



ANGLICAN  
FUTURES

THINKING TOGETHER

# MAKING THE MOST OF A COVID CHRISTMAS

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Gafcon UK provides hope to all who affirm the 2008 Jerusalem Declaration.

Anglican Futures is one way in which we equip faithful Anglicans by encouraging us all to:

- Think Ahead (in the light of today's evidence)
- Think Afresh (in the light of eternal truth)

Gafcon UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (no. 1187303 Find out more at [www.gafconuk.org](http://www.gafconuk.org))



# Making the Most of a Covid Christmas

## 1. It's all in the attitude: Christmas is NOT cancelled

### Six steps to making Christmas 2020 better than ever!

**1. Get out of sticking plaster mode:** No one wants a bad/sad version of last year. The participants in the Gafcon UK Anglican Futures events have come up with nearly 100 ways to do Christmas differently - and you and your church family can probably think of more.



**2. Take the opportunity to mix things up:** Imagine if you'd sat down last year and suggested to your church family that you thought the effort involved in the usual Christmas programme wasn't worth it - and you wanted to try something different? The benefit of a crisis is that people expect change - make the most of the opportunity. Covid gives your church the chance to do something different - to create new traditions.

**3. Think beyond the 25th December:** The choices you make about how you celebrate Christmas this year will have an influence on your church family and your community in the year to come. So, keep in mind the way God might be leading your church in the longer term. Do you need to build relationships within the church family? Is the ministry too clergy-focused? Do you need to be more outward looking? Are there 'idols' that could be challenged now - while change is expected? It's not just about Christmas, 2020.

**4. Gather a team:** Even if it's just 2-3 to begin with. Doing things differently will require a different set of skills - and so often this will bring people who have been on the fringe into the centre of things. What scares the life out of you might be just the opportunity that someone else has been waiting for. Be guided by the gifts God has given your church family



**5. Think about your context:** Not all the ideas will work for everyone. Some won't work at all for you - some may need adapting. Spend some time with your team thinking about your church family and your community and plan accordingly.

		IMPACT				
		VERY LOW	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH	VERY HIGH
PROBABILITY	VERY LIKELY	Yellow	Orange	Red	Dark Red	Dark Red
	LIKELY	Green	Yellow	Orange	Red	Dark Red
	POSSIBLE	Green	Light Green	Yellow	Orange	Red
	UNLIKELY	Green	Light Green	Light Green	Yellow	Orange
	RARE	Green	Light Green	Light Green	Light Green	Yellow

**6. Assess Risk - Don't try and eliminate it:** It is important that in putting any of these ideas into practice we follow good practice - whether that is to do with food hygiene, safeguarding or the latest Covid guidelines. However, a good risk assessment is about minimising risk not eliminating it - so let's think about might be possible before dismissing an idea as crazy!



# Making the Most of a Covid Christmas

## 2. Learning from the experts: We need to think beyond 'Carols'



It is unlikely that there will be scenes like this in your church this year - but that may not be a bad thing.

In 2018, a YouGov poll showed that for 49% of people the idea of going to church at Christmas was irrelevant to them. This figure increased to 52% in economically deprived areas.

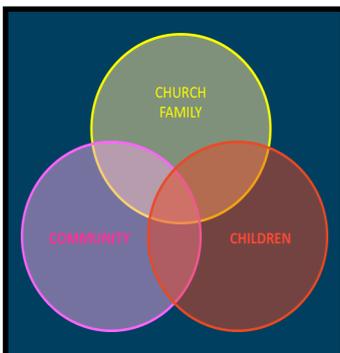
Perhaps more interestingly, amongst the men for whom attending Church was relevant, more than one in five (22%) actively disliked the experience.

Listening to or singing Christmas carols was more popular, (61% liked the idea of that) but still, the figures were much lower amongst younger people and men. 17% of men were able to say that even listening to Christmas carols was irrelevant to their experience of Christmas - and again, almost a third of men (30%) who listen to or singing carols over Christmas, actively dislike the experience.

**This year might just give your church family the freedom to explore new ways of celebrating Christmas.**

Let's not forget the particular context in which we are celebrating this year:

- Gathering together for Christmas dinner is likely to be restricted
- Local travel restrictions may stop some families from meeting.
- Nearly 8 million people in the UK live alone. During lockdown a third of people reported feeling always, or almost always lonely.
- There are at least 650,000 fewer people on the national payroll now than in March 2020.



As you start to plan, it might be helpful to think about three overlapping groups of people:

*The Church Family* - who particularly need to be helped to connect with each other, care for one another through the emotional and financial hardship, and to actively celebrate the "Good news of great joy."

*The Local Community* - who we long to hear the good news - how might we communicate it to them this year? How might the church family give people a taste of God's love and care?

*Children:* How can we help the children in our church families, and in our communities, better understand the real wonder of Christmas this year?



## Making the Most of a Covid Christmas

### 3. Learning from the Experts: Sharing the Good News with families with kids

It was a joy to have Ed Drew, from 'Faith in Kids', join us for this Anglican Futures event. He shared some very helpful insights into how we might think about approaching Christmas from the perspective of families with young children and his pearls of wisdom appear throughout this document. As you start thinking about how to reach families, don't forget to ask the families who are in the church already what they think would work best!



#### My assumptions

1. Our church families want to celebrate Christmas
2. Christmas is our best opportunity to welcome guests to take a look at our church
3. All families are different. We can generalise. Your families understand your community.

Let's ask parents how we can help them share the truth about Christmas with their children is key - without inundating them with emails and instructions and videos to watch. Parents who have been home-schooling have had enough emails, resources and lists of what they 'should' be doing. How can we help families to engage with Christmas in a way that feels spontaneous and adventurous?

Hopefully, the kind of activities we share in the rest of this resource will give you some ideas about how to do this and remember guests don't have to come to the church building to experience something of what it is to be a member of your church family.



#### Engaging families in a Covid Christmas

##### Families don't ...

- head for (our) traditions
- need any more live streams or screen options
- want their children's behaviour to be on show
- want a sad version of last year

##### Families do ...

- long for an immersive experience offering wonder
- enjoy adventure and informality
- want to be part of their community
- want to create memories together
- need preparation and a large team to execute the plan

**"Smaller, less sharp, less well-produced could win this Christmas"** but that doesn't mean we want chaos! Ed's idea of staging a 'rehearsal' for any big activity you are planning is a good one - if it is Advent windows or an outdoor service - why not think about having a smaller version of the same idea - based around Halloween or Harvest? It will let people see that it will work, you can iron out the problems and give people confidence to invite their friends.

<https://faithinkids.org/>



# Making the Most of a Covid Christmas

## 4. How to make the most of Advent: Reflection

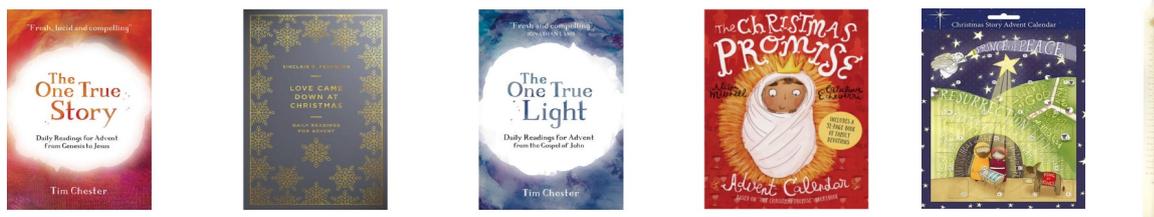
*“A huge part of the Christian life is learning to look back in order to go forward. For example, when we conduct Christmas services, we want people to understand Jesus’ first coming (back) in order to be ready for His second coming (forward). And if we ourselves want to go forward with confidence and joy (in Him) we will need to remember what He has said and done.”<sup>1</sup>*

All too often we miss out on Advent - that precious time of reflection on the first coming of the Lord Jesus and anticipation of His return. Perhaps, this year we could plan to be different.

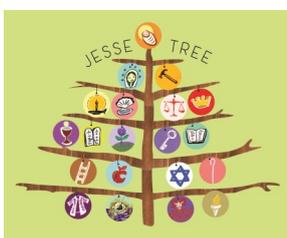
### A Time of Reflection?

How might we encourage our people to set aside time each day to focus on the Lord Jesus?

Adults could commit to a **daily reading**: there are lots of readily available resources<sup>2</sup>. And to keep people going you could have a pop-up book group or people could meet up one-to-one to talk about what they’ve learned. A **daily video** shared on Facebook or a WhatsApp group of someone in the congregation reading the reflection, might help non-readers engage.



Similarly, there are some great resources for families: **advent calendars**<sup>3</sup> that come with ideas about how to engage with the bible story. Or, an **advent candle** which has a different name of Jesus to explore each day - the more creative could come up with an **associated challenge** for children to do before the candle burns down. Again you could engage the church family - by sharing photos or videos of the challenges in a WhatsApp group or private Facebook Page.



Creating a **Jesse tree** can be a great way of exploring Jesus’ family tree during Advent. The Reformed Church of America<sup>4</sup> has a whole section of their website dedicated to resources to help you make the tree - including family and adult devotions for each day.

Or how about creating a **reverse Advent Calendar** - Identify an individual or family you want to bless this Christmas - and instead of receiving a gift each day - wrap one up and place it in a box or simple fabric advent calendar - to be delivered on Christmas Day. Perhaps you could link up with your local **Foodbank**, and ask them to offer your gift to a family they know?



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gafcon.org/devotion/deuteronomy-chapters-two-and-three> Simon Manchester

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.10ofthose.com/uk/products?q=advent>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/the-christmas-promise-advent-calendar-1>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.faithward.org/jesse-tree/>



# Making the Most of a Covid Christmas

## 5. How to make the most of Advent: Anticipation

### A Time of Anticipation?

In the depths of winter we all need something to look forward to - and this year it may feel pretty grim. How might your church family create a buzz in your community - making them aware that, as Christians, we have something to celebrate and we long for them to join in?

### Using a single building as an Advent Calendar

Is your church building in a prominent place? Could you **project a different image**<sup>1</sup> onto it each day? It may need to be for a limited time (so that there is a projectionist in situ) but it could become a local landmark - something people look forward to/ talk about. It's a way to show the community that Christmas is not cancelled.



Or, if you have a building with **windows on several storeys** - could you light up a new window each day - building up an image or message to your community? Or, do you have some kind of **'shop' window** where you could set up an Advent Calendar - opening one 'window' each day? If not, if your building is in an accessible location - could you create a 3D advent calendar **inside your church** building using boxes piled on top of each other - each day a new symbol of Christmas could appear in the church building. Would word get out that it was somewhere to visit?

### Using multiple buildings as an Advent Calendar

Do you have 24 'houses' in your community with connections to the church family? Are they close enough to one another for people to see connections between them? Could you set up a **'window' advent calendar**<sup>2</sup>?

Day one - a single household reveals a decorated window - with some kind of Christmas theme - lots of lights - branded with the church logo. Day two - a second house joins in. Each day another house reveals their window - and reveals to the world that they are looking forward to celebrating the true meaning of Christmas this year.



You could number the windows at the start or keep people guessing as to where the next house will be. If you can't see windows because of long drives - **gates could be decorated** instead or life size **'nativity scarecrows'** could appear on people's drives - complete with lights so they can be seen in the dark. Or, perhaps we could start a **Spoonville**<sup>3</sup> Nativity craze?

<sup>1</sup> <https://unsplash.com/> is a great source of high resolution free images

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.edenprojectcommunities.com/stuff-to-do/organise-a-living-advent-calendar> offers a secular version—how-to guide

<sup>3</sup> <https://spoonvilleinternational.com/>



## Making the Most of a Covid Christmas

### 5. How to make the most of Advent: Anticipation (Part2)

#### How many ways can you use a Christmas Tree?

It depends on how you decorate it.

Your tree could become your **advent calendar** with 24 numbered 'decorations' that are swapped each day for the next symbol of Christmas.



Or you can use trees as public spaces to remember key events: one church has a tree in their church with the names of all the couples that have been **married** there in the past ten years (plus significant anniversaries). It is an opportunity to remind the couples of the vows they have made and invite them back. How about baubles with the names of all those **baptised** in the last sixteen years? Or a tree of **remembrance** - a place to remember a loved one who has died. This might be linked to a **Blue Christmas** gathering.

Some churches have explored the idea of having a **Tree of Hope** where people can hang messages of hopes or fear, praises to God or intercessions (just make sure they are laminated if outside).

All these ideas can be used to make links into the community and point people to the hope that is found in celebrating the true light coming into the darkness.

Or put a **tree on wheels** - and take it round the neighbourhood - with a small choir of carol singers.

#### How can we learn from the local pub?

The best pubs make us feel as if there is something going on all the time. Is it time to take a look at your **noticeboard**?

How can you convey that Christmas isn't cancelled - even if we are in lockdown - how can you make sure people passing by know that God has not disappeared, that the church family will be celebrating and they are welcome to join you?

#### An Advent Holiday Club

With Christmas falling on a Thursday and many people not travelling this year - it may be possible to organise a one-day/one morning holiday club (current guidance allows for bubbles of fifteen children; with more than one bubble in the same area, if socially distanced<sup>1</sup>). This event could be linked in to activities happening on Christmas Eve for the whole family - so that children want to bring their parents along/ log-in to online provision. For example, a new nativity video could be filmed or they could decorate the church Christmas tree.

**Craft evenings** could be organised round seated tables of 6 or in homes with a Zoom 'instructor.'

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>



## Making the Most of a Covid Christmas

### 6. Sharing the Good News by caring for people

There is something about offering something ‘free’ to people who have no concept of grace, which opens up all kinds of opportunities to talk about Jesus to people who may have thought the ‘church’ was not for them. So let’s think hard about how we can care for people this winter.

It might be as simple as reminding our church family to be **good neighbours** - dropping in a card and a mince pie - checking that those on their own are OK - or it may need a little more organisation.

You will know the needs in your community: are there people that are facing financial hardship that you can help? Who is likely to be alone this year in your neighbourhood; overseas students, the widowed or divorced, young people who can’t get home?

#### Offering Hospitality

If it is possible to gather - could you offer a **socially distanced Christmas meal** in your church hall - with small tables and table service? Or, if allowed, groups of 6 in homes?

Or, if people are shielding, could you offer to bring people **Christmas in a Box**? Pieminister have a great recipe for **Leftovers Pie**<sup>1</sup> - which would give people a real taste of Christmas or for the more traditional it would be possible to use the principle of ‘chicken en papillote’ and deliver a **turkey dinner** ready to put in the oven.



Or, if you don’t have the resources to cook for people - is there any mileage in approaching a **local pub and delivering their food** to people? Or, working on the **Food Bank** principle - could you offer Christmas boxes or even boxes throughout advent?

Christmas is a time when many people get into debt – is this the year to investigate how your church might get involved with Christians Against Poverty’s<sup>3</sup> **debt counselling** teams?

Or, perhaps there are simpler ways we can show we care - **Christmas cards** from the church to all your community - perhaps including a **Good News newsletter** - celebrating local good news stories and weaving in the gospel; forming a **choir** and finding out if there are ways you might ‘entertain’ a local old people’s home - you may have to sing outside but with a PA they may still be able to enjoy the sound. Encourage the children in your church to **draw pictures** and send small gifts to the residents?

<sup>1</sup> <https://pieminister.co.uk/tag/turkey-leftovers/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.sidechef.com/recipes/4907/chicken\\_en\\_papillote\\_with\\_spring\\_vegetables/](https://www.sidechef.com/recipes/4907/chicken_en_papillote_with_spring_vegetables/) Bacofoil 2-in-1– Foil Parchment Paper works really well

<sup>3</sup> <https://capuk.org/>



# Making the Most of a Covid Christmas

## 7. Sharing the Good News in our buildings

### A Socially Distanced Gathering

If you have a large church building and the government guidance allows us to gather, then it might be possible to do something resembling the **traditional nativity** - but it will take some imagination. Socially distanced groups of chairs or taped off pews are not going to make visitors feel comfortable - particularly if they are already concerned about their children disrupting things. One church (without pews) is suggesting families **bring a rug** to sit on - giving children a 'boundary' but allowing them to wriggle.

There are lots of ideas for these kind of gathered services:

- Faith in Kids<sup>1</sup> offers numerous **original scripts** for talks and presentations - that are well worth a look.
- There are several versions of the **Chocolate Nativity**<sup>2</sup> doing the rounds on the internet.
- The Children's Society<sup>3</sup> have lots of resources associated with a traditional **Christingle** service.

### But, what if that isn't possible?

Many traditional church buildings are just not flexible enough to create a welcoming environment for a socially distanced gathering. But, they can still be used if you think about walk-through events - experiences rather than services - which households explore together.

For example you could set up a **Stable Trail** - with different scenes (Mary and the Angel, Bethlehem, Shepherds on the hillside, the Magi's visit) - with a short scripted presentation and an opportunity to interact with the characters. Some churches have been known to bring in the odd donkey or sheep - just to make things seem real. The local primary school or nursery could be invited during the day and families invited in after school or at the weekend.



This year might be the year **to consider a Christmas Tree Festival** - if you can't use the pews to sit in - then use them as the base to bring people into the building so you can share something of the Christmas message as people look at the trees - decorated by local groups. Or you could have an **Art Show** with a Christmas theme.

Or, maybe you could just make your church building available as a **sanctuary of peace and quiet** - a safe place for reflection or pastoral support over the Christmas period - with appropriately trained volunteers taking turns to staff the premises.

<sup>1</sup> <https://faithinkids.org/resources/app/g/christmas/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.visitnairn.com/classictale.html> or <https://www.childrenandyouth.co.uk/children/a-chocolate-nativity/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-you-can-do/fundraising-and-events/celebrate-christingle>



## Making the Most of a Covid Christmas

### 8. Sharing the Good News without a building

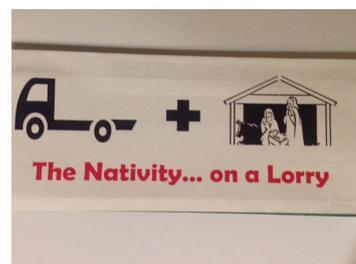
It may be that you don't have a church building - or you may just want to reach those people who find going into a church building intimidating.

Well, if you are willing to wrap up warm - you could explore some of the ideas from our Out of the Box - Anglican Futures event<sup>1</sup>. **Drive-in Carols** or **Forest/ outdoor church** or **Church in the Car park** or **church yard** or **on the street corner**.



If you are feeling brave, you could take **the Stable Trail outside**. So, rather than expecting people to come to you - move the scenes to open spaces in your local area - and give people a map to follow - or surprise people on the High Street, as an angel appears to Mary - or shepherds suddenly wander past—asking for directions to the stable.

Why not create a **Christmas carnival**? Put the scenes on the back of a flatbed lorry, or tractor, or truck and take the nativity to your neighbourhood. You could encourage people to come out of their houses to watch - any messaging would need to be basically visual - but it might be possible to encourage people to stand in their doorways and join in **singing a carol**.



Or stream a **carol service into the local pub** - so people can sit at tables of 6 and watch the service.



If you are lacking actors - then perhaps a simple **Geocache nativity** - hiding stones with the nativity characters painted on them and encourage families to search for them - possibly swapping their own painted stones for those in the cache.

Or, perhaps some kind of **mystery treasure hunt** - again focused in the local community - that families can engage with. As a family follow the clues they also discover something more about the Christmas story.

Or, ask the local shopkeepers if you can hide nativity figures in their **shop windows** for people to find - with a prize for finding them all. This gives the shops potential foot-fall and the treasure hunt can form an invitation to an event you are planning - or tell the Christmas story along the way.



<sup>1</sup>[https://mcusercontent.com/3a5abfd1065f1d313bd3a866d/files/9bdef412-e8a0-4da0-95b6-da9095d820b3/Anglican\\_Futures\\_Outside\\_the\\_Box.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/3a5abfd1065f1d313bd3a866d/files/9bdef412-e8a0-4da0-95b6-da9095d820b3/Anglican_Futures_Outside_the_Box.pdf)



## Making the Most of a Covid Christmas

### 9. Sharing the Good News in Lockdown

It may be that either locally or nationally we are back in lockdown over Christmas - expected to remain in our houses apart from daily exercise. What do we do then? There are lots of ideas for keeping people connected in our Lockdown Learning publication<sup>1</sup> and many are just as relevant at Christmas. Here are a few particularly festive ideas.

#### A Christingle/Chocolate Nativity in a box

If the only way to share the joy of a Christingle service or Chocolate Nativity is online - then why not serve those who plan to 'come' by providing them with the raw materials? Delivering boxes with everything you need to participate in the event will add to the sense of anticipation and encourage people to login!

#### Travelling Posada Crib

The Posada (which means inn) is a Mexican tradition for Advent. Mary and Joseph (crib figures) spend the night in different homes during Advent - if you can get hold of some large (sanitise-able) figures that could journey round your church family it could be a fun way to connect people as the figures are passed from house to house (making use of daily exercise). Photos of things that Mary and Joseph get up to (on their journey to Bethlehem) could be fun to share and a simple activity card could be produced (**make your own Mary and Joseph peg dolls**) and/or a book of the nativity story could be given to each family - 10ofthose have several different giveaway packs<sup>2</sup>.



#### Local Videos

Very few churches have the skills and resources to produce a high quality Christmas video - but people enjoy seeing themselves and people they know on the screen. If the church family can't be together for Christmas - could you produce **at-home nativity video** - with different households



playing different parts and someone splicing it all together? Or a **local nostalgia video** - interviewing some local characters about their best Christmas or the Christmas of their childhood and then weaving the Christmas message into the narrative? Or simply ask local people to **tell the Christmas Story** - this could be aimed at adults or an **Open the Book version** could be produced for the local Primary school.

#### Using Commercial Videos

Speak Life and others have produced some very good **Christmas videos** in the past - and they are likely to have something new this year. It might be worth giving some thought to how we might share these well on social media - in a possibly oversaturated environment.

<sup>1</sup> [https://mcusercontent.com/3a5abfd1065f1d313bd3a866d/files/fb1a90b4-9371-42d8-82b7-a6f45d96d175/Anglican\\_Futures\\_Lockdown\\_Learning.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/3a5abfd1065f1d313bd3a866d/files/fb1a90b4-9371-42d8-82b7-a6f45d96d175/Anglican_Futures_Lockdown_Learning.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.10ofthose.com/uk/>



## ANGLICAN FUTURES

THINKING TOGETHER

# MULTIPLYING MINISTRY IN THE REAL WORLD

*How can we plan for growth in an economic environment that is causing us to tighten our belts? What do you dream of seeing happen over the next five years - in your particular context? What are the challenges? How can we help one another?*

Join us to discuss these ideas:

Wednesday 14th October 10.30am and 19.45pm

Friday 16th October 10.30am

Book your place at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/gafcon-uk-18387367857>

Priority given to Gafcon UK Members

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