



# December 2008

## Christmas Message

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Every year around this time, I have a familiar experience. I'm out shopping or working and as I go to the cash desk to pay or chat, the cashier or sales advisor will say, "Merry Christmas."

I realise that this comment is not always motivated by their genuine interest in whether or not I enjoy Christmas. I'm aware that they may be saying this because they've been told to! But at least once every year, I have a sales advisor or cashier who looks me in the eye and says "Merry Christmas," and really means it. And it changes my whole day.

There really is something genuine to this whole idea of Christmas cheer. As December 25th draws near, people warm up just a bit. If you're out and around on Christmas Eve, you'll notice that people are friendlier than on any other day of the year.

Do people warm up when they are aware of the reason for Christmas, that a baby was born in a stable? Do people make an extra effort to practice what the angels sang of - "peace on earth, goodwill towards men?"

But consider this - why do we notice this at Christmas? Why does this surge in kindness stand out? I think it's because, despite our best intentions, good will towards each other

can easily become a seasonal event rather than a standing policy.

When Jesus entered our world, he didn't come to brighten our Decembers, but to transform our lives. It can be hard work to practice good will towards one another. But Jesus came into our lives, so we can change our ways.

The work of Jesus on this earth provides a plan for loving our neighbour in a busy and complicated community. Jesus made a point of seeking out people who were the broken and marginalised of his day - the lepers, prostitutes and tax collectors - and he saw the value in each one of them. And so, He helped them recognise the value in themselves.

This Christmas season, because of the credit crunch, some may not be so full of Christmas Cheer, but let us recognise that goodwill towards people is a series of decisions that we should work at, not only in temporary Christmas cheer, but in the decisions of our everyday lives.

Christmas Blessings  
Alison Finch (Town Centre Chaplain)

We pray for all Christmas services, events and outreach activity this Christmas

**Everlasting Father,  
thank you for your gift  
of hope,  
the indescribable gift of  
your Son.**

**Wonderful Counsellor,  
shine your light again  
this Christmas.**

**Teach us to champion  
peace and justice.**

**Prince of peace**

**help us to build your  
kingdom,**

**for the sake of the poor,  
the weak and the  
broken. Amen.**

**With thanks to Christian  
Aid**

**[www.christianaid.org.uk](http://www.christianaid.org.uk)**

# Christmas and Town News

## Christmas

We take time to pray for the homeless and other vulnerable people this month.

We thank God for the new communities emerging.

### We especially praise God for:

- The new Emmaus community
- The Out for Good project (see page 3)
- The Korban project (see November prayer guide)
- The New Neighbours' Project
- Every act of kindness in Jesus' name.

### We pray for:

- Older people. In the UK around 1 million older people will eat Christmas lunch alone.
- The homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless
- Those who are lonely or grieving this Christmas
- Street Pastors and others engaged in outreach

## Friends International at Christmas time!

- We praise God for the Christmas celebration to be held on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> December at 6.30 pm in the large Ivor Crewe lecture theatre arranged by the Christian groups on campus. Pray that a good number of staff and students will come and all will be to the glory of God.
- Pray for all the Christmas events which are being put on by JAF, CCF, CU, Anglican Chaplaincy and Friends International
- The Friends International Christmas parties on 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> December.

### Pray for:

- Hospitality for International students over Christmas, that

there will be enough Christian folk offering a meal in a home between 20<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> December. If you can help please ring Michael and Caroline on 825060 or e-mail: [frinco@essex.ac.uk](mailto:frinco@essex.ac.uk)

Thank you for praying!

*Joan Davies*

### Colchester Boiler Room

When I was praying about how to worship and serve Jesus at Christmas time, I was reminded about that many people feel most lonely and most forgotten at this time of year.

In response, Colchester Boiler Room Community is planning a Christmas Feast for people who are hungry or lonely at Christmas time.

This has been scheduled for Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> December in the evening.

St Botolph's Church have donated their church hall and kitchen as a venue. Big thanks to our friends there!

Please contact me if you know anyone who would appreciate a invitation. Also, if you would like to be involved in planning the meal, helping on the evening, or donating funds to help pay for it. Thanks for considering this,

*Richard Smith*

Colchester Boiler Room Community  
01206 522781  
[richard@colchesterboilerroom.org.uk](mailto:richard@colchesterboilerroom.org.uk)

### Christmas Stamps

Those wishing to keep Christ at the centre of Christmas are encouraged to request "traditional" postage stamps, which this year are available, as before, alongside other designs.

## Strategic Plan

A short survey about the nine priorities set out in the draft Colchester Borough Council Strategic Plan 2009-12 will appear, with a freepost return slip, in the Winter Courier.

An online version is also available by following the newsflash link at the top of the [www.colchester.gov.uk](http://www.colchester.gov.uk) home page.

On Thursday 11th December, Graham Kendrick's **Dreaming of a Holy Night** comes to Charter Hall. Tickets direct from Charter Hall. [www.grahamkendrick.co.uk](http://www.grahamkendrick.co.uk)

The **Hope in Colchester** Christmas outreach event will take place on the last late night shopping night which is **Wednesday 17th December**. It will take place from 7 pm to 9.30 pm, outside Lion Walk URC (car park area).

- Gift Wrapping
- Christmas belief surveys (must attend training evening first)
- Carol singing (no talent required!)
- Serving refreshments (or organising them)
- Prayer/pastoral

Please let me know of any volunteers and contact me for more information.

Many thanks  
James Collitt 07977 510880

### Prayer Breakfast

Date: Saturday 7th December  
Time: 8.30 am - 10 am  
Greenstead Free Church, Magnolia Drive

## Out for Good

Out for Good faces some challenging times as we approach the end of the first year 'trial period'. During this year our aim was to establish whether this model of low occupancy supported accommodation could work on two fronts:

1. To enable and assist young men with challenging behaviour to reform, re-integrate, explore and find faith.
2. Establish a funding stream that would ensure sustainability and longevity. We have housed six young men all with a long record of offending/drug abuse.

Only one of the six we have worked with directly through Out for Good house has gone back to prison, he has recently been released and lives in Chelmsford, we still have ongoing contact with

him. One has moved away to a residential college where he is undertaking a catering course. This is the longest period of his teenage life that he hasn't offended, taken drugs, we still see him on a fortnightly basis. The two current residents are doing really well, both undertaking voluntary work and both have linked with the local church community and receiving support via that connection, and we have witnessed a heart warming family reconciliation with one lad. Neither has re-offended or lapsed back into the drug culture. Of the other two ex residents we only have knowledge of one who is still local but managed not to go back to prison, although we know he is still taking drugs and offending. The other lad abandoned his room and we pray for his continual safety.

It is fair to say that those lads who join churches and explore and experience the Christian faith fare significantly better than those who find that engagement difficult. We have had terrific support from the Boiler room community and DNA network. On the down side and the most challenging, and which threatens the future of the project, we have not been able to secure funding to maintain the current status quo, five applications were made to different trusts and so far four have turned us down. We would appreciate your prayers and support which can be channelled through DNA Networks.

*Pete Hope*  
mob. 07941 019750  
Email: Hopeboy291@aol.com

## The Economy

**We continue to pray for the issues raised by shifts in the economy, and for our response to those in need.**

Relate, the UK's largest provider of relationship support, revealed that one in four couples cite debt as the single biggest cause of their arguments, while two in five have lied to each other about how much they owe. According to the charity Credit Action, one person is declared bankrupt or insolvent every five minutes, while 104 properties are being repossessed daily. **Please pray...**

- For those families whose homes have been repossessed or are at risk of repossession. Pray that they would get good practical advice.
- Counsellors who work at debt advice centres and charities,

like Care for the Family, who provide education on money management.

- For those couples and families who are covering up the reality of their financial situation. Pray that they would have the strength to be honest with each other.
- About the new course launched by Care for the Family, 'Quidz In', designed to help parents raise financially confident children. .
- For those who have been made redundant and are currently struggling to support their families financially. Ask for perseverance as they look for work, and support from family and friends as they make any difficult transitions.
- For those families who are

dreading Christmas this year because of financial issues. Please pray that they would find peace of mind in the true meaning of Christmas and be able to enjoy some quality time together.

- That in the midst of money worries, families would understand that God is their foundation and promises to provide. Our Heavenly Father knows what we need. (Matthew 6: 25-34)

*Care for the Family*

Thousands of Britons have viewed the Church of England's prayer for the current financial situation. In the first 3 weeks it was on line, over 8,000 hits were registered on the site. For more details  
<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/prayers/#financial>

# Coastlands and Gateways

Coastlands and Gateways is a prayer initiative linking prayer networks across the British Isles.

“God has given us a mandate to stand, watch and pray for our nations. We are thrilled that so many people are rising to the challenge. We pray knowing that our God has already won the victory and He is looking for those who will declare and release it.

## We give thanks:-

- For all the groups praying across our nations – walking, sailing and even flying - seeking God on behalf of their communities.
- That there has been protection from terrorism and as our emergency services have stopped dangerous situations before they have even happened.
- For the safety of our road, sea, rail and air networks. We are particularly thankful that nobody was killed in the channel tunnel fire recently
- For the drop in the general crime figures.
- For the outpouring of healings and salvations in some of our communities.
- The examination of media standards after the recent BBC Radio 2 problems.
- For the raising up of all the prayer networks and groups in strategic places eg. Heathrow. For those who are seeking to pray into the roots of issues in our nation, and for those who have a special mandate to pray for the monarchy.

## Please continue to pray for:-

- A reduction in the number of guns, drugs and people being smuggled into our nation.

- An understanding of violence and death – it has been said that people involved in this have no comprehension or responsibility for the consequences of their actions.
- Protection of all our transport systems
- Road safety
- Protection of oil and gas platforms and storage facilities.
- That angels would stand guard at the gateways of our nations, to protect and prevent anything entering which is not part of God's purposes.
- Stopping of racism
- For the media to have a balanced report instead of releasing hopelessness.
- For troops in Afghanistan and Iraq and as the authorities look to send troops to Congo. For protection as they go, for their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. For strength and healing where it is needed on their return.
- Data security
- Increase of the security of our borders by strengthening structures and procedures.
- Righteousness and truth within our government and those in authority to prevent manipulation and control of those in authority.

We were handed the torch (false fire) from Beijing. Thank God for the great canopy of prayer He is building across the land as we approach the 2012 Olympics. We cannot see all that He is doing but please pray for protection, revival and restoration to draw the UK back into the centre of God's will. That we will fulfil His Kingdom purposes to be a witness to the nations of the world and for the true fire of God to be seen. Please pray for wisdom and pro-

tection in all the preparations and for the Church to be mobilising and positioning itself”.

*Sue and Val Coastlands and Gateways*

## **Secondary School Consultation**

We pray for Essex County Council, teaching and other staff, parents and students of all our secondary schools as decisions are being made regarding the future. We especially pray for Thomas, Lord Audley and Alderman Blaxill schools, and for God's will to be done in all things.

## **Whole Hearted Singing**

Sing Gospel

♪ From a Selection of Songs New & Traditional, With Song Leader & Vocal Tutor Jeanette Cleary.

Greenstead Community Centre, Hawthorn Avenue, Colchester

Time: 10.30am - 12.30pm  
Every Saturday til 13<sup>th</sup> December

*Any Age, any Ability.*

£5 Per Session 01206 500429  
or 07954 371370

j.net@naturalvoice.net -  
www.naturalvoice.net

## **Thank you to those who contribute to the prayer guide each month.**

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The contributors' views are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the editors.