WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



December 2026

Covering Thoughts

With Christmas on the horizon, I have been painting watercolour miniatures to send instead of Christmas cards. The cover image is shown at its original size; all the other paintings chosen for the newsletter are considerably larger than they appear here. Reducing a large painting for printing can tighten the image, making it look more polished and finished, with clearer colours. I have often been disappointed to find that I like an original less than its photograph.

Working small has set me thinking about how much a miniature can convey. Can it suggest atmosphere, weather conditions and space without relying on size and detail? Beyond careful composition and decoration, can a painting convey a sense of wonder and mystery that invites the observer to touch the spiritual in life? I cannot answer that question, but I know that when I paint, something happens to me that is akin to prayer.

Painting miniatures has opened my eyes to the blessing of small things: simple human kindness, a small task done with love, words that reconcile, and eyes that greet you and see you as you are. For these things I am grateful. When the burden of preparation for the Christmas season weighs us down, may these small blessings keep us in touch with the present moment, reminding us of the value and blessing of smallness in the presence of Majesty.

Christine Bainbridge

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Minister's Letter

I always find something magical and special about this time of year. In some ways, it seems to bring out the child within us, the excitement for the presents on Christmas Day, the decorations going up, the getting together with family and friends, but in many ways there's more to it than that.

The excitement starts to build, as we walk down our high street in late November or early December, and you can feel it, the fairy lights are strung up, the brass bands are tuning their instruments, and familiar melodies drift out of shop doorways, even in an increasingly busy and secular world, it seems that almost everyone loves Christmas.

Why does this season hold such a universal pull? For many, it is the warmth of nostalgia—the scent of pine needles, the glow of candles in the dark of winter, and the cherished traditions passed down through generations, for others, it is the rare permission to slow down, gather around a table with family and friends, and practise generosity through the giving of gifts. At its heart, the culture of Christmas taps into a deep, shared human longing for light in the darkness, peace on earth, and goodwill toward one another.

Yet, as wonderful as the tinsel, the carols, and the festive feasts are, they are only echoes of a much deeper story. The true meaning of Christmas isn't found in the perfection of our decorations or the stress of finding the right present. It is found in a quiet, humble stable in Bethlehem over two thousand years ago. Christmas is the celebration of the Incarnation—the astonishing truth that God did not remain distant from our struggles, our loneliness, or our broken world. Instead, He stepped directly into human history as a vulnerable newborn baby.

Every tradition we love about this season actually points back to that manger:
The lights we hang in the winter gloom reflect Jesus, the Light of the World, arriving to scatter our darkness. The gifts we exchange are a small mirror of the ultimate gift of grace—a Saviour given freely to us, not because we earned it, but because we are loved. The gathering of family reminds us that through Christ, we are welcomed into the family of God, where no one has to walk alone.

This December, we don't have to choose between enjoying the festive cheer and honouring the sacred truth of the season. In fact, understanding the real story makes the celebration even richer. When we see past the commercial rush to the grace at the centre of it all, the pressure to create a "perfect" holiday fades away, replaced by genuine joy and peace.

As you hang your lights, wrap your gifts, and share meals with loved ones this Christmas may you experience not just the magic of the season, but the enduring hope of Emmanuel—God with us.

So why not find time this year to invite someone to come and join in our Christmas celebrations as we celebrate the birth of our King together.

Happy Christmas

Your friend and minister

Robert

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Prayers

Please remember in your prayers all members of Phyllis Williams' pastoral group: Jean Boxall, Ruth Baer and Jeff Clarke.

Also remember members of the Care for the World Ministry Team: Rob Holdaway, Ann Bettess, Tina Everett, Robert Harding, Elaine Matejtschuk, Mike Matejtschuk and Ellen Webster.

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Reflection

This Christmas at a time of our greatest need for world cohesion, co-operation, and peace, we have been fragmenting into cruelty, violence, and corruption on steroids. Relative poverty in the UK has continued to grow annually. Elon Musk has more wealth than 51% of the lower income population of the USA. I have been reflecting on those times past when I had close contact with widespread hardship at Christmas. The late 1980's came to mind.

I was working as a counsellor at a College of F.E. in London, deep in the dark days of severe Government budget cuts to education and social care – I remember the stress and misery caused to all by the policies. Our human resources team referred to constant rounds of staff redundancies as "deletions" as in "we have had to delete X and Y." Some students could not even afford to buy notebooks for their studies. We were able to give them sheets of paper to tide them over.

There were no social benefits to take care of those young people who were either forced to risk homelessness or continue to endure abuse in their homes in order to have a roof over their heads. Critics at the time argued that the policy drove vulnerable teenagers into extreme poverty and contributed heavily to youth homelessness. Depression and stress related illness was common, and Christmas had arrived, presents were expected, money was not available. The suffering of the students and staff deeply affected me. However, the belief that education had the power to improve life was still paramount in the college – the staff always did their best to deliver, and despite severe limitations we cared for our students' wellbeing. What would we do without teachers?

Then as now throughout the world, the powerless endure what they must but the call for world justice continues- as we can see in the teachings of Jesus. Even now there is a small gleam of hope coming from the USA, and closer to home.

May you all have a Peaceful and Joyful Christmas.

Tom Goss

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Blended Service Rotas for December 2026

Dates	**Worship Leaders**	**Readers**	**Intercessor**	**Vestry Elder**	**Welcomer** **Door Steward**
6th	Robert Sheard HC	Ann Bettess	Robert Harding	Ellen Webster	Debi Kidd Ann Hardiman
13th	Richard Bainbridge	Christine Bainbridge	Hannah Buss	Rob Holdaway	Chris Shelley Robert Harding
20th	Noémi Roy All age	Ann Gajda	Barbara Joiner	Marian Mole	Ann Gajda Bobbie Stormont
24th **Carol Service**	Colin Thompson				Debi Kidd Liz Barry
25th **Christmas Day**	Robert Sheard	Bev Paton	Tina Everett	Noémi Roy	Liz Barry Charles Bennett
27th **Café Style Service**	Robert Sheard	Barbara Joiner	Ann Bettess	Phyllis Williams	Tom Goss Elaine Matejtschuk

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Common Lectionary Readings - December 2026

Note: leaders may choose to use other readings

Date	6th	13th	20th	25th	27th
First Reading	Isaiah 40: 1-11	Isaiah 61: 1-4 & 8-11	2 Samuel 7: 1-11 & 16	Isaiah 9: 2-7	Isaiah 61: 10-62
Psalm	Psalm 85: 1-2 & 8-13	Psalm 126	Psalm 89: 1-4 & 11-26	Psalm 96	Psalm 148
New Test.	2 Peter 3: 8-15a	I Thess. 5: 16-24	Romans 16: 25-27	Titus 2: 11-14	Galatians 4: 4-7
Gospel	Mark 1: 1-8	John 1: 6-8 & 19-28	Luke 1: 26-38	Luke 2: 1-14	Luke 2: 22-40

Dec 6th - Each year from 25th November to 10th of December there are marches to reclaim the night - what should we reclaim?

Dec 13th - This Sunday is celebrated as Gaudate Sunday - let us rejoice for what we can.

Dec 20th - In a sketch Andre Previn accuses Eric Morecombe of playing the wrong notes to which he responds that he is playing all the right notes but not always in the right order. Where is the theology here?

Dec 25th - Remember the Jews felt their home had been taken away by the Romans, the 'elephant in the room' of the New Testament.

Dec 27th - The Celtic Christians had a concept of anamchara -a soul friend - who makes the journey with us?

Richard Bainbridge

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Christmas Coffee Morning
At the Manse



14th December 2026
10.00am -12.00noon
All are Welcome



Donations welcome for The Falcon school

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An Observation

It has been 8 weeks since I broke my arm and shoulder and two weeks out of plaster. Electric shock like pain shoots from my stiffened fingers up my arm.
There have been various observations since that time which have made me look at life with a wider view.

I was going down the garden next day, still in some shock when the silence there surprised me – almost as if I was in another world. There was a sense of space and a greater awareness of everything around me. The colours of plants, trees, soil, walls, the rustling of leaves, the wetness of the grass, the brightness of bird song, the lightness of being as if I was outside my physicality, observing.

Then later the kindness of strangers in helping me. So many seemed to know what I needed, being with me, talking caringly, hugging me, carrying shopping. Strangers appearing unexpectedly – a mental empathy.

Pain makes one irrational and perhaps my period of quietness has made me more aware of others' needs – seeing outside myself – to a greater existence than the here and now. A period of quiet brings God's presence for the wholeness of His world.

Alice Halliday

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Deadline
8th December is the deadline for the January Newsletter. Please send copy to: *newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk*. Please type all contributions in Calibri font, size 11. Thank you. **Please note the early deadline because of the Christmas holidays.**

Disclaimer
The Editors welcome letters, articles and announcements from individuals and organisations, but reserve the right to publish or not.

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Memory Café Wreath Making







Laurence Devlin

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NEW YEAR'S DAY WALKS 2027

Tina has kindly offered to do a Shotover walk on New Year's Day before the shared lunch Chez Devlin. In recent previous years we have walked around streets in the village calling on people unable to join a walk themselves. I shan't be leading such a walk, myself, this year, but might I suggest that if you are not going to join Tina's walk on Shotover, you might perhaps wend your way towards the High Street for the shared lunch, instead, thinking of whom you might be able to visit and give a New Year greeting to, en-route?
Just a thought?

Tony Barry

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Christmas Café Service

You're invited to do something a little bit different this festive season!

Join us on **December 27th at Wheatley URC at 10:00 am** for a warm, relaxed, and cozy **Christmas Café Service**.

Another chance to sing some more carols. With the theme of shepherds and angels, we'll be looking at the Christmas story in a slightly different way to our usual worship.

If you have or are fed up with a mountain of leftover mince pies, chocolates, biscuits or Christmas cake hiding in the kitchen, bring them along to share with everyone as we gather round for a relaxed morning together.

Come as you are, grab a seat, and let's keep the festive warmth going just a little bit longer. We'd love to see you there!



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Falcon School Update

Reviewing Next Priorities … Difficult Decisions!

Following our recent help towards classroom refurbishment (**thank you!!**), the school, in discussion with ourselves, have again updated their development priorities and have been particularly brave with their decisions.

It would have been easy to progress to any of the next priorities highlighted in the September Newsletter (eg security fencing, solar power, external painting of classrooms) but, despite the benefit being less visually apparent in terms of 'school fabric' improvement, Wilbert and the school have decided to: …..

…… place **1st priority emphasis over the next 3+ months on the income-generating 'Poultry Project' …** i.e. the purchase **(with our help!)** of a further **100 hen-laying eggs at $1000/£750 (to be added to the existing 86 hens)** followed, as soon after as possible, by a further 100 hens at the same cost.



Once settled in, this should generate net income of very approximately $290 per month (before deduction of miscellaneous expenses) which can be gradually invested into the other school priorities

The school is 'biting the bullet' because they feel that they must **try to take even more responsibility for generating their own income**, however long this may take.
And this is also brave because, like all things in rural Zimbabwe, the school is aware of the usual risks involved …e.g. the poultry 'run' needs to be carefully managed and they have already obtained training, including how to minimise infection.



Despite not warranting further investment right now, **the Farming Project, for which we helped install irrigation last year, is also proving very fruitful** as both an educational project (see photos!), as well as providing food to supplement pupils' lunches, small amounts of feed for the poultry 'run' and, in future months, additional income from the sale of surplus ripe mealie cobs.

Thank you so much for your continued vital support for the Falcon school .. if you have any ideas of how we can help with further fund raising to support the school and its development challenges, they would be most welcome!

Care for the World Team

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Christmas cards

It has been the custom for many years at Wheatley URC to send just one Christmas card to the whole church. The money saved by not sending dozens to church friends could then be given to charity. The cards will be pinned to the notice board for all to read and to wish one another A Very Happy Christmas.



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Dates for Your Diaries

Weekly

Sunday	Pulse Youth Group
6-8pm (term time)	
Mon & Thurs 9.00am	Mindfulness Sitting Group
	Mark Williams - jmarkgwilliams@gmail.com
Friday 10am	Table Tennis
	Val Farmer – val_farmer40@hotmail.com
Fridays	Friday is Robert Sheard's day off

Monthly

First Sunday	Teas - 2.30-4pm
	Ann Bettess – annsgoog@gmail.com
First Tuesday	Dance Chapel – bobbiestormont@gmail.com
Second Tuesday	Lunch Club
	Val Farmer – val_farmer40@hotmail.com
First Thurs. 10am	Prayers for the World
	Ann Hardiman
First & Third Thurs.	Coffee Morning
10.30am	Barbara Joiner – albarjoiner2@gmail.com
Second Thursday 10am	Memory Café
	Laurence Devlin – laurencelalanne99@gmail.com

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