

# Connect

## Spring Edition

March to May 2026



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### Editor's Greeting

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"Spring has sprung, the grass is riz,  
I wonder where the birdie is?  
The bird is on the wing, oh, that's absurd!  
I always thought the wing was on the bird."

At the risk of sounding too clichéd it is always a joy to see the signs of spring bursting forth all around. At the Manse we are grateful to those who planted so many bulbs in the front garden blessing us each year with a wonderful display of snowdrops (aka Candlemas Bells), crocuses (I wonder if they're the saffron producing sort?), tête-à-tête and even the odd hyacinth.

From the study window I have been blessed by the sight of small birds such as blue tits and even the occasional long-tailed tit flitting around. There have also been large and almost cuddly looking bumble bees tucking into the nectar.

Spring is, of course, the season of new life and Easter is just around the corner. In March we are still journeying through Lent. Lent is from the Old English word for Spring, "lencten", which itself finds its roots in the Germanic word, "langitinaz" which refers to the lengthening of days. Those of us who find the gloom of winter challenging, look forward to more sunlight hours.

Anyway, enjoy reading the news from around the Pastorate.

*Revd Adam Earle*

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### News from the Churches

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#### Hadleigh United Reformed Church Great Meeting

#### A Sky Full of Stars

It may be March but we begin by celebrating some of our Christmas events. Christmas is a wondrous festival of light in the midst of the dark days of winter, so what better than to celebrate with "A Sky Full of Stars".



On Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> December the church opened its doors for "A Sky Full of Stars - A Community Christmas Installation – Shining brighter together this Christmas", in collaboration with Suffolk Mindful Makers.





Folk were invited to, “Step into a magical space filled with stars, celebrating light, kindness, colour and community.” The event included a special display of 500 stars representing the people who use the church and community centre each week.



The stars continued to shine for our Carol Service, led by Revd David on 14<sup>th</sup> December.

There was a craft table for all ages and a peaceful space to pause and reflect. Refreshments and a warm welcome were shared in the Ansell Community Centre.



**Thinking Day 2026**

On Sunday 22nd February we had a special Cafe Church service to celebrate 100 years of 'Thinking Day' in the guiding movement. The overall theme of our worship was 'To love one another' based on one of our readings for the day: John 13:34-35.



The beautiful display formed the setting and backdrop for our Christmas services including our Christingle Service, led by Karen, on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December.

More stars featured in our worship and all those who attended were invited to create their own Christingle. We shared the Christmas story and explored the meaning of the different elements of the Christingle.



We began with a hearty breakfast of toast, crumpets, pastries and fruit, followed by our call to worship.



The service comprised a range of activities including colouring hearts, a jig-saw bible verse, connection between guides and others around the world and a video story of The Good Samaritan; all punctuated with songs, discussion and prayer.



Towards the end of the service the Rainbows, Brownies and Guides came to the front with their colours to renew their promises. We were delighted that so many made the effort to come along. This was a lovely, all age service organised by our Junior Church Team.

### Samara's Aid Appeal



For some time now Hadleigh URC have supported Samara's

Aid Appeal. The project, founded and run by Samara Levy, started in August 2014 has quickly grown much larger, providing medical and humanitarian aid, currently focused on Syria.

Maureen, our church link and representative regularly receives emails and updates from Samara. In our most recent magazine we were able to share some good news:

"The new mountain outreach centre for orphans and vulnerable children is now open! This takes us to a grand total of Four centres in different locations. It is so small, has only been open for a month, yet they have 30-60 children coming each day and sometimes more.

Towards the end of 2025 we also opened our desert outreach centre which also receives 30-60 children every day for education and a cooked lunch each day.



The Christmas parties went down so well! The rural centre hosted 170 children and they said it included singing and dancing and was met with great happiness. 71 attended our desert centre who have never been to a Christmas party before and were thrilled.

Our mountain centre hosted an incredible 96 children and some local teenagers 9 dressed up in Santa outfits and helped distribute gifts. Our city centre hosted an incredible 401 children across different days.

Something we are incredibly grateful for is rain! Last year there was barely a drop in the desert which was really worrying. This year there has been rain across the areas we work in. Please pray for more, at the right times.

Please continue to pray for protection because the situation on the ground is so volatile. We pray the situation will eventually be calm and stable for everyone.

Please pray with us for lasting peace and that Syrian people can finally begin to rebuild their lives.”

If you would like to find out more about this incredible organisation working in such a challenging environment please visit the website: [www.samarasaidappeal.org](http://www.samarasaidappeal.org)

## Monks Eleigh Church



As we mentioned in the last edition of Connect, the church meeting voted to close Monks Eleigh Church as a separate congregation at our

September meeting. To mark this moment and to celebrate with thanksgiving the life and work of Monks Eleigh Church there will be a special service, led by Revd Lythan Nevard (Synod Moderator), at Monks Eleigh on **Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May** beginning at **15:00**. Please do come along and share in this time of worship.



## Ordination & Induction of Elders

On Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> January we were delighted to share in the ordination and induction, led by Revd David, of Linda to the eldership of the URC.



Linda leads our Girl's Brigade and contributes to church life in a range of ways including supporting the Indoor Carboot Sales, the monthly Coffee and Cake (part of Tuesday Welcome), the Inbetweeners and in many practical ways.

We are delighted to have Linda join the team. At the same service we were also pleased to induct Ian and Rachel, both ordained elders returning to the serving role.

## Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Over the last few years, we have not had a opportunity to join with other local churches to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This year we agreed to join with the folk from the Parish Church with a service that we hosted. This took place on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> January at 3pm. The service was led by Revd Adam and Revd Mary Sokanovic (Rector of the Parish of Whitton with Thurleston and Akenham).



This year's worship material was prepared by the Armenian Apostolic Church - one of the world's oldest Christian churches and the national church of Armenia. According to tradition, it was founded by the apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus. In 301 AD, Armenia became the first country to adopt Christianity as its state religion through the influence of Gregory the Illuminator.

We were invited to pray, especially, for the Armenian people and the displaced

Armenian people of the Artsakh region under Azerbaijan control. As part of the service, we shared the light from a single candle (representing Christian unity) using traditional beeswax candles and united in declaring our common faith using the words of the Nicene Creed.

It was a joy to, again, have Stephen Hogger play the organ. There was one exciting moment when the organ developed a problem but thankfully Stephen was able to climb up into the organ loft and sort it out. Stephen is a key member of the Ipswich Theatre Organ Club, which owns the organ – he regularly works to maintain and tune the organ.

### **The Wombles of Castle Hill?**

You'll remember the Wombles of Wimbledon Common, gathering litter for recycling and creative re-use. On Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February, as part of our Eco Church, Caring for Creation commitment we held a litter pick in the local area.

Equipped with high-visibility jackets, litter pickers and sacks, an intrepid band of church volunteers ventured out in the wind and rain to collect litter in the local area.



Although small in number, the group made a visible statement of our care for the environment and our commitment to serving the community. Once the litter pick

was completed, they returned to church for a welcome warm drink and cake.

Another litter pick is planned for the summer, when it is hoped that families and church organisations will join in to make it a truly “Mega Pick.”

### **Church Charities**

Each year we select two (or sometimes three) charities to support through prayer and fundraising. In 2025 these were:



Families Together Suffolk – a local focused on ensuring families have access to the networks, knowledge and skills that provide a strong foundation for their child's future. This year we were able to contribute £380 to their work as well as regularly giving produce to support families in need.



FNKD (Friends of North Kigezi Diocese) – a UK-based charity sponsoring children in Africa. Since 2006, they've worked in rural Uganda to support orphaned, abandoned and vulnerable children with education, care and sustainable development. Rachel, one of our elders, works in support of the charity and makes regular visits to Uganda. We were able to contribute £460 for their work.

On Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> February this year, we also held our annual FNKD Quiz fundraiser with Mark, one of our elders, serving as Quizmaster. The event raised over £400 which is an encouraging contribution.

At our Church Meeting on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> January we selected two charities for 2026.

The St Elizabeth Hospice in Ipswich - A Suffolk-based charity that provides free, compassionate care



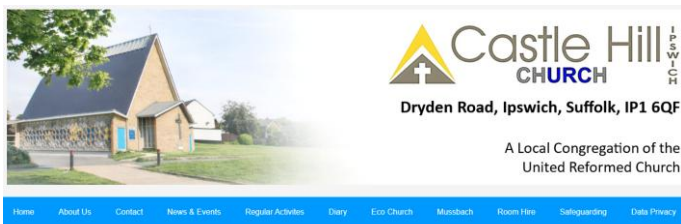
and support for people living with progressive or life limiting illnesses and their families.

The Nest - A charity that supports young people struggling with mental health and finding it hard in school, work, or everyday life. The work is farm based and give opportunities to develop new confidence and skills.



## New Website

Castle Hill's new website is now live. This now hosted by iChurch, the URC's own website support service. This is the same service used by some of the other churches in the Pastorate. The web address remains the same: [www.castlehillurc.org.uk](http://www.castlehillurc.org.uk)



## 'Ello 'Ello 'Ello

It is not often that members of Castle Hill Church feature on the social media feed of the Ipswich Police. On 10<sup>th</sup> February, those attending the weekly Tuesday Welcome received a visit from PCSO 3005 Manning and PC 5319 Todd.



Fear not however as the reason was entirely innocent. The two officers spent time talking with those present, discussing any

concerns, answering questions, and offering advice. This is part of the police commitment to communication and liaison with the community.

## Sharing the Gospel – Worship Series



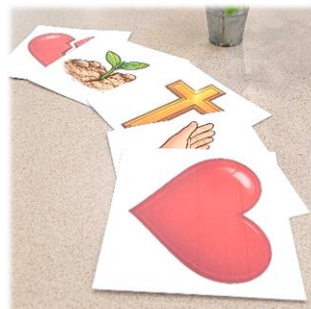
Beginning on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> February and including 22<sup>nd</sup> February and 1<sup>st</sup> March, we had our first themed worship series, led by Revd Adam. This

is part of the new venture to offer a block of three weeks, once a year, to focus on a particular theme with the needs and mission of each local church in mind.

At our Church Meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> January we agreed to focus on the theme "Sharing the Gospel – What do I say?".



The first service was Café Style with the theme "The Gospel in a Nutshell". We explored stories and how they may be summarised – drawing out the key points, the essence.



We reflected on the elements of the Gospel with the aid of some images. These five pictures highlighted God's love, the broken relationship between humanity and God, God's giving of his Son, our need to respond and receive and the blessing of new life.



As well as discussion there were also some simple craft activities. Some folk created flower hearts to display with the simple message “God Loves You!” and others used acrylic pens to create “God Loves You!” stones to leave in a place where people might see them.



The second week we explored the idea of story and how our story fits into God’s story and how we can share our experience of God and God’s love in everyday conversation. Our Third week focussed on how the small things we say or do in sharing the Good News can have a lasting impact like the sowing of seeds.

Rather than collecting items and filling boxes ourselves we now collect money to contribute with £20 being the equivalent to a box. This means the charity can purchase items in bulk and adapt the contents to the needs of specific people. The money can also be used to purchase “extra” essentials which would be too large to fit in the boxes, such as the thermos container shown in the top left photo above.



We are grateful to all who contributed this time round, raising £260 i.e. 13 boxes.

### Link to Hope Shoeboxes

### Sermon Series



For a number of years now, St John's have supported the annual shoebox appeal for Link to Hope. The

charity is committed to supporting the poorest people, young and old, in Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria and Romania.

We are grateful to Revd David who led us in our first three-week series. Beginning on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> January we explored “Christian Faith and Hope in the



Modern World.” We chose this theme given the rapidly changing world in which we find ourselves, where fear and uncertainty are prevalent and where things such as technology have an increasing impact.

The three Sunday themes were:

- Week 1: Hope when the world feels unsteady.
- Week 2: Faithful living in fractured times.
- Week 3: A Hope that looks forward and lives now.

If you would like to listen to an audio version of the series you can, at present, find them on our church website:

[www.stjohnsurcipswich.org.uk](http://www.stjohnsurcipswich.org.uk) select the About Tab and scroll down.

### Just For Fun

As mentioned in the last edition of Connect, we launched the new, combined group, Just for Fun - bringing together Singing for Fun and Creating for Fun. We are now following a thematic approach with each meeting focussed on a different theme.



For the first meeting of the year on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> January, our theme was sunshine. We had a quiz about the Sun. Most of our

answers were guesses but we learned a few fascinating facts along the way. We enjoyed creating sun catchers and joined in singing some sun themed songs such as "The Sun Has Got His Hat On" and "Bring Me Sunshine".

Our meeting on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> February explored the theme of birds. Unfortunately, Revd Adam did not have time to sort any songs but we enjoyed creating colourful parrots, colouring cheerful song-birds and a quiz to identify various British Garden birds – some more familiar than others.



The theme for the meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> February was Preparing for Easter as we had no meetings scheduled for March due to the Lent Course. We had a egg themed memory game, and an egg sudoku type game as well as a rather splendid egg jigsaw puzzle.



Songs included, "In My Easter Bonnet", "English Country Garden" and "Spring Chicken" which was a new one for us. Our crafts were Easter baskets, then filled with chocolate eggs and Easter egg cards.

Our next meeting, which will also have an Easter Theme, will be on **Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> April**. Subsequently we continue to meet on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays of each month.



**Leiston & Saxmundham  
United Church**

### Happy Birthday LSUC

On Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> January, with worship led by Sue Liddell, Leiston and Saxmundham United Church celebrated our first birthday. There



have been many things to keep us busy over the year to make sure that everything is in place to enable us to operate smoothly. Good progress has been made so far.

Recently we renewed the copyright licences that we require for our worship. We now have one set of licences covering worship and other events whether at Leiston or Saxmundham. To the Christian Copyright Licence office, we are now known as “The roving congregation of Leiston and Saxmundham United Church” – that’s quite a title.

## Uniting In Worship

Leiston and Saxmundham United Church is part of and reflects the traditions of both the United



Reformed Church and the Methodist Church. Over recent months we have very much enjoyed having the opportunity, on the fifth Sunday of months with five Sunday, to join in worship with friends from other local Methodist churches. Most recently we gathered at Knodishall for worship.

There will be another joint service 29<sup>th</sup> March (Palm Sunday) held at Peasenhall Methodist Church, led by Circuit Superintendent Minister Revd Vivienne Smith. In May we will be again be gathering in Knodishall and, all things being equal, we will be hosting a united service in Leiston at the end of August.

## Christmas Lunch

Our second LSUC Christmas Lunch was held on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> December at Leiston Church.



There were around twenty-five folk in total. We shared a tasty meal of roasted chicken

breast with a sausage filling and wrapped in bacon. There were roast potatoes, roast parsnips, the ubiquitous brussels sprouts, veg and plenty of gravy. This was followed by a selection of tasty deserts including fresh fruit salad, chocolate cheesecake and lemon cheesecake (all homemade).



Following the meal, we enjoyed the raffle with some fun Christmas prizes (although Revd David didn’t win the Christmas Pudding) and a seasonal sing-a-long. After costs for food were deducted, the event raised more than £175 which is great.

## Film Lunch



Our first film lunch of 2026 was held on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> February. Our lunch

of this occasion had a slight romantic learning including sausage rolls, cheese palmiers (heart shaped), scones with jam and cream, lemon drizzle cake and grapes.

Our film was “Meet Me In St Louis” with a warm romantic theme and a feel good style. There were some familiar songs including “The Trolley Song”, “You an I” and “Have yourself a merry little Christmas. The film celebrates four seasons in the life of a St Louis family and has a happily-ever-after ending.



Numbers were very encouraging, with 20 people attending. Donations totalled £130 towards the work of the church.



Our next film afternoon will be on **Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> April**. Although we cannot publicise the film (except by word of mouth) in advance,

we will be enjoying a couple of short “silent” films starring some very well-known comedy actors of the 1970s. Our lunch will have a “packed-lunch” theme.

### Spring Concert

In keeping with the pattern we have established over the past



few years we will be holding our Spring Mini-Concert and Tea on **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> May** at Saxmundham Chapel. With music, songs, a sing-a-long and plenty of banter we will enjoy items related to the theme “A Handful of Songs”. The concert begins at **14:00** lasting about 45 minutes, followed by tea in the hall. Admission is free but we do invite donations to cover the costs of food and to contribute to the church fund. Do come along if you are able.



## Felixstowe United Reformed Church

### Christmas 2025

Our two main Christmas events for 2025 were the Carol Service on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> December and our United Christmas Day service. Our Carol service followed the



same pattern as the one held at St John’s in the morning and at Castle Hill in the later evening on the same day. We were glad to welcome a number of extra folk who also stayed and shared in tea, mince pies and cake in the hall afterwards.

As we had no “choir” to present the musical items not sung by the congregation, Revd Adam, who also played the organ, and Gillian sang these as duets. Revd David led the service and members of the congregation brought readings from Scripture and reflective readings focus on Joseph, the Shepherds.

### Epiphany Meal

It is a long standing tradition for the members and friends of Felixstowe URC to gather for an Epiphany Meal. Organised by Brian, this year we visited “The Alex Brasserie” on the sea front – a restaurant with quite a view. However, the weather did not make it quite so attractive. The company was good and everyone enjoyed the opportunity.



The staff made us feel welcome and even went to the trouble of placing name cards with an Epiphany greeting on our table. We had the upper dining area all to ourselves.

There was a wide choice of meal options from the menu. Many of us selected from the “café meals” section – including such delights as beer battered fish and chips, salad bowls, tandoori chicken skewers and steak and ale suet pudding. Most folk enjoyed ice-cream and/or cake for dessert.

### Churches Together in Felixstowe Service

On Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> January friends from the churches across Felixstowe for a special service to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.



Worship was held at “River of Life Church” and made use of the published material with a Felixstowe spin. As part of the service a combined choir was drawn together from various churches including Brian from our own number. Brian is our representative on the Churches Together committee.



### Charitable Giving.

Each of the churches in the pastorate approach charitable giving in slightly different ways. At Felixstowe it has been our practice, for some time, to nominate charities for collections on communion Sundays. We also organise special collections seasonally including in response to specific appeals.

Here are some of the projects, charities and appeals that we have been able to support over the last few months:



**DISASTERS  
EMERGENCY  
COMMITTEE**

The DEC’s Middle East Humanitarian Appeal in support of those suffering as result of conflict in Gaza, Lebanon, the West Bank and Syria where needs remain huge.



For a brighter future, free from domestic abuse

Lighthouse Women’s Aid, an Ipswich based charity, providing advice, resources and refuge for woman and children caught up in abuse and other challenging circumstances.



The Leprosy Mission Great Britain is a global Christian organisation leading the fight against leprosy. Working to break the chain of leprosy (a curable disease) transmission, locating and treating individuals and saving lives.



Many of the churches in the Pastorate have worked to support TWAM over the years. It is a Christian charity that collects unwanted usable tools, refurbishes them, and sorts them into trade tool kits for livelihood creation. Their mission is to empower people to put poverty in the past for good and begin their own sustainable careers.

In 2026 the Church Meeting have decided to focus our giving and fundraising efforts on four charities. Nominations were sought and the following charities were selected: Christian Aid, Leprosy Mission, Water Aid and St Elizabeth Hospice.

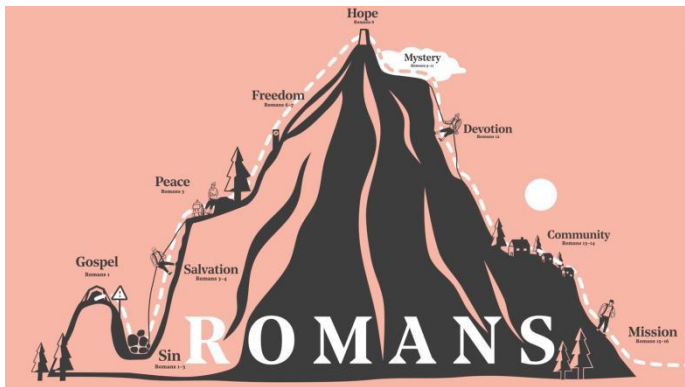
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## Pastorate and Other News

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### The Roman's Course

Beginning in October, we offered the opportunity to engage in the ten sessions of the Bible Society Roman's Course by Andrew Ollerton. The course was offered in person at Felixstowe URC and online via Zoom. This was a joint venture with our Methodist friends.



We had five sessions before Christmas and then resumed for sessions 6-10 in January.

Having the opportunity to explore and unpack a single book of the Bible in much greater detail was a blessing. It was thought provoking and fascinating to share different perspectives and interpretations of Paul's letter.

It may be possible to offer further opportunities to engage with the Bible Course and the Romans Course for any folk who would be interested.

### Pastorate (Online) Link Bible Study



Our (almost) monthly "Link Bible Study" open to all across the pastorate will take place at **10:00am on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> April**

when our theme will be **Humility** and **Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May** when we reflect on **Kindness**. We meet via the Castle Hill Zoom

Account – ID 889 953 6542, or you can join by telephone by calling 0208 0806592.

### Save The Date – Pastorate Away "Day" Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2026



A reminder to save the date for our first Ipswich and East Pastorate Away Day. We will provide further details after Easter. It will be a great opportunity to get to know each other, to reflect and to learn more together.



### Christian Aid Week 2026



Through "Commitment for Life" and directly the churches of I&E, along with many other local churches, mark Christian Aid week by encouraging giving and often highlighting current needs and actions in our worship.

Christian Aid Week this year takes place from **Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May**. This Christian Aid Week, your support could help mothers in Nairobi, Kenya, facing the devastating reality of urban poverty and the daily struggle to feed their children.

'Most parents wake every single day knowing that they must go and earn money, otherwise their children won't eat that evening.'



**Fridah** knows this reality well. But she's determined to protect her grandchildren from hunger. Through our partner, Beacon of Hope, she's received tools, seeds and training to grow fresh

vegetables in a small city space – food she can cook for her family or sell to earn income.

“Now I can plan. I can buy this; I can buy that. I can help my family.”

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## Celebrating the Season

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# Holy Week & Easter

Easter is the principal festival of the Christian year as far as God's love and grace revealed in Christ are concerned. From Palm Sunday to the cross and beyond we recall, give thanks and celebrate the pivotal point in history.



## Palm Sunday Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> March

We commemorate the Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem, coming in peace, riding on a donkey – a contrast to the victory processions of the Roman emperor.

**10:30 Castle Hill – Ipswich** Peter Dawson

**10:30 Felixstowe** William Glasse

**10:30 Hadleigh - Café Worship** Revd Adam

**11:00 LSUC United Worship @** Peasenhall

**10:45 St John's – Ipswich** Revd David Rees



## Maundy Thursday Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> April

We remember the institution of The Lord's Supper with its rich symbolism of the impending suffering of Christ.

**12:00 Felixstowe** Revd Adam

**Lunch Reflection with Communion**

(Please bring your own sandwiches)

**12:00 LSUC @ Leiston** Revd David

**Lunch Reflection with Communion**

**19:00 Castle Hill** Revd David

**Communion**

**19:00 Hadleigh** Revd Adam

**Communion & Gethsemane Reflection**



## Good Friday Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> April

We recall the crucifixion of Christ Jesus. It always seems odd to call the day Good Friday but the meaning is more, “good” as in “holy”, or some suggest, “God's Friday” is the root.

**10:30 Castle Hill** Revd David

**Reflective Worship**

**10:30 St John's** Revd Adam

**United Service All Age**

**12:00 LSUC Saxmundham** Sue Liddell

**Reflection at the Cross**

**14:00 Felixstowe** Revd Adam

**Reflection at the Cross**

**14:00 Hadleigh** Revd Michael Tillett

**Reflective Worship**



## Easter Sunday Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> April

On this day we once again declare, “Alleluia! Christ is Risen!” and raise our voices in praise of our risen saviour. The stone is rolled away, the tomb is empty and history is transformed.

**10:30 Castle Hill** Revd Michael Tillett  
**Resurrection Worship with Communion**

**10:30 Felixstowe** Revd Adam  
**Resurrection Worship with Communion**

**10:30 Hadleigh** Revd Janice White  
**Resurrection Worship with Communion**

**10:30 LSUC Leiston**  
Sue Liddell & David Sillett  
**Resurrection Worship with Communion**

**10:45 St John’s** Revd David  
**Resurrection Worship with Communion**

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### Eco Church

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### Saturday 28th March

Since 2007 millions around the world in a simple but powerful act: switch off for one hour. By turning off non-essential lights and devices, we come together to show our commitment to protecting nature and tackling climate change.

Anyone, anywhere can take part by spending 60 minutes doing something - anything - positive for our planet.

Please join in, and share the challenge with others as a witness to caring for God’s creation. Here are some examples of things you could do:

- Take a walk with a friend. Leave electronic devices at home. Enjoy talking and listening to each other and the sounds of the world around you.
- Arrange a candle lit dinner, cook and enjoy a vegetarian feast with loved ones.
- Go stargazing with friends and family, leaving your phone switched off.
- Stay in and enjoy a night of board games, with the family, by candle light.

You can find out more by visiting the Earth Hour website: [www.earthhour.org](http://www.earthhour.org)



The Sunday after Easter is traditionally known as Low Sunday by way of contrast to the high celebration of the week before. This year, as an ongoing part of our commitment to Eco Church and Caring for Creation **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> April** will be one of our Eco themed services.

Our theme this year will be “Hope for the Future” and we will consider the impact of “Climate Anxiety”, some of the good news stories for the world and how we, as Christians and stewards of creation are called to point to God as the source of hope for the future.

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## Time to Pray

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St John's URC is on the corner Cowper Street, named after the poet William Cowper (pronounced Cooper), whose poetry was

sometimes in the form of hymns. Some of his most famous works appear in the URC Rejoice and Sing hymn book including: God moves in a mysterious way (R&S 59), O for a closer walk with God (R&S 551) and Jesus, where'er thy people meet (R&S 476).

Here is one of his hymns which does not appear in our hymn books. It is entitled, "Exhortation to Prayer." Some of the language may be a little old-fashioned but the words are worth reading:

What various hindrances we meet  
in coming to the mercy seat!  
Yet who that knows the worth of pray'r  
but wishes to be often there!

Pray'r makes the darkened clouds withdraw;  
pray'r climbs the ladder Jacob saw;  
gives exercise to faith and love;  
brings ev'ry blessing from above.

Restraining pray'r, we cease to fight;  
pray'r makes the Christian's armour bright;  
and Satan trembles when he sees  
the weakest saint upon his knees.

Have you no words? Ah, think again:  
words flow apace when you complain,  
and fill a fellow-creature's ear  
with the sad tale of all your care.

Were half the breath thus vainly spent  
to heav'n in supplication sent,  
our cheerful song would oft'ner be,  
"Hear what the Lord hath done for me!"

Verse three has a vital message for us – a call to persevere in prayer and cause Satan to tremble. When we hear the news, we can feel fearful or disheartened but we are to persist in prayer.

Here are some places and situations in our world for which we should continue to pray.

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### Ukraine / Russia

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Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. The conflict has become a prolonged war involving heavy artillery, drones, and trench fighting along a long front line. Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced and large areas of infrastructure destroyed. Pray for:



- A just and lasting peace.
- Protection of civilians, refugees, and children.
- Wisdom and restraint among political and military leaders.
- The church in Russia and Ukraine to be instruments of love and reconciliation.

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### Palestine / Israel

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The conflict escalated dramatically after Hamas attacked Israel in October 2023. Israel's military campaign in Gaza has caused extensive destruction and large civilian casualties. The conflict is rooted in a decades-long struggle between Israelis and Palestinians over land, security, and political sovereignty. Pray for:



- Peace between Israelis and Palestinians.
- Protection of civilians on all sides.
- Comfort for grieving displaced people.
- For Arab and Jewish Christians to be witnesses of reconciliation.

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## Iran / Israel / USA

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A major escalation in 2026 followed joint U.S.–Israeli strikes on Iran that triggered retaliation across the region, including missile and drone attacks against Gulf countries and fighting involving militias in Iraq and Lebanon. The conflict now involves several states and threatens wider regional instability. Pray for:



- De-escalation and diplomacy to prevent a lengthy wider regional war.
- Civilians across the Middle East caught in the crossfire.
- Persecuted Christians in the region.
- Leaders to choose restraint.

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## Sudan Civil War

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Since 2023, Sudan has been torn apart by fighting between the national army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The conflict has caused mass killings, famine risks, and millions of displaced people, making it one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.



Pray for:

- Protection of civilians and aid workers.
- Food, medical care, and relief to reach those suffering.
- An end to ethnic violence and atrocities.
- The Sudanese church to remain strong and compassionate.

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## Myanmar Civil War

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After a military coup in 2021, Myanmar descended into a nationwide civil war between the military junta and various resistance groups. The military has been accused of widespread attacks on civilians and villages. Pray for



- Freedom and justice for the people.
- Protection of ethnic minorities.

- Courage for churches and Christian leaders, many of whom face persecution.
- International efforts to bring peace.

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## Ethiopia (Tigray and Regional)

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Although a peace deal was signed in 2022 ending the main Tigray war, violence continues in parts of Ethiopia, including Amhara and Oromia regions. Ethnic tensions and political struggles continue to destabilize the country. Pray for:



- Lasting reconciliation between ethnic groups.
- Healing from trauma and famine.
- Wisdom for political leaders.
- Unity among Ethiopian Christians from different backgrounds.

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## Syria Conflict

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The Syrian civil war began in 2011 and continues in fragmented form. The government controls most territory, but fighting persists in several regions, and millions remain displaced internally or as refugees abroad. Pray for:



- Peace and rebuilding of communities.
- Refugees who have lost homes and livelihoods.
- The Syrian church to endure and serve.
- Justice and reconciliation after years of violence.

The **Summer Edition** of Connect is due to be published at the beginning of June. If you have any items for inclusion please let Revd Adam have them by **Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> May**. He would especially welcome photographs of church events and activities.