



Welwyn Garden City, Harpenden  
and Wheathampstead  
United Reformed Churches  
Magazine



December & January 2025

Dear Friends,

Grace and peace to you.

As we journey through this time of year, one thing that people often comment on is the decreasing amount of light that we have during the day due to the seasonal change that has come upon us. This is something that many people find difficult, and there are some who even find that it causes their spirits to become downhearted. Yet, it is also worth remembering that even in the darkness of the seasons, and in the darkness of our own lives, God is always present.

So, as this year draws to a close and we celebrate the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, we do well to remember His coming and the fact that He has brought light to this dark world. And alongside this we will also be reminded that Jesus' birth is not an isolated event, but is one part of God's great plan to bring us salvation and draw us to Himself.

Graham Kendrick summed these two aspects up well in one of his songs:

Like a candle flame,  
Flickering small in our darkness.  
Uncreated light  
Shines through infant eyes.

*God is with us, alleluia.  
Come to save us, alleluia.*

Geoffrey Ainger's hymn, which I have often sung at communion services on Christmas Eve, also focuses on these things:

*Born in the night,  
Mary's child,  
A long way from your home:  
Coming in need,  
Mary's child,  
Born in a borrowed room.*

*Clear shining Light,  
Mary's child,  
Your face lights up our way;  
Light of the world,  
Mary's child,  
Dawn on or darkened day.*

*Truth of our life,  
Mary's child,  
You tell us God is good:  
Prove it is true,  
Mary's child,  
Go to your cross of wood.*

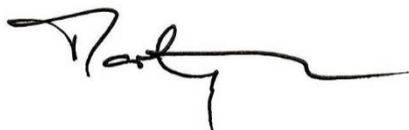
*Hope of the world,  
Mary's child,  
You're coming soon to reign;  
King of the earth,  
Mary's child,  
Walk in our streets again.*

For the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus are all vital parts of God's story.

So, may we each see the beauty of God's light in the midst of the wonder of Jesus' birth. May that light illuminate our lives, may we allow it to shine forth from us to illuminate our world, and may we rejoice in the story that God invites us to share in as we celebrate our Saviour's birth.

May God bless you as you celebrate and rejoice in the birth of Emmanuel and the light that He brings to our world!

In His name,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Mary', written in a cursive style.

## Christmas Fayre 2024

I thought I would take this opportunity to give you a little insight into the history of our Christmas Fayre which I have been coordinating, with help, since 2008 when as a Manager I attended a meeting where they were considering dropping the event as the footfall and the money it generated didn't justify the effort involved. Being younger at the time and loving a challenge I decided to take it on as I felt all it needed was taking and shaking and so with a band of willing, enthusiastic and supportive helpers we set about our task. It was at this time it was decided to share our profits 50/50 with Isabel Hospice as Isabel Last, its founder, had been a member of our church. Programmes, and raffle books were printed and posters displayed around the town. Letters appealing for raffle prizes and donations were distributed to businesses, clubs and venues in the town. On the day stalls were draped to look like Country Fayre Stalls, Michael, Cherylle's husband created Santa's elaborate grotto and an entertainer had been booked. We said our prayers and went ahead in faith. We were overwhelmed by the success and have continued to be amazed and grateful over the years even during COVID when with HelenK's help we ran a Click & Collect Order Catalogue full of donated items with pictures.

Over the past 17years we have been able to donate £18,581 including the £1,350 from this years net profit of £2,690.

We have dispensed with in the years post Covid, some of the frills and extras, due to lack of manpower and extras we felt didn't justify the expense of providing them, but it doesn't appear to have affected our footfall, or our monies raised.

So thank you from the bottom of my heart everyone who helped make this year and the past 17years of Christmas Fayres such resounding successes. To all who contributed by donating items, helping by manning stalls and activities and not least our kitchen and refreshment teams. To Philip for counting and depositing all the small change in the bank. And a very special thank you to Allison for all the volunteering time she has devoted to the planning, setting up and on the day over and above her administrative employed hours and duties. Thank you also Allison for your caring and understanding as I have felt useless of late.

A few more to thank as we are very blessed as a church by the support we receive from friends and families associated with this church.

Shaun C Setting up & clearing away,

Mary B & Lyn H who provide & run The Tombola

Carolyn H (Jean H's daughter) who ran Choc Tombola with your donations

Dorothy T Renowned for her preserves

Jordan Face Painting was recruited by Christine N who could not be with us this year.

Gordon from The Deli at Welwyn North Station who has supplied us with baguettes free of charge for the 17 years I have been organising the catering.

We must also show our gratitude and appreciation to those in our community who donated Raffle Prizes this year.

Tesco for 2 Hampers, Lambert's 2 Flower Vouchers, Café Trio 2 Breakfasts,

WGC Golf Club Round of Golf for 4 people.

Many thanks once again to everyone who gave their help and support making this event the success we have come to expect year on year.

It would be a pity if this event and the donation it enables us to give Isabel Hospice were to cease to be on the calendar as it is an occasion our community look forward to and enjoy. Sadly, this was Allison and my last year organizing the Christmas Fayre as Allison has so many balls to juggle at this time of year in her administrative role and I am running out of steam. If you think you might be able to step in we are happy to share our knowledge and experience Please consider it as planning needs to start early usually a heads up of the date in the June/July Magazine.

God Bless you and thank you one and all for your help and support over the past 17 years

May I take this opportunity of wishing everyone in our Pastorate an enjoyable and peaceful Christmas and a Happy and Healthy 2025.

God Bless

Joyce Nicolson

At the last Joint Elders Meeting it was suggested that it would be a good idea to include a section on Knowing Your Elder – here goes!

### **KNOW YOUR ELDERS: NORMAN DEAS, HARPENDEN URC.**

I was born and brought up in Motherwell, just south of Glasgow, known mainly for its huge steel mills (now sadly gone) and its football team – aptly named the Steelmen. Being the younger brother I followed in his footsteps by attending the local primary school and then going on to Glasgow High School. The daily commute to Glasgow was always a slight thrill as these were the days of steam trains and Motherwell being on the main line south meant that we often travelled on the long distance express trains which stopped at Motherwell – name spotting of famous engines was one of our many interesting pastimes.

These were the post war years and life was a lot more simple and in these times churches were generally full each Sunday. Our family were members of South Dalziel Parish Church, part of the Church of Scotland at which my father was session clerk (church secretary) for near on 25 years and had over 700 members and approx. 50 serving elders!! We lived in Manse Road and along with most of our other neighbours we all attended church regularly and with all the other associated activities relating to church activities such as Boys Brigade, Junior Choir and Youth Fellowship it formed a very large part of our social lives.

My mother was from Manchester and my grandfather was manager of a cotton mill so we spent most of our summer holidays in the south of England at various resorts staying overnight at my grandmothers on the way south. Life before motorways meant that a drive south to Manchester would take the best part of 10 hours but it always seemed a great adventure and holidaying in such places as Cromer, Sidmouth or Llandudno seemed so far away from home in Motherwell – but truly great family memories.

Towards the end of my schooling in Glasgow came the choice of what to do – my father was a chartered accountant which my elder brother also took up and so was

under a certain amount of persuasion to join the same profession. However the careers talk at school had an excellent presentation made by the Scottish Hotel School, part of Strathclyde University, and it all sounded so glamorous like possibly managing a 5 star hotel so I thought that was for me!

It was there that I met a young lady at one of the student union discos – as one does – and having coaxed her into taking an interest in me we started going out together. Jill, from Dunfermline, was determined to work in London so when I graduated I followed suit and started work with The Charles Forte Organisation in and around London eventually ending up as catering manager at Luton Airport in both flight catering and in the terminal building – a lot smaller in those days. (not quite the 5 star hotel originally envisaged!).

We got married in 1969 and with Jill working in London we decided Harpenden seemed an ideal place to live but at the time people tried to dissuade us as it was regarded as a bit of a sleepy place to live mainly full of retired people and certainly not for young couples – how times have changed!

Working at the airport was fairly challenging and with very unsocial hours decided to go into contract catering joining the Compass Group as catering and hospitality manager at IBM Training Centre and then at The London Business School in Regents Park slowly working up over the years to become regional director of its London and City business. I then joined Glynwed International in Leicester managing one of their catering equipment divisions for several years and then finally decided to branch out on my own forming my own contract catering company, Goodfellows Catering Management Services which I grew to eventually sell back to the Compass Group in 2004.

With work at the airport being demanding it meant most Sundays were work days and it wasn't till life became more settled in 1973 that we started coming to Harpenden URC. Before this we had attended services at St Columba's, Church of Scotland, in Pont Street in London and it was in 1972 that our daughter Sarah was

christened there by the Rev Fraser McLuskey. Jonathan, our son, came along in 1975 and was christened here in Harpenden and Sarah was married in the Church in 2004 and we now have 4 grandchildren, Grace 19, George 16, Albert 8 and Henry 5.

Harpenden URC in the 70s and early 80s was a thriving church very well attended but with work commitments I played a fairly low key role although organising the annual church bazaar and running the Junior Church with Jill for nigh on ten years was certainly challenging but equally very rewarding. In the 80s I became an Elder spanning a period of 6 years but again work came into play so had to step aside and it wasn't until 15 years ago that I became Church Treasurer and once again became a serving Elder.

I am still doing some work within the catering industry and sit on various representative bodies and committees within the industry and I am also a main board governor and director of a multi academy trust (8 academies) in Hillingdon, Middx. with whom I have been closely associated with for many years as a catering consultant.

My outside interests previously comprised of distance running entering various 10Ks and half marathons and in 2011 ran the London Marathon in support of various causes but hey these are long gone days!! Having been brought up almost next door to Motherwell Football Club I have always been interested in football hence my support and attendance at Spurs, Luton Town and Scotland – o dear no winners there but you still have to keep the faith!!

Norman ( Harpenden)



There doesn't seem very much new news to report on from WUC. This last weekend we have visited both WGC and Harpenden churches. The Christmas Fayre at WGC was attended by six of us, most of whom managed to buy or win something that could be the first step to stocking up presents for Christmas. We obviously stopped for a delicious soup and sandwich lunch and had a very enjoyable time. On Sunday we were at the Harpenden Communion Service led by Tina and managed to get coffee and biscuits before we left so they could get on with their church meeting!

The previous week, being Remembrance Sunday, we met at the War Memorial with all other church congregations, all the uniformed organisations and representatives from many village activities, for a service which was held outside and attended by many villagers. Many wreaths were laid and 105 pebbles, each with the name of a local man written on who had fallen during the two world wars. These had been handed out to those attending and each placed around the memorial as their name was read out from the Roll of Honour.

Looking ahead our churches get extremely busy and we start the Christmas period with a Churches Together Advent Carol Service on the evening of 1



December at St Thomas More Catholic Church. We have our church Carols of Praise on the 8 December at 3.30, so please let us know if you would like your favourite carol sung if you are able to attend. This will be followed by refreshments too early for mince pies, obviously the shops don't think so!

Hoping we will all meet up over this period and are able to wish a Happy Christmas to each other personally. If not see you at WGC for the Pastorate Service on 29 December.  
Jackie and Jane (Wheathampstead)

I heard the bells on Christmas Day,  
Their old familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet  
The words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
And thought how, as the day had come,  
The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along  
The unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
Till ringing, singing on its way,  
The night revolved from night to day,  
A voice, a chime

A chant sublime  
Of peace on earth good-will to men!  
But in despair I bowed my head;  
“There is no peace on earth”, I said;  
“For hate is strong,  
And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth good-will to men!”  
Then pealed the bells more loud and  
deep:  
“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep,  
The Wrong shall fail, The rRight prevail  
With peace on earth good-will to men!”

This poem - later adapted for a song - was written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow on Christmas Day 1863 during the American Civil War. The verses that refer to the war are usually omitted. The world in which we live today, however, has not ceased its warfare, or hatred.

Longfellow was born in Portland, Massachusetts in 1807. He graduated from Bowdoin University and subsequently became one of its professors. He then travelled to Europe. There he learned to speak at least eight languages. Returning to America he taught at Harvard College. He gave up teaching at the age of 47 to concentrate on his writing- mainly his poems. He is noted for such poems as: The Village Blacksmith (my favourite), The Song of Hiawatha, Evangeline, Paul Revere's Ride, and The Cross of Snow.

His life was not a bed of roses. He had many sad and heart-breaking experiences. In an age of candles and open fires women were particularly vulnerable to their nightgowns and dresses catching fire. His wife's dress caught fire. Henry tried to extinguish the flames and in the process was severely burned on his face and hands. He survived the fire, but his wife did not. Thereafter he wore a beard to cover the damage to his face.

Longfellow is acknowledged as the supreme American poet of the 19th Century.  
*Graham Neads( Harpenden)*

## Truth and Trust

A few weeks back it looked like I was going to have to prepare and subsequently present the sermon at WGC URC, well out of my comfort zone, as they say. But in the end, I didn't have to do it and was kindly saved from the task by someone else; however this was after I had done an awful lot of thinking.

The set Lectionary reading was a bit too obscure for me to make anything of, and instead I chose one of the alternative set readings, knowing I could take the word 'truth' as my text. I thought this fairly topical with the US Presidential election at its height with lots of fake news being reported. 'The immigrants are eating the dogs in Springfield' as Trump claimed!

So, what do I mean by truth? My own weighty dictionary definition gives 'the state or quality of being true: loyalty, honesty, accuracy, integrity, etc.' Not much help really, as it seems to me that this is entirely dependent on the individual's personal view.

Therefore, what does the Bible say?

God commands people to tell the truth, most notably in the Ten Commandments, given in Exodus as 'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour' (Exodus 20:16) and restated in Leviticus 19:11 as 'You shall not lie to one another'. The book of Proverbs informs us that telling the truth always leads to the best long-term outcome. When you tell the truth, justice is done but lies lead to injustice. Thoughtless words can wound as deeply as any sword, but wisely spoken words can heal. A lie has a short life, but truth lives on forever.

So, did Jesus explain truth better?

Jesus said God's word, the Bible, is truth (John 17:17). Christ, as God, is the personification of truth (John 14:6 and Ephesians 4:21). God cannot lie (Titus 1:1-2).

Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?'. Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice' (John 18:37).

Some more thoughts on truth and lies - in John 8:32, Jesus says, 'And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'. The previous verse in John calls us to hold on to the teachings of the Bible. We have to do that even when they are difficult and feel like lies.

Today, truth seems to be less important in our communities. Increasingly we see our political leaders putting their desire to stay in office ahead of their obligation to be truthful. It is a sad fact that we no longer expect authority to be truthful. If they do it, why should we be different?

Of course, in these days of fake news and propaganda, we often can't be sure whether something we read is the truth or not. Very often, the truth is that we don't know the truth, and perhaps we need to accept that. We may want something to be true, but that doesn't make it true.

Which brings me back to my point that it is up to each of us to decide for ourselves what is true and not to spread false information.

In my early days, I thought the legal oath was a bit verbose and a good example of tautology, which is the repetition of the same word or phrase or the same idea etc. 'I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God'.

But if I say to you 'I didn't go to the King's garden party at Buckingham Palace this year', it would be the truth. But it is not accurate, because it gives the impression that either I was invited, but something prevented me from attending, or that I expected to go as I have gone in previous years but wasn't put on the guest list this year. So not the whole truth as you'll see.

There is another word, which I can't actually remember what it is, where a legitimate excuse is used to conceal another failing. So, if I miss the train I intended to catch in order to be on time, and the next one is cancelled, I can use that excuse saying, 'sorry I'm late but the trains were delayed'. True, but nonetheless misleading.

I was brought up at home knowing that I wouldn't be punished if I told the truth. If you owned up, such as accidentally breaking something there may have been consequences, but nothing serious.

Another interesting aspect of truth is the 'white lie', defined as something which is patently untrue, that is often said to protect someone or to avoid hurting someone's feelings. No one would tell a toddler that their drawing of them was rubbish or that the pretend cake they have made is awful. You just wouldn't do it, but why doesn't the concept of truth still apply?

I'd love it if in a future article someone might respond to my thoughts .....

Philip Read WGC URC

# Carols by Candlelight

Sunday 22nd December at 4.00pm

Welwyn Garden City

United Reformed Church

Doors open at 3.45 pm



## Food bank Challenge Heroes!

On Foodbank Sunday in November, our young people (together with some of us slightly less young people) headed to the supermarket to complete a £10 food bank challenge!

We thought about what the food bank does for the community and how Jesus taught us about caring for our neighbours. With this in mind, we set out to buy as much food as possible for £10 to donate to the food bank.

Our young people worked really well together to spot bargains and spend wisely. We crept slightly over the £10 limit but they were totally awesome!

Lynn ( WGC URC)



# Harvest 2024 – URC Harpenden



The autumn term started with Harvest, thanking God for his wonderful creation. Bronwen, Gill and Becky and the flower team decorated the church beautifully and as usual an amazing amount of food was given by the congregation to the Kings pantry food bank at the salvation army in Harpenden to help those in need in Harpenden. The choir sung for us led by Don. The service was followed by a bring and shared lunch, it was great that some of the Wheathampstead folk were able to join us for the service and lunch. Janes homemade blackberry crumble was thoroughly enjoyed. The bring and share lunches are a good time of fellowship to enable us to get to spend time together, getting to know one another better as well as sharing good food. Thank you to all those who made harvest special.



We now find ourselves speeding and heading towards Christmas and in transition, on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> November, we will finish the Christian year with a stirrup Sunday service at 10.30. After the service we will be open for lights up, as Harpenden will



be switching on their Christmas lights for Christmas, URC Harpenden doors will be open for lights up at 1.30. The theme this year is Angel delight.



We will be icing angel cookies, snow globe making, angel making and refreshments will be served including mince pies.

The light up event is a great way to meet and welcome people in Harpenden.

We have a good programme set for advent starting with a

Christingle on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> December at 10.30.

Carols by Candlelight 22<sup>nd</sup> December 6.30pm

Christmas eve Crib and Carols 3pm

Christmas Day 10pm

Please join us for any of these events and services remembering you can catch up on our YouTube channel with any of the services you miss!

Click the link to watch our services

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCuA0DrNbGk6-86gHYpxf-yg>

The carols by candlelight on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> December is a favourite, the church glows as you approach, remember to invite your friends and family this year, mince pies are served after the service. Let us all Remember Jesus is the reason for the season.

Each year we have cards for good causes in church – remember if you need Christmas paper, cards and gifts, cards for good causes are open 10.00 to 4 Monday to Saturday.

There is currently a post-box at the back of church to post all your local Harpenden Christmas cards until 9<sup>th</sup> December at URC Harpenden. The scouts will deliver the Christmas cards in the community.

Through these events and services, we hope you find a warm welcome, enjoy the carols as you do your Christmas prep and bringing a true enjoyable meaning to your Christmas plans and for Christmas!

Sharon.



Wheathampstead United Church

Invite you to join them for their **Carols of Praise** service

Sunday 8th December

At 3pm

Led by Harry Smith

## CHURCH FAMILY CORNER

First on our Birthday List in December is Olive J. on 4<sup>th</sup>, then Melva S. & Roger S. who share a birthday on 5<sup>th</sup>, Philip R. on 7<sup>th</sup>, then Lucy S. who will be 9 on 10<sup>th</sup>.

Moving on to January 2025, we start with Shaun C. & Doreen G. who share a birthday on 6<sup>th</sup>, then Laura's son, Rory, who will be 18 on 16<sup>th</sup> and Linda S. on 20<sup>th</sup>.

We send our birthday congratulations and best wishes to all these friends and hope they each enjoy a happy day.

**Please help me to add to my birthday list by giving me your date of birth or anniversary dates by finding me on Sunday mornings. Or contact Allison in the church office on 01707 333326 or email: [officewgcurc@gmail.com](mailto:officewgcurc@gmail.com).**

We have 3 Wedding Anniversaries to celebrate in this edition:-

- \* Norma & Ted Collie will celebrate their 62<sup>nd</sup> on December 16<sup>th</sup>.
- \* Barbara & Joe Palacio will celebrate their 69<sup>th</sup> on 14<sup>th</sup> January.
- \* Cherylle & Michael Cooper will celebrate their 48<sup>th</sup> on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

We send congratulations to all these couples and hope they enjoy their special day when it comes round.

Please continue to keep Scott, Jenny, Xander and Howard in your prayers as they face the challenge of keeping to a fat-free diet and rebuilding muscle strength for Scott and finding the best secondary school place for Xander for next September. Please pray especially for Jenny as she copes with it all every single day.

Please 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

## To follow a Star

**'Ahmad! Ahmad! Come boy!'**

That's Master calling. 'Coming Master' That's another trip up to the roof. In fact, I've been up and down all this week – many times a day. Master's up there with two friends. Master is a very important person here in Petra – he is called a 'diplomat' – and he travels to many places on behalf of our King Aretas IV. His friends are, likewise, from diplomatic circles. Master is also a great teacher and is interested in the stars and the heavens. Which is one of the reasons I have to keep running up to the roof as all three are star-gazing! And when there are no stars, they spend hours studying charts and drawing lines from star to star.



Master has tried to 'educate' me in the mystery of the heavens. He says that the stars form 'pictures' – of people from history, like famous warriors, but also birds and animals. He has pointed out these shapes, but to be honest, I can't see them myself – except one which Master calls the 'Great Bear'.

This is an important shape because it helps us to find the Pole star. He says the Pole star helps us to find where the North Pole is and then we can find our way. Thing is though – you can't see it in the day! But it's not a problem for me because I always know where I'm going – I just follow the paths!

So, when I pointed this out Master showed me a clever little toy. It's a stone fish on a cord, and when he dangles the fish, it always turns its head towards the North. I tried to make one but it didn't work – it just twirled round and round. Master said it should be made of a special type of rock. And it works in the daylight too!



**'Ahmad! Ahmad! I'm still waiting!'** Oops, I'd better get a move on – he's a good master but very impatient...

... Now I've heard it all! Master says we're going on a journey with his two friends. Now, that's ok usually, and I often go with him on what he calls 'diplomatic missions' which is interesting. This time, though, Master said, **'We're going to follow a star.'** I don't like to question Master's mind, but sometimes I do wonder – he does get carried away at times. So far as I know, stars don't move so how can you follow ONE – there are so many up there? And we won't be able to see THE star in the daylight. Mine is not to reason why, I just do as I'm told. Apparently, this star is a new star, very bright, and Master said it is a sign of a new king. Yes ... well... firstly stars are 'pictures' and now they're 'messengers!

When I asked where we were going, he said 'to the West' – but he did say we'd be going via Jerusalem. We've often gone there on diplomatic missions – nice place, I like it there – the people are very religious and have a beautiful temple for their god. But what I do know is that Jerusalem already has a king so it's probably not there where the new king is.

No peace for me for a few days now as I've got to organise the journey– animals (donkeys and camels), men, provisions. Oh yes! Master asked me to bring him the 'special' box. He keeps things in the box to give presents to the dignitaries he meets – spices, jewels and cloth because it's always a good idea as a show of friendliness. When we've been to Jerusalem previously, I know Master has given gifts, but if he visits the court, he always takes some gold – he says that's what you must give to a king. So, enough chatting - I'd better go now to fetch the box before I forget.

Vivienne ( Harpenden)

Hello to everyone.

Lee and I volunteered at Greenbelt this year on behalf of the U R Churches. The theme for this year was Dream On. Part of the craft activities was to create a dream quilt, with church members squares sewn on to a quilt on display. We had a fabulous time, made many new friends and experienced a very leaky tent! Despite this God met with us in a very special way, challenging us, and opening our minds to the issues we were aware of and those we have seen in the media.

I volunteered in the craft section and Lee the cafe, which was lovely as we were in the same tent. We had daily shifts to work, then the rest of the day was our own. The URC cafe tent where we were, offered subsidised meals using food that would have gone to landfill. The team worked so hard and provided great meals, and always were friendly and up beat.

We were able to participate in 2 different Forest Church groups, one led by our dear friend and co founder of the forest church movement, Rev Paul Cudby, and the other by Brother Cassian. We even went to a Goth Eucharist, where I had a deep and profound encounter with God.

Below are the quilt squares submitted by members of our junior church, and mine

done at the festival. We thought it would be good to show the contributions in situ, on the quilt in the tent. Thanks to you lovely children who contributed. Enjoy the pics!  
Tracy and Lee





## **Family Christmas Special**

**23<sup>rd</sup> December**

**3.30pm – 5.15pm**

**Bring your family for a celebration of**

**The Christmas Story**

**With playtime, toys, and crafts**

**Refreshments provided**

**No charge but donations appreciated**

## My journey with Cancer – Joanne Austin

As we come to the end of 2024, I can't help but look back on the last year and realise how important my faith and my church family is to me. I therefore wanted to write something to share with you all how they helped me through the daily pain and uncertainty that cancer brings.

It was May 2023, we'd not long come back from an amazing once-in-a-lifetime family trip to Florida and I was looking ahead to celebrating my husband's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in June along with my daughter going into her last year of secondary school. Not only that but my job was taking over my life, not that I realised it at the time, and I was constantly seeking recognition and promotion which of course meant more hours and more stress!

And then suddenly everything changed on the morning of Friday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2023, when I heard those words "I'm afraid it's cancer" being spoken to me. That was it my life changed...everything that had been going round in my head (work, kids, housework etc.) just disappeared and all that was left was "I have cancer". I was 46 years old with a hectic and stressful lifestyle, I didn't have time for this to happen .... and then the "what had I done wrong? What did I do to deserve this?" questions started to fill my every waking thought... that I began to realise with the help of my faith and the love of support of my family that my negative thoughts were not going to help me beat this.

From my daily prayers and witnessing so much sorrow as part of my journey, I began to realise how I had so much to be thankful for – my prognosis was excellent and whilst my treatment was going to be horrendous it wasn't going to be forever. I am so fortunate to have an amazing family, supportive and loving church family, friends and work colleagues – in fact, the ladies of my village co-ordinated a rota for a weekly dinner delivery to coincide with my chemotherapy treatment dates! Disappointingly, I'm still no good at flower arranging despite having been sent goodness knows how many bouquets.

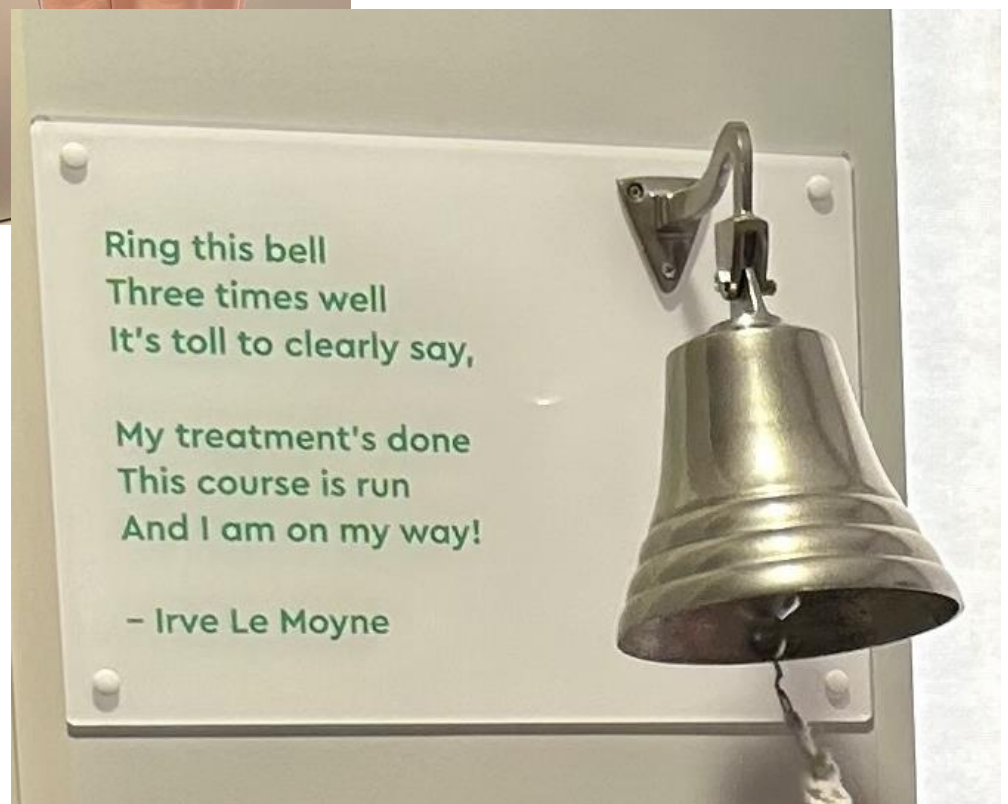


Treatment finally came to an end late September this year, it was finally my turn to ring that bell. I am so very, very lucky to have been given the all-clear. In fact, I'm a new woman – I've decided to take a different, less stressful direction at work, I'm kinder to myself and more patient with everyone (even my teenagers!) plus I don't think I have ever felt so healthy as I do now – my diagnosis was a real wake-up call.



I will never know what caused my cancer; and, I have finally accepted the fact that that's OK. What I do know is that life is so very precious and that waking up every day is a true gift.

Someone once told me that the hardest things only ever happen to the strongest people. I think it was God's blessing.



Greetings from Lincolnshire

I have just come in from playing with the dogs on the paddock. They were running around chasing balls and rolling in the last of the snow but I gave up all too soon for them because I could no longer feel my fingers!!

I wondered how long it was since it was quite so biting cold and that sent me reminiscing about the last year.

It has been a good year for the retreat with several people coming to spend a few days here. Some asked for more from me than others and one person wanted just the kind of retreat I had envisaged. She knew what she wanted to reflect on and asked that I create morning and evening worship and spend an hour a day accompanying her as she reflected. It was a time of blessing for both of us and a privilege to share.

I have also led an Elders retreat day for a church in the Synod and the autumn Synod Quiet Day. Such a joy to prepare and participate in.

We have had a few holiday bookings as well but not enough to enable us to have the amount of help we envisaged on the land. Much as we love it, it certainly keeps us busy. Both of us have had physio for various reasons this year reminding us that we don't get any younger so it would be good to have a few more paying guests.

It has been a funny old year in the garden. The weather meant a very late start for planting. At one point I wondered if we would harvest much at all from the raised beds as only one French bean plant germinated, and the mange tout were a bit hit and miss! The real successes were the butternut squash and tomatoes. A couple of experiments paid off. Tomatoes in self-watering pots did well and enabled me to identify the best variety for growing that way. Then I had 18 seedlings that looked a bit sorry for themselves and popped them into two new beds with a tarpaulin behind as a shield from the wind and they took off producing a huge crop that will keep us in soup and sauce all through the winter.

Chanty acquired a young cockerel last Christmas. He is called Ralph! He soon fitted in with the girls but sadly she lost all her original flock this year. The latest girls have been very slow at laying, and we still only have 2 hens out of 6 producing

eggs. They have a new chicken run after a disaster in the storms when a neighbours field shelter came crashing through the fencing, landed on the chicken run buckling the roof and two sides, broke some more of our fencing and ended up 3 fields away!!! Their space has also been curtailed so the dogs have a free to run in the paddock. Our furry friends are doing well. Oscar is getting older and stiffer so when we heard about Jess who was in need of a new home, we

decided she would be a good foil for Zoes energy. They love a chase around together and Oscar tries to join in.



It has been lovely to see family and friends over the year. Sharon, Sanjay and Jonathan came to see us before heading off for Dubai and Rogers 70th birthday was a lovely occasion which he really enjoyed.

Ava, our granddaughter, was baptised in the summer and started school in September. She is the youngest in the class but is doing well and her first parents evening was very positive. She is apparently very good at helping children with special needs.

My biggest frustration is cataracts! Not yet ready for removal by the NHS they are limiting. Earlier in the year I had my glasses changed and they were an absolute disaster. It was an ongoing saga. I couldn't see to use the computer and driving felt risky, but the opticians kept encouraging



me to persevere with them. Even trips to London for World Day of Prayer meetings needed planning well so I could travel on from Kings Cross with someone without getting lost!! In the end they conceded that a retest was needed, and I was greatly relieved to find that my prescription did indeed need changing! To misquote scripture, once my vision was very blurred but now, I see! Thank the Lord!!

It is always good to hear your news. We think of you often. If you are ever passing our way or want a short break away, we would love to have you as our guests. Roger joins me in wishing you all a very Happy Christmas. May you know all the blessings of the season, and may 2025 be a good year for us all.

Every blessing

Jane



Christmas can be a particularly difficult time for people who may be grieving a loss, for those who are living alone, or those who have painful associations with this time of year.

The service is open to anyone who wants to take a quiet moment away from the stress of Christmas. Afterwards there will be refreshments, time and space for your own reflection and people to talk to if that is helpful.

Saturday 21st December 2024 at 6pm at WGC URC

## Christmas at WGC URC

<b>Sun 1<sup>st</sup> Dec</b>	10.30am	<b>Worship with Communion</b> – 1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent
<b>Sun 8<sup>th</sup> Dec</b>	10.30am	<b>Sunday Worship</b> – 2nd Sunday of Advent & Gift Sunday Bring unwrapped toys, gifts and toiletries to be collected by Santa for Home-start, the Food Bank and homeless
<b>Sun 15<sup>th</sup> Dec</b>	10.30am	<b>Songs of Praise – Carols edition</b> – Join us for a service which includes singing the top 10 Carols as voted by Classic FM. 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent
<b>Sat 21<sup>st</sup> Dec</b>	6-8pm	<b>The Longest Night</b> A welcoming space for all, and especially for those who don't find Christmas easy. Short reflective service. Opportunity to talk, light a candle & remember loved ones. Refreshments served
<b>Sun 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec</b>	4.00pm	<b>Carols by Candlelight</b> Come and see the Church at its very best!
<b>No Morning worship</b>		Traditional carols and the Christmas story in a warm and friendly atmosphere. Please note the extensive use of candles. Doors open at 3.45pm - 4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent
<b>Mon 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec</b>	3.30 – 5.15pm	<b>Christmas Special for young families.</b> 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.
<b>Weds 25<sup>th</sup> Dec</b>	10am	<b>Christmas Day Service</b> Coffee and mince pies from 9.30am
<b>Sun 29<sup>th</sup></b>	10.30am	<b>Morning Worship</b>



# NATIVITY SCENE

## WORD SEARCH PUZZLE

ANGEL  
ANIMALS  
BIRTH  
CAMELS  
CHILD  
CHRIST  
COWS  
DONKEY  
GIFT  
GOLD  
HALO  
HAY  
HORSES  
JOSEPH  
MANGER  
MARY  
MULES  
MYRRH  
NIGHT  
SHEEP  
SHEPHERD  
STABLE  
STRAW

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

The words appear UP, DOWN, BACKWARDS, and DIAGONALLY.  
Find and circle each word.





# Christmas Dingbats

<p><b>DONKEY</b> → DONKEY</p>	<p><b>HODRIVEME XMAS XMAS XMAS XMAS</b></p>	<p><b>S</b> </p>	<p><b>EMINEM</b> </p>
1	2	3	4
<p></p>	<p><b>SENFRAKSE</b></p>	<p></p>	<p><b>FIR</b> — <b>HERE HERE HERE</b></p>
5	6	7	8
<p></p>	<p><b>+ OUTLET</b></p>	<p></p>	<p><b>NOE</b></p>
9	10	11	12
<p><b>Grrrr + 2.54cms</b></p>	<p><i>Jingle</i> → ← <i>Jingle</i> <i>Jingle</i> → <b>END</b></p>	<p><b>HORROR Dec 24th</b></p>	<p></p>
13	14	15	16
<p></p>	<p><b>EVE EVE EVE HOLLY HOLLY → CAROL</b></p>	<p><b>CARIBBEAN OFFSPRING HEY HI HELLO</b></p>	<p><b>CHRISTMAS CHRISTMAS CHRISTMAS CHRISTMAS → CHRISTMAS</b></p>
17	18	19	20

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Please can I have any articles for the next magazine by the 20<sup>th</sup> January 2024. Please send by email or contact me by phone for WGC URC & Wheathampstead articles. For Harpenden URC articles please contact Sarah Connor 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.



Wishing you all a very  
Happy Christmas and a  
Peace filled New Year.

Allison.x

P.s Plus lots of chocolate,  
lots fun, and lots of  
pressies. xxx



