

Advent and Christmas Resource 2025

These **Gifted** tables are designed to be part of *The Methodist Church's* broader message of good news to a weary world during the Advent and Christmas season.

You are a gift. Made with love.



Facilitator's Guide



Dear Friends across the Northampton District

This Advent and Christmas, **FEAST** (Friends Exploring And Sharing Together) invites you — as individuals, congregations, and circuits — to join with others across the Connexion in the GIFTED campaign by setting a **GIFTED Table** in the midst of your community.

These tables (whether small and simple, or big and boisterous) are part of our wider calling to New Places for New People, and offer spaces to listen deeply, share generously and celebrate God's presence among us.

Rooted in heritage, reaching with hope

Drawing on our Methodist heritage of going to where the people are, and affirming our District's Mission Development Plan to be growing, evangelistic, justice-seeking, and inclusive, these gatherings offer us the chance to not only tell our stories of faith, and sing our songs of the season, but to also affirm that:

1. **People are a gift** – *made by God with love.*
2. **Church community is a gift to others** – *for inviting them in to be blessed.*
3. **Jesus is the ultimate gift** – *given freely.*

Through **G**race, **I**nvitation, **F**aith, **T**ransformation, **E**ncounter, and **D**iscovery, we will approach the same passage (John 1:1–14) from different angles and with different entry points. So whether people come once or every week, there is always something new to notice.

A Seasonal Tool for Discernment, not another Programme

This resource isn't about adding pressure, or creating more tasks for your "To Do" list.

Instead, it is an invitation to listen: to God, to one another, and to the communities we serve. At every Gifted Table, we are both hosts and guests as we make space for spiritual curiosity, receiving with love the stories, wisdom and gifts of others.

Through these encounters, we will prayerfully ask:

- Where is **God** already at work around us?
- Who are the **people** longing for connection, hope and belonging?
- What new **place** might emerge as faith, story, and community intertwine?

The **FEAST** Rhythm & Flow

Each Gifted Table is designed to last around **60 minutes**, although in later weeks this may become longer as relationships deepen, and follows a simple rhythm:

- **Friends (5–10 mins)**: Welcome, and a simple icebreaker.
- **Exploring (10–15 mins)**: Words or phrases that stand out.
- **And (5–6 mins)**: Receiving the gift of wondering.
- **Sharing (15–20 mins)**: Conversations, stories, and a possible creative task.
- **Together (10 mins)**: Sending and singing.

This rhythm can be shortened for informal spaces or extended in settings with more food, music, or worship.

Start Small, Think Big

You don't need a large team or a big budget, even with a pot of tea, a plate of mince pies, and the Spirit of **Advent**-ure we believe that something sacred will unfold. You might begin simply with one session, one Gifted Table, in one new place, with just a handful of people. The aim here is not to seek impressive numbers, but to nurture authentic relationships, so that stories of hope stir, peace is planted, joy is rekindled and God's love and light is made visible.

Examples you might consider:

- Hosting a Gift of Good Food meal as part of your church's warm space work/community pantry or larder etc.
- Creating a Crafty, Chatty Christmas Café in a school, library, or community hub.
- Organising a Bring-and-Share Breakfast for parents/carers after the school run.
- Offering warm drinks, carols, and conversation on the high street or community garden/village green.
- Visiting a care home, sheltered housing, or day centre with mince pies, music, and prayer.
- Setting up a Festive Tea Break in your workplace, foodbank, or community kitchen.

To support and encourage you in this work, a "Gifted Table" grant is available to help local churches (£100 for a one-off event or £250 for running all six sessions). This has been created to give space for your hopes to grow, with a quick and easy to complete application form. Please see the Finance and Grants Page on the District website for further details.

Wherever you begin, the invitation is simple: **set the table, take your seat, and discover what God is doing and join in.**

Mission in Context: Discovering Your Unique Table

Every congregation, church and community is different, and so every table will be different. **One size does not fit all.**

Instead, Gifted Tables encourage us to ask:

- Who is God calling us to notice?
- What hungers and hopes are emerging from the people here?
- How might the light of Christ be revealed in ways that feels true to this place?

A table in the market square will look different to a table in a rural chapel kitchen, and both will look different from one in a school or chaplaincy setting.

The key is to try and go somewhere you wouldn't usually go, or meet people you wouldn't usually meet, and then create a space where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued so that each and every Gifted Table might become a bigger gift to your worship, your welcome and your worship.

Facilitation Guidance

The role of each facilitator is to hold the space with care and curiosity.

- **Guide, don't lecture.** Your task is to open space, not to give answers.
- **Ask open questions.** Invite wondering, not right answers.
- **Value every voice.** Affirm what people share. If a wider explanation is needed, or a challenge is required around Methodism's desire to use inclusive language, imagery, and inclusion for all, do this kindly and sensitively.
- **Watch for frequent voices.** Try to open space for others: "Let's hear from someone new."
- **Allow for silence.** Listening is as important as speaking.
- **Confidentiality.** What is said should never be told, or revealed as 'a secret'. However, it is sacred and is not to be used as gossip, no matter how good-intentioned. (Although in matters relating to Safeguarding, information must be shared)

Think of yourself less as a teacher, more as a table companion.

Settings: **Warm spaces:** Sessions will need to be short and conversational.
Church settings: Please feel free to add extra carols and prayers as needed.
Care homes: Focus on the poem and carol as memory prompts.
Families/Schools: Expand the crafts to embody the theme across all generations.

Resources

Each time we come to the table, we will gather around the same scriptural focal point: John 1:1–14 which is the anchoring text across all sessions. In week one, you may wish to do the reading yourself, but do seek other voices in the weeks that follow. Variety is added through the following:

- **A Poem** – a seasonal text to spark imagination.
- **A Pop song** – a familiar Christmas track that opens reflection.
- **A Carol** – a hymn anchoring us in tradition and worship.
- **A Creative activity** – optional, simple, and inclusive.
- **A Live-it-out action** – to carry the theme beyond the table.

After the Table

When the table is cleared and the candles are blown out, the conversation continues — in memory, in prayer, in daily living.

Please remember to fill in the FEAST feedback pages, these will help to capture your observations and reflections. This is not about writing an essay, but simply jotting down a few thoughts under the headings:

- **Friends** – Who gathered? What relationships grew?
- **Exploring** – What stood out in scripture or poem?
- **And** – How did people connect with the music or reflection?
- **Sharing** – What stories or gifts were offered?
- **Together** – How was the blessing carried into the week?

Over time, these notes will become a record of grace in your community, guiding you to ask: *What has God been showing us, and where are we being called next?*

Then as you journey beyond Epiphany and Covenant seasons, you can pause and reflect on what has been learnt and ask “what has God showed us, and where are we being called next?”

Gifted Table Resource Suggestions

Don't forget to ask about other formats, language and accessibility needs.

Essentials

- People willing to invite those whom they know
- Reusable table covering / cloth
- Candles and/or LED tealights
- Good hospitality (drinks + cake/pastries/mince pies)
- Weekly participant sheets for each person, including poem, scripture, carol.

Additions

- Fairy lights or simple lighting
- Local greenery (holly, ivy, pine)
- Blank cards and pens for writing prayers/live it out commitments *
- Craft supplies for each week (gold/silver card, coloured paper, origami sheets, tealights -LED for safety, stickers or festive embellishments)
- Luggage labels or GIFTED Tags for the final week *
- Small gifts (baubles, bookmarks, fair-trade chocolates)

* You can order GIFTED-branded items through Methodist Publishing

<https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/books/MGCGTGC25/christmas-2025-gift-cards>

Eco Principles

- Reuse wherever possible.
- Choose recyclable or compostable.
- Buy local and fair-trade.
- Print only what's needed.
- Share or compost food waste.

PLEASE remember to follow best practices regarding recruiting volunteers, risk assessments, and safeguarding procedures.

Linking with Wider Gifted Resources

This pack is offered alongside the wider Methodist Church Gifted campaign in which you will find:

- Lectionary-based worship resources for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany.
- Crafts, prayers, and discussion guides for groups.
- Materials for Sunday worship, families, and intergenerational settings.

Use them to enrich your Gifted Table — or keep things simple. Both are gifts in themselves. These can be found by following this link

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/christmasresources/>

A Final Word

Above all, let us remember that the most powerful part of **GIFTED** and of every **Gifted Tables** isn't what we plan — but how **God's Spirit** helps us to **live it out, locally and lovingly**.



Week 1 – The gift of Grace

The gift we want people to remember:



Love is the heart of Christmas: grace is freely given, not earned.

Friends

- **When has someone's kindness or care touched your life unexpectedly, and how did it make you feel?**

Facilitator guidance:

- Keep this time light and conversational. Short stories are enough; try not to let people dominate, as this will set the tone for the following weeks.
- If the group needs it, begin by offering an example of your own experience (e.g. a neighbour's help, a friend's encouragement).
- Reassure that there is no "wrong" answer. Listening with openness is also part of sharing the space.

Exploring

Poem: *Love Came Down at Christmas* by Christina Rossetti.

- **What insights into grace does this poem give you?**

Scripture: John 1:1–14.

- **What word, phrase, or sentence first caught your attention?**

Facilitator guidance:

- Read both the poem and scripture slowly, use pauses to let key words settle.
- Invite participants to speak aloud the words or phrases that caught their attention.
- Silence is a powerful 'gift'. Allow time for reflection before moving on.
- If needed, ask: "Which words helped you to feel that you are loved today?"
- Don't feel pressure to explain the text: The aim is to notice, not teach.

And

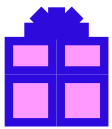
Take the time to listen to your head and heart, and notice what memories or longings stir within, those moments of Grace.

Facilitator guidance:

- Introduce 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' with words similar to: This song was written in wartime to comfort people who felt far from home and unsure of the future. It carries a gentle hope that love can hold us even when life is fragile.
- Play the song in full, and where possible, have the lyrics printed or on a screen so that people can follow.
- Keep this section prayerful and spacious. Don't rush too quickly into sharing.

Sharing

- **Where do you notice moments of grace in everyday life?** 
- **How can we offer these "gifts of grace" to our communities this Advent?**
- **Who in your life has spoken grace to you?**



Optional craft activity: Constellation of Grace:

Offer star-shaped cards and invite each person to write a single word of grace they've received (e.g., "welcome," "forgiveness," "time"). Place them on the table and shape them into a starry constellation of grace.

Facilitator guidance:

- Encourage stories of everyday examples of grace — from simple kindnesses to moments of generosity.
- The prompts are just prompts, follow where you sense the Spirit is leading, but don't be afraid to draw people back to the topic.
- Again, in this opening week and as an encouragement to new voices, prompt with: "As I listened, I noticed what about you?"

Together

- **This week, try to notice one act of grace that is shared with you; be it a kind word, a gentle act, or a simple smile, and pass it on.**

Carol: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.

Facilitator guidance:

- If singing isn't comfortable for the group, play the carol softly and let it wash over the space.
- End with gratitude: thank participants for sharing and listening.

Blessing:

Friends, beloved of God, may we

Explore the light that shines in our darkness.

And receiving grace upon grace, may we

Share that love with open hands and hearts, as

Together we live as gifts to the world. **Amen**



The gift we want people to remember:

Love is the heart of Christmas:
grace is freely given, not earned.





Week 2 – The gift of Invitation

The gift we want people to remember:



Invitation is God's way of saying, "You belong here."

Friends

- **Have you ever received an unexpected invitation that changed something for you?**

Facilitator guidance:

- Keep this time light and conversational. Let people share simple experiences (e.g. being invited to join in, receiving a meal, or being greeted warmly).
- If the group is shy, share a personal example to open the way.
- Affirm all answers; even brief responses build connections.

Exploring

Poem: *The Gate of the Year* by Minnie Louise Haskins.

- **What insights into invitation does this poem give you?**

Scripture: John 1:1–14.

- **What word, phrase, or sentence first caught your attention?**

Facilitator guidance:

- Seek volunteers to read both the poem and scripture slowly.
- Invite participants to speak aloud the words or phrases that caught their attention.
- Remember the 'gift' of silence. Allow for pauses between people's reflections.
- If needed, ask: "Which words helped you to feel that you belong today?"
- Don't feel pressure to explain the text — reminder: aim is to notice, not interpret.

And

Take the time to listen to your head and heart, and notice what memories or longings stir within, those moments of Invitation.

Facilitator guidance:

- Introduce 'I'll Be Home for Christmas' with words similar to: This song is written and sung as a letter home from the view of a soldier stationed overseas. It carries the longing to belong, to be welcomed and remembered.
- Play the song in full, and where possible, have the lyrics printed or on a screen so that people can follow.
- Keep this section prayerful and spacious — don't rush too quickly into the next section.

Sharing

- **What makes you feel truly welcomed?** 
- **How can we offer these “gifts of invitation” to our communities this Advent?**
- **What invitation do you feel drawn to accept this season?**



Optional craft activity: Wreath of Welcome:

Offer strips of different coloured/patterned paper and invite each person to write what helps them feel welcome into space (eg, a personal invitation, smiles, accessibility, food). Link them together and place them centrally on the table.

Facilitator guidance:

- Encourage participants to share everyday examples of welcome — from smiles to moments of community inclusion.
- The prompts are just prompts, follow where you sense the Spirit is leading, but don't be afraid to draw people back to the topic.
- If someone is dominating the conversation, try to encourage new responses with: “I wonder what others think about...”

Together

- **Who might you offer an invitation to this week through a meal, a walk, or a conversation, to help them feel they belong?**

Carol: *O Come, All Ye Faithful*

Facilitator guidance:

- If singing isn't comfortable for the group, play the carol softly and let it wash over the space.
- End with gratitude: thank participants for engaging in all that you have done.

Blessing:

Friends, invited by Christ, may we

Explore the call to belong.

And receiving a homecoming love, may we

Share that gift with generosity, as

Together we live as children of God. **Amen**



The gift we want people to remember:

Invitation is God's way of saying,
“You belong here.”





Week 3 – The gift of Faith

The gift we want people to remember:



Faith shines as light in the darkness, a gift we share with one another.

Friends

- **What helps you keep going when things are uncertain?**

Facilitator guidance:

- Keep this time light and conversational. People might answer with a variety of practices from music, nature, or silence.
- If the group is shy, offer an acknowledgment that faith can be fragile as well as strong.
- Remind people that they need only share what they are comfortable with.

Exploring

Poem: *First Coming* by Madeleine L'Engle

- **What insights into faith does this poem give you?**

Scripture: John 1:1–14.

- **What word, phrase, or sentence first caught your attention?**

Facilitator guidance:

- Ask if anyone would like to read the poem and/or scripture slowly.
- Invite participants to speak aloud the words or phrases that caught their attention.
- Silence is a powerful 'gift'. Allow time for reflection before moving on.
- If needed, ask: "Which words helped you to feel light in your life today?"
- Don't feel pressure to explain the text — the aim is to notice, not teach.

And

Take the time to listen to your head and heart, and notice what memories, longings, or hopes stir within, those moments of Faith.

Facilitator guidance:

- Introduce 'Mary, Did You Know?' with words similar to: This song is almost a whisper and it wonders what it means to carry something precious when you don't yet see how it will unfold, like holding a hidden hope.
- Play the song in full, and where possible, have the lyrics printed or on a screen so that people can follow.
- Keep this section prayerful and spacious — don't rush too quickly into the sharing section.

Sharing

- What does “light in the darkness” mean for you today?
- Where do we need to bring these “gifts of light” to our world this Advent?
- Who has helped you hold on in a time of darkness?



Optional craft activity: Circle of Light.

Using a strip of paper, invite each person to write a situation, place or person that needs a light to shine. Wrap these around LED tealights and gather them together to create a circle of light.

Facilitator guidance:

- Encourage participants to share honesty — faith is not certainty.
- The prompts are just prompts, follow where you sense the Spirit is leading, but you may need to draw people back to the topic if the conversations wander.
- Remember to help new or quieter voices.

Together

- Choosing your own, or a different tealight from the sharing time, try to remember the person, place or situation in prayer during this week.

Carol: *Silent Night*

Facilitator guidance:

- If singing isn't comfortable for the group, play the carol softly and let it wash over the space.
- End with gratitude: thank participants for what they have brought and remind them to take their candle.

Blessing:

Friends, held in faith, may we

Explore the light that shines in our darkness.

And receiving God's gift of trust, may we

Share that hope with those around us, as

Together we walk in the promises of God. **Amen**



The gift we want people to remember:

Faith shines as light in the darkness,
a gift we share with one another.





Week 4 – The gift of Transformation

The gift we want people to remember:



Transformation begins when God makes the ordinary extraordinary.

Friends

- **When or where have you seen signs of transformation around you?**

Facilitator guidance:

- This week, you are looking to encourage stories of small changes that made a big difference.

Exploring

Poem: *On the Mystery of the Incarnation* by Denise Levertov.

- **What insights into transformation does this poem give you?**

Scripture: John 1:1–14.

- **What word, phrase, or sentence first caught your attention?**

Facilitator guidance:

- Again, seek volunteers to read both the poem and scripture slowly.
- Invite participants to speak aloud the words or phrases that caught their attention.
- Remember the 'gift' of silence. Allow for pauses between people's reflections.
- If needed, ask: "Which words feel especially challenging in light of today's news?"
- Don't feel pressure to explain the text — reminder: aim is to notice, not interpret.

And

Take the time to listen to your head and heart, and notice what memories, longings, or hopes stir within, that seek peace amid the pain of our world, those moments of Transformation.

Facilitator guidance:

- Introduce *Someday at Christmas* with words similar to: First performed in 1967, this song imagines a world renewed by peace, kindness, and compassion — a someday that, despite nearly sixty years, is still sadly needed. Yet it reminds us that this day can, and will come, through the many small transformational acts of love that take place within our everyday lives.
- Play the song in full, and where possible, have the lyrics printed or on a screen so that people can follow.
- Keep this section prayerful and spacious — don't rush too quickly into the next section.

Sharing

- **When has the ordinary in your life become extraordinary?** 
- **Where do we need to bring these “gifts of transformation” to our communities this Advent?**
- **Do you notice something new beginning in you?**



Optional craft activity: Origami.

Provide square origami paper (or cut A4 into squares). Choose 1–2 simple shapes that you are familiar with and comfortable with, and guide people step by step to show that even the smallest of changes lead to transformation.

Facilitator guidance:

- Encourage participants to share concrete, local examples and affirm both big visions and small actions.
- The prompts are just prompts, follow where you sense the Spirit is leading, but don't be afraid to draw people back to the topic.
- If someone is dominating the conversation, try to encourage new responses with: “I wonder what others are noticing about...”

Together

- **Commit to taking one small action for justice or peace each day this week, by buying fairtrade, donating to charity etc.**

Carol: *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

Facilitator guidance:

- If singing isn't comfortable for the group, play the carol softly and let it wash over the space.
- End with gratitude: thank participants for engaging in all that has been shared.

Blessing:

Friends, in ordinary ways, may we

Explore the wonder of God-with-us.

And receiving this transforming love, may we

Share signs of that gift in our daily lives, as

Together we are changed by Christ's light. **Amen**



The gift we want people to remember:

Transformation begins when God makes the ordinary extraordinary.





Week 5 – The gift of Encounter

The gift we want people to remember:



God meets us in every encounter — even the ordinary.

Friends

- **What makes you feel most “at home” in a place or with people?**

Facilitator guidance:

- This week, you are looking to encourage stories of encounters with people, places, or moments.

Exploring

Poem: BC:AD by U.A.Fanthorpe.

- **What insights into unexpected encounters does this poem give you?**

Scripture: John 1:1–14.

- **What word, phrase, or sentence first caught your attention?**

Facilitator guidance:

- Ask if anyone would like to read the poem and/or scripture slowly.
- Invite participants to speak aloud the words or phrases that caught their attention.
- Silence is a powerful ‘gift’. Allow time for reflection before moving on.
- If needed, ask: “Which words feel hopeful to your life today?”
- Don’t feel pressure to explain the text — the aim is to notice, not teach.

And

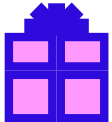
Take the time to listen to your head and heart, and notice what memories, longings, or hopes stir within, those moments of Encounter.

Facilitator guidance:

- Introduce ‘When a Child Is Born’ with words similar to: This song imagines that the whole world pauses to welcome a fragile, tiny new life, and how this can change everything, and everyone.
- Play the song in full, and where possible, have the lyrics printed or on a screen so that people can follow.
- Keep this section prayerful and spacious — don’t rush too quickly into the sharing section.

Sharing

- What encounters, joyful or difficult, have shaped your memories of Christmas?
- How might we help others in our communities to experience the best “gifts of encounter” this Christmas?
- Where do you go to encounter “God with you” moments?



Optional craft activity: Pocket Hearts.

Using card or paper hearts, invite each person to write a word or phrase that represents an encounter of love, be that a person or an act of kindness, that they will continue to carry within their heart.

Facilitator guidance:

- Encourage participants to keep the focus outward as well as inward by sharing everyday examples, not just any dramatic ones.
- The prompts are just prompts, follow where you sense the Spirit is leading, but you may need to draw people back to the topic if the conversations wander.
- Remember to help new or quieter voices with: “As I listened, I noticed what about you?”

Together

- Remember to notice and name the presence of God in each and every moment of this week.

Carol: *Joy to the World*

Facilitator guidance:

- If singing isn’t comfortable for the group, play the carol softly and let it wash over the space.
- End with gratitude: thank participants for what they have brought and remind them to take the craft.

Blessing:

Friends, as bearers of light, may we

Explore the gifts of Christ’s presence.

And receiving this love made near, may we

Share that joy with all that we meet, as

Together we encounter God in people and places. **Amen**

The gift we want people to remember:

God meets us in every encounter — even the ordinary.





Week 6 – The gift of Discovery

The gift we want people to remember:



Discovery (of God) is not the end, but rather an invitation to keep journeying deeper.

Friends

- **Have you ever been on a journey that changed how you see the world?**

Facilitator guidance:

- This week, you are looking to encourage stories that are both light and profound examples. Discoveries that are playful as well as serious.

Exploring

Poem: The Work Of Christmas – Howard W Thurman

- **What insights into discovery does this poem give you?**

Scripture: John 1:1–14.

- **What word, phrase, or sentence first caught your attention?**

Facilitator guidance:

- Is there anyone who has not yet had a turn? Remind them to simply take their time as they read the poem or scripture to the group.
- Invite participants to speak aloud the words or phrases that caught their attention.
- Remember the 'gift' of silence. Allow for pauses between people's reflections.
- If needed ask: "Which word/phrase feels shiny and new to you today?"
- Don't feel pressure to explain the text — reminder: aim is to notice, not interpret.

And

Take the time to listen to your head and heart, and notice what memories, longings, or hopes stir within, those wonder-filled moments of Discovery.

Facilitator guidance:

- Introduce 'Somewhere Only We Know' with words similar to: This song tells of finding a hidden, secret place and then stepping onward. Carrying that which has been found in our hearts, but also, more importantly, out into the world.
- Play the song in full, and where possible, have the lyrics printed or on a screen so that people can follow.
- Keep this section prayerful and spacious — don't rush too quickly into the next section.

Sharing

- What have you discovered about yourself, or God, during this GIFTED season? 
- How might we share these “gifts of discovery” within our families, friendship groups, and community in the year ahead?



Optional craft activity: GIFTED tags.

Using the Gifted tags (see Methodist Publishing) or luggage labels, invite each person to write a word or phrase that

- A) speaks of what they found or received during this time together and
- B) how/where they might carry this gift out into the world.

If your group has been fairly consistent and has gotten to know each other well, you could suggest that each person write the gift(s) they have seen displayed in the person sitting next to/across from them.

Facilitator guidance:

- This is the week to link all your conversations and weeks together, both personal life and community. If someone hasn't spoken much, perhaps ask them to say what they have heard throughout the weeks as they have listened to the 'table talk'.

Together

- Hang your GIFTED tag where you will see it daily, let it act as a reminder of all that you shared/found here. Pause to ponder what next steps/new thing God might be gifting you.

Carol: *We Three Kings*

Facilitator guidance:

- Celebrate all who have helped (set up, packing away, food, tech etc) over the weeks, and repeat the Together call to share every unique GIFT they have with the world, and *if they are ready* with God.

Blessing:

Friends, seekers of Christ, may we

Explore the light that guides our way.

And receiving new insights about God, may we

Share our GIFTED discoveries with the world, as

Together we continue to journey on and in the way. **Amen**

The gift we want people to remember:

Discovery (of God) is not the end, but rather
an invitation to keep journeying deeper

