

### Michael Hopkins' New Year Message

Dear Friends,

First, let me express my heartfelt thanks to each of you for your dedication and hard work over the Christmas season. Whether through community events, activities, or leading worship – often including special and extra services - you have gone above and beyond. In doing so, you have not only shared the story of Jesus but also made Christ visible in the world today. There is no greater calling, and your commitment is deeply appreciated.

As we step into a new year, I wish you a Happy New Year. For many, 2024 brought its share of challenges and a mix of sadness and joy. While some achieved much, for others, simply making it through was an accomplishment in itself. As we look to 2025, our hopes are renewed.

2025 also marks a significant milestone: the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, a defining moment in the formation of our faith. At our Synod meeting on 11 October, we will be privileged to welcome the Revd Dr Susan Durber, President of the World Council of Churches and a familiar figure to many in Wessex. She will guide us in reflecting on this important anniversary. Such moments remind us that our hope is not in the turning of the calendar but in Christ, who makes all things new.

You may have noticed the popular refrain of “New Year, New You.” Yet this idea, rooted in both self-criticism and consumerism, can feel harsh. We are not disposable objects to be replaced annually, nor should we discard ourselves like outdated electronic devices. Instead, I encourage you to reclaim the “old you.” Refine, evolve, and improve if you can, but move toward your true self, not away from it. Be kind to yourself and your mind.

This brings me to an alternative approach for the start of the year: Gentle January. In a season where many feel the weight of exhaustion rather than refreshment, let's embrace gentleness:

- Gentle with ourselves,
- Gentle with each other,
- Gentle with our to-do lists and plans,
- Gentle with our creation,
- Gentle tones of voice to accompany gentle footsteps and gentle thoughts, all of which can be gently brought into our pauses and prayers.

Gentle January sounds inviting to me: a soothing, restorative alternative to the hurried resolutions and relentless pace of the world. May it bring you peace, renewal, and grace as we journey together into this new year.

With every blessing for 2025,

Michael Hopkins

## Annual Church Returns and Safeguarding Annual Returns for 2024

The online portal for both the Annual Church Return and the Safeguarding Annual Return **is now open**.

Thank you to all the churches who have already started and/or completed their annual returns.

We encourage those who have not yet started, to log on soon so that any problems can be ironed out quickly.

If you would like some help, please call or email either Deborah (Annual Church Returns) or Ruth (Safeguarding Annual Returns) and we will help wherever possible.

Deborah – [office@urcwessex.org.uk](mailto:office@urcwessex.org.uk) – 023 8067 8570

Ruth - [development@urcwessex.org.uk](mailto:development@urcwessex.org.uk) – 023 8067 4513

Please request a paper copy or pdf version of the questions if you prefer.

## 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](mailto:mshrubsole@gmail.com))

## Upcoming Synod events

Bookings for all events and training courses to  
Ruth Heine at the Synod Office

Email: [bookings@urcwessex.org.uk](mailto: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 – *Foundation & Intermediate courses in 2025*

**Foundation & Intermediate** Safeguarding: training courses.

- 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](mailto: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 12<sup>th</sup> February 2025 9.30-11am** – book via link  
[DBS Eligibility Webinar – Faith Sector 12.2.2025 9.30-11am](#)

- **DBS Barring Webinar 5<sup>th</sup> March 2025 12.30-2pm** – book via the link [DBS Barring – Faith Sector 5.3.2025 12.30-2pm](#)
- **DBS Update Service Webinar 28<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto: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](mailto: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) on **Saturday 1 March 2025, 9.30am – 1.30pm**, at Immanuel Church, Southbourne, Bournemouth, BH6 3QJ.

To register your interest, please email [bookings@urcwessex.org.uk](mailto:bookings@urcwessex.org.uk)

*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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:dso-n@urcwessex.org.uk)

Mary Thomas – [dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk](mailto: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**

### **URC Youth Assembly 2025**

**URC Youth Assembly, 7 – 9 March 2025.**

Details on the [poster](#). Wessex Synod will fund places at the Early Bird Price for bookings received before 26 January 2025, and help with transport.

[Further information about Youth Assembly](#).

Book your place by emailing [bookings@urcwessex.org.uk](mailto: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](#).

### **URC Children's and Youth Bi-monthly Newsletter – January 2025**

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

Bi-monthly Newsletter – [January 2025](#)

## Job Opportunities

### URC vacancies

Head of Governance Services: [Head of Governance Services](#)

Personal Assistant: [Personal Assistant](#)

## 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 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](mailto: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

### Evangelism in the URC

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

Link: [Evangelism in the URC](#)

## 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](mailto:deepti.upadhyaya@urc.org.uk) with the details below:

Full name

Email

Synod/Church name

Role/job title

## 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](mailto:helen.everard158@gmail.com) to register by 28th February

No French speaking needed!

## 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](http://www.lampscollective.com)

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

## Prayer Calendar

### February Calendar

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

## 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!

## March Calendar

2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading: St Andrew's</li><li>• Robert Barthram as he retires</li><li>• Gosport United Reformed Church, St Columba</li></ul>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Verwood</li><li>• St Paul's, Bracknell</li><li>• Thatcham</li></ul>
16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hungerford</li><li>• Bishop's Waltham United Free Church</li></ul>
23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting of Synod on 29<sup>th</sup></li><li>• Bitterne Park</li><li>• Guildford, Portsmouth Road</li></ul>
30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Christchurch: Somerford and Burton Greem</li><li>• Park, Reading</li></ul>

## March Eco Prayer

God of each yesterday and  
of every tomorrow,  
of transitions that  
pivot us between your now and your not yet,



stand strong beside us in the moment.  
Help us so in turn to stand firm,  
to hold solid ground  
In this month of spring promises and uncertain storms  
We are conscious of change  
And wonder if it is change for the better.  
We pray be with those who plant and grow our food  
Those most affected by the warming world.  
We pray for actions and research  
Which helps all to care for creation  
And for small acts of love  
Which have big consequences.  
In moments of shaky uncertainty  
when all seems tumultuous, stand firm.  
As your world turned upside down,  
on the cross, so companion us  
through all uncertainties.  
And so may we remain strong in resurrection hope  
and stable in undying love. Amen

(adapted from a prayer by Rev Ruth Harvey from the Iona community)

**Items for the next edition to [office@urcwessex.org.uk](mailto:office@urcwessex.org.uk)**

**by 12noon on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2025**

**Please submit news items in the form of:**

**a heading; date and venue details; a brief descriptive sentence and a website link.**