

HOPE

Together

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Local churches beating lockdown with creative Christmas ideas

Across the country, churches are finding creative ways to connect with their villages, towns and cities to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Over the last few weeks, HOPE Together has had orders for thousands of copies of the *HOPE at Christmas* magazine.

'We want people to know they're not forgotten,' said Rev Wilma Pearson from Cathcart United Free Church of Scotland in Glasgow, when she told HOPE how they planned to use the magazines. The church normally holds a carol service in a local park, as well as singing round a local estate. This year, they will deliver copies of *HOPE at Christmas* through letterboxes, each accompanied by a Christmas card. 'We've delivered magazines to these flats before, but reckon this year people might have more time to read them!' she said.



Martin Cook, a member of Upper Stratton Baptist Church in Swindon, also plans to use the magazines as a way of connecting with members of the community at Christmas time. In previous years, they have set up a pop-up café in a gazebo to give people hot drinks, a mince pie, a copy of a HOPE magazine, a Luke's Gospel and information about their Christmas services. This has become something that local people look forward to each year – as has a carol-singing evening in a local pub. Because neither of those events is possible this year, they plan instead to deliver a copy of *HOPE at Christmas* to every house in the area, with a Christmas card, an invitation to request a copy of the booklet '[HOPE in Uncertain Times](#)' (available from www.hopetogether.org.uk/shop) and an offer of prayer for those who would like it.

Although the exact restrictions we will face in December are not yet clear, Sally Pidd from Lancaster says volunteers should be able to distribute the magazines they've ordered during their daily exercise time. Sally is part of an inter-church group reaching out to a local estate – and they are not the only group working together across denominations to distribute copies of *HOPE at Christmas*. On

the Isle of Wight, Methodists and Anglicans are partnering to give them out to households in Wroxall. Margaret Moyce from the Methodist Church said, 'We are hoping and praying that the inspirational articles in the magazine will touch people's hearts and indeed give them hope!'

HOPE at Christmas is designed to be accessible for people who are not yet Christians. Helen Shannon from church@five in North London described the magazines as 'bright, eye catching and an easy read, with loads of pictures'. This year, they will be distributing them with packages of Christmas goodies – including Christmas decorations, crafts, sweets...and an invitation to their online Christingle service. Families who want to join in will receive an 'everything you need for a Christingle service' bag on their door steps the morning of the online service. 'We use the mags every year on our estates,' said Helen. 'They are cheap, accessible and not too preach-y.'

Michelle Gore, from Bluntisham Baptist Church in the Fens, agrees about the suitability of the magazines for people who are not part of a church. 'They have a good balance of stories, good for Christians as well as non-believers,' she said. They will be delivering copies of *HOPE at Christmas* to houses in a number of nearby villages, as well as leaving some at the village shop for people to take. They'll add a label wishing people 'Happy Christmas from everyone at Bluntisham Baptist Church' and include a flier for their online Christmas Eve service. 'We really want our communities to know that our church wants to reach out to folk,' said Michelle. 'Although our buildings are closed, our church is still very much alive!'

Roy Crowne, HOPE's executive director says: '*HOPE at Christmas* is designed to be a conversation-starter – a way to connect with people who are not part of our churches. It's amazing to see the creative ways churches are preparing to reach out to people in their communities inspire of Covid restrictions.' Copies of *HOPE at Christmas* are available to buy from the HOPE shop at 10p a copy – www.hopetogether.org.uk/shop.