



A promise of hope

Christmas 2023



Thank you for choosing to use our Christmas resources this year!

The theme for our 2023 Christmas campaign is *A promise of hope*.

The Christmas story is one of hope. Our God became like us and entered our world. Jesus came to bring light to the darkness. Jesus came to bring joy and good news to people. Through him we would know that we are children of God; that Heaven is our home. **Into a weary world, a promise of hope was born that night – but what does 'hope' look like?**

This year, around 36,000 children will come into care in the UK. Each and every one of them needs and deserves to experience welcome, stability and a feeling of safety. But our care system is stretched to the point of breaking. Thousands more foster carers are needed across the country just to ensure that every child has a roof over their head. Children are waiting too long for a home that will meet their needs and offer them the right kind of care and support.

What does 'hope' look like for them?

We have created a free and flexible package of resources for your church to enjoy this Christmas season. It includes a brand new video, sharing some real-life stories of hope from the Home for Good network.

Along with our new short film, we have compiled some additional suggestions below to help shape your service this year. You'll find:

1. Some tips for gathering together this Christmas.
2. Some song suggestions from the Home for Good team.
3. A list of Bible readings that relate to this year's theme, 'hope', and some ideas for telling these stories.
4. Three written prayers for churches who like to use liturgy or written prayer content in their services.
5. Activity ideas for children and youth groups.
6. Points for a sermon or talk.



We recommend that you tailor these suggestions to fit your congregation; we know that every church is different, and we want you to do what will work best for yours.

We have created a new short film for you to use and share this Christmas. It's made up of real-life stories from people in the Home for Good network – foster carers, adoptive parents, individuals with lived experience of care – each answering the question, 'Where have you seen a promise of hope?'. These stories beautifully illustrate that 'hope' can show up in a variety of every day ways, and inspire us to consider how we might bring hope to others around us. We would love it if you could play this video in your church Christmas service this year, as a standalone item or incorporated into your sermon or talk.

You'll also find some information about giving. This resource is a free gift – but we can only continue inspiring and equipping churches with the support of amazing people like you. **We'd love to invite you to 'pay it forward' so that more churches can receive our resources for free and help to find more safe, stable and loving homes for children who need them.** Churches across the country support Home for Good either through hosting a special collection during their services or making a monthly or annual donation. You can find more information about giving on page 18 of the pack.

We hope you find this material helpful, and that it's a blessing to your church family. And we wish you a very merry Christmas, from all of us here at Home for Good!

Gathering together

The Christmas season may draw people into our church services and gatherings who aren't usually there; visiting friends and family members, children, young people and families from local schools, individuals for whom attending church at Christmas time is especially important or part of tradition. It's also, for many of us, a time when our church families and communities feel especially dear to us; we love to gather together for services, to pray, to sing and to have fun.

Here are some suggestions of ways you can make your service a space of even greater welcome – to those who have never stepped foot in your building before, and to those you know well.

- Perhaps you could write 'Merry Christmas' or 'Welcome' in different languages on your screen or your Order of Service handout.
- Maybe you could have a diverse range of voices, ages and faces contributing to your service, through readings, worship and prayers.
- Good coffee and delicious biscuits (or mince pies!) go a long way in showing value and breaking the ice as people enter and settle into the service.
- Consider how your church can ensure that your services are accessible to all. Could you invite a sign language interpreter? Could you include some Makaton in your worship (check out [these carols from The Makaton Charity](#))? Could you incorporate some visual supports to help people understand the shape of your service (ASD in Church have some [free downloadable visual supports](#))?



At Home for Good, we're especially conscious of those who may face barriers to feeling included because they or someone in their family has experience of care. Check out appendix 1 at the end of this pack to read some more tips that specifically have care-experienced children and their families in mind!

Songs

Lots of carols and Christmas hymns remind us of God's heart and of the radical compassion and hospitality He showed through Jesus, and invite us, the Church, to respond.



- Joy to the World
Let every heart prepare Him room!
- Once in Royal David's City
With the poor, and mean, and lowly, lived on earth our Saviour holy.
- O Come, O Come Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
- O Holy Night
A thrill of hope; the weary world rejoices.

In addition to the classics, you might want to include some alternative, more contemporary or all-age music in your Christmas service this year. Some members of the Home for Good team have shared their favourites:

- The whole of Rain for Roots' album, *Waiting Songs*, is brilliantly poignant for Advent and Christmas. We especially like *Every Valley (It's Hard to Wait)*!
- *God's Christmas Light*, Fischy Music.
- *Hear the Bells*, Worship for Everyone.
- *Fear Is Not My Future*, Maverick City Music.
- *You're The Hope (Psalm 65)*, Kiran Young Wimberly & The McGraths.

Bible readings

The Christmas story is one of hope. But why? And what do we mean when we talk about hope? The readings suggested below may help to bring answers to some of these questions; you might want to read them aloud as part of your service, or use them as a basis for a talk, sermon or activity.

We'd encourage you to think of ways in which you could make your readings interactive and accessible for all. Could you incorporate some visuals? Could you have a BSL interpreter at your service to help communicate the words to those who sign?

Isaiah 9:1-7

The words preceding chapter nine are of darkness, suffering, judgement. And then chapter nine begins with an incredibly important word: 'But'. This 'but' carries God's grace, His great love and compassion for his people, His generous forgiveness and his awesome faithfulness. And then in this well-known passage, we read that darkness is not the end. God has something different for His people.

Luke 1:26-38 and Luke 1:46-56

Mary is visited by an angel who tells her that she's going to conceive and give birth to a son; his name will be Jesus and he will be the son of God. In response to what she's been told, Mary prays these words of praise and worship, gratitude and hope.

Matthew 20:16-20

Jumping from the pages that tell of his birth to the last in Matthew's Gospel, these words reinforce to us God's promise of His presence with us – always, to the very end of the age.

Hebrews 6:13-20; Hebrews 10:23; Colossians 1:15-27

These verses aren't normally chosen for a Christmas service, but they share a brilliant illustration of hope – an anchor for the soul, firm and secure – and a reminder that we, the Church, carry the hope of Christ in us.



Congregational prayers

For those who use liturgy or congregational prayers in your worship, we've written three prayers for you.

Congregational prayer 1

God of Hope,

God of waiting,

God of whom the prophets spoke, years before their words would come to fruition.

We pray for those who are waiting for family.

We pray for children and young people who are waiting for the right place to call home. For those who are experiencing move after move in search of permanence; for those who may have to move long distances because that's where the nearest available foster carer is; for those who may have to be separated from siblings.

Will You hold them in your arms through the waiting, the wondering and the questioning?

Will You help them know your presence, close and comforting alongside them?

Lord, we trust that you have something different and better for these precious children; will you help us play our part in carrying your hope?

God of Hope,

God of little glimmers,

God who was born on this earth not into riches and royalty, wealth and beauty,

But as a tiny baby, to an ordinary family, in a quiet corner of an unremarkable town.

We praise you and we thank you for the little signs of hope in our lives; hints of your presence with us, reminders of your greater plan.

As we think specifically of those caring for children with experience of the care system, we thank you for hugs. We thank you for eye contact. We thank you for questions, conversations, songs. We thank you for meals cooked and shared, lifts offered, laundry helped with.

We thank you for the moments that might seem small and insignificant to some, but that mean the world to others, and we ask that you might open our eyes to these glimmers of hope, that we might be better both at noticing them and at offering them.

God of Hope,

God of mighty wonder,

God who was welcomed with the bright light of stars and the songs of angels;

Whose name was proclaimed and praised over the hills and fields outside Bethlehem.

We praise you and we thank you for the moments when hope hits us like a ton of bricks! For that family who finally are receiving the support they've been needing for so long; for pieces of policy and legislation passed that will lead to real and lasting change; for families found for children and teenagers through fostering, adoption and supported lodgings.

We pray for social workers and other professionals, and for policy shapers and decision makers, and for the systems and structures that shape our society. May hope and justice run through them at their core.

Congregational prayers (continued)

Congregational prayer 1 (continued)

God of Hope,**Emmanuel, God with us,**

God who designed us, created us and has always known us,

God who entered into our world, moved into our neighbourhood,

God who promises His presence with us, always, even to the end of the age.

We thank you and we praise you this Christmas. We ask that you'll show us afresh in this season what hope really is. And we ask that you will empower and inspire us to carry your hope into our families, our communities and our world.

Amen.

Congregational prayer 2

God of Elizabeth,

Who celebrated and blessed her relative Mary upon hearing her good news.

Thank you for the power of relationships, and the difference our words, prayers and actions can make.

May we be a people who celebrate and bless others.

Make us encouragers, Lord. Give us eyes to see the gold in those around us, especially in those who are often overlooked.

Use our words and our actions to lift those feeling low, to remind others of their worth, to speak truth when they don't hear it and to let them know they are loved.

Fill us with your joy, that we can't help but rejoice when we see what you are doing through others in our lives, our communities and our world.

God of the shepherds,

The first to welcome and worship the newborn King.

Thank you for your Church.

May we, the Church, be a people of welcome and hospitality.

May we always be receptive to those on the edges of our congregation, and invite them in.

Will you help us notice those with an empty seat beside them, and be the ones to fill it.

Draw our attention to those who are missing from our Church family. Help us create an environment where they feel safe, valued and that they belong. May we bend so that others can fit in.

May our welcome of others be worship to you.

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Congregational prayers (continued)

Congregational prayer 2 (continued)

God of the Magi,

Those wise individuals who studied, and who engaged with rulers, leaders and kings.
We thank you for those who lead us – locally, globally, academically, politically, spiritually, in community. We pray for our policy-shapers and decision makers, and for the next generation of leaders, who you are already raising up.
May those of us with influence use it to help others notice the disadvantaged and marginalised.
May those of us with skills to listen, learn and investigate use them to search for solutions.
May those of us with a platform step aside to make room for and amplify the voices of those who aren't heard enough.
May we be filled with and driven by hope. May we be passionate about and committed to justice.

God of Mary and Joseph,

Who raised and loved your son, Jesus.
We thank you and we pray for those who open their hearts and homes to children and young people through fostering, adoption, kinship care or supported lodgings.
We ask for more individuals, couples and families who will provide a place of stability, where children and young people will be supported to thrive. Show us, Lord, if this is something that we can do.
And if we can't, help us step in to wrap around families who do with encouragement, prayer and practical support.
May we, your Church, be a people who care deeply about children, young people and families in our community.

Amen.



Congregational prayers (continued)

All age prayer

Father God, thank you for HOPE.
Thank you for always keeping your promises to us.
Thank you for always being with us.
Thank you for always being our friend.
We thank you this Christmas for Jesus – our promise of hope,
And we ask that You will help us share the hope we have with
others around us;
Our friends, our family, our neighbours, our community.
Amen.

One of our brilliant
volunteers has
shared this prayer
with us in BSL. [View it
here](#), and please use
it as you pray!

Activities for children, youth or families

The following activities on pages 09, 10, 11 and 12 can be adapted to use with church kids groups, youth groups, as part of an all-age service or even with families at home.





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ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH OR FAMILIES

Christmas Hopes

We often talk about what we're 'hoping' for for Christmas – in a cross-your-fingers, wishful thinking sense. What would it look like for us to think differently about 'hope' this year?

Ask the children or young people in your group what they are 'hoping' for this Christmas. We're imagining that their minds will go straight to gifts they hope to receive, but also encourage them to think beyond presents and about the food they might eat, the parties they might attend, the people they might spend time with. Be sensitive to who's in the room, and lead this element with an awareness that not every child will necessarily receive many gifts this year, or there may be people they are unable to spend time with who they miss. It might feel more appropriate to ask people to make their lists in their head, or write them down on a piece of paper rather than shouting out loud.

ASK THE GROUP:

What do you think the word 'hope' means?

Listen to their answers – you may want to write them all down on a piece of flipchart paper to keep a note of them all.



Explain that while we often think of 'hope' as a wish, or a feeling we get when we really want something to happen, the Bible teaches us something very different. 'Hope' in the Bible is more like confidence. Hope is believing that, no matter what's going in our lives, the things God says are true, and He keeps His promises.

Explain that having hope like this doesn't mean our lives are always going to be easy; that's not what God promises. But what He does promise is that He will always be with us. He will never leave us. He will always be our friend.

ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH OR FAMILIES

Christmas Hopes (continued)

ASK THE GROUP:

Can you think of someone in your life who needs a friend?

Perhaps there's a child in their class who is a little shy and who struggles to get involved. Maybe they have a grandparent who lives alone. Maybe there's a new family in your church who haven't really met people yet.

Share with your group: There are some children in our town/city/country who aren't able to live with their birth families – you might already know a child like this in your church or school. We know that these children need the things that all children need – they need a home that feels safe, they need a grownup who will look after them and show them love, they need friends they can rely on. Some children wait a long time for these things.

ASK THE GROUP:

If our hope in knowing that God is always with us, what would it look like to share that hope with others?

How can we let God use us to show others his love and friendship?



Lead your group in writing a new kind of Christmas list.

Instead of listing all of the things we're wishing for this year, let's make a list of all the different ideas we can think of to show God's love and friendship to people that we know!



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ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH OR FAMILIES

Glimmers of hope craft

Create some sparkly decorations together as a reminder of the hope we have in God.

Before you meet with your group, gather the supplies you need for this craft. You can use what's available to you – we'd suggest some card or cardboard, something sparkly like sequins or glitter, something shiny like tinfoil and some pens or crayons to write and draw, but be as creative as you like! You'll also need some scissors, some tape or glue, and some string to hang your decorations.

If your group is younger, you might want to prepare some of their craft in advance. You could cut the card or cardboard into a star shape or circle, and you might want to add the string in advance too.

Share with your group that Christmas is a brilliant time for us to remember God's special promises to us, as we celebrate His big promise coming true when Jesus was born. Invite your group to think about some of the other special promises God has made to us – you might need to help them, but we can keep things as child-like as necessary. God has promised to always be with us. God has promised to always love us. God has promised to always be our friend.

Share with your group that together you're going to make some special Christmas decorations that will remind us of God's special promises. They might want to keep their decoration for themselves, or they might want to give it away as an encouraging gift.

Invite them to write or draw something on their decoration that will remind them of one of God's promises, and then to decorate it with colours, sparkles and fun.

Feel free to share a picture of your creations with us! You can tag us on Instagram ([@homeforgood.org.uk](https://www.instagram.com/homeforgood.org.uk)) or email us at info@homeforgood.org.uk.

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ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH OR FAMILIES

Gingerbread nativity characters

To make delicious gingerbread, you need lots of different ingredients. Without even one, things just don't work the same way!

Create some gingerbread nativity characters together. You can adjust the difficulty level depending on the age group you're working with, and how much time you have – you can bake the gingerbread from scratch, or buy some pre-made gingerbread people and coloured icing. Depending on your gingerbread construction skills, you could build an entire nativity scene, manger, animals and all! Feel free to source your own recipe – in our view, **BBC Good Food** never fails!

Discuss with your group the ingredients needed to make gingerbread – perhaps as you add them to your mix, if you're making your own. There are so many different things – flour, sugar, butter, spices and every ingredient is a little different, and does a different job. Every ingredient is important. Without the rising agent, our gingerbread would be flat. Without the sugar, it wouldn't taste right. Without the spices and syrups, it would just be a normal biscuit.

Chat about how in the Christmas story, there are so many people and so many parts. Reflect on how every role was so important in preparing to welcome Jesus into the world.

Talk about how we, the Church, are a bit like an amazing gingerbread creation. All of us are a little bit different; we like different things, we are good at different things, we each look and sound different, we have our own feelings and ideas and stories. Celebrate that God can use each of us individually, and, importantly, together, to show His love.

Finish decorating your gingerbread nativity, and then tuck in – but not before taking a photo of your creation, and sharing the picture with us! You can tag us on Instagram (@homeforgood.org.uk) or email us at info@homeforgood.org.uk.

Ideas for a talk or sermon

We know that every church is different, and every church leader is too. You will have your own style and preferences when it comes to speaking; you'll know what will land with your church family, and how things might be interpreted. You'll have an idea of who might be in the crowd – kids, grownups, new faces, familiar faces, maybe all of the above. So, we don't want to give you a pre-written talk, or a script to follow. Rather, we hope that the points we've shared below might help inspire a talk for your Christmas service this year. Feel free to pick and choose elements that you feel will help you, and adapt them to suit your service and community – those whose style is more expository may wish to focus on just one of the verses or passages.

Open: What are you 'hoping' for this Christmas?

Ask your church family to think about what they are 'hoping' for this Christmas. Minds will go straight to gifts they hope to receive, but also encourage them to think beyond presents and about the food they might eat, the parties they might attend, the people they might spend time with. Be sensitive to who's in the room, especially if you're addressing children and young people, and lead this element with an awareness that not everyone will necessarily receive many gifts this year, or there may be people they are unable to spend time with who they miss. It might feel more appropriate to ask people to make their lists in their head, rather than shouting out loud.

Now would be a great chance to share a personal story of your own. Do you have a memory of receiving a gift you really wanted as a child – or maybe a memory of a time you didn't? Did you ever receive something really strange or interesting for Christmas? Can you recall a time when you were really hoping for something to happen?



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Ideas for a talk or sermon (continued)

Wonder: What does 'hope' really mean?

Often, when we talk about hope, we speak about it as though it's a wish; if I cross my fingers then perhaps this might happen. If I manifest well or often enough then this dream might become reality. Hope in the Bible is different. Biblical hope is a certainty, a confident expectation, not based on an individual's strength of feeling, but entirely on who God is. In a section in Hebrews 6 that's entitled 'the certainty of God's promises' comes this amazing verse - 'we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure,' (v19). The writer of Hebrews has exhorted us to 'hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful' (Hebrews 10:23).

Hoping in God doesn't depend on us, our ability, strength of feeling or determination. Our hope is Him and in Him.

Isn't that lovely – we can all hope in Him and live lives of wonder, free from challenges because of it. Just kidding. That's not what hope is either.

The promise of God is not that following Him means a life without suffering or counting the cost, nor that we will never experience challenge or heartache. The promise is His presence. That He will always be with us. We can have confidence that He will NEVER leave us or forsake us. His promise is that one day, we will be with Him in eternity where there are no more tears, sadness, mourning, death or any of the things that rob us here.

This side of eternity, our lives are lived in tension, in the in-between of the now and not yet. Our hope is Him – present, alongside, hearing our prayers, moving powerfully in and through us but sometimes in the midst of challenge, heartache and pain. And our hope is also to come.

(If you're addressing an all-age crowd, you might want to simplify some of this. Check out the 'Christmas hopes' activity for children and youth on pages 09 and 10).

Explore: Where's the hope in the Christmas story?

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, prophets of God spoke of a hope that would come to the world through a coming Messiah – we often hear the words of one of these prophets, Isaiah, at Christmas time.

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned...For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

These are brilliant, exciting, encouraging words – but sometimes when we read them at Christmas, we ignore the context they were spoken into. The words preceding chapter nine are of darkness, suffering, judgement. They address a community who were afraid, who felt powerless, who were facing real enemies, who were wondering where God even was.

Ideas for a talk or sermon (continued)

Explore: Where's the hope in the Christmas story? (continued)

And then chapter nine begins with an incredibly important word: 'But'. This 'but' carries God's grace, His great love and compassion for his people, His generous forgiveness and his awesome faithfulness. And then in this well-known passage, we read that darkness is not the end. God has something different for His people.

But these promises weren't fulfilled right away. There are pages and pages, chapters and chapters, between these words and those that speak of Jesus' birth, representing years and years of waiting. And that speaks to the idea of 'hope', doesn't it? Our hope is not that everything will be made right, right away. Our hope is Him – present, alongside, hearing our prayers, moving powerfully in and through us but sometimes in the midst of challenge, heartache and pain. And our hope is also to come.

Then, one day, an angel appears to an ordinary girl named Mary. He speaks words to her that echo the promises of the prophets, and tells her that she will give birth to a child.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.

The longed-for, hoped-for Messiah was coming – in a way that would overturn expectations, evoke questions and confusion. The hoped-for Messiah would come as a tiny, vulnerable, utterly dependent baby.

I wonder how Mary felt in that moment. We know that has some questions about the logistics; I imagine there were many more questions than just those recorded in Luke. Yet in this unexpected fulfilment of promise and hope, Mary responds with praise to God in a beautiful and powerful Magnificat; a picture of what it is to have hope in God, whatever our circumstances.

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant... His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation... He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.

Months later, Jesus is born; again, the circumstances are far from what you would imagine for the Messiah. The promised hope of the world was born in a quiet corner of an unremarkable town, to two very ordinary people. His first visitors were shepherds, followed by Magi who had been lead by a star. He would grow up to continue to challenge expectations; God-in-flesh was and continues to be truly counter-cultural. Jesus treated men and women equally in a society where women were considered less important. He welcomed children in a radical, loving way. He ate with people that society looked down on and treated those considered 'unclean' with great compassion, even coming close. He challenged racism and xenophobia of His time through teaching and parables. He had no time for empty religious performance that neglects what is most important – mercy, faithfulness and justice. He taught his followers about the

Ideas for a talk or sermon (continued)

Explore: Where's the hope in the Christmas story? (continued)

Kingdom of Heaven, pointing them and us towards a time where everything would be made new and right. Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, was – is – hope, and he also brought and shared more hope.

Jesus died on the cross, dealing with sin once and for all and creating a way for us to be brought close to God. We see the climax of God's covenants with Israel, we see proof of His love and justice. Triumphantly Jesus rose again, defeating sin and death entirely. And in his last days on earth before ascending to Heaven, where we'll one day be with him, He gifts his spirit and speaks words that reinforce to us God's promise of His presence with us – always, to the very end of the age. Paul writes in Colossians that Christ in us is the hope of glory. The promise of hope is fulfilled – and in its place sits more hope.

Apply: What do we do with this learning?

One of my favourite Christmas carols is O Holy Night. There are so many lines in it that I love, as they illustrate God's nature. But there's one line, in the first verse, that resonates with what we've been speaking about.

A thrill of hope; the weary world rejoices.

The Christmas story is one of hope. Our God became like us and entered our weary world. Jesus came to bring light to the darkness. Jesus came to bring joy and good news to people. Through him we would know that we are children of God; that Heaven is our home. Into a weary world, a promise of hope was born that night.

But as we know, the promise isn't that everything will be okay all of the time. And our world still feels weary today. (Church leaders, at this point you might want to identify some things that are particularly relevant to your community – poverty, climate change, loneliness, fear...)

This year, around 36,000 children will come into care. The reasons for their being unable to stay with their birth family are vast and varied; every child's story is unique. But each and every one of them needs and deserves to experience welcome, stability and a feeling of safety.

Our care system is stretched to the point of breaking. Thousands more foster carers are needed across the country just to ensure that every child has a roof over their head. Children are waiting too long for a home that will meet their needs and offer them the right kind of care and support.

Right now there is a desperate shortage of foster carers in the UK. And that means that children are experiencing multiple moves in short spaces of time; such instability and uncertainty. There are children and young people who are having to move miles from all that's familiar to them – because that's how close the nearest available foster home is. There are brothers and sisters

Ideas for a talk or sermon (continued)

Apply: What do we do with this learning? (continued)

who are having to be separated, living apart, because there just aren't enough carers who can look after them together.

Right now, there are children for whom adoption has been deemed the right decision, but who are waiting too long for the right family to be found for them. Children who are Black, who have a disability, who are over the age of four or who are part of a sibling group are among those waiting eighteen months or more for family.

Right now, one in four teenagers in care in the UK are over the age of 16. Did you know that? 25% of children in care are teenagers, over the age of 16. (Church leaders, please note – these are UK wide statistics. You may wish to use something more relevant to your region or nation. If so, you can visit our [statistics page](#) on our website to find out more.) Yet there are limited options for these precious young people. What they need is support and encouragement, yet all too often they're being placed in accommodation that's entirely unsuitable – bedsits, B and Bs, caravans, even tents. What does 'hope' look like for them?

Hope is Him – present, alongside, hearing our prayers, moving powerfully in and through us but sometimes in the midst of challenge, heartache and pain. Our hope is also to come as we look towards a day when there will be no more tears, sadness, mourning, death or any of the things that rob us here.

But as those who follow Jesus, we're also carriers of hope. We have the power and responsibility to bring hope to hopeless situations. There are over 50,000 churches in the UK. In every village, town and city in the country these churches – big, small and in between – are filled with people who want to follow the example of Jesus, seeking justice, showing compassion and practicing hospitality, bringing hope. Imagine the difference we, God's Church, His people, could make.

There will be times when 'hope' looks and feels huge and miraculous for these children and young people; it will look like stable families found for children and teenagers through fostering, adoption and supported lodgings. It will might look like a family finally receiving the support they've been needing for so long. It could look like pieces of policy and legislation passed that will lead to real and lasting change in the care system and in our society.

But there will also be times when hope looks different. Hope might look smaller than we imagine it might. It might look a bit more 'normal' than we imagine it might. 'Hope' for these children and the families who care for them might look more like a baby in a manger than a majestic king; a meal shared, a conversation had, a lift offered, a kind word spoken.

(This would be a great opportunity to show the video included in our resource pack!)

Our invitation to you this Christmas is to consider: how might you share God's promise of hope in this community?

Giving to Home for Good

We can only continue inspiring and equipping churches with the support of amazing people like you. We'd love to invite you to 'pay it forward' so that more churches can receive our resources for free and help to find more safe, stable and loving homes for children who need them. Churches across the country support Home for Good either through hosting a special collection during their services or making a monthly or annual donation.

This Christmas, please consider:

1. Hosting a special collection for Home for Good
2. Committing your church to a monthly or annual donation



There are three ways that you can donate:

1. BY BANK TRANSFER:

You can make a donation into Home for Good's bank account using these details:

Name on account: Home for Good
Bank: CAF Bank, 25 Kings Hill Ave, Kings Hill, West Malling ME19 4JQ
Sort code: 40-52-40
Account No.: 00029458



To help our finance team identify your donation, please also send an email to fundraising@homeforgood.org.uk to let us know the name and address of your church, and the date and amount of your donation.

2. BY CHEQUE:

You can send a cheque made out to 'Home for Good' to Home for Good, Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7JB. Please also include the name and address of your church along with the cheque.

3. ONLINE:

You can donate with a debit or credit card online at homeforgood.org.uk/christmas-pay-it-forward. Please ensure that, unless it is your own personal money, you do not tick the Gift Aid declaration.

If you have any questions about how we use donations to facilitate our work or would like to know more about giving as a church, please contact us at fundraising@homeforgood.org.uk.

Thank you – your generosity will make a transformational difference. Together we can find a home for every child who needs one.

Appendix 1: Gathering together

At Home for Good, we're especially conscious of those who may face barriers to feeling included because they or someone in their family has experience of care.

Everyone's experience will be different, and there's no one-size-fits-all approach, but here are a few ideas of ways you can show some understanding to people with care experience and their families.

- **How do you show welcome?** Many of us love a hearty handshake or a warm hug, but there may be people coming through your doors who can feel anxious around new and unfamiliar people. Could your welcome team offer some different options to those who come to the door – a handshake, a high five, a wave or a smile?
- **Think about the sights, sounds and smells.** We know that many children who have experienced trauma can experience sensory integration issues. This means that sometimes things like lights, music or scents can feel overwhelming to them. Could you have some ear defenders available to anyone who might want them? Could you create a 'calming corner' somewhere in your space, with dimmer lights, perhaps a pop up tent, softer fabrics and maybe some fidget toys, and make the whole congregation know they can use this corner if things feel too much?
- **Have a think about the language you use when talking to kids and youth.** Instead of saying 'parents' or 'mums and dads', try 'your grown up' in acknowledgement of those who aren't living with their birth family right now.
- **Allow grownups to stay with children if you have a separate kids or youth programme in another room.** And be flexible with your age groups; some siblings may feel more comfortable if they can stay together, and others may be able to engage more in an activity designed for younger children.
- **Some children might behave differently to their peers – and that's ok.** Behaviour is communication. Help families feel welcome by demonstrating to them that you're not phased by their child's loud noises, their wandering around the room or their expressions of emotions.
- **Think carefully about some of the stories we tell around Christmas.** Not all children will feel safe at the thought of an unknown man coming into their home or bedroom on Christmas Eve, even if he's bringing gifts! Children whose experiences mean they feel a sense of shame or blame may find conversations around being 'naughty' or 'nice' enough to get gifts really difficult.