

How can we respond as individuals, churches and Warm Spaces?

The first Sunday in Advent is often linked to the theme of HOPE. The Gospel message, the incarnation of Jesus, is all about HOPE. These current times have left many feeling hope-less and understandably so when they fear how they will pay their bills, feed, light and heat their homes and their family. None of us have a magic wand to make it all better but we can ensure that we do not lose sight of the reasons people are accessing Warm Spaces and some of the justice issues their existence raises. Nearly 40 Methodist churches in our District and over 200 countrywide, have opened up their buildings or provided spaces in community buildings as Warm Spaces. Providing somewhere for people to keep warm for a couple of hours, receive a warm welcome and something to eat and drink. It is wonderful that churches have wanted to do something practical to help their local communities in this cost of living crisis, but it is also unjust that these spaces should be needed and we need to make sure that message is heard too. Methodists have a history of speaking up about the issues of the day as Social Justice was a foundation of much of the work of the early Methodists.

We are suggesting people send a letter to their local MP but with an added "gift". MPs receive many letters each week, so receiving something to grab their attention is important. This Advent I am suggesting we use the image of candles. Most churches light advent candles each year as a reminder of the coming of the light of the world. For many this winter, they may have to turn lights and heating off and candles may well be what they choose to light their home to save money so it seemed an appropriate image. We need some hope and light in these dark times. A sample letter you can personalise can be found on the District website.

<https://www.newcastlemethodistdistrict.org>

In the week leading up to, or the week after 27th November I am asking people to send a tealight candle or candle tree decoration (homemade or bought- see below for details) with an accompanying letter (these will be available to personalise) in a Christmas card to your local MP highlighting some of the issues people are facing this winter and asking for hope and help. You can do this as individuals but I also encourage you to mention it at your churches and ask others to do the same. If you are running a Warm Space you might want to offer the opportunity for people to make a candle and provide letters to sign and offer to post them on their behalf so that those most affected by the crisis can have their voices heard too. You might want to offer an additional prayer on that first Sunday in Advent for people affected by the energy crisis.

If MPs and the Chancellor receive a good number of candles in the post every day for a week or two, they are going to get a message so there is power in numbers. We have been moved and motivated enough to want to do something practical for those suffering by offering Warm Spaces, let's also be motivated to seek hope and justice.

CANDLES:

- The simplest thing is to get hold of a tealight candle and pop one in with the letter to your MP.
- Some of you might feel a little more creative and wish to make candle tree decorations. A simple felt candle to cut and stick or from a craft foam sheet, a knitted candle (pattern here <https://www.handsoccupied.com/candle-ornament/>) or you could make a paper or card one by drawing a candle and popping a piece of string or wool in the top to hang on a tree.
- You could buy a candle tree decoration if you see one in the shops.
- It really doesn't matter what it's made of or how perfect it is, the important thing is that it is a symbol of light in the darkness, of hope in troubled times.
- To save postage, a Warm Space could offer to provide the candles and printed off letters to personalise and then collect them in by a certain date and take them to the constituency office personally.

