Yours

November 2026

Magazine of
The United
Church
Winchester

The United Church, Jewry St, Winchester, SO23 8RZ 01962 849559
Registered Charity no. 1135083 Website: ucw.org.uk

Worship		
Lead	Pat Fry	
Pastoral		
Lead	Jane Lawson	
Bereavement	Sandy Foster	
Flowers Distribution	Lesley Worrall	
Property		
Lead	Martin Ramsey	
Finance		
Treasurer	Janet Messer	
Donations & Gift Aid	David Worrall	
Payments & Expenses	Steve Barber	
Administration		
Church Secretary	Adrian Bulley secretary@ucw.org.uk	
Asst Secretary	Dorothy Lusmore	
Facilities Manager	James Daniel facilities@ucw.org.uk	
Mission		
Lead	Jo Pellatt mission@ucw.org.uk	
Safeguarding		
Co-ordinator	Tim James	07925 691260
Deputy Co-ordinator	Christine Cook	01962 884510
MHA Communities Winchester (formerly LAH)	Hannah Shave	01962 890995
Yours magazine	website page: **ucw.org.uk/yours/** email address: **yours@ucw.org.uk**	

Opening Letter – Saints All the Way to Advent

I love the month of November, with its cool mornings and bright sunshine. Even rain, maybe especially rain! The colour forming on the trees, finding woollies, getting out the winter jacket, scarves and hats. Porridge – with treacle!

This year we are in for an extra special November. We start the month with All Saints' Day and Howard Sharp returns to lead our worship. The word 'saints' (*hagios* Gk, *sanctus* Lat) has a rather holy ring to it, but really it is about being a different kind of person. In the OT the Sabbath was a holy day, the Temple a holy building, they were separate, different.

Many of the city's church leaders meet up each month to pray, normally at St Lawrence at 8.00 am and then enjoy breakfast together nearby. The last time we met it was warm and we breakfasted outside. Suddenly workmen came past carrying the stone saints from the Buttercross, all cleaned and brushed up (see picture). Saints however are not of stone, coloured glass or brass – they are normal people doing extraordinary things, every day.

As Christians we are called to be different people, guided by, propelled by, the love of Christ for others. A people joyfully sharing in worship, caring for our church fellowship and serving the community. In other words, to be Saints (not just to follow them!)

So, we begin November with All the Saints, then we Remember and we finish with Advent. All of them celebrations of huge importance. We remember with the determination to pray for peace, to work (write letters, speak, urge) for peace and to be peacemakers in and among the people we live and work with. Finally at the end of this month, we celebrate Advent – a time of anticipation of new things, of better things, of challenging times. Advent begins a time of celebration but also of examination – how do we measure up to the claims of the One of whom angels sang, shepherds wondered, Mary rejoiced, to say nothing of Joseph?

Friends, this November enjoy the porridge, let the winter sun shine on your face and inner being, but also let us join with saints to seek in every way we can for peace and prepare to come to Advent with wonder sparkling in our eyes as we anticipate again the coming of our Lord.

Howard
Revd Dr Howard Mellor

Editorial

This month's front cover helps us look forward to our Advent theme of 'Waiting in Wonder'. Advent starts on 29 November this year.

As prospective ministers consider coming to lead our church and Wesley, Weeke, Jane Lawson reports on a recent meeting with Circuit leaders asking where God might be leading us next. (See page 7).

David and Lesley Worrall discover a labyrinth in Cornwall and Cathy Blackburn recounts a hike with Jim across the Pyrenees in

the footsteps of the French Resistance and escapees from the Nazi Regime.

All this plus reviews, poems, reflections, news and humour.

Thank you to all this month's contributors.

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

News of the United Church Family

Friends will be very sad to hear of the death of Isabel Witham on Friday 2 October.

We send our love and remember in our prayers all of the family, including Nancy, David, Laurie and Fiona.

Isabel and Alfred were members of this church community for more than 50 years. Latterly they lived at a care home in Alton. Alfred died in March 2024.

They were a much-loved part of this church family, so often joining in with church events and walks.

There was a warm welcome from Isabel to all who joined the church community.

Many of us recall, on arriving as newcomers, how Isabel soon offered an invitation to Sunday lunch and how our children loved to run around in the garden and look at the beehives with Alfred.

Isabel was busy in so many aspects of church life, from pastoral visiting to baking (well known for her lemon drizzle cake!) and serving in the coffee bar. Year after year, she made Christmas cakes

for families who received help from the Winchester Churches Christmas Project. I recall that one year she made and decorated 14 cakes! Isabel always volunteered, too, to bake cakes for regular fundraising events at St Maurice's Covert.

Isabel was a talented flower arranger, providing beautiful arrangements in the sanctuary, including for special Sundays such as harvest festival. She organised a flower festival in our church building, shortly after we moved back into the 'new' church in 1991. We are thankful for all that Isabel did amongst us.

We celebrate the birth of Oscar John McTiffin Fenton, born on 23 September! A son to Alison and Simon Fenton, a brother to (big sister) Grace, and for Helen and Mac a second grandchild. Congratulations!

We continue to pray for and remember all of those who can no longer be with us in church on Sundays, or who are at present unable to do so. You remain very much a part of our church family. We know that some of you regularly join services online, thanks to the tech team.

There are a number of our church family who are undergoing medical tests and treatment. Please be assured of our continued thoughts and prayers.

Please do let me know if you would like me to include anything in this space in future editions of *Yours*. You can email me on: pastoral@ucw.org.uk

Jane Lawson, Pastoral Lead

Any views or opinions expressed in* Yours *are the views and opinions of the individual contributors and do not represent the views or opinions of The United Church unless clearly stated.

What is at the Heart of the United Church and where might God be Leading us Next?

A focus group discussion (representing a range of people) was held on 8 October. We were pleased to have Revd Kate Cambridge and Hilary Evans, senior circuit steward, join us. The meeting aimed to increase understanding of what is at the heart of the United Church while the Circuit considers ministers who might join this church and circuit.

There was rich discussion, and common threads emerged about what's at the heart of UCW. Here's a taster of aspects of the conversation.

A few recurrent characteristics mentioned:

Welcoming.

Inclusive. Recognition of individual contributions.

Ecumenical. Rooted in parent denominations.

Responding to need. Good pastoral and practical care.

Making connections between the Bible and modern life issues of the day.

We aren't afraid to ask difficult questions or raise difficult issues of our time as relevant to our faith.

Preaching is thought-provoking, not dictating.

Lay involvement and leadership are strong, so build on this.

Thoughts about possible next steps included:

Looking forward, how do people find us? e.g. advertising, getting the message out there about what we're like.

What improvements can we make to accessibility?

The church is strong on welcome and less strong on deepening discipleship, nurturing and sharing faith.

Explore the possibilities of linking to the community through creative activities. These can provide touching points with the wider community.

Perhaps we need more of a mix in our worship. Expand our bandwidth?

Develop our inclusivity in pursuing membership of Open Table Network and Inclusive Church Network.

Food for further thought? Perhaps scope to widen the conversation?

Jane Lawson

Worship Enabling Group

We meet usually once a quarter to plan our programme of services and house group meetings. This year, without a regular minister, we have taken more responsibility for planning, and we need your ideas. If you have ideas for worship, or topics to discuss or study, or concerns about worship services, please talk to a member of the team: currently, Howard Mellor, Pat Fry, Tom Belshaw, Margaret Axford, Dorothy Lusmore, Andrew La Follette, Tony Wood. We need a wider representation and would be delighted to welcome new members to join the team. Please talk to me for further details.

Pat Fry

‘The Corners’ by Nadia Bolz-Weber

A Prayer for Those who Died for War

Dear Power Greater Than Myself,

Power greater than my fears, greater than my hopes, greater than my limited understanding of basically everything,

We have set this day aside to remember.

To remember those who died IN war.

Whose bravery was not enough to survive the battlefield.

But God, help us also remember those who died FROM war.

Whose bravery was not enough to survive the battlefield of an injured mind.

Help us remember those who are still trying to survive wars long past.

Who no longer wear the uniform, but still bear the scars, seen and unseen.

Help us also remember those who died FOR war.

Children and mothers and bakers and doctors and people just walking to the grocery store, whose civilian status was not enough to keep them safe from mortar shells, and who do not have flags and parades in their honour.

May their memory be for blessing,

But may it also be for warning.

May their memory help us not forget the long, tangled cost of war, and to see in our own human hearts all the very things that led them to die.

Amen. Nadia Bolz-Weber

Church Lunch

Over 40 of us shared a delicious meal on 18 October, prepared by the wonderful team of cooks in the photo. What a happy bunch as they served their own dishes – no competition at all for which pan was emptied first!!

A moment of good fellowship and togetherness. The team promise another lunch after Christmas – watch this space!

The United Reformed Church Banner

The United Reformed Church is making a banner for its General Assembly in 2027. The banner will reflect all the congregations across the country – including Local Ecumenical Projects like United Church. The idea is that each church makes one square that will form part of a huge patchwork. The theme we are asked to reflect is 'what makes us joyful in the life of our congregation'.

To get us started we're asking everyone to suggest ideas for what makes you joyful about our church – you can use words or pictures (or both) – we're just after the ideas at this stage so don't worry about great works of art or prose! Then a small group will use this to design our square – which we can paint, appliqué, embroider or sew. If you want to volunteer for the small group please mention that when you reply. Please send your responses to Janet Messer by email to emailmesser@gmail.com or hand to me in person before the end of October.

Bethlehem Baubles

Looking for an unusual Christmas gift? Tempted by all the Christmas decorations appearing in the shops? Why not buy baubles from Bethlehem Baubles.

These are truly special baubles. Hand-blown by Muslims and painted by Christians in Bethlehem. These decorations provide meaningful work for artisans in Palestine who have virtually no tourist trade to rely on now. Each bauble comes in its own protective box with a leaflet telling its story – ready to be posted on or stored with your decorations. There are new designs for 2026.

You can purchase direct from their website: bit.ly/4zyx46k. Quote the code c12 to get a discount and United Church will also get a small commission. Or save on the shipping by joining a church order – see Janet if you'd like to add to the order (we'll still get the commission, and you'll still get a discount).

Reformation Sunday

Sometimes it feels as if The United Reformed Church in England is an insignificantly small community of Christians. But I have just learnt that the URC is part of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, which includes more than 100 million Christians, in 230 participating churches, in 109 countries. As part of this Christian Community, we are invited to share in celebrating Reformation Sunday. As we are already committed to joining our Methodist friends in their anniversary celebration on 2 October, we have to find an alternative way.

Reformation Day is celebrated in the last week of October, commemorating the day when Martin Luther is said to have nailed his '95 Theses' (calls for reform) to the church door in Wittenberg where he taught Biblical Theology. Whilst there had been earlier movement for reform both within and outside the Roman Catholic Church in Western Europe, this is seen as the decisive moment beginning the Protestant Reformation.

But this is not just about history: the call to worship for that service begins:
'The Reformed Church was not born from a desire for comfort, but from the need for faithfulness.
It was not born to preserve privilege, but to proclaim good news.
It was not born complete. It was born reforming.
The Reformed Church, always reforming.
Today we worship God, who still speaks, still calls, and still opens new paths.'

So we are challenged today to consider what needs to be reformed, within our churches and in the world we serve; not just to consider, but to take action.

The URC in Britain invites us all to use the opening prayer from that service in our own prayer times:

God of wind and fire, Breath moving over chaos,
Voice that still echoes through locked doors and fearful hearts,
You keep calling your people forward to a costly discipleship
when fear tells us to remain still.
You awaken your Church through prophets, poets, reformers, and ordinary disciples who dare to strike the walls of silence with truth, compassion, and hope.
Today we gather from many places, many languages, many struggles and memories, yet held together by your grace.
As the hammer once echoed upon the wooden door, may your Spirit echo among us now. Strike against our indifference.
Strike against the fear that keeps us quiet.
Strike against every wall that divides your people, wounds creation, protects injustice, or silences the vulnerable.
Reform us again, O God.

Reform our worship when it becomes performance instead of prayer, or mere repetition without soul.
Reform our churches when comfort matters more than courage.
Reform our theology when it forgets the poor, the excluded, and the wounded.
Reform our lives until grace becomes flesh among us.
When we are perplexed, teach us not to surrender to despair.
When hope feels fragile, teach us again the stubborn hope of the Gospel.
Move us beyond nostalgia into courageous and costly discipleship.
Move us beyond institutional survival into communities where justice can breathe and communion can flourish.
And today, as we prepare to name what still needs reform in our churches,
our nations, and our world,
give us humble hearts, prophetic imagination,
and the perseverance to pursue truth with compassion,
to seek not only justice but reparation,
and to keep knocking on the doors of history.
May this worship become living witness:

bread shared, truth spoken, dignity defended, creation cherished, and love embodied.
In the name of the Creator, the Living Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pat Fry with Extracts from World Communion of Reformed Churches material for worship on Reformation Sunday 2026

Kerdroya – A Cornish Hedge Labyrinth on Bodmin Moor

A post-script to the church members' afternoon in Itchen Abbas

Some readers will remember Alison and Clive Wood's kind invitation to spend an enjoyable summer afternoon with them in their garden in Itchen Abbas. During our time there, several of us took the opportunity to cross the road to visit St Mary's Church and whilst there to walk the tiled walkable labyrinth set into the chancel floor – an intriguing first time and for us, thought we, our only 'labyrinthine' experience.

It was something of a surprise then, whilst visiting relatives who reside on Bodmin Moor in Cornwall, to be offered the opportunity to walk a second labyrinth just 2 months later. On this occasion it was outside and the much, much bigger Kerdroya, a Cornish Hedge Labyrinth set on Bodmin Moor beside the shores of Colliford Lake.

Recently opened after 7 years of construction and measuring 56 metres wide, Kerdroya has been built

using twelve regional styles of traditional Cornish hedging that combine stone walling with compacted earth and vegetation, creating a distinctive boundary style unique to Cornwall, as well as habitats for local flora and fauna. The full route to the centre and out is about one mile, winding through nearly 780 yards of Cornish hedge and is considered the largest labyrinth of its kind in the world.

As some of the Cornish hedges are very new, the hoped-for colonisation by local wildlife has yet to take place but those constructed earlier show clear signs of what the whole will become in just a few years' time.

In recent times labyrinths have undergone a significant revival and found a renewed purpose as places for spiritual and religious experience, reflection, and interaction; for us, walking a Kerdroya devoid of other people as it was yet early in the day, it was not difficult to realise and appreciate that description as even the sounds of the busy nearby A30 did not reach us; perhaps the wind in the right direction!

Should your journey into Cornwall's furthest reaches leave you with a little time then a stop at Colliford Lake to experience nearby Kerdroya is full worthy of consideration. Colliford Lake is clearly signposted off the west bound A30; although directly accessible off the east bound carriageway, it is far, far safer to use adjacent junctions with their under or overbridge crossings of an extremely busy, fast moving and so very dangerous A30.

Notes.

Although in the past the terms labyrinth and maze have been used indiscriminately and confusingly; with increasing interest in the early 20th century, the difference between them was clearly articulated –

labyrinths have just one continuous path (unicursal) and are not a puzzle, whilst mazes have many branching paths (multicursal) and so are a puzzle. For each, however, you have to turn either right or left immediately on entering, depending upon the design. Thus, Kerdroya itself may be defined as 'left-hand unicursal labyrinth', i.e. you turn to the left directly you enter it to follow just a single path that serves both the way to the centre and then back out again.

Kerdroya is a Cornish language descriptive word that means 'castle of turning' and as you walk round and round the path to the centre of the labyrinth you do become aware of a perceptible increase in height. That said, Kerdroya is accessible to all, whether on foot or in wheel or push chairs, although inbound wheelchair users may have to be a little patient and forbearing when they have to pass the same type of outbound conveyance.

David & Lesley Worrall

Coping with Alzheimer's Disease

Channel 4's *Jon Snow: A Last Big Story* is a deeply moving and at times uplifting portrayal of a brilliant man who has Alzheimer's disease.

It is a documentary reflecting the possibility, for some who face the challenges of Alzheimer's disease, of finding opportunities for fulfilment and joy, showing how this might be facilitated by others, through encouragement and support.

It doesn't shy away from the realities of the disease. At the same time, it shows without sentimentality the essence of a kind and great man and that this has not disappeared with the onset of the disease.

Jon's wife Precious said, 'I'm not under any illusion that it isn't hard to care for someone with Alzheimer's, but that burden can be lifted, by finding opportunities for adventure.'

The Guardian newspaper *(June 2026)* described the programme as follows:

'The hour-long documentary follows the 78-year-old investigative journalist and former Channel 4 news anchor in the wake of his diagnosis with Alzheimer's disease. During the course of one of his visits with his wife, Dr Precious Lunga, to family in Zambia, he gets wind of a story about a nearby environmental catastrophe involving a Chinese mining company that has gone virtually unreported … His nephew Charles Sibanda-Lunga takes him to visit the environmental activists … Snow's compassion, his outraged sense of justice ("The whole field is dead! And nothing has been done!") remains undimmed.

'This intelligent, gentle-but-unsentimental hour gives the journalist his laurels and the man his dignity, all while acknowledging the cruelty and grief behind the disease.'

The documentary is available to stream on Channel 4. Or on YouTube bit.ly/4zyAaHu. It aired in June 2026.

Jane Lawson

Entering the Wisdom Years – Winter Gifts

Getting older is a bit like coming down a mountain after a long hike. The descent is often harder than going up, and getting older is in many ways harder than being young.

Coming down the mountain of life takes us by a route we have never walked before and challenges us in ways we are not familiar with. We have to learn to acknowledge our limitations, to accept help when we need it and to deal with a return to 'the plain', sometimes from the heights of responsibility and respect. We have seen amazing things as we hiked. We have seen the view from the mountaintop. We have stories to tell. We have wisdom to share. We have discovered unexpected winter gifts. For example …

Simplification – we don't have so many 'needs', we may want to live more simply and we are more willing and able to do without things we once thought essential.

Tolerance – we are more readily able to see both, or all sides of an issue and may find ourselves in the role of peacemaker or bridge-builder. Experience may have gifted us with a greater degree of empathy.

The gift of being who we really are. We are less concerned with what other people are thinking, because we feel more at home in our own skins. We have learned to accept our weaknesses and embrace our strengths.

Perhaps the greatest gift of all is the gift of the bigger picture. We have lived through many crises, both local and global, and we are still here! We have gained a longer perspective about the many difficulties that life throws at us. We can listen patiently and with empathy to the struggles of the young, while knowing deep down, that 'this too shall pass'. The ocean of life is deeper than its surface turbulence.

Margaret Silf is the author of a number of books for 21st century spiritual pilgrims, and a retreat and workshop leader. She works ecumenically and is passionate about making Christian spirituality accessible in everyday life. Her latest title is *The Wisdom Years: A Spirituality of Ageing*, (DLT 2025).

Read Margaret's other reflections on Entering the wisdom years on St Paul's Cathedral's website at bit.ly/3WeP0Vb.

Anna Chaplaincy for older people

Vintage Fun

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Caraway

In the Steps of the French Resistance

My husband Jim and I were invited to join in a trip going over the Pyrenees with a group of many ex-RAF personnel. We first had this invitation by a person who lives close to us in Abbotts Barton, who knew keen people interested in remembering those who risked their lives walking over the Pyrenees to help those who wanted to escape the Nazi regime. Many whom the resistance people helped were Jewish people escaping from being sent to concentration camps. Some were RAF pilots who had made a difficult journey through France, possibly after their plane had been shot down and who then made the emergency parachute jump on to French soil. Some wanted to escape the Vichy French rule, where many Vichy police had collaborated with the Germans. All these people were helped to escape in difficult conditions across harsh winds and snow by the resistance people. Our walk was to remember those who unconditionally helped others to safety.

We flew into Toulouse airport on 29 August 2026 and made our way to a hotel in Toulouse previously booked. We found out while we were there that it had previously been the Gestapo headquarters in Toulouse.

There were organised minibuses for the 18 of us doing this trip stopping in Alos, and Seix. The hardest part of the walk was walking up the mountain through mist and climbing over rocks and boulders. We had 3 guides with us, who were supportive and made sure we all kept together as some were at different levels of ability.

At the refuge all 18 of us shared a dormitory (bunk beds). That was alright as we were all tired and everyone was up again at 6.00 am to have a quick breakfast and walk down to a lake and then up through impacted snow to the crest of the mountain. Here we could see Spain one side and France the other.

We had a small service of remembrance, with an ex-RAF staff member reading out the words said at each Remembrance Sunday:

‘They shall grow not old, as we that are left to grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning

We will remember them’.

This was incredibly moving as we were all in awe of those who helped people to safety across into Spain through difficult terrain.

On our descent we had a difficult narrow traverse to make, but again our guides were there to make sure we could all negotiate holding on to rock faces and traversing again down the steep descent into Spain.

The skies were bright blue and we saw vultures flying above us. We saw marmots popping up from their burrows. It truly was the most amazing walk, remembering those who not only once, but many times risked their lives to help vulnerable and some desperate people to the safety of neutral Spain.

I felt very humbled as we had modern gear with waterproof light jackets, good walking shoes, and food in our stomachs. But those helping others may have only been eating berries – we saw blueberries growing wild - and have had very mismatched clothing. A truly incredible experience I would love to do again.

Cathy Blackburn

From 1976 to 2026: Heat, Memory and Change

I was fortunate to win one of a limited number of traditional apprenticeships in the Brighton Parks and Gardens Department. The Director at the time was Mr J. R. B. (Ray) Evison, a man of considerable horticultural standing and the author of a number of books.

Part of the systematic training programme involved moves around the borough, to gain experience of as wide a range of horticultural operations as possible. In 1976 I was assigned first to the plant nursery at Stanmer, working in the glasshouses, and then to the western end of the Brighton seafront. Outwardly, these were arguably the worst places to be in the hot summer of 1976: glasshouses, followed by a seafront with no shade from trees.

Both, however, had their compensations. At Stanmer I worked mainly with cool-house plants such as Cyclamen, cool temperate ferns and ornamental Asparagus (*Asparagus sprengeri* and relatives). The glasshouses were shaded from April to September, and in hot spells the vents and doors were left open day and night. The houses were also frequently damped down, which gave us the chance to damp ourselves down too, if we wished. The seafront, meanwhile, had no shade but did have a cooling sea breeze.

The two venues also offered a contrast in human interaction. The nursery was open only to official guided tours, while the seafront was awash with thousands of people every summer day. With the onset of autumn came the conference season. In 1976 Brighton hosted the Conservative Party, and delegates made use of the putting green opposite the Brighton Conference Centre if they wished to practise their putting. One of them was Michael Heseltine, then a Shadow Cabinet minister. He was clearly interested in, and knowledgeable about, horticulture. He is arguably one of the parliamentarians of this and the late twentieth century most engaged with the subject, and 1976 was the very

year he and his wife bought Thenford, now home to a large garden and arboretum of high renown, with regular open days.

Meanwhile, the seafront had traditional bedding, with the sunken garden as its jewel in the crown. It lay immediately east of the boundary between Brighton and Hove, which is at its most recognisable on the seafront, where the large Peace Statue stands right on the line. The public often asked about plants in flower at a given time, *Tamarix ramosissima* being one example. In 2026, by contrast, some members of the public might well object to hosepipes being used during a hosepipe ban.

Returning to these two places fifty years on, what has the last half century brought?

The Stanmer nursery I knew in 1976 no longer exists, but it has been replaced by something much more accessible to the public: The One Garden Brighton (www.onegardenbrighton.com). It sits within the Stanmer Estate, next to the University of Sussex. Stanmer Park was the estate of a branch of the Pelham family, which produced two eighteenth-century prime ministers. If you enjoy freely accessible public gardens, it is well worth a visit when exploring the wider Brighton area.

The Sunken Gardens and the other seafront gardens, by contrast, have been entirely obliterated, perhaps because of the increased financial pressures on local authorities in providing statutory services over the intervening years.

There is at least one other strong tie between the two places: both were used as filming locations for the 1969 film *Oh! What a Lovely War*, directed by Richard Attenborough. Being local, I was taken as a child to watch the filming on the West Pier, which was then still standing.

One last thought about two summers of hot, dry weather exactly fifty years apart. Rightly or wrongly, I could not stop thinking of the biblical concept of the Year of Jubilee. Perhaps that is because, in a

spirit of interdisciplinary endeavour, I am always looking for arithmetical rhythms and sequences in history and politics. And that was before I read Dr Ian Paul's commentary on Revelation.

Chris Young

Part of the One Garden at Stanmer on the outskirts of Brighton. In the background is the house of the former plant nursery's deputy manager; I always thought this was a fine exemplar of a detached Sussex country cottage. In the 1970s espalier trained pears adorned the walls seen in the picture.

These seaside gardens are at Eastbourne, just west of the pier. Unlike Brighton, Eastbourne have retained their promenade flower beds; indeed, until relatively recently they were still planting out thousands of traditional bedding plants. Lately this practice has been replaced with drought resistant plants; these were looking in fine form when I made a visit to the town this hot summer of 2026.

News of the Wider Church

Pope Leo XIV underwent a successful operation at Rome's Gemelli Hospital. Following the operation, the Vatican said the 71-year-old was diagnosed with lung adenocarcinoma, a type of lung cancer, after surgeons removed the lower lobe of his right lung.

Vatican commentator Austen Ivereigh told *Premier Christian News* the Pope's illness offered an important spiritual message about human vulnerability. 'In a world of supermen and tyrants who despise weakness, it's really important that the Pope is frail, is vulnerable,' he said. 'He's there by the grace of God,' he added, explaining that the Pope's experience could deepen his connection with others facing cancer. Vulnerability offers another form of Christian witness, demonstrating that spiritual leadership does not depend on physical strength.

A priest in the Palestinian Christian town of Taybeh is appealing for help after its olive groves were vandalised. In a letter calling for prayers and published by the Catholic aid agency CAFOD, Fr Bashar Fawadleh said that Israeli settlers had been damaging and stealing olive trees causing many families to face serious difficulties accessing their land. He said the vandalism was 'reducing a harvest that is essential for the livelihood of our community'. For generations olive groves have been an economic necessity and an important expression of identity and perseverance in the region. Fr Bashar wrote that this year 'the losses have been particularly painful. Many families will produce far less olive oil than they need for their own households. Some who have spent their lives caring for these trees may now find

themselves unable to rely on the fruits of their own land'. He added that he was 'deeply concerned' over the impact of the situation on families who are already facing significant challenges, because 'every lost harvest places additional pressure on people striving to remain on their land and preserve their way of life'. CAFOD's Middle East Programme Officer Maya Street said this was not 'an isolated occurrence' but part of an 'increasing pattern of violence against Palestinians, and their land and heritage.'

The 90th anniversary of the famed **The Battle of Cable Street** was marked in October, as part of Black History Month.

Three years before Nazi troops stormed into Poland, sparking the Second World War, a heroic Methodist minister and his congregation in London's East End aided protestors clashing with the might of the British Union of Fascists (BUF). The Methodist Church assisted the protestors against the rising far-right movement. In 1936 Oswald Mosley's BUF was on the rise, inspired by fascist movements that had taken power in Europe – notably in Germany and Italy – and had thousands of members across the UK. Calling for alliances with the fascist powers and espousing racist and antisemitic policies, the BUF planned to march with their infamous Blackshirt supporters through London's East End on 4 October. Both fighting and peaceful protest happened at various points, forcing police to reroute the fascist march through Cable Street.

Members of St George's Methodist Chapel on Cable Street, led by minister the Revd Percy Inneson, opened the church to the crowds fighting the Blackshirts, offering vital support and comfort. Cable Street would prove to be the scene of the fiercest fighting and police told Mosley that the rest of his march could not go ahead.

The BUF was made illegal by the British Government in 1940 and Mosely imprisoned.

'Although the iconic church in Cable Street is no longer there, the justice-seeking witness of the Methodist Church in Tower Hamlets today remains the very antithesis of bigotry and repression. The spirit of resistance in 1936 lives on.'

A primary school in Scotland has defended its decision to drop the word 'Christmas' from its seasonal cards. In an email to parents, Kaimhill School in Aberdeen said it wanted to reflect the school's multicultural and multi-faith community and so would be rebranding the cards as 'Winter cards' rather than 'Christmas cards'. The email said the terminology 'helps ensure that our language is welcoming and inclusive of all members of our school community. Of course, families are free to refer to these cards as Christmas cards if they wish.'

But the decision has been heavily criticised, with Reform UK MSP Angela Ross saying it was an attempt to put 'inclusivity before British religious celebration' and 'part of a wider campaign that is steadily erasing British cultural life from our schools'.

The school's head teacher, Susie Webster said that after a screenshot of the email was shared on social media, the deputy head had received an 'abusive and threatening' telephone call which was 'followed by disappointing comments on social media suggesting that Christmas was somehow being removed from our school. I want to reassure you that is simply not the case.'

Scotland's Education convener Martin Greig has also criticised the backlash. He told the Press and Journal that: 'It is not appropriate to weaponise Christmas. The event encourages people to come together freely and share goodness and hospitality'. A spokesman for Aberdeen city council said: 'The school community enjoys

celebrating a number of festivals and Christmas continues to play a large part in Kaimhill School at this time of year'.

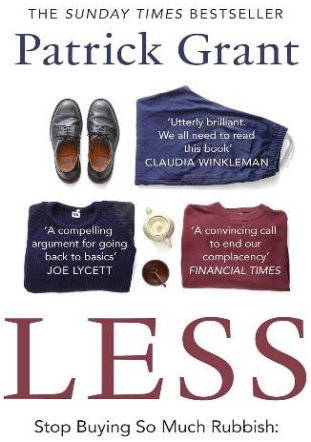
England captain Maro Itoje has revealed he has been 'teased' during his rugby union career for not swearing because of his Christian faith. Speaking on the *For the Love of Rugby* podcast, Itoje was asked whether he makes a conscious effort to mind his language while on the pitch. He said: 'It is a conscious thing, but not so conscious because I never do it.

'It's mainly for religious reasons. I don't believe that is the way the Lord wants us to use our mouths. With no judgement on other people, I try to refrain from that.' Nicknamed The Pearl, the 31-year-old has spoken about how he has gone from 'luke-warm Christian' to having Jesus at the centre of his life.

'The humility that I have tried to embody throughout my life definitely comes from knowing that everything I have has been a gift, not by my own doing, but by the guy upstairs,' he told *BBC Sport* last year. Itoje was speaking as England prepares for the Nations Championship, with the first game against Australia on 8 November.

A retired Church of England bishop has urged Christians to take practical action against modern slavery, warning that the demand

for cheap goods can contribute to exploitation. Bishop Alastair, who was the Bishop of Derby between 2005 and 2018, told *Premier* that Christianity provides a clear reason to stand up for people affected by trafficking and exploitation, consumers should question companies about their supply chains. Speaking to *Premier Christian News* at the G20 Interfaith Forum in Salt Lake City, Utah, he said people of faith had a responsibility to look beyond their own needs and care for the vulnerable. 'Most of us contribute to modern slavery as consumers who want cheap goods and services,' he said. 'If you go to the store and buy a T-shirt for £1.50, okay, buy it. Great, you know you'll look good in it. But when you get home, just take a minute, email the company, and say, "This is a great bargain, can you assure me there's no exploitation in your supply chain that produces this very low price?"



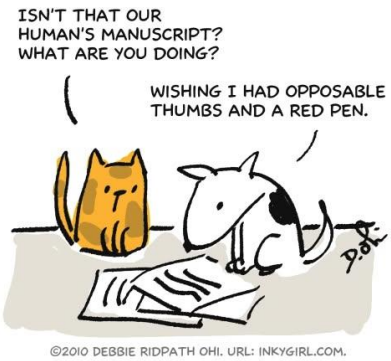
'Companies are frightened to death of that. It would only take a minute of your time, and yet we don't bother. We just put on the t-shirt and think, great, I've saved a lot of money. We've got to look out for other people and not ourselves.'

According to the Global Slavery Index, billions of pounds worth of goods at risk of modern slavery are imported by G20 nations each year. Clothes account for around a third of the total. Meanwhile, a total of 6,003 potential victims of modern slavery were referred to the Home Office from January to March 2026.

'Every human being is precious. In our language, each person is a child of God. We're all equal,' Bishop Alastair said.

Dorothy Lusmore

Comedy Corner



The deadline for December/January *Yours* is Mon**day 16 November.** All contributions welcome. Send to yours@ucw.org.uk.

UNITED CHURCH
WINCHESTER

Services for November 2026

In-person and live-streamed

1 NOVEMBER

10.30 am **Morning Worship (HC)** Revd Howard Sharp

8 NOVEMBER REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

10.30 am **Morning Worship** Revd Howard Mellor

15 NOVEMBER

9.00 am **Holy Communion** Revd Gary Watts

10.30 am **Morning Worship** Revd Gary Watts

22 NOVEMBER

10.30 am **Morning Worship** **Pat Fry**

29 NOVEMBER

10.30 am **Morning Worship** **Tom Belshaw**

followed by Church Meeting

HC: Holy Communion

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

YouTube: tinyurl.com/ucw-services