

YOURS Magazine of The United Winchester

Magazine of The United Church

December 2023/ January 2024



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Tim's Letter: When Hope Seems Lost

'No love that in a family dwells, No carolling in frosty air, Nor all the steeple-shaking bells Can with this single Truth compare — That God was man in Palestine And lives today in Bread and Wine.'*

So ends John Betjeman's iconic poem 'Christmas'. In his inimitable style, Betjeman lulls the reader into safety evoking warm memories of a sentimental past, only to reveal the real motive behind his project with utter clarity in the final lines. There's 'tissued fripperies' and 'Bath salts' a-plenty, and we'll certainly do our best to make sure 'The church looks nice on Christmas Day'! But to Betjeman, the sights, sounds and smells, the season and all its trappings, lose all wonder, all majesty, and all context without the person of Jesus. Christmas makes no sense without Christ.

Furthermore, this singular moment in salvation history takes place in Palestine, a region that was already hotly contested when Mary and Joseph made their way to Bethlehem. In a feeding-trough lay the birth of *all* hope, delivered into a cradle of civilisation to unexpectant parents searching for shelter. The Christ-child Himself, born into an occupied land, then forced to flee the tyranny of a despot.

As we see images of desperate infants struggling for life in Gaza's chaotic hospitals, we are moved and appalled. The strain of their first breaths echoes those of Jesus who clutched to life in his first moments just a short distance from them. It is tempting to lose all hope when faced with such suffering. Yet, the hope we briefly glimpse in Christ at this time must also be afforded to these poor wee souls, not for our sake, but for theirs. It's hard, I know, but we must fight with words to keep hope alive, at least as hard as those

who seek to destroy it with guns. When hope seems lost is when we must hold on to it the most.

Dear God,

'We pray for peace,

but not the easy peace built on complacency and not the truth of God.

We pray for real peace, the peace God's love alone can seal.' +

Amen.

Yours in Christ, Tim

- * 'Christmas', John Betjeman (1906-1984)
- + Alan Gaunt (1935–2023) Singing the Faith 719

Editorial

Several people have asked if Carol Jessop's moving story of her father, which she shared with us during the Remembrance Day Service, could be reproduced in *Yours*. We're delighted to be able to do so, along with photos of her dad which she has kindly sent us.

Our cover picture by Amy Crocker is one of a collection of artwork for Advent created by several of a talented group from our congregation last year.

Alison Wood and Rosie MacMullen share more treasures from Italy and Guernsey, Sarah Holmes features in this month's Brief Encounter and we have wisdom from earlier years from Jim Forster, writing about the difference between joy and happiness, and Howard Sharp on God's creative and redemptive love.

Wishing you all a Joyful Christmas and a Peaceful New Year.

The Yours Team—Bob Lord, Dorothy Lusmore and Sophie Armstrong

News of the United Church Family

Some of the younger members of our Church family are busy looking at options for next steps in education or work. Some tough decisions! We hope that goes well.



Congratulations to Miranda Roles, who completed the Andover half marathon. Miranda told us more

about this in the October edition of *Yours*, including about the cause for which she ran. We wish Miranda well as she continues to make plans for an eight-month international volunteering placement in Uganda with Project Trust.

We are pleased to hear too that things are going well for Neil Messer in his new role at Baylor University, Waco, Texas. We look forward to him being around for a little while over Christmas.

Finally, a birthday to celebrate!

We celebrate the outreach into the Winchester community that has taken place over the last 30 years through the Winchester Churches Christmas Project. It began 30 years ago with an idea and the support of a few. It has grown into an initiative that touches the lives of many individuals and families and has earned the trust and support of numerous local organisations who work tirelessly in the ongoing support they offer. A real partnership endeavour!

Jane Lawson, Pastoral Lead

Remembering my Father

Remembrance Sunday holds a special place in my heart. It is a day when we all pause to remember and honour the lives of those who died fighting for our freedom. Most of us will not know them, how could we? But they all had a life before the war they died in. For many it was a life full of achievements and dreams. I want to tell you about just one of them and celebrate his life. I want to tell you about my dad, Don.

My Dad was a Canadian born in Vancouver in 1919. His mother

was Laura Barnum a member of the Barnum and Bailey circus family and his father Arthur Little made his living fur trapping around the Hudson Bay. In the school holidays Don and his brother Earl travelled north with their father to help with the fur trapping. When they left school, they were both expected to accompany their father for months on end living in the family trailer in subzero temperatures. My dad hated this life,



especially the killing of the wild animals usually moose and polar bear. I learnt from my cousin who grew up with him that Don closed his eyes when he took aim with his rifle with the hope he would miss.

When Great Britain declared war on Germany in 1939, Canada quickly followed. My dad joined the Royal Canadian Engineers, glad no doubt of escaping the dreaded fur trapping trips with his father. He was just 21.

After basic army training in Canada Don arrived in Great Britain in the spring of 1941. To make the Canadian troops stationed here feel at home local people organised evening dances. My mum loved dancing. It was at one of these dances that my mum and dad met. Mum said it was love at first sight. They married six

months later. The war made things so uncertain that you grabbed happiness when you could.



My grandparents adored Don as did the rest of my family. He was kind, caring and funny and he loved their daughter. I was born in the summer of 1943. I have a photo of him holding me at just a few days old. His regiment left for Italy just three weeks after I was born to join other troops defending the monastery at Monte Cassino in Italy.

He wrote to my mum every day. He was killed in the spring of 1944.

He is buried in a Commonwealth War Graves cemetery on a hillside overlooking the Adriatic Sea in Italy. Ralph and I visited his grave several years ago. To me it is one of the most beautiful places on earth.

The Canadian Government gave free passage to Canada for wives, widows and children of Canadian Servicemen. They especially wanted the children who would be so important for Canada's future. Although mum didn't want to



leave her family, she took up the offer. The bombing was bad where we lived, and she wanted to keep me safe. We stayed with my Canadian grandparents in Medicine Hat, Alberta, where they now lived. They of course were thrilled to have their grandchild home with them. A little bit of comfort after the loss of their son. Sadly, I was too young to remember anything about this time. But after two years mum was homesick, and we returned home to my English grandparents. The war in Europe was over and she felt it was safe. She remarried in 1947 and I have a sister

Over the next few years, we lost touch with my Canadian family, but Canada did not lose touch with us. They paid a monthly allowance for my upkeep until I was 18, and I had a yearly visit from someone at the Canadian Embassy to ask me if all was well. Mum said it was Don still caring for us.

When my Mum reached the age 60, even though she was still married to my stepdad, she received a generous Canadian war widows' pension. She was then convinced Don was watching over us. It did make the last few years of her life so much more comfortable.

The story of my dad's life could end here. How could I find out more?

And then 20 years ago, our youngest daughter Catherine joined a genealogy website to start researching our family tree. Almost immediately my lost family in Canada responded. They had been looking for Mum and me for over 50 years. We had been found. It was like one of those TV reunion programmes.

Ralph and I have visited Canada several times over the past few years. I have also taken our three daughters and a grand-daughter to meet their Canadian family. My cousin Lou who grew up with my dad has been able to answer so many of my questions. I have photographs of my dad as a child and even the compass he took with him on fur trapping trips. I now know so much more about this wonderful man who was able to give so much love in the time he had with us.

Mum kept all the letters dad wrote to her from Italy. I have them and the pen he wrote them with. They are very special. My dad may not have been physically with me during my lifetime, but I have felt his presence and I know he loved me. We can rightly at this time mourn his loss, but we can also celebrate his life.

Carol Jessop

(Carol shared her story during the Remembrance Day Service)

Remembrance

It may seem strange to include a piece about remembrance in this edition of *Yours*. But after attending the United Church service on Remembrance Sunday, thoughtfully led by Tim, I found a card which quoted a poem by Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy. It is not an easy read, but in the current world situation with several wars raging, I felt it was sadly relevant.



Studdert Kennedy (1883–1929) was an English Anglican priest and poet. As a chaplain during the First World War he was colloquially known as 'Woodbine Willie' because he distributed Woodbine cigarettes to soldiers as he moved around the battle lines. Here is the poem, entitled just 'Waste'. It points out the sheer futility of war.

Waste

Waste of muscle, waste of brain,
Waste of patience, waste of pain,
Waste of manhood, waste of health,
Waste of beauty, waste of wealth,
Waste of blood and waste of tears,
Waste of youth's most precious years,
Waste of ways the saints have trod,
Waste of glory, waste of God – War!

Graham Rolfe

Joy Kamara

Joy entered the Hampshire Young Poet 2023 competition, organised by the Hampshire Cultural Trust. On 14 October 2023, she was awarded first prize for her age category, 4–7 years. The theme for the competition was 'Home'. The poems were judged by Hampshire Poet, Nazneen Ahmed Pathak, who also presented the prizes at The Arc in Winchester Library.





As many of you will know, Donna is now cared for at Westacre Nursing Home due to her dementia. She is visited daily by her husband Bev, who many of you have come to know. The church has shown great kindness to both of them. I remember the home my parents created when my brothers and I were growing up, and how secure and loved I felt.

I think that Joy's poem reflects a similar sentiment, and I wish my Mum could have read it, or could understand it. I wish I could thank her again for everything she did for us.

This is Joy's poem:

Home

All the art I do for my mum,
Rainbows, trees, flowers, and sun.
I'll invite my friends over to play,
Sharing my toys on this lovely day.
The cats on the sofa, the best place to go.
A sick bowl when poorly, a cuddle when low.
Tasty food, bike in shed.
Kisses, warmth, bath and bed.

Mary Kamara

Link to Hope

Thank you to everyone who packed a shoe box or gave a donation. We sent 96 boxes in total. The boxes are now on their way to Eastern Europe where they are in great need.





Lesley Worrall and Yvonne North

The Baglioni Chapel Frescoes

As we approach Advent I think again of the beautiful frescoes in the Italian town of Spello. The second of the three biblical stories in the Baglioni Chapel is the Adoration of the Shepherds. As with the Annunciation, this scene is placed in the Umbrian landscape rather than in Bethlehem. The angels in the sky proclaim the good news and those on the ground emphasise the sacred nature of the newborn baby.



The shepherds kneel in devotion. Their gifts are local produce – a prosciutto ham and a basket of eggs. Their role as shepherds is emphasised by their humble appearance, even a missing tooth. They are the first visitors to the Holy Family. Behind them the Magi can be seen looking for Jesus and carrying their precious gifts. Two beams have fallen from the stable roof and form the shape of a cross on the ground; a sign of foreboding in an otherwise joyful reverent scene.

I like to think that the worshippers in this small farming community at the turn of the sixteenth century would have felt that Christ's birth was very personal to them when they saw the nativity scene set in familiar surroundings. The trees, plants and even the reeds used for the stable roof are all accurate to the area. It is quite likely that they recognised some of the faces too as locals were frequently used as models in fresco work.

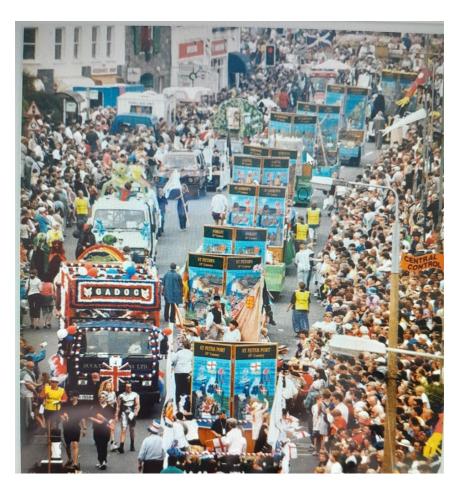


(You can see the fresco in more detail online at the Web Gallery of Art.)

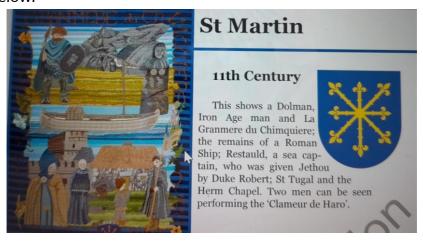
Alison Wood

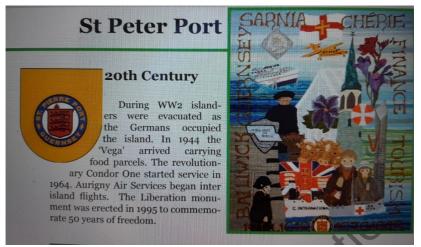
The Guernsey Millenium Tapestry

After my disappointment in being unable to view the Guernsey Tapestry on my recent trip (see November's edition), I wrote to ask if I could get any material to use in *Yours*. To my delight I was granted permission to take anything I liked from the draft copy of *Stitch by Stitch* by the late Joan M. Ozanne who was awarded the British Empire Medal for service to the community. This book records the way in which the community came together to create The Millenium Tapestry.



This amazing work of art contains panels covering ten centuries. You can see them all in this Procession and the first and last below.

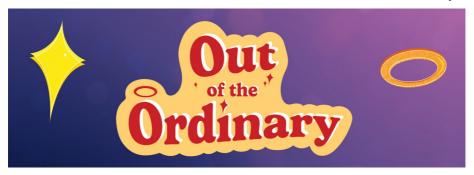




This fascinating path through Guernsey's past is well worth my taking a return trip to see.

Rosemary MacMullen

Plans for Advent and Christmas—Out of the Ordinary



This year the Methodist Church has offered a series for Advent: 'Out of the Ordinary', exploring how just as God revealed his love for us in a human life in Jesus, he speaks to us today through ordinary things. We are invited to scratch beneath the service for signs of God's love. The pictures introduced each week at the front of the church will focus on these themes.

Week 1: Letting stuff go: a box of presents

In the build up to Christmas retailers encourage us to spend more and more on bigger, better presents, more elaborate decorations, and more extravagant food. As the people of God we are invited to think about what is really important, to discard what has no true value and root out deep-seated wrong attitudes in our own lives.

Week 2: Reaching into the corners: a feather duster

A feather duster gently removes the cobwebs, and gets into the corners removing the dust that is hard to reach. The prophets urged people to think deeply and discard false assumptions and ingrained prejudice.

Week3: Shine the light: a lantern

John the Baptist shone the light of God's truth in dark times. As Christians we too are called to shine the light, to shine with the light of God's love in difficult times.

Week 4: Listen and speak: speech bubbles

Christmas songs and carols have been blaring out in the shops. We are called to hear the heart of the message, to invite the Christ child to 'be born in us today' once again, and to share that message. A celebratory carol service.

Reflection and Refreshment

A peaceful place to reflect and pray for peace

In decorating the church for Christmas we felt it was important to recognise the pain of war and our longing for peace. So, rather than lots of brightly decorated trees, we are having fewer trees, decorated in white and gold, interspersed with pictures and prayer stations inviting reflection. The church will be open for refection 1–23 December, during coffee bar opening, weekdays 10–12, and additionally on Saturday afternoons 2–4pm, with simpler refreshments.

Christmas Eve Carol Service

It has been impossible to have a Sunday afternoon or evening carol service because of difficulties parking during the Christmas market. This year Christmas Sunday is Christmas Eve, after the market has closed, so we are taking the opportunity to offer two services: the usual Sunday morning 10.30 service, and a carol service at 4, preceded by a light afternoon tea from 3. Whilst we realise some will be unable to come because of family commitments, we thought this was too good an opportunity to miss. If you want to attend an evening carol service on 17th, you will be very welcome at Wesley Methodist in Weeke.

If you can help with stewarding or serving refreshments at any of these events please talk to Pat Fry, Janet Messer, Dorothy Lusmore or Ann Bulley.

Pat Fry, Worship Lead

Joy – A Brief Meditation for Advent

Joy is greater than happiness. Happiness turns up more or less where you would expect it to – a good marriage, a satisfying job, a pleasant vacation.

Joy on the other hand is notoriously unpredictable. Paul calls it a gift – a gift which Christ claims as his own; 'These things I have spoken to you,' he said at the Last Supper, 'that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full'.

At this season of Advent, we remember the angel's declaration to the shepherds, 'Behold, I bring you news of great joy which will come to all the people: for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord'.

Joy comes unbidden wherever there is love: the love of man and woman, the love of a mother for a child. It comes whenever; for a brief minute or two, we experience ourselves at unity with the created cosmos, with the mist of a morning, the surge of a stormy sea, the evening sunset, the quiver of a religious moment.

But it is there, less fleetingly, more surely, more serenely, in a life which is put into the loving hands of God. Then it becomes a joy which even absorbs grief and pain and fear. This is the joy we long for and which the Gospel proclaims.

Lord, give us joy, in the name of Christ. Amen.

Rev. James Williams Forster

Jim wrote this for Yours for Advent 2020 but it didn't reach us. It is a pleasure to publish it now with fond memories. (Ed.)

God's Creative and Redemptive Love

David Worrall was tidying up the other day when he came across some old copies of Yours. The April 2003 edition fell open at this introductory letter for Easter by Howard Sharp. The story he tells and the commentary that follows, says David, not only speaks to God's power in the current conflict in the Middle East, but also to the threat or positive potential of AI. It's very relevant to today. 'Plus ça change...!'

I came across this ancient story from India today:

Four royal sons were questioning what speciality they should master. They said to one another, 'Let us search the earth and learn a special science.' So they decided, and after they had agreed on a place where they would meet again the four brothers started off, each in a different direction.

Time went by and they met again and shared what they had learned. One had mastered a science which made it possible from a piece of bone to manufacture flesh for it. The second had discovered how to grow a creature's skin and hair if there was already flesh on a piece of bone. The third told how he was able to create limbs if flesh and hair and skin are present on the bone. The fourth had learned how to give life to the creature if its form is complete.

Thereupon the brothers went into the jungle to find a piece of bone so that they could demonstrate their specialities. As fate would have it the bone they found was a lion's, but they did not know that and picked up the bone. One added flesh to the bone, the second grew hide and hair, the third completed it with matching limbs, and the fourth gave the lion life. Shaking its heavy mane, the ferocious beast arose with its menacing mouth, sharp teeth and merciless claws and jumped on its creators. He

killed them all and vanished into the jungle.

We've heard a lot about weapons of mass destruction in the last few months. By the time you read these words I suspect that so called conventional weapons will have wreaked a fair amount of mass destruction on Iraq. The war may now be over, or perhaps dragging on, but I can't help feeling that once the US and UK governments embarked on this threatening course of action there was little doubt it would spiral out of control, with consequences that future generations may well have to face.

Bishop John Baker posed a question after his talk entitled 'Almighty God, an exploration about what we understand about the nature of God's power'. 'If you were God, knowing what outcome your creative act would lead to would you still have gone ahead and created?' In other words, has creation been worth it? My guess is that most people would rather have lived than not, though there are some people for whom life has been so awful or become so awful that they have decided not and have given up and taken their own lives.

Apart from God's creative power, Christians also speak of his redemptive power. Redemption is my favourite theological word. Basically, it means 'putting right the mess', or bringing some good out the evil which life, or we ourselves, bring upon ourselves. That is what I hope and pray for now in Iraq and for the UN and our international relations. Along with creation, redemption is the ongoing activity of the God who is like Jesus and it is a never-ending process. What we saw on the cross and in the resurrection which happened once in time, is what God is always doing. As God enters into his creation and suffers with and alongside people so such love offers up new possibilities and hope for starting again.

It's a message we all need as we make sense of our

personal stories as well as those of the world around us. It is so easy for our enterprises to get out of control and then threaten to overwhelm us. The message of Easter reminds us of God's creative and redemptive love which is ever and always for us and will not let evil and death have the last word.

Yours in Christ, Howard

The M&S Christmas Advert isn't Selfish, it's Realistic

A heated debate has broken out over this year's Marks & Spencer's Christmas advert. Katharine Birbalsingh – dubbed Britain's strictest headteacher – described her 'deep disappointment' with the advert, claiming it 'puts two fingers up' to traditional Christmas values.



The ad – dubbed 'Love *This*mas not *That*mas' – features a host of well-known faces, including singer Sophie Ellis-Bextor, engaging in traditional yuletide activities: decorating the Christmas tree,

playing games with friends and family, writing Christmas cards. But soon, the scene turns dark. Games are thrown away and Christmas cards destroyed as people free themselves from the expectations of a 'Perfect Christmas'.

For Birbalsingh, this goes against 'the inspirational spirit of Christmas of self-sacrifice, gratitude, giving of one's time'. Instead, the advert tells us to 'do whatever we want for ourselves', she says.

Leaving aside a 'spirit of Christmas' message that fails to mention the reason for the season (Jesus), if I'm honest, when I saw the advert for the first time, what I felt was: liberation. Often, it is women who still bear the brunt of trying to create a perfect Christmas. The Christmas story – the Christian one – should free us from the need to live up to impossible standards, especially in pursuit of a commercial Christmas that requires us to keep up appearances.

If you picture the typical nativity scene, it's likely to include an image of Mary, mother of Jesus, gazing adoringly at her child. She looks serene, thankful, glowing; despite the fact that her Son – God incarnate, the saviour of humankind – has been delivered into less than ideal circumstances. Surrounded by animals, for goodness' sake.

My experience of motherhood does not live up to this picture of serenity in the midst of chaos. Every day is a juggling act; my mind constantly distracted by the mental load of managing a home, work and children, despite having a supportive husband. This stress is exacerbated during the festive season, cranked up several notches as the pressure to have the perfect Christmas significantly increases my already-high stress levels. Did I sort out the children's fancy dress Christmas outfits? When exactly are they supposed to be wearing them, anyway? Have I

remembered to buy presents for their friends and cards for their entire class? Have I bought gifts for the teachers?

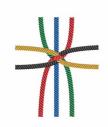
A study by YouGov conducted last year found that more than two in five Brits feel stress during the Christmas period, with one in four reporting struggling with mental health and depression. According to the study, women were more affected than men. Around 35 per cent of men felt stressed, compared to more than half (51 per cent) of women. While one in four men said Christmas made them feel anxious, more than a third of women said the same. Whether or not we are married with children, women are still often responsible for buying gifts for friends and family, coming up with the Christmas menu, travelling for hours to see our loved ones.

At the end of yet another year that will, surely, have contained its fair share of pain, heartbreak and horror for all of us (as well as a little fun, joy and pleasure, I hope!), it's time to cut ourselves a little bit of slack. This Christmas, we can rest in the arms of a saviour who asks us to hand over all our burdens.

Chine McDonald, Director of Theos, from *Premier Christianity Magazine*.



Churches Together in Winchester Update



Greetings,

There is so much to share as we move towards Advent and Christmas – we have opportunities to celebrate, times to serve and events to support. Let us also covenant to pray for peace and justice.

Hope 24 – Talking Jesus

Wed, 6 December 7.30pm at Vineyard Church

We are thrilled to be welcoming Rachel Jordan-Wolf to Winchester with an inspiring presentation based on research from the recent Talking Jesus report.

Don't miss this inspiring event – register now (free) on





Sharing Faith in 2024 – In preparation for a season of evangelism we have arranged to meet with Steve Lee, a seasoned communicator of the good news of Jesus, to explore and support one another together as we seek to effectively reach the communities in which God has placed us. Church leaders, clergy and lay, are welcome to meet Wed 22 November 7.30pm at the Vineyard Church. Further details from nigel@winchestervineyard.org.uk

Grace and peace to you all for Christmas and the New Year.

Howard

PS: we have an exciting pulpit swap coming up in January to celebrate our unity in Christ! Revd Howard Mellor (Chair CTiW).

United Church Winchester

Church open

for rest and reflection.

Join in some quiet activities with space for meditation and prayer.

Everyone welcome

2pm—4pm

Refreshments available

Every Saturday in December until Christmas.

Brief Encounter with Sarah Holmes

What is the first news/historical event you can recall from your early life?

The Ethiopian famine and the song 'Do they know it's Christmas' in 1984.

One bit of advice you'd give to your younger self?

If you want to do something, there is always a way.

Who was your first hero?



Jana Novotna when she won Wimbledon in 1998. She memorably cried on the Duchess of Kent's shoulder in 1993 when she lost the Wimbledon final to Steffi Graf.



What is your favourite saying or quotation?

'There is no such thing as near and far with God.'
Passed down to me from my great grandfather on a small piece of old parchment, (not sure of the author).

What is your favourite piece of music?

Edward Elgar's Enigma Variations, Nimrod.

What film had a lasting impact on you?

Cry Freedom, 1987, directed and produced by Richard Attenborough.

Special places that you've been to?

Iona and Taizé on retreats as a younger adult; it was a moving experience sharing the Christian faith with others from all over the world.

Where do you feel closest to God?

Walking around in nature. Can be anywhere when I pray.

What is the talent you wish you had?

To paint oil paintings.



What would people be surprised to know about you?

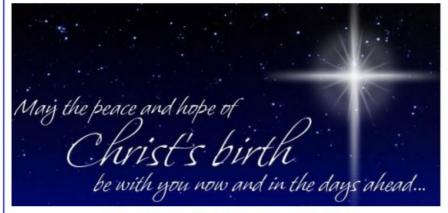
I used to enjoy spending my summers as a teenager feeding calves on my uncle's farm.





Vintage Fun

All welcome!



CHRISTMAS PARTY

Monday 11th December 2 - 4 pm

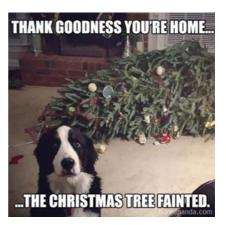
at the

United Church

Jewry Street, Winchester SO23 8RZ
Vintage Fun is a monthly afternoon of friendship
over a cup of tea. Each afternoon will offer a variety of
activities, with tea and cake.

Comedy Corner









The deadline for *February Yours* is **Monday 15 January.** All contributions welcome. Send to **yours@ucw.org.uk.**



Services for December 2023

In-person and live-streamed

3 DECEMBER ADVENT 1

10.30 am Morning Worship (HC) Revd Adrian Bulley

10 DECEMBER ADVENT 2

10.30 am **Morning Worship** South Wonston House

Group

17 DECEMBER ADVENT 3

10.30 am Morning Worship Revd Tim Searle

24 DECEMBER CHRISTMAS EVE

10.30 am Morning Worship Revd Tim Searle

4 pm Carol Service Revd Tim Searle

Preceded by light afternoon tea from 3 pm

31 DECEMBER

10.30 am Morning Worship Margaret Axford

HC: Holy Communion

UCW website: ucw.org.uk/streamed-services/

YouTube: tinyurl.com/ucw-services



Services for January 2024

In-person and live-streamed

7 JANUARY

10.30 am Morning Worship Revd Tim Searle

14 JANUARY COVENANT SERVICE

10.30 am Morning Worship (HC) Revd Tim Searle

21 JANUARY CHURCHES TOGETHER PULPIT EXCHANGE

10.30 am Morning Worship

28 JANUARY

10.30 am Morning Worship Revd Tim Searle

HC: Holy Communion

UCW website: ucw.org.uk/streamed-services/

YouTube: <u>tinyurl.com/ucw-services</u>