

# Southern Synod News

Welcome to the latest edition of Southern Synod News. This month we have some heartwarming stories from throughout the Synod.

We would love to hear from you! If you have any exciting upcoming events, celebrations or good news to share from your local church we would love to include it in the next edition. Please send items for the next issue to Ross ([office@urcsouthern.org.uk](mailto:office@urcsouthern.org.uk)) by Monday 26th January 2026.

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## Latest News



## Thamesmead Confirmation

On Sunday 7th December, 21 young people and adults were confirmed into St Paul's Church in Thamesmead. The church is an LEP with the Anglicans, Methodists and URC. The service took place at William Temple Church in Abbey Wood and was led jointly by Rt Revd Alastair Cutting (The Bishop of Woolwich), the Revd Jonathan Dean (District Chair of the London District of the Methodist Church) and Revd Cristina Cipriani, the Synod's Ecumenical Officer.

This is an annual event that represents the vibrant ecumenical work that is alive in South East London.

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## Pamela Tolhurst is awarded the Langley People's Award!

We hope you will join us in congratulating Pam Tolhurst, whose hard work for the Langley Trust has been recognised with an award. Pam, Local Church Leader at Gillingham URC, is Volunteer Chaplain to two Langley Trust projects in the Medway Towns. She has been given the Langley People Award 2025 for Volunteer Champion. Langley Trust is a Christian organisation providing housing, support and care helping people who are ex offenders or at risk of offending to transform their lives. Well done Pam!

If you would like to volunteer for the Langley Trust, more information can be found at the link below.

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### **East-Team Churches in Eastbourne celebrate Christmas!**

During Advent, the East Team churches in Eastbourne celebrated joyous fellowship through two delightful events: the Christmas Lunch and the Christmas Coffee Morning. Community members gathered to share fellowship and celebrate the blessed season of Advent. There were different stalls of delicious home-baked cakes, pastries, and mince pies. Everyone was wearing vibrant Christmas jumpers. These gatherings created a warm and inviting atmosphere filled with laughter, love, and hope, as all participated in raffles, exchanged gifts, and bought candles and decorations to spread the festive spirit. Together, we embraced the joy of this season, strengthening our community bonds as we awaited the celebration of Christ's birth.

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## **December at Crawley URC: Light, Joy, and Generosity**

December has been a joyful and meaningful time at Crawley URC, marked by worship, creativity, and care for our local community.

On Sunday 7 December, we celebrated a Christingle service, where we built the traditional orange together: the orange representing God's world, four gummy bears for the four cardinal points, the red ribbon recalling Jesus' love and sacrifice for all, and the light on top proclaiming Christ as the Light of the World. It was a colourful, hands-on service full of joy and wonder, reminding us of God's presence and love made visible in simple signs.

Later in the month, members of Crawley URC took Christmas carols beyond the church walls, singing at Three Bridges Station in support of Crawley Open House, a charity we have been proud to support for many years. While our singing may not have been pitch-perfect, the generosity of passers-by certainly was: thanks to their kindness, we raised an amazing £478 to support people experiencing homelessness and vulnerability in our town.

Both events were gentle but powerful reminders that the light of Christ shines not only in worship, but also in generosity, community, and sharing joy with others.

*(Article by Revd Cristina Cipriani)*

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## **Save the Date: Synod Fun Day 2026!**

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The Synod Fun Day Out will be taking place on **Saturday 20th June 2026** from 10am to 4pm. This will be a day full of fun, food and fellowship.

It will be taking place at Shires Oast at The Hop Farm, TN12 6PY

To help, please contact Ruth Armstrong on [ruthlucy@live.com](mailto:ruthlucy@live.com)

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## **Structure Review – Please let us know your views**

The Synod Strategy published in late 2024 referred to a review of structures. A small group has been set up to explore whether the committees and processes that are currently in place are helping the local churches to flourish and thrive.

### **The voice of churches**

We are hearing from field officers, area leaders and staff about the congregations they are working with, their expectations, and their understanding of how Synod works to support them and what they would like to see. The URC Church Life Review recommendations offer a chance to rethink the support that could be available. We are keen for churches and individuals to contribute to the review directly. More details are on the Synod website here

<https://southernsynodurc.org.uk/southern-synod-structure-and-governance/>

Closing date for initial contributions 15<sup>th</sup> February 2026

# Changes in Southern Synod

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## **Pagham URC closes...**

Pagham United Reformed Church sadly had their closing service on the 29th November. The Church was founded in 1964, and has faithfully served Pagham community since then. We hope you will all join us in praying for the Church community they navigate their closure.

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## **The sad passing of Revd Keith Havers and Revd Brian Stone**

Southern Synod is very sad to share the news that both Revd Keith Havers and Revd Brian Stone passed away in December.

Revd Keith Havers faithfully served Red Lake, Hastings 1958-61; Faversham 1961-71; Seaton 1971-85; Lyme Regis 1975-84; Charmouth 1976-85; Deal 1985-90; Letchworth 1990-98.

Similarly Revd Brian Stone spent the majority of his ministry invaluable serving Southern Synod as minister at Witham 1971-74; Moat, East Grinstead 1974-80; Central Hove 1980-94; Haywards Heath & Lindfield 1994-2001.

We hope you will join the whole Synod in sending your prayers to their families at this difficult time.

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# Upcoming Training and Events

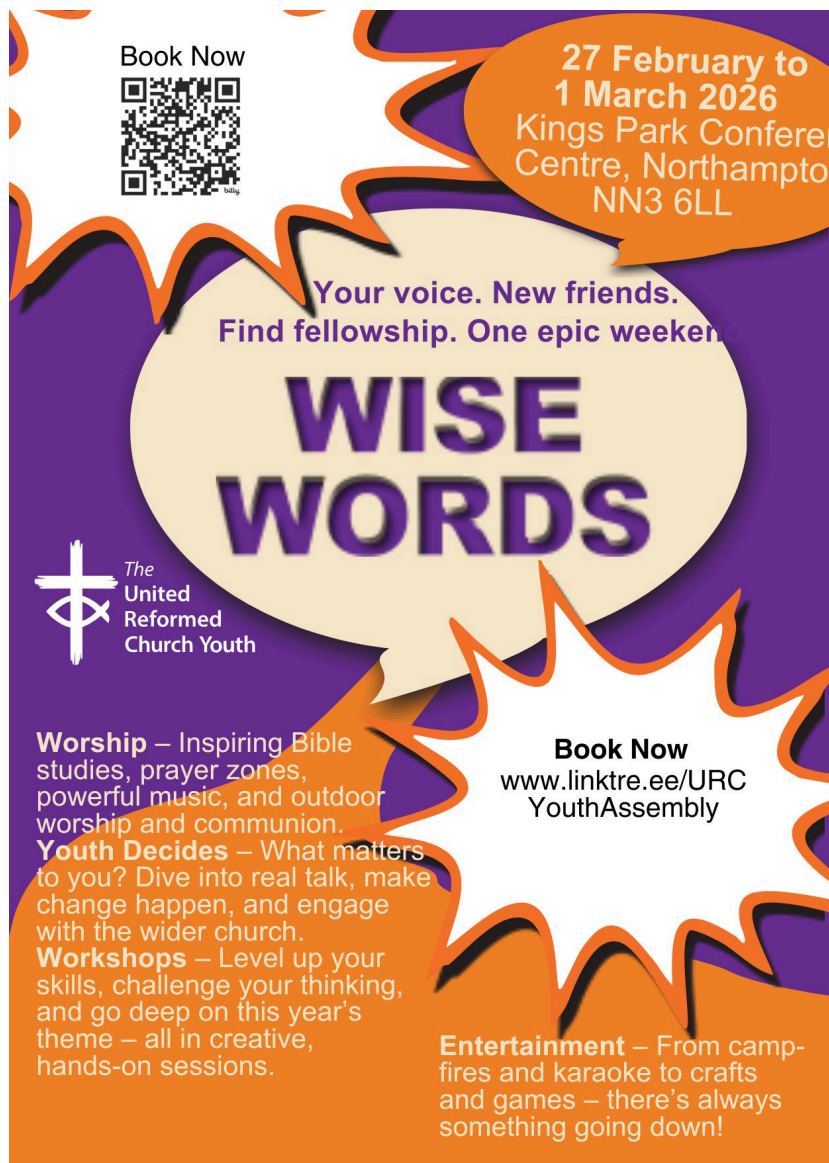
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## **FaithTalk Webinar - Preparing for Easter**

Please join URC Mission on Wednesday 28 January 2026 from 7-8pm. They will gather to chat about ways that we can engage those around us in the Easter story, and its power to transform lives. Do join for the conversation, ready to share ideas and resources that you have used.

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## URC Youth Assembly 2026

Bookings are now open for URC Youth Assembly 2026 themed "Wise Words – Wiser Action". The Assembly, taking place 27 February–1 March 2026 at Kings Park Conference Centre in Northampton, offers a weekend full of worship, workshops, entertainment and time to breathe.

An early bird discount for places is available at £125 until 7 December. After which, places cost £155 until 25 January 2026. Youth Assembly is for all young people – from Year 10 up to and including 25 associated with the URC in any way. Please approach your church and Synod for help with funding. For more information, or register for Youth Assembly 2026 at the link below.

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## Faith in Later Life Event - Being a Dementia Friendly Church

"Faith in Later Life" are running a fantastic, free event on the 22nd January aimed at exploring the practical ways your local church can develop a welcoming and supporting community for those living with dementia. For more information or to book this event, please click the link below.