



## SEASONAL IDEAS FOR REFLECTION AND WORSHIP

This year we're inviting your church to make a donation to our work, through a collection at an Advent Sunday service or Christmas carol service, at a shared lunch or coffee morning, or by holding a sponsored walk.

We've provided ways to help you introduce CUF's work to your congregation, pray for the projects we support, and engage even the youngest members of your church.



Christmas is a time when we open our doors a little wider. There might be more people squeezing around the table for a meal at home. More people in our churches attending carol services. We go out of our way to offer hospitality to friends and strangers. Like the innkeeper in the Christmas story, we extend a wider welcome.

Church Urban Fund supports churches and communities to provide a wider welcome all year round. Together we tackle complex challenges such as homelessness, poverty, and exclusion, by mobilising individuals, churches, and whole communities to make a difference through initiatives such as Places of Welcome.

From providing spaces where people can meet and find friendship, equipping

churches to support refugees, to training mentors to support people with experience of homelessness, our work brings people together to build strong communities where people receive the support they need and everyone has a part to play.

This Advent we are inspired by the words of **Romans 12:12-13**: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer; Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."

The familiar scriptures and carols of this season also remind us to embrace a wider welcome by extending hospitality that builds community and belonging, showing compassion and generosity, and fostering hope and peace.

## CUF's work

At CUF our vision is a future where everyone in England can access a community of support when they need it most.

Our mission is to tackle complex challenges like poverty and exclusion across England by mobilising people, churches, and whole communities to make a positive difference.

We aim to transform the lives of those in poverty and strengthen communities by reducing loneliness, increasing self-confidence and building stronger communities.

Show our short video or use the simple script to encourage your church to support the work of CUF through giving and prayer.

This 5 minute video describes CUF's mission and features some of the churches and groups we work with.

Hear how we help churches and community groups provide a wider welcome by offering free spaces for people to meet, increasing participation, building community and supporting refugees.

## Prayers

**Romans 12:12-13 says: Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer; Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.**

Use the following suggestions to shape a time of prayer and intercession.

- Pray for those who are struggling to afford the essentials like food, heating and secure housing.
- Thank God for the individuals, groups and organisations in your local area who are bringing hope and showing love by supporting those in need.
- Pray for local institutions and professionals who serve your local community: schools, local councillors, GPs, police, social prescribers, social housing landlords and local charities.
- Pray for a greater awareness of issues of inequality and injustice and for a more just and equal world.
- Pray for those who are lonely and isolated especially at this time of the year.
- Pray for community groups and places in your area where people gather for friendship and connection.
- Pray for those who volunteer locally, that people's talents and strengths are recognised, encouraged and valued.
- Pray for opportunities to give and receive generous hospitality this Christmas that builds community.





## An Advent prayer

Watchful at all times,  
let us pray for strength to stand with confidence  
before our Maker and Redeemer.

That God may bring in his kingdom with justice and mercy,  
let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy.**

That God may establish among the nations  
his sceptre of righteousness,  
let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy.**

That we may seek Christ in the Scriptures  
and recognize him in the breaking of the bread,  
let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy.**

That God may bind up the broken-hearted,  
restore the sick  
and raise up all who have fallen,  
let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy.**

That the light of God's coming may dawn  
on all who live in darkness and the shadow of death,  
let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy.**

That, with all the saints in light,  
we may shine forth as lights for the world,  
let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy.**

We commend ourselves and all for whom we pray  
to the mercy and protection of our heavenly Father:

*Silence is kept.*

Almighty God,  
as your blessed Son Jesus Christ  
first came to seek and to save the lost;  
so may he come again to find in us  
the completion of his redeeming work;  
for he is now alive  
and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.

Amen.

## A prayer from CUF

God of compassion,

Give us a vision of your love  
in the darkness that often  
surrounds us;

Give us the faith to believe in  
hope even in places and lives  
where hope has been eroded;

Give us the strength to reach  
out and build community and  
connection with those who are  
isolated and forgotten;

Give us the courage to  
grow networks of love and  
hospitality in the places where  
we live.

We ask this in the name of  
Jesus.

Amen.

## All age activity: Paper chains

This short activity focuses on the power of strong communities as you create some festive decorations to decorate your church space and welcome your community this Christmas.



### Equipment:

- Strips of paper approx. 15cm x 2.5cm. You can use any paper – recycled wrapping paper, magazine pages or even newspaper – the more colourful the better!
- Glue sticks or tape.
- Marker pens (optional).

### Instructions:

Take a strip and make a loop securing in place with glue or tape. Thread another strip through the first loop and make another loop.

Get everyone involved in making a really long paper chain. You could set a time limit or target length. People might want to work in small groups and then link their shorter chains together into one long chain. You could give people the option of writing their names, and those they love or want to connect with, on the paper strips.

### Reflection:

Hold up a single loop of paper....

A single loop isn't very festive – no one would hang up one loop of paper to decorate their house at Christmas.

It's only when we start to join the loops together that we create a chain that looks beautiful.

The more loops we add and the more variety of colours and patterns we use, the longer, stronger and more Christmassy the chain becomes.

This is the same with our churches and communities. The more people we include, the stronger our communities become, no one is left on their own and everyone is supported.

This Christmas let's follow Jesus example of loving our neighbours and look for ways to make our chains of friendship and community longer and stronger.

If you have more time you could ask people to reflect a bit more on the symbolism and practical uses of chains:

- Discuss how chains can symbolise unity, connection, strength, and friendship.
- Explore how chains are used in everyday life, such as for securing objects or connecting things.