

December 2022

Greetings!  
& Happy Advent!

As December dawns, those of us who follow the Christian tradition begin our celebrations of Advent and Christmas. Along with the candles, the cards, and the giftable cookies, this sacred season also invites us to spiritual contemplation. To ponder what it means to wait for the coming (*adventus*) of Jesus. To prepare to greet his birth with our own acts of inclusive love. To participate in worship services and community carol sings. Except on December 18<sup>th</sup>!

That is the date of the World Cup final! And a Church of England advisory group strongly recommends NOT scheduling carol services for that day. <sup>i</sup> Anglican clergy do not wish to be seen as zealots opposed to fun. Nor do they want hundreds of poorly attended services up and down the country!

Religion and recreation are not considered adversaries in today's Church. (Rightly so! ) More significantly, in Britain, football and the Church "*have a conjoined heritage.*" "*Several Premier League football clubs of today started up as parish church football teams, set up for the health and wellbeing of those local communities. They were established to have a positive impact, especially in communities where poverty and deprivation hindered any kind of thriving.*"<sup>ii</sup>

Faith and football once shared values and goals! The one developed from the social care objectives of the other. At its best, "The Beautiful Game" still reflects its social justice heritage. Professional player, Marcus Rashford MBE, spearheads a campaign to end food poverty in Britain. World Cup 2022 has become a voice for oppressed groups. God's dream of peace and justice for all is sometimes glimpsed more clearly in arenas of sport than in spheres of socio-political action.

Even if you are not a big football ("soccer") fans, there is something special about players and supporters from around the world coming together in an attitude of solidarity and sporting behaviour. The surprise wins, the courageous protests, the amazingly tidy Japanese locker room, their peace cranes ... all these happenings increase our understanding of other nations and cultures. We have more in common than we ever imagined! (I KNOW I have a Japanese footballer among my ancestors ☺ ) Finding commonalities with people we considered "other" is the first step towards acceptance and inclusion. It's a "kick off" to worldwide peace and justice! May the best team win!  
May God's goals be furthered!

Deepest Advent Blessings,  
*Brenda*

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<sup>i</sup> Church Support Hub, "Making the Most of the World Cup Final"

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid