

## **Welcome**

I am very pleased to extend a very warm welcome to this year's visitation. As always, I am most grateful to all those who have made this possible – the host parishes and their clergy, Readers, organists, administrators and lay people providing hospitality; our administrative and support staff of the Diocesan Office, supporting the Visitations by their presence and advice; David Cheetham the Diocesan Registrar, playing his part; and to my secretary Christine Taylor on whom falls the day to day administration and the preparations for these visitations. As in previous years a copy of my Charge is available for you to take away, and the Charge will also appear on the Diocesan website after this cycle of visitations.

The main purpose of the Visitation is to admit to office those elected as churchwardens to serve as Bishop's Officers in their parishes. To those who have served before and are returning re-elected, welcome back. To those who are elected for the first time, a warm welcome; and to all of you, continuing and new Churchwardens, on behalf of the Bishop, our sincere and heartfelt thanks. I am aware of the responsibilities of Churchwardens and the amount of time and hard work that is involved. You, like so many others in the Church, are volunteers, part of that most impressive volunteer base the Church of England offers to the nation and our local communities.

A pleasing feature of these Visitations is the presence of clergy and laity who come to support you and are here as your guests; to them, a very warm welcome. I am sure, as Churchwardens, you are most grateful for the help and support you receive from colleagues, friends and family who sustain you in the exercising the responsibilities of your Office. I commend all our Churchwardens to the prayers of the people in our parishes, so that you may be upheld and supported in the exercise of your Office in the Church. I am very conscious of all the hard work and imaginative approaches to mission and ministry being undertaken in the parishes. We need to beware of taking too much for granted, and I would ask you please to thank your clergy, Readers and lay ministers who do so much to sustain the life and growth of the Church. And let that thanks be a regular thing; gratitude should be at the heart of our relationships in the Church.

## **Articles of Enquiry**

Thank you for returning the Articles of Enquiry. As always, I am most grateful for the time, effort and care that have gone into their completion. The analysis of information contained in your returns will be forwarded to you in a future mailing and will also be available on the Diocesan website.

## **Bishop of St Albans**

In January we were delighted to receive the news of the appointment of the Rt Revd Alan Smith, Bishop of Shrewsbury in the diocese of Lichfield, as the next Bishop of St Albans. Bishop Alan will move to the diocese in the late summer and begin his ministry among us in the autumn. The service of inauguration and enthronement will be in the Cathedral on Saturday 19 September. Arrangements are in hand and details will be published shortly. Meanwhile, I commend Bishop Alan to your prayers. I know you will want to offer him a warm and hospitable welcome as our bishop as he moves around the diocese and as he invites us to share with him in mission and ministry.

In welcoming Bishop Alan, we are also conscious that with the vacancy in See responsibilities have fallen on the suffragan bishops who hold, by delegation, the administration of the diocese. In thanking Bishops Christopher and Richard for their care and diligence, we are also mindful of the support provided to us by their offices, and by the staff of Abbey Gate House, the Diocesan Office and the Diocesan Registry. We are richly served by the hard work and dedication of administrative and support staff and we should never underestimate the debt of gratitude we in the parishes of the diocese owe for their commitment and hard work.

## **Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban**

The very name of our diocese, St Albans, reminds us of this land's Christian proto-martyr, Alban. There has been a place of worship at the reputed site of his execution for centuries and now stands there the mother church of our diocese, the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban. The Cathedral is a large and intricate building, reflecting many periods and styles of architecture. It is, as the name indicates, the place of 'Cathedra', the Bishop's seat, and so the Cathedral will be the place where Bishop Alan's ministry will be inaugurated later this summer. The Cathedral draws a huge number of visitors every day. Some are pilgrims, some sight-seers, but very few leave without being touched in some way by this remarkable holy space. The Intercessions Board, where people are invited to leave short written prayers, is testimony to the faith and longing which finds its expression in a visit to the Cathedral.

The Dean and Chapter are most keen that the Cathedral should be placed at the service of the whole diocese. I want to suggest two particular ways that this might be accomplished. First, by having a parish or deanery visit to the Cathedral. Coming in the pilgrims' spirit, such a visit gives your group exclusive access to the Cathedral, usually in the evening. There can be a guided tour, given by one of the Cathedral Guides, and then a time of silence and the evening service of Compline. Many people who have experienced such an evening speak of it as a time when "the Cathedral became significant and alive for me". I do encourage you to suggest such an evening to your parishes. Also, the work of the Cathedral's Education Centre is rightly well appreciated. The programme they offer children and young people is exciting and imaginative and many school groups have the most wonderful experience particularly as they hear and often re-enact the story of Alban. As a centre of learning the Cathedral library offers a wide range of books which can be borrowed.

In return the Dean and Canons are always delighted to be asked to visit parishes for Sunday worship. Here in St Albans diocese we have a wonderful Cathedral, do use it in the task of discerning the Kingdom and sharing the gospel.

### **Care of the Clergy**

One of the vital and most important parts of your role is the relationship you have with your clergy which is so important for the spiritual, pastoral and liturgical health of the parish. I would simply draw your attention to a very important area, and that is your hugely important role in the pastoral care of the clergy. Naturally, the Rural/Area Dean, the Archdeacon, the Bishop, all play our part in providing clerical pastoral care, but you are on the ground, being with your priest week by week. Of course a balance has to be struck here and I know that of many virtues exhibited by Churchwardens, loyalty is invariably near the top of the list. Everyone has their down periods, but if you do have genuine and prolonged concern about a member of your clergy or their family, please speak in confidence to the Rural/Area Dean or Archdeacon. Clergy stress does not seem to be diminishing. We do have agencies upon whom we can call to offer help and advice. Often it is we clergy, who have the duty and the joy of providing pastoral care, who are appallingly bad at asking for care for ourselves. Let's be clear. I am emphatically **not** suggesting that as Churchwardens you become diocesan informers! But if you do have genuine concern for the pastoral well-being of your priest or their family, then loyalty sometimes means sharing that concern so that appropriate help and support may be offered. And of course the Visitation Inspection always gives us the opportunity to speak in confidence about clergy and family welfare. Above all, thank you for the support you offer your clergy.

### **Vision for Giving**

Last year Bishop Christopher initiated a programme called 'Vision for Giving'. This programme focussed on the Stewardship elements of Vision for Action. In the Autumn 12 events were held across the Diocese and approximately 750 people attended representing around 240 out of the 360 churches that were invited to send representatives.

Next month there are three more events to enable those parishes unable to attend last year to attend this year, and details have been circulated. I do hope that those of you who were unable to attend will find time to come along this year, as the events have been well received.

It is too early to assess the full impact this process has had, but I know our Stewardship Development Officer, Geoff Fletcher, has never been busier visiting parishes in order to promote, develop and encourage Stewardship. In these times of economic hardship it is essential to practice good Stewardship. Please encourage your parishes in their Stewardship and always feel able to contact Geoff Fletcher for advice and support. He has details of many resources to help you. We do not want the work of God's Church to be diminished, especially in these times of financial difficulty.

### **Financial responsibilities**

Resourcing, or financing, the Church for mission is a joyful privilege for us as Christians and members of the body of Christ, the Church. St Paul clearly teaches us that we have a responsibility towards each other. The strong are urged to help the weak. All of us are called to extend the frontiers of mission, a real task in this diocese as we confront the challenges of new housing areas in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. The mission of the Church is primarily funded through Parish Share. And Parish Share can be described as: 'my parish's share of the cost of mission and ministry, through the Church of England, across the diocese of St Albans'. A more limited view uses language like 'the money we pay to St Albans', or a tax on success! We need to begin to embrace a wider vision; Parish Share is about mission, responding to the call of God, and we need to do that with generosity and good grace.

May we, through you, offer our thanks for the regular payment of parish share? Many parishes now contribute through direct debit or standing order and we need to increase the numbers so doing. God calls us to engage together in a serious and urgent task; let's not be hampered by meanness and a lack of urgency. Rather, by our endeavours let generosity, sacrifice and a rich abundance of resources, be our hallmark.

Whilst there is still plenty of money around, undoubtedly the current financial crisis does make for problems, especially for people who are trading. We therefore, as churches, need to be scrupulous about the payment of bills. Let's hope it is something of a rare occurrence where one parish treasurer can say, 'I wait until the second or third demand before I pay the bills'. That is just irresponsible, and contrary to our Christian calling. In the current financial climate that can lead to bankruptcy for traders. It is not unreasonable to expect bills to be paid promptly, at least within 28 days if not sooner. Some of you may know the excellent practice of our own diocesan finance department where bills are normally settled within a 7 day period. No wonder people tell me they like working for the diocese of St Albans – they know they will get paid promptly! It is a good practice we might model in our own parishes.

### **Deanery re-organisation: consultations**

One of the strengths of the Church of England is that every part of our land is in a parish and so enjoys the opportunity of the provision of spiritual nurture and pastoral care. However parishes should not exist in absolute isolation. Increasingly pastoral provision, education, mission and ministry is rightly seen as a collaborative process and one of the joys of being an Archdeacon is to see many examples of close co-operation between parishes to the mutual benefit of all. One clear example is in a multi-parish benefice where a stipendiary priest together with ministerial colleagues, provides ministry and promotes mission in several parishes. There are also notable examples of Team and Group Ministries where "together not alone" is seen as the way to release potential and encourage growth.

As some of you will know, we have been giving some thought to the shape, size and composition of deaneries and how they might best serve in the task of mission and ministry, given that the number of stipendiary clergy available for deployment is going to reduce. As with any proposed change, the debate is keen and sometimes intense. Opinions of course vary. I want to give the assurance that we will listen very carefully to all the responses and take them into account as we seek to find a way forward. The ecumenical aspect of any re-organisation is also an important

factor. What this process seeks to accomplish is to help parishes own their membership of a Deanery. I very much hope that this will be reflected in vigorous attendance at Deanery Synods, Chapters and other Deanery services and events.

And now to something a little domestic!

### **Water Charges**

Charging schemes for surface and highway drainage have already begun to affect churches, particularly in the Northern Province of the Church of England. Nationally, our Church, along with others, is continuing to press the government, OFWAT, and the Water Companies for a fair and permanent solution. There is an on-line Downing Street 'e-petition' which already has around 40,000 signatures and we are being asked by the Archbishops' Council to encourage as many signatures as possible. If you feel able to do so, please go to the relevant e-mail address contained in the appendix to this Charge. In addition, if you have such an opportunity, please make known the concerns of the Church to your Member of Parliament.

### **Conclusion**

The Visitation continues and this year I shall be inspecting personally in the deaneries of Buntingford and Stevenage. As always, I am grateful to you for the care and preparation with which you approach these occasions, and the welcome you give to me and to the Rural/Area Deans and teams of lay inspectors. Churchwarden's training will be held on Saturday 27 June, and I look forward to meeting a good number of you there. Thank you to those parishes who contribute to my Discretionary Fund which meets emergencies during the year, relieving stress and financial burdens which happen from time to time, often totally unexpected, among our clergy. Contributions are always most welcome both from parishes and individuals. The thank offering at the end of this Visitation is to cover expenses, the balance going to the Discretionary Fund, and Gift Aid envelopes are available.

St Paul in his first letter to the Church at Corinth, Chapter 12, chooses the image of 'Body'. Our membership of this Body is through our common baptism whereby we are bound to God and to each other. All this language is not just about our corporate image, but about our corporate reality; not single independent entities, but rather different parts making up the corporate whole: and the strength is in the difference. We need each other. So may this image of the Body of Christ be real to us as together, as members of the Diocese of St Albans, we move forward together in mission and ministry.

As always I am grateful to the Diocesan Registrar and his staff for the support and advice I receive over the year. It is now my pleasure to call on the Registrar to admit you, on my behalf, as Churchwardens for the ensuing year.

Trevor Jones  
Archdeacon of Hertford