

Welwyn Garden City, Harpenden
and Wheathampstead
United Reformed Churches
Magazine



December, January & February
2025/2026

Dear Friends,

Grace and peace to you.

Writing a letter for an issue of a church magazine that spans the months of December, January, and February is always going to be a strange and challenging task. For one invariably writes such a letter in the middle of November, and it is not uncommon for the focus, quite understandably, to be on Christmas and the birth of Jesus. But one consequence of all this is that one skips over the season of Advent, moving on quickly from autumn and harvest festivals to the celebration of Christ's birth. In this way, we inadvertently echo the shops around us, who, we often complain, "seem to put their decorations up earlier and earlier each year!"

And yet, in contrast to this headlong rush towards celebration, the Church has long encouraged faithful followers to spend the time leading up to Christmas as a time of preparation and reflection, so that we might make ready, not just for the celebration of our Saviour's birth, but also for that time that is coming, when he will return. Advent has become a religious season that the Church has clung on to, in the face of a world that has become decreasingly familiar with it.

Rachel Mann speaks of this in the introduction to her Advent and Christmas devotional, *In the Bleak Midwinter*, when she writes,

Ours is a time when consumerism and conspicuous consumption have become the norm. Christmas – which, as a concept, has so dominated Advent in the popular mind that Advent barely registers – has become the defining focus for the consumption of 'stuff'.

Advent – that great season of discipline, preparation and fasting – has become so lost that if it registers at all in the popular mind, it is as a kind of reverse of classic meanings of Advent. Modern secular Advent means treating oneself to 'foretastes' of the feast, with barely restrained glee. Advent calendars – as ways to mark time until the first day of Christmas – have evolved into structured paths of indulgence; and such calendars today include not only chocolate treats but sometimes gin, whisky, cheese and so on. At one level, this is all good knockabout fun; at another, it frames 'Advent time' as '(self-)indulgent time'.

This leaves us with a challenge. For, even if we felt inclined to do so, we would not be able to change what has become the default pattern and ritual of the pre-Christmas season for most people, both inside and outside the Church. Yet, at the same time, there are, no doubt, elements of the traditional Advent season that we would like to keep, to treasure, and to encourage others to value.

So, the question is, how do we balance this tension? How do we rejoice in and celebrate those parts of popular Advent that can be described as “good knockabout fun”, while also making room for those traditional aspects of Advent that can help us to focus our hearts, minds, and spirits on the coming of Jesus – as a baby in Bethlehem; as the revelation of God in each of our lives; and as the One who will make all things new when he returns.

There are no easy answers to the question, but in seeking to try, it is, I believe, imperative that we seek to value both styles of Advent. For if we simply decry the popular version of Advent, we will do nothing more than alienate all those for whom that is a precious and treasured part of their Christmas. And if we overlook and ignore the traditional aspects of Advent, we will lose something that can be both a blessing and a guide for us as we draw ever closer to the celebration of Jesus’ birth.

The traditional Advent carol, *Hills of the north, rejoice*, encourages us to celebrate, sing, and be joyful. It reminds us of what the birth of Jesus means for all people, and it speaks of the salvation that he brings. And it also looks forward to that time when Jesus will return, all will be made new, and all people will be drawn to him.

*Hills of the north, rejoice,
river and mountain spring,
hark to the advent voice;
valley and lowland, sing.
Christ comes in righteousness and
love,
he brings salvation from above.*

Isles of the southern seas

*sing to the listening earth,
carry on every breeze
hope of a world's new birth:
in Christ shall all be made anew,
his word is sure, his promise true.*

*Lands of the east, arise!
He is your brightest morn,*

*greet him with joyous eyes,
praise shall his path adorn:
the God whom you have longed to
know
in Christ draws near, and calls you
now.*

*Shores of the utmost west,
lands of the setting sun,
welcome the heavenly guest
in whom the dawn has come:*

*he brings a never-ending light
who triumphed o'er our darkest
night.*

*Shout, as you journey on,
songs be in every mouth!
Lo, from the north they come,
from east and west and south:
in Jesus all shall find their rest,
in him the universe be blest.*

Charles E Oakley (1832-1865)

May I encourage you to enjoy your Advent traditions, whatever they may be. But may I also encourage you to take some time to pause for a while, to take a break from all the busy-ness that Christmas preparations often bring, and to spend a moment or two reflecting on the wonder and the awesomeness of what this season truly means for us all.

So, may you know God's blessing as you journey through this Advent season, however and wherever that journey takes you. May you know the joy of the Christ-child as you celebrate his birth. And may you celebrate the love of God with all whom you spend time this Christmas and New Year.

In His name,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "C. E. Oakley", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dear friends,

As Christians we are people of hope and expectation. During Advent we look forward to the coming of Christ and even though we know that he has already come, it is a time of reflecting on the world that Jesus was born into, circumstances which has many resonances with us today. The people longed for light to come into their dark world and to be rescued from oppression. It is one of the amazing truths of our faith which we celebrate at Christmas that God became incarnate in Jesus and lived amongst us. He came to bring about change but he faced resistance and today that resistance is as great as ever.

We believe that although Christ has come, we still await the coming of his kingdom in all its fullness as the world goes through birth pains (Mark 13:8). And in the meantime, we are called to carry on the incarnational work that Jesus began to be light, to be peace and also to bring joy to our world.

Prayer

O God Most High, you love justice, hate oppression and promise both liberty and justice.

Anoint us by your Spirit, that we may bring good news to the downtrodden, bind up the broken and set the captives free.

Help us proclaim your favour, that those who mourn will be comforted, tyrants face justice, and our earth be renewed according to your will. Amen

Revd Andy Braunston Prayers from the Heart - The URC Prayer Handbook 2020

Wishing you a very happy Christmas and a blessed and peaceful New Year on behalf of the Synod Staff.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George".

Thames North Synod Moderator

It has been a busy Autumn in all our churches in the Heartland Group and Wheathampstead Churches Together.

St Albans URC held a weekend led by the Wild Goose Resource Group with workshops held on the Saturday. We attended the Friday evening Worship where we learnt lots of new songs led by the group of three and their guitars. We moved around a lot and had plenty of different conversations on questions asked by the team. It was an inspiring evening unfortunately due to our own service we were not able to attend the Sunday morning Worship.

Six of us attended the WGC Quiz Night which devised by Matt is always challenging! We were quite relieved and extremely surprised that we came 4th, although it's really all about a fun night out!



Locally a Churches Together event was held at the Chapel Halls where an excellent speaker from Operation Noah spoke about the Charity which encourages us to look at how churches and individuals can, through the banks they use, support environmental issues. Jane reported on the evening to Synod News (October issue). Wheathampstead were praised for this 'being one of the smaller churches' in TNS!



The usual Service of Remembrance was held at the War Memorial where we remembered over 100 men from the village who had died in the World Wars. Stones with each individuals name on had been handed out to those attending and presented at the Memorial as the Roll of Honour was read out.

Looking ahead Churches Together will be holding an Advent Service on 30 November.

We now have Christmas cards to be delivered to

every house in the village before then! The two local primary schools take it in turns to draw nativity pictures and one is chosen for the front of the card.

There are lots of services and carols to attend before Christmas day and we especially look forward to the Harpenden one on 21 December with the lovely choir singing and needless to say the mulled wine and mince pies to follow.

In January we will be holding a special Songs of Praise, another WCT event, to mark the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. 3pm in the Chapel Hall on Sunday 25 January, hope you can join us.

Wishing you all a very Happy and Peaceful Christmas.

Jackie Wheathampstead

Dear Friends in Christ,

Thank you for joining me on Saturday, 6th September, to celebrate my ordination and induction as Minister of Word and Sacrament. Having members from the Mid-Herts Pastorate join me in worship, prayer, and fellowship deepened the joy of the day and reminded me of our shared calling to serve Christ together.

I apologise that I couldn't spend more time with each of you; between welcoming guests and the whirlwind of celebration, precious moments slipped away too quickly. Please also accept my heartfelt thanks for your generous gifts, which will stand as lasting reminders of our unity and ministry.

With deepest gratitude and warmest thanks,

Tina





We welcomed Betty Francis into membership on Sunday 9th November at our morning worship. (Betty transferred her membership from her previous URC church). Wheathampstead united church joined us and we all welcomed Betty into our fellowship at Harpenden URC.

It is lovely to have Betty as a member of our Church. Betty has recently moved to Harpenden to be near her

family. Betty was very involved with her previous church. We are very fortunate to have Betty in our fellowship at Harpenden URC and it is so good to see Betty settle into church life.

Sharon Harpenden



Harvest was celebrated on Sunday 6th October at URC Harpenden.

The church looked superb thanks to Bronwen and the team of flower arrangers. It is wonderful to lead worship surrounded by so many beautiful floral displays. A special thank you to Karin for the beautiful flowers given in memory of her mum and more memories were made.



The theme for harvest this year was “what’s on your plate” – giving thanks to God for all He has given us. Reflecting and thinking about creation, the produce and food available to us, and being thankful for our favourite foods and healthy foods, our gifts and our talents, as well as being thankful for the spiritual gifts given.

We are very fortunate to be given so much by our loving generous God and Lord of the Harvest.

The choir led by Don sang – the service was a celebration of creation and the creator.





It was good to spend time afterwards with the church community having lunch and cakes with the lunch donations going to MacMillian, £175.00 was raised on Sunday for a very worthy charity. Thank you to all those who

baked the yummy cakes and cookies and for those who brought food along making our harvest lunch a success.

Thank you to all those who prepared for harvest and for those taking part in the service and in the packing down and delivering the food donated to the salvation army for the foodbank. Another successful harvest festival in many ways. Harvest is a good time to reflect and take stock. Let us thank God for all the blessings received. Let us enjoy the autumn term and marvel at the colours of creation and give God the praise for his handiwork.

All the generous food donated in the service went to local foodbank in Harpenden supporting the local community.

Fall, Leaves, Fall

Emily Brontë

Fall, leaves, fall; die, flowers, away;
Lengthen night and shorten day;
Every leaf speaks bliss to me
Fluttering from the autumn tree.
I shall smile when wreaths of snow
Blossom where the rose should grow;
I shall sing when night's decay
Ushers in a drearier day.



Back in the summer, we at Welwyn Garden City URC were lucky enough to be contacted by Network Homes. I say lucky, but I actually personally know the lady in charge of the project! We were asked if our children and young people would like to create some artwork to brighten up the bill boards on their latest project. We were set the theme of Bees. So, we gathered the children and young people from Family Games, Sunday school, Youth club and Saturday families and set to work. We also had an evening where we watched the Bee movie for inspiration!

As you can see from the pictures below, they produced some wonderful artwork. Unfortunately, the day they picked for photo's was the day most of the children had gone back to school, but luckily Lucy and Alex were there to save the day. If you are walking past B&Q, they are building where all the old car show rooms used to be. Please stop and have a look as they really are quite something and there is also a message from Martyn.

We were gifted £1200 in vouchers and have started to spend some on craft equipment, lego and a BBQ which will be used for family events and also by the wider Church family. There are also plans to buy outside equipment.

Allison WGC



Remembrance 2025

As we took part in Remembrance and spent time reflecting, we may have focussed on some of the following elements, we may have reflected on freedom, hope and peace as these can be key words we associate with remembrance.



Elements we may have reflected on

We were honouring sacrifice: Acknowledging and giving thanks for the lives of those who have given their lives for our freedom.

We are remembering the personal cost of war: Reflecting on the human cost through individual stories, like a soldier's sacrifice or a widow's long grief, and not just the scale of the conflict.

We will often hear and recognise these poignant words on remembrance Sunday

*"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them."*

We are also recognizing current service: Honouring those who continue to serve and protect us today.

We are reflecting on peace: Understanding that the symbol of remembrance (the poppy) is a sign of both remembrance and hope for a peaceful future, and that peace requires active effort, not just a wish for it.



Remembrance can be a personal and communal act: Participating in remembrance through organized events like Remembrance Sunday services, or through personal, private moments of reflection and memory.

Remembrance is an Inclusive and diverse reflection: Acknowledging that remembrance is a deeply personal and inclusive event, bringing people from all faiths, cultures, and backgrounds together. The wars involved the whole world and still do.

Remembrance goes beyond glorification: Recognizing that remembrance does not glorify war but acknowledges its terrible human cost. Remembrance reflections often include a prayer or a call for peace. A poem we can reflect on

The Path to Peace

They gave their day for our tomorrow,
In fields of mud and endless sorrow.
A hundred years have marched right by,
Beneath the same, unchanging sky.
We stand in silence, count the cost,
Of all the lives so bravely lost.

The crimson poppies gently blow,
Above the crosses, row on row.

Their sacrifice, a solemn plea,
For a world where all can live in peace and be free.
They dreamt of home, of love, of rest,
And put their courage to the test.
Their young lives cut, their futures stilled,
A path to peace, however willed.

We wear the poppy, red and true,
A symbol for the brave, for me and you.
But let it be a peace-filled sign,
Not of war, but of a hope divine.
To honour them, we must ensure,
That such a conflict comes no more.
No more the guns, the cries, the pain,
Only the gentle, autumn rain.

Let understanding light the way,
To build a brighter, peaceful day.
From memory's depth, a lesson learned,
For all the lives that were not returned.
We are the living, we must strive,
To keep their dream of peace alive.
In every heart, let kindness start,
And play our own, important part.

We will remember their great sacrifice,
And work for peace, at any price.
For in this world, we all can build,
A promise kept, a hope fulfilled.

Lest We Forget.

WGC 2025 Round Up

I am writing this as we head into Advent at the start of a busy few weeks in the life of our churches. As we draw closer to the end of 2025 it doesn't seem possible that a year has passed since we were prepping for Christmas 2024. We have enjoyed one another's company as a Pastorate worshipping together, sharing lunch, quiz nights and of course our coach trip to Norwich to wish Tina every success and happiness as she embarked on the next step of her journey with her girls. We all miss her bright bubbly personality and all she brought to our Pastorate in her time with us and wish her an enjoyable Christmas with her new church family.

We have welcomed Tracy as our Mission Developer, and Joanne Austin who is supporting Philip now that I have stepped down as Joint Church Secretary.

With Tracy now looking after Thursday Club for me I am hoping this will help me devote more time to the Pastoral Care of our congregation alongside Flower and Décor , and liaising with Martyn when required to ensure the smooth running of funerals at a difficult time for families. I will happily take on any other task and finish events which I feel able to manage if needed.

I cannot close without saying a few thankyou's to those who work so hard to help us keep our heads above water as the demands of looking after our church become more complex year on year.

Thank you, Martyn, for looking after our Pastorate and the LAG singlehanded and Lynne for her creativity with our young folk.

Thankyou Allison for keeping us in line and the office running smoothly and for all the time you voluntarily give to our youth.

Thank you, Helen, for all the support you have offered to Sarah and Tracy as they learn their new roles and the many other ways you support our church.

To Matt and Cherylle as they battle with our unreliable system every Sunday
Alongside many other roles.

To all our other volunteers who help keep groups thriving during the week and on Sundays Welcome and of course Coffee. A special thank you to Kathleen for looking after Sunday Coffee for more years than I care to remember.

Last but not least Philip who quietly soldiers on looking after so many aspects within our church which are too many to mention. We would be lost without you.

God bless you all and I hope you all enjoy a restful Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.



Thank you to all my Pastoral Visitors here is a picture of Margaret Basch who was delighted to see them and recognised both Linda and Joyce D when they visited her recently in her care home. She is keeping and looking well. She loved the flowers from Church

God Bless Margaret and keep well xx

Joyce N WGC URC

Waiting for God-ot

Samuel Beckett wrote the play entitled 'Waiting for Godot' – a tale of two men waiting for their friend Godot, but he never shows up. As Beckett sees it, humanity is waiting for God(ot) to come and save us. But it seems that our waiting, like that of the two friends, is in vain.



Well, what do we expect and when? Certainly not Christ descending in a blaze of glory, surrounded by the angel choir. If we read Matthew 2:36 Jesus tells us 'But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.'

Jesus warns the disciples that the coming of the Lord will be 'like a thief in the night' - that they (we) must be ever-vigilant. He also reminds them of the story of Noah. Only Noah was 'ready' for the impending flood. In faith he built an ark. One may imagine the local people deriding him, calling him crazy, a prophet of doom. The flood came and only the residents of the ark remained – to start anew.

Commentators note that 'The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth ... and that he regretted that he had made humans. So he said, I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground.'

As then, we are living through dangerous and evil times, disturbing and distressing. The world yearns for justice and peace and the future for many is uncertain, even catastrophic. We have seen floods destroying the way of life; famine and war. God regrets, certainly he does.



For us today though, we look to the rainbow in the sky, coming after the flood, as a sign of God's promise: 'Never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.' God sends his Son to show us a way of living pleasing to him – and with the promise of eternal life.

So we can ask again, 'What are we expecting?' We use the words, '**God is with us**'; '**Christ is risen**'. Therefore, IF we believe these words, then our waiting is not in vain. There are, surely, instances in our lives when we experience the nearness of Christ; the work of his hands; the reality of God. And so, we put our trust, and hope in the divine plan and in his timing – for God **IS** with us and we wait for his promise of salvation.

Vivienne Kendall (WUC)

CHURCH FAMILY CORNER

Now that we have moved to a quarterly issue of our magazine, we have decided to limit our birthday congratulations to those reaching a significant milestone so please let me know if you, a family member or a friend would like a mention!

One significant birthday that I missed in the last edition was Jonathan B's 60th so we send belated congratulations to him with thanks to his sister for organizing a very enjoyable celebration for him and his family.

We have several Wedding Anniversaries to record in this edition:-

- * 63rd for Norma & Ted on December 16th
- * 49th for Cherylle & Michael on January 22nd
- * 56th for Alison & Graham on February 7th.

We were sorry to hear that Peter is in a care home in Leighton Buzzard but the good news is that he is regaining his strength and hopes to be able to return to his bungalow in due course.

We were pleased to welcome Martyn Mc. back to our pulpit after a spell in hospital with long Covid which continues to be a problem for others, including Matt. Please remember those who still have relapses even after the five years since 2020.

Please also remember to pass on any other concerns to our minister, Martyn, an Elder or Pastoral Friend so that no one gets forgotten.

We thank God for all the Blessings we receive as members of our Church Family here in Welwyn Garden City.

Thank you, Ann Meers

Have you had a song or a hymn tune go round in your head day after day, so that you say to someone, 'I can't get it out of my head'? The hymn "Abide with me" has been doing that to me lately. It's one of my favourite hymns. It's based on that passage of Scripture in which we find Jesus, recently risen from the dead walking with two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus. But the disciples were so disturbed and confused in their minds on hearing the news that Jesus had risen from the dead, they failed to recognise him.

When they arrived at the place where they lived, they said to this stranger, "Why don't we you stay with us , it's getting dark."(King James Version, "Abide with us.")

" Abide with me" written by the Rev. Henry Francis Lyte. Although I have written about the hymn before I thought I'd like to research it more thoroughly and see how he lived, and what he produced in the form of hymns and poetry.

Abide with me! Fast falls the eventide;
the darkness deepens. Lord, with me
abide.

When other helpers fail, and comforts
flee,
help of the helpless, O abide with me!

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little
day;
earth's joys grow dim, it's glories pass
away;
change and decay in all around I see.
O Thou who changes not, abide with
me.

I need Thy presence every passing
hour;

what but Thy grace can foil the
tempter's power?

Who like Thyself my guide can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide
with me.

I fear no foe with Thee at hand to
bless;

Ills have no weight, and tears no
bitterness.

Where is death's sting? Where grave
thy victory?

I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing
eyes,
shine through the gloom, and point
me to the skies;

heaven's morning breaks, and earth's
vain shadows flee:
in life, in death, O Lord, abide with
me!

The first thing we need to notice is that the original hymn contained two more verses, and other differences. The main differences were made by William Henry Monk. Here's the original hymn:

Abide with me ! Fast falls the
eventide:
The darkness thickens. Lord, with me
abide.
When other helpers fail, and comforts
flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me

Swift to it's close ebbs out life's little
day;
Earth's joys grow dim, it's glories pass
away:
Change and decay in all around I see.
O Thou who changest not, abide with
me!

Not a brief glance I beg, a passing
word;
But as Thou dwell'st with Thy
disciples, Lord;
Familiar, condescending, patient, free,

Come not to sojourn, but abide with
me.

Come not in terrors, as the King of
kings:
But kind and good with healing in Thy
wings,
Tears for all woes, a heart for every
plea,
Come, Friend of sinners, and then
abide with me.

Thou on my head in early youth didst
smile;
And though rebellious and perverse
meanwhile,
Thou hast not left me, oft as I left
Thee.
On to the close, O Lord, abide with
me!

I need Thy presence every passing
hour.
What but Thy grace can foil the
tempter's power?

Who like Thy self my guide and stay
can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide
with me!

Henry Francis Lyte was born on the 1st June 1793 at Ednam, near Kelso, in Scotland. His father was an officer in the navy, but not very interested in his family and eventually deserted them.

Henry was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland. He was a member of the Church of England all his life. Wherever he went he was acknowledged as a man who had a great love for people. But life was not easy for him in a time when doctors had little knowledge of how to deal with such complaints as asthma and tuberculosis, with which he suffered. They could only suggest a warm climate. But he was known as a man of great talent, excelling in music, poetry and ministry. He also made many friends who helped him during times of crisis. One of his poems is entitled, 'Friends Lost in 1833,' The first verse reads as follows: "Gone?—Have ye all then, gone,— The good, the beautiful, the kind and dear? Passed to your glorious rest so swiftly on. And left me weeping here?"

Was Henry married? Well, it seems he was: possibly twice! In a poem headed Agnes, (that I am reading,) he gives the impression that he not only knows her, he is emotionally connected to her from childhood through her teenage years to her early death as his loving wife. That being the case his marriage to a Miss Maxwell - the daughter of a prominent Methodist family with a large fortune, was his second marriage. The husband and wife separated on Sundays to follow their own tradition of worship: she to the Methodist Church, and he to preach in the Parish Church. It was a happy marriage and they had two daughters and three sons.

Due to his health he was forced to resign from various appointments in different

parts of the country, and helped by his wife's fortune visited other countries in an endeavour to seek relief in a warmer climate. In 1819 he moved to Brixam in Devon, where he spent twenty-eight years. He loved to visit the fisherman coming in after being at sea. He delighted in talking to them. Because he showed such interest in them, they asked him to conduct services for them. But, his health was getting worse and he was advised by his doctor to take things easy - he couldn't, it wasn't in his nature to do so. He just loved meeting people, talking about their experiences, and telling them about Jesus.

In addition to these activities he was devoted to his writing of poetry, and, in particular his paraphrase of the Psalms. He also wrote four hymns: 'Praise my soul the king of heaven. ' 'God of mercy, God of grace.' 'Pleasant are Thy courts above.' 'Abide with me.'

"Abide with me" was written by Henry to be sung at his farewell service before he travelled to Europe. When he introduced it, the congregation was in tears. It was the 4th September 1847. Henry died, and entered the presence of his Lord in Nice, France, on 20th November 1847.

But that wasn't the end of the hymn. It took on a new life. When in 1927 the king's secretary asked him what he would like to replace Alexander's Rag-time Band at the Cup Final, the king (George V) replied, "Abide with me." On announcing the hymn, the crowds took to it with great delight! Many stars, Christian and non-Christian have sung it since. One example is Edith Cavell, who in October 1915 sang it as she was taken from prison to be executed.

It still goes round in my head! It's such an emotional and meaningful prayer.

Graham Harpenden

Children and Families Catch-Up

We have had an amazing time with the young children and families over the past couple of months.

The children completed another foodbank challenge in October – seeing how much food they could buy for £10 to donate to the foodbank. It was great to see how well they worked as a team to look for bargains and total up the shopping.

The end of October saw our first ‘firepit party’ and we all had fun around the bonfire, eating hotdogs, drinking soup and toasting marshmallows – I’m not sure who had the best time – the adults or the children! As always, thank you to Allison for all your help with organizing it.



In Saturday Families Church we looked at the wise and foolish builders, sharing songs, crafts, pasta tower making and a particularly fun ‘hands on’ demonstration by Martyn and the children, looking at how sand isn’t the best building foundation. As always, a big thank you to Phillip and Sandra for all the help during these often, messy sessions.

If you were in church for Remembrance Sunday you were able to see the beautiful ‘stained glass’ poppy candle holders the children made – they really were outstanding and they loved sharing them with you all at the end of the service.

We are so blessed to have such fantastic young people as part of our church family, full of energy, excitement and fun.

Lynn WGC URC



On 21st September, Don McCanlis, our Organist and Choir Master, was presented with a Certificate and a Voucher to celebrate his 45 years at Harpenden URC.

As all who have listened and sang to Don's music whether it be at Sunday services or specially put together for special occasions his skills and special touches are very much appreciated by everyone.

We are certainly very privileged to have such a brilliant Organist and his music is such a joy to listen to as well as being a very important part of our Sunday services.

Don has said that he is happy to continue playing for us as long as his fingers can put up with it!

The picture below shows both Don and his wife, Maureen, along with various members of the church choir.

It's all my eye and Betty Martin (*)

I felt particularly important as a young man to be asked by my employer to sign the Official Secrets Act; but on the other hand, a refusal would have meant being shown the door.

I recalled this request when thinking about writing something on truth for the Church Magazine, very topical if you think of the newspaper headlines around the second week of November when I am drafting this.

I learnt something quite late in life which was sound advice and the story leading up to it would have made for scandalous reading, but I'm still bound the Act and will therefore err on the side of caution.

The advice was something just said in passing by an eminent Barrister (QC as was then, KC now of course). I was a very minor member of the legal team defending a company being wrongfully sued by the Government of the day trying to avoid severe EU penalties. I say no more than that.

During discussions, an insignificant misdemeanour by the defendant became known and I think I may have suggested (stupidly) how this could be 'glossed over'.

The response was immediate: 'when you think you should conceal something, all the more reason to bring it out in the open'.

The case never came to trial, and the Government got its own back by other means.

Whilst thinking about truth, the headlines have been dominated recently by the King's brother Andrew, the abuse of position by Ministers in making appointments or failing to fully disclose their personal details, the discrimination within the Metropolitan Police and the BBC with its doctored reporting, the list goes on.

However, when even our great institutions fail us, it is difficult for us ordinary folk to know just who to trust, and decisions can be extraordinarily complex. For instance, emotion can completely over-ride common sense as we have all seen with romance scandals, on the rise and costing victims, both male and female, substantial amounts of their life savings.

People who can be trusted tend to demonstrate consistency in their words and actions over time. If someone reliably does what they say they will, keeps their promises, and behaves predictably, it is a strong indicator that they are trustworthy.

Those deserving of our trust are open about their intentions, admit when they are wrong, and provide clear explanations; we should be cautious of those who appear evasive or change their story. And a good guide might be to look at how people treat others, particularly those who can offer absolutely nothing in return. Good advice might be to ask someone you do trust what they think, if still not sure, don't rush, take time.

I have written before in our Church Magazine about truth and made the point that 'white lies' as we used to call them when I was a child were acceptable as long as they were just to save someone else's feelings. I still consider that this is OK.

(*) Finally, does anyone else recognise the phrase 'All my eye and Betty Martin'? I'd never heard of it, but in the context of the conversation that I still recall vividly, it was a polite way of telling me that what I was saying was nonsense, rubbish or untrue. Searching the term now on the internet gives an explanation. I'll leave you to decide if it is true or not!

Philip Read WGC URC

Christmas Cards @WGC URC

Please consider sending just one card to your Church friends, by adding it to the notice board and making a small donation to our Crisis at Christmas collection.

This way we save on card, and postage and make a difference to someone at Christmas.

POETRY CORNER -*We have several talented poets connected with all three churches. Please feel free to send me any you have written and they will appear in our poetry corner throughout the year.*

The poem reproduced below was found by chance
in a book donated to a local charity shop.

It was written by the Revd Neil Thorogood, a former Minister at the Free Church, WGC. Neil was elected Moderator-Elect 2025-2026, to serve as General Assembly Moderator 2026-2027. On the main URC website, he described the role as an “awesome honour and daunting responsibility” and said it carried for him “a host of meanings”.

[Neil’s father was a General Secretary of the United Reformed Church.]

Neil thanked those who are supporting him into the role, including his family, and also his congregations of Trinity-Henleaze and Thornbury in Bristol “who have joined me in this adventure and to live into the consequences together”.

The Playground Was a War Zone

The little child watched, and anger grew.

The playground was a war zone, with enemies, known and not-yet-known,
everywhere.

The school day brought a series of skirmishes, with sabotage, hijack and ambush
(real and imagined).

Words were amongst the most powerful weapons deployed, although fists and
well-timed feet played their part.

The little child played hiding, or playing sick, but the camouflage never lasted.

In time the little child found a way of coping.

The secret lay in hunting down another child even smaller, even weaker, even
more afraid.

After taking a wry look through one of the standard leaflets always found in medicine packets, Christopher was prompted to write a sonnet, using the exact words of the leaflet, but changing their order.

Lesser evil

Only a common virus, a stuffed-up nose,
Deadened head. "Decongestant medicine,
Sort you out", the chemist said. "Take a dose
Of this non-drowsy, pseudoephedrine
Hydrochloride". At home, in smaller
Print, I see the warning: *May cause tremor,
Nausea, fast or irregular
Heartbeat, sleeplessness, high blood pressure,
Vomiting, headache, restlessness, or
Sometimes urinary retention in men.
Talk to your pharmacist or doctor,
should anything else unusual happen
or you are concerned.* Concerned enough
to fight the bug alone and dump this stuff.

Christopher | Alderson 1999



A Festive Fayre Blessing

Blessings on your Christmas meal
May your gravy not congeal
May your peas not squash and squelch
Nor your cabbage make you belch
May your sprouts not decimate
Nor your stuffing balls cremate

May your parsnips not go mushy
Or your roasties turn out slushy
May your bird be full of juice
Be it turkey, duck or goose
May you vegans make the most
Of their festive beans on toast

May your cranberry sauce have tang
And all your crackers bang
May your stilton cheese not stink
Nor your pigs in blankets shrink
May your chocolate log not melt
May you not exceed your belt

May your mince pies laced with sherry
Taste as good as Mary Berry's
May your dog not scoff your box
Of expensive Belgian chocs
And may the God of all things good
Who provides your earthly food
Fill your soul and satisfy
With rich blessings from on high

Gill Meredith





Carols by Candlelight

Sunday 21st
December at
4.00pm

Welwyn Garden City United
Reformed Church

Doors open from
3.45pm



Christmas Gift Appeal - Help us to help 3 local Charities

We will be collecting gifts for Women's Refuge, Home Start and Restart on the 13th and 14th of Dec

13th Dec the Church will be open to receive your unwrapped gifts

From 10am – 1pm

14th Dec from 10am -10.30am where the gifts will be collected and blessed during our service. You can drop your gifts off in the foyer and you would be very welcome to stay for the service.

We have asked the charities for the sorts of things they would like and below are some suggestions, however anything you wish to donate will find a good home.

Women's Refuge	Restart	Home start
Women's toiletry Gift sets	Hats & scarves	Toys for children aged 4 and under. Suggested simple drop in puzzles, hand held toys, bath toys
Hair ties, clips and brushes	Gloves & Socks	
Children's toys, books and games New or in excellent condition	Toiletries that will fit in a rucksack	
Chocolates and biscuits	Baby wipes	
Pyjamas for Women and children in various sizes		
Coloured pens and pencils		
Adult and children colouring books		
Reed diffusers		

Christmas Anagrams Make a Christmas Word(s) – the number of words is in brackets

1. Shh Tarmac Refits (2)
2. Hmm Saints Dig (2)
3. Him Sweetener (3)
4. Pa Prawn Rip Peg (2)
5. Ask Own Elf (1)
6. Racer Catch Smirks (2)
7. Caste Indoor (1)
8. Grail Fit Shy (2)
9. Omelet Its (1)
10. East Ion Tip (1)
11. Nets Light In (2)
12. Anagram Ya Wine (4)
13. Richest Stream (2)
14. Nearby Cars Cure (2)
15. Name Mi Post (1)
16. Lava Dance Trend (2)
17. Snacker n Fine (1)
18. A Decking Ogles Snow (3)
19. Italic Tea Firer (2)
20. Beor Once Geezers (2)

Answers by request from Allison

ANGELS
CANDY CANES
CHIMNEY
COMET
DONNER
FROSTY
IVY
NOEL
PRANCER
SNOWFLAKE
TINSEL
YULETIDE
BELLS
CARDS
CHRISTMAS
DINNER
COOKIES
ELVES
GARLAND
JACK FROST
MANGER
NORTH POLE
PRESENTS
SCROOGE
SNOWMAN
TOYS
BLITZEN
CAROLS
CHRISTMAS
LIGHTS
CUPID
FAMILY
MERRY
NUTCRACKER
REINDEER
SEASON

G M E R R Y J I N G L E B E L L S L A H K G D B O D Y Z Q B
B Q K Z X W H G A D F R O S T Y Q I J A C K F R O S T W W C
L B J L H Z M B U V X C N R U D O L P H J O W H K X P C U K
I C N O R T H P O L E Z F L H T F Y S N O W F L A K E A B X
T O V C B O J F G J W R F E T D V F O R N A M E N T S N J I
Z D A N C E R R R C W V G U S Y U R R E I N D E E R G D N V
E I A C O C L P G S X L X B R T R I S C C B Q D I M Q L A Y
N M W C H I M N E Y F F K H I Z I A N H Z Y X I C C P E T I
F K M S X V Y F A M I L Y A S E V V T R S L E I G H J S I V
F J I J U M U L J W Q M N Z F C I U E I G N Z Z A Z Z F V F
Q B S I T T L H O L L Y L V C F X L W S J V S G R U Y R I S
W J T H H Q E U Q S Q C O O K I E S P T Y I C A E J P H T P
O R L O D X T U C H N E N D S S N T E M N S R R C W D E Y I
N B E C C M I W U D M Z Q W A U D U A A U O O L O H P S X R
Z M T A U M D Y B G N Q N I N S R K C S T W O A M J C L G I
F I O T T E E E O H I C J C O R H G E L C P G N E L U E G T
B Y E M K H B P W T O N H W H R N E N I R T E D T S P D R S
V U F W J T H R P P U L G R C R Y X R G A U Q F O T I I I A
L J I I G S N A Y P T N I E I E I R M H C U U L W O D J B N
A B R N E G C N A O Q K B D R S Z S I T K B P T E C O O B T
N E E T D E H C J L J K X S A B T T T S E Q C T L K S L O A
G M P E V P E E Y M E R B S Q Y R M D M R Y M O V I S L N C
E N L R G R E R Z G V R P F I W S E A O A M O Y E N E Y B L
L S A G X E R Q U Q X A E A I D N P A S N S A S S G A N E A
S M C C I S U R C A N D Y C A N E S A D T N D N N S S V L U
I W E H H E H W N X E L U Q C A R D S X M R E I G W O I L S
D N F R J N F R C H E S T N U T S R W T V A E R N E N N S E
F O F K E T K O Z K T T X X Y W J L X V H N N E F N R N S E
L E S F K S S N O W M A N T I N S E L B P U R M P D E A F N
Q L V N S P T O O Q C A R O L S M K H E V O P Q F G N R M R

Christmas

SPIRIT
VIXEN
BOW
CHEER
CHRISTMAS
TREE
DANCER
FESTIVE
HOLIDAYS
JINGLE BELLS

MISTLETOE
ORNAMENTS
RIBBON
SLED
STOCKINGS
WINTER
CANDLES
CHESTNUTS
DASHER
FIREPLACE

HOLLY
JOLLY
NATIVITY
PEACE
RUDOLPH
SLEIGH
WREATH
SANTA CLAUSE
GINGERBREAD MAN

CHRISTMAS EVENTS @ WELWYN GARDEN CITY URC

Sun 30th Nov	10.30am	Worship with Communion – 1st Sunday of Advent
Sun 7th Dec	10.30am	Sunday Worship with Communion– 2nd Sunday of Advent
Weds	10.30am	Christmas Carol Communion-Join us for Carols coffee and mince pies and a short Communion service
Sat 13th Dec	10-1pm	Gift Donation drop in. Please help us to spread some help and warmth this year to the following charities Restart, Women's Refuge and Home start. We will be collecting unwrapped gifts of toys, gift sets, ladies & children's P.J's, warm hats scarfs & gloves, pens pencils and colouring books, boxes of biscuits and sweets.
	7pm	Male voice choir Christmas concert, Tickets available via the MVC website or contact the office on 01707 333326
Sun 14th Dec	10.30	Morning Worship & Gift Sunday. Please see the list above. We would love for you to join us, but if you are unable to drop your gifts on the 13th, you can pop in before the service starts at 10am
	2pm	West Country Carols – Pop along to hear wonderful music and singing performed by the Chiltern West Gallery Choir. Enjoy coffee/tea and mince pies. There will be 'Tales told & hospitality aplenty' at this totally free event.
Sat 20th	10-12noon	Christmas Special for young families. Christmas story and simple carols in church, playtime and crafts for families with children up to age 7. Older siblings welcome. All children must be accompanied.
Sun 21st Dec No Morning worship	4.00pm	Carols by Candlelight 4 th Sunday of Advent Come and see the Church at its very best! Traditional carols and the Christmas story in a warm and friendly atmosphere. Doors open at 3.45pm -
Weds 25th Dec	10am	Christmas Day Service Coffee and mince pies from 9.30am
Sun 28th	10.30am	Morning Worship will be held at Harpenden. Vaughn Rd AL5 4ED
Tues 6th Jan	6.30pm	Moving from Darkness into the Light, An Ephiny Service'. A quiet reflection, music, prayer, bible readings, poetry and the remembrance of all our loved ones who have gone before.

Contact Details for the Magazine

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Please can I have any articles for the next magazine by the 20th February 2026. Please send by email or contact me by phone for WGC URC, Wheathampstead and Harpenden articles.

Many thanks, Allison Giles

I hope you have enjoyed reading this magazine. If you have, please consider sending us an article, I'm sure we would enjoy what you have to say. If you would like to contribute and are not really sure what, please contact one of the people above, who I'm sure could give you some suggestions.

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To all those who read and contribute to this magazine



— *I wish you a* —
MERRY
CHRISTMAS
AND HAPPY NEW YEAR

