

SPOTLIGHT

Offington Park Methodist Church Magazine



December 2024/January 2025

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CHURCH FAMILY NEWS



BIRTHDAY

Mollie B

Margaret H

We wish you all the best for your special days!

OFFERTORIES

Month	Cash & Envelopes	Standing Orders
October	£715.00	£6110.33

The Editors would like to wish all our readers,
advertisers and contributors
a very happy Christmas
and a peaceful and blessed New Year.





Dear Friends,

As we enter the season of Advent, the time of waiting, it is apparent around us that many are eager to rush through this season, in order to come to the main event.

Christmas songs are already blaring out over sound systems; Christmas trees have been erected and decorated; parties and meals are in full swing. Our own Christmas tree at church will be up for the Christmas Fair on 30 November, partly because it was less disruptive to our outreach project to do this while it is closed for extension work being carried out to the café area at the back of the church; but also because we are going to be using it during our Advent services.

Why are people so keen to advance the start of Christmas? Apart from those who commercially want to encourage people to spend as much as they can for as long as they can, I think it is the need for light to shine not only into dark spaces and the shorter days, but the need for light in the anxious times some are facing with lack of employment security, poor mental health, living below the poverty line, the rise in drug abuse and the general unease of the situations around the world, just to mention a few.

This year in Advent we are following the Methodist Church's 'Hush the Noise,' which is based on the carol, "It came upon the midnight clear". Our services won't all be quiet, far from it, but it is a beautiful carol and has much to say to us as we look to retell the Christmas story once again. There will be daily readings on our website for those who wish to follow along.

Advent and Christmas bring a unique opportunity to share the love of God and to shine the light of hope we hold with others. Jesus is the Light of the World and I pray this year we will be able to offer that hope to many more as we continue to welcome around 300 people on most weeks into our Holy Space, not just over Christmas but into the New Year. As the Christmas song declares, "so here it is, Merry Christmas, everybody's having fun. Look to the future now, we've only just begun."

Many thanks for the letters and cards of encouragement and support. I look forward to sharing in this season and the future with hope, excitement and anticipation.

I pray you will have a healthy, peaceful and blessed Christmas.

With Love and Blessings

Dawn

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Jonah



Revenge is a dish best served cold. That's what Jonah thought. The thing was, he was a prophet - a man of God!

God told Jonah to preach to the great city of Nineveh; telling them that God's judgement was coming. The people there were extremely wicked and violent. And they were also Jonah's enemies. Because Jonah knew God loves to show mercy, he ran the other way. He didn't want the Ninevites to be saved!

Jonah's story is one of the most entertaining of the whole Bible! It includes a suicide-mission in a raging storm, prayers from the belly of a massive fish and the shortest sermon in the world preached in the middle of the most dangerous place on earth. And all the way through it, this sulky prophet rants and raves at God's mercy.

Do you need to get even when someone hurts you? Do you like to see the bad guys get what they deserve?

Then the book of Jonah will force you to answer this big question: Are you okay with God loving your enemies?

the lighthouse
@ Offington Park



SOFT PLAY AND CAFE

CATCH A TIDDLER FOR THE LIGHTHOUSE!

One thing the Lighthouse Soft Play and Café is always short of (apart from volunteers, that is (see article on page 24) is small change, specifically five pence pieces!

You can help us by saving as many of these tiddler coins as you can at home. When you have at least £1 worth, bring them in to the Welcome Desk and we'll swap them for a shiny £1 coin. We will also happily swap other small denomination coins (British only!) for larger coins. The change will really do us good!

Thank you in advance for your help.

The Lighthouse Team

THE HOUSE OF GOOD

The House of Good is the National Churches Trust's ground-breaking research into the value of churches to all of us. We have long known that churches are important to society. But how important?



That's the question that *the House of Good* set out to answer, and the findings are remarkable. *The House of Good* demonstrates the importance of church buildings to everyone in the UK. Their research showed that churches provide an astonishing **£55 billion** of social value to the UK every year. *The House of Good* calculates six key areas of economic and social value including the market value of churches, as well as the huge wellbeing benefit to people from support services provided in church buildings.

Churches and church buildings provide massive social support to people and communities throughout the UK, including in the most deprived areas. They provide a network of social support which helps to build more resilient and socially cohesive communities which results in huge wellbeing benefits. For every £1 invested in churches, the benefits to society are worth over £16.

But churches are guaranteed no support from governments, and many are in danger of closure. In England, there are 900 places of worship on Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk' Register; In Wales, 25 per cent of historic churches and chapels have closed in the last decade; and the Church of Scotland is actively planning to close as many as 30%-40% of its churches.

Churches are in crisis and urgently need our support. So, now we know just how much we all stand to lose if we allow churches to close, what can we do to help?

Every Church Counts is National Churches Trust's blueprint of how churches can be saved for the future. It wants the UK Government, heritage organisations and Christian denominations to work together to tackle the UK's single biggest heritage challenge, starting with a national conversation on the future of church buildings.

To be a part of this, and for more information, visit: [Every Church Counts | National Churches Trust](#)

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION (EDI)



Jesus preached about discrimination and judgment based on outward appearances. Jesus, our perfect example of a righteous man, welcomed all with open, loving arms and commanded us to do the same.

No physical or financial trait changes the way God sees that person, treats that person, and loves that person. God did not create a different patriarch for the different races.

As part of our rollout of EDI, we will be featuring stories from members of the church and community in upcoming issues of Spotlight and on the church main website. Please remember to go and check out our EDI webpage . This can be found on the top bar of the Home page under 'More' (scroll to the end) and click on 'EDI'. Alternatively, on your browser type: <https://offingtonpark.org.uk/edi>

Here are some important upcoming EDI dates for your Diaries:

DECEMBER 2024

- ◇ 1st – World AIDS Day
- ◇ 2nd – International Day for the Abolishment of Slavery
- ◇ 3rd – International Day of Persons with Disabilities
- ◇ 10th – Human Rights Day

JANUARY 2025

- * 1st – World Day of Peace
- * 4th – World Braille Day
- * 17th – International Mentoring Day
- * 21st – World Religion Day
- * 27th – Holocaust Memorial Day

If you would like to share an EDI item to highlight any community work or ministry you are doing in this space, please contact Tanya via the Church Office (details on back page).

HELP! IT'S NEARLY CHRISTMAS

The frost is crisp, the snow's in the lane,
The jingling songs begin again.
The frantic dash as everyone tries
To be the first to eat the mince pies!

Christmas is near, it's thundering in,
We'll just have to take it on the chin.
We'd like to take it slow and steady
But if we do we won't be ready.

The tree stands bare, a lonely sight,
Its lights unstrung, its starless height.
Boxes of baubles, tangled and tight,
No sign of the tinsel! This can't be right!

The gifts to wrap, the cards to send,
The shopping list that will not end.
Biscuits to bake, a pudding to steam,
And no doubt Tesco's won't have any cream.

The kids want magic, chill frosts, maybe snow,
The in-laws arrive as the wine starts to flow.
The cat's in the tree, the dog's eaten the ham,
I'm barely holding it all in hand!

But then I pause in this mad parade,
And think of the memories being made.
The laughter, the warmth, the love we share,
The chaos fades - it's beyond compare.

So the biscuits can burn, the bows fall flat,
The mess will settle, we'll smile at all that.
For Christmas isn't just a chore,
It's the joy of love - and so much more.

So here's to the madness, the festive cheer,
The ever-sought hope of a brighter New Year,
To Grandad's jokes, which have us in fits,
Yes - it's nearly Christmas - but we love it to bits!



THE LIGHTHOUSE @ OFFINGTON PARK

the lighthouse
@ Offington Park

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROJECT UPDATE



SOFT PLAY AND CAFE

In the previous issue of Spotlight, we said that the Community Outreach Project (COP) was virtually complete. We can now safely say that it is.

All significant payments from the COP Fund have been made and there is a residue within the fund which will be applied to cover ongoing commitments such as staff salaries and other operational changes and improvements as recommended by the Operations Group and approved where necessary by Church Council.

In terms of changes, we are looking to get new signage for the car park to direct people to both Zach's Café and The Lighthouse, and we will be purchasing some new 'A' Boards for advertising. These will replace the tired and worn-out boards we are currently using to advertise both community facilities.

Some of the bigger improvements are obvious (such as the 'wave painting' in the corridor connecting the Lighthouse to the toilets and the installation of new eco-efficient sensor-controlled lighting in that area) and some not so obvious (for example the installation of new electrical sockets to enable equipment to be used at the Lighthouse reception desk without trailing wires creating safety concerns as at present).

The Lighthouse continues to grow as awareness builds amongst the community. We have received some fantastic reviews on social media and we are fully booked for party Saturdays until March 2025. If you have a child or grandchild that is looking for a soft play party, go quickly to our website www.lighthousesoftplay.com and book it now while there is space!

We have been pleased to see how much crossover there is between the Lighthouse and Zach's Café, with regular customers using Zach's either before or after their soft play session. We are keen to build on the interactions and, as we go to press, the new extended Zach's counter is being built. We are hoping and praying that this will be a major improvement for customers and volunteers alike. And that brings us to volunteers, which are still desperately needed.

Please read Pam's article on page 24 and think, pray and ask God to show you where you can be His hands and feet in this key venture.

A CLOSER LOOK AT....SALOME *the disciple who learned what greatness really means*



The world honours the great people of history with titles, statues and tales of legend. When Jesus invited her two sons to become his disciples, Salome knew greatness lay in their future too. And as a good mother, she sought to help them get the very best out of their new position in Jesus' service.

But Salome had the same view of greatness as the world around her: she asked Jesus, 'Grant that my sons can sit on thrones either side of you in your kingdom'.

'You don't know what you're asking', was Jesus' unsettling reply.

Salome needed to learn what it really means to be great in the Kingdom of God. She saw the Saviour serving the sick and poor; she saw the King humbly riding into Jerusalem on a donkey; and she saw him rebuking rather than recruiting the powerful (but hypocritical) religious leaders.

Yet when her King was hung naked on a cross, she was one of the few who stayed with him. She had discovered that true greatness - the humble, serving greatness of God's kingdom - is rarely recognised or valued in this world.

If you want to become great, walk the road to the cross next to Salome and experience with her what real greatness really is.

Follow the story in Matthew 20: 20-28 and Mark 15:40, 16:1

LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE PAGE

Well. how many things did you find beginning with the letter **S**? We couldn't possibly list them all, but one brave family had an attempt to find what they could and came up with 216!! We're not sure that 'spider's legs' counts as 8 things, but well done for trying! We stand in awe of your superb attempt.

Watch out for more challenges in 2025.



MOVE OVER, STRICTLY!

Even Strictly, with all its dazzling sequins and sparkling costumes, can't compete with the spectacle of thousands of starlings in a murmuration! You don't need to be in the country to see them, either. They are all over, from nature reserves to supermarket car parks. So pop the soup in a flask, don the hat and coat and take a wander to see what you can spot. Here are some things to look out for.



OWLS

As the nights draw in, young Tawny Owls are noisily making themselves known, hoping to muscle in and set up their own territory. But if other owls are close by, there's often a standoff in the darkness, so it's hoots before dawn. Listen out as the rival calls reverberate through the parks and gardens. The famous 'too-wit, too-woo' is actually a duet – the female making the first note and the male answering.

Whilst there are short-eared owls in the UK all year round, now is a great time to see them as more arrive from Scandinavia, Russia and Iceland to escape the freezing conditions further north. The best places to spot them are during the day at our wetlands and coastal marshes, flying low over the landscape on the hunt for rodents and ready to swoop down at deadly speed to catch their supper.

STARLINGS

The Starlings are beginning to do their thing. At roost sights around the UK, these birds, with their shiny 80s wedding suits, are beginning to gather for a dance, as many more arrive from the continent for winter. As the Starling ranks swell, their performances can switch from a cast of hundreds to flocks of thousands, sometimes tens of thousands. Be in no doubt, this swirling choreographed marvel is one of our most spectacular natural events, outclassing even Tasha Ghouri on Strictly!

Like the best surprises, a murmuration can catch you unawares and happen almost anywhere there's a safe place for starlings to roost, even in fields behind the supermarket. At dusk on a crisp clear autumn evening, keep your eyes peeled for a perfect performance!

But, what's it all about? Well, the murmuration provides the birds with safety in numbers, warmth and the opportunity to share information about the best feeding grounds. To watch a murmuration, it is best to check in advance before heading out. There are specialist websites such as [Starlings Murmurations UK | Starling Roost Sites](#) which offer good updates on the latest sightings.

BACK TO BLACK (AND BLUE)

Around this time, the regular rowdy garden crew is usually starting to return in greater numbers, hopping and flitting around after nature's harvest begins to wane. The alarm calls of blackbirds and the manic chirps of Blue Tits can rise up around the bird table if you keep it well stocked and your feeders full.

WHOOOP, WHOOOP!

The UK can see up to 16,000 whooper swans descend from Iceland, announcing their arrival with pleasant honks like a broken old car horn. Bewick swans are smaller and make their journey south from Siberia. Both birds have black and yellow bills which can make it hard to tell them apart, but the Bewick's call is more 'excited dog' than old car. Also spending winter with us are Canada Geese, Greylag Geese and Barnacle Geese, and we welcome 400,000 pink-footed geese from Iceland, easily distinguishable by, you guessed it, pink legs!

ALL AT SEA

Here's a great seal fact - did you know that 40% of the entire world population of Atlantic Grey Seals can be found swimming around the UK coast? Most are in the north and west, especially Cardigan Bay in Wales and the islands of Mull and Iona in Scotland. However, there are also populations on the coasts of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk. As the temperatures drop and the wind and waves begin to rise, the seals head to sandy shores. The males arrive first, looking to set out a territory. The females soon follow, seeking out a peaceful place to give birth to pups born with a brilliant white coat of fur. The exact time varies depending on where you are in the UK.

Happy spotting!



To our generous donors:
I am delighted that we
were able to send off 70
boxes for the children of
Moldova last month. My

thanks go to all who contributed a box, or
donated money, or put items for placement
in other boxes. I know that much thought
and love were put into the boxes. It is a joy
to share the love of Jesus in this way. Thank
you so much.

Margaret H



OFFINGTON CAMEO

Friday December 13:

"A Christmas Celebration"

Fun, Food and Fellowship!

Friday January 10 2025:

"A Summer Garden Party"

Friday January 24 2025:

"From a Bygone Age"

in the Allan Fletcher Hall, 10:15am for a 10:30am start

CAMEO

Margaret H

ANYONE FOR TEA?

Sue K is organising a New Year afternoon tea. A great chance to have a quiet afternoon to meet with old friends, make new friends and enjoy some chat, tea, and cake.

Why not take some time out for yourself, especially if you're a carer for someone, or you just want time away from a busy schedule. Interested? Then contact Sue via the Church Office which has more information and can book you a place.





Church Office and Welcome Desk:

We close at noon on Thursday 19 December and reopen at 9:00am on Thursday 2 January

Zach's Café

We close at noon on Thursday 19 December and reopen at 9:00am on Monday 6 January

The Lighthouse Soft Play and Café

We close at 3:00pm on Saturday 21 December and reopen at 9:30am on Thursday 2 January

A Prayer for Peace in Ukraine and Gaza

Last month, the war in Ukraine, following Russia's unprovoked and illegal invasion, reached 1,000 days, with no immediate end in sight, and with the potential escalation of the conflict from the USA changing its stance on using long-range missiles to attack targets inside Russia. And with the war in Gaza raging for over 400 days, we offer this short prayer:



Eternal God,

We lift the peoples of Ukraine, Russia, Gaza and Israel into your loving and tender care.

Bring comfort to the grieving, strength to the weary, And hope to those burdened by fear.

May wisdom guide leaders toward justice,

And compassion heal hearts torn by conflict.

We pray that peace may flow like a river through each nation, bringing unity, hope and love. Amen



A minister told his congregation, 'next week I will preach about the sin of lying. To prepare for my sermon, I want you all to read Mark chapter 17.

The following Sunday, the minister asked for a show of hands from everyone who had read Mark 17. Every hand went up. The minister smiled and said, "Mark only has sixteen chapters. I will now proceed with my sermon on the sin of lying".

BIBLE HEROES

Joseph

It's hard to give up our plans and dreams. In fact, the world tells us to do whatever it takes to achieve our desires.

But Joseph was different. He was a man of faith. His dreams were dashed when he discovered that his wife-to-be, Mary, was already pregnant.

In order to keep his plan of having a nice, respectable family, he would have to break things off with her. "Not so fast", said an angel. "The child she is carrying is from God".

What was Joseph to do? Cling to his life's ambition? Or follow this bizarre new twist from God and become part of the most exciting event in history?

We all have expectations for our lives, and perhaps others pressure us with their expectations too. When we feel God directing us to something completely different - even to a life that makes no sense at the time - how do we give up our plans for God?

*Joseph quietly and humbly shows us how **faith allows us to forego our own agenda so we can follow God into something far, far better.***



We invite any man, grumpy or not,
to join us at 10:00am on 10 December, for a
grumpy **Christmas Special**
in the Quiet Room.



We meet again on 14 January 2025 for our
New Year's Lunch
at Ye Olde House At Home, Broadwater Street East

12:30pm

Please sign-up, indicating your menu choices (see the online menu) at the Welcome Desk **by 19 December.**

WHAT'S ON - DECEMBER 2024

Sun	1	8:00am	Rev Dawn Carn	Holy Communion
		10:30am	Rev Dawn Carn	Morning Worship
Mon	2	1:45pm	Offington Bells	
Tue	3	12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	
Thu	5	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
		1:30pm	Knit 'n' Natter	We restart on 9 January 2025
Sun	8	10:30am	Rev Dawn Carn	Holy Communion
		3:30pm	Messy Church Team	Messy Church
Tue	10	10:00am	Grumpy Old Men	Christmas Special
		12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	
Thu	12	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
Fri	13	10:30am	CAMEO	Christmas Celebration
Sun	15	8:00am	Breakfast Church Team	Breakfast Church
		10:30am	Wendy Corney	
Tue	17	12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	Christmas Dinner (advance booking only)
Wed	18	10:30am	Mid-month Holy Communion	
Thu	19	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
Fri	20	7:00pm	Christmas Concert	With the Salvation Army
Sun	22	10:30am	Nativity Service	For all ages
		4:00pm	Carol Service	

HIRE OUR ALLAN FLETCHER HALL -

To book or enquire, visit
www.offingtonpark.org.uk
[/venue-hire](mailto:venue-hire@offingtonparkchurch@gmail.com)
 or email us at venue-hire@offingtonparkchurch@gmail.com



WHAT'S ON - DECEMBER 2024 (continued)

Tue	24	3:30pm	CHRISTMAS EVE Rev Dawn Carn	Christingle Service
		5:00pm	Rev Dawn Carn	Christingle Service
Wed	25	10:30am	CHRISTMAS DAY Christmas Praise	Bring a Gift to Show
Sun	29	10:30am	Adam Cook	

WHAT'S ON - JANUARY 2025

Sun	5	8:00am	Rev Richard Tanner	Holy Communion
		10:30am	Rev Richard Tanner	
Mon	6	6:45pm	Offington Bells	
Tue	7	12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	
Thu	9	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
		1:30pm	Knit 'n' Natter	
Fri	10	10:30am	CAMEO	A Summer Garden Party
Sun	12	10:30am	Rev Dawn Carn	Covenant Service with Communion
		3:30pm	Messy Church Team	Messy Church
Mon	13	6:45pm	Offington Bells	
Tue	14	12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	
		12:30pm	Grumpy Old Men	New Year Lunch at 'Ye Olde House'
Thu	16	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
Sun	19	8:00am	Breakfast Church Team	Breakfast Church
		10:30am	Rev Rosemarie Clarke	
Mon	20	6:45pm	Offington Bells	
Tue	21	12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	

WHAT'S ON - JANUARY 2025 (continued)

Wed	22	10:30am	Mid-month Holy Communion	
		7:00pm	Alpha Course	
Thu	23	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
		1:30pm	Knit 'n' Natter	
Fri	24	10:30am	CAMEO	From a Bygone Age
Sun	26	10:30am	Mary-Jane Newman	
Mon	27	6:45pm	Offington Bells	
Tue	28	12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	
Wed	29	7:00pm	Alpha Course	
Thu	30	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	

ALPHA – WE NEED YOUR HELP!

No doubt you will by now have seen our Alpha advertisement, promoting the Alpha course which begins at Offington Park with an 'invitational supper' on Wednesday 22 January 2025 at 7:00pm.



We are casting a wide net to attract as many people as possible, with a focus on those who already use our premises for Messy & Breakfast Church, Zachs, The Lighthouse and Tuesday Lunches, as well as those who will be coming along to our Christingle services on Christmas Eve.

We will be giving each of them a personal, enveloped, invitation. We'll also be asking each of you to give invitations to friends and neighbours. It's an opportunity for people to explore faith in a non-threatening way.

But, as ever, we will need help to run the course, and are asking for volunteers to serve in any capacity they can. Every role is important, be it welcoming guests, leading small groups or just generally helping to prepare and serve food. We have information/training materials for all roles. Please let us know and we'll only be too happy to explain more.

With our love,

Steve & Karen

Once again, a very big **THANK YOU** for all your food donations and financial support. It really is very much appreciated.

In addition to our usual requirements, this month we are looking for items to fill Christmas food hampers. Typically this is mince pies, Christmas pudding, chocolates, sweets, selection boxes for children and the like. As a rough guide, just think about what YOU would like in a Christmas hamper!

We are also looking for warm winter clothing, such as hats, scarves and gloves as well as sleeping bags and blankets.

What else are we doing? On 1 and 15 December there will be afternoon tea with Santa at the Tarring Road café. We are grateful to Bowers & Wilkins for sponsoring these events and providing cinema tickets for the children, and we also thank Glaxo Smithkline for a tree, lights and Christmas toys.

On 16 December Age UK will be providing Christmas dinner for their clients in the café, and SHOUT will be organising dinner on Christmas Day for needy families and the homeless. This will be in the café and comprise three sittings so that we can cater for our usual numbers of around 100 people.

This will be a wonderful opportunity for them to take part in the Christmas festivities in the company of others.

Your donations are helping us to help those in need in our community, so do please keep giving. If you want to know more about what we are doing, look up 'SHOUT WSK' and follow us on Facebook. Many thanks.

John B



Let's Party!

Why not book a fabulous
SOFT PLAY party for your child?

Each Party features::

- Exclusive hire of the soft play
- 75 minutes soft play time
- Party tea in our party room
- Party host
- Cake ceremony

Ages 1-10

Prices from
£185 for 15
children

Max Party Size
30 children

Book and Pay Online
lighthousesoftplay.com

GEORGE STRINGER ROWE

Cradled in a manger, meanly,
Laid the Son of Man His head;
Sleeping His first earthly slumber
Where the oxen had been fed.
Happy were those shepherds listening
To the holy angel's word;
Happy they within that stable
Worshipping their infant Lord.



George Stringer Rowe was born on 1 February 1830 at Margate, Kent, to parents Thomas Smith Rowe and Mary Rowe. From an early age, he showed an interest in both music and ministry. The Primitive Methodist movement, a branch of Methodism that sought to return to the grassroots evangelism and fervour of the early Wesleyan revival, had roots in Rowe's region of England and was a significant influence on his life. The movement placed a strong emphasis on preaching, evangelism, and hymn singing, often conducted outdoors in fields and streets to reach working-class communities.

Rowe joined the Primitive Methodist Church and began preaching while still a young man. In 1859, he married Jane Vanner at Saint Thomas Church in Clapton and together they had four children.

As he matured, Rowe grew into a respected minister and served in London and various other parts of England, including Ipswich, Hull, Southport and Leeds. His sermons were known for their passionate call to repentance and spiritual renewal, resonating deeply with the Primitive Methodist emphasis on heartfelt, accessible religion for the common person.

Rowe's hymn writing emerged naturally from his life as a preacher. He saw hymns as a way to tell the gospel and the transformative power of Christ's love. Rowe's hymns encouraged believers to live out their faith with conviction, inspiring them to deeper commitment and holiness. The lyrics of his hymns were accessible, relatable, and

doctrinally sound, and his style reflected his Primitive Methodist background, emphasizing personal experience, emotional engagement, and a call to action.

"Cradled in a manger, meanly" echoes Rowe's humble and heartfelt style. It reflects on the paradox of the King of Kings born in a lowly stable, emphasizing that Christ, though divine, came into the world under humble circumstances. Rowe's use of the word "meanly" (meaning "lowly" or "humble") underscores the idea that God chose the ordinary and unspectacular as the setting for the extraordinary event of the Incarnation. It poignantly reminds us that by becoming human and experiencing poverty, Jesus opened the way for all to approach him, regardless of status or wealth.

As a hymnwriter, Rowe played a unique role in the Primitive Methodist movement by adding a lyrical voice to its theology and mission. Primitive Methodism was known for its revivalist character, and Rowe's hymns embodied this spirit, using simple language to emphasize the personal experience of God's presence and deliver profound messages of faith, repentance, and discipleship. Rowe's influence extended beyond his hymns, as he became a prominent leader within the Primitive Methodist Church. As well as writing many hymns, he authored several theological works and manuals to guide believers in their faith, and he took part in efforts to preserve and promote the unique identity of Primitive Methodism within the broader Methodist family.

George Stringer Rowe died on 18 August 1913 at his home in Bromley, Kent. Though he may not be as widely recognized as some of his Methodist counterparts, his hymns remain cherished for their authenticity, warmth, and theological depth.

"Cradled in a manger, meanly" encapsulates the spirit of Christmas and remains a beautiful example of how hymnwriters like Rowe used their gifts to proclaim a message that transcends time and speaks to the enduring mystery of faith.

SUSTAINING HOPE - A REPORT

We have been asked by Circuit to print the following report from a District gathering in October which concerned our responses to the needs of Refugees, Migrants & Displaced Persons. It has been very slightly abridged.

“What makes them come here?”

Rev John Howard suggested that above all people are looking for stability - including from the impacts of climate change. He highlighted the many conflicts, often overlooked, which are currently raging - not least in Africa - and are resulting in many refugees, most of whom begin as internally displaced people. His presentation included photographs from his visit to the vast, tented Kiziba refugee camp in Rwanda, with its appalling conditions.

Then, illustrated with photos and a short video, John spoke of his more recent time in the Methodist Liaison Office in East Jerusalem, during which he visited refugee camps in Palestine and in the neighbouring countries. Many of these were originally established for Palestinians, driven out when the modern state of Israel was created in 1948. Over time refugees themselves have replaced the original canvas tents with solid buildings and developed basic education and health services. The three around Bethlehem alone now house over 60,000 people. Many refugees still cling to the UN's recognition of their Right to Return. But meanwhile, constant exposure to violence feeds an insecurity which undermines any efforts to create a stable society.

John told us that Lebanon and Jordan both now have more refugees than settled citizens. In Lebanon, these include refugees more recently arrived from Syria, especially into the Bekaa Valley, where they are living under canvas and often camped in other people's gardens.

In Gaza, the refugee camps are 'holding places' rather than 'home' as people are being repeatedly displaced. With everyone focused on surviving for the next day or two, there is currently no energy or scope to develop leadership and build community. John had seen confusion, uncertainty and instability everywhere, but also the determination to find a way through it all, including therapy for the children, who are particularly traumatised. John described how, in tightly-packed refugee camps, young people are easily radicalised and parents will do anything they can to get them to a more positive place, where they can grow up in greater security. Asked how we can best help, John said that to deal properly with the refugee situation, we have to address the instability at its roots. This includes challenging the UK's exporting not just of weapons but also of the electronics that operate those weapons.

To help the situation in the camps we need to identify and engage with agencies working there, e.g. Save the Children and Christian Aid in Gaza. John recommended the book *The Lightless Sky: My Journey to Safety as a Child Refugee* by Gulwali Passarlay from Afghanistan, and also from Netflix 'The Oak House', based on the true experiences of Syrian refugees.

“What happens when they get here?”

Rev Gill Songer, a presbyter based in Folkestone, volunteers with the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB), which covers every UK place of detention. Her role is to monitor the treatment of people detained in short-term immigration holding facilities along the Kent coast. She explained that there are monthly meetings with all the organisations involved, and links are being established with key places in northern France.

French police do stop many people getting into boats; as a result boats are launched further away from Calais and are more overcrowded. French police often face violence and have to deal with the aftermath of failed launches. British authorities track the vessels, but do not act until a boat is in English waters, where the Border Force picks people up. They try to ensure children under 18 are not at risk, as well as identifying adults pretending to be minors.

People are processed/medically examined on 'the jetfoil', then taken to another tent and arrested for entering the UK illegally. After 24 hours they are bailed and dispersed. Unaccompanied minors are found somewhere to stay by Kent Social Services.

IMB staff are allowed to observe each stage of the process. Their reports lead to positive changes to facilities, procedures and people's arrival experiences.

Some statistics:

- 2023: 52,530 illegal migrants were detected; 17% were not from boats.
- 2023: 104 visits made by the 10 IMB volunteers in Kent.
- End September 2024: 23,612 people had arrived in 503 boats.
- Mid-October 2024: 973 people arrived on one day, in 17 boats.

Gill spoke of the kindness of staff that she has seen in the Care and Custody tents. The process is very organised and Gill was thanked warmly for her involvement with the IMB. She encouraged more people to do so.

The gathering finished with prayer for all those we had heard about - refugees, asylum seekers and those who work with them and seek to make it possible for them to find a safe, new beginning. The next meeting is on **Saturday 17 May 2025** at 10:00am. Venue to be advised.

Hazel F

BLESSED (from Pam F)



I am not one of life's volunteers. I am not someone who would be inclined to step forward or put my hand up. I work on the basis that there are a lot of better qualified, more gifted or talented people than me.

I suspect this may be a hang up from school days when I was ALWAYS the last to be chosen for any team. It was fair enough – there is not a sporty cell in my body.

Having said all of that, I would not consider myself to be lazy either. If you ask me to do something, because I'm not very good at saying 'no' – I'll probably say 'yes' and then I'll give it my all. I might moan a bit – but you'll have me there when you expect me, or need me.

I now seem to spend a good chunk of my day off in the week, and my Saturday, volunteering at The Lighthouse – the Soft Play Café we opened at Offington Park in June. This isn't because I have a burning desire to spend hours with other people's children or their Oat Milk latte-drinking parents and carers.

No. The reason I'm there is that I believe in what we are trying to do: to offer a safe, fun environment to welcome families onto our premises; to open ourselves to conversations that would never be had otherwise; to offer support and a listening ear in a completely non-threatening way.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he spoke about the Collection they were making for the Christians in Jerusalem. But these words struck me about our giving in general:

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not regretfully or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

Corinthians 9: v6 – 8 (New RSV Updated Edition, BibleGateway.com)

Being a Christian isn't just about turning up on a Sunday morning, sitting in a chair, singing what we are told to sing and being quiet when everyone else is. It is about making a **conscious decision** that what we do on a Sunday affects the whole of our week. The effort we put in to God's work will indeed reap benefits – not only for others, but will bring blessings for us, the givers, too.

Let's be honest: our church is run by a handful of people – often wearing multiple hats. I appreciate that we have many folk in our fellowship who have 'done their bit' and would love to do more, but are now unable to do what they have done in the past. But I suspect that there are others who need to hear that they are needed by God, and that he has an important part for them to play in the Kingdom. Maybe, like me, these folk need to be asked to take part - because they won't volunteer for all the tea in Methodism!

They need to hear that yes, it may be hard work, but it's also a blessing. My favourite time at The Lighthouse is on a Saturday when we run the Birthday Parties for anything up to 30 children at a time. They are in the party room, sitting at long tables. As they finish their pizza or hot dogs, we ask the Birthday Child if they would like to sit on the special Birthday Chair. This large, wooden 'throne' must have been sat on by many a Minister over the years – but has been re-purposed. The child sits on this special chair as the candles on their cake are lit, the lights are turned out and we sing 'Happy Birthday'.

The joy on their face and the faces of the parents and other children is a treat worth all the inconvenience and pain. We made that happen. We were able to offer that. We have been blessed.

Please think about it – we don't ask for much - maybe you could cut up the carrots on a Friday, or sweep the floor after a session. Maybe wipe down the tables after a party or empty the dish washer. You don't have to commit to a three-hour shift if you don't want to. Those of us that do would welcome you with open arms for anything you can offer. And then you can be blessed as we are.

Doing God's work where He has placed us.

CHRISTMAS QUIZ

When the turkey's not the only thing that's stuffed, relax and unwind with our not too challenging quiz, which has - ooh, 25 questions - and a very obvious theme!

1. In which film did the song White Christmas first feature?
2. To which country does the territory of Christmas Island belong?
3. If you were born on Christmas day which star sign would you be?
4. What is the name of the dog in 'The Grinch Who Stole Christmas'?
5. In what decade was the first Christmas card produced?
6. Which novel has been portrayed on screen more than any other?
7. Who was Ebenezer Scrooge's first ghost visitor in Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol'?
8. Which American state became the first to recognise Christmas as an official holiday in 1836?
9. In which James Bond film does the character Dr Christmas Jones feature?
10. Who wrote the song 'White Christmas'?
11. 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' featured in which classic musical?
12. Where was Good King Wenceslas the King of?
13. In what American state does most of the movie 'White Christmas' take place?
14. What was special about the FA Cup qualifying soccer match between Linfield and Cliftonville in 1888?
15. Who wrote the Christmas story, 'The Snowman'?
16. Whose was the first voice on the original 1984 Band Aid single 'Do They Know It's Christmas'?
17. What kind of Merry Christmas did a Common group of environmentalists want us to have in 1974?
18. In the song, where was I when I saw Mommy kissing Santa Claus?
19. What is the name of Scrooge's clerk?
20. Which Christmas Carol contains the word "Fa-la-la-la-la-la-la-la"?
21. In which City can you find Wenceslas Square?
22. Which actor/singer died on Christmas day 1995?
23. Which well-known Carol was written by Charles Wesley to a Tune composed by Mendelssohn?
24. What country is Europe's largest exporter of Christmas Trees?
25. Which King of England was crowned on Christmas Day?

CONNECTING WALL

Assemble the words below into four connecting groups of four

SHERRY	BOXER	PORT	BERMUDA
WAVES	SAINT HELENA	CYCLING	VERMOUTH
LANZAROTE	CRAFT	MARSALA	BRUSH
BEACH	MADEIRA	RUGBY	ASCENSION

THREE SHORT BUT TRICKY PUZZLES!

Dave went to the movies with his uncle. They went up to the ticket booth and Dave had to pay, as usual. But the ticket lady said, 'you can go in but not your friend'. **Why wouldn't she let Dave's uncle in?** He was smartly dressed and had often been to that cinema before without any trouble.

Leonardo da Vinci carried out the following experiment. He held a sphere of very thin fragile glass above a solid stone floor. When he dropped it, the sphere fell two metres without breaking. How?

Two fathers and two sons went into a bar for a drink together. They spent £15 altogether, with each spending the same amount of whole pounds. **How much did each man spend?**

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and Philippians 4:10-20 (the joy of giving)



Friends,

You know it's that time of year once again, when you are inundated in the media (I once had medicine for that!) with countless Christmas gift advertisements and a myriad of sickly-sweet Christmas feel-good movies every afternoon. That said, I'm an old softy at heart and do love "Miracle on 34th Street".

This is also the time of year when the younger members of the Carr family are sending texts and emails with long lists of desired gifts. Do you remember the 'old days' when you actually wrote a list and left it in the grate for Santa? I do.

Anyway, to my utter amazement, in this high-tech fast moving world, one of the gifts listed was the game "Snakes and Ladders" Yes, the old ones really are the best.

Snakes and Ladders is a game that has been played for centuries. A thrilling race which prepares us in its own way for the ups and downs of life. It reminds me of Jesus, who lovingly prepared us for the ups and downs in our lives (John 16:33). Jesus also shared with us a special message of peace. By trusting him we know that whatever happens, we have hope and strength, we know that he walks with us, and that we are never alone.

That's what's at the top of my list: the greatest gift of all - Jesus, a gift given freely by our Lord, with joy. Thank you, Lord. Season's Greetings and God bless you all. **John C**



IT'S A MYSTERY?

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NEXT EDITION

Copy Deadline

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Please submit material for the next edition
to the Editors at:

offingtonspotlight@gmail.com

King Arthur and his knights were trapped in a castle, under siege from a mighty army. The only hope was to send one of the knights to get help, but the problem was that all the horses had been killed in the battle.

"We must get help somehow", said Arthur.

"I realise that, sire", said Sir Lancelot, "but we have no horses. If a knight was to set off on foot, he'd be attacked almost at once."

"Is there not another animal he can ride?", asked King Arthur. "What about that mighty wolfhound? It could surely bear the weight of a man".

"No, sire, no", said Sir Lancelot. "The wolfhound is much too dangerous. It has large snarling teeth and is completely wild. I wouldn't send a knight out on a dog like this".



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