



Engage Befriending Drop-In

The Engage team would like our volunteers and Engage friends to come to our Engage Befriending drop-in



Thursday 11th December
in the Atrium Café

Thursday 8th January
in the Atrium Café

Thursday 12th February
in the Atrium Café

Thursday 12th March
in the Atrium Café

From 10.30am to 12 noon
Pop in for a cuppa, say hello and meet other volunteers, Engage Befriending friends, and the team.

We'd love to see you there.

The **Atrium Café** is at Greyfriars Church, Friar Street, RG1 1EH



The Christmas Book Club

Sarah Morgan

Every year, Erica, Claudia, and Anna reunite for their book club holiday. They're bonded by years of friendship and a deep love of books, but there is still so much they keep from each other . . .

At the cosy Maple Sugar Inn, Hattie specialises in making her guests' dreams come true, but this Christmas all she wants is to survive the festive season. Between running the inn and being a single mother, Hattie is close to breaking point. Over the course of an eventful week, Hattie sees that the friends are each carrying around unspoken truths, but nothing prepares her for how deeply her story will become entwined in theirs.

The Christmas Book Club is a heart-warming festive novel about friendship, family, and new beginnings, set in the cosy Maple Sugar Inn. The perfect Christmas read, full of warmth, romance, and emotional depth.



Contact the Engage Befriending team

Main number: 0118 995 2102 | Email: engage@themustardtree.org

Jackie Curtis: 07887 395115 | Jo White 07437 011764 | Sheila Cox 07516 254916

If you would like a large print version of this newsletter, please let us know.

Engage is part-funded by many organisations including:



Apply for your postal vote now

The local elections in May might seem a long time away but if you have not yet reapplied for your postal vote ahead of next May's local elections, you could lose the chance to vote by post. Changes introduced by the Elections Act 2022 mean postal voters are now required to reapply for their postal vote every three years.



More than 9,000 postal voters in Reading have so far failed to respond to requests from the Council to reapply after emails and letters were sent to more than 18,000 householders. Residents who do not reapply by 31 January 2026 will lose their opportunity to use a postal vote in May, but can still vote in person at their local polling station.

The quickest and simplest way to reapply is online but you can also request a form to be posted to you by emailing elections@reading.gov.uk or calling 0118 937 3717.

If they no longer wish to vote by post they should contact elections@reading.gov.uk or write to: Reading Borough Council, Electoral Services, Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading, RG1 2LU.

Carol Services around Reading

A carol service lets you experience the uplifting atmosphere of traditional Christmas music, reflect on the story of the Nativity, and connect with the community. Different churches have different traditions - some combine classic carols sung by a choir and the congregation with readings from the Bible, some more contemporary music, and some by candle light. Here are just a few of the carol services around Reading. Also look out for carol services near where you live. You will always receive a warm welcome, and they often include seasonal refreshments.

South Reading

St Agnes

292 Northumberland Avenue, Reading, RG2 8DE

- Sun 14th Dec, 6pm - Contemporary Carols With The Vocal Works Gospel Choir Service

St Barnabas

Elm Road, RG6 5TS

- Sun 22nd Dec, 4pm - Nine Lessons & Carols

East Reading

Wycliffe Baptist Church

233 Kings Rd, Reading RG1 4LS

- Thurs 18th Dec, 10:30am - Week day Carol Service
- Sun 21st Dec, 4pm, - Candle lit Carol service

Central Reading

Greyfriars Church

Friar Street, Reading. RG1 1EH

- Sun 14th Dec, 4pm & 6pm - Carol Services

West Reading

St Catherine's Tilehurst

Wittenham Avenue, Tilehurst, RG31 5LN

- Sun 14th Dec 7.00pm - Carols by Candlelight
- Sat 20th Dec, 6pm - Carols under the Old Oak Tree

Caversham & Emmer Green

Grace Church

119 Peppard Road, Caversham, Reading, RG4 8TR

- Sun 21st Dec, 6pm - Carol Service

St Peters

The Warren, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7TH

- Mon 15th Dec, 7.30pm - Carols in Caversham Court Gardens
- Sun 21st Dec 6.30pm - Lessons and Carols

St Johns

St John's Road, Caversham, Reading, RG4 8EB

- Wed 17th Dec, 7.30pm - Community Carol Service

Favourite Christmas Carols

We asked a few members of the Engage Befriending team to share their favourite Christmas carols, and why. Do you have a favourite Christmas carol, or Christmas song, or can't you wait until Christmas is over so you never need to hear another Christmassy song?!

Shiela



My favourite Christmas carol is **Silent Night** as we often sing it by candlelight and sometimes in German. At church the children sing a verse on their own, unaccompanied, such a special moment.

Jo



It's really difficult to pick a favourite, but I'm going to go for **Hark The Herald Angels Sing**. It's also really joyful, and I especially like trying to join in with the descant on the last verse which I learnt when I was in the school choir many years ago!

Jackie



My favourite carol is **Joy To The World**. I love the music, it's so uplifting and with a bright feeling. You can sing it loudly! Though my singing isn't great. Telling of the Lords love for each of us, so we should sing it loudly.



My carol is **In The Bleak Midwinter**. Although it is unlikely that it was snowing where Jesus was born, the picture of winter is very Christmassy, and it contrasts the cold stable with the love and devotion of one's heart "What can I give Him, Poor as I am? If I were a Shepherd I would bring a lamb; If I were a Wise Man I would do my part, Yet what I can I give Him, Give my heart."

Tony



Christingle: A Light in the Darkness

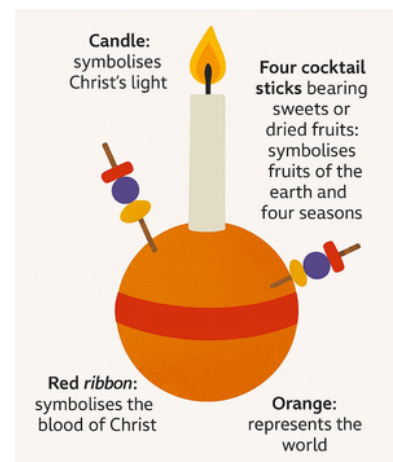


The **Christingle** is a cherished tradition in many Christian communities, especially during the Advent and Christmas seasons. Its origins trace back to 1747 in Germany, where Moravian Bishop Johannes de Watteville first introduced the concept during a children's service.

He gave each child a lighted candle wrapped in a red ribbon, symbolising Jesus as the light of the world and the hope of salvation.

Over time, the Christingle evolved into a more elaborate symbol. Today, it typically consists of:

- An orange, representing the world
- A candle inserted into the orange, symbolizing Christ's light
- A red ribbon around the orange, signifying the blood of Christ
- Four cocktail sticks bearing sweets or dried fruits, representing the fruits of the earth and the four seasons.



The tradition spread from Moravian churches to other denominations, particularly in the UK. In 1968, John Pensom of **The Children's Society** popularized Christingle services as a fundraising initiative, beginning with a service at Lincoln Cathedral. Since then, Christingle has become a beloved part of British Christmas celebrations, combining spiritual reflection with community support.

Keeping Well This Winter

As the evenings draw in and the frosts begin to sparkle on our windows, winter reminds us of both its beauty and its challenges. For many of us, the colder months can feel long and heavy, but with a little preparation—and a lot of kindness—we can keep well and even find joy in the season.

Here are a few tips for keeping well, based on information from **Age UK** and the **NHS**.



Warmth and Comfort

Keeping warm is more than a luxury; it's a safeguard for our health. The NHS reminds us that homes should be heated to at least 18°C, especially in rooms we use most. Age UK suggests layering clothing, using blankets or hot water bottles, and closing curtains at dusk to hold the warmth in. These small steps make a big difference.

Guarding Against Illness

Winter often brings coughs, colds, and flu. Vaccinations are one of the best protections we have, and those of us over 65 are encouraged to take up both flu and COVID-19 jabs. Washing hands regularly and keeping a few simple medicines at home can help us manage minor illnesses without unnecessary trips out in the cold.



Nourishment and Movement

A hot meal each day, with plenty of protein, keeps our strength up. Warm drinks throughout the day are both comforting and practical. Even gentle movement—walking around the house, stretching, or chair-based exercises—helps circulation and keeps us feeling more energetic.

Companionship and Cheer

Perhaps most importantly, winter is a time to lean on one another. Loneliness can bite harder when the nights are long, so staying connected matters. A phone call, a shared cup of tea, or joining in parish activities can lift spirits. Age UK reminds us that hobbies and conversation are as vital to wellbeing as warmth and food.



Practical Help

There is support available. The **Winter Fuel Payment** and **Warm Home Discount** can ease the burden of heating costs. Age UK, Citizens Advice and the local council can advise on grants and schemes—help worth seeking out.



Looking Out for Each Other

Winter asks us to care for ourselves, but it also invites us to care for one another. If we are able we can share in practical acts of kindness with each other — checking in on neighbours, sharing a meal, or offering a lift to the surgery. Together, we can make this winter not just bearable, but blessed.

Beware of winter fuel payment scams



Between April and September 2025, Action Fraud has received 2,790 crime reports relating to Winter Fuel Payment scams, with victims reporting losses totalling over £27,000. Winter Fuel Payments are made automatically, you do not need to do anything. If you receive any text messages about Winter Fuel Payments, it's a scam.

Not sure if a message is real? Contact the organisation directly using the contact details on their official website, not the number or web address in the message. Your bank (or any other official source) won't ask you to supply personal information by email or text message.

Tell Tony!



Tony is eager to hear from you! He is a member of the Engage team responsible for assembling this newsletter. Feel free to share any local happenings, suggest content ideas, write an article, or ask a question that we can address for you—just reach out!

You can contact us via email at engage@themustardtree.org or send your thoughts to: Engage Befriending, 4 Sackville Street, Reading, RG1 1NT.

Parish nurses in Reading

In Reading there are parish nurses in the Whitley area of south Reading, and the Southcote and Coley area of west Reading.

What does the Parish Nurse do?

Parish Nurses work with people of all ages and backgrounds, with any faith or none, focusing on the person rather than just a medical condition, and integrating all the different aspects of health.

A Parish Nurse can:

- Provide advocacy and moral support
- Provide general health advice and education
- 'Signpost' people to other support or medical services
- Pray for people
- Clarify medical procedures or issues
- Simply listen (which they do an awful lot of!)
- Provide specialist health promotion classes

The role complements, but does not replace, the NHS and other statutory services. They are uniquely placed to be able to attend to the well-being of the 'whole person', irrespective of their faith, or no faith, their age, sex, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or ability.

Who can receive this service?

The Parish Nursing service is available to anyone living or working within the Reading Gateway church parish in Whitley, or in the designated areas of Coley and Southcote.

How to make a referral?

All referrals will be assessed by the Parish Nurse:

South Reading - nurse Jill
Phone: 07473 079904
Email: parishnurse@readinggateway.church

Southcote and Coley - nurse Melanie
Phone: 07355 248986
Email: melanie.gager@torchhub.org.uk



Melanie's story

Hello, my name is Melanie, and I am the Parish Nurse for Southcote and Coley. I've worked in healthcare for over 40 years, most recently as a Nurse Consultant in Intensive Care at the Royal Berks. I loved that role, but this year I felt God calling me to lay it down and step into something new.



When I first saw the application, I had never even heard of Parish Nursing. After training and now some experience, I can see just how great the need is. Through a Christian charity called Torch, I now serve as a registered nurse, caring for the whole person – body, mind and spirit – in the heart of the community.

Southcote and Coley together have over 22,000 residents. The needs are many, but God encourages me to build relationships one by one - I listen, learn people's challenges, and offer advice, advocacy, and health support. What makes Parish Nursing unique is time – time to listen, time to walk alongside people, and, when asked, time to pray. I serve those of any faith or none.

It is a privilege to sit with families facing long-term illness or the final stages of life, and a joy to introduce those who are lonely or isolated to the many activities in our local churches – from toddler groups to art and craft, to "Happy Feet" (which, to my surprise, is chiropody and not a dance class!).

I also work with schools, GP practices, the council and charities such as CCA, The Mustard Tree and The Cowshed. Parish Nursing brings me joy because it takes me to the marginalised and unheard – to those who are heartbroken, body broken or spirit broken. My idea of "normal" is challenged daily, but again and again I see God at work in Southcote and Coley, bringing wholeness and hope.

My hope for the future is that the Parish Nursing team will grow, so this outreach can continue. My vision is simple: to know people by name, to hear their stories, and to bring peace in the name of Jesus.

Christmas Word Search

Y L I R R E M G N O D G N I D E V C J U
 W H X A W A Y I N A M A N G E R A E M W
 D Z R E I N D E E R X M X F T K O A E F
 R Y H D R Y P I D D U V A H E H O T G C
 E E F W X V F I Q E J V G P O H H G F O
 B K I T S W S K G L C I L L Z R I U P W
 M N Q L X A D R E S N K Y L E I G B L C
 E O S T E N M Z E T I N T E O J B E O D
 C D L G X C N T N K I N K H O R O Q L F
 E E L N J W Q E S G C I B Y E N A I L I
 D L E I N L L K H I N A T L T H H C T N
 C T B K K I X T N G R O R S A C A W K F
 F T E C S P C J S A T H R C Y N E L C S
 D I L O T L R E N H M I C O C L K J L V
 L L G T S F T E E H F W B R V I P E T S
 I D N S A U C W S E Y S O E E W C R T B
 T V I R R K O O H E Y J D N B H E B K S
 X Q J K T R W T C R N A Z S S E T F W M
 T L E Z L S R R A F Y T I L Y L S A H H
 O Y F D N O R M T S T S S Z M J H F F R

Away In A Manger
 Cake
 Carol
 Crackers
 December
 Deck The Halls
 Ding Dong Merrily
 Father Christmas
 Jingle Bells
 Joy To The World
 Little Donkey
 Marys Boy Child
 O Holy Night
 Pigs In Blankets
 Presents
 Reindeer
 Silent Night
 Snowman
 Stocking
 The First Noel
 Tree
 Turkey
 Twelve Days
 We Three Kings

Last month's answers

A	G	A	T	H	A	C	H	R	I	S	T	I	E
N	R	P	A	R	T	E	S	U	O	M	S	O	O
O	R	I	E	N	T	E	X	P	R	E	S	S	U
L	E	P	M	R	I	T	S	D	A	G	G	E	R
E	S	M	A	O	T	T	R	T	E	S	E	C	E
D	E	D	I	T	T	V	R	T	E	G	E	I	
M	P	E	M	S	S	I	A	R	T	T	E	O	R
E	P	T	O	Y	S	U	V	N	Y	P	I	P	H
T	O	E	P	E	S	M	S	E	M	M	E	N	N
L	I	C	I	O	S	T	A	P	U	D	T	S	M
G	R	T	E	S	I	I	E	R	E	D	R	U	M
U	O	I	L	L	D	S	M	R	P	C	A	E	O
N	T	V	I	R	T	O	O	I	Y	L	T	L	V
L	G	E	N	I	D	A	N	N	P	C	E	E	M

Katherine's Two Truths and a Lie

TRUE She can play the lord of the dance on the recorder

TRUE She has played tenor horn in the south area band

FALSE She has played the saxophone in a band

Top 10 Christmas Cracker Jokes

Appently these are the top 10 Christmas cracker jokes. Do you agree? Do you know any better cracker jokes?

1. **What do you call a snowman with a six-pack?** An abdominal snowman.
2. **Why was the turkey at the Christmas party so proud?** Because it was stuffed!
3. **What do you get if you cross Santa with a detective?** Santa Clues.
4. **Why did no one bid for Rudolph and Blitzen on eBay?** Because they were two deer.
5. **What do you call a bunch of chess players bragging about their wins in a hotel lobby?** Chess nuts boasting in an open foyer.
6. **Why does Santa go down chimneys?** Because it soots him.
7. **What do you call an elf who sings?** A wrapper.
8. **What do snowmen eat for lunch?** Iceburgers.
9. **Why did the Christmas tree go to the barber?** It needed a trim.
10. **What do you get when you eat Christmas decorations?** Tinselitis.



New Year Word Search

I Y H N R W O L A W E N E R V U N J
 I A F H U M Y W Y T I R E P S O R P
 T Y I A D U O P E L M A X P S V J R
 T A R D M F W C H A M P A G N E T C
 E T E E M I N F R I E N D S H I P E
 F R W S L A L R M A W E T S B U C L
 N A O A D U P Y E F Z R J X F A L E
 O D R J G D C O D S A B E I L M P B
 C I K N O D J K N T O P E E U U A R
 W T S T A X O N S T O L N H D S R A
 U I Q E L T K H T H V D U V Y I T T
 M O B V S F S H F P A Y T T Q C Y I
 V N U H T E G F F R A O B B I S O O
 L T L J R I W W H W A X G A M O J N
 B V D F N I O U L S X C U J K G N S
 Z M B D C N O I T A P I C I T N A Q
 O W I X F H Q N W O D T N U O C E G
 W M M W Y T I V I T S E F Z V I B I

Anticipation
 Calendar
 Celebration
 Champagne
 Confetti
 Countdown
 Dance
 Family
 Festivity
 Fireworks
 Fresh Start
 Friendship
 Goals
 Hope
 Joy
 Luck
 Midnight
 Music
 Party
 Prosperity
 Renewal
 Resolution
 Toast
 Tradition

Match the words/phrases with their definitions

Abundance

Adieu

Anew

Auld Lang Syne

Clean slate

Countdown

First-footing

Hogmanay

Janus

Kissing Bough

Midnight Kiss

Midnight Supper

**Out with the old,
in with the new**

Resolution

Ring in the new year

Wassail

1. The final seconds before midnight, often shouted in unison.
2. A Scottish song meaning "times gone by," sung at midnight.
3. A promise to improve oneself in the new year.
4. Starting fresh, leaving the past behind.
5. Beginning again, symbolising fresh starts.
6. A farewell word meaning "goodbye," perfect for the old year.
7. A tradition said to bring luck and strengthen bonds.
8. Wishing prosperity and plenty in the year ahead.
9. To welcome the year with joy and celebration.
10. A saying that embraces change.
11. From Old English waes hael ("be healthy"), both a spiced drink and the act of toasting good health.
12. The Scottish word for New Year's Eve
13. A Hogmanay tradition where the first person to enter a home after midnight brings luck.
14. The Roman god of beginnings and transitions, with two faces looking forward and backward. January is named after him.
15. A late-night feast, popular in Victorian England, to welcome the year with full stomachs.
16. An old English decoration of greenery and apples, hung at Christmas and New Year, under which people kissed for luck.

Coping at Christmas and this winter

If you are finding it difficult this winter or over the Christmas period - whatever the reason - there are people to talk to and to help.



The Silver Line
helpline for older people

Run by  ageUK

Someone to talk to, day or night

The Silver Line Helpline is a telephone service just for older people. We're open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Our friendly, caring team are ready to answer your call and help you in any way that we can.

The Silver Line Helpline is a free, confidential helpline for older people, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. **If you need to talk, we're here to listen.**

Some people call us for a chat, or to tell us about their day - some call just to say good morning or good night to someone.

Others call for information, to get support with something, or to share a concern or worry.

 **Get in touch**

Want to talk?

We're ready to listen.

0800 4 70 80 90





Call us anytime, day or night. We're always open.
You can find out more about The Silver Line on our website

www.thesilverline.org.uk





Other services you might find useful
Age UK runs a range of services for older people:

Age UK Advice Line	Telephone Friendship Service	Your local Age UK
The Age UK Advice Line is a free, confidential national phone service, helping you get reliable, up-to-date information and advice on everything from benefits to bereavement.	If you're missing the joy of regular conversation, this service matches over-60s with a friendly volunteer for a weekly chat. To find out more, visit www.ageuk.org/telephone-friendship , call 0800 434 6105 , or ask a member of The Silver Line Helpline team.	Local Age UKs offer services and support in the community. There are more than 120 local Age UKs across England, as well as Age Scotland, Age NI and Age Cymru. To find your local Age UK, visit www.ageuk.org.uk/inyourarea
0800 169 65 65 (8am-7pm, 365 days a year).		

Other helpful numbers

  **0300 123 3393**
 Helpline
 mind.org.uk

Free mental health support.

  **Text SHOUT to 85258**
 **24/7 text service**
 giveusashout.org

Free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging service for anyone who is struggling to cope.

  **116 123**
 **24/7 helpline**
 samaritans.org

Whatever you're going through, a Samaritan will face it with you. We're here 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

  **0800 58 58 58**
 Helpline
 thecalmzone.net

Whatever you're struggling with, we've got your back. From depression to money worries, we've got loads of practical advice and information to help.


 **0808 808 1677**
 **Mon, Wed, Thu, Fri: 9.30am-5pm**
Tue: 1pm - 8pm
 cruse.org.uk

Support for those who are grieving.

Another year has come and gone, you see,
And left its gentle marks on you and me.
Last summer's sun felt scorching,
bright, and bold,
Now winter's chill seems so much deeper, cold.

As the New Year dawns, with chances fresh and new,
We look ahead, with purpose shining through.
The past a lesson,
not a heavy chain,
We welcome promise, amidst life's joy and pain.