

**TOGETHER
NETWORK** 



Includes your
**Advent Reflection
pull-out**

Homeless but
NOT
Hopeless

Together in Prayer

Homelessness

November 2019 - January 2020

Homeless but not hopeless

Homelessness is a serious and growing issue. The statistics are staggering: one in ten people in England say that they have personally experienced homelessness and the number of people sleeping rough in London alone has doubled in the last five years.

This prayer diary explores a variety of ways our local workers on the ground are working to tackle homelessness, with suggestions of how you can support them in prayer.

"Thank you. It is so encouraging to know that people are praying for what we are involved with."

Anna, Development Worker in Norfolk

THE ADVENT SLEEPOUT CHALLENGE

The Advent Sleepout Challenge is a national, sponsored event to help homeless people in England transform their lives and communities through the work of the Together Network.

Find out more at www.sleepoutchallenge.org.uk





This winter, please pray:

For those whose lives are being turned upside down as they lose a permanent place to sleep each night because of ill health, insecure housing, relationship breakdown, loss of jobs or changes in the benefit system.

For those experiencing homelessness, whether they are sleeping rough, staying in night shelters, living in temporary accommodation, staying with family or friends, sofa-surfing or sleeping in their cars. Pray that they are kept safe, and that they may be given hope that their situation will improve.

For the many night shelters beginning to set up for the winter. Pray that there are enough warm and safe beds so that no one has to sleep rough on the streets. Pray for all those helping in the shelters; pray for wisdom, patience and tenacity so that warm and generous hospitality is offered to every person who comes to rest, eat and sleep in the shelters.

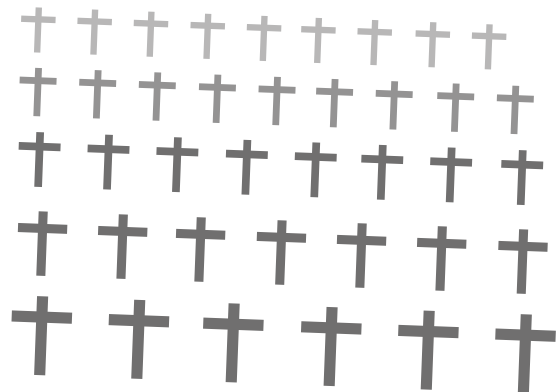
For wisdom for local authorities and central government as they respond to the housing and health needs in our country this winter.

For compassion, safety and strength for our development workers and all those working, day and night, to try to meet some of the needs of those who find themselves without a home.

Diocese of Canterbury

Together Kent is working with two homeless charities, local authorities and a prison to support ex-offenders who are released into street homelessness. The aim is to provide somewhere that they can stay whilst receiving the community support they need to make a successful transition to an independent tenancy.

A grant has recently been received which enables the project to take the first steps towards converting a property. Please thank God for the support received and pray that the local community will embrace the project and provide the support that the tenants need.



The deaths of 726 homeless people in England and Wales recorded in 2018 represent an increase of over a fifth on the previous year. That's the largest rise since these figures began in 2013.

Diocese of Manchester

Greater Together Manchester runs the GTM Night Shelter, bringing together communities and churches across Manchester and Salford to offer shelter and support to men who would otherwise be sleeping rough. They are running two night shelters this year, working in partnership with the 'A Bed Every Night' programme across Greater Manchester.

Please pray for the staff and volunteers who work tirelessly to ensure that the shelter can open each and every night between October and April, and for the churches and community groups who generously offer use of their buildings. Pray that the guests will find a way to rebuild their lives and leave behind homelessness and the challenges that come with this. Pray also for the work of Greater Together Manchester's support staff and their partner organisations who work together to support guests during the day, helping them find stability, work and long term accommodation.

Diocese of Norwich

Imagine Norfolk Together coordinates two winter night shelters.

In Great Yarmouth The Living Room shelter is now able to employ both a Support Advocate and a Project Co-ordinator, and they hope to increase their provision to five nights a week this year. Please pray for the wonderful team of volunteers, trustees and their two workers. Please pray that they are able to support the visitors to the shelter well.

Across the Diocese, please pray for King's Lynn Winter Night Shelter, which last year supported 97 visitors, across 151 nights, with over 6,500 hours of volunteer time.

Ryan's Journey out of Homelessness

“ I fled domestic abuse and ended up in King's Lynn. I was suicidal and went to the hospital for help. After a fortnight of staying there, I felt sufficiently confident to tell all I'd been through. I was supported by one of the independent living coaches at the Purfleet Trust and by the end of the week she had a place for me in one of their houses. I registered for Universal Credit. Now I want to get back to work. Eventually I want to train to become a nurse.



Kathy - "I feel fantastic!"

“ The Night Shelter has helped me in every single way I can think of. It got me off amphetamines. The regular food, shelter and care made all the difference. People listened and even helped me with my medical needs. Now I'm in another hostel for a month and after that I will get support towards a place of my own, which will be adapted for my needs. If it wasn't for the Night Shelter I wouldn't be where I am now. I would probably be on the street - dead. I feel fantastic now – I sincerely mean it.



Advent Sunday Reflections

Over the next four pages you will find your pull-out Advent Sunday Reflections for December 2019.

Our Advent Sunday reflections can be used individually, or as a church, as you journey through Advent.

Feel free to download more copies from www.cuf.org.uk or call 0207 898 1647 for hard copies.

**TOGETHER
NETWORK** 

**National movement,
Local action**

The Together Network is a subsidiary charity of the Church Urban Fund

Church Urban Fund,
Church House, 27 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3AZ
togethernetwork.org.uk

Sunday 1st December, Advent 1

• Isaiah 2:1-5 • Psalm 122 • Romans 13:11-end • Matthew 24:36-44

Darkness

The last few years have felt like a dark time for most people in Britain. The uncertainty of the last few years has undermined confidence in our political life and people feel afraid to voice their opinions. Coming after a long period of austerity, which reduced the assistance available to the poorest in our society, many people feel trapped in frustration and insecurity.

Isaiah chapter 2 describes such a time in the life of Israel. Through Isaiah God speaks as a caring father, who feels that he can barely recognise his children any more. It's a crisis of identity - the nation once knew who they were in relation to God - but now all is confusion. Trust has broken down.

However, the Father's heart is still turned towards his people, even if they choose to look away. In this context Psalm 122 seems like a memory of 'the good old days'. It depicts the city of Jerusalem as united around its worship of God in the temple - 'bound firmly together' (v3). The different tribes of Israel are happy to come and worship together in their holy city - and receive the judgements of a common authority - the throne of the Davidic monarchy. They pray together for peace and security - the common good of the city they love.

Where can we find the common good of the country we love today? Can it even remain one political entity? In chapter 13 of St Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul urges Christians to invest in the governing structures of their society and even to pay their taxes willingly as a contribution to the good of all. Paul links this sense of civic duty to the Ten Commandments of Moses and Jesus' command to love our neighbour. In verses 11-14 Paul urges us to 'lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light'. However daunted we are by the darkness of our times, Paul urges us to take these practical actions, because we belong to Christ.

In Matthew 24 Jesus is speaking into an age of anxiety - his world is the very opposite of the world of Psalm 122, because in his day Jerusalem has become a place of unjust rule, and the temple has lost its status as a focus of spiritual unity. Jesus commands us to be alert and ready for his future coming. He fleshes this call out in verses 45-51, providing a picture of the choice we must in our own time make between good and bad stewardship of all that God has given us.

Sunday 8th December, Advent 2

• Isaiah 11:1-10 • Psalm 72:1-7 • Romans 15:4-13 • Matthew 3:1-12

Hope

The messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11 is a picture of hope. Darkness is pushed away by a vision of right rule. Jesse was the father of King David, and the hope comes from the expectation that someone is coming who stands in their heritage, and can bring the inspiration and judgment that characterised the kingship that David was remembered for. In verse 2 leadership is clearly defined in terms of empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Verse 3 brings in the wisdom tradition, defined by the book of Proverbs as 'the fear of the Lord'. Verses 4 and 5 define leadership as equity in judgement and righteousness in conduct. Verses 6-8 depicts a community whose members have completely opposite interests, but somehow live in peace together because the messiah is leading them. Our response must surely be 'If only!'

While experience makes us cynical about our leaders, Psalm 72 urges us to pray for those in positions of authority. It gives us a vision of good leadership leading to peace and prosperity - and in verses 2 and 4 that is specifically defined as to 'defend the cause of the poor... give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor'. These are clauses we should be quoting in our prayers of intercession Sunday by Sunday!

In Romans 15:12 Paul deliberately refers to Isaiah 11 to say that in the life of the church those golden promises of messianic rule are being fulfilled. He prays for the church to live in harmony under Christ, and states that in Christ gentiles (non-Jews) are now included within the promises given to Israel. This is what it means for the wolf and the lamb to live together, and this is what it means to call Jesus both servant and King. Paul believes that his readers will be filled with hope when they see the grace of God at work in this historic dissolving of the ancient enmity between Jews and Gentiles.

Our modern democracies were founded on the hope that the opposition between rich and poor could be overcome, but that hope has floundered in recent years. Can we recover that vision?

Listening to the voice of John the Baptist in Matthew 3 challenges us to consider what we might need to repent of, if we are to make our hopes of a more equal society real in the future. Perhaps we have gone too far with a 'meritocracy', which has in practice allowed the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer. Perhaps more redistribution of opportunities to the less well should be our next step.

Sunday 15th December, Advent 3

• Isaiah 35:1-10 • Psalm 146:3-10 • James 5:7-10 • Matthew 11:2-11

Encouragement

In Isaiah 35 the prophet foresees the great things that will happen in the age of the Messiah - which we can already glimpse in the life of the church today. It is so easy for us to feel weak or fearful - but we forget that the ministry of our church is a real fulfilment of prophecy and the promises of scripture. Together, we have opened eyes and ears, we have enabled access and we have given a voice to the voiceless. There is a way, the way of Christ, and we are followers of that way. We can lead others onto this Holy Way, and, as Isaiah says, it is not hard to navigate. This Way takes us to a place of praise, and as we sing together, our 'sorrow and sighing shall flee away' (v10). Taken as a whole, the Bible invites us simply to accept God as our King. If we make this step of faith we step out of the world's framework of gain and blame into a ministry of service which echoes into eternity. Psalm 146 reminds us that mortal rulers are time-limited. They cannot last. But God is always there, bringing justice for the oppressed, giving food to the hungry, setting prisoners free and lifting up those who are bowed down. So, every time we help to do such a thing ourselves, we are acting under the rule of God, and opening the present moment to the eternal values of our King.

Chapter 5 of the letter of James begins by scolding the rich who oppress the poor. For we who look on in horror, and seek to help, he urges the patience of a farmer. We must work at a patient, organic pace, and not fall out with those we share the task with in frustration. We may have an impression of farmers as eternal grumblers, but James sees instead an endurance and strength we should emulate. 'The farmer waits for a precious crop from the earth' - and we who work with people rather than soil should see how precious they are, and how rich the reward is from working with them.

Languishing in jail, John the Baptist needed encouragement. He wanted to know that Jesus was indeed the one foretold in Isaiah 35. Jesus specifically refers to the promises made there, clause by clause, and is specific about how he has fulfilled them in his reply. Those promises are still being fulfilled in our world today, and we can each contribute to the work with our prayer, our action and our giving. We admire John the Baptist for his courage and integrity and his willingness to step away from all comfort and minister in the desert. But, Jesus said that even the least of those who followed after him, as part of the Kingdom of Heaven were greater than John. Since Pentecost, we in the church are privileged to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and bring good news to all. We too can offer leadership in the Kingdom, under the authority of Christ, that can change the world.

Sunday 22nd December, Advent 4

• Isaiah 7:10-16 • Psalm 80:1-7 • Romans 1:1-7 • Matthew 1:18-end

Change

The church has been so keen to take the name of 'Immanuel' from this story of the king of Israel and the prophet Isaiah and apply it to the coming Messiah, that we have lost sight of what was immediately at stake between the two men at the time. In this moment, as the rest of chapter 7 makes clear, Isaiah is asking the king to face up to a massive historical change that is coming up - and the king is trying to fob him off. Isaiah is saying that decisive change is coming, within the time it takes a child to be born and become self aware - but the king prefers not to know.

Too often it suits those in power to blur and obscure the need for change, as with the debate over climate change - or inequality - in our time. This prevents honest debate, and means that the status quo stands unchallenged.

When we consider the frequent weakness of our church's witness to our society we too must cry out with the author of Psalm 80 'Restore us, O God'. How often do we really challenge the clever obfuscations of those in power? How often do we really challenge even ourselves with the real implications of what we believe?

St Paul is not so weak! He is the apostle of change, and 'the great includer', destined to bring all the gentile races under the same canopy of salvation as the Jews. Paul proclaims Jesus as both the human Messiah (as descendent of David) and the divine Saviour (as the Risen One). Paul turned the world upside down - how could we be called to do anything less?

God changed everything for Mary and Joseph when he made them part of his salvation plan. It was chaotic at first, as their engagement was disrupted by her unexpected pregnancy. But, God shepherded them through with the angel's reassurance to Joseph that he should stand by Mary, and the words of Isaiah 7 applied to a new situation of urgent change.

Our Messiah is called 'God is with us'. If his destiny is 'to save his people from their sins' why should we be so afraid of our own weakness? Let us all find the courage to be change-makers, wherever God has called us to take our stand.

Amen.



Diocese of Exeter



Transforming Plymouth Together have linked up a number of local churches with Shekinah: a local homelessness charity. They are also bridging connections between churches who want to get involved and a Salvation Army hostel and the Plymouth Soup Run which delivers meals all year round. Please pray that these links flourish and that churches continue to become further involved with this ministry.

Diocese of Coventry

Transforming Communities Together Warwick is supporting churches as they respond to the increasing issue of homelessness in Warwick. Please pray for the churches to have wisdom in how they respond and that the right partnerships will open up so that they are able to help in the most effective way. Pray for those who find themselves homeless to be healed emotionally, physically and spiritually so they are able to access the help that is on offer and see their lives transformed.

Diocese of Lichfield

Transforming Communities Together leads the Wolverhampton Homelessness Forum, which draws together partners from across the City who want to end homelessness. This ranges from the council to the smallest soup run. Complex problems like homelessness require a partnership approach, which the forum helps facilitate. The group have recently worked with senior Department for Work and Pensions managers on improving the journey for people experiencing homelessness accessing benefits.

Please pray that partnerships across the city strengthen, so that even more people can be supported.



Thank God that homelessness is decreasing in Wolverhampton!



4,751

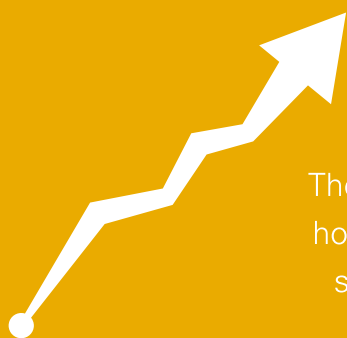
people are estimated to be sleeping rough on any one night in England.

30

The life expectancy of rough sleepers is 30 years shorter than for the rest of the population.



169%



The increase in homelessness since 2010.



1 in 10

people in England say that have personally experienced homelessness.



Facts on this page are from: 'Opening our Eyes to Homelessness', Church Urban Fund, 2016

Diocese of York

Together Middlesbrough and Cleveland are part of the Positive Pathways project, which works to provide one-to-one support to people experiencing homelessness, often with complications of chronic substance abuse and mental health issues. A team of staff and volunteers are slowly gaining the trust they need to help restore dignity into these people's lives, beginning the journey towards improved life choices. Please pray for patience in these relationships, and energy for all the staff and volunteers.

Diocese of Leeds

Wellsprings Together also supports the Positive Pathways project, in Bradford, funding a worker at Bradford Winter Shelter. This shelter provides 12 beds a night for 17 weeks in the coldest months of the year (December to March), in a different partner church each week.



Unlike many hostels, it is able to offer beds to people with 'no recourse to public funds' – for instance failed asylum seekers, people who've been trafficked, or partners of those with residency rights whose relationships have broken down – as well as those who have recourse to public funds but are not a priority case.

Please pray for the more than 900 volunteers at churches across Bradford who provide guests with a friendly welcome, a hot meal each night, a warm bed, and breakfast in the morning. Please also pray that guests get all the support they need: from simple conversations with people who listen, to emotional support, to finding longer-term accommodation.

A Prayer for Homelessness

Written by Rev Steve Wild, Chair of Transformation Cornwall

Dear Lord,

You totally understand how homeless people feel. Jesus himself was homeless for most of His public ministry, leaving the security of the carpentry business to travel around Palestine. Jesus is recorded as saying "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Luke 9:58) We hold before you all of the homelessness work that Churches in England are involved with.

We remember all who are homeless. May we have compassion for the young, older, and otherwise vulnerable among them. We pray that they would experience your love toward them and that you be their protection and provision in time of need. May their hearts experience the warmth of your hope and the light of your love.

Move on us, Lord, to be agents of your provision. Stir our hearts with the knowledge that when we feed and clothe those in need, we are clothing and feeding Jesus (Mt 25:34-46).

Amen

