

Connect

Winter Edition

December 2025 to February 2026

Editor's Greeting

We have a colourful edition of Connect this month with a significant number of photographs gathered to illustrate the various events and activities that have been going on in the pastorate churches. We look back to harvest, reflect on the remembering season and look ahead to Christmas and New Year.

This is our fourth Connect Winter Edition and the 11th Edition overall. I hope you enjoy reading these as much as I enjoy compiling them. It's encouraging to see what is going on and how God is at work.

Revd Adam Earle

News from the Churches



Felixstowe United Reformed Church

Harvest Festival

After the lull of the Summer where we journey through what is known in the Church calendar as "Ordinary Time". It is good to take time to delight in the season of creation and give thanks to God for his generous blessings. We held our annual harvest celebration, led by Revd David on Sunday 28th September.



Thanks to our team of arrangers for ensuring a colourful, celebratory display was in place to mark the occasion. All gifts were given to the Manna Pop-Up shop which operates from Christ Church Felixstowe.

Macmillan Coffee Morning

Following the success of last year's joint venture with the Methodist congregation, we held another coffee morning in aid of Macmillan

Cancer Care on Saturday 4th October at FMC Trinity. It was very well supported, with a variety of stalls and plenty of tasty treats to share. With all donations counted we were thrilled to announce that £1457 was raised to support the excellent work of Macmillan.



We hope to organise further events in partnership with our Methodist friends over the coming year.

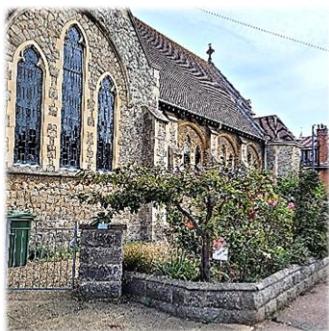
Felixstowe in Flower



We are greatly blessed to have an accessible and well maintained garden bordering the front and side of the church building. This is part of our Eco-Church commitment promoting bio-diversity and sustainability.

The garden is looked after by Phil and Yvonne who work hard to keep it in order and healthy throughout the year. They have established a wonderful range of plants that keeps giving month by month. The garden is open for anyone who might like to come a sit awhile.

On Sunday 23rd November we were delighted to be able to present Phil and Yvonne, on behalf of the church, with the Felixstowe in Flower award for “Best Sustainable Planting”. They also secured the runners up place in the “Best Commercial Garden” category.



Congratulations to Phil and Yvonne for all their hard work and commitment. The certificates have been framed and will be displayed in due course.

Time to Remember – Tree of Light

During the Covid lockdown in 2020 we had to say farewell to a significant number of church members and friends who passed away during that time. When the situation improved and we were able to meet for worship again, we established an annual “Remembering” service for people to remember and give thanks for loved ones no longer with us.

This year our service took place on Sunday 26th October (Led by Revd Adam). The theme was Light and Life, two things that are closely entwined through Scripture and are central to our faith. As our act of remembering, folk were invited to hang small cardboard flowers on the branches of the lighted tree, each bearing the name of a loved one.



We understand that the theme has, or will be continued, with services at Castle Hill (30th November) and St Johns' (14th December). We hope they find it as helpful as we did.

Looking Ahead

We continue to pray and ask your prayers for the future work and mission of Felixstowe URC and any partnerships that we may establish. Please pray for God's continued guidance and wisdom as we seek to follow his will and way.





Hadleigh United Reformed Church Great Meeting

Looking Forward

We are continuing with our exploration of God's will for our mission and commitment over the next few years. In the last edition of Connect we mentioned that we would be holding a Church Vision Morning on Saturday 10th September. This took place as planned and proved very helpful.

Our opening worship focussed on the second chapter of Habakkuk (no we aren't all that familiar with it either), especially verses 2 and 3, "Then the Lord told me:

"I will give you my message in the form of a vision. Write it clearly enough to be read at a glance. At the time I have decided, my words will come true. You can trust what I say about the future. It may take a long time, but keep on waiting - it will happen!"



With this encouragement in mind, we worked in groups to explore five focus areas:

- Prayer
- Jesus at the Heart of it All
- Being Seen and Known
- A Voice and Hands for Justice
- Being Honest, Realistic and Faithful

Some really engaging, helpful ideas and observations were shared. These were collated and taken to the Elders' meeting which took place on Monday 1st December. Our next step will be to apply these to our Mission Action Plan.

Monks Eleigh Chapel

At our September Church meeting we voted, on the recommendation of the elders to officially close Monks Eleigh as a congregation of the United Reformed Church. The chapel congregation was founded in 1820 and four years later a barn owned by Mr. William Faiers was converted for worship. In 1845 the barn was purchased by John Ansell and associated with the Hadleigh Church (now URC).



In 1870 a larger chapel was built on the site to accommodate the growing congregation.

Use of the larger chapel, for worship, ended some years ago. The space was used from 2015 to 2023 by "Sounds of the Past" a museum of historic radio and recording equipment. This has since been reopened by enthusiasts and more information can be found on the group's Facebook Page.



The small, original chapel has continued to serve as a place for occasional worship and as a retreat centre (which we introduced in an earlier edition of Connect).



The official service of Thanksgiving for the witness and work of the Monks Eleigh Chapel will be held at 3:00pm on Sunday 10th May. The Moderator of URC Eastern Synod, Revd Lythan Nevard, will be joining us. Further details will be sorted nearer the time but please put the date in your diaries and come and share this time of worship with us.

The chapel will be retained as part of the Ansell Trust and be available to various groups as a place for meeting. If any of the other parishes are looking for a place to meet for an event or retreat, then the Heart of Monks Eleigh (H.O.M.E.) may be ideal.



DAY RETREAT CENTRE

A space for people to be at HOME with themselves, with others, or with their God

Fruitfulness on the Frontline



The other churches in the parishes had the opportunity to participate in the Fruitfulness on the Frontline course over the last few years.

Having joined the parishes in January (that

year went quickly didn't it!) a number of folk from Hadleigh have engaged with the six-session course. This was an evening "delivery" of the course but we are planning day-time sessions in the new year. If other folk would like to join us do please let Revd David know.

If you want to know more about the FOTF material you can visit the LICC website: licc.org.uk/ourresources/fruitfulness/

Blythswood Christmas Shoebox Appeal



For quite some years now Hadleigh have supported the annual Blythswood Christmas Shoebox Appeal. Items are gathered and boxes filled by a wonderful team of helpers.



Filled with small, practical items such as toiletries, stationery, and clothing, the individually-wrapped boxes are distributed in schools, hospitals, orphanages and care homes, and to households in very low income communities. Many have gone to people affected by the war in Ukraine.

In Hadleigh's November newsletter Hilary reported that this year over 151 boxes had been filled and prepared. Huge thanks go to the helpers and all those who contributed in any way.

Castle Hill School's Harvest Celebration

Over the last few years Revd Adam and Revd David have been working to establish stronger links with the school directly opposite the church in Dryden Road. One of events that we host is the school's annual harvest assemblies. These are gatherings for pupils and staff and are an opportunity to celebrate, give thanks and bring harvest gifts.



There are always some wonderful songs which the children enjoy. An absolute favourite is “Big Red Combine Harvester” and “Autumn Leaves” comes a close second. The concluding song this year was “Praise to the One” – giving thanks to God for all creation.

Revd David and Revd Adam had a lot of fun (as did the children) sharing the story of Stone Soup. A stranger, visiting a village where famine is causing fear and isolation, persuades the villagers to share the little they have to ensure that everyone is fed.

All the gifts brought by the children were taken and shared with FIND (Families in Need) Ipswich. Thanks to everyone who contributed so generously to the collection.



CHAPS Pantomime

As mentioned in the last edition of Connect, the Castle Hill Amateur Performers annual pantomime took place during the October half term week.



The “Haunted House Pantomime” tracked the adventures of a group of young “ghost-hunters” visiting an ancient Manor House. There was lively music, comedy and laughter throughout and the cast gave their very best.

It was a strange experience for Revd Adam to lead the pre-performance prayer in a room with a werewolf, two vampires, Dr Frankenstein (and her monster), a mummy, several ghosts and at least three police officers. The cast were focussed and the audience participated with enthusiasm. A considerable amount was raised in support of this year’s nominated charity – Children in Need. Well done to everyone who took part or supported the performances.

Something Old, Something New

For some years now Castle Hill has been the host venue for a monthly gathering “Fish & Chip Fridays” organised by Headway Suffolk – especially with those living with dementia, and their carers, in mind. Unfortunately, this came to an end in September.



Fish, Fun & Film Friday

Wanting to offer something in place of this, with a wider, inclusive remit (but

still supporting those who previously attended Fish & Chip Fridays), we have launched something new, building on the old. On Friday 24th October we held our first Fish, Fun & Film Friday session. We welcomed over 30 folk who enjoyed games (including Bingo), chat and a fish and chip meal. There was a raffle with prizes generously contributed by many who came. The session concluded with a showing of the original Dad’s Army Film.



Our second meeting (and final one for 2025) was held on Friday 28th November. This time we enjoyed Christmas crafts and a pre-Christmas sing-a-long led by Revd Adam and Gillian. Over 40 folk enjoyed the fish and chip lunch and we were delighted to welcome several new friends.

The film which followed lunch (and another fabulous raffle) was “Passport to Pimlico” one of the original Ealing Comedies. The

biggest laugh came at the sight of a Pig being parachuted in to help the isolated Pimlico residents.

Our next meeting will take place on Friday 23rd January. We begin at 11:30am with conversation, refreshments and activities, we enjoy lunch at about 1:00pm and then watch our film. We are not able to announce the film in print or online in advance but rest assured it will be a good one. All are welcome to join us.

New Members

In the last edition of Connect we were thrilled to be able to share the news that on Sunday 5th October, as part of our Harvest Celebration, we welcomed three new folk into Membership. At the end of the service Revd Adam asked if anyone else would like to become a member and a number of people came forward.



Visits and discussions were arranged and a special church meeting was held on 19th October to approve the welcome of the new members. This meant that at our Café Style Communion Service on Sunday 2nd November, we were delighted to welcome a further five people into membership (shown here). A warm welcome to Beth, Michael, Diane, Lily and Alan. What a wonderful blessing.

Christmas Fayre 2025

On Saturday 29th November we held our annual Christmas Fayre. There was plenty to do and lots of good things on offer. The event included the popular Grand Raffle (selling over 1000 tickets), Tombola, Gift Stalls, Cakes, White Elephant, Jigsaws and Books. There were refreshments available in the Christmas Café and Santa called in so a number of children (and older "children") were able to pay him a visit.



In the Sport's hall we had a children's craft table – with "Gonk" decorations and cards to colour. We introduced some new "Side-show" games including the Hungry Snowman, Penguin Fishing, Rudolph's Nose and Santa's Special Delivery. These proved very popular and we are already working on some ideas for additional games next year.



We do not yet have a final figure raised but the event was a success. Thanks to everyone who helped, contributed, organised and attended.

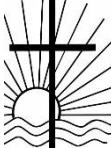
A Sign of the Times

If you happen to be passing Castle Hill URC you may have noticed that we have recently introduced a new way of sharing information and publicising activities and events. We now have a digital display screen (designed for use in daylight) with scrolling posters and information on display. Each image is displayed for a short time before advancing to the next automatically. This is very eye-catching.

At present this is operated "locally" with new items being added and out of date items removed by means of direct connection.

We hope soon to have remote-access software installed which means that those who will be updating the information will be able to do so from the comfort of their own homes.



 **St John's**
United Reformed Church

90+ Celebration Party

We love a party at St John's and are glad to try out new reasons to gather for some good food and fellowship. On Saturday 4th October, taking inspiration from an idea gleaned from Felixstowe URC, we held our first 90+ celebration party at which we shared a special time together.

Those members of the church who had reached or exceeded the age of 90 were our special guests, and a good time was had by all.



There were plenty of sandwiches and cakes, we had a Sunday School song sing-a-long and our guests of honour were presented with cards, a colourful flowering plant and a chocolate medal.

Saying Farewell

St John's have had to say farewell to a significant number of folk who have passed away this year. All of them precious friends whose contributions to the church over the years have been much appreciated. On Tuesday 18th November we gathered to give thanks for the life of our former minister Revd Peter Ball.



Peter was a loving and inspiring man of God whose life and ministry brought joy, hope and positive challenge to so many. The thanksgiving

service, led by Revd Adam and Revd David, was attended by over 200 people in person and over 750 people live online. Since then, the number of folk who have accessed the online recording has risen to over 1000.

In memory of Peter, gifts have been invited in support of St Elizabeth Hospice, in Ipswich, whose home care team gave such tremendous support to Peter and Catherine in the final weeks of his life. If you would like to make a contribution and have not already received details please contact Revd

Adam on revaje@outlook.com and he will let you know how.

On Sunday 14th December Revd David will be leading a "Tree of Light" remembering service. This will be an opportunity for folk to remember and give thanks for the lives of precious loved ones no longer with us.

Just for Fun

Beginning earlier this year (and mentioned in previous editions of Connect) we have been holding two monthly events "Singing for Fun" and "Creating for Fun". The first speaks for itself – a time to gather and sing, just for fun, with a varied repertoire.



The second a time to join in some creative craft and art activities or bring your own projects to share as we chat and create. At our November meeting (shown in the photo) we created some Christmas cards and enjoyed our usual refreshments.

The final meeting of the year will be on **Wednesday 10th December at 2:00pm** and will be a "Just for Fun" Christmas party to include games, songs, crafts and some party food to enjoy. You are welcome to come along even if it would be your first visit.

In the new year we will continue to hold two monthly sessions, usually at 2:00pm on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday each month. The sessions, entitled "Just for Fun" will combine singing and creating for fun with additional options such as jigsaws, games and other

activities, offering a wider choice to suit different folk. All are welcome to come and join in.

Our first meeting in January 2026 will be on **Wednesday 21st January**. Then the **4th** and **18th February**. We will take a break in March to accommodate the Lent Course which is being held that month. In **April** we will gather on **1st** and **15th**. Further dates will be announced in the New Year.

Advent Gifts

Over the last few years, we have (along with Castle Hill) offered a simple gift to our young people to mark the season of Advent. At Castle Hill this includes the Girl's Brigade and Tiny Tots (Pre-school Parent and Children's Group) and at St John's the Rainbows, Brownie and Pre-school.



This year we have produced our own gifts. For the older children we gave them each a little book about Advent traditions and the candles of the Advent wreath plus a picture and stickers and a small chocolate angel (absolutely essential according to Revd Adam!). For the Tiny Tots and Preschool we will be producing a little book about Christmas customs and traditions, told in simple rhyme. They too will receive a chocolate angel!



Leiston & Saxmundham United Church

Autumn Concert

In the last edition of Connect we advertised our Autumn Concert. This was held at



Saxmundham Chapel on 18th October. The concert, entitled "As Time Goes By – Flavours from History" turned out to be musical memories from Revd Adam and Gillian Earle.

We had a varied and lively programme which included music for organ, piano and voice. There were organ arrangements of some familiar orchestral pieces, music made famous by Glenn Miller, a performance of the short musical "Jonah-Man Jazz" and a Sound of Music sing-a-long.

Afterwards we shared a tasty tea of sandwiches and cake. It was good to welcome over twenty folk and donations amounted to over £100 towards the work of the church. Our next concert will be in May so watch out for details in the March edition of Connect. This too will be held at Saxmundham Chapel and our Autumn Concert will be at Leiston Church.

Leiston Food Bank

Marion and David Sillett have been running the independent Leiston Food Bank, at Leiston Church, for over a decade. It has been a welcome lifeline for many over the years. After careful consideration they have both decided to step down from the role. We want to say a huge thank you for all they have done, the hard work, determination and commitment. We wish them well as

they continue to support the work and life of the church with a little extra space to do some of the things they love such as holidays in Scotland.

On Sunday 9th October, in recognition of all their hard work and commitment, Revd David presented David and Marion with a certificate – one of the “official” URC certificates for “Loyal and Devoted Service”. They also received a gift to use as they wish as a token of our gratitude for all they have done and continue to do.



We are grateful to the Project40Seven (a Community Interest Group based in the premises next door to the church) team who have taken on the running of the foodbank.

Film Lunch

On Saturday 8th November folk gathered at Saxmundham Chapel to enjoy the next in our series of Film Lunches. The film was the original “Dad’s Army” featuring the warmly pompous Arthur Lowe as Captain Mainwaring, the delightfully understated John Le Mesurier as Sergeant Wilson, Clive Dunn as the wonderful (Don’t Panic!) Lance Corporal Jones and Ian Lavender as “Stupid Boy” Private Pike.



Our lunch had a very WW2 theme with sausage meatloaf filled bread rolls to make the meat ration go further, bread-pudding to use up the stale crusts (we were fortunate to acquire some eggs from Private Godfrey who keeps chickens), a sponge cake, apples and a few other rare treats.

Pastorate and Other News

Revd Adam Completes EM2

Training and development for ministry is an ongoing process. Prior to ordination ministers complete four years of Education for Ministry Phase 1 (EM1) which involved college courses, placements and other activities.

Following ordination, ministers enter Education for Ministry Phase 2 (EM2) with additional support available for the first three years of ministry including an annual Summer School. Revd Adam was ordained in July 2022 (doesn’t time fly) and completed EM2 earlier this year.



At the meeting of Eastern Synod, held at Christ Church, Chelmsford on Saturday 11th October Revd Adam, along with Revd Mark Hayes (Thaxted URC), received their certificates of completion of EM2, presented by Moderator – Revd Lythan Nevard. They, as all other ministers, are now part of EM3

with funding and opportunities for training and development available to them as they continue to serve in ministry.

Romans Bible Study



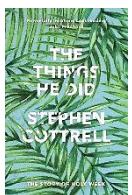
The Romans Bible Study Course is taking a break for Advent and Christmas. We have completed the first five sessions, with positive feedback from those who have taken part. Our in-person sessions resume on **Wednesday 14th January** at 10:00am, meeting at Felixstowe URC and online sessions resume on **Thursday 15th January** at 7:00pm via Zoom. There are five more sessions beginning on those dates and every Wednesday and Thursday until 11th and 12th February.

Lent Studies 2026



Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on 18th February 2026. During Lent we will have a variety of opportunities to engage with Lent Studies and worship. Full details will be circulated in the New Year.

Churches Together in Hadleigh

The course begins on Wednesday 18th February and concludes on Thursday 2nd April. Full details will be made available via the Hadleigh Newsletter and Website. This year's study will focus on the book "The Things He Did" by Stephen Cottrell.

Churches Together in Felixstowe

There will, as in previous years, be a variety of opportunities to participate at different times, days and venues across the town. The theme is to be confirmed.

Leiston & Saxmundham Lent Gatherings

Beginning on **Wednesday 18th February** (Ash Wednesday) we have a simple reflective time of worship and Lunch at **12:00 noon**. Then we have two further sessions at **12:00 noon** on **Wed 5th March** and **Wed 19th March**. We will confirm venues in January.

Psalm Lent Study - Ipswich

In Ipswich we will be offering two weekly in-person sessions on the theme "Dwelling in the Psalms". These will be held each Wednesday from **25th February to 25th March**. Afternoon sessions at **2:00pm** will take place at St Johns URC and evening sessions at **7:00pm** will be at Castle Hill.

Pastorate (Online) Link Bible Study



We will be continuing with our monthly online "Link Bible Studies" open to all across the pastorate. We meet via the Castle Hill Zoom Account – ID 889 953 6542, or you can join by telephone by calling 0208 0806592. We normally meet on the first Thursday each month at 10:00am. In 2026 we start on **Thursday 5th February** and then on **Thursday 5th March**.

Save The Date – Pastorate Away "Day" Saturday 27th June 2026



We will, of course, provide full details and arrangements nearer the time but please save the date in your diary for our first Ipswich and East Pastorate Away Day. We have provisionally booked New Chapel Farm near Halesworth. It will be a great opportunity to get to know each other better, to reflect and learn more together.



There are many different opportunities to mark Advent and Christmas in worship across the pastorate. The details are provided here. Please pray for those who will lead worship and those who will attend that these times will be a blessing for all.

Sunday 7th December (Advent 2)

Usual Sunday worship services across the pastorate plus:

3:30pm Christingle Service
@ Hadleigh United Reformed Church

Sunday 14th December (Advent 3)

Usual Sunday worship at Felixstowe plus:

10:30am Advent Café Style Worship
@ Castle Hill United Reformed Church

10:45am Tree of Light Service
@ St John's United Reformed Church

2:00pm Carols & Cake (Informal Worship)
@ LSUC Leiston Church

3:00pm Carol Service
@ Hadleigh United Reformed Church

Tuesday 16th December

6:30pm Outdoor Carols & Refreshments
@ Castle Hill United Reformed Church

Sunday 21st December

Communion service at Hadleigh URC plus:

10:30am Festival (Nativity) Service
@ Castle Hill United Reformed Church

10:45am Carol (& Toy) Service
@ St John's United Reformed Church

10:45am Carol Service
@ LSUC Saxmundham Chapel

3:00pm Carol Service
@ Felixstowe United Reformed Church

6:30pm Carols by Candlelight
@ Castle Hill United Reformed Church

Wednesday 24th December – Christmas Eve

4:00pm Family Carol Service
@ Castle Hill United Reformed Church

5:30pm Christmas Eve Worship
@ Hadleigh United Reformed Church

6:30pm Community Carols (Led by LSUC)
@ Post Office Square Leiston

Thursday 25th December – Christmas Day

10:30am Christmas Day Worship
@ Castle Hill United Reformed Church

10:30am Christmas Day Worship
@ St John's United Reformed Church

10:30am United Christmas Service
@ Felixstowe United Reformed Church

10:30am Christmas Day Worship
@ Hadleigh United Reformed Church