Happy Christmas! Is that the first time you’ve read or heard that this year? Probably not. The TV adverts come on earlier each year, the stock hits the shelves ahead of time and we start planning our shopping budgets sooner than the year before - those of you that are very organised may even start doing shopping earlier and earlier too! With this issue of SR News, we want to shine a light on what has the potential to be a less jolly side of Christmas. We want to be honest and real, to appreciate the stories from all around our diverse city, and to stand alongside households and walk with them. After the last 18 months, it feels like there’s a lot of pressure on this Christmas. So, how can we journey with these households to support and uplift them as we celebrate Christmas together? In this issue we’ll learn about the difference that shopping small and local can make, we hear from FareShare about how their Christmas campaign is supporting children that receive Free School Meals, the impact of the universal credit lifting has had plus more...
Is a Fairtrade, Ethical & Sustainable Christmas Really Possible?

I don’t know about you but I often feel quite daunted by Christmas shopping. Who have I got to buy for? What would they like? What budget per person are we setting? Then add to that wanting to be eco-friendly and ethical as much as possible. It can feel a bit like an impossible task. Well, we recently got in touch with Sarah, founder of Just Fair Trade on Silver Street in Leicester, to ask her if she had any tips on how to do Christmas more responsibly.

"I have spent more than 20 years helping people with Christmas shopping! It started in my house when I held Traidcraft Parties back in the early ’90s. Now I help customers choose gifts in our large shop on Leicester’s Silver Street. It’s something I love, talking to customers. From the purchasers who start early and organised arriving with a list, to the last minute Christmas Eve shoppers with a slight look of panic in their eyes. If I can help them choose thoughtful gifts that will give joy to the recipient I’m happy."

"Fairtrade was probably the first to encourage people to think about what they buy and ask who makes or grows it and how they are treated. Then more questions were asked;

How is it made?

Who made it?

Is it sustainable?

How did it travel to get on the shop shelf?

How is it packaged?

Does the maker get paid fairly?

What’s it made out of?

All these questions, it can feel overwhelming and you can wonder if its even worth trying to do the right thing, whatever that right thing might be! Here are 4 simple pointers for enjoying a more fair trade, ethical and sustainable Christmas:
Is a Fairtrade, Ethical & Sustainable Christmas Really Possible? Cont.

1. Don't fall into the trap of the novelty purchase that is quickly discarded and becomes rubbish. Consider William Morris' golden rule; ‘Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.’

2. Buy products with a story. Know where the products come from and who made them. In our case, it might be fair trade jewellery makers in Peru and Ecuador, in another shop a silversmith in Harborough. Not only is this kind of purchase more likely to benefit the maker, but makes the gift more individual and special.

3. Look for Recycled and Up-cycled options. Recycled plastic bottles are being made into soft rugs, cushions, throws, backpacks! Newspaper is skillfully woven into pencil pots and photo frames. Aluminium is remade and enamelled creating beautiful colourful bowls and coasters.

4. Spend with independents (physical or online) and the money stays local. For every £1 spent, 63p stays in the local community compared to 40p with larger businesses, or just 5p for online shopping! In Leicester, we are lucky to have a range of independent shops, explore The Lanes and St Martin's Square and you'll find lots of choice.

"Remember, you have the power to do good with every purchase!"

A big thank you to Sarah, founder of Just Fair Trade on Silver Street in Leicester, for sharing some of her story with us along with some super helpful top tips that will help us all to do Christmas a bit more responsibly this year.
FareShare - Big Give Christmas Challenge

Every day people of all ages go hungry. This can be for reasons such as redundancy, reduced welfare support, receiving an unexpected bill whilst working on a low income. This means that many people have no choice but to turn to drop-in centers, food banks, emergency help to feed themselves and their families. Going along to a lunch club helps to alleviate loneliness as well as providing a hot meal. This is where FareShare Midlands comes in. They reclaim good-to-eat surplus food from manufacturers, suppliers, and retailers that would have otherwise been thrown away. We distribute this food to hundreds of local charities and community projects across the Midlands. The food is then turned into thousands of nutritious meals every week for the people who need it most. For the community groups we work with, our service is a much-needed resource.

This year, FareShare Midlands is taking part in the Big Give Christmas Challenge, the UK’s biggest online match funding campaign. Thanks to the match funding every donation unlocks four times its value! This will mean we could deliver 16 meals for every one pound pledged over Christmas. This year, FareShare Midlands is focusing its campaign on raising funds for the provision of food to families during the school Christmas break. For many families, the hot meal their child receives at school is their main meal of the day. When schools break up this is no longer available to them. FareShare provides a solution to that.

Mark your calendars for the 30th November - 7th December and please consider donating if you can to support their campaign. For more information on the campaign and to donate click here.
With Universal Credit Lifting...

You’ve probably read the headlines and heard the news. At the beginning of November universal credit (UC) was cut by £20 per week. That’s £80 a month. This alongside the rise in gas prices, electricity prices, petrol prices and grocery prices plus the drop in temperatures is leading to some very hard situations for thousands of households. One Foodbank Guest recently said:

"The £80 extra a month from UC isn’t much, but I usually pay about £45 a month for my gas. Yesterday I received a new gas bill for more than £150 for the month. I haven’t had my electricity bill yet. I have no idea what it means for the winter. My husband is ill and I usually turn the heating on to keep him warm. When we’ve not been able to afford it before I used to tell him to go to bed. It’s not just me though is it? There are thousands of people in this position."

Another explained:

"As someone who works and claims UC, I rely heavily on the kindness of family as my income and UC combined are insufficient. Without my family, I would be struggling to feed and clothe my three children let alone rent and maintain a place for them to live in. Many are not in such a fortunate position and the increase in prices and reduction in income will leave many struggling to cope financially, leading to debt, homelessness and severe poverty."

There are no simple answers, but that should not stand in the way of kindness and generosity towards neighbours where possible. If you are fortunate enough to have not been affected by this UC cut then consider how you could help those who have. During the Christmas season, offering gifts of time, a homemade picnic, a film night, a morning cleaning/decluttering, a shared meal offered or a lift somewhere are all simple ways we can show we care. Or you could donate goods or finance to one of many charities that support households in situations such as this.
A Cup Full of Hope

The USPG – United Society Partners in the Gospel - are an Anglican mission agency that partners churches and communities worldwide in God’s mission to enliven faith, strengthen relationships, unlock potential and champion justice. They bring people together from different parts of the global Church in mutually enriching conversation and profound encounters, to deepen faith in Jesus Christ. We strive to make connections between the churches of the Anglican Communion to deepen bonds of affection and learn from each other in rich exchange. We promote education and leadership and strengthen the unity and capacity of the Anglican Church.

For this Advent and Christmas they have released a range of resources from around the world to enrich and diversify our services. What sort of things are available?

- Liturgical and Prayer Resources
- Sermon Scripts for both adult and all age talks.
- Powerpoints to accompany both adult and all age talks
- Pre-recorded Sermon.
- Children’s Resources

To look at and download any of these FREE resources or to contribute to their christmas appeal then click here.
National Estate Churches Network

What is the National Estate Churches Network? (NECN)
It’s a network that supports people active in Christian ministry on social housing estates in England and Wales.

How do they provide support?
Via a network of local groups plus conferences, estate-specific resources, helpful emails and social media, strategic representation and much more.

Who is a part of NECN?
NECN's membership includes church and community leaders and workers, clergy, residents, and others who live, work and serve God on housing estates across England and Wales.

Why are you telling me this?
If you are a part of Christian ministry on a social housing estate near you then check out their [website](#) to access information and resources that may well be really helpful to your ministry!

Earlier this year the NECN held an online conference which you can catch up with on their [youtube channel](#). Videos range from 15mins to an hour and a half and cover topics such as schools work and community chaplaincy. If social housing estates are part of your mission field then do check out these free resources and make use of them.

Keep a look out for our next issue coming out after the new year!