



*Action for
Children*

The gift of joy

A special Christmas service in
support of Action for Children

About **Action** *for* **Children**

Action for Children believe that every child should have a safe and happy childhood and the foundations they need to thrive.

We put children at the heart of everything we do. That includes our mission and values. They're our blueprint for the way we work.

We protect and support children and young people. We do this by providing practical and emotional care and support. We make sure their voices are heard. And we campaign to bring lasting improvements to their lives.

In 2022/23, we helped



765,905

A stylized city skyline illustration in black and white, featuring various buildings and structures, positioned behind the large red number 765,905.

**children, young people and
families across the UK.**

Dear friends,

The challenges of the cost of living crisis have continued to affect millions of children, young people and families across the country. Knowing how stretched household budgets are, we are humbled by your continued generosity, which has helped us to support even more vulnerable children this year.

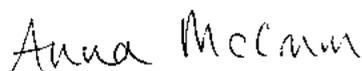
As we look ahead to Christmas, our theme is ‘The gift of joy’, recalling the angel’s words heralding the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, and the great joy brought to all by his birth. We hope it will uplift you and other Christians in celebrating this special time, and help Action for Children to bring heartwarming festive joy to thousands who still face hardship.

This worship outline is designed to be flexible. Feel free to choose your own hymns and prayers, or tailor your service so it works for you and your congregation. You can pick and choose ideas, and swap in some of your own. To download more copies and a Christmas carol booklet, visit: actionforchildren.org.uk/support-us/fundraise-with-us/fundraise-in-your-church/

Thank you to the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Gill Newton and Kerry Scarlett, the Revd Barbara Glasson, and the Revd Mike Long for providing materials for this worship outline. We always welcome feedback on our resources so please do get in touch if you have ideas on how we can improve.

Finally, thank you so much for your continued support. You help us to make sure more children grow up safe and happy. I hope you have a joyful Christmas with your loved ones, and a happy New Year.

With best wishes



Anna McCrum

Interim Faith Partnerships Lead

anna.mccrum@actionforchildren.org.uk

Planning your Christmas service

We hope this booklet will help you to plan a special Christmas service in support of Action for Children. You can also use it at any other services or events you're organising. Please feel free to choose different carols, prayers and activities – whatever works for you.

Your regional community fundraiser can help you plan and also send you lots of useful fundraising materials, including:

- **Gift Aid envelopes.**
- **Posters.**
- **Leaflets.**

If you receive this as a mailing, you'll find their details on the enclosed contact sheet. If not, at: actionforchildren.org.uk/support-us/fundraise-with-us/fundraise-in-your-church/ (This link is also where you can download extra copies of this booklet and PowerPoint slides).

A great way to bring our work to life is to get one of our friendly speakers to talk at your church. Get in touch with your regional fundraiser to find out more. Our YouTube channel – [youtube.com/ user/ ActionForChildrenUK](http://youtube.com/user/ActionForChildrenUK) – also has a selection of fantastic videos about what we do. You can show them at your service or any other event.

Banking funds raised

You can now pay the funds you raise into your local Post Office.

To do this, you first need to apply for a deposit card by contacting our Supporter Care Team: ask.us@actionforchildren.org.uk or calling **0300 123 2112**.

There are other ways to pay: BACS (online banking), our website, or by telephone. These are our preferred methods as they help keep operational costs to an absolute minimum. This means we can focus funds on supporting children.

If you choose to pay in your funds by cheque, please:

- Write your details on the reverse of the cheque itself. This helps us to track it and – importantly – to thank you.
- Send cheques to our Watford Office:

**3 The Boulevard,
Ascot Rd,
Watford,
WD18 8AG**

Our colleagues there will receive and acknowledge them, with thanks.

An outline for a **Christmas service**



Welcome

The worship leader encourages members to welcome each other before explaining that the service will focus on Action for Children's work.

Welcome everyone.

The theme of today's service is 'The gift of joy'.

The magic of Christmas begins in childhood. It's a time for children to make precious memories. For them to feel happiness and love – the kind of magic that lasts a lifetime.

For vulnerable children across the UK, Christmas is anything but magical. No stockings. No presents. No festive food – maybe no food at all.

We're there when families can't afford the basics. We top up the gas meter when the house feels cold. Put food on the table so no one in the house goes hungry. Buy a Christmas present when a parent can't. We're a vital lifeline for desperate families with nowhere to turn.

You could help a vulnerable child feel the magic of Christmas – a magic that will last them a lifetime.

Prayer

Creator God, we praise you, that in your wisdom, you have made us for relationship with you and with others. You have created us to be in families and communities and we know that these can be places of great joy and flourishing.

Incarnate God, we thank you that you chose to enter the world as a tiny baby, born into a human family, raised within a community with all the joy and challenges that brings.

Spirit of God, we rejoice that you move in us and in your world, helping us to discover joy and uncover new experiences and treasures.

Gracious God, we thank you for the work of Action For Children and for all the ways in which the organisation seeks to provide support, relief and encouragement to children and families so that more joy might be discovered in the life they share together.

May the kindness, care and love shown to those who need it most enable them in some small way, amidst all the challenges they face, to encounter the one who came into the world to bring joy and peace, our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray,

Amen.

Prayer by the Revd Gill Newton, President of the Methodist Conference, 2023-2024



Carol

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks By Night – *Singing the Faith: 221*

Poem

Joy is surprise,
an angel in the night
when you are scared.

Joy is gift,
wrapped with care under the tree
from a stranger who knows you to be good.

Joy is what happens
when you find you're not alone
on the dark hillside of your questions.

Joy is the alleluia of a moonlit sky
revealing the unexpected baby
to be the most important one on earth
and heaven too.

Joy is the star to follow
in the company of love

Joy is gold found
cradled in a stable like a king.

Poem by the Revd Barbara Glasson, former President of the Methodist Conference.

Carol

O Come, O Come Immanuel – *Singing the Faith: 180*

Story

Emily's story

See page 13

Bible reading

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Luke 2: 8-12

Carol

Joy to the world, the Lord has Come! – *Singing the Faith: 330*

Story

Natasha*

Single mother Natasha was referred to Action for Children by her doctor because she was struggling to cope with her seven year old son Rory's aggressive behaviour. Action for Children helped Natasha with advice to calm him. After getting to know her support worker better, Natasha expressed that she was also unable to cope with the rising cost of living. She was dreading Christmas, wondering how she would afford to heat the house or buy her children the presents they wanted.

Natasha's 10-year-old daughter Rosie overheard her mother telling her auntie “I don't know how I'm going to get through Christmas this year.”

Natasha realised this because her daughter's Santa list was so short and included a food bowl for the family's dog and a £25 Primark voucher. Rosie told her mum she knew she couldn't afford Christmas this year and didn't want to burden her.

“It just broke my heart,” said Natasha. “It really was heart breaking to think at 10 years of age, you're worrying about these sorts of things.”

Action for Children was able to help by paying for heating oil, school uniforms and Asda gift cards to help through the Christmas period.

“Action for Children took so much pressure off me keeping the house warm for the kids when it was freezing last year, that really did take a huge amount of weight off my shoulders. I was able to make a really good Christmas dinner for the children – so Action for Children did make huge, huge impacts on our lives.”



But with money still very tight, Natasha says she’s “dreading” this Christmas. She believes Rosie isn’t telling her about things she needs to buy.

When asked what she wanted for Christmas, Rosie said, “Some oil so mummy doesn’t have to worry about keeping us warm while we’re home for the holidays.”

“Nobody knows what’s going to happen. Will we have enough money to put oil in the tank? Will we have enough money to go to the food shop? Will we have enough to keep the electricity going?”

While Natasha is approaching another Christmas with a worry about finances, she’s so grateful for the support of Action for Children, knowing that she can reach out and get a helping hand again this year if she needs it.

**This story has been made anonymous*

Carol

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing – *Singing the Faith: 202*

A Christmas reflection

The minister or worship leader may choose to share their reflections on Christmas, the theme and the Bible readings. Alternatively, read the reflection written below by Action for Children trustee, the Revd Mike Long.

The theme is 'The gift of joy'

There is enormous joy in the wonder of Christmas – in the promise of the angels, the accounts of shepherds and wise travellers, as well as the marvellous incarnation of Jesus Christ himself. Here, we see the love of God made real.

The angel brings surprising, fabulous news that will stir hearts and change lives, and a sign of this new beginning – of the reign of a Saviour – is the arrival of a vulnerable child in a stable. It was a wonderful and yet strange sign, one that directed attention to the child on the margins, to what was fragile rather than strong, to what was quite beyond the realm of ordinary expectation. This is hugely significant, for it inverts contemporary values and understandings: it places a weak and vulnerable child at the centre of God's purposes. This is what led shepherds into new discoveries of wonder and joy. It also signified the beginning of more positive attitudes and regard for children, seen in the coming years, among the followers of Jesus.

Action for Children has known that wonder and joy can be found in the unlikeliest of places. The Christmas story reminds us how the extraordinary is revealed in what might first appear as weak, neglected or marginalised. We know that in the most fragile of environments, and with the right support, security, happiness and opportunity can be found, and lives utterly transformed. We've seen this in our residential homes, our provision for disabled children, mental health programmes, advice services, short breaks, fostering support, and interventions among children exploited through organised crime networks.

There is joy in abundance when children are helped to make new discoveries, realise their potential, develop bonds of security and trust, and feel affirmed and supported.

There are many ways in which we can bring the joy of that first Christmas into the lives of others. In working for safe and happy childhoods, Action for Children is an important one of them.

So, like the shepherds, we can each of us keep watch this Christmas and be aware of the needs of others around us. Like the shepherds, we can each

of us believe in the joyful gift of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the example of his life and service to the most vulnerable. And like the shepherds, we can each of us act to bring joy to our communities.

Reflection by the Revd Mike Long, Action for Children trustee and Notting Hill Methodist Circuit Superintendent

Prayer

God of love,
We pray for all who feel afraid today
Who struggle to find joy in the midst of uncertainty about what the future holds
We pray for families who are struggling this Christmas
For young people who do not know which way to turn
Loving God, bring your peace, and your joy

God of peace
We pray for all who feel exhausted today
Who are finding the pressures of family life overwhelming
For carers and foster parents who long for respite
For all who work tirelessly for Action for Children, particularly those on the frontline,
Peaceful God, bring your rest and your calm

God of justice
We pray for all who feel trapped by systems which prevent flourishing
For young people trapped in criminal exploitation
For all who have power to change policy for good, that they may use that power well.
Justice seeking God, bring transformation

God of all
We pray for all children and young people
In our community, in our church
For those known to us
Show us ways to work safely and well with others
To offer spaces for joy in this challenging world
Amen.

A prayer by Deacon Kerry Scarlett, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, 2023-2024

The Lord's Prayer

Carol

It came upon the midnight clear – *Singing the Faith: 205*

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.



Emily's story

After leaving an abusive relationship, mother of two Emily* received emotional support and a Christmas food and present hamper.

Mum of two and nurse Emily*, 42, was in an abusive relationship when she tried to take her own life on three separate occasions. Her ex-husband was not only abusive to her but to her seven-year-old sons from a previous relationship. Thankfully Action for Children stepped in to support Emily and her sons as she left the abusive relationship and navigated a new life with her boys.

As well as ongoing support, the family also received a Christmas hamper full of treats and presents that would normally be outside Emily's budget.



“ If it wasn't for the work Action for Children have done with me, I do not believe I'd be the person that I am now. ”

Emily

**This story has been made anonymous.*

Take Action for Children

Here's three things you can do to support Action for Children right now:

1 Volunteer

Support children and young people while boosting your skills and meeting new people. Volunteering with Action for Children is a meaningful way to help some of the UK's most vulnerable children and families. It's also an opportunity to develop and enjoy new experiences. You'll connect with your community, meet new people, learn new skills and share what you know. Take a look at the roles available here: actionforchildren.org.uk/support-us/volunteer-with-us/



2 Sign up to our campaigns

Join us, take a stand and raise your voice for safe and happy childhoods. Right now, our frontline services are seeing rising mental health concerns and an increase in child poverty. This isn't just bad luck. Young people are in crisis, yet vital support services are being cut.

We won't stop fighting until every child grows up safe and happy. But, alone, our voice isn't enough.

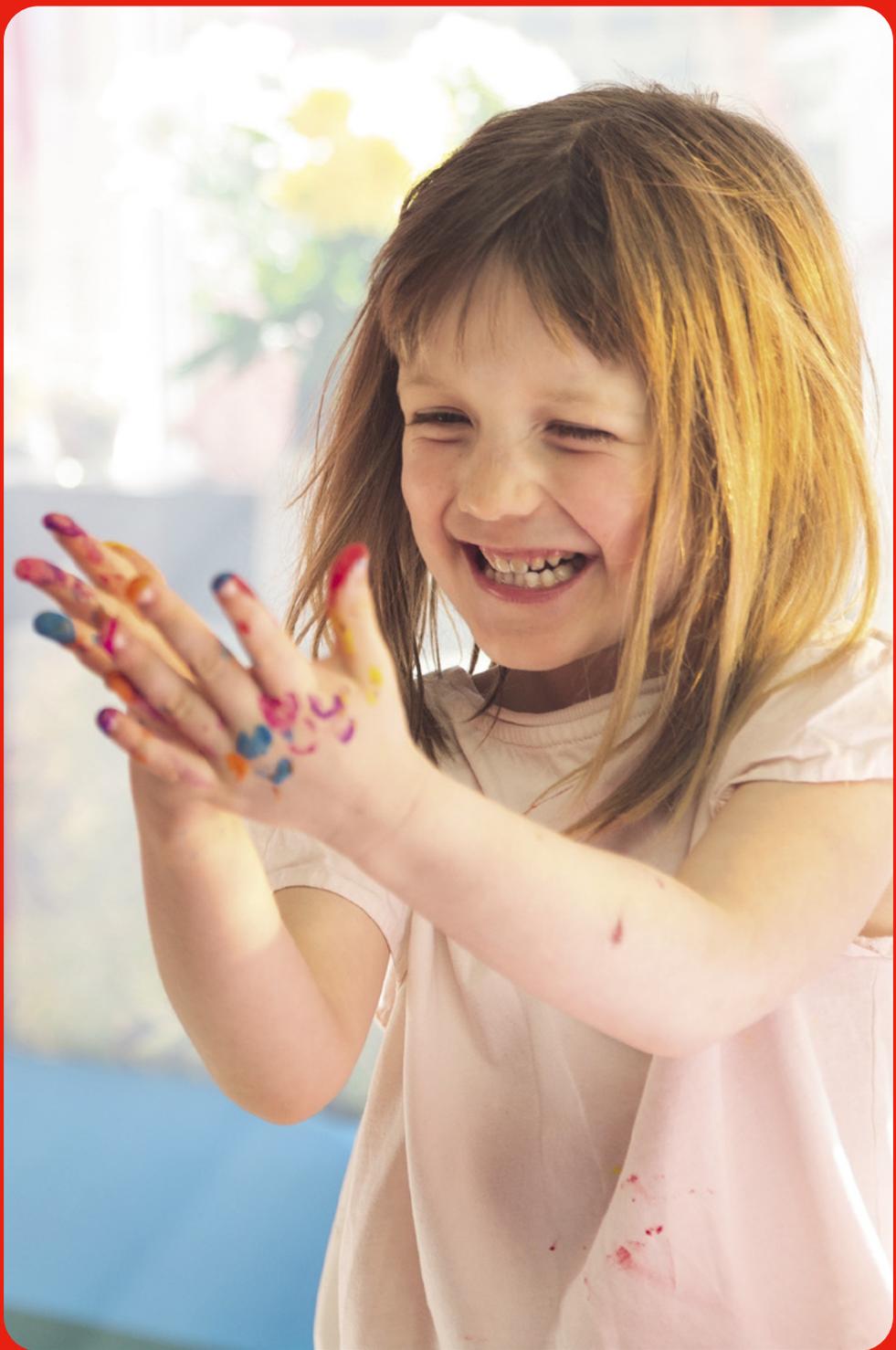
Change is only possible with supporters like you behind us. Sign a petition, speak with your MP or share our campaigns with friends and family. When you do, you're joining a movement improving the lives of children in the UK. Find out more about our current campaigns and how you can support us here: actionforchildren.org.uk/support-us/campaign-with-us/



3 Deck your halls

Come together with family and friends to decorate your own Action for Children bauble (included in this pack). And read more about how you can support our Secret Santa campaign on page 18.





How to enhance your Action for Children Christmas service

Talk about Action for Children

You could use one or more of the following to explain how Action for Children's work makes a difference.

- ★ Invite a speaker to talk about Action for Children.
- ★ Play a short video clip from Action for Children's YouTube channel.
- ★ Add in more stories about how Action for Children help children and their families. Your Regional Fundraiser or our Supporter Care Team can share these.

If you don't have a speaker and would like to talk about what Action for Children does, please use the words provided on page 2.



Parent Talk tips for a joyful Christmas

Christmas can bring joy, but it can also bring worry about finances. Our online service Parent Talk offers support for parents and carers across a broad range of areas, including creative ideas for celebrating Christmas on a budget.

Try some of the ideas below for keeping the costs down this Christmas:

- ★ Children don't need lots of expensive toys to be happy. A few thoughtful gifts and experiences will mean a lot.
- ★ When writing letters to Santa, encourage your children to talk about their wishes and hopes instead of focusing only on presents.
- ★ Try the four-gift rule: Something they want, something they need, something to wear and something to read. You could even ask your child to base their letter to Santa on this.
- ★ Facebook can be useful for finding free and pre-loved toys and games. Lots of neighbourhood groups or 'for sale' groups advertise free items that you can go and pick up. While the toys may not be brand new, they are new to your child – and that's what's exciting.
- ★ Arrange a book or toy swap with friends, where each child can swap an item for something different.
- ★ Look at experience gifts, like annual passes to family attractions. You could even create your own coupons for days out to a beach or museum.
- ★ Ask your child to help you make potato stamps ([bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/how-make-potato-stamps](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/how-make-potato-stamps)) for homemade Christmas cards or wrapping paper.
- ★ Create your own salt dough decorations ([bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/salt-dough-christmas-decorations](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/salt-dough-christmas-decorations)) to put on the tree and gift to friends and family.
- ★ Suggest a Secret Santa with friends and family, where you each have one person to buy for. It can help to set a budget and reduce the number of gifts you need to buy.
- ★ Make handmade or edible gifts. Try a recipe for chocolate bark or biscuits.

Find more Christmas tips and extra support if you need it, from Parent Talk: parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/?s=christmas

Be a
Secret
Santa
for a vulnerable child



The magic of Christmas begins in childhood. Hanging stockings. Sharing festive food. Presents under the tree. It's a time for children to make precious memories. For them to feel happiness and love – the kind of magic that lasts a lifetime.

For vulnerable children across the UK, Christmas is anything but magical. No stockings. No presents. No festive food – maybe no food at all.

But you could help change that. Your gift could help a vulnerable child feel the magic of Christmas.

Children across the UK need a Secret Santa like you.

4.2 million children now live in poverty in the UK. That's 600,000 more than in 2012. And 29% of all children.*

At Action for Children, we've seen children without a bed sleeping on the floor with just blankets. Families phoning us crying because they have no money to feed their children.

We're there when families can't afford the basics. We top up the gas meter when the house feels cold. Put food on the table so no one in the house goes hungry. Buy a Christmas present when a parent can't. We're a vital lifeline for desperate families with nowhere to turn.

By donating and becoming a Secret Santa, you could give a vulnerable child the essentials of warm clothes, a hot meal, or a special present just for them.

Last year, your generous support helped us be there for over 765,905 children, young people and families in the UK, through 426 services. Vulnerable children and families given hope and support, because of amazing people like you.

Childhood is short and precious. There isn't long to make happy memories. That's why we need your support now.

You could help a vulnerable child feel the magic of Christmas – a magic that will last them a lifetime.

Be a Secret Santa for a vulnerable child.

iamsanta.org.uk

*National statistics; Households Below Average Income: an analysis of the UK income distribution: FYE 1995 to FYE 2022. Published 23 March 2023.

Deck your halls

Come together as a family, school or congregation this Christmas, and decorate your own Action for Children bauble. Find your bauble template enclosed in this pack.



Share the joy

We love seeing pictures and videos from your events. Send them to us or post on social media (...and make sure you tag us!)



 /actionforchildren

 @actnforchildren

 @actionforchildrenuk

Get in touch

Action for Children

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[actionforchildren.org.uk](https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk)

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