we use to fund our ministry—which currently represents roughly 30% of our total operating income.
 - Our church building remains in very good condition, with only minor repairs needed.
- **Improving our ability to connect** by investing in delivering campus-wide high-speed wi-fi. This was not achieved in 2024, so remains a goal for 2025.
 - As we become more of a venue for activities in Jesmond we know that robust wi-fi is a demand. Whilst we do not have a figure for this, we will explore quotes soon that help us understand what this might cost.

What’s going, or being put on hiatus:

- **Big Questions Café.** This popular partnership between us and Jesmond Library has become far more cost-effective in 2024 as we shifted to providing our own food and involving the community in the washing up. We also held our largest BQC on Artificial Intelligence, with over 50 in attendance in 2024. However, the programme needs lay leader

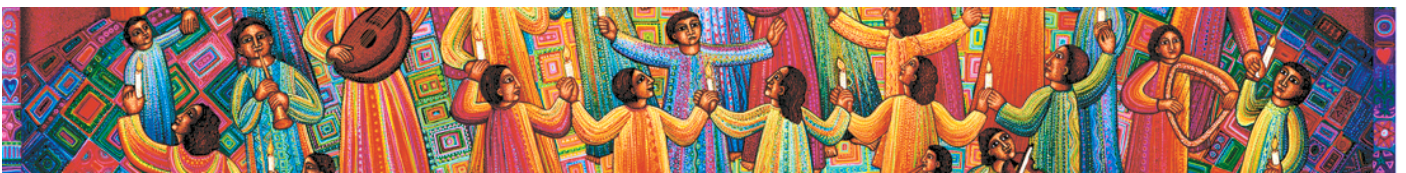
time and leadership to continue. It has been placed on hiatus until someone feels called to lead the initiative.

- **A Pioneer Children, Youth, & Families Worker.** This was a Synod-funded post to be shared across Jesmond and two other pastorate churches. After nearly three years of unsuccessful advertisement of the post, we concurred with Synod that we should withdraw the post and consider other ways to engage with our community. We were to pay for any programming costs associated with the post.
- **Youth Opportunity Scheme employees.** These were Synod-funded positions that provided funds to churches to hire young people for essential work or ministry in their midst. These are currently under review and may not be continued past August 2025. Our expenses were to cover training and programme costs.

Areas for improvement

These remain areas for improvement from 2024, and we recognise that we have not progressed on them significantly in the past year. We re-list them here to remind ourselves of the significance of these areas and that we still should lean into these areas:

- One area elders noted in reviewing our budget is a lack of investment in intentional interfaith engagement and with Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people in our community. We challenge ourselves and our church to think more deeply about ways that we could make such engagements going forward.
- We are exploring two ideas for Haldane House Flat 51a, a one-bedroom flat. Currently it is let, but we think there's missional opportunities for it. One idea is that we offer it up as refugee housing, receiving a more modest income but aligning that investment with our goals to be present with those in need of a shelter. Another option is to use it as a flat for visiting scholars, artists, and musicians. To recoup costs and help fund that programme, it could be let out as an 'AirBnB' spot when not in use. Other ideas are welcome!



The recommendation

We are recommending to the church to run a possible deficit between the church and Haldane House operating funds of around £26,500 in 2025. We do not think deficit spending will continue into 2026. This is sustainable in part because we have been running significant surpluses; last year we anticipated a deficit of nearly £66,000, but ran a surplus of £39,709. This was largely because much of the anticipated building work could not start until 2025 and other project activities did not in the end take place, but even then, the significant difference in anticipated costs gives us confidence that we can afford to run a deficit whilst still funding the new initiatives as suggested.

This is a year to pivot toward the vital and vibrant future to which God calls us.

The Nazareth Manifesto: Being With God

1. Our calling is to imitate the way God is.
2. Our clue to how to imitate God is to follow the way God is with us in Christ.
3. Our first awareness is the abundance of God and our own scarcity—together with our gratitude that we have been given so many ways to transform our scarcity into God's abundance.
4. It is a miracle of grace that God meets our scarcity through the abundance we discover in those apparently more exposed to scarcity than ourselves.
5. A community seeking regeneration has already within it most of what it needs for its own transformation.
6. We do not configure situations as problems needing solutions.
7. We cannot understand, listen to, be taught by or receive grace from people unless we inhabit their world which we see as valuable for its own sake.
8. There is no goal beyond restored relationship: reconciliation is the gospel.
9. The centre of ministry is worship (being with God); and the centre of mission is being with the disadvantaged and receiving abundance from them.
10. Being with is both the method and goal of social engagement.

Our church is drawing upon the Nazareth Manifesto as a way to develop our values in ministry. This summary is by Richard Carter in The City is My Monastery, and is from Samuel Wells, Δ Nazareth Manifesto, pp 27-31

*Cover art: Swanson, John August. Celebration, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://digilib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-image/link.pl?RC=56538> [retrieved May 6, 2025]. Original source: Estate of John August Swanson, <https://www.johnaugustswanson.com/>. The artist has granted permission for the non-commercial use of this image with attribution. The artist must be contacted for other uses.*