

## TALK

*Mark Russell, Chief Executive, The Children's Society*

Just over 50 years ago, The Children's Society introduced Christingle services to the Church of England. For over 50 years in services around the country, Christingle has been a treasured part of Christmas with so many children and young people holding oranges with candles flickering with warmth and light and hope. But Christingle is going to be different this year, whether your service is in a church or a school or whether you're having your Christingle service at home, it's going to be different.

And right now we're taking part in our first ever online Christingle service. And I hope it will be the biggest Christingle service ever. Of all of the years we've ever had Christingle, I think we need Christingle this year the most.

2020 has been a tough year. So many people have lost their lives. Others have been really poorly. Others have lost their jobs and livelihoods. And so many people have been lonely and frightened and anxious. The coronavirus crisis had hit all of us, affected all of our lives but whilst we're all in the same storm, we're not all in the same boat. This crisis has affected the poorest and most vulnerable people in this country the most.

And most of all, this crisis has affected children and young people. Too many young people are living in poverty. Too many children are feeling alone and frightened. But in this difficult year, the Christingle in your hand brings us hope. The red ribbon around the orange reminds us of God's amazing and incredible love.

The cocktail sticks with the sweets remind us that even in tough, tough times, there are always things in all of our lives that we can be thankful for. And the candle right in the centre shines a light showing us that light always overcomes darkness.

Throughout the Bible, time and time again, Jesus is described as the light of the world. We heard that in our reading from John's Gospel, just now. And in my own life, whenever I've felt I've been in darkness, when I've prayed I've had a real sense of God's light and God's love helping me through. This little Christingle candle reminds us that no matter how dark the room, this little candle can extinguish that darkness. And what happens is that God's love and God's light shine through Jesus Christ. And we receive that light and that love. And then we can reflect it to those around us. We can pick up the phone to an elderly person having a tough time and feeling alone. We can send a card or a text message to somebody who's struggling.

We can leave some food at our local food bank. But what Christingle tells us most of all, is that when we stand together, even in an appropriately, socially distanced way, when we stand together, our light will shine brighter. And in this service, I invite you to stand together, whether you're in Manchester or Maidenhead, Newcastle or Newquay, Sheffield or Southampton, Liverpool or Lyme Regis, let's choose to stand together this Christmas because when we choose to stand together, we can make a difference.

So let me tell you how you can make a difference this Christmas. 140 years ago in this very church in South London, a remarkable and a wonderful man called Edward Rudolf saw that so many children were living in poverty and were hungry and he was determined to do something about it. And he started The Children's Society and he gave us a big, bold vision to build a society for all children. Where no child should be frightened and no child should be left behind. And 140 years later, we still hold on to that big, bold vision. And I am so proud of my team who work right around the country with some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The Children's Society works tirelessly to enable every child to walk tall, to enable every child to know hope. Hope of a happier home life. Hope of getting a job. Hope of escaping those who harm them. Hope that tomorrow can be better than today.

And that hope lives inside the heart of every child in this country. And The Children's Society see that hope and we fight for it. But let me level with you. 2020 has been really tough for The Children's Society too. Like so many charities, we've lost millions of pounds in income and yet more and more children need our help. So will you choose to stand with us? Will you pray for us? Will you support us financially? And will you leave your own message of hope for children in this country? So right after this service, go to our website, [christingle.org/2020](http://christingle.org/2020) and leave your message of hope for the children of this country. I'm so grateful to you for your support and for your prayers because together we can make a difference. Together we can rekindle hope in the hearts of children and young people in this country. Because the Christingle reminds us light always overcomes darkness. And hope always overcomes fear.