

THE HADLEIGH MESSENGER

October to December 2025

A Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year
to All Readers of the Hadleigh Messenger



“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign:
The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son,
and will call him Immanuel.”

Isaiah 7:14

The Magazine of the
United Reformed Church, Hadleigh, Essex

PREACHING ARRANGEMENTS FOR OCTOBER 2025

| | | | |
|--------------------------|---------|--|-------------------|
| Sun 5 th Oct | 10.30am | Harvest Festival | Mrs Heather Brown |
| Sun 12 th Oct | 10.30am | Morning Service | Mrs Heather Brown |
| Sun 19 th Oct | 10.30am | Morning Service with Holy Communion | Rev. Dan Pratt |
| Sun 26 th Oct | 10.30am | Morning Service | Mr John Simmons |

PREACHING ARRANGEMENTS FOR NOVEMBER 2025

| | | | |
|--------------------------|---------|--|----------------------------|
| Sun 2 nd Nov | 10.30am | Morning Service | Mr John Amos |
| Sun 9 th Nov | 10.30am | Morning Service Remembrance Sunday | Mr Ian Miller |
| Sun 16 th Nov | 10.30am | Morning Service with Holy Communion | Rev. Dr Jim Tarrant MA MTh |
| Sun 23 rd Nov | 10.30am | Morning Service | Mr John Amos |
| Sun 30 th Nov | 10.30am | Morning Service | Mr Keith Berry |

PREACHING ARRANGEMENTS FOR DECEMBER 2025

| | | | |
|--------------------------|---------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Sun 7 th Dec | 10.30am | Gift Service | The Elders |
| Sun 14 th Dec | 10.30am | Carols & Communion | Mrs Heather Brown |
| Sun 21 st Dec | 4.00pm | Carol Service | Rev. Dr Jim Tarrant MA MTh |
| Sun 28 th Dec | - | NO SERVICE | NO SERVICE |

CHURCH MEETING

Thu 20th Nov 12.45pm

ELDERS' MEETING

Thu 11th Dec 1.15pm

CHURCH FLOWERS

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Sun 5 th Oct | Mary Hawthorne – in memory of Vera Knapton |
| Sun 25 th Oct | Wednesday Flower Class – in memory of Betty Rice |
| Sun 8 th Nov | Pamela George – in memory of Colin |
| Sun 15 th Nov | Jeanne Spackman – in memory of Marjorie & Geoff Chase |
| Sun 22 nd Nov | For Mary Milne |
| Sun 6 th Dec | John Rice – in memory of Barbara |
| Sun 20 th Dec | Jean Reeve – in memory of her mother |



Note: If you'd like to make a donation towards the cost of the church flowers on a particular Sunday, perhaps to celebrate a special event or remember a loved one, then please speak to Heather Brown. Heather phone number is 01702 557678.

Christmas celebrations

Dear friends,

Christmas has definitely started earlier this year and with the first advent service on the 30th November, I knew I needed to get everything prepared at church. On Thursday 28th November, I started by hanging up the large wall plaques which have lovely, large, painted candles with a dried flower arrangement at the base.

The next job was to get the tables placed ready for the tree and draped with green cloths. Derek Simpson helped to put together the base for the tree to stand in. Once this was done, I was able to put the tree in place. Sue Horton then arrived to help place the lights and baubles on the tree. Lastly, the crib scene was arranged on another table, near to the tree. At last, the church looked like it was dressed for Christmas,

I had already completed the floral arrangement and the candle wreath on the Wednesday afternoon, ready for the Sunday service which Keith Berry would be taking. So, by the time I had finished, the coffee morning had ended and I was pleased to be able to make my way home with Malcolm to have a cup of tea and lunch.

Malcolm would usually help me with these chores, but due, to his sciatica and tendinopathy, he is finding life quite difficult. It always makes life much easier when people are happy to help and work together. So, to all those who helped me, I must say a very big thank you; it is great to have your support!

However, this is not the end of my story! When we came home, I noticed that Andrew (our second son) had brought down the boxes and lights for our home decorations. That afternoon he put up the lights outside the house and then put lights up inside the lounge bay window. On the Friday evening, he and Michael decorated the tree, and when I went into the lounge the next morning, I



saw they had placed our little olive wood nativity scene on Michael's fish tank. It reminded me that there was one item missing – the 3D pop-up nativity book that

I bought for Michael for his first Christmas.

All four of the children enjoyed playing with this book and it's had an important place on the top of the piano at Christmas. When the children were young, they loved to turn over the pages each

week and to move the figures using the tags on the side of the pages. It's amazing that they are still working and in good condition!



If Jennifer comes home and finds the book is not on the piano, she soon finds it on her bookcase and puts it in its rightful place for Christmas! She also insists that the carol music book is open and ready to play on the piano and she spends quite a lot of time playing the carols throughout her stay with us!

All this activity reminded me of some verses in Deuteronomy: 'These commands that I give to you are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.'

Changes in habits and working hours have altered the way our society now views Sunday. For some, it is no longer a day of rest and for many the desire to attend church for worship has been lost. However, Christmas is a time when memories formed when younger can be a reminder of our Christian faith; a time that can bring some of the thoughts and attention back to what it really means.

Time together at Christmas provides an opportunity for us to gently remind our family, particularly the younger members, about the true meaning behind the celebration. With that in mind, each year I try to find a small book or item for our granddaughters, to make them aware of the true reason for Christmas.

Enjoy the celebrations and be sure to remind your friends and family what Christmas means to you. Speaking about our faith in a gentle manner can be a strong aid to those who have perhaps forgotten its significance and might just bring them back to a lasting faith in God, where they will find peace and strength.

May God bless you and all your families this Christmas.

Heather Brown

From the Editor Welcome to the final edition of the Hadleigh Messenger for 2025. Regular readers will be aware that the magazine has not been published to its usual timetable, for which I apologise.

This is another unusual edition as it covers a period of three months yet we are already in the third month. For historical continuity, I've also included details of the October and November services and to provide an element of future-proofing, I've also included details of the January 2026 services below.

I'm still not as productive as I would like owing to the continuing effects of sciatica and tendinopathy, or possibly some other muscular ailment. In November, I saw a physiotherapist at Southend Hospital who thinks my problems relate to misalignment of two of my vertebrae for which exercises to strengthen my back muscles have been prescribed. I still have to work at the computer standing up, which is not very comfortable because of some numbness in my feet but I am fortunate to experience only minimal back pain.

Thank you to Heather and Doreen for providing items for the magazine and to Jean Imbush who has contributed to the Family News section. It's always nice to hear from people who have been connected with the church in the past. (For those who don't know, Jean's late husband, Bryan, was our minister for five years from 1996 to 2001.)

Sadly, our Salvationist friend Jim Clubb died unexpectedly in October. I was honoured to be asked to give a tribute at his funeral at Hadleigh Temple on 7th November. I thanked God for all Jim's work at our church and other churches and I also took the opportunity to thank all those from Hadleigh Temple who have led worship at our church over the years.

We continue to be blessed by both clergy – mainly retired but not all – and lay preachers from various churches, particularly Christ Church Rayleigh URC, who assist Heather and Rev. Jim Tarrant in leading our worship currently.

May the true spirit of Christmas be with you at this special time.

Malcolm Brown



Christmas Services

Sun 7th December – Gift service

Gifts of chocolates and biscuits will be collected for friends of the church whose lives are not as easy as they once were. Money will also be collected to buy gifts for those supported by HARP.

Sun 14th December – Carols & Communion

Our December Communion service will be on the second Sunday, with carols.

Sun 21st December – Carol Service at 4.00pm

Our main Carol Service will take place in the afternoon at 4.00pm with mince pies and cakes served afterwards. Please take the opportunity to invite friends and neighbours.

Malcolm Brown



PREACHING ARRANGEMENTS FOR JANUARY 2026

| | | | |
|--------------------------|---------|--|-------------------|
| Sun 4 th Jan | 10.30am | Morning Service | Mr Ian Miller |
| Sun 11 th Jan | 10.30am | Morning Service | Mr John Amos |
| Sun 18 th Jan | 10.30am | Morning Service with Holy Communion | Mrs Heather Brown |
| Sun 25 th Jan | 10.30am | Morning Service | Mrs Heather Brown |

| |
|--|
| Articles for the magazine can be e-mailed to the Editor, Malcolm Brown, at mgbrownmail@yahoo.co.uk . Opinions expressed in any published articles do not necessarily reflect the view of the Editor or the policy of the United Reformed Church, either locally or nationally. |
|--|

Harvest Festival 2025

This year's Harvest Supper was held on Saturday 4th October, a week later than usual. About sixteen people sat down for the meal, the usual delicious cold buffet prepared by the ladies of the catering team.

After the supper, we adjourned to the church for the entertainment. I forgot to take any photos during the supper so this photo is taken in the church later.



The entertainment began with a couple of videos relating to corn dollies. I then inflicted another multiple-choice quiz on those present. The fact that the winning team scored 14 out of 20 gives an indication of the difficulty of the questions! June Gargrave and Doreen Churchill read poems

and Heather played a tune on the piano before Rev. Jim Tarrant wrapped up proceedings



The Harvest Festival Service on Sunday was led by Heather. There was a nice selection of fresh, dried and tinned food items on the harvest table. The knitted produce made by my mum some years also

had another outing.

Thanks to everyone who helped with the Harvest Supper and brought items for the Harvest table.

The fresh produce was taken to Little Havens Hospice and the tinned and dried produce was donated to the food bank run by Hadleigh Salvation Army Temple.

Malcolm Brown

Sycamore tree

It's always rather sad when a tree has to be chopped down but the sycamore tree at the entrance had to be felled on 17th October as it was causing problems in two directions. The height of its branches were interfering with electric and phone cables whilst the roots were causing the nearby concrete footpath to lift and were also pushing over concrete posts supporting the fence and the very large wooden post supporting the manse driveway gate.

Although the tree looked relatively healthy, after it had been felled we were amazed to discover that the trunk was actually quite rotten and almost hollow, with just a narrow healthy area around the perimeter. It is perhaps just as well that it came down when it did!



The tree before felling



Just the trunk left



The largely hollow trunk

The tree, which was quite old, was one of a pair that stood either side of the original path to the church before the path was diverted when the manse was built. The other tree had to be felled some years ago after it was attacked by a fungus.

Malcolm Brown

Family News

Jim Clubb

Jim passed away on 14th October after a short illness. Although he never worshipped with us on a regular basis, he was very much part of our fellowship, preaching regularly for many years, and we will miss him. An obituary appears elsewhere in the magazine.

Rev. Gordon & Wendy Bates

Some readers will undoubtedly remember Gordon and Wendy, particularly as Gordon was an Associate Minister at the church for several years when Rev. Bryan Imbush was our minister. For those who haven't already heard, Gordon and Wendy moved to the Isle of Wight in the summer to live in a care home near to their daughter Nicola. The Editor now has the address of the care home should anyone like to write or send a card to the couple.

We send our love to Gordon and Wendy and pray that they are adjusting to life in their new home.

Mary Milne

On 18th November, the Editor was able to visit Mary in Catherine Miller House care home in Leigh-on-Sea. I took with me a birthday card and some bars of chocolate to give to Mary on the occasion of her 99th birthday.

Mary is still able to walk around with a walker but had decided not to move from the dining table after breakfast that morning even though her normal chair in the lounge had been specially decorated with ribbons and balloons for her birthday. I chatted to her at the dining table for a time but it was a one-sided conversation as she did not want to engage. However, she did perk up and smile when I told her that I was going!

It is good to see that Mary is still mobile at the age of 99 although dementia has diminished her quality of life. We continue to remember her this Christmas.

Colin & Marion Melliush

Like Mary Milne, Colin's wife, Marion, is resident in Catherine Miller House and suffers from dementia. Colin himself is now in need of some care at home so we remember them both.

We send our love to Colin and Marion and pray that they may receive the care that they need.

News from Jean Imbush

Jean writes:

"Since leaving the Southend area, I've been living in Hornchurch to be nearer to family and London. I travel up the City for lunchtime Organ recitals, often in a beautiful Wren church such as St Stephens Walbrook, St Lawrence Jewry and St Margaret's Lothbury. I attend St Vedast alias Foster first for a short lunchtime Mass service.



St Stephens Walbrook



St Margaret's Lothbury

My interest in organ music comes from Rev. Bryan Imbush my late husband. It has given me much joy in old age and I have made like-minded friends. The Organ Club held its 100th anniversary lunch recently in beautiful Cutlers Hall. Being a member, you can attend their organised events in churches around the country and also go on short holiday breaks.



My eldest granddaughter Charlotte graduated from Sheffield University as a Junior Doctor in August and has been posted to Glasgow for two years.

I'm still fortunate to be mobile but you never

know in old age what's around the corner.

God bless,

Jean

Thank you for your news, Jean. Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Birthdays in Nov, Dec & Jan



Not Only Christmas Day

Lord, this is my prayer
Not only on Christmas Day
But until I see You face to face
May I live my life this way:

Just like the baby Jesus
I ever hope to be,
Resting in Your loving arms
Trusting in Your sovereignty.

And like the growing Christ child
In wisdom daily learning,
May I ever seek to know You
With my mind and spirit yearning.

Like the Son so faithful
Let me follow in Your light,
Meek and bold, humble and strong
Not afraid to face the night.

Nor cowardly to suffer
And stand for truth alone,
Knowing that Your kingdom
Awaits my going home.

Not afraid to sacrifice
Though great may be the cost,
Mindful how You rescued me
From broken-hearted loss.

Like my risen Saviour
The babe, the child, the Son,
May my life forever speak
Of all that You have done.

So while this world rejoices
And celebrates Your birth,
I treasure You, the greatest gift
Unequaled in Your worth.

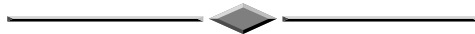
I long to hear the same words
That welcomed home Your Son,
'Come, good and faithful servant',
Your Master says, 'Well done'.

And may heaven welcome others
Who will join with me in praise
Because I lived for Jesus Christ
Not only Christmas Day.

Mary Fairchild



Please remember those associated with our fellowship in need of prayer...



New Year's Eve Social – Wed 31st Dec @ 6.30pm

It is planned to hold a New Year's Eve Social again this year, commencing at 6.30pm and finishing at around 9.00pm. If anyone would like to come but is concerned about transport to the church and home again, please phone Malcolm on 01702 557678. We will be having a 'bring and share' supper and a list will be placed on the foyer noticeboard for people to enter their names and the food item(s) being brought. Help would be much appreciated on the night in preparing food items for the supper table as they arrive and in serving refreshments. If you have ideas for suitable games, do please let me know. It is not compulsory to take part in the games! I look forward to seeing some of you there.

Malcolm Brown

Jim Clubb 1935 - 2025

Sadly, Jim passed away on 14th October in Southend Hospital after a short illness. He had been admitted unexpectedly a week earlier and was diagnosed with a large duodenal ulcer that had burst and for which there was no treatment.



Jim and his twin-brother John were born in Rochford Hospital on 9th December 1935. They grew up in Hadleigh in Oak Road South but after their parents died they bought a flat in Castle Lane and then a bungalow in Church Road, located only about fifty yards from our church. Jim and John both worked for P&O in London before taking voluntary redundancy and then both took on new jobs with HM Customs & Excise in Southend until finally retiring.

Jim and John were Salvationists and both played in the local Salvation Army Band in their younger days. Their association with our church began over twenty years ago they began attending the coffee morning and the bible study and prayer meeting as John was finding it more difficult to walk to Hadleigh Temple because of asthma.

Jim began preaching at the church and over the years preached on numerous occasions. As well as regular events at the church, he attended special events such as the harvest supper and anniversary tea. In the early years he would preach at the evening service. When the evening service was reduced to just once a month, a communion service, Jim kindly offered to take the service every month if Heather would preside over communion.

Preaching with just a few notes tucked in his bible. Jim's message was always clear, and he knew the bible inside out. He earnestly wanted people to know about God's love and the promise of eternal life offered to those who believe. Jim also preached at various other churches in south-east Essex. Jim believed passionately in the power of prayer. In recent years when he was in a care home, he would end visits with a word of prayer and would offer the same to people who spoke to him on the telephone.

Jim also led our former monthly midweek service on occasions, when he often sang a song accompanied by Colin Melluish on guitar. The pair would also sing together on other occasions such as the harvest supper. Jim enjoyed singing and had a love of poetry. He was a member of the Highlands Men's Forum Choir, which became Hadleigh Male Voice Choir when the practice venue changed from Highlands Methodist Church to Hadleigh Methodist Church. In their concerts, Jim would often read a poem or two as his party piece. Before it disbanded, the choir was led by Keith Johnston from Hadleigh Temple and our own Heather Brown was the pianist.

Jim's brother John passed away in March 2009, which must have been a difficult time for Jim, having lived with his brother all his life. However, Jim carried on working hard for the Lord until, in 2021, after several falls and after one particular hospital stay, he ended up in Rosedale Court care home in Rayleigh. He was not initially keen on staying there but, after accepting that he could not look after himself properly in his bungalow, he decided to stay and soon settled in. He was very happy there, which may have had a lot to do with the fact that he found a new ministry there after being asked to lead a service once a month. He also talked and prayed with other residents, sharing God's love.

Jim's funeral and wake were organised by Mary Parker and her sons. Mary had known Jim since he was a young man and they maintained a close friendship. The funeral was held at Salvation Army Hadleigh Temple on 6th November and was led by Major Mark Cozens. Afterwards, Jim was laid to rest with John in Woodside Cemetery, Benfleet.

Jim would have reached 90 years of age on 8th December. We give thanks to the Lord for his long life and for all that Jim did in His name to spread the gospel, which had been at the centre of his life. May he rest in peace with his beloved brother, John.

Malcolm Brown

Note: Audio and video recordings of Jim's funeral are available online together with photographs taken at Hadleigh URC events and during activities at Rosedale Court care home. These can also be provided in other formats on request. Please contact Malcolm for details.

Prayer reflection – Light in our darkness

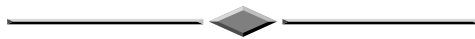
Prepare to welcome the Christ child into your heart and life. Recognise that the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus make it quite clear that the good news he brought was not the promise of an easy life with no problems. Instead he brings the promise of God's presence, support and forgiveness. Praise God for the wonderful gift of Jesus. He became one of us to show us how to live a life of love and respect for all. May we follow truly.

Ponder your present circumstances, good or not so good, and realise how much support, help and friendship you are receiving. Thank God for the care and love he has provided for you. Look back over your life and consider all you have learned about yourself and about living well through times of difficulty and hardship. Give thanks for the strength of mind, courage and compassion you have developed. Pray for the grace to use all you have discovered for the benefit of others. Be glad of the opportunities to serve.

Praise God for the gift of Jesus – for his life and teaching, for his care and compassion and especially for his death and resurrection. Accept the hope and salvation Jesus offers and receive the Holy Spirit to guide and direct your way forward. Thank God for his amazing grace in abiding with us now and always. May the light of Christ's love shine in your heart and in your life.

Prayer – Thank you Lord for your wonderful grace bestowed upon us. May we see the light of Christ chase away the darkness of life's difficulties so that we are able to welcome all who come into your family. May our service be a delight not a duty. *Amen.*

Beryl Hunt



Stark risks for UK's churches, says NCT survey

In a report based on its national survey of churches in the UK, the National Churches Trust (NCT) paints a mixed picture of the state of local church buildings and the fortunes of their congregations. The survey, NCT's first for 15 years, received responses from 3,628 churches, broadly representative of the UK in terms of denomination, attendance, building age and location.

Given that 64% of churches surveyed are pre-20th century buildings, it is unsurprising that roof repairs, guttering, drains and heating are high on the list of pressing concerns for many congregations. But the findings focus as much on church activities as on properties. NCT insists that churches "are not passive relics of the past; they are active, living places, powered by volunteers and sustained by the communities who depend on them".

Nevertheless, though almost two-thirds (64%) of churches surveyed believed they "definitely will" or "probably" be used as a place of worship in five years' time, one in 20 churches said they "definitely" or "probably" will no longer be in use.

Positives are identified in the report, especially in the ways churches connect with their local communities. Over half of all churches are used

by other organisations at least once per week, confirming their role as civic hubs. Fifty-six per cent of churches distribute food, and 85% say they would expand community support if they had more resources.

Resources are hard to come by, though. Sixty-two per cent of congregations require additional financial support, 39% say they could do more with better facilities, and 70% say they need more volunteers. The report says: "A lack of volunteer time ... prevents churches from doing more in their community, with this factor rising sharply from 33% in 2010 to 45% in 2025."

The National Churches Trust concludes that churches want to do more – "to expand cultural programmes, deepen social care and strengthen their environmental action". But without intervention, the risks are stark, the authors say: "If churches close, the impacts will multiply: a loss of heritage, a loss of social care, and a loss of spaces for solace and belonging. It would signal not only neglect of our cultural inheritance, but also a failure to care for communities at their most vulnerable."

The full report and summaries can be read at www.nationalchurchestrust.org/survey

From head to mistletoe: the curious biology of elves

As Christmas Eve draws near, we're reminded of the tireless elves behind the scenes, toiling in workshops to bring festive magic to life.

Imagine Santa's elves not as fantasy figures but as highly adapted beings designed for the unique demands of their world. From enhanced resilience to happy hormones and efficient energy production, each adapted anatomical feature serves a purpose, allowing them to work joyfully, and without pause, in a cold climate that would challenge the rest of us. Through the lens of this imagined elf, we take a look at general anatomy, using scientific principles and a nod to the Will Ferrell movie *Elf* to fill in some of the festive details.

Ho-ho-hormones

The remarkable cheer and endurance of an elf can be attributed to a finely tuned endocrine system that supports both their emotional resilience and energy needs. Their pituitary glands probably produce high baseline levels of serotonin and endorphins – often called “feel-good hormones” – helping them maintain a naturally cheerful disposition even under the pressures of Christmas deadlines.

Beyond individual happiness, elves surely must thrive on teamwork in the workshop. An elevated capacity to release oxytocin, the “bonding hormone”, helps foster strong social connections, promoting a collaborative and harmonious working environment. With extra oxytocin receptors in the brain, elves would quickly form bonds with each other, boosting morale and creating a positive atmosphere that is crucial for high-stress, close-quarters work. Also essential for good elf and safety.

Presumably, elves would require adaptable sleep patterns to handle the long hours leading up to Christmas. Their pineal glands could produce a specialised form of melatonin, allowing them to reset their internal clocks on demand. This adaptation would support both sustained alertness during extended shifts and quick recovery naps, keeping them fresh and focused throughout the season.

Good skin and elf care

In the North Pole's long winters, elves may rely on their skin's heightened ability to synthesise vitamin D even in low-light conditions. This helps regulate mood and energy by supporting serotonin production, which promotes emotional stability,

and enhancing mitochondrial function for efficient energy production. Their skin might also be rich in melanin that adapts to seasonal light changes, maximising their sunlight absorption without risk of seasonal-affective disorder.

Sugar and spice

The elf digestive system is probably optimised for processing high-carbohydrate, high-sugar diets without succumbing to the energy crashes humans might experience.

To thrive on a diet rich in sweets, elves would rely on high levels of sucrase, maltase and amylase — enzymes that break down sugars and starches quickly. This enzymatic boost allows for rapid glucose release, sustaining their energy without the usual sugar crash, and keeping them fuelled for long hours in the workshop.

Elves' livers could also play a crucial role, storing vast reserves of glycogen for quick energy release when needed, especially during the busiest days of the festive season. Their small intestines might boast enhanced villi – tiny, finger-like projections that line the gut – increasing the surface area for nutrient absorption and ensuring every candy cane is put to good use.

Elves might have highly efficient mitochondria – the tiny powerhouses inside cells that convert food into energy – allowing them to produce energy from nutrients more effectively. This could keep their energy levels steady without sharp crashes, helping them remain upbeat and active throughout their lengthy work shifts.

Cold comfort

Thriving in the subzero temperatures of the North Pole requires more than a good set of thermals. Elves' circulatory systems probably feature counter-current heat exchange mechanisms – where warm blood flowing out heats up cold blood coming back in – similar to those found in penguins' feet and human testicles, to minimise heat loss in extremities. Blood vessels in their hands and feet would work in tandem to recycle warmth.

Elf respiratory systems are equally impressive, designed to maximise oxygen intake in cold, thin air. With larger-than-average nasal cavities lined with specialised mucous membranes, elves can warm and humidify incoming air, protecting their lungs from the frigid environment.

Hear comes Santa Claus

Acute hearing would be essential for quality control and ensuring every toy meets Santa's exacting standards. In a bustling workshop, elves need heightened sensory abilities to stay on task. Their ears, already iconic, might also feature internal adaptations – enhanced auditory canals for picking up subtle sounds.

Elf eyes, adapted for the low-light conditions of the winter months, would probably boast a high density of rod cells – the light-sensitive cells in the retina that help us see in darkness – allowing them to see clearly even during the longest polar nights. Perhaps they've also evolved a reflective layer behind the retina, similar to a cat's tapetum lucidum, giving them a distinctive twinkle and ensuring no detail escapes their gaze.

Sleighing it

An elf's musculoskeletal system would need to be both robust and specialised for the physical demands of their job. Working long hours

crafting toys requires dexterous hands supported by flexible yet strong finger joints, enhanced by tendons and ligaments adapted to repetitive tasks. To avoid the perils of repetitive strain injuries, elves might have increased collagen production, keeping their joints supple and resilient. With an optimised ratio of fast-twitch muscle fibres (for quick movements) and slow-twitch fibres (for endurance), elves would be perfectly suited for bursts of energy and sustained activity alike, ensuring they can switch seamlessly between nimble toy-making and the occasional snowball fight.

So this Christmas, as you admire the handiwork of Santa's helpers, spare a thought for the ingenious anatomical adaptations that make the merry work of elves possible.

Michelle Spear

Professor of Anatomy, University of Bristol

Published on The Conversation website at www.theconversation.com on 10 Dec 2025.



The oldest Christmas hymn ever written

One of my favourite YouTube channels is *The Salisbury Organist* where Ben Maton makes videos of visits to beautiful village churches to play old organs. A recent video, made on a visit St Mary's Church in Long Cridel, Dorset, featured what Ben claimed to be the oldest Christmas hymn. The words in the original Latin from the 4th century and the English translation by John Mason Neale from 1851 are below.

Latin (4th Century)

- 1. Veni, redemptor gentium,
ostende partum Virginis;
miretur omne saeculum:
talis decet partus Deum.*
- 2. Non ex virili semine,
sed mystico spiramine
Verbum Dei factum est caro
fructusque ventris floruit.*
- 3. Alvus tumescit Virginis,
claustrum pudoris permanet,
vexilla virtutum micant,
versatur in templo Deus.*
- 4. Procedat e thalamo suo,
pudoris aula regia,
geminae gigas substantiae
alacris ut currat viam.*

English (1851)

- 1. Come, Thou Redeemer of the earth,
And manifest Thy virgin birth:
Let every age adoring fall;
Such birth befits the God of all.*
- 2. Begotten of no human will,
But of the Spirit, Thou art still
The Word of God in flesh arrayed,
The promised Fruit to man displayed.*
- 3. The virgin womb that burden gained
With virgin honour all unstained;
The banners there of virtue glow;
God in His temple dwells below.*
- 4. Forth from His chamber goeth He,
That royal home of purity,
A giant in twofold substance one,
Rejoicing now His course to run.*

It's worth watching the video on Ben's channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@SalisburyOrganist> if you're able. He gives the history of the hymn and explains how the music for it came about.

Malcolm Brown

Church Life Review – The Latest

As the Church Life Review approaches the culmination of its 2nd phase, where are we now?

Editors note: The first article was written before the General Assembly held from 14-16 November. An update follows immediately after.

The URC's Church Life Review is coming to the end of its second phase. The vision of the review as a whole is a flourishing Church, less burdened, and better enabled. Phase Two has involved investigating, proposing, and guiding changes which will help the URC flourish into the future. This phase culminates in an extraordinary session of General Assembly in November 2025.

Phase Two has consisted of four work streams: financial resource sharing, shared support services, employing lay workers, and new URC communities of worship and discipleship.

The finance workstream, after consultation in June 2024, drew up proposals for a new shared fund to finance changes coming from the review. These were discussed at a consultation with synod moderators, treasurers, and trust convenors in May 2025. The refined proposal for the Church Life Fund comes to General Assembly in November. The viability of the other three work streams and subsequent proposals depend on the establishment of the CLR shared fund.

The shared services workstream consists in establishing a shared resources portal for the entire denomination, and designing shared services beyond the resources portal. A consultation on this workstream in November 2024 led to a high-level operating model for the portal: it should start relatively small, be

accessible to a wide range of users, involve properly resourced experts in their subject and allow feedback on errors.

It became clear that some kind of support function for the portal, such as a helpdesk, would be a major benefit. A group is working on the design of the portal, with an initial version to go live before November. Other shared services are being designed, including IT, HR, payroll, accounting support for local churches, and procurement/buying solution. The review is monitoring a living lab in North Western Synod, exploring the usefulness of, and calls upon, a helpdesk for local churches.

The lay worker workstream engaged Eido, a faith-based research organisation, to undertake eight case studies exploring lay worker employment across the denomination, including those employed directly by local churches, and those employed by synods. Interim findings are highly encouraging, and a report and recommendations will be brought before Assembly in November. The Church Life Fund will provide grants for lay workers in local churches.

The new communities workstream involved the 'Conversations at the Crossroads' consultation in January, with a diverse group of 'Mission and Discipleship Animators'. Following that, a New Communities Working Group was established to consult further and draw up a proposal to inform funding decisions and the development of church communities on the ground. New communities may be alongside existing churches or in 'Greenfield' areas. Some might need significant funding, some less. The aim is for them to be experimental, evolutionary and evaluated.

Extraordinary General Assembly 14-16 November 2025

Rev. Dr John Bradbury, General Secretary of the URC, gave a presentation looking back on the story of Church Life Review (CLR), starting in 2021 with a call for people to share their experiences, hopes and fears about church life. This was accompanied by focused research into who the URC are, and forensic accounting, which raised questions but showed we had some financial resources. What emerged, said Dr Bradbury, was the picture of a Church in which small congregations make an oversized difference to their communities, but are deeply tired and scared of running out of people.

Our Church continues to face decline, he said, but also faces a moment of opportunity in our society: "The proposals that come to this General Assembly are a faithful attempt to offer a response to what we have heard the Church say it needs. We believe they will equip us for the next stage of the journey together as the United Reformed Church. But we are under no illusions that this is the whole solution to the challenges we face..."

"My prayer is for the movement of the Holy Spirit among us. I believe there is a Kairos moment in the life of the Churches in this part of

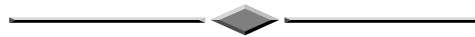
the globe. Something is changing around us – something which opens up new possibilities. I believe that in our discernment together this weekend, the foundations might well be laid for the next stage of our journey together as the United Reformed Church that will enable us to respond faithfully to the call of God, who is holding before us a moment of promise, opportunity, and hope.”

General Assembly went on to pass motions supporting all the proposals of the Church Life Review. In summary, these were:

- greater financial resource sharing between Synods and the creation of a Church Life Fund;
- shared support services for local churches, including a resources hub;
- increased employment of lay workers to relieve pressures on the local church;
- the creation of new communities of discipleship and worship;

Peter Knowles

Thames North Synod representative to General Assembly



Mission Partnership Progress

During the past year, Malcolm and I have been attending various meetings to discuss a proposal for six churches in the Southend area to form a Mission Partnership. One local church that is not included is Bramerton Road Community Church, Hockley, who are in a shared pastorate with Basildon URC and they have already joined a Chelmsford-based Mission Partnership.

Following the retirement of Rev. Andrew Birch and the move of Rev. Sohail Ejaz to Kent, the six churches are currently served by only one stipendiary minister – Rev. Naomi Young Rodas. Naomi was originally appointed to Christ Church Rayleigh URC but her scoping has been altered so that she now also serves at Bridgwater Drive URC and Kings Road URC. Only when a Mission Partnership is formed will a second minister be called to serve the six churches.

There have been regular meetings led by Rev. Naomi covering Policies and Letting, Finance and Treasurers, and Worship, in order to establish similarities across all the churches.

All the Churches involved were asked to vote in our Church Meetings for the following:

- To approve joining the Mission Partnership
- To approve the name for the Mission Partnership suggested at one of the planning meetings, i.e. South East Essex Mission Partnership.

All six churches have now agreed to join the Mission Partnership and agreed to the proposed name so we are slowly making progress to become the South East Essex Mission Partnership.

Before a second minister can be appointed, each church in the partnership must provide a pastoral profile which will be incorporated in the Mission Partnership pastorate profile.

Recently, Christ Church Rayleigh URC sent us an invitation to an afternoon tea on Saturday 14th February to celebrate this achievement, and to provide a space and time for all the church members to mingle and chat together and get to know each other. There will also be a special service, when all the churches will meet together to celebrate the new South East Essex Mission Partnership. The service will be led by the Eastern Synod Moderator, Rev. Lythan Nevard, but the date has not yet been finalised. The afternoon tea may be moved to depending on when the special service is held.

After the formation of the Mission Partnership, it may take several months to find a new minister for the Mission Partnership, but we are making steady progress and there is a good atmosphere when we meet, and a feeling of one-ness between all of us that we look forward to a shared future.

Heather Brown

Auntie Winnie

Auntie Winnie
Put on her pinnie
Ready to go,
Making and baking
As it's Christmas time you know,
So she's rushing to and fro.

Now, Uncle Billy
Willy-nilly
Is more the ponderous type.
While Auntie flits
He calmly sits,
Playing the guitar
And sings a little song
As he looks upon
the star
At the top of the Christmas tree.
Tra la la la.



Doreen Churchill

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2026

One Body, One Spirit – Ephesians 4:4

For 2026, the prayers and reflections for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity have been prepared by the faithful of the Armenian Apostolic Church, along with their brothers and sisters of the Armenian Catholic and Evangelical Churches.

These resources draw upon centuries-old traditions of prayer and petitions used by the Armenian people, along with hymns that originated in the ancient monasteries and churches of Armenia, dating back to the 4th century.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2026 extends an invitation to draw upon this shared Christian heritage and to delve more deeply into our fellowship in Christ, which unites Christians worldwide.

Paul's epistles stress the importance of unity within the Church, urging us to live lives worthy of our calling with humility, gentleness, patience and love (Ephesians 4:1-3). Ephesians 4:4 summarises the teachings of Paul about unity, emphasising here, too, that the followers of Christ represent 'one body and one Spirit', united in a single hope.

Meetings in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2026

Tue 20th Jan 7.30pm – Meeting at Hadleigh Baptist Church

Wed 21st Jan 10.30am – Meeting at St James the Less Church with Holy Communion

Thu 22nd Jan 2.00pm – Meeting at Hadleigh Methodist Church

Fri 23rd Jan 2.00pm – Meeting at St Michael's Church, Daws Heath

Sat 25th Jan 4.00pm – Praise service at Hadleigh Methodist Church

The resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity can be downloaded from the Churches Together in Britain & Ireland website at <https://ctbi.org.uk/resources/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2026>.

Malcolm Brown

Computer Corner

Interesting video

The Budget: What does it actually mean for you?

A thirty-minute video presented by Adam Fleming of the BBC's Newscast team on the November Autumn Budget. Adam is joined by Helen Miller, Director at the Institute of Fiscal Studies.

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uz-Z3wAXm38>

Useful free software

Advanced IP Scanner

This program is a network scanner that allows you to analyze devices attached to a network. Its main use is to show all network devices but it can also give you access to shared folders and provide remote control of computers via other specialist software. It is easy to use and runs as a portable edition.

URL: <https://www.advanced-ip-scanner.com>

Helpful article

What to do if you lose your mobile phone

Losing your mobile phone can be a very distressing experience and the chances of recovering a stolen phone can be slim. However, there are measures you can take before and after the event to prepare and protect your data from such situations. This article from the MoneySuperMarket.com website lays out the steps you need to take in a very easy to follow way.

URL: <https://www.moneysupermarket.com/mobile-phones/guides/lost-or-stolen-phones>

Word Search – Budget terms

Inspired by the Chancellor's Autumn budget speech

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| J | L | I | L | E | V | Y | M | D | T | V | U | Y | G | B | U | T | N | E | Q |
| V | U | F | X | I | W | V | G | Z | K | I | E | T | Y | Z | I | E | Y | W | I |
| H | F | Z | A | A | X | G | D | N | T | G | F | Z | L | R | A | G | F | Z | D |
| H | E | R | T | Y | N | H | R | D | T | E | B | E | Z | U | J | D | E | M | Y |
| F | E | I | L | E | R | I | E | I | U | M | M | Z | N | J | E | U | I | Y | I |
| I | E | J | L | Q | N | A | F | V | D | T | L | P | Z | E | U | B | O | F | T |
| T | P | R | T | C | K | S | O | A | D | X | Y | R | N | P | B | E | H | I | K |
| F | A | C | O | E | I | A | R | U | U | E | G | Y | E | C | C | P | D | H | M |
| Q | A | M | C | N | S | J | M | X | K | S | B | Y | T | U | U | E | T | U | A |
| S | E | U | C | L | M | S | C | Y | I | J | T | I | Z | R | R | L | X | M | I |
| V | L | A | C | S | I | F | A | G | R | S | R | E | S | C | E | F | R | G | W |
| S | P | H | N | O | I | S | N | E | P | U | U | V | R | D | F | P | K | H | Q |
| J | A | K | A | D | I | V | I | D | E | N | D | R | L | I | Y | W | O | Q | J |
| T | Y | V | H | Y | D | J | Z | N | I | U | U | O | C | O | T | W | B | R | I |
| G | S | M | I | W | L | K | Y | M | I | S | H | M | W | H | E | Y | O | P | P |
| N | P | X | S | N | T | Q | M | T | I | S | W | A | T | X | A | L | E | X | E |
| N | Y | J | U | R | G | S | J | Y | E | X | G | V | C | F | R | R | E | C | C |
| I | U | Q | S | H | G | S | U | R | I | E | H | I | R | S | M | Z | G | R | T |
| T | S | F | I | K | J | V | H | K | V | D | S | O | H | U | S | W | T | E | L |
| K | Z | M | V | C | F | T | O | E | O | E | F | W | W | Z | T | S | P | U | S |

ASSET
AUSTERITY
BENEFIT
BUDGET
CREDIT
DIVIDEND
DUTY
EXCISE
FISCAL
INCOME
LEVY
PENSION
PROPERTY
REFORM
RELIEF
SAVINGS
SURCHARGE
TAX
THRESHOLD
WAGE

Words may appear in any direction including diagonally, back to front and upside down.

WHAT'S ON

A round-up of future events in the area

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Sun 14 Dec 2025 | - Gaudeamus Choir presents 'Sing Choirs of Angels' at St James the Less Church. Starts at 3.00pm. Adults £10.00, children free - pay at the door or order in advance by phoning 01702 556600 or 01268 77177 |
| ditto | - Allegro Choir presents 'An Afternoon of Christmas Music' at St Barnabas Church. Starts at 3.00pm. Admission £10.00, children free. |
| ditto | - Traditional Folk Carol Service with The Famous Potatoes at St Clement's Church, Broadway. Leigh-on-Sea from 6.30pm to 8.00pm. |
| Mon 15 Dec 2025 | - Smart Minds dementia club at Hadleigh URC from 1.00pm to 3.00pm every Mon. Phone Sue on 07889 762172 if interested. |
| ditto | - Afternoon Tea & Chat at Hadleigh Library from 2.30pm to 4.30pm. |
| Tue 16 Dec 2025 | - Kettle's On Coffee Morning at St Barnabas Church, Hadleigh, from 10.30am to 12.00 noon. Held every Tue. |
| Wed 17 Dec 2025 | - Coffee Morning at St Michael's Church, St Michael's Road, Daws Heath, from 10.00am to 11.45am. Held every Wed. |
| ditto | - Westwood Art Group from 9.30am to 12 noon at the SA Hadleigh Temple Hall, every Wed. Phone Ian on 07768 871875 for info. |
| ditto | - Top of the Hill Club meeting (chat, play games) at the White Hart pub, Thundersley from 14.00-16.00. Held 1 st & 3 rd Weds. All welcome. |
| Thu 18 Dec 2025 | - Drop-in at SA Hadleigh Temple from 9.30am to 12 noon with friendly chat, free tea and toast or coffee and cake, every Thu. |
| ditto | - Coffee Morning at the church from 10.30am to 12 noon. Free refills. |
| Sun 21 Dec 2025 | - Allegro Choir presents 'An Afternoon of Christmas Music' at Benfleet Methodist Church, High Road, South Benfleet. Starts at 2.00pm. Admission £10.00, children free. In aid of UNICEF. |
| Sat 3 Jan 2026 | - Hadleigh PIP Councillors Street Stall outside Iceland store, Rectory Road from 10.00am to 12.00 noon. Held 1 st Sat, weather permitting. |
| Fri 9 Jan 2026 | - Castle Point Art Club from 10.00am to 12 noon in wooden hut next to Hadleigh URC every Friday. Phone Ted on 01702 555113 for info. |
| ditto | - Benfleet Art & Crafts Club from 2.00pm to 3.30pm at Hadleigh Methodist Church. Held every Friday. Phone 01702 554358 for info. |
| Sat 10 Jan 2026 | - Coffee Morning at Hadleigh Methodist Church from 10.00am to 12 noon with drinks, cakes and bric-a-brac stall. Held 2 nd Sat of month. |
| ditto | - Beat and Beans Café at St James the Less Church from 10.30am to 12.30pm. Refreshments & live music by Silver Darlings Shanty Crew. |
| ditto | - Coffee Morning & Book Sale at St Peter's Church, Thundersley from 10.30am to 12.30pm. Held 2 nd Sat of month. |
| Sat 31 Jan 2026 | - Hadleigh & Thundersley Community Archive Drop-in at Hadleigh Library from 10.30am to 12 noon. |
| ditto | - H & T Community Archive slideshow 'Recovering Our Past - in 100 Pictures' at St Michael's Church Hall at 2.00pm. Entry £4 at the door. |
| Sat 21 Feb 2026 | - Castle Point Astronomy Club Open Evening (free) at St Michael's field, Daws Heath, from 6.30m to 8.30pm, weather permitting. |

More events listed on the HELIX website at <http://www.hadleighessex.info>