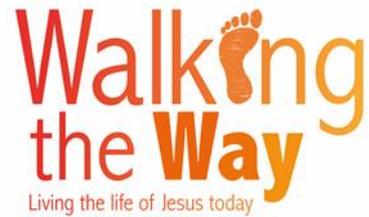


# Walking the Way through Advent



## Introduction

As we approach the season of Advent, the United Reformed Church explores the themes of waiting, preparing, hope and God's love made human, through its focus on lifelong missional discipleship: 'Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today'.

In this resource, you will find a range of suggestions to help individuals and groups think, pray, reflect on, and explore the season of Advent.

Gaining new perspectives and trying new things are challenges that living the life of Jesus today brings. As such, Walking the Way seeks to involve people of all ages in discipleship, pray in new ways and places, encourage faithful practices and promote actions that speak louder than words. This will help us grow in confidence to reflect and live our lives the way Jesus would want us to, as we connect with the world we live in today.

Feel free to use one or more of the ideas in this resource for Advent, or better yet, let them spark your imagination to come up with new ways of encouraging and involving people your church and wider community. Whatever you decide to do, let us know how you get on by [emailing](#) us or calling 0207 520 2718, so we can share your good news, ideas and experiences more widely.

May God richly bless us all as we seek to live the life of Jesus today.

## Waiting in everyday life

If God is present everywhere, and at all times, then Advent waiting must surely start with our own experiences of waiting. What are you waiting for?

At home, we might be waiting for food to be ready or for the kettle to boil, for the call to come and eat, the washing to finish, or a delivery to arrive.

In our relationships, we might be waiting for an answer to a text message, an email or a letter. We might be preparing for a friend or visitor's arrival or departure.

On the move, we might wait for a bus or a train, or be stuck in a traffic jam. We might be waiting our turn to speak, act, play, or wait in line in a seemingly endless queue.

How many of us have watched the clock tick away in waiting areas of GP surgeries or dentist practices, or for the school day to finally come to an end, or news of an emerging situation?

How does it feel to wait? Is it exciting, frustrating or boring? Do we wait passively, irritably or do we use the time efficiently?

What are symbols of waiting for us? Is it an egg timer? A clock, perhaps? Do we count down days or sleeps, crossing off the calendar as we go?

What stories of waiting can we remember from the Christian tradition? What saints or heroes stand out to us in the Bible, Church history or from our local congregation? Does exploring the stories of these significant people give any new perspectives on waiting?

Waiting for the 'not yet' seems to echo the anticipation of the Lord's Prayer: 'Your kingdom come, your will be done.' How do we experience the 'now' and 'not yet' of the Kingdom of God? What are each of us waiting for God to do, be, answer, change, challenge, restore?

How can we connect our own everyday waiting with those who cry out for peace, justice, relief from suffering and hunger?

Why not gather some people from your church and create some prayers together for Advent and explore what waiting means in your community?

In this society, where everyone wants instant results, could we choose to wait more, by using opportunities to wait and by practicing the spiritual discipline of patience? What might this look like?

See what people in your church can come up with and compare experiences to ascertain what works and what needs further thought. Share your findings more widely so that others can benefit.

**Waiting in Worship** As your local church gathers in worship during the Advent season, bring the experience of everyday waiting into your prayers by inviting four different groups (eg a prayer group, house group, youth group, junior church group, craft group, a family or a few friends together) to prepare their own Advent candle lighting ceremony to be shared with the whole congregation in worship. Give each small group a different theme for each of the weeks of Advent. Try to involve people of all ages, stages, backgrounds and walks of life as possible.

The themes could be:

- Overall Focus:           What are we waiting for?
- Weekly themes:        1) Yesterday, today, forever – Hope for God's people
- 2) Prophetic voices – Speaking up, speaking out
- 3) John the Baptist – Preparing the way
- 4) Mary – Carrying new life into the world
- 5) Christmas Day – God's love takes shape, born among us

Give each group these guidelines to help them prepare:

Each week in the season of Advent, we will light the candles of an Advent ring in our service. You are invited to prepare a short, thoughtful reflection on the theme of the week as we light the candle.

As you think about the theme you have been given, keep these questions in mind.

What does your theme mean:

- a) in the Christian story?
- b) to you?
- c) to the world?

Reflect together on what you want to say about this theme in the worship service.

Plan how you want to share your reflections. Perhaps you could tell a story or say a prayer? Maybe you could perform a song or a drama? A piece of art or craft might help people think about your theme, or a poem. You could organise an activity for everyone in worship to do together, to help break the ice and open up the theme. Try to bring your own perspective and experience into whatever you offer.

Keep your idea between five and ten minutes long, then light the Advent candle.

### **Waiting in the local community**

Having considered waiting in our own lives and celebrated together in worship, it's time to go out into the local community. Here, we can make a difference by helping others to focus on God and the birth of Jesus at this important time.

One idea is to give all those associated with the church, including user groups, a candle and a prayer card. Invite them and their families to light the candle on Christmas Eve, as the first star appears in the sky, and place it in a window. The prayer should be short and simple but should be made relevant for each local context. One example is:

*'Jesus, Light of the world, please shine your light on me, my family, on our home, our street and our city/town/village tonight, this Christmas and throughout the coming year. Amen'*

Local churches could also design worship services which can take place in public, perhaps on one day during each week of Advent. As well as making the church and its activities visible in the community, this also creates space for conversations and the chance to invite people to get involved with the church, perhaps by coming along to other Christmas activities and services too.

Churches could also offer a local service to the community, such as: free tea or coffee for commuters on cold winter mornings; a shop or stall for fairlytraded Christmas goods; a quiet space away from bustling high streets; a present-wrapping service; or a free 'make a Christmas decoration, with a Christian message' stall. What could your church do to help people in your local area this Advent?