

Connect



Winter Edition

December 2024 to February 2025



Editor's Greeting

Revd Adam Earle

Welcome to the Winter edition of Connect – our ninth quarterly pastorate newsletter. At the time of writing the weather is still a little undecided but colder days and even snow are threatened.

Over the next few weeks we are encouraged to remember those for whom Christmas is not such a happy time and be thankful for the many who will work on Christmas Day providing health and social care, emergency services and volunteer support for those in particular need.

Let's also take the time to remember the many thousands, around the world, who face ongoing troubles through war, famine or the consequences of natural disaster and those who have been driven from their homes as refugees. Please continue to pray for these folk, and those who work to support them, and consider ways in which you might be able to equip the work of organisations such as Christian Aid and other charities who would welcome your contributions this Christmas time.

Have a blessed Christmas and may the new year bring new hope and opportunity.

News from the Churches

Felixstowe URC

Partnership

We are continuing to pursue partnership with the other churches in the town directly, such as with Felixstowe Methodist Church and through the Churches Together in Felixstowe. We have now established an occasional but regular pattern of shared services with Felixstowe Methodist Church. Most recently, on 20th October, we were joined at the URC for our Caring for Creation Service. On 17th November we joined the congregation at Felixstowe Methodist Church @ Trinity for worship led by Revd David.



Macmillan Coffee Morning

As part of our partnership working with the Methodist Church, on Saturday 28th September we held a joint Coffee Morning, held at Trinity Church with folk from the URC supporting and sharing in the preparation and serving on the day. The coffee morning was held in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support. The proceeds on the day raised £466.29. With some further donations this meant that a cheque for £691.29 was sent to the charity.



Time to Remember

It has become an annual feature, since the Covid lockdown time during which we as a church lost a great many members and friends, to hold an annual service of remembering. This year we held this special service on Sunday 27th October, led by Revd David. The service provided a space to reflect, give thanks and acknowledge our gratitude and sense of loss for departed loved ones.



Pause for Prayer

For several months now, we have held a short, monthly prayer time before worship (from 10:10 to 10:25) on one Sunday each month. We have normally gathered in the vestry with various people joining us. More recently we have held our meeting in the transept which makes it more visible and accessible for some. During the winter months we have returned to the vestry as we hold our services in the small hall and the main church is not heated.



Each time we gather, we spend a short time, sharing matters for prayer and then we enter into open prayer with folk either praying aloud as they feel led or in silence for various needs and concerns. Prayer is an important part of our life together and we hope develop our prayer times and activities further as we look to our next priorities and review our Mission Action Plan.

Winter Months



The main church worship area at Felixstowe is a very large space. During the winter months (except for special services such as our Family Carol service on 22nd December when we welcome additional people) we gather for worship in the small hall, accessed via the Tomline Road entrance. This space is easier and less costly to heat, using less fuel and is therefore part of our commitment to Caring for Creation.

Castle Hill URC

Indoor Carboot Sale

Once each month the church is host to a large and increasingly successful “Indoor Carboot Sale” (Table Top Sale), held in the church and sports hall. These are much appreciated by sellers and buyers alike and there are a wide range of items, pre-loved and new, available. Details and dates for these may be found in the Church newsletters. If you would like to find out more, please contact organiser Katie on 07787325536.



CHAPS Pantomime

During the Autumn half-term week, the Castle Hill Amateur Players (CHAPS) presented their **annual pantomime** – this year it was, “The Little Mermaid”.



The colourful cast kept the audience entertained with a lively performance including music, dance, laughs-a-plenty and just the right amount of drama to capture the imagination. It was good to see so many of our younger performers, who have grown in confidence over time, really giving it their all.

The proceeds from this year's performances and associate activities, such as the ever-popular raffle, will go to support the work of mental health charity Mind, Suffolk. Further information about the work of the organisation may be found by visiting their website: www.suffolkmind.org.uk

Links with Castle Hill School

Our ministers have been developing links and supportive activities with the school(s) opposite the church, Castle Hill Infant and Junior Schools. On Wednesday 2nd October we were very pleased to welcome the school to the church for their annual Harvest assemblies. This was a first for the school and the church. Due to the number of pupils, they held three gatherings with children organized by their school house teams - across the age range.



There was enthusiastic singing, gathering of harvest gifts, poetry and a short message involving talking fruit and vegetables given by Revds Adam and David. It was a real joy to welcome the children and staff. The very generous collection of gifts was shared with

the "Top-up Shop" at Whitton Parish Church and with FIND (Families In Need) in Ipswich.

In December we will be hosting the school's Christmas Carol Concerts with three separate events for Early Years and Key Stage 1 (4-7), Lower Key Stage 2 (7-9) and Upper Key Stage 2 (9-11). Revds Adam and David will be sharing a short Christmas message at these special events.

Café Style Worship

Our café styles services continue to be a feature (about once a quarter) of our pattern of worship at Castle Hill. They are well attended and many folk enjoy the relaxed setting and the opportunity to take part in various activities.



Our most recent café style worship was held on Sunday 17th November. The theme was "The Bible". As usual we sat together at tables and enjoyed refreshments and snacks throughout the service. There was a Bible Quiz, crafts including a mini-lantern, questions and ideas to discuss and some interesting illustrations such as a Bible with no words.

Our next Café Style Service is scheduled for **Sunday 9th February 2025.**

Christie Organ

The organ at Castle Hill is rather unusual and not the sort you might expect to find in a church. It is a theatre or cinema organ with all the bells and whistles (quite literally)

associated with such instruments. It started life in the Century Cinema, Clacton-on-Sea, Essex where it was installed in 1935 by builders Hill, Norman and Beard under their "Christie" brand. It was opened with a recital in July 1936.

The organ was purchased by the Ipswich Light Organ Music Society (now Ipswich Theatre Organ Club, ITOC) in 1967 with the intention to install it in Ipswich Town Hall. As this plan was not able to proceed, it was arranged for it to be installed in Castle Hill URC. It was opened on 21st November 1971. One of the organists on that day was John Mann who had played it four years earlier at the farewell concert in Clacton before its removal.

The pipes are housed in a large chamber above the stage at the back of the main church area. The three manual console with its classic cinema horseshoe arrangement of stop controls stands at ground level. It is on a moveable platform and for recitals it is moved to a central position in front of the stage.

The organ is maintained by the ITOC team. The church has an agreement allowing us to use the instrument in "Classical Style" for worship services. Unfortunately, we do not have a regular organist any more so it is only played occasionally.

Since it's installation at the church it has undergone some enlargement and improvement including the fitting of a state-of-the-art control system linking the console to the pipes making it more reliable. It has some quirks and foibles which add to the sense of fun and challenge when playing it. It will be played, by Revd Adam, for the Joint Advent Music & Readings Service on Sunday 1st December, for our Carols by Candlelight

Service on 22nd December and for the Family Carol Service on 24th December.



If you would like to hear it in all its magical theatre organ glory then ITOC hold concerts on Sunday afternoons four times a year. A variety of skilled theatre and cinema organists are invited to play and the concerts are very entertaining.

The dates for 2025 are as follows:

14:30 Sunday 16th March
14:30 Sunday 18th May
14:30 Sunday 19th October
14:30 Sunday 16th November

There is a charge for admission of £12. ITOC members receive a discount £10. Annual membership is £10 which, in addition to takings at concerts, goes towards the cost of maintaining the instrument. For further details of membership you can contact the club secretary by emailing pat@gilpat.co.uk and she will be happy to assist.

We are reliably informed that the concert on 16th March will be given by the wonderful Robert Wolfe who is the resident organist for the Wurlitzer organ in Fakenham, Norfolk. He is a very skilled and highly entertaining performer. If you visit this link <https://www.facebook.com/RobertWolfeWurlitzer/videos/891890308783614> you can catch a short blast of one of his previous performances at Castle Hill.

St John's URC

Hymn Sing

We mentioned in the last edition of Connect that we would be holding a Hymn Sing on 5th October. Well, we did just that! We had a wonderful time, sharing readings and singing a great selection of hymns reflecting different themes.



We started with that wonderful hymn "Praise Him, praise Him! Jesus, our blessed Redeemer!" by Fanny Crosby. It's always a great one to loosen up the vocal cords.

Our first theme was Pilgrimage and included "Who would true valour see" by John Bunyan, a new hymn to an old tune "Onward, Christian Pilgrims" and primary school favourite, "One more step along the world I go."

Our second selection were based on Spiritual and Gospel songs including "He's got the whole world in his hand", "O when the saints go marching in" and "Down by the Riverside". The final selection were songs of faith which tell a story – words composed in light of the experience and challenges faced by the writers – these were: "When peace like a river (It is well)", "Amazing Grace" and "What a friend we have in Jesus."

Afterwards we shared tea and copious quantities of cake. Revd Adam offered to sample them all beforehand to make sure they were safe but we declined the offer!

Link to Hope

We are again supporting the Shoebox Appeal. This has been running since



1992. The filled boxes, containing gifts and useful items, have brought smiles to thousands of people across Eastern Europe over the years. Over 1 million shoe boxes have been sent.

The boxes are sent to people in Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria and Romania, facing significant hardship. The scheme collects boxes for entire families and for older people so nobody is excluded.

In the past members and friends of St John's have filled boxes for collection but over the last two years we have, instead ask for donations of £20 per box which also covers the transport cost. The money is used by the Link to Hope charity to obtain the items and fill the boxes ensuring that everything is cleared for transport and meets the specific requirements of individuals.

Items placed in the boxes include "priority items" such as toothpaste and toothbrushes, candles and holders, small games, sweets and chocolates, soap and flannels. Other items include colouring pads, crayons, calculators, small toys, DIY tools, accessories, toiletries, Reading glasses and items such as hot water bottles and small items of clothing.

Brownies' 55th Anniversary

On Thursday
28th November
the Brownies at



St John's, the 40th Ipswich Brownie Pack, will be hosting a special tea party, with invited guests, to mark their 55th Anniversary. This is a significant milestone in the work of the pack and we congratulate all those who continue to support and participate in this wonderful, active organisation.

Saxmundham URC

Film Afternoon

On Saturday 28th September we held another of our film afternoons and showed the 2016 version of the film “Whisky Galore!” It was a funny, heartwarming and entertaining film. During our viewing we handed round popcorn and afterwards we enjoyed a Scottish Themed Tea.



Our next Film Afternoon will be on Saturday 1st February 2025 from 13:00 – 15:00. Due to the licence arrangements, we are permitted to publicise the title of the film in advance but has a family holiday theme. On this occasion we will begin with Bacon Rolls (or vegetarian sausages) and Soup and then watch the film, aiming to be finished so we can get home before it gets dark. Do come and join us.

Harvest Praise

It was good to welcome folk from Leiston to join in our annual Harvest Praise, held on Sunday 29th September. Worship included our favourite Harvest Hymns and readings as well as times for prayer and reflection. In giving thanks for God’s generous blessings, we are also grateful that we have enough to share. Thanks to everyone’s contributions we raised £52 and gathered fresh produce all of which was donated to Leiston Foodbank.



Start the Week

We continue to hold our Start the Week with a Cuppa meetings each month. At our meeting on Monday 28th October we were pleased to



have 11 folk in attendance. It is a wonderful opportunity to share in friendship and fellowship Our next meeting will take place on **Monday 25th November** at the usual time of 10:00 to 11:30ish (as the mood takes us). Our December meeting will be on **Monday 23rd December** so do come and share a seasonal cuppa before the full festivities kick in; there will be mince pies!

Christmas Event

In a change to our usual early Christmas Coffee Morning and Sale we are holding a Christmas Dinner Party on Saturday 7th December. The event is already at its capacity with people signing up in advance to enable us to cater for the required number.



Leiston United Church

Autumn Days

On Saturday 19th October from 14:00 we held, what we hope, will be the first of a series of **mini concerts** at Leiston. The title for the concert was, “Autumn Days”. We welcomed folk from the church and wider community for an entertaining time of music and “banter” provided by Revd Adam and his wife Gillian. We were treated to a varied programme which included organ music (the organ behaved itself throughout), songs, recorder and piano music and a bit of a sing-along.



Afterwards we shared a delicious afternoon tea in the hall. Tasty sandwiches, sausage rolls, cake galore (perhaps we could make a film about that!) and plenty of good company and conversation.

There was no charge for admission but we welcomed donations towards the work and mission of the church. We were pleased to receive over £90 in donations. We intend to hold our next mini concert and tea in the first half of 2025 when, hopefully, Spring will be in the air.

Leiston Food Bank

Marion and David, with support from family members and friends, continue to do sterling work in ensuring the food bank is open on Friday and Saturday mornings each week. Recently Marion and David's grandson Joshua started at university so is no longer available to help on a Friday morning. Thankfully their younger grandson Ollie has stepped up to the mark and is a welcome help.



We would very much welcome further donations towards the provision of food and other essentials. If any folk from across the pastorate would be willing to contribute, please contact Revd Adam (revaje@outlook.com) – thank you.

New Beginnings: Leiston & Saxmundham United Church (LSUC)



Following the decision of our church meetings to proceed with the necessary arrangements, from January, Leiston United Church and Saxmundham URC will unite as Leiston & Saxmundham United Church (LSUC) – One Church in Two Locations.

We will continue to hold services and make use of both our buildings but will operate as one church as far as church and elders' meetings are concerned. We will have one church secretary and one treasurer with the support, for both, of an admin assistant.

In January we will also be reviewing our Mission Action Plans and drawing up a combined plan identifying the missional aims in both locations and as a new partnership. There are many interesting possibilities and we will work together to discern God's will and make right decisions for the future. Please do pray for us as we proceed.

Pastorate News

Hadleigh URC

It is with great pleasure we announce that, following 100% support from the extraordinary church meetings held across the pastorate and a similar unanimous decision from the church meeting at Hadleigh URC, we will be welcoming Great Meeting Hadleigh URC into the Ipswich and East Pastorate from 1st January 2025.



Hadleigh URC has been in vacancy for some time since their minister Revd Bryn Rickard moved on to work for a mission organisation in Oxford. Thank you to Revd John Cook (Interim Moderator) and to all the elders and members who have worked so hard to see the church through this time of change and transition. Please continue to pray for Hadleigh URC and all the churches in the Pastorate as we look to the future together, seek God's will and purposes and find new ways to support and encourage one another.



You will notice this new version of the Pastorate Logo has been deployed as part of the title to this edition of Connect. This incorporates Hadleigh and marks the joining of the Leiston and Saxmundham churches.

At **14:30** on **Sunday 9th February 2025** there will be a special service to welcome Hadleigh URC into the pastorate. The service will be held at Hadleigh URC (Market Place, Hadleigh, Ipswich IP7 5DL), led by the moderator Revd Lythan Nevard and will include the Lord's Supper – a wonderful reminder of our faith and unity. Please keep an eye out for further details of this time of worship together.

Bible Course

Over the last few weeks and looking ahead, a number of people have joined in the Bible Society Bible Course. This is a “whistle-stop” tour of the Bible, looking at the continuity of the message and story of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.



Each session includes video presentations and opportunities for discussion. The course is accompanied by a very well presented manual giving reminders of the content covered and illustrating various points.

The course is being delivered as a face to face session in Felixstowe or via Zoom. We are working in partnership with Methodists from the Ipswich Circuit to share in this learning opportunity.

We hope, once we have completed the course and following our Lent course series, to offer opportunities for people to explore some of the questions and matters raised in greater depth. A series of “Matters Arising” sessions are being considered.

Advent Candles & Hymn

It has been our custom, for several years now, to mark the weeks of Advent, in each of the pastorate churches, by lighting candles on an Advent wreath and using the same prayers and hymn in each church. This year is no exception. The words of the hymn are set to the tune “Lourdes”.

Here are the words of the hymn and the theme for each of the candles:

Week One – The Candle of Hope



On this day we light the candle of Hope, expressing out belief, that although the world remains living in darkness, Christ's birth gives hope that what we see is not all there is. Christ is the hope of the world. We celebrate his coming, bringing hope to the troubled world.

The first Advent candle declares with its flame, the **hope** of salvation secured in Christ's name.

Be bold, be bright,
shine on through the night,
God's love, God's grace,
revealed in Christ's light.

Week Two – The Candle of Peace



On this day we light the candle of Peace. Christ came to end division and enmity

between peoples and nations. He heralds an acceptance of difference and diversity. He is the Prince of Peace.

The second bright candle cries rest for the soul, God's **peace**, for the nations, "Shalom" – make us whole.

Be bold, be bright,
shine on through the night,
God's love, God's grace,
revealed in Christ's light.

Week Three – The Candle of Peace



On the third Sunday in Advent, we celebrate that Jesus' birth brings joy to our world. The

joy that Christ gives is not superficial or passing. It reminds us that in all of life's moments there is a deep and resounding rejoicing though the life that God gives.

The third Advent candle tells us of deep **joy**, which nothing in heaven or earth can destroy.

Be bold, be bright,
shine on through the night,
God's love, God's grace,
revealed in Christ's light.



We are no longer alone; God is with us. We are no longer homeless; a bit of the eternal home itself has moved into us. Therefore, we adults can rejoice deeply within our hearts under the Christmas tree, perhaps more than the children are able. We know that God's goodness will once again draw near.

Week Four – The Candle of Love



On this final Sunday in Advent, we light the candle of love. God so loved the world that he

gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Our fourth candle speaks of the truth from above God's heart, reaches out to embrace with true **Love**.

Be bold, be bright,
shine on through the night,
God's love, God's grace,
revealed in Christ's light.

Christmas Day – The Christ Light



On this day of celebration, we light the central candle, signifying that Jesus is the light of the world. The light of Christ shines in darkness and brings hope, peace, joy

and love. We proclaim boldly that Christ, the light of the world, is born.

The waiting is over,
we welcome the morn.
The **Christ-light** is shining,
our Saviour is born.

Be bold, be bright,
come sing with delight,
God's love, God's grace,
revealed in Christ's light.

Advent & Christmas



The seasons of Advent and Christmas mark the beginning of the Christian year. To mark these special times we have a range of opportunities in the pastorate churches, to gather and celebrate. Here are details of the special times of worship which take place over the coming weeks.

Sunday 1st December – Advent Sunday

Castle Hill URC

16:00 Music & Readings for Advent

This is an united service with St John's URC marking the beginning of the season of preparation and waiting for Christmas. The service includes readings, reflections, songs and hymns and prayers. We have our seasonal singers (drawn from both churches) leading the music. The service is followed by tea. The service is led by Revd David and Revd Adam will play the organ and piano.

Sunday 8th December

St John's URC

10:45 Christmas Toy Service

Each year we invite people to bring new toys to be given for families in need and who may struggle with the added cost of Christmas. Please do bring a gift to add to the collection if you are able. Our service is led by Revd David Atkins.

Sunday 15th December

St John's URC

10:45 Christmas Carol Service

We share in a service of readings, retelling the Christmas story, carols and choir songs. The service is led by Revd Adam who will also be playing the music for us.

Leiston United Church

16:00 Carols & Cake (Joint Service)

This is a relaxed time to celebrate. We sing familiar carols, hear Bible readings recalling the Christmas Story and reflective readings. There will be some solo pieces for listening and after our time of worship we share a Christmas celebration tea. The service is led by Revd Adam who will also provide the music with assistance from his musical wife Gillian.

Tuesday 17th December

Castle Hill URC

18:30 Outdoor Carol Sing

This is a new venture for us – an opportunity for friends from the community to share in a fun time of carol singing with a short and simple message. We meet outside the main building. We will be using the Bethlehem Carol Sheets so folk will be able to request their favourites. Afterwards we will serve mulled fruit juice, hot chocolate, mince pies and chocolate mini-rolls.

Sunday 22nd December

Saxmundham URC

10:45 Christmas Carol Service (Joint Service)

A service of carols, readings and reflection on the events of the first Christmas. We welcome Mr William Glasse to lead our worship.

Felixstowe URC

15:00 Family Carol Service

The singing for our service will be led by friendly local choir, Orwell Connection. We will sing familiar Christmas carols, share readings and reflections and enjoy some items presented by the choir to lead us through this joyful celebration. The service is led by Revd David and Revd Adam (who will also be playing the organ).

Castle Hill URC

18:00 Carols by Candlelight

Our Seasonal Singers will again be leading the singing for this service with a mixture of favourite carols, choir songs, readings and reflections. The service is led by Revd David, with Revd Adam providing the music.

Tuesday 24th December

Castle Hill URC

16:00 Family Carol Service

A simple, fun service with songs, a retelling of the Christmas story, a short talk and prayers. Come and mark this special time with all the family. The service is led by Revd David and Revd Adam will again be providing the music.

Leiston Community Carols

18:30 in Post Office Square

We gather in Post Office Square to sing carols and share readings led by members of the various local churches, part of Leiston Christians Together. The music is provided by the Leiston Royal British Legion Band.

St John's URC

23:30 Midnight Service

A simple, traditional service including carols, readings, reflection and communion – a great way to see in Christmas morning. The service is led by Mr Peter Dawson.

Wednesday 25th December

Castle Hill URC

10:30 Christmas Family Worship

Led by Revd David.

St John's URC

10:30 Christmas Family Worship

Led by Revd Adam.

Felixstowe URC

10:00 Christmas Family Worship

United Service held at Felixstowe Methodist Church @ Trinity site.

Saxmundham URC & Leiston United Church

10:00 Joint Christmas Day Worship

Led by Mrs Sue Liddell.

A kindly 90-year-old grandmother found buying presents for family and friends a bit much one Christmas, so she wrote cheques for all of them, to put in their Christmas cards. In each card she wrote, "Buy your own present", and then sent them off. After all the Christmas festivities were over, she opened the drawer of her desk and found the cheques! Everyone had received a card from her with "Buy your own present" written inside, but without the cheques!



Eastern Synod News

October Synod Meeting

The Eastern Synod representatives from the churches, organisations, guests and synod officers meet, twice a year, once in March and once in October. Our most recent meeting took place on Saturday 12th October, hosted by Witham United Reformed Church (Essex).



The opening worship was led by members of Witham URC and included an overview of some of the work of the church and congregation in the town. The building is well used in support of church led and other community activities, with a community café at its heart and provision for people of all ages across the weekly programme.

Ministers marking Jubilee years since ordination were celebrated by the Moderator and certificates were presented. These included: Revd Derek Newton and Revd Malcolm Hill, both marking 70 years, Revd Peter Brewer, marking 75 years and Revd Roy Muttram, marking 50 years. The Moderator also celebrated the appointment of Revd Dr Peter McEnhill as Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge.

The main theme and focus of the gathering was Ecumenism. The United Reformed Church grew out of the ecumenical movement and has, from the outset, been

committed to working with our fellow Christians across the range of denominations including many of our local churches being in ecumenical partnerships. Lindsey Brown – URC Evangelism and Ecumenism Officer reminded us the ecumenism is exciting and very much part of our DNA as a church. The challenge for the URC is to reinvigorate our ecumenical vision and the need to ensure that each generation captures the vision of the call to and advantages of working ecumenically. The importance of an approach built on willingness, openness to learn and active humility in developing relationships was highlighted.

Lindsey reminded us of the various ways in which churches can work together in partnership including:

- working on specific projects;
- working in a more formal partnership for a particular missional opportunity, with a more written agreement;
- forming a “new” church or organisation with a constitution to outline the partnership working.

It is interesting to note that all of our Ipswich and East Mission Action Plans identify ways of working in partnership with other local churches. This is something on which we will continue to build.

Synod have introduced “Faith in Action” awards, looking for examples of how churches are engaged practically in missional activities. Awards were presented to:

- Whittlesford URC who have installed a Bicycle Repair Station for use by the many passing cyclist.
- Rayleigh URC for the “listening place” in the local “Greggs” with a volunteer being present to engage in listening.

- Great Totham URC have considerable grounds and have made some available to the local community as allotments.
- Wymondham URC have made an area of unused land available to the local community as a Happiness Garden.
- Christ Church Chelmsford have offered a Pop-Up school uniform shop offering preloved uniforms and other resources.



At the close of the meeting our Moderator Revd Lythan Nevard led a short service of worship and Communion with an ecumenical flavour drawing on liturgy and prayers for a variety of Christian traditions.



The meeting received various reports including Finance and Resources, Youth and Children, Mission and Training, General Assembly 2024 (Claire Coster - Hadleigh URC), the Pastoral Committee and the Synod Clerk.

The Moderator welcomed two new ministers – Revd Andrew Madharara – Plume Avenue URC, and Revd Karen Knight – Herts and Essex Border Mission Partnership. It was also noted that Revd Robert Sheard had been inducted as minister of Christchurch Needham Market. Two Missional Partnership have now been officially established – Norwich Area, and Herts and Essex Border. Christchurch, Southminster is entering into a Local Ecumenical Partnership. We were informed of two church closures – Trinity URC – Norwich, and Christchurch LEP in Great Yarmouth.

Something to Make You Smile

In Washington, a TV reporter was working on an assignment called, “The Spirit of Christmas”, so he called the British Embassy and asked to speak to the British Ambassador.

“Ambassador,” the reporter said, “you have been very kind to us through the year and we would like to include you in a Christmas news segment we’re going to run. Tell me, what would you like for Christmas?”

The Ambassador replied, “I am very touched by your offer, but I must decline to accept any gift.”

“Oh please,” said the reporter, “you really have been very helpful to us, so won’t you please tell me what you would especially like for Christmas?”

Again the Ambassador refused, but the reporter persisted, and he finally gave in. “All right then, if you insist. This Christmas I would like a jar of mint jelly.”

Having forgotten about the conversation, the Ambassador was surprised when, several weeks later, he turned on the evening news and heard the same reporter introducing a segment on “The Spirit of Christmas”.

“We recently interviewed three visiting ambassadors and asked them what they would like for Christmas. These three diplomats each gave revealing answers when they pondered what they would most like during this season of goodwill.

The German Ambassador said: ‘I would like to see a peaceful and prosperous year ahead for all the citizens of the planet. May God bless us all.’

The Swiss Ambassador said: ‘May the Spirit of Christmas last throughout the year. It is my dream that our world leaders will be guided toward a common goal of peaceful coexistence. This is my wish this Christmas season.

And then we ask the British Ambassador, who said, ‘I would like a jar of mint jelly.’”

Caring for Creation & Commitment to Justice

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The UN Sustainable Development website introduces the Sustainable Development Goals with these words, “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. It provides a blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.

At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and

developing – in a global partnership. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.” The Sustainable Development Goals are as follows:



End poverty in all its forms everywhere.



End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.



Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.



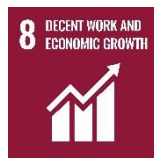
Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.



Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.



Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.



Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and production employment and decent work for all.



Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation.



Reduce inequality within and among countries.



Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.



Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.



Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact.



Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.



Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.



Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.



Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

Some progress has been made to achieving these goals but, with only six years to go before the intended target of 2030, progress is not as encouraging as had been hoped. Sadly the current global situation, with wars, conflict and political struggle has in fact led to a decline in many of these areas and has the potential to further exasperate the work of the United Nations in working towards them

For example, wars in places such as Gaza and Sudan have significantly reduced accessibility to medical facilities and medicine, reversing progress made towards health and wellbeing for all. Wars have destroyed infrastructure and prevented access and distribution of essential resources and food. Conflict and climate change have damaged harvests and productivity making food security and sustainability worse. Inequality of wealth and power between and within nations has meant the rich have become richer and more people face poverty.

As Christians it is not difficult to recognise, in these goals, our calling and commitment to love of neighbour, to be good stewards of the world and to challenge injustice, recognising each individual as a child of God, made in God's image. As we have considered before, salvation and reconciliation, through Christ, is about all of creation. As we seek to serve God, to live and share the good news, we commit ourselves to humanity was intended to be. So what can we do?

Pray:

- for peace - hold those places where conflict continues before God;
- for leaders of nations that they may recognise God's wisdom and authority

and care for people and the world rather than wealth and power;

- for all who work to bring help and relief and sustainability that they may be strengthened and enabled to persevere;
- through each of the goals and ask God to show us ways that we, as individuals or as churches, can enhance our commitment to them.

Act by:

- supporting campaigns and organisations which promote the sustainable development goals;
- finding out more by visiting the SDG website <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> and share this information with others;
- writing to politicians and leaders, especially those of our own nation, to challenge them to strive towards securing the SDGs through policy and action;
- continuing in your commitment as a good steward of creation and promoting this to others;
- picking a goal and finding out a specific action or commitment that you can pursue in support of achieving that goal.

The United Nations Development Programme have a range of products, including gifts (maybe for Christmas), sold to raise money to further work towards the goals. You can purchase items by visiting <https://shop.undp.org/> All items purchased here (rather than from other sources) contribute directly towards the work.

The next edition of Connect will be published in March 2025. If you have any items for inclusion, please send them to Revd Adam on revaje@outlook.com by 20th February 2025.

I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
and mild 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 world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each dark, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And 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 Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."