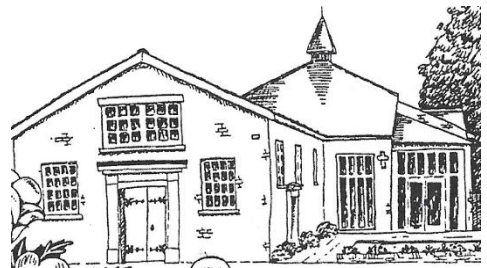


# Stepping Stones

*Newsletter for*

EPPING UNITED  
REFORMED CHURCH



ONGAR UNITED  
REFORMED CHURCH

December 2025 and January 2026

Minister: Revd Karen Knight



## **Advent Reflections**

As we enter the season of Advent, Christians face a bit of a culture clash: while we wait for the fulfilment of prophecy, God breaking into the world as one of us, we want to put aside time for prayer, for the Bible, for a period of quiet expectancy for that extraordinary moment to hit us as fact once again. And yet alongside this, our unique and extraordinary faith, is the deafening noise around us: relentless jingling adverts for more food, more bargains, more made-up gaps in our lives that only X can satisfy, the colour, the flashing lights, the muzak, the build-up of tension: 'are you ready?', 'I haven't even started', 'oh I got all mine done at the end of October'. All what? What is everybody doing?

Our churches are doing many things this year to make Christmas, and the divine breakthrough, known more widely. Our focus will be on the transformational miracle of this moment, on deepened connections with each other, with those we invite into God's church, and with those who have never encountered the story quite like this before. It has become so familiar that we must continue to make it fresh and full of wonder and amazement again: God, inconceivable, mysterious creator and perfecter, becoming a tiny vulnerable human baby born into poverty in a country oppressed under a foreign empire, his parents forced to seek refuge abroad... when we are asked 'what is God like?' we have a clear answer: Jesus. And we know what Jesus was like through the four gospels: we have so much source material there to share with others. We will all have our favourite stories of this person that we have been getting to know on our own faith journeys\*.

So as we join in with the various activities going on this year we ask God to help us to give people that fresh glimpse of who Jesus is, and what the story we are remembering means to us, while we also look for those quiet spaces of peace to refresh and recharge ourselves on this remarkable journey.

*\*Some of my favourites: Mary's song of joy and expectation at finding herself pregnant (Luke 1:46-55), the two commandments (Matthew 22: 37-40), 'do not be afraid' (John 6:20), looking after the least (Matthew 25: 35-40 and Luke 10: 25-37). What are yours?*

Lindsey Brown

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About this time of year, I often visit an elderly lady who lives alone at the top of an almost perpendicular track to take her the Christmas goodies.

Its quite a stressful exercise: with worry as to whether I will catch the train; whether I will make the local connection and finally a twenty mile drive with time to worry as to whether the track will be sufficiently ice free to enable a car to get up it at all.

Shutting the gate on the departing car, the stillness of the night finally takes over: in the distance the bubbling call of a curlew on the riverbank: overhead the silent passage of a barn owl across the moon; the air so bitterly cold and sharp that you can smell the frost on the pine trees, the frosted grass and a brilliant moon combining to create a silver land dreaming under the velvet sky alight with a million stars- the beauty is awe inspiring, the peace tangible after a stressful day.

And it's the same moon and the same stars which shone at Bethlehem when Christ was born. Born into a world of stress to bring peace and hope. His light, like that of the moon, seeking the darkest of places then and seeking them now; light and peace always there ready to support us if we will only shut the gate on our worldly cares, pause for a moment in stillness and let him come in.

In his words *"be still and know that I am God."*

From Janet Wallace (from a group at the former Woodford URC)

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## Epping URC News

### Preaching Plan, all 11am unless stated

#### December

7<sup>th</sup> Christingle Service led by Rev Karen Knight at **4pm- no 11am service**

14<sup>th</sup> Efua Koi-Larbi

21<sup>st</sup> Carol Service led by the Elders followed by lunch

25<sup>th</sup> Rev Karen Knight **10:30am**

28<sup>th</sup> **No Service** – United service at Ongar URC, 11am led by Rev Karen Knight

#### January

4<sup>th</sup> Rev Stuart Veitch *Holy Communion*

11<sup>th</sup> Joan Smith

18<sup>th</sup> Rev Marcia Tull

26<sup>th</sup> Lindsey Brown- A service celebrating our link with our twinned church in Zimbabwe

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It was joyous recently to hear Noah read in the service, it was read so beautifully, clearly and meaningfully. It was like watching a butterfly emerging, he has been with us since he was 9 months old.

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Birthday wishes this month to Pauline, Moira, Emily and Alan.

## **Dates for your Diary**

- **Advent Bible Study:** Every Friday during Advent at 7pm starting on the 28<sup>th</sup> November, led by Karen. It will be an informal time of reading, chat and refreshments for body and soul.
- **Christmas decorating of the church:** Friday 5<sup>th</sup> December from 10am. All welcome to help to decorate the church for Christmas.
- **Christingle:** Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December at 4pm. Please note there is no morning service on this day.
- **Christmas Coffee Morning:** Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> December, 10:30am-Midday. Donations for Crisis at Christmas
- **Christmas Pantomime:** Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> December, 9:45am. See below for more information

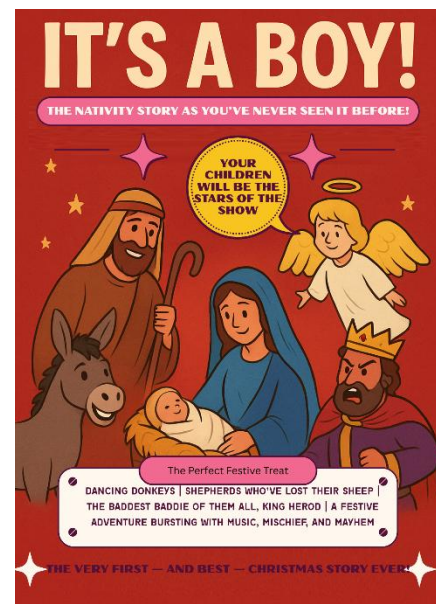
## **Christmas Pantomime: *It's a Boy! The Nativity as you've never seen it before***

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> December at 9:45am at Epping URC

The very first — and best — Christmas story EVER! This time brought to life as a laugh-out-loud family pantomime. Join our dancing donkeys, shepherds who've lost their sheep, and the baddest baddie of them all, King Herod, for a festive adventure bursting with music, mischief, and mayhem.

Packed with fun and full of heart, *It's a Boy!* by LolBear shares the true meaning of Christmas — the story of Jesus' birth — through joy, laughter, and plenty of panto magic.

Your children will be the stars of the show, stepping on stage as Wise Men, Innkeepers, Angels, and more. Expect hilarious skits, classic panto moments ("He's behind you!"), and heart-warming scenes that celebrate the wonder of that first Christmas. A perfect festive treat for the whole family — joyful, funny, faith-filled, and full of audience participation from start to finish.



Followed by refreshments. Retiring Collection for Crisis at Christmas

There is a signup sheet at the back of the sanctuary or book your place here:

Please feel free to pass onto anyone who may be interested.



## **Toddler Group**

In November, we enjoyed a Pudsey Party when we raised a fantastic £90 for Children In Need. It was lovely to have Barbara with us to help out on the day.

The toddler group will be having their Christmas party followed by a nativity service in the sanctuary with Rev Karen on the 17<sup>th</sup> December.

All of the Toddler Group families will be receiving this year's URC Advent packs called "Advent Unpacked" which is an alternative Advent calendar in a box of postcard-sized cards — one for each day in Advent. Alternating images of things associated with Christmas and characters from the Christmas story, there are fun facts and activity ideas on the reverse and also includes a DIY nativity set.



## **Christmas Cards**

This year instead of sending cards to everyone individually in the church, why not hang just one card on our special Christmas Card line to everyone in the church. The money you save not buying everyone a card, you could put in the donation pot for charity (to be decided).

## **Support for those living at The Bell Hotel**

There has been no heating at The Bell and many windows are also cracked and broken meaning that it has been freezing for those living there, many of whom do not have winter clothes. There is a collection of winter clothing including coats, hats, scarves, gloves etc. If you are able to donate any then they can be brought to the church on a Sunday or speak to Claire.

**Epping for Everyone**



**Epping for  
EVERYONE**

**CHRISTMAS  
LUNCH  
2025**

**Saturday 13th December  
at Epping Hall (St Johns Road)  
from 12:30pm to 3pm**

**Open to everyone in Epping**

**Join us for food, friendship and  
Christmas cheer. We welcome  
all who come in the spirit of  
peace and goodwill**

**Bring along your favourite  
festive dish to share and  
enjoy an afternoon of  
connecting with your  
community**

**Scan to book:**







# CHRISTMAS GIFT APPEAL

**Support the women and children  
spending this Christmas in a local  
Domestic Abuse Refuge.**

Please donate a shoebox-sized parcel filled with  
small gifts, wrapped and labelled for:

**Women, Boys or Girls,**  
with age ranges 5-10, 10-14, 14-17  
i.e Girl age 10-14 or Boy age 5-10

**Please leave your gifts at:**  
**Hammond & Smith**  
**(from 1<sup>st</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> December)**  
**or**

**Epping Hall, St Johns Road, Main Room**  
**(downstairs)**  
**Saturday 13th December**  
**(from 12:30-3pm)**

***Your kindness will make a  
difference.  
Thank you***



# **Ongar URC News**

## **Twinkles**

Despite the abysmal weather lately, our attendance has kept up with around 10 adults and more children each week. Our charity morning for Children in Need was very successful and £80 was raised for that charity. There was a host of raffle prizes and we try to make sure that everyone wins something, even if we cheat!! This Advent we will be giving out Advent Packs for each child, which are family-friendly material to use during Advent. Our next event will be on our last Thursday before Christmas when we will go into the church for our carol service, which will be followed by a small party for the children and mulled wine and mince pies for the adults.

Some sad news for Twinkles in that Llyris, who has been helping on a Thursday for some years will not be available for a whole year after Boxing Day this year. This, combined with Pam taking some time to rest from the group, leaves the whole running of the group to me. I appreciate that there is no-one in the church who can commit to helping every Thursday but perhaps you could let me know if you would be willing to help on a rota basis, say once a month. If you have done the Safeguarding training, that is all the better! I have committed to keeping the group going until at least the summer of 2026, so please keep this group in your prayers as it serving a very valuable role in Ongar.

**Joan**

## **Pause For Prayer**

The church is still open on the first Saturday of each month providing a quiet space for prayer and reflection. I have had some interesting conversations over the year with visitors to Ongar who have dropped in for a while, having seen that the church was open. I have also met people from Ongar who have never been in before but who have come in out of curiosity.

**Joan**

## **Open House**

We will be having our Christmas Coffee Morning on the 17th December where we enjoy mince pies and mulled wine along with tea and coffee. This will be the last before Christmas. We will meet again on the 7<sup>th</sup> January.

It is lovely to meet with our friends and share each others news on a weekly basis.

Tea, coffee and biscuits are always available. Plus birthday cake when the “birthday person” brings a cake to share. This has become a welcome tradition.

**Pam**



We would like to wish “Happy Birthday” to those having a birthday in December.

### **Preaching Plan , all 11am unless stated**

#### **December**

7<sup>th</sup> Graham Watson                  Sacrament of Holy Communion  
14<sup>th</sup> Michael Dyer  
21<sup>st</sup> Joan Smith                      Family Carol Service  
25<sup>th</sup> United Christmas Day Service at Epping URC at **10:30am** led by Rev Karen Knight  
28<sup>th</sup> Rev Karen Knight

#### **January**

4<sup>th</sup> Local Arrangement  
11<sup>th</sup> Efua Koi-Larbi  
18<sup>th</sup> Elizabeth Stockdale  
26<sup>th</sup> Rev Karen Knight

### **Future Dates**

6 <sup>th</sup> December	10-12 noon	Pause for Prayer
13 <sup>th</sup> December	5.00 pm	Saturday Group

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## **Rev Cecil White**

**(former minister of Epping & Ongar URCs between 2018-2022)**

Cecil’s daughter, Melanie, has contacted me to inform me that he is retiring at the end of November after 40 years in the ministry. He and Sam are retiring to Diss in Norfolk, where Mel says he plans to spend ‘plenty of time drinking coffee, reading newspapers, running and bird watching, as well as spending a suitable amount of time teasing the grandchildren.’ I have sent a personal message to Mel to be included at his last service in Lincolnshire.

Knowing Cecil, I am sure he will find plenty to fill his time, especially following some of the research he has intended to carry out over the years.

Joan Smith

# **Herts and Essex Border Mission/Ecumenical Partnerships**

## **Duggie Dug Dug's Nativity Delivery**

St Andrew's Methodist Church, Harlow on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December at 3:30pm

**Join us for a festive and fun nativity puppet play by Duggie Dug Dug, perfect for the whole family to enjoy together.**

The story follows Gabriel's attempts to deliver the Nativity and bring Mary and Joseph, the wise men, the shepherds, the sheep, and the heavenly choir, together in the right place at the right time. Achieving that turns out to be like herding cats, as almost everything goes hilariously wrong along the way. Until finally, Gabriel (played by Doug), my heavenly technically savvy assistant, and a crazy donkey(!), manage to pull it all altogether in the nick of time. The show is 90 minutes, including an interval, and it's packed with puppets, songs, illusions, crazy antics and lots of fun and laughter. As always, in the midst of the craziness and fun, the message of Christmas shines through. Families will love it! A donation pot will be available at the event, with money raised going to Action for Children.

Free Admission, book your place here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/duggie-dug-dugs-nativity-delivery-tickets-1829808439299>



**A Hilarious Family Christmas Show**  
For all the family! So much fun!  
**Duggie Dug Dug's**  
**Nativity Delivery**

**St Andrews Methodist Church, Harlow on the 7<sup>th</sup> December at 3.30pm**

Free Tickets available here: 


## Christmas on the Heath

A festive poster for 'Christmas on the Heath'. The background is a dark, starry night sky with soft, out-of-focus golden lights. In the lower half, there are silhouettes of evergreen trees, some of which are decorated with warm white lights. The title 'Christmas on the Heath' is written in a large, elegant, white cursive font with a thin red outline. Below the title, the event details are written in a smaller, yellow, sans-serif font. At the bottom left, there is a QR code. To the right of the QR code, the ticketing and donation information is written in a white, sans-serif font.

# Christmas on the Heath

A magical evening of Christmas  
themed music, readings & comedy

Fri 19th & Sat 20th December at 7pm  
United Reformed Church, Hatfield Heath



Tickets are free but booking is essential to plan for numbers.  
To book please visit [ticketsource.co.uk/heathplayers](https://ticketsource.co.uk/heathplayers)  
or secure your free tickets from Footprint in the village.  
Donations are welcome with all profits split equally  
between the church and Mencap



Leaside Christmas Tree Festival

**Leaside Church &  
Community Centre**



# **Leaside Christmas Tree Festival**

**Friday 5<sup>th</sup> December 6pm - 9pm**

**Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> December 9am - 1pm**



**In aid of  
Action for Children  
Christian Aid  
Leaside Community Centre**



**Win a  
Christmas  
Hamper**

**'Through care and nurture we witness to the Gospel of Christ and  
share that Gospel through service within the community.'**

Registered Charity No. 1181223

## **Communities Standing Together with Refugees**

At a time when we are witnessing increasing anti-migrant sentiment in some local communities including our own and in politics, the Communities Together with Refugees campaign aims to show that not only are refugees welcome here, but that our communities stand wholeheartedly together.

Focused on the first weekend of December (5-7 December), individuals, groups and organisations are invited to join in with creating public displays of orange hearts – a symbol of compassion for people fleeing war and persecution – in thousands of different ways in local communities.

<https://jpit.uk/issues/asylum-and-migration/stand-with-refugees>



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## **Churches respond to asylum reforms**

Leaders of the Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches have issued the following statement in response to the government's announcements this week on proposed changes to its asylum and returns policy: Public debate around migration has increasingly been shaped by voices that trade in fear, resentment, and the scapegoating of those who already carry heavy burdens. We fear that the tone and content of the Home Secretary's recent announcement on asylum policy reform risks deepening these fractures rather than healing them. For the full statement, visit <https://urc.org.uk/jpit-churches-respond-to-asylum-reforms/>

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## **Rebuilding homes and hope: Hurricane Melissa appeal launched for Jamaica**

The United Reformed Church, through [Commitment for Life](#), has launched an appeal to support both the immediate and long-term needs of affected church communities across Jamaica following Hurricane Melissa. The most pressing needs include shelter, safe drinking water, sanitation, healthcare, and food. In the coming weeks the focus will shift to the removal of debris and the restoration of basic access. There is also going to

be a need for long-term support around reconstruction of homes, recovery of livelihoods, and the restoration of community services. Your support will be critical for our partner church, the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands.

### How to give:

Donations can be made by **visiting the appeal's GoFundMe page**: <https://gofund.me/64d03eaba> or by cheque. Please make cheques payable to the URC Trust and post to Commitment for Life, United Reformed Church House, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT, with the reference "CFL Jamaica Appeal" clearly marked.

Direct bank transfers can be made to the URC Trust using the same reference. The details are:

Account name: United Reformed Church Trust

Sort Code: 40-05-03

Number: 01191802

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## Eco Tips from Eco Church

### Celebrate a simpler and greener Christmas.



As Advent begins, let us turn our gaze to the true meaning of Christmas - God with us, Emmanuel. The humble birth of a child in a stable may seem distant from the way we celebrate today, but it offers a profound reminder of simplicity. This season, let's reflect on the story that we wish our actions and choices to tell. Consider A Rocha UK's blog on journeying towards a zero-waste Christmas [arocha.org.uk/journeying-towards-a-zero-waste-christmas](https://arocha.org.uk/journeying-towards-a-zero-waste-christmas). Suggestions include sustainable, homemade or non-physical gifts, reusing cards or wrapping, and recycling as more waste ends in landfill at Christmas than any other time of the year.

May our hearts and our celebrations align with the simplicity and beauty of the Christmas story.





# Reverse Advent Calendar

The URC has produced a free, Reverse Advent Calendar to help donations to foodbanks this Christmas. The calendar lists regular and festive items requested by foodbanks, with a check list to view what's been donated and related notes about your donations.

Download here: <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Reverse-Advent-Calendar-2025-copy-scaled.jpg>



## Reverse Advent Calendar

### 24 days of giving for your local food bank

- 1 Tinned soup, hearty varieties, ring-pull if possible
- 2 Pasta or rice
- 3 Pasta sauce, jar or carton  
(check if your food bank takes glass jars)
- 4 Tinned vegetables
- 5 Tinned meat or fish
- 6 Tinned fruit, in juice rather than syrup
- 7 Breakfast cereal, low sugar or wholegrain options
- 8 Long-life milk (UHT), whole milk, semi-skimmed,  
or dairy-free alternatives
- 9 Tea or coffee, small jars or packs
- 10 Biscuits
- 11 Long-life fruit juice, cartons,  
no refrigeration needed
- 12 Tinned beans
- 13 Instant noodles or cup a soups
- 14 Cooking oil, small bottle
- 15 Toiletries: toothpaste, toothbrush,  
deodorant, razor, shave gel
- 16 Shower gel or soap, unisex
- 17 Sanitary products, tampons or sanitary pads
- 18 Packets of crisps, nuts and raisins
- 19 Tinned custard or rice pudding
- 20 Jam or peanut butter
- 21 Instant mashed potato or stuffing mix
- 22 Christmas chocolates or sweets
- 23 Savoury crackers or mince pies (long shelf life)
- 24 Gift voucher or cash donation



**The  
United  
Reformed  
Church**

[www.urc.org.uk](http://www.urc.org.uk)








**Notes**

- Please check expiry/use by/ best before dates.
- Please donate items with at least one month ahead.
- Avoid fresh/perishable foods, unless your food bank says otherwise.
- Consider storage – items should not require refrigeration.
- Drop-off times – deliver your box by mid-December. so families can receive them in time for Christmas.

**Optional extras**

- Include a Christmas card with a message.
- Use a reusable bag for your donations.
- Pet food - ask if your local food bank accepts it.

  
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