



Future Publishing Ltd, 121–141 Westbourne Terrace, Paddington, London W2 6JR
0330 390 6591; www.countrylife.co.uk

A time to give with love

As many of us prepare to celebrate a simpler Christmas, the Revd Lucy Winkett is moved by the generosity of those often dealing with their own difficult circumstances and stresses that giving someone your time can be a great gift, too

CHRISTMAS is one way that we measure the passage of time. It's a punctuation moment in the year and we find ourselves remembering that it's the first Christmas in this house or that it was the last Christmas with her or him. Nostalgia plays a large part in our celebrations as adults: it is a set of rituals to return to, which anchor us somehow, especially if the memories are happy ones.

'This is expressed in the birth of Christ, who showed us what God is like, but also what it could be like to be human'

In my role as Rector of St James's Church, Piccadilly, in central London, I watch the run-up to Christmas take a particular turn each year. At the heart of the West End, our parish is full of bars, restaurants and shops, all advertising Christmas parties from October onwards. It was very odd being in central London during lockdown or restricted Christmases, when the lights were on and the decorations were up, but the streets were deserted. There was a special bleakness about the city during that time. If I'm honest, there hasn't been a return to a pre-pandemic Christmas atmosphere, although the same lights and decorations are on this year. There are particularly spectacular angels that fly down Jermyn



Street and Piccadilly, but the crowds hurrying by underneath feel different: a bit more thoughtful somehow, less hedonistic and a little more, well, fragile.

As this year's John Lewis television advertisement—with its focus on children in care—suggests, society is thinking about deeper themes, beyond the determination to have a good time.

I see much of this at St James's. One of the striking moments of this winter was an

exchange we had in the run-up to the festive season. Every week, we host a hot meal in the church for people going through homelessness or on low incomes. It's often a lively and chatty evening: the conversations I've had with our guests range from politics to history, music, family. One of the most animated was an argument about the 17th-century English Civil War and the merits (or otherwise) of the actions of Oliver Cromwell. As our Christopher Wren church



was consecrated in 1684, we were in the right place to be discussing the aftermath of the only 11 years of Republican rule that England has had and the debate went long into the evening.

Another time, we were collecting donations for our local food bank, when one of our homeless guests turned up with an offering. I am ashamed to say that I was rather too surprised that this had happened. Really, I shouldn't have been: people are generous and kind, despite strikingly difficult circumstances. Yet this was such a remarkable gesture, I felt humbled by it. It was a moving example of gift-giving that put all my prospective shopping to shame. Of course, I want to live in a city that has neither food banks, nor people sleeping on the streets. But at a time of great hardship for many and great anxiety for most, this impulse to give a gift to someone else moved me beyond words.

This is one of the ways in which I think that the message of Christmas makes sense in a secularised society. For Christians, the celebration focuses on the astonishing gift that God gives: of life itself, of wonder and miracle, light and hope. This is expressed in the birth of Christ: a unique and irreplaceable human life who showed us what God is like, but also, perhaps more challengingly, showed us what it could be like to be human. I think that within all human

beings, practising Christian or not, there is the deep impulse to give. Not only to buy presents, but to give, sometimes, ourselves, our time, our love or our commitment. It's implanted deep within us as part of what human beings do.

‘Within all human beings, Christian or not, there is the deep impulse to give’

It's also affecting our approach to work, particularly among younger people who appear to seek demonstrable purpose—especially social purpose—in their jobs, as I recently found out at a meeting with business leaders. Attention to environmental and modern-day-slavery issues among today's corporations is notably strong and

these concerns are also shaping the way we shop and give at Christmas. The younger generations can see that a throwaway culture harms the planet—single-use plastic or fast-fashion goods may raise eyebrows if unwrapped on Christmas Day.

But raising these concerns doesn't have to reduce the fun or dampen the celebrations. Staple gifts of soap, tea, candles, clothes, jewellery, books and electronic gadgets can all be kind to people and the planet, if chosen carefully. Perhaps, therefore, this Christmas might be a simpler, more thoughtful one, expressing the sort of empathy and imagination that was shown by our homeless guest, not only for other people, but for the Earth, and making every gift, however simple, more beautiful, because it's given with love.

The Revd Lucy Winkett is the Rector of St James's Church, Piccadilly, London W1. Formerly a professional soprano, she is a long-standing contributor to 'Thought for the Day' on BBC Radio 4's 'Today'. The church is raising funds to repair and re-use its buildings in an environmentally sensitive way, honouring its post-war history, as well as adapting, re-landscaping, celebrating and cherishing the historic green space and architectural heritage. To donate to the St James's Wren Project, visit www.sjp.org.uk/donate/the-wren-project

COUNTRY LIFE
Six issues for £6*

Visit www.countrylifesubscribers.co.uk/X820

*After your first six issues, your payments will continue at £39.99 every three months. For full terms and conditions, visit www.countrylifesubscribers.co.uk/6for6terms
Offer closes January 31, 2023

Property Magazine of the Year 2022, Property Press Awards

PPA Magazine Brand of the Year 2019

PPA Front Cover of the Year 2018

British Society of Magazine Editors Columnist of the Year (Special Interest) 2016

British Society of Magazine Editors Scoop of the Year 2015/16

PPA Specialist Consumer Magazine of the Year 2014/15

British Society of Magazine Editors Innovation of the Year 2014/15

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR) www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Zillah Byng-Thorne
Non-Executive Chairman Richard Huntingford
Chief Financial and Strategy Officer Penny Ladkin-Brand

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

Editorial
Editor-in-Chief **Mark Hedges**

Editorial Enquiries
Editor's PA/Editorial Assistant **Amie Elizabeth White** 6102

Telephone numbers are prefixed by **0330 390**
Emails are name.surname@futurenet.com

Deputy Editor **Kate Green** 4171

Managing & Features Editor **Paula Lester** 6426

Architectural Editor **John Goodall**

Gardens Editor **Tiffany Danef** 6115

Executive Editor and Interiors **Giles Kime** 6047

Acting Deputy Features Editor **Carla Passino**

Acting News & Property Editor **James Fisher** 4058

Lifestyle and Travel Editor **Rosie Paterson** 6591

Luxury Editor **Hetty Lintell** 07984 178307

Head of Design **Dean Usher**

Senior Art Editor **Emma Earnshaw**

Deputy Art Editor **Heather Clark**

Senior Designer **Ben Harris**

Picture Editor **Lucy Ford** 4072

Deputy Picture Editor **Emily Anderson** 6488

Chief Sub-Editor **Octavia Pollock** 6605

Senior Sub-Editor **Stuart Martel**

Digital Editor **Toby Keel**

Property Correspondent **Penny Churchill**

Country Life Picture Library
Content & Permissions Executive **Cindie Johnston** 6538

Commercial director
Clare Dove

Advertisement director
Kate Barnfield 07817 629935

Advertising (Property)
Julia Laurence 07971 923054
Lucy Khosla 07583 106990

Luxury
Katie Ruocco 07929 364909

Interiors/Travel
Emma Hiley 07581 009998

Art & Antiques
Mollie Prince 07581 010002

Classified
Tabitha Tully 07391 402205
Millie Filleul 07752 462160

Advertising and Classified Production
Stephen Turner 6613

Senior Ad Production Manager
Jo Crosby 6204

Inserts Canopy Media
020-7611 8151;
lindsay@canopymedia.co.uk

Back issues
www.magazinesdirect.com

To find out more, contact us at licensing@futurenet.com or view our available content at www.futurecontenthub.com

Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
Circulation Manager **Matthew De Lima**

Production
Group Production Manager **Nigel Davies**

Management
Senior Vice President Women's, Homes and Country **Sophie Wybrew-Bond**
Managing Director **Chris Kerwin**

Please send feature pitches to countrylife.features@futurenet.com

Printed by Walstead UK

Subscription delays
We rely on various delivery companies to get your magazine to you, many of which continue to be affected by Covid. We kindly ask that you allow seven days before contacting us about a late delivery at help@magazinesdirect.com

Subscription enquiries
0330 333 1120
www.magazinesdirect.com