



## Christmas Newsletter 2023

### Christmas Message from our Ministers...

I love the night sky. I love playing the game of, "Is it a star? Is it a planet? Is it a satellite? Is it the international space station?! Nope, it's a plane!" We always hope for something extraordinary – yet, for the most part, it is something quite ordinary. It is one of the realities of life that things that are regular for us, even when they are special, become ordinary. It's how traditions form; when something special becomes ordinary and comfortable. Christmas is a wonderfully regular time (it's coming whether we are ready or not!) but I'm not sure it can ever be called ordinary! The story of a child being born to an unmarried mother, in less-than-ideal circumstances, relocated by political forces, is really, quite ordinary. However, out of this ordinary story comes a truly Extraordinary story of angels and

shepherds, of far-off visitors and extravagant gifts; out of this ordinary story comes the extraordinary story of God's beautiful and wonderful gift of Jesus, a gift of grace and love and light and goodness.

With all that we have planned at SwanBank this Christmas we really encourage you to dive into the celebrations and to invite those around you, friends, neighbours, family and colleagues to come and join in. We hope that in this 'ordinary' season you encounter something quite 'out of the ordinary', and that in turn, you might help someone else to encounter the 'extraordinary' gift of God in Jesus Christ.

*Kathryn and Ruth*

### 'Christmas reflections'

Like most people at Christmas, I think of all the places and all the churches in which I have spent Christmas in the past – and all those people I have spent Christmas with.

One of my memories is of St David's, Wales, in 2008. The Welsh have a special extra Christmas service, Plygain, at 6am on Christmas morning. So, the congregation is quite small! As a recent incomer I had never been in this church, a non-Conformist one, before. It soon became apparent that everyone present in the Tabernacle was expected to walk to the front and say something, in most cases best wishes for Christmas Day. When the sidesman came to me, I declined, saying, 'I am a stranger here.'

Then I thought. 'No Christian is a stranger in any church on Christmas Day'. I walked to the front and apologised for my earlier refusal and greeted them all. It was a lesson. We should think not only of our own church and congregations at such a time but also of our fellow-believers elsewhere. We cannot see them, but they are there. So, I learnt something

that Christmas 15 years ago, -Nadolig Llawen!

In July I slipped while moving the dustbins and came crashing down. Skipping a description of the injuries, I found myself walking with a stick. People's attitude completely changed. I only had to stand on the kerb and the traffic stopped. On buses people leapt to their feet, offering me their seats. If I dropped my stick, they rushed to pick it up. 'Here you are duck.' I suspect that subconsciously they thought of their grandmothers. So, in this harsh world, and rarely harsher than at the moment, there is a common humanity. We just must hope that it wells up and eventually sweeps away the forces of hatred. We might utter a special prayer this Christmas. The Holy Land is racked by strife. Bethlehem is more part of a scene of conflict than a symbol of love. But, as St Paul enjoins us in more than one letter, we must not give up.

**Margret Brown**



# SWANBANK

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### Swan Bank – Christmas Day Hospitality

On Christmas Day we welcome guests into the church building who would otherwise be alone on Christmas day, providing them with a meal and entertainment. We will also be delivering meals to those who are unable to come into the building for any number of reasons. This outreach to the isolated and vulnerable in our community often reaches over 270 people.

We couldn't do this important service for our community without the many volunteers who give up their time on Christmas day to serve.

Do you drive? Could you spare some time before the 10:30am service to deliver meals to our guests at home? Could you help bring guests for

the 10:30am service on your way to church or take them home again at 3:15pm after your dinner? We aim to match drivers with guests who live in their area or on route.

If you would like to volunteer, please contact the office or email

[ChristmasDay@swanbank.org.uk](mailto:ChristmasDay@swanbank.org.uk)



All roles are subject to completion of safeguarding checks. Thank you, **Amy Rome**.

### 'I did it for Connor': Rachel Cooper raises £1,700 for SADS UK

Rachel who used to work on the young people's team at Swan Bank decided to take part in a half marathon. She wrote on her 'Just Giving' page:

*'On Sunday 3rd October 2021, I lost a great friend. One moment he was there, making us laugh whilst doing the worm, stealing grapes and breadsticks during communion, playing football with the lads, crying at the mildest of spice levels, discussing in great detail the ins and outs of every film at the cinema... and then he was gone. The lives of his family, his beautiful fiancé Jess, and so many of his friends and the people who loved him, changed forever.'*

At the end of the run Rachel said,

*'By far my greatest achievement so far. This half marathon was no joke. Torrential rain, hail, 40mph winds and nearly getting blown off the top of the Orme. Every muscle and joint in my body aches and I had blisters the size of golf balls but there was no way I wasn't going to finish this*

*race. I did it for Connor. I hope he would be proud of all the money we have raised for a charity so far. A charity so important to him. £1680 and counting!*

*Massive thank you to my cheerleaders who kept me going with homemade signs, cheering, music, and running alongside me. And thank you to everyone who donated. I am so so grateful. Connor... We did it!'*

[Rachel's Just Giving link for SADS](#)



**SADS UK Helps Save Lives, informing the public and health professionals of symptoms of Heart Conditions that can cause a Sudden Arrhythmic Death (SADS) if not detected and treated. The charity donates cardiac equipment and defibrillators in the community and supports research into SADS.**



### Focus on Monday Bible Study Group

There are many small groups meeting under Swan Bank's umbrella, and the one which I lead, meets in the Fellowship room at Swan Bank on Monday mornings.

The group had been meeting for quite a few years when Sue and I joined soon after being welcomed into the Swan Bank family around six years ago. We had looked on the group to meet more members of the church family as well as being able to learn from and contribute to the existing members' discussions.

Around twenty people met each week, and the leaders covered a vast range of chapters from the bible, at times spending several weeks expanding specific chapters, and offering the opportunity for some of the group to lead a week, as their individual gifts were recognised. That gave the opportunity for even me to lead the occasional session.

During 2019 the previous leaders looked for someone new to take over their leadership. After much prayer and consideration, I accepted their offer.

Little did I, or anyone else, know what the country was to face early in 2020, and that it would mean not being allowed to physically meet as a group for several months, and that this would have more longer-term effects on our group.

Several members took the opportunity to review their overall church membership, and moved to churches closer to their homes, joining groups



within their new fellowships. Others changed their worship habits and reduced their overall attendance at church – including small groups, while some of the more mature members found that the “Lockdown” took its toll on their physical ability to leave their homes.

We are now a group of around twelve who have found the group to be a safe space to discuss our understanding or doubts about the scriptures. This has been evident as many have been able to share personal experiences or concerns.

We still meet weekly on Monday mornings at 10.00am, share some light refreshments, prayer and discussions and aim to be finished by 11.30am.

We would love to offer a warm welcome to anyone who is free during that time and would like to join us for a safe, pressure free time.

God Bless **Dave Howe**.





### Swan Bank 'Get Ready, Christmas is Coming!' Social

We had such a great night at our Pie & Pea Supper and Beetle Drive. Thank you to everyone who came along and joined in the fun. The new housekeeping and bookings teams pulled out all the stops to make it a night to remember. Great food; lovely goody bags; great music and even compere Sue to keep us in order. Worthy prizes winners were Lucy Jeffries, Nick Jeffries and John Rodgers.

Rita Taylor – *'It was really good fun. It brought back so many lovely memories from Beetle drives we used to attend when we were a little younger.'*

Phoebe Boden – *'It was a great night. Lovely to meet new people and have such a good laugh.'*

Val Walton – *'I've never played before. Wasn't it good? I'm worn out now!'*



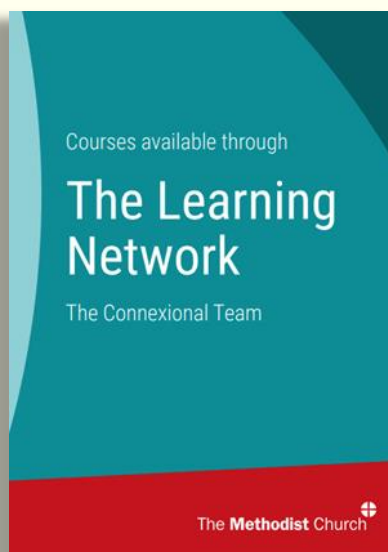
### Methodist Learning Courses

Did you know that the Methodist Church offers over 20 learning courses, many on-line? These include:-

- Bible Literacy
- Calling and Vocation
- Circuit Steward Training
- Lay Employment Support
- Leadership Development
- Mental Health
- Supervision
- Positive Working Together
- Theological Literacy
- Worship Leading

For a full brochure please follow the link below,

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/29680/learning-network-brochure-feb2023.pdf>





# SWANBANK



## Christmas Newsletter 2023

### Foodbank Update

Thank you everyone for supporting the foodbank over another difficult year. Our prayer has always been that we won't need foodbanks in the future. Unfortunately, as you can imagine with rising fuel and food prices this year, we are seeing more people and especially families needing our help. Some families have found themselves accommodated in the George Hotel for several weeks at a time. This is often not a pleasant experience for them, but thanks to your generosity, we have been able to support them.

We are so blessed by the support we receive. From all of us at foodbank, we wish you a peaceful, joyful and a happy Christmas. May you be blessed through the New Year ahead.

A huge thank you for your generosity.

**Sue Woodward** & volunteers.

The reverse advent calendar below shows the typical items we often need.

Stoke-on-Trent **Reverse ADVENT CALENDAR** **NOVEMBER/DECEMBER**

Donate an item for 24 days

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
Tinned Potatoes	Box of biscuits	Box of chocolate	Instant Mash Potatoes	Tinned Fish	Fruit Juice
<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>
Christmas Treats	Tea Bags	UHT Milk	Tinned Dessert	Rice	Tinned Meat
<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>
Rice pudding	Instant Mash Potatoes	Tinned Vegetables	Pasta Sauce	Cereal	UHT Milk
<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>
Tinned Fruit	Jam	Nuts & Confectionery	Tinned Dessert	Tinned Tuna	Tinned Tomatoes

[stokeontrent.foodbank.org.uk](http://stokeontrent.foodbank.org.uk)

Registered Charity in England & Wales (1150820)

Please leave any donations at a suitable supermarket donation point or bring into church where it can be collected by the foodbank team.





### Christmas at SwanBank

Out of our ordinary acts, in our ordinary lives, the world-transforming extraordinary love of God shines through.

This Advent and Christmas, you are invited to experience the wonder of how God's love is revealed in the ordinary; 2000 years ago, a seemingly ordinary birth changed the world.

We would love for you to join us as we celebrate Christmas and all that it means.

For more information about each event and how to book please see our website or Facebook page.



### Contactless Giving

To make giving easier we are introducing an alternative way to make a donation to the work of the church.

A contactless payment point will be positioned in the main church auditorium where you can make a payment of your Choice with a simple touch of your contactless Payment card or phone.



### Christmas at Swan Bank

Fri 1 <sup>st</sup>	Burslem Christmas Lights switch on from 4pm onwards.
Sat 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Christmas Messy Church, £1 including breakfast and lunch! 10am -12noon.
Wed 6 <sup>th</sup>	Advent Bible Study in the Fellowship Room. 7pm for 7:30pm start.
Sun 10 <sup>th</sup>	Afternoon Tea in Support of the Night Shelter (for details see the flyer in 'Dates for your Diary' section), 2-5pm.
Tues 12 <sup>th</sup>	Little Treasures Christmas Party, 9-11am.
Tues 12 <sup>th</sup>	Drop-in Communion, 12noon-1pm.
Tues 12 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday Club Carol Service, 2pm in the Fellowship Room, followed by mince pies (what else!) and hot drinks at 3pm.
Wed 13 <sup>th</sup>	Advent Bible Study in the Fellowship Room. 7pm for 7:30pm start.
Fri 15 <sup>th</sup>	Carols at The Crown Pub, from 7:30pm.
Sun 17 <sup>th</sup>	Carols and Lessons Service, 10:30am.
Sun 17 <sup>th</sup>	Christingle Services. 4pm and 6pm.
Wed 20 <sup>th</sup>	Advent Bible Study in the Fellowship Room. 7pm for 7:30pm start.
Fri 22 <sup>nd</sup>	School's Out Family Film Night, Pizza and hotdogs from 5pm. Film starts 17:30pm.
Sun 24 <sup>th</sup>	Nativity Service, 10:30am. Children can come dressed as their favourite character (and adults if they wish!)
Sun 24 <sup>th</sup>	Christmas Eve Midnight Communion Service, 11pm for 11:30pm start.
Mon 25 <sup>th</sup>	All Age Christmas Day Celebration Service, 10:30am.
Sun 31 <sup>st</sup>	New Year's Eve, Celebration Service, 10:30am.



### Christmas Cards



There's still time to get your Christmas cards from **Ruth Hearson**. Her contact details are [ruth.hearson@gmail.com](mailto:ruth.hearson@gmail.com) on Facebook or Instagram [@ruthhearsenillustrator](https://www.instagram.com/ruthhearsenillustrator) or see her after the 10.30am service on Sundays.

A large version of the card will be available for everyone to sign in lieu of sending out cards to each other. You could donate the money saved to the church outreach activities over Christmas if you wish.

### Future Articles

If anyone has any stories or articles to be considered for inclusion in future newsletters, please contact **Shirley Brooks** or **Nigel Johnson** directly

or email :- [officeassistance@swanbank.org.uk](mailto:officeassistance@swanbank.org.uk).

### Regular Weekly Events at Swan Bank

#### Sunday

**Sunday Night Young Adults** – Fellowship Room, 7:30-9pm

#### Monday

**Prayer Time** – Meeting Room 1, 9-9:30am

**Bible Study** – Meeting Room 1, 10-11:30am

**Gospel Choir** – Main Church, 7:30-9pm *2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays of each month*

**Men's Bible Study** – meeting suspended until the new year

#### Tuesday

**Little Treasures (0-4 years old)**– Lower Hall, 9:30-11am *(term time only)*

**Chatty Café** – Coffee Lounge, 10am-12noon

**Tuesday Club** – Coffee Lounge, 1:30-3:30pm

**Tuesday Night Youth (11-16 years old)**– Youth Room, 7-8:30pm *(term time only)*

#### Wednesday

**Knit & Natter** – Coffee Lounge, 10am-12noon

**Foodbank** – Coffee Lounge, 2-4pm *(E-voucher will be required from a referral agency)*

#### Thursday

**Younger Youth (School years 3-6)** – Upper Hall, 5:45-7:15pm *(term time only)*

**Youth Club (11-16 years old)** – Upper Hall, 7:30-9pm *(term time only)*

#### Saturday

**Messy Church (Primary aged children)**– Lower Hall, 10am-12noon *(first Saturday of each month)*

**Please check, as the Christmas period may affect some of our regular activities.**





# SWANBANK

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### Dates for the Diary

**Christmas Afternoon Tea in Support  
of the Community Night Shelter**  
Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December

*Christmas Afternoon Tea*

**STOKE ON TRENT CHURCHS  
COMMUNITY NIGHT SHELTER**



**SUNDAY 10TH DECEMBER**

**2:00PM - 5:00PM**



**Swan Bank Church**

EMAIL: [STOKEWINTERNIGHTSHELTER@GMAIL.COM](mailto:STOKEWINTERNIGHTSHELTER@GMAIL.COM) FOR TICKETS



**£5.00**

CAKE SALE

CHRISTMAS  
MUSIC



STALLS

TEA WITH A  
TWIST

All proceeds go to helping the homeless

E-mail [stokewinternightshelter@gmail.com](mailto:stokewinternightshelter@gmail.com)

**Carelink Connect Club**  
Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> December  
& Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> February.

**Carelink  
Connect  
Club** 

**Are you over 65 and want to...  
Video call your family...  
Turn off the light from your chair...  
Come along to Connect Club**



Have a cuppa with one of our friendly **Connect Buddies**,  
who will be on hand to answer all your digital dilemmas

**NEW SESSIONS FOR 2023-  
2024**

5<sup>th</sup> December 2023 10.00-12.00pm  
and  
6<sup>th</sup> February 2024 10.00-12.00pm  
Swan Bank Church Café, Burslem

If you're interested but struggling to get there  
independently, please get in touch

**BYOD**

**Bring Your  
Own Device**

\* don't worry if  
you don't have  
your own device  
you will still

**Join our  
Community**

For more information and to book a free place contact:  
Jess 01782 810320 / 07435 408187  
or Christine 01782 810320 / 07733 895330

**SALTBOX**  
Strengthening Our Communities

**CareLink**   
loneliness : let's face it together





# SWANBANK

## Christmas Newsletter 2023

What's on in December - further afield...

### Christmas Charity Concert

The Strings & Sunshine  
Community Ukulele Band,  
Biddulph Strummers & Singers  
with lots of ukulele Friends at Christmas.

Music, songs, cake  
& coffee!!!



Tickets £5 : [kevin@sascub.uk](mailto:kevin@sascub.uk)

or Tel: 0780 304 6766

Whitehill Methodist Church

Thursday 7th December 2023

Starts at 7.30pm

All monies raised will be donated to the  
Alzheimer's Society and Douglas MacMillan.



### ENGLESEA BROOK CHAPEL AND MUSEUM

INVITE YOU TO A

## CAROL SERVICE

3PM SUNDAY 10TH  
DECEMBER 2023

A service of carols, readings and sketches in the beautiful and atmospheric setting of the Englesea Brook Chapel, to be followed by seasonal refreshments.

Free entry, parking available

Englesea Brook Chapel and  
Museum, Englesea Brook Lane,  
CW2 5QW

[www.engleseabrook.org.uk](http://www.engleseabrook.org.uk)



Scan to find us  
on Google Maps



**SwanBank Church, Swan Square, Burslem, ST6 2AA**

Office hours:- 10am - 4pm, Tuesday – Thursday



01782 575129



[admin@swanbank.org.uk](mailto:admin@swanbank.org.uk)



[www.swanbank.org.uk](http://www.swanbank.org.uk)

Sunday 10:30am Service, live stream links:-



[www.youtube.com/@SwanBank/streams](https://www.youtube.com/@SwanBank/streams)



[www.facebook.com/swanbank/?locale=en\\_GB](https://www.facebook.com/swanbank/?locale=en_GB)



# SWANBANK



## Christmas Newsletter 2023

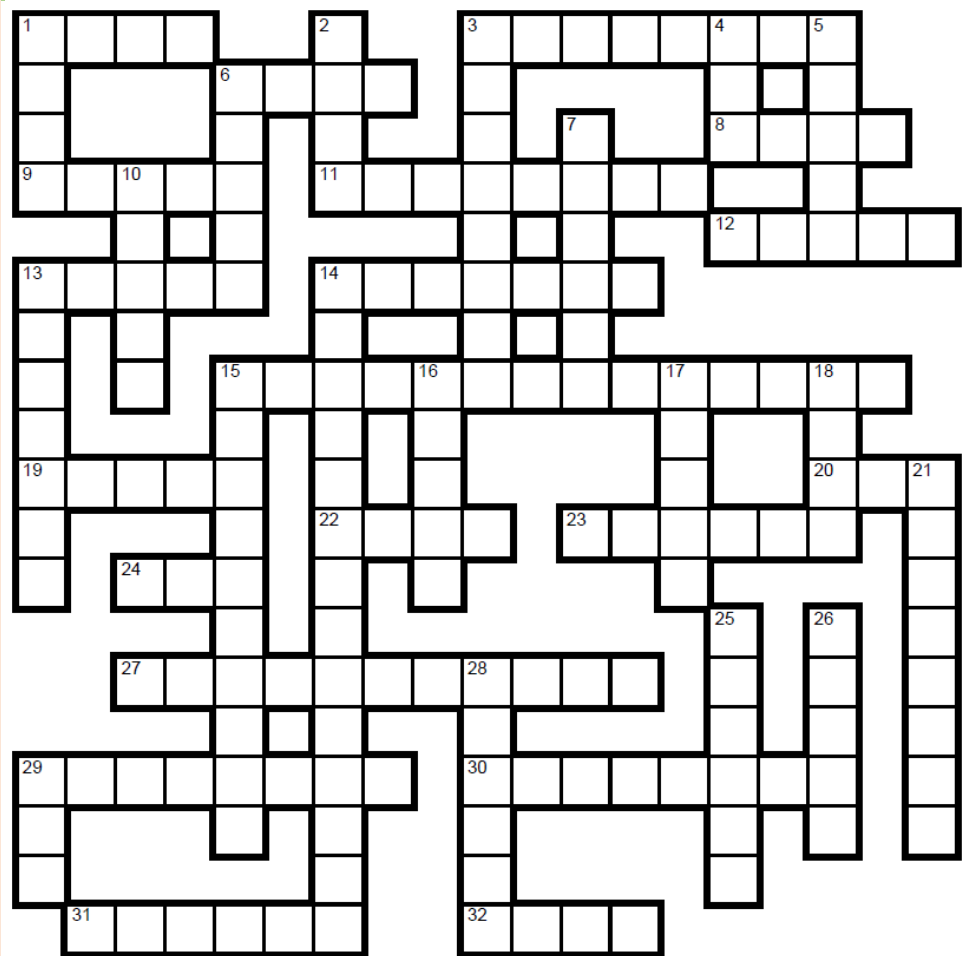
### Why not try our Christmas Crossword?

#### Across

- 1 Transportation for going over snow (4)
- 3 Mixture of seasoned ingredients (8)
- 6 Baby's bed (4)
- 8 Period from December 24th to January 6th (4)
- 9 Red-breasted bird (5)
- 11 Twelve days after Christmas (8)
- 12 Alcoholic drink normally served in a bowl (5)
- 13 Jolly (5)
- 14 News (7)
- 15 Goes with the turkey (9,5)
- 19 A type of tree used at Christmas (5)
- 20 The colour of Santa's hat (3)
- 22 \_\_\_ log; traditionally burned at Christmas (4)
- 23 Sanctified (6)
- 24 Cured leg of pork (3)
- 27 Christmas song (6,5)
- 29 Found under the Christmas tree? (8)
- 30 Grace (8)
- 31 Snow falls in this season (6)
- 32 Given at Christmas (4)

#### Down

- 1 Bright celestial body (4)
- 2 Christmas tree type (4)
- 3 Take aback (8)



BiblePuzzles.org.uk

- 4 No room here! (3)
- 5 Elvish colour (5)
- 6 Sweets; flavoured sugar (5)
- 7 Container usually found in a stable (6)
- 10 Beginning of life (5)
- 13 Amazing event (7)
- 14 Written after Christmas? (5,3,6)
- 15 Formal events (10)
- 16 Ring out from churches (5)
- 17 Accompaniment for food (5)
- 18 Printed or written greeting (4)
- 21 Month in which Christmas falls (8)
- 25 Nature of God (6)
- 26 One was born in Bethlehem (5)
- 28 Sweetened milk drink, with eggs and alcohol (6)
- 29 Pastry dish (3)

*Answers will appear in the next edition of our Newsletter*