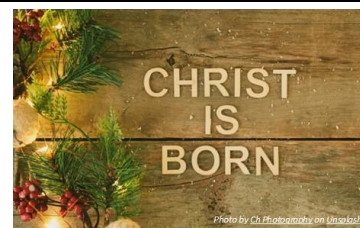


Sharing the Vision

December 2024

News from the Wessex Synod



From everyone at the Wessex Synod Office we wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year

Wessex Synod Office Christmas Arrangements

The Wessex Synod Office will close at 2.30pm on Thursday 19th December and reopen at 9.30am on Monday 6th January 2024.

Emails and telephone messages will not be monitored during this period, and will be dealt with when the Synod Office reopens in January.

In the event of an emergency, please contact the Synod Moderator, Michael Hopkins on moderator@urcwessex.org.uk or 07716 409 350.

Christmas Message from the Moderator

Dear friends,

Thank you for all that you have done during the year serving God through the United Reformed Church. Thank you to all Ministers, Lay Preachers, and everyone else leading worship over the Christmas season. I will pray for you, not least for the stamina needed.

There are many challenges in our world just now, as there are in many people's personal lives. The point of Christmas is God's showing us God's irrational commitment to a better future, and God's reminding us that despite everything we are loved even when we have forgotten what love feels like. The Christmas story does not promise us smooth pathways, nor entitle us always to happiness, but instead we are given the strength and the skills to await our collective salvation, even from the brink of death. I wish you a happy Christmas!

Michael Hopkins

Wessex Synod Moderator

Annual Church Returns for 2024

The online portal for the Annual Church Returns will open on Monday 6 January 2025 and will close on 28 February.

I encourage you to start completing your annual return early and if at any time you need some help, please either call or email me and I will help where possible. If you are unable to complete it online, and require a paper copy, please let me know asap.

Many thanks.

Deborah – office@urcwessex.org.uk – 023 8067 8570

Safeguarding Annual Return – Portal

The online portal will be open from Monday 6 January 2025 and will close on 28 February. Please start the annual return early and ask for help if you need it. Please request a paper copy or pdf version of the questions if you prefer.

Email: development@urcwessex.org.uk

New Eco Church Survey

A new and updated eco church survey was published by A Rocha in October. There are new questions and themes in each of the five categories including:

- a greater focus on net-zero
- the building section now better reflects the size of the church
- new questions for limited or non-land-owning churches
- a greater focus on biodiversity

There are also new, updated resources to help your church achieve an eco-church award including guides on how to write an environmental policy & action plan and creating a church land management plan.

If your church started a survey under the old survey (before 8th October 2024), you have until the end of January 2025 to complete it. If your church is starting a new survey now, it will be under the new survey. It would be better not to rush to complete an old survey, it is recommended to start a new fresh survey.

Read more about the new survey and to see the new questions and resources here: <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/new-eco-church-survey-go-live/>

They have split the survey into five sections. It is an online survey to complete, but before doing that anyone can view the new survey by going here:

<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/eco-church-survey/>

and scrolling down; there are five picture boxes on the right-hand side each called "... survey questions" which you can click on to see or print the text of each section of the new questionnaire.

For any advice with the new survey, completing the old survey, or if your church is completely new to Eco Church, please feel free to contact the Synod's green advocate, Mike Shrubsole (mshrubsole@gmail.com)

URC Line Management Training

The URC Line Management training dates for 2025 have now been arranged. The sessions will be online on Zoom from 10 am to 11:15 am.

You can find the training dates and topics here: [URC Line Management Training](#)

To reserve a place, please email Deepti on deepti.upadhyaya@urc.org.uk with the details below:

Full name

Email

Synod/Church name

Role/job title

LAMPS – The Passion

What is The LAMPS Collective? They are professional artists with a shared Christian faith who create and tour live theatre and produce creative resources for the church. You can find more details here about them here.

www.lampscollective.com

Read more about There: [The Passion Information](#)

Upcoming Synod events

Bookings for all events and training courses to

Ruth Heine at the Synod Office

Email: bookings@urcwessex.org.uk

Tel: 023 8067 4513

Safeguarding

Safeguarding Training – *Flowchart*

The flowchart gives an overview of the various safeguarding training courses on offer and has a table which shows the mandatory level of safeguarding training for various roles within the URC. The [flowchart](#) is on the Synod website.

Safeguarding – *Away Day for Safeguarding Coordinators & Deputies*

Saturday 15 March 2025 at Fleet URC and on zoom. 10.30am – 3.30pm.

Safeguarding Away Day for Church Safeguarding Coordinators and Deputies.

Bookings: <https://www.urcwessex.org.uk/event/safeguarding-away-day-for-church-safeguarding-coordinators/>

URC Safeguarding Newsletter – *October 2024*

Read the latest [newsletter](#) from the Safeguarding Team at Church House.

Safeguarding Training – *Advanced Safeguarding*

Advanced Safeguarding Training online.

Tuesdays 14 & 21 January 2025. 6.30pm – 8.30pm on zoom

This course is mandated for those in the following roles:

Children and Youth Workers including volunteer leaders, and Adult Workers including volunteer leaders.

Anyone who has completed the Foundation & Intermediate safeguarding training is also welcome to attend (numbers permitting). Places are limited, priority will be given to those in the mandated roles.

Safeguarding Training – Foundation & Intermediate courses in 2025

Foundation & Intermediate Safeguarding: training courses.

- Saturday 11 January 2025, at Trinity Church, Totton. 10am – 4pm
- Saturday 25 January 2025, at Trinity URC, Charminster. 10am – 4pm
- **Online** foundation & intermediate safeguarding training across 3 sessions. Thursday mornings 9.30am – 11am on 30 Jan, 6 Feb and 13 February 2025.
- Saturday 1 February 2025, at Wheatley URC Oxford, 10am – 4pm.
- Saturday 8 February 2025, at United Church Winchester. 10am – 4pm.
- In person **Refresher** Sunday 23 February, at Petersfield URC. 1pm – 4pm.
- Online Refresher training across 2 sessions. Tuesdays 6.30pm – 8pm on 16 September and 23 September 2025.

To book your place please email: bookings@urcwessex.org.uk or book via the Synod website, go to Safeguarding page

<https://www.urcwessex.org.uk/safeguarding/>

National Safeguarding Training courses – DBS

Various workshops to help understand DBS products and services.

- **DBS Eligibility Webinar 12th February 2025 9.30-11am** – book via link [DBS Eligibility Webinar – Faith Sector 12.2.2025 9.30-11am](#)
- **DBS Barring Webinar 5th March 2025 12.30-2pm** – book via the link [DBS Barring – Faith Sector 5.3.2025 12.30-2pm](#)
- **DBS Update Service Webinar 28th March 11-12pm** – book via the link [DBA Update Service – Faith Sector 28.3.2025 11-12pm](#)

Further information and bookings via the links.

If you have any further questions please email Laura Gaskell

Laura.Gaskell@dbs.gov.uk

Training Webinars. [Elders as Trustees](#). This is available online for you to access in your own time.

Safeguarding – Good Practice 6

GP6 is now available. Church House has sent out hard copies to Church Safeguarding Coordinators. **GP6 is available online** [here](#).

Stepwise – Faith Filled Worship

An online group will be starting after Easter in 2025.

For those who have completed the Faith Filled Life stream.

Please email bookings@urcwessex.org.uk to find out more or to register an interest.

First Aid training – information on courses

Local churches have a responsibility to ensure that there is adequate provision of first aid at all their programmes.

[Flowchart](#) to help churches identify the appropriate training.

[Booking procedure](#).

First Aid training – courses in 2025

Emergency First Aid (4 hours) There are places available

Tuesday 21 January, 9am – 1pm, at Trinity Church Totton, SO40 8WU.

Saturday 1 March 2025, 9.30am – 1.30pm, at Immanuel Church, Southbourne.

To book a place, please email bookings@urcwessex.org.uk

Courses at Tadley URC, Bitterne Park URC and Guildford URC – all full.

If your church would like to host a course, please ask for information.

Mental Health First Aid training – dates in 2025

Wessex Synod will cover the cost of the following courses, (2-day course or online equivalent).

- Become a certified Mental Health First Aider.
- Become a certified Youth Mental Health First Aider.

Training dates and further information can be found on the trainer, Peter Larkum's website [here](#).

Please register via Wessex Synod, not direct, and preferably no later than 10 days before the start of the training course.

Email: bookings@urcwessex.org.uk to receive the link to register on the course.

Development and Support

Bookings for all events and training courses to

Ruth Heine at the Synod Office

Email: bookings@urcwessex.org.uk

Tel: 023 8067 4513

From your DSOs

Development and Support Officers Mary and Ray continue to support churches, elderships and ministers, individually and through their work with the pastoral committees.

If you or your church feels that the DSOs can be of assistance, please do be in touch with them.

Ray Stanyon – dso-n@urcwessex.org.uk

Mary Thomas – dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk

Dates in 2025

Church Secretaries' Networking Zoom – Saturday 18 January 2025.

Lay Preachers' Gathering – Saturday 29 March 2025 at Sarum College.

Church Treasurers' Networking Zoom – changed to **Saturday 14 June 2025**.

Elders' Conference – Saturday 28 June 2025 at Sarum College.

Children's and Youth Events and Training

Wessex Synod's Winter Youth Retreat

Winter Youth Retreat. 17 – 19 January 2025 at Waverley Abbey, Farnham.
For young people in school year 9 up to age 25 years. Free event.

[Further information](#). Closing date for bookings: 9am Wednesday 8th January 2025.

Book your place <https://www.urcwessex.org.uk/event/wessex-winter-youth-retreat/>

URC Youth Assembly 2025

URC Youth Assembly, 7 – 9 March 2025.

Details on the [poster](#). Wessex Synod will fund places and help with transport.

[Further information about Youth Assembly](#).

Book your place by emailing bookings@urcwessex.org.uk

Children and youth Work webinar

For those working with children and young people.

Understanding behaviour and additional needs webinar. Available on YouTube [here](#).

Job Opportunities

URC vacancies

View by clicking on the following link: [Administrator - Church Life Review](#)

Other News

URC Church & Community Engagement News

View the latest issue: [Church & Community Engagement News](#)

URC Education and Learning bi-monthly newsletter

View Issue 12: December 2024 of [Education and Learning bi-monthly newsletter](#)

URC Children's and Youth Bi-monthly Newsletter – November 2024

From the Children's and Youth Team at Church House.

[Bi-monthly Newsletter – November 2024](#)

URC News Update

[View December/January News Update here](#)

News Update is seeking anything of interest for the denomination as a whole from across the country – and the nations.

Any news/photos/event information for the next edition should be sent to:

ann-marie.nye@urc.org.uk

You can subscribe to News Update via the link on the URC website.

Joint Public Issues Team

[View latest JPIT newsletter](#)

Churches Together in England Newsletter

Latest newsletter available here: <https://cte.org.uk/enews/>

News from around the Synod

Does your church have a good news story?

If your church has something it would like to share with people via the Synod Website page “[Stories from our Churches](#)”, please send the article to the [Synod Office](#) and we will publish it on that page.

NB If using photographs please ensure you have signed permission from those people featured for it to be published on the Synod Website (not just for your own personal church's use) and supply this at the same time as submitting the article.

New Stories are added as when they are received, so do keep an eye on the page regularly.

Reminders

Theology of Worship Group

The Theology of Worship Group provides preachers and worship leaders (and other interested persons) helpful stimulus and opportunities to reflect on worship in the URC. At the meetings we discuss the issues on the nature, theology and practice of worship in the URC and suggest ways to address some.

The group is looking to widen the Planning Group as well as seeking a new chair. If interested, or want to know more, and have some free time, why not join our next Planning Team Meeting.

Date: Monday, 20th January 2025

Time: 7:30 -9pm. Via Zoom

To register your interest in attending the planning meeting, please contact, Rev. Dr. Richard Goldring, ToW Group Secretary, rgoldring23@gmail.com

Evangelism in the URC

Take a look at the new page on the URC Website all about Evangelism.

Link: [Evangelism in the URC](#)

Le Weekend – 2-4 May 2025

A weekend away in Luneray, France with friends from Wessex Synod and United Protestant Church of France

2-4 May 2025

Theme: The Word

Prayer, Food, Sharing, Friendship

Please email Helen Everard on helen.everard158@gmail.com to register by 28th February

No French speaking needed!

Prayer Calendar

January Calendar

5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cumnor• East Cliff, Bournemouth
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rowlands Castle• Aston Tirrold
19	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fordingbridge as it closes• Banbury URC @ The Haven• United Church Ferndown
26	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beacon Hill, Hindhead• Bell Street United Church, Shaftesbury

January Eco Prayer

Lord God

In our winter, help us remember our warming world

Be with those struggling to plant and harvest because rains have not come

Help those fighting wildfires because the earth is warmer

As we plan our planting

Help us to grow better in tune with your world

And help us to act in whatever way we can

For all things work for good through Jesus who loves us

Amen

February Calendar

2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parkstone• Weymouth: Hope and Radipole (signing their covenant with the Methodists)
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9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caversham Park, Reading • Mere • Elstead
16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hythe, Cornerstone • Maidenhead
23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting of Synod on 27th • Bournemouth: Immanuel, Southbourne

February Eco prayer

On the border between winter and spring
 May the Living God be praised
 In the uncertainty of seasons amid climate change
 We turn to God, whose world we inhabit,
 To pray for animals and plants,
 Abundance of life, caught in difficulties of our making
 Have mercy, Lord.
 Yet still, in the cold
 When the promise of growth is still far away
 Or a day when the sun warms the bare branches of trees
 May the Living God be praised
 Thank you, Lord, for the time of waiting
 Sleep time for plants and animals
 Thank you for the pause before growth
 When snowdrops show that
 Abundant growth is arriving in secret
 Until blooms coat the earth
 With joy
 May the Living God be praised!

Items for the next edition to office@urcwessex.org.uk
by 12noon on Monday 13th January 2025
Please submit news items in the form of:
a heading; date and venue details; a brief descriptive sentence and a website link.